

From Hollywood Mobster to Russian Gangster: Representations of Mafia in Coppola's *Godfather* Trilogy and Balabanov's *Brother* films

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Abstract

This study examines the changed mythology of crime in the Hollywood gangster genre resulting from new representations of mafia in Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy. The trilogy will be viewed as a point of departure for new experimentations in the gangster genre in response to the Russian experience of mafia, namely in Aleksei Balabanov's *Brother* film sequence. This analysis will discuss the key themes that appear in Coppola's trilogy including family, morality, and identity and consider the extent to which they either translate to or mutate in Balabanov's sequence. This research will also explore how Balabanov infuses his films with unique Russian stylistic elements from the *bylina* (fairy-tale) and aesthetics from *chernukha* (dark cinema) in order to create a reimagined version of the gangster film. On a basic level, this work will compare the two on-screen depictions of mafia, yet its broader aim is to reveal the tension that arises as Balabanov both resists and succumbs to the influence of Hollywood on Russian cinema and how post-Soviet society and culture relates to globalised American culture.

Keywords

gangster genre, mafia film, gangster hero, The Godfather, family, brotherhood, morality, masculinity, Russian cinema, Russian national identity, Italian American identity, social critique

Introduction

In his exploration of Aleksei Balabanov's oeuvre, Frederick H. White observes that '[w]hen talk of the Russian mafia was prevalent in the West in the 1990s, there were semantic associations with the Italian mafia, especially the version popularized by Francis Ford Coppola's Godfather trilogy' made in 1972, 1974 and 1990.¹ The intention of this research is to investigate the complexities of the relationship that White is referring to through a comparison of Coppola's trilogy (henceforth *The Godfather*) with Balabanov's films *Brother* (1997) and *Brother 2* (2000). On a superficial level, this will facilitate an evaluation of the extent to which the *Brother* sequence derives or deviates from Coppola's work. On the broadest level, this will demonstrate the wider cultural influence of America on post-Soviet culture. There is extensive literature treating *The Godfather* and *Brother* films separately, yet there are fewer papers which take such a concretely comparative approach. This will involve an in-depth treatment of both sets of films in order to uncover the innermost tensions that characterise their similarities and differences. These tensions are manifest in the social and historical contexts of Russia and America, how these influenced the genre conventions of each filmic series, how the Russian and American versions of the gangster hero and the gangster narrative are both conflicting and overlapping, how the perception of the mafia as a family or brotherhood can be problematic and interpreted differently, and finally, how the use of American values in opposition to Italian or Russian ones for social critique within a genre influenced by Hollywood brings further complications.

Although the release of the first film (henceforth *Part I*) in *The Godfather* predates the release of the first *Brother* film by 25 years, comparisons between both the American and Russian historical contexts can be maintained. Additionally, there are visible similarities between the way in which each director responds to his own society and its problems. Coppola revolutionised the contemporary formula for the gangster film, and years later Balabanov defied audience expectations of the gangster film type that Coppola had created.

Balabanov revealed the influence of Hollywood on post-Soviet cinema in an attempt to create independently of it. Both films present a gangster hero to whom the spectator is not accustomed, a complex reflection of the problematic society to which each belongs. Structurally, Coppola frames the parameters for a new gangster genre upon which Balabanov builds his own Russian version of the gangster film, adding elements of Russian folklore and Russian cinematic aesthetics which distinguish it from its Hollywood predecessor. For Coppola, mafia is synonymous with family; whereas for Balabanov, mafia equates to brotherhood — in both the literal and patriotic sense — the bonds of which are as strong as blood ties. Thematically, both directors approach wider questions of ethnicity and identity

¹ Frederick H. White, "Balabanov's Bandits: The Bandit Film Cycle in Post-Soviet Cinema" in *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 25, 2 (2016), 82–103 (p. 84) < [hOps://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26598683](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26598683) > [accessed 23 May 2022].

that are especially pronounced when contrasted with the American context. This paper will pay attention to each of these elements in order to fully understand why they are the root of the aforementioned tensions between the individual films and the separate franchises.

Gangster Movies and Bandit Blockbusters

The necessary starting point for this research is to consider how both *The Godfather* and *Brother* films operate within the gangster genre and to examine the relationship of their respective social and historical contexts with the genre. In Rick Altman's study *Film/Genre*, the author recognises the malleability of genre and its capacity to perform many tasks at once. Within a film, Altman defines genre as structure and formula; externally, he characterises genre as a label given to a film by the industry and the corresponding interpretation of a film by its audience.² The gangster genre, as argued by John Cawelti, has developed varying formulas and structural possibilities that are found in *The Godfather* and *Brother* films. Both franchises have been labelled by the film industry as gangster films and audiences have received them as such. Altman acknowledges that these definitions of genre presuppose a number of assumptions that are made about genre, although it is not within the scope of this study to treat them all. Most interestingly, the assumption exists that all genres are transhistorical, meaning that *Brother*, made in 1997, can have a relationship with *The Godfather* which concluded in 1990.³ As a corollary, the assumption also exists that genres must be both similar and different in order to succeed.⁴ This research seeks to explore at which points *The Godfather* and *Brother* films are not only similar as gangster films but different, especially with reference to their contexts, narrative structures, and visual styles. Balabanov's attempt to russify the Hollywood tradition as seen in the *Brother* films situates the Russian gangster film in a larger struggle that is the attempt to distinguish Russian cultural production from a seemingly inescapable American influence.

When considering the Hollywood gangster genre, it is often traced back to classics such as *Little Caesar* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932). That said, Francis Ford Coppola's interpretation is the most famous and revolutionary contribution of all time. Based on the 1969 novel by Mario Puzo, *The Godfather* revolutionised the artistic template for the new gangster genre, enabling impactful representations of mafia in different cultural contexts, the Russian derivation being of interest in this enquiry. Puzo's novel began circulating in the USSR in 1973,⁵ as well as pirate copies of *Part I*, *The Godfather: Part II* (henceforth *Part II*), and *Scarface* (1983) in the late Gorbachev years, signifying 'that the predominant image of organised crime was

² Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, (London: British Film Institute, 1999). p. 14.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵ Sergei I. Zhuk, "Soviet Americanists and American Visual Media in the USSR during the Brezhnev Era" in *Entangled East and West: Cultural Diplomacy and Artistic Interaction during the Cold War*, in ed. by Simo Mikkonen, Jari Parkkinen and Giles Scott-Smith (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018) pp. 163–192 (p. 174) <<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110573169-008>> [accessed 23 May 2022].

American-influenced'.⁶ This had the effect that elements from neighbouring genres such as the vigilante film also appear in the *Brother* sequence, namely in the protagonist, Danila Bagrov. Danila is as much, or even more like Paul Kersey (*Death Wish*), Travis Bickle (*Taxi Driver*) or John Rambo (*Rambo*) as he is like Michael Corleone, *The Godfather's* main protagonist. The popularity of these Hollywood titles combined with the real-life experience of ubiquitous criminality in post-Soviet Russia after the fall of the USSR saw that 'the Russian gangster film as a genre fully emerged'.⁷

Balabanov presents a deliberately un-Hollywood, unglamorous mafia by drawing from the *chernukha* (dark cinema) tradition and using structural elements of Russian folklore to portray the Russian experience of crime on screen. These deviations from the Hollywood gangster genre allow Balabanov to 'articulate a kind of hostility toward America and the West in order to reject its hegemonic influence on Russian culture', especially in *Brother 2*.⁸ Balabanov is even credited for carving out a sub-genre that Frederick H. White has termed the bandit film cycle, beginning with *Brother* and ending with *Dead Man's Bluff* (2005).⁹ White contrasts the 1930s gangster film with the Russian bandit film, arguing that 'unlike the American gangster films in which law enforcement almost always punishes the criminals in the end, the Russian bandit films portray the bandit as the hero who must, through violence and criminal behaviour, overcome social, political and economic barriers'.¹⁰ Notably, the same is true of *The Godfather*, and this offers grounds for its influence on *Brother*. That said, the *Brother* films are not simply a distortion of Hollywood blockbusters, given that they also fit into a rich tradition of Russian crime films, both Soviet and post-Soviet. This means that *Brother* sometimes differs more from *The Godfather* than Russian crime genre films such as Pavel Lungin's *Oligarkh* (2000) or the series *Brigada* (2002), which are much closer in structure to *The Godfather*. However, as Altman would argue, noticing these differences between films pertaining to an overarching genre reveals how they succeed.

The first two instalments of *The Godfather* were made during an 'an era that saw not only the disintegration of the family, but also the deterioration of America's faith in government'¹¹ after

⁶ Patricia Rawlinson, "Mafia, Media and Myth: Representations of Russian Organised Crime" in *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 37, 4 (1998), 346–358 (p. 348) < <https://doi-org.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/10.1111/1468-2311.00105> > [accessed 23 May 2020].

⁷ Lioudmila Fedorova, 'The Russia They Have Lost: The Russian Gangster as Nostalgic Hero', in *A Companion to the Gangster Film* ed. by George S. Larke-Walsh (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2019) pp. 302–318 (p. 302) < <https://doi-org.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/10.1002/9781119041757.ch16> > [accessed 23 May 2022].

⁸ Dawn Seckler & Stephen M. Norris 'The Blokbuster: How Russian Cinema Learned to Love Hollywood', in *A Companion to Russian Cinema*, ed. by Birgit Beumers, (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2016) pp. 202–223 (p. 207) <<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118424773.ch9>> [accessed 23 May 2022].

⁹ White, 'Balabanov's Bandits', p. 82.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹¹ Vera Dika, "The Representation of Ethnicity in The Godfather" in *Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather Trilogy* ed. by Nick Browne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp.76–108 (p. 78) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139172912.005>> [accessed 23 May 2022].

the unpopular Vietnam War and Watergate scandal under Nixon.¹² Coppola sets *Part I* in 1940s New York, with a storyline that underlines the tensions between the establishment and society just as the audience of modern-day America was facing both prolonged economic instability and a crisis of the family ideal. *Part I* begins with Amerigo Bonasera's (Salvatore Corsitto) famous line 'I believe in America' and the inferred subtext 'I don't believe in its system of justice – represent[ing] the beginning of a progressive critique in the trilogy'.¹³ He pleads with Don Vito (Marlon Brando) to punish the Americans who raped his daughter and walked free from prosecution by the American courts. The crime itself is more than a violation against Amerigo's daughter. It is symbolic of an American attack on ethnic Italians and their family, a concept that Coppola uses to explain the mafia resorting to violence against their enemies. Amerigo's story has no bearing on the rest of the plot, but it prefigures the trilogy-long criticism of American institutions and capitalism. The subsequent narrative arc is described as 'the myth of the individual at odds with the system but with no counteracting myth of the need for a law-abiding society'.¹⁴ Therefore, when the main protagonist Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) inherits his father Don Vito's criminal business empire, he is unable to avoid murder and corruption while he tries to maintain honour, family values, and follow his own moral code.

Similarly, the first scene of *Brother* 'functions as a [...] political and cultural manifesto for the film as a whole'.¹⁵ It begins with the protagonist Danila Bagrov (Sergei Bodrov Jr.) walking through the set of a music video for the song *Kryl'ia* ('Wings') by rock band Nautilus Pompilius. In the refrain 'Where are your wings / That I loved so much?' the word 'wings' suggests Danila's desire to ascend towards something greater, a higher power – anything more meaningful than this gritty post-Soviet existence. The song precludes Danila's philosophical search for meaning in this strange new Russia and marks his benevolent intentions in an unforgiving society. Unfortunately, as for Michael Corleone, these good intentions do not prevent him from carrying out violent actions. In the visually similar opening scene of *Brother 2*, Danila walks through the set of a TV-advert whilst an actor, dressed in a designer suit, standing in front of a shiny hummer, recites 'No, I am not Byron', a Lermontov poem. On hearing Lermontov, any Russian will remember his most famous work 'A Hero of Our Time' a description since attributed to Danila, the Russian gangster and 'hero of the new time'.¹⁶ Balabanov uses the actor to mock everything he represents: a chic, stereotypical Russian mafia boss and modern version of the superfluous man. Balabanov visually contrasts the shabbily dressed Danila with this actor, suggesting that Danila is a

¹² Glenn Man, "Ideology and Genre in the Godfather Films" in *Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather Trilogy* ed. by Browne, pp. 109–132 (p. 127) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139172912.006>> [accessed 23 May 2022].

¹³ Ibid, p. 115.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁵ Susan Larsen, 'National Identity, Cultural Authority, and the Post-Soviet Blockbuster: Nikita Mikhalkov and Aleksei Balabanov', *Slavic Review*, 62, 3, 491–511, (p. 506) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3185803>> [accessed 23 May 2022].

¹⁶ Fedorova, 'The Russia They Have Lost', p. 302.

classic Byronic hero. The reference to the Russian poet signifies Danila's purpose of finding true Russian identity in its post-Soviet form and associates Danila with a legendary hero who must save Russian society from ethnic enemies and capitalist villains. Both Michael and Danila are presented as everyman figures struggling with the system or a lack thereof, yet as *The Godfather* and *Brother* unfold, so too does the complex nature of each protagonist, demonstrating them to be more than just everyman characters.

In *Part I*, the system is the American government, which is vilified through the characters who symbolise it. Policemen are as untrustworthy as the judge who pardons the men who raped Amerigo's daughter. When Michael visits Don Vito in hospital, the officers try to detain him in order to leave Don Vito vulnerable to attack by rival gangs. This triggers Michael's initiation into the underworld with the murder of a rival gang leader and a corrupt policeman at Louis' Italian restaurant. Coppola's camerawork in this scene 'does not position the viewers on the side of the law, but rather securely engages them on the side of the criminal' by walking them through the action with Michael so that they identify with the murderer not the victim.¹⁷ The 'subjectivizing techniques'¹⁸ in this climactic scene reverse the 1930s Hollywood tradition of 'othering' the criminal from the audience,¹⁹ thereby turning 'the fantasy of the self-made man' appreciated by a 1930s audience into the fantasy of the self-made criminal.²⁰ Throughout the trilogy, this counter-cultural hero redefines the on-screen gangster and addresses the troubles in off-screen society; namely, disillusionment with the government and the demise of the 1950s traditional American family. The essential feature of this new gangster is that he is situated within the image of family, and his criminal activities are justified because they satisfy the audience's desire to revolt against the system and revive the 1950s traditional American family.²¹

In *Brother*, the system has disintegrated, and is represented by traces of what it used to be (the army, the police) and what it could become (criminals, non-Russians). In *Brother*, Danila's first conversation is with a policeman who asks him if he wants to join the force. Without hesitation Danila declines, a message to the viewer that police are not to be respected or trusted, to the extent that Danila would sooner choose unemployment or crime. This alludes to the insufficiency of law enforcement and corruption in Russia, Balabanov's 'implicit criticism of the post-Soviet era'.²² In a slight contrast to the overt hostility and criticism of institutional power that runs throughout *The Godfather*, in *Brother*, there is a combination of criticism of those who vainly purport to uphold the law, and towards anyone who poses a threat to Danila's survival as he navigates the underworld. It is worth pointing out that *Brother*

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁸ Man, 'Ideology and Genre', p. 115.

¹⁹ Alessandro Camon, 'The Godfather and the Mythology of Mafia' in *Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather Trilogy*, ed. by Browne, pp. 57–75 (p. 70) <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139172912.004> [accessed 23 May 2022].

²⁰ Dika, 'The Representation of Ethnicity', p. 84.

²¹ Ibid., p. 78.

²² Fedorova, 'The Russia They Have Lost', p. 303.

marks a thematic turning point in Balabanov's oeuvre, whereby his portrayal of graphic violence, pornography, and corrupt policemen intensifies in later works such as *Of Freaks and Men* (1998) and *Cargo 200* (2007). '*Brother* displays stock features of the director's subsequent films' situating his work in a world of 'post-Tarantino' violence, criminality, and conflict, seen through the eyes of an alienated and 'morally questionable' hero.²³ In the way that Coppola's trilogy addressed the insecurities and wishes of his American viewers, Balabanov's film studio 'was able to both lend a voice to the average Russian audience for mythological bandit heroes and articulate a cultural ideology embedded with social and political messages'.²⁴ The following sections will delve further into the narrative formulas, structural elements and characteristics of the gangster hero displayed in *The Godfather* and *Brother* films, as well as how Balabanov russifies the gangster film.

New Gangster Heroes and New Gangster Narratives

In John Cawelti's study of the gangster genre, he states that *The Godfather* 'established a new fashion in the portrayal of crime' in terms of both character types and narrative structure.²⁵ Coppola's disruption of these conventions marks a pivotal moment for cinematic representations of crime that have paved the way for Balabanov to reinterpret these elements further and add his own. Coppola is responsible for a ground-breaking reimagining of the gangster hero. In Robert Warshow's formative essay, *The Gangster as Tragic Hero* (1948), he makes three pertinent observations about the gangster. He claims that the gangster's entire being centres on acquiring individual authority, that the gangster's downfall is in his need to succeed rather than the criminal methods he uses to do so, and that the social dilemma is embodied in the gangster hero and resolved by his death.²⁶ In both *The Godfather* and *Brother*, these traces of the tragic gangster hero do appear, although in two new types of the gangster protagonist that Cawelti names The Don (or Godfather) and The Enforcer.²⁷ The Don is the leader of the criminal organisation, he is a father to his followers and sets a moral example for them. The Enforcer is the professional criminal, often a contract killer and is in direct opposition to the warm, emotional Don, adopting a rational and detached personality.²⁸ The Don corresponds to Michael, a family man who prides himself in his honour and ethics. The Enforcer corresponds to Danila, who is trained in violence having fought in the Chechen War. Although Danila denies his military service, the viewer knows he is lying, given

²³ Rimaglia Salys, 'Introduction', in *The Russian Cinema Reader, Vol. II: The Thaw to the Present*, ed. by Rimaglia Salys, (Boston, MA.: Academic Studies Press), pp. 257-260 (pp. 259-260) <hOps://doi.org/10.1515/9781618113764-032> [accessed 23 May 2022].

²⁴ White, 'Balabanov's Bandits', p. 83.

²⁵ John G. Cawelti, 'The New Mythology of Crime', *Boundary 2*, 3, 2 (1975), 324-357 (p. 339) <hQps://www.jstor.org/stable/302105> [accessed 23 May 2022].

²⁶ Robert Warshow, 'The Gangster as Tragic Hero', *The Par?san Review*, 15, 2 (1948) 127-133 (p. 133).

²⁷ Cawelti, 'The New Mythology of Crime', p. 339.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

that he is unmoved by the sight of dead bodies, carries out murders for his brother Viktor (Viktor Sukhorukov) like a professional, and makes his own weapons.

According to Warshow's thought, both Michael and Danila aim to assert themselves, and to gain their own power and agency. That said, they depart from Warshow's idea that gangsters are motivated solely by individual gain, in that they are also driven by being part of a collective. In Michael's case, the collective is his blood family and mafia family, and in Danila's, it is his brothers and compatriots. I will return to these notions of family and national identity in later sections. Michael's demise is not because of his need to succeed rather than his criminal ways, as Warshow would maintain. It is due to the fact that his need to succeed, to protect blood family and make his mafia business legitimate, is indivisible from crime, violence, and the overwhelming forces of greed, money, and power. Danila's idea of success is simpler and purer: that of survival and restoring the Russian nation. Nevertheless, it is equally inseparable from crime. For Danila to outlive his enemies and help his brothers, he must engage in assassination missions, which he does successfully. However, his success is only superficial. Danila may not die at the end of *Brother 2*, but the convention of the gangster's death is transposed to the decline of America as the scapegoat for the corruption of the Russian state. Thus, Danila's downfall is his ultimate inability to fix a broken Russian society. When Michael dies at the end of *The Godfather: Part III* (henceforth *Part III*), it is clear that institutional corruption will continue after his death. Therefore, the Don and Enforcer only fulfil the first half of Warshow's third criterion, that the gangster hero is the embodiment of social ills, but not that these are resolved by his death.

In addition to these two new gangster models are their associated plot types: The Enforcer's caper and the saga of the family.²⁹ The 'caper' comprises an ambitious and detailed mission undertaken by The Enforcer that unfolds with great action and suspense.³⁰ Both *Brother* films embody The Enforcer's caper, since the trajectory of each film follows Danila on a complex assassination mission. Contrastingly, *The Godfather* constitutes an epic and emotive family saga based on the relationship that The Don — first Vito, then Michael Corleone — has with power, and how he uses power to the benefit of his family.³¹ Although the trilogy is not a caper, similar escapades laden with symbolism appear throughout the three films as part of The Don's larger goal: exacting justice, protecting his family, and advancing his position in society. Yet upon closer inspection, it is convincingly argued by Emily Schuckman Matthews that Danila's heroism is more legendary than that of an emotionless Enforcer and the overarching story more profound than that of a caper, as has already been hinted by the references to 'Wings' in the first film and Lermontov in the second.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 346.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 344.

³¹ Ibid., p. 337.

Schuckman Matthews provides an in-depth examination of Vladimir Propp's framework of the *bylina* (epic poem or fairy-tale) as the structural basis for the *Brother* films, whose stock characters such as hero, helper, villain and princess help to establish Danila as the *bogatyr* (folk-hero). For example, in *Brother*, Danila confronts Kruglyi (Sergei Murzin) the "unquestionable villain" who speaks in proverbs much like a character from a *bylina* would. He meets Hoffmann, one of his 'helpers'³² and the 'ethical voice'³³ of the film. Danila asks Hoffmann: 'Tell me, why do we live?' which highlights his concern for wider existential questions beyond the miserable reality of contract killing. Hoffman also lays the groundwork for an expansion of Danila's understanding of brotherhood which arrives in *Brother 2*, given that he and Hoffman develop a brotherly relationship based on loyalty, even though they are not related by blood or nation. Balabanov even makes a visual reference to the *bogatyr* in *Brother* by placing a wall-hanging depicting a *bylina* in Danila's lover Sveta's (Svetlana Pismichenko) apartment.

Danila's assassination mission in *Brother* appears to be a caper on the surface, but the folkloric symbolism indicates that 'his journey is about something larger'.³⁴ As he travels to Moscow, the film's closing shot shows the snow-covered road ahead lined with snow-topped trees. This white scene evokes a fresh start, as well as recalling the forest itself as 'the symbolic site of transition in the folk tale', thus anchoring Danila's story in a meaningful larger picture.³⁵ Having carried out the murder, Danila proves 'successful as an enforcer [...] by the end of the film' and the expectation for his success as a *bogatyr* in the sequel is created, although not fulfilled in the end.³⁶ By taking uniquely Russian structural elements from the *bylina* including the *bogatyr*, Balabanov elevates the status of his film to the same level of impact of a Hollywood family saga, without simply reproducing one using the same ingredients. The blend of Enforcer-caper-*bylina* allows Balabanov to differentiate his work from the Hollywood tradition by using the Russian literary tradition as he retaliates against the American cultural influence of the post-Soviet era.

In addition, Balabanov diverges from Coppola's aesthetic choices for the on-screen representation of violence and crime. Contrary to the theatricality of the murder scenes in *The Godfather*, *Brother* borrows from the *chernukha* cinematic tradition of the 1980s. Derived from the Russian word for 'black,' *chernukha* depicts 'the darkest, bleakest aspects of post-Soviet life' often 'represented within an atmosphere of cruelty and physical violence'.³⁷ *Chernukha*

³² Emily Schuckman MaOhevs, 'Folk Elements in Aleksei Balabanov's *Brat* and *Brat 2*: A Morphological Analysis', *Bal>c Screen Media Review*, 3, 2015, 64–83 (p. 72) <hOps://doi.org/10.1515/bsmr-2015-0024> [accessed 23 May 2022].

³³ Larsen, 'Na:onal Iden:ty, Cultural Authority', p. 505.

³⁴ Schuckman MaQhevs, 'Folk Elements', p. 74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³⁶ White, 'Balabanov's Bandits', p. 86.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

was integral to post-Soviet cultural products depicting endless misery.³⁸ Volha Isakava asserts that *chernukha* is not temporally confined to the perestroika or early post-Soviet years, but a discourse of trauma that became the baggage of the 1990s and has survived to the present day. The *Brother* films bear the burdens tied to the *chernukha* tradition; namely ‘the identity and value crisis of that period, being a dark spot that still attracts public anxiety’ and the question of how to live through and after the 1990s.³⁹

One of the key principles of *chernukha* was an authentic depiction of life. The tradition ‘was largely driven by an inversion of Russia’s most enduring cultural clichés’ such as the ‘integrity of the family’ which offers an interesting comparison with the similar degradation of the American family in *The Godfather*.⁴⁰ This attention to realism saw a de-glamourisation of violence in *Brother*, and an awareness of ‘the inability to overcome the traumatic experience or rather fixation on it.’⁴¹ Balabanov used camera filters that replicated the dim-coloured effect of the Soviet celluloid used in *chernukha* films, the *shostka*, named after the Ukrainian factory in which it was produced.⁴² The resulting dark representation of crime strays from the stylishness associated with *The Godfather*, and invokes an image of the black hole or ‘ideological vacuum’ left in post-Soviet society after the collapse of the USSR.⁴³ These structural, stylistic, and aesthetic elements constitute the necessary tools for Balabanov to imbue a sense of unique Russianness into the Hollywood-dominated genre, ultimately exposing the tension between the influence of Hollywood and the director’s desire to resist confinement to its conventions.

Morality, Family, and Bonds of Brotherhood

As previously discussed, Michael (The Don) does everything for his family and family business, and Danila (the Enforcer-*bogatyri*) makes decisions out of a loyalty to his brothers by blood or nation. The only non-blood brother to Michael in *The Godfather* is Tom Hagen, who holds a similar position as Hoffman to Danila as a person from whom Michael seeks advice. This

³⁸ Eliot Borenstein, *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 125 < [hOps://muse.jhu.edu/book/24488](https://muse.jhu.edu/book/24488) > [accessed 23 May 2022].

³⁹ Volha Isakava, ‘The Body in the Dark: Body, Sexuality and Trauma in Perestroika Cinema’, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3, 2 (2009), 201–214 (p. 204) <[hQps://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1386/srsc.3.2.201_1](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1386/srsc.3.2.201_1)> [accessed 23 May 2022].

⁴⁰ Nancy Condee, *The Imperial Trace: Recent Russian Cinema*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 14 <[10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195366761.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195366761.001.0001)> [accessed 23 May 2022].

⁴¹ Isakava, ‘The Body in the Dark’, p. 210.

⁴² Irina Gradinari, ‘From Hollywood to Russia: New Russian Action Cinema. Masculinity Politics and National Identity in the films of Aleksey Balabanov’, in *Genre Hybridisation: Global Cinematic Flows*, ed. by Ivo Ritzer and Peter W. Schulze (Marburg: Shüren, 2013), pp. 281–294 (p. 288) <<https://doi.org/10.5771/9783741000416-281>> [accessed 23 May 2022].

⁴³ Brigit Beumers, ‘National Identity Through Visions of the Past: Contemporary Russian Cinema’, in *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*, ed. by Mark Basin and Catriona Kelley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) pp. 55–72 (p. 57) < <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511894732.006> > [accessed 23 May 2022].

section will investigate how both Michael and Danila wrestle with their own moralities informed by the morally corrupt societies to which they belong, and why this is significant for the conversation about the gangster genre. In *The Godfather*, the family motif is powerful because it justifies the Don's involvement in crime and violence. Coppola structures organised violence around family events or religious rituals to achieve this justification. In *Part I*, Don Vito conducts his meeting with Amerigo Bonasera in his office while Michael's sister Connie's (Talia Shire) wedding reception is underway in his garden. In *Part II*, Michael has a business meeting at his home in Lake Tahoe whilst his family are outside celebrating his son's Holy Communion. In both of these cases, business is always attended to so that family life is preserved, the main message being that latter cannot exist without the former. *Part I* ends with visually arresting shots of extreme violence interspersed with the baptism of Connie's baby. Coppola crosscuts between frames of family and shots of extreme violence to create the effect of Eisenstein's montage, a technique that plays contrasting images in succession to derive meaning.⁴⁴ The intended meaning is that violence is necessary in order to protect family. It is noteworthy that at this ceremony Michael assumes the role of religious Godfather after having ordered a murder as mafia Godfather, illustrating the inherently opposing forces that challenge Michael in his double-edged role.

Part II alternates between Don Vito's story from 1901 in Sicily to 1920s New York, and Michael's life in 1950s Nevada and California. The comparison between these two generations evokes the sense that – even had Don Vito hoped for the opposite – Michael is destined to follow in his father's footsteps down a path of crime. As in *Part I*, montage intersperses the murder of Don Fanucci (Gastone Moschin) with crowds of families and children celebrating a religious festival. After killing Fanucci, the camera follows Vito walking through the procession to his family. He picks up his baby son uttering 'words of paternal affection that elicit sympathy from the viewer', again placing murderous acts in the larger context of familial protection.⁴⁵ The irony is that the method of violence as protection later proves detrimental to the very family he wishes to preserve. The Don's 'double morality' hinges on 'the forced cohabitation of opposite principles – violence and love' for both are needed to maintain the existence of his blood and mafia family.⁴⁶ The Don's 'moral code is observed beneath the rubric of "honour"', yet Michael acts unlawfully and immorally, this losing the qualities connected to The Don.⁴⁷ Michael states 'we're all part of the same hypocrisy, Senator', demonstrating his belief that legitimate business in America is as corrupt as criminal enterprise and that he will have to act unlawfully in order to legitimise his business. *Part II* ends with Michael ordering the death of

⁴⁴ Phoebe Poon, 'The Corleone Chronicles: Revisiting The Godfather Films as Trilogy', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 33, 4, (2010) 187–195 (p. 189) <hOp://dx.doi.org/10.3200/JPFT.33.4.187-195> [accessed 23 May 2022].

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁴⁶ Camon, 'The Godfather and the Mythology of Mafia', p. 66.

⁴⁷ John Krapp, 'Ideology, Rhetoric, and Blood-Ties: From 'The Oresteia' to 'The Godfather'', *Mosaic*, 32, 1 (1999) 16 (p.8)<hOps://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A54482279/AONE?u=ucl_Oda&sid=bookmark-AONE&id=c9719a9d> [accessed 23 May 2022].

his own brother, Fredo (John Cazale). In so doing, he violates the only existing material basis for his honour – that of blood ties. The act of ‘killing a brother is a direct assault on the ideal, and the very structure of the family’, signifying that The Don’s lost morality will cause his downfall in *Part III* and deconstruct the myth of the family built in *Part I*.⁴⁸

This justification for committing violence for family in *The Godfather* appears in *Brother*, although not in the same way. The first film begins with Danila travelling to Saint Petersburg to visit Viktor under their mother’s instruction. It takes Danila two days to find Viktor and when he does, Viktor is in danger with a mafia boss, Kruglyi, since Viktor has asked him for too much money to carry out a killing. Viktor manipulates Danila to complete the assassination for him so he can avoid capture by Kruglyi’s men. Danila’s willingness to help his brother reveals his unconscious desire for a father figure, although Viktor is revealed to be an inadequate paternal surrogate, a *frère fatal*.⁴⁹ Viktor betrays Danila in a set-up, then begs him ‘don’t shoot me brother’, and Danila responds ‘but you are my brother. I used to call you Papa’. At first glance, this brotherly relationship underline’s Danila naivety. Balabanov intends to trick the viewer and the other characters to believe this idea of Danila, then proceeds to depict Danila as anything but naive. Equally, their exchange highlights Danila’s hope to salvage his relationship with Viktor even after the latter’s treachery, as well as his belief that a deracinated and fatherless Russia can recover its past Soviet glory. The theme of fatherlessness also places *Brother* within the Russian cinematic tradition of the 1990s whereby sons search for a lost father or an alternative paternal figure and if sons do find fathers, they accept them regardless of all their shortcomings.⁵⁰ The mafia depicted here is ‘a false family’ given that Viktor betrays his own brother, and it becomes clear that ‘the isolated small group of friends inside the mafia [is] a real brotherhood’.⁵¹ Even the title of the second film, *Brat Dva*, is a homophone for the word *bratva*, meaning a non-blood-related brotherhood or gang of men. *Bratstvo*, the traditional word for brotherhood used in the familial sense, does not appear. This foretells the way in which Danila’s loyalty develops over the two films from one towards blood relatives to brothers in the wider sense of the word.⁵²

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⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 493.

⁵⁰ Tatiana Smorodinskaya, ‘The Fathers’ War Through the Sons’ Lens’, in *Cinepaternity: Fathers and Sons in Soviet and Post-Soviet Film*, ed. by Helena Goscilo and Yana Hashamova, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) pp. 89–113 (p. 90).

⁵¹ Fedorova, ‘The Russia They Have Lost’, p. 311.

⁵² Larsen, ‘Na:onal Iden:ty, Cultural Authority’, p. 509.

'brotherhood' and his desire for a symbolic rather than genetic restoration of paternity.⁵³ In both films, the assassination missions are hardly as important to Danila as his overarching propagation of true Russianness. Danila's 'loyalty to family and nation', coupled with Russia's reality in which 'everyone lives by his own laws and instructions'⁵⁴ justifies 'Danila's impromptu vigilante justice.'⁵⁵ The significance of vigilantism in the film points to the different contexts in which Danila and Michael find themselves. Danila enters and exits the criminal world at will due to the absence of law and order, whereas Michael complains that he keeps getting pulled back into it to ensure the survival of his family in a corrupt American system. Danila is much more of a lone-wolf than Michael, and his loyalty to Russia is more abstract than Michael's to his family. Yet the assault made on his wartime brothers launches Danila into his mission in *Brother 2*, showing how important these battlefield bonds are to him. In any case, Danila's resulting moral code, like that of Michael, is a problematic combination of loyalty and violence or crime. By the end of the film Danila remains good at his core despite the fact that his black and white value system often leads to immoral acts whereas Michael's morally bad decisions are symptomatic of irreversible moral collapse.⁵⁶

At the end of *Brother 2*, Danila has no choice but to abandon Viktor in Chicago because the latter has exhibited over-indulgence, greed, and 'American' behaviour. Danila may have previously forgiven Viktor's double-crossing set-up, but the fact that he is seduced by an American lifestyle, even comically declaring 'I'm staying!' while American police handcuff him, proves too shameful for Danila. Despite Viktor's betrayal and lack of respect for his brother or his brother's values, Danila does not kill Viktor, yet Michael kills Fredo in cold blood for his betrayal, demonstrating the differences between the protagonists' attitudes surrounding morality, brotherhood and family in the two cultural contexts. It is through Danila that the audience realises that the real pain of fatherlessness is not caused by an inadequate brother-father like Viktor, but by the loss of the great family that is the Russian nation, as seen in the collective identity crisis which followed the dissolution of the USSR. This need for identity informs much of Danila's decision-making. Most notably, his treatment of ethnic minorities and hatred for America, which will be examined in the following section, taint his positive patriotic endeavours and moral goodness with a disconcerting layer of nationalism and racism. Equally, Michael's misguided morality and fall from honour will be examined in more depth.

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⁵³ Schuckman MaQhews, 'Folk Elements', p. 78.

⁵⁴ Federico Varese, 'Is Sicily the Future of Russia?' Private Protection and the Rise of the Russian Mafia', *European Journal of Sociology*, 35, 2 (1994) 224–258 (p. 246) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23997468>> [accessed 23 May 2022].

⁵⁵ Larsen, 'National Identity, Cultural Authority', p. 504.

⁵⁶ Schuckman MaQhews, 'Folk Elements', p. 70.

The crescendo of tensions that build throughout both *The Godfather* and *Brother* films reaches its peak when Coppola and Balabanov directly oppose Italian or Russian values with American ones. Particular attention must be paid to *Part III*, the finale to Michael's story and the ultimate deconstruction of the myths explored in the previous two films.⁵⁷ The myth of authentic Italianness, termed 'Italianness' by Vera Dika, is built in *Part I* and *Part II* through Coppola's use of sound and image to evoke a sense of nostalgia for old Sicilian culture.⁵⁸ The mandolin in the theme tune emulates the sound of traditional Sicilian songs from a bygone era. Stills from the film, especially scenes of The Don conducting business indoors, could be Baroque paintings as Coppola employs *chiaroscuro* to produce 'a quality of pastness on the part of the image'.⁵⁹ The warm, 'soft-focus nostalgia' of Vito in Sicily and New York corresponds to Vito's warm-heartedness, family orientation and ability to maintain his Sicilian identity abroad.⁶⁰ *Part III* deliberately juxtaposes this warmth with a grey 'image of the Lake Tahoe house in disrepair',⁶¹ reminding the viewer of 'Michael's cold professionalism' the day he ordered his brother's death in this very location.⁶² Coppola's artistic choices in *Part III* preface the crumbling of Michael and the Corleone family.

In Part III, Michael discovers that 'the world of finance and politics is not less treacherous or evil' than the criminal world after he finds corruption at the highest-level of the Catholic Church, the supposed epitome of morality.⁶³ Michael hosts an opening ceremony of the Vito Corleone Foundation for which he receives a papal award. His wife, Kay (Diane Keaton), views this as a transactional 'sham designed to purchase honour and respectability'.⁶⁴ This reveals how skewed Michael's moral compass has become, since he believes that donating money will allow him to buy his Sicilian identity back. Michael also fails to find a biological successor to his empire and settles for Vincent (Andy Garcia), his brother Sonny's (James Caan) illegitimate son. Vincent carries out Joey Zasa's (Joe Mantegna) murder which happens in almost identical circumstances to that of Don Fanucci's in Part II. However, this time bystanders scream and hide in fear as Vincent and his accomplices put lives at risk. This 'attack ends with no clear heroes and little honour', signifying the organisation's fall from grace and the loss of old mafia ways.⁶⁵ Part III rejects any possibility of redemption since Michael is neither able to avoid corruption, nor able to reinstate his family bloodline with a suitable heir. Michael descends from the American Dream to an American nightmare, seeing his morals and honour replaced with capitalist greed, as well as detaching him from his role

⁵⁷ Poon, 'The Corleone Chronicles', p. 192.

⁵⁸ Dika, 'The Representa:on of Ethnicity', p. 77.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 93.

⁶⁰ Man, 'Ideology and Genre', p. 126.

⁶¹ Dika, 'The Representa:on of Ethnicity', p. 98.

⁶² Man, 'Ideology and Genre', p. 119.

⁶³ Camon, 'The Godfather and the Mythology of Mafia', p. 66.

⁶⁴ Krapp, 'Ideology, Rhetoric, and Blood-Ties', p. 13.

⁶⁵ Dika, 'The Representa:on of Ethnicity', p. 101.

as ‘upholder of the Sicilian mafiosi values’, and from his ethnic roots.⁶⁶ The final blow comes at the end with the death of his daughter Maria (Sophia Coppola). Michael’s unresolved tragedy eventually leads him to die alone in his garden ‘psychologically destroyed by guilt’.⁶⁷ Coppola defies expectations of the gangster hero, the gangster film, and the Hollywood happy ending at the conclusion of his three-part saga.

Contrary to the immigrant gangsters of the Corleone family, who seek to establish themselves in a foreign country, Balabanov presents post-Soviet gangsters as ‘displaced persons’ or ‘immigrants in their own country’ as they try to navigate its changed reality.⁶⁸ Balabanov expresses the “common anxiety about what it means to be Russian through Danila’s interactions with others.⁶⁹ Russian insecurities about identity are projected onto different versions of the ‘other’ under the pretence of patriotism, bravery, and solidarity with the working class, and it is Danila’s job to fight and defeat these enemies.⁷⁰ The issue of identity centres on what Russians are not, rather than the essentialist characteristics of what they are,⁷¹ as seen through a ‘clear stigmatisation of otherness’ in the film.⁷² Danila attacks ethnic minorities, exhibits anti-Americanism and outright racism which ‘disturbingly, secured the film’s huge success with audiences’.⁷³ For example, Danila sees Chechen men fare-dodging on a tram and calls them ‘black-assed scum’, a common xenophobic phrase used against Caucasians in Russia.⁷⁴ At a party, Danila berates a guest for his ‘shit’ American music. After being told the guest is French not American, Danila replies, ‘What’s the difference?’ and walks away, demonstrating his prejudices against any person from the West. This behaviour is mirrored by Viktor in *Brother 2*, when he calls Ukrainian gangsters derogatory ethnic insult and asks ‘What’s the difference?’ when discussing Romanians and Bulgarians. This reveals the Russian ‘unconscious wish to restore these lost appendages of the empire’ and turns these nations into “enemies and generates aggressiveness against them’.⁷⁵

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 190.

⁶⁷ Krapp, ‘Ideology, Rhetoric and Blood-Ties’, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Fedorova, ‘The Russia They Have Lost’, p. 303.

⁶⁹ Larsen, ‘National Identity, Cultural Authority’, p. 493.

⁷⁰ Fedorova, ‘The Russia They Have Lost’, p. 313.

⁷¹ Vanessa Rampton, “Are You Gangsters?” “No, We’re Russians”: The Brother Films and the Question of National Identity in Russia’, eSharp: Reaction and Reinvention: Changing Times in Central and Eastern Europe, (eSharp (2008)), 49–68 (p. 59) <https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_92500_smxx.pdf> [accessed 23 May 2022].

⁷² Gradinari, ‘From Hollywood to Russia’, p. 292.

⁷³ Yana Hashamova, ‘Aleksei Balabanov’s Russian Hero: Fantasies of Wounded National Pride’, Slavic and East European Journal, 51, 2 (2007), 295–311 (p. 298) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20459478> [accessed 23 May 2022].

⁷⁴ Larsen, ‘National Identity, Cultural Authority’, p. 505.

⁷⁵ Hashamova, ‘Aleksei Balabanov’s Russian Hero’, p. 304.

It is no coincidence that “both films build their central conflicts around the clash of American commerce and that the corporate villain Mennis in *Brother 2*, is American.⁷⁶ America is used as a tool to set up an ‘ideological conflict [...] between socialism and capitalism’, whilst also perpetuating a ‘self versus other’ mentality that associates degeneration with America and Russia with its opposite.⁷⁷ Balabanov underlines the negative impact of capitalism through the use of two taxi trip interludes. In Moscow, Danila rides in a taxi with an irritable driver who complains of everyday corruption and weak law enforcement, before critiquing political leadership:

Driver: They’ve bred a race of idiots. They buy the car then they buy the driving license [...] Where do these cretins get the money? They probably buy that as well. You vote for some thin guy and within a year you’re watching a fat hog on TV, and he is telling me how I should live, scum!

This speech articulates the everyday Russian’s dissatisfaction with a new way of life in which the improper use of money is commonplace, and politicians are greedy ‘hogs’ who are only interested in themselves. Danila then asks: ‘Go right behind that building,’ provoking an angry response: ‘Behind that building! That’s the Taganka Theatre. There were fewer halfwits in my generation!’. This exchange exposes the generational gap between a man who grew up in Soviet times with a strong sense of cultural identity, and one who is unsure of his place in history. Upon his arrival in New York, Danila rides in another taxi with a Russian immigrant driver who gives him an equally pessimistic lecture:

Driver: Where’s your homeland now sunshine? Gorbachev sold your Homeland to the Americans to live the high life. And now your Homeland’s screwed up two wars and the Crimea. Sold out all those Russians living in the Baltics and the Serbs. Homeland! Nowadays, your homeland is wherever your backside is warmest.

Danila responds, ‘Do you have a brother in Moscow?’ to which the driver does not reply. Here, Danila’s question is intended to remind the driver that ‘your’ homeland is also his own homeland, implying that the driver has betrayed his country and his national ‘brothers’ by deserting them. Perhaps the most interesting of Danila’s interactions in *Brother 2* is with Mennis at the film’s denouement. Danila gives his most famous pronouncement of morality with his oft quoted *sila v pravde* (power is in truth) speech. He does not stipulate what truth is and ‘leaves open the question of whether simply feeling that others are wrong is enough to justify the use of force against them.’⁷⁸ Even today, the phrase *sila v pravde* has appeared in

⁷⁶ Larsen, ‘National Identity, Cultural Authority’, p. 504.

⁷⁷ Fedorova, ‘The Russia They Have Lost’, p. 313.

⁷⁸ Rampton, “Are You Gangsters?”, p. 53.

Putin's rhetoric on more than one occasion.⁷⁹ There were even plans to erect a monument to Danila in Moscow, showing that even years later, Danila's nationalist message still resonates with the Russian people in their quest for self-understanding.⁸⁰ *Brother 2* ends with Danila and Dasha-Marilyn boarding a plane from America to Russia with the song 'Goodbye America' playing as the credits appear. Balabanov creates an overwhelming sense of triumph over evil. Ultimately, however, the harsh reality of Russian life will be waiting for Danila and Dasha upon their return. As Borenstein states, '[h]eroes can succeed, and good can even triumph over evil now and then, but only at great cost: a Russian happy ending has to be bittersweet'.⁸¹ They will return to Russia under Yeltsin, a president known for encouraging a chaotic and rapid transition to capitalism, the very system that Danila criticises and blames for America's depravity.

Conclusion

It is clear from this research that the connections drawn between the Russian mafia and Italian mafia go beyond the socio-historical and permeate the realm of trans-historical cultural production. This comparative study of *The Godfather*, the most famous Hollywood representation of Italian mafia, with *Brother*, the most popular post-Soviet representation of Russian mafia, has uncovered the multi-layered influence of the Hollywood gangster genre on Balabanov's Russian bandit cycle, as well as the post-Soviet identity struggle characterised by a 'push and pull' relationship with America and the West. It has also shown how both *The Godfather* and *Brother* films portray the corruption of the authorities, or total lack thereof, which necessitates the use of crime to survive the American capitalist system or the lawless crumbling Russian state. Furthermore, the comparison demonstrates how both franchises are a projection of the audiences fears and desires about how their society operates.

Through an analysis of genre features expounded by Rick Altman, and of what is meant by the gangster genre in John Cawelti's terms, this study has found that both *The Godfather* and *Brother* films can be compared and contrasted in their use of narrative structures – specifically the caper and the family saga – as well as gangster hero types, namely The Don and The

⁷⁹ See Ol'ga Churakova, Elena Mukhametshina and Elizaveta Bazanova, 'V interv'iu Vladimira Putina agenstvu TASS polutologi uvideli "oshchushchenie messii"', *Vedmosti*, 24 November 2014, Politics Section, <www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2014/11/24/putin-pokazyvaet-silu> [accessed 23 May 2022] and 5 Oborona Sevastopolia, 'Putin o SMN: "Sila v Pravde"', online video recording, YouTube, 20 December 2018, <www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvEoDR4jxWo> [accessed 23 May 2022].

⁸⁰ See Anna Kruglova, "'Ego Mozhno Nazvat' Simvolom Devianostykh": Skul'ptor Andrei Klykov Rasskazal o Pamiatnike Danile Dagravu', *Russia Today*, 27 September 2018, < www.russian.rt.com/nopolitics/article/558870-skulptor-pamyatnik-brat> [accessed 23 May 2022] and Iana Bobylkina, 'U Avtorob Skul'ptury Danily Bagrjva Sprosil, Zachem moskve Pamiatnik Banditu', *Daily Storm*, Culture Section, 10 October 2018, <www.dailystorm.ru/kultura/u-avtorov-skulptury-danily-bagrjva-sprosil-zachem-moskve-pamyatnik-banditu> [accessed 23 May 2022].

⁸¹ Borenstein, *Overkill*, p. 114.

Enforcer. It has explored the elasticity of the genre itself through Coppola and Balabanov's abilities to break expectations of what constitutes a gangster film. Coppola's revolutionising of the 1930s gangster genre by creating a new gangster in Michael Corleone paved the way for Balabanov to conceptualise Danila and develop his bandit films.

Stylistically, Balabanov re-worked the conventions of the aesthetically glamorous family saga by placing *Brother* in the *chernukha* tradition and suffusing it with uniquely Russian folkloric elements. As a result, he was able to russify the gangster film, creating a film specific to the Russian experience. While it is beyond the scope of this study to approach every intricacy of family, morality, nation, and identity, *The Godfather* and *Brother* films approach these themes through their complex relationships with criminality, violence, and American values.

Most importantly, whilst no Russian film has a happy ending, and no genre has a fixed definition, it is a certain fact that traces of the Hollywood tradition are visible in Balabanov's work, along with his attempt to resist them. By bringing these tensions to light, so too can the wider tensions of cultural influence between America and post-Soviet Russia be better understood.

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