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Conference Report

The Fascist Challenge. Networks, Promises for the Future and Cultures of Violence in Europe, 1922 – 1945

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Abstract
This conference report comprises the contributions of European and American specialists in Fascism on the topic of networks, promises for the future and cultures of violence in Europe, 1922–1945. It was concluded that a much more in-depth examination of fascist networks, as well as their learning and acquisition processes is required, especially after 1939 and in the currently under-researched regions of Eastern and Southern-Eastern Europe. Secondly, the concept of a 'New Man' should be applied in more detailed studies on population and educational policies. Thirdly, there is a need to counter the frequently lamented asymmetrical state of research between Italian fascism and National Socialism.

Keywords
Fascism; anti-Semitism; racism; Eastern Europe; South-Eastern Europe; modernity; violence; political religion

In 1922, Benito Mussolini seized power in Italy. Despite the optimistic predictions of leading communists who believed 'that the dictatorship of the fascist chief would perish, but not as a result of its longevity',[1] this event brought about the victory march of fascism as a political movement in Europe. Ninety years after the 'March on Rome', an international conference, entitled 'The

[1] Edmondo Peluso. 'Brief aus Italien, Die ersten Schritte des Diktators, 15.1.1923.' In *Komintern und Faschismus 1920-1940*. Ed. Theo Pirker. Stuttgart, 1965, doc. I/13, 115.

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Fascist Challenge. Networks, Promises for the Future and Cultures of Violence in Europe, 1922 – 1945', was organised by the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich in conjunction with the University of Konstanz (Sven Reichardt) and the LMU Munich (Martin Baumeister). The aim of the conference was to provide an overview of research undertaken to date and to explore new areas of investigation.

By way of introduction, HANS WOLLER (Munich) identified the stages, interpretative controversies, and unexplored avenues in research on fascism, emphasising the currently widely accepted generic notion of fascism. In light of the most recent research, differential criteria frequently used in earlier research, such as racism, anti-Semitism, the willingness to use violence, and totalitarian rule, have increasingly lost their meaning. Potential avenues for exploration may specifically be found in research on transnational networks and transfer processes. Until now, there has been a paucity of research on relationships between fascist movements, including their exchanges and effects, particularly in the case of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. He further argued for a more intensive pan-European interpretation of the fascist notion of the 'New Man' and indicated that a stronger focus on the war period was required, as most research had been concerned predominantly with the origins of fascism, but less so with fascist rule. Woller concluded by stating that the aim should be to counter the 'national fragmentation' of research on fascism.

The first panel focused on developments in debates and comparative research on fascism since the early 1990s. FERNANDO ESPOSITO (Tübingen) talked about the relationship between fascism and modernity. He showed how the concepts of modernisation and fascism used in early research tended to exclude each other analytically, primarily as a result of the contrary normative meanings they had been given. In the 1990s, researchers initially focused on the 'modernising effect' of regimes, resulting in an interpretation of fascism as a response to the 'crisis of modernity', thus providing them with new and presumably more stable patterns of order. According to SVEN REICHARDT (Konstanz), the use of violence was the key instrument for establishing order. Within fascism, consensus and violence were two sides of the same coin, with violence having both a destructive and an ordering function. Reichardt argued that consensus could be reached in a fascist society through eliminating political adversaries, the continuous threat of violence, and implementing 'positive social programmes'. In the commentary and discussion that followed, the question was raised as to what extent indifference or the absence of political opposition could actually be understood as a consensus or whether it would be better to speak of a simulated consensus.

By using the term 'cultural turn' and the concept of civil society, ROBERT O. PAXTON (New York) threw light on two further developments in recent

research on fascism. He referred to the 'cultural turn', which specifically takes into consideration the self-representative dimensions of fascist regimes in the form of rituals, ceremonies, dress, language and myths. This is an important part of research on fascism, but one which nevertheless still cannot explain the success of fascism. Therefore, it should always be used in conjunction with the 'practice of power'. Paxton believed that the concept of civil society is very useful for analysing fascism. Fascism proved to be very successful in regions where civil society institutions had already established themselves as mediators between the state and individuals. Against this background, he identified the need for comparative studies, such as those including youth and professional associations.

MARTIN BAUMEISTER (Munich) traced the development and use of the concept of 'political religion' from Eric Voegelin in the 1930s onwards to Hans Maier, Michael Burleigh, Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch and Emilio Gentile. Due to the problematic definition of the concept of religion, as well as the lack of distance between the fascist 'cult of the Lictor' and Catholicism, critics of this concept have tended to predominate so far. However, Baumeister referred to a recent article on the Franco system as a political religion,[2] which provides support for the view that it may still be useful to examine the interlinking of religion evolving into fascism and the sacralisation of politics.

In his contribution, MAURIZIO BACH (Passau) examined how Max Weber's ideal type of charismatic rule could be used to explain the dynamics of fascist and National Socialist mobilisation. The attribution of charisma to political leaders enabled the propagation of a class-transcending communitisation of fascist society, which in turn led to mass mobilisation. In his commentary, WOLFGANG SCHIEDER (Göttingen) referred to the ambiguity contained within the Weberian notion of charisma and the constructed character of charisma in the case of Hitler and Mussolini. He also pleaded for an investigation of the real type instead of the ideal type.

Mussolini's German visitors and the way in which he held an audience were the topic of the evening lecture presented by WOLFGANG SCHIEDER (Göttingen). Masterfully orchestrated, Mussolini portrayed himself as a teacher of fascism, thus gaining support for its dissemination. However, *Il Duce* also used these meetings and secret talks to apply political pressure and to avoid conventional diplomacy, in his own particular way.

The second panel examined the historical origins of fascist networks, their concentration, structure and scope, as well as the actors in these networks and their exchange processes. In his presentation, HANS WOLLER (Munich) described the significance of Rome as the centre and Mecca for fascist

2) Zira Box and Ismael Saz. Ismael. 'Spanish Fascism as a Political Religion (1931-1941).' *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 12 (2011) 4, 371-389.

movements in Europe. Mussolini did not initially want Italian fascism to be understood as an ideological export product. Nevertheless, during audiences and demonstrations he still displayed the successful architecture of fascism to numerous fascist leaders, such as Oswald Mosley, Anton Mussert and Fürst Starhemberg. An idealised image of fascism and the adoption of rites and symbols may be provided by the 'pilgrims to Rome', but existing research is still unable to present a detailed picture of how such transfer processes occurred in practice. This is mainly the result of disparity between sources. The rise of a National Socialist Germany resulted in a second centre of power, but failed to replace Rome as a key location for learning about fascism. The latent rivalry between Rome and Berlin led to conflicts of loyalty in other fascist movements and ultimately to the failure of any attempt to institutionalise a 'fascist International'. The attempt to establish such an International was addressed in more detail in the paper given by TOBIAS HOF (Munich). The Action Committees for the Universality of Rome (*Comitato d'Azione Universalità di Roma* (*CAUR*)) were established in Rome in the summer of 1933, with the aim of promoting the idea of an International to fascist organisations abroad. In the following year, the first conference took place in Montreux, Switzerland, although the German representatives did not attend. A key point of contention at the conference was the National Socialist theory of race. Due to the preparations for the Italo-Abyssinian War and decreasing levels of support among leading fascist players, the project was finally put to rest *ad acta*. Through the proclamation of the Rome-Berlin Axis, *Il Duce* confirmed his ultimate preference, being bilateral cooperation.

MACGREGOR KNOX (London) highlighted Italy's support and political instrumentalisation of ethno-nationalistic terrorism. Mussolini hoped for an easy conquest of states such as Yugoslavia, due to their internal destabilisation. In Knox's view, the most significant event of terrorism-endorsing politics was the assassination of Yugoslav King Alexander I by the Croatian Revolutionary Movement, the *Ustaša*, in 1934. Due to the lack of military strength of the Italian *Forze Armate*, however, Mussolini's hope of gaining the upper hand through orchestrating and encouraging national conflicts remained unfulfilled.

TRAIAN SANDU (Paris) spoke about the role played by Romania in fascist networks. In particular, he highlighted the importance of the *Action Française* in establishing the Legion of the Archangel Michael (1927) in Romania and pointed to its waning influence in the 1930s. In addition, direct contact between representatives of the Iron Guard (such as with those from Italy and Germany) was quite weak, being confined to a small, elitist circle. Sandu emphasised that on the one hand, the ideological proximity of the regimes acted as a fertile ground for cooperation. However, he also showed that this alliance did not

provide a secure shield against the interests of fascist states stemming from their political realism on the other hand.

In the commentary that followed, CHRISTOPH CORNELIßEN (Frankfurt) once again underlined the relatively late discovery of the history of such exchange processes and the subsequent need for further research in this area.

The theme of the third panel was the bio-political vision of the 'New Man', as well as the significance of racism and leader cults within different types of fascism. Supported by numerous illustrations, ROGER GRIFFIN (Oxford) showed participants the self-presentation of fascist leaders and referred to various stereotypical image projections. The propaganda positioned the charismatic leader, as one who would lead his devotees into a glorious future, at the heart of a political religion. DIETER POHL (Klagenfurt) then raised questions about the historical place of typically fascist ideologies about the enemy, since anti-communist, anti-Semitic and racist ideas were also prevalent in non-fascist societies. He showed that fascism played a key role in all three convictions. Anti-communism was widely accepted, even if its various manifestations in practice still remain under-researched to date. Anti-Semitism was also generally approved in many fascist movements. During WWII, there was even an attempt, orchestrated by Germany, to 'create a pan-European anti-Semitism' through the establishment of numerous institutions. Although biological racism predominantly took hold in Germany, its spread within Italy remained limited due to the influence of the Catholic Church. According to Pohl, this illustrates that specific ideologies about the enemy were largely subject to national cultures. He indicated that future research should also include a focus on eugenic networks.

In his contribution, PATRICK BERNHARD (Freiburg) examined the vision and specific social technologies for the creation of a 'New Man' within Italian fascism and how it was received or in some case adopted in National Socialist Germany. He argued that Italian measures, such as the settlement of selected persons in conquered colonies, mothers' relief work (*Mütterhilfswerk*), and various mobilisation campaigns, exerted a significant influence on those in power in Germany. The National Socialists copied several Italian initiatives, resulting in competition and renewed distancing between fascists and National Socialists. Bernard argued that the ultimate outcome of this development was an increased radicalisation of both systems.

The question as to whether or not a new fascist type of woman had emerged in Italy or Germany was examined by PETRA TERHOEVEN (Göttingen). She argued that there had been no new concept of woman, neither north nor south of the Alps. Women had still been politically marginalised in Italy, despite the cult surrounding fascist fighter Ines Donati, who had died at a young age, and the female students at the fascist girl's academy in Orvieto.

Moreover, the women's organisation *Fasci femminili* also remained under the ultimate authority of men. Although women had, in line with propaganda, more flexibility within National Socialism, for example, as settlement assistants or Gau Women's Association Leaders (*Gaufrauenschaftsleiterinnen*), the aim was never one of emancipation in terms of equal opportunities. Referring to an increase in professional activity by women under Italian fascism, the question was raised during the discussion as to whether or not such a view was rather one-sided.

In his commentary, CHRISTOF DIPPER (Darmstadt) underlined the biopolitical vision shared by many researchers at the end of the 19th century, as being able to influence the future through a 'transformation' (*Umgestaltung*) of humanity. Yet Dipper pointed out that such a transformation failed to capture the idea of an 'anthropological revolution' (E. Gentile). In the roundtable that followed, MAGNUS BRECHTKEN (Munich), ARND BAUERKÄMPER (Berlin), PATRIZIA DOGLIANI (Bologna), ULRICH HERBERT (Freiburg) and DIETER POHL (Klagenfurt) also discussed the potential for creating a 'New Man' and the hope of being able to form a homogenised society. Bauerkämper noted that research to date has limited itself too much to the history of ideas. Herbert expressed some doubts about the application of the concept of a 'New Man' and questioned the effectiveness of re-education. In any case, a more general consensus also emerged in the discussion, in that future research should focus more on both attempts, as well as specific steps at applying the concept within the context of population and educational policies. Several discussants suggested that biographical group studies be undertaken, so as to assess the extent to which young people, who had been affected by fascism, had actually internalised its ideas and their potential impact post-1945.

The final panel highlighted another under-researched topic, namely the significance of the war for fascism. In his presentation, THOMAS SCHLEMMER (Munich) examined the question of whether or not there had been a fascist war. He made clear that the war had rarely been a topic in the fascism debates that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, even if it seems that fascism would have been inconceivable without WWI and WWII. He identified civil war, colonial and *Lebensraum* war, racism, and totality, as the structural features of fascist war. However, military encounters not only served to conquer new *Lebensraum*, but also produced a 'New Man' in the shape of a warrior. After discussing the structural features of fascist war, Schlemmer presented its developmental characteristics and underlined that even if the National Socialist war had its roots in fascist war, it still moved beyond this because of its aims and praxis. In his conclusion, he pointed to the need for further research on learning and acquisition processes after 1939 and the 'Axis' coalition war.

CONSTANTIN IORDACHI (Budapest) provided a comparative examination of the fascist movements in Romania (Legion of the Archangel Michael),

Hungary (Arrow Cross) and Croatia (the Croatian Revolutionary Movement, the *Ustaša*), and commented on both similarities and differences. All three movements had the radical transformation of society as their objective, were anti-Semitic and upheld the infallibility of their respective '*Führer*' Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Ferenc Szalasi, and Ante Pavelic. Yet while the Arrow Cross propagated the creation of a pan-Hungarian empire and the *Ustaša* wanted to establish an independent Croatian state, the Legion in Romania advocated for the expulsion of ethnic minorities from influential positions. Iordachi criticised the frequent marginalisation of these movements as puppet governments and argued strongly for their inclusion in future comparative studies as actors with their own political agendas.

The contribution by H. JAMES BURGWYN (Philadelphia) considered the representations of Italian *spazio vitale* and German *Lebensraum* in the Balkans. The Italians attempted to claim the Balkan region as *Lebensraum* for their empire and hoped to be able to defend the area against the German 'desire for expansion to the South-East' (*Drang nach Südosten*). Whereas the Italians initially wished to 'Italianise' the region through cultural dominance, the German soldiers acted from the start with great brutality against the 'racially inferior' population. Due to the level of resistance encountered, the Italians increased their approach of repression and detention of the civil population. In summary, Burgwyn argued that the war crimes of the Italians in the Balkans – aside from the killing of Jews and the mass execution of hostages – were comparable to those of the Germans.

The presentation by AMEDEO OSTI GUERRAZZI (Rome) focused on the possible reasons for the brutality of the fighters in the fascist Social Republic of Salò (RSI), founded in 1943, as well as the objectives of their struggle. In order to eradicate the humiliation of betrayal towards the German Empire, their fights were sometimes more extreme and brutal than those of the Germans against the partisans and civilians, whom they accused of treason, particularly following the fall of Rome in the summer of 1944. The 'Nazi-fascist Italians' overcame their nationalism and viewed those Italians who had not joined the RSI as their main enemies. Under a swastika banner, they fought for the creation of a 'New Order'. Osti raised concerns about the lack of knowledge that still exists with respect to the actual number of massacres committed by the Italians.

WENDY LOWER (Munich) criticised the paucity of research on the involvement of women in the Holocaust. Through several case studies, she highlighted the level of involvement of German female perpetrators in the conquered regions in the East. Their direct or indirect participation in the crimes against Jews and other victims of National Socialist politics of assassination often had an ideological basis. However, it also occurred as a conscious transgression of gender roles. In his subsequent commentary, ARND BAUERKÄMPER

(Berlin) raised the issue of the reaction by men to female participation in such crimes.

Three main challenges for future research arose from the presentations, discussion and commentaries. First of all, a much more in-depth examination of fascist networks, as well as their learning and acquisition processes is required, especially after 1939 and in the currently under-researched regions of Eastern and Southern-Eastern Europe. Secondly, the concept of a 'New Man' should be applied in more detailed studies on population and educational policies. Thirdly, there is a need to counter the frequently lamented asymmetrical state of research between Italian fascism and National Socialism, through a more intensive investigation of the unexplored avenues referred to by the presenters. It is only by filling these empirical gaps that we can hope to find more insightful answers to outstanding questions on the nature and impact of fascism.

Conference overview:

Thursday, 28 June 2012

Thomas Schlemmer (Munich), Hans Woller (Munich): Welcome and introduction

Panel 1 – Debates and Research on Fascism since 1990 (*Faschismusdebatte und Faschismusforschung seit 1990*)

Chair: Christof Dipper (Darmstadt)

Fernando Esposito (Tübingen): Fascism and Modernity. From Excluded Other to Paradigm (*Faschismus und Moderne. Vom ausgeschlossenen Anderen zum Paradigma*)

Sven Reichardt (Konstanz): Fascism, Consensus and Violence (*Konsens und Gewalt im Faschismus*)

Robert O. Paxton (New York): Fascism, Culture and Civil Society

Martin Baumeister (Munich): Fascism as a 'Political Religion' (*Faschismus als 'politische Religion'*)

Maurizio Bach (Passau): Charisma and Fascism. Fascism from a Social Sciences Perspective (*Charisma und Faschismus. Der Faschismus in sozialwissenschaftlicher Perspektive*)

Wolfgang Schieder (Göttingen): Commentary

Evening lecture

Wolfgang Schieder (Göttingen): The Spell of Fascism. National Socialist Cadres in Audience with Mussolini, 1931 until 1945 (*Faszination Faschismus. Nationalsozialistische Führungskader in Audienz bei Mussolini, 1931 bis 1945*)

Friday, 29 June 2012

Panel 2 – Transfers between Affinity and Difference. The Scope, Concentration and Sustainability of Fascist Networks (*Transfer zwischen Affinität und Differenz. Reichweite, Dichte und Tragfähigkeit faschistischer Netzwerke*)
Chair: Sybille Steinbacher (Vienna)
Hans Woller (Munich): Rome as a Place to Learn about the Fascist Model (*Rom als Lernort*)
MacGregor Knox (London): Mussolini and Ethno-Nationalist Terrorism. The Quest for Results
Tobias Hof (Munich): From the Fascist 'International' to the Proclamation of the 'Axis' (*Von der faschistischen 'Internationale' zur Proklamation der 'Achse'*)
Traian Sandu (Paris): The Romanian Case. The Iron Guard as Part of the Fascist Network
Christoph Cornelißen (Frankfurt): Commentary
Panel 3 – Power and Future. Bio-political Visions, Racism and Leader Cult (*Herrschaft und Zukunft. Biopolitische Visionen, Rassismus und Führerkult*)
Chair: Margit Szöllösi-Janze (Munich)
Roger Griffin (Oxford): The Fascist Leader – Representation and Cult
Dieter Pohl (Klagenfurt): Nationalism, Racism, Anti-Semitism. The Relationship between Model, Transfer and Tradition (*Nationalismus, Rassismus, Antisemitismus. Zum Verhältnis von Vorbild, Transfer und Tradition*)
Patrick Bernhard (Freiburg): The 'New Man'. Discourse and Political Practice (*Der 'neue Mensch'. Diskurs und politische Praxis*)
Petra Terhoeven (Göttingen): The 'New Woman' between Anti-Feminism and Fascist Promises of Emancipation (*Die 'neue Frau' zwischen Antifeminismus und faschistischer Emanzipationsverheißung*)
Christof Dipper (Darmstadt): Commentary
Roundtable
Anthropological Revolution and Totalitarian Rule. Possibilities and Limitations of Historical Comparisons (*Anthropologische Revolution und totalitäre Herrschaft. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des historischen Vergleichs*)
Chair: Magnus Brechtken (Munich)
Discussants: Arnd Bauerkämper (Berlin), Patrizia Dogliani (Bologna), Ulrich Herbert (Freiburg), Dieter Pohl (Klagenfurt)

Saturday, 30 June 2012

Panel 4 – 'New Men' and 'New Wars' (*'Neue Menschen' und 'neue Kriege'*)
Chair: MacGregor Knox (London)

Thomas Schlemmer (Munich): Was there such a Thing as a Fascist War? (*Gab es einen faschistischen Krieg?*)

Constantin Iordachi (Budapest): Fascism in South-Eastern Europe. Romania's Legion of the Archangel Michael, Croatia's *Ustaša*, and Hungary's Arrow Cross

H. James Burgwyn (Philadelphia): Fascism and Imperialism. Italian *spazio vitale* and German *Lebensraum* in the Balkans

Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi (Rome): Collaboration and Conviction. Fascists as Mercenaries and Crusaders

Wendy Lower (Munich): Female Fascists as Holocaust Accomplices and Perpetrators

Arnd Bauerkämper (Berlin): Commentary