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**Kaleidoscopic realities: Italian Mafia(s) Fiction's  
Audiences in Argentina**

María Soledad Balsas

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## Special Issue

# Culturas Mediterráneas y usos políticos de las representaciones nacionales en el siglo XX

Mediterranean cultures and political usages  
of national representations in the 20th century

Marició Janué i Miret - Marcela Lucci (Editoras)



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## Kaleidoscopic Realities: Italian Mafia(s) Fiction's Audiences in Argentina

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### *Resumen*

Los escasos estudios realizados sobre las mafias italianas en Argentina señalan un fenómeno delimitado histórica y geográficamente. Las ficciones sobre las mafias parecen proporcionar el marco interpretativo básico para abordar este problema. Tienen el potencial de ayudar a generar un efecto de normalización de conductas, aceptación de grupos, estilos de vida, promoción de principios y modelos y posicionamiento social de personajes mafiosos que son de fundamental importancia para la difusión de la cultura mafiosa. ¿Cómo funciona este proceso a nivel transnacional? Para responder a esta pregunta, se presentarán los principales resultados de un experimento basado en la investigación empírica sobre audiencias.

### *Palabras clave*

Audiencia; Mafia; Ficción; Italia; Argentina.

### *Abstract*

The few studies conducted on Italian mafias in Argentina pointed out to a historically and geographically delimited phenomenon. Mafias fictions seem to provide the basic interpretative scheme to approach this issue. Mafias dramas have the potential to contribute to generate an effect of normalisation of behaviors, acceptance of groups, lifestyles, promotion of principles and models, and social positioning of mafia characters that are of key importance for the dissemination of mafia cultures. How does this process actually work in a transnational basis? To address this question, the main findings of a two-step experiment based on empirical audience research will be presented.

### *Keywords*

Audience; Mafia; Fiction; Italy; Argentina.

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*in Italian culture consumption in Argentina today.* - 6. *Italian mafias fiction's audiences in Argentina.* - 7. *Conclusions.* - 8. *Bibliography.* - 9. *Curriculum vitae.*

### 1. Introduction

There has been a growing display of violence on screens across Latin America, as a result of the increase, among other expressions, of organized crime, drug trafficking, and the mafias in the region (Observatorio Iberoamericano de la ficción televisiva, 2018). Not only do the critical issues of the global agenda enter the social imaginary and public opinion through the classical forms of information but also through a range of genres and formats that is expanding throughout the cultural industry, including its cybercultural and computer developments alongside conventional media (Ford, 1999). Arguably, the alluded forms of violence are frequently presented as indigenous processes; seldom are global connections explored. Thus, the social image of Latin America as a violent –and corrupt- region might be growing stronger.

It is striking that until recently the subject has suffered so much lack of attention (Orozco Gómez, 2011). A possible explanation for this could be found in the widespread rejection of violence-related topics as perceived by cultivation theorists (Gerbner, 1977). Cultivation theory is based on the causal relationship between the amount of time spent in front of the television set and the perception of reality, without taking into account other intervening factors. Cultivation theorists assume that television messages tend to guide the opinions and behavior of the audience in line with the interests of the dominant elite, legitimizing the status quo. From this viewpoint, television contents would cultivate simplified, distorted and stereotyped images that would produce homogenizing effects from which it would not be possible to discern between “objective” reality and “televisual world”.

Instead, the theoretical scheme of cultural imperialism structured the debate on the role of foreign media in Latin America since the 70s of the 20th century. In this context, it is taken for granted that Western powers, particularly the United States, export their audiovisual products to “developing” countries with the deliberate intention of persuading their inhabitants to adopt the cultural values of their lifestyle, implicit in the audiovisual content (Dorfman and Mattelart, 1986; Elasmár, 2002). Although the hypothesis of cultural imperialism could still turn out to be of interest nowadays (Ortiz, 2003), it proves to be unsatisfactory to understand the growing disjunction that characterizes global communication scenario (Appadurai, 1996).

Once the initial phase of development of the audiovisual industry is overcome, the theoretical model of cultural proximity arises precisely as an alternative to reflect on transnational television consumption (Straubhaar, 1991). How useful is it to explain Italian mafias fiction's reception in Argentina? The cultural proximity model is based on the conceptualization of the (transnational) audience as heterogeneous and active one in its deliberate search for cultural proximity. Cultural proximity is defined as the tendency towards the use of cultural capital in the preference of media products of the same culture or, at least, the most similar culture possible in terms of clothing, ethnic types, gestures, body language, definitions of humor, rhythm of history, musical traditions, religious elements, etc. Rather than an essential cultural quality, cultural proximity represents a changing phenomenon in dialectical relationship with other cultural forces.

Then, the general disdain experienced towards the popular forms of cultural consumption that television fictions – not only in Latin America, indeed (Mills in Buonanno, 2012, p. 4) – still embodies today could be seen as another plausible reason for the aforementioned lack of academic interest. Not to mention the traditional lack of resources available to conduct empirical research on media reception in Latin American countries that researchers in the region historically had to face. Last but not least, in the context of an academic tradition that privileges the (printed) word, the interest for the performativity of visual items is considered a critical turn (Entel, 2005).

Research work in the field of transnational television consumption in the Latin American region tends to concentrate on Latin American viewership in the United States (Lozano and Frankenberg, 2008). As a consequence, little do we know about how European television is received, negotiated and/or resisted in Latin American countries. On the other hand, even though transnational communicative structures are an issue not only within the academic debate but also within the political agenda in Europe (Chalaby, 2005), and despite the existence of several European channels with an international reach, what the literature review makes evident is that hitherto less scholarly attention has been drawn to non English-speaking television consumption by European audiences outside the European space (Balsas, 2018).

The global ramifications of mafia phenomenon (Sergi and Lavorgna, 2016), facilitated to some extent by migratory flows (Ciconte, 2008; Carbone, 2019), undermine the limited interest granted to Italian mafias fictions in Latin America, that emerge as a privileged area of analysis from multiple perspectives. As a general rule, mafia fictions can undoubtedly contribute to grow public awareness on sensitive topics. However, they may also generate an effect of normali-

zation of behaviors, acceptance of groups, lifestyles, promotion of principles and models, and social positioning of mafia characters (Ravveduto, 2019). This is of strategic importance considering the relevance of social consensus for the dissemination and/or acceptance of mafia culture(s): “la paura e il terrore non sono mai stati sufficienti, da soli, a garantire la sopravvivenza”<sup>1</sup> (Ciconte in Ravveduto, 2019, p. 10).

If we assume that mafia identities, likewise National ones, pass through literature, news, cinema, television, then the circulation of media products through a vast area of transnational influence forces more recently the reconsideration of roles, categories and spaces. For instance, the (re)production of discourses based on atavistic images about Italian mafias requests for alternative forms of critical thinking to undermine the visual scenarios that populate our global contemporaneity. Hence, it is necessary to analyze how identities are processed or constructed in programs of different genres made for international television audiences, paying special attention to the ways of seeing in different contexts (Mazziotti, 2006). For this purpose, fictional media contents –films, television series and soap operas– are particularly meaningful.

All in all, how do audiences from different countries interact with transnational fictions about mafia(s)? How does the mixture between the affective, the legal, the religious, the political and the civic, among other factors, that this type of fiction proposes operate in the appropriation of meaning(s) by audiences in Argentina? To what extent is the “cultural proximity” model useful to explain these dynamics? Do mafia dramas foster civic and/or political engagement? In which ways? How do mafia fictions interact with political opinions? Do they work as public agenda setters? To what extent do mafia movies, series and soap operas replace news items in relation to some particularly sensitive social issues?

Argentina is a privileged case for analyzing the consumption of Italian mafias audiovisual products in a transnational perspective. Despite the vast literature on the various aspects inherent to the enduring Italian presence in Argentina, little is known yet about the consumption of Italian culture in the country that hosts the largest number of Italian people residing abroad, either migrants who arrived in different historical periods or their descendants born in Argentina (Fondazione Migrantes, 2020).

The changes that have taken place in recent years in the ecology of audiovisual media in Argentina ratify the timeliness and relevance of the topic outlined here. The penetration of pay-TV in Argentina is among the highest in Latin

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<sup>1</sup> “Fear and terror have never been enough, alone, to guarantee survival” (author’s translation).

America, despite the progressive downward trend in the number of subscribers. In this milieu, international players are positioned as key actors both in production and in the television exhibition (Observatorio Iberoamericano de la ficción televisiva, 2017). In parallel, a growing audiovisual consumption is registered through over-the-top platforms such as Netflix among the youngest and highest-income segments of the local audience. In fact, the estimated audience of Netflix in Argentina amounts to more than two million viewers<sup>2</sup>.

To begin with, in the following section main methodological decisions are briefly discussed. After that, the analysis unfolds from *Cosa Nostra* hegemony to the so-called Netflix revolution, from the (over)exposure of Italian audiences to mafia audiovisual products to the assumed denial of Italian mafias existence in Argentina. Finally, the preliminary findings of a publicly-funded research experience that was carried out in the context of the project “*Global, nacional y local: las audiencias de ficciones sobre mafia(s) italiana(s) en la Argentina*”, Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET)/National Scientific Council, during the second half of 2019 are presented.

## 2. Methodological notes

As the Argentine case epitomizes, *mafiosi* stereotypes audiovisually conveyed through mass media may have a direct impact on the public understanding of mafia phenomena. On the basis of the widespread social image of mafia criminals that would still wear *coppola* and *lupara* and run away from justice (Klipphan, 2010), it would be pretty difficult –if not completely impossible– to assess the very existence of mafia itself nowadays, not only in Argentina indeed. Thus, it seems timely to relocate the question on the historical origins of Italian mafias in Argentina, its area of geographical, political and ethnic influence within the academic debate. In this attempt, more questions than certainties arise. So that I preferred to explore the perceptions that Italian mafias dramas consumers in Argentina developed rather than departing from a taken-for-granted concept of mafia.

To fulfill this goal, I undertook a twofold research initiative. During the preliminary phase, an online survey to explore Italian culture consumption in Argentina was applied. The main objective in this case was to situate audiovisual products in the scenario of Italian culture consumption in Argentina at large. The questionnaire was made out of 42 multiple choice and open-ended questions divided into five sections: socio-economic profile, radio & music, press &

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <<http://sinca.gob.ar>> (30 December 2020).

books, television & audiovisuals and other cultural activities. A total amount of 245 respondents of both genders (male: 33,6%; female: 66,4%) were involved through snowball sampling. Due to the sample traits, the results could not be claimed to be representative. However, they offer some interesting insights to further reflect on the topic of interest. The participants were native Italians (12,8%), dual citizens (60,9%) or Argentinians (26,3%). The great majority of them were between 36 and 70 years old. They lived in 14 different provinces: *Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Santa Fe, Mendoza, La Pampa, Río Negro, Tucumán, Entre Ríos, Salta, Corrientes, Misiones, Chaco, Santiago del Estero* and *Chubut*.

In the next stage, a focus group session that was attended by 7 participants was conducted. Drawing on their media experiences, I focus on the discourses that viewers from different genders, ages and social as well as National backgrounds build on Italian mafias as a means to approach an elusive and changing object of study. To this end, focus group discussion revealed itself as a particularly suitable technique not only to gain a better knowledge on individual insights but also to foster social conversation on a declared uncomfortable topic to talk about, as frequently related to fear and silence cultures:

“me encantó el diálogo, el encuentro, también. Y sobre todo que veníamos personas de diferentes lugares, lo mismo de diferentes edades que yo creo que eso enriquece muchísimo más” (young Italian-Argentine female participant)<sup>3</sup>.

“Una perspectiva desde acá que tengo súper naturalizado. Me parece fascinante. Entender un poco. (...) Pero con mis amigos todavía no hablo de esto” (young native Italian male participant)<sup>4</sup>.

Based on a selected set of 14 images captured from foreign as well as indigenous audiovisual products of special interest for the research purposes, the discussion was audio recorded and then transcribed in order to be analysed. After a short personal introduction, participants were invited to choose an image from the set and to explain the reasons why they did so. In a second moment, the conversation was encouraged through four more questions. The order of the questions was mainly guided by the conversation flow. Even if the session was conducted in Spanish, Italian language was also used. On the whole, the session lasted for almost two hours. It took place on december 11, 2019, in a meeting room at *Instituto de Desarrollo Económico y Social (IDES)*, the research institute that I belong to. The invitation to join the session was spread through a massive e-mailing and through social networks: *Facebook, WhatsApp* and *LinkedIn*. Par-

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<sup>3</sup> “I loved the dialogue, and the meeting, too. And above all that we come from different places, different ages that I believe enriches much more” (author’s translation).

<sup>4</sup> “A perspective from here that I have overnaturalized. I find it fascinating. To understand a little bit. (...) But with my friends I still do not talk about this” (author’s translation).

ticipants that had answered the survey and expressed their willingness to take part in forthcoming research initiatives to be developed in the same institutional frame were contacted, too. No specific age, gender, residence or Nationality status criteria were applied in the selection of the candidates; instead the sole interest relied on their audiovisual consumption of mafias fictions.

### 3. From the hegemony of Cosa Nostra to the Netflix revolution

#### 3.1. The rise (and decline) of Cosa Nostra

Due to the universally known “The Godfather” (1972, 1974, 1990), we are used to think on Italian mafia as a Sicilian product and on *Cosa Nostra* as a kind of criminal aristocracy, an emblem of all criminal power (Buonanno, 2012). In this milieu,

[l]’equilibrio tra finzione narrativa ed eventi storici reali è misurato dalla verosimiglianza della trama che risponde alle attese del pubblico, la cui conoscenza del mondo mafioso è tutta fondata sull’esperienza mediata. Si crea, così, un effetto di “inversione della realtà”: la fiction diventa la pietra di paragone del reale<sup>5</sup>.

Interestingly enough, characters in mafia films are not meaningful for ordinary people only but they also operate as authentic role models for *mafiosi*, too:

[d]alla lettura dei nomi [of young bosses on Facebook] si comprende quanto abbia inciso il successo della serie *Narcos* e quanto sia ancora rilevante, dopo oltre trent’anni, il mito di Tony Montana (Al Pacino) protagonista di *Scarface* (1983)<sup>6</sup>.

Altogether, mainstream Italian mafias movies contributed to (re)produce a public story, usually an eccentric and folkloric one, of criminal organizations associated with images of violence and death: it seems as if without the spectacle of death, mafias do not exist (Ravveduto, 2012). The absence of murderous violence has allowed Italian mafias to hide behind the circulation of money.

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<sup>5</sup> “The balance between narrative fiction and real historical events is measured by the plausibility of the plot that responds to the expectations of the public, whose knowledge of the mafia world is all based on mediated experience. This creates an effect of ‘inversion of reality’: fiction becomes the touchstone of reality” (Ravveduto, 2019, p. 86: author’s translation).

<sup>6</sup> “[F]rom nicknames [of young bosses on Facebook] one understands how much the success of the *Narcos* series hit and how relevant, after more than thirty years, the myth of Tony Montana (Al Pacino) protagonist of *Scarface* (1983) still is” (Ravveduto, 2019, p. 104: author’s translation).

La preoccupazione è che l'immaginario esalti la forza e quasi l'onnipotenza delle organizzazioni criminali. (...) "ricerche dell'impianto metodologico discutibile" che enumerano i fatturati miliardari delle mafie; "giornalisti sprovveduti" che ricalcano il cliché di una mafia buona delle origini; fiction televisive che mostrano i boss in ambienti lussuosi frutto di abilità manageriali (...) [costituiscono] meccanism[i] di rafforzamento degli stereotipi<sup>7</sup>.

According to Elizalde,

[l]a mafia es estudiada por sociólogos, por sicólogos y por antropólogos como forma social, para comprender qué mecanismos la determinan y de qué manera piensa y siente un integrante de esa organización. Pero serán la novela de Mario Puzzo y la saga fílmica creada por Francis Ford Coppola *El padrino*, las que en los años ochenta y noventa colocarían el tema en un nivel de divulgación que difícilmente la ciencia social hubiera podido hacerlo<sup>8</sup>.

In an expanded communicative context in which clichés and forms of self-imagination ruled for decades, well-informed discourses are particularly needed.

More recently, "The Sopranos" (1999-2007) engaged in the systematic deconstruction of *Cosa Nostra* mythology by introducing a nostalgic perspective on the assumed lost world of the most famous crime organization worldwide (Buonanno, 2012). As an epitome of the so-called quality television, by means of its artistic excellence, this television series managed to establish the mafia story genre in contemporary North American television and, arguably, to some extent pre-announced the advent of Netflix revolution (Menduni, 2015).

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<sup>7</sup> "The concern is that the imagination enhances the strength and almost omnipotence of criminal organizations. (...) 'Research of the questionable methodological design' which enumerate the billionnaires turnover of the mafias; 'unwary journalists' who follow the cliché of good mafia origins; television fiction showing bosses in luxurious environments as the result of their managerial skills (...) [constitute] mechanism[s] for strengthening stereotypes" (Ravveduto, 2019, p. 23: author's translation).

<sup>8</sup> "Mafia issues are studied by sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists as a social form, to understand what mechanisms determine it and in what way an organization member thinks and feels. But it will be Mario Puzzo's novel [sic] and the film saga created by Francis Ford Coppola *The Godfather*, which in the 1980s and 1990s would place the issue at a level of public knowledge that social science could have hardly achieved" (Elizalde in Cannata, 2018, p. 4: author's translation).

### 3.2. Netflix revolution

Born in 1997 in the United State as an online version of ordinary videotape rental, Netflix has largely contributed to bring about important innovations in terms of international visibility of Italian fictions, in general, and mafia dramas, in particular. In 2008, 2,500 films and TV shows were added to its library. Thanks to strategic joint-venture agreements with leading audiovisual content producers, the company consolidated itself as a key player in streaming television distribution in recent years.

As part of its international expansion strategy, Netflix landed in Italy in 2015. Within its library, only 20% of products in 2016 were produced by -and for- the Italian market. To counterbalance foreign availability of contents, and to increase local audience adherence to the platform, a programming strategy based on *Suburra, the series* (2017), also known as the Italian answer to *Narcos* (Nguyen in Renga, 2018), a Netflix-Cattleya-Rai Cinema series on the relationship between mafia and politics in contemporary Rome, was enacted. Unfortunately, no data is available on viewership: indeed Netflix's promotional rhetoric is based on detachment from traditional TV values, including audience rating scores. The company has never disclosed the visualization data of its original contents: it presents itself as caring more for the quality of products, services and user's experience than about numbers (Brembilla, 2017).

Since 2011, Netflix has allowed its audiences in Argentina to overcome the linguistic gap that the international Italian television channel often poses (Balsas, 2018). In fact, the platform includes the possibility of choosing among different languages for dubbing and/or subtitles within its main features. The asynchronism that Netflix enables is also valued as a positive attribute in terms of "freedom": watching what is wanted where and when the viewer is willing to. Unlike international Italian broadcaster channel, whose contents – generally speaking – are perceived to be of a poor quality and aimed at an older audience by viewers in Argentina (Balsas, 2018), Netflix seems to better satisfy the increasing demands for quality television contents that audiences nowadays require, especially youngest segments.

As far as Italian mafias dramas are concerned, Netflix products would be closer to tastes and consumption habits of youngest and highest-income audience segments in particular, for whom excessive lifestyles underlying mafia stories are frequently considered cool. Audiovisual products such as *Suburra, the film* (2015), *Suburra, the series* (2017), *Lo spietato* (The ruthless man) (2019), *Peaky blinders* (2019), and *The irish man* (2019) usually take distance from conventional Italian mafia stories. First of all, they do not focus exclusively on *Cosa Nostra*. Interestingly enough, *Lo spietato* could be seen as the first movie on *'Ndrangheta* to

be featured on small screens in Argentina. Secondly, mafia relationship with politics, religious leaders and economic elites tend to be more explicit, with evident consequences for public spheres.

Last but not least, their transnational appeal is also due to a more complex image of mafia criminals in terms of gender, National and cultural identities. For instance, given the symbolic connections established between violence, power and money and the social construction of masculinity, mafia stories have traditionally been portrayed as innately male. Unlike male characters depicted as “institutional heroes”, women protagonists were often presented in subordinated roles (Buonanno, 2012). More recently, not only are women roles becoming increasingly ambivalent (Barra and Scaglioni, 2015) but also the popularity of beautiful criminal antiheroes is increasing (Renga, 2018), claiming our compassion in a much more straightforward manner. In this milieu, increasing representation of minority groups such as migrant and queer mafia criminal characters is considered disruptive, too (Renga, 2018).

#### 4. From Italian (Over)exposure to Pretended Argentine (In)visibility

##### 4.1. The successful cycle of mafia dramas in Italy

According to Italian National Public Library Service, 3,365 monographs concerning mafias, understood as *Cosa Nostra*, *Camorra* or *'Ndrangheta*, were published from the second half of the 20th century up to 2018. In 85% of cases, they were written by writers, journalists, magistrates, politicians and intellectuals; only the remaining 15% is attributable to scholars. There is an evident disproportion in the quantity of works dealing with each of the three organizations: the Sicilian mafia with 2,627 publications reaches 78% of the total amount of publications on the topic, suggesting a hierarchy of the imaginary (Ravveduto, 2019).

In line with this trend, it is noteworthy that out of the 337 movies about mafias made in Italy between 1948 and 2018, 179 were devoted to *Cosa Nostra*, 119 to *Camorra*, 13 to *'Ndrangheta*, 6 to *Sacra Corona Unita* and 20 to other mafia organizations (Ravveduto, 2019), thus consolidating the underlying pattern in printed publications. Taking into account the strategic importance of mafia-related topics for the economic survival of the entire Italian audiovisual industry, it comes as no surprise that mafia references are likely to be found in all sort of cinematographic genres: from the Italian *noir* to the “Italian comedy” or even the music hall...

All in all, socially committed drama, and mafia stories in particular, traditionally enabled public-service broadcaster to attract large audiences while jus-

tifying its cultural mission, allowing an “imaginary community” to recognise itself in (Barra - Scaglioni, 2015). The first *sceneggiati* – adaptations of classic literary masterpieces – about organized crime in Italy were shot in the 1970s. In 1984, *La Piovra*, the most widely sold in the world Italian melodramatic television mafia story, made its first appearance on Italian screens. Set in Sicily, its visionary plot aimed at “unmasking the reacherous relationships between crime and power, in their twofold embodiment: the deadly power of organized crime, and the criminal connections of political and financial power” (Buonanno, 2012, p. 44). By combining a mixture of mafia violence and emotional turmoil, it managed to get involved unusual female viewers for mafia-related genres.

What is peculiar to *La Piovra*, however, is the intensity of its politicization and the fact that it was the cause and focus of controversy and very heated political and ideological debate (Buonanno, 2012, p. 53).

Indeed, its success increased enormously the number of people keen on reading journalistic reportage on the activities of *Cosa Nostra*. Therefore, it unfolded into a sequence of ten miniseries before coming to an end in 2001. Interestingly, Buonanno (2012) acknowledges the influences of American action movies and cop shows in the scripts and in the direction style of the so-called quintessential Italian television drama.

In 1996, the first daily Italian soap opera – *Un posto al sole* (A place in the sun) – was screened. Albeit the general discredit of the genre in Italy, usually seen as frivolous and culturally insignificant, it also proved hugely successful, specially in terms of growth of Italian television drama industry: it “marked a decisive watershed in the history of television drama and had a far-reaching influence on the subsequent evolution of the Italian fictionscape” (Buonanno, 2012, p. 103). Set in Naples, its formula combines innovative narrative elements for the genre, such as frequent outdoor shooting and the inclusion of social utility issues, i.e. struggle against mafia groups (Buonanno, 2009; Cardini, 2017). As a matter of fact, this narrative trait may turn out to be considered a turning point in hegemonic Sicilian-type mafia discourses. It still airs today, either in Italy (RAI 3) or abroad through international Italian public television corporation channel (RaiItalia).

Thanks to a European grant, in 2008 a new soap opera was added to the long list of Italian mafias audiovisual products. Produced by Italian public television corporation in a typical Mediterranean setting, in *Agrodolce* seven families from different economic and cultural backgrounds, from wealthy aristocrats to poor workingclass people, faced each other in real-life storylines that involved issues such as the struggle against mafia, immigration, unemployment, health and education in Sicily (Cardini, 2017). Based on an industrial facility located near

Palermo city, the project was also aimed at creating new job opportunities in a region where it is usually difficult to run economic businesses for political and cultural reasons indeed. But due to the fierce competition with news shows in the same time slot, *Agrodolce* failed to reach a massive audience and after its first season was cancelled, suggesting a decline of successful mafia cycle in Italian public television. Not surprisingly, this success was instrumental to fuel commercial initiatives.

However, editorial policies enacted by Italian public and private networks concerning mafia fictions present similarities but also important differences (Barra - Scaglioni, 2015). For the sake of comparison, specially in recent years, Italian commercial television corporations have been experiencing a quite successful mixing of languages, genres and styles (Menduni, 2015), resulting in audiovisual products such as *Romanzo criminale. La serie* (Criminal tale. The series) (2008-2010), *Faccia d'angelo* (Angel's face) (2012), *Gomorra. La serie* (2014-2016) and *1992* (2015) that in some cases boost local perspectives on mafia stories far beyond National boundaries.

As a conclusion, the 100 audiovisual series – 10% of the entire offer Italian television aired – produced from 1988 to 2008 represent a further evidence of the enduring attraction between Italian mafias phenomena and public and private television networks alike. *Cosa Nostra* is the protagonist in 57 out of 100 titles; less than a third is devoted to *Camorra* and *'Ndrangheta* (Ravveduto, 2019). For more than two decades, there has never been a television season in which at least one, but normally more than one, homegrown mafia story has not made an appearance on Italian screens. As a whole, these figures represent “an incontrovertible evidence of the fascination with Mafia stories” in Italy (Buonanno, 2012, p. 142).

#### 4.2. *Mafiascape in Argentina. In the image and likeness of Sicilian mafia in the United States*

Not surprisingly, in Argentina a body of knowledge with a clear potential neither to inform the public debate about the presence of Italian organized crime nor to counterbalance the stereotypes that permeate the hegemonic interpretation in tune with the image of the Sicilian mafia in the United States has not been produced so far. This lack of academic vision was widely exploited by local press according to its own commercial interests. In fact, the scarce availability of studies on the topic, usually journalistic-style ones, pointed out to a historically and geographically delimited phenomenon concentrated almost exclusively on the Sicilian version of organized crime during the first decades of the 20th century in the specific context of *Buenos Aires*, *Córdoba* and *Santa Fe* (Gon-

zález, 1971; Zinni, 1975; Bra, 1989). It does not seem a coincidence that the Neapolitan *Camorra* and the Calabrian *'Ndraggheta*, who on the whole did not arouse the same interest as the Sicilian mafia by the audiovisual industry worldwide, have remained largely absent in the public agenda as well as in media outlets in Argentina until recently.

No matter the pervasiveness of mafia-related genres in Italian mediascape as well as the widespread presence of people of Italian origins in Argentina, it is pretty fair to claim that in Argentina Italy-made mafia fictions have traditionally had a low impact. For instance, why was the internationally successful *La Piovra* not aired in Argentina? Nevertheless, this does not necessarily imply that mafia stories are completely absent in Argentine media landscape: up to the moment I have been able to identify four audiovisual items featuring Italian mafia issues. An underlying common trait to all of them is recognisable through the influence of Northamerican audiovisual products over mafia stereotypes produced locally, that by the way tend to highlight anachronistic aspects of (Sicilian) mafia in Argentina.

This influence could be traced back in late 19th century, when Argentine popular newspapers faced a lack of structural expertise to define the symbolic terms of mafia-style crime occurring in some areas of the city where Italian migrants used to live. From the second decade of the former century a growing spectacularization of news by imitation of the great Northamerican tabloids took place, given the high potential of entertainment that crime stories presented when they included images (Caimari, 2007).

During the next decade, films about Italian mafia that Hollywood popularized seemed to be of the utmost importance in the attempt to (re)create its presence in Argentina (Caimari, 2007). But as Caimari warns, projecting upon the local "gangsters" the attributes of their Hollywood counterparts is an inevitable but risky exercise considering that Sicilian mafia groups in Argentina had their own characteristics (Aguirre, 2010).

From then on, with few exceptions Italian mafia theme in Argentine media was barely in evidence for long periods of time. Only in 1953, the young writer David Viñas, under the pseudonym of Pedro Pago, published the story of the two most famous *mafiosi* in Argentina: Juan Galiffi, also known as "*Chicho grande*", and Francisco Morrone, "*Chicho chico*" (Zangrandi, 2012). Viñas-Pago emphasized the biographies of criminals and their social determinants. In both texts, elements of continuity with gangster cinema and genre *noir* are recognisable: family, tradition, power relations, corruption, and betrayal are among the topics developed by Viñas-Pago (Setton, 2014a; 2014b).

Even if Viñas-Pago's books on Sicilian mafia in Argentina went mostly unobserved, almost two decades later were reworked by Argentine well-known cinematographic director Leopoldo Torre Nilsson so as to shoot his famous film "*La maffia*" (1972). It could be regarded as the first – perhaps the only one – mafia movie to be produced in Argentina. Considering that the spelling of "*maffia*" is commonly misunderstood as a mistake, it is necessary to bear in mind that

[i]l primo vocabolario del dialetto siciliano che registra la parola mafia è quello del Traina, pubblicato nel 1868: e la dà come nuova, importata in Sicilia dai piemontesi, cioè dai funzionari e soldati venuti in Sicilia dopo Garibaldi, ma proviene forse dalla Toscana, dove maffia (due effe) vuol dire miseria<sup>9</sup>.

By choosing the word "*maffia*", Tore Nilsson might have meant to describe mafia phenomenon in Argentina in an archaic, primitive and poor fashion.

Just in 1991, a soap opera on Sicilian mafia was broadcasted in Argentina. Maybe it was the first and the sole one. Due to the success experienced by Argentine soap operas in Italy in previous years, "*Cosecharás tu siembra*" (You harvest what you sow) was co-produced by *Canal 9* in Argentina and *Retequattro* in Italy, one of the four channels of the Fininvest television network owned by former premier Silvio Berlusconi, who during a press conference in Russia while still in charge complaint himself about bad reputation that Italian mafia fictions contributed to create on Italy abroad (Buonanno, 2012; Ravveduto, 2019). Settled in the first half of 20th century, the plot combined conventional love stories with war, migration and mafia issues. The soap introduced outstanding discursive innovations, being the portrayal of Sicilian mafia and Italian diplomacy in Argentina as part of the same ruling class, bonded up through family ties, the most important one.

Although sociocultural profile of *mafiosi* continued to change, at the beginning of the 21st century old-fashioned Hollywood-style stereotypes persisted in Argentine mainstream television as they provided the basic interpretative scheme to approach mafia issues. For instance, one episode of the commercial television series "*Casados con hijos*" (Married with children), broadcasted by *Telefé* in 2006 in the prime time slot, was devoted to Sicilian-type *mafiosi*. Altogether, the outdated and unrealistic image of Italian mafia conveyed in it was anchored in violent and chauvinistic men ruled by cumbersome cultural traditions.

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<sup>9</sup> "The first dictionary of the Sicilian dialect that records the word mafia is that of Traina, published in 1868: it is taken for a new word, imported into Sicily by Piedmontese people, that is, by officials and soldiers who came to Sicily after Garibaldi, but perhaps it comes from Tuscany, where maffia (with two f) means misery" (Sciascia, 2013, p. 7: author's translation).

Given the revitalisation of Italian migration flows to Argentina experienced since global economic crisis in 2008 (Balsas, 2015a; 2015b; 2019a), in 2013 a parodic – and to some extent controversial – spot on Italian mafia issues reached generalist television audience in Argentina. Presumably, it sought to counter-balance Sicilian mafia's negative traits with the more positive aspects generally associated to new Italian presence in the Latin American country. Based on the migration experience of a middle-aged Italian cook called Bruno Corleone that arrived in Argentina while escaping away from his mafia family in Sicily, *Sal-sati's* – a tomato sauce brand – spot (re)produced rooted discourses on Italian mafia presence in Argentina. But unlike previous audiovisual products on the topic, in this case *mafiosi* were presented as highly dependant on family constraints people that nevertheless have the chance to undertake a different way of life in a new context: Argentina. While the image of Italy was connotated by the negative presence of mafia groups, the more positive image of Argentina was built on “the best of Italy”.

##### 5. Trends in Italian culture consumption in Argentina today

It is generally assumed that Argentina is the most “Italian” country across the globe, considering the great amount of people of Italian origins living in the country. This image was fuelled by elitarian discourses that traditionally imagined the Latin American nation as a white and European one. But also by instrumental uses of Italian (e)migration in Italy. Albeit Italian historical heritage in Argentina is undeniable, this assumption could turn out to be awkward in terms of the socioeconomic gaps between the two nations. In order to assess cultural gaps, a survey with no representative claims was applied.

According to socioeconomic profile of respondents, they had a medium-high income. They said to have access to post-graduate education (34,2%), to be bilingual (76,7%) and to count upon various subscription services: internet on mobile telephone (87,7%), home internet (95,9%), and pay-television services (67,2% Netflix - 73,2% cable television). On the whole, the emerging profile could be informed by the method of administration of the questionnaire itself, based on the internet. They declared to use Facebook (93,1%), Instagram (60,7%), LinkedIn (42,9%), Twitter (39,3%) and Snapchat (4,9%) on a regular basis. Facebook was supposed to be used as the main source of information to know what was going on in Italy (65,1%), followed by the press (61%) and television (52,3%), indicating changing trends in transnational news consumption.

The average amount of time spent in front of the television set to watch Italian content was declared to be 30 minutes a week. In fact, 61,8% of participants

acknowledged to tune to international Italian television channel at least once a week. Information programs (48,8%), films (45,9%) and general interest shows (45%) were among the most popular genres for them. In 82,4% of cases, the use was made through the television set (79,5%) via satellite / cable TV (73,2%); the computer only represents 45,4% of users. Television consumption of Italian contents through other devices or via streaming platforms such as Netflix did not seem to pose a threat to the widespread practice of watching Italian television via the television set. Perhaps this strategic position derives from the fact that it is the only means of communication that actually broadcasts content specially created for Italian residents abroad.

A mere 15,4% of respondents answered that they had gone to the cinema only twice in the previous 12 months. Among those who had actually gone to the movies, 57,7% had not seen at least one Italian movie. On average, 8 Italian films are exhibited on Argentine theaters a year (Balsas, 2019b). Comedies (45,7%) and dramas (30,7%) were the type of Italian films that participants declared to have seen the most. To conclude, the main results of the survey suggest an audiovisual profile based upon classical television consumption of transnational Italian contents.

## 6. *Italian mafias fiction's audiences in Argentina*

During the focus group session, participants referred to Italian mafia as a polysemic concept that enables to shed light on kaleidoscopic realities:

Hay silencios sobre qué es la mafia. O sea, lo vemos en una serie de televisión o lo vemos en la película pero no hay otra información. O sea, vos podés saber por estudioso, por investigadores, cómo funcionó el nazismo, cómo funcionó el fascismo, cómo funciona el stalinismo, vos podés saber cómo fueron los mecanismos de los regímenes más brutales. Sin embargo, no podés saber... este... (...). Nadie entiende bien qué es en definitiva la mafia. Por eso insisto sobre esto, giro sobre esto. Es como cualquier actividad delictiva conforma mafia. La actividad delictiva sabemos de qué se trata. O sea, cualquier actividad discriminatoria no significa nazismo... quiero decir. Es polémico, pero es así (middle-aged Italian-Argentine male participant)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> "There are silences about what the mafia is. That is, we see it in a television series or we see it in the movies but there is no other information. That is, you can know by scholars, by researchers, how Nazism worked, how fascism worked, how Stalinism works, you can know how the mechanisms of the most brutal regimes were like. However, you can not know (...) (...). No one understands well what the mafia is ultimately. That is the reason why I insist on this, I turn on this. It is like any criminal activity conforms mafia. Criminal activity we know

A mí siempre me impresionó, o sea, el concepto de mafia... Sí, es eso... Más o menos es eso que está ahí. Incluso va mutando, va cambiando. Se va transformando como veíamos ahí con ese tipo... El político... Pero a mí siempre me impresionó que también el hecho que la mafia como en las películas de los años '30 o '40, las más antiguas. (...) Entonces ahí ya hay otra dimensión de la mafia que viene como obviada, olvidada, en los relatos, que son fundamentales para poder comprender la potencia que tiene hoy la mafia (middle-aged Italian-Argentine male participant)<sup>11</sup>.

Un gran problema. Una organización criminal. (...) Y a veces pienso en la palabra mafia (...) para designar algo que es fuertemente injusto. (...) Me llamó la atención también cómo se puede utilizar esta palabra en tantos y en muchísimos contextos. No sólo en el histórico y en los productos mediáticos (young native Italian female participant)<sup>12</sup>.

To different extents, these interpretations are evidently rooted in media imaginary.

Interestingly, according to their National backgrounds participants acknowledged different uses of audiovisual products featuring Italian mafia issues. For instance, native Italians were mainly concerned about the naturalisation of behaviors, acceptance of mafia styles and promotion of mafia characters through them:

esos productos que en Italia funcionan bastante, van afuera tengo el miedo que no sean contextualizados muy bien. [...] Es mi duda. Algo que pueda a llevar a

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what it is. I mean, any discriminatory activity does not mean Nazism (...) I mean. It's controversial, but it is like that" (author's translation).

<sup>11</sup> "I was always impressed, that is, by the concept of mafia (...) Yes, it is that (...) More or less it is that which is there. It is even mutating, it is changing. It is transforming as we saw there with that guy (...) The politician (...) But I was always impressed by the fact that the mafia as in the movies of the 30s or 40s, the oldest ones. (...) So there is already another dimension of the mafia that comes as forgotten, neglected, in the stories, which are fundamental to understand the power of the mafia today" (author's translation).

<sup>12</sup> "A big problem. A criminal organization (...). And sometimes I think of the word mafia (...) to designate something that is strongly unfair. (...) It recalls my attention how this word can be used in so many and different contexts. Not only in the historical milieu or in relation to media products" (author's translation).

algo bueno, de entender qué es realmente la mafia (young native Italian male participant)<sup>13</sup>.

Yo creo que cuando creces en los barrios, cuando no tienes una alternativa, educación por ejemplo, y para ti ser el jefe del barrio es lo que aspiras más a hacer. Esas series sí que pueden sin herramientas hacerte replicar esos comportamientos. Muchas veces, no sé, dan una punta. Sí. Puedo llegar a tener yo también el sillón de oro, lo que sea (young native Italian male participant)<sup>14</sup>.

However, native Italian participants also recognised that the reception of mafia fiction messages were highly dependant on education, class status, etc.

Y, más o menos, de donde venimos sabemos cuáles son las dinámicas más escondidas de la mafia. Así que cuando vemos una serie como "Gomorra" o como "Suburra", bueno, es muy difícil que se tome como ejemplo positivo, a menos que claramente vos la vivís la mafia de una manera diferente. Vivís en el barrio y la vivís como pibe de la calle. Digamos, como un sistema de valores totalmente diferente (young native Italian male participant)<sup>15</sup>.

In tune with conventional social images, mafia issues appeared to be more connected to lower classes audiences' interests.

In Italian native participants' discourses, the lack of hope on effective solutions to social problems involving mafias, on one hand, and of pleasure on mafia audiovisual products viewing, on the other, were self-evident: "por un lado el desconsuelo... Estamos jodidos y no salimos de ahí" (middle-aged native Italian male participant)<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> "Those products that work a lot in Italy, go abroad, I am afraid they are not contextualized very well. (...) It is my doubt. Something that can lead to something good, to understand what the mafia actually is" (author's translation).

<sup>14</sup> "I believe that when you grow up in the neighborhoods, when you do not have an alternative, education for example, and for you being the head of the neighborhood is what you most aspire to do. Those series can without tools make you replicate those behaviors. Many times, I do not know, they give a clue. Yes. I can also have the golden armchair, whatever" (author's translation).

<sup>15</sup> "And, more or less, where we come from we know what are the most hidden dynamics of the mafia. So when we see a series like 'Gomorra' or 'Suburra', well, it is very difficult to take it as a positive example, unless you clearly live the mafia in a different way. You live in the neighborhood and you live it as a kid on the street. Let us say, as a totally different value system" (author's translation).

<sup>16</sup> "On the one hand the grief(...) We are fuck and we do not get out of there" (author's translation).

no soy un consumidor tan fuerte de series y (...) películas de la mafia perche' oramai llegó un punto que no puedo verla más (...). Eh, porque me da bronca. Me da enojo. (...) Es algo que no (...) eh, me da más energía también para decir bueno, tengo que comportarme de otra manera, tengo que cambiar. Me prende ¿no? Pero es que, no sé, a veces (...) (young native Italian male participant)<sup>17</sup>.

A veces sí me quita un poco la esperanza porque claro porque nosotros de clase media qué podemos hacer (...) eh, para poder evitar todo eso. Tenemos solamente nuestro voto, e intentar ir a votar siempre (...) Y, no sé, yo razono así pero(...) No inventarnos excusas (...) Hacerse responsables del mundo en que vivimos. Y bueno sí realmente teniendo vidas normales es poco lo que se puede hacer para contrarrestar todo esto, ¿no? Eh, sí, entonces sí, un poco me quita la esperanza (...) Soy un poco negativa. Sí, eso (young native Italian female participant)<sup>18</sup>.

While for some Argentine participants mafia fictions seemed to function as privileged sources of information on a presumed foreign social issue...

“Suburra” es dura y esta de Milán, cómo es, eh, “Lo spietato” es durísima (...) Es tremenda. (...) esa cosa de sangre fría, de hacer negocios con todo, de falta de solidaridad, falta de lealtad, un personaje sombrío, la mujer (...) [silencio]. Eh, sí, me abatió verla. Pero no desconcierto, o sea, yo no me sentí parte de esa sociedad, o sea, no es mi patria lo que están contando (...). Yo no sé nada de la política italiana... Ustedes mencionaron un montón de políticos y demás, o sea, sí, de golpe, una historia así sobre Argentina me generaría más que desconcierto. Qué sé yo (...) (senior Argentine female participant)<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> “I am not such a strong consumer of series and... mafia movies because there already came a point that I cannot see them anymore (...) Eh, because it makes me angry. It makes me angry. (...) It's something I do not (...)” (author's translation).

<sup>18</sup> “Sometimes it does take my hope a little because of course because we middle class what can we do (...) eh, to avoid all that. We only have our vote, and always try to vote... And, I do not know, I reason like that but (...) Do not make excuses (...). Let us take responsibility for the world we live in. And well yes really having normal lives is little that can be done to counteract all this, right? Eh, yes, then yes, it takes my hope a little (...) I am a little negative. Indeed” (author's translation).

<sup>19</sup> “‘Suburra’ is tough and that one from Milan, how is it called, uh, ‘Lo spietato’ is very hard... It is tremendous. (...) that cold-blooded thing, of doing business with everything, of lack of solidarity, lack of loyalty, a shadowy character, the woman (...) [silence]. Eh, yes, it struck me to see it. But I do not disconcert, that is, I did not feel part of that society, that is, it is not my homeland that they are telling. (...). I do not know anything about Italian politics... You mentioned a lot of politicians and so on, that is, yes, suddenly, such a story about Argentina would generate me more than bewilderment. I do not know (...)” (author's translation).

... out of which they can even experience pleasure:

los italianos de acá, ustedes tienen un conocimiento obvio de su patria, de sus territorios, y ustedes cuentan de su experiencia personal (...) Yo lo que sé lo sé a partir de las ficciones (...) Y es lo único que puedo hablar (...) Eh, a mí, yo dije que me gustaban estas historias, y me fascina esa cosa religiosa (...) “El Padrino” y los bautismos y (...) Me parece hermoso [Risas] (senior Argentine female participant)<sup>20</sup>.

The appeal of Italian mafias fictions seems to derive mainly from the denial of Italian mafias presence in Argentine society. As Ravveduto points out,

senza il BACKGROUND del vissuto, ognuno “vede ciò che è in grado di vedere” accertando e riconoscendo la rappresentazione del reale più vicina al proprio sentire: ogni individuo, di fronte allo schermo, è un'entità sociale e morale distinta, capace di scelte e volontà proprie, ma, al tempo stesso, è partecipe delle tensioni e dei sentimenti comuni a chi condivide con lui non solo l'esperienza della visione ma anche un immaginario collettivo che restituisce coesione al corpo sociale a cui sente di appartenere<sup>21</sup>.

In this sense, it is also noteworthy that some Italian-Argentine discourses unfolded themselves as more ambivalent:

A mí me pasa lo contrario. No sé si soy más chica, esta cuestión cosmopolita. [...]. Con todo respeto. Pero para mí si bien hay cosas lo veo en una cuestión, en una particularidad italiana, hay un montón (...) Y no por sacarle esa cuestión específicamente italiana (...) Pero yo veo cosas que nos golpean como sociedad y como sociedad global. El crimen, la trata de personas, la cuestión de los inmigrantes. (...) Eh, a mí ese desconsuelo que me puede dar una serie italiana como “Gomorra” me la pueden dar otras producciones como (...) acá (...) A ver

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<sup>20</sup> “You Italian people here have an obvious knowledge of your homeland, of your territories, and you tell about your personal experience (...) I know what I know from fictions... And it is the only thing I can talk about (...) Eh, me, I said I liked these stories, and I love that religious thing (...) ‘The Godfather’ and baptisms and (...) I find it beautiful [Laughs]” (author’s translation).

<sup>21</sup> “Without the background of the experience, everyone ‘sees what is able to see’ by ascertaining and recognizing the representation of reality closest to his/her own feelings: each individual, in front of the screen, is a distinct social and moral entity, capable of own choices and wills, but, at the same time, is a participant in the tensions and feelings common to those who share with him/her not only the experience of vision but also a collective imagination that restores cohesion to the social body to which they feel they belong to” (Ravveduto, 2019, p. 45: author’s translation).

(...) Qué sé yo, pensando en la lógica carcelaria, la Argentina que es un sistema saturado, qué sé yo (...) Creo que si bien lo vemos estereotipado, por una cuestión vinculada a la mafia italiana, yo creo que hay problemas que nos aquejan a todos como sociedad. Eh, sea en Italia, sea en China o sea en Hungría. Eh, pensando, o sea, sí, me da un poco de desconsuelo pero yo sé que esto mismo puede estar pasando acá (...) (young female Italian-Argentine participant)<sup>22</sup>.

But unlike native Italian participants, for some Italian-Argentines mafia fictions may contribute to social change:

Inclusive en el caso de "Suburra", la película, que tiene una versión película además de la serie (...) Eh, por lo menos yo que estudio la política (...) No solamente genera consenso... eh, sí consenso... sino también repudio. Porque vos ves esto (...) los parlamentarios (...) moviendo recursos, moviendo intereses. Y a mí de alguna forma se cae completamente la idea de la representación política (...) La idea de una forma (...) el mismo Estado (...) las instituciones, que están en declive hace ya bastante tiempo, vos lo ves [comentario inaudible] con esas imágenes salís a la calle y anarquismo puro. Por suerte, como diciendo, esto no es solamente así (...) De alguna forma genera aceptación (...) Con la esperanza que alguien no siga con la misma lógica (young female Italian-Argentine participant)<sup>23</sup>.

To conclude, it is pretty evident that the reception of Italian mafias fictions' message depends on the social position, the sensitivity as well as the cultural

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<sup>22</sup> "The opposite happens to me. I do not know it is because I am younger, this cosmopolitan issue. (...) Respectfully. But for me, although there are things I see as Italian issues, there is a lot (...). And not because of taking out that specifically Italian question (...). But I see things that hit us as a society and as a global society. Crime, human trafficking, the issue of immigrants. (...) Eh, to me that dismay that an Italian series like 'Gomorra' can give me other productions like (...) here (...) Let us see (...) I do not know, thinking about prison logic, Argentina that is a saturated system, what do I know I (...) I think that although we see it stereotyped, for an issue related to the Italian mafia, I think there are problems that afflict us all as a society. Eh, be it in Italy, be it in China or be it in Hungary. Eh, thinking, that is, yes, it gives me a little grief but I know that this may be happening here (...)" (author's translation).

<sup>23</sup> "Even in the case of 'Suburra', the movie, which has a movie version in addition to the series ( ) Eh, at least I study politics ( ) Not only does it generate consensus ( ) eh, yes consensus ( ) but also repudiation. Because you see these ( ) politicians ( ) moving resources, moving interests. And somehow the idea of political representation falls completely ( ). The idea of a form ( ) the same State ( ) the institutions, which have been in decline for quite some time, you see it [inaudible comment] with those images you go to the street and pure anarchism. Luckily, as if to say, this is not just like that ( ). It somehow generates acceptance ( ). With the hope that someone does not follow the same logic" (author's translation).

formation of the audience. As a matter of fact, the availability of different sources of information emerges as an essential requirement not only to interpret what is seen but also to develop a critical viewpoint on audiovisual mafia products.

### *7. Conclusions*

From the previous analysis, theoretical notion of cultural proximity, understood as the likelihood to privilege audiovisual products based on viewers' cultural identity, proves to be as problematic as cultivation theory and cultural imperialism imperatives to reflect on transnational audiovisual consumption, albeit for different reasons.

Unlike Argentine participants, some of which derived pleasure from audiovisual items featuring mafia topics from the interpretation of mafia as a foreign issue, native Italian viewers in Argentina tended to distance themselves from mainstream fictions on Italian mafias, either produced in Italy or elsewhere. Rather than identifying themselves through clothing, ethnic types, gestures, body language, definitions of humor, rhythm of history, musical traditions, or even religious elements embedded in their culture of origin, they said not to experience pleasure – or to feel uncomfortable – while viewing them. In this sense, the cultural proximity principle also proved to be highly dependant on the social sensitiveness of the topic. Furthermore, they were suspicious about their transnational appeal as well as about their contribution to a better public understanding on Italian mafias issues. Noteworthy, these criticisms are in clear contrast with long-lasting mafias stories's success in Italy, suggesting that cultural belonging to the origin is as meaningful as social positioning in the receiving context.

On the other hand, these results contribute, at least in part, to make evident the considerable gaps in the acknowledged importance that Italian mafias media, scientific and social discourses in general are granted in Argentina. In the age of globalised mafias, well-informed global narratives to overcome information gaps are highly on demand. To this end, fictional genres could turn out to be as strategic as informational ones. If transnational, including diasporic, audiences are no longer assumed in the sense of mere theoretical and/or commercial speculations but as a precondition of existence in the public transnational sphere, it is necessary to imagine them in other, perhaps more articulated, ways.

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### 9. Curriculum vitae

María Soledad Balsas holds a permanent research position at Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, Argentina. She obtained a PhD in So-

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