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"The Sicilian Mafia". Twenty Years After Publication

Abstract

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In this essay, I describe the reasons that led me to study the Sicilian mafia, and some of the difficulties that I encountered during my fieldwork in Palermo in 1986-7. I then review the effects that my study - which was first published 20 years ago in Italian and has since been translated into English, German, Spanish and Polish - has had on the scholarship on the mafia as well as on that of similar organisations in other countries.
The Sicilian Mafia is a renowned criminal organization. They are also well known as Cosa Nostra. While the organization still remains to this day in Sicily, it has been present here since the early 19th century. Around the second half of the 20th century, the organization would turn international. The term mafia is generic, as it could refer to any criminal organization. After several bosses wound up in handcuffs, nearly all of the remaining bosses sought refuge in the United States committing to strengthen their organization there. When World War II was in full swing, US Intelligence (Office of Strategic Service at that time) would seek out imprisoned Sicilian mob bosses in the United States. Sicilian mafia boss Domenico Rancadore has been arrested in London after 19 years on the run. Not much happens in Uxbridge, a west London commuter suburb just inside the M25. Or it least it didn’t until today, when a quiet, dapper and “very pleasant” gentleman who lived on Manor Waye and was often seen polishing his cars was revealed to be a wanted Sicilian mafia boss. The man described by neighbours as “one of the nicest people you could meet” was also a “dangerous” mafia extortionist from Palermo in Sicily. Mr Rancadore – a retired PE teacher who lived on an Italian state pension – was noted for continually cleaning his Mercedes and Jaguars, according to the residents of Manor Waye.