

MEDITERRANEAN NOIR

Dennis Broe

MEDITERRANEAN NOIR – SUNLIGHT GLEAMING OFF A BATTERED .45

The emergence of Mediterranean Noir over the last few decades is part of a trend in contemporary cinema toward regional noir—which also includes Nordic and Asian Noir—countering Hollywood’s now often pale imitation of the form. Of the three regional formations, Mediterranean noir retains perhaps the deepest ties to the Classic Period Noir of the late 1940s. This was a period in which the dark style was often employed to express anger, despair and frustration at the global corporate rollback, led by the US, of working people’s hopes for a new postwar world. Noir itself contributes to what has been termed the Mediterranean Imaginary in its stressing of historic inequalities in a region in which those contrasts have always been stark and in its exposure of the “deep state,” that is the hidden power in the region and how, in Fernand Braudel’s term the *longue duree*, that is, over centuries, these elements have acted to maintain those inequalities.

Noir itself, far from being a Hollywood construct, began not in the LA of the 1940s but rather in France in the late 1930s at a moment where the dismantling of the workers gains in the Popular Front was expressed in an aesthetic formation that may be termed Late Poetic Realism or Early Film Noir. There it includes such films as Carne’s *Quai des brumes (Port of Shadows)* and *Le Jour se leve (Daybreak)* and Renoir’s *Le Bete Humaine*. These dark tracts, centered around Jean Gabin’s doomed working class male outsider—and the equally doomed women who accompanied him— featured a character whose ultimate exile through death was emblematic of the expunging of working class ideals in the light of the business offensive to regain its hold that ultimately led to the fall of the Republic and the victory of fascism.¹

After the war there was, universally, a hope for change which affected the film industry as well. Everywhere there was an impulse toward creating films whose subject would be the promise and the problems of building a more equal postwar world. From Italy’s *Bicycle Thief* to the US’ *Crossfire* to Britain’s

¹ For a full account of this moment, see my *Class, Crime and International Film Noir: Globalizing America’s Dark Art* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 2014.

It Only Rains on Sunday to Japan's *Drunken Angel*, this impulse, which located the cinema on the frontlines of this building of a new society, reigned. However, this change did not occur. Instead, a global corporate rollback and repression was instituted under the name of the Cold War which by 1948 resulted in the following: the effective removal of left discourse in the US after the defeat of the Wallace Presidential Candidacy; the retreat of the Labour Government in Britain in the face of US loans; the defeat in Italy of a Popular Front coalition that resulted in the semi-permanent coming to power of the US-backed Christian Democrats; and increasing pressure on Japanese labor in light of the quashing of a general strike the previous year (Broe).

Around the world, directors retreated to dark stories of outsiders who bravely battled the forces of order to clear their names for crimes they often did not commit, just as the left itself in the wake of the global US-led communist purge was being hounded and pursued for its "unlawful" actions in prompting labor and peoples' campaigns for a more equal world. Film Noir proper in the US, in such films as *Out of the Past* and *The Big Clock*, in Italy in *Neorealismo Nero* in De Santis' *Tragic Pursuit* and *Bitter Rice*, in the UK in "Spiv" and outsider films such as *They Made Me a Fugitive* and in Japan in Kurosawa's questioning of the precepts of the crime film in *Stray Dog* all expressed this global lament for a lost opportunity and critique of the return of the old order.

Much has happened since including a more dominant role for what has been termed neo-noir as a recognized genre, particularly in the United States but also in the world as a whole. This acceptance of the form has sometimes, because of the dominance of Hollywood, which has claimed the leading role in creating and perpetuating the form, acted as simply a means not of critiquing global power, but of promoting and maintaining US cultural hegemony. In these instances the dark style is not a locus of critique but a focal point for prolonging and fetishizing despair.

To speak of noir in the contemporary period, though, and to speak beyond the Hollywood variant that has itself almost become a dominant style, albeit one that has largely lost its power to challenge the system, is to speak of regional noir. The dark style has emerged as a site of critique in at least three prominent areas of the globe: Scandinavia as Nordic Noir; Asia including Japan and Korea, but now most prominently featured in China; and the Mediterranean in both its European (Italy, France, Spain) and Afro-Asian (Algeria, Turkey) variants. It is in the region that noir perhaps most strongly maintains its originary force of critique, as a style adopted by film and television personnel (with at least two cases, Nordic and Mediterranean, also

founded in a literary milieu) to give stylistic and thematic voice to similarly felt problems with the everyday abuse of power and force in these regions.

The regional approach to noir studies also coincides with a movement in labor histories in the last two decades toward transnational labor studies, a move elaborated in British Labour studies, which had previously viewed workers struggles only in a national context. The field then moved away from a single country model and even from an Atlanticist perspective, in which all labor studies are referred to via Euro-American forces, toward seeing labor now and in the past as integrated into the world as a whole, most forcefully through the (perpetual) integration of global capital (Allen, Campbell and McIlroy 2010, p. 366). In film history and in the history of that variant of the crime film called the film noir, this idea encompasses the notion that regions, in the moment of the transcending of the nation state, provide a more generalized way of viewing the object while still retaining a particularity.

The prevailing pattern of noir may be highly influenced by a Hollywood stylistic model (of, for example, an overall dark palette, protruding shadows, enhanced location shooting), itself the product, as my book *Class, Crime and International Film Noir* shows, of other national noir models from the classic period. However, the consideration of the particularities of noir by region counters that global model whereby all cultural formations emanate from the Eurocentric center, in this case from Hollywood. Comparative considerations of noir by regions, which this article can only outline, breaks down the model of all culture disseminating from one focal point and, through noir's recurring resistance and its force of critique, begins to define the way that power is arranged, enacted, and subverted in the different regions. It is through this particularity within the general that we can perhaps follow Braudel's dictum of 'the need to grasp change in the whole before we can comprehend changes in the parts' (qtd. in Allen, Campbell and McIlroy 2010, p. 51).

Finally, there is, drawing on Max Cafard's 'Surregionalist Manifesto' (2003, p. 6), a freedom in the region as an entity that breaks down boundaries in its particular place and time. Within regions, Cafard conjures in a Deleuzian mode using the Louisiana Bayou as his model, there are 'no borders, no boundaries, no frontiers, no State Lines'. While the State is a 'parasitical growth on the region, something exterior, hostile, threatening,' regions are themselves 'wild' and looked upon by State and Capital with 'a cruel and rapacious eye' (Cafard 2006, p. 9): 'The Region is against the Regime'. This validation of the region by Cafard (a made-up name, the word in French means 'cockroach' and perhaps denotes the smallest element of any region) is

opposed to Wallerstein's systems theory, and is not itself 'a system.' However, the region does, apropos of Braudel's magisterial study of the Mediterranean which begins with that region's geological breakdown into mountains, plateaus, and plains, 'follow Geo-Logic and move in Geo-Logical time,' an approach which 'relativizes the pseudo-politics and pseudo-economics of all systems of power' (Cafard 2006, p. 12).

ASIAN AND NORDIC NOIR

A film that denotes the regional character of Asian noir, where financing among the key players of Japan, China, its semi-autonomous entity Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea is common, is *The Yellow Sea* (2010). The title connotes the border region between China, Russia, Korea, and Japan in a Korean film that takes as its subject the global question of 'illegal' movement in the region. The narrative concerns a cab driver, Gu-nan, living in Yanji City, a Korean Autonomous Zone in China, who must illegally cross the Yellow Sea into Seoul in South Korea to murder a target specified by a Yanji crime boss, Myun Jung-hak, in order to clear his gambling debts. Gu-nan's wife is in South Korea and he has not heard from her, so he also uses the crossing as an opportunity to find her. The film, in its evocation of the bleakness of the 'container' crossing, where these refugees are stowed away as human cargo and where the body of an immigrant who dies on the crossing is summarily dumped, relinks to the social dimension of earlier noirs and situates itself in line with other immigrant border-crossing films such as Michael Winterbottom's superb, and neglected, *In This World* (2002) which details the crossing into the West of two Afghans.²

Most striking though in terms of Asian Noir is the recent emergence of a Chinese variant. There have been three noir masterpieces over a period of three years, all dealing in various ways with the breakdown of community and the plight of the disenfranchised in the wake of China's continuing rapid capitalization. *People Mountain, People Sea*, a hit at the 2011 Venice Film Festival, follows a peasant tracking the murderer of his brother, with the killer not seen as a Charles Bronson type meglomaniacal sadist, but rather as the creation of a system where ordinary fellow feeling is breaking down. In

² Perhaps more presciently, it links to Aki Kaurismäki's *Le Havre* (2011) which refers to that city's cinematic heritage, including multiple noir references, in its story of an African boy from Gabon who escapes the container in which he has been transported and whose cause is taken up by the older residents of the city, including one of them named, apropos of the lead actress in *Le Jour se lève*, Arletty.

the end, the two meet in a final sequence that is an exposure of the brutality of conditions in Chinese mines and here systemic brutality trumps as well as enables individual brutality. Noted Sixth Generation Director Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin* (2013) recounts four stories of the New China, each featuring the increase in violence that Jia sees as now marking China's full-frontal entry into a capitalist economy.

Finally *Black Coal*, which won the 2014 Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, a film that seems to be about a serial killer whose crimes remain undetected, is instead an examination of how the individualized spirit of capitalism has decimated the social fabric of the mining town in which it is set. In the regional model, this film draws on the Korean serial killer film *Memories of Murder* (1990) and a film with Japanese and Korean variants about a woman whose lovers are butchered titled in Japan *Into the White Night* (2011), both of which are used to reposition that most tiresome and apolitical of American sub-genres, the serial killer film, into a form that instead sheds light on the society that produces the atomized and anti-collective social climate necessary for this type of crime to exist. By drawing on sources outside the Hollywood model, including the British television mini-series *Red Riding* (2009) which uses the continual presence of the killer to investigate police corruption in England's formerly industrialized North, this regional representation is able to reinvent a depoliticized Hollywood Noir subgenre.³

Closer to the Mediterranean, and perhaps sharing characteristics with its southern regional cousin, is Nordic Noir. One shared aspect is the founding of this regional noir variant in a literary mode with, in each case, a strong novelistic strain of noir then inspiring a visual representation in film or television. There is, though, a profound difference between the critique of power in the two regions. Nordic noir is often concerned with the excesses and corruption of the supposed Scandinavian Social Democracies, most strongly established since the Second World War, and with how the rhetoric of those democracies about equality and shared possibilities does not live up to the contemporary picture of lethal corruption in a decaying infrastructure that makes a mockery of platitudes about social equality.⁴ Mediterranean

³ For the Hollywood version, see the way the serial killer revenge story moves the focus away from US-Mexican border relations in the opening season of FX (Fox's) *The Bridge* (2013-2014).

⁴ As yet, the Nordic Noir tradition has not particularly centered a critique on the capitalist, free-market 'opening' of the Scandinavian countries, preferring, for example, to see the high-tech dynamism of the Lizbeth Salander lead character in the *Millennium* series as countering social democratic decadence. David Fincher's American remake of *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) does ascribe more of the corruption to the general malaise of a cut-throat 'liberalized' society where each competes against or battles the other.

noir, as we shall see, is more suspicious of power in general as already corrupt in a region that has a longer, pre-democratic history of vast inequality and forceful resistance.

As basic as the founding of Nordic noir in the literary milieu of the Scandinavian crime novel, was the equally basic avowed desire of the authors to warn their society of the dangers of social democracy atrophying or worse, devolving into a more hard-fisted brand of antagonistic capitalism. The progenitors of the genre were Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö. Their Martin Beck novels, including most famously *The Laughing Policeman* (1971), depicted the danger of this atomizing of their world in the grisly crimes in their books. According to Sjöwall:

We wanted to describe society from our left point of view. Per had written political books, but they'd only sold 300 copies. We realized that people read crime and through the stories we could show the reader that under the official image of welfare-state Sweden was another layer of poverty, criminality and brutality ... [that] Sweden was heading ... towards a capitalistic, cold and inhuman society, where the rich got richer, the poor got poorer.

(*qtd. in Helf 2013*)

The bleakness of Scandinavian cinematic noir is on view in the desolate, icy setting of Greenland, long-colonized by Denmark, in *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (1997), the film version of a novel by Peter Høeg, where an isolated murder investigation in a barely livable land challenges the image of the far-north touristic paradise, now being presented, in particular, in Iceland's promoting itself as non-stop spas and a center of contemporary design. The film's desolation, written on the faces of its haggard characters, counters the image of 'fjords, gamboling reindeer and modern, well-designed towns inhabited by blonde-haired, healthy types' (Forshaw 2010, p. 9).⁵

The current most popular example of Scandinavian noir, after the phenomenally successful *Millennium* film series (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* [2010] and the rest) from the Stieg Larsson novels, is the Danish television series *Forbrydelsen* (2007–12), a global success that has also been transferred to US television as *The Killing* (2011–), whose format of each season tracking a single crime has also inspired other global series including France's most

⁵ At the 2012 Venice Architectural Biennale, the Denmark pavilion featured a plea for Greenland, which guarantees its colonizer access to the now-melting Arctic Ocean with its more easily tapped oil supply, to maintain its ties to Denmark.

successful series, *Engrenages* (2005–), but also was equally inspired by a forgotten US series with a political crime at its center, *Murder One* (1995-7).

The epitome, though, of Scandinavian noir is a series with which *Forbrydelsen* only partially engages and that is Lars Von Trier's *The Kingdom* (1994, 1997). The eerie haunting of a hospital within the unrolling of a plan to modernize both the building and the health system by 'liberalizing' its services makes this series the true inheritor of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (1990–91). Von Trier's series continues the Scandinavian critical tradition which is in danger of being subsumed by *Forbrydelsen's* gender-politics only approach to the crime film. The first season murder is of a young girl whom the no-nonsense police detective, Sarah Lund, works overtime to avenge, but the series disdain's any larger critique, though one of its lead characters, who is exonerated of the murder, is a wily politician who is both corrupt and charismatic. *Forbrydelsen* has the visual trappings of the older Scandinavian noir tradition, but it straightens out *Twin Peaks'* and *The Kingdom's* vicious attack on bourgeois society, adding the procedural element of *CSI* (2000–). Though it mildly critiques the evolving neoliberalizing of Scandinavian society, it more often either ignores or cooperates in that process, rather than in the earlier Lynch and Von Trier models which utterly disturb and question it.

A SEA NOT LIKE ALL THE OTHERS: NOIR AND THE MEDITERRANEAN IMAGINARY

The term the Mediterranean Imaginary suggests a sort of politico-geographical linking of the land and sea formations of the Mediterranean basin with a model of an entrenched power structure that features a high level of wealth concentrated in a few hands maintained by a "deep state" through various forms of internal control. The term also conjures resistance in the form of democratic forces which attempt to combat this force, seen most prominently at the moment in the emergence of the anti-austerity party, Syriza, in Greece.

The term "deep state" itself was coined to describe the confluence of "intelligence services, military, security, judiciary and organized crime" hidden from democratic practice that had endured for centuries in a particular Mediterranean country, Turkey. The term has recently also been applied to the US, particularly post-9/11 (Lofgren). Noir, as an aesthetic formation, is adept at exposing these formations because the form itself embeds its critique within a kind of "deep style" that uses oblique angles and shadows to describe world's hidden from the ordinary, the everyday

world of daylight; a style that is very much in evidence in Italian noir which constantly hints at the murky interconnections of a world where power, wealth and force converge. Noir is also uniquely capable of using the crime metaphor as a way of suggesting that the daily use and abuse of power in the region is constructed not around democratic processes but around backroom arrangements involving coercion, as the repeated scenes in the gangster bosses office in the Turkish noir *Cakal* and the institution in the Algerian war of the nefarious Le Main Rouge (Red Hand) viewed visually in *Outside the Law* as a gangster formation demonstrates. Finally, noir also suggests the enormous difficulties and dangers of contesting this power in its offering of bitter and hard-fought partial victories, such as the young intellectual's rebelling against his enlistment in a gangster cadre which requires him to flee, again in *Cakal*, discussed more fully below.

Mediterranean noir may be said to be, if that word was not discredited, the *origin* of noir, since, as author Jean-Claude Izzo points out, the Bible, set on the shores of this sea, is 'the world's first great anthology of violent crime stories': 'Like Cain's heart, the history of the Mediterranean is black' (Ferri 2006, p. 5). But while primordial fratricidal murderousness may be the poetic way of expressing the particular predilection for violence surrounding the sea, the cause of crimes of such a dark nature may instead be imbedded in the specific history of the region's power relations.

Braudel (1972, p. 77) cites two currents, both relevant to the history of noir in general, as central to the Mediterranean. He attributes the region's 'traditionalism and rigidity' to the fact that newly cleared plains remained in the control of rich and powerful landowners who dominated the area in the sixteenth century, the time in which his study takes place. This history is as opposed to, say, America where the land belonged, at least initially, to those who cleared it. Thus, in Sicily, Andalucía, The Balkans, and Turkey, 'the rich are very rich and the poor are very poor.' On the other hand, this rigidity and power was often contested by the mountain people who surrounded the sea, often 'in revolt against the establishment of the modern state and its *carabinieri*' (Braudel 1972, p. 39). These modes of conduct, which included that of the vendetta, were not influenced by medieval codes of justice, as reflected in an old Corsican proverb: 'Law, I make my own laws and I take what I need.'

Braudel is sketching the two opposing trends in the crime film: the police procedural, on the side of the law and in defense of traditional property and power which quotes the stylistic tropes of the noir; and the noir proper, with

its outside-the-law fugitive whose quest is often viewed as one of innocence wronged. This dichotomy also aligns with a basic division in the region, that between nomad (the noir fugitive) and settler (the cop). A noir trend, begun under Kurosawa, stressing the similarities between cop and criminal, reminds us, as Braudel (1972, p. 179) says, that these two forces, often seen in history as irreconcilable, 'at the same time ... are complimentary; indeed they urgently require each other.'⁶

To distinguish Mediterranean noir from its northern cousins, just as Braudel distinguishes the region from the rest of Europe, there is another salient common characteristic and that is the color,⁷ of the sea, of the sky, of the landscape; its 'almost gaudy yellows, reds, ochres, and above all blues' versus the 'blacks and browns of Northern Europe' (Reynolds 2006, p. 4).⁸ Finally, if there are crucial similarities in Mediterranean noir, there are also particularities in a region where each area is able to 'preserve its own irreducible character, its own violently regional flavor in the midst of such an extraordinary mixture of races, religions, customs, and civilizations' (Braudel 1972, p. 179). Further, this brief consideration will engulf the entire Mediterranean, east and west, taking in Algeria and Turkey, whereas most previous noir characterizations have centered more narrowly on the western Mediterranean, Italy and France, neglecting even Spain.

Western Mediterranean noir, following its initial embedding in the Bible, is strongly founded in literature, in detective and crime fiction. This is especially true of Spain, where the novel is the most prominent purveyor of noir. The most well known Spanish crime author is Manuel Montalbán, whose Pepe Carvalho series describes the mean streets rapidly being gentrified of his native Barcelona just after the break with Fascism in the mid-1970s. As is true of many Mediterranean authors, Montalbán has a past history as a victim of violence; he was arrested in 1962 in an anti-Francoist demonstration and beaten in front of his wife by a notorious fascist torturer (Eaude). The short stout Carvalho, who lives and loves to eat, is compared by Montalbán chronicler Mike Eaude (2006) to Chandler's Philip Marlowe; both ordinary

⁶ The settler, for example, would often plow the land to such an extent that it was fallow and then be greatly aided by the nomad's use of the land for grazing which helped replenish it.

⁷ An early cinematic manifestation of Mediterranean noir was classic period director René Clément's *Plein Soleil* (1959) which, as a critic in *Le Monde* noted at the occasion of the 2013 rerelease of the film, was the *première* injection of the color aesthetic as a part of the European film noir (Samuel Blumenfeld, Friday 12 July 2013, p. 13).

⁸ This similar spectrum follows also from a 'homogenous' climate, occasioning, as Braudel puts it, 'the same seasonal rhythm, the same vegetation, the same colours ... the same landscapes, identical to the point of obsession; in short, the same ways of life' (1972, p. 235).

men, 'relatively poor because otherwise he wouldn't be a detective having to do disagreeable and dangerous jobs to earn a living.' Also like Marlowe, 'When he pulls the thread leading to a criminal, he often finds that a leading capitalist is behind the crime. How else could it be in a criminal capitalist society?'

One of Montalbán's most famous Carvalho's, 1979's *Southern Seas* (made unsuccessfully into a film in 1991 demonstrating the power of the *novela negra* over its cinematic realization), describes the onset of *descencanto*, the disenchantment that came after the period of democracy at the end of the Franco era. It was at this moment that noir novelists and filmmakers began to register the generalized perception that power relations in Spain after Franco had only changed on the surface (Davies). The novel uses the disappearance of the scion of a wealthy industrialist family, with a Gauguin-like obsession with the allure of Tahiti, not as an excuse to escape to an exterior region, but instead to register an interior critique. The industrialist's body is not found in Tahiti but in a section of the city being 'renovated,' that is, in an older, poorer Barcelona that is being demolished. Carvalho hears the story of this systematic destruction from the industrialist's working-class girlfriend with whom he had 'stowed away.' What begins as a romantic idyll becomes instead a paean to a class that is rapidly disappearing.

Mediterranean noir proper begins in France, Marseille to be exact, with a trilogy of novels by Jean-Claude Izzo tracking the long-embedded power structure of that city in its central description of police corruption and as viewed through the eyes of a criminal turned cop Fabio Montale, who in the course of the trilogy (*Total Chaos*, *Chourmo*, *Solea*), will become disgusted with the force and quit. Before writing the trilogy, Izzo was a left-leaning journalist constantly battling corruption and an admirer of the American noir novelists David Goodis and Jim Thompson. The opening novel *Total Chaos* unwinds Montale's history as street hoodlum, whose one boyhood friend dies at the hands of the police revenging another friend as part of a mafia-police cabal that Montale eventually exposes. The novel is much better than the French-Italian television series, *Fabio Montale* (2001), with Alain Delon which, though co-scripted by Izzo, is more extended tribute to an aging Delon than critical perspective on Marseille. Better even than the trilogy, and perhaps more related to the anarchic spirits of Thompson and Goodis, is *A Sun Before Dying* (1999), Izzo's novel written just prior to his own death the following year of lung cancer. The novel tracks the inevitable demise of its aging vagabond protagonist Rico, who continues to drink himself to death and refuses all council on how to prolong his existence. There is something in Rico's refusal to deny the power of death and his embracing of it that both

elevates the fate of this denizen of the streets to a heroic level and reaffirms in his decision to die, a kind of individuality that is lost in the consumerist world of healthy 'alternatives' to this inevitability.

It is in Italy with Massimo Carlotto and *The Goodbye Kiss* (2000) that this form both reaches its novelistic peak and at the same time is finally surpassed in its screen version *Arrivederci Amore, Ciao* (2006). Carlotto also had a bloody encounter with the law from the period of near outright civil war in Italy in the seventies between leftists and the police, the famous 'Anni di Piombo' ('Years of Lead,' meaning gunfire). In 1976 as a member of the activist Lotta Continua, he was arrested, tried, and convicted for the murder of a young girl he had found stabbed on the streets. He fled to Mexico, returned in 1985, was retried, reconvicted, and imprisoned until 1993 when he was pardoned.

These events inform the opening of his 2000 novel *The Goodbye Kiss*. The protagonist's quest to be free of the police and of his period of parole forms the background of both the novel and the film made from it. However, the protagonist in both novel and film is not an innocent fugitive, but rather a representative of the ultimate corruption that both the novel and, to a greater extent, the film attribute to the Berlusconi era in Italy, an era where, in the words of the novel, 'the legal and illegal economies were merged in a single system, offering the opportunity to grow rich and build a discreet position of power'; 'business, crime and politics' mixed to such an extent as to seem inseparable (Carlotto 2006, p. 108). Both describe a more blatant grab for wealth by this new power elite. 'I represent a group of businessmen and professionals who have long been marginalized in the political life of this city. But now the wind has changed and we intend to count more and more' (Carlotto 2006, p. 102) is how the Italian senator in the book expresses this change under Berlusconi.

This transformation has been accompanied by a hardening of censorship and an inability to comment directly on this system. The fact that noir novels and films are designated as the social outlet for expressing outrage at this deepening corruption may account for the popularity of the form in Italy, which can be seen in booming sales and two noir novel lines opened by the left-leaning publisher Einaudi and, with fellow noir purveyor Carlo Lucarelli⁹ hosting his own television show on crime. Publicists describe an 'Italian

⁹ Lucarelli's is a more conservative, ready-for-television, approach to the genre. *The Damned Season*, the most famous entry in his wartime trilogy, follows Commissario DeLuca, a 'neutral' inspector during the Fascist period who after the war hides his identity from the partisans while solving a violent crime that implicates their leader.

public ... permanently hungry for *gialli*' (Jones 2006), the sensational 'yellow' novels and films of the 1970s from which this new incarnation, more focused on critique than its generic root, springs.

There is a gaudy, tarnished quality to the film, directed by Dario Argento protégé Michele Soavi, that is reminiscent of the *gialli*, which trades both in soft-core porn and in garish horror. The porn influence is evident in a sequence where the protagonist Giorgio brutalizes the working-class women at the strip club where he is hired for his looks, and later in an S&M sequence where he humiliates the bourgeois wife he is blackmailing into having sex. Likewise, the tawdry horror of the final sequence consists in Giorgio's glee at the destruction of a young bourgeois girl and recalls Soavi's first film *Cemetery Man (Dellamorte Dellamore [1994])*, set entirely in a graveyard, and his apprenticeship with horror impresario Argento. This tacky effect, though, is exactly right to express the seamy quality of the corruption under Berlusconi: the sex scandals, one involving prostitution with a minor for which he was first convicted and then exonerated; the abuse of power in using the office to do favors for lovers for which he has also been convicted; and the mixing of private and public finances.

Soavi draws consistent parallels in the rise of the protagonist who makes his initial money in Milan to Berlusconi's rise in the same city. Giorgio's money comes from two robberies, the first of the Milanese club owner, and the second in which he and the crooked cop who holds his reins betray the other thieves. Giorgio then invests in a restaurant as a way of laundering his money, of becoming the very respectable 'Monsieur Giorgio.' Though his customers whisper about his criminal past, they respect, and in the case of a young bourgeois woman, Roberta, are in awe of, his wealth and charm. Similarly, it was frequently hinted that Berlusconi's original money in Milan development had shady sources (Ginsborg 2005) before it was cleaned with his building up of a media empire which helped guarantee him his national reputation.¹⁰

Giorgio woos Roberta and proposes to her because he needs her as part of his final rehabilitation. He brutally murders the cop, his criminal partner, who reappears in Rome where he is now an upstanding citizen, dumps his body in a car, and then showers in a scene that is reminiscent of Norman

¹⁰ The most recent expose of this relationship was in the new form of docudrama noir that also blended Brechtian distancing narrative devices in Sabrina Guzzatti's *La Trattavitta (The Treaty)*. The film, screened at the 2014 Venice Film Festival, suggested that Berlusconi's coming to power in 1992 was part of a State-Mafia truce that ended the gangland murder of Italian judges and in return had the state withdrawing legal pressure on the organization.

Bates's clean-up of his murder in *Psycho* (1960). When Roberta grasps that Giorgio is a murderer, he turns the beautiful apartment he has bought them into a mausoleum as he isolates and then begins slowly poisoning her. The last sequence is the epitome of his brutality, a *Notorious* (1946) in reverse focalized through the poisoner, as Giorgio plays the pop song that for Roberta connotes their 'relationship,' 'Arriverderci Amore, Ciao' ('Goodbye Lover, Goodbye'). The song now becomes a dirge, and, as his 'wife' crawls towards the door in her last stab at freedom, the newly respectable 'Monsieur Giorgio' stands in front of it, halts her progress with his designer shoes, and watches her die. The last sequence illustrates the way that Berlusconi's lawlessness was not above destroying even the middle classes when they stand in his way.

The coda has Giorgio, now pardoned, at Roberta's funeral in the rain. He alone is without an umbrella though, in voiceover accompanied by the pop song, he says he is now, having been pardoned, 'a man like all the others,' a perfect echo of Berlusconi's oft-repeated defense of his criminal acts as being simply like everyone else. 'Why must I be chased from parliamentary life for tax evasion when many other Italians cheat on their taxes,' was his defense, echoing Giorgio, after his 2013 conviction in the courts (Fressoz and Ridet 2013, p. 17).

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN NOIR: SUNLIGHT GLEAMING OFF A BATTERED BERETTA

This brief survey of the Algerian and Turkish portion of Mediterranean noir indicates that noir in the eastern part of the sea has similar characteristics, especially in its critique of a deeply embedded power structure and the continuation of either an outright dark palette or the adoption of paler tones that mask the bright light of the region. The differences in the two areas often spring from the colonial interplay with the West and that interplay also includes the kinds of ways that American noir is absorbed.

Take the case of Rachid Bouchareb's *Hors la loi* (*Outside the Law* [2010]), an Algerian-French co-production which attempts to combine the neorealist and noir traditions in presenting the eruption of the Algerian War in France and in its quoting of both *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) and the stylistic gangster tropes of Coppola, DePalma and Scorsese, as they have been simplified and absorbed by films like *American Gangster* (2007). *Outside the Law*, at various points, reduplicates the structure of *The Battle of Algiers* on the European homefront and in a more commercial context. In sequences similar to

those in the earlier film, the lead revolutionary figure of the three brothers, Abdelkader, becomes politicized by watching a guillotining in prison, then forbids alcohol and tobacco among the Algerians in France, after which he watches another brother Messaoud be married under FLN auspices.

Outside the Law also duplicates the relating of the chronological structure of the war from its beginnings to Algerian independence. The contemporary film's unique contribution is the depiction of the French massacre of the Algerians at Sitif on 8 May 1945, VE or Liberation Day. On that day Algerians, who had fought with the French in the war, demanded their own liberation, but, in answer, they were mowed down in the streets. The film suggests this moment was the actual beginning of the Algerian War. *Outside the Law* concentrates on the 'second front' of the war, opened by the FLN in France. On the French side, opposing this war at home meant the organization of the 'anti-terrorist' group Red Hand, which is shown torturing and attacking Algerians in a sequence that duplicates the famous 'torture montage' of the paratroopers against the FLN in Algeria in *Battle of Algiers*.

The film shifts from its opening neorealist moments into a noir battle of cops and gangsters with the style this time a duplication of the contemporary American gangster film, complete with dark palate, glistening low angle shots of the machine-gun battles of the FLN and the Red Hand, and an insidious undercurrent of violence present in Abdelkader's reading of the death sentence to a café owner who has been collaborating and then the clumsiness of strangling the owner over Rockabilly music; Scorsese-esque touches that here seem more imposed noir stylistics than organic outgrowth of the film.¹¹ Thematically, though, there are moments when *Outside the Law* moves closer to the preoccupations of Mediterranean noir and intersects with an earlier Algerian noir, *Automne Octobre à Alger (Autumn: October in Algiers [1992])*, which follows the harassing of three young men that eventually culminates in the 1988 uprising against the repression and layers of corruption in the Algerian state. Likewise, *Outside the Law* critiques both the ruthlessness of Abdelkader's revolutionary tactics and of Messaoud's violence in becoming a killer for the revolution, while validating the third brother Said's following of his, more peaceful, passion of having a boxer beat the French in the ring. The character paths imply, as part of the liberation moment itself, a critique of the future trajectory of a rigid, corrupt post-revolutionary state which uses the memory of the revolution to sustain its power and to excise pleasure.

¹¹ Bouchareb's next project *Belleville Cop*, a buddy film about the linking of an Algerian and American cop, was a more blatant Hollywoodization of Mediterranean noir, written by *48 Hours* (1982) screenwriter Larry Gross.

Perhaps the most quintessential Mediterranean noir in terms of its modern treatment of the sea and its color schemes, its appropriation of and reminder that the more nihilist form of existentialism sprang from this area, and its presentation and critique of the most deeply embedded unequal power structure is the Turkish film *Çakal* (*The Jackal* [2010]). The gangster milieu of the film is adapted from a popular series of Turkish gangster films and the existential overlay and saturated color scheme from the modernist noirs of Nuri Binge Ceylan's *3 Monkeys* (2008), where the color pattern is one not of gleaming sunlight but of a bleached quality that translates as 'silvery melancholy,' and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2012), composed mostly of long shots at night, which in many cases utterly obscure the characters. In *Çakal* the fatalism of the lead character's fall into the gangster world, often expressed through his voiceover ('Whatcha gonna do? Some die, some go on living'), combined with the ultimate decision of his friend not to eliminate him and their subsequent flight to who knows where recalls the climactic moment in one of the founding texts of existentialism. In a southern Mediterranean country, Algeria, the lead character in Camus's *The Stranger* does *not* pull the trigger on an adversary, in part because he is blinded by the bright light of the Mediterranean sun.

In the young man Akin's Istanbul, though the sea is everywhere present, even the daylight by which that sea is illuminated is faded and bleached as are the character's lives. Akin lives in one of the poorest sections of Istanbul where the unemployed gather in the shadows of a castle, the remnant of an entrenched feudal power structure. Thus, the young man's musings, partly prompted by the death of his mother, though they have a metaphysical veneer, are also grounded in his social location and class position ('Why are they them and we just have to stay being us ... Who decides?').

Akin's gangster bosses, who he eventually rebels against ('I'm also a dog ... without an owner'), are shown railing against the world and imposing their will on it at the opening of the film, before we meet Akin. This opening is then reshowed later in the film and revealed to be not Akin's flashback, but a teaser lifted from a later point in the narrative. The first showing of the scene in the opening illustrates the two gangsters' entrenched power and control over their world. 'We live, they die. Life, its damn cruel,' they chortle while doing a line of coke and celebrating what they think is an execution of both a rival and of Akin, who they have tabbed as hit man and patsy. However, after the second iteration of the scene, Akin's friend kills both gangsters and escapes, with the narrative thus questioning that power. Akin and his friend are headed to no physical location, but in the young man's mind, toward his

utopia in a bottle that is the aquarium he had urged his gangster boss to buy. The aquarium is a miniature world that recapitulates the world of the sea that is everywhere present in Istanbul, but that in the present reality is confining and not a route to escape.

This final image of the aquarium as virtual sea where Akin can still find shelter recalls an image of the sea in the initial wave of noir in *Quai des brumes*, which the Gabin character watches in the hope that it will take him away from his current misery. Both prove illusory, yet both also register the desire of each character to find a world that is better and more equitable than the one that the noir structure continually exposes.

AFTERWORD

Recently, we may have seen the ultimate Mediterranean Noir in the Spanish post-Francoist film *La Isla Mínima* (2014), a film which, in recalling *Chinatown*, attempts to peel away the fascist layers underlying a society on the brink of either throwing off those vestiges or embedding them more deeply.

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