Between Fascism and Democracy: The Allied Occupation of Sicily

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On July 10, 1943, Allied troops landed on the shores of Sicily as part of an operation codenamed Operation Husky. This invasion marked not only the beginning of the Italian military campaign but also the start of the first Allied occupation as soldiers turned into governors overnight, tasked with rebuilding a foreign society that had been devastated by Fascism and war. As part of the Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories (AMGOT), American and British men oversaw civil affairs and navigated Sicily's complex political landscape to establish a new post-Fascist order. Yet the Allies were not the only political actors on the island: Sicilians used occupation as an opportunity to change Sicily's system of government and rearrange local power structures. In the aftermath of Mussolini's fall, American and British soldiers, Sicilian separatists, mafiosi, and communists converged in Sicily to construct a new form of government and reorganize Sicilian politics.

This paper explores interactions between Sicilians and the Allies from 1943 to 1945 to understand how different political actors exploited the occupation to attain influence and reimagine Sicily's political system. I frame the occupation as a constant negotiation of power between the occupier and the occupied. In doing so, I challenge historical accounts that have oversimplified the occupation by portraying it as a top-down system of government in which the Allies monopolized political power. This traditional historiography emphasizes the Allied experience and denies the Sicilian population authority, crafting an incomplete and inaccurate narrative of the AMGOT. By viewing occupation as an arbitration of power, I argue that Sicilians held agency and actively shaped postwar Sicilian society.

In spite of its significance as the first Allied occupation, few scholars study the occupation of Sicily and it has remained a vastly unexplored topic within Italian history. The majority of existing literature focuses on the structure and functions of the AMGOT as scholars

contend the extent to which the Allies were successful at civil administration. As an experiment in military policy, the AMGOT has proved a most compelling subject for military historians. Canadian military historian Cindy Brown argues that the AMGOT was critical to rehabilitating Sicily and attributes many of the problems experienced by officials to "the broken civil society caused by 20 years of Fascism and the overall war rather than specifically by the Allied invasion."[1] Many scholars have contested this positive view of the AMGOT, including contemporary labor historian Maurice Neufeld who claimed the incompetence of poorly-trained civil administrators resulted in delays for critical needs such as food and transportation, exacerbating poor socioeconomic conditions in Sicily.[2] In their analyses, both Brown and Neufeld acknowledge that the organization of the AMGOT had ramifications for the Sicilian population: the administration of the AMGOT either healed Sicilians from the harms of Fascism or further aggravated Sicilians' struggles. That being said, both historians neglect to include Sicilians in their account, even as they measure the AMGOT's success by its effect on the civilian population.

Regardless of whether the AMGOT was an administrative success, scholars tend to focus almost exclusively on the Allies and grant very little, if any, agency to the occupied. The Sicilians are viewed as either the victims or the beneficiaries of Allied governance but are seldom portrayed as political actors themselves. The vast majority of academic literature glosses over the participation of Sicilian officials in the AMGOT and ignores local political movements and aspirations. By looking at the Allies in isolation, scholars decenter the Sicilians from their own history and fail to account for the influence of local political elites on Allied governance and

[1] Cindy Brown, "To Bury the Dead and to Feed the Living," *Canadian Military History* 22, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 45.
[2] Maurice Neufeld, "The Failure of AMG in Italy," *Public Administration Review* 6, no. 2 (1946): 137.

objectives. This paper aims to correct this narrative by focusing on American interactions with Sicilians and understanding the effects of these interactions on Italy's postwar government. I examine Allied relationships with several Sicilian political organizations, including separatists, communists, and the mafia, to comment on how the occupation influenced Sicilian political movements, structures, and beliefs. In doing so, I aim to restore the Sicilian people as actors in this narrative.

While scholarship on the subject is limited, I draw upon two major studies of the Allied occupation: David Ellwood's *Italy, 1943-1945* and Isobel Williams' *Allies and Italy Under Occupation.* The first text presents a political overview of the Allied campaign in Italy and examines the internal and international dimensions of the Anglo-American presence on the peninsula. Ellwood's book provides valuable insight into the motives and challenges of the Allies as they sought to "demonstrate to Italians a way forward for their future, both politically and economically, after the fall of Fascism and the subsequent collapse of the State."[3] While his work extends beyond Sicily, his high-level political analysis of the war in Italy contextualizes the occupation of the island and situates it within larger political aims. For a more localized history, Williams' study on law and order within the occupation of Sicily reveals the attitudes and actions of ordinary soldiers, particularly as they relate to the Sicilian people. Highlighting these common perspectives and experiences illustrates what life was like for the average person under occupation, whether they were American, British, or Sicilian. In combining these two sources, I hope to understand how broader geopolitical interests and contexts translated to everyday encounters between the Allies and Sicilians.

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[3] David W. Ellwood, *Italy 1943-1945: The Politics of Liberation* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 1.

The primary sources for this paper consist of declassified government documents, war diaries, and official military histories of the Allied occupation. The government documents originate from several Allied agencies, including the Office of Strategic Services, the Psychological Warfare Division, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. By nature of their declassification, the British and American governments have curated and redacted many of these documents so they provide only a partial picture of Allied sentiments. That being said, they provide critical insights into official attitudes towards Sicily and reveal Allied ambitions and challenges in governing the island. The war diaries complement these more official sources with personal recollections and eyewitness testimony from boots on the ground. Through these diaries, I determine how American soldiers executed these policies and perceived the political situation in Sicily. By using these sources in conversation with one another, this paper paints a portrait of the AMGOT's lasting impact on Sicilian politics and people.

While these sources produce a compelling image of the AMGOT, they are state-sponsored documents and present a biased account of the occupation in favor of the occupier. These documents obscure the thoughts and feelings of the Sicilian population except for when they are relevant to Allied interests. Although I would have liked to include Sicilian perspectives in this paper, I am unfortunately limited by my lack of language proficiency in Italian. To bring these voices to light, I adopt the subaltern approach of "reading against the grain" and search official Allied documents for language that might reveal the presence and perspectives of ordinary Sicilians. By using subaltern methodologies, I aim to acknowledge "the contribution made by the people *on their own,* that is, *independently of the elite."*[4] In other words, I plan to

[4] Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 39.

restore human agency to the Sicilian people and understand their role not as survivors of Fascism or subjects of the AMGOT, but as people with their own hopes for Sicily's future.

This paper begins by describing the motives and structures of the AMGOT to situate the occupation within its geopolitical context. Looking internally at the AMGOT, I explore the extent to which Sicilians held agency within the administration and investigate dynamics between the Allies and Sicilian officials. I then turn my attention to the AMGOT's interactions with three external political forces: Sicilian separatists, the mafia, and the communists. First, I examine how separatists used the occupation to strengthen their movement and achieve Sicilian autonomy, even without Allied involvement. Then, I address the occupation's revitalization of the mafia and demonstrate how the AMGOT granted mafiosi renewed authority within Sicilian society. Finally, I discuss the contribution of Allied mismanagement to the communist movement in Sicily, highlight Sicilian forms of resistance, and evaluate the United States' response to these growing leftist sentiments in the context of the Cold War.

The Establishment of an Allied Military Experiment

The Allied Military Government of Occupied Territory, later shortened to the Allied Military Government, existed to advance Allied war aspirations by limiting soldiers' involvement in civil affairs and preventing the civilian population from becoming a burden on the war effort. To that end, the Sicilian people were an afterthought in the pursuit of larger military aims; Allied interests, rather than Sicilian needs, determined official AMGOT policy and characterized the occupation.

When the Allies won the North Africa campaign on May 13, 1943, they soon began to set their sights on the invasion of occupied Europe and final defeat of Nazi Germany. As a gateway to Europe, Sicily offered miles of undefended coastline for amphibious landings and a strategic

position in the Mediterranean.[5] In an April 9th report, the Joint Staff Planners wrote, "The freeing of Sicily from Axis military control would greatly improve our control of the Mediterranean, provide the United Nations with excellent operating bases for further prosecution of the war, and deprive Italy and Germany of important sources of citrus fruits and vitamin resources, and two-thirds of Italy's supply of sulphur."[6] The Allies considered Sicily to be a valuable military asset and believed its capture would strengthen their position in Europe. Beyond these strategic benefits, the loss of Sicily would also be a powerful blow to Axis morale and encourage resistance in neighboring countries.[7] With Mussolini's power waning, Italy appeared to be in a vulnerable political position and the collapse of Fascism seemed imminent.[8] This political instability provided the perfect opportunity for the Allies to strike. Before dawn, on July 10, 1943, Allied troops arrived on Sicilian beaches and fought German soldiers for control of the island. The retreat of German occupiers and the collapse of the Italian state created a political void that necessitated a new form of government. To meet this need, the Allies created the Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories.

First and foremost, the AMGOT was a military operation. According to the Allied Commission, "It was to be the AMGOT's task to relieve combat troops of the burden of civil administration, assist in making available to the occupying forces the economic resources of the occupied territory and to govern in such a way as to 'promote political and military objectives of

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[5] Isobel Williams, *Allies and Italians Under Occupation: Sicily and Southern Italy 1943-45* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 5.

[6] Memorandum by Joint Staff Planners to Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Special Military Plan for Psychological Warfare in Sicily," April 9, 1943, Folder 003180-004-0508, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part 1: 1942-1945, The European Theater, National Archives, College Park, Maryland, 1, https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=003180-004-0508&accountid=9892.

[7] Ibid., 2.

[8] Ellwood, *Italy 1943-1945,* 25.

the Allied Forces in connection with future operations.'"[9] The AMGOT's first priority was to relieve troops from civil affairs and support the Allied military effort; the socioeconomic needs and interests of the Sicilian population were secondary to Allied desires. The AMGOT leaders communicated this objective to officers, as described by Civil Affairs Officer Henry Adams: "The purpose of military government during war was and is to further the military effort by controlling civilian life so that it will not endanger, but rather assist the military effort."[10] The Allies viewed the preservation of law and order within Italy as necessary for the military campaign to succeed. Therefore, the Sicilian population was a liability that had to be controlled.

Beyond these military objectives, the AMGOT adopted a political orientation as it sought to form a stable and democratic government in Italy. According to the American Office of Strategic Services, "The United States is pledged to the destruction of the Fascist regime and the freeing of the Sicilian people."[11] The separation of the Fascist regime from the Sicilian people in this language reveals American attitudes towards Italy: Fascism had been imposed upon the population against their will and was not intrinsically Italian, unlike Nazism in Germany. Sicilians were thus victims of Fascism, rather than enemies, that needed to be freed by American troops. The Allied Commission described the AMGOT as a project "to bring peace and order in the wake of the armies of liberation, to give moral and physical assistance to a misled and shattered people and to afford a former enemy country an opportunity to redeem itself."[12] This description of Sicilians as "misled and shattered" embodies a paternalistic mindset that

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[9] Allied Commission, *A Review of Allied Military Government and of the Allied Commission in Italy, July 10, 1943, D-Day, Sicily to May 2, 1945, German Surrender in Italy.* (Rome: Public Relations Branch, Allied Commission, US Army, 1945), 8-9. The in-text quotation is from General Eisenhower's AMGOT operational order issued May 1, 1943.

[10] Henry M. Adams, "Allied Military Government in Sicily, 1943," *Military Affairs* 15, no. 3 (1951): 162.

[11] Memorandum by Joint Staff Planners to Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Special Military Plan for Psychological Warfare in Sicily," 1.

[12] Allied Commision, *A Review of Allied Military Government,* 6-7.

undermined the political agency of Sicilians: Fascism was not something that Sicilians chose but rather something that happened to them. As victims, rather than agents, Sicilians were ignorant people who had been "misled" by Mussolini and were powerless in the fight against Fascism. American officials viewed their mission as one of liberation and guidance, to help Sicilians reconstitute themselves and establish democracy in a country that had been damaged by Fascism. In pursuit of this policy, the United States intended to grant Italy full nationhood and peace without reprisals.[13] Doing so would also ingratiate the fledgling postwar Italian state to the United States, serving American interests. In July 1943, the State Department drafted a plan to create a "prosperous and democratic Italy oriented towards the 'Anglo-Saxon orbit' and the United States in particular."[14] The 'liberation' of Sicily would encourage democracy in Italy in advancement of America's political agenda and foster good relations with the American government.

To accomplish these goals, the United States created the AMGOT as its own division separate from combat soldiers. Civil Affairs Officers (CAOs) comprised the backbone of the Allied military government: four hundred British and American men summoned to manage civil operations in Sicily, one per every 10,000 Sicilians.[15] Each CAO was assigned an area to oversee and reported to the Senior Civil Affairs Officer of their respective province. Lord Rennell of Rodd, an English aristocrat, commanded the military government as Chief Civil Affairs Officer and reported to General H. R. Alexander at Allied Force Headquarters.[16] This was the

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[13] Memorandum by Joint Staff Planners to Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Special Military Plan for Psychological Warfare In Sicily," 1.
[14] Andrew Buchanan, "'Good Morning, Pupil!' American Representations of Italianness and the Occupation of Italy, 1943-1945," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 2 (2008): 218.
[15] C. R. S. Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy, 1943-1945* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1957), 4.
[16] Adams, "Allied Military Government in Sicily," 162.

administrative structure and leadership that the Allies believed would transform Sicily from a weakened Fascist land to a free and democratic island.

When the Americans landed in Sicily, their only knowledge of the Sicilian people came from a six-week training course in Algeria. From June 1st to July 15th, 1943, Allied instructors lectured future AMGOT personnel on Italian life and history, language, and military government and organization.[17] Only a minority of Civil Affairs Officers had paid attention to these lessons; the majority maintained the following attitude as summarized by Civil Affairs Officer Henry Adams: "It didn't make any difference if ninety percent of the Italians were of Roman Catholic faith, if the Fascist wheat storing and distribution system of the Amassi was good in itself, or if regionalism was an important element of Italian political tradition—innate practicality and common sense would produce efficient administration."[18] Many American officers dismissed these lessons on Sicilian culture as unnecessary and failed to see the benefits of this knowledge. Due to this mentality, a large number of the AMGOT officials arrived in Sicily unprepared and ignorant of the population they would be governing.

These four hundred men with little to no prior experience soon became military provincial governors as they received regions to administer. As Adams describes, "We had only one small-scale map which Major Palmer had acquired from a traffic MP on the way out of Palermo. On the basis of this map, assignments were made."[19] Regions were divided among Civil Affairs Officers somewhat arbitrarily based on geographical markers, with no knowledge of the political or social context of those areas. Allied officers governed large swaths of population: Major Palmer, for instance, granted Adams 24 square miles with a population of

[17] Ibid., 157.
[18] Ibid., 158.
[19] Ibid.

43,000 civilians.[20] Instructions were few, vague, and general.[21] As the boots on the ground, the Civil Affairs Officers were responsible for executing AMGOT objectives within their respective towns. For many Sicilians, these Civil Affairs Officers became the face of the Allied occupation and served as their primary contact with the Allied military government.

Sicilian Administrators Within the Military Government

The Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories was a diverse political body that consisted of officials from multiple countries, each with their own motives and interests. These administrative layers were complex and rife with tensions between the Americans and British as their different perspectives on the Italian situation became evident in their management of Sicily. While the contentious dynamics between the Americans and British are well-known, one aspect of the AMGOT that scholars have often overlooked is the presence of local Sicilian officials whom the Allies relied on to operate the military government. The inclusion of Sicilians alleviated Americans of many burdens of ruling and helped create a political structure that would endure after the Allies left Sicily, ensuring the stability of Sicilian government. While the Allies did not include Sicilians in policymaking, local officials still had agency: they influenced the civilian population and used resources to obtain positions of power.

The indigenous Italian population was the "vehicle for Allied rule" as AMGOT officials integrated Sicilian bureaucrats into the administration and relied on them to execute their policies.[22] At its peak, the Allies employed 40,000 Italians in Sicily.[23] This doctrine of indirect rule had grown out of a colonial context and was informed by Lord Rennell's experience with

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[20] Ibid., 161.
[21] Ibid.,158.
[22] Philip Boobbyer, "Lord Rennell, Chief of the AMGOT: A Study of His Approach to Politics and Military Government (c.1940–43)," *War in History* 25, no. 3 (2018): 316.
[23] Allied Commission, *A Review of Allied Military Government,* 24.

civil affairs in Africa.[24] In this sense, the occupation was an evolution of imperial government as the Allies modeled the AMGOT after colonial political structures. Beyond requiring fewer officers, the dependence on pre-existing Sicilian government structures provided a variety of benefits: it prevented language difficulties, encouraged local officials to remain obedient, deterred strikes, incentivized people to remain at work, and avoided the impression that the Allies were establishing a government of their own in Italy.[25] For these reasons, the Allies preserved Sicilian governmental agencies and allowed locals to participate in the AMGOT.

While indirect rule allowed Sicilians to work in the administration, their primary role was to execute Allied decisions and they had little to no input when it came to setting policies. The Allied occupation relegated Sicilian political movements and desires to the sidelines as British and American interests drove postwar policy. From the beginning, the Allies excluded Sicilian political organizations from the AMGOT's administration:

> It was also strictly laid down that neither individual politicians nor organised political groups, however sound in sentiment, should have any part in determining the policies of the administration. Commitments of any kind to, or negotiations with, any local political elements were to be avoided and Italian political leaders in exile were to have no part in the administration.[26]

By establishing this protocol, the Allies limited the influence of Sicilian political actors on Sicilian governance and required local officials to be apolitical, suppressing Sicilian political agency. Officially, this measure existed to preserve Allied neutrality in Sicilian politics but it had the dual effect of consolidating the AMGOT's political control over Sicily. The refusal to engage with Sicilian political organizations reduced the number of political bodies with whom the occupiers had to share power, and enabled the Allies to disregard Sicilian politics in favor of

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[24] Boobbyer, "Lord Rennell, Chief of the AMGOT," 305.
[25] Boobbyer, "Lord Rennell, Chief of the AMGOT," 316.
[26] Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy,* 11.

their own interests and beliefs. The Office of Strategic Services believed "that AMG not only dominates Sicily but also holds in its power the political destiny and future of that island."[27] By barring Sicilian politics from the military government, the Allies attempted to become the sole official authority in Sicily.

That being said, Sicilian officials still held power within the administration and exhibited agency in realms outside policy-making. The quality of Sicilian work determined the success of the administration; local officials had the capacity to slow down or sabotage the functions of the military government. The Allies expressed frustration with the substandard work of local officials which they attributed to incompetence and laziness, writing, "All reports agree, moreover, that as a rule Italian officials adopted a procrastinating attitude."[28] While this may have been the case, it is also possible that Sicilian officials deliberately underperformed as a form of resistance. A report by the Psychological Warfare Division claimed the unsatisfactory work of local officials was due to both a complicated bureaucratic procedure and an insufficient salary which lowered morale and encouraged indolence.[29] This statement suggests that Sicilian officials refused to work diligently because the Allies did not compensate them appropriately, demonstrating a degree of defiance towards the occupiers. Furthermore, Sicilian officials could use their authority over the civilian population and decide whether or not to enforce Allied policies. The Agriculture Sub-commission reported that Italian officials "have been inclined

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[27] Office of Strategic Services, Sicilian Separatism with Particular Reference to the Report of Lord Rennell of Rodd, November 19, 1943, Folder 002921-017-0017, Office of Strategic Services (OSS)-State Department Intelligence and Research Reports, Part 04: Germany and Its Occupied Territories During World War II, National Archives, College Park, Maryland, 15, https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=002921-017-0017&accountid=9892.

[28] Office of Strategic Services, Administration of Agriculture, 15.

[29] Psychological Warfare Division, Details Of Report On Public Opinion Surveys Conducted In Sicily From November 1943 To January 1944. Part 5B. Italy. Southern. Reports On Conditions In Liberated Italy And In Enemy-Occupied Italy. Place Null, February 16, 1944, FO 371/43942-0009, Conditions & Politics in Occupied Western Europe, 1940-1945: Selected files from series FO 371, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, 71. link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5108247555/GDCS?u=mnalmgl&sid=GDCS&xid=8f29cb3f&pg=1.

however, to side with their countrymen in understating agricultural production, granting rather generous retentions, and shutting their eyes to black-market operations."[30] By permitting these illegal institutions to exist, and even abetting their growth, Sicilian officials weakened the Allied military government and promoted unofficial alternatives. In this way, local AMGOT officials held power as their performance determined the success of the administration.

In a society that had been ruled by Fascism for decades, the decision to retain Sicilian governing structures meant the retention of many ex-Fascist officials as well. Within Sicily, "if genuine enthusiasm for the party had in Sicily been small, lip service to it had been all but universal among officials, the professional classes and the well-to-do."[31] The majority of the Sicilian government had reported to and been involved in the Fascist regime, making defascitization a near-impossible task. The Local Government Sub-Commission, whose mission was to integrate communes into the centralized administration, struggled to find competent career officials free from the taint of Fascism.[32] Although the Allies wanted to expel ex-Fascists from government, they also recognized a need to preserve experienced bureaucrats. The lack of competent personnel forced the Allies to tolerate Fascist employees in the administration and allowed holdovers from Mussolini's administration to remain in power. Experience thus became a valuable asset that Sicilians could leverage against the Allies to preserve their position within the administration. In addition to knowledge, political connections and social networks enabled particular ex-Fascist officials to remain in power. When it came to defascitization, the Allies complained that relatives or friends often interfered in favor of an incriminated ex-Fascist

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[30] Office of Strategic Services, Administration of Agriculture in Occupied Areas as Illustrated by Allied Experience in Italy, May 1, 1945, Folder 002875-007-0025, Office of Strategic Services (OSS)-State Department Intelligence and Research Reports, Part 05: Postwar Europe, 1945-1949, National Archives, College Park, Maryland, 15, https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=002875-007-0025&accountid=9892.

[31] Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy,* 48.

[32] Allied Commission, *A Review of Allied Military Government,* 82.

official.[33] By using their resources at hand and exploiting Allied weaknesses, Sicilian bureaucrats retained their posts even with the change in regime.

Although they shared a common nationality, the civilian population expressed dissatisfaction with the local Sicilian officers and a lack of trust in native political institutions. In a public opinion survey conducted by the Psychological Warfare Division, none of the Italian administrative offices received a high vote of confidence from the people, with the highest vote polled being 25%.[34] Of the 2,650 civilian respondents, 43% wanted the AMGOT to replace existing officials with more trustworthy people, 35% wanted more competent officials, and 34% wanted to replace Fascist officials.[35] These figures emphasize the lack of faith in the administration and the inability of many Sicilians to depend on the government, whether it was operated by the Allies or fellow Sicilians. This data also serves as a potent reminder that the Sicilian population was a diverse community that contained layers of power; the interests, identities, and experiences of local AMGOT officers were not representative of Sicilians at large and sometimes were in direct conflict with the civilian population. Local officers had a uniquely strong form of agency due to their position within the military government and relationships with Allied officials that distinguished them from the rest of the Sicilian population. The unpopularity of Sicilians administrators demonstrates the discrepancy between civilians and bureaucrats, as administrators often used their increased authority to advance their own interests and not necessarily the interests of the population at large.

In line with the doctrine of indirect rule, the Allies incorporated Sicilians into the AMGOT to compensate for the lack of available Allied personnel. While Allies prevented local

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[33] Office of Strategic Services, Administration of Agriculture, 15.
[34] Psychological Warfare Division, Details Of Report On Public Opinion Surveys, 68.
[35] Ibid., 71.

officials from setting policies, they held authority over the civilian population and decided how to execute AMGOT policies, granting them increased agency compared to the rest of the Sicilian population. Their employment within the AMGOT provided them economic security and government connections, while also ensuring their position within the new Italian government. The role of local officers within the administration thus improved their status and influence within Sicilian society, sometimes even at the expense of the broader Sicilian community.

The Sicilian Independence Movement

As the Allies transitioned Sicily from a Fascist to a democratic government, many civilians saw the occupation as a chance to redefine Sicilian politics. The fall of Mussolini energized local political organizations across the island who hoped to gain Allied support and use the occupation to realize their platform. Most notably, the Sicilian separatist movement appealed to the Allies for sympathy as they sought to establish a free and independent Sicily. It has been estimated that at least ten percent of Sicilians were separatists and the movement cut across ideological and class lines.[36] In spite of its popularity, very few historians have studied separatism and the majority of scholarship exists only in Italian, with the exception of a monograph by historian Monte Finkelstein. For this section, I draw upon Finkelstein's work and various government documents to explore how the introduction of the Allies to the Sicilian political landscape reignited the separatist movement. The separatists used marches and acts of resistance to assert agency and achieve Sicilian autonomy, even as the Allies failed to acknowledge them as a legitimate political movement.

[36] Monte S. Finkelstein, *Separatism, the Allies and the Mafia: The Struggle for Sicilian Independence, 1943-1948* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1998), 15.

Under Fascism, many Sicilians grew disillusioned with the Italian state as Mussolini neglected the South and deprived Sicily of any autonomy it once had. According to Finkelstein, "Fascism represented the worst excesses of state centralization and left Sicily seething with popular discontent...Sicilians seized on the moment of liberation from Fascism as an opportunity to free themselves from Italian hegemony."[37] Regime change invited the possibility of creating an independent Sicily. Led by Finocchiaro Aprile, the separatists adopted the American rhetoric of liberation and hoped to use the occupation to advance their agenda as the Allies influenced the formation of the Italian postwar government. Lord Rennell claimed it was obvious that the Sicilians believed "the liberating mission of the Allies involved the separation of Sicily from Italy."[38] The Allied occupation of Italy thus opened the door for separatists to reenvision their political future.

Separatists appealed to the Allies for support and attempted to connect themselves to the Allied regime to gain political favor. In early 1944, Aprile held a meeting in the presence of 1,000 people where he claimed "[British Foreign Secretary Anthony] Eden's statement that the 'British government has not yet examined the question of Sicilian independence, but that it appears that the majority of the people desire independence' constitutes a precise engagement on the part of the British government." In the same meeting, he declared that Americans should also support Sicilian independence.[39] Separatists tried to leverage the Allied presence to legitimize

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Office of Strategic Services, Sicilian Separatism with Particular Reference to the Report of Lord Rennell of Rodd, 8, https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=002921-017-0017&accountid=9892.

[39] Psychological Warfare Division, Psychological Warfare Branch Report On Transfer Of Territory To The Italian Government, The Abdication Question, Party Policy And Activities And Political Trends In Sicily. Part 5B. Italy. Southern. Reports On Conditions In Liberated Italy And In Enemy-Occupied Italy. Place Null. February 29, 1944, FO 371/43942-0010, Conditions & Politics in Occupied Western Europe, 1940-1945: Selected files from series FO 371, National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, 11, link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5108247718/GDCS?u=mnalmgl&sid= GDCS&xid=3a35f411&pg=13.

the movement, as Allied support would translate into global recognition of Sicily as a political body separate from the Italian mainland. In more extreme instances, some separatists advocated for permanently remaining under Allied control. In a letter, an Italian writer outside Naples wrote that "everyone wants a free Sicily as an American protectorate."[40] These sentiments became officially embodied in the Sicilian Party of Reconstruction, led by former priest Antonio Di Stefano, which consisted of 40,000 members and called for Sicily to become the 49th state of the United States. If that goal could not be accomplished, the party wanted Sicily to become part of the British Commonwealth, a United States of Italy, or a larger European confederation.[41] Within the separatist movement, the desire for Sicily to leave Italian jurisdiction was more powerful than the desire for complete Sicilian independence, evidenced by the many Sicilians willing to accept American or British rule. The presence of the Allies thus offered a new opportunity to Sicilian separatists who saw their British and American occupiers as potential allies in the movement for separation from Italy.

Despite the optimism of separatists, both the British and American governments made official declarations against Sicilian independence. The common perception was that Sicilian separatism was "an instrument through which the island's reactionary classes sought to retain their traditional powers and privileges against the threat of modernization."[42] The Allies viewed separatism as a conservative movement led by the *latifondisti,* or landowners, who opposed social reform and wanted to preserve the status quo. In addition to this poor reputation,

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[40] Information & Records Branch, Postal And Telegraph Censorship Report Dated 3rd April Compiled From Letters Written In Italy To Italian P.O.W.s in British Camps. Part 5B. Italy. Southern. Internal Situation In Italy. Place Null, April 3, 1944, FO 371/43836-0031, Conditions & Politics in Occupied Western Europe, 1940-1945: Selected files from series FO 371, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, 10, link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5108345276/GDCS?u=mnalmgl&sid=GDCS&xid=7a56bb25&pg=1.

[41] Finkelstein, *Separatism, the Allies, and the Mafia,* 78.

[42] Ibid., 16.

separatism was not in the interest of the United States government: an independent Sicily would weaken the economic position of Italy and place another financial burden on the United States' shoulders as the primary rehabilitator of Italy. With war raging against Japan, Sicilian independence would also decrease Italy's military potentiality and leave the Allies in a more vulnerable position.[43] For these reasons, the Americans condemned the separatists and attempted to suppress separatist activity on the island. At a meeting for AMGOT personnel, Chief Civil Affairs Officer Lord Rennell of Rodd told staff, "The Sicilian Independence Movement, which was making itself felt throughout the island, should be discouraged and all meetings forbidden. We should discount all Sicilian statements that they would really like to be governed by some other country."[44] In making this decision, the Allies dismissed the separatist movement as a valid political movement.

Separatists continued to gather and support their cause despite the Allied ban on political activity. The CAO of Ragusa reported in September 1943 that he had stopped attempts to hold meetings for Sicilian Independence.[45] The Allied effort to disband separatists demonstrates that the movement was popular and active across the island, and continued to meet regardless of Allied policy. In addition to Ragusa, CAOs reported signs of separatist activity in the provinces of Trapani, Enna, and Agrigento.[46] Separatism was widespread and appeared en masse as a political force throughout Sicily with separatists notably participating in demonstrations and

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[43] Vanni P. Montana, "Sicilian Unrest Analyzed," *New York Times*, February 12, 1945, 18, in Office of Strategic Services, Italians and Italian Americans Political Attitudes, 204.

[44] Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories, Copy Of Minutes From AMGOT Meeting Held At Palermo. Part 4. Italy. Southern. Administration Of Italy After Defeat: H.M. Government's Policy. Place Null. September 10, 1943, FO 371/37309-0002, Conditions & Politics in Occupied Western Europe, 1940-1945: Selected files from series FO 371, National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, 3, link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5108290573/GDCS?u=mnalmgl&sid=GDCS&xid=30fca4c2&pg=12.

[45] Ibid., 8.

[46] Ibid.

distributing propaganda. On March 5th, 1944, five hundred demonstrators marched through the streets of Palermo waving the Sicilian banner and yelling "viva Siciliana independente" and "viva gli Alleati."[47] Through clandestine meetings and demonstrations, separatists maintained an ongoing political presence on the island even without Allied support.

Although separatists supported the Allies, the defiance of Allied orders to cease political operations reveals a certain degree of subversion among separatists. Separatists engaged in acts of resistance that sabotaged the Allied administration or hurt fellow Sicilians, as seen in their withholding of food. According to the Office of Strategic Services, "There is conclusive evidence that the Sicilian Separatist movement is successfully opposing the pooling of wheat and that, with the connivance of the authorities, the large landholders of the Island—many of whom are supporters of the Separatist movement—refuse to deliver their produce."[48] The deprivation of food was a political tactic that harmed Allied governance and granted separatists political power as they controlled valuable commodities. This control over material goods translated to political influence and dictated the exchange of power between the Allies and the separatists. By denying these resources to the AMGOT, the separatists asserted their agency, sent a message of political dominance to the Allies, and pressured the government into enacting their agenda.

Although they had denounced separatism, rumors spread that the British were secretly supporting the Sicilian Independence Movement as part of a plan to gain control of the Mediterranean. For the United States, a British-controlled Sicily would have negative

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[47] Psychological Warfare Division, Psychological Warfare Branch Report On The Italian Fleet Crisis, Mass Meetings In Naples, Party Policy, Political Trends In Sicily, Personalities And Labour And Economic Situation; 'New York Times' Article On Sforza Interview. Part 5B. Italy. Southern. Reports On Conditions In Liberated Italy And In Enemy-Occupied Italy. Place Null, March 26, 1944, FO 371/43943-0003, Conditions & Politics in Occupied Western Europe, 1940-1945: Selected files from series FO 371, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, 19, link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5108247859/GDCS?u=mnalmgl&sid=GDCS&xid=3a8df8a4&pg=1. "Alleati" translates to "Allies.

[48] Office of Strategic Services, Administration of Agriculture in Occupied Areas, 52.

geopolitical repercussions: the United Kingdom already controlled Gibraltar and the African coast and Americans believed that more power for the British would only contribute to another war.[49] The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency, interviewed a variety of experts on the separatist movement and its connection to the British government. Following one such conversation with an Italian professor at Harvard, Gaetano Salvemini, the OSS reported that "it is increasingly probable that Britain is behind the Sicilian separatist movement. Apparently a great effort and a vast amount of money have been lavished on the project, but with negligible results."[50] This insistence on British sponsorship of separatism repeats itself in a number of American documents and newspapers, showing it was a prevalent belief among both government officials and the Italian-American public. In a 1945 editorial entitled "Sicilian Unrest Analyzed", Italian-American writer Vanni Montana claimed that the majority of American Sicilians opposed separatism because they believed the movement to be the result of British influence.[51] Italian-Americans and supporters of Italian unity dismissed separatism as a British import rather than an authentic Sicilian movement, diminishing the legitimacy of the separatists in the eyes of the United States government.[52] In this manner, contentious relationship dynamics between the United States and Britain were projected onto the separatists and weakened their political influence.

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[49] Memorandum of conversation with Judge Francis X. Giaccone for Elizabeth McFadden, Office of Strategic Services Foreign Nationalities Branch, December 16, 1944, 1-2, in Office of Strategic Services, Italians and Italian Americans Political Attitudes and Viewpoints on Wartime Developments and for Postwar Italy, 1945, Folder 001717-017-1600, U.S. Office of Strategic Services, Foreign Nationalities Branch Files, 1942-1945, National Archives, College Park, Maryland, 51. Proquest History Vault. Please note that I will be using the page number of the "Italians and Italians Americans…" PDF file for the citation.

[50] Office of Strategic Services Interoffice Memorandum, "(Italy) Interview with Prof. Maetano Salvemini, Cambridge, Mass., Tuesday evening, 27 February," March 1, 1945, 6, in Office of Strategic Services, Italians and Italian Americans Political Attitudes, 268.

[51] Montana,"Sicilian Unrest Analyzed," 18, in Office of Strategic Services, Italians and Italian Americans Political Attitudes, 204.

[52] Finkelstein, *Separatism, the Allies, and the Mafia,* 25.

In lieu of complete independence, many Italians attempted to convince separatist leaders to pursue a policy of federalism. Sicilian statesman Vittorio Emanuele Orlando believed that federalism was the best argument against separatism and sought to foster a new political organization in Sicily that favored autonomy along these lines.[53] To that end, Orlando met with Aprile in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade him to adopt a policy of administrative autonomy rather than separatism.[54] Although Aprile rejected autonomy, the idea appealed to many Italians, including more moderate Sicilian separatists. Count Carlo Sforza, an Italian diplomat, informed the United States that Italy's future would depend on decentralization in government.[55] In the end, "the idea of administrative decentralisation and a far wider degree of local autonomy received strong popular support, and was embodied in the new constitution of the Italian republic."[56] Sicily now had its own president, regional council, and assembly elected by universal suffrage with power over agriculture, industry, commerce, public works, tourism, education, and the region's budget.[57] Under the postwar constitution, "autonomy represented the first sign of Sicily's new status as an integral and equal part of the Italian state."[58]

Although autonomy disappointed radical separatists such as Aprile, the majority of Sicilians viewed it as a victory after years of negligence from the Italian government. In a report completed by the Psychological Warfare Division, one Sicilian school teacher said, "Regional autonomy is desired by far the greater part of the Sicilian people...With this provision a part of

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[53] Office of Strategic Services, Orlando Endorses Federalism to Fight Sicilian Separatism, November 25, 1944, Report JR-1246, 1, in Office of Strategic Services, Italians and Italian Americans Political Attitudes, 33.
[54] Office of Strategic Services, V.E Orlando and Finocchiaro Aprile Confer on Sicilian Autonomy, January 20, 1945, Report JP-1389, in Office of Strategic Services, Italians and Italian Americans Political Attitudes, 305-306.
[55] Office of Strategic Services, Count Sforza on Italian Reconstruction, January 17, 1945, Number N-169, 1, in Office of Strategic Services, Italians and Italian Americans Political Attitudes, 119.
[56] Harris, "Allied Military Administration of Italy, 1943-1945," 60.
[57] Finkelstein, *Separatism, the Allies, and the Mafia,* 187.
[58] Ibid., 193.

the separatist ideal will be realized, and this movement will no longer have as many reasons to object to the government so that this party will no longer increase in members."[59] The realization of autonomy fulfilled many separatists' desires and ended the separatist movement, even as a few extremists continued to fight for Sicilian independence. Although the Allies did not support Sicilian independence, their presence in Sicily reinvigorated the movement and renewed discourse on Sicily's status within Italy. As regime change created political opportunity, separatists mobilized and used political resources to attain Sicilian autonomy in the new Italian government. Their ability to do so despite Allied efforts to suppress them is a testament to the agency of the Sicilian people throughout the occupation.

The Death of Fascism, the Rebirth of the Mafia

Just as the separatists used the occupation to strengthen their political movement, the mafia used the Allied occupation to achieve prominence and economic prosperity within Sicilian society. Mafiosi took advantage of Allied naivety and poor socioeconomic conditions to obtain positions of power, control the thriving black market, and intimidate civilians with violence. Through the occupation, the mafia gained renewed agency within Sicily.

Prior to World War II, Mussolini went to great lengths to eradicate the Sicilian criminal organization which he viewed as a threat to the sole authority of the Fascist regime. Acting on Mussolini's orders, Prefect of Palermo Cesare Mori launched a campaign against the mafia that involved massive round-ups and raids throughout the 1920s; from 1925 to 1928, Mori arrested

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[59] Psychological Warfare Division, Copy Of Psychological Warfare Branch Report 'Conditions In Liberated Italy'. Part 6B. Italy. Western. Reports On Conditions In Liberated Italy. Place Null, January 15, 1945, FO 371/49869-0009, Conditions & Politics in Occupied Western Europe, 1940-1945: Selected files from series FO 371, National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, 2. link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5108327701/GDCS?u=mnalmgl&sid=GDCS&xid=dc605103&pg=1.

11,000 people, 5,000 of them in the province of Palermo alone.[60] These aggressive efforts suppressed the mafia and drove it underground, reducing the agency of the mob in Sicily. This period of decline ended with the arrival of Allied troops in the summer of 1943 as banditry and crime became commonplace and mafia members increasingly found themselves within positions of power. By February 1944, "both mafiosi and the separatists had managed to create the widespread impression that they were Uncle Sam's favourite Mediterranean nephews. It looked to many as if Sicily's future would be as an autonomous American protectorate and mafia fiefdom."[61]

This sudden reappearance of mafiosi in distinguished positions caused many to speculate that the United States had collaborated with the mafia throughout the occupation and directly supported the mafia's revival. In a newspaper article on the subject, one Palermo resident stated, "[The Allies] made a deal with bad guys and then we got stuck with the mafia back in control."[62] This claim has become a popular belief within Sicilian culture and has been supported by journalist and mafia expert Michael Pantaleone. Recent scholars, including Salvatore Lupo and John Dickie, have disputed this idea by asserting there is no evidence that the Allies conspired with the mafia. Instead the reality is far less scandalous: through naivety and mismanagement, the AMGOT created renewed space for the mafia within Sicilian society.

The failure of the AMGOT to meet the needs of Sicilians provided opportunities for the mafia to step in and offer its assistance, reinvigorating the mafia's presence throughout Italy. The war had decimated the Sicilian economy and poverty invited criminal activity:

> Now food supplies were low and the railway infrastructure had been shattered by bombing. The crime rate soared. A number of prisoners had escaped in the confusion of

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[60] John Dickie, *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 156.
[61] Ibid., 198.
[62] Tim Newark, "Pact with the Devil?" *History Today* 57, no. 4 (April 2007): 32. https://www.historytoday.com/archive/pact-devil.

> the invasion, and the black market, which was already widespread during the last years of Fascism, became the only means of survival for many...Just as it had done after the First World War, banditry returned once again the to the Sicilian countryside.[63]

Many Sicilians suffered as the Allies neglected to establish a decent welfare system. In lieu of an effective government, the mafia took advantage of these dismal conditions to control the black market and establish itself as an authoritative body. Poor administration strengthened the mafia as the people of Sicily turned to an alternative to the state to feed them. Mafiosi also used their position to align themselves with the Allied occupiers and gain important political contacts in the administration. Allies negotiated with mafia leaders to organize the distribution of petrol coupons and tires needed for the trucks that supplied the black market.[64] Through these encounters, mafia members became part of Allied networks and used the occupation to advance their own interests.

In addition to the black market, mafiosi exercised agency in an official capacity as family connections enabled them to assume active roles in the Allied administration and operate within the governing structure. As soldiers, Italian-Americans became valuable assets to the Allied military forces due to their personal connections, knowledge of the Mediterranean theatre, and ability to speak Sicilian dialects.[65] For these reasons, they were often placed in positions of power within the AMGOT and entrusted with managing civil affairs. Unbeknownst to Allied leadership, a handful of them had connections to the mafia. Lord Rennell of Rodd noted that many of the American emigrants who had returned to Sicily and were employed by the administration at various levels had been raised by the American mafia.[66] Similarly, Captain W.

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[63] Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, 196.
[64] Salvatore Lupo, "The Allies and the Mafia," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 2, no. 1 (March 1, 1997): 26.
[65] Stefano Luconi, "Italian Americans and the Invasion of Sicily in World War II," *Italian Americana* 25, no. 1 (2007): 5.
[66] R. Mangiameli, "La regione in guerra," in *Storia d'Italia dall'Unità a Oggi. Le Regioni*, ed. M. Aymard and G. Giarrizzo, vol. 5, *La Sicilia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), 499, quoted in Lupo, "The Allies and the Mafia," 26-27.

E. Scotten reported of several Sicilian-American Civil Affairs Officers and locally recruited interpreters "whose family connections or antecedents in the United States have led them into the sphere of the Mafia."[67] The AMGOT provided American mafiosi the opportunity to connect with their Italian family members and reward them with political positions. Even for Italian-Americans not directly associated with the mafia, Educational Advisor George Robert Gayre claimed that:

> The first thing [Italian-American CAOs] did on returning to the land of their fathers was to seek out their relatives—people often living in abject poverty, and many of them of the near criminal class. As a result they have become involved in the feuds of their kinsmen, and furthermore they have assumed the hatred of their kin against other classes higher in the social scale.[68]

Through their family members, some Italian-American officials became embroiled in local conflicts and vendettas that led them into the realm of the mafia. Italian-American familial networks thus created opportunities for mafiosi to obtain advisory roles within the AMGOT and serve in an official capacity.

Most often, American naivety enabled the mafia to gain power within the administration. Civil Affairs Officers arrived in their assigned towns unprepared and ignorant of Sicilian customs, history, and leadership. In light of their own lack of knowledge, CAOs depended on ecclesiastical figures and Sicilian-American interpreters to indicate who could be trusted. Mafiosi were often prominent community members and presented themselves as anti-Fascist to Allied officials, garnerning their trust. When replacing Fascist mayors, "rural centres that had spent two decades without politics often turned, or were forced to turn, to the local men of

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[67] Memorandum by Captain W. E. Scotten to Brigadier General Holmes, October 29, 1943, The Problem of Mafia in Sicily, R11483/6712/22, Giuseppe Casarrubea Archive, Sicily, Italy, 4. https://archive.org/details/captain-scottens-report-on-the-problem-of-mafia-in-sicily/mode/1up

[68] G. R. Gayre, *Italy in Transition. Extracts from the Private Journal of G. R. Gayre*, ed. Bernard Wall, vol. 23 (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1947), 55.

honour; after all, many men of respect could present themselves as victims of Fascist repression."[69] Most notably, the Allies nominated Lucio Tasca Bordonaro, a mafia associate, to be mayor of Palermo at the end of September 1943.[70] Similar scenarios occurred throughout the island as Americans unknowingly appointed mafiosi to political positions. Lord Rennell of Rodd, Chief Civil Affairs Officer, described the hardships for many CAOs when it came to replacing a town's Fascist mayor:

> More than half the adult population of Sicily is illiterate and the choice of candidates for an unpaid office was small in many of the remoter communes. Moreover, the Sicilians of any standing, whatever their political views, who were ready to cooperate by work and responsibility, as opposed to advice and criticism, were singularly few. The majority of communes are rent by personal jealousies and feuds and found it difficult to agree in suggesting a name or names. With the people clamouring to be rid of a Fascist Podesta, many of my officers fell into the trap of selecting the most forthcoming self-advertiser, or following the advice of their self-appointed interpreters who had learned some English in the course of a stay in the U.S.A. The result was not always happy. The choices in more than one instance fell on the local Mafia 'boss', or his shadow, who in one or two cases had graduated in an American gangster environment. All that could be said of some of these men was that they were as definitely anti-Fascist as they were undesirable from every other point of view.[71]

Many mafiosi rose to preeminent positions within their local communities and the AMGOT's administration by preying on the ignorance of CAOs. As members of the Sicilian elite, mafiosi were able to appeal to the British preference for co-opting members of the old aristocratic ruling class while also presenting themselves as anti-Fascist.[72] In doing so, they deceived many Allied officials into granting them positions of authority.

Flaws in the administrative structure of the AMGOT further aggravated the situation and contributed to the revival of the mafia. At the outset of the occupation, a lack of transport options

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[69] Dickie, *Cosa Nostra,* 195.
[70] Ibid., 198.
[71] Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy,* 63.
[72] Lupo, "The Allies and the Mafia," 27.

and the restriction of postal and telegraph facilities isolated CAOs from the rest of the AMGOT and decentralized the administration. One CAO said, "In fact for a long time each province remained, in a way not always desirable, a law unto itself."[73] Cut off from the rest of the military government, Civil Affairs Officers had to rely on local Sicilians for advice and make decisions without conforming to any strict policy. The dependence on local opinion "often led to the retention of former Fascists in administrative positions because of their usefulness, or the appointment of popular local personalities."[74] The seclusion of CAOs made them vulnerable to manipulation by the mafia and other local agents. The divorce of the CAO from the greater institution of the AMGOT diminished their authority and allowed the mafia to wield power unchecked by a larger political body. In this manner, insufficient resources and poor planning on behalf of the AMGOT created opportunities for the mafia to prosper.

With their renewed strength, the mafia threatened local people and ignited a wave of terror and violence throughout Sicily as revealed in letters captured by British censors. One person from Petrosino, Trapani wrote, "As soon as it is dark we close the door and we dare not even put our noses outside because the Black Hand[75] is beginning to show itself."[76] In a survey completed by the Psychological Warfare Division, 98% of Sicilians respondents declared public security to be less than a year ago and 96% considered it dangerous to go outside at night.[77] Many Sicilians experienced firsthand the dangerous consequence of the mafia's reappearance and feared for their lives. Trapani Censorship recorded 41 letters between January 15th and February 2nd addressed to local inhabitants that demanded sums ranging from 15,000 lire to

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[73] Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy,* 36.
[74] Finkelstein, *Separatism, the Allies, and the Mafia,* 28.
[75] The Black Hand, or "Mano Nera", is another term for the mafia.
[76] Information & Records Branch, Postal And Telegraph Censorship Report, 5.
[77] Psychological Warfare Division, Details Of Report On Public Opinion Surveys, 74.

200,000 lire under threat of kidnapping, destruction of property, bodily harm, or death. One such letter, signed "Mano Nera," blackmailed a man in Militello, Catania to pay 30,000 lire in a carefully specified way or face the murder of his son Giovannino.[78] The mafia used violence to acquire power and capital while the AMGOT did little to protect the civilian population. Local people expressed a lack of confidence in law enforcement and viewed police officers as either complicit or incompetant. According to a report, 43% of Sicilians surveyed believed that well-organized criminal gangs operated in Sicily and 35% believed the police knew of them but were either powerless or unwilling to break them up.[79] Under Allied administration, the mafia became a dominant force in Sicily once again as the government failed to provide proper protection and resources. As one Sicilian wrote, "The brazenness of the Maffia is unendurable."[80]

The revival of the mafia was not due to any conspiracy but instead to Allied incompetence. Economic failure, administrative oversights, insufficient training, and a lack of resources provided fodder for the mafia to thrive throughout the occupation. The mafia and the black market thus served as correctives to government failures. As one postwar analysis of the AMGOT stated, "The paying off of old scores in a land where vendetta had been for centuries a national characteristic was only to be expected. The removal of the heavy hand of Fascism gave rise to a freer use of the dagger and the pistol—which the Allied Military Government was wholly unable to prevent."[81] The failure of the AMGOT to meet Sicilian needs enabled the success of these illegal systems and encouraged crime as Sicilians found ways to survive

[78] Information & Records Branch, Postal And Telegraph Censorship Report, 5.
[79] Psychological Warfare Division, Details of Report on Public Opinion Surveys, 84.
[80] Information & Records Branch, Postal And Telegraph Censorship Report, 5. This quote is from a letter originating from Catania.
[81] Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy,* 53.

independent of the Allied military government. The mafia flourished in this environment as it used violence to obtain power.

Communism and the Dawn of the Cold War

Allied mismanagement had political consequences as starvation and poverty caused many Sicilians to support the growing leftist movement. In response to Allied failures to secure food, civilians became disillusioned with Western democracy and engaged in acts of political resistance throughout the island, such as protests and riots. Through these demonstrations, Sicilians exercised their agency and expressed their frustration with the regime; violence and protests served as some of the only methods for these impoverished Sicilians to make political statements due to their lack of education and exclusion from governing institutions. This turbulence alarmed Allied officials who believed building a Western and democratic Italy meant building a country that was anti-communist. As Churchill stated, "A Communist Italy under totalitarian rule is fundamentally opposed to the policy of Great Britain and I think also of the United States."[82] The United States used economic aid and psychological warfare to successfully discourage the growth of communism in Italy, undercutting Italian autonomy.

Several scholars, such as David Ellwood and Mario Del Pero, have examined the United States' strategy towards communism in Italy, offering a rich understanding of American intervention prior to and throughout the Cold War. Unfortunately, the majority of these studies emphasize the American perspective within a broader geopolitical context that overlooks the contributions of ordinary Italians. This paper recenters the Italians within this narrative and stresses that American policies were a response to acts of agency, such as protests and violence,

[82] Ellwood, *Italy 1943-1945*, 89.

committed by the Italian people. Sicilian food riots and leftist political support pressured the Americans to adopt a more aggressive anti-communist policy in Italy. While the United States eventually weakened Italian autonomy, it is important to keep in mind the initial power of the civilian population to alarm American political operatives and influence Allied policy.

In Sicily, poor conditions under the AMGOT pushed citizens further left and promoted Italian Communist Party (PCI) membership and popularity. The AMGOT chose to continue the *amassi* food system which required growers to send a quota to collection points and then sold excess food stuffs on the open market for a set, affordable price. Unfortunately, the *amassi* system was understaffed and the set prices were too low to ensure farmers' compliance; farmers chose to withhold produce or sell it on the black market until the official prices rose to a profitable level.[83] As a result, food prices rose to ludicrous costs and mass starvation ravaged the island, with only the wealthiest being able to afford groceries. In a survey of 2,400 Sicilians from November 15th to December 15th, 1943, the Psychological Warfare Division discovered that food costs had increased 76% from the previous year in the official markets, and 95% total when they factored in additional purchases made on the black market to compensate for insufficient rations. The failure of the Allies to procure food resulted in a thriving black market where prices were fourteen times the ration price and nearly 60% of weekly bread purchases came from unofficial sources.[84]As one Palermo resident wrote, "Thousands of people...prefer the black market to an honest job, thereby earning fortunes undreamed of in the past."[85] The presence of Allied troops further aggravated the economic ordeal as highly-paid soldiers bought expensive goods and increased inflation in Sicily, where the cost of living was much lower than in the

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[83] Finkelstein, *Separatism, the Allies, and the Mafia,* 31.

[84] Psychological Warfare Division, Details of Report on Public Opinion Surveys, 42, 48.

[85] Information & Records Branch, Postal And Telegraph Censorship Report, 5.

United States or Britain.[86] The food crisis was a direct result of poor Allied governance as the AMGOT failed to provide enough food to the public market and lower the price of necessities.

Allied mismanagement had devastating effects on the Sicilian population as many suffered from starvation and poverty. Officer Gayre described the situation in bleak terms: "For instance, in the case of small children there is no milk, no patent baby foods, and no olive oil—this last being the staple diet of all classes and ages...And we seem, so far, to have been unable to cope with the situation. Meat is only to be seen about once a week, and no fish can be got at all."[87] Middle-class Sicilian families had to sell jewelry and prized possessions to afford the price of bread. [88] The food crisis was so dire that the international Italian-American community received word of it and expressed disappointment in the AMGOT. On March 1, 1945, Dr. Emanuele Momigliano, President of the Chicago Mazzini Society, said, "After eighteen months of the so-called freedom, thousands are starving...Some 300,000 tons of fruit have been requisitioned from Italy for the Allied armies."[89] Italians and Italian-Americans blamed the Allies for the famine and viewed them as directly responsible.

The food shortage had political ramifications as protests and acts of resistance spread throughout the island. On the morning of March 3rd, 1944, a crowd of several hundred people, composed of poor women and children, gathered at Caltanissetta demanding bread and threatening to break into the bakery. Within an hour and a half, the crowd grew to 1,500 to 2,000 people and began to march towards the Prefettura. In response to the protest, "the pumps were turned on, shots were fired in the air to intimidate the protesters, and hand-to-hand struggles

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[86] Gayre, *Italy in Transition*, 40.
[87] Ibid., 33.
[88] Ibid., 45.
[89] Foreign Nationalities Branch, Things Italian, Report 277, March 1, 1945, 1, in Office of Strategic Services, Italians and Italian Americans Political Attitudes, 271.

developed."[90] Demonstrations such as these occurred throughout Sicily as thousands of people rioted due to the lack of food. Between March 24th and March 28th, three protests broke out in the town of Termini Imerese demanding increased rations, two of which involved looting from flour mills.[91] A rumor, disputed by the Allied Control Commission, accused American troops of using machine guns and grenades at a bread riot in Caltagirone on January 25th.[92] Regardless of whether the rumor was true, its existence indicates a distrust, and even resentment, of the Allied administration among the Sicilian population. As hunger spread, so too did contempt of Allied officers for their inability to provide relief.

This dissatisfaction with the Allied mismanagement of food corresponded to an increase in leftist sentiments and a rejection of Western ideals. As one AMGOT official described, "Democracy is in danger of becoming a laughing stock, having given the people far less than was afforded by fascism. There is a rhyme going round Palermo—'When we said '*Buon Giorno'* we had bread, now that we say 'Goodbye' we starve.'"[93] The failure of the Allies to provide people with basic necessities led to a skepticism in democracy as a form of government. Contemporary journalist Gretta Palmer quoted a Foreign Economics Administration official as saying the following:

> There is no democracy in Italy. Thanks to us, there is no enthusiasm for democracy. As a result of muddled thinking, we have wrapped the country up in red tissue paper and asked

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[90] Psychological Warfare Division, Psychological Warfare Branch Report On Political Developments, The Armed Forces, Demonstrations, The Press, Public Opinion, Labour, Health And Economic Situation. Part 5B. Italy. Southern. Reports On Conditions In Liberated Italy And In Enemy-Occupied Italy. Place Null, March 29, 1944, FO 371/43943-0004, Conditions & Politics in Occupied Western Europe, 1940-1945: Selected files from series FO 371, National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom, 18. link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5108247896/GDCS?u=mnalmgl&sid=GDCS&xid=2226c3ce&pg=1.

[91] Williams, *Allies and Italians Under Occupation,* 144.

[92] Allied Control Commission, Bread Riots Occur At Caltagirone In Sicily; A.C.C. States Reported Use Of Weapons By American Troops Without Foundation. Part 5B. Italy. Southern. Internal Situation In Italy. Place Null, February 19, 1944, FO 371/43836-0014, Conditions & Politics in Occupied Western Europe, 1940-1945: Selected files from series FO 371, National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom. link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5108345209/GDCS?u=mnalmgl&sid=GDCS&xid=917ad424&pg=1.

[93] Gayre, *Italy in Transition,* 98.

> the Communists to call for it. We have done more than all the Communists have done to advance the Communist revolution in Italy. When the revolution comes—it will, as soon as our troops are withdrawn—don't blame Stalin. Blame London and Washington which could not make up their minds whether they wished to make a friend of Italy or beat her to the earth.[94]

For ordinary Sicilians, American democracy meant starvation and communism seemed to provide an answer to Sicily's miserable conditions. One Sicilian in Ragusa wrote, "Here we have bolshevism at full blast...Demonstrations, flags, scythes and hammers, they are all free of charge."[95] Within Sicily, the movement represented a new development on the political scene that grew organically out of popular sentiments and demanded radical reform of the state. As scholar David Ellwood writes, "The Italians...had acquired a political voice of their own and a whole range of views on their future."[96]

The rise of communist attitudes alarmed American officials, as seen in several reports that warned of a forthcoming communist uprising. A 1945 Joint Chiefs of Staff report stated the following:

> There have been unsubstantiated rumours that a Communist rising will take place in the northwest before October and criminal offences have been repeatedly perpetrated by the more lawless Communist elements. It is considered in general that the revolutionary parties are playing a waiting game until at least the departure of Allied armed forces from Italy, although local violent incidents will continue.[97]

The Allies believed the communists, supported by the Russians, intended to overthrow a constitutional government by force. The same report claimed that there were 50,000 partisans under communist control, many of whom were "highly trained specialists in political

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[94] Secret Intelligence Italian Section, Italian-American Political Thought and Activity, January 20, 1945, Report #43, 8, in Office of Strategic Services, Italians and Italian Americans Political Attitudes, 149.
[95] Information & Records Branch, Postal and Telegraph Censorship Report, 7.
[96] Ellwood, *Italy 1943-1945*, 2.
[97] George S. Smith, Memorandum enclosure, "Appreciation on the Current Situation in Italy," Folder 003180-005-0689, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part 1: 1942-1945, The European Theater, National Archives, College Park, Maryland, 6. https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=003180-005-0689&accountid=9892.

organizations, subversion and propaganda and in all branches of revolutionary technique."[98] Such descriptions presented the communists as a threat to Allied interests and democracy at large. These rumors of a communist coup were not isolated to American intelligence but appeared in reports from the Italian Royal Navy, which believed that 30,000 communists were organizing to "demoralize the armed forces and replace them with a Red Army."[99] This language depicted the communists as a violent and insurrectionist body set on sabotaging the war effort. In doing so, the demise of the communists became not just a political objective, but a military one as well. For Americans, the threat of a communist Italy had to be avoided at all costs.

The suppression of communism thus became Allied policy towards the later end of the occupation as Italy's postwar government took shape. In 1945, Ellwood claims the Allies perceived that "the real issue inside the country was no longer an 'institutional' one, monarchy versus republic, but was a battle between totalitarianism and democracy, between the threat of a Communist police state and the hope of liberal democracy on the Anglo-American model."[100] The British and Americans believed Italy would play a vital role as a defense against communism and Soviet influence in Europe. Contemporary Italian historian Momigliano said:

> If Italy can be helped she can become a bulwark against Communism. If not, Europe is lost, Europe will go Communist. We, the Italians, can immunize—confine—Communism to Yugoslavia and Bulgaria and other lands under Eastern influence, and prevent it from spreading to France and other Latin countries.[101]

The desire to stop communism in Italy suddenly became an urgent necessity as the fall of Italy meant the fall of Western Europe. Although the United States had been relatively indifferent to

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[98] Ibid., 9.

[99] Office of Strategic Services, Report on Communist Party in Italy, January 26, 1945, Report JR-1548, 4, in Office of Strategic Services, Italians and Italian Americans Political Attitudes, 158.

[100] Ellwood, *Italy 1943-1945*, 200.

[101] Foreign Nationalities Branch, Things Italian, 2, in Office of Strategic Services, Italians and Italian Americans Political Attitudes, 272.

Italy prior to World War II, Italy suddenly took on a renewed importance as the Cold War dawned in the opening months of 1946.

As material conditions corresponded to political attitudes, Americans believed that increased economic aid would solve the 'communist problem' and restore Sicilian's faith in democracy. As Dr. Mario Einaudi, an Italian scholar of political theory, told the OSS, "Unless we improve conditions in Italy, the country will go Communist."[102] The United States financed eighty percent of civil relief supplies to Italy and quickly made Italian economic recovery dependent on America: by 1946 the US was supplying Italy with 40 percent of its fuel imports, 70 per cent of its food imports and 100 per cent of its imported medical supplies.[103] Such a substantial investment in the country incurred Italian gratitude, interlinked the two countries' economies, and brought Italy into the American sphere of influence. This financial support was part of a broader strategy of revitalization which encouraged Italy to adopt economic practices that would align with American values and interests. The dependence on American aid caused the newly formed Italian government to orient its political and economic structures relative to American desires. In the winter of 1944 to 1945, the Italian government sent a mission headed by Signors Quintieri and Mattioli to the United States to ask for advice on economic policy. The American government suggested that Italy abandon autarky and embrace private enterprise and free international trade. In January 1946, the Italian Minister of Foreign Commerce, Ugo La Malfa, announced an economic programme that mimicked American recommendations.[104] In this manner, American financial support indebted Italy to the United States and encouraged the new

[102] Memorandum from the Foreign Nationalities Branch to the Director of Strategic Services, "Intervention in Italy," December 21, 1944, 9, in Office of Strategic Services, Italians and Italian Americans Political Attitudes, 56.
[103] Tom Behan, *The Italian Resistance: Fascists, Guerrillas and the Allies* (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 220.
[104] Norman Kogan, *Italy and the Allies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 180.

government to adopt economic policies that Americans favored (i.e. ones that were grounded in capitalism).

This policy also entailed supporting Italian parties with a pro-Western orientation, most notably the Christian Democrats. George F. Kennan, the director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, defined political warfare as "an integrated application of diplomatic, economic, cultural, ideological, propaganda, and covert tools."[105] The United States used political warfare in the Italian democratic elections of April 1948 by covertly supporting democratic anticommunist parties, like the Christian Democrats, the Republican Party, and the Social Democratic party. Central Intelligence Agency Operative F. Mark Wyatt was one of the American agents who ensured the electoral victory of Christian Democrats over the Communist Party. As he describes, "We had bags of money that we delivered to selected politicians, to defray their political expenses, their campaign expenses, for posters, for pamphlets." CIA operatives delivered millions of dollars in cash to the eventual victors and exchanged suitcases full of money in the four-star Hotel Hassler in Rome.[106] The election resulted in a landslide victory for the Christian Democrats against a coalition of pro-Soviet Socialists and Communists. According to American historian James Miller, "The results of the April 1948 elections created a general confidence in Washington that the United States had the right tools and the right strategy to effectively deal with the left."[107] Americans developed a strategy to combating communism, based on their success in Italy, that proved critical with the start of the Cold War.

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[105] Alessandro Brogi, "Taming Dissent: The United States and the Italian Centre-Left, 1948-1978," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies (Springer Nature)* 14, no. 3 (September 2016): 215

[106] Tim Weiner, "F. Mark Wyatt, 86, C.I.A. Officer, Is Dead," *New York Times,* July 6, 2006, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/06/us/06wyatt.html. See also Jeremy Isaacs, dir.,"The Marshall Plan," *The Cold War*, episode 3, CNN.

[107] James Miller, "Roughhouse Diplomacy: The United States Confronts Italian Communism, 1945-1948," *Storia delle Relazioni Internazionale* (Florence), 5, quoted in Mario Del Pero, "The United States and 'Psychological Warfare' in Italy, 1948-1955," *The Journal of American History* 87, no. 4 (March 2001): 1306.

In Sicily, American intervention popularized the conservative Christian Democrats and prevented the Communists from becoming a dominant political force, undermining Sicilian agency. In the 1946 election for Constituent Assembly, Christian Democrats received 30.47% of the vote within the Agrigento, Caltanissetta, Palermo, and Trapani provinces. In the 1948 Chamber of Deputies election, 46.31% of the electorate in the same regions voted for the Christian Democrats, a 15% increase. [108] These electoral results were a product of American intervention; the United States employed covert strategies and financial support to ensure that Italy remained oriented towards the Western democratic sphere, securing its role as a 'bulwark' against communism in Europe. Although American interference diminished Italian autonomy, it is vital to recognize that the United States only developed this strategy because of the power of leftist organizers and Sicilian protesters. As hunger spread throughout Sicily, people turned out in droves to demonstrations and voting booths to express their frustration and advocate for a radical new political system. Through this statement of agency, the Sicilian people pressured the United States government to act and influenced Allied policy.

Conclusion

In the wake of Fascism, the Allies and Sicilians sought to establish a new postwar future that aligned with their respective interests and ambitions. The Allies used the occupation to influence Italian politics in a way that supported their agenda as they deterred the growth of communism and advanced their military campaign. In turn, many Sicilians leveraged the Allied presence to pursue their political aims or new economic opportunities, or responded to poor Allied governance with acts of resistance. Great diversity of interests existed even within the

[108] "The Archive of Election History,", Ministry of the Interior: Department of Internal and Territorial Affairs, accessed February 20, 2021, https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php. See election results for the 1946 Constituent Assembly and the 1948 Chamber of Deputies.

blanket terms of "occupier" and "occupied": British and American officials held conflicting policies towards the occupation, while Sicilians struggled to agree on a unified vision for Sicily's future. In the end, some groups, such as the mafia and the Americans, accomplished their objectives; others, like the separatists, achieved a compromise; and others, like the communists, failed altogether.

Despite the diversity of actors, the historiography of the AMGOT has focused solely on the Allied perspective and ignored local agents, resulting in one-sided and incomplete accounts. Exploring interactions between the Allies and Sicilians, rather than focusing on the Allies in isolation, grants a more holistic and accurate view of the occupation as an exchange between the occupier and the occupied. This approach recenters the Sicilians and ascribes them a degree of agency by acknowledging their role as political actors. While this paper has attempted to include Sicilian perspectives, it relies on American and British sources in which Sicilians appear only through their relevance to Allied officers. To remedy this issue, future scholarship would greatly benefit from a subaltern narrative of the occupation that features Sicilian voices and captures civilian attitudes and beliefs in their own words. By studying the Sicilian experience, we humanize the occupied and acknowledge their existence beyond the scope of the occupier.

Under Allied governance, Sicilians shaped society through official means, such as appointments to administrative positions, and through unofficial channels, like protests and the black market. Sicilians participated in the Allied military government and used the occupation to assume positions of authority, as seen in the ascendancy of the mafia. The achievement of Sicilian autonomy occurred largely without Allied assistance as separatists congregated in secret, organized political events, and engaged in acts of resistance to apply pressure on the Italian government. Civilians compensated for the failures of the Allied government by constructing

their own systems, such as the black market and the mafia, to perform traditional government functions. While these methods were illegal and dangerous, they were often the only means of survival for many Sicilians as the Allies failed to provide sufficient food, economic support, and law enforcement. In this manner, Sicilians continued to exert agency and influence the environment around them even as the Allies dominated the government.

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