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JCH

Article

Journal of Contemporary History
0(0) 1–25
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DOI: 10.1177/0022009420909164
journals.sagepub.com/home/jch

# Civilian Disarmament: Public Order and the Restoration of State Authority in Italy's Postwar Transition, 1944–6

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## Abstract

Despite its impact on the breakdown of public order and on the rise of armed violence, the role of civilian disarmament in post-Second World War transitions is yet to be properly investigated. This article argues that the disarmament of the population was a key passage in two critical aspects of the normalization of postwar Italy: the reaffirmation of State authority and the reconstruction of control structures in response to the delegitimization of established authorities that followed their collapse in September 1943. Specifically, the article focuses on the intersection between the proliferation of war weapons, public order policing, and the recovery of Italian sovereignty in the aftermath of the Second World War. This article will demonstrate that disarmament was instrumental in reshaping Italian institutions according to the imperative of regaining control over the national territory in a context marked by foreign occupation, conflicting claims of legitimacy and the inversion of the monopoly on legitimate violence. The urgency to disarm incentivized both Italian and Allied authorities to rebuild the State control system in accordance to the pre-existing model of a centralized, authoritative administration. This led toward the preservation − in the sphere of public security − of agencies and individuals strongly compromised with the Fascist regime.

## Keywords

civilian disarmament, Italy, monopoly on violence, postwar Europe, State authority, State continuity

> The Capital, the province of Rome and all of Italy are, as is known, full of weapons. One might say that there is hardly anyone who does not keep weapons of some kind

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> or caliber in their house and on their properties under the specious pretext of security. There is hardly a party which does not possess large and well-concealed and guarded deposits of weapons of every kind, again under the specious pretext of the violence exercised by other parties and of the dangers of subversion and revolutionary acts from within and without.[1]

Ciro Verdiani, the Prefect of Rome, thus described the predicament of the country in July 1946, long after the end of the war. Verdiani was not overstating the seriousness of the problem. Across the Peninsula vast numbers of Allied, German and Italian war weapons had found their way into the hands of civilians and former combatants, pouring into Italy's daily life during the chaotic transition from wartime to peacetime.

The unchecked proliferation of firearms was a problem common to most liberated countries in postwar Europe. Its impact on the deterioration of public order and on the rise of armed violence after the conflict itself was apparent on a continental scale. In Germany, for instance, 'millions of firearms remained in circulation [...] and normative constraints to orderly and lawful behaviour had crumbled', while in Belgium a 'considerable increase' in the number of weapons among civilians 'and the development of highly mobile and extremely violent forms of banditry all contributed to a sense of urgency and crisis'.[2]

In this European scenario Italy draws particular interest for the interaction of concurring factors such as the duration and brutality of the liberation process, the multiplication of entities claiming authority, and the strength of its Resistance movement. The central argument of this article is that disarmament was a key passage in two critical aspects of the normalization of postwar Italy: the reaffirmation of State control, and the reconstruction of State structures in response to the delegitimization of established authorities that followed the collapse of the Italian State on 8 September 1943.[3] In its initial stages, the failure of early attempts at disarming the civilian population strongly contributed to the prolongation of a 'near civil war state' into the late 1940s.[4]

[1] 12 August 1946, Police Headquarters of Rome to Interior Ministry, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Ministero Interno, Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza (DGPS), Divisione Affari Riservati e Generali 1944–1946, b. 167.

[2] R. Bessel, 'Establishing Order in Postwar Eastern Germany', 139–57, 140, and P. Lagrou, 'Regaining the Monopoly of Force: Agents of the State Shooting Fugitives in and around Belgium, 1940–1950', 177–95, 178, in M. Mazower, J. Reinisch and D. Feldman (eds), *Postwar Reconstruction in Europe. International Perspectives, 1945–1949*, Past and Present Supplement 6 (New York 2011). The same volume also offers an interesting reflection on the Italo–Yugoslav border area: see P. Ballinger, 'At the Borders of Force: Violence, Refugees, and the Reconfiguration of the Yugoslav and Italian States', 158–76.

[3] According to Ernesto Galli della Loggia, the armistice and the ensuing dissolution of State structures resulted in the 'death of the fatherland': E. Galli della Loggia, *La morte della patria. La crisi dell'idea di nazione tra Resistenza, antifascismo e Repubblica* (Roma-Bari 1996).

[4] J. Dunnage, 'Continuity in Policing Politics in Italy, 1920–1960', in M. Mazower (ed.), *The Policing of Politics in the Twentieth Century: Historical Perspectives* (Oxford 1997), 57–90, 80.

Specifically, the article focuses on the intersection between the dispersion of war weapons, the management of public order,[5] and the restoration of the Italian State's authority in the aftermath of the Second World War. Accordingly, it is divided into three main blocks, addressing three aspects that are inextricably intertwined in the development of disarmament strategies. First, from a social perspective, the article seeks to examine the effects that this dispersion of war armaments had on public order, particularly on the level of non-politically motivated, everyday armed violence. It will show how this led to a crippling weakening of the State monopoly on legitimate force and to a loss of control over the national territory, forcing the authorities to tackle the 'firearms epidemic' as a major concern. Second, from an institutional point of view, this study focuses on the Italian State's attempts to re-establish its monopoly and recover its prerogatives after these had been significantly undermined during the waning phase of the war amid civil conflict, foreign occupation and the collapse of established authorities. Finally, a conclusion will reflect on the results achieved by the disarmament campaign and its legacy in relation to the public order policies adopted by postwar Italian governments.

The European postwar has recently received fresh attention from historians, who have increasingly come to reject the all-encompassing, uplifting narratives of postwar reconstruction in Europe, while extending its traditional chronology well into the second half of the 1940s.[6] The persistence of aspects of violence in peacetime has come to the fore, revealing 'a world without institutions'[7] where traditional State services such as government, public safety and order had all but disappeared.

[5] The connection between violence and public order policing in Italy's long postwar period has been recently analyzed in E. Acciai, G. Panvini, C. Poesio and T. Rovatti (eds), *Oltre il 1945: violenza, conflitto sociale, ordine pubblico nel dopoguerra europeo* (Rome 2017), and P. Dogliani and A.M. Matard-Bonucci (eds), *Democrazia insicura. Violenze, repressioni e stato di diritto nella storia della Repubblica (1945–1995)* (Roma 2017). For further analyses of public order see J. Dunnage, 'Policing and Politics in the Southern Italian Community, 1943-1948', in J. Dunnage (ed.), *After the War. Violence, Justice, Continuity and Renewal in Italian Society* (Leicester 1999), 32–47; D. Della Porta and H. Reiter, *Polizia e protesta. L'ordine pubblico dalla Liberazione ai «no global»* (Bologna 2003); F. Grassi Orsini, 'Guerra di classe e violenza politica in Italia. Dalla liberazione alla svolta centrista (1945–1947)', and E. Bernardi, 'L'ordine pubblico nel 1947', *Ventunesimo Secolo*, 12 (2007), 75–104, 105–29; I. Rossini, *Riottosi e ribelli. Conflitti sociali e violenze a Roma (1944–1948)* (Roma 2012).

[6] A fundamental work concerning the emergence of new interpretations of the European postwar is T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York 2006). For a brief overview of significant works on the subject see V. Sebestyen, *1946: The Making of the Modern World* (London 2014); and I. Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe, 1914–1949* (London 2015). Also interesting is the work on the concept of *sortie de guerre*: see B. Cabanes and G. Piketty (eds), 'Sorties de guerre au 20ème siècle', *Histoire@Politique. Politique, Culture et Société*, 3 (2007). Similarly, research on the aftermath of the First World War has analyzed the persistence of violence in Europe well after the end of the conflict: see R. Gerwarth, *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End* (London 2016); J. Boehler, 'Enduring Violence. The Postwar Struggles in East-Central Europe, 1917–1921', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50, 1 (2015), 58–77; and P. Gatrell, 'War after the War: Conflicts, 1919–1923', in J. Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War 1* (London 2010), 558–75.

[7] K. Lowe, *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* (London 2012), XIII.

Although these studies insist on the continued impact of war violence on societies, the concrete process of civilian disarmament rarely features in the historical literature on postwar Europe. With the exception of peacekeeping studies[8] – which have strongly underlined its importance for understanding postwar transitions – the presence of war weapons among civilians, its link to the breakdown of public order, and its role in slowing down the process of normalization in liberated Italy and elsewhere in Europe have yet to be properly investigated.

The focus on disarmament – and a closer dialogue between historical research and the findings of security studies – provide historians with new tools to analyze the complex evolution of post-Second World War transitions, in all their different national variations. In this framework, the choice of the Italian case study is intended as a stepping stone toward a comparative analysis of the problem on a continental scale, the lack of which greatly hinders a fuller comprehension of the phenomenon's true magnitude in Europe. It is used here to gain a more nuanced understanding of the efforts made by postwar Italian governments and Allied agencies to restore law and order, while reimposing State authority through the disarmament of civilians in the wake of a civil war[9] that had brought Italy institutional confusion and conflicting sovereignties.

Disarmament was both a necessary prerequisite for the normalization of liberated territories and a useful tool for the refoundation of a defeated – and militarily occupied – State such as Italy. The disarmament of non-State actors is 'a precondition to the creation of a State monopoly on force', especially where this has been weakened or broken in the throes of a conflict, and 'can sometimes accelerate the consolidation of coercive power' in unstable regions.[10] However, the recovery and restoration of sovereignty in the delicate passage from autocracy to democracy was neither a neutral nor an apolitical endeavour. It required the affirmation of a specific idea of State and the subsequent construction of a certain administrative and policing apparatus.[11] The removal of war armaments from the hands of the

8 Focus on the relevance of civilian disarmament in transitional contexts is the cornerstone of the current United Nations' policy on post-conflict situations. Since the late 1980s, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) has been the main strategy adopted by the international community to bring war-torn countries onto the path to normalization. On DDR see A. Ozerdem, *Postwar Recovery: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration* (London 2009); S. Tholens, 'Winning the Post-war: Norm Localisation and Small Arms Control in Kosovo and Cambodia', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 22, 1 (2019), 50–76.

9 For a reflection on the concept of civil war in Second World War Italy see C. Pavone, *A Civil War: A History of the Italian Resistance* (London 2013).

10 H. Wulf, 'Challenging the Weberian Concept of the State. The Future of the Monopoly of Violence', Occasional Papers Series 9, The Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (ACPACS) (2007), 143; Y. Zhukov, 'Taking Away the Guns: Forcible Disarmament and Rebellion', *Journal of Peace Research*, 53, 2 (2016), 242–58, 257. On the rupture of the monopoly in Second World War Italy see G. Crainz, *L'ombra della guerra. Il 1945, l'Italia* (Milan 2007), 97; T. Rovatti, 'Ansia di giustizia e desiderio di vendetta. Esperienze di punizione nell'Italia del centro-nord, 1945–1946', in Acciai, Panvini, Poesio and Rovatti (eds), *Oltre il 1945*, 73–87, 82; and P. Jenkins, 'Policing the Cold War. The Emergence of New Police Structures in Europe, 1946–1953', *The Historical Journal*, 31, 1 (1988), 141–57, 147.

11 Historiographical suggestions on the process of State (re-)building and its link to the expansion or restriction of the monopoly on legitimate violence in different contexts can be found in D.E. Davis and

population was therefore an ineludible step in overcoming the difficulties of the postwar period.

The Italian transitional period poses a few, inescapable challenges to those who intend to study it: shifting chronologies, overlapping authorities and institutional confusion create a tangle that is not always easy to unravel. Several conflicting entities competed for legitimacy and control – the Allied Military Government, the Kingdom of the South, the National Liberation Committee,[12] the Italian Social Republic and the German occupying forces, in addition to the 'sovereignty of the individuals in arms'.[13] This was even more so the case in Italy than in other European countries because of the accentuated, multiple breakdown of centralized authority that took place after the Anglo-American invasion of Sicily and the removal of Mussolini from power in July 1943.

Notwithstanding the layered complexity of the period under consideration, this article deals with a clearly defined subject. Geographically, its focus is on those Italian provinces that, after being liberated from Nazi-fascist occupation through the combined action of Allied armies and patriotic insurrections, were handed back to the administration of the Italian government (see Table 1). Liberated Italy progressively expanded northwards following the advance of the frontline throughout the Peninsula. After an interim phase under strict military occupation, these regions were formally transferred to the Italian administration, on whom the responsibility of maintaining law and order fell. There, the Italian Government was presented with a complex institutional situation of limited sovereignty, the Allied Control Commission (ACC) being the ultimate arbiter under the terms of surrender signed in September 1943.[14] Chronologically, the article will examine the period between the restitution of the first batch of provinces (February 1944) and the lead-up to the June 1946 referendum, which marked a first turning point in the institutional life of the Italian State and in the normalization of political life.

This article demonstrates that disarmament was instrumental in reshaping Italian institutions in accordance with the imperative of regaining control over the liberated territories. Its relationship with the capacity of the Italian State to recover full sovereignty made disarming civilians a priority for all policy-makers involved. Equally important was its role in pushing both Italian and Allied

A.W. Pereira, *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation* (Cambridge 2003); A. Colás and B. Mabee, *Mercenaries, Pirates, Bandits, and Empires. Private Violence in Historical Context* (New York 2010); D. Churchill, 'Rethinking the State Monopolisation Thesis: The Historiography of Policing and Criminal Justice in 19th Century England', *Crime, History & Societies*, 18, 1 (2014), 131–52; and M. Millan, 'Sostituire l'autorità, riaffermare la sovranità. Legittima difesa, corpi armati e la crisi dello Stato nell'Italia giolittiana', *Studi storici*, 1 (2019), 113–40.

[12] The Committee was a coalition of six antifascist parties representing the Italian Resistance movement.

[13] G. Filippetta, *L'estate che imparammo a sparare. Storia partigiana della Costituzione* (Milan 2018), 183.

[14] On the Anglo-American occupation of Italy, see C.R.S. Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy 1943–45* (London 1957); D.W. Ellwood, *Italy 1943–1945* (Leicester 1985); and B. Arcidiacono, *Le 'précedént italien' et les origines de la guerre froide. Les Alliés et l'occupation de l'Italie, 1943–1944* (Brussels 1984).

**Table 1.** Transfer of Liberated Provinces Back to Italian Administration.

| Date | Provinces |
|---|---|
| 12 September 1943 King's Italy | Bari, Brindisi, Lecce, Taranto |
| 11 February 1944 | Agrigento, Cagliari, Caltanissetta, Catania, Catanzaro, Cosenza, Enna, Matera, Messina, Nuoro, Palermo, Potenza, Ragusa, Reggio Calabria, Salerno, Sassari, Siracusa, Trapani |
| 20 July 1944 | Avellino, Benevento, Campobasso, Foggia, Napoli (province, not city) |
| 12 August 1944 | Frosinone, Latina, Roma |
| 12 October 1944 | Chieti, L'Aquila, Pescara, Rieti, Teramo, Viterbo |
| 10 May 1945 | Ancona (province, not city), Arezzo, Ascoli Piceno, Grosseto, Macerata, Perugia, Pesaro, Siena, Terni |
| 28 June 1945 | Firenze, Pistoia; Pisa and Livorno (provinces, not cities) |
| 10 August 1945 | Apuania, Ancona (city), Bologna, Ferrara, Forlì, Lucca, Modena, Parma, Piacenza, Ravenna, Reggio Emilia |
| 28 December 1945 | Alessandria, Aosta, Asti, Belluno, Bergamo, Bolzano, Brescia, Como, Cremona, Cuneo, Genova, Imperia, Mantova, Milano, Novara, Padova, Pavia, Rovigo, Savona, Sondrio, Spezia, Torino, Trento, Treviso, Varese, Venezia, Vercelli, Verona, Vicenza; Cities of Pisa, Livorno, and Napoli; island of Pantelleria |
| 31 December 1946 | Udine |
| 5 October 1954 de facto (London Memorandum), then 10 November 1975 *de jure* (Osimo Treaty) | Trieste |

authorities toward the preservation – in the sphere of public security – of agencies and individuals strongly compromised with the Fascist regime.

The article also shows that armed disorder and strategies of consolidation of State authority were unifying factors on a national level. Studies on the Italian postwar period have traditionally drawn a distinction between the experiences of the North from those of the South. They have shown a 'historiographical imbalance' – as Nicola Gallerano has aptly put it – in relegating the Mezzogiorno to a 'different postwar', suspended between the brief Nazi presence, the Allied occupation, and the surviving Italian State.[15] Historian Gloria Chianese has further described this chaotic middle ground as a 'half-peace', where wartime destruction

[15] N. Gallerano, 'L'altro dopoguerra', in N. Gallerano (ed.), *L'altro dopoguerra. Roma e il Sud, 1943–1945* (Milan 1985), 31–49; and N. Gallerano, 'Sulla ''sfortuna'' storiografica del Regno del Sud', in J.A. Davis (ed.), *Italy and America 1943–1944: Italian, American and Italian American Experiences of the Liberation of the Italian Mezzogiorno* (Napoli 1997).

was quickly replaced by peacetime uncertainty and unprecedented violence.[16] More recently, however, Joshua Arthurs has stressed the need to abandon such a dichotomy between a politicized North and a 'telluric' South.[17] It is necessary, therefore, to reintegrate postwar social violence in the Mezzogiorno within the broader national framework, by relinquishing simplistic distinctions, in order to better understand the developments of the transition on the countrywide level. The focus on illegal firearms and their indiscriminate use can be of service in reconciling the two parts of this national story.

This article will employ civilian disarmament as a prism through which to provide answers to pivotal questions surrounding the rehabilitation of Italy after the end of the war: in what ways did the Italian State set out to fully regain its monopoly on legitimate violence and its control over the national territory in a context marked by foreign occupation and 'suspended sovereignty'? What role did disarmament play in urging Allied and Italian authorities to favour continuity over discontinuity with the past regime? More generally, how long and conflicted was the postwar adjustment period really? When did the war end and the peace begin?

At the end of August 1945, in Delianova, a small village near Reggio Calabria, two Carabinieri ordered the suspension of a public ball that was taking place in the main square of the village because of the late hour. Their demand was met with the throwing of three hand grenades that resulted in severe harm to both the square and the soldiers. The dancing culprits were never apprehended.[18]

However bizarre it may seem, this was not an isolated incident in postwar Italy. The dangerous combination between the widespread presence of war armaments and the long shadow of war had a pervasive effect on the condition of the country.[19] The ready availability of grenades and machine guns made all disputes potentially fatal. To make matters worse, political altercations were commonplace in liberated Italy. In September 1946, for example, in the Viterbo area, two violent incidents involving supporters of conflicting parties took place. In Canepina, on their way back from the local patronal festival, a group of chanting *qualunquisti*[20] was jeered at by a group of women, who responded to their slogans with 'dirty catcalls'. Meanwhile, local leftists joined the fray, escalating the banter into a fight. Two hand grenades tossed by the *qualunquisti* quickly ended the confrontation. A few kilometers away, in Fabrica di Roma, communists and *qualunquisti* also fell

[16] G. Chianese, *'Quando uscimmo dai rifugi'. Il Mezzogiorno tra guerra e dopoguerra (1943–46)* (Roma 2004), 77–95. Also see G. Gribaudi, *Guerra totale: tra bombe alleate e violenze naziste. Napoli e il fronte meridionale, 1940–44* (Torino 2005).

[17] J. Arthurs, 'Combattere l'altro dopoguerra: conflitto sociale nel Mezzogiorno, 1943-1944', in Acciai, Panvini, Poesio and Rovatti (eds), *Oltre il 1945*, 57–72.

[18] ACS, Ministero Interno, Gabinetto, Fascicoli Permanenti 1944–66, Relazioni dei Prefetti e dei Carabinieri, 1944–6 (FP), 20 August 1945, Prefecture of Reggio Calabria to Interior Ministry, *Relazione settimanale sulla situazione politica, economica annonaria, sullo spirito e sull'ordine pubblico e sulle condizioni della pubblica Sicurezza*, b. 198.

[19] For an overview of the presence of war traits in post-liberation Italy, see Crainz, *L'ombra della guerra*.

[20] The *Fronte dell'Uomo Qualunque* was a short-lived, populist political experiment created by Italian journalist Guglielmo Giannini in 1945.

into a violent dispute during the local festival; a member of the latter group, after suffering a beating, reacted by ‘extracting from his pocket a Breda hand grenade, throwing it at his attackers and causing the wounding of various bystanders’, three of which were near-fatally injured.[21]

Similarly, social tensions often erupted into outbursts of armed violence. In Ginestra, a village near Potenza, after a protest had led the local population to damage the water main, the Carabinieri were drawn into a gun fight, with several grenades exploding on both fronts. Another bomb, undetonated, was thrown into the crowd from a nearby balcony.[22] Around the villages of Minervino Murge, Andria and Corato, near Bari, civil disturbances resulted in a long-lasting armed challenge to the institutions in June and July 1945. Shootouts erupted between opposing political factions, civilians and the military, causing several deaths on all sides.[23]

Violence and rebellion, however, were not always the end goal, as shown by a few instances in which war armament was only a means to facilitate the completion of everyday tasks. War weapons were so easy to obtain that they were often used for hunting and recreational purposes. In September 1945, for instance, in Baratili S. Pietro, near Cagliari, two men were stopped by local Carabinieri while carrying a cart loaded with seven 80 kg airplane bombs. The blacksmith and his partner were going on a poaching expedition along the Sardinian coast.[24]

In addition to the presence of weapons of war in social and political confrontations, between 1944 and 1946 liberated Italy witnessed a discernible growth in criminal activities. It is around this time that sources start making references to a resurgence in ‘banditry’ across the Mezzogiorno.[25] The recrudescence of armed crime was not an Italian peculiarity, as postwar transitions are often marked by the loosening of legal bonds.[26] A substantial loss of social cohesion and

[21] DGPS, 1944–46, b. 167, 12 September 1946, Canepina (VT), Prefecture of Viterbo, *Incidenti fra qualunquisti e comunisti a Canepina*; 23 September 1946, Fabrica di Roma (RM), Prefecture of Viterbo, *Lancio di una bomba nel comune di Fabrica di Roma*.

[22] DGPS, 1944–46, b. 167, 10 August 1945, Prefecture of Potenza, *Relazione settimanale*.

[23] Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (PCM), Gabinetto, Affari Generali, 1948–1950, b. 3750 - cat. 1-6-4. The situation was only pacified thanks to the intervention of political intermediaries and 76 arrests.

[24] DGPS, 1944–46, b. 168, 18 September 1945, Police to Interior Ministry, *Baratili S. Pietro – Sequestro bombe d’aeroplano*.

[25] Interestingly, an absolute lack of references to traditional organized crime syndicates emerges from these sources. Prefects insisted on describing a different, new kind of crime, which was seen not as structural but as linked to the circumstances of war. A useful reflection on the nature of these sources can be found in P. Iaccio, ‘Condizioni di vita e ordine pubblico al sud nei rapporti del Carabinieri’, in A. Placanica (ed.), *1944: Salerno capitale* (Napoli 1985), 805–61.

[26] The unchecked spread of crime in postwar Italy is analyzed in R. Canosa, *Storia della criminalità in Italia dal 1946 a oggi* (Milan 1995), and R. Cacciafesta, ‘L’influenza della guerra sulla criminalità italiana’, *La scuola positiva* (1947), 458–73. On the role played by organized crime, see also J. Cockayne, ‘Can Organized Crime Shape Postwar Transitions? Evidence from Sicily’, *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 3, 1 (2018), 9–27. For a European framework, see the German case studied by A. Kramer, ‘Law-abiding Germans? Social Disintegration, Crime and the Reimposition of Order in Postwar Western Germany, 1945–1949’, in R.J. Evans (ed.), *The German Underworld: Deviants and Outcasts in German History* (London 1988), 238–61; and T. Kehoe, ‘Control, Disempowerment, Fear,

institutional control led to a pervasive diffusion of illicit behaviour. Juvenile delinquency, prostitution, thievery and contraband became unbridled phenomena.

Living conditions in Italy worsened dramatically, mirroring the desperation that took over the entire European continent in the aftermath of the war. Hunger, along with moral and material destruction, facilitated the spread of criminal activities that ranged from food theft to murder, leading to higher rates of interpersonal violence and a severe breakdown of civil order.[27] The situation in the Peninsula was particularly grim. Overall, statistics show an increase in reported robberies from an average of 1795 a year in the 1937–9 period to 20,884 in 1945 and 18,270 in 1946.[28] Meanwhile, violence skyrocketed nationwide. In the five years following the end of the Second World War in Italy, the homicide rate increased by 133 per cent compared with pre-war levels.[29]

In post-liberation Italy, however, the abundance of war armaments enabled the diffusion of a particularly pernicious strain of armed violence which raised deep concerns among local communities and central administrations alike. The second half of 1945 saw law enforcement agencies report the ever-growing activities of 'brigand gangs' around Mount Vesuvius, in Sicily, Apulia and Calabria. These gangs, armed with weapons stolen from Allied and Italian army deposits, or collected after the departure of the occupying armies, were heterogeneous in their composition. Former partisans, common criminals and Italian and Allied deserters came together to exploit the weakness of the State and take control of vast areas of the countryside, through which they roamed mostly undeterred.[30]

The south-eastern region of Apulia was among the ones hit the hardest by the upsurge in banditry.[31] 'Apulia, as it is well known, is without peace', a Carabinieri report stated in October 1945. Gun fights were frequent and the criminal underworld experienced an alarming growth, so much so that 'actual banditry plagued the countryside', with robberies and assaults becoming a daily occurrence. In late

and Fantasy: Violent Criminality During the Early American Occupation of Germany, March–July 1945', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 62, 4 (2016), 561–75.

[27] A fresh outlook on the interplay between order, conflict and violence in S. Kalyvas, I. Shapiro and T. Masoud, 'Introduction: Integrating the Study of Order, Conflict and Violence', in S. Kalyvas, I. Shapiro and T. Masoud, *Order, Conflict and Violence* (Cambridge 2008), 6-7. An analysis of the dynamics of violence in the aftermath of internal conflicts can be found in S. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge 2006).

[28] M. Dondi, *La lunga liberazione. Giustizia e violenza nel dopoguerra italiano* (Roma 1999), 80. For a look at the well-documented case of Rome, see A. Bistarelli and F. Lagorio, 'L'onda lunga della guerra. La violenza privata a Roma (1943–1945)', in N. Gallerano (ed.), *La resistenza tra storia e memoria* (Milan 1999), 208–42.

[29] After the First World War it only increased by 52 per cent, see D. Archer and R. Gartner, 'Violent Acts and Violent Times: A Comparative Approach to Postwar Homicide Rates', *American Sociological Review*, 41, 6 (1976), 937–63, 948. The statistical data provided by ISTAT are also useful: *Cause di morte negli anni 1943–1948*, series III, vol. I (Rome 1952).

[30] On the proliferation of Allied crime in Southern Italy see I. Williams, *Allies and Italians under Occupation. Sicily and Southern Italy, 1943–1945* (Basingstoke 2013), 31–86. For a comparison with other European cases, see T.J. Kehoe and E.J. Kehow, 'Crimes Committed by U.S. Soldiers in Europe, 1945–1946', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XLVII, I (2016), 53–84.

[31] An analysis of pre-existing social tensions in the region in D. Tarantino, *Dal 'regno' alle 'repubbliche' del Sud: la Puglia dal fascismo alla democrazia, 1943–1944* (Bari 2006).

1945, the region was overrun with 'thieves, grouped into well-armed, reckless bands'. Among these, a criminal organization devoted itself to assaulting freight trains along the Bari-Foggia railway line, becoming particularly dreaded.[32]

The Mezzogiorno was particularly troubled by the resurgence of armed crime in the aftermath of the war. Yet, banditry was not exclusively confined to the South. Criminal activities and common armed violence skyrocketed throughout the North as well, although with divergent practices and chronologies dictated by the different impact of the civil war on those regions. Political vendettas and transitional violence were not the only forms of bloodshed that spread across the former Italian Social Republic, where they claimed the lives of more than 9000 fascists and collaborators.[33]

The North witnessed a particular brand of mixed violence, with several episodes blurring common and political violence in the context of a broader disorder created by the uncertain postwar transition. Residual and 'diverted' inertial violence were well present in the Po Valley, thanks not least to the significant presence of firearms. As shown by historian Massimo Storchi, bands in the province of Modena – among the most violent in postwar Italy – routinely combined political assassinations with armed robberies.[34]

More specifically, sources refer to the appearance of bandit squads in Lombardy and Friuli, among other areas.[35] Several armed gangs were also roaming the countryside in regions as diverse as Piedmont and Abruzzo. In January 1946, in the outskirts of Asti, near the two villages of Canelli and Pombarcelli, multiple gunfights erupted between a well-armed gang and the local Carabinieri; the 15 men involved were only able to escape after discarding their British machine guns in the fields.[36] About a month later, an even larger band of 40 men, armed with assault rifles and hand grenades, spread terror across the Teramo province with their violent crimes.[37]

These episodes of armed violence took place in a framework characterized by the general collapse of law and order. In the aftermath of the conflict, the Italian State

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32 FP, b. 199, 31 October 1945, Comando Generale dell'Arma dei Carabinieri Reali (CCRR), *Relazione sulla situazione politico-economica, sulle condizioni dell'ordine, spirito pubblico, ecc., nelle Puglie, relativa al mese di settembre 1945*.

33 The starting point for the prolonged debate on the exact number of victims is a report from the Ministry of Interior dated 4 November 1946, according to which 8197 people had been killed and 1167 were missing. See G. Crainz, 'La violenza armata dopo la liberazione. Problemi storici e storiografici', *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Micheletti*, 8 (1992), 453–65; Crainz, *L'ombra della guerra*, 79; and N.S. Onofrio, *Il triangolo rosso. La guerra di liberazione e la sconfitta del fascismo, 1943–1947* (Rome 2007).

34 M. Storchi, *Uscire dalla guerra: ordine pubblico e forze politiche: Modena, 1945–1946* (Milano 1995). The archives from Emilia have been largely exploited to highlight the specificity of political violence in the so-called 'triangle of death', the epicenter of residual violence against fascists in 1945. However, they are yet to be fully mined for the study of common armed violence.

35 Archivio di Stato di Milano, Questura, Gabinetto, b. 194, and DGPS, 1947-48, b. 231.

36 DGPS, 1944–46, b. 168, 5 February 1946, DGPS to Interior Ministry, *Canelli e Pombercelli (Asti)*.

37 Ibid., 25 March 1946, Police to Interior Ministry, *Banda armata operante nella provincia di Teramo*.

was structurally weakened by the destruction of war, the dissolution of its peripheral administrative structures, and the state of disarray experienced by its armed forces after the September 1943 armistice. It was also disempowered by foreign military occupation and the institutional supervision it was subjected to after barely surviving a stark military defeat. The shortage of resources and manpower that plagued the Italian police forces, coupled with the complete failure of the Government's first attempts at disarming the civilian population, only compounded the gravity of the situation on the ground.

A decisive factor in the creation of favourable conditions for the diffusion of armed violence and criminal activities described in the previous section was the deficiency of adequate State control over the liberated territories. After the partial dissolution of the Italian armed forces in the aftermath of the armistice and the disarmament imposed by the occupiers – both Germans and Allies – the Carabinieri, the main agents of order in the country, were left with few weapons and fewer vehicles. In September 1945, out of the 3500 Carabinieri deployed in the city of Naples, 1984 were unarmed and unable to perform their duties owing to a severe lack of equipment.[38] In Messina, 201 Public Security agents had only 99 pistols and 27 carbines at their disposal.[39]

From Palermo to Milan, the activities of law enforcement were severely hindered by the dearth of equipment. Requests for weapons, vehicles, even uniforms and boots, were flowing to the Ministry of Interior from all provinces. Given the modern armaments the bandits were equipped with, prefects and Carabinieri pushed for a stronger intervention from the Government that was intended to level the playing field. The deployment of mobile police battalions, well armed and well equipped, was the solution suggested by agents on the field to counter the surfacing of war-ready bandit squads.

The difficult overall conditions of the Italian State and the Allied Control Commission's reluctance to enlarge the ranks and resources of the Italian police led to an exceedingly slow recovery of acceptable levels of State control in the liberated regions. A strong process of disgregation was underway in Italy. The State that emerged from the ashes of the war, struggling to regain its standing, is not to be considered a monolith, all powerful and all reaching. Rather, the interim period can be interpreted as a phase of renegotiation of the social contract in certain areas of the country.[40] In this period the Italian authorities did not yet have the power, or the legitimacy, to impose themselves and fully re-establish their

[38] FP, b. 198, 14 September 1945, Prefecture of Naples to Interior Ministry, *Relazione mensile sulla situazione politica, economica ed annonaria, sull'ordine e lo spirito e sulle condizioni della P.S.* The related data is also reported in Williams, *Allies and Italians*, 210.

[39] ACS, Allied Control Commission for Italy 1943–1947, 143–1571, 10 December 1945, Interior Ministry to ACC PS Subcommission, *Armamento vigili urbani.*

[40] For a broader view of the concept of monopoly on force and its challenges see, among others, H. Wulf, 'The Privatization of Violence: A Challenge to State-Building and the Monopoly on Force', *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, XVIII, 1 (2011), 137–49; and A. Anter, *Max Weber's Theory of the Modern State. Origins, Structure and Significance* (Basingstoke 2014). Its link to firearms is well analyzed in Zhukov, 'Taking Away the Guns'.

prerogatives. As many observers on the ground denounced, the 'serious lack of authority of all State powers' was manifest.[41]

Similar struggles were experienced in other liberated countries throughout Europe.[42] In their attempts to explain the predicament postwar States found themselves in, some studies have introduced and embraced the notion of lawlessness (or anomie) to indicate the quasi-total lack of control and the degeneration of public order in post-liberation Italy.[43] Others go as far as to adopt the category of anarchy, understood as the lack of effective State control on given territory, as an enabling factor in the rise of violence in the country.[44]

From a historiographical point of view, however, the most damaging aspects of the Italian transition from wartime to peacetime were a deep delegitimization of State authority among the population, and the dissolution of the State monopoly on legitimate violence. The process of State delegitimization, as shown by Robert Gerwarth, is often an inevitable byproduct of military defeat.[45] The civil war and the ensuing doubling of State structures and allegiances further contributed to engendering a strong distrust in the authorities, largely perceived as still connected to their fascist past.

Under such circumstances, this monopoly – or at least the State's ambition to control its own territory – was not merely broken under the weight of a disgregating process begun with the war and the challenge posed by a diverse range of opponents, from foreign powers to criminals.[46] One could argue that this monopoly was inverted altogether. While the *de jure* monopoly survived the military occupation imposed by the Allies and was then handed over to the surviving Italian government, as per the terms of both the September 1943 armistice and the 1907 Hague Regulations,[47] the de facto monopoly was broken by the acquisition of effective control over the territory by non-State actors. As suggested by Toni Rovatti and Mirco Dondi, after having been shattered during the war, the

[41] See 27 August 1945, CCRR, *Relazione mensile sulla situazione politico-economica, sulle condizioni dell'ordine, spirito pubblico, etc., nelle Puglie e nella provincia di Matera, relativa al mese di Luglio 1945*, FP, b. 199. Also see 1 September 1945, Prefecture of Ragusa to Interior Ministry, *Relazione generale sulla situazione politica ed economica della provincia*, ibid., and DGPS, 1944-46, bb. 165-168.

[42] For regional surveys on the difficulties of postwar transitions, see R. Bessel, *Germany 1945. From War to Peace* (London 2010); M. Conway, *The Sorrows of Belgium. Liberation and Political Reconstruction, 1944–1947* (Oxford 2012); A. Knapp (ed.), *The Uncertain Foundation. France at the Liberation 1944–47* (Basingstoke 2017).

[43] For the most recent references, see E. Acciai, G. Panvini, C. Poesio and T. Rovatti, 'Introduzione', in Acciai, Panvini, Poesio and Rovatti (eds), *Oltre il 1945*, 13; Dogliani and Matard-Bonucci, 'Introduzione', in P. Dogliani and M.A. Matard-Bonucci (eds), *Democrazia insicura*, XV–XVII.

[44] F. Grandi, 'Why Do the victors Kill the Vanquished? Explaining Political Violence in Post-World War II Italy', *Journal of Peace Research*, 50, 5 (2013), 577–93, 587.

[45] R. Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, 14. See also W. Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat. On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery* (New York 2003).

[46] The Weberian concept of monopoly is often understood as a reasonable aspiration on the part of the modern State to effectively rule its population and territory, rather than as a model carved in stone. However, it is widely used by historians to indicate the State projection of legitimate control.

[47] See articles 42 and 43 of the Hague Convention on military occupation, and the *long terms* of 29 September 1943.

monopoly on violence needed to be gradually rebuilt and reimposed in the aftermath of the liberation.[48]

It has previously been demonstrated that between 1944 and 1946 the loss of State control materialized in some regions in the shape of well-armed bands of criminals, which did not encounter any real opposition from the mostly disarmed police forces. At a time when war weapons were a common commodity, public and private guards were the only people without any.

This de facto reversal is often implied in reports from the Mezzogiorno, where a stark imbalance started to emerge. Early attempts at disarming the civilian population to counter this dreary state of affairs failed to achieve any significant results. On the contrary, they had a perverse effect on public safety: while most of the respectable elements within the population responded by giving up their weapons, the ban ended up strengthening the 'position of the illegitimately armed'. As reported by the Carabinieri in Apulia, 'criminals possess modern war weapons, while the police forces essentially lack any, and cannot fight evil with adequate means.'[49] In Reggio Calabria the Prefect further stressed how pernicious the 'condition of inferiority of the police towards armed bands of criminals' really was.[50]

No transfer of legitimate control from State institutions to non-State actors ever took place. Nonetheless, in certain areas criminals, political groups and civilians opposing the established authorities were the only actors with the capacity and military means to impose effective control over the territory, given the inadequate presence of State agencies. The strengthening of law enforcement agencies and launching of extensive mop-ups were therefore two sides of the same strategy.

Easy access to firearms in postwar Italy was a plague in need of eradication. The impact it had on the maintenance of public order became evident to institutions and citizens alike, and required head-on confrontation by the authorities. Verdiani himself emphasized the need for a swift and radical solution: 'In the interest of State security, public order and safety – he stated – [. . .] it is necessary that the State order total disarmament and the total surrender of every weapon held by anyone, for any reason, be it hidden or clandestinely in circulation.'[51]

The mandatory surrender of war armaments was implemented in two steps throughout the country. First, upon the establishment of the military government in a given province, the Allied Military Government (AMG) issued *Proclamation no. 2* (art. I, comma 5), which required the removal of all firearms from the hands of the civilian population.[52] According to its provisions, the unlawful possession of

[48] T. Rovatti, 'Ansia di giustizia', 82, and Dondi, *La lunga liberazione*, 11.
[49] See CCRR report in note 41.
[50] Ibid., 1 December 1945, Prefecture of Reggio Calabria to Interior Ministry, *Relazione generale sulla provincia per il mese di novembre*, b. 198.
[51] 12 August 1946, Police Headquarters of Rome to Interior Ministry, DGPS, 1944–46, b. 167.
[52] Full text in ACC, 100–785.

war armaments beyond a certain date was to be considered a war crime, and was accordingly punishable by death.[53]

The disarmament of partisans was a factor of instability during this phase. In the immediate aftermath of the Liberation, the Allied Forces Headquarters ordered all patriots in the North to hand over their weapons. Through celebratory ceremonies taking place in most provinces between the end of April and the beginning of May 1945, the Allies were able to recover 173,416 rifles, 7342 machine guns, 5235 Stens and 78,651 hand grenades (among others weapons).[54] Yet, the numbers did not add up: only a portion of the weapons issued by the Allies in the lead-up to the insurrection were retrieved. According to ACC estimates, partisans had 'handed in one weapon per capita which was not, probably, their best weapon', at the same time having 'retained one or more good weapons'.[55] In the troubled months of the postwar adjustment phase, armed partisan violence and fears of armed uprisings became serious concerns, fuelled by the presence of such a substantial illegal arsenal.[56] Both issues were crucial in convincing the Allied and Italian authorities to proceed with radical disarmament programs.

The Allies played a central role in shaping responses to the firearms crisis even after the restitution of territories to the Italian administration had taken place. This engendered a continuity in policy between the occupation and the post-liberation periods that favoured the transformation of disarmament into a long-term strategy, rather than a short-lived effort. The second step in its implementation was therefore taken in liberated Italy under strong pressure from the Allied Control Commission. On two separate occasions – following the restitution of the southern provinces in 1944 and of the northern regions in 1946 – ACC Commissioner Ellery Stone directly approached the Italian Ministry of Interior, requesting it to set up a draft ordinance that all prefects had to enforce automatically once their province was returned to the Italian administration.[57] Consequently, a prefectorial decree, drafted along the lines of the Allied Military Government proclamation, was issued in all Italian provinces upon their liberation. Articulated in six items, the

[53] For the AMG stance on weapons see 17 September 1943, PS Division AMGOT, *Firearms*, and 26 September 1943, AMGOT Sicily to all CAPOs, draft instructions, *Control of Arms*, ACC, 143–56.

[54] ACC, 125–243, 14 August 1945, AFHQ, *Surrender of Arms by Partisans in Northern Italy*. It is still difficult to obtain exact numbers, given the variety of agencies involved in the supply and recovery of the weapons. Additionally, many firearms had been obtained, unregistered, upon the surrender of the Nazi-fascist forces. See P. Tompkins, *L'altra Resistenza. Servizi segreti, partigiani e guerra di liberazione nel racconto di un protagonista* (Milan 2009), 415, for slightly higher numbers: 215,000 rifles, 12,000 assault rifles, 5000 machine guns, 750 grenade launchers and 217 pieces of artillery.

[55] See ACC report to AFHQ, 27 August 1945, *Illegal Stocks of Arms and Civil Disturbances in Italian Government Territory*, ACC, 143–1450.

[56] Several attempted insurrections in 1946 marked a revival of partisan sovereignty following the Togliatti amnesty for fascists and the manifest failure of postwar purges. On the problematic demobilization of Italian partisans see M. Dondi, 'Azioni di guerra e potere partigiano nel dopoliberazione', *Italia Contemporanea*, 188 (1992), 457–77, and C. Manzati, 'Il dopoguerra nel Veronese. Smobilitazione delle formazioni, occultamento delle armi e rivolte partigiane (1945–1947)', *Venetica*, XII, 4 (1995), 95–134.

[57] ACC, 109–1846, 18 May 1944, ACC Legal Subcommission, *Possession of Firearms by Italian Civilians*, and 136-340, 31 January 1946, Stone to De Gasperi.

scheme was a comprehensive ban on firearms, which was intended to represent the main instrument in the normalization of the area. It ordered the population to surrender all war weapons within 10 days from the publication of the decree. Citizens were also compelled to declare the possession of all common firearms, whose related licences and permits were suspended pending review. With this passage from the Allied to the Italian administration, the handling of the firearms issue became subject to Italian law, and those who contravened the measures envisaged by the decree were to be punished according to article 697 of the penal code, which entailed a four-month jail sentence and a 3000 lira fine.[58]

The actions of the four Italian Prime Ministers of the transitional period – Pietro Badoglio (July 1943–June 1944), Ivanoe Bonomi (June 1944–June 1945), Ferruccio Parri (June 1945–November 1945) and Alcide De Gasperi (December 1945–July 1953) – mirrored the strict guidelines received from the Allied Control Commission. The political leaders thus displayed a seamless continuity in their policies on disarmament, all recognizing that 'the unlawful possession of weapons, explosives and ammunitions by Italian civilians [was] becoming an increasing threat to public order'.[59] Yet, Italian governments were neither passive nor unwilling recipients of such instructions. They too had their reasons to proceed with a speedy and effective disarmament of the civilian population.

The transfer of administrative responsibility from the Allied Military Government to the Italian authorities implied that the efforts to disarm civilians in liberated areas fell within the purview of Italian law enforcement. As explained in clear terms to Bonomi in May 1945, following the successful conclusion of the military campaign in Italy, public order became the sole responsibility of the Italian authorities. Should military support in public order operations be requested by the Italians, help would be refused unless the situation directly threatened Allied military interests. In that case, the area would again pass under Allied control, effectively annulling the transfer.[60]

The Italian authorities were concerned about the arms epidemic to the point that they repeatedly pleaded with the Allied headquarters for help. In September 1944, Bonomi presented the remarkable number of war weapons in possession of civilians as the most relevant concern of the Italian government. Public order in the liberated territories was so unstable, and the operations of disarmament so ineffective, that the Prime Minister asked Stone to proceed with harsher arms raids in the provinces that had yet to be transferred to the Italian authorities.[61] Even more significant in showing the Italian government's concern with the deterioration of public order linked to illegal arms is a letter of instructions Bonomi sent his Chief

58 30 June 1944, Interior Ministry to all prefects of the Kingdom, *Disarmo delle popolazioni*, DGPS, 1944–46, b. 167. See also ACC, 143–780, 7 December 1944, DGPS to PS Subcommission ACC, *Controllo delle armi da fuoco*.

59 ACC, 109–1846, 27 September 1944, ACC to Regional Commissioners, *Unlawful Possession of Weapons, Explosives and Ammunitions*.

60 PCM, 1944–1947, b. 3336, 13 May 1945, Stone to Bonomi.

61 ACC, 143–899, 15 September 1944, Bonomi to Stone, and 6 October 1944, Bonomi to Stone.

of Police a month later. 'The surrendering of arms that are unlawfully kept by civilians – he stated – is one of the principal means to secure [...] the maintenance and safeguarding of public order.' The continuous interest shown by the Allied Control Commission led Bonomi to instruct the police accordingly: 'No tolerance shall be granted in case of infractions of the law. If the means of persuasion adopted remain ineffective, the recovery of the arms must be achieved in any possible way with the necessary energy.'[62]

Both the Italians and the Allies considered disarmament a precondition for the restoration of public safety in the war-torn country. Its relevance in the broader scheme of the transition, however, is not self-evident, and it remains to be explained why disarmament featured so prominently in the Italo-Allied discussions of those years.

The restoration of law and order, to quote a report from AMG Liguria, was 'a matter which is of vital importance to Allied Military Government and to the re-establishment of the Italian Government'.[63] The Allied Control Commission itself was adamant in reminding Bonomi that, when handling the operations to disarm the civilian population, 'any failure on the part of the police to enforce the law will be construed as a confession of inability to preserve public order.'[64] In a further reflection on the subject, in August 1945 Supreme Allied Commander Harold Alexander explicitly urged the Italian government to 'take the strongest possible steps to deal with civil disturbances within their own territory', as any further deterioration was 'likely to have the most serious consequences'. In connection with the gravity of the situation concerning the link between illegal arms and public order, Alexander continued, the Italian government 'must inevitably be an important factor affecting any decision of the Allied government in regard to the return of further territory to Italian control'.[65]

A perfect example of this entanglement is provided by the delayed restoration of the northern provinces to Italian administration in January 1946. Originally planned for September 1945, this step was postponed owing to Allied concerns, not least regarding the great number of illegal firearms still in the possession of civilians.[66] A chain reaction had been activated: the issue of disarmament was strongly linked to the maintenance of public order in liberated territories; in turn, the ability to maintain public order was strongly linked to the Allies' willingness to return occupied provinces to the Italian administration. Therefore, a vital relationship emerged for the Italians between the need to restore law and order and the preservation (or recovery) of sovereignty.

62 ACC, 143–780, 6 October 1944, Bonomi to Chief of Police, *Arms Surrendering*.
63 ACC, 125–243, 17 May 1945, AMG HQ Liguria Region to AMG, *AMG Policy in Northern Italy*.
64 ACC, 136–340, 25 September 1944, Stone to Bonomi.
65 ACC, 143–1450, 21 August 1945, W.D. Morgan, Chief of Staff of Field Marshal Alexander to ACC, *Illegal Stocks of Arms and Civil Disturbances in Italian Government Territory*.
66 Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, *1945, Vol. IV: Europe* (Washington, DC 1968), 1019–96.

The push towards the normalization of public order in the liberated territories and the continuity between Allied and Italian policies were the two driving forces behind the process that led both parties to settle on a project of radical disarmament of all civilians. Notwithstanding the perceived relevance of this goal, early attempts at voluntary and conciliatory disarmament proved dramatically ineffective. Arsenals were still stored away in cities, fields, factories and homes across the peninsula. Former partisans, workers, members of neo-fascist organizations and regular citizens kept firearms hidden from the authorities for the most diverse reasons, from self-defence to hunting, but also, as feared by government officials, for insurrectional or criminal purposes.

The response these measures elicited among the general public was not satisfactory. Between late 1944 and 1946, prefects and police commissioners (*questori*) consistently lamented the utter failure of disarmament efforts. In Naples, for instance, the prefectorial decree, issued a second time in June 1945, was 'nearly completely ignored'. The results were appalling: only 16 carbines, 2 rifles, 2 revolvers, 521 rounds of ammunitions and a broken machine gun were delivered to the authorities across the whole province.[67] In Apulia the situation did not differ significantly. In Taranto, a single hand grenade was surrendered by a former Italian Army officer,[68] whereas in Foggia 3 pistols and 8 grenades were turned in. It almost seemed as if, to quote an AMG report from Tuscany, Italians were 'under the impression that shotguns and ammunitions are not firearms within the meaning of the proclamation'.[69] In such a context, the Prefect of Foggia argued: 'It is no longer possible to speak of voluntary disarmament. Effective disarmament may only be achieved with extraordinary laws and means, and with a large, well-armed public force.'[70]

The disappointing results of the disarmament campaign were ascribable to the incapacity of the State to translate policies into actions. The significant weakening of traditional State structures made effective control over the liberated territories impossible. The Italian authorities did not have efficient tools at their disposal to counter the scourge of illegal firearms. As the Allied Control Commission was ready to admit, the Italians were 'called upon to rectify in Italian government territory a situation which the Allied authorities, in conjunction with the Italian administration with much greater means at their disposal, have failed to control in the North'.[71]

In order to regain its capacity to restore law and order in the newly received territories, the recovering Italian State needed to restructure its policing apparatus, by either preserving the existing organization or proceeding to create a new one not

[67] Reports dated 14 August and 14 September 1945: see note 38 and Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Questura, Disposizioni di massima 1902–1971, b. 136.
[68] 8 October 1945, Prefecture of Taranto to Interior Ministry, *Puglie – Disarmo*, DGPS, 1944-46, b. 168.
[69] ACC, 143–780, 28 October 1944, John Chapman, *Minute 9*.
[70] Ibid., 17 October 1945, Prefecture of Foggia to Interior Ministry, *Puglie – Disarmo*.
[71] ACC, 143–780, 7 December 1944, DGPS to PS Subcommission ACC, *Controllo delle armi da fuoco*.

compromised with the Fascist regime. Responding to present needs, both the Italian and the Allied authorities agreed to exploit the existing system of control, which in the past had served the Fascist regime so well. With the restitution of most of the northern provinces to the Italian administration in January 1946 and the simultaneous establishment of the first De Gasperi cabinet (10 December 1945), two initiatives ensured the required strengthening of policing structures: the reorganization of police forces and the reinstatement of career prefects.

The Carabinieri were chosen as the foundation of policing in both occupied and liberated Italy.[72] Yet, their number was restricted by Alexander's Headquarters to 55,000, a number which from the very outset was deemed insufficient to tackle the deterioration of public order.[73] Increasing the strength of the Carabinieri consequently became a goal common to the policies of both the Allied and Italian authorities.[74] The rearmament of the Carabinieri was a pivotal pressure point for the Italian government. Once committed to the maintenance of public order, the Italian authorities lobbied relentlessly 'to ensure that the Italian government was not further denied the means to carry out those tasks of defending the law and protecting public order which the Allies rightly asked of them'.[75] Significantly, the Allied Control Commission endorsed Prime Minister Parri's request in view of 'the more modern weapons with which delinquents are almost universally armed'.[76]

The emerging need to disarm civilians had shown the Allies that they could not have it both ways. As bluntly put by ACC officer John Chapman, 'either the Allied governments are vitally interested, from a world security viewpoint, in leaving Italy with a police force sufficiently strong to maintain law and order' – in which case the Carabinieri needed to be promptly and appropriately rearmed – 'or the Allied governments are not concerned with Italy's ability to maintain law and order' –

72 Public order policies and police forces in H. Reiter, 'Le forze di polizia e l'ordine pubblico in Italia dal 1944 al 1948', *Polis*, X, 3 (1996), 337–60. On the supplementary role of the Italian army see F. Cappellano, 'Esercito e ordine pubblico nell'immediato secondo dopoguerra', *Italia contemporanea*, 250 (2008), 31–58.

73 Williams, *Allies and Italians*, 206. In late 1944 the Allied Control Commission highlighted that there were 'not sufficient Carabinieri in the country to ensure the maintenance of law and order in Italy after the occupation of the northern regions', ACC, 105–576, September 1944, draft, Ellery Stone to G-5 Section AFHQ, *Carabinieri*.

74 On the role and the reconstruction of the Italian police forces, see R. Canosa, *La polizia in Italia dal 1945 ad oggi* (Bologna 1976), and A. Sannino, 'Le forze di polizia nel secondo dopoguerra (1945-1950)', *Storia contemporanea*, XVI, 3 (1985), 427-85. For the Allied perspective, H. Reiter, 'I progetti alleati per una riforma della polizia in Italia (1943-1947)', *Passato e presente*, XV, 42 (1997), 37-64.

75 ACC, 143–1327, 24 September 1945, Parri to Stone; pressing requests for weapons and equipment in ACC, 143–1326, 1 March 1945, CCRR to PS ACC, *Richiesta materiali di armamento*; 20 June 1945, SMRE to CCRR, *Armamento occorrente alle legioni CCRR*.

76 Ibid., 5 October 1945, CA ACC to AFHQ, *Arms for Police Forces*. The widespread concern for the dispersion of war weapons put the inadequate armament of Italian law enforcement in the spotlight, too. In February 1945, the authorities lamented that all too often Carabinieri were armed with a single rifle and nothing more, urging their rearmament: see ACC, 143–1326, 18 February 1945, CCRR to PS ACC, *Assegnazione di armi e munizioni ai CCRR*. As late as May 1946, the Ministry of the Interior denounced 'the absolute deficiency of automatic arms' at the Carabinieri's disposal: 14 May 1946, Interior Minister (Ferrari) to Public Safety Subcommission, *Automatic Arms for Civil Police*.

in which case the Allies had the obligation to inform the Italian government that it was their exclusive responsibility to rearm their own police forces.[77] Combined pressure from Italian governments and the Allied Control Commission led the Allied Forces Headquarters to move past the limitations in force and allow the expansion of the Carabinieri to 65,000 men in May 1945 and to 75,000 in March 1946, effectively contributing to the improvement of public order in the liberated territory.[78]

An even more decisive step was taken in early 1946. Coordinating the operations on the ground and serving as liaison officers between the central and local dimensions of the disarmament campaign, prefects were responsible for representing the State in each province. In the heated debate on the transition, the prefectorial institution became a 'symbol of authoritarianism' and of State control over local areas.[79] The future President of the Republic, Luigi Einaudi, further believed that democracy and prefects were not compatible, as the kind of centralized State they embodied was no longer acceptable.[80]

In this climate, following the liberation of a province from Nazi–fascist occupation and the implementation of Allied Military Government, most prefects would be appointed by the local National Liberation Committee with Allied approval. These were political appointments, expression of a clear attempt at an antifascist renovation that followed the liberation of the North in April 1945. Upon the restitution of the northern provinces to the Italian administration a few months later, these prefects returned under the authority of the central Italian government, and no longer depended upon Allied authorities and the Committee.[81]

The necessity to set the stage for the impending institutional referendum and the elections that were to take place in the spring of 1946 urged the Italian authorities to adopt a more resolute approach. The newly appointed cabinet headed by Christian Democrat leader De Gasperi complied, accelerating the removal of most of the politically chosen prefects and replacing them with career prefects, who were considered to be more reliable and more effective in tackling public order and disarmament issues. This signalled an attempt to centralize control on the ground, through the appointment of government officials which were experienced and more easily directed from Rome.[82] The role played by the prefects who

[77] Ibid., 17 September 1945, John Chapman, *Memorandum*.

[78] The comparisons with pre-war levels are uncertain, as estimates range from 50,000 to 75,000: Williams, *Allies and Italians*, 206. Mussolini boasted in 1927 that the total police force amounted to 100,000 men (Carabinieri, State police, municipal police and militia combined), 24.

[79] M. De Nicolò, 'I prefetti nella costruzione dello Stato repubblicano', *Amministrazione pubblica*, (2011), 106–17, 107.

[80] Luigi Einaudi, 'Via il prefetto!', *L'Italia e il secondo Risorgimento* (17 July 1944).

[81] For a reflection on the role of prefects in liberated Italy see, among others, G. Tosatti, 'I prefetti della liberazione', in G. Tosatti, *Storia del Ministero dell'Interno. Dall'Unita alla regionalizzazione* (Bologna 2006).

[82] The decision was approved on 31 January 1946: see A. Cifelli, *L'istituto prefettizio dalla caduta del Fascismo all'Assemblea Costituente. I prefetti della Liberazione* (Rome 2008), 344–72; A.G. Ricci, *Aspettando la Repubblica. I governi della transizione, 1943–1946* (Rome 1996), 164–7; F. Fonzi, 'Ordine pubblico e libertà di voto nella primavera del 1946', *Clio*, 23, 4 (1987), 625–60, 630–6.

were reinstated (or never purged in the first place) was pivotal in coordinating the operations of disarmament in the lead-up to the administrative elections of 1946, the first called since the establishment of the Fascist dictatorship.

The reinstatement of career prefects fit within a broader process of restoration that was accelerated by the combined need to quickly restore order in the northern provinces after their transfer into Italian hands and the urgency to guarantee the uneventful unfolding of the voting operations. Three factors contributed to the main institutional policy-makers' choice to re-establish certain State structures that allowed both sides to efficiently achieve their goals: the necessity to restore effective control over regions under Allied administration; the Italian need to reassure the Allies on matters of public safety in order to regain and consolidate Italian sovereignty over liberated territories; the Allied requirement to pacify the troubled regions and curb any attempts at a leftist overtaking of the country.[83]

Political fears of an insurrection were indeed rapidly spreading both within and outside Italy, amidst growing concerns for the slow demobilization of communist partisans, the creation of a Soviet-led communist bloc in Eastern Europe, and the outbreak of a civil war in Greece. The Communist Party, while playing a major role in legitimizing the new regime with its public stances in support of the democratic process and the disarmament campaign, was in fact suspected of secretly planning an armed insurrection.[84] Anxieties over the reported formation of a clandestine paramilitary network of left-wing revolutionaries helped convince the Allied and Italian authorities to act resolutely in disarming the population.

In response to the mounting pressure brought about by these growing internal and external anticommunist fears, the process of restructuration resulted in the return to a State model that, in its control apparatus, closely resembled the one that had collapsed during the war. As an impactful incentive, disarmament pushed the two governments towards the adoption of a 'continuist line' that, in the early stages of the transition, promoted 'a deeper break with the Resistance rather than with the legacy of the Fascist regime'. As highlighted by historian Davide Conti, the only effective purge that was carried out ended up targeting partisans and antifascist personnel which had entered the administration after the war, leading to an 'inverted purge'.[85]

[83] The perception of an impending 'red threat' had a strong impact on the formulation of Allied policy in Italy, see M. Gat, 'The Soviet Factor in British Policy Towards Italy, 1943–1945', *The Historian: A Journal of History*, 50 (1988), 535–57, and K. Mistry, *The United States, Italy and the Origins of Cold War: Waging Political Warfare, 1945–1950* (Cambridge 2014).

[84] This is not the place to go into detail about the PCI's policy and the controversy surrounding its 'double strategy', which will feature heavily in an article I am currently working on. However, for initial references on the subject, see P. Di Loreto, *Togliatti e la doppiezza. Il PCI tra democrazia e insurrezione, 1944–49* (Bologna 1991); L. Valiani, *Tutte le strade conducono a Roma* (Bologna 1995); M. Caprara, *Lavoro riservato. I cassetti segreti del PCI* (Milan 1997); V. Zavslavsky, 'L'apparato paramilitare comunista nell'Italia del dopoguerra ('45–'55)', *Nuova Storia Contemporanea*, 1 (2001), 89–124; and G. Pardini, *Prove tecniche di rivoluzione. L'attentato a Togliatti, luglio 1948* (Milan 2018).

[85] D. Conti, *Gli uomini di Mussolini. Prefetti, questori e criminali di guerra dal fascismo alla repubblica italiana* (Torino 2017), 9, 29–30. See also Dondi, *La lunga liberazione*, 177–82.

State continuity[86] was a rather dynamic process that emerged in most sectors of Italian institutions and culture, ushered in by the ineffectiveness of the postwar purges.[87] It certainly cannot be reduced to the interaction between the search for order and consolidation of sovereignty; nor can it be entirely ascribed to the pull of the firearms crisis, however powerfully it came to be perceived.

Nevertheless, the reconstruction of a control machine in open continuity with Italy's autocratic past entailed the rehabilitation of men and structures heavily compromised with the Fascist regime. For instance, out of all prefects in charge under the new Republican administration, 79 had served under Mussolini. 135 police commissioners and 139 *vicequestori* also survived the transition and remained in service after the war.[88] Ciro Verdiani, Prefect of Rome in 1946 and an OVRA official in the wartime Fascist occupation of the Balkans, serves as the perfect example of how men with past experience in the regime's control system turned out to be useful in addressing specific postwar needs such as disarmament.[89]

Even more importantly, the normative framework that supervised the implementation of the disarmament campaign remained largely unaltered from the prewar period. The whole legislative foundation of the restoration of law and order in postwar Italy was borrowed from the 1930s, when the Rocco penal code (1930) and the Public Security Law (Tulps, 1931)[90] had been adopted. Articles 38–41 of Tulps constituted the cornerstone of the Italian authorities' efforts to disarm the population in the aftermath of the war, empowering the police to operate 'also in derogation of the laws in force'.[91] Similarly, articles 697–9 of the Rocco code allowed strong State control on all matters regarding the possession and circulation of firearms.[92]

Disarmament was instrumental in shaping the reconstruction of the new postwar State. The urgency to disarm incentivized both Italian and Allied authorities to rebuild State structures in accordance with the pre-existing model of a centralized, authoritative administration, with strict control over the territory and an even

[86] For a brief introduction to the topic of State continuity, see C. Pavone, 'The General Problem of the Continuity of the State and the Legacy of Fascism', in J. Dunnage (ed.), *After the War. Violence, Justice, Continuity and Renewal in Italian Society* (Leicester 1999), 5–20.

[87] On the purges see H. Woller, *I conti con il fascismo. L'epurazione in Italia 1943–1948* (Bologna 1997); R. Palmer Domenico, *Italian Fascists on Trial, 1943–1948* (Chapel Hill, NC 1991); G. Montroni, *La continuità necessaria: università e professori dal fascismo alla Repubblica* (Milan 2016).

[88] Conti, *Gli uomini di Mussolini*, 16; Tompkins, *L'altra Resistenza*, 374. See also G. Melis, *Storia dell'amministrazione italiana* (Bologna 1996), 409-13, and F. Malgeri, 'Mario Scelba e l'ordine pubblico nell'Italia del dopoguerra', in P.L. Ballini (ed.), *Mario Scelba. Contributi per una biografia* (Soveria Mannelli 2006), 111.

[89] On Verdiani's unusual career path see Conti, *Gli uomini di Mussolini*, ch. 2, 109–47.

[90] See Royal Decrees 18 June 1931, no. 773, and 6 May 1940, no. 635.

[91] According to art. 216 Tulps, in the event of a nationwide state of public danger law enforcement could act *contra legem* as well as *praeter legem*: Della Porta and Reiter, *Polizia e protesta*, 31.

[92] Most of these articles are currently in force. The continuity with pre-fascist liberal Italy, highlighted by the similarities with the Zanardelli Code of 1889, has also been discussed by some studies: see S. Cassese, *Lo Stato fascista* (Bologna 2010).

stricter legislation on firearms. Disarmament was also a visible manifestation of the de-escalation the country needed after years of armed conflict and indiscriminate violence, a necessary intermediate step for the normalization of daily life in postwar Italy. The intensification of systematic sweeps led to the uncovering of hundreds of thousands of firearms found hidden in private houses, factories, fields, cemeteries, even hospitals and archives, across the entire country.

On aggregate, the figures are impressive. The intervention of the authorities following their restoration started to bear fruit, however gradually. In February 1956, Giovanni Carcaterra, head of the Italian Police, informed the Ministry of the Interior about the results of police round-ups of illegally detained war armaments that were carried out between 1945 and 1955 across the national territory. 173 cannons, 798 mortars, 5493 machine-guns, 36,121 assault rifles, 181,462 rifles and carbines, 49,513 pistols and revolvers, 319,758 hand grenades, 11,479 tons of explosives and 25,339,495 rounds of ammunitions were recovered by Italian law enforcement over the course of a decade.[93]

The sheer number, origin and diverse range of weapons recovered in each of these findings reveal the complexity of the transition experienced by the peninsula. In a single sweep, the Carabinieri might find Italian M-91s, British Stens and German Mausers, along with hand grenades of all provenance, all stashed under one roof. This happened with surprisingly little dissimilarity across the various regions of Italy after their liberation (see Table 2 for a detailed regional distribution of the weapons retrieved). The contrast between a Mezzogiorno plagued by banditry and a North shaken by political violence is perhaps less evident in the documentation regarding the recovery of war armaments.

The retrieval of illegal weapons was indeed a national issue which helps bridge the gap between the South and the North in the postwar period. All regions, regardless of their path to liberation, were heavily affected by the consequences of the dispersion of firearms. On a general note, however, a distinction emerges in the composition of these arsenals, reflecting the different developments of the war in each region. In the South, weapons abandoned or buried by the retreating German Army, left behind by Allied divisions moving northwards and by Italian soldiers who deserted after the armistice, or stolen from army deposits, found their way into the houses of bandits, former partisans, political activists and common citizens. In the North, where a longer Nazi occupation generated a ferocious civil war and a stronger resistance movement, hidden firearms were mostly supplied to partisans by the Allies, looted at the expense of the occupying German and Italian troops or kept by former Social Republican soldiers.

93 PCM 1948–50, b. 3749, cat. 1-6-4, 29 February 1956, DGPS a PCM, *Rastrellamento armi – statistica annuale*. Also see Archivio Storico del Senato, Ministero dell'Interno, *Dati riassuntivi del materiale bellico sequestrato nel territorio della Repubblica negli anni 1947, 1948 e 1949*, and *Documenti di vita italiana*, 8, July 1952, 440. Documentation on individual sweeps conducted by both Carabinieri and the Army is stored in ACS, category C2B; Archivio Storico dell'Arma dei Carabinieri, Rome; Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Rome, I–3, bb. 58, 145, and N1-11, bb. 1945, 2027, 2157.

**Table 2.** Weapons and Ammunitions Recovered by Italian Authorities in the Postwar Period, 1945–55

| Regions | Cannons | Mortars and grenadelaunchers | Machine guns | Assault rifles | Rifles and carbines | Pistols and revolvers | Hand grenades | Explosives (tons) | Rounds of ammunitions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Piedmont | 30 | 114 | 626 | 2799 | 14,551 | 4319 | 34,144 | 808 | 2,637,949 |
| Liguria | 15 | 62 | 435 | 1778 | 10,762 | 1897 | 29,063 | 1054 | 2,327,210 |
| Lombardy | 38 | 209 | 2035 | 16,947 | 90,412 | 8513 | 68,588 | 1516 | 6,412,420 |
| Venezia Tridentina | 2 | 8 | 56 | 1194 | 4319 | 1916 | 4551 | 1782 | 635,402 |
| Veneto | 18 | 94 | 531 | 2188 | 13,932 | 4502 | 37,601 | 868 | 2,249,672 |
| Venezia Giulia | – | 1 | 9 | 78 | 343 | 287 | 2903 | 7 | 63,723 |
| Emilia and Romagna | 26 | 131 | 1033 | 3399 | 14,597 | 3172 | 32,466 | 916 | 3,441,664 |
| Marche | 4 | 7 | 90 | 455 | 2418 | 1260 | 10,158 | 174 | 660,056 |
| Tuscany | 10 | 44 | 204 | 1785 | 7772 | 3429 | 28,401 | 770 | 2,883,201 |
| Umbria | – | 7 | 15 | 369 | 1392 | 556 | 3105 | 40 | 260,153 |
| Lazio and Sabina | 17 | 83 | 166 | 1255 | 4215 | 1643 | 21,073 | 2064 | 1,308,986 |
| Abruzzo and Molise | 1 | 5 | 31 | 274 | 1244 | 913 | 6617 | 73 | 180,473 |
| Campania | 3 | 12 | 68 | 1224 | 4882 | 5023 | 13,267 | 385 | 651,053 |
| Apulia | – | 6 | 41 | 558 | 1897 | 3023 | 3184 | 535 | 315,003 |
| Lucania | – | 1 | 7 | 52 | 348 | 762 | 570 | 3 | 26,728 |
| Calabria | – | 3 | 10 | 360 | 1663 | 3546 | 2539 | 41 | 114,008 |
| Sicily | 9 | 28 | 126 | 1284 | 7177 | 3483 | 20,104 | 402 | 1,124,930 |
| Sardinia | – | 3 | 10 | 112 | 538 | 1269 | 1404 | 34 | 46,864 |
| Total | 173 | 798 | 5493 | 36,111 | 181,462 | 49,513 | 319,758 | 11,479 | 25,339,495 |

*Source*: Combined data from *Armi e munizioni rastrellate nelle varie regioni italiane dall'immediato dopoguerra e tutto il 1954* and *Armi e munizioni rastrellate nelle varie regioni durante l'anno 1955*, PCM, Gabinetto, Affari Generali, 1948–50, b, 3749.

The Italian case study demonstrates why civilian disarmament helps better understand historical developments in post-Second World War Europe, offering new insights on three key issues.

First, it provides a new angle to consider the tribulations of the State in the aftermath of the war. Liberated Italy exemplifies the difficulties experienced by several European countries in their quest to recover traditional State prerogatives after the havoc wreaked by the war. The end of the Second World War in Europe, while marking a zenith in the hopes of reconstruction, represented a nadir in the defeated States' capacity to impose authority and restore public order in their territories. The loosening of control, paired with a crisis of delegitimization and the inevitable instability produced by the conflict, resulted in serious damage to States' monopoly on force. In this framework, the massive presence of war armaments in the hands of civilians was a retarding factor in the process of postwar normalization. Firearms served as an enabler in a context strongly characterized by multiple, pre-existing social and political tensions aggravated by the war. The broadening of operations aimed at removing war weapons, both forcibly and consensually, from civilian possession, ran parallel to a reconstruction of the State's administrative and governing bodies.

Second, our case study sheds new light on the role played by the Allied occupation in the transitional process. The relationship between the disarmament campaign and the Italian authorities' quest to reclaim full sovereignty was symbiotic. Disarmament was a crucial element in the recovery of State authority because it represented the convergence between two different yet complementary needs of the Italian government and the Allies, namely the restoration of public safety and normalization, representing an evident legacy of Allied policies in liberated Italy. Policing practices, which were passed down from the Allied Military Government to the Italian authorities almost untouched, were not only an important *trait d'union* between the occupation and the postwar governments, but also one of the fields in which Allied influence was more fully and manifestly exerted.

Third, disarmament highlights a twofold line of continuity. On the one hand, the control of firearms represented a bridge between Fascist regime, foreign military occupation, the democratic Republic, and the emerging needs of Cold War policing. The Allied and Italian authorities shared a common goal: to keep the revolutionary tendencies of the Resistance movement at bay and to maintain law and order through the restoration of 'traditional' policing structures. This led to a speedy rehabilitation of institutions and individuals strongly compromised with Fascism in the public security system, with laws and policies surviving the passage from the pre-war to the postwar period mostly unscathed. On the other hand, disarmament policies produced a fundamental connection between the four postwar Italian governments. Subject to strict directions from the Allies, the Italian authorities – while never having a fully independent say on the matter – concurred that the restoration of public order was the primary, overriding concern in the reconstruction of liberated Italy.

Finally, the successful affirmation of the new Republican State and its capacity to control its population, after a long adjustment phase, was not an obvious outcome. Partition of the national territory, civil war, military occupation, social tensions and loss of legitimacy had dramatically weakened the Italian State. Disarmament was instrumental in both normalizing the country and rebuilding the State, thereby playing a vital role in its recovery.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Department of Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World at the University of Padua for hosting this research. Also, I am grateful to my friends and colleagues from the ERC-Prewaras, in Naples and Vermont for their constructive criticism and generous support before, during and after the writing process.

## Funding

Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, FRAGMON/R16TCEYFWF

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