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Homosocial relationships and patriarchal conventions
in *The Godfather*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Godfather (Francis Ford Coppola) is a 1972 mob drama film based on Mario Puzo's novel (1969). The film focuses on organized crime in the city of New York after the Second World War, and more specifically on the Corleone family, one of the most powerful mob families under patriarch Vito Corleone (Marlon Brando). When Vito's youngest son, Michael (Al Pacino), reluctantly joins the Mafia, he becomes involved in an inevitable cycle of death and betrayal. Michael will have to face plenty of challenging situations during the film, confront enemies from different Mob families and go back to his family's natal country to become the worthy heir of his father after his death.

The Godfather is mainly settled in a time period—from 1945 to 1955—when patriarchy was not frowned upon, it was something common (Higgins, C. 2018, p. 4). Further do, this Mafia family is rooted by old customs, most of the gangsters in the film come from Italy, the Corleone Family specifically comes from Sicily which allows the spectator to understand most behaviors by the characters in the film, including the female roles (Ambrogio, A. 1978, *The Godfather, I and II: "Patterns of Corruption"* p. 37). *The Godfather* tries to portray how Italians across the Pacific Ocean are tied by knots that cannot be seen like family trust, support and also common aspects like food. These tight knots were visible even in relationships between Italian-Americans who were not blood relatives. The definition of "patriarchy" given by the Cambridge dictionary is: "a society in which the oldest male is the leader of the family, or a society controlled by men in which they use their power to their own advantage". This quote would perfectly fit if someone tries to define the Corleone Family only changing the word "society" for "organization".

Overall, the film got a lot of positives reviews since it was launched. Vincent Canby referred to *The Godfather* as “a superb Hollywood movie”, a “gangster melodrama come-of-age, truly sorrowful and truly exciting” (1972, *New York Times*). Nowadays most critics still hold it in high regard, but they are more critical of diverse topics such as the relationship between men and the Italian American society portrayed in the film. The figure of Francis Ford Coppola is also important in the film itself. Jonathan J. Cavallero mentions in one of his works, *Hollywood's Italian American Filmmakers*, how Coppola was chosen due to his Italian heritage and, although he was born in Michigan, he was raised in Queens, New York, where *The Godfather* is settled. Peter Cowie also makes a point about Coppola’s style and his approach to his work: “Nothing has influenced Coppola’s life and work so dramatically as his Italian blood.” (Cavallero, J. 2011, *Francis Ford Coppola: Ethnic Nostalgia in the Godfather Trilogy*, p. 102)

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze the homosocial relationships and patriarchal conventions settled in *The Godfather* in order to comprehend society behavior and the American Gangster Genre from the time regarding women situation. This study paper is divided in sections. First, the theoretical framework where I will put *The Godfather* film into context. Later on, the body section where I will comment over different scenes of the film to prove my thesis statement. The theoretical framework is divided in two parts, the first one mentioning several masculine theories about male relationships and the position of women at the time. Secondly, a study of the American Film Genre and society point of view towards it. The body section is based on scenes extracted from the film focusing on mise-en-scene topics such as costume and location. I will also rely on the use of characters regarding their behavior, costume and location inside the frames. These

topics will be interrelated with the ones treated on the theoretical framework. The topics being masculine theories about homosocial relationships, women and minorities, and lastly the gangster genre and how it affected society's perspective regarding violence and women related house-matters.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 PATRIARCHY AND HOMOSOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The Godfather I is a film in which men dominate. It is not surprising due to the year it was released (1972), a period of time when women's independence and freedom were not even close to nowadays condition (Russo, JP. 2011, *The Italian in Modernity* p. 443). The art of cinema was not different from other artistic fields, few people expressed their discomfort towards patriarchy and the role of women. When *The Godfather* came out, it was a perfect representation of society in terms of how families behave indoors, specifically Italian-American communities which are popular for carrying on old customs and roots (Philips, G. 2004, *Godfather: The Intimate Francis Ford Coppola* p. 96). Anthony Ambrogio claims in his work *The Godfather, I and II: "Patterns of Corruption"*, that the first scene of the film is already giving less importance to women. It is Don Corleone's daughter wedding, but the real business is happening at Vito's office (when undertaker Bonasera's asks the Godfather to avenge his daughter and godson Johnny Fontane requests a part in a movie).

Drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick understanding of "homosexuality" and male homosocial desire we understand several aspects about Coppola's intentions while directing *The Godfather*. This term is also studied in the book *The Conundrum of Masculinity*, a compilation of masculine aspect entries written by Chris Haywood, Thomas Johansson,

Nils Hammarén and Marcus Herz. The term focusses on the relationship between people from the same sex from a friendship and mentorship point of view. It can be said to be defined by their homosocial ties. This term is very accurate and the one I will use during the study paper to define men relationships in *The Godfather*. The concept uphold and reinforce similar gender categorizations, focusing on single-sex groups and often alluding to hierarchical gender connections in which (often white) men strengthen certain hegemonic gender ideals (Haywood, C. and Harz, M. 2017, p.73). This idea reminds me to a very similar notion to the concept of patriarchal society where women are displaced to a secondary role.

Furthermore, Todd W. Reeser talks about masculine characteristics and features attached to powerful men in the Gangster Film Genre. He mentions various elements which often come out while researching about his own *Theory of Masculinity*. These terms are violence, war, sexism, rape, and homophobia. All these components have negatives connotations and are somehow associated to male gender which makes us wonder about the idea of society towards men. “Masculinity is very often tied to power, whether in government, the household, or the military” (Reeser, T. 2010, p. 7). This quotation by Reeser about masculinity concurs with the figure of Michael in *The Godfather*, an ex-military soldier tied to power who is in charge of a big family (household). Furthermore, Reeser mentions the idea of secrecy and hiddenness, two characteristics that characterize Michael’s behavior and bring him problems with his wife.

Jonathan J. Cavallero talks about minorities in *The Godfather* and how they are portrayed in the film atmosphere. He connects *The Godfather* and patriarchy, how they link to embrace a conservative worldview that relegates women and minorities into a lower

social status. He explains how this idyllic Italian dream is corrupted by American society, but he is also critical with the Corleone family and all mob organizations which adulterate the seemingly Italian American families by “bloodshed, extortion and murder” (Callavero, J. 2011, p. 108). Cavallero connects the topic of minorities with Italian American heritage. He states that the feeling of family trust that Italian American society tries to embrace is worthless. He argues that *The Godfather* characters are not well represented in comparison with the ones from the Novel. How this feeling of family protection and loyalty is just adulterated for economic purposes and moviegoing interests.

2.2 GANGSTER FILMS

The Godfather belongs to a group of films that show the gangster violence in the United States during the entire 20th century. It treats topics such as honor, betrayal, revenge, sexism, and male hegemony but focusing on the family unit (Philips, G. 2004 p. 98). The Corleone family is attached to old customs, Vito Corleone, the first Godfather of the family is “old-school”. He mentions plenty of times during the film how crucial trustiness and family values are for him. He only wants Italian people working for him and trust all his associates even though he knows they can betray him. Remarkably, there is little room for women in gangster films such as *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese 1990), *Scarface* (Brian de Palma, 1983) and *Once Upon a Time in America* (Sergio Leone, 1984). Gardaphe regards the directors of these films as reporters of this society of controlling and violent men who were almost fighting against women rights despite of the second feminist wave (around 1960s to 1980s) that was increasingly challenging American society. (Baker, A. 2006 p. 508).

On the other hand, Barry Langford explains in his book *Film Genre Hollywood and Beyond*, how contemporary Gangster Films often connect the audience's knowledge about gangster film codes and conventions with a source of humor. This entails the spectator's cold-blooded position towards sexist and criminal behaviors from the protagonists. Langford also talks about the generic gangster revival in the 1970s and the comparison of gangster characters with the Western (cowboy-hero): "a certain masculine style and the elaboration of a code of behavior through acts of decisive violence are central concerns in both genres." (Langford, B. 2005 p. 134). Langford regards the delinquent individual into a meaningful aesthetic form (he brings broad symbolism into this figure) and states that the gangster is the man of the city while the cowboy is the man on the frontier. Adrian Martin also makes a point in his book *Mysteries of Cinema* when he talks about "The Gangster as Tragic Hero", the gangster is a bigger-than-life figure who portrays a desire for absolute success, and total access to a lost, reckless, anarchistic childishness which justifies its actions. (Martin, A. 1982/2016 p. 246)

Moreover, Munby also states that the notable decline in popularity of the American Gangster Genre was in fact a reflection of real anxiety about these films' role in encouraging an upsurge in violent racketeering. In addition, American citizens projected as gangsters might seem to serve such xenophobic ideologies rather well. However, famous Italian Americans figures such as the New York Mayor, Fiorella La Guardia, quickly denounced characters like Rico in *Little Caesar* (1931) by Mervyn LeRoy as defamatory. (Langford, B. 2005 p. 139). One important topic in this genre is the gangster's principal bodyguard. Martin, A. specifically shows his perspective about this figure, the most trusted functionary, the closest to him. This character is in the position where he can betray or

cancel the rules of the “contract” with his boss and take the power for himself. This is a toxic figure typical from gangster films which is related with homosocial relationships inside the genre. This notion also puts the role of women in check as it happens in the film *The Big Heat* [Fritz Lang, 1953] when the protagonist claims “There’s no one close to me”, his rival replies: “You have a wife”. (Martin, A. 1982/2016 p. 252). Gangsters tend to forget about their wives or female partners while they are working. They rely on their mob associates, bodyguards, personal chauffeur and specially on family bonds if they can. In addition, American Gangsters Films follow a pattern of loneliness towards important gangster figures who prefer not to share guilt or pain with his close circle (specially with women) and keep every inch of responsibility for themselves.

In conclusion, the idea of patriarchy and homosocial relationship studied by film critics and scholars throughout the years can be related with the audiovisual field. Plenty of theories and study papers regarding gender equality are noticeable while exposed through different film genres; being the American Gangster Genre one of the most representative ones due to the patriarchal system followed by mob organizations. *The Godfather* is a good example because of its good representation of personal relationships not just between men but also with women. I will now proceed with the analysis of different scenes from the movie which illustrate patriarchal values settled in the film. These values are not celebrated but either denounced throughout the movie. Several characters behave in different ways depending on their positions towards women and homosocial relationship aspects such as respect, trust and betrayal.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE GODFATHER

3.1 COSTUME AND CLOTHING

In this first section of the study of patriarchy and homosocial relationships between men in *The Godfather I* will be analyzing the clothing and costumes chosen for the characters throughout the film. It is a fact that each character has a specific outfit selected by professional designers previously. The main characters' costumes have a precise meaning in the film. It does not only give information to the spectators about their personality, but also helps the audience and the film critics to observe differential social values from the movie and the epoch it is settled in. Gangsters during the 1950s, including the ones in *The Godfather*, used to wear their own style of clothes, mainly “hats and dark suits, jackets and trousers; and later tight-fitting, double-breasted jackets, coats with big Napoleonic collars and flared trousers” (Grieveson, Sonnet and Stanfield, 2005: 165-166).

Anna Hill Johnstone was the professional costume designer in charge of *The Godfather's* character dressing. It is severely overlooked how much Johnstone's genius—meticulous, deliberate—shaped women's fashions in the film. Anna's precise clothing selection was expected due to her previous knowledge about the use of masculinity topics inside the film; She was a big fan of the novel and knew about gangster dressing style. Women in the film are presented as magnets of male ambition, motive, and desire. For example, Connie is used as a tool by Carlo so he could have more power and responsibility inside the family (ambition). From a symbolic viewpoint, that is a strong role to be part of,

but it is also a problem that *The Godfather's* women act, for the most part, as conduits for a plot about men's rivalries and men's business. As Anna Hill affirms in an interview: "*Given that women speak all too rarely in the film, it's especially important that we dwell on how their clothes speak for them.*". Moreover, her valuable work was noticed by the audience, and she received an Oscar nomination for her spectacular job in the film. Another shining

objective she accomplished was how she turned Michael Corleone (Al Pacino), who was dubbed "the midget" by producer Robert Evans, into a



figure of "slow-burning" glamour with his dark three-piece suits and his tilted homburg hat. She did not only embrace women characters through costumes but also men. She was able to make personal clothing profiles to each main male character, not just Michael but also Sonny (James Caan) (Figure 1) with his informal grey suit and Vito Corleone (Marlon Brando) himself, with his particular bow tie and red flower.

The first scene of the film presents Connie's (Talia Shire) wedding. There are plenty of people dressed up; women concretely are all wearing long dresses with bright colors. There is not a single woman wearing trousers or an outfit different from a dress. We are aware of this thanks Anna Hill's comments after the movie and due to the context the film is settled in. On the contrary, men are all wearing suits. There is a differentiation with the suit colors used by gangster who are members of the Corleone family and men who are

not mob related. Men at the wedding who are wearing black or dark colors such as brown are the ones who belong to the Corleone family in general. In this scene in particular black is related to death and murder; undertaker Bonasera (Salvatore Corssito) is also wearing black, but he is not in the mafia, this is due to his job. On the contrary, white can be associated with innocence in this scene; we can observe how mainly young children are wearing white clothes. The biggest representation of white as innocence in the wedding is the costume of Johnny Fontane (Al Martino) who is wearing a completely white suit. Johnny is an innocent singer and actor whose prime years are gone. Now, he needs to rely on Vito's power and influence to achieve his goals. It seems that he is not aware or acts like he does not know how his godfather, Vito, grants all his wishes.

Focusing on Michael and Kay (Diane Keaton), when they are presented together in the wedding, we can observe how different they are dressing. Kay with her beau, Michael, with his brown and boxy uniform from the army (Figure 2). Next to Kay, Michael and his uniform nearly disappear, swallowed by the aimless enormity of her gown.



Figure 2

Both characters do not fit properly with the wedding dressing code. Kay dress is rather informal, and it seems like she is going to a picknick while the rest of the Corleone women wear more formal dresses. This was pointed by Anne Hill to try to empower the character of Kay which will be getting smaller as the film progresses. Kay outfits develop from bright unattached dresses to more discrete and private apparels characterized by dark colors. Michael's outfit is also very different from the rest of Corleone members at the wedding. He is wearing his military uniform to show that he is different from his family. At first, he portrays distinct values from the rest of the gangsters, but this will change as the film develops along with his outfits. The fact that he is wearing a military uniform reflects the way Michael challenges the rest of his family who wanted him to become a regular gangster just like the rest of them, but he rather chose his own path.

Clothing style in New York for that age was represented by dark suits with a long trench coat and a bowler hat (Grievesson, Sonnet and Stanfield, 2005). If we observe the lapse of time when Michael lives in Sicily the pattern does not stop. Women still only wear long dresses with bright colors in general while men continue wearing the suit outfit except for the jacket as a feeling of wilderness and freedom. It is also necessary to remark the fact that Michael is always wearing a suit vest while he is in Sicily the same way his brother Sonny does during the entire film. This suit vest thing can be interpreted as a bulletproof vest given the fact that Michael and Sonny are Don Corleone's main heirs, and they are good targets to hurt the pride and reputation of the Corleone family.

There is a similitude between Connie's and Michael's wedding in Sicily. Again, only women, children and the music band are wearing light colors, white principally, as a symbol of innocence. The rest of men are wearing black or dark suits at the

wedding. Apollonia (Simonetta Stefanelli) can be said to be the definition of inno while she is on screen. She is always wearing light colors throughout the film except for one scene while she is walking next to Michael, this can be interpreted as Michael “infecting” her. The fact that Apollonia barely speaks at first with Michael and it is her father the one who decides her future already shows the kind of patriarchal society in Italy



during the 50s. The most representative scene for Apollonia as an innocent woman is after her wedding with Michael. They are both alone in their room (Figure 3) and she is just wearing a thin white nightdress. Michael finally takes it off for her at the same time he metaphorically removes all her innocence. From that point Apollonia is more open with Michael and it seems like she has grown as a woman. This relationship is heavily featured by patriarchal discourses and it is another perfect example about how men portrayd women as objects of desire in *The Godfather*.

In conclusion, the costume selecction given to each character throughout *The Godfather* is characterized by each one of their personal profiles. Anna Hill did not want only to choose clothes that fit the differnet character’s behavior but she tried to go further, and she trully succeeded. Clothing and dressing code in the film explore various social fields such as male oppresion, gangster envioroments closeness to death and the innocence of children and women. Different film critics were aware of this situation and studied the use of patriarchal symbols referring to costume inside *The Godfather*, for

example, Vito and Michael's outfits which are very similar by the end of the movie and bring a broader meaning to their character. This meaning is entangled to ambition and desire, not only regarding power and influence but also women and family. This significance attached to clothing does not rely on colors only, it moves beyond and plays with the use of the outer space or the situations the characters are dealing with, always bounded to the main classic style from the 50s.

3.2 LOCATION AND SETTING

Now I will proceed with the examination of settings and locations inside the film and how women role is barely significant. *The Godfather* is based on homosocial relationships and the way men acted in consequence of their actions, how they answered when another gangster betrayed or disrespected them. Official gangster meetings were characterized by well manners and mutual respect between them while they all were reunited. Mobsters regularly had more respect between them, even when they were enemies, than the one they showed to women from their own family. Patriarchy in *The Godfather* excludes women from controlling their mobility, sexuality and reproduction. These limited boundaries on women's freedom can be perceived and showed through setting and location during the film. Women don't get a lot of screen time or participation on important parts of the movie, in fact, when they are shown, they are always operating with a single purpose: men's profit. Their role is to stay in the house and take care of their families while their husband tries to earn a living. This makes women dependent on their men. This turns into a cycle of oppression that is present in their lifestyle.

There are plenty of scenes where men are just sitting around a table arguing about their business or next moves. For example, when the heads of all New York mob



Figure 4



Figure 5

families arrange a meeting to talk about the future of their organizations (figure 4) or when the leaders of the Corleone family meet Virgil Sollozzo (Al Lettieri) “The Turk” to discuss the drugs issue (figure 5). During all those scenes, there is not even one where a female is present. All scenes with women intervening are linked with family matters or house affairs.

There is a significant fact about these conversations between men themselves and the ones in which women are involved. Male conversations between gangsters from the same organization are often at home. When the meetings are between different mob organizations, they tend to gather at public places like restaurants or neutral locations where both parts can feel safe. On the contrary, conversations between men and women are always settled in private spaces. This is a clear representation of the way women were treated in the 50s, especially around gangster environments. The only scenes between a man and a woman located outdoors are from Michael with Kay when he was not an official member of the family. During that period of time, Kay was the only representation of freedom and independence for women in *The Godfather*, for example at Christmas, when Michael and Kay are buying presents for their relatives and found out about Vito’s

assassination attempt. This will change as the film develops and Michael gets more involved in the family business. Their conversations will evolve with the passing of events, and they will talk just through the phone, or they will only meet at private places as Kay begins to lose her female strength and influence towards Michael.

By the end of the film, Michael is assaulted by his sister Connie who blames him for the death of her husband Carlo (Gianni Russo). Connie is quickly tossed from the room, but Kay remains there. As soon as Connie is gone, Kay asks Michael for the truth. He lies to her face and tells her to bring him a drink. Right after she leaves Michael's office,



he closes the door behind Kay's back as a sign of exclusion. This is a perfect example about how women were not relevant towards important issues, but they only had a decent role regarding housewife matters. Considering this scene, we reach to conclusion that women were conceived by the men of the film as mere objects. Gangsters used women as house tools, human trophies to display or personal waitress that work for them. Men from the epoch took advantage of their privilege and exploited women for their own benefits and pleasures. This is what Sonny and Michael Corleone do with the women who surround

them, including their sister Connie, who will be a strong pillar for Michael when he takes care of the family business, even after she finds out that he killed her husband Carlo (this is easier to appreciate in the next two movies).

There are more home scenes which exhibit the minimum importance male gangsters gave to their women while they were having an average conversation at the table. The most representative one in the film might be a family dinner at the Corleone's house when Vito was at the hospital and Michael hiding in Sicily. We can only recognize the face of men during this scene. Sonny, the head of the family while Vito is at the hospital, is presiding the table.

Connie's figure is completely covered by her mother Carmela "Momma" Corleone (Morgana King) whose face is not even shown



during the entire scene. The only woman we can perceive is Tom Hagen's wife, Theresa (Tere Livrano), who is completely irrelevant during the entire film. This is a perfect example of the low visibility given to women in *The Godfather*. In this scene there are also relevant lines linked with patriarchal discourses. Carlo disrespectfully orders Connie to shut up as soon as she mentions anything about the family business. Sonny quickly tells Carlo to treat his sister with respect, but it is Momma Corleone, a woman herself, the one who tells Sonny not to interfere because now that Connie and Carlo are married, he is the one in charge of her. Right after that, Carlo tries to charm Sonny so he could have a better position

inside the Corleone organization, but Sonny halts him and mentions: “we don’t talk family business at the table”. This can be interpreted as if Sonny does not want Carlo to get involved with the family or that women were present at the table, so it is not time to talk about it. Vito Corleone is presented as a familiar individual, and he always wanted to have a close family he could trust. Therefore, he knew he had to put business aside during family time and bring different conversation topics or he could create a toxic environment inside his home.

Inside film settling, *The Godfather* characterizes for its appearance of male and female characters depending on the outer space each scene is located. I will not focus on principal actors because most of them are men, I will go deeper and observe the characters who are irrelevant in the film but participate in the plot. For example, the fact that all police officers in the city are men illustrates the opportunity for women in that epoch to become any kind of law enforcement officer. Every time some member of the Corleone family has a meeting with another gangster, only men are present in the location they meet. Females are not presented doing any kind of job during the film, not even as waitress in a restaurant or members of the music band in the wedding of Michael and Apollonia in Sicily. The only time we can see women working in *The Godfather* is when

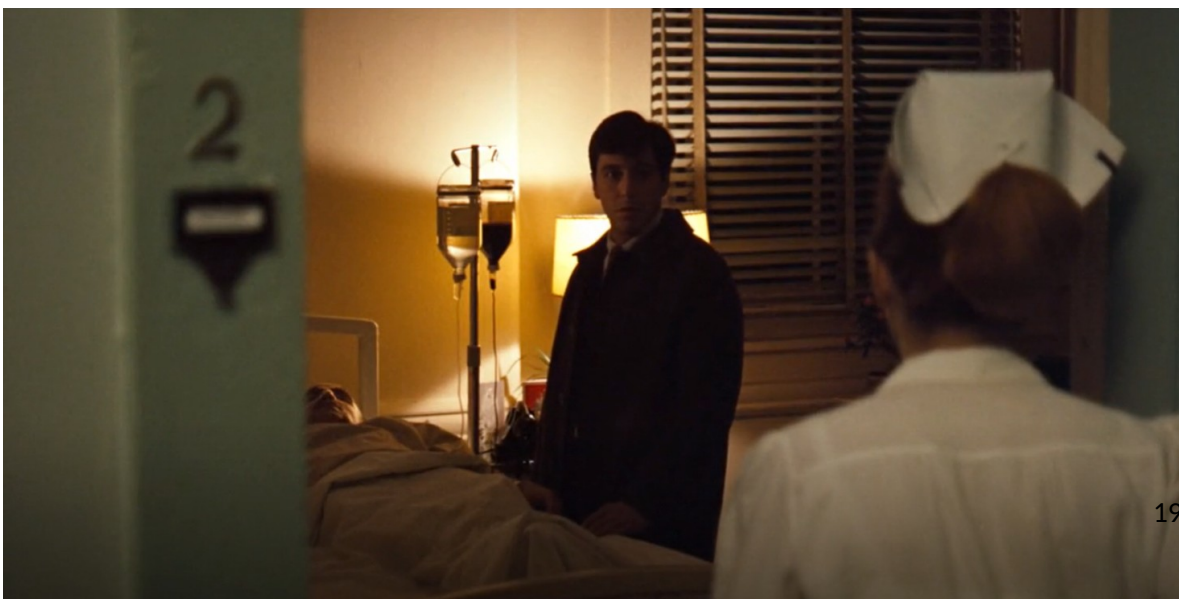


Figure 6

Michael goes to the hospital to check on his father (figure 6). He comes into the hospital and there are no men inside, only the nurses are working, and they are all women. The only man present in the hospital besides Michael and Vito is Enzo Aguello (Gabriele Torrei) friend of the family who is just passing by to thank Vito for a favor he did with his work visa.

It is interesting to observe that nursing is a profession related with “care”, one of the few features associated with women within the film. The fact that the only work done by women throughout the movie is nursing shows the patriarchal situation experienced by the feminine gender, not just in terms of power and importance, but also abstracted to a less common field such as their daily professions. Women are hardly visible in any scene settled outside a house. Relevant characters such as Connie and Momma Corleone are only presented inside their home or during public events such as weddings, baptisms and funerals. Furthermore, women characters who are most of their time at home are not yet safe. They suffer an intense abuse from their own men like Connie with her husband Carlo, who cheats on her and physically beats her more than once. The most remarkable case is the death of Apollonia, who dies from a car bomb exploding inside her own residence.

A quote from Mario Puzo, the author of the novel *The Godfather* can be used to summarize all relationships between men and women in the film and the novel. “She is my daughter, but now she belongs to her husband. He knows his duties. Even the King of Italy didn’t dare to meddle with the relationship of husband and wife.” (Mario Puzo 317). This quotation simply explains the power of patriarchal conventions established in the epoch the movie is settled. Women belong to men all their lives; first, it is her father the one

responsible for them and the one who decides what she can or cannot do. If a woman gets married, her husband is her new “owner” and the one who decides for her and treats her as he pleases. This feeling of ownerships and belonging can be extracted to the use of setting, location and even positioning inside the film. The appearance of women just in public events, the place where females are sited and located inside the frames and the assigned professions given to them are just the tip of the iceberg and represent a clear impression of how oppressive the feminist situation was during the 50s.

3. 3. SOCIETY NORMALIZATION OF MALE GENDER VIOLENCE

Contemporary gangster films sometimes create on the audience a feeling of familiarity with gangster film codes and conventions. This develops into a source of knowing humor, for example, the dazzling performance from James Caan as Sonny Corleone overshadows his brutality, his infidelities and the big pressure he put on everyone. His great personality and sharp tongue makes the spectator empathize with him to a point that you feel sorry for him when he dies even though he was a ruthless criminal. This feeling of attachment is explained by Langford and it can be used to analyze how American Gangster Genre bewitched society during the 70s (Langford, B. 2005, p. 136). People did not know or did not want to realize how these films transmitted and normalized oppressive behaviors regarding criminality and women empowerment. The emphasis and fancy presentations of social events such as weddings and gangster meetings in *The Godfather* increased the levels of organized crime and society started to idolize and copy dangerous moral values which are not sufficiently punished in gangster movies.

Crime, violence and murder are not the only risky terms covered in the film. The relationship between men and how they interact with each other is another arduous

topic. Homosocial relationships were directed by a hierarchy of power depending on the status of each man, their position and importance inside their organization. The gangster genre gives a lot of credit to moral values such as respect and confidence between men. Plenty of times, high positioned gangsters such as Vito and Michael showed more respect and admiration for some of their enemies than for people from their own organization, including their relatives, as it happens with Fredo Corleone (John Cazale) in *The Godfather*, first-born son of Don Corleone, who is relegated to unimportant tasks because of his weakness and naivety. Furthermore, society has adopted some of these conventions and attitudes. Several crime organizations, and less important gangs establish their rules based on old values and create a kind of brotherhood following a peculiar creed (Langford, B. 2005, p. 137)

There are two perfect examples in the film which represent the homosocial relationships that gangsters of the time had between them. Carlo, Connie's husband, was part of the Corleone family but he was not a representative figure inside the organization. This happens because Carlo was Vito's son-in-law, and he did not want to leave his daughter without a husband. Carlo saw this as a lack of respect towards his name and Connie was the one who suffered the consequences (gender oppression from husband to his own wife). When Sonny found out (figure 7), he went to Carlo's zone and beat him up. One

important thing is that Sonny did not hit Carlo because Connie was a woman, he did it



Figure 7

just because she was family, his blood, so if Carlo damages and disrespects Connie, he also disrespects the Corleone organization. This is the kind of action and response *The Godfather* portrays towards men and women. Carlo felt humiliated after Sonny's beating and betrayed the family contacting with the other mob organizations in order to eliminate him. By the end of the film, Michael finds out and makes Carlo pay with his own life for the death of his brother. This is how American Gangster Genre represented its idea of homosocial relationships, men with huge ego who relied on their personal pride and are willing to kill anyone to maintain their status.

Another scene that demonstrates the harsh relationships between men in *The Godfather* is the situation with Salvatore Tessio (Abe Vigoda) who had a very solid role inside the Corleone family. He decided to betray Michael after Vito's death and ally with Emilio Barzini (Richard Conte). When Michael finds out he decides to kill him, but he is very sad about it. Tessio realizes he has been caught (figure 8) and leaves one the most remarkable quotes from the movie: "*Tell Michael it was only business. I always liked him*" as Tom Hagen answers "*He understands Sal*". These two quotes recap the relationship



Figure 8

between men in the film, and how it was portrayed by gangster genre. Michael knows that it was the smart move for Tessio to betray him and he almost admits that he would have done the same;

but in this environment, treason is paid with your own life. This behavior, represented by

Tesio in this scene, can be observed several times in gangster genre. It is often condemned but with a feeling of respect and esteem that always characterized gangster environments.

However, regarding gender stereotypes inside films, the American Gangster Genre also projects unfair notions which demonstrate the oppression women suffer during the epoch. *The Godfather* directly displace women from the real action all through the movie. It creates the impression that female issues are only linked to house matters just like the average genre films did and society did not even realize. These small plots were considered minor issues and people agreed with that. The Godfather movie was not seen as unmoral regarding women position when it was released. It relegated women to a secondary level by representing the real situation with female rights at the time, especially in gangster environments, and for society this impression was perceived as something normal.

There is a precise term studied by Carmela Coccimiglio which denominates women in American Gangster Narrative as “absence presence.” She means that women are perceived as “a convention of the patriarchal gangster landscape and often with little import while at the same time they cultivate resistant strategies from within this backgrounded positioning” (Coccimiglio, C. 2013, p. 3). Whereas previous scholar papers on gangster have identified how women are characterized as stereotypes, this notion argues that female characters often employ their marginal positions for empowering effects. Focusing on texts from Puzo’s *The Godfather*, before getting into the film. This section argues that housewives actively participates in creating the idea of a traditional family and everything that represents (presence), while criticism to their husband’s criminal behavior and infidelities exposes the family image they want to portray (absence). Family ideals from the

epoch were a mere illusion based on guise where men in the family had all the power while women were harness and used to save appearances.

There are some scenes and characters inside the film that expose these oppressive actions. Sonny Corleone's multiple infidelities during the film while he acts like he is the perfect husband with Sandra, also as a role model for his children and a good brother with Connie. The scene right before Sonny beats Carlo up shows him cheating on

his wife which could be considered a betrayal to his wife and his family at the same time. There is a scene starring Peter Clemenza (Richard Castellano) where he is going for a ride with



Figure 9

two other members of the family. Right before he leaves his place, his wife asks him to get her some "cannoli". During their excursion, Clemenza had the mission to murder one of his companions for betraying the family. After the killing (figure 9), when they are about to hide the corpse and the car, Clemenza tells the other mobster one of the most famous quotes in the movie: "leave the gun, take the cannoli". This phrase represents several aspects treated in this section regarding both relationship between men and female importance in the film. Clemenza and his assistant just murdered one member of the Corleone family because of his betrayal to the organization while they went to the store to get some "cannoli" for his wife. The men relationship in The Godfather is based on trust and paid

with your own life. On the other side, Clemenza's wife request is portrayed as a secondary issue and treated just as a house matter, relegating female position to a meaningless duty.

The main representation for this part of this analysis is pictured by a single character of the film, Michael Corleone. Michael is the main protagonist of The Godfather, not just this in first film but for the entire trilogy. He is the character who develops the most and he makes a huge change from his first appearance to the last one. Michael could be the

perfect definition of a gangster for the film genre. At first, he seems to be a perfect gentleman who does not care about the family



business, and he tries to separate himself from the mafia environment. He also stands out for treating Kay in a right way during the first scenes. He gets implicated in an unescapable pattern of murders and betrayal after his father shooting. Michael understands that he can not hide from his heritage and decides to inherit everything his father knows. After his time in Sicily and the death of his brother he becomes the boss of the Corleone family, from this point, everything changes. Michael starts to treat Kay with no respect, and he only wants her by his side to feel powerful and to have someone to rely on. His relationship with Apollonia is not that different, the film creates the impression that he truly loved her but he only perceived her as a beautiful trophy and a valuable treasure to retain. Furthermore, his relationship with different male gangsters are based on trust and respect. He gives an edge

to anyone he considers his friend, having said that, if Michael contemplates the idea that any of his acquaintances have gone too far or have disrespected him, he does not hesitate and quickly eliminates them.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has analyzed the homosocial relationships between men and the patriarchal conventions portrayed in *The Godfather*. Firstly, on the theoretical framework, the topic of study is approached from a different point of view, focusing on broader aspects related to gender and society. It relies and uses different theories of masculinity to understand the behavior of several male characters in *The Godfather* and their conduct towards men and women. I also relied on the analysis of the American Gangster Genre and its use of stereotypes for film production. This genre portrays a series of values and conventions that repress women and displace them to a secondary role. Finally, for the analysis of the theoretical framework, I have contemplated how society was portrayed in the epoch. How gangster films like *The Godfather* were not contemplated as oppressive movies regarding women rights, because they were a mere representation of society itself and this vision was considered something usual for them.

The second part of this study paper is the analysis of *The Godfather* taking into account different mise-en-scene categories like costume, dressing code, location and settlement. These fields of study have been supported by scenes from the film which revealed a negative behavior regarding women's situation. I have used several characters of *The Godfather*, mainly Sonny, Michael and Vito Corleone and examined their costume,

style and conduct throughout the film. In this body section, I have also contemplated the representation of society in *The Godfather*, and I have compared it with society at the time. Turns out that the film portrays a significant number of stereotypes that were actually present and settled from the 50s to the end of the century.

To sum up, *The Godfather* is a gangster film that creates a representation of the American society both inside and outside gangster environments. The film contemplates the homosocial relationships and the women oppression through the use of characters' costumes, the location of scenes or the position of characters inside the frame. It represents all these unfair aspects at such an accurate level that it was not classified as a sexist film when it was first launched. Therefore, in *The Godfather* women are relegated to roles influenced by the patriarchy while, inside this system, men control power.

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