

Saviano at NYU with Roubini. Criminal Economy and Mafia

Luca Delbello (December 09, 2011)



Gomorra's writer met with students, professors and journalists at New York University's Paulson Auditorium. He talked about mafia and its impact on the financial crisis.

The Paulson Auditorium of New York University is filled with students, professors, journalists and simply curious people who gathered together to attend one of the most expected events of the whole year, the one with the famous journalist and writer Roberto Saviano and the economic international guru, Nouriel Roubini, a prophet of this financial crisis that seems to clamp the world in an iron fist.

The Director of [Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimo'](#) [2], Stefano Albertini, is one of the organizers of this lecture that had as moderator professor Ruth Ben-Ghiat, chair of NYU's Department of Italian Studies.



Saviano, author of *Gomorra*, the book that disclosed several secrets surrounding the world of organized crime and mafia in Naples and its suburbs, has been put through a strict protocol of protection and he's been a lecturer at New York University for a semester, for a post-doc seminary on the international organized crime.

The conference, as he said in a video invitation featured on the Internet for the past days, stands as a way of thanking the University for having allowed him, in these months, to teach and research in the United States.

The writer made his entrance, together with Roubini and Ben-Ghiat. The audience greeted him with a lively applause, confirming the author's notoriety. He looked a little shy in front of the microphone, while the audience paid much attention and did not lose a single word.

He was the first to talk, thanking the audience for the patience shown in undergoing all the custom-like procedures, with the metal detector and bag checks.

His speech analyzed with a sharp and brilliant look the "wicked" management of the criminal capitals from the international economy. Still the implacable narration of the journalist didn't spare anybody. His analysis could have bothered many in Wall Street or even at the White House, when he admitted, without limitations, that "European and American banks launder between 500 and 1000 billions of dollars of dirty money every year." The writer's targets were especially Citibank and Wachovia, some of the most famed banks in the world.

"One of the biggest American banks, [Citibank](#) [3], makes a huge percentage of profits from services offered to criminals and from accounts on which they deposit their money," and he continued "despite of all the denunciations and requests for an improved public control on the banking operations, banks continue with their business, laundered money grows, because the governments and the banks don't have any interest in undermining the high profits that keep this always fragile economy alive," his words made echoes to hundreds and hundreds of people who occupied Zuccotti Park with the famous motto "Occupy Wall Street", a manifestation in which Saviano was involved a few days back.

The two methods of Private Banking and Correspondent Banking are used by the banks to launder criminal money, the first one makes it possible through the utilization of code names for bank accounts and the second one through providing a banking service from a bank to another, "it allows the foreign banks to make business and to provide services for their own clients where they don't have any legal jurisdiction."

"In the last twenty years the increasing illegal banking operations have taken away several resources to the legal ones, this is the essential point," Saviano admitted sadly.

[Wachovia](#) [4]'s case is more peculiar, "it's like an attack." The famous American bank has recently paid a 50 million dollars fee for not having looked out for the cash used for a shipping of 22 tons of cocaine, the bank was sanctioned for not having applied the anti-laundering restrictions on the transfer of bank accounts for 378 billions of dollars.

The even more surprising element is that Wachovia stocks raised "inexplicably" their value on the market as soon as news of the fee had reached the press.

The individual is oppressed by these powers. "We are not talking about a problem but about the problem," the rules of the game are still more subtle than the final outcome, as they allow this mechanism to thrive. The cure for this disease is nowhere to be found.

Gomorra's writer didn't avoid talking about organized crime and about the perception of Italians abroad.

"Italians have the best anti-mafia law in the world but I know that we cannot take it anymore to be associated with the mafia world," and he talked about characters such as Michael Corleone by Mario



Puzo or Al Capone played by De Niro, just as examples. "We can't put the blame on Scorsese or on the Sopranos for the mafia and this perception."

The important is to know what happens, he claimed, "The indifference is the worst form of omerta' (a conspiracy of silence)"

After Saviano's speech, professor Roubini started to talk and thanked his interlocutor for being in New York, risking his life everyday for justice and social equality, and by commenting his words he added that there is another important discipline that should be studied, a better management of criminal money.

"There's a constant overlap between illegal and legal activities".

Roubini's speech focused on the problem of recession, according to the scholar, in fact, the whole economic world system is about to risk a collapse in a few months, if adequate measures are not adopted as soon as possible.

"A lot of people worry about the Euro zone but they don't take care of how the United States are about to challenge a deep recession next year," these are the warning words by Roubini, that in the past has shown to understand in advance the movements of the global financial system.

He talked about democratization of the credit, a system used in Anglo-Saxon countries, famed and much discussed, and explained to the audience the problem related to the "housing bubble." People borrowed too much and got into severe debt. It was the American dream falling apart.

Whereas the Continental Europe welfare system has let the public debt of many countries go higher up.

Professor Ben-Ghiat, helped by Professor Stefano Albertini, selected some of the questions coming from the audience. "What are you looking for in New York, why are you teaching in the universities of the US?" she asked Saviano.

"I will always be back in my country, New York could give me something different, I want to experiment and observe, moreover I'm attracted to the idea of living a normal life, or at least lighter."

We see him leaving the stage together with the lecturer after the last question, with a long look at the whole auditorium, trying to say bye to the people who would like to shake his hand.

His presence in the United States was made possible by Scholars at Risk, an academic network in defense of the principles of freedom of thought and expression, supporting those intellectuals that have limited liberties in their countries. New York has maybe helped the author of Gomorrah under this aspect and has given him that dimension of "normality" and of "light life", as he called it, and that is what everybody needs.

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