

## The Role of Women in Criminal Organizations

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**Abstract :** Family plays a central role in the Calabrian criminal organization, which draws its strength from blood ties and gender stereotypes that still impose a strong verticalization of intra-family relationships for the benefit of men. However, female figures are of great importance in the organizational structure of the 'Ndrangheta families, despite the fact that they appear to be formally suffocated by the culture of gender subordination still strongly present in the archaic world of criminal organizations. And this is so much true that over time, the women of the 'Ndrangheta have added to the function of 'internal containment', the increasingly explicit function of intermediaries in the 'external' activities of the clan. But what happens in the 'Ndrangheta if women break the bond and decide to speak? The results are shocking. When a woman starts talking to ask the institutions for help, the system 'goes crazy', because the woman is considered the means of consolidating and transmitting family codes: she educates, forges, holds the structure together. If a woman from the 'Ndrangheta decides to speak out and get out of the family bottlenecks of the clan, she does not exclusively destroy the family; she destroys the system. This happens because, while not playing the same roles as men within organizations, women carry out support activities as intermediaries for the circulation of communications, thus ensuring the operability of the gang in practice and on a daily basis. Crossing the border means breaking the bonds of belonging, thus questioning one's own identity and reconstructing it according to other points of reference. How much these disruptive choices are feared by the men of the 'Ndrangheta has been seen in the dramatic stories of Lea Garofalo and Maria Concetta Cacciola: the fear of the breaking of the family pact, of the earthquake that arises from within, has marked their fate of death, useful both to stop the judicial action and to recompose the organization's estate under the aegis of terror. With physical, psychological violence, underhanded torture, and moral blackmail, the men of the mafia family tried to heal the shock caused by the voices of women, relying on violence and yet another attempt to subordinate them. This proves that the 'Ndrangheta is really afraid of them. The female voices of the 'Ndrangheta, who have shaken a consolidated and considered intangible system, represent the anti-'ndrangheta par excellence; in their choices, there is an even stronger desire to break with the mafia world.

**Keywords :** families, gender, 'Ndrangheta, stereotypes

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