

Naples Walks Alone, on Burning and Bloodied Sidewalks

Judith Harris (June 06, 2008)



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ROME -The vicious attacks by the professional crime clans of Naples, which amount to attacks upon the Italian nation, are a rerun of the orgy of violence of Sicily in the Eighties, when the Faustian bargain of protection, promotion and murder was struck. Just as in Sicily at that time, in the Campania Region around Naples today industrialists on the one hand make regular pay-off's to racketeers and on the other hand pad the wallets of selected politicians and corrupt bureaucrats.

Even as dioxin-emissions from smoking rubbish continue, and soldiers were turned out to combat



protesters from all walks of life, including but not only criminal, on Sunday, June 2, businessman Michele Orsi, 47, was summoned to a meeting in a café in the main piazza at Casale di Principe, near Caserta outside of Naples, and gunned down in broad daylight by at least 18 shots fired from two pistols. Investigators here say that the Casalesi, as the powerful local clan at Casale di Principe is called, believe that Orsi had turned state's witness in the ongoing appeals trial in Naples known as the Spartacus Trial.

The presiding judge at the first trial, Raffaello Magi, told former magistrate Giuseppe D'Avanzo that, unusual for Naples, the Casalesi are organized in similar fashion to the Sicilian Corleonesi: "The territory is divided into fiefs; leadership is turned over to a capozona (local boss); membership is expanded through blood ties; and they show an extraordinary capacity to exploit links with local entrepreneurs...."

"Unlike the Neapolitan gangsters who live off cocaine dealing or extortion, the Casalesi exploit intensively their territory in every area of economic potential. They do the dumping of the toxic refuse, they hold the monopoly on the cement market, they control the distribution of various essential products. They mediate the consensus at election time and are the social mediators when the institutions collapse, such as now, with the garbage. They offer protection and market opportunities to a fragile business world in need of protection and support. They condition the politics of the administrations, large and small."

All this was what Orsi, a businessmen who seems to have been trapped between the devil and the deeply polluted political sea, was confiding to investigators, according to press reports. His lawyer yesterday acknowledged that Orsi's company paid E. 15,000 monthly for four years for "protection." Because bullets had been fired at Orsi's home in late March as a warning, an investigation into the police failure to provide adequate protection has been opened even though Orsi himself said, in an interview, "I am not a pentito, I have nothing to repent." Investigators confirmed that in the strictest sense he was not, but that he had contributed valuable information to investigators.

Just two days before Orsi's murder a 25-year-old woman, whose aunt had turned state's witness, was shot but not killed. But in a series of presumably related murders over the past two months, the relatives of two other businessmen cooperating with the authorities have been eliminated in what are called here "transversal killings." Interviewed yesterday by RAI TV, journalist Roberto Saviano said that, "It's nearing the end of the Spartacus trial, and this is behind the Casalesi raising the stakes....Orsi was killed because he was talking about the relationship between the clan and the Casalesi." This trial, "inexplicably ignored by the Italian media," is the equivalent of the Maxi-trial in Palermo, he added.

Saviano should know, and the murder of Orsi appeared an uncomfortable case of life imitating art. The way Orsi was attracted to the café where killers were in wait appears borrowed from a key incident in the hit movie *Gomorra*, which won a prize at the Cannes Film Festival last month. Directed by Matteo Garrone, this stunning movie, which together with *Il Divo*, literally relaunches Italian cinema, was based on the book of the same name by Saviano, the heroic young Neapolitan reporter who will spend the next few decades, if he is lucky, continuing to live under police protection.

Saviano's book and Garrone's film are dramatic testimonials to the dumping of illegal waste, which experts here believe earns the Camorra, or Gamorra, in local dialect, an estimated \$3.5 billion annually. At least half a million tons of rubbish slip "under the carpet" every year, in the words of the new high commissioner on rubbish Guido Bertolaso, speaking one year ago.

The movie is currently on view in 23 movie houses in Rome alone while the book, translated into 24 languages, has sold three million copies. This is welcome news, for it pits the skills of a young director and young writer (Saviano is 28) against the relative indifference of the outside world, which delights in the photos of the rubbish pile-up, but skimps on reporting and analysis. By contrast, the fact that the heroin processed in Sicily ended up on the streets of New York and Paris attracted worldwide media and governmental attention; Time magazine alone dispatched a photographer and two reporters, including myself, to cover the so-called Maxi-trial conviction of 360 Sicilian Mafia mobsters in December, 1987.



This indifference has changed, thanks to Saviano, who has however become the Salmon Rushdie of Italy—indeed, at a writer’s conference in New York last month the two men met and compared notes. Exactly like Rushdie, Saviano lives under permanent threat and permanent protection, and at the Cannes Film Festival, where Saviano arrived as a celebrity, he was unable, for his own protection, to make a public entrance. He had hoped to buy an apartment in Naples, but the condominium rejected his application; subsequently other Neapolitans wrote him a letter offering him hospitality, however.

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