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"You Wanna Play Rough?": The Unlikely Partnership of the Italian Mafia and Butch Lesbians in Greenwich Village, 1945-1968

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“YOU WANNA PLAY ROUGH?”: THE UNLIKELY PARTNERSHIP OF
THE ITALIAN MAFIA AND BUTCH LESBIANS
IN GREENWICH VILLAGE, 1945-1968

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of Fort Hays State University in
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by

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ABSTRACT

During economic and political upheaval in Europe beginning in the late-1910s and dramatically progressing throughout the 1920s, young Italian men emigrated to the United States to earn decent salaries to bring back to their families across the ocean. However, some single men embraced the opportunities of New York City and its diversified neighborhoods. Since xenophobic sanctions forced disenfranchised minorities into confined spaces and immigrants tended to find comfort settling in neighborhoods with well-established ethnic enclaves, this pushed Italian immigrants into the same space as butch lesbians in a counterculture place referred to as Greenwich Village on the west side of Lower Manhattan. Once settled in, those with ties to the original Sicilian *Mafia* and who intended to institute a new American sector of the criminal enterprise, joined arms with butch lesbians who felt ostracized by their queer community for their conformity to heteronormative-based approaches towards jobs, hobbies, and relationships. This thesis explores the ways the unlikely partnership of the Italian Mafia and butch lesbians transgressed traditional Italian-*machismo* dynamics, particularly in the way that female masculinity complemented *Mafia* tradition. Through first-hand accounts, one can see that the alliance revolved around achieving the American Dream—the primary bond between the butches and Italians. While Italian immigrants were criminalized in American society, the butches' conformity to patriarchal structures severed their ties with femme lesbians and especially openly-radical gay men. In accepting, or rather ignoring, their estrangement from society and closely-affiliated social groups, the butch lesbians and Italian Mafia established a profitable business that spanned the post-World War II era in the most populous city in the country.

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Jess, Matt, and Colton, all the tears and laughs we shared in the temperature-like hell of Room 387 will not be forgotten. I wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

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INTRODUCTION

Approximately a twenty-minute taxi ride from New York City’s commercial center, Times Square, on the lower side of Manhattan, the Rainbow Inn at 82 East 4th Street sits quietly on the outskirts of the Bowery and Chinatown, or so it seems from the activity above ground. While Midtown saw postwar prosperity appear in the form of skyscrapers (for example the United Nations Secretariat Building and the Lever House—both opening in 1952), the neighborhoods situated south of 14th Street bore witness to a number of urban subcultures that found safety within the basements of cheap East Side real estate. When Vito Genovese, the leader of the Genovese crime family, one of the original Five Families credited with the creation of the American Mafia, purchased the Rainbow Inn in 1953, the property already carried a reputation with the New York City police as a frequently raided speakeasy. Although the general manager Stephen Franse established himself as a successful, Mafia frontman for the newly named Club 82, the boss’s wife, Anna Genovese (formerly Petillo), proved to be the biggest asset as business expanded into the erotic, eccentric, and homosexual underground of Greenwich Village where the Genoveses and other Mafia families purchased the more real estate in addition to the Rainbow Inn.¹

In November 2021, Warner Media Network signed a deal with Jessica Bendinger and Michael Seligman, the co-hosts of the original Stitcher podcast *Mob Queens*, to turn their audio story of Anna’s secret life of crime and love into a limited series on HBO.

¹ “Fact Sheet: History of United Nations Headquarters,” Public Inquiries: United Nations Visitors Centre, February 2013, accessed February 22, 2022, https://visit.un.org/sites/visit.un.org/files/FS_UN_Headquarters_History_English_Feb_2013.pdf; “Lever House,” Landmarks Preservation Commission, November 1982, accessed February 28, 2022, <http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/lp/1277.pdf>; Eric Ferrara, *Manhattan Mafia Guide: Hits, Homes & Headquarters* (Cheltenham, United Kingdom: The History Press, 2011), Appendix.

Over the course of twelve episodes, the pair embark on an investigation into the woman they refer to as the “Godmother.” After searching through birth, marriage, and death records from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the two followed up on a few genealogical leads. In the episode titled “Chapter 6: Kismet” of the Mob Queens podcast, Bendinger and Seligman interviewed Anna’s granddaughter Mia. While the team uncovered evidence earlier in the show posing questions about the Mafia wife’s sexuality, they purposefully redacted any suggestive remarks out of respect for Anna and Mia’s relationship. Ironically, though, she chose to touch upon on the topic without prompting.²

As she reminisced about her outings with her Italian grandmother, Mia mentioned Anna’s romantic involvement with a woman named Jackie who lived at the Hotel Arlington. When Anna went to visit Jackie, the latter left her grandchildren in the park across the street to play, never to be allowed upstairs in the building. At age twenty-one, Mia met Jackie for the first and only time at her grandmother’s funeral where she discovered Anna’s secret after she aligned the timelines. She confirmed that her grandmother had another amorous affair with Gwen Saunders, a cashier at one of the nightclubs, too. Aside from her Mafia status, the Italian-American businesswoman brought an invaluable personal connection to the queer patrons and performers who entered Club 82 and the other bars she helped run. Because although Mia was not aware of Anna’s sexuality, it seems apparent from interviews with drag kings and drag queens

² Larry Henry, “Anna Genovese’s Life Examined in ‘Mob Queens’ Podcast, HBO Series,” The Mob Museum: National Museum of Organized Crime & Law Enforcement, November 30, 2021, accessed February 22, 2022, <https://themobmuseum.org/blog/anna-genoveses-life-examined-in-mob-queens-podcast-hbo-series/>.

from that time period who had the opportunity to be around the Mafia wife knew about her extra-marital relationships with women.³

In the most concrete manner, Anna acts as a physical nexus that links the Italian Mafia with butch lesbians, and then, these two social groups with public demonstrations of masculinity, specifically aspects of Italian masculinity. Despite sharing a personal connection with the homosexual grouping, her attitude and approach towards life resonated with butch lesbians, more so than gay men, who, like herself, were trying to assert their identity within a male-dominated social world which she successfully infiltrated. She stands a symbol of a mutually-beneficial partnership, rather than an exploitative one, in which she mastered the masculine identity, according to principles set forth by Italian culture for attaining full manhood, to the point that she faded into background of operations where her female character was disguised by her new-found masculine identity.

Unlike the ostentatious gay men who stood their ground at the Stonewall Inn on June 28, 1969, butch lesbians bought into a mutually-beneficial relationship with the Italian Mafia, especially the Genovese crime family, and the organization's other supplementary partner, the New York City Police Department (NYPD). Although many people considered Anna a public icon for her divorce from and testimony in open court against her powerful Mafia husband Vito, the queer subculture in Greenwich Village admired the ambitious woman for her style, sympathy, and conviction. As Anna managed to infiltrate the male-dominated social world of the Mafia, drag kings and butch lesbians

³ Jessica Bendinger and Michael Seligman, hosts, "Chapter 6: Kismet," Mob Queens (podcast), September 2019, accessed February 1, 2022, Spotify.

recognized that a basic understanding of money, and not getting swept up into the fight for equal rights, especially the freedom of expression, could bring them under the umbrella of financial success and protective services too.

Since the women acted with a sort of *machismo* nature, they did not pose a threat to proud Italian men who viewed drag queens and “fairies” as detriments to the Italian American man’s mission of reaching middle-class status.⁴ During their attempts to secure civil rights in the growing metropolis, gay male entertainers gained several enemies including the Mafia, the NYPD, and the politically-moderate queer organizations such as the Mattachine Society and the Homophile Youth Movement. Since society deemed them to be weak and foolish based on masculine standards, the gay men did not receive fair compensation for their performances, causing many of them to spend the rest of their lives confined to small apartments in the city they never earned enough money to escape. However, in similar instances, the women demonstrated female masculinity, aligning well with the Italian Mafia’s masculine standards, which can be argued either allowed them to gain more respect or simply prevented them from being exploited to the extent of flamboyant, gay men who openly defied a traditional masculinity which Italian men are expected to uphold.⁵ As a result of this connection of sexuality, the women who accepted jobs with the Italian Mafia managed to flee New York City with their substantial savings

⁴ In *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World*, George Chauncey defines *fairies* as flamboyant men, primarily gay, who were considered degenerates by the public for acting or dressing feminine and crossing the gender line. Once they started to gather in groups at Paresis Hall and other Bowery resorts, *fairies* influenced the predominant image that people labeled as male homosexual behavior.

⁵ Within this context, “female masculinity” refers to the conventional theories and conceptualizations of masculinity in the creation of the heroic or perfect version of man now portrayed by a woman. Thus, male masculinity would pertain specifically to men who exhibit such qualities or attributes. See Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

and move to Miami and other port cities where members of the mob also retired with their earnings and freedom once the Stonewall Riots triggered the dismantling of the alliance's ideal environment of Greenwich Village. From the mid-1940s to the late-1960s though, an unlikely partnership surfaced from a combination of Prohibition, immigration, and the unique Bohemian space of a Lower Manhattan neighborhood to promote the expansion of the Sicilian *Mafia*'s money-laundering monopoly into the U.S.⁶ Based on the butches' *mammismo* resemblance – behavioral similarities between Italian mothers and butch lesbians – and the admiration of female masculinity as complementary to Italian masculinity, the Italian Mafia established a trustworthy bond between their organization and butch lesbians, leading to a glamorous and highly-profitable gay bar scene in Greenwich Village.

Short History of the *Mafia* and the Mafia (A.D. 1250-Present)

The words *mafioso* and *mafiosi* (translated to English as “mafia”) comes from Arabic meaning “swindler(s)” or “cheater(s).” However, in Italy, up until the Italian and Sicilian *Mafia*'s criminal deviance, it generally remained an honorable name for those who courageously combated the illegal ways of the *campieri* and the *campagnia d'armi* (“fieldmen” and “arms campaign”.) For this reason, the country considered the proto-*Mafia* as a moral police force against feudalistic corruption. When the King of Sicily, Frederick II, died in 1250, he left the island in severe political strife as a result of the Constitutions of Melfi, or *Liber Augustalis*, a legal code he enacted in 1231. By the

⁶ Since the word “mafia” is used as a proper noun in relationship to a Sicilian criminal organization and its offshoots in the U.S, it will be capitalized throughout this thesis: whereas, the two words “mafioso” and “mafiosi” are common nouns and do not require capitalization. When the word “mafia” appears italicized, the content is referencing the organization in Italy. If the word “mafia” does not appear in italics, it has taken on a transnational language within the U.S.

King's decree, the Constitutions of Melfi diminished the authority of the feudatories, especially the nobility. Since King Frederick II saw his position as a sacral role, the code reallocated political control to local magistrates who were held in check only by the King himself. Although his death marked the beginning of the breakdown of feudalism in Italy, it sparked social upheaval amidst drastic changes in the regional economies and the local governments which even lasted until well into the country's political unification in the nineteenth century too. Without an executive enforcement, tension mounted between several groups including the Bourbon Kings of Naples, reformists from France and Great Britain, and various social under-classes across Italy. While the diplomats from northern Europe wanted to modernize the Sicilian state, the Bourbons regained control from the French and British militias and ratified their own land reforms in 1735. However, this approach increased the stratification of the state because with the abolition of checks and balances on the barons who acquired vast estates from foreign leaders, capital gain became the main objective over creating a diversified industrialized economy. Despite revolts starting as early as 1812 and stretching into the 1860s, the upper class continued to rent farmland on short term leases to *gabellottos*, former stewards who turned into tenants in an attempt to ease tensions and establish a barrier between themselves and the proletariat. Eventually, the *gabelloti* saved enough money to purchase their own properties. Due to increased banditry, they entered into a contract with the *campieri*, members of an exclusive Bourbon militia which maintained order in rural Italy (*campagna d'armi*) through a series of complex partnerships, to protect their newly acquired estates. Since the majority of the brigands actually served under the *campieri*, the *gabelloti* hired these dualistic schemers; otherwise, they remained at high risk of

theft, either forfeiting their crops or forking over a substantial fee to get them back. In addition, this standing militia controlled the peasantry. After the Italians revolted and unified in 1860, the state confiscated church landholdings and redistributed them to the general public, intentionally excluding most peasants. As a result, the *gabelloti* gained more territory and separated themselves further from their fellow under-class Italians. If a peasant did secure any property, soil infertility and small portions required them to seek other work as share-croppers under their former masters. Since the *gabelloti* and the *campieri/campagnia d'armi* dictated rural-Italian land, they intimidated new landowners who could not afford to purchase security from the brigands due to their net margins.⁷

In Sicily, a combination of favorable weather conditions and fertile soil allows citrus fruits to grow abundantly along the coastlines. With industrialization at a standstill and agriculture still bolstering the economy, these crops, especially lemons, became susceptible to predation by brigands because they could be harvested without any heavy or loud equipment during the dead of night. Also, this type of fruit matures quickly and drops recyclable seeds, so thieves could steal lemons and start their own plantations fairly quickly, creating a larger degree of competition within the market. Since the brigands targeted these fruits, lemons became the first and foremost crop that needed protection, ultimately spawning the initial business of the proto-*Mafia*. To stop the repetitive exploitation of the lower-classes, a band of Italian “brothers” offered inexpensive protective services in competition with the *campieri*. The self-named *mafiosi* consisted of an assortment of citizens, ranging from peasants to even politicians, anyone who felt

⁷ Arcangelo Dimico, Alessia Isopi, and Ola Olsson, “Origins of the Sicilian Mafia: The Market for Lemons,” *The Journal of Economic History* 77, no. 4 (2017): 1088-1089, 1096.

marginalized in the unrest of the Sicilian state. While they used force as a means of fending off the brigands, they believed they were invoking violence as a right in their moral vendetta against the nobility. Eventually, this righteous aggression gave way to extortion and other illegal activity, still all justifiable by the *mafiosi* as defensive operations.⁸

Once these measures were taken against the *campieri*, the *mafioso* became linked to the use of violence and crime to combat politically oppressive structures, gradually taking on an offensive approach. Over the years, the group's animosity towards other elites encouraged lawlessness, still considering itself an ethically-virtuous in comparison to tyrannical nation-states. During Benito Mussolini's regime, the fascist Prime Minister ardently condemned the criminal organization; nevertheless, any hopes of eliminating the "domestic terrorist" threat subsided when the Allies in World War II launched Operation Husky, a full-scale invasion on the southern island. Great Britain and the U.S. worked in collusion with the *mafiosi*, who still owned the majority of land following the overthrow of the Bourbons in the mid-1800s, to establish a puppet government to maintain order throughout the region.⁹

During the 1950s, the group endorsed the Christian Democratic Party against the Communist Party which the peasantry supported. Due to their high membership numbers, the criminal organization provided votes at the expense of compromising the party's political integrity. In exchange, the Christian Democrats granted full immunity to the

⁸ Dimico, Isopi, and Olsson "Origins of the Sicilian Mafia," 1097.

⁹ Jane Schneider and Pete Schneider, "Mafia, Antimafia, and the Plural Cultures of Sicily," *Current Anthropology* 46, no. 4 (2005): 505.

mafiosi in all existing and future legal cases allowing them to infiltrate new areas of economic interest without fear of repercussions. As a result, they gained dominance in the globalized trafficking of heroin throughout the 1970s, earning the pact the derogatory name of the “Wicked Deal.”¹⁰

From its inception, men within the *Mafia* consider themselves to be outside of state-established law; therefore, they must provide their own protection. Although *cosca* is commonly known as the spiny leaves that encompass the inside of an artichoke, within a *Mafia* context, *it* refers to the territorial, fraternal clans within the larger order of the group, who adopt the names of local towns, villages, or neighborhoods to serve as a sign of tribute. Often times, the interconnectedness of the organization causes crossovers within the *cosche* system. With the induction of non-blood-related godparents, the clans created ties to expand trade across familial lines in addition to establishing a sort of mentorship program for Italian children. Although children are not obligated to join the *Mafia*, elders severely judge those who choose other careers, suggesting that they have no *fegato*, or guts, so it is only expected that those who cannot handle the grueling lifestyle opt out of their own free volition. Since scenarios can be unpredictable, establishing trust outside of the immediate family helps the clan initiate good connections throughout the grandiose structure in case some men refuse to run the business. As a result, in an environment with reduced ethnic ties, such as the U.S., the Italian Mafia recognized the importance of securing outside connections with trustworthy individuals, including the

¹⁰ Schneider and Schneider, “Mafia, Antimafia,” 505-506.

butches in New York City who seemed to operate with the same respect towards silent partnerships.¹¹

Within Southern Italian culture, a strong sense of “amoral familism” – conducting oneself with awareness of and advantage for the nuclear family at the expense of the greater community – prevailed.¹² As a result, this social vacuum emerges from a sort of dependency, loyalty, and validation from individuals within the group, rejecting outside influences and creating a single-minded coalition that reaffirms itself through conducive standards. While statutes may differ, all criminal organizations recognize some sort of code, and the *Mafia* functions under one of the strictest ones: *omertà* (law of silence). Sicilians adopted the Spanish word *hombre*, a “man,” shortening the translation to *omu* (evolving into *omertà*), meaning that men should take an offensive stance towards egregious acts, avoid asking for assistance, and disregard crime committed throughout the fraternal order. If they fail to oblige, men are subject to sanctions for meddling or snitching. As aforementioned in earlier instances, any Sicilian or other Southern Italian who deviates from the standard grain of masculinity risks alienation from society, completing stripping him of his manhood and selfhood at once.¹³ Since the butches in New York City adhered to similar masculine guidelines that generated a hardened character, they had no trouble complying with *omertà*—best exemplified by their

¹¹ Schneider and Schneider, “Mafia, Antimafia,” 502-503.

¹² Maria Bigoni, Stefania Bortolotti, Marco Casari, Diego Gambetta, and Francesca Pancotto, “Amoral Familism, Social Capital, or Trust? The Behavioural Foundations of the Italian North-South Divide,” *Economic Journal* 126, no. 594 (August 2016): 1333, doi:10.1111/ecoj.12292.

¹³ Giovanni A. Travaglino, Dominic Abrams, and Georgina Randsley de Moura, “Men of Honor Don’t Talk: The Relationship Between Masculine Honor and Social Activism Against Criminal Organizations in Italy,” *Political Psychology* 37, no. 2 (2016): 185-186.

incessant refusal to disclose secret information about their time working with the Italian Mafia, thus making finding primary sources even more difficult. In the lower, west-side Manhattan neighborhood, the two groups followed similar codes of conduct as they collectively tried to achieve the American Dream through unconventional and unlawful means.

The American Dream which inspired immigrants, in this particular case Italians around the turn of the twentieth century, to travel across the Atlantic Ocean and pursue opportunities in the U.S. stems from destitution and damage culminating from centuries of physical and political wars in the Europe. Due to significant stratifications in wealth, those who participated in the Italian Diaspora, which started during the onset of unification in Italy, heavily decreased in the 1920s, and ended in with rise of fascism in the 1940s, left their homeland with hopes of finding their place within a country that was still in the early-stages of development. For them, the goal was to secure fair-compensated work and create a livelihood where future generations would have the chance to reach a higher education, career, or status rather than being trapped below the poverty line. Unfortunately, in spite of this optimism, Italians entered into an environment with burgeoning hierarchies and biases forcing immigrants into the same prescribed identities they endured in Europe and playing a big role in the Italian Mafia's insurrection in the U.S.

It can be argued similarly that the butches whom the mob entered into business with sought out social mobility from the American Dream as well, but in the women's case, it would be a society where gender and sexuality in general did not confine or bar them from authenticating a queer identity. While these two groups might seem to have

separate goals, each of their interpretations of the American Dream centers around the social evolution. As their paths cross in Greenwich Village, the two happen to find common ground with the *mammismo* and female masculinity, especially the latter which ideologically validates their violent and criminal actions.

Chapter Outlines

This thesis explains the conscious and subconscious factors that led to a unique and unlikely partnership between the Italian Mafia and butch lesbians in Greenwich Village from 1945 to 1968. Chapter One, “Decoding Italian Criminality,” describes how the ethnicity and masculinity of Italian men has inherently labelled them as criminals by birth. Using sociological and psychological frameworks, one can track the gendered evolution of delinquency, especially within strong patriarchal cultures such as Italian that emphasize *machismo* pride in all aspects of life. It gives context to the unlikelihood of an Italian Mafia and butch lesbians partnership based on traditional practices and principles, but highlights certain features that grounded the alliance. Chapter Two, “The Outlaws’ Village,” sets up the social, cultural, economic, and political background that fostered the relationship within a unique and confined neighborhood in New York City. Through micro-studies of immigration, Prohibition, and queerness, an interconnectedness emerged as an ideal space where butches and the Italian Mafia came into contact under the same frustrations and aspirations. Chapters Three, “The Mafia’s Best Friend ‘Butch,’” and Four, “The ‘Fairies’ are Up in the Clouds,” detail the diverging experiences of gay men and women in relationship to straight society, the NYPD, and the Italian Mafia within their entertainment careers and personal lives. By gathering interviews from several New York-based archives and from the documentary that premiered at the Tribeca Film

Festival, the past stories and current lives of former club workers from mid-twentieth century New York City enlighten scholars on the contrasting treatment drag kings/butches and drag queens/fairies received from the Italian Mafia. Finally, the Conclusion will review the ideological and geographical circumstances manufacturing a temporary alliance allowing each party to achieve its own version of the American Dream.

To give the proper attention, description, and context to the selected period (1945-1968), this thesis employs two time-sensitive words: *butch(es)* and *fairy(ies)*. *Butch* establishes a distinction between lesbians who adhere to a masculine identity as opposed to femmes who exhibit a feminine identity. Rather than referring to themselves as *lesbians*, the majority of women in the middle period between first wave (1848-1920) and second wave (1963-1980s) feminism identified with one of two adjectival nouns: *femme* or *butch*. During the early 1900s, the more masculine individuals comprised the most preeminent image of lesbians. Beginning in the 1970s, *butch* started to shift into an androgynous connotation, so readers must note that within this thesis it refers to traditionally-discrete masculine appearance and demeanor.¹⁴ Initially, the thesis highlights *butch lesbians* for contrast, then it transitions into a collective noun, *butches*, for simplicity purposes. As for *fairies*, its usage retains the derogatory undertone which was employed as a generalized name for all gay men whether they displayed masculine or feminine demeanor. While the offensive term carries with it years of oppression and discrimination, it must be used to highlight the way in which the Italian Mafia perceived

¹⁴ Lillian Faderman, "The Return of Butch and Femme: A Phenomenon in Lesbian Sexuality of the 1980s and 1990s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 4 (1992): 581-582, accessed March 28, 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3704264>.

gay men as foolish and expendable. For reference purposes, *fairies* will appear interchangeably with *gay men*, which was a less common term during the timeframe but nonetheless identical. Without these two words, the argument of the ensuing pages would lose a sense of candidness which is essential to detailing the intertwined experiences of each social group involved.

During the peak years of immigration at the dawn of the twentieth century, Italian immigrants found themselves targets of anti-immigrant conspiracy theories through government reports, newspaper articles, and books concerning ethnic eugenics in the U.S. The Sacco and Vanzetti trial of the 1920s stands as evidence to the extent that the country tried to encode Italian criminality into American social and political prejudice.¹⁵ This subterfuge purported that Italians brought criminal societies with them from Italy. As a result, Italians, especially men, felt forced to seek redemption in tandem with other subjects of negative racial and ethnic stereotypes such as Blackness or anti-Asian sentiment. Compounded with the male-oriented approach to violence and crime, Italian men, as well as other criminally-stereotyped males, struggled simultaneously to overcome gender and ethnic/racial generalizations amidst finding work to settle their families in a foreign land. Due to constant pressure to provide financially for their families back in Italy and U.S. limitations on immigrants' accessibility to stable and fruitful work, both of which American society overlooked, Italian men seemed to have

¹⁵ Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian immigrant anarchists, were wrongfully indicted in 1920 for robbery and murder at the Slate and Morrill shoe factory, allegedly murdering a guard and a payroll clerk. Despite innocent pleas, all hearsay testimonies, no previous criminal records, discredited evidence, and confessions from other arrested individuals, Sacco and Vanzetti were sentenced to die by the electric chair in 1927. After conducting ballistic tests and gathering incriminating statements from the men's former friends, the governor of Massachusetts called for the men's names to be cleansed of all disgrace, fifty years after their executions.

fallen back into a violent and criminal lives which reinforced biases against Italian Americans. In actuality though, Italian men had resorted to old-style means and methods of combatting political corruption and subjugation through organized crime in order to attain a better life – in this case, the American Dream.¹⁶ In addition, one explanation for their criminality centered around the dark skin of Southern Italians which threatened American whiteness.¹⁷ These negative stereotypes neglected the Italian culture’s strong devotion to sustaining the nuclear family, though sometimes this passion came at the expense of other communities. The partnership between the Italian Mafia and butch lesbians challenged these assumptions. Rather than criminals who only established loyalty bonds with other Italians, this thesis presents members of the Italian Mafia as common immigrants searching for the American Dream in an unjust country, joining arms with another marginalized group, butches, with whom they shared in their success with.

In Spanish, *machismo* refers to an affixed standard for masculinity involving a man’s appearance, practices, behaviors, emotion, personality, and hobbies which uphold “perfection.” While *machismo* has become a part of transnational terminology to denote a strong sense of masculine pride, in the Italian language, *maschile* and *mascolino* are

¹⁶ Callie Harbin Burt, Ronald L. Simons, and Frederik X. Gibbons, “Racial Discrimination, Ethnic-Racial Socialization, and Crime: A Micro-Sociological Model of Risk and Resilience,” *American Sociological Review* 77, no. 4 (2012), doi.org/10.1177%2F0003122412448648.

¹⁷ Peter Vellon, “Italian Americans and Race During the Era of Mass Immigration,” in *The Routledge History of Italian Americans*, eds. William J. Connell and Stanislao G. Pugliese (New York: Routledge, 2018), 215; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

adjectives that describe ideologically-manly characteristics of the male sex.¹⁸ During the 1980s, discussions of gender brought a poststructuralist dimension to conceptualizations of masculinity. In *The Sexuality of Man*, circa 1985, authors Andy Metcalf and Martin Humphries outlined the ordinary man as aggressive, competitive, emotionally inept, and envious of other people's accomplishments. They deem the innate desire for male domination to be a by-product of discourse rather than the structuralist angle of hegemonic masculinity.¹⁹ Thus, men must engage in manly displays of power such as physical violence and embrace the language of "strong," "confident," or "dependable," which further endorses the ideal image of manhood. If he cannot fulfill these roles or acquire such identity traits, it evokes distress and fear about a man's ability to demonstrate his manliness; as a result, men are stuck in constant conflict with sexual perfection, estranged emotions, and competitive relationships with their peers. For the Italian Mafia, which strongly embodied conventional masculinity, to engage with women who displayed female masculinity, crossed the gender divide and validated butch identity in accordance with masculine roles and characteristics—unlike the fairies who

¹⁸ Steve Garlick, *The Nature of Masculinity: Critical Theory, New Materialisms, and Technologies of Embodiment* (Vancouver, Canada: The University of British Columbia Press, 2016); Alicia M. Walker, *Chasing Masculinity: Men, Validation, and Infidelity* (London, U.K: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Valeria Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Jared Yates Sexton, *The Man They Wanted Me to Be: Toxic Masculinity and a Crisis of Our Own Making* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2020); Barbara Pozzo, "Masculinity Italian Style," *Nevada Law Journal* 13, no. 2 (Winter 2013); Sveva Magaraggia, "Tensions between Fatherhood and the Social Construction of Masculinity in Italy," *Current Sociology* 61, no. 1 (January 2013), doi.org/10.1177/0011392112464231; Steven C. Hughes, *Politics of the Sword: Dueling, Honor, and Masculinity in Modern Italy* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2020).

¹⁹ Andy Metcalf and Martin Humphries, *The Sexuality of Men* (London: Pluto Press, 1985).

endangered masculinity. Also, the duo's bond underlined how men were capable of cooperating with women towards a collective, not individualistic, objective.²⁰

Historiographically, the story of the relationship between the Italian Mafia and the gay and lesbian community throughout the mid-twentieth has been limited to short, nuanced references scattered across comprehensive works about the rise of the five crime families and homosexual life in New York City.²¹ Even more so, for an extended period of time, lesbians remained largely excluded from this account of activities they participated in for several decades. In 2015, Phillip Crawford Jr. published the first explicit survey of the Italian Mafia and gay men in Manhattan. In *The Mafia and the Gays*, Crawford details the exploitative methods the criminal organization utilized to subjugate the gay men who worked or entertained at their nightclubs throughout New York City. Although Crawford underlines the greediness of the Italian Mafia and stresses how homosexual males were targets because of their sexuality, he unfortunately overlooks the lesbian partnership arising from the Italian Mafia's distrust of fairies. During the height of the Cold War, closeted homosexuals especially threatened U.S. security, as there were rumors that communists would threaten to expose these individuals to their families or employers as a way to gain control and ultimately information on activity within the states. Unlike their male counterparts though, whose

²⁰ Nixon, Sean Nixon, "Chapter 5: Exhibiting Masculinity," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 296.

²¹ Selwyn Raab, *Five Families: The Rise, Decline, and Resurgence of America's Most Powerful Mafia Empires* (New York: A Thomas Dunne Book for St. Martin's Griffin, 2016); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Hugh Ryan, *When Brooklyn Was Queer: A History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2019); C. Alexander Hortis, *The Mob and the City: The Hidden History of How the Mafia Captured New York* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 2014).

sexuality drew attention and could lead to disloyalty, the demonstration of female masculinity, which butches conformed to, did make them easily manipulatable because their loss of femininity was not perceived as serious of an offense to society in comparison to flamboyant gay men. Since Italian masculinity adheres to the strongest degree of *machismo*, this further endorses butches as a better match for the Italian Mafia rather than fairies.²²

In post-World War II Greenwich Village, the *mammismo/mammoni* bond transcended familial boundaries, with the butches assuming a similar disposition to that of the independent and feared Italian mother. Also, these types of lesbian women possessed a sharp *machismo*-like persona, exhibiting a tough exterior to avert any feminine affinities and authenticate themselves as hard-working and financially-conscious Americans. After some critical judgement of fairies as insufficiently masculine, the Italian Mafia opted for a business partnership with women they considered to be reputable associates who understood their cooperation would inevitably elevate their economic and social status, thereby benefitting both parties in some manner. Within each of their own worlds, butches and *mammismos* assumed and fulfilled traditional, patriarchal roles such as family protector. As seen through an Italian lens, the *mammoni* grew up moving away from the *mammismo*'s safe dominion and toward the chaos and instability of the immigrant work force. In their resembling of a familiar figure, the butches offered a new avenue of co-dependence to Italian men by building trustworthy bonds that resulted in a mutually beneficial pact which controlled New York City for

²² Phillip Crawford Jr., *The Mafia and the Gays* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 4-5.

over twenty years until a combination of the Stonewall Riots, the sexual revolution and civil rights of the 1960s, and internal investigations of the NYPD abruptly terminated the partnership in 1968. Despite this rather short timeframe, the women gained a more authoritative image defended by the infamous Italian Mafia and all of its other secondary allies as well. As a result, each party moved closer to achieving their goals and aspirations.

Although the butches were not involved in the logistics of the Mafia businesses, their jobs bartending, waitering, and performing on stage became essential to the profitability of operations. When they were placed in the lineups for shows, the butches dressed as male impersonators, otherwise referred to as drag kings; however, these women did not feel as though they were performing as males. Instead, they were authenticating their image and their identity, which dares to explain why butch waiters and butch entertainers dressed alike. It was not a costume. It was normal female masculinity on display. Unlike fairies whose eccentricity transformed them into ostentatious roles as drag queens, the butches' sexualities remained intriguing yet sensible to the heterosexual clientele, as they were simply displaying their identity, female masculinity, which was not necessarily new in concept, just an alternate gender depiction. Thus, the butches had the appeal and the Mafia had the venue. Since they both adhered to the same traditional standards of masculinity, they co-existed with mutual respect understanding that without the other they could have survived in New York City, but together, they could increase revenue across the boards and live the American Dream which was promised to them.

CHAPTER ONE: DECODING ITALIAN CRIMINALITY

Despite adding the discrimination of sex alongside race in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, in the forty years since, women continue to live without protection from sexual harassment laws, often forcing them to deal personally with acts of hate or violence and formulate their own safe spaces. The collective title being coined by Tarana Burke in 2006, the Me Too movement gained momentum following the exposure of Harvey Weinstein as a serial sexual predator in 2017. The founder of Miramax Films and The Weinstein Company used his position as a film producer to exploit, harass, assault, abuse, and rape dozens of women over the course of three decades. In March 2020, a judge sentenced Weinstein to twenty-three years in prison. His conviction inspired the predominantly female victims of other powerful individuals to speak out publicly against their abusers and file legal charges as a step towards reparations. They shared their stories on social media, collectivizing the movement under the cross-platform label #MeToo. Survivors identify themselves using symbols such as the geometric rose, the teal ribbon, and the wearing of denim on April 28 during sexual assault awareness month. However, counter-activists asserted that the female-oriented semblance of the movement directly warranted the exclusion of male victims, exacerbating their silence and promoting the stereotype of male-on-female violence. Although the Me Too following did not facilitate the gendered standard through which society chooses to evaluate victims and criminals, it reinforced a complex framework which actually targets toxic masculinity as the

egregious source and facilitator of oppressive schematics rather than the men themselves.²³

Within a globalized setting, the Me Too movement was not met with the same energy and support in a self-ascribed socially-progressive U.S., and Burke's campaign faced immense backlash from two specific entities that had developed long-standing reputations since the 1980s. The Men's Rights Movement blamed aggression towards men on feminism and sudden unbalanced opportunities for women at the expense of fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons. Meanwhile, anti-feminists despised the contradictory message of liberation which came from exposing misery and pain. The country appeared to be divided on the subject, causing a subsequent rift in American politics. While the Canadian federal government brought new sexual harassment legislation to the floor and the French Parliament heard proposals for fining "catcalling" each within a year of the Me Too insurrection, some U.S. policy analysts and portions of the general public denounced the victims' testimonies as uncorroborated allegations or personal misgivings.²⁴ In 2019, Sonia Teanio, a master's student in Public Policy and an intern at the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, discovered in two consecutive surveys (2018 and 2019) conducted by the market research company Ipsos MORI that despite sexual harassment, sexual violence, and domestic violence claiming the first spot on the general population's list of social concerns in Italy, more than 50% of respondents

²³ Michelle Rodino-Colocino, "Me too, #MeToo: Countering Cruelty with Empathy," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 15, no. 1 (2018): 96, accessed December 7, 2021, doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2018.1435083.

²⁴ Clotilde de Maricourt and Stephen R. Burrell, "#MeToo or #MenToo? Expressions of Backlash and Masculinity Politics in the #MeToo Era," *Journal of Men's Studies* 30, no. 1 (2022): 55-56, doi:10.1177/10608265211035794.

agreed the issue of women's violence was an exhausted topic and that they *should* use their innate features, such as their sexual body parts, to achieve success.²⁵

Based on sixty years of collaboration, the unlikely partnership between the Italian Mafia and butch lesbians stands in contrast to several criminal, ethnic, and gendered concepts listed above. It challenges the argument that violence and crime occur in entirely male-dominated worlds where women have no relevance. In addition, it complicates the findings from Teanio's research that recommend that female physicality is the only method that Italian men believe leads to personal success, as the Italian Mafia deemed female masculinity as valuable trait for many reasons.

As seen in Teanio's discoveries, men in Italy see gendered disparities, yet they opt to disregard and operate in accordance with traditionally-oppressive constructs. Thus, this favor of conformative womanhood suggests Italian masculinity is hesitant towards endorsing Westernized notions of feminism and still upholds a pre-World War II sense of circumscribed gendered relations. The survey findings illuminate a more culturally embedded resistance that inhibits female autonomy, one that stems from a self-sustaining patriarchal setup reaffirmed through ethno-nationalistic organizations, including the Italian Mafia, that mentions violence as an intrinsically masculine act. As a result, the group's original goal to fight against state-sanctioned corruption slowly developed into

²⁵ Maricourt and Burrell, "#MeToo or #MenToo?," 51-52; Ian Austen and Catherine Porter, "Chapter 2: International Response to #MeToo: In Canada, a 'Perfect Storm' for a #MeToo Reckoning," in *#MeToo: Women Speak Out against Sexual Assault*, eds. New York Times Editorial Staff (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2018); Dan Bilefsky and Elian Peltier, "Chapter 2: The International Response to #MeToo: France Consider Fines for Catcalls as Women Speak Out on Harassment," in *#MeToo: Women Speak Out against Sexual Assault*, eds. New York Times Editorial Staff (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2018); Sonia Teanio, "In a country concerned about sexual harassment, why did #MeToo fail to gain traction in Italy?" King's College London, August 27, 2019, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/in-a-country-concerned-about-sexual-harassment-why-did-metoo-fail-to-gain-traction-in-italy>.

criminalized endeavor morally justified under feudalistic – and now capitalistic – tyranny which only men are free to challenge.

When sociologists and psychologists explore the realms of violence and crime, their studies focus on culture, sociality, addictions, serial patterns, power relationships, and even neurological processing.²⁶ On the other hand, some historians try to explain violence and crime within the patriarchal framework of the nation-state, a process born from subtly embedding sexism and racism deeper into nationalist culture.²⁷ Although ethnicity has been interwoven into assessments of gender and race, isolating the origination of the ethnic criminal from masculinity and color warrants a more authentic and candid examination of criminal stereotyping in that regard. Even worse, the primary typecasts that historians scrutinize (male=criminal and female=victim; Black=criminal and white=victim) impose binary standards that society uses to judge all cases. From the gendered-angle of assumption, a man who is the victim of violence or crime is not allotted the same sympathy or care as a woman because his positioning as a male in the

²⁶ Laurence Miller, *Criminal Psychology Nature, Nurture, Culture*, 1st ed. (Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas Publisher, Ltd., 2012); Hye Jeong Choi, Rebecca Weston, and Jeff R Temple, "A Three-Step Latent Class Analysis to Identify How Different Patterns of Teen Dating Violence and Psychosocial Factors Influence Mental Health," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 46, no. 4 (2016), doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0570-7; Kim, Jae Yop Kim, Jeon Suk Lee, Sehun Oh, "A Path Model of School Violence Perpetration: Introducing Online Game Addiction as a New Risk Factor," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 32, no. 21 (November 2017), doi.org/10.1177/0886260515597435; Bill Rolston, "Crimes of Passion: Sociology, Research and Political Violence," *Irish Journal of Sociology* 8, no. 1 (January 1998), doi:10.1177/079160359800800105; Sylvia Walby, "Violence and Society: Introduction to an Emerging Field of Sociology," *Current Sociology* 61, no. 2 (March 2013), doi.org/10.1177/0011392112456478; Siniša Malešević, *The Rise of Organised Brutality: A Historical Sociology of Violence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), doi:10.1017/9781316155332.

²⁷ Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon Hawkins, *Crime Is Not the Problem* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997); David D. Laitin, *Nations, States, and Violence*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007); Lyn Mikel Brown, Meda Chesney-Lind, and Nan Stein, "Patriarchy Matters: Toward a Gendered Theory of Teen Violence and Victimization," *Violence Against Women* 13, no. 12 (December 2007), doi.org/10.1177/1077801207310430; Abigail R. Esman, *Rage: Narcissism, Patriarchy, and the Culture of Terrorism* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2020).

social hierarchy invalidates his trauma as meaningless in the greater scheme of life. As a result, this fixed label generates a temperament in relation to masculinized language and nature. Even if a woman commits violence or crime, the average person sees the situation through one of two lenses. In the first, she is described by overtly-harsh, traditionally-masculine adjectives (aggressive, vengeful, territorial) which strip her of any female resemblance and place her within a male-oriented context. In the second, people empathize with her actions, suggesting that a sudden urge of rogue sexuality caused her to stray from women's motherly instinct and moral alignment. By closer inspection, one can clearly see that gendered discussion of violence and crime does not center around men but rather the matter of masculinity.²⁸

While some feminists fear that degendering violence and crime will detract from empowering the female voice and destroy support for sexual assault recovery centers, prevention programs, and sexual harassment awareness trainings, avoiding a deconstructive analysis will continue to decrease the recognition of men as victims too. Despite their social activism, some feminist initiatives require men who do not adhere to traditional standards of masculinity to defend themselves in a two-sided attack. Also, they ignore instances such as the case of the Italian Mafia and butch lesbians where masculinity was mobilized as violent or criminal power over women. Instead, masculinity served as a commonality between the two groups, fostering a loyal alliance. Counterintuitively, favor for a gender-neutral approach shifts attention away from

²⁸ Bob Pease, *Facing Patriarchy: From a Violent Gender Order to a Culture of Peace* (London: Zed Book, 2019), 125; Rachael E. Collins, "'Beauty and Bullets': A Content Analysis of Female Offenders and Victims in Four Canadian Newspapers," *Journal of Sociology* 52, no. 2 (June 2016): 297, doi.org/10.1177/1440783314528594; Kathryn Ann Farr, "Defeminizing and Dehumanizing Female Murderers," *Women & Criminal Justice* 11, no. 1 (2000).

examining interpersonal and environmental factors from childhood and cultures whose focal points are the nuclear family, each influencing the ways in which parents see their children as premature, moldable beings. Ultimately, this retards their development into self-cognizant adults. Sometimes, triggers of aggression, which can manifest into violence or crime, stem from signs, symbols, or experiences from the early stages of life. Since the mass media especially benefits from republishing the gendered stereotype though, men, who have become common enemy number one, must undergo sociological, psychological, and historical research to challenge the singular gradient of masculinity and expose their multi-dimensional narrative that places them outside of propagated, *machismo* identity.²⁹ This thesis disputes the intransigent notion of masculinity and shows the Italian Mafia, a criminally-stereotyped order of men, embracing a position that defies previous logic in a time that predated discussions of desexualizing violence and crime.³⁰

This chapter explores the gender dynamics and the coding of violence and crime related to the Italian ethnicity and Italian men, including the evolution of stereotypes throughout U.S. history. It aligns with many historians' abandonment of the one-dimensional approach to manhood that dominated studies until the rise of post-structuralism beginning in the 1980s, all the while challenging society's ongoing

²⁹ Julia T. Wood, "Chapter 10: Gendered Media: Media's Influence on Gender," in *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, And Culture*, 8th ed (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2008), 259-261.

³⁰ Pease, *Facing Patriarchy*, 126.

adherence to a singular assessment of manhood.³¹ In addition, this thesis will dissect typical man vs. man conflict to uncover the more complex and serious battle of the subconscious man versus the societal man. From this, one can begin to comprehend violence and crime as not biologically engrained but socially constructed within men, rearing subsequent misconceptions about ethnicities with deep, patriarchal roots. Since the Italian Mafia contains strong ties to patriarchy, masculinity, and criminality, it stands as the ideal testament to the logic used by the old scholarship that society operates through.

Nonetheless, the following denotes the main reasoning for the inclusion such discussions. During this chapter, readers will come to understand the choice of the word “unlikely” when describing the partnership of the Italian Mafia and butch lesbians, as it will detail the way that violence and crime have become masculine concepts suggesting that women are detached from environment which condone or support such actions. Due to the unique, dualistic disposition of butch lesbians, the Italian Mafia, whose culture still appears to be deeply-rooted in a traditional perception of masculinity, found a sense of familiarity with a group of individuals whose sex should have immediately dissuaded the men’s interests. However, since masculinity is not exclusively male, female masculinity, as demonstrated by the butches in Greenwich Village, means these women were able infiltrate not only a strictly-male-dominated social organization but Italian men’s entire culture through the concealment of femininity. In addition, these butches adhered to this identity outside of working with the Mafia in their domestic lives with their femme

³¹ Kalle Berggren, "Sticky Masculinity," *Men and Masculinities* 17, no. 3 (2014); Todd W. Reeser, "Introduction: The Study of Masculinity," in *Masculinities in Theory* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Francisco Quiroz and Javier Pineda Duque. "Subjectivity, Identity and Violence: Masculinities at Stake," *Universitas Humanística*, no. 67 (2009).

partners, assuming the male role in a heteronormative dynamic. Over the course of almost three decades, the butches in Greenwich Village temporarily upset the understanding of masculinity, Italian masculinity, and the Italian Mafia, eliciting the separation of gender/sexuality from cultural stereotypes. Upon exploring the intricacies of immigrant and Italian masculinity, one can begin to comprehend why the postwar Italian Mafia opted into a mutually beneficial partnership with butch lesbians whose sex alone contradicts general beliefs about the organization.

Although the gender discourse of economic systems and globalization reveals distinct disparities between men and women who are inherently intertwined in an intransigent hierarchy, a macroscopic study exposes multiple versions of implicit masculinity that dictate different gender roles depending on the culture or society. Within capitalism, masculinity authorizes men to use violence to instate and maintain sociological order empowering unsanctioned “community” policemen. From this designation and feeling of worthiness, a man views himself as part of a governing collective mass and, at the same time, is permitted to use force to impart a standard upon his fellow men. Unlike their docile brothers who are content with demonstrating their manliness through monotonous outlets such as sports or hunting, “martial men” are those who choose to display their superiority through brazen acts of muscularity, toughness, courage, and aggression.³² By constantly designing new spaces in society, “martial men” appoint themselves dictators of masculinity within those realms, as in the case of the Italian Mafia, the men who developed the organization defined and set the ideal image of manliness. When an institution erects itself upon strong, patriarchal roots, it upholds

³² Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 140.

practices and behaviors that require physical demonstrations of power to “measure up” to insurmountable standards of the “perfect man.” Within this structure, privilege masculinity, a cisgender, heteronormative construct, empowers men; however, this entitlement comes with schematic constraints which damage and oppress the non-cisgender and non-heterosexual man. Thus, an organization such as the Italian Mafia, which inflicts violence upon its own members who break formal codes, still adheres to the edification of traditional masculinity despite fostering “martial men.”³³

Driven by a strong sense of fraternity, allegiance, and honor, the criminal organization legitimizes violent masculinity as a means of internal policing. Within Italian society, the acquiring of strength and skills serves as a bonding activity as demonstrated by playing soccer, hunting boars, or working on all-male assembly lines. By engaging in these customs, a man earns his “Italianness” and a spot within an ethnically-exclusive social group. Rather than seeing men as merely workers, husbands, or fathers, they become social beings seeking company from *compaesani* (friends, countrymen, compatriots, non-biological brothers) for fun experiences and validation. Aside from reaching cultural expectations of manhood, men should also find self-hood within these constructs that possess a great degree of homosociality, a concept that is present as seen by the behaviors of other cultures but has firmly existed within Italy since the time of the Roman Empire. For example, shepherds from Tuscany traveled in all-male cohorts choosing to abandon their families for months at a time finding solace and comfort in *compaesani*. During these instances of isolation, camaraderie surfaced,

³³ Joan Acker, “Gender, Capitalism and Globalization,” *Critical Sociology* 30, no. 1 (January 2004): 20, doi.org/10.1163/156916304322981668; Pease, *Facing Patriarchy*, 52; Clementine Ford, *Boys Will Be Boys: Power, Patriarchy, and Toxic Masculinity* (London: OneWorld Publications, 2019), 2-3.

causing men to seek advice and support from each other rather than from their wives, mothers, children, or society in general.³⁴

Arguably grounded by the same desire to attain ideological manhood, masculinity in America sought a more globalized stamp of validation. Even before English migration across the Atlantic Ocean, a strong resentment of the feudal system emerged around the 1780s, set off by a widening gap between the middle-class who favored Westernized thinking and endorsed personal success and happiness, and the aristocracy who wanted to preserve a collectivist system prohibiting individualistic mobility. The upper-class feared that individualism would incite civil competition increasing the lower classes' chances of social climbing, leading to social panic among those who were skillfully inept – individuals who relied on inheritances and lacked any sort of skills to make a livable wage.³⁵ As in the case of the Italian Mafia forming as a defensive force in southern Italy and Sicily, American and Italian nationalistic masculinity arose from the actions of the working class, who labored hard to live reasonably, in stark contrast to the elites. John Locke and other Enlightenment philosophers helped give language to these men's expressions. Since they did not have expendable funds, the average Americans and Italians asserted their power through physical displays, including manual labor and violence.

With the arrival of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, the demand intensified for diversified laborers in areas of manufacturing, architecture, finance, and

³⁴ Joan Weibel-Orlando, "A Room of (His) Own: Italian and Italian-American Male-Bonding Spaces and Homosociality," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008): 167-168.

³⁵ Nixon, "Exhibiting Masculinity," 298-303.

insurance which quickly made much small-scale trade work obsolete. During the late-nineteenth century, professionalism came from combining aristocratic policies with artisanship, for example, a mechanic learning to run his own company's finances.³⁶ With this economic restructuring, masculinity diverged from a formal, institutional reaffirmation to an informal, autonomous version where men faced new challenges in asserting their superiority in a freer market. By associating their new movement with religious doctrines, many of these self-proclaimed "workmen of God" justified and moralized their new forms of masculinity as furthering their ultimate goal of fulfilling a higher purpose on the journey to salvation.³⁷ As a result of feudal corruption and sinfulness, this apparent virtuosity made Western masculinity into a symbol of worldly redemption, one that was open to exploring new pathways for reaching manhood. For this reason, men moved easily between the public and private sphere, slowly acquiring a greater masculine empire than ever before, but also conforming to policed plurality which was unwilling to compromise key attributes of manliness.³⁸

Since U.S. culture exists partly as an amalgamated derivative of conventional European creeds for gender and selfhood as well as the opportunistic and self-expressive freedom of the American Frontier, masculinity in America appears to be trapped within a conflict of individualism versus collectivism. However, during certain periods in American history, one ideology overwrites the other which proved to be the case in the mid-twentieth century at the onset of the Cold War. With the fear of communism

³⁶ Nixon, "Exhibiting Masculinity," 298-303

³⁷ Nixon, "Exhibiting Masculinity," 298-303

³⁸ Nixon, "Exhibiting Masculinity," 298-303.

triggering the “Red Scare,” a succeeding panic called the “Lavender Scare” permitted the persecution of homosexuals in government.³⁹ Although no evidence suggests such instances transpired, the State Department and Congress deemed “unmoral men,” coded language for gay men, to be national security risks, prompting several legislative and executive hearings. Since these men were fearful of disgrace and condemnation, communist enemies would be able to manipulate them into disclosing classified information or committing domestic acts of terrorism.⁴⁰ For this reason, the social crusaders who attempted to impart an unaccepted, alternate version of masculinity alienated themselves, diminishing their innate masculine image and authority in the process. Their attention-grabbing methods widened a divide between them and butch lesbians who preferred gradual and subtler tactics of modifying gender and sexuality norms such as taking on a man’s duties privately at home. However, those who grow up during a stringent or tense period of revolt often find fuel in an energetic anger towards conservatism and conformity campaigns. Since many individuals from the younger generation were forced into early maturity in the wake of World War I and II, they were stripped of their childhood and the chance to learn common social skills necessary to

³⁹ Due to topicality reasons, the “Lavender Scare” is only addressed within a U.S. context. However, it is important to note that similar anti-gay and ant-lesbian sentiment stemming from the fear of communism led to international persecutions. For example, in Great Britain, the scandalous case of John Vassal heightened attacks on homosexuals. The British civil servant acted as a spy for the Soviet Union from 1954 until his arrest in 1962. Although some historians question the authenticity of his claim, the sexually-closeted Vassal insisted the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB), the Soviet Union’s main security agency, coerced him into submission using photographs of the clerical officer in compromising positions with gay men in Moscow. Regardless of their reputation or status, all homosexuals appeared to be communist conspirators, thereby warranting state-sanctioned violence. Alan Turing, who served as a British code-breaker during World War II, was subjected to chemical castration for homosexual activity. Shortly afterwards, Turing committed suicide.

⁴⁰ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 6, 9, 69.

navigate adulthood.⁴¹ After Japan signed a formal surrender in September 1945, many average Americans were ready to throw off the restraints they had endured at home during the war. In that vein, others challenged the gender structure reinstated following the treaty signing. When the women who answered the call to the workforce were immediately expected to resume domestic life once the male soldiers returned, they gathered under a female labor movement which created an even more socially-confused, gendered battlefield where rogue masculinity became justifiably-normal to combat the dissolution of the capitalistic patriarchy.⁴² By opting into a partnership with butch lesbians, the Italian Mafia directly contested the notion that Italian, American, and newly merged Italian American masculinity was stuck in a traditional patriarchal approach of asserting power when change challenges social positioning. Finding common ground through female masculinity, the Italian Mafia displayed a more open approach towards women than other men who felt re-entitled to their former statuses during the postwar era.

Although both entities are attached the male identity, violence and crime constitute different demonstrations of masculinity, and social groups like the Italian Mafia linked to these actions are expected to contribute to public reaffirmation of the patriarchy via these means. Violence, refers to an act of rage manifesting itself into a physical form, which most likely results in the harm of oneself or other(s). Crime can be either violent or non-violent, breaching a set of established rules or regulations. Although

⁴¹ Micaela di Leonardo, "White Lies, Black Myths," in *The Gender Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy*, eds. Roger N. Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 60.

⁴² Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 8, 12.

a crime might not directly affect a specific person, it can indirectly disrupt or cause anxiety within the social order of a society that relies on cooperative trust to function relatively peacefully. Although there is no formal ethical code, the implicit natures of violence and crime denote an informal standard that a person should avoid deviating from. However, the evolutionary urge to demonstrate intelligence, enhanced by the need to establish a social and emotional bond, evokes violence as a way to safeguard one's selfhood against fellow men who threaten his spatial existence. As a result, the ego overtakes the situation and isolates the identity, destroying any sense of empathy which is an essential sociological element to preventing an outbreak of violence and crime. Within the Italian Mafia, whether an underboss or a mere associate, members see each other as humans with the same aspirations, desires, and morals. If an individual's actions stray from any of these collective ideas, he no longer has empathy to protect him, making him into just another target whose goals jeopardize the Italian Mafia's space.⁴³

Based on John W. Burton's scholarship in conflict studies, humans possess ontological needs that drive their actions. If an individual cannot satisfy his instinctual desires, he deems this a violation of his natural-born rights, resulting in conflict and crime, with violence becoming an answer within the problem-solving process.⁴⁴ Within a Mafia context of the early-twentieth century U.S., Italian immigrants wanted to attain the American Dream. However, a discriminatory government and prejudicial society barred them from success, justifying maltreatment as appropriate for their indolence. This setting, with similar corruptness that prompted the creation of the Italian Mafia in

⁴³ Jason Roach and Ken Pease, *Evolution and Crime* (London: Willan Publishing, 2013), 4, 31.

⁴⁴ John W. Burton, *Violence Explained: The Sources of Conflict, Violence and Crime and Their Prevention* (Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1997), xii.

Europe, triggered Italian immigrants to form an Americanized version of the criminal organization to right wrongdoings. During the process, they enlisted the help of butch lesbians who shared the same aspirations and inflicted misfortunes on fairies whose lifestyles contradicted multiple aspects of Italian masculinity. Within the organization's practices and procedures, elite officials appointed themselves judges and executioners, a dualistic power that is quite appealing to those who admire privileged masculinity, especially butches who gain a more authoritative image by association.

From a sociological standpoint, masculinity involves a complex relationship in which older men teach younger men about gendered expectations that those being mentored must display to other men, ultimately taking over their mentors' the spot in perpetuating the cycle and training new eras of adaptable men. Although men do not carry any instinctive gene to commit violence and crime, social and cultural structures create a power dynamic in which men are expected to naturally respond with aggression. When the Italian Mafia joined forces with butches, they expanded beyond their traditional form of familial training by taking on the task of teaching the women the ways of the organization as well as enhancing the disposition of female masculinity.

Since these women do not fit the typical criminal stereotype, their involvement with the notoriously violent and illicit Italian Mafia contests the notion that violence and crime were a part of an isolated male-oriented world. While it is questionable whether men possess a biological inclination, irritants, which vary among humans, heighten people's intimacy with violence and crime. For men, the constant pressure to reach peak masculinity can exasperate their emotional and physical self-control, and butches who are physiologically restricted by femininity also experience an analogous frustration trying to

adhere to a prescribed construct of identity. Often times, consuming alcohol can become coping mechanism through which people, more statistically men, express their true thoughts and selves because it is a common cognitive agitator that stops self-restraint. Within their operations in Greenwich Village, alcohol was extremely present. Since it is a depressant with stimulant effects, the combination of frustration and fear for men who feel marginalized by masculinity causes them to directly attack something or someone with whom they associate with their despondency embracing misogyny, narcissism, or homophobia, toxic male opinions they might disagree with when sober. In accordance with the Italian Mafia, the butches drinking habits remained subtler and more proper in contrast to the fairies who wildly and excessively indulged themselves with alcohol. Unlike the butches who used drinking for a social function in order to fade more into the formal demeanor and behaviors of masculinity, gay men became overtly expressive, actively trying to break away from another activity with masculine ties and expectations, yet another reason for the Italian Mafia's disdain for fairies. Occasionally though, approaches towards handling identity crises can turn more hostile than merely social drinking and aggravation can manifest itself through unfiltered word choices, but violence and crime being the most deliberate, bodily reactions as reprobates, other known as "martial men." In general, people who think they are discriminated against feel a sense of entitlement to their hostility. As a result, retribution does not directly target a singular person or object, rather entities seen as possessing the rights or privileges that one has lost or been denied because of their identification or previous offenses.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Pease, *Facing Patriarchy*, 130-131; Seymour, "Imprisoning Masculinity," 38.

During any time period, in any part of the world, men commit eighty percent of all reported crimes. Although it has been established that violence and crime are not biologically encoded within men, this statistic sparks serious question about the environments which cause this sizeable imbalance. Contrary to common assumptions, evidence shows that men, more often than not, commit violence or crime against other men, except in cases of domestic disputes.⁴⁶ However, this one, reoccurring instance disseminates the idea that men dominate power dynamics inside the private home, so when male-on-male violence or crime transpires outside, in the public sphere, their actions are interpreted simply as masculine urges in competitive spaces. By stereotyping these incidences, fraternal conflict becomes normal for asserting manliness at an acute level or in an organized manner. In the U.S., young men involved in gang-related activity hold the highest homicide rate. Within criminal organizations, *machismo* endorses violence and crime as a means of mandating masculinity and generating loyalty among constituents.⁴⁷

Although society has come to associate violence with criminality, this erroneous assumption overlooks violence embedded withing social or cultural practices including prizefighting, sports, war, fraternal and sororal hazing, hunting, etc. Since these types of environments cultivate a social rationale and acceptance of acts of aggression, the Italian Mafia, for example, offered not only a space for men to release their masculine frustrations in validating a setting with arguably no more or less violence involved than other socially-putative situations. In addition, it created a supportive atmosphere for

⁴⁶ Roach and Pease, *Evolution and Crime*, 65.

⁴⁷ Pease, *Facing Patriarchy*, 125-126, 132.

butches to explore and build up their masculine positions of power until the sexual revolution of the 1960s. While these groups support their members in exhibiting such strong characters, by joining, men, and now butches, directly submit themselves to masculine policing by higher-ranking superiors as well. If an associate defies any codes, he or she will receive serious repercussions for his wrongdoings and his failure to uphold the core principles of Italian masculinity as set by the Mafia. Since the Italian Mafia has the ultimate authority over determining standards of manliness, any changes, such as the inclusion of female masculinity throughout the mid-twentieth century in America, only happens within the organization's, culture's, and families' permissions. Regardless, the traditionally-dominant ideology and depiction of masculinity will continue to be the one that society uses to stereotype the gender of members of the criminal enterprise.⁴⁸

While this explains the gender-bias of Italian male criminality, the ethnic pigeonhole for Italian criminality existed long before the founding of the Italian Mafia and is engrained from socio-cultural relations back in the European country. Although they share the same country of origin, Northern Italians and Southern Italians carry distinct, regional differences in appearance, demeanor, and histories. Even in Italy, the majority of Northern Italians describe their compatriots as unmotivated, violent, insensitive, and needy. With closer examination, one can see that these conjectures stem from one of three issues: a commitment to work; Northerners' frustration with Southerners claiming a majority of government jobs; or the over-allocation of funding to the southern economy and infrastructure.⁴⁹ As a result, Southern Italians seem to fall

⁴⁸ Pease, *Facing Patriarchy*, 127, 129.

⁴⁹ Paul M. Sniderman, Pierangelo Peri, Rui J.P. de Figueiredo Jr., Thomas Piazza, *The Outsider: Prejudice and Politics in Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 86-87.

outside of public safety measures, even more than foreign immigrants. (See Table 1) From the 1880s to the 1920s, most immigrants from Italy came from Sicily and the southern regions around Naples, so these individuals instinctively turned into the common image and stereotype for the entire ethnicity, which Northerners had been trying to erase in their homeland too. However, the creation of an American sector of the Italian Mafia cemented the false impression into general society.

The Italian criminal stereotype seeped into American culture through the transference of Southern generalizations into a concrete image repeatedly publicized through the media of the times. When Italians started migrating to the U.S. around the turn of the twentieth century, the coincidence of cinema's inception and Jim Crow America resulted in the further projection of systemic racism onto the population, consciously embedding American prejudices. Since Southern Italians have naturally darker skin compared to their northern and other European counterparts, society categorized them as inferior using the same racial science to subjugate Africans and Latinos. While the Italians' culturally-comparative Irish twin slowly earned acceptance via an ancestral connection to the British Isles and his whiteness, the Italian American gained notoriety as a threat to society due to his skin color and a historical link to criminality, specifically the Italian Mafia. However, the gangster, infatuating film enthusiasts and spreading fear throughout the streets of suburbia, represented only a small cohort of individuals from one geographical region of Italy. Aside from his lighter complexion, the Northern Italian stereotype imagined as a harder working individual, engaging in more business-like ventures, earned himself a wealthy but snobbish

reputation; on the other hand, Southern Italians were conceptualized as lacking professionalism and paid no heed to their responsibilities. Quickly, the negative Southern version overran his Northern equivalent, heavily supported by anti-immigration sentiment across the country. Despite current statistics that confirm reduced crime rates in the regions south of Rome, a short synopsis of criminality in Italy shows how organized crime, facilitated substantially by the Sicilian Mafia, gradually transformed into a socio-cultural agency that not only legitimized but moralized illegal actions as a symbol of Italian masculinity, as perceived by the average American and a significant portion of the population throughout the globe. Although the origin story of the Italian Mafia centers around an ethical crusade against corrupt authoritarians, as the men would also undertake in an Anglo-centric America, the group whose code upholds violence and crime generated an all-encompassing immoral stereotype from which they could not escape. However, the unlikely duo of butches and the Italian Mafia disputes the assertion that Southerners failed to operate pragmatically, as the bond was not immediate. It required a businesslike approach with negotiations and compromises to end in a mutually-beneficial contract.⁵⁰

This result also supports the notion that violence and criminality are not ethnically ascribed, and even some white, American women, who are supposed to be moral compasses for society, could resort to immoral, violent, and criminal lifestyles. Nevertheless, the iconography and depictions of Italian Mafia members neglected or rather refused to acknowledge the butch side. Despite *machismo* being predominantly

⁵⁰ Carla Bagnoli, "The Mafioso Case: Autonomy and Self-Respect," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 12, no. 5 (2009): 477-479, doi.org/10.1007/s10677-009-9154-x.

characterized by a physically tough persona matched with dark eyes and a distinct facial structure which most Italian men naturally possess, during the first half of the twentieth century, filmmakers turned the immigrant into the most fascinatingly humorous and dumb character in all of entertainment. In *The Organ Grinder* (1909) and *The Italian* (1914), the immigrants struggle to assimilate and resist Americanization. On screen, Italians appeared intoxicated or unhygienic. After World War I, *Dangerous Hours* (1919) showed them hoarding explosives to spark a revolution. Then, once the Great Depression hit and “talkies” took over the movie screens, film writers used the Italian American gangster to decrease citizens’ anger towards banks and refocus hatred on criminally-inclined immigrants. As seen in *Night Ride* (1931) and in *Manhattan Merry-Go-Round* (1938), the main Italian characters engaged in serious illegal activities such as shoot outs, theft, and evading arrest, all of which reinforced the Italian male image of violence and crime.⁵¹

Perhaps the only evidence that suggests Italian male culture nurtures violence and crime stems from sociological studies that have deduced that groups who support a strong sense of community and self-pride carry a more criminogenic tendency in order to protect such entities and ideas. Those who reside in industrial areas where cheap rent reflects poor standards of living tend to engage more in criminal activities as well. Since these two findings appertained to Italian American immigrants from the late-1800s to the early-1900s, white citizens thought that engaging in organized crime was an ethnic rite of passage. Rather than renouncing prejudicial criminality, the U.S. Immigration Commission of 1911 supported the notion that, specifically, Southern Italians were

⁵¹ Norman Simms, “The Italian-American Image During the Twentieth Century,” *The Histories* 5, no. 1 (2019): 20, https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the_histories/vol5/iss1/4.

naturally susceptible to such impoverished and corrupt lifestyles. In addition, similar to other minorities, especially African Americans, society accused Italian Americans of stealing jobs from whites but, more important, causing the country to degenerate due to their stupidity and beastly behaviors. In the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *North American Review*, the *Forum*, *Scribner's*, and the *McClure*, editorialists used political documents and subjective psychological studies to perpetuate ethnic and racial criminality, especially in relation to Italians. Despite the majority of Italian Americans holding zero connections to the Sicilian, Italian, or Italian American Mafia, men, women, and children acquired the craven stereotype of not being able to achieve success by common means, causing them to resort to their traditionally-unethical ways of life. Regardless of the validity of these arguments or the lack thereof, these prejudices pushed the Italian Mafia and butch lesbians into the same space, both seeking autonomy from prescribed identities.⁵²

During World War II, anti-Italian American misinformation and animosity reached its peak in order to gather support for efforts abroad. Besides being Catholic and Southern Mediterranean, they had ancestral ties to a country with which the U.S. was at war. The government initially sent Italians to internment camps with other immigrants. Upon their release though, President Franklin Roosevelt famously said that American citizens should not worry about Italians who are nothing but opera singers from a cowardly country. Non-immigrants also used “Dago” and “Wop” as derogatory words for Italian Americans, and made jokes about hiding personal belongings from the

⁵² Louis Corsino, “Revisiting the Link between Italian Americans and Organized Crime: The Italian Americans and Polish Americans in the Community Context,” *Italian American Review* 6, no. 1 (2016): 89-91.

kleptomaniacs. During these tense times, there seemed to be few attempts to restore the Italian man's image of family and pride. Even in the case of Al Capone, people overlooked his transformation from a poor son of immigrant parents to the head of successful, criminal enterprise for what it really was: a resourceful method of achieving the American Dream promised to opportunistic, hard-working settlers.⁵³

While this inaccurate, offensive stereotype applies only to a select group of individuals, Americans latched onto this one, extreme version of Italianness. During the early-1900s, another character personified rugged and insurgent behavior similar to the gangsters in film, but instead, the cowboy received greater, patriotic support. Within their own rights, each character exhibited a dominant masculinity and high degrees of social mobility in the "Wild West." Also, the iconographic street style image of the Italian and the flashy-ranching outfits of the American cowboy suggested that these men ran the urban and rural sectors of the nation. Within the skyscraper backgrounds of New York City, Chicago, Boston and Kansas City, the gangsters in film gave off an overly confident undertone as rulers of the cities. On rainy days or sunny days, the men wore heavy-duty coats accentuating the broad shoulders of their stocky build, making them appear inherently stronger. Both men and women idolized the antagonistic demeanor and sexually explicit expressions of the Italian gangster who exhibited young, romantic charm with the experience of an older gentleman. Regardless, the Italian-American is not "American" in the way that the cowboy is a nationalistic symbol. Again, immigration, as a threat to white, Anglican supremacy, turned the Italian searching for the American Dream into an enemy of the state. Society often considered Italian charisma and

⁵³ Simms, "The Italian American Image," 20-21.

intuitiveness as manipulative attempts to undermine good-natured citizens. As a result, the “West” remained safe and inaccessible to those whose migratory invasion tried to sever ties between nationhood and manhood upon which the country built American masculinity. The Italian Mafia and butch lesbians’ relationship countermanded this white, heteronormative perfectionist rhetoric. Instead, it highlights an instance when Italian masculinity, with its deep patriarchal roots, was more flexible and accepting of butch lesbians than a self-proclaimed, socially-progressive America.⁵⁴

Rather than fitting the Italian Mafia into the parameters of butch lesbianism, examining these types of women as infiltrators of Italian masculine culture gives more attention and respect to their ability to overturn centuries-old limitations emplaced upon gender and sexuality. It shows masculinity as malleable amidst backlash; whereas, there appears to be less resistance and baggage femininity carries with a historical hierarchy sexual disposition. As much as the Italian Mafia can be suspected of monetizing the butch identity, the women just as much put themselves out for the public gaze in order to authenticate female masculinity as conformative to precepts of masculinity, the only difference being their sex. Once again, the unlikeliness stems from preconceived notions of masculinity, Italian masculinity, and the Italian Mafia which prevent the general public

⁵⁴ Weibel-Orlando, “A Room of (His) Own,” 167-168; Nixon, “Exhibiting Masculinity,” 305, 308; Jennifer Louise Field, “Chapter Five American Dreams and Nightmares: Remembering the Civil Rights Movement,” in *Violence in American Popular Culture*, vol. 1, *American History and Violent Popular Culture*, ed. David Schmid (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2015), 123; David McWilliam, “Chapter Nine Fear and Loathing in Suburbia: School Shootings,” in *Violence in American Popular Culture*, vol. 1, *American History and Violent Popular Culture*, ed. David Schmid (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2015), 198; Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 139; Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of the U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 95-99.

from comprehending any association with homosexuals, let alone females who surely could not understand or engage in exclusive facets of manhood.

CHAPTER TWO: THE OUTLAWS' VILLAGE

By examining American and Italian socio-cultural discourse through a transnational lens, one can see clear evidence of the *machismo* nature in a hybridization of Italian, Italian immigrants, and Italian American lifestyles throughout the first half of the twentieth century. However, in studying hybridity, scholars must separately acknowledge aspects of both the country of origin and the host country, recognizing the fact that transculturation may arise from voluntary or involuntary migration on a wide array of paths. Whether diaspora people or transmigrants, the individuals' choices of what and how to preserve their ethnic identity in the wake of nationalistic cleansing prove the significance of certain social, cultural, economic, and political customs with which Italian Americans opt to self-identify despite hostility that might endure from assimilation efforts. Within this chapter, I explore how the countercultural space of Greenwich Village came into existence as a result of migration patterns and government interventions. By understanding Italian immigration, Prohibition, and the Bohemian legacy of the neighborhood, individuals can see how the unlikely partnership between butch lesbians and the Mafia manifested itself in a post-World War II U.S.⁵⁵

Immigration

Despite Jewish historicism, in recent years the word “diaspora” has expanded in language to encompass all acts of human dispersion, domestic or international. During a globalized era, diaspora can no longer be confined to a physical geographical analysis.

⁵⁵ Michel Bruneau, “Chapter 2: Diasporas, transnational spaces and communities,” in *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, eds. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 37-38.

Instead, it must include a comparative transnational study of people, culture, and agency. Arguably, the examination of diaspora-related concepts within transnational societies equips scholars with a better understanding of new – yet familiar – philosophies and practices in a fresh space or community. These settlements consider identity an essential element of socio-spatial networking, collective memory, and territorial expansion. Once a population is pushed or pulled to a new destination voluntarily or involuntarily, some diaspora migrants integrate into their surroundings, refusing to assimilate to the dominant party. While these individuals undergo several simultaneous changes in treatment, comfort, accessibility, etc., dispersed groups connect with one another in a horizontal manner, where they all consider themselves on common ground in contrast to a vertical method that set ups a hierarchy. The Italian Diaspora of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emanated from entrepreneurial and cultural poles. Through this process, transnational communities emerge as reflections of origins with “migration expertise.” Over time, repetitive settlement re-instills pre-diaspora traditions, rituals, and values within these secondary communities, creating a mixed identity and subsequently a new iconography of foreign cultures in that space. Although diaspora migrants do not always receive benefits from the host nations, their global network helped insulate them from the economic, social, cultural, and political control of the host nation.⁵⁶

With this solitary type of cultural identity, common historical experience and shared codes collectivize “one people” with constant and continuous frames of reference.⁵⁷ For example, the socio-economical Mafia institution surmises Italianness

⁵⁶ Bruneau, “Chapter 2,” 35, 36, 39, 40, 43, 47.

⁵⁷ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 234.

from not just an American view but a global one, too. From an opposing perspective though, a cultural identity that undergoes a diaspora phase implies interference and begs the question: what have Italian Americans become? Rather than focusing on the original, old identity, this redirects the attention to a new alterable one which toils with a series of compromises, adaptations, pressured or unpressured choices, and, often, unintended consequences, suggesting that identity is fluid not grounded and that it is relative to social positioning. With this “double-nature,” migrating Italians engaged in an interpersonal complex of cultural structures like capitalism and masculinity facilitating a hybrid identity that favored female masculinity as a reputable offshoot of Italian traditionalism, which helped shape the unlikely duo of butch lesbians and the Italian Mafia.⁵⁸

In the U.S., ethnicity endures a three-phase process. Initially, immigrants extricate themselves from their ethnicity to partake in American opportunism. This comes off as temporary assimilation, except it is a tactful façade. During the second phase, they employ autonomy to reject subservient civil and political enforcements by the host country. Finally, the third part involves “the hyphenated integration of ethnic identity with national identity” wherein pride for each co-exists and neither overrides the other.⁵⁹ However, it must be acknowledged that in the evolution or “rebirth,” the fused classification, such as Italian American, still highlights a minority within the American population and only through full Americanization does a person rescind his or her ethnic denomination. Although it is disingenuous to assume that there exists one interpretation

⁵⁸ Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 236-237, 244.

⁵⁹ R. Radhakrishnan, “Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora,” in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 121.

of Italianness, it seems apparent that the Italian and Italian American are not the same ethnicity based on the polemical structure of identity. With the economic and cultural demands of American capitalism, Italians were pressed into a situation where citizens were manipulated into forgetting the past and developing a new puppeteer faction with decreased intimacy with ethnic origins, except for the traditions and stereotypes of predominant public opinion.⁶⁰

Beginning in the 1880s, “The Great Arrival” refers to the massive influx of immigrants from the economically distraught European states. Although the Italian states declared unification under one flag in 1871, the newly-formed country struggled with ongoing problems including violence, poverty, and political strife. In addition, unification triggered some anxieties about the loss of regional or local Italian cultures in midst of collectivization. Since a significant portion of the peasantry resided in rural, southern region and the island of Sicily, the area suffered severely. During that time, diseases and natural disasters, especially earthquakes, caused damages that the government could not afford to fix. As a result, these conditions pushed Italians to emigrate to the U.S.⁶¹

Due to decreases in transatlantic transportation prices and the spreading news of the American Dream, beginning in the late-1800s, blue collar workers migrated to the U.S. to earn money to send home to their families. It was typically men who were either

⁶⁰ Radhakrishnan, “Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora,” 124.

⁶¹ “Immigration and Relocation in U.S. History: The Great Arrival,” Library of Congress, accessed February 2, 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/italian/the-great-arrival/>; For an in-depth analysis with primary sources, Ken Ciongoli and Jay Parini’s book *Passage to Liberty: The Story of Italian Immigration and the Rebirth of America* brings the Italian perspective to the reader’s attention, providing documentation about the triumphs and tribulations individuals and families faced which made the path towards American citizenship and freedom harder than the nation advertised to European emigrants.

single or unaccompanied by their families who boarded the boats. Some scholars argue that because of this unattachment or detachment, the history of homosociality, and the perpetuation of gender segregation within the culture, affected their open-mindedness towards homosexuality. Regardless of their marital status, though, thirty to fifty percent of Italian people moved temporarily, *ritornati*, sending back approximately \$4 million to \$30 million depending on the number of working Italian immigrants per year. The influx of wealth notably aided in the rebuilding of their homeland's economy. From 1907 to 1911 alone, 73 out of every 100 immigrants from Italy left the U.S. within the year they arrived, nearly a 59% increase from the 1890s. In the 1920s, their entry through Ellis Island declined, likely due to the international conflict of World War I, but, by that time, Italians comprised ten percent of the foreign-born population in America.⁶²

In the aftermath of World War II, the “Melting Pot” analogy presented a duplicitous image of open-mindedness and integration, whereas Americanization actually influenced immigrants to assimilate into American consumer culture. As European immigrants sought opportunity in a prosperous, postwar economic environment, the country reaffirmed the canonical Anglo-American legacy through an overtly-emphasized conformist attitude where past ethnic identities were subsumed under the urban rubric of whiteness and sent to estrangement in suburbia. In addition, with Italy's fascist regime aligning itself with the Axis Powers throughout the conflict in Europe, those already resided as well as those who immigrated to the U.S. following the seize fire were heavily discriminated against, deemed to be spies or domestic terrorists, which inhibited the

⁶² Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 75; “Immigration and Relocation in U.S. History: The Great Arrival.”

Americanization process. Simultaneously, the domestically-imperialistic U.S. overrode racial and ethnic identities with a nationalistic denominator as ascribed by the label Italian American.⁶³

While those who were married lived with their families, the single men rented rooms in multi-tenant houses where they quickly formed intimate all-male social worlds. Nevertheless, with exceptions, neither a married nor single man could avoid the saloons, billiards clubs, and local entertainment scenes that served as sanctuaries away from mothers, wives, children, and their male obligations. Since these became common meeting places, people began to call these cohorts “sons of unrest” because they lacked an American work ethic, uncaringly embracing the stereotype.⁶⁴

As for females, Italian mothers and fathers enforced strict laws on their daughters, ensuring a watchful eye remained on them at all times. During the Progressive Era, the Carnegie Corporation published ten volumes about the practices and problems with Americanization. In *New Homes for Old*, Sophonisba Breckinridge, the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Chicago, noted the parenting shift that most newcomers consciously made. “[I]mmigrant parents, except those from southern Italy, recognize the impossibility of maintain the old rules of chaperonage and guardianship of the girls.”⁶⁵ According to one mother, if daughters and granddaughters could not be trusted in a close-knit village back home, life in a major city could not

⁶³ Richard Alba and Victor Nee, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration,” *The International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1997), doi.org/10.2307/2547416.

⁶⁴ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 76.

⁶⁵ Sophonisba Breckinridge, *New Homes for Old* (New York: Harper, 1921), 176.

justify loosening any restraints. The Italian fathers assumed the role of the enforcer, imposing physical punishment to preserve obedience.⁶⁶

Despite these protective tactics, women proceeded to migrate more than men following World War I and II. Moreover, they often chose to settle in areas where the patriarchal eye did not reach, in particular New York City, where they easily blended into the big crowds. While those with husbands and children tended to their duties in the evenings, those without familial ties worked the night shifts and partook in activities that defied their typical characters.⁶⁷

When the wars began in Europe, the U.S. shipped able-bodied men across the oceans calling upon women to serve the demands of the work force. Once they joined society and indulged in the amenities that men had enjoyed for years, females felt freed from the custody of their male counterparts who would have hated the sexually explicit behaviors of suppressed lesbians, but without men around, the fear of judgment and punishment subsided for many women. After the soldiers returned, the safety and constancy of domesticity pulled a lot of wives back into traditional practices, but the companionship heterosexual and homosexual females found during such short periods of time built up a support system for most notably women's clubs but less notably an open lesbian subculture.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Sophonisba Breckinridge, *New Homes for Old*, 177.

⁶⁷ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 26.

⁶⁸ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 38-39.

Prohibition

On December 5, 1933, the U.S. Congress under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt repealed the 18th Amendment passage of the 21st Amendment. It also granted each state the right to regulate alcohol within its borders. Thus, in 1934, the New York State Legislature approved Chapter 478 enacting an Alcoholic Beverage Control Law (ABC) and creating the State Liquor Authority (SLA) and the Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control to enforce state protocols. Still today, its duties remain to the “protection, health, welfare, and safety of the people of the state,” as evidenced through reviews, permits, inspections, and licensures.⁶⁹

When the SLA assumed full control over the execution of the ABC Law, it issued a series of documents and procedures to prevent any and all distributors from evading its jurisdiction, aimed specifically at renowned bottle clubs.

It shall be unlawful for any person, partnership or corporation operating a place for profit or pecuniary gain, with a capacity for the assemblage of twenty or more persons to permit a person or persons to come to the place of assembly for the purpose of consuming alcoholic beverages on said premises, which alcoholic beverages are either provided by the operator of the place of assembly, his agents, servants or employees, or are brought onto said premises by the person or persons assembling at such place, unless an appropriate license has first been obtained from the state liquor authority by the operator of said place of assembly.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Vincent G. Bradley and Kathy Hochul, “2020 Annual Report,” New York State Liquor Authority, accessed February 3, 2022, <https://sla.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/01/2020%20NYSLA%20Annual%20Report%2012-16%20atnoon%20editon%20-%20Sharif%20edits%20-%20licensing%20edits%201-4%20-%20SK%20-%201-6.pdf>.

⁷⁰ The Consolidated Laws of New York, Alcohol Beverage Control Law, Chapter 3-B, Article 5, Section 64-B, revised December 31, 2021, accessed February 4, 2022, <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/ABC/64-B>.

Even after Prohibition ended, those who engaged in bootlegging throughout the drought continued on with their businesses because of the high profitability and permits dumped onto their enterprises by government interference. Likewise, guests who brought their own alcoholic beverages could avoid paying inflated prices. The wordage of the Section 64-B directly attacked any sort of trafficking that undermined the power of the SLA by outlawing patrons' rights to affordable and open-access bottle clubs.

In addition, New York's ABC Law required liquor sellers to monitor the activities on their sanctioned grounds and preserve a loosely defined description of "order." As cited in the 1934 copy of Chapter 478 of the Laws of the State of New York, "no person licensed to sell alcoholic beverages shall suffer or permit any gambling on the licensed premises, or suffer or permit such premises to become disorderly."⁷¹ Without a set definition of the term "disorderly," it stretched the legal reach of the SLA, enabling the agency to intervene in the social set-up of the bar atmosphere. It manipulated the law to close any and all establishments run by owners whose permits could not be revoked for prejudicial reasons. Instead, the SLA, with assistance from the NYPD, terminated agreements with sellers on the grounds of civil chaos and destruction.

The courts backed the bureaucratic team over the city's citizens by not allowing those arrested on the bases of "disorderly conduct" to defend themselves in front of their fellow constituents. "The judge or assistant judge shall have power to hear, try and

⁷¹ Chapter 478, Article 8 §106, subcategory 6, in *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the One Hundred and Fifty-Seventh Session of the Legislature Begun January Third and Ended and April Twenty-Seventh 1934 at the City of Albany Also Laws of the Extraordinary Session, 1934 and Other Matters Required By Law to be Published with the Sessions Laws Volume I* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, State Printers, 1934), 1112.

determine summarily and without a jury all charges for being disorderly persons.”⁷² This granted the SLA and the NYPD final say on all matters they deemed fell under the term’s extensive umbrella. By removing a portion of the checks and balances system between the executive and judicial branches of New York, the two agencies became free to control the sale and distribution of alcohol under their own, unregulated rules and for their own benefit.

Due to their demographics, the governments of the state of New York and the State of California tended to mimic each other; therefore, the court cases on the West Coast regarding the meaning of “disorderly” influenced the East Coast’s stance on the matter. In *Stoumen v. Reilly* and *Vallerga v. Department Alcoholic Beverage Control*, the California Supreme Court made major decisions on the wording of ABC mandates. In both instances, the bars served homosexual patrons who were considered harmful to public morals. Since the two states are well-known for their prominent queer population, their legal actions significantly affected the rest of the nation’s view on the activities and behaviors of the LGBTQ+ community.

On August 28, 1951, the California Supreme Court ruled that the SLA could not inhibit the use or authorization of a bar’s liquor license based solely on an establishment’s association with the queer community, employing bias in deeming it disorderly. According to the majority’s opinion written by C.J. Gibson, homosexuality does not signify a specific conduct. The Black Cat, in San Francisco, served as a highly

⁷² Chapter 369, Article 8 § 57, subcategory i, in *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the One Hundred and Fifty-Seventh Session of the Legislature Begun January Third and Ended and April Twenty-Seventh 1934 at the City of Albany Also Laws of the Extraordinary Session, 1934 and Other Matters Required By Law to be Published with the Sessions Laws Volume I* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, State Printers, 1934), 935.

advertised “hangout” location for homosexuals, which the respondents claimed promoted prostitution and other illegal activities in relation to the patrons. They suggested that habitual equated to harmful even though the evidence proved that the conditions were purely social and crimeless. The California judges stated that “good cause” in the form of “something more” than a frequent, homosexual attendance must be proven to suspend or revoke a person’s liquor license. However, then the second phrase became the angle from which people attacked the law.⁷³

In 1959, the California Supreme Court readdressed and redefined “something more” to mean any displays of sexual urges or desires which may legally be done in the privacy of one’s home but illegally as indecency in the eyes of the public. With this clarification, they upheld the “good cause” aspect, but they decided that sufficient evidence could not be based upon arbitrary or biased thoughts on the morality of public welfare. Nevertheless, as cited in the conclusions of each docket, the department still retained its authority to institute disciplinary actions, stopping alcohol sellers and distributors they deemed “out of line.” Even short suspensions could ruin owners’ reputations and profit margins resulting in foreclosure. When these cases unfolded, the state of New York watched and remained silent on the discussion of “disorderly,” as they ultimately saw that the SLA and the NYPD would resume their work definitively using their original methods of operation. For the Italian Mafia and butch lesbians, this meant

⁷³ *Stoumen v. Reilly*, 37 Cal.2d 713, SCOCAL (August 28, 1951), accessed February 5, 2022, <https://scocal.stanford.edu/opinion/stoumen-v-reilly-29515>.

they had to establish a secondary partnership that allotted them the protection to operate their business without interference.⁷⁴

The Village

Beginning in the sixteenth century, the neighborhood bordered by 14th Street to the north, Broadway to the east, Houston Street to the south, and the Hudson River to the west famously known as Greenwich Village became a safe haven for many individuals facing discrimination and a place where defiance was celebrated. The Anglicized word Greenwich comes from Groenwijck which is Dutch for “Green District,” an area where the general public tolerates prostitution. Although some citizens credit resident Sir Captain Peter Warren, a distinguished Royal Navy officer who served from 1716 until his sudden death in 1752, with the name as it matched one of his other estates, the city’s first record of Greenwich appears on March 28, 1713.⁷⁵

In the early 1800s, the English set their goals on acquiring the Dutch settlement which continued to grow as a market center due to its accessible and centralized location. During this time, the neighborhood seemed to be shielded from epidemics, especially yellow fever, which terrorized the rest of New York.⁷⁶ The neighborhood turned into an exclusive resort for those who could afford sanitation luxuries. Eventually, the success

⁷⁴ *Vallerga v. Department Alcoholic Beverage Control*, 53 Cal. 2d 313, 347 P.2d 909, 1 Cal. Rptr. 494, SCOCAL (December 23, 1959), accessed February 5, 2022, <https://scocal.stanford.edu/opinion/vallerga-v-dept-alcoholic-bev-control-29822>.

⁷⁵ Anna Alice Chapin, *Greenwich Village* (New York: Dood, Mead and Company, 1920), 35-36; Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909*, v. 6 (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1915-1928), 159.

⁷⁶ It is possible that Dutch trading networks helped in the immunization against yellow fever, as opposed to stationary enclaves which were suddenly inundated with multiple, unfamiliar infectious diseases.

brought insurance agencies, printing services, newspapers, post offices, and banks to the area creating an independent suburbia. Meanwhile, the northside and southside turned into modest offshoots. Built in 1796, Upper Greenwich welcomed the New York State Prison as a sort of tourist attraction, with one owner going as far as to advertise his hotel based on its proximity to the penitentiary. For the next one hundred years, the entire neighborhood continued to grow in sizeable ways because of its robust and stable economy.⁷⁷

By the early 1900s, Greenwich Village had created a strong bohemian community backed by the rebellious countercultures and major social movements including socialism, feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, Marxism, Freudianism, and avant-garde art. In 1912, it acquired a simpler name, *the Village*, signifying a mythological quality to the self-indulgent society within. As an intersection of culture and politics, it actively shaped the iconography of American cultural history. Until the 1960s, when a combination of Civil Rights and anti-war activism disassembled the collective unit, this specific grouping of people challenged the hegemonic idea of a “neighborhood” bounded by one ethnicity or religion. Instead, it eliminated the concept of barriers, geographic or cultural, to erect a testing ground for the imagination of the American Dream, and in theory, creating a newfound version of hegemony.⁷⁸

Although the Village supported the women’s suffrage movement in the early-twentieth century, the majority of the females in the community rejected feminism for its

⁷⁷ Chapin, *Greenwich Village*, 45, 47, 51-52.

⁷⁸ Ross Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village: The American Bohemia, 1910-1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), ix-x, xvi.

narrow-minded ideologies and goals. They understood the intricate network that their neighborhood survived and thrived within, so the unique reformers set their sights on a cultural change rather than a legislative one. However, the women soon realized that the neighborhood still carried remnants of a traditional, male-oriented setup, meaning the area was not completely separated from the male-defined problems that affected the rest of New York and the U.S. While women could confront bodily-exclusive issues such as birth control and abortion, men controlled all technical, mechanical, and fiscal concerns. It is important to note that the Village supported a socially-progressive agenda. However, this was still a pre-Nineteenth Amendment era. By the time of World War II and especially into early postwar years, women, primarily drag kings and butch lesbians, who did not embrace the same anti-binary sentiment towards domesticity, turned away from the feminist brigade in favor of female masculinity, recognizing the gendered structure of the times.⁷⁹

The “Green Light” Means Go

Despite its social stratification, the diversified neighborhood welcomed any and all groups who felt persecuted in the “Big City” to bring their talents and expertise to a place where climbing the ladder was not an impossible task. Although the radicals and the devotees still connected with *the Village* name, Italian immigrants used the term the “Ninth Ward,” likely in reference to a sister division of New Orleans, Louisiana where refugees from Italy and Germany sought low-cost living arrangements. With its twisty streets, Old World ornamentation, and cheap housing options, it appealed to men and

⁷⁹ June Sochen, *The New Woman: Feminism in Greenwich Village, 1910-1920* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 5, 24-25.

women who wished to escape conventional family lifestyles but needed to remain within a budget. Also, the eccentric and non-conforming culture added an extra confidence piece to homosexuals who needed a safe space to express or discover themselves.⁸⁰

During the 1920s, Greenwich and Harlem developed lesbian enclaves geared especially towards single women. Within these tightly knit groups, a bond of trust and a web of commercial services appeared, causing them rarely to seek outside assistance. If they wanted to leave their enclaves for the day or night, the women met at bars or speakeasies owned by other lesbians where their sisters performed. Although gay men were more publicly visible, their female counterparts chose to keep to themselves, avoiding any flamboyant actions possibly outing them to heterosexuals. The white lesbians of Greenwich Village and the black lesbians of Harlem remained perfectly content with performing heterosexual lifestyles, not drawing attention to their sexuality.⁸¹

In *L Is for Lion: An Italian Bronx Butch Freedom Memoir*, readers can follow the life of Annie Rachele Lanzillotto, presently a poet and performance artist who grew up as a tomboy in 1960s Bronx. She reflects on her sexuality and gender in relation to the customs of her traditional Italian family. On several occasions, Lanzillotto comments on her father's ability to fade into silence, almost non-existence; whereas her mother vocalizes her being at all times. One day, dad breaks the back of his chair and begins to yell profanities, but mom proactively turns the faucet water on high to drown out the cussing. Meanwhile, the mother proceeds to detail, over the sounds in the background, all

⁸⁰ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 228-229.

⁸¹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 136.

her chores in progress. As an observant daughter, she notices that men on the streets, similar to her father at home, tend to convey messages with minimal communication, words or emotions. However, women, who share the same characteristics as her mother, feel the need to verbalize themselves more in public to the point of over-clarification. During these instances, men slip into the background without a fight or social pressure. She envies this power.⁸²

During a 2021 interview, Frank DiMatteo, a former mafia member turned memoir author, reflected on his experiences running his territory on Presidents Street, including the type of demeanor used to set forth a power dynamic. He recalled that, at only thirteen-years-old, he stood at six feet tall with a solid build. If his height and stature were not enough, an escort would by-pass the bouncers and accompany underage Frank into 21+ bars and nightclubs. Although no one ever told him, he knew he had to act mature and dress with class. As long as he fell in line, he faded into the background, similar to the father of Lanzillotto. In both cases, the Italian man becomes aware of his role and understands that his invisibility within the family, the Mafia, and other cultural institutions benefits him in the end.⁸³

Since many of the Village bachelors came from the working class, the subculture that appeared incorporated some core values, but the blatant disregard for fulfilling family obligations symbolized a new form of manliness which did not care about social

⁸² Annie Rachele Lanzillotto, *L Is for Lion: An Italian Bronx Butch Freedom Memoir* (New York: The State University of New York, Excelsior Editions, 2013), 205.

⁸³ Vlad Lyubovny, "Frank DiMatteo on Mafia Association, Crazy Joe Gallo, 'Irishman' being Bullsh** (Full Interview)," VladTV, January 19, 2021, YouTube, accessed February 26, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3lyTb6JGsQ>.

respectability. They stood indifferent on the subject of marriage, recognizing the benefits in addition to the subsequent constraints. As early as World War I, when some men failed to respond to their nationalist obligations, feminists began blaming bachelors for society's moral degradation, specifically targeting establishments that sponsored entertainment for men in order to subdue the male, sexual prerogative. The men despised the sanctimonious brigade whose objectives overturned binary-gender power. When women started to infiltrate the public domain, their presence threatened the essence of middle-class manhood.⁸⁴

With fragments of Prohibition, immigration, gay activism, and feminism intertwined, Greenwich Village proved to be the perfect grounds for opportunity. While Italian immigrants sought profitable investments to send monetary care packages home to their partners, drag kings and butch lesbians concerned themselves with securing a stable, normal livelihood devoid of attention. Due to the SLA's strict and over-reaching regulations, the realm of liquor sales and distribution seemed to be ideal for both parties. With a strong Mafia presence in the neighborhood, a trustworthy and police-protected network for funneling money already existed, and the Italians hired women who showed a strong adherence towards female masculinity, a respectable patriarchal spinoff. Thus, a dynamic duo surfaced excluding femmes and gay men who were caught up in the fight for expressionism and rights rather than playing to the power advantages of the times.

⁸⁴ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 78-79, 111-112.

CHAPTER THREE: THE MAFIA'S BEST FRIEND "BUTCH"

On first glance, the ideological basis and historiographical background of Italians and the Italian Mafia do not seem to favor any sort of mutually-beneficial alliance, especially one involving women. However, the struggles of most American immigrants forced them to use their resourcefulness and ignore any past misgivings they had about working with women. Luckily, Italians did not have to completely abandon their conventional notions of sexuality because drag kings and butch lesbians self-identified with heteronormative masculine characters through a blended form of sexuality called female masculinity. Since this alternate form of masculinity upheld the same traditional principles of toughness, compliance, and loyalty, the Italian Mafia considered their alliance with the butches to be grounded upon not only money but character, too.

With the coincidence of the feminist movement in Greenwich Village, women exhibiting unruly features of manliness through male impersonation and butch/femme relationships appeared less threatening than the unfettered activism of their straight sisters and gay male counterparts who employed civil disobedience on the streets of New York City. Since the earliest known civilizations, cross-dressers have been involved in festivals, rituals, and other cultural events. Historically though, male cross-dressers undergo immense scrutiny for relinquishing their status in favor of a lower one and for undertaking the character for erotic and sexual fantasies. On the other hand though, female cross-dressers assume the persona of a man to partake in behaviors and pursuits

permitted only to men. They consciously recognized the gendered structure of society and focused on obtaining power by adhering to the patriarchal system.⁸⁵

Joan of Arc, a heroine of France and a Catholic Saint, remains arguably the most famous female cross dresser throughout world history. During the Hundred Years' War, she served as a relief army leader against the English, securing a crucial victory at the Siege of Orléans (October 12, 1428 – May 8, 1429). After returning home, King Henry VI sent Anglo-Burgundian forces to capture Joan and bring her back to England to be tried in court. They charged her with heresy and witchcraft, employing her male impersonation as evidence of religious, governmental, and social infractions. In 1431, the commanders found her guilty, condemned her, and burned her at the stake. Although the military only had men's clothing to offer and the conservative design of the armor safeguarded her virginity, the English viewed transvestism as a severe transgression against male authority and honor.⁸⁶

By the early-twentieth century, men realized that flamboyant, gay men – or so-called fairies – posed a bigger threat to middle-class men's American manhood campaign than their female counterparts. Due to the growing concern of feminization, youth social groups such as the Knights of King Arthur, the Sons of Daniel Boone, and the Boy Scouts of America assembled to reinstill manly wisdom and knowledge into future generations.⁸⁷ As one of the movement's biggest proponents, President Theodore

⁸⁵ Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2000), 340; Lisa Underwood, *The Drag Queen Anthology: The Absolutely Fabulous but Flawlessly Customary World of Female Impersonators* (Abingdon-on-Thames, United Kingdom: Taylor and Francis Group, 2004), 4.

⁸⁶ Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1999), 17, 157.

⁸⁷ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 113.

Roosevelt highly encouraged boys to take on “strenuous lifestyles” which built up their muscularity countering medical issues or other perceived weaknesses that could make American men seem to be easy targets for foreign attacks.⁸⁸ Indeed, the lifestyle proposed participation in bodybuilding, prizefighting, and other rough sports to increase their physical strength. While these macho men concentrated on creating a perfect persona and physique, fairies with their extreme effeminacy undermined their efforts and tried to equalize the genders through three distinct means. First, since they could so easily assume a female character, it destroyed the idea that there are clear, unbreachable divisions between men and women. Their outrageous behaviors and attires drew attention to the artificiality of bodybuilders, mocking their efforts to masculinize themselves. Finally, their unabashed interest in other men raised concerns about sexual tensions within the realm of male sociality. Thus, the celebration of the body insinuated a sort of sexual intimacy within the brotherhood. Despite attempts to separate the she-man from the middle-class man, the line disappeared, and the term “fairy” turned into a derogatory name for this entire male social category.⁸⁹

Since their culture requires men to maintain a self-care and cleanliness routine to remain presentable at all times, Italian men often fell into the same feminine category as fairies. In 1922, the NYPD arrested a seventeen-year-old boy from Italy and his friend in Prospect Park. The detective on scene demanded that the two remove their hats immediately. Once he noticed their tweezed eyebrows, he deemed them to be fairies who had tried to blatantly trick the officer with the ball caps on top of their heads. Although

⁸⁸ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 113.

⁸⁹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 113-116.

round faces, soft, thin fingers, clean-cut hair lines, and full lips denoted half of the Italian-male population, society determined these features to be unique to fairies, yet another reason that men of that ethnic origin despised gay men and the assumptions that came along with their identities.⁹⁰

By the same heteronormative thinking that pits fairies against middle-class men, lesbians adopted a traditional gender style into their relationships, which is considered to be a butch/femme dynamic. While the home might not contain a man and a woman, this preserves the patriarchal and matriarchal roles for husbands/fathers and wives/mothers even if one component is missing. Also, one presumes that these positionings correspond with their employment and sociality in public settings as well.⁹¹

While their tendency to exhibit masculine traits results in some social benefits and increased opportunities accessible otherwise only to males, butch lesbians could not enjoy those full benefits because of their assigned gender; nevertheless, they must endure all the negative consequences for choosing to identify themselves within the contexts of male roles. If a woman displays strong-man muscularity, she can apply for more strenuous, physical labor jobs than her femme partner. Whether or not the butch's blue collar coworkers accept her hire, she will most likely be welcomed more quickly and undergo less sexual harassment than a lesbian who still retains her womanly, sexual appeal. In male-dominated environments, butches gained a sense of identity by engaging with men as though their sexual orientation did not matter or at least not to the extent it

⁹⁰ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 54.

⁹¹ Heidi M. Levitt and Katherine R. Heistand, "A Quest for Authenticity: Contemporary Butch Gender," *Sex Roles* 50, no. 9/10 (May 2004): 605.

did within a sexually divided structure such as the traditional home. However, this sort of ascendent nature required the women to inherently assume the responsibilities of a protector. Thus, they would take on a demeanor that could easily shift from offensive to defensive as needed. Rather than a purely male duty upheld through brotherhood, *machismo* men expected butch women to ensure the safety of their femme partners in the same way they did with their mothers, wives, and daughters and build a community that bonded over female masculinity. Due to social confusion surrounding the butch identity, butch lesbians created an androgynous aesthetic that never quite resonated with one sex more than the other one. As a result, in the grand scheme of gender and sexual politics, these types of women split from the feminist movement and established a feminist-lesbian movement that better aligned with their positioning within national politics around the mid-1940s, between the First and Second Waves of Feminism. Since their female masculinity granted them access to better treatment and made for a distorted form of discrimination, butch lesbians did not agree with all fundamental feminists' demands.⁹²

However, being butch did not just constitute a somatic look or actions. It meant that women assumed a mental and emotional mindset that mimicked that of their male counterparts. Like men, their strong appearance (muscles, stoicism, dark-colored clothing, stiff body language, non-verbal communication, tall posture) concealed any internal pain, afraid that any signs would show weakness and damage their image as a man. If forced to address their psychological issues, the time and effort spent subduing

⁹² Levitt and Heistand, "A Quest for Authenticity," 606.

their problems caused them to struggle even more in expressing themselves. Hurt became so subliminal that the thought of bringing matters to the surface for fixing triggered an even worse discomfort. However, as women, their intuitiveness with their feelings could not be overridden, and butch lesbians retained a soft, sensitive side as a reminder of their womanhood.⁹³

Despite the Italians' dislike for fairies that helped develop a bond between *machismo* men and butches, another reason for the Mafia opting into a partnership stems from the *mammismo* figure. Although the stereotype appears in comic representations and is frequently used in jokes throughout Italy and the rest of the world, scholars study her with intense scrutiny. In Italian culture, co-dependent relationships between *mammismos* and *mammoni*, sons, appear to be obsessive, even neurotic. According to social historians, some aspects of stereotypes come from reasonable and consistent evidence, as each of these two Italian typecasts have repeatedly proven. As common with most mothers, the *mammismo* has an innate nurturing side and takes a lot of pride in raising her children, especially her son(s).⁹⁴

For men, she symbolizes the model woman, one who gives herself over fully, thus creating an extreme emotional dependency on her son and engendering a similar feeling of reliance by him on his mother. Over time, some men invoked the *mammismos* to blame women for the economic and social problems that happened periodically throughout Italy. Despite negative criticism, the *mammismo/mammoni* relationship

⁹³ Levitt and Heistand, "A Quest for Authenticity," 613-614.

⁹⁴ Daniela Bini, *Portrait of the Artist and His Mother in Twentieth-Century Italian Culture* (Teaneck, New Jersey: The Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2020), 3.

remained, continuing to affect men's limited civic education, immaturity levels, and complete disregard for familial and political responsibilities. Some sociologists even suggest the worse health of Italian men in comparison to women could be related to intensive care and protection that mothers offer but wives fail to provide. As a result, a narcissistic mother could influence, even control, her son's beliefs and ideologies to satisfy her emotional needs. However, a *mammismo* does not show weakness, as she is highly respected and feared amongst the Italian population. The seriousness with which she performs her matriarchal duties creates a sense of unmatched superiority and pride. She commits to her role, intentionally embracing a hardened character.⁹⁵

Although most lesbians who were involved in the bar scene throughout New York City in the mid-twentieth century have passed on, some memories and pictures survived through remaining former performers, such as Malvina Schwartz (also known as [aka] Buddy "Bubbles" Kent), and close friends or family members, including Lisa Davis. While social organizations, including the Mattachine Society, Inc. of New York and the Homophile Youth Movement, and biographical documentaries such as *P.S. Burn This Letter Please* chronicle the historical advent of the Stonewall Riots from the gay men's point of view, the stories of drag kings and butch lesbians have largely disappeared from remembered history, as their cooperation with dictators of sexual culture, the Italian Mafia and the NYPD, nullified their relationship to their queer brethren who for the longest time controlled the homosexual narrative. In general, there continues to be a somewhat limited spotlight on women's activism and history. Regardless, the butches who received benefits (stable work, protection, a sense of community) from the Italian

⁹⁵ Bini, *Portrait of the Artist and His Mother*, 3-4.

Mafia and the NYPD, both entities considered to be enemies of gay men, alienated themselves from the traditional feminist and gay rights movement that sought equality in an unfair environment. Instead, the butches focused more on self-indulgence rather than joining social fights that did not reflect their identity.

At the time that this paper was written, there appeared to be only two well-documented and verified sources that detail the lives of these women working in Greenwich Village for the Italian Mafia, with only one being from a male impersonator. In 1983, Joan Nestle, the co-founder of Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA), interviewed Malvina Schwartz (aka Buddy “Bubbles” Kent) about her time as a legendary drag king in New York City from the 1940s to the 1960s.⁹⁶ Born around 1920, she would have been in her early sixties when the interview was recorded on the original cassette tape.⁹⁷

Born in Manhattan, Malvina’s family moved around a lot because her father refused to work. When she was in high school, she visited the Village bars but never drank. As a star athlete and bright student, she remained innocent, even though she knew that her sexuality would imply otherwise. Due to the lively backdrop of the 1930s and 1940s from various social events and catastrophes, she stated that neighborhood served as

⁹⁶ After conversing with Désirée Yael Vester, a current archivist, caretaker, and librarian at the LHA, she confirmed that Hugh Ryan’s transcript on the Hazlitt website is accurate and factual. Lisa Davis, a Greenwich Village historian and colleague of Nestle, gifted Ryan a CD copy of the tape recording, presumably keeping ahold of the original cassette herself. Despite mentions throughout the interview about multiple recordings, Ryan and the LHA concluded that either Ryan’s CD contains a compilation of several discussions between Nestle and Kent or, a second tape disappeared before making it to the LHA because the only tape on site holds less content than the one is Ryan’s possession. Nevertheless, on this CD, Schwartz talks about her life in the utmost detail that which is currently accessible to historians, as she has since passed away with no documented death date or traceable evidence of her existence.

⁹⁷ Hugh Ryan, “The Three Lives of Malvina Schwartz: Butches, Femmes, and Mobsters: Inside the world of America’s early drag superstars,” Hazlitt, October 12, 2016, accessed February 11, 2022, <https://hazlitt.net/longreads/three-lives-malvina-schwartz>.

a “melting pot” and essentially felt that it was “her territory,” likely due to the freedom she felt under the protection of the Italian Mafia. She graduated from high school at only sixteen years old; however, she knew that her family could not afford to send her to college, making getting a job the next step in life for her.⁹⁸

Since employers would not hire Jews or homosexuals, she changed her name from Malvina Schwartz, a distinct Jewish name, to a more congenial one, Buddy Kent, grew her hair out, dressed herself more like a “girl,” and carried around a small cross. Eventually, she took on the nickname “Bubbles.” After she turned eighteen, she applied for a job working as a bartender at a small nightclub called Ernie’s near Jackson Square in Greenwich Village. Although she chose to keep her invented name, the club became the first place where Buddy could express her sexuality. She cut her hair short again and wore a buttoned-up shirt, a vest, a tie, and black pants. One day, the SLA came into the nightclub and told the owner Ernie that she did not seem old enough to serve alcohol. Since he had connections with the SLA men, Ernie slipped them some money and informed Buddy that from then on she could only serve until midnight. “Because now my cover was blown: I was a girl.”⁹⁹

From then on, Buddy mingled with customers for the remainder of her shift. After she danced and drank with them, men, women, or a couple, she received tips. Seeing her success, the owner raised Buddy’s salary as well. Suddenly, one night, the nightclub

⁹⁸ Malvina Schwartz (Buddy “Bubbles” Kent), interview by Joan Nestle, January 27, 1983, transcript, Hugh Ryan Personal Collection, accessed February 11, 2022, <https://hazlitt.net/longreads/three-lives-malvina-schwartz>.

⁹⁹ Malvina Schwartz interview.

could not fill its lineup, and she offered to get up on stage and tap dance. Since the crowd seemed to enjoy Buddy's performance, the entertainment managers helped her assemble a real act, becoming one of the audiences' favorite performers. When she turned twenty-one, the ambitious and talented entertainer discovered that the famous 181 Club was hiring, and she jumped at the opportunity, understanding what it would mean for her career, livelihood, and safety as a lesbian in New York City in the 1940s.¹⁰⁰

In Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer's scandalous 1951 expose titled *New York: Confidential!*, the two deemed the 181 Club to be the "most notorious" lesbian bar in the urban metropolis. Stephen Franse, associate of the Genovese crime family and Charles "Lucky" Luciano as well as the frontman for the Italian Mafia-owned Club 82, owned and operated the gay-friendly cabaret club beneath the Yiddish Arts Theatre at the intersection of 2nd and 12th Street. Upon entry into the 181 Club, the journalists discovered that cops seemed "comparatively lax about enforcing the law[(s)] against female entertainers or hostesses."¹⁰¹ During that time, citizens could not dress in drag or any sort of clothing considered common for the opposite sex. However, the men found that "by means of broad burlesque, the regulation [was] skirted. The swish in wig and dress [was] okay if the trousers [hung] down under the gown."¹⁰² Lait and Mortimer also stated that until the late-1930s, many nightclubs in Midtown Manhattan appealed to the queer crowd, but once the cops began to crack down on drinking and "disorderly

¹⁰⁰ Malvina Schwartz interview.

¹⁰¹ Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer, *New York: Confidential!*, 6th ed. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1951), 75.

¹⁰² Lait and Mortimer, *New York: Confidential!*, 74. *Swish* is a derogatory word referring to an effeminate gay man.

conduct,” the community escaped to Greenwich Village. Since the NYPD realized they could not rid the city of homosexuals, they opted into the onsets of segregated geography, allowing them to mingle without police interference so long as they agreed not to bother other neighborhoods and abide by the law. For some years, the 181 Club adhered to these terms.¹⁰³

According to Buddy, the 181 Club employed only attractive young lesbians to sing, dance, waitress and/or bartend, but if an individual fit the advertising call, she could make a lot of money. For the Italian Mafia, women who exhibited butch demeanors such as Buddy could serve in multiple capacities throughout the venue, as their female masculinity allowed them to seamlessly blend into the underground operations. When Buddy worked as a chorus boy and a waiter, she and her co-workers “were all making money and buying cars and really living it up.”¹⁰⁴ Eventually, she got herself a regular act where she wore a tailcoat and a top hat impersonating Fred Astaire. She incorporated dance steps from musicals she saw on Broadway as well as from classes she took from Pearl Primus, a famous American dancer and choreographer who had just opened her first dance school uptown. During an interview with *Xtra! West*, a gay-themed newspaper, published by Pink Triangle Press in Vancouver, British Columbia, Buddy repeatedly brought up the big money she made working at the 181 Club on and off stage. After good Saturday and Sunday nights, she could go home with around \$100 in tips, which is equivalent to a little over \$2,000 in the inflated economy of 2022. Once the women had their earnings in hand, they would spend it, rarely allocating any amount to savings.

¹⁰³ Lait and Mortimer, *New York: Confidential!*, 75.

¹⁰⁴ Malvina Schwartz interview.

Since the drag kings has a unique appeal to their heterosexual clientele, the Italian Mafia gave drag kings work in exchange for increased commissions. Despite the high cover fees and the over-priced, water-downed drinks, the 181 Club constantly had a line up and down the street with people waiting to attend the 10:30 p.m., 12:30 a.m., or 2:30 a.m. show. However, this all ended in 1951 when the SLA terminated the 181 Club's liquor license. When undercover officers entered the nightclub, they reported that the female entertainers wore men's clothing and cut their hair short. If they did not dance indecently on stage, the women worked as tuxedo-dressed waiters serving drinks after the cut-off time and to already drunk, incoherent customers. The officers claimed that the waiters spent more time mingling for tips rather than tending to their jobs. On that night, the Mafia bosses with ties to the 181 Club lost a \$500,000 annually-grossing business.¹⁰⁵

Despite occasional setbacks, the butches always managed to found a way, if they so chose, to reenter the entertainment business through other successful Mafia venues. After a good run at the 181 Club, Buddy joined Kicky Hall and his Review, a traveling drag show, which complemented her career aspirations as an entertainer more. After touring in Atlantic City for three months, they returned to New York City with a series of performances at the Moroccan Village where the setup was extremely professional. Unlike most bars, the bouncers charged a cover and a minimum, which ultimately made more money for all of the nightclub's employees.

¹⁰⁵ Lisa E. Davis, "Back in Buddy's Day: Drag's original lesbians reflect on their heyday," *Xtra* (Vancouver, British Columbia), February 28, 2006; "Which-Sex-Is-Which Club Loses License," *Daily News* (New York City, NY), April 28, 1951.

Within these businesses, the butches would become occasionally trapped within a sort of competition with each other over commissions and tips, exemplifying a ever-present rivalry that exists within masculinity and now female masculinity as well. Blackie Dennis, a female crooner who originally worked at the Moroccan Village, did not appreciate other male impersonators, especially traveling companies, invading her territory. However, after setting aside her ego, she realized that their shows increased her monetary intake and that there was more than enough in circulation. Once Blackie Dennis met a high-society woman with a significant family trust fund, she fled to Florida with her lover where she enjoyed the finer things in life. Arguably similar to some of her fellow female entertainers, she cared about show business as long as it remained the easiest and safest source of money.¹⁰⁶

Despite the Italian Mafia's reputation as an organization not to be messed with, their establishments were still subject to rare burglaries and muggings. One early morning at the Moroccan Village, a group of armed robbers entered the nightclub and held everyone hostage. While Blackie Dennis was singing, one of the men jumped on stage and drew a gun on the guests demanding they hand over all of their jewelry and money. At the same time, some cops who were in the audience reached for their weapons and a shootout began. Unfortunately, the incident wounded five: two entertainers, one guest, a detective, and one of the thieves. After the traumatic event, the wrecked Moroccan Village closed, and the women moved on again.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Malvina Schwartz interview; Davis, "Back in Buddy's Day."

¹⁰⁷ "Cops, Thugs Shoot It Out In Night Club, Wound 5," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY) February 26, 1950.

Once the butches either became fed up with the constant turnover or believed their prime time on stage had passed, they moved onto bigger, more managerial jobs. After stripping as a man for a few years at a straight nightclub called Jimmy Kelly's on Sullivan Street, Buddy saved enough money to partner with Kicky Hall and Jackie Howe, another gay nightlife manager, to purchase the Page Three, an empty space with great potential. While the trio enjoyed the thrills and made good money for several years, the onset of television, disco, and radical feminism forced them to close the doors to Page Three in the 1960s. During that decade, the sexual revolution really propagated the notion that females needed to fight against any and all forms of heteronormativity; therefore, venues where drag kings and butch waiters projected themselves as men rather than masculine females seemed to threaten the liberation of womanhood. Eventually, Buddy got a job as a medical technician at Saint Vincent's Hospital where her only regret in life was not going to college. She said she was too wrapped up in the extravagant lifestyle of working with the well-paying Italian Mafia.¹⁰⁸ Since this was the first space where Buddy's identity was not only accepted but praised, the poor, Jewish lesbian became

¹⁰⁸ Malvina Schwartz interview.

captivated by a partnership with men who embodied “perfect” masculinity, the heteronormative image they were chasing.¹⁰⁹

Although male impersonators dramatized the masculine female character with their manly appearances and attires, off stage these women assumed male roles and demeanors in their social dealings. As the man in the relationship, they defended the femmes, becoming vulnerable to ridicule if they failed or showed weakness. Comparable to the customs of straight couples, the “girl” never carried anything, the “man” always paid the bill, and he also assumed the lead when dancing. In addition, the femme would not drive, but if she did, the femme would stop on a side street where no one could see them to save the butch’s self-image. The practices purposefully ensured that the masculine person in a relationship always upheld the traditional tenets of manliness, whether or not the individual was male or female.

During the early 1900s, the “cult of muscularity” formed to combat the onsets of a blurred gender line that emerged from intimate non-heterosexual bonds. By exhibiting strength, emotional, mental, or physical, men asserted their superiority all in an attempt to

¹⁰⁹ When Joan Nestle reminisced about her interview with Buddy, in a very adamant tone she said that the entertainer’s “life wasn’t exotic. It was *real*. She was a working woman. She had talents and she wanted to use them to pay her rent, help her girlfriends. The real importance [of that interview] was how it showed the everyday nature of making a life as a different kind of woman” (Schwartz Interview). For years working with the LHA, Nestle struggled to convince onlookers that these were women’s lives, not simply roles, which the Italian Mafia supported with livable wages and protection from homophobic attacks by the NYPD. Although the Italian Mafia spotlighted the butch character in various capacities and performances at the nightclubs, the women were simply displaying their everyday identities, still maintaining the same attitudes and approaches towards when they went home after work or left the entertainment business entirely. She wanted to show that women from the lesbian bars in the 1950s were not concerned with heteronormativity. Instead, they openly displayed their queer identity. However, for the archivist to substantiate the human underneath the makeup and heavy clothing, she needed to include evidence of how the Mafia favored butch lesbian acted in normal, more relatable settings. Despite the archivists and historians who were fascinated with Buddy, no obituary, under any of her names, exists. Like her friends from the bar, the documentation of their lives remains hidden and incomplete.

avoid association with term “boy” which was equivalent to being called a “sissy” or “pussyfoot,” striking at their potency. Similarly, women who identified themselves as the man in the relationship wanted to showcase their aptitude and squander any signs of female vulnerability. Within the home, the femme tended to the chores and cooking. Even if the butch came from a big Italian family and made better food, the femme would serve the food and accept the compliment as her other half attended to the guests drink requests. As Nestle intended to show, the women who self-identified with the male figure within lesbian relationships committed themselves to upholding masculine customs, duties which were especially respected in Italian cultural dynamics.¹¹⁰

Since the butches committed themselves to the Italian Mafia and their jobs, often times, they would ignore other parts of their lives causing them to crumble. According to Buddy, it seemed to her that butches dedicated so much attention to satisfying others that they never felt fulfilled in life. While these women experienced short and long relationships in the same way as heterosexual couples, “the dykes many times weren’t sexually fulfilled...There were some dykes in the Thirties who were using dildos, but that was very rare. But the ones who were had those two-sided ones, so evidently they were getting their satisfaction!”¹¹¹ When there seemed to be a genuine care and concern for sexual pleasure, the relationships appeared to have lasted longer. Nevertheless, the monotonous aspect of marriage countered by the fear of being alone trapped a lot of lesbians in a cycle of complacency.

¹¹⁰ Malvina Schwartz interview; Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 114.

¹¹¹ Malvina Schwartz interview.

While femmes could blend in with heterosexual females, the butches possessed mannish physical appearances, such as short hair and pant suits, which made it difficult for them to hide their sexuality and inherently pushing them into sexually-complicated scenarios. Since most employers refused to hire homosexuals, it limited masculine females to factory work where they were deemed “the token freak of the company.” On the streets, women would endure catcalls, but for the butches, it triggered even more irritation because it completely undermined their masculine ego. In addition, if femmes had to step in to calm them down and explain the mismatch in physical power, it even further challenge the butches ability control their partner or the situation. As is argued by Buddy in her interview, “we didn’t have what you have, consciousness raising groups. You had to work out your own problems or you became a neurotic who fell by the wayside. A lot of gays wound up psychotics, alcoholics, or junkies, because they couldn’t cope.”¹¹² When the butches worked as male impersonators in the bars, no one contested their version of masculinity because it was seen as simply an act. However, society still operated through heteronormative structures, so the citizens of New York could not see the women outside of their traditional feminine characters, and especially not demonstrating themselves in masculine roles.

Since most of Buddy’s fellow entertainers never got the opportunity to share their experiences before they passed away, this interview survives as a unique and rare biographical piece. Fortunately, Nestle’s acolyte Lisa E. Davis befriended a number of butches who worked at the nightclubs in Greenwich Village and her evidence attests to

¹¹² Malvina Schwartz interview.

the same sort of environment and treatment that Buddy details which helps resolves critiques of extrapolation.¹¹³ In part through her biographies of these butch lesbians, people can see that as waiters and performers these women intermingled with the heterosexual clientele, a business procedure that the Italian was too impersonable and the drag queens overly-personable to do themselves.

Born and raised in Georgia, the comparative litterateur used her connections to secure a job at Stony Brook University and escape to New York City. In 1974, Davis went to visit a friend in Greenwich Village and saw a “For Rent” sign. She immediately signed a lease and moved into the neighborhood. When she was teaching Spanish to a nun in the Village, the latter introduced Davis to a number of former male impersonators from 1950s and 1960s who had since moved to the suburbs of Manhattan or to Miami. It just so happened that the nun’s sister was dating an old performer from the neighborhood who had kept in touch with some of her co-workers. From this connection, she met many women who gathered on Sundays to reminisce about their time in show business which was “undoubtedly the happiest, most exciting time of their lives. They remembered it warmly. Number one [because] they made lots of money.”¹¹⁴ Since the guests thought the sharp-dressed butches were a sight to see, the butches got big tips from all the patrons they mingled with and served throughout the parties. According to their recounts to

¹¹³ Lisa E. Davis is a biographer, whose primary focus is the butch lesbians who lived in Greenwich Village and worked for the Italian Mafia throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. When some of them discarded their mementos, Davis combed through the trash to save them. She wrote down their stories and incorporated them into her non-fictional and fictional writings. Despite the women’s nonchalant attitudes towards their histories, Davis foresaw future generations who were eager to hear about the butches who helped the Italian Mafia operate the nightclubs in the neighborhood.

¹¹⁴ Lisa E. Davis, interview by Bria Sandford, February 15, 2014, audio recording, “Your Village, Your Story: Greenwich Village Oral History Project,” *The New York Public Library: Community Oral History Project*, accessed February 15, 2022, https://wayback.archive-it.org/14173/20200911183907mp_/http://oralhistory.nypl.org/interviews/lisa-davis-gbqwsc.

Davis, "...they all worked for the Mafia. And the Mafia ran the Village."¹¹⁵ Since the Italian Mafia controlled the local economy and politics of Greenwich Village through their ties with the NYPD and the SLA, anyone who worked in the neighborhood was likely knowingly or unknowingly linked to the criminal organization. In this case, the butches business with the mob was more clearly defined as a mutually-beneficial partnership in which the combination of their roles resulted in luxurious livelihoods for both parties. Due to their success with the nightclubs, they controlled the entire economy of the neighborhood, putting their competitors out of business and evading income taxes with legal connections.

According to Davis, all of the lesbian bars were located from West 3rd Street to Sixth Avenue near the Manhattan El (the New York City subway system), which suggests an underlying matter of geography which actively molded the concentration of Italian Mafia businesses and homosexual nightlife in Greenwich Village. Nonetheless, since the gay bars, which was the generalized term for lesbian bars as well, were situated further uptown, they retained a higher sense of extravagance, with flamboyant drag queens to match their style. Even in the queer community, men and women underwent segregation and social stratification. On West 3rd Street, the Italian Mafia found cheap real estate in the shadows where their dealing could remain in secret. During that time, everyone had connections in the world of organized crime, including the NYPD. To shield themselves from any heavy fines or serious jail time, the Mafia gave the cops money in exchange for their blindness towards the group's illegal activities in Greenwich Village. After World War I, women suffragists moved into the neighborhood, which

¹¹⁵ Lisa E. Davis interview.

resulted in lesbians outnumbering gay men in Greenwich. It became more convenient and strategic for the Mafia to hire newly-independent and unaffiliated cohorts of butch women to do their biddings in the bars for a reasonable fee, of course. When Davis asked her entertainer friends about social welfare concerns, they informed her that the area was less dangerous back then because the success combined with the Mafia and NYPD's protection scared other criminals away. Also, they told Davis that the citizens of New York were not desperate for money following the economic recovery from World War II. In a separate statement, Davis testified to the safety of the environment as well. She recalled drunkenly stumbling home one night, throwing hundreds of dollars into the air, only to receive the occasional stare from tourists who were not used to Village culture. Without a clear explanation as to why, she said the scene started to change in the late-1980s. However, until then, only visitors were scared of the free-spirited neighborhood where the main rule was not to interfere with the Mafia or any of its associate partners.¹¹⁶

During the interview, Davis speaks about the lives of several butches detailing anything from their work to their relationships to their attitudes towards their lives as lesbians. According to her memory, she first met a short, thin woman, Gayle Crumpton, whose stage name was Gayle Williams. She worked at the 181 Club which the women said was an extremely classy venue. Using the tips and commissions she received at the nightclub, she opened a furniture and antique store with her lesbian lover. She eventually retired to Florida where Davis would occasionally visit her and salvage photographs from the trash that Gayle deemed as unimportant junk.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Lisa E. Davis interview.

¹¹⁷ Lisa E. Davis interview.

Eventually, Gayle met Blackie Savage who was another entertainer in the Village.¹¹⁸ After years of working in the entertainment scene, she acquired a rather impersonal and methodical approach towards life, only enhanced by her choice to run an unemployment agency when she left the nightclub world. As a daughter from a strict Jewish family, it seems highly unlikely that Blackie Savage ever told her old-school mother about her time working in the drag shows.¹¹⁹

Although working with the Italian Mafia combined with the generally hard life of a homosexual in mid-twentieth century, conservative America, not every butch lesbian possessed a stoic personality. Unlike Gayle Williams and Blackie Savage, Leigh Walters was a conventionally attractive woman from Hell's Kitchen, who had a sense of comfort and warmth about her. Although Walters could not escape the draw of the liquor bottle that was passed around her Irish family, Davis considered her to be a lovely individual regardless of her battle with alcoholism. She ran a marina with a friend named Corrine in Oyster Bay. When Corrine got fed up with Walters' drinking, she tried to transfer all the business documents into her name only, including the house she shared with Walters. However, before Corrine could dump her, Walters called up her Mafia friends who had since moved to Miami following their retirement from running Greenwich Village. As quoted from Davis's butch friends, "the Mafia...[was] very good to the gay girls."¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ It is important to note that Blackie Savage and Blackie Dennis are not the same person. Since the first name "Blackie" was fairly common for darker-skinned performers at the time, drag kings who went by this name can be easily confused. However, in Davis' interview with Buddy, the latter confirmed that Blackie Dennis found a partner and escaped to Miami to live out her life in luxury. Because this falls within the timeline of Blackie Savage's run at the 181 Club, historians can conclude that these were two separate individuals.

¹¹⁹ Lisa E. Davis interview.

¹²⁰ Lisa E. Davis interview.

Even those such as Walters, who worked alongside the Italian Mafia, feared the organization. If one of the women reached out for help, the group happily obliged. When Davis was at a diner one evening with estranged lovers and a few other close friends, she met the man that the Mafia sent to handle the Corrine situation. They called him Big George. He informed Corrine that she needed to rescind the paperwork and remove her name as owner on each property; otherwise, he would intervene himself. Since Corrine came from an Italian family, she understood the seriousness of the threat. Big George spoke to Corrine about treating Walters better as well. After that, the group exchanged a pleasant conversation over dinner. From her years of working with the Italian Mafia, Walters, and her fellow butch co-workers, had established a good rapport with the organization where their help building and expanding the profitability of their businesses secured the women protection for life. Although there was no expectations of long-term cooperation and advantages after the disassembly of the partnership in the late-1960s, the bond the two had formed in the nightclubs, in this case, proved to be for life.¹²¹

When Davis suggested to the former male impersonators that they should go on record either in a documentary or non-fictional expose, those who were still alive rejected the idea. They said that their old employer would not be fond of the publicity. Although the majority, if not all, of the Mafia members from their time in the bars had long retired from the business, so they had nothing to be afraid of, the women mutually agreed it was just not appropriate to discuss the matters, especially if they wanted assistance from active associates such as Big George. In Davis' experience working with Italians, in

¹²¹ Lisa E. Davis interview.

particular Sicilians, she learned that employees, no matter their ranking, would not cross the boss or any established territorial boundaries. For this reason, Davis became the narrator for the lesbian Mafia affiliates from Greenwich Village.¹²²

From their conversations, Davis determined that the coincidence of the end of World War II and the height of the Italian Mafia made the Village a lucrative and overall fun neighborhood to live and work in. During the war, Europe's overall economy collapsed, and all the money shifted to the unsullied and industrialized U.S. Since a lot of the women came from families affected by the Great Depression, they came from nothing and had nothing to lose, "so they were delighted to work for the Mafia and put on little suits and get a lot of money...mak[ing] a hundred, two hundred dollars a night in tips."¹²³ The glamorous yet inclusive culture of Greenwich Village attracted celebrities like Eleanor Roosevelt in addition to the queer community and the Italian Mafia.¹²⁴

Due to this elevated level of appeal, the neighborhood became flooded with aspiring performers. Since the Mafia did not explicitly advertise their jobs, aspiring entertainers typically had to have connections with someone already involved in the shady-side of show business. Otherwise, wannabes would frequent the nightclubs concentrated on West 3rd Street and wait outside in hopes of catching a member's eye. As stated earlier, the bars were situated in the shadows, which Davis refers to as the "closet." It is this descriptive word that highlights the butches and the Italian Mafia's

¹²² Lisa E. Davis interview.

¹²³ Lisa E. Davis interview.

¹²⁴ See also Jan Jarboe Russell, *Eleanor in the Village: Eleanor Roosevelt's Search for Freedom and Identity in New York's Greenwich Village* (New York: Scribner, 2021).

preference for fading into the background of society where they could conduct their lives without outside interference. Nonetheless, since the NYPD and the SLA still deemed the gathering of homosexuals to be “disorderly,” this turned into another instance in which the Mafia paid off the cops to prevent them from interrupting their open hiring events. The women who were trying to maintain a stable income appreciated the upfront protection as well. Once they received their first paychecks, the women became part of a tightly knit community. One night, a drag king would be asked to dance at the 181 Club and the next day to serve drinks as a waiter at the Moroccan Village. When the Mafia interviewed the women, they needed to have talent as well as “the look.” Otherwise, they would not make money for the organization or themselves for that matter, which was ultimately the whole point behind the partnership with the butch lesbians.¹²⁵

Personally, Davis never formed any romantic connections with women from Greenwich Village. Like other femmes before her, she said that the bar scene remained rather complicated for those who were merely inexperienced patrons. During her time in the neighborhood, which was nearly a decade after the partnership dissolved, the butches seemed to have become overly rough because. Once the Stonewall Wall Riots caused the Italian Mafia to pull out of the gay bar scene, subsequently leading to the overall decline of queer establishments in Greenwich Village, young women from reduced-housing areas like the Bronx moved into the neighborhood where they were fixated on exhibiting their tough and rugged bravado in stark contrast to the butches approaches in the decades preceding that era. While the butches from the 1940s and 1950s exhibited hard exteriors,

¹²⁵ Lisa E. Davis interview.

their work with the Mafia arguably humbled them and rid them of any excessive cockiness.¹²⁶

Meanwhile, their male counterparts in the homosexual movement appeared to be extremely brash in their proceedings with heterosexual members of society. When violent confrontations involving gay men, the Mafia, and the NYPD broke out in June 1969, the drag kings and butch lesbians felt a disconnect from what the drag queens and fairies considered a self-righteous demonstration, even more so than their quarrels with the feminist movement. Due to their mutually-beneficial business with the criminal organization, and indirectly the cops, the butches considered themselves privileged, a big contention within the queer community. These women worked with the Italian Mafia did not face the same challenges of social legitimization that gay men struggled against or even other butch lesbians who were not involved the protective organization. While guests were hesitant to allow drag queens and fairies to engage with them, the women enjoyed working at the nightclubs where they were essentially idolized for their “eccentric” sexuality. Although they did not flaunt themselves to the flamboyant extent of the gays, they never voiced any concerns about artistic deprivation. While some might argue that money was exchanged for their silence and compliance, the women willingly opted into the opportunity, often seeking bigger and better jobs that would fund their future endeavors such as an antique store, an unemployment agency, or a marina.¹²⁷

Aside from a mutual respect, the Italian Mafia, on the Genovese side, and the queer community shared a common denominator: Anna Genovese (formerly Vernotico,

¹²⁶ Lisa E. Davis interview.

¹²⁷ Lisa E. Davis interview.

maiden name née Giovaninna Petillo). As aforementioned, Anna was married to the head boss of the Genovese crime family which gave her exclusive access to this underground world which she had more personal connections with through her true sexual identity. She acts as a nexus between the two worlds being able to master both female masculinity and the art of secrecy. Although her husband Vito Genovese ran the streets of Greenwich Village, she internally managed the nightclub scene, first the 181 Club until it shut down in 1953 and then the 82 Club. During Davis' informal interviews, the former entertainers claimed that Anna was quite the frontwoman for the Mafia as well as a slightly-closeted lesbian. According to her old employees, Anna operated the two properties in a uniquely domineering manner, showing hints of the traditional *mammismo* mixed with the female masculinity of a butch. Despite having confirmed affairs with a couple of her female workers, Anna managed to keep her personal life from interfering with operations and focused more on legitimizing herself through strong displays of female masculinity and independence.¹²⁸

Since the criminal organization was all about merging their businesses, Anna's double loyalty scared her lesbian workers because the Mafia held a stake in not only liquor distribution but the sex trade as well. To their memories, the male impersonators recalled the prostitutes to be rather enjoyable to hang around, who frequently worked inside and outside of the nightclubs based on orders from the Mafia. Lucille Mellon, a member of the famously wealthy Mellon family and a nameless, "closeted" butch lesbian, allegedly headed the prostitution rings in conjunction with her drag queen husband, Gene,

¹²⁸ Lisa E. Davis interview.

and the Genoveses. Mellon attended the nightclubs for two reasons: to grow her clientele and gather new “call girls,” including Leigh Walters. Presumably, not everyone wanted to participate or enjoyed working in prostitution. However, through her interviews, Davis found that a lot of the female entertainers who were hired out of the 181 Club and the 82 Club appreciated the extra cash from the side jobs. Also, according to Davis’ interviewees, it gave them the opportunity to fulfill scandalous, sexual fantasies such as threesomes and role playing.¹²⁹ From the information Davis gathered in her conversations with the former entertainers, “[the Mafia] liked the girls because...they were sort of respectful...women. They were nice Italian boys. But they also liked the idea that maybe they could get [the lesbians] into the sex business and that would be also more money for everybody. More money for them, more money for the girls. And many people went that way.”¹³⁰

Despite the success of her businesses, Anna’s strained marriage to Vito ultimately ended her reign as queen of the Italian Mafia and gay nightlife. Although Anna filed for divorce in the late-1940s, she dropped the suit in 1951. However, after trying to rekindle their love for a couple of years, Anna’s previous decision came back to haunt her, as Vito became abusive thinking it would subdue his wife rebelliousness. Since Anna was not an easily scared woman, this violence inevitably backfired on Vito by refueling Anna’s resentment towards him and now vengeance. So, in 1953, she gave testimony in the Superior Court of Freehold County, New Jersey, where the couple lived at the time, about her husband’s illegal involvement in gambling, casinos, dog and horse races,

¹²⁹ Lisa E. Davis interview.

¹³⁰ Lisa E. Davis interview.

rackeetering, and, his biggest enterprise, the Italian lottery which grossed \$20,000 to \$30,000 every week. Although this would lead to the demise of her own establishments, Anna set out to prove that Vito could afford a relatively cheap alimony check. On the other hand though, in coincidence with anti-communism and fear from the Red Scare, the government targeted homosexuals who had insight or information on open court cases during a period of time referred to as the “Lavender Scare.” Therefore, Anna might have cooperated with investigators in exchange for immunity and/or protection, especially considering that Vito’s associates initially tried to destroy her credibility and character through her sexuality, publicly denying their acceptance of the lesbian community.¹³¹

The male impersonators and butch lesbians who worked in the 181 Club, the 82 Club, the Moroccan Village and all of the other Mafia-run nightclubs in Greenwich Village built a mutually beneficial relationship with their Italian bosses. Although some respect originated from discernible remnants of their traditional culture, the men saw a similar desire for wealth, power, and the American Dream that other communities did not possess or care to acquire. Arguably, the greatest component in this unusual alliance stems from the common goals set forth by both parties. Instead of wasting time, effort, and money convincing a partner of the primary objective, the Italian Mafia and the butch lesbians both wanted sustainable and gratifying livelihoods that anti-immigration policies and homophobia actively attempted to deprive them of.

¹³¹ “Village Joints Probe Seeks Mrs. Genovese,” *Daily News* (New York City, NY), March 19, 1953; Judith Atkins, “‘These People are Frightened to Death’: Congressional Investigations and the Lavender Scare,” *Prologue Magazine* 48, no. 2 (Summer 2016), accessed February 28, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2016/summer/lavender.html>.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE “FAIRIES” ARE UP IN THE CLOUDS

While butch lesbians found mutually beneficial success in Greenwich Village, gay men struggled to secure strong connections with the Italian Mafia, resulting in financial distress. Aside from female masculinity and the *mammismo/mammoni* derivative, the butches bonded with their bosses over a mutual disgust of and animosity towards fairies. Unlike their female counterparts who were focused on working within a masculine world of power, it appeared the drag queens and gay men were more concerned with the fight for attention, recognition, and expression – best exemplified by events associated with “coming out” in a homosexual society such as debutante and masquerade balls which were extremely popular New York, Chicago, New Orleans, and Baltimore beginning in the 1930s.¹³² Arguably, the alternate social positionings that influenced the reasonings, rationales, and methods through which gays and lesbians confronted inequity in the Village stems from the sociological underlining of feminine and masculine demonstrations of confidence and assertiveness. In short though, the fairies craved attention, but the butches preferred a more secluded lifestyle in the social “closet,” similar to that of the Italian Mafia.

Women exhibiting more masculine demeanors and mannerisms often face the challenge of balancing interpersonal power and sociability to override the feminine behaviors inherently linked to their biological identity. According to Linda L. Carli, a renowned social psychologist, gender and sexuality exist as one joint construct as it exists in accordance with traditional, heterosexual theories and notions. With influence, there

¹³² Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 7.

comes power. Since “expert power” comes from “perceived competence,” the conventional assessment that women have lower intelligence levels and less expertise means they do not possess a high degree of “expert power.” Thus, in the case of butches, they chose to engage with customarily masculinized concepts and institutions such as finances and the Mafia. These women straddled a fine line of social influence, though. During the course of authenticating one’s power, a woman cannot appear too forceful or overly concerned with others’ opinions; otherwise, she will be displaying feminine behavior by her need to be seen. As a result, the butches censured themselves to prevent a besmirching of their male personas and in hopes of increasing their authoritative impact across the gendered sexuality spectrum. Despite research affirming that individuals respond more favorably to modest women rather than those who try self-promotion tactics, females live within a double jeopardy sort of scenario where modesty equates to incompetence but confidence has consequences of rejection.¹³³

For the most part, men do not incur any repercussions for overtly displaying expert power. Since male strength operates with supportive social schematics, females employ their domestic settings as well as interpersonal relationships to earn referent power. Because this type of control comes from one’s communal traits including friendliness and agreeability, women typically possess more referent power than men, especially considering gender conformity stresses the importance of self-reliance as an essential component of masculinity. Also, this dynamic causes women to act more compassionate and grandiose with greater care and concern about society’s opinion as it

¹³³ Linda L. Carli, “Gender, Interpersonal Power, and Social Influence,” *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 1 (1999): 83-85.

affects the referent power which they take outside of the home.¹³⁴ Based on Carli's sociological review, one can assume that drag queens and fairies exhibited more referent power than "expert power," as it corresponds to the more feminine nature they presented. Also, it dares to explain the rift within the queer community and why butches concentrated on building up "expert power" as opposed to fairies whose flamboyancy inherently stripped them of their masculinity and imposed the social-dependency of femininity's referent power upon them.

While this describes the sociological theories at play in Greenwich Village, perhaps the greatest example and testament to the juxtaposing experiences of drag kings/butches and drag queens/fairies comes from detailed accounts by the gay men who worked at the same Mafia-owned establishments as Buddy Kent, Gayle Williams, and Leigh Walters. In 2014, a box, containing sixty-year-old letters about the underground activities of New York City's male drag community, resurfaced in a Los Angeles storage unit. Immediately, a small group of film producers set out on a five-year investigation to find the individuals who wrote to Reno Martin, the addressee who was an American talent agent and radio broadcaster throughout the mid-twentieth century, about their lives and the general atmosphere of the neighborhood. Since a lot of the men's families and friends did not approve of their sexuality and subsequent lifestyle choices, Martin turned into a confidante for quite a few of his gay friends, and after he moved away from his hometown of New York City, they decided to write to Martin to stay in touch and air out their issues to someone who genuinely cared to listen. The documentary featuring these

¹³⁴ Carli, "Gender, Interpersonal Power, and Social Influence," 86-87.

missives, *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*, debuted at the TriBeCa Film Festival in 2020 containing nearly two full hours of never-before heard interviews with the writers of the forgotten letters. Unlike Nestle and Davis' interviews, though, the film carries a discriminatory undertone where the men tend to reflect more on the negative aspects of their time in the entertainment scene than did their butch equivalents, ultimately indicating that not everyone in the queer community enjoyed as safe and successful a life funded by the Italian Mafia as their beloved lesbian business partners.¹³⁵

Although New York City welcomed homosexuals more than other northern-metropolitan areas, national culture remained firmly affixed to anti-communist, socially conservative ideologies, rejecting individuals who threatened heteronormativity, a crucial element in traditional hierarchies. According to Michael (aka Daphne), who is the first former female impersonator to speak in *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*, the neighborhood bullies would beat up anyone they thought was gay, explicitly remembering them throwing rocks at him from the moment he started walking the streets alone as a young boy.¹³⁶ Since he always saw himself as a cute, little girl, he wore his sister's dresses and heels around the house when no one was home. To Michael, dressing up as a girl turned into a fun game; however, he had no wishes to *be* a woman. His sister never scolded him,

¹³⁵ "P.S. Burn This Letter Please," *TriBeCa*, accessed February 21, 2022, <https://tribecafilm.com/films/p-s-burn-this-letter-please-2021>.

¹³⁶ Within this thesis, the female impersonators are referred to using their real names and male pronouns rather than their stage names. Although their stage names are included for extra detail purposes, during *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*, they are not interviewed in drag, implying a separation of identities and characters. In another footnote, the one exception is addressed.

but she constantly reminded her brother that he should avoid letting their mother see him wearing girl's clothing.¹³⁷

While some of the drag queens grew up in Manhattan, others moved to New York City after hearing about the alleged acceptance and opportunities the area offered. Henry Arango, who used "Adrian," his mother's name on stage, moved to the U.S. from Havana, Cuba following the rise of Fidel Castro. According to Henry, on the island, the threat of a nuclear bombing forced the nightclubs to close during the onset of the Cuban Missile Crisis in the late-1950s and early-1960s. Instead of dying alone on the streets, most individuals wanted to be at home surrounded by their families. Henry hated the tense atmosphere, and his father refused to accept that his son wanted to be a dancer rather than a lawyer like himself. One night, Henry met two returning Cubans who worked at the 82 Club in New York City. After assuring him that they could secure him a job, Henry escaped from Cuba, auditioned at the 82 Club, and turned into a drag star in their regular lineup. As a major advocate of the more sensual side of entertainment, his most famous routine titled "Dance of the Seven Veils" had him portraying the Biblical stripper Salome. At the end of the act, he demanded the head of Saint John the Baptist, with a realistic prop adding to the over-the-top nature of his performances. Unlike the cautious crowd in Cuba, the gays in the Big Apple indulged themselves in "sex, drugs, and rock n' roll."¹³⁸ With their minds set on fun, "[gays] didn't have any civil rights, but who needed it?" Due to the political tension the United States had with satellite countries

¹³⁷ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*, directed by Michael Seligman and Jennifer Tiexiera (New York City, NY: The Film Sales Company, 2021), accessed February 22, 2022, Kanopy, <https://hayslibrary.kanopy.com/video/ps-burn-letter-please>.

¹³⁸ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*.

for the Soviet Union, including Cuba, it is likely that Henry's sexuality only compounded to being outcasted by American society in part due to his recent immigration.¹³⁹

During this time, another drag queen who used the stage name Josephine Baker (Jo for short) immigrated illegally to the U.S. from the Dominican Republic. She selected this stage name in reference to a famous American-born entertainer who traveled around Europe.¹⁴⁰ Since Josephine needed a sponsor, Lennie, another drag queen from Manhattan who owned a series of side businesses, including beauty shops, used his residency and reputation to help her gain placement and eventually citizenship working as one of the hair dresser employees.¹⁴¹

With the "disorderly conduct" rules still in place, the NYPD frequently arrested drag queens to the point where certain nightclubs refused to allow them to enter out of fear of SLA penalties. On September 16, 1957, Charlie, an unidentified friend of Reno Martin, wrote to the radio man, telling him when he attended a bar called the Cork that weekend with Daphne, they were denied entrance. Charlie mentioned that the cops were out in hot pursuit as well. For this reason, few drag queens still had the courage to paint (i.e. to put on makeup), and those who did developed a callous personality to combat the intimidation, harassment, and discrimination tactics inflicted upon them.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please.*

¹⁴⁰ Sadly, Josephine "Jo" Baker passed away from AIDS in the middle of the 1980s epidemic in America. In the film, no one verifies what Josephine's real name was, so for this reason, I use the pronoun "she" in my description of Josephine's life, as her run in drag is the only memory left of her existence.

¹⁴¹ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please.*

¹⁴² In "Queer, Not Yet Here," Kopano Maroga explains that the verb "paint" refers to drag queens application of makeup. Typically, drag queens and female impersonators will use a lighter-coloring, even white, foundation to portray a hyper-feminized character.

Residing in Garland, Texas, at the time of the 2020 interview, Claude (aka Claudia) dressed up in drag for the first time, when he was only fifteen, with Daphne and a couple of other friends. After they shaved their eyebrows, they drew them back on with pencil except much higher on their foreheads and put on thick fake eyelashes all to accentuate their more feminine features. While many people called them freaks, in extreme cases like Claude's, once arrested for "disorderly conduct," authorities would send homosexuals to Bellevue Hospital or other mental health institutions where doctors could "cure" them of their mental illnesses. In *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*, Claude said, "...closing in on sixteen[, t]hey put me in a place called PQ5, the wacko ward, because I was gay. And every day, I had to have a sit down session with the shrink, and all they wanted to do was get their paycheck."¹⁴³ When the psychiatrists questioned Claude about his choice to run away from home, he would repeatedly explain to them that being constantly beaten up by bullies was not an enjoyable way to spend his life. Since the hospital could not legally hold Claude against his own free will, Bellevue released him into the streets with nothing but the clothes on his back. As a result, he admitted "I started turning tricks [(prostitution)], because I had no other source of income. So, I had to. It was a matter of are you gonna [sic] be hungry or you do not want to be hungry. Pick one."¹⁴⁴ He eventually discovered that he could earn more money dancing and stripping on stage in drag.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*.

¹⁴⁴ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*.

¹⁴⁵ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*.

At the Cork Club and other gay bars, the clientele enjoyed the company of the flamboyant men and paid them exceptionally well primarily because they were closeted homosexuals, too. In a letter from Charlie to Martin, he comments on the handsomeness of the “trade.” According to Michael, the queens called the straight men, who came into the clubs and acted as if they were not attracted to the same-sex, “trade.” Claude mentions sitting in the booths chatting it up with rich men who would buy them alcohol; usually these men came from lifestyles where homosexuality was condemned, so hanging out with the drag queens became their only source of semi-romantic interaction.¹⁴⁶

Aside from casual tips and gifts from patrons, Robert, a self-identifying female mimic, stresses the fact that female impersonators were paid for their artistry. In his interview, he noted that drag queens did not receive any compensation for their tricks and gimmicks, though. For this reason, the men stole almost all of the items for their costumes. While the male impersonators could swipe suits and tuxedos from their father and brothers’ wardrobes, the outfits that the female impersonators and drag queen wore could not be found within any ordinary closet, especially in a poor woman’s closet. Although not every drag queen resorted to theft in order to stay up-to-date with the ever-changing fashion trends, a significant portion of the community stooped to that desperate level causing outsiders to critically judge the morality of all the members.¹⁴⁷

According to their testimonies in the documentary, Robert and Lennie, two former members of the U.S. navy officers who were also female impersonators in New

¹⁴⁶ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please.*

¹⁴⁷ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please.*

York City at the time, in addition to several other drag queens, struggled to overlook some of Josephine's serious and corrupt character flaws which included being a kleptomaniac. On November 19, 1957, in a depressingly sour note, Josephine told Reno Martin that "there is no happiness for a fagg [sic]" asserting that romance was dead in Greenwich Village.¹⁴⁸ She described her coping mechanism: mopping. Amongst the drag community, the word "mopping" meant shoplifting. Before sitting down to write, Josephine, accompanied by Claude, went to a clothing store where she managed to grab four sweaters and inconspicuously leave without paying for them. She said she was starting to collect for her winter ensemble, because this became the means by which she and Claude turned into glamorous icons. Unlike the rest of society, though, the inner-drag community quickly recognized the crookedness of certain entertainers. Also, dish, or gossip, traveled quickly within the tightly knit friend group. Once Josephine and a fellow named Frankie stole two long fringe curtains, one silver and one gold, from a popular store in the area, someone wrote to Martin dishing about the incident. However, even the anonymous letter writer could not help but admire and applaud the two thieves for finding a way to evade the financial trap of their expensive hobby. "I can't see spending all that loot for drag. Those lucky bums got everything for nothing."¹⁴⁹

Eventually, though, the notoriety of their illegal enterprise resulted in an official NYPD investigation that ended at the 82 Club where a number of drag queens were arrested on site, aware yet unaware of Josephine and Claude's records. Josephine confessed all the details of their break in to Martin, asking him kindly to destroy the self-

¹⁴⁸ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please.*

¹⁴⁹ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please.*

incriminating evidence immediately after reading, which he clearly failed to do since the letter still exists sixty years later. Late one night, the two drag queens sneaked into the Metropolitan Opera, which had just received an exclusive shipment of hair pieces from Italy. With each wig tagged anywhere from \$50 to \$75, the thirty-five items they stole amounted to \$1,750-\$2,625, which equates to \$16,908-\$25,361 in the economy of 2022.¹⁵⁰

While Josephine and Claude decided to save a few of the wigs for themselves, they sold the remainder to other drag queens working at Louis' State. They entered the dressing room with a full tote of gorgeous hair pieces, automatically attracting the attention of everyone who was supposed to be getting ready for the show. Although the two were selling the wigs far cheaper than what they appeared to be worth, no one asked any questions. Unfortunately for the thieves, Henry had started working for Local 764, of the wardrobe stylists union and who also acted as guardians of child actors who had a stake in the Metropolitan Opera. Since it was understood within the drag community that dish spread fast and the story had already hit the newspaper headlines, Henry heard rumors about the robbery. Along with a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent, Henry and one of the Metropolitan employees, Nina, went downstairs to the dressing room at the 82 Club where most of drag queens at Louis' State worked double shifts. Immediately, the three noticed a man fixing a stolen wig atop his head. When the FBI representative ripped off the hair piece from his head, the drag queen turned around and exclaimed that he just spent \$30 for that particular wig. Upon informing the man and the rest of the buyers backstage that the items they purchased were the stolen property of the

¹⁵⁰ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please.*

Metropolitan Opera, the FBI, with the assistance of the NYPD, arrested all of the innocent men unconsciously involved in the scheme. This instance serves as an example of the untrustworthiness and gullibility that the Italian Mafia foresaw as detrimental to a potential partnership, consequentially promoting work with inverse butches. Although the Italian Mafia employed gay men as primarily drag queens, this cemented the extent of their involvement with each other, as the organization could not risk its enterprise on the backs of fairies who possessed distinct masculine and social standards. It was important for the Italian Mafia to set a limit with gay considering they were extremely close to each other through their entertainment operations.¹⁵¹

According to the tabloids, the officer recovered seventeen of the thirty-three wigs reported stolen. Also, the articles detailed the methods by which the two robbers gained entry. Based on the authority's investigation, Josephine and Claude blended in with ballet dancers arriving for rehearsal. In *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*, when the interviewers read one of the newspaper clippings to Claude, he laughed hysterically at the elaborate assumptions, elevating his sense of pride that even after all of these years the police still failed to uncover the truth. Since he had already been convicted of the crime, Claude used the documentary to clarify the specifics of the raid. To enter the Metropolitan Opera, individuals walked through three enormous gates, and on that particular night, the person in charge of locking up missed the middle passageway. Once inside, Claude came upon the main stage where he stood at the center spot and "got [his] cookies off."¹⁵² When Josephine caught him in the act, Claude responded that he wanted to remember the

¹⁵¹ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*.

¹⁵² *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*.

moment. After frolicking across the main stage, they ascended the stairs and kicked in the door to the “Wig Room.”¹⁵³

With the wigs scattered across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and New Jersey, the two returned cheap replicas in place of the real ones. Since the cops could not tell the difference, the judge lessened Josephine and Claude’s time served to only a year at Ryker’s Correctional Facility, mainly due to their “cooperation.” When recounting his criminal past, Claude does not appear remorseful for his actions, instead retaining a grudge against whoever ratted them out to the police. During the interview, he disappeared into his bedroom and returned with a sixty year-old wig from the Metropolitan Opera, which was supposed to be used in *Rigoletto* before the two had stolen it in September 1958. Aside from the thrilling memory behind the piece, Claude saved the wig to boost his ego by still withholding evidence from the police.¹⁵⁴

Throughout the second half of the documentary, the queens from the 1950s describe the Drag Balls they frequently attended, a surprisingly integrated setting that welcomed all races as well as queers. After the film producers showed them photographs that they salvaged from the storage unit, the former entertainers began to reminisce about their glory days including the costumes they used to bedazzle the friends who accompanied them to the events. It becomes quite clear that the band of “sisters” viewed their time in Greenwich Village as merely an extravagant social vacation.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ “Stolen Met Wigs Located,” *Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), December 11, 1958.

¹⁵⁴ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*.

¹⁵⁵ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*.

For this reason, in the nightclubs where the Italian Mafia hired drag queens and gay men, they classified the fairies as a cheap and non-combative expense that helped them expand their New York empire. Unlike the loyal and silent butches, these self-centered and exigent men appeared expendable to the Italian Mafia who deemed their claim for social rights to be based on fleeting self-indulgences rather than for progress towards the American Dream. A former female impersonator at the Moroccan Village, Joseph (aka Tish) recalls tables at the back of the lounge being reserved for owners/associates of the Mafia and representatives of the NYPD. “As long as they treated us well and they were content with us, then we’re content with them. Well, we had to be content with them, but, you know.”¹⁵⁶ Although some drag queens thought they had a kind of stake in some sort of contractual agreement with the Mafia, realists like Joseph knew that their employment meant little to nothing with so many other business collaborations. Terry, another female mimic from the 82 Club, clearly states that “...the mob saw it as an easy moneymaking scheme, because they didn’t overpay us. You may be sure of that.”¹⁵⁷ She goes on to say that compared to any other identity group, the gay community was especially easy to control and manipulate, so it became the best choice for the insatiable Italian Mafia. Henry supports Joseph and Terry’s testimonies, claiming that without the Mafia, female impersonators would not have existed in New York City. Since they had investments in almost every type of business in Greenwich Village, the

¹⁵⁶ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please.*

¹⁵⁷ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please.*

drag queens could not avoid the criminal organization even as average public citizens after they removed their makeup.¹⁵⁸

Aside from the distinct external character differences between both parties, the Italian group deemed gay men to be untrustworthy, gullible, and, overall, unambitious in their transient lives. Although Josephine and Claude's illegal antics shows one micro-historical example of criminality within the drag queen community, in their separate interviews, each of the interviewees alludes to "mopping" as a common practice among the poor impersonators, with some even justifying or sympathizing with the conditions that incited their delinquency. Despite their illegal enterprises, the difference of private versus public displays in which they committed their crimes ultimately appalled the Mafia. Besides that, gossip traveling quickly within the gay male social world signaled serious confidentiality issues. Last, when the two thieves sold the wigs to their fellow drag queens, understanding the consequences for them if the cops found the items in their possessions, their selfishness exhibited a complete disregard for their friends who were essentially their family. Since Italian culture operated under a strict respect for allegiances, they viewed drag queens as incapable of loyalty, especially if they abandoned their brothers during desperate times.

As for their folly, female impersonators, such as Joseph and Terry, understood their positioning within the social hierarchy of the Village and recognized that they were being exploited by the Mafia. However, they still chose to engage with their manipulators, which ultimately made them appear more immature than if they had not

¹⁵⁸ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please.*

entirely grasped the underlying circumstances. During the documentary, the men testify to the Mafia's control over New York City, even condemning its corrupt relationship with the NYPD. Yet, knowing the methods that the city's keepers employed, the drag queens joined the Mafia's workforce, not necessarily naïve in the sense that they were anticipating better treatment, but foolish to think that they would not be frustrated by a lack of compensation and protection.

Finally, as the interviewees sat reflecting on their times in the bars, one could not help but notice that everyone, except Robert and Claude, still lived in cramped, little apartments in New York City. Unlike the women who earned enough money in their side businesses to retire to Florida, and tried to rid themselves of their memories, the drag queens saved countless videos, flyers, and photographs from their famous days. Even today, a few of them still dress up for occasional marches, reunions, or festivals. Nevertheless, the money-centric organization could not foresee female impersonation as a stable, long-term career. To them, it seemed to be a hobby, but for the queens, it consumed them. Since the two groups had contrasting opinions on one's purpose in life and self-fulfillment, the gay men working for the Mafia received a frugal paycheck that funded temporary indulgences but still required Henry to work at Local 764 until the age of 93. While the drag queens and fairies were caught up in the fight for social equality and expressionism, they invalidated their campaign because the Italian bosses saw their affinity for show business as a weakness that warranted illegally low wages and mistreatment.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please.*

The drag queens' willingness to participate in *P.S. Burn This Letter Please* further validates the Mafia's choice to forego a serious alliance with that side of the queer community. As mentioned earlier, the women who worked in the 181 Club, the Moroccan Village, and the 82 Club agreed to answer only a small number of questions, and in the case of Lisa Davis, they choose to disclose information to one confidante. Again, to safeguard the interests of their criminal associates, they refused any sort of audio or video taping in order. In contrast, one could argue that gay men are still trying to grapple for attention and money, which has been their motive since they moved to Greenwich Village. Conducting themselves in an entirely contrary manner, the butches, also considered queer outcasts of society, sought out opportunities to earn acceptance, but they demonstrated the ideally opposite traits of their male counterparts, inherently widening the divide, which would eventually trigger the events at the Stonewall Inn between gay men and the Italian Mafia, as well as its NYPD ally.

CONCLUSION

During the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, the city of New York turned into an Americanized Sicily, a space dominated by a criminal organization with the ability to create or destroy the economy under any sort of provocation no matter how tiny. As they bonded over masculinity and the methods necessary to obtain the American Dream, the Italian Mafia and butch lesbians found an unlikely alliance within a culturally diverse neighborhood in Lower Manhattan where they developed a solid grounding in business, entertainment, and *machismo*. In 1969, the Stonewall Riots that transpired over six days outside a frequently police-raided gay bar in Greenwich Village clearly proved that the Italian Mafia chose the right partnership from within the gay and lesbian community. Although the demonstrations are considered transforming events in the twentieth century fight for LGBTQ+ rights in the U.S., the protestors who were primarily gay men upset a social equilibrium between butches, the Italian Mafia, and the NYPD. Again, the drag queens and fairies drew attention to themselves, creating a collective memory that displaces other participants, lesbians, and leaves them with little to no resonance with their ascribed history.¹⁶⁰ Also, once the revelations of Patrolman Frank Serpico and Sergeant David Durk's self-sponsored investigation into the corruption within the NYPD spurred the creation of the Knapp Commission and targeted their long-term Mafia affiliates, the men realized that the silence and cooperation of their butch friends were

¹⁶⁰ Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M. Crage, "Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth," *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 5 (2006): 727, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472425>.

invaluable traits that no other group, specifically gay men, maintained under instances of distress.

The Homophile Youth Movement in Neighborhoods (HYMN), a social activist group that complemented the Gay Liberation Front, printed a series of flyers in the late 1960s directly addressing the toxic, political complexity of New York City. On one handout, a writer highlighted the signs plastered on the outside of the Stonewall Inn that read “Legalize Gay Bars and Lick the Problem.”¹⁶¹ It asserts that besides the illicit activity within the establishments, the control that the Mafia retained over the bars was illegal in and of itself, especially because it prohibited genuine homosexual businessmen from opening better and safer venues out of utter fear of the consequences from the “unholy alliance of the Mafia and elements in the Police Dept. who accept payoffs and protect the Mafia monopoly.”¹⁶² The flyer goes on to optimistically encourage gay men to answer the call to action as the government failed to recognize them as citizens whose rights they must protect. During their declaration of victimization, the gay men deliberately ignored drag queens’ delinquent tendencies in an attempt to appear self-righteous and sanctimonious to the general public. Whether or the drag queens and fairies rioted as a result of social injustice, compensatory shortages, or a combination of both, they despised the criminal organization that manipulated another minority to elevate their own status on the social ladder.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Donn Teal, *The Gay Militants* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), 24-25.

¹⁶² Teal, *The Gay Militants*, 24-25

¹⁶³ Teal, *The Gay Militants*, 24-25.

As for the gay women of Greenwich Village, their thoughts on the unethical situation surrounding the nightclubs has gone fairly undocumented. Since they benefited from the Mafia's stronghold, they rarely voiced any quarrels with the advantageous arrangement. In the Wild Oscar column of New York Mattachine Society's October newsletter, the editorialist replied to a letter from a lesbian woman written under the pen name Sapphic Sapphire who was confused by the typical butch/femme relationship within her dating life. Wild Oscar wrote back saying "practicing lesbians do quite nicely without relying on the bar life. They can gather anywhere and create a network."¹⁶⁴ While the drag queens made the nightclubs their main form of social interaction, the butches considered them to be merely businesses, permitting them to step away from work and pursue other platonic or romantic endeavors.

If their juxtaposed sexualities did not generate an internal rift within the queer identity, the butches adopted similar skeptical and segregated approaches, like their Italian bosses, towards ostentatious homosexuals. As early as the 1930s, the Mafia began embedding anti-flamboyant thoughts and beliefs into lesbians' minds. Spivy, a renowned gay female singer who performed at a place called Tony's, earned enough money by 1940 to open her own entertainment spot, Spivy's Roof. Quickly, the venue acquired a reputation for serving as the starting stage for future famous vocalists, including Mabel Mercer, Thelma Carpenter, and Liberace/Paul Lynde. Despite her own sexual orientation

¹⁶⁴ "Wild Oscar," *New York Mattachine Society Newsletter* (October 1969), Archives of Sexuality and Gender, accessed February 28, 2022, https://go-gale.com.i.ezproxy.nypl.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=MultiTab&hitCount=5&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=3&docId=GALE%7CXDFKHD638064125&docType=Newsletter&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZHSI&prodId=AHSI&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CXDFKHD638064125&searchId=R5&userGroupName=nypl&inPS=true.

though, Spivy intended for her establishment to remain inconspicuous, essentially underground. Under her instructions, the doormen intentionally denied entrance to all homosexuals, mainly men, who showed any sort of flashy attire or behaviors calling for attention and in theory destroying Spivy's Roof's good standing among the heterosexual crowd. For this reason, the gays who were allowed inside typically came as couples. With assistance from the Mafia, the women further distanced themselves from their spotlight-needy counterparts on the basis that the gays' poor image would ruin their chances of authenticating the butch lesbian identity within American society. Since the women preferred to fade into the background, the Italian Mafia supported their compliant partners who were more focused on extricating themselves from an overt feminine character.¹⁶⁵

Meanwhile, several moderate homosexual organizations such as the Mattachine Society tried to separate themselves from the drag queens and their grandiosity. In the Mattachine Society's made-for-television documentary, Harold "Hal" Call, the group's openly gay president, explicitly told viewers that "the swish, or the queen represents actually a small minority within the homosexual grouping, but to the public, this is a stereotype view or picture by which all homosexuals are judged it seems."¹⁶⁶ According to the film, these types of showy individuals are not welcomed by the rest of the community. Since they reject society for the wrongdoings they believe have been done to them, the drag queens do not concur with the moderate agenda. As a result of

¹⁶⁵ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 349-350.

¹⁶⁶ *The Rejected*, directed by Richard Christian (1961; San Francisco, CA: KQED, 2015), YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DG_-MIM4Cb8.

exclusionary statements and actions, ostentatious gay men lived in social solitude where they developed into the common enemy amongst all other groups.¹⁶⁷

Within the scope of this research, one witness contested the thesis claiming that the Mafia offered him, a female mimic, the same pay and protection as the male impersonators; however, the man's story is extremely rare. When describing the scene at the 82 Club, all of the interviewees from the film *P.S. Burn This Letter Please* remain fixated on the design and decor of the stage, only speaking about the external beauty of the building, not the cynical characters of the businessmen inside. However, Terry, the only transgender female to entertain as a drag queen in the 82 Club, tells her story from an alternate angle. She says that she had a close, personal relationship with Anna Genovese in particular, claiming that the wife of the Mafia boss "did good things for me."¹⁶⁸

Despite trying to force herself into acting like a gay man her entire life, Terry knew she was not sexually attracted to men. After performing at the 82 Club for a period of time, she made peace with herself and gathered up enough courage to start the transitioning process. Living on the edge of financial destitution, drag queens could not afford anything outside of their normal expenses such as medical operations. Unintentionally, Terry told Anna about her situation to which the 82 Club boss responded by sending her quoisexual employee to her personal physician. Over the course of eighteen months, a doctor in Brooklyn examined and treated Terry with one weekly shot.

¹⁶⁷ *The Rejected*.

¹⁶⁸ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please*.

He prescribed her with daily pills as well. The doctor's office never billed Terry though. After two years of attending visits and a year and a half of receiving hormones, the doctor, through frequent installments from Anna, arranged for Terry's surgery. During that time, and even today, society used derogatory terms like "self-mutilation" to describe transitioning as medically unethical and immoral. Regardless of the criticism, Terry went through with the procedure to live the life she had always wanted, one that would have been impossible without Anna's monetary and emotional support.¹⁶⁹ Although no one can argue that when Anna assisted Terry it did not come from a place of empathy, considering the 82 Club boss was constantly berated for her seemingly open yet closed sexuality, a contention can be made that Terry's story resonated more with Anna's personal struggles. For this reason, the former female impersonator received exclusive favor stemming from an enigmatic bond over the complexities of inter-female masculinity.

Once social justice officers from the NYPD launched internal investigations in the late 1970s like "Operation Together," which cracked down on Mafia-run monopolies and their political connections in New York City, a significant number of associates started to step away from the illegal businesses, willingly or unwillingly, over the next several decades. While some of the men involved pled guilty and served their time in federal prisons, others watched as the organization collapsed internally from a decline in Italian immigration, the infiltration of undercover cops, and the FBI's disbandment of highly-profitable unions. Although the original Five Families, the Bonanno, Colombo, Gambino,

¹⁶⁹ *P.S. Burn This Letter Please.*

Genovese, and Lucchese clans, still exist in the twenty-first century, the groups tend to maintain a lower profile than they did in the latter half of the previous era.

Nowadays, movies such as *The Godfather*, *American Gangster*, *Goodfellas*, and *The Sopranos* continue to foster a fascination with criminal overlords. As an exciting supplementary source, countless former members are still alive and residing in their original, territorial neighborhoods. On his hard-hitting, online show, Vlad Lyubovny (aka DJ Vlad), a well-known interviewer, journalist, and video director, sits down with individuals who have retired from the Mafia, ranging anywhere from underbosses and caporegimes to soldiers and associates. In Vlad's session with Frank DiMatteo, a "survivor" turned best-selling author, viewers learn a little bit about the ideal character traits which make a loyal worker for the criminal organization.

Since DiMatteo's father and uncles were a part of the Mafia, he observed their idiosyncrasies starting when he was a young boy all the way up until her opted out of the business well into adulthood. Although he hated to admit the truth, he quickly noticed that all the men highly invested in the inner-workings of the group, including his own father, showed signs of schizophrenia. Despite his father being an extremely warm and loveable man, Frank Sr. killed at least ten people. While some of the men could be seen crying at baby christenings, they could immediately "...get triggered off [and] it's you know back to business."¹⁷⁰ Often, society deemed butches to be detached from their feminine emotions. Concerned with exemplifying a nonchalant masculine attitude, the

¹⁷⁰ Lyubovny, "Frank DiMatteo on Mafia Association."

women understood the appropriate times and places to snap between pleasure and professionalism.¹⁷¹

During DiMatteo's experience working alongside one of the all-time wealthiest crime bosses, Carmine Galante, he quickly realized that in the Mafia, the organization likes to preach about loyalty, but when it comes down to the dirty business, everyone possesses their own prerogatives. Therefore, individuals must fend for themselves and their own futures. Like Galante, most people obsess over climbing the social ladder, which means that any obstacle, specifically person, who stands in the way of achieving a higher status is automatically labeled as a threat. Similarly, the butches refused to accept positions as merely cheap laborers for the Mafia's businesses. While they did not aim their sights at rising in the ranks of the criminal organization, the lesbians wanted to gain wealth and respect to boost their spot on the societal totem pole, separating themselves from the apathetic side of the queer community.¹⁷²

By establishing a divide, the butches tried to restore a beneficial relationship with law enforcement which had been severely damaged in the months surrounding the Stonewall Riots. The gay rights groups targeted the NYPD with several scandalous, accusatory advertisements. For example, the New York Mattachine Society printed a pamphlet called "The Pocket Lawyer." If arrested, a person could consult the eight different tips offered inside the small slip of paper, one of which warns those who are placed in handcuffs to deny any advice or counsel from lawyers recommended by the

¹⁷¹ Lyubovny, "Frank DiMatteo on Mafia Association."

¹⁷² Lyubovny, "Frank DiMatteo on Mafia Association."

police. Determined that pinpointing one of the culprits of their oppression would grant them some newfound serenity on the path toward expressive freedom, these gay-directed attacks on authority simultaneously widened the interest gap between them and lesbians in concert with the Mafia. Once again, these acquiescent women proved the value of their partnership except this time implicit through the actions of their indigent, male counterparts.¹⁷³

The most critical assertion that DiMatteo contends throughout his interview with Lyubovny addresses the instinct that voluntarily draws individuals into the criminal enterprise. According to the expert, the people who actively pursue the gangster life tend to possess a natural slyness which helps them succeed and move up in the organization at an expedited pace. In comparison to himself and others whose families chose the Mafia lifestyle, he claims that those who want to join the businesses have an irreplaceable passion that motivates their every choice. In the 1940s and 1950s, the butches, with their innate cleverness from maneuvering their way through a patriarchal society by engaging in female masculinity, opted into a relationship with criminals. Again, they did not desire higher positions within the organization. Instead, their main goal remained a better, safer, life for themselves and their families, arguably the same reason that the Italian immigrants inaugurated old-Sicilian operations in a socially intolerant America.¹⁷⁴

Over the course of several decades, the butches and members of the New York City Mafia built a mutually beneficial relationships on the basis of female masculinity,

¹⁷³ *If you are arrested...: 'The Pocket Lawyer,'* (New York: The Mattachine Society of New York, Inc., 1960s), Mattachine Society, Inc. of New York Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, accessed February 28, 2022, <https://digitalcollections.nysl.org/items/1c712ea0-b4d1-0138-5467-0f8d9dff86a1>.

¹⁷⁴ Lyubovny, "Frank DiMatteo on Mafia Association."

not necessarily condemning traditional, Italian manliness, but rather shifting femininity to adhere to a heteronormative and patriarchal structure. From this connection, the butches received special protection from not only their immediate partner but secondary collaborators as well, primarily the SLA and the NYPD. Since the two communities settled in the uniquely progressive neighborhood of Greenwich Village, arguably the most financially-motivated immigrants and queers joined forces to create an illegal empire in Manhattan. Although butches do not interact with the Mafia to the open extent they did throughout the mid-twentieth century, they still abide by *omertà*, which explains the limited documentation from the lesbian perspective. Whether the women consciously or unconsciously obeyed the code because they were conforming to expectations of sexuality or the organization, the butches succeeded in not only infiltrating but altering preconceived notions about the Italian Mafia, a deep-rooted cultural group whose image impacted the perception of Italianness in a new, Americanized environment.

TABLE 1

Evaluative Reactions by Northerners to
Southerners and Immigrants

<i>Item</i>	<i>Southerners</i>	<i>Immigrants</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Honest	68	73	-5*
Selfish	36	33	3
Law-abiding	35	51	-16*
Intrusive	61	55	6*
Slackers	57	37	20*
Violent	41	34	7*
Complainers	67	56	11*
Minimum N	1010	843	

* significantly different at $\alpha = 0.05$

Notes: Cell quantity is percentage of respondents agreeing (strongly or somewhat) with the description.

Weighted frequencies; unweighted N

Source: Paul M. Sniderman, Pierangelo Peri, Rui J.P. de Figueiredo Jr., Thomas Piazza, *The Outside: Prejudice and Politics in Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 86.

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Thesis: "You Wanna Play Rough?": The Unlikely Partnership of the Italian Mafia and Butch Lesbians in Greenwich Village, 1945-1968

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