

Interview by Team Unbound with the Prosecutor of Crotona, Domenico Guarascio

Prosecutor, Operation “Stige” showed that the Farao-Marincola clan was not only seeking control of the territory, but the monopoly of entire legitimate economic sectors. Today, has the Cirò-based ’Ndrangheta managed to evolve into even more invisible forms and become further entangled with entrepreneurship?

«Yes, it has continued to maintain and refine that control. We must imagine a territory like the Cirò area, which has only a few key economic activities: the fish market and everything related to public demand, such as waste disposal and public procurement. The clan has continued to exercise its power, as confirmed by investigations conducted even after Operation ‘Stige.’

The central point that emerged is the desire to blend into the economy to avoid arrests. We have alarming wiretaps in which clan leaders tell their sons: ‘We must no longer ask for money through extortion; we must learn to work. After all, in Calabria no one refuses us work.’ This “fluidity” of evidence allowed us to identify a plateau of businesses that appeared legitimate but were mafia-run in substance. They were the only ones operating in the area, often practicing anti-competitive pricing.

Consider the bakery sector: a clan leader told his sons that ‘with water and flour you make money.’ If you impose your bread and your flour on all local businesses, the profits become immense. Moreover, the ’Ndrangheta helps these companies—sometimes creating them from scratch—expand into Germany, Tuscany, or Lombardy. They do not use marketing plans, but the force of intimidation: we recorded mafiosi selling wine ‘door to door’ in Italian restaurants in Germany. Restaurant owners recognized them and bought the wine, even if they did not need it. It is a distorted economy of scale: the entrepreneur gains foreign markets effortlessly, but in return

loses control of the company, which becomes completely absorbed by the clan».

Crotone and its province are dotted with assets seized from criminal clans, yet many remain unused or are vandalized, such as the villa of Nicola Arena. What strategy is needed to ensure that confiscation becomes a real instrument for a healthy economy?

«It is a complex challenge. Experience tells us that without the involvement of the Third Sector—associations, volunteers, civil society—the use of confiscated assets does not work. Direct management by local authorities often suffers from the chronic difficulties of the Calabrian public administration: lack of resources, infrastructure problems, and waste treatment issues.

The initiative must be made more attractive for associations, while remaining vigilant: sometimes even the Third Sector is contaminated and hides entities created ad hoc by clans to regain possession of assets. Without a deep pact between the judiciary and citizens, if civil society does not physically reclaim these spaces, even confiscation risks sinking into bureaucratic inefficiency».

Crotone often ranks among the lowest places for quality of life. Is there a direct link between infrastructural isolation, the lack of employment, and the power of the 'Ndrangheta?

«Absolutely yes, it is almost self-evident. The absence of infrastructure and employment inevitably creates manpower for criminal organizations. If a twenty-year-old has no prospects or education, he ends up dealing drugs. It is disheartening to have to repeat this even today.

The problem is the narrative: those who describe this reality are often accused of being a 'Cassandra' who refuses to see the beauty of the territory. Instead, we must start from the basics and tell young people the truth. These phenomena do not have a metaphysical origin; we are not 'deviant' because of some innate moral flaw. We are in this situation

because structural problems are not addressed. Why are infrastructures not built? Why are environmental clean-ups not initiated? These are the questions citizens must ask their representatives».

What would you say to the young people involved in civic monitoring who demand transparency, wanting to be able to choose whether to stay or leave this city?

«I would tell you to keep going. Only by reclaiming public spaces can you consciously decide to stay. The 'Ndrangheta thrives where citizens turn their faces away and fail to inform themselves. Often there is no public opinion speaking about confiscated assets managed by municipalities; it is an inexplicable silence.

You are privileged observers. When you connect abstract concepts like 'legality' to objective data—labor market, school dropout rates, public contracts—the picture becomes clear. In this way, you proudly take ownership of the destiny of your land».

Prosecutor, you see every day how the 'Ndrangheta is suffocating this land. What gives you the strength to keep going, and how can we stand by your side?

«The strength comes precisely from occasions like this, from seeing young people who care about the future of their country. To stand by us, you must inform yourselves, study, and be curious citizens who respect the rules.

If we systematize the repressive activity of the judiciary together with a conscious social network, the 'Ndrangheta—which is a human phenomenon—will meet its end much more quickly. If instead we choose the narrative of 'burying our heads in the sand' to avoid rolling up our sleeves, then we will remain forever alone, sadly looking out the window».