

Silence is What Keeps the Mafia Alive

Letizia Airos Soria (October 23, 2009)



Antimafia prosecutor Pietro Grasso visits New York to celebrate the anniversary of Petrosino's death and present his book "Per non morire di Mafia" (As to not be killed by the Mafia), based on an interview with Alberto La Volpe to promote legality

Antimafia prosecutor, Pietro Grasso, accompanied the delegation of ANFE Sicilia that during the celebrations in honor of Petrosino promoted a constant and daily commitment against the Mafia in Sicily.

Along with him, Don Ciotti ([see interview](#) [2]) and Francesco Bertolino, the former president of Addio Pizzo ([see interview](#) [3]) were in New York.



Grasso was seen speaking at two official appointments in New York: the presentation of his book held at the Italian Cultural Institute and the conference at the John Jay College for Criminal Justice ([see article](#) [4]).

For the editors of i-Italy and the [Calandra Institute](#) [5], particularly Anthony Julian Tamburri, it was also an honor to welcome Pietro Grasso, Don Ciotti, and Francesco Bertolino in our offices: it was a unique opportunity to reflect on the reality and complexity of the phenomenon of the Mafia in Italy and throughout the world.

Some of Pietro Grasso's remarks can be found in the audio slide show above in Italian.

Below are some points recalled from the interview in New York with Pietro Grasso about his book.

"As long as the Mafia exists we need to talk about it, discuss it. We must react. Silence is the oxygen by which the criminal system organizes itself, and how the dangerous symbols of the Mafia, economy and power, strengthen themselves. Tomorrow we will be talking of the silences of today, and pay for them. I silenzi di oggi siamo destinati a pagarli duramente domani. We will have a stronger Mafia, and our citizens will be less free."

This is what is written on the back cover of Grasso's most recent book, "Per non morire di Mafia" (As to not be killed by the Mafia), a work based on an interview with Alberto La Volpe (Sperling & Kupfer 2009).

An interview of nearly 300 pages that talk, that don't want to keep things quiet, and that recollect the life of the Antimafia prosecutor. After "Pizzini, veleni e cicoria. La mafia prima e dopo Provenzano" (Pizzini, poisons and chicory. The Mafia before and after Provenzano) written with journalist Francesco Licata, we have another four-hand work. This time his partner is an excellent testimony, Alberto La Volpe, the last journalist to have had contact with judge Falcone.

Pietro Grasso was appointed Antimafia prosecutor in 2005 after an important experience as prosecutor, judge, and adviser to the maxi trial against 474 Mafia defendants. The maxi trial was set up by Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino in 1986 and became a milestone for the reactions against the Mafia.

Today the Public Prosecutor's Office led by Grasso controls 26 local anti-mafia prosecutors scattered throughout Italy, and is the only structure that has created a judicial database useful to all investigative apparatuses.

As the same prosecutor confirmed to the Sicilian journalist Umberto Lucentini who interviewed him with knowledgeable questions during the presentation at the Italian Cultural Institute, his commitment against organized crime began in the 1980's when the President of Sicily Piersanti Mattarella was killed by Mafia. He was a strong proponent of a policy of renewal within its current that would ensure a better moral behavior, free from corruption in the public sphere.

"I come to know more about the Mafia world during the maxi trial of 1986 established by Falcone and Borsellino, the two judges murdered along with their escorts. I was one of the judges called, a huge responsibility: it depended on me whether people who committed heinous crimes (including rape) were set free. The trial lasted two years, and at the time of deliberation we spent 35 days with no contacts with the outside world.

Falcone, however, is a fundamental turning-point in the Antimafia investigative activity, especially when collaborating with the FBI. In fact, it's from the FBI that Falcone "borrows" the figure of the witness or collaborator of justice. Thanks to their contribution he could ascertain the truth on several crimes.



His example was fundamental to realize the importance of the continuing if not daily collaboration between Italian and American investigative services. "Collaboration," states a resolute Pietro Grasso, "is what we want especially now, given the presence of organized crime throughout the world."

At the Italian Cultural Institute Prosecutor Grasso also recounted private episodes. He recalled an incident that happened to his son. "My wife and I were faced with terrible dilemmas. How could a kid his age be escorted? How could he go out to a pizzeria or by himself on his motorscooter?" In these words the anguish of two parents who face the daily, "normal" life, but also the strenght of a man that had to rationalize the feeling of danger for who knows how many times.

"We live and have lived a life under constant control, to the smallest detail...despite this my wife and I decided to go ahead and not listen to the threats. This also when my work was destroyed from another sentence: the only importantthing for me was and is to do at my best what needs to be done, regardless of external factors. Not only conscience and duty, but also enthusiasm and passion give me the strength to go on."

The book "Per non morire di Mafia" also gives voice to delicate but fundamental aspects regarding the relationship between the Mafia, the economy, politics, and business. "I am the crucial knot to break this bond. To do it, however, we need the press and judiciary to be free and independent."

And if you try to make him explain the dynamics of the relationships among these elements, he respond: "The one needs the other. The Mafia needs politics, politics needs the Mafia. This is why, as it is explained in the book, in the pre-election periods the Mafia looks for consent. And it is actually already predisposed. In a town everyone knows who the Mafia likes. I ask a Mafia boss for a favor that I need, and he becomes the intermediary with someone else. As long as certain needs aren't considered human rights, this system will continue to work endlessly."

And it is in the name of these "connections" that Grasso states that Mafia is a structural phenomenon. It should be fought with continuous and daily law enforcement efforts: "Va combattuta con una continua e quotidiana azione di contrasto: "We should always talk about it to not die by the Mafia. Silence is what keeps the Mafia alive."

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