

## Claudio Pavone: contrasting pro-fascist revisionism in the realm of public memory

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XPONOS #44, 1 Δεκεμβρίου 2016



Claudio Pavone, historian and outstanding figure of Italian intellectual life, passed away on 29 November at the age of 96. In 1943, as a young man, in the wake of the Italian armistice of 8 September and the subsequent German occupation of Central and Northern Italy, he joined the resistance movement. The experience of *Resistenza* contributed to developing his left-leaning political views as well as his strong social and civic commitment, of which he conceived as a service for the political community of citizens rather than a matter of party politics. Pavone was aware that the 1943–48 period he had witnessed and actively participated in represented a crucial passage of Italy's contemporary history. His future work would often return to those years of struggle and transition. However, in doing so it would make no concession to self-celebration, but follow the guidelines of methodological rigorousness, meticulous documentation, and reflexivity.

After the war Pavone worked as an officer of the Central State Archives, where he contributed to the acquisition and conservation of the then recent documents of the fascist and war period. Later he started publishing historical studies by his own and in the 1970s began teaching at the University of Pisa, from where he retired in 1991. His first major work was *Amministrazione centrale e amministrazione periferica* of 1964, where he analyzed the establishment of institutional and administrative equilibria in the early days of the Kingdom of Italy. As Raffaele Romanelli has recalled in these days of mourning, Pavone's pioneering in-depth exploration into such a "topic of perennial relevance for the history of Italy" offered a stimulating input to his own and other scholar's studies.

Pavone's work gained particularly far-reaching resonance in a period that coincided with another important transition in Italy's history. In the early 1990s, the party system that had ruled the country's political life since the end of the Second World War succumbed because of the implosion of the Communist experience and the explosion of corruption scandals that dragged the Christian Democrat and Socialist parties down to the political mud. The emergence of the so-called "Second Republic" and Silvio Berlusconi's rise to power brought about revisionist narratives regarding fascism and resistance that referred (often inappropriately) to earlier scholarly studies, like those by Renzo De Felice; politically, they were instrumental for the reintegration of neo-fascist movements into Italy's power game. Pavone's 1991 book *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* highlighted the complex variety of motivations behind the partisans' struggle. From his study, *Resistenza* emerged as a war for national liberation and as a civil war against fascist political thought. In addition, its numerous Marxist elements invested great hope into their fighting of the class enemy that they saw pulling the strings behind the Fascist and Nazi regimes. In his work, Pavone strenuously defended the moral worth of resistance, because the unselfish and highly risky choice by so many thousands of Italian citizens restored dignity to the nation in a moment of moral disaster and political uncertainty. At the same time, his work infringed on a taboo of previous "partisan history" through the recognition of the 1943–45 struggle as a civil war. As the documents unmistakably told him, it was also a war between consistent portions of the Italian society, rather than one that an almost compact nation moved on alien occupying forces who were assisted by just a handful of treacherous puppets.

Actually, already since the 1970s a younger generation of historians linked to the institutes for the study of the history of the Italian liberation movement had begun to challenge the "official" narrative of the partisan associations by investigating elements of structural continuity and interpreting fascism and neo-fascism as phenomena that genuinely rooted in national history. The work of a widely esteemed historian of the elder generation and former partisan like Pavone definitely validated their effort. It also helped contrasting more convincingly the accreditation of blatantly pro-fascist revisionism in the realm of public memory, which however would remain an open battlefield. For all these reasons as well as for their intrinsic scholarly value, *Una guerra civile* and other works by Claudio Pavone will remain an important reference also for future students of Italian contemporary history.

(first published in CHRONOS magazine, 1 Dec. 2016)

