



## 2. The pack of the “Green Park”. Rhetorics and stereotypes in the press representation of a gang rape case

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines media representations of the gang rapes perpetrated in Caivano, a town in the Neapolitan hinterland, involving two young victims aged 10 and 12 and nine aggressors, seven of whom were minors. Through a mixed methods content analysis of a corpus of 110 articles from 15 Italian newspapers, the work investigates how the narrative surrounding the case was constructed, focusing on issues of secondary victimization and concealment of male responsibility. The findings reveal a systematic use of the “periphery rhetoric” to obscure the perpetrators’ accountability and to deflect attention from the gendered dimensions of the violence, ultimately depoliticizing it.

### **Key words**

Gender-based violence; Gang rape; Social representations; Media discourse; Secondary Victimization; Intersectionality.

### **2.1. Gender-based violence in the media<sup>1</sup>**

Gender-based violence (GBV) is the product of culturally transmitted social mechanisms that are reflected in the way in which violence is framed and narrated (Saccà, 2021, 2024).

For this reason, the representation of gender-based violence in the media, and in the news media in particular – that by virtue of their

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the result of the joint work of both authors. The analysis of the data and the drafting of the manuscript were carried out on an equal and collaborative basis. Anyway, for a formal recognition of the sections, the paragraphs 2.1 and 2.3 are attributable to Rosalba Belmonte and the paragraph 2.2 is attributable to Lucia Pelle.

pervasiveness represent privileged channels for the transmission of cultural models – has been the subject of scrutiny and debate in academic research, with significant critical implications both nationally and internationally. Indeed, what emerged from such research is that the representations of male violence against women spread by news media do not always contribute to a proper framing of the phenomenon. On the contrary, linguistic and sociological research conducted on the journalistic coverage of gender-based violence revealed how such representations often contribute to legitimizing and reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices about the women victims of male violence, the perpetrators, and the violence itself. This happens through the normalization of violence (Bullock and Cubert, 2002), especially when it is represented as part of the family ménage, or through its episodic representation – namely a portrayal that frames violence as an individual phenomenon and ignores its systemic roots (Abis and Orrù, 2016) – while a thematic representation of GBV situates it within a sexist social structure upholding the patriarchal status quo (Meyers, 1994, 1996; McManus and Dorfman, 2003; Carlson and Worden, 2005; Carlyle et al., 2008; Belmonte, 2021, 2024).

Moreover, in newspaper articles reporting on gender-based violence, women tend to be depicted as partly or fully responsible for what they have suffered (“secondary victimization”) or as passive victims without agency, portrayed metaphorically as “preys”. In contrast, men – when they are not rendered invisible through the so-called “linguistic avoidance”, a strategy that involves using grammatical constructs (such as the passive form) to avoid mentioning the aggressors (Lamb, 1991; Janney, 1999; Romito, 2008; Thompson, 2019) – are not described as “hunters”, but their violent actions are framed as the result of external factors, which allow for their responsibility to be concealed (Busso et al., 2019).

This is also what emerges from the research project *STEP. Stereotypes and prejudice. Toward a cultural change in gender representation in judicial, law enforcement and media discourse*, which analyzed the social representation of gender-based violence and of the women experiencing it – focusing on the judicial and journalistic fields – to deconstruct the sexist stereotypes and prejudices that often characterize such representation (Saccà, 2021). For what concerns the journalistic narrative of GBV, the analysis of 16.715 newspaper articles dealing with the phenomenon yielded five main narrative elements that contribute towards maintaining and repro-

ducing a sociocultural context that favors male violence against women: an imbalanced representation of victims and perpetrators in the press; a shifting of responsibility away from the perpetrator; the negation of female subjectivity; the normalization of violence; a prevalently episodic narration of violence (Belmonte 2021, 2024).

Such narrative elements do not comply with the Venice Manifesto (2017), namely the manifesto for gender equality and correct information that provides a set of recommendations to improve gender equality in the media and eliminate all representations – those of gender-based violence in particular – which, even unknowingly, contribute to reproduce stereotypes and, thus, to foster power asymmetries between men and women<sup>2</sup>.

In the context of male violence against women, gang rape represents a culmination of power asymmetry shaped by both gender relations and group dynamics – thus often resulting in more severe forms of physical, psychological, and symbolic violence than those seen in individual assaults (Gidycz and Koss, 1990). Historically, the Italian feminist movement in the 1970s has mobilized around gang rape cases, such as the Verona case and the Circeo massacre (Creazzo, 2008; Filippini, 2022). Feminist groups, like the Cherubini Street collective from Milan, argued that every rape is a political issue, since it stems from broader patriarchal violence rooted in male domination<sup>3</sup>.

The issue of gang rapes has recently attracted widespread media and public attention in Italy, as documented by a report from the Italian Department of Public Security, which recorded an increase in these crimes – a rise that might be related to a greater number of victims coming forward, thereby revealing previously unreported cases (Ministero dell’Interno, 2023).

Despite its relevance, gang rape remains understudied in literature, which mainly focuses on wartime gang rapes (Card, 1996; Cohen, 2013; Danjibo and Akinkuotu, 2019), rapes on U.S. campuses (Benson et al., 1992; Sanday, 1992; Martin and Hummer, 2018; Kirby, 2020), or specific cases (Roychowdhury, 2013; Belair-Gagnon et al., 2014, Beltrán and Calvet, 2020).

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<sup>2</sup> The Venice Manifesto has been promoted by the association GiULiA (United, Free and Autonomous Journalists) and by the Equal Opportunities commissions of FNSI (National union of journalists) and Usigrai (Rai journalists union).

<sup>3</sup> N. M. Filippini, “Lo stupro non è una «questione ambientale» ma di cultura patriarcale”, *Il Manifesto*, 6th of September 2023.

Studies comparing gang rapes with single-assailant rapes reveal that the former are more likely to involve younger, often unemployed victims and perpetrators, increased substance use, and reduced victim resistance — factors that contribute to more severe physical and psychological consequences for the victims (Ullman, 1999). Survivors of gang rape also face greater social resistance, more elevated rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, more frequent suicide attempts, and intensified stigma. Furthermore, they encounter greater difficulty in accessing social support and often experience more strained personal relationships due to the enduring stigma associated with their assault (Ullman, 2007).

Addressing gang rape also provides insight into group dynamics and homosocial bonding among perpetrators, thereby contributing to the research on the social construction of masculinity. Male violence in this context can function to solidify camaraderie and affirm collective dominance over women (O’Sullivan, 1991).

Interestingly, the recent increase in reported cases coincides with a period marked by what some scholars describe as a “crisis of the patriarchy” — a response to shifting gender relations that challenge traditional male authority (Pitch, 2008; Cannito, 2019). As societies move toward greater gender equality, the redefinition of male roles has, in some cases, triggered backlash from men who are reacting to the perceived loss of previously unquestioned privileges (Kimmel, 2000; Pitch, 2008; Garofalo and Vingelli, 2014).

Male homosocial dynamics in gang rape play a critical role in understanding collective forms of male responsibility and complicity. Porter and Alison’s (2001) study on leadership in gang rape cases found that most incidents involved clearly identifiable leaders, suggesting that hierarchical group dynamics significantly influence the perpetrators’ behavior. Bandura’s (2017) theory of moral disengagement further illuminates the psychological mechanisms by which individuals justify violent actions, including strategies such as the diffusion of responsibility, which enables perpetrators to distance themselves from feelings of guilt.

Nonetheless, the rules that govern gang rape are highly influenced by broader social and cultural structures. Shared social norms, culture (and subcultures), and gender inequalities transmitted by socialization all contribute significantly to the social tolerance of such acts (Khan et al., 2020).

Furthermore, in recent years, many gang rape cases have involved the non-consensual sharing of intimate images (NCII), a form of online gender-based violence. Platforms such as Telegram enable the emergence of violent homosocial communities where sexist language and practices can thrive, reinforcing patriarchal power structures through the objectification of women’s bodies (Semenzin and Bainotti, 2020; Scarcelli and Farci, 2022). This digital violence not only reflects but also extends offline gender-based violence, revealing how this phenomenon adapts to and evolves within the digital age.

### **2.1.1. A case study: the “Caivano rapes” in Italian newspapers**

In 2023, two girls aged 10 and 12 were repeatedly gang raped by a group of young men aged between 14 and 19 in Caivano, a town in the hinterland of Naples, known as one of the major drug trafficking hubs in Europe. These gang rapes took place in *Parco Verde* (“Green Park”), a social housing district that had already been in the spotlight in 2014, when a six-years-old girl, Fortuna Loffredo, was serially abused and then murdered by being thrown from the eighth floor of an apartment block by Raimondo Caputo, a forty-three-years-old man.

The gang rapes committed at Green Park garnered significant media and public attention and sparked widespread coverage in major Italian newspapers (and abroad), evoking strong emotional responses and attracting political interest, with politicians visiting Caivano and even enacting legislation named after the case. This prominence makes the case a compelling subject for academic study. Moreover, as previously stated, gang rape is an under-researched phenomenon in the literature, which is particularly notable given how starkly it represents gender-based power imbalances. It should also be considered that this case lends itself to an intersectional analysis, examining how the various axes of oppression – gender, class, geographic origin, and social status – interact in shaping the violence and its public perception (Crenshaw, 1997). These factors often serve to contextualize or even minimize the perpetrators’ responsibility, framing the violence within the socio-cultural and geographical context of both the victims and the aggressors. An intersectional approach helps to situate these diverse subjectivities, embracing their complexities. These differences are significant in the case study, as the press often highlights geographical, socio-economic and educational context as

explanatory factors for the violence, sometimes minimizing male responsibility.

Based on these premises and on the assumption that media play a crucial role in forming worldviews, reflecting and reinforcing societal gender norms and constituting an arena where power is constructed and negotiated (Lupton, 2014; Lalli and Gius, 2016; Harvey, 2019; Saccà and Belmonte, 2021), we conducted an analysis on the journalistic representation of the Caivano case to answer two levels of research questions, a general one and a specific one. At the general level, we tried to understand if the journalistic representation of gang rapes in Italy reflects the dominant stereotypical views of violence against women rooted in patriarchal conceptualizations of gender roles and sexualities. At the specific level, we tried to understand which role was played by the milieu of Caivano, characterized by social marginality and high levels of crimes, in shaping the narrative of the facts. For what concerns this latter question, the initial hypothesis is that the social criticality of Caivano's context diverted attention away from male responsibility for the violence.

The analysis draws from the PRIN 2020 "Stereotypes and prejudices: the social representation of gender-based violence and contrast strategies ten years after the Istanbul Convention" and the STEP-Ricerca e Informazione Observatory<sup>4</sup>, which monitors and analyzes the journalistic representation of GBV in Italy.

Specifically, we conducted a mixed methods content analysis of a corpus composed of 110 articles addressing the so-called "Caivano case", published in 2023<sup>5</sup> by 15 Italian newspapers: *Avvenire* (4 articles); *Il Corriere Adriatico* (1); *Il Corriere della Sera* (2); *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (18); *Il Giornale* (7); *Il Giorno* (5); *Il Manifesto* (2); *Il Mattino*

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<sup>4</sup> A national, independent observatory, chaired by Prof. Flaminia Saccà and created by the agreement between the Department of Psychology of Developmental and Socialization Processes of Sapienza University of Rome and the equal opportunities committees of the National Federation of the Press, the Usigrai, the Order of journalists, GIULIA journalists and the University of Tuscia. The observatory aims to monitor the social representation of gender violence in the media, the state of the art of the Venice Manifesto and the analysis of how the information system treats, interprets and represents the phenomenon of male violence against women. The Observatory brings together Sapienza University and many organizations specialized in journalism and gender equality to create a national database on the social representation of gender-based violence in the Italian press.

<sup>5</sup> After the news of Caivano gang rapes became public and before the 31st of December.

(29); *Il Messaggero* (9); *Il Sole 24 Ore* (2); *Il Tirreno* (4); *La Nazione* (5); *La Repubblica* (7); *La Sentinella del Canavese* (1); *La Stampa* (14)<sup>6</sup>.

Precisely, the quantitative analysis consisted in computing the words' frequency aimed at identifying the most common lemmas in the corpus and analyzing the frequency of specific linguistic expressions<sup>7</sup>. The qualitative part of the work involved a human-based content analysis consisting in reading and interpreting each article and systematizing them by compiling a content analysis coding sheet focusing on the portrayal of victims and perpetrators, the presence of secondary victimization and the concealment of male responsibility in the narrative, the actors contributing to the framing of the case through their statements, the intersectional dimensions of the violence, and the ways in which the context of Caivano was represented.

## 2.2. Findings

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, this work investigates how newspapers portrayed the gender-based violence perpetrated in 2023 in Caivano, with particular emphasis on secondary victimization and the mitigation of male perpetrators' responsibility, while also focusing on the intersectional dimensions of the case, particularly in relation to the construction of a “periphery rhetoric”.

By examining how the press represents the gang rapes, we identified the main narratives employed to construct the events, frame the social context, and characterize the victims and the perpetrators. The analysis highlights how the convergence between gender-based violence, suburban contexts and institutional discourse shapes the media coverage of the case. The results are articulated through three key thematic areas. The first focuses on the intersectional dimensions of the coverage and the recurring use of a “periphery rhetoric”, which blames the violence on the socio-geographical context of Caivano. The second explores the concealment or mitigation of male responsibility in the narrative, through mechanisms such as linguistic avoidance,

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<sup>6</sup> The analyzed articles have been extracted from the news articles database of the STEP-Ricerca e Informazione Observatory through a keyword search, by using the words “Caivano” and “Parco Verde”.

<sup>7</sup> The results of such computing have been graphically represented in this paper through the word clouds, in which the larger the word, the higher the frequency (and vice versa).

secondary victimization, and the emphasis on environmental causes. Finally, the third section examines the central role that newspapers assign to institutional and/or public voices, such as politicians at the local and national level or the local parish priest, and their influence in shaping the public framing of the case, often prioritizing political agendas over a gender-sensitive understanding of the violence.

### 2.2.1. Blaming the margins: intersectionality and the “periphery rhetoric”

The issue of social marginality emerges as a central element in the journalistic narrative surrounding the case. Initial evidence of this is found in the frequency of the place-related terms within the headlines of the news articles included in our corpus, represented in the word cloud in figure 2.1.

In our corpus, the term “Caivano” appears in nearly half of the headlines (51 occurrences), making it by far the most frequently used word. The term is often employed to refer to the rape incidents themselves, linking them directly to their geographic setting. This pattern is echoed in other, less frequent terms that still reflect the broader social context, such as “*Parco Verde*” (“Green Park”, 9), “*inferno*” (“hell”, 7), often used by the victims’ parents to describe their harsh living conditions, and “*spaccio*” (“drug dealing”, 4)<sup>8</sup>.

The crucial role of the socio-cultural milieu in shaping the narratives surrounding the case is further supported by an analysis of the most frequent terms found in the content of the news articles (see the word cloud in figure 2.2.).

The first major cluster of words pertains to geographic origin, emphasizing its centrality in the framing of the case: terms such as “Caivano” (300 occurrences), “*Parco Verde*” (263), “*Napoli*” (“Naples”, 164), and “*quartiere*” (“neighborhood”, 59) are particularly prominent, alongside terms specifically associated with social marginalization, such as “*spaccio*” (“drug dealing”, 57), “*degrado*” (“decay”, 56), and “*camorra*” (49).

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<sup>8</sup> Another lemma that frequently occurs in the headlines (20 occurrences) catching the attention is “*Meloni*” – the head of the Italian government – but it will be discussed in the 2.2.3. paragraph, dedicated to the media coverage of the institutional actors intervened.



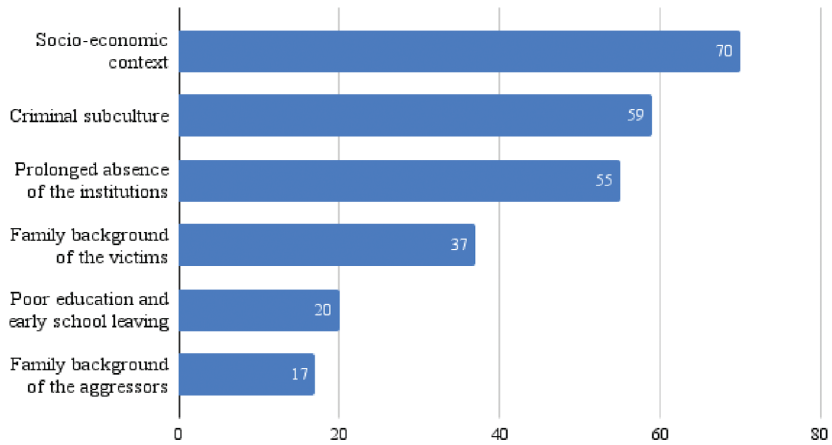


Fig. 2.3. Which aspect of the context is depicted as responsible for the violence? Source: PRIN 2020 and STEP- Ricerca e Informazione Observatory.

To test this hypothesis, it is first necessary to clarify whether responsibility for the violence is explicitly attributed to the social context of Caivano. This dynamic appears in over two-thirds of the analyzed articles (69.1%, 76 articles), revealing a tendency to interpret male violence primarily through socio-economic and cultural lenses, while sidelining a gender-based perspective. This displacement of responsibility manifests through various themes, as figure 2.3. illustrates.

The most frequent attribution of responsibility is to the socio-economic context. Marginality is often invoked through descriptions of the area's geography, limited job opportunities, and pervasive poverty. This is particularly evident in articles focusing on the public housing complex where one of the victims resided and which has been the site of numerous tragic events.

Nearly sixty articles address organized crime in the Caivano area and its associated subculture. The Green Park is consistently depicted as a hub of illicit activity, primarily due to its well-established reputation as a key site for drug trafficking, even at the international level. This connection is further emphasized in articles that mention the affiliation of two of the aggressors with families linked to the *camorra*.

Another prominent theme of the narration is the prolonged absence of institutions. This idea is often reinforced by institutional representatives, who attribute responsibility for the violence to the lack of active

state presence. The fourth most common argument involves the victims’ families, who are sometimes accused of failing to protect their children.

Low education is not a frequently cited factor; however, it occasionally appears in statements made by the principal of a school in Caivano. Finally, the least common argument connects male violence to the families of the perpetrators.

Based on this analysis, we can confirm the hypothesis that the place of origin is portrayed as the primary “responsible” party for the violence, thereby mitigating the offenders’ accountability.

Consequently, among the various intersecting axes of oppression, the gender axis is rendered invisible, and responsibility for the violence is shifted solely to the “periphery rhetoric”.

### 2.2.2. The concealment of the perpetrators

A significant portion of the analysis focused on the representation of both victims and perpetrators, as well as the rhetoric surrounding the distribution of responsibility between them. The main findings point to a widespread invisibilisation of male aggressors and, consequently, a concealment of their responsibility in enacting the violence — often through narratives that either portrayed them as partially victims of the social marginality of their neighborhood or omitted them entirely.

To illustrate this point, one notable element is the significantly lower visibility that perpetrators receive in the press compared to victims. This is evident in the word cloud in figure 2.2., where the three most frequent terms used to describe the girls appear in total 346 times (“*vittime*”/ “victims”: 137 occurrences; “*bambine*”/ “little girls”: 123 occurrences; “*ragazzine*”/ “girls”: 86 occurrences), whereas the top three references to the men only appears 262 times (“*ragazzi*”/ “boys”: 95 occurrences; “*gruppo*”/ “group”: 90 occurrences; “*minorenni*”/ “minors”: 77 occurrences)<sup>9</sup>.

Similarly to the victims, the most common way through which perpetrators are described is through age-related nouns. However, in 51.9% of the articles that mention them, non-human descriptors are used — most commonly the term “*branco*” (“pack”), which appears eight times in headlines and 73 times in the body of the articles. While

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<sup>9</sup> Even the term “*due*” (“two”) that occurs 402 times, in most of the cases (236) is referred to the victims, while in 23 cases it is referred to the two adults member of the rapist group.

this term may appear to be a vivid or degrading label to refer to the group of boys, it actually dehumanizes the offenders, echoing the same rhetorical fallacy as the word “*orco*” (“ogre”) (Belmonte, 2021; Saccà, 2021). Such terminology removes agency from the perpetrators and obscures the structural nature of male violence.

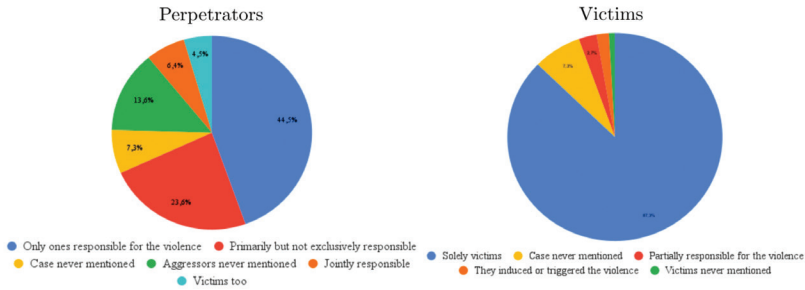
The representation of male responsibility for the violence is illustrated in the left pie chart in the figure 2.4..

The portrayal of perpetrators as solely responsible for the violence appears in fewer than half of the articles (44.5%). The second most common portrayal — found in just under a quarter of the articles (23.6%) — presents the aggressors as primarily, but not exclusively, responsible. These narratives typically employ the “periphery rhetoric” as a triggering factor, thereby contributing to a dynamic of mitigating male responsibility. The third most frequent category comprises articles in which the offenders are not mentioned at all (13.6%). Additionally, 7.3% of articles do not reference the violence directly, while approximately one in ten articles portray the perpetrators as either jointly responsible (6.4%) or even as victims themselves (4.5%).

Furthermore, a comparison of the two charts that portray the representation of perpetrators and victims, as shown in figure 2.4., reveals a lack of alignment between the frequent depiction of the girls as solely victims and the attribution of full responsibility to the aggressors. This suggests that while most articles acknowledge the violence suffered by the victims, this recognition does not consistently translate into a strong attribution of male responsibility. Instead, there is a clear tendency to externalize the causes of violence, attributing them to contextual factors — what we identify as the “periphery rhetoric”.

Particularly striking is the inconsistency between the proportion of articles in which victims are never mentioned (0.9%) and those in which aggressors are omitted (13.6%). Consequently, in 12.7% of the articles the case and the victims are discussed, but the perpetrators are not mentioned, thus contributing to a narrative of a violence that has no agents.

The two most recurrent themes that serve to deflect male accountability are the portrayal of the perpetrators as a “pack” (“*branco*”), and the framing of them as victims of the Green Park social context. The former, as previously discussed, dehumanizes the aggressors and distances them from their actions. This rhetoric employs terms such as “*branco*” (“pack”), “*capobranco*” (“pack leader”), “*mostri*” (“monsters”), “*bestie*” (“beasts”), and “*lupi*” (“wolves”).



**Fig. 2.4.** Comparison between the representation of perpetrators and victims. Source: PRIN 2020 and STEP- Ricerca e Informazione Observatory.

Secondly, regarding the theme of social degradation, the widespread use of the “periphery rhetoric” is evident, to the extent that some articles even omit any mention of the perpetrators (figure 2.4.).

Lastly, less frequent strategies for mitigating male responsibility include blaming the victims’ families for alleged negligence, citing the unregulated accessibility of online pornography, and referencing the perpetrators’ family backgrounds — two of whom, as previously noted, are related to prominent organized crime figures.

### 2.2.3. Shifting the spotlight: media coverage of institutional actors

A key element in shaping the interpretive frameworks employed by the media in representing gender-based violence is the coverage of different voices. The selection of who is granted the right to speak — and thereby to influence public discourse — is central to the construction of these narratives.

In this case, an initial observation concerns the prominent role played by two main actors: on the one hand, institutional and political figures; on the other, the parish priest of Caivano, Father Maurizio Patriciello. Their visibility is already evident in the word clouds of headlines and article content (figures 2.1. and 2.2.), particularly for institutional representatives — most notably, “Meloni” (referring to Giorgia Meloni, the Italian President of the Council of Ministers), which is the second most frequent recurrence in figure 2.1., appearing 20 times.

Overall, the corpus contains direct quotations from at least thirty different individuals. The five most frequently cited categories of speakers are: institutional and/or political representatives (present in 31 articles),

the parish priest Father Maurizio Patriciello (29), the victims' relatives (27), judicial authorities (21), and the victims' lawyer (19).

The first category includes public statements from all the political figures who have publicly addressed the case, such as the President of the Council of Ministers, Giorgia Meloni, the President of the Campania Region, Vincenzo De Luca, and the Mayor of Caivano, Vincenzo Falco. These actors predominantly frame the case in terms of institutional failure and social degradation in the Green Park, often neglecting to address gender-based violence, thus struggling to prioritize a genuine cultural reform to address patriarchal violence.

The second most cited voice is that of the parish priest, Father Patriciello. His public appeal to President Meloni and his activism against organized crime have contributed to his portrayal as a "front-line priest." However, in his commentary on the case, he places considerable emphasis on the socio-economic conditions of Caivano, at times equating the girls and their perpetrators as mutual victims of a degraded environment.

The next more prominent voices are those of the victims' families — especially the mothers. One particularly notable instance is a mother's appeal to President Meloni to help her leave Green Park, reinforcing the interpretation of the violence as a consequence of social decay.

Judicial figures are primarily quoted in relation to procedural developments and court rulings; thus, their visibility reflects their institutional role rather than a particular narrative position.

The final key actor is the victims' lawyer, Angelo Pisani — whose media presence is amplified by his prior involvement in high-profile cases, including that of Fortuna Loffredo. While he regularly advocates for justice and highlights the structural marginalization of Caivano, he rarely frames the violence in gendered terms.

Beyond the analysis of individual speakers, it is also useful to examine the broader perspectives reflected in media coverage, including both direct and indirect discourse. As shown in figure 2.5., the viewpoints expressed can be categorized as "favorable to the victims", "favorable to the perpetrators", "neutral/ambiguous".

The graph reinforces the findings related to the most frequently cited speakers, while offering additional insights into how the violence is framed. Most of the viewpoints represented in the media are favorable towards the victims, though not without notable exceptions.

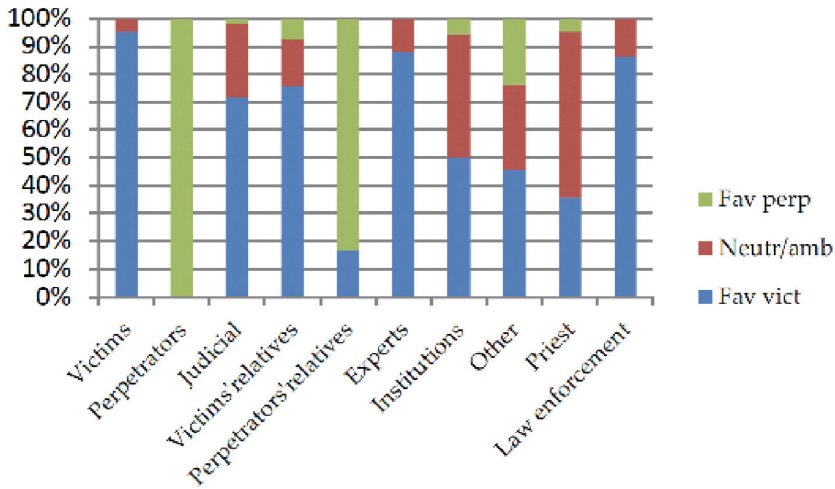


Fig. 2.5 Viewpoints expressed. Source: PRIN 2020 and STEP- Ricerca e Informazione Observatory.

The judiciary, along with institutions and political representatives, receives the most coverage. However, while judicial voices are either explicitly aligned with the victims or maintain a neutral stance, political figures support the victims in only half of the cases, whereas in eleven instances they issue ambiguous statements. This pattern mirrors Father Patriciello’s commentary, although he is quoted slightly less frequently.

The category “other” includes legal representatives of both parties, individuals from civil society or the entertainment sector, healthcare professionals and witnesses that express a diverse range of viewpoints, while perpetrators and their relatives, unsurprisingly show near-exclusive support for the accused. By contrast, all other categories of speakers — including the victims themselves, their relatives, law enforcement and experts — tend to align with the victims. Nonetheless, notable exceptions include statements made by a victim’s mother and uncle, which contributed to secondary victimization.

In conclusion, the analyzed media gives considerable coverage to figures – both institutional and non-institutional – who often frame the case through the lens of socio-economic hardship, thus reinforcing the “periphery rhetoric”. Nevertheless, the dominant perspective in journalistic narratives remains largely favorable towards the victims.

### 2.3. Discussion: from the concealing of the culprits to the de-politicization of violence

The analysis of news articles dealing with the gang rapes perpetrated in Caivano in 2023 has led us to interpret these awful acts of violence from three intersecting perspectives.

The first perspective addresses the difficulty of the press in clearly defining the culprits. As illustrated in the previous paragraph, the perpetrators of the gang rapes receive significantly less visibility compared to the victims in the press reconstruction of the facts. This happens primarily through the mechanism – whether deliberate or unconscious, sometimes subtle and shrewd, at other times crude, but always systematic – of linguistic avoidance, through which violence against women is regularly presented as “acts without agents” (Lamb, 1991; Janney, 1999; Romito, 2008; Thompson, 2019).

A more sophisticated form of linguistic avoidance that occurs in this case is the euphemistic labelling of the offenders. In general, euphemizing is a technique that allows a phenomenon to be labelled in an imprecise and misleading way, thereby obscuring the seriousness or responsibility of whoever has committed it (Romito, 2008). One of its manifestations involves the representation of the violent men as non-human beings. As explained in the previous paragraph, in most of the analyzed articles, perpetrators are represented by using the term *branco* (“pack”) which, although intended to convey disapproval towards the aggressors, ultimately produces the effect of concealing the direct relation between masculinity and violence. The latter is thus narrated as something that does not directly involve men (Giomi and Magaraggia, 2017). On the contrary, clearly highlighting the male protagonists of the violence would mean standing up to the men’s power – deeply rooted in every culture and social context – to disappear from discourses on violence against women.

In other words, linguistic avoidance and euphemizing labelling represent a form of “misdirection” (Thompson, 2019) – namely the use of communicative strategies that draw attention away from the true causes, as well from the true authors of violence against women (men!). Furthermore, these strategies not only obscure the responsibility of male perpetrators but also serve to conceal the norms, attitudes, and beliefs that underpin much of men’s violence against women.

The concept of misdirection is useful to introduce the second perspective from which the gang rapes of Caivano have been interpreted by many observers, namely the frame of social marginality. Our analysis has shown that a significant portion of the news articles depicts the aggressors as primarily — but not exclusively — responsible for the violence. Responsibility for the violence is often associated with the socio-economic context and the criminal subculture of Green Park. Their association with a socially marginalized and criminalized environment makes the sexual violences appear more acceptable, as it aligns with stereotypical expectations concerning certain contexts. It is precisely within this association that misdirection lies. Fundamentally, it serves to divert attention from one issue — violence against women — onto another, redirecting the focus toward other factors and thus circumventing the original subject of discussion (Thompson, 2019). Indeed, framing these gang rapes as the consequence of a particular subculture means de-gendering men’s violence against women by placing it on an equal footing with common crime. Moreover, such a reading denies the transversality of GBV, which is not directly linked to economic conditions, educational background, and social status of both victims and abusers. On the contrary, it transcends territorial, generational, and social boundaries.

Thus, focusing exclusively on the marginal and criminal context not only conceals the agency and the responsibility of perpetrators, but also obscures the role of cultural norms — and with them, the very “everydayness” of men’s violence against women.

Finally, a third perspective that deserves attention concerns the viewpoints reflected in the news articles covering the case. As reported in the previous paragraph, among the most frequently cited figures there are politicians, who tend to frame the case through the lens of socio-economic hardship — often by focusing on the role of politics in restoring law and order through a government intervention in the peripheries.

Thus, a story of gang rape against two girls has been narrated as a story of youth distress, educational poverty and juvenile delinquency; matters that should be addressed through a government action. Which is exactly what happened with the issuing of an emergency decree — the so-called “Decreto Caivano” (law decree n. 123 of the 15th of September 2023) — intended to contrast juvenile delinquency, into which gender-based violence is thus implicitly assimilated, and the

adoption of an extraordinary infrastructure interventions plan, allocating up to 30 million euros to address problems not directly related to gender-based violence<sup>10</sup>.

In other words, what we witnessed is a shift of spotlight — from the gang rapes of two girls to the marginal context in which such rapes have been perpetrated — resulting in the de-genderization and de-politicization of the issue. The latter, meant as the loss of political character of the issue and the annihilation of divergences and conflicts within the field of political action (De Nardis, 2017; Moini, 2019), contributes to normalize gender-based violence as a form of common criminality that can be contrasted through a technical administrative power exercised by lawyers, magistrates, law enforcement officers, special commissioners, technicians and even priests (as exemplified by the central role of the parish priest of Caivano, Father Patriciello).

In this regard, it is noteworthy that the research did not reveal significant differences in the framing of the case based on the political orientation of the analyzed newspapers.

In conclusion, whilst the research did not reveal significant instances of secondary victimization of the two young girls – unwilling protagonists of this awful story – it is necessary to highlight the externalization of the perpetrators' responsibility. Rather than narrating gender-based violence by delving into the patriarchal roots of the phenomenon, newspapers contributed to a process of misdirection, namely a shift of responsibility from the real authors of the violence to the social, economic and familiar context within which the events took place. In doing so, the press acted – whether willingly or not – as a sounding board of a narrative that, once again, fails to turn the spotlight on women and on the violence that they suffer as women.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.programmagoverno.gov.it/media/c03nc3pv/focus-piano-straordinario-caivano-finale.pdf>

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