

PAROLE-CHIAVE
nuova serie di "Problemi del socialismo"

I/2

Claudio Pavone

giugno 2019/dicembre 2019



Carocci editore

Recalling Pavone, Writing “Moral History”

by Victoria de Grazia

Recalling Claudio Pavone, and his life work, makes me recall some important moments in my own intellectual-emotional growth to which he was tied. It was the spring of 1966 when I had my first encounter with him, so to speak. I was then a second-year university student enrolled in Storia Contemporanea at the Facoltà di lettere e filosofia at Florence via Smith College's year abroad program, and the professor, Ernesto Ragionieri, “comunista di larghe vedute”, instructed us to bring Pavone's first book *Amministrazione centrale e amministrazione periferica. Da Rattazzi a Ricasoli, 1859-1861* (Giuffrè, 1964) to the exam. From my fellow students, I grasped that “portare all'esame” meant memorizing the 826-page book with its two hundred page introductory essay and 600 pages of documentary appendices. I came through the exam with a 110 lode, a vocabulary da “notaio rampante”, and my first real grasp of the State, with an S maiuscolo: not good government, or the 50 federal states, or the negative liberties U.S civic education had taught me about, but founding laws. Whatever the good intentions of Italy's Founding Fathers, these laws – Rattazzi, Casati, etc. – had deeply structured who got what in the new nation, and had indelibly crimped the democratic fabric of national civic life. In sum, Claudio Pavone's first big book was as sobering as his last.

When I first met Claudio, the man, not the book, at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, all fascist-glass, sunshine, and eerie silence, it was a world away from the “politica faziosa e divertita” of Florence, with its garrulous old communist *partigiani*, student productions of Brecht's *La linea di condotta* at the case del popolo, and the quarrels with the latter's direzione to quiet the riotous tombola-playing public so we could hear our own high-minded cultural production. Pavone was the aristo-intellectual-functionary, whose careful scholarship in the “Continuità dello Stato” and apparent equanimity reinforced that if we were honest with ourselves, painstaking scholarship had to be our major political commitment.

Later, this acquaintance blossomed into a kind of camaraderie when at some point, with Vittorio Foa, Claudio showed up in New York City. It must have been 1980 as the dream-crushing Carter Administration

settled in after the grand hopes of the late 1960 and politically terrifying, but exciting swerves of the 1970s. If Mario Monicelli had directed Tati's Monsieur Hulot and Totò to play *Azionisti* commissars (an oxymoron) he might have captured this odd couple, Foa braving the Fordlandia's frigid winter, in his worker's jacket and cap, Pavone cloaked in green Loden with his tan cashmere scarf, both urging us to keep the faith, "la via è lunga e accidentata," leaving me and my *Radical History Review* comrades greatly cheered.

From there, it was fast forward to 1991 when *La guerra civile* was published. I have to confess that I couldn't embrace the historiographical debates that ensued at the time, being more worried about the U.S. neo-imperialist trajectory after the crash of the Soviet Bloc, and, frankly, having a more immediate and compelling contact with Italian memory politics of the war period in my own home. By that time my husband, whose father and grandfather had been murdered in June of 1944 by the Germans in a frightful reprisal against villagers in the wake of a half-baked partisan action, had seen what his own daughter understood at age three (his own age at the time he saw the massacre) which is to say, everything, and had embarked on his own arduous trip down memory lane.

That is not to say that I didn't process the volume's riches. Who couldn't be struck by the work's probing humanity as a moment of personal philosophical reflection, but also the clarity of seeing the period from the collapse of the state, September 1943 to Italy's liberation in April 1945, as a civil war, class war, and war of liberation. There was much to ponder: why did that moment seem to transform political choices into moral and ethical decisions? Was it a reaction against the nihilism of Nazi-Fascism? Death and disorder? The collapse of the State?

La guerra civile came out in 1991 as the culmination of a decade long season that had started as early as 1981 with Pierre Vidal Naquet's, *Assassins de la memoire* (republished in 1987 and 1992), had seen the furious debates of the Historiker-Streit, around the "Past that will not Pass away", the publication in English in 1986 of Soviet novelist Vassily Grossman's *Life and Fate*, that put the human struggle during the Battle of Stalingrad at the center of reflection about the capriciousness of the Stalinist state and the racist and totalitarian Nazi-fascist war-mongering. And in 1987, Arno Mayer's *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* Had come out, framing the "Judeocide" in the context of Hitler's crusader war against the Soviets, his goal to put an end to a "cult of remembrance" that, in his view, had "become overly sectarian."

Pavone had done something different. He had plumbed existentially the hardest moment of Italy's national history, he had made himself a protagonist, and he explained the many moral claims without moralizing.

own elegant biographies on the Rosselli brothers and Silone, to bring the book to publication.

Paradoxically the delay that had made the book's translation into English seem regrettably tardy made it timely, albeit for a whole new cycle of politics and historical reflection. Celebration of the post-communist moment, the birth of the New Europe of the EU, and worry over globalization, has given way to the breakdown of the liberal world order and the reset of some full-fledged constitutional crises. And everywhere, it seems that reactionary movements have been thriving off of the crisis of the progressive norms and values underlying "humanitarianism," the "right to intervene," in the transatlantic novel "Normative Europe," as well as the solutions that we had come up with in the past to fight our cultural battles, over the so-called correct memory to debate the Resistance, but also about the terms in which to frame our understanding of the tenacity of Fascist Regime, and, especially, about the capacity of the fascist movement to win power in the first place.

To start, Pavone's *Civil War* still has lots to add in conversation with Olivier Wieviorka's magisterial *The French Resistance*. The Parisian historian's goal is nothing less than to mount the final "storm against the Bastilles of Memory" with a total history – which would lay to rest once and for all that Resistance was a universal and united movement motivated by a pure sense of patriotism, and to subject it to a cool and objective process of historicization. And so it does: the immense figure of Charles De Gaulle is re-sized to become only one of the leaders. And "the shadow army" which took up arms is only a small minority until late 1942. The Resistance only became a mass movement coinciding with the Allied invasion of Normandy. And, yet, Wieviorka still wants to establish the Resistance as the keystone of a national-progressive history. There is still a "French people," meaning 'the vast majority of the population (who) rejected collaboration and were viscerally opposed to Germany.' He is still inclined to write of their 'patriotic feelings' and 'the patriotic frenzy' that 'took hold of the country' after the D-Day landings, as if the resistance movements had not in France, too, moved against the background of three wars: the class wars, the civil war, and the Allied war against the Axis and the New Order.

Pavone can now be put in conversation with Istvan Deak, the Hungarian-American historian, whose powerful, brief *Europe on Trial* explores the experiences of collaboration, accommodation, resistance, and retribution under German occupation, as well as Soviet, Italian, and other military rule. Those under foreign rule faced innumerable moral and ethical dilemmas, including the question of whether to cooperate with their occupiers, try to survive the war without any political involvement, or risk their lives by becoming resisters. Many chose all three, depending

on wartime conditions. Sometimes collaborators and accommodators of the first years of the war became resisters when impending German defeat became evident: "changes at the battle front made resisters out of collaborators, although many performed both functions simultaneously."

Deak signals local partisans in the Ukraine who "fought the German and Soviet occupiers simultaneously [and] alternately harassed, robbed, or even killed Germans, Soviet partisans, Jews, local Communists, political rivals and Polish peasants," and he has a good eye for the Communists who accepted Stalin's line after the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact that the war was a conflict among capitalist powers, a conflict that didn't concern them, only to become the most heroic, self-sacrificing anti-Nazi warriors after 1941. As Deak observes, resistance could be both ethical (by fighting the Nazis) and unethical (by bringing down frightful retaliations). And in the face of so much moral complexity, he can only indict those who did not stop the war in the first place, namely, the liberal international order. It alone had the moral authority and elite, if not the will, to block the German invasion of Eastern Europe, which was the framework in which the occupation and the civil wars it unleashed occurred.

More generally, it would be fruitful to put Pavone's *Civil War* in conversation with the problematic of fascism more generally in the early twentieth century. The new international history on fascism sees it arising in one form or another across the planet, with the Nazi-Fascist New Order, the rising hegemony, an alternative, it claimed to be and was regarded widely as having become, to the liberal international order, but also to America's imperial *Lebensraum* via the Monroe Doctrine and Soviet Russia's giant empire. The more we understand the real and substantial appeal of Nazi-Fascism, its geo-political vision, its promises for a third-way, its racially-groomed New Man, its highly ramified welfare state planning (both the outcome of war, and the means to mobilize to fight on) its anti-Imperialist neo-colonialism, its mercantilist economics, the more we will agree with Pavone that it took enormous imagination to foresee an alternative – before 1943.

Down to the time that the U.S. mobilized, the Battle of Stalingrad signaled the turning point on the fronts, and the Fascist regime in Italy was overthrown, the battle against fascism globally was unremittingly bleak. The Resistance opened the way to cacophony of claims about "morality," about moral compass, and a new moral order not just because of the defeat of the Nazi-Fascist New Order on the battlefields, but because of the force of new moral ideas, a new mix, often in battle with one another: the struggle against corruption and for the restoration of the law, small d-democracy, Soviet economic egalitarianism and social justice, the U.S. standard of living, and civic democracy, the Catholic renewal with the

embrace of human rights, humanist existentialism, and the anti-colonial anti-Western spirit that would later coalesce at Bandung. In sum, the sea change in moral thinking at the time of the Resistance reflects a wider and deeper tide of change.

Ultimately, Pavone's reflections on the civil war that brought an end to fascism should be brought into conversation with the classic study on its origins, namely, Angelo Tasca's *The Rise of Italian Fascism, 1918-1922*. This is not because the Civil War of 1943-1945 was in any simple way a resumption of the conflicts of 1919-1922. The debate around the use of the term "Civil War" for this earlier period, even when it cited Tasca, and highlights the violence of the period exercised by the squadristi against the left, has not done justice to Tasca's insights, much as I admire, say, the effort of Matteo Di Figlia, to explore the terms of discussion in "Guerre civili," (*Meridiana*, 2013, 85-104). Civil war, as Pavone captured, is not about might versus right, or the sheer violence of fratricidal war, or about good Resistance versus bad Fascism. It is about two, or diverse sides, resorting to violence to make their moral claims, and recognizing one another as the enemy because both are armed both morally and militarily, and each had to rout the other on both grounds.

We have to recall that the immensely talented Tasca, after fleeing the fascists to France, then existing the murderous struggles within III international, published his book in French for Gallimard under his nom de plume A. Rossi in 1938. This was truly the *annus horribilis* of anti-Fascism, as fascism's victory in Ethiopia paved the way for German Rearmament, the reaction's triumph in the Spanish Civil War, defeat of the French Popular Front, indeed, for an unremitting sequence of defeats down to Stalingrad in February 1943! Not by chance, the book ~~it~~ was immediately translated into English and widely discussed.

Tasca's contention "to define fascism is above all to write its history" made two fundamental arguments as he detailed the squadristi's overwhelming assault against the strongholds of Socialism. First, he emphasized fascism's extraordinary tacticism: how it mercilessly exploited the limits imposed on conventional political parties by custom, rules, and their own programs. The fascists, he underscored, exploited every gap between theory and practice, every pre-conceived notion of good and bad, every abstract position over whether the enemy was capitalism, totalitarianism, benighted masses, the strong-man trickster, to gain practical advantage over their opponents. And Mussolini, Mussolini was cynically at home with the word "moral" (and "love"), and a keen eye for defending all of the moral conventions of the moment that suited the purposes of gaining power. Arguably, the founding moment of the fascist regime was on January 3, 1925, when, as President of the Council of Ministers, Duce