DOM HOLDAWAY

BOSS IN SALA
Cultural Legitimacy and Italian Mafia Films

Abstract
This article identifies a recent trend of critically acclaimed, accessible mafia narratives, and offers a possible interpretation of the films as belonging to the quality sector. Following a discussion of ‘quality’ in the Italian industry, the article first provides a historic overview of Italian mafia films in order to contextualize the recent shift in tone and form. The second section then offers an analysis of the production, distribution and performance of ten mafia films released between 2004 and 2016 in relation to Mary Wood’s definition of quality filmmaking. By employing a methodology that moves from cultural history to production studies, the article reveals the continued relevance and (often institutional) legitimation of mafia narratives, therefore raising further questions about the specificity of the Italian quality sector, its boundaries, and its problematic relationship with popular film.

Keywords
Contemporary film; quality; organized crime; mafia; cultural legitimacy.

The resounding success of Lo chiamavano Jeeg Robot (Mainetti, 2016) at the 2016 David di Donatello awards continues a pattern, which began during the mid-2000s, of providing awards or public/critical recognition to film narratives about Italian organized crime. The beginning of this trend can more or less be traced back to Le conseguenze dell’amore (Sorrentino, 2004), an arthouse film that was in competition at Cannes and won five David di Donatello awards, and to Romanzo criminale (Placido, 2005), a fictionalized account of the Banda della Magliana that met popularity and critical success (the film won eight Davids and five Nastri d’argento as well as a nomination for the Golden Bear at Berlin). These were followed by the Neapolitan mafia film Gomorra (Garrone, 2008), which, alongside Sorrentino’s Il divo (2008, with several references to the Sicilian mafia), earned similar acclaim and awards at the Cannes Film Festival. The trend then included Una vita tranquilla (Cupellini, 2010, two-time winner at the Rome Film Festival); Salvo (Grassadonia and Piazza, 2013, in competition at many international film festivals including Cannes and London); the (M)TV personality Pif’s widely-praised, ironic dramedy La mafia uccide solo d’estate (2013, which participated at the Turin Film Festival and the European film awards); to some extent Non essere cattivo (2015, Italy’s entry for the 2016 foreign language Oscar); not to mention Munzi’s 2014 Anime nere, which won sixteen David di Donatello awards the year before Jeeg

* Università di Bologna – dominic.holdaway@unibo.it.
Alongside these critically successful auteur films, there have been a number of middlebrow thrillers and comedies which have found sizeable audiences and occupied a central position in cultural debates. In the category of thrillers, Vallanzasca: gli angeli del male (Placido, 2010) premiered at the Venice Film Festival, and Suburra (Sollima, 2015) has been widely discussed for its involvement with Netflix; while in the category of comedies Un boss in salotto (Miniero, 2014) was the second highest grossing Italian production of the 2013/14 season, and Noi e la Giulia (Leo, 2015) was the fourteenth highest of 2014/15.

It is also worth recalling the TV adaptations of both Romanzo criminale (Sky, 2008-10) and Gomorra (Sky, 2014-present), the major success of which has inspired critics to identify a ‘third’ way – defined by quality – of Italian TV dramas.

In the following, I question whether this trend can be interpreted as the Italian mafia film’s turn to quality. Mary P. Wood defines the quality sector in European cinema as a means for artistic and political directors to find mass appeal through the right balance of style and production conditions. Wood’s exempla are directors like Besson, Von Trier, Almodóvar and, in Italy, Rosi, Bertolucci and Benigni, who successfully negotiated “big budgets, stars, international distribution and […] spectacle” in order to make exportable and therefore more profitable products, while also to weaving in nation-specific imagery, either diegetically or through the auteur’s persona.

This definition rightly takes for granted a supra-national viewpoint, presuming that quality films seek success on a specifically global (or at least European) scale. It is equally interesting to consider how a quality sector might function within a domestic film industry, such as the Italian one. Wood hints at the specificity of this context in an earlier definition of Italian quality film as products “characterized by technical expertise, set pieces of showy mise en scène, complex narratives, serious ideas, Italian stereotypes, and the personal signature and commitment of […] the director/author”. Aside from technical prowess, then, what appears specific to Italy is ‘serious’ or ‘complex’ themes, made accessible through stereotypes, and with an authorial stamp. Perhaps one can intimate here the influence of paternalistic, realistic and/or engaged film that has dominated Italian film history and remains a recurrent mode of the 2000s, albeit with a necessary hike of budget and style.

The following section of this article offers a historical overview of the mafia in Italian cinema. As it seeks to illustrate, “seriousness” is nothing new to Italian mafia films – in fact, political engagement has un-representatively skewed the criticism and historiography of this sub-genre. Rather, the sample outlined above innovates, or renovates, thanks to an increase in technical and aesthetic standards while nevertheless maintaining the possibility of political interpretation. As the first part demonstrates, this

---

1 I have consciously omitted a handful of contemporary ‘mafia’ films that are thematically connected, yet had insignificant box-office takings, variable critical acclaim and little aesthetic or narrative originality. This includes Fine pena mai (Barletti and Conte, 2007), Galantuomini (Winspeare, 2008), Fortapàsc (Risi, 2009), Una siciliana ribelle (Amenta, 2009) and La nostra terra (Manfredonia, 2014).

2 Anon., “La top 100 della stagione”, Ciak, 8/August (2014); and in Ciak, 8/August (2015).


can be conceived as the return to a long tradition of mafia films that are made accessible through popular aesthetics, such as comedy or action.

The quality mafia films of the last decade nevertheless have more varied production contexts and box office success than one might expect, in view of Wood’s definitions. This aspect is the focus of the second section, which identifies the production and distribution patterns of ten of the above films. In part this variance can be put down to the financial limitations of the Italian film industry – a domestic quality sector will perhaps not have the same scope as an international equivalent – and in part to the different career stages of the directors. It is nevertheless possible to read the examples as quality films in view of a set of shared characteristics (identified below), not least of all an unwavering cultural relevance and the directors’ common ambition for wide appeal and recognition. These incongruences raise questions about the relationship, in Italian film culture, between quality and cultural legitimacy, as this article proposes in conclusion.

I. ITALIAN MAFIA FILMS

A misconception in Italian film history8 is that the first Italian mafia film is Pietro Germi’s In nome della legge (1949)9. In fact, as Sebastiano Gesù notes, the first recorded case of organized crime on screen is La Camorra napoletana (1906), which attracted enough spectators for over two-hundred projections at the Sala Edison in Milan10. In the 1900s to 1910s, images of the mafia oscillated between comedies that riffed on the “mano nera” (following the 1906 American-Italian production The Black Hand) or family melodramas which hinted at criminal ties, and a “vena documentaristica” symbolized by the short newsreel Gli imponenti funerali del poliziotto americano Joe Petrosino (1909)11. Critical reactions to the films were similarly divided. Though they were popular and attracted sizeable crowds, films like La camorra napoletana also triggered moralistic protests, in particular on behalf of Catholic communities, “che invocarono l’intervento della censura per proteggere i minori ‘dagli spettacoli cinematografici, nei quali i fasti della società corrotta e della delinquenza sono posti innanzi con tinte ammaliatrici alle tenere anime dei fanciulli'”12.

Though representations of the Mafia disappeared during the Fascist “Ventennio”, not least of all due to increasing censorship13, when post-war filmmakers returned to the mafia its representations forked in the same way between entertaining genre vehicles and realist denunciations. On the one hand, two strains of popular sub-genres are important: first, during the early 1960s, the mafia comedy; second, in the late 1960s and 1970s, the numerous polizieschi that narrate organized crime. Illustrative of the former strain are I mafiosi (Mauri, 1959), L’onorata società (Pazzaglia, 1961) and Mafioso (Lattuada, 1962), and the Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia film series based on ‘i
due mafiosi’, directed by Simonelli. The polizieschi were more numerous: some fifty mafia films in the filone were released between 1960-80, the majority between 1972-77, and many as a none-too-subtle imitation of *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972), such as *La mano lunga del padrino* (Bonomi, 1972) or *L’amico del padrino* (Agrama, 1972).14

On the other hand, there is a path of canonical, political mafia films represented by the work of filmmakers such as Petri, Rosi and Ferrara. The tone, structure and content of such films was complicated during the 1960s and ’70s, reflecting an ideological desire to challenge or alienate the viewer; doubtless the most important instance within this strand is Francesco Rosi’s *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), praised at length (for example by Eco) for its innovative form and political engagement15. A few of the other examples draw from literary work by Sciascia (e.g. Petri’s *A ciascuno il suo*, 1967; Damiani’s *Il giorno della civetta*, 1968; Rosi’s *Cadaveri eccellenti*, 1976) or from real events in Italian history (Rosi’s *Il caso Mattei*, 1972 and *Lucky Luciano*, 1973, or Ferrara’s *Il sasso in bocca*, 1969). It is worth noting, however, that film criticism and scholarship on Italian mafia films from the past twenty years has focused almost entirely on the political strand (Rosi et al.), and paid next to no attention to genre representations16.

In fact, during the 1980s the distance between ‘high’ and ‘low’ forms of mafia film became far less pronounced. This moment has cultural relevance in Italy, since, as Capuzzo writes, the 1980s represent a “consolidamento di una società più moderna, nella quale lo spirito del mercato e del capitalismo permeano aree sempre più estese”, and at the same time the “riemergere di vizi storici del peculiare sviluppo italiano – corruzione, familismo, clientelismo – con un degrado dello spirito civile”17. Together with the crisis of the film industry, which forced filmmakers to look to popularizing techniques for ticket sales, it is not surprising that the ideological representation of “vizi storici” therefore adopted more consumable aesthetics at this time. Examples include *Cento giorni a Palermo* (Ferrara, 1984), *Mi manda Picone* (Loy, 1984), *Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti* (Wertmüller, 1985), *Pizza connection* (Damiani, 1985), *Il camorrista* (Tornatore, 1986) and the long-running TV drama *La piovra* (Rai, 1984-2001).

The aesthetic of mafia films was then affected dramatically by the tragic bombings in Palermo, in 1992, which took the lives of Falcone, Morvillo, Borsellino and their escorts. Though not unique, these assassinations had a significant effect on Italian society and cultural memory18. In film culture they led to a dearth of popular representations of the mafia19, and the profusion of serious, respectful and melodramatic biopics about

---


16 Cf. for example the issue “Speciale: Cinema e Mafia”, *Rivista del cinematografo e delle comunicazioni sociali*, 66, 3 (1996): 7-22, which cites political film heavily; or D. Renga ed., *Mafia Movies: A Reader*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011, the second half of which, on Italy, focuses predominantly on political films. This is not exclusive, however, and the chapters employ an impressive range of methodologies of analysis.


19 After *Johnny Stecchino* (1991), which preceded the bombings by just one year, practically no comic representations of the mafia were created in their wake, excluding the surrealism work of Cipri and Maresco.
anti-mafia martyrs. Instances include Giovanni Falcone (Ferrara, 1993), Il giudice ragazzino (Di Robilant, 1994), Un eroe borghese (Placido, 1995), Placido Rizzotto (Sciameca, 2000), I cento passi (Giordana, 2000), Angela (Torre, 2002), L’uomo di vetro (Incerti, 2007) and Una siciliana ribelle. As well as providing “academic fodder” in Anglo-American film scholarship, these films re-instated the divide between critics and the public, with the films gaining critical praise, yet attracting insignificant audiences.

During the mid-2000s representations of organized crime shift again, producing a group of technically accomplished, aesthetically distinct dramas with higher budgets and greater takings and critical success – the films cited in the opening of this essay – that contrast previous standards. When placed in contrast with engaged anti-mafia biopics, this change has a few immediate consequences: first, its emergence signals that the period of ‘post-traumatic’ political-realist films is closing – or at least losing some of its aesthetic relevance. Second, such quality films in fact reflect the on-going dialectic of politics/entertainment which has always categorized Italian (mafia) film, perhaps reflecting the apex reached in the 1980s. Considering in particular the second point, the following section will turn to the production and distribution changes that these films incurred in order to address the mafia narrative to a greater audience.

2. Production and Distribution Trends

This section limits itself to ten films, all of which represent a form of organized crime: the Cosa Nostra, the Camorra, the ‘Ndrangheta, the Banda della Magliana, the banda Vallanzasca, or non-specific Roman criminal groups. The production and distribution data about the films is included in Figure 1.

The incongruent production and distribution of the films makes it difficult to read them as quality productions. The estimated budgets of the films in this sample are not uniform, and vary from around one million Euro (Salvo, Lo chiamavano Jeeg Robot) to seven or eight million (Suburra, Vallanzasca, Romanzo criminale). As the data in figure 1 shows, the higher budget films are co-productions between major, private companies (e.g. Cattleya or Warner Bros.) with smaller companies, particularly in France, such as Babe Film. Middle-sized and smaller budgets are unsurprisingly the result of co-productions between smaller companies (CinemaUndici, Wildside, Goon Films) and public funds at European (MEDIA Programme, Eurimages), national (Rai Cinema, MiBACT) and regional levels (Sicilia Film Commission, Regione Lazio).

As this indicates, many of the films utilize public funding in the name of cultural value. Seven of ten films in this sample were awarded funding from the Italian Cultural Ministry (MiBACT) as ‘film d’interesse culturale’, and another (Vallanzasca) was

and Roberta Torre’s grotesque musicals, Tano da morire (1997) and Sud side stori (2000). Action film iconography can be seen a little more commonly, for example in La scorta (Tognazzi, 1993), Milano-Palermo: Solo andata (Fragasso, 1995) and its 2007 sequel.

For example, Testimone a rischio (Pozzessere, 1997) pre-emptively features at length in the aforementioned special issue of the Rivista del cinematografo on “Cinema e mafia” (66, 3, 1996), yet attracted only 65,000 spectators. Even Placido Rizzotto, which has been widely praised by scholars for its aesthetic originality, had an audience of only 75,000. Cf. M. Marcus, “In Memoriam: The Neorealist Legacy in the Contemporary Sicilian Anti-Mafia Film”, in Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema, edited by L.E. Ruberto and K.M. Wilson, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2007, 290-306; audience data taken from the “Lumière” European Audiovisual Observatory.

The films are: Le conseguenze dell’amore, Romanzo criminale, Gomorra, Una vita tranquilla, Vallanzasca, Salvo, La mafia uccide solo d’estate, Anime nere, Suburra and Lo chiamavano Jeeg Robot.
awarded the status of ‘cultural interest’ without any funding. Five were co-produced by the film arm of the Italian public broadcaster, Rai, and the three débuts (Salvo, Jeeg Robot and La mafia uccide solo d’estate) also had regional support. This allows us to connect the motif of organized crime to a political-cultural priority, despite the ideological discontinuity between the various films. Moreover, four films were awarded EU production or distribution funds, and seven are co-productions with other European countries, demonstrating that the relevance of the content transcends Italy’s borders. Moreover, the same eight ‘film d’interesse culturale’ were also labelled as ‘film d’essai’ by MiBACT. This qualification provides immediate access to the Schermi di qualità programme, also funded by the Ministry (and supported by several of the industry’s trade unions), and which provides around €2.5m to c. 500 movie theatres in Italy to favour the distribution of “difficult” films. Though the large number of film d’essai makes it hard to isolate a particular relevance of organized crime, a study by Zambardino has demonstrated that such favoured distribution has the potential to improve ticket sales by 40%.

The Italian distributors of the films are mostly mainstream, and include Warner Bros Italia, 20th Century Fox Italia, 01 Distribution and Medusa. Andrea Occhipinti’s company Lucky Red distributed Jeeg Robot, and the younger Good Films distributed Anime nere, Non essere cattivo and Salvo. The work of Good Films and Lucky Red is particularly relevant. First, the significance of the content of such films is made apparent by the relatively restricted activity of the two companies – due in part to the oligarchy of the distribution system in Italy – demonstrating that organized crime is privileged content for minor, independent distributors. Second, both distribution companies have gained recognition and degrees of fame in particular following the festival success of these films, particularly Anime nere and Jeeg Robot.

As the data reproduced in Figure 1 shows, the films have had relative success in cinemas, with seven circulated in more than 300 cities and four in more than 400. Over half of the films had more than 500,000 spectators in Italy and took more than €3m domestically. The films have also been exported to some degree within Europe, though only the most recognisable auteurs (Placido, Garrone and Sorrentino) have been able to attract foreign audiences, that nevertheless remain humble (excluding Gomorra, seen by over 1.5m Europeans). Despite their limited international distribution, this data, along with the notable festival presence of the films, indicates that Italian mafia films occupy a privileged part of the market.

Overall, the production and distribution of these films indicates less a coherent segment of the quality sector than three fairly distinct production patterns that relate, more than anything else, to the career stages of the directors: débuts (Salvo, La mafia uccide solo d’estate, Lo chiamavano Jeeg Robot); films that attempt to seal the reputation of a young director (Le conseguenze dell’amore, Una vita tranquilla, Anime nere), and high budget films that cohere with Wood’s definition of the quality film (Romanzo criminale, Gomorra, Vallanzasca and Suburra). That said, the humble or mid-sized budget films can also be read as a strategic effort to aim at the quality sector. Wood describes this
process in relation to *Le conseguenze dell’amore*: “Armed with critical recognition for his originality and visual style, Sorrentino then needed to make his name, while aiming at the mass audience in order to access a larger budget. These ambitions entailed a bid to enter the quality sector of the film industry.”

With this in mind, in fact, not only the medium-budget films but also the débuts in this sample can be seen as a tactical attempt, on different scales, to gain critical and popular attention, indicating further still the cultural relevance of organized crime themes.

In fact, the same push for personal “originality and visual style” that categorizes such career tactics has resulted in a group of uniform characteristics for these films, which relate to an authorial stamp, technical sleekness, serious/accessible narratives and high budgets, all with an eye to wide distributions (and which bring them in line with the definitions of the quality sector). These can be summarized as follows:

- The ‘above the line’ troupe of each film targets an authorial model, with the (exclusively male) director/s credited as screenwriter/s in all but two cases, and the titles branded as ‘un film di…’ in publicity. The screenwriters and directors of photography include some of the most respected and active professionals today, such as Maurizio Braucci, Rulli/Petraglia, Luca Bigazzi and Daniele Cipri. The films make use of a representative group of (again, mostly male) actors. Some, such as Toni Servillo, have gained international recognition; many of the others (Favino, Rossi Stuart, Timi, Santamaria, Amendola, Pif) are well established personas in Italy’s film and TV industries. Some of the more recent films feature young actors who have found recent acclaim, such as Marco D’Amore, Luca Marinelli and Alessandro Borghi.

- The films are stylistically accomplished, with continuous montage and spacing, and each film is categorized by a specific visual style, that unites mise en scène, lighting and camerawork. *Le conseguenze dell’amore* and *Una vita tranquilla* use slow, long shots and cold, greyscale sets that reflect Northern locations; *Romanzo criminale* and *Vallanzasca* are fast paced, and use costumes and props that fetishize the 1970s-80s; *Gomorra* combines observational, handheld camerawork with hyper-real colours and sets that reflect the narrative’s dramatic violence; *Anime nere* uses chiaroscuro to contrast the obscurity of Calabria with the bright spectacle of Milan, and *Salvo* plays with light/day and dark/night metaphorically to reflect the power shift between protagonists; *Suburra* relies heavily on moods exaggerated by the score, and quick cuts between scenes that relate violence to politics; *Jeeg Robot* riffs on the performance of violent crime and heroics through diegetic songs and TV Shows; and *La mafia uccide solo d’estate* plays with history, autobiography and cronaca through retro sets and costumes as well as the director’s observational style that is characteristic of his TV programme. Furthermore, across the spectrum — and as a very marked difference to the mafia films of the 1990s and early 2000s — the films use dramatic spectacle. In some cases this is achieved through action and violence (*Suburra* and *Jeeg Robot*, for example, include varying degrees of destruction). More generally, however, the films use visually-striking sets: from the tanning station in *Gomorra*, *Suburra*’s Dubai Café or the stadium and Colosseum in *Jeeg Robot*, to the building site in *Le conseguenze dell’amore*, the warehouse and hill in *Salvo*, and the yachts and milanese skyscrapers in *Anime nere*.

- Finally, the films share a number of narrative motifs and basic structures. Each film

---

included in this sample focuses on male protagonists (as per the norm of mafia films), almost universally involved in power dynamics either within or against crime syndicates. Each of the films plays thematically with morality, ironically challenging the black and white divide between good and bad — and therefore differentiating themselves from moralistic anti-mafia biopics of the 1990s-2000s — through moral hierarchies via greater and lesser evils among mafiosi (Vallanzasca, Romanzo criminale, Gomorra, Suburra, Una vita tranquilla, Salvo and Anime nere). Le conseguenze dell’amore presents a protagonist that disregards social or criminal ethical codes entirely, at least until his meeting with Sofia; and Jeeg Robot and La mafia uccide solo d’estate ironically renegotiate the relationships between average men and the mafia, through the light-hearted misunderstanding of a child or the fantastical potential of super-heroes. The narratives of the films are not ‘complex’ in the way the term is intended in studies of quality television\(^27\), in that they are linear (Gomorra is segmented but each story remains linear; only Romanzo criminale has an oneiric alternative time-line, and, along with Vallanzasca and La mafia uccide solo d’estate, a diegetic past/present divide). Nevertheless, in each case narrative complexity comes from unknown elements, in the form of past decisions that are slowly revealed or remain hidden throughout, and almost universally remains present in unstable and uncertain futures (as embodied in the final sequence of Una vita tranquilla, where the protagonist disappears to begin his life again). These characteristics bring the sample of films closer to, if not directly within, the quality sector. While the films vary significantly in budget and audience reach, it is apparent that the ‘seriousness’ of organized crime as subject matter endows them with a particular cultural legitimacy — and one that is more often than not institutionalized. And despite the ultimate variations in tone and pace, which disavow the possibility of identifying a single genre trend, each film uses style, spectacle, narrative complexity and stereotype in order to prioritize audience appeal over political comment. This shift in particular makes this trend of filmmaking stand out from the post-1992 anti-mafia rhetoric, which necessarily had the opposite objective (political legitimacy over consumability).

3. QUALITY ‘BRACKETS’ AND LEGITIMACY

This essay has attempted to contextualize the emergence a small trend of mafia films which signal a shift from hegemonic, anti-mafia politics towards middlebrow, consumable cinema — in fact re-producing the tendency of anti-mafia narratives of the 1980s. I have attempted to suggest that to some extent this trend marks the mafia narrative’s shift into the quality sector. This indicates that a narrative motif (if not a genre per se) can provide a ‘bracket’ within the quality sector. In the case of organized crime, this is the result of the national and international cultural relevance of the mafia both as a means for entertainment and a socio-political anxiety.

In fact, as the previous section has sought to illustrate, these films adhere to prevalent notions of quality filmmaking on an aesthetic/narrative level more than on an industrial one. The relative inexperience of many of the directors has restricted their access to substantial budgets, audiences and international exportation, despite the wide critical acclaim that these films have gained (as mentioned in the introduction). Nevertheless,

the films’ insistence on authorial signatures, captivating narratives and spectacle align the objective (if not finality) of these films to those of the quality sector: the strategic negotiation of relevant content and popularity.

This discussion has moreover served to identify a number of tensions surrounding boundaries, insofar as the sample of mafia films is both inclusive and exclusive: on the one hand, the overview of Italian mafia film history sought to indicate the need to go beyond the one-dimensional aesthetic of anti-mafia films and rather to include genre vehicles. On the other, my sample of ‘quality’ organized crime films omitted both a few examples of niche, political films that did not reach mainstream audiences, as well as comedies such as Un boss in salotto and Noi e la Giulia. These films share interesting characteristics with the quality films above: they are among the most profitable and widely consumed examples Italian mafia films in recent history (Un boss in salotto took €12.3m, 130% of Gomorra’s takings), and also supported centrally (Noi e la Giulia received State funding, Un boss in salotto the status of cultural interest; both are film d’essai), and they ultimately dodge closure and force us to take account of the ‘serious’ impact of the mafia. Nevertheless they are stylistically less unique, the authorial stamp is weaker, they prioritize stereotypes and scale down the seriousness of the content for humour, resulting in adverse critical reactions. As such, while the benefits and the esteem of the quality sector appear to offer a comforting solution to the ‘problem’ of popular cinema – not taking the content seriously enough – the reaction to these comedies indicates that there are limits to acceptability, too.

The problematic boundaries of the mafia/organized crime film, particularly in light of the critically-derided/popular “cinepastiera” Un boss in salotto, guide back to a fil rouge of the Italian film industry and its studies: cultural legitimation. As I have shown, the Italian mafia movie has had a difficult relationship with criticism and film historiography, precisely due to the pressing need to produce legitimate content about a current social issue. Furthermore, quality mafia films continually signal different types of cultural legitimation, be it critical (through their many accolades), public or institutional (through the processes of State funding and supported distribution). While it is problematic to relate institutional ‘cultural interest’ to quality – films funded by the State often have very contained audiences – the cultural legitimacy of the ‘serious ideas’ of quality film is, I believe, what makes such thematic ‘brackets’ potential contributors to aspirations of middlebrow audiences. The recent turn to quality mafia films therefore not only signals a shift in the social meaning of the mafia, but moreover that this subject matter has affirmed itself as a profitable and exportable image of Italy’s ‘dark side’.

---

28 For example, a review published on Cineforum’s website gives Un boss in salotto just one star, criticizes its use of stereotypes and the danger of “banalizzazione” of organized crime, and uses the second half of the review to praise La mafia uccide solo d’estate. B. Sorrentini, “La mafia fa ridere?”, Cineforum, January 1, 2014, online: http://www.cineforum.it/recensione/La_mafia_fa_ridere [accessed May 25, 2016].

29 The film was labelled a “cinepastiera” by the director, playing ironically with the line of the moralistic protagonist in the film “la pastiera non entra a casa mia, siamo una famiglia onesta” and making reference to the despised series of Christmas comedies, cinepanettoni. See also A. O’Leary, Fenomenologia del cinepanettone, Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2013.

The data reproduced in this table is expanded from the following sources: the Internet Movie Database (IMDb.com) and film credits; the results of public applications for film support to MiBACT, available online at http://www.cinema.beniculturali.it/; the annual “Top 100 della stagione” reports in the August issues of Ciak, 2005-15, with supplementary audience/distribution data kindly provided by Cinetel (http://www.cinetel.it). The budget estimations were calculated according to the quotes given in the Ministry’s documentation, if not found in industry articles in Il giornale dello spettacolo or online at: http://www.cineuropa.org/. All websites were accessed in April and May 2016.