

# The perennial commitment of Francesco Rosi in his most contemporary cinema, through his work *Dimenticare Palermo* (The Palermo connection)

*El compromiso perenne de Francesco Rosi en su cine más contemporáneo, a través de su obra *Dimenticare Palermo* (The Palermo connection)*

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ARTICLE



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## Abstract

Throughout his work, the film director Francesco Rosi adopted a political commitment to the current affairs that afflicted Italy, especially the south of the country. In one of his last works, *Dimenticare Palermo* (The Palermo connection, 1990), he delves into the relationship between politics and the mafia. Conditioned by the topics he deals with, his films end up adopting a film noir narrative. Contemporary to the debate at that time, he was in favor of a controlled legalization of drugs, although the confrontation with the PSI, which advocated a different position, has jeopardized his project.

## KEYWORDS

Francesco Rosi, The Palermo Connection, Italian cinema, Political Cinema, Gangster thriller.

## Resumen

A lo largo de su obra, el director de cine Francesco Rosi adoptó un compromiso político sobre los temas de actualidad que aquejaban a toda Italia, especialmente al sur del país. En una de sus últimas obras, *Dimenticare Palermo* (1990), se adentra en la relación entre política y mafia. Condicionado por los temas que trata, sus películas acaban por adoptar una narrativa cercana al cine negro. Contemporáneo al debate de aquel entonces, se posiciona a favor de una legalización controlada de las drogas, aunque el enfrentamiento con el PSI que propugnaba una postura diferente haya hecho peligrar su proyecto.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Francesco Rosi, Dimenticare Palermo, Cine italiano, Cine político, Thriller de gánster.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In all his works, the film director Francesco Rosi has adopted a civil commitment to the issues that afflicted the entire Italian Republic, with particular attention to the connection between organized crime and the national and international political world. Thanks to the international success of his feature films, he was seduced by seductive proposals from national producers that diverted him from his initial purpose (*The Moment of Truth*, 1965 and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, 1987). In other projects, however, he adopted a fabulistic metaphorical register (*Siempre hay una mujer*, 1967) or an operatic one (*Bizet's Carmen*, 1984) to achieve global transcendence, albeit with irregular success.

This research proposes to reconsider *Dimenticare Palermo* (1990), the penultimate feature film made by the Neapolitan filmmaker, as a return to the path of social denunciation. This film, almost testamentary, once again delves into the relationship between politics and the Mafia. Although, this time, the criminal conspiracy is focused from an American perspective. His interest in an argument as lively at the time as the controlled legalization of drugs is developed within the codes of gangster movies and film noir thrillers.

After a long career as assistant director and co-writer for Goffredo Alessandrini and Luchino Visconti (among others), Rosi made his debut in 1958 with *The Challenge*, a fresco of the pulsating Naples working class, in whose misery

are hidden the roots of a young man's ambitions for power, anxious to climb the Camorra hierarchy. At its premiere, the director exposed the narrative rhythms typical of gangster films inserted in a Mediterranean setting. In his later film *The Merchants* (1959), the Parthenopean atmosphere expatriates and contaminates northern Germany. There, the voices and figures of Neapolitan swindlers surround Alberto Sordi's grotesque mask, which sustains a narrative tension that balances between comedy and film noir.

In his next film, *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), he re-traces the exploits of the bandit Giuliano from his years of militancy in the ranks of Sicilian separatism to his paid mercenary activities in Mafia and the latifundium interests. It tells the story of the massacre of the peasants of *Portella delle Ginestre*. The historical facts are reconstructed and represented with a complex flashback architecture that fuses photographic coverage, performance, and journalistic coverage. It is an austere and vigorous register that Rosi applied to successive works of cinema research. In *The Hands on the City* (1963), he transfers the same stylistic register to the urban setting of Naples to narrate the ravages caused to the city's fabric by real estate speculation. Later, in *The Mattei Case* (1972), he takes his model of dramaturgy of reality to its ultimate consequences, recounting the intertwining of international political strategies and the interests of the big oil industry.

In both features, Rosi organized his civil denunciation around the presence of world-renowned performers, such as the American Rod Steiger and Gian Maria Volonté, a transalpine icon of political cinema. As the historian Stefa-

no Masi intuits, the disturbing presence of this great actor, controlled by the director with meticulous subtractive attention, becomes almost a trademark of Rosi's civil cinema, from *The Mattei Affair* to *Lucky Luciano*, the criminal biography of an Italian-American kingpin (2006).

Rosi's characters, so strongly committed to the chronicle, nevertheless live their presence in the story in a dimension of archetypal dramaturgy. This approach, which cools their substance and transforms them into symbols of elemental passions, distances her from the narrated circumstances and brings it closer to universal archetypes. Thus, the antiheroes and palace intrigues of Italian politics in *Excellent Corpse* (although clearly inspired by real characters, everyday occurrences in the press and on the RAI news) become, in the chilling formal representation of the film, metaphysical and timeless figures (Masi, 2006). From a visual perspective, the metaphorical and, in some cases, abstract turn of his involvement was possible due to the change in the direction of photography. The dry and vigorous look of the late Gianni Di Venanzo gave way to the more spectacular chromaticism of Pasqualino De Santis. The change has provided discontinuous results that have not always harmonized the vision's pyrotechnics with the discourse's seriousness.

## 2. MAFIA AND SCENIC ARTS

Traditionally, Southern Italy has been strongly identified with the presence of the Mafia and its stereotypes through fiction. In Italian literature, the culture and thought of Verga, De Roberto, Pirandello, Brancati, Sciasciacia, and Bufalino, among others, have contributed to accentuat-

ing the negative aspects in the strong characterization of Sicily. On the other hand, one cannot do without the idealized and mystical look under which it has also been represented on many occasions. In any case, it can be affirmed that it continues to arouse interest throughout the decades. This is attested to by the stainless mythology of *The Godfather*, a saga inaugurated in 1971 by Francis Ford Coppola and Mario Puzo (with Marlon Brando and Al Pacino), and the successful series *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), by David Chase starring James Galdonfini.

In the scenic and cinematographic arts field, the Mafia, in a way, has become the calling card of the island's identity, intimately linked to the concept of *Sicilianity* and, therefore, understood as the binder of the island's own culture. The presence of violence in the Sicilian imaginary is not only present in cinema and literature but even long before it was recognized as a feature of its own. Already in the famous play *I mafiusi de la Vicaria*, by Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaspare Mosca, written in 1863, a world composed and ruled by mafiosi in the prison of Palermo is described, albeit under a positive connotation (Cannizzaro, 2019).

In 1890, Pietro Mascagni's opera *Cavalleria Rusticana*, based on Giovanni Verga's novel of the same name, depicts southern Italy as a land of illiterate peasants, of men fiercely jealous of their wives, with archaic traditions and trapped by primitive feelings and passions. These elements are also reflected in the various film versions of other Verga novels, such as *La storia di una capinera* (Giuseppe Sterni 1917, Gennaro Righelli 1943 and Franco Zeffirelli 1993), *Los Malavoglia* (plot of Luchino Visconti's *La terra trema*, 1948) and the 1886 theatrical text,

*La lupa*, made into a film by Alberto Lattuada in 1953. Finally, it is necessary to recall the interest of the seventh art in the literary work of Leonardo Sciascia, who denounced the collusion between the state and the Mafia in *The Day of the Owl* (1961), *To Each His Own* (1966) and *Il contesto* (1971). All of them were made into films by Damiano Damiani (1968), Elio Petri (1967) and Francesco Rosi (1976). The latter changed the title to *Illustrious Corpses* (1976).

Unlike the previous texts, the latter aims to underline the national and international dimension<sup>1</sup> of this powerful criminal organization, as it happened in his *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), *Il caso Mattei* (1972), and *Lucky Luciano* (1973) and, definitely, in *Dimenticare Palermo* (1990). He is an author linked to the cinematic sensibility of modernity, jointly attentive to the story and its form of construction (Stefani, 2019). On his last trip to Sicily, he combines a linear narrative structure in an attempt to respect the construction of the original story, the starting point of the film's plot. It is a novel written by the French journalist Edmonde Charles-Roux, who had already garnered some recognition in the literary field. The author, the daughter of an ambassador in the diplomatic corps, grew up in the interwar period, surrounded by diverse European cultures. She lived in Prague, in the former Czechoslovakia, and in Rome, at the French embassy of the Vatican.

However, his stay in Sicily and the fascination he felt for Palermo would mark his future and his intention to capture his experiences in a story. There, on the island, he lived intense situations that would remain imprinted for life in his memory and nourish his work's content.

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1 Actually, the film *Mafioso* (1962, directed by Lattuada and written by Azcona and Ferreri) already illustrated the international links of the Mafia. However, the presence of the comedian Alberto Sordi as the protagonist diluted the initial critical intention.

Near the old Vucciria market, located in the historic center of the Sicilian capital, he witnessed a knife attack motivated by jealousy, in which a reputable American citizen with native roots stabbed a fresh fish vendor.

The geographical context of the author's origin and the story's protagonist ensure its international dimension. Rosi maintained that Naples, his city of origin, and Palermo were the focus of the same disease, a criminal virus that affected Italy and, consequently, the rest of the planet. These assertions were made during an exchange with spectators after the screening of *Hands on the City* (1963), in a colloquium where he interspersed his film with documentary fragments on Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, anti-mafia judges assassinated in 1992 in the Sicilian capital (Marrone, 2022).

### **3. OUBLIER PALERME, THE POWER OF GOOD STORIES**

The novel written by Charles-Roux still preserves, after more than half a century, the atmosphere of the land annexed to the Italian peninsula and the chromatic range that nourishes it and gives it life. The story's protagonist is a skilled New York politician, a second-generation immigrant who doesn't even babble Italian. Like many Brooklyn natives, he had never even gotten to know the land of his ancestors. Finally, he is given a chance on his honeymoon when he and his new bride decide to go to Sicily and get first-hand contact with his ethnic and cultural roots. There, he reconciles his past with that of his parents while at the same time discovering a new and obscure facet of his personality.

The story *Oublier Palerme* won the prestigious Goncourt Literary Prize in 1966, which led to several filmmakers' interest in bringing it to the big screen. Luchino Visconti was one of them, although he finally gave up the difficult task of adapting it, citing an excess of narrative material in the manuscript's pages. Empowered, his disciple Francesco Rosi perceives it as a stimulating challenge, which also satisfies his intentions before knowing the book, capturing a story about a character of Sicilian origin who visits Italy and the island for the first time:

A character is suddenly confronted with his cultural origins. I had been thinking about this topic for some time and knew about the novel's existence. When I read it, I realized that the author adopted a perspective exactly like mine (Rosi-en-Ciment, 2008, p. 185)

Rosi meets Edmonde Charles-Roux during the shooting of *Carmen* (1984), which has locations in Marseille, as she lives with her partner in that Mediterranean town. The Neapolitan director confesses his intention to use only the last hundred pages of the monograph for length reasons. He considered that the whole book was long enough to edit several chapters. Rosi argues the need to update the collective imaginary and defends that in the last decades, the mechanisms of power of the system have changed radically. On the one hand, it becomes a free adaptation of Edmond Charles-Roux's novel, with echoes of *Illustrious Corpses* (1976), in which it starts as a realistic film and ends up evolving into a metaphysical allegory (Crowdus, 1994).

Since the accidental shooting of Visconti's *The Earth Trembles* (1948), Rosi has visited Palermo assiduously. First with *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962) and later with *Lucky Luciano* (1973), he has considered the evolution of the sizeable clandestine structure of tobacco cigarettes into an intense drug trafficking trade. It is a fluid exchange between America and Italy, in the hands of mafias protected by an impenetrable political power worthy of Lucky Luciano himself. On the other hand, the director has never abandoned his interest in revisiting the issues that afflict southern Italy, at least not since *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1978), where there was a favorable ideological context.

He argued that he had made a film about the problems of the Lucan territory in the 1930s rather than portraying the present because the problems afflicting society were the same. In the south of the country, it is possible to find issues identical to those suffered by those in the north, such as the uncertain future that awaited young people. In the 1970s, many of them, children of peasants from all parts of the country who managed to graduate from prestigious universities, were torn between rejecting their peasant heritage and continuing their way of life. Both the graduate degree and the working conditions were unsatisfactory (Betella, 2010).

As in *Illustrious Corpses* (1976), Rosi delves into the interplay between legal and illegal power to reflect on why attempts to put an end once and for all to mafia organizations have failed. At the time, the Italian Parliament was debating to tighten existing legislation against drug trafficking. The film revolves around the degeneration of a culture and the mafia's ability to produce a subculture of violence. Rosi's perspective depicts the island as a labyrinthine landscape where man is a figure of agony (Marrone, 2022).

In *Dimenticare Palermo*, he raises several unresolved questions about the tremendous dramatic disease of the South: the power game trapped in hierarchies rooted in political power brokers responsible for the Mafia's criminal activities. As far as public opinion is concerned, while in the United States, a developing debate on the decriminalization of narcotics was beginning in the transalpine country, the issue had not yet entered the political, media, or civil agenda.

Rosi, for his part, in a colloquium with Edmonde Charles-Roux, declared himself a fervent advocate of legalization. He advocated a regulated supply by the state where, in a controlled manner, those who signed up on a pre-established list of consumers could be supplied with a certain amount of hallucinogens per month. The primary motivation of the initiative consists in counteracting the criminal business harming the health of a community that is no longer provincial or national but global. The French writer, who also agreed with the proposal, was delighted to cede the exploitation rights to her novel.

The fascination was mutual and the synergy, total, since Rosi appreciated Charles-Roux for her sensitivity, quibbling, and courage: "Despite many others who, if they could, would take me to court, she agreed with me on the issue of drug legalization. The drug addict is treated as a sick person and not as a criminal" (Francesco Rosi in Kezich, 2005). Both, without being natives, lived in the same Sicily and drank from the essence of that land during the same period, between two and three generations.

## 4. THE UNCOMFORTABLE POLITICAL LINE OF LEGALIZATION

Since his debut with *La sfida* (1958), Francesco Rosi has been making a cinema strongly linked to reality, except for only two detours: one fabulist (*C'era una volta*, 1967) and the other operatic (*Carmen*, 1984). The leitmotif of his filmography undoubtedly privileges the relationship between cinema and politics (Stefani, 2019). But, in this case, he wants to broaden the horizon of a small group of bandits that grows in age and size until it expands its tentacles in the different strata of the planet. The protagonist is Carmine Bonavia, who aspires to be mayor of New York. The plot revolves around him, making it necessary to move physically and narratively to the city that never sleeps. For this purpose, Gore Vidal was hired as co-writer.

The writer had been politically active in the Democratic Party in the Big Apple and shared his residence between the American capital and the cities of Rome and Amalfi. To maintain the Palermitan cultural imprinting, he turned to Tonino Guerra, a screenwriter sensitive to poetically perceiving the melancholic vein of urban spaces. His pen recreates an image of the city as a superimposition of voices and characters, foreshortenings of locations through plausible portraits free of folkloric colorism:

Scattered fragments of unreachable truths, a surprising way of facing impenetrability, the stainless lying word of power in a zigzag journey that defies the rules of silence, the baroque darkness of a corpse that needs to be interpreted and deciphered as a text, the theater of justice, of the process, of the subtlety of law, of the sentence as

mask and falsification (...) Places where history is inevitable, like a car accident, where the same geographical nature provokes history. (Andò, 1991, p. 161)

The Rai journalist, who travels to New York to interview him, becomes the catalyst of these two intimate reactions. Characterized by a young and radical personality, not by chance, played by Carolina Rosi, the director's daughter, she asks him to make a genuine mutation of the political situation. Under typical behavior of a young age, she asks for a total and sudden change. The correspondent provokes him to analyze and externalize his state of mind and to face his most profound aspirations. She indicates the absolute; she wants no concessions and no grayscale. Bonavía understands that the journalist is the moral spokesperson of the new generation.

Rosi also employed the resource of the protagonist's journey toward a change of position in the metaphysical thriller *Illustrious Corpses* (1976) mentioned above. In the director's own words, this film is a journey in the company of a detective who gradually loses his trust in state institutions (Marrone, 2022). In *Dimenticare Palermo*, the same Democratic candidate understands that the citizens of the future will not want a welfare state. They will not need an administration that, on the one hand, opens detoxification centers and, on the other hand, operates in collusion with the big drug dealers.

A first reflection pushes him to radically modify the political line: thanks to a timely survey, he obtains absolute leadership in the electoral polls. Another meditation forces him to proceed along deeply intimate paths: a journey into the past in a land devastated by the violence of the few and the misery of the many. It

is a place that his parents have wanted to forget as unworthy, as a violator of historical, cultural, and scenic beauty. Breaking the pact proposed in the title and remembering Palermo means opening dangerous memory archives:

Archives in ruins, where the betrayal of memories takes place, where civilization commits suicide, where devastation and violence acquire an even sensual nuance, an eroticism that many sensitive locals confess (with annoyance and shame) to have tasted. Archives are where traces of slow and criminal cancellation are accomplished, and human intelligence is regularly ridiculed. Archives as a projection of simple data, facts and documents on which the sense of human reflection has been lost. (Andò, 1991, p. 161)

Remembering Palermo means undergoing small but constant mutations. He becomes vulnerable to jealousy, gradually more intense, because of the compliments offered to his wife. He is the victim of a hidden power that determines his mental itinerary, a helpless and indefensible hostage of a powerful criminal will. He is always more disturbed by Medusa's fascination with the Sicilian mysteries, to which he feels an ancestral bond.

Finally, he is forced to forget all the new routes. As the visible face of criminal power enigmatically predicts, one must remember Palermo and then forget Palermo to survive Palermo. All the modifications brought to the original plot and, mainly, the political line proposed by Rosi's character, with plot and opinion twists, did not find favor with the socialist party. Its charismatic leader, Bettino Craxi, at the time, had present-

ed a bill that dictated the imprisonment of drug addicts, and the entire press close to the government fiercely attacked the Neapolitan filmmaker's project:

My friend, the journalist Antonio Ghirelli, who was the head of Craxi's press office, wrote me a very long letter, three pages long, asking me if I wanted to confront the leadership of the party. I answered him with arguments that he knew better than me (...) I resigned from the PSI National Assembly, which did not decide anything, had no decision-making power, and never met. I have always felt closer to the socialist party, but I must admit that (excluding the complaint of my film *Cadaveri Ecellenti*), I have always had excellent relations with the communist party. (Rosi, 2012, p. 416)

## 5. FROM THE DISCOMFORT OF THE SOCIALIST *RAIDUE* TO THE ENTHUSIASM OF THE "COMMUNIST" *RAITRE*

At the time when the feature film was still a project, Francesco Rosi was highly regarded in the circles of Rai, the Italian national public radio and television network which, before the private competition, was already blatantly politicized: *Raiuno* belonged to the Christian Democrat orbit, *Raidue* to the Socialist and *Raitre* to the Communist one. On the occasion of the World Cup in Italy, the government decided to produce a collective film in which twelve great national filmmakers presented many cities, each the official venue of the competition. Rosi was chosen to narrate his hometown, Naples.



His declared intellectual closeness to socialist ideals aroused the sympathies of the Italian Socialist Party and, consequently, of *Raidue's* management. The productive management of the national television channel, reinforced by the success of the above-mentioned tourist-documentary project, promised Rosi the financing of his next film, the cinematographic transposition of Edmonde Charles-Roux's novel. After the six-handed rewriting (those of Rosi, Vidal, and Guerra, as mentioned above), the plot assumed the value of the protagonist's double journey: interior and exterior. On the one hand, the realization of the great responsibility he acquired once he became mayor of New York; on the other, the necessary transparency of conscience that necessarily involved the recovery of his origins. Both paths led to counteracting the perverse and criminal drug trade with the drastic decision of controlled liberation, just the opposite line to the positions of the socialists.

Thus, after a delayed formalization, the project passed into the hands of the administration of the 'communist' Raitre. The delay made hiring an Italian-American actor of the caliber of Robert De Niro, Al Pacino, or Joe Mantegna impossible. When an agreement with Ricard Gere, the male sex symbol of the eighties, finally seemed definite, Rosi thought of bringing Mario Cecchi Gori, famous for his remarkable ability to hire actors, to the project. The veteran Florentine producer, whose rich filmography was mainly in the comedy of manners genre (hence his skill with actors), accepted the proposal enthusiastically since he had been trying to internationalize and diversify his production for a few years, with some films of social denunciation<sup>2</sup>. Cecchi Gori considered the protagonist of *American*

*Gigolo* unsuitable for the role (P. Shrader, 1980) and proposed James Belushi, an actor who had just triumphed with *Danko* (W. Hill, 1988), a story of espionage linked to international drug trafficking. Belushi, after a passionate reading of the novel, enthusiastically agreed. In addition, Rosi was very positive about his Albanian origin, which is culturally very close to southern Italy:

Jimmy is a great actor. Very intuitive. At first, I had other actors in mind, but when I found out that he really wanted to work with me on this film, I contacted him. He comes from Albania, a country very close to Puglia. His father, like Bonavia's father, was a restaurant owner in Chicago, and since he was a child, he had learned, by living there, what it means to live in a small ethnic community. Before starting the shooting, I asked him to come with me to Sicily. (Ciment, 2008, p. 188)

Accustomed to working with actors whose character, psychology, and existential projection match those of his characters, Rosi accompanied Belushi to Sicily. They went to Portella della Ginestra (site of the massacre perpetrated by the bandit Salvatore Giuliano) and to the adjoining Piana degli Albanesi, where the American actor was able to dialogue with his heirs of his former compatriots: Belushi literally imbibed the *genius loci*. He began to share an attractive discovery of belonging to the group with his character. Rosi managed to turn Belushi into Carmine Bonavia himself. He was opaque, like a particular political class, but with a presence that bears the stigmata of his ethnicity, a body that perfectly narrates the story of his past events. He defined himself as a character who

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<sup>2</sup> He had produced, for example, Damiano Damiani's political films such as *L'istruttoria è chiusa: dimentichi* (1971), *Perché si uccide un magistrato* (1974), *Goodbye & Amen* (1977),

accepts the idea that the culture of violence is ramified everywhere and who, to secure the mayoralty of New York, does not renounce the use of more or less debatable trickery:

Rosi has not transformed his main character into an ideal paladin or, for that matter, a nice man. James Belushi does not have a friendly face. Bonavia is ductile, skillful, and telegenic but not uncorrupted. His return to Palermo on the occasion of the wedding forces him to reveal a secret part of himself. In him are awakened impulses that his birth in the United States (his father emigrated there shortly before World War II) has cleansed but not extirpated. (Bolzoni, 1992, p. 107-108)

At the same time, Rosi did the opposite work with Mimi Rogers, an actress who had recently achieved global success with *Desperate Hours* (Michael Cimino, 1990). He kept the future interpreter of Mrs. Bonavia totally isolated from any Sicilian influence. Her character, as also contemplated in the novel, is an independent and complicit companion simultaneously: inflexible at the moment of validating the husband's political action but strategically willing to understand the compromise when the situation requires it. Her understanding of her husband's behavior represents a small flame of hope within the dark pessimism of the epilogue. It is a tragic conclusion hinted at by Vittorio Gassman's surprisingly melancholy cameo:

A prince who, for having offended the mafia organization, has been condemned not to show himself, under penalty of death, outside the doors of a luxurious hotel. He will spend the

rest of his days there, in halls and gardens where kings and celebrities have stayed. It is a figure dictated by an almost surreal taste that, in other hands, would have fallen into the sketch. Gassman, guided by Rosi, makes him a character of significant dramatic volume, a key to solving the thriller that sustains the moral concerns that constitute the initial motif of the film. (Bolzoni, 1992, p. 108)

In this way, the prince's character, in homage to *El gatopardo* (Luchino Visconti, 1963), represents the longevity of a criminal power that constantly changes its appearance to continue committing crimes with impunity. Only at the end does the face of power appear: the impenetrable mask of Joss Ackland. It is the decisive encounter between Sicilian and Sicilian: the ultimate fulfillment of Bonavia's initiatory journey into the deepest darkness of his Sicilian roots, into the relentless darkness of power. Faced with this threshold, this abyss of conscience, the protagonist is forced to decide whether or not to become the mayor of the Mafia: now it is no longer just a matter of ideological conviction but of a solid inner acquisition.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In the same way that Leonardo Sciascia's novel *Il contesto* was the origin of *Cadaveri eccellenti* (1976), and Carlo Levi's memoir *Cristo se paró en Eboli* was the origin of the 1979 film of the same name, the Edmonde above Charles-Roux's *Olvidar Palermo* (1966) inspired the plot of the film under consideration here. As Francesco Rosi acknowledged, this book could not have left him indifferent because he found the themes he has been dealing with since 1960 in his successive attempts to depict southern Italy in cinema (Esteve, 2001).

However, the greater complexity of the writer's pages, mainly originating from her own experiences as an ambassador's daughter, dictated a more linear exposition of events. The international cast, coming from big commercial successes of the old Cecchi Gori's hand, brought a representation closer to the thriller. However, the filmmaker did not betray his intention to denounce the contemporary social situation in southern Italy. Still, he had to assume narrative configuration standards more comparable to the crime films of the time:

These norms allow him to underline the collusion between the criminality of the overt executors and the hidden political principals. In other words, even if, by hypothesis, everything that Rosi denounces in *Salvatore Giuliano*, *The Hands on the City*, or *Dimenticare Palermo* were a big lie, all these films would still be masterful examples of film noir. (Toffetti, 2015)

The harshness of the attacks made by many specialized critics or, even worse, the absolute indifference has shown how *Dimenticare Palermo* defied many contemporary national critics. The majority spoke of a production that "aban-

doned its duty of testimony "by inertia or confusion of ideas" (Argentero, 1989). Rosi adopted the rough and coarse features of the crime thriller to investigate uncomfortable and censored issues. His return to Palermo concluded a particular line of research on the hidden and criminal power of the Mafia: its first connection with the constituted order in *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), the industrialization of its families in *Lucky Luciano* (1973), the mysterious fatal incident of an enlightened industrialist who does not yield to the blackmail of the international oil cartel in *Il caso Mattei* (1972), the strategy of tension that defuses reformist drives in *Cadaveri eccellenti* (1976) and, finally with *Dimenticare Palermo*, the definitive representation of Mafia globalization.

With this last film, Rosi crowned a necessary investigation that set out to denounce the clandestine drug market, spread everywhere, and to unmask the guilty ineffectiveness of repressive measures. The insinuation of a personal proposal, under the forms of legalization and not liberalization, aroused panic among moralists and the hatred of conniving politics. The historian Francesco Bolzoni recalls that, with *Dimenticare Palermo*, Rosi reaffirms his belonging to a committed cinema. A personal line that ignores fashions is insensitive to easy infatuations and that, above all, recovers the strength of Hollywood expressive conventions (1992). Consequently, the respect for a narrative configuration following the same chronological order as the original text reaffirmed the intention of focusing on the tragic plot reference rather than the enunciative construction: the importance of the rebuke rather than the aesthetics.

The Neapolitan filmmaker, therefore, demonstrated his commitment to take on a project only when he considers it unavoidable when the need arises to investigate the dynamics of a tremendous plague such as drug trafficking

when the ineffectiveness of the means employed to counteract it is incomprehensible and, once the governmental collusion with the merchants of death is implied, to arouse debate among the public to find the most appropriate solution.

His authorial legacy required him to coordinate all the expressive elements regarding communicative effectiveness. Pasqualino de Santis' help allowed Rosi to count on the wide Kodak chromatic range. His inseparable cinematographer experimented with this new emulsion, which was much more sensitive and allowed him to shoot in real locations without needing a lot of light. It allowed him to obtain a morbid tonality and a great depth of field without having to open the diaphragm excessively. The versatility of the impressionable support made possible a differentiation of shades between the more contrasting colors of New York and the softer and more subdued colors of Palermo.

The strong contrast between the pragmatic time of the Big Apple and its fast-paced modern life, embodied in the dizzying election campaign, marriage, and interviews, with the interior, slow, and almost motionless time of Palermo, was represented chromatically. The same duplicity was expressed in musical terms, which Rosi had entrusted to Ennio Morricone. Concerning the spirit of the original story, the Maestro worked on two distinct themes. The first was challenging and rigorous, like an algebra equation linked to the idea of criminal power, extended to an economic and international political dimension. The second was sweet and melancholic, introducing the affective concept of memory and nostalgia.

The abandonment of the author's modern and 'Brechtian' look could have been interpreted as a cession to ensure commercial success. On the contrary, they have been somewhat necessary discursive simplifications when assuming more immediately effective thriller codes. The strong contrasts of this genre and its dry dialogues effectively and forcefully transmit information. Because, as Bolzoni (1992) reminds us, all cinema, not only minor cinema, lives by conventions.

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