

THE FALL OF MUSSOLINI

ITALY, THE ITALIANS,
AND THE
SECOND WORLD WAR

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The Forty-Five Days, July to September 1943

THE international consequences of Mussolini's dismissal by the king on 25 July 1943 were significant but contained. The Italian ramifications of Mussolini's fall were less immediately significant, but ultimately uncontrollable. There has been so much controversy over the responsibility for and significance of the events from Mussolini's removal in July 1943 to the signing and declaration of the armistice between Italy and the Allies in September 1943, that it becomes extremely difficult for the historian to clear a path through the retrospective mutual recriminations and mud-slinging of the protagonists. The only place to start is with the announcement to the nation by the 72-year-old Marshal Pietro Badoglio, called out of military retirement by the king to head the new government after the dismissal and arrest of Mussolini on 25 July 1943.

Badoglio was a deeply compromised figure, though he probably did not appear so to those who appointed him. A very political military man, Badoglio had successfully ducked and weaved with the Fascist dictatorship for two decades, garnering position, honours, and riches from the regime. He had managed to assume the credit for Fascism's military successes, including the extremely brutal pacification of the Italian North African colony of Libya in the late 1920s and the conquest of Ethiopia, in East Africa, in 1935–6. He had then evaded responsibility for its military disasters, including the botched invasion of Greece in late 1940. He resigned his position as head of the supreme military command, nominally the most important military post under Mussolini, in the wake of that disastrous campaign. Because he was regarded as the scapegoat for what happened in Greece, he left with his reputation, amazingly, largely intact. Approached by the king before 25 July

to be Mussolini's successor, he had two and a half years of apparently clean hands to recommend him as a credible replacement of the dictator.

What Badoglio announced to the nation was that the war would continue, which, once the declaration had sunk in, dampened the popular celebrations which followed the news of Mussolini's dismissal. The days after 25 July saw the defacing, dismantling, and toppling of some of the public marks and signs of the Fascist regime, the now-familiar symbolical cleansing which usually characterizes the transition from one political regime to another. As elsewhere, such popular anger directed against the outward manifestations of a discredited regime was also a sign of the people's sense of impotence. People could only take symbolic revenge on a regime which had already fallen; it was activism and opposition after the event. The impact of Italy's disastrous war on popular morale had destroyed the credibility of Mussolini and the Fascist regime. Quite understandably and predictably, the Italian people expected the end of Mussolini to mean the end of the war, too. It meant the same for the king and the military, also. But they had decided not to take Grandi's advice and achieve it in the risky and compressed timescale of an immediate and simultaneous changing of sides and declaration of war on Nazi Germany.

The war continued because the king and his new government did not want to provoke or provide a pretext for a German-inspired Fascist counter-coup and the German military occupation of Italy. It was the constant fear of German reaction which underpinned and, one has to say, undermined the Badoglio government's action (and inaction) during the so-called Forty-Five Days between July and September 1943. Some of the government's irresponsible behaviour only becomes remotely intelligible if you bear in mind that the concern throughout was to withdraw from the war at minimum cost. It wanted to leave the war with the monarchy and state institutions intact, without fighting the Germans—preferably without having to fight anybody—and in a way which would avoid mainland Italy becoming occupied territory and a war zone. One could say that such aims were desirable, even high-minded and in the national interest. But one could not say in the circumstances that they were in any way realistic. It was this lack of realism, and a consequent overestimation of the country's capacity to function as an international free agent, which ultimately makes the charge of irresponsibility stick.

A sign of the government's lack of perspective was its refusal, or inability, to assess realistically the intentions and actions of Nazi Germany. From the start, Hitler regarded the removal of Mussolini as a betrayal of the Axis

alliance, and expected and planned for the eventual Italian exit from the alliance. The Germans substantially increased their military presence in Italy between July and September. Rather than exclusively concentrating its forces in the south for the defence of its ally, Germany also stationed its troops alongside Italian forces in the centre and north, to facilitate their disarmament when the Italian changing of sides occurred. The Germans, in other words, always intended to occupy Italy and always intended to defend their own frontiers not on the Alps, but in Italy itself. The Alps were not the preferred defensive line for the Germans. Occupying Italy would allow them to set up a Fascist government behind their lines, continue to exploit the economic resources of northern Italy, hold on to the Balkans, and keep some of Germany itself out of the range of Allied bombing. There was never any danger of Italy provoking Nazi Germany into action; it was taking action, anyway. The Italian government's dilatory approach to armistice talks with the Allies was presumably meant as a ruse to reassure the Germans of its continuing loyalty to the Axis alliance. The attempt at deception served to bring about the conditions which made a painless exit from the war even more unlikely than it was at the start.

There is no need to imagine how the Germans responded to Italian hopes, probably held up to mid-August 1943, of leaving the war with Hitler's consent. This had been the fanciful thinking of some military figures and diplomats, including Ambrosio and Bastianini, both before and after the Feltre meeting between Hitler and Mussolini on 19 July. The idea was that Italy would negotiate a separate peace with the Allies and a peaceful withdrawal from the Axis alliance with Germany, which would leave Italy at peace, neutral, and with no foreign armies fighting each other on Italian territory. For their part, the Allies were equally uninterested in allowing Italy an easy withdrawal from the war. The idea of a negotiated peace contradicted the declared goal of unconditional surrender. An Italy occupied by the Germans was preferable to a neutral Italy, since the occupation would overextend German manpower and resources, and weaken its capacity to fight on both the eastern and planned western fronts.

Interestingly, this aspiration to international neutrality was reflected in the internal political neutrality of the Badoglio government. The king's new government immediately abolished the organs of the Fascist state, the Fascist Party, the Grand Council, the Special Tribunal, the corporations, the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations. But it went no further in a consciously anti-Fascist

direction. It promised elections after the end of the war, and banned all party-political activity for the duration of the conflict. One would hardly have expected anything different in a country still at war, when even democratic states suspended normal politics for such a national emergency.

There was a relaxation of the ban on party activity, allowing some space to organize for reforming anti-Fascist groups. But again, the government's release of anti-Fascist political prisoners was a reluctant drawn-out process and discriminated against Anarchist and Communist prisoners. Certainly, anti-Fascists were kept out of the government. There was no inclination to bring back those whom the king referred to as the 'ghosts' of Italy's pre-Fascist past. Indeed, the royal government was so repressive of popular agitation against the war that it behaved as if it was back in 1922 facing a socialist revolution and determined, this time, not to allow the spread of popular unrest which had necessitated the recourse to Fascism in the first place. The royal government's reluctance to open itself out to popular anti-Fascist forces was a very serious self-limitation. It was entirely consistent with the government's concern to protect against political instability and social change a conservative, monarchical social and political order. Under no circumstances would such a government ever call on the people to help it prevent or expel German occupation of the country.

Goebbels expected the king, after Mussolini's dismissal, to establish a regime like Franco's in Spain. He was close; but Badoglio's government was more like Marshal Pétain's Vichy regime in France. It was conservative, authoritarian, certainly not democratic, but not fascist either. It was a system which the king thought the Germans might be prepared to deal with, as they had done with Pétain in France from 1940. But in its partial disassociation from Mussolini's Fascist regime, it might also be enough to reassure the democracies.

Some tentative diplomatic feelers to the Allies after 25 July produced so negative a response as to make it clear that the Allies were only prepared to talk about an armistice, an end to military hostilities. The Germans were as clearly unwilling to consent to Italian withdrawal from the war and would, in fact, oppose it; so began the protracted pantomime of the Badoglio government's armistice negotiations.

An army general, Giuseppe Castellano, a trusted subordinate of Ambrosio, the head of the general staff of the armed forces, was sent by the government to Madrid and Lisbon to meet Allied representatives and discuss an armistice. Castellano had no official credentials and was not authorized to negotiate on behalf of the government. This caution was presumably designed to keep the

trip as secret as possible and to allow Badoglio to disown the mission if it was uncovered or produced uncongenial results. He went there and back by train, which at least was quicker than going on foot, leaving Rome on 12 August 1943 and returning to the city on 27 August 1943. The army general staff was so ignorant or suspicious of the Castellano mission that it confusingly sent one of its men on a similar expedition to contact the Allies while Castellano was still in transit. Ambrosio persisted right up to the declaration of the armistice in keeping his own armed forces very much in the dark about the government's intentions, again presumably to maintain secrecy and avoid any leak provoking the Germans into action.

Castellano's 'present' to the Allied contacts in Madrid and Lisbon and to the Allied military command in Algiers, North Africa, was to reveal something of German troop deployments in Italy. Off his own bat and without Badoglio's prior approval, he also intimated that Italy might well accept unconditional surrender if it was allowed to redeem itself by fighting the Germans alongside the Allies. What Castellano was mandated to outline was Italy's negotiating position on an armistice. This was that there should be Allied landings on mainland Italy *before* an armistice, that these landings should be significant enough to be militarily successful, and that they should take place in central Italy, well north of Rome, to ensure that the Germans withdrew their forces to the Alpine frontiers. The famous British historian of modern Italy, Denis Mack-Smith argues, controversially, that these conditions were those of a country with ideas well above its station, and of a country which was going to wait and see who actually won the war.¹ The first assertion is accurate, the second is less convincing. The Badoglio government had definitely decided to work towards an armistice with the Allies. The conditions were its preferred minimal costs option: the Germans would be expelled from Italy by Allied military strength, with little or no military input required from Italy.

The Allied commanders were insistent that an armistice would have to be agreed before any landings on mainland Italy took place, in order to facilitate those landings by removing Italian military resistance to them, at least. The Allied military command's immovable stance on this reflected the lower priority being given to an Italian, as opposed to a mainland French, invasion. The Allied landings in Italy needed all the help they could get to be successful.

Castellano, during his follow-up meetings with Allied commanders in Sicily at the end of August 1943, was told by his government to bring up the Darlan model. Admiral Jean-François Darlan was the Vichyite commander

in French North Africa who had negotiated the end of French opposition to the Allied 'Torch' landings of late 1942. The analogy, or possible analogy, with Darlan was entirely misplaced and, once again, demonstrated the lack of a grasp on reality of the royal government and its inflation of Italy's current international position. Vichy France was collaborating with the Germans, but was not in the Axis and not at war with the Allies. Badoglio's Italy was still in the Axis and still fighting the Allies as an enemy state.

The Allies could not oblige on the timing of the armistice, nor could they promise a landing north of Rome, beyond the logistical range of the Allied forces. But they were so keen to broker an armistice that they promised military help to Italy in order to defend Rome against the Germans, in the shape of a special airborne mission of US forces.

When Castellano met the Allied representatives in Sicily at the end of August 1943, he was instructed by the government to insist on the original conditions broached with the Allies at Lisbon. He still did not have the government's authority to sign an armistice. Practically imprisoned on the island by the Allies, who threatened and cajoled the Italian government at a distance, he was eventually enabled to sign the armistice on 3 September 1943. Given the way in which the Italian government had conducted itself, the Allied military command was hardly going to give a precise date for mainland landings. Despite all the protestations to the contrary after the event, the Italian government definitely knew within a few days of it actually happening on 8 September 1943, that Allied landings at Salerno, south of Naples, were imminent and would coincide with the official declaration of the armistice.

The rational and sensible thing to do, once the armistice was signed, was for the government to prepare militarily for the armistice and for the defence of Rome. In fact, consistent to the end, it did hardly anything. The army high command had already drawn up military directives on how to carry out anti-German military action. From 2 to 6 September, these directives were sent to its commands in Italy. Ambrosio drafted military directives for the army commands under his control as chief of staff of the armed forces in the Balkans and the Aegean islands, but chose not to send them. The directives that were dispatched were certainly more proactive than Badoglio's instructions to the army on 8 September. But they provided insufficiently clear guidance, judging by the very varied ways in which they were interpreted and implemented on the ground on and after 8 September, and by the calls made for clarification by local commanders to the army

ministry and supreme command in Rome, on the declaration of the armistice. The calls were unanswered or inadequately answered, because most of the people equipped to deal with them were abandoning their desks in Rome to join the king's flight from the city on 9 September.

The Allies had indicated their willingness to help the Italians defend Rome, to make up for the fact that the landings would be some way to the south of the capital. General Maxwell Taylor, of the US army, made a risky flight to Rome on the night of 7–8 September, to confirm that the Americans were coming and to make arrangements for a landing of an airborne division on airfields around Rome. The top military figures in Rome pretended not to be interested in the US offer of military help. Ambrosio, incredibly, took a train to Turin, in north-west Italy, on 6 September and went walkabout for two days, deliberately missing Taylor's arrival in Rome. General Giacomo Carboni, the nominal commander of the Italian motorized corps charged with defending Rome, told Taylor that the Italian forces would not be strong enough nor ready enough to protect the landing of the US airborne troops and for the immediate defence of Rome. An incredulous Taylor then met Badoglio himself in the middle of the night and, in his pyjamas, Badoglio fired off a telegram to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Allied forces' commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean. The message ludicrously requested a delay to the declaration of the armistice, which amounted to a rejection of the armistice: it was, apparently, 'no longer possible', wired Badoglio, 'to accept an immediate armistice'.² Eisenhower angrily rejected the request; Taylor understandably called off the operation to help defend Rome.

Later, the king and his advisers were contemplating a rejection of Eisenhower's rejection, until an officer present had to remind them that the government had actually signed the armistice on 3 September. To repudiate it now would mean Italy alienating both the Germans and the Allies. There was no need to anticipate such a consequence. The mutual alienation of both ally-turned-enemy and enemy-turned-ally, was, indeed, the unhappy product of Forty-Five Days of royal government. Successfully offending both sides is perhaps one definition of neutrality!

Behind the passivity and prevarication of the government and the military at this crucial stage of the armistice process lay the concerns which shaped policy from the beginning. There is some evidence to suggest that the message to Taylor about Italian unreadiness to defend Rome was prompted by a determination of at least some army commanders to do what they could

to prepare the defence of the city in the time gained by the postponement of the armistice declaration. But this does not seem to have been what prompted the inaction of Ambrosio and Badoglio. They, and the king, were still dreaming the impossible dream, that since the Italian army was deemed to be insufficiently strong to fight and defeat the Germans, the job had to be done by Allied military strength alone. And anyway, they continued to think, if Italian forces did fight the Germans, this would simply provoke the German occupation of Rome and central and northern Italy, and the German capture of the king and the Badoglio government.

Worse was to follow, if that were possible. Faced by the imminent declaration of the armistice, the king and Badoglio decided to abandon Rome and head by car convoy with a large group of senior military staff to the Adriatic port of Pescara, on the opposite eastern seaboard of Italy. From there, they would be shipped to Brindisi, a southern port in Allied hands. Ambrosio quite deliberately destabilized any possible effective military defence of Rome in order to protect the king's departure. He ordered Carboni's motorized troops out of Rome to nearby Tivoli, which also meant the army high command, having just moved to Rome, now had to move out again, totally disorganizing any military resistance to a German attack on the city. It was a very clear demonstration of where, for Ambrosio, the national interest lay. The country's capital city and, indeed, most of central and northern Italy, were sacrificed to save the king's skin. Or as Ambrosio would have put it, parts of the national territory were temporarily sacrificed to German occupation in order to save a man and an institution which embodied the nation as a whole.

On the evening of 8 September, Badoglio's instructions to the military were that *any* attack, whatever the source, was to be resisted. The Italian supreme military command's orders to the armed forces were, 'in no case are you to take the initiative in hostilities against German troops'.³ The orders were perhaps not so much unclear as wrong. They explicitly ruled out any Italian armed forces' *initiative* against the Germans, any *attack* on the Germans. How the instructions were applied is a story for later. The one dubious merit of the orders was simply that they were consistent with the 'busy doing nothing' approach of the royal government throughout the Forty-Five Days: on no account were Italians to fight Germans and thereby offer any provocation for a German takeover of Italy. In a tragic chain of events which should have been foreseen and guarded against, the king's government had brought about the very situation it wanted to avoid.

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The Armistice, September 1943

ON the evening of 8 September 1943, Marshal Badoglio, the head of the government, announced the armistice in a radio broadcast to the Italian people and armed forces:

The Italian government, acknowledging the impossibility of continuing the unequal struggle against the overwhelming power of our opponents, and with the aim of sparing the nation further and more serious harm, has requested an armistice from General Eisenhower, commander-in-chief of the Anglo-American allied forces. This request has been met. Consequently, all hostilities against Anglo-American forces by Italian forces, everywhere, must stop. Italian forces, however, will resist any eventual attacks coming from any other source.¹

Italian armies were not only located in mainland Italy itself. They were dispersed over the areas they occupied in France, Yugoslavia, mainland Greece, and the Greek islands. For most army commands, wherever they were, this was the first and only directive about the armistice they received. The air force and navy commanders were apparently forewarned of the declaration of the armistice by the armed forces' supreme command. This went some way to explaining why these forces actually managed to change sides, if not intact, then with some kind of residual fighting capacity. Most vessels of the Italian navy sailed out of Italian and Italian-held ports, beating off attempts to stop them, and gathered, as planned, at the British Mediterranean island of Malta or at other Allied-controlled ports. Some of the remains of Italy's air force made it to airfields in those parts of southern Italy conquered by Allied forces and placed under the administration of the king, who with members of his government and military command, had fled there from Rome on the declaration of the armistice. Some aircraft were already located in the conquered areas of the south.

From Malta and from southern Italy, what remained of the Italian navy and air force were eventually allowed by the Allied command and the royal

government to help Italian troops who were continuing to fight the Germans in various parts of occupied Yugoslavia, mainland Greece, and the Greek islands, in the expectation or hope of Allied landings and support. Allied and Italian military support was too little and too late to affect the outcome of this fighting.

For those who could actually take it in, Badoglio's deliberately muted declaration of the armistice only contained a specific order to stop fighting the Allies. It did not order Italian forces to fight the Germans, only to respond to attacks from whoever they came, meaning, of course, the Germans, and including, as it transpired, Yugoslav, Albanian, and Greek partisans resisting Axis occupation of the Balkans.

This cautious message kept to the letter, if not the spirit, of the armistice agreement signed with the Allies on 3 September. In this document, there was certainly no explicit mention of the Italians actively helping the Allies against Germany. The commitment was to cooperate with the Allies and resist the Germans. The Allies promised support for any Italian forces resisting the Germans, a promise the Allies felt that they were already keeping by planning the aborted expedition to help in the defence of Rome. But in agreeing to the armistice on 3 September, the king's government knew from the joint Churchill and Roosevelt Quebec declaration communicated to them during the negotiations, that the armistice conditions on Italy would be eased in light of the extent of the Italian government's and people's support of the Allied war on Germany, for however much longer the war lasted. This Anglo-American concession on the principle of unconditional surrender at least gave Italy the opportunity to 'fight its way home', which was what Grandi, back in July 1943, had regarded as the only way Italy could possibly leave the Axis.

But, as we have already seen, this was an opportunity the king and Badoglio were determined not to take. They wanted to leave the war without fighting the Germans. This strategy, if that was the word for it, was reflected in the careful wording of the armistice announcement, and, indeed, in the orders and guidance to the armed forces which were given—and not given—by the military command in the period between the signing of the armistice on 3 September and the king's flight from Rome early in the morning of 9 September. The Italian military command had drawn up directives after the signing of the armistice, which, while repeating the mantra that the Italians were to fight the Germans only if attacked by them, at least envisaged active measures to prepare for such attacks. These directives, 'Memorandum OP 44',

were sent to army commands by Badoglio and Ambrosio, head of the supreme command. But despite desperate appeals from some senior officers on the general staff, they refused during the night of 8–9 September to give the order for these directives to be activated. OP 44 remained unopened in sealed envelopes on the desks of army headquarters across occupied Europe, awaiting the order to slice the envelope open which never came.

In the orders which were actually given, the message was basically the same. An order sent to Italian commanders in the Balkans and Aegean stated that if there was no German attack on them, then Italian forces should not make common cause with local partisans ('rebels') nor with Allied troops if they attempted landings. This instruction all but contravened the armistice clause on cooperation with the Allies. Nevertheless, the Italian commander in Greece, General Vecchiarelli, passed this order on to his local commanders, uncoded so that all and sundry would know, after the declaration of the armistice on 8 September. Again, in the very early morning of 9 September, a few hours before the king's flight from Rome, the army ministry clarified something which had obviously been bothering army commands everywhere. German requests to move its troops around in Italian-occupied zones were not to be regarded as hostile acts, and Italian commanders could, if they wished, inform local German commands of their own troop movements and intentions. This instruction practically invited German forces to occupy Italian-held territory and take steps to neutralize Italian forces, something they were already doing and intended to do on the declaration of the Italian armistice.

Finally, there were specific instructions to Italian commands on the central Mediterranean islands of Sardinia and occupied Corsica, which were prepared but not sent at the time of the declaration of the armistice. These were, anyway, effectively countermanded by Ambrosio's response to a query from the Italian military commander on Sardinia early on 9 September. The prepared order was dispatched on 12 September from the supreme command's new location of Brindisi, in south-eastern Italy, when it was too late to make any difference to what was happening on the ground. It envisaged the Italian expulsion of German forces from the two islands, and explicitly ruled out German forces being allowed to transfer from Sardinia to Corsica and thence, of course, to the mainland. Ambrosio, however, on the verge of leaving Rome and still fearful of capture by German forces surrounding the city, told the Sardinian commander that he could allow German forces there to leave the island 'peacefully'. This, again, was tantamount to contravening

the terms of the armistice, and once again, confirmed the drift of the other instructions coming out of Rome before the lights went out in the War Ministry. It was, and is, all very well to point to the lack of proper guidance to the army before and during 8–9 September. But if that advice had been more generally forthcoming, then it would have been, ‘do all you can to avoid fighting the Germans’.

The behaviour of Badoglio’s government during the Forty-Five Days from the overthrow of Mussolini on 25 July to the declaration of the armistice on 8 September; and the military command’s orders between the signing of the armistice on 3 September and the flight from Rome on 9 September, including those actually delivered and those which, deliberately, were not, were, ultimately, all one. The king and Badoglio would not contemplate ordering an attack on the Germans, because in their view any such order, or even the whiff of an intention to give one, would provoke German attacks on Italian armed forces and on the Italian population, and bring about the German occupation of Italy. More immediately, such an order would also provoke the Germans into attempting to capture the king and his government.

The king’s official declaration of war on Nazi Germany came only on 13 September. But the itinerant military command had, from Brindisi, on 11 September, told its commanders in the field to treat the Germans as enemies. By this time, the king’s person was safe behind Allied lines in southern Italy, and it was clear the Allied forces would have to bear the brunt of fighting the Germans and forcing them out of Italy. A declaration of war on Germany made at the same time as the armistice declaration, might, but only might, have induced the Germans to think twice about summarily executing Italian officers and men who had fought them after the armistice, treating them as irregulars rather than combatants with the rights of prisoners of war. But even after the official Italian declaration of war on Nazi Germany, the Germans continued to kill captured Italian soldiers.

Badoglio’s announcement of the armistice on 8 September appeared to provoke among the Italian people that same mix of enthusiasm and consternation which had greeted the news of Mussolini’s fall in July. A mother in the Adriatic port city of Pola, now Pula, on the tip of the Istrian peninsula—a mainly Slav-populated territory annexed to Italy in 1920—reported how the armistice ‘arrived as a surprise for everybody, both in Pola and throughout the peninsula and even further afield, where our troops were left without any orders or officers for much of the time’. On the evening of 8 September, the word on

the streets in Pola was that 'the war is over',² a personal relief to this woman, who had been packing her son's bags for his call-up on 15 September. In fact, the war was only just beginning for the 'Italian' towns and cities dotted along the Yugoslav Adriatic coastline. The woman's son, saved from call-up by the armistice, was enrolled in the army of Mussolini's Italian Social Republic in spring 1944. In Fiume, now Rijeka, further up the Istrian peninsula, a resident recalled that most people were 'disorientated' by Badoglio's broadcast, and 'each one of us had the real feeling that something dreadful and inevitable was about to happen'.³ It duly did.

Such responses were not confined to Italians who felt particularly vulnerable as Italians because of the places where they lived. A young student at Florence University, back home in Formia, a coastal town just north of Naples and of Salerno, where armistice day Allied landings had occurred, remembered the anxiety caused by what she saw as the ambiguity of Badoglio's statement. 'But what will happen to us, now?', she cried in tears, her panic a kind of counterpoint to the other sounds coming from the street of 'jubilant shouting'.⁴ Inland, the same question was being asked in the market square of Isernia, in Campobasso province, where people had gathered once the ringing of the church bells had announced the armistice. While babies and children 'celebrated, the adults put anguished questions to each other: "the armistice has only been signed by the Italians; how will the Allies react? What is going to happen?"'⁵ It takes a while to realize that the 'Allies' referred to in this woman's account were the Germans. The answer to these popular anxieties came two days later, on 10 September. The town, an important regional communications fork and soon to become a war zone as the Germans withdrew to the defensive Gustav Line for the winter, was subject to a nasty aerial bombing raid by Italy's ex-enemies and new allies.

The responses to Badoglio's armistice announcement among the senior commanders, officers, and men of Italy's armies resulted in the almost total disintegration of the country's military forces. This was a national disaster, the effects of which reverberated through the remaining years of the war and into post-war recrimination and memory. It was experienced at the time as a national disaster, and from whatever perspective it was experienced, it was remembered as such.

If the general outcome of the armistice declaration was the disbanding of the Italian armies, it is difficult to generalize on how this came about. Italy's armies disintegrated in a variety of ways. Looking back on these events, this was

almost bound to be the case. The officers and troops of Italy's widely dispersed armies were forced to make decisions and choices on their own account, in an institutional vacuum without any of the usual reference points which might have guided or offered a direction to how people behaved. For a couple of days after the declaration of the armistice on 8 September, there was no government in Italy, or at least no functioning government. The king, his head of government, and senior military commanders were incommunicado and in transit to their new location in the Allied-controlled south of the country. Telephone calls to ministerial and military offices in Rome were either unanswered, or answered by officials and officers too junior, too ignorant of what was happening, and too frightened and wary to offer any useful or convincing information and advice on how to proceed.

Soldiers listening to Badoglio's broadcast, which was all that most of them would have had to go on, interpreted the armistice as meaning that the war was, finally, over for them. Badoglio was telling them to stop fighting the Allies; that, at least, was clear. He was also not telling them to fight the Germans. If they were not fighting the Allies, and not fighting the Germans, then their war was over and they could expect to return home.

This was a natural and justifiable reaction in the circumstances. The armistice was not so much the cause as the occasion for the break-up of the Italian army. The *tutti a casa* (everybody home) phenomenon after 8 September was the army voting with its feet on the Fascist wars of 1940–3. These wars had demoralized Italian troops, tired them out, kept them from their homes for unjustifiably long periods, forced them into the uncongenial occupation of territories whose peoples rejected them, distanced them from their officers for whom they had little natural respect. After the fall of Mussolini in July—for them as for the bulk of the population, the natural end to the war—they must have been stupefied by Badoglio's decision to continue fighting a war which had lost its initiator and its point.

That the disintegration of the Italian army was rooted in a widespread war-weariness among the troops, seems clear from what happened to the Italian defence of Sicily against Allied invasion in July 1943. Here were the first signs of the dissolution of the country's military forces, anticipating what was to happen more generally after 8 September. Italian military resistance to the invasion, especially among coastal defence units, was flaccid and brief. The police chief of Catania, a major city on Sicily's eastern coast, reported on 20 July, ten days after the invasion started, that there were 'long

files of disbanded and hungry Italian soldiers turning up in the Mount Etna area', spreading panic and terror and putting local people in fear of a 'dangerous brigandage'.⁶ The policeman had more than enough public order and welfare problems to handle in the city itself, with 30,000 people effectively displaced by incessant day and night Allied aerial and naval bombardment. He probably exaggerated the potential for banditry of fleeing Italian troops, in a report which was passed directly to Mussolini by his superiors. But the picture he portrayed was of an army in the process of self-dissolution.

Eyewitness accounts told the same story. A young woman whose family farm near Ragusa was in the immediate hinterland of the south-eastern coast of the island where Allied forces had landed, recorded an almost Shakespearian encounter with a small group of three frightened and embarrassed Italian soldiers creeping through the fields in the dark 'for fear of being discovered'. Assuming that her account captured at least the gist of their dialogue, it was a meeting and a conversation which was both comic and tragic in its depiction of an army disintegrating and on the run, and almost philosophical in the way the soldiers had already rationalized and justified to themselves the fact that they had given up. The young woman confronted the men,

'Have you run away?'

'Yes, signorina, . . . we are only fugitives, not deserters . . . Here, in Italy, we make war, lacking what we need to defend ourselves . . . and just to have ourselves slaughtered like sleeping dogs.'

'Where are you heading?'

'On whatever road lies ahead of us . . . and which gets us away from that damned hell-hole . . . that mouse trap . . .'

Clearly, these cowed and bedraggled men were not yet at the bandit stage of desperation. The young woman gave them a drink of water, some bread and jam, and off they went. But the shared sense of shame and humiliation remained with her; she observed that when the 'liberating' Allied troops passed through, later, they were received by the locals with 'frightened and bewildered looks . . . at the mercy of a dismay which we could not overcome'.⁷

The invasion of Sicily in July 1943 anticipated the armistice of 8 September in another significant way. According to the Catania chief of police, the German troops were behaving as if they were in occupation of an enemy city, forcibly commandeering cars and trucks for their eventual withdrawal and

threatening a scorched earth policy in retreat. The police chief would not have made this up. His own car, along with the prefect's, had been taken at gunpoint by German soldiers, who had fired on him and his police bodyguard as they drove off. The German forces behaved in the same way towards Italian soldiers and civilians in southern Italy during their aggressive retreat of the autumn of 1943 to their first major defensive line, the Gustav Line, stretching across Italy from the coast between Naples and Rome to the Adriatic coast just south of Pescara. Their vindictiveness was now reinforced by their sense of having been betrayed by Italy and Italians on 8 September.

There was clearly a breakdown of normal army discipline and of the hierarchy of command after the declaration of the armistice. Many officers were as bemused as their men by the turn of events and, effectively, decided not to face up to their responsibilities to their men, slipping away themselves without telling them or leaving them with any orders or guidance. In parts of occupied Yugoslavia, some local commanders hared off to the nearest airfield for a flight back to southern Italy, leaving their men behind them. The sense that they had been abandoned and let down by their officers featured strongly in the memories of the aftermath of 8 September. There was sometimes a feeling that they expected no better from their officers. A soldier at Cuneo, in Piedmont, sarcastically asked his commanding officer after the armistice announcement, 'but basically, colonel, sir, what do we have to do, now?'⁸ The sarcasm of the soldier's rhetorical question could not disguise his underlying anxiety, nor his lack of expectation of a decent answer and of some leadership from his officer. Elsewhere, there were cases reported of incensed soldiers, full of frustration and rage, smashing up and then, with local people, looting their own barracks and army stores.

In many army garrisons and barracks, authority fragmented, and a kind of democracy prevailed. Some commanders took the mood of their men and before the Germans could intervene, allowed them to leave and disperse to their homes as best they could in a kind of spontaneous disbandment. This, at least, was one step further than simply abandoning their men without saying anything. But abandonment was what it amounted to, ultimately. A man remembered that his brother, who eventually made it home to Macerata, in south central Italy, from service in the Balkans, told him that his commander's words to his unit after the armistice declaration were, 'save yourselves if you can; we no longer have any orders; it's unconditional surrender—look out for the Germans'.⁹ Some middle-rank and junior officers, usually closer to their

men and how they felt, disputed decisions taken on their force's behalf by senior officers, and hived off on their own, acting unilaterally and taking initiatives which were not authorized by their commanders. In a few notorious cases, the men killed their commanding officers because they ordered them to do something which they did not want to do.

This parcelling out of military authority inevitably stalemated the army units' capacity to act effectively as one fighting force. It also neutralized unilateral initiatives, one group's action or will to act being stymied by the inaction of another group, with sometimes tragicomic outcomes. An officer commanding twenty-five men in an artillery barracks in Alessandria, in north-western Italy, and intending to resist any German attack, sent his corporal to get grenades and ammunition from the depot. The soldier was told by the officer in charge of the stores that he would release nothing without the appropriate chit: 'he does not want any trouble'.¹⁰ The unit was subsequently disarmed by German soldiers. The officer and his men had decided to fight the Germans, which was their response to the vacuum created by the armistice declaration. But they were prevented from doing so by the bureaucratic obstinacy of the quartermaster, who stuck to the normal rules in an abnormal situation, which was his response to the disorder and crisis enveloping him.

Unlike their Italian counterparts, German forces had been prepared for an eventual Italian armistice, and on its announcement put into effect plans to neutralize and disarm the armies of their former ally. Between the fall of Mussolini in July and the declaration of the armistice in September, German reinforcements had moved into Italy itself and Italian-occupied France and the Balkans, positioning themselves near or alongside Italian forces in key strategic areas. Soon after the declaration of the armistice, often on the same evening of 8 September, German units approached Italian commands and confronted them with a choice, or an ultimatum. Italian forces could either cooperate with and join the Germans, continuing to fight the Axis war, or they could lay down their weapons and disarm. Those who chose not to surrender their arms, or not to communicate a decision at all within a short deadline, would be attacked by the Germans and forcibly disarmed. In some places in the occupied Balkans, local German commanders also offered repatriation after disarmament as an inducement to surrender. These promises of repatriation were not normally kept and were probably never seriously made. There were cases in mainland Italy, however, of Italian troops who surrendered

their weapons being allowed to leave their barracks and go home, joining those who were disbanding spontaneously.

The fact that German forces had a plan and the will to implement it, and were confronted by Italian troops who had no plan and now had to make a choice, more than compensated for the Germans' numerical inferiority. In the north-eastern city of Padua, home to a large Italian garrison, the entry of a very small advance force of about twenty German troops on 10 September was sufficient to provoke the immediate, panicky dispersal of Italian soldiers, not waiting for but anticipating the German ultimatum. The city just seemed to freeze, or shut down, in the presence of this tiny German force. 'No authority . . . raised its voice,'¹¹ civilian or military, as Italian soldiers moved out of their barracks, ditching their uniforms and weapons, and clogged up the city's trams and buses in a desperate attempt to leave. By the time the Germans reached the barracks, around one thousand Italian troops were still inside. They were disarmed, taken to the railway station, loaded onto cattle wagons, and dispatched by train to internment camps in Germany and Poland.

Capture, disarmament, and internment was what happened to around 650,000 Italian soldiers in mainland Italy and in Italian-occupied territories. A recent estimate was of over 850,000 men captured and disarmed by the Germans after the armistice, over half of them taken in the Balkans and the Greek islands, the rest in France and Italy. The figures are approximate because the Italian military authorities have never worked out the full extent of the internment operation. The Germans captured whole units in their barracks and garrisons, men passively waiting for something to happen, either because their officers had kept them together to await developments, or by force of inertia, where their officers had deserted them and left them to their own devices. This inactive waiting on events was perhaps the clearest sign of the Italian army just giving up. Many of them had decided not to move, even when there was an opportunity to do so in whatever gap there was, hours, a day, between the declaration of the armistice and the arrival of German troops.

The hundreds of thousands of men who were captured and interned became another 'Italy', in forced exile along with the other hundreds of thousands who were prisoners of war of the Allies. Overall, perhaps 1,300,000 Italians were imprisoned by enemy powers in the course of the war. About 50,000 were in the USSR, taken prisoner during the campaigns on the Axis' Eastern front. Another 40,000 or so were held in French-run camps in North Africa, captured during the last of the fighting in Tunisia in

spring 1943. Around 50,000 of the 125,000 captured by American forces, were in camps in the USA, where their labour was needed. About 400,000 had been captured by British forces and were dispersed all over the British Empire, in East and South Africa, Egypt and the Middle East, India, Australia, as well as in Britain itself. Finally, there were the largest group of all, imprisoned in Germany after 8 September 1943 and, again, a vital source of labour for the war economy of their captors.

These men were isolated and separated from events in Italy, some of them for years at a stretch. One artilleryman, called up in 1940, was taken prisoner by the British at the battle of Sidi El Barrani, in North Africa, in January 1941. Initially imprisoned in Egypt, he was transferred to a POW camp in South Africa and thence to one in England, surviving over six days at sea in a lifeboat after his transport ship was torpedoed during the voyage. After being in four separate camps in England, he was eventually repatriated to Italy in April 1946, and had been away from home as a POW for over five years. Admitted to a Pesarò mental hospital in early 1947, his doctors understandably ascribed his depression and eventual schizophrenia to his experience of war and prolonged imprisonment.

Italian POWs were generally reasonably treated in British and American camps, but often maltreated in Soviet, French, and German camps, where they were made to suffer for Italy's invasion and occupation of the USSR and France and for the betrayal of Nazi Germany. They were usually bored by the routine sameness of daily life in the camps and the low levels of subsistence and stimulation on offer. But they were still, in their apathy, inertia, and isolation, required to make a choice about which of the Italies they belonged to, after 8 September 1943.

In the British and American POW camps, the choice was either to cooperate, or not, with their captor-allies. The king's government, once set up in southern Italy, urged Italian POWs to cooperate, and cooperation meant recognizing at a distance that the royal government was the legitimate government of the country and giving their loyalty to that government. Taking this choice made some concrete difference to their lives, and to their status. They officially remained POWs, but could wear the flash on their uniforms which indicated Italy's position now as co-belligerent with the Allies in the war against Nazi Germany. They could expect better jobs, better working conditions, and a better life; they moved relatively freely in their host societies, poised between semi- and full freedom. Some even went back to Italy.

If one chose not to cooperate, then life got no better, but also got no worse; the Americans still expected prisoners to work. In some camps, the non-cooperative POWs were segregated from their fellows, to avoid tension and conflict between them, presumably, but were not otherwise treated very differently. The segregation probably reinforced the initial choice not to cooperate, now a matter which defined and so cohered this sub-group of POWs, and exacerbated their apartness from a world changing around them. A soldier could have made the choice not to cooperate as a Fascist, and become an even more committed Fascist by the point in 1946 and 1947 when he was released and repatriated to a post-war anti-Fascist Italy. Of the 50,000 Italian POWs in American camps, about three-quarters of the officers and of the men opted for cooperation, and numbers increased as the Allies advanced through Italy and the end of the war drew nearer.

At Hereford camp in Texas, Gaetano Tumiati, one of around 900 non-cooperative POWs kept there, clearly could not and did not want to understand what was happening in Italy. Learning of the fall of Rome to the Allies in June 1944, he remarked, 'Why so much joy? How can people be so welcoming to the victors? . . . Just a year ago, the Allies were our enemies, and I would never have imagined that they could be received in this way. What on earth is happening in Italy?'¹² For Tumiati and his fellow 'refuseniks', the Italian people were behaving dishonourably, while they, of course, were acting honourably, refusing to abandon the German ally with whom Italy entered the war and refusing to be bought into supporting the Allies by the offer of a better life as a POW. For some of these men, Tumiati included, the nation whose honour they were defending was the Fascist nation and the war they wanted to fight was the Axis war. But by no means all of them were Fascists; many became socialists and communists after the war. Their refusal to cooperate presumably, then, sprang from some sense of group identity as POWs and of personal honour and self-respect, the feeling that accepting favours from your captors was a humiliating form of submission to them.

A similar test of national loyalties was required of the Italian military prisoners in Germany. Here, the personal and material inducements or pressures were greater than in British and American camps. If an internee opted to declare his loyalty to Mussolini's Italian Social Republic (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*, RSI), the Fascist mini-state set up under German auspices in German-occupied northern and central Italy in late 1943, then he could

expect to leave the camps and find 'normal' work outside. Some declaring for Mussolini were enrolled into newly formed Italian SS units or into the reforming army of the RSI, being trained by the Germans for eventual service back in Italy. But this did not seem to be obligatory.

Unlike their men, the 30,000 or so interned officers were not initially required to work in or from the camps. About a third of them were induced to choose the Social Republic, with explicit guarantees that the condition of their repatriation would not be enlistment in the Republican armed forces. If a soldier refused to recognize the Fascist Republic, then he remained a forced labourer, often dispersed to smaller sub-camps nearer the place of employment, where work discipline was harsh and rations so low that he usually went hungry. The Germans were only really interested in the internees as workers. In July 1944, Fritz Sauckel, the Nazi leader responsible for wartime labour recruitment from the occupied territories, obtained Hitler's agreement to convert the internees into civilian workers, which would have made them the responsibility of the German firms to which they were allocated. This conversion to civilian status was initially meant to be agreed to by the internee, who was to sign a work contract with the employer. But, in a further act of resistance which also reflected their resentment at bad treatment in Germany, most internees refused to agree to work contracts. After a couple of months, the Germans were recategorizing them as civilian workers without their consent, to pre-empt their refusal. The change of status might or might not have made a difference to the way they were treated. Generally, refusal to back the RSI also meant the perpetuation of the prisoners' uncertain and vulnerable status—neither POWs nor internees by any international convention—which justified, if justification was needed, their continued maltreatment by their German captors.

Nine of every ten soldiers, as opposed to officers, chose prison and forced labour rather than recognize the legitimacy of the Fascist Republic as the nation's government. It was undoubtedly both humiliating and embarrassing for the RSI to have its legitimacy rejected by so many men, and to be forced to acquiesce in the continued detention of Italians by its German ally. The categorization of the prisoners as Italian military internees (*internati militari italiani*, IMI) was, in effect, an attempt to dignify their imprisonment and so cover up the Fascist Republic's humiliation by these men.

A similar mix of personal, group, and national honour must have motivated this mass refusal. As with the non-cooperators in the Texan camp, it would have appeared undignified and lacking in personal integrity to accept the bribe

of a better life offered by their captors. But much more was involved. Men who had been engaged in fighting a Fascist war were now explicitly rejecting the chance to rejoin that war and the claim of a revived Fascism on their national loyalties. In the 1980s, when memories of internment were recorded and anthologized, internment was remembered as anti-Fascist resistance. On this occasion, there is no need to express the usual reservations about the retrospectively rationalizing nature of memories. These military prisoners had explicitly rejected Fascism, and suffered for it.

What is really interesting about the choice faced by men imprisoned by opposing powers which were invading and occupying their country, was that it involved making a judgement on the armistice of 8 September. Similar concepts of personal and national honour inspired, or partly inspired, very different choices. For some of the men refusing to cooperate in the Hereford camp, the armistice had not only meant an end to the war with the enemy, the Allies, but a dishonourable changing of sides and repudiation of the country's alliance with Nazi Germany. The armed forces' commander-in-chief was the king, and he was now ensconced in the south under Allied protection and had made his Italy an ally of the Allies. For men like Tumiatì, the king's betrayal of the German ally on 8 September released them from any sense of loyalty and obligation to the king and the Italy he embodied, and enabled them to renew their commitment to the Fascist nation, still faithful to the original German alliance.

Among the military prisoners in Germany, the career and reserve army officers, at least, would have continued to recognize the king as their commander-in-chief and as head of state. Their loyalty to the state and nation as embodied in the king would have overridden their loyalty to Mussolini as head of a past and present Fascist government. As for the men who refused to rally to the RSI from their camps, it seemed unlikely that they did so out of any lingering loyalty to the king and his 'Kingdom of the South'. The king and the military establishment had betrayed them by taking the country into a Fascist war, which they now explicitly rejected, and had continued fighting that Fascist war even after the fall of Mussolini. Both sets of men not cooperating saw the king and his government as betraying the country on 8 September, and did not accept that the monarchy any longer represented their idea of what constituted the nation and national values. A shadow civil war was being contested in the Allied and German prison camps over a country which was and remained physically distant. It was fought for real in a divided and occupied Italy after 8 September 1943.

As the Italian armies broke up after 8 September, most soldiers either disbanded and tried to get home or were captured by the Germans and transported by rail to prison camps in Germany. On the edges of what had become armies of stragglers and prisoners, were officers and men who decided to resist disarmament and fight the Germans, and those who decided to join the Germans. There was relatively little fighting between Italians and Germans on the Italian mainland. Plans had been made for the defence of Rome, and the city was defended, for a while. But the will and capacity to fight were undermined by the diversion of armoured vehicle units to protect the king's flight from the city early in the morning of 9 September, and by the senior commanders' reluctance to engage the German forces moving in on the city.

Their unwillingness was justified at the time and afterwards as the only way of avoiding German reprisals and destruction of the city. The garrison commander's decision to negotiate a ceasefire and surrender on the afternoon of 10 September was at least consistent with the supreme command's general stance on the armistice, to avoid fighting the Germans if at all possible and certainly to avoid any popular uprising. General Giacomo Carboni, head of the motorized units charged with defending Rome, had kept his promise to provide a cross-party 'Anti-Fascist Front' with some weapons for the defence of the city. But most of these were easily located and confiscated by the police from the garages where they had been deposited. There was some combined civilian and army resistance in the west of the city. The memories of Emilio Lussu, a lifetime anti-Fascist who attempted to organize resistance, revealed both the will to fight and the hopeless, desultory way in which the fighting fizzled out. On his rounds, he found 'from behind trees and from house corners, civilians and disbanded soldiers, only one of whom had a rifle, spilling out towards Porta San Paolo'.¹³

Elsewhere, there was resistance to disarmament among some units in Milan and in the surrounding region at Como and Varese, in some parts of Tuscany and on the north-eastern border areas of Alto Adige and Venezia Giulia. The fighting was sporadic and usually did not last long. In Carrara, a marble-mining town inland from the Tuscan coast, resistance went on for two days after the armistice. It was conducted by an ad hoc force of a few platoons of the Alpine regiment stationed there, locally resident soldiers on leave and some local anti-Fascists, who took to the mountains to fight before dissolving after encounters with pursuing German troops. The only successful act of military resistance on mainland Italy seemed to occur in the major south-eastern port

city of Bari. Here, General Nicola Bellomo's forces prevented the Germans from disabling the port and held the port area until Allied Canadian troops moved across from the toe of Italy to its heel after crossing from Sicily.

The only places where it could be said that a proper military changing of sides took place after the declaration of the armistice, were the central Mediterranean islands of Sardinia and Corsica, the French island occupied by Italian forces since November 1940. On these islands, the Italian armed forces' numerical superiority over the Germans was so marked that the real issue was whether, and how, German forces would be evacuated to mainland Italy. The local Italian commander in Corsica, General Giovanni Magli, was dining with his German counterpart when the news of the armistice came. Courtesy towards a dinner guest, reflecting the reasonable relations existing between the two commands, at least indicated a peaceful German departure from the island. But, of course, Magli was not informed by anybody that the supreme command had authorized the passage of German troops from Sardinia to southern Corsica, and thence to the mainland.

Incapable of conducting a peaceful withdrawal and not trusting their ex-ally to guarantee one, German forces attacked and seized Sardinian ports to enable their evacuation to Corsica, where the real trouble occurred. The German forces in Corsica joined up with their compatriots from Sardinia and attacked Bastia, Corsica's main city and port of embarkation for mainland Italy. The armistice terms, even Badoglio's radio broadcast, required an Italian military response to any German attack. Under siege from combined Italian military and French partisan forces, the Germans managed to leave for the mainland by 4 October 1943.

This three-way involvement of Italians, Germans, and local partisans in the working-out of the armistice in Corsica, characterized what happened on Italy's north-eastern border and in the Axis-occupied Balkans, but with far less honourable and congenial outcomes. The experiences of a bar and its owner in Gemona del Friuli, about 30 km north of Udine and close to Italy's present border with Slovenia, offer a snapshot of frontier life in wartime. The changing clientele of the bar, commandeered as a military headquarters by everybody who passed through, marked the changing occupation of the area: German soldiers from the fall of Mussolini in July 1943 to just after the armistice in September; then a stream of fugitive Italian soldiers asking for civilian clothes to replace their uniforms, who then 'fled in the direction of Mount Glemina which was near my house';¹⁴ a Croat

command; and the Germans again in autumn 1943. To complete the cycle, the bar was taken over by partisans of a communist 'Garibaldi' formation in 1944–5, and then destroyed by an earthquake in 1976.

The presence of Slav soldiers after the September 1943 armistice was an interesting development. In these border areas, in the new territories acquired by Italy after the First World War, and in wartime occupied areas of Yugoslavia further down the Dalmatian coast, the hiatus of authority and control existing immediately after the armistice declaration was an opportunity for Slavs to reclaim territory, both collaborating Slavs and those resisting Axis forces. After the armistice, there was a three-way claim on the city of Fiume (now Rijeka), a mainly Italian populated enclave in territory annexed in 1920: the Germans, Slav partisans, and the fascist statelet of Croatia, set up under Axis auspices after the German invasion and defeat of Yugoslavia in 1941. The Italian garrison commander tried to keep his troops in their barracks, though he could not prevent many spontaneous defections, so that he could surrender them to the incoming Germans. They arrived from Trieste, the Italian border city to the north-west, on 14 September, bombarding positions occupied by Slav partisans in the mainly Croat eastern suburbs of the city.

The coming of the Germans was of some immediate relief to a now very vulnerable Italian population, since it pre-empted an Italian military surrender to the Slavs, of whatever persuasion. The fairly orderly disarming of the garrison could not prevent the city becoming clogged up in the week following the armistice by disbanded Italian soldiers from the interior trying to reach Trieste. One of several compatible eyewitness accounts of Italian residents reported the 'continual passing through of troops' at Fiume, 'an afflux which day by day became more confused and disorderly: the superior officers all seemed to have disappeared, and most units no longer have vehicles; soldiers crossed the bridge . . . tired out, exhausted, covered with dust as if they had walked for long distances on foot. Many of them arrived without their weapons,'¹⁵ which had been stripped from them by local Croats to the east of the city. In this way, the disbandment of the Italian armies in Yugoslavia directly fed the partisan guerrilla warfare which had made the Italian occupation of Yugoslav territory untenable from the start. Local partisan bands and German forces preyed on the disintegrating Italian armies for their weapons, equipment, and vehicles. The competition for Italian military resources complicated, hindered, and in some cases prevented the attempts of Italian soldiers to repatriate themselves from the occupied territories in the Balkans.

In Montenegro, Italian troops disbanded, abandoning their equipment and weapons to the partisans—some of them joined the partisans. In inland Istria, north of Pola, the Italian commander at Pisino (now Pazin) surrendered weapons and the town to Slav partisans and headed for Pola, only to find that the Italian ships had already left for Malta, bottling up Italian troops at the tip of the Istrian peninsula for capture by the Germans. Some of the deals with local Slav partisans worked successfully. On 9 September, near Spalato (now Split), where Croat fascists, and nationalist and communist partisans were jockeying for position, an agreement was brokered with Tito's communist partisans, with the blessing of their British liaison officer. Tito's men provided safe passage for the repatriation of Italian troops who did not want to join the partisans. These first evacuees would not necessarily have been too happy about being landed at Pescara, in German-occupied Italy. Later, Italian troops in this area fought off German attempts to disarm them, with partisan support, and on this occasion were evacuated by Italian ships to Bari, in Allied-occupied Italy.

In Argirocastro (now Gjirokastër), in southern Albania, a 6,000-strong Italian garrison refused the German demand to disarm and began a long march to the coast. Some of them were successfully disembarked by Italian vessels from Santi Quaranta (now Sarandë), before the German capture of the nearby island of Corfu made further use of the port impossible. The force was partly pursued and partly protected by rival nationalist and anti-fascist partisan bands. A deal with the latter enabled the Italians and partisans to fight off an attempted German landing at the port. The garrison commander decided to keep to the protection for weapons deal and handed over his troops' weaponry to the partisans, a premature decision with catastrophic consequences. Some of his officers opposed the handover, arguing that the commander had forfeited the only resource and leverage which the force possessed. Proceeding unarmed up the coast to another port, groups of officers and men flaked off, making for the interior to shelter with the local population as best they could, or joining the Albanian partisans. The remainder of the garrison was captured and killed by the Germans. Its commander was beheaded and his head paraded around impaled on a bayonet.

A similar tragedy unfolded in the Italian-occupied Greek Ionian island of Cefalonia. The local commander, General Antonio Gandin, rejected the orders coming from the Italian command for Greece. These were to surrender to the Germans and to await what the Germans were promising for Italian forces in Greece, which was repatriation. The Italians were numerically far superior to German forces on the island, though admittedly

less well equipped. But their resistance was ultimately undermined by divisions within the Italian forces, and by the effects of the temporary vacuum of military authority in Italy itself. Unable to make any contact with the army command in Rome, now en route to Pescara and Brindisi, the garrison commander had to make his own decisions, or allow them to be made for him by his officers and men.

His own inclination, and that of his superior officers, was not to fight an ex-ally, and to temporize and arrive at a deal with the Germans. The will to fight the Germans was strong, however, among his junior officers and the rank-and-file troops. Three officers attempting to organize a surrender of their division to the Germans were shot by their own men. An extraordinary vote allowed by Gandin confirmed that the majority wanted to fight the Germans, rather than be disarmed by them. This democratic decision was one which Gandin could not countermand. He now knew that fighting between Germans and Italians was taking place on other Greek islands, and that the supreme command, from the safety of Brindisi, was expecting Italian forces to fight and promising support from mainland Italian and Allied forces.

Eight days of fighting ensued until the Italian surrender on 22 September. About 1,200 Italian troops were killed in action. Beside himself with anger at Italian treachery, Hitler ordered the local German commanders to kill those who had resisted. About 4,800 captured troops were shot, most of them gunned down where they surrendered. About 340 officers, including Gandin, were systematically executed in batches by their German captors. Some 2,000 soldiers were sent off for internment, and many died in the water when the vessels taking them away hit mines. Of the 11,000 troops there, perhaps 1,000 Italian soldiers escaped German capture, and many of them ended up joining Greek partisan formations on the island. Cefalonia was the most significant and emblematic single incident of Italian military resistance to the Germans. Overall, it has been estimated that about 25,000 Italian officers and men were killed in fighting and round-ups after the armistice.

Where there was resistance to German disarmament on mainland Greece and on the Greek islands, the Cefalonian experience of the disintegration of Italian forces was replicated. Most men were killed during and after the actual fighting, or interned, by the Germans. A small number evaded capture and took to the mountains, enlisting with local partisans or simply seeking shelter and refuge. Where help was not forthcoming from the local people, hunger and tiredness forced these fugitives out into the open, inviting capture and internment.

In Thessalonika, on the mainland, the civil war between Greek nationalist and communist partisans, effectively over who and what should come after the expulsion of the German occupier, worked to neutralize the military use of Italian forces. The commander of the Pinerolo division, General Adolfo Infante, like so many local commanders in Italian-occupied Greece, refused to accept Vecchiarelli's instruction to surrender to the Germans. He genuinely seemed ready to undertake the operation of changing sides after the armistice, which was more or less completed by Italian commanders on Sardinia and Corsica. Changing sides in Thessalonika, where there were many partisans but few German troops, meant joining forces with the Greek resistance against the Germans. This he agreed to do, on 11 September, after contact with partisan leaders and Allied agents working with the Greek resistance. But the division was such a significant military resource, that its use was bound to affect the balance between rival Greek monarchist and communist partisan formations. The communist resistance organization, ELAS, preferred to disarm and intern some of the Italian troops fighting with them, on the suspicion and potential risk of them being poached by the rival nationalist resistance movement, EDES.

What did not happen in Cefalonia, though it did occur elsewhere in Italian-occupied areas, was the defection of some Italian forces to the Germans after the declaration of the armistice. It would not have been seen as a defection by those who joined the Germans, but rather as the honourable standing at the side of one's ally, and in Italian Yugoslavia, the honourable defence of the Italian national interest. These concerns seemed to determine the actions of General Zannini, the commander of Italian forces in Udine and Gorizia which had been fighting Slav partisans in this frontier area since late 1942. He ignored calls coming from some of his divisional commanders to attack the Germans, and from local anti-Fascists offering their support for resistance to German occupation. To him, the communist Slav partisans and anti-Fascists were one and the same, the social and the national enemy combined. The deal he negotiated with the Germans was that German occupation of the region would not be resisted, Italian troops would keep their own arms in order to police the area, and some Italian units would continue the anti-partisan war in Gorizia alongside the Germans. Faced with the choice of fighting the Germans and fighting the partisans, he chose the latter, for class and national reasons.

Similar reasoning was deployed by a young NCO on leave in the Italian enclave of Zara on the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia, which enabled him to

welcome the German takeover of the city a few days after the armistice. 'I had fought with them on the North Africa front,' he remembered, 'and I did not like the idea of turning against an ally like someone changing partners during a dance; the Germans, anyhow, were a defence against a potential Slav occupation after the dissolution of the Italian army, which had occurred in an incredible fashion under our very eyes.'¹⁶ Another veteran of the North Africa campaign also found that his nationalism was compatible with loyalty to the German alliance in this part of the world. Having witnessed the 'slavo-communists' entering his own locality in Istria on armoured vehicles of the now dissolved Italian army, he could see that the worst was avoided with the later arrival of German troops, who ended the partisans' takeover and pursued them into the countryside. Once he and his companions had enlisted in the armed forces of the RSI 'in order to defend our own homes, our own people', he could claim that 'a bit of Italy . . . had taken up arms again'.¹⁷

Perhaps significantly, the young man on leave in Zara was a university medical student who had actually volunteered for service in North Africa. It seemed to be the case that the military units who went over to the Germans after the armistice were either those with a particular *esprit* and a commitment to the Fascist war, like volunteers, or those who might be expected to have and retain a stronger than usual personal and ideological attachment to Fascism and the Axis. We have already come across the parachutists, those unused assault troops of 1942-3, most of whom ended up fighting as infantrymen in North Africa. In Sardinia, most of the Nembo parachutist division opted for the Axis and for evacuation with their German comrades, and killed one of their commanding officers who attempted to persuade them of their duty of loyalty to the king and his choice of changing sides. In Calabria, in the south of Italy, a captain led over to the Germans part of his battalion of men in the parachutists regiment there, 'for the honour of Italy', as he put it.¹⁸ Joining the Germans in retreat, his men participated in the killing of Italian civilians at Rionero in Vulture, an action for which the officer was tried after the war.

It is difficult to perceive any of the parachutists' motives behind the behaviour of the anti-aircraft defence personnel who, oddly, stayed at their batteries and were taken over by the Germans when they occupied the north-eastern border areas and the Italian-occupied Balkans in September 1943. It might have been something to do with the relatively quiet and uneventful war so far for these units in the Balkans, untouched by Allied bombing raids until late 1943 and early 1944. One man, an officer's adjutant serving in Zara's anti-aircraft

battery, spoke of his idyllic situation on the 'splendid Bersaglio peninsula, surrounded by the sea', 'a kind of military villa resort holiday' where anti-aircraft attack exercises were a 'pastime'.¹⁹ All this was to change from the armistice, as Zara was flattened by Allied bombing attacks in 1943–4. But for these men, there was little demoralization and disaffection with a Fascist war, which made them want to leave at all costs. If not a group with a particular combatant élan, they were a group with a special status and function and were nominally under the civilian administrative control of the prefect, the top state official in the area. At least in Zara, the prefect gave clear orders for the men at the batteries to stay where they were, 'to await military developments'.²⁰

Some Fascist Militia units attached to regular army divisions in the Balkans also chose to continue fighting with the Germans after the armistice. This happened, for instance, in inland Dalmatia, where Yugoslav nationalist Cetnik and Titoist communist partisan bands were fighting each other as much as the Axis occupiers, a similar situation to that existing in Albania and Greece. The Venezia division was effectively commandeered by Tito's partisans, not the dominant partisan force in the area, on the advice of British intelligence officers operating with the Yugoslav resistance. But the division's Militia forces rejected the Allies' advice and the partisans' pressure, and joined the Germans. On the Dodecanese island of Rhodes, governed by the Italians since the Italo-Turkish war of 1911–12, around 2,000 of about 37,000 Italian troops preferred fighting with the Germans to internment. On the island of Samos, the presence of about 1,500 Militiamen in the garrison, who made clear their continuing attachment to the Axis war, was enough to induce the garrison commander's surrender to the Germans without him testing the will to fight of the rest of his forces.

Deciding what to do after the declaration of the armistice on 8 September would not have been easy for Italian soldiers, especially when many of their officers abdicated their responsibility to lead them. Where a soldier was and what he was doing at the moment of the armistice announcement, clearly mattered, if only because such circumstances could open up or, alternatively, limit his options. Nuto Revelli was the young Alpini officer whose post-war accounts based on personal testimonies have done so much to reveal the wartime experiences of the men who fought on the Russian front. By his own account, his own response to the armistice was 'instinctive, immediate. As soon as the Germans entered Cuneo [his native town, just south of Turin], I ran home. I recovered my three automatic weapons and slipped them into my military rucksack. Then I went off to my first partisan base.'²¹ Revelli may

have described his reaction as instinctive, but it was hardly an uncalculated one. He had a history of disaffection with the Fascist war and with Fascism's ally, the Germans, as a result of his experiences in the USSR and, especially, of the dreadful retreat from the Don early in 1943. His decision to resist the German occupation of his country after the armistice was evidently driven by the anger and resentment he felt towards the Germans and an awareness of what German occupation would entail.

We know that his decision was not an isolated one. Italian forces in Gorizia, on Italy's north-eastern frontier, were reinforced during 1943 by repatriated Alpini being regrouped after the Russian campaign. Like Revelli, some officers and men hid their arms to escape German confiscation and took to the hills to form partisan units of their own. The 'autonomous'—that is, non-political—Osoppo Friuli partisan formations which operated in Venezia Giulia, were started up by fugitive ex-soldiers and included officers and men from Alpini regiments serving in the frontier areas before the armistice.

These men would have been engaged in fighting against Slav partisans in 1943, as would Italian forces stationed throughout annexed or newly occupied parts of Yugoslavia. It would hardly have been the natural choice for them to join the Slav partisan bands who had been the enemy in a particularly nasty anti-partisan war. A frontier guard recalled how he and his companions had left their base for Fiume and been approached by local Titoist partisans to join them. But 'nobody went with them . . . everybody wanted to get home'.²² One has to assume that the desire to leave the war and return home was the paramount consideration for most Italian soldiers. It was then a matter of whether there was a real chance and expectation of realizing this preference. In this case, the soldier clearly expected, as well as hoped, that he and his comrades would be picked up by Italian ships from Fiume and repatriated.

When that option disappeared, as it did very quickly for many thousands of troops spontaneously disbanding for home, their choices narrowed. The soldiers starting the trek home had not surrendered to the Germans and were treated as fugitives by them, to be pursued, captured, and interned. One choice was to remain a fugitive and hope to last out the war, in whatever circumstances you could. A wartime resident of Pola remembered one of the soldiers she sheltered in her home following the armistice because he decided to stay on in the area for months afterwards, moving into a vacated house in the city until he was bombed out early in 1944. Then, 'good peasant lad that he was',²³ he moved in with the local farmer's

family who owned the orchard where he worked. Things became too uncomfortable when the Germans started calling up men for military or labour service. It was at this point, in spring 1944, that he left, taking a boat to Ancona on Italy's Adriatic coast, and from there making, presumably, for his home in a Fascist new town in the reclaimed marshland near Rome.

Some fugitives became official, like those ex-soldiers who were disarmed in Thessalonika and then put up on local farms for the remainder of the war, their board and lodging paid for by the British government through British agents attached to the Greek resistance. These fugitives, far from home, found reasonably safe and comfortable refuge among local communities. For others, it was a matter of lying low and living off the land. A military engineer, evacuating his wife and newly born baby daughter from a heavily bombed Zara in November 1943, holed up in an abandoned and ruined house in the countryside. There, 'in the depths of a thicket', they came across 'a military tent covered with leafy branches',²⁴ and inside, an Italian soldier, a peasant conscript from S. Donà di Piave, near the Venice lagoon. He told them that he had managed to escape capture by the Germans when they took away all his companions from the barracks.

The engineer was involved in his own tortuous journey home. Refusing to present himself to the Germans in Sebenico (now Sibinek) after the armistice in September 1943, he finally returned home to the Emilian town of Modena in central Italy, at Easter time, 1944. He and his family passed through several hands, the Germans, a Slav peasant family billeting nationalist Cetnik partisans, the Germans again, and finally the Italian police at Zara, where his wife's family connections secured papers for himself, his family, and their Venetian straggler to take a ship to Venice. His testimony revealed the bare bones of a personal 'everybody home' story which illustrated the extraordinary mobility of war-time. It also inadvertently exposed the often highly circumstantial choices faced by Italian soldiers after 8 September. Our engineer had hitched a lift with a vehicle in an armed German convoy travelling from the interior to Zara on the coast. The driver was an Italian 'in German uniform' who 'said that he had preferred driving a lorry' for the Germans to a German 'concentration camp'.²⁵

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that some Italian officers and men in the occupied Balkans actually wanted to join local partisans in the struggle against the Germans after the 8 September armistice, and eventually were able to exercise that choice as the forces to which they belonged disintegrated under pressure from Germans and partisans alike. But in the circumstantial,

not to say incidental, wartime way of things, disbanded soldier fugitives were as likely to have joined local partisan formations in the Balkans because they could not find a way home out of the bottlenecks in Adriatic ports, because of chance encounters with partisans while on the run, and because joining them provided company, shelter, and food for desperate men who, as fugitives from the Germans, lacked all of these essentials for life and survival. Similar events and motivations would also have characterized the 'everybody home' phenomenon on mainland Italy.

The break-up of the Italian army in September 1943 was something experienced and felt as a national disaster by the Italian people. For some, the armistice meant a very direct sense of personal loss and family separation. A woman remembered as a girl joining the general initial popular enthusiasm at the news of the armistice, near Gaeta, a port on the Mediterranean coast between Rome and Naples. Her uninhibited childish jubilation was chastened by the sight of a group of grieving women who were the wives of marines. 'They were not happy,' she recalled; 'they were crying. They looked out towards Gaeta where on the ships leaving the port were their husbands. Turning to us, they shouted, "Sing . . . sing while you can . . . The worst is yet to come . . . now the war really starts."' ²⁶ This sounds almost too melodramatic to be true. But the women were right. The war was not over for their husbands, and nor was it for the area where they had been stationed. Gaeta was very close to the Gustav Line, the first major defensive line straddling the country from one coast to another to which the Germans withdrew in September and October 1943. The whole area became a war zone, occupied and defended by German troops with little regard for civilian sensibilities or safety, and bombarded by Germans and Allies alike.

Other people literally walked into the war they wanted to avoid or leave. A professional soldier recalled his good fortune in making it home after the armistice. But 'it was worse', ²⁷ because home was inland from Gaeta, in the mountains at Cassino, where the retreating Germans commandeered their houses. As the military front stabilized there in October 1943, local people were forced to take refuge from both German and Allied fire in the wooded countryside nearby, forming a flotsam community with disbanded fugitive soldiers and refugees fleeing the bombing and fighting in Naples and its hinterland.

It is, perhaps, too easily assumed that Italian soldiers and civilians who were near the frontlines at the time of the armistice, were generally safer, and that troops who came from the south and were serving in the south

found it easier to reach home. This was certainly the impression given by the writer Norman Lewis, an Allied intelligence officer landing with the US Fifth Army at Paestum, near Salerno. His diary entry for 11 September 1943 recorded that although the Italian soldiers he observed, 'who had walked away from the war... on their way to their homes in the South', were in terrible shape, with blood sometimes oozing through the cracked leather of their boots, 'they were, nevertheless, in tremendous spirits, and we listened to the trail of their laughter and song all through the day'.²⁸ But it is salutary to remember, also, that German troops retreating through southern Italy in September and October 1943 killed over 1,500 people in a violently brief occupation. Most of the victims were civilians resisting the Germans' retreat and their forcible ejection of them from their homes, as in Cassino, or people killed in reprisal for such resistance, or military stragglers.

The army's disintegration happened in the people's midst, and invited, even required, them to show compassion and solidarity towards young men who no longer wanted to be in uniform. It must be said that sympathy was not always forthcoming. The same young university student at home in Formia, near Gaeta, who remembered feeling disorientated by the armistice announcement, also felt bewildered and humiliated by the procession of scruffy disbanding soldiers passing through the streets of her town a few days later. Her father asked one of them where they were going and received the disdainful and defensive reply, 'we're going home. The war is over. How come you don't know?' He compared this end to the war with his own, in 1918. 'We were proud, confident, looking good. And all these men, they are our sons.'²⁹

A military chaplain attached to a disbanding infantry regiment on the front line in the southern province of Catanzaro noted the soldiers' sense of humiliation at defeat and having to change sides, which was heightened by the way the local population turned out to welcome the Allied troops and, realizing that they were Italians, 'shouted insults' at them as they passed through.³⁰ A similar sense of shame and humiliation was shared by a schoolteacher observing the aftermath of the armistice in Merano, an important garrison town near Bolzano, on Italy's Alpine border with Austria, though with considerably greater sympathy for the abandoned and rudderless Italian soldiers she talked to in the streets of the town, the morning after 8 September. She found a group of soldiers, 'silent and disorientated, each one carrying his own little cardboard suitcase', who said that their 'officers had left them free to go. They added with astonishment that they had received no orders.' Further on, in the garden of the

garrison command headquarters, she tried to comfort a sergeant 'with his arms wrapped around his knees, shaking his head and repeating in a loud voice the obsessive refrain, "what a humiliation! What a humiliation!"' Most of these men would be picked up as fugitives and returned to the garrison as prisoners.

Merano was in the Alto Adige, or the South Tyrol, a largely German-speaking area which became part of Italy at the end of the First World War. After the armistice, the whole region was effectively annexed to Nazi Germany and placed under a Nazi Party *gauleiter*. A local Tyrolean police force was rapidly improvised under German auspices, and our schoolteacher witness saw a teenage recruit to this militia shoving through the street to the barracks with a rifle 'which was bigger than him', an Italian officer, 'his uniform tattered and filthy with dried mud, stripped of his belt and pistol', rendered defenceless by the callousness of his captor, who was 'young enough to have been his own son'.³¹

Everywhere, disbanding soldiers needed help if they were to get home. Above all, they wanted civilian clothes to replace the uniform they no longer wanted to wear and which identified them as military fugitives. They stopped people in the streets, knocked on people's doors, asking for clothing, a meal, temporary shelter. The initial spontaneous response, where it came, sometimes developed into a more coordinated enterprise involving groups and networks of people, a mark not only of collective compassion but also of latent organizational skills being put to work. An elderly working-class woman in Turin turned her house into a reception and transit area for disbanding soldiers. She canvassed help with food and clothing from her neighbours and the local nuns, disposed of the weapons, and accompanied the soldiers to the railway station, deflecting suspicion and avoiding detection by treating them as if they were her relatives. Such efforts were among the first examples of popular resistance to German occupation, even more so, in the case of the anti-Fascist woman in Bologna who collected together civilian clothes for disbanding troops which she offered in exchange for their weapons. Her house became not a resting place for fugitive soldiers, but an armoury of their weapons, for use in the armed resistance against German occupation.

People noticed new faces among the porters and orderlies at the local hospital, who were now wearing different uniforms. A victim of an Allied bombing raid on Isernia, in Campobasso province, on 10 September, was treated at the town's hospital where she saw arriving a group of disbanding soldiers, 'tired and in a bad way, in clothes which were half civilian, half military.

They stayed at the hospital to receive help, and to give it.³² Women gathered outside barracks to offer food and water, and words, to the young soldiers now imprisoned inside and awaiting transfer to internment in Germany.

Two young women guiltily remembered how on the streets of Zara, one late afternoon soon after the armistice, they had been unable or unwilling to offer help with a place to stay and hide out for a while, to two young soldiers who had approached them, their greyish-green army uniforms peeking out from under their ill-fitting civilian clothes at the neck, wrists, and feet. The two women then later anxiously scoured the faces of the bedraggled captured Italian soldiers being escorted through the city, for a sight of the men they had spoken to, but 'they weren't there'.³³

It was almost impossible for ordinary Italians not to observe and not to become caught up in the disintegration of Italian armies after 8 September. A woman left Portomaggiore, near Ferrara, in the Po valley between Bologna and Venice, for a tortuous family trip of her own, travelling by train to collect her children who were staying at her mother-in-law's place in the province of Brescia, in Lombardy. On the way out, at Ferrara station, one of her many changes, she noted that it was full of German soldiers loading captured Italian troops onto cattle wagons for transportation to Germany. On her way back, she could not avoid becoming personally involved. In her train compartment, there was an Italian soldier dressed in civilian clothes who 'for fear of being captured by the Germans, begged me to allow him to hold my baby so as to make himself less conspicuous'.³⁴

These were typical wartime stories, typical in their incidental, even accidental, nature. The war came unavoidably but unpredictably to people going about their own business, who were forced to make choices, rapid choices, which they would have wanted to avoid, choices which had consequences and affected the lives of others and put themselves and others at risk. The woman in the train had arrived in Brescia after curfew and had been forced to solicit a German soldiers' escort to her mother-in-law's house in the city. Now her compassionate, concrete help to a fugitive made her complicit in the soldier's flight and as liable as he was to detection and punishment by the Germans who had earlier protected her and allowed her to be reunited with her children. One wonders whether there was time for any of these calculations of risk to have influenced the women's decision whether to help or not.

Finally, of course, the break-up of the Italian army after the armistice impinged on the lives and outlooks of Italians, because, in their tens of

thousands, they came back home, to villages, towns, and cities across Italy. A child during the war, Silvio Trambaiolo remembered the odd hiatus of a couple of months between the ringing of the church bells on 8 September to celebrate the armistice and the end of the war and the arrival of the new authorities, young Fascist policemen and militia in the uniform of Mussolini's Italian Social Republic, and occupying German troops. He was brought up in a small village of peasants and agricultural labourers, Piacenza d'Adige, on the Po valley flats between Padua and Rovigo, in north-eastern Italy. The village's rural out-of-the-way insignificance was probably why the Germans used it to billet and rest soldiers in transit to and from the fighting front as it moved ever closer in 1944–5. But in the autumn of 1943, 'no one seemed to have a clear idea of what was happening. Apparently the war had not ceased, yet servicemen from the village, dressed in civilian clothes, were returning in throngs... fleeing from wherever they had happened to be at the time of the armistice.'³⁵

The return of the village's young men was both a blessing and an encumbrance. Hiding in cellars and out in hay barns, their presence, and the knowledge of their presence, drew the village to the attention of the Italian and German authorities. These were able-bodied men, after all, who should have been called up to the armed forces of the RSI, representing one of the Italies of the 1943–5 period, or to labour service for the Germans, whether locally or in Germany. Avoiding or rejecting these claims on their labour and loyalties would take some of these young men, fugitives in their own village, into the ranks of the anti-Fascist and anti-German resistance.

The armistice of 8 September has become a mythical event. Its meaning and significance have been endlessly speculated on since the end of the war, and become the object of contentious public and political debate. Over the past decade or so, there has been a feverish and unbalanced debate in Italy about the existence and nature of the Italian nation and Italian national identity. This is the outcome of, and one of the responses to, sometimes related political and social developments. There occurred in the 1990s the apparent collapse of the institutional and political alignments characterizing the Italian parliamentary republic since the late 1940s. A cause and a symptom of political realignment were the emergence and presence in government of the Northern League, a secessionist movement which has questioned whether the south has a place at all in the Italian national state. Recent influxes of economic migrants and asylum seekers from the Balkans

and Africa have, as in other European countries, reopened debates about racism, colonial pasts, and the kind of national society which Italians have now and might want in the future.

In the overheated debate about national identity and national consciousness, the armistice of 8 September 1943 has for some commentators, journalists, and historians, been seen as the start of the 'death' of the nation, the start of the dissolution of a sense of nationhood which has apparently blighted post-war Italy. From this viewpoint, what disintegrated after the armistice was the army, arguably Italy's most important national institution, the guarantor of national independence and internal order, and since it was a conscript force in which the nation's male citizens had to serve, the most evident expression of national unity and strength. The giving in and going home of most of Italy's soldiers after the armistice, denoted for some a deeply seated failure of nation-formation and a weak to non-existent sense of nationhood among Italians. This is really an old debate taking a new form. Ever since the late and imperfectly realized political and territorial unification of Italy in 1870, people have agonized over whether a country so internally divided by class and local and regional identities did, and could, constitute a nation. Fascism's aggressive nationalism and imperialism, and its attempt to mould a new nation through totalitarian organization, was one attempt to resolve Italy's national problem.

It may now be time to see the armistice in its proper historical proportions, without forgetting that the disproportionate use and interpretation of it by different groups has already become part of Italy's history and the way Italy remembers its own past. The most evident and immediate consequence of the armistice, or rather of the way in which the armistice was managed and handled by Italy's military and royal establishment, was that the capital city, Rome, was inadequately defended and allowed to fall into German hands. Nobody at the time anticipated that it would take another nine months of warfare for the Allied forces to liberate Rome from German occupation. But the failure to hold on to Rome in September 1943 prolonged the war and the German occupation of central and northern Italy.

The armistice also conditioned how the Germans occupied Italy, which mirrored how the Germans treated those Italian soldiers who fought them after the armistice. To the Germans, the armistice and changing of sides of 8 September were a second betrayal. The first betrayal was Italy's decision not to remain in the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary and to enter the First World War on the Entente side against Germany and the

Austrian empire in May 1915. The armistice confirmed for the Germans the existence of a defective Italian mentality which became evident in what they saw as Italy's derisory and half-hearted contribution to the Axis war effort between 1940 and 1943. Italians were seen and stereotypically as a congenitally untrustworthy and deceitful people, and were to be treated and occupied as such. The Germans very rapidly transformed Italy from being a useless ally to being an occupied enemy country, a change accelerated by the transfer to the Italian war of German military units who had already demonstrated how to handle 'inferior' peoples in occupied eastern Europe and western Russia.

The harsh nature of German military occupation of Italy, in part determined by the armistice betrayal, had important short-term and long-term effects. It helped to undermine from the start the credibility among Italians of Mussolini's Italian Social Republic, installed in German-occupied Italy from the autumn of 1943. As with Marshal Pétain's government in occupied France, Mussolini's Fascist Republic could have tried to justify its existence as a collaborating regime on its capacity, by merely existing, to prevent the worse, and to mitigate the most punitive aspects of a Nazi German occupation. After the armistice, the Germans treated occupied Italy as if it was occupied Poland; they annexed territory, ruthlessly exploited the labour and economic resources of the country, and defended Germany in Italy with no regard for the lives and livelihoods of Italian civilians.

The longer-term effect of a harsh German occupation, predicated on a perception of Italian betrayal, was historiographical, or to do with how the war would be remembered in Italy in the post-war period. This takes up an important point already made in the Introduction. The disintegration of Italy's armies following the armistice had involved German troops disarming and killing Italian officers and men in the occupied territories, and forcibly interning in prison camps in Germany and Poland over 600,000 Italian soldiers. This was enough to make people forget that these same Italian officers and men had conducted their own forcible occupation of other people's territory between 1940 and 1943. From being the victimizers, Italian soldiers were now the victims of German oppression. The status of victimhood could then understandably enough be conferred on all those Italians who were forced to endure the full rigours of the Nazi German occupation of part of their country. Their wartime suffering and misfortune were caused by the occupier. This was how, and why, in so many retrospective personal testimonies of experiences during the war, people reminisced as if the war really started for them in 1943, not 1940.

In a very evident and literal sense, Italy ceased to exist as a national state between 1943 and 1945. The country was divided and occupied by invading foreign powers; the Germans effectively annexed the borderlands of north-eastern Italy. More importantly, perhaps, three different versions of Italy came to exist within the country. Each of these competing Italies was a child of the armistice. There was a calculation behind the royal coup against Mussolini and the Fascist regime in July 1943. It was that the king, and behind him, Italy's conservative military and political establishment, could achieve a soft landing from Fascism and the Fascist war, and manage the transition from Fascism to post-Fascism in a way which would both end the war and protect the position of these conservative forces who had been Fascism's fellow-travellers.

To an extent, it would be fair to say that the operation was botched. The monarchy's and the military's credibility as the forces representing the nation and the national interest was undermined as a result of the Badoglio government's decision to continue the Fascist war while conducting ludicrously protracted negotiations with ludicrously inflated expectations for an end to the war with the Allies. That credibility was all but destroyed by the national humiliation of the 8 September armistice. But not all was lost. The king and the military had secured something from the armistice. The armistice itself was Allied recognition of the king's government, the signatory of the agreement, as the legitimate government of Italy. The Allies would want to keep this government in existence, because having signed the armistice, it was the Italy which could be made to comply with the terms and obligations of the armistice agreement on the occupation of the country.

As the Allies moved slowly north, they released liberated areas of the south to administration by the king's government, which allowed and justified the partial recuperation of the state's military and civil apparatus in the south. This, alone, is probably sufficient explanation for the continuation in office of a largely unpurged and unreconstructed civil service, the state machine which had serviced Fascism, into the post-war Italian Republic. A military force of sorts was reformed, after the total collapse of the armistice, and, now that Italy was a co-belligerent, participated in the Allied military campaign against the Germans in Italy. A civil service, or part of it, returned to their desks. There was some justification for the view that the king had maintained the continuity of the state in the south. It was hardly coincidental that a majority of people in the south, which was the king's Italy between 1943 and 1945, voted to retain the monarchy in the 1946 referendum.

It was, of course, the case that the Allies insisted on the king broadening out his government to include other national anti-Fascist and anti-German forces which Badoglio had attempted to exclude from political life during the Forty-Five Days. The fact that there was a referendum at all on the monarchy was the clearest indication that the king had not been able to guarantee a politically and socially conservative outcome to the fall of Mussolini. But this was the political price paid for the botched operation of the armistice. What had been gained in late 1943 was the opportunity, at least, for the king to remain in the political game, and the continued existence of a monarchical Italy which could attempt to influence, even determine, what happened in the country after the war. Given the extent of the king's complicity in twenty years of Fascism, still being in the picture was probably more than the monarchy deserved to extract from the disaster of the armistice.

The impetus behind the emergence of the two other Italies of 1943 to 1945 also came from the armistice. That minority of soldiers who went over to the Germans after 8 September, and that minority of Italians, Fascist or otherwise, who rallied to Mussolini's Social Republic in northern Italy in late 1943, felt or were made to feel that they were restoring national honour by sticking with their German ally and rejecting the betrayal of the nation by the king and Badoglio. That Mussolini's client Fascist regime in the north was Social and a Republic denoted a repudiation of the king and a conservative fellow-travelling establishment, which, in the wishful thinking of the RSI's apologists, had compromised the Fascism of 1922 to 1943. Much of the RSI's propaganda was directed at contesting the legitimacy of a king who had betrayed the country in September 1943.

The armistice was also a liberation and a stimulus for political anti-Fascism in Italy. The collapse of the Italian army after 8 September fed directly into anti-Fascist and anti-German armed resistance. Soldiers trying and failing to get home after the armistice declaration took refuge in the hills and mountains of the country, sometimes forming their own apolitically national partisan bands, sometimes becoming or joining political anti-Fascist formations. The anti-Fascist political movements and parties denied an effective voice by Badoglio's government during the Forty-Five Days, could now organize and resist without restraint.

The sense of relief and release among anti-Fascists was apparent immediately after the armistice. On 11 September, the broadsheet of the Action Party, a liberal-socialist anti-Fascist resistance movement, made a rallying cry to its

readers, characteristically placing Italy's national struggle in a European-wide context: 'we do not have to write on walls, at night, in a secret and underhand way, "Long Live the Heroic Danes!" We too are now like them, like the French, the Belgians, the Dutch, like the Yugoslavs and the Greeks, like the Czechs and the Poles.'³⁶ The day after the armistice, it was Rome's anti-Fascist front organization, including socialists, communists, and actionists, which attempted to mobilize popular resistance against the German seizure of the city. These anti-Fascist groups were the first to take to the armed struggle against a revived Fascism and German occupation. A broad alliance of anti-Fascist movements formed the Committee of National Liberation for Northern Italy (Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale per Alta Italia, CLNAI) in January 1944 to run the activities of the armed resistance and to act as an underground government in German-occupied northern Italy. Representatives of these movements were then incorporated into the king's government in June 1944, after the Allied liberation of Rome. Both the Italian Social Republic and the anti-Fascist resistance refused to recognize the legitimacy of the king, and justified their own legitimacy as representing Italy on the basis of his treachery at the armistice, where he had betrayed respectively the German ally and the Italian people.

In this light, it is just tendentious to want to argue that the 8 September armistice meant the end of the Italian nation. Those who do so are really lamenting the passing of a particular version of the nation, the conservative nationalist one. Arguably, not even the Fascist version of the nation, nationalistic, racist, imperialist, totalitarian, had died or been killed off in late 1943. It survived in an attenuated and less than independent form, in the RSI. What the armistice entailed, was, finally, the opening up of the succession to Fascism which should have or might have occurred after the fall of Mussolini in July 1943. The effect of the armistice was to lead to a contest between different ideas of nation and nationhood, in a country which was divided by more than invading and occupying foreign armies. It was not the end of the nation, but a battle for the nation.

6

The Invasion and Occupation of Italy, and the Kingdom of the South, 1943–1945

IN spring 1943, General Sir Bernard Montgomery, commander of the British Eighth Army, gave an order to the head of MI9, the military intelligence service responsible for escaped prisoners of war in Axis-occupied Europe, which in turn was to be communicated secretly to the camps in northern and central Italy which were holding over 85,000 captured Allied servicemen. The instruction was to the effect that in the event of an Italian surrender, Allied POWs should ‘keep fit and stay put’ and await the arrival of Allied troops.¹ In the actual event of the Italian armistice of 8 September 1943, and in light of what happened afterwards, this was rather stupid advice. But at the time it was made, the order reflected a confidence among Allied military commanders that Italy could be easily and rapidly conquered and occupied. Apparently, their military plans anticipated that after crossing from Sicily to Calabria on the mainland in September 1943, the Allied forces would take the Italian capital city by Christmas 1943 and the rest of the country by the summer of 1944.

In the event, Allied forces spent the Christmas of 1943 stalled at the first of the Germans’ major defensive lines, the Gustav Line, straddling south central Italy from the Mediterranean to the Adriatic, which protected Rome and prevented the Allies from relieving the beleaguered Allied bridgehead south of Rome, at Anzio. Rome was not liberated from German occupation until June 1944. During the summer of 1944, Allied forces liberated much of central Italy. But the advance was already slowing down again by the autumn before the Gothic Line, another German fortified defensive line thrown across Italy from near Pisa, on the Tuscan Mediterranean coast, to near

Rimini on the Adriatic coast. There were advances, but no complete breakthrough, in the ensuing battles on the Gothic Line, and Allied forces spent another winter in neutral gear, this time south of Bologna and the Po valley. The rest of central and northern Italy was liberated in the spring of 1945.

There were political, strategic, and military reasons which explain why Italy, in Churchill's phrase, 'the soft underbelly of the Axis', turned out to be a 'tough old gut', in the words of US General Mark Clark, commanding the American Fifth Army in Italy. Churchill, already thinking of the political shape of post-war Europe, was all for pushing hard in the Italian war and getting Allied troops into central and south-eastern Europe to pre-empt Soviet armies advancing from the east. For President Roosevelt, however, and his military commanders, the only 'second front' which would satisfy Stalin and the USSR and win the war against Nazi Germany was the invasion of continental Europe from the west through France. While never losing his enthusiasm for the Italian campaign, Churchill was obliged to recognize that the Allied priority was the planning and implementation of the Normandy landings in France, which took place in June 1944.

Certainly, after the Allied taking of Rome in June 1944, the Italian theatre of war was absolutely secondary to the invasion of France. The main Allied commanders, Eisenhower and Montgomery, had already, in December 1943, left Italy to others and assumed command of the 'Overlord' campaign. Seven divisions of Allied troops were withdrawn from Italy after the taking of Rome, to participate in landings in southern France, and were barely replaced by newly formed Italian army units. The Italian campaign was now even less important than the minor Allied invasion of southern France.

Allied commanders in Italy were slow to recognize and tap the military contribution which a growing Italian armed resistance to German occupation could make to the liberation of central and northern Italy—as slow, in fact, as the laborious military advance up the peninsula from north to south. There is evidence to suggest that during the late summer and autumn of 1944, partisan bands harassed retreating German forces in coordination with Allied advances, until partisan and Allied fronts converged. Allied support to the Italian partisans, in the shape of intelligence agents, special operations forces, and drops of equipment and weapons, only reached and benefited a relatively small proportion of partisan formations. From the autumn of 1944, help to the Italian partisans slowed down and was diverted to internal resistance movements

which were then of greater military significance to the Allied war and which seemed to be doing a more effective job in driving out the German occupier, whether in France, Yugoslavia, or Greece.

Field Marshall Sir Harold Alexander, the Allied forces commander in Italy, had foolishly informed the Italian partisans in November 1944 that the exhausted Allies were taking a winter break on the Gothic Line, and advised them to disband and suspend their operations until the renewal of the Allied offensive in the spring. The Germans and the Fascists were aware of the announcement, which practically invited their forces to move against the partisan movement in a concerted way, knowing that it would be the only enemy they would have to fight over the winter. Alexander at least acknowledged his mistake by attempting to restore Allied material support to the Italian armed resistance and shore it up until the offensive could be resumed. But the whole disastrous episode showed how little the Allies thought of the Italian resistance at this point, and how little they thought of the Italian campaign. In 1944–5, the point of the war in Italy became holding down German forces there and so preventing German reinforcement of the main fighting fronts in France and eastern Europe.

The Allied decision not to commit themselves fully to the war in Italy, matched the Germans' decision to make a defensive stand there. Encouraged by the containment of Allied landings at Salerno in September 1943, Hitler decided not to follow Rommel's plan to withdraw German forces to the Alps and, instead, backed the (then) air force commander Kesselring's strategy of fighting over everything in Italy and to defend in depth and delay the Allied advance for as long as possible. The outcome of these corresponding strategic decisions was a kind of military parity in the Italian war. The Allies had almost complete air superiority, but could not always make it count, since bombers and fighters had to operate over mountainous terrain and sometimes could not operate at all, kept on the ground by the exceptionally bad weather which marked the successive autumns and winters of 1943–4 and 1944–5. Even if they had wanted to commit more effort and resources to the war in Italy, the Allies would have found it logistically difficult to do so. As it was, they faced problems in supplying and backing up their forces by sea, since they used southern ports which they had to clear of German mines and scuttled ships and to repair from the effects of their own bombing raids of 1940 to 1943.

A lengthening occupation of the south by the Allies and of the north by the Germans was also both cause and effect of a military stalemate. By the 1944–5

winter, armies of about 600,000 Allied troops nominally confronted German armies of around 500,000 men. But most troops on both sides were behind the front lines in occupied territory, as reinforcement and for control of the territorial hinterland to the actual areas of fighting. In terms of real fighting forces, perhaps 40,000 German troops faced about 70,000 Allied troops. Such a balance of forces was unlikely to produce a rapid, decisive breakthrough. German forces were never routed in battle. They generally withdrew in reasonably good order to planned and prepared defensive lines across the country, elongated 'trenches' from which they could stabilize the fighting front.

The German armies fought a well-organized and tenacious defensive war in Italy, exploiting the mountainous terrain of the Appennines and the lousy weather to slow down the Allied advance. Both sides used their vehicles to get their infantry to the front lines, and then fought on foot. The Allies preceded their infantry offensives with lengthy and sustained bombardment, from the air (where this was possible) and from land. With heavy autumn rains in both 1943 and 1944 churning up mountain tracks into mud and further reducing the pace and momentum of the war, it was little wonder that British officers and men felt that they were reliving the static attritional campaigns of the First World War. A fusilier on the river Volturno, near Capua, north of Naples, in late 1943, was clearly demoralized by 'a steady, drenching rain which in no time produced inches of water in the bottom of the slit trenches'.²

The opposing armies were both multinational affairs. The Germans had Italians, Czechs, Russians, Ukrainians, and Cossacks fighting for them. But the Axis forces in Italy were Eurocentric in comparison with the Allied 'United Nations', who were a global village of black and white troops from the British and French empires and from the USA, including a segregated American Negro division. There was a large Polish contingent, some Belgians, Greeks, Danes, Hungarians, Russians, Czechs, Austrians, and, of course, Italians. There were even a Palestinian Jewish force, some Egyptians, and a Brazilian expeditionary force.

The problems encountered in the liaison between and coordination of the multinational Allied forces might well have also slowed down the Allied advance, since the commanders could deploy them to fight alongside each other, but could not really mix them up if circumstances suggested it. A British officer recalled how he was ordered to take the bridge at Pontecello, near Cesena, in Emilia, central Italy, in October 1944. The Polish liaison officer failed to show up, and having started the operation on their own, the British

troops eventually ‘found the Poles, and, after a feverish and comic conversation in French, confirmed where we were on the map . . . and where the enemy was’.³ Such incidents were probably common enough. But it is difficult to say how many more lives were lost, how much less ground was gained, how much more time was wasted, as a result of these linguistic obstacles.

Those most affected by the multinational composition of the Allied forces were likely to have been the Italians, who found themselves being liberated by the rest of the world. They witnessed a passing and sometimes frightening pageant of different peoples in uniform, including Americans, British, New Zealanders, Canadians, South Africans (black and white), Rhodesians, Indian Sikhs, Afghans, Nepalese, and Free French forces largely made up of white French-officered black and arab troops from Senegal, Morocco, and Algeria. It was certainly confusing. Some of the inhabitants of liberated villages in the province of Pesarò-Urbino, in south central Italy, recalled the black troops in their midst as being Senegalese, when these West African soldiers were never on their section of the front line. Some of the people around Cassino remembered the rape and pillage by Moroccan troops after the eventual fall of what remained of the town in May 1944, in particularly blood-curdling and stereotypically racist terms. The Fascist Italian Social Republic certainly tried to extract what advantage it could from the invasion of the country by such a polyglot force. Much of its poster propaganda exploited the racially composite character of the Allied enemy forces, though it was usually the image of the American Negro soldier which was employed to represent the threat to European civilization posed by what was portrayed as a racially hybrid and degenerate invading extra-European army.

The prolonging of the war in Italy, and its grinding nature, had very dramatic repercussions for the Italian people. The war of 1940 to 1943 had touched practically every family in the country, self-evidently because of the conscription to military service of husbands, sons, and brothers. Cities were bombed, and people evacuated them, sometimes permanently, but usually commuting between city and countryside. As the Fascist regime’s control of the home front broke down, people’s lives and livelihoods were shredded by shortages of food and fuel, rationing, and recourse to the black market.

All these detrimental facets of wartime civilian life continued, as the war continued, between 1943 and 1945. But the situation was worse, because Italy was now itself a battlefield. The war moved from south to north in destructive waves, as the front and the armies passed through both countryside and town.

Peripheral rural areas which had not seen or experienced a war or invasion for centuries, now went through the most terrifying modern war, where civilians, if not exactly combatants, occupied the front line of fighting and were treated as combatants by both armies in the war zones. 'We thought we were right in the wolf's mouth,' recalled a woman in Portomaggiore, near Ferrara, in north-eastern Italy, as the Eighth Army approached in early April 1945.⁴

Between 1943 and 1945, the war arrived in areas of the country which had not been affected physically and materially by the war of 1940 to 1943. Some towns and cities were bombed from the air by the Allies for the first time, and then regularly, for as long as the war lasted for them. Padua, for instance, a city just south-west of Venice, suffered its first Allied air raid on 16 December 1943, and then twelve more, until its liberation from German occupation in March 1945. Nine out of every ten buildings in the city were damaged or destroyed. Padua was a target because it was on a main railway line, had a military garrison there, and as a relatively large urban area was an administrative and services centre for that part of Venetia. In destroying it, the Allies destroyed the infrastructure of German occupation.

But the war also came to Sant'Alberto di Ravenna, a village in the low-lying marshlands around Ravenna in east central Italy, which had absolutely no objective military and strategic importance at all. It was only a target for three Allied bombardments by air and by land artillery in December 1944 and January 1945 because it was in the way of the Allied front. The laborious progress of the fighting and the tenacity of German military resistance involved the war coming not once, but twice, to this provincial backwater. Having retreated from the village in December 1944 when its loss to Canadian troops appeared imminent, the German forces were able to return for another month of occupation because the Allied advance was held up elsewhere. As the Canadians gradually fought their way into the village in mid-January 1945, the evacuating villagers were caught in cross-fire and counter-attacks. Those fleeing included people who had earlier evacuated to the village from the provincial capital, Ravenna.

The slow advance of the military war also meant that many parts of the country experienced two waves of foreign occupation. Just two provinces, Brindisi and Lecce, in the deep south-east of the country, which together constituted what there was of the 'Kingdom of the South' in September 1943, avoided any real kind of German occupation. Italy's two major north Italian cities, Milan and Turin, were occupied continuously by the Germans

from the armistice of September 1943 until the liberation of late April 1945. In between, there were two sets of occupation of varying durations. Naples was occupied by the Germans until early October 1943 and then by the Allies until 1946. Rome was occupied by the Germans until June 1944, then by the Allies. Florence was occupied by the Germans from September 1943 to August 1944, thereafter by the Allies. Zara, the ex-Italian enclave on the Yugoslav Adriatic coast, was occupied by the Germans from September 1943 until the end of October 1944, and then by Tito's partisans.

It was certainly the case that the Germans, as opposed to the Allies, were never seen as liberators. But it cannot be assumed that, initially anyway, Allied occupation was more benign than German, or that conditions for the population improved significantly from one occupation to another. This was partly because the conduct of both German and Allied occupying armies was driven by the same logic of invasion and occupation, to control the territory in pursuit of the priority for them of waging the war. In a slow-moving war, the Allies had to administer liberated areas which were still close to the front lines, and as a result, felt that they had to try to control everything.

So the Germans forcibly evacuated the population of Pesarò, a town on the Adriatic coast in September 1944, as the Allied armies approached and the area became an active war zone. After the front line passed, the Allied military administration maintained the evacuation of the coastal port sections of the town and prevented people from returning to their homes, which were requisitioned for use by Allied troops and officials in areas regarded by the Allied commanders as still militarily and strategically sensitive. The continuation of German systems of occupation was one reason, among others, why the leader of Pesarò's provisional local council complained that Allied liberation was turning into Allied occupation, hence alienating popular sympathies.

It was hardly to be expected that Allied occupation would make much initial difference to the wartime conditions in which people lived. The Allied military government in liberated areas inherited a physical and psychological terrain devastated by the effects of war and German occupation. In other words, the war continued, even though the war had moved on. In Umbria and the Marches, regions largely liberated by Allied forces in the course of the summer and early autumn of 1944, the local people continued to provision themselves throughout the following winter by making long, regular hikes on foot by mountain paths in bad weather, carrying sacks of grain on their backs and heads. Much of this self-provisioning was smuggling, of course. The prefect of Pescara province estimated in

April 1945 that over half the provincial population were living off the black market and illegal trading. The army of smugglers were mainly small peasant farmers who, partly because of war damage to their land and the uncleared and still dangerous debris of war, were unable to farm and produce enough for subsistence or the black market. To survive, they had turned to trading in rather than supplying the black market.

The persistence of the black economy was, indeed, the mark of the essential continuity of the war in Italy. Successive governments and successive occupations in both the south and north of the country attempted to regulate the production, supply, and distribution of basic foodstuffs to consumers. Peasants everywhere, whatever the government or occupation regime, went on evading the requirement to supply a good proportion of their crops at officially set prices to public deposits, whatever their guise as Fascist *ammassi* or non-Fascist ‘granaries of the people’. They did so because prices were always higher on unofficial markets, which consumers increasingly had to resort to if they were to feed themselves at all.

South central and central Italy between the two main German defensive lines, the Gustav Line and the Gothic Line, was the most fought-over territory of the Italian war from the winter of 1943–4 to the winter of 1944–5. The fighting was heavy, and the Allied advance was often laborious. It took six weeks, in August and September 1944, for the Allied forces to fight their way from Ancona, a port city on the Adriatic, to Pesarò, 40 miles on, partly because of the problem they had to confront all along the eastern coast. They were advancing from the south to the north across rivers which ran to the coast from west to east.

To be a civilian in the actual fighting zone was terrifying. Everybody was vulnerable, especially those who were already so. The psychiatric hospital at Volterra, a Tuscan hill town near Siena, was hit during a bombardment in July 1944, inducing panic among the nursing staff whose charges included over 450 increasingly agitated criminally insane patients. It was usually just as bad to be in the immediate hinterland of the fighting zones, especially on the German side of the war. This was because German forces beat very aggressive retreats and intensified their occupation methods to ensure total territorial control of the areas just behind the front. A peasant farmer, forced by the Germans to leave his home with his family and lodgers, evacuees from Pesarò, described what the soldiers did to the land which had been in his family’s possession for over two hundred years, in order to construct and protect an anti-tank ditch



3. The people of Rionero in Vulture, Potenza, in southern Italy, grieve the killing of fifteen hostages by retreating German troops in late September 1943. The sign on the wooden cross says, 'to the martyrs of Nazi-Fascist savagery'.

on Monte Cabbate, near Pesarò: 'the area to the north and south of the ditch was mined with anti-personnel and anti-vehicle explosive ordnances. In these areas, all the vegetation was cut down to make the advancing troops more visible. The houses of the local peasants, scattered along the line of the ditch, were blown up with large amounts of explosive.'⁵ The family returned to their land once the fighting had passed through, and some of them were injured by mines awaiting clearance, in November 1944. The massacres of civilians by German troops which occurred should really be seen as part of the military campaign to secure an area totally. This was the aim and effect of the 'march of death' of the German SS armoured division which started and ended with massacres at Sant'Anna di Stazzema in August 1944 and at Marzabotto in October, brutally pacifying the Tuscan and Emilian countryside inland from Pisa on the western extremity of the Gothic Line.

The intensity of the fighting meant that the physical devastation of war was enormous. In the province of Chieti, in Umbria, central Italy, a quarter of the towns and villages, including Ortona, were literally razed to the ground as the front passed through. On liberation in June 1944, there were over 72,000 homeless people in the province. Whole areas were rendered impassable and incommunicable as a result of the physical damage to the roads, railways, and telegraph lines. Normal economic life was disrupted, not only for the period of the fighting, but afterwards as well. Mills and bakeries did not function, because owners and workers were too afraid to risk going to work, electricity supplies were interrupted or cut off altogether, and grain and flour could not



4. A British army photograph showing an evacuee carrying her belongings returning to the ruins of her home town, Ortona, on the Adriatic coast south of Pescara, in late 1943.

be produced or delivered. The planting and harvesting of crops had to be delayed or could not take place at all, again because farmers did not want to work in the open or could not properly farm damaged or mined fields. The Germans, for instance, laid nearly 10,000 mines in the valley between Pesarò on the coast and the Renaissance new town of Urbino inland, which was the province's main area of agricultural production. On liberation, it was initially impossible either to produce or distribute foodstuffs, and, indeed, for the Allied occupation authorities actually to reach some villages badly damaged in the fighting.

Much can and should be made of the differences in the experiences of people living in the north and the south of the country between 1943 and 1945. But much should also be made of the similarity in people's circumstances as the war moved north.

When Allied troops entered Naples early in October 1943, on the back of the famous 'Four Days' of popular risings against German occupation, it was the largest city to be liberated in Axis-controlled Europe. It also became the Italian city which had the longest period of Allied occupation, from October 1943 until January 1946. Much of the surrounding region of Campania was returned to Italian governmental administration fifteen months earlier. This was how Mario Palermo, the Communist Party leader in Naples, saw his city at the point of liberation:

there was no water, no electric light, no foodstuffs of any kind, no means of public transport. Rubble obstructed the streets. Unburied dead bodies, devastated factories, people without jobs, and tens of thousands, thousands and thousands of disbanded soldiers, bombed-out houses, while the others, the best of them, were requisitioned by the Allies as offices and residences. Fishing was banned. The port half-destroyed, full of vessels of every kind. And in this picture of squalor, desolation, and chaos, thousands and thousands of soldiers from all over the place, Americans, English, Canadians, Brazilians, Indians, Moroccans, Poles, French, Algerians, who wandered through our streets looking for adventure and entertainment. The black market which they encouraged was operating at full steam. Prices increased to giddy heights. Prostitution was spreading.⁶

Much of what happened in Naples under Allied occupation had already occurred on a smaller scale in the naval port of Taranto, on the heel of Italy, taken over by a polyglot Allied force on the day after the armistice, on 9 September 1943, without any German occupation. Both port cities enjoyed a precarious and volatile dependence on an occupying force which became the

major, almost the only, source of legal and illegal employment. Taranto was used to repair damaged Italian and Allied shipping, and both ports supplied and reinforced the fighting front and provided rest and recreation for tens of thousands of multinational Allied troops. The long stalemate on the front at Cassino during the 1943–4 winter had the effect of bottling up Allied troops in Naples and extending their stay in the city. The reliance of Naples' social and economic life on Allied occupation was so marked that a visiting Italian official reported to his political masters in the Bonomi-led government in March 1945 that 'what people fear most is the end of the war'.⁷

The new dimension which the presence of Allied troops brought to the cities of the occupied mainland south was an incredible spending power, which fuelled both inflation and the black market economy. Both phenomena existed before the arrival of Allied troops. But inflation rocketed and the black market expanded exponentially after liberation. It was estimated that up to the liberation of Rome in June 1944, nearly 40 per cent of all spending in liberated areas of the south was being done by Allied occupation troops. On the island of Sardinia, where, as we have seen, German troops evacuated quickly for Corsica after the armistice, and where there was no Allied occupation to follow, price levels were under half of what they were in the liberated mainland south.

What combined with Allied purchasing power to send prices to the skies were continued shortages and need in the city's population. In a move which was both laughable and serious at the same time, the Allied administration's insensitive and misfiring contribution to the food needs of the city was the distribution of a ghastly soup powder made of peas, which no Neapolitan could cook or actually wanted to eat. The Allied authorities miscalculated that a largely agricultural southern economy would enable the liberated areas to be self-sufficient in food. But even though the fighting had stopped, producing and marketing foodstuffs which met Italian eating patterns and dietary needs, were inhibited by the lasting wartime damage to land and infrastructure. The Allies were obliged to import food through the port to feed the city. The same wartime transport and communication difficulties which continued to isolate Naples from the rest of the south, also made the newly printed Allied occupation money, the 'am.lira', an exclusively Neapolitan currency. Am.lira notes which were intended to facilitate trade and exchange throughout the liberated south, stayed and circulated in the city, giving another kick to inflation.

So plenty met scarcity in Naples. The Allied troops were supplied in abundance and had a generous surplus to trade in a city which needed to live

and provide for itself. The bulging Allied depots at the port, and the large supplies of goods of all descriptions passing through the city, were inviting targets for theft, diversion, corruption, smuggling, and illegal trading. These activities eventually bound together Allied officials and troops and the city's population in complicit self-sustaining networks of low-level criminality.

The writer Norman Lewis was a British intelligence officer in Naples with the impossible job of policing British forces in the city and their multiple daily contacts with the local population. He recorded in his diary for 18 April 1944 a report by the Allied military administration's propaganda and 'culture' branch, the Psychological Warfare Bureau (PWB), that 65 per cent of the Neapolitans' per capita income came from dealing in stolen Allied supplies, and that a third of all imported supplies and equipment found their way on to the black market. Whatever the accuracy of the estimates, they denoted the extent of the phenomenon, which Lewis himself confirmed by being drawn into the system himself. Dispatched to police Benevento, a town about 40 miles inland from Naples, with a bunch of gung-ho and drunken Canadian military policemen, he obtained from a friendly pharmacist in Naples the drugs which his main Italian informant needed but could not obtain on prescription or otherwise in Benevento. The chemist 'had every drug known to modern medicine, and I knew where his abundant supplies came from'.⁸

Since the black market was, effectively, the only market which worked in the city, and was at the heart of the interaction between the Allied occupiers and the occupied population, one might regard it as a humanitarian crime wave, crime with a human face. But here, as elsewhere, the black market had very distorting and dysfunctional economic and social effects.

In repairing and reopening the port, the Allies were soaking up much of the unemployment caused by the wartime collapse of the city's industries. But pay was, relatively, still low, certainly in black market conditions. Lewis wrote that an ordinary British soldier earned more than an Italian foreman in the naval shipyards. Working for the Allies obtained a ration card for a worker and his family. But many people could only survive by getting involved in the black market as well, often stealing and dealing in the goods they came across in their Allied workplaces. The employment agencies set up by the Allied administration to manage the city's workforce were kept busy by a constant turnover in labour. It was unheard of for workers to stay at their jobs for more than a week. Only one in five workers stayed on to the next day, and many simply faded away from the work site after the distribution of the daily meal.

The lethal combination of scarcity in the midst of plenty, of urban poverty with Allied troops flush with money and time on their hands, encouraged the spread of an informal and unprofessional prostitution. Lewis recorded another PWB statistic that 42,000 women in Naples, out of a nubile female population of about 150,000, were regularly or occasionally prostitutes, a figure he regarded as ‘incredible’,⁹ and not because he doubted whether it could be true. In his work in the city, he came across both the lighter and darker sides of the phenomenon. He was responsible for vetting young Italian women who wanted to marry British servicemen, and had to test the credibility of the relationship by checking whether they were prostitutes or not. If they lived in poor and squalid districts and yet had food stocks in clean and well-looked-after apartments, the assumption was that they were living off immoral earnings. He also, by his own accounts, was personally approached several times by young women or their pimping mothers and fathers, offering sex ‘for a good square meal once a day’.¹⁰ The fact that these young Neapolitan women were driven to sell their bodies out of personal and family need, in order to obtain what was otherwise unobtainable, made their work essential to family survival and so, presumably, tolerable to their parents and siblings.

But widespread prostitution could threaten the cosy market-driven sociability which was developing between occupying Allied troops and the city’s poor. Lewis records being called out to handle an ugly confrontation involving ‘mobs of youths’ who were attacking and humiliating local girls walking out with Allied soldiers, and beating up their Allied boyfriends. By the time they had armed themselves and reached the scene of the trouble, ‘the storm had come and passed . . . All the local black market activities, involving the sale of American cigarettes, articles of military clothing and food, were being carried on with absolute normality . . . a drunken American negro slept in a flower bed. We could go home.’¹¹

One wonders whether this heady symbiosis of a city and its occupiers had any lasting effects on Neapolitan and Italian culture and life. The unbalanced, frenetic, and false prosperity of a black market economy lasted long enough. But it was temporary, and bound to be so. The urban poor had shared in the ‘good life’ for a while, and been exposed to the consumerist civilization of the Western Allies. This was one reason why Italians’ memories of Allied occupation tended to concentrate on US soldiers especially, whose spending power and consumption were considerably higher than British troops’, even though British officials and soldiers had a bigger role in the Allied occupation and administration of liberated Italy.

Even living for twenty years under Fascism, Italians were well aware of the USA as the epitome of a better material life. The myth of the land of plenty was conveyed to them by the experience of mass emigration to the United States. But the emigrant model of material wealth being secured by hard graft and sacrifice hardly fitted the reality in wartime Naples of an impoverished city population feeding off the spending sprees of young soldiers on leave. The feel of an American consumerist society was passed on rather better in the Hollywood film romances and their home-grown imitators which filled out the cinemas of 1930s Fascist Italy. It figured, indeed, in the Fascist regime's own wartime propaganda, which attempted to elevate a materially poor but ideologically armed Italian people above a materially endowed but spiritually degenerate enemy, 'blood' over 'gold'. It was, of course, the gold which appealed and attracted, and which won the war. One cannot imagine more counterproductive propaganda than this.

It was not really until the so-called economic miracle of the 1950s, when the country's politics were moulded by the cold war division of Europe into Eastern and Western blocs, that Italy adopted, or adapted, US-style consumerism, or at least, put itself in a position to do so. The economic miracle finally built in self-sustained economic growth, belatedly fulfilling the dreams of the American Marshal Aid planners of the late 1940s who filtered US post-war aid to Western Europe, including Italy. Marshal Plan posters declared to southern peasants that 'you, too, can be like us'.¹²

If the Neapolitans learned anything from the experience of Allied occupation, it was dependence. The Allies were the people's new and powerful patrons in straitened wartime circumstances. Naples voted to retain the monarchy in the 1946 referendum, and elected monarchists to the post-war Italian parliament and city council. Their populist, welfarist, clientelistic hold on the city's poor most resembled the parasitic dependence of the wartime occupation period.

Once it was liberated in June 1944, Rome never quite developed the same rapport with the Allied occupying forces as Naples did. After Naples and what lay between Naples and Rome, the Roman cityscape must have appeared really strange to Allied troops, because its status as a so-called Open City under German occupation had protected it from war-inflicted damage. The only ruins were those of ancient Rome. The Lazio region around Rome had, however, been a war zone and was badly damaged in the fighting, which helped to account for the influx of over 200,000 refugees and evacuees into the

city after its liberation. The incomers' swelling of the population to about three million was one of the most evident signs that the city was at war, along with a collapsing infrastructure and an estimated 300,000 unemployed. Like Naples, the city initially had only precarious transport links with its sources of food supply. Nevertheless, its liberation temporarily worsened the food situation in Naples, as southern agricultural producers and suppliers chased a better market in the capital. The single railway line to Naples took freight and military traffic, but only in January 1945 did the first passenger train leave from Rome for Naples. The 120-mile journey took twelve hours.

One interesting thing about the Allied occupation of Rome was the way in which, very rapidly, the economic situation worsened to match that in occupied Naples. This, in fact, was a feature of the Allied liberation of the south. Conditions of life in the already liberated areas spread or were carried into the newly liberated areas. The introduction of the occupation currency, the *am.lira*, and the ever wider ramifications of the black market which accompanied occupation, pushed prices sky-high and involved practically the whole population in the black economy, whether as consumers, wholesalers, or more characteristically, as the small traders who dealt in tiny amounts of foodstuffs and goods, not as a matter of gain but of subsistence.

The unemployed and near-destitute people living in the city's new suburbs or *borgate* had been moved out of their city centre Renaissance slums when these were demolished to clear the space for the Fascist regime's imperialist-minded town planning projects during the 1930s. These were marginalized suburban communities whose 'community spirit' was engendered and sustained by their own very high levels of petty banditry, crime, prostitution, and black marketeering, all activities designed to cause as much trouble as possible for the authorities. During the nine months of German control of the city, the criminal anti-authority activities of the suburban gangs could almost be construed as resistance to Nazi occupation. But in January 1945, the leader of one of the *borgate* gangs, known by his nickname or *nom de guerre*, 'the hunchback of Quarticcio'lo', was killed in a shoot-out with police, and this time, his criminality was no longer regarded as patriotic.

The acclimatization of the city to what conditions were like in the rest of liberated southern Italy was probably the reason why Rome's substantial middle-class and lower-middle-class white-collar population never took to the Allied occupation. In Naples, the people felt that the Allied occupiers were their new defenders and saviours, the solution to their problems of wartime survival. In Rome, people tended to see the Allies as the cause, or the

aggravation, of the city's wartime problems. The fact that the mainly resolutely English-speaking and self-contained Allied military administration was not a big local employer, added to the Romans' resentment.

The Allied officials were not particularly sociable. Sponsored by the PWB, British and American artists, poets, and musicians came to work, perform, and be in the city. Young and hungry Roman intellectuals, and would-be intellectuals, gatecrashed their gatherings, for the food and drink as much as the culture. One of them recalled listening to a reading by the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, though it was probably more of a slurring than a reading: 'he was completely



5. Meeting of cultures: Scottish soldiers wearing their tartan kilts examine the Coliseum in Rome in June 1944, while a Roman woman examines their dress.

drunk, always'.¹³ Most of the city's musical and cultural events during the Allied occupation were organized by the occupiers for the occupiers, British, American, and other Allied troops and officials. It was not exactly the case that interaction with the locals was banned. This happened in Taranto, where eventually Allied troops were barred from entering the city centre. But interaction was not exactly encouraged, and for this reason, among others, Rome never warmed to its occupation.

In the summer of 1944, twenty German divisions were retreating across Umbria, the Marches, and Tuscany towards the Gothic Line. On the eastern edge of the Gothic Line was the coastal town of Pesarò, which was to become, in German plans, a kind of trench. Local communities immediately to the north and south of Pesarò came under intense pressure from German forces. Reinforcements poured into the villages to the north. Local men were press-ganged on threat of death and reprisal to transport equipment and munitions on their oxen and carts, and to work to German orders on preparing trenches, fortifications, and shelters, or sabotaging the area's infrastructure.

Similar German round-ups of local men and their cattle to carry munitions occurred in Mombaraccio, an inland agricultural commune, but at a later stage, when the first fighting hit the area in late August 1944. Preparatory to the fighting and, again, in an attempt to clear a war zone, German troops and Italian police of the Fascist Republic took to the hills to root out the local partisan band, formed in March from Mombaraccio peasants evading the Republic's military call-up. In June, the band had ambushed and killed a few German soldiers, and captured and executed a man who was probably known to them, since he was born in Mombaraccio and had returned from working in Milan to act as a guide and interpreter for German forces in the area.

To the south, the inhabitants of the small town of Marotta, about halfway between Ancona and Pesarò, were chased out of their homes by a company of Russian soldiers in the German army, who billeted themselves in the local Catholic orphanage.

Pesarò itself, with a peacetime population of about 50,000, was a reception area for evacuated people. From late 1942, the town received a huge influx of evacuees from Rome, Naples, and other bombed southern cities, and of the families of military and civilian officials and emigrants repatriated from Italy's now defunct East African empire. They lived without jobs and on welfare in the town's hotels and guesthouses.

The town suffered its first Allied bombing raid in November 1943, inducing a first movement of people from the town to the surrounding countryside. In January 1944, the Germans publicly warned the inhabitants that they could order the total evacuation of the coastal zone to a depth of 10 km (6.2 miles) to take place within two days. The town's public offices and officials were transferred and dispersed to inland communes, while the 'new' provincial capital became Urbino, its own population now increasing by a third to over 30,000. The German warning had itself encouraged a more or less managed, if voluntary, further evacuation of many of Pesarò's population, mainly to communes on the outskirts of the town.

Then, finally, in June 1944, the Germans ordered the complete evacuation of the town and the coastal zone, and this time, it was everybody for themselves. The evacuation order posted on the town and village walls gave no real indication as to where the evacuees should go, and since there was no transport or fuel available, people had to evacuate on their own, 'even on foot'.¹⁴ The prefect's advice was to head south, in other words, towards the Allied lines. But he recognized that this could not be a planned evacuation, because of the previous more or less spontaneous evacuations, which had saturated the province. The evacuation of Pesarò had, then, repercussions throughout the province, which was now being criss-crossed by long columns of homeless people looking for somewhere to stay. Mombaraccio, with a population of about 4,000, had, in fact, been designated by the prefecture as an obligatory evacuation zone for Pesarò after the German warning in January 1944. Its population now reached twice its normal size, with the arrival of a new wave of refugees.

The Germans, again as common practice in areas which were becoming war zones, stripped, plundered, and transferred by rail to the north, the machinery, raw materials, and stocks of Pesarò's two main factories. One of them was Benelli's, a motorcycle manufacturer converted to war production, making bikes for the army and motor parts for the air force. The other was a metallurgical manufacturing plant owned by Montecatini, a huge industrial corporation. The Benelli management had attempted to save and hide what they could before the Germans arrived to dismantle and then mine the factory. But, again characteristically, the Germans kidnapped and held a Benelli brother as hostage, and the location of the caches of equipment had to be revealed.

The Germans had demanded a total evacuation, and it had been total. After the Allies had liberated the town, the military government's census in

October 1944 counted one hundred people still living there. The enforced evacuation, here as elsewhere, was the German attempt to clear and control the area for military operations. In this case, by pushing the town's population inland, they had created what they might well have wanted to avoid in a war zone. The province was now teeming with a hungry, homeless, and moving population, getting in each other's way. Perhaps that was actually the intention, to expel and set on the move a mass of people who would be a kind of human shield, clogging up and complicating the Allied offensive.

The evacuations of the town before the final, definitive one, in June 1944, did, in some cases, meet a planned and organized response in the agricultural communes inland from Pesarò. Some communal administrations requisitioned houses and facilitated temporary rental agreements between evacuees and local residents, or made available public buildings and schools as reception areas for the incomers. But evacuees were a considerable financial and welfare burden for under-resourced local councils, and as the countryside filled up with each successive influx of refugees, evacuating families had to find shelter where they could on peasant farms. They often occupied the stalls and barns emptied by the German requisitioning of livestock and grain.

It is important to realize that evacuation, this unexpected and emergency interaction between town and countryside in the spring and summer of 1944, was something which was largely handled and managed by the women of both peasant and urban families. The men were usually absent, or at least, inactive, lying low and keeping out of sight, to avoid German and Republican round-ups which were intensifying as the Germans prepared to defend the area and, if necessary, retreat from it.

It was hardly surprising that the host peasant women seemed to adapt better to the new situation created by the influx of evacuees. They were, at least, on home ground, and were accustomed to mucking in with other peasant families and their relatives where circumstances required it. Evacuation, like the war generally, was another admittedly extreme emergency of peasant life, to which they had to adapt in order to survive.

For the wives of urban evacuee families, evacuation to the countryside was a distressing and disorientating experience. To the anxieties and difficulties of fleeing from Pesarò were added the problems of adaptation to a different kind of life. Cohabiting in cramped and unsalubrious conditions with unfamiliar people, other evacuees, the host peasant family, was personally and collectively uncomfortable. From their memories of the experience of evacuation, it

appeared that they tried, in difficult circumstances, to transplant the separateness and privacy of the urban nuclear family to the farm courtyard. They cleaned up their own space and ate their meals on their own as a family. But it clearly did not always work. One woman recalled distastefully that it was ‘a completely public kind of life’.¹⁵

As the person now responsible for the welfare of her evacuee family, the town wife’s one daily pressing priority was to find enough food to feed the family. This was probably not very different from what was required in her previous wartime urban existence. But the context was different. ‘You walked and walked if you wanted to eat,’ remembered one woman,¹⁶ and you developed your own ersatz food replacements, making bread from potatoes, and coffee and tobacco from anything. Women and their children scrumpled, that is stole, fruit and vegetables from farms and fields. ‘We lasted a month on pears,’ recalled another woman,¹⁷ remembering her life of exile in the countryside in the spring of 1944.

Age seemed to make a difference to how women responded to the experience of evacuation, and this was confirmed by the memories of women who evacuated from other towns in other places in 1943–4. The then girls’ and young women’s memories of evacuation were full of the innocence of being young and of the lack of awareness of the gravity of their situation, which weighed down the recollections of their parents. But they had a sense of how different things were, living in the countryside during the war. Their friendships were wider and more varied, as a result of families being thrown together by circumstances, and they found company and activity outside the family and, to an extent, beyond family restraints and conventions. They had a good time, in other words; no school (it was the summer, anyway), not washing or changing their clothes much, playing and gossiping in the fields with new friends, holding impromptu dances in the barns.

In the industrial town of Terni, to the north-west of Rome in central Italy, which had over one hundred Allied air raids in the ten months from August 1943 to liberation in June 1944, practically the whole population decamped to the surrounding mountainous countryside. The adults remembered the evacuation as an uncomfortable and undesirable return to nature, sleeping on the ground, eating without utensils, living with the fleas and insects in abandoned, semi-destroyed, and plundered farmsteads. For the children, it was the best of a return to nature, an extended holiday in the countryside. As one then 12-year-old girl recalled, ‘every day was like a Sunday, for us’.¹⁸

The Balkan Adriatic port and naval base of Zara, along with Italy's north-eastern frontier provinces and the rest of Italian-occupied and Italian-held Yugoslavia, were effectively annexed to Nazi Germany after the armistice. In May 1944, the German military ordered the complete evacuation of the city because of heavy Allied bombing raids. As in Pesarò, this was an order which finalized a process of leaving the city which had started in late 1943. Zara was an Italian island in a Slav sea, and the greatest threat to the German occupation, other than Allied bombing, were Tito's Slav partisans. Zara's position as an Italian outpost in German-occupied Yugoslavia gave a definite additional frisson to the relationship between Italian evacuees and the Slav peasant families they roomed with in the countryside of the interior. In Còsino, a small town 8 km (5 miles) from Zara, overlooking the city, an Italian evacuee remembered how their Slav hosts 'slammed their right fists into the palms of their left hands, saying 'neka, neka [that's good, that's good]', as they all watched the city burn below them in the distance.¹⁹ A well-off Italian family evacuating from their villa on the Zara seafront to one room in a house in Diklo, in the Slav hinterland to the city, had a similar experience. They recalled the locals 'witnessing the Allied bombing raids from the terraces of their houses, or standing on roofs, jubilantly applauding the columns of fire, the crashes of bombs, the curtains of dense smoke hanging heavily on the horizon'.²⁰

In this case, evacuation had led to an incongruous cohabitation of Italian city dweller and Slav peasant. The fact that the Italian evacuees paid rent for their Slav lodgings undoubtedly helped; it was a deal, an arrangement, in other words. Family connections and previous acquaintance also eased the way. Rather than a place in the stalls of a farm, one Italian family, for instance, stayed in the house of the local Croat elementary schoolteacher, who was known to them because of his marriage to an Italian from Zara.

But, however inherently or potentially tense the cohabitations might have been, it was clear that some kind of mutually supportive complicity between evacuee and temporary landlord developed out of the common wartime situation which they had to find a way of coping with, and surviving. The Zara evacuees were living in rural areas which were nominally occupied and held by the Germans, but where Slav partisan bands were active. One Italian evacuee remembered that in the village where they stayed, the partisans held meetings in farmyards specifically for the re-education of Zara refugees, who were treated to what came across as menacing speeches in barely understood Croat. When the Germans periodically hit the area, looking for partisans, they

similarly improvised meetings to warn people off helping the partisans, addressed to all the local inhabitants, Slav residents and Italian evacuees alike. The complicity came, in other words, from neither Slav host nor Italian evacuee doing or saying anything which could compromise the other in the eyes of either the Germans or the partisans, and hence threaten the survival of both. Several Italian evacuees remembered that their peasant families had regular contact with the partisans, even if they were not partisans themselves, and that the peasants made no attempt to hide these contacts. When you think about it, this could only mean that the peasants had confidence in the evacuees, and believed that they would remain silent in the event of a German round-up or raid.

The Pesarò urban housewives had not exactly enjoyed their evacuation to the countryside. But they had, because of wartime circumstances, become the decision makers for their families. Did this last? Did they take this wartime-induced self-confidence and sense of their own worth into post-war life? They certainly employed some of it on their immediate post-liberation or post-war return to Pesarò. Some of them got involved in the local branches of one of the Communist Party's many wartime and post-war capillary organizations, the Union of Italian Women. These functioned in Pesarò as community groups which tackled the still pressing concerns of returning families about food supplies, accommodation, welfare, and the resumption of schooling for their children. In these activities, the men remained in the background as much as they had done during the war. The women organized community fund-raising events and parties, and as one of them recalled with evident pride in her independence of her husband, 'I went dancing, even on my own if he wasn't around, and he didn't say anything about it.'²¹

The experience of evacuation and the involvement of village communities in the violent and brief front-line fighting, probably did not have the same liberating effects on the outlook and behaviour of peasant women as they did for their temporary guests from the city. The parish priest at Montnaggiore al Metauro, in August 1944 one of the villages directly on the front running along the river Metauro, which flowed from the mountains eastwards to the coast at Fano, described the Allied liberation as an exotic week-long procession, 'a dense, uninterrupted passing through of trucks, cars, sidecars, motorcycles, weapons of all kinds, with soldiers from different races and different nationalities, English, Canadian, Australian, Negroes, all in different uniforms, with different looks and behaviour'.²² He and his fellow Catholic priests found the

war deeply disturbing, or rather, deeply ambiguous. The priest of the village of Cerbera rather pathetically wondered aloud to his archbishop in July 1944 how he was to celebrate mass now that his church was full of evacuees and local people made homeless by the Germans' blowing-up of their houses. He was clearly too overtaken by events to realize that the wartime suffering of his parishioners was an opportunity to excite and strengthen their natural religiosity. In the same diocese, at Mondavio, his colleague was organizing prayer meetings and hymn singing in the local shelters.

But for the priests and their bishops, the invasions and occupations of their parishes by foreign troops in the summer of 1944 were a potential threat to religion, morality, and good order. One is naturally sceptical as to whether local people would have necessarily perceived an Allied occupying force dispensing 'lots of money, goods, entertainments, distractions',²³ in quite the same way as the bishop, who was concerned about the undermining of faith and morals in his flock. That is, until one realizes that the priests' reports to the bishop, admittedly written up to a year after the 1944 summer, all unequivocally stated that the presence of Allied troops had not encouraged sexual licence and promiscuity among the local women. The priests were not reticent in expressing their often prurient fears about the behaviour of their women around Allied soldiers, which is good reason to accept their word when they said that their female parishioners kept their distance, and their virtue.

Even the girls and young women who were living in the countryside as evacuees spoke very little about any sexual adventures in their time of relative freedom, and they certainly ruled out, in their memories anyway, dalliances with Allied soldiers. In Marotta, the parties held there by the Allied troops were for, and attended by, the female workers who came from the nearby town, Fano, to clean their vehicles, not the local women. One does get the sense from these testimonies, of priests and women alike, that the soldiers, German or Allied, were all the same, as arrogant and intrusive as the other, another unpleasant visitation which the war had brought on them, and to be coped with by remaining and holding on to what they were.

By the middle of October 1944, after battles on the Gothic Line, Allied forces were within 12 miles of the major central Italian city of Bologna, a transport and communication node for the whole country, which was close enough for them to start artillery bombardments. The Allies expected the city to fall before the winter, and so did the Germans, who from the late summer of 1944, implemented their chaotic but planned aggressive retreat

and reinforcement of the new defensive position they intended to retreat to. In a pre-allocated exercise in asset stripping, German military and civilian agencies based in the city moved to plunder and destroy the area's agricultural and industrial economy. Industrial plant and raw materials were seized and moved north, as were grain stocks in the *ammassi* and the region's livestock, some of which was slaughtered, butchered, and stored, the rest herded together in special collection centres in other places. German divisions were paid a bounty for each animal they delivered to the improvised pens. Bologna was becoming a farm-yard, anyway, because the massive influx of reinforcing German troops to the province was driving peasant farmers and their families into the city with their produce and farm animals, a reverse evacuation from countryside to town. In the autumn of 1944, the planned German withdrawal from Bologna resembled a giant cattle drive out of the gates of the city.

Reinforcement German army and Waffen SS units, joined by German police, trawled the front-line areas in the hinterland and mountainous Appennines villages near the city, not only attacking partisan bands, but also rounding up able-bodied men and women for deportation to work in Germany. Over 7,000 people were captured in this attempt to clear the front line of its human resources, and the great majority of them were not partisans or those taken in specifically anti-partisan operations. The German round-ups of August 1944 paralysed the life of the province. Everything closed down, as the population, effectively, went into hiding or left for the city, deterred from their normal activity by the fear of being caught up in the German terror.

The round-ups ended, or were curtailed, in October 1944, partly because they were proving so counterproductive, with local young men joining the partisans in order to escape capture, and partly because the front had stabilized. Bologna's fall, which appeared imminent, was postponed. In Bologna itself, the German air force organized its own swoop on skilled industrial workers, and snatched eighty men to work in aircraft factories in Germany. But the effects of this raid were to stall German war production and administration in the city. Hundreds of blue- and white-collar workers absented themselves from factories and offices. Men were still sought for what was effectively forced labour, but were now mainly deployed on German work projects in northern Italy, including the building of new defensive fortifications in the neighbouring province of Ferrara. If a Bolognese agreed to work closer to home, then at least he received a ration card and some guarantee that he would not be deported to labour camps in Germany.

Since the front outside Bologna stopped at the point it had reached in October 1944, the city existed through the 1944–5 winter until the front moved again in April 1945, as an overcrowded, under-resourced, and underserved frontier town. The Germans had planned and carried out their usual plunder in an area of imminent retreat, and many of the city's administrative offices had been transferred to the north, by the time it became clear that Bologna would not fall, yet, to the Allies. Refugees and evacuees had poured into the city, and even the famous arcades of the city centre streets were walled up to provide temporary accommodation for refugee families. And the Germans, unexpectedly, were still there, in occupation. Local manufacturing was at a standstill, because of pre-emptive German asset-stripping, and there was not much work or welfare available for a swollen labour force. There was a run on candles, in heavy demand because of the large number of families living in temporary shelter and with no electricity supply. Lacking raw materials, local producers closed down. The official price per candle was 2.10 lire in November 1944, but hardly any were available at this price; the black market price was 22 lire. The city was beleaguered from within by the Germans and from without by the Allies, existing in a precarious, dangerous, and dimly lit limbo. Germans, Fascists, and partisans were penned up together in the besieged city, which was one explanation for the desperate ferocity of the civil war being fought there during the winter of 1944–5. Reprieved by the halt of the Allied advance, Germans and Fascists hunted down partisans unable to leave the city, who responded in kind, attacking anybody in uniform.

But the towns strung along the banks of the river Senio, either side of Faenza in the province of Ravenna, went through an even crueller frontier existence during the winter of 1944–5. The front ran along the river, with Allied forces on one bank and German trenches and lines on the other. Where towns straddled the river, they straddled the front. Cotignola, a town of about 7,000 people to the north-east of Faenza, was first bombarded by Allied artillery on 29 November 1944, and then for the next 145 consecutive days. The town was on the front line for four months. Over 80 per cent of its houses were destroyed and one in ten of the population were killed or wounded. The Germans started evacuating the parts of the town they controlled in late December 1944, blowing up the houses and mining all the landmarks, including the churches. By the time the Allies crossed the river and captured the other bank, early in April 1945, their

soldiers had nicknamed Cotignola ‘the Cassino of Romagna’, after the terrible attritional stalemate on the Gustav Line during the previous winter. As in Cassino, towards the end of the fighting, it was a case of the Allies’ continual shelling destroying the ruins created by earlier bombardments.

A local priest and an impromptu council of other citizens attempted to run things, or rather, as the priest’s diary put it, to confront ‘times of impossible choices and sufferings. I remember the consultations, the perplexities. How were we to behave in round-ups?’²⁴ One can only empathize with the local family carefully feeding up the other member of the family, their pig, only to have it seized at the point of slaughter by German troops who had obviously been following the fattening process. Three days after stealing it, the German soldiers returned the pig’s head to the family. Was this a gesture of humiliation, a trophy confronting the family with the thought of what they had lost, or of sympathy, since something, anyway, could be made of the head?

It was more of the same in the small spa town of Riolo Terme, west of Faenza. Constantly bombarded by artillery exchanges and constantly in a line of fire, the town was effectively cut off for days at a time. It was full of evacuees from neighbouring areas, who were forcibly evacuated, once again, by the Germans from some parts of the town. About 3,000 locals and evacuees were crammed into the town centre districts, forced to live ‘a desperately troglodyte existence’ in basements, ditches, the pits left in the ruins of bombed-out houses, ‘at the mercy of observers in two opposed lines, who scrutinized every movement whatsoever in order to counter it’.²⁵ ‘You lived the life of the catacombs,’²⁶ recalled one survivor, who knew his history. Five hundred people were killed, 250 were wounded, which was, again, about one in ten of the town’s expanded wartime population.

It should be clear from this account of the passing of the military war from north to south after the armistice of September 1943, that with Italy as a battleground, the war affected practically all Italians in some way. The conditions of civilian life got progressively worse and remained poor, even after the fighting had moved on. The destructive reach of the war, whether experienced as bombing raids, evacuation, hunger, and malnutrition, or any combination of these and other damaging impacts of war, reduced life to a matter of bare survival. Those for whom life was never much more than this, anyway, had to find new ways of surviving. The war was a greater shock and challenge to those Italians who used to have a cushion in life, for whom life was not normally a question of subsistence.

The war in Italy was such a different and difficult experience for Italians that it provoked sometimes extraordinary behaviour among them. There was, above all, a very noticeable mobility of people during and as a result of the war. The countryside, especially, was just teeming with people on the move, people who belonged there and people who normally did not, many of whom were the flotsam and fugitives of war. Roaming around the countryside were soldiers of many different nationalities, as well as Italian troops, both those who had disbanded and were still on the run and those who had enlisted, or been enlisted, to fight alongside the Allies or in the armed forces of the Fascist Republic. There were Allied prisoners of war who had escaped from or simply walked out of their camps after the armistice, some of whom were trying to cross to Allied lines to the south or to neutral Switzerland in the north, while others kept moving, or sought refuge, hoping that the advancing front would reach them. There were deported central European and Balkan Jews, Slavs, and Gypsies who had similarly melted into the countryside from their camps in south central Italy after 8 September 1943. There were evacuees and people who came into the countryside on a regular basis to forage for food, smugglers, black marketeers, young men avoiding military conscription and labour service, partisan bands and those who pursued them, and all the other fugitives of war, the men of the German police and of the Fascist Republican police and militias.

The Italian countryside became a crowded and dangerous place, exposing everybody there to incongruous and incidental encounters with people from other worlds. How else, but for the extraordinary mobility caused by war, could one explain the marriages, in 1946, of three local women in the small rural commune of Cartoceto, in Pesarò province, to respectively, an ex-naval officer from Cagliari on the island of Sardinia, an ex-soldier who came from Genoa on the Ligurian Mediterranean coast, and an ex-driver in the Polish army (who could have been Polish or Italian), or the birth of a child in 1945 to the local schoolteacher, the father of whom was a German officer?

It has become fashionable in recent Italian writing on the war to draw attention to the behaviour and conduct of the silent majority of Italians. This is often done for quite tendentious reasons, to demonstrate what, in fact, was always obvious, that those who actively resisted German occupation and those who actively collaborated with it, were small minorities. Resisting or collaborating were not how most people responded, the argument goes. Most people occupied a grey zone between resistance and collaboration, or rather, beyond

resistance and collaboration. They chose to make no choice at all, to do nothing and wait out the end of the war, in a passive and non-committal way.

Such reasoning is double-edged or, at least, can be employed to do different things. It can be used to undermine the myth that the country was practically unanimous in its opposition and resistance to Nazi occupation, and that those who collaborated with the Germans were an isolated, exiguous minority. It can also be used to condemn a nation for its loss of national and collective identity. *Attendismo*, a ‘wait and see’ policy, negatively understood as ‘a plague on all your houses’ fence-sitting, was the mark of a people who had forfeited its soul and its ideals, putting the individual struggle for survival above the country’s survival.

This division of the Italian people at war into active minorities and an inactive majority is also a superficially appealing one, because a non-involved wait-and-see attitude would appear to be the most likely and appropriate way in which people could hope to survive the war and, with survival being the priority, was bound to be the way out of the war adopted by the great majority of Italians. Such a view bases its credibility on what is taken to have been the actual behaviour of most people in the war between 1943 and 1945. It is, though, a misrepresentation of the reality of wartime life for many people. This was not a war people could stand aside from; the war came at them from all sides and it was impossible to separate themselves from its effects and from the demands and choices it imposed on a daily basis. To survive at all, people had to act, and react, make hard, unpalatable, inconsistent, contradictory choices from day to day, as circumstances demanded. How were people to feed themselves today, and tomorrow, and the next day? How were young and middle-aged men and their families to respond to military call-up, to labour service? How were people to respond to the presence of evacuees from the town, of an escaped Allied serviceman wanting food and shelter, of a partisan band, of a foreign or Italian Jew? How were people to respond to police and army round-ups and sweeps in their area?

One has only to think through the ramifications of, say, hostage-taking, to realize how impossible it was for ordinary people to have or adopt a wait-and-see attitude to the war and its impacts. Both sides—the RSI and the German forces, and the partisan bands—took hostages from among the civilian population. To some extent, they did so for similar reasons, to use them as prisoner exchanges or as a means of counter-reprisal, and to throw the moral responsibility for the mutual violence on to the other side. For the Germans and the RSI police,

hostage-taking was also, and primarily, a crude way of controlling and terrorizing the local population, since it made the community as a whole responsible for the lives of its own people, the individual hostages, and for the presence and actions of the partisans in their area. Whatever they felt about it, hostage-taking required the community to make a choice, and the choice was a really difficult one, since how they behaved put lives at risk. This was the point of taking hostages, to involve a wider group of people in the fate of a few individuals, to make the community collectively pay for the activity of a few partisans operating among them.

It is important to realize that these choices were highly charged, intense ones for the people having to make them. Those making demands on them and demanding choices from them, the partisans, the Germans, the Fascists, always polarized the choices and made them a matter of either collaborating or resisting. The RSI required its civil servants and public employees to take an oath of loyalty to the Republic. One response of the anti-Fascist resistance organizations, the National Liberation Committees (*Comitati di Liberazione Nazionale*, CLNs), was to say that ‘whoever swears is a traitor’. Where did that leave the civil servant wanting to keep his job and support his family? The CLNs urged people not to pay taxes to the RSI, and some wanted to punish those who did. People constantly faced tests of their loyalties, tests of which side they were on.

These were hardly situations in which people normally wanted to find themselves, or choices which people normally wanted to make. But the proliferating and corrosive effects of the war required most Italians to make such choices, some or most of the time. People had to find ways of coping and surviving in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Their conduct and behaviour matched the extraordinariness of the times. Prostitution, petty crime, black-marketeering, resistance to or collaboration with authorities making unpalatable demands on them, were all popular, majority activities and responses, and can be regarded as part of the Italian people’s wartime survival kit.

It can be said with some justification that these difficult choices of war were faced for longer and with greater intensity by people living in the north and centre of the country than people living in the south, simply because the lengthening of the war prolonged the German occupation of the centre and north. The whole argument about the grey zone of an apolitical, apathetic majority materializing between the actively resisting or

collaborating minorities, has arisen from a re-evaluation of what it was really like to be in the north and centre, as opposed to the south of the country, where, it is assumed, the concept has no meaning.

It is sometimes forgotten that there was popular opposition to the brief and violent German occupation of the south in September and October 1943, in the regions of Puglia, Campania, Abruzzo, and Molise. There is some evidence that in Naples, at least, such resistance was organized or channelled by reviving anti-Fascist political parties. As in Rome, a National Liberation Front made up of Communist, Socialist, and Action Party members had existed in Naples since the downfall of Mussolini in July 1943. But the Four Days of popular disturbances in Naples between 28 September and 1 October 1943, which could pass as the city's act of self-liberation, were largely a matter of spontaneous combustion. The people were reacting against the cumulative effects of the oppressive and taxing system of German occupation, the requisitioning and plundering of the human and material resources of the city, and the policy of reprisals following any resistance to these measures, something which escalated and maintained the momentum of popular protest. An unorganized, reactive popular response to German occupation, rather than anti-Fascist party-organized opposition, also mainly characterized what resistance there was to the Germans in Lazio, the region around Rome, in late 1943 and early 1944. This kind of resistance to German occupation in the south was not, in fact, at all southern. Although there developed in the centre and north of the country a strong, organized, armed resistance to the Germans, which never really occurred in the south before Allied liberation because of the relative brevity of occupation, most popular resistance there, also, took the same forms as the civil disobedience in the south in 1943–4.

There was apparently little *Fascist* resistance to the Allied occupation of the south, in contrast with the anti-Fascist resistance to German occupation of the north. In the north, resistance to the Germans also meant resistance to the Fascist Republic, the client state installed by the Germans under Mussolini's leadership in late September 1943. The presence of the Fascist Republic gave a civil war—Italians fighting Italians—dimension to resistance in the north. Some local Fascist parties had spontaneously reformed after the armistice and offered their services to the German occupier. But the Germans always realistically envisaged that the Fascist Republic's remit would be in northern Italy. While there were undoubtedly Fascists overtaken, as it were, by the Allied invasion and

occupation of the deep south in September and October 1943, organizationally, the Fascist Republic had only the time and the resources to situate itself in those parts of south central Italy which were north of the Gustav Line.

Some eighty or so Fascists were tried in one southern province, Catanzaro, for resistance to Allied occupation between October 1943 and April 1944, when the area eventually passed to the king's government. This hardly constituted a Fascist rising against the invader. But the fact that any Fascists attempted anything at all, pointed to the presence of social and political conditions which enabled a conservative restoration, rather than a democratic reconstruction, to occur in the post-war south. Peasant land agitation, combined with the impromptu and shallow formation of CLNs and anti-Fascist parties, enhanced the southern middle and landowning classes' fear of communism. The perceived threat of social revolution justified the use of the same heavy-handed and repressive handling of peasant grievances by landowners and local authorities which had characterized the Fascist and, indeed, the pre-Fascist periods. That same fear of social upheaval weakened the resolve of the Allied military government to proceed with a serious purge of local police and officials compromised by Fascism. The royal government had no resolve at all, when it came to replacing 'Fascist' state officials. The old ways, and the old personnel, were clearly the best, when it came to repressing social unrest. Southern conservatives were at one with the king's administration in projecting a lurid scenario of a liberated south apparently sliding into communist-inspired social anarchy. The neo-Fascist Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano, MSI), partly based its post-war revival in the south on this resurgent and largely manufactured anti-communism, and the opportunity it provided to rehabilitate Fascists and 'Fascist' officials of the old Fascist regime. In the late 1940s, the MSI was active in developing legal and welfare support groups to protect Fascists and officials from the courts and the purge commissions, as both a surrogate for and future basis of political activity.

As with German occupation of the north, the Allied occupation authorities in the south did have their own client state in the royal government of the Kingdom of the South, to which they progressively passed the administration of liberated territory. While it might have had different characteristics to anti-Fascist and anti-German resistance in the north, there was resistance of a kind in the south to Allied occupation and the king's government.

The armistice of September 1943 was not just a ceasefire agreement between the Badoglio government and the Allies. Italy was to change sides

and fight alongside the Allies against Nazi Germany. Badoglio eventually declared war on Germany on 13 October 1943. It was a political as much as a military decision, needed to establish the royal government's credibility with both the Allies and the Italian anti-Fascist political parties. All sides were now united in wanting to drive the Germans out of Italy. Italy could bury the Fascist regime's alliance with Nazi Germany and, indeed, twenty years of Fascism, by fighting its way back to being, and being recognized as, a free and independent country. The declaration of war was also, very importantly, the opportunity for the king and Badoglio to redeem themselves and reaffirm a monarchical leadership of the nation, when the monarchy's standing as a patriotic and national force had been so damaged by the disaster of the armistice. The organized, armed anti-Fascist and anti-Nazi resistance movement in the north came to see itself as the one single expression and symbol of national recovery and national redemption after September 1943. It is important to recognize that there was an opportunity and a chance for this national redemption to come from the newly liberated south. The royal government, it must be said, did not appear to want to grasp the opportunity. Its reticence now was consistent with its behaviour at the time of the armistice, and with its conservative, establishment nature.

At issue was the kind and extent of the military contribution the royal government and the liberated south could make to the Allied campaign in Italy, the degree to which the south could participate in the liberation of the north. The Allies were concerned to limit the Italian military role, partly because they did not wish to see the re-emergence of armed forces which were a badge of national sovereignty and which gave real muscle and independence to the Italian government. A government with its own army could well affect and even predetermine how the Allies would dispose of an occupied Italy. The British commanders, especially, also tended to continue to regard Italy as an ex-enemy power which should be penalized for the Axis alliance and whose armed forces could not really be trusted. These were precisely the reasons why Hitler, on the other side, was reluctant to allow Mussolini a reconstituted army in the north, which would be largely recruited from the 'traitorous' Badoglio army captured and interned by the Germans after the armistice. As Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, chief of the Supreme Command of the German armed forces, put it, 'the only Italian army that will not betray us is an army that does not exist'.²⁷ The Italian military units Hitler grudgingly permitted to be

formed, had to be trained and equipped in Germany, and were not usually deployed in the fighting against the Allies.

In the south, the Allies permitted the raising of an Italian force of an anticipated nearly half a million men. They were happy for the great majority of these men to be used either for internal policing and defence of liberated territory, or for servicing and service in Allied armies. But they insisted that only about 60,000 men were to be trained and equipped as separate combat units for use in the Italian campaign.

There were calls from among the anti-Fascist parties in the south, and others, for the creation of a new volunteer army in the south to fight the Germans alongside the Allies. Such a force would mark a definite break with the monarchical and Badoglioian army, and would allow the incorporation of career regular army officers who were disgusted by the way the king had allowed the army to disband and disintegrate after the armistice. This view of a new Italian army was unacceptable to the Allies, who felt that such a force would escape its control, and absolute anathema to the Badoglioian Italian military command because of its democratic, volunteer character.

By October 1944, there was still a shortfall of about 100,000 men on the Allied target or limit of half a million men. One explanation must be both Allied and royal scepticism about the validity and utility of raising such a force. But after the taking of Rome in June 1944, in a significant realignment encouraged by the Allies, the Italian government was broadened out to include the anti-Fascist parties, headed not by Badoglio but by Ivanoe Bonomi. He was an old politician and former prime minister from Italy's pre-Fascist and anti-Fascist liberal past, who had emerged from the shadows just before Mussolini's dismissal in July 1943 as the possible figurehead of a moderate anti-Fascist succession to Fascism. Probably only an anti-Fascist, non-monarchical government would have taken the decision to proceed with the recruitment of the remaining 100,000 men.

It was a disaster, in some ways comparable to the disaster of 8 September 1943. Essentially reflecting the compromises between the monarchy and political anti-Fascism and between moderate and more radical anti-Fascist forces which lay behind the formation of Bonomi's government, the operation was managed by a still unreconstructed military command in the conventional and traditional fashion. It was a call-up, an obligatory enlistment, conscription, in other words, not a recruitment call for volunteers. The decision to conscript, rather than recruit, was a very significant one. The government, or rather the

military command, intended to raise and train a regular army of conscripts, who became soldiers because they had to, not because they wanted to. The contrast could not have been greater with the armed forces of the Resistance in the north, who were volunteers fighting not a conventional, but an irregular guerrilla, war, and who believed that they were fighting a popular anti-Fascist and anti-Nazi war with a definite idealistic and ideological component.

There was something more to the call-up of November and December 1944 than the fact that it was decided on more than a year after the king's declaration of war on Nazi Germany. The call-up papers were addressed to the young men of the south aged between 20 and 30 years old who had been in the army on 8 September 1943, and had disbanded after the armistice. The military command estimated that there were about 200,000 of them, who had made their way home in September 1943. It was not a call-up, but a recall-up.

This was probably enough to guarantee failure. The war had ended for these men over a year earlier, in ignominious circumstances and after three years of useless combat. It seemed to be an act of revenge on men who were blameless, enacted by the men who were actually responsible for the national catastrophe of 8 September 1943, for the war which was now dividing and destroying Italy, and for the Fascist war of 1940 to 1943. The conscripted men refused to show, and in great numbers. Tens of thousands of names were referred to the military courts for not responding to the call-up. The attempt to round up, arrest, and charge the military defaulters was as cack-handed and counterproductive in its effects on the southern population as the German and Fascist pursuit of the draft-dodgers in northern Italy was. In the Lazio region, 14,000 were conscripted, but only 3,700 turned up at the barracks. It was a military strike which became a matter of social and popular protest, and in some places, mass civil disobedience. In Ragusa, in Sicily, where the opposition to the call-up and its social resonances were greatest, there were five days of violent civil disorder, with popular demonstrations, attacks on public buildings, even exchanges of fire, until, eventually, the army regained control. The *tutti a casa* (everybody home) movement of the armistice was reborn as the *non si parte* (nobody leaves) movement, spreading to Sardinia, Puglia, Calabria, Campania, Lazio, Umbria, across the liberated south.

The evident connections between the army's disbandment of September 1943 and the no-show of November and December 1944 would suggest that the mass refusal of military service was the specifically southern reaction to the armistice. It was an indication of how seriously the armistice

events had discredited the king and the military as national and nationalizing institutions. In a wider setting, the protests of the *non si parte* campaign were yet another demonstration of southern Italy opposing national central state authority, and refusing incorporation into one Italy, a feature of the wayward and imperfect nation-forming which had occurred since the political and territorial unification of the country in 1870–1.

It seems unlikely that these tens of thousands of young men in the south were refusing to participate in the war against Germany because they were committed Fascists. It might perhaps be nearer the mark to say that they rejected call-up because they were not Italian patriots. Ideas of and hopes of Sicilian autonomy and separatism had some political and popular currency at the time, and the experience of the war so far was hardly conducive to a sense of belonging to Italy. Although the methods of conscription were conventionally military, and so this was not necessarily how the call up would have appeared to those being called up, it was nevertheless the case that the young men of the south had refused to take part in a national, anti-Fascist war to drive the Germans out of Italy. The south was refusing to liberate the north, and as a result, did not fully share in what, elsewhere, was being portrayed and experienced as a war of national liberation and redemption.

Taking part might have helped to make the anti-Fascist liberation struggle popular in the south. Whether the call-up of late 1944 was a missed or botched opportunity can perhaps be gauged from what happened to the four Italian combat groups of about 50,000 men in total, who did, eventually, fight alongside the Allies in the Italian war. Their input was carefully controlled, as the Allies wanted, in a quite deliberate devaluing of their military contribution to the campaign. They fought among other Allied units and under Allied strategic command, between January and April 1945. The ‘Cremona’ combat group, for instance, was attached to the first Canadian army corps, on the Adriatic sector of the front. It was the one combat group to enrol as volunteers in its ranks, men from the partisan bands of newly liberated Tuscany and Emilia. The ex-partisans gave the force its democratic élan, and to a degree, took the places of the young men from the south who rejected the call-up. It was troops of the Cremona who derisively cat-called and barracked the king’s son and their nominal commander-in-chief, Prince Umberto of Savoy, when he visited and inspected the combat groups. This public display of disloyalty and lack of respect towards the monarchy expressed and fused the feelings of the two anti-establishment components of the force, the democratically national ex-partisans of the centre

and the north and the post-armistice soldiers of the south, the combination which might have liberated all of Italy.

It is possible to speculate that the south's mass abstention from a national war in late 1944 might have nourished the political phenomenon of the immediate post-war period which both marked and exploited the south's sense of apartness from the rest of the nation. 'Down with everything! Fed up with everything!'²⁸ expressed the sceptical and aggressively apolitical stance of *l'uomo qualunque* ('the ordinary bloke' or 'the man in the street') movement, which at its peak won a fifth of the vote among the south's lower middle and middle classes, a constituency which later moved on to the Monarchists and the post-war neo-Fascist party, the MSI. If this was the case, then the *non si parte* movement was the nearest Italians got to widespread Fascist resistance in the liberated and Allied-occupied south.