

# MAFIA AND ANTI MAFIA

A B R I E F H I S T O R Y

UMBERTO SANTINO

Foreword by John Dickie

I.B. TAURIS

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**Umberto Santino** is the founder and director of the Centro siciliano di documentazione in Palermo, which was the first centre for research into the mafia and was established in 1977 and then named after Giuseppe Impastato, a leader of the antimafia movement who was assassinated by the mafia in 1978. He is one of the most authoritative experts on the mafia and has been a leading figure in the antimafia movement over the past few decades. He has lectured at university level and spoken at conferences, seminars and other events in numerous countries.

*"Mafia and Antimafia: A Brief History* helps bring our knowledge of the mafia up to speed with thinking on the front-line, in Sicily. But it also fills a gap in our appreciation of the civic and political importance that research into the mafia has, and of its profound relationship with the antimafia movement. Umberto Santino, perhaps more than anyone else in Sicily, is the living illustration of how the forces ranged against the mafia power system have developed their understanding through a constant encounter with the mafia's horrifying reality."

– John Dickie, Professor of Italian Studies at  
University College, London

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3. A document containing a list of outlawed bandits from the scrubland around Palermo. (*Giovanna Fiume, Le bande armate in Sicilia (1819–49), Palermo: Annals of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Palermo, 1984, p. 185.*)
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5. A recent photograph of the Vucciria market. (*www.impresapalermo.it.*)
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15. Nino Bixio, a leading member of Garibaldi's Mille. (*Nino Bixio*, lithograph, Fratelli Terzaghi, *Milan*, from *Giuseppe Cesare Abba*, Da Quarto al Volturno, p. 26.)
16. On 1 October 1862, 12 people were stabbed in Palermo, the anonymous drawing shows the execution of one of those condemned. (*Salvatore Mannino*, I pugnatori di Palermo del 1862, *Palermo: Il Vespro*, 1976 (original edition 1903).)
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Anna Puglisi, my life partner, is co-author of this book rather than a collaborator. Her contributions include the maps and tables and the layout of the photographs.

Vincenzo Pinello, a member of the Centro Impastato and editor of the periodical *Espero*, assisted in reconstructing the present composition of Cosa Nostra in the province of Palermo.

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## FOREWORD

The history of the Sicilian mafia, and of the fight against it, has many lessons to teach us. One of the most important lessons concerns the close relationship between reality and representation: between, on the one hand, what the mafia does, and on the other hand, the way the mafia has been studied by academic researchers, described by journalists, seen by photographers and film directors, and talked about by politicians and the general public. Throughout its history, the Sicilian mafia has succeeded in shaping what the world thinks of it. Indeed this power to shape perceptions is one of the many things that make the mafia much more than just a bunch of crooks. In other words, the mafia has an ideology – a vision of itself, of Sicily, and even of Italian history – that it needs to pass off as the truth.

At the simplest level, the mafia spreads that ideology when it needs to escape justice: on countless occasions, defence lawyers, recruited to defend *mafiosi*, have argued that the mafia is not criminal, and still less a criminal organisation, but rather an ancient attitude embedded deep within the psyche of every Sicilian. Or that violent struggles between mafia factions are merely disputes within and between families. But the mafia's ideology has purposes that are far more ambitious than the exigencies of the courtroom. The mafia is a network that stretches from the street-corner thug up through the social classes to the corrupt doctor, entrepreneur or statesman; it needs to win the passive or active support of a significant section of the population; it needs to infiltrate the political, administrative and economic system; it needs to confuse the public and discredit its enemies: for all these reasons, the mafia is a

power system, and as such it has an ideology to both disguise and legitimate itself. The mafia ideology is certainly false; it is also frequently jumbled and unsophisticated. But one measure of its insidiousness is the fact that a number of academic researchers have produced work that, to a greater or lesser extent, naively elaborates some aspects of that ideology.

So it is appropriate that Umberto Santino begins his *Mafia and Antimafia: A Brief History* with a critique of the 'stereotypes and paradigms' which for so long shaped thinking about the mafia, and many of which have more or less distant origins in the mafia ideology. But this translation of the text is appropriate for a profounder reason: for its author, perhaps more than anyone else in Sicily, is the living illustration of how the forces ranged against the mafia power system and its ideology have, like their enemy, blended reality with representation – in this case by joining research and writing with activism.<sup>1</sup>

Santino was born in the Sicilian interior in 1939. After roughly a decade of militancy in the New Left milieu, he left politics in 1977 and, with his wife Anna Puglisi, founded the Centro siciliano di documentazione (Sicilian Documentation Centre) an independent and self-financed library, archive and research hub based in Palermo. A long season of intense intellectual activity began at that point: *Mafia and Antimafia: A Brief History* is a synthesis of the many important works written by Santino as part of his work with the Centre.<sup>2</sup> While Anna Puglisi has written a series of influential studies of mafia women, Santino's research output has ranged from a survey of mafia murders, to analyses of Sicilian organised crime's links to the economy and politics, to globalisation and narcotics trafficking, to the history of the mafia's earliest manifestations and of the antimafia movement from its origins to the present day. His work is distinguished by its ability to blend a range of disciplinary approaches in what he himself has suggested could be called a 'socio-history'.

Santino's prolific research activity was conducted in a climate of rapid change, controversy and, above all, bloodshed. The years following the foundation of the Centro siciliano di documentazione were to be the most violent and dramatic in the Sicilian mafia's history. Propelled by narcodollars, and shielded by its close relationship with sections of the ruling Christian Democrat party, Cosa Nostra embarked on an unprecedented and savage attack against anyone who stood in its way:



police, magistrates, politicians, journalists, professionals and activists. Indeed, the mafia murder of one young activist would draw Santino and the Centre into the first, longest and most significant of the many campaigns that have run alongside their intellectual activities.

Peppino Impastato was from Cinisi, the seaside town near Palermo airport which was a strategic base for the powerful boss Gaetano Badalamenti and his transatlantic drug trafficking. Impastato was from a family profoundly immersed in the mafia: his father was an affiliate, and his paternal uncle was the boss before Badalamenti. Rebelling against this background, Impastato became a passionate and eloquent, if occasionally tormented, advocate of a range of left-wing causes. He was unrelenting in his denunciation of the mafia, whether it be in his writings, in the satirical broadcasts he made through Radio Aut (a station he founded), or through a public exhibition showing the mafia's damaging impact on the local landscape. On the night of 8/9 May 1978, just after that exhibition, Peppino Impastato was kidnapped, tortured and then left by a railway track with dynamite tied to his body.<sup>3</sup> Just as the boss Badalamenti had intended, his death was dismissed in the press as a terrorist attack gone wrong: 'Leftist fanatic blown apart by own bomb on railway track', was one headline. The police and judicial authorities took the same highly improbable line on Impastato's death.

Although Umberto Santino and Anna Puglisi had not known Peppino Impastato personally, they were immediately convinced that the mafia was responsible for his death. Together with Peppino's mother and brother, they embarked on a tireless and courageous effort to get the case reopened, and expose a mafia cover-up. The Centro siciliano di documentazione was renamed after Peppino Impastato in 1980, and is now universally known as the Centro Impastato. One of the first magistrates to take the Impastato case seriously was Rocco Chinnici. Until Chinnici's assassination in 1983, the Centre's relationship with him became a model of many future practical and intellectual collaborations between magistrates committed to prosecuting the mafia and intellectuals committed to trying to understand it.

After more than two decades of dogged efforts, the campaign on the Peppino Impastato case finally achieved results. In December 2000, a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry stated that the investigation into the murder of the activist had effectively supported the killers'