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The American Dream in *The Godfather* Trilogy
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- 1) Puzo, Mario. The Godfather. New York: Putnam, 1969.
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1 Introduction

The iconic *Godfather* saga was the outcome of fruitful cooperation between Mario Puzo and Francis F. Coppola which left a prominent mark in the field of popular culture. Not only it opened doors for countless mob narratives, such as *The Sopranos* or *The Goodfellas*, and signified a change in the roles of protagonists from good guys to anti-heroes, but it also served as the reflection of the Italian-American culture from the era of the mass immigration to the United States. The trilogy is especially remarkable for its vast scope ranging from accurately depicted ethnic background and insight to the mafia to the sheer criticism of capitalism and the ‘rags-to-riches’ phenomenon. Released during the disillusioned period of the Vietnam War and Watergate, the book and the first two movies reached outstanding commercial and critical success, regardless the disapproval of American values embedded in the core of the story.

My aim is to concentrate on the American Dream from the perspectives of Vito and Michael Corleone, both of which epitomized the polar opposites in the terms of life aspirations. The majority of my thesis will be dedicated to the character of Vito Corleone. Through the notion of success, Puzo and Coppola managed to underline the differences between first-generation immigrants influenced by an Italian inclination towards a family and Americanized second generation which abandoned the ideology of their parents for consumerism.

At the beginning of the thesis, the era of the third wave immigration will be commented on along with its brief history followed by the Italian ethnicity in greater detail. With respect to the portrayal in the story, aspects such as Sicilian history or situation in the United States will be analysed. In the next chapter, I will explore the definition of success for Vito who exercised steep upward mobility while staying loyal to the Italian traditions. The enclosing part is structured around the criticism of the American institutions and the denial of the American Dream from the standpoints of Vito and Michael.

2 American Immigration

In order to understand the significance of the American Dream in *The Godfather* trilogy, it is crucial to examine Vito Corleone's progress towards organized crime during the era of mass immigration. A considerable portion of the story is occupied with the rise from poor conditions to financial and political power of Don Corleone acting as the embodiment of 'rags to riches' phenomenon. The first chapter will focus on the history of modern immigration to the United States, more specifically the Ellis Island period (late 19th century-1950s). With general information stated, the Italian wave will be specified in terms of emigration stimulus, the initial situation in the United States, and gradual decline of ethnicity. These historical aspects will be compared accordingly with their representations within the story.

2.1 The History of the Modern American Immigration

Italians were an inseparable part of the third and the largest immigration wave to the United States connected with the period from the 1880s up to the 1920s, the time of major social changes triggered by the industrial revolution. During this era, the United States exhibited the image of life without the Old Continent's difficulties therefore attracting millions of poor.

The third wave was the result of the industrialization in Europe and America. With the new technology, industry began to expand whilst creating new working opportunities and the consequent demand for workforce attracted the masses to towns. The society began to shift; from rural to urban-centred, which proved to be the vital contribution to the collapse of agrarian system in poverty-stricken areas such as southern Italy.¹ Besides financial difficulties, other nations were impaired by pogroms (Russia), revolutions (Mexico), or persecution (Jews).² With the lowering costs and increasing speed of transportation, due to the invention of steam ships, masses were given a chance of life in the 'New World'. This marked the beginning of the largest immigration tide with numbers around 15 million people.³

¹ Maldwyn A. Jones, *American Immigration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 199.

² "Immigration Timeline," The Statue of Liberty & Ellis Island, Accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/immigration-timeline#1880>.

³ Jones, *American Immigration*, 179.

The feature differentiating the 'new immigration' from the old one is, by virtue of mechanization, any person could operate machines with little schooling thus the demand changed from expensive specialized workers of the old immigration to the large amount of cheap and unskilled ones of southern and eastern Europe.⁴ The high influx resulted in the establishment of Ellis Island in 1892 in order to control immigration, a considerable amount of which preferred to stay in New York.⁵

Upon their arrival they had to face uneasiness including isolation, poverty, and resulting criminality. Crime in particular occurred among poor communities which failed to adapt to a new environment, especially Irish.⁶ Living conditions were severe as well; the majority had to survive in primitive, overcrowded tenement flats deprived of light and sanitation resulting in rapidly spreading diseases and high death rates.⁷ Immigrants tended to establish communities based on the local origin, language, and religion. These gatherings provided them with much needed familiarity as well as protection from the hostility of nativist movement.⁸ The best known examples of these communities are Little Italia's and Chinatowns found in major US cities such as New York, Boston, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Speaking of the workplace, initially it was rather stereotypical: predominantly manual labour; frequently employed in construction works and heavy or textile industry.⁹ In the question of why the newcomers preferred to settle in cities rather than the countryside, Jones points out several reasons:

“(…) the great mass of late-nineteenth-century immigrants could not possibly have become farmers on arrival because they were almost completely without capital. Nor was the position of farm labourer attractive to them, the language difficulty was more serious on the farm than in the factory, employment was more intermittent and the pay lower than in other forms of employment.”¹⁰

It must be mentioned the immigrants contributed largely to the country's economy boom and thus the influx remained unrestricted up to 1920s because of

⁴ Jones, *American Immigration*, 180.

⁵ "U.S. Immigration Before 1965," History.com, 2009, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.history.com/topics/u-s-immigration-before-1965>.

⁶ Jones, *American Immigration*, 211.

⁷ Jones, *American Immigration*, 224.

⁸ Jones, *American Immigration*, 136.

⁹ Jones, *American Immigration*, 217.

¹⁰ Jones, *American Immigration*, 214.

demand for workforce. However, extremely high numbers of arriving people and enduring social problems mixed with their flawed adaptation provoked the resentment among natives. The nativist movement had been prominent since the late 19th century during the third wave and peaked in the 1920's when restriction quotas came into function. Nativism criticized the crime, poverty, and illiteracy of immigrants, especially those of poor origin whom they perceived as an inferior race. One of the most extreme cases of hatred occurred in New Orleans 1890 where 11 Italians were lynched by an angry mob.¹¹ It was the result of Italian gang being accused of murder of David Hennessey, the police chief of New Orleans, which created the myth of mafia's presence in the United States.¹²

As the 20th century progressed, immigrants started to be more noticeable in politics, research and the loyalty in wars which slowly improved their reputation. Nevertheless, due to the combination of ethnic overpopulation and the associated problems, by the early 1920s nativists successfully established the reduction of immigration which marked the decline of the third wave.¹³ Not only the reduction policy, such as National Origins Quota Act of 1924, but also The Great Depression and world wars negatively affected ethnicity.¹⁴ As less people were allowed to enter the United States, ties with homelands were gradually being weakened. Additionally, the second-generation immigrants distanced from their ancestors as they started to adopt American values while having no connections with the old countries. Speaking of the Second World War, immigrant men often participated in the conflict leaving women to take care of a household. After the war, the declining ghettos were often being left for suburbs, moving then-immigrants more towards conformity as the importance of ethnicity faded.¹⁵

2.2 Italian Immigrants

The chapter will be focused on Italian immigrants who are essential for the interpretation of the American Dream within *The Godfather's* story which authentically

¹¹ George Pozzetta, "Italian americans," Countries and Their Cultures, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Ha-La/Italian-Americans.html>.

¹² James Finckenaue, *Mafia and organized crime* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 53-54.

¹³ "U.S. Immigration Before 1965," History.com, 2009, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.history.com/topics/u-s-immigration-before-1965>.

¹⁴ Frank J. Cavaoli, "Patterns of Italian Immigration to the United States," *Catholic Social Science Review* 13 (2008): 217, 219.

¹⁵ Jones, *American Immigration*, 297-299.

represents the typical environment and culture. Italians belong among the best examples of upward social mobility as the community rose from extremely poor conditions and thanks to their character and experience gained in their homeland they were able not only to adapt to life in America, but also to reshape its culture. Apart from fictional Vito Corleone, Frank Sinatra or Al Capone attained their own version of the American Dream. Owing to the latter, the ethnicity suffered considerably from the association with criminality.¹⁶ This in combination with the lack of education and the formerly complicated adaptation (due to language, skill, origin and traditions) assigned them a lesser position within the society.¹⁷ Nevertheless, throughout the 20th century their reputation has improved significantly and nowadays they are fully integrated and appreciated members.¹⁸

2.2.1 Contemporary History of Italy

In the late 19th century, Italy was greatly afflicted by economic decline; the situation reached catastrophic measures especially in the agrarian south. The resentment of modern agriculture and cultivation of the land, the following low productivity, dwindling fruit business and wine export ban made the southern Italy one of the poorest parts of Europe.¹⁹ The resulting period of economic hardship gave way for crime to become more apparent; the mafia was emerging and acquired the main influence over Sicily. Its degenerated form brought extreme poverty upon the land which is accurately portrayed in *The Godfather*.

Within the trilogy, ruined Italy appears in Vito's and Michael's storylines as they spend their time in a mafia-controlled town of Corleone in Sicily. The book and the movie instalments present an accurate insight into the life in the area, including its past and the rise of mafia as well as its evolving character and cruel practices which affected both protagonists. Being the poorest mafia-driven part of the country was the result of the history of mistreatment as M. Puzo clarifies in the 23rd chapter.

“Sicily was a land that had been more cruelly raped than any other in history.

The Inquisition had tortured rich and poor alike. The landowning barons and the

¹⁶ George Pozzetta, "Italian americans," Countries and Their Cultures, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Ha-La/Italian-Americans.html>.

¹⁷ Cavaioli, "Patterns of Italian Immigration to the United States," 216-217.

¹⁸ George Pozzetta, "Italian americans," Countries and Their Cultures, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Ha-La/Italian-Americans.html>.

¹⁹ Jones, *American Immigration*, 199.

princes of the Catholic Church exercised absolute power over the shepherds and farmers. The police were the instruments of their power and so identified with them that to be called a policeman is the foulest insult one Sicilian can hurl at another.”²⁰

This statement is supported by country’s depiction in *Dejiny Mafie* by S. Lupo; throughout the 19th century Sicily struggled with economical downfall, social unrest, and countless conflicts between families, aristocracy and government. The rising instability produced a room for the mafia to evolve whilst supplying the functions Italian administration could not provide which only deepened general disbelief in legal forces. Late 1800s is the genesis of mafia’s typical practices such as protection business, dispute settling, corruption, or use of violence.²¹

Cosa Nostra as a counter-force against the official government achieved the status of the most powerful organization on the island while exploiting the poor, restricting development, increasing the amount of violence-related deaths and providing next to none benefits in return.²² All of the aforementioned led many to emigrate from Sicily in hope for better future abroad. A portion of Sicilians transferred the mafia traditions to the United States which significantly contributed to the expansion of organized crime. The experience gained in the homeland proved to be a vital factor behind Vito’s successful pursuit of the American Dream as I will demonstrate subsequently.

2.2.2 Emigration to the United States

After emigration ban had ended in 1859 the Italian movement to the United States was on the constant climb culminating in 1914. The majority consisted of southerners for the reason that the northern Italy did not economically struggle on such extent. During the very early stages, the immigrants were mostly males whose goal was almost exclusively to earn finances. These workers did not attempt to adapt to American principles and nearly the half of them returned to the old country.²³ Besides anti-acculturation mentality, another reason for the withdrawal stemmed from the hostility of

²⁰ Mario Puzo, *The Godfather* (New York: New American Library, 2005), 311.

²¹ Salvatore Lupo and Branislav Čech, *Dejiny mafie: od jej vzniku po súčasnosť* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2002), 16, 17, 24.

²² Puzo, *The Godfather*, 309-312.

²³ Jones, *American Immigration*, 197, 200, 201.

the hosting society.²⁴ Those who stayed were later on accompanied by women and families. Typically for the third wave, the majority preferred to settle in cities where they established ethnic communities. Speaking of destinations, among others there were New York, New Jersey, Chicago, but also Louisiana, California, and Florida. The consequence of the large flow of Italians over an extensive period of time was numbers exceeding 4 million, placing them among top 5 immigrant nationalities.²⁵

In the process of arriving in the United States, Vito similarly to real-life immigrants was greeted by the Statue of Liberty. F. F. Coppola presented a glimpse of an overcrowded ship sailing by the statue for Ellis Island where inspections were being held. While Vito was passing the primary and medical inspection, he faced the language barriers, the extreme scale of 1901 immigration and the ignorance from officials as they wrongfully attached him the surname of Corleone instead of Andolini. Also, during the ‘six-second physicals’²⁶ he got mistakenly marked with ‘X within a circle’ which stood for ‘definite sign for mental disease’.²⁷ There is a discrepancy between the story and real events; the second movie depicts the protagonist quarantined for smallpox in island’s hospital in 1901, the building was, in fact, founded a year later.²⁸ Vito then, correspondingly to real-life immigrants, regrouped and proceeded to live with the relatives in neighbourhoods.

2.2.3 Neighbourhoods

In major cities, immigrants tended to congregate in specific areas establishing highly concentrated communities. Namely Italians based these communities on a region they inhabited in the former country. Needless to say, these provinces tended to bear animosity towards each other. For this reason, people initially identified themselves with the specific place rather than collectively as Italians. With New York being one of the most stand-out examples, the very first communities emerged in Lower East Side, when the Irish moved to the north. Italians then spread across the city, forming ethnic ghettos such as: Neapolitans and Calabrians in Mulberry Street, and Sicilians in Elizabeth Street both of which are a part of Little Italy. In addition, Sicilians expanded northward to Harlem; northern Italians could be found between 8th and 15th

²⁴ Michel S. Laguerre, *Diasporic Citizenship* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 41.

²⁵ Jones, *American Immigration*, 209.

²⁶ Anne E. Birn, “Six Seconds Per Eyelid: The Medical Inspection of Immigrants at Ellis Island, 1892 – 1914,” *Dynamis* 17(1997): 309.

²⁷ Barry Moreno, *Encyclopedia of Ellis Island* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 32.

²⁸ Moreno, *Encyclopedia of Ellis Island*, Chronology xxiii.

wards west to Broadway.²⁹ The story of adult Vito is connected with Hell's Kitchen where he used to grow up and work.

Young Vito's storyline between 1917 and 1920 precisely demonstrates the harsh surroundings of Italian neighbourhoods as well as the life of a stereotypical immigrant. Beginning with families cramped in insufficient tenement flats accompanied by diseases and primitive medication all as inseparable parts of their existence. Then there was starvation which made basic food such as a pear highly valuable. Desolate streets were covered in litter and full of all-age crowds in cheap clothes with an occasional truck or a horse-cart passing by. On the ground level there were food stands, theatres, restaurants and stores one of which employed Vito.

The available evidence of immigrants preferring Italian with English being heard rarely is shown during Vito's dialogues. Even though by the time he had been in the United States for over 16 years, he still used anything but simple phrases. This may suggest three aspects: first the bad quality of English language education in Italian schools, as well as no progress towards adaptation to American values, and lastly, it emphasised the sense of belonging and trust as Vito was asked whether he speaks Italian before he was handed over the guns for hiding.

Neighbourhoods like Hell's Kitchen allowed Italian culture to thrive. Many *festas* took place on the streets, celebrating important Italians such as Columbus, Dante Alighieri or religious Feast of San Rocco on 14th August during which fictional Don Fanucci was assassinated. Conversely, Italians adopted a variety of America-related customs, e.g. Christmas Eve and Santa Claus.³⁰ The combination of traditional Italian art with the new one influenced by the life in the New World is presented throughout the theatre scene featuring Italian music and language combined with contemporary problematic of immigration and detachment from the old country.

As a consequence, the resemblance to Italy boosted the immigration tide for it further enhanced America's attractiveness for emigrants.

²⁹ Jones, *American Immigration*, 223-224.

³⁰ George Pozzetta, "Italian americans," *Countries and Their Cultures*, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Ha-La/Italian-Americans.html>.

“City streets in the United States became transplanted into Italian towns and provinces, where old parochialisms, including endogamy, flourished. This situation encouraged more and more Italians to set out for America.”³¹

2.2.4 Workplace

In the terms of employment, a *padrone* system deemed to be highly influential for the unskilled new immigration. It was a method of recruiting labourers in Italy by *padrone* who closed a contract with American employers to whom the workers were shipped. The workforce ranged from children to adults and eventually this method got banned. *Padrone*'s function then changed to an employment agent who exploited on his people and as soon as their independence grew, *padrone*'s power vanished.³² Italians were then mainly employed in construction works, garment industry, and as strikebreakers.³³ Family business was as well a common phenomenon as shown in the protagonist's case who worked in grocery store belonging to his relatives Abbandandos.

The situation in the workplace was nevertheless desperate. The majority had to tackle wages insufficient to support families, discrimination caused by their ethnic origin, and limited working opportunities rooting from the lack of education and skills. During the WWI available jobs further narrowed due to a policy which preferred to employ natives.³⁴ The always-present mafia made entrepreneurship even more difficult by demanding a cut for their protection which Puzo embodied in Don Fanucci, a member of the Black Hand. Blackmailing and replacing former employees with connected people were their usual practices of controlling business. The latter is exemplified by Fanucci interested in profiting on war via imported food which could be done through assigning his relative to the store.

“During World War I, when imported olive oil became scarce, Fanucci acquired a part-interest in the Abbandando grocery store by supplying it not only with oil, but imported Italian salami, hams and cheeses. He then moved a nephew into the store and Vito Corleone found himself out of a job.”³⁵

³¹ Cavaioli, “Patterns of Italian Immigration to the United States,” 215.

³² Jones, *American Immigration*, 191-192.

³³ Jones, *American Immigration*, 220, 217, 190

³⁴ Jones, *American Immigration*, 282.

³⁵ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 184.

Similarly to non-fictional Italians, Vito proceeded to work for the railroad where the author points out discrimination coming from other nationalities and also low wages due to declining work after the war.

“He worked in the railroad for a few months and then, when the war ended, work became slow and he could earn only a few days’ pay a month. Also, most of the foremen were Irish and American and abused the workmen in the foulest language (...)”³⁶

With these conditions indifferent among the poor ethnicities, crime was becoming the common way of obtaining a livelihood. Poverty, anti-establishment attitude, and opportunity to work for thieves contributed to protagonist’s descent to organized crime.

2.2.5 Post-Immigration Era

With the introduction of immigration-limiting policies in 1920s the influx lowered drastically. Thus the heritage of the ‘old country’ began to fade; family-oriented Italian values were overshadowed by the American ones focusing on success. As seen during the 1920s and 1930s, America-born second generation of immigrants was reaching adulthood and their perspectives of life often clashed with ones of their parents. Having no ties with Italy, the American way of life started to take bigger toll on young people as they were exposed to its influence in schools, art and sport signifying a positive step towards assimilation.³⁷

For instance, the difference between generations is noticeable in the matter of woman emancipation. In the story, we can compare the treatment of Kay Corleone with Carmela Corleone. The latter, commonly referred to as ‘Don’s wife’, was the stereotypical first-generation immigrant wife occupied only with the role of housewife and mother. Carmela did not want to be involved in Vito’s work nor was she allowed to do so.

“His wife had never questioned him about the clothes he had washed the night he had murdered Fanucci. Had never asked him where all the money came from when he was not working.”³⁸

³⁶ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 185.

³⁷ Jones, *American Immigration*, 298.

³⁸ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 197.

“(…) But that doesn’t mean he tells her everything. (…)”³⁹

Compared with Americanized Michael, who atypically for second-generation Italian married New Hampshire-born Kay, allowed her to be, to certain extent, involved in his career as she could question his doings. What is more, Italian pre-marriage rules were not respected by the couple.

“(…) this one time I’m letting you ask about my affairs (…)”⁴⁰

“(…) Then we couldn’t go out to dinner, we couldn’t go to the theater, and we couldn’t sleep together tonight. Not in my father’s house, not when we’re not married.”⁴¹

The adoption of English, the American ideology and deviation from Italian traditions took a toll on the character of Italian neighbourhoods. The post-quotas demise continued with striving during the Great Depression and lasted up to the end of the Second World War when families started to move to the suburbs.⁴²

This phenomenon of mobility can be spotted in *The Godfather* as well. After the heyday of neighbourhoods in the pre-1920s the story distances from the desolate area thanks to rise of Vito’s power. During Prohibition, the family was able to move from Hell’s Kitchen to crime-ridden Bronx and at the time of WWII, they moved once again to the noble compound in Long Island symbolising the upcoming movement to city peripheries as a part of the American Dream.

Post-war propensity for conformity, i.e. abandoning communities for the suburbs, further enhanced the collapse of traditions as Italians integrated into American society. Besides the positive attitude towards adaptation, loyalty to the USA also improved Italian approval rate. Contrary to Japanese, Italian community was not severely persecuted thanks to their support in World War II.⁴³ This sort of dedication to the country is mirrored by Michael being awarded with the Navy Cross for fighting in the Pacific. Furthermore, Italian culture managed to broad its influence outside Little Italy’s through music, cuisine and cinematography. Especially movies concerned with

³⁹ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 348.

⁴⁰ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 419.

⁴¹ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 69.

⁴² George Pozzetta, "Italian americans," *Countries and Their Cultures*, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Ha-La/Italian-Americans.html>.

⁴³ Vincent J. Cannato, "How America became Italian," *The Washington Post*, October 09, 2015, accessed February 10, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-america-became-italian/2015/10/09/4c93b1be-6ddd-11e5-9bfe-e59f5e244f92_story.html.

an Italian theme acclaimed astounding popularity and ratings with films such as *The Godfather* (9,2/10), *Goodfellas* (8,7/10), or *Casino* (8,2/10).⁴⁴ *The Godfather* in particular has strong relevancy for both Italian and American cultures while emphasizing the issue of assimilation as Vincent Cannato explains in The Washington Post article:

“The movie reinforced the connection that many Americans made between Italians and organized crime, a stereotype that bothered Italian Americans. But Coppola and Puzo turned the Corleones into classic American characters, embodying the broadly relatable conflict between fathers and sons, tradition and modernity.”⁴⁵

Not only that, Finckenauer stresses the importance of *The Godfather* which helped to expand the knowledge of *La Cosa Nostra* at the time of its premiere.⁴⁶

With decreasing Americanism caused by Vietnam and Watergate, all sorts of ethnic revivals began emerging across the States encouraged by multicultural policies. As the Italian community deviated further from the dire situation of the third immigration wave, the interest in cultural pride rose steadily while preserving the specific characteristics such as traditions, locations and family bonds.⁴⁷ Such phenomenon can be spotted at the very beginning of *The Godfather Part III* with Michael reviving Italian traditions after the decades of refusal.

⁴⁴ “IMDb,” Accessed February 10, 2017, <http://www.imdb.com/>.

⁴⁵ Vincent J. Cannato, "How America became Italian," The Washington Post, October 09, 2015, accessed February 10, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-america-became-italian/2015/10/09/4c93b1be-6ddd-11e5-9bfe-e59f5e244f92_story.html.

⁴⁶ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 40, 42.

⁴⁷ George Pozzetta, "Italian americans," Countries and Their Cultures, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Ha-La/Italian-Americans.html>.

3 Vito Corleone and Success

The thesis will proceed with emphasis put on Vito Corleone, the character essential for the representation of the American Dream within the story. The protagonist experienced an extreme upward mobility from a poor immigrant to a powerful, wealthy, and respected crime-lord. Being the hybrid of both American and Italian notions of success was the result of using his talents and personality mixed with faith in family and friendship. By blending practices of both cultures in order to create unique conditions where business and family affairs did not contradict, Vito consequently received the highest ranking in crime called ‘godfather’.⁴⁸ This part will be concerned with the representation of accomplishment from American and Italian perspectives in the first chapter; then Vito’s progress in crime career and his leadership of Corleones will be analysed.

3.1 Representation of Success in the First Chapter

During the opening chapter, Mario Puzo presents the symbiosis of both American and Italian aspirations. More specifically, the wedding day scene exposes the high-class setting along with family-centred event. In this part, I will point out various aspects that are regarded as a success according to a country. Presence of the American Dream will be taken into consideration; the rest will be concerned with family and Italian customs.

3.1.1 The American Dream

The first sign of success is the ownership of the multi-house compound the family lived in. According to J. Cullen, the dream of owning a home has been an inseparable element of the American Dream: “No American Dream has broader appeal, and no American Dream has been quite so widely realized.”⁴⁹ Its powerful attractiveness managed to push aspirations stereotypical for various nationalities aside. Italians included, it was often of a higher priority than the education of children.⁵⁰ The mall was located in the Long Beach suburban area making it an evident factor in inclination towards materialism. The area quickly developed throughout the 1920s and

⁴⁸ “Boss (crime),” Wikipedia. March 15, 2017, accessed March 17, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boss_\(crime\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boss_(crime)).

⁴⁹ Jim Cullen, *The American Dream* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 136.

⁵⁰ Cullen, *The American Dream*, 148.

1930s,⁵¹ similarly to the book, hosted several bosses of crime organizations,⁵² and during post-WWII era Long Island was one of the first places pioneering suburbia in the States.⁵³ In connection with that, possession of a car enabled Don to distance himself with the family from dangerous Bronx to tranquil areas of Long Island. Corleones disposed with a rich array of luxurious vehicles of prestigious brands such as Cadillac; more precisely the family favoured Fleetwood model in its various incarnations.

Turning to Don Corleone, the favourable outcome of underground wars had earned him great financial resources, recognition, and connections ranging from small businessmen to show business to politics, in which he was also involved. Some of these cornerstones of the Dream were predominantly used in order to strengthen the power and independence of his organization. The good relationship with the authorities was grounded in the profound use of diplomacy and bribery. Given these points, the wedding period displays the very peak of his upward mobility.

With concern to Don's persona, he was well spoken, intelligent and of good image despite his age: "an inexperienced observer might easily have thought the Don himself was the lucky groom."⁵⁴ He received great popularity not only from his family but even fear-inducing characters of hitman Luca Brasi and rival Don Barzini.

There's, however, little focus put on materialism; Puzo briefly describes the mall and a few hints of high-end lifestyle only to switch to a personal subject. In case of Vito, this tendency is common across the story; he did not indulge excessively in being rich and frequently used his resources for career purposes or to help the community. But despite the materialism being pushed aside, the American Dream is to be well spotted in his progress towards the climax.

3.1.2 Preserving the Traditional Community Life

Switching to Italian perspective, Vito's success can be observed in community subject as well. The protagonist disposed with a loyal following both of which benefitted from each other. In terms of attaining popularity, Puzo explains: "Don Vito

⁵¹ Joseph Kellard, "Walking Through Long Beach History: 1869-1945," Long Beach, NY Patch, February 14, 2012, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://patch.com/new-york/longbeach/long-beach-history-1869-1945>.

⁵² Corey Kilgannon, "Growing Up in Massapequa, and in the Mafia," The New York Times, September 28, 2002, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/29/nyregion/growing-up-in-massapequa-and-in-the-mafia.html>.

⁵³ Cullen, *The American Dream*, 151.

⁵⁴ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 12.

Corleone was a man to whom everybody came for help, and never were they disappointed”⁵⁵ and “Don Corleone received everyone— rich and poor, powerful and humble— with an equal show of love.”⁵⁶ One of the pillars of the successfulness dwelled in belief in friendship: “Friendship is everything. Friendship is more than talent. It is more than government. It is almost the equal of family.”⁵⁷ Due to his highly developed diplomatic skills and ability to accomplish what he had promised, he turned into a godlike persona in the eyes of his friends as displayed in the scene with dying Genco Abbando.

Don was equally ambitious in family life. In spite of the wedding, Corleone family was being held close together since the 1910s and, remarkably, the second generation did not stray from the parents. That was all due to Vito’s great dedication to the family which had always been proclaimed to be his priority. Up to the wedding day he was undertaking all the necessary steps to keep the family life in a healthy condition.

Vito deemed vital to provide the best environment as possible, therefore he moved the family from crime-ridden neighbourhoods to the suburbs. With regard to the mall, it is reminiscent of a scaled-down neighbourhood hosting a plentiful Italian enclave. It is also one-of-a-kind environment due to its conflicting character: it is located in rich suburban location whilst contributing to maintain the remaining ethnicity. One of the main reasons for the migration was the better future for the successors: “Like any other parent he wanted his children to go to better schools and mix with better companions.”⁵⁸

Given the question of education, Vito wanted them to study as he deemed it to be a more efficient way of achieving wealth and power: “Lawyers can steal more money with a briefcase than a thousand men with guns and masks.”⁵⁹ The most ambitious of them all, Michael, was sent to college at Dartmouth being expected to achieve a prestigious position in career. Still, Vito had never been too forceful in his wishes about children’s future giving them sufficient leeway in their endeavours; the majority of which already had chosen to become involved in the family business by the time of the event.

⁵⁵ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 11.

⁵⁶ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 12.

⁵⁷ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 33.

⁵⁸ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 212.

⁵⁹ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 208.

Another proof of Vito's devotion can be spotted in the investment of resources. He did not hesitate to prioritize family over finances: "This fancy wedding left me a little short of cash."⁶⁰ The event can put a lot of stress on a father due to Sicilian customs such as not refusing any request on his daughter's wedding day. Nonetheless, Vito managed to mix career with family matters, a phenomenon significant for his storyline. In the past, in spite of the lack of time rooting from expanding business, he spent the remaining free moments with his family effectively.

Throughout the conversation with his godson Johnny Fontane, we can spot the phenomenon of Vito applying his life philosophy to others. This is especially being prominent in the subject of parenthood which is perceived as a thing of honour: "A man who is not a father to his children can never be a real man."⁶¹ Speaking of marriage, Vito exposed himself as very traditionalistic. He always preferred the family to be functioning, most notably in upbringing, no matter the circumstances. Shortly after the wedding, Carlo begun beating pregnant Connie; Don was, however, very restrained in and did not want to intervene:

"(...) but now she belongs to her husband. He knows his duties. Even the King of Italy didn't dare to meddle with the relationship of husband and wife. Go home and learn how to behave so that he will not beat you."⁶²

Vito was even more radical in the question of divorce if a child was involved: "He is the father of your child. What can a child come to in this world if he has no father?"⁶³ Oppositely, Vito's passive stance changed as he turned more initiative when he dealt with masculine members of the family as in the case of Johnny Fontaine: "I didn't tell you to get married again. Do what you want. It's good you wish to be a father to your children. (...) But then, you must make their mother accept you."⁶⁴

The aforementioned confirms that Vito did not abandon the old-country standards stating a man should be in charge of a family⁶⁵ no matter the period of the

⁶⁰ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 19.

⁶¹ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 32.

⁶² Puzo, *The Godfather*, 227.

⁶³ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 228.

⁶⁴ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 32.

⁶⁵ Michael Lalli, *The Italian-American Family* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 1966), 48.

Great Depression and onwards which shattered the traditional family structure for the majority of Italian households.⁶⁶

Prevailing loyalty to homeland's culture can be as well seen during the wedding. To mention few aspects: the ceremony in Sicilian style and the previously mentioned customs. As a Sicilian, Don abode *Omerta*, the oath of silence, prohibiting anyone from revealing information to the outside world. Violation of this rule has fatal consequences and because of this and personal interests he preferred not to give Barzini into the hands of the authorities.⁶⁷ One of the exceptions to the rule was the recruitment of a German-Irish to the function of *Consigliere*, which, according to tradition, is reserved for Sicilian-born only.

Overall, Vito Corleone exposed prominent first-generation-immigrant features with scarcely any signs of being Americanized in the field of a family life.

3.2 Vito's Progression to Success

The first chapter depicts the pinnacle of Vito's relentless pursuit of the American Dream and the outcome of his efforts to create a functioning family while preserving its qualities of the old world. To earn better understanding of what is behind the successful realization of his aspirations, I will separately examine the phenomenon of upward mobility and family leadership.

3.2.1 Upward Mobility

As for the upward social mobility, *The Godfather* does not differ from a typical 'rags to riches' story of "poor boys (and, later, girls) who, with nothing but pluck and ingenuity, created financial empires that towered over the national imagination."⁶⁸ Vito, as a poor orphaned fugitive child who fled from the hostility in Sicily, managed to turn into a respected, powerful, and prosperous person.

Experience from Sicily

In a flashback to Vito's childhood, Sicily played crucial role in terms of his experience which was used to become successful in the States afterwards. As mentioned in the *Contemporary History of Italy*, Sicily more than any other part of the country had

⁶⁶ Cullen, *The American Dream*, 165.

⁶⁷ Lupo and Čech, *Dejiny Mafie*, 148.

⁶⁸ Cullen, *The American Dream*, 59-60.

to tackle extremely bad economy along with the abusive mafia. Corleone town, in particular, became known for the most dangerous and mafia-leading Corleonesi family.⁶⁹

The chapter is fairly condensed; Vito's father disobeyed the orders from the mafia, killed its chief provoking the syndicate to hunt him and his sons down. Only Vito survived and had to flee the country since he was perceived as a future threat to Don Ciccio due to a penchant for *vendetta*. This incident and existence in Sicily taught Vito three essential elements: importance of diplomacy, the personality of a Sicilian, and the principles of *Cosa Nostra*.

First of all, he acknowledged his father was killed because of inappropriate behaviour and chose to be more strategic in the future:

“In later years Vito Corleone understood that what had made him act in such a perfect, tactical way with Fanucci was the death of his own hot-tempered father who had been killed by the Mafia in Sicily.”⁷⁰

Secondly, especially in the south where the mafia reined, the government was unable to fulfil its functions, therefore many of them had to be done by the criminal organization.⁷¹ This started to shape his anti-establishment attitude, commonly shared among the inhabitants of Sicily, only to be deepened by the experience in America. Due to the strong disfavour of police among Sicilians, *Omerta* became a fundamental rule in their lives. Distrust towards each other was a widespread phenomenon and the foundation of protection business, which would become one of the prime services provided by Corleone syndicate.⁷²

And lastly, since the Palermo area was the cradle of *Cosa Nostra*, Corleone was directly exposed to its character, principles and practices. Given the fact the mafia is “the unique culture of Sicily,” it is proclaimed to be a part of every Sicilian which strengthens the crime tendencies.⁷³ Since having entered the crime-world, Vito began to exercise the features of a regular *Mafioso*: “(...) entrepreneurial, opportunistic,

⁶⁹ "Italian mafia cosa nostra, sicilian mafia, omerta, palermo, corleone, corleonesi, Michele Navarra, Luciano Leggio, Totò Riina, Bernardo Provenzano Tommaso Buscetta, Giovanni Falcone, Paolo Borsellino," Italy, italian people, italian life, about italy, italians, accessed February 23, 2017, <http://www.understandingitaly.com/profile-content/cosanostra.html>.

⁷⁰ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 188.

⁷¹ Lupo and Čech, *Dejiny Mafie*, 23.

⁷² Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 82.

⁷³ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 17, 34.

aggressive, [and] capable of violence.”⁷⁴ Puzo describes mafia’s history from being an equivalent of justice and a helping hand for the poor descending to its degenerated form used by the rich while exploiting ordinary peasants.⁷⁵ Some of the characteristics were adopted and vastly improved by Vito’s organization.

Opportunity in the US

Despite the life in the United States being impaired with drawbacks, especially in the workplace, it granted leeway to use Vito’s gathered knowledge and talent to climb up the social ladder. One of the biggest advantages of early life in America compared to Sicily was the considerably limited presence of the aggressive form of *Cosa Nostra* which kept on decimating its homeland. No organized crime meant more freedom in neighbourhoods, the lesser threat of *vendetta*-related deaths and more space for small-scale criminal activities. On the other hand, in the course of time, poor neighbourhoods provided the ideal environment for organized crime to spring up. Finckenauer notes that, there criminals could gain new connections, skills, sources of income; in other words, money, power, and status.⁷⁶ Under these circumstances, Hell’s Kitchen naturally represented a perfect starting point for the protagonist.

Crime

Being left unable to secure his family, Vito was offered to join an Italian gang interested in heists. This authentic portrayal of companionship among Italians was community’s response to the inhospitable outside world.⁷⁷ On behalf of his corroded relationship with the country, ranging from the mistreatment on Ellis Island, bad state of neighbourhoods, to the incompetence of the US laws, Vito decided to enter the crime-world which would eventually accelerate his social advancement. It was made through an insignificant position of a truck driver in a heist, which used to be one of mafia’s most common activities for obtaining finances.⁷⁸ The well-executed job attracted the attention of Don Fanucci, the embodiment of opportunity through which Vito could advance. By refusing to give in to his demands, the new resentment against abusive criminals was added to his already existing anti-law attitude.

⁷⁴ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 17.

⁷⁵ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 311-312.

⁷⁶ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 62, 63.

⁷⁷ Lupo and Čech, *Dejiny Mafie*, 158.

⁷⁸ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 88.

Up to this point, the protagonist had been driven by the idea of ‘determinism’ which gave him no alternative but to join the gang in order to gain finances for his family. However further on, Vito could decide whether he would conform to the reign of *padrone* and return to ordinary life or whether he would oppose and pursue the American Dream via organized crime.⁷⁹ While deciding Vito acted rationally: “He owed Fanucci no personal debt of gratitude, they were not blood relatives, he did not love Fanucci. Why, then, should he give Fanucci seven hundred dollars?”⁸⁰ As presented, the foremost motive leading to the conclusion was the matter of honour. In order to prevent his friends and family from being parasitized on, he decided to get rid of Fanucci which Vito justified as doing the world a favour: “Surely the world could do without such a person.”⁸¹ This cold-bloodiness against enemies became his staple in the upcoming years. It goes hand in hand with no hesitation to use force against those who deserve it which was a typical mentality Vito adopted from southern Italians.⁸²

In order to initiate the ascend in the crime hierarchy, Vito must have taken advantage of the conditions the neighbourhood provided which in combination with the gained experience, personal qualities and can-do attitude made great predispositions for success. Thanks to Vito’s observant personality, he learned Fanucci was a freelance criminal; the Black Hand was not an organization, but a criminal phenomenon done by independent groups.⁸³ This implied: the lack of organized crime in the area, eliminating Don would not cause any retaliation, and finally there would be an opportunity for Vito’s organization to take over. What is more, *padrone*’s unpopular practices played in Vito’s advantage as well; by committing the murder Vito would gain respect in the neighbourhood meaning radically improved social recognition.

Another key factor was good fortune in meeting the local mobster; had Vito not confronted Fanucci he might never get an opportunity to begin his rise to a crime lord. Equally important was Fanucci not being a member of the mafia as an inevitable *vendetta* would halt any future chances of succeeding. Thus, from the perspective of the American Dream, the murder represents a chance to begin a better life.

⁷⁹ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 74.

⁸⁰ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 192.

⁸¹ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 192.

⁸² Lupo and Čech, *Dejiny Mafie*, 26.

⁸³ Lupo and Čech, *Dejiny Mafie*, 161.

The assassination stands for the major breakthrough in Vito's upward advancement. After the death of *padrone*, the protagonist received a great deal of appreciation from Italians and became the 'man of respect'. The murder ultimately demonstrated that Vito held no constraints to revolt against any form of government and was not to submit to anybody. Moreover, the event initiated the next stage in the pursuit of success; he gained all the predispositions that enabled him to enter the new world of possibilities where he could exercise his talents.

Organized crime

If committing the murder represented an opportunity to start the pursuit, then the resulting participation in organized crime stands for the advancement towards the 'American Dream'. In the following part, I will examine the period from the 1920s to the 1940s which traces Vito's steep upward mobility; from 'a man of respect' in Hell's Kitchen to the most powerful Don among the five New York families.

With Fanucci gone, Vito received good reputation in the neighbourhood and his character developed as well; since the murder he had possessed strong personality which helped him in the future endeavours. All of this caused the clientele to start emerging asking for specific services. Similarly to a *Mafioso*, Corleone then took the opportunity and began fulfilling functions the government did not perform, beginning with the court-like services.⁸⁴ As follows, through the use of diplomacy and fear-inducing personality, Vito managed to settle a dispute between a landlord Mr Roberto and a poor tenant Mrs Colombo and prevented her from being expelled from a flat. By virtue of the fear of the mafia, the owner apologised, returned Vito's money used in persuasion and fled from the neighbourhood. After this incident, a frequent Sicilian phenomenon begun to appear; there was a great demand for protection, which Vito advertised as a 'friendship'. Not only it was a clever move for the trust was deeply missed in the homeland and so offering a 'friendship' encouraged the clientele but this service also marks an inclination towards organized crime. Protection business became the first main source of income, but also one of the fundamental practices of Corleone syndicate. Vito's business talent can be clearly spotted in providing services for which there was a strong request. The next step for the organization was the establishment of Genco Pura, an olive oil enterprise.

⁸⁴ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 82.

The period of Genco Pura and onwards exhibits plenty of features peculiar for organized crime. Corleone syndicate was continuously adopting its typical traits, i.e. violence, illegal enterprises, and corruption.⁸⁵ First off, the store was supported by the systematic use of violence and persuasion which eventually made it a monopoly on the market. Secondly, Genco Pura acted as a legal front for illegal activities during Prohibition. Company trucks were used to smuggle liquor, one of mafia's signature involvements. With reference to Prohibition, it represents one of the most important events in organized crime history as mobsters like Al Capone reached unprecedented power:

“When the 18th Amendment to the US Constitution, and the Volstead Act of 1920, set conditions on the distribution and consumption of alcohol, they did not really affect the demand nor change the technology for producing alcohol, but they did create illegal markets and produce the conditions for the formation of large criminal enterprises.”⁸⁶

The ban of alcohol was indeed profitable for fictional Vito as he earned the title of ‘don’. With expanding empire, illegal activities required political protection so did the reorganization of *famiglia*'s structure. Corleone syndicate more and more resembled Sicilian *Cosa Nostra* in terms of influence, methods and administration. By bribery and distancing from *caporegimes*, a precaution towards the police was made, therefore the boss was impossible to trace. Since the re-management, the organization had possessed the aspect of a Sicilian ‘secret organization’. In order to enhance empire's capabilities, the recruitment of enforcers was necessary. Along with *caporegimes* they count for extremely devoted criminals willing to do any type of work for Don.⁸⁷

At the end of Prohibition, the syndicate exercised yet another specialty of *La Cosa Nostra* and that was its dynamic character. Vito began looking for the new sources of power which led to participation in official institutions like unions and intervening in elections.⁸⁸ Speaking of income, the organization turned to hazard, bookmaking, running numbers, and later on the confection industry as a common switch into legal markets.⁸⁹ During The Great Depression, the Corleone empire was an equivalent for

⁸⁵ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 5.

⁸⁶ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 69.

⁸⁷ Lupo and Čech, *Dejiny Mafie*, 15.

⁸⁸ Lupo and Čech, *Dejiny Mafie*, 30.

⁸⁹ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 88.

high living standards, prosperity and happiness; factors positively affecting the loyalty towards its boss. Puzo depicts the empire as a quasi-state which is detached from the negative impact of the outside world such as the Second World War.

The last crucial period of Vito's upward mobility came with the two fictional underground wars: the Olive Oil War and the Pacification of New York, both containing similarities to real events. In the first one, based on the Castellammarese War, Corleone organization stood against various criminal syndicates including Al Capone's and Salvatore Maranzano's.⁹⁰ The second war which reduced the New York underground corresponds to the establishment of five leading New York families.⁹¹ The positive outcome proves Vito was not only able to achieve the 'American Dream' (as by that time he possessed a great fortune and power since the wars), but also to successfully defend it.

The material gains of Vito's relentless pursuit have already been spoken of in the beginning of this chapter; however, I would like to close this part with the attention put on the now-iconic conversation between Vito and Bonasera which adequately summarized the character of Corleone organization. It was a unique hybrid with resemblances to the traditional mafia along with atypical features.

With attention to shared features, with Bonasera begging Don Corleone for help, we are given an insight of how the mafia functions.⁹² "This scene illustrates the mafia "client" system of favors, services and dependencies. "Power and influence are exercised through knowing the right people in the right places, and through violence when necessary."⁹³ Another key point is the abundant presence of prestige and wealth, the pillars of LCN's power.⁹⁴

A drastic difference can be spotted in Vito's behaviour towards his client. Whereas a stereotypical mafia would be likely to persecute the client for preferring the law, Vito acted differently. Given the real example of Mrs Rugnetta; she asked the Palermo court for justice in the case of murder of her son and as a punishment local *capomafia* caused Rugnetta's shop would not profit anymore.⁹⁵ Compared with

⁹⁰ "Olive Oil War," The Godfather Wiki, accessed March 03, 2017, http://godfather.wikia.com/wiki/Olive_Oil_War.

⁹¹ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 86.

⁹² Puzo, *The Godfather*, 24 – 28.

⁹³ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 43.

⁹⁴ Lupo and Čech, *Dejiny Mafie*, 14.

⁹⁵ Finckenauer, *Mafia and organized crime*, 26.

Bonasera who violated the law of *Omerta* by trusting the police, Vito turned him into his loyal and useful customer rather than handicapping him in one way or another.

3.2.2 Leading the Family

The upward mobility brings up a question whether the achievement of power, money and status was a by-product of securing the family. As will be demonstrated, appropriate family management and loyalty play equally important roles in the story as all the actions and talent exercised in the pursuit of success. The family aspect is what significantly differs the first immigrant generation from the second, as seen in the aims of Vito compared to Michael who put the family at stake as he attempted to achieve his vision of the Dream.

Returning to Vito's storyline, the inception of a traditional family on the US soil was yet another vital objective to succeed in. In relation to the opening scene, throughout the span of years Corleones retained the form of a Sicilian family, regardless the turmoil that endangered ethnicity during the post-third-immigration-wave period. The factors which helped him to establish a prototypical southern Italian community in American suburbia will be discussed below. For this part I will predominantly use *Ethnic Family Patterns* by P. J. Campisi.

The early to mid-20th century stands for the era of great cultural clashes between Italian refugees and alien environment which spawned an extreme hardship upon the family-centred lifestyle. The switch from agricultural to capitalistic society meant less time was available to spend with family in favour of work. Also the anti-ethnic Americanization process must be taken into account, both of which became rapidly growing threats to Italian ideology. Nonetheless, the concepts of a typical family and the sense of companionship brought by the first generation temporarily found shelter in ethnic neighbourhoods providing protection from the outside influences. The early families adopted numerous qualities of 'a southern Italian folk-peasant culture'; to draw the main traits from Campisi's study: patriarchal character, active community life, strong family and community bonds, solidarity, large families with many children, mothers lead a domestic life and do not earn wages, fathers possess great respect, and marriage in early teens.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Paul J. Campisi, "Ethnic Family Patterns: The Italian Family in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 53(1948): 444 – 445.

Correspondingly, Corleone's pre-crime period did not deviate from the description: "four mouths to feed;"⁹⁷ Carmela married when she was 16 years old and retained the position of a housewife; there was a lively community in Hell's Kitchen, Vito had the leading position within the family, etc. The obligation of supporting the expanding family was confronted with the uncertainty in the workplace but despite the setback Corleones continued to keep the Italian elements.

The deterioration of Italian values generally begun to appear as children started attending schools. During 'the conflict stage', they were extensively exposed to the American influence which was transmitted to their homes culminating in the clash between tradition-defending first generation and progressive descendants. Shift in family ideology (e.g. a father loses his importance, a mother has to work, children acquire more independence) in combination with the necessity of getting acquainted with American values in order to conform or become employed signified the beginning of the end for the traditional family.⁹⁸ The inner disintegration of families during the post-immigration era increasingly led the first generation to abandon the old-country ways under the pressure of Americanization.

At this stage, the evolution of Corleone family started to deviate from the trend. In contrast to ordinary Italian families, Vito managed to avoid the impending demise thanks to taking part in illegal activities which did not pose any obligations for acculturation. This way he could earn enough financial resources to take care of his family without the necessity to assimilate in order to become employed. For this reason, Carmela could afford to stay at home which goes hand in hand with preserving the Italian-like household. Coupled with the father being close to home and the capable personality prevented the descendants, except for Michael, from revolting against the family. The young Corleones could be labelled as community-focused descendants; by Campisi's definition: "Italian way of life, close to parental home, interaction with the non-Italian world is at a minimum, and interests are tied up with those of the Italian community."⁹⁹ The clientele and friends created a vast community surrounding the family which also helped the peasant traditions being kept intact. Parallel with the achievement of the American Dream, leaving the declining neighbourhoods of the

⁹⁷ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 184.

⁹⁸ Campisi, "Ethnic Family Patterns: The Italian Family in the United States," 448.

⁹⁹ Campisi, "Ethnic Family Patterns: The Italian Family in the United States," 447.

1940s for suburbia marks the final step in isolation against the negative impact of the outside world.

Along with the peaking career Vito managed to recreate a prototypical southern Italian family which can be deemed as a great accomplishment given the devastating post-ethnicity period. Equally, credit must be given to the Hell's Kitchen community without which Vito would have been handicapped in the progress towards the 'American Dream' as it had been Italians who opened the door to underworld for him. On the flip side, it must be noted that the American Dream's upward mobility helped Corleones to avoid the fate of Italian families that could not afford the financial backup the traditional life demanded. With this in mind, Vito's storyline demonstrates extraordinary symbiosis of the Italian and American ways of life, both profiting from each other; the balance which is broken by Michael's reign affected by Americanization.

4 Denial of the American Dream

In the enclosing chapter I will look into the criticism of the United States and its culture. The first half will introduce Puzo's opinions on Americanism presented by Vito's storyline. The second part will be occupied with American Dream's impact on Michael Corleone and the family.

4.1 Vito's Perspective

The thesis will continue to focus on the subject of Vito's character. His depiction undermines the ideology of the American Dream by exhibiting its absurdity. Moreover, the adoption of mafia techniques brought attention to the inefficiencies of the American law. And lastly, his storyline contains strong anti-American thoughts.

4.1.1 Character

Positives

Speaking of Vito Corleone, it is critical to mention he is a considerably artificial character due to the combination of extraordinary positive traits and predispositions for success in various departments. The most of his properties were already introduced in the previous chapter; to recapitulate the major ones: intelligent, foreseeing, opportunistic, courageous, capable, and gifted in social and career matters. In addition to that, his persona is pushed towards perfection by remaining humble regardless the great achievements which puts him in contrast with self-absorbed characters such as the movie producer Jack Woltz. In spite of being a criminal, Vito partly preserved morality by refusing drug and prostitution business: The affair involved drugs, in which I have no interest."¹⁰⁰ "He was notoriously straitlaced in matters of sex."¹⁰¹ It must be mentioned that Vito favoured diplomacy above force which was only used when no other options were available:

"I'll reason with him," Vito Corleone said. It was to become a famous phrase in the years to come. (...) When he became a Don and asked opponents to sit down and reason with him, they understood it was the last chance to resolve an affair without bloodshed and murder."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 273.

¹⁰¹ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 65.

¹⁰² Puzo, *The Godfather*, 191.

By restricting the violence, Vito avoided an association with a stereotypical ruthless *Mafioso*, given the example of Salvatore Riina – *capo di tutti capi* from Corleonesi clan and convicted murderer of many.¹⁰³ Contrastively, Vito was often referred to as a businessman, albeit with non-conventional attitude, taking actions beneficial and righteous for the community and business:

“My father is a businessman trying to provide for his wife and children and those friends he might need someday in a time of trouble. He doesn’t accept the rules of the society we live in because those rules would have condemned him to a life not suitable to a man like himself, a man of extraordinary force and character. (...) In the meantime he operates on a code of ethics he considers far superior to the legal structures of society.”¹⁰⁴

Vito demonstrated nobility in personal priorities as well; as mentioned previously, he valued family and friendship over materialism. Oppositely to Johnny Fontane, who exchanged his family for celebrity lifestyle, and Michael Corleone, whose dream of legal organization decimated Corleones, Vito remained in control of the appeal of greater gains and did not reject the community for his own good. As such, having established limits, before the American and Italian notions of success could clash, can be regarded as one of the most critical accomplishments in his self-development.

What removes Vito farther from the mainstream is being gifted in the subject of career and family. With respect to the *Organized Crime*, Vito proved talent in leading the organization which attained a dominant position in underground and politics. To recapitulate main management skills: adaptation to new conditions as seen in switches in endeavours, monopolistic tendencies (“Like any good businessman he aimed at holding a monopoly by forcing his rivals to abandon the field or by merging with his own company”¹⁰⁵), competitiveness in the elimination of rivals, relationships at good levels with the right people, e.g. senators, and ability to keep his ‘world’ satisfied even during the hardship of the Great Depression.

Similarly to the case of Fanucci’s elimination, Vito managed to seek for opportunities in occasions unimportant for others. This applied to business matters as

¹⁰³ “Salvatore Riina,” Wikipedia, March 26, 2017, accessed March 28, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvatore_Riina.

¹⁰⁴ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 349.

¹⁰⁵ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 200.

well. Thanks to Vito's observatory character and 'reasoning' tactics he was able to exercise the vital steps in order to close every important contract. The famous phrase "I'll make him an offer he can't refuse"¹⁰⁶ epitomized Vito's great capability seen in the Woltz episode. To get a movie role for Johnny Fontane, Vito demonstrated an ability to find a way how to persuade seemingly impenetrable characters. Because diplomacy was ineffective in this example, force had to be used. Killing a pride and joy of Woltz in the form of an extremely rare and expensive horse resulted in Fontane receiving a role and the expansion of the Corleone organization into the movie business.

In connection with business, Vito's refusal of the lucrative drug deal with Virgil Sollozzo demonstrated his strategic dispositions as participating in such matters would cost him a political influence: "It's true I have many, many friends in politics, but they would not be so friendly if my business were narcotics instead of gambling."¹⁰⁷ Besides that, the inclusion of the moral aspect into business, which was one of the main reasons behind the refusal, can be counted among Vito's idiosyncrasies. The further differentiation from the second generation can be spotted when his old-fashioned anti-drug attitude conflicted with the opinions of Hagen and Sonny, all of which perceived drugs as a great benefit for the organization: "Drugs are the coming thing, we should get into it."¹⁰⁸

The success in family life added to Vito's already extreme uniqueness. It is the only major character in the story that blended fruitful career while retaining a satisfied household. The cause of boundless admiration for his character was discussed in the preceding chapter; to recap: establishment of a traditional family, dedication to the family, strong leadership, and a good father and husband. Referring back to parenting, he had never been too forceful and he was keen to give advice and worked for the brighter future of his children. The moment which presented Vito's good-hearted personality was him taking care of orphaned Hagen in the 1920s, therefore saving him from death and giving him a chance for a better life. The ultimate proof of parental love being placed above profits was spotted in giving up the position of the Corleone organization in order to save his son Michael: "I would not have made that peace but that I knew you would never come home alive otherwise."¹⁰⁹ Another uniqueness of his

¹⁰⁶ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 34.

¹⁰⁷ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 66.

¹⁰⁸ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 87.

¹⁰⁹ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 387.

was both career and community elements were intertwined; friendship was incorporated into the business: “I believe in friendship and I am willing to show my friendship first.”¹¹⁰ What is more he treated his rivals with high respect, as seen in Don Barzini being invited to the wedding.

Finally, I would like to highlight Vito’s relentless efforts. Despite reaching the peak in the wedding-day period, Vito afterwards continued to be as dedicated as possible to the organization and family, e.g. deal with Sollozzo, security of Michael’s future, job for daughter’s husband Carlo. This can be compared with once highly acclaimed Johnny Fontane who resigned after his career potential had expired and family life ended in ruins, thus subsequently coming for advice to Don:

“Then my whore second wife throws me out. And Ginny and the kids won’t take me back unless I come crawling on my hands and knees, and I can’t sing anymore. Godfather, what the hell can I do?”¹¹¹

As an outcome of Corleone’s admirable list of positives he received the affectionate reputation of ‘godfather’, an idol for the community.

Negatives

Due to severe unbalance between pros and cons, the authenticity of the protagonist is further undermined when it comes to flaws which would add to human-like qualities. Being a crime-lord and the associated vices aside, Vito possessed a noticeable low amount of shortcomings, the majority of which were of a minor character. These encompass selfishness as some of the actions, e.g. keeping his people happy, were said to be predominantly undertaken for good his of own: “Not his best friends would have called Don Corleone a saint from heaven. There was some self-interest in this generosity.”¹¹² In terms of moving to Long Island, Puzo states: “For his own personal reasons he wanted the anonymity of suburban life where his reputation was not known.”¹¹³ Yet, in these instances the benefits for the community were indisputable. Another irrational criticism of Vito’s decisions concerned Hagen in the function of a *consigliere*: “And of course an Irish as a Consigliere had been the only foolishness the Don had ever perpetrated. No Irishman could hope to equal a Sicilian for

¹¹⁰ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 202.

¹¹¹ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 31.

¹¹² Puzo, *The Godfather*, 203.

¹¹³ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 212.

cunning.”¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, this statement contradicts with Hagen’s solid performance in business with Woltz or at being progressive in the investment in drugs.

Up to this point, all of the aforementioned ‘flaws’, explicitly stated by the author, posed no threat to Vito’s greatness. The most serious defects appeared throughout the drug deal. Firstly, Vito was unable to break his old-fashioned beliefs; more precisely to deal with somebody interested in prostitution and narcotics. And secondly, quite paradoxically, faith in family in the form of excessive reliance on Sonny indicated Vito’s biggest weakness. Sonny’s outburst during the negotiations evolved into the assassination of Vito and the decline of Corleones: “Sollozzo’s eyes flickered again but this time with satisfaction. He had discovered a chink in the Don’s fortress.”¹¹⁵

Unique personality

Thus far the superiority of the protagonist should be evident. Being the most flawless and gifted person in the story brings up the issue of the availability of the Dream for the masses. Implying that an ordinary man would unlikely possess the vast array of positive values with a few cons like Vito did. This is supported by the real-life inspiration; his character is believed to be modelled after four highly successful mob bosses: F. Costello, J. Profaci, J. Bonanno, and C. Gambino. The mixture of their most positive features includes: no-drugs attitude and involvement in politics (Costello), olive oil business leader (Profaci), upward mobility from Sicilian child immigrant to the member of five New York families (Bonanno), low-profile and *capo di tutti capi* (Gambino).¹¹⁶ The fact that one person incorporates all of these properties makes Vito a strikingly fictional character. Even Puzo explicitly evaluates the protagonist as someone special: “(...) Vito Corleone was not only a man of talent but, in his way, a genius.”¹¹⁷ Certainly, it was not author’s intention to create an authentic figure. Through the portrayal Puzo hints that, in essence, the American Dream is potentially unrealizable for it requires an absurd amount of skills to reach such career highs, not to mention its harmonization with the family subject. This theory is in agreement with a contemporary

¹¹⁴ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 381.

¹¹⁵ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 67.

¹¹⁶ “Vito Corleone,” The Godfather Wiki, accessed April 05, 2017, http://godfather.wikia.com/wiki/Vito_Corleone#cite_note-The_Godfather_Book-3.

¹¹⁷ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 201.

belief about the American Dream retaining a degree of exclusivity as is proven by the survey *Attitudes about the American Dream*.¹¹⁸

4.1.2 Criticism of America

Up to this point, Vito Corleone could be perceived as an excellent, albeit unrealistic, prototype of successfulness. Nonetheless, Puzo's criticism of the American culture should be brought to the limelight; precisely the way Vito's American Dream was achieved, anti-American attitude, criminality and justice in the US.

Even though Vito was remarkably talented, he was forced to choose the life of a criminal in order to 'make it'. As outlined in *American Immigration*, conditions in 1910s America contradicted with the ideology of 'the pursuit of happiness'. Poor immigrants in particular were deprived of educational privileges and advantage from the accomplishments of their parents which are important predispositions for future success accordingly to A. Pallas' article.¹¹⁹ The lack of jobs and futility of hard work contributed to the disillusion of the first generation immigrants and as a result, most families agreed the success is achievable for the second generation only.¹²⁰ Correspondingly, there was no possibility Vito could reach the success of this scale the non-crime way due to lack of opportunity to exercise his talents elsewhere: "(...) he had never had the opportunity to use that intelligence and courage."¹²¹ In relation to factors crucial for 'making it', Puzo also stressed, contrary to popular opinion,¹²² the importance of neglected outside factors such as good luck, i.e. Prohibition, or the Italian community without which even Vito would be less likely to advance.

Moreover, Vito's early life in the US developed animosity towards the country which weakened the resentment against unconstitutional activities. In connection with that, the denial of the American Dream is strengthened by his disfavour of America which lasts throughout the whole story: "This country has been good to me." Upon this story being relayed to the Don he said angrily to the caporegime, "I have been good to him."¹²³ Another example of anti-American attitude is the disapproval of Michael's

¹¹⁸ Sandra L. Hanson and John Zogby, "Trends—Attitudes About The American Dream," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 74 (2010): 576.

¹¹⁹ Aaron M. Pallas, "The American Dream and the Power of Wealth," *Sociological Forum* 23 (2008): 633 - 639.

¹²⁰ Campisi, "Ethnic Family Patterns: The Italian Family in the United States," 449.

¹²¹ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 192.

¹²² Hanson, Zogby, "Trends—Attitudes About The American Dream," 573.

¹²³ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 211.

participation in WWII, which marked the period of a great nationalistic trend in supporting the country: “He performs those miracles for strangers.”¹²⁴

Then there is the key issue of Vito being a murderer, even though the eliminations of Fanucci or Ciccio can be justified to an extent; Fanucci was parasitizing on the community and Ciccio killed Vito’s relatives. Nonetheless, Vito decided to start his upward mobility deliberately through the cold-blooded murder instead of returning to his pre-crime lifestyle. Also, later in the story, these violent propensities remained present: orders which handicapped others, merciless procedures against enemies tied with his revengeful persona or failed reasoning was followed by the demonstration of force. Therefore, the aspect of violence in the opportunity (i.e. killing Fanucci) and in the subsequent pursuit of success severely impairs the morality behind the story. Plus, it indicates the lack of chances of reaching the success legitimately for the Italian immigrants, further contributing to the dispraise of the American Dream.

The second portion of criticism of America is concerned with injustice. Throughout the story a reader comes across various instances of flaws in the US system. To name a few: Nazorine being robbed by a wholesaler without a chance of receiving his money back via law and rapists who crippled Bonasera’s daughter stayed unpunished. Vito Corleone exercised unconventional and mostly unlawful procedures (see quote no. 104) some of which were based on those of Sicilian protection business:

“If by some misfortune an honest man like yourself made enemies they would become my enemies”– the Don raised his arm, finger pointing at Bonasera– “and then, believe me, they would fear you.”¹²⁵

Because Vito’s methods were more efficient than the legal ones he was often asked to compensate the functions government failed at: (Bonasera) “I ask you for justice.”¹²⁶ Other examples of system defects are extensive corruption or lax police activity in Fanucci’s murder investigation: “He only learned later that the police had been delighted with the murder of Fanucci and not too anxious to pursue his killers.”¹²⁷

In conclusion, through the deliberately fictional protagonist, Mario Puzo exposed numerous critical flaws in the American culture. Vito Corleone served as a

¹²⁴ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 14.

¹²⁵ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 28.

¹²⁶ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 27.

¹²⁷ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 195.

medium for criticism which, besides pointing out the law issues, predominantly stressed the improbability of the American Dream.

4.2 Michaels's Perspective

The last part of my thesis will focus on the representation of the American Dream in Michael Corleone's story. In this case Puzo with Coppola showed the phenomenon in a different light, most notably the devastating consequences the Dream can produce given more realistic situation also with the second-generation priority of 'making it' taken into account. Here the pursuit of the American Dream stands as a polar extreme to Vito's utopian case.

4.2.1 Michael's Pursuit of the American Dream

Returning to the wedding day period, Michael was depicted as a perfect adept for achieving success. Firstly, this includes the capabilities of his father: "He had all the quiet force and intelligence of his great father, the born instinct to act in such a way that men had no recourse but to respect him."¹²⁸ Secondly, Michael came from privileged background which, as discussed earlier, is one of vital predispositions for succeeding. And thirdly, he was given a high-class education at Dartmouth College. Michael also showed a great propensity for the American way of life; he revolted against the Italian-American stereotype of dating Italian women only by his relationship with American Kay Adams. Another evidence of his patriotism was the participation in the WWII while defending the United States in Pacific. Thanks to his efforts he was awarded with the Navy Cross and an article in Life magazine. Michael was also peculiar for being highly independent from the family and by distancing himself from its cause: "That's my family, Kay. It's not me."¹²⁹ Whereas the rest of Corleones stood as anti-American defendants of Italian heritage, Michael could be placed on the very opposite end of scale as an Americanized second-generation immigrant:

"The individual changes his Italian name, moves away from the Italian neighbourhood and in some cases from the community, and has little to do with his foreign-born parents and relatives. The ideal is to become acculturated in as short a time as possible."¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 13-14.

¹²⁹ *The Godfather*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola (1972, Paramount Pictures).

¹³⁰ Campisi, "Ethnic Family Patterns: The Italian Family in the United States," 447.

Up to Sollozzo's assassination, Michael could be perceived as a stereotypical example with good predispositions for success without being as removed from mainstream as Vito was. However, the following attempts of Michael attaining his vision of success not only negatively impacted the evolution of his character, but also contributed to the erosion of the family. After the exile to Sicily, Michael's aspirations switched to making the Corleone syndicate the most powerful organization whilst eradicating everything in his path and getting rid of the Sicilian (and illegal) elements in the family, thus establishing an American household: "Anyway I don't want that to happen to our kids. I want them to be influenced by you. I want them to grow up to be All-American kids, real All-American, the whole works."¹³¹

With this in mind, Michael is the character who experienced the greatest personality change in *The Godfather* trilogy. The increasing obsession with power developed a considerable amount of negative features distinguishing him from Vito. To begin with morality, under his reign the organization expanded into the prostitution ring which is proved by the scene with Senator Geary and dead prostitute in one of Corleone's brothels. More to the point, Michael's case marked a great deviation from loyalty to Italians as he favoured H. Roth over F. Pentangeli, a loyal family friend and *caporegime*, due to business matters. The cruel personality, which was rooted in retaliation for Vito being shot and then strengthened by Apollonia's assassination, became fully prominent with Michael being a don. The unparalleled ruthlessness in Corleone business was exemplified by ordering the slaughter of other New York dons or by eliminating other businessmen like Roth. While Vito embraced friendships and 'reasoning' instead of force, violence was a common solution to problems for Michael. This policy dramatically impaired his popularity and made him numerous enemies. His response on the question of why he did not stop even after winning further exposed his aggressive and relentless character: "I don't feel I have to wipe everybody out, Tom. Just my enemies, that's all."¹³²

What is more, these vicious habits were not limited to business only, but also transferred to family signifying the major discrepancy between Michael and Vito. Michael had no balance set between the pursuit of successful business and family and frequently selected the former, e.g. not being at home for Christmas because of the deal

¹³¹ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 348.

¹³² *The Godfather Part II*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola (1974, Paramount Pictures).

with Roth. Michael grew largely disrespectful towards his loyal friends such as Tom Hagen, who had been shouted at and insulted. Over the span of years, Michael became distrustful in his family by keeping things secret from *consigliere* and dishonest when Kay questioned Carlo's death. The relationship with Kay was deeply flawed, too. She was treated mainly as a mother to his successor and due to the lack of love she decided to leave the dysfunctional marriage. The episode led to the abortion of their third child undertaken in order to deprive the syndicate of a new leader which prompted Michael to beat her. Similarly, he did not receive any affection from siblings Connie and Fredo all because of either his subjective feelings or the prosperity of the organization; Michael made his sister a widow and Fredo was assigned a second-rate function intentionally limiting his potential. The situation escalated in him committing *vendetta* against the family, something out of the question for Vito. Among the victims of Michael's revengeful tendencies were S. Tessio and F. Pentangeli, the close friends of the organization. And the worst of his actions which decimated the family; Michael ordered the murders of Connie's husband Carlo and brother Fredo.

4.2.2 Conclusion to Michael's Pursuit

Apart from the improbability of the American Dream in Vito's part, Puzo demonstrated the negative consequences that might occur given the less idealistic case. Michael being controlled by success and emotions added to the imperfect qualities making him substantially more convincing character than Vito. He was prone to make unwise decisions and, despite bringing the organization to the commercial apex, the consequence was losing his family. The inspiration by two criminals, compared to four in Vito's instance, further enhanced his realistic portrayal; these are: Joseph Bonanno (young boss)¹³³ and Vito Genovese (exile to Sicily and orders to kill New York dons).¹³⁴

Since the promotion of Michael to a don, he behaved as an inferior community leader. The lack of appreciation, the rising egoism and obsession with power all combined with the second generation's trademark of deviating from the old-country traditions dissolved once great Corleone family. Michael's priorities turned out to be completely opposite to Vito's and as a result, while Vito gained a lot of affection from

¹³³ "Joseph Bonanno," Wikipedia, April 04, 2017, accessed April 12, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Bonanno.

¹³⁴ "Vito Genovese," Wikipedia, April 04, 2017, accessed April 12, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vito_Genovese.

the community, Michael's campaign gained him nothing but long-lasting disrespect and refusal from the remaining relatives. His ego and greed single-handedly eradicated the community with the re-creation of a *vendetta*-driven empire similar to ones in Sicily; the reason Vito left his homeland in the first place.

Additionally, there is attention put on the outside elements such as luck, which frequently worked against Michael's favour in contrast with Vito who had perfect conditions, e.g. Prohibition or no penalties from Fanucci's murder. Numerous important events turned wrong due to unfavourable circumstances; namely the expansion to Cuba was halted by a revolution which accentuates the theory that the realization of the American Dream highly depends on the right circumstances, the outside elements noted in the preceding subchapter. Notably in *The Godfather Part II*, overcoming these difficulties fuelled his determination which consequently drove him to act against the family.

As the last part of the denial, both Vito and Michael confirmed the American Dream is not a guarantee of a satisfied life. Whereas Vito elevated his being with the family being a priority; Michael, on the other hand, reached unsurpassed commercial success yet his life quality showed the opposite tendency. Michael's late attempts to reunite with the family were cut short as one of his countless enemies, he had made throughout the years of uncompromising pursuit, deprived him of his child. With respect to the very last scene, despite once reaching his aspirations, he died alone as a broken man mirroring the emptiness of the American Dream and the importance of family.

5 Conclusion

The trilogy disposes with numerous noteworthy qualities one of which is the sheer range of topics it covers. For the majority of mainstream it may pose as a great narrative about the mafia and rise to power. Especially considering the era the book and movie adaptations were released, *The Godfather* helped to clarify the phenomenon of *Cosa Nostra* to the general public. Its shocking value was not only enhanced by the authentic representation of these secret organizations, but also by the scale of their influence on the US soil which brought the power of legal institutions into doubt. In the same way, Puzo's and Coppola's work pictured the clash between Italian and American ideologies via the aspirations of the first and second generation Corleones. Throughout the story the realistic depiction of the modern American history served as a background to the evolution and decline of both ideologies. The significance of *The Godfather* is further emphasized by the innovative introduction of protagonists tied with the underworld. Vito Corleone is, to an extent, a hero who protects the community and punishes those who deserve it. Michael, on the other hand, evolved into anti-hero not bound by any institutional, nor moral limitations. Consequently, this setting caused a lot of controversy; Puzo was falsely accused of glorifying the crime world, while the story merely reflected author's rather cynical opinion that "crime is good for America."¹³⁵ It is remarkable that the narrative abounding with the critique of the American culture gained such great acclaim in its homeland.

Anti-American attitude manifested predominantly through the American Dream was my primary goal to examine in my thesis. In the opening chapter concerned with the immigration to the United States, I analysed Puzo's highly accurate illustration of Italian ethnicity beginning with the arrival to the Ellis Island up to the revival movements in the 1970s. In connection with that, the unfavourable situation in the States was one of the factors behind Vito's descent into crime along with his mindset of securing the family. *Vito Corleone and Success* concentrated on the idea of accomplishment from family and career standpoints. It was established that Vito primarily used all the elements tied to the American Dream, such as financial resources, recognition, and power, in order to become fully independent from institutions and to preserve the Italian character of the community. The purpose of the last chapter was to

¹³⁵ Puzo, *The Godfather*, 430.

examine the denial of the American Dream and Americanism in general. Vito's case demonstrated how the phenomenon is out of reach for ordinary aspirants as well as the improbability of reaching extreme career highs along with keeping the high standard in family life. In addition, the anti-American nature was strengthened by pointing out the inefficiencies of the law in the same way as by presenting mafia practices as noticeably more effective. In the closing section, I described the devastating impact the vigorous pursuit of the American Dream can induce. Michael's actions causing the fall of Corleones can be interpreted as a metaphor for the demise of Italian values due to Americanization.

In the end, even though *The Godfather* is often cited as a story about the realization of the American Dream and understandably so thanks to the upward mobility of Vito Corleone; under closer inspection I came to the conclusion that the story essentially rejects America's frequently glorified features. The family and humanity of the Italian way of life were clearly given a superior position to material success with Americanization being suggested as a negative phenomenon which decimated morally more advanced culture. In other words, while the saga can be inspirational owing to Vito's great achievements, it also serves as a warning against the negative consequences of excessive careerism.

6 Resumé

Trilogie *Kmotra* disponuje řadou pozitiv, mezi které patří i samotná škála témat, kterých se dotýká. Pro většinu čtenářů, či diváků může série představovat rozsáhlý příběh o mafii a vzestupu k moci. Vzhledem k době, kdy byla kniha i filmové adaptace zveřejněny, *Kmotr* napomohl osvětlit jev mafie, do té doby pojem záhadný pro širokou veřejnost. Příběh byl šokující nejen díky autentickému ztvárnění kriminálních organizací, ale taktéž kvůli interpretaci jejich vlivu na americké půdě, což vneslo pochyby na adresu legálních institucí. Stejnou míru realismu obsahoval i konflikt mezi italskou a americkou ideologií. M. Puzo společně F. Coppolou ztvárnili tento konflikt skrze rozdílné životní cíle první a druhé generace Corleonů. V příběhu je mnoholetý úpadek těchto ideologií podložen realistickým ztvárněním moderní americké historie. *Kmotr* byl ve své době, mimo jiné, význačný i uvedením nového typu protagonisty. Vito Corleone může být do jisté míry chápán jako ochránce italské komunity a taktéž jako hrdina, který trestá špatně se chovající kriminálníky. Na druhou stranu, z Michaela se postupem času stal anti-hrdina nevázaný jak zákonem, tak morálními hodnotami. Ve výsledku mělo toto obsazení za následek vlnu kontroverze; Puzo byl neprávem obviňován z oslavování kriminality, přičemž příběh pouze odrážel jeho cynický pohled na Spojené státy. Je pozoruhodné, že toto dílo oplývající kritikou americké kultury nabylo uznání jak u odborné kritiky, tak i u běžného publika.

Hlavním cílem mé práce bylo prozkoumat protiamerický postoj prezentovaný především skrze fenomén amerického snu. V úvodní kapitole věnované tématu imigrace jsem se zabýval věrohodnou ilustrací italské komunity od éry Ellis Island po období etnických hnutí let sedmdesátých. Ve spojitosti s tím, nepříznivá situace v USA a snaha zabezpečit rodinu byly jedny z hlavních faktorů přispívajících k Vitovu vstupu do podsvětí. V následující kapitole byl kladen důraz na Vitův úspěch na poli kariéry a rodiny. V závěru mého zkoumání bylo stanoveno, že hlavní hrdina využil prvků amerického snu, jmenovitě finančních prostředků, reputace a moci, aby upevnil postavení své organizace a taktéž aby zachoval její italský ráz. Záměrem poslední části bylo analyzovat popření amerického snu a amerikanismu. Vito demonstroval nedostupnost fenoménu pro každodenního člověka pospolu s nepravděpodobností dosažení extrémního úspěchu v kariéře zároveň s udržením vysoké úrovně v rodinném životě. Protiamerický charakter příběhu je zdůrazněn porovnáním neefektivního amerického zákona s praktikami mafie. Uzavírající pasáž je koncentrována na

devastující dopad honby za americkým snem. Michaelovo jednání zapříčinilo konec rodiny Corleonů, což může být interpretováno jakožto metafora pro úpadek italských hodnot pod vlivem amerikanizace.

Je pochopitelné, že díky vzestupu Vita Corleoneho je *Kmotr* často citován jako příběh o uskutečnění amerického snu. Nicméně po bližším zkoumání jsem došel k závěru, že sága v jádru popírá často opěvované vlastnosti Ameriky. Italský způsob života upřednostňující rodinu a lidskost je zde nadřazený aspiraci po materiálním úspěchu. Puzo a Coppola nastínili proces amerikanizace jako záporný fenomén, který zdecimoval morálně více pokročilou kulturu. Jinými slovy, i přestože je příběh Vita inspirativní, co se týče jeho dosažených úspěchů, *Kmotr* taktéž poukázal na negativní následky, které může snaha o naplnění snu způsobit.

7 Abstract

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The thesis will examine The Godfather trilogy, the most renowned work of Mario Puzo and Francis F. Coppola, with the emphasis put on the character of Vito Corleone and the element of the American Dream. The opening part will focus on the historical background, notably the period from the mass immigration to the U.S., which will be followed by the notion of success in Vito's story in terms of family and upward social mobility. The closing part will demonstrate views on the American Dream from the perspectives of Vito and Michael Corleone.

8 Anotace

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Tato bakalářská práce se bude zabývat jednou z nejvýznamnějších trilogií Maria Puza a Francise F. Coppoly s názvem Kmotr. Důraz bude kladen jak na postavu Vita Corleoneho, tak na prvek amerického snu. V úvodní části se zaměřím na historický podklad příběhu, konkrétně období masové imigrace do USA a dále. Následující kapitola bude věnována Vitovým úspěchům v otázce rodiny i sociálního a komerčního vzestupu. V závěru práce bude rozebrán pohled na americký sen z pohledů Vita a Michaela.

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