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## REVIEW

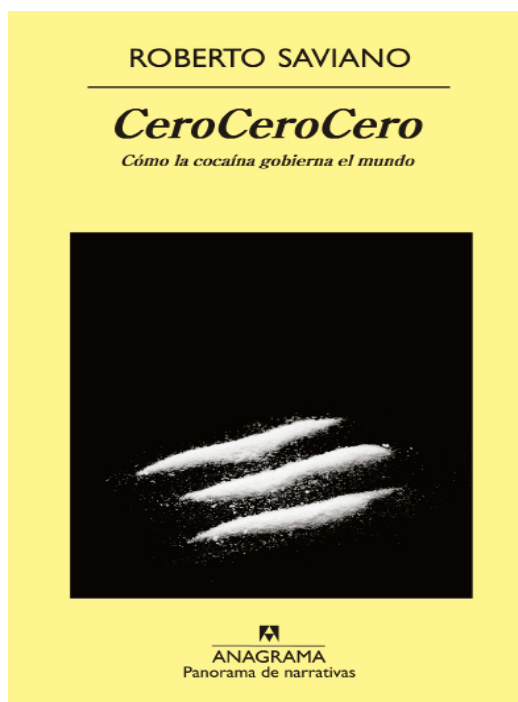
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### OF THE BOOK: CEROCEROCERO. COCAINE, POWDER OF HAPPINESS

*Authors: Roberto Saviano.*

*Editorial: Barcelona: Anagrama, 2014.*

*ISBN:-1978-84-339-7883-7. (496 pages)*



*“Writing about cocaine is like using it. You want more nuances every time, more information, and those you find are succulent, you cannot do without them any longer. You are addicted”* (Saviano)

**R**oberto Saviano, Italian journalist, born in Naples in 1979, hit the headlines with the publication in 2006 of “Gomorra”, in which he describes the activity of the Camorra. Since then he has lived surrounded by bodyguards and members of the carabinieri day and night.

In his new research work, “ZeroZeroZero”, written in a journalistic style, he looks at cocaine trafficking in the world in which everyday stories and not so everyday stories intermingle, capable of turning the stomachs of even those familiar with the whole issue. Such is the case, for example, with the description of the brutal torture and later murder of Enrique “Kiki” Camarena, a DEA agent who had infiltrated the Guadalajara Cartel. His story had already been told in the powerful novel “The power of the dog” by Don Winslow, which Saviano echoes, highlighting it as typifying the most extreme and irrational violence, far beyond anything imaginable. But one story does not rule out other interpretations, not narrated in the book, like the one which at the end of 2013 points the finger at the CIA’s involvement in the murder, after Kiki discovered links between Washington and Caro Quintero, the cartel kingpin, as a way of financing the Nicaraguan counter-revolution.

Saviano refers to some of the most relevant moments in the history of organised crime, such as the alleged meeting held in 1989 in Acapulco, chaired by Félix Gallardo “The Godfather”, in which agreements were reached on how to divide out the business among the various cartels. Various leading figures, who in recent years have become tragically famous, were recorded as attending that meeting: Guzmán Lorea, best known as “The Chapo”, who received areas in Lower California and Sonora, and who was to create the powerful Sinaloa cartel; Rafael Aguilar, who took over the region from Juarez to New Laredo, later again taken over by Armando and Vicente Carrillo Fuentes, the well-known Juárez cartel; and the Arellano Félix brothers, who took control of the Tijuana route.

This carving up of territory triggered a lust for the control of the different cartels, leading to a vicious war which continues to the present time. Also related to this story is one of the most widely reported incidents, the murder of cardinal Posadas Ocampo, who some members of the Tijuana cartel mistook for Guzmán, “the Chapo” in a spectacular shoot-out at Guadalajara airport in May 1993. Some theorists argue, however, that this was no accident, and that the cardinal was aware of the activities of Salinas de Gortari. Then there was the first incident deemed a narco-terrorist attack, when a bomb went off in a square in Morelia (Michoacan) in 2008, leaving 8 people killed and 100 injured, in the war between the Michoacana and the Zeta families.

There is an underlying belief that comes across throughout the book, which is that the production of drugs per se is not what is important. Distributing, supplying,

organising, controlling and acting in retaliation when necessary is what is fundamental. This innovative idea of business was introduced by the Chapo, it is what catapulted the Mexican cartels to the highest-ranking positions in international trafficking. Starting out in the land of the Aztecs, the current nerve-centre of cocaine trafficking, Saviano embarks on a journey that takes the reader to places like Colombia, Italy, Spain, Nigeria and Russia. He describes the effects of cocaine in the crudest terms, introduces us to the ambience and the haunts of organised crime groups and takes us on a tour of the main focal points of the problem in the world.

References to Spain, far from anecdotic, are repeated several times throughout the text, thus situating the country as a fundamental player in the business. Spain is home to the drug lords. Not only does it illustrate the all too well known geographic advantages of the peninsula, but also the importance it has acquired as a money-laundering centre and residence.

On the journey undertaken by the reader there is no shortage of detailed descriptions of the make-up of the cocaine trafficking trade, viewed from multiple perspectives; the effects that it brings about in numerous arenas, from its initial production and subsequent treatment, before moving on to an analysis of the existence of a cocaine-oriented cult and culture. On the other hand, it also deals with how the mafias go about their business, the birth of some of the most noteworthy cartels, the availability of resources allowing criminal organisations access to submarines, or to send planes loaded with cocaine to the Sahel, the training of “mules” in Curacao, the preparation of suitcases with fibreglass and cocaine, and the difficulties of detecting liquid cocaine.

Not surprisingly in such activities they avail of the assistance of analysts or “travel doctors” who study legislative loopholes, weaknesses in policing, modes of transport and routes, estimates of losses through seizures and financial and technological tangles designed to hide such activity and launder the proceeds.

Saviano’s contribution does not, however, end there; in his research he dares to go one step further in demonstrating links to the financial system and how the cartels have assisted banks during the crisis, providing liquidity, and the existence of what is called narco-capitalism. Aid that was initially highly advantageous for the US Banks, but which at the present time has found the perfect sanctuary offered by European banks which lack the mechanisms to operate against this permeability in relation to money-laundering.

In this sense this is a necessary work, one that attaches names, places and stories to what generally reaches us in the form of statements or data, especially through organisations like UNODC (the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime). A text of huge interest for investigating police, specialists in organised crime, and for all those attempting to come to grips with what is happening; not only in countries like Mexico or Colombia right now, but also right across the international spectrum.

From the point of view of intelligence analysis, we should point out the complexity of the task facing police forces, greater, for example, than is the case with the measures applied in the fight against terrorism. In this instance, these are particularly opaque activities, which are bound up in turbulent processes of financial and technological engineering and for that very reason demand a high degree of specialisation, with sufficient financial backing. Such activities, on occasion, are directed and supported by elements very close to the institutional powers, and as a result of this very complicity place obstacles in the way of any possible investigation.

The fight against drug trafficking, as one of the most salient manifestations of organised transnational crime, is a battle that is being lost right now. The Director of UNODC has stressed the minimal changes that have taken place with regard to the phenomenon in recent years, while several countries have pointed to failures at a meeting that took place in Vienna in March of this year. John Collins, coordinator of the London School of Economics (LSE) International Drug Policy Project emphasised that “the current strategy has been a disaster. It has not achieved its main objectives, and in fact has produced many negative consequences and counter-productive effects. To continue in the same vein would therefore no longer be justified”, in a report endorsed by four Nobel Prize-winning economists, and by leading personalities such as Nick Clegg, Javier Solana and George Shultz.

Is there a formula for turning the situation around? Currently work is being carried out on early warning systems, better training and resources; but, despite all of this criminal activity is not on the decrease. A totally resilient threat, capable of permanent adaptability. A global threat that does not face the contribution of preventive action beyond regional scope.

Finally, Saviano’s conclusion deserves consideration for what it is worth. When a measure fails, it is logical to seek other alternatives. There are an increasing number of voices in favour of legalisation. Would it be a solution? In what conditions? The debate is out there.