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Gender, violence, and power: applying the Galtung Triangle to organized crime

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Gender, violence, and power: applying the Galtung Triangle to organized crime

Tiziano Peccia*

Abstract

This article applies Johan Galtung's "Conflict Triangle" theory—traditionally used to analyze state and inter-group conflicts—to the underexplored realm of organized crime, with a focus on gender dynamics. Centering on the Ascione Clan, a Camorra group in Italy, it examines the often-overlooked roles women play in perpetuating and challenging violence within criminal organizations. Through qualitative analysis of secondary sources, the study highlights figures like Antonella Madonna and the mother of Natale Dantese, revealing how women, typically seen as marginal, are central to the clan's operations and power structures. The research illustrates how cultural norms, structural inequalities, and direct violence interact to sustain the Camorra's patriarchal systems. It particularly traces Madonna's transformation from a participant to a leader and eventual collaborator with law enforcement, showcasing the complex relationship between gender, power, and resistance. By extending Galtung's framework to the micro-level of organized crime, the study reveals its broader applicability in understanding gender-based violence. Combining insights from peace studies and political anthropology, it offers a nuanced analysis of how gender functions as both a stabilizing and destabilizing force in criminal organizations, urging future research to further explore these intersections within non-state violent entities.

Keywords: Galtung, violence, organized crime, Ascione clan

Abstract

Questo articolo applica la teoria del "Triangolo del conflitto" di Johan Galtung — tradizionalmente utilizzata per analizzare i conflitti statali e inter-gruppo — al campo poco esplorato della criminalità organizzata, con un'attenzione particolare alle dinamiche di genere. Concentrandosi sul Clan Ascione, un gruppo di Camorra in Italia, esamina i ruoli spesso trascurati che le donne svolgono nel perpetuare e nel contrastare la violenza all'interno delle organizzazioni criminali. Attraverso un'analisi qualitativa di fonti secondarie, lo studio mette in luce figure come Antonella Madonna e la madre di Natale Dantese, rivelando come le donne, tipicamente percepite come marginali, siano centrali per le operazioni e le strutture di potere del clan. La ricerca

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illustra come norme culturali, disuguaglianze strutturali e violenza diretta interagiscano per sostenere i sistemi patriarcali della Camorra. In particolare, ripercorre la trasformazione di Madonna da partecipante a leader e, infine, a collaboratrice con le forze dell'ordine, mostrando la complessa relazione tra genere, potere e resistenza. Estendendo il quadro concettuale di Galtung al micro-livello della criminalità organizzata, lo studio rivela la sua più ampia applicabilità nella comprensione della violenza di genere. Combinando le intuizioni provenienti dalle scienze per la pace e dall'antropologia politica, offre un'analisi sfumata di come il genere funzioni sia come forza stabilizzante che destabilizzante nelle organizzazioni criminali, sollecitando la ricerca futura a esplorare ulteriormente queste intersezioni all'interno delle entità violente non statali.

Parole chiave: Galtung, violenza, crimine organizzato, clan Ascione

Introduction

This article aims to explore new applications of Johan Galtung's theories, particularly his *Conflict Triangle*, to address under-explored issues in the context of organized crime and in gender studies. While Galtung's framework has traditionally been used to analyze state-level and inter-group conflicts, focusing on the relationship between cultural, structural, and direct violence, this study seeks to expand its relevance by examining the dynamics of gender violence and the often-overlooked roles of women in criminal organizations. Using the Ascione Clan, a Camorra group in Italy, as a case study, the article aims to investigate, through a qualitative analysis of secondary data, the roles of key female figures, such as Antonella Madonna and the mother of Natale Dantese. These women, typically seen as peripheral actors, are shown to play vital roles in both the perpetuation and disruption of violence within the organization.

By applying Galtung's Conflict Triangle to the microcosm of mafia structures, this study sheds light on the intersection of cultural norms, structural inequalities, and direct violence in maintaining the Camorra's power. It also traces the transformative journey of Antonella Madonna, from clan member to leader and eventual collaborator with law enforcement, highlighting the complex interplay of gender, power, and violence in a patriarchal criminal environment. The interdisciplinary approach—incorporating secondary data, documentary

evidence, and insights from peace studies and sociology—offers a nuanced understanding of how gender dynamics both reinforce and disrupt mafia structures. Ultimately, this research not only deepens our understanding of the internal power dynamics and conflicts within the Camorra, but also extends the applicability of Galtung's theories (in an issue dedicated to the memory of the author), highlighting the importance of considering gender in the study of violence within criminal and non-state entities.

1. Gendered violence and Galtung's Triangle: Exploring new applications in Mafia type organizations

...making a definition of 'violence' [...] is a highly unenviable task, and the suggestions will hardly be satisfactory to many readers. However, it is not so important to arrive at anything like the definition, or the typology—for there are obviously many types of violence. More important is to indicate theoretically significant dimensions of violence that can lead thinking, research and, potentially, action, towards the most important problems. If peace action is to be regarded highly because it is action against violence, then the concept of violence must be broad enough to include the most significant varieties, yet specific enough to serve as a basis for concrete action (Galtung 1969).

Defining the concept of “violence” remains an inherently challenging and often unsatisfactory task, as Johan Galtung noted in his seminal 1969 work. Galtung argued that the objective should not be to produce a singular, definitive definition or typology of violence, but rather to identify the key dimensions of violence that can inform thought, research, and action. He emphasized that for peace-building efforts to be meaningful in response to violence, the concept must be broad enough to encompass its most significant forms, yet precise enough to guide concrete action. This insight highlights the need to understand violence as a polymorphic phenomenon, with diverse manifestations and implications. The exploration of this pluralism and its varied expressions remains a foundational aspect of Galtung's contributions to Peace Studies.

Central questions—such as what violence is, who perpetrates it, how it manifests, and for what underlying reasons—have driven the development of new methodologies and

analytical tools to capture both the visible and invisible dimensions of violence. These inquiries have given rise to a rich body of literature over the past century, spanning various fields of application.

Galtung's work has been particularly influential in understanding the multifaceted nature of violence in conflict-related case studies. One of his most significant contributions is the "Galtung Conflict Triangle", also known as the "Triangle of Violence". This model categorizes violence into three interconnected dimensions, such as: direct violence (linked to behavior), cultural violence (rooted in social constructs), and structural violence. These dimensions are represented at the vertices of the triangle, illustrating their interconnectedness and the way they reinforce one another within a cyclical framework. The positioning of these categories within the triangle is deliberate: direct violence occupies the upper vertex as the most visible form of violence, while cultural and structural violence are represented at the lower vertices, as less visible yet equally important.

Galtung elaborated on these connections, stating that: *"The visible effects of direct violence are known: the killed, the wounded, the displaced, the material damage, all increasingly hitting the civilians. But the invisible effects may be even more vicious: direct violence reinforces structural and cultural violence"*. He further emphasized the critical importance of addressing cultural and structural violence, as these less visible dimensions are essential to the prevention and resolution of conflicts, as well as the implementation of rehabilitation measures: "Cultural and structural violence cause direct violence, using violent actors who revolt against the structures and using the culture to legitimize their use of violence as instruments. The direct violence may be the lesser evil, at least in the longer term, than the structural and cultural damage wrought".

The concept of violence has evolved through the contributions of various scholars, with Sylvia Walby offering a more nuanced understanding. While Galtung's model identified three forms of violence—direct, structural, and cultural—these were not fully explained, particularly regarding the interactions between them.

Walby—among other authors—significantly contributed to the literature by viewing violence as a distinct societal domain, shaped by complex, self-organizing systems. She emphasizes that violence operates on multiple scales, from global conflicts to interpersonal violence, with feedback loops that can either escalate or constrain it. In this revised view, structural violence is no longer seen in isolation but as intersecting with domains like the economy, polity, and civil society. Violence perpetuates inequality across these systems, and education plays a role in maintaining these power structures. Walby also redefines "structural violence" as "systemic violence," reflecting its broader, interconnected nature. Cultural violence is understood as part of complex discursive systems, where ideologies legitimize violence through education, media, and other societal institutions.

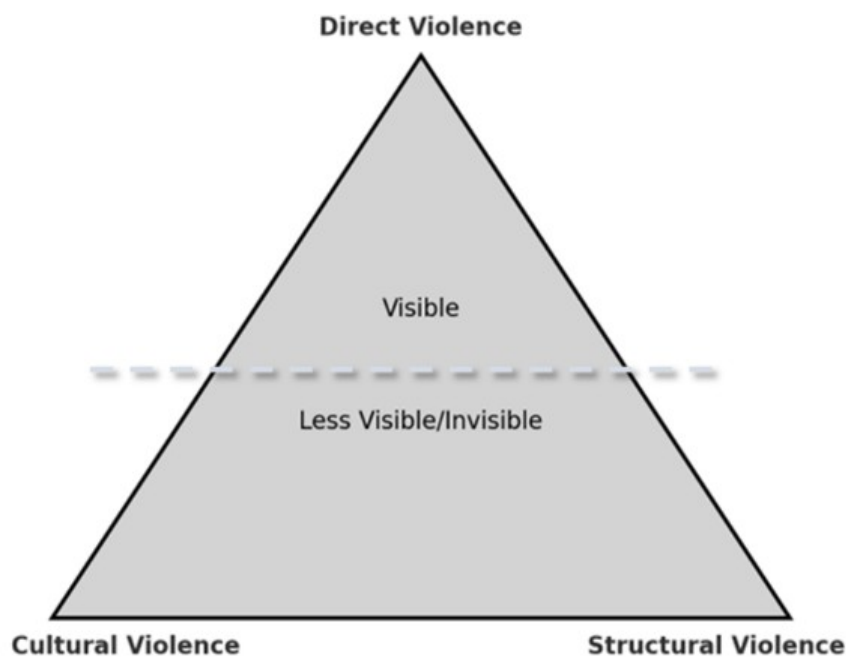


Figure 1: **Galtung's violence triangle: from visible to invisible dimensions**

Building on this perspective, the Galtung Conflict Triangle has been widely employed to analyze both inter-State and intra-State conflicts, as well as asymmetrical conflicts involving States and non-State actors. However, its utility could extend beyond these contexts.

This study mobilizes Galtung's framework to examine a local conflict, specifically the violence perpetrated by the Camorra, a Mafia-type organization, where factors such as gender, economy, education, culture, and social norms intersect. This approach integrates Sylvia Walby's interpretation, expanding upon Galtung's original model. The focus is on the dynamics of female violence, which is often less visible than male violence, and the roles women play in perpetuating violence within such organizations.

As Marie Elizabeth Handman suggests, women's violence tends to be subtler and more concealed compared to that of men; which allows it to be analyzed through Galtung's framework, distinguishing between visible and invisible (or, more accurately, "less visible") forms of violence.

Through this analysis, the study aims to demonstrate how Galtung's framework, along with its subsequent developments, opens new avenues for research—particularly in understanding how women exploit cultural and structural violence to reduce their visibility and benefit from less overt forms of violence, while also exploring how they can be victims of such violence as part of a patriarchal culture and system, as seen in Camorra and Mafia-type organizations. In cases where women wish to commit acts of violence, they may delegate direct actions to others, remaining hidden behind layers of cultural and structural legitimacy. This approach seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of conflict within these organizations and how gendered dynamics influence both the visibility and enactment of violence. However, before analyzing the behavioral, cultural, and structural dimensions of any conflict, it is crucial to conduct a thorough assessment of the conflict's nature to establish a comprehensive understanding of the parties involved and their interrelations.

2. Fragile Ecosystems of Power: Examining the Ascione Clan in Ercolano

The conflict to be analyzed is that of the Clan Ascione. Chris Bowkett, in his PhD thesis prepared at Bath University on the "anti-pizzo movement," consolidated various references and sources of different natures (including an episode of the documentary *Camorriste*

dedicated to Antonella Madonna and newspaper articles) to reconstruct the chronology of the Clan's dismantlement in Ercolano. A student of the University of Milan, Viola Bianchessi, did the same under the supervision of Professor Nando Dalla Chiesa, reconstructing Madonna's profile and cross-checking data from secondary sources such as newspapers (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, *La Stampa*, *Il Mattino*, *Napoli Oggi Notizie*, *Odt Mi*). The sources mobilized by the cited works and authors, which are not primary sources such as direct interviews with the subjects of the study, on the one hand, reveal the limitations of relying solely on secondary sources. On the other hand, they demonstrate the complexity of conducting Mafia-related studies, particularly in safely accessing individuals who are actively involved or have previously played roles in these organizations.

In 1996, Operation "Nemesi" took place in Ercolano, leading to the imprisonment of 194 affiliates of the Ascione Clan. Among the camorristi arrested, Leonardo and Salvatore Zirpoli decided to start collaborating with justice. However, the first retaliations occurred: Leonardo Zirpoli's teenage son was murdered, and their stepsister, Giuseppina Brisciano, survived an attack. From that moment, Gennaro Brisciano, another member of the Brisciano family, also began cooperating with justice to disclose criminal activities related to the Ascione family. Gennaro Brisciano was murdered in 2003 in an attack orchestrated by Enrichetta Cordua.

Enrichetta Cordua, the wife of Giovanni Birra, led the Clan during her husband's imprisonment, highlighting the significant role that women in the Camorra can play when the male leaders of their families are in prison. During Operation "Reset" in 2007, Enrichetta Cordua was also imprisoned and, in a subsequent phase, began cooperating with justice.

This context provides an introduction that is crucial to understanding the fragile ecosystem in which the analyzed Clans operate in the Ercolano area, often under the pressure of police operations and attacks from other criminal agents operating in the same territory. This context also explains how female-to-male transitions can occur in leadership roles within the Clans of the area, typically when these women's husbands are in prison. Allum

and Marchi conceptualize women's participation in the Camorra as a “*Female Reserve Army*”; Alessandra Dino describes women's acquisition of power in these contexts as a “temporary delegation of authority”.

This is what happened to Antonella Madonna—previously mentioned in this work—when she assumed leadership of the Clan Ascione. As reconstructed by Bowkett through secondary sources such as the Camorriste documentary (in which Madonna is directly interviewed, interspersed with contributions from journalists, magistrates, and carabinieri), Antonella originated from a disadvantaged social background and became pregnant by Natale Dantese at the age of 13. She subsequently moved into her boyfriend's home and began living with Natale Dantese's parents.

Dantese gradually rose within the Ascione Clan hierarchy, leveraging periods of imprisonment within the Clan as an opportunity to accelerate his vertical mobility in leadership. This ascent culminated in his assumption of full leadership of the Clan, facilitated by further imprisonments within its ranks. Even during Natale Dantese's leadership, Madonna played a crucial role: she managed the Clan's economic affairs. Specifically, she was responsible for paying the lawyers of Clan members, providing salaries to members of the organization, and ensuring social welfare support for families with incarcerated relatives.

While discussing the manifestations of violence in Mafia operations, Mafia individuals also act as “professionals” of “social relationships” (Sciarrone 2002). This suggests that Mafia agents are adept at investing in social capital. Through her continuous interactions with Clan members, including the support she extended to the families of imprisoned individuals, Madonna was building substantial social capital—a network of mutual trust and complicity. By visiting families to deliver financial aid and compensating for their “relatives' silence” while they were in prison, Madonna simultaneously strengthened her social relationships and constructed a network rooted in consensus and shared symbology.

Within this symbology, and through the material act of exchanging money to secure silence and complicity with the Camorra, Madonna cultivated an image as someone who

“provided help.” This image was instrumental in facilitating her transition to leadership. At just 25 years old, she succeeded her husband, Natale Dantese, as the leader of the Clan.

The primary interference in her leadership arose from a romantic relationship she initiated with a sailor. During this time, Antonella Madonna was under surveillance by spies employed by Dantese’s family. When these informants uncovered Madonna’s relationship with the sailor, Natale Dantese’s mother informed him of the affair while he was in prison. Following this revelation, Antonella Madonna lost her legitimacy as a leader and became a victim of violent reprisals from within the Clan, including physical abuse and death threats. Custody of her daughters was transferred to Natale Dantese’s mother. Consequently, Madonna decided to cooperate with Italian authorities, becoming a collaborator of justice.

3. The Role of Women in Camorra’s Violent Conflicts: A Galtungian Perspective

The scope of the analysis to be undertaken using the Galtung Triangle concerns the roles played by Madonna and Dantese’s mother in the violent cycle of internal conflict that strained the survival of the Ascione Clan. Following Galtung’s methodology, it is essential to analyze the (a)symmetry of the relationship between the two categories of actors who, by opposing each other, generated an escalation of violence within the Clan.

Typically, symmetrical conflicts occur among actors with equivalent status, capacity, and critical mass; historically, such conflicts have occurred between states. Asymmetrical conflicts, by contrast, are characteristic of newer generations of conflict, where one actor may be a state and the other an organized group acting as an antagonist, such as a terrorist organization or other non-State actors (Galtung 2008; Ziyadov 2006). However, in the case of the conflict between Madonna and Dantese’s family, the relationship could initially be defined as asymmetrical. Madonna held leadership with *de jure* legitimacy (e.g., her designation by her husband following his imprisonment) and exercised political and administrative control over the Clan. Here, “political” is defined as the capacity to share a vision with Clan affiliates and influence future strategic orientations.

A preliminary analysis might categorize this conflict as asymmetrical. While the Dantese family included influential members within the Clan's hierarchy, they lacked formal leadership positions. In Camorra clans, leadership is typically concentrated in a single individual who legitimizes their authority through demonstrable acts of power, often characterized by visible and symbolic violent actions. However, when considering that the resources available to both factions were comparable in terms of critical mass and potential, the conflict could also be regarded as symmetrical *de facto*.

As previously noted, the Mafia operates as a form of criminality that employs violence to accumulate resources. As discussed earlier in this research, drawing on Sciarrone's perspective, «*the amount of social capital an individual possesses is not solely determined by the number of actors they can mobilize; it is also influenced by the resources owned by the individuals with whom they are connected*». While Madonna controlled significant resources, such as the custody of weapons and the Clan's treasury, the Dantese family demonstrated a strong ability to mobilize their social capital—specifically, Natale Dantese's allies within the Clan—transforming this social capital into both consensus and physical violence against Antonella Madonna.

As argued by Foucault and Sciarrone, one form of capital can be transformed into another, and as Sciarrone further elaborates, a "resource" has the capacity to be converted into different types of resources. In this context, the relationship between the parties can be characterized as "asymmetrical *de jure*," given Madonna's formal position as the leader, but "symmetrical *de facto*," as Natale Dantese effectively leveraged his capital and influence to generate alternative forms of capital and strategic actions.

Another reason why this conflict cannot be defined solely as asymmetrical is that, in asymmetrical conflicts, "*the structure is such that the top dog always wins, the underdog loses. The only way to solve the conflict is to change the structure, but this can never be in the interests of the top dog. So, there are no win-win outcomes, and the third party has to join forces with the underdog to bring about a resolution*" (Miall, Ramsbotham & Woodhouse 1999). This means that, for Madonna (the top dog), a strategy to achieve a win outcome would have been to negotiate with Dantese's mother (who took the initiative

to inform Natale Dantese) and the rest of the family—demonstrating the key roles played by these two feminine figures in the conflict.

This case study highlights various forms of violence, starting with the most visible, such as physical aggression. A notable example is the attacks directed at Madonna and the sailor, vividly depicted in the documentary *Camorriste* and reconstructed in Bowkett's analysis. One of the most intense scenes takes place in Madonna's bedroom, where members of Dantese's family forcibly enter and assault both her and the sailor. The brutality of this violence is further emphasized through the visual narrative, as reflected in the bruised and battered portrayal of the actresses representing Madonna. The documentary narrative also includes a brief depiction of physical violence between Madonna and Dantese's mother, who meet in a bar and engage in a minor physical altercation. However, the documentary does not explore deeper forms of violence, such as cultural and structural violence, which are more challenging to identify, depict, narrate, and visually represent.

According to Galtung, "cultural violence" is *"any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form"*. In Madonna's case, cultural violence is represented by the "legitimacy" of attacking a woman—physically, verbally, and symbolically—for adultery. Another significant form of symbolic violence was connected to the abduction of Madonna's children. Following the attack on Madonna, her two daughters were taken by Dantese's family and moved to live with Dantese's mother. This event became one of the pivotal factors that motivated Madonna, as she stated in her interviews, to cooperate with justice.

Other violent reactions included the fear generated by the Clan to minimize the visibility of Madonna's transgressions. When Madonna was arrested in 2012 and began cooperating with justice, she also revealed details about her relationship with the sailor. This information became a media scoop, eventually reported in journalistic articles. According to an article published by Arnaldo Capezzuto for *Ossigeno per l'Informazione* and referenced by the Order of Journalists of Lombardy, Clan members violently sought to suppress the dissemination of this news. Capezzuto reported the Clan's "directive" in his own words: *"This news should not be disseminated, it needs to be censored. And the other*

journalists, 'sbirri' (the cops), and newspaper hawkers need to understand that on these kinds of things we are 'intransigenti'. On December 7th, Clan affiliates approached newspaper hawkers and kiosks, explicitly suggesting that there were no newspapers available, thereby concealing the copies. These suggestions were followed by the hawkers.

The cultural perception of adultery as something that brings shame upon a man's honor, integrity, and its associated symbolism is also reflected in acts of micro-violence and intimidation that restrict press freedom and the right to information.

Structural violence occurs in any scenario where inequality is perpetuated, resulting in negative externalities (such as suffering) that are embedded within institutions. One of the secondary objectives of this work is to outline how Mafia-type organizations function as a corpus of rules and norms, constituting a form of pseudo-judicial order. In the 19th century, Santi Romano introduced the concept of *statualità*, asserting that even non-state entities, such as Mafia organizations, are institutions with their own norms and laws. The illegality of these norms does not negate their judicial nature. Political anthropologist Deborah Puccio-Den affirms that Mafias "have legislative and executive authority, tribunals that resolve disputes and impose punishments, agents who enforce those punishments, and statutes that are as precise and elaborate as state laws" (Puccio-Den 2015, my translation).

Michel Foucault also argued that Western societies, since ancient times, have established new strategies and mechanisms for exercising "bio-power." Bio-power refers to "disciplines of the body" designed to regulate populations. Governance, historically based on repression and coercive power, often culminating in death, has been progressively replaced by bio-power. Bio-power aims to "produce, develop, and order social strength," exerting a less overtly oppressive influence on individuals' lives. However, it still regulates actions through inspections and a complex system of regulations. This underscores the multifaceted nature and dimensions of violence within this conflict, wherein the entire Clan mobilized to suppress Madonna's agency and obscure her transgression of the patriarchal codes and norms of the Camorra.

Foucault further concluded that this “progressive evolution” highlights the growing importance of “the norm at the expense of the juridical system of the law.” Yet, the creation of a “normalizing society” through the development of bio-power does not diminish the power of law or render judicial institutions obsolete. On the contrary, normalization is accompanied by significant legislative production. The norm is not opposed to law itself but to the juridical, representing institutions of law that embody the sovereign’s power. One set of “normative practices,” as identified by François Ewald, aligns with what Foucault describes as a “disciplinary society.”

In this context, one challenge lies in situating Mafia-type organizations within one of the disciplines mapped by Foucault. Unlike prisons, Mafias, while operating within defined territories and enforcing specific norms, also have an immaterial component that influences their ecosystems, perceptions, and actions. However, similar to prisons, Mafia ecosystems are aware of state norms. This awareness allows to observe more clearly the gap between the antagonism analyzed by Foucault and the norms and juridical institutions.

Like the detainees in Foucault’s analyzed prisons, Mafia actors are aware of the norms they are expected to follow to conform to juridical institutions’ laws. However, they fail to take the necessary “step” to align themselves with the “global power” described by Foucault. Instead, they become “parasites” within the system—antagonistic to the mechanism itself. They exist in a parallel relationship with Governance, operating under its umbrella while adhering to their own norms and rules. Although familiar with the norms and the language used to interact with other actors, they use these tools instrumentally, selectively adhering to laws that serve their interests.

To return to the gender dimension of this analysis, it is important to make another statement. As Foucault stated, “laws” often accompany “norms.” Similarly, Mafia-type organizations have their own set of norms and laws, which evolve progressively. These norms and laws, while originating from different systems, can share common denominators. Through a process of osmosis, the norms and laws of Mafia-type organizations can be influenced and shaped by those of broader governance structures or other micro-powers. A notable example is the set of laws authored by Salvatore Lo

Piccolo, modeled after the Ten Commandments. These laws were accompanied by norms that defined women primarily in relation to men—as sisters, daughters, or wives—rather than as autonomous individuals independent of male authority. This formalized and codified a gender hierarchy within Mafia written rules, reinforcing the subordinate role of women to men. Patriarchy, in this context, aligns with Walby's definition as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” (Walby 1989).

For this reason, in analyzing the conflict of the Clan Ascione, gender-related discrimination must be considered as part of the structural violence affecting the juridical aspects of the Clan. It is also necessary to examine the broader context of Italian society, where these crimes were perpetrated. Until the early 1970s, adultery was considered a crime specifically targeting women. This societal norm influenced the laws and rules of other micro-powers, including Mafia-type organizations. According to Julien Pieret, historically, “criminal law is a law created by and for men, built in their own image (a list of abstract incriminations rationally organized) and which justifies an inequality between sexes” (Pieret 2016, my translation).

In Italy, the crimes of adultery (art. 559 c.p.) and concubinage (art. 560 c.p.) were included in Italian criminal law and were characterized by gender discrimination. These laws targeted wives, who could be condemned for a single case of adultery, whereas men were permitted to maintain *more uxorio* relationships provided they exercised “discretion” by not housing their concubines in the same residence as their wives. The Italian Constitutional Court abolished these laws only in 1960, stating that “the entire system related to articles 559 and 560 of the criminal code [...] bore the imprint of a historical period in which women did not benefit from the same social status as men, and this inferiority was reflected in the regulation of marital rights and duties” (Basile 2013).

After establishing the patriarchal framework of norms and rules that characterize the dynamics of Clan-type—reflecting broader societal and historical patterns—it becomes essential to examine other key actors involved in the analyzed conflict. For instance, attention can be directed toward the actions of Dantese's mother: Was her behavior

violent? Did she actively exercise violence? While the subtlety of her role in the conflict may render her actions less visible, they warrant closer scrutiny. Operating under the assumption that individuals are rational actors, Dantese's mother would likely have been aware of the potential consequences of revealing Madonna's adultery to her son. Despite Natale Dantese's initial response to the revelation ("*Let her go, I will survive (...) if she becomes a pentita, she will create problems*"), the family nevertheless proceeded to retaliate against Madonna.

Reconstructing the process of violence and crisis escalation, the événement déclencheur of the Clan's crisis can be attributed to the revelation made by Dantese's mother. This subtle and initially invisible trigger catalyzed a more overt and spectacular manifestation of violence, ultimately instigating direct violence (Pasculli 2009), which, in such clans, remains predominantly under the control of men. Another example of indirect violence perpetrated by Dantese's mother is the abduction of Madonna's children. By assuming custody of Madonna's daughters, Dantese's mother embodied the role of a "moral entrepreneur," reinforcing and regulating normative standards of "proper motherhood". Through this action, she actively enforced rules that defined and sanctioned behaviors she deemed deviant, thereby reasserting control over social and familial expectations. As cited by Siebert, this aligns with the "pedagogy of Mafia," in which the mother is the custodian of the organization's codes and norms and assumes responsibility for the education of its progeny - in this case, Madonna and Dantese's daughters.

To further highlight the invisibility of indirect violence in this case (Peccia 2018), Dantese's mother is often overlooked in public discourse. For example, the article "*La donna boss che 'cornificò' il marito detenuto al 41 bis: la storia 'da zia,'*" published by the independent newspaper Internapoli, does not mention her. Even articles aiming to discuss women's roles in the Camorra, such as "*Donne di camorra, quando la criminalità si tinge di rosa,*" published by Nanopress, fail to mention Dantese's mother. These articles focus instead on high-profile female bosses, such as Anna Mazza and Giusy Vitale, who held visible leadership roles in the Moccia Clan of Afragola and the Vitale Clan of Partinico, respectively.

Similarly, in the already mentioned PhD thesis of Chris Bowkett, which analyzes civil society and the anti-pizzo movement in Ercolano, Dantese's mother is not explicitly discussed, even in the sections addressing women's relevance in the Camorra. Bowkett refers generically to "Dantese's family" without mentioning the decision to separate Madonna from her daughters and assign them to her mother-in-law. According to Madonna's own declarations, this event was a key factor in her decision to cooperate with justice.

Conclusions

As discussed in other works, particularly in Mafia-type organizations, the violence committed by women is typically subtle, less visible, and more strategic due to the economically driven nature of these criminal groups. Direct violence is often delegated to men to protect the clan's activities and uphold Mafia norms, codes, and survival (Peccia 2020). This stands in contrast to more visible and spectacular forms of violence, such as those seen in politically oriented criminal organizations, where violence also serves symbolic purposes (Gowrinathan 2021; Guittet 2018). This study highlights the applicability of Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle in examining the nuanced dynamics of gender violence, exploring the visibility and invisibility of various forms of violence, and shedding light on the roles of female actors in the crisis of the Ascione Clan.

By integrating insights from Galtung's theories, feminist perspectives, and Mafia studies, this research highlights the interconnected dimensions of direct, structural, and cultural violence within patriarchal systems in Camorra organizations, illustrating how these forms of violence intersect, reinforce, and sustain one another. Alessandra Dino, in her analysis of Giusy Vitale, identifies a dual characteristic in Vitale's behavior and words that can also be observed in the case of Madonna. On one hand, there is the construction of a "female identity" within the Mafia that aligns with traditional norms; on the other, there is a clear "attempt" to assert greater autonomy within an oppressive context. In Vitale's case, this dynamic ultimately leads to a form of "homologation" to the masculine model imposed by the organization.

However, as evidenced by Madonna's experience, this alignment underscores critical structural limitations: women remain constrained within the boundaries of patriarchal systems, lacking access to the same privileges and power afforded to men, and are frequently subjected to double standards. This phenomenon, extensively documented in scholarly literature, transcends the specific context of criminal networks and reflects broader societal dynamics (Endendijk, van Baar & Maja Deković 2020; Hill & Kears 2011).

The roles of women—such as Antonella Madonna and Dantese's mother—highlight the complex intersection of power, social norms, and violence in these contexts. Within patriarchal systems, women occupy dual positions as both agents and victims, navigating structures where their influence, though often obscured, proves essential. These portrayals of women in violent and post-conflict narratives also evoke the framework proposed by Sjöberg and Gentry in *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, which categorizes representations of violent women in armed conflicts into three archetypes: the mother, the monster, and the whore (Sjöberg & Gentry 2007). By employing an interdisciplinary approach, the study emphasizes the importance of addressing the gendered dimensions of violence in organized crime and offers a framework for examining women's roles in either perpetuating or challenging these systems.

Ultimately, this analysis enhances our understanding of the dynamics within Camorra organizations and extends the relevance of Galtung's theories to localized conflicts involving non-state entities, providing new perspectives on the intersections of power, gender, and violence.

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