



Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia: A History of the Sicilian Mafia

John Dickie

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Cosa Nostra is the compelling story of the Sicilian mafia, the world's most famous, most secretive and most misunderstood criminal fraternity. The mafia has been given many names since it was founded one hundred and forty years ago: the Sect, the Brotherhood, the Honoured Society, and now Cosa Nostra. Yet as times have changed, the mafia's subtle and bloody methods have remained the same. Now, for the first time, "Cosa Nostra" reconstructs the complete history of the Sicilian mafia from its origins to the present day, from the lemon groves and sulphur mines of Sicily, to the streets of Manhattan. "Cosa Nostra" is a definitive history, rich in atmosphere, and with the narrative pace of the best detective fiction, and has been updated to make it the most vital contemporary account of the mafia ever published. The mob genre has finally grown up.

Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia: A History of the Sicilian Mafia Details

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From Reader Review Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia: A History of the Sicilian Mafia for online ebook

Sergio says

Un estudio de la Mafia en profundidad desde su inicio a mediados del siglo XIX que resulta ameno y sorprendentemente didáctico, sobre todo para esclarecer como es posible que una organización así haya sobrevivido tanto tiempo y con tanto poder favorecida por la negación y muchas veces colaboración del poder judicial y la clase dirigente italiana.

Necesario aclarar que el libro es literalmente lo que se describe y quien busque la historia de la versión estadounidense y sus capos se va a ver muy decepcionado pues apenas se trata en un capítulo y ocasionalmente con sus tratos con los partientes en Italia. Esto es la Mafia original, su parasitismo en Sicilia y un intento de explicar cómo ha podido llegar a solaparse con la idea que tiene de sí mismo un pueblo. Ay, qué harto he acabado de la "cavalleria rusticana" y las excusitas.

Andrew says

True Crime is my guilty pleasure; the majority of what I read is sensationalist tripe; but I do love it so. My ex wife refers to it as 'dick-lit'

This on the other hand is a well researched, bona fide history book coupled with all the joys and readability of a good thriller. It looks at the Sicilian mafia from it's inception right up to the modern day. Some of these Sicilian guys make Jon Gotti look like a choir boy and think nothing of assassinating High Court Judges or Politicians; riveting stuff.

Tony Gualtieri says

The sad history of western Sicily and the corruption that has prevented this beautiful land from thriving. Blessed with all the gifts of the Mediterranean, Sicily has been held hostage by the graft and cruelty of its "Men of Honor." This book gives an easy-to-read narrative from the Mafia's origins in the early 19th century up to the first year's of the 21st. An interesting book that is ultimately frustrating in recounting the fatalism that has sustained these criminals for such a long period.

Wesley Gerrard says

This is a study on the notorious criminal organisation the Sicilian Mafia - Cosa Nostra - Over the years, Cosa Nostra has become an alternative source of political power in the Southern Italian island. The reach of this criminal organisation has spread its tentacles across the globe, becoming a feared and respected multinational criminal organisation. From more humble roots in dealing with cattle rustling, the Cosa Nostra moved into more traditional mafia activities such as protection rackets and later made very heavy profits in drug

smuggling. The Cosa Nostra is a difficult theme to research due to the clandestine nature of its activities. It is a secret brotherhood and we learn of its hierarchy and organisation plus its almost religious like entry rituals. It can be bloodthirsty and strict and its internal discipline is its means of maintaining its power. It is in effect a tandem organisation to State power in Italy and its members, even on the run - are able to live clandestinely with few problems. The links between Cosa Nostra and the American Mafia was interesting - Joe Bananas a figure that bridged the gap between both worlds. The two mafia wars of the Twentieth century were bloody and Cosa Nostra resorted to terrorism in its fight amongst itself and also with the state. There has been a very damaging emergence of Pentiti who are whistleblowers who reveal to the authorities the crimes of former colleagues in exchange for immunity or freedom. The Cosa Nostra was brought to the brink of destruction by some of these treacherous characters. The Maxi-Trial led by antimafia judges such as Falcone caused much devastation and meant a change in strategy, leadership and tactics. Falcone ended up suffering a gruesome death, a fate shared by very many enemies of Cosa Nostra. It was interesting seeing some of the dirty political dealings that many leading Italian political figures have with Cosa Nostra, including well known long term President Silvio Berlusconi. The research for this book was often second hand, relying on preceding authors and also details could often be fussy due to a lot of the knowledge of structure of the organisation and its activities come from Pentiti who often are less than reliable sources due to their own bias. I felt that it was an interesting and enlightening study although towards the end of the book the author's clear antimafia stance became a little annoying as I felt could have been more subjective and perhaps focussed too much on the Crime aspect of Cosa Nostra and lacked respect in terms of seeing it as a perhaps positive force in much of what it does.

Tyas says

I've just got the updated version. This is the most authoritative book on the Sicilian Mafia available in English.

The following here is my Indonesian review on the book, first posted in another site :

Tentunya ingatan akan trilogi The Godfather belum lekang dari ingatan kita. Trilogi tentang mafia yang banyak dipuja-puji di seluruh belahan dunia itu, ternyata disambut dingin di Italia. Banyak yang mengatakan bahwa yang dijabarkan film itu tentang mafia – terutama ketika menyangkut Sisilia – tidaklah akurat.

Akan tetapi, Tommaso Buscetta ternyata cukup menyenangi film tersebut. Hanya saja ada adegan yang dianggapnya berlebihan dan tidak realistis, yaitu ketika para mafiosi mencium tangan Don Corleone.

Siapakah Buscetta? Dia adalah seorang pentito (jamak: pentiti), anggota mafia yang berbalik menjadi informan polisi. Kesaksiannya merupakan salah satu sumber paling berharga mengenai mafia saat ini. Sebelum Buscetta, yang dijuluki 'bos dua dunia', sebenarnya sudah banyak pentiti lain. Sayangnya, mereka tidak dianggap serius. Kesaksian-kesaksian mereka berlalu bagai angin, dan banyak orang yang tak mau percaya bahwa mafia adalah sebuah organisasi kejahatan rahasia. Banyak yang lebih percaya bahwa mafia hanyalah sekadar semacam 'cara berpikir' ataupun 'perilaku' orang Sisilia. Baru beberapa tahun belakangan ide mafia sebagai suatu kelompok terorganisasi benar-benar diterima masyarakat. Namun, saat itu sudah terlambat. Kuku-kuku mafia telah tajam menghujam tidak saja Sisilia, tapi Italia. Telah terlalu banyak korban jatuh, baik dari kalangan mafia sendiri, para penegak hukum, maupun masyarakat biasa.

Sekarang ini kita sendiri menggunakan istilah 'mafia' dengan amat longgar. Gerombolan penjahat terorganisasi apa pun sering kita sebut 'mafia'. Di Indonesia saja, sering kita dengar istilah 'mafia peradilan'. Namun menurut John Dickie, penulis buku Cosa Nostra yang meraih penghargaan 2004 CWA Gold Dagger

for Non-Fiction, istilah ‘mafia’ sebenarnya hanya bisa digunakan untuk menyebut Cosa Nostra, organisasi kejahatan Sisilia. Kelompok-kelompok lain yang sering disebut ‘mafia’ juga adalah ‘Ndrangheta (di Calabria), Camorra (di Napoli), dan Sacra Corona Unita (Puglia). Istilah ‘mafia’ juga harus dibedakan dari ‘bandit’. Mafia mengenal ‘omerta’ (kode moral anggota mafia; asal suku katanya adalah ‘umirtu’, rasa malu) dan kerap disebut ‘men of honour’. Terasa ironis memang karena mungkin kita tak bisa membayangkan seorang ‘man of honour’ membunuh anak kecil dan melarutkan jenazahnya dalam larutan asam, seperti yang dilakukan oleh Giovanni ‘lo scannacristiani’ Brusca, salah satu dedengkot mafia terbesar di pengujung abad ke-20.

Dickie juga menyanggah teori bahwa mafia adalah warisan kuno kebudayaan Sisilia. Kalau Anda pernah membaca serial Master Keaton, misalnya, di situ dipaparkan teori yang cukup lama dipercayai tentang mafia, bahwa mafia lahir dari gerakan kaum miskin dan tertindas Sisilia melawan para penjajah Prancis berabad-abad silam. Dickie justru membuktikan bahwa mafia adalah gerakan modern – baru lahir di abad ke-19 – yang berlatar belakang masalah persaingan bisnis di daerah perkebunan kaya di Sisilia. Mafia Sisilia pula yang ‘melahirkan’ mafia AS yang justru lebih dikenal dunia berkat tokoh-tokoh semacam Al Capone, Lucky Luciano, ataupun John Gotti. Akan tetapi, dalam perkembangannya, kedua ‘cabang’ mafia yang terpisah samudra itu menjadi berbeda dalam banyak hal. Giovanni Brusca, misalnya, merasa malu sendiri ketika mengunjungi mafia AS di New Jersey. Ia terperangah melihat betapa saling terbukanya mafia di AS dan betapa membunuh bagi mafia AS hanyalah suatu keterpaksaan jika tak ada cara lain yang bisa ditempuh.

Dickie menegaskan bahwa mafia memang harus diberantas, tapi ia juga menegaskan betapa sulitnya menghadapi mafia yang seperti sudah mendarah-daging di Italia. Mereka mencengkeram politik, ekonomi, bahkan sepak bola. Dan para mafia memang seolah hidup di dunia mereka sendiri, dunia yang sulit kita mengerti karena cara berpikir dan nilai-nilai moral kita yang berbeda dengan mereka. Misalnya saja, bagi para mafia, pembunuhan adalah pekerjaan (bahkan kewajiban) bermartabat, tapi jangan berani-berani tidur dengan istri sesama mafia – itu adalah kesalahan besar, noda bagi seseorang, sama seperti menjadi seorang homoseksual (seperti penuturan putra John Gotti, mantan pemimpin mafia paling berpengaruh di New York) ataupun menjadi germo. Dalam konteks inilah kita mengerti mengapa Bruschetta bisa memaafkan seorang pentito lain yang telah membunuh dua putra Bruschetta – karena ia sendiri pernah dan tahu benar bagaimana rasanya menjadi anggota mafia.

Masih banyak lagi hal mengenai mafia dan sejarahnya yang diceritakan Dickie. Detail-detail yang dijabarkannya – mulai dari ritual inisiasi mafia sampai la mattanza, perang mafia kedua yang kejam dan memakan korban lebih dari 200 orang di tahun 1980-an – kerap kali membuat bergidik sekaligus memicu adrenalin. (Tidak heran kalau sampai ada orang yang terinspirasi membuat film dari buku ini!) Cara bertuturnya enak dan lancar. Informasi yang dijabarkannya padat dan sangat ‘mencerahkan’ – rasa-rasanya kita takkan bisa mengaku-aku tahu tentang mafia kalau belum membaca buku ini, yang merupakan buku otoritatif pertama dalam bahasa Inggris mengenai mafia.

Dan karenanya, saya rasa pantas jika buku ini saya beri nilai 5/5.

Mari Biella says

The word ‘mafia’ is known to everyone; and yet not many people have a very clear idea of what it is. Mention the mafia, and most people probably think of the American Mafia (though this is in fact an offshoot of a decidedly Sicilian tree), or a scene from *The Godfather*. The truth, as John Dickie shows in this excellent account, is both more interesting, and more complicated and harrowing, than fiction.

Nobody knows quite when or how the mafia came into being; even the origin of the name is now hopelessly lost and obscure. Mafiosi themselves tend to use the name 'Cosa Nostra' – 'our thing'. The organisation owes much, perhaps, to Sicily's unique history. This small island, situated in the middle of the Mediterranean, barely a stone's throw from the Italian mainland and yet very different to the remainder of the peninsula, has been conquered by Greeks, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, and the French. Some of these colonial powers were more forbearing than others, but ordinary Sicilians rarely benefited from their rule. Distrust of the state, and the conviction that an honourable man sorts out his own problems and avenges insults and injuries on his own initiative, was and is widespread. Strange as it may sound, honour – albeit of the kind that few outsiders would recognise – is written into the mafia's DNA.

The mafia seems always to have existed on two levels. On one level, it is hidden and mysterious, a substratum that only its members know of or understand. Crime – fraud, drug-trafficking, money-laundering, protection rackets – is its *raison d'être*. On another level, however, it rises up into the mainstream and infiltrates politics, law enforcement, the judiciary, the Church. As the author says, Cosa Nostra 'is a shadow state, a political body that sometimes opposes, sometimes subverts, and sometimes dwells within the body of the legal government.' (Of course, and as it's only fair to point out, there have also been politicians, policemen, judges and priests who have courageously taken a stand against the mafia, and have paid dearly for it.)

There have been many attempts to deal with the mafia, none of which have been entirely successful. Mussolini launched a war against Cosa Nostra, perhaps motivated by an incident that occurred when he visited Palermo and the mayor (a Mafioso) gestured at his bodyguards and said, 'You are with me, you are under my protection. What do you need all these cops for?' The implication was clear: here, the mafia were in control. The *duce* did not take kindly to such a statement, and under his regime the mafia seemed to be in retreat – only to advance again in the post-war era. In the 1980s, in the aftermath of the brutal Mafia Wars, a determined effort to overcome the mafia was launched by magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, and led in time to the Maxi Trial, in which 342 mafiosi were convicted. The mafia response was swift and brutal: Falcone, Borsellino and many others were killed, which in turn led to a wave of public revulsion.

Which leads us neatly to the present situation, insofar as it can be understood. The *Pax mafiosa*, ironic as the name may sound, is in place, and the days of car bombs and public shootings seem to be over, at least for now. Brutality continues ('I filled a cemetery all by myself,' new capo Matteo Messina Denaro has reportedly claimed), but it does so in private and out of sight. The modern mafia have grasped one of the more elemental, and odd, rules of postmodern society: that which does not exist in the media can be said, in a certain sense, not to exist at all.

What of the future? This versatile organisation, deeply embedded in the structure of Sicilian society, probably isn't going anywhere fast. It may change and adapt, but it will almost certainly continue – for the time being. 'The mafia of Sicily pursues money and power by cultivating the art of killing people and getting away with it,' Dickie states. That, at least – sadly – is unlikely to change any time soon.

Imani says

Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia tells the story of the Sicilian Mafia from creation to somewhat end..??

While it was an informative novel, there was just too much information; so many names, dates, and stories that it was hard to keep up. I am thankful that I had my professor to help guide me in what he wanted me to learn because I would have been lost.

John Dickie did a good job by giving you all of the facts about the mafia, but I wouldn't suggest this if you are looking for something concrete because it seems like Dickie goes all over the place, jumping from year to year and story to story.

It was still good, but beware of all the information that will be thrown at you.

Alexandra says

Mammamia!!!! Da habe ich mich so auf dieses Buch gefreut, denn seit dem Tod Falcones habe ich mich mit dem Thema nicht mehr ausführlich beschäftigt und ich wollte nach dem Film "Il divo" wieder mal Up to date im Who is Who der Mörder, Wirtschaftsverbrecher und honorigen Leute sein.

Nach 150 Seiten musste ich das Buch vorerst mal weglegen. Wie kann man derart langweilig über ein so spannendes Thema schreiben und dann auch noch die Wiederholungen, die Unübersichtlichkeit.....grauslich!!! - Ich bin in der historischen Mafia steckengeblieben und noch gar nicht zur Gegenwart bzw. zu jenen Kapiteln der 80er und 90er Jahre, in denen ich mich gut auskenne, vorgedrungen. Vielleicht wird es ja noch besser.

Irgendwie scheint dieses Buch sich selbst zu verlieren beim Anspruch wirklich historisch korrekt alle komplexen Zusammenhänge immer und immer wieder zu kauen. Dass so ein Thema nicht einfach ist, sei unbestritten, aber dass eine gute Aufarbeitung möglich ist, sieht man an David A. Yallop, der die sicher genauso komplizierten wirtschaftlichen Zusammenhänge zwischen Finanz, Kirche und Mafia in den 80er Jahren sowohl genau und komplex als auch spannend erzählt hat.

Deshalb verstehe ich die euphorischen Rezensionen von Tagesspiegel, Süddeutscher Zeitung und Welt am Sonntag überhaupt nicht. Aber vielleicht wirds noch besser (habe ich schon zum zweiten Mal geschrieben ist das eine Beschwörung?).

Auf jeden Fall gilt das Zitat auf der ersten Seite nicht: Dickie mag ja sicher ein guter Historiker sein, aber auf keinen Fall ein gewandter Erzähler!!

Kiragu says

To say Cosa Nostra is well done is not enough. We are talking about tracing Mafia in the late 1800s in Sicily, its exportation to America in the early 1900s and its development since. You will not find the climax of Mario Puzo's The Godfather because Cosa Nostra is a chronological trace. John Dickie may have set out to educate through his book and not to thrill. However a story of mafiosi and mafioso will always be a tale of excitement.

The lowlight is that Dickie touches much of much which means the book needs more pages if it's to tell the story of mafia in detail. A reader feels that the writer is in a hurry to fill 150 years of mafiosi activity in a few

chapters.

I do congratulate Dickie for his research and his excellence in remaining neutral. I'm educated on the History of mafia and will definitely be out looking for more of Dickie.

Christopher Ashley says

surprisingly thorough and readable history of the mafia in sicily. shame they had to blow up all those fiat 500s.

Panos Maris says

A comprehensive and telling account of the mafia, this book takes effort in targeting the exact inception of this vague and shadowy group. It's also a slap to the face to all my Italian peers who attribute mafiosi behavior to the mainland, when clearly it originated amongst their islander counterpart. Any historian who appreciates meticulous writing will surely find wealth in this accurate but often grotesque text.

Lupo says

"Come sempre, le vicende della mafia sollevano interrogativi che riguardano l'Italia ne suo insieme". Questa frase, a pag. 300, demolisce ogni possibile illusione che in Italia ci sia parte del potere realmente immune da contaminazioni mafiose. E anche grande parte del mondo civile e produttivo. E' esemplare la vicenda di Giulio Andreotti, sette volte presidente del consiglio, senatore a vita e candidato alla presidenza della Repubblica, che ha, secondo la magistratura, collaborato con la mafia fino al 1980. La famosa "assoluzione" di Andreotti fu infatti una semplice prescrizione, visto che i reati di cui era colpevole, come dice la sentenza, sono prescritti. Non innocente, prescritto.

Questa mia introduzione per dire che riesce difficile rimanere saldi dopo aver letto questo libro. la vicenda di Andreotti mi era ben nota, come anche altre complicità tra politica e mafia, ma la descrizione precisa di come mafia e stato abbiano collaborato e come l'ultimo fosse permeato dalla prima già nel 1876 (milleottocentosettantasei) fa vacillare ogni residuale amore verso questo paese.

Il libro è scritto molto bene, si legge come fosse un giallo, anche laddove i fatti sono noti al lettore. Dickie non induce certo mai in condanne di ambienti e Paese, rende chiaro che non certo tutti i Siciliani e gli Italiani sono mafiosi e tanti hanno cercato di combatterla. Il problema è che i tanti avevano da combattere anche contro lo stato, coscienti o no di questa alleanza che ha schiacciato il paese, e la Sicilia in particolare, dalla nascita del Regno d'Italia. Ma lo Stato siamo anche tutti noi.

Dickie cita buoni libri italiani sulla storia della mafia, ma fa notare che storia sulla mafia in italiano ne è stata scritta solo dopo la morte di Falcone e Borsellino, avvenuta oltre cento anni dopo la nascita della mafia.

Insomma, con stile ci dice che abbiamo capito poco o non abbiamo voluto capire bene il fenomeno mafioso fino a quando non ce lo ha fatto capire Falcone, e questa è una colpa.

Da mettere nei programmi di maturità.

Ruth says

My big question is this: what made Giovanni Falcone and Paulo Borsellino (both born and bred in Palermo) become heroic fighters for justice when others born in the same time and place turned to violent crime? Who lit that spark? Where did they get such courage from? The courage to continue on a path even though they knew it would lead to a violent death.

This is a fabulous book: a detailed account of the development of a criminal organisation from early 19th century to 2006 (the capture of Bernardo 'The Tractor' Provenzano). Dickie is at pains to explain that Cosa Nostra is not some vague Sicilian tendency towards vendetta. It is a carefully organised structure with clear membership processes.

So what are mafiosi? They are 'entrepreneurs in violence.' Dickie quotes Franchetti: "[in the violence industry] the mafia boss...acts as capitalist, impresario and manager...he regulates the way labour and duties are divided out...Discipline is indispensable in this as in any other industry if abundant and constant profits are to be obtained. It is the mafia boss's job to judge from circumstances whether the acts of violence should be suspended for a while, or multiplied and made fiercer. He has to adapt to market conditions to choose which operations to carry out, which people to exploit, which form of violence to use."

That sounds like a description of Tony Soprano; it was published in 1877. Yes, 1877! What sort of blind amnesia does Italy suffer from? And Dickie is absolutely clear: this secret society based on violence has not melted away.

Gerald Sinstadt says

Prefacing Dickie's masterly history is a lengthy disclaimer that can only have been written by the publisher's lawyers. The caution is understandable. Dickie names names by the hundreds, many of them linked to crimes of extortion and murder.

From its origins in the 1860's up to the Berlusconi (nothing alleged in his case) era, Dickie portrays the Sicilian Mafia as an organisation that has structure but no overall shape. Mafioso, he argues, is a state of mind. But there are initiation ceremonies, and once enrolled there can be no resigning.

The author has clearly immersed himself in his subject. He leaves no room for ambiguity about the Mafia's links with politicians of every faction, not excluding those at the very top. He identifies missed opportunities for destroying the brotherhood, leaving little doubt that the problem persists to this day.

Leslievenson says

Pass me the pasta
