



Mafia Republic: Italy's Criminal Curse. Cosa Nostra, 'Ndrangheta and Camorra from 1946 to the Present

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In MAFIA REPUBLIC, John Dickie, Professor of Italian Studies at University College, London and author of the international bestsellers COSA NOSTRA and MAFIA BROTHERHOODS, shows how the Italian mafias have grown in power and become more and more interconnected, with terrifying consequences.

The *Financial Times* described John Dickie's MAFIA BROTHERHOODS as 'Powered by the sort of muscular prose that one associates with great detective fiction' and in MAFIA REPUBLIC John Dickie again marries outstanding scholarship with compelling storytelling.

In 1946, Italy became a democratic Republic, thereby entering the family of modern western nations. But deep within Italy there lurked a forgotten curse: three major criminal brotherhoods, whose methods had been honed over a century of experience. As Italy grew, so did the mafias. Sicily's Cosa Nostra, the camorra from Naples, and the mysterious 'ndrangheta from Calabria stood ready to enter the wealthiest and bloodiest period of their long history.

Italy made itself rich by making scooters, cars and handbags. The mafias carved out their own route to wealth through tobacco smuggling, construction, kidnapping and narcotics. And as criminal business grew exponentially, the mafias grew not just more powerful, but became more interconnected.

By the 1980s, Southern Italy was on the edge of becoming a narco-state. The scene was set for a titanic confrontation between heroic representatives of the law, and mafiosi who could no longer tolerate any obstacle to their ambitions. This was a war for Italy's future as a civilized country. At its peak in 1992-93, the 'ndrangheta was beheading people in the street, and the Sicilian mafia murdered its greatest enemies, investigating magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, before embarking on a major terrorist bombing campaign on the Italian mainland.

Today, the long shadow of mafia history still hangs over a nation wracked by debt, political paralysis, and widespread corruption. While police put their lives on the line every day, one of Silvio Berlusconi's ministers said that Italy had to 'learn to live with the mafia'; suspicions of mafia involvement still surround some of the country's most powerful media moguls and politicians.

The latest investigations show that its reach is astonishing: it controls much of Europe's wholesale cocaine trade, and representatives from as far away as Germany, Canada and Australia come to Calabria to seek authorisation for their affairs.

Just when it thought it had finally contained the mafia threat, Italy is now discovering that it harbours the most global criminal network of them all.

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Shane Kiely says

Very well written & interesting, though I would've liked more of an account of the 'ndrangheta (though the absence of information in this regard is well explained) Best read as a companion piece/sequel to Dickie's previous book Mafia Brotherhoods though it might work just as well in isolation (I didn't read it that way so I couldn't say).

Garvan says

Really very good book . Shocking and chilling. The level of corruption to the upper levels of power is well told.

Vittorio Vandelli says

... a wise traveller should bring this book with him on an Italian holiday and use it as sunscreen while tanning on a gorgeous Sicilian beach.

As I was researching for my book Silvio Berlusconi's Italy: a portrait of the country and its godfather, I stumbled into this thick volume. I had almost involuntarily been dragged into the criminal dark side of Italy since writing about the last twenty years of Italian public life - the Berlusconi Age - meant writing about the permanent mafia-state connections, "a very real deal between the mafia and the state in the founding years of the Italian Republic", as the author puts it.

So, since it is impossible to write about Berlusconi without writing about the Italian mafias, I dived into 'Mafia Republic' and swimming there was a very pleasant, so to speak, activity. First of all professor Dickie has a voice of his own, a narrative style that makes this true crime narrative very fluent, catching and interesting. If reading extensively, the anxiety-generating story of the Italian 'organized crime' gives you a clear general picture; instead, if you are interested in particular aspects and periods, you can also find detailed information on single episodes.

The outsider's look of the author into Italian matters is an advantage: when a qualified tourist visits a place he often sees things the original inhabitants don't see anymore, or pretend not to see. Paradoxically, he sees the mafias everlasting presence in Italian life much clearly than most of my fellow-citizens, of the Italian state and of politicians who has kept denying the presence itself of the mafia or diminished its role repudiating the fact that our three main mafias are crime syndicates, piovras that are a counter-states, organized, efficient and merciless. " ... the mafioso was a typical Sicilian, because this [his] exaggerated pride and self-containment had seeped into the island's psyche as a form of resistance to century of foreign invasions. Therefore, to repress the mafia was inevitably to repress the Sicilian people", write Dickie quoting a 1930s 'negationist' essay.

Since the opening chapter, the author's position is clear: the mafias are "a monstrous insult to the Italian Republic's founding values. The mafias' appalling cruelty is essential to what they are and what they do ...

through violence, and through the many tactics that it makes possible, the mafias corrupt the Republic's democratic institutions, drastically curtail the life-chances of its citizens, evade justice, and set up their own self-interested meddling as an alternative to the courts. ... nothing short of a criminal regime." And, soon afterwards, the key and unique characteristic of the Italian mafiosi is pointed out: "Mafiosi are criminal, and they have always been. But ordinary criminals, however organized they may be, do not have remotely the kind of political friendships that senior mafiosi have always enjoyed. It would be far, far beyond the mental horizon of any common-or-garden crook to try and shape the institutional destiny of his homeland in the way Sicilian mafiosi tried to do after 1943." ... "For over 40 years after the establishment of the Republic, ... the DC [the ruling Christian Democratic party] provided the mafias with their most reliable political friends ... better the mafia than the Communists ...". Better the mafia "than a serious attempt to understand and tackle the island's criminal system of which many of the governing party's key supporters were an integral part... the state and the mafia formed a partnership, in the name of the law" (the paradox is taken from the title of first Italian 'Western' film on the mafia, a 1949 Pietro Germi movie whose phony message is "mafiosi are not criminal ... [they are] an auxiliary police force".

Alas, in the eighties "Sicily, Calabria and Campania stood at risk of becoming narco-regions, swollen empires of graft, nightmarish mockeries of the civilized Europe to which they purported to belong". Here the book approaches its climax: this is the period of the Antimafia Palermo Pool, of Falcone's and Borsellino's activities and slaughters, of the 'Maxi-trial', of the Corleonesi war on state, of the mafia-state negotiation in the early 90s, of the collapse of the first Republic, of the rise of Berlusconi, of its alleged deal with the devil, of its ascent to political power and of the beginning of the second Republic 'in the name of the law', of continuity: when the DC disappeared, wiped away by the 'Clean Hands' investigation on endemic political corruption, 'Forza Italia' was born, ready to carry on.

Since then, the mafias have adopted a "submersion strategy – 'walking with padded shoes', as he [Provenzano] termed it – aimed to keep Cosa Nostra out of the headlines ... Under the Second Republic, the battle against the mafias has been carried on largely in spite of the political system, rather than because of it. The strange thing is that some quite extraordinary successes have been recorded all the same". Indeed, today's Parliament is still the place with the highest criminal density in the country, corruption runs wilder than in the 'Tangentopoli' era and submerged New Deals among politicians and mafiosi are discovered on a daily basis.

In conclusion, this book welcomes you to Italy, land of beauty and corruption, home to Leonardo and the mafia, where the media are not free and a lot of underground knowledge - or counterculture - is needed. We all know too much about our bright sides, from nature to culture, from food 'delizie' to 'made in Italy' stylish manufactures: a wise traveller should bring this book with him on an Italian holiday and use it as sunscreen while tanning on a gorgeous Sicilian beach.

Tom Roth says

Very extensive book. Really good, but often hard to follow because of the enormous amount of information about the different mafias over time and all the different names.

Romilda says

John Dickie demystifies the world of the Cosa Nostra in Mafia Republic. It's a factual depiction of the mafia underworld and it's impact on all levels of society. The stories at times can be quite gruesome which adds to the gravity of the book. The Mafia Republic is truly a state on its own.

Doug Newdick says

An excellent history of organised crime in Italy in the 20th century, *Mafia Republic* combines academic research with impassioned polemic and punchy writing. John Dickie takes you through the origins and evolution of the Cosa Nostra, Camorra and 'Ndrangheta in modern Italy arguing that they are cohesive organisations that have thrived in the spaces left for them by the modern Italian state - both influencing and influenced by the shape of Italian politics, economics and culture. He argues that only in the last few years has Italy become capable of addressing the problem of organised crime, finally overcoming the post-war amnesia regarding the mafia and the cold war societal divisions that the mafia exploited. Read if you are interested in organised crime or Italian history.

Roger says

John Dickie has become something of a Mafia "expert", this being his third book about the subject (the others being Mafia brotherhoods and Cosa Nostra). He writes lucidly and well about the peculiarly Italian mix of culture, criminality and power that is encompassed by the major organised crime societies mentioned in the title.

Originally confined to their own areas of the Peninsula and Sicily, *Mafia Republic* describes how, after World War II, these criminal syndicates expanded their range into Northern Italy and beyond - to the USA, Australia, South America and Asia - via the explosion of money provided by the drug trade. Dickie describes the inter-connection between Cosa Nostra and the political networks in Sicily and how up until the end of the Cold War they both relied on each other to confirm their power. Until the present time, it has been the ability of these Mafia organisations to influence the political arena that have enabled them to lurk "openly in the shadows", and infect nearly all areas of business in Italy.

At the end of the Cold War, when the old certainties no longer applied, and with much more at stake owing to the rivers of gold provided by drug money, the connections that had slowly built up between Cosa Nostra and the Camorra particularly, and between Cosa Nostra and the Government, began to break down. "Warfare" broke out, with no-one being immune to the bullets of the assassins. Salvatore Riina, the Corleonese who murdered his way to power in the 80s, finally went too far when he murdered Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, two of the country's most committed anti-mafia judges. Even the politicians couldn't sweep this under the carpet, and the response was heavily damaging to all the Mafia syndicates. The forces of law and order were helped by the "pentiti", Mafia bosses who started to tell all - Riina's murderous rampage had convinced many that it was safer to talk from a prison cell than stay on the streets.

Dickie's book ties these strands together well, and also shows how the Camorra rose to be a power before splintering into so many criminal gangs, and how it is the 'Ndrangheta has become the major world-wide force in drug trafficking, after a late start and a side-track into kidnapping that did not endear it to its criminal associates.

While this book does not take you into the soul of Sicily in the same way as *Midnight in Sicily*, it is a great one-book introduction into Italian organized crime.

Recommended.

Check out my other reviews at <http://aviewoverthebell.blogspot.com.au/>

Luca Ambrosino says

ITALIANO / ENGLISH (Mafia Republic: Italy's Criminal Curse. Cosa Nostra, 'ndrangheta and Camorra from 1946 to the Present)

Mi sono sempre documentato molto sulla storia della mafia siciliana (Saverio Lodato, Marco Travaglio), abbastanza su quella della camorra napoletana (Roberto Saviano) e poco o niente sulla storia della 'ndrangheta calabrese. Tuttavia sono sempre stato curioso di leggere qualcosa sull'argomento "mafia" scritto da qualcuno che non fosse italiano. Premesso questo, quando ho avuto per le mani "Mafia Republic" dello storico britannico John Dickie (che per di più tratta in egual misura delle tre principali organizzazioni criminali italiane), l'ho comprato *"senza pensier"*.

L'autore ripercorre le vicende principali della criminalità organizzata in Italia a partire dal secondo dopoguerra fino a circa 5 anni fa. Soprattutto nella prima parte della sua narrazione l'autore fa capire quanto sia radicato nel territorio quel sentimento di omertà solidale tale per cui membri di spicco del sistema criminale organizzato, quali Giuseppe Musolino, Serafino Castagna "mostro di Presinaci", Pupetta Maresca 'e lampetielli' (lame guizzanti), assumono l'aspetto di figure quasi mitologiche nell'immaginario collettivo dell'epoca. La credenza popolare riguardo l'origine stessa delle mafie è emblematica. La leggenda narra che tre valorosi fratelli, di nome Osso, Mastrosso e Carcagnosso, cavalieri della Spagna medievale, furono ingiustamente perseguitati per aver vendicato lo stupro della sorella. I fratelli fuggirono a Favignana, un'isola remota al largo della Sicilia, e lì trascorsero anni ad elaborare le regole e i rituali dell'Onorata società, prima di separarsi ed intraprendere strade diverse. Osso andò in Sicilia per fondare *"cosa nostra"*, Mastrosso si recò a Napoli per dare vita alla camorra, e Carcagnosso si stabilì in Calabria per generare la 'ndrangheta.

Devono trascorrere lunghi anni prima che cosa nostra, camorra e 'ndrangheta vengano riconosciute come realtà criminose esistenti sul territorio italiano. Tra tutti gli oramai ben noti elementi distintivi delle mafie in Italia, come la corruzione, lo stragismo, l'omertà, l'imposizione coatta della propria volontà sulle istituzioni, ha attirato la mia attenzione un'aspetto che stupidamente ignoravo: la coalizione tra membri di mafie distinte.

"Gradualmente, l'Italia meridionale stava sviluppando un sistema criminale molto più coeso che in passato. I membri delle tre mafie storiche dell'Italia hanno sempre avuto contatti reciproci, soprattutto per il tramite del sistema carcerario. Ma dagli anni Sessanta in poi i casi di doppia e perfino di tripla affiliazione diventarono sempre più comuni."

Sì, perché dagli anni Sessanta in poi lo Stato italiano, con il dichiarato scopo di arginare il fenomeno in base al quale ex-detenuti sistematicamente rientravano nel giro criminoso subito dopo aver scontata la loro pena, introdusse una legge che "confinava" i membri di organizzazioni criminali al di fuori del loro territorio. Ed ecco che affiliati siciliani venivano confinati nel territorio campano, che negli anni sessanta si riteneva essere oramai sicuro e bonificato dalle organizzazioni criminali, per favorirne un sano reintegro nella vita sociale. Questo è qualcosa di spaventoso. Uno dei punti di forza, e allo stesso tempo debolezza, delle organizzazioni criminali in Italia era stata la forte radicalizzazione nel territorio di appartenenza. Tuttavia, un provvedimento scellerato dello Stato ha allargato i confini delle mafie, rendendo possibile "un'alleanza delle alleanze". Lo Stato non si accontentava di avere tre grossi cancri, ora ne permetteva la diffusione in metastasi

sull'intero territorio italiano e nel cuore delle amministrazioni.

Se volete avere una visione storica globale sulle mafie principali che hanno operato e che operano tuttora in Italia, questo testo è un'ottima scelta, fidatevi.

State senza pensier'.

Voto: 8

I read a lot about the history of the sicilian mafia, named *cosa nostra* (Saverio Lodato, Marco Travaglio), enough about that of neapolitan camorra (Roberto Saviano) but nothing about the calabrian 'ndrangheta. However, I was curious to read something about the "mafia" topic that was written by someone who was not Italian. That said, when I was in a store and I saw "Mafia Republic", written by the british historian John Dickie, who deals with the three main italian criminal organizations, I bought it without hesitation.

The author recalls the main events of organised crime in Italy from the second post-war period up to about 5 years ago. Particularly in the first part of his narrative, the author let us understand how the code of silence is deeply rooted in the italian territory, and this is why prominent members of the organised criminal system, such as Giuseppe Musolino, the "Presinaci monster" Serafino Castagna, and Pupetta Maresca 'e lampetielli' (flicking blades), take the form of mythological figure in the collective imagination of that time. The popular belief about the birth of the mafias is emblematic. The legend says that three brave brothers, named Osso, Mastrosso and Carcagnosso, knights in the medieval Spain, were unjustly persecuted for revenging their sister's rape. The brothers fled to Favignana, a remote island off Sicily. They spent years working out the rules and rituals of the "Honorable Society" before separating and taking different paths. Osso went to Sicily to found cosa nostra, Mastrosso went to Naples to give birth to the camorra, and Carcagnosso settled in Calabria to create the 'ndrangheta.

A lot of years should pass before that cosa nostra, camorra and 'ndrangheta are recognized as criminals realities in the italian territory. Among all the well-known distinctive features of mafias in Italy, such as corruption, brutal massacres, the code of silence, imposition of their will on the institutions, an aspect in particular attracted my attention: the coalition between members of distinct mafias.

"Gradually, a much more cohesive criminal system than in the past was developing in the southern Italy. The members of the three historical mafias always had mutual contact, especially through the prison system. But from the sixties onwards, cases of double and even triple affiliation became increasingly common."

From the 1960s onwards, with the aim of restraining the phenomenon that previous condemned people systematically fell into their criminal environment, the Italian State introduced a law that "confined" members of criminal organizations outside of their territory. We can see that, in order to promote their reintegration into social life, sicilian affiliates started to be confined within Campania territory, the historical region of camorra, which in the 1960s was wrongly considered to be safe and free from criminal organizations. This is something scary. One of the strengths, and at the same time weakness, of criminal organizations in Italy had been the strong rooting to their territory. However, a harmful law widened the mafia borders, making an "alliance of alliances" possible. The government was not satisfied with having three major cancers: it was allowing to spread them like metastasis across the entire italian territory and administrations.

If you want to have a global historical view of the main criminal organizations that lived and still live in Italy, this work is a great choice, trust me.

State senza pensier'.

Vote: 8
