

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Lo Stato illegale. Mafia e politica da Portella della Ginestra a oggi**, by GIAN CARLO CASELLI and GUIDO LO FORTE, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2020, 208pp., €18.00 (paperback), ISBN 9788858136898

Italy's history and collective memory have always been linked to the history of mafia organisations, especially the Sicilian Cosa Nostra. Thirty years after the bombings of Capaci and via D'Amelio in 1992, where the judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino were killed in attacks orchestrated by Cosa Nostra, we are still left with questions; we also have doubts about the other terror-like attacks that Cosa Nostra inflicted on the Italian state in 1993 in Florence, Rome and Milan. On the one hand, the state's reaction to those events was fierce, with strong judicial and police activities in the 1990s/2000s that severely maimed Cosa Nostra. On the other hand, however, 30 years down the line, Italy is still struggling to manage the mafia presence, as even more insidious forms of mafia power have emerged – a contradiction that should push Italians to ask questions about and demand scrutiny of the controversial history of Italy and mafia organisations.

The two former antimafia judges, Gian Carlo Caselli and Guido Lo Forte, the authors of *Lo Stato Illegale (The Illegal State)* have built their careers on the back of the state's fight against criminal powers in Sicily and elsewhere in Italy; they put this contradiction at the core of their book, which focuses on the judicial and social history of Cosa Nostra.

The book is structured as a homage to memory and history, and in so doing it takes an almost encyclopaedic approach to Cosa Nostra, its past, its present, and its characteristics. More specifically the book aims to reconstruct both the judicial history of the Sicilian mafia since the aftermath of the Second World War and the most recent events that have seen the courts identify new and subtler interpretations of mafia methods and power in the peninsula. Important names and important cases populate the various topics covered. In fact, the authors make a specific choice to look at the 'political' aspects of the mafia organisation. The various chapters take the reader through the trials that have signalled not only the connivance of political figures and parties with Cosa Nostra, but also those trials that specifically demonstrate the ability of Cosa Nostra to build and exploit an extensive network of external relations, which ultimately constitute its enduring force.

Cases that are covered in the first chapter of this book range from the trials of Giulio Andreotti, former prime minister of Italy, and Marcello Dell'Utri, former right-hand man of Silvio Berlusconi when he was prime minister and senator for the Forza Italia party, to the trial of Judge Corrado Carnevale, president of the Court of Cassation criminal section. These cases redefined the concept of the mafia's 'external support', in jurisprudence as well as in public office. The second chapter looks at other manifestations of the political power of Cosa Nostra, including important murders – such as that of journalist Peppino Impastato, and of Piersanti Mattarella, president of Sicily. Many of these homicides are intertwined with bigger cases across the 1980s and 1990s; they are testimonies of a specific strategy that Cosa Nostra adopted in those years to acquire political power. Chapter 3 specifically looks at the evolution of the antimafia legislation in 1982 and its contested application to the political strategy of the mafia in the following ten years. Chapters 4 and 5 could be read together as an attempt to leave the state-centred perspective and dwell more in the mind and

the organisation of Cosa Nostra. This is where the authors look at the effects of jail terms on the mafia affiliate and the everyday functioning of Cosa Nostra. Data range from extracts from intercepted conversations to other court files that might shed light on these aspects, and are related more to the functioning of Cosa Nostra and its political strategy than to the purely criminal activities of the various clans. Chapter 6 deals with the infamous trial known as ‘La Trattativa’ (The Negotiation) and its court results of the past decade. In 2018, Palermo courts did affirm that the state entered a pact with Cosa Nostra to stop the terror-like strategy in the 1990s, thus confirming the weight of the political dimension of Cosa Nostra in the past decades. Finally, Chapter 7 looks at Cosa Nostra in the last 15 years, the new scenarios that have emerged and doubts that remain when reading contemporary events in the light of such a complex past.

From the beginning, the authors share their interpretation of the abovementioned core contradiction. This contradiction exists because there is still a tendency to consider mafias as ‘normal’ criminal phenomena, operating against public order. Rather, the authors say, we should be able by now to recognise how mafias are in fact a system of criminal power that is essential to the function of various interests and that satisfies a ‘demand of mafia’ in political, economic and entrepreneurial circles. Indeed, this idea is not new in research by historians and sociologists. However, the most important analytical key of this book – which adds considerable vigour to the already existing theoretical standpoints on the politics of the mafia – is the centrality of memory. A discourse on memory is even more necessary at the beginning of the third decade of the 2000s, when knowledge moves through super-fast and hypertrophic channels and there is the perception that everything is new and/or accessible all the time, anywhere. This book is not only an important collection of historical and judicial data, but it also connects this data with the direct experiences of two authors who lived that history first-hand. Books and data on Cosa Nostra are widely available today; what is missing is not the knowledge of the phenomenon itself but the systematisation of this knowledge through socio-historical and socio-judicial lenses.

The contribution of this book is precisely this: it’s an attempt to build historical memory collectively, so that readers of today can continue to ask difficult questions about yesterday and can try and understand how local phenomena, such as the events that characterised Cosa Nostra and took place Sicily in the 1980s and 1990s, still shape national identity.

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**Turpi traffici. Prostituzione e migrazioni globali 1890–1940**, by LAURA SCETTINI, Rome, Biblink, 2019, 231 pp., €18.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-96244-81-4

This book sheds light on a fascinating but underexplored aspect of the history of Italian migration: the international dimensions of prostitution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was a period in which prostitution was becoming globalised and Italy and Italian women were very much part of this trend. Prostitution, as Schettini demonstrates, was both a reason for women to migrate as well as something migrant women could end up being forced into because migration had made them so vulnerable. This is a surprisingly wide-ranging book for such a