Two Paths to the Same End?

The Challenges of the Liberation in France and Italy

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The fact that France and Italy shared something of a common fate during the ‘dark years’ is clearly sufficient grounds to justify a comparison of the two cases. Indeed, both countries were characterized by their ambiguity. On a domestic level, the Fascist and the Vichy regimes both claimed to be launching a national revolution and they did so, at least initially, with the passive, if not the active, consent of their populations. On an international level, the two ‘Latin sisters’ were allies of the Reich, an alliance that was official in the case of Italy and rather less obvious in the French case, even though Marshall Pétain set his country ‘on the path of collaboration’ on 24 October 1940 and at no time supported British or American action, including during the Anglo-American landings in North Africa in November 1942. In 1940, however, Charles de Gaulle launched his famous appeal and kept the ‘true France’ in the war. In 1943 King Victor Emmanuel III assented first to the deposition of Mussolini and then to the conclusion of an armistice which transformed Italy, until then supporting Germany, into an ally of the Anglo-Americans. The declaration of co-belligerence on 12 October 1943 made this turnaround official. At the moment of their liberation, the two countries faced, in many respects, a comparable situation. First of all they had to negotiate their new status with London and Washington, or indeed with Moscow, which was by no means a foregone conclusion in either case. The British and the Americans distrusted their partners: they harboured doubts about Badoglio’s resolve and only grudgingly acknowledged General de Gaulle, whose government was not recognized de jure until 23 October 1944. The two governments also had to eliminate the legacies of Fascism and Vichyism which, given the popularity of these political experiments and their hold on the army and the administration, was a high-risk undertaking. The French and Italian populations were subjected to a harsh German occupation until 1945 and maintained complex relations with their liberators thereafter, and they lived throughout this period in a context dominated by shortages, military operations and the violence of war.

These factors set out a common framework which makes it possible, and pertinent, to undertake a comparison of the two countries. As such, France and Italy were placed, ex ante, in comparable, though by no means
identical, historical conditions. However, the paths these two countries took out of war were, ex post, fundamentally different. This chapter will help make sense of the different ways in which France and Italy negotiated their transition to peace, without losing sight of the numerous factors which, despite certain similarities in their situation, make each case unique. Such a comparison has three benefits. Beyond the singularity of each nation’s fate, it allows us to understand that the choices made by Philippe Pétain and Benito Mussolini created, to use a concept favoured by sociologists, a situation of path dependency, constraining their respective countries to play assigned roles within strict margins of manoeuvre, regardless of the will of the population. It also offers a means of distinguishing between those factors which, in the transition out of war, were exogenous (the decisions of Berlin, London, Moscow and Washington) and those which were endogenous (the weight of traditions, social structures and political precedents). Finally, it allows us to comprehend that these transitions to peace were also governed by internal dynamics which played out in unique contexts after 1943-1944, leading ultimately to profoundly different situations.

Timing

First and foremost, the two countries were liberated at very different speeds. In the Italian case, the process dragged on for almost two years: the Allies landed in Sicily during the night of 9-10 July 1943, liberating the south of the country in 1943, but they did not break through the Gustav line until the end of May 1944 and only entered the north of the country in April 1945. With the exception of Corsica, reconquered in September and October 1943, the liberation of French metropolitan territory did not begin until the Allies landed in Normandy on 6 June 1944, but the Allied advance that followed was particularly rapid. Paris fell on 25 August 1944, and the French-American forces that landed in Provence on 15 August 1944 in the framework of Operation Dragoon moved up the Rhône Valley at top speed. The bulk of French territory was therefore liberated in around three months, after which the Germans only occupied a few pockets on the coast and part of Alsace.

The fact that the liberation of Italy was more spread out, in both temporal and spatial terms, resulted in the atomization of the territory. Different regions were subject to fundamentally different forms of war, occupation and political rule. The greatest rupture divided the north and centre from south along the Gustav line, the former occupied by the Reich and subject to the authority of the Italian Social Republic of Salò and the latter ruled
by a king closely controlled by the Allies. This division reawakened old fractures, since the Gustav line followed the geographic and cultural frontier which, until 1861, separated the multiple northern principalities from the southern kingdoms of Naples and the Two Sicilies, conquered by Garibaldi in the course of the Expedition of the Thousand. Post-war accounts drew on older representations distinguishing the north, the symbol of a politicized and armed resistance, from the supposedly politically backward south.

As a result, these territories were unequally exposed to the violence of war, a variation in regional experiences which also characterized the French case. Certain French regions, above all Normandy, were profoundly affected by the violence of combat. Normandy was a war zone between the launch of Operation Overlord and the beginning of Operation Cobra on 25 July 1944. Pounded by incessant bombardment and devastated by a series of battles, this region bore the brunt of the violence. During the summer of 1944, 14,000 civilians perished in Lower Normandy, half of them undoubtedly as a result of the bombing conducted between 6 and 15 June.1 Whole cities, including Caen and Saint-Lô, were razed to the ground. Ports that the Allies attempted to capture from solidly dug-in German units were particularly hard hit: Le Havre, Dunkirk and Saint-Malo were almost completely destroyed. Conversely, a large part of French territory was spared from such violence, particularly as a result of the German retreat ordered by Hitler on 16 August 1944, which explains why several cities, including Lyon, Dijon and Lille, fell practically without combat.

In Italy, on the other hand, the violence of war was infinitely more brutal because it lasted longer and affected a much larger territory. The Allies had been bombing the peninsula since the start of the war, focusing particularly on the south, and in October 1942 they began a campaign of bombing raids on the main cities, hoping to break Italian resistance, topple the Fascist regime and oblige the government to capitulate.2 Turin, Milan, Genoa, Naples, Palermo, Taranto, Bari and Messina were among the principal targets. France was also the victim of bombing – 67,078 French people were killed – but neither the British nor the Americans intended to use this means of targeting civilians and inciting an insurgency against

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the Pétainist regime. In Italy the Germans had also prepared a series of
defensive lines (principally the Gustav line and the Gothic line) which
slowed the Allied advance. They also employed scorched earth tactics as
they retreated, taking any goods and materials that they judged necessary
for the war effort with them. In France, the Germans retreated in an orderly
fashion after 16 August and abstained from establishing defensive lines with
the exception, as previously noted, of the Vosges.

The violence of combat and the presence of German and Allied troops
produced different results on either side of the Alps. In Italy, the war had laid
bare the adventurism of the regime and the incapacity of the ruling classes
either to organize civilian life or to protect the population: anti-aircraft
defences proved ineffective, as did the rationing system. All the structures
of daily life were in crisis. Bombing raids and their trail of destruction
aggravated the circumstances, leading to tragic situations such as that of
the city of Naples, according to an Allied report:

The city had suffered very severe damage. The gas, electricity, water and
sewage systems were out of action and a considerable number of people
lived more or less permanently in Air Raid Shelters. It was evident that
these factors, operating in a depressed, malnourished, unwashed populace
of nearly a million, were ideal for the occurrence and rapid dissemination
of infectious disease. [...] During the period October 1943 to February 1944,
there were 1500 known cases of Typhus in Naples and its immediate vicinity.

Particularly low rations and scorched earth tactics only further exacerbated
the situation which, in terms of food and sanitation, painted a particularly
bleak picture.

The liberation of France was undertaken in circumstances that were in
many respects less tragic. Certainly, destruction had been widespread. The
war had laid waste to a quarter of all housing, destroyed 22,000 kilometres
of railway lines out of a total of 40,000, and by 1944 industrial production

4 Gabriella Gribaudi, ‘The True Cause of the “Moral Collapse”: People, Fascists and Authorities
under the Bombs: Naples and the Countryside, 1940-1944’, in Bombing, States and Peoples in
Western Europe, 1940-1945, ed. Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp and Richard Overy (London/
New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), pp. 219-238; C. Baldoli, A. Knapp,
5 Allied Force Headquarters, Typhus Commission, Notes on the Civil Typhus Outbreak: Italy,
had fallen to just 38 per cent of 1938 levels. Likewise, shortages weighed heavily on the population. In August 1945, meat rations were limited to 100 grams per person per week. In the region of Marseille, young people in category J3 (a privileged category) were only consuming 1781 calories per day. Nutrition, in turn, had an effect on the state of public health. A survey of school children in the thirteenth district of Paris revealed, for instance, that the weight of boys aged 15-16 had, on average, fallen by 7.6 kilograms between 1935 and 1944 and that the average height had fallen by 7 centimetres. On the other hand, unlike its neighbour, France did not experience famine or epidemics between 1944 and 1947 and public sanitation remained at the most satisfactory level possible for a country bled dry by four years of war and occupation.

The Question of Power

Widespread shortages presented a political risk that was all the greater for the fact that they coincided, in both France and Italy, with something of a power vacuum. In Italy the Fascist regime had collapsed in the south but neither the king nor the Prime Minister, Badoglio, was able to build national unity around their own persons. In the north, the Salò Republic was also contested by the resistance, which grew in strength as time passed. In France, the État Français (‘French State’, the official title of the Vichy regime) had disappeared into thin air as the Allies advanced. Nothing, however, guaranteed that General de Gaulle would manage to impose his rule. The attitude of the communists was cause for concern, not least because misery offered a fertile terrain for revolt.

The Allies assessed these risks lucidly but not without concern for the potential disorder that could threaten their military operations. They guarded against such dangers by striving to impose their control. Italy became subject to the rule of the Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories (AMGOT) in Sicily and the Allied Military Government (AMG),

7 Note by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Supply, 24 July 1945, Archives nationales de France (henceforth ANF), F3 RAV 1.
8 Report sent by the Commissaire de la République in Marseille to the Minister of Supply, undated (December 1944 or January 1945), ANF F3 RAV 2.
9 Letter from the director of the National Institute of Hygiene to the Minister of Supply, undated, ANF F3 RAV.
a less restrictive formulation, in the rest of the peninsula as it was progressively liberated. Power, in other words, came into the hands of the military, which was demonstrated by the fact that the Anglo-Americans treated the Italians as enemies, not as allies (otherwise they would have, like Norway, enjoyed the status of 'liberated territories'). Even if divergent visions set Washington, favouring strict control, in opposition to London, advocating a form of indirect rule, the two powers conserved the bulk of Fascist cadres and avoided launching a brutal purge so as not to disorganize the administration of the country even further. In February 1944, the liberated territories came under the control of the Italian government. The latter nevertheless had to respect the directives of the Allied Control Commission, which insisted that the clauses of the armistice signed on 29 September 1943 be observed. Carrying out the orders of the commander in chief, and receiving political recommendations from the Advisory Council for Italy, the commission, the only interlocutor of the Italian government, reserved the final say for itself. The primacy of the military justified American reticence in associating the French Committee of National Liberation (CFLN) with the conducting of Allied policy in Italy, despite the good conduct of the French Expeditionary Corps (CEF) on the front. To the great despair of the Italians, however, the transfer of responsibility was very gradual, and some areas that were considered particularly sensitive remained under the jurisdiction of the AMG for a long time, including Naples, an extremely important port for communications and military supplies, which remained under AMG control until 1946.

France had an altogether different fate, owing to the decisive action of General de Gaulle. Having brushed aside his rival, General Giraud, de Gaulle successfully re-established his power in North Africa, singlehandedly overseeing the destiny of the CFLN from 2 October 1943. He relentlessly insisted that the Allies negotiate the forms of power which would impose his authority when the Liberation came, but neither London nor Washington took him up on this offer, preferring to leave the question open. However, preparations for Operation Overlord obliged the Allies to look beyond temporary arrangements. Roosevelt resigned himself to sign a draft directive, on 15 March 1944, intended for Commander in Chief Dwight Eisenhower:

You will have ultimate determination of where, when and how civil administration in France shall be exercised by French citizens remembering always that the military situation must govern. [...] In order to serve the setting up of any such civilian administration in any part of France you may consult with [the] French Committee of National Liberation and may authorize them in your discretion to select and install the personnel necessary for such administration. You are, however, not limited to dealing exclusively with said Committee for such purpose in case at any time in your best judgment you determine some other course is preferable. [...] You will have no talks or relations with [the] Vichy regime except for the purpose of terminating its administration in toto.12

These instructions marked an important rupture since they broke irreversibly with the État Français, with which any negotiations were henceforth ruled out. Unlike in the case of Italy, Roosevelt did not imagine dealing with the former Vichy administration. Similarly, as his instructions show, he did not intend to place France under the rule of AMGOT, contrary to the legend spread by the Gaullists during and after the war: unlike her ‘Latin sister’, France was not considered as an enemy which needed to be ‘occupied’. Roosevelt refused, however, to consider de Gaulle’s committee as a legitimate government, recommending to his supreme command that it remain open in the choice of political authorities. In short, the problem concerned not so much the future status of France but rather the question of who had the power to appoint the administrators of liberated France: the American president demanded this right, a right which de Gaulle, invoking national sovereignty, refused to concede to him.

After the landings of 6 June 1944 the situation evolved rapidly. De Gaulle stopped begging for Allied endorsement, as he explained to the British ambassador Duff Cooper in April 1944. Recalling the meeting in his memoirs, de Gaulle wrote that

the formality of recognition no longer interested the French Government. What was important was to be recognized by the French nation. And that fact was now established. The Allies could have helped us to gain

12 Franklin D. Roosevelt, Instructions of 15 March 1944, National Archives and Records Administration (henceforth: NARA), RG 331/12/108.
countenance when it had been useful. They had not done so. At present, the matter was without importance.\textsuperscript{13}

The head of the Provisional Government of the French Republic instead imposed his power from below by installing a handful of faithful followers in Normandy. This devolution of power worked out for the best: the officers of Civil Affairs were pleased with their close collaboration with the Gaullist authorities, and Eisenhower abstained from making the question a matter of principal. The warm welcome de Gaulle received on 14 June 1944 in Bayeux, the first French town to be liberated, followed by his ‘coronation’ through his triumphal parade into Paris on 26 August, showed the Allies the futility of their opposition. They therefore resolved to recognize the Provisional Government \textit{de jure}, but still waited until 23 October to do so.

France and Italy did not, therefore, experience their liberation under the same legal conditions. Enjoying all its rights, France was considered (at the risk of taking a rather optimistic view of the situation in practice) as an independent power and as a victor; Italy only enjoyed limited sovereignty and needed to obtain the assent of London and Washington in order to act. While Italy escaped the fate that befell Germany, it came out of the ordeal singularly diminished, all the more so because high political tensions were accompanied by conflicts between the liberated population and their liberators on a local level.

**Encounters**

The conventional image of the liberation is one of jubilant civilians celebrating the arrival of their liberators. While this image is not entirely false, it nevertheless merits serious qualification, particularly when one takes the attitude and behaviour of the Allied troops into account.

In Italy, Allied soldiers behaved more as occupiers than as liberators, showing little concern for the local population. The Allies waged war as they pleased, without worrying unduly about the security of civilians. The number of accidents rose as a result. A German bombing raid on the port of Bari on 2 December 1943 detonated the Allied stores of mustard gas, claiming hundreds of victims. A train transporting bombs exploded at the station of Torre Annunziata, not far from Naples, on 21 January 1946 causing

54 deaths, injuring around 300 and making 9,000 homeless.\textsuperscript{14} Drivers drove at breakneck speeds, causing numerous accidents.\textsuperscript{15} The relative opulence of the soldiers, meanwhile, reinforced their arrogance and widened the gulf that separated them from an emaciated population. Agostino degli Espinosa concluded:

For years some had waited for these men as a source of salvation, many others who had not waited for them thought of them as benevolent friends. Instead, they were tough soldiers, strengthened by unimaginably powerful equipment, scornful and arrogant, especially towards those who fawned upon them. They took the things they desired rudely on account of their power; they were not cordial or friendly even if they were extremely polite; it was never possible to touch their hearts in a state of equality. Not only were they winners, proud of their victory; they were men who believed themselves to be superior.\textsuperscript{16}

The fate reserved for women confirms the complexity of the situation. The second sex was very much the victim of the liberators, who raped thousands of Italian women. The troops of the French Expeditionary Corps in Italy are particularly notable for the large scale of such violence. The breach of the Gustav line in May 1944 was accompanied by millions of cases of looting and rape. In total, the French command in Italy received almost 20,000 requests for compensation for theft and 1,500 for rape.\textsuperscript{17} Perpetrated in the mountains of southern Latium by groups of soldiers (mainly from the French colonies) who were frustrated by the tough winter battles, avid for revenge and in

\textsuperscript{14} Report of Comando Generale dell’Arma dei Carabinieri, 30/01/1946 (A.C.C. (Administration Control Commission) 156/790C/49, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma). Photographs of the disaster have been uploaded onto Youtube by vesuvio.web.com under the title ‘Torre Annunziata 21 gennaio 1946 “Immagini della memoria”’.

\textsuperscript{15} Maria Porzio, op. cit., pp. 74-75.

\textsuperscript{16} Agostino degli Espinosa, Il regno del Sud. 8 settembre 1943-4 giugno 1944 (Rome: Migliaresi editore, 1946), p. 136. Agostino degli Espinosa, writer and economist, wrote the chronicle of the events which characterized the history of the Kingdom of the South, through the memory of his own experience, witness testimonies of numerous protagonists, newspaper articles and Italian and Anglo-American diplomatic documents. A singular character in the context of the time, a monarchist and legitimist, but also a sincere anti-fascist and advocate of a genuine renewal of the political and social life of the country, he succeeded in giving a profound vision of reality and the contradictions experienced by the population of the South.

\textsuperscript{17} Note by Jacques Gachet on civil reparations, 17 September 1947, Service Historique de la Défense, 4Q157 (consultation dérogatoire).
search of war booty, these crimes terrorized civilians. At the same time, spaces of fraternization opened up between Italians and Anglo-Americans: 2,062 marriages were celebrated in the city of Naples alone. The situation was different in liberated France, even if France also suffered its share of violence. The lorry drivers who plied the ‘Red Ball Express’ to bring war materiel as close as possible to the front rarely exercised prudence and caused numerous accidents. Allied troops, when they were not actually committing misdemeanours or engaging in criminal activities, often behaved as if in a conquered territory. ‘There is the usual looting and stealing by British troops, particularly on the coast, which is causing unfavourable comparisons between the behaviour of our troops and the Germans’, Brigadier R.M.H. Lewis noted on 14 June. Some soldiers refused to pay for their purchases, while others even committed veritable ‘hold-ups’. Rapes were also perpetuated. In the American case, the Judge Advocate General estimated that 181 women, French or foreign, had been raped in France between June 1944 and June 1945. In the British case, the courts martial punished 2,897 thefts, 275 cases of ‘impropriety’ and 1,033 diverse crimes over the all of the theatres of operations in the years 1944 and 1945. By all accounts these numbers are underestimated. In the French department of Manche alone, the historian Michel Boivin has estimated, 208 rapes and around 30 murders were committed by American troops. However, this violence represents only the sombre part of the liberation. In many towns the population celebrated the Allied troops who had delivered them from the Pétainist or Nazi yoke. That is not to say, however, that this liberation resolved all the political and social tensions of the day.

19 Maria Porzio, op. cit., p. 146.
20 Brigadier Lewis, Second Army, letter to DCCAO, 14 June 1944, NARA RG 331/54/292.
22 Comprehensive Summary of Court-Martial Convictions (British Other Ranks, Home and Overseas), BNA, WO 93/53.
Social Unrest

The arrival of the Allies hardly brought an end to antagonisms, although once more the situation differed between France and Italy. On the Italian peninsula, the British and Americans opted to support the king and General Badoglio, a questionable solution to say the least. Badoglio, as head of the Army General Staff since 1925, had employed barbaric tactics during the war against Ethiopia in 1935. In political terms his nomination was far from a rupture with the old regime. On a social level, too, tensions were exacerbated because of the inefficiency of his government. Incapable of negotiating the armistice with the Anglo-Americans, he had abandoned soldiers to their fate and allowed 600,000 prisoners to be captured by the Germans. Badoglio proved equally incompetent at feeding the starving population. In December 1943, bread rations in Naples fell to 100 grams per day and, even though they subsequently increased, they still could not provide more than a thousand calories a day in February 1944. Even though the government was opened up to include other parties, it by no means enjoyed the confidence of the population, not least because it failed to maintain order. Bandits criss-crossed the countryside and the Mafia, suppressed under Fascism, raised its head once more.

Formed after the fall of Mussolini, the first Badoglio government (25 July 1943 to 17 April 1944) was composed of numerous military figures and state functionaries who had played an important role in the politics of the deposed regime. The parties which had formed the Committee of National Liberation (CLN) – the Socialist and Communist parties, the Party of Action (Partito d’Azione) and the moderate parties of a liberal bent – agreed to participate in Badoglio’s second national unity government (22 April 1944 to 8 June 1944). Recently returned from exile in the Soviet Union, the General Secretary of the Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti took the crucial decision to participate in the government and to ‘freeze’ the institutional question regarding the monarchy until the end of the war. After the liberation of Rome, the king, who had refused to abdicate, was forced to nominate his son, Umberto II, as General Lieutenant of the Kingdom. The government came under the leadership of a representative of the political parties, the liberal Ivanoe Bonomi.

At the same time, the partisan groups which were fighting in the north against the Republic of Salò and against the German occupiers were

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unified under the control of the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale Alta Italia (Committee of National Liberation for Northern Italy, CLNAI). The representatives of the partisans were even more resolved to combat the institutions and figures of the Fascist regime; they were also fully committed to struggle to change social relations. They therefore always sought the support of the workers and peasants, though this policy was not without its contradictions: sometimes the actions of the partisans provoked Nazi reprisals. The difference between the two situations was remarkable. In the north, the suffering of the populations generally emanated from the collaborationist government and the German occupiers; the representatives of the CLNAI, the partisan leaders, thus represented the struggle against a despotic and violent power and were able to incarnate hopes for change in the future. In the centre-south, on the other hand, civilians had to obey a new government and parties that were not legitimized either by a popular vote or through resistance struggle and which seemed to strive harder to impose themselves in the new balance of power than to defend and protect the populations.

In the liberated territories, the scale of shortages, combined with disappointment in a government that had maintained the bulk of Fascist cadres, provoked a backlash from the local population. In 1943, local republics were formed in Sanza, near Salerno, and in Caulonia in Calabria. Civilians lynched or killed fascists, peasants occupied lands and employees went on strike. The authorities responded in part through the Gullo decrees, which transferred wasteland and badly farmed fields to landless peasants, but above all it resorted to force. On 19 October 1944 the carabinieri opened fire on a Palermo strike committee demanding wage rises, causing 16 deaths and injuring 104 people.25 These uprisings, it should be noted, remained largely spontaneous: the parties of the left played no role in either initiating or prolonging them.

The army was not spared from this movement of civil disobedience. After the declaration of co-belligerence the Badoglio government decided to launch an appeal for volunteers to fight alongside the Allies. Poorly equipped and commanded by generals who had led Fascist forces, this army struggled to recruit from within a population that was tired of the Fascist regime and the long years of war, and that did not wish to fight all over again. The authorities decided to impose conscription in September 1944, which only resulted in widespread unrest. Many young men evaded the draft:

200,000 of those called up in February 1945 did not respond. In the post-war period, more than 50,000 trials for desertion were commenced, confirming just how widespread the refusal to fight had been. While the decrees of March 1946 abolished the death penalty and long prison sentences for this offence, thousands of Italians were deprived of their citizenship for many years, losing their right to vote, their driving licences and so on.26 Other young men rebelled. In Ragusa in Sicily (4-9 January 1945) the government sent in the troops, leading to thirty-seven deaths and eighty-seven people being injured, numbers that undoubtedly underestimate the real casualty rate.

In the occupied territories, disobedience and the rejection of the war were directed against the authorities of the Salò Republic. The Italian Social Republic (RSI) had sought to reconstruct the army in order to strengthen its position in the alliance with the Reich. In November 1943 the Minister of Defence, Rodolfo Graziani, called up all youths born in 1923 followed by all men born in the years 1923-1925. When recruitment met with little success, a new decree, promulgated on 14 February 1944, introduced the death penalty for draft-dodgers and deserters. This was followed by a decree which promised a legal pardon for all men who enrolled voluntarily before 18 April 1944. Despite harsh Fascist repression, characterized by round-ups and death sentences during the winter of 1943-1944, few men responded to these summons. Instead, these measures drove young men to join the partisans: ‘the stronger state constraints on young men became, the higher the numbers of volunteers for the partisans rose’.27 Draft-dodging thus took place on a large scale and was comparable, in many respects, with that which characterized the Kingdom of the South. In both cases it revealed a refusal to pursue war and to recognize the legitimacy of the state.28 After the entry of the anti-fascist parties into the governments of national unity, the resistance leadership was unified and came together with the desire to transform the partisan groups into a veritable army. The unified command oversaw the insurrection of the northern towns in April 1945, which became the symbolic date of the Italian liberation. Alongside a core of resolute and politicized combatants, however, throughout this period there was also a fluctuating mass of young men, hesitant and uncertain, who were fleeing

28 Santo Peli, La Resistenza in Italia..., op. cit., p. 48.
the army of the Social Republic on the one hand but who did not manage to brave life in the partisan groups on the other. Many were on the run for the whole of the war; others found compromise solutions by engaging in the war industries or in the Organisation Todt.

From the winter of 1943-1944 onwards, the Germans and the ‘Repubblichini’ violently attacked the partisan groups in order to drive them out of the territory. Violent roundups, accompanied by mass shootings, were carried out in Tuscany, Emilia, Piedmont and the Veneto. By imposing a policy of terror on the civilian population, the Germans hoped to break all ties of solidarity with the combatants. The razing of villages, reprisals extending to whole territories (such as at Marzabotto and Sant’Anna di Stazzema) and mass deportations all grew in frequency. Although Allied bombs were falling on the peninsula, it was above all the violence of the Fascists and the Germans which affected the population. To this extent, the population in the north experienced the extreme face of Fascism which nourished anti-fascism and gave succour to those parties which represented it and which headed the resistance. In the post-war period this movement became known as the ‘north wind’, as opposed to the supposedly more moderate and conservative winds blowing from the south.

In the south, meanwhile, civil society felt abandoned and poorly represented. Civilians responded to shortages by developing autonomous but anomic forms of behaviour. Stimulated by the presence of the Allies, the black market developed on different levels ranging from modest family trafficking to networks involving the Mafia or Camorra. ‘It has come to the attention of this Headquarters that Black Markets operating on a large scale are flourishing in the city of Naples and surrounding area’, a report of 14 January 1944 revealed.

It has also been found that the sources of supply of these black market stocks are, to a large extent, Allied military supplies. During November and December approximately $20,000 worth of stolen US military supplies, principally food and fuel, were recovered. This is believed to represent only a small part of the military supplies which found their way into Black Market channels.29

On a different level, prostitution became increasingly widespread. On 11 January 1945, Il Risorgimento – the only newspaper authorized to appear

in Naples – revealed that between 1 October 1943 and 31 December 1944, 14,325 prostitutes had been arrested or sent to hospital.

The inability of the authorities to guarantee a minimum standard of living, as well as the repression of popular revolts, forced the population to become self-reliant. Italians sought salvation by developing free strategies rather than by relying on the legal authorities in which it had no confidence, a development which contributed to the further discrediting of politics.

France, meanwhile, was largely spared from social unrest. Shortages were certainly the order of the day and the black market, far from collapsing upon the departure of the Germans, only flourished after the liberation: ‘its techniques have hardly varied and have not been renewed in the course of the last five years’, the regional directors of the Bank of France observed in March 1945. ‘Only its relative importance has changed.’ Small- and large-scale trafficking coexisted, stimulated by the presence of an American army that had rare products at its disposal: petrol, sugar, cigarettes and chocolate. Le Havre and Marseille became two crucial hubs for black-market exchanges. The authorities tried in vain to fight back with repressive measures, but never actually resorted to the use of force.

Unlike in Italy, social discontent did not turn the French population against the authorities, as the case of the army illustrates. While young Italians were refusing to respond to the call to arms launched by the Badoglio government, 190,000 Frenchmen joined the French army after August 1944 to pursue the war in Germany, hold the Alpine front and clear out the Atlantic pockets. Certainly, the imposition of conscription by the Italian Social Republic drove 250,000 young Italians into the ranks of the resistance, but this enrolment did not take place within a legal or state framework, an indication that the political situation, on the other side of the Alps, was singularly different.

War and occupation gave rise to deep social distress on both sides of the Alps. Both populations hoped that the liberation would bring an improvement in the material situation, but such hopes were soon dashed, and the disappointment was all the more acute for the fact that people had been hoping more than just the return of white bread. The two populations had hoped for economic and social renewal, a form of New Deal. Did this

mean there was a threat of revolutionary uprising? The presence of Anglo-American troops, the prudence of Stalin and the strategy of the Communist parties – intent in the first instance to play the card of national unity – all suggested that such action would be futile. Yet the burgeoning of social conflicts in Italy, and the strikes of 1947-1948 in France, revealed the deep dissatisfaction of two populations which, despite the liberation, felt let down by the timidity of the post-liberation reforms. This disappointment soon gave rise, in France at least, to the notion of a ‘betrayed revolution’.33 In truth, the political situation was far from simple, even though it obeyed singularly different logics in each of the two countries.

Purges

The eradication of the Vichy and Fascist regimes was in fact undertaken along markedly different lines. On 28 December 1943, under pressure from the Allies, the Badoglio government had promulgated a decree in order to purge the administration. But the agents of the old regime managed to delay its application, which in turn brought the next government, opened up to other political parties on 22 April 1944, to adopt a new decree on its first day in office to punish the ‘criminal and illegal acts of Fascism’, which notably foresaw the setting up of provincial commissions composed of a judge and two jurors. The magistrates, as a general rule, bore witness to a lack of eagerness to punish the guilty of the Fascist regime, whether big or small. After the king had been sidelined and his son nominated as the General Lieutenant of the kingdom – the official abdication did not take place until 9 May 1946 – a High Court of Justice was set up in July 1944. It was limited, however, to judging the small fry of the previous regime, with the notable exception of General Roatta, accused of having been behind the murder of the Rosselli brothers and of running a brutal regime of occupation in the Balkans. The progress of the Allied troops, finally, led to extraordinary courts of assizes being formed in order to punish Fascist crimes which, it was believed, had covered northern Italy in blood.

In January 1944 the CLNAI was given a mandate to coordinate the partisan struggle in the north and to organize a form of clandestine government, yet the committee doubted the good faith of the central government. It thus created popular courts of assizes which carried out justice in such a summary fashion that innocent people sometimes got caught up in it, including 33 ‘Betrayed Revolution’ is the title of a work published in 1945 by the communist Pierre Hervé.
the families of Fascist dignitaries. Likewise, a harsh purge was carried out after 25 April 1945, the date from which the Comitati di liberazione launched an order of insurrection to hasten the war in the north to a finish. This order led to an orgy of violence. In the city of Turin alone, the purge claimed 1,138 victims. The head of the Fascist Party in Piedmont's capital, Giuseppe Solaro, reputed for his fanaticism and cruelty, was condemned to death by a tribunal of partisans, and obliged to walk through the city in front of jeering crowds to be hanged in the same public square where, just a few days earlier, four resisters had been hanged on his orders. The most strongly symbolic moment of the purge and the end of the war was of course the execution of Mussolini and his mistress on 28 April 1945: they were hanged in Milan in a public square used by the Fascist regime for the hanging of partisans. Crowds attended the display of the bodies and took out their anger on the corpses.

Unlike in France and England, Italy had not known a regicide in its history, a watershed between opposing periods. [...] The last to arrive in this area, as in others, Italy experienced the execution of the Duce when the twentieth century was well under way. And the macabre exposition of the corpses which renewed the tradition of the deposed/dead tyrant, which needs to be shown to the people, all the while making reference to Fascism which had practiced it in the same place.34

Conversely, many major criminals escaped punishment. While General Graziani, head of the armed forces of the RSI, was sentenced to nineteen years in prison for his crimes, he was granted a remission of seventeen years and was liberated three months after being sentenced.35 From 22 June 1946, the government also decided on an amnesty, the fluid conditions of which permitted genuine Fascist criminals to be acquitted while condemning, for example, young people who had deserted. The Fascist criminals benefitted, moreover, from the laxity of the Court of Appeal which, as a general rule, rendered invalid the judgements pronounced by the extraordinary courts of assizes. ‘The Court of Appeal’, the historian Hans Woller has argued, ‘not only exaggerated but in many cases overstepped the bounds of what could be tolerated, to the point that some of its sentences represent one of the

darkest and most depressing pages in the entire history of Italian justice’.

In the same vein, thousands of state functionaries, despite being sentenced by Italian or Allied Commissions, were ultimately acquitted by means of appeal. In 1960, every one of the 135 chiefs of police in Italy had been a loyal servant of the Fascist regime.

The purge resulted in the exacerbation of tensions in the Italian peninsula. In spite of legislative measures, the apparatus of Fascism remained largely in place at the liberation, provoking anger from part of the population that found itself faced by its former enemies in the police, the army or in the agricultural cooperatives as if nothing had changed. The indecisiveness of the new government contributed greatly to delegitimizing all forms of authority and encouraging civil society to practice a form of civil disobedience.

The post-war purges followed a wholly different trajectory in France. A savage purge was implemented, even before the liberation, which led to between 8,000 and 9,000 extrajudicial executions. While around a thousand were pronounced by exceptional tribunals, 80 per cent were perpetrated ‘partly during the occupation, [and] mostly during the battles of the liberation’, which suggests that they can considered as acts of war rather than the sign of blind violence. The Gaullist government, however, quickly set about bringing the purge under control. It became principally confined to the Courts of Justice, instituted by the ordonnance of 26 June 1944, while a High Court, formed by the ordonnance of 18 November 1944, was charged with legal proceedings against dignitaries of the French State. The civic chambers, for their part, oversaw cases of ‘indignité nationale’ (which took away the citizenship rights of those whose behaviour during the war years was found ‘unworthy of the nation’), while the military tribunals that oversaw the purge in North Africa, both before and after the foundation of the Courts of Justice on the mainland, passed judgement on French as well as foreign citizens convicted, for instance, of war crimes.

The purge, as Henry Rousso has emphasized, was carried out on a massive scale: 311,263 cases were opened at the Courts of Justice and the Civic Chambers. It was also relatively severe, since between 1,500 and 1,600 death sentences were carried out and over 35,000 Frenchmen were condemned to prison sentences. Those responsible at the highest level were severely

36 Ibid., p. 546.
39 Henry Rousso, art. cit., p. 500.
punished, beginning with the two heads of the French State: Philippe Pétain and Pierre Laval were condemned to death. Pétain, the hero of Verdun, saw his sentence commuted, finishing his days on the Ile d’Yeu. Public functionaries were also struck hard: overall between 22,000 and 28,000 functionaries were affected, including in the police forces. The severity of the judges should not, however, be exaggerated. Many of those responsible at a high level of the administration escaped punishment, including René Bousquet, the Chief of Police. Appeals brought before the Council of State allowed many complainants, in the course of time, to win their cases. Between 1945 and 1950 the percentage of verdicts that were repealed never fell below 50 per cent, and even rose above 80 per cent in 1957. It should also be noted, for good measure, that the process was interrupted by two amnesty laws, in 1951 and 1953, which contributed, alongside the pardons and remissions, to the gradual emptying of the prisons. In 1946, 29,000 prisoners were held in French jails as a result of the purge, but their number had dwindled to 1,000 in 1954 before falling to just 9 in 1960.

Be that as it may, the purge was considered as failure in both countries, one country deploring its severity and the violence unleashed by the new victors, the other denouncing the impunity enjoyed by the representatives of the old order. It resulted in the exacerbation of social divisions in France and Italy, countries which were, in addition, subjected to territorial revisions.

Territorial Revisions

Both before and during the war, the Italian Fascists had pursued a policy of Italianization, directed against the Slavs. At the end of the war ethnic conflicts re-emerged, growing as a result of the political dispute that set the Yugoslav communists, supported by the PCI, in opposition to the local Italian population. Tito wanted, in fact, to annexe Istria and Venezia-Giulia, accelerating the march of the Ninth Yugoslav corps towards Trieste. On arriving there it engaged in arrests and summary executions, the first victims of which being the resisters enrolled in the CLN, feared by the Titoist government for its anti-communism. On 12 June the Allies reached

the city and the Titoist troops withdrew to behind the Morgan line, although they continued the purge in the area under their control, while Trieste was placed under Allied authority and not returned to Italy until 1954. This was an important episode: not only did clashes between Slavs and Italians become more frequent, despite Allied tutelage, but 350,000 Italians fled the Yugoslav zone. Italy, like Hungary and Czechoslovakia, was not spared the influx of migrants which resulted from post-war border changes.

France, meanwhile, was spared this fate. Neither its frontiers nor its metropolitan population were subjected to the repercussions of war, with the exception of the hundreds of thousands of French citizens who, as deportees, prisoners or workers returned to France once the liberation came. A subtle but crucial difference, however, was that the French Empire was already creaking under strain, which did not bode well for the future. Colonized peoples, shaken by the defeat of 1940, subject to intense pressure during the war and open to the winds of independence unleashed by the Atlantic Charter and the pronouncements of President Roosevelt, no longer intended to accept white rule passively. In January 1944 violent disturbances erupted in Morocco. On 1 December 1944 a protest of Senegalese tirailleurs, demanding the payment of their wages, was savagely put down in Thiaroye in Senegal. On 8 May 1945 a peaceful demonstration, demanding the liberation of Messali Hadj, was bloodily suppressed in Sétif and Guelma in Algeria.

Beyond their differences, these two examples confirm that, after the defeat of the Reich, the pre-war territorial order could no longer be sustained as before. Territorial contentions poisoned relations between Rome and Belgrade; and the irruption of demands for independence, even though minimized by Paris, eventually sounded the death knell of the Empire and brought about the fall of the Fourth Republic. This eventual collapse confirmed the ambivalence of the end of the war and the return to peace. On the one hand, societies, resistance forces and even sections of the political elite wanted a profound change in the rules of the game; on the other, the traditions, the political networks and the general inertia associated with the old order persisted. And the former did not manage to impose themselves on the latter: the party political system which was established after the war was, it must be said, singularly ill-equipped to meet these new challenges.

A New Political System?

The end of the Vichy and Fascist regimes, and the dreams which had kept resistance hopes alive even in the darkest of hours, led many men and
women to hope that liberation would profoundly alter the political order. In both countries these hopes were cruelly dashed.

In Italy, political renewal came up against tough obstacles. First of all, the Badoglio government and its successors avoided carrying out a thorough purge. From 25 April 1945 onwards, the date of the insurrection in the north and the definitive liberation of the peninsula, two territorial parties faced each other: those who represented the resistance in the north and those who had participated, after September 1943, in the governments of the parts of Italy liberated by the Allies. The former pressed for profound change in state institutions and a veritable purge while the latter, already implicated in the old apparatus of power, proved more attentive to the balance of power and to the renewal of institutions and social relations. For a brief period of time, the ‘north wind’ appeared to prevail: still united in a national coalition the parties accepted to confer the presidency of the council to the resistance leader of the Guistizia e libertà brigades, Ferruccio Parri, who belonged to the Partito d’Azione (21 June 1945 to 8 December 1945). But the Parri government soon succumbed to the blows of the moderate representatives who intended to liquidate the Committee of National Liberation, hasten the return of the old prefects, and to bring the purge to a close. The presidency therefore passed to the leader of the Christian Democrats, Alcide de Gasperi. Parri was also abandoned by his allies on the left who wanted to maintain their role in the new political configuration. It is significant, in this respect, that the highly contested amnesty law was signed by Palmiro Togliatti, leader of the Communist Party and Minister of Justice in the de Gasperi government. The gulf separating the population and the political parties thus only tended to grow. The latter gave the impression of fighting over political posts rather than defending their ideas, as a disenchanted Vittorio Foa noted:

The coalition of the parties has remained a gymnastics competition rather than becoming a centre of reference and a promoter of ideas that go beyond the sphere of the parties. [...] The government and the parties have gradually become detached from the needs and profound aspirations of the ordinary people. [...] They have clashed on remote and abstract policy positions.

42 A brilliant description of the historical context and of the day-to-day conflicts between the old guard and the new political forces can be found in a work by Carlo Levi, anti-fascist of the Partito d’Azione, writer and eyewitness of events: Carlo Levi, L’orologio (Turin: Einaudi, 1950).
43 Vittorio Foa, Scritti politici (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010), p. 112.
The political parties can make all the compromises they want and negotiate mutual concessions in the context of government; however, this is not sufficient to build a democracy, especially if the instruments of state policy are still those of fascism, not just of the people but also of the arbitrary forms of behaviour’, he added in January 1946, barely a few months before the referendum. Many elements brought about division, ranging from the issues at hand (Fascism, the resistance, Communism, the Church, etc.) to the people who should, by all logic, have gathered people together, such as the king. Majorities came together to reject the monarchy, which was certainly compromised by the attitude it had adopted towards Fascism, and to elect the Christian Democrats by a comfortable margin in the legislative elections of 1948. But this vote expressed, above all, a desire to reconnect with a form of normality after the combined shock of Fascism and war.

France, meanwhile, did not sink into the torment of disillusion, even if the political landscape was characterized by relative stability. Indeed, the war only gave rise to one truly new party, the Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP) which wore the colours of Christian Democracy and supposedly embodied fidelity to General de Gaulle even if it above all served to attract the votes of the moderate right. Despite its ambitions, the resistance was incapable of creating its own political body, with the exception of the Union démocratique et socialiste de la Résistance (UDSR), a modest party which nonetheless managed to play a pivotal role skilfully and to offer secure ministerial careers to its members, starting with François Mitterrand. Neither the French Communist Party (PCF), nor the Section française de l’Internationale ouvrière (SFIO) made use of the war years to modernize politically. The lucid reflections that Léon Blum made in À l’échelle humaine did not capture the public imagination and the old guard reconnected after 1946 with the outdated cult of Jules Guesde. The PCF, meanwhile, continued to tread its Stalinist path.

Power relations had nevertheless been altered. Socialists and Communists dominated the political landscape while the right and the radical socialists had almost entirely disappeared from the scene. But this situation was in no way a product of the war. The left had been gaining ground since 1932, a fact which undermines claims that the liberation represented a political

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44 Ibid. p. 148.
earthquake, especially since the right, after 1945, had sixty-two deputies whom the elected representatives of the MRP could join.46

The relative absence of tensions between the population and the central government was not, therefore, due to an improbable rearrangement of the political landscape but instead to a range of other factors. On one level, General de Gaulle managed successfully to incarnate national unity. He enjoyed an incontestable moral position based on the struggle that he had pursued since the foundational act of 18 June 1940. He also managed to consolidate this position by restoring the authority of the state, making a series of visits to the provinces that further established his popularity and, ultimately, associating all parties in a government which brought together the full breadth of the political spectrum. Through his words, and through a prudently executed purge, he managed to eradicate Vichyism and unite the French by claiming, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, that the mass of the population had participated in the act of resistance. The de Gaulle government and its successors also began a thorough process of reform. Large-scale nationalizations allowed the state to control such vital sectors as energy, banking, insurance and transport. Unlike in the United Kingdom, indicative planning allowed the activity of these public companies to be coordinated, so that they worked in unison towards the modernization of the country. State intervention in the economy was also coupled with a generous policy towards salaried workers, which took shape with the introduction of social security through the ordonnances of 4 and 9 October 1945. Ultimately, many developments, including votes for women, the reform of the status of tenant farming, and the creation of the École nationale d'administration (ENA), promised a better tomorrow.

There was nothing revolutionary about these reforms: they had been advanced and debated during the 1930s. Far from provoking debates and controversies as they had during the interwar years, however, they enjoyed broad consensus after 1945. By revealing the delayed development of France, the defeat of 1940 had resulted in a hunger for modernization, which was further stimulated by the shortages of the occupation and the spectacle of the American army. Disorientated by the crisis of the 1930s, the right had watered down its liberal, free-market policies, especially as the Vichy regime had accustomed the employers to working with together the public

authorities. Discredited by their close association with Philippe Pétain, conservative forces were too weak at the time of the liberation to oppose state intervention. Perhaps they also assumed that social reforms would stop short of toppling of the cadres of the liberal economy, a hypothetical threat rendered credible by the high scores of the Communist Party. In all events, the French were able to envisage a future with relative optimism because, unlike after the First World War, the public mood was not to return to the status quo ante but to lay the foundations of a France that was at once more modern and more fair.

The neo-Fordist compromise of 1945 – to increase mass production and at the same time guarantee decent wages and a form of social security – was strong enough to last until the 1980s: no government, whether on the right or the left, called social security or nationalization into question. Many problems persisted, however. While the French would have hoped for a revision of institutions, the constitution of the Fourth Republic, grudgingly accepted by only a small majority, reproduced the same faults of the Third Republic which, when stormy weather came, did not give the executive the means to resolve the crises that were about to unfold. Similarly, members of the resistance, however animated they may have been by generous intentions, revealed themselves to be strongly conservative when it came to the question of empire. Shortages also created tensions that would only be exacerbated further by the Communist Party’s calls for a ‘battle of production’, which led to a silencing of proletarian demands for the reconstruction of the country. These tensions were present in French society but, unlike in Italy, they did not explode until 1947-1948. Taken together, the aura of General de Gaulle and the capacity of the PCF to control a significant part of the working class offer an explanation for this period of reprieve, one which Italy never experienced, perhaps for lack of a charismatic leader determined to engage in policies of economic and social reform at the time of liberation.

At the risk of stating the obvious, the end of the war marked a moment of transition between conflict and the restoration of a form of normality. This transition was certainly complex in both France and Italy, as a result of the combined effects of the pursuit of the war, the intervention of the

Allies in domestic affairs, the legacies of Fascism and Pétainism and the political and social dynamics that were unleashed after 1943 in Italy and after 1944 in France.

The military operations, as we have seen, followed different rhythms, which exposed the Italian peninsula to violence that was infinitely more murderous than that which affected France. Likewise, London and Washington placed Rome under a tutelage from which Paris was spared thanks to the political sense of General de Gaulle who was capable, through his words and actions, of imposing a brief but energetic purge while at the same time beginning a powerful movement of reform, reforms from which the Badoglio government abstained. A gulf henceforth separated the government from those it governed in Italy, which incited the population to defy the authorities and to seek the path of salvation in autonomy. The diversity of experiences during the two-year period from 1943 to 1945 also led to divergent interpretations of past events and created a divided memory of the war. These elements exercised a powerful influence on political behaviour and over the formation of the republic by widening the historical rift between north and south. The struggle in the north, moreover, also developed as a form of civil war between Fascists and anti-fascists which, on the level of local communities, had many consequences in the post-war years in terms of resentments, reprisals and conflicts.49 In France, conversely, national unity, formed under the aegis of the ‘man of 18 June’, circumvented conflicts and difficulties. Unlike its neighbour, France did not experience civil war, however resentful the resistance, which was quick to denounce ‘the betrayed revolution’, and the Vichyites, who were inclined towards bitter brooding, may have been. Political traditions, it is true, were not the same in each case. While the nation-state was taken for granted in France, in Italy it did not constitute the essence of the political community, a community which instead resided in the city, the province, or the region (where, moreover, political and ideological allegiances continued to evolve, in contrast with the relative stability of political allegiances observable in French regions). France, as a result, began the second half of the 1940s in a mood of relative optimism since the government, casting a veil of forgetting over the legacies of the past, launched itself into a programme of modernization coupled with genuine, albeit imperfect, social justice. In Italy, on the other hand, the legacies of two decades of Fascism were far

49 On the violence in Emilia against those accused of having collaborated with the Salò Republic, which continued for many years after the war, see Guido Crainz, L’ombra della guerra. Il 1945, l’Italia (Rome: Donzelli, 2007).
from eradicated and the divisions of the past, complicated by the emerging Cold War, weighed heavily. In France, the difficult challenges of war and occupation had led to a consensus being formed around economic and social progress. In Italy, meanwhile, the war only stirred up divisions and weakened a country which, in 1945, remained poor. The French ultimately placed their trust in the state and in an elite group of public functionaries to usher in a period of post-war prosperity that would last three decades, the so-called ‘Trente glorieuses’; Italy’s post-war recovery could only be achieved, conversely, by drawing on the vitality of civil society. The end of the Second World War therefore set the two ‘Latin sisters’ on markedly different paths.

Translated by Tom Williams