

# Women, criminal power and violence: The case of the Casamonica Clan

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## Abstract

This study explores the role of women within the Casamonica group through an intersectional perspective integrating gender, ethnicity, and class, with particular attention to violence as both experienced and enacted. The Casamonica constitute a relevant case for the analysis of emerging indigenous mafia formations: a network of interconnected families of Romani origin primarily based in Rome and its surrounding areas, which has progressively acquired features typical of established criminal organizations. In recent years, both sociological scholarship and judicial discourse have increasingly framed the group within the category of mafia-type organizations.

Drawing on the concept of the matrix of domination, the article examines how power relations are constructed, reproduced, and legitimized, emphasizing the centrality of gendered and private violence as mechanisms of social regulation. Within the group, women's roles reflect patterns observed in organizations such as the Camorra and the 'Ndrangheta, while remaining deeply embedded in Romani cultural traditions. The analysis is situated within a broader framework that connects criminal relations, models of territorial infiltration, cross-cutting social relations, and forms of popular sovereignty.

The study adopts a qualitative and intersectional methodology based on biographical and semi-structured interviews, alongside the analysis of judicial documents and court rulings. Women's life histories are examined to investigate how notions of honor and the body emerge as products of inequality shaped by specific criminal relational models. Despite the heterogeneity of individual experiences, the findings reveal recurring patterns of legitimation structured around dynamics of continuity and discontinuity, imitation and contamination, and recognition and stigmatization.

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These dynamics are articulated across four analytical dimensions: structural, practical-disciplinary, interpersonal, and hegemonic. Together, they highlight the complex and ambivalent role of women in the reproduction and legitimization of mafia-type power.

**Keywords:** women, violence, criminal power.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The proposed study represents an attempt to analyze the Casamonica mafia families, moving beyond traditional analytical models linked to definitions of criminal organizations. It aims to consider the specific axes of power within an intersectional framework, beginning with violence as the key interpretive lens. The overall objective of the proposal is to combine existing studies on this specific criminal organization with an intersectional approach that allows for consideration of the specificities of the case study. This is extremely significant and valuable in light of this analytical perspective. In fact, Casamonica are indigenous Roman mafia clans of Roma origin, in which traditional cultural norms are subordinated to exclusively criminal imperatives. This occurs within a relatively young organization that lacks the rituals and symbols typical of traditional mafias. In this direction, the main events related to women's subjectivities were analyzed, identifying the different ways in which mafia violence and gender-based violence are incorporated. In particular, this study aims to show how violence against women is a key feature of power-based organizations like mafias. These groups are built on strong power imbalances. Gender-based violence reflects and reinforces this asymmetry. The methodological effort that characterized the entire study was the use of an analysis matrix in which were included the different dimensions related to the study of the mafia phenomenon and the experiences of the women involved.

## Interpretative framework

The study is part of a more general reflection on mafia-type organizations whose general objective is to analyze how mafia power legitimises and supports gender-based violence. The starting point is to consider gender-based violence as substantial and structural to the Mafia's power, functional to the reproduction of dynamics and hierarchies. First of all, it is necessary to deconstruct one of

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<sup>1</sup> While the article is a result of the authors' shared effort, reflected in the introduction and the conclusion, paragraph 2,4,4.2,4.4 are to be attributed to Sabrina Garofalo, while paragraph 3,4.1,4.3 to Ilaria Meli.

the fundamental pillars on which the mafias have relied: the untouchability of women and children. Starting from this, it is possible to identify daily forms of violence against women in the study of various criminal organizations. This violence is instrumental to criminal power, as it maintains a strong asymmetry of power that allows control over people and territories. Controlling women, in daily behavior and above all in the sexual sphere, allows us to maintain the status quo and limit the possibility of betrayal to men and clans. This determines a continuous reproduction of traditional and highly stereotyped roles.

This approach is based on a particular way of studying mafias, concerned not only with the construction of criminal networks, but also to the ways in which power should be understood as political power that translates into practices of male power over territories, relations, resources and bodies. In these terms, to read Mafias as a specific form of organization of power, means to deepen the theme of rights and freedoms, starting from their denial. From that point of view, Mafia can be understood as the negation of democracy, from the dimension of rights and freedoms. This denial of democracy manifests itself in the suppression of fundamental rights and freedoms. First of all the right to life, recalling that mafia power is characterized by the authority to determine life and death, in the continuing dialectic between Eros and Thanatos (Siebert 1994, 1996). Mafias can therefore be read by analysing human rights not merely as abstract legal norms, but as dynamic social constructs, influenced and reinterpreted in the historical, cultural and political contexts in which they manifest themselves. This approach highlights how human rights are constantly negotiated and challenged in social practice, rather than being simply applied as abstract principles (Blokke & Guercio 2020). The main link is thus found in the formal definition of gender-based violence, which “violence against women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (Council of Europe, 2011) . In the specific case of mafia studies and the approach used for this article, it was chosen to relate mafia violence with gender violence and to identify the plans and forms in which violence—both male and mafia—is enacted, endured, and internalized. It defines mafia violence as “a profoundly multidimensional and polysemous phenomenon which sometimes reveals profound differences in the practices, strategies and action plans used by the various organisations active in different territorial areas and social contexts, economic and cultural, and that it has undergone profound changes over time which have marked elements of continuity and discontinuity in relation to the past” (Massari, 2017, p. 257). Staying on the theoretical level, violence in mafia organizations can be considered as part of a spectrum of violent dynamics as “an element in a range of behaviors that includes but does not end in it” (Santoro, 2017, p. 259). To thematize the mafioso acting as violent acting allows to

understand the forms of communication, instrumental use, organizational dynamics and symbolic use of violence. Violence, therefore, is read as a "necessary resource" to manage economic affairs and to affirm and reproduce power. In this sense, violence is attributed economic value becoming a tool for social, cultural and also symbolic recognition. It's important to consider the basis of mafia phenomenon in the accumulation of economic wealth on the one hand and on the other the foundation of power, instrument for the construction of consensus, reputation, legitimacy within and outside the organisation and in the territories where it is established.

Sciarrone (2009) writes that violence and social capital are two core elements of mafias. Mafia violence takes different forms depending on goals and strategies. High-intensity violence includes massacres and public, symbolic acts. Low-intensity violence is more hidden and silent (dalla Chiesa, 2017). This study builds on theories of mafia violence. It connects them with human rights and the denial of democracy. The focus is on everyday life. It explores how denied rights and freedoms shape common sense and influence social relationships. As Dino writes (2017, p. 261): "Violence creates bonds and relationships, it takes root in the bodies, an instrument of power display, a means to demarcate the limits of belonging and legitimacy. But also pervades the daily life, crossing the sphere of emotions and the most important issues of mafia identity: those concerning power, secrecy, death, fear, pain, guilt, repentance and lies". What makes the case study chosen even more interesting is the possibility of intercutting the dimensions of power with the specificities arising from the original size of the families considered. Considering the Romani subjectivities, represents a step forward in overcoming the consideration linked to the definition of homogeneous "community" over-determined by the "ethnic" dimension (Tremlett, 2009), starting from critical Romani Studies. This approach aims to enrich Romani Studies with critical social theories, such as feminist and intersectional theories. Contributions from Roma feminists (Kóczé, 2009; Izsák, 2015; Brooks, 2012) introduce and adopt intersectional theory, proposing to replace the concept of "ethnicity", prevalent among scholars from essentialist cultural views of Roma and Sinti to an understanding rooted in structural racism, with that of "racialized minority" (Kóczé, 2020; Vincze, 2014). This concept shifts the analytical focus from alleged "cultural" characteristics of Roma and Sinti to structural racism and, more in detail, to the processes by which the dominant society produces racialization of Roma and constructs them as "others". Particular attention in cross-sectional literature has been given to the trajectories of Roma women, with particular reference to the dynamics of control related to the family, the neighborhood and then in relation to public policies implemented in different contexts and territories. As far as the family context is concerned, female biographies have highlighted strong social pressures on female daughters for compliance with patriarchal gender roles and expectations. These expectations translate into dynamics of control over the female bodies, on the honor of families by enforcing strict control over the sexuality of girls. These expectations translate into specific forms of building relationships

and interpretation of the sexual dimension, “While in the Roma culture as in the traditional Indian one (also in transition) marriage is born of agreement between families and is from the first day “agape”: conjugal love (as a form of conjugal love rooted in familial agreements, often referred to as ‘agape’)” (Corradi, 2013, p.8). Such forms of social pressure concern marriage, and that results in practices of control of daughters resulting from fears of kidnapping, forced marriages, sexual violence, or even sexual behavior that can undermine the “honor” of the daughter and therefore of the family. Marriage represents the entry of women into their husband’s families, and the analysis of female trajectories (Mantovan & Maestri, 2021) highlighted the forms of violence that “include social control and forms of oppression by the husband and his family are very widespread, and sometimes even aggravated by the context of cohabitation (...). The husband’s family sometimes acts as an aggravating factor in marital violence. From the life trajectories emerges, as a common practice, that after marriage the bride joins the family of her husband, often moving into the house of her parents’ in-laws. In some cases, it is mainly the relationship with the mother-in-law”.

Another element related to the construction of the gender dimension in patriarchal order is the emphasis placed on the concept of reproduction and therefore on the expectations linked to motherhood. In the analysis of Roma women’s subjectivities, it is important to emphasize the importance of empowerment practices and social capital networks that allow building alternative biographical paths resistant to contingent power dynamics. All this has many similarities with the dynamics related to gender expectations in the criminal mafia organization, where social control, territorial and on women’s bodies is built on the pillars of the honor of women and the family. Control practices and disciplinary mechanisms are common to the experiences of women in mafia contexts. Therefore, the application of an intersectional framework and a matrix of domination such as the one described above, thus analyzing the structural, hegemonic, relational and practical disciplinary dimensions in the levels of analysis as those of the context, family and community relations, gender and generation relations and narrative production as a social representation can be a good opportunity to explore new research paths.

## **The case study and methodology**

The Casamonicas are a family-based criminal organization, consistent with what the literature defines as indigenous Roman mafias (Martone, 2017). They are a group of families of Roma origin, bound by strong kinship ties, further reinforced through arranged marriages. This strategy has been widely studied in relation to traditional mafia organizations (Arlacchi, 1983). In fact, has proved

effective in forging alliances and securing prestige, while at the same time creating strong bonds of trust within the clans (Sciarrone, 1998), making it more difficult for members to leave, as this would compromise both criminal and family relationships. Each family exhibits a markedly patriarchal and hierarchical structure, with the oldest man in command. Women are relegated to a subordinate role in terms of illegal activities and as ‘vestals’—guardians of the home and family honor (Dino & Principato, 1997), responsible for raising children and transmitting values and rules. The Casamonica community is not monolithic, but rather characterized by a high degree of criminal diversity. Some families constitute true mafia-style organizations, others have less criminal prestige and are active in the areas of usury and fraud, while others are completely uninvolved in illegal activities. Although often collectively referred to as a single clan, the Casamonica families operate independently and operate autonomously, according to a division of areas of competence within the city but resorting to solidarity when necessary. The strength of this bond emerged clearly in the wiretaps, particularly in a passage in which Giuseppe Casamonica, a senior member of one of the families under investigation, described the nature of family relationships to someone outside the clan: ‘You know what it is? Our family is all united that is, the important thing is that we are united with each other because if I... need something from my brother and there is no one else, it's absolutely no problem. We are really united, especially in the family, it's a thing, it's our own race that is made this way. If I need something, even if I'm in trouble and I don't know, I go to my uncle and my uncle helps me, that's not the problem. Maybe I can go to my cousin, my uncle, and so on...' (Tribunale di Roma, 2019, p.41). All the Casamonica families present in Rome originated in the 1940s when two couples from Abruzzo and Molise moved to Rome and settled in the south-east of the city, along Via Tuscolana, where they are still strongly rooted today. At the time, they were nomadic horse traders involved in small-scale predatory criminal activities who over time had been able to take advantage of the relationships they had forged within the criminal milieu of the capital. In particular the one with Enrico Nicoletti, treasurer of the Banda della Magliana, for whom they acted as an aggressive enforcement wing for debt recovery. In a short time, some of the Casamonica families were able to achieve a qualitative leap in the scale and sophistication of their criminal operations. In addition to the crimes, they have historically been involved in, linked to usury, extortion, and fraud, some families have entered the drug trade and, according to recent investigations, also international cocaine trafficking, for which they could count on direct contacts with Colombian producers. Among the numerous groups belonging to this criminal federation, the proposed analysis focuses in particular on the members of two clans. The first is composed of two of the most important families of the clan, led by Feruccio and Giuseppe Casamonica, who live with sisters Gelsomina and Anna Di Silvio. Settled in a neighborhood inhabited by the Roman middle class almost on the outskirts of the city, where they have built large villas protected by high walls and gates, symbols of their power. They manage drug dealing in the nearby neighborhood of

Romanina and a profitable and violent usury business. The second group, on the other hand, was formed by the families of Giuseppe Casamonica and his cousins Luciano and Consiglio. They distinguished themselves for the importance and volume of their business dealings, as well as for the recognition it obtained as interlocutors of the traditional and foreign mafias operating in the city. The clan's real stronghold is a small, narrow alley in the Quadraro district, a working-class area that has recently undergone gentrification: an area described as "impenetrable" by investigators. Before the arrests, the alley was one of the drugs dealing spots run by the clan, where insolvent debtors were also summoned and the clan exercised military control over the territory. Both clans were investigated and definitively convicted of mafia-type criminal association (pursuant to Article 416bis of the Italian Penal Code) following investigations by the Rome Public Prosecutor's Office called "Gramigna" in 2018 and "Noi Proteggiamo Roma" in 2020. These are not the first investigations against the two groups, but for the first time they have provided in-depth knowledge of a criminal world that was previously little known. Although long known in Rome for their violence and ability to exert considerable intimidation, the Casamonicas have long gone unpunished, taking advantage of the language barrier (they spoke a hybrid language mixing Romani and local Italian dialects to avoid wiretapping), the strength of their internal ties, and their strong control of the territory in the areas where they settled, which complicated the work of law enforcement. What made the aforementioned investigations possible, however, were, in both cases, the testimonies of justice collaborators within the families. In particular, the magistrates availed themselves of the collaboration of two women, Debora Cerreoni and Simona Zakova, partners of young leaders of their respective clans, but both 'gagge', which in the Casamonica dialect means of non-Roma origin. This is unusual and contrary to the clan's rules of endogamous marriage, so much so that both unions were opposed by the husbands' families. The women's collaboration proved extremely valuable. Not only because it allowed the conversations to be deciphered and the rules of the two families to be understood, but also because both had been socialized as adults to the rules of the clans and their lucid account offers a unique insight. The analysis of judicial and documentary sources was accompanied by extensive empirical field research conducted from 2019 to 2022 using ethnographic community-based research methods. The study of an object like the mafia, which is secret and illicit in nature, presents obvious difficulties from a methodological point of view, in terms of access to the field, the use of sources, and the possibility of understanding a phenomenon while remaining outside of it. These are "objective limitations" (Sciarrone, 2009, p. 6) that exert a strong influence on the structuring of research activities, but to which scholars have tried to find correctives. One of the main knots to be unraveled concerns the use of court documents and law enforcement databases. These undoubtedly represent a rich source of information, but they are secondary sources, produced without the will or direct intervention of

the scholar and serving different purposes<sup>2</sup>. The reading of this type of material must take into account that that of the forces of law and order is a lens that gives us a filtered image of the criminal phenomenon, allowing us to know the strategies of repression, rather than the phenomenon itself. It is therefore necessary for anyone wishing to undertake a study on the subject to broaden the spectrum of sources. Here, an approach was chosen that combined the study of documentary sources with ethnographic work, which proved to be particularly suitable for the in-depth study of little-investigated contexts<sup>3</sup>. For the study of criminal aspects, we drew on judicial acts, institutional reports (DIA, DNA, DCSNA, Reports of the Lazio Region Observatory on Security and Legality), press sources (print or television). Regarding empirical work, numerous semi-structured interviews were conducted on the basis of snowball sampling, starting with those categories that the literature on the mafia phenomenon has considered, according to a well-established methodological approach, to be of particular interest, such as so-called privileged witnesses, key informants (journalists, politicians, representatives of institutions and law enforcement agencies, teachers, and trade representatives). The aim was to listen to as diverse a range of voices as possible, representing both institutional perspectives and the narratives of individual citizens. These were complemented by participant observation experiences, including attendance at court hearings (where permitted by the restrictions in force at the time due to the Covid-19 pandemic), anti-mafia demonstrations, and various public meetings in the neighborhoods involved in the research.

## **An analysis for four dimensions**

The interpretative effort that characterized the entire study is the application of an analytical matrix designed to integrate the various dimensions related to the analysis of the mafia phenomenon from the female experiences within the clan of Casamonica. Based on field research, was necessary a reorganization not only of analytical dimensions but also of sources and fields of inquiry.

In this sense, an attempt was made to relate the axes of power characterizing a reading of intersectional type with the levels of analysis identified according to the sociological and criminological literature on the subject. Specifically, with a intersectional approach, the

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<sup>2</sup> Cfr Ruggiero 1996 and Iannello & Vesco 2017.

<sup>3</sup> The community study was the technique chosen to tackle the first analyses of mafia organisations in the 1970s and 1980s, in particular by foreign anthropologists such as Anton Blok (1974) and Jane and Peter Schneider (1979) or by Fortunata Piselli and Giovanni Arrighi (1985). This technique has acquired a new centrality in recent years, confirming its validity in providing original contributions to analysis.



structural dimensions, the practical-disciplinary dimension, the interpersonal dimension and the hegemonic dimension have been chosen. The structural dimension generally refers to the way in which institutions, laws, social norms and economic systems are organized so as to produce and maintain social inequalities. This dimension looks beyond individuals and focuses on the power structures that influence and condition the possibilities and limits of people in a given social group. It analyzes the systemic roots of inequalities, highlighting how power operates at an institutional and social level, not only interpersonal. The level of analysis connected to it is therefore the context, analyzing organizational forms on the one hand and resources and opportunities given in a territory on the other. Specifically, it is proposed to consider the level of context understood not only as territory, but also taking up the theories of capability approach (Sen 1995, Dahrendorf 1994) therefore, freedom is about the chances of life, which are opportunities, possibilities, defining the chances of life as a social, structural concept. In this sense it is possible to focus on the theme of opportunities in a multidimensional perspective, through the analysis of the context of cultural, economic and social capital.

The practical - disciplinary dimension, on the other hand, allows us to consider how power is managed and reproduced in everyday practice. In this case, reference is made to how the dynamics of social control and on women's bodies develop, starting from how family and mafia group control is built. The family and social control is translated into different forms of use of control devices at relational level (community control) and spatial (control of territory, neighborhood). This dimension also includes the study of devices for subtracting subjectivities from forms of control and the related dynamics that become processes of delegitimization and secondary victimisation.

The interpersonal dimension is part of the analysis of the concrete experiences of people who are at the intersection of several forms of oppression. This includes aspects related to relations, the ways in which hierarchical forms between genders and generations are translated, between internal and external. Therefore, the community, gender and generation relations were analyzed, a privileged place for the study of processes of construction of gender and translation of forms of daily violence.

The analysis of the hegemonic dimension considers discourses, stereotypes and cultural representations that define social hierarchies. In this case the representations that through discursive practices are built inside and outside of the criminal organization have been deepened. The analysis of discursive practices and visual representations made it possible to consider on the one hand the stereotyped forms linked to certain cultural elements. and on the other hand to consider the emphasis placed in the processes of self-representation and heterorepresentation.

As highlighted in the analysis of the theoretical approach, below we deepen the analysis of the case Casamonica starting from the matrix of domination, analyzing then:

1. structural dimension
2. hegemonic dimension
3. relational dimension
4. practical disciplinary dimension.

These dimensions are then analysed in the research levels, such as those of context, family and community relations, gender and generation relations, and discursive and narrative production as a social representation. It is specified that these analyses also respond to the complexity of the phenomenon being studied and that the dimensions and levels are distinguished on an analytical level but can be read in a synchronous manner in daily practice.

### **The structural dimension**

This dimension includes the analysis of context and conceptualization, common across various interpretations of the mafia phenomenon of territory as a space, a space that is both real and symbolic, privileged exercise of this specific power and construction, the assertion and reproduction of social consent. The territory, analyzed in the forms of “territorial lordship” (Santino, 1994), is the basis of mafia power, understood in the dialectic of extortion-protection, in the control of environmental and economic resources, and as a space of control where the denial of rights and freedoms takes place. In the territories, the mafia power is therefore detrimental to the democratic order, since it establishes different forms of social regulation. Moreover, the territory is the basis for the good functioning of mafia organizations, representing the place of primary recognition of power. All this has obvious implications on the symbolic level and defines specific forms of communication and narration.

Symbol of the relationship between Casamonica and territory is the distribution of families within the urban fabric. Elsewhere (Meli, 2023) this model has been defined as an “enclave” settlement model, which describes the tendency of related families to build their homes along the

same street or around the same courtyard<sup>4</sup>, establishing a clear separation with the rest of the territory and thus making *de facto* private a public space<sup>5</sup>.

This intersection between private and public space translates into practices of totalizing control over each component of the Casamonica community and in particular on the women of the clan, whose functions are mostly relegated to the domestic space. These, in fact, very often are responsible for monitoring the houses, so that it is provided that one of them stays at home even in case of parties and celebrations involving the whole family. Women are sometimes involved in the distribution of drugs that takes place around the houses, where they keep the fireplaces to get rid of illegal substances in case of checks by law enforcement. The dominance is not only on people, but also on the urban space that is shaped according to criminal needs: planters placed in the center of the carriageway to obstruct the passage of motor vehicles in front of the drug areas, where access is further restricted, if not completely blocked, by roadblocks and roads that become private parking lots at clan parties. The power is visibly asserted and symbolically displayed in aesthetic choices that are clearly identifiable, characterized by statues of horses at the entrance, decorations in Pompeian red and a general display of luxury<sup>6</sup>. The perception, passing through these areas, is that of entering into a territory other than the surrounding urban space with which the Casamonica develop relationships that are mostly built around predatory-type dynamics. This analysis highlights how the concept of enclave can specifically characterize the dynamics of violence in a context "enclosure".

In this specific spatial form it is possible to define a real and symbolic boundary that as always, defines an inside/outside. In this sense, we can develop further reflections related to a panoptic model of continuous surveillance and control, translating in forms of total control especially on women, constantly monitored and checked especially in daily action.

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<sup>4</sup> This arrangement is facilitated by the informal housing that characterized the early stages of the clan's settlement in various areas of the city, where they built their homes illegally, outside the provisions of the zoning plan, on land that was agricultural at the time. Violence and predatory behavior have characterized the Casamonica clan's relationship with the surrounding area ever since. In fact, it was customary for the clan to occupy land, effectively alienating its ownership from the legitimate owners, as recounted by a woman whose family moved to the area at the same time as the Casamonicas: "They occupied many plots here by putting horses on them. If no one said anything, they would slowly build on them and move in. I say this with certainty because they tried it on me too" (interview with a resident and activist from Romanina).

<sup>5</sup> The courtyard is, in fact, the place where the Casamonicas of Quadraro exercise total control, flaunting their power. It was here, for example, that in 2017 they celebrated the return of Consiglio, who had just been released from prison, as collaborator Fazzari recounted: "welcomed as a hero by everyone (...) it was a bit like a scene from... from the movie *Gomorra* (...). He entered Luciano alley, with his horn blaring, from Via Tuscolana and throughout the alley, he descended as if he were a boss (...) who was serving a life sentence or like... I don't know (...) Everyone was there (...) his uncles, everyone who lived there. Giuseppe... everyone. Everyone, without exception. (...) Everyone was waiting for him down there" (Court of Rome 2019, p. 194).

<sup>6</sup> This characteristic is identified by Sales (2009) as typical of urban mafias, such as the Neapolitan Camorra, which, despite the need to act in secret, also need to make themselves recognizable in a complex and stratified context.

## The practical - disciplinary dimension

In this field of analysis, the focus is on the organizational practices of social institutions in exercising power and regulating social relations. Based on this analysis the presence of localised households <sup>7</sup> in an enclave space which, as pointed out, leads to strong internal control. In the specific analysis conducted, the practical - disciplinary dimension has as focus the the broadly defined dynamics of familial and social control. The specificity of the case allows us to analyse above all the control devices on the bodies, which are mainly female bodies and to highlight forms of conditioning and subjection identifiable as a form of gender violence.

One of the most widely used practices as a control tool is found in the restriction of personal freedom. We find traces of this in the stories of both women, today collaborators of justice, Cerreoni e Zakova, defined "gagge" by Casamonica because they are foreign to the Roma culture. These are socialized into the norms of the clan in adulthood, activating processes of internalization of prohibitions and rules that have then facilitated the narration in their own testimony. From the analysis of life stories emerges a "spiral" of forms of domination and control that unfolds from the weakest forms to the most intense ones, with progressively more restrictive rules. The first form of control result in the imposition of clothing: in the initial phase of the construction of romantic relationships, individual choices were tolerated, while in a stabilisation phase of these relationships, we see the imposition of the traditional canons of Roma customs. This emerges clearly in the story of the engagement that makes Debora Cerreoni to the magistrates: " As long as we were engaged Massimiliano allowed me to wear what I wanted (...) "we went dancing and on those occasions I wore jeans or skirts (..) All this changes before the wedding when we lived in Ostia. Once Massimiliano had to come and pick me up and he disappeared. (...). The next day I went to him (...) and he told me that he had not come to pick me up because I was wearing pants and I had to put on a skirt"<sup>8</sup>.

Considering the gender analysis, it should be specified that there is no such aesthetic code for men, who wear expensive and designer clothes and accessories, *adorned with gold jewelry*. If on the one hand it's possible to see the specific dynamics of the study of subcultures, on the other hand the "Casamonica style" has become a brand, characterized by ostentation of luxury, exhibited in daily actions, but above all online, through images and videos posted on social networks. This dynamic is part of the processes of self-representation and construction of the imaginary, so it is possible to assist the construction of the image of "man Casamonica" characterized by a series of

<sup>7</sup>The control then extends to every aspect of life and, in the absence of the husband, is delegated to the older women of the family. Precisely for this reason Cerreoni, when the companion buys a house in the alley of Porta Furba, close to the sisters, decides to leave him and move in with an aunt in Catania. This, however, tracks her down and convinces her to get back together, with the promise that it would guarantee a different life from that of the other women in her family.

<sup>8</sup> Cross-examination of witness Debora Cerreoni, lawyer Naso, Gramigna trial hearings, 11 February 2020.

well-recognizable symbols: Rolex watches, precious jewels, a specific haircut, important tattoos. Such examples are some of the distinctive signs of male clan and can be considered as a sign of belonging to the group, both from inside and outside. The control exercised on the clothing shows how this represents a factor of identification, whose non-compliance determines different forms of reaction not only by the partners but by the whole community. Cerreoni always says: "When I lived in the alley of Porta Furba I lived in a situation of total subjection, I was obliged to respect all the provisions of the Casamonica (not only by Massimiliano but also by his brothers), I had to dress as they said and I could not breathe. On the rare occasions I tried to assert my independence I was threatened, beaten (even inside the prison) and even kidnapped (...)" (Tribunale di Roma 2018, p. 88).

As can be seen from the woman's account, the dynamics of control are reproduced and maintained through the use of physical violence and restriction of personal freedom, as a disciplinary practice. In addition to physical and psychological violence, there are obvious forms of economic dependence in the stories analysed. This element is clear in the reconstruction offered by the second collaborator, Simona Zakova<sup>9</sup>: born in the Czech Republic, she leaves her family and country to move to Rome with her partner, after meeting him during a period of hiding. Once arrived in Italy, she initially finds a job, from which she is forced to resign, with the reason that women of the clan are not allowed to be engaged in activities outside those of the family: "Cristian's family explained to me that for the Casamonica women must stay at home and take care of their husband and children, they must not go out and must not give confidence to other people (...)" (Tribunale di Roma 2020, p. 96). Words that can be traced back to the testimony of Cerreoni who says: "women who work (inc.) are considered a bit 'prostitutes, they are not seen as so good'"<sup>10</sup>. In the analysis of investigations conducted by the judiciary it is possible to trace some women involved in work activities working: what characterizes this situation is that women are unmarried and are involved in criminal activities as subjects of cover and justification of income and property. Also in this case, there is a specific control device of unmarried women who on the one hand can be present in the public sphere and on the other must be instrumental to collective criminal action.

The experiences analysed also show how control devices are implemented in a transversal manner not only on "gagge women", but on all women in the family who can only go out accompanied and *had to obtain their partner's permission* to see other women. This was witnessed in the interviews carried out under the research to women resident in the settlement neighborhoods of the clan who had relations with the women Casamonica and confirmed by Zakova:

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<sup>9</sup> The woman explains that initially, after returning from the Czech Republic, her husband rented her an apartment in eastern Rome, in the Finocchio neighbourhood, where she lived alone, while he continued to live with his parents. It was not acceptable to live with a woman who was not only "gaggia" but also a foreigner. In this situation, she managed to keep her job as a cashier in a supermarket.

<sup>10</sup> Cross-examination of witness Debora Cerreoni, lawyer Naso, Gramigna trial hearings, 11 February 2020.

“After being arrested Raffaele continued to maintain a control over my life through his mother, who lived in the apartment next to mine. In particular, she demanded that I have no friends, that I do not see anyone. (...) In addition, my husband did not want his daughters to go to school, nor to kindergarten (...) says that women should stay at home” (Tribunale di Roma 2020, p. 96).

The control over bodies is therefore translated into forms of isolation, typical of ‘Ndrangheta-style organizations, which have roots in the concept of honor and control of relationships that fall only into specific endogamic forms. Episodes of extreme physical violence is found in numerous testimonies in spousal relations in contexts where such violence is legitimized and is part of the shared common sense.

The violence suffered in family and couple relationships, or the processes of recognition of the same are, as shown by the stories of Cerreoni and Zakova, part of the biographical path. In these cases, the paths of escape from gender violence coincide with the paths of breaking up and moving away from the same clan (Garofalo, 2023).

Such empowerment paths of the women of the Casamonica are hindered in daily practice and the attempts at rebellion have as reactions violent actions with the aim of intimidation. When Debora Cerreoni tries to rebel, with the aim of breaking the relationship with his partner, he suffers heavy retaliation, even denouncing a kidnapping of persona by her partner’s sister and other women of the clan. The level of violence suffered emerges in the words of Cerreoni, who states: “With reference to Antonietta (Casamonica), again, I want to highlight that she was actively involved in the kidnapping perpetrated against me. I was kidnapped because I had left Massimiliano Casamonica (who at that time was in prison), I had betrayed him, I had found a job in a restaurant, I had started to dress in a normal way (I no longer wore long skirts, but jeans), I even got a tattoo. All this was unacceptable for the Casamonica, because with my behavior I was “dishonouring” the family, I was losing their prestige. So they decided to kidnap me, it was also a “demonstrative” gesture for evrybody” (Tribunale di Roma, 2018, p. 218).

In this statement, it is possible to identify elements common to the actions of the ‘ndrangheta, specifically dynamics relating to the disciplining of female bodies both within the family context and outside it, with demonstrative actions aimed at maintaining prestige, a frame that emerges from the analysis of the qualities of relationships, which is the subject of the next paragraph.

### **The interpersonal dimension**

Analyzing the criminal dynamics from the perspective of the interpersonal dimension allows us to consider the quality of relationships within the family and the community, using violence as the analytical lens, particularly how it is enacted and experienced from a gendered perspective. The relationships between family members and clans are characterized by the recurrent use of both

physical and verbal violence, used in particular against female subjectivities. As Debora Cerreoni says: "The state of submission I was in eventually became unbearable when Massimiliano was detained. Because for Casamonica I was a "gaggia" and because of this, I had— in their eyes — fewer rights than a woman of Roma ethnicity" (Tribunale di Roma 2018, p.88).

Reading in a dialogic way the practical-disciplinary and interpersonal dimensions, violent behaviors are justified as defending the family's honor and prestige of the family. Cerreoni's account reads: "I am aware of the fact that Giuseppe Casamonica had a lover (...) Giuseppe had lost his head for this girl, even preferring her to go to the interview rather than her children. I know that for this reason Liliana Casamonica called Stefania, who told me that she had brought a hammer and a knife and threatened to kill her saying: "with this (that is the knife) I cut you and with this (that is the hammer) I break you" (Tribunale di Roma 2018, p.227).

As we can see, violence is not only suffered by the women of the clan, but it is also a way of regulating the conflict between female subjectivities for the defense of honor and reputation, main characteristic on which is based and legitimizes mafia power. Further analyzing this episode, it is possible to highlight not only the punitive action towards the woman for which Giuseppe Casamonica had "lost his reason" (as women said): he preferred her to his children for interviews in prison, making this story visible and no longer hidden. In this case it is possible to show also the use of a violent language and a threat linked to precise tools that without mediation, highlight the will to kill and subsequently cancel the body.

Violence is also used in a symbolic way, to symbolically assert the incompatibility of certain behaviors with the expected gender roles imposed on women and, as emerging from the surveys, how the punitive action is declined and modulated according to the objective that is not only practical, but at the same time symbolic and demonstrative. As the justice collaborator reports: "She told me that her books had also been burned, burned—as punishment for her attending university" (Tribunale di Roma 2018, p.227). Further element of reflection is offered by the account of the destruction of the house and especially the books: it was evident to the girl involved, a university student, the distance between the two worlds, highlighting the difference with the two female models.

The pre-eminence of role expectations in relation to women is also highlighted by the social operators who work in the neighborhood, who give an interesting highlighting how the control of girls' sexuality is central to the broader regulation of their bodies.

One of the relevant elements in this direction is the demand for contraceptive measures hidden from families, precisely because the sexual relationship and the possibility of a pregnancy outside wedlock is strictly forbidden. The same idea applies to maternity management. In the marital relationship, often "consecrated" at a very young age, women are closely linked to the dimension of motherhood, to the point that a wife, if she does not immediately start a pregnancy after

marriage, is likely to be separated from her husband and his family. As it emerges from this interview: "in the family under my house, a brother and three sisters, when the only man was married, were both minors, great party, because here when they make parties they must be seen and heard, that poor girl for a few years did not become pregnant and they were sending her away from home" (interview with resident and activist of the Romanina district). These expectations, therefore, are rooted in the traditional roles of wives, useful for strengthening the ties between families, and mothers, necessary for reproduction and, from a criminal point of view, the perpetuation of the power of the clan, which is also measured by the number of its members.

As can be seen, the interpersonal dimension is the place where one can analyse the ways in which asymmetric relationships are built up as a result of practices aimed at disciplining behaviour, of female role expectations and maintenance of the criminal balance.

### **Hegemonic dimension**

In considering the hegemonic dimension, forms of legitimization of dominant power have been analyzed, "in this case examined through the lens of mafia and patriarchal power. In this direction, it was possible to verify how the ideologies, traditions, beliefs of the dominant group were shared, reproduced and normalized. The deepening in this case is linked to the mechanisms through which these ideologies, traditions and beliefs have taken root in the common sense in order to legitimize positions of power and subalternity, to legitimize both dominant and subordinate positions within the power hierarchy. In this direction, patterns of hegemonic reproduction are similar to those implemented in organisations of the 'ndranghetistic or camorristic type.

When considering a common fact, what emerges is the strength of blood ties, which bind all exponents together, according to a family criminal model that corresponds to the 'ndrine, the basic unit of the 'ndrangheta. This characteristic has as direct consequence a smaller number of collaborators or witnesses, which makes, from the criminal point of view, highly reliable and strongly cohesive organizations. But in addition to the practical-organizational element, this similarity is reproduced, in the hegemonic dimension, when considering the self-representation element: Casamonica are well aware of the prestige of the 'ndrangheta and therefore often use the organization as a term of comparison.

They explain, for example, to a Calabrian associate close to the clan, so able to fully appreciate the proposed similarity: "We gypsies have rules as there are rules the Calabrians, the mafia, a hierarchy" or "Our family is like yours in Calabria" (Tribunale di Roma 2018, p. 91). The 'ndrangheta becomes, therefore, not only a simple reference model from which to learn modalities of action, despite the different complexity of the organizational structure, but also an instrument of legitimization and criminal recognition. Through explicit references to the imaginary and to



languages and forms related to the 'ndrangheta, with which it has direct and organizational links, the criminal model of the Casamonica is strengthened in its public representation. However, from the analysis of tools and communication strategies also emerges a strong similarity with Camorra clans. To the camorristic organizations in particular active in the city of Naples, they approach, in fact, the cultural alphabet and the need to exhibit and show luxury and wealth, as a tool to claim their power. It is a justice collaborator, from Calabria transplanted in Rome, to introduce the comparison: "The 'ndrangheta is noisier when it wants, but it is more silent [...], the camorristi like the Casamonica, tend to be more flamboyant and demonstrative, they do it in a theatrical or ostentatious way"<sup>11</sup>.

The analysis of forms of hegemonic reproduction also allows us to consider what can be defined as counter-hegemonic actions, defined in this case as devices of subtraction, forms of action put into place by women, which are more or less explicit, but more often in latent forms, they trace paths of liberation and acquisition of autonomy spaces.

Among these, a mode of egemonic subtraction, acts of withdrawal from hegemonic control, is the level of educational attainment among young women, which often stops at lower secondary school, as the coordinator of a local committee in one of the clan's rooting neighborhoods tells: "this year we have 5 girls who are attending middle school and it is an exceptional event, since girls are often withdrawn from school upon reaching puberty do not attend school anymore (...) will go to the second grade this year (...) if they are there it is because their mothers have come to see education as a possible path to emancipation... (...) No mother wants her daughter to grow up in a strongly male-dominated environment (...) "<sup>12</sup>. This represents a moment of distortion precisely because, as emerges from the testimony of several people active in the world of school, teachers or parents met in the neighborhoods during the field research, even today, very often young Casamonica are withdrawn from schools at the appearance of the first menstrual period, while boys usually complete school. Once again reflects the gendered expectations imposed on girls, linked to the role that girls must prepare themselves for: to this purpose it is necessary to limit prolonged contact with communities outside the family which can show and propose alternative educational models.

When considering the mechanisms of subtraction, Cerreoni's story may highlight elements of strong discontinuity but also of innovation in women's paths. "The concept that emerges from the words used directly by the woman is that of dignity, as explained in"<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Examination of witness Massimiliano Fazzari, Gramigna Trial Hearings, 13 December 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with an activist from the Romanina neighbourhood.

<sup>13</sup> Manuscript submitted by Debora Cerreoni, cited in Tribunale di Roma 2018 (p. 48).

## Conclusion

The study of the Casamonica clan conducted using a multidimensional and multilevel matrix of power analysis, has made it possible to bring together the dynamics of mafia-style criminal power building with the practices of male and mafia power expressed in everyday interactions. The interpretative framework presented allows us to conceptualize mafias as entities that deny democratic rights, mafia violence as political violence, and gender-based violence as a denial of human rights. Starting from this theoretical framework, it was therefore possible to understand the processes of constructing power relations by considering the specific nature of the criminal organization in structural terms, and then to understand how, in practice, these dynamics are translated into disciplinary practices targeting women's bodies. All this was done by considering the relational, gender, and generational dimensions, as well as the mechanisms for reproducing hegemonic power as well as strategies of resistance and subversion. In this sense, it is possible to initiate a reflection that contributes to the debate on the recognition of the Clan as a mafia-type group. It is therefore possible to initiate a reflection on the recognition of mafia methods in everyday practices and violence. Starting from the literature on the subject, it is possible to identify, for example, the irreversible nature of the marital commitment, characterized by the indissolubility of a bond not as a sacred bond, but in terms of honor and credibility. In the being-versus-appearing dialectic that characterizes mafia systems, the concept of honor remains central to behavioral action and, above all, to the construction of the self-image, where an honored family corresponds to a respected family. The concern for external reputation is central to the observed dynamics. Central to the concept of honor is also the concept of betrayal, understood as an act to be punished, not only as a betrayal of the marital bond but as a betrayal of the entire criminal group. As in 'Ndrangheta-style criminal organizations, betrayal of the family is an act to be distanced from when it occurs, but above all to be avoided. Betraying the spouse means breaking the pact of honor and thus becoming dangerous to the entire organization, not only in symbolic terms but also in practical terms. The power that translates into the lives of women in the clan also identifies as betrayal the women's entry into the public sphere. The choice of a job that implies not only economic independence but also a necessary encounter with other realities, is denied and considered unacceptable behavior precisely because such entry into the public sphere could represent recognition of a possible alternative life. Control over women's lives is enacted through control over their bodies: decisions to wear non-traditional attire, such as jeans, is seen as an act of rebellion and distancing, and asserting bodily autonomy through acts such as getting a tattoo. This control therefore extends from the type of clothing worn to the control of sexuality and motherhood, effectively influencing the entire life course of women within the clan. The honor

of the family and the reputation of the entire clan, in this case too, become central. The theme of prestige as an element linked to external recognition, influenced by women's behavior, requires demonstrative action towards the outside world, which always develops in the dialectic of punishment and representation. All this, which characterizes mafia action from a gender perspective, invites further reflection on the specific criminal dynamics and gendered power structures within the Casamonica clan. What emerges is a model of mafia action carried out in terms of male and macho power that permeates the female worldview. Even in instances where women ascend to leadership roles exercising delegated authority in the absence of male leaders, as in the case of Stefania Casamonica, who commands the Quadraro clan during her brothers' imprisonment, replicating traditional male power paradigms. Violence is used as a means of regulating conflicts, directly by women, as described by collaborators who describe her in these words: "Because she is more of a man than a woman! (described as embodying masculine traits to an extreme degree)" "(inc.) It is well known and even with her hands she is a man..." (Tribunale di Roma 2018, p. 161). The study therefore opens up perspectives for analysis that revisit the concepts of power and violence in mafia criminal organizations, considering the forms of power management in a framework of male and male-dominated power. In this sense, it is possible to consider how mafia power is rooted in relational and territorial logics that are reproduced in violent relationships instrumental to the power.

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