

Barter Mafia-State Debuts at Venice

judith harris (September 04, 2014)



This year's 71st Venice Biennale international film festival showcases one of Italy's more polemical new films: actor Sabina Guzzanti's 100-minute "The Barter, Investigation into a the State-Mafia Negotiation." The story is based upon a deal believed to have been worked in the earlier Nineties which allegedly resulted in a peace treaty between the Italian authorities and the Sicilian Cosa Nostra under Salvatore ("Totò") Riina. The film comes at the same time that the trial – the real trial – over this alleged affair is taking place in the real Palermo.

ROME – This year's 71st Venice Biennale international film festival showcases one of Italy's more polemical new films: actor Sabina Guzzanti's 100-minute "La Trattativa, Indagine sulla trattativa Stato-Mafia" (The Barter, Investigation into a the State-Mafia Negotiations), presented Sept. 3 and 4. The story is based upon negotiations which are believed to have taken place in the earlier Nineties and allegedly resulted in a peace treaty between the Italian authorities and the Sicilian Cosa Nostra headed at that time by Salvatore ("Totò") Riina, boss of the Corleonesi. (Click [here](#) [2] to see the trailer)

That negotiation, which allegedly took place after a series of bombings in 1992-1993, is currently being adjudicated, not in virtual or film reality, but in a Palermo courtroom. Already in March of 2012

a Florentine court convicted 15 Mafia bosses for a related case – the massacre on Via Georgofili in Florence from the explosion of a 250-kg. bomb near the Uffizi Museums, which killed five including a child of nine, and injured some 40 others. In the sentence the court wrote that, “Beyond doubt there had been a negotiation brought about at least initially on the basis of ‘do ut des’ [give and take]. The initiative had been taken by the representatives of the [state] institutions rather than by the men of the Mafia.”

In the same period Judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino and Salvo Lima, a top Christian Democratic party leader in Sicily, were all murdered. Besides the bomb near the Uffizi, another was placed by the Mafia at an ancient church in Rome. Among the alleged elements under negotiation was the abrogation of harsh imprisonment conditions, the release from prison of several top bosses and abolition of a law protecting those who cooperate with the investigators.

During the same period both the Christian Democrat (DC) and Communist (PCI) parties faded away after over four decades of power, in a process that came to be known as the unofficial end of the First Republic. In the ongoing trial in Palermo’s criminal Court of Assises Marcello Dell’Utri, an intimate of former Premier Silvio Berlusconi and manager of his early election campaigns in Sicily, is among those under prosecution, accused of being the link between the Italian state and the Mafia. In the film Massimo Ciancimino, the son of the compromised Palermo mayor Vito Ciancimino, is played by Filippo Luna. In real life the younger Ciancimino is an important witness for the prosecution in three separate trials, in Caltanissetta as well as Florence and Palermo.

It takes courage to bring this unfinished dirty business onto the silver screen, but Guzzanti is anything but timid. Her film, shown outside the competition, won a standing ovation from the film critics on hand at the Lido Sept 2. “Without that so-called negotiation,” she said at a press conference there, “we would have had a better Italy, and Judges Falcone and Borsellino would still be alive.” The more she studied the matter, she went on to say, “the more I felt depressed and also fearful. I also thought that, after this type of thing, I’d leave the country.” Instead, she also came to think that it was a civic responsibility to care “and not to delegate everything to the judiciary”—hence her film, in which, she says, every word was checked 1,671 times for accuracy.

Besides inspiring Guzzanti, the Palermo trial has brought to light any number of disturbing sideshows. Using sophisticated eavesdropping equipment, Palermo penitentiary police overheard Salvatore (“Totò”) Riina, 83, the imprisoned boss of Sicily’s notorious Corleone organization, confide to a fellow prisoner that the Roman Catholic Church was “interfering.” Palermo penitentiary police also heard Riina say that Father Luigi Ciotti is “a priest to be eliminated” and “akin to Don Pino Puglisi.”

Father Giuseppe (“Pino”) Puglisi, murdered nineteen years ago in Palermo on his 56th birthday, was the first martyr of the Catholic church to have been killed by the Mafia and was beatified by Pope Francis on May 25, 2013.

Father Ciotti heads Libera, the network of anti-Mafia associations, which has carried on Father Puglisi’s work and every March 21 organizes a commemoration ceremony for the slain priest, who was beatified by Pope Francis in May 2013.

Father Ciotti has daily protection by two arms guards. The Palermo court records show that the Interior Ministry, informed of Riina’s threat many months ago, had been expected to upgrade this protection, but no one had advised Father Ciotti himself of the threats. “I find this singular,” Father Ciotti acknowledged in an interview with the Italian daily La Repubblica. “It strikes me as a lack of respect for the two policemen who accompany me every day.” Messages of solidarity with father Ciotti came from President Giorgio Napolitano, from Premier Matteo Renzi and from the Italian



Bishops Conference (CEI), among many others.

Riina, nicknamed “the Beast” (La Belva), is believed to have killed several dozen people personally and to have order the deaths of countless others. He is serving two life sentences in a maximum-security prison.

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