

initiatives blocked, because commissioners do not want to make long-term political and economic choices. Mete says: 'In this fashion the attitude of mistrust which is one of the essential prerequisites for the spread of Mafia culture is increased. In reality, a policy created to weaken criminal groupings runs the risk of preparing the ground for their rejuvenation, a confirmation of their hegemonic role in local society' (p. 179).

This is a necessary and sobering book. But like nearly all Mafia and anti-Mafia literature it baulks at stating the obvious: that the whole system needs radical change, not just individual pieces of legislation.

Tom Behan

**The Italian Resistance: Fascists, guerrillas and the Allies**, by Tom Behan, London–New York, Pluto Press, 2009, 255 pp. + notes, US\$30.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-7453-2694-8

Claudio Pavone's monumental work *Una guerra civile* is arguably the pre-eminent influence in recent scholarship on the Italian Resistance. Tom Behan's *Italian resistance* takes the reader beyond Pavone's now familiar tripartite framework of the Resistance as patriotic, civil and class war. As the title suggests, Behan's book concerns the roles of fascists, guerrillas (or partisans) and the Allies during the period 1943–1945. He outlines the workings of each group, the ideologies which united and divided them during the Resistance and the relational tensions which have persisted since the Liberation.

The very structure of the book makes it attractive to Resistance expert and novice alike. As Behan himself describes it, Part I is principally chronological, Part II more thematic. Those just venturing into the field will find Part I an accessible and comprehensive examination of the period. Chapter 1 provides the necessary background on the fascist period of 1922–1943. It also challenges the myth of 'italiani, brava gente', arguing that the Italian role in the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans during 1940–1942 was 'no different to that of the Nazis' (p. 17). Behan argues that the Balkans were 'a dress rehearsal for how fascist forces were to treat presumed partisans and their supporters in Italy' (p. 18). Throughout the book Behan takes a strong stance on Italian war crimes in the Balkans, reiterating that Italian guilt remains largely unacknowledged and uninvestigated.

Chapter 2 focuses on two key dates: 25 July and 8 September 1943. His discussion of 25 July highlights both the euphoria and the confusion following Mussolini's arrest. The armistice of 8 September is shown to introduce a period of spontaneous, uncoordinated activity, typified by a series of missed opportunities. The social and political response to these two key dates is elaborated in Chapter 3. Another key moment, the 'Four Days of Naples' (28 September–1 October 1943), is presented as 'a sign of the scale of popular resistance [the Germans] were to encounter for the rest of the war throughout the peninsula', and not, as Benedetto Croce argued, 'a kind of primitive spontaneous apolitical revolt' (p. 38).

Chapters 4 and 5 – ‘Resistance in the Mountains’ and ‘Resistance in the Cities’ – focus on the varying motivations behind people’s decision to resist, whether by armed struggle or by industrial protest. Behan takes a strong position on the relationship between the partisans and peasants in the mountains. Oral testimonies and interviews combine to make an engaging case for the harmony between partisans and peasants. However, other histories ‘from below’, for example Nuto Revelli’s collections of oral testimonies, show that relationships between the local communities and the partisans were not as consistently positive as is perhaps suggested here. Regardless, a strength of these two chapters is Behan’s ability to convey the optimism and excitement of these days.

This optimism reaches its apex in Chapter 6. As Behan narrates the liberation of Genoa, Milan and Turin, there is a clear delight in the sources open to him. He provides fascinating detail on the negotiations between the Germans and the partisans for control of these cities. The short-lived optimism of the period is further examined in Chapter 10, ‘The Partisan Republics’. In Chapter 6, quoting a *Giustizia e Libertà* article from May 1945, Behan wryly notes its foresight, given the corruption of Italian politics since the war: ‘Mistrust politicians: those who want to earn a living from politics are above all layabouts, and they’re always money-grubbing. Politics is what you do once the working day is over’ (p. 105).

Chapters 7 and 8 deal with the lot of partisans and fascists respectively following the liberation of Italy. Behan is strongly pro-partisan in his representation of the frustrations, disillusionment and indeed humiliation of partisans postwar, particularly when it comes to the legal difficulties they faced. Throughout the book Behan staunchly defends the Italian Resistance against the revisionist claims and agendas that subsequently surfaced. The sub-title of Chapter 8 is telling: ‘Italian Fascism: down but not out’. As part of his defence of the Resistance, Behan carefully traces – and refutes – the gradual re-legitimation of neo-fascism in postwar Italy.

Each of the four chapters of Part II would function well as a stand-alone essay for those familiar with the broader context of the Italian Resistance. Four key themes are presented in Chapters 9–12 respectively: ‘Female Fighters’, ‘The Partisan Republics’, ‘Organising “Terrorism”’, and ‘An Uneasy Alliance: The Resistance and the Allies’. As he has done in Part I, in Part II Behan continues to elaborate on existing studies bringing fresh insight to issues central to discussion of the Italian Resistance. His examination of each of these four aspects takes the long view, showing the postwar legacy of relationships and politics during the Resistance. His analysis is particularly helpful in that while he refutes the revisionist stance robustly, he highlights how perceptions evolve with time.

While Behan’s consideration of the official period of Resistance adds many new and fascinating details to our understanding of the forces in play at the time, his study is particularly valuable for its elucidation of the influence of the Resistance on post-Liberation Italy. Indeed, his introduction argues strongly that ‘one simply cannot understand modern Italian society and politics without understanding the Resistance. Modern Italian democracy comes directly from the Resistance, it comes from below’ (p. 5). Many of his most fascinating insights come ‘from below’ and are presented in the form of extracts from interviews and memoirs. As one has come to expect from Behan, *The Italian*

*resistance: Fascists, guerrillas and the Allies* is a well-researched and well-written study which is a pleasure to read and a valuable addition to an individual or institutional library.

### References

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