

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI

Filozofická fakulta

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Tomáš Pospíšil

Abused and Idolized: The Depiction of Women in Martin  
Scorsese's Italian-American Films

Bakalářská práce

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedl jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In my thesis I will focus on the neglected role of women in the male dominated world of the Italian-American themed films directed by Martin Scorsese. I will analyze the portrayal of female characters in contrast to the machismo of the protagonists. Mainly I will work with the depiction of women in connection to the Italian-American mafia portrayed in Scorsese's films. I will analyze the representation of women as wives, mothers and mistresses of the Italian-American mobsters. My thesis will concern the depiction of women in the following films: *Raging Bull* (1980), *Goodfellas* (1990) and *Casino* (1995). I will work with the scripts of these films to try to determine whether Scorsese empowers women at all or shows them as mere victims and objects. My thesis will also briefly cover the role of women in the Italian-American households and consequently in the structures of organized crime syndicates.

The idea of choosing this topic came gradually to me. At first it was a class that I was taking at our department about feminism and masculinity in film and literature taught by Marian Siedloczek. At around the same time I picked up a book by Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, which resonated with me deeply and made me more aware of the past struggles of women and the lasting consequences they carry even to these days. Then I have, by chance, ended up seeing a season of TV series which was coincidentally about the feminist movement. The last drop was a dream - a sort of an epiphany - that all the time this topic was right under my nose, so it was only natural that, instead of focusing on the romanticizing of crime in Scorsese's work which would be much too obvious, I chose the way Scorsese depicts women in his filmography, especially women in the brutal world of Italian-American mafia.

As opposed to Scorsese's portrayal of the world of organized crime and his preoccupation with the lives of gangsters, the topic of my thesis is relatively specific and deals only with sideline characters who are on the outside of the spotlight, therefore not many analyses have been written about the overlooked female characters. Because my thesis aims attention at these neglected themes of otherwise richly analyzed work, not many available secondary sources can be found concerning the relevant topic. For this reason I will mainly analyze the screenplays of the films while taking into account

critical works which are mentioning female roles at least briefly or touching on a subject closely associated to my topic in some measure.

In the first part of my thesis I will provide the background of Martin Scorsese, including his short biography, list of his notable works and his personal experience and relationship with women of his life. Following chapters will deal with the Italian heritage, particularly Italian-American immigration to the United States, background for the role of women in Italian-American households and more specifically the position of women in the structure of Italian-American mafia.

In the main body of my thesis I will analyze individual scripts of the selected films. Starting with a short summary of the analyzed films promptly followed by the analysis itself focused on the role of female characters. I will discuss the way women are depicted in the film, taking into account its particular scenes relevant to my claims, and what message does it send to the viewer. The analysis of individual scenes will serve to establish the general portrayal of women and its impact on the overall setting of the film and what possible emotions does it awake in the viewer and society as a whole. If the depiction of women characters in the roles of mothers, wives and mistresses merely presents them as victims or empowers them.

In the final part of my thesis I will summarize the conclusions reached in the analyses and incorporate reasons for criticism and briefly mention the current struggles of women in the Hollywood film industry. Finally my thesis will discuss whether the way the sideline female characters are portrayed can offer an alternative reading of the film.

## 2. LIFE AND WORK OF MARTIN SCORSESE

Martin Scorsese, Italian-American filmmaker, rightly considered to be one of the most famous filmmakers of his era, was born in the City of New York in the autumn of the year 1942 to an Italian mother and Italian-American father. As an Italian-American he is not afraid to proudly explore his heritage in his work. With a career spanning over 50 years he has multiple awarded and honored films, now considered cult classics, in his body of work. It includes such hits as *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, *Goodfellas*, *The Last Temptation of Christ* or *Shelter Island*. In most of his films he usually casts awarded and honored actors most frequently Robert De Niro or Leonardo DiCaprio who both also have Italian ancestry.<sup>1</sup>

Scorsese is known for his harsh and violent portrayals of American culture, not shying away from profanity and provocative controversial topics exploring the dark side of human nature and character. He makes movies about troubled disturbed characters, usually observing, through a camera lens together with a viewer, their life on the margin. Exploring the tender side of covetous psychopaths, revealing their inner struggle and crisis of identity, sex and masculinity. Scorsese's films often deal with male psychology. The man's inner demons, suppressed under thick layers of unceasing strive to become the self-made man his parents can be proud of. However as the story develops, the protagonist is faced with more and more critical situations, his inner demon's voice gets louder, scratching at the walls of his weary soul, begging to be liberated. It is not long until some unfortunate event finally unleashes him sending the protagonist spiraling out of control. The character's eventual meltdown is then heavily reflected in his behaviour towards other characters, women included. This crisis of the protagonist also has a significant tie into a Catholic guilt and leads to a consequent struggle with the overall Italian-American identity. These recurring motifs are typical for Scorsese's films which are revolving around the Italian-American theme of organized crime.

Rarely does he shoot movies that are under 2 hours, yet still he manages to attract a wide range of audience. His stories are almost exclusively focused on male

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Barson, "Martin Scorsese," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Scorsese> (accessed July 4, 2019).

protagonists. Female roles are usually only supporting, and are told in relation to the man, hero of the story, who is the centre of the movie's universe while the woman revolves around him. Scorsese portrays women either as victims or idols, they are either abused or worshipped. Their role fluctuates between an angel and a whore, this dichotomy is typical for his filmwork.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.1. WOMEN IN MARTIN SCORSESE'S LIFE

When looking at the women in Martin Scorsese's life it is important to note that he was married numerous times. First of all, his five wives aside, the most important and beloved woman in his life was definitely his mother. Scorsese had a strong bond with his mother, which was documented in the *Italianamerican*, a little peek inside the Scorsese family in a documentary film from 1974. The proof is also a fact that he even did not hesitate to cast her in one of his films, *Goodfellas* (1990), where she had a small role of a mother of one of the mobsters. The whole scene was improvised and she was praised for her portrayal of Italian mother, who is oblivious to her son's criminal activity. Serving dinner in the eerie morning hours and casually joining in on the chat and the men-talk.<sup>3</sup>

Mothers in the Italian-American households, especially mothers of Italian-American mobsters clearly stand higher in the hierarchy than the wives. While wives get treated as a property most of the time, unless they can come in handy for some odd job or prove themselves useful in covering up for their husbands' misdemeanors, mothers on the other hand are always treated with respect. Not only it is because of the respect towards the elderly, but there is a stronger family bond connected with family roots based on the ancestry, son and mother are bound by blood, whilst husband and wife are just bound by a document of sorts. In the man's eyes, his wife is an object he owns and controls. Mother is sacred, revered and always treated with utmost decency.

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<sup>2</sup> Maria T. Miliore, *The Scorsese Psyche on Screen: Roots of Themes and Characters in the Films* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2004), 124.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Scorsese and Nicholas Pileggi, *Goodfellas* (Screenplay, 1990).

Martin's mother, Catherine, was surely a heavy influence on him, and his love for her is portrayed through the characters she played in his films. She played a mother for characters in the very first films of Scorsese *It's Not Just You, Murray!* and *Who's That Knocking at My Door*, continued by the role of a mother in *The King of Comedy*, but it was a role of a mother in *Goodfellas* that gained her recognition and became her most well known appearance.<sup>4</sup> However Scorsese's bond to his mother, and the mother's role in the family is best portrayed in the aforementioned 1974 documentary *Italianamerican*. Catherine's dominance and Scorsese's father passiveness in the documentary typify the matriarchal tendency in the Italian immigrant culture. As Mary Pat Kelly notes: "A son learns reality from his father, but his mother teaches him to shape it."<sup>5</sup> The statement captures the essence of the role of the mother in Italian immigrant families accurately, an example is shown in a seemingly ordinary scene when Catherine explains her pasta sauce recipe. The segment provides an example to the mother's prominence not only in the cooking but the overall preservation of the home. The strong matriarchal tendency in the Italian immigrant homes will be further developed on in the subsequent chapters.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Casillo, *Gangster Priest: The Italian American Cinema of Martin Scorsese* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 128.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Pat Kelly, *Martin Scorsese: A Journey* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991), 17.

### 3. ITALIAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Scorsese's life, roots and his ethical and religious attitudes certainly reflect in his movies and especially in the characters he chooses to explore. His personal beliefs about masculinity and femininity, his values and experiences can be found in the psychology of the characters thus providing a better picture for understanding Scorsese himself. Growing up in the New York's Little Italy district Scorsese had a chance to experience first-hand the streets booming with life, the violence of the gangs, the sermons of the priests. As Scorsese himself notes: "I was raised with them, the gangsters and the priests. And now, as an artist, in a way, I'm both a gangster and a priest."<sup>6</sup> these experiences influenced his career and the films reveal a lot about his childhood and youth he spent among the Italian-American immigrant families.

#### 3.1. ITALIAN IMMIGRATION

Numerous studies were conducted and extensive amounts of essays were written on Italian immigration to United States, however most of them are focused on a basic struggles of immigrants in general, often describing only the lives of men. Surveys of Italian-American life generally fail to incorporate women's experiences.<sup>7</sup> One reason could be that quite often the wives came significantly later, sometimes months or even years after their husbands, so their journey fell into a shadow of their brave men.

The fact that Italian women were left behind and thus their assimilation to the American culture was met with obstacles and their experience was belated, is described in the following passage by Donna Gabaccia where she compares the roles of a husband and a wife in the Italian-American family:

While American society was and is patriarchal, similar to Italian society, it lacked the power dimension of the mother in Italian society. When Italians first immigrated to the United States,

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew J. Rausch, *The Films of Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Donna Gabaccia, "Italian American Women: A Review Essay," *Italian Americana*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1993): 38.

they tended to cluster together in urban ghettos (areas predominantly consisting of others from the same cultural background), out of choice (subcultural similarities), and necessity (jobs and affordable housing). Italian immigrant women frequently lived in ghettos, and if they did not work outside of the home, their exposure to the norms and values of the dominant culture was less than their male “working” counterparts. This segregation of Italian American women from the dominant culture was maintained until the 1950s.<sup>8</sup>

From the previous statement it can be concluded that wives were limited to attending the space they lived in and seldom worked outside of home. The conditions in the first generations of Italian immigrants were completely opposite. The first generations sent every available member of the family, including school age children, to work instead of school, to contribute to the family income, parents also feared that education could cause rebellion against their authority.<sup>9</sup> The changing roles of women were closely tied to the financial situation of the family. However their role as mothers remained of utmost importance.

Most of the Italian immigrants used to settle in New York. New York City is known for its immense population of Italian immigrants, often being called the Italian-American capital. Reason for this nickname comes from a fact that New York City is home to the largest population of Italian-Americans that decided to leave the old country and start anew in the States. As of 2000 census an enormous 2.7 million<sup>10</sup> citizens of the New York State reported Italian ancestry, seven hundred thousand of those living in the Big Apple. The high tide of the Italian immigration to the United States was between the years 1880 and 1920 with more than four million Italian immigrants coming and settling in the New World. The Italian immigration peaked in the year 1970 and since then it is gradually declining as the economy of Italy started to prosper.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Susanna Tardi, *The Changing Roles of Italian American Women, Anti-Italianism, Italian and Italian American Studies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 96.

<sup>9</sup> Humbert S. Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnics: The Italian Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 145.

<sup>10</sup> “Statistics,” The National Italian American Foundation, <https://www.niaf.org/culture/statistics/> (accessed July 26, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Frank J. Cavaoli, “Patterns of Italian Immigration to the United States,” *The Catholic Social Science Review*, no. 13 (January 2008): 218.

### 3.2. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ITALIAN-AMERICAN HOUSEHOLDS

Traditional Italian-American family, in the time of the mafia heydays, strictly followed gender-based patterns typical for the period before the rise of feminism. As was usual at the time, a husband, as the head of the family, was considered to be the supreme authority not only over his wife and children, but often times also over his unmarried sisters. He was to be respected, feared and revered.<sup>12</sup> These stereotypical roles of patriarchy, where the husband is the head of the family with unlimited power, are quite truthfully reflected in Scorsese's filmwork. His depiction portrays realistic values held by Italian-American families back then when it was current.

To understand the role of women in households of Italian immigrants, it is important to know their role prior to the peak of Italian migration to the States, that ranged circa from 1880 to 1910.<sup>13</sup> Italian wives were entrenched in a family that was primarily father headed, but mother centered. The role of the mother slowly grew in importance over the years, as the socio-economic status declined. The family's image was dependent on the signs of overall well-being that emanated from the household and family members. The occupation of the father was less important than the mother's ability to provide a secure and happy home. Fundamental significance in the Italian culture, which is steeped in family, food and pride, was to always keep up a good picture of the family as a whole and to never show any signs that could add to a bad impression.<sup>14</sup>

Women held an important role in the immigrant communities, and that was to serve as preservers of Italian tradition and culture, which they achieved mainly through cuisine. They were expected to cling to their function of preserves and traditional gender roles even generations after migration.<sup>15</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter if women worked it was seldom outside the house, but many Italian women worked in the production of clothing, because it was a line of work that allowed them to work at home. This work was also tolerated by their husbands who expected that their wives

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<sup>12</sup> William S. Egelman, "Traditional Roles and Modern Work Patterns of Italian American Women in New York City," *Italian Americana*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 188.

<sup>13</sup> Tardi, *The Changing Roles of Italian American Women*, 95.

<sup>14</sup> Tardi, *The Changing Roles of Italian American Women*, 96.

<sup>15</sup> Andrea L. Dottolo and Carol Dottolo, *Italian American Women, Food, and Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 38.

would attend to household and take care of the domestic chores like cooking and taking care of children. Women's most important role was cooking and maintenance of home. So while Italian immigrant families were seemingly patriarchal, the women's essential role in the household made it a hidden matriarchy.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.2.1. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MAFIA

Because of the cultural stereotype people tend to associate criminals only to a male gender. Upon learning that a certain criminal is of female gender it usually raises a mild disbelief or a few startled reactions. This stereotype has influenced society for decades, providing sort of immunity to behaviour of mafia women, whom criminal organizations wisely used to their benefit. Judges considered mafia women to be merely a passive objects controlled and dominated by their mafiosi menfolk.<sup>17</sup> Women were certainly useful to the structure of organized crime even in the difficult times, for example in situations when the boss and other ranking members of the mafia were imprisoned, women sometimes assumed power and acted on their commands. However only really strong and ambitious women could achieve such fair treatment and assume the roles that were not subordinate within the criminal organization. Most of them were not that lucky and remained as minor servants of their dominant men often suffering physical as well as psychological violence caused by their husbands.

Objectifying women unfortunately runs hand in hand with mob and gangster culture. So to depict the reality accurately means to depict that mistreatment, violence and sexism. It is typical that the mobsters tend to have extremely old-world views, which are based on their Italian-American heritage, traditions and pride. In Scorsese's films women are often referred to as "broads" or "whores", and are under complete control of men. The wives are not seen as human beings by their mafiosi husbands, but rather as objects that are either disposable, or opposed to that, as a trophy prize to display.

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<sup>16</sup> Casillo, *Gangster Priest*, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Giovanni Fiandaca, *Women and the Mafia: Female Roles in Organized Crime Structures*, Vol. 5. (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2007), 2-3.

#### 4. ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED FILMWORK

It is no surprise that Scorsese's own life experiences and visions of society reflect in his films. Most frequently he addresses the themes of Italian-American identity, faith, especially catholicism and its concept of guilt and redemption, but also more harsh provocative themes of violent machismo, modern crime and gangster cult. Scorsese shows that he does not shy away from the use of profanity and repugnant scenes of drastic violence. Scorsese's films are almost exclusively dealing with male psychology, protagonist of the story is almost always a man, the theme is usually concerning machismo and the cast is heavily male dominated. His portrayal of women is criticized for being shallow, degrading or in some cases entirely missing from the picture. The following chapters aim to analyze the portrayal of female characters in Scorsese's films, his dichotomous depiction of women as either auxiliary and powerless or aggressive and egotistical.

The focus on the role of women in his films comes to me as intriguing because of the way how Scorsese's films celebrate a man's world through the eyes of male protagonists who are more than often portrayed as machos. Hence we can say that Scorsese's interest hones in on the macho male protagonist leaving only a small space for female characters who are then left as sidekicks and act only in supporting roles.

Over his career Scorsese was met with criticism for his degrading, one-dimensional view of womanhood (notably in the film *The Wolf of Wall Street*, released in 2013),<sup>18</sup> as all of his films are almost exclusively portraying the male characters as superior to their female counterparts. He was accused of negligence towards female characters by Meryl Streep, who called out "the inadequate portrayal of strong female leads in his filmwork."<sup>19</sup> There are some films where Scorsese does highlight the supporting women, where they are portrayed as more three-dimensional characters, however their character remains unexplored.

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<sup>18</sup> Moira Herbst, "The Wolf of Wall Street's Male Gaze," *Aljazeera America*, February 9, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/2/wolf-of-wall-streetmalegaze.html> (accessed June 26, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Rosie Dunford Wood, "The Role of Women in the Films of Martin Scorsese," *The Student Newspaper*, January 31, 2018, <http://www.studentnewspaper.org/the-role-of-women-in-the-films-of-martin-scorsese/> (accessed June 26, 2019).

According to Caroline Madden, Scorsese's depiction of women is always told in relation to the man:

Very often Scorsese is telling his stories through the lens of the male gaze, but it is a lens that he is specifically dissecting. That is what he is interested in exploring the flaws and crises of masculinity. He has a very particular world that he wants to portray- such as the Italian American and Catholicism that influenced his earlier work. Three-dimensional women are there in some of his work, but they are sprinkled throughout his filmography.<sup>20</sup>

The reference of a male gaze is a term which comes up quite frequently when talking about Scorsese's work. It comes from an essay by Laura Mulvey titled *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*<sup>21</sup> which describes the way female characters are portrayed and perceived by their male counterparts.

It is true that women mostly take a backseat in the male-driven story, but that is because he chooses stories where the main focus is on the male protagonist. The lead character is the driving force of the whole story and the plot is centered around him. Scorsese often sees a whole universe in a single character.<sup>22</sup> His protagonists are almost exclusively complex dimensional characters who carry some kind of a burden from their rough past. Often times though, these seemingly hard on the surface characters conceal their inner soft nature, which sort of punctures the illusion of their macho stereotype. This is then the reason for these men to assert their dominance over women by chipping away at their sense of self to make the women feel inferior and prove their own role as the superior of the two. Scorsese's films are rarely depicting themes of love or family. His main focus remains on the individual, his protagonists are usually filled with violence and anger felt towards society that they perceive as corrupted and making them feel trapped. The protagonist is also often alienated from his close ones. His relationship towards women usually comes down to the two views, he either admires women or mistrusts them.

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<sup>20</sup> Caroline Madden, "The Women of Martin Scorsese's Films," Screen Queens, November 24, 2014, <https://screen-queens.com/2014/11/24/the-women-of-martin-scorseses-films/> (accessed April 22, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, *Visual and other pleasures* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> Vincent LoBrutto, *Martin Scorsese: A Biography* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2007), 341.

Scorsese depicts the film's world in accordance with the reality, scenes where women are left at the mercy of their oppressive and aggressive partners are based on real life situations inspired by the crude conditions of being a member of mafia family. However the aggressive male protagonists are rarely unpunished, so in the end men often pay for their degrading actions towards their weaker counterparts. I do not suppose that Scorsese portrays an offensive personal vision of his own, but rather a recollection of truthful events which served as an inspiration for the story. A story he merely mediates to us and leaves the interpretation to the audience. Therefore the audience sees the wrongdoing of his characters, contemplates it, and maybe even takes a lesson from it. The film then does not serve as a derogatory affirmation of male superiority but rather as a cautionary tale that is truthful to reality and strive to move consciousness in society. I think Scorsese's aim is to portray the brutal world of a mafia in its raw rendition, and by showing us the degradation of women and how they cope with their feelings of victimhood is to be taken as a cautionary tale, not as a mocking assertion of male dominance. It is true that female characters in his films are usually limited to restrictive roles of mothers, wives or mistresses, but showing us their struggles and mistreatment they suffer from is of a great confessional value.

#### **4.1. RAGING BULL (1980)**

*Raging Bull* is a film adaptation of the memoir of Jake LaMotta, a real life professional boxer and middleweight champion who was active from the 1940s to 1950s and towards the end of his career was also a stand-up comedian. The story maps his professional career and his personal life, his psychotic violent outbursts both inside and outside of ring.

##### **4.1.1. LORI ANNE FLAX AS FIRST WIFE IRMA LA MOTTA**

The film presents us women in the role of wives. First we get introduced to an unnamed character of Jake's first wife, Irma. Irma has only two short scenes at the beginning of the film and her name is not even used in the film, the final credits also only mention her as Irma. Her character completely, and conveniently for Jake,

disappears after he falls for Vickie. In the two scenes that offer us a reading of her character and an option to comprehend the character of Irma, it is quite difficult to find out anything that would make the viewer sympathize with her. Scorsese did not apply any film element to make the viewer feel pity for the abandoned character of Jake's first wife. Her brief depiction, her clothes, and line delivery and her motion on the screen gives and creates almost a negative vibe oozing off of her character, and her portrayal then can be seen as disagreeable. Her appearance is also opposite to that of Vickie, while Irma wears a convenient stay-at-home and ready-for-kitchen clothes, Vickie is highly stylish with shiny blonde hair and a youthful body exposed to admiration.

The first scene with the first wife of Jack clearly shows who is the dominant character in the relationship. The frame is centered on Jake, the dialogue he leads with his wife asserts his supremacy. In the following exchange of lines where she serves him a steak for dinner her mannerism and posture expresses a bitterness towards her husband which is potentiated by her angry glare. She slams the steak onto his plate saying: "Here's your steak. You can't wait for it to be done. Here."<sup>23</sup> In this brief exchange Scorsese conveys the tension in the spiteful relationship between Jake and his wife and their chronic hatred they feel toward one another. As opposed to Jake, the screams of his wife are far more annoying and sound more aggressive than his, indicating the irritation felt by Jake. It is Scorsese's conveyance to makes us sympathize more with Jake rather than Irma.<sup>24</sup> As the argument is interrupted by a visit of Jake's brother, he grabs Irma by her hair and shoves her to the bedroom slamming the door shut behind her, the final gesture of the dominant man dealing away with his "annoying" wife.

According to Peggy McCormack, Scorsese's depiction of Jake's first wife is notably and purposely not flattering, he portrays her as a grumpy, bitter, screaming wife so the Jake's way of shutting her in the bedroom actually evokes a feeling of relief in a viewer.<sup>25</sup> There is also no background or development in her character, Scorsese did not offer us any scenes that would reveal the reason of her bitterness and justify her

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Schrader and Mardik Martin, *Raging Bull* (Screenplay, 1980), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Peggy McCormack, "Women in *Raging Bull*," in *Martin Scorsese's Raging Bull*, ed. Kevin J. Hayes (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 100.

<sup>25</sup> McCormack, "Women in *Raging Bull*," 99.

annoying behaviour. Her depiction is completely negative and the lack of any film elements that would make the viewer sympathize with her are only steering the sympathies towards Jake, so when he eventually flirts with Vickie it is understandable and not at all formidable or condemnable. As McCormack argues Irma's character can be perceived as a "shriek".<sup>26</sup> However to oppose McCormack's argument and defend the character of Irma, it is Jake who made Irma like that. Irma's bitterness and "tiring bitchiness"<sup>27</sup> is caused by Jake's irrational and controlling behaviour. It is his fault that Irma became grumpy. Her lack of affection can be blamed on his disrespect and aggressiveness towards her.

The interesting fact is that the jealousy and lack of trust later felt by Jake for Vickie may come from the fact that he himself has cheated on his then-wife Irma with Vickie, the infidelity is resonating into the relationship with her and creates ground for his suspicion which is escalated by Vickie's highly sexualized image.

#### **4.1.2. CATHY MORIARTY AS SECOND WIFE VICKIE LA MOTTA**

From the moment we are introduced to Vickie, it is clear that Jake's intention is to own her, to obtain her beauty, the strong sense of his desire to possess her as a trophy is apparent. He is obsessed with her beauty and perceives her only as an object of admiration. In his introduction he courts her and speaks to her in flatteries: "When did you fall outta heaven? Anyone ever tell you you're the most beautiful one here, princess of the pool."<sup>28</sup>

It is not long till the soft and fragile Vickie finds herself in a nasty and violent relationship, which can be characterized as a confinement. After marriage Vickie becomes a perfect example of a trophy wife. However fairly early at the beginning of their marriage, first signs of unhealthy relationship quickly start to show up, such one can be observed in a scene at the pool. Her youthful beauty, for which Jake picked her to be his wife, eventually becomes her doom, as it cannot be unnoticed and draws

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<sup>26</sup> McCormack, "Women in *Raging Bull*," 100-101.

<sup>27</sup> McCormack, "Women in *Raging Bull*," 100.

<sup>28</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 17.

attention and stares of male admirers making Jake boil with sexual jealousy. She becomes a victim of his aggressive mood swings and sadly also a target of his swinging punches.

Even other men cannot escape his jealous rage. When his wife briefly expresses an opinion that one of his opponents is good-looking, Jake takes it upon himself to have revenge and completely destroys the poor guy's face. Only thing she said was that he was "up-and coming, he's good looking..."<sup>29</sup> All it took was this one innocent remark of his wife to set him off. His anger is building up and Vickie is defenceless in her argumentation.<sup>30</sup> Since then Vickie is under austere control, constantly accused and reprimanded for even a slightest hint of her being interested in someone else. Jake controls her in every possible way even when she is looking at someone he immediately accuses her: "What're you lookin' at? You lookin' at him?"<sup>31</sup> Her response bears no significance to him as he follows with: "Don't tell me "No." I saw you lookin' at him. Why, you like him?"<sup>32</sup> These signs of controlling behaviour and obsessive jealousy make Vickie a victim of abusive relationship.

Jake feels empowered by owning her sexual beauty, but at the same time he is also scared it might not be true. This fear transforms into aggression and he attacks her to evade it. Her beauty serves as a fetish for him which also causes him a great deal of anxiety. Her transformation from living the life of a trophy wife to the idyllic life of a mother of his children is shot in such a contrastive way to the objective narration that it implies it is only Jake's idealized vision of the relationship.

To analyze the depiction of Vickie in more detail it is also essential to look at Scorsese's way of filming her in particular scenes. The already mentioned scene at the swimming pool, where Jake sees Vickie for the first time already offers valuable interpretations. First of all the camera's detailed focus lingering on her face, hair and legs splashing in the pool is a way of practically fetishizing her body to show Jake's sexual desire. However this obsessive desire does not disappear after she becomes his wife and mother of his children. Because of her lasting highly sexualized appearance Jake is unable to perceive her as a loyal wife and fights with his fear over her sexuality.

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<sup>29</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 31.

Even though it is shown that Jake's psychopathic jealousy is not reasonable Scorsese's way of portraying Vickie's fidelity remains ambiguous. In the scene where Vickie kisses goodbye Jake's brother it is intentionally shot in slow motion to show Jake's distrust and create a sense of doubt in a viewer. Jake states very clearly he does not like the way she kisses him goodbye and when she tries to protest he shuts her down: "Shut up. You just say hello and goodbye to him. You don't kiss him the way you did. That's out of line."<sup>33</sup> The narrative of the film also never shows Vickie alone in any scenes to reveal her personality, the fact that she is excluded from the narrative point of interest makes her character distant and her scarce representation does not allow for viewers to create a strong bond with her or feel more empathy towards her character. However she does express her feelings about the relationship not being ideal. "I don't get to breathe without tellin' him. He keeps me in a cage. If he thinks I'm lookin' at somebody the wrong way, I get used as a punching bag."<sup>34</sup> She is certainly a victim of Jake's violence and her confession eventually does make the viewer feel pity towards her character, but her role of a victim is not the main focus of the film. In the few lines she has she voices her doubts and fears: "He gets crazy sometimes. I'm scared."<sup>35</sup> However because of the narrative focus on Jake her voice is muffled and remains unheard.

After a big fight between Jake and Vickie, where he is slapping her violently and accusing her of cheating: "Answer me. Open this fuckin' door, you fuckin' cunt! Who've you been fuckin'?"<sup>36</sup> She is no longer afraid and fights back with words and snatchy remarks to incite his rage: "All right, I fucked everybody! Go ahead, kill me, kill me."<sup>37</sup> After being a victim for so long Vickie finally cracks and is brave enough to stand up to Jake saying: "I'm not afraid of you anymore. I don't care if you kill me... You're a sick animal. You're not only an animal, you're a stupid animal. You're rotten. Rotten. You're a sick maniac. A maniac! You belong in a mental hospital."<sup>38</sup> After it is over she is determined to leave him and gets as far as packing a suitcase. This resolute decision portrays Vickie's strong character who refuses to stay a mere victim of Jake's

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<sup>33</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 51.

<sup>34</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 38.

<sup>35</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 38.

<sup>36</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 64.

<sup>37</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 64.

<sup>38</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 66.

abuse: "I'm leaving you. And I don't care if you do try to kill me. Go ahead. I'm not afraid of you anymore. There's worse things than being dead and one of them's living with you. I'm leaving tonight. I must have been crazier than you are for stayin' with you this long. You're hopeless."<sup>39</sup> Her words reveal that she was well aware of his abusive behaviour and is finally strong enough to voice her pain. However he begs her to stay, in this scene there is an apparent change in the frame, as opposed to his dominance in most of the scenes, the reconciliation scene is shot in a way that Vickie shares the screen with Jake. He is crouching behind her gently hugging her waist, here Vickie is perceived as a goddess who has Jake at her own mercy.<sup>40</sup> His pleads are answered and she decides to stay, which weakens her character again. The point she made in the preceding act of victory is thrown away by Jake's single excuse. However in the end she eventually leaves him with her head held high while retaining her dignity.

The role of women is absent after Vickie's departure. Since then there are the club girls who are presented only as a sexual commodity, they are shallow characters without names who are perceived as not interesting to Jake or the viewer.

Portrayal of women in the *Raging Bull* is flat, only seen in relation to Jake's perspective, once he notices them and they become objects of interest for him. Women in the film can be divided into three possible categories: either as not interesting to even know, as completely unknown or, the saddest case which is also a Vickie's case, as unknowable making them victims of obsessively frustrated Jake beaming with violent jealousy.<sup>41</sup> As Peggy McCormack further develops on this claim:

These three categories of women are known only as objects of Jake's interest. The film's naturalist worldview defines Jake as the narrative's focus. La Motta, as constructed in the screenplay of Paul Schrader and Mardik Martin, reflects historical, cultural, social, economic, physical, and psychological gender ideologies. Jake is the product of his childhood during the worst part of America's Great Depression.<sup>42</sup>

Scorsese's roots and heritage of his generation are also projected onto the screen. The claim offers possible reasons as to why is Jake behaving the way he is.

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<sup>39</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 67.

<sup>40</sup> Schrader and Martin, *Raging Bull*, 67.

<sup>41</sup> McCormack, "Women in *Raging Bull*," 92-93.

<sup>42</sup> McCormack, "Women in *Raging Bull*," 93.

His background as an Italian-American child of immigrants shapes his identity; his native Bronx provides the setting in which poverty and his Italian-American culture permanently affected him; and finally, his own genetic accidents of physical toughness, violent temper, and ambition factor into his expectations of male and female behavior. Jake emerges from the film as a deeply insecure, violently tempered, sexually paranoid, profoundly ambitious, extremely traditionalist male who, in the 1940s and 1950s, brawls his way to the middleweight championship.<sup>43</sup>

McCormack's statement sums up not only the reasoning behind the behaviour of Jack, but also the general characteristics of male and female roles at the time.

The viewer is offered a story of Jake, sharing the intimate experience of how it feels like to be him, thus making the viewer identify with Jake, despite his behaviour. The deeper the knowledge of a protagonist, however disagreeable, the more probably the audience is to accept and sympathize with him.<sup>44</sup> In contrast women remain only as scripted objects of Jake's subjective point of view. Scorsese depicts the women merely as accessory, relating to Jack either as wives, girlfriends or mother to his children. The story's access to women is limited. They are represented in stereotypically limited roles, Jake sees them either as pure immaculate virgins or villainous "whores". His insecure psychotic jealousy connected to his manhood takes a toll on Vickie. The beatings are there to shock the viewers and make them realize how twisted the character of Jake is. The scenes showing us the brutal beating of Vickie function as an Aristotelian spectacle, viewer simply cannot take his eyes off of the screen and is compelled to watch without wanting to.

Among mixed reviews the film also appealed to some feminists, who interpreted the explicit display of violence, caused by protagonist's supposed masculine social disease, as a profound critique of masculinity. *Raging Bull* can indeed send out signals about masculinity being in a crisis, however it remains a question of it offers any critique at all despite being radically disturbing. There are two roles of violence in the film. Firstly the violence serves as an element of authenticity, because it is an inherent factor of masculinity in a man who is trying to fight against a repressive system of a corrupt society, thus violence can be celebrated as a pure human desire. On

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<sup>43</sup> McCormack, "Women in *Raging Bull*," 93.

<sup>44</sup> McCormack, "Women in *Raging Bull*," 94.

the other hand it portrays the protagonist as a responsible victim of his own transgressive desire. Combining the self-destructive acts of excessive violence with a tinge of nostalgia for traditional family values practically calls for a moralistic condemnation of violence.<sup>45</sup>

All in all the fact that Scorsese leaves the audience confined to Jake's perspective throughout the film and most of the scenes depict the women in an unflattering way makes the viewer sympathize more with the male protagonist. The lack of background or development of female characters does not provide any bond to them and makes it difficult to be interested in women of the story or feel enough pity for them in the harsh situations they face. Their status is only that of a respondent to Jake's actions and the viewer is distanced from women's feelings. However women manage to get out of the toxic relationship while retaining their dignity, they are winners in the end. It is a story of flawed man, and we get to see his bad side, which shows his aggressive violent outbursts that clearly shock the audience and urges the viewer to think about his acts in accordance with the morality. From the story of Jack we get to learn what it is like to live with a psychotic violent man, if not necessarily from a woman's perspective, we still get to learn about the traumatic effects it has on women.

#### **4.2. GOODFELLAS (1990)**

*GoodFellas* is an adaptation of Nicholas Pileggi's non-fiction account of the experiences of the real-life Henry Hill, published in 1985 as *Wiseguy: Life in a Mafia Family*. We follow a life of Henry Hill on his way of becoming a gangster. Being a male dominated genre generates issues of representation of gender. The film received critique for its representation of women as complicit, hysterical, objectified and stoic.<sup>46</sup> However the character of Karen might be the strongest one in the story.

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<sup>45</sup> Pam Cook, "Masculinity in Crisis?," *Screen*, Volume 23, Issue 3-4 (Sep/Oct 1982): 39.

<sup>46</sup> Bambi Haggins, "The Cinematic Seduction of Not a Good Fella," in *A Companion to Martin Scorsese*, ed. Aaron Baker (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 443.

#### 4.2.1. LORRAINE BRACCO AS WIFE KAREN HILL

Half an hour of the film passes until Karen is introduced. She is looking longingly at Henry, who is completely oblivious and ignores her. And then, quite unexpectedly, after half an hour of Henry's narrative voice over Karen takes over with her own narration of the story. Before she was just a friend of a "Jew broad"<sup>47</sup> but now the role of narrator switches to her. Until then Henry was describing the wiseguys' business in and out with all the machismo references and violent criminality. Karen's sudden voice over narration breaks the pattern of male narration and is contrastive to the setting and overall vibe of the so far men themed film. Her monologue serves as a feminine element in contrast to the male dominated world of organized crime and her sudden intrusion gently provides different interpretation of particular moments. It is exceptional because for the first time we get to know the part of the story from a female point of view, and hear Karen's subjective feelings and her own point of view on the main protagonist: "I couldn't stand him. I thought he was really obnoxious."<sup>48</sup> Scorsese hints at her significant role in the story.

Their first date was halted to an abrupt end by Henry literally pushing Karen back home, which showed his dominance over her. When the second date came Henry stood her up, but Karen did not let her pride be walked over. She took the matters into her own hands and went to look for Henry. She caused a scene in front of his friends and other wiseguys, which would be very humiliating for a man of his position taking into account the situation. However she is portrayed as an exceptional fiery woman who refuses to be a mere victim, she shouts at him and talks him down asserting her dominance. This causes Henry to really notice her and he actually takes a liking to her stating that her fiery character actually attracts him. She is indeed portrayed as a beautiful, confident and brave woman who is not afraid to stand her ground, she screams: "You've got some nerve. Standing me up. Nobody does that to me. Who do you think you are?"<sup>49</sup> It is clear that Karen is no sideline character but one of the main characters in the film.

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<sup>47</sup> Martin Scorsese and Nicholas Pileggi, *Goodfellas* (Screenplay, 1990), 30.

<sup>48</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 31.

<sup>49</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 32.

Then follows the famous long track sequence scene where Henry leads Karen to the club showing off his power and influence he gained as a wiseguy, claiming again his throne and the leading role of the film leaving Karen awestruck and dazzled by his confidence. They are seated just as a comedian on stage delivers jokes about wives, women are put at their place again and story is back on men business. Scorsese switches between these two contrastive worlds seemingly swiftly and through the character of Karen and her voice over monologue offers a different point of view on the story and the protagonist Henry.

Henry and Karen encounter a man named Bruce, who lives across the street from her, his longing gaze at Karen gives out his fancy for her and makes him pose as a threat in Henry's eyes. Karen is oblivious to this threat, much like she is oblivious to Henry's suspicious amount of connections he has at such a young age. Although her narration continues, she has a limited access to the story and knows less than the viewer already does making her less relevant in the plot line, but still a major character nonetheless. At this point in the story Henry treats Karen as a goddess, pampering her with gifts and expensive dinners.

Karen eventually becomes a victim of Bruce's sexual harassment and his attempt to rape her. She is shaken as she describes how he "started to touch her, started to grab her, even when she told him to stop he did not stop..."<sup>50</sup> then she breaks down crying. Henry takes her home so she can put herself together and goes on to deal with the attacker and beats him senseless with a gun. Karen still flustered from the attack and from what she just saw is handed the gun covered in blood to hide. Her voice over continues as she describes how the fact that her boyfriend gave her a gun to hide did not scare her but in fact actually kinda turned her on: "I know there are women, like my best friends, who would have gotten out of there the minute their boyfriend gave them a gun to hide. But I didn't. I got to admit the truth. It turned me on."<sup>51</sup> Scorsese emphasizes Karen's fearless character as something that levels her with Henry, making her an equal partner and equally prominent character in the story.

Cue on the next scene where Henry marries Karen, at the wedding reception a character Tommy, violent macho Italian man played by Joe Pesci, gets reprimanded by

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<sup>50</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 39.

<sup>51</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 41.

his mother, played by Scorsese's own mother. She is scolding him for not being like Henry, settled down with a nice girl as is expected of men his age. From this scene it can be judged that for the character of Italian mother is typical the family centered approach. The romantic wedding dance of the newlyweds shows just how happy and in love Karen and Henry are. This dreamy scene is immediately followed by a scene with Karen's mother, dressed in a nightgown with her hair tucked, while the husband is slouching on the couch. This portrayal of a long married couple serves as a contrast to Karen's. Karen's mother is chiding Henry for not calling Karen while he is out at night, declaring that her husband, Karen's father, never stayed out all night without calling to which Karen argues that her father never even went out at all. Karen's mother is portrayed as the dominant head of the family who controls the household while her father is the silent type who gave up on any resistance in order to live comfortably and at peace.<sup>52</sup>

Scorsese portrays Karen's mother in contrast to Karen. When Henry finally returns home Karen opens the door with a sweet greeting, happy to see him while her mother angrily starts to scold Henry for coming so late screaming: "Where were you why didn't you call? Where have you been? We were worried to death. A married man does not stay out like this."<sup>53</sup> to which Henry just turns around with laughter and leaves. Karen sides with Henry and starts screaming at her mother. Scorsese depicts the raging mother-in-law as a negative character which puts the calm and understanding Karen in a good light, making the viewer like her and sympathize with her.

Then there are other wives of Henry's friends and associates. They are portrayed as trophy wives styling their hair or painting their nails while talking about their husband's business in a manner of talk which resembles the rough men talk including profanity and talking about the killing. The women talk about the killings and deaths without twitching an eye as if it would be a regularly discussed topic at their gatherings. Their use of profanity and the rough talking portrays their deformation after marriage to wiseguys. Scorsese depicts them in the same way as the mafiosi men. As Karen narration continues she remarks that the wives had "bad skin and wore too much

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<sup>52</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 42.

<sup>53</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 45.

makeup and they did not look very good, but instead they looked beat up.”<sup>54</sup> As she observes them she begins to understand the differences between being a gangster’s wife and being a normal married women. She is aware of her difference from the other wives, criticizing their looks, style and parenting, but her concerns are blocked as her narration explains she got accustomed to the new way of life. Then there are closeup shots on these women and they indeed are portrayed as if they were deformed, beat up by their seemingly idyllic marriage to rough men living dangerous lives full of violence and killing. The wives are depicted as female copies of their husbands and in a superficial way as opposed to Karen, whose character has more depth.

At this point Karen’s voice over reveals that she knows all about Henry’s line of work and even though she is afraid of him she accepts the fact that what Henry does is dangerous and illegal. Scorsese’s use of Karen’s voice over and her strong personality makes the viewer connect to her character and at times even consider her to be the leading role of the film who is telling the story. Her dominance in the plot and her stable personality is shown in numerous scenes. For example when two detectives show up at her doorstep with a search warrant she offers them coffee and goes on about her chores without panicking or raising any suspicion that would give Henry’s activities away or put him at danger. By showing us Karen as an equal partner in crime and marriage to Henry, Scorsese makes her character exceptional and she stands out throughout the story. However the plot line is still centered on Henry and his cronies and completely ignores the personal life of Karen, so the fact they already have a child together is shown just aside in one of the scenes. Despite Karen’s assimilation to Henry’s life and work and the continual use of her narration, her personal life is still neglected in the overall plot. Karen’s depiction as a wife makes her certainly superior to other wives, but her character, despite showing signs of independence, is still perceived as inferior to her husband and in particular scenes her behaviour is superficial and degrading. There is a scene where she asks her husband for money to go shopping for some clothes, a typical wife activity, and when she obtains the money from him she rewards Henry with a fellation.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 47.

<sup>55</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 52.

Henry's mistress is introduced just out of the blue while he casually takes her out on a Saturday night with the guys who also bring their mistresses. As opposed to Karen, the character of the mistress is plain and dull and featureless, her personality is shallow and Scorsese does not introduce her traits at all as she serves only as a distraction and temporary patch for Henry. He spends the night with her and the following scene again presents the unspoiled picture of Karen with their two children, again the fact that Karen had borne another child is left out of the story. Later it is revealed that the name of the mistress is Janice. The sudden infidelity of Henry comes as quite a shock to the audience and actually makes the viewer feel pity towards his wife Karen, who is depicted as a loving mother, at least at the few scenes the plot offers here and there. The scene with the mistress depicts her in a fashionable clothes with a tiny dog in her hand showing off the apartment to other women while in Henry's narration we hear that "Karen was home with the kids and she never asked any questions anyway"<sup>56</sup> Janice is portrayed very superficially and her character seems as a materialistic gold-digger from the way she boasts off about the furniture, giving a tour around the apartment for the other girls making them admire all the luxury expensive things Henry bought her, also from the way she dresses, the shiny clothes she wears, and her mannerism it can be said that her character cares more about the things than Henry. However without much information about her and the lack of scenes that would reveal something more about her character it is difficult to judge. Scorsese provides certain hints, for example the use of a song *Baby I Love You* while Janice shows off the luxuries which can be interpreted as an element of irony. Her depiction is unflattering and Scorsese intentionally does not want the audience to create a bond to her character, but rather to feel more sympathy toward the character of wife Karen. Even Henry treats her with lack of respect and sees her more as an object.

It does not take long for Karen to lose her patience and she makes a scene accusing Henry of his infidelity. Even though Scorsese depicts her in this scene as a hysterical screaming wife he still lets her retain her dignity by her refusal to become a mere victim. Sadly her screams are ignored by Henry and the pity felt for her character fuels a despise of Henry, who is slowly spiralling out of control and becoming an unreliable protagonist who gradually loses his ground. Karen goes as far as to pay the

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<sup>56</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 57.

mistress a visit, she brings her two children with her and screams at her, calling her a “whore” and warning her to “stay away from her husband.”<sup>57</sup> Again she is acting hysterical and is overwhelmed by emotions but Scorsese does not depict her despair in a negative way, she is not portrayed as a desperate housewife who tolerates her husband’s affair, but instead she takes the matters into her own hands and fights for her family, for the peace of her household and for the sake of their children, to preserve their marriage. This depiction of a loyal wife and brave mother actually scores her more sympathy than the protagonist Henry.

An iconic scene follows where Karen wakes Henry up while pointing a loaded gun right at his face. Her voice over narration reveals her state of mind and justifies her actions by confessing her emotions without any veils: “But still I couldn't hurt him. How could I hurt him? I couldn't even bring myself to leave him.”<sup>58</sup> She is aware of his misdemeanors but still cannot bring herself to leave him and no matter how bad she feels she is still attracted to him, and she does not want to let the mistress win the situation. As she speaks her mind: “The truth was, that no matter how bad I felt, I was still very attracted to him. Why should I give him up to someone else? Why should she win?”<sup>59</sup> her strong personality is revealed. This revelation described in her own words shows that she is definitely not portrayed as another one of the weak women who are left at mercy of their dominant husbands. She rejects her role of a victim. However her seemingly triumphant victory does not last long. The moment Henry calms her down and she stops crying he slaps her making her fall off the bed, leans over her grabbing her hair and pointing the gun at her. Now Henry is in charge of the dialogue holding the ace in his hand in the form of a gun. Karen remains calm and in between his screams and her tears blurts out whispering apologies. The moment she takes over dominance Scorsese immediately puts her down again and asserts Henry’s power and superiority in the relationship. However Karen still remains to be the more sensible character.

When Henry ends up in jail Karen visits him with their children, she looks worned out and weary. Upon learning that his mistress’ name is in the register of visitors she causes a scene again refusing to be his slave smuggling things for him to

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<sup>57</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 61.

<sup>58</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 62.

<sup>59</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 63.

jail. She sacrifices her values and is willing to put herself at risk by making a deal with Henry to help their family stay afloat financially, in exchange for him ending it with Janice. When he is released four years later she is there waiting for him, she remains to be portrayed as a loyal wife who sticks through the worst times with her husband. She is the most innocent character and heroine of the story, as she managed to take care of the family while Henry was inside and also forgave him. That shows her strong personality and kind heart.<sup>60</sup>

However Henry finds another mistress, Sandy, who helps him deal drugs and is also addicted. Meanwhile Karen has a third child. Scorsese leaves these little episodes on the sideline of the story focusing more on the Henry's drug business. The Sandy character is portrayed in a very sexualised way. Their relationship seems to be build on their drugs smuggling business and sexual desire. In one scene she is wearing erotically attractive clothing and behaves in a seductive manner groping Henry's crotch, this depiction lets her character fall into the call girl category of women, with no other character traits than to serve as a mean of satisfaction of Henry's sexual desires.<sup>61</sup>

Towards the end of the film when Henry's addiction gets worse and things start to fall apart even Karen's appearance reflects the misery, she looks exhausted by life, smoking and sipping wine in every scene. She is becoming a wreck much like her husband Henry. She slowly descends into being a partner in Henry's criminal activities. When Henry's eventual meltdown comes she is there for him to comfort him. The scene shows her embracing him in her arms and console him. She assumes the role of the protector and comforter proving her incredibly strong personality. She takes over his errands even at a risk of an imminent death. In the final credits it is revealed that Karen eventually divorced Henry, she managed to save herself from the downfall.

It is typical that wives get cheated on, and are not always treated with respect, however they are the backbones of the family and the household making their role important for the protagonist. Karen's portrayal as a wife and a mother is mostly positive, she retains dignity throughout the whole story and her role as a mother is painting a picture of her in a good light. *Goodfellas* is also a unique film because despite being heavily male dominated and centered around men it offers a female point

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<sup>60</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 71-73.

<sup>61</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, 83.

of view by the means of Karen's narrative voice over monologue she uses to describe not only on her feelings but also to comment on the crucial moments of the plot.

The character of Karen in *Goodfellas* is one of the strongest and multi-dimensional female characters in Scorsese's male dominated films. Through her voice-over narration she justifies her actions and provides reasons for staying with her husband Henry with whom she willingly participates in the criminal activities. She has the ability to observe and judge other characters from her own perspective which offers the viewer an opportunity to interpret the story from a different point of view and expose the ups and downs of roles of wives. *Goodfellas* is definitely a pioneering film in Scorsese's portrayal of women.

#### **4.2.2. CATHERINE SCORSESE AS TOMMY'S MOTHER**

With brief features in the previous scenes Tommy's mother, played by Scorsese's actual mother Catherine, makes a significant and memorable appearance at the one hour mark of the film. The scene where Henry together with Tommy and Jimmy visit Tommy's house at eerie morning hours in order to obtain a shovel so they can dig up a hole to bury a body they have in a trunk of the car. To their surprise Tommy's mother is still awake and greets them warmly in the kitchen asking them worriedly what happened. Personal relationship aside Scorsese here beautifully depicts the loving and caring mother of an Italian mobster. She does not mind the nighttime intrusion and is happy for a company of her son and his friends willingly telling them to make themselves at home and kindly offering them a meal she cooked. Scorsese depicts the typical hospitality of Italian mother, ready at all times to attend to her son's needs. Despite the fact that Tommy has not been to see her in a long time she is not mad at him and does not reproach him for neglecting her, instead she is curious about his life and asks him how he has been. Meanwhile the whole group is feasting on the meal she prepared on a table and Scorsese offers us a scene of an idyllic family get together. In spite of the dead body in the trunk he makes the setting feel homely and secure thanks to the presence of the mother, who poses almost as a saint, feeding her hungry boys whom she took under her wings like her own sons. She does not ask questions when her son, stained by blood, wants to borrow one of her knives, to in his words get rid of the

deer he hit with a car. It is a question if she believes his story or rather chooses to believe it, if she is aware of her son's activities and ignores them or if she is truly so oblivious and naive. Scorsese leaves this interpretation open or rather does not suggest either of the two.

Tommy's mother once again, this time in a friendly manner, taunts her son with questions about his love life and whether he is planning to finally settle down with a nice girl. He responds by hugging her and telling her that he loves her causing her to smile.<sup>62</sup>

The whole scene functions as a harmonious moment of tranquility and complete peace of mind for the characters in a difficult situation and offers a moment of calmness even for the viewer distressed by the earlier situations. By showing us this serene scene symbolizing the atmosphere of well-being in the Italian family which is created by the mother, Scorsese paints the picture of the role of the mother as a nurturer, which is depicted by her maternal desire to feed her boys, typical of Italian mother.

### **4.3. CASINO (1995)**

*Casino* is a glamorous film depiction of the flashy 1970s of Las Vegas gambling underworld. Featuring Robert DeNiro and Sharon Stone as lead actors it embarks on a life of Sam "Ace" Rothstein who is based upon a real figure, Frank Rosenthal, once a prominent figure in the underworld of Las Vegas' gambling scene. The film was released in 1995 and received warm criticism once again proving the qualities of Scorsese's work. Scorsese worked again with Nicholas Pileggi with whom he created *Goodfellas*. The prominent female character in the story is Ginger, protagonist's wife, played by Sharon Stone, who earned an Oscar nomination. Her depiction will be analyzed in the following chapter.

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<sup>62</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Goodfellas*, because the scene was improvised there are no specific lines mentioned in the screenplay.

### 4.3.1. SHARON STONE AS WIFE GINGER MCKENNA

Unlike in other male dominated films by Scorsese, here the female character, Ginger, actually goes through some kind of development and has a story of her own. She is also dominating certain scenes and gets a significant amount of on-screen time. However her portrayal is very negative. She is portrayed as a cold-hearted woman who ruthlessly exploits a man's love. As opposed to *Goodfellas*, where the Karen character had a positive role and was portrayed as sympathetic, in *Casino* the character of Ginger is more villainous. She suffers from a mental illness and becomes a drug addict, putting her daughter in danger, quite the opposite of Karen, she also defies her husband who is extremely kind and supporting, unlike the husband of Karen.

When the main protagonist Sam first sees Ginger, she is portrayed as a strong independent woman. Not afraid to stand her grounds she is demanding from her male companion to get a fair share of the winnings and get paid evenly for her contributions in the gambling, she says: "I won all that for you. What am I getting? I want a rack."<sup>63</sup> When he refuses she tosses his chips into the air for everyone to take, thus attracting attention of the surrounding people including Sam, who noticed her prior to her making a scene. We then get a long shot on her character with a song playing in the background which clearly indicates Sam's fancy for her. This is proved with his line: "What a move! I fell in love right there."<sup>64</sup> Followed by: "But in Vegas, for a girl like Ginger, love costs money." Ginger says she has to use the powder room prompting Sam to take out his wallet and offer her cash, she confidently takes \$100, much like the character of Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Hence there is an apparent message about Gingers' standards, her goal in life in the first place was to obtain money. However Sam is not at all oblivious to this, in fact he is much aware of her fondness for wealth, "Ginger's mission in life was money."<sup>65</sup> he says. "Ginger was a queen around the casino."<sup>66</sup> Scorsese makes Ginger's character striking in a lot of ways but also portrays her as a really cunning character, creating a sense of unease and apprehension about her. She established herself as a gifted swindler, exploiting wretched individuals for

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<sup>63</sup> Martin Scorsese and Nicholas Pileggi, *Casino* (Screenplay, 1995), 26.

<sup>64</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 26.

<sup>65</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 27.

<sup>66</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 27.

their money and making them lose their finances by keeping them gambling for days on end. She certainly knew her way around the casino and she seemed to have everything under control except one thing. Her so called “pimp boyfriend”<sup>67</sup> Lester. A degenerate poor fellow, but despite his flawed character she had a weakness for him and could never turn him down. She saw him just like an unlucky guy and felt the need to take care of him. This shows Ginger in a contrast to her confidence as a bit naive. In the scenes with Lester, Ginger is portrayed as tawdry and in complete inferiority to him. While being highly dominating and superior to Sam she completely undermines her confidence when it comes to Lester, who is treating her as something less and only uses her for his benefit. Sam on the other hand treats her as a queen. Scorsese’s portrayal of this conflicting personality shows Ginger’s character as unstable.<sup>68</sup>

The first portrayal of Ginger as a breathtakingly beautiful and self-reliant woman, dressed as a goddess with all attention on her is contrasting to her personality full of flaws and dishonest behaviour. Her fiery action is what attracts the main protagonist Sam, much like Henry in *Goodfellas* fell for Karen. Scorsese intentionally creates a sense of awe about her character, with the long track scenes showing her beauty and indomitable charm. Scenes where she carries herself with confidence looking indeed like a queen serve to establish her character as a dominating woman of the story. Everything changes when Sam announces to Ginger that he would like to marry her, settle down and have a family. She is honest and tells him upfront that she is not in love with him: “I’m not in love with you. I’m sorry. You’ve got the wrong girl.”<sup>69</sup> This shows Ginger’s moral side. Sam tries to persuade her anyway even though she feels insecure about the future and the possibility of their marriage failing. Eventually she gives in, mainly because of the promise that she will be secured financially for the rest of her life. Right from the start of their marriage we can get a clear sense that already their relationship is tarnished with insecurities and definitely not healthy. The character of Sam is obsessed with the idea of an ideal married life with kids, he wants to have a trophy wife for everyone to admire, it is more of a power move on his side, a calculated move to build up his own image. Ginger on the other hand is totally obsessed

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<sup>67</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 28.

<sup>68</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 37.

<sup>69</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 36.

with Lester, calling him on her wedding day and crying about her being weak: “I know Lester, but this is the best thing I can do. I'm sorry. I love you.”<sup>70</sup> She feels trapped by marriage. She does tell Sam that it is hard for her because Lester is her best friend since childhood, Sam does understand her situation, but speaks his own mind about her relationship with Lester being over for good, because they are married now: “Look that part of your life is over with.”<sup>71</sup> This sends a clear message that once Ginger gets married to Sam she becomes his property and he has an absolute power over her. Scorsese depicted the change Ginger went through from her single life to the married life as something that weakened her character's dominant introduction.

Sam keeps his word about setting up Ginger by practically buying her affection with expensive gifts and jewelry. In the scenes where Ginger is enjoying the luxuries of married life Scorsese depicts her in a superficial way. Women here are mostly depicted as dishonest, unstable and not to be trusted, Ginger's cunning personality only proves the point.<sup>72</sup> Her superficial tendency to focus on the money is highlighted in a scene where she asks her husband for a large sum of money. She claims: “Listen, I've been independent my whole life. I never had to ask anybody for anything.”<sup>73</sup> When she is humiliated by having to explain what she needs it for and is unable to explain she goes on and “steals” the money from their deposit box in a bank. Her depiction gets more negative and makes the audience despise her actions, steering sympathy towards Sam. When her drinking is getting out of hand he is trying to talk some sense into her: “Ginger, please, you've got to get yourself together. It's not for me. We've got a kid for godsake.”<sup>74</sup> He offers to help her. However she does not want any help.

When she seeks consolation at Sam's friend Nicky she makes sexual advances on him leading to Ginger actually cheating on Sam with Nicky. Her portrayal gets more and more negative as she kidnaps her daughter, and is taking drugs right in front of her while being abused by Lester. Her character went through a complete change and now suffers not only emotionally but also physically. However Sam decides to give her a second chance and takes her back, mainly because of their daughter. However she tries

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<sup>70</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 37.

<sup>71</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 38.

<sup>72</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 38.

<sup>73</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 63.

<sup>74</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 68.

to get rid of her husband by getting him killed: “Help me kill this bastard.”<sup>75</sup> When Sam overhears the conversation he throws her out of the house. She is hysterically screaming obscenities and is completely losing her mind. All she cares about are finances: “I’m not getting out of here till I get my money.”<sup>76</sup> She feels no remorse or shows any empathy towards other characters. Her character is depicted as mentally unstable as she is slowly going insane. Her physical appearance and mannerism resembles that of a drug addict. Her actions also become quite shocking. Her role as a mother is absolutely horrifying, because Ginger ties her daughter to a bed so she can go out drinking. Her character as a mother is depicted as pure evil. When she hysterically attacks Nicky he violently kicks her out of the building. Her violent rage gets out of control and towards the end of the film she is completely out of her mind. Under the self confident independent dominant woman she was harboring deep rooted insecurities and unstable emotions. However her eventual mental breakdown was in part caused by Sam, who is also responsible. Her sad life full of misery has an unfortunate end when she overdoses on drugs.

Scorsese shows Ginger in a sexually attractive way, and makes her character well aware of her own engaging charm, which she uses to her benefit. The character of Ginger is doing a great deal about her sexual attractiveness and the way she is seen by men. Her showy personality is used as a seducing element in the film, which later turns out to also be her weakness. She is often a subject of sexual flirtations, hence her sexuality can be interpreted as a vulnerability, which eventually begets her aggressiveness. Scorsese first portrays Ginger as a strong, attractive and dominant woman, who eventually by her own means ends up as a victim. Scorsese portrayal of her as a calculating wife, and his depiction of her character does not make the audience sympathize with her nor feel sorry for her and her difficult situation.

Sharon Stone's character in *Casino* as a gaudy swindler is the typical archetype of the immoral femme fatale. She is portrayed as a manipulative gold-digger who abuses her husband and exploits his love for money and her personal gains. The portrayal of her husband Sam, played by Robert De Niro, is flattering, as it captures his blind and naive love for her. He tolerates almost all of her betrayals and therefore wins

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<sup>75</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 109.

<sup>76</sup> Scorsese and Pileggi, *Casino*, 109.

the sympathy of the audience. Ginger's character is perceived as the most evil and vile character even though the film depicts roles of harsh violent men, her character is the only true villain of the story. Her punishment comes in the form of the fateful drug overdose which leaves the depiction of her character in the two-dimensional type of roles portraying the female stereotype. However when analyzed more closely, we realize that she is a victim of her own demons, therefore we can feel at least some compassion for her character.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The focus of this thesis has been to analyse the depiction of women in the Italian-American films directed by Martin Scorsese. Mainly the aim has been to evaluate the depiction of women in connection to the Italian-American mafia portrayed in Scorsese's films. It was found that Scorsese usually depicts roles of women in the categories of mothers, wives and mistresses. The role of a mother is relatively stable and unchangeable throughout his films. Scorsese often portrays the recurring character of the Italian mother who is always kind-hearted and caring. Perhaps it is because of Scorsese's close relationship with his own mother, often casted in his films for these stereotypically Italian roles, that depicts the character as a saint and a guardian angel. The role of a wife differs depending on the protagonist and the setting of the film. The two contrary roles are best represented in *Goodfellas* and *Casino*.

While the portrayal of women in Scorsese's films can be viewed and interpreted as degrading it is important to note that Scorsese tries to depict the reality. His realistic portrayal of women corresponds with the setting of his films. Because women married to or otherwise associated with mobsters suffered in real life Scorsese simply portrays that harsh reality. Arguing that he is insensitive towards women's suffering means misreading of the themes of his films which show various characteristics of human nature, including the dark side. If the female characters are analyzed closely and in more detail we cannot but feel compassion for them and condemn the violent acts of men. Thanks to this thesis I re-watched the films with a newfound lens of appreciation.

All in all, despite a few isolated occurrences, Scorsese at large portrays female characters as only sidelines to a male-driven story. Nevertheless, Scorsese appears to show an interest in the price of womanhood, which is afflicted by a man's violent outbursts and proofs of his own machismo. Possibly, it can be debated, whether Scorsese's uses these depictions to point out some of the concerns regarding the gender-specific tension and a gradual and inevitable degradation of men and fall of masculinity in the current modern culture. Scorsese's films offer a view on women under the rule of patriarchy. If Scorsese deliberately demeans the female characters or merely presents the factual reality of the merciless gangster world while gravitating towards a deeper understanding with a moral lesson at the end is subject to

interpretation. It is true nonetheless that females are not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. With exception being the film *Goodfellas*, the women's point of view is missing entirely and thus the film is impoverished of female views, which may be a deliberate way of portraying the ignorance of men or an author's own obliviousness or uninterest in the topic of women which can be influenced by his Italian Catholic upbringing.

However accusing Scorsese of sexism and misogyny because female characters mostly suffer in his films is unfair and not justified. Because accusations based on the unflattering and shallow portrayal of women in his films are equally shallow and perceive the films in an extremely superficial way. Scorsese's films are complex and mostly deal with themes that are focused on men. There are films that deal with female psychology as well as male psychology, Scorsese focuses more on the topics of male psychology and violence, which is his free choice as a filmmaker. Variety is a spice of life, therefore privileging portrayal of masculinity, as well as femininity, should not be condemned. Despite Scorsese's blindspot concerning women's experience and the perspective of womanhood, his films offer valuable message about the consequences of violent male behaviour, particularly for women.

In connection to my topic there are more current conflicts and far more important struggles of women in the film industry, more specifically their mistreatment by the higher-ups and scandalous revelations known as the "MeToo" movement. A series of accusations of sexual harassments, assaults and predatory behaviour by famous producers and actors towards actresses sparking the "MeToo" movement caused a stir in the Hollywood industry and shed a light on the dark side of the shiny celebrity world. The revelations opened a serious discussion on the topic of female oppression outside of screen. While it is important to provide a fair share of opportunities regarding the depiction of gender, more pressing matter is the fair treatment of women in the industry that was for far too long dominated by men.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cílem této bakalářské práce bylo analyzovat opomíjené role žen ve filmech Martina Scorseseho. Zejména pak zobrazení ženských rolí ve spojitosti s Italsko-Americkou mafií. Práce pojednává o ženských postavách v rolích matek, manželek a milenek Italsko-Amerických členů mafie. Tyto role jsou zkoumány ve filmech *Zuřící býk* (1980), *Mafiáni* (1990) a *Casino* (1995). K rozboru jsou využity scénáře zmíněných filmů jež slouží k následnému posouzení zda Scorsese ženám dodává roli individualizovaného subjektu či je pouze ponechává v roli oběti. Práce rovněž ve stručnosti nabízí souhrn rolí žen v Italsko-Amerických domácnostech a také ve strukturách organizovaného zločinu.

Nejprve jsem vyhledal scénáře analyzovaných filmů a ujistil se, že odpovídají reálnému dialogu použitým ve filmu. Poté jsem vyhledal relevantní sekundární zdroje včetně knih zaměřujících se na život a dílo Scorseseho, knih pojednávajících o Italsko-Americkém odkazu a migraci a knih popisujících role žen v Italsko-Amerických domácnostech a strukturách organizovaného zločinu. Dále jsem také vyhledal relevantní články popisující zmíněná témata. Vzhledem k specifičnosti tématu mé bakalářské práce jsem nenašel dostatečné množství relevantních sekundárních zdrojů, proto jsem se snažil dostupné materiály využít v plné míře.

První část mé práce stručně přibližuje život Martina Scorseseho, jeho dílo a vztah k ženám. Následující kapitoly popisují témata týkající se Italských imigrantů ve Spojených státech a role žen v Italsko-Amerických domácnostech. Zvláště pak role matek, jež jsou považovány za středobod Italské rodiny. Role matek jako takzvaných pečovatelek je podpořena názory ostatních autorů a také samotným vyobrazením postav matek v analyzovaných filmech. Analýza této role je pak dále rozvinuta v hlavní části práce.

Hlavní část bakalářské práce počíná čtvrtou kapitolou všeobecnou analýzou motivů Scorseseho filmů. V následných podkapitolách se práce zabývá analýzou scénářů konkrétních filmů. S přihlédnutím k relevantním scénám jsou postupně odhalovány charaktery žen znázorněné v rolích matek, manželek a milenek. Analýza těchto postav prokázala, že role matek je zobrazena jako převážně pozitivní, kdežto role manželek a milenek má tendenci mít spíše negativní zabarvení. Opakujícím se motivem

byla postava Italské matky jako láskyplné pečovatelky, vyskytující se ve většině filmů. Naopak role manželek byla rozdílná. Ve filmu *Zuřící býk* byly analyzovány postavy dvou manželek. Postava první manželky působila velmi nevýrazně a chyběl jakýkoliv element, který by více poodhalil její charakteristiku. Postava druhé manželky Vickie byla zobrazena jako oběť domácího násilí. Jejím soužitím s hlavní postavou, psychopatickým tyranem Jakeem, se film věnuje pouze okrajově. Navzdory narativní lince popisující život Jakea, postava Vickie a její nelehký osud skýtá cennou výpovědní hodnotu o boji ženy, která se vymanila z roli oběti domácího násilí.

Postava Karen ve filmu *Mafiáni* může být považována za jednu z nejsilnějších a nejmoudřejších postav filmu. Skrze vlastní vyprávění divákovi odhaluje svůj ženský úhel pohledu na nehostinný svět organizovaného zločinu. Díky tomuto unikátnímu pojetí narace, kdy z pozice zúčastněného pozorovatele je dějová linka vyprávěna vedlejší ženskou postavou, může být tento film vnímán ve vztahu ke Scorseseho kariéře jako průkopnický.

Postava Ginger ve filmu *Casino* je typickým archetypem nemravné femme fatale. Její zobrazení je úmyslně nelichotivé a její chování zavrženíhodné. I přes nespočet scén zachycující násilnosti mužů, je to právě postava Ginger, která svým jednáním sklouzává do postavy záporáka celého příběhu. Její nešťastný osud je završen úmrtím na předávkování drogami. Úmrtí Ginger je pomyslným vykoupením z jejích hříchů a vysvobozením její ztrápené duše. Při detailnější analýze její postavy bylo zjištěno, že byla pouhou obětí svých vlastních neřestí a vnitřních démonů a proto u diváka přeci jen vzbuzuje soucit.

Celkově vzato i přes několik ojedinělých příkladů, Scorsese prezentuje ženské postavy pouze ve vedlejších rolích k příběhu zaměřeném na muže. Přesto se může jevit, že Scorsese projevuje zájem o hodnotu ženství, zejména pak ženství které se stává terčem násilného chování mužů. Jeho filmy nabízejí pohled na ženy pod vládou patriarchátu. Zda Scorsese úmyslně ženské postavy ponižuje, či naopak prezentuje faktickou realitu nemilosrdného světa mafie, záleží na subjektivní interpretaci. Zůstává však pravdou, že ženy jsou vnímány pouze ve vztahu k mužům. Ženský úhel pohledu se v jeho filmech vyskytuje jen velmi zřídka. Výjimkou je film *Mafiáni*, kde postava Karen promlouvá k divákovi skrze vlastní monolog a sama vede část vyprávění příběhu.

I když se může zdát, že zobrazení žen ve filmech Scorseseho může být interpretováno jako ponižující, je nutno podotknout, že Scorsese se pouze snaží věrohodně vykreslit realitu. Toto realistické znázornění žen odpovídá tématu jeho filmů. Jelikož ženy, které vstoupí do sňatku s členem mafie či jsou jinak zapleteny do chodu organizovaného zločinu, se většinou potýkají s utrpením a mívají nelehký osud. Scorsese tedy pouze přenesením na plátno znázorňuje onu krutou realitu. Pokud jsou ženské postavy zkoumány více podrobně můžeme dojít k závěru, že si zasluhují soucit a násilné skutky mužů pak naopak musí být nutně vnímány jako odsouzeníhodné. Navzdory absenci perspektivy ženských postav, Scorseseho filmy prezentují cenná poselství o důsledcích násilného mužského chování, zejména pro ženy samotné.

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<http://www.studentnewspaper.org/the-role-of-women-in-the-films-of-martin-scorses>

## **ANNOTATION**

**Name:** Tomáš Pospíšil

**Faculty:** Faculty of Arts, Palacký University in Olomouc

**Department:** Department of English and American Studies

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## **ABSTRACT**

My thesis focuses on the neglected role of women in the male dominated world of the films by Martin Scorsese. It aims to analyze the portrayal of female characters in contrast to the machismo of the protagonists. Mainly I work with the depiction of women in the brutal world of Italian-American mafia portrayed in Scorsese's films. I analyze the depiction of women as wives, mothers and mistresses of the Italian-American mobsters. My thesis concerns this depiction of women in the following films: *Raging Bull* (1980), *Goodfellas* (1990) and *Casino* (1995). I work with the scripts of these films to try to determine whether Scorsese empowers women at all or shows them as mere victims and objects. My thesis also briefly covers the role of the women in Italian-American households as well as in the structures of organized crime syndicates.

## ANOTACE

**Jméno:** Tomáš Pospíšil

**Fakulta:** Filozofická fakulta

**Katedra:** Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

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## ABSTRAKT

Má bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na opomíjené role žen ve filmech Martina Scorseseho jež pojednávají převážně o životech mužů dominantního postavení. Práce má za cíl analyzovat vyobrazení ženských postav v kontrastu s maskulinním světem filmu. Zejména pak reprezentace žen v bezútěšném životě Italsko-Americké mafie znázorněné ve filmech Scorseseho. Práce zahrnuje analýzu ženských postav v rolích matek, manželek a milenek Italsko-Amerických členů mafie. Tyto role jsou zkoumány v následujících filmech: *Zuřící býk* (1980), *Mafiáni* (1990) a *Casino* (1995). K rozboru jsou využity scénáře zmíněných filmů jež slouží k následnému posouzení zda Scorsese ženám dodává roli individualizovaného subjektu či je pouze ponechává v roli oběti. Práce rovněž ve stručnosti nabízí souhrn rolí žen v Italsko-Amerických domácnostech a také ve strukturách organizovaného zločinu.