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**È STATA ROMA: LA CRIMINALITÀ CAPITOLINA DAL 'POLIZIOTTESCO'
A SUBURRA, MATTEO SANTANDREA (2019)**

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Reviewed by Dana Renga, The Ohio State University

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the original Italian are mine.

Italy has a rich tradition of producing films, documentaries and television programmes on organized crime, and filmmakers and showrunners have made hundreds of products that focus on criminality from the inside, or on those who battle against illegality. The past ten years have witnessed an uptick in scholarship on film and television representations of Italian organized crime, treating onscreen depictions of Italy's several mafias from a diversity of perspectives. Matteo Santandrea's *È stata Roma: La criminalità capitolina dal 'poliziottesco' a Suburra* joins in the discussion of mafia screen scholarship and is unique in focusing on movies and series that take place in Italy's capital and that were released over the past 50 years.

The aim of the volume, as the author explains at that end of the chapter engaging with Rome's criminal history, is to attempt to 'retrace the itinerary of audiovisual production that [...] will reveal dynamics and historical settings analysed thus far' (60).¹ In particular, such dynamics revolve around a persistent trend in the films and series under consideration to represent Rome as an apocalyptic, or post-apocalyptic, landscape that does not at all resemble the eternal and beautiful city evoked in other films – amongst a few others, Santandrea cites *La dolce vita* (Fellini, 1960) and *Roman Holiday* (Wyler, 1953). For one, Santandrea maintains that the films in the volume focus on the Roman periphery – Pasolini is a regular reference point – and thus redirect the tourist gaze towards another reality that is much more abject and unappealing. In my view, this is not at all the case with the film *Suburra* (Sollima, 2015) and the series *Suburra. La serie (Suburra. The Series)* (2017–present), which frequently feature some of Rome's most recognized landmarks and tourist destinations.

Both in the book's brief introduction and brief conclusion, Santandrea brings up how films and television series depicting criminality in the capital often emphasize a sense of 'moral degradation' (192) or 'social and moral degradation' (9) that positions the city of Rome not as a victim to poor administration and organized crime, but as a malicious and venal tyrant. Although not ground breaking in its analysis, *È stata Roma* is important in its discussion of several understudied films, in particular those from the 1970s. It is also important in offering a succinct overview of Rome's troubled political history and a synopsis of the cities' history of organized crime. In this way, Rome, not the traditional setting for mafia movies, is resituated as a corrupting caput mundi.

The book is divided into four chapters, each including two to three subsections, which are preceded by a short introduction (four pages) and followed by a brief conclusion (three pages). The first chapter sets up the historical and political framework of the analysis and establishes 'a genesis of a violent Rome' that finds its brutal roots in its foundation, a legacy of violence that continues as a 'natural consequence of the disastrous conditions of extreme poverty' (16). This abjection is experienced by the vast majority of the population and is juxtaposed with the ostentatious status of the clergy and the nobility (such a narrative of disequilibrium rings true, for example, in the *Suburra* novel, film and series). The second chapter has a focus on films released during the 1970s, a decade that the author categorizes as 'the most intense and articulate of the second half of the twentieth century' (61). Relying on scholarship by Christian Uva and Alan O'Leary, amongst others, this section looks at several crime films and instant movies that engage with the events of the *anni di piombo* and that might act as a mirror to project the local or regional fears and anxieties to national audiences. As Santandrea claims, the clamorous events of the 1970s make good subject matter for the many instant movies and political films of the period, many of which take as their backdrop the city of Rome.

In the subsequent chapter, the author first looks towards films and series produced during the 1980s and 1990s, a period (at least the 1980s) that the author claims is not capable of narrating the tumultuous events from the 1970s, and as a result, and in line with other critics, the author infers that films released during the period are considered of lesser value to a more engaged cinema of the decade prior. The 1980s also witnessed the coming-of-age of the Rome-based crime criminal organization, the Banda della Magliana, and the second half of this chapter treats the film and series *Romanzo criminale* (Placido, 2005; Sollima, 2008, 2010). As Santandrea explains, both series and film are marked by a sense of nostalgia for the 1970s, a melancholic drive coupled with a narrative structure that prompts viewers to root for criminal antiheroes. The author cites various scholars who have written on the film and series, but overlooks Catherine O'Rawe's seminal *Stars and Masculinities in Contemporary Italian Cinema* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) on the film and series, whose writings on retro masculinity, nostalgia and male bonding would have been useful to the overall discussion of the film and the series' address.

The title of the final chapter 'Rome will fall' evokes themes of decay and degradation running through the films treated throughout the book. This section treats some more recent productions, in particular the film and series *Suburra* and *Dogman* (Garrone, 2018) and *Lo chiamavano Jeeg Robot* (*They Call Me Jeeg*) (Mainetti, 2015). As with other discussions in the book, here the emphasis is on Rome's defunct status as a criminal metropolis where "'heroes" don't seem to exist' (164). Santandrea's discussion of a fallen Rome, and absent heroes, is most apt with regard to the analysis of *Dogman*, which, it should be pointed out, does not take place in Rome. However, the author's claim regarding a difficulty to identify even a 'weak [...] ethical code' in *Suburra* (it is unclear whether the reference is to film or series) is arguable given the complex relationships that various protagonists in the series forge with friends, family and frenemies, as many of these relationships have at their foundation ethical codes.

The volume closes by again elaborating upon the central claims regarding what emerges in the texts under discussion is a, '[c]apital that is devastated on human, ethical, and environmental levels, and which has arrived at a complete, and most likely unsolvable, crisis' (193). Lacking in the volume is

a discussion of gender, most likely as central protagonists of the series under discussion are men (several women in the texts discussed have powerful roles in less central roles, however). It would be interesting to consider how a television series such as *Baby* (Andrea De Sica and Anna Negri, 2018–present), which centres on female friendship and female sex work, might challenge such a reading, in particular with regard to the series' innovative representation of the space of Rome.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2943-2080>