

***SUBURRA. LA SERIE* AS "PATRIMONIO INTERNAZIONALE / INTERNATIONAL PATRIMONY"**

DANA RENGA

Name Dana Renga

Academic centre The Department of French and Italian
The Ohio State University, USA

E-mail address renga.1@osu.edu

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ABSTRACT

This essay investigates fascinations surrounding glamorized criminals by looking at how recent Italian history and queer bodies are represented, negotiated, and received in Italy's first made-for-Netflix series *Suburra. La serie* (2017-). In many ways, the series is a distinctly Italian production, especially in terms of the popular mafia-corruption plot that is based upon real life events. However, *Suburra. La serie* is a transnational production that engages viewers outside of Italy. This essay pays attention to the series' interesting marketing strategy that flagrantly draws attention to fictional/his-

torical consistencies, before addressing the physical allure and charisma of criminal antiheroes who appear trapped in a perpetual adolescence. Most importantly, I address how *Suburra. La serie*'s singularity as a transnational co-production allows for a unique representation of gender and sexuality on Italian small screens, as it marks an opening up of a mainstream space on the small screen to tell stories from the perspective of a non-normative sexual orientation. *Suburra. La serie* engages in a representation of queer masculinity that is distinctive in relation to Italian serial drama as a whole and especially in relation to serial dramas that depend upon sympathetic perpetrators to create relationships with viewers. As I argue, *Suburra. La serie* is a queer text with an address to viewers spanning continents, cultures, and languages.

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“Ostia, una Suburra vista mare / Ostia, Suburra with a sea view”. (Haver, “Ostia, una Suburra vista mare: Ormai sembra una Terra di nessuno”)

“Il fascino del male continua a conquistare il piccolo schermo / the allure of evil continues to conquer the small screen”. (Bigi, “Perché Suburra – la serie è più di un gangster story”)

“*Suburra* mixes *The Godfather* with *The Sopranos* for the queer generation”. (Reddish, “Meet Giacomo Ferrara, the adorable actor playing a closeted mobster in Netflix’s ‘Suburra’”)

1. INTRODUCTION: SYMPATHETIC PERPETRATORS

Dubbed the “Italian answer to *Narcos*” (Nguyen 2017), the entire first season of *Suburra. La serie* was available for download on October 6, 2017 on Netflix, which debuted in Italy in 2015. *Suburra. La serie* is Italy’s first made-for-Netflix series and is available for streaming to Netflix’s almost 110 million members in 190 countries (Netflix Media Center, 2017). *Suburra. La serie* is a prequel to the 2015 film (Stefano Sollima) and 2013 novel (Giovanni De Cataldo and Carlo Bonini), both entitled *Suburra* and both of which chronicle the church, state, and mafia involvement in 2011 in a corrupt development deal in the seaside town of Ostia, located thirty kilometers from Rome¹. Spanning a twenty-one-day period in February and March, 2008, the series is a coming-of-age story focusing primarily on the exploits of three attractive young men who angle for their share of the profits in the nascent stages of the Ostia land and port deal. Leading antihero Aureliano Adami (Alessandro Borghi) is the son of a small-time gang leader who struggles with his semi-impotent father Tullio (Federico Tocci) and controlling and power-hungry

1 The film *Suburra* has received little critical attention. A notable exception is an intriguing essay by Dom Holdaway that discusses ten recent mafia movies in terms of production, performance, and distribution as relating the quality label (Holdaway 2016). Another unique take on the film and series is by Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni who note that the series is interesting in that it sheds light upon “new relationships among the various segments of the Italian cultural industries” while participating in a trend at work in Italian pay TV, that is the serialization of “models at once literary and cinematic”. They note that the film *Suburra* premiered in Italian theaters on October 14, two days before Netflix was launched in Italy. Thus, a very distinct marketing strategy. (Barra and Scaglioni 2016: 413).

sister Livia (Barbara Chichiarelli); Alberto “Spadino” Anacleti (Giacomo Ferrara) is in love with Aureliano and must repress his homosexuality from the members of his Sinti crime family, in particular his older, traditional brother Manfredi (Adamo Dioisi); and Gabriele “Lele” Marchilli is a middle-class son of a policeman who prefers dealing drugs and the Roman nightlife to his studies. All three are under the control of Roman mafia kingpin Samurai (Francesco Acquaroli) who is working to bring the Sicilian mafia into Rome through the Ostia port arrangement. Aureliano, Spadino, and Lele commit murder, deal drugs, manage sex work, and engage in extortion, and their involvement in such illicit acts leads to the death of several of those most dear to them. And yet, like many male protagonists gracing small Italian screens over the last ten years or so, they are represented in highly sympathetic terms. Indeed, in Italian television, gangsters and criminals are constructed to warrant our compassion in a much more straightforward manner than we have ever seen before. In particular, *Suburra. La serie* engages in a representation of queer masculinity that is distinctive in relation to Italian serial drama as a whole and especially in relation to serial dramas that depend upon sympathetic perpetrators to create relationships with viewers.

This essay investigates fascinations surrounding glamorized criminals by looking at how recent Italian history and queer bodies are represented, negotiated, and received in *Suburra. La serie*, both in Italy and internationally. In many ways, the series is a distinctly Italian production, especially in terms of the popular mafia-corruption plot that is based upon real life events. However, on par with – or even more so than – the smash hit *Gomorra. La serie* (*Gomorra. The Series*, 2014)², *Suburra. La serie* is a transnational production that engages viewers outside of Italy. In what follows, I pay attention to the series’ interesting marketing strategy that flagrantly draws attention to fictional/historical consistencies, before moving on to address the physical allure and charisma of criminal antiheroes who appear trapped in a perpetual adolescence. Further, I address how *Suburra. La serie*’s singularity as a transnational co-production allows for a unique representation of gender and sexuality on Italian small screens, as it marks an opening up of a mainstream space on the small screen to tell stories from the perspective of a non-normative sexual orientation. As I will argue, *Suburra. La serie* is a queer text with an address to viewers spanning continents, cultures, and languages. Or, in the words of one reviewer,

2 *Gomorra. La serie* is now in its third season with show rites purchased in over 190 countries (Sky Atlantic HD 2017).

‘Suburra mixes *The Godfather* with *The Sopranos* for the queer generation’ (Reddish 2017).

2. SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

The sections that follow are indebted to social network analysis, in particular promotional posts by Netflix on the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter, and fan reactions to these posts. Also analyzed are fan videos and blogging sites that endorse *Suburra. La serie*’s queer position. The established field of Social Network Analysis allows scholars to look towards social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to discover social relations between individuals and groups, and to assess how interactions on social media effect or exert an impact upon ‘social behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge’ (Prell 2012: 1) As social network scholars note, social networks tie together individuals or organizations, and are of essential significance to contemporary society in their ability to exert influences over all aspects of daily life, including labor, emotional ties, and recreational pursuits (Fu, Luo, and Boos 2017: 5). Further, new media technologies are essential for their ability to enable connections between ‘queer members of diasporic communities’ by enabling cyber community users to engender novel spaces where they can make their voices heard. Thus, new identities are established that develop simultaneously as cyberspaces develop (Atay 2015: 2), and new media technologies can empower encounters between queer members of social networking communities. My analysis of social networks is also indebted to Judith Halberstam’s concept of “the queer art of failure”, in particular with regards to how the subversive in popular culture can present alternatives to dominant heteronormative culture. To this end, my taking into account posts about and reactions to the queer content in *Suburra. La serie* turns towards “low theory” in order to seek out “counterknowledge in the realm of popular culture and in relation to queer lives, gender, and sexuality” (Halberstam 2011: 19).

3. “SUBURRA VS. REALITY”

The book, film, and series are very loosely based on the “Mafia Capitale” scandals that rocked the Italy when they were unveiled in 2014, and pointed towards an intricate web of mafia-church-state corruption in the nation’s capital dating to at least 2000. Many who have written on the film and the book note affinities between fact and fiction, such as

similarities between historical and fictional “bad guys” (such as Samurai’s resemblance to Roman mafia legend Massimo Carminati), Pope Benedict XVI’s resigning from office, the fall of then-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s government, elaborate parties involving politicians and prostitutes, and emergent criminal gangs in the Eternal City³. As one reviewer writes, “sembra di veder animarsi le pagine dei giornali con l’elenco degli scandali che hanno colpito di più l’opinione pubblica / it’s like watching the newspapers come to life with all of the scandals that captured the public eye” (Mereghetti 2015). One publicity stunt for the film involved promoting a building project called “Ostia Waterfront” that promised to transform Ostia into an Italian Las Vegas by 2017. The pseudo-advertising campaign involved a website (www.ostiawaterfront.it) and a truck adorned with billboards and accompanied by scantily clad women passing out flyers advertising the hoped-for beachside revolution (De Santis 2015). The promo was met with public scandal, in particular on the Facebook Page of the group “Roma fa schifo / Rome is disgusting” which is part of a platform that allows for disgruntled citizens to voice discontent regarding the governmental mismanagement, collusion, criminality, corruption, and degradation apparently rife in Rome (Facebook 2015a).

Since Mafia Capitale made the headlines over three years ago, it is not uncommon to read news accounts of gang activity in and around Ostia. For example, during the month following *Suburra. La serie*’s release, news outlets reported on topics that include police sweeps in Ostia so as to prevent mafia turf wars in late November (The Local 2017) or the 6 November violent assault by Roberto Spada – of the notorious Spada organized crime family – on an RAI journalist in broad daylight during a taped interview (Fiano 2017). The Sky series and miniseries *Romanzo criminale. La serie* (2008-2010), *Faccia d’angelo* (*Angel Face*, 2012), and *Gomorra. La serie* met with much controversy due to what was felt by victims groups, politicians, neighborhood coalitions, and other stakeholders to be these programs’ representation of criminality through the eyes of alluring wrongdoers who might lead viewers down the wrong path⁴. Unlike its filmic predecessor,

3 For debates around the film *Suburra*’s factual accuracy, see, for example, Mereghetti (2015), Romani (2015), and Nextquotidiano (2015). The latter’s title reads, “Quanto somiglia Suburra a Mafia Capitale / How much does Suburra resemble Mafia Capitale?” Massimo Razzi (2015) notes the surprising similarities between the 2013 novel and the events surrounding Mafia Capitale that were not made public until the following year.

4 Such criticisms on these programs are plentiful. To cite a few examples, the victims’ group *Vittime del Dovere* denounced *Faccia d’angelo* as they claim that the

this is not the case for the Netflix production, even though the series features good-looking criminals whose infiltration into the Vatican and national politics must resonate amongst Italian viewers, many of whom are surely aware of the mafia’s stronghold in Rome.

What might account for this dramatic difference in reception? One simple explanation involves Netflix’s relative popularity in Italy. Although subscriptions are on the upswing with 800,000 reported on the day of *Suburra. La serie*’s release of October 6, 2017 (Filippetti 2017), membership pales in comparison with that of premium pay network Sky, which boasts close to five million subscribers (Bayre 2017)⁵. And of these 800,000 subscribers to Netflix in Italy (or Netflix’s 110 million global users), it is impossible to know many actually watch the series, as Netflix, like other streaming providers Amazon and Hulu, keeps such ratings data to themselves (Koblin 2017)⁶. Also, as of writing, it is still early in the game, and it is possible that further coverage through reviews, critical essays, and fan blogs, coupled with the recent announcements of a guaranteed second season and talk of a third, might bring greater attention to the series, possibly resulting in greater scrutiny (Leonardi 2017).

As it stands, the coverage I have encountered (and there is not much) that links contemporary criminality with the series is almost lackadaisical in tone, and straightforwardly mentions that the series is inspired by real-life events: “Ostia, una Suburra vista mare / Ostia, Suburra with a sea view” (Haver 2017); “The growing lawlessness in the Roman municipality inspired the plotline for the Netflix series *Suburra*” (Nadeau 2017); or “Ostia come Suburra, la zona malfamata cuore dell’Urbe televisiva piena di bordelli e bettole poco raccomandabili / Ostia like Suburra, the infamous area of the television capital full of disreputable brothels and dives”

miniseries is interested in making a profit off real lives lost and demonstrates a lack of respect for victims and their families while urging young spectators down the path of crime. The *Faccia d’angelo* letter queries, “ma cosa può succedere se una persona fragile assiste a tale mitizzazione di personaggi negativi, o se lo spettatore è un adolescente, persona immatura / but what could happen if someone who is fragile watches this mythologization of negative characters, or if the viewer is an adolescent, or immature” and points out that baby gangs (gangs composed of young kids) watch *Vallanzasca*, *Uno bianco*, and *Il capo dei capi*, texts which are “capaci di caricarli e motivarli prima della consumazione del reato / capable of psyching them up and motivating them before they commit a crime” (Piantadosi 2012). On the “morality” of *Romanzo criminale: la serie*, and a discussion of the controversy surrounding “negative role models” in the series, see Boni (2014: 31-5). For a take on the many polemics surrounding representing history in *Gomorra. La serie* see Renga (2016).

5 As of June 30, 2017, Sky reports 4.78 million subscribers (Bayre 2017).

6 For more on the “Netflix Effect” as relating to consumption, marketing, media convergence, and constructed audiences, see McDonald and Smith-Rowsey (2016).

(Haver 2017), a statement which directly links the oceanside neighborhood with the lower-class ancient Roman suburb “Subura” known for its red light district. Such an anti-critical tone mirrors the resigned reactions that local residents have to elevated crime in the area. For example, one woman flatly notes that local youth enter organized crime as these networks offer the only viable option for getting by (Nafeau 2017). This attitude stands in juxtaposition to the calls for arms voiced by detractors of *Gomorra. La serie*, where protesters are primarily concerned with how the series might equate several Campanian cities with the camorra, or are infuriated that Roberto Saviano, author of the book *Gomorra* (2006) and co-creator of *Gomorra. La serie*, might be getting rich off the criminal organization while exploiting the residents of Naples and Scampia⁷.

Suburra. La serie is also conspicuous from the much-debated Sky counterparts *Romanzo criminale. La serie*, *Faccia d’angelo*, and *Gomorra. La serie* for its explicit narrative focus on church and state corruption. While it is clear that gangsters enter into affairs with politicians, the police, or an array of legitimate businesses in these other programs, their narratives focus principally on the lives and loves of gangsters. (In *Gomorra. La serie*, for example, politicians and agents of the law figure little, if at all, in the majority of episodes, and in *Faccia d’angelo* police investigators are represented as upstanding citizens consumed with bringing the protagonist to justice.) Instead, the narrative of *Suburra. La serie* is divided between the triumvirate’s romances, bromances, and criminal endeavors, and the flagrant venalities at work in the Vatican and in parliament. This narrative focus is clear in the storyline of Amadeo Cinaglia (Filippo Nigro), a seemingly incorruptible left-wing politician who, without much prodding, goes into business with Samurai. Thus, Aureliano, Spadino, and Lele are cast as the lesser evils when set against a crooked national body.

Further, *Gomorra. La serie* is about the city of Scampia, and directly engages stakeholders who respond quite negatively and vehemently to what is perceived as a negative representation of the city. On the contrary, most of *Suburra. La serie* that relates to the criminal trio is shot in nonspecific locations, and the depiction of criminality is more directly associated with church (the Vatican) and state (several political offices). Also, *Romanzo criminale. La serie* witnessed a publicity campaign around the slogan “il crimine paga / crime pays” that enraged constituencies and provoked protest. A

7 For more on the protests surrounding the series and Saviano’s involvement in it, see Renga (2016: 287-9).

series of four posters appeared in cities throughout Italy that featured the faces of Freddo, Libanese, Dandi, and Patrizia. To the right of each appeared the wording “io ho rubato / I stole” (Freddo), “io ho ammazzato / I killed” (Libanese), “io ho spacciato / I dealt drugs” (Dandi), and “mi sono venduta / I sold myself” (Patrizia), with “il crimine paga” featuring under the wording “Romanzo criminale la serie”⁸.

Those behind the creation and promotion of *Suburra. La serie* do not appear concerned about any polemics that might result from the series’ perceived mimetic take on daily life, and instead make the most out of recent malfeasant developments in the capital. Leading up to the October 6, 2017 release of *Suburra. La serie*, Netflix launched a publicity campaign on Twitter and Facebook that blatantly foregrounded the parallels between the subject of the fiction and contemporary, real-life events in and around Rome. On October 4, both networking services featured the game “Suburra vs.

Reality”. “La realtà dei fatti spesso è più sconcertante della finzione / The reality of events is often more disconcerting than fiction” proclaims the post that challenges fans to discern whether a set of five newspaper headlines correspond to “Suburra” or “la Realtà”. Stories – of which there are about twenty or so to choose from – involve the arrest of corrupt politicians, gangland fights, homicides, suicides, the discovery of the bodies of a priest and an “uomo asiatico / Asian man”, drug trafficking, prostitution, the arrest of two Sinti men, and homeless camps around the Vatican (Facebook 2017c). Based upon the score received (zero to five correct), players receive derisive, encouraging, or congratulatory messages from leading antiheroes Aureliano and Spadino, who look out towards and speak directly to viewers – with a perfect score, Aureliano exclaims “Bravo, tu sai come si amministra Roma / Well done, you know how Rome is run”, while with only two correct, Spadino scoffs “non hai voluto fare le cose con calma / you didn’t want to take your time!”

In addition to the game, the Twitter page includes several tweets prompting users to reflect upon topics that include

8 Three of these posters – of Libanese, Freddo, and Patrizia – can be found online at “Il crimine paga” (2010).



FIGURE 1. SUBURRA. LA SERIE VS. REALITY

the history of Rome, contemporary politics, corruption in church and state, and local mafia activity and arrests – one post from the day before the series’ premiere references a contemporary article in the leading newspaper *La Repubblica* that includes the tagline “Ostia laboratorio politico-criminale / Ostia political-criminal laboratory” (Angeli 2017) while another from September 28 links to an article about the arrest for money laundering of a member of the Roman mafia the Banda della Magliana (La Repubblica 2017). Interestingly, these posts are not included on the much more popular Facebook page, which might hint that the network is being cautious regarding marketing strategies with a potential backlash – as of December 27, 2017 the official Twitter page @SuburraNetflix has only 1,977 followers (Twitter 2017a) compared with the Facebook page’s 37,847 followers on the same day (Facebook 2017b). Many debates have ensued on social media and blogging sites surrounding what many feel is a glamorized representation of the Roman criminal gang the Banda della Magliana in the *Romanzo criminale* series, and found that users have conflicted, and even angry, reactions to content that equates historical fact and fiction (Renga 2017). It is interesting that protests against both Facebook and Twitter posts *Suburra. La serie* that present the villains of *Suburra. La serie* as alluring, or which conflate real-life events with the series’ fiction, are nonexistent. Rather than voice concern about the dangers of casting perpetrators in a fascinating light, users comment on Borghi’s beauty and Spadino’s dance moves, or they encourage friends to watch and comment on the series, commend it for a job well-done, debate its merits or criticize the subtitling. Also, they laud the actors’ abilities, express a desire for a second season, ask advice as to where to purchase Aureliano’s sunglasses, worry that the series might act as a spoiler for the film. Or, as I discuss in detail later, enthusiastically discuss the obvious chemistry between Aureliano and Spadino.

One commenter remarks under the “Suburra vs. reality” post, “la realtà ha da tempo superato l’immaginazione / for a while now, reality has surpassed the imagination” (enric0.v, October 4, 2017, comment on Twitter 2017b). This straightforward tone is also apparent across the reception of the series, fan interactions with web-based content, and the coverage of recent criminal events in Rome and Ostia. Unlike the 2015 film, the Netflix series has (as yet) sidestepped the protests surrounding other popular, recent series and miniseries with a criminal focus, all the while featuring Spadino, an attractive, queer protagonist who is not reduced to a cliché, punished, or alienated from the narrative. Indeed, *Suburra.*

La serie has “rivoluziona[to] la tv / revolutionized tv” in Italy in more ways than one (Pasquini 2017).

4. “THE ALLURE OF EVIL”

Suburra. La serie’s leading bad men Aureliano, Spadino, and Lele add to the influx of sympathetic perpetrators – criminals, mobsters, corrupt politicians – who have flooded small Italian screens over the last ten years or so on the networks RAI, Mediaset, and Sky.⁹ It is interesting however, that, unlike in the American model, the majority of Italian serial televisual offenders in central roles are conventionally attractive¹⁰. As Jason Mittell notes, with the exception of Jon Hamm’s Don Draper from *Mad Men* (2007-2015), the charisma of “[Tony] Soprano or [Vic] Mackey [from *The Shield*] shines through despite, rather than because of, their appearance” (Mittell 2010). This is not the case in Italian series focusing on criminal antiheroes, where good looks are the rule and not the exception (one review of *Suburra. La serie* underlines that all of the men on the show are “incredibly handsome”, extolling to viewers “seriously, take a look at these hunks” (Collins 2017). The choice to craft arresting antiheroes contributes to their criminal allure while offering an intriguing take on discourses surrounding the crisis of masculinity so prominent in contemporary screen studies scholarship¹¹. Further, while the narratives of most American productions such as *House of Cards* (2013-) or *Dexter* (2006-2013) are (with a few exceptions)

9 Take, for example, the Sky series and miniseries *Romanzo criminale. La serie, Faccia d’angelo, Gomorra. La serie*, and *1992 and 1993* (2015-); the Mediaset programs *L’onore e il rispetto* (*Honor and Respect*, 2006 -2017), *Il capo dei capi*, 2007), and *Il clan dei camorristi* (*The Camorra Clan*, 2013); or the RAI series *L’ultimo dei Corleonesi* (*The Last of the Corleonesi*, 2007), all of which feature villains played by conventionally attractive actors.

10 One clear exception is *True Blood*’s Bill Compton (Stephen Moyer) and Eric Northman (Alexander Skarsgard). Attractive televisual vampires are on the rise these days, and good looks is a standard for the vampire genre, and this quality adds to their allure. In her study of vampire fiction, Ananya Mukherjea notes that recent incarnations of vampires are “fantastically flawless” (Mukherjea 2011: 12) while Ruth La Ferla points out that recent onscreen vampires have never before “looked so sultry – or camera ready [...] Bela Lugosi they are not” (La Ferla 2009). Another anomaly is Jaime Lannister (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) from the ensemble series *Game of Thrones* (2011-). However, he does not occupy the central role of narrative action as happens with the American criminal offenders discussed above.

11 Catherine O’Rawe’s *Stars and Masculinities in Contemporary Italian Cinema* offers the most thorough and thought-provoking treatment of onscreen crisis masculinity in the Italian context. See in particular pp. 1-10 of the introduction, chapters 1, 2, and 3, and the afterward (O’Rawe 2014). Also in the Italian context see Sergio Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema: Sexual Politics, Social Conflict, and Male Crisis in the 1970s* (2014).

purely fictional, this is not the case in the Italy where the bulk of more recent Italian series are based upon historical figures and actual organized crime networks or important, real-life events¹². Italian television programs featuring beautiful criminal antiheroes are growing rapidly in popularity on public, private, and pay networks and platforms. That several recent Italian television series are available internationally on the Sundance Channel, Hulu, and Netflix, and can be purchased and rented on iTunes and Amazon, speaks to their transnational appeal and growing fan base. It’s fascinating that spectators enjoy re-experiencing Italy’s painful recent history in the safety and comfort of their own homes, in visually pleasurable forms that invite compulsive viewing habits. In the Italian tradition, good looks, while adding to the allure of leading bad men, heighten interest in Italian television programs precisely because their narratives are anchored in the Italian present or recent past.

One reviewer writes, “Suburra è un’esperienza traumatica in una realtà che non vorremmo conoscere ma dalla quale non riusciamo a distogliere lo sguardo / Suburra is a traumatic experience in a reality that we would not like to experience, but that we cannot look away from” (Ahlen 2017). Such a statement gets to the heart of film and television scholarship on why viewers take pleasure in virtual relationships with fictional characters who, were they to show up at our doors, would terrify many of us, and push us to call the police. This is especially the case in Italy where a daily look at the newspaper reveals stories of corruption, clan wars, raids, drug busts and homicides, all mafia related, and which resonate with the narrative of, for example, *Suburra. La serie*. Discussed as “perverse allegiances” (Smith 1999), “sympathy for the devil” (Carrol 2004), “appealing, attractive murderer[s]” (Smith 2011), or “sympathetic allegiance [with] antiheroes” (García 2016: 70), focal antiheroes who are endowed with qualities that elicit viewer alignment are abundant in contemporary serial television programming.

Take, for example, Aureliano Adami, a key member of the gangster trio in *Suburra. La serie*, and who is the main character in the book and film. The Adami family misfit is played by Alessandro Borghi who is called “The Italian Brad Pitt” (Proietti 2016) and was chosen to be the first man to act as the “host” of the 2017 Venice Film Festival, an honor typically awarded to an Italian actress who is dubbed the “madrina / sponsor”. Borghi is described by many bloggers and reviewers as a “sex symbol”

12 American exceptions include *Deadwood* (2004-2006) and *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-2014) which include characters based upon historical figures.



Mai porgere l'altra guancia a Aureliano Adami. #SuburraNetflix
See Translation



FIGURE 2. AURELIANO ADAMI, ANGEL OF EVIL

who comes off as a “James Bond all’italiana / Italian James Bond” (Abbiadati 2017). The rising star is the center of much media attention around the series and is featured prominently on *Suburra. La serie*’s Facebook and Twitter pages, where he or his fictional counterpart Aureliano have a more prominent presence than the other characters/actors involved in the series¹³. Some images and short videos accentuate Aureliano’s dark side. For example, one post warns users to “Mai porgere l’altra guancia / Never turn the other cheek”, as Aureliano gazes seductively out towards viewers while in a super-imposed video he violently beats a rival to death. Posts also feature the following: jokes about his speedy driving, tongue in cheek how-to lessons that instruct users on how reach his “Zen” condition, warnings about never getting on his bad side, a feature on the “Aureliano Adami state of mind”, or a short video called “legami/ties” where he is shown playing with his beloved dog

13 As of December 8, 2017, seven Facebook posts are dedicated solely to Aureliano. Also, Aureliano (or Borghi) is the face of the leading image on five other posts that contain a series of individual images (such as red-carpet debuts or composites of lead characters). Further, the cover photo of the trio positions Aureliano squarely in center as is the case with the Twitter header photo (although the image is different). Conversely, Spadino is the focus of five individual posts, two dedicated to his criminal allure, and three less serious posts that discuss dissing, his dancing prowess, and table etiquette. Lele is featured on one post (Facebook 2017b).

(Facebook 2017b). User reactions to these videos are uniformly positive and enthusiastic, which makes sense insofar as the Facebook page is “liked” by a community of fans.

Aureliano Adami is a consummate example of a sympathetic perpetrator, and he is endowed with many of the characteristics that render likeable the various “hideous men” (Mittell 2014) omnipresent on small screens as of late. In *Engaging Characters*, Murray Smith underlines the processes by which viewers engage with villainous characters so as to judge them positively or negatively. The “structure of sympathy” is composed of three “levels of engagement”, which Smith calls recognition, alignment, and allegiance, components all produced by narration. The first, recognition, refers to how viewers construct characters, connect all of the dots and character traits outlined in the section above and recognize them as distinct “textual constructs” and not masses of attributes (Smith 1995: 82-83). Once we have understood characters as such, we align with them when we are given access to “their actions, and to what they know and feel”. In this way, we are privy to a lot of what they experience, and we see them interact at work, at home, with their friends, and on their own (Smith 1995: 83-4). Allegiance is the most important element for creating viewer sympathy. Audiences are able to “morally evaluate” characters only once they feel they have “reliable access to character’s state of mind” and understand what led to characters to act as they do (Smith 1995: 84). Viewers then can then form opinions about and possibly relate to characters and are complicit in their choices, whether morally sound or sordid.

Viewers might align with and feel allegiance for Aureliano for several reasons, even though he is a hard-core criminal who maims and murders many, and exhibits particular violence when killing Spadino’s cousin and his girlfriend’s pimp, and even murders his good friend Lele’s father. First off, we get to know Aureliano quite well, as we see him in several spaces and contexts: at the gym while boxing, swimming or brooding alone, playing with his dog at the beach, arguing with his sister and father, developing intimate friendships with Lele and Spadino and rivalries with Samurai and Sara Monaschi (Claudia Gerini), who works for the Vatican and is manipulated by several key players in the Ostia deal. Although he is spoken about by his father and Samurai as the least adept of the Adami siblings, he is positioned as the clear leader of the trio and is physically fit and clever in his criminal enterprises (although not incredibly successful), and he moves up the chain of command by the end of the season when Samurai accepts his position and cuts him in on the deal. He also falls in love

with Isabelle (Lorena Cesarini), a prostitute from Senegal who, in a very stereotypical fashion, he attempts to rescue but cannot as she is murdered by his vindictive sister Livia. Isabelle’s death endows Aureliano with further pathos while vilifying Livia. Further, he has a compelling backstory that marks him as a tragic figure – his mother died giving birth to him, and his father resents him as a result. Like most recent televisual anti-heroes such as Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini, *The Sopranos*, 1999-2007) or Ciriaco De Muro (Marco D’Amore, *Gomorra. La serie*), Aureliano has father issues, and endeavors to take his father’s place so that he can come-of-age in the streets on his own terms. Perhaps most importantly, Aureliano struggles with his criminal dark side, and unlike Samurai, Manfredi Anacleti, or his sister, is not at ease harming or murdering people who he feels do not deserve it. (He even refuses to abandon his dog, even though keeping the animal makes him vulnerable as it ties him to a murder.) Aureliano suffers over and over again: he cries, looks bereft, and experiences what is best described as existential angst when confronted with what he feels is his solitary position in life. In the words of Jessica Page Morrell, “here is the trick with creating anti-heroes: They always possess an underlying pathos” (2014: 143).

As do many actors, Borghi is involved in the dissemination of story-lines about his character that might engage viewers and push them to consider the complexity of Aureliano’s persona. The rising Italian star recounts to an interviewer that *Suburra. La serie* is not interested in just showing the “lati cattivi / negative sides” and “aspetti brutti / ugly aspects” of characters, but instead strives to narrate a “momento di umanità / moment of humanity” that frequently (and paradoxically) is juxtaposed with violent scenes (Vitali 2017). However, Giacomo Ferrara (who plays Spadino) disagrees with Borghi, and hopes that viewers will have a more Manichean reaction to *Suburra. La serie*’s the series’ characters, and will be disgusted by them (“facciano schifo”), and not follow in their footsteps (Fumarola 2017). Such responses by those involved in the production of programs featuring glamorized representations of criminality are common, as actors, showrunners, creators, or producers work to preempt debates and polemics potentially spurred by what victims, activists, or average citizens might perceive as irresponsible representations of alluring delinquents¹⁴. In the same interview however, Ferrara discusses the difficulties of interpreting Spadino

14 For example, Roberto Saviano advocates for *Gomorra. La serie*’s “realism” and foregrounds the series’ ethical dimension that might push viewers towards engagement in the antimafia struggle (Renga 2016: 289).

without transforming him into a “macchietta / caricature” and notes that he worked hard to make the character nuanced, a move that counters Ferrara’s earlier statement regarding the loathsome quality of the characters in the series (Fumarola 2017). In many ways Spadino is quite nuanced, and, as I will now discuss, engenders the first gay sympathetic perpetrator in a central role in the Italian small screen tradition.

5. “MEET THE FAIRY GODFATHER”

Before *Suburra. La serie*, Italian premium serial television was reluctant to feature gay or queer characters, and any minor gay characters are represented as stereotyped, closeted, under-developed, or their perceived “deviant” behaviors resulted in their being ostracized or killed off (and this is the case, with few exceptions, for mainstream Italian television)¹⁵. For example, in *Romanzo criminale. La serie* the only openly gay character, Ranocchia, has a minor role and is bullied by main male protagonist Dandi; he also develops a fatal illness that Catherine O’Rawe notes is “coded as AIDS” and speaks to an “anxiety about contamination” running throughout the series (O’Rawe 2014: 131). *1992/1993* introduces a few minor gay characters, some with HIV/AIDS, and one closeted politician representing the extreme right regionalist and federalist Northern League, whose sexual dalliance result in his being blackmailed. The series focuses, however, on a white, straight character named Luca, who contracts HIV because he is unknowingly exposed to tainted blood; he is represented as a martyr figure whose suffering is foregrounded. Finally, one episode of each of *Gomorra. La serie*’s first two seasons focuses on a different transgender character, both of whom are quite developed. In the end, however, one character named Luca is murdered and the other called Nina is publicly shamed and then abandoned before being left to suffer in melancholy. Conversely, *Suburra. La serie* is genuinely interested in exploring the complexities of what it means to be gay if “sei

l’erede di una famiglia mafiosa in ascesa / you are the heir to a rising mafia family” (Corsi 2017)¹⁶.

The character of Spadino in *Suburra. La serie* is a sui generis queer protagonist in the Italian small screen tradition, both in terms of his representation within the series and how he is marketed and received extra-diegetically. Viewers learn that Spadino is gay early on in the first episode (“21 Days”, 1.01), when he speaks unhappily with his mother about his impending arranged marriage with Angelica (Carlotta Antonelli), the daughter of another Sinti clan boss. To console him, she tells him in Sinti: “I know what you are. I understand”. He asks her what that is. “What you are,” she replies, “whatever you are, you can’t be that here, in this house, in this family. You can’t.” For the first time in the series, we get the melodramatic theme music that will serve as a motif underlining the sadness, longing, and distress frequently felt by Aureliano, Spadino, and Lele, and is heard in particular when Aureliano and Spadino feel bereft about the direction in which their lives are heading. The second time we hear the music, for example, is two minutes later when Spadino drives to a gay cruising area, but cannot bring himself to pick up a man who – with his piercing eyes and bleached blond hair – strikingly resembles Aureliano.

The representation of Spadino is “Totalmente lontano dai soliti cliché LGBT a cui la televisione italiana ha spesso abituato i suoi spettatori / completely distant from the typical LGBT clichés that Italian television frequently accustoms viewers” (Boni 2017). *Suburra. La serie* makes overt its queer themes from the beginning, and each episode develops Spadino’s storyline. In particular, across the first four episodes, Spadino’s angst at having to live in the closet is obvious, as is his discomfort with the arranged marriage and his developing attraction towards Aureliano, the chemistry between the two men increasing with every episode. The focus of “The She-Wolf” (1.05) is the gauche wedding ceremony complete with a mock-up of the Trevi Fountain which is followed by Spadino’s unwillingness to consummate the marriage (he instead cuts his arm with a dagger to simulate the virginal blood on the sheets).

15 Andrea Jelardi and Giordano Bassetti’s *Queer TV: Omosessualità e trasgressione nella televisione italiana* offers the most comprehensive overview of the representation of gay and queer characters in Italian television through the mid-2000s. The authors note that although more gay characters feature on Italian screens in the 1990s and 2000s, for the most part, and with minor exceptions, they are stereotyped and have minor roles (Jelardi and Bassetti 2006). Luca Malici authored an enthralling study of audience reception to the heightened visibility of GLBT individuals on Italian television in the 1990s and 2000s. Akin to Jelardi and Bassetti, Malici notes that although the “televisibility” of GLBT characters has “increased exponentially” in Italy, such representations are “problematic in terms of both quality and quantity” (Malici 2014: 189).

16 *Suburra. La serie* is a queer text not only due to its focus on a gay gangster. For one, the beach in Ostia, the location of the violent murder of Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1975, is a central space of homosocial bonding and mourning for Lele, Spadino, and Aureliano. In her writings on the film and series *Romanzo criminale*, Catherine O’Rawe discusses the beach as an “exclusively homosocial space” that is haunted by the nostalgic yearning for an impossible “recuperation of a group masculinity” (O’Rawe 2014: 101-2). Similarly, in *Suburra. La serie*, while at the beach male characters revel in their arrested development, choosing friends over girlfriends, and thus forestalling (as long as possible) the entrance into adulthood. Such gestures recall Halberstam’s discussion of an “extended adolescence of nonreproductive queer subcultural participants that [...] offers alternative life narratives” (Halberstam 2005: 175).



Gira voce che Anacleti e Adami stanno a fa' impicci. #SuburraNetflix

See Translation



FIGURE 3. SPADINO'S PATHOS

In “Garlic, Oil, and Chili Pepper” (1.06) the homoerotic nature of the Spadino-Aureliano relationship is made manifest as the pair takes a road trip during which they further bond while relaxing in a thermal hot spring where they rub mud on one another’s backs (this episode is a favorite with fans who “ship” or “root for” / “believe in” the Spadino/Aureliano relationship, as I discuss later). In the following two episodes, Spadino is ever more frustrated with his forced union until Angelica spies on him while he meets with Aureliano and she easily guesses that her husband is in love with a man, at which point she attempts to blackmail him, telling him that she will keep his secret if he impregnates her. In the penultimate episode “Pitch Black” (1.09), Spadino’s euphoria at having finally stood up to his family leads him to kiss Aureliano who then turns on Spadino, and insults him with homophobic slurs. In the final episode “Call It Sleep” (1.10), Spadino comes into his own, takes over his family, and has sex with Angelica so as to maintain his pater familias status. This scene is particularly touching as Angelica gently assists helps Spadino have sex with her, as he grimaces and is patently discomfited. In their final confrontation, Spadino does not kill Aureliano when he has the chance (nor does Aureliano kill Spadino when he has

a clear shot). Spadino tells his friend that he knows who he is and does not have to prove anything to anyone, as he is a “zingaro e un froc** / a gypsy and a fa***t”. Spadino’s narrative concludes when he confidently picks up the Aureliano-doppelganger prostitute and drives off in his luxury car¹⁷.

Like Aureliano, Spadino is presented as a compassionate and complex figure. (The same is also true of Lele, but to a lesser extent, as he is given less screen time.) Aureliano’s ill deeds pale in comparison with those of his two friends, each of whom, for example, murders the other’s father. Born into a family that will never accept him, he struggles with filial ascension and is set up in contrast with his older brother Manfredi, who is cruel, unsympathetic, lecherous, and follows antiquated patriarchal customs. For example, before Spadino meets his betrothed, Manfredi forces him to kill a sheep, a violent and outdated ritual with which Spadino is clearly at odds¹⁸. Unlike Aureliano and Lele, Spadino does not commit murder and refuses to “be a man” in the way his mother orders, instead preferring to spend his time playing and plotting with his friends, or in his club dancing. One reviewer notes that Spadino’s “joyous, snake-hipped” dancing marks “his only true moments of freedom” (Feay 2017). I would add to this his intimate bonding with Aureliano, his affinity for music, or his day in the city center with Angelica where they disrupt diners at a five-star restaurant in Rome’s most affluent shopping district and gleefully run off without paying their tab¹⁹. Like his criminal counterparts, Spadino suffers profoundly and openly weeps. All this, coupled with his charisma and good looks, endow him with pathos and prompt viewers to respond positively towards him.

Reactions to Spadino and the Spadino/Aureliano coupling in reviews, blog sites, and in comments to Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube posts are plentiful and consistently positive, and speak to the “participatory culture” of online communities (Jenkins et. al. 2009):

17 Many reviewers and fans comment on the manifest gayness of the series, for example Emanuel Amabilis who lists the “10 momenti più gay di Suburra / 10 gayest moments in Suburra” (Amabilis 2017).

18 The representation of the Sinti families in the series is quite stereotypical. For specifics, see Carradori (2017).

19 This scene seems inspired from Francesca Comencini’s *Una giornata speciale* (A Special Day, 2012) where the two youthful main protagonists steal a dress from a posh designer shop Via dei Condotti and run off into the crowd (Angelica and Spadino are in the same area). Danielle Hipkins offers an intriguing reading of this scene in the Comencini film in terms of “lines of flight” that, citing the work of Jessica Ringrose and Emma Renold, disrupt “normative, oppressive boundaries of (working-class) femininity” (Hipkins 2016: 30). With this scene, *Suburra. La serie* critiques “normative oppressive boundaries of” heteronormativity.

bellissimo! Adoro questi due, non ci sono parole per descrivere quanto li ami. Spadino è il primo personaggio gay che si distacca dalla classica figura caricaturale e parodistica a cui ci ha abituato la televisione italiana, e merita, merita un sacco [...] spero che gli autori saranno coraggiosi abbastanza da continuare ad approfondire la loro relazione e magari, chissà, a regalarci anche mezza gioia.

beautiful! I adore these two, there are no words to describe how much I love them. Spadino is the first gay character who is distanced from the classic caricatured and parodic figure that Italian television has gotten us used to, and this really, really means something [...] I hope that the authors will be courageous enough to continue to deepen their relationship and maybe, who knows, gift us with a little happiness. (User comment to BloodlessAgain 2017)

In un mondo fatto di machismo a go-go come quello dei malavitosi, suona ironico e sicuramente soddisfacente che sia proprio un personaggio gay ad essere il *più uomo*. Spadino, infatti, è quello che più di tutti gli altri realizza un percorso di maturazione e affermazione complete [...] Adesso abbiamo un mafioso gay intelligente e incasinato quanto quello etero, felice e triste quanto quello etero e, secondo le limitanti logiche di genere di questi mondi, *maschio* come la controparte eterosessuale.

In the super macho criminal world, it sounds ironic and surely satisfying that it is precisely a gay character who is the *most manly*. In fact, Spadino, more than anyone else, realizes a complete journey of maturation and affirmation. Now we have a mafioso who is as gay intelligent and screwed up as a straight mafioso, as happy and sad as a straight mafioso, and, according to the limiting gender logic of this world, as *masculine* as his heterosexual counterpart. (Romano 2017)

“Meet the fairy godfather” is the tagline of an English-language review that lauds the Netflix series for putting forward a “sexy, stylish gay mobster” who is the craftiest of the triad and is “more gangster” possibly due to his “double minority status” (Reddish 2017) as both Sinti and gay, a position that leads him to develop survival skills that allow him to get

ahead, and even thrive, in seemingly impossible circumstances. In terms of character complexity and allure, Spadino gives onscreen white male criminal figures such as Tony Soprano, Walter White (Bryan Cranston), and Ciriaco De Marco a run for their money²⁰.

Netflix is not at all shy in drawing attention to Spadino’s sexuality and to the erotic nature of the Spadino/Aureliano relationship. For example, on October 21, 2017 Netflix posted a video called “Gira voce che Anacleti e Adami stanno a fa’ impicci / Word is spreading that Anacleti and Adami are getting into trouble” to the official Twitter and Facebook sites. The forty-eight second video is composed of eighteen Spadino/Aureliano moments, the majority of which we see the pair laugh, bond, look meaningfully at one another, enjoy a plate of pasta or soak in a thermal hot spring. In a few other clips, Spadino breaks down or wistfully smells Aureliano’s sweater, and in one moment Aureliano lies in bed with his girlfriend. The post is accompanied by the love song *It’s You* by Martha

20 Fans on official Netflix sites privilege Spadino to Aureliano. After the trailer and the Aureliano/Spadino post I discuss in the following paragraph, the two most popular Facebook posts in terms of “likes”, “shares”, and “comments” are devoted to Spadino / Ferrara (Facebook 2017b).

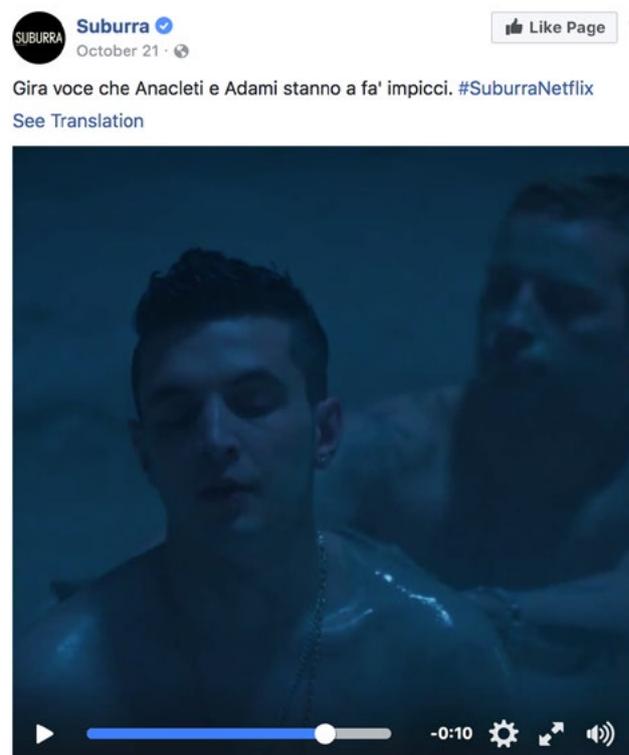


FIGURE 4. MALE BONDING



Suburra

October 21 · 🌐

Like Page

Gira voce che Anacleto e Adami stanno a fa' impicci. #SuburraNetflix

See Translation

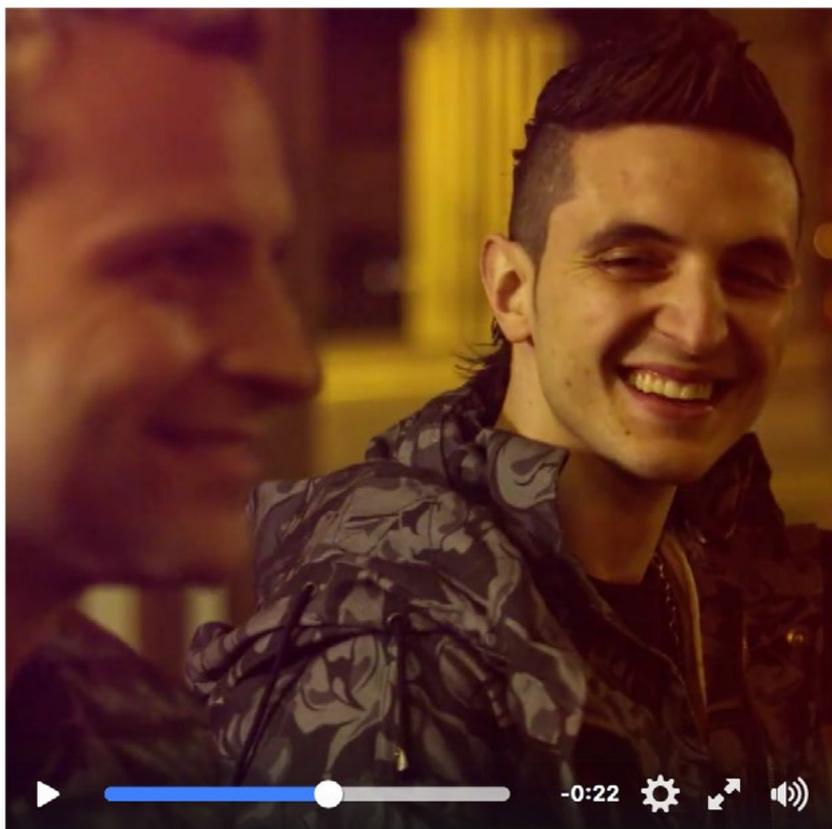


FIGURE 5: “THE COUPLE OF THE YEAR”

Bean and Chris Lewis that is on the soundtrack to Netflix’s first Spanish original series *Las chicas del cable / Cable Girls*, a period drama set in the 1920s that focuses on female bonding and has queer themes, and which develops intimate relationships between key female protagonists²¹. In this way, the *Suburra. La serie* video has a transnational appeal. The series’ address to viewers across the globe who are attracted to queer programming might also be heightened considering that Spadino is the second gay criminal character featured in a 2017 Netflix production, the first being the openly gay and powerful drug

21 The series has a vast fan-base, and many fans have created videos, blogs, and websites devoted to the Carlotta/Sara coupling (for one example of many, see the Tumblr blog “carlotasara”).

trafficker Helmer “Pacho” Herrera in the American Netflix production *Narcos*, a character who is “revolutionizing what it means to be a powerful gay man” (Friedlander 2017).

At the same time, the video speaks to a national fan-base by including quotations from the Twitter posts of four fans, which read:

“Patrimonio internazionale / International patrimony” @lifewithbi

“La coppia dell’anno / The couple of the year” @pearsephona

“Romeo e giulietta chi? / Romeo and Juliet who?” @pinkplumcake

“Shippo Aureliano e Spadino e non mi pento di niente / I ship Aureliano and Spadino and I do not at all feel badly about it” @Helactras²²

Of the more than fifty posts on the Facebook site (as of the time of writing) the Spadino/Aureliano post is the third most popular in terms of “likes” (more than 4000) and fourth most favored according to “shares” (almost 500) and “comments” (all 695 of which are affirmative). Such contributions by the network promote a form of what Jason Mittell calls “forensic fandom that invites viewers to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of the story and its telling” (Mittell no date)²³.

Netflix’s advertising campaign regarding the Spadino/Aureliano coupling might imply that the service is attempting to gain access to, in Suzanne Danuta Walters’ words, the “gay market” which is a “commodity” ready to be exploited for capitalist profit (Walters 2001: 254). However, the queer response to the series emphasizes an “unsettling of the mainstream” that

22 Each of the original posts are easily found with a Twitter search.

23 Admirers of the series and the Aureliano/Spadino storyline have created their own videos and web pages promoting the relationship, such as the remediated YouTube video “Aureliano + Spadino shining lights are placed in the dark” by BloodlessAgain (2017). These paratexts enlarge the original series, reaching broad audiences with diverse viewing preferences. In the words of Marta Boni, such paratexts, “perform operations which reframe the experience of the fictional universe, adapted to the times and contexts in which they appear” (Boni 2014: 111).

is central to the project of queer television studies (Joyrich 2014: 133). Lynne Joyrich argues that television queerness can be both reactionary and progressive, both “the electrical spark and the grounding against any possible shock”. This paradox is at play in *Suburra. La serie* as the Spadino storyline marks a “piccola rivoluzione / small revolution” (Romano 2017) in the representation of LGBT characters in Italian small screen programming, even though his popularity is most certainly bolstered by his association with a series of routine conventions used in Sky programs to represent criminal antiheroes (i.e. they are attractive, glamorous, white, and engage in deep bromances). Concomitantly, *Suburra. La serie* engages international viewers who turn to streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime – both of which have developed a significant reputation for producing serial dramas featuring sympathetic LGBT characters (i.e. Netflix’s *Sense8*, 2015-2018, and Amazon Prime’s *Transparent*, 2014-).

With *Suburra. La serie*, Netflix uses dependable production and marketing strategies to hook a sizable international viewership. Such tactics do not negate the series’ potential as a queer text. Alexander Doty notes, “queer reception (and production) practices can include everything from the reactionary to the radical to the indeterminate”. Queer reception is anti-essentializing (someone might identify to one’s family or friends one way, yet “queerly experience” a media product in quite a different fashion) (Doty 1993: 15). Sara Ahmed points out that while compulsory heterosexuality is socially comfortable (and is structured around weddings, childbirth, labor, death), it is by no means mandatory. She argues that when queer bodies push against “narratives of ideal heterosexuality” (Ahmed 2014: 146) there is a potential to rework the heteronormative. She writes: “The hope of queer is that the reshaping of bodies through the enjoyment of what or who has been barred can ‘impress’ differently upon the surfaces of social space, creating the possibility of social forms that are not constrained by the form of the heterosexual couple”. Thus, queer can be highly revolutionary when positioned nearby heteronormativity, and the “hope of queer politics” involves transformed modes of being with others (Ahmed 2014: 165). The representation of Spadino, and the circulation and reception of the queer Spadino/Aureliano videos, both official and fan-based, certainly endorse such a progressive position.

6. CONCLUSION: “BRUTAL MASCULINITY”

In the Italian mainstream television tradition, *Suburra. La serie*’s representation of a gay male character is revolutionary.

With its overt queer subtext, *Suburra. La serie* is pioneering in the representation of sex and gender on Italian small screens and appeals to viewers inside and outside of Italy. At the same time, the focus on the homosocial exploits of a criminal band of brothers who attempt to make it big in Rome against a larger political and criminal backdrop might draw in, for example, fans of the Sky hit series *Romanzo criminale*, the majority of whom reside within the nation’s borders. The queer position that the series promotes, however, comes at the expense (as per usual) of women, almost all of whom are represented in problematic terms and are not put forward as characters that prompt audience alignment. With regards to the treatment of women in the Sollima film, Danielle Hipkins astutely points out how, “Quite different to the knowing and playfully extended boyhood of male characters, the preoccupation with female youth in Italian cinema gives us the disposable girl corpse of *Suburra*” (Hipkins 2017: 271). Although female characters in the series are more developed and have greater screen time and increased positions of power than the few women in the film (most of whom are prostitutes and one drug-addled girlfriend), all female characters in the series are represented as power hungry, vindictive, manipulative, or compliant to the men around them²⁴. To cite two examples among many, the only woman of color in the series is Aureliano’s girlfriend Isabelle who works as a prostitute, returns to Aureliano over and over again regardless of how poorly he treats her, and is murdered by Livia. Livia, like many of the women in the series, is coded as selfish and conniving and thus beneath the moral code of her criminal male counterparts. As a measure of her depths, Livia cold-heartedly kills Aureliano’s dog and orders her lover’s murder.

It is interesting that the only woman put forth as a positive figure is Aureliano’s mother, who we never meet as she has been dead for a few decades. Instead, as is common in contemporary quality programming, the father/son bond, and all of its nuances (becoming the father, growing up differently than the father, rebelling against the father, killing off the father) drives the story forward. As is frequently the case in male melodrama, the diverse crises experienced by youthful male protagonists are narratively central and further assist in rendering these men likable to viewers. To cite an extreme case, even Aureliano’s overt homophobia is packaged as potential-

24 For a compelling collection of essays treating criminal antiheroines in television, please see Milly Buonanno, ed. *Television Antiheroines: Women Behaving Badly in Crime and Prison Drama*. Margaret Tally notes that audiences view female antiheroines as “unlikable to varying degrees” which is not the case with male antiheroes who come off as sympathetic to viewers (Tally 2016: 7).

ly excusable when he is depicted as despondently mourning the close bond with his friend Spadino. Even though the two straight characters Lele and Spadino have love interests, the connections privileged by the series are those between men, and these “brutal masculinit[ies]” (Feay 2017), bromances, and homosocial bonds are cast as the most compelling relationships, which – according to the thousands of fan blogs and posts that I consulted – engage gay, straight, lesbian, and bisexual audiences internationally. In this way, @lifewithbi’s post “Aureliano + Spadino patrimonio internazionale!!” is telling. The etymology of “patrimony” relates to “social organization defined by male dominance or relationship through the male line” (Oxford English Dictionary). In *Suburra. La serie*, male power and patrilineal succession are front and center, regardless of who is looking at, and liking, who.



FIGURE 6. “INTERNATIONAL PATRIMONY” AND *SUBURRA. LA SERIE*’S TRANSNATIONAL ADDRESS

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 1993 (2017)
Boardwalk Empire (2010-2014)
Il capo dei capi (2007)
Las chicas del cable (2017-)
Il clan dei camorristi (*The Camorra Clan*, 2013)
Deadwood (2004-2006)
Dexter (2006-2013)
Faccia d'angelo (*Angel Face*, 2012)

Game of Thrones (2011-)
Una giornata speciale (A Special Day, 2012)
The Godfather (1972)
Gomorra (2006)
Gomorra. La serie (Gomorra. The Series, 2014-)
House of Cards (2013-)
Mad Men (2007-2015)
Narcos (2015-)
L'onore e il rispetto (Honor and Respect, 2006-2017)
Romanzo criminale. La serie (2008-2010)
Sense8 (2015-2018)
The Sopranos (1999-2007)
Suburra. La serie (2017-)
Transparent (2014-)
True Blood (2008-2014)
L'ultimo dei Corleonesi (The Last of the Corleonesi, 2007)
Uno bianca (2001)
Vallanzasca (2010)