The nexus of women and 'Clan Crime': unravelling the dynamics and constraints

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Abstract

Despite its prominence in public debate, scholars have given little attention to women's roles in 'clan crime' in Germany. This article aims to bridge this gap through in-depth ethnographic fieldwork and 18 interviews conducted with women from various 'clans' throughout the country. These women are part of the al-Rashidiyya community with origins in Mardin, Turkey. Adopting an anthropological perspective, I seek to uncover the underlying historical, cultural, social, and contextual factors shaping women's participation in 'clan crime', whether through indirect support or direct involvement. My findings reveal that women play a crucial, albeit often hidden, role in 'clan' dynamics and criminal activities, which frequently go unrecorded by the police. Although they are unlikely to hold leadership positions, women exert their influence through other means, such as shaping their children's behavior, actively encouraging their sons to engage in criminal activities, or transmitting criminal norms and roles through socialization. Women themselves may also engage in crimes such as money laundering and financial fraud. By shedding light on these dynamics and emphasizing the importance of gender dynamics in the broader study of criminal groups, I expand our understanding of organized crime and similar clan-like mafia structures.

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Introduction

High-profile robberies, such as the 2019 heist at Dresden's Green Vault and the 2017 theft of gold coins from Berlin's Bode Museum, have garnered extensive political and media attention in Germany. In both cases, members of the 'Remmo clan' were arrested and later convicted in incidents commonly referred to by the police and public as 'clan crime' ('*Clankriminalität*') (Schuetze 2023). However, this term, frequently used in discussions, lacks a standardized, consensus-based definition in scholarly literature and in the practices of security authorities. It is often applied to describe kinship groups characterized by strong familial ties (Görgen et al. 2022: 15, 24). From the perspective of the security authorities, these kinship groups, often sharing a common ethnic background, operate within patriarchal, hierarchical structures where family elders traditionally resolve conflicts outside the formal legal system. Moreover, the supposed 'clan' affiliation significantly influences the facilitation of offenses and complicates investigations, as these groups are perceived as isolated from broader society and inclined to engage in public acts of violence (LKA-Nordrhein-Westfalen 2022: 7, 10).

However, the term 'clan crime' is highly controversial, and its understanding varies not only among different police authorities but also in public discussions (Görgen et al. 2022). To be precise, in this article, I use the term 'clan' to refer to social groups characterized by a shared ethnic identity, historical background, and familial interests. These groups transcend the bounds of a formal hierarchy or documented genealogical relationships (Collins 2006:17; Hille 2020:14). They often self-identify as '*ashira*' in Arabic, a term translated into English as 'tribe' (Eisenstadt 2007: 162) or 'clan' (Barakat 1993: 50–51), representing not just genetic entities but flexible socio-cultural structures and networks of fictive kinship. This usage of 'clan' aims to align closely with the translation of '*ashira*' while acknowledging the sensitivity surrounding the term. This sensitivity guides my analysis's focus on specific kinship groups, particularly those of al-Rashidiyya origin located in Mardin, Turkey. The village has 18 kinship groups, including Remmo, al-Zein, Omeirat, and Miri, among others, who are often linked to 'clan crime' and are under police scrutiny. These kinship groups have faced continuous and long-term marginalization in Turkey, driving many to migrate to Lebanon between the 1920 and 1960 s and eventually to Germany in the 1980s (see below).

Given the current dearth of empirical research on 'clan crime', much of the discussion surrounding them takes place in the media or popular-scientific literature. By presenting al-Rashidiyya community as tight-knit, homogeneous, and sharing norms and values that encourage criminal behaviour, the debate often oversimplifies their composition. Consequently, there is a lot of confusion about their nature and hierarchical structure. Many attribute collective responsibility to 'clan members' and leaders for organizing crime (Heise and Meyer-Heuer 2020), or at least accuse them of being complicit through their silence and refusal to cooperate with the police (Dienstbühl 2021; Ghadban 2018: 12, 159, 262). Furthermore, some scholars and observers have recently criticized the climate of fear and sensationalism the media perpetuate around 'clan crime' (Özvatan et al. 2023). Marcus Staiger and Mohamed Chahrour (2022: 20) argue that the media's consistent depiction of 'clans' as 'archaic, back-

ward, and brutal' perpetuates negative stereotypes. Several scholars have expressed concern about the potential risk of the term being used to stigmatize specific ethnic communities, and thereby exacerbate social divisions and foster prejudice (Boettner and Schweitzer 2020; Feltes and Rauls 2020; Liebscher 2020; Rauls and Feltes 2021; Reinhard 2021).

In discussing women's involvement in 'clan crime', it is important to clarify that the focus is on those women who are actively participating within their criminal kinship circles, often within smaller family units known as '*bayt*' in Arabic (see Rohe and Jaraba 2015). However, it must be emphasized that the majority of women in these communities are not engaged in criminal activities, yet they suffer disproportionately. They bear the brunt of heightened scrutiny and further marginalization due to the illicit actions of a few. By isolating the problematic aspects of this issue, this approach seeks to highlight the plight of the majority of women who endure these hardships, with the aim of alleviating their burden and redirecting the focus towards those actually implicated in criminal activities. This distinction is crucial to address the injustices faced by the community and to prevent the unwarranted stigmatization of innocent individuals.

Like the phenomenon itself, the role of women in the context of 'clan crime' has not yet been thoroughly studied. The existing literature typically associates women with 'clan crime' in various ways. Ghadban (2018: 41; 153) and Dienstbühl (2021: 41), in different contexts, argue that women's autonomy and agency within al-Rashidiyya community are often limited due to the imposition of traditional gender roles and family expectations. These expectations manifest in various ways, as women are perceived as valuable 'assets' used to enhance their family's social and economic standing through strategic endogamous marriages (Dienstbühl 2018: 8; Heise and Meyer-Heuer 2020: 105). Their primary obligations revolve around maintaining family structures and social networks, which are achieved through these marital unions. Such unions serve to strengthen social ties, preserve kinship identity, and foster loyalty (Dogan 2022).

Unlike male kinship members, several of whom have written about their past criminal careers (Al-Zein 2020; O and Kensche 2020), the women's stories are largely absent from the discourse – hence, the heavy reliance for the truth on media and popular-scientific literature (Dienstbühl 2021; Ghadban 2018; Heise and Meyer-Heuer 2020). Outside Italy, the literature has paid limited attention to women's participation in organized and family crimes (Fiandaca 2007). In Germany, empirical approaches have been relatively underused for examining women in crime, whether in general (Bucerius 2018: 39; Kallinger 2007: 221; for an exception see Haverkamp 2011), or specific to 'clan crime'.

Having undertaken extensive ethnographic fieldwork and 18 interviews with women from various al-Rashidiyya kinship groups (see below for more details), it is evident that women play a crucial part in 'clan crime'. However, it is important to see their role in the context of their socio-historical position, and to avoid making broad generalizations or assumptions. Drawing on Kathy Charmaz's (2014: 22) work on grounded theory, which emphasizes the importance of empirical data when generating theories, in this article I explore the dynamics and fluid nature of the influences that women wield in 'clan' structures. Through an anthropological approach, I aim

to uncover what underlying historical, cultural, social, and contextual factors shape women's participation in 'clan crime', whether through indirect support or direct involvement. A critical examination of the broader sociocultural context in which these processes unfold, should have a contribution to make to the broad discussion on the role of women in organized crime and similar clan-like mafia structures (Allum and Marchi 2018; Arsovska and Allum 2014; Denton and O'Malley 1999; Fiandaca 2007; Kleemans et al. 2014).

The article is structured as follows: Firstly, I provide an overview of the methodology employed in collecting data on 'clan crime' in Germany. Then, I delve into the historical marginalization experienced by the al-Rashidiyya community during their migration from Turkey to Lebanon, and subsequently in Germany, exploring how this has influenced the roles of women within the community. Next, I examine the ways women contribute to their families' criminal activities, often from behind the scenes. Lastly, I analyze women's direct involvement in 'clan crime', focusing on the specific roles they assume. By employing a multi-period framework, this study aims to offer valuable insights into the intricate dynamics and processes that shape the roles of women in the al-Rashidiyya community in Germany.

Women and crimes

For five decades, scholars have been trying to understand the role of women in organized crime and to address the gender gap in the criminal justice system (Adler 1975; Chesney-Lind 1986; Fiandaca 2007; Geppert 2022; Havard et al. 2023; Siegel 2014; Simon 1975). While women are traditionally thought only to play supportive or peripheral roles in criminal networks, there is increasing recognition that their involvement can surpass these stereotypes. There is evidence of them taking on diverse roles in criminal organizations, including leadership positions, decision-making, recruiting members, managing finances, and even perpetrating acts of violence (Allum and Marchi 2018; Arsovska and Allum 2014; Fiandaca 2007; Kleemans et al. 2014). They are important in drug markets (Denton and O'Malley 1999), terrorist organizations (Banks 2019; Bloom 2010), and in organized transnational crime (Arsovska and Allum 2014; Hübschle 2014; Kleemans et al. 2014; Siegel 2014). Furthermore, through education and socialization, women have been found to influence the criminal behavior of their children (Moors and Spapens 2023). Studies also highlight the unique strategies women employ to navigate male-dominated criminal hierarchies, such as forming alliances, leveraging social connections, and exploiting gender stereotypes (Shapiro 2020).

Several theories have been proposed to explain the increasing involvement of women in criminal activities. One of the earliest is Freda Adler's (1975) masculinization theory, in which she argues that as women strive for liberation and equality, they emulate traditionally masculine traits, including violent criminal behaviour. Feminist scholars, however, criticize it on the grounds that it relies on a male-centered ideology and fails to account fully for the complexities of women's criminal behavior. It oversimplifies the factors influencing women's involvement in crime and overlooks broader structural and sociocultural influences (Guerreiro et al. 2022; Smart 1995).

Nonetheless, some contemporary authors continue to reference the masculinization theory by suggesting that women may become involved in crime because their socialization more closely resembles that of their male counterparts (Dodge 2007; Garcia and Lane 2013).

Simon (1975) draws on statistical analysis to posit that access to opportunities is what influences women's involvement in crime. 'As women become more liberated from hearth and home and become more involved in full-time jobs, they are more likely to engage in the types of crimes for which their occupations provide them with the greatest opportunities' (Simon 1975: 1). In contrast to Adler, Simon attributes the rise in female criminal behavior to the progress achieved by the women's movement in expanding opportunities for women and not to them adopting 'masculine' traits. She stresses that men engaged in more criminal activities historically because of their advantageous social opportunities, expertise and networks. Furthermore, she contends that as women's opportunities, capabilities, and social connections grow within the broader societal context, the incidence of female criminality will also increase.

The perspectives of both Adler and Simon are forms of opportunity theory, or more specifically of the emancipation theory of female crime (Allum and Marchi 2018: 366). There are, however, limitations to their research. First, their reliance on official crime statistics is problematic because these may well inaccurately capture the full extent of women's involvement in criminal activities. Also, despite the recent advancements in women's participation in the labor force, they continue to be concentrated in low-status, low-wage positions in the clerical, sales, and service occupations (Banarjee et al. 2014: 6). Moreover, in traditional family structures like the 'Arab clan', women often do not have the opportunity to develop or alter their lives. They are expected to adhere to strict gender roles and norms that limit their autonomy and opportunities for personal development. These traditional family structures may perpetuate patriarchal values and control, further restricting women's choices and freedom.

Advocates of the theory of economic marginalization, however, argue that increased female participation in the labor force does not necessarily signify greater gender equality or improved economic conditions for women (Chesney-Lind 1986). Some scholars link the narrowing of the gender gap in criminal behavior to the growing financial instability experienced by women. They argue that women's marginalized economic circumstances, including lower wages, undervalued occupations, and job insecurity encourage them to engage in crime. In essence, women are driven to commit crimes as a rational response to poverty, economic insecurity, and a disadvantaged economic position (Chesney-Lind 1986: 94). Areas with high crime and delinquency rates often exhibit a range of interconnected social issues, such as single-parent households, unemployment, overcrowded living conditions, reliance on welfare, and low levels of education (Chesney-Lind and Shelden 2013: 81–82). These social problems are attributed to the breakdown of institutional and community-based controls, influenced by factors like industrialization, urbanization, and immigration (Chesney-Lind and Pasko 2013: 19).

In the case of al-Rashidiyya community in Germany, traditional theories may fall short as they often overlook the subtle and indirect roles women play, roles that are usually not captured in police or court records. Unlike other organized crime

groups with documented cases of female participation, (see, Allum and Marchi 2018: 364; Dino 2007; Massari and Motta 2007), the same level of information is unavailable on women of al-Rashidiyya community in Germany. 'Clan crime' take place in cultural and social settings in which traditional gender roles and power dynamics carry substantial weight. In other words, family and kinship ties, loyalty, and cultural expectations are far more important than economic or individual motives in shaping women's participation in 'clan crime'.

To delve into this complex social fabric, I employ the grounded theory approach as devised by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which emphasizes empirical data and inductive reasoning. With its roots in sociology, grounded theory enables one to comprehend and elucidate human behavior through a process of inductive reasoning (Elliott and Lazenbatt 2005). In allowing one to collect a rich array of detailed data directly from individuals and communities, it facilitates a thorough exploration of social and cultural phenomena, and accommodates multiple methods of data collection, including interviews, observations, and documentary analysis of relevant sources. These diverse approaches enable the researcher to gather first-hand accounts and contextual information, and they yield valuable insights into complex phenomena (Bryant and Charmaz 2010). A distinguishing feature of grounded theory is its flexibility. Rather than imposing pre-existing frameworks, literature or theories, it accommodates adaptive and inductive data collection and analysis (Dunne 2011). It also enables the researcher to explore the nuances and intricacies of the phenomena being studied and facilitates the identification and development of theories that are grounded in empirical evidence.

An anthropological perspective

Ethnographic research has unraveled a rich array of insights into the workings of mafias and organized crime groups. Researchers have explored the complexities of their organizational structures, activities such as illicit drug trafficking, and the critical influence of family ties and socio-economic factors (Adler 1993; Bucerius 2014; Whyte 1943; Fleisher 2000; Ianni and Reuss-Ianni 1972). Despite a considerable number of studies in this area, ethnographic work specifically examining 'clan crime' in Germany remains exceptionally limited. The dearth of ethnographic involvement with 'clan crime' arises from a host of practical and ethical issues. Engaging with illicit markets or witnessing criminal activities directly involves considerable risks, necessitating adaptable and pragmatic research methods (see, Allum and Marchi 2018: 364). As Hobbs and Antonopoulos (2014: 96) have emphasized, accessing members of organized crime for research purposes presents significant obstacles, making standard research methods like surveys or consent forms unfeasible.

Investigating the participation of women in the al-Rashidiyya community presents unique challenges. The insular nature of these kinship groups, adhering to traditional Muslim values and strict gender segregation, significantly limits opportunities for direct observation and hampers the collection of personal narratives (see Allum and Marchi 2018: 361). As a male researcher external to these communities, gaining access to the women's realm posed significant obstacles, amplified by the cultural

norms that enforce a rigid divide between men and women. The influence of gender dynamics on fieldwork is well-documented, and the barriers faced by male researchers in accessing female spaces within such societies are substantial (Bucerius and Urbanik 2019; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 74). Although my research initially centered on the male perspective within 'clan crime' and Alternative Dispute Resolutions, efforts to engage with female members were met with considerable resistance. Attempts to conduct interviews were often met with hesitation or outright refusal, attributed to a myriad of reasons including privacy concerns, cultural inhibitions regarding communication with non-members, and apprehensions of negative repercussions.

Overcoming these barriers necessitated a systematic approach to building trust and establishing rapport, reinforced by solid assurances of confidentiality and anonymity (Giri 2022: 9). My extensive, long-term ethnographic fieldwork, conducted over various periods between 2015 and 2023 in Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), was crucial in gaining the trust of community members. This trust, in turn, facilitated the acquisition of rare and valuable insights into the lives and roles of women within the community.

As Dunn (2019) notes, deep engagement in the field offers opportunities for unexpected encounters, enabling researchers to discover new sources of information. A pivotal moment occurred after the publication of an article I wrote in August 2021, which led to contact from a woman belonging to a criminal family. Initially seeking advice on prevention and solutions for this phenomenon, this interaction developed into a significant connection. In another instance, while visiting a supermarket, I encountered a woman with a 'clan' surname working as a cashier. Intrigued by the potential for further insights, I approached her for a conversation. Surprisingly, she agreed to an interview and introduced me to her family, which allowed me to interview her mother as well. In January 2023, during a Friday sermon, a man who recognized me from a talk on 'clan crime' approached me. He invited me to his home, where his wife, Nabila, was eager to discuss the topic further and learn more about my work, sharing her own experiences in Berlin. These serendipitous encounters during my fieldwork significantly expanded my access to participants and their networks, establishing a network of informants who became invaluable 'eyes' in the world of al-Rashidiyya women.

Because my gender made it difficult to participate in a female social environment, I mainly relied on interviews. Ethnographers engaging in research on crime and criminal justice frequently use face-to-face interviews as a way of delving into the participants' narratives and experiences (Bucerius 2022: 75; von Lampe 2016: 51). As a data collection method, interviews have numerous advantages. They offer flexibility in that they allow researchers to adapt to the participants' needs and preferences. Also, they grant researchers a degree of control over the research process, which enables them to focus on particular themes or topics of interest. Through interviews, unexpected information can emerge to yield a broader contextual understanding of the subject matter (Windle and Silke 2019: 405).

On completion of my fieldwork in 2023, I had an opportunity to conduct interviews with 18 women from a diverse range of age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and kinship affiliations. Recognizing the significance of capturing their

experiences and perspectives, I ensured that multiple interviews were conducted with many of these women, and still, even after the completion of my fieldwork, I regularly exchange information with some of them. Only one woman agreed to have her interview audio-recorded; the others preferred their responses to be documented through detailed note-taking. Various factors may have influenced this preference, including concerns about privacy, cultural norms, or uncomfortable feelings about being recorded. Audio recordings can have legal repercussions, such as being used to subpoena witnesses, or cited in German courts as evidence to support deportations (Bucerius 2022: 67). To mitigate these concerns, the collected data was pseudonymized, meaning that identifiable information was replaced with unique codes to preserve privacy. This step was essential in ensuring the confidentiality of the participants, aligning the research with best practices, and complying with ethical standards, including those related to data protection regulations.

With the exception of one, none of the women I interviewed held leadership positions, were directly involved in criminal networks, or had any criminal convictions. However, many of them were born into and grew up in criminal families, in which several family members, including their fathers, mothers, brothers, and cousins, were active offenders. Their stories provided valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of 'clan crime' because, as 'insiders', they were ideally placed to witnesses first-hand the unfolding of developments over the course of their lives.

The data collection phase of this study necessitated a thorough consideration of essential contextual elements. Proficiency in both Arabic and German, the primary languages spoken by the first and second generations of al-Rashidiyya community, significantly aided in transcending linguistic obstacles and enabled a direct, nuanced dialogue with participants. This dual linguistic proficiency proved crucial in adeptly managing the intricate power dynamics between the researcher and the subjects, facilitating genuine and equitable exchanges of information. Observational data were recorded with meticulous attention to detail, ensuring linguistic accuracy and cultural sensitivity throughout the documentation process.

Furthermore, the research findings were developed through a collaborative approach, engaging in detailed, repeated discussions with two female informants from al-Rashidiyya community. These interactions were essential for challenging and refining the study's outcomes to ensure alignment with the participants' experiences. Such iterative conversations underscored the participatory nature of the ethnographic process, anchoring the findings in the lived experiences of the community and upholding the study's accountability.

Reflecting on the scope of this study, it is important to acknowledge that its foundation rests on 18 in-depth interviews conducted over a lengthy period. This method, involving repeated interviews, was not just a preferred choice but a necessity. Traditional surveys or questionnaires were unfeasible due to the cultural nuances and insular nature of these communities. While this approach provided rich, detailed insights, it is important to recognize the potential for inherent selection bias. It does not claim to offer a comprehensive overview of the subject. Additionally, the constraints of gender segregation and my position as an external male researcher may have influenced the depth and breadth of the narratives shared. Therefore, while the findings

are enlightening, they should be viewed as a snapshot, predominantly reflecting a specific subset within the larger al-Rashidiyya community context.

Locked in the margins: tracing centuries of marginalization

The initial step in comprehending the role of women in 'clan crime' in Germany is to delve into their historical marginalization, which influenced their status within the al-Rashidiyya community and their involvement in 'clan crime.' When feminist criminologists began investigating the reasons behind women's engagement in unlawful activities, economic marginalization emerged as a significant factor. Specifically, the limited access to essential services, employment opportunities, and income pushes women into illegal activities (Carlen 1988; Maher and Daly 1996). Furthermore, the fact that women are often victimized within their own families exacerbates their marginalized status (Chesney-Lind 1986).

The al-Rashidiyya community can trace its origins back to the Savur district in Mardin, a historically significant city in Turkey with a diverse cultural and ethnic mix (Üngör 2011). There is some disagreement regarding the community's historical roots and identity. While some believe they have Arabic origins, others lean toward Kurdish origins, which have divided the people along these lines. The establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 marked a turning point for the al-Rashidiyya community, similar to other ethnic groups like Armenians and Syriacs (Erol 2015), who were systematically excluded from political or social participation. The consequences of this exclusion were far-reaching, encompassing political pressure, challenging living conditions, limited access to education, and inadequate healthcare (Ahmad 1995; Özdemirici 2017: 22: 68; Staiger and Chahrour 2022: 52–53).

Due to limited opportunities, many al-Rashidiyya families made the difficult choice to emigrate to neighboring countries, notably Syria and Lebanon, in search of a more promising and inclusive environment (Ahmad 1995: 68). The majority of the al-Rashidiyya community migrated to Lebanon, with a smaller portion settling in Syria. This migration primarily occurred in two distinct periods: the two decades between Sheikh Said's revolt in 1925 and World War II, or between the mid-1940s and the early 1960s (Meho and Kawtharani 2005: 248). However, in Lebanon, al-Rashidiyya community encountered a disheartening continuation of their marginalization as they were denied legal citizenship and, consequently, basic social and political rights (Özdemirici 2017: 20). Most had to wait until at least the mid-1990s to obtain Lebanese citizenship (Meho and Kawtharani 2005: 251). Their marginalization led to impoverished living conditions, limited access to education, and exclusion from various social benefits (Meho and Kawtharani 2005: 255; Staiger and Chahrour 2022: 57; Ahmad 1995: 89).

I conducted interviews with six 'clans women' born in Lebanon but later migrated to Germany, who, due to a lack of formal education, struggled with illiteracy (see Meho and Kawtharani 2005: 251). As Mariam, whom I met several times in late 2021 and early 2022, expressed:

we were not allowed to attend school, and even when there was a chance, it was only up to the fifth grade. In addition, in our group [al-Rashidiyya community], women were not encouraged to pursue an education. If a family had the opportunity, they would send only one child, usually a son. From a family of eight or ten children, only one could receive an education (personal interview, NRW, November 2021).

During the Lebanese Civil War from 1975 to 1990, al-Rashidiyya community in Lebanon faced significant challenges. Loyalties divided among different factions, leading to immense suffering, loss of life, and the haunting disappearances of loved ones (Staiger and Chahrour 2022: 72, 67). Many al-Rashidiyya families sought refuge in Germany and other European countries due to the desire for stability, security, and better opportunities (Boettner and Schweitzer 2020; Krafft-Schöning 2013: 18; Rohe and Jaraba 2015: 47–51). However, in the 1980s, strict regulations on asylum, residence permits, work permits, naturalization, and education limited refugee opportunities (O and Kensche 2020: 282; Staiger and Chahrour 2022: 112). This situation persisted until the mid-1990s, leading to the emergence of enclaves where kinship groups lived in segregated communities, relying on family networks for survival (Rohe and Jaraba 2015).

Nabila, previously mentioned for her willingness to share her experiences, was born in Berlin and later married a relative in NRW. During multiple meetings from January to June 2023, she discussed her challenges with *Kettenduldung*, a situation where her residency is repeatedly extended every 3 or 6 months without leading to a permanent residence status. This status, inherited from her parents, has now been passed on to her five children. In the 1980s, Nabila's family, fearing deportation to Lebanon, registered as stateless in Berlin and destroyed their documents. Fortunately, an NGO intervened, persuading authorities to allow Nabila and her siblings to enroll in school, marking a crucial turning point for her personal growth and empowerment. Despite this progress, Nabila encountered another hurdle after completing primary school when she aimed to transition to secondary education. Navigating the complex paperwork, appointments, and convoluted procedures proved immensely burdensome for Nabila and her family (Staiger and Chahrour 2022: 133). Gathering numerous documents, proving residency, and providing extensive family history evidence consumed their time and energy, leaving a lasting impact.

Even after securing a school place, women not only faced bureaucratic challenges but also encountered social prejudices and stereotypes within the German community, which portrayed them as lacking ambition, intellect, or academic potential (Krafft-Schöning 2013: 136). Expectations within their own community placed added pressure on them to prioritize family obligations like early marriage and child-rearing over their educational aspirations, with many young women pressured to leave school for marriage, often around age 15 or 16. Despite evolving times and an increasing number of women pursuing education and marrying outside their community, stereotypes and discriminatory practices persist, as observed during fieldwork, where some children from al-Rashidiyya community were stigmatized in NRW schools on suspicion of potential criminality. This issue has led to concerning initiatives, with some teachers and social workers launching campaigns to target and monitor so-

called 'clan kids' (Jaraba 2023a: 11). In one instance, a woman from the community accused a school of treating her children as 'enemies.'

Behind the scenes

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it became evident that numerous kin groups from the al-Rashidiyya community were involved in criminal activities (Henninger 2002: 723; Schweitzer 2020: 365). These activities began with minor thefts but gradually escalated to more serious offenses, including extortion and drug trafficking. While several factors contributed to this trend, it cannot be attributed to Adler's (1975) theory of masculinization or Simon's (1975) theory of available opportunities. Instead, limited opportunities within the legal framework likely played a significant role (Rohe and Jaraba 2015: 47). There is evidence of individuals with few prospects turning to criminal behavior as a means of securing their livelihood (Vigh and Sausdal 2018: 451). Due to their restricted access to legal employment, many al-Rashidiyya members had to rely on the welfare system (Schweitzer 2020: 367) or engage in illicit activities such as theft and drug trafficking, and in some cases, both, to generate income.

The drug market boom that hit various European countries in the 1990s (Spapens and Moors 2020: 238) presented kin members with an opening to enter the criminal economy and thereby boost their power and status. Sharing information about violent criminal acts, according to Campana and Varese (2013: 263), promotes cooperation among co-offenders. People generally feel more comfortable confiding in and cooperating with those with whom they share a bond, which is why the influence of family ties in violent crime is well-documented (Spapens and Moors 2020). The 'clan' members particularly benefited from their strong family bonds in their confrontations with Albanian and Turkish criminal groups, which lacked robust family support (Al-Zein 2020).

Another contributing factor is seeing the German state as weak and unjust. Subcultures with a negative view of all authorities are more likely to disobey the law and regard illegal activities as acceptable survival strategies (Spapens and Moors 2020: 237). Perceiving the state as weak enabled criminal groups to disregard German laws, use younger family members as scapegoats, apply parallel justice to manipulate the justice system, and exploit the welfare services (Heisig 2010; Richter 2022).

Over time, 'clan crime' have become better organized and structured, particularly within sub kin groups known as *bayts* in Arabic. Each *ashira* (clan) consists of various components, including patrilineages (*hamulas*), 'clan' subsections (*fakhdhs*), and sub kin groups (*bayts*) (Barakat 1993; Eisenstadt 2007: 162). The *bayt*, which allows individuals to trace their ancestry over three to four generations through paternal and maternal links, is important in the context of 'clan crime' because it serves as the foundational unit for social and economic activities. Within a *bayt*, individuals maintain connections, share a sense of solidarity, and are bound by social, economic and blood ties. Social interactions within a *bayt* often involve blood feuds or conflicts (Jaraba 2023b).

The *bayt*, which is where criminal operations are planned, coordinated, and executed, provides the organized, efficient and complex structure in which different criminal activities such as drug trafficking, extortion, or money laundering take place. Each *bayt* usually has its own leader or influential figure to exercise authority and make decisions. Such localized decision-making facilitates adaptability and autonomy within each *bayt*, while still maintaining a sense of connection and loyalty to the larger 'clan' (Jaraba 2023b: 95).

As 'clan crime' became more organized, opportunities for women, which in both criminal and family structures are usually in the role of latent supporter (Allum and Marchi 2018: 369), expanded. As the daughters, sisters, or wives of criminals, women acquire insights into the workings of the criminal network. Although their roles are often unseen and behind the scenes, they provide essential support in that they help shape the family's criminal ethos and reinforce the norms and values associated with criminal behavior. In short, as the transmitters of knowledge, skills, and values from one generation to the next, they are more than mere bystanders.

The absence of women in leadership roles

In contrast to mafia-like family structures where women sometimes assume high-ranking positions in the absence of male relatives (Ingrascì 2021: 108; Massari and Motta 2007: 64; Sergi 2018: 152), my research findings indicate that there are no known cases of women in al-Rashidiyya community playing similar roles. This discrepancy can be attributed to a variety of reasons.

First, because the hierarchical structure of al-Rashidiyya community is highly patriarchal, it favors men (Görgen et al. 2022). Also, criminal activities like drug trafficking, extortion, and violent confrontations with rival groups often require physical strength and a certain level of influence, qualities typically associated with male members (Siegel 2010: 72; Steffensmeier and Allan 1996).

Second, cultural norms in al-Rashidiyya community, in which family honor looms large and women are encouraged to prioritize their roles as mothers and carers, would have discouraged women from doing anything that might jeopardize the family reputation. The physical risks of engaging in crime, the legal repercussions, fear of social condemnation, and a desire to protect their families would all have played a part in discouraging the women's direct involvement.

Third, women, whether sisters, mothers, or wives, are the guardians of family honor and their behavior determines the reputation and dignity of the entire family (Kahn and Véron 2017). The imprisonment of a woman is seen as a source of profound shame or dishonor (*ayb*). The preservation of family honor and the avoidance of any actions that could tarnish it are deeply ingrained in the kinship collective consciousness.

Control mechanisms

Integrating the power-control theory, as developed by Hagan, Gillis, and Simpson, into the analysis of al-Rashidiyya community, provides a profound insight into the gender dynamics and delinquency prevalent within these groups. This theoretical framework, which evaluates delinquency through a class lens within the household context, is based on the relative positions of husbands and wives and how this hierarchy influences domestic social control. In patriarchal families, where wives generally possess less power than their husbands, daughters experience more restrictions compared to their brothers, often resulting in fewer delinquent behaviors among the female siblings (Hagan et al. 1985, 1987).

Almost all my respondents mentioned the pervasiveness of gender preferences and biases, which are deeply entrenched in al-Rashidiyya community and perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes and power imbalances. The same pertains to the Italian Mafia where mothers reinforce notions of male superiority and female inferiority (Ingrascì 2021: 67). Males often receive preferential treatment when it comes to inheritance, property ownership, financial support, and even leisure activities. For example, Maha shared her personal experience of being constrained from socializing and going out, while her male siblings were freer to do so, including attending discos. She recounted an incident when her brother unexpectedly met her in the city center enjoying an ice cream with her classmates:

> when I returned home, my brother was furious. He accused me of bringing shame to the family by being seen in public with male classmates and enjoying myself. He yelled at me, calling me names and questioning my morality. It was as if my mere presence in a public space, enjoying a simple treat with my friends, was a transgression of the family's honor and reputation. I felt humiliated and controlled, as if my actions were constantly under scrutiny and subject to judgment. When my father return home, I was punished by physical abuse. This is something I will never forget (personal interview, NRW, April 2022).

This discrimination between sons and daughters within al-Rashidiyya community is an important aspect to consider. The women I interviewed confirmed that such discrimination exists, and even those who have children acknowledge a preference for sons over daughters. This can be attributed to various factors, including cultural and societal norms that prioritize male heirs and perpetuate patriarchal values. In the context of the Italian Mafia, Ingrascì (2021: 69) noted that women may seek recognition through their role as biological mothers, which could explain why they tend to promote the superiority of their sons. Similarly, among al-Rashidiyya community, sons are often seen as the carriers of the family lineage, inheritors of property, and future economic providers. These beliefs can result in the devaluation of daughters and a preference for sons who are perceived to possess greater social and economic value within the family and community. It is important to note that this preference for sons does not necessarily imply active mistreatment of daughters but rather reflects deeply ingrained gender biases and societal expectations.

Encouraging crime

Women may not only discriminate between sons and daughters but also, in some cases, actively encourage their sons to engage in crime. Abber, who belongs to a criminal family, explained how her mother played a pivotal role in influencing and shaping the criminal behavior of her brothers. Abber recounted a pivotal instance involving her mother:

> My mother didn't just turn a blind eye; she was a driving force behind my brothers' descent into crime. When our cousin, already deep in the drug market, proposed that my brothers join him, it was my mother who endorsed the idea. She didn't just accept it; she argued that it was a necessary move for our family's survival in tough economic times. This wasn't just about passive acceptance; it was active encouragement (personal interviews, NRW, September and October 2021).

By endorsing the idea, Abber's mother was effectively legitimizing and normalizing criminal behavior within their family, and hers is not an isolated case. I have heard of several other women who actively encouraged their sons to engage in crime. This behavior indicates a broader trend within the culture of criminal *bayts*, where some mothers play a crucial role in passing down criminal behavior to their sons. Various factors contribute to this, including the perception of crime as a pathway to power, respect, and economic success. Mothers may see it as a means for their sons to assert dominance, affirm masculinity, and improve their social status within al-Rashidiyya community. In some instances, they may romanticize crime as a form of resistance against an unjust or oppressive society, or they may view involvement in illicit activities as a way to access financial resources that are otherwise difficult to acquire through lawful means.

Educating role

Mafia women assume the role of educating their children on the principles and norms of the criminal group. Ingrascì (2021: 63) describes how, by instilling Mafia values into their children's upbringing, women foster a sense of normality that enables their children to engage in criminal activities. Mothers impart knowledge on how to navigate the complexities of a Mafia family, avoid conflict with other members, meet expectations, foster loyalty, and adhere to the rules governing a 'career' in the Mafia (Sergi 2018: 152). As primary caregivers, they are responsible for instilling in their children the complex knowledge, beliefs, and codes of conduct that define the criminal lifestyle. Their role as educators is pivotal in the continuation of the criminal family's legacy. They bear the weight of passing down generational wisdom, transmitting the values and traditions that have sustained their criminal lineage for years.

Women also transmit important practices to their descendants, such as the value of silence and intra-network solidarity, which are crucial for evading the authorities (Guerreiro et al. 2022: 55). Studies have revealed that the intergenerational trans-

mission of criminal behavior can be influenced by the criminal records of mothers. Research indicates that children with a convicted mother are at a heightened risk of becoming involved in criminal activities themselves compared with those with only a father with a criminal record. Moreover, when both parents have criminal records, the risk of intergenerational transmission further increases (Spapens and Moors 2020: 238–9).

One example that stood out during my research was the account of Amira, who belonged to a prominent criminal family. She vividly described how the women in her family prepared their children to deal with the challenges and opportunities they would encounter in their future lives as criminals. She recounted instances of women engaging their children in conversations about loyalty, honor, and the family's reputation through storytelling and personal anecdotes conveying the significance of maintaining a united front, protecting their own, and seeking retribution where necessary. She firmly believed that by embedding these values from an early age, 'clan' children would grow up fully committed to their criminal lineage (personal interview, Berlin, March 2023).

Amira's example further highlights the potentially perilous role of women as educators within criminal families. Women actively participate in transmitting the ideology and practice of vendetta, often encouraging their male relatives or sons to seek revenge (Ingrascì 2021: 73). By perpetuating a culture of revenge, women contribute to the ongoing cycles of vendettas and historical conflicts between different kinships groups that have persisted for several decades. Through their stories and teachings, women instill in their children a strong sense of obligation to defend their family's honor and reputation, promoting a culture of violence and retribution. This perpetuates a cycle of revenge in which conflicts are fueled and intensified, often resulting in further violence and unrest within the criminal community. The influence of women as educators in this context underscores the profound impact they have on shaping the values and behavior patterns of future generations within criminal *bayts*.

Money laundering

In Germany, which is recognized as a money laundering haven, criminal *bayts* discover additional opportunities to exploit the system and effectively launder their illicit gains. The country's advanced financial infrastructure, combined with inadequate scrutiny and enforcement, creates an environment that encourages money laundering (Bülles 2013: 249). The inadequate supervision of estate agents and notaries public also significantly increases the risk of money laundering. In addition, bringing money launderers to justice is often contingent on the police and public prosecutors being aware of the underlying criminal offense (Stukenberg 2021). This allows criminal networks to navigate through and exploit the loopholes in the system, thus facilitating the legitimization of their unlawfully acquired funds.

There is evidence that women often get drawn into their partner's criminal activities, and help with such things as money laundering (Kallinger 2007: 222; Soudijn 2010). In fact, their help with money laundering (see Cano-Paños 2021: 148) arises because women are thought to be less likely to raise the suspicions of the law enforce-

ment authorities, which makes them ideal candidates for managing the covert aspects of financial transactions linked to criminal activities. Women thus contribute to the concealment of illicit funds and help integrate them into more legitimate financial systems. This allows criminal organizations to sustain and expand their illegal activities while evading detection and scrutiny from law enforcement agencies.

Several women have spoken to me about women's involvement in money laundering, with Abber's mother an illustrative example in this respect. Given their involvement in various criminal activities, Abber's brothers recognized the high risk they were taking and the need to include the mother in the money laundering operations by registering multiple businesses in her name. By employing this tactic, the family created a facade of legitimacy for the illicit proceeds generated by their criminal activities. By putting these businesses in her name, the mother facilitated the integration of illegal funds into the formal economy, which made it challenging for the authorities to trace the origins of the money. This strategy is frequently employed in money laundering schemes, as it provides the appearance of legality, and effectively obscures the true nature and source of the funds. These actions demonstrate the active role that women can play in furthering the financial operations of criminal organizations by enabling them to sustain their illicit activities while evading detection (Soudijn 2010: 6).

Women spoke of acquiring assets, including significant amounts of gold. To secure and expand their holdings, often while receiving social benefits for years on end (LKA-Nordrhein-Westfalen 2021: 15), criminal *bayts* with profit-oriented motives have often invested in property in both Germany and abroad (Turkey and Lebanon). These assets play a part in storing and transferring illicit wealth, so contribute further to money laundering. Women may use the proceeds of crime to acquire assets such as real estate, luxury goods, or jewelry. These assets are then used to mask the illegal origins of the funds, so create an appearance of legitimacy. By holding valuable assets, women in criminal *bayts* become crucial to the complex network of financial operations that enables the family to safeguard and grow its wealth while evading suspicion from the authorities.

One young woman claimed to know several women personally who had stepped in to help relatives who were being bugged or followed. Criminal groups are familiar with the process, which has been observed in different contexts (Soudijn 2010: 6). When one woman's sons and husband were in legal trouble and facing scrutiny from the police and tax authorities, and declared their businesses bankrupt, she took matters into her own hands. She registered numerous businesses in her name and effectively became the face of the operations. By assuming this responsibility, she shielded her sons and husband from further legal repercussions and ensured the continuation of their illicit ventures. However, the authorities eventually caught wind of her involvement and are carrying out investigations and legal proceedings against her.

It is important to recognize, though, that not all women either share that view or are prepared to commit crimes. Zahra, a young woman from a criminal *bayt*, spoke about her struggle to escape the demands of her criminal brother, who wanted her to buy a house in her own name for money laundering purposes. Despite the strong pressure, she firmly refused to be involved in such illicit activities and consciously

decided to distance herself from her brother's criminal endeavors. However, her brother persisted and employed subtle and forceful tactics to try to convince her. During one of our interviews, she said that she would rather die than break the law (personal interview, NRW, February 2022).

Several factors influenced Zahra's decision to distance herself from her family's criminal activities. First, she had witnessed the legal problems her mother, brother, and father had encountered, and was determined not to go through the same experiences. The negative effects of their involvement in crime served as a strong deterrent for her. Second, Zahra wanted to retain her personal values and integrity. She understood the implications of engaging in illegal actions and believed in upholding the law, even if it meant facing adversity within her own family. Her commitment to maintaining a clean record reflected her belief in leading an honest and principled life.

Third, Zahra aspired to a different life, one free from the burdens and risks associated with criminality. She longed for stability, independence, and the opportunity to build a legitimate and respectable future. To achieve this, she took decisive steps in her journey. After completing her school education, she secured an apprenticeship place and made the courageous decision to move to a new city. This move allowed her to distance herself from the influence of her family and start afresh in an environment where she could pursue her aspirations without being hindered by the criminal activities of her relatives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has illuminated the complex roles of women in 'clan crime' within the al-Rashidiyya community in Germany, revealing that their involvement extends far beyond the traditional views of peripheral support to organized crime. Through an anthropological lens, we have seen that women are pivotal in maintaining family cohesion and criminal operations, often under the constraints of patriarchal traditions and gender norms. Their roles range from latent supporters to active participants, shaping the criminal ethos and ensuring the transmission of criminal knowledge and values.

Despite their exclusion from overt leadership positions, women's influence is substantive and multifaceted. They are at the nexus of family and crime, wielding influence in subtle yet powerful ways. Whether through coercion or cultural conditioning, many find themselves reinforcing criminal activities and ideologies, sometimes even nurturing the next generation of offenders within their families.

For practitioners and policymakers, the findings emphasize the need for culturally informed approaches to the prevention and investigation of crimes involving women. Acknowledging the intricate socio-cultural and familial factors at play is crucial for developing holistic strategies that address the root causes of women's involvement in crime. This approach may involve socio-economic empowerment initiatives, educational opportunities, and culturally integrated social services.

The patriarchal structure within these communities often results in a diminution of women's agency, silencing their voices and limiting their roles. The power dynamics

at play within the 'clan' can perpetuate gender inequalities and foster an environment where leaving the criminal fold is fraught with danger and societal backlash. The testimonies shared by the women in this study highlight the pervasive role of fear and cultural expectations in maintaining their allegiance to their families and criminal networks.

To dismantle the cycle of female involvement in 'clan crime', a nuanced understanding and redress of the ingrained social norms and gender roles are imperative. These roles, often dictating women's complicity in criminal activities, must be reevaluated in the context of immigrant community dynamics. Offering women empowering alternatives to crime can lead to their autonomy and a departure from their preordained roles. Addressing these complex challenges is essential for creating a society where women can make independent decisions, unmarred by the legacy of crime and familial pressures.

Transitioning from this understanding, we recognize that women have a profound impact on their children, often serving as the primary influencers in shaping their future paths. As such, it is crucial for state authorities and societal institutions to reassess their interactions with these women, not as criminals or mere byproducts of criminal environments, but as central figures capable of steering their families towards positive change. By breaking down the barriers of mistrust and opening avenues for dialogue, we can harness these women's potential as pivotal agents in their communities. Empowering women with the means to redefine their roles can catalyze the disruption of criminal patterns. Such empowerment, supported by policies that validate women's autonomy and well-being, not only frees them from their adverse circumstances but also enlists their vital contributions to a justice system that is inclusive and attuned to the realities of diverse communities.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Informed consent Given the sensitive nature of the research topic and the presence of criminal offenders within the community under study, traditional written informed consent was neither appropriate nor feasible. Instead, all participants were orally informed about the purpose, methodology, potential risks, and benefits of the research. They were assured of their right to withdraw at any time and given the opportunity to ask questions. Every participant verbally agreed to take part in the study. This chosen approach was guided by the principles of ensuring the participants' safety and confidentiality and was conducted in line with the ethical guidelines of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and the German Anthropological Association (GAA). The collected data was coded and pseudonymized in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to safeguard individual identities (https://gdpr-info.eu/). Pseudonymization involves replacing identifiable information with unique codes, thereby maintaining the necessary context for analysis while ensuring privacy.

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