

Critical Review

SAVIANO, Roberto (2008). *Gomorra. Infiltrado no Império Económico da Máfia Napolitana*, Caderno, 2008, Lisboa, 3ª. Ed.: 351 pp

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Organized crime is, currently, the number one threat on the planet. In Italy, the fourth economic power in the EU, the amount of business from organized crime is only surpassed by the total amount from public companies. According to the General Confederation of Italian Commerce, two thirds of the wealth generated by underground economy derives from criminal activities. Mafia interests control 20% of commercial companies and 15% of manufacturing industries, which represents 15% of the GDP (nearly 900 billion euros in 2000). The combined assets of the different mafias were in excess of 5.5 billion euros, somewhere between 6% and 7% of the total Italian national wealth available.¹

Countless publications about "the mafias" followed the assassination of the Kennedy brothers, who knew and fought organized crime. Some were well documented and/or with many references, and others were the result of great courage.² These and other qualities characterize the much-prized book by Robert Saviano, which we review in this text. The author was born in 1979, in Naples, territory of the "Camorra", and Europe's criminal organization with the largest number of members.³ Saviano has a degree in philosophy and is a journalist and organized crime investigator specialized in the Camorra. He is the son of a doctor who, during his youth, worked in ambulance service in an area where, on average, five people die daily. In an unpretentious text, rich in description, he shares documented facts, experienced and collected in the land of clans, where the modern law theory was subverted, where no one can stand against the

¹ FURET, F. (2003). "Economie de la Cosa Nostra", *Banc Public*, 116, January (<http://www.bancpublic.be>).

² TAPIA, René (2003). "Corrupção e crime organizado". In *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Portuguese edition, June: 2.

³ In the South American country where the author of these lines was born, slang borrows many words from different languages (the native language is expanded by words of different origins brought in by early immigrants) and "camorra" means a heated argument. "Armar camorra" (cause camorra) means to provoke a fight.



camorra (275-76).⁴ His memories of his father help us understand his moral commitment, his need to understand the economic and financial mechanisms of clan affirmation as an entrepreneurial organization that produces wealth through bloodshed and grows through a philosophy of fear (350-51). It is a system where homicide is a must (273).

His first memory, which he only later understood, is a dialogue he had with his father, when the latter explained that between a doctor and a philosopher, it is the doctor who may make decisions regarding peoples' lives, decide whether to save them or not, do good when he has the opportunity to do bad. "True good is when we have the opportunity to do bad, but choose to do good" (202). He only understood that conversation when he heard the story in the second memory, which he was told many times over: When an ambulance arrived and the wounded person was on the ground but the police had not yet arrived at the scene, they could not move him because if the news would spread, the *killer*⁵ would come back, jump in the ambulance and finish the job (202). Once, his father found a young man dying and against his colleagues' opinion ("Let's wait. They will show up, finish their job, and then we take him": 203), transported him to the hospital where he was saved. That night the *killer* went to his father's home and beat him up so badly that for a couple of months he could not go out in public. "Maybe that is, in part, the reason why I graduated in philosophy, so I would not have to decide in place of someone else" (id.).

The camorra is back in existence after years of silence (115). Under these circumstances, Raufer had to learn "the trade of living" (185)⁶ and decided to understand how this criminal entrepreneurial system that "generates the majority of the nation's economy" emerged in the "heart of Europe". With a multilevel entrepreneurial design (226), it manages to turn 500% profits (79) and, from drug trafficking alone, can generate five hundred thousand euros a day (137).⁷ In chapters of great objectivity, although not devoid of emotion, the author tells us about specific circumstances in the region which combine with current historic circumstances of world change and the emergence of new phenomena and processes, to determine these "retrieval strategies".

First, there is the logistic network of the international commerce of *haute couture* textiles (a worldwide commercial network, from the production to the *outlet* market where drugs often circulate (53-58);⁸ then, its connections with the other mafias which work as privileged intermediaries in the drug business;⁹ next, the unpredictable 1980 earthquake, which provided it with an opportunity to get rich through the appropriation of reconstruction funds,¹⁰ such as the funds for the construction of a new highway; these facts coincided with the fall of the eastern European regimes which the Camorra

⁴ In chilling pages, he tells how those who oppose the mafia's designs, such as journalists who defy pressures, mayors who oppose its control of public works or sanitation, and even clergymen who denounce it, are vilified, assassinated, and even cut up so that their bodies will not be found. There is also the case of a *mafioso* who contracted AIDS and is assassinated "so that he won't infect the daughters of any Camorra families" (323).

⁵ Slang in Italic in the original.

⁶ "Three thousand and six hundred dead since I was born (1979). The camorra has killed more than the Sicilian mafia, more than the 'ndrangheta, more than the Russian mafia, more than the Albanian families, more than the total numbers of deaths caused by the ETA in Spain and the IRA in Ireland, more than the Red Brigades, more than the RAN (Revolutionary Armed Nuclei, radical right wing groups), and more than all the victims of State that took place in Italy. Camorra has killed more than any other..." (145)

⁷ "There is not a single drug introduced in Europe than does not go through the Secondigliano market" (83).

⁸ Near the beginning of the text he shares a moving episode of his visit to the home of a tailor, who worked for the mafia for a salary of six hundred euros per month, when the tailor sees on the television an American actress during the Oscars wearing an outfit sewn by him.

⁹ "In alliance with Nigerian and Albanian clans and Ukrainian Mafiosi "(226) "in a position to establish a direct alliance with South-African cartels" (73)

¹⁰ "The 1980 earthquake destroyed the Valle di Lauro and the flow of one hundred million lira for reconstruction gave rise to an entrepreneurial Camorra bourgeoisie" (175).



initially served as intermediary, later as praetorian guard, to finally take over their arsenals.¹¹

It is an economic supremacy that does not derive directly from criminal activity, but rather from the ability to balance illicit and legitimate capital (242) "... involving a lower middle class removed from the mechanisms of crime but tired of entrusting its wealth to the banking industry" (68),¹² which runs into chronic unemployment and a total lack of social growth projects" (5) and work as employees in the organization that protects them, though without knowing who directs them. We are shown an example of the building of a mafia clan, with all its international, legal, and illicit criminal limitations (228): By killing Mário Iovine in Cascais, Portugal, in 1991... Casale's Camorra became a multipurpose enterprise... with conditions to participate in all businesses (investing) the amount of illegally obtained capital... Concrete, drug trafficking, racketeering, transportation, sanitation services, and the monopoly of commerce and supplying by imposition". It is, we may add, "one of the most flourishing intercontinental trafficking ventures that crime history has ever witnessed. From China, the clans transport and distribute several products in Europe: digital photo and video cameras, construction equipment and supplies, name brands like Bosch, Hammer, Hilti..." (59). In short, it is "a violent and fierce bourgeoisie that finds in the clan its most powerful and fierce forefront. (221).¹³

¹¹ "As soon as the socialist curtain fell, the camorra met with the leaders of the dissolving communist parties...Aware of their crisis, the clans informally acquired entire arsenals of weapons from eastern States - Romania, Poland, former Yugoslavia - paying for many years the expenses of guards, security personnel, and officers in charge of maintenance of military resources. In short, the clans secured part of the defense of those countries. In the end, the best way to hide weapons is to keep them in the barracks. So, for years, the bosses had as reference, not the weapons black market, but the complete arsenal of eastern European armies at their disposal" (191). "The weapons issue remains hidden deep in the guts of economy, locked in a pancreas of silence. Italy spends twenty seven million dollars. It is the 8th largest budget in the world R.T.). This is more than Russia, twice as much as Israel (...) three thousand and three hundred millions is the amount of weapons business in the hands of the Camorra, 'ndrangheta, Cosa Nostra, and Sacra Corona Unita (217).

¹² The new Camorra bourgeoisie of Casale transformed the extortion business in a sort of additional service, a participation in a racket initiated by the Camorra. Paying a monthly fee to the clan may entail exclusively funding their businesses, but at the same time it may include receiving economic protection with the bank sector, trucks being on time, or the service of respectable commercial agents. The racket works as a purchase of imposed services" (60)

¹³ "Investigations were increasingly leading to the repossession of the assets when Dante Passarelli was found dead in November 2004. ... With his death, the assets that would have gone to the State were returned to the family...Clans do not allow mistakes " (246).



Karl Max reduced the fundamental tools for acquisition of primitive capital to "money and violence" (Book 1, chapter 24, paragraph 6 of "Capital". He was referring to the State in the origins of capitalism. In this era of systemic crisis,¹⁴ when "the old one has yet not died and the new one is still unborn"(Gramsci), mafias do not replace the governments, they run parallel to them and gather the tools necessary to the "accumulation of great capital" (309)¹⁵where "ferocity is the real value of commerce: renouncing it means losing everything" (30). These days, when we begin to witness talk of corruption,¹⁶ texts of great factual and analytical richness such as the one we introduce, are both useful and necessary. To oppose barbarity requires more than the "courage of truth" Hegel referred to. Robert Saviano lives in hiding, under police protection.

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¹⁴ "Everything had changed in the past few years. Everything. Unexpectedly. Suddenly"(26).

¹⁵ "The business volume managed by the Schiavone family amounts to five thousand million euros. The total economic power of the Casalesi family, including real estate, land, stocks, cash flow, construction companies, sugar factories, cement industry, usury, and traffic of drugs and weapons, is about thirty thousand million euros", 229).

¹⁶ The example of waste dumps and toxic waste management as a mafia business, and the mafia's relationship with politicians, public service employees, the entrepreneur and unemployed graduates serving as environmental experts, is a classic one.