

Women and the Mafia

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Women and the Mafia

Edited by

Professor Giovanni Fiandaca

*Università degli Studi di Palermo
Palermo, Italy*

 Springer

Editor:
Professor Giovanni Fiandaca
Università degli Studi di Palermo
Palermo, Italy

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Contributors

Giovanni Fiandaca, Editor, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy

Felia Allum, University of Bath, Bath U.K.

Fitore Paluca Belay, Police Captain, Tirana, Albania

Franco Di Maria, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy

Alessandra Dino, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy

Denise Frossard, Magistrate, San Paolo, Brazil

Yakov Gilinsky, University of Saint Petersburg, Saint Petersburg, Russia

Ombretta Ingrascì, University of London, London, U.K.

Eva Maria Kallinger, Journalist for Focus, Germany

Clare Longrigg, Correspondent for The Independent

Monica Massari, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy

Raffaella Milia, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy

Anna Maria Milito, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy

Cataldo Motta, Public Prosecutor's Office of Lecce, Lecce, Italy

Gioacchino Natoli, Public Prosecutor's Office of Palermo, Palermo, Italy

Antonino Oliveri, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy

Ryu Otomo, Correspondent for Le Monde, Tokyo, Japan

Teresa Principato, Public Prosecutor's Office, Trapani, Italy

Adriana Rossi, University of Santa Fe, Santa Fe, Argentina

Ernesto Savona, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, Italy

Renate Siebert, University of Calabria, Calabria, Italy

Girolamo Lo Verso, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy

Introduction

Giovanni Fiandaca

Our investigation into the role of women in organized crime sprang from the great tradition in Palermo of research on this subject—for example, the conference *La donna nell'universo mafioso* (Women in the Mafia Universe), organized by the Faculty of Educational Science in February 1997, and the works of Teresa Principato and Alessandra Dino, which include the outstanding book *Mafia e donna, le vestali del sacro e dell'onore* (Mafia and Women, Vestals of Honor and the Sacred) (Flaccovio, Palermo, 1997), as well as the research of Umberto Santino and Anna Puglisi.

But why extend the study of the role of women in mafia criminal activities to other criminal organizations not only in Italy but also in other countries? First and foremost, the subject has been studied very little, especially outside Italy, which gives the research a fascinating, “pioneering” character, although one fraught with understandable difficulties, such as establishing current data.

At the same time, the comparison between what occurs inside the Sicilian Mafia and other “mafias” helps us to better understand this world in Italy, brings out potential similarities as well as differences, and can help to debunk simplistic myths and widespread common clichés. In any case, this research is a valuable chance to further the understanding of organized crime internationally. As a research group, we are grateful to the City of Palermo for having supported and financed our studies as part of its project to encourage the development of a culture of legality.

In this introduction, I present some general considerations that should be kept in mind in studying this subject. The first is the need to control interpretive “preconceptions” as much as possible. Individual researchers are not blank slates and inevitably operate with preconceived concepts and hypotheses that may prejudicially influence the interpretation of data. However, these preconceptions should be kept in check as much as possible; research should be based on the empirical analysis of data instead of general preconceived ideas.

An empirical analysis of data obviously does not suggest denying that the role of women in organized crime is the result of a heterogeneous mix of factors; not all these roles can be analyzed using strictly empirical methods, and so interpretation

is to some extent unavoidable. Nevertheless, such interpretation should never completely disregard the empirical data.

I would like to present here some potentially influencing factors on this subject by first distinguishing between factors that are “endo-criminal” and those that are “exo-criminal”: the former refers to factors within the “logic” of criminal activity; the second deals with elements tied to the more general context, that is, socio-cultural or economic factors interacting with, although outside, the individual criminal. Endo-criminal factors include historico-criminological aspects, cultural codes, and the organizational structures of the specific criminal groups (i.e., rigid and centralized as opposed to fluid and horizontal; their complexity or simplicity; the primitive or technologically-evolved character of the organization and/or related criminal activity, etc.). For example, the cultural codes of established Italian mafias (Sicilian Mafia, ‘Ndrangheta, Camorra, etc.) show a traditional male chauvinist imprint and, as such, theoretically give little autonomous space to women; however, since the Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta is more horizontally structured than the Sicilian Cosa Nostra and is centered around *famiglie di sangue* (blood families), women may more likely play practical roles in criminal activities precisely because the *cosca* (gang) coincides with the natural family (see the chapters by Ingrascì and Siebert). So emerges the importance here of the organizational aspect with respect both to the cultural universe as well as basic values. The dimension I would define as organizational-instrumental reasoning about criminal activity also has a broader effect on the criminological level. In other words, the type of criminal behavior in question can also influence the space occupied by women. I refer here to more or less traditional associative conduct; active roles emerge here either of support or assistance or, on the other hand of leadership positions inside the criminal organizations, that is, extra-associative, or not necessarily associative, behavior related to so-called sophisticated crimes (criminologically a bit more advanced in terms of tradition), crimes such as drug trafficking, fraud, swindling, and money laundering.

Associative Behavioural Typologies

Several older judicial rulings reveal that the possibility that women might perform (generally nonviolent) auxiliary or supporting roles in criminal associations was considered as early as the nineteenth century. Consider those women who acted as a “*vivandiera*” (supplier or provider), “*postina*” (postman), or “*messaggera*” (messenger) for early associations of *briganti* (brigands or highwaymen). The fact that these supportive types of behavior frequently did not cross the line of punishability can also be explained through the cultural stereotype of criminals as male; this stereotype influenced even judges for a long period of time and has tended to penally “immunize” the behavior of mafia women, who are considered “passive subjects” completely dominated by their *mafiosi* menfolk.

On the other hand, although the phenomenon is statistically infrequent, women may at times even assume leadership roles in crisis situations, as when the male

boss is in prison, a fugitive, or otherwise unable to fulfill his role. For example, Massari makes this clear in relation to several cases of women in the Sacra Corona Unita: “The man’s absence, on one hand, and the temporary position of the woman, on the other, are directly related as well as logically consequent.”

Of course, another necessary condition for this to happen bears *mention*. Women in these cases are characterized by powerful, self-confident, enterprising personalities, as well as a heightened awareness of the culture of violence.

Examples are also found in other countries of women endowed with powerful criminal personalities who take the reins of the organization in periods of crises for the men; the chapters on Brazil, Argentina, and Japan, for example, all refer to this. In these cases, however, it is not always clear how much is due to the crisis situation because of the absence of suitable men and how much instead is due to the higher criminal potential of the women in question.

Extra-Associative Behavioural Typologies

In terms of extra-associative behavioral typologies, in other words behavior related to crimes not associative in themselves (such as drug dealing, fraud, money laundering, and management of illegal economic activities), the growing involvement of women in active roles tends to be observed more internationally. In terms of functional organizational reasoning within the logic itself of criminal activity, this phenomenon can be explained through circumstances in which women, precisely because they are women, are less suspected than men of carrying out illegal activities; because of this, they can more easily elude police investigations and magistrates’ inquests.

Now we come to the “exo-criminal” factors that influence the role of women in the criminal environment. With no presumption that these are complete, I list them as follows:

- Socio-cultural development, either general or contextual.
- Emancipation of women from the point of view of potential parity with men.
- Economic conditions such as employment crises, problems of economic survival, and popular life-style models inspired by the values of success and profit (more succinctly, economic need and/or greed).
- Psychological personality traits of these women in terms of strength of character, charisma, potential for aggressivity, predisposition towards violence, attitudes as a leader, and so on.

I include personality characteristics among the “exo-criminal” factors because the existence should be excluded of any real “criminal psychology” as an “innate” inheritance; certain psychological traits may predispose someone toward criminality if influenced by a context or involvement in a criminal environment. In this sense, I would refer to an interaction between personality characteristics and environment.

Having said this, let us focus particularly on the growing trend towards the emancipation of women, in the sense of their assuming roles generally less

subordinate to men. How and to what extent do forms of women's emancipation in this general sense encourage more active roles for women within criminal organizations and crime in general?

At first glance, it might seem that the growing phenomenon of women entering roles beyond those of traditional assistance and support (e.g., female "providers" or "messengers"), roles that call for more developed and sophisticated activities (e.g., female "money collectors," managers of businesses or shops, money launderers, etc.), might be explained in terms of cultural evolution and the personal emancipation of women with recognized roles of active collaboration or co-leadership and substantial parity with men. But questions remain: are we in a real sense dealing here with a form of expressive emancipation in a passage from cultural tradition to modernity? Or is this a form of "partial," "incomplete," or "apparent" emancipation characterized by a persistent hybridization between tradition and modernity?

As far as Italian "mafias" are concerned, this second concept seems potentially dominant since in them aspects of both modern emancipation and archaic primitivism co-exist. Analyses of women's cases in the chapters by Monica Massari and Ombretta Ingrassi, for example, are representative in this sense. Although they perform leadership roles as replacements for their "husbands," on one hand, these women are capable of exercising violence and power (legitimized, of course, by their relationships with their respective menfolk), while on the other they remain subject to the men's power and violence. Maria Serraino, an 'Ndrangheta woman with a **substantial** role as head of the family, suffered beatings and other psychological violence by her husband.

As Ombretta Ingrassi observes in her chapter, although "the apparent and presumed parity won by women inside the mafia syndicate may manifest itself in the dimension of work, it does not in the individual sphere." So could we be dealing here with a "pseudo-emancipation" (as she suggests) rather than an actual emancipation? Let us see how things stand in other countries from this point of view.

The chapters on Germany, Japan, and Argentina all make reference to "emancipation" and its possible link to the taking on of criminal roles by women. The development of illegal markets, connected in part to socio-economic evolution and globalization, offers greater opportunities for women as well; their growing entrance into the criminal world constitutes a reaction against discrimination, an instrument (though arguable) of emancipation from the perspective of gender equality. Manabu Miyazaki, for example, supports this thesis in Japan.

One possible link between the emancipation of women and their growing participation in crime is also theorized in the chapter on Germany, which refers, in particular, to the growing incidence (around 35.7%) of women in crimes such as money laundering.

But we should ask ourselves once again whether this is a real form of emancipation. One explanation might be that women in crime are "emancipated" by the family ties and trust between family members, authors of crimes that create illegal profits, and the women who launder the money. Then there is always the "criminal-functional" explanation; women stand out much less and are less

suspicious of money laundering as well. A link between the increase in women's education (in this sense educational emancipation) and the increase in active criminal roles is also suggested in the chapter on Argentina, although related to the remarkable growth in the number of women found guilty of retail drug dealing (aside from cases of women involved in power relationships and networks of political corruption). Essentially, two categories of women are involved in drug dealing; on one hand, women who have a diploma but are unemployed and enter the illegal circuit to satisfy basic economic needs; and, on the other hand, women who enter the drug trade to maintain a satisfying socio-economic status or out of greed. Although these women are more emancipated than in the past, in Argentina once again we are still dealing with forms of coexistence between the old and the new, between modernity and tradition. Crime appears as an instrument of emancipation only from a perspective of incomplete or distorted modernity: a sort of transition toward modernity. But do these links, problematic and ambiguous as they are, truly exist between crime, tradition, and modernity? When speaking of the apparent or incomplete emancipation of women, are we superimposing our moral prejudices on reality?

The research conducted by our group seeks to make the first, although perhaps incomplete, attempts at answering these sorts of questions.

I A History of Women in the Mafia

1

Doing It for Themselves or Standing in for Their Men? Women in the Neapolitan Camorra (1950–2003)

Felia Allum

In today's globalized world, "local" variables no longer seem relevant when analyzing different social, economic, and political phenomena. Transnational characteristics seem more appropriate. The same applies to the specific study of organized crime. Generic and interchangeable terms such as "transnational organized crime" or "mafias" are now used to describe and analyze different criminal groups such as Colombian cartels, Chinese triads, and Italian organized crime groups, suggesting that local differences among gangs are no longer fundamental since, in order to survive in the global economy, they have all adopted similar economic methods and therefore have come to resemble each other.

This would be a simplistic analysis of organized crime today, however, since cultural and local contexts still do play a considerable role in distinguishing different criminal groups. As Castells argues, "the more organized crime becomes global, the more its most important components emphasize their cultural identity, so as not to disappear In so doing, they preserve their ethnic, cultural, and, where possible, territorial bases. This is their strength. Criminal networks are probably in advance of multinational corporations in their decisive ability to combine cultural identity and global business" (Castells, 2000:210).

In this regard, the Neapolitan Camorra has always been and still is very different from its Sicilian counterpart, Cosa Nostra, in terms of origin, organizational structure, activities, and role in civil society and politics, so much so that Sicilian *mafiosi* make fun of Neapolitan *camorristi* and consider themselves superior and more professional. For example, Tommaso Buscetta described *camorristi* as "buffoons" to Judge Falcone (1993:99), and the *pentito* Salvatore Migliorino explained that *camorristi* showed off too much and acted too much in the open (interview, 22 August 1997:29). So, the regional contexts of the Sicilian Mafia and the Neapolitan Camorra clearly mark their differences, and this also applies to the role of women in both organizations.

Sicilian Mafia women are perceived as loyal and subordinate wives who do not interfere with their husbands' criminal projects or decisions. In contrast, Camorra women have always been much more involved and aware of their men's activities. They are not passive onlookers, but are the active backbone of this criminal organization, and have become increasingly involved, sometimes out of necessity,

sometimes because of a specific criminal intent. They do not find themselves on the margins of the Neapolitan criminal underworld, in the shadow of their fathers, brothers, cousins, husbands, children, and lovers. Over time, they have transformed themselves from being part of a strong, intimate support system into leading protagonists. Women take on active, formal roles in the Camorra not only as directors of “front” companies, but also in leadership positions, making strategic decisions regarding the clan’s activities, taking matters into their own hands, and even killing. For example, in May 2002, in Lauro, a town in the province of Avellino, a shoot-out between women from the Graziano clan and women from another clan (the Cavas) left three women dead and six injured (“Donne Killer,” *Cronache by Napoh*, 29 May 2002:1). This suggests that Camorra women are now definitely taking center stage as major players.

Three factors can help explain the transformation of women’s roles in the post-war period, particularly over the last twenty years: (1) changes in civil society; (2) the first Camorra war in the 1970s to 1980s with the opposition of two different criminal models; and (3) the Camorra’s flexible internal structure and lack of organizational hierarchy, these factors have given women the space and opportunity to become active in the realm of crime as well as in the private family sphere. As the Camorra has changed from a traditional criminal model of behavior into an efficient, modern, money-making machine with a flexible structure, so too has women’s behavior changed, shifting from traditional roles of support and loyalty to new active roles that include executive decision-making.

In general, the changing role of Camorra women largely reflects the broader changes in civil society in the post-war period. Women in Neapolitan society have become increasingly emancipated: they slowly moved from the private family sphere to the public sphere of work. Young women today have more social aspirations than their mothers and want to combine family life with work rather than just concentrating on the family as their mothers did. The same is happening in the criminal underworld; as Claire Longrigg said, “Neapolitan women play a full and active part in society, perhaps more than women from any other region of Italy, and the criminal underworld is no exception” (Longrigg, 1998:35).

Women’s emergence from invisibility into powerful visibility seems to have occurred in three stages:

- Stage one: 1950–1976: women as part of a support system
- Stage two: 1976–1990: women defending their men.
- Stage three: 1990–2000: women becoming criminals.

Of course, each of these stages builds on the previous one(s), and we must also bear in mind the differences among clans and regions. On the whole, however, this chronological approach does help to clarify the analysis.

In the first stage Camorra women are part of a support system like that described by Renate Siebert (1996) with reference to the Sicilian Mafia and the Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta (following the Sicilian code of conduct, i.e., what we could call “the Sicilian model” of providing emotional and financial support). Between 1950 and 1976, Camorra women provided a constant support system for *camorristi* both

informally as well as formally. However, even during this early stage, Camorra women begin to break away from traditional forms of behavior and display a voice independent of their men. In stage two, women defend their men. This model of behavior clearly moves away from the Sicilian model. Many changes took place during this stage due to conflicting criminal models: the first Camorra war in the 1980s between the *Nuova Camorra Organizzata* (NCO) led by Raffaele Cutolo, who sought to impose a Campania-based model, versus the smuggling gangs influenced by Cosa Nostra, the *Nuova Famiglia* (NF) alliance, which sought to impose a more traditional model based on the Sicilian code of conduct. This had implications for Camorra women and their behavior. During this war, although few women were visibly involved in top-level activities and most were only part of the support system, some women were openly involved and defended their men as much as possible. The media, however, did not perceive them as having much of an independent role because Mafia bosses would not permit it; but, as many judges have suggested, they may actually have played a much more important role than is generally believed, although this is difficult to document. In stage three, women become major players in the Camorra and criminals in their own right. This may be because there were no longer men suitable as leaders or because the women felt they had the skills to be as good as, if not better than, their male counterparts.

The crucial turning point in this chronology is between stages two and three, when Camorra women broke away from simply being a support system and became major players. The end of the first Camorra war in the early 1980s produced criminal chaos: there were so many different forms of Camorras, with different roles and activities, that a traditional code of honor like the Sicilian one could no longer prevail even in those clans that had been “Mafia-ized” (i.e., colonized by the Sicilian Mafia in the 1970s and 1980s). This enabled women to find a space where they could take on an active role. This third stage also coincides with the *pentito* phenomenon in Campania (criminals turning state’s witness in return for lighter sentences), which gave women the opportunity to assert themselves in reaction against the effects that these testimonies were having in destroying the clans.

Let us now consider more closely each of the three stages. During the first stage, women informally coordinated low-level Camorra networks. They created the conditions that encouraged their sons to become *camorristi*. They sold smuggled American cigarettes, petrol and drugs, and received stolen goods on street corners in order to earn money for their large, extended families. They stashed stolen guns and illegal goods, and even sheltered fugitive bosses from the police and judges. But they also played an essential role in the emerging organization, that of representing the Camorra in the local community: For example, “Donna Gemma,” wife of Forcella smuggler Pio Vittorio and mother of the future Forcella boss Luigi Giuliano, represented the Giuliano clan; and Fortuna, wife of Vincenzo l’Americano, was a powerful *guappo* (a Camorra wise guy) during the 1950s (Gribaudo, 1999).

Formally, they became directors of phantom “front companies” and received public contracts, as was the case in the 1960s of Maria Orlando, mother of Lorenzo Nuvoletta of the Nuvoletta clan (De Gregorio, 1983:89), or Antonietta Di Costanzo,

wife of Antonio Orlando, the uncle of Lorenzo Nuvoletta, also from the Nuvoletta clan (Feo, 1989:69).

However, one episode from this era that shows clearly the changing role of Camorra women, and how independent they were to become, is the story of the beautiful Assunta Maresca, known as “Pupetta” (Little Doll). Pupetta Maresca was the daughter of Vincenzo Maresca from Castellamare di Stabia, a man renowned for his criminal dealings. She was brought up in a semi-illegal context and fell in love with a local *guappo* from Palma Campania, Pasquale Simonetti, known as Pasquale ‘e Nola. He was a *guappo* in the traditional sense of the word and did business particularly with the “agricultural sector”; he worked in the fruit and vegetable market in Naples and dealt in smuggled goods. His style and power bothered other *guappi*, and one day in 1955 he was shot by a hit-man commissioned by his rival, another *guappo*, one Antonio Esposito. Pupetta was pregnant and devastated; since she believed the police knew who the culprit was but were not prepared to do anything about it, she drove to Naples with her younger brother, Ciro, and murdered Antonio Esposito in broad daylight. This episode and the following trial made international headlines that connected it to the “old Camorra,” as though they were dealing with the final traces of a traditional Camorra that would soon disappear. However, more importantly, this showed that Camorra women were different from Sicilian women; they were a support system, but also were prepared to speak their mind in public, become involved, and cross the line for their men. During the rest of this period, no such episodes came to light in the media. This stage was dominated by women who were part of the criminal support system and who helped to strengthen the different emerging Camorras.

The emergence of NCO Boss Raffaele Cutolo in the 1970s and his attack on smuggling clans closely connected to the Sicilian Mafia, such as the Nuvoletta, Bardellino, Zaza, and Giuliano clans, marked the beginning of the second stage of transformation in which some women came to the forefront to defend their men. These smuggling groups, highly influenced and, in some cases, even co-opted by the Sicilian Mafia, organized to form an anti-NCO alliance, the NF. So there were three different ideological criminal positions: the independent NCO, based on a Campania-Camorra idea, and the NF, divided into two groups, one influenced and co-opted by the Sicilian Mafia and one independent of the Mafia. All these gangs sought to project a strong image of a male-only Camorra, but this was far from reality. It is clear that during this period (1976–1990) women from the NF clans close to the Sicilian Mafia played the traditional role and conformed very much to the Sicilian Mafia’s code of conduct; they provided emotional and financial support while never attempting to become involved in criminal activities or decisions. This appears to have happened with the Nuvoletta clan from Marano, the Bardellino-Casalesi clan from the Caserta region, the Gionta clan from Torre Annunziata, the Limelli clan also from Torre Annunziata, and the Alessandro clan from Castellamare di Stabia.

The Casalesi clan from Casel di Principe is a good example showing the secondary role of women. Although it would become the most dangerous and economically successful clan in the region, its women would never appear to be as

independent and outspoken as other Camorra women. Women from this clan most resemble Sicilian Mafia women, and this may well explain why it has been so successful and resilient, even today.

Women taking on active roles and defending their men during this second stage came from the gangs not affiliated with Cosa Nostra. Three women really came to the fore during this phase: Rosetta Cutolo, sister of NCO Boss Raffaele; Anna Mazza, wife of Boss Gennaro Moccia and mother of the Moccia brothers; and Pupetta Maresca, partner of drug baron Umberto Ammaturo and sister of Ciro Maresca.

Raffaele Cutolo always maintained that his older sister knew nothing about his criminal activities and did only what he asked: “Rosetta has never been a *camorrista* . . . She only listened to me and sent a few suitcases [of money] to prisoners like I told her to” (*Il Mattino*, 4 November 1992). Nevertheless, it is clear that (1) Raffaele wanted to maintain a male-only organization based on principles such as criminal fraternity and solidarity and so could never be seen giving a role to a woman, his sister; and (2) maybe more important, he did not want to implicate her and therefore always argued she was innocent. Many of Cutolo’s lieutenants did not believe she held an important role because she was a woman. Former NCO lieutenant, now *pentito*, Pasquale Barra argued, “What has Rosa Cutolo got to do with it; what have *women* got to do with the Camorra?” (Il Tribunale di Napoli, *Sentenza nei confronti di Saviano Sabato*).

However, if we look at the facts, another picture appears. Rosetta Cutolo not only visited her brother on a regular basis in prison, she also received clan members in her home in Ottaviano (organizing them and their families, and finances), was a member of the team that helped Cutolo escape from the Avellino prison hospital, attended peace summits between NCO and NF leaders in 1981 and 1982, remained a fugitive until 1993, and, after being arrested, was released in 1999. Some have suggested that her long period as a fugitive was part of a pact her brother negotiated with the government (“his life for her freedom”) (Rosanova, interview, 3 January 2002). Judges have had no doubts about her full and active involvement in the Camorra: “Ms. Cutolo’s situation has undoubtedly been influenced by her brother’s way of life . . . which by no means excludes the determination and skills she deployed in achieving the NCO’s goals” (S1: 394). Rosetta clearly and intelligently looked after her brother’s criminal activities; she was no subordinate or passive bystander, but was fully involved in the clan’s activities and enabled it to survive while Raffaele was in prison. However, the clan would eventually be defeated. Rosetta demonstrates the limits of power conceded to Camorra women during this stage because the clan relied on her but did not want her to be seen as being involved or visibly active. In the next stage, women became more successful as they became criminal protagonists in their own right.

Anna Mazza became involved in Camorra activities when rival gangs murdered her husband, Gennaro Moccia, boss of Afragola, in 1976. She became known as “the Black Widow.” She supported her sons in avenging their father’s murder and became the leader of the gang, directing its activities and influencing its ideology: “Up to that point, Anna Mazza had just been the wife of a *capo*,” says Travaglino.

“That day, she became a *capo* in her own right—one of the most dangerous, certainly one of the most bloody” (quoted in Longrigg, 1998:17). Although she would not admit to being the driving force behind the clan, she led the group while her sons were in prison. When the eldest, Angelo, known as “Enzo,” became a leader of the Alfieri Confederation in the mid-1980s, her leadership role grew less important, although she still managed local criminal activities, as well as relationships with politicians, while her sons were involved in regional Camorra warfare. Today, it appears she still runs the clan, directs its activities, and visits her sons in prison.

Pupetta Maresca, who became known as “Madame Camorra” (De Gregorio, 1983:31), continued her criminal career when she was released from prison in 1964. She met and became the partner of drug baron Umberto Ammaturo, following him in his criminal activities (even though it appears he may have been involved in the murder of her son, Pasqualino). She was part of his support system. Their separation in 1982 did not mean the end of Pupetta’s Camorra activities. In February 1982, during the war between the NCO and NF, she made an appearance to defend her men, her *camorristi*, at a press conference: “To draw fire from her brother (Ciro), Pupetta Maresca created a spectacular diversion She called a press conference at an exclusive press club on the seafront in Naples” (Longrigg, 1998:8).

As seen from this brief analysis of Camorra women in the second stage (1976–1990), only a few Camorra women were prepared to move beyond their role in the traditional support system. Those who did became involved in their men’s activities and defended them staunchly, following their court cases and maintaining contact with their lawyers. But they were still not as fully active and involved as the next generation would be.

Stage three in the 1990s was a period of chaos for the Camorra in terms of social, economic, and political activities. Its traditional reference point, the Christian Democratic Party, declined and disappeared, leaving the dominant Camorra groups with no sense of direction. This also coincided with the spread of the *pentito* phenomenon in Campania and major government repression against the Camorra. Thus, the different Camorra clans, both in the city and the surrounding areas, were in a state of flux. This period of change allowed, forced, or encouraged women to come to the fore regardless of whether the clan had been influenced by the Sicilian Mafia or not. The Sicilian model of total commitment, loyalty, and subordination had weakened except for a case in Casel di Principe.

In the hinterland of Naples, the Gionta clan, affiliated with Cosa Nostra, should have maintained the Sicilian model of a male-only organization where women were not active. But it did not. Valentino Gionta’s wife, Gemma, had always been an important figure as the boss’ wife. She appears to have been involved in different extortion scams, participated actively in meetings, and made important decisions concerning clan activities, although only as her husband’s representative. She was respected as such, but she was never seen as an active member since “she was only a woman” (Migliorino, interview, 22 August 1997:29). As in the traditional model, she was the figurehead director of front companies for the clan, but when most of the clan was in prison and depleted by the *pentito* phenomenon, some leadership was needed. Gemma felt that the decline of the clan caused by the revelations of state witnesses needed to be stopped and decided to do something

about it by becoming involved in the clan's activities in order to guarantee its survival. Thus, the Sicilian model was no longer respected. Taking messages to and from her husband in prison was no longer enough. Gemma Donnarumma's role as a full participant in Camorra activities can be seen clearly in an episode that took place in 1995. "Several clan members who were in prison decided to turn *pentiti*. To pressure them not to do so, Gemma forced their wives to dress in black, demand divorce, and give interviews on the subject so their husbands would be completely disowned" (Tribunale di Napoli, *Ordinanza custodia cautelare in carcere nei confronti di Donnarumma Gemma*).

In this regard, it is interesting to note that Camorra women reacted much more violently to the *pentito* phenomenon than Sicilian Mafia women. Maria Licciardi of the Secondigliano clan from Naples also sought to control the possible impact of the *pentiti's* statements to protect the clan. For example, the police established that, a few days after his escape from his protected location, *pentito* Constantino Sarno met Maria Licciardi to ask for money in return for retracting statements on the clan's activities. The Secondigliano Alliance was split on this problem; some wanted to pay him, others wanted to pretend to pay him and then murder him and his family. On 15 June 2001, Maria Licciardi was stopped in a car with her sister, Assunta, and her sister-in-law with a suitcase full of money (300 million lire, around 50,000 euros) that the judges believe she was on her way to deliver to him.

The Secondigliano clan is an example of the latest generation of Camorra clans; its women's behavior reflects stage three. Though not affiliated with the Sicilian Mafia, it had been part of the NF alliance and had a pact with Carmine Alfieri in the early 1980s. It was part of what became called the "Secondigliano Alliance" or the "New Campania Mafia," an alliance between the different clans from the city and immediate surrounding area (the Secondigliano clan, the Contini clan from Naples, and the Mallardo clan from Giugliano). Gennaro Licciardi, Eduardo Contini, and Francesco Mallardo led this strategic criminal alliance, which dominated the Neapolitan criminal underworld during the mid-1990s; there was a time when all three leaders and their supposed deputies were in prison. As a result, Gennaro Licciardi's youngest sister, Maria Licciardi, was left in charge of the clan's activities. Some argue that women have always played a fundamental role in the Secondigliano Alliance. When *pentito* Gaetano Guida, from the Capodichino neighborhood, was asked about the role of women in the Secondigliano Alliance, his reply was quite indicative:

They are on the front-line. It has always been like this in the Secondigliano clan, in the sense that women (wives, sisters, and mothers of the leaders) have always had an influential role in many decisions. Maria Licciardi, Gennaro's sister, is representative of this. She was his *confidante*. She took orders to and from her brother; she transmitted his orders and messages, even those of major importance. On more than one occasion, she transmitted his orders to kill. I don't recall the details but I know that, for our clan, talking with Maria Licciardi was the same as talking with Gennaro, the boss. I can add that Secondigliano women took on all sorts of jobs on behalf of the alliance: they took messages to prisoners, distributed money to members, organized activities, especially numbers running and extortion rackets. In other words, they constitute the backbone of the organization" (RG GIP 996/99:51)

Some prosecutors have argued that she had no real criminal intent but rather acted out of necessity. What is clear is that she managed to keep the clan together for a brief period until younger members believed they could do better and sought to diminish her power. A bloody feud broke out over a drug deal. Many were killed, and she was arrested in 2001.

It should be emphasized again that women in the city clans appear to have become more active and visible over the last ten years. When a power vacuum appears, intelligent women take over; they no longer merely defend their men but become active players. For example, Teresa De Luca Bossa was convicted of being the leader of a clan; in addition, the women of the Giuliano clan in the Forcella district, Carmela Marzano, Marianna Giuliano, and Ermina Giuliano (the wife, daughter, and sister of Luigi Giuliano, respectively), who all in one way or another had relationships with *camorristi*, became fully involved in clan activities when their men were sent to prison.

This brief overview of Camorra women in the post-war period has shown how their role changed from being part of a simple support system (after the Sicilian model) to becoming protagonists in their own right, either out of necessity or with criminal intent. Camorra women have been present in different ways during the post-war period either in supportive roles or in leadership positions. Without women the Camorra would probably not have survived. The question is whether they will still be allowed to play these important roles when the men come out of prison. What seems ironic is that, by becoming protagonists and participating in Camorra activities, these women appear to have broken away from the traditional model of female subordination, when in reality they have been defending a strong traditional male organization that seeks to control civil society, the economy, and politics and so block the modernization of southern Italy.

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2

Mafia Women: The Affirmation of a Female Pseudo-Subject. The Case of the ‘Ndrangheta

Renate Siebert

Women and Criminality/Women and Violence

Much debate has taken place over the last few years on the role of women in mafia-style criminal organizations. For a long time, popular opinion, the judgment of many experts, the evaluations of magistrates and judges¹ and the testimonies of mafia men have centered around the idea that women in these environments play only the passive roles of mother and wife, substantially hidden from the criminal acts perpetrated by their men. These women in the shadows appear to be, for all intents and purposes, living in traditional and premodern conditions, subordinate to the dictates of a patriarchal world not much different, in terms of family and private life, from the rest of the “traditional” world—the rural world undergoing the process of urbanization—that is, passive and backward women. Recent developments beginning in the 1990s, connected in large part with the testimonies of men (and a few women) who turned *state’s witnesses* and the destruction of previous organizational and family equilibria, have brought quite a different image into focus, one in powerful contrast to the earlier picture.

The aim of this chapter is to shed some light on these emerging trends in the context of the Calabrian mafia, the ‘Ndrangheta, starting from a more general consideration of female criminality and the relationship between women and violence. It is useful to examine the relationship between women and various forms of mafia-style criminal organizations at different levels: on one hand, as part of the general debate on the relationship between women and criminality, and on the other, in relation to the history and local characteristics of specific criminal organizations. Special attention will be paid to the question of the relationship between women and violence.

Female Criminality

We begin with one basic fact: in Italy, as well as all the other countries considered, the level of female crime is low compared to that of male crime, particularly as regards violent crimes. Female percentages for violent crimes in Italy have been

nearly constant over several decades (between 6 and 8 percent), while the trend has been increasing for crimes against property, robberies, and so on (between 10 and 18 percent). In Italy, the female prison population is similarly low, with numbers fluctuating over the last 50 years between 5 and 7 percent of the overall prison population.² Reports produced in this research project show similar trends in many other countries. The obvious difference in deviant conduct between men and women has been generally interpreted based on two different assumptions, which may be called the emancipation hypothesis and the gender hypothesis, respectively.

The Emancipation Hypothesis

This interpretation suggests that lower female criminal activity can be attributed to the substantial subordination of women in patriarchal contexts and backward living conditions, especially regarding their presence in the public sphere. During the 1970s, the hypothesis was advanced that, with the greater overall success of female emancipation, the quantitative gap between criminal acts committed by men and women would decrease since women would have increasing opportunities to pursue both legal and illegal careers. Although this hypothesis was never confirmed, it gave rise to ideas and debates on the nature and causes of female participation in crime. In fact,

Since the 1970s, no growth has been registered in the levels of arrests, reports, and convictions of women for violent crimes and, at least in Italy, percentages have also remained the same related to theft-type crimes, with the exception of shoplifting in large department stores and pickpocketing.³

The basic assumption of this first hypothesis, let us call it “emancipative,” is that female criminality can be explained in the same way as male criminality. This refuses to take into account gender differences that produce different feelings, emotions, attitudes, and behavior.

The Gender Hypothesis

This approach tends to analyze female deviant conduct, first, as conduct “in itself,” in other words, based on an analysis of the feminine as a social construct in relation to, as well as independent from, the masculine social construct. In this view, female criminality should not be considered a subspecies of general “normal” criminality, represented by data based on the observation of (more visible) male criminality, but rather a way of being and acting derived from history, long-term psycho-social processes, and the socializing processes that affect women. The specific quality and originality of these processes risk never being investigated if male conduct remains the measure of perception and evaluation of what women feel, think, do, and do not do.

Female socialization involves the internalization of the vulnerabilities and weaknesses of women’s sexual identity that leads to particular deviant behavior. In the

family contexts, girls are subjected to greater primary social control than boys and become accustomed to having fewer liberties. They tend more to sublimate than to act directly. Symbolic violence, which has for centuries conditioned the socialization of the difference between the sexes, is also perpetuated beyond the will of the individual. Pierre Bourdieu writes,

The passions of the dominated *habitus* (from the point of view of gender, ethnicity, culture or language), a somatized social relationship, social law converted into incorporated law, are not those which can be suspended by simple force of will, founded on acquiring a liberating consciousness. If it is completely illusory to believe that symbolic violence can be overcome with only the weapons of consciousness and will, this depends on the fact that the effects and conditions of its efficiency are deeply inscribed in the deepest area of the body under the form of dispositions.⁴

Add to this the fact that much female deviance is expressed, interpreted, and repressed as a psychological and psychiatric pathology. Women are “psychiatrized” more than men:

We can say that if criminal deviance in women is much lower than in men, it is also because, paradoxically, many more types of behavior and attitudes are forbidden to women with respect to men; in other words, the environment of female deviance is potentially much larger, even though interpreted differently, than that of male deviance That is to say, female deviance . . . is more frequently psychiatrized than criminalized.⁵

This last assertion recalls the long history of penal differentiation between women and men on both the practical and theoretical levels. For centuries, female imputability was diminished or blocked with reference to the ancient principle of *infirmitas sexus* (or *imbecillitas sexus*, as well as *fragilitas sexus*), borrowed from the tradition of Roman law:

Perhaps the ambivalence registered when a collective group must inflict a penalty on a woman can be interpreted precisely in this sense: women make up part of the community in an ambiguous way, certainly not as completely as men do; at times they are absorbed into it, at times they are excluded from it. Their sphere of belonging is participation in the community, but only to the extent that it is connected, fundamentally and dependently, to the family. They incarnate both social inferiority and a sublime closeness to the sacred in the sense they are carriers of life. Therefore they are publicly untouchable, since they are both sacred and inferior. Because of this, preference is to delegate their control to the family, the only entity to which they are tied by a real pact. When, for whatever reason, this control decreases or whoever exercises it prefers to delegate it to public powers, those ambiguous mechanisms of punishment are manifested under the banner of the politics of ‘symbolic attenuation.’⁶

Thus, female deviancy and criminality are constructed and defined between inclusion and exclusion, between the public sphere and private family sphere; these forms of deviance and criminality are, in part, still waiting to be narrated by the protagonists of these acts and, in any case, analyzed in general.

Women and Violence

As an introduction, the following is a brief list of theoretical and methodological indications that emerged during our research:

- It is important to proceed toward more clarification, description, and analysis of the roles and functions of women in mafia crime starting from the accounts and statements of the women themselves (since until now most available statements have been from male *mafiosi*, some of them collaborators and some not).
- It is necessary to read the sources free from the restraints of a widespread social representation that considers female deviance identical to male deviance, different only quantitatively (and, in any case, that uses as a reference point that implicitly defines male deviance as “normal” deviance).
- From an analysis of the specific mafia organization’s operations, female criminal practices need to be described by evaluating and defining individual female activity as *support*, *temporary delegation of power*, or even *sharing of power* (it should be mentioned that men act on all these levels).
- The question of *recognition* should be brought into focus: on whom and what does the fact depend that an order is followed on the part of members inside the organization? Power belongs to those who are able to make themselves obeyed. What happens if a woman gives orders that have not been legitimized by a man behind her (husband, brother, son)? For now, it would seem that a man’s recognition-obedience mechanism is engaged only in encounters with other men, except when temporarily activated toward a woman for a limited period while the woman is acting in the place of her man in prison.
- With respect to the central question of *power*, traces of definitions should be found in the statements of both women and men in order to understand whether the connections among wealth, the ability to arouse fear and exercise violence, the importance of patronage politics, and the awareness of one’s ability to mediate and exercise hegemony over relationships with others in a hierarchical manner (different aspects that make up what might be called *mafia power*) are all experienced in a significantly different manner by men and women as regards both the ability to exercise power and as the willingness to recognize it in others. Furthermore, an analysis seems warranted of the diversified relationships women of different social backgrounds in a mafia context entertain, on one hand, with state power and, on the other, with the power of the criminal organization. (The chapter by Rossi on the Argentine context distinguishes between women who use power/state domination and others who feel abandoned by the state: both are given as reasons for being involved with organized crime.)

One very important aspect regards *violence* and the specific ways this violence is expressed, acted out, or performed by women. For men as well as women, the relationship with violent activity is never detached from the violence experienced over the course of their lives. This relationship is not linear, however; it is instead controversial and contradictory, with at times perverse results. We know from

collaborators' stories that a coldness in killing, a freezing of feelings and emotions, and a substantial absence of a sense of guilt are part of mafia normality, and that this "spell" disappears immediately with a change of life (from *mafioso*, involved in this environment's consensual universe, to collaborator): there are stories of former *uomini d'onore* (men of honor), ruthless killers in the past, who become anxious over a potential break-in by a thief.⁷ No longer moralized and legitimized as a structuring activity of mafia activities, violence in this case suddenly reassumes all its frightening power over the individual.

In contrast to men, women are carriers of an unconscious historical memory of their body's intrinsic vulnerability: a meta-historical experience inscribed in the reproductive quality of the female body, which coexists with and is superimposed upon the individual method of relating to violence. Frequently added to this is a biographical experience of molestation and violence, at times sexual. Enzo Ciconte has reconstructed various episodes of sexual violence perpetrated by *'ndranghetisti* (members of the 'Ndrangheta):

The truth is, it is the *'ndranghetisti* themselves who engage in dishonoring their women. A *capobastone* (local underboss) in Nicastro was accused of attempted rape. In Seminara, a defendant was accused of "having deflowered four poor, unhappy girls." Again in Cirella di Platí, there was a case of rape by a *picciotto* (young apprentice *mafioso*) who broke into a house armed and forced a girl into "sexual congress." Near Palmi, an underboss "soothed the lascivious thoughts of a *picciotto*, the dearest of the group, by giving him the opportunity to sacrifice the virgin Bava on the altar of pleasure." In any case, when they were not raped, other forms of violence against women by *'ndranghetisti* were not infrequent.⁸

Therefore, historical memory and biographical memory place the female subjects specifically in a violent criminal context, a context that requires great coldness and indifference in manipulating violence and death since this constitutes part of a structured professional activity. I believe we find ourselves dealing with another issue in the difficult construction of an explanation for the lower "violent criminal ability" of women. There are cases of dissociation and collaboration on the part of women who have in this way liberated themselves from a violent relationship; first of all, these stories do not represent any rebellion against criminal violence carried out in their mafia environment, instead it was the violence experienced against their bodies that caused violent outbursts in these women. In these cases, the intimate violence that reached and touched these women became the detonator that jeopardized and destroyed that other soulless, chilling violence that acts as a basis and bond for mafia power.

We take as a given that the polarization between aggressive men dedicated to violence and war, on one hand, and peaceful women, reproducers of life, on the other, should be set aside as a stereotype or, in the best of cases, as a shared social representation from the past. Nevertheless, differences exist and should be studied closely. In recent years, historical studies of women's participation in Nazi violence and totalitarian-type contexts have revealed that substantial female subordination to a context of power with strong male and male chauvinist connotations does not inhibit women from also being active and acting violently themselves. They can be

executioners in some situations, yet victims in others. A large number of women were aware of and part accomplices in the activities of their husbands, brothers, and lovers in the SS, for example.⁹ Another line of research goes deeper into the relationship between women and war, and women and bloody violence. Again in the context of this research, it should be underlined that women are capable of cruel acts of violence, but, since they are not considered subjects in every sense of the word, their actions appear chaotic and occasional:

Male violence can be *moralized* as a structured activity—war—and, in this way depersonalized and idealized. Female violence, instead, has never led to anything good. It was too personalized and vindictive. . . . Collective male activity can be moralized, can take place within legitimate cultural confines. Outside a horizon fused with the history of war/politics, feminine violence breaks up into revolt, revolution, or anarchy: when things escape control. When women transgress, derealizing themselves as peaceful and peacemaking subjects, the options are limited. . . . Historically men who exceed the limits in violent acts face greater options.¹⁰

In a recent study on the history of “face-to-face killing” in the twentieth century, Joanna Bourke maintains that there is no substantial difference between women and men in the pleasure of killing; it is only that women, until now, have been forbidden the concrete exercise of violent wartime activities: “Women did not thrust bayonets into live flesh but rather imagined doing it.”¹¹ Nevertheless, the fact of desiring to exercise violence while simultaneously being materially obstructed from doing so (as outlined in the examples analyzed by the author: the two world wars and the Vietnam war) leads to violent forms of compensation:

Instead of being the “other” in war (as certain historians maintain), women have made up an integral part of the massacres and mythology that surrounded it. . . . The pleasure of violence was shared by women but, since the experience of combat was denied them, and thus its realistic and literary representation, they reacted by offering and sacrificing the bodies of their sons, boyfriends, and husbands on the fields of battle. Thanks to this violence, they earned the right to pain.¹²

In this analysis, it is not difficult to see a problematic picture that refers us back, for example, to the role of mafia women in promoting vendettas. After the removal from Cittanova of ten children, ordered by the Juvenile Court in Reggio Calabria, several mothers and other women from the family were given permission to visit them in their new home:

Some of these women had not renounced their “educational” work, to the extent that this type of lecture was given to a ten-year-old boy. “You are a Facchineri, and like a black falcon you must fall on your enemies; you are from a powerful, important family that has never let anyone walk over them.” Making use of the assonance between the surname [Facchineri closely resembles *falconiere* or “falconer” in Italian] and black falcon [*falco nero*], the women presented the child with a violent image he could use to identify himself. The child had to imagine being a predator, a member of a powerful breed, fearless, and ready for combat.¹³

Most analyses refer therefore to the experience of female violence in reference to wars; however, they also present interesting ideas for analyzing our research material precisely because, on one hand, mafia women are accustomed to violence in the relationships between members as well as between themselves and the world around them, and, on the other, they are subordinate and forced to express only certain forms of this violence and not others; Thus, the hypothesis could be advanced that these women represent real social capital for criminal organizations in their exercise of “territorial rule.” Dominated and subjugated for centuries, women have developed an ambivalent and dependent relationship with power and violence, as well as an ambivalent relationship with the condition of being a victim. Though the oppressive side of power is well known, power also attracts, almost perversely. This predisposition, or *habitus*, profoundly structures the relationship with the other, with men:

Since different socializations dispose men to love power games and women to love the men who play them; masculine charisma is, at least in part, the charm of power, the seduction that the possession of power exercises in itself on the bodies whose instincts and desires are even politically socialized.¹⁴

If this is true in general, then it has particular significance in contexts clearly marked by violence. Once again, hypothesizing an analogy between the war environment and the mafia environment, I would like to quote Virginia Woolf, who highlighted how the unequal relationship with power has significantly conditioned and structured the relationship between men and women in violent contexts. Women “have functioned as mirrors with the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man enlarged up to two times his normal dimensions. Without that power . . . the glories of all our wars would be unknown.” These mirrors were “essential for any heroic and violent action.”¹⁵

Women of the 'Ndrangheta

From a reading of essays on the 'Ndrangheta and local periodicals from the last twenty years and interviews with Magistrates Eugenio Facciolla (assistant prosecutor for the Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia, or DDA [District Anti-Mafia Administration] in Catanzaro) and Salvatore Boemi (former assistant public prosecutor for the DDA in Reggio Calabria and now deputy public prosecutor at the public prosecutor's office in Reggio) an outline emerges that can be summarized as follows, though obviously with much caution: Through an enormous “modernizing” development during the 1970s and 1980s, the 'Ndrangheta went from a rural mafia (connected to proceeds from extortion, kidnapping, and smuggling) to an entrepreneurial and financial mafia with vast branches in northern Italy and abroad (Germany, Eastern Europe, Australia, and Canada). Even though today the 'Ndrangheta seems present across the entire territory of Calabria, we need to make some distinctions; Alongside communities under strong territorial mafia control one can also find communities where mafia presence is completely absent.

Furthermore, and this appears particularly important in analyzing activities and functions performed by women, some areas (especially the central-south part of the region) have a very old tradition, while others (the north) have only recorded a mafia presence since the 1970s. On one hand, this historical heterogeneity translates into heterogeneity with respect to the forms of criminality and diversity with respect to the individuals who compose the organization (family structures, class, ways of thinking); on the other hand, it has led to an overall underestimation of the mafia presence and its effects in northern Calabria. At a hearing before the Anti-Mafia Commission, Alfredo Serafini, public prosecutor in Cosenza, explained,

The problem of criminality in Cosenza began with a misunderstanding. Everyone had always considered Cosenza a sort of happy island with respect to Reggio Calabria more than Catanzaro. In reality, it was not like that. Cosenza had its own burden of criminality, perhaps a bit submerged, but no less important; above all it was a land of conquests by criminal organizations: the ‘Ndrangheta from the South, the Camorra from the North, and the Sacra Corona Unita from the East; these all put pressure on the area of Cosenza that represented a buffer zone.¹⁶

This special constellation of the territory, at the crossroads between influences of the *malavita* (underworld) from Campania and Puglia, can be easily read in the story of Florinda Mirabile, daughter of a Camorra clan boss who moved to the Piana di Sibari and, for a period when she was very young, the girlfriend of Pasquale Galasso, the state’s “superwitness” from the Camorra, whom she asked for help in using a gun to avenge the murder of her father, Mario Mirabile. Galasso procured a precision shotgun for her, but the vendetta was never carried out. Since 1995, she has been a state witness against the Calabrian gangs, and she received a light sentence during the Galassia trial. Newspapers took obvious pleasure in reporting on her because of her youth and beauty.¹⁷

Another aspect that historically characterized the ‘Ndrangheta is connected to its organizational structure, which is essentially based on family relationships: blood family and criminal family, or *cosca*, tend to coincide:

As opposed to the Sicilian Mafia, the ‘Ndrangheta continues to be divided into autonomous *ndrine* with no single command structure; the *ndrine*, in turn, are more and more made up of very broad parental and family bases. These continue to represent the backbone of the ‘Ndrangheta’s structure.¹⁸

The already cited Parliamentary Commission report states

As opposed to what many have believed for some time, the blood family as a basis for the mafia family, the family structure as a basis for the mafia organization, have revealed themselves—in the real situation in Calabria as well as in other very distant and different territories—to be an extraordinary instrument for safeguarding and expanding the ‘Ndrangheta. Precisely this “primitive” structure has allowed the ‘Ndrangheta to avoid the storm that struck Cosa Nostra, the Camorra, and the Sacra Corona Unita. The number of Calabrian state witnesses is definitely lower than for all the other groups for various reasons. The first, and most powerful, is that any Calabrian *mafioso* who decides to become a state witness must first bring legal actions against his own closest family members.¹⁹