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Destabilising Paradise: Men, Women and Mafiosi: Sicilian Stereotypes

Elizabeth Hart

Whilst Sicily, the place, has been described as a "terrestrial paradise", Sicilians have been more negatively stereotyped, not only within Italy, but also globally. This paper, with its focus on filmic representations, argues that stereotyping of Sicilians, for an Italian as well as a global audience, allows space for destabilising characteristics, such as criminality, to be both contained and explored. It proposes that these stereotypes illustrate the ascendancy of audience need and expectations over any hegemonic intent in media representations and that their survival is embedded in aesthetic pleasure, which is partly fuelled by a sense of exotic difference.

Keywords: Stereotypes; Film; Sicily; Sicilian; Mafiosi; Masculinity

Labat, after a journey in 1611, described Sicily as "a terrestrial paradise inhabited by demons" (37). This early summary and categorisation of an island and its people has since been frequently echoed. Whilst the natural beauties and antiquities of Sicily have received copious praise, its inhabitants have fared less well, resulting in a stereotyping that has operated, not only within Italy, but also globally.

This article, whilst recognising that place too is subject to stereotyping, hopes to focus on some stereotypes of Sicilians, avoiding, if possible, a corrective stance. These stereotypes are particularly foregrounded when they are juxtaposed to those notions of a "terrestrial paradise" that descriptions of the place evoke. This paper argues that stereotyping of Sicilians, for an Italian audience as well as a global audience, allows space for destabilising characteristics, such as criminality, to be both contained and explored. Furthermore it proposes that these stereotypes illustrate the ascendancy of audience need and expectations over any hegemonic intent in media representations

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and that their survival is embedded in aesthetic pleasure which is partly fuelled by a sense of exotic difference. This perception is enhanced by the diverse cultural influences that have shaped Sicilians. The main focus is on how stereotypes have operated within film and the films more specifically referenced are those that have been both commercially successful and deal directly with stereotypes. There are by implication films where stereotypical characters are used simply as a backdrop for the action. The argument develops in three stages: the contexts and origins of Sicilian stereotypes; film and Sicilian stereotypes; Mafiosi, "galli" and women. The Mafioso has been selected because of its widespread currency and the other two because they are inscribed into wider debates on gender but are also inflected by regional perceptions.

Stereotypes of Sicily and Sicilians have emerged initially from the plethora of travel writing pertaining to the area. Sicily, the place, has to a large extent been typified as a paradise in these accounts ranging from Cicero to those of the Arab, Edrisi, who described it as the "pearl of the century for abundance and beauty" (23). Later travellers echoed this and in 1833 Newman wrote to his sister from Sicily on 27 April "I never knew that Nature could be so beautiful; and to see that view was the nearest approach to seeing Eden" (344). Sicily, glowingly described by travellers and poets, it would seem, is a paradise that was primarily tainted by the inhabitants. The place-myth exists in ironic tension with the stereotypes of its inhabitants. In 1843 Barbiera (307) echoed Labat's earlier description which equated Sicilians with demons spoiling paradise and Frances Elliot thought that: "From time immemorial the Sicilian is an outlaw and a bandit" (17). The relative consistency and tenacity of these representations relates to the theory that people recall factors that support their stereotypes (Rothbart 343).

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to trace the emergence and reinforcement of these stereotypes it is worth noting that they have been given political and sociological weight in their incorporation into what came to be labelled, "the southern question". This might be best described as a portmanteau term that incorporates and covers the social and geographical problems facing the Mezzogiorno or Meridione, both words used for parts of Italy located south of Rome. Discourses established at the time of Italy's Unification were undoubtedly mobilised in the stereotyping of Sicilians and John Dickie in *Darkest Italy* examines how stereotypes of the South were systematically evoked to support nation building at the time of Unification. Sicily, as the southernmost point and with an already distinct historical identity, was invested with a concentration of difference. He analyses how, the magazine, *Illustrazione Italiana*, drawing on notions of Orientalism constructed Sicilians as picturesque for its readers. This, with its emphasis on the exotic and its underlying threat has foregrounded that the picturesque has a close affinity with the grotesque (Dickie 110). This later becomes significant in filmic representations which invest these stereotypes with the added status of spectacle More recently these same stereotypes have been given political and social focus by the Lega Nord which has

revisited and fostered a sense of Otherness and exploited prejudice to support its policies of separatism.

Sicily, having not only evoked travel, political and sociological writings, has also inspired considerable writing on what it is to be Sicilian; an influential example of this is the work of Leonardo Sciascia. Matteo di Gesu writing in *La Repubblica* suggested a year's sabbatical from writing about "what Sicilians are like and why" (Di Gesu 110). Merlo in a critique of the novelist Camilleri suggests that he writes as if "sicilianita" is a "DNA [. . .] a separateness which exists only as a stereotype, a prejudice which gathers together, in a disordered fashion, personal difficulties and every kind of banality and which sees sexual voracity as an expression of lyrical sensitivity and friendship as rhetoric" (Merlo 11–12). "Sicilianita" and "sicilitudine" are terms invoked to explain everything from ecological negligence to petty criminality. They operate as terms of absolution and offer in substantiation the literary writings of Sicilians themselves, among others, conveniently forgetting the exigencies of narration and the impact of personal perspectives in the writings of for example Sciascia, Lampedusa, Brancati, all writers whose fiction has been filmed. These established stereotypes have been implicated in a range of debates on regional identity and have become vehicles for the analysis of ideological attitudes many of which are seen as reductive.

Stereotypes provide us with a useful saving of cognitive energy offering a consensual shortcut to the recognition of specific groups or individuals. This functionalism is, however, marred by their generality and their potential for prejudice and it is these factors that contribute to the ideological anxieties that stereotypes generate. They categorise but also evaluate and it is this aspect that is linked to political and hegemonic perspectives because these evaluations are often perceived as negative. It is worth noting at this point that some stereotypes which Italians attribute to Sicilians are perceived internationally as more generally representative of Italians and the resonance of Goethe's much quoted comment that "Sicily is the key to everything in Italy" (53) is relevant to this perception. However, these shifting geographical parameters, which locate characteristics such as, jealousy, excessive devotion to mothers and corruption, are indicative both of the expediency and fallibility of these stereotypes. The range of cultural and historical discourses which have centred on Sicily and Sicilians means that any reality has been inflected if not drowned in the tropes of a web of intertextual references not easily untangled. It is important to recognise that, although film can offer audiences the possibility of problematising this categorisation, it also taps into an imagination, which according to Smith is "criss-crossed by culturally established routes" (47); and filmic stereotypes of Sicilians illustrate these routes.

Undoubtedly stereotypes of Sicilians are used in different ways within the context of Italy's cultural, social, political and global identity but have also achieved an extensive circulation in part due to the some 250 films located there. It was natural, if not inevitable, that the stereotypes extant from the historical discourses circulating on Sicilians were assimilated into filmic representations. Film, with its mass distribution

of images, added to the proliferation of extant images and, more importantly, it naturalised them through the agency of narration. These stereotypes, many of which reflect the discursive regimes, which traditionally saw Sicilian as Other, seem to offer further endorsement of this. Consequently critics such as Roberto Ando see film as being complicit in the promulgation of colonialist attitudes towards Sicilians. This seems to be supported by the fact that most of these films have been directed by non-Sicilians; some have been generic, like *Corleone*; others, like *La Terra Trema*, have had political or social agendas. This exploitation of Sicilians by the cinema is in fact addressed as a theme in Tornatore's film *L'uomo delle stelle* which opens with a sequence showing both the reluctance of Sicilians to give information and the possible stereotypical options for the identity of the body floating past. According to the local men working nearby, the body could, they say, belong to "a trades unionist, a policeman or a brigand". All are popular types for inclusion into films located in Sicily; the final ironic suggestion is that it is simply "a son of a bitch".

Although implicated in the shaping and reinforcement of audience perceptions, film, as any other product for cultural consumption, has an economic imperative to retain sensitivity to its audience. In doing so it is motivated, in part by financial imperatives, to attract audiences and these socially coded and accepted representations, which are ideologically compatible with the assumptions of prospective spectators, are implicated in the aesthetics of consumption.

Consequently, shifts in stereotypes reflect audience expectations, but also their concerns and aesthetic pleasures. In film, particularly mainstream narratives, the recurrence of stereotypes is embedded in the formal aspects of film and is congruent with characterisation and the economy of narration. It also offers aesthetic pleasures, which partly derive from an awareness of difference and the spectacle of an exotic otherness. These pleasures are not however simply rooted in otherness but rather in the interplay and tensions between this and the familiar. Issues of identification and engagement impact on how audiences perceive stereotypes and the meanings they derive from them and, as stereotypes are essentially consensual, they operate through a series of subtle negotiations between spectator and text. Film contributes to that web of perceptions with varying levels of reflexivity in mainstream narratives and with a more conscious desire to shape in differently targeted art-house films. Even those, however, can be swamped by the appeal of the picturesque stereotype as Tornatore's *L'uomo delle stelle* illustrates. This film, which intends to show how cinema has exploited Sicilians, loses both narrative trajectory and intent in portraying the seductively picturesque inhabitants. In doing this it confirms their attraction as stereotypes. Their exotic otherness offers a form of cultural tourism, which complements the visual paradise of the setting.

Sicily offered filmmakers a Mediterranean paradise coupled with established stereotypes which, drawing on the referential knowledge of the audience, are utilised to confirm the apparent realism of the location and subsequent action. The spectacular nature of the medium and the classic realist approach to narration in mainstream cinema attaches factual credibility to these consensual images and so

contributes to the creation of a cultural identity which in this case promotes Sicilian as Other. This supports the importance of audience needs to locate difference or deviance, which, in this instance, is apparently rendered discrete by a geographical specificity and which, moreover, has a physical and historical detachment from the mainland.

This difference manifests itself in character or behavioural traits and in *Only The Lonely* the anxious mother when faced with news of her son's girlfriend begs "at least tell me she's not a Sicilian". This is before she launches into a list of the characteristics of Sicilians. This is intended to show comic prejudice but by implication is recognisable to the audience. These characteristics of personality and behaviour follow the usual catalogue of attributes of, for example jealousy and passion. Stereotypes established by earlier discourses are in film rendered visible through actions that have manifest consequences and so are subsumed by the narrative. Film also supports physical stereotypes of appearance and dress and utilises visible signifiers of identity: such as moustaches and props, like luparas (a type of gun used by shepherds for shooting wolves but linked to Mafiosi), or costume, such as caps for the men and drab black clothes for the women. The ethnic and social terms of reference, which are the result of a steady process of sedimentation, can be triggered by accent alone.

Language is an important signifier of difference, and a Sicilian accent and a selective use of dialectal words immediately locates cultural origin and triggers referential awareness in the Italian spectator. Perhaps for the international spectator the Sicilian and the Italian are conflated in exaggerated speech and mannerisms. Dialectal forms are chosen at times for caricature, at others simply as mimesis but it is always with intelligibility in mind. Some of the semantic choices such as "don" and "cumpare" (godfather) carry an added weight of connotation. Quite frequently in television dramas and films, characters that are portrayed as criminal, ignorant, or socially inept, have Sicilian accents. The latter characteristics are rehearsed in the cycle of films made by Franchi and Ingrassia. The former is illustrated in series such as *Il Maresciallo Rocca* and *I Carabinieri*. A range of markers, from the visual to the linguistic, indicates this regional identity and even the inclusion of folk music contributes to the codification.

Recent advertising campaigns have reflected the widespread nature of these associations and I refer to two that are significant in that they reflect recurring filmic stereotypes. The first exemplifies a Sicilian stereotype used for comic effect that in its exaggeration borders on the grotesque, whilst the second presents an emotional and tragic one. The first was publicity for *Granigel*, a frozen drink, shown on Italian television in the spring and summer of 2004. This showed men wearing the traditional caps and extolling the virtues of the product in strong Sicilian accents and comparing it favourably to that made by their mother. A much more sophisticated campaign intended for international consumption is the 2004/2005 Dolce and Gabbana's promotion of their perfume, *Sicily*. This consists of a captioned series of visual material. The language used promotes the stereotypes of passion as positive

expressions of sensuality and drama. It is accompanied by a short film which utilises the internationally known talents of Morricone, Tornatore, and Bellucci: composer, director, and actress respectively. This was shown on English television in December 2004 and can also be seen on the product web site. The film is an economical narrative of death, mourning and desire, against a background of tradition. It is remarkable as a stylish reworking of stereotypes. Made in black and white it suggests an aestheticised earlier time and the lack of dialogue focuses the spectator on the visually conveyed narrative which contrasts age and youth; women as upholders of tradition and as desirable; and utilises the traditional signifiers of black clothes, and caps. The overall effect is one of moody intensity and it promotes a sensuality that overcomes grief. This commercially exploitable emotional charge is an aspect of Sicilian life with which audiences are as familiar as they are with its expression as spectacle. The use of emotion as spectacle evokes an aesthetic pleasure that operates almost generically.

This stereotype, in which Sicilians are portrayed as passionate, tragic victims, plays against the thematic background described by Leonardo Sciascia in *La Sicilia nel Cinema* as "Sicily as a world betrayed" (243), and this has a long filmic history. Some of the earliest films located in Sicily associated the inhabitants with tragedy, deprivation and harsh conditions. Filmed against the backdrop of the real life disaster of the 1908 Messina earthquake, clichéd stories had a dramatic impact that simultaneously offered a vicarious realism. An example of this is *Dalla Pieta all'Amore*. Later, Visconti's *La Terra Trema* was to present Sicilians as prototypes of oppression for both national and international audiences. This influential film received considerable critical attention and presented post-war Europe with aesthetic images of Sicilians ennobled by hardship. Their realism was authenticated by the apparent use of an incomprehensible regional dialect, which was in fact a blend of archaisms, literary dialogue and dialect (Parigi). The effect of this was that it firmly established Sicilians as Other and exotic in positioning them at a distance from audiences by the use of an explanatory voice over narration in Italian. This use of language also confirmed Sicilians as backward when it came to accepting the normative and modernising influences of the rest of Italy, which, during the Fascist era, had been encouraged to use Italian. Voice over narration also links with, and is reinforced by, the hierarchies and power structures traditional in ethnographic filmmaking. These assume that knowledge and interpretation reside outside of the action and in the framing narrative voice. The combination of accent and dialect to authenticate location and the exploration of social problems through narratives located in Sicily was to be re-utilised by subsequent films, few of which offered the aesthetic impact and ideological didacticism of Visconti's work and none used Sicilian dialect so exclusively.

The theme of fated suffering is inherent in the adaptation of Verga's novella *Cavelleria Rusticana* into Mascagni's operatic version in 1890. This was followed by a series of filmic adaptations that established a more colourful strand of stereotyping. The sexual tension, jealousy, violence, heightened passion and bloody ending

enhanced its appeal for audiences as is evidenced by the remakes. The first film of *Cavelleria Rusticana* in 1909 was followed by another in 1916 and a further one in 1924; and there were later remakes including the Zefirelli version in 1982. It contained elements that proved not only popular but also capable of transposition to a range of narratives in which Sicilians were invariably obsessed with honour: vengeful and impetuous. The more populist and folkloristic elements gave the stereotypes the appeal of the picturesque and offered spectacle as a form of cultural tourism. These filmic adaptations together with the operatic version ensured considerable cultural circulation. The duel scene at the end was frequently depicted on the traditional decorated Sicilian carts, and consistent intertextual references attest its familiarity as can be seen in two very dissimilar films: *Godfather Part Three* and *Mimi Metallurgico Ferito Nell'Onore*. The former utilises it as a narrative thread and in the latter Mimi is told not to behave like Compare Turidduu, the jealous protagonist.

As thematic and character stereotypes were utilised they came to offer a quasi-generic set of possibilities to filmmakers. These had an economic function in relation to narrative and could indicate to audiences the possible parameters of the film. This is particularly evident during the sixties and seventies when Sicilians were linked to repetitive cycles of crime films and to locate a film in Sicily would invariably bring with it audience assumptions and generic expectations of character and narrative with Mafia associations. An indicator of the diffusion of the association of Sicilians with crime is an English film titled *The Sicilians* simply because of a tenuous link with a Mafia boss. Much of the discourse of this type of generic film works to foster the Mafia as myth, which supports that stereotype and presents a closed world of self-referentiality. Spectators access this through repetition and familiarity and, as the cycles confirm, it proved to be a commercially successful formula.

The first stereotype I intend to consider in more detail is the Mafioso. Of all the stereotypes associated with Sicilians this is probably the one that has the greatest currency globally. There are mafia web pages; a popular computer game called Mafia-game.com: the city of lost heaven; CDs of Mafia songs and even the *Simpsons* has a Mafioso in Fat Tony. Although these examples are circulated by differing media and establish variant cultures of consumption the figure of the Mafioso is consistently criminal and powerful. The Mafioso is an interesting example of how stereotyping works for audiences and shows the divergence between "cultural global and national interpretation" (Hedetoft 278) and so confirms that the audience is not simply an effect of the text. The Mafioso has remained as a stereotype but one that has been inflected by historic and cultural discourses that have spanned Italy and the USA and consequently the resonances have diverged. This amply illustrates the fact that "the same filmic images or sounds provoke distinct reverberations for different communities" (Shohat and Stam 163).

The Mafioso, a figure associated with crime, intimidation, honour, violence and power, is an interesting generic variant in the long history of the crime film. This anti-hero energised by aspirations and success became a staple of crime genre cycles,

a stereotype that from *Little Caesar* and *Scarface* was circulated by Hollywood: a more powerful agent than Italian cinema. The many films that feature a Mafioso maximise their transgressive appeal in incorporating them into narratives, which offer them as spectacle. Their violence and power has a potential visibility in action and in Hollywood films is particularly marked by the iconography that surrounds them, such as clothes, guns, and cars. The ambivalence which stereotypes generate finds a visible correlative in the Hollywood Mafioso. It is perhaps film's capacity to incorporate this ambivalence into narration and spectacle in the figure of the Mafioso that is responsible for the success of the *Godfather trilogy*, which according to Camon "chose to embrace the Mafia myth" (65) and made it into "a popular culture staple" (57). The practice of fixing difference, through closure and exclusion, establishes a marker between the deviant and the norm but, in establishing this sense of Other, serves as a compelling reminder of that Other's inherent attraction. Nowhere is this more clearly established than in the Hollywood Mafioso who is both Other and object of desire. So the Mafiosi of Scorsese's *Goodfellas* operate in a familial way generating an atmosphere of caring and mutuality coloured by positive ethnic associations with family and food; the other, negative, aspect of the stereotype is their aggressive and repressive criminality, which explodes into violence. This film, not only presents the stereotype for audience consumption, it also deconstructs it revealing the tensions it generates between the recognition of difference, which separates and its attraction which admires.

The figure of the Mafioso in Hollywood is undoubtedly inflected by their status as immigrants and their relationship to American culture but there is also a strong insistence on regional ethnic identity. The Italianate names on the credits of Hollywood productions strengthen this perception of ethnic authenticity. Furthermore these films within the narrative also repeatedly invoke the links with Sicily. Mama Camonte in *Scarface* is represented as non-American and reminds audiences of Tony's ethnic origins. The *Godfather* trilogy includes episodes set in Sicily. These confirm the origin of the myth and serve to emphasise the importance of Sicily, as both place to escape from, and place to return to, as confirmation of success. Michael Corleone dies in Sicily and so effects a final return. *Goodfellas*, in the voiceover narration, refers to the village in Sicily his mother and the local mobsters come from, and to the "old country". This ethnic identity highlights their difference.

There is however a significant difference between the Mafioso stereotype in Hollywood films and those made in Italy, which have focussed much less on the iconic individualism of the gangster figure and more on the pervasive and corrupting power of individuals robbed of the glamour of their American counterparts. Mazzola points out that "to Italian directors, discussing the Mafia means necessarily making a political statement" (89). Through such Italian films as *Cadaveri Eccellenti* the Mafia, as institutional corruption, has been interrogated but they have also legitimated, endorsed, aggrandised and retained the intrinsic air of mystery that surrounds Mafia dealings. They foster notions of omerta, a code of silence, which is a feature of the Mafia code and one, which enhances the stereotype of them as men of rectitude and

honour. The Hollywood Mafioso is a protagonist in the American dream and carries the weight of immigrant aspirations but in Italian films the key protagonist is more likely to be the individual who stands against the Mafioso. This recurring character is a stereotype that has received little attention although present in *In Nome della Legge*, the earliest film to mention the Mafia, and in subsequent films. This suggests that the "good" character although significant to narration and meaning does not offer the same aesthetic pleasure. Moreover these films offer the "good" hero for audience approval but inevitably reflect his isolation and difference from those who surround him. In doing this, by implication, the Mafioso seems the norm. This can be seen in *In Nome Della Legge* where the young magistrate is isolated in his search for justice; and where this is visually conveyed in a scene at the bedside of a murdered man. Whilst the villagers and relatives are grouped together by the door refusing to speak, he and a policeman attend the dying man. Furthermore these heroes, frequently real life characters, end up dead. *Placido Rizzotto* had as its protagonist Rizzotto, a communist trade union leader who opposed the Mafia and disappeared in 1948. Later his body was found. Whilst audience sympathy lies with their heroic struggle, power, it implicitly suggests, remains with the Mafia. In Italy the appeal of the Mafioso lies in their strength compared to the weakness of the state.

Italian versions of Mafiosi are more varied than, and not as iconic, as their Hollywood counterparts. Their integration into everyday life makes them appear not only more ordinary but also makes their threat more sinister as there are fewer visible signifiers. James Mason playing the part of a Mafia boss in *Gente di Rispetto* exemplifies this. Their lack of iconic glamour may make them seem less stereotypical to international audiences, but they are still coded as Sicilian by their accent and a sprinkling of dialect as in *Lucky Luciano*. In *Mimi Metallurgico* one of the film's comic narratives is constructed on the pervasiveness of the Mafia and, although comic, its sinister capacity is in no way diminished. The ironically named *Il Mafioso* portrays a vulnerable ordinary person, played by Alberto Sordi, who is used by the Mafia on a killing mission and then expected to go back to his routine existence. This black comedy highlights the power of the Mafia against which, in the film world, the individual is powerless. Benigni's film *Johnny Stecchino* presupposes a familiarity with Mafiosi and other stereotypes, including the reputed obsession of Sicilian males with their mother. These it exploits for comic effect. An example of this is when the innocent Benigni arrives in Palermo and is told of the shameful notoriety of the city, the spectator expects to hear of the Mafia only to be repeatedly foiled by hearing of other reasons for the shame; the water shortage, the traffic and Etna. The bathos reminds audiences of the limitations of stereotyping and the fragility of our own knowledge; but the laughter acknowledges the pleasure of recognition as well as its dangers. The popularity of this stereotype indicates an audience appreciation of the spectacle of difference and manifest success.

The fact that the Mafioso in film is usually represented as male conflates this particular stereotype with those of patriarchal figures and the reality of the mafiosa, as attested to by Puglisi who cites examples as early as 1927, and Clare Longrigg, is

largely ignored. Roberta Torre's film *Angela*, whose protagonist is part of the Mafia organisation, is an exception; but having challenged stereotypes on one level the narrative then becomes weighted with stereotypes of performative Sicilian masculinity and sexual jealousy.

This concern with male power and sexuality links with another well circulated stereotype of the Sicilian man; that of the "gallo" or cockerel. Their behaviour and attitude is described in Italy as "gallismo" and more widely for global audiences merges with images of machismo and the "Latin lover". Fascism in Italy had fostered the existent cult of virility and productiveness so that when the term "Latin lover" emerged in the fifties it was within a culture attuned to visible notions of masculinity. The term "gallo" was given definition by the protagonist of Brancati's 1941 novel, *Don Giovanni in Sicilia*, which was then filmed in 1966 by Lattuada. Subsequent writings by this Sicilian novelist and critic, in particular *I piaceri del Gallismo* in 1946 along with the journalistic writings of others has ensured the term has been amply circulated. The defining characteristics of this expression of masculinity was, the desire to talk to other men about sexual conquests and the strong element of fantasising which accompanied these sexual encounters. For Brancati the posturing masculinity of his characters was also a metaphor for the empty posturing of fascism with its militarist aspirations. However, when the novels were transposed to film the ironic and political overtones were abandoned in the focus on appraising masculinity in a society that emphasised the performative role of the male. In the process they deconstructed the stereotype of male potency. The films of Brancati's novels emerged at a time when Italy, in modernising, was developing differing notions of masculinity and the term locates in Sicilians an exaggerated masculinity, which manifests itself sexually and in terms of patriarchal control. This is a concept that Camilleri still finds worth satirising in *La Stagione della Caccia*.

The films of Pietro Germi provide excellent examples of the stereotyping of Sicilian men and of the performative masculinity, which Gilmore attributes to Mediterranean males in general, emphasising the importance of the public manifestation of this masculinity. The public sphere in which masculinity is defined contrasts with the private and domestic sphere that is coded as feminine and this is illustrated in both *Divorzio all'Italian*a and *Sedotta e Abbandonata*. In both films, groups of men are seen gossiping together and discussing women while their wives and daughters are at home. As honour establishes respect in the public sphere, a man has to be able to protect his family whose weakest members, the women, need the most vigilance. This strength was further codified as sexual potency. This is shown in *Il Bell'Antonio* where, to salvage the family honour tainted by his son's impotence, Antonio's father dies trying to prove his own virility. *Il Bell'Antonio,* with a protagonist unable to fulfil these gender expectations, ironically explores these stereotypical assumptions, as does *Paolo Il Caldo.* Both films take these assumptions and manipulate them to reveal the tensions and fragility of these aspirations and serve as a commentary not simply on Sicilian mores but also on the changing nature of Italian society. It is convenient to locate these regressive attitudes in what is traditionally perceived as the more

retrograde south. It is also ironic to note that often in these films the women emerge as the stronger characters. In *Divorzio all'Italiana* Fefe, after much delay, is precipitated into action by his rival's wife and in *Sedotta e Abbandonata*, Agnese rejects the restrictive code to conform and accept marriage. Similarly, in *Mimi Metallurgico* the Sicilian women show strength but in the stereotypical desire for revenge and their restricted lives and attitudes are contrasted with the socially and politically emancipated Fiore from Turin.

For wider audiences the term "Latin lover" evoked associations with a more exotic and less restrained sexuality and served as a label for the sexual difference located in Mediterranean societies, perceived as less developed and therefore earthier in their passions. In *Mimi Metallurgico*, Mimi is summoned as "Latin lover" to the bed of one of his sexual partners who appears to be foreign. A perception of this more vigorous and expressive sexuality was fostered by Hollywood in its protagonists, for romantic narratives, and the star system it manipulated to enhance these personas. Although there were antecedents for the stereotype, such as Don Juan and Casanova, it was the persona of Valentino in the twenties, which reached mass audiences. Malossi describes the "Latin lover" as he leaps "from the screen and bursts onto the stage of Italian holiday culture" (24). He offered commodified desire and was linked to the notion of holiday romances gently satirised in *Un Americano a Roma* and celebrated in such films as *Roman Holiday*. Because of its perceived difference, the more primitive and spontaneous passion associated with Mediterranean males in general, was seen as exotic but also as threatening in its potential for excess. For Italians this excess was exhibited by Sicilian males; often as jealousy that could lead to violence as in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, but more frequently in film its effects were diffused by comic exaggeration and provided the stereotypes which peopled the Sicilian world of what Leonardo Sciascia in *La Sicilia nel Cinema* describes as "erotic comedy" (243). These link with those post-Unification notions of the picturesque, which could so easily be elided into the grotesque. The Sicilian "gallo" was a variant on perceived Mediterranean male sexuality but provided for Italians a convenient geographical location for anxieties pertaining to male/female relationships.

Film certainly deals with the stereotype of Sicilian hyper-masculinity and investigates its fragility as in *Mary per Sempre*, or its comic potential as in *Mimi Metallurgico*. The latter is a hectic pastiche of stereotypes in which the virile Mimi ends up with two partners and must seduce a third woman to redeem his honour. This stereotype reflects an almost generic cycle of development, which culminates in the comic and parodic and illustrates how audience reception, in light of social changes, modifies its construction. More recent films do not centre on the "gallo" stereotype and this reflects the changed perceptions of male and female roles. Interestingly, the Dolce and Gabbana film represents male and female as equally sensual. The stereotyping of women and of the "gallo" is linked, as the inherent conflict between the aggressive sexuality and protectiveness of the "gallo" contributed to the stereotyping of women into mother/madonnas or whores.

Having dealt with "galli" and Mafiosi leaves little space for dealing with female stereotypes. This is ironically appropriate as they are quite frequently hidden; Fefe in the opening sequences of *Divorzio all'Italiana* describes women as "sequestered and invisible". They are objects of fantasising desire, or seen simply as adjuncts to, or proof of, male activity. The iconographic aspects of stereotyping portray the women as sensual or as homely. Quite frequently they are dressed in black, as signifier of traditions of mourning, and of the regressive customs that deliberately suppress women's sexuality. It is, however, worth remembering that *Divorzio all'Italiana* ends with the bikini-clad replacement of the homely wife, and that Mimi's wife happily flaunts her baby, result of an extramarital relationship. In this the films offer another set of possibilities which problematise the stereotype. There is more differentiation on the basis of age in stereotypes of women. While the male characters remain relatively unchanging in their power, potency and virility, it is more likely that, the older the woman is, the less she is represented as sexually attractive. Examples of this can be seen in Fefe who falls in love with his young cousin, rejecting the advances of his older wife; and in the woman Mimi must seduce in order to re-establish his honour. The latter is deliberately filmed in such a way as to make her seem grotesquely fat. In these, although the stereotypes are rendered comic, and the male image is threatened by the narrative, there is a resonance of more entrenched views on differences between male and female sexuality. In more recent films, the representation of women is the one that reflects the greatest changes and other than accent there is little to regionally distinguish young women; but older women are still imbued with anxious maternalism as in the mothers in *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* and *La Scorta*. It would appear that an emphasis on sensual beauty, as exemplified by actresses such as Maria Grazia Cucinotta, has promoted an accepted sexuality, which was previously more evidenced in male roles.

Blatant stereotypes of men and women have effectively been toned down and Sicilian virility is now embodied in the athletic, bluff and kindly Commisario Montalbano, in *Montalbano* a popular television version of Camilleri's detective, who is played by a Milanese with an exaggerated accent. Women are represented in varying degrees of sultriness or harassment; pale reflections of the earlier whores and wives. Stereotypes, although they fix difference, are not fixed. Whilst the Hollywood stereotype of the Mafioso proves more enduring perhaps because, as Claire Monk suggests, in defining the continuing appeal of the gangster they are a "celebration of regressive ideologies" and present a "vehement opposition to the feminine spheres" where "male rituals and hierarchies and rivalries take precedence" (173). It also offers an aesthetic pleasure that is founded in nostalgia and which, in spite of being problematised by the text, as in *Goodfellas*, has retained a place in the collective imagination. It confirms the complexity of stereotypes and offers an example of a stereotype that exists almost exclusively in an aesthetic dimension.

In conclusion, film, in its use of Sicilian stereotypes, continues to utilise those that still have currency and which will facilitate narration and ensure audience appeal. Consequently, films associating Sicilians with criminality, lack of modernity, violent

passion and the picturesque, continue to appear. They reflect audience perceptions in accordance with press and broadcast information on Sicily. The presence of these stereotypes and the absence of alternatives suggest a need to reflect on these de-stabilising characteristics as well as confirming their attraction. Some, like the Hollywood Mafioso, satisfy an aesthetic need and survive the social contexts that have generated them retaining an existence beyond the texts in which they appear. These stereotypical demons do not simply de-stabilise, but complement and refine our notions of Paradise. They offer us a localised imperfection, which is safe in its containment as textual construct.

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