

## CHAPTER FIVE: EXULTATE JUSTI



### 1. Intimidation and threats

Di Bella's last words, still hopeful in January 2017 (when the article quoting him was published), have proved prophetic: we witnessed it become a reality on July 1, 2017, following the signing of the ministerial accord *Free to choose*. We have also seen, at the end of October 2017, the important request made by the CSM to the legislature to proceed with the promulgation of such a law. But the road is still long and hard. The action of the Reggio judiciary, since its first manifestation in 2012, was met with mountains of written threats and actions both real and symbolic by its detractors. If, according to the Court, each decree represents protection for minor children as well as hope for the family, for the 'Ndrangheta it is an attack on their parental rights, to their sense of belonging to a family, to their values. The forty impeccable and irreproachable court rulings in Reggio have unleashed an uproar within the family *cosche*. The 'Ndrangheta obviously do not want the State interfering in their business, let alone within their own biological family, and they will not tolerate the idea that the right to raise a child can – because of their own delinquency – be delegated to the State. The Court rulings have triggered a thirst for revenge that has led to an escalation of threats and intimidation against the juvenile judges and magistrates of Reggio, beyond the complaints against those judicial proceedings. It is a fact that the Court in Reggio is small and provincial, with just four seated judges, in an area with a frightening percentage of mafia crime. The Juvenile District Attorney and Court, located in the same building in the heart of the city, are an easy target and should be a source of concern for the (too often indifferent) governmental authorities. The words of Prosecutor Latella, “our building is left to its own devices”, say a lot about the state of things; and those with a good memory unfortunately cannot help but remember the complaints made by Judge Giovanni Falcone: of the loneliness and isolation on the part of colleagues and governmental authorities in the fight against the mafia. This is the principal thesis of the Juvenile Court that,<sup>1</sup> due to the remarkable number of incidents against them, in June 2016 organized a debate open to colleagues and to the press, so that the discussion could help to ease the sense of isolation.

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<sup>1</sup> District Attorney Giuseppina Latella, President of the Court Roberto Di Bella, and Public Prosecutor Roberto Di Palma.

The figure of the judge and juvenile magistrate, particularly in a context such as Reggio, a “reality of associative criminality” (Di Bella), is very exposed, “high profile” (Latella).<sup>2</sup> A bulwark of legality in a territory where criminality dominates, working in a very delicate terrain: in defense of the youngest and most fragile. But sometimes there is a silver lining to a bad situation.

## 2. Boomerang and Obstacles

Despite the gravity of the situation, the aforesaid episodes have had limited success from the point of view of the media, among law enforcement, and in the public opinion. Indeed, the repeated threats to the Court and to the Juvenile District Attorney have had a boomerang effect on those who make them with hopes to intimidate, silence, and shut down people and institutions. The cowardly acts taking place in the shadows stand in opposition to courageous protest in full daylight. On June 7, 2016 the District Juvenile Chamber of Reggio Calabria, which brings together lawyers specialized in the protection of minors and the most important trade associations involved in the defense of human rights and the law, recognized the importance of the activities carried out by the judiciary and members of Reggio’s juvenile justice system in the protection of minors and their future, and it launched a sit-in and protests in support of the institution. This was an important moment in which president Di Bella insisted on the need to for networking, because isolation kills: “We must not be afraid to talk about it because our silence only plays into their hands.” It is necessary to break the mafia rule of silence against those who threaten:

We must go out and have the courage to point the finger at these families and say clearly that their children are not their property, they are here in this world to be loved, not to become weapons to be used to their liking.<sup>3</sup>

And he offered his thanks to the large audience present to provide support and community:

I thank you, your presence comforts us. We are human beings, we are afraid too but we must move forward. We have mapped out our path.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> According to the words of Giuseppina Latella,

<sup>3</sup> Roberto Di Bella. Quote from the article by Valeria Guarniera in *Il dispaccio*, June 7, 2016, <http://ildispaccio.it/reggio-calabria/111646-reggio-uniti-con-tribunale-dei-minori-silenzio-fa-il-gioco-di-chi-minaccia>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

A path undertaken by the Juvenile Court of Reggio Calabria, fraught with obstacles and resistance, as emphasized by Di Bella:

There have been many bureaucratic difficulties, there are no funds and every time that we intervene to protect these children we must recreate a new plan from scratch. But now we have reached a stage where we can no longer improvise. We first need the public opinion to create consent, to begin to make people understand that the responsibility of raising children is a serious matter.<sup>5</sup>

He uses strong words to describe the situation:

We have whole families who ruin their own children and we are seeing it daily, because there is great suffering. Kids who are already resigned because they know what is in store for them. Resigned mothers and parents who, despite everything, continue to push them toward this fate.<sup>6</sup>

The work that they are doing, he maintains, is laborious and delicate, but it is finally producing benefits: “Something is changing” (Di Bella). The Juvenile Court of Reggio Calabria is at the forefront of the fight against the ‘Ndrangheta as regards removing children from harmful environments that oppress the area and the people who live there. But Di Bella also makes an appeal that the responsibility for so delicate a job not be placed on the shoulders of a few individuals, and he repeats his mantra:

Events like this are very welcome, isolation and overexposure are both very dangerous. So I would like to repeat that these events are positive because they raise awareness, but it is important that they do so at even higher levels: the system must be regulated from the legislative point of view, and then we have to give a shape, a social continuity to this project. We need workers who are truly capable of tackling this phenomenon.<sup>7</sup>

It is the hope that now, after July 1, 2017, things really will change and the State will implement what it has promised and signed.

Commenting, against critics and detractors of his project, on the importance of removal from a diseased environment that would likely frustrate any attempt put in place to save these boys, Di Bella explains:

If we remove these kids from Calabria, it’s certainly not because we distrust the local workers: this distancing provides them the

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem.*

opportunity to experience different lifestyles and also to ensure the continuity of their paths of recovery and legality. We need a system that can get up to speed as soon as possible. And then we need to ensure job opportunities for these kids who come back to us – finally having recognized the positive role of the State – to ask for help. And it is very difficult to give them answers. We must all do something more.<sup>8</sup>

It is now clear to the reader that the children whom the Reggio Court wants to support are not the typical children of ordinary poverty, hardship and violence, but are the sons of the mafia, new ‘Ndrangheta recruits, heirs of the bosses. They are children and adolescents who, as we have seen, already know how to shoot a gun at age nine, ask for a Kalashnikov at age twelve, are familiar with weapons, prepare and sell drugs, and collect extortions at age fourteen, kill at age sixteen. Therefore, the intervention of the Juvenile Court of Reggio becomes a crucial act against the ‘Ndrangheta, as Prosecutor Latella also reiterates, because it gets right into the heart of the family’s structure and acts on behalf of the child while undermining the very foundation on which organized crime rests. On the other hand, we have seen that the Court’s intervention works at the same time to awaken the consciences of ‘Ndrangheta women, also victims of the same system. “Something is changing”, repeats Di Bella. It is true, although it is not an easy road. Too often the mafia mentality is already so deeply ingrained in the way children and mothers think and perceive as to be ineradicable.

By reading the words of the judges, however, we see the internal paradox, the suffering of individuals who feel, on the one hand, a sense of belonging to a mafia family and, on the other, the need to be free of it. Last but not least, and hopefully the harbinger of good news and hopes, another sentiment is taking the foot and influencing, at the ground level, the sons of mafiosi saved by the Juvenile Court: refusal. The refusal to return to their beautiful but accursed land, Calabria, with the desire to remain in a different place “where everything is clearer than here”, according to one of the saved youths who escaped from the many who instead have remained submerged in the mafia miasma.

### **3. Voices from prison**

In closing, a last new tile to add to the mosaic, built piece by piece by the Juvenile Court of Reggio. To the children – such as the baby-collaborator V. and his two siblings, R.C., or the two siblings D. and N., all children of mafia bosses – and the mothers – from those killed by the mafia such as Lea, Santa and Cetta to the

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<sup>8</sup> Di Bella, in a private correspondence with the author, July 20, 2017.

others, all wives of bosses, who are now under State protection with their children – we may now add, *exultate justis*, the fathers of the ‘Ndrangheta.

On August 10, 2016, from the maximum security prison in which he is imprisoned in accordance with 41 bis, a brutal boss of the ‘Ndrangheta in Reggio, whose name I must withhold in order to protect his children, gave the following statement during an official interrogation before the Honorary Judge:<sup>9</sup>

A.D.R.<sup>10</sup> My name is [omissis], neither my lawyer nor a court-appointed lawyer is present. I have been informed of my right to a lawyer, but I intend to answer questions anyway.

A.D.R.: I am particularly grateful to the judge and the Juvenile Court of Reggio Calabria because they gave my children the chance to live in an environment other than the one in which they grew up and gave them the possibility of a better future, with civilized values and legality.

A.D.R.: I last saw my sons in January 2016. With respect for the decree providing for the physical and mental health of my children, I would like to have contact with my children by phone, letters and visits. I do not know where they are and I do not want to know: I only want to know that they are doing well. I do not want to be misunderstood, I will respect the court provisions, but I would like to have contact as their father, while still respecting them and the court rulings. Maybe I could see them every three or four months, and if they write to me I would be willing to write to the Juvenile Court, Social Services, or the lawyer who protects my children, to whoever would give me permission to write and how often. Currently I cannot contribute to the maintenance of my children, but if and when I could I would be happy to do so. Letters without a return address cannot be delivered here, but I can ask if it can be authorized that my children write only their names [without their address] to protect their secure location, since the post here is checked both incoming and outgoing. Alternatively, as far as talks, I would like to be able to talk to them on the phone for ten minutes once a month, and since I am under 41 bis my calls are recorded and they can bring my children to wherever they feel it is best to call.

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<sup>9</sup> He is the undisputed leader of the *cosca* [omissis] which is federated with another formidable group, and has been condemned for the crimes of mafia association, extortion and others with a definitive sentence of eighteen years. He was also investigated for serious violent crimes, just like his elderly father who is serving a sentence for murder. And again in another trial, he was sentenced to another eighteen years, though the sentence has not yet been finalized, as he must await the judgment of the Appellate Court. In essence: his sentence will be nearly life-long. The quotes in the text are taken from the minutes of the hearing on August 10, 2016, with place and names omitted.

<sup>10</sup> ‘A.D.R.’ stands for “A domanda risponde” (responding to a question).

Following this are signatures notarizing the minutes. This is an unprecedented and emblematic case: an ‘Ndrangheta boss who for the first time shows gratitude toward the Juvenile Court which has taken away his children. After many threats, intimidations large and small, attacks and insults:<sup>11</sup>

This is an important step and may not be the only one. There are other things brewing as well...<sup>12</sup>

It is important that these are the words of a mafia boss doing 41 bis, not an informant, the father of children who have been removed, and he contradicts, from within the ‘Ndrangheta system, the characterization of Di Bella as “playing fast and loose with the law” or as a “child thief.”

#### 4. Concluding reflections

I conclude with some reflections on the situation as it stands while I write these final pages. The Juvenile Court and District Attorney’s office of Reggio continue their strenuous commitment to the project. On Saturday, October 14, 2017, while in Catanzaro speaking at the thirty-sixth National Congress of the Italian Association of Magistrates for Children and Families, Di Bella reiterated:

They have called me a “child thief”, but we use this tool only when there is a definitive injury to the mental and physical wellbeing of the children. At the core of our action is solely the protection of the child.<sup>13</sup>

Once temporarily removed from their families, the children, as we have seen, are entrusted to the care of associations, such as Libera or Unicef, and in some cases also to volunteer foster families. Judge Di Bella has defined this path as an “Erasmus of legality”,<sup>14</sup> through which

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<sup>11</sup> The most recent challenge which the press has aimed at the CSM’s recent action in favor of Di Bella’s best practice (on CSM see footnote 121) – and it would be important to understand who orchestrated the press coverage – dates to October 28, 2017, and is available in *Il dubbio*: <file:///Users/animal/Desktop/The%20doubt%20Dear%20CSM,%20Slurried%20was%20Son%20of%20a%20boss%20but%20you%20rebelled%20a%20Father%20-%20The%20doubt.webarchive>

<sup>12</sup> Di Bella, in private correspondence with the author, June 17, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> [www.strill.it/primo-piano/2017/10/ndrangheta-giudice-di-bella-non-sono-ladro-di-bambini-do-loro-futuro-diverso/](http://www.strill.it/primo-piano/2017/10/ndrangheta-giudice-di-bella-non-sono-ladro-di-bambini-do-loro-futuro-diverso/) (October 14, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*. *Erasmus* is an exchange program for students within the European Union offering study abroad learning and volunteer opportunities.

we try to offer the children a different world view from the one they know, one where violence is not the only answer and prison is not a mandatory career step.<sup>15</sup>

The President of the Reggio Court also emphasized the “extraordinary results”<sup>16</sup> achieved in these few years:

Most of the children, after undertaking this difficult path, have resumed their studies, have taken on community service work or, in some cases, have begun to collaborate with the associations.<sup>17</sup>

Di Bella has therefore stressed the fundamental role played by the mothers of these ‘Ndrangheta children:

These are desperate women scarred by death and imprisonments; for them our court has become a last resort, the only hope of being able to save their children from a predetermined fate.<sup>18</sup>

Di Bella’s experience is not an isolated case. It is echoed by his colleague Patrizia Esposito, the president of the Juvenile Court of Naples – in Camorra territory – who was dealing with “kids with violent conduct beyond all extremes”.<sup>19</sup> The judge explained the rise of the so-called *paranza dei bambini*,<sup>20</sup> gangs of young

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*. It should be noted that these statements were made eight months after the resounding decision made by the Juvenile Court of Naples, along the same lines as Di Bella’s project, which revoked parental rights from families affiliated with the Camorra clan Elia, removing six children between three and fourteen years of age who were assisting or had assisted with the packaging and sale of drugs in the area of Pallonetto di Santa Lucia in Naples. Four of the six children subject to the ruling are siblings, while a fifth is a cousin of the latter ([www.prealpina.it](http://www.prealpina.it), February 16, 2017). The Neapolitan juvenile justices have justified their decision in this way: “If they remain in their homes, entrusted to the care of their respective families, it would force them to stay in an extremely harmful situation” ([www.ilmattino.it](http://www.ilmattino.it), cit., October 28, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> This expression was already in use in the nineteenth century, as we see from the title of the anonymous booklet *Natura ed origine della misteriosa setta della Camorra nelle sue diverse sezioni e paranze. Linguaggio convenzionale di essa, usi e leggi* (The Nature and Origins of the Mysterious Sect of the Camorra in its Various Sub-groups and Gangs), published in 1850 in Naples by Filippo Serafini. The term is taken up by the Swiss-born Italian writer and polygraph Marc Monnier, in his book *La Camorra. Notizie storiche raccolte e documentate* (The Camorra: A Collection and Documentation of Historical Information) Firenze, Barbéra, 1862), where he explains: “In Naples there were twelve centers, one for each district: each of these centers was subdivided into special *paranze* (gangs), which acted on behalf of them and formed their own possess” (p. 44. The edition cited is Marc Monnier, *La camorra*, edited by Felia Allum and Alessandro Colletti, Città di Castello (Perugia), Edizioni di Storia e Studi Sociali, 2014). The expression was incorporated into the title of Roberto Saviano’s book, *La paranza dei bambini* (Milano, Feltrinelli, 2016) which, along with *Bacio feroce* (Milano, Feltrinelli, 2017), is part of a short series of novels on children who wield criminal power within the Camorra. For the meaning

children who have filled the void left by certain clans after many arrests, with daily brutality and violence. She explained that the children of the Camorra

are kids who come from bad families with evil female role models who, during the periods of their husbands' incarceration, take over as boss.<sup>21</sup>

These declarations parallel those made about Sicily by Emma Seminara, President of the Juvenile Court of Catania, when, with regard to the Cosa Nostra children she had met, she spoke of ten-year-olds who

didn't know how to write, who had never celebrated a birthday, and who had received a gift from their family only to celebrate their first purse-snatching. When facing these situations it is impossible not to intervene, to protect the physical and mental wellbeing of the minor.<sup>22</sup>

The quotations above offer a map of different locations and situations sharing the same devastating effects which the mafia subculture unleashes on children and on mothers.

To celebrate the day dedicated to juvenile courts and to the family, Attorney General of the State Beniamino Calabrese, and President of the Juvenile Court of Catanzaro Luciano Trovato, in support of the project Free to choose, have proclaimed

the willingness of the Province of Calabria [...] to approve a law that provides resources to create a veritable pool of anti-mafia educational foundations which will assist the minors in the paths laid out by the Calabrian courts.<sup>23</sup>

The current shared desire on the part of the authorities to approve a national law for the benefit of mafia children is one of the most important results of the project initiated by Di Bella and his colleagues. To this is added the wellbeing of mothers

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of the term *paranza* we refer to the definition in Treccani: "1. a. Coastal fishing boat [...] for fishing in pairs (in "*paranza*"), in which each "*paranza*" pulled one side of a trawl net. B. A motorized fishing boat that operates in tandem with another. C. Fishing net for bottom trawling [...] pulled by two small boats or "*paranze*", used especially in shallow waters. D. In cooking terminology, *fried p.*, a mixed fry of fish and small mollusks caught by "*paranze*". 2. Fig. In the jargon of the Neapolitan camorra, a group or gang of *camorristi*. B. In Rome, (archaic), a company of people joined by friendship, or associated in an undertaking, an affair, a work activity. In criminal jargon, a small group of con-men or thieves who work together" ([www.treccani.it](http://www.treccani.it). My emphasis). In 2001, former lawyer and now author Diego De Silva has dedicated an important, very well written book to the children of the Camorra: *Certi bambini* (Torino, Einaudi).

<sup>21</sup> [www.strill.it/primo-piano/2017/10/ndrangheta-giudice-di-bella-non-sono-ladro-di-bambini-doloro-futuro-diverso/](http://www.strill.it/primo-piano/2017/10/ndrangheta-giudice-di-bella-non-sono-ladro-di-bambini-doloro-futuro-diverso/) (October 14, 2017)

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*. My emphasis.



and women, the other crucial result of this project, which is confirmed by the recent and vigorous request on the part of the then newly elected National Anti-mafia and Anti-Terrorism Prosecutor (previously chief prosecutor of Reggio Calabria) Federico Cafiero De Raho, that the State finally intervene to help women who are trying to escape from the mafia. De Raho emphasizes that their cases

are increasing significantly. I believe this is linked to the experimental program being carried out by the Juvenile Court of Reggio Calabria. The Court removes the children from *cosche* families. It suspends parental rights in order to remove them and allow them to grow up in a different environment, with a new cultural upbringing. Many women are beginning to consider this possibility of a life away from violence and imprisonment.<sup>24</sup>

The fact that, even today, there is no law to protect these women is, as De Raho remarks,

an issue which we have discussed repeatedly with various subsections of the State. As of now, only associations such as Libera and Caritas deal with the issue. They may not be enough. I am convinced that the State should find a way to guarantee a new identity to these women, a cover and a form of social assistance. They must not be left alone. They must have a home, a safe place and a new identity. They must be able to live another life.<sup>25</sup>

The action taken by Di Bella is ever more visible. At the governmental level, thanks to the July 2017 agreement; at the legislative level, thanks to the October 2017 request by the CSM; at the political and legal level, thanks to events such as the one dedicated to the States General of the Fight Against the Mafia (SGLM), held in Milan on November 23-24, 2017, in which Di Bella presented his work for the first time before the most important Italian authorities;<sup>26</sup> at the level of cultural

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<sup>24</sup> [www.quotidianodelsud.it/calabria/cronache/cronaca/2017/09/15/de-raho-donne-stanno-scappando-mafia-ma-stato-non-pu-lasciarle](http://www.quotidianodelsud.it/calabria/cronache/cronaca/2017/09/15/de-raho-donne-stanno-scappando-mafia-ma-stato-non-pu-lasciarle).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> This event marked the conclusion of the work conducted between October 2016 and the end of May 2017, by a ministerial commission intended to update the tools used to fight the mafia. The event was hosted at Palazzo Reale, and the President of the Italian Republic Sergio Mattarella was present. It was organized by the Ministry of Justice in collaboration with the Municipality of Milan, and was attended by the highest authorities in the fight against the mafia and the most qualified journalists on the subject. Di Bella's speech in the second panel of the second day, entitled *A new awareness in the fight against the mafia*, has given rise to a broad consensus among insiders and the press. Minister of Justice Andrea Orlando, who provided opening and closing remarks, praised Di Bella's initiative before the President of the Republic. It is important to mention the list of participants on duty in those days: Giuseppe Sala, Mayor of Milan; Roberto Maroni, President of the Province of Lombardy; Federico Cafiero De Raho, National Anti-mafia and Anti-terrorism Prosecutor; Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission; Franco Roberti,

dissemination through the press and visual media: the Italian news and the film in production which will make known the situation to the public at large.<sup>27</sup> Last but

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Coordinator of the Scientific Committee of the States General (previously National Anti-mafia and Anti-terrorism Prosecutor); Salvatore Rossi, Director General of the Bank of Italy; Pier Carlo Padoan, Minister of Economy and Finance; Alessandro Pansa, Director General of the Department of Information Security; Carla Del Ponte, Magistrate; Luigi Marini, the Italian Permanent Representative to the U.N., New York; Piero Grasso, President of the Senate; Nando Dalla Chiesa, sociologist; Salvatore Lupo, historian (University of Palermo); Nello Musumeci, President of the region of Sicily; Rosy Bindi, President of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on the Mafia Phenomenon; Giovanni Legnini, Vice President of the Superior Council of the Judiciary; Nicola Gratteri, State District Attorney at the Court of Catanzaro; Francesco Greco, State District Attorney at the Court of Milan; Giovanni Melillo, State District Attorney at the Court of Naples; Giuseppe Pignatone, State District Attorney at the Court of Rome; Roberto Scarpinato, General Prosecutor at the A Court of Appeal of Palermo; Gaetano Manfredi, President of the Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities (C.R.U.I.); Raffaele Cantone, President of the National Anti-Corruption Authority; Marco Minniti, Minister for the Interior; Maurizio Martina, Minister for Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies; Valeria Fedeli, Minister of University and Research Education. Among the journalists: Gad Lerner, Attilio Bolzoni, Marcelle Padovani, Enrico Deaglio, Liana Milella, and Luciano Fontana (current Director of *Il Corriere della Sera*).

<sup>27</sup> One notes that in Italy and beyond, the importance and urgency of Di Bella's revolution is continuously monitored by the principal national television channels, television and radio news outlets, influential newspapers (*Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, *La Stampa*, *Il Fatto quotidiano* to name a few). On February 11, 2017, Di Bella was interviewed by *Corriere della Sera*: "Il giudice che salva i figli dai boss: 'Sono le madri a chiedermelo'. Di Bella, il presidente del Tribunale per i minorenni celebrato dal «New York Times»: 40 i minori allontanati. Sperimentano la chance di una vita diversa dall'unica conosciuta nelle loro famiglie di 'ndrangheta, grazie ai provvedimenti civili di decadenza o limitazione della responsabilità genitoriale" (The judge who saves children from the mob: "It's the mothers who ask me to do it." Di Bella, President of the Juvenile Court and honored by the *New York Times*: forty children relocated. They are experiencing the chance at a life that is different from the only one they've known in their 'Ndrangheta families, thanks to the civil rulings limiting or revoking custodial rights from the parents. [www.corriere.it/firme/luigi-ferrarella](http://www.corriere.it/firme/luigi-ferrarella)). For the first time on November 12, 2017, Rai3, one of the most followed national television channels, dedicated the final segment of the 7:00 pm news hour to Di Bella's case. See <http://www.raiplay.it/video/2017/11/TG3-5ed99250-cf52-41b1f6fe3c240.html> (segment at 30'33"). On December 12, 2017, Rai TGI aired the world premier "I said no" segment by Maria Grazia Mazzola. It is an exclusive interview with Alfonso Gallico, who was then twentyyears old, in which the youth speaks for the first time in public against the mafia to which his family belongs. He is the son of Rocco – one of the most terrifying bosses of the 'Ndrangheta, currently in prison doing 41 bis. The youth, who was himself in juvenile detention for mafia-related crimes, after following the path laid out for him by Di Bella, now says: "The mafia oppresses and suffocates." In December 2017, the prestigious national publishing house Treccani devoted a long essay to Di Bella's initiative in its annual volume *Il libro dell'anno* (The Book of the Year) 2017, written by Luigi Ferrarella. On February 2, 2018, the news that Di Bella's protocol *Free to choose* was signed by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, by the District Anti-Mafia Directive, and by the CEI, was widely reported by the national press: [www.avvenirecalabria.it/2941/galantino](http://www.avvenirecalabria.it/2941/galantino), *Il segretario generale della CEI interviene alla firma del protocollo di intesa per il progetto 'Liberi di scegliere'. Galantino: «La Chiesa accanto a chi si dissocia dalle 'ndrine»*; [www.calabriaecclesia.org/Pages/NewsMondoDetail/6079/Il segretario generale della Cei interviene alla firma del protocollo di intesa per il progetto %27Liberi di Scegliere%27 Galantino](http://www.calabriaecclesia.org/Pages/NewsMondoDetail/6079/Il_segretario_generale_della_Cei_interviene_alla_firma_del_protocollo_di_intesa_per_il_progetto_%27Liberi_di_Scegliere%27_Galantino) «La Chiesa accanto a chi si dissocia dalle %27ndrine»; [www.radioinblu.it/2018/02/02/liberi-di-scegliere-il-nuovo-protocollo-dintesa-firmato-presso-la-direzione-nazionale-antimafia](http://www.radioinblu.it/2018/02/02/liberi-di-scegliere-il-nuovo-protocollo-dintesa-firmato-presso-la-direzione-nazionale-antimafia) (by Marino Galdiero); [www.ildispaccio.it/primopiano/1](http://www.ildispaccio.it/primopiano/1) «Una concreta alternativa di vita ai minori vittime della criminalità organizzata»-firmato a Roma Protocollo d'Intesa". The prestigious *The*

not least, the February 2, 2018 memorandum of understanding *Free to choose* was signed, at the Rome offices of the District Anti-Mafia Directive, by the Presidency for the Council of Ministers, the anti-mafia association *Libera* and other Calabrian institutions, and for the first time gained the support of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI).<sup>28</sup>

This book aims to provide readers with a greater understanding of the work carried out by Di Bella and Latella, as well as that of the Italian Parliament and the Parliament of the European Union, so that they may work more quickly to cooperate with the action initiated by the Court and by the Juvenile District Attorney of Reggio Calabria, followed by the juvenile courts of Catania and Naples, in the transformation of the currently regional law *Free to choose*, ratified by the Italian Government and supported by the CSM, into a national law and, finally, into a European directive to counteract the mafia at a broader and more effective level. This work acknowledges that, unlike pizza,<sup>29</sup> the mafia is a global phenomenon that affects all of us directly, and the devastating effects of which victimize the most fragile among us, including women and children.<sup>30</sup> Both

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*World Today* dedicated its cover story to a report on Di Bella's case intitled "An Italian judge's radical plan. Helen Fitzwilliam outlines a protection programme to rescue women and children of the 'Ndrangheta, a mafia clan that kills those who dare to betray it." (February & March 2018, Volume 74, Number 1, by author Helen Fitzwilliam).

<sup>28</sup> The accord signed by the those days National Anti-Mafia Prosecutor Federico Cafiero De Raho, by the Undersecretary of the Presidency of the Council Maria Elena Boschi, equal opportunity delegate, by President of the Court of Reggio Calabria Roberto Di Bella, by District Attorney of the Juvenile Court of Reggio Calabria Giuseppina Latella, by the District Attorney of the Court of Reggio Calabria Calogero Paci, and by the President of the *Libera* Association Don Luigi Ciotti, sanctions the task within the Calabrian province as a shared course of action. The aim is to activate a support network between the legal system, the regional government, and the associations, thus allowing for the protection and security of a concrete life alternative for oppressed minors coming from families involved in organized crime or who are the victims of mafia violence. This path, also firmly supported by the Italian Episcopal Conference with Secretary General monsignor Nunzio Galantino present at the signing, provides for the activation of a system of interventions (educational, psychological, logistical, academic, economic, and employment-based) within the organized crime environment of the province of Reggio Calabria, aimed at women, children and immediate family members subject to judicial measures by the Juvenile Court of Reggio Calabria with the objective of guaranteeing concrete life alternatives. The current accord aims to open a broad perspective that will extend the above-mentioned tools to other judicial districts as well. "It is not simply collaboration, nor is it testimony, but rather a life choice. It is a clean break with respect to the mafia family model." So spoke Federico Cafiero De Raho, in an interview with Tg2000 News, following the memorandum of understanding by the National Anti-Mafia Directive for the support of women and children from organized crime families or who are victims of mafia violence.

<sup>29</sup> Alberto Varvaro (1934-2014), an authority in the field of Romance Philology, notoriously claimed that 'mafia' is the most used Italian term in the world, followed in second place by 'pizza.'

<sup>30</sup> On the disturbing role of the City of London that – enjoying a substantial extraterritoriality based on privileges in effect since 1191 – has become the heart of world finance due to low taxes, one should bear in mind the words of Gratteri and Nicaso: "The city has its own mayor, its own

Gratteri, among the most experienced magistrates in the fight against the ‘Ndrangheta, and Nicaso, a great expert on the ‘Ndrangheta worldwide, have repeatedly warned of the need for a global fight against the mafia and have reaffirmed that combating the mafia on a planetary scale every day is becoming more and more tiring: the differences between legal systems, the lack of involvement in criminal organizations and the difficulty of globalizing the fight, all encourage the mafias that instead manage increasingly to cooperate and function at an international level.<sup>31</sup> However, cases like that of Di Bella on an Italian scale, along with the help of volunteer associations such as Libera and Addiopizzo, and those mentioned by Gratteri and Nicaso on a global scale, show us that fighting the mafia subculture is not an impossible task.<sup>32</sup>

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magistrates, its own police force. These are chosen by its eight thousand residents and businesses, including five hundred banks [...]. They are a city within the city who answer neither to the queen, nor to the government, nor to Parliament. Here you will find the most powerful and wealthiest economic institutions such as the Bank of England controlled by the Rothschilds, Lloyds of London, and the London Stock Exchange. Some statistics would help us to better understand the size of this revenue. According to a study by Transparency International UK, within six thousand square meters in the heart of London, there would be 36,324 properties ascribable as shell corporations. Also in London, ninety per cent of the buildings owned by foreign companies are registered as tax havens. As indicated by the Central Anti-Drug-Trafficking Directive and as has emerged from the many investigations coordinated by the Italian judiciary, the most powerful criminal organizations, such as the ‘Ndrangheta, also invest here” (p. 46-47, *Fiumi d'oro*, cit., 2017). On the ‘Ndrangheta’s presence in all key sectors of politics, public administration and the Italian economy, see the *Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo nonché sulle dinamiche e strategie della criminalità organizzata di tipo mafioso* (Prot. 12720/2017/PNA; from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Gratteri’s & Nicaso’s last book *Grifone. Come la tecnologia sta cambiando il volto della ‘ndrangheta* (Milano, Mondadori, 2023), focuses on how technologies are changing the face of organized crime (see dark web, untraceable dirty money transitions, cryptocurrencies, AI, Metaverse, and Non-fungible tokens).

<sup>32</sup> Di Bella is currently President of the Juvenile Court in Catania (Sicily), with still an active involvement in Calabrian schools. In Catania, Di Bella continues to apply his revolutionary methods while achieving important results, such as the recent collaboration by Mafia Godfather Giovanni Piero Salvo. Sentenced to life, Salvo now admits to the criminal wrong which completely defined his own life, and offered to teach imprisoned Mafia youngsters how to avoid committing his crimes and choose to fully embrace legality instead (see: <https://palermo.repubblica.it/cronaca/2024/06/30/news/Catania>; Laura Di Stefano, *A casa del boss del clan Cappello: “Non mi pento ma tolgo carusi alla Mafia. Ai giovani dico: attenti, quel mondo fa schifo”*, «La Sicilia», 11 July 2024, pp. 1-3). As for his Memorandum of Understanding *Free to Choose*, a new law has been successfully promulgated in Calabria (Regional Law 28 June 2023, n. 27), titled “Riconoscimento e sostegno del progetto ‘Giustizia e Umanità Liberi di scegliere”” (Recognition and support of the ‘Justice and Humanity Free to choose’ project). Furthermore, in April 2024 *Free to choose* protocol has been renewed and signed by the Italian Government (three-year duration). The international fame of this magistrate has been very recently consolidated in the Australian TV documentary *Seizing the Italian Mafia’s Most Valuable Asset* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=58mymJRYBHg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58mymJRYBHg)); and in an article by journalist Clare Longrigg in «The Guardian» (Sat. 22, June 2024), [www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/22/these-kids-are-violent-drunk-on-power-can-mafia-children-be-saved-from-a-life-of?CMP](http://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/22/these-kids-are-violent-drunk-on-power-can-mafia-children-be-saved-from-a-life-of?CMP).