

Chapter 2

Mafia and Daily Life: The Evolution of Gender and Generational Relationships

Renate Siebert

The activities of the Mafia, or to be precise the Mafias, are criminal in nature, but these activities should not be confused with ordinary criminality. For this reason, the Mafia is something different and even more dangerous because its aim is to have supremacy over territories, especially the individuals that live in these territories; over their bodies and souls. Rather than seeking formal control over the institutions of the state, the Mafia aims to have control over the society. Spaces controlled by the Mafia tend to stagnate and decay, turning into hybrid spaces in which citizens become subjects. In places controlled by the Mafia, a type of society is created that combines certain features of dictatorship, based on advanced technologies, with characteristic of pre-modern or feudal subjections. Umberto Santino has developed a theoretical explanation of this socio-historical mixture; he speaks of “signoria territoriale” (territorial domination), defining it as “the aspect of the Mafias that continues over time” (Chinnici and Santino 1991, p. 254). What exactly is the territorial domination of which he speaks?

It consists, first of all, in pervasive personal domination: The organization and its bosses—important or not—pretend to know and decide about matters of life and death, the activities, and even the personal relationships of the people that live in the subjected territory (Siebert 1996a, p. 18). This domination does not stop at the threshold of the house: There is no such thing as privacy where the Mafia rules. Indeed, intimate relations are also manipulated to procure wealth and practical power. Marriage plans between clans require specific “choices,” and the risk of Mafia secrets being revealed requires behavioral codes, which are inspired by a hypocritical desire for the appearance of respectability and are imposed by the threat of violence. Bans on divorce and on touching the wife of an honored man are rooted strictly in the rules of predatory enrichment and Mafia command, rather than in the belief related in alleged rules of “honor.”

R. Siebert (✉)
Dipartimento di Sociologia, Università della Calabria, Ponte Bucci,
87036, Rende (CS), Italy
e-mail: siebert2011@gmail.com

Adherence to the parallel social world of the Mafia, for most of its members, is accompanied by a sense of total identification that is expressed in beliefs and the internalization of a system of values often completely opposed to those of civil society and the political environment. The force of this alternative world emerges strongly in the stories of those who collaborate with the justice system, stories that judges uncover in their interrogations. Those who tell their stories feel no guilt for the numerous crimes they have committed. The totalitarian quality of these Mafia criminal organizations, found in the diverse forms of territorial domination, is deeply linked here, in the certainty of the members to be the only ones to declare what is right and what is wrong, who can live and who, on the contrary, must die. Having total power over the life and death of the others, a Mafia boss sees himself as a god, or lifted up to the same level as god. When Antonio Calvaruso asked that the life of an acquaintance who had been sentenced to death be spared, Leoluca Bagarella responded:

Never again must you allow yourself to make these types of requests for those that I have condemned to be eliminated. Because here, if there is a God, I am He. I have the power to give life, and to take it away (Dino 2008, p. 76).

[Non ti devi permettere mai più di fare certi tipi di affermazioni su dei soggetti che io ti dico devono essere eliminati (...) Perché qua, se c'è un Dio quello sono io, (...) Io ho il potere di togliere e di dare la vita].

Distancing oneself from this crazed desire for omnipotence, often by collaborating with the authorities, tends to open Mafia adherents' eyes to a puzzling reality: No one is unique, omnipotent, or alone, but everyone interacts socially with each other; the human being, as such, is the result of many relationships that make up a society. Daily life is made of multiple diverse relationships. Having an experience of all these could be traumatic, but it offers new unexpected perspectives. Umberto Ammataro, a Camorra pentito narrates:

Being connected with other people and feeling like an ordinary man was strong. I had to learn to control myself, I hear people say no when the answer is no! Indeed, over the years I've discovered something: The real hero in this society is the everyday man: The ordinary man, the family man who works. My eyes were opened up to a new dimension, fraught with difficulties, which are the real things, everyday things, because I had always glossed over society, if I may say so. I had never waited in a line, I had never waited at a ticket window [...] Well, today I wait in line [...] I had never dwelled on the concept of the corporate body of society. And this was a big mistake as a father. Being a father and not realizing this is a huge mistake [...] I had to go through a lot of training. I was not used to having to deal with the public [...] It took a lot: A lot of patience (Gruppo Abele 2005, pp. 376–377).

[L'impatto con la gente e sentirsi un uomo qualsiasi è stato forte. Ho dovuto imparare ad autocontrollarmi, a sentirmi dire no quando è no! Sì, io in questi anni ho scoperto una cosa: il vero eroe in questa società è l'uomo qualunque. L'uomo qualunque, il padre di famiglia che lavora. Ho scoperto una nuova dimensione, irta di difficoltà, che sono le cose reali, giornaliere, perché la società io l'avevo sempre sorvolata, se così si può dire. Io non ho mai fatto una fila, non sono mai stato in coda ad uno sportello (...) Insomma, oggi faccio la fila (...) Non mi ero mai soffermato sul concetto della società costituita. E questo fu un grande errore anche come padre. Essere padre e non avere coscienza di questo è un errore madornale (...) Ho dovuto fare un forte apprendistato. Io non ero abituato ad avere a che fare con il pubblico (...) Ci è voluta tanta, ma tanta pazienza].

Salvatore Stolder, another Camorra pentito, expresses a similar disposition:

Before, if I were to walk into a store, the salesperson would leave everything and come right to me. I had always lived that way, up until I was 37, and suddenly I go to the store and I have to wait in line. I never even went to a supermarket, and now to stand here in line, what an absurdity! Then something happened, once my wife ran into a person with her shopping cart and apologized, but then he came over and said: “Teach your wife how to behave.” Nothing like this had ever happened in my life, so I stood there—I am not lying—for five minutes, staring at this man, with him having taken me for a fool [...] I could not react at all. Now I see, and I hope that there is a chance to re-enter a whole different world: I am born again; I am born again under the law. In the past I was in the negative, now I am in the positive. My children make me feel that way. When I speak with them I feel clean. Sometimes I look at my wife and just start laughing because they get into these discussions where they get right to the center of the argument. It kills me the way they talk (Gruppo Abele 2005, pp. 417–420).

[Prima ero abituato che, se andavo in un negozio, il commesso lasciava tutto e veniva da me. Fino a 37 anni ho sempre vissuto così, poi all'improvviso vado al supermercato e sto in coda. Io non ero mai entrato in un supermercato, e sto in coda, una cosa assurda! Poi mi è capitato un episodio, mia moglie con il carrello una volta ha urtato una persona e gli ha chiesto scusa, questo è venuto vicino a me e mi ha detto: “Insegna l'educazione a sua moglie.” Non mi era mai capitato un fatto del genere, rimasi – non dico bugie – circa cinque minuti immobile a guardarlo e quello mi avrà preso per un pazzo (...) Ma non ho reagito (...) Ora vedo, spero almeno che ci sia un varco, una possibilità per rientrare in un mondo tutto diverso: sono rinato, sono rinato nella legalità. Mentre prima ero nel negativo, ora sto nel positivo. Me lo fanno sentire i miei figli. Quando io parlo con loro sento un'espressione pulita. A volte guardo mia moglie e mi metto a ridere, perché fanno dei discorsi chiari, vanno subito al centro di una cosa. Mi fanno morire come parlano].

Acting as lords over life, even while imposing death, the Mafia's domination over its territory remains absolute. The Mafia's social control, whether blatant or covert, is everywhere: In daily life, relocations, relations, marriage choices, job market, and investments. Anything from an anonymous letter to threatening calls, from decapitated animals to bombs, from the destruction of victims' gravestones to the defacing of corpses. Destruction of gardens, bombs in stores or under cars, and houses being burnt to the ground. An emblematic case is that of Elisabetta Carullo, a young mayor twice over, of Stefanacconi in Calabria. Attacks began before her election and continued throughout her administration:

During the most severe period, their strategy was clear: Attack. Not the mayor, who was protected, but the lesser-known candidates, on their way home to their families [...] they came at us with small assaults, for example destroying my father's land in the countryside, where they cut down all the trees, the vineyard, destroyed everything that was there. Then, they attacked a counselor, a wheelchair-bound woman with a weak family on her shoulders: They set her house on fire and her parents risked their lives. Such a tragedy. And then there's the former vice mayor, who was the target of thirteen attacks: He also had a weak family, and one night they shot his brother, injuring his arm. These moments are tough to relive. Again, another attack on another counselor: They shot at the front door of her house and the following night they set her car on fire. They also shot the former vice-mayor. Those are the most exemplary instances, but there are many more—over eighty, in fact—that have been reported (Siebert 2001, p. 50).

[Nella fase acuta degli attentati la strategia era chiara: attaccare. Non il sindaco, che era protetto, ma i candidati più deboli della lista, per poi arrivare alle loro famiglie (...) ci hanno colpito con piccoli attentati, per esempio danneggiando il podere di campagna di mio padre,

dove hanno tagliato tutti gli alberi, la vigna, distruggendo tutto quanto c'era. Poi, hanno attaccato una consigliera, una ragazza sulla sedia a rotelle con una famiglia debolissima alle spalle: le hanno incendiato la casa, e i genitori hanno rischiato la vita. Un episodio tragico, bruttissimo. E poi l'ex vicesindaco, che ha subito più di tredici attentati: anche lui aveva una famiglia molto debole alle spalle, e una sera hanno sparato nella Proloco ferendo suo fratello al braccio. Momenti drammatici. Ancora, l'attentato a un'altra consigliera: hanno sparato contro la porta di casa e la sera dopo le hanno incendiato la macchina. L'attacco all'allora vicesindaco: gli hanno sparato mancandolo solo per caso. Questi gli episodi più vistosi, ma ce ne sono moltissimi altri, oltre ottanta, tutti denunciati].

Precisely because it is so all-encompassing and pervasive in regard to private and public life (and also because it is deeply rooted in everyday life), territorial dominance represents a form of dominion that requires many people to become involved in illegal activity. Those small, subtle, and nearly unconscious daily habits and routines, like the obvious ones, are clearly criminal in nature. Among the latter illegal activities, there are violent and intimidating acts, but also silence—the refusal, the fear—of testifying. From the former ones, we can count behavior codes, ways of thinking and speaking that legitimize violence and that are passed from one generation to the next, and that play a pivotal role in communication.

By dominating the territory, Mafia assumes power over both illegal and legal activities. Through the monopoly of violence, usually carried out in the form of the death penalty, the Mafia takes on an institutional personality. The importance of Mafioso control over the territory is demonstrated by the fact that even important bosses that became wealthy by smuggling drugs and weapons are not afraid to ask for money (the common *pizzo*) from the fruit vendor by his house. Of course, it is not because he needs the money, but rather it is to convey a message: We are in charge here. The territory is the space where Mafia power has its roots; it is the material and symbolic place for them to assert, with arrogance, their authority. The territory also represents a shooting ground for their enrichment, a resource to plunder, exploit, and then destroy. Illegal dumping, defacing construction zones, and speculation on water resources: In line with the tendency to waste away industrial society, the Mafia represents a factor of further and dangerous acceleration of environmental destruction.

It is evident how this is important for everyone's daily life and everyone's quality of life. It is in the context of everyday life that citizens gain experience with constraints imposed by the Mafia, and it is on the daily level that citizens exercise freedom and democratic rights or, on the contrary, they are faced with negative criminal powers that suspend the exercise of such rights. Moreover, as shown by the statements from collaborators of justice, even for those who are still involved with Mafia activity, daily life is often the arena for conflicts, choices, and contradictions that lead them to escape from this oppressive environment.

Daily life has another crucial effect on people: Habits—reassuring gestures that help them to reject distressing issues. The sphere of daily life, concerning “territorial domination” in one's personal life, is extremely ambivalent in that truth and falsification are found together. On one side, the Mafia represents a dangerous threat to society, for freedoms and the democratic rights that we can experience from day to day in each of our lives. On the other side, we have the tendency to perceive the

Mafia as something far from us, like something that concerns others, because the Mafia is a phenomenon that generates fear and anguish. The Mafia is death. Imagining it as something far from us heralds a life that is immune from its influences; it falls within the defensive mechanism of the psyche. It is the appearance of the obvious—this is how it is, this is how it has always been, and how it will always be—that represents the core of our daily thinking. The Mafia exists, and certainly is unpleasant. The important thing is that I would not have anything to do with it. The repetition of gestures and daily practices creates mechanism of “familiarization”: We tend to integrate facts and unexpected traumatic events into the parameters of our daily routine. The ability to classify these frightening, albeit normal, instances that are remarkable in their cruelty and ferocity tranquilizes us and enables us to stay in our place as passive spectators. We are not called to be part of this cause. After all, these things happen, do not mind them. It is obvious that they happen.

In this respect, daily life represents a privileged sphere of social control; a sphere in which the individual learns how to adapt and conform. Not so much because it was forced by coercive means—institutions acting behind the scenes—but because mechanisms such as “familiarization” help to soften clashes and disputes, and avoid the assumption of ambivalence and contradiction. Everything becomes easier.

Mafia, death, anguish. The difficulty of becoming aware of the danger of the Mafia is this: Daily life and its way of thinking offer grounds for strong mechanisms of removal. Everyday thinking is deeply rooted in our appearance; everyday thinking is comforting and opaque. Everyday thinking acts as an antidote to the agony of death:

Heidegger got to the root of the specific ambiguity of the daily thoughts and behavior in the suppression of the idea that death is even a possibility. Everyday thinking says, “Someday you will die. But for now, as for me, not yet.” It lies, therefore, in the chatter of “yes” [...] For everyday thinking is what truly appears, without further investigation (Jedlowski 1986, p. 41).

[Heidegger rintracciava la radice dell’ambiguità specifica dell’atteggiamento e del pensiero quotidiano nella rimozione che questi operano dell’idea della morte come possibilità. Il pensiero quotidiano dice: “Un giorno o l’altro si dovrà morire. Ma per ora, quanto a me, ancora no.” Esso si adagia, così, nelle chiacchiere del “sì” (...) Per il pensiero quotidiano è vero ciò che appare, senza ulteriori indagini].

The grounds of daily life, thus, turn out to be a crucial place: A symbolic battleground between life and death, Eros and Thanatos. But there, where the Mafia’s territorial domination rules, there is also a constant threat of physical violence, even death. “The drama of the Mafia is in the evocative power of primal fears” (Abruzzese 1993, p. 205). On the battleground of everyday life, a bloody war is being fought.

However, as already pointed out, everyday life is not a unique reality. Besides the obvious, the removal of death, out of conformity, daily life is the environment in which an individual lives and grows. The everyday, through strategies and practices connected to the awareness of rights and obligations, through the act of becoming aware of potential freedom, can become a place for civil resistance. Daily practices can become a fertile ground for the construction of a civil and democratic society. In everyday life, every single person develops his or her own personal individuality, experimenting with pleasures and torments of their own choice, creating their own biography.

One can assume that the everyday life of those who live and grow up in a *Mafioso* environment—in comparison with those in the adjacent society—is “normal,” similar to that of everybody else, and in some part significantly different. In the past, such daily aspects were not well-known, and perhaps even of little interest. A significant shift occurred with the phenomenon of collaborators of justice, which was incentivized by specific laws, since the 1980s. Family conflicts, which were created for the decision of one member to become a “pentito,” easily led to the breaking of all ties of silence about gender and generational relations among Mafia family members. Nowadays, women and children, mothers, wives, and sons/daughters appear in the spotlight of public opinion and mass media: Sometimes as victims of cross-vendetta, others as an active part of the collaborative process. They often take on the guise of trying to defame the collaborator of justice or pressure him/her to withdraw the testimony. In this regard, scholars and judges spoke about a “new communication strategy” (Principato and Dino 1997, p. 16)¹ of organized crime: If at one time the icon prevailed of the Mafia woman, the whole house, church, and tradition, being unaware about all criminal activities of the male clan, since the 1990s, the Mafia has been sending its women to the front lines, with sensational stunts like press conferences, participation in talk shows, and public smearing of their “pentiti” relatives. Such conflicts, though widely exploited by criminal organizations, still tell us something about their daily life. Likewise, and even more so, the collaborators of justice do.

First of all, these men describe their entire criminal lives, of having killed frequently and brutally, viewed by them as being completely “normal” or, rather, in the same manner as a professional activity. There appears to be an awareness of having lived in a different world: A world, however, equally legitimate, or at least equally “right” as that of society as a whole. Saverio Morabito, a *Ndrangheta* pentito narrates:

I was a gangster and every day I tried to do it better because I believed it was just a job like any other job, even if it went beyond the limits of the law. And every day I tried to improve myself in my field, like someone who works in a big company as an employee and, over several years, due to his skills, pulls some strings and becomes a CEO. He is successful because he knows how to stay in touch with people, how to treat people, and does not back down when problems arise (Sciarrone 2006, p. 155).

[Io facevo il malavitoso e cercavo di farlo ogni giorno meglio perché la ritenevo una professione come un'altra, anche se andava oltre i limiti della legalità. E ogni giorno cercavo di perfezionarmi nel mio campo, come uno che entra in una grossa azienda da impiegato e negli anni, per la sua bravura, brucia tutte le tappe e diventa amministratore delegato. Ce la fa perché ha saputo mantenere i contatti giusti, ha saputo trattare, non si è tirato indietro di fronte ai problemi].

This perception of normalcy, however, must be the result of a strong influence on the way of thinking and feeling that mark the process of socialization: Both primary, for those who are born and raised in this environment, and secondary, for those

¹ The passage said: “In contrasto con questo lungo periodo contrassegnato dall'unica dimensione loro consentita—quella di silenziose e invisibili tutrici dell'ordine e del sistema di valori di Cosa Nostra, uniformate e appiattite sulla figura dei loro compagni—la nuova strategia comunicativa dell'organizzazione le ha sempre più spesso trasformate in decisivo ed efficace veicolo comunicativo nei confronti del mondo esterno.”

who become involved through the affiliation process, which is no surprise that it is referred to as a “second baptism.” The habit of elitism, of submission to the bosses’ authority, of violence, and most of all, of silence. A silence in the communication with others, and presumably, a silence toward one’s own deep desires, of one’s desire to feel and think. The injunction of non-communication, in the context of contemporary society, undoubtedly marks a division between Mafia society and democratic society.

A sort of paradox, at least for someone who watches this parallel world from the outside, regards the quality of life that seems grotesquely torn between two extremes: On one side, the enormous wealth, at least in the dominant families, and on the other side, the difficulty and the impossibility to benefit from it. Not only for the purposes of going underground, which require a modest lifestyle, even in a cramped underground bunker, but also for a series of impositions from the organization itself, follow the rules of secrecy and of the subordination under the bosses.

Daily life in the Mafia, one could say in conclusion, is marked by a very contradictory quality of life, both on a material and sentimental level. Predominant seems to be the social control that appears as a projection on the territory of a control even more marked which is that over the affiliates and the members of their families. The basic rules are to loyally follow the orders, to be submissive to the hierarchy, to vindicate received offenses without asking the government to help, to not testify against affiliates, to assist fugitives, and to not have any kind of relation with law enforcement and the courts. In the case of transgression (whether of their own accord or that of their family), the efficient trials of Mafia organizations do not hesitate to impose punishments of up to a death sentence.

It is possible to hypothesize that every single individual develops such contexts in significantly different ways according to whether they are young people or adults: The questions of generations; or men and women: The question of gender.

Boundaries, on one hand, and conflicts on the other, between the usual world of civil society and that of the world apart, with their codes and severe hierarchies, appear to be less sharp today, in light of the experiences of collaborators of justice and their families. The horizon of the life of Mafiosi “pentiti” is involved in that affect of personal relations and individual psyche. Through collaborators’ testimonies and their families (which look like the tip of an iceberg in movement), we are able to perceive and interpret (with caution) some relevant aspects of these phenomena. From these testimonies, there comes some valuable insight about daily life, about family relations and suffering: Voices that come from “another” world, voices that express dismay, distress—but also relief—for the changes taking place. Voices, which are sometimes silent, are able to be expressed only in the extreme forms of mental suffering.

In the decision to become a “pentito”—and the journey is a long and arduous one—women have a predominant role, both positive and negative. It is often the women who, as the courts say, prevent cooperation at the very last minute. The management of daily life, the mediation between different sectors of the social world, and in particular, the mediation between the one and only past world and the many future worlds are under the domain and the control of women. “Foreign pres-

ence” in the Mafia universe, as Alessandra Dino has suggested, women have developed particular communication skills that aid them in crises and changing situations. More open to cultural influences than men—not to mention more educated—women probably, still have a lot to say about this restoration phase in the Mafia world. In particular, wives that come from a Non Mafia environment have kept a distance, a change that is helpful in the transition from one status to another. An ambiguous distance, however: Not taking responsibility for their actions through mourning and awareness, they are on the edge, somehow suspended and paralyzed between two incompatible worlds. Among other things, it seems that women tend to hide parental responsibilities from their children more often than men. A Calabrese judge, on this matter, said:

The first approach is closure, in the sense of not letting everything be known [...] But in most cases I’ve found that the father had a very clear conversation with his children [...] wives, conversely [...] I noticed closure toward children as to not let them know what the father was doing (Facciolla).²

[Il primo atteggiamento è protettivo e di chiusura, nel senso di non far sapere tutto (...) Ma nella stragrande maggioranza di casi ho trovato il padre che ha fatto un discorso con i figli molto chiaro (...) nelle mogli, viceversa, (...) ho notato una chiusura verso i figli per non far sapere tutto quello che faceva il padre].

This is the course of life in the balance between worlds. On the one hand, the world of the Mafia: One world, a closed horizon, a forced context that does not allow the expression of subjectivity, no dissent allowed. It does not create consistent psychological problems until it appears closed, unique, and intact. A world already beyond those who have decided to “take the plunge”; a world, however, that represents a piece of oneself and that reclaims in some ways a mental domination that these people do not want to give any more. On the other hand: The opening. The promise of subjectivity as an invitation to the dimension of one’s choice, as a guarantee to be able to say no, a way of access to democracy, in a way mental and existential, even before institutional and relating to rights.

II.

On the historical level, secular fights for democracy have been fought on several frontlines. I would like to quote, immediately, two that—in a completely negative way—remind us of the Mafia. The first consists of the fact that the democratic system is based on the progressive creation of territorial spaces, which are non-violent on the inside, namely the abolition of private violence (vendetta and justice of itself), in favor of the violence monopoly in the state’s hands. Democracy is created in a way that citizens are protected from arbitrary violence and facilitates communication among citizens and between citizens and institutions. Democracy is the opposite of omertà and the threat of violence and death: Both, however, being the fundamental characteristics of the various Mafias.

The second front on which the decisive battle has been waged for centuries, and is one of the columns of the democratic system is the principle of equality. It is notorious that, on the contrary, what we may call the internal rules of a Mafia

² Personal communication with Eugenio Facciolla. Catanzaro, November 19, 2001.

organization are anti-egalitarian: In the first place because the organization invests itself into an elite superiority (“whoever is a man, I decided it”) that is translated in the evocation of life and death over other people, a belief that attracts easily weak and mediocre people. In the second place, the anti-egalitarian Mafia is notorious for its sexism, in the relations with women and feminine in general, but also as multiple testimonies show, in the relations with single women, wives, daughters, lovers, and mothers. Democracy means the guarantee of being able to say no, to have a guaranteed right to dissent, to have the right to choose, both for men and women equally. Mafia means submission, regression from citizen into subject. To women, in particular, it is forbidden to be an individual, lest the consequence be death. Repercussions of those “apart” rules of Mafia world—which is structured in parallel to the “normal” world of the nearby society—are heard from women and men. However, restrictions for women are much heavier:

Among other things, due to its separate character, the organization is able to preserve ideologies on the inside that have already become obsolete on the outside: I am referring in particular to the control of Mafia women’s sexuality, which seems to be static in theory but also in practice, when all around the community where affiliates live (when we also refer to neighbors in Palermo or villages in the rural Sicily) move toward an almost complete liberalization of morality. One of the differences between the inside and the outside is this: The women of Mafia men are not allowed to do what others can do (Lupo 2003, p. 60).

[Tra l’altro, proprio per il suo carattere separato, l’organizzazione è in grado di preservare al proprio interno ideologie divenute ormai obsolete fuori di essa: e mi riferisco soprattutto al controllo della sessualità delle donne dei mafiosi, che a quanto sembra permanere rigido non solo in teoria ma anche nei fatti, quando tutt’intorno la comunità in cui vivono gli affiliati (quand’anche ci riferiamo ai quartieri popolari di Palermo, o ai paesi della Sicilia rurale) vanno verso una pressoché completa liberalizzazione dei costumi. Una delle differenze tra il dentro e il fuori è proprio questa: alle donne dei mafiosi non è consentito quanto è consentito alle altre].

At this point it is useful to reiterate that the Mafia is a male-only organization. Membership is closed to women. However, in multiple articulated forms, the feminine presence appears to be central for the unleashing of Mafia “domination” over a territory, for the reproduction of domination relations day by day, but also for the illegal management (Siebert 1996b).

For a long time, the role of women in the Mafia world remained in the dark. Silent, unknown, most of the time they become visible during funerals. A widespread social representation is the collective portrait of women eternally dressed in black, in a theatric pose that oscillate between reverential silence of subordination and the supplication of a vendetta. Traditional women, in all regards. The few words that Mafiosi filtrated from this opaque world headed in the same direction: women were completely dedicated to family, to be exemplary mothers and obedient wives; women unaware of the illegal activities of their husbands. Stereotyped women, icons of the common male imaginary. Functional women for the criminal organization precisely due to their invisibility.

Women, however, from time to time were killed or “accidentally” involved in some violent conflict, or because they became an involuntary witness, or because (we may think today) they were involved in some direct participation. Women

sometimes “took the plunge” and became witnesses for the prosecution in some trials by testifying, narrating, and accusing.

In order to think about the responsibilities and the effective engagement of women in Mafia criminal organization, it is necessary to distinguish the various level of involvement. Just as the Mafia itself, from the point of view of the social composition of its affiliates, is not homogeneous, even women who are within its range of influence are extremely different from each other. First, there is a distinction between those born and raised in Mafia families (in families where one or more men are affiliates) and those that are connected with the Mafia or for a temporary criminal activity or by a personal relation with Mafiosi.

If women until recently represented a sort of opaque continent and largely unknown—Teresa Principato, at this point, speaks about a “story of submerged centrality” (p. 39)—the phenomenon of the collaboration with justice has opened a dense and invisible veil, showing connections, relations, activities, and responsibilities.

In the moment that the parental family and the Mafia family conflict—like in the case of a repentance of one or more male family members—women stand up, making themselves visible, and earn great importance. The organization, of course, finally decides to give women a voice. But there is more: This sudden emersion of women seems to adhere to a specific strategy that criminal organization follows:

We do not believe it is by chance that actresses of this new communicative strategy are mainly women who, for the first time, are allowed to speak in defense of the Mafia system—thus implicitly claiming a role within the organization—through the excommunication and the disgust by those who are betrayed and accused. Executing this task, women appear strong, aggressively defending a world of death and suppression, ready to sacrifice their own children, to curse and insult those who try to break free from this lethal commitment, using all necessary means, even going so far as to question family values as sacred as motherhood (Principato and Dino 1997, p. 16).

[Non riteniamo casuale che attrici di questa nuova strategia comunicativa siano in prevalenza le donne, alle quali viene per la prima volta concesso di prendere la parola in difesa del sistema mafioso – così implicitamente rivendicando l’esistenza di un loro ruolo all’interno dello stesso – attraverso la scomunica e il disprezzo manifestati di chi ha tradito e accusato. E nello svolgimento di tale compito le donne di mafia appaiono dure, aggressivamente tese alla difesa di un mondo di sopraffazione e di morte, pronte a sacrificare i propri figli, a maledire e insultare chi tenta di liberarsi dall’abbraccio mortale del vincolo di affiliazione, servendosi di tutti i mezzi e arrivando addirittura a mettere in discussione valori familiari sacri, come la maternità].

This increasing active involvement of women in criminal activities is undoubtedly incentivized from the fact that several men, following severe prison regulations introduced after the attacks of 1992, cannot exercise their power in the first person. In this context, the women of the family—sisters, wives, daughters, and mothers—are invested with a temporary power to exercise on behalf of men who are either in prison or are on the run. It becomes legitimate, then, to wonder about the prospects of a leadership position in these organizations. I asked Eugenio Facciolla, attorney of the DDA (Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia) of Catanzaro, if it was possible for a woman, after the man was released from prison, to be unwilling to return to her submissive role under the boss:



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