

Coloured by *giallo*: Italy's change and development as seen in Italian *giallo* films from the
1960s to the 1980s

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p><i>Giallo</i> on käsite, joka useimmiten viittaa tiettyihin Italiassa 1970-luvun aikana suosiossa olleisiin rikos- ja mysteerielokuviin. Lajityypin elokuvat nousivat suosioon kotimaassa Dario Argenton debyyttielokuvan myötä vuonna 1970, mutta ne olivat suosittuja ja tuottavia myös ulkomailla. <i>Giallo</i> oli perusluonteeltaan eksploitatiivinen, hyödyntäen ajankohtaisia puheenaiheita sekä provosoivaa kuvastoa, kuten vähäpukaisia naisia ja seksuaalista kanssakäymistä. Huolimatta paikoin epäreilusta kakkosluokan elokuvan maineesta, <i>giallo</i>-elokuvat esittivät ja hyödynsivät ajankohtaisia aiheita ja tarjosivat yleisölleen niistä tulkintoja. Tämä tutkimus käsittelee pientä joukkoa <i>giallo</i>-elokuvia vuosien 1968–1980 väliltä, ja tarkastelee, miten ne kuvasivat ja ymmärsivät aikakaudelle ominaisia teemoja ja tapahtumia. Tärkeimpinä teemoina tarkastelussa on miten elokuvat kuvaavat naisia ja naisten rooleja, miten äitiys esitetään, sekä miten urbanisaatio ja modernisaatio esitetään ja koetaan. Esillä on myös katolisen kirkon ja uskon rooli sekä kulutuskulttuurin maailmanvalloitus.</p> <p>Tutkimus osoittaa, että <i>giallo</i>-elokuvat olivat poliittiselta näkökannaltaan paljolti vasemmistolaisia, usein kritisoiden ja tähdäten rikkaita ja kauniita. Ehkä soveltuen aikakauden radikaalien vasemmistoliikkeiden näkemyksiin, ”vapautunut” nainen nähtiin paikoin uhkaavana sekä fyysisesti että kansan tulevaisuuden kannalta. Elokuvat olivat hyvin kriittisiä kaupungistumisen ja kulutuskulttuurin vaikutuksia kohtaan, ja maalasivat niistä paikoin karkeitakin uhkakuvia. Niissä kritisoitiin usein kansainvälisiä suuryhtiöitä ja niiden saavuttamaa epäreilua vaikutusvaltaa. Nykyisyys ja tulevaisuus nähtiin epävarmoina ja epätäydellisinä, mutta myös väistämättöminä. Menneisyyden synkät luvut ja instituutiot, kuten katolinen kirkko, nostettiin usein esiin ja niitä tarkasteltiin kriittisesti. Elokuvien kuvaus ei kuitenkaan ollut täysin yhtenevää, vaan eroavaisuuksia ilmenee. Yhteistä kaikille käsitellyille elokuville kuitenkin on niiden sisältämä kuvaus suurista muutoksista sekä uuden ja vanhan vääjäämättömästä yhteentörmäyksestä. <i>Giallo</i>-elokuvien maailma on joko jatkuvassa murroksessa tai sitten se käsittelee muutoksista koituneita seurauksia.</p>	
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Coloured by *Giallo* - Italy's cultural change and development as seen in Italian *giallo* films from the 1960s to the 1980s

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1. Introduction

1.1. The themes of the research

Giallo, or *gialli* in plural, is a term that usually refers to a style of violent mystery and crime films created in Italy mainly from the 1960s to 1980s. The first half of the 1970s is typically viewed as filmic *giallo*'s golden age. As an exploitation film genre, some of *giallo*'s hallmarks are convoluted mysteries and beautiful, often scantily clad, women being the main targets of brutal and inventive violence. However, under the exploitation trappings there exist many interesting themes and presentations in *giallo*. My thesis illustrates and analyses how several *giallo* films released in Italy from the late 1960s to the early 1980s depicted and utilised the social, political, and religious turmoil in Italy during that period. Attention should also be paid to the nature of the production and the industry in which the films were created. For many producers and filmmakers, *giallo* was a momentary commercial venture, a chance to reap profit out of a trendy phenomenon.

The timeframe of this thesis will begin from the late 1960s when national unrest expanded in Italy, up to the early 1980s, the year of the Bologna massacre and a couple of years after the abortion law had passed. The 1980s can also be seen as the ultimate funeral march for *giallo* as a film style, as other film styles replaced it by turning more profit internationally and domestically. The main focus will be on films released in the first half of the 1970s. The main points of interest are how the films depicted women, how they riffed and rode on the feminist statements that circulated during the period, how the films presented urbanisation and its consequences and how they clashed with rural Italy and the institutions of the past. Understanding Southern Italy, "*mezzogiorno*," will play into some of the analysis.

1.2. Questions

This study will examine how the *giallo* films interpreted and reflected the societal and cultural changes and phenomena in Italy over the course of the 1970s. How were certain themes depicted and what were the films trying to tell by the presentation? The questions are:

1. How are women portrayed and why?

2. How are urbanisation and its clash with the rural depicted?
3. What sort of reality do *gialli* generally built and presented?

These questions will allow me to present *giallo* as not just a colourful style of over-the-top crime mystery films, but as films that are interesting even beyond their status as emblems of a specific cultural moment. It must be kept in mind, however, that the film style *giallo* was born within a film industry where the dream of profit often was the main point.¹ *Giallo*, or films later evaluated as *giallo*, adhered to the specific *filone*,² a certain style of film. *Filoni* usually were based on previous successful films that provided templates for others to copy and rip off. Most of those working within the systems of *filoni* were workers first and artists second. Visual elements and narrative choices later deemed significant and thematically interesting by researchers might have been implemented simply to stay within a specific lane or market. As such, the nature of violence and nudity should not as such be so strictly credited to the filmmakers' personal views or biases. But the nature of the production does not necessarily impact how the final product was received or interpreted. The majority of the audience is generally not aware of the production realities of the films it consumes.

1.3. Methods and theories

Films are typically complicated cultural products with many different agents contributing to their conception and ultimate manifestation.³ But for the purpose of this paper, the method of close reading is relatively easy to apply to them and does not require handling too many overly complex schematics. The actions I have taken are as follows: I have watched the films at first “normally”, then for a second time while taking notes. The second and possibly the third full viewings were conducted by concentrating on a specific aspect or a theme present in the film. Relevant visual and auditory elements and their symbolism were also taken into account, which admittedly are elements some might construe as aforementioned “complex schematics.” Any subsequent viewings were partial, in order to check a specific element in the film. I then carried

¹ This is to preface the presupposition that the so-called “trash films” do not have anything interesting or relevant to say and are not to be taken seriously by default.

² *Filone* refers specifically to the specific Italian style of film. Not directly comparable to genre, *filone* is more of a larger trend that can include many different interpretations (veins) of that trend.

³ The director of the film is usually put forth as the “creator” and the one from whom the vision grew. Often this is misleading as the director might simply be chosen as “director for hire” to direct a script written before their involvement. It is highly difficult to gauge the authorship of ideas and who contributed what in a film production, even if documentation and interviews exist concerning the matter. Corporate meddling, studio guidelines, public image are only some of the things that might stand in the way of “the truth.” Also, egos.

out an analysis of the themes of the film and how those themes were interpreted, and from what those interpretations might have sprung. In this, I have connected them to the relevant contexts of what was happening in Italy at that time or to a specific corresponding aspect in Italian culture. The historical contextualization of the films is the main point of this thesis. I will not be providing hard facts but I will offer an interpretation of what I think the likely context was.⁴

It is ultimately not very believable to work from a supposition that a film's contents strictly and specifically reflect the contemporary events and climates of the nation they were created in. They surely had an effect, and the filmmakers through their work granted the audience an interpretation of those things. However, as researchers like Valentina Vitali and Damien Pollard have argued,⁵ it is important to recognise the context and history of the film industry itself as it can be a very different agent than the nation. *Giallo* was first born within the 1960s and the 1970s Italian film industry, which as an entity had been affected by different historical, political, economic, and social factors. *Filoni* like *giallo* themselves were only a corner of the industry, born out of specific circumstances and developments. It is not very apt to impose strict judgments or theories about a film and its creators if the field and resources with which they were operating are not recognised. Even if the *giallo* creators had some leeway on how they made things, they had to consider the profitability of those things. Analysing a film can easily go overboard. All that said, the majority of *gialli* were modelled after themes set by directors who are nowadays "reclaimed" as *auteurs*,⁶ like Dario Argento and Mario Bava.⁷ And despite the economic realities of film production, writers and directors were not completely algorithmic machines who were slaves to producers and distributors.⁸ As will become apparent, many of the Italian filmmakers were politically inclined towards the left, a fact that is easily recognisable from the films. The fact that a product is cheaply and efficiently made does not negate the possibility of it including poignant content.⁹

⁴ Saarelainen 2012, 245.

⁵ Vitali, Valentina. 2016. "The exclusion of giallo films from the history of Italian cinema." in *Capital and Popular Cinema: The Dollars Are Coming!* Manchester Film Studies. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Pollard, Damien. 2021. *Sound without Borders: Industry, Society and the Voice in Giallo Cinema*. Pembroke College: University of Cambridge. Both speak specifically about the Italian context.

⁶ The title of *auteur* is often granted to filmmakers, mostly directors, who over their career form a recognisable style and way of crafting films. The concept is contestable in a sense that it pronounces the remarkability of the director specifically.

⁷ But even the directors nowadays considered "artists" and "auteurs" did not see themselves as such within the industry. Mario Bava, for example, stated "I am a craftsman... ..I make films like I was making chairs." Quoted in Pollard 2021, 14.

⁸ Even if many *giallo* scripts are similar, there still was at least an impetus to do something original.

⁹ Even the most shallow and unoriginal films contain some sort of theme or a thought they follow.

The analysis regarding the depiction of women will partly be based on Laura Mulvey's feminist film theory and Barbara Creed's application of it. Laura Mulvey formulated her theory in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Mulvey launched the concept of the "male gaze." According to Mulvey, "male gaze" occurs when a film is constructed in a way that male characters have the active roles, and the film is seen from their point of view. Female characters are seen from their point of view, depicted as visual pleasure for the male characters and exist only to further their narrative arcs. This also applies to the male-dominated film industry and the male viewers, who supposedly are the main target audience of the majority of films. Mulvey built her theory and criticisms around Hollywood studio films and the classic movie-going experience where the audience, in theory, could not look away from the screen.¹⁰ Barbara Creed utilised Mulvey's theories and applied them specifically to horror films in order to examine how they depict femininity and female sexuality as threatening and monstrous.¹¹

Mulvey's theory can easily be applied to many films. But if used too strictly, it does not leave room for a particularly varied or historically interesting analysis. It easily can be applied to *giallo*, and it has been, as some of the films practically cry out for this sort of exploration by directly utilising psychoanalytical gimmickry in the plot. Gary Needham literally begged people to study *giallo* from this angle back in 2002.¹² There assuredly is an abundance of women displayed in scant clothing (or not even that) across *giallo*.¹³ Sometimes the films featured full-length striptease presentations, especially in the early 1970s. These scenes do not necessarily exist to empower the women¹⁴ but to exploit their image. But the results will not be very varied or necessarily accurate if the historical or cultural contexts and *zeitgeist* are not considered. Utilising these theories as themselves threatens to steer the analysis too much towards a specific result. As such, this theory could only be used in this thesis as a preliminary guide to help with the analysis.

¹⁰ Mulvey 1989, 14–29.

¹¹ Creed 1993.

¹² Needham 2002.

¹³ Some directors, like Sergio Martino, have stated that it was always very awkward when women actors had to perform naked, or if there was a sex or a rape scene. Also, that not every actor was comfortable displaying their body in a specific way. On top of everything else, it might be useful to investigate *filone* cinema's exploitation of actors themselves on top of themes and topics.

¹⁴ There are exceptions, for example in Luciano Ercoli's *Death Walks on High Heels (La morte cammina con i tacchi alti, 1972)*. The main character, a striptease artist, is mentioned to be "the breadwinner", and her boyfriend is a jobless drunk.

1.4. Source material

The main source material of this research is six *giallo* films released over the period from the 1960s to 1980s. The sample was chosen relatively randomly, but due to my previous interest in this subject, it might be skewed towards what has been easily available and to my personal taste. The sample is also relatively narrow, so the text will have features of a case study.

I have viewed the films in their “original” Italian audio, but with the English subtitles found on the discs. Whether the translation the distributors have carried out is accurate or of a good quality is difficult for me to personally evaluate. But these films were made in the way that not one audio track is necessarily “original”, as the films were shot without on-set audio with a multilingual cast, all speaking their native languages. *Gialli* were mainly aimed at the international market, with each country providing their own dubbing and editing.

There exist dozens of *giallo* films, made as single productions in Italy or often as international co-productions, with ranging levels of seriousness and quality. In recent years availability has become less of an issue, with many high and low level *gialli* having received high quality home video releases based on new film transfers, with restored original audio tracks. The discs I am using are new-ish releases. A portion of them is based on recent 2K or 4K scans of the original film negatives, carried out during the last ten years. Some, like Lucio Fulci’s *Don’t Torture a Duckling* (*Non si sevizia un paperino*, 1972), are based on older transfers. The Nucleus Films’ release of Giulio Questi’s *Death Laid an Egg* includes two cuts of the film: a director’s cut that runs to 114 minutes and an alternate edit (referred to as “*giallo edit*” on the disc) that runs to 91 minutes. Perhaps somewhat illogically, I decided to use the 114-minute version. The films featured in this thesis are not completely unknown, but they might be less popular than their creators’ other works. Three of the directors included, Sergio Martino, Lucio Fulci, and Dario Argento, are some of the most prolific *giallo*-directors, known to some extent outside their specific circles. Next, I will list the films, with their generally used English title and the original Italian title and the original premiere year in parentheses. Also in parentheses will be the name of the distributor of the specific release of the film I have used.

***Death Laid An Egg*¹⁵ (*La morte ha fatto l’uovo*, 1968. Nucleus Films)**, directed by Giulio Questi, predates the most popular form of *giallo*. In the film, Anna and Marco are a married

¹⁵ Previously gone by the title *Plucked!*

couple who run a modern and automated poultry farm. They deliver their product to “Chicken Association”, a company on a quest to global market domination by bringing chicken “to every home”. So begins a convoluted plot filled with conspiracy, soap opera-style drama, *giallo* tropes and social commentary.

*All Colours of the Dark*¹⁶ (*Tutti i colori del buio, 1972. Shameless Entertainment*), directed by Sergio Martino. The main character is Jane, who is plagued by trauma because as a child she witnessed her mother’s murder. Before the events of the film, she also lost her unborn child in a car accident. As a result, she is tormented by nightmares and crippling indecisiveness. When therapy and her fiancé’s favoured pills do not help, she turns to Satanism advertised by her new neighbour Mary. The film are features successful and independent women who are actually corrupt, extreme perversions and predators lurking in the city and exploration of the isolation, loneliness and existentialism of an urbanised consumer society.

*Don’t Torture a Duckling*¹⁷ (*Non si sevizia un paperino, 1972. Arrow Films*), directed by Lucio Fulci. Fulci’s film takes place in a rural community in the southern countryside, shot on location, where young boys are being preyed upon by a serial murderer. The film touches upon many different topics, dealing with the relations of Christianity and old natural religions and magic thought inherent to the south. A major theme is the vicious confluence of the urban and the agrarian. A major part of the film is its critical look at the Catholic Church.

Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key (*Il tuo vizio è una stanza chiusa e solo io ne ho la chiave, 1972. Arrow Films*) is very loosely based on Edgar Allan Poe’s short story *The Black Cat*, again directed by Sergio Martino. It is set in the Veneto region where a married couple, Irina and Oliviero, live in a crumbling villa. Oliviero is a drunken layabout writer who abuses Irina verbally, physically, and sexually. A serial killer apparently emerges with victims suspiciously connected to Oliviero. Oliviero’s niece Floriana is also thrown into the equation when she arrives to illicitly procure Oliviero’s late mother’s hereditary jewellery for herself. Calamities ensue. The themes explored are European integration, the legacy of Italian colonialism, the vanishing of the domestic countryside and its values, lopsided nostalgia and guilt of the past and, of course, the destructive sexual obsessions with dead mothers.

¹⁶ Also known by the title *Day of the Maniac*.

¹⁷ Also known by the title *Long Night of Exorcism*.

Suspicious Death of a Minor (Morte sospetta di una minorenne, 1975. Arrow Films) is Sergio Martino's *giallo-poliziottesco* hybrid. An underage sex worker is found butchered, prompting a roguish undercover police detective to take matters into his own hands. Set in a poor district of Milan, the film is about insurmountable corruption, the harsh living conditions of the poor and the powerlessness of the police in the face of almost existential threats. The entire structure of society from top to bottom is shown to be corrupt and exploitative.

Dario Argento's *Inferno (Arrow Films)* from 1980 is the second part of his *La Trei Madri*-trilogy. It moves away from the usual touchstones of *giallo* and more towards fantasy horror. In the centre is the mystery of the Three Mothers, a trio of demonic witches ruling behind the scenes in major cities of Europe. The main characters find themselves slowly uncovering the New York-based Mater Tenebrarum's web of influence and corruption. The most relevant content to this thesis is the story of the Three Mothers, what they might signify and from where their ideology might stem.

1.5. Previous research

Academic research into *giallo* has become more common in the last couple of decades, in multiple languages, like German, Italian, and English. The works mentioned in this section have provided the basis and inspiration for my own text. English language *giallo* research was boosted by Gary Needham with an article titled "An introduction to the Italian 'giallo'", published in a 2001 issue of since-deceased film journal *Kinoeye*. In the article Needham lays out the history of *giallo* films, their place within the Italian film history, *giallo*'s usual and repeating contents and topics, and some starting points for deeper future analysis. Some of the points he emphasises come into play in my own text, like the gender roles and the matter of location. A point he also raises is genre ambiguity, which is something that seems to be mandatory to address in any text involving *giallo* or other Italian film styles.

One of the most cited and referenced English-language academic *giallo* works is Mikel J. Koven's book *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*, published in 2006. The book is a concentrated, general view of the entire genre and touches upon many different aspects of it. The book provides background and information on many different *gialli*

and aims to establish multiple concepts and terms to use when discussing them. Due to this, the latter half of the book becomes more of a glorified listing of films. Notably, Koven asserts that *giallo*-films should not be looked at as popular cinema, but instead as vernacular cinema that worked outside popular culture.¹⁸ According to Koven, this helps put aside notions of “good” and “bad” cinema when analysing *giallo*. The book feels a little defensive and is very much steeped in Koven’s own folkloristic thought processes about the nature of Italian cinema. The impact of the book depends on one’s definition of popular culture.

In her 2020 book *Giallo!: Genre, Modernity, and Detection in Italian Horror Cinema*, Alexia Kannas concentrates purely on several *giallo* films’ utilisation and critique of the urban environment and modernity in general. Kannas also includes lengthy chapters on *giallo*’s history, its functioning as a strand of *filone* cinema, and its status as cult cinema. Kannas utilises a slate of theoretical models revolving around genre, reception, and cultural studies. A good half of the book is dedicated to this genre analysis and historical contextualisation. The films themselves receive a more theoretical evaluation. It is a very honest look into *giallo*, attempting to push it to a higher standard of consideration. The book acts as an inspiration for my own text.

Damien Pollard’s doctoral thesis from 2021, *Sounds without Borders: Industry, Society, and the Voice in Giallo Cinema*, has Pollard claiming that studying *giallo* from any historical angle without taking the nature of production into account, is inadequate. For example, a *giallo* film featuring a serial killer murdering women is not necessarily a signifier of the creators’ misogyny. Instead, it should be thought of within the context of production necessities. If one wished to make money, they made a *giallo* film. And making a *giallo* film meant utilising a popular format with certain necessary elements.¹⁹ Pollard himself strictly concentrates on *giallo*’s sound design as a major element of marketing, enticement, and narrative meaning. His view is well-established and logical and has been taken into consideration when writing this text. Pollard’s is a work of Film Studies and considers the usage of sound tightly alongside the production necessities and larger contexts. I have made an effort to conduct a historical and contextual look into *giallo* films, pinpointing their usage of historical stereotypes, social

¹⁸ Compare to vernacular literature: literature written in the language of the “common people.” Vernacular can be understood as something made for the consumption of “the people,” rather than something made for domestic and international glory and box office success.

¹⁹ It should, of course, be asked why this sort of format was/is popular in the first place.

developments, and other similar elements. Those elements do exist and are understood by audiences watching them despite their production and budgetary dimensions, of which the audience likely was not aware. Films are entertainment products, and their meaning is ultimately created by the viewer. My work is still concerned with more general, wider themes, but conducted within the field of history, viewing them as sources that do contain something of their time.

1.6. Structure

The second chapter is divided into five sections. In the first three I will provide a historical overview of Italy after the Second World War, as widely as is relevant for my thesis. The segment after that will briefly go over the key developments in the Italian post-war film industry. In the final segment I will explain *giallo* more in depth. In the third chapter I will present my observations and analysis of the films regarding their presentation of women and how it corresponds to the contemporary contexts. I have divided this chapter into segments: women versus tradition and women as matriarchs. There will be some overlap between these segments. The fourth chapter will focus on analysing changes in how the films depict urbanisation, the countryside, mezzogiorno, globalisation, and how they understand modernity. Attention will be paid to the rendering of economic development and its consequences. In the concluding chapter I will tie the themes together to demonstrate how *giallo* understood and played with societal themes, and the social reality of its time.

2. Italy after WWII

This chapter provides the necessary historical background that will act as the basis of my analysis of the films. I will begin with providing information about Italy's development after the Second World War, including the protestations and movement activity of the late 1960s. I will present the radical movement activity of women in a bit more detail. The final two sections concern the Italian film industry, the emphasis being on exploitation cinema. I will also contextualise *giallo* in more detail.

After the fascist reign and the world war came to their end, Italy started taking steps towards a democratic form of government. The Christian Democratic (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC) government that came to power in 1948 in the spirit of the dawning Cold War, was adamantly right-wing and conservative. The party politics were also marred by the strong influence of the Catholic Church and by corruption, in part due to the patron-client system and mafia connections that existed, especially in the countryside and poorer areas. This way of operating led to incompetent decision-making and a lack of national planning. Much fascist legislation also remained in place for a long time, including laws advocating racial purity. The powers of the police also were at similar levels as they had been during the fascist regime, enabling violent confrontations between authority and the people.

Mostly the northern parts of Italy received the rewards of the so-called Economic Miracle that the industrialisation, opening of global trade, and financial aid programs brought. This combined with the poorly planned and implemented attempts to modernise the agrarian south emphasised internal dividers and caused large waves of emigration from the countryside to the expanding cities. This added to the labour surplus that enabled a more rampant exploitation of workers. Many people were forced to live in poor conditions due to the haphazard urban planning that had been a hasty response to the growing populace. The almost careless way in which cities were being built also worked toward eradicating much of nature and landscape. Italy transformed from an agrarian nation into an industrial one rapidly and with painfully lacking finesse.²⁰

University entry exams were abolished in the 1960s at the same time the compulsory schooling was extended. Thousands got a chance to expand their education, but it soon became clear that

²⁰ Kurz & Tolomelli 2008, 83.

the outdated educational system was not up to the new challenges. Students came from different financial and social backgrounds which led to uneven learning experiences. Insufficient number of teachers and lecturers led to poor quality of teaching and unfavourable student-staff relationships.²¹ Like elsewhere, Italy saw a powerful wave of protest and movement activity during the 1960s and the 1970s. Students of universities radicalised alongside the workers, fuelled by the idealistic goals of Neo-Marxism, ultimately forming the New Left in an answer to the stagnated Old Left. An impetus to rise was found when the dock-workers launched a wave of protests in 1967. University students originally protested mainly for the workers' rights, but Neo-Marxist ideologies provided an enticing mould with which the entire system might be changed. The New Left was concerned with more than the material reality, bringing identity and personal life into the discussion. Built-up discontent erupted in the Hot Autumn of 1969 and started a decade of movements, protests, and internal terrorism.

2.1. 1968 and the women's movement

Feminism and the women's movements in Italy had lost much of the momentum they had received immediately after the war. Progressive groups operating within socialist circles were shunned due to the Cold War tensions.²² Traditional family structures and hierarchies were commonplace (and still are), with women being strictly "the second sex," whose responsibilities were seen to lie largely at home.²³ Lack of public services to support families or children forced women to further increase their domestic workload. Ideological currents that emerged in the wake of the economic miracle diminished sensitivity to sexual discrimination by generalising a belief that the evolving modern society would automatically eradicate the shortcomings of the previous systems.²⁴

Regardless, more women were able to receive higher education and had access to the circles of the emerging New Left, and thus platforms and skills to speak and discuss different matters. Women workers were also common in factories following the sprawling urbanisation of Italy. When workers and students radicalised, feminists joined them, taking in the Marxist rhetoric of change, societal upheaval, and other idealistic endeavours.²⁵ However, the women

²¹ Lumley 1990, 49-56.

²² Ergas 1982, 257.

²³ McCarthy 2000, 31.

²⁴ Ergas 1982, 258.

²⁵ Ginsborg 1990,367.

participants soon realised that the male radical actors speaking about changing the system were not interested in discussing the questions about women and their liberties and rights. The proposed “new society” would ultimately keep the traditional hierarchies of society in place. For example, the workers’ charter of 1973, the article banning unfair discrimination at work, did not comment on discrimination based on sex or gender. The worker and the student were predominantly thought of as male characters.²⁶ Thus, as feminists made efforts to separate themselves from the movements, the first ones to receive criticism were the male-dominated radical groups.

The Neo-Feminism of the 1970s set out to bring attention to the deficits in women’s standing in society. *Liberta femminile*, the female liberation, was the notion on which Italian feminist discourse was mainly based.²⁷ But feminism did not emerge into the 1970s as a one unified front. Fragmented women’s movements did not have that many connections to parties or politics but were instead leaning on being vocal about tough subjects, although the New Left offered previously unattainable political resources and models for organisation and networking. There were multiple pioneering groups, such as *La Rivolta Femminile* and *La Movimento de Liberazione della Donna*, which emphasised different arguments. *La Rivolta Femminile* was the most radical of the groups: they stated that equality between men and women only sought to further enslave women since “equality” put men forth as the model for “normal.” They emphasised how different women were from men and wished the difference to be reflected in any possible changes or developments.²⁸

Natural targets for feminist groups could be thought to have been the issues of abortion, divorce, and contraception, which had been illegal for a long time. These were also things that were largely thought to be sins by the Catholic Church.²⁹ Ultimately, the quest for legalising abortion did become the steering force of Italian second-wave feminism and was achievable in terms of legislation and politics. This was disappointing for some, as it turned the women’s struggle into a singular legal campaign as opposed to the structural revision of the old cultures and mentalities that radical actors were dreaming about.³⁰

²⁶ Ginsborg 1990, 367; Dunnage 2014, 181; McCarthy 2000, 30-31.

²⁷ Bracke 2017, 534.

²⁸ Malagreca 2006, 82. Largely a complete separation of “men” and “women”.

²⁹ McCarthy 2000, 31.

³⁰ Bracke 2017, 535.

Abortion, contraception, and divorce connected to matters of home and family. Family was considered Italy's stabilising "basic social unit", a notion strongly advertised by the Catholic Church and the DC after the World War.³¹ Women were expected to give birth to the future workers of Italy and to care for the home, children, and the husband. Divorce was outlawed until December 1970 when Law 898 came into effect. *Lotta Femminista* was a group that advocated for wages for housework. *Rivolta Femminile* denounced marriage altogether, citing family as the site of male domination and a general lowering of women.³² Still, motherhood was championed as something that was undoubtedly and uniquely women's own experience. The issues were seen to be inherent to the world in which the children would grow up.³³

La Rivolta Femminile was quite critical of motherhood as they were experiencing it at the time. For example, in their 1970 *Manifesto di rivolta femminile*, the co-founder of the movement Carla Lonzi, wrote that women were fed up with "bringing up a son who will turn into a bad lover." A mother was expected to raise their children, but as that happened in the oppressive and shackling dimension of the family and home, the children would grow to recreate the unequal and oppressive systems currently in place. The movement did not, however, denounce motherhood completely but thought of it as the one of the main dividers between men and women as was written in their other main text "*Sputiamo su Hegel*". Thus, it had value since *Rivolta Femminile* wished to emphasise the difference between men and women. But the same powers that shackled women in the family and home had corrupted the motherhood experience. Because of this long, historical corruption, new, "modern" women could also see motherhood as something that would pull them back into subjugation.³⁴

The response of Italy's political parties was hostile or indifferent. There was no wish to legitimise or give respect to non-political and vocal groups. The DC held that neo-feminism was harmful and that it aimed to destroy the important values of Italian society. The Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI) sought to avoid conflict with the DC in the hopes of achieving a political alliance. This also meant alleviating the political pressure caused by the events of 1968-1970. Because of these reasons, the PCI appeared hostile towards the women's movement, their women's commission proclaiming Neo-feminism to be "the

³¹ McCarthy 2000, 31.

³² Lumley 198 ,317.

³³ Benedetti 2007, 85.

³⁴ Benedetti 2007, 85-86.

wrong way to treat an important problem.”³⁵ The abortion question’s prominence in the latter half of the 1970s made it easier for the women’s movement to reach the political level.

2.2. The countryside and the Years of Lead

Industrialisation required resources, workers, and places to put the workers. Environment and the countryside were eagerly sacrificed for this development. Northern Italy was the largest beneficiary of the success and growth. The unevenness of the development caused a wave of immigration from southern Italy, *mezzogiorno*, which hastened the rampant urbanisation and gobbling up of the environment even more. In this segment I will provide some context for *mezzogiorno* as well as the Years of Lead, the period of national unrest.

Southern Italy’s status as “the Other” of Italy hails back to pre-unification (*risorgimento*) when the southern areas of the peninsula formed the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (*Regno delle Due Sicilie*). Towards the end of the kingdom’s life cycle, problems regarding politics, corruption, economy, education, and national progression caused a brain drain. The intellectuals who had “escaped” were quick to voice their discontent about a kingdom they felt was “almost biologically corrupted,” and thus, a lost cause.³⁶ After *risorgimento* and during the latter half of the 19th century, the nation building processes brought attention to the undeveloped nature of the south, especially when compared to the North. The image of *mezzogiorno* as backwards and filled with inebriates was supported by elites and intellectuals who touted ethnocentric views about their own country inside their own country. For example, in 1898 sociologist and statistician Alfredo Niceforo wrote that *Mezzogiorno* was “so rough, so primitive” and that he “unconsciously compared” it to the “modern grace” of the North.³⁷ To Niceforo’s mind, there existed empirical evidence that other people, like Southerners, could be inferior as a race, and their differential treatment could be scientifically justified. It was to be the Southern Question: what to do about *mezzogiorno*, if it was to be a part of “modern” and European Italy? The use of such a concept already aimed to differentiate and to restrict the “barbarism” and the uncivilised way of life into a separate geographical location.

³⁵ Ergas 1978, 263-264.

³⁶ Dickie 1999, 8.

³⁷ Niceforo, Alfredo. 5-6, *L’Italia barbara contemporanea* 1898. Translation to English and quoted by: Dickie, John. *Darkest Italy*, 6-7.

According to Jane Schneider, after Italian unification, the image and the conceptualisation of Southern Italy were formed through a sort of unwitting co-operation between the Northern and Southern intellectuals. In the North's desire to be a part of the grand European machine, the rhetoric of its elites painted the less developed South as a separate and shunned part of the nation. The Southern intellectuals would, in turn, comment and critique the many deficits and problems they recognised in *mezzogiorno*, such as poor education, transportation, and communication.³⁸ These intellectuals also included Antonio Gramsci. There were times when political and economic measures were taken supposedly to develop the undeveloped areas of the South, but these were largely done in order to exploit the region.³⁹

Elements that often exist in stereotyping the *mezzogiorno* includes the presence of magic and natural religion, which is relevant in this thesis. Much of this stereotype was built in intellectual writings, but it was also present in popular culture like films and novels. In a different approach, anthropologist Ernesto de Martino in his 1959 book *Sud e magia*, described his fieldwork in the Lucania region of *mezzogiorno*. He presented the actual rites, rituals, and beliefs and made a case for their place in the world of the 1900s. He also evaluated Southern Catholicism's connections and adaptations of the supposed "black magic." The "magic" was not contained inside a chaotic and "barbaric" realm, nor was it necessarily negative. Films in my thesis draw on Southern Catholicism's relationship to "black magic", but they also touch on the clash of both with modern society.

During and after the economic miracle that had quickly propelled Italy to financial success, the situation in the South had been slow to change, despite multiple projects designed to develop the Southern areas more towards the model of properness that obviously was the North. Corruption, human greed, and mafia, combined with poor financial and structural planning watered any sort of plans down to near pointlessness. Factories and other avenues for work were abandoned and left in disarray. People had to move in order to have a chance at making a living.⁴⁰ The South, despite the neglect, stereotyping and the Otherness, was part of Italy and that was a fact always catching up with the entire country.

³⁸ Schneider 1998, 8.

³⁹ Depictions in different media, like literature and films, also build the image of the South as a decrepit place filled with rough people.

⁴⁰ The "Southern Worker" to some extent became a romanticised figure in the movement activity of the 1960s and 1970s.

Another theme that needs proper explanation here is the Years of Lead (*Anni di piombo*), since it is relevant in analysing the graphic and grandiose displays of violence and the depictions of police operations in *gialli* and *poliziotteschi*, in this thesis, primarily in *The Suspicious Death of a Minor* (*Morte sospetta di una minorenne*, 1975). The period of violence known as Years of Lead was borne out of the protest and movement activity of the late 1960s. Militancy arose on both sides of the political spectrum. A networked effort of anti-Left activity arose in 1969 and continued to the 1970s. Neo-Fascist Street violence escalated to bombings as the neo-Fascist party achieved success in the 1972 elections. The Left answered in kind, as the Red Brigades (*brigata rosse*) formally entered the stage on 20 October 1970. In a leaflet they announced their intention to “fight the bosses and their lackeys on their own ground as equals.”⁴¹ Showing up as supporters of the workers, their doctrine was that change was achieved through violence. They saw themselves levelling the playing field as the enemies, were it extra-parliamentary groups or the government itself, were always eager to resort to physical violence themselves. Repeated police answers kept the Brigades in the public view.⁴² Their targets became politicians and wealthy businessmen, such as the manager of Alfa Romeo. Kidnappings eventually developed into executions. The Brigades’ messages were widely seen and circulated, in part thanks to the sensationalising news media that regularly displayed them and brought them forward.⁴³ The armed violence and the 1978 kidnapping of Aldo Moro by the Brigades also compromised the progressive Eurocommunism⁴⁴ built by the Italian Communist Party by forcing it to expand the police and restrict liberties. This ultimately led to the dissolution of the Red Brigades.

2.3. Italian film industry and the *filone* cinema

*“The use of violence was often instrumental to production demands, as we had to accept the cheapest solutions. Meanings have been given to certain situations in my movies when, in fact, they were just attempts to resolve problems from time to time.”*⁴⁵

After the Second World War, the Italian film industry was perceived by Allied powers to be purely a Fascist contraption. The 1948 Italian government was hesitant to support the film

⁴¹ Lumley 1990, 280.

⁴² Eley 2002, 409.

⁴³ Lumley 1990, 283.

⁴⁴ Born out of West European Communist Parties’ retaliation against the Soviet Union’s “Communism”, Eurocommunism strove for politically progressive programs tailored specifically to each country’s needs.

⁴⁵ An interview with Sergio Martino: An American in Rome. Interview conducted by Giulio Olsen.

industry properly. Funds were instead strategically granted to control it in order to satisfy American studios looking to make their triumphant return to the international market.⁴⁶ American films flooded the Italian market, aiming to garner back the lost international profits and to export the American ideals to the world.⁴⁷ After a brief slumber, the tide of endless Hollywood schlock was answered with artistic and visionary films of the Neorealist movement, often based on the new harsh realities of postwar-Italy.⁴⁸ Italian films of this period achieved international acclaim and long-standing prestige. Before long neorealism morphed into “pink neorealism” (*neorealismo rosa*), precursor to Italian comedies, that rode on top of well-established and marketable “safe” names known inside and outside of Italy, as American films were still common competition in the domestic Italian market.

Beginning in the 1960s, several large Italian film studios and production companies began withdrawing from the film industry, partly due to the growing presence of television and radio, and partly due to the competition with foreign films. This time concrete efforts to revitalise the domestic film production were taken. The Italian state began offering financial aid and bank loans to aid domestic productions. This led to the emergence of many small producers looking to get their piece of the easy money, but also to compete with the television-filled future with as much (or as little) variety.⁴⁹ Most relevant to this thesis, horror and crime cinema had to go a bit further to gain steam. Horror and thriller films did not have a built-in audience in Italy (like spaghetti westerns did on the account of American westerns) and had to first find their distribution and box office outside the home country. This was not unusual in Italy, but the “trash” cinema market became tightly woven into internationality. International advances and distribution deals, combined with the domestic aid programs, meant that a low-budget film could make back its costs before a single frame had been shot.⁵⁰

The *filone*-style of cinema emerged during this period. *Filone*⁵¹ is a concept used to describe film styles, such as *giallo* or spaghetti westerns, which are formulaic, profitable, and consist of numerous rapidly made films. *Filone* cinema is cyclical in nature. When one strand (like *giallo*)

⁴⁶ Sorlin 1996, 85.

⁴⁷ Nicoli 2016, 138-139. The decline of Hollywood during the 1950s was also a factor in the powerful push.

⁴⁸ Neorealism wished to emphasise the “real” by using non-professional actors, shooting on location, etc.

⁴⁹ Vitali 2016, 56-57.

⁵⁰ Baschiera 2016, 3.

⁵¹ The better known *filoni* are spaghetti westerns, *giallo*, *peplum* (swords and sandals), *poliziotteschi*, gothic horror, cannibal films, splatter zombie films.

of film became less popular (=profitable) than another one, filmmakers and producers abandoned the old and went with the new (like *poliziotteschi*). This is also the general description of an *exploitation film*, a film prepared to sacrifice narrative and artistic cohesion in order to exploit a trend. *Giallo* was one of the trends of the early 1970s.

The nature of the *filoni* and the general industry environment had a major effect on the concept of “Italian horror.” International distribution, marketing, and finally home video releases over the period from the 1960s to the 1980s also fed to the mental image of a “particularly Italian” thriller.⁵² Horror and crime films made in Italy are often stereotyped as offensively trashy, sleazy, and violent, with nonsensical plots and poor overall cohesion.⁵³ Italy is thought of as the originator or a major attributor of multiple exploitation film genres like the *mondo* tradition, the cannibal film boom, and the more splatter-oriented zombie films. These Italian exploitations, *filone*, were usually based on another popular film, eliciting the crying about ripping off others.⁵⁴ *Filone* cinema, like *giallo*, relied on other films that were popular and well-made so that the success could be copied as quickly and as often as possible. “Italian horror” is generally thought of as an inherently Italian phenomenon, even despite its multinational nature of production and creation.

Directors like Joe D’Amato and Lucio Fulci made their name with these sorts of films that faced much censorship and editing in the international market, sometimes granting them a sort of an overblown reputation as “forbidden films.”⁵⁵ In international markets, Italian films received new titles, English⁵⁶ dubbing and were cut up and often censored. Advertising, like posters, were markedly changed to emphasise the “wild” marketable aspects of the films. In the grindhouse markets of the United States, Italian horror and thriller were moulded to resemble better known American films of the same calibre. Also due to the nature of multinational productions, distributors of different countries could manoeuvre actors of their

⁵² Church 2015, 1-2.

⁵³ As far as stereotypes go, a lot of Italian exploitation and horror do include an abundance of these elements.

⁵⁴ Popular American films often originated these sorts of exploitation cycles. George Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* (*Zombi* in Italy) spawned countless Italian zombie films, *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Exorcist* inspired many similar possession- and satanic panic films, Alfred Hitchcock inspired *giallo*, films like *Dirty Harry* influenced the *poliziotteschi* cycle, etc. Also, a certain director often spearheaded a *filone*, like Sergio Leone in spaghetti westerns and Mario Bava in *giallo*.

⁵⁵ For example, in the 1980s United Kingdom, many Italian films fell under the semi-official popular moniker of “video nasty”, films that did not fall under the regulations of Obscene Publications Act of 1959.

⁵⁶ Or Spanish, or German. Availability of other audio tracks than Italian or English is not very common, if they exist.

liking into the films.⁵⁷ The distributors also had the prerogative of editing the finished film to better showcase the actors most popular in their respective national markets.⁵⁸ Due to practices like this, many different versions of different films float around, making it difficult and costly to pinpoint the original prints.

This sort of filmmaking was entirely moulded to monetary gain. Profit and paying bills were the first and the second priority, and if mutilation and rape were things that sold at the moment, those had to be included and advertised. If an actor was known (and cheap), they were to be included.⁵⁹ But if the filmmaker managed to weave those major selling points satisfyingly into the film, they might have some more manoeuvrability beyond them. Some directors, like Lucio Fulci, also created their “auteurist” touch through these exploitative elements, like extreme gore.⁶⁰

In Italy, the main avenues for *gialli* were *seconda visione* and *terza visione* theatres.⁶¹ These were cinemas located in poorer districts and locales, usually visited by “regular people.” These movie theatres played more “low-brow”, low budget films, such as *gialli*, that had had a short or non-existent shelf life in the *prima visione* (first run) theatres in the bigger cities.⁶² Mikel J. Koven talks about these theatres in connection with *giallo*’s typical loose plot cohesion. According to him, for people visiting these low-level theatres and watching the supposedly surface level *filone*, seeing the film was more of an excuse to go out and spend time. The director Sergio Martino has commented on this in an interview, in which he stated that he did not “rely on specific target”, and that he “often saw upper-class people” in *prima visione* theatres also simply enjoying themselves or chasing a thrill.⁶³ This is to hint that the nature of the moviegoing experience of the 1970’s Italians is very difficult to investigate and questionable to make generalising statements about.

⁵⁷ Actors like Christopher Lee, Boris Karloff, and Donald Pleasence appeared in many Italian and other European horror and thriller films.

⁵⁸ Shipka 2011, 11.

⁵⁹ “Popular” could mean many things. Usually the popular stars were unknowns but later became famous, like Clint Eastwood. Or they were genre actors in the twilight of their careers, like Boris Karloff.

⁶⁰ Being labelled and sold as “exploitation master” or in the case of Fulci, “Godfather of gore”, could also become a limiting burden.

⁶¹ Meaning “second run” and “third run” theatres.

⁶² *Prima visione* theatres also had higher ticket prices.

⁶³ An interview with Sergio Martino: An American in Rome. Interview conducted by Giulio Olesen.

2.4. Locating filmic *giallo*

The concept of *giallo* in Italy goes back to 1929 when the publishing house Arnoldo Mondadori Editore began releasing translated crime fiction in a novel format. The series was titled *I libri gialli*, later *Il Giallo Mondadori*, in reference to their bright yellow (*giallo*) covers. The term *giallo* in the Italian context differs from its English-language usage. In a lot of English-language discussion, *giallo* specifically refers to the film style of the 1960s and 1970s. In Italy, *giallo* is more of a general term when referring to crime and mystery entertainment, including films, books, and comics.⁶⁴

Italian horror director Mario Bava⁶⁵ is often cited as the originator of the filmic *giallo* tradition.⁶⁶ His films from the early 1960s, *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (*La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, 1963) and *Blood and Black Lace* (*6 donne per l'assassino*, 1964), are indeed films where many popular filmic *giallo* touchstones and repeating motifs seem to originate.⁶⁷ These include aesthetic and drawn-out murder scenes, strong visual and colour language, and the traditional outfit of the killer. *Blood and Black Lace* also set to stone the prevalent themes of *giallo*: the painful torture and death of the rich and beautiful.⁶⁸ Bava's original *gialli* are sometimes seen as belonging to the tradition of German *krimi*-films.⁶⁹

In English-language film literature, *giallo* usually is synonymous with its high-mark period during the early 1970s. Dario Argento's directorial debut, the 1970 *Bird with A Crystal Plumage* (*L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*), took elements of Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* and spun them into what became the often copied model for a basic *giallo* film.⁷⁰ It featured a foreign civilian finding themselves entangled in an increasingly complex serial murder mystery

⁶⁴ Italian crime and horror comics, *fumetti neri*, became a commercial success around the same time as Bava's *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*. Often including a tagline "*giallo a fumetti*", the comics featured similar exploitative elements as did filmic *giallo*. Diabolik, a murderous master criminal, is the most famous *fumetti neri* character.

⁶⁵ Bava is one of the Italian directors who was later "reclaimed" as an auteur and a master of visual language. Nowadays many cite his films having had strong influence of horror, slasher, crime, and thriller film genres.

⁶⁶ The concrete "beginning" of the Italian gothic horror cycle is also often attributed to Bava and his 1960 film *Black Sunday*.

⁶⁷ Bava's influences themselves seem to owe much to the German *krimi* films, and *giallo* novels and comics.

⁶⁸ Shipka 2011, 75.

⁶⁹ *Blood and Black Lace* was an Italian/German/French production. The German production company could use Bava's film to compete with other *krimi* in Germany. Baschiera 2016, 4.

⁷⁰ The word "proto-*giallo*" is sometimes used to indicate a *giallo* that is pre-Dario Argento, though this feels unnecessarily reductive.

after seemingly witnessing a faceless killer violently attacking a woman. The supposed perpetrator was dressed in a black trench coat and a hat, complete with the soon-to-be trademark black gloves: the exact same outfit as the one worn by the killer(s) in *Blood and Black Lace*. Violence was graphic and drawn out, eliciting claims of misogyny as many *giallo* murder scenes, especially Argento's, focus on women writhing in extended agony.⁷¹ Another element in the film that many others implemented with varying degrees of success was the dubious psychoanalytic logic used to explain the killer's murderous mania.⁷² Similarly to Bava, Argento also made innovative usage of visuals, camera angles, sets, and colours: things that have become ingrained in the popular memory of *giallo*.

Bird was followed by dozens of films made utilising a similar template, often equipped with a similarly grandiose title. Due to oversaturation, dilutive convergence with other *filoni*, and dropping audience interest, a style commonly recognised as *giallo* ultimately withered away. Attempts at diversification often included introducing supernatural elements into an otherwise grounded genre or becoming parodically self-referential and deconstructionist. Some lesser-known *gialli* popped up here and there over the 1980s and even the early 1990s. Ultimately *giallo*'s stylistic markers in films decreased enough that it can be said to have ended.⁷³

Italian gothic horror film cycles of 1950s and 1960s also influenced the artistic and narrative language of *giallo*⁷⁴ while the striking depictions of brutal violence, sexualised murder, and explicit nudity were an escalation of Bava's and Argento's filmmaking. Practically all *gialli* feature classically beautiful women, often seen in various states of undress only to display the actress.⁷⁵ The see-through nightgowns and lingerie shots owe much to the 1960s *fotoromanzo*, photo-romance magazines. During the 1960s they had come to feature actual photographs of women daring to wear less and engaging in different activities than being housewives.⁷⁶ *Fumetti neri*, *giallo*'s comic book manifestation, had also entered publication in the early

⁷¹ In one of the most infamous and often cited quotes from Argento he states that he prefers seeing beautiful women being murdered as opposed to other types of victims.

⁷² Films of Alfred Hitchcock are seen as a major influence on *giallo* as a whole, especially the 1960 *Psycho*. The infamous "psychologist explains the plot for the audience"-scene of *Psycho* is recreated in Argento's film.

⁷³ Nowadays *giallo* lives on through homages. For some recent examples, see the 2021 films *Malignant* and *Last Night in Soho* ("most expensive *giallo* ever made") or the 2020 film *The Last Matinee* (*Al morir la matinée*).

⁷⁴ Mutually, Italian gothic horror film cycles were majorly influenced by the financially successful British Hammer Studios' horror films and the US director Roger Corman's series of Edgar Allan Poe adaptations.

⁷⁵ Multiple *giallo* "leading ladies" or female side characters had roles in the sex comedy genre, soft-core porn, or other exploitation films. Some had also appeared in the *fotoromanzo*-magazines as models.

⁷⁶ Vitali 2016, 53.

1960s, featuring bloody violence and sexual content. Bava's films exploited the trends, and later *gialli* squeezed every bit of possible excitement out of them: explicit nudity and brutal violence often went hand in hand. The human body, almost always the female body, was exploited and paraded around, either in the slow camera crawling over the naked form, or the twistedly erotic struggle of the murder victims. *Giallo* director Sergio Martino has stated that at the time wealth, promiscuity, and lewdness were seen as signs of corruption in Italy and in film they acted to justify the murder of those exhibiting those features. *Giallo* strived to make the murder act, the abuse, and the destruction of the human body interesting and fun, into "art".⁷⁷

2.4.1. Women in giallo

One avenue of interest in this research is how women are presented in *gialli*. Despite featuring the marketable visual pleasure, more than a few *gialli* depict women in leading and commanding roles, as the amateur detectives that work out the mystery or as the intended victims ultimately outmanoeuvring the killer. There are *gialli* with women attempting (and succeeding) to escape the bonds of traditions like family and marriage and generally seeking an independence of some kind. Women are also shown in many different work scenarios and careers and living independently, even if their jobs tend to circulate between being a photographer, a secretary, or a model. These are all issues and discussions that were becoming more visible in Italian society during the heyday of *giallo*⁷⁸, -thanks to the more radical women's movement and the growing number of female voices in the workforce and political spheres. Through a simplistic logic, producers and writers could presume that these were things people wished to hear and talk about as one major aspect of *giallo* is its contemporary setting.⁷⁹

There is also a somewhat prevalent theme of a woman being the killer or a predator similar to a man, their victims being both men and women, sometimes children. Many *gialli*, at least in the very early phase, intentionally played around with the default expectation that a killer is a man and then in a shocking twist revealed the killer to be a woman. The cliché *giallo*-killer's outfit of a hat and a trench coat fits very well, as it efficiently conceals the sex. The point-of-view shots of the killer's hands (always wearing black gloves) also supports the confusion.

⁷⁷ The "fun factor" of *giallo*, the out-there killing methods and murder weapons, are the result of operating inside a *filone*. The films attempted to one-up each other by introducing different means of murder.

⁷⁸ Of course, those ideas existed in Italy long before them.

⁷⁹ But there are some *gialli* that take place in different time periods.

Sometimes the women who are initially portrayed as submissive, weak, and soft in front of the male characters are revealed to be twisted and murderous. But also, women appearing as independent, professional, and wealthy are often revealed to be predatory and murderous. In many cases, a just revenge and retribution for abuse and oppression are the motivations of a female *giallo* villain, rendering their actions sympathetic. But sometimes they are rich and privileged and do as they please, which, in turn, is meant to render their violent deaths satisfying.

Leaning into the growing popularity of psychoanalysis,⁸⁰ many *giallo* narratives feature a matriarchal character who is antagonistic or posthumously the root cause of the killer's, usually man's, mental instability. Main characters can also be in similar anguish, like Jane in Sergio Martino's *All Colours of the Dark (Tutti i colori del buio, 1972)*. Mothers can be portrayed or seen as monstrous, even literally, but weak men still are bound to them and are unable to function properly in their absence. One can also see the stereotypical Italian concepts of *mammismo* and *mammone* in the *giallo*'s portrayal of mother-child relationships. *Mammismo* refers to a mother-son relationship where the mother is blamed for smothering, pampering, and controlling her son. As a result, the grown man is ruined, pathetic and weak, still dependent on his mother: *mammone*.⁸¹ The concept of *mammismo* and using mothers as scapegoats for current problems mostly originates from postwar Italy and its failings.⁸² Oliviero in *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*, for example, is portrayed as *mammone*. And as Oliviero longs for his dead mother, other characters simply observe "*Italians are like that.*"

2.4.2. Fake Italy, fake world - the location of *giallo*

It is important to explain the milieus where most *gialli* take place. This thesis attempts to understand *giallo* through the mentality that it is specifically an Italian product, and then present the films as entities that reflect Italian culture and society. But as has been stated, production of *giallo* was majorly entangled in the international contexts and depicted a variety of foreign locations, such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Germany. How would a crime

⁸⁰ And also into Hitchcock's *Psycho (1960)*, a thriller film with its basis in psychoanalysis.

⁸¹ The equivalent Finnish term could be: "mammanpoika".

⁸² Patriarca 2018, 31.

film set in Dublin with an international crew, foreign financing, but an Italian director specifically reflect Italy?⁸³

Giallo's milieu is characterised by its artificiality and its style of production. *Gialli* are most often set in urban locations, which are ambiguous enough that the dubbing and the cast might obscure the country of the setting. *Gialli*, as other Italian films, did not utilise on-set audio.⁸⁴ All films were dubbed, most often in Italian and English, so that the international audience could more easily fit them into their own national context. When the films were shown in Italy, they had been dubbed over in a specific form of Italian.⁸⁵ This emphasised the “fakeness” of the film and promoted the imagined community of a singular Italy.⁸⁶ *Giallo* film, as a domestic and international product, was in both contexts painfully artificial⁸⁷, which is emblematic of the Italian style of production.

At the same time, *giallo* is known for its wide display of foreign locations. In these *gialli*, the reading of the foreign nationality is very surface level and mostly exists literally in the background. The variety is mostly due to the international nature of the productions, but it has also been read to exploit the growing popularity and possibility of international travel. Mutually, many *gialli* feature foreign characters who have travelled to Italy. Most of the films in this thesis are specifically stated or shown to take place in Italy. Those films tend to depict Italy's internal diversity. This is observable in *Don't Torture a Duckling*, *Death Laid an Egg*, *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*, and *The Suspicious Death of a Minor*. The divide exists mainly between the countryside and the city, but it also exists inside the city. The films depict urban Italy, rural Italy, old Italy, “modern” Italy, and Italy as seen by the poor and Italy as seen by the rich.⁸⁸ Who could say what is “Italian” in these films?

In the end, *giallo* was a product of a specific set of circumstances and influences.

⁸³ Pierre Sorlin's *Italian National Cinema* (1996) is a book about what makes a “national” cinematic product. According to Sorlin, situating any film into its origin country and culture is difficult and problematic. Because first, whose right is it to say what is natively “Italian”?

⁸⁴ Due to international casts, actors on set could all speak their own native language as the dialogue would be dubbed over. It is arguable whether this works as the actors' lip movements rarely match the dialogue on the either audio track. In a strange way, this is partly what makes Italian films “Italian”.

⁸⁵ Sorlin 1996.

⁸⁶ The imagined community, an idea that the nation is more united in culture than it actually is, would exist in *giallo* through the form of spoken Italy. The Italian dialogue often presented a uniform language.

⁸⁷ Of course, all films are without exception “fake” and artificial. To what extent that presents a problem is up to the skills of the filmmakers and the experience of the individual viewer.

⁸⁸ At least how the filmmakers imagined these things to be.

3. Women versus tradition - family, work, marriage, and sexuality

“I’ve noticed your life’s hell, so why do you stay?”

Floriana’s question to Irina in *Your Vice Is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* (1972).

In this chapter I will examine the films through the angle of how they depict women, family, and marriage, and how sexuality is seen or depicted. I have kept in mind the contexts of the late 1960s and the early 1970s when analysing the films. Extensive emphasis is placed on Sergio Martino’s two films, *All Colours of the Dark* (*Tutti i colori del buio*, 1971) and *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* (1971). The films were released in the Italian market the same year, both feature the actress Edwige Fenech in a major role, both feature Sergio’s brother Luciano Martino as a producer, and both feature Ernesto Gastaldi as a writer. The other films examined are Lucio Fulci’s *Don’t Torture a Duckling* (1972) and Dario Argento’s *Inferno* (1980).

*All Colours of the Dark*⁸⁹ stars Edwige Fenech as Jane Harrison, a jobless young woman living in an apartment building in London, where everyone is a stranger to one another. Jane has been left emotionally stunted and depressed after losing her unborn child in a car accident, much to the frustration of her fiancé Richard and her sister Barbara. Richard desperately wishes for them to get married, and Barbara claims that Jane simply “never grew up.” Barbara is a strict and independent woman who works as a secretary to Jane’s therapist, who specialises in psychoanalytic theory. Jane is plagued by surrealist nightmares, not only of her dead child but also of the event from her childhood where she witnessed her mother being murdered. No treatment seems to help Jane until she gets to know her neighbour Mary, who introduces Jane to a Sabbath of Satanists. Jane begins to partake in the increasingly delirious rituals until she manages to get away and ends up in the arms of her fiancé.

Jane is a woman who is stuck between the two worlds: the safer traditional world and the dangerous modern world. These two worlds are signified by two things: the safe and traditional alternative entails Jane to finally marry her fiancé and settle down to be supported by him. The

⁸⁹ It must be noted that this film is likely intentionally very similar to Roman’s Polanski’s 1968 film *Rosemary’s Baby*. It is one in a long line of films influenced by Polanski’s film. While knowledge of this influence might appear to somewhat undermine this film’s analysis, I believe this not to be a big problem. *All Colours of the Dark* was made in 1971, three years after *Rosemary’s Baby*’s original Italian cinema run and during the busiest phase of *giallo*’s life cycle. It is an Italian *giallo*-interpretation of similar themes, which makes it unique enough.

other option is more complicated: freedom and liberation are linked with satanism, witchcraft, serial murder, and ritual sacrifice.

Forming a family and raising children was, for a long time, put forth as the main function required of women in Italy. Jane has gone through a miscarriage that has left her jaded about everything. Her fiancé is offering the seemingly only solution to go forward: marriage. The death of Jane's mother and her own failure of becoming a mother are incapacitating elements in Jane's existence. It is irrelevant that the miscarriage was due to an accident, she failed to create that base unit of a happy, traditional Italian life: family. She "never grew up", as her sister Barbara puts it, she doesn't have any higher education and is not prepared to take care of herself. So even before the miscarriage, she was being prepared for the role of a housewife. Barbara, Jane's sister, is highly educated and works for a psychoanalyst therapist whose prowess in the field she supposedly idolises. Jane's fiancé dismisses such stupidity, advocating that vitamin pills are a preferable option to a therapist.

Italian feminists of the 1970s did utilise the ideas of psychoanalysis to explain women's societal position and how men's and society's general attitude towards women was created.⁹⁰ Barbara at first appears to be the "optimal" version of a modern woman who has a proper job, a good education, and is highly independent. She also idolises the therapist and his psychoanalyst theories, citing him as a genius. But the film proceeds then to show how ineffectual the therapy and the theory are in treating Jane's condition, as reliving and digging up the trauma are detrimental to Jane's condition. Richard quickly dismisses the entire idea, and Barbara is later revealed to have been a member of the Satanic Sabbath, out to ruin Jane through devilry and trickery. The character of Barbara plays into the negative stereotype of the independent, "liberated" woman as a witch, as someone entangled in witchcraft and Satanism who is now also utilising the tools offered by science. The film is connecting the independence and self-determination of women to something that is conceived as perverted and cruel. Like satanism, those concepts are things that are deviously being offered to frail young women in the broad daylight.

One of the major notions of the Italian feminist movement was the demand for women to have the right to control their bodies, their own sexuality. A major part of the campaigning involved

⁹⁰ Ginsborg 1990, 368.

the legal right to abortion. In a perhaps questionable way, Jane's automobile accident can be seen as commentary on this particular notion. She lost an unborn child by the only legal way that was possible in Italy in 1971. The cause of this was the symbol of modernity and industrialism, the car. This is a very twisted way to present the issue to audiences, but it is quite clear: look what happens when you do not have children. Catholic values rooted in the constitution and the culture of Italy, emphasised the importance of the family. To not want to form a family when there was an opportunity was seen as something against the Divine doctrine. Taking all this into account, it can be read that the film is critical of the notions of freedom of body as a threat even to the core of society. Jane loses her child, so she loses her grasp on life and is pulled into a world of strange vices, lust, and blood where her body and sexuality are exploited and perverted, all in the name of "ultimate freedom".

Jane is literally lured into this modern world (or its exaggerated caricature) by her neighbour Mary. Mary comes "from the provinces" and is in fact a member of the Satanic Black Sabbath. The Sabbath dabbles in black magic, twisted rituals and, of course, massive orgies. Jane ends up taking part in these rituals, where the leader of the sabbath is so cartoonishly evil that he kills a puppy and after drinking its blood himself, forces Jane to do the same. After some time, Jane is given an opportunity to become a full member. To achieve this, she must kill Mary, who tells Jane that she wants it and that way she will be "free forever." Mary chooses the destruction of her own body, even forcing another woman to do it. This is also the gateway for Jane to achieve her own freedom by becoming a full member.

The film portrays the idea of sexual liberty to the parodical extreme with its depictions of mass orgies and blood drinking. Witchcraft and satanic symbols are also linked to this free-spiritedness symbolising how twisted and against the norm the complete personal sexual liberty is.⁹¹ The search of it leads Jane to take part in this mockery of Christianity and Christian rites. In a melodramatic way, the blood of the killed animal is a twisted version of the Blood of the Christ, through which one's sins can be cleansed.⁹² In the film, the lopsided communion instead invites sin into the person (Jane) who is taking part in the ritual. The ones advocating and practising these liberties are portrayed as sickening, physically repulsive, and the film's main

⁹¹ Some other *giallo* films with depictions of rituals, orgies, and/or satanism released around the same time: Giuliano Carnimeo's *Case of the Bloody Iris* (*Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer?* 1972), Lucio Fulci's *A Lizard in Woman's Skin* (*Una lucertola con la pelle di donna*, 1972).

⁹² Lot of this sort of imagery is essential to the film's nature as a Satanic panic film, but it is fitted to the overall themes of the narrative.

killer is also a henchman of the sabbath. Jane's sister, Barbara, is revealed to be a member. Barbara who in the beginning of the film is portrayed as an independent, determined, and successful. This freedom and power she has achieved for herself were influenced by the sabbath, thus casting a twisted light onto her position as a "modern" woman.

Even Jane and Barbara's mother is revealed to have been a part of the sabbath. Jane, being the main character and thus the one the audience looks to do the right thing, chooses to oppose the sabbath and its vices. She wins by choosing the traditional married life. In the end, her neighbour Mary brought the deeply-rooted tradition of perversion and black magic from "outside" into the city, where such things are able to flourish hidden. The ending states, however, that the traditions of the "civilised", Christian people are even more deeply rooted and thus are the right choice, as Jane and her fiancé embrace after a fateful confrontation with the cult's leader.

Sergio Martino's *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* centres around the dynamic between the writer Oliviero and his wife Irina. The couple lives in a villa inherited from Oliviero's deceased mother, where the abusive and alcoholic Oliviero hosts ill-conceived parties for all sorts of suspicious characters. He viciously humiliates his wife in front of the "guests" and privately beats her. Oliviero also has had an illicit affair with a young woman who works at the town's bookstore and does not let familial relations stand in his way as he later proceeds to sleep with his own niece. The main plot forms around the hook of whether Irina will manage to survive her husband's antics, but as is usual for *giallo*, the circumstances turn out to be not quite so simple.

The film initially builds Irina up as a passive and submissive woman, who appears terrified to rise against her husband directly. The arrival of Oliviero's niece Floriana seemingly works to build up her courage to act in defiance of Oliviero, as she also falls in love with Floriana. Floriana in reality is a villain without any sort of roots, who sails the world seeking to take advantage of others without much care. She develops a sexual relationship with Irina, and together they aim to have Oliviero arrested as they believe him to be the recently surfaced serial murderer. Floriana's only true goal is to steal the family jewellery that Oliviero's mother left behind. She engages in multiple sexual relationships in the town, even with both Oliviero and Irina at the same time, in order to garner information and influence, not actually caring for

Irina's safety or wellbeing. By the time it seems that the two of them are the only ones left on the killer's list, Floriana abandons Irina to the hopeless situation and escapes.

The film presents Floriana's sexual escapades as signs of moral corruption that is sealed with the fact that she does not care whether she is with a man or a woman. Homosexuality is often a point of drama, comedy, and a sign of depravity in *giallo*. The thesis in this film is depravity, to demonstrate the corruption of this person. This also corresponds to Sergio Martino's later statements that lewdness and being or appearing wealthy were seen to be features that might justify lethal punishment. Floriana even sleeps with Oliviero, her relative. Incest is also strongly suggested in Oliviero's and his mother's relationship. While Floriana is not the killer of the film, she is portrayed to be as unbecoming as possible, and the viewer is swayed to wish for her to face swift punishment when her true nature is revealed. She ultimately also receives it.

In *All Colours of the Dark*, the notion about liberation of women and their sexualities were demonised and connected to black magic, while in *Your Vice Is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*, Floriana presents a singular expression of this sort of total freedom. She is completely devoid of any sort of conventional human decency or manner, only out for herself. The audience is made to dislike her by making her mock and abandon the abused Irina at a dire moment. She is unwilling to place herself at risk for anyone's sake. In the moment when the killer seemingly sets their eyes on her, she loses the total control of her situation she has enjoyed until that point. Scared of being moved by anyone other than herself, she exits the stage, similarly to Barbara in *All Colours*, who is "free" and appears as a well-adjusted individual. But Barbara, too, does not hesitate to destroy even her own sister to get what she wants.

There is an attempt to throw these dynamics on their head, when it is revealed that Irina was actually the murderer all along. She organised the entire situation in jolly cooperation with her secret lover in order to exact revenge upon Oliviero and to steal his mother's fortunes for herself. It is even revealed that it was her who masterminded the untimely death of Oliviero's mother. At the end, she orchestrates the deaths of Floriana and her new lover before also killing her own lover in order to secure her position and to get everything for herself. Irina is ultimately found out by the police. With the twist, Irina's actions are understandable, even if her methods are morbid. Oliviero was by nature a violent alcoholic and an abusive husband who needed to be dealt with. Along the way, Irina eliminated all those for whom Oliviero might have ever

shown an inkling of some sort of affection, including the black servant Brenda and the cat Satan. The film aims to illustrate a point that women are just as capable of committing terrible deeds as men, and they might be more efficient at it than men. In the end, nobody is the “good guy”. An abusive marriage appears as a state from which one can only escape through a bloody battle of wits.

Martino’s films play up and exploit the ideas of women’s position in society and women’s liberation by using “strong” women as villains. These women acting without constraint or attempting to secure their freedom corrupt the “natural” order in a negative way and proceed to create bloody mayhem. In *All Colours of the Dark*, the independent sister Barbara is a part of the sabbath that seems to have no problem with serial murder, ritual suicide, and the seduction of the “innocent.” She is also the one orchestrating the mental destruction of her sister in order to get to her fiancé for herself. Mary, who brings Jane into the sabbath, gains complete freedom by committing suicide during a ritualistic orgy. In *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*, Floriana is an immoral human being who plays with other people’s feelings and uses her looks and manipulative personality to cheat and exploit. Irina, the abused housewife, is revealed to be a mastermind behind the bloody ordeal, showing a complete disregard for anyone other than herself when she eliminates every other major character, including her only real ally. Irina, however, is a somewhat sympathetic character, doing what she must to survive herself.

In his film *Don’t Torture a Duckling* Lucio Fulci portrays a somewhat misplaced fear or a dread of modernity and industrialisation and the destruction of the natural landscape. He criticises the Catholic Church for its hypocrisies and ideologies that are based on a disregard for reality. There are two major women characters in the film who both appear as outcasts despite their completely different backgrounds and situations. Both are suspected and vilified based on surface-level knowledge and presuppositions by other characters. The way the film is constructed also acts to build up these red herrings in order to make the narrative twists more striking. Women and their sexuality are at the centre of the serial killing priest Don Alberto’s misguided agenda to protect young boys from their corruption.

Patrizia, played by Barbara Buchet, is a rich young woman who is literally hiding in the southern Italian village of Accentura after being involved in a drug scandal in Milan. She is immediately out of place in the village by appearance and behaviour. Her early scenes are built

to cast suspicion on her as she does some very questionable things. In her very first appearance she is completely naked and proceeds to tease one of the young boys of the village (who is later murdered) and asks him sexually suggestive questions. She forces her ways and culture into the backwards *mezzogiorno* by driving around in a brightly coloured modern car and by flaunting her wealth. She appears to embody and vindicate the suspicions of the Catholic priest Don Alberto, who presents the idea that everything deemed “modern” is poison to society. “It is our tolerance that is to blame”, he states when provided with a window to vent his feelings. Police interrogate and suspect Patrizia, who turns out not to be the most cooperative person, enforcing the general impression of her as a creepy figure. Adding to all this, other characters witness Patrizia meeting with the village “witch”, feeding the stereotype of an independent woman being a witch. She is, at least in the Catholic priest’s world view, the symbol of the force opposing religion and the correct ways, emblematic of the problematic dimension of urban life.

La Maciara is another major woman character in the film. She is supposedly a witch who attempts to utilise a magic ritual to kill the boys (who are later murdered by Don Alberto) as a punishment for disturbing her own child’s grave. La Maciara is shunned by the villagers and later killed by them, despite her magic not having had any actual effect on the lives of the children. La Maciara’s scenes and actions are accompanied by sinister chords and evil sounds. She is entirely painted as “the witch”, despite her magic involving the Catholic saints and Christ himself.

Despite Patrizia not playing into the traditional and “proper” model for a woman like other women in the village (like Don Alberto’s mother), she manages, alongside a city journalist Andrea Martelli, to uncover the mystery. Don Alberto, a celibate young priest of the Catholic Church, is the real killer. He evaluated the alluring corruption of modernity and the seductive corruption of women’s sexuality to be so evil that it is better to kill the children before they are ruined too much beyond the original sin. Markedly, he is only killing young boys, “my brothers,” only attempting to murder a young girl, her own sister, when she might have been a witness to his crimes.

Under all the muck, Fulci is criticising the vilification of women and the archaic reasons that the ancient belief systems are giving for it. Genre conventions of *giallo* somewhat obscure these messages, but they also can act to emphasise them through bluntness. Change, even

radical change, is necessary for society to progress beyond superstitions, outdated ideologies, and improper figureheads. Patrizia is a young woman with a spotty history of drug use, but she still rises to fight against the horridness perpetrated by a man of the cloth. She is an imperfect hero in imperfect world. Don Alberto, an advocate of self-proclaimed purity and spiritual cleanliness, is the villain. In his mind there can or should be no compromise regarding these things. As a reward for all his efforts his head gets split open when he falls off a cliff. The corruption, according to him, poisons and corrupts due to our “tolerance” of those things. The director Lucio Fulci was a Marxist who was an active member of the Italian communist party in his youth. While it cannot be said for certain whether he personally injected Marxist or Gramscian elements the film, it is conceivable as he has both the writer and the director credits. The approach is also subtly different than in many other *giallo* films by specifically inspecting larger themes through the serial murder-template rather than making the film be about the crimes.

The worldview of the two Martino films is somewhat similar to Fulci’s but they do differ in points. Martino’s films are very critical or afraid about “the modern” in general as that seems to be a world controlled largely by market forces and corporate greed, and of women’s place in that world. In *All Colours of the Dark*, urbanisation is given as an unfortunate and inevitable change, in which the old, safe traditions, and beliefs can and must survive if there is to be order. Those proclaiming liberation and individualism are made into villains to be feared. The film also largely plays into fears regarding Satanism and connects independent and prosperous women into it and its circles. The film depicts Satanism stereotypically and as completely terrible, lending to the stylistic necessity of a satanic panic film. In *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*, the two main women characters are at first shown as sympathetic and morally upright, struggling to get an upper hand against an oppressive, violent male figure, but both are ultimately revealed to be working under less sympathetic motivations. Martino’s films look to the past and its failures and to how those can negatively affect the present. There were poisonous things in the past, but also stabilising elements that should not be forgotten. There is a need to come to terms with the past, and the new and radical solutions might not always be correct. Fulci’s film is more concerned with the future, curious to find solutions and compromises to the challenges brought on by the changing world. One of these challenges is the position of men and women and their primal nature and how those fit into the modern world.

3.1. Deathly mothers

“*He misses his mother. The Italians are like that*”.

-A statement by one of Oliviero’s foreign guests as she observes Oliviero longingly gaze at his mother’s portrait in *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* (1974).

Mothers and matriarchal characters are often present in *giallo* films. They are utilised to enrich a film’s narrative, to explain the cause of the killer’s or another character’s mental instability through ambiguous psychological readings. Mothers are the antagonist and the catalyst of the present-day problems. The legacy or memory of fathers is not present in the *gialli* analysed in this study. The stereotypical concept of *mammismo* can be seen in many *gialli*, as well as the influence of psychoanalysis. In this segment I will look at the films through these two angles.

In Sergio Martino’s *All Colours of the Dark*, it is Jane and Barbara’s mother’s memory that looms over the story. A major plot point is also the fact that Jane herself was going to be a mother, but she lost her unborn child in a car accident. It is revealed that the mother used to be part of the satanic cult but was killed after she attempted to get away. In the present, Barbara has taken her mother’s place as a member of the cult and is using her influence to secretly ruin her sister.

Jane and Barbara’s mother was and is a negative influence despite her late change of heart. The film’s use of satanism, witchcraft, and cultism symbolise the ideas of women’s liberty and independence as negative and destructive. The mother was seduced by these ideas, and that mistake has followed the lives of her children ever since. The film purports that the traditional motherhood dictated by Italian and Catholic ideas is the safe and correct way forward, and the satanist cult fears it and actively seeks to stop it. Jane herself lost her child and at the same time she got stuck in one place, unable to move forward or to marry her fiancé. In the end of the film, when Jane chooses the future possibility of married life instead of a fate at the hands of the cult, she is able to get over the past traumas with the help of her fiancé. The women depicted as strong and independent, like Barbara and the neighbour Mary, are destroyed as they were full members of the corruptive cult. But even as the film seems to advocate the properness of a stay-at-home motherhood, it also highlights that experience’s possibilities to ruin a child through the characters of Jane and Barbara. Martino delves deeper into this in *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*.

Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key stars Oliviero, a son of a deceased noblewoman. Oliviero “misses his mother” as “the Italians are like that.” It is heavily hinted that Oliviero had sexual relations with his mother, supported by the fact that he cannot experience sexual arousal anymore if the partner is not wearing his mother’s old gown. In life, Oliviero is a failed writer who has lost his touch after his mother’s death. He is a sleazy layabout who mopes around his unearned and crumbling house, and between the depraved parties he humiliates and beats his wife. The mother also symbolically lives on through her cat Satan, who plagues Oliviero’s wife Irina through his sheer existence.

The film plays into the negative Italian stereotype of *mammismo*, and Oliviero is the archetypal *mammoni*, a momma’s boy. His relationship with his mother has ruined him, and her permanent absence has rendered him into a bum who does not contribute anything to society. He holds a grudge against his wife Irina because she is not his mother. Of course, despite being a terrible person and formulating a plan to kill his wife, Oliviero is not a killer. Irina is the mastermind behind the murders plaguing the villa and the town. She also killed Oliviero’s mother out of hate and greed. Oliviero’s mother, being an heir of nobility and tradition, could be as controlling and manipulative as she wished at home without being questioned. Irina, a younger and abused housewife, must manoeuvre behind the scenes, and utilise smoke and mirrors in order to attain an inkling of similar power. The memory and experience of the monstrous mother has poisoned Oliviero and through him also Irina. Her influence has made marriage into a dilemma from which Irina must escape through force and she ultimately loses herself in the process. The film presents the influence of the mother at its worst: as something that destroys and corrupts both the past and the future.

Don Alberto in Lucio Fulci’s *Don’t Torture a Duckling* was raised “right” by the calculation of Catholic Church. He became spiritual, taking on the profession of a priest, his goal being to raise other children into a similar model of Christian properness. But he turns out to be one of the “bad apples”, as referred to, for instance, in *La Rivolta Femminile*’s radical rhetoric, a different sort of beast than Oliviero. He was raised by a conscientious mother, who was during the process confined in the societal prison orchestrated by the oppressive circumstances. Don Alberto has grown to embody all the oppressive and negative features inherent in traditional Italian and Catholic society. He aims to diminish sexuality, and he despises “the modern” and change so much that will go to the lengths of murder in an attempt to hinder their influence.

He has also grown to be in command of his own mother, who holds no power over him. As a socialist, Fulci is highly critical of the Church and the old order and shows that their days are hopelessly numbered. He asserts that powers of change will be too powerful to leave archaic superstitions, such as religion and magic, in place. The new sort of hero in the modern times will be a character like Patrizia, who is an imperfect young woman, but honest and capable of recognising and speaking out about what is wrong and out of place. Of course, such utopian strides did not occur in reality.

Dario Argento's *Inferno* from 1980 is the second film in his *La Tre Madri*-trilogy. Created long after the heyday of *giallo*, *Inferno* strives towards the fantasy horror genre while still boasting some key *giallo* features. The plot centres around the witch triumvirate *La Tre Madri*, or The Three Mothers, who are vaguely based on Thomas de Quincey's 1845 poetic prose essay collection *Suspiria de Profundis*.⁹³ The youngest and most evil mother, Mater Tenebrarum, is the antagonist of *Inferno*. Her portrayal functions in tandem with the other two mothers seen in *Suspiria* (1977) and *The Mother of Tears* (*La Terze Madre*, 2007). They are demonic, supernatural entities corrupting the present world through their use of old magic and weak-willed male slaves. Tenebrarum's servants are men and animals, who despite regular abuse and torture remain loyal to their mistress. The film directly challenges the witches' position as "mothers" by stating that they are incapable of creating life, which is considered in the film as the key feature of motherhood. In truth, they are "wicked stepmothers", as stated by the architect Varelli. The connection to old fairy tales, like *Snow White* and *Cinderella*,⁹⁴ is clear in Varelli's statement. Mother Tenebrarum is a false mother, only shrouding herself within the title in order to enslave and corrupt, someone who should be overcome and destroyed. Tenebrarum is literally a demonic mother-figure from the past, infecting the present as the stereotype of *mammismo* claims mothers do.

The *gialli* inspected here have differing interpretations of mother figures and motherhood. Sergio Martino's two films had the same director, producer, actor, and a writer, and they portray a somewhat similar understanding of the topics. The urban and modern world is scary and isolating and the old, safe values are deteriorating. The trauma caused by mothers and their choices haunt all characters in both films, poisoning the present and making the future

⁹³ Dario Argento's *La Tre Madri*-trilogy consists of *Suspiria* (1977), *Inferno* (1980) and *Mother of Tears* (*La terza madre*, 2007).

⁹⁴ 1977 *Suspiria* takes place in Freiburg, Germany, next to the mythical Black Forest, *Schwarzwald*. It is popular belief that many of the stories published under the Brothers Grimm's name were based on this location.

something to be frightened of. It is understood as a happy ending when Jane and Richard stand together against the Satanist cult in *All Colours of the Dark*. The ordeal has given Jane a lesson, and Richard what he wants. Marrying and settling down to be supported is the safe and proper action for a woman. In *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* Oliviero's mother's ghost looms over the entire story, acting as the catalyst. Her memory and incestual relationship with her son made him into a violent, shady figure against whom Irina is forced to act with violence and murder.

In Lucio Fulci's *Don't Torture a Duckling* it is presented that the Catholic Church as an institution aims to control and hinder mothers and women in general. Don Alberto as a priest has assumed authority and fear over his mother who is confined to an existence of constant work. The backwater village of Accentura has in the film been a sheltered enough of a community so that Don Alberto might "protect" its occupants from the modern Italy, where the accountability, usefulness, and values of the Church were being questioned at the time.

The issues of contraception, abortion, legal divorce for women, motherhood, and the relevance of the Catholic Church were issues brought to the surface during the time these films were being made and released. Owing to their rapid production schedule, the strictly contemporary settings, and the exploitation genre conventions, these issues were also topics utilised and distorted to create the narratives. The nature of the *giallo* as a *filone* was also the latching onto ideas of others and putting a different twist onto them. The ideas presented in the films do not necessarily represent the opinions of the writers or the directors, as elements in them are topics that proved to be popular in previous films. Based on the small number of films inspected here, it can be said that as a whole *giallo* was not of one mind about any singular issue or topic. The creators working within the *filone* took ideas or ready-made scripts and adapted those to fit into the world of *giallo* mystery, which by its most basic nature involved brutal violence and nudity.

4. The colours of *giallo*: urban, rural, and the inevitable societal change

4.1. The dreadful urban reality of *giallo*

Films across the *filone giallo* depicted a variety of exotic locations both within Italy and in foreign lands, so much so that sometimes *giallo* has been likened to a cinematic rendition of a travel catalogue. But the most typical settings in which *gialli* took place were urban environments, cities where people and their personalities drown in the brown and grey concrete jungle. Swathes of people wander the streets without knowing the first thing about each other. The police are always late, if they arrive at all. And if they do, they fall short of their promise, as they are faced with a futile mission. Murderous mayhem ensues in the streets, abandoned houses, deserted construction zones, apartments of high-rise buildings.⁹⁵ These locations also pronounce the feeling of desolation, isolation, and dread. Menace and misery imposed by cities is one of the most universal elements throughout different *giallo* films, and it is often entangled in more abstract concepts, such as cultural and economic change.

While physical violence is a constant threat, these more abstract menaces aim to change people and the ways they operate. These agents of change are not necessarily born out of the urbanisation and the cities, but they are made more efficient by those things. They also directly oppose past institutions and traditions, such as the Catholic Church. In the next segment, I will analyse the portrayal of cities and their problematic existence, as seen in *giallo*. In the section after that, I will analyse how the films presented the countryside and the way urbanisation clashed with its reality. I will also be paying attention to the more general elements that operated in the background, such as a rejection of rose-tinted nostalgia of the past and the hegemonies of religion and the economy.

4.2. Crippling corruption in the city - law is not enough

“Not many honest people around here. Only thieves and whores.”

“And policemen.”

Woman describing her neighbourhood in the fringes of Milan in *Suspicious Death of a Minor*.

⁹⁵ In other words, places where it is relatively cost-effective to shoot a film.

Suspicious Death of a Minor (1975) is strongly influenced by Italy's Years of Lead (*Anni di piombo*), the decade-long period of politically charged domestic terrorism and street fighting. While not acting out a version of any actual events, the world presented is a bleak and familiar reflection of reality. It is a world filled with poverty, everyday violence, rampant corruption, and the police that have been subjugated to serve the corruption. In bare essentials, it is a story about the elite class exploiting the lower classes. By the nature of the mystery/cop film genre, these elements are sensationalised but boiled down to an easily digestible concoction. *Suspicious Death of a Minor* is a symbolic cultural product of that time in more ways than one. It was made and it premiered during the Years of Lead, but it also signifies a shift in the area of *filone* cinema. The early 1970s were the peak of *giallo*'s popularity, but already in 1975, the style was going out of fashion. Making *poliziotteschi*, or police films, was more topical and safer. *Giallo* did not die completely, but it started to lag behind. As if to emphasise the point that this film takes place in a different reality than *giallo*, in one scene the main characters go to a rundown *terza visione* theatre playing Martino's *giallo* *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* to a largely uninterested and small audience. Despite this, the film is rooted in *giallo* traditions, with its more understated action, atmosphere, camera work and the concentration on the crime solving aspect. But *poliziottesco* looms over it, with its chase scenes, shootouts, and the irredeemable inhumanity of the crimes on display.⁹⁶ A major signifier is also the shift from a civilian protagonist to a police protagonist.

The film's story revolves around the murder of an underage girl Marisa, who turns out to have been roaming the streets as a sex worker. The case leads the main character, the undercover police inspector Paolo Geremi, to discover a sizable child prostitution and drug trafficking operation run by a coalition of wealthy business owners. The leader of this group, millionaire Gaudenzio Pesce, adopted Marisa at the age of thirteen, raped her, and forced her into prostitution. A wayward home for orphaned and poor girls is used as a smokescreen to disguise the child prostitution operation. The diabolical Pesce also bankrolls a made-up criminal organisation called Kidnappers Anonymous, who specialise in kidnapping children of other wealthy industrialists. These kidnapping cases, such as the kidnapping of a chocolate factory

⁹⁶ Serial murder, rape, and mutilation of *giallo* might be equally irredeemable, but the heightened reality of *giallo* often shrouds those things in "macabre fun". In *poliziottesco* the cold nature of the crimes is used to justify the bloody vengeance the police must exact upon those responsible. *Giallo* is essentially escapism while *poliziottesco* might not always be.

owner's son, are highly publicised by the media and work to obfuscate the true devilry at play behind the scenes. The whole scenario is a parodic reference to the very public kidnappings and violence carried out during the Years of Lead and the way the media publicised them for engagement and profit. The hypocritical and distorted picture of the world presented by the media is also evident in the film's scenario. The fraudulent kidnapping and safe return of the rich industrialist's son is made into a huge news story with journalists crowding the family while at the same time no one, not even the police, is even remotely interested in the brutal murder of an underage girl, an underage child prostitution circuit, or the general misery of people on the fringes of Milan. It is a media-built false happy ending.

This is the reality brought forward that the protagonist faces. Corruption in the upper echelons of society renders the police powerless in combating villains, who exploit the situation of the poor for their own advantage without thinking twice. "Are you asking us to investigate, or overthrow the government?" asks the police chief of Germa. Inspector Paolo Germa, an archetypal rogue detective with unorthodox methods, resigns from the force after having his investigation into the millionaire Pesce barred. He goes vigilante, plants evidence, and personally goes after Pesce with the intention of merciless extermination. During the final confrontation on a train, Germa proceeds to shoot and kill Pesce. Legal procedures and by-the-book means are insufficient at achieving justice in a stagnant and inherently corrupt world. The vengeance delivered through the barrel of a gun does little to improve the world but provides catharsis and an illusion of personal agency when in reality none exists. The idealistic and meticulous Germa with his plans to uproot the festering corruption is lowered down to the level of a hitman whose efforts are ultimately rendered into another case of "senseless violence" in the world of the dawning *poliziottesco*, reflecting the everyday brutality of the Years of Lead.

Sergio Martino's *All Colours of the Dark* (1971) presents similar existentialism and dread of urban life. The urban lifestyle provides efficient tools for the villains seeking to corrupt the weak and the frail. Not only do the architectural decisions grant means of easier physical concealment, but the modern society also now provides the ambiguous disguise of "just some guy" who walks past on the street and is never thought of again. But in the world of urban *giallo*, that faceless stranger just might have been a diseased maniac, serial killer, or an assassin for some ungodly conspiracy.⁹⁷ Wrong ideologies may reside in the very neighbouring

⁹⁷ Though it is not outside the realm of possibility that something like this could happen in real life.

apartments of upstanding citizens. The general hollowness and enormous emptiness of everyday life provides an open door for those ideologies to assert themselves into that life, as there may be nothing there in the first place. The message is “do not trust your neighbours.” The bleakness of city life is concentrated on the can of mass-produced and processed food that the protagonist Jane and her fiancé regularly eat, as they do not possess the basic skills to actually prepare food.

Also present is the bitter truth that some are bound to be left behind in such an environment. The apartment complex is a place where people foreign to each other live in close proximity, often not learning the first thing about one another. In the film, the protagonist Jane lives in this sort of environment. The spirit of community is absent in such a place, a void that false ideologies are eager to fill, if one is not careful. The modern world pushes people towards independence, a state of being ultimately revealed as fraudulent and devious. Safety is in the traditions such as marriage, although, in the film, it seems that mostly women are incapable of achieving the “correct” flavour of independence. Jane’s sister Barbara, a successful and learned woman, actually is a lifelong member of the Satanic Sect. Jane, the “heroine”, is not the same as her sister. She “never grew up”, as Barbara puts it. Jane does not thrive in the urban environment; she and her fiancé are in fact incapable of even preparing their food. Looking backwards is required for Jane to progress and to end her emotional hollowness.

Dario Argento’s *Inferno* from 1980 seems oriented towards annihilating the past and the aspects of culture deemed guilty of sullyng the present. The film takes place across the cities of Rome and New York. There is no sense of grandeur or enormity to these locations, as the plot revolves around very specific neighbourhoods. The main attraction is the witch Mother Tenebrarum’s house in New York, which is a tall, stylish apartment complex complete with secret passages. Each Mother in Argento’s *La Trei Madri*-trilogy operates out of their special house, designed, and built by their slave, architect Varelli. In Varelli’s words “The earth that houses are built upon becomes deadly and pestilent, so much that buildings surrounding them and sometimes the entire neighbourhood smell bad because of them.” The Mothers’ houses are old and inconspicuous in the way that they fit into the urban environment. They have been spreading “evil” for a long time. Surrounding Tenebrarum’s house are small and failing businesses, and the apartment complex is half-empty. These “monstrous dwellings” are

reminders of a dangerous and unknowable past that has almost a fairytale-like quality.⁹⁸ On the surface, they appear sturdy and stylish, but the interiors are crumbling. Their mere existence worsens the neighbourhood, which is why each film ends with the destruction of the building and the Mother occupying it. The removal of these old buildings (and the death of their matriarchs) are things protagonists either wittingly or unwittingly strive towards since their destruction is necessary for progress and freedom. According to Varelli in the film “They (the Mothers) want nothing to change.”⁹⁹ The Mothers themselves deceive and enslave men, as their buildings deceive and enslave the neighbourhood or even entire cities. Tall buildings, busy streets, and fancy architecture all grant an impression of technical and cultural progress, but all are marred by an infected culture that does not want to change. Ultimately the film shows that progress, however clumsy, is possible, as Mother Tenebrarum, self-titled “Death”, burns away in flames alongside her home.

All in all, in these films, cities, urbanisation, and globalisation are depicted as entities that corrupt, destroy, and isolate people. They appear to possess very few outright positive features, even when observed beyond the killers’ and lunatics’ distorted points of view. Corruption can stem from earthly sources, like the political system in *Suspicious Death of a Minor*. Supernatural or mystic forces often act in symbolic roles, representing faulty and abstract cultural development and its particular characteristics that appear to be guilty of causing the misfortune. For example, this is seen in *All Colours of the Dark* and *Inferno*.

The corruption and destitution are in plain sight for everyone to see, yet everyone seems powerless or uninterested in changing anything. In *Suspicious Death of a Minor*, everyone seems to know who the real monsters are, but the official authority, the police, is powerless to change anything since they themselves are compromised. In *Inferno*, Mother Tenebrarum’s dwelling and its influence is an open secret, but people are both enslaved and addicted to the situation, as the Mothers “do not want anything to change.” The industrial world makes it easier for the worst people imaginable to flourish at the expense of regular folk. In *Death Laid An Egg*, the old, natural world is being “rescued” by the big corporate business under the shadow of civilization. The monolithic Chicken Association is turning animals into products first,

⁹⁸ In *Suspiria*, Mater Suspiriorum’s ballet academy is located in Freiburg, next to Schwarzwald, the Black Forest, which allegedly served as a basis of some stories collected by Brothers Grimm.

⁹⁹ The destruction of the buildings also symbolically strike against the crippling Italian *mammismo*, a concept used to describe detrimentally close and unhealthy relationships between men and their mothers. More on this thematic in chapter 3.1.

workers into machines, and the remaining people into money-generating husks. According to the Association, working constantly is “imperative” to orderly living. Aggressive advertisements and manipulative taglines have changed people living in cities into easily mouldable consumers who question nothing and lap up the fraudulent marketing rhetoric in sectarian ecstasy. The world is generally bleak, despite the fact that killers are apprehended and mysteries solved. Urban reality is controlled by corrupted market forces. What remains is a world where one can get knifed down in the middle of a busy street and still die alone.

In various *gialli*, the depiction of cities, economic development, and the cultural changes they bring also clashes strongly with the agrarian past and the countryside. In the next section, I will analyse how some *gialli* depicted the Italian countryside and especially its confrontation with modern and urban Italy.

4.3. Ruinous modernity - countryside is mutating

“These are sad times...”

The priest Don Alberto commenting on society in Lucio Fulci’s *Don’t Torture a Duckling (Non si sevizia un paperino)*, 1972.

“So beautiful. So free. Just a dream.”

“If I knew where dreams come from, I’d go there and dive right in.”¹⁰⁰

Anna and Marco’s conversation in Giulio Questi’s *Death Laid an Egg* (1968).

An element often present in *giallo* is the ambiguous countryside. In many *gialli*, the characters make a brief visit to this “Other Place”, either to escape, relax or to receive an important clue. The countryside is often pictured as a collection of crumbling buildings amidst unkempt nature or as a fancy villa functioning as a vacation home. A few exotic *gialli* utilised remote castles complete with courtyards and gardens, chasing after the gothic influences of the 1960s. Xavier Mendik has referred to the cliché as “the southern *giallo* journey.”¹⁰¹ For example, this journey is featured in *All Colours of the Dark*, despite the film taking place outside of Italy. In the film, what is meant as a relaxing rural getaway turns into a nightmarish revelation: the countryside is where the black magic originates. In this section I will analyse the role of the countryside in

¹⁰⁰ Anna and Marco’s conversation in *Death Laid an Egg* (1968).

¹⁰¹ Mendik 2015, 46.

the films I have chosen, how the urban and global reality affects them, and how the old institutions like the Catholic Church are facing the existential upheaval that all these things bring. Also of note is how the countryside, despite its stereotypes, is imagined as something inherently domestic and natural in a global world that at least appears to be keen on obliterating the value of those things.

Giulio Questi's *Death Laid an Egg* (*La morte ha fatto l'uovo*) premiered in the wild year of 1968. It paints a suffocating picture of a global consumerist society that seeks to enslave rational reality for the sake of its own self-sustainment. It is an overwhelming and unimaginable monstrosity that drills away at people and leaves them empty of reason, turning them into drones. The film demonstrates this emotionless absurdity by utilising the mechanisation of agriculture, namely poultry farming, in which Italy was on its way to becoming one of the leading countries at the time of the film's release.¹⁰² The film fits *giallo*-style hijinks, societal commentary, and tongue-in-cheek art film parody into the framework of an inane soap opera about a couple, Anna and Marco. There is no usual *giallo* ambivalence here: the film is quite critical of mechanisation, consumerism, and capitalist mentality.

The Machine has made the human labour largely obsolete at Anna and Marco's poultry farm. They have laid off their entire workforce, remnants of which still loom around the farm, throwing rocks and socialist taglines like "machinery belongs to everybody" and that Anna and Marco will shortly be "dealing with the unions." According to Anna, "They've always hated us," referring to their own status as "bosses". Workers have been replaced by an automated feeding apparatus that feeds the chicken. The farm has basically turned into an automated factory: the only manual labour required is refilling the machine and packaging the product (chicken) for easy transportation. The front of the farm with the chicken and the feeding machine appears clean and bright, as an antithesis of the supposed "barbarism" of the countryside. But the backroom where the chickens are killed and plucked is nasty and gritty, another terrible truth too difficult to bear. To kill something is to acknowledge it is alive.

The "Chicken Association", an ambitious and globalising corporation, is constantly looking for scientific breakthroughs to breed chicken into cheaper and more efficient products. Their

¹⁰² Godley 2014, 332-333.

ultimate goal is “free global movement” through which they claim economic and political power. All who work within the organisation, including Anna and Marco, are expected to dedicate their lives to the glorious global machine. According to the president of the Association, working constantly is “an imperative of organised life.” In a series of self-congratulating conversations, the president wishes “to get the message across that chicken is accessible every day!” because “people don’t know enough about chicken.” This grand vision entails chicken’s grotesque initiation into the society through the manipulation of the Association. Publicity agent Mondaini proclaims that chicken is an “unknown” that is in the process of being rescued from “the fear of centuries of barbarism” and is being brought into the light of civilization, where it can be saved. The film shows in graphic detail that this entails genetically morphing chicken into a senseless object, “all meat.”¹⁰³ Mondaini sketches out this glorious future onto a series of manipulative advertisements where giant chickens in suits and uniforms live amongst humans. The most efficient way of operating in the global business requires the hollowing out of the human element and lowering its worth to the level of a barnyard animal without the people realising the ploy. By taking ultimate control of an entity dubbed as the “unknown”, in this a chicken, the Association controls the image and the perception of it. As stupid as Mondaini’s imagery appears, the film demonstrates its effectiveness, as in the end people in the city are viciously fighting over live chickens thrown at them from the back of a truck.

The film is not entirely unsympathetic to Anna and Marco, despite their social standing. Their instructions are as such: “tighten production or die.” An answer materialises in the farm’s laboratory where an unnatural invention becomes reality: a new breed of chicken without heads, limbs, bones, or feathers. The “animals” are slowly pulsating with life on the table as the farm scientist and Anna gush over them as if the existence of these piles of flesh correlates with healing the world’s ills. Marco, shaken by the unseemly sight, proceeds to beat the mutant horrors into a bloody pulp. He is interrogated by the higher ups at the Association who remind him that emotions are unnecessary in “the business.” Under extreme stress, Marco seemingly turns to the age-old therapy of serial murder. He does not actually hurt anyone, instead he hires

¹⁰³ In one scene, the higher-ups of the company gather to watch a video that displays in graphic and clinical detail the process of causing genetic mutations in chicken DNA. These pictures are also rolling during the opening credits of this film.

women to act as his victims when he fantasises about attacking and butchering them with a knife.¹⁰⁴

The film presents the developing machinery, production systems, and the global market as incomprehensible monoliths capable of turning people insane. The chicken feeding machine is like a beast that ultimately consumes life. All the aspects of the move into mass mechanised and automated production of practically everything are portrayed as demented and inhuman, and the ones carrying out these developments are seemingly completely out of their minds, as that is required to function in the modern capitalist society. Marco and Anna are struggling to stay sane when everything else is already insane. The clinical, scientific, and emotionless modern agricultural industry is “sorting out” the barbaric methods of the past and turning its products into mass-produced perversions. The Association also produces egg and chicken styled furniture and decorations that are plastered all over their offices. Marco is mentioned to have written an academic paper on a painting depicting a chicken. What has happened is the complete objectification of an animal and the Association aims to own every facet of its existence, to control the narrative. The chicken industry comes to symbolise the markets and corporations that worm their way into every aspect of natural life and strive to make sure that their commercial existence is constantly rendered unto people’s eyeballs and ears. According to the Association, they are “increasing advertisement to a political level.” The film messages that these large corporations and global markets are not simply offering things to buy, they morph and manipulate and thus hold a frightening influence on lives and decisions, despite not actually earning that sort of power through legal or political means.

The installation of new technology and then laying off the workers does not develop the countryside, nor does it improve the quality of life for anyone other than the men in suits. As can be seen throughout the history of Italy, projects to modernise the countryside often devolved into exploitation and corruption, and the film portrays this without an inkling of anything that might be construed as positive. Economic development is more like indoctrination of everyone involved into soul-eating white-collar jobs.

¹⁰⁴ This could be seen as something that ties back to the decreased human labour at the poultry farm. At the farm, most of the work regarding feeding and caring for the chicken has been relegated to the machine and the only work still offered to humans is the butchering of the chickens. Marco tries to relive the sensation of the very human act of killing while he attempts to hang onto his diminishing humanity.

The road between the poultry farm and the city decreases the space of the natural, and essentially renders the farm into a statistical factory. While the highway depicts a concrete development of infrastructure, it is also a thinning line between liberating sanity and confining insanity, the countryside, and the city. When Marco drives down the road to the city, his senses are bombarded to the point of delirium with a relentless array of advertising boards, heralding the horror of the consumerist society. This eldritch experience is delivered with a technique of quick cuts, zooms, and blaring noises. Marco and Anna's machinery has planted the capitalist insanity into the pastoral reality of the farm and tied their lives irrevocably to the world of "progress" it represents. The roadhouse next to the highway is a brief station of respite where Marco therapeutically plays the role of a serial killer. Other visitors also stay there to alleviate anxieties of the artificial existence through eccentrics, for example the man with a plastic bag over his head choking himself with toilet paper. The air outside has become suffocating.

The film's final message is that the battle for sanity is lost and the capitalist, consumerist nightmare is already in place. At the end of the film, Marco drives through a city street where the workers of the Association are throwing hundreds of live chickens for excited people to catch. Everyone is fighting over the chance to have "chicken in their family", where it is told they belong. The incorporeal voice of the Association's president is loudly proclaiming the upheaval of the old barbaric world and the ushering in of the new modern and global world: "The inevitable moment has arrived, the opening of international barriers!" The brainwashed masses believe every corporate tagline shouted at them, however ludicrous the sentiments. Marco and Anna, the seemingly last relatively sane people within this sphere of existence, are both unjustly killed. Marco's final destiny is to fall into the machine and get ground into chicken feed, the same fate that met his dog earlier in the film. But it is the modern and global world that is "barbaric" and primal and has let go of conventions of rationality. People are simply different types of fodder to abstract apparatuses larger than themselves. People have in fact been lowered to the level of farm animals, totally controlled by their capitalist overlords: cities bursting with adverts are their cages.¹⁰⁵ Dramatic rhetoric, theatrics, and advertisements have distorted the "old world" to appear barbaric and something to be tamed. People not willing or capable of playing along are neutered into non-persons to be gobbled up by the new, distorted world, as Marco literally is. When Marco's friend, who is suffering from amnesia,

¹⁰⁵ The president's speeches and advertisements echo the method of playing music for chickens at the farm.

claims he cannot even find the streets anymore and that he is “Outside”, Marco grimly remarks that he “may just be the luckiest man in the world.”

The idea of people as slaves to the consumer society extends to the audience: Anna and Marco’s state-of-the-art poultry farm is equipped with an extensive audio system playing music for the chicken all day. The “music” doubles as the film’s insane soundtrack as if to imply that the consumers of this entertainment product are reflective of the chicken in their cages, both unwittingly manipulated by the faceless and hideous forces of the global mass market. Consumers occupy a proverbial cage, and the entertainment industry churns out two-bit entertainment for them on a conveyor belt. And the audience picks at the garbled mess slapped into their face, much like hungry chicken, as escapist entertainment may be vital stuff to survive in the otherwise crushing world.

Lucio Fulci’s *Don’t Torture a Duckling* is a film that takes place entirely in the fictional Southern Italian village of Accentura and goes through similar anxieties about modern life as Questi’s film, albeit in more conventional style. Utilising the “tourist gaze”, Accentura is a place where remnants of the pastoral beauty and the past are being overshadowed by the modern and the urban. Busy highways and modern houses are in the process of turning the once natural landscape into a haphazard scattershot of greys, blacks, and whites. People from Milan and other cities utilise the highways to travel to the countryside in order to engage in activities that might not be so fondly looked upon in the city. The film’s title comes from the doll that Patrizia, one of the main characters, is able to buy even in this once remote village: Walt Disney’s Donald Duck, a character from a company that specialises in the assembly line type of “magic.”

Fulci’s *mezzogiorno* is a compromised and confused place. The strands of modern and urban life appear as things that are out of place in the village, actively suppressing the natural things and the environment, including the humans who live in that environment. The town is mostly rendered by utilising the image of its real-life location of Sassi di Matera, full of ancient human dwellings and churches that are dug into the rock of a mountain. These houses contrast strongly with the artsy and weird getaway house Patrizia spends time in. The suffocation of the natural and the cold indifference of the modern are encapsulated in the scene where the “witch” La Maciara succumbs to her fatal wounds next to a noisy highway, cars speeding past, ignorant of the ongoing tragedy.

Patrizia is first presented to the audience as someone embodying the worst aspects of “the city life”: indecency, suspect affluence, consumer mentality, and drug use. In the beginning of the film, she is already “hiding” inside the village after a drug scandal in Milan, appearing naked to one of the boys who is later murdered. She teases him by asking him several suggestive questions. She buys Malvina, Don Alberto’s sister, a mass-produced plastic Donald Duck doll to replace her broken, more traditional looking one. In doing so, she evokes the capitalist dream of the Walt Disney Company. Patrizia is one of the prime suspects for most of the film, before the third act where the film places her as a protagonist alongside with the city journalist Andrea Martelli. It is these two outsiders who ultimately manage to stop the killer, the priest Don Alberto. What is conveyed is that modern and urban civilisation are scary, flawed, and difficult to understand, but in the end the conflict they bring is necessary for any change to occur and change is inevitable. What is more, the “modern” seems capable of affecting the hegemony of Catholicism that is also old enough to have been carved into the very earth of the town in the form of cave churches and frescos.

People in Accentura are portrayed as inherently superstitious: even when cleared of any actual illegal activity, the men of the village beat La Maciara, the “witch, to death. The portrayal is in accordance with the presence of old religions and beliefs in the South as devices of security and stability, which are more deeply rooted than Catholicism.¹⁰⁶ Destroying what is conceived as the concrete channel of evil makes the villagers feel safe. Witches can be beaten into submission, metaphysical concepts like “sin” can not.¹⁰⁷ Mob justice is also feared and expected by the police of the village to the point that they do not wish to conduct investigations into it. The actual killer, the Catholic priest Don Alberto, is killing the children in order to protect them from the corrupting (mostly sexual) vices of the city life that lie in wait even while acknowledging the contradiction: that corruption already exists within the village and within the boys. By his logic, via his methods they will get away with a “lesser sin.” The extra-Christian religious influences are in his view ultimately lesser sins than those of modernity, as paganism can in theory be excised or reformed.¹⁰⁸ Fulci does portray the South as a dimension outside the rest of Italy, seemingly decidedly rough and archaic. But it is a dimension whose

¹⁰⁶ Southern Catholicism does not necessarily cancel out beliefs that might elsewhere appear to be “black magic”.

¹⁰⁷ Although this is essentially what the film’s killer, Don Alberto, is attempting.

¹⁰⁸ As the film demonstrates, this has not happened. Instead, Catholicism has incorporated elements of folklore and people’s religion into itself in order to appear as universal as possible. In other words, a charade.

gateways have been torn open in the past and steadily more in the present. Don Alberto, and maybe his religion, is thus facing a long defeat,¹⁰⁹ as the film presents the Church to be a part of the problem.

Interrogating Catholicism is a major part of the film. It is a religion and a system of values intrinsically linked with Italian society and the life in the film's Accentura, providing structure, guidance, and a system of morality. Don Alberto represents this religion that markets itself as the universal truth improving everything in accordance with it. He feels it is his responsibility to save the future by acting in accordance with his own religion's thought processes. He sees modernity, urbanisation, and consumer culture as destructive forces to be fought against. In a scene he recites a list of "city" things he thinks are a sign of "sad times," against which the church must take direct action. According to him, things such as the cinema numb humans, making them incapable, immoral, and dangerously ignorant of the increasingly manufactured reality. The hint is that in the apparently sheltered South, humans can be more in touch with the natural reality, of which Christianity is a part.¹¹⁰ He is not saying anything that had not been stated by the Catholic Church. In the 1950s, Vatican had warned the Christian Democratic government of the effects industrialisation and consumerisation might have on spiritual life. This warning was connected to the growing popularity of television, an invention that supported materialist and consumerist culture through advertisements. In 1957, Pope Pius XIII commented that the "traditional Christian aspect" of the "rural population" was threatened by these things.¹¹¹

The film also makes it clear how entangled and messy Catholicism has become with the local practices and beliefs, and how Don Alberto overestimates his own value. This is accentuated with the church bells that echo throughout the village, alongside local songs, and crucifixes and crosses scattered here and there. The "witches" of the village, La Maciara and Uncle Francisco, practice magic that has been muddled by Catholic concepts of demons, the Devil and Saints. "*Black magic is nonsense,*" claims Don Alberto while the superstitious villagers beat Maciara to death for using an old ritual in an attempt to do harm. According to the anthropologist Ernesto de Martino, Catholicism in the Italian South was quite different from that in the

¹⁰⁹ In 1972, mass attendance in Italy had dropped down to 35.5 per cent. In 1970, Catholic memberships had dropped 1.3 million from 1966. Dunnage 2002, 170.

¹¹⁰ That is, according to Christians.

¹¹¹ Ginsborg 1990, 241.

“modern west.”¹¹² It possessed “magical flourishes”, both traditional and adopted from people’s religions. It was a more mysterious form of Christianity. The locals have taken in teachings of Catholicism and have fitted them to function within the “magic” that seems stereotypically characteristic of Southern Italy.

In the village, Catholicism is not what the priests and politicians say, it is what people have made it into. Don Alberto might claim black magic to be “nonsense”, because in a theoretical sense that black magic is Catholicism that has used its authoritarian position to absorb other beliefs into itself. There is an entertaining connection between Don Alberto’s and La Maciara’s actions. La Maciara attempted to use an old magic ritual to kill the children¹¹³, but it was Don Alberto who actually carried out the killings. Old “paganism” and Christianity worked in an unwitting tandem, making it difficult to say where one ends and one begins. All religion is faulty, as the film shows all supernatural beliefs ultimately leading to dangerous confusion and violence.

In the film, Catholicism works to place itself firmly into the natural order of life as the correct and “good” system of beliefs. The depiction of Maciara’s magical rituals is accompanied by sinister chords, while Don Alberto appears with overpowering but soft and divine-sounding melodies screaming in the background. The film reveals all this grandiose display of goodness and properness of the Catholic Church to be false when Don Alberto is exposed as a maniacal killer with a delirious spiritual quest. He even tries to kill his young sister because she could be able to identify him as the killer. In the film’s view, the Church’s position of power is based on mental, spiritual, and finally physical violence.

This film could be read with the knowledge that the director Lucio Fulci was a lifelong Marxist, probably influenced by the writings of Antonio Gramsci. Fulci also co-wrote the film. In the film the influences of Gramsci can be seen in the ideas of progress. For Southern Italy (or the rest of Italy) to ever evolve, the pervasive ideological grip of the Church would have to be broken and repurposed.¹¹⁴ In addition to itself, the Church kept relevant the “pagan” and magical rites and beliefs by merging with them, exactly as demonstrated in the film. Perhaps the backwards beliefs and archaic rituals would have over time naturally developed into the

¹¹² Martino 1959, 14-15.

¹¹³ La Maciara wished death on the boys, because they had been disturbing the grave of her dead child.

¹¹⁴ Saunders 1999, 182.

Gramscian “Marxist religion”¹¹⁵ and culture if Catholicism had not imposed itself upon the country so strongly and violently. But *Don’t Torture a Duckling* presents the forces of urbanisation, industrialisation, and commercialisation as more powerful than either Catholicism, old religion or their combinations, working physically and mentally to sweep over them. By its nature this upcoming change is also capitalist, exploitative, and imperfect, as the flaws in Patrizia’s character symbolise.¹¹⁶ But it might also ultimately be necessary because ideology, such as Marxist socialism, could more successfully be implemented in an industrial and developed society rather than in an agrarian and backwards one.

Another question inherent to the South is what actually “belongs” there? The film gives no clear answers to this question. For example, Patrizia’s father is mentioned to originally hail from the village. One thing, however, is clear in the film: the Catholic Church is insidious and hypocritical, and its philosophies can easily be used to attempt to justify ill intent. It will close its eyes from its own doctrinal corruption and pretend that this is how it always was. Don Alberto does not wear a concrete mask when he commits his murders. In fact, his victims appear visibly happy when they see him. His mask is the church and the false trust he has built, which allows him to easily approach his victims. The church’s continuing and prolonged presence has only led to backwards development and upkeep of the “barbaric” superstition, when otherwise the South might have already evolved further.

In *gialli*, the countryside is often ambiguous and not as clearly situated as in Fulci’s film. It is concrete and extradimensional at the same time. Interestingly, in Sergio Martino’s gothic horror *giallo*, *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*, locations and how they connect are decidedly defined. The author Oliviero’s family villa is located just outside “a peaceful Veneto town” in the contemporary Northeast of Italy, the “Third Italy.” Third Italy has been used to refer to the areas of north-eastern and central Italy with a strong presence of crafts-based small firms that specialised in specific trades and crafts. Concept of Third Italy has been used to distinguish these areas from the underdeveloped South and the triangle of

¹¹⁵ In Antonio Gramsci’s view, before a Socialist society could even be imagined, the people should *believe* in it and culture should be developed in accordance with socialist values. As religion is a pervasive force in people’s lives, influencing much of their thoughts and behaviours, socialism should in effect become the religion. Forlenza 2021, 38–60.

¹¹⁶ One could say all this has come to pass in real life, as the city of Matera, in addition to being a common film shooting location, is also a popular tourist location. Its main draws obviously are the history and the very “archaicness”.

heavy industry in the Northwest of Italy.¹¹⁷ Oliviero is a drunken layabout who invites the circuit of travelling hippies¹¹⁸ or “*lunatics, krauts and foreigners*,” into their home and then mocks and torments the apparently submissive and resigned Irina in front of them. He is also shown to frequently abuse her physically and even sexually. He engages in incest¹¹⁹ with his cousin Floriana, a way to demonstrate both characters’ lacking morality. There is no mystery in the sense that the audience and apparently the characters are certain that Oliviero is the serial killer. The story appears to morph into one about whether Irina manages to save herself from her husband. The countryside is not any sort of escapist haven, a romantically gothic milieu closed off for a ripe Agatha Christie-style mystery, nor is it a detached assortment of shacks in the middle of nowhere. It is a connected, concrete location with communications and means of modern transport readily available, with the killer’s victims surfacing both in the town and in the villa. It has become part of the rest of the world. Oliviero’s “guests” drive up and down with their motorcycles and cars, the old woman collecting garbage uses a bicycle. Oliviero’s car and signs of its usage, like dirt on the tires, feed the mystery. It is also on a highway leading out of the town where Floriana and her lover meet their demise, as orchestrated by Irina. Through these excessive connections to the “real world”, this place of (supposedly) past nobility is open to all the influences of the Outside and the Global. Alongside globalisation and new ways of life, the law also surprisingly has a better reach, as the Edgar Allan Poe-esque crime is ultimately uncovered by the police.

European integration is a theme operating in the background of the film, often in a very negative and bitter manner. The police detective comments about how even in “this small Veneto town” they are enjoying a multinational assortment of goods and delicacies. “European integration isn’t bad, right?” he asks Oliviero. He follows this with a sarcastic comment regarding the funding and equipment of their forensics laboratory: they have achieved the awesome technological power of a magnifying glass. He is obviously hinting that the “foreign matter” is taking funding away from them. The old lady collecting bottles and garbage reminisces about the old times when parties were proper and there were no such things as “foreigners.” Even Oliviero vents to the cat Satan about his guests: “it’s so easy for these

¹¹⁷ Bianchini 1991, 336.

¹¹⁸ The hippies are pictured stereotypically: they use drugs, engage in public sex, and dance in nude. They “go with the flow.”

¹¹⁹ Sexual relations or tension between parent and child, two cousins or stepparents and step-children are not unusual plot elements in *gialli*. It is almost abundant in Martino’s film as Oliviero is also depicted as having had sexual obsession or mania with his late mother.

youngsters to think they're something when it's obvious that they're actually nothing." Oliviero and Irina also have a black maid called Brenda working at the villa. According to Oliviero, "losing the colonies and getting a servant like Brenda, wasn't a bad deal," because "perhaps black woman is everyone's secret dream." Brenda seems to escape the judgments other foreign interlopers receive due to her social standing as a servant. The men in the town also note that they sometimes do "prefer their coffee black." The insinuation is that Brenda is not seen as anything but a servant and a sexual object.

The film has characters who are nostalgic for the "good old times." The old lady wishes the villa was in its former glory, complete with the late baroness lording over it. It is a yearning for a display of old nobility, after whom others might attempt to model their own and proper "domestic" behaviour. But this also is the past of fascist rule and imperial power, perhaps symbolised by the garbage the old lady is hauling back and forth. The crumbling villa and the antics of Oliviero are symbolic of the rapidly vanishing roots of the region as European integration is sweeping over. Foreign products and foreigners-on-equal-footing are met with fatalistic bitterness shrouded in sarcasm and deep-rooted traditions of exploitation. The next generation of Italy, or rather Veneto, is "nothing", as encapsulated by Oliviero. The youngsters partying at the villa have no roots or homes, they are vagabonds who hold nothing important but their own pleasures. Floriana, mentioned to be 20 years old, is a drifter who exploits people for her own benefit and then promptly departs for parts unknown. The theme of a changing populace and the decline of the "original" can perhaps be explained by the fact that the film takes place in a Venetian town. The Statute of Veneto of 1971 defined the region to consist of "the Venetian people," distinct from Italy or other nationalities. In the film, as the result of globalisation, urbanisation, and the economic miracle, the supposed uniqueness of the people and the culture are under threat and lumped into the general category of the "Italian nation", or even worse, a global nation. But the film also demonstrates that the nationalistic glories of the past were based on the traditions and politics of exploitation and brutality. The remnants of these distorted traditions, like Oliviero, are outright terrible and the very definitions of dead weight.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Oliviero also is a stereotypical *mammoni*, a *momma's boy*, ruined by his mother. The concept is based on *mammismo*, a way to blame "overprotective" mothers for the failures of their sons. I have explored this film with this context in chapter 3.1.

In the 1970s *gialli*, *mezzogiorno* and the Italian countryside more generally is a decrepit place where rough people live in rough conditions. It does feel like an “Other Place” where the rules are, or used to be, different than elsewhere. But the gates of this other place have been opened, and it is in the brutal process of change. It has been connected to the rest of Italy and the world through highways and cars. The characters can travel there by car, even for a brief visit. Notable also is that most often “the countryside” is not necessarily the South, it is simply a detached location outside a city. This really accentuates the thought process of “us and them” and how that is essentially breaking due to the infrastructure and development. *Giallo* built upon this old divider while presenting its more modern aspects. The countryside is beautiful, it is exploited, it is backwards, it is changing.

But, in contrast, modern and urban living is depicted as an empty, meaningless grind. The *gialli* inspected here understand something original and primal in the countryside, even something nostalgic. The ambivalent romanticism about the South and the countryside exists within the built-upon stereotype. It is seen as a natural home, a place that is real. In Questi’s film, Marco and Anna resist their indoctrination into the machine of industrialisation and international markets and ultimately die before they fully join it. Marco is literally ground into food and fed to it. The mind-melting consumer culture permeates every facet of existence, as evidenced by a scene depicting an open-air ice cream bar that comes across more as a prison. It is a clear critique of large corporations and market entities who disguise raw and devious exploitation as a grand adventure. This philosophy is present in the general themes of the films, they are not simple exaggerations from the villains like Don Alberto. The countryside and the emblematic South are at the same time beautiful and natural and unrefined and backwards. Change and development is shown as unavoidable, but as something that must inherently clash with what is already in place. Progress can happen only through conflict that is physical, mental, and cultural. Ultimately only the mysteries of the murders are satisfyingly answered, the mystery of the reality that bore them still remains.

4.4. Clashes of new and old within *giallo*

In the *gialli* inspected in this chapter, the city, urbanisation, globalisation, and the development of the global economy have appeared as mostly negative forces. As a milieu, the *gialli* utilise the city and its features to present how easy it is for malicious forces to fester and corrupt in such an environment. At the same, there are people who are especially vulnerable to such

negative influences which the city seems to offer in abundance. It is also shown how corrupt the society built upon these developments is, for example, in *Suspicious Death of a Minor*. This film also bridges the decreasing *giallo* to the rising style of *poliziottesco*, a shift from fantastic escapist realities to the more bleak and “realistic” dimension filled with politically loaded violence.

Globalisation appears as an element in more than one film. It is portrayed as a terrifying new world order by the director Giulio Questi, who connects it to the new consumerist lifestyle. In Sergio Martino’s *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*, a police chief voices his discontent regarding the foreign influences in bitter irony. At the same time, it is also questioned whether the past, signified by lingering legacies of fascism and imperialism, was any better than what the future seems to hold.

In the end, in the worlds of *giallo*, it seems an inevitability that the “new” and “modern” must clash with the old and traditional. Sometimes this can bring good and sometimes bad results. Neither the past nor the future seem perfect or even very optimal, but facing both is ultimately unavoidable. Old institutions and hegemonies like the Catholic Church, the natural religions of the South, and the people living in cities and in the countryside must all react in some way to these frightful forces. Ultimately in these *gialli* the world seems to be in a constant process of change, or it is often brought up how different things are now from what they were in the past.

5. Conclusion: Slices of *giallo*

Giallo, thought of as inherently “Italian” style of film, was an exploitative form of crime-mystery thriller that utilised the excitement and titillation of bloody violence and nudity in order to turn a profit. Trend-seeking and trend-exploitation were paramount to *giallo*, to catch that most profitable moment of certain ideas. Due to the competitive nature of *giallo* film production, one-upping each other was part of the game. Despite these exploitative horror and crime trappings and the nature of the market, the filmmakers also managed to convey their sense of current culture and reality through their own filmic lenses. They provided a depiction of current events for the audience consuming the entertainment. Many of the background elements and sometimes the narratives themselves were obviously influenced by things such as urbanisation, the emergence of the New Left and its critique of the past, second-wave feminism, and the prevalent question of the fate of agrarian Italy. *Giallo*’s usual contemporary setting made this almost unavoidable, despite its position as an international product. And despite its commercial nature and conveyor belt-style mentality, filmmakers had enough freedom and flair that their works are recognisable as stories borne out of different minds. As have demonstrated, the interpretations and opinions present in the films did differ from each other, while leaning strongly towards the left of the political spectrum. Variance could also be seen in different films by the same director and writer. This speaks for the filmmakers’ flexibility within the production world of *filoni*.

This thesis has examined three of Sergio Martino’s *gialli*, which all deal with similar themes. All three films feature commentary on the urbanisation of Italy (and the larger world) and present this largely as a negative development. The “urban” world is unsafe, corrupt, and almost foreign. The people in positions of power, like the police, are depressed and thus wilfully ignorant of the grey, smeary existence they wade through. The learned portion of the populace are all proclaiming concepts and ideas so abstract that they seem to provide little use for the “regular” people. The higher classes can also be corrupt and disgusting, making the misery imposed upon them seem justified and even necessary. In Martino’s *Suspicious Death of a Minor*, the elite is directly responsible for the misery of the poor working classes and exploits the news media to bury the dreary lives of those living in the gutters while exploiting them relentlessly. The regular people in Martino’s films are usually lost and disoriented by the urban reality, making them easy to control and sway into different directions. Giulio Questi’s *Death Laid an Egg* provides similar depictions of the global capitalist present and future,

building them into complex apparatuses of delirium that swallow people alive if they are not ready to give up all their personal agency and thoughts. Lucio Fulci's *Don't Torture a Duckling* presents urbanisation and modernisation as powerful forces of change that will sweep over even the most remote areas of Italy. There are, however, dim glimmers of hope. They exist in people who are able to have agency and oppose the old and parasitic institutions as well as the new ones. The future is scary and manually built, but so was the magical past that is alive in the southern countryside. Magic does not in fact exist, it was a concept made up by people.

Another major theme examined here is the presentation of women and how the films understood their position and development. The themes in the films appear to pick at typical notions of women's liberation; at times it is in direct focus and often it is an inherent part of fictitious "giallo-universes" that are based on the then-current reality. In the films there is a variety of women depicted. At times, like in Martino's films, the supposed free woman is presented as antagonistic and dangerous. The idea of female emancipation is linked to the archaic ideas of witchcraft and satanism, the corrupt ideals that now wear masks provided by urban and modern society. In *All Colours of the Dark*, Barbara's sister Jane is a woman to whom the plot of the film happens instead of her actively contributing much to it. Her final and ultimately correct choice in the film is to enter marriage, as the world of liberation is corrupt and dangerous. In *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*, Floriana presents the extreme form of individualism and self-centredness. She is a rootless wanderer, bound by nothing, and she actively chooses to use her freedom to exploit and manipulate. Patrizia's depiction in Fulci's *Don't Torture a Duckling* appears more nuanced than these. She is a young "modern" woman who also does as she pleases and has partaken in a fair share of scandal and corruption. She certainly does distasteful things but is instrumental and active in uncovering the killer and saving the day. She is a flawed and contradictory protagonist who exists and is needed in a flawed and contradictory world. The real world is not black and white, there are no satanists to throw off the roof in order to save the day.

One major female character that repeats in *giallo*, including the films examined here, is mothers and matriarchal figures. Almost all films present mothers as corrupting influences, either as actually "evil" or simply as having failed in their task of upbringing the next generation. There is not much room for nuanced examinations of motherhood in these films, as they inch more towards the fairy tale-type renderings of wicked step-mothers, even verbalised as such in Dario

Argento's *Inferno*. They hark back to the Italian *mammismo*, the blaming of Italian mothers for the ills of the current day and the failings of their children.

As seems evident, different *giallo* films featured some very clear interpretations of contemporary events, and much can be read from them. As entertainment products, they also unavoidably acted as stimulants and interpreters of reality to the audience. They were not empty and clinical money-making schemes, but films with thematic narratives. All in all, while depictions differ, the one thing that all these films share is the powerful feeling of change. Things in the world are not as they once were and will still continue to develop, regardless of anyone's feelings or thoughts. The solving of murder mysteries grants the "regular people" momentary and fleeting agency within the films' universe, but it is still a minuscule element in the larger world. All films look back into the past, either to question it, to fondly reminisce about it, or to provide contrast for the present. Whether the new generations are up to facing the challenges of the current and coming days is questioned, but it is also shown how decadent the past generations could be, despite the rose-coloured nostalgia touted by some characters.

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