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Italian-American Identity
in Mario Puzo's
The Godfather

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I dedicate this work to all readers.

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Abstract

This work presents a study on the identity issue among Italian-American minority in Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (1969). This popular crime novel offers different aspects of the Italian culture which many Italians still maintain and insist on keeping in the host country. However, their daily contacts with the Americans lead to big changes in the original Italian culture, especially the concept of family. This study aims to explore the evolving nature of the Italian-American identity in *The Godfather* and to analyze Michael's identity, which becomes a combination of both Italian and American cultures, in order to pick out the motives which prevent him from both keeping his identity and assimilating into the American one. The originality of this study lies in the fact that it takes the concept of godfather to mean a co-father contrary to most critics who take it to mean a leader of a mafia family.

Keywords: Italian-American, stereotype of mafia, identity, identity crisis, assimilation, hybrid identity.

ملخص

يقدم هذا العمل دراسة لمسألة هوية الأقلية الإيطالية المتواجدة بالولايات المتحدة الأمريكية في رواية العَرَب للروائي الأمريكي الإيطالي الأصل "ماريو بوزو". تبرز هذه الرواية عدة جوانب من الثقافة الإيطالية التي لا يزال معظم الإيطاليين يحافظون عليها بصرون على إبقائها في البلد المضيف. ومع ذلك فإن احتكاكهم الدائم بالمجتمع الأمريكي أدى إلى تغيير الكثير في الثقافة الإيطالية الأصلية و بالأخص مبدأ تكافؤ العائلة الذي يعتبر من أهم مبادئ هذه الثقافة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استطلاع تطوّر الهوية الإيطالية الأمريكية في العَرَب و إلى تحليل هوية مايكل ، التي أصبحت مزيجاً من الثقافتين الأمريكية و الإيطالية ، بغية إستخراج أهم الدوافع التي منعت الإيطاليين في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية من الإبقاء على هويتهم الأصلية ومن الإندماج الكامل في المجتمع الأمريكي على حد سواء. يكمن الإبداع في هذه الدراسة في أخذ مصطلح العَرَب للدلالة على الأب الثاني بعكس معظم النقاد الذين أخذوا المصطلح للدلالة على زعيم عصابة المافيا.

الكلمات الدالة: إيطالي أمريكي ، الصورة النمطية للمافيا ، هوية ، أزمة هوية ، إستيعاب ، هوية هجينة.

Résumé

Dans ce travail nous abordons le problème de l'identité de la minorité italienne aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique dans le roman *Le parrain* de l'écrivain italo-américain Mario Puzo. Ce roman présente différents aspects de la culture italienne que la plupart des Italiens insistent à garder dans le pays d'accueil. Pourtant, le contact quotidien avec la société américaine a provoqué l'altération de beaucoup de concepts de la culture italienne d'origine, et plus particulièrement celui de la famille, un des concepts les plus importants de cette culture. L'objectif de ce travail est d'explorer la nature de l'identité Italo-américaine dans *Le parrain* et d'analyser la personnalité de Michael, qui est devenue une hybride des deux cultures italienne et américaine, afin de déceler les principales causes qui ont empêché les italiens aussi bien de s'intégrer dans la société américaine et de garder leur identité d'origine. L'originalité de cette étude réside dans le fait qu'elle prend le concept du parrain pour signifier un co-père contraire à la plupart des critiques qui le considèrent comme un chef d'une famille de mafia.

Mots clé : Italo-américain, identité, crise d'identité, stéréotype de mafia, culture hybride.

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General Introduction

Identity is a passionate subject for debate across the United States which is traditionally a nation of immigrants. America has adopted an open-door policy towards foreign comers from every corner of the globe. It becomes a popular destination for people escaping poverty, unequal treatment, religious oppression, and political corruption. Therefore, America grows diverse; it includes every race, language, and culture. In this sense, the term ‘melting pot’ comes to refer to the variant cultures and traditions every ethnic group has brought with him rather than the number of immigrants. Italians are part of this diverse American society and are certainly distinguishable from the others in that they hold the unique characteristics of their culture in terms of complexion, language, religion, and food. However, with the assimilation process, Italian-Americans were forced and forced themselves to forget about their culture in order to integrate into American society and be socially accepted. Consequently, they grow increasingly confused about their identity.

Identity crisis becomes the most important and controversial issue in Italian-American literature. It emerges in the writings of many Italian-American novelists especially when America was showing hostility towards Fascist Italy and Italians were seen as organized mob criminals. Italian-Ameican characters often struggle to maintain their identity or to bring Italian identity and the dominant American culture together which led to an identity crisis. In the same vein, Fred L. Gardaphé addresses Italian-American identity crisis as the primary outcome of assimilation in his essay *Identical Difference: Notes on Italian and Italian-American Identities*¹. For him, ‘Italian-Americans are still very much at a loss for who they are’ (63). Their identity seems to be a combination of two different cultures. Obviously, they are not Americans and they even become ‘as different from Italians as the egg is different from the eggplant’ (63). In another book, entitled *Dagoes Read: Tradition and the Italian/American Writer*, the same author, Gardaphé, provides a very good reason why the large majority of Italian-Americans have an identity crisis. ‘So often the Italian/American audience has had to observe its history and culture through the eyes of those non-Italians who, though sometimes with utmost sincerity, never reach more than a superficial portrayal of the Italian/American experience’ (98). Unlike Gardaphé, Michael La Sorte² views the Italian-

¹ This essay is originally published in Paulo Janni and George F. McLean, eds. “The Essence of Italian Culture and the Challenge of a Global Age.” *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change*, Series IV West Europe. 5, (2003): 60-72.

² Michael La Sorte is a professor of sociology at the University of New York. He started his career in sociology then shifted his interest to migration studies and movements within and from Italy.

American identity loss from another perspective. He believes that 'Italian-Americans have a bad image. Part of it, perhaps, is our doing, but much of it has to do with the American public's fascination with the more unusual activities that have been associated with the Italians . . . And as we become more middle class I think we will start to look back at our heritage (qtd. in Gardaphé, *Dagoes Read* 123-124). La Sorte considers that identity loss has appeared among the Italian-Americans because of the shame of being called criminals or gangsters. Nevertheless, he calls for the restoration of Italian identity.

One of the best-known Italian-American novelists whose novels tackle the issue of Italian identity is Mario Puzo. In *The Godfather*, which is the core of this dissertation, he shows how lifestyle and social class affect the creation and maintenance of Italian-American identity. *The Godfather* shapes Puzo's greatest hit which has elevated him to the rank of the greatest multiethnic writers in American literature. The novel is a story of one of the Five Families in New York. It centres on Vito Corleone, the head of the family Corleone who has left Sicily and comes to the United States. Vito re-establishes the Sicilian Mafia system in his new home and rules with his power of persuasion; he helps those who ask him favours for their loyalty yet he is hard-hearted with his enemies. The clash with the other families starts when Vito has refused to go into something as dirty as prostitution or drugs and has turned down a drug business proposal from a powerful family. Later on when Vito dies of a heart attack, his son Michael, though he has so long rejected the family business, succeeds him. The novel also offers detailed perspectives on Michael's journey from an American outsider to a Sicilian godfather; it expresses how Michael ends up being what he has never wanted to become. Although the seeds of *The Godfather* lie in one of the awful associations with Italian mafia, it is appealing because of the theme of family pride and its moral code. Despite the fact that Vito is a murderer, his love to his family and his moral code make him a good, warm-hearted man. The concept of family-centered is one of the main features of Italian culture. Therefore, Puzo, as an Italian-American novelist, puts a lot of emphasis on the importance of family to the Corleones and shows how they pride themselves on their loyalty to their family and friends. Furthermore, the conflict in *The Godfather* is all but Vito's struggle to protect his family from the enemies.

By depicting Italian-Americans as mob criminals in his work, Puzo reaffirms the widespread belief that criminal behaviour is a part of Italian identity. In the last few years,

several studies have criticized Puzo for this depiction in *The Godfather*. In his book, *Italian Signs, American Streets: The Evolution of Italian-American Narrative*, Fred L. Gardaphé argues that *The Godfather* ‘certainly was the first novel that Italian-Americans as a group reacted to, either positively or negatively, perhaps because it appeared at a time when Italian-Americans were just beginning to emerge as an identifiable cultural and political entity’ (89). He denounces the novel because ‘it created an identity crisis for Italian-Americans throughout the nation. Antidefamation groups denounced Puzo for creating a bad image of Italians in America . . . and real *mafiosi* claimed that Puzo knew what he was writing about’ (89). Chris Messenger looks at the novel from another angle. In his book, *The Godfather and American Culture: How the Corleones Became Our Gang*, Messenger states that *The Godfather* coincided with the Civil Right Movement of the 1960s which ‘had begun to educate Americans in dramatic fashion about the right to claim what is justly yours in the name of oppressed identity on the one hand and American ideals on the other. Vito and Michael Corleone do not grow apart: they unite to kill the bastards and proclaim their family rights’ (7). He goes on to say, ‘I respect Italian-American reactions to *The Godfather* . . . feel a complex mixture of pride, identification, and frustration in its stereotyping. It’s a curious fate to be an “unprotected” ethnic minority where all belts are off in contemporary politically correct discourse’ (9). Messenger ends his book with ‘Siting *The Godfather* in American culture is finally about how to negotiate America as a text for authors, readers, critics, immigrants, and families. It’s about the things we carry as we move from one group and identify to another and back again: ideals, people, conditioning, dreams, and metaphors’ (297). John C. Hulsman and A. Wess Mitchell have a completely different view. In their book entitled, *The Godfather Doctrine: A Foreign Policy Parable*, they clarify the United States’ changing geopolitical place in the world according to the novel. For them, ‘The aging and wounded Vito Corleone, emblematic of Cold War American power, is struck down suddenly and violently by forces he did not expect and does not understand, much as America was on September 11th. . . The sons approximate the three American foreign policy schools of thoughts: Liberal institutionalism, neo-conservatism and realism, vying for control in today’s disarranged world order.’ (13) It becomes obvious that *The Godfather* can be interpreted in various ways. While most critics treat it as a purely crime novel and take the concept of ‘godfather’ to mean a leader of a mafia family, this dissertation will approach the novel from a rather different social perspective, where the ‘godfather’ stands for a ‘co-father’ and a head of his family. Although *The Godfather* is riddled with crime and violence, it is very significant because it provides an accurate account of what a real Italian family in America

might be like. The novel provides almost all the aspects of Italian culture which form their identity. From this point, this dissertation will discuss whether Italian-Americans keep their identity, despite the challenges of American society, or they simply adopt the dominant one.

This study is an attempt to further our thinking about Italian-American minority in the United States. Its main objective is to explore the evolving nature of the Italian-American identity in *The Godfather* and to analyze Michael's identity in order to pick out the very significant factors which prevent him from both keeping his identity and assimilating into the American one. Therefore, it is hypothesized that Italian-Americans have created their own world in order to preserve their culture, consequently their identity. For the smoothness of the ideas within this study, a set of questions must be approached. What set Italian-Americans off from the other entities? To what extent might an individual keep his customs and belief in a society where very different cultures coexist? What are the aspects of Italian identity in reference to *The Godfather*? Finally, what are the potential consequences of the assimilation process? The nature of this research requires a thematic analytical approach.

This study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter will provide a historical background to the Italian experience in America. It will first discuss the different waves of Italian immigration to America along with the contributing factors that forced them to flee their homeland. Second, it will offer a thorough study of Italian-American culture. Finally, this chapter will offer a glimpse into the evolution of Italian-American literature. The second and the third chapters are the core of this dissertation. Chapter two will shed light on Italian-American identity in Puzo's *The Godfather*. It will first introduce an overview and a synopsis of *The Godfather*. Second, it will discuss the way Puzo represents Italian-Americans. Finally, it will compare and contrast a deeply patriotic Italian and an Americanized Italian who ends up going back to his native values. The third chapter will be devoted to the study of Michael, a second-generation Corleone who attempts to reject his sense of identity and is changing towards Americanism. It will, first, delve into Michael's life to find the essential factors which support him to establish a more Americanized way of life. Next, it will present the turning point in his life and follow his new Sicilian identity. This chapter will close with Michael adopting aspects of both cultures, Italian and American.

Chapter I

Historical Background of Italian-Americans in the United States

The United States has always been referred to as a ‘melting pot’³ nation, embracing people from diverse countries, races, and religions. Immigrants not only incorporated into the American society, they also transformed it. In fact, it is the integration of immigrants that shaped the nation into what it is today. All those people arriving in America were seeking freedom and economic opportunity for a better life. Italians were not an exception, millions moved to America. The great majority determined to settle in the New World and to become immersed in the new culture, while the rest planned to make fortune and return home to Italy. For both, life was not that easy once they reached the land of opportunity. This chapter is an attempt to introduce the way that Italian-Americans have been defined ever since the arrival of the first Italian immigrants to the United States. It focuses on four sections. The first one discusses the different waves of Italian immigration to America. The second part is mainly about Italian-American culture. The third section examines how Italian-Americans were welcomed by their host country, and the last part presents Italian-American literature which reflects their lives in America.

1. A Brief Glimpse into Italian Immigration to America

Italians have been entering the United States since the famous Italian explorers Christopher Columbus, Giovanni Cabot, Amerigo Vespucci, and Giovanni da Verrazzano landed there in the fifteenth century. However, they did not attempt to settle in America in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Italian immigration to the New World started gradually to increase in the 19th and 20th centuries. It was often referred to as the Italian Diaspora and it can be divided into several distinct waves according to significant factors.

1.1. The First Wave

From the late 1800s to the 1920s, over four million Italians⁴ left their homeland and moved to the United States. These refugees were mainly peasant farmers from Southern Italy.

³ Melting pot is a metaphor coined by the English writer Israel Zangwill in his play *The Melting Pot* (1908). It is used to describe the American society in which the heterogeneous societies lose their identities and produce a fully new culture from the combination and mixture of their varied cultures.

⁴ Michael Burgan, *Immigration to the United States: Italian Immigrants* (New York: Facts On File, Inc, 2005)

Great poverty, diseases, and natural disasters were the crucial factors that pushed Italians to emigrate from Italy to wherever they could find a job and survive. They settled especially in New York, San Francisco, New Jersey, California, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. During this period, Italy became unified under an Italian government. However, it seemed that the impact of this unification was disastrous on the South, as it transformed it into an exploited colony of the north and encouraged millions of southerners to leave their homeland. The new government focused on the development of the North, neglecting the stagnant economy of the South and the suffering of the farmers there. It did not irrigate the land, plant trees to stop erosion or improve the quality of the soil. As the land grew poorer, so did the farmers. To make things even worse, the government imposed higher taxes, and required young men to serve in the military (Burgan 29; Christa 104). In addition to the continuing economic downturn, the population was increasing which led to extreme poverty. Some refugees, who fled to the United States said, 'We would have eaten each other had we stayed' (qtd. in Dinnerstein and Reimers 50).

Along with poverty, disease and natural disasters had a big role in pushing Italians to flee the country. The cholera, malaria, and trachoma epidemics swept through Italy, killing more than 50,000 people and leaving the rest of the peasants barely able to survive (Dinnerstein and Reimers 49; Christa 104). Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, flooding, and landslides, devastated almost entire towns. The worst was the Messina earthquake that triggered a tsunami killing hundreds of thousands and destroying almost all the cities in the toe of Italy (Burgan 29).

Most of the first wave Italian immigrants did not intend to stay in the United States. They would work hard in order to return quickly to Italy. These immigrants were named after the migrating birds known as 'birds of passage'⁵ or 'sojourners' (Burgan 32). However, for many reasons most of these Italian immigrants ended up staying in America.

The immigrants landed first in Ellis Island, an island in New York Harbour. It was the main centre for processing immigrants in the United States. At the island, they had a medical

⁵ American historians utilized this image of the 'birds of passage' as a metaphor for immigrants returning home. Simona Frasca, *Italian Birds of Passage: The Diaspora of Neapolitan Musicians in New York* (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2014) 109.

and legal inspection. These inspections were a terrifying task. If one failed to pass the exam, he would be deported back to Italy. With chalk, they put marks on coats of migrants. They used 'Sc' to refer to scalp problems and 'X' to refer to mental disability. Immigrants, then, had to pass the legal inspection. They needed to answer a list of several questions to determine if they should be accepted to stay in America. After 1917, immigrants had to prove that they could read in any language. Although a small number of Italians, approximately two percent, were sent back to Italy, Ellis Island frequently struck fear in their hearts. According to Ben Morreale and Jerre Mangione in their history of Italian immigration, *La Storia*, Italian immigrants used to rename Ellis Island *L'Isola dell Lagrime* which means "the Island of Tears" (qdt. in Burgan 31).

Early Italian immigrants were generally working class who could neither speak English nor read or write Italian. They were helped by a *padrone*, an Italian word meaning 'boss or lord'; who would help the Italian immigrants to adjust to living in America in return for part of the immigrants' pay. However, Congress ended the *padrone* system in 1885.

On arrival in the New World, the Italians found themselves in a far strange land with a completely different language. In addition, most of them came to America with neither money nor education. To cope with this situation, Italian immigrants, like many other immigrant entities, bound together establishing communities known as 'Little Italies'. Within these communities they could speak their language, help each other, and preserve their food, close-knit family organization and religious practices.

These 'Little Italies' became important cultural areas of the cities. Italians established their restaurants, therefore introducing Italian cuisine to America. Missionaries were sent to 'Little Italies' in the U.S. to serve the people there. As immigrants were able to establish themselves, the next generation was able to stay in school and learn trades. Thus, they were able to raise themselves to the level of skilled labour, and eventually to professional jobs. In fact, an Italian entrepreneur, Amadeo P. Giannini, established a bank in San Francisco for the Italian population there, which eventually became Bank of America, one of the largest banks in the country today (Dinnerstein and Reimers 165).

Outside their 'Little Italies', Italians suffered discrimination in housing and employment. They were not only limited by language barriers, but also without any education. Therefore, they were directed to handicraft jobs, often in deplorable conditions. Usually men worked as miners or street cleaners and women helped in making clothes in industries. These early Italian immigrants became subject to discrimination and unfair stereotypes which immediately created an open hostility and stigma upon them and the newcomers.

1.2. The Second and Third Waves

The second wave of Italian immigration to the United States took place from the 1920s to the 1960s. The new arrivals settled in the cities that already had Italian communities like New York, Boston, and Chicago. In 1922, the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini came to power. As the father of Fascism⁶, he kept the fascist regime and got rid of all other political parties. As a result, the Italians who opposed Fascism fled to America. Unlike the Italian immigrants of the previous decades, those people, known as exiles, were well educated. They included political leaders, artists, writers, and priests. They chiefly sought freedom which they were denied in their homeland (Burgan 62,63). Italian immigration dropped sharply during this period due to the Second World War, the Great Depression, and the new American immigration restrictions.

The United States passed laws to limit all kinds of immigration. In 1917, America reduced immigration by preventing the illiterate from entering the United States. Immigrants were asked, at Ellis Island, to prove that they were not illiterate and yet could read English or any other language in order to be accepted in America. It was simply called the literacy test. In 1921, President Warren G. Harding signed Emergency Quota Act which was the first major restriction on European immigration. The number of new immigrants to enter the United States was sharply reduced and a quota was established for new arrivals from each nation. This act stopped the back-and-forth movement of the Italians. Three years later, his successor President Calvin Coolidge signed Johnson-Reed

⁶ 'Fascism' is an authoritarian and nationalistic system of government in which opposition is not allowed.

Act⁷ establishing the National Origins Quota Act, which reduced the number of immigrants to two percent. In 1929 a new National Origins Act was adopted; the total number of immigrants was reduced to 150,000 to be distributed to the European nations (Christa 198).

The free immigration policy in the American history came to an end with the passage of Johnson-Reed Immigration Act in 1924. Although the United States changed its restrictions on immigration after the Second World War, it has never opened its gates to unlimited numbers. In 1965 the quota system was eliminated and the new immigration law was adopted to place all nations on an equal basis (Dinnerstein and Reimers 87). When he signed the Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Reform Law on Liberty Island in New York Harbour in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson said, ‘today the golden door to immigration has never stood wider.’⁸ President Johnson abolished restriction laws which were based on nation of origin. From now onwards, the United States accepts immigrants on the basis of their skills, professions, and accomplishment rather than their countries of origin. It welcomes gifted professionals, scientists, and artists who are usually from non-European countries.

During the First World War, Italy sided with the Allies, and almost 70,000 Italian-Americans who were still Italian citizens left the United States and returned to Europe to fight for their native nation. This was partly because they had been suffering from discrimination and violence in America. The U.S leaders became aware that these immigrants were not loyal to the USA - their adopted nation - and were not truly Americanized. Therefore, they insisted on ‘100 percent Americanism’ to assimilate the Italians and other immigrant groups. Under the ‘100 percent Americanism’ process, Americans taught the immigrants English as a way to force them to forget their native language. They also pushed for their citizenship and thus their loyalty to the US. Italian-Americans proved their loyalty and earned citizenship by joining the US military and fighting for the United States during the First World War. Ten percent of soldiers killed during the First World War were Italian-Americans (Burgan 52-53). The Second World War,

⁷ Johnson- Reed Immigration Act, also called the Immigration Act of 1924. This act restricted the number of immigrants who were allowed to enter the United States through a quota system based on national origins. The quota completely excluded Asian immigrants and accepted only two percent of the population of each country in the U.S.A. For example, the quota for Italy decreased from 42,057 to 3,845.

⁸ Frank J. Cavaioli, “Patterns of Italian Immigration to the United States.” *The Catholic Social Science Review*, 13, (2008): 213-229.

however, would find the United States in conflict with Italy, and Italian immigrants would find themselves briefly branded as enemy aliens.

When the United States joined the Second World War in 1941, there were almost one million⁹ enemy foreigners in its territory. Americans were worried about Italians' loyalty to their adopted nation. However, Italian-American soldiers joined the American armed forces. An estimated number of 500,000 Italian-Americans fought side by side with the U.S forces, yet Italy was fighting against the United States. (Burgan 52) In 1944, President Roosevelt signed The Servicemen's Readjustment Act¹⁰ to reward the armed forces for their service. Once the war was over, integration became the catchword for Italian-Americans, who were no more classified as enemy aliens. In fact, if World War Two did one thing, it turned Italians into Americans. These immigrants became uniquely Americans yet preserving their own traditions.

From the 1970s onwards, the number of Italian immigrants gradually declined as a result of improved economic conditions in Italy. At the time, the European Union facilitated the mobility of its citizens between European nations. Therefore, many Italians, who really wanted to leave Italy, choose to stay in Europe rather than going to North America. (Burgan 68) The Order Sons of Italy in America¹¹ revealed that today, Italian-Americans constitute more than fifteen million people in the United States, which represent about six percent of the whole population. They are considered the fourth important European entity after the Germans, Irish, and English. In addition, the Italian language is the fourth European language most spoken in America. It is worthy to note that Italian language and culture became hard stumbling blocks to overcome.

⁹ Michael Burgan, *Immigration to the United States: Italian Immigrants* (New York: Facts On File, Inc, 2005) 64.

¹⁰ The Servicemen's Readjustment Act, also called The G. I. Bill of Rights. It provided money, opportunity to buy a new suburban house, and other benefits to help veterans returning from the Second World War.

¹¹ Established in 1950, The Order Son of Italy in America (OSIA) is an organization in the United States which is committed to fighting discrimination and supporting Italian-American cultural events. It seeks to preserve and spread information on Italian culture as well as encouraging the involvement of its members in all civic, charitable, and patriotic activities.

2. Italian-American Culture

Although they have been living in the US for more than 120 years, Italian-Americans are absolutely attached to their Italian roots. Some historians believe that unlike the other European immigrants, who lost their original cultural characteristics in America and adopted the dominant language and culture, Italians not only kept the culture of origin, they also became strongly bound to their traditions and faith. The first and the second-generations of Italians that came to the United States often struggled to survive in the new environment, realising that everything was different especially language.

However, other historians, such as Vincent Cannato and Rudolph Vecoli, think that as Italians assimilated into American society so did their culture. The third-generation, which was socialized at school, was more American than Italian, after all, they were born Americans and lived in the United States. Some of them even rebelled against their home culture, and adopted the host culture.

The American society seems at odds with the Italian one. America is an individualist society in which the ties between individuals are loose. People are more self-centred and stress their individual goals. They are expected to look after themselves, as individuals, and their immediate family only. Individualism lies in one's moral right to pursue one's own happiness. This pursuit requires a large amount of independence and self-responsibility. They are also emotionally independent from others. Italy, on the other hand, is a collectivist society. Italians are integrated into groups and look after each other in exchange for loyalty. Collectivism requires the individual to sacrifice himself for the sake of what is called the common good. They feel as if they are all one big family. Italian immigrants have carried such an idea to the United States and keep following it.

When studying the Italian-American culture, some pillars, like language, food, and others should be included. Some of the first Italian immigrants never learned English especially those who were living in 'Little Italy'. They did not need it because almost everyone, in the community, spoke Italian. However, their children learned English at school though they were not even allowed to use it at home. With time, many Italian immigrants felt the need to learn English and use it to help their children succeed in the United States and to

avoid discrimination. It is important to note that because America was fighting Italy in the Second World War, Italian language was seen as a threat against the country. More importantly, with the adoption of the English language, Italian-Americans did not totally reject their language. Many Italian words are familiar to Americans and even to English speakers all over the world. For example, '*mafia*' is an Italian word which means a criminal organization and '*mafioso*' is another Italian word, which means a member of the *mafia*. Keeping their language, or at least some words, definitely shows how Italians in the U.S.A find it difficult to give up their native language in order to speak English. Because by accepting the English language, they are losing a part of their culture.

In Italian culture, family is of paramount importance. Talia Wagner, a family therapist, described family as being 'an extremely important value within the Italian culture.'¹² The husband is the head of the family, while the wife is the soul. Traditionally, the father must support and defend the family while the mother has to take care of her husband and their children. Children must respect and obey their parents and elders. Today, though most Italian-American families seem to be very similar to American families, they are still close. The ties within their family are much stronger than the American families who are separate, in addition, divorce was strictly forbidden until recently. Economically and socially, the family work as a collective unit. This solidarity of the Italian family is based on extended family, which includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and even people who are not related by blood but have a valuable contribution to the family, rather than the Americans' idea of just a mum, a dad, and kids. American children are supposed to leave home at the age of eighteen or nineteen to go to university or start a career. They should not depend on their parents. This follows that many elderly in America would live alone, independent and self-reliant rather than depend on their children. Furthermore, Italians identify themselves in terms of *who they are*; their names, their fathers' names and their birthplaces, unlike the Americans who identify themselves in terms of *what they do*; *their jobs*. The maintenance of the Italians' strong connections is reflected in frequent family gatherings and enjoyment of spending time with their family members. Perhaps, the best moments for family gatherings are during mealtimes.

¹² *Italian Culture: Facts, Customs & Traditions*: <http://www.livescience.com/44376-italian-culture.html>

Italy is a country of wide variety, and cooking is just one aspect of the diversity of Italian culture. The culinary history of Italy is as long and diverse as the country's history itself, its origins can be traced back as far as the Ancient Rome. Italian cuisine has developed and changed following the changes of Italy itself throughout centuries of conquest and invasion. With each new settlement, a new set of cultural influence, customs, and, of course, food were brought. Today, the Italian gastronomy is a mixture of the Roman, Jewish, Arab, Byzantine, Etruscan and Greek cuisines. It is extremely diverse and rich that is why it is considered as a unique cuisine in the world.

The Roman legacy is reflected in spicy food, vegetable dishes, cereals, fruits, and an extensive repertoire of spaghetti. They also elevated bread to the staple of the diet Mediterranean. Etruscan gastronomy offers cereals, soups, and meats as dietary staples. Greeks introduced olives, dried figs, and walnuts. The traces of Arab influence can be found in the Sicilian cuisine with its variety of spices, almonds, and sweets. For instance, the most famous Sicilian dessert *cassata* has Arabic origins. It was in the 9th century when Arabs also introduced rice, pasta¹³, artichokes, and notably, coffee to Italy.

Variations in dishes, diverse types of bread, and style of cooking differ according to region. In Sardinia and other Coastal Italian regions, the cuisine is more indigenous. It provides delicacies which are more associated with the sea like fish and seafood dishes. Naples is known for its *pizzas*. *Risotto* is a well-known specialty of Milan. Bologna has a deep history with its *ravioli*, *tortellini*, and *cappelletti*. And the region of 'L'Aquila is renowned for its *panarda*, which consists of forty different dishes served in one single meal' (Moliterno 709).

Italians consume a wide range of vegetables, like greens and fruits. This is reflected in their dishes, such as *minestrone*, as well as salads, which are ever-present in the table. Without fail, Italians start their meal with mixed salads, as a part of appetizers. A mixed salad is made of lettuce and many aromatic herbs like mint, fennel, parsley, oregano, chervil, chicory, watercress (Capatti and Montanari 77). They are mix all together and left to macerate

¹³ The origins of pasta seem vague. Some claim it to be a Chinese product whereas others claim it to be an Italian product which was consumed during Etruscan times.

in its dressing which ‘must be well salted, with little vinegar and lots of oil’ (Capatti and Montanari 81).

Miraculously, almost all Italian dishes have become American everyday food like spaghetti and pizza. As they widely welcome the Italian food, Italians grow extremely proud of their fine cuisine. However, food is not the only aspect Italian-Americans have contributed to American culture, religion is another aspect, though it seems that Americans have a very bad influence on Italian-Americans.

Italians consider religion quite important in their lives and categorise themselves as Catholics. However, in a secular society, they start losing their religion just like the majority of the Protestant Americans who do not practise their religion regularly.

Although both Catholics and Protestants are Christians and do agree on who Jesus is, they largely disagree in many aspects. Catholicism, on the one hand, stands for the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church who believe that the Catholic Church is the original and the first Christian Church. On the other hand, Protestantism includes the forms of Christian faith and practices which originated with the doctrines of the Reformation in which many Roman Catholics deviated from the larger body, the true Christianity, and formed their own sect. The Protestants believe that the Catholic Church became corrupt. In fact, the main conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism is over the pope’s authority. The Catholics believe that the pope is the visible head of the church; however, the Protestants believe that Christ alone is the head of the church. Accordingly, the Protestant Church rejects the authority of the pope. Likewise, the Roman Catholics reject the authority of all Protestant clergy.

Italians are deeply religious and the Catholic Church has a significant role in their lives. After many decades of growing tensions between the Italian government and the papacy, they finally signed the Lateran Pacts in 1929 which established the state of the Vatican City and reaffirmed the declaration of 1848 that Roman Catholicism was the sole religion of the state. The church became a powerful force in Italian society and politics, especially with the Catholic involvement in the armed resistance against the German occupation and the abolition of the monarchy in 1946. However, by 1974, religion dramatically declined in Italy when Italians, despite the opposition of the pope, voted by

majority in a referendum to keep the divorce law¹⁴ and supported a law giving women the right to abortion (Moliterno 253).

In the United States, the predominant Protestants discriminated against Italian immigrants. As Catholics, they found only Irish Catholic Churches, where the priests knew neither the Italian language nor the Italian customs. Consequently, Italian-Americans built their own churches to preserve their traditions. However, the majority has no interest whatsoever in Catholic practice, and ‘the standard refrain is that Italian-Americans only entered churches to be christened, married, or buried’ (qtd. in Hirschman 12). Generally, men attend church only on selected occasions when family loyalty makes presence compulsory, such as weddings and funerals, and leave it to women to attend mass and to keep the faith. They considered church as ‘a cold and almost puritanical organization.’¹⁵ That is why the Irish clergy usually regarded them as indifferent Catholics or even pagans. Furthermore, a radical Protestant organization known as The American Protective Association ‘promoted intolerance towards Catholics and advocated barring Italian immigration to the United States’ (qtd. in Muscio et al. 35).

Many Italian-Americans believed in the existence of the evil eye, charms, spells, and other types of omens like wearing certain symbols which provided protection. In this sense, a historian stated, ‘through the use of rituals, symbols, and charms, they sought to ward off evil spirits and to gain the favour of powerful deities’ (qtd. in Dinnerstein and Reimers 65). However, these beliefs yielded to the rationalism of the modern age. Along with their superstition and faith, many other aspects of Italian culture put them at odds with the mainstream of American life and class them with the other marginalized groups.

3. Americans’ Attitude towards Italian Immigrants

No one can deny the fact that Italian-Americans, just like the other minorities in America, suffered from discrimination and violence. The Italian immigrants came to America

¹⁴ The ‘divorce law’ was first proposed in 1965 but it was prevented by the Christian Democrats. However, with the efforts of the ‘Italian League for the Introduction of Divorce’ the law was eventually passed. A referendum was sooner held on request of Catholic organizations.

¹⁵ Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reiners, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 65.

with high hopes. Moreover, they did not expect such abruptness from the American society. The new immigrants, like the previous ones, were usually stereotyped as representatives of some kind of lower species.

Italians, who formed the largest European immigrant group in the twentieth-century, were strongly detested by the Americans who used to call them ‘wops,’¹⁶ ‘dagos,’¹⁷ and ‘guineas’¹⁸ and often referred to them as the ‘Chinese of Europe’ and ‘just as bad as the Negroes.’ In fact, it was the first mass immigration of poor Italians that evoked such xenophobia and racial hatred. They were cruelly treated in America, some of them were even forced to attend black schools in the South. According to *The New York Times*, in 1875, it was ‘perhaps hopeless to think of civilizing [Italians] or keeping them in order, except by the arm of the law’ (qtd. in Dinnerstein and Reimers 55). Other newspapers announced that Italians were criminals by nature and that their race was inferior and degraded. An observer wrote that Italians ‘are as a race simpleminded and often grossly ignorant.’ In addition, E.A. Ross¹⁹ argued that ‘all the criminals are here’, that is why since migrations started, crime had declined significantly in Italy. As a matter of fact, Americans were frightened about southern Italians because northern Italians themselves regarded them as dangerous criminals and literally describing them as ‘an army of barbarians encamped among us’ (qtd. in Dinnerstein and Reimers 55).

Despite their loyalty to America, Italian-Americans could not get rid of discrimination. They still heard the insulting slang expressions that the Americans used to describe them. When she was asked about what it means to be Italian-American, an Italian-American woman says, ‘I tell you. It is our curse. Because everybody thinks we’re all criminals, we can’t get ahead. Not in politics or anything else. The Mafia- is our curse’ (qtd. in Kessner 217). However, the Italian-American relationship started changing after the Second World War when the Italian-Americans proved to be a valuable

¹⁶ ‘Wops’ comes from ‘guappo’, a Sicilian word which is derived from the Latin word *vappo* or ‘sour wine’. The Romans used this word figuratively for a ‘worthless guy’. However, it is believed that the word originated at Ellis Island and is an acronym for With Out Papers or With Out Passport.

¹⁷ ‘Dagos’ is derived from the Spanish name ‘Diego’ which means ‘James’. It was coined by British sailors to refer to Spanish and Portuguese sailors in the 17th century. However, in the 19th it became used in the USA as an offensive term for Italians.

¹⁸ ‘guineas’ comes from ‘Guinea Negro’ which refers to blacks or people of mixed ancestry. It became used to refer to Italians because they tend to have a slightly dark complexion.

¹⁹ Edward Alsworth Ross is an American sociologist and a major figure of early criminology.

supporter by joining the American army during the war. Usually, Italian-Americans succeeded in reaching middle-class status and achieved important positions. For example, the Italian-American John O. Pastore was the first to be elected governor of a state in 1946, and L. Jay Oliva was the first to become appointed president of New York University in 1990 (Dinnerstein and Reimers 168).

Italian-Americans have long been struggling with stereotypes. In Italy, particularly Sicily, there was an organized group of criminals known as 'the Mafia'. In the United States, some Italian immigrants imported this mafia system and were involved in organized crime. In the course of time, Italian-Americans became closely associated with mafia in the white public view. Senator Estes Kefauver referred to the Mafia as 'the shadowy international organization that lurks behind much of organized criminal activities' (qtd. in Dinnerstein and Reimers 168).

In his book, *The Crooked Ladder: Gangsters, Ethnicity, and the American Dream*, James M. O'kane identifies seven routes that some members of ethnic minorities used in order to achieve their remarkable shift from the bottom of the social hierarchy to the middle class status. For him, Italians often used the criminal road to prosperity. In addition, a historian of Italians in Chicago Humbert Nelli affirms:

Crime, one means of economic advancement independent of education, social background or political connections, provided for all classes of Italians opportunities for quick and substantial monetary gain and sometimes for social and political advancement as well. Within the colony bankers and padroni, backhanders and other lawbreakers all realized small but important profits by swindling or terrorizing compatriots. The "syndicate," a business

operation reaping vast profits from the American community, offered almost limitless opportunities for promotion within its hierarchy. Thus for some, crime offered means of advancement within the ethnic community and for others opportunities outside it. (qtd. in Dinnerstein and Reimers 169)

Nevertheless, a study in Massachusetts showed that Italian-born Americans, who represented eight percent of the whole population, form only four percent of the criminals. In addition, the U.S Department of Justice estimates that less than 0.025% of Italian-Americans have hands in organised crime²⁰. Despite that, when the stereotype of mafia was first reflected in Italian-American writings, with Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*, it seems that it really appealed to both the readers and the writers as the novel was a bestseller for many months, encouraging other writers to adopt such a theme.

4. The Evolution of Italian-American Literature

Since literature is the mirror of the society in which it is created and perceived, Italian-Americans created their own literature in the land of prosperity and freedom. A literature that depicts their special experiences, culture, and issues. Consequently, Italian-American writings reflect mainly their stereotypes, and changing status while focusing on themes full of fear and xenophobia. Their writers tend to reveal the real images of their homeland; the way of life and the values of their ancestors.

²⁰ *Italian Immigration*. November 11, 2016. <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk>

At the beginning, Italian-American literature was marginalized and ignored. The key fact was that Italian-Americans were stereotyped as illiterate and uneducated. Literature was not written for them because they could not read. In addition, it was an oral literature derived from an immigrant view. Therefore, no one was writing neither for them nor about them.

Fred L. Gardaphé, in his essay “The Italian-American Writer”²¹, provides good reasons for the marginalization of Italian-American writers and literature. For him, it appeared in Italy long ago when the Catholic Church refused to educate people in order to keep them subservient and inferior. The Church used to interpret the Bible for them, and to guide them, in order to keep the common people extremely obedient. It never liked the idea of educating people because if the masses were educated, they would become strong enough to protest against the Catholic Church, something that the Church never wanted because it would reduce its influence over them. Fed up to the back teeth with their hopeless situation, the peasants fled to the United States escaping both Italy and the authority of the Catholic Church (qtd. in Carosone 12,13). However, the peasants remain believing that they only need to work, and that school education is not important; reading and writing are useless since neither will gain them work to support their families especially since they did not speak English. Therefore, literature is irrelevant, writers are not valued because they really do not work, and being a writer will not support a family. Being a writer simply means that one will tell the family’s secrets and break the silence. ‘Without writers, there are no readers; without readers, there are no writers. Thus, Italian-American literature becomes marginalized because it is not popular enough’ (qtd. in Carosone 12-13). However, throughout decades, the descendent of the Italian immigrants assimilated into American culture and society. They became fluent in English, and even made it their native language. Italian oral literature disappeared. This generation of Italian-Americans shifted to writing. Hence, Italian-American literature was launched and Italian-American writers started appearing. As Gardaphé put it, ‘Italian-American literature is the result of what happened when those *dagoes* began to read’ (Gardaphé, *Dagoes Read* 10).

In his book, *To Hyphenate or Not to Hyphenate: The Italian/American Writer: An Other American*, Anthony Julian Tamburri analyses the history of Italian-American writings

²¹ This essay is discussed in Michael Carosone, *The Marginalization of Italian-American writers and Italian-American Literature*. MA thesis. Brooklyn College, 2007. 13-17.

and the presence of the hyphen in the phrase Italian-American. He puts forward, ‘my suggestion to adopt the slash in place of the hyphen involves not removing the hyphen but, more precisely, tilting it on its end by forty-five degrees, he depicted the formula Italian-American → Italian/American’ (46-47). His reasoning behind his suggestion is that the hyphen in ‘Italian-American’ creates a kind of physical division between the two items. ‘In the first case,’ he argues, ‘it actually bridges the physical gap between the two terms, thus bringing them closer together . . . Secondly, the integrity of the grammatical rule requiring a grapheme between two such terms in an adjectival phrase would remain intact’ (47). He wants to change the hyphen to a slash because ‘it underscores the ideological difference perceived in the “original term”’: that is, it sets up a contrast between the ethnic and the dominant groups from the perspective of the latter’ (46). In other words, changing the hyphen to slash unifies the two terms and, at the same time, maintains the integrity of grammatical rules.

The fact that Italian-Americans were struggling to survive in the New World was depicted in several novels. In 1939, Pietro Di Donato captured the Italian immigrant experience in his powerful novel *Christ in Concrete* where he presents his own true story as a founding myth of Italian-American culture. Jerre Mangione’s *Mount Allegro* (1943) is an autobiographical work exploring his upbringing among Sicilian Americans in New York. Mangione along with Ben Morreale are famous for *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian- American Experience* (1992). It tells the story of the mass migrant which took place from 1880 to 1924. In *Unto the Sons* (1992) Gay Talese tells the story of his own family’s immigration experience to the United States. The novel opens with his father and ends with Talese as a character where he captures the clash between first and second- generation Italian-Americans and retells the ancient myths and account of the evil eye. The novels written during the second half of the twentieth century were full of themes of the obstacles that Italian immigrants faced while they were pursuing the American Dream²² (Hendin 301- 311).

Many Italian-Americans’ civil rights were deliberately violated; this was revealed by ‘A Secret Story’. It is a series of stored photographs, oral histories, and letters showing

²² American Dream was first used by James Truslow Adams, an American historian, in *The Epic of America*. A precise definition to the American Dream does not exist. However, it can be defined as being the opportunity and freedom for all citizens to achieve their goal and become rich and famous if only they work hard enough.

imprisonment of Italian 'enemy aliens'. In 1999, Resolution 2442 was passed by the US House of Representatives which acknowledged the wrongdoings of the American government. Furthermore, under President Bill Clinton, the Wartime Violation of Italian-American Civil Liberties Act became Public Law 106_451 that assured the existence of government violations of Italian-American civil liberties. (Hendin 304)

Stories that rejected the stereotypical happy-go-lucky Italian family started to emerge. Savarese, a playwright and television writer, wrote *The Weak and the Strong* (1952) which tells the story of an Italian-American family struggling to survive immigration and Great Depression. Michael De Capite's *No Bright Banner* (1944) is the coming-of-age story of an Italian-American who uses education to escape his ancestors' destiny.

Novelist Mario Puzo, whose earliest works *Dark Arena* (1955) and *The Fortunate Pilgrim* (1964) received critical acclaim without financial success, took advantage of the nation's new obsession with the mafia and published his fifth novel *The Godfather* (1969). The most popular crime novel ever published with a touch of reality. It explores the experience of the Mafia organization in New York, the so-called, 'Five Families,' which represents a classic Sicilian-American story. In the novel, Puzo depicts Italian-Americans as gangsters; the most popular stereotype associated with Italians. In addition, almost all the characters in the novel, especially those involved in the Mafia, are Italian-Americans. *The Godfather* spent nearly eighteen months on the bestseller lists, over twenty million copies were sold and reached vast audiences in its film adaptations. Consequently, Puzo became 'the greatest multiethnic literary success' in American literature. The novel offers detailed perspectives into the internal life of an Italian Mafia family - The Corleone Family- and its friends and enemies. As the family takes part in crime business, it gains power and success. Since the publication of *The Godfather*, and particularly since its film adaptations in the 1970s, the novel has an extremely big influence on Italian-American literature. Despite the fact that many critics see that Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* did not encourage the Americans to deny the stereotype that all Italian-Americans were criminals in the mafia, many Italian-American novelists have been writing in its shadow. For example, in *Honor Thy Father* (1971) Gay Talese explores the Mafia phenomenon.

As a conclusion, this chapter has shown the Italians' long journey to America: the different waves of Italian immigration and the contributing factors that forced them to flee their homeland to the United States. Next, it has explored a brief overview of the Italian culture. Then, it has highlighted the way the Americans used to treat them. Finally, this chapter has presented the body of Italian-American literature that reflects their lives and changing status in America through time. The most important figures that shaped, not only the Italian-American literature but also the American literature as a whole, are included. For instance, Mario Puzo's famous novel *The Godfather* (1969), which forms the core of my study, has a big influence on Italian-American literature.

Chapter II

Identity in *The Godfather*

The Godfather is the most popular crime novel ever published. Its immense popularity coincided with the social turbulence of the second half of the twentieth century in the United States. America was passing through a period of change and the set values of the American society were being challenged. Following the civil rights movements²³ and feminist movements²⁴, many socio-cultural changes took place such as the youth culture symbolized by hippies²⁵, and the so-called New Age²⁶ movement focusing on spiritualism. With the advance of multiculturalism²⁷, ethnic minorities started to turn to their own heritage and to take pride in it. Multiculturalism concerns how different identities, often based on ethnicity, religion, race, and gender, can be accepted as equal in a pluralistic society. This chapter is, therefore, dedicated to the study of one of the most influential novels in Italian-American literature, *The Godfather*. It will first introduce an overview on the novel, then dig deeper into it and provide its synopsis. Next, it will examine Italian-American identity through family traditions, language, religion, and food. Then, it will compare and contrast between the two very different characters, Vito Corleone and Amerigo Bonasera, who end up close friends.

Set in New York City, Sicily, and Las Vegas in the course of the late 1940s, *The Godfather* has an increasing popularity, the film adaptation, directed by Francis Ford Coppola in 1972, is also considered the greatest film of all time. Its author, Mario Puzo, with his brilliant style describes the progress of the most powerful Mafia family in New York and looks deeply inside the family. The storyline focuses on a Sicilian Mafia family, headed by the Don Vito Corleone, who has settled in the United States and has become synonymous with the Mafia organisation. The clash with the other

²³ 'Civil rights movement' is a protest movement against segregation and discrimination in the Southern US from the 1950s to the 1960s which led to the Civil Right Act of 1964. The African-Americans were denied their civil rights by state laws such as the voting restriction, Segregation law, Jim Crow Laws, and De Facto segregation.

²⁴ 'Feminism movement' also called the 'women's liberation movement' or 'feminism'. It is an organized movement for the achievement of women's rights which began when Betty Friedan published her bestseller *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. They called for reforms on issues such as equal pay, abortion, maternity leave, easier divorce, reproductive right.

²⁵ 'Hippies' refers to the largest countercultural group in the USA which came about the 1960s. They were young adults who protested the Vietnam War, the cultural standards of their parents, and materialism. They created their own communities, took drugs such as LSD and marijuana, listened to psychedelic music, and embraced sexual liberation.

²⁶ 'New Age' refers to the 'Aquarian Age' which is supposed to reunite man with God. It is a theology of 'feel-goodism', 'universal tolerance' and 'moral relativism'. The New Age is considered as a new way to understand reality.

²⁷ 'Multiculturalism' is taken to mean that several cultures coexist within a single society where diversity is valuable rather than just been accepted.

families starts as the Corleone family has refused to participate in drug trade. After Vito's death, his son succeeds him and takes over the family business.

1. Synopsis of *The Godfather*

The Godfather opens in 1945 as the Don Vito oversees the wedding of his only daughter Connie. His beloved son Michael returns from Dartmouth College, where he went after returning from World War Two. During the wedding, the Don is receiving the people who ask him favours. As a self-respecting Sicilian man, Vito will never refuse a request on his daughter's wedding day, symbolising his honour and love for her. One of the visitors is the undertaker Amerigo Bonasera who wants to extract his revenge on his daughter's rapists. Since the court does not serve him right, he turns to the godfather for justice. Another one is the Don's godson, Johnny Fontane, a famous singer who is about to lose his brilliant career. Once the wedding is over, Vito sends Tom to make the movie producer, Jack Woltz, give Johnny the role he wants. While they are talking, Jack Woltz shows Tom Khartoum, a very expensive racehorse. He refuses to put Johnny in the movie. The next morning, Woltz wakes up to find in his bed the head of Khartoum cut from its body. As he realises the power of the Corleone family, he plans to cast Johnny. As far as Johnny's family is concerned, he has divorced his first wife, with whom he has two daughters. The Don advises him to be a good father to his daughters. Johnny leaves his second wife and establishes a platonic relationship with his first wife.

A meeting is arranged with the Turk drug smuggler, Sollozzo, who wants the participation of the Corleones in his narcotics business in order to gain protection. The Don politely refuses his offer. Later, Hagen is kidnapped after Vito has been shot down in the street. Sollozzo calmly asks Hagen to convince Sonny, who will become the head of the Corleone family after his father's death, to deal in drugs. Vito survives. When Michael visits his father in hospital, he finds him alone and without protection. He realises that the Corleones' enemies have offered the police bribes in order to leave the Don unguarded. That night, a corrupt policeman breaks Michael's jaw and left him disfigured for years. The Corleones want to take their revenge on both Sollozzo and the policeman. Since Michael is the only one who is out of the family business, he is also the only one who can get close

enough to Sollozzo to take revenge for his father. Blinded by vengeance, Michael shoots them in a meeting designed to end the conflict and flees to Italy to hide.

Back at Sicily, he was born Vito Andolini in Corleone, Sicily. His mother sends him to America to save him from a local Mafia chief. In America, he changes his name to Corleone to keep some tie with his native village. Growing up in Hell's Kitchen, Corleone is adopted by the Abbandando family. He is a peaceful man who starts making an honest living at Abbandando's grocery store to feed his family. He marries a Sicilian girl and has three sons and a daughter. His tranquillity, however, does not last long, as he soon loses the job because Abbandando is forced to dismiss him to make room for the nephew of the gangster *padrone* Don Fanucci. Later, Vito kills Fanucci as he threatens him and tries to extort money from him. Vito Corleone becomes the most feared man in America, starting his career in crime. He has the honorary titles of the *Godfather* and *Don*²⁸ by those who respect and fear him.

Corleone and his friend Genco Abbandando start their business of importing olive oil from Italy. Their company, Genco Pura Olive Oil Company, becomes the biggest olive oil importer in the United States. Vito's business flourishes as he imports liquor during Prohibition²⁹. In this way, Vito is running an illegal business besides his legal business of importing Italian olive oil.

The war that began with the shooting of Vito continues with Sonny as the leader of the Corleone against the other families. One day, Carlo brutally beats his wife Connie. Although her brother Sonny has previously been warned not to interfere between them, when he hears what has happened, he drives off towards their apartment in a terrible rage. The Corleone family's enemies trap Sonny and kill him. Later, the Don arranges a meeting with the heads of the other families to end the feud. He states that he will not take vengeance on Sonny's killer and insists on allowing Michael to return to America safely.

²⁸ According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, 'don' is taken from the Italian word, *donno*, a title of respect which literally means lord. The word has also the meaning of the leader of a Mafia family.

²⁹ Prohibition refers to the period from 1920 to 1933 in the history of the United States when the Eighteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution made it illegal to manufacture, transport, and sell alcoholic beverages.

In the land of his father, Michael comes to understand the old tradition in a different way. He marries a local girl, Apollonia, according to Sicilian custom. One day, when they are going on a trip, she decides to drive the car. While Apollonia is sitting in the car it explodes and she dies. The attack was meant for Michael. His guard has planted a bomb in his car. Michael returns to America, meets Kay and marries her. Vito goes into semi-retirement and puts Michael in charge of the family. One morning, he suffers a severe heart attack and dies. Michael warns Tom that the head of a rival family will try to kill him under the pretense of establishing peace between the families and that whoever approaches him with a deal from his rivals will be the traitor within the family. The next day, the *caporegime*³⁰ Tessio calls to arrange a peace meeting. When Michael becomes the godfather, he arranges for the murders of all the family's enemies and traitors. These enemies are: the bodyguard from Sicily, Tessio, Tattaglia, Barzini, and Carlo. The latter admits that he helped enemies to trap Sonny. The Corleone family is now fully restored to power and Michael avenges his father, wife, and brother.

The Godfather closes with Kay moving back to New Hampshire. She has left Michael because of his lie that he had not killed Carlo. Tom comes out to tell Kay that Michael is ready to give her whatever she wants to ensure their kids' welfare. While there, he explains the pressures Michael lives in as a Don and how it has been his duty to kill Carlo. She ends up returning to Michael. Kay has converted to Catholicism and she buries her sorrows, like Mama Corleone, by going to daily mass and praying for Michael's soul. This story has elevated Mario Puzo to the rank of the greatest ethnic writers in America, despite the fact that it represents the stereotype of mafia which had been associated with Italian-Americans ever since their arrival.

2. The Representation of Italian-Americans in *The Godfather*

The Godfather details the experience of one of the Five Families³¹ in New York, and portrays its leader as he tries to re-create the Sicilian Mafia system in America, his new home.

³⁰ 'Caporegime' is an Italian word used in the Mafia for a high-ranking member of a crime family who leads a crew of soldiers. A *Caporegime* is similar to a military captain who commands soldiers.

³¹'The Five Families' is a name given to the five main Italian-American crime families which dominated organized crime in New York City since early 1930s. These Mafia organizations operate mainly in New York

Puzo's characters are of Italian-American descent. The protagonist of the story, Vito Corleone, along with his sons and almost all the other characters in the novel are part of the family business. They are depicted as violent and cold-blooded murderers. This portrayal of Italian-Americans as gangsters has reinforced the most popular stereotype of mafia which is associated with Italians and widely accepted in the American culture.

What makes *The Godfather* original is that it glorifies the Italian-Americans by their flashy lifestyles and relations to organized criminal activities. They are at the same time cruel and pleasant. The main character, Don Corleone, though a murderer, he is depicted as an honourable man. In other words, Vito is regarded as a righteous man, who is looking for justice in this world, rather than simply a cruel killer. When Vito kills the gangster Fanucci, he gained a good reputation in Hell's Kitchen. With Vito's deed, they got rid of a gangster who used to extort money from the inhabitants of that area and threaten them. By killing Fanucci, he starts his career in crime, yet he only kills those who threaten his family or betrays him. Vito is also a good father to his children. 'None of us here want to see our children follow in our footsteps,' the Don once says, 'it's too hard a life' (Puzo 256). He is very sympathetic; he struggles and makes sacrifices so that his children and grandchildren do not have to struggle as he did. He does not want his children to be criminals, he wants them to be more honest, more civilized as Michael says about him 'He never wanted me in the family business' (Puzo 318). By the family business he is referring to the criminal organisation.

Even when he runs his illegal business, Vito is depicted as a kind, generous man who lives by a strict moral code of loyalty to his friends and, above all, to his family. The Don Corleone never betrays anyone, that is why much of his power is the result of the loyalty he has gained by doing people favours. In Bonasera's story, for instance, when Vito sends his men to beat up the youths who attack Bonasera's daughter, he expects Bonasera's friendship. Now, Bonasera feels safer as the Don Corleone is on his side, he also feels a sense of justice. However, he is worried about how he will pay back the Corleone's favour. Later, this favour is asked when Sonny is massacred by another mafia family. The heartbroken Vito asks Bonasera

City, New Jersey, Las Vegas, Florida, and Massachusetts. Their criminal activities include mainly murder, assault, bribery, robbery, smuggling, and drug and weapons trafficking.

to repair the extensive physical damage in Sonny's body so that his mama will not see him in this intolerable situation. This is how Bonasera pays back the Don's favour.

Don Corleone is the godfather of the two orphans Tom Hagen and Johnny Fontane. In the novel, Tom clarifies this traditional Sicilian culture of having a godfather, 'the world is so hard a man must have two fathers to look after him' (Puzo 52). Sicilians refer to both father and godfather as *cumpari*³² meaning co-father. Choosing a godfather depends largely on social status and his ability to offer protection and well-being of the child. It is certainly preferable to have a godfather who is a man of influence, having a higher social status than the child's parents. The godfather is given the same respect as the real father, consulted on important matters, and his advice often heeded. When Johnny's father dies, feeling responsible for him, the Don takes over Johnny's upbringing. And when the German-American Tom comes home with Sonny, the Don adopts him but not formally, because changing the boy's name is disrespectful for Tom's family, according to Sicilian traditions. Later, Tom succeeds Genco Abbandando and becomes the family's *consigliere*, an advisor to Vito.

The female character plays a marginal role in *The Godfather*. Italian women are portrayed as old housewives. Mama Corleone, the wife and the mother in the mafia family, is the stereotypical mother figure. She cooks traditional Italian meal for her family and takes good care of her husband, children, and grandchildren. Women and young children are never involved in criminal activities. It is safer for them not to know anything about it. Moreover, as an obedient wife, Mama Corleone never asks or reacts to the actions of her husband and sons; always turning a blind eye.

To cut the long story short, *The Godfather* reaffirms the belief that criminal behaviour is an essential aspect of the Italian culture. However, what really makes it so popular is not the theme of organized crime, but rather the theme of family pride and personal honour. It portrays the Italian-Americans with a strong sense of kinship to survive in a cruel New World.

³² Salvatore Lupo, *The Two Mafias: A Transatlantic History, 1888-2008* (Macmillan: Palgrave, 2015) 166.

3. Italian-American Identity in *The Godfather*

The Godfather sheds light on the Italian-American culture. When digging deeper into the Corleone family, it becomes noticeable that they are happy, indeed proud, to be Italians. Even though they have lived in the United States for many years, the Corleones strictly adhere to their Sicilian origin. They still cook their traditional Italian food, use Italian language, maintain their family pattern, practise their religion 'Catholicism', and even give their children Italian names. Puzo, in this novel, deals with the Italian-American experience of the first and the second-generations of the Corleone family. Vito, a first-generation Italian-American, struggles to find a place in the American society. However, his son Michael has rather an identity crisis.

The novel provides an accurate account of what a real Italian-American crime family might be like. In addition to the themes of violence and crime, it has the attractive theme that touches every culture; being loyal to family and friends. *The Godfather* shows how important family is for the Corleones and how far they can go in order to keep their word. The Corleone family men are cruel and vindictive and yet they love their families above all. The fact that nothing is more important than the safety and the well-being of the family is obvious when Sonny rushes to Connie's aid when she has been brutally beaten by Carlo. Though the Corleone family is involved with mafia, their love to each other and their faith to the family are admirable. Indeed, the atmosphere of this family is so attractive that makes the Don Corleone believable, understandable, and rather with an appealing personality. The Corleones are sympathetic because all those who are killed or punished either betray or threaten the family.

The Corleone family is an extended Sicilian-American family. In addition to Vito, his wife, three sons, and a daughter, it includes people, like Tom Hagen, who are not related by blood but have a valuable contribution to the family. Tom, whose roots are German-Irish, is treated like a member of the Corleone family. They set a high value on family. It is absolutely sacred that every member feels obliged to respect his family. They are pretty tight-knit, connected by strong love and respect to each other and no one can take an outsider position over the family. 'I have respect for you. But don't ever take sides with anybody against the family again' (Puzo 342), says Michael to his brother Frederico, when

he gets out of line, because any attempt by Frederico, or any other member, to leave threatens the whole family. In return, the Corleone family affords the essential protection as well as emotional and financial support to its members. Thus, the central conflict of *The Godfather* is how to keep the family together in a land where people do not depend on the family unit anymore.

The term 'Corleone' itself is the name of a Sicilian town. When young Vito Andolini flees Italy and lands in America, he changes his name to Corleone to keep some tie with his native village. Vito is proud of being a Sicilian and very keen on maintaining his identity in the New World. He holds the values of family and friendship in high regard and does what he believes is necessary for a man's family to be successful. He works on the principle that a man must remain loyal to his wife and must make the family the core of his being. The Don's adherence to this idea of spending time with the wife and children is obvious in several instances in the novel. 'A man who is not a father to his children can never be a real man' (Puzo 31), says the Don to his godson Johnny Fontane. When Johnny has problems with his second wife, the godfather compels him to take good care of his family and to be a good father to his children, regardless of the circumstances. Johnny's second wife is about to leave him because he loses his voice and he is no more a famous Hollywood star. Taking the Don's advice, Johnny ends up leaving her and establishing a platonic relationship with his first wife in order to take care of his daughters.

Another example of the Don's old-fashioned Italian attitude is seen in his relationship with his daughter Connie. On Connie's wedding day, the whole family is gathered and the Don symbolically honours his daughter by granting all wishes on that day. As a respectful Sicilian, Corleone never refuses a request on his daughter's wedding day. However, when her vicious, unfaithful, and disrespectful husband, Carlo, beats her, Vito does nothing in order to help Connie. 'She is my daughter but now she belongs to her husband' (Puzo 211), he says. According to tradition and Sicilian morality, he cannot interfere in his daughter's marriage. Instead of speaking to Carlo, he rationalises that his daughter should submit to Carlo's authority. Vito also orders the rest of the family not to interfere between Connie and Carlo. For him, since she is married, Connie has to learn how to manage her life with her husband without the interference of anyone. This incident shows that the Don is rather a man of

contradictions. While he appears to be a loving and caring father, he does not help his only daughter.

The Corleones never discuss business with women and the outsiders. Connie and her mother are never involved in any business that takes place with the Don and his sons, and they are never supposed to ask. This is to keep women and children safe and sound. The Italian behaviour in this novel is stressed by the use of Italian vocabulary.

Mario Puzo wrote *The Godfather* in English and put some Italian words as if to emphasize the Italian origin of the speakers. They are Americans of Italian descent, however, still Italians. Puzo's choice of not translating some Italian words reflects how the Italian minority in the United States find it difficult to give up its native language and speak English. By accepting to speak English as a language, they are not only losing a part of their culture, and yet their identity, but also getting a new identity.

The Godfather reflects how Italian-Americans are still using their Italian language. This is obvious right from the character's names. Almost all the characters in the novel, especially the Corleone family, are Italian-Americans with Italian or Latin names. They use English broken with Italian words, as if to show their social separation from the American society. This combination became known as Italian English; a form of American English. It uses the grammar and American English words along with Italian words. Ironically, it sounds as if they are speaking Italian regardless of how much English words it holds.

Perhaps, the most popular Italian words used in *The Godfather* are *omerta*, *mafioso*, *consigliere*, *caporegime*, and *padrone*. These words are powerful because they definitely have a meaning that can change the reader's view of a story. They also have deep emotional meaning because the reader will closely associate them with the story as they are mentioned in the novel. *Omerta*, for instance, which means the law of silence, looks suitable only for violence, and the *godfather* looks suitable only for Vito Corleone.

Even before reading the novel, religion is highly visible right from the title: *The Godfather*. The term 'godfather' itself holds a religious sense. It comes from the order of baptism, where the parents of a Christian child choose another powerful adult to stand in as a

caretaker for the child. The Don Vito is a godfather to Johnny Fontane and Tom Hagen in this strict sense. However, he never formally adopts the orphan Tom, because he felt it disrespectful for Tom's real family to change the boy's name. This title nearly gives him a supernatural characteristic that is at once divine and cruel. He is a man of acute intelligence and aggressive force, compassionate and ruthless, graceful and dangerous. He offers protection, and justice but for a price.

The Corleones are Roman Catholics and religion is an important aspect of their life. Mama Corleone clearly demonstrates this importance of religion in her family. She goes to church every morning to say prayers for her husband's soul. Her daughter-in-law, Kay, being eager to know about Catholicism, asks her if church attendance is necessary in Catholicism. 'Oh, no, no, some Catholics only go to church on Easter and Christmas', says mama Corleone to Kay, 'You go when you feel like going' (Puzo 345). The first-generation of the Corleones relies on its religious beliefs. However, the second and third-generations abandon the religion their family practises. While mama Corleone attends church every morning to keep the faith, her children hardly ever go to the church. Moreover, the Corleone men are rarely seen in the church, even if they remain believers in some way. Michael, for instance, attends church only on his wedding day in Sicily. Furthermore, when Sonny is murdered, it is the duty of the Corleone women to go to church in order to say their masses and prayers for Sonny's soul.

In his process of becoming more American, Michael often forgets about his religion. When Kay converts to Catholicism, he is not pleased. In other words, Michael prefers his children to be Protestant because it sounds more American. Ironically, as Michael is becoming more American, his wife, Kay, is becoming more Italian. After converting to Catholicism, her sister-in-law, Connie, is teaching her how to cook some traditional Italian dishes.

For Italian-Americans who seek to maintain their Italian tradition and thus their identity, food traditions provide the best means of doing so. Food is regarded as an important cultural marker by which individuals are identified. Therefore, what one eats and what he does not eat is largely the result of which group he belongs to. In this sense, Italian-Americans are extremely proud of their fine cuisine as Italian food becomes very popular and has almost created its own culture in the United States. Americans widely welcome the Italian cuisine. In

the novel, characters eat solely Italian food at home or in restaurants, showing that Italian food is served and consumed almost everywhere in America.

Puzo utilizes food as a perfect way for Italian-Americans to shape a hearty, old-fashioned family gathering. The Corleones use mealtime to offer a sense of family and togetherness. They take their time to eat and enjoy their Italian food as well as the family company. For them, it is an opportunity to eat, talk, laugh, and to enjoy one another's presence.

Italian women take pride in cuisine. For them, food is more than just a purely biological need; it is life. In the novel, food is abundantly present to express love, care, and generosity. When the warm-hearted Sonny brings Tom to their home, the Don immediately accepts the boy into his family. Tom is an orphaned twelve-year-old who lives in the streets of New York. At the Corleone home, the family offers him 'a hot dish of spaghetti with oily rich tomato sauce, the taste of which he had never forgotten' (Puzo 44). Food provision reflects the Don's generosity toward the guest. It is used to welcome Tom when he first enters their home, and to evoke his memories later. This dish makes the first memory which Tom Hagen comes to share with his new family.

Bread, olives, cheese, and pasta are important parts of Italian-American meals. Typical Italian dishes are dominated by tomato, either sauce or fresh, pepper, garlic, and sausage. Olive oil is also widely used in Italian cuisine. It is used in dressing salad and steamed vegetables, in cooking, and is also added to the dough of some types of bread. Furthermore, Italian-Americans are fond of pizza³³, they still eat it a lot. In the novel, pizza is baked in a huge brick oven. This oven is old and unique because it uses firewood when cooking. Italian-Americans are still using the traditional way in cooking pizza. Other Italian-American food and beverages mentioned in the novel are salami, veal and coffee. 'Try the veal,' says Sollozzo, 'it's the finest in New York' (Puzo 130). Veal is one of the best Italian dishes. It is usually served in the presence of non Italian-Americans, as a way to make them try their delicious food. Moreover, the Corleones always celebrate most Christian holidays, including Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Easter, with traditional food. In *The Godfather*,

³³ 'Pizza' is said to be invented in honour of the Queen Margherita of Italy, when she visited Naples. Topped with tomato sauce, basil and cheese, pizza has the colours of the Italian flag red, green, and white.

Italian-Americans give the Don clotted-cheese and wheat germ pies in Easter as a sign of respect. Such celebrations are just one way the Corleones use in order to show great pride in their Italian sense of identity, while others are eager to ignore them in favour of the American ones.

4. Don Vito Corleone Compared to Amerigo Bonasera

Although the coexistence of Italians with Americans does not necessary imply assimilation with them, Bonasera seems to take this implication necessary as he fully assimilated into the host culture. *The Godfather* begins with representing two characters of the first-generation Italian immigrants, the main character, Vito Corleone, and the undertaker, Amerigo Bonasera. While the former strictly adheres to his traditions and even changes his name to keep some tie with his native land, the latter assimilates completely to America, he is named after Amerigo Vespucci after whom America is named. Vito Corleone has similarities with and differences from Amerigo Bonasera.

Both Corleone and Bonasera are Italians who come to America seeking better life and face similar circumstances. Vito escapes his father's killer in Corleone, Sicily. At the age of twelve he flees to America when a local mafia chief kills his father. Because he was afraid that they would seek revenge, the mafia chief orders to kill the rest of Vito's family. In America, Vito changes his name to Corleone in order to keep some tie with his native village. Growing up in a ghetto in New York, Vito marries a Sicilian girl and has three sons and a daughter. He is a peaceful man who makes an honest living at Abbandando's grocery store to feed his family. However, he soon loses his job, as Abbandando is forced to dismiss him to make a room for the nephew of the gangster Fanucci. Later, Vito kills the gangster Fanucci, when he threatened him and tried to extort money from him. He becomes the most feared man in America, starting his career in crime that expanded with a quiet and wise decision-maker who never allows for making decisions in anger or hatred. In Hell's Kitchen, Vito builds his mafia empire, and becomes the head of the most powerful crime family in the United States: the Corleone family.

Bonasera comes to America seeking to make fortune. He becomes an undertaker and lives in Vito's neighbourhood. Unlike the other residents, Bonasera is never willing to accept Don Corleone's friendship, although the Don's wife is a godmother to his daughter.

The difference between the two characters is that Vito Corleone and Amerigo Bonasera react very differently in the New World. The ambitious Corleone obviously adheres very strictly to his personal code of honour. He holds tradition in high esteem and feels contempt for drugs, excessive alcohol consumption and prostitution. Even though he is a *mafioso*, Vito Corleone has an impressive personality; he is a man of honour, humane and faithful to his family and friends. Nevertheless, he has a firm belief that the American law will not protect him. Therefore, he adopts his Sicilian law of revenge 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' to protect himself, his family and anyone who asks for help in return for their favour when the proper moment comes. That is why, when Vito Corleone has lost his job, he switches to violence in order to get both his right and respect. He has a wife and three children to feed but he does not have any work. In this hopeless situation, he ultimately resorts to criminal activities in order to save his family from starving to death.

On the other hand, Bonasera has a strong desire to become a good American citizen. As he assimilates into the American society, so do his culture and native tradition. Bonasera believes in America and trusts in law and order. He has brought up his beautiful daughter in the American style, and he wants her to be an American. Unlike the stereotypical Italian girls, Bonasera's daughter used to go on dates with her American boyfriend. One day, her boyfriend and his friend mortally disfigure her in an attempted rape. Looking for a way to get past this violent incident, Bonasera turns to the court to take his justice. The judge gives them a suspended sentence because the youths are from wealthy, politically connected families. The verdict of the judge deeply shocks the poor Italian father and shatters all the trust he has had in the American justice. Miserable Bonasera quickly realises how corrupt the judges are in the United States. He subsequently turns to the Don Vito Corleone, the leader of the most powerful mafia family in America, to get his daughter's right, which is for him killing the two young men. Bonasera makes matters worse by offering the Don money to make his daughter's attackers suffer. However, the Don neither agrees to kill the youths nor accepts money from the undertaker.

Vito Corleone, who is already disillusioned by the American justice, criticises Bonasera for his sheer stupidity to believe America and blames him for not coming to him first. The Don sends massive men to beat up the attackers of Bonasera's daughter, and expects a favour from Bonasera one day. After all, Vito is a 'reasonable man' (Puzo 251), rather than a cruel gangster. He is a *mafioso* who knows exactly that killing the youths is rather a revenge, not justice since Bonasera's daughter is still alive. In this way, the fire of revenge burning inside the Italian father and his daughter is put off by the Don Vito instead of by America. Therefore, Vito Corleone gives the undertaker a feeling of justice that a supposedly legitimate society has denied him.

Bonasera's belief in America is shaken and betrayed by leaders in the American society, especially the judges and the police officials who allow the youths to go free. This event shows the ambiguities of Bonasera's life in the United States. When the American law denies him his right, he turns to the traditional Sicilian authority. Although Bonasera has found success by adapting to the American way of life, once his family has been attacked, he returns to his roots through Don Corleone. The undertaker subsequently changes his loyalty from the nation that betrays him which is America, to the authority that saves him which is Vito Corleone.

The Godfather unveils the consequences of denying justice in a very comprehensible way. This event is the reason behind the transformation of Bonasera, it demonstrates how social injustices led the man to turn to the most violent Don of the American Mafia. Bonasera was denied justice which is the right of every human being. After all, gaining money and power is not the only goal of the Corleone Mafia family. There is another important goal which is to gain their rights and respect. Bonasera shifts from embracing the American values to going back to his native values. The undertaker is hailed after the Italian Amerigo, after whom America was named and 'Bonasera' which is an Italian word for 'good night'. As if Amerigo Bonasera is saying 'good night' to America to befriend the Don Vito Corleone.

To conclude, this chapter has presented a study of Italian-American identity in *The Godfather*. It has first introduced an overview and a synopsis of this novel. Second, it has discussed how Mario Puzo represents Italian-Americans, both men and women. Third, it has provided a thorough study of Italian-American identity through delving deeper into their way

of life; food, religion, family traditions, and language. Fourth, it has drawn a comparison between the two Italian-American characters, Vito Corleone and Amerigo Bonasera. A patriotic and an Americanized who, once denied his right, returns back to his native values and joins Vito. However, there still exist other people who believe in America, trying hard to become Americans and to establish American families completely different from their own Italian-American families. This is the main topic of the present dissertation which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter III

Michael's Identity Crisis

The second-generation Italian-Americans emerged from the 1920s to the 1940s. They were born and live in the United States. However, at home they were brought up in their typical Italian traditions. Unlike their parents, who stayed in their 'Little Italies' and were relatively distinct from the other ethnic groups, this generation of Italian-Americans has direct social contacts with the other entities and is more exposed to the American mainstream culture³⁴ and values which seem in many ways at odds with those of their parents. In this sense, the second-generation Italian-Americans began to feel part of two entirely different worlds. Moreover, this group grew to have fairly an ambivalent attitude towards ethnicity³⁵ partly due to the American efforts to encourage the immigrants to embrace an American identity in order to fully incorporate them into American society. At school, they learned English and were educated according to American standards, they were also influenced by the Great Depression³⁶, and were tested by the Second World War. Accordingly, this chapter is devoted to the study of second-generation Corleone family notably Michael, a World War Two veteran, who seems to have an identity crisis. This section attempts to sharpen how Michael has rejected his identity as a Corleone and is changing to make himself more American.

1. Michael's Americanized life

As a matter of fact, being born and growing up in the United States are frequently confusing issues for the immigrants' children. They are often put under pressure to preserve their culture of origin on the one hand and pressure to assimilate into American society on the other hand. The Corleone children, as second-generation Italian-Americans, were granted American citizenship. As articulated in the 14th

³⁴ The American mainstream culture refers to the dominant and widely accepted culture in the US, especially ordinary American ideas and values which are not extreme.

³⁵ According to *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture*, 'ethnicity' was first used in 1896 by G. Vacher de la Ponge 'to describe the cultural, psychological and social characteristics -which he defined as "natural and counterfeit"- of a population.

³⁶ The Great Depression refers to the economic depression, which started in the United States in 1929 with the Wall Street Crash. People spent too much under 'Live now, pay later'. They bought expensive products, like automobiles, but they did not really have the money to pay off debts and loans. This led to a huge decline in stocks which sparked a severe economic crisis. Many people were jobless, homeless, and hungry. However, the nation's economy started to gradually recover with the outbreak of World War Two. The factories began to produce weapons, bombers, and other war supplies then, many people were able to find jobs.

Amendment³⁷ of the United States Constitution, a child who is born in the United States territory acquires citizenship even if his parents are not American citizens. This Amendment has allowed the Corleones to immediately gain the birthright of citizenship and be identified as Americans. It is important to note that the citizenship right is a key element to guarantee their integration and assimilation into American society. Likewise, the Corleones insist on being American citizens of Italian descent.

Very early in the novel, Puzo introduces his main characters one by one during the Don's daughter wedding day. As far as Michael Corleone is concerned, he is depicted as a handsome man who has just returned from the Second World War as a highly decorated Marine captain. He has an Ivy League³⁸ education; he studies at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and has a romantic relationship with a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant girl, Kay Adams. Therefore, Michael has literally embraced a more Americanized way of life; becoming the only one of the Corleones who attempts to assimilate into the culture of his adopted homeland. Furthermore, at Connie's wedding, Michael tells Kay stories about Luca Brasi, the Don's right-hand, showing his innocence, naivety, and decency. He, in fact, reassures her that he is completely isolated from his family business. It is here that Michael's issues with identity are first revealed in the novel.

Michael's identity crisis erupts in his youth when he has felt disheartened from following in his father's footsteps, whom he most identifies with. Michael is the closest to his father in terms of intelligence. Obviously, the Don Vito recognizes these qualities in young Michael since he never wants him in the family business. In an attempt to establish his own identity beyond the influence of his family, especially his father, Michael joins the military service and the Dartmouth College. Furthermore, since he is absolutely aware of the stereotype of mafia, he feels like ashamed of his ethnicity and he is willing to detach himself from all what is Sicilian. For Michael, his ethnicity is a stigma which must be avoided as

³⁷ Also called The Citizenship Clause or The Liberty Clause, the 14th Amendment to the American Constitution was ratified in 1868 during the reconstruction era. It states that all persons born or naturalized in the US are citizens of the country who deserve equal protection of the law. It adds that the state government cannot deprive any citizen of life, liberty, or property without due cause. The 14th Amendment has three principle clauses: citizenship clause, due process clause, and equal protection clause.

³⁸ Ivy League is a group of eight colleges and universities in the United States which have a reputation for academic and social prestige. The members of the Ivy League are Harvard, Columbia, Dartmouth, Cornell, Yale, Princeton, Brown, and the University of Pennsylvania.

much as possible. Therefore, he takes an 'outsider' position which impels him to reject both ethnicity and mobster. On the contrary, his family is still extremely proud of the ethnicity and the culture they have brought from Italy. At the wedding of his sister, Michael sits with his American girlfriend Kay separately from his family. He is depicted as a charismatic and an honourable man who is proud of Kay and has not the least desire to be connected to his family.

Michael's desire to separate himself from his family appears in different aspects of his life throughout the novel. Michael's name forms the first impression that he is unique within his family. Out of four children, Michael is the only one whose name is obviously not Italian, Portuguese, or Latin. Through his name, Michael is directly shown as different from his family; a man who is ready to reject his Italian blood. Then, Michael volunteers for the Marines despite the bitter opposition of his father. The Don is deeply disappointed with him because fighting on behalf of strangers in a war, which is utilized to test their loyalty to America, inevitably means that Michael is losing, at least, some of his heritage and more importantly, he is increasingly isolating himself from the Corleone family. In other words, as Michael marches off to the Second World War, he is claiming his right to support the United States army which is the first concrete step towards his assimilation and subsequently his Americanization. Moreover, Michael's fighting in this war is seen as something completely non-Sicilian; he immerses himself in a war where the United States was fighting against his father's land. When Michael has been discharged, he joins the Dartmouth College.

Unlike his parents who have a very limited educational background, Michael has gone to Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. As a matter of fact, if the birthright citizenship of the second-generation immigrants identifies Michael as an American citizen, getting more education affords him a good opportunity to integrate into American society because school is inevitably used to socialize this generation as quickly as possible especially through educating them according to American standards. Moreover, the notion that basic education should be free and available for all dates back to the nineteenth century, and is one of the core principles for asserting an American identity for the immigrants.

Michael gains Americanization through not only his participation in World War Two and his Ivy League education, but also his choice of a non-Italian partner. He chooses a WASP³⁹ woman: Kay Adams who is at once his complement in terms of an American way of life and his opposite in terms of an ideal wife in a traditional Italian family. Kay represents the American social mainstream in which Michael does believe and wants to be part of. 'She was too thin, she was too fair, her face was too sharply intelligent for a woman, her manner too free for a maiden' (Puzo 13). Contrary to Michael, his family dislike Kay for the very traits that he highly admires, especially those which characterize her as an American who is totally different from the stereotypical Italian wife. In addition to her surname, Kay is a well-educated woman, she is a schoolteacher, she dates Michael, her father is a Baptist pastor, and her family traces back its American roots for 'two thousand years' (Puzo 13). These factors together combine to make Kay a very significant wife for Michael because she satisfies his eagerness to become more American, to have an honest life and, most notably she encourages him to remain outside of the family business.

To speak of Italian-American families, it is necessary to speak in traditional terms with reference to first-generation Italians. The Corleones rely solely on their family in order to survive and improve themselves. This strong family pattern is encouraged by their parents. However, when their children begin to absorb the lifestyle of the host country, the meaning of the extended family starts to change and some of their Italian moral values disappear, creating friction between the first and second-generations in the Corleone family. To put it another way, some of their children show little interest in their family and tend to accept the American pattern of small families. For example, the Don's oldest son, Sonny, does not respect the unwritten set of principles which rule the Italian family, especially the one emphasizing that a man must spend time with his wife and children. Sonny is almost never depicted with his wife though he is married and he has children. Indeed, he often has affairs with other women. Unlike his father who is strait-laced and virtuous, Sonny is promiscuous and unfaithful to his wife Sandra. Later, when Michael becomes the godfather, he also rejects his father's concept of the

³⁹ WASP is an acronym for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant which is used to refer to the Americans whose ancestors came from northern Europe, especially from England. It is believed that these Americans are powerful and influential.

family. While he claims that he protects his family, he kills his brother-in-law Carlo, turning his sister into a widow and her children into orphans.

Another important aspect that clarifies this shattering sense of traditional Italian family can be seen in the concept of date and marriage. At Connie's wedding day, Michael does not hesitate to accompany his girlfriend Kay with him: something, which is according to Sicilian traditions, totally unacceptable because Italians believe that whomever their children bring home is the person he will actually marry. However, Kay has been his date, whom the Corleones do not know and have not even met before. Moreover, Italian parents prefer that their children marry Italians while Kay is a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. In addition, Michael seems to forget a great deal of the values of the family. He breaks the old Sicilian code of silence when he tells Kay stories about his father's right-hand man Luca Brazi. Michael should not tell her about his family's business for many reasons besides the demanding loyalty to his family and the fact that Kay is an outsider.

The Corleones start adopting American practices like smaller families and the use of the English language at home. Connie, for example, does not live with her in-laws which is something strange in Italian traditions. Another example can be seen after Sonny's death, when his wife, Sandra, has refused to stay with the Corleones, her in-laws. She takes her children and moves to Florida in order to live with her parents. Indeed this departure from ethnic origins can be seen throughout *The Godfather* in many instances as the Corleone family stay away from Italian traditions and begin to welcome non-Italians in the family and its business. Michael marries a non-Italian girl and, after his father's death, he excludes Tom, his brother and the former *consigliere* of the family, from the family business in an offensive manner 'You're out, Tom' (Puzo 355) and puts Albert Neri instead. Although Tom is just like his brother, Michael does not hesitate to remove him when the Corleone family has been threatened. Something, which could never have been happened if the Don Vito is still alive. Michael is about to settle the family's accounts with its enemies and needs to put on a brave face.

2. Michael's Acquisition of the Sicilian Identity after Performing a Dramatic Shift

The other face of Michael is revealed when he visits his father in the hospital after he has been shot down in an assassination attempt. Michael goes there just to find the hospital deserted and no one guarding his father. Still valuing loyalty to his family, Michael promises his father faithfully that he will protect him. If Michael is to fulfil his promise, then he must step into a new identity. The way he manages to get rid of the assassins of his father marks the final stage of Michael's journey from an innocent American man to a purely Sicilian mafioso. Michael converts from a war hero and college man to a ruthless gangster when he has believed that he needs to satisfy his desire for revenge. A revenge for his father's blood which is fully demanded in their old Sicilian code of honour. Therefore, Michael determines that his father's murderers must be eliminated. A decision which tends to be a complete rejection of the moral values by which he has previously lived his life. Michael's killing of Sollozzo and the captain McCluskey encourages him to go further into his business and shows how powerful Michael is and how dangerous, savage, and destructive he can be. When Michael has committed the murder, he goes to hide in Sicily.

Michael flees to his father's land in Sicily to gain protection against his father's enemies and to escape the American police arrest. While there, he learns more about the Mafia and its origins, which helps him to understand the Don and his family business.

Michael finds Sicily culturally different from America. Nevertheless, he enjoys himself very much and seems happy there. In Italy, Michael eventually stops behaving after the American way and starts to honour and appreciate his Italian heritage. He establishes a peaceful life in Sicily and marries a beautiful young Sicilian woman, Apollonia Vitelli, according to Sicilian customs. For example, they get married on a Sunday, which is a good luck tradition for them and they also walk to their wedding ceremony together. Michael's marriage to a Sicilian and his acceptance of the Sicilian traditions symbolize his embrace of the Sicilian culture. It is here that his new identity starts to take form. Michael is flexible enough to accept an Italian identity. By the time his wife Apollonia is murdered, he has almost assimilated to the Sicilian culture.

In Sicily, Michael becomes conscious of being neither fully American nor fully Sicilian. He is not fully American partly because he becomes a gangster. On the other hand, he is not fully Sicilian since he calls himself 'a stranger in this country' (Puzo 294), so he feels that he does not belong to Italy. Moreover, although his family strictly adheres to its Sicilian roots, Michael does not know the real Italian traditions. This is made clear when he speaks about the beautiful girl Apollonia, who later becomes his first wife, in an improper manner without having the least idea that he has been speaking in front of her father. 'I understand I've offended you by talking about your daughter. I offer you my apologies, I'm a stranger in this country, I don't know the customs that well . . . I meant no disrespect to you or her' (Puzo 294). When Michael realizes his mistake, he apologizes and most importantly, he mentions 'respect' to his father because if he has not mentioned it he would never have met her.

Unfortunately, Michael's tranquil life comes to an abrupt end with the cruel murder of his wife. The Mafia war in the United States reaches Sicily, as the family of 'The Turk' Sollozzo is willing to exact its revenge on him. Michael's bodyguard betrays him and plants a bomb in his car in order to murder him, but kills Apollonia instead. After his wife's murder, Michael determines to return to America where he joins the family business.

Michael returns to America blinded with vengeance for his wife Apollonia and his brother Sonny. Now he is ready to conduct the family business. He becomes increasingly in charge of his family's affairs and his loyalty shifts from his country to his family. As the Don Vito gets older with more health problems and less power, he retires and paves the way to Michael to become the godfather of the Corleone family. Ironically, for the whole attempt Michael has made to get rid of his family business, he has no choice but to follow in his father's footsteps. He joins the family business in order to defend his family against the enemies. Meanwhile, Michael resumes his relationship with Kay and they get married.

The American Kay is perhaps well known for her constant interference in Michael's business and her questions. Unlike the stereotypical Italian wife who never dares to ask her husband about his business, Kay is a wife who does ask questions that force Michael to justify his deeds. Her motivation behind questioning Michael is, in a large part, to determine his

commitment to his family's business. The best example is perhaps when Kay questions Michael if Connie's accusations that he has killed her husband are true. Michael does not answer his sister, yet feels obliged to answer Kay. Nonetheless, he lies to her and denies his involvement in the murder. Although Michael has promised Kay that he will completely legitimize all Corleone enterprises in five years, he gradually becomes more cruel than his father.

The fact that she converts herself and her children from Protestantism to Catholicism soon after her marriage does not mean that Kay assimilates into her husband's world. She rather continues to have an outsider position, partly because she can never understand the codes of a Sicilian family. Kay now becomes a devout Catholic and her refusal to accept Michael's underworld participation is largely motivated by her religious belief. When she has felt absolutely sure that Michael will not change and his guilt will never finish, Kay chooses to appeal to God for her husband's salvation. What really characterizes Michael's relationship with Kay is this conflict of change and status. While Michael is changing towards Americanism, he keeps many aspects from his Italian heritage which he could not forget or neglect.

These contradictions in Michael's life raise him culturally hybrid. Although he has honoured the Sicilian traditions, when Michael returns to America he marries the WASP Kay and has a desire to see his children 'all American' (Puzo 318) and to make certain that they achieve the American dream.

3. Michael's Hybrid Identity

Being between two countries, Michael experiences a sort of cultural shock. He finds himself in a dilemma over the coexistence of the Italian and American cultures while he is developing his own identity. Puzo starts with promoting the idea of Michael's assimilation into mainstream American culture, by depicting him as a war hero who is willing to die for his country, while his family is trying to preserve their ethnic ties. However, his killing of Sollozzo and captain McCluskey deprives Michael of the world he has been trying hard to be part of and involves him in the Sicilian world of mafia: the one which he has so long rejected.

Michael ends up keeping his American identity and adopting the Sicilian one. He wants to assimilate but at the same time preserve his culture. Now, he has two separate identities which never blend with each other.

To conclude, this chapter has discussed Michael Corleone's identity loss as he switches from an American to a Sicilian and ends up adopting both identities. It has first presented Michael's Americanized life. Next, it has signalled the turning point in his life and how he becomes what he never wants to be. Then, it has shown how Michael ends up adopting aspects of both cultures, Italian and American.

General Conclusion

To reiterate, the main purpose of this study has been to examine the nature of Italian-American identity in Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*. As we delve deeper into the novel, we come to conclude that the Italian heritage along with the American assimilation process pull Italian-Americans in different directions. A fact easily recognized in Michael's shaken identity who chooses to follow his father's footsteps after having enjoyed an American way of life for many years.

Italian-Americans, just like many other ethnic groups, still have a sense of confusion over their identity largely due to the circumstances they faced while shaping their identity. In fact, the coexistence of very different cultures in America has created hybrid mixed ethnic groups which clash with the dominant culture on the one hand and on the other hand with their US born children who are American citizens by birth. Furthermore, since Italian-Americans are in search of better lives, they do whatever it takes to achieve their goals. Over the course of generations, they had a strong desire to forget their past and to adapt themselves in order to fit the mainstream of American life and be socially accepted. However, the misrepresentations, which were widely accepted among the Americans, make the attempts of Italian-Americans doomed to failure. They could not succeed simply because the shadows of the stereotypes of Sicilian mafia and crime are always present, emphasising an ever-lasting indignation and shame among the Italian community.

Although they have been in the United States for more than one hundred years, these stereotypes are still one of the big issues that Italian-Americans have to face. A fact which makes the study of Italian-American identity necessitates being familiar with the way they have been defined since the arrival of the first wave of Italian immigrants to America. This point has been discussed in the first chapter along with the core components of the Italian culture, followed by a thorough study of *The Godfather* in relation to the characters' identity in the second chapter. As for the third chapter, it has dealt with Michael's unstable identity.

The Godfather helps to unveil the complexities of the Italian-American identity by using a hybrid pattern to deal with the conflicting influences of Italian and American cultures. It also helps to reveal a side of the Italian-American experience as portrayed by a second-generation Italian-American novelist. Although this side depicts the Corleones as gangsters, it

also depicts them as honourable men. Showing that they are criminals not by nature but because of social injustice in the supposedly called land of equality. For further researches in this vein, one can analyze how social inequality may lead to criminal behaviour and destroy whole societies.

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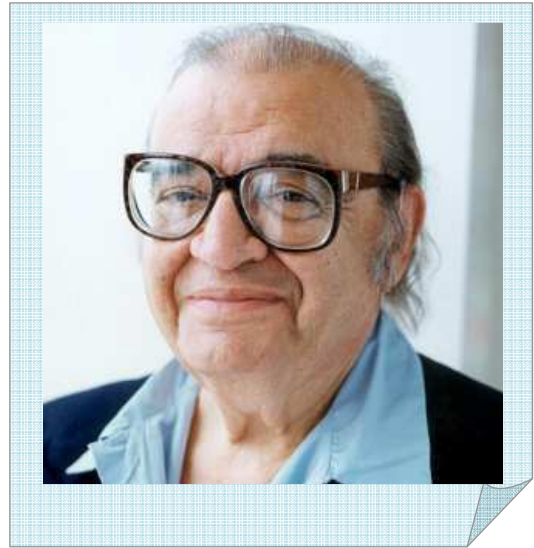
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Appendices

Appendix A: Author Biography

Mario Puzo was an Italian-American novelist and screenwriter best known for his Mafia crime novels. Puzo was born in 1920 to a family of Italian immigrants, and he passed his childhood in Hell's Kitchen, an Italian ghetto in New York. During the Second World War, he joined the Army Air force in Germany. While in the army, he married Erika Lina Broske, they had five children. Upon his return from the war, he attended the New School for Social Research and Columbia University.



In 1955, Puzo published his first novel *The Dark Arena* but it wasn't until his fifth novel *The Godfather*, published in 1969, that he achieved his success, capturing Puzo into the front ranks of American authors and making the novel the unprecedented best seller. The novel introduced a completely new genre of novels through depicting both the family's criminal activities and its strong ties. Later in 1972, the novel was adapted into a film by Francis Ford Coppola. This experience of co-writing the movie based on his novel led to his career as a screenwriter. He received two Academy Awards for *The Godfather* and the sequel *The Godfather: Part II*. Puzo continued to write screenplays like *Earthquake* (1972), *Superman* (1978), and *Superman II* (1981).

The increasing popularity of *The Godfather* pushed Puzo to keep writing popular novels about the Mafia including *Fools Die* (1978), *The Sicilian* (1984), and *The Last Don* (1996). His last two novels, *Omerta* and *The Family*, were published posthumously (2000, 2001). *Omerta* along with *The Godfather* and *The Last Don* are considered part of his Mafia trilogy. Mario Puzo died of heart failure in 1999 in Bay Shore, New York at the age of 79.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ "Mario Puzo". *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica, 2016. Web page. 02 nov. 2016 <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mario-Puzo>.

Appendix B: Mario Puzo's Mafia Novel

The reshaping of American literary culture from the early 1950's to the early 1970's might be captured in one historical image. James Jones's *From Here to Eternity*, the massive blockbuster about the Regular Army in the last months before Pearl Harbor, was awarded the 1952 National Book Award in fiction. Not quite two decades later, Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* was not even nominated. Joyce Carol Oates was honoured for *Them*, her long aimless narrative of poor whites adrift in riot-torn Detroit.

Puzo had treated the Mafia in his novel in much the same way that Jones had treated the army_as an autonomous social institution with its pressures for conformity, where there is no place for a man with any real integrity. From this it does not follow, however, that Puzo's theme is what Gay Talese described in the *Washington Post* in reviewing the novel:

Whether men's ambitions are fulfilled in the arena of politics or banking, business or crime, it makes little difference, the rules are often the same; it is a game of power and money; might makes right; and the most brutal acts are easily justified in the name of necessity and honour. Governments fight world wars for honour, drop atomic bombs for peace, stage bloody brawls for Christ; and the Mafia, on a mini-scale, acts out similar aggressions for similar goals, profit, prestige and justice as they see it.

The Godfather is not, in short, an anti-Vietnam War novel in disguise. Rather, it is a novel that belongs to the same class as *From Here to Eternity*. It adopts the techniques of literary naturalism - the detailed social observations, the tone of moral detachment, the long

sojourn among an underclass - to tell the story of an institution not immediately associated with the degradation of man.

And like Jones, Puzo fills his pages with man after man-dozens of them, including the occasional woman-all of whom are distinct individuals, with individual histories and traits. No character is introduced without a back-story and a chapter to himself. This is the method of the blockbuster. In 1952 it was possible to win a major American literary award with a naturalistic blockbuster; by 1970 a novel had to be a 'holy vessel of the imagination' to receive official recognition.

If it is read at all any more, Puzo's *The Godfather* is probably read as the 'novelization' of Francis Ford Coppola's famous film of the same title, which was rated the third greatest American film of all time. It took Coppola three years to bring the novel to the screen. According to literary gossip, Puzo moulded and trimmed his work-in-progress to satisfy the demands of Paramount Pictures. If there is any truth to the rumour, however, it is startling that the most important scene in the novel, in which 'Don Corleone gave the speech that would be long remembered' and in which 'he coined a phrase that was to become as famous in its way as Churchill's Iron Curtain'_the phrase that inspired the dust jacket illustration by S. Neil Fujita that was reproduced on the movie posters_ only makes it into the film version in heavily abbreviated form.

After the Don is shot on the streets outside Genco Olive Oil, after Michael Corleone guns down the police captain Mark McCluskey and the drug smuggler Virgil Sollozzo, after Sonny Corleone has been murdered in retaliation, Vito Corleone calls a meeting of New York's Five Families with 'invitations to Families all over the United States' in order to sue for peace. The meeting is filmed by Coppola, and so too is the Don's speech. But its central passage is not recorded:

Let me say that we [in the Mafia] must always look to our interests. We are all men who have refused to be fools, who have refused to be puppets dancing on a string by the pulled men on high Who is to say we should obey

the laws they make for their own interest and to our hurt?
Sonna cosa nostra . . . these are our affairs. We will
manage our world for ourselves because it is our world,
cosa nostra. And so we have to stick together to guard
against outside meddlers. Otherwise, they will put the ring
in our nose as they have put the ring in the nose of all the
millions of Neapolitans and other Italians in this country.

Coppola does not include this speech, because it does not express his message. Coppola's message is delivered by Al Pacino (in 'a part too demanding for him,' according to the late Stanley Kauffmann). When Michael Corleone returns from hiding in Sicily after the murders of Sollozzo and Captain McCluskey, he finally goes to see his old flame Kay Adams.

Michael tells her that he is working for his father now. 'But I thought you weren't going to become a man like your father,' Kay says; 'you told me.' 'My father's no different from any other powerful man,' Michael replies, 'any man who's responsible for other people, like a senator or president.' 'Do you know how naïve you sound?' Kay asks with a smile; 'senators and presidents don't have men killed.' 'Oh,' Michael says; 'who's being naïve, Kay?' Or, in other words, Gay Talese had it right after all. The Mafia differs from the U.S. government only in the extent and reach of its power. This is a view that can be enjoyed by libertarian and political radical alike, but it is not the view of Puzo's novel.

In the novel, Michael's speech to Kay is rather different:

You've got the wrong idea of my father and the Corleone
Family. I'll make a final explanation and this one will be
really final. My father is a businessman trying to provide

for his wife and children and those friends he might need someday in a time of trouble. He doesn't accept the rules of the society we live in because those rules would have condemned him to a life not suitable to a man like himself, a man of extraordinary force and character. What you have to understand is that he considers himself the equal of all those great men like Presidents and Prime Ministers and Supreme Court Justices and Governors of the States. He refuses to live by rules set up by others, rules which condemn him to a defeated life. But his ultimate aim is to enter that society with a certain power since society doesn't really protect its members who do not have their own individual power. In the meantime he operates on a code of ethics he considers far superior to the legal structures of society.

I'd be tempted to characterize this view as fundamental to Italian fascism if Benito Mussolini had not been an intense and triumphant foe of the Mafia and its 'separate authority.' At all events, it is *not* a view that is affirmed by Puzo. In a small passage tucked away in a seemingly unimportant scene, Puzo makes his own view clear in his own voice. In contrasting Sonny Corleone to his brother-in-law Carlo Rizzi, Puzo writes that Sonny 'was a man who could, with the naturalness of an animal, kill another man, while [Carlo] himself would have to call up all his courage, all his will, to commit murder. It never occurred to Carlo that because of this he was a better man than Sonny Corleone.' A better man, even if he also beats his wife. The mere fact that Carlo recognizes a moral authority that is separate from his own, if only in restraining him from murder, means that he is a moral advance over Sonny. The Mafiosi may consider themselves 'far superior' to the rest of society, but by Puzo's lights, they are lesser men.

Puzo's prose rarely flashes, but it rarely loses its balance either. *The Godfather* may not have been the best American novel of 1969, or even the third best, but it remains a novel worth reading, if only for its ambition of *copia* or completeness. *The Godfather* is a full picture of the Mafia, but it does not glamorize it. Puzo represents the Mafia as the social institutionalization of violence. This is not an accidental feature of 'refusing to live by rules set up by others,' but it's very essence. Nor does Puzo suggest a superficial and sloganeering moral equivalence between the Mafia and governments or businesses. His Mafia is a unique institution that uniquely degrades men, when it does not murder them.

By the critic and literary historian: D. G. Myers

A Commonplace Blog <http://dgmyers.blogspot.com/2013/10/mario-puzos-mafia-novel.html>.