ETHNICITY, CLASS AND HUMOR: STEREOTYPICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF ITALIAN AMERICANS IN FILM

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the intersections between representations of ethnicity and class, focusing on the role humor plays in constructing ethnic and class identity on the big screen. The aim of the study is to show that humor can be used to subvert mainstream negative stereotypes, while still signaling acknowledgment and appreciation for past ingroup stereotypical representations. Object of the study are mafia films and, specifically for the analysis of the humor, mafia comedies featuring Italian Americans. Sociological and semantic studies of humor have been brought together and the overlapping between semantic scripts, ethnic stereotypes and sociological findings on ethnic jokes has been shown. This provided a theoretical framework to analyze humor as a manifestation of both class and ethnic stereotypes. The analysis of the two mafia comedies, *The Freshman* (1990) and *Analyze This* (1999), has confirmed the hypothesis that humor functions as a commentary on ethnic and class identity. Moreover, recent mafia comedies have been read as parodies of past mafia movies directed by Italian Americans. The analysis has emphasized how parodies exploit humor to signal continuation and change simultaneously. Like class and ethnic humor, parodies reiterate the previous discourse, signaling critical distance through humor. In conclusion, the paper has found explanations for the pervasive use of humor by ethnic and class minorities, by interpreting it as a tool to critically comment on the historical, sociological, political reasons behind mainstream stereotypes about the group. It is a means to appropriate and invert the discourse, thus turning it into the face of the initiator.

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Introduction

Black Australians have the ability to invoke stereotypes in order to laugh at themselves.
(Shoemaker, 1982: 32)

This project started four years ago with a research on Australian Aboriginal literature. That journey into anthropology, mythology, colonial history, literature and sociology of an old but forgotten people ignited an interest in ethnic and humor studies. Aboriginal dramas that tell of discrimination, exploitation, and cultural degradation paradoxically brought to light a persistent humorous attitude that conveys strength to the voice of this race. Humor was found to be an instrument to subversively use stereotypes and turn them in the face of their instigators. Exposures to media and representations of Jewish, Italian Americans, Latinos, homosexuals, and working-class people triggered the recognition of the pervasiveness of this subversive humor in the voices of subordinate groups.

These observations set the premises for the present paper on Italian American representations in films. The aim of the study is to investigate how humor functions in the process of ethnic and class identity construction and definition. Humor is shown to be a tool suitable for many purposes; it can reinforce and spread discrimination as well as subvert mainstream derogatory discourse. This second aspect constitutes the focus of this project that will use Italian American representations to understand the mechanisms at stake when class and ethnicity meet in humorous discourse. This study will point out the subversive function of parody and humor and their role in the assimilation and upward-mobility process.

The first chapter will discuss the cognitive and psychological nature of stereotypes and explain their role in humor. Ethnic humor is here claimed to ground in ethnic scripts that coincide with cognitive stereotypical constructs. The chapter will also point out the intersections between ethnic and class stereotyping and define the main working-class stereotypes. It will

conclude with a tentative definition of working-class humor, showing its reliance on stereotypical scripts about class.

The second chapter will introduce the stereotypes about Italian Americans by reviewing the history of their cinematic representations. The study will go back to the 30s to account for the origin of filmic Italian American gangsters and it will then document the birth of Italian American cinema dwelling specifically on the genre of mafia movies by Italian American filmmakers. The chapter will conclude with a review of modern mafia comedies. The third chapter will undertake the task of defining and illustrating the main stereotypical traits of filmic Italian Americans in the works by Coppola and Scorsese. It will read Italian American cinema as an exploration and criticism of class and assimilation issues through which Italian American filmmakers have attempted to appropriate and subvert mainstream stereotypes.

The last chapter will deal with humor in the cinematic representations of Italian Americans. It will focus on the ethnic scripts employed to create humorous mafiosi and it will show their overlapping with the mainstream stereotypes used to ethnically define pictures. Mafia comedies produced in the 90s will be read as spoofs of mafia films produced by Italian American directors. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the punchlines in the movie *Analyze This,* showing its parodic nature that is claimed to be a device for stereotype subversion. Parody is shown to be a strategic narrative device that Italian American cinema could exploit to rejuvenate Italian Americans on screen and free them from gangsterism.

1. Stereotyping and Humor

This chapter will set the theoretical framework for the analysis developed in the present thesis. First, the literature on stereotypes will be presented, in order to illustrate how ethnic and class identities are constructed. Attention will be drawn here to the multifunctional nature of stereotypes that can serve both discrimination and identity assertion. The interpretative key for this investigation is indeed the process of inversion that stereotypes are subject to. Stereotypes will then be discussed in relation to ethnicity and class, showing the intersections between the two.

The second part of the chapter will focus on humor. The literature on ethnic humor will be reviewed, bringing together linguistic and sociological theories. The study will then propose an approach to investigate humor about class, following the models developed in ethnic humor theories. For this purpose, the chapter will deal specifically with the working-class stereotypes that underlie the stereotypical representations of ethnic groups in the attempt to determine the scripts on which working-class humor relies. In the last section, these scripts will be tested, by analyzing the humor in the American sitcom *Roseanne.* The illustration of working-class humor will be instrumental to show that most subordinate groups are subject to the same humorous discourse and tend to use humor for similar purposes and in similar ways.

1.1 Stereotypes and the Process of Stereotyping

In defining stereotypes, this study will draw from cognitive and sociological approaches, in order to illustrate both the process by which stereotypes are constructed and their impact on society. The first approach shows that stereotypes are cognitive structures that define our expectations. The second approach analyzes stereotypes' contribution to discrimination and prejudice.

According to cognitive psychology, a stereotype can be defined as "a cognitive structure containing the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about some human social group" (Mackie & Hamilton, 1993: 42). Therefore, stereotypes make world processing easier, so that people can assign others to a defined category and thereby come to terms with the infinite variety of the world. It is evident that such structures fulfill an important role in the economy of an individual's information processing system, since, as Grauman & Wintermatel state, "The psychological economy of the variant over the invariable, of the lasting over the fleeting, is evident: If someone (or something) is typed, we 'know' who or what we have to deal with and how to behave whenever in the future we meet a typical 'instance' of a category" (1989: 186).

Sociological studies, on the other hand, draw attention to the socially shared nature of stereotypes that makes them "much more pernicious, because they affect entire groups of people in a common way" (Stangor & Schaller, 1996: 4). Stroebe & Insko point out that a more sociological approach is needed to understand the functions stereotype serve in "the creation and maintenance of group ideologies explaining or justifying a variety of social actions against the outgroup" (1989: 5). Indeed society utilizes stereotypes as a means to categorize the 'other' (Goffman, 1963: 2) and thus establishes the boundaries between ingroup and outgroup. Through stereotyping, a group preserves its identity and creates "positively valued differentiations" (Stroebe & Insko, 1989: 5) from other negatively categorized groups.

1.2 Ethnicity and Class in the Process of Stereotyping

The importance of taking into consideration both cognitive and sociological definitions of stereotypes is best acknowledged when trying to understand the mechanisms underlying interethnic relationships in a multiethnic society. Following the cognitive interpretation of stereotypes, the cohabitation of numerous ethnic groups calls for a means of typing that allows to

categorize individuals on the basis of few traits. Through stereotyping, we can come to terms with the plethora of cultural norms, traditions and customs we are faced with on a daily basis. Yet, as sociological studies underscore, stereotypes are socially shared and used by a group to set up boundaries within a society on an ideological basis. The socially shared nature of stereotypes thus impacts on interethnic relationships and causes prejudice and discrimination.

Stereotypes distinguish between 'we' and 'they' (Rose, 1964) and it is the power differential between the two groups that determines who is going to dictate which group constitutes the norm and which the deviation (Frezza, 1995: 162). In a multiethnic society, the predominant group exploits ethnic stereotypes to discriminate and marginalize ethnic and social minorities by defining them as deviant. For this reason, working-class scholar Zandy emphasizes that the study of race and ethnicity "is not complete if class is excluded" (1991: 158). Jensen, on the other hand, notices that working-class cultures "tend to be more embedded in ethnic (non-Anglo) traditions" (2002: 7) because mainstream culture is supposed to be white and middle class. Those who do not belong to the predominant majority have to be marked as 'other,' both ethnically and socially. "Authentic ethnicity" is thus confined to working-class status,[1] in the attempt to underline the separation between the dominant white society that detains the power and the means of production and the ethnic minority that depends on them.

[1] As Boscia-Mulé argues, scholarly discourse supports this false encoding of ethnicity by viewing "low-class immigrant culture" as "the authentic ethnic model to which the ethnicity of later generations, and upper-class ethnic Americans, is to be compared" (1999: 94). Di Leonardo (1984) also criticizes much of the literature on ethnicity because, by defining ethnicity as a normative behavior rooted in family traditions, it fails to take into consideration matters of age, class, and gender. Ethnicity becomes encoded in stereotypical and, hence, fixed, unreal and false representations that do not change with time. Scholarly discourse thus also views ethnicity as static, impeding its entrance into mainstream society. Frezza (1995: 38) emphasizes that ethnicity is instead continuously constructed and reconstructed. Important in this context is the concept of invention of ethnicity. See Boscia-Mulè (1999: 23) for a discussion of the theory.

1.3 Stereotypes: Appropriation and Inversion

The literature on ethnicity emphasizes that ethnic identities are constantly negotiated between the groups involved (Boscia-Mulè, 1999; Frezza, 1995). Given the power differential existing between the two, however, the dominant group tends to influence the self-representation of the minority group. Allen argues, for instance, that ethnophaulisms[2] attack a whole ethnic group so persistently to cause a distorted self-perception (1983: 9). Cognitive psychology claims that behavioral expectations do not only determine attitudes towards members of a group, but also the behavior of the members themselves (Stangor & Mark, 1996: 13). Given the constraints of the norm-based expectations, the members of a group tend to unconsciously avoid inconsistent behaviors thus reinforcing the current stereotypes (14). Gambino also observes that "much of the group's understanding of itself bows to the preponderant myth held by the dominant larger society" (1997: 274).

Yet, as the relationship changes in society, ethnic slurs and ethnic stereotypes are subject to pragmatic or semantic modification. Allen notices that ethnic slurs over time are subject to "inversion" (1983: 7). In other words, the ethnophaulisms and stereotypes once used to derogate an ethnic group are given "a positive, warmly humorous meaning within the group that was the original target of the slur" (7).[3] The passage from internalization of the stereotypes to their inversion occurs through a gradual appropriation by the minority of mainstream stereotypes. This

[2] Ethnophaulisms are the verbal pictures of negative stereotype; they are the slurs used to refer to outgroups. The term was coined by Roback (1944) to refer to ethnic slurs; from the Greek ethnic, indicating a national group, and phaulism, meaning 'to disparage' (251). As a matter of fact, linguistic forms are certainly the most direct and effective way to establish boundaries and, thus, to differentiate among groups. As Allen stresses, "vocabulary of ethnic abuse is a response to social diversity" (1983: 1). Ethnic labels help justify discrimination by ridiculing an ethnic group; this strategy facilitates the effort of keeping the alien group down, of controlling its behavior in order to avoid social awareness. Allen claims that derogatory labeling is a strategy to manipulate reality and achieve social control according to the belief that "if one can name or attach a label to an object, in this case, an ethnic individual or groups, then one can wield power over it by simply calling its name" (10).

[3] This process of appropriation can be observed in advertising, where over time former negative stereotypes acquire a "positive, warmly humorous" connotation. Di Leonardo refers to this process as the "commoditization of ethnic identity" (1984: 180) that associates certain ethnic groups to certain commodities to promote sales. In this process, stereotypes are completely inverted so that the once improper and despised foreign ways "now become idealized images harnessed to products" (180).

process is possible thanks to the neutrality of the stereotypical constructs emphasized in cognitive psychology. Stereotypes relate to the salient cultural, physical and behavioral characteristics that define an ethnic group as homogenous.[4] They thus partially reflect real attitudes of the stereotyped group. Once the minority gains more power and visibility, it can reinforce its identity by exploiting mainstream stereotypes to proudly mark its difference from the dominant group.

1.4 Ethnic Humor

Ethnic humor has often been claimed to be one of the strategies used for ethnic stereotyping. Allen (1990) speaks, for instance, of a tendency to mimicry, caricature and ridicule against the immigrant. This can involve ridiculing the behavior, appearance, and the language of an ethnic group, as well as its accent and errors in speaking the dominant language. Boskin & Dorinson also observe that "people have undoubtedly always laughed at others who seemed 'distinct', to reassure themselves and to blunt the threats implicit in differences" (1998: 205). Ethnic humor thus is often used to set the boundary between groups, by relying on stereotypes.

Ethnic jokes are indeed based on over-generalizations and prototypicality; they imply "the pinning of an undesirable quality on a particular ethnic group in a comic way or to a ludicrous extent" (Davies, 1990: 4).[5] They thus treat an individual "solely and entirely [as an instance of] "the targeted ethnic group" (Raskin, 1985: 207). The reliance of ethnic humor on stereotypes seems hence obvious, yet it is still largely debated among humor scholars. In the next sections,

[4] In his work on ethnophaulisms, Allen identifies the various thematic categories from which ethnic slurs and thus stereotypes derive: physical traits attributed to the immigrants, character differences, generalization of common proper names among the ethnic group, dietary labels and mispronunciation or deformation of the group name (1983: 80). A stereotypical trait is derived from every category so that the stereotype of an ethnic group could be viewed as the sum of the various stereotypical traits attributed to it.

[5] Davies defines ethnic group as "a people with a common cultural tradition, a real or imagined common descent, and a distinctive identity" (1990: 2). This implies that territorial and political changes do not affect the existence of a separate ethnic group. Thus, dispersed groups of immigrants still constitute an ethnic group, although they may have never been to their home country, they might not even know the language and be linked to the culture via distant ancestors. Yet, their ethnicity is not less real to them despite the differences with "territorially based nations and subnations" (2).

the literature on ethnic humor will be reviewed, firstly focusing on its forms and structures and secondly on its functions, specifically discussing its relation to stereotyping.

1.4.1 Scripts and Ethnic Humor

Given its universality and visibility, ethnic humor has been the object of numerous studies in all fields of research: psychology (Juni & Katz, 1996; 2001; Dorinson, 1981; Ziv, 1984), sociology (Davies, 1990; La Fave et.al., 1974, 1976), intercultural and linguistic studies (Hay & Holmes, 1997; Raskin, 1985). Of necessity, however, this study will be constrained to the review of the works by Raskin (1985) and Davies (1990). The first offers a semantic analysis of humor – within which he includes ethnic humor as well - and the second offers a comprehensive sociological investigation of the uses and contents of ethnic humor around the world.

In his presentation of the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH),[6] Raskin defines ethnic humor as "another special category of humor [...] based on a number of specific scripts and oppositions which have to be internalized by the speakers and hearers of ethnic jokes" (1985: 180). Script is defined as "a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it. The script is a cognitive structure internalized by the native speaker and it represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world" (81). The foregoing definition clearly echoes the definition of stereotypes in cognitive psychology. Attardo indeed points out that scripts go beyond lexical information and that they are "stereotypical" and "prototypical" (2003: 12). They store encyclopedic[7] information that is "conventional, fictional,

[6] This theory of humor provides "the necessary and sufficient conditions that a text must meet for the text to be funny" (Attardo, 1994: 198). The main hypothesis is that: "A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the [following] conditions are satisfied: (i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts (ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposing (Raskin, 1985: 99). See Attardo for a bibliography on the concept of scripts (1994: 199) and a detailed illustration of the SSTV (196-214).

[7] Raskin (1985) distinguishes between semantic scripts and encyclopedic scripts that contain information about the world and not the lexicon. It seems that the difference between semantic and encyclopedic scripts is of a quantitative nature, relating to the degree of closeness of association of the scripts. See Attardo for a more detailed treatment of the issue (1994: 200-202).

and mythological" and are thus "at the best very crude approximations of reality" (Raskin, 1985: 180). Ethnic scripts differentiate between a supposedly 'normal group' that represents the majority and a minority that behaves differently. Raskin's illustration of ethnic humor seems to confirm its reliance on stereotypes that are semantically stored in encyclopedic scripts.

Raskin identifies three most popular ethnic scripts: dumbness (185-189)[8], stinginess (189-191), and cunningness or craftiness (191-194). They are claimed to be universal because they are found in virtually any language and any country. In every society there is an ethnic group labeled stupid, or canny (186) about which ethnic jokes circulate. These can be quite similar across languages and countries with the sole minor substitution of the target group with another for which the same ethnic script holds (206). This means that an ethnic joke to be truly ethnic does not necessarily have to be cultural specific, i.e. referring to just one ethnic group, but it must root on an ethnic script (207). The joke will succeed only if referred to some ethnic group associated with the particular script used. Stupidity jokes, for instance, are similar in any language, but while in the United States the target position is occupied by the Poles, in France it is occupied by the Belgians (Attardo, 2002: 15).[9] In addition to the three main scripts, Raskin introduces more specific scripts (1985: 194) that tend to be always associated with one particular ethnic group, such as the script of efficiency and beer-loving for the Germans (197), the oversexed minority script for many Latino cultures (156, 194-195)[10], or of cold politeness for the British (197). It stands out that ethnic scripts simply codify semantically the stereotypes circulating about a certain group.

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[8] In this study this script will be referred to interchangeably with dumbness and stupidity that is the term used in Davies (1990).

[9] See Davies for a list of the various targets of stupidity jokes in different countries (1990: 43). Moreover, such ethnic jokes set the boundaries not only between different nationalities, but also between different groups within a country, such as the stupid Italian carabinieri in Italy, the Ostfriesen in Germany, etc. It should be noted that the substitution of targets, however, is also dependent on the situation depicted in the ethnic joke that often is also ethnically specified. See Attardo for a discussion of the importance of "situation" for jokes explained in the General Theory of Verbal Humor that identifies 6 Knowledge Resources according to which jokes are constructed, "situation" being one of them (1994: 222-229).

[10] This is often associated with the dumbness script (Raskin, 1985: 194-195); indeed, it will be shown that it is often referred to Italian Americans as well.

The most comprehensive study of ethnic humor is certainly Davies's survey of *Ethnic Humor around the World* that sets out to document "the origins and reasons for the popularity of specific ethnic scripts" (1990: 6). His approach to ethnic jokes is comparative; he analyzes the butts of the jokes in relation to their position in society and to that of the joke teller, trying to find sociological explanations for their roles in the jokes (4). He shows that most jokes are based on pair of qualities like dumbness vs. canniness (4), with ethnic groups lined on the two opposite sides of the pair, such as Poles vs. Jews in the stupid/canny pair.[11] His survey confirms the universality of these scripts claimed by Raskin (1985), by identifying in every culture which ethnic group is labeled stupid or canny. Yet, some ethnic groups are associated with one feature across different cultures such as the canny Jews or the stingy Scotsman (102). The main scripts identified by Davies (1990) in his sociological survey corresponds to those of Raskin (1985).

1.4.2 Main Ethnic Scripts

Raskin observes that "the script of DUMBNESS is probably the most widely used specific ethnic script" (1985: 185) and Davies confirms that stupidity jokes are "far more widespread, more numerous, and more durable than any other" (1990: 10). In the dumbness script, "the targeted group which is depicted as dumb, unreasonable, irrational, irregular" (Raskin, 1985: 186) contrasts with the majority that is considered rational, non-dumb and reasonable.[12] The opposition reflects thus the "typical good/bad kind of oppositeness" (186). Jokes about stupidity are often pinned down on ethnic groups that are very similar to us, on neighbors or citizens of the

[11] This finding could be explained by the binary nature of ethnic scripts that Raskin underscores (1985: 190).

[12] In relation to the ethnic script of dumbness, Raskin affirms that "What is obvious to 'us' and therefore to everybody is not obvious to 'them,' and the denigrating judgment follows from that immediately" (1985: 185). Yet, there are different views on the disparaging and discriminating function of ethnic humor, as it will be discussed later. The script of dumbness stands in opposition to the one of cunningness. The latter assumes that a certain group does something unusual to achieve a certain purpose. Cunningness implies certain cleverness in the minority group that is able to reach its goals in smart and new ways; hence it "may command some reluctant admiration." However, the new strategies employed by the ethnic group are often represented as immoral, unethical or unlawful. For this reason, the script of cunningness is "closely associated with the script of deception" (191).

same country or about the most well assimilated immigrants (Davies, 1990: 42). They are usually identified as possessing "a strong sense of place, tradition, customs, relationships and even methods of work" (45), which impedes their economic development. The butts of jokes are thus in a marginal position within a dominant culture and it is the asymmetry of the relationship that determines the humor (43). The dumbness script seems thus to be more intertwined with class issues than any other script.[13] As a matter of fact, the labeling of an ethnic group as dumb has more to do with its position in society than with specific ethnic traits; indeed, it will be shown that the working class is also associated with this script.

Another script that Raskin discusses at length in relation to dumbness is language distortion (1985: 181-185); Davies (1990) also refers to this phenomenon as a strategy to verbalize the ethnic script of stupidity. This script is easily evoked by a mispronounced, misused or misplaced word, sound or utterance; the opposition is once more between the 'normal' way of speaking of the majority and the talk of the ethnic group (Raskin, 1985: 181).[14] A stupidity joke can often be triggered by the use of a distinctive speech or accent to indirectly signal a certain ethnicity (Davies, 1990: 56). The language distortion script relates to the strategies of stereotyping that Allen (1983) stressed of ridiculing and mimicry; the majority often teases the minority group for its strong foreign accent or it tends to mime it in order to elicit laughter.[15]

This is particularly true in relation to immigrants in the United States, whose position "has been in many ways the most asymmetrical one of all" (Davies, 1990: 56). For the sake of assimilation, immigrants had to speak English and, though perfectly competent in their own

[13] The script of cowardice identified by Davies is, for instance, a far less generalizable script because it is mostly rooted in specific historical events that pertain to one single group (1990: 170-233). Cowardice and militarism are less determined by a group's social status and power; they rather depend on historical events, defeats and victories.

[14] As for any ethnic script, the features ascribed to the ethnic group are both fictional and realistic; in the same way, language distortion scripts are sometimes "based on linguistic fact and do take into account the real phonological and phonetic differences between the two languages in question. Many others, however, are fictitious and represent mythical stereotypes which exist in the minds of the monolingual speakers of one language about some other language" (Raskin, 1985: 181).

[15] Good imitators will also "imitate the typical intonation and body language" (Raskin, 1985: 182).

language, they came through as 'dumb' in English. Immigrants could not retaliate back with jokes about Americans because Americans were their point of reference (57). Over the years, a strong link has emerged between stupidity and broken English (58). For these reasons, in this study the ethnic script of language distortion is considered as a 'subscript' of dumbness. Raskin himself notes that "language distortion is a secondary opposition, subservient to the more popular binary scripts used in ethnic jokes" (1985: 185).

1.4.3 Functions of Ethnic Humor: Disparagement and Ethnic Assertion

Aggressiveness of Ethnic Humor

It has often been claimed that ethnic jokes are signals of ethnic conflict. Raskin, for instance, writes that "most of ethnic humor is functionally deprecatory, or disparaging" (1985: 180). The idea that humor possesses a negative and aggressive element has had many advocates in humor theory, from Plato to Hobbes. The latter introduced the superiority theory of humor[16] according to which we laugh at the disadvantages, lack of luck, and stupidity of others because it makes us feel superior (Attardo, 1994: 49-50). This theory has been amply discussed, researched and experimented in the literature on humor.[17] La Fave et.al. (1974), for instance, conducted an experiment in the 70s to test Hobbes' s superiority theory and found that groups judge as funnier those jokes that depict the ingroup as victorious at the expenses of the outgroup (191). The issue is, however, still amply debated. This study holds the view that ethnic humor can be aggressive and disparaging, but this is not a necessary condition. Ethnic humor is based in stereotypical constructs and, like them, it can serve different functions such as discriminating and disparaging, but also facilitating contact, reinforcing group solidarity and challenging prejudice.

[16] This theory of humor is often referred to as either the "hostility' or "superiority" theory of humor.
[17] See Attardo (1994: 47-48) for a thorough bibliographical reference.

Davies (1990) claims that scripts are erroneously believed to coincide with stereotypes leading to the association of the latter with ethnic humor. He claims, instead, that ethnic scripts are not necessarily negative and discriminating while stereotypes are. As a sociologist, Davies considers stereotypes as a social stigma.[18] As already noted, however, this study considers stereotypes as cognitive constructs that can be turned into a social stigma by the way they are used, but do not necessarily imply any prejudice in themselves. From a cognitive perspective, thus stereotypes and scripts do coincide. The latter could be regarded as the semantic codification of the cognitive stereotypical constructs we use to make order in the infinite information and diversity we encounter.

On the other hand, this study agrees with Davies's argument that a person who enjoys ethnic humor does not necessarily subscribe to the stereotype, where subscription is meant as the process of using stereotypes to discriminate. Enjoyment of ethnic humor can have various motivations and does not always imply aggressive feelings towards the target.[19] However, as previously noted, the ethnic scripts, and thus the stereotypes they relate to, must be internalized. They must be part of the encyclopedic knowledge of the interactants, since the enjoyment of a joke requires an understanding of the scripts, which incongruity builds upon.[20]

Ethnic Humor in the Assimilation Process

In his investigation of ethnic humor, Davies observes that it "fluctuates with the importance of ethnicity as a social category at any given time" (1990: 3). In the first contact phases of two

[18] He does not specifically define stereotypes or address the issue; but he assumes them to be discriminating social constructs.
[19] Rose also notices that "on hearing a joke or story about his group or another, the listener is often unsure whether the teller accepts or rejects the stereotypical characters and characteristics described" (1964: 103). This stresses the fact that both options are possible: one can enjoy an ethnic joke not because of its aggressive meaning, but because of the incongruities it creates between scripts shared by the speaker and the listener.
[20] Chiaro (1992) had already convincingly argued that the enjoyment of humor presupposes a shared knowledge of the culture it is embedded in. Relying on the SSTH, her claim could be further specified in that the shared knowledge required for the enjoyment of humor should encompass scripts as well.

ethnicities, for instance, ethnic humor is highly visible and has mostly a negative connotation because of the centrality of ethnic conflict. Then, it usually levels off, following "amalgamation" (Marcuson, 1990: 12) and the immigrant is more favorably represented to facilitate the process of assimilation. Ethnic humor then re-emerges in periods of ethnic revival that cyclically take place in a multiethnic society. In this case, humor is usually employed by the targeted ethnic group, to assert its identity or challenge mainstream discourse. This evolution echoes the foregoing process highlighted in reference to stereotypes. Indeed ethnic humor seems to go through the same stages. First, a discriminating phase can be noticed, when the humor is used by the dominant group at the expenses of the minority. This disparaging and aggressive humor is then often transformed into a self-disparaging humor that internalizes the prejudices of the dominant group. To this regard, Boskin & Dorinson speak of a "humor of the oppressed" that is "inwardly masochistic, indeed tragic, externally aggressive, even acrimonious" (1998: 214). Finally, the disparaging quality of the ethnic humor is inverted into an assertive manifestation of ethnicity that is particularly visible in periods of ethnic revival.[21]

There is ample evidence in the literature on ethnic humor of this process of inversion by which ethnic groups come to contribute to the development of ethnic jokes at their own expenses. Jews, for instance, "have played a very active role in constructing distinctively Jewish jokes that have an individual zest to them, and which have an appeal far beyond the boundaries of the Jewish community" (Davies, 1990: 116).[22] This attitude has been interpreted as a strategy to cope with "a harsh reality by making it temporarily appear less threatening in face of hostility

[21] Inversion is facilitated in the case of ethnic humor by its ambiguous nature (Attardo, 1994; Raskin, 1985). As Davies (1990) sustains, jokes are intrinsically subject to alternative interpretations and construct a different reality. Therefore, their contribution to stereotypes cannot be proven and assessed. La Fave & Mannell (1976) also discuss the relative nature of jokes and claim that if they are indeed culturally relative, we cannot be confident as to what is perceived amusing, thus we cannot make any claim regarding the aim of the humor. All these characteristics make of ethnic humor a perfect tool to both support and subvert prejudiced beliefs. The process of internalization, appropriation and inversion is here obviously simplified; different factors influence the process which is not so automatic. However, the interesting notion for this study is the existence of such a pattern.

[22] See Raskin (1985: 209-221) for a more detailed treatment of Jewish humor.

and division" (121-122). Juni & Katz suggest that ethnic humor at one's own group expenses could be regarded as a "disarming tactical maneuver" (2001: 2); by poking fun at one's own group, an individual steals the weapons for ridiculing from the hands of the dominant other.[23] The aggression and hatred against immigrant ethnic groups can also be dampened by the comic image that ethnic jokes spread about them (Davies, 1990: 124). Moreover, when an ethnic group tells a joke about its own kind, it is usually expressed differently or reformulated. Raskin observes that "when an ethnic script is used by the targeted group themselves, it becomes absurd, unreal and exaggerated" (1985: 212). This exaggeration and over-the-top teasing signals that the joke has no relation to reality and the different zest that the ethnic group introduces in self-directed jokes thus inverts their negative connotation.

Beyond dampening and disarming, ethnic humor can also reinforce group identity (Rose, 1964: 104). Davies observes that ethnic groups use outside jokes about them and exploit their ambiguity in order to assert "their distinctive identity, albeit within a framework not of their own choosing" (Davies, 1990: 311). Leveen argues that "ethnic speakers celebrate identity by telling jokes about their own ethnic group" (1996: 2).

There is scholarly agreement on this function of ethnic humor and some studies have documented the uses of humor within subordinate ethnic groups, confirming its solidarity reinforcing quality. In their study on the functions and uses of ethnic humor among Maori in New Zealand, for instance, Hay and Holmes (1997) observe that ethnic humor often aims at reinforcing solidarity within the group. They highlight three strategies in which this function is

[23] In the movie *8 Mile* (2002, by Curtis Hanson), the ending is exemplary in this sense. The whole plot is based on the rap battles and the attempts by the white Eminem to enter the black world of rappers. The battles are won by the person who is able to better denigrate the other; the whole rap is a form of disparaging humor and sarcasm. In the last scene, the young white rapper is competing for the title and he has to start the battle. He represents the minority in the film and knows well the discourse the other can use to annihilate him; he thus decides to make fun of himself instead of attacking the other. He confesses all his weaknesses and leaves the adversary with no arguments to build up a 45 second mocking rap. Eminem uses self-disparaging humor as a means to invert the roles of dominant and subordinate that in the world of rap sees Black Americans in the dominant position.

performed:[24] 1. In a joking relationship, teasing signals shared background and culture; 2. It can highlight similarities and reinforce ingroup solidarity by capitalizing on shared experience; 3. It sets the boundaries to the others, thus indirectly stressing the union within the group (132). These forms of humor are obviously more likely to be used by marginalized and subordinate groups rather than dominant groups (142). This constitutes a partial explanation for the widespread use of humor in ethnic self-representations, be they comic or dramatic.

Another interesting function that ethnic humor can serve is directly related to its grounding in the asymmetry of power between groups, i.e. in class differences. Boskin & Dorinson argue that the appropriation of "the humor of ridicule may serve to support the ladder for upward social mobility" (1998: 206). By challenging mainstream ethnic humor and hence stereotypes, the subordinate group asserts its identity and demands social recognition, which is inevitably tied to upward mobility.

1.5 Humor and Class

While ethnic humor has received sustained treatment in the literature, the relation between humor and class has long been neglected. The purpose of this study is to show how intertwined ethnic and class humor are and to highlight the common strategies and mechanisms involved in the two phenomena. As Davies (1990) points out, ethnic jokes are rooted in the relative social position of the butt and the joke teller; they reflect power structures, opposing moral values and social boundaries. Boskin & Dorinson also emphasize the role of class in relation to ethnic humor that they define as "a function of social class feelings of superiority" (1998: 205) nurtured

[24] La Fave & Mannell (1976) list nine reasons for the possible enjoyment of ethnic humor at one's own group's expenses. These generally confirm Hay & Holmes's observations (1997) about solidarity reinforcement and Juni & Katz's illustration (2001) of ethnic humor as a self-defense device.

by the WASP majority towards the immigrants. Exploring ethnic humor, thus, inevitably leads to discuss issues of class and vice versa.

Being ambiguous in nature, humor can best show the ambivalence of the stereotype and turn the negative into the positive or vice versa. For this reason, humor is often found to be a strategy of self-assertion for subordinate groups. Indeed Smith (2004) considers humor as a typical form of communication among the lower classes. Zandy also views humor, wit and language play as common features in working-class communication that is often used to mouth back at the dominant group (1991: 158). Like ethnic humor, humor about class can thus be both disparaging and self-assertive.

1.6 Working-Class Humor

Working-class humor is grounded in stereotypical traits about the working class. As for ethnic humor, working-class humor can both disparage and validate its target. This study is interested in its uses for validating working-class culture and reinforcing solidarity. As previously shown, ethnic humor is rooted in ethnic scripts, in other words in stereotypes we construct about different ethnicities. The reliance on scripts is general to all forms of humor, hence to identify jokes about class, it is necessary to identify those 'class scripts' they are based upon.

The literature on this matter is marginal; however, much of what Davies (1990) and Raskin (1985) have argued in relation to ethnic humor seems to be also applicable to class humor. In media, for instance, we find negative representations of the working class such as the stupid male, the unruly woman and the so-called dysfunctional family. Working-class stupidity is often represented as originating from ignorance that is signaled by a non-standard and 'colorful' way of speaking. Clearly, scripts such as dumbness and the related language distortion script prove valid for the working class as well. Indeed language distortion and lack of cleverness are pinned

down on disadvantaged groups who do not have much education and hence belong to the lower classes. As already noticed, the dumbness script seems to originate in class differences and to be subsequently exported onto immigrant disadvantaged groups. Beyond being ethnic scripts, dumbness and language distortion also function as working-class scripts within working-class humor.

1.6.1 Working-class Scripts

In order to argue that a text displays working-class humor, it is necessary to identify more specific scripts that are associated with this class, beyond the quite universal dumbness and language distortion ones. It has been shown that Raskin lists as more specific ethnic scripts those stereotypical traits that have come to be inevitably linked to a certain ethnic group. There being no data available on working-class scripts, the only way to determine them is to locate the main stereotypes circulating on the working class and verify their exploitation as a source of humor in a working-class text.

Of necessity, this study cannot delve into myriads of representations of class to determine which are the stereotypes associated with it. Yet, a way to overcome such a technical hurdle is to look at how the working-class defines itself, i.e. finding a list of working-class traits that are recognized as salient and representative within the group itself. As a matter of fact, the review on stereotype formation has shown that stereotypes stem from the generalization of observed behaviors, attitudes and values that are salient to the group identity. Stereotypes, it has been argued, can be used not only to discriminate, but also to assert one's identity. Values that are defined as typical of the working class by the ingroup thus coincide with the negative stereotypes the outgroup holds about it. The difference lies in the perspective, uses, positive or negative connotation of such overgeneralization, but not in their content.

Smith (2004) offers such a list on the Bottom Dog Press website.[25] Together with his students, Smith has conducted a survey on working-class values and they have come up with 5 macro-areas: a.) communication b.) family c.) community d.) work ethic e.) education. In the following brief overview of the working-class values identified by Smith, attention will be drawn to their potentially negative connotation, in order to confirm their overlapping with outgroup negative stereotypes.

a.) Communication is affirmed to be direct to the point and functional, in other words it does not dwell on individual reflections or self-analysis. Christopher & Whitson observe that working-class people "do not speak standard English nor conduct conversations along intellectually analytic lines" (1999: 73). Working-class communicative styles are also connected to the idea that working-class people are rich in common sense. This quality is often contrasted with the upper classes that, despite their education, are often unable to understand the most trivial matters because they allegedly look for a too complex explanation. Working-class communication is also supposed to be sincere according to the motto "speak the truth, yet keep it in the family." In exogenous negative representations, this working-class value can feed into the dumbness and the language distortion scripts. The dumbness script relies on the idea that the group is naïve and lacks education, as well as on the inability to speak the standard language and to use refined forms of expression. It thus relies on the same features highlighted here, albeit marking them negatively.

b.) Family is supportive; working-class people stick together at any time and they help each other out in any situation (Jensen, 2002; Zandy, 1991; Lauter, forthcoming). The working-class family

[25] As published on the website: "Bottom Dog Press, Inc. is a nonprofit literary and educational organization dedicated to publishing the best writing and art from the Midwest. [...] We believe in a sense of place and person, in writing that reveals through its directness an essential human story. We also support the history and development of Working Class Literature and work to provide outlets for that writing and information on that vital art."

is also physically very close; kids are supposed to "stay close to home" because personal contact is a preferred form of communication (Smith, 2004). The working-class family is often patriarchal, although women play a significant role in supporting and bonding the family.[26] This value has given rise to representations of the working class as ruled by machismo and authoritarian principles. The working-class family is represented as a constraining structure that impedes individual achievement and imposes rigid and old-fashioned gender roles.[27] A script for patriarchality/machismo[28] could thus be hypothesized.

c. Community is the third main value of working-class culture. It implies "mutual respect and cooperation." Community relationships are ruled on a "democratic and egalitarian" basis which dictates fair treatment and a sort of protective attitude for the "little guy" (Jensen, 2002: 7-8). Within the community there is much arguing and therefore denial and anger that arise from the difficulty to see multiple perspectives. The community value can be transformed into a negative stereotype by associating the neighborhood with gangs, crime and improper behavior. Moreover, the arguing among its members can be perceived from the outside as a sign of violent nature. This value could thus activate scripts like violent minority or crime-prone minority.[29]

d. Work ethic is essential to working-class culture (Zandy, 1991; Lauter, forthcoming). Work is seen as the fabric of life because it provides the means for the family. A decent working-class person is understood to work hard and follow through in his duties; the work ethic requires a

[26] This is probably due to the fact that traditionally it is the man in the house who provides the means of sustainment for the family, while the woman stays at home to take care of the children and of the man's needs. However, this gender role issue needs further study into the shifting of values over time and the changed position of women in society.

[27] According to Lauter, this image of the suffocating and detrimental working-class family derives from a concrete "anxiety having to do with the differences between core working-class values –solidarity, care for craft, a certain social conservatism – and those of the dominant capitalist culture" that roots on individualism (forthcoming: 12).

[28] The existence of these scripts is only hypothesized; they will thus be graphically underlined to differentiate them from those that have been documented in the literature. This study proposes a way to address the issue of working-class humor and attempts to identify the scripts underlying them. However, more research in the matter is needed to come to a thorough definition of working-class humor.

[29] The working-class male's depiction as violent and masculinist could be synthesized in a script such as animalistic nature which would apply to many ethnic minorities too; it would then connect to the oversexed minority script Raskin underlines in reference to Latinos.

functional and practical attitude of the sort: 'get things done, have a good job and respect the tools that serve for your job.' This practical view of work as a means to sustain one's family can be negatively depicted as a lack of ambition on the part of the working-class person. Manual labor can also be used to represent a working-class person as dirty, uneducated, unskilled and incapable to move up. This value could be associated with many scripts such as uncleanliness, laziness, and lack of ambition.

e. Education. Finally, the working class values education. The attitude to this regard is conflictual. Basic education is valued and appreciated; higher education is encouraged because it represents a means to achieve a better life and freedom of choice. On the other hand, too much education causes skepticism because of the fear that the education gap between children and parents will negatively affect the family and the community.[30] This value can be transformed into negative stereotypes that view working-class people as lacking ambition, being ignorant and lazy. It could thus be associated to the same scripts highlighted above and in particular to the language distortion one.

From this brief overview, it seems that working-class scripts heavily overlap with ethnic ones; dumbness and language distortion appear to be the most common scripts. From the foregoing list of values, it can be hypothesized that a working-class text will present scripts such as patriarchality/machismo, laziness, violent minority, uncleanliness and lack of ambition and that it will use them for humorous purposes.

[30] A working-class person who acquires an education is skeptically regarded whenever he/she tries to raise himself/herself above the others. The common reaction in such circumstances is to warn the person not to forget where he/she comes from and thus to show the appropriate loyalty and respect for one's community and friends (Smith, 2004).

1.6.2 *Roseanne*

Having mapped out the main stereotypical traits/scripts on which working-class humor supposedly relies, this section will try to test their validity by analyzing the humor in the working-class sitcom *Roseanne.* The analysis will highlight the presence of the foregoing scripts and draw attention to the functions in which they are used. It will be argued that the sitcom's success was mainly due to its display of working-class humor. Albeit not dangerously challenging for mainstream discourse, it subverted many of the stereotypes about the working class. This created to a recognition effect in many viewers who enjoyed being finally able to laugh at themselves and their community in a validating and not disparaging way.

Roseanne[31] was aired between 1988 and 1997 on ABC after that it was syndicated and old episodes are still shown on many different channels at different times. It depicts a working-class white family,[32] the Connors, in Landford, a fictional town in Illinois. Lee summarizes the plot of the series as a sitcom that "revolves around real 'slice of life' situations of living and surviving in a blue-collar community in the Midwest of the United States" (Lee, 1995: 470). *Roseanne* is defined as an "anti-family sitcom" that uses "sarcasm, cynicism, and real life problems to create a type of in-your-face comedy heretofore unseen on prime-time" (Lichter et.al., 1994: 20).[33] For this reason, *Roseanne* has become in the eyes of the American audience the modern "prime-time working-class hero" (189).

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[31] Previous to *Roseanne,* most media representations of the working class have been negative and constructed by outsiders. Working-class characters have been mostly stereotyped as buffoons, inarticulate and slow individuals (Butsch, 1995). This feeds into the claim put forward in this study that the working-class is associated with the dumbness and language distortion scripts. *Roseanne* belongs to a new trend of working-class sitcoms that emerged in the 90s and provided an alternative image of the working class, of which it certainly was the most popular and successful one (Henry, 2003: 265-266; Linkon, 1998).

[32] Interestingly enough, there is no other ethnic reference, though it is widely known that Roseanne comes from a poor Jewish family in Salt Lake City (Lahr, 2000: 114).

[33] Roseanne is considered as a pioneering sitcom because "it was the first to put America in contact with something resembling real life in the working-class world – a place where children are difficult, parents have real emotional and financial problems, and there's discrepancy between what American society promises and what it delivers" (Lahr, 2000: 124).

The main character of the series is Roseanne played by Roseanne Barr. She is not just the main actress; she is the promoter, producer and inspiration of the whole comedy. Roseanne's character is heavily based on her comic persona; it represents a "brash, loudmouthed, working-class mother and wife who jokes and mocks the unfairness of her situation and who is especially blunt about her views of men and sexism." Contrary to most representations of working-class male in television, Roseanne's husband, Dan (John Goodman) is a real and supportive companion within the family (Butsch, 1995). The Connors have three kids: Darlene, Becky, and D.J. The series, however, is not limited to the nuclear family; another main character is Roseanne's sister, Jackie who is constantly looking for a job and a partner. Besides these constant characters, many other family members and friends come and go in the Connors' life, portraying the solidarity network representative of working-class culture and values.

Critics agree that the uses of humor in this sitcom are the major factor contributing to the series' success over the years; they all regard humor as a tool used to question the dominant discourse about class and gender within the series. According to Lahr, humor is used in the sitcom to make statements about class and gender (2000: 252). Mile argues that "through her comic constructions, Barr attempts to rewrite the housewife's discourse and to redefine the 'I'" (1992: 42). Finally, Lee sees in Roseanne's humor a tool to unmask "the absurdities and pain of living in the American dream" (1995: 471). Roseanne's humor is unfeminine because it is aggressive and satirical; it does not spare anyone or anything, not even the working class (Lahr, 2000). However, as Mile suggests, though "not 'nice', Roseanne's humor is not self-denigrating either, it does not attack women themselves but rather the cultural frames which surround them. It mocks traditional roles and oppressive roles" (1992: 41). Roseanne Barr publicly

acknowledges that her aim has always been to disrupt the stereotypes on working-class women from within the mainstream system (Lahr, 2000: 114).

In the episode "Born to be Wild," there are many examples of this form of humor. Aired during the second season of the show in 1989-90, it focuses on the arrival of an old friend of the Connors, Ziggy. He is an adventurous type with no stable ties to any place and any people; he explores the world alone on his motorbike. Listening to Ziggy's adventurous anecdotes, Dan is led to think about the boring routine of his job and his life. Ziggy easily convinces him to embark in a commercial adventure by opening their own motorbike repair garage. While for Ziggy the project simply constitutes a new challenge, the Connors take it seriously and invest their lives into it. The episode addresses, thus, serious issues like the alienation of work, economic struggle and work ethic.[34]

The strong relationship with Ziggy is signaled by the teasing relationship he entertains with all the members of the family. The following exchange takes place at the very beginning of the episode, when Roseanne sees him for the first time after years:

> **R:** Hey, you big jerk, how long have you been here?
> **Z:** I just got in last night in
> **J:** Ouch ouch, you are on my leg
> **R:** This is incredible, because we were just talking about you
> **Z:** Yeah?
> **R:** Yeah! Uh, me and Dan were watching this James Cagney movie, you know, and just as they were taking him down the hall to the prison, you know, to get electrocuted, out of nowhere Dan goes: "I wonder, what Ziggy's up to!"

She calls him "jerk" and makes fun of his irresponsible way of life in an affectionate way; it is indeed a common belief that we make fun of the people we love. Roseanne resorts here to the lack of ambition script by teasing Ziggy on the assumption that he will not have amounted to anything in the time she hasn't seen him.[35] The script is however presented in contrast to the

[34] The excerpts from the episode gave been transcribed by me.
[35] There are other examples of this sort in the sitcom. When Darlene sees the stack of dollars in Ziggy's hand, he is worried that she might think he got it through drugs. Dan says not to worry because he will tell her that Ziggy robbed a bank. All these jokes

positive representation of Roseanne and Dan as a hard-working lower class family, with a strong work ethic and sense of responsibility. The contrast is emphasized in the following exchange, where Dan and Ziggy are sharing their latest experiences. After having recalled all his adventures, Ziggy asks Dan what he was up to. Dan answers:

> **Dan:** Well, not much..... the kids are good, Rosie is great ... paying the bills
> **Z:** Yeah, what do you do for an adventure... you know.... a little danger
> **Dan:** ... paying the bills

The Connors' serious work ethic is again reinforced in the end, when Ziggy walks out on Dan and Rosie. He leaves them with a mortgage on the house and no support, because he is unable to commit himself seriously to a business activity. Dan is ready to abandon the project that seems impossible without Ziggy, but Roseanne's reaction is to make fun of Ziggy: "**R:** You cannot sit here and tell me that Ziggy is irreplaceable, Dan, I mean the guy wore a rag on his head!" The "rag on the head" functions here as a signal of Ziggy's irresponsibility. It indirectly activates once more the lack of ambition script.

In the episode, Roseanne employs mainstream stereotypes against the working-class, but at the same time she offers counterevidence against them in her own and her husband's behavior.[36] This could be explained according to La Fave & Mannell's claim (1976) that subordinate groups make use of the dominant disparaging humor to set boundaries within their group.[37] By

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indirectly argue that Ziggy is not able to earn that much money through honest work and a respectful career. One might see also a link to the violent minority stereotype in that Ziggy is often associated with some criminal activities that imply violence.

[36] This form of disparaging humor that functions to set the boundary between the Connors and Ziggy contrasts with the previous jokes, where Rosie, instead, teases Ziggy to signal shared background and solidarity. This difference is signaled by the use of "the guy." Rosie does not use the pronoun to refer back to Ziggy, she says "the guy" thus putting a distance between them and him.

[37] Humor in the sitcom serves also the aim of setting boundaries with the middle class and it indirectly reaffirms one's working-class identity. Roseanne often uses humor to underline her difference from middle-class women, as in the following example from the same episode: "**Z:** Me and Rosie are running away together / **R:** All right, like I'd give up Raoul for you!" The target of the humor in this joke is Latino men on the one hand and rich women on the other who stereotypically use their money to enjoy the company of handsome and exotic lovers. Roseanne here indirectly asserts with pride her difference and the healthier relationships working-class people entertain with each other, based on honesty and sincerity. The same claim is reiterated in the final episode of the series, after Dan has won the lottery. Roseanne discovers that he has a lover and he defends himself complaining over a 'hole' in his life that he was able to fill thanks to this new woman. Roseanne does not accept the excuse and accuses him to have changed because of money, endorsing the middle-class ways. She yells her working-class identity that she

distinguishing themselves from those individuals in the group that conform to the stereotype, they indirectly affirm their similarity to the dominant group.

Ziggy is also the target of jokes that build on the "patriarchality/machismo' script. This script is often found in the present episode, as could be anticipated by the strong feminist agenda of Roseanne Barr. In the following dialogue between Roseanne and Ziggy, she is inquiring as to his intentions with her sister with whom he has just started a relationship:

> **R:** But you know, she really had a rough year, you know ... she lost her job and she lost her fiancé. Now, here is Ziggy again
> **Z:** All right, she's making a come-back!

Ziggy's answer is clearly masculinist in that he implies that being with him is a source of pride. Jackie indirectly takes revenge on his masculinist commentary.

> **J**: Oh.... You'd have to pay half the rent, half the utilities and you bring your own laundry over to Roseanne!

By refusing to wash his clothes, Jackie asserts her independence. She wants to show that she will not be a submissive woman and do all the work for her man. On the other hand, she still partially confirms the machismo script, by implying that Roseanne fits into the traditional view of women who do all the housework. The previous examples show that much humor is aimed at reinforcing and signaling friendship through teasing. The mocking employs some of the working-class scripts hypothesized above, showing that mainstream stereotypes can indeed be used by the group in positive ways.

Other jokes seem to relate to a certain extent to the scripts hypothesized above. Twice in the sitcom, humor is directed to the kids' attitude towards education. In the first case, Darlene asks her mother for money, to pay her sister for doing her homework. In the second case, Beckie is going out with friends. Roseanne reminds her that she should study, so Beckie pretends to be

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defines as direct, sincere and overtly loathing hypocrisy and psychological excuses that the working-class cannot afford to have, given the much more concrete needs and worries its status imply.

confused and says that she actually meant she was going to the library. In both cases, Roseanne laughs and teases her daughters for their laziness and lies. The dumbness script is used to tease Ziggy and reinforce once more the joking relationship he entertains with Roseanne, as in the following example.

> **R:** Well Ziggy, you used to believe you could see yourself sleeping if you just woke up fast enough
> **Z:** And I've never been proven wrong

In the sitcom, humor also functions as a survival strategy, a self-defense and stress-release mechanism against the anxieties and concerns of working-class people, as highlighted in psychological theories of humor.[38] In the episode, there are many instances of such a use, especially after the Connors decide to put a mortgage on the house and risk all their savings to open the garage. Roseanne repeatedly uses fantasy humor[39] to create an imaginative tragic situation that depicts the possible outcomes of the newly undertaken adventure:

> **R:** Are we all gonna be eating cat food, or just the kids?
>
> Or:
> **R:** Well, he says he believes in you, I, you know, I guess I should to .... Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm just gonna step outside and puke[40]
>
> And also:
> **Dan:** Ziggy, in 5 or 10 years when the bank is off our backs, we'll be ready to celebrate
> **R:** In the meantime, I just want to stay in here and concentrate on how to arrange the furniture out on the sidewalk

Creating a tragic fantasy situation and laughing about it allows the Connors to vent their fears and step back from real life anxieties. This is a common strategy in the "humor of the oppressed" that explains the presence of humor in many dramas and serious situations as well.

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[38] See Lefcourt and Thomas (1998); Martin et.al. (1993). This seems to be also the way it is used in real life situations by working-class people The issue, however, needs further analysis, because there has not as yet been any study on working-class humor in authentic sources. There are some studies on humor in the workplace that have not used the data, however, to elicit information about the nature of working-class humor (Holmes, 2000). Miller (1986) investigated teasing in a working-class community stressing its socialization function. Seckman & Couch (1989) researched humor in a factory setting.

[39] Hay defines fantasy humor as "the construction of humorous, imaginary scenarios or events" (1994: 8).

[40] The contrast between Roseanne's language and the formal context in which the conversation is taking place could contribute to the humor, by activating the language distortion script. As a working-class woman, Roseanne often uses colorful expressions and non-standard language. When this is juxtaposed to a formal way of speaking like the one of the banker, the contrast is humorous.

From this brief analysis, it can be concluded that Roseanne's humor mostly targets working-class people in an affectionate way.[41] It mocks the members of the family, friends and neighbors who entertain joking relationships with one another, strengthening their sense of solidarity. The humor resorts to stereotypical scripts about the working class and uses them to show a sense of belonging and pride in being working class.

[41] Another interesting question is who is the targeted audience? Does Roseanne humor attempt to appeal to a working-class audience? Or being ambiguous, could it appeal both to the working-class viewers who recognize themselves on screen and to middle-class viewers that can thus laugh at the 'less fortunate' workers? This question would need further analysis in the production system; a research in the kind of ads and sponsors of the sitcom would bring some results on the matter as well as a look at the audience ratings of the sitcom.

2. Italian Americans in Films: Mafia Movies

This chapter will review the history of cinematic Italian Americans, presenting the most significant movies for the construction of Italian American identity on screen. The birth of the gangster genre will be outlined to set the premises for the analysis of today's Italian American cinema, that will be shown to be largely reliant on gangster and mafia images. The last part of the chapter will focus on modern mafia comedies by non-Italian Americans that will be the specific object of the analysis proposed in the fourth chapter.

2.1 The Role of Media in the process of Stereotyping

Media represents a very rich resource for the analysis of stereotypes because they contribute to their circulation and reinforce them with their representations.[1] As Linkon & Russo observe, "Media texts provide tools –narrative patterns, explanatory models, terms, and images – that individuals use in interpreting their lives and experiences" (2001: 2). They argue for a discursive theory of class that puts emphasis on the media and on language as sites where discursive patterns about class are represented, constructed and reconstructed.[2]

Media exploits class and ethnic stereotypes, because they need to create characters that draw the attention of the public and, as Lourdeaux stresses, "ethnic characters [...] create a sense of the Other who can be ridiculed and admired at the same time; the quiet ridicule maintains sufficient distance for viewers to feel comfortably different, while admiration means to be attracted to positive social values proven by experience" (1990: 4).

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[1] As Zagarrio observes: "Film participates and is complicit in the play between reinvention and reaffirmation of tradition, between creativity and repetition, between self-affirming cultural strategies and subservient ones, that generate complex discursive and visual narratives on the screen" (2002: 4).

[2] Appadurai even sustains that media contribute to a culture of resistance; they constitute a sort of stimulus to react against conformism and assert individual identities and alternative views and beliefs. He claims that "Ci sono prove sempre più evidenti che l'uso dei mass media nel mondo produce spesso resistenza, ironia, selettività e, in generale, azione. [...] Magliette, cartelloni pubblicitari, graffiti, ma anche la musica rap, la street dance e le baraccopoli indicano tutti che le immagini dei media sono rapidamente assimilate entro repertori locali fatti di ironia, rabbia, umorismo e resistenza" (2001: 21).

2.2 Movies in the 20s, 30s and up to the 70s

During the beginning contact stages between two cultures, the media tends to represent the conflicts arising in society, thus expressing the fears of the dominant population. The other is defined by the white majority and ascribed certain physical, psychological and social traits to distinguish it. Being produced in a time of massive immigration, movies in the early stages of the cinematic industry helped establish the negative stereotypes about the different ethnicities that came to the United States after World War I in pursuit of the American dream.[3] In order to appeal to the white dominant social groups, images of Italian Americans had to conform to the assumptions held about them and based on the fears of the WASPs. Therefore, ethnic filmic representations "reflected not so much immigrant neighborhoods as the fears and desires of WASP audiences" (Lourdeaux, 1990: 46).

Italians constituted a significant percentage of the immigrant masses arriving on the American shores between 1890 and 1960/70.[4] On screen, they were soon used as "the quintessential example of European immigrants" (Cortes, 1994: 90). Their representations gradually acquired a more negative connotation, because of the increase in the immigrant population and the ensuing conflicts. By the 1930s, Italian Americans were turned into "undesirable icons" (92) and "served as extreme examples of moral corruption, revenge, sexual license, and wild jealousy. [...] Italians showed the worst side of the immigrant masses" (Lourdeaux, 1990: 81).[5] The movies reinforced the beliefs that were already circulating about

[3] In a society, there is the need to dictate what is appropriate behavior and what not. In order to establish such social rules, negative, undesirable and unlawful traits need to be pinned down on a group that can be used as a model of how a real American should not be. As Gardaphe points out, there is the "need for a society to have a figure that can represent fringe behavior against which the center of society can formulate its values and identity. The mafia myth has thus served an important function in American society in both defining what is American and what is acceptable behavior in American society" (2002: 57).

[4] See Nelli (1983) for an historical account of Italian immigration and assimilation patterns.

[5] Cortes claims that the negative twist in the 1930s was also largely due to the depression that "focused this fascination with crime on the special problem of gangsterism, particularly ethnic gangsterism as a barometer of the nation's social ills" (1994: 92).

Italians and which viewed them as uneducated, violent, unreasonable and stupid.[6] Although positive features of Italian culture were acknowledged in American society, the threat of the Italian immigrant masses felt by the majority of the population shaped their representations in the motion pictures.

Two of the most significant movies in this period are Le Roy's *Little Cesar* (1931) and Hawks's *Scarface, The shame of a nation* (1932).[7] As D'Acierno observes, they "established once and for all the (im)proper place of the figure of the Italian American in the American imaginary" (1999: 568). By "(im)proper place," D'Acierno refers to the negative representations of Italian Americans as criminal and violent. *Little Caesar* established the representation of the gangster and set the canon for later images of Italian Americans on screen, such as the concern for clothing and elegance as status symbols. Casillo identifies the signs of *italianità* in Rico's character: "his accent, his Pidgin English, his meal of spaghetti in a diner, and his awkward celebration of his gangland successes at the Palermo Club; [...] fat cigar and flashy clothes" (2000: 377). Lawton synthesizes the representation of the Italian American mobsters in the film "as a violent, erratic, dangerous incompetent, sentimental, opera-loving clown who couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with a machine gun" (2002: 89). Here, Lawton (2002) and Casillo (2000) have listed all the major stereotypical traits that can be found in movies with Italian Americans at large in the past as well as today.

Scarface, The shame of a nation introduced the figure of Al Capone on screen that inspired many other movies and series later on.[8] The story is supposed to be based on Al Capone's real

[6] LaGumina (1999) provides a rich resource of documents of the time. These account for the birth of the Italian American stereotypes and present all the features highlighted above.

[7] See Cortes for a more detailed list of films produced in this period that feature Italian Americans (1994: 93).

[8] The movie was a success and its story was readapted by DePalma in *Scarface* (1983). The new version starred Pacino as a gangster of Cuban origin instead of Italian American. Beside DePalma, Scorsese also dealt with issues concerning immigration and ethnic conflict in his latest *Gangs of New York* (2002) that does not feature Italian Americans. It is interesting to note how representations of criminals that draw attention to ethnic conflict are common to any subordinate group, Australian Aborigines,

life and to be inspired specifically by his murder of "two of his henchmen with a baseball bat" (Casillo, 2000: 377), a motif that will repeatedly appear in later movies like *The Untouchables* (1987) and *Analyze That* (2002). Tony Camonte is represented "as a lowbrow simian with oily hair who speaks pidgin English riddled with malapropisms;" he will eventually lose his accent as he rises in the world of crime. However "as in *Little Caesar,* the impulsive Latin lacks sober middle-class methods" (378) that he will never acquire. Camonte also set the standard for the Hollywood mobster as a violent but charismatic figure.[9]

Indeed, the movie provoked much debate because of its powerful depiction of the mafioso that could be interpreted as a glorification instead of an indictment. In order to release the movie to theaters, the director and producers had to modify the ending convicting Tony for his crimes. They also added the subtitle, *The Shame of A Nation*, to clarify that the film did not intend to glamorize gangsterism but rather to condemn it. *Scarface* introduced various features that became trademarks for gangster and mafia movies, such as an unprecedented violence on screen and the famous flipping of the coin that often typifies the gangster.

In the years after WWII, representations of Italian Americans diversified.[10] Next to gangsters, struggling immigrants (*Teresa*, 1951), high school basket cases (*Blackboard Jungle*, 1955), diligent fishermen (*Clash by Night*, 1952), private detectors (*From Here to Eternity,*

Native Americans, Latinos, etc. This shows that many movies about gangsterism, crime or violence in connection with immigrants are often a metaphor for the process of assimilation or a tool to discriminate depending on who is producing them. Many Italian American directors chose to represent other ethnicities on screen in order to clarify how crime is a phenomenon arising from the immigrant experience and the assimilation process that is not linked to any particular ethnic group.

[9] Cortes notices that many of the movies in this period represented Italian criminals both as victims and victimizers, "as decent people who chose criminality out of frustration over apparent societal obstacles to legitimately-attained success, criminals to be pitied as well as feared" (1994: 93). The chapter on Italian American cinema will show that this same discourse is sustained by directors of Italian descent. Yet, in these first exogenous representations as well as in the self-representations of Italian Americans, violence is realistically and spectacularly portrayed thus indirectly reinforcing the stereotype.

[10] The diversification of roles was also due to the contribution of soldiers of Italian descent during the war. The image on screen became more positive because America needed to stress unity instead of otherness in order to call the immigrants to defend their new home country (Coletta, 2000: 20). Marcuson notices the same tendency in American drama (1990: 161). During the war, however, the representation of Italians was ambivalent because of Italy's allegiance with nazi Germany and the many defeats that provoked the stereotypes of Italians as cowards (Cortes, 1994: 96). See also Davies for a sociological explanation in relation to jokes on coward Italians (1990: 170-233).

1953), hard-working ranchers (*Wild Is the Wind*, 1957), honest and lonely butchers (*Marty*[11], 1955), determined cotton gin managers (*Baby Doll*, 1956), industrious dockworkers (*A View from the Bridge*, 1962) and boxers (*Golden Boy*, 1939; *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1956) started to appear on screen (Cortes, 1994: 97-98). These movies constitute another trend in cinematic representations of Italian Americans that fits into what Zaniello calls the "ethnic working-class cycle of films" (1996: 154). Despite portraying hard-working and honest Italian immigrants, these movies share many stereotypical representations with the more acclaimed gangster films. In particular, they all feature violent behavior of some form, such as "the commercialized violence of professional boxers, or the explosively temperamental violence of ordinary men and women" (Cortes, 1994: 98). Violence was thus cemented as the Italian American characteristic par excellence.

Despite these heterogeneous representations, Italian Americans still mostly featured in gangster films; in some, the Italian immigrant was shown heroically fighting back criminal organizations. An example of these films is *The Black Hand* (1950) that attempts to document historically the development of the Italian American mafia in connection to Sicily. However in most of the films it was the Italian American to constitute the threat. This association between Italian Americans and crime was reinforced in the 1950s with the successful TV drama *The Untouchables* that "was commonly known as the show featuring 'the cops against the wops' because of the numerous Italian gangland figures featured on the program" (Coletta, 2000: 21). The program inspired the successful DePalma's cinema version with the same title released in 1987 (Nepoti, 1995: 87).

[11] *Marty* was the first American movie to win at Cannes Film Festival and the predecessor of working-class Italian American films in the 90s.

In the 60s, comedies started to exploit the Italian American mafia stereotype for humorous effect. As with the founding dramas of the gangster genre, these comedies use many stereotypical traits in their depiction of Italian Americans. Mostly they emphasize vanity and pay particular attention to clothing, stupidity, the Italian American accent, superstitions, and fatalism,[12] but also solidarity with dear ones and loyalty to family and friends. In Wilder's *Some Like it Hot* (1959), mafiosi play a secondary role, but their representation is in line with the ones previously illustrated. Italian American mafiosi are comically stereotyped as stupid and gullible; the boss is characterized through clothing, specifically through his spats that give him his nickname. In Capra's *Pocketful of Miracles* (1961), we find signs of superstition, excessive care for clothing, Italian American womanizers and a marked Italian American accent.[13]

As this brief overview of the first 50 years of the cinema sound era shows, since their appearance on screen, Italians have been associated with crime and lawlessness; their contributions to American society are said to be food, wine and a culture of crime (Coletta, 2000: 10). After two hundred years, the picture has not changed, as Coletta points out:

> A survey of the American cultural landscape reveals that several main images and themes about Italian Americans occur with great regularity. Of these, the most prominent revolves around crime and the Mafia stereotype. That many Italians possess some connection to an illicit mob underworld is a misconception that has persisted throughout the twentieth century (10).

[12] Lourdeaux (1990) considers fatalism as one of the defining traits of Italian American culture and an ethnic sign that even the non-ethnic director Capra often used.

[13] Capra was one of the first Italian American directors to attain success in Hollywood. However, his cinema represents mostly Irish Americans because Capra refrained from doing ethnic cinema in order to be accepted into the system. Most of the directors of this period followed the same strategy; ethnic cinema developed only after the 70s. D'Acierno identifies three main strategies adopted by Italian American filmmakers over the years: "(1) adopting the paradigmatic Hollywood directorial position of 'passing': the outsider as insider, the Capra position; (2) maintaining an intermediate position that involves the appropriation of traditional genres for the purposes of ethnic representation, as in the case with Coppola in *The Godfather* trilogy; (3) occupying the strict position of the ethnic cinema: the cinema of 'divided consciousness' in which the 'cursed part' – the secret wound of ethnicity – is displayed, and the figure of the outsider is both treated as a theme and inscribed within cinematic language itself, as in the case of Scorsese" (1999: 567). Yet, Lourdeaux (1990) points out that even directors of the first period did introduce signs of *italianità* in their films such as familial and community values, albeit through white American characters, in order to please the mainstream audience.

In the following paragraph, we will see that this association has been reinforced by the appearance of Italian American directors and by their work.

2.3 The Birth of a genre: from the 70s on

In the 70s, America experienced an ethnic revival that was paralleled by an "ethnic movie boom" (Coletta, 2000: 26) with the rise of numerous ethnic filmmakers, actors and screenwriters. Most immigrant ethnicities had been living in the United States for three generations and had now acquired the power to raise their voice and tell their story. Hollywood, on the other hand, soon realized the "hypertrophied commercial possibilities of ethnicity" (98). Many of the filmmakers and actors that asserted themselves during this period were of Italian descent. These celebrities include Coppola, Scorsese, DePalma, Cimino, De Niro, Pacino, Pesci and Turturro, just to name a few.[14] They "brought a gold rush of Italian American depictions, propelling Italian-American life and culture into the forefront of the Hollywood curriculum" (Cortes, 1994: 98). In the second half of the 20th century, Italian American directors have certainly dictated the image of Italian Americans on screen. Nonetheless, they had to conform to Hollywood rules thus creating a mainstream cinema with ethnic overtones. In other words, they strategically inscribed their ethnicity within the successful gangster genre using the mafia as an ethnic signifier. Given the innumerable Italian American filmmakers that entered mainstream cinema, the analysis will limit itself to the work of Coppola and Scorsese who have largely determined the discourse of Italian American cinema (Casillo, 2000: 374).[15] As D'Acierno points out:

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[14] Contemporary American cinema owes much to the contribution of Italian American directors and actors and their success "might be regarded as another triumphant version of the American success story as scripted in the Hollywood 'melting pot'" (D'Acierno, 1999: 563-564). Yet, most of these Italian Americans in their work object the ideal of the melting pot and the American dream.

[15] The significance of the work of these two directors expands far beyond their films concerning Italian Americans; *The Conversation* (1974) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) by Coppola and *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974) and many others by Scorsese are milestones for the modern American cinema that do not relate to Italian Americana. Their work is, nonetheless, always concerned with American society, its conflicts and contradictions and their reworking of the Italian American experience fits into this more general approach. Scorsese's last movie for instance, *Gangs of New York,* goes back in

> Coppola and Scorsese have given Italian American cinema its two primary 'genres': the epic or large-scale gangster film as art, and its gritty, more obsessive and visceral street-bound variant, the 'mean streets' film, both of which are expressions and codifications of the Italian American urban experience and the gangsterism – real and imaginary, small-time and corporate – it produced as its primary mythology (1999: 679).

Thus, both Italian American street and independent cinema on the one hand, and mainstream and epic cinema on the other have always privileged the representation of mafiosi or gangsters.

2.3.1 Francis Ford Coppola and *The Godfather* trilogy

The release of *The Godfather* in 1972 signals "the arrival of the New Ethnicity in Hollywood and marks the moment in which Italian American artists assume, for the first time, the position of holding the 'language' of the mass media in their own hands" (D'Acierno, 1999: 568). Hollywood cinema industry was looking for new formats that could guarantee success over a long period of time and so turned to ethnic familial sagas to win over greater audiences. During this time, Puzo published his novel, *The Godfather* (1969), that soon became a best seller.[16] Paramount, thus, decided to film the book and entrusted the young Coppola with its script and realization. Coppola grasped the opportunity to enter mainstream cinema and to exploit its forms and sources to tell his own story of the Italian American experience within the constraints of the gangster model. According to D'Acierno, he has indeed "stolen the entire genre of gangster film and used it to inscribe within it the myth he has stolen from the history of his tribe" (1999: 582).

The Godfather resulted in a colossal commercial success,[17] starting the tradition of the sequel and, as Costa (1985: 132) emphasizes, leading the transition from "auteur to the block busters." It also marked the passage from the gangsters of the 30s to modern mafiosi. Contrary to

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time to the beginning of the American republic to document ethnic conflict between the British and the Irish showing how it is at the roots of the American multiethnic society

[16] For an interesting reading of the novel and its influence on American imaginary, see Messenger (2002).

[17] As Cortes underlines, the influential success of the film is mirrored in the resulting boom of mafia jokes, mafia products and in "the public institutionalization of the expression, 'I'm going to make you an offer you can't refuse'" (1994: 100).

gangsterism, the mafia signaled a peculiar Italian phenomenon being the product of a specific cultural experience that was exported from Sicily to the United States with the immigration from the south.[18] Coppola's representation of the mafia family presented the American audience with a fully new system of values and beliefs that came to represent Italian culture in both positive and negative terms. Scholars (Cortes, 1994; D'Acierno, 1999; Phillips, 1990; Lourdeaux, 1990) agree in defining the film as an epic that centers on the theme of the family, a constant in Coppola's movies. Family, community, religion, ethnic identity, assimilation, quest for wealth and power, violence as an instrument for success, values and codes of honors are the themes that underlie this modern American epic (Cortes, 1994: 100).[19] Their portrayal will become the prototype for the next Italian American movies and the 'most important legitimator of the new wave of Italian American sex-and-violence odysseys" (99).

Coppola skillfully created a movie that matched the immigrant struggle to assimilate and move up socially with the folkloric flavor that Americans had learned to appreciate on screen (Lourdeaux, 1990: 173). *The Godfather* thus won over the American public by transforming the mafioso stereotype into an American myth and a source of success and fame for Italian Americans at large. As Coletta rightly notices, "The great appeal of the Corleone clan allowed the stereotypical image of the Italian criminal to become an increasingly more powerful and accepted presence in American culture." (2000: 28).

The impact of the Godfather trilogy on subsequent movie production is documented by *The Image Research Project: Italian culture on Film* conducted by De Cerro for the Italic Institute of

[18] The birth of mafia movies introduced new stereotypical traits associated to mafioso culture such as the 'man of honor,' and the concept of 'vendetta' (vengeance). These two are also connected to the more generic Italian American cultural trait, and stereotype, of *bella figura* according to which an individual should always defend his face publicly, and hence any attack to someone's face is to be considered a major offence.

[19] A full illustration of *The Godfather* trilogy cannot be included in this study; the next chapter will discuss the three films for their significance in representing the struggle for assimilation. For a more detailed analysis of the films, see Phillips (1990: 143-159) and Zucker (1984). The latter also provides a full bibliography on Coppola and the trilogy up until 1981 (75-211).

America. The study was started in 1995 and is annually updated. The survey quantifies the number of movies featuring Italian/Italian Americans in films and the roles they play in these as exemplified in the following table:[20]

TOTAL ITALIAN RELATED FILMS SINCE SOUND ERA (1928)	**1233**
Films which portray Italians in a positive light	374 (31%)
Films which portray Italians in a negative light	**859 (69%)**
INDIVIDUAL CATEGORIES	1233
Mob characters	500 (40%)
(Real mob characters)	58 (12%)
(Fake mob characters)	442 (88%)
Boors, buffoons, bigots or bimbos	359 (29%)
Positive or complex portrayals	374 (31%)
INFLUENCE OF "THE GODFATHER" (1972)	
Mob movies prior to "The Godfather"	207 (43%)
Mob movies after "The Godfather"	293(57%)
TOTAL NUMBER OF ITALIAN AMERICANS (2000 U.S. Census)	15 - 16 million
TOTAL NUMBER OF ITALIAN CRIMINALS (1999 F.B.I. Statistics)	1,150(.0078%)

The table shows that following *The Godfather* almost 300 hundred movies were produced that featured Italian Americans in the role of gangsters or Mafiosi. The number is even more

[20] On the website, the criteria employed to define negative and positive stereotyping are explained. The distinction could raise various objections, but for the purposes of this study, we are mainly interested in the sheer number of Italian mobsters on screen independently from their connotation.

impressive if we consider that from the 70s onward, Italians had fully assimilated into American society, entered the middle class and acquired powerful positions. There is thus no sociological justification for the proliferation of mafia movies except the quasi-mythic status that *The Godfather* trilogy has acquired in society's consciousness.

2.3.2 Martin Scorsese and Street Mobsters

Martin Scorsese, unlike Coppola, grew up in Little Italy as a working-class Italian American. The years spent there marked his life and inspired his art: "Scorsese translated this world into film with religious-like devotion" (Lourdeaux, 1990: 218). In Scorsese's Italian American films, his blue-collar background is reflected in the choice of topics and characters.[21] The protagonists are not the all powerful Corleones, but the street gangsters, the blue-collar Italian Americans who struggle to make a living through violence and crime. As D'Acierno claims, "Scorsese [...] created a street cinema that captured the visceral rhythms of urban existence in 'Little Italy' and converted the blue-collar film into an art form" (1999: 586).

Scorsese is more interested in inner states rather than colossal epics; this is shown by his cinematographic choices as summarized by Bliss: small movies, limited time span, limited locales (1985: 1). While Coppola started the epic tradition of mafia movies, Scorsese established the tradition of Mean Streets, independent cinema that inspired many younger directors from Tarantino to the Black American Lee (Giovacchini, 1995: 213). His style is documentary (Weiss, 1987: 19) with the use of "on-the-spot recording, unprofessional footage" (21) in order to "convey an acute sense of actuality" (21). Thanks to his superb technique, Scorsese brings to life

[21] Scorsese also made his childhood experiences the object of his 1974 documentary *Italianamerican*, a long interview with his parents all shot in Little Italy. Four years later, in 1978, he shot *American Boy* that focused more on his own experiences and he then combined the two movies in *American Scrapbooks*. This documentary, as attested by the two titles, is a testimony of the double consciousness of Italian American directors that oscillate between their cultural heritage and their fully American identity. Scorsese's filmography is also an evidence of this double identity; while Italian Americans play an important role in his production, they are certainly not its main subject.

on screen New York's Little Italy as probably no other director ever did. Realism and accuracy indeed mark all of Scorsese's cinematographic production and account for his undiminished critical and commercial success despite his off-Hollywood attitude. The main motifs in his movies are religion, community, friendship, isolation, entrapment, the resulting violence, money, and assimilation (Weiss, 1987: 30-45; Lourdeaux, 1990: 218).

Scorsese's saga on Italian Americans started with *Who's Knocking at My Door* (1969), but it was the second movie of the cycle that aroused the interest of critics and Hollywood, namely *Mean Streets* (1973) where the director explores issues of sexuality, gender and violence. *Mean Streets* is above all the story of a whole community, New York's Little Italy in the 70s. It tells a collective experience, one that Scorsese himself has lived in his childhood and can thus portray with deep personal knowledge and authenticity[22] (Lourdeaux, 1990: 240). In this film, Scorsese sketches what will become his two key characters. First, there is Charlie, the young Italian American male who attempts to behave decently, to protect his friends and to follow the Catholic religious faith. This figure is juxtaposed with the dysfunctional misfit Johnny Boy, who is self-absorbed and incapable of controlling his emotions.[23] The movie is a 'quadro impressionante di sottoproletariato urbano, ne mette in luce l'autodistruttivitá, la chiusura, le ossessioni" (Fofi, 1995: 254).[24]

In 1990, Scorsese returns to the Mean Streets cinema with *GoodFellas*, one of the most successful and acclaimed films of this genre. Scorsese documents here the changes that have affected the community of *Mean Streets* of which it could be considered a continuation. Scorsese

[22] The whole film was shot in only 27 days and the actors improvised many scenes in order to achieve more authenticity and realism. The scenes at the street festival of San Gennaro where shot during the real *festa* taking place in Little Italy, NY; thus all the people in the street contribute to the documentary and realistic style of the whole movie.

[23] In the first scene where Johnny Boy appears, he is introduced through a slow motion sequence that "calls attention to the fact that Johnny Boy is out of step with the rest of the world" (Weiss, 1987: 23).

[24] "an impressive picture of the urban proletarian landscape; it highlights its self-destructiveness, entrapment and obsessions" (translation by me).

anthropologically documents the goodfellas' life from their daily routines, their familial relationships, their way of speaking, their behavior, and their clothes. These current street mobsters display less tight community ties, less religious concerns, and a more consumerist culture.[25]

The film begins with the Italian-Irish-American, Ray Hill, confessing his sole aspiration to become a gangster; to him, this is synonymous with money and power, a form of upward mobility through crime (Morandini, 2003). Through Hill, we enter the world of wise guys and we partake in their daily violence; Scorsese introduces here the idea of 'gangster high,' the exaltation that these street mobsters feel in their violent acts through the continuous use and abuse of drugs. The outrageous violent acts are represented as the norm; these mobsters are lower crime workers that take pride in a job well done, a murder in their case. The movie does not try to justify the violence that defines this Italian American community. However, it depicts the fascination exerted by the Mafioso spectacular facade on young working-class Italian Americans. Scorsese reveals the "gangster culture of spectacle" that roots on "self-display, conspicuous violence (violence as spectacle), conspicuous consumption, conspicuous expenditure (money is to squander), and conspicuous bad taste" (D'Acierno, 1999: 647). The focus on wealth and the mobsters' obsession with money symbolize their aspiration to social mobility, their attempts to enter the White American middle class through illegal ways.

In his last movie on Italian Americans so far, *Casino* (1995), Scorsese picks up the legacy of *The Godfather* in representing the attempts of the mafia to legalize their business in Las Vegas. The similarities, however, end here because Scorsese is always more interested in the

[25] Fofi emphasizes the sociological study behind Scorsese's movies and points out that the evolution of the charachters from *Mean Streets* to *GoodFellas* is due to class mobility: "il freddo reperto di vita quotidiana di piccoli gangsters italiani, *GoodFellas* (1990), manovali del crimine, 'picciotti' in tutto simili ormai ai loro colleghi italiani, con gusti, consumi, mogli piccolo-borghesi, di una banale volgarità e diversi dagli abitanti della loro strada, del loro quartiere, semplicemente perché il loro mestiere e' il delitto.:..riannoda con *Mean Streets*, questo film, ma tra i bravi ragazzi di oggi non ce ne sono con dubbi morali, con tormenti esistenziali o religiosi, si sono solo funzionari e impiegati del crimine" (1995: 248).

street mobsters and the dynamics on the street, within the community, rather than in epic family histories such as the Corleones. The motifs are still violence, greed and its repercussions on personal relationships, and assimilation. The latter is here more evident because Scorsese juxtaposes the Jewish gambler and gangster, Ace Rohstein,[26] to the violent, irresponsible, Italian American gangster Santoro played by Pesci.[27] The first is represented as a very rational criminal who could manage to enter the American middle class were it not for his connections with the Italian American gangster (D'Acierno, 1999: 655). The second, instead, "brings mean streets with him; despite his façade as a family man, he is incorrigible, unwilling to pass, incapable of relinquishing his primordial ghetto identity" (655).

Coppola and Scorsese, thus, have established a new cinematic genre that has known a continuous success since the 70s and has inspired many other directors, both Italian Americans and non-. Coppola's mafiosi and Scorsese's mobsters have also become role models for much of the American audience and for the real mafiosi themselves that have started to behave as their cinematic counterparts. The most evident and popular figure that exemplifies this process is probably the convicted criminal Gotti who shaped his identity in dialogic relationship with the representation of Hollywood mafiosi, becoming himself the subject of many TV fictions such as *Gotti: The Rise and Fall of a Real Mafia Don* (1996) and two primetime mini-series, *The Last*

[26] Interestingly, Arnold Rohstein was a famous Jewish gangster murdered in 1928 who was considered one of the American criminal figures that founded the business-type gangsterism (Rubin, 2000: 6). Given the meticulous accuracy of Scorsese, he might well have chosen this fictional name to connect to this past history. Interestingly, Scorsese cast the quintessential Italian American gangster, De Niro, in the role of the Jewish gangster. De Niro had, whoever, already played such a similar part in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon A Time in America* 1984. Scorsese seems to often play with ethnicity issues in his casting choices.

[27] It should be researched further the pairing of Jewish and Italian Americans on screen. There are indeed many examples of similar interethnic filmic couples throughout cinema history. The 'odd couple' Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis; Hyman Roth in *The* Godfather, as the disloyal Jewish partner of Michael in the *Immobiliare* business; Henry Hill's wife in *GoodFellas;* Ace Rohstein as the "Golden Jew" in *Casino* paired with Santoro; Lucanova and Danny Rose in *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984). Also the current leadoff series on HBO, *The Sopranos,* features a Jewish gangster among the Italian American ones. For a thorough discussion of Jewish gangster representations, see Rubin (2000). Other famous and important predecessors for the humorous pairing of Jewish and Italian American are the Marx Brothers, where Chico represents the Italian American buffoon (Woll & Miller, 1987: 275), and Marx the Jewish comedian. There are, thus, many predecessors of the odd couple Crystal-De Niro that features in *Analyze This* and will be the object of the analysis in chapter 4.

Don (1997) and *Bella Mafia* (1997) (D'Acierno, 644-645). As Gardaphe states, Gotti "started imitating the characters in *The Godfather* films. After a generation, one can hardly tell the difference between the real and artificial gangster" (2002: 53). This continuous dialogue between real life and films in the process of identity formation is highlighted in many mafia movies and also in the later mafia comedies.

2.4 Other representations of Italian Americans

Some Italian American directors have chosen to take a different path from Coppola and Scorsese, but their representations adopt largely the same stereotypical traits though in different contexts. DePalma, for instance, chose to focus his film, *The Untouchables*, on the heroic deeds of the FBI mafia agents who arrested Al Capone rather than on the boss himself.[28] However, De Niro playing Al Capone endows his character with the same traits seen in Scorsese's gangsters and especially in the pre-*Godfather* movies. Al Capone is portrayed as a very fashionable man; in the first scene, DePalma uses a very effective high-angle shot of De Niro in a extremely luxurious room while being shaved and manicured. Al Capone is always surrounded by luxury, golden and red decorations, enjoying good food and opera music. In the film, the most memorable scene juxtaposes De Niro/Al Capone while at the Opera crying for the aria *Ridi Pagiaccio* and the images of the murders he ordered. He speaks with a marked accent and is crudely violent as shown in the famous dinner scene where he kills one of his men with a baseball bat, a scene that is often quoted in mafia movies.

Next to mafia movies, another genre of films representing Italian Americans developed which focused on the legitimate struggles of Italian American working-class men towards a

[28] Nepoti points out that this movie was another Hollywood's commercial operation that tried to exploit the TV success the series had by producing "un film a larga scala su dei mitici eroi americani" (1995: 88).

better life. Famous examples here are *Rocky* (1973) and all its sequels that feature the rise of a poor, simple and uneducated Italian American boxer to world champion and myth. As D'Acierno phrases it, "Sylvester Stallone plays the role of the every-White-man as ethnic underdog, enacting the blue-collar version of the American Dream" (1999: 591-592). Scorsese also explored this theme in *Raging Bull* (1980) narrating of the rise and fall of the Italian American boxer, Jack La Motta. These movies together with the before-mentioned boxing films, *Golden Boy* and *Somebody up there Likes Me,* albeit focusing on the legitimate struggle of Italian American men, still resort to the violent stereotype. Men of Italian descent are here also defined as primitive, instinctive and hence genetically violent (590). It could be argued that the two genres of crime and athletics have been so much exploited in the representations of Italian Americans in films because they both were "the primary means of immigrant upward mobility" (608).

When not athletes, Italian Americans have been portrayed as artists or performers; *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) narrates of the attempts of working-class Italian American Tony Manero to achieve fame by dancing. This movie belongs to the so-called "cinema of the *Guido"* where *guido* "is a pejorative term applied to lower-class, macho, gold-amulet-wearing, self-displaying neighborhood boys" (628).[29] Turturro has also directed many movies that explore the experiences of immigrants of Italian descent who struggle in pursuit of the American dream. In particular, *Mac* (1992) is "the culmination of Italian working-class cinema as it extends from *Marty* through *Saturday Night Fever*" (670); it represents an Italian American "self-obsessed" working-class family and its attempts to sustain a family construction business (Zaniello, 1996:

[29] *Guido* seems to derive from a common Italian first name or from the Italian verb "guidare" referring to the Italian American trend to "cruise in hot cars" (D'Acierno, 1999: 628). Other movies of this cycle are: *The Lords of Flatbush* (1974), *The Wanderers* (1979), *True Love* (1989), *Baby, It's you* (1983) and *My Cousin Vinny* (1992).

144).[30] In the same period, Savoca also directed various movies that focus on the experiences of working-class Italian American women like *Household Saints* (1993) and *True Love* (1989). These non-mafia Italian American movies represent "the conventional myth of 'ethnic rags to mainstream riches,' of working-class accession to the American Dream" (629). However, the Italian American working-class film cycle has always remained in the shadows of mafia and Mean Streets Cinema (Cortes, 1994: 104).

More recently, the new trend in Hollywood is towards interethnic cinema; indeed many of the new films explore issues such as interethnic conflict, marriage and friendship.[31] Emblematic in this regard is the production of the Black American director Lee[32] who has documented ethnic conflict in American society throughout his movies. Lee portrays poor neighborhoods where Black Americans live next door to Italian Americans. He shows the conflict between the two ethnicities highlighting the issue of whiteness.

Italian Americans being in an ambivalent state between white and non-white have often struggled to differentiate themselves from the non-white in order to assimilate. Italian American

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[30] Zaniello sustains that "the film concerns the passion of these craftsmen to do a job well and how difficult it is to sustain that passion in capitalist America" (1996: 144). This aspect coincides with literary representation of and by Italian Americans that stress the importance of the aesthetics of work as Gardaphe (2004) points out.

[31] See Hull & Viano (1998) for a discussion on Black American representations in Italian American cinema. Coppola and Scorsese briefly deal with interethnic conflict in their movies, and the image they portray is mostly one of racism. In *The Godfather I,* we see the mafiosi despise Black Americans and in *Mean Streets* we see Charley's attraction to and rejection of a Black American club dancer. In a voice over, we hear his considerations about the impossibility of having a relationship with her on the grounds of the color of her skin. Mixing with Blacks would be a stigma that the mafioso community is not willing to bear. The representation of Black Americans in Italian American cinema is linked to the issue of whiteness; the need for Italian Americans to distinguish themselves from the darker minorities in order to enjoy more advantages and rights. As Guglielmo & Salerno stress, newly arrived Italians in the United States did not have a "consciousness about its color line," but they soon learnt it in the blue-collar multiethnic neighborhoods (2003: 3).

[32] Lee's movies such as *Do the right thing* (1989), *Jungle fever* (1991) and *25th Hour* (2002) show this process of acquisition of whiteness and consequent discrimination. In *Do the Right Thing,* there is a famous sequence where "virtually all of the ethnic groups badmouth one another, making it clear that Lee knows all to well that racism forms the core of the melting pot" (Hull & Viano, 1998: 171). In his last film, *25th Hour,* Lee inserts a similar scene where the white protagonist rails against all ethnic groups; through his eyes, we see stereotypical representatives of working-class men of all ethnicities yelling at him. Italian Americans populate many of Lee's films that resort to the common stereotypes circulating about them. Zagarrio describes the Italian Americans in these movies as: "vulgar erotomaniacs, insensitive and immature, violent and dirty men" (2002: 128).
See Snead (1994), Giovacchini (1995) for a treatment of Black American cinema that highlights the similarities between the two forms of ethnic self-representation. Issues such as negative self-representations, stereotypical stasis, identity struggle mark Black American cinema as well (Snead, 1994: 2-4). See in particular Giovacchini for an analysis of "homeboy movies" whose format strongly resemble Scorsese's (1995: 210).

cinema has only partially addressed the issue in the past; today, however, the topic seems to have gained more poignancy.[33] *A Bronx's Tale* (1993), De Niro's directing debut, for instance, focuses on interethnic love and conflict between the Italian American and Black American street guys. These new movies combine the tradition of blue- collar and mafia genres by portraying the poorest neighborhoods in metropolitan cities populated both by hard-working men and mobsters. They thus depict the two ways in which the young and working-class ethnic youth can assimilate.[34]

2.5 The Parody of a Genre: Box Office Boom of Mob Comedies:

As already noted, the years following the *Godfather* trilogy saw an increase in the production of mafia movies. While through the 70s and the 80s mafia dominated mainly in dramas, towards the end of the 80s and the 90s, numerous mafia comedies appeared creating a visible new trend in Hollywood. Coppola and Scorsese's works as well as the roles played by De Niro and Pacino set the standard to represent people of Italian descent on the big screen. The unprecedented success of *The Godfather* was a unique opportunity to exploit a commercial format that attracted viewers over a long period of time. Building on this fact, many films were produced that satirize on the genre.

The 80s[35] and 90s did indeed see an outburst of mafiosi represented in comic situations; as D'Acierno argues, "These films signify that the mafia stereotypes had become so well established in the collective mind that they could be played off" (1999: 632). As Cortes describes

[33] Tamburri agrees with this tendency when he observe that: "While the older generations concentrated more on the by now well-known thematics of immigration and organized crime, as well as the debunking thereof, these younger artists/performers of short films have added to the general theme of heritage, at various degrees, of race, gender, and sexuality" (2002: 105).
[34] See Cortes (1994: 102-106) for a review of the latest trends in Italian American representations.
[35] In the 80s, Italian American mafiosi also appeared as secondary characters in many movies, Allen, for instance, also exploited the stereotype in his comedy *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984). The Italian American singer Lucanova is represented as a temperamental womanizers with a drinking problem; he is typified through a strong accent, greasy hair, flashy clothes and gestures

this new phase, "Movie mafia chic had now added a new dimension, mafia parody chic" (1994: 101).[36] The radicalization of stereotypes and the birth of a full-grown genre of mafia movies prompted the birth of its parody. Interestingly, none of these new comedies has been produced by Italian American directors;[37] this issue will be addressed in the fourth chapter where the function of parody is discussed.

In 1985[38] the great American director, Huston directed a dark comedy about a mafia hit man, Charlie Partanna, who falls in love with Irene Walker, an attractive, blond Polish killer.[39] Huston exploits here the mafioso image "solidly embedded in the psyches of movie audiences" (Cortes, 1994: 101) to create a "sardonic" picture of the Italian American mafia. Indeed, the sources of humor in the film are breaches of ethnic stereotypes and their juxtaposition. Huston undermines the image of the mafioso as a masculinist and sexist person by showing Partanna falling in love with a working woman, even more, with a female killer. The whole movie challenges the stereotypical Italian American gender roles. The most subversive character in this perspective is Maerose Prizzi. She is the daughter of the biggest mafia boss and has been expelled from the family for dishonoring her former lover, Partanna. Maerose is a modern workingwoman that does not fit into the stereotypical image of Italian American women. Yet, out of jealously for Partanna, she pretends to conform to the rules within the mafia family so as to convince her father to assassinate the ungrateful man. Maerose dresses up in black or grey long dresses, goes back to living with her father, cooks and cleans for him without ever

[36] See Cortes for more examples of mafia comedies (1994: 101).
[37] Cortes observes that *The Godfather* had a significant impact also on non-Italian-American cinema in that the presence of Italian Americans on screen increased generally. Italians have become the favorite "subsidiary criminal characters" and Italian last names are often used to characterize a secondary figure as violent and sadistic (1994: 101).
[38] In the same year, DePalma directed *Wise Guys* defined by critics as a black comedy. At the end of the movie, the two protagonists open a restaurant with Italian-Jewish specialties.
[39] D'Acierno writes of this comedy: "The masterpiece of the Mafioso comedy is Houston's *Prizzi's Honor*, which, among other things, introduces a feminist theme into the patriarchal universe of the mob in the form of a hit-woman who becomes the wife of Charlie Partanna, who will eventually have 'to ice' her to affirm the ever-weakening law of the father" (1999: 632).

complaining. In other words, she makes the caricature of the conservative 'good Italian American girl' that is so often shown on screen. Huston's comedy is quite unusual in the panorama of mafia comedies for its strong feminist overtones.

A more traditional mafia comedy is *Married to the Mob* (1988) that resorts to the stereotype of the beautiful woman trying to escape the violent and dangerous Italian family. After the death of her husband Frank 'Cucumber' De Marco, the brassy but charming Angela grasps the opportunity to cut the ties to her neighborhood and mafia family. However, the mob keeps looking for her; eventually she will be able to break these undesirable ties with the aid of the Anglo-Saxon FBI agent, Mike Downey. Italian Americans in this movie are again overtly stereotyped in their clothing, jewelry, and way of speaking. All the Italian American men are represented as sex-driven and animalistic; women are over-jealous wives who spend their time either cooking or at the hairdresser. The gatherings between the mafioso wives recall similar scenes in *GoodFellas* when Karen ironically comments on the Italian American style.

The 90s have certainly been the most productive years for this type of comedy starting in the 1990 with the release of *The Freshman,* a hilarious parody of *The Godfather* that will be analyzed in the next section. Towards the end of the 1990s, then, various movies came out in a very short period of time featuring Italian American bosses in comic situations. In *Oscar* (1998), Stallone, who has always been associated with the honest working-class Rocky, played a mafia boss who has difficulties in managing his own family. Oscar is a good-hearted mafia boss, a very stereotypical figure and unrealistic one. He is typified through his flashy elegance, greasy black hair and golden watches that make him resemble more of a dandy than a mafioso because he lacks the hard image established by actors like De Niro and Pacino.

In 1999, two mafia comedies came out, *Analyze This* and *Mickey Blue Eyes* (1999). Both encountered much success. The former in particular was a hit at the box office, and its concept was replicated in the TV series *The Sopranos* that is today HBO's leadoff series. The interest and fascination in the topic has since not diminished as the success of *Analyze That,* the sequel, in 2002 clearly shows. These movies and programs show that the modern Italian American mafioso is a fully American phenomenon.

Although these films all draw on the antecedent of *The Godfather* and 'pay their respect' to the founding movie in many ways, these bosses are far from Don Vito and the young Michael. They are certainly very stereotyped in their cultural attitudes and appearance, perhaps more so than Michael Corleone, but their characters do not retain any authenticity in their cultural heritage. They build more on the figures of recent American mafia bosses like Gotti who exploited the stereotype and the success of the mafioso on screen to shape an attracting public image out in the real world.

3. Stereotype Traits and Class in the Films

In the historical overview, it has been stressed how most of the crime movies tell the story of immigration, assimilation and upward mobility. Except for *The Godfather*, most films portray working-class Italian Americans, thus fitting into the "blue-collar cinema" tradition as many scholars emphasize (D'Acierno, 1999; Zaniello, 1996; Lourdeaux, 1990). This chapter will reanalyze Italian American cinema in order to identify the major stereotypical traits used in self-representations by Americans of Italian descent. The analysis sets out to document the intersections of Italian American stereotypes and the working-class stereotypes identified in the first chapter.[1] Commenting on Italian American self-representations, the investigation put forth in this chapter will specifically deal with the inversion of ethnic stereotypes developed in the years before 1970. In dissecting Italian American representations, particular attention will be paid to the uses of humor and irony to comment on ethnic stereotypes.

3.1 Signs of Ethnicity and Class

In his comprehensive study of Italian American representations in American drama, Marcuson identifies six main qualities associated with this ethnic group: (1) the prevalence of unskilled and artisan occupations, (2) criminal behavior and violence, (3) lack of consistent interest in the Catholic faith, (4) sensuality, (5) the enjoyment of Italian foods and wines, and (6) the pleasure found in performing and listening to music (1990: 288). Looking at movies from the early twenties, Lourdeaux elicits three main stereotypes about Italians: "honest unskilled laborer," "slick nobleman" and "vengeful Italian lover" (1990: 69). D'Acierno summarizes the main stereotypical traits in Italian American cinema as follows:

[1] Ethnic slurs also stress this connection by relying on features like greasiness and dirtiness, due to the hard labor. Labels such as wop are also strongly associated to the working class. For a complete treatment of ethnic slurs, see Allen (1983).

> blue-collar or criminal males in the role of visceral or authoritarian heroes who express themselves through violence [...]; overevaluation of kinship [...]; recessive women confined in the kitchen or the shadows but whose force is expressed within the ***domus***; and, most tellingly, males who have difficulty with language (1999: 592).

From the observations of these three scholars and the previous review of Italian American films, working-class status, violence, machismo of the Italian male and religion emerge as the major filmic codes defining Italian Americans on screen. Food, wine and clothing also function as signals of ethnicity that convey to the picture its fascinating folkloric overtones. The following sections deal more specifically with the representations of these stereotypical traits focusing only on those that have been found to be commonly exploited for humorous purposes, namely family, violence, gender role, religion, language disfiguration, and clothing.

3.1.1 The Italian American Family

Most representations of Italian Americans use the attachment to the family as a sign of ethnicity. Lourdeaux claims that family is also the major source of inspiration for Italian American filmmakers (1990: 176). Coppola chose to tell the experience of the Italian immigrants through the accounts of three generations of the Corleone family. His representation of a close-knit family that always sticks together and demands full respect and loyalty has contributed to the creation of the myth of the Italian family. This has come to imply very close relationships among the members, a sharing of every moment of your life with your siblings, parents, uncles and even the extended family.

Scorsese has taken inspiration from his own experience and his family; his films do not focus on individual families, but he does portray familial ties. In *Mean Streets,* for instance, Charley shows a strong attachment for his cousin Johnny Boy and a heavy reliance on his boss uncle. In Scorsese's films, family often causes entrapment and dooms the characters to failure

and lower class status.[2] He mainly represents the extended family that comes to include almost the whole neighborhood, the Little Italian community that is the real focal point of Scorsese's representations. The strong community ties and male friendships also paradoxically lead to isolation and a stasis, which ends in violence. In the ethnic working-class film cycle – *Marty, Saturday Night Fever, Rocky, Mac, Household Saints,* etc. - the narration is always centered on the nuclear family and the community.

Thus, the filmic Italian American is always characterized as a familial individual; much of the stereotyping derives, actually, from the family background. As D'Acierno interprets the phenomenon: "The Italian American has been constructed and institutionalized as a cultural stereotype or, to be more precise, as a constellation of stereotypes clustered around the master-stereotype of *la famiglia*" (1999: 614). All the many stereotypes hinted at in the previous review of Italian American cinematic representations - food, machismo, gender roles, consumption and flashy taste - can be tied back to the common trope of the family. Gender roles and machismo are the consequence of the Italian familial structure, where the woman dominates in the house, but is invisible outside. Food is also associated with the stereotype of the Italian woman and mother who spends her life cooking for her men. Finally, flashy taste is just a reflection of the over-the-top attitude of Italian families that are also characterized as loud, prone to discussion and unable to pass in an upper-class, white environment. The family thus defines the Italian American and sets him/her apart from WASP society. D'Acierno summarizes the power of the master stereotype of the family as follows:

> In other words, Italian American family life is represented as a spectacle, as a mode of emotional, culinary, and melodramatic excess. *La famiglia* is represented as the strong family – the hypercoded family – that at once requires a degree of fidelity and provides an order of pleasures that are both alien to the economy of the typical

[2] In his movies, Scorsese makes ample use of the freeze device to "suggest the static and entrapping feeling" (Weiss, 1987: 23) that the Italian American neighborhood forces upon these street mobsters.

> WASP family. *La famiglia,* always pictured as a regressive depository of tradition and arbiter of gendered sexuality, is the primary unit of the stereotyping, negative as well as positive, of the Italian American identity (591).

The stereotype of the family can be both positive and negative. As a matter of fact, both mafia movies and ethnic working-class films root in this archetype. However, they reflect two different and opposing discourses about the Italian American family: on the one hand, the strength of the family to create a criminal network (the "crime family") and, on the other hand, the honest, hard-working family that struggles to assimilate ("the good family") (567).[3]

Over the years, and due to the impact of *The Godfather* trilogy, the 'bad family' seems to have "usurped the place of the 'good family' in the fantasy network of the American imaginary" (575). The Italian word *famiglia* has now entered the American vocabulary as a synonym for a mafioso clan and many mafioso families[4] are now part of the mainstream American culture: the Corleones, the Genovese, the Sopranos, the Vittis; and the Gottis – the latter being to a certain extent not less fictional or 'mythical' than the others.[5] To a certain extent the Italian American stereotype of the family could be argued to coincide with the mafioso one;[6] so that the latter can be regarded as the quintessence of Italian American identity on screen. Obviously, one cannot

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[3] Recent movies have centered around this contrast within the Italian American ethnicity; De Niro, for instance, deals with the issue in *A Bronx's Tale*. Here, the young protagonist is torn between his loyalty to the honest, hard-working father and the fascination exerted by the boss of the neighborhood who acts as a sort of godfather for the boy on the street. In the end, the protagonist of the movie will opt for the honest way; he will follow his father's example. This ending is not common to many mafia movies where usually the "bad family" always wins – the "good one" not being represented at all.

[4] PBS has recently shown a documentary entitled "Medici: Godfathers of the Renaissance." The program argues that the Renaissance Florentine family –known for its fundamental role in the development of the arts in Italy – used mafioso policy and methods to exert its power. On the website, modern mafioso vocabulary is used to refer to this Renaissance family such as in "How to be a medieval Mobster", "Guys and Dolls." Italian history is thus reinterpreted as a succession of power between many mafioso families.

[5] Joseph Sciorra observes that the image of the Italian American mafia family has entered also the world of music and in particular gangsta rap with some Italian American performers who have adopted "a media-derived mafia guise" such as Lords of Brooklyn, Jo Jo Pellegrino, Genovese and Don Pigro. Here, there is also a cultural exchange between different ethnic minorities "with African American MCs taking on Italian sounding names like Ghetto Mafia, Capone (of the duo Capone and Noreaga), the New Orleans group Gambino Family, Irv Gotti from New York, and many others." (Footnote 10.)

[6] The representation of Italian American culture as crime oriented has historically been explained in terms of a peculiar family system that Banfield defined as "amoral familialism" (1958). According to his approach, southern Italians experienced a weak social organization and community that led them to rely exclusively on the family. There were no communal interests but only family interests which allowed for illegal activities and behaviors as long as these did not damage the family. See Di Leonardo for a criticism of this theory (1984: 19-20).

ignore the positive representations of the family in many films from the 50s onwards; yet, these representations have never been able to match their negative/criminal counterparts.

Scholars of working-class values and culture have pointed out that family and community are the focal points of working-class life (Smith, 2004; Zandy, 1991; Lauter, forthcoming; Coiner, 2001). The nuclear and extended family constitutes the network that working-class people span as part of a survival strategy. Yet, family is also represented as a chain that keeps the individual down and prevents him from pursuing an independent life and achieving middle-class status, as in the case of the ethnic family.[7]

In conclusion, family is the macro-stereotype for the working-class and for any ethnic groups that comes to be associated with it. It is the major ethnic, working-class stereotype from which all the others are derived or to which they are attached. Waters (1990) notices that most of the features we attribute to Italians are shared by most ethnic groups. When subjects in her study were asked to name the most distinctive ethnic values for their group, they all cited the family, perceiving it as specific to their own ethnic culture.[8] Waters thus concludes that family is "a legacy in part of an immigrant culture, and a positively ranked value in American middle class culture" (138).[9] From both sides of the ethnic divide, there is a strong will to retain some of the ethnic values and stereotypes that contribute to a positive image of the ethnic group. The family is certainly one of these archetypes that can be claimed by any ethnicity in the United States

[7] Many working-class novels deal with this paradox within the working-class family and the conflict an individual experiences in trying to move up and remain faithful. In *Bastard Out of Carolina,* Allison powerfully represents the conflictual dynamics within a lower-class family. She both shows the positive side of being able to count and receive support from your family, and the negative side of this tight familial community.

[8] Hollywood representations mirror such similarities. Pakistani, Greek, and Indian often portray the same situations and stereotypes – *East is East* (1999), *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002), *Monsoon Wedding* (2002), etc. Ethnic difference is marked only through food, clothes, gestures, and way of speaking.

[9] In her survey on Italian Americans in California, Di Leonardo (1984) observes that most of them still believe in the myth of community and family despite the objective lack of such a network in the scattered Californian landscape. Interestingly, her survey encountered objections from other scholars who claimed it to be superficial because Di Leonardo had not located any Italian American community and, according to their ideological and mythical view of ethnicity there had to be one (129-130). See Di Leonardo chapters 3 and 4 for a further treatment of the discrepancies between the community and family stereotype with the reality lived by Italian Americans in California.

hence becoming an all American trope. Yet, in the case of the Italian Americans this positive and symbolic stereotype has come to be associated with crime and that is why most representations of Italian Americans on screen are ambiguous in colliding positive and negative traits.

3.1.2 Violence

From the stereotype of the 'bad family' derives another of the dominant features of Italian American representations, namely violence. In chapter two, it has been emphasized that violence connects mafia movies and the 'rags to riches movies,' becoming the main symbol for the Italian American male, be it a criminal, athlete, boxer or laborer (Cortes, 1994: 98; D'Acierno, 1999: 590). Violence also links the pre-70s exogenous representations of Italian Americans to Italian American cinema on the one hand, and the new generation of Italian American directors to the forefathers of Italian American cinema, Coppola and Scorsese on the other.

The violent character of filmic Italian Americans is linked to their representation as primitive and passion driven individuals. This stereotype is a legacy of the 30s movies that depicted the Italian "as a creature of passion, an emotional being given to excess in love and hatred, whose religion, culture, and condition seemingly explained his exaggerated behavior" (Woll & Miller, 1987: 275). In their study of the similarities in the representations of Italian and African Americans, Vigliotti et.al. observe that "this violent, sexual, animalistic nature seems a constant in films featuring male characters of Italian-American descent, echoing the treatment of black males in American cinema since its inception" (1999: 3).[10]

[10] Most Latino cultures are also associated with this same stereotype and, turning to working-class literature many examples of violent lower class male emerge as well. Some examples can be found in Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* and also some reference in Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim.*

While non-ethnic exogenous representations have used violence to create a threatening picture of the 'other,' ethnic directors have used it to convey a sense of authenticity[11] to their films and to comment on social and ethnic conflict. In Italian American cinema, violence and crime are indeed embedded in the critical assimilationalist discourse. Italian men fight to enter the middle class and against the other ethnicities to assert their whiteness and align themselves with the white Anglo majority.[12] Violence dominates Italian American male relationships within the family as well; in *Mac,* Turturro depicts violence between brothers as a consequence of the conflict between the Italian American familial values and the individualist white American middle-class ethic (Baker & Vitullo, 2001: 221-222).

In the mafia genre, violence represents the instrument to achieve wealth. In the pursuit of the American dream, Italian Americans often encounter discrimination and marginalization. This impedes them from moving up. Hard work does not constitute a key to success either, therefore mafiosi "substitute violence for the work ethic" of the Italian Americans. Through crime, they are able to attain the desired wealth and respect, even if only of the underworld (D'Acierno, 1999: 647).

Coppola and Scorsese use violence for "narrative progression and narrative resolution" and to delineate characters (Zucker, 1984: 27). In *The Godfather* trilogy, for instance, Don Vito's three sons attitude towards violence, murder and vengeance determines their destiny and role within the family. Sonny is depicted as a hot-tempered man who enjoys using violence, but not in rational ways; this anticipates his violent death and marks him as unsuitable for the Donship. Fredo has become known for his cowardice; his character is best delineated in the scene of the

[11] The display of violence in Italian American cinema serves the same purpose as in Black American cinema where it functions as an evidence for the authenticity of the films and of the inner city's problems (Giovacchini, 1995: 211).
[12] This aspect, as already noticed, is analyzed by the Black American director Lee, but it is hinted at also in Italian American movies as De Niro's *A Bronx's Tale,* and indirectly in the racist observations uttered by the Corleones in *The Godfather.*

attempted murder of Don Vito where he shows his complete helplessness. His lack of courage and incapacity to defend the family anticipates his exclusion from it and his betrayal. Finally, Michael's destiny as the future Don is decided when he avenges the attempted murder of his father with cold blood and rationality.

In Scorsese, violence is used as a sign of unattained socialization and dysfunctionality. Zucker claims that it "results from the almost impossible demands that a society which views itself as orderly and organized imposes on individuals who, through socialization, are expected to suppress hostile tendencies in favor of correct and polite responses" (1984: 24). Society, however, is not represented as the only cause of violence; family and community, as already noted, function in these films as cages that entrap the Italian American male. Sudden eruptions of violence (Weiss, 1987: 40) are also rebellions against the oppressing patriarchy of traditional Italian American families.[13]

In Scorsese's films, an escalation of violence can be observed from *Mean Streets* through *GoodFellas* (1990)[14] to the extreme case of *Casino* (1995).[15] Violent behavior gradually becomes a defining part of his characters' identity; they resort to it in any occasion without the need of any pretext.[16] These violent mobsters have nothing in common with the noble Corleones who use violence only when needed. They are purely interested in money; they do not share the old-fashioned and fascinating ideal of the man of honor. Indeed, Scorsese shows that violence

[13] Lourdeaux argues that "in *Mean Streets* young men's rage is implicitly a response to male elders who tightly control the ownership of small businesses and thus the chance to marry" (1990: 236). Violence is thus caused by the family's oppression which conversely derives its influence from its control of upward-mobility chances.

[14] Cortes observes that *GoodFellas* features "excessively violent rhapsody [...], the splattering of blood and joltingly earthly language" (1994: 102).

[15] *Gangs of New York* could also be added to the list. Although it does not deal with Italian Americans, it continues the same discourse on ethnic conflicts and has been widely criticized because of the excessive use of violence.

[16] Throughout Scorsese's Italian American filmography, the actor that embodies this escalation is certainly Pesci. He always plays the outrageously violent and instinctive Italian American man who is proud of his sheer force and fear-instigating reputation from which his power depends. In both *GoodFellas* and *Casino,* he looses control of his violent behavior. His mad killings and murders always 'force' the mafia bosses to kill him in order to avoid further scandals and troubles. His characters embody pure violence and greed; loyalty to friends is for them only a corollary to profit. Once a friendship or relationship is not profit-winning anymore, they get rid of it in the only way they know, murder. Pesci's characters are, thus, quintessentially stereotypical, but Scorsese uses them subversively to criticize the mafia.

increases perpendicularly to the decrease of ethnic values. While in *Mean Streets* Charlie seems still attached to his ethnic heritage and in control of his emotions,[17] in the later films the characters identify themselves with their ethnicity on a mere symbolic level detached from any real significance (Boscia-Mulé, 1999: 19).[18] The violence escalation in Scorsese's later movies seems directly connected to the breaking up of the community due to the upward mobility attempts and the creeping of individual middle-class cultures and values into the working-class environment.[19]

It should be noted that Coppola and Scorsese have acquired much of their popularity thanks to their portrayals of filmic violence. Both directors have masterfully represented violence on a visual level creating suggestive and mesmerizing scenes on a technical level (Zucker, 1984: 28) - through their use of colors, stylization, etc. (Bliss, 1985: 29). Yet, both directors have also clearly exposed the repellence of violence on a thematic level. Michael loses the affection of his second wife and son and causes the death of his first wife and his daughter because of his violent business, as Phillips comments, "the vile business has invaded his home and all but destroyed it" (1990: 149). Scorsese's characters often encounter violent death and Pesci's masterful depictions of the uncontrolled and perversely violent mobster can only induce loathing and repellence.

3.1.3 Ambivalent Religious Faith

Coppola and Scorsese share another common motif in their juxtaposition of Italian American violence and Catholicism. Their first films "introduce a theme that persists in Coppola and Scorsese, namely the contradiction and even complementarity between Italian violence and

[17] Even Johnny Boy who resembles more the characters played by Pesci is more controlled compared to them.
[18] See also Gans (1979) for a detailed treatment of the term he introduced.
[19] The rise in crime in economically disadvantaged areas where family and communities are broken apart by unemployment is indeed a well known social phenomenon (Linkon & Russo, 2002: 211-212).

Catholicism" (Casillo, 2000: 379). Religious faith constitutes one of the main cultural themes for Italian Americans; their representation thus cannot escape including it in the picture.

Coppola interjects his epic narration of the Corleone 'dynasty' with many religious ceremonies that mark the gradual evolution of the family. He starts *The Godfather* with the wedding ceremony of Don Vito's daughter and ends it with the baptism of Michael's son. Michael's narrative in *The Godfather II*[20] begins with the communion of the son and *The Godfather III* opens with the ceremony in which Michael is presented with the Order of St. Sebastian, the highest honor the Catholic Church can bestow upon a layman.[21] All three movies thus begin with a family gathering associated with a religious rite cementing the connection between Italian cultural heritage and Catholicism. Religious ceremonies are always juxtaposed with assassinations carried out in the name of the Corleones; with this narrative strategy, Coppola emphasizes the ambivalence of the Italian American faith that becomes a leading motif in the last movie of the trilogy.[22]

As for Scorsese, it is widely known that in his adolescence he aspired to become a priest, but because of the chaos and temptations of New York's Little Italy, he gave up the project and turned to movie making. Nonetheless, he retained his strong religious imprint and made faith and religion the core of many of his Italian American movies.[23] As Lourdeaux notices, "in his early films he often confronts social chaos by turning to religion and rituals of social rebirth to anchor his Italian-American values" (1990: 220-221).

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[20] *The Godfather II* has a double narrative structure that crosscuts between Michael Corleone's consolidation of power, and his father Vito Corleone's rise from poverty to the establishment of an American mafia empire.

[21] Beyond religious ceremonies, Coppola carefully portrays mafia rites as the famous "baciamano" with which he ends *The Godfather,* opens the *The Godfather II* and reiterates in the *Godfather III.* The rite indeed signals the beginning of a new Donship and thus marks the succession of the three Godfathers, Don Vito, Don Michael and Vincent, the future and last Don.

[22] Coppola portrays here the connections between the mafia and the Vatican and features various meetings between Michael and Rome's highest archbishops.

[23] In *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese through American Movies,* the director affirms: "I can also see great similarities between a church and a movie house. Both are places for people to come together and share a common experience, I believe there is a spirituality in films, even if it's not one that can supplant faith" (166).

Scorsese claims, for instance, that the heart of the project of *Mean Streets*, "has more to do with Catholicism than with being an Italian-American" (240). Indeed religion constitutes a motif in the movie that represents Charlie's "obsession with damnation" (71). In the opening scenes,[24] Scorsese shows a priest, a church and then a close-up of the "Festa of San Gennaro" which recurs at various points in the movie. Soon after, there is a suggestive shot of Charlie in the church surrounded by candles with a voice-over in which the protagonist voices his religious concerns.

In Scorsese's later movies, religion and sacraments become ethnic symbols deprived of any meaning. They come to represent the fading vestiges of Italian culture and childhood traditions (229), thus symbolizing the cultural degradation experienced by the Italian American youth. In *GoodFellas,* for instance, all the mobsters wear golden crosses, but they do not manifest any faith whatsoever. Scorsese often juxtaposes violence with religious iconography enriching his texts with subliminal religious meanings and indirectly commenting on cultural and spiritual loss. Religious symbols and ethnic violence are thus invariably associated in the filmography of the two leading Italian American directors confirming that violence and Catholicism are the main emblem of *italianità* together with the family (189). This juxtaposition will be shown in the final part of the chapter to be often exploited for humorous effects.

3.1.4 Gender Roles and Machismo

In the review about the representations of Italian Americans in films, many of the major characters and actors have been mentioned that have shaped the Italian American image over the last 70 years. Interestingly, most of them are men: Don Vito and Michael Corleone, Rocky, Jack

[24] At the beginning of the movie, there is also the home-movie sequence that features Charley's baptism reinforcing the idea that faith is central in his life and tribulations. The scene is shot with a held-hand camera to convey the impression of a home movie. Scorsese often uses this device also to signal chaos, drunkenness and convey a sense of authenticity and realism (Bliss, 1985: 3).

La Motta, Tony Manero, Charlie, Ray Hill, Partanna, etc. Baker & Vitullo claim that *The Godfather* trilogy, *Mean Streets,* the *Rocky* series, and *Raging Bull* "have found critical and/or monetary success by emphasizing a masculinized version of Italian-American identity" (1990: 213).[25] This reflects the stereotype of the Italian American family as a rigid patriarchal structure, particularly in representations of the "bad family' in which the criminal activities are always in the hands of the men.[26] The stereotypes associated with Italian American men have been pointed out repeatedly; they are represented as violent, primitive and greedy womanizers who often drive their women down with them.[27]

Given their marginality, this study has not made any reference to the Italian American women that populate Italian American cinema.[28] They are represented only as members of mafioso families - mothers, sisters, daughters, grandmothers - they are not considered as independent individuals with their own story to tell.[29] The filmic Italian American woman is selfless and dedicated; but she is also strong and supportive. Her presence in the movies, albeit

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[25] This ideal of Italian American masculinity has started to be questioned in modern mafia comedies such as *Analyze This* and in the TV series *The Sopranos* where both protagonists suffer of panic attacks and go into psychotherapy. In the series this crisis in masculinity is even more evident since the psychoanalyst is a woman, played by Lorraine Bracco.

[26] This is the reason why Huston's black comedy *Prizzi's Honor* stands out in the panorama of the representations of Italian Americans. Women have leading roles in the comedy and are not represented as loyal and servile characters, but determined and vengeful individuals, just like the men. One could hypothesize that the reason for this underlying feminism is the fact that the director – and actually most of the cast – are not Italian American and are not mainly concerned with issues of authenticities.

[27] The womanizers and primitive stereotypes ties into the oversexed minority script identified by Raskin (1985: 194-195).

[28] In his analysis, Lourdeaux (1990) investigates with some depth the diverging tendency in the portrayal of Italian men and women since the 30s. While the former were depicted as mainly criminal, dangerous, emotion-driven and womanizers, the latter were seen as victims of machismo and the patriarchal system that characterized Italian culture (65). The exotic beauty of Italian women was highly appealing to Anglo-American masses that thus wished to conquer the Italian female and disempower the Italian male: "For this reason, the attractive Italian woman had to be taken out of her neighborhood. [...] By the early 1930s, then, the Italian woman on screen had become an opera puppet pulled by the strings of Anglo-American desire, while the Italian gangsters of *Little Caesar, Public Enemy* (1931), and *Scarface* were all the rage" (65). The representation of Italian women in mainstream non-Italian American cinema since the 30s has developed in a binary way; next to the exotic beauty of young Italian females, media established also the image of the middle aged - often ugly - Italian woman always dressed in black who spends her days cooking for a dominant husband (Coletta, 2000: 10-11). There are a series of films that made the fortune of Italian beauties such as Loren, Lollobrigida and Lisi.[28] In these movies, the Italian and Italian American woman is at the center of the narration, but her co-protagonists are always non-Italian men confirming Lourdeaux's argument (1990) that films encoded the desire to appropriate the exotic beauty in the mainstream white society by separating her from her ethnic community. When Italian American men are the subjects of the narration, the Italian American women in the film fit, instead, in the second stereotypical representation of domestic women whose lives revolve around their men's needs.

[29] Research on Italian Americans has also paid scant attention to gender issues and has represented women as "secondary and stereotypical figures [...] 'merged' physically and ideologically with the family" (Di Leonardo, 1984: 24). Most research on Italian Americans indeed stresses the role of women as moral center for the Italian American, working-class family (Birnbaum, 1990; DeSena, 1990; Cavaioli, 1990)

minimal, is essential because she serves as the guardian of the family traditions. She is the repository of Italian American culture.

In the whole *Godfather* trilogy there are only five main female characters that bear some significance for the narrative of the films: Don Vito's wife, Connie Corleone - Vito's daughter - , Apollonia – Michael's first wife, Kay Adams – Michael's wife – and Mary Corleone –Michael's daughter. The Corleone women (Michael's mother, sister and daughter) and the Michael's short-lived Italian wife are a "conservative characterization of women devoted to home and family, revered and protected for their support and self-sacrifice" (Baker & Vitullo, 2001: 214). The only non-Italian American woman, Kay Adams, is always represented as an outsider in the family; she does not respect Italian customs, she does not understand and approve of the men's business, and her cultural difference finally determines her expulsion from the family.

In Scorsese's movies about Italian Americans, women appear as wives, lovers of the goodfellas or as prostitutes. They acquire leading roles only in their pairing with the male protagonists who represent the real focus of the narration. Scorsese dwells more on the representation of male friendships rather than on men and women relationships. Indeed most of his movies have as protagonists a duo or triad of male friends: Charley and Johnny Boy in *Mean Streets*, Henry Hill, James Conway and Tommy DeVito in *GoodFellas*, and finally Ace Rohstein and Santoro in *Casino*. Scorsese's women are often not of Italian American descent; the only main Italian American woman is Teresa in *Mean Streets;* while in the others the leading female characters are the Jewish Karen Hill and the white Ginger McKenna. Italian American women only appear in the background accompanying the bosses, but they seldom utter a line.[30]

[30] Teresa, Karen and Ginger are all represented as victims of the patronizing and authoritative patriarchal structure of the Italian American community and family. Scorsese shows here once more the constriction of the Italian American community that annihilates individual and personal relationships. Typical of such an image is the intervention of the mafia boss in *GoodFellas* to settle the marriage problems of the Hills. In order to do business with the Italian American mafia bosses, one has to behave properly with the family, or at least retain the appearance of doing so.

In the ethnic working-class films, women have bigger roles in that they function as more visible symbols of the familial institution. They provide support to the struggling, hard-working men; this is definitely the case in *Marty* and *Rocky*. In order to see women really take center stage in films about Italian Americans though, we have to turn to the 90s and the appearance of the first Italian American female director, Savoca. Her representations, however, confirm the stereotype of the domestic Italian American woman who dictates the rules inside the house, but has no voice outside that sphere.

In the first chapter, the working-class family has been defined as patriarchal in structure with the woman associated with the hearth and constituting the spine of the family tradition. Indeed, Waters argues that gender roles in lower-class families resemble Italian American gender divisions (1990: 81). In literature and other artistic representations, the lower-class woman is always represented as submissive to the man. Her realm is the home where she rules;[31] she keeps the family traditions alive and holds the family and community together. Waters observes that lower-class women are assigned the task of "netting the web of kin and friends relations" (81). All these features apply to the filmic Italian American woman as well, but also to American women of Greek or Indian descent - in other words to 'ethnic women' in general.[32] The image of the filmic Italian American woman is thus strongly shaped across class lines.

3.1.5 Linguistic Disfiguration

A common stereotypical trait that pervades any representation of Italian Americans, be it 'positive' or 'negative,' is the Italian American accent that often becomes a source of humor in non-Italian American comedies and advertising of Italian products. In all the films mentioned so

[31] Waters objects to the common claim that women possess power within the house; she sustains that they rather "benefited by the prestige and power of the motherhood and familistic ideas" (1990: 48).

[32] In literature, there are examples such as *Out of this Furnace* (Allison, 1992) where Slovak women are represented as strong individuals contributing to the sustaining of the family and function as the guardian of the house, but they prefer to stay backstage.

far, the main characters have a distinct accent that marks them off.[33] In *The Godfather,* Don Vito has a strong Italian accent and a seemingly difficulty to express himself; Brando's linguistic performance has become one of the classics in cinema and many other films pay tribute to the way of speaking he invented.[34] Don Michael is one of the few college educated Italian Americans on screen, but he will have to unlearn his college language and attitude in order to assert himself as the Don. He will have to adopt the mafioso language and gestures that everybody around him uses, thus stepping further away from the middle-class image he seeks to portray.

In Scorsese's movies, the characters are also often stereotyped as speaking with an accent; Johnny Boy and Charlie in *Mean Streets* represent second-generation Italian Americans but they still sound like first generation immigrants. This choice in the representation of Italian Americans can be justified by the need to employ evident signs of ethnicity and class; the Italian

[33] Ethnic accents and words are often the target and source of ethnic slurs. Many indeed derive from mock imitations of the Italian accent in English. For instance, one of the labels identified by Allen for Italian is *spic*; its origin is unclear, even if most people agree that it derives from *spaghetti* (1990: 60). However, a specious etymology which has found some diffusion contemplates the derivation from the verb 'to speak:' a way of mimicking the Italian pronunciation in sentences like 'no spicka Engleesh" (60-61). Although the etymology based on the English mispronunciation on the part of Italian immigrants is specious, it testifies that a marked accent can be used for stereotyping; today people do speak of a typical Italian-American accent, which has thus clearly been codified as an ethnic symbol.

[34] Not only the accent or way of speaking, but also the very lexicon used by Italian American mafiosi has become a cinematic myth. So much so that even in films representing Black Americans, we find imitations of Don Vito's talk. The movie *Set it off* (1996), for instance, recounts the story of four Black American working-class women that decides to resort to thievery to escape their neighborhood. Their decision do commit a crime is depicted as a mafioso meeting. They sit around an oblong table and the woman who makes the proposal starts off imitating Don Vito, in the accent, tone and linguistic choices. All the other women join her in the mafioso talk that constitutes a source of humor. In *The Sopranos,* the same kind of language is used which has now been marketed as a product. Books in mafia talk and websites are encountering much success and are proliferating. As Coletta observes, the success of Italian Americans in front of the camera "spawned a whole industry of mafia-inspired products including: Godfather pasta, pizza franchises, sub shops, bakeries, fashion, board games, and recordings" (2000: 28). The *Sopranos* website, for instance, offers a course in "mobspeak." Many TV ads, humorous postcards and posters use Italian American typical expressions even when the products or events advertised do not relate to Italian Americans. A poster I personally saw reads: "If you taka my space, I breaka your face." Here the tendency to add vowels at the end of every word typical of Italians and Italian Americans of the first generation is mocked together with the mafioso discourse of violence and menacing. Another example of the use of mafioso talk for advertising are some posters used by a YSU fraternity to advertise a party. First, they spread a flier with a famous scene of Marlon Brando in *The Godfather* and the words: "Paddy is coming." The association between the typical Irish name and the symbol of the Italian American mafia did not offer many clues as to the purpose of the flier. The second flier included the name of the fraternity and "Presents ... PADDY MURPHY. These guys say you'd better go ... or fuhgeddaboutit," below a picture of *The Sopranos* and finally "Come pay your respects." Here again, the fraternity resorted to expressions that have become symbolic of the typical mafioso such as "Come pay your respect" – a quote from *The Godfather* – and "fuhgeddaboutit" that should imitate the Italian pronunciation of the sentence "forget about it" – that cinematic Italian American mafiosi use with obsessive frequency.

American accent soon sets the story in its right social context: ethnic minority in urban area, working-class characters with no education. D'Acierno claims that the main characteristic of cinematic Italian Americans is their entrapment in language that has contributed to the image of primitive, irrational, lower-class, and often dumb people (1999: 592). In the following excerpt, D'Acierno bitterly recapitulates the main Italian American characters on screen and their linguistic impediments:

> Marty, who is confined to the litany, "I dunno, Angie. What do you wanna do?" [...]; the Godfather himself, the Italian American Zeus, who speaks physically throttled jaw speech, together with the larger cast of English-murdering characters who speak in undeleted expletives and ejaculations ('bada bing[35]'); and Rocky, the self-described 'great White dope,' a troglodyte who has to practice his dumb jokes before he delivers them to his beloved Adrian and who is so imprisoned within language that his most expressive speech act is 'yo' (592).

This linguistic stereotype and caricature have a strong link to class representations and the persistence of the lower-class stereotype in relation to Italian Americans. First, language is one of the most evident indicators of class membership. Second, broken English represents a common obstacle in the process of upward mobility. As D'Acierno observes, being trapped by "linguistic disfiguration, cinematic Italian Americans have never been able to improve their class image, of which language is the inevitable mirror" (592).[36]

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[35] Used in *Analyze This* by the psychiatrist to imitate the Italian American way of speaking, and repeatedly by Jelly in the first and second movie.

[36] D'Acierno's conclusion (1999) from his analysis of the representation of Italian Americans is quite drastic in reference to language. He sees broken English and the Italian American accent as a way to argue that the language proper to Italian Americans is bodily and animalistic language. He connects this representation to the stereotype of the spectacle of Italian American life style and interprets this as a disfiguration of the Italian rich visual cultural tradition, as he explains in the following quotation: "Italian Americans are perpetually characterized as the primitive people of the body who have no linguistic identity. Their proper language is body language: the language of gesture and the self-display of the spectacle. The positive stereotype of Italy as the supreme visual culture is translated into the stereotype of bad taste, of the spectacle of the kitsch" (604). Another important Italian cultural heritage is classical music, specifically opera. This historical treasure has also been trivialized in mafia movies because it has come to be associated to the mafia and its close mindedness. D'Acierno claims that "[opera and mafia have] been the dominant mode through which Italianness has been configured in the American imagination" (568). The opera is a major part of the soundtrack (together with Italian American singers such as Sinatra and Bennett) of most Italian American movies; from *The Godfather,* through DePalma famous use of the aria "Pagliaccio" in the scene where Capone commits an outrageous murder in *The Untouchables*, until the recent use in *Analyze This.* Scorsese seems to refrain from this stereotypical use of music.

3.1.6 Clothing and Physical Appearance as a sign of class and ethnicity

Another constant in cinematic representations of Italian Americans is the predilection of Italian men for flashy clothes, golden chains and amulets.[37] This applies both to the *guido*[38] stereotype and to the gangster icon. Casillo observes that the Italian American gangster is typified by "a love for fancy clothes, confirming the popular assumption that Italian-Americans dress in vulgar style" (2000: 379). Baker & Vitullo even argue that the masculinity of Italian American men is undermined by "their association with physicality and style" (2001: 220).

The stereotype of the Italian American male concerned about clothes dates back to the 30s and the famous scene in *Little Caesar* where Caesar celebrates his first victory by buying a new suit that should mark his improved status. In *The Godfather II,* we see the powerful Don Michael being mocked and insulted by a U.S. Senator for his 'oily' hair and silk suits. Scorsese has also offered a particular effective portray of the stereotyped appearance of the Italian American male. Critics agree that he "authentically [details] the dress, food, homes, and general circumstances of Italian American Life" (Coletta, 2000: 32).

Most mobsters in Scorsese's movies, for instance, are obsessed with money and with class symbols (53) like cars, watches, and clothing. Charley in *Mean Streets* always wears elegant suits, mainly the pin-striped suit that is often associated with the image of the mafioso. The other street mobsters also wear suits, but with flashy colors or shiny texture, another stereotype that is exploited for humorous effects in later comedies. In Scorsese's movies, the gangsters use clothing as a symbol of status; it is a form of showing off their wealth according to the assumption that "power of money [...] demonstrate[s] one's worth" (55).

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[37] See Bruzzi (1995) for an analysis of clothing in gangster cinema.

[38] Tony Manero in *Saturday Night Fever* is probably the most famous and extremely stereotyped *guido* with his 'greasy' hair, shiny and flashy suits and golden amulets that mark him as a working-class ethnic.

3.2 Mafia and Mean Streets movies as Metaphors for Assimilation

Most of the recent mafia movies have been produced, directed and acted by Italian Americans; this raises the question of the internalization of stereotypes. This issue is strongly debated within the Italian American community that often reproaches Italian American filmmakers, actors and producers of reinforcing the negative image of their ethnicity. Indeed, self-portrait is considered as "the greatest threat to the Italian American public image, since such movie textbooks carried the aura of insider knowledge, adding legitimacy to their representations" (Cortes, 1994: 102).[39] Yet, this study claims that today's stereotypical representations of Italian Americans do not constitute a form of self-denigration and submission to the predominant culture, but they rather testify to a process of appropriation and inversion of mainstream stereotypes.

The allegedly negative images of Italian Americans can be interpreted as a criticism of the American system and the hurdles immigrants are faced with in the process of assimilation. Coletta notices that "many classic gangster films subtly addressed the struggle of these various ethnic groups to be included within the American social mainstream" (2000: 23).[40] His assumption is that the "Italian-American gangster stereotype, as constructed within mainstream, contemporary Hollywood productions, has been employed to showcase the movement of Italians into the "white cultural category" (29). Sautman agrees with Coletta's argument and interprets contemporary representations of Italian Americans as "sites for the inscription of explosive or socially unacceptable racial discourses; as such, they engage critically the problematics of how

[39] Coletta claims, for instance, that Italian Americans are among the few ethnicities that are still the object of mocking after 200 years of assimilation in the American society (2000: 3).

[40] D'Acierno also emphasizes this function of the crime film as it can be seen in the following quotation: "Throughout its long history, the crime film has served as a critical means of exploring the American Dream as it has been internalized in the psyche of the deterritorialized criminal, usually the ethnic outsider, who by definition is confined to the 'underworld,' the gangland that exists just under the surface of ordinary life. To make himself seen, the gangster must 'cheat' the American Dream by substituting violence for the work ethic while displaying in flagrant fashion all the lineaments of instant success – 'the Look' (sharp clothes and the aggressively postured body), fast cars, fast women, loose money – and exercising power over others in a spectacular way" (1999: 647).

'whiteness' has been constructed and embraced" (2002: 1-2). Achieving 'whiteness' is almost synonymous with achieving 'middle-class' status and one of the motifs of Italian American cinema is indeed "the rise to middle-class status and hard work" (Coletta, 2000: 30).

3.2.1 *The Godfather* Phenomenon

The Godfather is prototypical in this process of identity construction in that it represents "the American tragedy of Italian assimilation of, and by, the American Dream" (D'Acierno, 1999: 569). Fofi et. al. agree in interpreting *The Godfather* as a fictional but sociologically well researched representation of the American Dream, as a "metafora dell'America e della sua storia, fatta da un americano che ha vissuto sulla sua pelle e nella sua famiglia la fatica dell'apprendistato all'America" (1988: 134).[41] Coppola himself publicly affirmed that his representation of the mafia was intended as a metaphor of America:

> I feel that the Mafia is an incredible metaphor for this country. Both the Mafia and America have roots in Europe. America is a European phenomenon. Basically, both the Mafia and America feel they are benevolent organizations. Both the Mafia and America have their hands stained with blood from what it is necessary to do to protect their power and interests. Both are totally capitalistic phenomena and basically have a profit motive (Lourdeaux, 1990: 186).

The trilogy clearly represents the analogies between corporate America and the mafia;[42] it narrates of the attempts of the Corleone family to legitimate their illegal activities by infiltrating into American politics and its business system. It depicts the

[41] "a metaphor of America and its history produced by an American who has experienced first hand and through his family the burden of the apprenticeship in America" (translation by me). This interpretation of the *Godfather* is best exemplified in the opening of the second movie of the saga where we see the very young Vito Corleone arrive at Ellis Island. He is on a boat with hundreds other immigrants of different ethnicities, all in search for a better life. In a powerful scene, Coppola shows the fatigued faces of the immigrants looking up at the Statue of Liberty, the symbol of their new life, of their hopes and of the American dream. Yet, as soon as they land, they are treated like cattle; lined up for physical check ups and shoved from one place to another. The young Vito Andolini becomes Vito Corleone because of miscommunication with the American officers who read his hometown name as his last name. The change of name marks Vito's destiny by inevitably and involuntarily associating him to one of the most renowned mafia controlled Italian villages.

[42] According to Casillo, this is the reason why mafia movies have known so much success. He sustains that "the gangster appeals to audiences cynically disillusioned with capitalism, not least through the notion that gangsters and businessmen follow the same methods" (2000: 378).

> process of stripping away the stigmatizing elements of the immigrant experience, which took crime as its initial mode of 'Americanization,' and then of transforming the family business into a good capitalist enterprise, a task whose emptiness is exposed the further we move unto the trilogy by the discovery that the good system is a mirror-image of the Mafia (D'Acierno, 1999: 569).

Towards the end of the movie, Michael disillusioned by his encounters with Italian businessmen, politicians, and clergy bitterly affirms: "Politics and crime. They're the same thing..."[43] Few scenes later, he expresses even more clearly Coppola's interpretation of the mafia and capitalism as mirror images of one another:

> Connie, all my life I, kept trying to go up in society, where everything higher up was legal, straight. But the higher I go, the crookeder it becomes. How in the hell does it end? Ahh -- been killing each other for centuries here. For money, for pride, family. To keep from becoming the slaves of the rich *pezzonovante*.

The evolution of the Corleones' activities under the second-generation Italian American Don symbolizes the process of Americanization in that the mafia not only becomes a capitalistic enterprise, but it is also stripped of its cultural heritage. Michael becomes the emblem of the deculturalization process and of the illusion of the American dream that is gradually exposed moving from the first to the third film. In the first movie, we see Michael reject and despise his family; he is an American soldier with a WASP girlfriend headed for a legitimate career. The attempted murder of his father, however, drives him back to the family represented as the trope of Italian culture from which an Italian American cannot escape. At the end of the third movie, he confesses to his sister Connie that: "All my life I wanted out. I wanted the family, out" but "just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in!" He cannot escape the Corleones' destiny that was decided in Sicily with the murder of Vito's father and in Little Italy where Vito got involved into crime out of necessity.

[43] The lines are taken from the online transcript of the movie.

Michael is represented as the good son, the one who has assimilated all the good Italian values and therefore, paradoxically, he is the most suited to run the criminal family business. The rest of the story tells of Michael's struggle to conform to American, white, and middle-class ideals, which determines his subsequent failure both as Italian Don and an American businessman. Thus, from the first to the third movie, we witness a degrading of cultural traditions that is best exemplified in the contrast between the beginning scenes of the first two movies clearly exemplifies this process. The first begins with a typical Italian marriage, celebrated with traditional Italian songs and dances and attended by many first generation immigrants who still talk in Italian. The second, instead, starts with the party for Michael's son's confirmation. The celebration takes place in the new Corleones' house on Lake Tahoe, Nevada[44] with mostly WASP guests among which American politicians; no Italian food is served and no Italian music is played. This shows Michael's attempts to mask his ethnicity in order to become white. His attempted rejection of ethnicity inevitably marks his fate because he thus looses the humanity that his Italian values conferred him despite his criminal behavior (Coletta, 2000: 38, 44). Phillips also observes that "throughout the picture Coppola makes it clear that the higher Michael rises in the hierarchy of Mafia chefs, the lower he sinks into the depth of moral degradation" (1990: 149). In the second movie, the process of deculturalization is well represented in contrast to Vito Corleone's rise to power. Whereas the father rises up to the status

[44] In his investigation on masculinity in the representations of Italian Americans, Baker & Vitullo (2001) offer an interesting mapping of Italian American films that highlights the strive towards assimilation and middle-class status of most fictional characters. Most films representing Italian Americans are set in Little Italies in major American cities, typically New York; Italian Americans are urban working-class and they are defined also by the neighborhoods they inhabit. Interestingly, in many movies we see the protagonists move away from their neighborhoods in the attempt to free themselves from their working-class background and to approach the middle class. Even the Corleones, who are from the start of the movie the most powerful family in town, move from their mansion in Long, Island, NY to the more middle class residence in Lake Tahoe, Nevada at the beginning of the second film. In *Raging Bull,* Jack LaMotta moves "from the Italian-American neighborhood where he grew up to bourgeois spaces on Pelham Parkway and in Miami" (218). In *Saturday Night Fever,* Tony Manero is initially defined through the space he inhabit – his working-class neighborhood in Brooklyn and the disco; however, upon his encounter with Stephanie who compares him to 'the real man in Manhattan,' he starts despising his community. At the end of the film, we see Manero leave Brooklyn and start his new life in a nice, middle class neighborhood. Place is, thus, used in the movies as a symbol of class membership and class mobility.

of boss by remaining loyal to his cultural heritage, Michael affirms his leadership by espousing the white capitalist business methods.[45]

Despite the many differences, both Vito and Michael are represented as good fathers, respectful husbands and wise men that are as honest in their friendships and relationships as they are dishonest in their business activities. Coppola represents them as more humane than the legitimate American and Italian businessmen who do not refrain from attacking religious icons as the Pope and do not possess any code of honor. For this reason, Coppola's representation of Italian Americans is quite contradictory and the release of the first *Godfather* movie provoked lively debates. While Coppola's aim was to represent the negative consequences of a success-driven culture, his representation of Italian Americans established the myth of the mafioso because, as Lourdeaux observe:

> Filmgoers clearly liked the beleaguered Michael, who first proved his WASP worth by separating himself from his disreputable family. They were repulsed only by the hypocrisy of institutional Catholicism and Italian ethnics, while they savored the justifiable violence of a man defending his family and achieving success in a brutal business world (1990: 185-186).

3.2.2 Mean Streets Cinema

As already noted, most of the successful and praised gangster movies deal with the attempts Italian Americans made to enter "white franchise in terms of class, economics, and race" (Coletta, 2000: 31). The propeller for mobster behavior and violence is the capitalist greed for money and power that pushes the lower-class wiseguys to seek illicit ways to achieve what mainstream society denies them. In regard to *GoodFellas*, Coletta observes, for instance, that "Italian Americans are hard-working and persistent, but that this Mafia subpopulation is willing

[45] Michael's betrayal of the Italian American origin can be seen in his neglect of the family. In *The Godfather II,* his son makes him a drawing with two checkboxes - "Did you like it? YES NO" - because he never sees him. Moreover, Michael entrusts the control of the poorest Italian neighborhoods to other mafioso families and refuses to intervene to help them. He attempts to cut any relation to all the other families to pursue the acquisition of the *Immobiliare* Company. This betrayal of old loyalties will cost him his family and cause the death of his beloved daughter.

to bypass the mainstream American system" (55). He thus makes the point that despite their "stylized ways of language and dress," cinematic wise guys do share many values and goals with the American middle class, but not the ideas about how to apply and achieve them (55).

In later movies, such as *GoodFellas, Casino, A Bronx's Tale,* and *The Sopranos,* the gangsters definitely belong to the middle class from an economic perspective; however they cannot enter it completely because of their marked ethnicity[46] that prevents them from achieving full whiteness (54). These families, who have attained the wealth of the American middle class, and sometimes even of the upper class, are still represented as the other. D'Acierno underlines that today "Italian Americans belong to majorities (White, Christian, Catholic, middle class) for which they represent the Other" (1999: 618).[47] They are still viewed as the 'other' because they have retained too many ethnic attributes that make them "the most blue collar of the middle class" (619). Like gangsters, "Italian Americans are in the middle; and hence over-determined with respect to both the majority and the other minorities" (619). They are more successful, rich and accepted than other minorities, but they are too ethnic to be really part of the majority.

In most Italian American films, the protagonists are entrapped in an identity struggle between their heritage and their middle-class ambition. Crime seems to constitute the link between the two, a way to reach the desired wealth without whitening up and submitting to the superimposed hierarchy of the American society. Indeed, Gardaphe interprets the gangster as "a means of transgressing the social boundaries set up by definitions of class" (2002: 51). It

[46] This theme is developed also in *The Sopranos*, where the family definitely belongs to the middle class from a mere economic point of view; however, it is differentiated from other Italian American families who are assimilated in the upper classes – as those at the Country Club – on the grounds of their visible ethnicity. Upper-class Italian Americans have lost most of their ethnic traits in order to pass and be accepted on the basis of their class membership instead of the cultural heritage. This process is common to any minority groups, being a defining criterion of the assimilation process.

[47] The resilience of the working-class and criminal stereotype in face of the Italian Americans' actual assimilation and current middle-class status is not surprising because stereotypes often remain anchored to the first stages of immigration and ethnic contact. Once the ethnic individual joins the middle class, he/she is not defined by color or ethnic lines any more, but rather in terms of success and status. Davies (1990) argues that ethnic humor is not subject to change either; ethnic jokes about Italian Americans today are still mainly associated with these stereotype traits and with the lower and marginal status of Italian Americans.

symbolizes the transition "from worker to power broker" (51). Italian American directors seem to have documented the access of Italian Americans to the middle class and power through the figure of the gangster that Gardaphe effectively defines as "a mode of being a man, a roadmap of moving from poverty or working class to middle or upper class. [...] a trope for signifying the gain of cultural power that comes through class mobility" (52).

3.3 Irony and Humor in Italian American Dramas

Before turning to the investigation of recent mafia comedies in the light of the Italian American cinematic tradition, it is necessary to briefly look at the uses and forms of humor within the dramas previously analyzed. Indeed Italian American filmmakers present a strong ironic tendency despite the seriousness of their representations.

In *The Godfather* trilogy, irony[48] is an instrument used to symbolically comment on the ambivalence of Italian American Catholicism and on the moral degradation the Corleones represent.[49] This is achieved by the constant juxtaposition between religious and mafia rites, between religious ceremonies that condemn sin and the actual display of cold violence by the Corleones. Phillips, for instance, emphasizes the "ironic parallel between Michael's solemn role as godfather in the baptismal ceremony and the stunning 'baptism of the blood' he has engineered to confirm his position as godfather" (1990: 147). Zucker echoes this ironic reading defining the final "baptism-execution" sequence in *The Godfather* as "exhilarating in its

[48] Irony has been the objects of thousands of studies in various disciplines and its definition is far from straightforwarded (Simpson, 2003: 90). In this study, irony is intended simply as an instrument to mark difference between what is asserted and what is meant (Simpson, 2003: 90; Hutcheon, 1985: 52). Many are the forms and devices irony can use, but as Simpson notices the main feature of irony is that it "engenders a discursive 'twist,' whether that be through implicature – a deliberate departure from Grice's maxims – or through some broader incongruity-generating strategy" (2003: 94). See pp. 90-97 for a more detailed treatment of irony. Coppola's juxtaposition strategy of violence and religion can be defined ironic because it uncovers the difference and hypocrisy between what the characters assert in relation to religion and what they actually do and think.

[49] Davies points out that religion is an ethnic differentiator that is often exploited in ethnic jokes. In particular, Roman Catholics are often the butts of jokes about stupidity due to the fact that Catholicism is viewed as a very traditional and corporate religion that does not promote economic competition through individualism (1990: 64). Italians being for the majority Catholic thus fit into the stupidity category according to all criteria. Coppola does indeed exploit religion as an ethnic differentiator; although he does not use it for stupidity jokes, he does show the ironic and critical potential of religion.

crosscutting between Michael's recitation of the church liturgy in which he renounces Satan and the assassinations of the rival mafia leaders" (1984: 28).

Irony takes center stage especially in Scorsese's production. Lourdeaux observes that, "Scorsese, always an Italian ironist, began his career with mock portraits of a mob underling and an earnest young artist; that is, he poked fun at the clichéd ideas and stereotype of the Italian hood, while saving some ridicule for himself as the self-absorbed artist" (1990: 218-219). Indeed Scorsese uses bitter irony to undermine stereotypes and to critically comment on issues related to violence, ethnicity and class conflict. His realistic account of street life is enhanced by the representation of the humor and sarcasm typical in that environment. In *Mean Streets,* for instance, characters signal solidarity and difference through their uses of humor. Charlie and Johnny Boy tease each other continuously to underscore their friendship; simultaneously, they use aggressive humor to set a boundary against, for instance, homosexuals and any group that they perceive as different. This form of humor emphasizes Scorsese's representation of the Italian American community in terms of isolation and entrapment, because it contributes to set Little Italy apart from the rest of the world.

In *GoodFellas*, the characters use the same forms of humor; what is most remarkable in the movie is, however, the ironic narrative strategy employed by the director himself. For this reason, the movie has often been defined as a black comedy that represents "the exhilaration with which the goodfellas perform their deeds as a kind of transgressive activity, including Pesci's monstrous hazings [...] with a grotesque mixture of comedy and terror" (D'Acierno, 1999: 649). Irony is mostly associated with violence in this movie as in most of Scorsese's work where "violence and comedy are linked in frightening juxtaposition" (Zucker, 1984: 28). The best example of this narrative strategy can be found towards the end of the movie. Tommy DeVito

has just killed one of the mafia made-guys for a trivial offence and, together with Henry and James, is on the way to bury him, in order to hide this serious breach of mafia code – you are never allowed to kill a made-man. While the half-dead guy is still in the trunk, they stop by at Tommy's house where they run into his mother. Her figure is heavily stereotyped as the woman who lives in the *domus*, or rather in the kitchen to serve her men. As soon as they step inside, she offers to cook for them and in the next scene we see them sitting at the table laughing and chatting. No one seems to remember the dead in the car, except for Henry who keeps looking out of the window where the shadow of the car functions as a constant reminder to him and the viewers of what happened. The contrast between the ethnic, lovable mother, the nice food,[50] and family chat with the unjustified and cruel murder is quite exhilarating and memorable offering food for thought. Indeed Scorsese seems to employ irony as a strategy to distance the viewers from the violent spectacle they are faced with.

Irony is also used as a form of metacommentary throughout the movie. From the very start and Henry Hill's voice-over,[51] the viewers are introduced to this sort of double narrative construed through juxtaposition. We hear Hill say "All my life I wanted to be a gangster" and in the next scene we see him standing in front of his mother with a brand new suit[52] and her

[50] Food is another constant ethnic marker in Scorsese's movies – as for all representations of Italian Americans – and a source of humor. Another exhilarating scene in *GoodFellas* occurs when the bosses are arrested. Scorsese depicts them in prison busy with cooking. We see them in their sleepers, short pants and socks stirring the past sauce; the voice-over tells us that they are the most dangerous mafia men around. In *Casino,* the most exhilarating scenes are also associated with food and the mafioso elders. As D'Acierno points out, Scorsese offers here a "gangster parody that depicts the all-powerful bosses as a motley crew of septuagenarian bosses, old chestnut themselves, who gather around a table – Last-Supper style – in the grocery to eat macaroni and drink red wine from old jelly glasses" (1999: 654).

[51] Scorsese largely uses this technique in his movies which has a strong ironic potential. The beginning of both *GoodFellas* and *Casino* introduce the characters through a voice-over of the protagonists. The introduction of all the mafia bosses of the neighborhood is often reliant on some stereotypical features that are satirized in the script. This technique has been exploited also by De Niro in *A Bronx's Tale* that starts with a similar hilarious commentary on all the mobsters of the nearby Italian café.

[52] Clothes are also a constant source of humor in Scorsese's movies. In *Mean Streets,* Johnny Boy is introduced while he enters the bar with a brand new suit and jokingly takes his pants off together with the coat and hands them to the attendant at the coat check. In *GoodFellas,* apart from this scene, Karen Hill also ironically comments on ethnicity through clothing. In a voice-over, she narrates of her first difficulties in adapting to the Italian American way of life. In particular she describes Italian American women teasing their way of dressing and their constant occupation with nail polishing, hairdressing, etc. In *Casino*, the flashy taste of the characters is particularly exaggerated. Ace, the Golden Jew, is set apart as the only non-Italian American also through

commentary is "You look like a gangster." The irony comes here from the different meanings the sentence assumes in relation to the mother, the son and the viewer. The first intends it as a derogatory remark, the son views it instead as a compliment, and finally, the omniscient viewer laughs together with the director/narrator at the contradiction. Later in the movie, Henry Hill explains, again in a voice-over, that he and his friends are just "blue-collar guys" who went into crime because it is 'the only way to cut some extra money." In the next scene, Scorsese shows these blue-collar Italian Americans handling stacks of 100 dollars[53] and buying the most expensive clothes, thus using irony for critical distance.

In conclusion, irony functions as a form of critical metacommentary by the director on the gangsters' life style. Through this device, Scorsese voices his criticism of the mafia and the mobsters; he attempts to demystify them and unmasks their hypocrisy, disloyalty and unfairness by constantly undermining their assertions through humor. Irony, however, enhances the quality of the picture and thus instead of achieving critical distance sometimes seems to increase the fascination and affection for the gangster figure viewers have grown accustomed to.

his pink jackets, blue shoes and socks. He only wears very flashy colors that ironically contrast with the rest of the characters and Scorsese also enjoys to repeatedly focus on his wardrobes and closet showing hundreds of like-colored shoes and jackets.

[53] As already observed, money is a motif throughout Scorsese's films; characters are constantly shown with money in their hands, visually emphasizing their belief that everything can be bought and all is about money. De Niro seems to have followed his maestro's steps and makes the same visual and thematic choice in *A Bronx's Tale.*

4. Parody and Humor in Mafia Comedies

In this chapter, the study turns away from Italian American cinema to analyze, instead, recent mafia comedies. Given the success of mafia comedies, as shown in section 2.5, it is interesting to investigate whether the humor really builds on the stereotypes developed through history and cemented by Italian American cinema. Mafia comedies will be read as parodies of mafia films produced by Italian American directors, specifically of the *Godfather* trilogy and the Mean Streets cinema. Since these comedies are produced by non-Italian Americans, the study will try to understand whether their use of humor is disparaging or subversive.

The aim of this investigation is to show that parody can undermine stereotypes by inverting them. To support this view, a brief definition of parody will be provided and its functions exemplified in a short analysis of *The Freshman,* the most complete parody of *The Godfather.* A more detailed analysis of the punchlines in the film *Analyze This* will point out that they rely on the scripts identified in jokes about Italian Americans and on the respective stereotypical traits previously identified in the movies. The scripts are here exploited to both positively tease the filmic heritage of the great Italian American directors, and to question the traditional discourse on Italian Americans.

4.1 Ethnic Jokes about Italians

From the survey on ethnic jokes all over the world, Davies concludes that Italian Americans are associated with the dumbness script; they are indeed the most frequent butts of American jokes about stupidity together with the Poles (1990: 63).[1] Given the stereotypical traits identified in mafia movies, this association should not come as a surprise. Italian Americans are depicted as

[1] It is interesting to notice that this association does not include Italians; although Davies stresses that dispersed groups of immigrants still constitute an ethnic group and share the same jokes via their distant ancestors (1990: 2). In the case of Italian Americans, however, there are two major differences: Italian Americans are the butts of stupidity and militaristic jokes, related to the mafioso stereotype, in America, while Italians are not associated to either of these two scripts, on the contrary they are the butts of cowardice jokes (201-202).

working-class, conservative, Catholic, family-oriented and entrapped in their community. This picture fits into Davies's argument that the dumbness script is often pinned down on marginal groups that tend to form big ethnic neighborhoods characterized by stability and continuity. Moreover, it has been repeatedly noticed that a common means to typify the Italian American on screen is through the use of the Italian American accent and the now popular mafia talk. This confirms the tendency towards language distortion as a means to activate the script of dumbness (Raskin, 1985). Two other secondary scripts associated with Italians are religion and food (Davies, 1990: 64; 276-306).[2] Indeed in the cinematic representations analyzed, religion and food have proved to be an ethnic differentiator widely used. Scorsese has also exploited their potential for humorous effect.

Moreover, Davies (1990) identifies another whole subset of ethnic jokes about Italians that is specific to America, namely jokes about organized crime and the mafia that portray Italians as "tough and ruthless" (200). Davies's sociological explanations for this presence illustrates the same argument put forth by Italian American cinema, i.e. crime is regarded as a "the missing (though deviant) ladder to success" (200) and upward mobility. Davies explains how the association of Italian Americans and organized crime is rooted in the history of south Italy and the criminal organization that existed there since the previous century. He claims that this association has been exploited by the media for its exotic connotation and because of its specificity to Italian Americans. Although other ethnicities have been involved in organized crime, the mafia has been in the news for longer than any other organization and it is much more

[2] Food is indeed one of the most used ethnic markers; however, a more detailed discussion of this trait is not included in this study because, though present as a stereotypical trait in *Analyze This*, food is not used as a source of humor in this case. "Eating humor" is nonetheless very much present in media representations of Italian Americans from advertising of Italian food products through humor, to humorous names for pizzas. An example is the advertising strategy of the Italian American restaurant *The Palermos*. They have given mafioso names to their pizzas and their staff is presented as a mafioso family; everybody has a nickname and a fictional story. See Davies for a discussion on food in relation to ethnicity and humor (1990: 276-306). Interestingly, gastronomic humor also bears a strong link to class in that there is a pattern of ethnic jokes that "mock an ethnic group because its real or supposed poverty forces it to eschew meat and to subsist on cheaper foodstuff" (288).

ethnically exclusive (201). Davies, thus, sustains that these tough jokes grew independently from the ones based on the "general big-city blue-collar Roman Catholic image" that the non-criminal Italian Americans share with Poles and Portuguese (201). This distinction could reflect in cinema the separation between the mafia/mean streets Italian American movies and the ethnic working-class films of Turturro and Savoca. Yet, as in the case of cinema representation, ethnic humor about Italian Americans is today dominated by the tough jokes about Italian gangsters.

4.2 Parody

The outburst of mafia comedies in the 90s can be regarded as evidence of the affirmation of a new cinematographic genre, namely mafia movies. This study is particularly interested in the interpretation of mafia comedies as parodies of the mafia genre that serve as meta-fictional commentaries. Significant in this context is the absence of parodies by Italian American directors; of the comedies mentioned above, none belongs to the Italian American cinema. This raises an interesting question about the reasons for such a lack that stretches over into Italian American literature where parodies have also just started to emerge.[3]

In order to understand the meaning of parody within a literary, cinematographic tradition, it is first necessary to define it. In the literature on parody, however, there is no agreement as to its nature (Rose, 1979: 18). Rose defines parody, for instance, as "the critical quotation of preformed literary language with comic effect" (59) and most other definitions include some reference to a ridiculing, mocking, or comic purpose (Hutcheon, 1985 420). Yet, as Hutcheon

[3] In his analysis of the development of Italian American literature, Gardaphe notices that the first parody in Italian American literature is *Benedetta in Guysterland* by Rimanelli written in 1993 (1996: 110). Gardaphe argues that Rimanelli parodies the mafia narratives of Puzo and Talese elevating the figure of the godfather on a level beyond their work and commenting on its heroic figure. See pp. 110-118 for a detailed analysis of the text and its intertextual references to mafia narratives both in literature and cinema. Gardaphe names few contemporary authors gradually emerging in the Italian American literature panorama who write parodies: Valerio, DeLillo and Sorrentino (1996: 215). Yet, parodies are still a minor production in Italian Americana and before the 90s, they were non-existent. Before *Benedetta,* only non-Italian Americans produced parodies of the Italian American mafioso (111); significantly, Gardaphe produces here as examples titles of films rather than novels. He mentions *Married to the Mob* and *Moonstruck* as two parodies whose 'parodic elements are (mis)read as realistic portrayals of Italian Americans" (1996: 215).

(1985: 32-49) and Simpson (2003: 123) argue, parody does not necessarily ridicule its target. Hutcheon (1985) convincingly shows that modern parodies do not aim at an aggressive ridiculing of the original texts they refer to. On the contrary, most of the parodies target texts that are regarded as the masterpieces of that tradition; they are born "out of affection" towards the target (Simpson, 2003: 123). As Simpson notes, "a well-taken echo of anterior discourse can be both stimulating and thought-provoking, and parody in its own terms can offer humor without hostility. [...] it may indeed be that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery" (123).

Hutcheon construes a definition of parody that is more neutral and avoids the confusion with ridicule and satire; she defines it as a "form of imitation with critical difference" (1985: 6). Parody involves the superposition of two texts and their juxtaposition in order to show similarities and differences. Critical distance is achieved with the strategic use of "ironic inversion which is not always at the expense of the parodied text" (6).[4] Rather than ridiculing the backgrounded texts, modern parody indeed uses them "as standards by which to place the contemporary under scrutiny" (57). In this sense, parody signals a change that entails continuity (4); it operates "as a method of inscribing continuity while permitting critical distance" (20).[5] Parody is thus a form of self-reflexivity, a meta-commentary on the form itself that brings to the

[4] Rose claims that irony serves two functions in parody: either for mocking or for signaling sympathy, both showing admiration and constructive criticism of the standard (28). Interesting to this regard is the concept of echoic irony that refers to the "echoic mention" quality of parody as defined by Sperber & Wilson (1981: 311). For a detailed discussion of the usefulness and weaknesses of the concept, see Simpson for its role in the treatment of parody (91-94, 114-118 and 124).

[5] This idea connects to the Russian formalists' view of parody as a signal and trigger of evolution and change in literary forms. Hutcheon synthesizes their view as follows: "Parody was seen as a dialectic substitution of formal elements whose functions have become mechanized or automatic. At this point, the elements are 'refunctionalized,' to use their term. A new form develops out of the old, without really destroying it" (1985: 36). A treatment of literary theory criticism goes beyond the purposes of this study, the reader is therefore directed to the discussion in Hutcheon for a more detailed analysis and to the bibliography she provides on the subject. Hutcheon agrees with this view in considering parody as a pivotal stage in the development of literary forms (35), however she objects the Russian formalist position for its ameliorative implication. Presenting parody as an evolution in literary theory, they seem to consider it as a stage towards an improved literary form. Hutcheon's definition is instead more neutral, stressing simply the imitative and critical component of parodies. Gardaphe also sustains that parody serves as a means for change; he views it as the bridge between modernism and postmodernism; it is essential in de-constructing and re-constructing the forms, codes and themes of a literary tradition (1996: 111). His position seems, however, more aligned with the Russian formalists in that he sees parodies as a means to rejuvenate Italian American literature and to delay the descent into cultural decay, hence implying a ameliorative function of parody (117).

forefront the aesthetic norms of a tradition by imitating them and ironically inserting them in a critically different context.

The present discussion of parody and the definition of its forms and purposes offers a serviceable model for the analysis of the mafia comedies of the 90s. They all pay their tribute to the milestone of the mafia genre, *The Godfather,* parodying it with affection. The example that best illustrates this strategy is probably the comedy *The Freshman* which is prototypical for its rich intertextual references to *The Godfather,* becoming almost a form of metacinema.[6] Bergman's comedy features Brando as Carmine Sabatini, an 'importer' also known as "Jimmy the Toucan" who bears a striking resemblance to the legendary Don Vito Corleone; and Broderick as Clark Kellogg, a fresh-faced kid from Vermont who has arrived in New York City to attend film school. At his arrival, Kirby steals all of Clark's things and then to make up for such a theft he introduces Clark to his uncle, Sabatini who hires him as an errand boy. Clark gradually realizes that Sabatini imports endangered animal species which would be served as delicacies at the Gourmet Club dinner for high-paying degenerates.

The parodic elements in the movie abound;[7] from Brando's impression of Don Vito to the continuous juxtaposition of scenes from *The Godfather* and similar events in the movie itself. Brando's spoof at his role as Corleone is achieved through imitation; he talks and looks exactly as the legendary Don. Yet, his caricature also creates critical distance. The Don is still the all powerful, respected and wealthy boss; however, the meetings do not take place in the sober and elegant office of the Corleone's mansion, but rather in a run down café in Little Italy. The Don

[6] The movie is also said to be a parody of the classic movie *The Sting* (1973). As a matter of fact, it does imitate the same narrative structure with Brando in the role of Paul Newman and Broderick in the role of Redford, yet with many critical differences. Some scenes do recall the original such as the meeting between Broderick and the two corrupted cops in the abandoned pavilion; the stepfather figure represents the same narrative role as the policeman.

[7] The parodic elements are not only aimed at mafia movies; the figure of the German chef, for instance, is a parody of filmic representations of former Nazi. The behavior, attitude, and talk – with the typical intermission of German words – of the chef typify him as a former nazi, a person who enjoys torture. The whole stereotype is inverted in the end when we learn that the chef and the boss are actually protectors of the endangered animals.

sits at his desk in the dark, just as in the epic movie, but the dimensions of the space surrounding him have shrunk. Moreover, the menacing Sabatini turns out to be a legal importer of endangered species and a benefactor.

The movie overtly marks its parodic nature through the insertion of many scenes from the original. In one case, we see Sabatini kissing Clark on the lips and, immediately following, the film cuts to Clark's film classroom where they are watching the famous scene in *The Godfather II* when Michael kisses Fredo on the lips. Clark can also function as a parody of fictional figures such as Ray Hill and Donnie Brasco, i.e. outsiders who fall under the spell of the mythical gangster figure that they come to appreciate and love.[8]

The significance of this movie lies in its ability to critically comment on the status attained by *The Godfather* in today's imaginary as a model and myth, while still showing affection and admiration for the original work of art. As a parody, *The Freshman* shows the confusion between reality and fiction that marks our century. Many of the comedies of the 90s make the same use of metacinema and parodic elements stressing this dialogic relationship between films and reality.

A last important observation about the use of parodic elements in recent comedies has to do with its role in stereotypical representations. The critical distance intrinsic in parody and the irony it often uses can indeed function as a form of inversion of negative stereotypes. Inversion implies a form of self-reflection; the creator of the new representation recognizes some truth in the common stereotypes of past movies, but he/she also creates a critical difference through a subversive encoding and use of the stereotypes. Thanks to its self-reflexivity and meta-commentary function, parody can serve as a perfect form to re-read, de-construct and re-construct past negative representations into positive ones.

[8] The cinema professor obsessed by *The Godfather* is also a spoof of today's mythical attitude towards the movie, with a mingling of reality and fiction.

4.3 *Analyze This*

Analyse This was released in 1999 and was a box-office success doubled in 2002 with the release of the sequel *Analyze That.* The movie is directed by Ramis and starred by De Niro, Crystal, Joe Vitarelli, Palmintieri and Kudrow. The comedy does not belong to Italian American cinema but it does feature many Italian American actors who have contributed to the evolution of Italian American cinema. The movie is clearly a commercial operation exploiting the mafia stereotype and the charisma of its actors to attract viewers. The format is simple: New York's most powerful mafia boss Paul Vitti (De Niro) is falling apart and has to get in touch with his feelings in order to regain his confidence to do the job. He turns to the Jewish psychiatrist Ben Sobol (Crystal) to find a quick and harmless solution.

In the movie, we can find many of the stereotypes that have solidified in the representations of Italian-Americans since their appearance on screen. Mafiosi are ethnically defined through clothing and a speech style that marks them off as Italian Americans from a working-class background.[9] They also use the typical mafioso expressions the audience is so familiar with since *The Godfather.* They are all criminals and violent; Vitti is a womanizer and he defines his 'colleagues' as beasts who sense weakness, employing the stereotype of the primitive nature of Italian Americans. Family is also a theme in that the psychological crisis Vitti experiences is due to his troubled relationship with his deceased father and the unanalyzed trauma of his death. The past is brought back by Vitti's preoccupation with his own son and his concern about his future. Vitti has to choose whether his son should emulate his same path or strive for a middle-class

[9] Food is also a recurrent ethnic marker in the film. Most of the meetings between Mafiosi take place in a restaurant and the most dramatic scenes are connected in some way to food. The movie starts with the killing of Vitti's *consigliere* in a restaurant; we are then to learn that Vitti's childhood drama took place in a restaurant. The cathartic scene where Vitti finally brings to light what is bothering him is initiated through his recollection of what he was eating that very day. Most Mafiosi are pictured as fat men, which is a source of humor especially in the final scene where they all attempt to flee from the FBI but cannot make it because they are too fat to go through the gates.

status that the money and power the Vitti have acquired could easily guarantee him. This comedy, hence, fits into the panorama of Italian American representations and their focus on upward mobility and assimilation. The following analysis of some of the punchlines of the film will show how these stereotypical features are employed to create a picture that friendly teases the gangster figure, taking it as a model and simultaneously signaling its current crisis.

4.3.1 Dumbness Script

Stupidity often means slowness in understanding things and in following other people's reasoning. In the movie, the character of Jelly is heavily stereotyped as the stupid mafioso who is loyal and obedient, but very slow in thinking. When Vitti asks him to find him a head doctor, Jelly needs lengthy explanations before he realizes that Vitti is looking for a psychiatrist.

VITTI[10]
Do I have to spell everything out for you?
JELLY
It saves time!

A person who is characterized as stupid is often represented as gullible too; in various parts of the movie, we see Jelly missing on a joke, sarcasm or allusion. In the follow up of the preceding scene, for instance, after Jelly has agreed to find a psychiatrist for an alleged friend of Vitti, he disarmingly asks:

JELLY

No one will ever know.
(then)
Could I ask you just one question?
VITTI
What?
JELLY
This friend. Is it me?
VITTI
Yeah, it's you!

Jelly fails to see the evidence, i.e. that Vitti is in a crisis and needs psychotherapeutical help. He does not even remark the sarcasm of Vitti's answer, but shows once more his dumbness and

[10] The script of *Analyze This* has been taken from the *All Movie Script* website and corrected by myself.

naivety. Jelly is stupid and because of this he does not have any doubts or crisis; he is the simple, uneducated, working-class mobster who knows his job, the hierarchy and does not question any of it.

4.3.2 Language Distortion Script

As previously noted, the dumbness script is often exemplified through the secondary script of language distortion. Like most Italian American movies, *Analyze This* ethnically marks its characters through the use of Italian American accent, mobspeak, Italian slang, and swear words.[11] In the movie, we repeatedly hear the expression "fuggedabottit' that has become a manifesto of Italian-Americanness and especially of the mafioso stereotype. The resilience of linguistic distortion in the representation of Italian Americans after so many generations has various explanations. First, as Davies (1990) has noticed, linguistic features are easy to mock and to emulate for derision purposes. Secondly, such ethnically over-specified mafiosi seem to belong to another world, cut off from the rest of the urban population. In a way, this can be reassuring because it implies that the criminal world represented is not part of the viewers' one.

Ridiculing or mocking one's way of speaking or linguistic errors is also another source of stupidity jokes. As could be expected from the previous discussion about Jelly's character, we can find many punchlines in the movie aimed at his faulty articulation of difficult words. In the following excerpts, Jelly is inquiring whether Vitti suffers of migraines, but he proves to be quite unfamiliar with the term that he completely mispronounces:

JELLY
(concerned)
You havin' one of those mindgrains?

[11] The mafiosi also display a speech style that reflects their lack of education and working-class background. Thus, they use double negation, pronoun repetitions and other features typical of non-standard English.

The next example is taken from the same scene and once more proves Jelly's ignorance and ridicules his attempts to use difficult words:

JELLY
Wow. This is like one of them Psychic, ESPN, ESPN things, you know. I just ran into a psychiatrist. Actually he ran into me.

The word Jelly is looking for is the acronym ESP that stands for Extra Sensory Perception. Not being familiar with the word, he uses a similar acronym which refers, however, to a famous TV sport channel. The joke works on two levels here, first Jelly's ignorance and secondly its indirect reference to the mafia practice of controlling the bets on sport games.

In this text, language constitutes a source of humor also thanks to the contrast between the psychiatrist's jargon and the mafia talk. Vitti and Ben come from two separate worlds where words assume different meanings. The next exchange is one of the many instances where the dialogue draws attention to this difference.

BEN
You don't hear the word 'no' very often, do you?
VITTI
I hear it all the time. But it's more like, 'No, no, please, no!'

While delivering the line, Vitti imitates the tone and facial expression of a pleading person who is being threatened to death. His joke also functions as an indirect menace to the psychiatrist, reminding him that it is not safe to say 'no' to a mafia boss. Another instance where psychoanalysis discourse and mafia talk are directly contrasted is when Ben convinces Vitti to call Sindone and discuss his attempted assassination.

VITTI
-- a blocked wish, and I'm looking forward to seeing you next week at that thing, then I can unblock that angered wish and then hopefully ---
(loses it)
-- you make one more move motherfucker I'll fucking cut your balls off I'll shove 'em up your ass; I'll fucking bury you. I'll put ice picks in your eyes; I'll chop your eyeballs, I'll send them to your family and say they can eat it for dessert, you understand me? *[...]*

The conversation starts out with typical formulas used in psychotherapy – "blocked wish", "angered wish" – but ends in colorful mafia slang rich in swearwords. The humor in the scene is enhanced by the fact that Ben is shown to put the words in Vitti's mouth, always whispering him what to say. At the end, however, he remains speechless in front of the violence of mafia talk.[12]

The difference in speech styles is particularly emphasized in the final sequence of the movie when Ben has to pretend to be a mafioso. Ben tries to imitate the Italian American accent with poor success; when he introduces himself he tries to turn his obviously Jewish last name in an Italian one by adding the ending –leone that reminds of the famous mafioso name Corleone from *The Godfather* saga:

[Ben]
My name is Ben Sobel --
(off Sindone's look)
-- leone. Ben Sobbeleone.

Ben's gesture and hectic, frenzy way of speaking, however, betray his Jewishness and, most importantly for the humor, his manners and register clash with the role he is trying to play. He is using psychoanalysis discourse masked by mobster's accents and manners; the result is a quite funny mixture of genres and codes.

4.3.3 Violence and Religion Script

Violence has been said to be the prime of filmic Italian Americans together with the family. It is also the source of much of the irony in Coppola and in Scorsese's movies when juxtaposed to religion. For this reason, the two scripts will be discussed together in this section. Violence is certainly one of the scripts exploited for humorous effect in *Analyze This.* The movie starts off with a violent scene where the old mafia boss Dominc Manetta is assassinated. This is

[12] The follow-up to this scene is also exhilarating because it contrasts the innocuous stress-release strategies of the psychoanalyst, such as hitting the pillow, with the violence of the mafioso who understands only armed forms of anger relief - he thus hits the pillow with a 9mm automatic.

juxtaposed with a psychoanalysis session in Ben's office where one of his patients vents about the problems in her love relationships. The contrast is quite hilarious, especially because of the evident boredom Ben feels that seems to call for some action, which is soon going to enter his life. The film cuts then again on an abandoned storage house where Vitti and his guys are interrogating a mobster of the opponent family. In this scene, Vitti starts to show the first visible signs of his crisis. He is menacing the defenseless Nicky, but is unable to strike.

Nicky goes suddenly quiet. He watches in terror as Jimmy steps aside and Vitti moves close holding a short length of lead pipe.

VITTI
You know me, right?
NICKY
Yeah. You're Mr. Vitti.
VITTI
And you know what I'm gonna do to you if you lie to me, right?
NICKY
Uh, you're gonna crack me on the head with that pipe?
JIMMY
(slaps him)
It's a rhetorical question, you fuckin' idiot.
VITTI
I'm gonna ask you this one Time, only one time. Who killed Dominic? (2)
NICKY
I don't know.
VITTI
(roars)
Who killed Dominic? Don't fuckin' lie to me!
NICKY
(in tears)
Honest to God, I don't know!
VITTI
You little motherfucker ... who killed Dominic?
Vitti winds up to brain him with the pipe. They all wince in anticipation of the blow. But Vitti just freezes there with his arm upraised. Then he drops his arm and seems to sag.
VITTI
Forget it. He don't know nothing.
He tosses the pipe aside. Jimmy looks at Jelly in surprise.
NICKY
Well, that was relatively painless
JIMMY
(slaps him)
Shut the fuck up!
NICKY
That hurt

In this scene, the humor arises from the evident contrast between the menacing behavior Vitti displays and the irreverent attitude of Nicky. The latter violates the behavioral norms for such a situation by providing answers to rhetorical questions that pragmatically functions as threats.

Besides, his violations emphasize the emptiness of the threats and thus demystify the image of the fearless mafia boss that Vitti is trying to convey.

The movie cuts again to Ben's narrative – the two lifestyles constitute a sort of double narrative in the first 15 minutes of the movie – to introduce the first encounter between the middle-class, orderly world of the psychoanalyst and the mafia underworld of Vitti. The narrative device for such a surreal encounter is a car accident that involves Ben and Jelly, Vitti's right hand. The whole dialogue bases the humor on the opposition of the two worlds signaled by the difference in linguistic registers. Towards the end of their talk, however, the violence script creeps in again to further reinforce the difference between the two men. The mafiosi have hidden a man in their trunk whom they are supposed to kill. This is a standard situation in a mafia movie, one that is usually not humorous. The format is here imitated and parodied in that the mobsters have to seal the broken truck with tape and the man inside starts screaming. The following dialogue ends the scene and culminates the parody:

Ben hears KICKING from inside the car trunk.
JELLY
Pings and knocks. What are you gonna do… Cheap gas.

Jelly utters this line with a heavy Italian accent and using the popular colorful expressions of the mafiosi such as "pings and knocks." The scene thus ironically echoes the thousands of cinematic scenes with violent mafiosi and dead corpses in car trunks, albeit representing Jelly as an innocuous, stupid but likeable Italian American. Once again the film resorts to imitation through critical distance.

In the film, there are also examples of meta-humor, which self-reflexively comments on the mafia filmic genre. After the attempted assassination of Vitti in Miami Beach; Ben suggests that he call his adversary, Sindone, who is known to have given the order for the murder, and to communicate him his anger feelings. When the phone rings, Sindone is watching "America's

Most Wanted" and rooting for the criminals. The irony is evident in the representation of a 'real mafioso' who spends his spare time looking at fictional representations of his world. The mirroring between films and real life as a gangster is emphasized again towards the end.[13] The climax of the movie is about to be reached; Sindone's men have located Vitti and he is about to give the order to kill him once more. The scene in Sindone's headquarters starts with a close-up on Sindone who is studying the paper and says:

SINDONE
(studying the paper)
I don't believe this, I'd like to see a movie but there's nothing out there. It's all this shoot-'em-up action bullshit. I get enough of that at work.

The ultimate parody of the violent stereotype associated with the mafioso occurs at the end of the movie during the climax scene. Vitti has decided to kill Ben because he has sold him out to the Feds; yet, he cannot bring himself to pull the trigger. Ben profits from his indecision and forces Vitti into talking about his childhood trauma. Vitti's break through experience is interrupted by the arrival of Sindone's guys who start shooting at Vitti, Ben, Jelly and Jimmy. Vitti breaks into tears and cannot control his emotions; he does not seem to notice the gun shots and does not even try to defend himself. Ben, on the other hand, panics and looks at Vitti for protection, what a mafioso is supposed to offer. The anti-violence psychoanalyst paradoxically incites the mafioso to kill and shoot. Ben's incitation is ironically formulated as a psychotherapeutic advice:

BEN
Paul! For God's sake, shoot somebody! You're gonna feel a lot worse. Come on, time to channel all this nice grief into a murderous rage – Paul, come on, time to shoot back.

[13] The sequel *Analyze That* plays even more on this aspect by introducing a film into the film. The narrative alternates between Vitti's story and the filming of the new TV series *Little Caesar*. The title is a direct reference to one of the founding movies of the mafia genre. In the film, Vitti is hired as an acting consultant for the program and his interaction with the Australian actor who is supposed to represent a mafia boss in the series is exhilarant. In the end, the real mafiosi escape the police because of the overlapping of their robbing with the filming of a similar situation in *Little Caesar* that takes place on the parallel street. The police ends up arresting the actors instead of the real mobsters. Other jokes are based on the paradox of life imitating art and vice versa. The young mobsters, for instance, use nicknames of famous Italian American actors like Pacino that symbolizes the cool mafioso boss on screen.

In the next scene, we see Ben taking the gun off Vitti's hands and start shooting out of sheer terror and defensive instinct. The Jewish psychoanalyst takes over the role of the Italian American mobster, an anticipation of the final scene where Ben has to pretend to be a mafia *consigliere*.

The religion script is not much exploited in the movie despite its significance in differentiating the two protagonists. However, there are some instances where humor plays on religious stereotypes. After the Miami incident that causes the interruption of Ben's marriage, Vitti sends him a fountain as wedding gift. When Ben, his son and future wife step out of the taxi in front of his house, they are faced with this flashy fountain that is taller than the house. Ben's comment indirectly acknowledges and teases Vitti's Catholic identity:

BEN
Call the Vatican. See if something's missing.

At another point in the movie, Ben and Vitti meet in a Catholic church where a funeral is taking place. The camera first focuses on Vitti who genuflects in front of a big crucifix and then moves on to Ben who, in entering the church, wiggles his fingers in the Holy water. The two men are thus directly juxtaposed in their religious beliefs and Ben's violation of the Catholic rite ensues laughter. In the dialogue that follows, attention is drawn to the violence of the world of the Catholic mafioso. This recalls Coppola and Scorsese's unmasking of the ambivalence of the Italian American faith.[14] Ben asks whose funeral it is and how the poor guy died and Vitti answers:

VITTI
He was on his way to talk to a federal prosecutor. Got hit by a truck -- twice.

[14] The ambivalence is highlighted in contrast to the foregoing conversational exchange where Vitti asks Ben whether he likes his present, the before mentioned fountain: "VITTI: Boundary issue? I say if more people gave from the heart, we'd all be better off." Vitti speaks here as a good Catholic, but soon after viewers are reminded that he is a dangerous criminal.

Vitti first presents the death as an accident and only after a pause that signals that there is more to come, he adds "twice." Here the implicature is that the guy was assassinated on purpose.

4.3.4 Gender roles: Oversexed Minority Script

As in Italian American movies, *Analyze This* features very few female characters; the only leading actress is Ben's future wife, hence a non-Italian, apparently Jewish woman.[15] Vitti's wife only appears at the end of the film for a short scene where she plays the nurturing mother to her son and husband reinforcing the stereotype of the invisible Italian American woman confined in the *domus*. Vitti's lover has instead a greater role and her presence reinforces the stereotype of the unfaithful and sex-driven Italian American male. The first scene where we see Vitti with a woman portrays him in bed with his lover having sexual intercourse. The scene is highly humorous because it portrays sex as a business unconcerned with emotions, as the following dialogue shows:

SHEILA
Oh, yes. Oh, yes.
(then)
Is everything okay, Paul?
VITTI
Will you stop talking? I'm trying to do this here.
SHEILA
You seem -- distracted.
VITTI
I am distracted. I got things on my mind. Will you stop talking?
SHEILA
Okay, I'm sorry. Why don't you lie down? Come on!
He goes back to lovemaking.
SHEILA
(after a beat)
Were you thinking about your wife?
VITTI
No, I wasn't thinking about my wife. What are you talking about?
(a long beat)
Now I'm thinking about my wife. Goddamn it, Sheila, why can't you keep your mouth shut!
Completely frustrated now, he gets out of bed, leaving her alone and confused.

[15] In the film, Ben's mother also makes a short appearance, but she utters in total two lines; the role of Ben's parents has been considerably cut from the original script.

Vitti's relationship with Sheila clearly reflects the stereotypical image of the submissive Italian American woman and the dictatorial man. Vitti gives orders as a tough mafioso is expected to do and the lover is not supposed to question them or even to speak.

The scene also indirectly points at Vitti's view of gender roles. Relationships are for Vitti straightforwarded; the wife is perceived merely as the mother of one's heir, while the lover is used to satisfy sexual instincts. The mother is the one with the higher status to whom one is supposed to show respect. At one point, Ben and Vitti discuss the relationship of the latter with his mother with a very humorous effect. Ben and Vitti are talking about the death of Vitti's father and the feelings that this provoked in him. Ben hypothesizes a conflictual oedipal relationship:

BEN
Oedipus was a Greek king who killed his father and married his mother.
VITTI
Fuckin' Greeks.
BEN
It's an instinctual developmental drive. The young boy wants to replace his father so that he can totally possess his mother.
VITTI
What are you saying? That I wanted to fuck my mother?
BEN
No, It's a primal fantasy --
VITTI
You've ever seen my mother? Are you out of your fucking mind?
BEN
It's Freud.
VITTI
Well, then Freud's a sick fuck, and you are too for bringing it up.

The joke lies both on the juxtaposition of linguistic registers and in the indirect reference to the Italian American familial relationships. First, Vitti is shown to lack any knowledge of Oedipus's myth and to struggle with the standard and educated language of the psychoanalyst – in the previous line, he asks Ben to speak English. Secondly, Vitti is appalled by the reference to his mother as a sexual object. This is not just due to her physical appearance, but also to the mafioso stereotype of the respectful son; there can be no joking on the figure of the mother. This is confirmed later in the movie, when Vitti refers back to Freud as a deviant person who does not respect the mother.

In the film, there are also many jokes that reinforce the oversexed minority script. Most of them relate to Vitti's extramarital relationship and his virility. In this scene, Vitti follows Ben to Miami and pulls him out of bed because he sexually underperformed with his lover. When Ben asks why he needs a lover, Vitti explains that he cannot do certain things with his wife.

BEN
Why can't you do those things with your wife?
VITTI
Hey. That's the mouth she kisses my children good night with. What are you crazy?

Clearly, the stereotype of the Italian-American man driven by sex but very traditional within the household is here reinforced.[16]

The other jokes build on the identity crisis Vitti is facing that for him is a sign of weakness, a loss of virility. For Vitti, psychotherapy should aim at restoring his self-confidence; yet, he is concerned about its consequences because a 'man' is not supposed to talk about his feelings or he will 'go soft'. Various jokes rely on this ambivalent view of psychotherapy.[17] The following scene takes place at the end of Vitti and Ben's first encounter. Vitti has just decided that Ben is going to be his psychiatrist, though the latter does not really wish to. Vitti, however, is still the powerful boss that dominates and gives orders.

VITTI
(Vitti and Sobel stand up; Vitti stops and leaning close, menacing)
Just one more thing. If talk to you and you turn me into a fag, I'm gonna kill you. You understand?
BEN
Could we define 'fag,' because some feelings may come up --
Vitti silences him with a wave of his hand.
VITTI
I go fag, you die. Got it?
BEN
Got it.

[16] The same kind of culture is portrayed in Puzo's *The Fortunate Pilgrim* (1964), where men are said to look for easy women just to please their sexual appetite, but they are always going to marry an Italian and chaste woman in the end.
[17] Another punchline that has become very popular addresses this ambivalent view on psychotherapy and in particular the opposing objectives of the mafioso and the psychoanalyst: **BEN**: "[...] First of all, and even if I could, what's my goal here? To make you a happy, well-adjusted gangster?"

The humor is due to the clash between two different worlds; in Ben's world a man can cry and show his feelings without being homosexual. In Vitti's world, instead, crying is automatically interpreted as a sign of homosexuality. The over-educated question of the psychiatrist who looks for definitions humorously contrasts with Vitti's categorical remark.

Other jokes focus on Vitti's reaction to Ben's help. They are usually over-the-top – his exaggerated "Doc, you are good" has become a popular gag – as is expected from the emotion-driven Italian American. In the following dialogue, Vitti expresses his regained trust in terms of virility. For him to feel good and 'normal' again means to feel a 'man'; so after their second 'session', Vitti triumphally exclaims:

VITTI
You're very good
BEN
There are underlying things
VITTI
You understand me? No, you're right. You're right on the money. I feel the juices rushing back to my balls as we speak.
BEN
I never thought I'll hear a man say that to me
VITTI
This settles it. You're my shrink.

The oversexed minority script is here reinforced by the continuation of the dialogue. Vitti feels healthy and powerful again; he is thus ready to seal such regained trust by proving to himself that his virility is intact. This reflects the representation of Italian Americans as animalistic and the stereotype is emphasized through the contrast with Ben. Vitti offers Ben to spend some time with the two sirens as if they were his own property:

VITTI
Sure? Want to give a little 'sta minch?

Ben refuses the offer because of his engagement with Laura; contrary to the Italian American, the Jewish psychoanalyst displays faithful relationships and a strong privacy over intimate matters. It is interesting to notice that Vitti uses a typical Italian, or rather Sicilian, expression that has become quite known to Americans through the exposure to mafia movies. The use of

Italian words to refer to sex seems to be a strategy that reinforces the association with the oversexed minority script. The scene also reiterates the masculinity stereotype in that Vitti is shown to treat women as mere sexual objects.

4.3.5 Flashy Taste Script

As already noticed, Mafiosi and non-mafiosi are differentiated visually in the way they dress. They all wear suits and shirts with white collars as they do in Scorsese's *Mean Streets.* It is interesting to notice that while in reality dress and costumes are the first elements to evolve with the years, the mafiosi and their style seem to have remained unchanged from the 70s on. This confirms the resilience to change of stereotypes and of ethnic humor. Italian Americans' concern for elegance and appearance is certainly a source of humor in the movie. Vitti's adversary is first introduced while he is having a pair of pants cut for himself, a symbol of his newly acquired power.[18] The viewers' attention is drawn to this detail through humor. In the scene, Sindone is outraged at Vitti; he curses him and orders Moony to kill him. The shot moves abruptly from Sindone's furious and yelling face to a frame with him and Moony having a casual exchange of views about the new pants:

SINDONE
[...] I want Paul Vitti dead -- now. You hear me? Dead! Not breathing now, dead!
MOONY
Okay, okay
SINDONE
Do you like these pants?
MOONY
They look great on you. You got some fucking tailor. I'll tell you that, you look good

Among Vitti's bodyguards, we find Jimmy constantly talking about his Valentino suit; in the final scene he lends one of his suits to Ben who has to pretend to be Vitti's *consigliere* at the biggest mafia meeting in history. Ben's success also depends on they way he presents himself;

[18] It is typical in these movies and also in Italian-American literature to see the Italian-American celebrate his/her fame, success or power by buying a new suit that fits with his higher status, as already highlighted in reference to *Little Caesar.*

therefore, clothes acquire an important meaning. In the following scene, Ben mocks the crass elegance of the shiny suit he is supposed to wear

BEN
This is chroma – I can see my own reflection
JIMMY
Let me tell you guys, le me tell you something
(his shoulder bandaged)
That's a fuckin' $1200 Valentino suit. And if you spill anything on it, I'm gonna'll mess you up good.

Ben's teasing is heightened by Jimmy's pointing out the monetary value of the suit, like Scorsese's mobsters do in *GoodFellas.* Jimmy blatantly represents the Italian American stereotypical fixation for clothes and appearance, being more concerned about the possibility that Ben can damage his suit than about his failure in playing the *consigliere.*[19]

4.3.6 Inversion of Roles and Stereotypes

As Davies (1990) observes, ethnic jokes seem to be aligned according to pairs of qualities such as stupidity vs. canniness. This is particularly interesting in regard to the movie under examination because, while Italian Americans fall under the stupidity label, Jews fall under the canniness one. Therefore, *Analyze This* presents us with two opposing stereotypes and uses their contrast and revolution for humorous effect. During the unfolding of the story, we see the contrasts between the uneducated, non-rational, impulsive mafioso and the canny, educated and smart psychoanalyst. In the end they engage in a mutual psychotherapeutic process where the mafioso decides to become an honest man and the psychoanalyst resolves his inferiority complex towards his father by helping Vitti breaking through. Much of the humor in the final part is due to the fact that the mafioso outclasses the psychoanalyst in analyzing the psyche, and the latter outdoes the former in shooting and menacing, as previously illustrated in relation to the violence script.

[19] However, the characters are not over-stereotyped in their clothing as in other movies; they do not wear visible gold chains or big rings. This is probably connected to an issue of class. These mafiosi are of a higher status than Scorsese's street wise guys; Vitti has acquired a sort of middle-class status that he cannot claim, though, because of his criminal activities.

In the following scene, Vitti refuses to talk about his father; he mocks Ben's psychoanalysis discourse that to him does not have any meaning and finally plays Ben's role by questioning him as to what his father does:

VITTI
You paused.
BEN
I did not
VITTI
You paused. That means you had like a feeling, like a thought. What does he do?
BEN
He's a psychiatrist.
VITTI
A psychiatrist! Ooh, now I know why you're fucked up. Next patient, please.
BEN
You know, we're running out of time, Paul. Let's not waste it talking about my problems.
VITTI
Your father's a problem?
BEN
No!
VITTI
That's what you just said!
BEN
I did not!
VITTI
Now you are upset.
BEN
I'm not upset!
VITTI
Yes, you are
BEN
Will you stop it?
VITTI
You know, I'm getting good at this.

Vitti not only employs Ben's language and reasoning, but he also ridicules the way Ben conducts his psychoanalytic sessions by reducing his knowledge to simple conventional phrases that are almost deprived of meaning. The contrast between the two registers is enough to stimulate laughter; the latter is heightened by the fact that the mafioso often wins out in the exchange, i.e. the stupid outperforms the canny in the pair. Indeed, in many of the exchanges, Vitti manages to undermine Ben's attempts at complex psychological explanations with his common sense. This is a form of validating humor that is common to working-class humor. However, the relationship between the two stereotypical roles is quite balanced. At the beginning, the mafioso dominates over the psychiatrist both physically and verbally winning most of the exchanges thanks to his

common sense. In the end, though, Vitti's unresolved past experiences emerge and he falls apart. It is the psychiatrist who dominates in the last part; Vitti's crisis conveys more confidence to the insecure Ben in his abilities as a therapist and his contact with the deviant world of the mafiosi reinforces his self-appreciation as a middle-class professional.[20]

4.3.7 Parodic elements

The Freshman has been defined as a parody of *The Godfather* and in general of mafia movies, arguing that most of the mafia comedies of the 90s follow the same pattern, albeit with a less marked form of metacinema.[21] *Analyze This* indeed contains many parodic elements of *The Godfather* and of mafioso Italian American cinema in general. The quotations from *The Godfather* that any average American and non-American is able to recognize are the scene of Don Vito Corleone's attempted murder in *The Godfather* and Ben's quotation of Michael's last word to his brother Fredo.[22]

These quotations account for the imitative component of a parody. It is now necessary to analyze how the necessary critical distance or ironic inversion is achieved. In Ben's dreaming sequence that emulates Don Vito's murder in *The Godfather*, Ben is portrayed buying oranges on

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[20] This game of power between the doctor and the mobster seems to be reflected in a filmic technique that Ramis privileges when shooting a dialogue scene between Vitti and Ben. He always uses a shot-reverse-shot in order to show the point of view of the speaker, thus when De Niro is speaking, we only see Ben's shoulders in the bottom right corner (we are supposed to see through his eyes) and when Ben speaks, we see De Niro in the bottom left corner. This changes, though, towards half of the movie, when they interchangeably occupy the bottom right corner; this seems to symbolize that the roles have been inverted; the powerful mafioso is now the weak element in the pair.

[21] Intertextual references in the movie go beyond the quotations from *The Godfather*. Another reference to previous films featuring Italian-American Mafiosi is, for instance, the wise guys' big meeting that resembles the one in Wilder's comedy, *Some Like it Hot*. This could also be homage to Wilder who according to Crystal [in the interview on the *Analyze This DVD*] had the original idea of a cinematographic subject involving a mafioso in need of a psychiatrist. Yet, Wilder never produced it. We could hypothesize that the time for such a comedy was not yet ripe in Wilder's years, since there was no tradition to pin the parody down.

[22] However, there are more hidden intertextual quotations that were inserted in the movie for the mere pleasure of the actors. In the first scene with Ben, he sits on his office armchair and his posture is exactly the same as Brando's at the beginning of *The Godfather*, only the cat is missing. The dreaming sequence is shot exactly as the murder sequence in *The Godfather*, every single frame is faithfully copied. These minor details are an indicator of the status of *The Godfather* in the Italian American cinematography and in the genre of mafia movies in general, *Analyze This* not being and Italian American movie. Indeed, not only actors and directors enjoy intertextual quotations, but many times they assume that their audience is going to notice these subtle references because of the myth *The Godfather* trilogy has grown into.

the street. In the meantime, Vitti is waiting near the car; two armed men approach and shoot Ben in the middle of the street. Vitti helplessly tries to use his gun, but is unable to control himself and bursts into tears. In the dream, Ben plays Don Vito and Vitti Fredo, the former the powerful boss and the latter the coward and clumsy son. Ironic inversion is achieved in placing the boss in the role of the weak and the Jewish insecure psychiatrist in that of the Don.

This ironic inversion of roles provides the source of humor in the follow-up scene as well. Ben meets Vitti in a church and tells him of his dream.

BEN
The other night I dreamed that you and I were walking down the street together and I stopped to buy some fruit, then out of nowhere two guys come and they kill me -- like Marlon Brando in The Godfather.
VITTI
Good scene. What I'd do?
BEN
You drop your gun, you run up to me and you yell, 'Papa, Papa!'
VITTI
I was Fredo. I don't think so.

This punchline works on three levels simultaneously, a fictional, metafictional and extrareferential one. First, the joke is targeted at Vitti, the fictional mobster who is associated with the spineless Fredo, reminding him of his identity crisis and increasing emotional instability. Secondly, it metafictionally satirizes the myth status of *The Godfather* by showing that the Italian American boss knows the story by heart, implying that mafiosi look at the trilogy as a sort of role model, or mobster guide. Thirdly, the joke makes reference to the real actor who impersonates Vitti. De Niro starred in the backgrounded text as the young Vito Corleone and his face is inevitably associated with that role. Therefore, it is highly ironic for De Niro to be cast in the role of Fredo.

The other quite evident quotation of *The Godfather* is to be found towards the end when Ben has to pretend he is Vitti's *consigliere*. He makes a terrible mistake by mispronouncing the word *consigliere* in front of all biggest mafia bosses; everyone laughs and Jelly corrects him. In

order to overcome the loss of *bella figura* and regain the trust of the bosses, Ben has to assert himself over the more humble Jelly. He, thus, slaps him and then, squeezing his cheeks, he says:

BEN
(slaps him again)
Never correct me in public again! Do you understand that? You broke my heart, Jelly, you broke my heart.

This is a famous quotation from *The Godfather II* when Michael utters the same words while squeezing Fredo's cheeks who betrayed him. The imitation is again quite accurate, emulating both the words and the gestures of the original. The context is, however, ironically inverted because we see again the psychoanalyst associated with the mafia boss and the loyal Jelly, who never hesitates to defend his boss, being associated with the disloyal Fredo who was unable to defend his father from the murderers.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the intersections of ethnicity, class and humor in media representations about Italian Americans. Two main issues are at stake: first, the incidence that class relationships bear on ethnic representations, often overriding and modifying ethnic discourse; second, the pervasiveness of humor in any representation of ethnicity, and consequently of class.

The first chapter has dealt with cognitive and psychological definitions of stereotypes, class discourse and humor theories in order to establish a link between these disciplines and the phenomena they study. It has been shown that ethnic stereotypes emerge from the power relationships of a society, which accounts for the many similarities in the stereotypical traits attributed to different ethnicities. Ethnic humor has been defined as arising from the juxtaposition of ethnic scripts that coincide with the stereotypes held about the groups at stake. The main scripts associated with ethnicities have been found to apply to the working class as well, confirming once more the interdependency of ethnicity and class.

The review of the cinematic representations of Italian Americans has pointed to the existence of a specific cinematic genre of mafia movies. The study has shown that this genre has come to constitute the emblem of Italian American identity on screen, both for Italian Americans and non-. The difference between exogenous gangster representations of Italian Americans and endogenous ones has been said to lie in their perspective and purpose. The former used the criminal figure to discriminate and marginalize the immigrant group, while the latter has adopted it as a cultural trope to comment on assimilation, integration and society at large.

As Rubin (2000) points out, the criminal figure functions as an instrument to discuss issues of identity, assimilation, and class conflict. This is the reason why most subordinate groups,

particularly immigrant ethnic minorities, have resorted to this trope in their self-representations. The criminal disrupts and questions the system; through his/her fluid persona (Rubin, 4), he/she lives outside the system and unmasks its codes, values and norms by breaking them. In the representations of ethnicities, criminals have thus been used "as a vehicle through which to consider assimilation into, and difference from mainstream culture" (5).

This tendency is common to various ethnic groups as evidenced in the analysis of Jewish gangsters offered by Rubin. However, while Jewish criminals have gradually disappeared from the screen, Italian American gangsters seem to be as popular as ever in American society at large. The key to understand this historical paradox is provided by Rubin, when she argues that Jewish gangsters have evaporated, because they had no direct poignancy any more (144). The criminal functioned as a site to interrogate the system, in a period when Jews were debating about what defined them culturally. The debate about ethnic identity exploited the gangster to set the boundary between Jews and the others. With the decreasing poignancy of such a question, the Jewish gangster lost its purpose and went off stage.

The resilience of cinematic Italian American gangsters can thus be interpreted as a signal of an ongoing debate about Italian American ethnic identity. Italian American directors continue to comment on their ethnic struggle through mafia-laden representations that are still tied to the working-class immigrant past and the fight for upward mobility. While Jewish gangsters have been co-opted in the status quo (144), Italian American mobsters still retain their cultural specificity. They have become the symbol of the successful realization of the American dream, acquiring a myth-like stature, without giving up their ethnic identity. As Vigliotti et.al. argue: "the filmic stereotype of the Italian-American as 'gangster' is possibly the last vestige of anti-assimilation efforts on the part of the Italian-American filmmaker" (1999: 221).

More recent representations, however, present a slightly modified picture. Scorsese has pushed his mean street heroes to the ultimate degeneration in *Casino,* where Italian Americans mobsters determine their self-destruction. Scorsese's pupil, De Niro, has chosen to tell the story of an honest bus worker who lives next door to the biggest boss of the neighborhood, but stays out of the business. Palmintieri, who wrote the script for *A Bronx's Tale* and plays the mafia boss, has created the figure of a successful mobster who symbolically adopts an honest neighborhood kid. He trains him in street life to teach him how to succeed without resorting to illegitimate business. Evidently, mafia bosses have gone either soft or mad on screen. This could signal a new phase in Italian American cinema that will gradually abandon the criminal archetype as a sign of a new phase in the continuous ethnicity construction process. Younger directors have indeed refrained from using the mafia genre to tell their stories and have preferred to tell the thousands of untold stories of Italian honest workers.

Yet, in order to move beyond the mafia genre into a new phase, it is necessary to deconstruct the discourse that has been established over the past decades. Mafia-related stereotypes need to be uncovered and recognized, both in their fictional nature and actual poignancy for some features of Italian American culture. Humor can contribute to introduce this subversion process by inverting the stereotypes, while retaining the ethnic cultural heritage they encode. Italian American directors, Scorsese in the first place, have shown that irony and humor can be a means to comment on the mobsters' condition and its meaning for the construction of an Italian American identity. Humor can both acknowledge a stereotype and subscribe to the cultural heritage it represents, while criticizing it. Thanks to the use of irony, Italian American directors can make use of stereotypical representations without endorsing them.

GoodFellas well represents the typical use of irony in Scorsese's films to comment on Italian American reality. The mythical Italian American mafiosi are old and impotent against the degenerative violence of the new generation that sends them to prison. Old mafiosi in bathrobes and socks, cooking pasta sauce in a shabby state prison, ironically represent the un-mythical nature of the mafia business. The all powerful, respected, feared and honorable gangster has grown old and weary; he does not approve the new disrespectful and murderous mobsters, symbolized by the characters played by Pesci in most Scorsese's movies. The mafioso man of honor has passed the crown onto the honest, smart Italian American Calogero of *A Bronx's Tale*, the boy who will go to college and make his big entrance into the honest American middle-class. The irony in the representations of the mafia grandfathers allows Scorsese to show appreciation for old traditions and values that have always been associated with the men of honor, from *The Godfather* onwards. Simultaneously, it signals distance and difference from that past. This facilitates the transition towards Calogero who is able to see the good in the evil criminal past and to combine it with the honest, hard-working philosophy of the Italian immigrant.

Despite their ample use of irony, Italian American directors have never moved on to produce comedies on the Italian American experience. Italian American mafiosi have been encoded within Italian Americana as mythical drama figures. There are spaces within drama that allow for humorous relief, but directors of Italian descent have not yet felt comfortable producing a parodic commentary on these deviant myths. Yet, towards the end of 1990s, the Italian American mafioso has been featured in more comedies than in Italian American dramas. Mafia comedies have become a new trend in Hollywood, one of significant commercial gain, thanks to the exploitation of the American fascination with gangster figures. As in Italian American cinema, these comedies play on the ambiguity of the mobster figure in the American

imaginary as a man that exacts respect and fear on the one hand, and a disruptor of social order on the other.

The mafia comedies of the 90s have been read in this study as parodies of Italian American cinema. Their use of humor once again is homage to the most significant films in the mafioso tradition on the one hand, and the unmasking of the mafioso crisis on the other. These comedies laugh with affection at the colossal *The Godfather,* signaling their detachment from the past and its legacy for the future. Leaving the Dons behind means entering the middle-class; the American Dream of the grandfathers finally comes true through *The Godfather* deviation. Sabatini, *The Godfather* double in the 1990 film *The Freshman*, adopts the honest and naïve cinema student Clark. Sabatini makes of him a man who will be able to stand up for himself in the future and he frees him of his naïveté by giving him insight in the adults' world. He acts as a *Godfather,* but, contrary to Coppola's Don, he does not force him into crime. Instead, it is the alleged boss who turns away from crime and enters the legitimate business. This non–Italian American parody celebrates the artistic and cultural heritage of the Corleones and of the Mean Street cinema with a critical distance that signals historic and artistic change.

Analyze This follows the steps of *The Freshman.* The parodic elements are less numerous in the film, but they are emphasized by the Italian American mafioso icon par excellence: De Niro. Albeit not an Italian American comedy, its main actor gives it legitimacy as a sort of self-reflexive representation. The most honorable, visible and respected cinematic gangster who wears De Niro's face is in crisis; he wants out. The movie imitates Italian American movies in its language, representation of violence and of the mafioso family. Simultaneously, it critically differs from these dramatic models, by inverting the roles. The mafioso uses psychoanalysis language and the Jewish psychoanalyst shoots the gun. *Analyze This* is thus characterized by its

parody of Italian American cinema and the subversive humor aimed at Italian American stereotypes. At the end of the movie, the viewer greets with affection the mafioso boss, conscious that his reign is over but still wondering what his new shape is going to be. *Analyze This* welcomes the heirs of the Corleones and Vittis into the American middle class showing appreciation for and difference from their cultural heritage.

The question that this analysis raises is why Italian American cinema does not produce self-reflexive parodies. These would allow for an artistic evolution that could lead to a more historically accurate representation of Italian Americans. Through parody, Italian Americans could seal their entrance into the middle-class world onto the big screen. As Hutcheon observes, parody is a means to come to terms with the "weight of the past" (1985: 29), a "means of freedom, even in the sense of exorcizing personal ghosts[1]" (35). For this reason, Gardaphe claims that parody would allow Italian American literature to enter a new stage and free itself of the past legacy of mafia narrative. The same could be argued for Italian American cinema. Movies like *A Bronx's Tale* are signaling a change within Italian American cinema; it remains to be seen whether comedies will expand the genre and introduce new formats and discourses that can comment on ethnicity and class.

Further research could analyze more closely the new trends within Italian American cinema and verify whether there is a dialogue between Italian American directors and non-Italian American parodies of their texts. A detailed investigation of Scorsese's uses of humor could also highlight endogenous strategies to comment on ethnicity and class from within the ethnic

[1] This interpretation of parody seems to come close to the before mentioned ameliorative implication. However, Hutcheon (1985) does not imply that parody constitutes the transition to a more refined literary form, but rather that it permits change through continuity. Literary forms and traditions are doomed to change – the term 'evolve' is purposely avoided here – and parody recognizes the legacy of the past while proving a form to de-construct and re-construct it.

boundary. The analysis could uncover the presence of more ironists in Italian American cinema than is commonly assumed.

Another line of research could investigate the new trend in Italian American cinema towards interethnic representations. First, it would be interesting to read past Italian American movies in these terms, in order to account for the scant representation of Black American and Italian American relationships. This investigation could address the interesting issue of whiteness and the masking or erasing of one's ethnicity for upward mobility purposes.

The lack of Black American characters in Italian American movies is contrasted with the overrepresentation of Jewish figures. Jews and Italian Americans are often paired both in Italian American dramas – *GoodFellas, Casino, Sopranos* – and in non-Italian American comedies – *WiseGuys, Analyze This, Analyze That, Broadway Danny Rose.* This is probably related to the fact that both Jews and Italian Americans are regarded as "white under condition" (Gardaphe, 2004).

Italian Americans and Jews share many stereotypes such as the over-possessive mother, the family, and the importance of food. However, they are the opposing extremes in the humorous script pair, cunningness vs. dumbness. As Davies (1990) observes, ethnic humor, and probably humor at large, often targets the neighbors, the next most similar group to the one of the joke teller. Given the similarities between Jews and Italian Americans, humor can find a rich source of laughter in their contrast, as shown in movies such as *Analyze This* and *Analyze That.*

Yet, Italian American and Black American stereotypes share even more features as Vigliotti et.al. (1999) have convincingly pointed out. Therefore, the lack of their paring is surprising. A plausible explanation for such omissions relates back to class and whiteness. Coming from more similar backgrounds, Italian and Black Americans have been more directly

involved in the fight over the category of whiteness. When they are paired in motion pictures, their relationships are always shown to be very conflictual; hence their contrast would generate different forms of humor. It would probably be more aggressive and disparaging: a form of teasing humor that aims at setting the boundary along race lines, rather than showing appreciation and building rapport. The analysis of the pairing would thus provide useful information on how humor is both affected and affects interethnic and inter-class relationships.

These future lines of research would shed some more light on the functions of humor as an indicator of class and ethnic conflict and class membership. They could confirm the claim put forth in this thesis that humor can unmask class and power relationships. It can set ethnic and class boundaries and function as a subversive force to challenge mainstream representations of an ethnic group. Through humor, the alien and threatening mafiosi and gangsta rappers can evolve into myth and models for the ordinary Italian American and Black American. Even more, they can become American icons of the USA melting pot.

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***A Bronx Tale* (1993)** by Robert DeNiro
***A View from Under the Bridge* (1962)** by Sydney Lumet
***American Boy* (1978)** by Martin Scorsese
***American Scrapbooks* (1979)** by Martin Scorsese
***Analyze That* (2002)** by Harold Ramis
***Analyze This* (1999)** by Harold Ramis
***Baby Doll* (1956)** by Elia Kazan
***Baby It's You* (1983)** by John Sales
***Black Hand, The* (1950)** by Richard Torpe
***Blackboard Jungle* (1955)** by Richard Brooks
***Broadway Danny Rose* (1984)** by Woody Allen
***Casino* (1995)** by Martin Scorsese
***Clash by Night* (1952)** by Fritz Lang
***Do the Right Thing* (1989)** by Spike Lee
***Donnie Brasco* (1997)** by Mike Newell
***East is East* (1999)** by Damien O'Donnell
***Freshman, The* (1990)** by Andrew Bergman
***From Here to Eternity* (1953)** by Fred Zinnemann
***Gangs of New York* (2002)** by Martin Scorsese
***Godfather, The* (1972)** by Francis Ford Coppola
***Godfather II, The* (1974)** by Francis Ford Coppola
***Godfather III, The* (1990)** by Francis Ford Coppola
***Golden Boy* (1939)** by Rouben Mamoulian
***Goodfellas* (1990)** by Martin Scorsese
***Household Saints* (1993)** by Nancy Savoca
***I love you to Death* (1990)** by Lawrence Kasdan
***ItalianAmerican* (1974)** by Martin Scorsese
***Jungle Fever* (1991)** by Spike Lee
***Little Caesar* (1931)** by Marvyn Le Roy
***Lords of Flatbush, The* (1974)** by Martin Davidson
***Mac* (1992)** by John Turturro
***Married to the Mob* (1988)** by Jonathan Demme
***Marty* (1955)** by Delbert Mann
***Mean Streets* (1973)** by Martin Scorsese
***Mickey Blue Eyes* (1999)** by Kelly Makin
***Monsoon Wedding* (2002)** by Mira Nair
***My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002)** by Joel Zwick
***My Cousin Vinny* (1992)** by Jonathan Lynn
***Once Upon a Time in American* (1984)** by Sergio Leone
***Oscar* (1991)** by John Landis
***Pocketful of Miracles* (1961)** by Frank Capra
***Prizzi's Honor* (1985)** by John Huston
***Public Enemy* (1931)** by William Wellman
***Raging Bull* (1980)** by Martin Scorsese
***Rocky* (1976)** by John George Avildsen
***Saturday Night Fever* (1977)** by John Badham

***Scarface* (1983)** by Brian DePalma
***Scarface: The Shame of a Nation* (1932)** by Howard Hawks
***Some Like it Hot* (1959)** by Billy Wilder
***Somebody Up there Likes Me* (1956)** by Robert Wise
***Sting, The* (1973)** by George Roy Hill
***Teresa* (1951)** by Fred Zinnemann
***True Love* (1989)** by Nancy Savoca
***Untouchables, The* (1987)** by Brian De Palma
***Wanderers, The* (1979)** by Philip Kaufman
***Who's Knocking at my Door* (1969)** by Martin Scorsese
***Wild is the Wind* (1957)** by George Cukor
***Wise Guys* (1986)** by Brian De Palma

TV Fictions:

***Bella Mafia* (1997)** (TV movie) by David Greene
***Gotti: The Rise and Fall of a Real Mafia Don* (1996)** (HBO)
***Medici: Godfathers of the Renaissance* (2004)** (PBS)
***Roseanne* (1988-1997)** (ABC)
***The Last Don* (1997)** (mini-series) by Graeme Clifford
***The Sopranos* (1999-)** (HB0)