



**Universidad**  
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# Undergraduate Dissertation

“That’s my Family, Kay, That’s Not Me”:  
Masculinity and Mafia Codes in *The Godfather*

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To my mother, for giving me her unconditional support in this journey

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## Introduction

In 1969 Mario Puzo, a New York writer of Italian descent, achieved great publishing success with *The Godfather*, a novel whose rights had already been acquired by Paramount before it was finished. The story follows Corleone's family, a fictional family inspired by Bonnano and Genovese crime families. In the first part of the cinematic trilogy, Francis Ford Coppola does not offer an insight into the origins of the family but provides an analysis of men's interactions in criminal groups. The film presents Vito (Marlon Brando) as the archetype of powerful and respected leader of the Sicilian Mafia, building his character from a glorified viewpoint. Through Vito's family, the audience can learn the Italian Mafia's concept of family, and how their manners and principles construct their identity as mob criminals.

Since its release in 1972, *The Godfather* has influenced the iconography of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, winning the Oscar for the best film the same year. With such artistic quality of photography and play of light, Coppola transports us to the different settings of Mafia ethos in a unique way, where light is present at weddings and social events, and shadows loom over the characters before each crime. As a result of the power struggle present in mob life, male characters perform a strong sense of masculinity, endorsing sexist discourses that reject women's involvement in Mafia ethos. As seen in Kay's (Diane Keaton) character, the role of women is de-emphasized, but of vital importance for the development of the plot, and they are the ones who constantly suffer the consequences of violence and men's thirst for power.

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse the representation of masculinity in *The Godfather* through the figure of Vito Corleone, the leader of the Italian Mafia that has achieved a cult-like status in the Mafia genre. By using specific scenes as examples

of the concepts under analysis, I will also explore how the film provides visual signifiers to enable us to study the clash of cultures between the characters of Michael (Al Pacino) and Kay.

## 1. Theoretical Framework

Coppola's film *The Godfather* shaped the way the Mafia and the Italo-American family and ethnic traditions in US film history are represented. As *The Godfather* has achieved cult-like status, the depiction of Mafiosi in films has been object of study, especially regarding the male and female roles. The gangster genre developed after 1967 and offered specific notions of masculinity through the articulation of what Larke-Walsh calls "Mafia Myths," a mythology whose purpose is to construct the discourses of ethnicity and masculinity in mob films (18). This notion of Mafia Mythology allows for a specific critical reading of the film through a series of genre conventions that articulate contradictory viewpoints through which the Mafia is both condemned and romanticised (16). This film genre characteristically portrays masculinity through complex identifications based on the relationship and interactions between men in the family. According to Gardaphe, the directors of this film genre work to report the controlling and violent men who were almost fighting against women's rights despite the second feminist wave (508). The rise in popularity of the gangster genre in the early seventies coincides historically with the feminist movement, which at the time was beginning to demand a greater role for women in public life. Despite this, the criminal environment of the Mafia film has traditionally marginalised the role of the female character, building sexist and misogynistic discourses that relegate the woman to the private sphere.

Films such as *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese, 1990) and *Donnie Brasco* (Mike Newell, 1997) reflect these different aspects of masculinity and how they elicit sexist

readings. In these films, female characters are generally fully aware of the illegal activities of their husbands, sons, and brothers but take a passive role. Although crime is intrinsically performed by the men of the family, mob films seem to blame women for passively enjoying their husbands' economic profits. As Dana Renga explains, the entire setting of *The Godfather* presents an exclusive male universe in which women voluntarily accept a subsidiary role. This sometimes contributes to an almost caricatural portrayal of compliant women who accept the risk derived from their husbands' actions. Additionally, this conceptualization of submissive women is tied to the stereotypical Sicilian concept of family and U.S. Mafia wives, as captured for instance in Scorsese's *Goodfellas*, where wives gather together at home to do their hair and makeup, emphasising their position in society relegated to the home sphere (Renga 52). Another example of this sexist portrayal, although a comedy, is *Married to the Mob* (Demme, 1988), where the wives are shown gossiping about cosmetics while their husbands are out killing, foreshadowing the aforementioned similar scenes in *Goodfellas* (Lark-Walsh 38). However, in *The Godfather* the female protagonist, Kay Adams (Diane Keaton), is cast in the WASP role, which, as I am going to analyse in the following section, deviates from the traditional Sicilian stereotype (Renga 32).

Mafia ethos shapes gender roles where women are positioned in a marginal and stereotyped position, a world in which women are not offered the possibility of escaping. Perhaps most important, men assert their dominion over the domestic space, as shown in Coppola's film when men close the doors when they visit Don Corleone (Marlon Brando), therefore isolating women in both public and private spaces. Despite the feminist movement's attempt to challenge women's relegated position to the private sphere, mob films came as a reminder of a male-centred society whose power can only be in the hands of the male population. In general terms, power is linked to the traditional performance

of masculinity, which is, in turn, linked to violence and is used in the film to highlight men's status as empowered men (Abadinsky 78). In this respect, initial reviews of *The Godfather* that focused on its violent content suggested that the film's attempts to promote Don Corleone and other male characters as empowered and rational *dramatis personae* were akin to Nazi propaganda that attempted to sweeten and glorify criminal men by focusing on their personal and family lives (Larke-Walsh 83). Therefore, this source of power rooted in violence is also linked to the representation of masculinity onscreen.

Mob films generally perform traditional masculinity linked to violence, which male characters also use to highlight their own status as empowered men. As I will develop in the following analysis, in *The Godfather* every character that is linked to femininity or that presents a less strong masculinity is the one who suffers violence (as is the case of Fredo Corleone). In this sense, *The Godfather* can be interpreted as a patriarchal dystopia, a scenario where a strongly questionable masculine identity is exercised. According to Srinivas Abhilash, the masculine role only works to adopt the position of protector, while making the awareness of power the fundamental value for the male characters (8). In the Mafia universe, privilege based on power and possession encourages the male characters' competition to reach the highest social position in order to be able to exercise authority over others (Srinivas 7). Therefore, the role of the woman in this mob universe is relegated to suffering the consequences of the battle of power between the men who exercise violence in organised crime. As I will analyse in the following section, in *The Godfather*, the family is constructed upon a hierarchical and predominantly sexist viewpoint, where power, the most important value in society, is only in the hands of the men.

## **2. *The Godfather***

### **2.1. Masculinity Codes in the Italian Mafia**

Mob films are a sub-genre of crime films that deal with the Mafia and questions of identity and masculinity. Different motifs and symbols have been used to convey the ideas of power, loyalty, and revenge as the key elements of the Italian American gangster (Babini). In particular, this genre foregrounds phallic masculinity, shaping the Mafia ethos into traditional gender roles. As Dana Renga explains, the gangster genre is haunted by the fear of effeminacy, a model that has traditionally marginalized women to the outer limit of the homosocial spaces (16). *The Godfather's* setting describes the Mafia codes of honour, business, and family, and grants insight into the codes of conduct and homosocial relations omnipresent in mob life. As Lark-Walsh explains, the gangster genre epitomizes the individual wealth and a new sense of identity linked to power and masculinity (10).

In *The Godfather*, the gangster of the Italian culture merges mob life, business, and family. The embodiment of this conciliation of business and family is Vito Corleone, whose status as the head of the Mafia is presented from a non-criminal point of view, that is, placing him as the rational hero who does not stain his hands with blood but claims to deliver justice. Contrary to previous representations of gangsters in US films, such as Tony Montana (Al Pacino) in *Scarface* (Oliver Stone, 1983), a cocaine addict with no morals or principles, Don Corleone's mannerisms and attitude make his character likeable and respected in the Mafia genre. The figure of the Italian as Mafioso has been a popular one, and previous portrayals of gangsters as murderers and cruel figures have changed in film history as they have become glorified figures. More than just a criminal, the figure of the mafioso has been reconstructed into a countercultural icon whose violent behaviour is not only legitimized but also glorified (Srinivas 3). Similarly, Adrian Martin argues that the gangster is a figure who portrays a desire for success, and total access to a reckless childishness that justifies its actions (246). This way, despite Vito Corleone's criminal and contemptible position as the head of an Italian Mafia based on corruption and murder,

the film reinforces his status as a kind and generous man who lives by a strict moral code of loyalty to family and friends, as he clarifies during the initial dialogue of the film.

The film's opening scene serves to present the Corleone family and disclose their business and family ethics. This first interaction reveals the Mafia's moral codes in the Italian sub-culture, which predominantly insists on loyalty and respect, both aspects being reinforced through notions of masculinity (Affron 243). In this exclusively male world, Don Corleone performs phallic masculinity linked to honour, power, and violence. In particular, he exerts the function of family protector, placed far from the cold-blooded murderer of traditional mob films such as *Goodfellas*. This protector and heartening role that Mafia Ethos constructs for men helps in building a clean and favourable image for Mafiosi despite the sexist discourses they endorse through their traditional conception of gender roles. Men's position as protectors reinforces the role of women as weak and vulnerable figures in a world where men embody the figure of the hero in a system of patriarchal authority (Renga 122). Consequently, Vito Corleone's attitude is guided by this hierarchical culture and society, where he must lead the Mafia and protect his family, especially the women.

During the first dialogue in the opening scene, the film establishes the principles that govern the Mafia and Vito Corleone's life. The film plays with the composition of the frame to make Bonasera's character (Salvatore Corsitto) look vulnerable and intimidated. The first shot starts with Bonasera's face in a close-up, followed by a zoom-out so that he gets smaller as he gets further away from the camera when narrating his daughter's tragedy. When he reaches the most emotional part of his story, a desk appears from the shadows, and the person to whom he tells his misfortunes can be seen from the back. At this moment, we know that he is not speaking from a dominant position, but that he intends to ask for help, and that the man in the shadows is the one who appears as a

possible solution in his moment of despair. The man in the shadows makes a hand gesture and an anonymous hand reaches him a glass. This not only marks that he has people under his command but also defines who is in control of the situation (Figure 1). A subtler detail stands out in the scene since the first thing we hear from Vito Corleone at Bonasera's request is a reproach about his lack of loyalty. All these subtle and carefully placed details suggest codes of morals and manners in Italian culture and the Mafia, in which loyalty and respect are the most valued attributes required for a respectful man in society.



Figure 1. Vito Corleone's powerful silhouette in front of Bonasera's figure.

During the dialogue, in which Bonasera asks for vengeance for his daughter's sexual abusers, two opposite worlds are presented: the U.S. world based on policies and a failed justice system, and the Italian world, whose principles are tradition, morals, and family values. Lark-Walsh argues that family relates to Mafia activity through Italian ethnicity and cultural associations, the family head being the pinnacle of Mafia authority. Corleone's family roots exert a great influence on his manners, which suggest Italian values of fidelity and respect. Bonasera is explaining how the American justice system has failed him and now wants Corleone's help to make his daughter's abusers pay. Presented as a vulnerable character, Bonasera conveys the importance of criminal justice in a world where justice is only in the hands of the powerful men. The system and the police did not bring Bonasera justice, but Vito, whose power is achieved through criminal

justice, can avenge the victims of the unfair U.S. system. Unaware of the Mafia's codes, Bonasera presents an unrespectful attitude, having rejected Corleone's friendship back in time for fear of the Mafia and violence. Corleone, as a sympathetic and respectful figure, has the grace to take a few minutes in the middle of his daughter's wedding –which takes place outside the house, in broad daylight, away from the dark room where the threads are moved– to listen to Bonasera, who despite his disrespectful manners, is treated like a gentleman. This attitude takes his character away from the traditional mob boss cliché and makes him human, with a strong sense of morals (Srinivas 5). In this part, the film plays with the viewer's sympathy towards him, revealing Vito's character complexity and human side by showing that he does not do things just for money, but that he values respect and appreciates friendship.

In terms of characterization and story arc, Don Corleone strikes a balance between Mafia and family life, yet performs a strong sense of masculinity through his gestures and particular voice. As previously mentioned, his character is identified by his mannerism and respectful attitude, visually emphasized in the first dialogue scene that takes place in his own house. Marlon Brando's performance, his gestures, and impeccable control of his movements serve to convey a sense of authority over the other men. This dramatization of masculinity through male characters' interactions serves to equate masculinity with power. Vito's body movements during the tense conversation serve as a way to secure his patriarchal position at the head of both the Mafia and the family. Sitting on a chair, a symbol of authority, the setting places the character in a legitimate position of power, as a businessman, not as a corrupted and perverted Mafia leader. His mannerism and way of talking also serve to convey his authority and power, as he stands out among the other Mafia members. Although they all wear similar costumes and behave in similar ways, Michael Corleone stands out for his smooth yet scary way of talking. The way he speaks,

almost in whispers, and his quiet demeanour establish from the beginning his character as someone extremely powerful and threatening.

From a stylistic point of view, Marlon Brando resorts to subtle expressive techniques that serve to characterise his character. His movements give spectators information not only about his personality but also about the strict codes of manners he follows. Each movement he makes with his hands is slow, controlled, and bound, matching his authoritative attitude. His relaxed posture suggests that he oversees the situation and that he does not feel threatened or insecure during the conversation but is self-assured. By means of a zoom, and a slight pan from Bonasera's figure, the camera then shows Brando's facial gestures with his iconic twisted mouth that has become a unique symbol of the trilogy. His previously relaxed body language changes when Bonasera makes the disrespectful mistake of asking how much money he needs to pay. Contrary to what Bonasera thought, Corleone's family does not make favours for money, but as an exchange of friendship and loyalty. Vito Corleone proceeds to stop petting his pussycat and, for the first time, the audience is able to see his full body and the rest of the Mafia through a long shot. This change in the leader's posture brings tension, as we can see his disappointment through his now tense movements. His reaction to Bonasera's question is emphasized through a medium close-up of his hurt facial expression and his frowned brows slightly sloping up, suggesting a look of disappointment and incredulity for such a disrespectful question – “Bonasera, what have I ever done to make you treat me so disrespectfully?”. From this moment, a long shot allows spectators to see the rest of the members of the Mafia, which conveys a sense of union and family as if all of them were offended by Bonasera's disrespect (Figure 2). In contrast with Vito's decisive movements and mannerisms, Bonasera has a hunched posture and makes unsteady movements which make him look like a submissive and vulnerable character.



Figure 2. Vito Corleone standing up, incredulous, after Bonasera's request.

Subtexts and inner meaning of power and masculinity can be seen in the business reunions during the opening scene of Corleone's daughter's wedding. The presence of homosocial spaces is clear from this very first scene, where Mafiosi share a room in Corleone's home to talk about business, prioritizing the Mafia deals over the wedding celebration, which takes place in the outside gardens. As Dana Renga argues, "the sanctuary of the don's study is an exclusive realm barred to women, yet it is one in which the decisions that shape the fate of women are handed down" (133). To reinforce this idea of separated spaces, lighting is used to convey a sense of strong masculinity in the indoor scenes, establishing a contrast between the colourful setting with warm summery colours at the outdoor wedding and the dark mob setting in Corleone's office. Whereas women enjoy the celebration of marriage, the men of the family preserve the ideals of the family business and masculine privilege in Don's sanctuary.

The film draws connections between exclusive male spaces where codes of masculinity and power are preserved and spaces where family and women enjoy the benefits of men's protection under the Mafia business. The lack of light and the balanced composition of the indoor space draws the audience's attention to Corleone's first appearance, where his figure seems to be prominent and emphasized by different aspects

of lighting and composition (Figure 2). The camera steadily focuses on Vito to the exclusion of all others, guiding the attention towards him as the central figure. Similarly, windows play an important role in emphasizing Vito's figure through a lighting contrast. The windows as the only source of natural light create a dramatic effect and mysteriously emphasize the characters. What is more important, backlighting is used to introduce Vito as a superior character without revealing his identity. The backlight is used to create a darker mood for the characters and emphasize the dark background of the topic they are discussing. Vito separates business from her daughter's wedding so that the dark atmosphere is far from the family's happiness during the wedding. In the shot where all Mafiosi are shown, the light makes Vito Corleone stand out from the rest of the characters (Figure 2). Lighting also reinforces his status as the leader, since top lighting is placed above his figure and shines downwards (Figure 3). This lighting intends to glamourise his figure and give prominence to him. It places him in a kind of divine light so that the audience can feel awe and pride in his dominance. Similarly, subtle details of costume also play an important role in how Vito's figure stands out. In contrast with all the rest of the characters, he is revealing a white blouse under the suit, which also reinforces his superiority and also conveys the threat of Mafia activity and violence (Larke – Walsh 182).



Figure 3. Vito Corleone sharing a sweet moment with his pussycat.

Don Corleone, surrounded by his Mafia members, is characterized as the embodiment of power, protected by his allies. This kind of portrayal suggests the importance of powerful men in the Mafia Ethos, a world of men that revolves around power and patriarchal codes of honour from which women are isolated. Vito Corleone presents the reconciliation between business and family yet isolates the women of the family. As Knepper and Johansen claim, within the context of the history of crime and criminal justice, the dual aspects of masculinity and violence are of great significance (229). Regarding mob life, it is undeniable that violent crime has been dominant in mob culture, in which the vast majority of violent felonies are committed by men (Knepper, and Johansen 230). Consequently, women are the victims of this violent masculine world. As seen in the opening scene of *The Godfather*, the contrast between male-exclusive spaces and women-allowed spaces serves to validate the view that the effective exertion of authority and power is the only real question of importance. Similarly, the lack of women during the opening scene suggests that men drive the criminal world and Vito Corleone is the epitome of authority in said world. The performance of masculinity to achieve Corleone's status as the Godfather is necessary for the criminal justice that the Mafia offers. Consequently, this masculinity rooted in violence and strict moral manners isolates women from the outside world of this business. Nevertheless, on most occasions, it is women in mob families who suffer the consequences of phallic masculinity, as is the case of Kay or Michael's sister. Despite Vito's genuine intentions to protect the family and bring justice, the application of masculinity rooted in brutality leads to violent events that kill families and love, as seen in Kay and Michael's relationship.

## 2.2. Michael and Kay: The Fragmentation of Cultures

As Srinivas argues, gangster films are usually loaded with the rise and fall of criminals and their activities leading to their tragic aftermath (4). In this trusted group of individuals, betrayal is not accepted, and if performed, it gives rise to vengeance. In *The Godfather*, it is Michael Corleone's attempt at vengeance that forces him to take part in his family's business. Initially, his character wants to keep a distance from the Italian mob life that takes place in his family, as he chose the American lifestyle with the purpose of sharing his love with his American wife, Kay. His identity is initially presented by opposition, as his identity is situated in stark contrast to the family's Italian culture. This is evidenced in the opening scenes at Connie's (Talia Shire) wedding. Michael is dressed in his army uniform rather than the black suits worn by the rest of his family. His costume not only signifies allegiance to the U.S. military rather than the Mafia hierarchy but also his American rather than Italian cultural heritage. Closer to his girlfriend, Kay Adams, Michael aspires to lead a more Americanized way of life to share his love with her and be loyal to American principles. Similarly, in terms of characterization and costume, Kay is also presented through differentiation. Specifically, Kay's clothes convey a conflict with Michael's family and Italian culture and manners. Whereas Michael's family is dressed in pink and warm colours, Kay wears a flashy red dress that symbolizes her distance from the family and at the same time draws attention to herself as an outsider. This way, this initial scene not only presents the characters and their relationship but also grants insight into their cultural inclinations.

The film addresses the process of Mafia implication and the importance of the principles of loyalty in Michael's biased and conditioned decision to break his relationship with Kay despite his initial opposite inclinations. Michael's rejection of his family business is revealed on several occasions, such as in the dialogue between Kay

and Michael during his sister's wedding. During this initial conversation, Kay seems to be looking around for Michel's family and proceeds to ask some of their names, confirming that she is not remotely close to them yet. After some hesitation, Michael gives up on Kay's insistence and tells her about his family's relationship with the Mafia. A medium shot during their conversation is used to emphasize the intimacy of their exchange, in which Michael reveals his criminal family roots and his inclinations against the family's criminal justice system and reaffirms his status as a pure and decent man – "That's my family, Kay, that's not me"–. This conversation is very important, as it reveals the influence of Kay on Michael's lifestyle, and how both share a romantic and balanced relationship alienated from the Mafia business. In the process of promising her to be an honoured man, Michael holds Kay's hands and keeps eye contact with her to reaffirm the veracity of his words. Nevertheless, although Michael claims to reject this criminal organization in this initial conversation, he is not able to escape from the tragic aftermath of Mafia involvement. It is Michael's love and affection towards his family and especially for his father which makes him take up revenge and eventually pushes him to join the family business. He cannot remain passive after the two assassination attempts on his father (Larke-Walsh 134). His unconditional love for his family can also be seen during the same conversation when he talks about his family's criminal business without ever criticizing them.

The balanced composition of the frame during their conversation conveys an equal-term relationship, as they are initially very close and guided by the same U.S. principles (Figures 4 and 5). Michael and Kay's faces are both shown from a close-up shot and the background is out of focus so that the attention is drawn to the couple's conversation. The camera plays with the 180-degree rule so that we can scan their reactions and analyse their relationship. Michael's performance is rather subtle and restrained, which is again a

clue for his distance from the Italian culture, where overly expressive gestures constitute a part of their identity. His facial expression is rather hieratic and almost blank: he does not move his facial muscles a lot, resulting in a passive and calm confession of his family's business so that Kay can believe him. Similarly, his body language is, like his voice, self-controlled and calm: he is holding Kay's hands steadily and keeping eye contact with her, and then looks at their linking hands (Figure 5). Kay's willingness to understand Michael's words with a calm attitude suggests that she is truly in love with him despite his family roots. Although at the beginning she smiles, we can see how her laugh vanishes when Michael mentions a gun. Despite feeling horrified, Kay's facial expression is rather calm, as she is trying to take Michael's words seriously: she does not move her eyes, resulting in a rather comprehensive and sweet attitude (Figure 4).



Figures 4 and 5. The composition during Michael's and Kay's conversation is balanced, symbolizing their initial strong relationship.

Although iconic, Kay can hardly be taken for the typical “Mafia wife”. In *The Godfather*, Kay presents a more complex characterization, as she does not fit into the stereotypical Mafia woman. The fact of casting Diane Keaton as Kay emphasizes the character's alienation from the Italian culture through her WASP character. Contrary to the previous representation of women in gangster films, Kay does not remain passive during her lover's involvement in the Mafia, but she tries to prevent Michael from taking part in this criminal organization. Her alienation from Italian culture builds her identity into an opposing Mafia character, which challenges the previous characterization of Mafia women as submissive and unassertive figures. As Larke Walsh explains, Kay's

antithetical character function is to bring consciousness about women's role in Mafia involvement, which is usually reduced to the purpose of taking care of the children and other women (154). Kay's differentiation in character makes her stand out for her defiant and active attitude, which serves to question Mafia's misconception of women as vulnerable figures who lack independence and a critical mind. Kay is not able to understand the Italian Mafia, whose codes of behaviour expect her to be an ally in the business and specifically a supporter of her lover's journey as a leader in this criminal organization. Her insistence upon Michael's detachment from the Mafia makes her be seen as an intruder who interferes with business and questions their codes of behaviour, shaping her character as a threat to Mafia men's unity. From a cultural point of view, Kay's character confronts not only the Mafia principles that isolate and degrade women but also Michael's Italian culture because she presents a disruption of the sense of community within ethnic identity present in Italian Mafias. This confrontation is seen at the beginning of the wedding scene, where Michael and especially Kay convey a clash of cultures, being both detached from Italy and its principles and manners.

Kay's character not only functions as a redeemer for women's role by challenging Mafia's culture but also voices one of the most predominant misconceptions about the Mafia: that Mafia men perform the role of protectors for vulnerable women (Renga 9). Rooted in sexism and phallic masculinity, Mafia culture helps in constructing an idealized concept of men as angels and protectors of the women, who are the vulnerable figures in the society. Despite being violent and criminal figures, Mafia men are believed to preserve an ethic of respect towards women since they reputably bring security by keeping women under surveillance. According to this theory, the act of killing becomes a means for both protecting women and asserting control over them. Nevertheless, *The Godfather* contradicts this misconception on several occasions in which women become

the recipients of violence and abuse, such as in the scene where Sonny dies after trying to save his sister Connie from her abusive husband. Despite Sonny's authority as a member of the Mafia and being a relative, Connie becomes the victim of domestic violence in an apparently safe atmosphere, protected by her family members. Although Mafia culture claims that women are vulnerable and need the protection of men, neither Vito Corleone nor Sonny could save Connie from the systemic violence exerted by other men. Similarly, Michael is not able to create a safe future for Kay, but he gives her a miserable life full of violence and death. In such a violent atmosphere, Mafiosi fail the task of protecting women and they often become the subjects of conflicts and violent behaviour that affect women both outside and inside the family. Mafia women are not offered the possibility of escaping but they are condemned to a life of misfortune and misery as they must live under the hierarchy of a violent organization that places them on the margins of society. Kay's character functions to explore the roots of the existing systemic violence in mob life, where men are not the saviours and protectors of women but the figures that work to exert this unilateral violence suffered by women.

The absence of women in the Mafia shapes their role as figures that suppress the conflicts and bring trust to the family (Renga 38). Carmela Coccimiglio studies the absence of women in gangster films and claims 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” (3). The identity of the members of the Mafia is constructed through a concept of masculinity that repels women-related attributes as signs of weakness (38). This reasserting of masculinity among Mafia men is exerted especially during the reunions where they discuss and celebrate business while isolating women from their masculine fraternal bond (39). Some studies have defined this concept as “homosociality”, which

refers to the homosocial tie that is created between the Mafiosi. As noted by Giovani Brusca, a brutal member of the Mafia in Sicily, Mafiosi commonly share fraternal moments while escaping from the company of their wives. The Mafia, he writes,

is made up of persons all of whom from the start have to kill, and have to know how to kill ... But we also had our good times, in our own way naturally. The grand banquets, great feasts in the countryside were the principal occasions for socializing ... Women were never admitted ... Different men brought different dishes: baked pasta, meat, fish, cakes and sweets ... We had some excellent cooks ... They cooked for all their comrades when they were in prison.

The isolation of women from men-exclusive spaces as Brusca addresses is emphasized in the last scene of *The Godfather*, where Kay is excluded from Michael's office. Although Michael promised her not to be involved in his family business during the wedding scene, radical change in Michael when he kills Sollozo (Al Lettieri), the corrupt cop, is due to the fact that his father was attacked and his brothers had not defended him strongly enough. Kay and Michael's solid relationship experiences a change as Michael is dragged by the Mafia business and becomes a murderer. The previously discussed balanced relationship between Michael and Kay suffers a disruption when Michael takes his father's place as a criminal leader. When Michael comes back to marry Kay after his Sicilian wife's death, the equal-term relationship seen during the initial scene of the wedding is broken through a radical change in framing and composition. In this scene, Michael is not a sincere man anymore, as he lies to Kay and promises her that he is not going to take part in the Mafia when he has already decided to become the leader. During this dialogue, Kay's facial expressions are not understanding anymore. Her facial gestures suggest sadness and disappointment, as if she did not recognize him anymore (Figure 6). Her mouth is slightly tilted down, and her eyes are gloomy which somehow makes us believe that she is about to cry; she knows that she has

lost the old Michael. To convey this disruption of the relationship, Michael does not look at her the same way but he avoids eye contact with her and they do not share affectionate moments anymore. Their smiles have faded and have been replaced by expressions of concern. Similarly, the composition of the frame is not balanced anymore; Kay is positioned on the right of the frame, which symbolizes that she is both trapped and isolated: there is no room for love in that atmosphere. She is surrounded by several separation barriers, with the closing door symbolising their detached and broken relationship through a fade to black.

Michael, surrounded by his Mafia members, has finally taken his father's place, but he is not able to reconcile mob life and business, condemning Kay to an isolated sorrowful life (Figure 7). The film plays with parallelism with the first scene, where Bonasera kisses now Michael's hand, symbolizing Michael's authority and control over the men in the room, as his father used to. In terms of costume, we can also perceive a radical change in Michael's character. In contrast with his military clothing during the first scene of the film, Michael is wearing a dark suit and white shirt as his father did, an item of clothing that is used in New York by Mafiosi, which suggests that he has finally embraced his Italian roots and his position as the head of the Mafia (Grieveson 124). By means of a closed and rigid composition, the film suggests that Kay is not welcome in the Mafia business, since she does not fit nor accept the sexist principles that Mafia has built for women. Therefore, the final scene foretells and conveys Kay's future as an isolated and abandoned woman in the Mafia ethos, whose culture does not offer space for women. To reinforce these gender-separated spaces, the film uses a door to symbolize the barriers that the Mafia constructs for all women.



Figures 6 and 7. The door separates Kay from now Mafia leader Michael.

## Conclusion

*The Godfather* provides an exploration of male hegemony focusing on the family unit (Philips 98). Through an analysis of masculinity, Coppola enables us to understand the basis of the Italian Mafia in New York during the 1970s. The character of Vito Corleone guides us to the mannerism and the principles that control the Mafia, which are characterised by respect and family loyalty. The film successfully establishes these principles in the opening scene, where the male-exclusive setting and the dialogues manage to provide a visual representation of the Mafia codes of masculinity. Specifically, Vito's performance provides an insight into the aspects of authority and respect in Mafia ethos, whose morals and codes of ethics are established through a strong sense of masculinity and hierarchy.

Through male-exclusive spaces, Coppola also offers a viewpoint on the role of women in Mafia Ethos. In *The Godfather*, the role of Kay is to provide an atypical characterization of a Mafia woman, as her identity is constructed by her WASP cultural roots. In mob life, Kay, like other women, is not offered the possibility of a safe horizon but is condemned to a life of misery with Michael. Through a meticulous play of composition and performance, the film offers an analysis of the conduct of gender hierarchy in Mafia ethos, where the figures of Kay and Michael entail a clash of cultures

and principles. In this male world, where the figure of the woman has always been silenced and displaced, Kay's challenging role against Mafia's codes constructs her character as a vindication against the sexist discourses that lead the Mafia.

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