THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

Faculty of Arts

Leaden Italy, Lost Italy:

A Cross-Cultural (Re-)Assessment of the Italian Crime Film

in the Years of Terrorism and Social Unrest

(1969-Early 1980s)

Giovanni Memola

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2014

This Thesis has been completed as a requirement

for a postgraduate research degree of the University of Winchester

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ABSTRACT FOR THESIS

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This thesis examines the generic body of a vast group of commercial crime films produced in Italy during the *anni di piombo*, or Leaden Years, a time peculiarly marked by widespread episodes of political violence and tragic facts of terrorism (1969-early 1980s). These films achieved resounding success at the national box-office by conjugating the aesthetic of foreign crime films and formulas with clear references to the grim and violent Italian reality. The aim of this thesis is to assess how, and to what extent, problems and concerns associated with contemporaneous historical events had effectively influenced their production and consumption, as well as their generic identity.

In contrast with traditional (and prevailing) critical accounts, this thesis contends that these films and their generic images are less concerned with terrorism and related political extremism than they are with other contemporaneous social events, such as the reigniting of culturally deep-seated regional tensions, and the crisis of a national benchmark such as the patriarchal family. In discussing this point, this thesis provides a thorough historical contextualization of the Leaden Years which does not rest exclusively on political-terrorist issues, but takes into account other topical social problems, as well as reconstructing the cultural and political-ideological complexity that marked this era. Arguments in support of this thesis have been crucially elaborated through referencing historiographical material and critical sources mostly from Italy, in an attempt to further provide the examination of these films and of their generic identity with an Italian critical and cultural perspective to date scarcely represented in the Anglo-American film studies upon which the theoretical body of the Italian crime film is prevalently built.

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DECLARATION AND COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

No portion of the work referred to in the Thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

I confirm that this Thesis is entirely my own work.

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Last but not least, a huge thanks to my girlfriend Laura, for her loving patience (which I sorely tried), and for her boundless confidence in everything I do, which has been of great motivation while I was working on this project.

Finally, a thought goes to my father Enzo, who passed away suddenly in November 2013. We used to talk on the phone quite often, and regularly chatted about football, Italian politics, economic crisis(es), weather, and how my thesis — or my 'book', as he called it — was going. This 'book' is dedicated to him.

INTRODUCTION

Between the end of the 1960s and the early 1980s, Italy experienced a long
period of discontent at a political and social level infamously referred to as *anni di
piombo*, or Leaden Years. A deep economic crisis, significant challenges to gender and
patriarchal hierarchies, and, most importantly, the tragic facts of urban crime and
terrorism together interacted and contributed to mark this period as one of fear, dismay,
and uncertainty. So unpleasant were the facts and the reaction of the civil society that
still today speeches and debates about the Leaden Years continue to cause controversy.
In the media sphere, references to this period are minimised, if not completely avoided,
which to a degree validates some recent readings of the *anni di piombo* as a 'national
trauma' (Antonello and O'Leary 2009).

During this time, there were produced around 300 crime films which
spectacularized key issues of Italy's turbulent reality in violent and thrilling plots (see
filmography listings in Bruschini and Tentori 2001; 2005). Mostly realised with medium
and low budgets, these films were based on different yet stylistically and thematically
overlapping formulas that in some cases originated prolific film cycles. Among the major
cycles were the so-called *giallo* and *poliziottesco,* which shared a certain inclination
toward graphic violence as well as an emphasising of topical issues concerning Italian
politics and society. *Giallo* films dealt with murder and mystery, and usually featured an
amateur detective seeking to unmask a psychotic serial killer in all-black outfit who
slaughters victims with blades and razors. *Poliziottesco* films dealt with gangsterism and
the procedural; a typical plot told of an Italian town terrorized by the activities of
muggers, extortionists, thieves, rapists, mobsters, terrorists, and the like, and of a
maverick police inspector (or a vigilante) who tries to restore the order by disregarding
laws and procedures. Many such films achieved resounding success at the box-office,
which further resulted in the development of film franchises based on specific
characters, actors, and settings.

Notwithstanding their popularity, these films and their respective cycles and
series were mostly pilloried by domestic film critics and reviewers. They were accused of
being nothing but exploitation products which clumsily plagiarised Alfred Hitchcock's
thrillers and the latest American and French crime/noir films — for example, *Dirty Harry*
(Don Siegel, 1971), *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), *Death Wish* (Michael

Winner, 1974), and *Law of Survival* (*La loi du survivant*, José Giovanni, 1967) — or just tried to emulate domestic high-brow films based on a crime/detective template (*Blow-Up*, Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966; *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion/Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto*, Elio Petri, 1970), although with much smaller budgets, lack of originality, and a tendency to include as many titillating sequences as possible. By the same token, they were criticised, often to the point of becoming subjects of mockery, for their banal treatment of political and social issues. Mostly informed by a prejudice against commercial cinema, these objections have contributed in keeping the Italian crime films on the fringes of domestic criticism for years. By contrast, foreign critics showed a less snobbish stance. In 1986, Kim Newman wrote that these films were much more complex and 'original' products than Italian critics believed, and that, although in many ways inspired by certain foreign models, the Italian epigones would substantially disregard such models, re-working mainstream generic conventions through 'surprisingly sophisticated mixes of imitation, pastiche, parody, deconstruction, reinterpretation and operatic inflation' (Newman 1986: 20).

Since the 1990s, prejudices towards the Italian crime film have been increasingly — and more effectively — challenged. In the wake of Quentin Tarantino's public reappraisal of post-war Italian genre cinema, previously neglected films and directors have shifted the attention away from exclusive accounts of high-brow cinema, and become the subject of a vast operation of critical recuperation that has been peculiarly concerned with generic products in the widest meaning of the term — genres, sub-genres, formulas, cycles, series, and so on. By following the belief that certain generic products crucially represent examples of post-war Italy's attempts to deal with major social and political discontent, these theoretical revisions have successively affected the study of both national cinema and popular modes of consumption and reception in a ground-breaking fashion (Frayling 2006; Goodall 2006; Günsberg 2004; Hughes 2004; Hunt 2002; Koven 2004 and 2006; Lagny 1992; Mendik 2004; Nakahara 2004). Crime/detective films have not been immune to this critical revision. To varying degrees, these have been explored so as to establish the relation between generic content and ongoing social changes, as well as in profiling specific industrial and spectatorial issues. To date, a major theoretical front views these films as permeated by wider anxieties regarding patriarchal decline and modernity. The manifest misogyny that marks the *giallo*, for example, where innumerable female characters are gruesomely murdered after being stripped of their clothes, has suggested interpretations about Italian men's

unease at a time in which a new idea of woman was pushing its way through into Italian society (Koven 2006). A related apprehension has also been noted within the *poliziottesco*, in which formulaic plots unravel as a 'male melodrama' (Wood 2007) featuring hyper-masculine lead characters whilst women are either relegated to very marginal roles or masculinized (Campbell 2006).

To a greater or lesser extent, these representations have been seen as expressing a preoccupation about the effects of modernization. Like the 'modern', emancipated woman, cutting-edge technological devices and the mass media are emblematically referred to on several occasions, and crucially associated with decay and evilness. The *giallo* killer becomes literally delirious when using telephones, cameras, and voice recorders, and it is no coincidence that his/her criminal performances are 'signed' through non-mechanical, pre-modern weapons (Koven 2006). In an analogous fashion, the *poliziottesco* inspector refuses the .44 Magnum or any other gun used as a fetish by his American colleagues, and commits himself to what he believes to be the necessary in terms of correctional rehabilitation, that is, the 'old school' of punches and kicks (see, for instance, Barry 2004).

Urban and industrialized environments are likewise subject to this preoccupation, becoming allusive stages of insecurity and bewilderment. The chaotic city, with its backdrop of violence, corruption and neuroses, symbolically reflects the loss of pre-industrial innocence and health associated with bucolic Italy. In it, stories unfold amid a wide range of opulent and hedonistic images linked with travel and expensive goods (Needham 2003; Edmonstone 2008), as well as with other images of uninhibited sexuality and fascistic violence (Barry 2004; Campbell 2006). However, these representations are in themselves 'problematic', being offered for the spectator's enjoyment while being at the same time stigmatised on a narrative level for their immorality — an ambivalence which reveals a difficulty in dealing with modern values and behaviour (Koven 2006).

Contributions on the Italian crime film have also focused on production and consumption issues. Many scholars refer to *giallo*, *poliziottesco* and other commercial cycles as *filoni*, a term which calls attention to the derivative nature of these products. In Italian, *filone* (singular form) loosely refers to 'strand', 'thread', and 'vein', as well as 'tradition' and 'current'. The term has undergone a gradual conceptualization by non-Italian film scholars which has led to the identification of *filoni* with the various formulaic

cycles produced in Italy between the late 1950s to the late 1980s which are crucially marked by stylistic and narrative excesses unknown to mainstream Hollywood genre films (see, for example, Edmonstone 2008). One such excess is represented by the 'set piece' or 'number', a sequence that seemingly outstrips narrative motivations to indulge in highly stylized murders, spectacular car chases, stripteases, and musical intermezzos — all at the expense, for instance, of a plausible detection or procedural storyline. As Robert Edmonstone has put it, to watch the average crime *filone* 'was to be confronted by a series of violent spectacles, and often narratively incoherent 'numbers', sandwiched like the song and dance sequence of the American musical between more dialogue and narrative scenes' (2008: 9).

For Mikel J. Koven (2006) the excess of the Italian crime film is less incoherent than a meaningful practice dictated by a specific spectatorial context and particular viewing habits of that time. Taking the *giallo* as an example, Koven argues that, unlike Hollywood crime/detective films, the Italian equivalents were primarily designed to meet the demand of working-class spectators inhabiting small towns and villages, who attended film theatres first and foremost as an excuse to socialize. It was quite common for them to go to the cinema on their own, after the working day, just to have some distraction and a chat with other people (cf. Wagstaff 1992; Bondanella 2009: 178-179). This implies that the *giallo* audience did not 'necessarily watch (or want to watch) movies as a classically integrated whole' but were 'sufficiently entertained' by a series of graphic murder 'set pieces' that punctuated the story, on which filmmakers peculiarly relied to get the audience focused and involved (Koven: 116). Making clear this point, Koven goes so far as to reject assessing *giallo* films on the ground of traditional mainstream cinema and genres, arguing that the related cycle may be best understood as an expression of 'vernacular' film, that is, as a filmic format that crystallises a specifically localised cultural performance.

Despite the critical interventions and contributions so far illustrated, the literature on the Italian crime film shows some significant inaccuracies and offers incomplete accounts that make the current theorization of the genre weak and debatable. To begin with, the study of narrative representations in relation to Italian society is not particularly insightful. There are no well-researched historical and social accounts, and the influence of the Leaden Years is mostly established by means of suggestive (but generalized) references to terrorism. Also, there is little or no mention at

all about other important factors of ongoing social concern and public debate which found room in the genre's textual body — e.g. Italy's regionalism, the changes in values and habits concerning family, the increase in rates of domestic violence as well as of antisocial and sociopathic behaviour (particularly among the youth), and the inaction and lack of clarity by the political class with regard to sensitive issues.

With respect to this, the literature on the Italian crime film is indebted to just a small number of contributions coming from an Italian background. Articles and essays by Italian film scholars available in English are limited to a few contributors (Baschiera and Di Chiara 2010a, 2010b; Curti 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2013; Ricci 2002), while references to Italian studies unpublished in English are sporadic. To a certain degree, this reflects the low international visibility of film studies conducted in Italy, as well as the restricted development of the discipline in both Italian academic programmes and specialised journals, where an aura of out-dated criticism still prescribes, to some extent, examples of seemingly 'low' cinema from being taken seriously. On the whole, this has resulted in Anglo-American readings and theoretical approaches prevailing, and has accordingly constrained the research focus on the Italian crime film.

Although essential for rehabilitating the subject within film criticism on a global scale, Anglo-American contributions have partly vitiated the quality of their own findings by exploring the relation between Italian society and the films at stake through a circumscribed, non-Italian point of view often unable to fully grasp the necessary connections between cultural, social, and industrial factors. The notion of *filone* as it has been popularised by Anglo-American scholars is emblematic of this aspect, establishing a somewhat misleading approach towards both film production and consumption. To sustain that Italian crime films 'fit' into a specific type of popular entertainment (*filone* cinema) where extreme contents (sex, violence) are typically prioritised over narrativity (continuity, coherence) leads to a failure in accounting for those films which profited, instead, from particularly studied plots. At the same time, it leads to the theorising of the recourse to the extreme as a function of commercial and industrial reasons only (i.e. exploitation cinema), while overlooking 'excess' as a wider trend in national culture that also involved high-brow cinema (e.g. Bernardo Bertolucci's *Ultimo tango a Parigi/Last Tango in Paris*, 1972; Marco Ferreri's *La grande abbuffata/The Big Feast*, 1973; or Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò*, 1976). Similar overgeneralizations also apply to spectatorship. The assumption that the audience who used to watch crime films was affected by an attention span so short that it made necessary 'numbers' to occur every five to ten

minutes or so has contributed to the conception of a kind of '*filone* spectator' that substantially disregards that Italian cinema-goers were also engaged with more conventional narratives, especially those of Hollywood films.

Theorizations on the genre have also been influenced by the quantity and type of film sources used for analysis. Despite hundreds of crime/detective films having been produced between 1970 and 1982 or so, there are but a few referenced films, usually cross-cited from one piece to another. This is largely due to the majority of films being sourced from Anglophone DVD/Blu-ray markets, where listings of available Italian crime films are currently limited. Italian DVD/Blu-ray and film library catalogues would certainly be better in this respect, but as they primarily stock films spoken in Italian, they represent a problem for many non-Italian speaking researchers. The access to English DVD/Blu-ray releases, however, raises other language issues. Most of these sources feature English versions of original Italian films, with dubbing overshadowing certain cultural specifics crystallised in the use of the Italian language, such as regional accents, speech patterns, puns, jokes, and popular culture references.

The present thesis addresses the Italian crime films produced during the eventful Leaden Years in order to assess their historical, cultural, and generic identity from an analytical and cultural perspective which has so far been missing from the body of theoretical work that they have generated — that is, an Italian one. This shall be realised by providing the films with a thorough historical and cultural contextualization which takes account of a large and thematically variegated number of Italian sources, particularly those that date back to the 1960s and the 1970s, as well as by examining these films in the light of historical, social, and industrial circumstances that have been either scarcely or never covered despite their relevance to the textual features of the genre. This thesis is not meant to deny the value of the Anglo-American critical work on these films. It is concerned, instead, with making sure that the historical and cultural aspects of the country and society which has produced and consumed such films do not get lost, and with seeking out valuable elements for understanding how the crime genre reflected Italian society during the discontent of the 'traumatic' Leaden Years.

This thesis is structured into two sections. In the first one, I shall outline the critical methodologies and theoretical approaches that have informed my analysis and research, discussing models which theoretically support the investigation of generic products in relation to the society in which these are/have been produced, as well as

discussing which sources have been employed and how (Chapter 1). Then, I shall provide a historical overview of Italian cinema and society from the end of the Second World War, pointing out cultural, economic, and industrial motivations that accounted for the popularity of the crime genre during the Leaden Years, both in cinema and other media (Chapter 2). In the second section, I shall focus on the relationship between crime films and some key specific events of the time in which they were produced. As well as discussing issues linked with terrorism and political violence, I shall also address topics and events that despite their historical importance, have been less covered by the literature on these films, such as the reigniting of nationally divisive drives based on Italy's deep-seated regional cultures, and the revising of sex roles and family paradigms in the wake of a crisis in the patriarchal model of society (Chapters 3 to 5).

PART ONE

METHODOLOGY AND SUBJECTS

Chapter 1:   Approaching Genre and the Italian Crime Film

Approaches to film genre have long provided fundamental critical tools to establish the cultural value of films, and to explore how they are produced and consumed within a society. Based on sets of conventions, genre crystallises a variety of practices and discourses which allow filmmakers and viewers to create, interpret, and share meanings via filmic texts. Through genres, the world we inhabit is transformed into imaginary worlds featuring specific sets of limited — and thus predictable — characters and situations: imaginary worlds which, because of their finiteness and conventionality, are more coherent and orderly than real world — and thus more comforting and reliable. These 'worlds', however, do not exist in fiction only, but also extend to the surrounding practices that inform and orientate both production and reception of films — e.g. institutional strategies, marketing and publicity, film reviews, and audience preferences. As Rick Altman has pointed out, genre is a multivalent tool: it is at once a 'blueprint' which patterns and programs filmmaking activities; a narrative 'structure' around which individual films are shaped; a 'label' used for communication purposes, especially by distributors, exhibitors, and advertisers; and also a 'contract', an ideal agreement between filmmakers and audience which is based on previously released films and involves specific entertainment promises as well as expectations (1999: 17).

Although marked by conventionalized and predictable features, we cannot consider film genres as being static or universal. Genres respond to the cultural and historical inputs of the society in which they have been devised and popularised, so their narrative and stylistic templates are defined in both space and time. Consequently, as the socio-cultural scene is periodically reconfigured by ideological shifts, technological innovations, and economic and political developments, so are generic contents, structures, and boundaries. If we consider, for example, a Hollywood genre like the science fiction film, we are able to observe significant modifications occurring over the decades: from low-budget and highly standardized productions of the 1950s that featured clashes between earthlings and outer space creatures at a time of fear of Communism and the atomic bomb, to the dystopian plots of the 1970s that expressed a feeling of paranoia and social uncertainty and the later stage of big-budget productions in which sci-fi conventions are developed in proximity of other generic 'worlds' such as

the horror (*Alien*, Ridley Scott, 1979), the family film (*E.T.*, Steven Spielberg, 1982), the disaster film (*Independence Day*, Roland Emmerich, 1996), the love story (*In Time*, Andrew Niccol, 2011), and so on. But similar changes also affect non-Hollywood genres. In the Japanese ghost film, for instance, the classical theme of the revengeful spirit of a woman haunting the men who have done her wrong has been revisited in more recent years by films like *Ju-on: The Curse* (*Ju-on*, Takashi Shimizu, 2000) and *Dark Water* (*Honogurai mizu no soko kara*, Hideo Nakata, 2002), which extends the topos of the ghost to child characters who have suffered from abandonment — a shift which has been interpreted as reflecting modern Japan's family and parental issues (cf. Iles 2005; Nelson 2009).

The above examples help to place film genres in a temporal perspective, thus as historical phenomena. According to Steve Neale (1990, 2000), genres' periodical evolution signals changes in both the broader repertoire of available conventions and forms, and the cinematic institution itself. Therefore, genres are best understood as 'processes of systematization' always ongoing. This vision is inspired by theories on literary genres elaborated by the Russian formalists[1], according to which the production of artworks is centred around certain dominant, canonized forms (i.e. genres) until new forms 'break in' and manage to become themselves canonized, so re-centring the production. Adopted to cinematic genres, this evolutionary model has allowed speculation on the fluctuating popularity (or 'dominance') of genres over the time as the result of temporarily coincident industrial factors. In a widely referenced article that first appeared in *Screen*, Steve Neale provides a capsule application of this model to the study of Hollywood genres, taking as a starting point the origins of cinema itself:

> cinema [...] arose in, and as, the conjunction of variety of art forms – canonized and otherwise: from photography, through pictorial entertainments and spectacles like the diorama, the zoëtrope, and the magic lantern show, to magic itself and to the vaudeville routine. Its earliest generic regime [i.e. the corpus of available genres at a particular historical moment], in America as elsewhere, was dominated by the genres associated with these forms; the moving snapshot or 'view', re-enacted and reconstructed news, trick films, and slapstick and gag-based comedy. Subsequent to this, a shift to a predominance of fiction, in particular melodrama (whether in its thrilling, mysterious, domestic, or spectacular guise) on the one hand, and comedy on the other. With accompanying subdivisions and with the addition of genres like the musical, this 'dominant' came to be stabilized in the era of oligopoly and studio control. Later, in a period of crisis and readjustment, 'adult' drama and 'epic' values – marked by, and derived principally

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1   Steve Neale cites works by Boris Eikenbaum, Jury Tynyanov, and Viktor Shklovsky (1990: 59).

from, the epic itself, and spreading from there to the western, the war film, the musical, and even, with films like *The Great Race* (Blake Edwards, 1965) and *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (Stanley Kramer, 1963), to slapstick comedy – gained a position of dominance, though by now they were beginning to jockey for position with 'exploitation' genres and the 'juvenilization' of Hollywood's output. Finally, more recently, the process of juvenilization has continued, with the emergence of the 'teenpic' and the predominance of science fiction and horror. Meanwhile, in exemplary illustration of [Russian formalist Viktor] Shklovsky's thesis, some of these genres, in combination with serial-derived individual films like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981) and *Romancing the Stone* (Robert Zemeckis, 1984), have been promoted the 'junior branches' of Hollywood's output to achieve hegemony within the realms of the family blockbuster.

(1990: 60-61)

However, such formal 'evolutions', as illustrated more in detail by Neale himself in later analyses on Hollywood genres (2000), do not concern industrial and institutional factors only, but externalise broader social and ideological developments in a society's history. With reference to the above quoted examples on American cinema, the emergence of the 'teenpic' (i.e. films having adolescents as protagonists and their targeted audiences), and the predominance of generic conventions previously associated with youth-oriented genres such as horror and sci-fi, may be interpreted as responses to the shifting demographics of American society. As several scholars have noted, most American films produced in the late 1970s to early 1980s were marked by an urge to disavow the recent troublesome past (the social and political conflicts of the 1960s and early 1970s, the Vietnam war, the Watergate scandal), and so implicitly promoted reassurance and forgetfulness through the restyling of idyllic formulas and the overwhelming spectacle of grandiose special effects (Britton 1986; Wood 1986). Director-producers like George Lucas and Steven Spielberg were among the initiators of a teen-friendly trend for big film productions which capitalized to some extent on the adults' nostalgia for their teenage years and a 'palpable desire for parental control and authority' (Doherty 1988: 237). Contextually, horror films featuring indestructible and quasi-supernatural 'monsters' such those of the *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* sagas, as well as films based on the struggle for the possession of the ultimate power or weapon like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (Nicholas Meyer, 1982), have been seen as becoming popular by transferring onto celluloid the widespread feeling of social helplessness and reciprocal fantasy of destruction regarding an oppressive capitalist system (Wood 1986: 168-169).

The model of generic evolution so far presented provides a flexible support for tracing the history of individual genres, accounting for the multiplicity of factors that contribute to stabilise specific generic formulas at specific historical periods. By the same token, this model is crucial for reflecting on the historical implications which led to the 'canonizing' of a genre like the Italian crime film. As I shall discuss in detail in Chapter 2, crime films became central (i.e. 'dominant') in the offering of Italian cinema at the outset of the 1970s, at a time of significant social transformations that can be seen to have affected industrial strategies. Their popularity lasted until the early 1980s, in concomitance with a new page of Italy's history marked by the weakening of the urban criminality, an economic recovery, and new ideological and industrial factors.

Following certain salient aspects of genre films, such as their ritual-like consumption, their repetitiveness based on a formula, and their peculiar dramatization of social and cultural issues, several scholars have agreed to consider them as modern equivalents of myths. Nowadays, in fact, in a way that reminds one of the ancient custom of gathering around a fire to listen to deeds of heroes and gods, masses of individuals watch and listen to stories that speak to their own concerns, which are renewed with differences at every iteration. This comparison has had significant implications in film studies, promoting critical approaches which examine the narrative structure and the social function of genres in line with theoretical and analytical accounts of myths.

Very influential, in this respect, have been the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who pioneered in the late 1950s to 1960s the structural analysis of tribal myths. According to the French anthropologist, a myth is a story shared within a community, which maintains its intrinsic significance notwithstanding alternative versions featuring different plots, settings, and characters. This story is symbolic of cultural contradictions that afflict the community, which are displaced in fiction in the form of binary oppositions, or antinomies. These oppositions shape the dramatic conflicts every mythical tale relies on, and their resolution provides a palliative intellectual means of mediating real contradictory circumstances. In *Structural Anthropology* (1963), Lévi-Strauss exemplifies his analytic method by assessing a group of American Indian tales and finding out that their narrative oppositions — herbivores *versus* carnivores, gardeners *versus* hunters, plant fibres *versus* animal sinews, and so on — were all related to an underlying opposition between agriculture and hunting — the myth's master antinomy. On closer

inspection, the agriculture/hunting opposition was interpreted as a symbolic transposition of the deeper dilemma between life and death in American Indian culture, which the natives tried to overcome by resolving surrogate conflicts between agriculture and hunting. A particular way adopted by this cycle of mythical tales to deal with the above referenced oppositional terms was found in 'mediator' characters. With regard to those tales dealing with herbivorous and carnivorous personages, for example, carrion-eaters such as the coyote or the raven function, in the logic of myth, to reconcile topical contradictions: they could eat meat like carnivores yet, like herbivores, they eat what they found on the ground with no need to hunt. Leví-Strauss clarifies this point elsewhere with another example, a myth about a sole which is able to fly by benefiting from its own flattish, kite-like shape:

> [w]hile it is obviously wrong and impossible from an empirical point of view that a fish is able to fight a wind, from a logical point of view we can understand why 'images' borrowed from experience can be put to use. This is the originality of mythical thinking — to play the part of conceptual thinking: an animal which can be used as what I would call a binary operator can have, from a logical point of view, a relationship with a problem which is also a binary problem.

(1978: 22-23)

As for film studies, the above considerations have inspired an approach that views genres as discursive structures responding to topical socio-cultural tensions and conflicts. In other words, a number of films associated with a given genre and produced at a particular time can be reasonably assessed so as to determine the underlying framework that embodies collective concerns as well as ideological orientations. This is apparent in a number of studies influenced by what Rick Altman has called 'the ritual approach' (1987; 1999), i.e. an investigation which speculates on the social function of genres by establishing a link between the popularity of certain generic forms and the needs of the community. With his *Hollywood Genres* (1981), Thomas Schatz stands out as one of the prominent pioneers of this approach. By addressing a number of popular genres produced by American studios as forms of a 'collective cultural expression' (p. 13), Schatz explores genres as sites of the investigation of the values and ideals of American society. Admittedly indebted with Lévi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology, Schatz views Hollywood genres as ritualized 'problem-solving operations' (p. 24) that contribute to 'what might be called contemporary American mythology' (p. 261); as a

locus in which one can find traces of 'Americanism', with all its 'rampant conflicts, contradictions, and ambiguities' (p. 31). This is further evident from the fact that, like myths,

> Hollywood movies are considerably more effective in their capacity to raise questions than to answer them. This characteristic seems particularly true of genre films. And as such, the genre's fundamental impulse is to continually *renegotiate* the tenets of American ideology. And what is so fascinating and confounding about Hollywood genre films is their capacity to 'play it both ways', to both criticize and reinforce the values, beliefs, and ideals of our culture within the same narrative context.

> (Schatz 1981: 35, emphasis in the original)

All things considered, the ritual approach to genre analysis as developed by Schatz and others attempts to find a connection between culture and filmic texts, and to answer what role generic narratives and formulas play in their audiences' lives. By stressing the relation between viewer and film as a ritualized practice that establishes a cultural mediation, this approach contends that film genres help to raise and resolve in fiction those cultural conflicts that society cannot, or does not how to, resolve in reality. By following this methodological line, the present thesis shall focus on the narrative conflicts that provide the generic identity of *giallo, poliziottesco* and other crime films, and discuss the peculiar organization of such filmic texts around binary oppositions that responded to real problems and preoccupations of Italian society (see table 1.1). Whilst some of the conflicts outlined have never been considered before, we can find others having been discussed already in Anglo-American contributions. By establishing a connection between the symbolic valence of such conflicts and broader socio-cultural issues, this study aims to interrogate how Italian crime cinema reflects upon Italian society amid the wider tensions of the Leaden Years.

With regard to the films discussed, it has been obviously impossible to address the hundreds of films released in the decade or so covered. So from an analytical point of view, I have opted for selecting those which are to me the most 'illuminating' in support of my arguments, and that ensure that those excluded do not invalidate the claims made. With the exception of those films referenced in the footnotes, all films have been watched both in their Italian version and their English dubbed one (if ever existed). The quotation of lines and dialogue excerpts generally come from English film versions, unless dubbing somehow 'disperses' some important detail in the translation

or adaptation process — in that case, quotations are from the Italian version of the film, accompanied by a notice in the text or in a footnote.

Text sources are based on both English and Italian language. These range from works within film studies and reviews to accounts exploring to varying degrees historical, socio-cultural, political, and economic aspects of Italy. With regard to the Italian-written sources, my attention has been primarily given to ones from the 1960s and 1970s, which have helped to provide a frame that is very specific to the Italian socio-cultural context of the Leaden Years. Amongst such sources, I have especially referenced those of popular mass production associated with media like television, the press, novels, and comics, as well as newspaper and magazine articles that account for key facts of public debate of that time.

English and Italian sources alike have been collected, where available, in London, through research work conducted at the British Film Institute and the British Library. At the latter place, I also had the chance to browse unpublished doctoral dissertations from not only the UK, but also the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. However, a substantial part of the collection process has also seen myself visiting Italian institutions like the Cineteca (Bologna), plus a variety of local libraries across Italy (Milan, Bergamo, Rome, Bari).

MAIN NARRATIVE BINARIES
Language *vs* Dialect
Diction *vs* Slang
Northern places *vs* Southern places
Northern Italians *vs* Southern Italians
Industrialized space *vs* Rural space
Well industrialized space *vs* Poorly industrialized space
Traditional Family *vs* Modern Family
Nuclear family *vs* Dysfunctional/Alternative family
Marriage *vs* Spinsterhood/Bachelor
Procreative sex *vs* Non-procreative sex
Heteronormative sex *vs* Non-heteronormative sex
Older woman *vs* Younger/'Modern' Woman
Man *vs* Emancipated woman
Adults *vs* Toddlers/Teenagers
Parents *vs* Offspring
Citizen *vs* State
Outlaw *vs* Police
Vigilantism *vs* Legal procedure
State-sponsored terrorism *vs* Generic terrorism

Table 1.1 – *Taxonomy of conflicts in Italian crime film narratives*

Chapter 2:   Contextualising Post-War Italy and the 'Leaden Years'

In 1981, following the Golden Lion awarded at the Venice Film Festival to Margarethe Von Trotta's *The German Sisters/The Bleierne Zeit*, a film inspired by the experiences of West German terrorist leader Ulrike Meinhoff, the media in Italy borrowed the title chosen for the film by Italian distributors, i.e. *Anni di piombo*, and used it to refer to the most violent decade the Italian republic had ever known. Nevertheless, the expression does not seem powerful enough to render the complexity of the historical period it refers to. Far from being remembered for tragic facts of terrorism only, those years stood out as a crucible of unprecedented socio-cultural fervour which led to outstanding achievements in terms of civil rights and challenged in many respects the authority of Italy's most important institutions — the family, the Catholic Church, the mass-based parties, and the nation state. Complemented by a severe economic crisis and a prolonged political uncertainty, the Leaden Years represented an important crossroads in the history of Italian cinema, affecting in varying degrees strategies of production as well as the consumption habits of the public. At the same time, the ideological and cultural stimuli of the period crept between the folds of national filmic texts, influencing the narrative content and form of niche art-house and mainstream films alike. In this chapter, I shall explore in detail the extent which made this period so crucial to Italian cinema, contextualising production and consumption issues that ground crime narratives via reference to major historical and cultural developments in post-war Italy.

2.1   Historical notes

After the years of struggle which had followed World War II, from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s Italy underwent a period of considerable growth, largely supported by the American funds of the Marshall Plan. Media all around the world described the outstanding performance of the country as a real 'economic miracle', an expression that historians would later adopt to define an age of unprecedented standards of employment and quality of life. The passage from the fascist Italy, mainly rural and provincial, to the prosperous Italy occurred via processes of industrialization and

urbanization, the seeming relentlessness of which reshaped territorial and social structures. A massive wave of internal migration estimated at about 9 million people between 1955 and 1971 (Prideaux 2011: 6) produced significant displacements from highlands to lowlands, from the countryside to cities, and from the South to the North. By hosting workers and families from all over the country, northern cities such as Milan and Turin became at once advanced industrial centres and places symbolic of Italy's social mutation and economic vitality.

On closer inspection, the whole society had become aware of the eventful transformations and their effects. The Olympic Games, held in Rome in 1960, and the choice of *Autostrada del Sole* (Motorway of the Sun) as a name for the first road infrastructure linking North and South of the country (1958), signalled that Italy had acquired consciousness of having stepped out of the dark tunnel of international isolation and national fragmentation. In addition, the increasing spread of the media as well as the sharing and consumption of goods on a mass scale contributed to landmark cultural changes and social behaviours. Lifestyles, languages, models, and aspirations tended to homogenise, helping to establish the character of the petty bourgeoisie and, simultaneously, to overcome long-lasting class and regional divides.

In contrast to socio-cultural and economical transformations, diffused conservative positions and a general political inaction (*immobilismo*) were holding the country back in sensitive matters such as civil rights, government structures, and administration of the commonwealth. By the end of the 1960s, Italian society seemed to realise the effects of a missed coincidence between development and progress, as insistent claims for reforms by students and workers signalled the end of the long-wave of prosperity and collective enthusiasm for the 'economic miracle'. In the aftermath of the 1968 protests and other key events such as the strikes of the so-called *autunno caldo* of 1969 ('hot autumn'), malcontent grew larger and larger, contributing to some extent to the diffused anarchism and the episodes of politically motivated violence of the next decade.

On a political level, the opening of the 1970s were strongly affected by the infamous Piazza Fontana bombing, an attack later attributed to ultra-right groups which saw 17 dead and about 80 injured in a bank in the centre of Milan in December 1969. The years-long lack of truth which marked the event, alongside a series of controversial deaths involving individuals to some extent connected or supposed to be connected with the bombing, caused numerous conspiracy theories to arise, and helped to popularise

the idea that some high ranking government officers pulled the strings of the events. Contextually, journalists came to consider Piazza Fontana and its charged aura of government-implicated mysteries as the Italian equivalent of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's assassination in the USA in 1963 (Cavallari 1972). Further excited by ongoing parliamentary debates such as the Divorce Act and the reform of the Labour Act, this political situation caused several political activists to radicalise their actions, resulting in an escalation of incidents between ideologically opposed groups — *rossi* versus *neri*, or 'reds' versus 'blacks' — and between police forces and such groups.

To secure social stability, Luigi Berlinguer, leader of the main opposition party PCI (the Italian Communist Party), proposed a joint agreement with the principal party of government, the DC (Christian-Democrats). Berlinguer's proposition, which media and commentators promptly named the 'historic compromise', came after General Augusto Pinochet's coup d'etat in Chile (1973), and was urged by the belief in many Communist circles that a similar overthrow was about to happen in Italy. The 'historic compromise' produced significant feedback on the political scene for several years to come, with DC leader Aldo Moro being among the foremost negotiators. However, the 'compromise' was not welcomed by a large part of the electoral base as well as by radical political groups which regarded the possible DC-PCI partnership as an attempt to further the sharing of power in Italy.

Criticism of the 'compromise' prefigured an atmosphere of wider dissatisfaction with the political class, which became self-evident with the referendum to repeal the law on divorce in May 1974. Indeed, the victory of those pro-divorce (59.3 per cent), and the polling figures (87.7 per cent), showed that a remarkable portion of electors had run against the lines of both principal parties: the DC, in fact, supported by the Church, had opposed divorce, while the PCI, sceptical about the victory of divorce, had called for abstention. In many respects, the referendum worked as an indicator of the effective gap between the big mass parties and the real needs of the citizens they were supposed to represent. To confirm this gap further, there was the considerable consent that certain extremist fronts were able to gain over those years, especially among struggling strata of society such as the labourers and the retired, but also among the youth and many Italian intellectuals.

Alongside the spread of social disorder and political uncertainty, the country had to come to terms with incipient challenges in terms of economics and employment. In 1973, the oil crisis forced the government to enact harsh measures of austerity. Soon

enough, measures for saving energy such as the banning of the driving cars on Sundays or the early closing of cinemas and theatres made the consumerist years of the boom a mourned time. To face the crisis, the government even delayed the introduction of colour in television broadcasting, fearing that colour television could let consumer behaviour and inflation run wild[1]. The grey economic outlook, along with increased unemployment, caused social malcontent to spread amid public disorder. In 1977, a shocking wave of violence persuaded domestic sociologists and political scientists that the traditional experience of protest movements and political groups had come to an end. Terms such as 'anti-movements' and 'second society' were coined to describe a phenomenon of social rebelliousness which no longer encompassed labourers and proletarians only, but a more heterogeneous and irreducible social category suffering from uncertainty and privation which included youths, feminists, graduates, the unemployed, and so on (Asor Rosa 1977; Melucci 1981).

In parallel to this, a number of political groups sided with the extreme left and the extreme right, as well as anarchism, adopted forms of armed opposition against the establishment on a large scale. Faced with the number of incidents and attacks which increased dramatically day after day[2], political discourse became bifurcated into being with either state and democracy or terrorism and violence. This became most apparent during the dramatic fifty-five days of captivity of Aldo Moro (March-May 1978), the DC leader kidnapped and then murdered by the Red Brigades, a self-proclaimed organization for proletarian revolution which could count on thousands of affiliates across the country (Bocca 1985). Politicians and media talked jointly of an attack on 'the heart of the state', while the DC's refusal to negotiate with the terrorists further reinforced the two-pole scenario. The Red Brigades, on their side, contributed to this contraposition via a series of communiqués full of invectives against the DC and the state itself that were regularly delivered to radio and television stations and the press. The kidnapping of Moro, put on private trial by the terrorist organization and then 'sentenced to death', likewise fell within this logic of extreme opposition and symbolic antagonism.

The months and years following Moro's assassination were marked by other tragic incidents caused by terrorist violence (kidnappings, murders of magistrates and

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1   Although the RAI, the national television network, had started its first tests with colour in 1970, the passage to full colour broadcasts was realised only between 1975 and 1977, a tremendous delay compared to other European countries. The BBC, for instance, turned to full colour transmissions in 1968.

2   Compare the 702 attacks of 1975 with the 2,597 attacks recorded in 1979 (Liehm 1986: 354).

journalists, other bombings) as well as by new revelations of political plots and conspiracies (such as that involving the masonic lodge P2)[3], which have further complicated any understanding of the tumultuous development of the *anni di piombo*. As historian Giorgio Galli has written,

> during the Leaden Years, intelligence, 'hidden powers', and the political establishment acted to impede the transformations in Italian society that could bring progressive government, leaving power to those groups and lobbies which had always controlled it. The price to pay for this were dramatic deaths […], several of such caused by the Red Brigades following the tragic and naïve illusion that destabilization could result in revolution.

(1993: 383, my transl.)

2.2   Notes on the Italian film industry, audiences, and the 'yellow' genre

From the end of the 1960s on, Italian cinema registered substantial changes in terms of film genres offered. Thrillers, gangster and detective films, fake documentaries, and action movies set in contemporary Italy and concerned with domestic current affairs and issues replaced previously popular genres and sub-genres essentially marked by non-Italian and anachronistic settings, such as the pirate film, the epic film (or *peplum*), the gothic horror, and the 'spaghetti' western. This Italo-centric repositioning followed the genuine need of representing and dealing with the present and its complexity; a need urgent for Italian cinema as culturally influential filmmakers such as Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti, Federico Fellini, Bernardo Bertolucci, and Pier Paolo Pasolini seemed more preoccupied with following symbolic and existentialist trajectories than addressing issues of public and social concern in an immediate fashion.

These changes in the national film offering occurred in the wake of some important historical conjunctures, including a generational turnover in spectatorship and the economic crisis. Whilst in the mid-1950s to 1960s Italian cinema had become a

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3   P2 (abbreviation for Propaganda 2) was a secret society whose existence was first uncovered in March 1981, in the process of a police investigation on a financial collapse involving the banker Michele Sindona. During a house search, the police found a list of 962 names of alleged P2 members which included politicians, industrialists, members of the army, and intelligence officers. The P2 programmatic manifesto came under the suggestive title of 'Plan of Democratic Rebirth', as the aim of the organization and its ideologue, Licio Gelli, was to establish a network of power, a kind of state-within-the-state represented by politicians, media exponents, bankers, trade unionists, and so on, which would work so as to give Italy the necessary ground for overcoming govermental disruptions. (For an in-depth study on the P2, consult Paul Ginsborg's *Italy and Its Discontents*, 2003b, pp. 137-178).

prosperous industry, with a number of film productions second only to the US and Japan and unrivalled box-office achievements in Europe (Corsi 2001), at the beginning of the 1970s it underwent a gradual and irreversible decline. The average family almost disapperead from cinemas, as the oil crisis caused the price of movie tickets to skyrocket. Relentlessly, a substantial portion of the public started migrating toward television, helped by favourable circumstances such as reduced costs of TV sets and, perhaps more importantly, the simultaneous advent of commercial broadcasting. Unlike the nation-funded RAI1 and RAI2, commercial TV stations attracted millions by supplying a seemingly endless stream of films, cartoons, series, soap operas, and shows of any kind, without late evening interruptions. Given such conditions, staying home and watching television soon replaced the habit of going out and attending movies. In the biggest cities, this was, moreover, proven as a good solution to the increasing fear of running up against some kind of bloody crime or terrorist incident[4].

The audience decline brought along a crisis of receipts that, over the years, proved to be irreversible, and hit severely the business of exhibitors and producers. Between 1970 and 1979 the number of picture houses across the country dramatically resized, dropping from 9,390 to 7,673 as television reinforced its dominance and exhibition became a less remunerative venture (Argentieri 2006: 122-131). Following the oil crisis and the consequent expensiveness of energy supplies, the cost of bills increased rather significantly for the exhibitors, in a scenario that became even harder when the government ordered the Sunday closure of theatres so as to ration electricity usage nationwide (ibid.).

On the side of the producers, things were not going any better. Fewer receipts meant fewer profits, and theirs suddenly turned out to be a risky job as compared to the earlier decades. Strategically, the Italian producers committed themselves almost exclusively to explicit and daring contents of sex and violence, which proved to be attractive for those who, alongside the niche of high-brow cinema followers, still attended the movies to some degree. As noted by Roberto Poppi and Marco Pecorari (1996: 7), such 'faithful' cinema-goers were respectively the young people, interested in plots no matter how deep and logical — or illogical — as long as they were spectacular, and the adult males, in search of explicit sexual content in greater and greater amounts

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4   Following the death anniversary of two far-right sympathizers, on January 1979 more than five cinemas based in Rome were set on fire, and many exhibitors intimidated and told to keep their business closed as a symbolic sign of mourning. In 1979-80, other fire attacks destroyed numerous screening spaces across the country, hitting traditional cinema houses (Rome, Naples) as well as screening rooms run by university and parochial centres (Padua, Rovigo). (For in-depth chronicles see Schaerf, De Lutiis, Silj et al. 1992: 780-781, 787, 814, 873, 881, 904, 907).

as censorship eased its restrictions.

In this context, crime stories became the flagship of the national film offering. By successfully conjugating the aesthetic of contemporaneous crime thrillers and hard-boiled films made in the US and in France with the needs and the expectations of the Italian cinema-goers, these films attracted a large audience nationwide. These films also capitalised on the previously established popularity of national crime novels and comics, as well as on spectacular accounts of domestic crime news (*cronaca nera*) diffused through the press and television, to supply a vast range of films mostly devoted to thrills, violence, and eroticism.

More specifically, the films were part of a larger storytelling tradition known as 'yellow'[5], a literature-derived genre of problematic definition to interlocutors of Anglo-American background. In the Italian language, one may define a 'yellow' as any story featuring, rather indistinctively, crimes, investigations, mysteries, and thrills. The word is particularly used 'by excited newscasters as they introduce breaking news about a dramatic murder *or* an intricate financial scam' (Eynaud 2007, my emphasis). A container which seemingly nullifies the generic and sub-generic classifications of Anglo-American literature, the 'yellow' is named after the colour of the binding of popular book series issued by publishing house Mondadori — *I libri gialli* (or 'the yellow books', 1928-1941) and *Il giallo Mondadori* (1946-present). Such publications made available, mostly for the first time in Italy, translations of a vast array of crime-inflected fictions by acclaimed Anglo-American writers such as Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Mignon G. Eberhart, Raymond Chandler, Edgar Wallace, Cornel Woolrich, John Dickinson Carr, and Elery Queen, as well as French writers as Georges Simenon.

In the post-war age, the narrative potential of the 'yellow' increased more and more. On the one hand, American hard-boiled fictions originally dated between the 1930s and 1940s were finally translated into Italian; on the other, a number of domestic novelists felt free to approach 'yellow' elements on a more regular basis, after years in which crime fictions had been opposed by the fascist regime fearing they could inspire criminal behaviour (Bonsaver 2007). As a result, whilst some novelists remained still attached to British, American, and French sources, others attempted to pilot textual

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5   The Italian word for 'yellow' is *giallo.* Nonetheless, I have opted to use its literal translation, i.e. 'yellow', in order to avoid confusion with the film cycle of the same name. It is here important to acknowledge that English speakers have imported '*giallo*' from Italian language just to refer to a very specific group of films, whereas its original usage extends far beyond that cycle and far beyond cinema. To be more precise, what English speakers call *giallo* Italians call, with reference to cinema, *giallo all'italiana* ('yellow' Italian-style) or, even more specifically, *giallo argentiano* as named after influential film director Dario Argento.

experiments by subverting narrative structures and hybridising contents, or just including references to Italian culture and society in a way never attempted before. One such innovator, Giorgio Scerbanenco impressed a significant change upon the physiognomy of the Italian crime fiction, being influential with respect to future novelists and filmmakers alike[6]. Within the short story collection *Milano calibro 9* (1969) and, above all, the tetralogy labelled 'Milano nera' (Noir Milan, 1972 [1966-1969]) featuring the fictional private detective Duca Lamberti, Scerbanenco abandoned the canons of the classical detective story to embrace hard-boiled and pulp tones, and afforded a contemporary revision of writing style and language, settings, and characterization. The usual tendency towards oratorical overtones and wordy embellishments proper to the Italian novelistic tradition was replaced by a more realistic linguistic register, marked by regional and dialectal expressions, peculiar phrasing structures (e.g. free indirect speech, noun dislocations), and the emulation of media and advertising languages at various lengths. Plot structure was similarly revised, shifting the narrative focus from crime investigation to the detective's thoughts as he moves across a locus of existential dismay and loneliness as exemplified by the industrialized city (see Ricci 2002).

Scerbanenco's all-Italian detective, Duca Lamberti, is the son of a police officer forced by his father to enter medicine to get prestige and a better standard of life. During his time as a medical practitioner, Duca helps a patient to die, which costs him disbarment and a three-year imprisonment for euthanasia. Having served the sentence, Duca joins his father's colleague working for the Milan police department and gets involved in investigations exposing him to the brutal and vicious reality of Italy's most modernized city. Duca's cynicism, his criticism of the legal-judicial system in Italy, and a large dose of alienation and human despair foreshadow the features of the fictional detective in vogue in the Italy of the Leaden Years[7]. The following description of Milan

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6   A tangible proof of Scerbanenco's influence is offered by a number of his novels and short stories being specifically adapted to cinema: *Naked Violence* (*I ragazzi del massacro*, Fernando Di Leo, 1969), *Safety Catch* (*Il caso 'Venere privata'*, Yves Boisset, 1970), *Death Occurred Last Night* (*La morte risale a ieri sera*, Duccio Tessari, 1970), *Asylum Erotica* (*La bestia uccide a sangue freddo*, Fernando Di Leo, 1971), *Milan Calibre 9* (*Milano calibro* 9, Fernando Di Leo, 1972), *Manhunt* (*La mala ordina,* Fernando Di Leo, 1972), *Young, Armed, Dangerous* (*Liberi, armati, pericolosi,* Romolo Guerrieri, 1976).

7   According to Carlo Oliva (2003), 'in a Chandlerian sense of the term, Duca Lamberti is a 'necessary hero'. But he's also a contemporary Italian character, a figure of a credible family background. He's not […] the usual *carabiniere* marshal playing [the Italian card game] *scopone* or a Rome-based version of Maigret. He's a genuine and exceptionally eloquent interpreter of the Italian torment of those years, as well as evidence that the long ostracism declared against the 'yellow' by literary and editorial establishments had by then no more reason to exist. Readers who had found Duca's stories so credible (and exciting) had come to realise how Italy had changed and how the popular narrative was quite capable — unlike, perhaps, more bombastic other forms of literature — to account for that change.' (181-182, my transl.)

from *Duca and the Milan Murders* anticipates and crystallises the malign city of many 1970s crime novels and films, a symbolic space within society where crime and violence are no longer acts of transgression, but ineradicable habits become signs of the time:

> [t]here are still people who don't realize that Milan is a great cosmopolitan city. They have failed to notice that the scale of things has altered. They talk about Milan as though it ended at the Porta Venezia, and as though the people are nothing but *panettoni* and *pan meino*. Mention Marseilles, Chicago, or Paris, and everyone knows you're talking of a wicked metropolis, but with Milan, it's different. Surrounded as they are by the unmistakable atmosphere of a great city, there are still idiots who think of it in terms of local colour, looking for *la basera*, *la pesa* [...], *il gamba de legn*. They forget that a city of two million inhabitants is bound to acquire an international flavour. There's precious little left nowadays of the old local colour. From all over the world, spivs and layabouts are converging on Milan in search of money. They all come, madmen, drunks, drug-addicts, even those who are simply without hope. It's so easy for them to hire a gun, steal a car and leap on to the counter of some bank or other, shouting 'Down, everybody', just as they've seen it done on television. The growth of a city brings benefits, of course, but it brings changes too, some of which make you think.

(Scerbanenco 1970: 108-109)

Alongside Scerbanenco's writing, crime and detective stories found a kind of noble ordination outside the mass market in the realm of 'higher' literature. Thanks to works of Carlo Emilio Gadda (*That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*, 1957) and Leonardo Sciascia (*The Day of the Owl*, 1961; *To Each His Own,* 1966; *One Way or Another*, 1974), Italian literary circles somehow overcame their prejudices regarding the 'yellow' which had set apart the tastes of Italian intellectuals and mainstream readers, and presented finely elaborated novels where the culprit was either undiscovered or unnecessary to the main plot's unfolding. According to literary critic Lucio Izzo (2001), such works were nevertheless 'denatured yellows' that, while offering a metaphor for contemporary Italian society as a puzzle of irresolvable perspectives, confirmed the substantial non-acceptance by the national cultural elite for the genre as a mass consumption product.

All things considered, a peculiar aspect of the post-war Italian crime story is the presence of meta-literary tensions. For Izzo (2001), domestic middle- and low-brow novelists were afflicted by a feeling of duplicity: on the one hand, they admired foreigners, especially the American hard-boiled writers who became more and more popular in Italy, and whose countercultural values many Italian readers sympathised with; on the other, they wanted to emulate — for a sort of cultural prestige — the

sophistication of their high-brow colleagues, whose engagement with reality and refusal of 'low' narrative resolutions had brought into crystallization what Umberto Eco called the 'problematic' rather than 'consolatory' novel (1978). It comes as no surprise that thanks to such meta-literary tensions and their systematization in the text, Italian crime fiction had come to formalise a somewhat completely different type of narrative register than that of its American counterpart. As Izzo (2001) has pointed out, the Italian crime/detective story's subalternity to (rather than independence from) 'high literature' made complicated any attempt at importing structures and motifs from the American genre narratives, resulting in an ambiguous adherence to original models as well as a disposition for re-elaborations. In this vein, the Italian critic Stefano Tani has observed that Gadda and Sciascia participated in (and were influential to) the creation of what one may term 'anti-detective fiction', that is a form of story which 'frustrates the expectations of the reader' and 'substitutes for the detective as central and ordering character the decentering and chaotic admission of mystery, of nonsolution' (1984: 40).

The intrinsically ambiguous yet multi-sided narrative structure of the literary 'yellow' lent itself well to render on screen the reality of Italy's Leaden Years, regardless of the filmmakers' specific intents. For auteurs, and for writers and directors interested in engaging with political discourses, the 'anti-detective' template allowed films to emphasize a feeling of social and existential disorientation in stories in which truth and reality are in an ambiguous relation (Francesco Piero Barilli's *The Perfume of the Lady in Black/Il profumo della signora in nero*, 1974; Marco Leto's *Al piacere di rivederla*, 1976), as well to express citizens' loss of confidence in and frustration concerning the State and institutions at a time particularly marked by political inefficiencies and governmental scandals (Carlo Lizzani's *Roma bene*, 1971; Francesco Rosi's *Illustrious Corpses/Cadaveri eccellenti*, 1976). Whilst moving across a variety of generic and sub-generic registers (detective, mystery, police, legal-procedural, gangster film, conspiracy, and so on), these films all shared the centrality of an unsolvable crime, in stories in which the only gratification for the spectator — to paraphrase Tani's definition of the 'yellow' — seemingly consisted in a sense of a critique of society and modernity which permeates the representation of characters and situations. The 'anti-detective' aspect, and the potentialities of the 'yellow' in terms of its narrative flexibility, were also found particularly convenient by commercial and low-brow filmmakers, who could indulge in spectacular scenes, as well as sexual and violent content, without caring too much about constructing classical detection plots based on a collection of meaningful evidence. Also,

the 'yellow' template allowed them to more easily differentiate their products, such that one story could be offered several times, only with a different 'yellow' angle in terms of lead characters — professional or amateur detective, police officer, special agent, lawyer, prosecutor, judge, vigilante, bandit, gangster, or terrorist — and settings — with some crimes affecting the private, domestic sphere, and others affecting the public, social one.

The production of these commercial, low-brow films is generally approached by critics and scholars in terms of a terminological and conceptual polarization around the two most successful crime cycles produced at that time: the *giallo* and the *poliziottesco*. Both cycles tend to be regarded as distinct generic entities, and are often addressed as individual genres. In this thesis I have opted, however, for considering the films usually associated with these respective cycles as different narrative expressions of one wider generic body — a body which one might call cinematic 'yellow', and which I simply refer to as 'the crime film'. This choice is essentially due to the absence of clearly defined and stable conventions in the broader Italian crime fiction tradition, which I see as also affecting crime film texts produced in the country. As some critics and scholars have observed, both *giallo* and *poliziottesco* films seem to resist generic definitions (cf. Needham 2003; Curti 2006), their narrative and stylistic features being extremely inclined to hybridize with other formulas and genres, such that it is not always true that a *giallo* story features a serial killer in black outfit, or that a *poliziottesco* one has a 'tough cop' *á la* 'Dirty Harry' who fights to restore order in town, which are the common generic features that I have outlined earlier in the Introduction. In this respect, for example, Dana Renga (2011b) has recently stressed the way in which both cycles are often brought together under the umbrella name of 'spaghetti thriller'. Andrea Ricci (2002: 2) has referred to the body of the Italian crime films even more problematically by using the category '*giallo/poliziottesco*/noir', and argues that it is to be understood as an individual genre based on consumption rather than on aesthetic conventions. The figures below display two advertisements used at the time of the theatrical release of two different films that nowadays are widely associated with the *giallo*. Figure 2.1 presents Sergio Martino's *Torso* (*I corpi presentano tracce di violenza carnale*, 1973) as being an ideal 'follow-up' of three other films: two films directed by a figure who is to date considered as one of the *giallo* authors par excellence, that is Dario Argento — *The Bird with Crystal Plumage/L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970) and *Cat o' Nine Tails/Il gatto a nove code* (1971) — and one film, *Execution Squad/La polizia ringrazia* (Stefano

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Vanzina, 1972) which is widely regarded as a prototype of the *poliziottesco* film and, in many respects, the initiator of the associated cycle, starting from the very word 'polizia' (police) in the title. Under the film title, the advertisement reads: 'Every new year cinema has given you an exceptional yellow film'. Figure 2.2 shows the advertisement for the *giallo* film *What Have You Done to Solange/Cosa avete fatto a Solange?* (Massimo Dallamano, 1972), which is described as 'the true police thriller'. The Italian word being used for providing the generic identity of the film is, in this case, one often used with reference to cop films of the like of the *poliziottesco* ('poliziesco'). Both figures are emblematic of how problematic generic definition of Italian crime films can be when they are approached through too specific and restrictive categories. By and large, in this thesis I am more concerned with affinities than differences between the two cycles; affinities that result from the centrality that both dedicate to crime, violence, and Italian settings, and that also emerge from a number of stylistic, narrative, and thematic elements that they share, something which is partly due their regular 'exchanging' scriptwriters (Dardano Sacchetti, Gianfranco Clerici), directors (Umberto Lenzi, Sergio Martino, Lucio Fulci), editors (Eugenio Alabisio), composers (Ennio Morricone, Franco Micalizzi, Stelvio Cipriani), and stars (Enrico Maria Salerno, Franco Nero, Fabio Testi, Luc Merenda, Claudio Cassinelli, Barbara Bouchet, Florinda Bolkan). Amongst such thematic elements are, moreover, as I shall show in the following chapters, some that are particularly inspired by the troublesome social context of the Leaden Years.

2.1   2.2

PART TWO

FILM ANALYSIS

Chapter 3:   On Regionality

From 1861 on, with Italy's political unity and the consequent proclamation of the *Regno d'Italia* (Kingdom of Italy), the notions of Italy as a nation state and of 'Italian-ness' have been assessed and questioned on many and repeated occasions by politicians, intellectuals, scholars, media insiders as well as common citizens. From the early 1900s studies on the socio-economic diversity of southern Italy with respect to the North (the so-called 'southern question') to the more recent secessionist vocation of the political party North League, that emerged in the late 1980s, the recognition and significance of Italy as a geo-political entity as well as a culturally and socially existent space has often been challenged by means of particularisms undermining any discourse of national representativeness and identity. This was particularly evident during the 2011 celebration for 150 years of political unity (17 March 1861) and 65 years of republican statute (2 June 1946), when nationhood discourses in the public sphere were to some extent delegitimized in the name of historical and socio-cultural issues (see, for instance, Rossella 2011).

Several studies by domestic scholars have linked such a relentless assertion of particular characteristics to the fragile nature of the myth of Italy as a nation-state (cf. Banti 2011; Bollati 1983; Del Lago 2002; Gentile 2009; Martinat 1994). By revising historical and ideological accounts regarding the period of unitary struggle (the Risorgimento, circa 1815-1871), as well the post-unitary efforts in promoting a shared sense of national identity, these studies have discussed the Italian nation in terms of 'invention', crucially stressing the fact that many distinct regional realities were somehow annexed unwillingly to the nascent state (see map 3.1, p. 48), and only afterwards integrated thanks to 'manufactured myths' on the origins of the nation. This approach can be related to scholarly concerns about the formation of modern states in both Europe and the rest of the world that has produced an extensive literature in the last two decades. Driven by the belief that nations are by-products of political and social engineering, a number of scholars have on the whole asserted that 'the history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of nation […] is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so' (Hobsbawm 1983: 13).

However, according to Amedeo Quondam (2005), Italy seems to have followed a very distinctive nation-making path when compared to Europe's other countries. Along with the glorification of key figures as holders of patriotic values, and of key facts and traditions which have provided the nationhood discourse with shareable bases and myths, the 'invention' of Italy has peculiarly interwoven with the goal of making Italians — a task that has been carried out as a response to the original fragmentation of society and that, differently pursued by different governments, has somehow managed to define 'Italian-ness' in terms of uncertainty. In nineteenth-century Italy, the ruling House of Savoy prioritised education of 'Italian' citizenship and history, in an attempt to spread a consciousness of nationality across the galaxy of particular communities. In the twentieth-century other political agents similarly undertook this effort, as they attempted to inflect the character of the Italians in relation to ideologies propagated by, for example, the regime of Benito Mussolini ('making the fascist Italian'), the Republic and the Constitution ('making the anti-fascist and democratic Italian'), and the big mass parties — the DC and the PCI ('making the Catholic Italian' and 'making the Communist Italian'). As every re-making also implied an un-making, this task has assumed over the times the connotations of a simultaneous process of appropriation of the particular and de-structuring of the nationhood discourse itself (Ascenzi 2009: 11). Therefore, it should not be any wonder that any short-circuiting of the nationhood discourse sees troubling instances about nation and nationality come along — above all, those related to regionalism. To paraphrase Quondam (2005: vi), the construction of a common and shared discourse of national traditions has transformed the Italian identity into a yard-like site where works are always in progress, unsolved and insolvable.

During the Leaden Years the issue of regionalism occupied a central role within the Italian society, supported by the effects of a severe economic crisis which followed the 'economic miracle' of the 1950s-1960s, and a widespread conviction that the country's industralization had somehow worsened the long-standing socio-economic divide between the regions of the North of the country and those of the South. In this chapter I shall show how regionalism had a certain relevance also in the crime films produced at that time, particularly in terms of representations of geographical spaces and linguistic characterizations. Before addressing films, I shall first dedicate a couple of sections to overview key moments of the history of Italy as well as of Italian cinema, so as to make it easier to understand how, and to what extent, certain aspects of Italian culture and society influenced films and their generic structures and content.

3.1 Italy's regionalism. A brief historical overview

In the early years following its unification, ruling Italy was marked by difficulties and complications as the new-born state failed to impose a centralised policy over the principalities and regions it had annexed. There were, in fact, many complex reasons that had helped regionalist concerns to be incredibly resilient. First, a widespread unease at the character of the new state, whose unification had corresponded to heavy bureaucratic measures quite unwelcome in the annexed territories (Lyttelton 1996). Second, the unchanged existence of municipal principles in the population, both in the regions of the South — that under the formerly Borbonic domination had been characterized by the centrality of cities, villages, and communities — and those of the North — whose past had been characterized by prestigious sovereign city-states as well as centres of agrarian power and autonomy (ibid.). Third, the difficulty of the national government to elude locally-shaped political and economic agreements, which led to the establishment of clientelistic dynamics between state and local power groups over any state initiative (Davis 1996; Lyttelton 1996). Fourth, and perhaps more recognisably, the existence of an impressive linguistic variety of dozens of spoken dialects, of which about fifteen types clearly differed from each other; peculiarly, there were cases in which dialects not only could differ between provincial districts, but also between neighbouring towns or, most distinctively, within the same town (Lyttelton 1996) (see map 3.2).

So dependent on regional divides, the new state was too weak to embody the Risorgimento myth of uniting the Italians 'downtrodden' and 'divided' by foreign dominations[1]. In a few years, scepticism had been aroused and dampened the enthusiasm of those who themselves had promoted the unitary operation. In a memorable passage that is still cited in present public speeches as well as informal conversations, Piedmontese statesman Massimo d'Azeglio bitterly noted that the making of Italy had been indeed an incomplete achievement: 'the Italians have been intent to create a new Italy, whilst they themselves remained the same as of yore […]. Italy is

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[1] The rhetoric of the Risorgimento was at most concerned with this idea of the repossession of a territory illegitimately ruled by foreigners, and the related sense of redemption and purification that uniting the Italians on such a territory would signify for both the individuals themselves and the course of history. Consider, for example, how this comes explicitily to the fore in the following English-translated stanzas of *Il canto degli italiani* (The Song of the Italians) — the poem written in 1847 by Goffredo Mameli and later set to music and adopted as national anthem: 'Let us unite, let us love one another, / For union and love / Reveal to the people / The ways of the Lord. / Let us swear to set free / The land of our birth: / United, for God, / Who can overcome us?'; 'We were for centuries / Downtrodden, derided, / Because we are not one people, / Because we are divided. / Let one flag, one hope / Gather us all. / The hour has struck / For us to unite'. (my transl.; original retrieved from Vulpone 2002: 15-17)

made, but [unfortunately] not the Italians' (1868: 6-7)[2].

Map 3.1 – *Italy in 1859*

Key: 1 = Kingdom of Sardinia,
2 = Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia,
3 = Duchy of Parma, 4 = Duchy of Modena and Reggio,
5 = Gran Duchy of Tuscany, 6 = Papal States,
7 = Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

Map 3.2 – *Isogloss of language families in Italy*

Key: 1 = South Italian, 2 = Sicilian,
3 = Central Italian, 4 = Tabarchin,
5 = Sardinian, 6 = Corsican, 7 = Tuscan,
8 = Occitan, 9 = Franco-Provençal,
10 = Tyrolean, 11 = Ladin and Friulan,
12 = Slovenian, 13 = Venetian,
14 = Gallo-Italian.

In many respects, the nearly non-existent roots of a shared idiom as well as an endemic illiteracy weighed on the precarious sense of national belonging. Estimations dated between 1860 and 1871 reveal that circa 70 per cent of the population could not read or write, while many reportedly 'literates' could at most write their own name; only 2.5 per cent, moreover, could speak and understand Italian, the would-be national language (Doyle 2002: 45; 55-56)[3]. In order to overcome this handicap and get Italian diffused as much rapidly as possible, the State invested great efforts in the public schools. However, the inadequacy of funds and the lack of concerted teaching delayed this goal. In many countryside schools, especially in the Mezzogiorno (Southern Italy),

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2   Pinocchio, Carlo Collodi's 1883 fictional character later popularised by Walt Disney in the homonymous animation film (1940), offers an interesting insight of the amount of pessimism and frustration about the unification, linking the anxiety about becoming a 'real boy' that defines the character — an immature and immoral living marionette carved out of wood — to the civic and pedagogic anxiety behind the making ('carving out') of the Italian citizen.

3   A very small amount which, in reality, would have comprised also statesmen such as King Victor Emanuel II and his Prime Minister Camillo Cavour, both speaking French and Piedmontese, and speaking Italian solely as third language — and nevertheless with poor skills, as has been demonstrated by several historiographical reconstructions (see Clark 2008; Forester 2001; Roscoe Thayer 2005).

the primacy of dialects was ironically reinforced as teachers themselves could barely speak Italian. In addition, there was local resistance to the acceptance of compulsory education[4], which produced dramatic results. According to estimations cited from the same source, about 80 per cent of southern children avoided compulsory education. To a large extent, the public school, in its 'distance between law and behaviour, ideal and practice [...], illustrated the disparity between the legal Italy promoted by the new state and the real Italy its citizens inhabited' (Doyle 2002: 55).

Schooling interventions seemed to bear fruit from the early twentieth-century as a result of fascism's nationalist policies, although it is thought by many that it was not until the diffusion of television that Italian became established and flourished as the national language we actually recognise[5]. Alien to many inhabitants, Italian finally became familiar even for those who never attended school in their lifetime. When RAI launched its first two television channels between 1954 and 1961, its mission was clearly set so as to make the public television service a work of civic pedagogy about nation. For Ettore Bernabei, historic RAI general director in charge until the mid-1970s, and a figure close to the DC, the model of inspiration was the BBC, and its founder John Reith's motto: inform, educate, and entertain. Therefore, television took up the task of defining the traits of national identity, as can be ascertained by the packaging of several shows[6].

However, the mission *á la* Reith was somehow compromised at its very origins, and the values of the BBC were rather exchanged for the network ideals of the American NBC. In 1954, *Un, due, tre* and *Duecento al secondo* already plagiarized overseas commercial spectacles like *Your Show of Shows* and *A Dollar a Second*. Then, in 1957,

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4 Priests often discouraged pupils from going to class or encouraged truancy overtly, in an attempt to keep central across the country the church's guidance in education. As a result, it became 'norm' for local schools to reach a compromise with the clergy, allowing priests to enter teaching and supply religious content. Making the obstruction of the public schools even worse, was the weak support of many peasant families, particularly in the Mezzogiorno, which preferred their children to work in the fields rather than attending 'unnecessary' classes.

5 As Anna Ascenzi (2009: 9-10) has observed in regard to education practice under the fascist regime, the public school operated less in the gradual overtaking of local communities (families, villages etc.) than in realising their peaceful cohabitation alongside the wider national identity. But whilst both primary and secondary classes performed a crucial job of sharing and homogenizing of nation-related values, Italian still experienced difficulty in superseding dialects. A series of concerted measures banned regional idioms from radio broadcasts, *cinegiornali* (newsreels), and other media, but the regime's idea of a national language, influenced by literary and oratorical patterns, was too artificial to be fully understood and, in practice, was considerably distant from colloquial speaking.

6 Programmes such as *Campanile sera* and *Telematch*, for instance, tried to 'assemble' the national from the thousand faces of the local (Grasso 2003). Others, made recourse to animated features, reportage, documentaries, as well as the interventions of experts through which was stimulated a consciousness about national facts and the participation of all in same leisure (Sorlin 2004). There were even ad hoc literacy shows through which TV overtly replaced functions pertinent to the public school: presented by a qualified schoolteacher, *Non è mai troppo tardi* (1960) aimed at making Italian spoken nationwide, with the significant supervision of the Education Ministry, which set up public screenings in the major centres as to allow those without television sets not to miss the 'class'.

thanks to *Carosello*, RAI brought advertising into prime time slots, turning a series of commercials into a show as popular as it was remunerative[7]. As Pierre Sorlin has sharply observed (2004), it was long before the 1980s (and the consequent advent of Silvio Berlusconi's commercial channels) that the 'American model' found space in Italian television — being, at the same time, imposed on the audience. In great measure, in representations on television and in advertising the character of the Italian became tied up with the notions of 'economic miracle', which implied a myth of nation based on a set of values closer to the 'society of consumption' than to those of the patriots or of ancient times.

By this time, Pier Paolo Pasolini had been writing numerous polemical pieces against TV, which he considered the right-hand ally of a new form of 'Power': consumerism. According to the writer and director, thanks to television, consumerism had become capable of realising the first and tangible unification of Italy, enabling a process of 'cultural homologation' that, among its effects, included the progressive detachment from various particular cultures and accession to the dominant culture of commercialism. In Pasolini's critique, language occupied a central position[8]:

> from the viewpoint of verbal language, there is the complete reduction to communication purposes only, with a massive impoverishment of expressivity. The dialects (the mother tongues!) are removed in time and space: the children cannot speak them any more because they live in Turin, Milan, or West Germany [following their families' relocation]. Where dialects are still in vogue, they have totally lost their potential inventiveness. No child of the Roman suburbs, for example, would be able any longer to understand the jargon of my novels of ten-fifteen years ago — and, ironically, he would be forced to consult the glossary attached as a good bourgeois of the North!

(1990: 54, my transl.)

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7   *Carosello* was a 10-minute daily advertising break screened every evening after the 8:30 news, and on air until the end of 1976. As Mark Tungate reconstructs, 'due to a quirk of Italian legislation, [… this] slot forced agencies to create advertising that resembled TV content: series of cartoons and comedy sketches, which had to be entertaining and/or educational. The sell was so soft it was positively downy. At its peak it was the most popular show in Italy, boasting an audience of 20 million (half of them children)' (2007: 141-142). For a more detailed examination on *Carosello* and its 'phenomenology', see De Iulio and Vinti (2009).

8   In his collection of essays *Passione e ideologia* (1960), Pasolini offered an overview of the various regional poetries in Italy, additionally arguing that the spreading of Italian language across the country resembled the modalities of a lingua franca. Some years before, he had engaged in the first person in the writing of poems in the dialect of Friuli, his mother's region, and a place where he used to live during his boyhood. In commenting on Pasolini's concern about the theme of language, Valerio Cruciani has summed up as follows: 'Pasolini, a bourgeois and cultured guy, brings to the extreme the ideological connotations of such a complex relationship between dialect and [national] language: that is, between the maternal and paternal world, between the pre-capitalist and neo-capitalist world, between a sentimental (prior to rational) adhesion to Italy's minorities and a rejection of a national unity made of exclusivist and bourgeois characters'. (2005, my transl.)

Although in the 1960s the population of dialect speakers was the majority, on television dialect was constantly excluded from shows, being at most exploited to connote social difference and subalternity, or introduce comical motifs — a strategy that, as I shall illustrate at a later point of this chapter, was significantly adopted in cinematic depictions too. RAI promoted what has been labelled 'conscious Italian', that is, a speaking pattern formalised and qualified, characterised by averageness and calm tones, as well as attention for syntactical correctness (Messina 2004). In parallel, Italian was finding channels of diffusion other than mass media like, for instance, the political activity of big, mass-based parties that through their national gatherings and assemblies, their bulletins, and their promotional materials, embodied an impressive work of civic pedagogy no less important than that of television.

From the end of the 1960s, the operation of nation building effected through television was marked by a halt. RAI started to decentralise its studios, which were originally based in Rome, to various cities nationwide. As well, programme content started giving voice to the Italy's different regional voices rather than trying to 'domesticate' them in the name of reaching one national identity. These changes would in 1979 eventually result in the launching of a third channel characterised by broadcasting regionally differentiated programmes, with numerous editorial staffs and productions being relocated to some dozen different cities of the country. To a great extent, such changes followed a wider re-emergence of regionalism in nationhood discourses after years in which the 'economic miracle', through its myth of wealth as being within everyone's reach, had in a way united the country, at least in terms of dreams and aspirations. The economic crisis of the 1970s, coupled with a social scenario affected by political turmoil and widespread criminality, brought the Italians, in some respect, back to reality, reigniting the never domesticated regionalist drives as a response to a nation state that seemed to many on the brink of falling apart. As Giorgio Grossi has pointed out, in the time between 1968 and the Moro murder,

> Italy did not please anyone, not students, not workers, not the 'silent majority', not the P2, not the currents of social Catholicism, not the Red Brigades, not the civil rights movement. And RAI [...] had nothing to do but participate — for better or for worse, sometimes with professionalism sometimes with manipulation — in this process of deconstruction of the collective identity. This led to the provision, almost daily, of an image of Italy that, despite being false and truthful at intervals, was never unique and one-dimensional; on the contrary, this image was able to exploit multiple identities rather than a more unified and coherent national

identity [...].

3.2   The 'southern question' between conception and preconception

As a result of the marked economic and social distinctions between northern and southern regions, a rhetoric of alterity that has considered the South as a geographical whole affected by backwardness has polarised Italy's regionalism into two main actors: on the one side, the rich, industrialised, and better educated North, and on the other the poor, mainly rural, and illiterate South, chronically suffering from political corruption and criminality. This dualistic scenario has found semantic legitimization in discourses of nationhood, being supported over the decades by the evidence of political interventions to sustain the South's economy and combat crime (brigandage, the mafia), and by the legacy of stereotypes as old as the unification equating southerners to underdeveloped and 'barbaric' individuals (Niceforo 1898). In many respects, the 'southern question' has been for the Italian culture and society a symbolic screen of the unresolved national character and, to a greater extent, a subsidiary strategy for coming to terms with 'Italian-ness' by making the South the generic depository of Otherness.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the expression *questione meridionale* ('southern question') started to spread in the mouths of politicians, scholars, and intellectuals, who used it to define the topicality of the Mezzogiorno in a country going at two different speeds. In 1911, Giustino Fortunato, an historian and leading politician, so concluded one of the first studies on the topic:

> that there is a southern question, in the economic and political sense of the word, no one doubts. There is between the North and South of the peninsula a great disproportion in the field of human activity, in the intensity of collective life, in the measure and type of production, and, therefore, as a matter of the intimate bonds that exist between the welfare and the soul of a people, also a profound difference between customs, traditions, morals and the intellectual world.

(311-312, my transl.)

For Antonio Gramsci, the 'southern question' was a less a matter of social and cultural disproportions than of opportunities and political interests. Indebted to Marxism, and driven by a class-conflict perspective, his numerous writings were devoted

to the study of internal political and social subjects, and their reciprocal 'relations of forces'. In particular, the 'southern question' was seen as a kind of variation of Italy's historic and contrasting relation between city and countryside[9]: the North-South divide, in fact, had come to crystallise within Italian society the effects of an opposition between a big industrial centre and a big rural area. (1971: 90-101, Q19§26). Such a divide had been consolidated in the wake of systematic strategies enacted by industrialists and capitalist farmers — the 'hegemonic groups' — in order to keep excluded from the political and civic arena the masses of peasants and labourers — the 'subaltern groups'.

As Southern Italy was mostly inhabited by illiterate peasants unaware of their class condition[10] and the North was the decisional centre of the national politics, it was 'natural' to recreate within society a dual, regionally derived dynamic which placed the South in subalternity to the North. Crucially, Gramsci rooted the establishment of such a dynamic in the Risorgimento, which he severely criticized for having been moved not by the binding necessity to create a big, modern State, but rather regional viewpoints of circumscribed groups that had aimed at extending their corporate businesses[11]. Put briefly, the unification represented an economic operation of northern interests headed by Piedmont rather than responding to a need from below[12]. This explained for Gramsci

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9   In particular, Gramsci traced back a certain fracture between city and country as early as the Renaissance, as he made clear by referencing a series of Niccolò Machiavelli's writings. For a closer examination see Gramsci's Q8 (2010b: 229 et seq.), and the comparative study *Hegemony and Power: On the Relation between Gramsci and Machiavelli* (Fontana 1993).

10   Gramsci described the South as 'an area of extreme social disintegration': the 'peasants who constitute the great majority of the population have no cohesion among themselves', they are 'in perpetual ferment, but as a mass they are incapable of giving a unified expression to their aspirations and needs' (1957: 42, Q19).

11   In the notebooks filled out during his detention, Gramsci observed: 'The hegemony of the North would have been 'normal' and historically beneficial, if industrialism had been able gradually to enlarge its horizons so as to continue incorporating new assimilated economic zones. Then, this expression would have been the expression of a struggle between the old and the new, between progress and backwardness, between the more productive and the less productive; there would have been an economic revolution of a nation, economic forces would have been stimulated and the conflict would have yielded greater unity. However, this did not happen. The hegemony seemed permanent; the conflict seemed to be a necessary historical condition for an indeterminate period of time and, therefore, apparently 'perpetual' due to the existence of a northern industry'. (Gramsci 2010a: 288, Q1§149)

12   This point is by now validated by many historiographical outcomes. The prevailing of regional dialects spoken as mother tongues, alongside the conservation of deep-seated local rivalries, had overall prevented the masses from getting coordinated or providing support to the unitary struggle. Therefore, if involved in the independence risings, it happened mainly by chance or manipulation. The small importance of the masses in the unification process is further manifested by their captious exemption from accessing plebiscitarian stages. As Don H. Doyle reconstructs in this passage, 'the Italian authorities took pains to stage elaborate plebiscites in which citizens elected to join the new nation, but these were largely for show. In Naples citizens were asked to vote not whether to annex their country to Piedmont and its monarchy but instead to approve of 'Italia Una Vittorio Emanuele'. The plebiscite in Naples took place in full public view in the central piazza, and enormous majorities approved the unification. But this was hardly a popular mandate, for the franchise was restricted to literate, wealthy taxpayers who amounted to a very small fraction of the total population' (2002: 38).

why two vast territories of different cultural and civil traditions were merged together, and why, from their interaction, the features and the elements of a 'conflict of nationalities' would come to the fore (1971: 92, Q19§26). With the subsequent proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, the governments which followed one another seemed more interested in consolidating the 'urban bloc' of northern industrialists instead of putting into effects an unitary economy. On the other hand, the South was increasingly disqualified from the national fabric, its diversity being viewed as an obstacle in Italy's process of modernization[13].

More recent studies on the 'southern question' have partly revised the accounts of the likes of Fortunato, Gramsci, and other scholars who have fed the extensive bibliography on the topic. John Dickie (1999), for instance, has argued that the stereotypical depiction of the Mezzogiorno's backwardness is in some measure owed to the way the 'southern question' has been framed in the language of nationhood, commencing from the very definition of 'Mezzogiorno':

> [t]wo important theoretical weaknesses are common to many studies: the South is constructed as an organic totality; and it is seen dualistically as a failed version of some scarcely defined idea of the North, Italy, Europe or civilization […]. These weaknesses can also be read as theoretical elaboration of the underlying assumptions of many of the most widespread commonplaces in literature, art, journalism, and other registers: the Mezzogiorno is conceived of as a single, simple reality that is Other. In other words, theoretically speaking, there is no absolute divide between ethnocentric stereotypes of the South and the idea of the South as a geographically totality. Historically speaking, the idea of the South as a distinct part of the Italian nation, and the stereotype of the South as Other to Italy, are born at the same time.

(Dickie 1999: 14)

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13 Nevertheless, as Gramsci observed, the 'poverty of the Mezzogiorno was historically 'inexplicable' for the popular masses in the North; they did not understand that unity had not taken place on a basis of equality, but as hegemony of the North over the Mezzogiorno in a territorial version of the town-country relationship — in other words, that the North concretely was an '*octopus*' which enriched itself at the expense of the South and that its economic-industrial increment was in direct proportion to the impoverishment of the economy and agriculture of the South. The ordinary man from Northern Italy thought rather that, if the Mezzogiorno made no progress after having been liberated from the fetters which the Bourbon regime placed in the way of a modern development, this meant that the causes of the poverty were not external, to be sought in objective economic and political conditions, but internal, innate in the population of the South — and this all the more since there was a deeply-rooted belief in the great natural wealth of the terrain. There only remained one explanation — the organic incapacity of the inhabitants, their barbarity, their biological inferiority […]. [These] opinions were consolidated and actually theorised by the sociologists of positivism [e.g. the above quoted Niceforo] […] acquiring the strength of 'scientific truth' in a period of superstition about science. Thus a polemic arouse between North and South on the subject of race, and about the inferiority of North and South […]. Meanwhile, in the North there persisted the belief that the Mezzogiorno was a 'ball and chain' for Italy, the conviction that modern industrial civilisation of Northern Italy would have made greater progress without this 'ball and chain' […].' (1971: 70-71, Q19§24; emphasis in the original)

In the similar vein, other scholars have pointed out how the 'southern question' had been referring to the Mezzogiorno as a subject of confused identification. In a recent paper on the modes of statistical data gathering taken in the Kingdom of Italy (Patriarca 1998), it has been shown how the macroregional subdivision of North *versus* South is contradictory and discontinuous. Indeed, the Mezzogiorno has been alternately defined not only in simplified opposition to the North, but also in relation to other macroregions such as Central Italy and the main islands Sicily and Sardinia (tab. 3.1). The problem raised from this approach lies in the fact that predetermined geographical divisions have been taken for granted over the decades instead of being subjected to a proper interrogation and historicization. Thanks to new researches, the economic diversities that distinguished Apulia, Calabria, Campania and Sicily — just to mention some distinct regions making up Southern Italy — have now been documented, with the effect of making increasingly difficult any reference to the South as either an undifferentiated or a coherent economic area (Patriarca 1998).

[NORTH]   [SOUTH]
[NORTH]   [CENTRE]   [SOUTH]
[NORTH]   [CENTRE]   [SOUTH]   [MAIN ISLANDS]
[CENTRE-NORTH]   [SOUTH]
[NORTH]   [CENTRE-SOUTH]
[NORTH]   [SOUTH AND MAIN ISLANDS]

Table 3.1 — *Negotiating the meaning of South*. Geographical categories used for official statistics in the Kingdom of Italy (Patriarca 1998)

The inadequate resolution of problems related to the 'southern question' — rural exodus and emigration, failure of local economies to satisfy labour demand and subsequent development of own employment, anomalous urbanization, anomalous consumerism, and the entrepreneurial attitude of the Mafia with its model of capitalist accumulation (Carello 1989) — has seen attempts at revising Italy's two-speed paradigm, trying to reverse the topic in nationhood discourses as a 'northern question'. As

interpreted in terms of concrete political demand, the 'northern question' comes to the fore as the mounting concern of a vast part of Northern Italy's inhabitants who believe their economic interests are inadequately protected by a political class mainly constituted by southerners — a class in itself too 'southernized' to carry out a national plan of equal development (Canavero 2003). Of course, this relatively new topic has made even more complex the already fragile national character, once again sectioned and problematised through opposing regional bodies[14].

3.3.1   Regionalism and Italian cinema: On-screen profiles

In Italian cinema, the topic of regionalism has centrally been channelled through linguistic characterizations and representations of space. Ways of speaking indebted to local dialects and clichéd suggestions about North and South, city and countryside, have given voice and visibility to a number of different regionally based realities, while at the same time exploring questions related to nationality. First to work this way was Neorealism that, in breaking with the fascist tradition made of postcard-like images and elegant Italian, introduced on screen the crudeness of remote lands, as well as the often incomprehensible and distant reality of regional dialects and cadences (*Paisan/Paisà*, Roberto Rossellini, 1946; *The Earth Trembles/La terra trema*, Luchino Visconti, 1948). Nevertheless, it was Neorealism's commercial and comedy-driven variant, the so-called 'pink Neorealism' of the early 1950s (*Bread, Love and Dreams/Pane, amore e fantasia*, Luigi Comencini, 1953) that dealt with regionalism with significant awareness, fully exploiting it to construct landscapes and characters to attract an audience (Acioli 2010). This was a time — and a production mode — in which informal Italian came into contact and mixed with dialectal cadences and constructs, in a coming to terms with the socio-cultural complexity brought forth by the 'economic miracle' and a soaring social mobility (Brunetta 1982).

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14 By contrast, as a response to an increasing 'nationalization' of certain malpractices, in more recent times Italy has been witnessing an interesting phenomenon of re-semantization of the 'southern question': as a result of the ascertained presence of criminal organizations also in the North of the country, the cliché of the South as national villain has been gradually minimized. Moreover, the South has symbolically provided the 'nation' with a civic statement of determination and courage in recovering from the plague of legal malfunctions and organized crime, bringing to the pantheon of national heroes examples of brave and honest magistrates who have given their own life to defeat Cosa Nostra and inspiring a culture of legality — e.g. Rosario Livatino (1952-1990), Giovanni Falcone (1939-1992) and Paolo Borsellino (1940-1992) (For a closer examination about the lives of these judges, as well as the impact of their deaths in popular imaginary, see Lane, 2010; Puccio-Den, 2011; Jane Schneider and Peter T. Schneider, 2003; and Stille, 1996).

In the heyday of the boom, would-be workers mainly moving from southern Italy relocated to modernized cities such as Turin and Milan, as well as other North-based industrial centres. However, because of differences in education, culture, and language skills, northerner citizens and southern workers failed to integrate, rather nurturing social tensions and discriminations about regional provenances. As many letting advertisements on local newspapers of the time may document, *non si fitta ai meridionali* ('we don't rent to southerners') become less a restrictive tenement option than a diffused discriminatory attitude. In Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers* (*Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, 1960), the story of a southern family of peasants that emigrates to Milan in search of better living conditions unfolds as a drama of struggles and humiliation as the family experience the dark side of Italy's '*dolce vita*' (named after Federico Fellini's homonymous film of the same year). In the 1960s and 1970s, in a larger measure than in art-house films, domestic genres and sub-genres fictionalised these regionalist tensions almost constantly. Comedy, in particular, in the wake of a tradition that dated back to the stock characters of the *commedia dell'arte*, exploited regional differences by means of characterizations centrally connoted via language. It became usual to listen to Italian-speaking characters and simultaneously to spot in such performances the influence of regional accents, inflections, and dialects. As Gian Piero Brunetta has argued,

> the speakers make known the magmatic overlay of accents and dialectal influences into a reality that has lost its centre and its most stable directional axes; and in which everyone is located midway in the path of a makeover. The crashing of the story becomes the counterpart of the crashing of language. The rush of a society set off in the conquest of mass consumption and entertainment, and in the revision of its past, is underway. At the same time, in parallel, it seeks to represent, by the exaggeration of flaws, the crisis of identity caused by this general transformation on the individual, showing the difficulties of communication on emotional, ideological and social grounds.

> (1982: 591-592, my transl.)

On the whole, the emergence of regional linguistic usages did not undermine the status of Italian as the nation's official language or its central function in the cinema production — and postproduction — of the country. In fact, apart from a very few productions designated for a local market for a short period of time — in circumstances that I shall illustrate hereinafter — Italian cinema was never subjected to a kind of

'regionalization' *tout court*. Within fictions, speakers who expressed themselves by accents, inflections, and even vernacular terms gave at the most a regional 'interpretation' of the national language, in an attempt — already pursued by Neorealism — to offer a plausible characterization of the inhabitants of a given space. In parallel, in many genre films the co-presence of Italian with differing regional ways of speaking was exploited to create dissonances functional to antagonisms as well as narrative tensions of various kind (of region, class, education, etc.). Eventually, this co-presence was assimilated by the 'body-voice' of some actors whose performances were distinguished, rather ambiguously, by the simultaneous pursuit of 'Italian-ness' and conservation of regional references[15].

That said, in Italian cinema national language was never really at risk of being eclipsed by vernacular idioms. As noted, the so-called 'Dante's language' was about to establish its linguistic primacy over dialects thanks to the increasing spread of mass media. And, as Pierre Sorlin writes, cinema was a major instrument in this respect: whereas, on the one hand, the '[p]eople who associated standard Italian with school and did not speak it enjoyed hearing it in films, maybe because it established a note of distance and artificiality [...] which prevented them from taking the story too seriously', on the other hand, they 'learnt words which […] could be uttered in their country' (1996: 170).

As the fictionalisation of spoken regionalisms mainly served to contextualise the characters, and suggest their particular background, this practice soon paved the way for the consolidation of stereotypes. Locutionary acts not only functioned to set apart northerners and southerners, mainlanders and islanders by means of acoustic dissonances evoking social and cultural irreconcilabilities, but also functioned to associate specific regional parlances with specific moralities and inclinations. According to a very simplified model, the northern speakers generally embodied characters of high social status, especially employers, magistrates, professors, and doctors, whilst the southerner ones generally represented the 'subaltern' classes of proletarians, with their attendant beliefs and their modes of working in everyday life. The Sicilian accent, for instance, was largely employed to connote familistic and corporativist attitudes based on

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15 With regard to the Roman comedian Alberto Sordi, Brunetta has highlighted the characteristics of a speech working as a 'double track': 'Sordi shifts the attention to the popular languages and, in particular, those of the petty bourgeoisie, projected in a strenuous social climbing by all means. He does not ever deny the cadences and vernacular forms: that which rather distinguishes and characterizes his characters is a great linguistic mobility, the effort to conquer the technological and managerial language, the attempt to camouflage and remove the umbilical cord with the maternal dialect'. (1982: 307, my transl.)

principles of honour, this especially given Sicily's implicit association with the idea of the mafia; the Neapolitan accent, instead, was less employed in its relation to Camorra (the local criminal organization) than to suggestions of governmental inefficiency and societal anarchism on the one hand and idleness and the 'art of getting-by' on the other.

Probably the most interesting aspect of this stereotypical practice was the fact that such typifications did not necessarily occur in fictions, say, set in Sicily or the Naples neighbourhood, nor necessarily in relation to characters who were supposed to be Sicilian or Neapolitan. Indeed, they also occurred in foreign productions subjected to dubbing. Introduced in 1932 as a response to the fascist regime's ban for non-Italian *talkies*[16], dubbing had become a central practice in the history of cinema in Italy. It did not affect foreign films only, but also Italian ones, becoming functional, to a large extent, in compensating for both a lack of skill in acting and the employment of non-Italian casts in co-production filming. However, before dialects were introduced in this practice, it might happen that pictures like George Cukor's *Born Yesterday* (1950), which made class divide a crucial element for the narration, were dubbed according to a sole linguistic register, characterized by bombastic expressions derived from theatre[17], and was thus inappropriate for a film that represented middle- and lower-class characters. By contrast, when dialects and regional idioms were finally adopted for dubbing, they were used so as to transfer ethnic, social, and psychological qualities onto speakers. Some dubbing studios, in fact, believed that certain of Italy's regional parlances might render best certain features of the 'source character', or might respond best to audience expectations across Italy. This school of thought has produced very interesting films whose dubbing would be worth closer examination, as well as gross examples in which Italian regionality is exploited to depict a story manifestly set outside Italy, and scenarios unrelated to Italian history[18]. From the 1990s on, however, the import of regional aspects into the dubbing of foreign films has been dramatically reduced. Today, it still survives in second-class comedies tending to the grotesque which are mainly unreleased in cinemas, although examples in mainstream culture may be cited, such as the Italian

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16 In the wake of the recent introduction of sound in cinema, the regime opposed by all means the spread of foreign languages in Italy, fearing that people could familiarise with foreign words. Before the advent of dubbing, foreign films were muted and dialogues replaced with intertitles being displayed with the function of narrative summary. (On the practice of dubbing in Italian cinema and its history, see Quargnolo 1986; Castellano 2000; Lancia, Giraldi and Melelli 2010)

17 This was essentially due to the fact that most dubbers in Italy came from the theatre.

18 Interesting examples are *Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger, 1969) with the Dustin Hoffman character surprisingly speaking Neapolitan, or the romantic western *Many Rivers to Cross* (Roy Rowland, 1955) re-titled *Un napoletano nel Far West* (A Neapolitan in the Far West), which changed a family of Irish emigrants living in the old West into a family of Neapolitans!

version of *The Simpsons*[19], or the recent animation film *Gnomeo and Juliet* (Kelly Asbury, 2011), a parodical rendering of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in which the Montagues speak like southerners and Capulets like northerners.

No less incisively than linguistic characterizations, the representation of space also was subject to regionalism. Differences between North and South were crystallized through the typification of two well-defined and opposed models: the urban landscape associated with modernity, and the rural landscape associated with backwardness. However, far from being motivated by realist intentions, these models stood out mainly because of their 'expressionist' potential. In the works of directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Lina Wertmüller, for instance, the setting of the foggy city of the North, where skyscrapers and chimneys stand over streets 'overpopulated' by cars, lent itself quite immediately to suggestions about alienation and the break-up of interpersonal communication (*The Cry/Il grido*, 1957, and *Red Desert/Deserto rosso*, 1964; *The Seduction of Mimi/Mimì metallurgico ferito nell'onore*, 1972, and *Everything Ready, Nothing Works/Tutto a posto e niente in ordine*, 1974); on the reverse, the sultry village of the Mezzogiorno, where houses are still made of stone and time seems frozen, functioned well for plots about individuals wanting to escape toxic social obligations associated with the family and the Church (*The Adventure/L'avventura*, 1960, and *The Eclipse/L'eclisse*, 1962; *The Basilisks/I basilischi*, 1963, and *Blood Feud/Fatto di sangue tra due uomini per colpa di una vedova*, 1978).

In the wake of the wider social reorganization brought forth by the 'economic miracle', narrative emphasis shifted almost entirely towards the city, making it the new space necessarily to deal with in relation to being 'Italian'. Acclaimed filmmakers abandoned their original bucolic and provicial settings and came to terms with this new object and those who live in it, e.g. Fellini (*La dolce vita*, 1960) and Bertolucci (*Partner*, 1968). Contextually, the instances of the regionalist discourse tended to be transferred onto the 'body' of the principal Italian cities, in the North as well as in the South. Even the 'southern question' diverged from the by-then exclusive depiction of the city in its opposition to the country, becoming 'urbanized' in confrontations between more modern and less modern cities. In the *giallo* and the *poliziottesco*, for example, the representational potentialities of urban locations were further explored in the light of the Leaden Years, and exploited to represent muddy and ultraviolent plots in

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19 See the interesting study by Sabrina Fusari (2007) on the linguistic choices made by the Italian dubbers of *The Simpsons*, in which specific regional parlances are used to render certain qualities of secondary characters such as police chief Clancy Wiggum (Neapolitan), the Scottish born groundskeeper Willie (Sardinian), reverend Timothy Lovejoy (Central Italy), bus driver Otto Mann (Milanese), and others.

paradigmatic spaces. As a result, narrative purposes and audience expectations could vary according to stereotyped film settings: the metropolis (Milan), the industrial city (Turin), the seaport city (Genoa), the decadent city (Venice), the art city (Florence), the average town of the North (Bologna, Parma, Pavia, Bergamo), the Apennine town (Perugia), the capital of the power (Rome), the capital of the Mezzogiorno (Naples), the hideout of crime syndicates (Palermo). According to a strategy also common to other fields of national cultural production, geography was used as a dependent variable in portraying 'ethnic aspirations', as well as delineating, in city after city, the body of different groups and their relation to political and cultural power (Landy 2000: 121-125).

In 1970 Italy's regionalism was overtly 'institutionalized' in the wake of the government instituting of twenty districts, or Regioni, with the task of administrating as many regional communities, which futher accentuated the national tensions deriving from the North-South gap. On the whole, during the Leaden Years the 'southern question' continued to be a key topic on the political agenda as well as in Italian cultural life. In many crime films, these tensions became apparent as depictions influenced by regionalist concerns are both insistent and functional with respect to narrative development. Set in the city that is symbolic of the Mezzogiorno's problems, *Violent Naples* (*Napoli violenta*, Umberto Lenzi, 1976) represents an urban space profoundly shaped and conditioned by its inhabitants' behaviour and beliefs. In the first four minutes of its running time, the film in three scenes exemplarily condenses several characteristics that reference Neapolitan culture, habits, and customs, which are essentially exploited in the manner of cliché. The opening scene is entirely shot from the inside of a car moving across the city. Accompanied by traffic noises, the spectator, through a point of view shot from driver's seat, is literally led into a place that is remarkably chaotic. When loud car horns are abruptly replaced by the score's main theme, which, entitled 'Folk and Violence', has a Neapolitan tarantella rhythm, the intention of connecting on-screen images of chaos to Naples as such is evident. Visually, car plates starting 'NA'[20] help contextualise the city even further, alongside key monuments such as the Maschio Angioino castle (fig. 3.1), typical public transport vehicles (fig. 3.3-3.4), and an uncountable series of shops. While the music goes on, there are not only objects to set the scene. People, in fact, appear in deep interaction with space, to the extent that traffic looks somehow regulated through their presence

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20   From 1927 to 1994 the plates of the cars issued in Italy had to include a two-letter abbreviation standing for the provincial district in which the vehicle was registered. In this case, 'NA' identified Naples. In other examples following, 'FG' and 'MI' respectively identify Foggia and Milan.

rather than by the vehicles. Regardless of zebra crossings or approaching automobiles, pedestrians cross at whatever point of the street (fig. 3.2-3.3, 3.6); a little boy 'steals' a tram ride in a 'habitual' fashion (fig. 3.4); and drivers nonchalantly double-park in a very busy street (fig. 3.5-3.6). In turn, the superimposed title confirms to spectators that what they are watching is Naples — and that this place is violent, too (fig. 3.7).

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This beginning works as many others in the crime films of this period, being not only an expedient to contextualize the story, but also an occasion for offering to audiences all over the country a sketchy, travelogue-like overview of the city, this being a narrative practice also common in other contemporaneous generic products of Italy (e.g. the *mondo* film, the cannibal film, and the Emmanuelle series). As some have observed,

this reveals that narratives are much concerned with images of tourism and consumerism, and implies a fascination with and desire for unaffordable travel and better life standards (cf. Edmonstone 2008; Koven 2006). In an opening scene like this, for instance, 'the central pleasure offered […] is not one of narrative exposition but the enjoyment of cosmopolitan Italy as spectacle' (Edmonstone: 160) – an implicit, synthetic way of acknowledging tangible modernising developments. However, as I shall soon discuss, this modernization is rendered as problematic and even treacherous.

After establishing the place, the subsequent scene serves to present the protagonist, Mr Betti (Maurizio Merli), who has been sent to Naples to cover the police inspector position. In addition, this scene introduces themes of urban dysfunction and the reciprocal Otherness of northern and southern Italians. A Venetian cop, Mr Antinori (Attilio Duse), has been ordered to pick Betti up at the railway station. Upon arrival, Betti apologies for the train delay but Antinori surprisingly reveals that he has just arrived to the station: 'I figured you'd arrive now, inspector: this train is always late. Oh, you might say it's perfectly punctual, 'cause it's always late by twenty minutes!' Having noted by the accent that his fellow cop is not Neapolitan, Betti, coming from an unspecified place of the North, sympathetically asks: 'How come I found you in Naples?', soon demonstrating regional solidarity: working in Naples makes Italian northerners *spaesati*[21].

In the third scene, the urban space is explicitly associated with evilness and peril via the introduction of organized crime and an 'uncomfortable' use of sound and montage. Betti and Antinori are just outside the railway station, very close to a car occupying a no-parking area (!) (fig. 3.8), and the soft off-screen sound of a street merchant singing with a recognisable Neapolitan accent creates an extemporaneous score for a few seconds. The quiet is soon broken when Betti is hit by a passer-by and falls on the sidewalk. The merchant's song is suddenly interrupted and is replaced by loud tyre screeches when a passing car hits Betti, and then moves away without stopping. Accelerated editing breaks spatial continuity, and does not give any possibility of clearly understanding whether Belli is fine after the crash: a voice saying 'Welcome back, Inspector!' follows up an abrupt close-up of Betti. Then, a reverse camera angle re-establishes continuity (and coherence) showing an old man on the opposite sidewalk. The man goes on to say: 'You should be more careful. Naples is a dangerous city *if you*

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21 The choice of this Italian adjective offers in this context an interesting understanding of Italian culture. *Spaesato* (singular) literally means 'landless', but in Italian current language is also peculiarly used to denote confusion, disorientation, as well as discomfort.

don't watch your step!' The warning is pronounced in plain Italian, yet strong inflections and syntactic constructions (above italicised) are recognisably Neapolitan[22]. At this point, the old man gets into a car close to him and is driven away, while the folksy theme of the film's opening starts again, and implicitly offers a commentary of what has just happened: folk *is* violence. Soon after, in explaining to Antinori that the old man is a leading mobster of Naples, Belli makes use of three slang words, so establishing a link between local language and crime. The boss is nicknamed '*O'* Generale', with emphasis on the article pronounced in local dialect (italicised); and he is a '*guappo*' (a bully criminal) and a '*camorrista*' (a member of the Neapolitan Mafia)[23].

Throughout the story a variety of remarks and comments underline regional differences. When Betti is introduced to Brigadier Silvestri (Carlo Gaddi), the latter complains about crime statistics regarding Naples, using the slang of Rome. Later Betti will tell Antinori: 'So we have a Romano. Those feel bad everywhere away from Rome' (my transl.)[24]. In another scene, the husband (Silvano Tranquilli) of a woman who has been kidnapped and raped refuses to make an official report to the police. Betti accuses him of negligence, while the man, belonging to the upper class, justifies his action according to a precise cultural code: 'because my wife and I wouldn't be able to stand anything if anyone else know about this disgrace [the rape]. We'd both be ashamed to go outside. You're not a Neapolitan, and you don't understand this type of mentality'. The confession of the man is pronounced in Italian, and no dialect inflections or tones occur. In stark contrast, the guys who raped his wife have been distinguished by slang speech, according to a phonological schema deliberately used in the film to connote street crime. During the man's statement of facts, frame composition conceptually supports different regionalisms by emphasizing the distance between the man (left), and dissenting northerner cops Betti (centre) and Antinori (right) (see fig. 3.9 below).

In the scene just described, the choice of hiding instead of reporting an offence connotes a kind of unwritten code of behaviour imposed by the inhabited space. In a similar fashion, many shopkeepers and general vendors humbly accept the 'rules' of a group of Camorra racketeers. When in a scene some gangsters destroy the shops of all those against protection, vendors choose not to collaborate with the police, and accept crime for what it is. Paying 'taxes' double — 'one for the State, and one for mafia' — is a very diffused practice, Belli ironically reckons. In the sequence of the racketeers'

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22 In the Italian version, the dialogue line says 'Bentornato, signor commissario! Ma voi dovete essere prudente. Vedete, Napoli è una città pericolosa *a non stare bene attenti*'.
23 *Guappo* is lost in the English dubbing, while *camorrista* is replaced with a more generic 'mafia'.
24 This sarcastic comment about the Roman police officer is completely lost in the English dubbing.

retaliatory action, director Lenzi represents the (negative) effects of this thinking through suggestive frame compositions. A sense of spatial inescapability is recreated through suggestive camera angles (fig. 3.10-3.11), while people looking out the balconies at what is happening visually conceptualise a space within which the population passively accept its own condition (fig. 3.12).

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Violent Naples implicitly links crime and social disadvantage to an irreversible state of disorder affecting the urbanisation process. Recurring images of housing agglomerates confusedly amassed (fig. 3.13-3.14), and buildings even shot from the

rooftops (fig. 3.15-3.16), impart a tendentious overview of Naples, and to a greater extent the Mezzogiorno, in terms of modernization's sustainability. If the number of buildings suggests the level of urban expansion reached by the southern city, the visual emphasis on irregular disposition and spatial 'asphyxiation' provides the text with the idea of ungovernability and menace. Several sequences, in this sense, work as a visual reportage of the building trade speculations made by Camorra in the wake of the 1960s demographic boom (Ravveduto 2007). The mise-en-scène shows the material effects of what several economic historians have defined 'urbanization without industrialization', that is, a chronic disequilibrium between urban population growth and effective possibilities of employment — whereas in the North the urban expansion took place in response to an expanding demand for industrial labor (cf. Angotti 1977; Caciagli and Belloni 1981; Chubb 1982; Kawata 2006). However, the stylistic choice of taking certain portions of space rather than others reveals the film narrative's aim of conveying precise meanings via images. In this respect, Naples is filmed as it is supposed to be imagined by viewers, especially those of North: as a place of ungovernable perspectives, and archetypically charged with all backwardness of the Mezzogiorno. As a result, space is here assumed as just a component of a wider cultural understanding. We can see, in fact, the extent to which streets, buildings, and inhabitants of Naples function as 'spatial predicates' of what Martin Lefebvre (2006) has defined as landscape, i.e. an interpretative gaze filtered out of a space.

In *Don't Torture A Duckling* (*Non si sevizia un paperino*, Lucio Fulci, 1972), another southern Italy setting offers interesting insights of stereotypes and related anxieties in Italian culture, but unlike in *Violent Naples* the Mezzogiorno's alterity is here established through its conventionalized representation as a pre-industrial space. The film is set in the imaginary village of Accendura, and plays on suggestions about the 'southern question' so as to mirror contrasts between past and modernity, and to challenge constructions of nationhood. Director Fulci, in fact, puts great emphasis on linguistic performance and depictions of religious practices, presenting the South as a socio-cultural body that disturbs the attempts of government and the Church in promoting a 'unified' civic and moral identity. The story, a muddy investigation of child serial murders, unfolds through clashes between the local peasants and a handful of 'foreigners' coming from the North (police and law officers, news reporters, and a rich lady of Milan), with dialectal parlances and rural landscapes being exploited so as to convey aural and visual discomfort.

These elements are summarized in the opening titles. A scenic view of mountains and dales (fig. 3.17) abruptly cuts to a modern motorway (fig. 3.18-3.20), while a supposedly diegetic folk song is stridently overlapped by the roar of an approaching car. The car plate indicating 'FG' makes clear to the audience that the story is set in the South (fig. 3.21), and more precisely in the Apulia region. By contrast, as the regional parlance of the passengers in the car reveals, this setting is at best generic: a mix of southern accents closer to Sicily and Calabria than Apulia de facto disavows any realist prerogative, at least in terms of language. As the story unravels, this and other details of car plates (fig. 3.22) as well as an emphasis on local newspapers (e.g. *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno* and *La Gazzetta del Sud*) mainly work as to hint at the context rather than providing realist support. In fact, as the invention of Accendura itself suggests, what is represented in *Don't Torture a Duckling* is rather the *idea of the South* — and it is very interesting to note how this idea is accordingly translated in film form.

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In all their immediacy and veracity, linguistic performance introduces the South. A mixture of dialectal accents and inflections represents it as a homogenous space — as if Calabria and Sicily, just to mention a couple of regions, shared the same history and culture. In this regard, the fictitiousness of Accendura is rather a work of

conceptualization, one that can be approached via John Dickie's discussion of the South as an 'organic totality' that is Other. On a closer examination, it is interesting to note how speeches and generic voices linked to regionality function as a strategy of distortion, as if interference, from time to time, would interrupt the ideal transmission of Italian and, to a greater extent, nationality. During a meeting of Italian-only speakers, the prosecutor (Virginio Gazzolo) is so annoyed by the buzzing of the Accenduriani coming from outside as to be compelled to close a window. Indistinct and disturbing, the voice-off of the locals recurs in several other sequences, always producing cacophonic effects: it accompanies the (uncivilised) demand for justice in the lynching of a man supposed to be the serial killer, but also marks the call of the order of family and religion, as in the scene in which one of the children hears his mother's voice when he is spending his time with Patrizia (Barbara Bouchet), a rich woman of Milan symbolising modernity and the consumerist lifestyle. On the whole, it implies failure in communication at a wider, national level. In a dialogue with a fellow northerner, Patrizia lets off steam: 'You are the only civilised human being I know in this damned place… I wandered a lot to understand the facts of this place, to understand this people! Nothing! Take a look at it [the newspaper]: pay attention to what these double-faced villagers are capable of!'[25] (my transl.)

The southern dialects indistinctly spoken in Accendura add a certain Gramscian emphasis to the narration, with the peasants turned into secondary (subaltern) characters far from the leading (hegemonic) roles crucially held by Italian speakers. In this respect, very interesting is the 'bilingual' figure of a carabiniere marshal, who functions as a kind of character-bridge between regional mentality and that, institutionally, of the nation state. Combining southern parlance *and* employment in the national sector, the marshal (Ugo D'Alessio) acts like an interpreter of the ways of thinking and living of the peasants, being consulted many times for 'translations' and adaptations in the national language by the public prosecutor. In many ways, his active role within the community, and his critical awareness about reality, recalls Gramsci's considerations about the necessity of education of the masses in order to overcome the status quo favoured by regional fragmentation.

At a narrative level, the marshal is centrally used to offer a kind of in-progress explanation of the folkloristic customs, in particular the superstitious beliefs to which the

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25 This dialogue excerpt has been completely altered in the English-dubbed version of the film: references to Patrizia's contempt for the people of Accendura are replaced by her disappointment against her father, who pushed Patrizia to move to Accendura.

people of Accendura adhere. By making clear what certain traditions and ideas mean for the peasants, the marshal implicitly emphasises aspects that further renders the South as 'Other' with respect to modernity, and that condemn religious practices and the locals' state of civilization. In a scene halfway in the story, the marshal discovers the corpse of a baby buried in a cave. Asked about its identity, the marshal reconstructs events by telling about a woman known in the village as the *maciara* (a dialectal word meaning sorceress) who lost her baby fifteen years earlier.

> Marshal: When the *maciara* was a young girl, they brought her to the exorcist as she had the devil in her. According to rumours in town, the exorcist got rid of the devil, and in the process he got the poor girl pregnant. But I repeat, sir, these are only jabbers because nobody ever saw this son. Some said he was born dead, others said he might have lived for a few months and she kept him hidden away because he was son of the devil.
>
> Prosecutor: Who stated the paternity then?
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> Marshal: Ignorance, sir. It's like that when a child is born deformed.

The character of the *maciara* (Florinda Bolkan) reinforces fantasies about the South's backwardness, while also highlighting the ambivalence of the superstitious Accenduriani, who are at the same time regular mass-goers and thus assumedly Catholic. Although the coexistence of institutional religion and popular religion was not an anomaly in Italy's religious practice (see Naro 2003), in this specific case it assumes a strong character of challenge and dispute. According to George R. Saunders, who has examined a series of studies conducted over the years by Italian anthropologists, this resistance to official doctrines responds to a deep-seated cultural habit that crucially highlights the 'southern question':

> a central component of the differentness of the Mezzogiorno has always been its religious imagery, and the refusal of much of its religious belief and practice to be diluted, rationalized, and bureaucratized as one would expect of 'modern' religion [...] The spirit of the South, particularly its religiosity and magical practices, has been seen as a form of practical wisdom, a fountain of energy for social transformation, a domain of autarky and of resistance to domination but also as ignorant superstition, debilitating fatalism and futility, a source of social divisiveness, and an anachronism.

(1998: 178)

So bifurcated into an antagonistic dialectic between Catholicism and neo-paganism, the theme of religion in *Don't Torture A Duckling* functions similar to how the use of language does with respect to national and regional Italy, hence reinforcing the discourse about the irresolvable character of national identity by implicitly raising questions about how Italians can be Catholic and superstitious simultaneously.

At this point of my argument, I shall shed light on the symbolic value of the 'southern question' as a *narrative solution* rather than the less innovative exercise of highlighting its specific characteristics in narrative, which responds to prefigured images of the Mezzogiorno. In substance, I intend to shift the focus from the how to the why of certain representations being used. This not to deny the importance of the analysis of stereotyped images, especially if put in relation with the culture that produces them, but rather to find an explanation for the particular use that several crime films made of 'southern question' portrayals even in non-southern settings. In *The House with Laughing Windows* (*La casa dalle finestre che ridono*, Pupi Avati, 1976), the setting in the Po Valley — the same which marks Bernando Bertolucci's *1900* (*Novecento*, 1976) — is rendered no less exotic and unsettling than that of Accendura to the eye of its protagonist — a young, 'urbanised' restorer (Lino Capolicchio). By and large, space is used as to emphasize dangerousness and hostility: many scenes take place on foggy moors and avenues (fig. 3.23-3.24), and the sound of whistling and flying foliage convey a suggestive atmosphere throughout the story. The parlance of the local population is a variegate mix of Northern Italy's regional accents, from Emilia-Romagna to Piedmont, while the locals themselves are depicted as hostile individuals, sometimes even 'monstrous' — there are dwarfs as well as others with disfigured faces (fig. 3.25-3.26), whose bodies are exploited to create visual contrasts between villagers and the foreigner visitor. Recurrent images of obsolete working tools, vehicles, and home appliances reinforce the impression of an anachronistic livelihood (fig. 3.27-3.30) that, in general, seems to be linked to the time of the Nazi Occupation during the Second World War — a time that the locals frequently return to in their speeches. In a witticism, a chambermaid tell the protagonist that the last tourists seen in the village had been the Germans in the 1940s; in another sequence, a chemist theorises that the disappearance of eels from the country is a result of the river being still full of war weapons. Finally, in Avati's film the accent on religiosity is no less bifacial and contradictory than Fulci's, with

a Catholic priest (Eugene Walter) that practices rites closer to exorcism than traditional liturgy and that in the end is discovered to be a possessed serial killer.

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Like *The House with Laughing Windows*, there are several other crime films entirely or partly set in central or North Italy which nonetheless adopt elements

generally attributed to the South[26]. What these films share is the recourse to antagonisms between regionality and nationality to enable and sustain narrative tensions that articulate a clash between modernity and anti-modernity, present and past time. In other words, in the hundreds of crime films produced over the 1970s, regionalism was prevalently fictionalised not only as a response to substantial socio-cultural multiplicity, but also for its capacity to refer to what was certainly the most diffused 'torment' in a society that passed with dizzy velocity from the thresher to the lathe, and from the boom to economic austerity: i.e. that 'existential doubt' that modernity was not at all beneficial, and that the detachment from bucolic values corresponded instead to a curse. In many respects, for its characteristics of 'resistance' and 'autarky' — to borrow these words from Saunders — regionalism lent itself very well to host symbolically, within the narrative treatment, a distrust towards institutions and an unease regarding social disintegration that increasingly grew as the years became more and more 'leaden'.

3.3.2 Regionalism and Italian cinema: Off-screen profiles

Up to the early 1980s, the bulk of theatrical film consumption in Italy could be divided into three levels that respectively referred to the presence in the peninsula of three types of film theatre. As Christopher Wagstaff has set out (1992), at the upper level there were the so-called *prima visione* cinemas (1V), structures so huge as to be located only in Italy's largest cities, and which screened the latest renowned features of Italian and American cinema, from art cinema fictions to commercial hits like Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns. Below the 1V cinemas followed premises of inferior dimensions, called *seconda visione* cinemas (2V), which were present in the cities hosting 1V cinemas as well as in all the remaining urban centres of Italy. The 2V cinemas ran features less renowned or reran successful features already screened in 1V cinemas over the previous weeks. At a lower level there were the *terza visione* cinemas (3V), that is, structures very modest in terms of space and facilities typically localised in outlying and

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26 *The Designated Victim* (*La vittima designata*, Maurizio Lucidi, 1971, also known as *Slam Out*) presents an opposition between a modern Milan and a provincial Venice. *Hotel Fear* (*Pensione paura*, Francesco Barilli, 1977) is set in an unspecified place by a lake in Centre-North Italy, in which the time of the Second World War is still the present time. The stories of *Watch Me When I Kill* (*Il gatto dagli occhi di giada*, Antonio Bido, 1977, also known as *The Cat's Victims*) and *Convoy Busters* (*Un poliziotto scomodo*, Stelvio Massi, 1978) are initially set in Rome but their plots effectively develop in provincial towns of Centre-North Italy such as Padua and Civitanova Marche.

rural areas. The 3V cinemas constituted the type of theatre most widely diffused across the national territory. Their programmes were based on features previously run in 1V and 2V cinemas months or even years before. In this exhibition system ticket prices varied according to the chosen *visione* circuit (see table 3.2)

THEATRICAL CIRCUIT	TYPICAL SCREENING	TICKET PRICE	TYPICAL LOCATION	TYPE OF AUDIENCE
Prima visione (1V)	Latest major productions	+500 lire	Main city	Upper and middle class
Seconda visione (2V)	Latest minor productions and second-run films	100-200 lire	Urban centre	Middle and lower class
Terza visione (3V)	Third-run films, *sottoprodotti*	50-100 lire	Suburban area and province	Middle and lower class

Table 3.2 – *The space of theatrical consumption in Italy*. Ticket prices are referred to the average cost of the 1960s, with exchange rate at circa 600-630 lire to the American dollar (Bondanella 2009: 178)

During the 1970s, in order to combat the massive intrusion of American films in the Italian exhibition market, the government allocated a special fund aimed at supporting the circulation of domestic films. Simultaneously, managers of 1V cinemas restyled their premises so to attract a major number of spectators. This led to a substantial portion of 2V audience being absorbed into the 1V circuit and, accordingly, to the increment of the 'qualitative' gap in programming as well as services between 1V and 3V exhibitors. As a consequence, part of the production system specialised in what critics used to call pejoratively *sottoprodotti* (sub-products), namely low-budget films realised in no more than three months that found, as best as they could, place in the still existing 2V theatres; otherwise, they were directly assigned to 3V theatres. This scenario contributed to the proliferation of an incredible amount of films that were loose and crude in content as well as in workmanship, and that often were destined for exclusive regional contexts. Among these films, there was a series of Naples-based crime fictions inspired by the local tradition of the *sceneggiata* (a popular play of Mediterranean derivation bringing together singing and drama) which were rarely distributed in Central or North Italy with the exception of cities with large communities of southerners like Milan and Turin.

Labelled as *guapparia* (Curti 2007c), this regional series was patterned on the 'tough cop' template, and were set in a well-circumscribed landscape made up of spaces

(Neapolitan slums) in which the 'predicates' are family sacrality and maternal veneration, a code of honour, male-oriented clashes, and the supremacy of the community over the State. The protagonist par excellence in the *sceneggiata* is a *guappo buono*, a good gangster holder of strong values of honour and family, who is placed in opposition to an unscrupulous gangster (*malamente*) coming from the same social background. A cathartic climax is supported by folk music or a song performed by the *guappo buono* after having finally taken his revenge and accordingly re-established moral equilibrium. In opposition to other 'tough cop' films like *Violent Naples*, *guapparia* films offered rehabiliting depictions of the city, and, to a larger extent, the South, even if inscribed within spectacular boundaries of violence. In *Big Mamma* (*Il Mammasantissima*, Alfonso Brescia, 1979), starring Neapolitan stage performer and folk singer Mario Merola, space is conceived so as to channel beneficial developments: disorder is overturned following local expectations, and Naples revaluated via an anti-modern perspective stressing values of which the city is the imaginarily holder. Even when the space embodies aspects perceived as malign (e.g. modernity, State inadequacy, criminal 'unfairness'), a counterbalancing innate force is at the same time likely to emerge.

In the opening titles, a combination of images of urban space and an in-progress march of people dressed like the local stock character Pulcinella (fig. 3.31) suggests tensions between modernity and the past. Glimpses of traffic (fig. 3.32-3.34) and low-angled buildings (fig. 3.35-3.36) are indistinctly mixed together with details of folkloristic objects (fig. 3.37-3.38) and religious symbols (fig. 3.39-3.40), while a tarantella score meant as played by the Pulcinellas themselves further stresses the existence of a strong continuity with the past and its traditions.

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The next scene introduces the main character, *guappo buono* Don Vincenzo Tramontano (Mario Merola), nicknamed 'Holy Mamma'. This sequence is constructed by emphasising patriarchal supremacy through imagery that is religiously charged. Don Vincenzo is dressing before a mirror (fig. 3.41), surrounded by the women of the house (wife, daughter, and servant) who all appear to be in ecstatic adoration (fig. 3.42-3.43) while giving him objects to wear (tie, coat, ring) as if as part of a ceremonial protocol (fig.

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3.44-3.46). Don Vincenzo's image is multiplied through mirror reflections, and transversally combined with religious icons present in the room (fig. 3.47-3.48). The women make adoring comments about the man, while a litany-like voice of a street-vendor coming from the open window lends the dressing act an impression of sacrality. To seal the 'ceremony', after dressing Don Vincenzo asks for a cup of coffee, 'as if it was the wine in a communion' (Curti 2007c).

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Don Vincenzo is a respected cigarette trafficker whose affairs benefit uncountable families of his slum; as he says himself in another scene: 'They [the State] think of depriving us of contraband, but they don't know that this will cause revolution in Naples. Half a million people live thanks to this bread' (my transl.)[27]. Although fictionalised, his characterization reflects much of the problematic relationship between a precarious economy and role of organized crime. As sociologist Marcello Ravveduto has noted,

> through contraband the Camorra introduces itself as an enterprise, occupying a relevant position within the job market [...] creating incomes for about 200,000 families [in the late 1970s]. Gratitude generates consensus: in return for a permanent salary, the community of precarious street-vendors covers any kind of illegal activity. A contiguous link between Camorra and poorest class is likely to be established.

(2007: 26, my transl.)

Sacralized and respected, throughout the film Don Vincenzo is portrayed as a hero. He defends a young couple in trouble with a pawnbroker without scruples, and even helps a priest to get back a valuable relic stolen by a group of gypsies. His goodness is implicitly sympathetic to that of the many Neapolitan individuals struggling for survival or even 'forced' to deal with crime. Narrative, in this sense, offers a compendium of several 'daily' professions — both legal and illegal — practised in the city: there are traffickers and sellers of smuggled cigarettes, usurers, deceitful gamblers, fraudsters of any type, illegal street-vendors, and even children working clandestinely instead of going to school. Realism, in this sense, is a major source of providing identification.

The plethora of these represented activities, in combination with Don Vincenzo's status, configure space in anthropological terms, or, as Martin Lefebvre has put it in his discussing the topic of space and culture, 'as pertaining to lived experiences' rather than based on narrative and aesthetic factors (2006: 51). The definition of 'lived experiences' fits well, in fact, with the many professions displayed throughout the film. Although the emphasis on favourable illegality could generate problematic readings of the *guapparia* alongside other contemporaneous crime narratives/formulas in which crime is, first and foremost, something to combat and possibly punish, to an attentive interpretation the presence of aspects so persuasively legitimating crime is not a false note. As Giovanni Buttafava (2000) has noted, the *guapparia* is many respects a variant of the *poliziottesco*

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27 No English-dubbed version of *Big Mamma* has ever been released, which further reflects the limited marketability of the product and its geographically circumscribed audience.

conceived as of serving precise local expectations. Elements of representation do not undermine, in fact, the *poliziottesco* main formula: cops become good smugglers and cars speedboats, while the police inspector concerned for defenceless citizens is transfigured into a good gangster sympathetic to marginalised environments. Moreover, this variant produces a kind of 'anthropological class solidarity' between spectators of the genre — being cops or criminals is a condition dictated by necessity rather than ideals:

> the care of some Neapolitan *poliziottesco* films in treating thieves, thugs, and 'minor' mafiosi takes into account the spectator of these films who presumably has a brother cop and a brother *camorrista*. The underdevelopment conditions — brought up as determinant in causing crime — do not justify anything to film viewers, as they well know that such conditions are determinant in police recruitment, too.

> (Buttafava 2000: 118, my transl.)

Overall, the very conditions of the Neapolitan people displayed in the film enable identification at many levels, as a significant number of *guapparia* film spectators presumably made of illegality the base for their survival. Further exploiting the Neapolitan landscape of 'lived experience' was Mario Merola's persona, which drew upon his accredited status as cantor of the city as well as his teen years as a *guappo* and his never denied 'friendships' with local gangsters (see Ravveduto 2007: 35-37). In *Big Mamma*'s final scene, Naples is channelled through *sceneggiata* elements and literally juxtaposed with Mario Merola's body. Don Vincenzo, disguised as Pulcinella, takes his 'deserved' vengeance and kills Don Salvatore Bufalo (Biagio Pelligra), a ruthless gangster who raped Don Vincenzo's (virgin) daughter and caused her death just before her marriage. Quite suggestively, the vengeance takes place during another folkloric march of Pulcinellas.

The symbiotic portrayal of Merola and the city was so successfully received by local audience so as to establish Merola as a living symbol of 'Neapolitan-ness' for the years to come: 'Merola became a sort of mass phenomenon, starring in seventeen film […] in five years: many of them were directed by Brescia, and all made considerable profits at the box office, even though mainly in the South' (Curti 2007c). Supported by music and carnivalesque iconography, but also an intense use of dialect and morality, Merola's performance in *Big Mamma* passes through and exploits a variety of elements,

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always suggesting rooted values and positive sentiments.

Undoubtedly, the production of *guapparia* films is an interesting phenomenon within Italian cinema for it manifested itself in absolute autonomy, if not in contrast, with respect to the wider national film industry and audience arena. Although the *guapparia* plagiarised narrative structures of the *poliziottesco*, it developed a distinct and recognisable style, based on regional iconography and the fictionalization of social, anthropological, and topographic elements, as well as dialogue and songs powerfully related to a Neapolitan-Mezzogiorno inflected culture. In concert with this, main motifs, and even modes of resolution of tensions, were reworked to respond to a precise protocol of audience expectations. In substance, while one can argue that *guapparia* cinema-goers were also likely to attend *poliziottesco* films, the same cannot be argued for the reverse, given the improbable marketability of *guapparia* films in Northern Italy (with, again, the exception of the industrial cities inhabited by families of Southern migrants).

Enabling the serialization of such films, alongside the more general hybridization of the *sceneggiata* with other genres such as the melodrama and the romantic comedy, was an authentic Neapolitan-Mezzogiorno factory comprising producer Ciro Ippolito, leading directors such as Alfonso Brescia and Mario Bianchi, actors-singers like Mario Merola, Pino Mauro, Carmelo Zappulla, and Nino D'Angelo, plus a plethora of supporting performers and professional technicians all strictly coming from the Naples area. Seen from the inside, the *guapparia* production establishment, while shaped by commercial purposes (such as marketing folk singers to sell records and audiocassettes), constituted an interesting self-representation of the 'southern question' realised through the conventions of the Italian crime film.

In many respects, one may observe how the *sceneggiata*-derived features resulted in an industrial operation similar to what American critics pejoratively called 'blaxploitation'. Just as the black gangster films that were produced in the US during the 1970s and mainly released in urban theatres within black communities consciously targeted the expectations of Afro-American cinema-goers (Lawrence 2010; Koven 2010), the *guapparia* series consciously targeted the expectations of a large portion of those attending film screenings in Southern Italy, especially in the Naples area. This parallel is not so forced if one considers that there have been studies, after all, which have discussed the condition of the southerners in Italian culture and society as constituting a

kind of 'blackness' (see Russell 2011: 181-206).

Moreover, there are many connections between these two crime formats. For example, the hero comes from a well-delineated urban context (the 'ethnic' community) which ideally excludes the presence of non-members (whites/northern Italians). Even the police are excluded from representation, as the plots generally result in a rivalry between gangs over questions concerning power, control, and cheating. Consequently, the display of crime does not involve international traffic and conspiracies, but more 'ordinary' thefts, burglaries, trafficking of contraband, extortion, and drug smuggling. As such illegal activities are centrally justified by the logic of 'getting by', in both blaxploitation and *guapparia* films the community itself (the blacks/the southerners) show an attitude of tolerance, if not condonement, towards them, additionally revealing the profound antithesis between this type of film and their mainstream counterparts in which the (institutional) law must finally overcome disorder (*poliziottesco*/Dirty Harry series, etc.). Sub-cultural elements are constantly brought up and glorified through self-referential considerations, extemporaneous references to a vague outside world regarded as source of all evil (whites/'those from the North', the government), and the central support of language and music (Black American slang/Neapolitan dialect, soul-blues-R'n'B music/Neapolitan folk song). Finally, humour and gags are more recurrent than in a conventional crime film (African-American street humour/*avanspettacolo* gags).

In this chapter, I have shown how the crime films produced during the Leaden Years are permeated by tensions of a regionalistic kind which emerge from both their narratives and a film industry influenced by practices of regional production and exhibition. Such tensions, as I have argued, are the result of a deep-seated social and cultural question linked with an idea of nation that had failed over the decades to provide a widely shared collective identity. In the 1970s, these tensions intensified as never before since the end of the Second World War. Domestic crime films brought these tensions on the screen through representations that embody conflicts between the nation and the regions, between North and South, between city and countryside; conflicts that are practically irreconcilable, and are emphasized in narratives by clashes between characters, settings, and ways of speaking. As well as responding to an actual need for affirming the existence of multiple and variegated cultural identities, these representations reveal in many ways the considerable extent to which the Italian crime

film of the Leaden Years not only reflected, but also participated in, a wider process of the deconstruction of national identity that was underway in those turbulent years; a deconstruction largely inspired by the socio-economic crisis that followed the recent years of the boom.

Chapter 4:   On Family and Patriarchy

Family has historically played a fundamental role within Italian culture and society. For centuries, Italian families from North to South had shared the patriarchal imperative within which the man was head of the household and maintained it economically, while the woman was in charge of housekeeping and child rearing. Rigidly based on gender differences, this division of roles and duties regulated not just the private but also the public life of the individuals, which resulted in the setting of family as a benchmark of principles and moral values of Italy as a whole. In this respect, uncountable are the studies that have stressed, for example, the importance of family in relation to the concept of nation and Italian identity, while also exploring its weight on the objectives, strategies, and decisions of other important institutions and domains of the national community, such as the government and the political parties, the Catholic Church, education, the health system, trade unions and other bodies connected with the world of work (cf. Barbagli and Kertzer 1990; Kertzer and Saller 1993; Saraceno 2004).

Family is regarded as a central and absolutely defining element of Italian culture and society not just within historical analyses, but also for popular culture. Stereotypes mainly inspired by American culture's representation of its Italian-American minorities and, in particular, the Mafia and its hierarchical, kin-based organizational structure have contributed to the crystallization of the idea of Italian family as a highly conservative institution; a social monolith closed both to dialogue and change which hardly tolerates deceit and offences, and tends to suppress individualistic drives. As well as being fed through fictions, films, and television shows (see De Stefano 2006; Renga 2011a; Fußinger 2012), this idea has found legitimization thanks to scientific studies. In a 1958 research on the lifestyle of a small community of Southern Italy, American anthropologist Edward Christie Banfield coined the expression 'amoral familialism' in the attempt to theorise a particular model of social behaviour in which individuals appeared as more naturally inclined to pursue the good of their family instead of the common good, or the good of the wider community they inhabited. For Banfield, who published his research findings in a book significantly entitled *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, such behaviour was dictated by a series of political and economical circumstances specific to the Italian context (some of which, such as the community's lack of trust in the central government, and the economic underdevelopment of the

associated region, relate to the wider 'southern question' I have discussed in the previous chapter). Later anthropological researches over various years have somewhat confirmed Banfield's findings, leading the scientific community to agree on certain typical features of the Italian family, in particular its functioning as site of social control and cultural repression, as well as its being a major obstacle to change and modernization (cf. Davis 1973, Bell 1979, Esposito 1989, Galt 1991).

In more recent times, such a monolithic vision of the Italian family has been contested. As Paul Ginsborg has pointed out in *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 'family has probably been a more constant and less evanescent element in Italian popular consciousness than any other', yet its role within society is far more complex than one is led to believe (2003a: 2). Such a perspective is validated by more recent anthropological studies which differ from Banfield and his fellow researchers' early studies in that their focus on family is not exclusively directed on to economical and political factors[1] but also takes into account such other factors as gender, sexuality, and age (Yanagisako 2002; Sciama 2003; Plesset 2006). Similarly, other studies have theorised that family in Italy is anything but a closed and change-resisting socio-cultural construct. Family is assumed to respond in a quite flexible manner to the stimuli coming from within society: it is used for expressing particular and diversified interests and identities, as well as for establishing associative (or dissociative) relationships with specific groups, classes, and values (see Filippucci 1996: 54-55).

In Italian cinema, representations of family units and their members have reflected this flexibility of family. As Marcia Landy has written, while screen portraits of the family are 'bilateral at best', they are also characterized by reference to 'a larger social fabric that exceeds the domestic sphere' (2000: 207). Ideally, family is 'a source of order and stability, and a force for national unity', but on the other hand it may as well be 'a tenuous haven from the depredations of the social order; a signifier for social fragmentation; a critique of gendered and sexual roles; and a myth in need of

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1   As Italian anthropologist Monica Bonaccorso has argued, the notion of 'amoral familialism' has been theoretically validated over the years by means of studies almost exclusively conducted in rural contexts, particularly in the peasant villages of the backward areas of the Mezzogiorno. The predominance of such a specific rural focus responded, particularly in the early days of the anthropological interest in Italy, 'to the tendency of British anthropologists to constitute the Mediterranean as a new, yet still exotic, area of anthropological enquiry, […] and [has] complied with American anthropologists' interest in exploring homelands of migrants to the United States' (2009: 8). Far from the researchers' focus, and therefore from the possibility of contributing to a theory of the social function of the family in Italy in a more complete and accurate perspective, there remained, for example, households of urbanized centres — the failure to study which is arguably surprising if one considers that Italy is the European country with the oldest and most established network of cities, and that Italian culture has traditionally valued urban milieux against rural ones (Signorelli 1996).

demystification' (ibid.).

During the Leaden Years, the patriarchal paradigm of Italian society underwent a severe crisis that was largely due to significant changes that occurred in the structure and values of the traditional nuclear family. Innovative legislation breaking with family and gender laws of the fascist and even pre-fascist period, and new social behaviour and ambitions inspired by the modern idea of Italy that had followed the 'economic miracle', opposed and led to the formal reassessment of some key patriarchal principles to which the Italian family had been historically attached. At the same time, the substantially Catholic framework of family according to which marriage occupied a central, formative role and sex had to be experienced for procreational purposes only, was severely questioned by the younger generations, especially women. As society revised its family-led assent, harsh ideological conflicts developed involving older and younger generations of Italians, parents and offspring, as well as men and women. Women, in fact, appeared more and more independent from male figures, and less and less related to the domestic dimension the Italian family traditionally assigned to them, which in many respects had serious — when not traumatic — repercussions on Italian males' psyches.

This chapter shall address Leaden Years crime films through their generic representations of family and its members. After a couple of sections outlining various socio-cultural and political-economical implications of the historical changes in the Italian family, and after one section dedicated to the way the Italian film industry was at large affected by such changes, in the remaining — and largest — part of this chapter I shall discuss the way in which in the Italian crime film characterizations of men, women, children, and youths, as well as of family units, significantly reflected topical concerns and anxieties about the (end of the) traditional, patriarchal family and, specifically, its deep-rooted gender and sexual norms.

4.1   Transformations of the family in Italy. A brief historical overview

The first signs of crisis for the traditional Italian family can be dated back to the booming 1950s and 1960s. The country's modernization coincided with the offering of new job types that were attractive to many for their potential to increase incomes and, prospectively, to ensure family wealth. The largest family units, especially those in the South and other rural areas of the country were slashed as one or more members of the

group migrated towards the industrialized centres of the North. Supported by increasing education in the country the variety of available jobs eroded the Italian family's previously crucial function of initiating and training youth into and for the world of work. It became increasingly frequent for sons and daughters of merchants, artisans, and fishermen not to follow in their father's footsteps, but rather to go after jobs in factories, in the construction industry, and in the media and service sectors. Following this new trend, many young workers could finally cut loose from their parent-employers, so breaking with the widely diffused custom of parents administrating their earnings and savings (Musso 2002).

The youth's economic autonomy became a factor of major destabilization for the Italian family. As well as depriving parents of their traditional control and decisional power, it created the conditions for many youths to leave their paternal homes and go and live on their own. In the public sphere, these issues were taken very seriously, being particularly exploited by newspapers and magazines that expostulated rhetorically about family distress and generational divides, often using sensationalist tones. 'An invisible barrier set us apart from our sons', wrote a journalist on *La Stampa*; 'war has not succeeded in destroying the Italian family, but they certainly will' (Benedetti 1957, my transl.).

Among the youth, those causing the greater distress within families were female. One facet of Italy's modernization was the plethora of jobs such as typists and telephone operators, which attracted a number of young women as being a viable (and much more exciting) alternative to being a housewife. The unprecedented boom in female employment revealed the need for autonomy from the family, within which, in many cases, there still were quarrels about which friends to go out with and how late to stay out at night (Piccone Stella 1993; Giachetti 2005: 31-32).

Of the many issues raised by the rapidly changing society, that of sexual freedom was certainly the most contentious, if only for the aura of immorality and bad reputation then associated with having sex before and out of marriage. As a result of full employment, widespread opportunities of private transport, and a flourishing entertainment industry, the public sphere had become a social space increasingly youth-friendly, and increasingly promiscuous. Even schools, an institution which embodied gender differentiation in its educational structure and content, gradually introduced gender-mixed classes from 1963 on. In the light of such changes, the chances that youngsters might have 'illicit' liaisons increased exponentially, making the parents'

traditional control on their relationships less and less effective. Associated with modernity and progress, the car and the motor scooter became vehicles somewhat legendary in that they allowed teenagers and young adults alike to experience their love affairs autonomously and far from family interference of any kind.

The issue of sex was particularly delicate when it related to women, in that public opinion was still largely influenced by a male point of view in terms of gender roles and equality. It suffices to say that as late as in the mid-1960s, when adultery was still prosecuted by law, there were lighter penalties if those who were found guilty of the associated crimes were male. Also, men could sue wives who spent too much time away from home, regardless of whether working reasons were involved, in the name of 'conjugal roof protection'. In the rural areas, especially in southern Italy, the sexual 'licentiousness' of certain women was viewed with distaste and derision by both men and women, in that it sordidly contradicted the traditional image of woman as faithful lover and guardian of the hearth (Scirè 2007: 3, 5). In how they behaved publicly, and in how they appeared in the clichés of consumer society and show business, younger women represented a radical challenge to this man-made world, to this androcentric culture. Generally in her twenties, a 'modern woman' was one who not only worked, but also drove a car, smoked cigarettes, wore clothes that were more and more revealing, and, above all, did not feel ashamed of living her sexuality freely (Giachetti 2005). Considering the long-established sexual and gender habits the Italian family of this time was based on, one may well understand how powerful — and, to some extent, shocking — the social rise of the 'modern woman' was. As well as opening up the space for a society in which men and women were substantially equal in terms of gender rights, this type of woman contrasted with the fundamental social roles such as those of wife and mother, which further problematized the notion of family.

Building on the momentum of the ongoing social changes, there were gradually introduced legislative measures that to varying degrees redesigned, at least formally, gender relationships and family models: the *legge sul divorzio* or Divorce Act (1970), the legalization of contraceptives (1971), the *statuto della famiglia* or Family Act, under which was introduced the legal parity of the spouses (1975), gender equality rules in employment (1977), and, finally, the *legge per l'interruzione di gravidanza* or Abortion Act (1978). These laws marked Italy's modernization in the field of civil rights over a relatively short period of time yet, rather peculiarly, much later than in other Western countries. Albeit subject to specific cases, divorce had been legal in countries such as

France, England, and United States since the late nineteenth-century (Glendon 1987) and, by the same token, State-sponsored medical systems for birth control were already available in Scandinavian countries at least forty years earlier (Glass 1938). Despite their historical delay, the related legislative innovations were accompanied by harsh cultural resistance. On the one hand, there was the Catholic Church, which saw in the proliferation of sexual behaviour unrelated with the logic of procreation, as well as in the legalization of abortion and divorce, threats to the sanctity of family. In this respect, one has to bear in mind not just the cultural but also the political weight of the Church in Italy. From the fall of the fascist regime on, the country was ruled uninterruptedly by governments headed by the Christian-Democrats (DC), the Catholic-influenced party. But resistance to change also came from the political-institutional establishment in its entirety. Most key roles in terms of political, legislative, and judicial activity were occupied by men (see Giachetti 2005: 201), who were manifestly unwilling to give too much space to women, and to their egalitarian claims. Although the Leaden Years are generally remembered as a period of significant achievements in terms of civil rights, this idea, while supported by objective facts, does not tell of the enormous difficulties the country had to face to get certain laws ultimately passed. Divorce and abortion, for instance, were both marked by a tortuous and turbulent law-making process, influenced by the strenuous pressing of political and cultural conservative areas. The law on divorce was proposed in Parliament in 1965, and discussed for five years before being approved, but then further contested and so submitted to a referendum to repeal it in 1974 (which was, though, unsuccessful). Legalization of abortion underwent a similar process. The law was first presented in draft form in 1973, finally approved in 1978, but then submitted to a referendum in 1981, which expressed in the end the popular will not to repeal it (Scirè 2007, 2008). Tensions between conservatism and modernity in relation to the idea of the traditional family were therefore key to Italy's Leaden Years, reverberating with great intensity in the private and public arena alike.

     Furthering the tensions was the feminist movement, which in these years evolved into an important social and political interlocutor. Italian feminism was marked by a galaxy of political movements and other groupings, which operated mainly in the big cities through self-managed initiatives and independent advisory bodies set up to raise awareness on specific women's issues. Family and couple relationship were the first 'battlefields' of Italian feminists. In them, feminists said, there were perpetuated the conditions of woman's historical subalternity to man within society. Patriarchal culture

was accused of crossing social classes and political power positions without distinction. Even workers, a social category that seemingly expressed a particularly progressive position, as evidenced by their union struggles and claims against labour exploitation, when in their own homes tended to relate with their wives and children by means of hierarchical and oppressive dynamics that were a surrogate, in some respect, of those they fought in the factories (Giachetti 2005: 168-169). Feminist critique also extended to politics — not only to the government led by the Christian-Democrats, but also to the opposition led by Communists. In the policy and programmes of the Communist Party (PCI), not only did women's rights appear as a very marginal topic, but it was also possible to find significant affinities with Christian-Democrats, as with respect to the importance of the traditional family (as was established by the opposition of both parties to divorce and abortion), and the degree of preoccupation and vigilance apparent towards excesses in terms of sexual mores (ibid.: 166). One of the most disruptive aspects of 1970s feminist movements in Italy — historian Gabriella Bonacchi (2004) argues — was exactly its unveiling of the 'intimate relationship' entertained by Catholic and Communist culture within Italian society, its revealing of the ideologically monolithic and closed nature of their positions in terms of women's rights and associated needs.

4.2   Familiarizing sex and gender equality

Family, with its aggregate of socio-cultural and political tensions, was a central topic of Italian cultural production of the time. Under the influence of authoritative scientific research focusing on contemporaneous structural and behavioural changes and their effects, there proliferated a large group of publications for mass consumption which reduced important issues to simplistic oppositions based on age, gender and class. In contrast with the 1950s and 1960s, when issues of supposed delicacy concerning the family were discussed with a certain caution, the 1970s were marked by a certain ease and nonchalance, confirmed by the references to once family taboos such as the use of contraceptives, divorce, abortion, orgasm, masturbation, and homosexuality. Occurring with a decade's or so delay with respect to other European countries such as France and the UK, this change enabled the opening up of a space for the circulation of publications featuring sex that was previously non-existent. Accordingly, the consumption of female magazines, tabloids, and erotic and pornographic publications for men registered an

authentic boom[2].

To a great extent, sex worked as a symptom of repressed needs and desires. From some of the most popular female magazines of the time, such as *Amica, Annabella, Bella*, *Gioia*, and *Grazia*, there emerged a rather agitated profile of the Italian woman, one which seemed marked by a tension between family and relational expectations, and the desire to assert herself as an individual. The emphasis that sex was given in these magazines — particularly in the agony columns — along with the direct manner adopted in dealing with women's sex and affective life signalled an ongoing revision of the authority represented by husbands, boyfriends, and parents. With regard to issues like orgasm and sexual fulfilment, the Italian female readers were instructed about how to become conscious of their own bodies and sexuality, hence challenging male-shaped social constructs related to sexual activity and helping women to gain better confidence in themselves[3]. This represented a substantial cultural 'turning point', if only because just a few years earlier these very magazines addressed woman's emancipation as only a social and not a sex-related fact (Cigognetti and Servetti 1996). This change embodied an implicit questioning of Italian masculinity, which was further reflected in the magazines' focus on personal stories in which the man and his adequacy as a (modern) partner were criticised[4].

The greater openness about sex had no less relevant impact on the consumption of images, in particular those associated with the female nude. The 1970s marked the transition from partial to full nudity, and from the 'sexually allusive' to the 'sexually explicit'. This transition was supported by the widespread availability of publications for males, especially tabloids, comics, and photonovels, which charged the female nude with a powerful transgressive meaning. It became quite a common experience to see

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2   By the late 1960s and during the first half of the 1970s, women's magazines reached ten million copies a month (7 million weeklies and over 2.5 million monthlies). *ABC*, one of the most popular tabloids, printed 500,000 copies a week. As for the sexy magazines addressed to a male readership, *Men* printed 520,000 copies a week, and *King* and *Playmen* respectively 300,000 and 500,000 copies a month (data reported in Giachetti 2005: 36, 56).

3   A 1971 study by Mirillia Bones on a sample of two hundred young adults revealed that females used to credit males with assumedly positive qualities such as self-confidence, rationality, creativity, dedication, self-sufficiency, courage, dynamism, and so on whereas they thought of themselves in rather negative terms. Asked to describe themselves, females mainly used adjectives such as irrational, incoherent, subdued, obliging, weak, gullible, delicate, frivolous, hysterical, fickle, and conceited.

4   To give an idea, I report an answer that appeared in *Bella*'s agony column 'L'amico del cuore' to a letter from a young woman who sought advice on how to make her boyfriend fall in love with her despite him admitting to being with her just to get sexual favours: 'Your amazing docility, your supine accepting all the crazy ideas of others, your spiritual servility towards guys, your wish to be considered like a tissue that one throws after use, [all these things] make you a very vulnerable person. You are in constant danger. Anyone can hurt you. If you don't understand that the *only feeling you should have is to slap that guy in public, in front of everyone*, then you deserve to be made a fool by your peers ruthlessly. How is it possible that you don't have a shred of dignity?' (Federico 1977, my transl.; my emphasis)

erotically charged images as a complement to articles and stories that dealt more or less explicitly with ongoing changes in customs. This practice was particularly exploited in articles about the private life of cinema and television celebrities, with sexy photographs of actresses and starlets being deliberately juxtaposed with stories that exposed lifestyles and love relationships which were mutually modern and incompatible with the traditionally sacred and inviolable idea of family. Such articles were among the most evident expression of a larger process of eroticization underway in Italian culture. As Giovanna Maina has noted, it soon became difficult to distinguish between erotic and journalistic or scientific publications in that even content and information substantially unrelated with sex became 're-functionalized in an erotic way' (2012: 62).

Like much of the printed press and most 'pulp' publications, sex became also the main attraction of the national cinema production. Film genres and related commercial formulas evolved very rapidly in accordance with changes in sexual customs. Whereas in the 1960s sex appeared to some extent restricted to narratives featuring stripteases and manufactured scenes with scientific presumptions (e.g. the *mondo* films), in the 1970s, in line with the wider eroticization of Italian cultural production, it became cross-generic, marking noticeably dramas, comedies, thrillers, horror and historical films. This was in some respects enabled by topical changes in administrative approaches towards 'obscene' representations, which, in line with the broader changes, had first resulted in a more flexible film rating system (1963) and, eventually, the legalization of *luci rosse* or 'red light' theatres for adults (1977). For film director Federico Fellini, the centrality of sex in Italian cinema could be read as a response to the progressive falling away of 'certain taboos and moralistic distortions' about sex which were typical of the Catholic culture of the Italian society; a 'reaction to the times when life's sexual aspects were something to hide, to avoid, something not to speak about', which, in a metaphor, is comparable to 'the freedom of a prisoner, or the appetite of one who has suffered a long period of fasting' (cited in Guidotti 2000: 15).

By and large, the emphasis on sex in all its forms contributed to an epochal change in the boundaries of decency and obscenity. In 1977, a survey on sexual and romantic behaviour conducted among over ten thousand readers of a popular youth magazine called *Doppiovù* revealed, for example, how virginity was no longer considered a value, but was rather seen as a 'nuisance'. By the same token, the majority of the interviewees regarded marital faithfulness as 'nothing but a bourgeois prejudice' (reported in Giachetti 2005: 69).

4.3   Cinema and the family

The historical and cultural changes in the family, as well as its discontents, were reflected quite instantly by Italy's domestic cinema. Following the changes in family structure, and the new values that emerged from a society modernized by capitalist production and consumerism, the cinematic image of family changed, too. In the 1950s, extended families faded from screen stories, being referenced mainly for parodic purposes in comedies, while images of nuclear families became a narrative standard, being particularly defined by an average of two children per household (Cigognetti and Servetti 1996). In the early 1960s, a film genre that had successfully marked the fascist era and the early post-war years, the family melodrama, abruptly disappeared from production, the specificities of its family setting being in many respects non-functional in relation to the latest demand for emotional situations unrelated with, and not finalised with respect to, marriage. Regardless of generic conventions, depictions of family (or a loving couple) within national cinema became, by and large, critical and hopelessly problematic. Marriage, that is family's founding act, began to be commonly associated with disastrous existential and social experiences, as well as being somehow emptied of the traditional importance the Catholic Church and local communities usually conferred on it. In particular, there began to emerge discontent that related, more and more clearly, to the legal dimension of marriage. In a segment of the anthology feature *The Birds, the Bees, and the Italians* (*Signore e signori*, Pietro Germi, 1965), a man unhappy with his marriage tries to split from his wife, but he is eventually forced to attempt suicide because of the mentality of the community he lives in, a small town where separations are seen with less benevolence than betrayals. In *La Notte* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1961), a marriage has proved an alienating experience because both spouses have fallen into a situation of standardized communication and half-hearted behaviour. In another anthology film, *Boccaccio '70* (Vv. Aa., 1962), two young spouses working in the same factory are forced to hide their marriage and the impending arrival of a baby in order not to annoy their unaccommodating employer, but they are eventually discovered and quickly fired.

Such problematical representations of family unity, and the emphasis on family as a place within which individuals are not necessarily in harmony, were crucially developed alongside innovative female characters — women who were less and less linked with domesticity, and less and less inclined to be influenced by their husbands,

their parents, and men in general. From the mid-1950s on, Italian women on the big screen seemed to be more likely to make their own choices rather than being subjected to those of others, thus shining a new light on certain rigidities of patriarchal culture. However, cinema seemed no less aware of related cultural tensions, and, consequently, of the necessary compromises women would have to be seen to make — as witness regionalistic tensions, as in *The Sign of Venus* (*Il segno di Venere,* Dino Risi, 1955), in which a Milanese young lady, Cesira (Franca Valeri), clashes with the backward mentality of some Neapolitan relatives, as she pushes for her cousin Agnese (Sophia Loren) to find a job and fulfil herself instead of staying home until a man asks her to marry; political and generational tensions, as explored through the widowed woman (Eleonora Rossi Drago) of *Violent Summer* (*Estate violenta*, Valerio Zurlini, 1959), who falls in love with a younger man from a fascist family (Jean-Louis Trintignant) and tormentedly decides to leave her child and her old mother to run away with him; or class tensions, as in *Six Days a Week* (*La bugiarda*, Luigi Comencini 1965), in which a young proletarian woman (Catherine Spaak) is led to 'steal' another woman's identity in order to entertain an adulterous relationship with an aristocratic man (Enrico Maria Salerno). As Anna Maria Caso has observed, as soon as woman's social emancipation enters into cinema,

> the traditional figure of the householder becomes less and less prominent. A steady image of austerity, the authoritarian husband [finally] fades, and so does, too, the humble and docile wife who was amazed at listening to the brilliant speaking of her husband […]. Supported by the appliances that partly cover for her at home and give her free time, there emerges [the portrait of] a restless wife who is more self-confident and direct, sometimes harsher [with respect to the past]; a wife for whom carrying out traditional womanly roles such as housewife and mother is no longer enough. Man-woman relationships become [accordingly] less predictable and more conflicting […].

> (2004: 173-174, my transl.)

In the next decade, the idea of the traditional family was further spoiled and debased by national cinema, and following historical events such the 1968 generational conflict and women's increasing emancipation, it become particularly associated with fantasies about tragic and violent actions. The generation of idle youth of such films as *The Young and the Passionate* (*I vitelloni*, Federico Fellini, 1953) and *Silver Spoon Set* (*I delfini*, Francesco Maselli, 1960) paved the way for a reactionary and nihilist generation: in Marco Bellocchio's *Fists in the Pocket* (*I pugni in tasca*, 1965), a young man tired of

replacing his blind mother in running the family plans to exterminate his parents and siblings; in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Luna* (*La luna*, 1979), a teenager who has grown up without a father is caught in a downward spiral of heroin addiction, complicating the already troubled life of his mother; in *Take It Easy Professor* (*L'uccello migratore*, Steno, 1972), a class of high school students paralyse learning activities by violently asking on a daily basis for teaching methods that cannot be adopted. Female characters start on alternative and sometimes discomforting paths with no clear aim but the need to demonstrate that different, personal actions are possible. In Marcello Fondato's *Diary of a Phone Operator* (*Certo, certissimo, anzi... probabile*, 1969), a young woman (Catherine Spaak) sharing her flat with a female friend (Claudia Cardinale) seduces her friend's partners and ruins her marital dreams in an attempt to save their friendship. In Enrico Maria Salerno's *Dear Parents* (*Cari genitori*, 1973) a student girl (Maria Schneider) who had moved to London breaks contact with her parents in Italy, and when her mother (Florinda Bolkan) goes to London to get her back, she makes her realise how unimportant family ties have become to her. In Marco Ferreri's *Bye Bye Monkey* (*Ciao maschio*, 1978), a woman (Abigail Clayton) gets pregnant after raping a man during an experimental stage performance, but decides not to have an abortion and to rear the child without a father.

Through these images of unstable and near-to-dissolution family units, as well as of women, youths, and offspring so different with respect to the traditional ideas of family and gender roles, Italian cinema built a feeling of discomfort and a sense of fear that the model of patriarchal society was perceived as being irremediably in decline. The 'modern woman' and her sexual open-mindedness caused a mixture of feelings: pleasure, yes, but also anxiety. As a number of psychologists and sociologists of that time stressed, Italian men, who until then had been not required to account for their sexual performances, were suddenly traumatized by the increased sexual knowledge and the new needs of their partners, as well as by mass media images of women who appeared sexually unsatisfied (cf. Granzotto 1977: 54; Giachetti 2005). The 'pick the holes' activity carried out by feminist militants or just sympathizers with regard to family and heterosexual relationships furthered male discomfort. From the personal stories and diaries of many women of the time collected by feminist activists there emerges the profile of a clumsy man, who likely exorcised his discomfort by hiding behind a wall of silence (see Passerini 1996: 153). The crime films at the core of the present study originated and developed within the socio-cultural context so far described. The

problems afflicting Italy's patriarchal society particularly found room within stories and formulaic narratives in which crime appears to a lesser or greater extent connected with non-traditional family structures and values, and in which the detective and legal-procedural framework is typically used to relieve patriarchal distress regarding 'modern women' and the younger generation. In the next sections I shall analyse these narrative features more specifically, as well as show their relation to contemporaneous familial changes and associated questions about gender, sexuality, and generational differences.

4.4.1 Men and women, husbands and wives

Family and its discontents are central in the characterization of the hero of the Italian crime film — the detective, and variants like the tough cop and the vigilante. Prevalently male, this character appears as a single man either unwilling to get married or emerging from an unsuccessful, sometimes even tragic, marriage, and thus as a man who is separated (*The Fifth Chord/Giornata nera per l'ariete*, Luigi Bazzoni, 1971), divorced (*From Corleone to Brooklyn/Da Corleone a Brooklyn*, Umberto Lenzi, 1979), or widowed (*Fear in the City/Paura in città*, Giuseppe Rosati, 1976). In the less likely cases in which the hero is featured as married, he happens to have a conflictual relationship with his wife and/or children, whom he views as hindrance to his investigation; other times, his wife and children become targets of brutal villains' retaliations, being raped, kidnapped (*Kidnap Syndacate/La città sconvolta: caccia spietata ai rapitori*, Fernando Di Leo, 1975), or murdered (*Colt 38 Special Squad/Quelli della calibro 38*, Massimo Dallamano, 1976). In any case, living alone is related to both the establishment and the maintenance of security and success. At first glance, this seems to follow the model of the 'free' and 'unconsumable' hero theorised by Umberto Eco in the well-known essay on the comic book character Superman (1972), but on closer inspection the typical 'a-familialism' of the Italian crime film hero reveals instead elements of frustration and discontent, as his freedom appears much closer to a curse. His life credo may very well be summed up as follows: 'the society I am part of is so awkward and corrupt so as to produce misunderstandings and betrayals among relatives, friends, and fellow citizens, therefore I have nothing left to do than stay alone and act by instinct' — a sad stance which reveals a contingent rather than congenital individualism. Being single, in this case, is more like a survival strategy; behind a proud as much as narcissistic form of

distinction and self-exclusion lies the discomfort of being incapable of understanding and communicating with the historically subaltern subjects of the family — the woman, and its offspring.

Although one may well object that this representation of the hero as a contrived single man is likely part of a broader construction within the detective genre film based on similar relational problems, one has also to consider the extent to which such a construction also responded to certain historical contingencies and cultural specificities in the very detective/police story framework. First of all, the literary influence of the 'yellow' to which I made reference in Chapter 2. Duca Lamberti, the detective character of the influential novels by Giorgio Scerbanenco, lives in a highly dysfunctional family, consisting of his widowed sister and her six-year-old daughter and Livia Ussaro, a non-related young woman whom Duca feels in moral debt to after a police operation had caused severe scars to her face. Duca's family situation is rather ambiguous in that he acts as a father to his sister's toddler and as a husband to Livia, although he is not a father or spouse *formally*. Considering how he acts at home, Duca would have 'what it takes' to start a family, but such an occurrence seems to be prevented by the society itself, which Duca regards with disgust; seeing it as a society where old values such as hard work and family have been overshadowed by a generalized desire for easy money and consumerist goods that now drive individuals to illegal and immoral activities of any kind, sometimes even at the expense of their families and their loved ones[5].

Duca's pessimistic stance interweaves with irrefutable facts concerning Italian reality. Between 1971 and 1981, there were registered drastic drops in the average number of family members (from 3.3 to 3.0) and in the number of family units with five or more members (from 21.5 to 14.9 per cent), as well as noteworthy increases in the number of single persons (from 12.9 to 17.9 per cent) and units constituted of one single parent with dependent children[6]. The generic representation of the detective within both 'yellow' novels and crime/detective films as a lone and 'family-less' character drew, moreover, on topical suggestions deriving from what one might call the 'theme of the Pasolinian cop'. In 1968, in the aftermath of violent clashes that occurred in Rome

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5   Readers familiar with another detective protagonist of the Italian literary genre such as Salvo Montalbano, created by Andrea Camilleri in the mid-1990s, and popularized by the successful television series *Inspector Montalbano* (Vv. Aa., 1999-present), can note similarities with the protagonist created by Scerbanenco. Like Lamberti, Montalbano avoids a permanent relationship and disregards in many respect the law that he himself embodies. While this can be considered a nationally specific feature of the detective/police character in the genre, a historically specific one which sets apart the two characters is provided by the critique to consumerism, which in Scerbanenco's fictions is central, in line with the discontent that followed the 'economic miracle'.
6   Figures by ISTAT (the Italian National Institute of Statistics) reported in Dau Novelli (2003: 285).

between the police and groups of university students, Pier Paolo Pasolini spoke publicly in defense of the police, overturning controversially (and provocatively) the position of a large part of the Italian Left which viewed the police as an outpost for repression in the service of the bourgeois state. Pasolini's defense, which he originally delivered in form of poem in the political journal *Nuovi Argomenti*, was based on the assumption that many of those who wore police uniforms were sons of poor people and peasants, who had chosen to be policemen not just by vocation but because of their need to have a guaranteed salary with which to help their families. In addition, Pasolini stressed the ideological paradox that had emerged from the clashes: the sons of the bourgeoisie (i.e. the students) had attacked the sons of the proletariat (i.e. the policemen) as an act of revenge against the very bourgeoisie. Pasolini's defense outlined an emotional and psychological profile of the average Italian workaday, ordinary policeman consisting of elements of social alienation, loneliness, and economic insecurity that in some respects romanticized police life:

> [policemen] come from the outskirts, whether urban or peasant. [...] I know very well how they were as little kids and teenagers, the precious thousand lire, the father who never grew up because of misery, which does not bestow authority. The mother calloused like a porter, or tender, because of some illness, like a little bird; the many siblings, the hut among the orchard overgrown with red weeds (on someone else's parcelled lands); the slums over the sewers; or the apartments in the vast council estates, etc. Also, look how they dress them up: like clowns, with that rough cloth that stinks of uniform and poverty. Worse of all, naturally, is the psychological state to which they are reduced (for about forty thousand lire a month): no more smiling, no more friendship with the world, separated, excluded (in an exclusion without equals); humiliated at the loss of their human values in exchange for police ones (being hated makes you hate).

> (1968, my transl.)

Pasolini's words stirred up a furore, his arguments becoming topics of public debate for several years to follow. The figure of the workaday policeman as a socially alienated and vulnerable man was revived by commentators and journalists whenever outbreaks of clashes between police and protesters occurred. Police officers sided with the intellectual, recognising themselves in his words, as well as using his arguments in the media sphere as a means to externalize their discomfort against a society that seemed to treat them like a fifth wheel: the young bourgeois mocked and beat them, newspapers were always up to mount arguments against their work, some political parties were

toying with the idea of disarming patrolmen, and the State, finally, did not protect them adequately, but rather seemed to exploit them, with salaries lower than most blue-collar employees, working shifts that exceeded eight hours a day (with unpaid overtime), and a prohibition on their being represented by a union[7]. Although a disorderly, risky life, and a scanty wage were problematic factors per se with respect to the likelihood of starting a family, Italian policemen had to deal, moreover, with questionable provisions that forbade them to get married before they were 28 years old, and without having first obtained an ad-hoc ministerial authorization (Curti 2006: 94). The difficult and uncomfortable lifestyle of ordinary policemen also became a major subject in the press. Tabloids, but also newspapers and newsmagazines, combined dramatic accounts of patrolmen who had lost their lives with information on their (low) wages and their families (wives-turned-widows and children-turned-orphans, inconsolable older mothers, and girlfriends who could no longer fulfil their dream of getting married[8]).

The popular figure of the 'Pasolinian cop' noticeably influenced the representation of detective and workaday police characters in contemporaneous Italian films. In the *poliziottesco,* in particular, verbal references about policeman's hard life are very frequent, and often result in a kind of sub-plot about a police officer getting killed and his wife and/or child remaining alone (see Curti 2006: 296-299). In some respects, notes Giovanni Buttafava, the *poliziottesco* can be read as a discourse on the wider discourse of being a cop (2000). Exploited for dramatic purposes by scriptwriters and directors, the 'Pasolinian cop' figure also proved successful in coding in the form of entertainment the feeling of pessimism and the wider preoccupations of the Italian citizen about the preservation of the patriarchal family and its authority in society. The

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7   Compare the memories of Achille Serra (2008), vice-chief of the Milan Police Squad during the Leaden Years, with the study by Franco Fedeli (1978) about police malcontent in Italy.

8   The following is the excerpt from an account appeared in the newspaper *La Stampa* about the families of three law enforcement officers who were killed near Genoa, during a stop-and-search operation on a train. It is interesting as an example of the high level of dramatization and sensationalism reached in the Italian press regarding policemen and their (loose) family connections: 'One [of the widows] sits on a couch. She has a blanket over her knees, a handkerchief in the hands. Her eyes are red from long crying. The two children, Margherita Franca, 6, and Luca, 5, are wandering around. They are sad, and when they see one crying, they start crying too. ''I touched him. Last night, when they let me seeing him in the coffin. Oh God, he was so cold! I can't get rid of that sense of cold''. In addition to the grief at the loss of their husband, for these three unfortunate widows — each of whom is left with two children — there are now serious economic problems to face. They will have to find a job to sustain their children […] [When their husband were alive] monthly incomes were around 150,000 lire, which also included family allowances and what was left of the police journey allowances […]. For the two-day working shift in Genoa which cost their husbands their lives, journey allowances amounted to 4,400 lire, a sum which is supposed to cover eating out, too. '' [For similar circumstances] I used to pack him a lunch for the first day, to save some money [...]'', says [widowed] Lucia Sturpino. ''He had no vices. The only money he spent was on the home. He used to say: Never mind we renounce some things, we do it for our children's sake. What matters is we stay together, and age together''.' (anon. 1971, my transl.)

figure as well seemed sympathetic with respect to the frustrations and problems of *seconda* or *terza visione* cinema-goers, whose prevalent middle-to-lower class background made them particularly concerned with such issues as labour exploitation and inadequate wages.

Alongside male detectives and policemen, another key character influenced by contemporaneous family-related changes and concerns about associated social problematics is that of the 'modern woman'. This character is central to the great majority of *giallo* films, her figure being linked with generic roles such as the eyewitness who acts as a detective and, above all, the killer's designated victim. Less central, but not necessarily marginal, the modern woman is also present in *poliziottesco* films, in which she mostly appears as a resourceful 'career girl' — for example, reporter (*Execution Squad/La polizia ringrazia*, Stefano Vanzina, 1972; *Violent Professionals/Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia*, Sergio Martino, 1973), magistrate (*Rome Armed to the Teeth/Roma a mano armata*, Umberto Lenzi, 1976), or schoolteacher (*A Special Cop in Action/Italia a mano armata,* Marino Girolami, 1976; *Convoy Busters/Un poliziotto scomodo*, Stelvio Massi, 1978). In all cases, this character typifies a woman who does not seem concerned at all about either finding a husband or becoming a mother. Very pragmatic in all kinds of social relationships, especially those involving sex, she sets her career and individual success above family. These traits are particularly evident in her interactions with single male characters, as well as in occasional comparisons with female characters expressing different (because conservative) models of femininity, and occur irrespective of such variables as age, civil status, occupation and/or geographical origin. A character like Patrizia of *Don't Torture a Duckling*, one of the films I have examined in the previous chapter, is emblematic in her substantial differences from other female characters featured in the film: her age is approximately under thirty, so she does not belong to the adult/older generation; she is not married; she works, so she is not a housewife; and she lives in a (northern Italian) city, so she is not like the (southern) women who inhabit the rural village centrally featured in the film.

As fictionalised in Leaden Years crime films, the 'modern woman' character presents a profound break in the history of Italian cinema. As I have pointed out in the previous section of this chapter, until just a few years earlier female characters of Italian cinema hardly called into question values concerning family, marriage, and maternity. Crucially, the break is realised less through some sort of hostility toward married and

domestic life than through a much more radical suppression of almost anything concerning the idea of woman as expressed through connubial and familial commitments. This is also due in large part to a couple of concomitant factors: on the one hand, the mix of stereotypes fed by the mass media, according to which young women were necessarily rebellious and transgressive; on the other hand, the need for film producers to satisfy the increasing demand for eroticism, which led to a focus on female characters free from romantic and family bonds.

The crystallization of this female character was supported by the casting of actresses 'gossiped' about for lifestyles that were allegedly 'modern'[9]; lifestyles which were somewhat transgressive compared with these of the 9 million housewives then still representing a great portion of the Italian female population (ISTAT 1971). A 'big name' of several crime films such as Edwige Fenech[10], for example, hit the gossip columns in 1971 for giving birth to an illegitimate child and for choosing to live as a single mother without publicising the paternity of her child. In addition to gossip about their private lives, many crime film actresses were associated with modernity through their frequent appearances in popular men's magazines like *Playboy*, *King* and *Men,* which, culturally, were much more sympathetic to sexual freedom and individualism than traditional family constructs. Stirring fears of gender parity that threatened the Italian man's authority and his idea of the woman as a home-maker and family carer, yet at the same time exploited as a major subject of male erotic fantasies, the 'modern woman' character epitomizes a key cultural ambivalence that characterized the process of female emancipation during the Leaden Years.

Tensions between traditional and modern ideas about family and associated gender and sexual models are central to the unfolding of the violent plot of *So Sweet, So Dead* (*Rivelazioni di un maniaco sessuale al capo della squadra mobile*), Roberto Bianchi Montero, 1972), a *giallo* film hybridized with cop drama elements. The film tells the

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9   To give one an idea, a listing of such 'modern' lifestyles appeared in a newspaper article about cinema and television celebrities (Madeo 1969), which focused upon the children of adulterous relationships, extramarital relationships, loose and rapidly changing love affairs, cohabitions passed off as affectionate friendships, and free and easy change of partners. Florinda Bolkan, Ingrid Thulin, Catherine Spaak, Anne Heywood, and Marina Cicogna were amongst the female celebrities named in the article.

10   Fenech played the lead in the following films: *Five Dolls for an August Moon* (*5 bambole per la luna d'agosto*, Mario Bava, 1970), *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* (*Lo strano vizio della signora Wardh*, Sergio Martino, 1971), *All the Colors of the Dark* (*Tutti i colori del buio*, Sergio Martino, 1972), *Your Vice Is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* (*Il tuo vizio è una stanza chiusa e solo io ne ho la chiave*, Sergio Martino, 1972), *The Case of the Bloody Iris* (*Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer?*, Giuliano Carnimeo, 1972), *Secrets of a Call Girl* (*Anna, quel particolare piacere*, Giuliano Carnimeo, 1973), *Strip Nude for Your Killer* (*Nude per l'assassino*, Andrea Bianchi, 1975), and *Who Mislaid My Wife?* (*Cattivi pensieri*, Ugo Tognazzi, 1976).

story of a mysterious individual who brutally kills unfaithful women and leaves near to their bodies photographs proving the claimed adultery. Leading the investigation is the head of the Criminal Investigation Squad Capuana (Farley Granger), a senior police officer too absorbed in his work to spend much time with his wife. While he carries out his investigations, and while the number of victims increases, Capuana runs into a seedy underworld of perversion and cynical opportunism that involves members of the city's wealthy families. Unfaithful wives do not seem to care about the risk of being killed by the killer, and continue to betray their husbands because 'after all', as one of them says, 'it's worth it'. The story's climax is reached when the killer phone calls Capuana and challenges him, announcing the name of the next victim: Capuana's wife Barbara (Sylva Koscina). Capuana has a hard time realising that the killer choosing Barbara implies that Barbara has been actually cheating on him. The police officer rushes to meet his wife, but when he arrives at the apartment where she is and finds the killer threatening her with a knife, he does not intervene; he stands still watching the scene before him from a window, while Barbara asks for his help and then agonizingly dies. Only at the end of the homicidal act does Capuana approach the killer, shooting him dead in cold blood without even trying to arrest him.

In the film, depictions of the adulteresses are imbued with anxieties about the stability and preservation of the traditional family, and about family-influenced social norms concerning gender and sex. The adulteresses are represented in a negative light, as betrayers without scruples who got married for convenience and spend their own time devising diabolical plots against their husbands. One of them has an affair with her neighbour, and does not feel any pity for her husband, a semi-infirm man who had attempted suicide as a desperate ploy to make his wife to take care of him. 'When you tried to kill yourself for my sake', the woman tells him in one scene, 'you could at least have done a decent job, and gone to hell instead of staying here, ruining my life'. In many respects, the film significantly works on the idea of the modern woman as a *rovina-famiglie* (family-spoiler), which is to some extent enhanced by the actresses cast in the roles of the adulteresses: all are well-known habitués of men's magazines, such as Susan Scott (stage name of the Spanish actress Nieves Navarro), Krista Nell, Femi Benussi, Irene Pollmer and Angela Covello, or showgirls 'appreciated' as cover pin-ups of some among the most popular magazines, such as Sylva Koscina and Annabella Incontrera. As well as titillating male sexual fantasies, these women were often associated with messages to a lesser or greater extent connected with family and its

discentents (see figures 4.1-4.4)
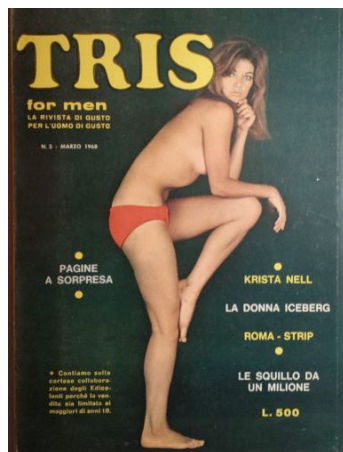
4.1 – Krista Nell
(*Tris For Men*, no. 3, 1968)
Headline: 'One million lire call girls'.

4.2 – Femi Benussi
(*ABC*, no. 14, 1967)
Headline: 'A strip tease school for seducing the husband'

4.3 – Sylva Koscina
(*Tempo,* no. 50, 1969)
Headline: 'Divorce, Italy Style: The last act'.

4.4 – Annabella Incontrera
(*Tempo,* no. 19, 1969)
Headline: 'Divorce in Italy. How to cure the ill family'

As the story progresses, *So Sweet, So Dead* develops an opposition not just between husbands and wives, but also between the latter and Capuana. In more than one occasion, the detective acts as a kind of alter ego of the killer: he indignantly addresses the victims as 'bitches', and shows concern over modern men, whom he views as being too much open-minded and tolerant towards certain behaviours of their wives or fiancées. Capuana's conservative ideas are further stressed in a scene in which he regrets not working in Sardinia or Sicily, in the archaic Southern Italy where 'two plus two makes four'. The opposition between Capuana and the adulteresses is revealing of

key gender tensions underlying in the story. The film seems to take advantage of the fact that Capuana is a police officer (i.e. a representative of law and order) to strengthen these tensions, and implicitly to establish that modern women (and, relatedly, men who do not punish, but rather tolerate women's modernity) are the cause of disorder as they violate the (patriarchal) law.

As simple as it is, the central conflict between a male order and a female disorder, and the consequent victimization of those associated with disorder such as the adulteresses, can be seen to work to intercept and satisfy the needs of a male audience who likely felt frustrated and threatened by the kind of women featured in the film. Moreover, *So Sweet, So Dead* was released in the aftermath of legislative changes significant for Italian society and its patriarchy-centred organization. Between 1968 and 1970, controversial measures were enacted that decriminalised adultery, abolished mitigating circumstances in cases of 'honour killing' (i.e. when husbands committed murder for avenging their wives' adultery), and eventually introduced divorce. These measures, however, were introduced and produced effects within the body of a society that was, in many respects, still very heterogeneous in its opinions about the matters of the measures; a society in which, although there was a strong push for innovation, there also persisted a stronger desire for conservation. Honour killing, for example, remained a widespread and also considerably accepted practice even though the judicial approach to it had significantly changed (see Bettiga-Boukerbout 2005). Similarly, extra-marital sex was still subject to moralistic (and male chauvinist) opinions and faced rigid condemnation. Unmarried women with dependent children, for example, were regarded with a certain disdain, and rarely found men willing to marry them (Scirè 2007: 4-7). Playing on the cliché of Southern Italy as a place of cultural backwardness, Capuana's reference to Sicily and Sardinia is an element in itself revealing of the nostalgia that permeates the film with respect to pre-modern (and thus patriarchal) society and its laws. With such premises in mind, one can might propose that scenes featuring the mockery of, vulgar insults towards, and even acts of brutal violence against women serve as moments somewhat relieving of the anxieties of an audience prevalently composed of males: moments that sublimate through different gradations an underlying punishment fantasy at the expense of the 'fairer sex'.

Violence against women within Leaden Years crime films is a very much debated topic in Anglo-American literature on Leaden Years crime films and cycles (see, for example, Campbell 2006; Koven 2006: 65-67; Edwards-Behi 2010; Forshaw 2010;

MacCormack 2012: 25-30). Overall, the prevalent position views the reiterated, excessive, and even sadistic acts of violence featured in these films as the expression of a misogynistic male culture, as well as the symptom of a deeper apprehension in some respects connected with ongoing female emancipation and gender parity processes. Uncountable, for example, is the number of women in the genre slapped in the face only because they contradict male characters (Edmonstone 2008: 157), and it is not by chance that young, or at least 'modern', women are predestined to die. In the *giallo* cycle, the relation between woman-victim and man-executioner, as already noted by Mikel Koven (2006: 73-75), is definitively attested to by the choice of murder weapons alluding in many ways to the male genital organ. The unfolding opening mechanism of the several (flick) knives and razor blades featured in the films further reinforces such a relation by playing on the correspondence between the blade unsheathed seconds before the murder and a penis that has just achieved an erection, ready to penetrate (and dominate) the victim 'on call'[11]. Without going into the matter of the symbolisms that lies behind such acts of violence and the ways they are perpetrated, I want to draw here attention to certain aspects that might explain the systematic violence against women in Italian crime films as being not just as the result of somewhat psychological (male) responses, but also the reflection of a specific socio-cultural context. What most astonished Italian feminists in the late 1970s, for example, was less the narrative predominance of women being raped or 'dismembered as roast chickens' than a certain degree of acquiescence and tolerance in the Italian society with respect to graphic images of victimized women (Carrano 1977: 78). This did not relate solely to films. Nationwide, kiosks and news-stands, for instance, were literally overwhelmed with 'pulp' publications of various type that did not skimp on images of women in pain, and featured sometimes more atrocious abuses than those shown on the cinema screen (see figure 4.5 below).

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11   The generic theme of the killer's weapon as a penis is freed from any possible misunderstanding by films such as *What Have You Done to Solange?* (*Cosa avete fatto a Solange?*, Massimo Dallamano, 1972, also known as *Who's Next?*) and *Gore in Venice* (*Giallo a Venezia*, Mario Landi, 1979), which feature young women being hit with blades in their vagina. This theme has led to extreme — and at the same time hilarious — consequences in *The Sister of Ursula* (*La sorella di Ursula*, Enzo Milioni, 1978), in which the featured weapon used for serial murders is a wooden phallic sculpture (for some information about this film, see Totaro 2011). As a side note, one has to consider the potential literary influence of such a theme. In a crime novel that sold millions of copies such as *The Sunday Woman* (*La donna della domenica*, Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, 1972), the plot is centred upon a murder committed with a phallic-shaped blunt object.

Vampirissimo, no. 11, 1974   *Storie Blu,* no. 34, 1982   *I Sexviolenti*, no. 3, 1973

I Sexviolenti, no. 2, 1973   *Killing*, no. 3, 1966

Figure 4.5 – *Violence against women in comic books, photonovels, and other illustrated novels*

All things considered, such publications, as much as certain crime films, were products of a society in which violence against women not only was a rather conventional ingredient of entertainment, but was also a somehow acceptable, even plausible practice. This stems from the fact that violence against women was something with which many people had familiarised in the course of their lives, either as victims or perpetrators, or even as both. The recourse to slaps and blows, for instance, was a rather conventional method for imposing or restoring marital or parental leadership within the household. It suffices to say that in the mid-1960s domestic violence constituted nearly the 90 per cent of the cases for which Italian women filed a claim for separation from their husband — well more than it was for cases of adultery or desertion of the marital

home (Tornabuoni 1965[12]). Significantly, domestic violence incidents did not diminish with the country's modernization and its higher average education level. As historian Giambattista Scirè has pointed out (2007), violence against women continued to be a common practice of illiterate and backward social classes, yet it also manifested amongst educated and well-off classes, as well as in the petit bourgeoisie that originated from the 'economic miracle'. As well, there was no particular distinction in the occurrence of such violence between North and South, nor between small rural villages and big urban centres. Slapping and dealing blows to women was de facto a practice typically accepted within households, as well as in the customs of certain local communities:

> in Calabria one could still run into folkloric rites seemingly out of time [that could result in forms of physical punishment] such as the *scampanata*, which addressed certain behaviours deemed transgressive, or anyway harmful to the common morality, including adultery […] and second marriages of widowed people. As well, in some inland villages of Sicily, the *malmaritate*, that is the married women who were regularly 'beaten up' by their husbands, paraded every year in a solemn procession to ask Saint Rita the grace not to be slapped anymore. One should also not forget that violent acts and [related] marital crises occurred no less frequently in Milan and Rome too, although they were little exhibited [as compared to other places of the country].

> (Scirè 2007: 3, my transl.)

Violence against women was very much connotative of sexual relationships, too. From numerous women's personal stories that appeared in the press as well as were used for sociological research during the 1970s to early 1980s, there came to the fore a portrayal of the average Italian man whose ideal of sex act was in some respect 'similar to rape', a man who generally manifested his intention to have sex through 'sudden and violent assaults', often persuaded that women liked him to do so (see Gianini Belotti 1980: 159-160). In considering the historical and cultural elements here presented, I would suggest that generic images of tortured and killed women are to be interpreted in a more complex way than in terms of the prevailing position of violence as an expression of male misogyny or discomfort. Taking reality instead of (male) psyche as a starting point, these images signal, among other things, that Italian patriarchal culture was unfamiliar with, much less believed in, other ways than violence and abuses for dealing

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12 Interestingly, the press article reporting these figures used national cinema as an example for introducing the subject, with references being made to contemporaneous films on women escaping violent relationships such as Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert* and Paolo Spinola's *The Escape/La fuga,* both released in 1964.

with women.

Partly related to violence against women, a particular aspect of the Italian crime film is its narrative ambivalence with respect to the very representations of women, which can be both deplorable and enticing, repulsive and attractive. In *So Sweet, So Dead*, violence, insults, and other punitive fantasies expressing concerns towards the 'modern woman' and her role in society alternate with situations that stimulate titillating and lascivious fantasies — images of half-naked women, striptease sequences, sexually explicit (and therefore provocative) verbal references, and sex scenes in which the adulteresses give themselves to their lovers without inhibitions. Music themes with a captivating rhythm accompany these situations and contribute sexually to tease the viewer, who can finally see 'at work' the beauties he generally sees on magazines' pages of various kind and readership. The contradiction resulting from the film co-featuring these enjoyable erotic situations with those others in which women are clearly pilloried is in itself symptomatic of a cultural dilemma manifesting itself recursively within the Italian crime film: the dilemma, namely, of how to combine, of how to let co-exist that which the 'modern woman' represents and signifies (i.e. the refusal of marriage, non-procreative sex, gender parity) with the idea of the traditional family.

The killing of women, as I have shown earlier on, resolves in a way this dilemma — even though surreptitiously — by eliminating one of the two terms of the contradictory ambivalence. Another, less 'drastic' way to deal with it is offered by establishing and exploiting a class-based dichotomy in relation to the idea of nuclear family: on the one hand, the bourgeois household, a place of vice and hypocrisy, on the other hand the middle-to-lower household, a place of humble people who work and do not have too many flights of fancy. Stereotypes of the bourgeois family are part of a vast popular literature that depicts 'the rich' as vicious and frivolous people. In Leaden Years crime films, however, such stereotypes are invoked from a very specific angle, which was largely based on popular suggestions resulting from a real story that scandalized public opinion, as well as monopolising the attention of the press media for a long period of time — the so-called 'Casati Stampa murder'. The name refers to a 1970 double murder followed by the murderer's suicide set against the backdrop of high society. The victims were respectively Marquis Camillo Casati Stampa (43 years old), his wife Anna Fallarino (41), and the young student Massimo Minorenti (24). The case was originally connected to one of adultery, a tragic consequence of the Marquis discovering his wife in company

of the student. But further investigations revealed lurid details of promiscuous sex games and voyeuristic perversions involving both spouses. The Marquis liked to see his wife in provocative clothes or naked as she was gazed at by other men, and got excited, in particular, in watching her having sex with unknown men. He personally chose and paid for Anna's sexual partners, all younger and good-looking men, and during her sexual encounters liked to stand by and take photographs. During their marriage, the Casati Stampas experienced hundreds of such situations. Apparently, the Marquis believed Anna would never fall in love with any one of her occasional partners. But when he discovered that she had actually started entertaining one without telling him, the Marquis went haywire. He took a rifle, went to the apartment where he was certain that Anna and her flame Massimo Minorenti were, and killed both. Then he pointed the weapon under his chin and killed himself too. In the apartment, the police found material that was promptly classified as 'obscene' — thousands of pictures portraying Anna and her sexual performances, amateur porn films, and a journal in which the Marquis used to annotate his thoughts on his and Anna's erotic life. In the weeks after the murder, extracts from the journal and related police reports appeared with a certain regularity in the press, often complemented with contributions by psychologists that contributed to the popularising the topic of sexual perversions. At the same time, more than 1,500 risqué pictures featuring Anna leaked out onto the gutter press, which further resulted in the printing of special issues on the story (see figure 4.6 below). However titillating, the case also provoked a wave of indignation due to the shocking way in which marital life and sex had been demystified. For the Catholic newspaper *Osservatore Romano*, the Casati Stampa story was symptomatic of the unfortunate, morally deplorable point at which the Italian society had arrived; the confirmation of how richness could very easily result in the pursuing of 'turbid and licentious acts', and of how 'catastrophic' certain 'mundane and subversive' conceptions about sex could be (reported in Costantini 2006: 115-116)[13].

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13   A comprehensive English-written account of the Casati Stampa story appears in a chapter of the book *The Secrets of Rome* (Augias 2007).

Figure 4.6 — *A collage of money, perversions, and death*. The morbid 'yellow' story of Marquis Casati Stampa and his wife in the headlines and covers of newspapers and magazines

Due to its mixing of sex, marital perversion, and violence the Casati Stampa case stood as a kind of blueprint for the most lurid crime film productions of the 1970s, which were typically set, not by chance, in bourgeois family contexts. By relying on the set of prejudices and fantasies about rich people, and by establishing associated images of bourgeois families in contrast with sober and chaste images of less wealthy families, the genre eventually consolidated a key narrative dichotomy that functioned to address, and deal with, issues about family at a time of great social change. In *So Sweet So Dead,* the adulteresses and their husbands all belong to city's high society — families of prestigious lawyers, of senior military officers, and of wealthy people connected with an exclusive bridge club. They live in two-floor terraced houses with wide gardens and interiors equipped with luxury and fashion furnitures. As the plot unfolds, several scenes are particularly devoted to the Santangelis, a family group including Paolo and Franca (Silvano Tranquilli and Annabella Incontrera), a husband and wife who betray each other but nevertheless remain together for the 'good name of the family', and Bettina (Angela Covello), their teenage daughter, who mischievously sympathises with 'student collectives' and is always willing to have a ride on a (boy)friend of hers' Lambretta in search of hidden places where they can cuddle and kiss. With respect to the habits of its members, the very family name 'Santangeli', which is composed of the English equivalent words 'saint' and 'angels', generates a jarring, sarcastic effect. In contrast to such a bourgeois family representation, Capuana, who makes no secret of disdaining

modern (and *therefore* lewd) sexual behaviour, and his wife live in a decent flat furnished in a classical and not sophisticated style. Barbara is a housewife and as per the traditional patriarchal family she takes care of her husband. Figures 4.7 and 4.8 below are emblematic of the differences between the two families in the film. In figure 4.7, Paola Santangeli and her daughter are in a room of their house decorated with mirrors featuring frames of fine artisanal making, modern (and expensive for those days) wallpaper, and curtains presumably made of silk or extra-fine cotton. The social status of the family members is further underlined by the two women wearing seemingly expensive, fashionable coats and the presence in the room of a servant. In figure 4.8, policeman Capuana and his wife are dressed quite casually. Their home furniture is quite conventional in terms of the style of the time. Walls feature no paper, and are instead simply painted in white. The only featured mirror seems to be a rather cheap one, with a frame so simple so as to suggest large-scale industrial production. Finally, the family does not have a servant — although Barbara, in a way, acts as a servant to her husband, as shown in the figure: she pours some coffee in a cup that she will serve to her husband.

4.7 – Santangeli

4.8 – Capuana

The antinomic relation between the Santangelis (as well as other bourgeois families featured in the story) and the Capuanas is also underscored in terms of dialogue, which stresses further ideological differences between the two family types and classes. In one scene, Capuana engages in a 'home sweet home' speech, as he tells his wife how much he loves the feeling of quiet and serenity of their home as opposed to the disorderly outside world. The Santangeli characters, instead, are restless, finding reasons or inventing excuses for not staying at home and spending as little time as possible with other family members.

Thus typically encoded within family representations, the bourgeois/non-

bourgeois dichotomy alleviates in a way the anxieties resulting from the genre's contradictory ambivalence regarding women to which I have made reference above. The dichotomy provides indeed a solution to the dilemma of how to enjoy the benefits of modernity, especially in matters of sex, without compromising the idea of the traditional family and its ordering, benchmark-like social function. The bourgeois family enables for the crime films' average spectator, whose family status was likely to be closer to the Capuanas than the Santangelis, the possibility of letting himself go with fantasies of sexual freedom, whilst at the same time allowing that spectator to rest assured that certain socially disreputable behaviour only occurs in classes higher than his.

The way this dichotomy works reveals in many respects the existence of a wider cultural hypocrisy, the same one noted by Michael Mackenzie in his study of the *giallo*, when he writes that narratives basically blame the very same people and practices that are used to titillate the spectator (2013: 214). Such is a hypocrisy that results from the fact that within the Italian society the bourgeois family was stigmatized for its supposed depravity, but it was also placed as enviable for the likewise supposed freedom of its members. To some extent, as the Casati Stampa scandal epitomized, the rich appear to be in possession of the 'enviable privilege' of living in a family that remains united whatever the behaviour of its members might be. In *So Sweet, So Dead*, for example, Paolo and Franca Santangeli are free to do anything they want, with whomever they like, regardless of the fact they are married. That notwithstanding, marriage is not jeopardized, the spouses' common thinking and shared interests making sure the household remains (formally) united. Even Capuana is led to envy the bourgeois family at a mid-point in the plot, when he reckons that they are a closed yet somehow ever surviving world.

4.4.2   Children and adolescents, parents and offspring

As well as single men and modern women, concerns about the changing family also affected representations of children and teenagers. Recurrently featured in crime film narratives of the Leaden Years, child and teenage characters are typically associated with violent and inauspicious situations — minors eye-witnessing murders[14], kidnapped

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14   See, for example, *Colt 38 Special Squad, Spirits of Death* (*Un bianco vestito per Marialè,* Romano Scavolini, 1972), and *Bloodstained Shadow* (*Solamente nero,* Antonio Bido, 1978).

children[15], assassinated children[16], children under suspicion of murder and child killers[17], possessed children[18], and mentally and/or physically ill offspring[19]. In some other cases, in which violence is no less central, these characters are represented in a sexually-charged context featuring characters such as prostitute schoolgirls[20], child molesters,[21] sexually precocious boys[22], and situations implicating minors as sexually abused[23]. Despite their high occurrence in the genre, all such characters and, to a larger extent, the associated depictions of childhood and adolescence, have been largely — and surprisingly — ignored in critical accounts, both Italian and non-Italian. Apart from some sporadic and brief references (for example, Bruschini and Tentori 1999: 13; Koven 2006: 66, 71), the critical void has been importantly filled by Michael Mackenzie (2013), although he treats the topic from a specific perspective and through a very narrow focus (i.e. gender representations in 1970-1975 *giallo* films), and does not provide a thorough historicization of what he calls the 'alarmist think-of-the-children paranoia' featured in the examined films.

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15   See *The Violent Professionals, Devil's Ramson* (*Senza via d'uscita*, Piero Sciumè, 1970), *Cat o' Nine Tails* (*Il gatto a nove code,* Dario Argento, 1971), *My Dear Killer* (*Mio caro assassino,* Tonino Valerii, 1972), *The Great Kidnapping* (*La polizia sta a guardare*, Roberto Infascelli, 1973), *Kidnap* (*Fatevi vivi: la polizia non interverrà,* Giovanni Fago, 1974), *Rabid Dogs* (*Cani arrabbiati,* Mario Bava, 1974), *Kidnap Syndacate* (*La città è sconvolta: caccia spietata ai rapitori,* Fernando Di Leo, 1975), *A Special Cop in Action* (*Italia a mano armata,* Marino Girolami as Franco Martinelli, 1976), *Free Hand for a Tough Cop* (*Il trucido e lo sbirro,* Umberto Lenzi, 1976), *Convoy Busters* (*Un poliziotto scomodo*, Stelvio Massi, 1978), *The Iron Commissioner* (*Il commissario di ferro*, Stelvio Massi, 1978), and *Porci con la P38* (Gianfranco Pagani, 1978).

16   See *Don't Torture a Duckling, My Dear Killer, The Violent Professionals, What Have You Done to Solange?*, *Manhunt* (*La mala ordina,* Fernando Di Leo, 1972), *High Crime* (*La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve*, Enzo G. Castellari, 1973), *Almost Human* (*Milano odia: la polizia non può sparare*, Sergio Martino, 1974), *The Manhunt* (*L'uomo della strada fa giustizia*, Umberto Lenzi, 1975), *Street Killer* (*Roma violenta,* Marino Girolami as Franco Martinelli, 1975, also known as *Forced Impact* and *Violent City*), *The Last Round* (*Il conto è chiuso*, Stelvio Massi, 1976), *Terror in Rome* (*I violenti di Roma bene*, Massimo Felisatti and Sergio Grieco, 1976, also known as *Violence for Kicks*), *Death Hunt* (*No alla violenza*, Tano Cimarosa, 1977), *Napoli… serenata calibro 9* (Alfonso Brescia, 1978), and *Day of the Cobra* (*Il giorno del Cobra*, Enzo G. Castellari, 1980).

17   See, respectively, *Devil in the Brain* (*Il diavolo nel cervello*, Sergio Sollima, 1972) and *Crazy Desires for a Murderer* (*I vizi morbosi di una governante,* Filippo Walter Ratti as Peter Rush, 1977); and *A Bay of Blood* (*Reazione a catena*, Mario Bava, 1971), *Night Hair Child* (*La tua presenza nuda*, Andrea Bianchi and James Kelley, 1971, also known as *What the Peeper Saw*), and the crime film featuring elements of dark humour *Il mostro* (Luigi Zampa, 1977).

18   See *The Lady in Red Kills Seven Times* (*La dama rossa uccide sette volte*, Emilio Miraglia, 1972) and *The Night Child* (*Il medaglione insanguinato*, Massimo Dallamano, 1975).

19   See *Don't Torture a Duckling, Crazy Desires for a Murderer, Bloodstained Shadow, Death Occurred Last Night* (*La morte risale a ieri sera*, Duccio Tessari, 1970), *Perché quelle strane gocce sul corpo di Jennifer?* (*The Case of the Bloody Iris*, Giuliano Carnimeo as Anthony Scott, 1972), *Rings of Fear* (*Enigma rosso*. Alberto Negrin, 1978), and *The New York Ripper* (*Lo squartatore di New York*, Lucio Fulci, 1982).

20   See *What Have You Done to Solange?*, *Rings of Fear*, and *Without Trace* (*...a tutte le auto della polizia*, Mario Caiano, 1975)

21   See *My Dear Killer*, *Bloodstained Shadow*, and *Cock Crows at Eleven (L'immoralità*, Massimo Pirri, 1978).

22   See *Don't Torture a Duckling*, *What the Peeper Saw*, and *Love and Death in the Garden of the Gods* (*Amore e morte nel giardino degli dei*, Sauro Scavolini, 1972).

23   See *Big Mamma*, *In the Folds of the Flesh* (*Nelle pieghe della carne*, Sergio Bergonzelli, 1970), *The Suspicious Death of a Minor* (*Morte sospetta di una minorenne*, Sergio Martino, 1975), and *The Big Racket* (*Il grande racket*, Enzo G. Castellari, 1976).

Not to overlook representations of children in Leaden Years crime films — not just those in the *giallo*, but also in other types of crime film stories — is important in that such representations marked a profound break within an iconographic tradition of the national cinema production that centred upon a correspondence between children and adults' (lost, perhaps retrievable) innocence. This correspondence drew in a certain measure on the cultural influence of the eminent national poet Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912), whose poetics based on the concept of the *fanciullino*, or 'little child', found — and still finds today — a large space within national compulsory education. According to Pascoli, in every man's soul is a child; that is, traces of a young age during which a desire for knowledge and the capacity for marvelling at the simple, essential things of the world were still strong. Pascoli saw in such a child the very essence of poetry, and accordingly established that those few, gifted people who are able to communicate with their inner child, with that sensibility which is inexorably lost when one becomes adult, are poets (see LaValva 1999 and, for a closer inspection, Truglio 2009: 107-134). Pascoli's *fanciullino* set, as a result, a dichotomy not just between poet and society, but also between children and adults and, correspondingly, innocence and corruption, essentiality and complexity. This pattern reverberates in the history of Italian cinema through child characters which are often emphasised within narratives as bringing a 'genuine' point of view with respect to family and social situations.

Neorealism is a major reference with respect to this. Films featuring child actors such as *The Children Are Watching Us* (*I bambini ci guardano,* Vittorio De Sica, 1944), G*ermany Year Zero* (*Germania anno zero,* Roberto Rossellini, 1948), *Shoeshine* (*Sciuscià,* Vittorio De Sica, 1946), and *Paisan* (*Paisà,* Roberto Rossellini, 1946) have been widely studied for their metaphorical use of children. According to some scholars, Neorealism exploited children and the suggestions about their purity to stimulate a confrontation with awkward adult reality (Cardullo 2001; De Luca 2009). The same was apparent in films following the neorealist period, such as Pietro Germi's *The Railroad Man* (*Il ferroviere*, 1956) or Pasolini's *Mamma Roma* (1962), only to be interrupted in the mid-1960s by the influence of Sergio Leone's western films. The misanthropic universe of the spaghetti western, in fact, made no allowance for anybody, let alone children. *A Fistful of Dollars* (*Per un pugno di dollari*, Sergio Leone, 1964), for example, begins with a child being the victim of a foul play. A cowboy (Clint Eastwood) makes his entrance in a sinister town and, after a few moments, he notices a man kicking a little boy (fig. 4.9). The scene continues with the little boy running away and the man sadistically firing at his

feet to scare him away (fig. 4.10). Probably shocking for most audiences of the time, this kind of violence involving minors eventually became a topos of the Italian westerns (fig. 4.11-4.14).

4.9 (detail)

4.10

4.11 – Child violence. A little girl tortured by being insistently trod on (*Django, Kill!*, G. Questi, 1967)

4.12 – Cruel orphaning. A crying child as the only survivor of a community massacre (*Colt in the Hand of the Devil*, S. Bergonzelli, 1967)

4.13 – Infantile trauma. A child's memory of a terrible act of violence (*Face to Face,* S. Sollima, 1967)

4.14 – Compromised innocence. A crying child moments before having his vocal cords brutally mutilated (*The Great Silence,* S. Corbucci, 1968)

Discharged from any ethical-pedagogical intent by the spaghetti western, the depiction of childhood in subsequent commercial film formulas contrasted even more with the film tradition of the past. The *giallo* and the *poliziottesco,* for instance, undermine the classic 'adult/corruption *versus* child/innocence' correspondence by charging child characters with the same vices, neuroses, anguish, and unhappy and mortal perspectives as the adults, as well as with sexual features that contrasted starkly

with the previously predominant angel-like, asexualized depictions (Landy 2000: 234-259). This undermining is typically realised by featuring child characters who are either victims of abuse and rampages or morally corrupt and sickening offenders. One of the most well-known crime films of the period, Dario Argento's *Deep Red* (*Profondo rosso*, 1975), explores both child types, standing as a specimen of Italian crime film narratives' particular concern with children and childhood in general. The film's plot is about a bloody chain of murders which have their root in a Christmas Eve tragedy of many years before, when a mentally disturbed wife killed her husband under her child's eyes. The macabre scene is accompanied with a diegetic sound coming from a record player — a children's song which is played in the presence of each new murder, with the effect of stimulating a disturbing association between childhood and violence. But together with the victimized child, *Deep Red* also features a 'bad', irredeemable child, Olga (Nicoletta Elmi), a little red-haired girl who likes torturing lizards and invokes a future made up of offence and maladjustment. The connection between childhood and violence is also revealed from other elements of the film, such as a narrative emphasis on macabre infantile drawings, unsettling references to fairy tales, the placing of a primary school as the key to the main mystery plot, and the use of toy puppets as metaphors of death. The film also features elements that somewhat sexualize childhood. A subtle form of eroticism pervades, for example, the scenes involving Olga. In one scene, the girl is alone on the bed in her room, in a Lolita-like pose; in another scene she is left alone with the film's adult protagonist (David Hemmings) who is a complete stranger to her and her father. In addition, Olga is affected by a tic that drives her to bite her lip, which is emphasized by several shots and even close-ups of her face, establishing to some (perverse) extent a titillating pose.

The shift in the filmic representation of children in Italian cinema was partly due to the commercial influence of some foreign films, such as *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968)*, The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), and *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976). But it was also — and perhaps more particularly — due to the centrality that childhood and, more generally, the theme of 'the younger generations' had achieved within the public debate in Italy in the wake of the broader changes affecting the traditional family. For over a decade, the long (and politically convoluted) making of the laws on divorce and abortion de facto monopolised public attention on family-related matters. Spurred by the lines of the principal parties and the Catholic Church, a considerable part of civil society was confronted with doubts and fears regarding the effect of the passing of such

laws on children, offspring, and their upbringing in non-traditional family units. Doubts and fears were also fostered by accounts of contemporaneous (and, in some respect, fashionable) pedagogical and sociological theories which reviewed traditional familial models and, at the same time, problematized common parenting approaches. In many households, there emerged concern that sons and daughters might be conditioned too much, that they needed to be left as free as possible, and not subject to either verbal or physical punishments (Giachetti 2005: 176). The aftermath of the 1968 youth protests had contributed, in addition, to a large-scale dramatization of the parent-offspring relationship, which appeared more and more like a generational war, a revolt of sons against fathers often evoked with apocalyptic tones in the mass media.

Already suffused with elements of anxiety about the fate of the Italian family, this scenario was further influenced by shocking facts reported by crime news, as well as by alarming figures concerning juvenile crime rates, which touched the chords of feeling in matters of popular interest regarding children, teenagers, offspring, and their safety and education. Marked by grim and mysterious elements, a series of real stories of the time implicating children became major topic of news for months and, correspondingly, major sources of criminalization fantasies based on class and sexual prejudices. I shall limit myself to mentioning just a few crime stories of the Leaden Years which I consider 'essential' in terms of narrative influence — the so called 'Lavorini case' or, more specifically, the murder in 1969 of a 12-year-old boy which caused an anti-gay media campaign and paedophile paranoia in the aftermath of the first (erroneous) evidence collected by the police; the 'Monster of Marsala' story, or the murders through starvation to death in 1971 of three little girls at the hand of their uncle in the name of familial revenge; the assassination in 1971 of Milena Sutter, the 13-year-old daughter of an industrialist drowned in a river by a child molester coming himself from a childhood of abuses; and the story of the seven-year-old Mirko Panattoni, who in 1973 was the first child to be kidnapped for extortion purposes in the history of the Italian republic. These news stories hit the public imagination for their jarring combination of children, i.e. archetypes of innocence and purity, with brutal violence and sexual corruption, but also for elements that seemingly negated any reassuring image of the Italian family — parental negligence, criminal motives associated with family traumas, 'abhorrent' sexual practices, and so on.

Alongside these stories, there also circulated no less discomforting tales of juvenile illegality, which offered an incredibly violent and dissolute portrait of the young

generation. 'The increasingly early ages of those committing thefts, robberies and murders', noted a survey of the time that appeared on the weekly *Panorama*, 'is, according to sociologists, social workers and educators, the most serious aspect of a [criminal] situation in itself worrying. [...] Within [our crime] figures there has also increased the percentage of very young offenders: the average age of first offenders was around 16, but today has reached 14, with peaks at 9-10 years' (Sottocorona 1977: 36, my transl.). These figures combined with other alarming findings that pointed out the existence of a widespread phenomenon of drug consumption amongst the youth. In Milan alone, excluding its provincial outskirts, there were counted as many as about 27,000 youths of school age using a wide range of drugs, including heroin and morphine (Petringa 1977: 4-5). This grim scenario of the juvenile world again called into question the family, its adult figures, and its values, as well as surrogate familial structures such as schools and the Church (cf. Petringa 1977; Militello and Mura 1977).

The popular unease provoked by crime stories involving minors affected in various ways the production of domestic crime films, and combined with broader concerns about topical changes in family structure and values. Childhood, youth, and parenthood became the subject matter of films which substantially used a focus on crime, and the detective/procedural narrative framework, to criminalise certain behaviours connected with the changes while at the same time inquiring into the contemporaneous crisis of the Italian family and trying to cope with the major causes of discontent. In Aldo Lado's *Who Saw Her Die?* (*Chi l'ha vista morire*, 1972), a sculptor living separated from his wife named Franco Serpieri (George Lazenby) investigates the killing of his daughter Roberta (Nicoletta Elmi) at the hands of a mysterious murderer of young girls. Roberta was found drowned in the waters of Venice, her corpse displaying shocking signs of sexual abuse. The film depicts childhood as a playful yet extremely fragile world, the successful protection of which is guaranteed through normative types of family structure, parenting behaviour, and sexual habits. The film begins with Roberta, who travels alone by air despite her young age, as she leaves Amsterdam, where she lives with her mother Elizabeth (Anita Strindberg), and heads for Venice, where her father Franco lives. Franco is anxiously waiting for her at the airport. He has not seen Roberta for several months and cannot wait finally to be able to spend time with his daughter again. Roberta's arrival, however, soon messes up his routine (as a single man). In order to find a satisfactory compromise between work, private life, and paternity, Franco consents to any request of the child. Roberta keeps playing in the street while her

peers respond to their mothers' calls to get back home; she wanders away when her father engages in conversations with adults; she is allowed to leave home to buy an ice-cream although it is already dark. In a key scene, Franco and Roberta are strolling among the tiny streets of Venice when they bump into a small group of children playing ball games. Roberta asks permission from her father to play with the other children. Franco's answer is initially no, but it changes as soon as he glimpses Gabriella (Rosemarie Lindt), a woman he used to have casual sex with, in the street in front of him (fig. 4.15-4.16). Franco's own responsibilities as a father are immediately ignored as soon as he envisages the possibility of having sex with a woman, and thus 'exercising' virility. After leaving Roberta with the other children (fig. 4.17), Franco approaches Gabriella. The two have a little chat (fig. 4.18), then Franco suggests that she follows him and 'makes up for lost time'. As the adults walk away (fig. 4.19), the scene returns to the group of children, who have now just started a new game — moving hand in hand in circle around Roberta while singing a nursery rhyme (fig. 4.20) the refrain of which, 'Chi l'ha vista morire?', gives the title to the film itself[24]. The images of this game alternate with those of Franco and Gabriella having sex in a bedroom; the children's voices mingle with the two adults' gasps of pleasure, producing a foregrounded intimation of manifest and latent connections between innocence and corruption in relation to sex (fig. 4.21-4.22). This narrative composition is further enriched through the sudden inclusion of the threatening presence of the serial killer within the scene. The killer is first 'announced' through a specific musical theme associated with the character since his first appearance in the film (i.e. a march-rhythmed warble song performed by a children's choir), and then revealed visually through unmistakable details such as his black clothes and the POV shots of his 'peeking' at the children (fig. 4.23-4.24). Complete with the presence of the killer, the whole scene assumes a density of meaning. Adult and child voices merge with the killer's theme, in a crescendo of different sounds that generates a disturbing noise, and combined with the images reinforce the impression that children are in trouble *because* adults have preferred having a good time to looking after them (fig. 4.25). By means of the scene's complex interplay of shots, editing, and sound, the circle of children appears, in this respect, less as a game and more as a danse macabre. Framed in close-ups, the faces of the children twirling hand in hand together follow one another like in a ritual — almost a sort of Russian roulette to pick out a victim (fig. 4.26-4.31). As

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24 The text of this rhyme, which tells of an eerie quest for truth regarding suspicious deaths involving children and animals as protagonists, like in a fairy tale, is a loose Italian adaptation of the English folk poem *Who Killed Cock Robin,* which arguably became known in Italy through the reference made to it in S.S. Van Dine's *The Bishop Murder Case* (1929; first Italian translation in 1933).

the circling of the children ceases, so does the mix of voices, trills, and music. The last close-up is of Roberta — she is the (next) one designated to die as through this ritual (fig. 4.32).

4.15	4.16	4.17
4.18	4.19	4.20
4.21	4.22	4.23
4.24	4.25	4.26
4.27	4.28	4.29
4.30	4.31	4.32

The pessimistic tone that attends the representation of childhood in *Who Saw Her Die?*, and which finds its instantiation into the shocking murder of Roberta, is crucially related to the critical representation of the adult world. As described in this last scene, and can be seen from other scenes in which the Roberta character is somehow central, children's fate is conditioned by parental neglect, the causes of which are significantly set in a relationship of some sort with non-traditional models of the nuclear

family. Roberta is the daughter of parents who do not live under the same (conjugal) roof. His mother and father live in different cities, and each one has started a new love life either with a regular partner (as per his mother) or with occasional ones (as per his father). Franco Serpieri, unlike the authoritarian father of traditional patriarchal families, does not take position against his daughter's individual initiatives, and rather promotes her actions in the public sphere without indulging in any particular forms of control. Roberta's mother Elizabeth does not appear in the film until Roberta is murdered except through 'depersonalized' characterization, as when her voice is heard during a phone call, or her physical traits are shown through the projection of a few slides. Such a representational absence, complemented with sequences in which Franco is shown as feeding and dressing his little daughter, places Elizabeth in opposition to mothers of traditional patriarchal families for whom competence in child rearing implied a constant vicinity to their children — with children being hence regularly monitored.

Adults' (harmful) influence on the world of children, as well as the causal relationships between child victimization and non-traditional family models, is further emphasized by narrative situations in which the Roberta character is depicted in sexually ambiguous terms. Verbal and visual references to Roberta as if she were a woman recur throughout the entire first part of the film. It is her father in person who often refers to the child in woman-like terms. In a scene in which Franco talks over the phone with Elizabeth, he says that he has found Roberta so much *grown-up* that she will probably be *wearing a bra* soon[25]. In another scene, Franco is asked about his present love affairs by a friend of his, but replies that he is actually busy with one *woman* only, Roberta. Similar comments occur in a scene that takes place at a café table in which Roberta is invited by her father's journalist friend (Piero Vida) to go with him to see how newspapers are printed: when the child refuses, the journalist jokingly admits to those seated at the table that he has never been much of a Latin lover with *women*. Scenes like these are a prelude to other ones in which Roberta works as a catalyst of situations bordering on incest and paedophilia: Father James (Alessandro Haber), a priest friend of Franco, says that Roberta is a 'cute' girl and caresses her with a mesmerized look on his face (fig. 4.33); in a similar sequence, the journalist character finds himself alone with Roberta and, after a few seconds during which he gazes at her with enchanted eyes, he caresses her hair and face (fig. 4.34). Finally, Franco and Roberta are represented as seated at a

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25   In the related English version of this scene, the dialogue between Franco and his former wife Elizabeth is re-dubbed rather deliberately, so that references to Roberta as 'grown-up' and 'wearing a bra' are replaced with allusions to her beauty.

restaurant table laughing and joking as if they were lovers, their interaction being deliberately eroticized through the combination of 'intimist' close-ups and the external point view of a restaurant customer acting like a voyeur (figures 4.35 to 4.38).

4.33

4.34

4.35

4.36

4.37

4.38

Sexualized minors, and situations invoking more or less explicitly paedophilia and/or incest are quite frequent in the Italian crime film genre (compare films cited in footnotes 19 to 22 above in this chapter). Sometimes they are even invoked at an extra-textual level, through posters and advertisements preannouncing them, as with the advertisement of Massimo Pirri's *Cock Crows at Eleven* (*L'immoralità*, 1978), a film showing that 'childhood and adulthood get into conflict when seduction of a man is concerned'. The 'exploitation' aura surrounding most crime films produced during the Leaden Years would perhaps lead one to regard their incest/paedophilic elements as the result of a commercial strategy. 'Exploitation', in fact, comes generally associated with a form of cinema that attempts to 'grab an audience by offering something unavailable elsewhere — films that pander to our baser instincts, pique our curiosity, salaciously sell us the seamier side of life, but do so knowingly, and for one basic reason — to make

money' (Ross 1993: 63). In reality, the matter is more complex than it seems, particularly because incest and paedophilic images, along with characterizations of sexualized children and teenagers, were not simply the prerogative of a segment of the Italian cinema production specifically attempting to cash in on certain 'shocking' values, whichever name this portion of production is called, be it 'exploitation', 'grind-house', 'B-cinema', or whatever. By and large, similar images of incest and paedophilia also featured in a great number of contemporaneous mainstream and even high-brow films, two types of production that are at odds, or in problematic cohabitation, with the 'exploitation' (under)world. Examples include films that make underage sex key to their plots such as *That Malicious Age* (*Quell'età maliziosa*, Silvio Amadio, 1975) or *Stay As You Are* (*Così come sei*, Alberto Lattuada, 1978), as well as films dealing with incest via its several variants — e.g. mother/son (Bertolucci's *Luna*), father/daughter (Gianluigi Calderone's *Passionate/Appassionata*, 1974), siblings (Luchino Visconti's *Sandra/Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa*, 1965), uncle or aunt with grandchild (Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution/Prima della rivoluzione*, 1964; Salvatore Samperi's *Thank You Aunt/Grazie zia*, 1968), and father-in-law/daughter-in-law (Mauro Bolognini's *The Inheritance/L'eredità Ferramonti*, 1976). In some cases, such representations were part of personal authorial paths imbued with generational and political concerns. For his *Sandra* for example, which tells the story of a relationship between a brother and a sister (Jean Sorel and Claudia Cardinale), Visconti stated that he had been inspired by the myths of Oedipus and Electra, and that he wanted to show the paradoxical extent to which an intra-familial relationship could ensure the preservation of the family itself (Liehm 1984: 234-236; Giori 2011). Via a different perspective, Bertolucci used incest in *Before the Revolution* as a means for exploring class and ideological differences, through a story centred on the emotional involvement of a young Communist man with his older and bourgeois aunt (Francesco Barilli and Adriana Asti). Whether they were linked with auteur-like ambitions or not, in the widest realm of domestic cinema — Italian crime films included — such representations evoked a feeling of pessimism and preoccupation about the very destiny of the traditional family and its members, especially given the 'anti-family nature' of sexual practices such as incest and paedophilia — the former being a practice that violates the exogamous principle which transforms family groups in civilized societies (see Krzywinska 2006: 160-161), the latter a practice that poses a threat to procreation and normative heterosexual relationships between adults.

Along with victim characters like *Who Saw Her Die*'s Roberta, through whom childhood is represented in terms of innocence and vulnerability, the Italian crime film also feature young executioner characters which embody a different facet of childhood, that of evil, corruption, and aggressiveness. On an iconographic level, these character types are mostly sorted into angelical (and sacrificial) figures — chubby faces and curly hair like a *putto*, and soft and weepy voices — and diabolical (and executioner) ones — flame red hair, wild eyes, and annoying, insolent sneers. Both figures, however, reflect the same concerns about family structure, parental behaviour, and 'family-led' sexual practices. Freely adapted from a Giorgio Scerbanenco's pulp novel, Fernando Di Leo's *Naked Violence* (*I ragazzi del massacro*, 1969) features a detective plot set in the Milanese juvenile underworld. The storyline progresses as police inspector Lamberti (Pier Paolo Capponi) investigates the death of a teacher brutally abused by her students — a group of minors with criminal records obliged to attend evening classes as part of a social rehabilitation programme. The police inquiry is initially stalled as the students' memories about the night of the murder seem to have been compromised by collective alcohol intoxication. However, by working on the apparently contrasting versions of each student about the murder, Lamberti realises that the key to solving the case is to be found in a louche ring of juvenile exploitation and underage prostitution headed by an adult.

In *Naked Violence* the topic of juvenile delinquency becomes an amplifier of social problems and cultural tensions concerning family. The scenes of the students being interrogated, as well as the final flashback scene which reveals how, and by whom, the teacher was effectively murdered, are constructed by setting up an explicit correspondence between youngsters and 'monsters'. In these scenes, the students' faces are deformed by out-of-axis and obliquely angled shots and near-to-extreme close-ups, and the images accompanied with a tune resembling that of a horror film. In addition to this, the students are characterised in accordance with an aesthetic canon which exploits unappealing features — they have spots, pallid and skinny faces, crooked and missing teeth, long and dishevelled hair, and half-closed and crossed eyes (fig. 4.39-4.44 below). Suggestions related to these physical traits are further reinforced by the youngsters acting in a riotous and irritating manner, as well by the provision of information about their criminal records both verbally and visually— records that include illegal gambling, thefts, drug use, money laundering, and sexual offences. Lamberti himself is absolutely sure about these youngsters' nature as he openly calls them 'rogues', 'rabble', and

'garbage'.

4.39	4.40
4.41	4.42
4.43	4.44

At a first glance, these examples seem to charge with some kind of anthropological guilt the generation of youth. But as the story progresses, the film gradually displaces (the causes of) juvenile 'monstrosity' onto social institutions such as the family and the State. During his investigation, Lamberti is supported by a youth counsellor (Susan Scott) appointed ex-officio to supervise the police work. This character is nevertheless more functional in terms of her attractiveness and her demonstrating of the latest fashions than for any professionalism she represents. As the counsellor herself believes that all counselling efforts are futile — 'We live in a society that creates [delinquent] boys like these, and then uses people like me and the [murdered] teacher

as a diaphragm. What we are supposed to do?'[26]— the film suggests a certain degree of scepticism about her profession, regarding it very much like some make-up upon the system of criminal procedure, or some sort of fashionable governmental trend. Not even the counsellor believes in the likelihood of the youngsters being socially rehabilitated, because she reckons that 'each one [boy] is worse than the other'. In brief, the counsellor character functions in terms of what it *is not*, setting up the main issue of juvenile delinquency in relation to the no less important issue of what kind of policies, resources, and competences the State is equipped with in confronting the world of youth. The State's responsibilities are further accentuated via references to the condition of the juvenile penitentiaries — which Lamberti as well as other characters occasionally describe as places of violence and non-rehabilitation. This is underlined through the representation of humiliating scenes of prison life and, in particular, the murder of a convict — all of which indict the State's incapability of providing youth with their rights to assistance, protection, and rehabilitation.

But responsibilities concerning the monstrous condition of youth are also laid upon the family. The students mainly come from dysfunctional family units, in which parents are either missing or incapable of providing valuable teaching; they are alcoholic fathers and prostitute mothers, dead or jailed parents. 'I'm afraid I just don't care about my son', a man sadly confesses to Lamberti against the backdrop of a significant setting — the tavern where he spends most of his time. As with *Who Saw Her Die?*, poor or absent parenting is once again put in direct casual relationship with the world of youth, as the source of their present problems and their future prospects.

Although they are based on different child/offspring types, both *Naked Violence* and *Who Saw Her Die?* deal with depictions of dysfunctional families and of parental neglect that point up the existence of some sorts of guilt attributable to the family and the adult generation in general — in the former film family and parents are blamed for the death of a child, in the latter one for what children have become because of their education. An important aspect to note in this respect is that in spite of the evoking of such family and parental responsibilities, no one parental figure is actually punished in the stories for either their neglect or inadequacy. On the contrary, the films enact disavowal mechanisms which minimize adult/parental faults or dissociate them from the family. In *Naked Violence*, in a scene in which a woman who has custody of her grandson

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26 My translation from the original Italian version. In the English version this line is slighty different, in a way that does not stress the unesufulness of youth counselling: 'Somehow society creates boys like these, but makes that our [society's] responsibility. What do you expect from us [counsellors]?'

is confronted with the evidence that she knew the boy was committing wrongdoings yet did nothing to stop him, the woman defends herself by citing a series of police inefficiencies in their dealing with juvenile crimes. At another point of the story, it is the school as a surrogate of the family that is involved in a similar disavowal mechanism. Lamberti interrogates two caretakers of the school about the teacher murder, specifically asking where they had been while the youngsters were committing their atrocities, yet the scene ends quite abruptly, leaving the question (conveniently) unanswered. The only one to receive punishment in the film is a transvestite adult who has had regular contact with the students and is found to have forced them into illegal activities. However, he is, crucially, not related to any of the students in terms of family and, no less importantly, embodies non-heteronormative sexual behaviour. This same mechanism of blaming parents (of dysfunctional families) while at the same time punishing figures unrelated to the household and upholding a sexually 'healthy' view of family also applies to *Who Saw Her Die?* In a scene that follows the finding of Roberta's corpse, Franco and Elizabeth talk to each other excitedly, trying to figure out what might have been the reasons for their daughter's brutal murder. Elizabeth makes self-criticisms about her own role as a mother, saying that she should not have left Roberta alone with Franco. Franco, who was supposed to look after Roberta, is so desperate that he destroys his works of sculpture. Parental responsibilities are here not just evoked but clearly exposed, as it is the same parent characters that admit their own faults. Yet this scene, however significant, is quickly followed by a new one in which the two parents are, in a way, 'absolved'. The journalist character sends for both parents and tells them he has realised Roberta's murder was not an isolated incident. From research conducted in the archives of the local newspaper, he has discovered other similar cases of little girls having been raped and found dead in the Venice canals. As well as shifting the focus from the parents' fault (and from inside the household) to the fault of a sexually deviant offender (and to outside the household), this narrative twist foreshadows the displacement of the parents' guilt onto someone else — in this case a paedophile priest, the only character to be actually punished in the film in relation to Roberta's death. At the heart of these films and their stories there seems to be, in many respects, a sort of cultural torment, a feeling moving parents and older generations to regard themselves as somewhat responsible for what was happening to their offspring and the youth generation. Recalled but at the same time evaded with respect to its more problematic connotations, this feeling is ultimately 'domesticated' within the genre, alleviated in

fiction by means of characters and situations which supply non-threatening solutions to the spectator and his or her disquieted conscience (as an adult and parent).

In this chapter I have shown how in the Leaden Years crime films images of family units and roles, as well as of women, men, and children, are affected by broader concerns that related to contemporaneous changes underway with respect to the idea of traditional patriarchal family, family-influenced gender hierarchies, and sexual norms. Generic stories are significantly permeated by tensions between traditional and alternative/dysfunctional family units, as well as between men and women, and parents and offspring. Such tensions affect depictions of key characters, and, more importantly, establish narrative conflicts between characters associated with opposing family backgrounds which are functional to the unfolding of the main plot. To a great extent, the Italian crime genre template is used by these films for coming to terms with (modern) ideas of family which were widely deemed deplorable, while at the same time fantasizing about the restoration of the patriarchal order and its gender and sexual rules, which is particularly realised by the victimization of emancipated female characters and the punishing of non-heteronormative behaviours. The simultaneous presence of elements endorsing sexual freedom and raising of questions regarding faults and hypocrisies within Italian nuclear families compromise, however, this search for order, while also signalling the difficulties and ambiguities that characterized the evolution of the idea of family in its transition from a patriarchal model to one in which gender hierarchies had became less rigid and sex was addressed with a higher degree of permissiveness.

Chapter 5:   On State and Political Violence

In spite of their complex articulation of social tensions and cultural conflicts deriving from Italy's socio-economic modernization and challenges to the patriarchal structure of society, the Leaden Years are generally remembered for the tragic facts connected with the political violence and terrorism that occurred against a background of political uncertainty and the growth of extremist and anarchist activity. Images of buildings and trains gutted by bombs, of innocent victims lying dead in the streets, and, especially, the crude images of Christian Democrat leader Aldo Moro's captivity and the discovery of his murdered body appear still today in mainstream media, and contribute to the definition of this era in terms of collective shock and fear, and suggest that terrorism was absolutely central to this period of Italian society and history. This has resulted in a number of cultural products of the 1970s being read to a greater or lesser extent connected with political violence and terrorism. Novels and other literary works, for instance, have been described as trying to amend their narrative modalities so as to meet changed perceptions of what Italian reality had become under the terrorist threat (cf. Burns 2000; Wren-Owens 2006). Comics, too, have been seen to be affected in a way by the turbulent historical events, with Italian heroes being represented as having no certainties except the lack itself of certainties (Raffaelli 2008: 138-139). The crime films at the core of the present study fall as well within these 'terrorism-oriented' readings. As well as depicting the grim Italian reality of the time, a number of these films particularly address the very theme of terrorism, through stories based on the unmasking of high-level conspiracies and plans of anti-democratic overthrows. To varying degrees, these films have been seen as somehow trying to deal with contemporaneous discontent caused by socio-political unrest, as well as reflecting wider anxieties connected with key historical events and their traumatizing effects. The brutal murder sequences and the chaotic plots of *giallo* films, for example, have been read retrospectively as codifying in a cryptic fashion broader apprehensions about the emergence of violence, including terrorist violence, in society (O'Leary 2007: 209). By the same token, the other major crime film cycle of the time, that is the *poliziottesco*, is described as echoing the 'paranoid atmosphere of a country plagued with terrorism' (Curti 2013: 1).

Recent studies have outlined the way in which the historicizing of the Leaden Years has nevertheless been based on assumptions that are too general, as well as on

ambiguous and contradictory references to terrorism and the organizations and individuals that were involved with it. Historian Guido Panvini (2007: 103-105) has noted how knowledge of the facts of terrorism during the Leaden Years is at large based on CliffsNotes-like information, mostly taken from mainstream mass media commemorations of the 1970s. But as the mass media tend to emphasize the most shocking episodes linked with terrorism, such as, for example, the bombings at Piazza Fontana (1969) and at the Bologna Central Railway Station (1980), or the Moro affair (1979), constructions of memories about the era, too, tend to rely principally, when not solely, on these specific events. This can lead to historically distorted accounts, and thus results in a misleading 'remembering' of the Leaden Years. Recent surveys conducted in Italian high schools have revealed, for instance, a certain trend of stressing the actions of the Red Brigades in the era to such an extent as mistakenly to attribute to them the responsibility for attacks such as the bombing of the railway station in Bologna or the one at Piazza Fontana in Milan (see Venturoli 2012). Inspired by the outputs of similar studies on national memory and the Leaden Years, in this chapter I shall focus on the relationship between historical events associated with political violence/terrorism and the contemporaneous crime films by questioning both the influence of and the anxieties deriving from such events with respect to the making and the consumption of these films and their generic narratives. In doing so, I shall provide an in-depth historical and cultural account of Italy's socio-political situation, one which covers the ideological, strategic, and varying characteristics of the wider phenomenon that, commonly referred to as terrorism, stands as the historical benchmark by which the Leaden Years are generally understood and remembered.

5.1   Historical notes on Italian politics, political violence and terrorism

The Second World War produced significant mutations within the Italian establishment and its political structures. The overthrow of the fascist regime and the coming into force of a republican order that replaced the monarchy reignited the national political scene. Some parties previously ostracised by Fascism returned to active politics, while other new parties, inspired by the anti-fascist struggles of the Resistenza (1943-1945), burst on the scene. In the first years of the post-war era, the political scene appeared as rather heterogeneous, made up of dozens of parties embodying political-

institutional and social positions of the most diverse kind. A listing of the main parties of the period includes left and/or centre-left formations such as the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI), the Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano (PSDI), and the Partito Radicale (PR); centre-oriented formations such as the Democrazia Cristiana (DC), the Partito Liberale Italiano (PLI), and the Partito Repubblicano Italiano (PRI); right-oriented formations such as the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI); and, finally, a few formations in favour of restoring the monarchy. The DC and the PCI, however, represented the greatest part of the electoral consensus. Between the early 1950s and the late 1960s, the two parties together received nearly 20 million votes, or about 65 per cent of the total votes cast. Specifically, the DC's base oscillated between 38 and 42 per cent, whereas the PCI's between 22 and 27 per cent[1].

Despite the evident polarization, however, Italy's political scene could not be said to be effectively functioning as a two-party or two-pole system. The proportional electoral system could hardly guarantee either the DC or the PCI the right to rule alone given the vote percentages above indicated. This scenario reinforced the political weight of certain 'minor' parties, which became essential to the making of parliamentary majorities and thence governments, as well as to their collapsing. In the first years of the republican era, the DC managed to rule with the support of some small centre parties, yet the government crises it had to face were numerous and constant. Between 1948 and the first half of 1963, as many as fourteen cabinets followed one another as a result of as many changed majorities, whilst nine different Christian-Democrat MPs alternated as Prime Ministers. Some such cabinets lasted just a few months or even a few weeks, these short time periods being necessary for the parties to revise political alliances, to form stronger majorities, and hence to avoid snap elections. In spite of the uncertainties provided by this electoral system, over the period the DC was somehow able to freeze its incumbency by riding the wave of the 'red menace' to secure the support of other anti-communist parties. This political strategy became the subject of harsh criticism soon after the 1963 general election, when in the face of a significant boost in the polls by the left-wing parties, the DC secured a majority with the socialist PSI and PSDI which de facto kept the Communists in the opposition.

The systematic exclusion of the PCI from ruling positions at a national level generated a significant debate regarding the mechanisms of democracy in Italy. In the second half of the 1960s, several studies were published that attempted to compare the

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1   I have personally elaborated these figures by taking into account official data from Italy's general elections of 1953, 1958, 1963 and 1968.

Italian political system with other political systems in Europe. According to Giorgio Galli (1966), Italy was dominated by a *bipartitismo imperfetto*, or imperfect two-party system, a system for which two hegemonic parties competed against each other without ever resulting in an effective and democratic alternation in power. Taking Galli's considerations as a starting point, political analyst Giovanni Sartori (1968) theorised the existence of a far more complex 'multi-polar system', which relied on the primacy of the DC — the 'system-balancing pole' — to exclude from government positions two other poles which were seen as carriers of extremist views — one such pole was the PCI, the other the ultra-right party the MSI.

During the Leaden Years, some substantial changes occurred within the model described by Sartori. While the centrality of the DC remained unchanged, the PCI and the MSI increased their political weight, making the ruling system more unstable. Compared to the 1960s, the MSI's share of the electorate had doubled, reaching almost 9 per cent of the total votes, while the gap between the DC and the PCI seemed to be progressively dwindling, to the point that many Communists became persuaded that a momentous victory over their historic rivals was within their reach. In jeopardising the DC, opposition parties seemed to take particular advantage of a widespread discontent regarding economic and security policies, as well as of incidental government scandals. The 1969 Piazza Fontana bombing in Milan, as I have shown in Chapter 2, had caused a ferment of rumours and political theorizing which insinuated the direct involvement of the State. Giuseppe Pinelli, an anarchist initially charged for the bombing, fell to his death from a window of a Milan Police Station. According to the police, Pinelli killed himself during an interrogation. A large part of the press, by contrast, was persuaded that Pinelli's death had been caused by the police, possibly after a brutal beating. Left-oriented newspapers launched a harsh campaign against Luigi Calabresi, a police inspector whom many described as a 'hard puncher'. Ultra-left weekly *Lotta Continua* stated in no uncertain terms that Calabresi was a murderer.

Piazza Fontana and the Pinelli case crucially affected the Italian political scene, resulting in an atmosphere of mutual suspicions and accusations among the most important parties of the country. The DC and the PCI accused the MSI of protecting the ultra-right milieu allegedly implicated in the bombing; the PCI, moreover, harshly criticised the DC, pointing the finger at the failure of its government in protecting citizens from both terrorist attacks and police abuses. The quarrel between these parties became harsher as the press revealed details of subversive plots involving neo-fascist groups

alongside 'deviant sectors' of the State, in particular secret service officers[2]. These revelations spread a climate of conspiracy paranoia all over the country, which intensified when police inspector Calabresi was in 1972 gunned to death by someone unknown. According to the several 'plot theorists', Calabresi had been killed by secret agents in the attempt further to cover up the bigger Piazza Fontana plot.

These facts contributed to the radicalisation of political militants' positions, especially those affiliated with what in political and media discourses were commonly called 'extra-parliamentary groups', formations of both Right and Left orientation which repudiated the principles of representative democracy and acted so as to get masses involved directly in decision-making processes. In Italy's biggest cities, 'black' and 'red' extra-parliamentary activists started fighting each other violently with a certain regularity. A police bulletin issued in 1971 reported that in Milan as many as 20,000 people were affiliated with political groups equipped with weapons of various kind (Baldoni and Provvisionato 2009: 29-30).

The basis for the 'historic compromise' between the DC and the PCI (see Chapter 2) is to be found within this social climate of fear, violence, and uncertainty. For PCI leader Enrico Berlinguer, a pact between the two parties would provide a remedy to the systemic government instability which de facto made Italy vulnerable to extremist attacks. The idea of the 'compromise' became stronger by the mid-1970s, in the aftermath of two shocking bomb attacks by 'black' groups that killed 20 people and wounded nearly two hundred[3]. However, there was strong resistance within the PCI base, as well as within the broader Italian Left, to the likelihood of an agreement with the DC. There were many political activists and commentators, in fact, who argued that the bombs were part of a 'state terrorism' strategy, which implied somehow the DC's involvement (see Panvini 2014). A major line of thought was that of the so-called 'strategy of tension': a state-sponsored strategy of terror allegedly backed by the US as part of the bigger Cold War framework which aimed to maintain the status quo through helping the DC stay in charge. Through this, terrorist attacks and other episodes of

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2   In 1971, the newspaper *Paese Sera* reported a coup that had almost been executed in December 1970. Leading the coup, which would have involved the occupation of ministry offices and a video message broadcast by RAI, was a former fascist official backed by an army General and corps of forest rangers. Also in 1971, the weekly magazine *L'Espresso* reported another coup plan that was supposed to have been actioned in 1964, with the occupation of important centres of power by Carabinieri units.

3   On 28 May 1974, during an anti-fascist protest held in Brescia, a bomb placed in a rubbish bin at Piazza della Loggia killed eight people and injured nearly 90. On 4 August 1974, another bomb was set on a fast train of the national railways which DC leader Aldo Moro was supposed to be aboard, killing 12 people and injuring about 50. In the following years, neo-fascist groups were found responsible for both attacks.

political violence would serve to put the blame on the DC's political and ideological opponents, while at the same time creating conditions that would enable the government to tighten up laws and police measures that would reinforce its authority.

It was exactly in this climate of distrust and frustration towards the State that the Red Brigades started to take their first, memorable steps. Originally, from 1970 to roughly 1974, the organization was involved in industrial sabotage and the intimidation of factory supervisors and managers, but gradually it swelled its ranks, and from 1974 extended its acts to the rest of society in a crescendo of violence that would involve targets carefully chosen amongst politicians, judges, police officers, and journalists. Its members had a history of political activism within the far-left, and had concluded that neither the parliamentary nor the extra-parliamentary opposition were sufficient to bring about the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in Italy. As a result, they espoused the idea of the 'armed struggle', being influenced in a way by the deeds of Latin American revolutionary groups such as the Uruguayan Tupamaros (Silj 1979: xiii). Their armed struggle was carefully planned and consisted of three phases: a propaganda phase, which sought to proselytise within and gaining support from the proletarian strata; a phase of political action, which sought to affect the national political process; and, finally, a phase involving a direct clash with the State and possibly a civil war supported by the masses (Manwaring 2004: 24-26).

However, the Red Brigades were not the only armed political group to be active in Italy. Other similar groups were aligned with Right and Left sectors alike, some of which obtained cover-ups from politicians and extra-parliamentary militants (Baldoni and Provvisionato 2009). The goals of such groups ranged from ambushes against ideologically opposed groups and the police to acts of violence and terrorism against political targets. A succinct listing of the most active armed groups in the first half of the 1970s includes 'red' formations such as the Red Brigades, the Communist Brigades, Partisan Action Groups, and the Armed Proletarian Nuclei, as well as 'black' formations such as the National Vanguard, the New Order, the Black Order, and Wind Rose. Alongside such groups, there were other 'minor' ones which joined armed struggle for different and specific reasons, thus making the framework of political violence and terrorism in Italy's Leaden Years even more complex. These included anarchist groups, separatist groups operating in the German-speaking region of Alto-Adige and in Sardinia, and international terrorist cells based in Italy (for a closer inspection see Rimanelli 1989).

Between 1974 and 1975, the Italian government responded to the rampant

political violence by creating specialized police units, as well as enacting a set of laws that significantly increased the powers of the police and the extent of prosecution. Specifically extended were the circumstances in which the police were allowed to use weapons and undertake legalized searches without warrant, while new measures were introduced that changed detention rules (such as the possibility of arresting someone for a suspicious crime and of holding people in jail without charge for up to four days), restored the *confino* (which was a measure in vogue during Fascism that established that offenders could not ever leave their native town), and, finally, established that crimes committed by the police had to be prosecuted in compliance with a special rather than ordinary procedure. Promptly labelled as 'special laws', these new measures were harshly criticized by the left-wing milieu, which viewed them as a clear violation of civil rights. By contrast, a large part of society seemed to be sympathetic to these measures, their severity being viewed as necessary, in some respect, to countering a no longer sustainable level of unrest and disorder. An article that appeared in the leading newspaper *Corriere della Sera* summarizes well the concerns of many Italian citizens:

> the situation is one of emergency and as such it has to be dealt with nothing but emergency measures [...] So the renunciation that we are forced to make with respect to our share of independence, the subjection of everyone to an increase of controls, the reviving of laws in themselves characteristic of a police regime – they all are [part of] the high price we have to pay to restore order, and free ourselves from the fear of outlaws [...].

> (Bovio 1975: 1, my transl.)

For those contesting the 'special laws', the increase in police power was less a necessary measure for the restoration of public order than a subtle political means of pleasing the police. In these years, in fact, episodes of insubordination and disobedience by police officers had become more and more frequent. Most policemen protested for better working standards and higher salaries, and urged the legalization of a police union (Fedeli 1978: 29-31), which suggested, in many respects, that the questions raised in 1968 by Pasolini's speech on the 'cop', which I cited in the previous chapter, had remained largely unanswered by the political class. For some commentators, by putting into force the 'special laws', the DC 'wished to regain control over the [frustrated] police body […] by proving that the policeman's best defence was the gun and not the union' (Cherubini and Diodà 1975: 172, my transl.).

Regardless of whether the 'special laws' were enacted to contest urban violence or to please frustrated citizens and policemen — or both — it is undeniable that they were enacted at a time of extreme difficulty for the DC and the Italian government as a whole. Insinuations about state-sponsored terrorism and the outcome of the divorce referendum had produced frictions among the members of the party, which had further repercussions for the government's stability. In 1974 alone, the country was ruled by three different governments, all of which were headed by the DC, with as many different coalitions. As Indro Montanelli and Mario Cervi have explained, behind these transitory governments hid the wider DC's attempt to 'buy time' so as to mitigate its internal frictions, to refine its relationships with its allies, and to study the moves of its main competitor, i.e. the PCI (1994: 38). The DC's *attendeismo*, or art of 'buying time', was arguably a way of ruling while avoiding the urgent measures the country appeared to be needing, especially with respect to the economy and employment.

The national political situation became more unstable and uncertain in 1976, after a general election that marked a historic result for the PCI, as they polled 34.37 per cent as opposed to the DC's 38.71 per cent. PCI's gains crucially eroded the power of the so-called minor parties on which the DC had hitherto relied to form governments, which resulted in a hung parliament. Faced with a situation in which Italy effectively lacked a government, as well as with pressure from international partners such as the USA, the UK, France, and West Germany, who threatened to renegotiate their agreements with Italy in the event of the Communists being at the head of the country, the DC and the PCI made an off-stage deal: the communists would remain in opposition in exchange for some important institutional positions. This deal allowed Christian-Democrat Giulio Andreotti to form a government which he himself defined, in a sophisticated lexical invention, as *governo della non sfiducia*, or non-no-confidence government.

The 'non-no-confidence' expedient, which roughly foreshadowed the conditions of the DC-PCI agreement theorized as the 'historic compromise', struck nonetheless a wrong note with public opinion. Because of its fundamentally ambiguous make-up, the non-no-confidence government seemed to cause more socio-political instability to Italy than it avoided. Among PCI voters, the idea of allowing the DC to keep governing as it had done in the last thirty years was difficult to accept. For political militants and extremists alike, the 'non-no-confidence' represented the starting point of a new and more radical phase of opposition, which reached its climax in 1977 in an outburst of violence across the country that reiterated to some extent the turmoil of 1968 amid

riots, vandalism, and clashes with the police.

On March 1977, in Rome, a protest that originated in the sphere of left extremism spread to such an extent that it involved more than 50,000 protesters, most of whom handled weapons and vandalising shops and police precincts in the city. A few days after, in Bologna, a series of riots by left militants culminated in the occupation of the town's main square, which was cut short by the extraordinary intervention of soldiers and tanks. What originally seemed a revival of 1968, or an outburst of violence by left-wing circles that had never been seen before, was followed in later weeks by similar actions by right-wing militants. As these circumstances revealed, urban unrest had lost the connotations of the historical opposition between Left and Right, between 'red' and 'black'. Now a conflict between the individual and the State, between citizens and institutions appeared to have taken the centre stage. As opposed to 1968, the 1977 protests appeared to occur apart from political doctrines and rigid ideological models[4], being shared by a socio-culturally composite galaxy that included disillusioned revolutionaries alongside young feminists, temporary workers, social outcasts, and gay people fighting for their rights (Baldoni and Provvisionato 2009: 205).

In the media and political discourse, these protesters were either called 'the autonomous' or 'the antagonists', labels that gave an idea of a two-sided opposition — on the one side the State, on the other a violent fringe of society unwilling to engage in dialogue — but that at the same time brutally simplified the complexity of the phenomenon. As journalist and historian Giorgio Bocca has attempted to explain,

> the hodgepodge of 'the autonomous' [is] a social magma [that] has no clear political consciousness of itself. It is based on large approximations, on *spontaneous agglomerations of all those people who identify themselves as losers* — [these people are] mass-like students 'parked' within faculties with no [occupational] future such as sociology, psychology, philosophy; unskilled workers; young proletarians with no prospects; [young adults] uprooted from the Catholic countryside and landed in the vacuum of values of the metropolis; corporations [of professionals] resigned to be exploited such as hospital staff; and, of course, intellectuals in search of achievement or revenge against official culture.

> (1985: 72, my transl., my emphasis)

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4   The political parties themselves had become a preferential target of attacks, as witnessed by an increasing number of bombings and devastations set against the buildings where party branches were based — 108 against the DC, 54 against the PCI, 43 against the MSI, thirteen against the PSI (Caruso 1978: 388).

Concomitant with the unrest of 1977, the Red Brigades intensified their political struggle, hoping that the wave of anger and dissent originated by 'the autonomous' would provide in some respect support for their revolutionary cause. In reality, despite the common denominator represented by armed struggle, many who took part in the 1977 disorder did not share the political approach of the Red Brigades, whose language was overloaded with Marxist ideology, and whose pattern of 'old style' militancy had no room for privacy (Baldoni and Provvisionato 2009: 266-267). This explains why the various groups and movements that comprised 'the autonomous' did not coalesce into the Red Brigades or other existing armed formations but, rather, originated new formations. As the wave of protests of 1977 came to an end, the hodgepodge of 'the autonomous' consolidated in an impressive number of new armed struggle groups. The number of armed groups operating in Italy, which was 'just' 21 in 1976, passed from 74 in 1977 to 177 in 1978 and 215 in 1979 (ibid: 278). Compared to the armed groups operating in the first half of the 1970s, those operating from 1977 on were characterized by a recourse to violence which was not expressive of a clear political project or of any political project at all. It is in this sense, for instance, that one can understand the parable of Prima Linea (Front Line), a group which has been regarded as one of most sanguinary of the Leaden Years despite a period of activity on average much shorter than other armed groups such as the Red Brigades (see Novaro 1991).

Aldo Moro's kidnapping and subsequent murder, which covered the period March-May 1978, opened the most dramatic phase of Leaden Years. A prominent member of the DC with a past as Prime Minister in four different governments, Moro was a living symbol of the 'imperialist' establishment that the Red Brigades set out to overthrow. The kidnapping took place after weeks of political unrest which had in January 1978 brought the already precarious 'non-no-confidence' government to collapse. Long-delayed, the 'historic compromise' seemed the only solution to a parliament that the 1976 polls had returned as hung. Bucking the majority of his party colleagues, Moro was one of the most convinced supporters of the necessity of the 'compromise', as he had clearly demonstrated in his last public speech, delivered about two weeks before he was abducted: 'We [Christian Democrats] had a victory [in the 1976 polls]; nevertheless we were not the only ones to win. There were indeed two winners, and two winners in a battle certainly create trouble. We are in a condition of paralysing in a way the PCI, and the PCI is as well capable of paralysing, to some extent, the DC. [...] [Given such circumstances we ought to] find a ground of harmony, a ground of

agreement that could allow us to rule the country until the difficult conditions of these recent years will last' (quoted in Montanelli and Cervi 1994: 223-224, my transl.). But the government of 'compromise' was never formalised. Moro's abduction burst like a thunderclap over the power games between the Italian parties by reshuffling the cards of possible agreements and leading, once again, to a DC-led government that received a full mandate from the parliament in the name of national emergency and democratic protection.

5.2   Italian cinema and its discontents

Italian cinema was actively involved in the socio-political events that shook the country. The wave of protests involving students and workers in the late 1960s inspired a series of initiatives that questioned Italy's main film institutions while also exposing the discontent of filmmakers and film technicians in terms of labour rights. Just as happened during World War II through the making of documentary films, and through the activities of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia and important journals like *Bianco e nero*, cinema revealed itself as a powerful site of amplification of all those political ideas that related to some extent to change and opposition. On March 1968, a hundred or so members of the National Association of Filmmakers (Associazione Nazionale Autori Cinematografici, or ANAC) mounted a polemic against the excessive interference of political parties in the management of Italian cinema, leading to the formation of an independent body — the Italian Cinema Association (Associazione Cinematografica Italiana, or ACI). The new body included directors such as Luchino Visconti, Federico Fellini, Mario Monicelli, Pietro Germi, Alberto Lattuada, Nanni Loy and Luigi Comencini; screenwriters such as Sergio Amidei and Suso Cecchi D'Amico; and actors such as Alberto Sordi (Argentieri 1998: 78; Liehm 1984: 249). A few months later, the major film-related events in the country such as the Venice International Film Festival and the Pesaro New Cinema Exhibition were hit by unrest and suffered programme disruptions. The police had to intervene to quell riots and vacate the theatres occupied by critics and filmmakers. In Pesaro, film director Valentino Orsini was arrested along with other 19 people after clashes with the police that had followed a public meeting. Behind such disorder was discontent regarding a model of film festivals that reflected the conservationism of the establishment. Protesters asked for an interdisciplinary approach

to films, for the centrality of workshops, and for film screenings that addressed the mass rather than élite audience (Argentieri 1998: 77).

Between 1969 and 1970, Piazza Fontana and the Pinelli case further spurred politically Italian cinema workers, particularly directors well-known to the public such as Federico Fellini, Bernardo Bertolucci, Nanni Loy, and Luigi Comencini, who were amongst the signatories of a public petition for charging with murder police inspector Luigi Calabresi, 'the torturer' (see Cederna 1971a, 1971b). In 1972, new protest demonstrations unsettled the Venice Film Festival. A group of filmmakers set up independent and free screenings in a space near the festival premises. The event, which had a resounding success among the public, was aimed at achieving reforms in film production regulations as well as new strategies for promoting film culture in Italy (Argentieri 1998: 81).

As institutional matters gradually got mixed up with the social effects of the broader economic crisis and political-governmental instability, filmmakers began discharging more and more frequently their own social and political frustrations on to the (textual) body of their films. By and large, distrust and protest became recognizable elements in a vast number of films of the decade, encouraging what has been defined by many as an 'exposé consumption' (Uva 2007: 11). Regardless of whether films were politically engaged or not, Italian cinema started to pick on the establishment and its inefficiencies, opportunisms, and lies. The 'exposé drive' operated across high-brow and low-brow films alike, and across genres. The reference to inefficient and/or wicked state institutions became a key narrative element of westerns (*Court-Martial/Corte marziale*, Roberto Mauri as Robert Johnson, 1974), sci-fi films (*N. P./N. P.: il segreto,* Silvano Agosti, 1973), and erotic films (*Caligula/Caligola*, Tinto Brass, 1979). Comedy, in particular, exploited contemporaneous socio-political tensions by offering grotesque and sarcastic depictions of the State's major bodies — political parties, the government, schools, unions, the police, the army, and the judiciary (cf. Bini 2011; D'Amico 2008: 211-249).

In the films of internationally acclaimed authors, the climate of unrest and uneasiness resulted in a 'rebellious and iconoclastic attitude' towards narrative forms and content (Celli and Cottino-Jones 2007: 106), the recourse to 'excessive' and shocking content being the most evident sign of this cinematic trend. Films such as Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), Pasolini's *Salò* (1975), and Elio Petri's *Todo modo* (1976) challenged censorship restrictions and hence the authority of the State through

representations of sex and political power strongly in disagreement with the Catholic, civic, and democratic principles of the establishment. The same attitude towards excess and the featuring of shocking scenes, however, was significantly shown by middle- and low-brow filmmakers, too. A director generally associated with 'B' productions such as Lucio Fulci used to label himself 'terrorist of genres' for the way in which he worked with narrative and generic conventions only to 'blow them up' through visual excesses that undermined and subverted most mainstream viewers' expectations (see Albiero and Cacciatore 2004).

Along with this rebellious and iconoclastic tendency, numerous films of the time are marked by a deep feeling of distrust, not just with respect to the ruling class, but with respect to the society as a whole. Such a feeling is shared, once again, by high-brow and low-brow films alike. In high-brow films such as Liliana Cavani's *The Year of the Cannibals* (*I cannibali*, 1970) and *The Night Porter* (*Il portiere di notte*, 1974), Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice* (*Morte a Venezia*, 1971), and Marco Ferreri's *The Seed of Man* (*Il seme dell'uomo*, 1969) and *Tales of Ordinary Madness* (*Storie di ordinaria follia*, 1981), such feeling emerges, for example, from a nihilist atmosphere surrounding places and characters, which is often supported by the setting-up of gloomy and decadent set designs (fig. 5.1-5.2). Similar atmospheres, nevertheless, also feature in films of less intellectual ambitions (and with tight budgets), especially those formulaic films conceived of as products for *seconda* or *terza visione* theatres. Horror films featuring zombies and cannibals such as *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (*Zombi 2*, Lucio Fulci, 1979) and *Cannibal* (*Ultimo mondo cannibale*, Ruggero Deodato, 1977), and action films set in post-apocalyptic contexts, such as *The New Barbarians* (*I nuovi barbari*, Enzo G. Castellari, 1982) and *2019: After the Fall of New York* (*2019 – Dopo la caduta di New York*, Sergio Martino, 1983), brilliantly succeed in delivering thrills and spectacle by offering fantasies about human and political bodies — citizens, communities, and states — in decomposition (fig. 5.3.-5.4).

5.1 – Remains of a large mammal in M. Ferreri's *The Seed of a Man*	**5.2** – Human corpses as urban décor in L. Cavani's *The Year of the Cannibals*

5.3 – Apocalypse-like effects
in S. Martino's *2019: After the Fall of New York*

5.4 – Death vandalising present
in L. Fulci's *Zombie Flesh Eaters*

5.3.1   State of necessity

Leaden Years crime cinema follows very closely such cultural trends. The feeling of disorientation and discomfort affecting most Italian citizens was given concrete form through narratives and formulas aimed for popular consumption that exploited law and order issues typical of the crime genre to stage a deeper anti-establishment discomfort and give vent to reactionary fantasies. Crime films of various kind produced in this era crucially feature upset protagonists linked with a generic repertoire of characters including detectives, police officers, judges, gangsters, assassins, and common citizens who are differently frustrated by society and its ruling structure. In *poliziottesco* and crime action films, a police inspector in conflict with his superiors or a citizen fighting crime alone stand as metaphors of the citizen's contempt for political institutions and society's power centres, and for the feeling of abandonment felt by the communities with respect to State protection. These metaphors which were used with a certain awareness by filmmakers (see Faldini and Fofi 1984: 450), as well as by distributors and advertisers: 'It'll be as if it's you in person', recites a phrase used for advertising *Highway Racer* (*Poliziotto Sprint*, Stelvio Massi, 1977), 'to catch the most dangerous scoundrels'. Such contempt is embodied not just by police and avenger characters but also by characters who are absolutely marginal in terms of the unfolding of the main plot, characters appearing in popular places or linked with 'humble' professions who are functional only for the trenchant lines they say about topical problems. In an early scene of *Stunt Squad* (*La polizia è sconfitta*, Domenico Paolella, 1977), for example, two background figures are sitting at the counter of a bar as they complain together with the bartender about the economic crisis and the uncontrolled spread of robberies. Similar

sequences are typical of crime film narratives, and allude to a kind of discomfort which is not limited to films' protagonists but is diffused in the whole society, being particularly present in those places and gestures that identify everyday collective rituals and practices — in the case of *Stunt Squad* the coffee break of two workers.

Socio-political discomfort also emerges from crime films that do not necessarily imply a police setting or the citizen-avenger theme. In the *guapparia* series and in some Mafia films, vexed citizens turn to certain 'honourable' people of the crime underworld as they have no trust in the state institutions and do not feel adequately protected by the police. In a film previously addressed in Chapter 3 such as *Big Mamma*, the character played by Mario Merola vindicates abuses of power and prevarications experienced by poorest people of his local community. In *Kidnap* (*Fatevi vivi: la polizia non interverrà*, Giovanni Fago, 1974) a Mafioso hit-man (Gabriele Ferzetti) is directly involved in the rescue of a little boy who has been abducted by brutal gangsters of a rival organization. In these films, the gap between citizens and State become a key element for the plot unfolding, as well as providing the ground for evoking extra-legal fantasies similar to those at the core of *poliziottesco* and crime action films through which are satisfied a wider desire for social justice and safety.

Although less accentuated as compared with the above examples, anti-establishment discomfort is also present in crime film narratives of the likes of mystery and *giallo* films, with characters involved in criminal situations who prefer not to have anything to do with the police, and try to get out of troubles alone. On the other hand, when the police are featured in the stories, they appear 'either useless in trying to solve the crime, or the mystery completely baffles them' (Koven 2006: 83), as happens in *Don't Torture A Duckling,* which I addressed in Chapter 3. Criticism of political and cultural institutions is occasionally involved, too, with politicians and cultural elites being portrayed in roles that are ambiguously criminal, or even as antagonists to the citizen-detective. In *The Iguana with the Tongue of Fire* (*L'iguana dalla lingua di fuoco,* Riccardo Freda as Willy Pareto, 1971) the status of immunity from prosecution enjoyed by a group of politicians prevents a police inspector (Arthur O' Sullivan) from investigating a chain of murders involving the staff of an embassy, which eventually brings to the fore the involvement of the ambassador himself. In *Testa in giù, gambe in aria* (Ugo Novello, 1972), a student (Corrado Pani) investigates a serial killer targeting intellectuals and academics, but in order to solve the case becomes himself a killer of such people. In *Short Night of Glass Dolls* (*La corta notte delle bambole di vetro*, Aldo Lado, 1971) a

series of murders initially attributed to a single individual is connected in the end with a satanist secret organization that constitutes city's most powerful people.

Discontent and discomfort materialize not just in narrative content, but also in certain stylistic expedients. Sudden zooms on to the characters' faces and whip pans support moments in which complaints and critiques are invoked, which is symptomatic of a certain animosity accompanying the communication of anti-establishment statements and thoughts (Ghezzi and Giusti: 10, 21). In an analogous manner, suffering or disappointed expressions are connoted by the frequent close-ups of the films' protagonists as they interact with powerful (and *therefore* harmful) groups or organizations (fig. 5.5-5.7).

5.5 – Harassed citizen
(*Street Law*, E. G. Castellari, 1974)

5.6 – Ready to bite
(*Manhunt*, F. Di Leo, 1972)

5.7 – Showdown
(*Napoli... serenata calibro 9*, A. Brescia, 1978)

5.8 – Repressed anger
(*Street Killer*, M. Girolami, 1975)

Anti-establishment elements are also located in the films' soundtracks. Titles of several instrumental pieces, for example, make reference to state inefficiencies and political corruption, as with 'Giustizia sommaria' (Summary Judgement), featured in *A Man Called Magnum* (*Napoli si ribella*, Michele Massimo Tarantini, 1977) or 'Una rete di protezioni' (A Protection Network), from *I Am the Law* (*Il prefetto di ferro*, Pasquale

Squitieri, 1978). Particularly significant, moreover, are certain songs that were used as filmic main themes. 'Those stealing a little will pay / Those stealing a lot are in liberty / Take it easy, don't ask yourself why / It's all up to Mother Justice' — so tells, for example, the translated lyrics of 'Mamma Giustizia', a song performed by I Nomadi which is featured in *No, the Case Is Happily Resolved* (*No! Il caso è felicemente risolto,* Vittorio Salerno, 1973).

All generic elements so far illustrated communicate not just a feeling of hostility towards the State, but also of an insistent demand for order and justice, which follows the contemporaneous loss of confidence in the political class and the government, as well as in State institutions such as the police and the bench. From the Pinelli case on, the attitude of public opinion and the press towards the working of police officers, judges, and politicians became rather oppositional. Failure in providing satisfying answers to questions of national interest, and in clearly identifying responsibilities for various politically motivated incidents, was coupled with the failure associated with the State and its law and order bodies to prevent crime spreading. In Italy's largest cities, criminal organizations were proliferating thanks to nationwide drug trafficking businesses, and as a result of an unprecedent circulation of heroin and cocaine (see Chapter 4.4.2) the rates of crimes like thefts, burglaries, and robberies were dramatically increasing. Neither did the economic crisis and diffused unemployment help to counter illegality. Finally, the radicalization of political extremism, and the more and more frequent episodes of political violence, brought several Italian cities to their knees. While some key bills for reforming the penal system were finding enormous difficulty in being transformed into laws because of the usual divisions between the various parties that comprised the governmental majority, the criminal emergency gradually revealed a wider problem of state efficiency, and partly seemed to be connected with the process of policy-making. The topic became contentious to the point of pushing the highest authority in Italy, the President of the Republic, into an unusual interference with parliamentary activity, as he urged all parties to find a common ground in reforming the institutional architecture of the State that many regarded as dysfunctional (see Leone 1975). On a cinematic level, such historical events influenced the changing in depictions of characters linked with law and justice. The reassuring representations of police officers and *carabinieri* as goodhearted men which occurred in the years of the 'economic miracle' in films such as *Cops and Robbers* (*Guardie e ladri*, Mario Monicelli

and Steno, 1951) and *Il carabiniere a cavallo* (Carlo Lizzani, 1961) were gradually replaced with portraits of officers frustrated by their work and by the events they had to deal with, as well as less sympathetic with people's needs and more concerned with bureaucratic issues (Micicchè 1980: 130; Mancino 2008: 159, 165). At the same time, images of corrupted judges and prosecutors made their appearance for the fist time in domestic film productions (see Tomeo 1973). Topical socio-political problems found room within crime narratives of various type, being elaborated in quasi-apocalyptic scenarios bringing together brutal crimes and seemingly invincible outlaws that metaphorically referred to what was perceived to be an unprecedented state of disorder and illegality. In this narrative context, citizens and/or detective who act as avengers, or are reluctant to follow rules and try to find personal solutions to problems, embody what Gian Piero Brunetta has defined as 'ideology of necessity' (2001: 414), namely the idea that the time for mediations and words, which had proved unsuccessful, was past, and that a time for actions had become by all means necessary.

Stefano Vanzina's *Execution Squad* (*La polizia ringrazia*, 1972) tells of a violent police inspector of the Rome Homicide Squad named Bertone (Enrico Maria Salerno) who has regular clashes with his superiors because of his violent manner and his attitude of disregarding legal procedures. The film significantly opens with a scene that criticizes the State and its legal-judicial system, while at the same time establishing the ground for a wider narrative conflict between the political-institutional establishment and Bertone, who, despite being a cop, reveals throughout the film a particularly close sensitivity to citizens' needs, which eventually leads him to resign from his job. A television reporter is interviewing a retired police officer, Superintendent Stolfi (Cyril Cusack), about the incredibly violent wave of crime that is sweeping the country. In particular, the interviewer asks whether there is a remedy to the spread of robberies, murders, and kidnappings. Stolfi provocatively responds by citing a passage from the popular Italian novel *Le avventure di Pinocchio*, written by Carlo Collodi in 1883:

> Pinocchio went to prison, you recall. […] Remember the scene […] when the Emperor amnesties all the criminals? There's the little puppet [Pinocchio] in the cell and he doesn't know why. It's not because he's done anything wrong, he hasn't. And then little Pinocchio comes to the prison guard and says: 'All the prisoners are being set free and I should be set free too'. 'Oh no — said the prison guard, — not you, you can't be set free. You're not a criminal'. 'Oh but excuse me — said Pinocchio — I am a criminal, I am, just like the rest'. 'A thousand pardons — said the prison guard, — in that case, you're free to go'. And he takes off his hat and he bows, opens the gates and sets Pinocchio free.

After Stolfi's interview, the scene continues with a chat between Stolfi and Bertone. Here we come to find that Bertone has reacted violently to the acquittal of Bettarini (Franco Fabrizi), a murderer Bertone himself had arrested. The police inspector notes how frustrating is to accept that criminals get out of jail after one has struggled to stop them. Stolfi tries to cheer Bertone up reminding him that, after all, he did his duty as a police officer. The telling of this episode from Bertone's life, combined with the reference to the nineteenth-century novel *Pinocchio*, serves as a sophisticated critique of the functioning of law and justice in contemporaneous Italy. Bertone experiences the (side-)effects of the legal system's dysfunction which is, in some respect, similar to that narrated in *Pinocchio*, as the film describes Bettarini's acquittal as deriving from legal cavils and loopholes. The correspondence so established between Pinocchio's personal story and Bertone's raises the question of law and justice as an issue which is, in a way, 'historical' for Italy; a thorny and disgracefully unsolved problem which is believed to be as old as the nation state itself (*Pinocchio* was written and is set in the period soonafter Italy's political unification[5]). More than one hundred years after the legal misfortunes of his ancestor-citizen Pinocchio, Bertone is disgracefully forced by circumstances to face an incoherent and confused legal system, one marked by multiple (and conflicting) decision-making layers, and one in which justice is likely to be the prerogative of the most powerful and most cunning individuals. The currency of *Pinocchio* is further reinforced by the novel's reference to amnesty. The issue of a general pardon was, in fact, a hot topic of the Leaden Years. The growth of organized crime and the broader rise in non-financial and non-fiscal offences had resulted in the number of arrests exceeding the effective capacity of the Italian jails to host prisoners, the disproportion being so serious and discomforting as to cause frequent disorder across the whole national penitentiary network (see De Vito 2009). In order to deal with the prison overcrowding crisis, there were introduced several measures of pardon over the years which produced, amid controversies, thousands of releases (see table 5.1 below).

References to amnesty recur in another of the film's scenes, and are part of a most comprehensive discursive pattern within the genre that is antagonistic towards the political-institutional establishment in its emphasising of national topical problems and its alluding to the citizens as victims, in some respect, of political negligence and a legal system that promotes impunity. The scene is set outside the premises of a penitentiary,

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5   See *intra*, p. 48, footnote 2.

and in it Bertone responds to a group of reporters who criticize the poor results of the fight against crime in Italy:

> There's one of the city's jails. Inside there, there are at least 2,000 men awaiting trial: heisters, counterfeiters, pushers, buyers, killers, con artists, embezzlers — you name 'em, we got 'em. Now, to actually arrest all these enemies of society the police force has to break its collective arm. That not withstanding, how many of them do you think will eventually stand trial and be convicted? I'll tell you — no more than 10 per cent. Because the legal professional senior applies the law not to further the cause of justice but to procrastinate until the next amnesty. So, before long, most criminals are back in the street. And with their skills honed to a 't' in prison, the State runs schools for criminals.

Year	Types of pardons	Number of prison releases
1966	- Up to 1 year sentence reduction to all convicts - Amnesty for all convicts in sentences of no more than 3 years	11,982 (total of detainees in 1965: 38,905)
1968	- Up to 2 years sentence reduction to all convicts - Amnesty for all convicts in sentences of no more than 5 years	315 (total of detainees in 1967: 31,605)
1970	- Up to 2 years sentence reduction to all convicts - Amnesty for convicts unconnected with financial crimes in sentences of no more than 3 years - Amnesty for convicts involved in politically-motivated offences	11,961 (total of detainees in 1969: 34,852)
1978	- Up to 2 years sentence reduction to all convicts - Amnesty for convicts of non-financial crimes whose highest punishment the law could inflict for their offence was a 3-year imprisonment	8,832 (total of detainees in 1977: 33,164)
1981	- Up to 2 years sentence reduction to all convicts - Amnesty for convicts of non-financial crimes whose highest punishment the law could inflict for their offence was a 3-year imprisonment	5,234 (total of detainees in 1980: 32,072)

Table 5.1 – *Measures of pardon and their effects (1966-1981)*. Data from the Research Centre on Prison, Deviancy and Marginalization, University of Florence (source: Piraino 2007)

The antagonism between Bertone and the establishment is further — and particularly — accentuated by a central conflict between the police inspector and Rizzuto (Mario Adorf), a district attorney who is depicted in many ways as hampering Bertone's work by imposing a procedural timescale and a strict observance of rules which is evidently in contrast with the operational impetus and 'flexibility' embodied by the

inspector. In one scene, an outlaw (Jurgen Drews) wanted by the police is holding hostage a young woman (Laura Belli) in a disused warehouse. Bertone and Rizzuto rush to the place, which has been surrounded meanwhile by police officers and sharpshooters, but the two soon argue about how to handle the situation. Bertone proposes to break in to the warehouse as soon as possible, while Rizzuto is willing to start a negotiation with the kidnapper, so as not to endanger the life of the hostage. Despite Bertone's arguments, the police finally follow Rizzuto's line, which prevails because of the latter's higher authority. The kidnapper asks for a motorcycle and for the police to let him leave the place without interferences or 'tricks', which is promptly accorded. Unfortunately, the kidnapper does not release the hostage, and during the getaway the latter is thrown off the motorcycle at high speed, eventually losing her life. The whole scene seems to fuel the thought that the hostage is dead because the State was unable or even unwilling to deal with the emergency that had arisen, and therefore reinforces the idea that individual actions and opposition to views and procedures imposed from above may produce better outcomes.

Similar scenes criticizing the State are quite frequent in Leaden Years crime films, and are often combined with a narrative emphasis on a number of different roles and professions associated with legal-judicial system. In this respect, the genre shows a tendency to 'clog up' narratives with characters ranging from ordinary police officers, lawyers, and prison warders to 'in charge' figures such as high-ranking police officers (inspectors and deputy inspectors, commissioners and vice-commissioners, chiefs, deputy chiefs, and general chiefs), professionals involved in the penal system (general attorneys, district attorneys and defence attorneys, magistrates, judges, and supreme judges), as well as politicians and civil servants (ministers, undersecretaries, MPs, mayors, and local and national administrators). A film like *Execution Squad*, for instance, features as many different law- and justice-related characters, not just Bertone, Rizzuto and the former Superintendent Stolfi, but Bettarini's defence attorney, the Rome police chief, the police general chief, and the Minister of Justice. The simultaneous presence of these 'legal-judicial characters' seems to allude metaphorically to the complexity of the State and its bureaucratic apparatus, as well as revealing anxieties and concerns about the convolutedness of the decision-making process. The various characters tend to establish non-collaborative relations which often culminate in conflicts, with each character being shown to prioritise their own interests and upholding the 'portion' of the State within which they hold a position of power. At a mid point of the story, after

Bertone tells news reporters that the city is being targeted by a gang of vigilantes (which he himself labels 'Anonima Anticrimine'), *Execution Squad* stages in rapid succession three short scenes featuring one new character every time. Each new character is associated with a position of power higher than that of the characters previously introduced, and brings into the narrative a further element of disagreement. This establishes a sense of irreconcilability regarding different powers within the State while at the same time opening up the space for a critique on the multiplicity of specific interests and the chances for opportunism in play within the decision-making apparatus. In the first scene (fig. 5.9), Bertone is called by the Rome police chief to report about his 'incautious' statements to the press: 'Vigilantes, anonymous society, are you mad?! Bertone, how could you even consider giving out this kinda story? The whole thing's a load of nonsense, complete nonsense', the Rome police chief angrily starts off. But as Bertone defends his own opinions and his freedom of expression, the police chief lowers his voice, revealing his real preoccupation: 'Bertone, please try and look at my side of it. Do you mind suggesting what I say to the police [General] Commissioner?' In the second scene (fig. 5.10), Bertone and the police chief meet the General Commissioner, who has personally intervened in the matter because of the controversy surrounding Bertone's statements. 'Your theory's ridiculous, positively ridiculous', the General Commisioner says as soon as he meets the two subordinate officers. The General Commissioner is quite concerned about the media spreading the idea of the birth of a new powerful criminal organization: 'As if the Mafia in Sicily and kidnappers [of the Anonima Sequestri] in Sardinia weren't enough... Now you want to add a gang of vigilantes in Rome! What'll I say to the Minister [of Justice]?[6] In the third scene (fig. 5.11), Bertone, the Police Chief and the General Commissioner are summoned by the Minister of Justice. The latter greets them offhandedly, as if their meeting was a governmental duty rather prompted by a real need to listen to them: 'I must be off in a few minutes so we'll have to make it brief. […] I will say at the outset that the government gives no credence to this story, it's incredible. […] But personally I'm very worried. The problem exists. We're suffering a wave of murder, robbery and rape. The desire of the citizen to create his own justice is understandable.' This scene ends with the General Commissioner asking for more police powers, but the Ministry does not sympathize with this solution.

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6   This line further reveals how the strong regionalistic framework of Italy's national culture that I have discussed in Chapter 3 could be used in different ways within narratives for making sense of a reality perceived as fragmented and multivalent.

5.9
Bertone (left) and the Rome police chief

5.10
Bertone (left), the Rome police chief
(middle) and the General Commissioner

5.11
The Minister of Justice (left) as he talks to
Bertone (right), the Rome police chief
and the General Commissioner

These three scenes explore different levels of power within State structure in a manner that is 'ascensional' — from the featuring of a medium-ranked police officer such as Bertone to the featuring of a top level figure such as the Minister of Justice. The rapid succession of the scenes produces a sense of a compulsive mechanism of an accumulation of roles and powers that renders the State as a vast and segmented body unable to ensure a harmonious collaboration between the various and many organs that comprise it. As well as expressing concerns about the Italian political-institutional system — about Italy's political hyper-fragmentation, and the inaction habitually affecting its decision-making processes — this representation significantly seems to suggest, on a related point, that the spread of criminality — and therefore social disorder — derives to

some degree from the chaotic functioning of the State and its powers. As various segments of the establishment struggle to find an agreement on how to deal with the criminal emergency because of specific ideologies and/or interests, so crime strikes harder and more shockingly. The above mentioned scene featuring Bertone and Rizzuto having different ideas about how to 'negotiate' with the kidnapper followed by the death of the hostage, is emblematic in this respect. A similar connotation is offered immediately after these three 'ascensional' scenes, as the storyline progresses with the alleged gang of vigilantes brutally killing three people in three consecutive short sequences. This narrative mechanism implicitly sets the State as responsible for country's condition of disorder. With their impetus to transgress (and transcend) the law to ensure social order and security, characters *á la* Bertone incarnate in many respects a need to reduce a national decision-making system which is commonly viewed as suffering from too many — and too many conflicting — layers of power, as well as from the existence of oppressive and seemingly nonsensical political and bureaucratic procedures.

5.3.2 Detecting terrorism

Execution Squad is often referenced to in relation to a body of films that dealt with themes to some extent connected with the political-terrorist discontent and events of the Leaden Years. At about a halfway point of the story, in fact, Bertone realises that the gang of vigilantes spreading terror in town is backed by a far-right organization that aims at restoring a 'State of order', at the head of which is Superintendent Stolfi. As table 5.2 shows below, during the 1970s there were produced several similar films to a greater or lesser extent connected with reality through the fictionalization of conspiracies aimed at establishing fascistic and authoritarian governments, as well as of intimidatory attacks, bombings, and the massacres of innocent people. They all were products which brought onto the big screen the grim and violent socio-political climate of the Leaden Years, and coded it into spectacular and thrilling narratives that aimed at entertaining the audience.

Year	Film title	'Terrorism' type
1972	*Execution Squad* (*La polizia ringrazia*, S. Vanzina)	Black; State-sponsored
1973	*The Great Kidnapping* (*La polizia sta a guardare*, R. Infascelli)	State-sponsored
1973	*The Violent Professionals* (*Milano Trema: la polizia vuole giustizia*, S. Martino)	State-sponsored
1973	*Revolver* (S. Sollima)	State-sponsored
1974	*Processo per direttissima* (L. De Caro)	Anarchist; State-sponsored
1975	*Killer Cop* (*La polizia ha le mani legate*, L. Ercoli)	International; State-sponsored
1975	*Silent Action* (*La polizia accusa: il servizio segreto* uccide, S. Martino)	Black; State-sponsored
1975	*The Left Hand of the Law* (*La polizia interviene: ordine di uccidere*, G. Rosati)	State-sponsored
1976	*Mark Strikes Again* (*Mark colpisce ancora*, S. Massi)	International; State-sponsored
1976	*Crimebusters* (*Poliziotti violenti*, M. M. Tarantini)	State-sponsored
1977	*Could It Happen Here?* (*Italia: ultimo atto?*, M. Pirri)	Red

Table 5.2 — *Terrorism-themed crime films for popular consumption produced during the Leaden Years*

At the time of their theatrical release, critics and reviewers responded to these films rather negatively, contesting the banality of their plots, as well as their stereotypical, bizarre, and demagogic content (cf. Valdata 1973; Porro 1975; Palazzi 1975). Conversely, contemporary critics and scholars regard these films as praiseworthy exemplars of an attempt at dealing with the Italian socio-political reality and its discontents (Curti 2006; Uva 2007); an attempt which is, moreover, significant if one considers that contemporaneous products of domestic high-brow cinema hardly approached issues connected with terrorism and political violence, except for a few allegorical films set back in time or in non-Italian contexts, and that were hard to decipher by the less educated such as Gillo Pontecorvo's *Burn!* (*Queimada*, 1969) and *Ogro* (1979) or Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's St. *Michael Had a Rooster* (*San Michele aveva un gallo*, 1972) and *Allosanfàn* (1974) (see Colleoni 2010: 16-67). For some film scholars, most auteurs experienced a certain difficulty in dealing with terrorism and its socio-political reverberations (Danese 2003: 64). Other scholars have tried to explain such a 'difficulty' as the result of a deeper state of embarrassment felt by many domestic filmmakers who had a long tradition of political commitment at seeing people, organizations, and political milieux with which they were familiar pursuing their political goals through murder (O'Leary 2007: 46-49; Uva 2007: 10-11). However one regards it, films such as

those displayed in table 5.2 have importantly compensated for the representational void on terrorism left by auteurs (Micicchè 1980: 130-132), which has somewhat contributed to the rehabilitation of the crime film genre within national culture, as well as giving more prominence in historical accounts on national cinema to its narratives and makers over the years. In parallel, scholarly publications of various types have begun to appear specifically concerned with investigating the relation between filmic depictions of political conspiracies and terrorism and the tumultuous Italian reality. Mary P. Wood (2012), for example, has written that Leaden Years crime films of popular consumption represent in many ways an attempt at confronting contemporaneous problems, while at the same time trying to understand causes and responsibilities of certain events through a generic framework based on the resolution of mysteries and the unmasking of plots. Also, Wood notices in these films the existence of anxieties and fears about what was happening in the country, which are particularly expressed in contradictory and problematic representations of violence. Austin Fisher (2014) suggests that Leaden Years crime films dealing with the political-terrorist landscape function less as cultural tools through which events or causes are understood, than as exemplars of a wider ritualistic practice aimed at celebrating the popular idea that the government was somehow responsible for social chaos and political violence. In the films he addresses, Fisher notes how all plots are characterised by a twist in which it is uncovered that people or groups linked with politics are somehow involved in the crimes, in accordance with a mechanism that Fisher relates to the Aristotelian notion of *anagnorisis*, or a final revelation which comes as a surprise for the character but not for the spectator.

Wood and Fisher's contributions outline the space of an important debate on the relationship between crime films and images linked with terrorism. Certain aspects that would seem relevant to the theorising of such a relationship, however, have remained, when not completely excluded, to some extent at the margins of the debate. One such aspect, as clearly appears from table 5.2, is that the production of crime films clearly based on terrorism and anti-democratic plots ended in 1977, in concomitance with the beginning of the most violent period of the Leaden Years in terms of armed political struggle and politically motivated clashes — it being the same period during which the Aldo Moro affair occurred. This is somewhat at odds with the idea of the crime film genre as providing a narrative framework through which terrorism and related discontent was dealt with. At the peak of the terrorist threat, in fact, thematically related films cease to be realised. Another important aspect to consider is that despite

numerous reviews and scholarly works establishing 'red' terrorism as a crucial historical fact for understanding the significance of certain generic representations produced during this age (see, for example, Barry 2004: 82, 86), depictions of left-wing violence/terrorism within the genre were practically non-existent, except for a film such as *Could It Happen Here?* (*Italia: ultimo atto?*, Massimo Pirri, 1977). To explain such aspects, historical references to terrorism and political violence, as well as speculations on their 'traumatic' influence, are not sufficient, but need to be complemented with, and supported by, analyses which start by placing terrorism into its social and cultural context. As several historiographical accounts show, before the Moro killing public opinion was arguably less concerned with 'red' terrorism than it was with other forms of terrorism. 'Black' terrorism, for instance, tended to be regarded as a sort of dark force characterized by a inclination to hit innocents in a crowd (as had happened with Piazza Fontana), as well as having threatening connections with 'deviant' government insiders, and related in many ways to the alleged form of State-sponsored terror crystallized in the theory of the so-called 'strategy of tension'. 'Red' terrorism, by contrast, seemed to enjoy a certain degree of cultural tolerance for quite a long time. Throughout the first half of the 1970s, the acts of the 'reds' gained more or less direct support from some levels of the population. Within factories, in particular, workers and union members endorsed forms of intimidation and violence against factory managers and, in some cases, even provided support of various kind during sabotage operations (Bocca 1985: 57-61). It was in this social context that the Red Brigades started off their criminal career. Their acts found support and cover-up because they got approval from workers who felt exploited, as well as because they matured within a cultural context in which common people would rather not have anything to do with the police and the judiciary — state institutions which were deemed to be causing trouble rather than addressing it. As is clear from the personal stories of Red Brigades members, the group was very much helped by common people (Bocca: ibid.)[7]. Even Moro's abduction was accompanied, in a way, with a feeling of approval, because it symbolically hit a certain kind of power and

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7   With respect to this point, I report the following affidavit from 'brigadist' Giorgio Semeria: '[While I was living in hiding] I didn't used to show off my identity to those who I met in the street or on the bus. But I didn't used to mislead those who understood or recognised me either. I often realised there were people who had helped me somehow — porters who had misguided the police, little boys of the neighbourhood who knew who I was but didn't tell their parents. I remember there was a cop, too, who knew me since high school. He used to call my mum, so as she could run and get me out of troubles. I met him personally once. He smiled and left quickly. […] In 1977, in a proletarian neighbourhood of Genoa, rumours said that some 'brigadists' were living in an apartment at the fourth floor of one estate. But no one informed on them. Only an old comrade approached them and said: ''This estate is full of children and, you know, there might be a gunfight. We're not saying that you have to move out right now, but try and understand us''.' (quoted in Bocca 1985: 57, my transl.)

politics towards which the Italians' discontent was by then strong and widespread (Montanelli and Cervi 1994: 234). But when the abduction became assassination, the link between the Red Brigades and the Italian society seemingly got lost — a fact which was greeted with surprise by the 'brigadists' themselves. The DC leader's assassination represented a 'leap in quality' of the armed struggle, regarding which the State could not be tolerant any longer. The police combed homes of entire Roman neighbourhoods, and set checkpoints at virtually every important street of the capital supported by army troops. It was as if the State was saying 'now we take it seriously', so giving proof of their strength and power not only to the Red Brigades but also to all those citizens who for various reasons had offered them support or just sympathized with their revolutionary ideals. Forms of tolerance towards Left extremism before the Moro case had been shown not only by workers, students, and distressed citizens, but also by a large group of intellectuals. Amid petitions and statements in defence of violent protesters and against the so-called 'special laws', these intellectuals consistently antagonized the national establishment. One of the most memorable moments of this opposition occurred in the aftermath of a trial against some members of the Red Brigades, which saw a number of jurors deserting the courtroom as they feared reprisals by the terrorist organization. For the poet Eugenio Montale, what had happened was quite understandable since the State could not expect that its citizens to play the role of heroes when necessary (reported in Nascimbeni 1977). For the 'yellow' novelist Leonardo Sciascia (1977), the Red Brigades were no more violent than the Italian political class which had been nefariously in charge for decades. Politicians regarded these opinions as unacceptable provocations, as clear evidence that intellectuals were opposing democracy and the principles of civilization (Galli 1993: 160).

To a great extent, it seems as if the Leaden Years were marked for quite a long time by a certain cultural acquiescence towards those involved in violent political activism, especially those sided with the left. Lazar and Matard-Bonucci (2010) have observed, in this respect, that 'terrorism' as a word started circulating with a certain regularity only after the abduction of Moro in 1978. Prior to this event, and thus for nearly a decade since the Piazza Fontana bombing that effectively opened the era, terms generally used for making reference to subjects involved in violent political activities were 'extremists' and 'subversives'. Such a terminological shift suggests a mutation in the attitude towards political violence within society, as well as in the associated perception of its dangerousness.

Leaden Years crime films well reflect the extent of this two-time relation between terrorism/political violence and society. In films before 1978, extreme political views and actions were hardly blamed or put in relation with peril of some sort, while terrorism was mostly regarded as the result of some sort of State-led operation. At this time, references to far-right, far-left, anarchist, or international terrorism were absolutely marginal and only loosely functional for the unfolding plot, and were often intimated through sketchy informative lines or stereotyped settings, costumes, and props. In *Mark Strikes Again* (*Mark colpisce ancora*, Stelvio Massi, 1976), for example, evidence that the kind of terrorism featured in the film is one with international ramifications rather than specifically Italian is principally given by the foreign names of the terrorists and the framing of a map of Europe (fig. 5.12). In *Silent Action* (*La polizia accusa: il servizio segreto uccide*, Sergio Martino, 1975), 'strategy of tension' suggestions about Italian far-right extremists being backed by CIA agents are supported by unemphatic revelations such as the featuring of a boxing gym (fig. 5.13) — a type of place which was commonly attended by young far-right affiliates at that time, especially in Rome (see Baldoni and Provvisionato 2009: 90-91) — and a mysterious English-speaking character[8], rather than clear, unequivocal references. By contrast, references to the involvement of State-sponsored forms of terrorism were made absolutely explicit by narratives. In *Killer Cop* (*La polizia ha le mani legate*, Luciano Ercoli, 1975) an investigation of a fatal bombing of a hotel is compromised by a prosecuting attorney who provides a cover-up for a bigger plan of political destabilization. In *Processo per direttissima* (Lucio De Caro, 1974), a police chief clearly states that his officers provoke incidents in extremist milieux because 'someone from Rome' has ordered to do. *Silent Action*, finally, already alleges State-sponsored terrorism in its Italian title, which translates as 'The Police Accuse: The Secret Service Kills'.

5.12   5.13

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8   In the English version of the film presumably aimed for the American market, this character was dubbed as speaking German, which obviously removed allusions to a CIA involvement.

By and large, before 1978 images of 'terrorism' and political violence in the crime film genre seemed arguably to express a relatively mild level of concern with respect to the type of crimes they represent. This is reflected in the very word 'terrorism' making its appearance in dialogues just a few times (the first time in *Mark Strikes Again* in 1976), as well as by the fact that political-terrorist crimes have no more prominence within the stories than 'ordinary' crimes such as thefts, robberies, or kidnappings. A film usually referenced for its addressing right-wing extremism such as *Execution Squad*, devotes, for example, a larger part of its plot to an investigation of two robbers who have killed a baker. References to terrorism or subversive plots are of secondary importance even for the advertisers of this films, who promoted the film by simply describing it as the story of a honest cop fighting a criminal organization (see *Stampa Sera*, 19-20 May 1972). Similarly, *The Violent Professionals* (*Milano trema: la polizia vuole giustizia*, Sergio Martino, 1973) turns into a film about a terrorist coup only near the end, after the film's plot has long revolved around two prison fugitives and their bloodthirsty gang that specialise in robberies. These examples suggest that 'terrorism' was considered, in many respects, as just *one* amongst various public order problems of that time, which problematizes certain readings of these crime films as specifically influenced by the preoccupations and discontent associated with it.

In many respects, in the crime films of this period 'terrorism' seemed to find space within narratives mostly for its narrative potential rather than for any real need to come to terms with it — or, as some Italian film scholars have put it, for its representation as based on instinct rather than on political reasoning (Bisoni 2009: 56; Mancino 1998). On a textual level, terrorism was mostly invoked because, in line with contemporaneous social discontent, it proved a valuable *narrative model* for criticizing the State and its political class, and exploited cultural expectations that related terrorism to State involvement and responsibility. At the same time, terrorism allowed for a 'legitimization' of certain ultra-violent and illegal solutions featured in narratives, the recourse to which seemed more 'reasonable' after dramatic scenes of massacres and bombings had occurred, while being also functioning to provide great amounts of spectacle and thrills. Evidence of this fictionalising of terrorism principally for narrative and commercial purposes rather than psychological and political ones, is given by other films which make allusive references to it while at the same time telling stories absolutely unrelated with the topic; stories which emphasize mortal explosions and the killing of innocent such as, for example, *Colt 38 Special Squad* (*Quelli della Calibro 38*,

Massimo Dallamano, 1976). This film was released in the summer of 1976, accompanied by advertisements with the following line: 'You'll see the first bomb of the summer' — a clear allusion to the summer of 1974 and its bomb attacks (see footnote 3 above in this chapter). A key scene of the film features an explosion taking place at the main entrance of the central railway station of Turin, which is followed by images of dead and agonized victims emerging amid fire, smoke, and destruction of various kinds (fig. 5.14-5.16). Desperate screams are accompanied by a voiceover of a news reporter that hints rather generically at the likelihood of 'one of the extremist factions' being responsible for the tragedy. This notwithstanding, there is no trace in the story of individuals or groups attempting to subvert democracy or spread terror because of some antagonist political agenda. The story is about a special squad of police officers hunting an organization of jewel traffickers, with this explosion being an act of a retaliation by the organization against the police.

5.14   5.15   5.16

    From 1978 on, references to terrorism and political violence in crime films are nil. The escalation of social disorder and mortal incidents which marked this period had a large influence on filmmaking approaches and commercial strategies linked with the crime genre, eventually resulting in a reconsideration of depictions and narrative uses of violence, as well as in a revision in terms of the content and tone of the major crime film formulas. The Moro affair amplified popular emotions of various types, and urged a collective reflection on the causes of terrorism's rise, which went so far as to involve also a reflection on cinematic representations. From international box-office hits such as *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971) to domestic 'exploitation' films, cinema in its entirety was accused of having long predicated violence as a kind of virtue, as well as having promoted audience familiarization with it (see Casiraghi 1978; Spinella 1978). For Italian filmmakers, these accusations had the effect of them rethinking the pertinence of certain violent excesses in stories dealing with contemporaneous reality. In parallel,

narratives about terrorism/political violence disappeared from the offering of national cinema, which marked the passage from a time in which terrorism was primarily a crime that proved a source of spectacle and entertainment to a time in which it had become something like a cultural taboo. To give one an idea about this change, it suffices to recall the difficulties of a crime film like *Could It Happen Here?* in finding distribution in the aftermath of the Moro affair despite its featuring 'big names' of commercial Italian cinema such as Luc Merenda and Lou Castel. The film's story about a terrorist plan for murdering the Minister of Home Affairs seemed perhaps too similar to what had just happened in the country, and the film was eventually interdicted from being screened (Michalczyk 1986: 204). It was also the last crime film to be produced on such a topic in relation to this historical period.

The socio-cultural effects of the Moro affair eventually influenced the crime film genre at both a textual and an industrial level. Concomitant with the intensification of the terrorist crisis, successful narrative cycles and formulas faced a rapid dissolution. The production of *giallo* films was significantly reduced, and those few films that were realised until the early 1980s predominantly featured fantasy and supernatural elements (e.g. *The House by the Edge of the Lake/Sensitività*, Enzo G. Castellari, 1979; *Scorpion with Two Tails/Assassinio al cimitero etrusco*, Sergio Martino, 1982). The *poliziotto* 'tough cop' formula was gradually hybridized with comic and slapstick elements which in many respects allowed for a less realistic (and thus traumatizing) use of violence. This change was also followed by a shift in emphasis from crimes involving State-related bodies and individuals to non-political crimes (e.g. bag-snatching, frauds, robberies, international jewel trafficking, and so on), as well as by a tendency to set stories abroad (e.g. *Flatfoot in Africa/Piedone l'africano*, Steno, 1978; *The Gang That Sold America/Squadra Antigangsters*, Bruno Corbucci, 1979). While such narrative variations were partly the result of an industrial attempt at finding new narrative formulas to counter the effects of a topical crisis of the exhibition sector (see Chapter 2.2), it is also true that they occurred at a time of a wider socio-cultural reaction against terrorism and political violence. As reported by the personal stories of national film producers and directors, from the Moro affair on there was a huge demand for escapism, for narratives that helped the spectator to forget the anguish of his or her everyday reality (cf. Faldini and Fofi 1984: 280; Danese 2003: 64). As well as being problematic on the ground of popular emotion, to make a film about terrorism had become in many respects quite a commercially risky job for many domestic producers.

In the light of what has been analysed and discussed in these last two sections of the chapter, I personally believe that the Italian crime film and its relationship with the violent Leaden Years has in many ways to be viewed from a different angle than that of the dominant critical position. Rather than offering an *immediate* representation of terrorism and its discontents, as has often been suggested more or less explicitly in the definition of its generic body as being made up of 'instant movies' (see, for example, Mortimer 2006: 28), the genre and its narratives seemingly *anticipate* and *prefigure*, in some respect, the very terrorist phenomenon that crucially characterizes the age. Several years before terrorism was widely perceived and accordingly regarded as a social threat, domestic crime films brought on to the big screen plots of various kind, mixing together rather confusedly coups and non-political crimes such as robberies, rapes, drug trafficking, and the like, in stories in which social discontent was nevertheless a dominant and central element, but was strictly connected with the State and its seeming inability to guarantee protection, security, and certainty to its citizens. But when in the wake of the turmoil of 1977 the phenomenon of violent political activism dramatically intensified and become widespread, to the point that the State and its representative bodies became main target of attacks by hundreds of groups, these alleged 'instant movies' inhibited that picturing of Italian reality which had been a key and commercially successful element in their production. The reasons for this, as I have said, are both cultural and industrial. As well as reflecting Italian society's peculiar relationship with the phenomenon of political violence in the 1970s, these crime films can be viewed as important historical documents of a larger socio-cultural process which, instead of representing some kind of trauma and strategies for coming to terms with it, display symptoms of a deeper discomfort that would eventually manifest with traumatic consequences for national culture and memory, but only in the following years. The feelings agitating the 'social magma' of politically disillusioned and frustrated Italian citizens described by Giorgio Bocca with reference to the incidents of 1977 are in many respects similar to those that agitate the textual body of the films addressed in this chapter. Restless and reactionary, such feelings are located in representations of fictional citizens who frustratingly feel that their rights and needs are taken into consideration by no one, and vehemently contest and oppose the State and its political and ruling class. By the same token, the failure of the 'historic compromise', less as a political project and more as a cultural one aimed at reaching a symbolic pacification of

the society, could be as well located, quite prophetically, in these films, in their stories in which mediations of any kind, and at any social and political level, are refused, and in which the protagonists are usually sceptical about what is the real nature of the measures imposed from above. Although the arguments according to which cinema had indirectly promoted violence may seem now exaggerated — especially in the light of the complex socio-cultural, political, and economic scenario from which the Leaden Years' socio-political conflicts emerged — it is on the other hand undeniable that the crime films examined in this chapter, however rough and instinctive in their rendering of problems and discomforts, in a way articulate moods and fantasies of subversion that later manifested in reality; moods and fantasies which starting from the very rough and instinctive riots that exploded in 1977 saw groups of young political militants and anarchists openly challenge the State and its institutions in a situation that lasted until the early 1980s. With respect to the dominant critical positions on the Italian crime film, I would suggest that these films need to be critically approached as cultural texts that were 'incubating', rather than somehow 'confronting', the political-terrorist events and discontent of the Leaden Years.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have examined the crime films that were produced during the Leaden Years (1969-early 1980s), a time of Italian history marked by significant social changes, a severe economic and political crisis, and an unprecedented wave of violence and criminality characterised in particular by the emergence of political violence and terrorism. Starting from the assumption that film genres and their formulas, as cultural products, reflect fantasies and concerns of the society in which they are originated, developed, and popularised, while also offering a surrogate means of addressing topical problems of the society and of coming to terms with associated concerns, I have approached and studied these Italian crime films and their generic contents and structures with the aim of speculating on how and to what extent cinema and Italian society were affected by the very turbulent events of the Leaden Years.

In doing so, I have dedicated great attention to the establishment of a thorough critical account of the historical and cultural context of Italy and the Leaden Years, as well as working on and with sources mostly from an Italian background. I was motivated to this after finding out that the body of critical work on these films had been built to a significant extent upon non-Italian studies and sources, as well as elaborated on the basis of a rather general cultural and socio-political contextualization of Italy and the Leaden Years, which in some respect made debatable certain theorizations regarding the relation between the films and society. I also found that the prevailing non-Italian readings could miss culturally specific aspects associated with the genre, especially certain narrative motifs that responded to precise industrial practices and audience expectations and were hard to detect unless one comes from an Italian background or is familiar with Italian language and culture. While I have not sought to 'demolish' existent Anglo-American theories and analyses, I felt that these needed to be, in some respect, 'left behind for a while', in order to take up points of view and draw on sources coming from an Italian background to assess anew the historical, cultural, and generic connotations of films that had originated and been developed, after all, in terms of an Italian context and background. A large part of the research has been directed, accordingly, towards investigating Italian sources of various kinds which would be useful in establishing a solid socio-cultural and industrial frame concerning the Leaden Years

and its contemporaneous cinema culture; a frame into which crime films could be placed in terms of a critical assessment of their cultural significance. The investigation of sources has prioritized material previously unaddressed in analyses on Italian films in general, such as crime news accounts, non-cinematic products made for popular and mass consumption, government statistics and bulletins, as well as studies by Italian historians, sociologists, and film critics and scholars never translated into English and thus not accessible to non-Italian speakers. This has been part of a broader thesis aim to give voice to an Italian-inflected perspective on these films, which during their discussion I have also contributed, given my Italian background. This 'Italian voice' has perhaps most evidently been apparent in the comparisons made between parts of Italian and English-dubbed versions of the films that have been addressed, which in terms of not only Italian crime films but Italian cinema at large is something which has never been done before.

In covering topics that related to key events and cultural aspects of the Leaden Years, I have found out that matters such as the reigniting of Italy's longstanding regionalist drives, and ongoing transformations in the patriarchal paradigm that dominated society and culture, are of greater influence on the crime films than the events of political violence and terrorism that are generally pointed to as being central to the unrest and discontent that marked the era. Problems relating to Italy's regionalism, for instance, are typically coded within spatial and linguistic representations, while cultural opinions about the North-South divide generally referred to as 'southern question' and its several variations, such as, for example, the city/countryside opposition, are used to establish narrative conflicts that draw on specific cultural expectations. Similarly, concerns about the contemporaneous decline of the patriarchal model of society are crystallized in clashes between male and female characters, between parents and offspring, as well as in a key narrative emphasis on dysfunctional households. Underlying these images are fantasies of patriarchal restoration, but also elements that reveal cultural ambiguities about ongoing changes in sexual mores and familial values, with the 'modern' woman associated with female emancipation, 'sexual revolution', and unmarried life becoming a character which both arouses male desire and invokes malevolence. Particularly significant, in addition, are child and teenage characters, which in contrast to similar characters of the cinematic national tradition of the past are systematically associated with a loss of innocence.

In contrast with issues concerning regionalism and the patriarchal and family

crisis, political violence and terrorism constitute a topic of surprisingly scarce relevance within and for the genre, except for its spectacular rendering of sequences of explosions and violent atrocities. From the analysis of films that deal more or less directly with this topic, there seem to be no traces that point the existence of anxieties or of a cultural need to understand the phenomenon of political violence and terrorism. References to terrorist or politicized armed organizations are either marginal or confused in their depictions, and seem to be fictionalized mainly as a means for offering a criminal variant to the wider repertoire of crimes represented in the genre. In many respects, it is the entirety of crimes rather than a single one or a single type that grounds social concerns and anxieties. The most referenced type of terrorism amongst the various ones mapping the political-terrorist scenario of violence of the Leaden Years is that one associated with the 'strategy of tension' and involving State insiders. But even in this case, representations of associated terrorists or subversives do not seem to be particularly influenced by preoccupations or anxieties linked with events of the Italian reality. Rather, references to State-sponsored terrorism and violence appear to be used for expressing that which is, in reality, another key concern of the crime films of the Leaden Years, along with the regionalist problems and the patriarchal and family crisis: the malfunctioning of the State, its institutions, and its ruling class. These latter aspects are central to the film's stories, and particularly emphasised by the representation of generic protagonists that function as metaphors of distressed citizens in conflict with the establishment. These protagonists are based on fantasies about how to solve, in the quickest possible way, troubles caused by people and groups linked in many and varying ways with the State and political power.

To a great extent, the Italian crime film's attention to, and representation of, terrorism reflected Italian culture and society's ambivalent relationship with the phenomenon of political violence and subversion during the Leaden Years. In reconstructing this period, I have shown how it is crucially marked by a split with respect to this phenomenon, which occurs around the period 1977-78. Before 1977, violent acts motivated by political reasons were a relatively ordinary factor of social unrest and disorders. They were mainly caused by opposed groups of militants, generally extremists, but were not considered as a priority problem in terms of security and public order. In some cases, the intimidatory and subversive actions of such groups were even welcomed with sympathy by certain strata of the population. Conversely, it was the so-called 'State terrorism', or the idea that 'deviant' bodies of the State were involved in

plans for political destabilization for which they often manipulated extremist groups, which made Italian citizens in some respect concerned. After 1977, the collective perspective about terrorism significantly changed. An unprecedented outburst of violence motivated more by anger against the State and its political class in general than by factious political views evolved gradually in an ideologically complex scenario of armed fighting that also included frustrated citizens not coming from a tradition of political militancy. Crime films portrayed terrorism and political plots for as long as the associated events caused a relatively mild level of concern for Italian society, mostly for spectacular and commercial reasons, but when the perception about terrorism changed, and the threat represented by terrorists of all kinds became *real*, the genre, as part of a broader cultural trauma which had meanwhile emerged, suddenly ceased to deal with the topic.

Contrary to most readings, often based on the assumption that the Leaden Years were a sort of long, permanent age of terrorist attacks and shocks, this thesis has shown how 1970s Italian crime films relate to the phenomenon of terrorism/political violence as being just one of various problems at stake — and not even the most anxiety-producing one for quite some time. Other problems of that time — the economic crisis, the 'southern question', the family crisis, the 'sexual revolution', etc. — are indeed more crucial to the establishment of the generic identity of these films. The findings of this thesis invite a thorough rethinking of the crime films of the Leaden Years, especially with respect to the extent to which historical events influenced the production and consumption of such films. Such a rethinking needs to be oriented towards considering this historical period in more socially and culturally complex terms — and not just in terms of terrorist violence and terrorism, of shocks and supposedly traumatic events. An approach which accounts for these films as incubating rather than confronting the terrorist discontent, in particular, can provide an interesting observation point for further research in cinematic images and products of this era.

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