



INTRODUCTION

FASCISM

While the term 'fascism' originated in Italy in the aftermath of WW1 and was used by a small number of European radical movements in the 1920s/1930s, the term has become synonymous with an international phenomenon that denotes both a particular kind of ideology and a specific historical force in interwar Europe. It has been used (and abused) since the 1920s and continues to be part of our language until our days. Yet, even ninety years since its first appearance, 'fascism' remains superlatively hard to define.

THE CONCEPT

Even in the early twenty-first century the term fascism remains one of fundamental ambiguity and controversy. Unlike many other “-isms,” it still invites competing perceptions of what it is and what it stood (or even stands) for. Originally a word borrowed from the ancient Roman imagery (fasces = bundle of rods surrounding an ax) coined in the Italian post–World War I context to express radical collective action in defense of the nation (Fasci della Difesa Nazionale), it was appropriated by Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) to label his nascent ultranationalist movement that eventually became the National Fascist Party (Partito Nazionale Fascista, PNF). Already in the early 1920s socialist observers ascribed a generic import to the term, as a historically specific reactionary vehicle for recasting monopoly capitalism and crushing socialist mobilization. At the same time, fellow travelers, disciples, and imitators across the continent in the 1920s and 1930s invoked the term or alluded to a sort of ideological-political affinity with the Italian model. The alliance between Mussolini’s regime and Adolf Hitler’s (1889–1945) National Socialist Germany was similarly founded on the premise of such a deep kinship in search of a universal postliberal and postsocialist order. The impressive diffusion of fascism as ideology and type of regime in the interwar period led the German historian Ernst Nolte to declare that the 1918–1945 period was the indisputable “era of fascism” and thus cast the phenomenon as the product of a particular continent-wide set of histori-

cal circumstances that manifested itself in a plethora of national permutations.

Yet, fascism remains superlatively hard to define in a way that generates academic consensus. One prominent analyst has described the fray of fascist studies as a “deserted battlefield.” Its allegedly generic nature has been fiercely contested by those who still perceive it as either a purely Italian phenomenon or a descriptive term that relates to style rather than substance. Some would deny it any degree of ideological import, thereby reducing it to a set of ad hoc practices that have been inflated into something more by subsequent academic wishful thinking. While historians tend to agree with Nolte that 1945 represented the cataclysmic end of the “fascist era,” others discerned an allegedly wider conceptual relevance that goes far beyond historical periods or geographic settings. And the catalog of controversy goes on: irrational and antimodern or an alternative radical modern formula? Antiliberal, antisocialist, or both? Revolutionary or counterrevolutionary/reactionary? Right-wing or syncretic or even a “scavenger”? What about its relation to other concepts, such as authoritarianism, totalitarianism, and dictatorship, with which it shared some crucial but partial similarities? Finally, if “fascism” had any intellectual substance, where did it come from and how did it shape its ideological content?



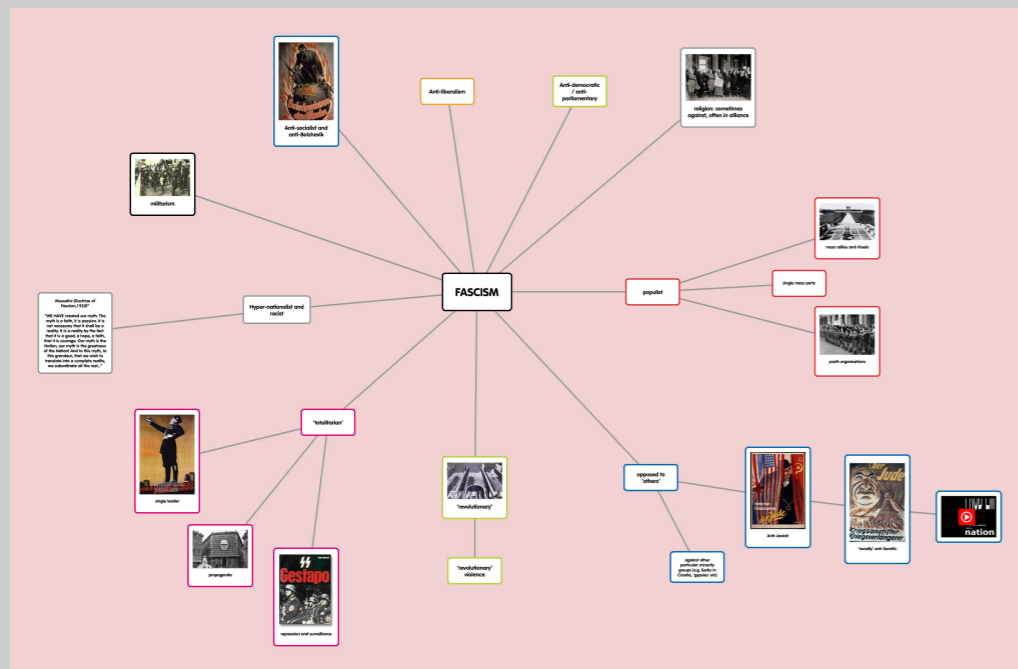
PART 1

IDEOLOGY

Fascism has been accused of being activism without principle, opportunism without substance, a hodgepodge of disparate ideas that did not add up to a coherent ideological vision. Yet, since the 1980s 'fascism' has been taken seriously as an ideological concept by scholars. What were the main ideas and unique features of fascist ideology? And, in the end, does 'fascism' deserve its very own place in the spectrum of ideological '-isms' of the 20th century?

FASCIST IDEOLOGY

Interactive 2.1 Main themes of 'fascist ideology'



PDF version (handout): visit <http://popplet.com/app/#/5636>

Some perplexing questions about 'fascist ideology':

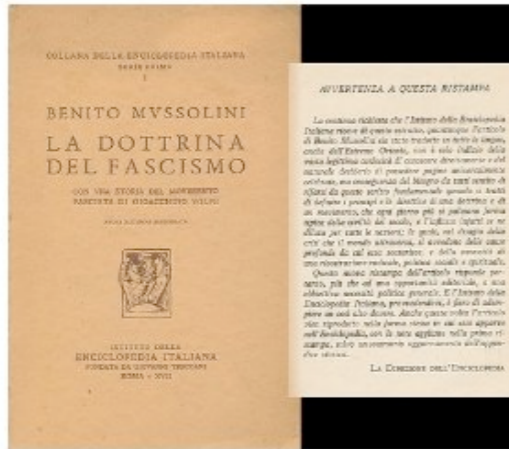
A. Was fascism an ideology of the right or the left? Or both?

Some authors see fascism as an ideology of the extreme right. See, for example, Kevin Passmore: *"Fascism is a set of ideologies and practices that seeks to place the nation, defined in exclusive biological, cultural, and/or historical terms, above all other sources of loyalty, and to create a mobilized national community. Fascist nationalism is reactionary in that it entails implacable hostility to socialism and feminism, for they are seen as prioritizing class or gender rather than nation. This is why fascism is a movement of the extreme right. Fascism is also a movement of the radical right because the defeat of socialism and feminism and the creation of the mobilized nation are held to depend upon the advent to power of a new elite acting in the name of the people, headed by a charismatic leader, and embodied in a mass, militarized party. Fascists are pushed towards conservatism by common hatred of socialism and feminism, but are prepared to override conservative interests - family, property, religion, the universities, the civil service - where the interests of the nation are considered to require it."*

Others believe that fascism combined elements of both the radical right and the radical left in a new synthesis, attempting to forge a 'third way' beyond liberalism and socialism. Zeev Sternhell, for example, located the ideological origins of fascism in the late-nineteenth century, in an attempt to fuse elements of

nationalism and socialism. The result was a new ideology, a “dis-sident synthesis” that amounted to a new ideology.

B. Was fascism based on doctrine or on the cult of action?



The 1932 publication ‘The Doctrine of Fascism’, allegedly authored by Mussolini himself

Some scholars have focused on fascism’s reaction to existing ideologies. Others have noted these negations but also focused on its allegedly unique vision of the future. Stanley Payne used Juan Linz’s distinction between ‘negations, ideology, and style’ to define fascism in these three terms:

It took Mussolini more than a decade to produce a programmatic statement of what his ‘Fascism’ was in ideological terms: in 1932 he published a long essay titled ‘The Doctrine of Fascism’, in which for the first time he attempted to give ideological substance to his movement. Hitler, on the other hand, had written ‘Mein Kampf’ in the mid-1920s while in prison, containing all main themes of his subsequent ideology (nationalism and Volk, racism, disdain of socialism, anti-Semitism etc).

A. The Fascist Negations:

Anti-liberalism

Anti-communism

Anti-conservatism, but of a more qualified nature, with a degree of willingness to

compromise at least temporarily, with rightist groups and principles.

B. Ideology and Goals:

Creation of a new nationalist authoritarian state not merely based on traditional principles or models.

Organization of some new kind of regulated, multi-class integrated national economic structure capable to some extent of transforming social relations, whether called national syndicalist, national socialist or national corporatist.

The goal of empire or a revolution in the nation's relationship with other powers.

Specific espousal of an idealist, voluntarist creed, normally involving the attempt to realize a new form of modern, self-determined secular culture.

C. Style and Organization:

Emphasis on esthetic structure of meetings, symbols and political choreography,

stressing romantic and/or mystical aspects.

Attempted mass mobilization with militarization of political relationships and style, and with the goal of a mass party militia.

Positive evaluation of- not merely willingness to use - violence.

Extreme stress on the masculine principle and male dominance, while espousing an organic view of society.

Exaltation of youth above all other phases of life, emphasizing the conflict of generations, though within a framework of national unity.

Specific tendency toward an authoritarian, charismatic, personal leadership style of command, whether or not to some degree elective.

C. What was so special about the fascist cult of the nation?

Roger Griffin defined fascism as ‘palingenetic, revolutionary, ultra-nationalist, and populist’. He saw fascism as a movement that preached national rebirth. Yet, others have questioned this assertion by pointing out that nationalist movements have dreamt of ‘rebirth’ since the mid-19th century (see, for example, the Italian word for the movement of national independence - Risorgimento, meaning rebirth and resurgence). In the case of National Socialism, the unique mixture of devotion to the Volk and biological racism (‘Aryan’ ideology) produced a new platform for nationalism. But could it be, as Sternhell has argued, that National Socialism was not ‘fascist’ but a phenomenon of its own precisely because of this unique synthesis of nation and race?

D. Was fascism ‘totalitarian’?

The standard definition of ‘totalitarianism’ by Carl Friedrich contained the following characteristics:

1. An elaborate ideology, consisting of an official body of doctrine covering all vital aspects of man's existence to which everyone living in that society is supposed to adhere, at least passively; this ideology is characteristically focused and projected toward a perfect final state of mankind — that is to say, it contains a chiliastic claim, based upon a radical rejection of the existing society with conquest of the world for the new one.

2. A single mass party typically led by one man, the "dictator," and consisting of a relatively small percentage of the total population (up to 10 percent) of men and women, a hard core of them passionately and unquestioningly dedicated to the ideology and prepared to assist in every way in promoting its general acceptance, such a party being hierarchically, oligarchically organized and typically either superior to, or completely intertwined with, the governmental bureaucracy.

3. A system of terror, whether physical or psychic, effected through party and secret-police control, supporting but also supervising the party for its leaders, and characteristically directed not only against demonstrable "enemies" of the regime, but against more or less arbitrarily selected classes of the population; the terror whether of the secret police or of party-directed social pressure systematically exploits modern science, and more especially scientific psychology.

4. A technologically conditioned, near-complete monopoly of control, in the hands of the party and of the government, of all means of effective mass communication, such as the press, radio, and motion pictures.

5. A similarly technologically conditioned, near-complete monopoly of the effective use of all weapons of armed combat.

6. A central control and direction of the entire economy through the bureaucratic coordination of formerly independent corporate entities, typically including most other associations and group activities.

[\[Link to full reading\]](#)

Yet, while some scholars are willing to talk of ‘totalitarianism’ when it comes to both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany (in addition to Stalinist Soviet Union), others see Italian Fascism as ‘less totalitarian’ and therefore less radical to the other two regimes.

But Emilio Gentile has rejected this assertion. In his opinion, the Fascist regime in Italy had very radical ambitions, even if it did not succeed in realising all of them. He called fascism a form of 'political religion', in the sense that it was a political ideology that sought to supplant all other beliefs and loyalties in order to become a single faith shared by the entire nation. It involved a new charismatic figurehead (Mussolini), a broad church (the Fascist party), and a series of liturgies (party rallies, collective rituals, sacred celebrations, 'chapels' to the 'martyrs' of the Fascist movement etc).



PART 2

ITALIAN FASCISM

Mussolini, the radical socialist of 1912, made a spectacular ideological and political u-turn in 1914 to join the most fervent nationalist forces who pressed for Italy's participation in WW1. By the end of the war he had emerged as the most admired leader of the radical nationalist camp, founding the Fasci and later the Fascist Movement and Party. His spectacular rise was confirmed in October 1922, when (following the 'March on Rome') he was appointed Prime Minister by the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III.

ITALIAN FASCISM

Mussolini and his accomplices during the 'March on Rome' in late October 1922. Mussolini was appointed prime minister on 29-30 October 1922.



The period between the political formation of the fascist movement and the appointment of Mussolini as head of a coalition government in October 1922 was too brief to allow the resolution of ideological ambiguities or even tensions. By 1925, when the Duce ushered Italy into the era of the Fascist dictatorship, fascism had already been arbitrarily associated with disparate trends: a generic reactionary offspring of monopoly capitalism for the Communist International; a new, highly promising system of rule for antiparliamentary elites across the continent; and a source of inspiration for a novel style of politics that could be appropriated by radical movements beyond Italy in search of the same goal of a postliberal transformation. It took Mussolini himself a bit longer to declare a wider relevance for his Italian experiment: in 1929 he spoke of fascism as an “export product” and a few years later (1932) went so far as to claim that the twentieth century would be a truly fascist epoch, just like the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries belonged to liberalism and socialism respectively.

But what did it mean to be a fascist? Unlike socialism in the Bolshevik Soviet Union, there was no Marxian gospel or Leninist scripture from which to draw dogmatic inspiration. Even Mussolini’s attempt to codify the fascist doctrine in 1932 in cooperation with the prominent philosopher Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944) came too late to have a real impact on the formation of the fascist experiment in Italy.

What the Doctrine emphasized, however, was fascism's emphasis on open-ended, heroic collective action for the spiritual regeneration of the nation. This goal was the necessary condition for the realization of Fascist Italy's historic mission: as a "third Rome" (heir to the universalist legacies of the Roman Empire and of Catholicism) the rekindled national spirit would be the harbinger of a global political, socioeconomic, and cultural revolution. The absence of a sacrosanct doctrine was regarded as a blessing, for a fixed ideology could curtail the spontaneity of collective action. Instead, fascism promised an open-ended, "holistic" radical utopia-in-the-making of which the whole nation would be the primary agent and the beneficiary.

The growing idea that Mussolini alone incarnated the fascist doctrine bred an overreliance on the "cult of the Duce" and a consequent monopolization of the movement by him. Mussolini made a series of fundamental choices in the second half of the 1920s that established the broad parameters of the fascist political experiment and provided a more tangible definition of what fascism stood for. The institutional-judicial reforms of Alfredo Rocco (1875–1935)—a prominent nationalist with far more conservative leanings than many early fascists (*fascisti della prima ora*) would have desired—set the foundations for a 'totalitarian' state that would function as the primary vehicle for national mobilization. As a result, the party was formally

placed under the institutional tutelage of the state and of the Duce.

Within less than a decade from Mussolini's appointment in 1922, Italian fascism had been established in the eyes of contemporary observers as a genuine political alternative to both liberalism and socialism; for many in the right, it was indeed the most effective and modern political solution. Mussolini cherished his role as the public face of a new political creed that had been pioneered in Italy: Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) visited; so did the renegade British member of Parliament Oswald Mosley (1896–1980), who immediately afterwards experienced a deep ideological conversion that turned him into the purveyor of fascism in Britain.

BENITO MUSSOLINI: Timeline

- 1883** Benito Mussolini (1883-1945), was born.
- 1906** Mussolini joins the Italian Socialist Party and gradually becomes an important political figure of the revolutionary left
- 1914** Following his support for participation in the war (against the line of the Socialist Party), Mussolini is expelled from the party.
- 1919** Benito Mussolini forms the Fascist movement in Milan Italy.
- 1922** Benito Mussolini (Il Duce) becomes premier of Italy following the 'March on Rome'
- 1922** Mussolini forms a cabinet in Italy.
- 1922** Mussolini marches on Rome.
- 1923** The Fascist Voluntary Militia forms in Italy under Mussolini.
- 1924** Socialist Giacomo Matteotti disappears from Rome and the Italian parliament after speaking against Benito Mussolini and his fascists. His body was found in a shallow grave three days later.
- 1925** Mussolini dissolves Italian parliament/ becomes dictator
- 1934** Dollfuss, Mussolini & Gömbös sign Donau Pact (protocols of Rome)
- 1935** Italy invades Ethiopia; a year later, after victory, the Italian 'empire' is proclaimed
- 1936** Mussolini describes alliance between Italy & Germany as an "axis"
- 1940** In June Mussolini joins Hitler in Germany's war and Italy declares war against France & Britain
- 1943** On 25 July Mussolini is arrested but then freed by German commandos and reinstated in the north of Italy under German tutelage
- 1945** On 29 April Mussolini is captured whilst trying to escape from Italy and hanged by Italian partisans.



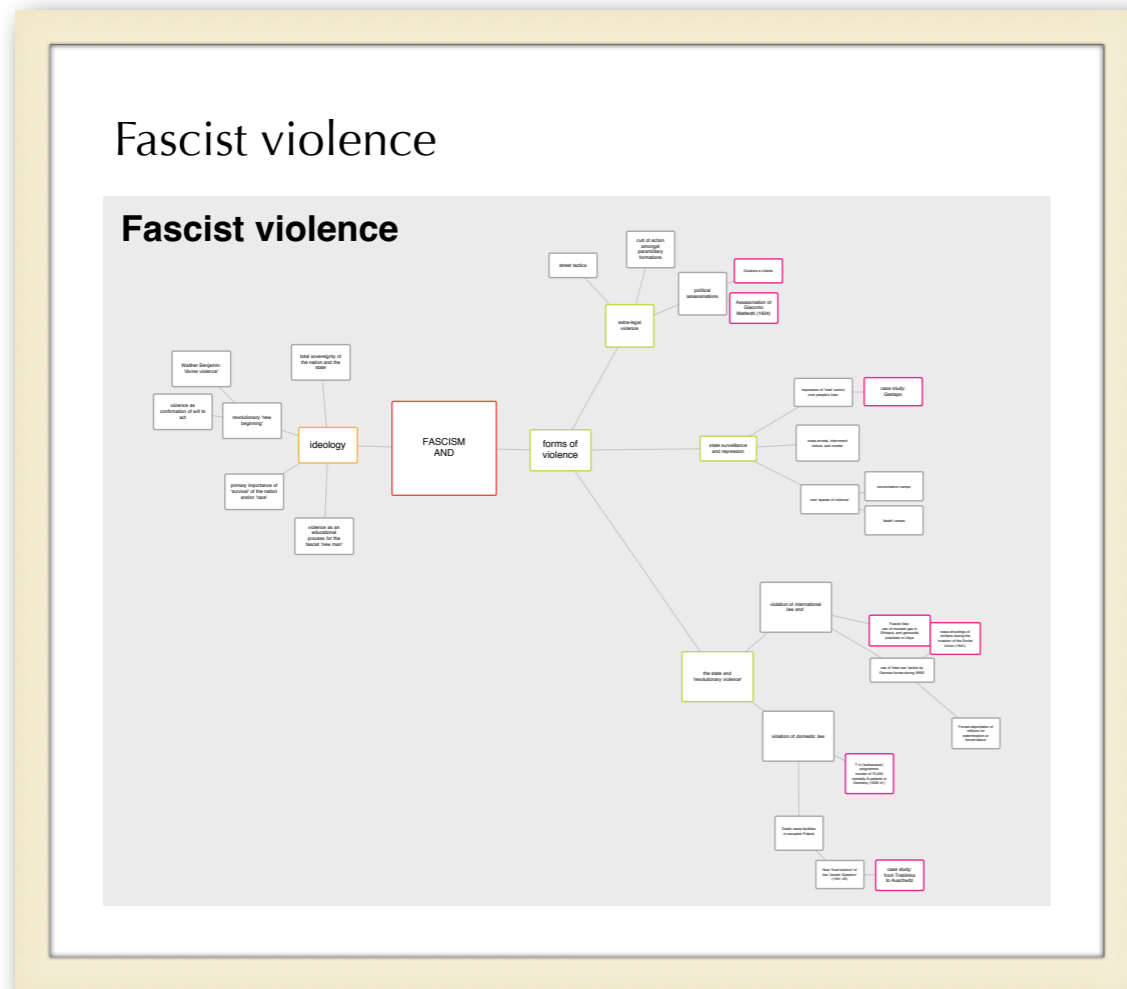
PART 7

FASCIST ITALY AND VIOLENCE

Fascism's relation to violence is multi-faceted. It relates to both ideas and political practice. Violence was part of fascism's political identity from its inception, as a radical anti-system force. But it took different forms in different cases, with Nazi Germany as the most radical.

Even so, Fascist Italy was a supremely violent dictatorship, both domestically and in the conduct of its foreign policy. Ruthless towards its internal opponents, Fascist Italy also engaged in militarism, colonial racism, and mass violence.

THE VIOLENCE OF FASCIST ITALY



PDF version (handout): click [here](#) to view the interactive graph.

Ever since its social formation in the immediate post-WW1 period until its collapse in the spring of 1945 Italian Fascism demonstrated a remarkable and multi-dimensional penchant for violence. As revolutionary political movement – even before its transformation into official party (Partito Nazionale Fascista, 1921) – groups of Fascist activists wreaked havoc in the streets, intimidating political opponents and never shying away from deploying physical violence as a terroristic device. The organisation of the movement as an extra-parliamentary, revolutionary and populist conglomerate of local activist groups directed by powerful regional officials (gerarchi) meant that Fascism acquired a highly visible and aggressive presence in everyday politics – disproportionate to its actual social appeal. Its paramilitary origins – evident in the movement’s first name, Fasci di Combattimento – survived the transition to party-form in 1921 with the creation and streamlining of the ‘militia’ (Milizia Volontaria di Sicurezza Pubblica, MVSP). In the absence of an official state clampdown Fascist gangs grew bolder in their discharge of violence. Fascist parades and demonstrations often provoked clashes with socialist and communist opponents, organised assaults, arson attacks and other forms of terror. Those in the liberal establishment who expected the ‘normalisation’ of the Fascist movement by co-opting them in the electoral lists of 1921

were soon confronted with the endemic and escalating character of Fascist violence. In late October 1922 Mussolini masterminded a bold bid for power by organising the 'March on Rome'. By that time the perception that the PNF was capable of carrying out such a terroristic enterprise against the official Italian state was so widespread that the March itself succeeded in its goal before it had even started. Wild rumours and political panic forced the monarchy and the entire liberal elite to hand over power to the leader of the PNF legally, thereby legitimising a badly organised act of political intimidation.

In 1923-24 the Fascist squadristi intensified their campaign against their opponents, bolstered by the benevolent or passive attitude of the official state authorities, now headed by Mussolini. In the summer of 1924 the kidnapping and assassination of the Socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti sent a twofold message: first, to the entire political elite that Fascist violence was open-ended and unscrupulous; and, second, to Mussolini himself that the real power of Fascism lay in the streets, largely uncontrolled by any political centre and capable of turning against its own 'charismatic' leader if need be. After a profound crisis that threatened to bring the regime to its knees, in January 1925 Mussolini assumed 'full responsibility' for the episode and demolished the last liberal vestiges of the state by declaring dictatorship. From that point onwards he embarked upon constructing a genu-

ine 'totalitarian state' (stato totalitario). At first sight, this move seemed to vindicate the radical activism of the Fascist movement that had been pressing for a 'second wave' of revolution to complete the 1922 March. In reality, however, this process was marked by a rapid appropriation of the movement by the Fascist state. The Mussolinian 'etatism' meant that power, consensus and coercion would be the exclusive privileges of the stato totalitario, in the context of which the previous autonomy of the movement would be gradually strangled. In a highly meaningful move the new Minister of Interior Luigi Federzoni sanctioned the dissolution of the MVSP and their absorption into the official state repressive mechanism.

During the 1925-35 decade the Mussolinian regime trod a delicate and often uncomfortable path between the quest for international respectability and a reality of controlled aggression. The Duce's foreign policy of 'determinant weight' (peso determinante) - inspired by the then Foreign Minister and prominent Fascist gerarca Dino Grandi - rested on the belief that Italy could become a balancing force in European politics, working with the guarantors of the Versailles settlement for peace and stability in the continent. At the same time, however, the Fascist regime sponsored (politically and financially) ideologically kindred and even terroristic groups in a variety of countries - from the NSDAP in Germany to the violent Macedonian (IMRO) and

Croat (Ustasha) ultra-nationalists. The latter were also provided with refuge when the Yugoslav state outlawed them and condemned their leader, Ante Pavelic, to death in absentia. From the Ustasha secret training camps in Italy Pavelic organised two attempts against the life of the Yugoslav king Alexander: while the first (1933) was a dismal failure, the second (October 1945) claimed the life of the monarch and of the French foreign minister Barthou who accompanied him in Marseille. The second part of the conspiracy entailed an internal Ustasha coup against Yugoslavia (one of the main targets of Italian irredentism ever since the end of WW1) but failed, forcing Pavelic and his movement to seek once again refuge in Italy until 1941, when the Axis invasion of the Balkans provided them with a state and the 'licence' to settle accounts with their opponents.

Only three months before the Marseille assassinations Mussolini had adopted a very different course of action vis-à-vis another international incident. The coup organised by the Austrian NSDAP – and with the secret support of the NS regime in Berlin – against Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss resulted in the immediate mobilisation of Italian troops in defence of the Austrian Republic and against the Nazi desire for annexation (Anschluss). The plot failed, although it did claim Dollfuss' life and plunged Europe in its most serious crisis since the signing of the Versailles Treaty. In response, Mussolini played the card of the peso determinante

and became a driving force of an anti-German diplomatic alliance with Britain and France (the so-called 'Stresa front'). But any illusions about the long-term goals of Fascist foreign policy became evident in the second half of 1935, starting with the invasion of Ethiopia. The aggressive colonial venture ushered in a new phase in Fascist foreign policy, marked by a growing willingness to use force, a rapprochement with NS Germany and a desire to tear apart the Versailles status quo. The occupation of Ethiopia in 1936 was followed by the crude intervention in the Spanish Civil War, the Axis alliance with Germany and, finally, Italy's participation in WW2 in June 1940.

In the domestic sphere, the creation of the *stato totalitario* involved a genuine institutionalisation of terror in everyday life. The Fascist regime promoted in tandem policies aiming at generating a broad social support and a system of direct coercion aimed at every form of ostensibly unacceptable dissent. With the suppression of the organised left (parties, trade unions, information networks) and of the liberal opposition Fascist totalitarianism endeavoured to cultivate a culture of social conformity based on consensus or at least passive acceptance. In reality, however, the Fascist project of consensus – reaching its peak during the Ethiopian campaign in the wake of the sanctions imposed on Italy by the League of Nations – proved a chimera confined to the level of intentions. In reality, the culture of conformity usually

bore the marks of grudging submission or of apathy. At the same time, pockets of dissent, both inside Italy and active abroad, continued to operate in opposition to the Fascist regime. They proved relatively successful in tarnishing the illusion of consensus, sometimes coming close to claiming Mussolini's own life. This reality obliged the authorities to adopt systematic measures of surveillance in the interior whilst stamping out international dangerous international opposition wherever possible.

Starting with the appointment of Arturo Bocchini as director of Public Security Police in 1926, the Fascist regime developed a network of public surveillance. The creation of the small but generally effective organisation of the Organisation of Vigilance and Repressions against Anti-fascism (Opera di Vigilanza Repressione dell'Antifascismo, OVRA) in 1927, coupled with wholesale police reforms after 1925 that granted sweeping powers to Bocchini's apparatus, generated a much more potent, centralised and efficient bulwark to individuals and organisations that the regime had defined as "socially dangerous". Through surveillance and ad hoc information, the OVRA held a large selection of personal files for the regime's opponents. Reported cases were dealt with through a system of graded severity – from 'admonition' to 'special surveillance' to 'confinement' and 'internal exile' (usually in remote Italian islands) to formal arrest. Informal agents and spies outnumbered official em-

ployees by up to 6:1. In the absence of reliable figures for

Assassination of Carlo and Nero Roselli (1937)



Brothers Carlo and Nero Roselli were members of the Italian Socialist party prior to the rise of Fascism. Immediately afterwards they fled Italy and continued their fight against the regime, founding the organisation GIUSTIZIA E LIBERTA that acted as a hub of all sorts of anti-Fascist dissenters across Europe. They settled in France. But in 1937 they were both assassinated by members of a French 'fascist' organisation called CAGOULE. Mussolini's involvement in the assassination has not been directly proven but is strongly suspected.

the size of the operation, it is believed that OVRA operated as the central nervous system (50-80 staff) of a much broader web that encompassed the entirety of the regime's police, counter-espionage, militia and party surveillance functions, as well as informal or ad hoc collaborators.

The neurons of this system spanned the entire Italian territory but extended well beyond, with secret spies and agents operating in countries with large concentrations of Italians that hosted prominent figures of anti-fascismo. In

1929 a group of anti-Fascist dissidents escaped from their 'internal exile' at Lipari. From their shelter in Paris the prominent Italian intellectuals Carlo and Nello Rosselli, Gaetano Salvemini, Emilio Lussu and Fausto Nitti set up the clandestine organization *Giustizia e Libertá* (Justice and Liberty, GeL). The goals of GeL was to bring together "republicans, socialists and democrats" in a common national struggle against the Fascist regime, disseminating systematically anti-fascist propaganda in the country, plotting the assassination of Mussolini and generating favourable conditions for an anti-Fascist revolution. Clandestine groups inside Italy – particularly in the north, which had a strong tradition in left-wing militancy – became bolder and underground criticism of the regime grew stronger in the 1930s. However, OVRA proved successful in infiltrating the domestic network of GeL, effectively protecting Mussolini from plots and arresting numerous activists in 1933-35. Then, in June 1937, the Rosselli brothers were assassinated in Bagnoles de l'Orne in France by members of an extreme fascistic French group called *Cagouleurs*, who had been tipped by the OVRA.

Overall, the capacity of the Fascist regime for terror has been largely overshadowed by the brutality of National Socialism in Germany. Even if contemporary research on the operation of the notorious Gestapo (*Geheime Staatspolizei*) has revealed a far less monolithic and effective organiza-

tion than previously thought, any comparison with OVRA in terms of structure, scope, and methods underlines the limits of the Italian Fascist 'totalitarian' experiment in action. The crucial mismatch between the two regimes concerned not just the level of brutality used but also the scope of its perceived opponents. Italian Fascism security policy focused primarily on shielding the regime and its leader from its political opponents, largely identified with left-wing and liberal anti-Fascism. By contrast, the range of targeted 'foes' by the NS authorities went far beyond the circle of political opposition, reaching ethnic/religious minorities (Jews, Sinti/Roma), forms of social behaviour ('asocials' – *asoziale* -, including 'work-shy', homosexuals, alcoholics and other categories of non-conformist behaviour), culture and science. Against the virulently anti-Semitic and aggressive 'bio-political' nature of National Socialism, as well as its escalating use of violence, Italian Fascism appears more conventional in its perceptions of 'threat' and in its methods of repression.

Yet, as mentioned earlier, this comparison has nurtured unduly sympathetic assessments of Mussolini's regime. The radicalisation of Fascist attitudes in the 1930s (and particularly in the second half of the decade) evidenced Fascism's inherent capacity for violence. Without any NS pressure Mussolini encouraged an anti-Jewish campaign, starting in 1934 but gathering momentum in 1936-38 and leading to

the introduction of racial legislation. From the moment that Italy joined the war (June 1940) until the occupation of Italy by NS Germany in 1943 and the creation of the Repubblica Sociale Italiana (Italian Social Republic, RSI), Jews (mostly of foreign origin) were rounded up and interned in more than forty special camps (such as Ferramonti di Tarsia in Calabria) as a measure of discrimination and segregation, not physical elimination. However, during the last two years of the war the Germans – with the complicity of the

Pacification of Libya (1928-32)



Omar Mokhtar, leader of the Senussi tribe, arrested by the Italian forces; he was publicly executed shortly afterwards. Up to 50,000 Senussi died during the years of 'pacification'. In that way the Fascist regime restored Italian control over the colony that it had conquered in 1912.

RSI authorities - extended their 'death industry' to Italy, with thousands of Jews residing in Italy deported to Poland and some killed in newly established camps in the north of the country (e.g. Risiera di San Sabba in Friuli).

If, however, this

different treatment of the Jews revealed the allegedly more

'benign' face of Italian Fascism, the 'pacification' policy in Libya in 1928-32 had showed a fundamentally different one. Mussolini inherited an unstable situation in the Italian colony, where the local population challenged the Italian colonial administration and forced them on the defensive. Starting in 1923 the Fascist regime initiated military campaigns for the restoration of Italian control over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica but was soon forced to fight a difficult and largely ineffective guerilla war against the local Sanusi bands. In 1929 Mussolini dispatched General Rodolfo Graziani with far superior military forces and equipment to 'pacify' the most troublesome pockets of resistance in Cyrenaica. Gradually Graziani turned the operation into a war of attrition aimed at starving the Sanusis and thus forcing them into submission. By cutting off the rebels' supply line with the coast, as well as by slaughtering their animals and destroying the water supply (both crucial for the survival of the local population), Graziani's forces managed to crush the Sanusi resistance by 1932. Many were killed by the Italian troops but many more perished as collateral victims of the indirect genocidal policy adopted by the Italian authorities. The leader of the Sanusi rebellion, Umar Mukhtar, was captured and hanged on Graziani's orders – in a consciously public manner repeatedly employed by the occupiers to demoralise the remaining rebels and force them into submission.

Similar, though not as extreme, methods had been employed in the context of earlier Fascist operations for the 'pacification' of the other east African colonies – Eritrea and Somaliland. But it was during the major colonial campaign in the history of Italian Fascism – the war against Ethiopia (1935-36) – that the regime went even further in its efforts to score a military victory and stamp out dissent. The catalogue of war crimes committed by the Italian military forces under the command of Marshall Pietro Badoglio but later by no other than Graziani is long and well-documented. The Italian troops made extensive use of poisonous mustard gas against their opponents, mistreated prisoners, bombed hospitals, razed villages to the ground, massacred civilians and summarily executed rebels before entering the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa in May 1936. But even after the official declaration of the Italian impero, resistance remained fierce and full Italian control was never fully established in the entire territory before collapsing altogether during WW2.

The dismal record of the Fascist regime in its colonial policies continued with the introduction of an apartheid-style separation regime in Ethiopia with a view to segregating both physically and biologically the indigenous population from the Italian authorities. The experience of managing a colonial empire in Africa rendered the Fascist authorities – and Mussolini personally – more sensitive to matters of

'race', which had previously occupied a very marginal position in the Fascist worldview. In fact, many historians connect the segregationist legislation in Ethiopia with the 1938 racial legislation against the Jews. In spite, however, of grandiose official declarations about the alleged superiority of the Italian stirpe or even extraordinary claims that it belonged to the 'Aryan' race, Fascist racialist policies did not seriously support the NS concept of a 'racial hierarchy' inside Europe. On many occasions during WW2 Italian military and occupation authorities proved unwilling to cooperate with their German partners in enforcing anti-Semitic legislation, arresting and deporting Jews. In Croatia the Italian occupation zone became a refuge for Jews and Serbs viciously targeted by the Ustasha regime and the Wehrmacht. Repeatedly the Italians expressed their dismay at the genocidal practices adopted by Pavelic's followers. In southern France too the Italian zone became a haven for Jews fleeing from the hostile environment of the Nazi-occupied north and the Vichy collaborationist state. All in all, Fascist Italy was happy to deploy terror in dealing with its internal political opponents and violently stamp out dissent, enforce racialist policies in the colonial field and segregate the Jews in its territory (and even then by no means in a consistent manner, as demonstrated by the failure of the Governor of Libya Italo Balbo to implement the 1938 legislation in his colony) but proved decidedly unwilling until 1943 to follow the NS model in population manipulation