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**The Invention of Fascist Governmentality:
How Italy challenged the Liberal International Order, 1925-1943**

A while back I wrote a piece for *Zócalo Public Square* to chafe at the misuse of the term fascism in U.S. political debate. My main point was that in its classic form globally between the world wars, the critiques, social inventions, and accomplishments of the regimes that eventually pivoted around the Axis were taken very seriously as signaling some third way between Soviet Bolshevism and American capitalism; they were regarded as responses, if not necessarily legitimate, to the breakdown of the liberal international order; only the most facile, usually conservative, observers regarded them as products of mass angst, the Big Lie, or contemptible strong men. I also argued that the forces of anti-fascism offered no concerted alternative until 1941 or so. Anti-fascist fronts were only fleetingly in power (in Republican Spain and France in 1935-1937). And between the Battle of Guadalajara (March, 1937) in the second year of the Spanish Civil War, when the Italian fascist expeditionary force was routed with the help of volunteer international brigades and the Battle of Stalingrad when the Soviet Army annihilated Germany's Sixth Army (August 1942-February 1943) the anti-fascist front failed to win any major victories on the battlefield.

That argument seemed to resonate with readers. But it left me conscience-wracked and curious whether I could make a compelling narrative to support my argument, with so many moving parts, such a complex historiography, and the risk of sounding like an apologist.

It is one thing for the current brilliant scholarship of the international liberal order of the early twentieth century to criticize the failings of the Versailles order, including the arrogant Woodrow Wilson and the equivocation of the United States over whether it should be a pillar of the new global order or a free rider. It is another to plumb the writings and speeches of the Anti-Versailles world, Mussolini in the lead, to argue that the Axis had a point, trying to organize an anti-Versailles/U.S./USSR coalition, pivoting around the rising new powers of the world, Italy, Germany, and Japan, with their respective spheres of influence in the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, and East Asia. And if needs be to ally in that effort with anti-colonial movements. It seems relatively straightforward to underscore how Wilsonianism drew on American history to offer universalist principles about national and individual rights. It is harder to accept, say, that Fascist Italy sought to legitimate its claims for the redistribution of global colonial resources in the name of international equity and justice or that the European New Order founded its legitimacy in the long history of European empires, whose most stable moment may have been the Pax Romana and most enduring institutional underpinning, the Church-State nexus.

Of course, my argument about the meaningfulness of fascism as a key to understanding the crisis of the early twentieth century liberal order was hardly novel. At least since the 1930s, leading social scientists had been attracted to the study of fascism precisely because it presented itself as a new political phenomenon and the only effective alternative to socialistic reforms, or, worse, bolshevism. Practically all observers worked from the premise that the interwar regimes arose in reaction to Europe's decline as a region of great power, and that some of the most calamitous dimensions of that reaction, whether in the form of scorched-earth war-making, anti-Semitic pogroms, Catholic crusaderism, mercantilist blockades, and absolutist rule recapitulated moments of the past. I think of the German-Jewish Leipziger

in British exile, Sigmund Neuman, who in his 1946 *The Future in Perspective* compared the Thirty Years War of early twentieth century, 1915=1945, during which Europe was faced with the decline of the modern Europe state system as the center of global power with the Thirty Years crisis of the 17th century and the rise of the modern European state system. There is the Swedish political economist Eli Heckscher picking up on the continental-wide recrudescence of mercantilist thinking, in English, first in his article "Mercantilism" in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, then in his two volumes of 1935 (the original Swedish was from 1931). I think of the fascinating work of Alphonse Dupront, *Le Mythe de croisade*, based on his legendary thesis (1957) on crusaderism as a recurrent European phenomenon. I think of more familiar, Karl Polanyi, the Hungarian-born economic anthropologist on *The Great Transformation*, who saw fascist corporatism and mercantilist policies as an element of the broad 20th century reaction pivoting around the state to the fragmentation of civil society by market forces.

What interests me in all of these works is that they saw fascist normative principles, ideas, and practices as reconnecting ideationally and materially with the European past. This deep history is significant, not merely as history of ideas of Europe; it is a reflection of "rival views of market," (Hirschman) of the friable bedrock of the European cape, of the constant friction between British liberal and continental physiocratic traditions of capitalism (as in Harvard economic historian Sophus Reinert's remarkable recent work), of the accretions of imperial projects for the region, which, even down to the present, are underestimated, in light of the emphasis on the nation-state and nationalism as the normal order of things.

I have been particularly stimulated by a certain vein of critical and comparative international history that sees the great challenges that emerged for non-imperial nation-states coming out of World War I (I think here of Adam Tooze's *The Wages of Destruction*). We see that particularly in the realm of how they are going to manage their relative scarce resources in the face of the challenges presented by the Versailles system, a more and more mercantilist global economy, with rising nationalism, closing off markets and emigration, together with the growing importance of new models of imperial organization that prized higher and higher productivity, more and more protected and monopolistic market organization, higher standards of living, and of economic and ideological integration through shared ways of consumption.

If we map the challenges the U.S., the British abiding hegemony, and the USSR present together to smaller continental European states, let's say Italy, for that is the subject at hand, we see the difficult choices any ruling elite would have had to have faced in the wake of World War I.

Leave aside for a moment the sheer devastation of World War I. In the United States, Italy could see an enormous new economic power, grown hugely by the war, and a creditor state, an empire in all but name, a model of industrialism which prized the so-called new Fordist man, white, decently waged, and ununionized, a giant pretty much closed market, and an emigration policy which, after several decades of welcoming Italian emigrants mostly at the lowest levels of the labor value chain, had started to exclude them, even as Italian emigration once more soared. Not only, its exclusion reaffirmed that Italian emigrants indeed belonged at the bottom of the race scale. Moreover, it needed U.S. capital, if it was to stabilize, much less grow, it had to stay a low wage area, which meant it continued to drive workers abroad.

In the British empire, fascist Italy would see a selfish, off and on senior partner, who when the going was good, during the era of late 19th century free trade era, was happy to have Italy as a junior partner in the Horn of Africa. But in the post-war world in the name of Western liberal white hegemony, with the backing of U.S., had dismissed Italy's claims to colonies for settlement and to show that Italy had a civilizing mission

of its, reinforcing its own superior claims in the influence it wielded in the League of Nations and mandate system.

Finally, there was the Soviet Union, pushed back behind its borders by containment, yet still the model of a new workers' civilization, and as it emulated Fordism, embarked on agricultural reform, and the planned economy, with a giant population, big domestic market, hemming in Christian Europe with its aggressive world revolutionism, materialist ideology, and Judeo-Bolshevik conspiratorial politics.

In my current effort to understand how a relatively small state actor could be so disruptive, especially as it formed an axis with two other emerging hegemony, Germany and Japan and a swathe of weaker ones, I can't avoid reassessing Benito Mussolini as a political entrepreneur-statesman: past leader of revolutionary socialism, an internationalist, a professional journalist and hugely successful newspaper editor (both for the Socialists and the Fascists) and a master golpista, who used his power as duce and dictator and his reputation as a quick study to mobilize expertise. As the one eminent mentor, the great liberal jurist Vittorio Scialoja commented: "Distinctly intelligent, he doesn't always get it, but when he does, he really does," adding the downside, that he "lacks a sense of economy, politics, and justice!"

Trying to sketch the resources Mussolini draws on to advance Italy as a rising hegemony in the face of the Versailles order, I have established a periodization that would date the invention of "fascist governmentality" roughly from October 28, 1925, the celebration of the 3rd anniversary of the March on Rome, at Milan, when he gave his first programmatic statement about his rule since he declared his dictatorship in the previous 10 months to, roughly 1928, when he has developed his new powers so significantly that he can think of his rule not only in the traditional form of governance, based on repressing and reformulating the traditions of representation of the people arising with the French revolution, which means as well, subordinating the fascist movement's party-militia to the state apparatus, but in terms of governing the population as a resource, in keeping with older mercantilist traditions of the body politic.

I have been developing the notion of "fascist governmentality" in the light of a couple of concerns: One is to contest the conventional use of the term totalitarian for Italy, but also for any regime, Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, The People's Republic of China. When Mussolini famously spoke the words "Our formula is this: everything in the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the state," in the speech referred to above, at Milan, October 28, 1925, he was not speaking of limitless power, as in conventional liberal notions of totalitarianism, (the submergence of the masses in the leader, and vice versa) but of a specific kind of state, not the expression of narrow bourgeois class interest, nor using only the power of the state apparatus, conventionally understood, nor one party rule. He recalls the power mobilized to fight a total war, meaning "the competition of peoples in the arena of world civilization persists." That recalls wartime government, but he moves beyond that, though not yet with a new institutional vocabulary. His rule, he says near the end is not "a change of cabinet," but a whole new "political regime," not a "Fascist government, in the sense that is the party of deputies," but a new conception of power that "takes what is most vital from every program, and (employs) the force to put it into effect."

"Fascist governmentality" underscores the wide range of means mobilized by interwar authoritarian rule—through the conventional state apparatus, party-militias, media and means of communication, alliances with religious bodies, and international alliance systems to advance hegemonic pretensions. Some of them were original social inventions; all played along with trends of the times and could be found in some measure elsewhere: In Italy, Mussolini mobilized a wide range of resources: Italy's geopolitical position, history, population, labor force, capital. He tapped into Italy's past: political theory, the First and

Second Rome, Italian humanism, its mercantilist traditions, Catholicism. In sum, he mobilized ideational and material means the liberal regime could not mobilize, for various reasons, including its class base and biases, its divisions, its secularism, the available technologies, its self-definition, etc. —in the realm of force, as well as in the realm of persuasion, in the realm of hard and soft power to advance the fascist agenda.

In earlier work, I was mindful of how much Mussolini was drawn to the population question. And that seemed to point to Michel Foucault's 1978-79 work on biopolitics. In reality, I became interested from another direction, to realize that at the very moment that Mussolini was cracking down on opposition parliament, representation through trade unions, he was cracking down on the pretensions of his own party for monopoly on representation, he, in effect, changed the conversation from the idea of the people (and their rights to legitimate their sovereign, the legacy of the French Revolution, the source of liberal politics, socialism, and early fascism) to the idea of the population, drawing on the mercantilist traditions of absolutist rule. At the point in his speeches and writings in 1928, he refers to the Piedmontese Jesuit Giuseppe Botero, as the founder of *raison d'état*, but also as one of his authorities on the subject of growing the population, I was reminded of Foucault's 1977-1978 lectures at the Collège de France, "Territory, Security, and Population" (which are perhaps less well-known than the 1978-1979 ones). In the former, he had started to develop his genealogy of changing traditions of European statecraft to understand the emergence of the welfare state, (État Providence) as a new form of "governmentality"—his term. There is a lot that is tentative and obscure there. What struck me, however, was that reflecting on fascist rule—and Mussolini's ambitions to turn Italy into an empire (the only other alternative in the European state system would be that it becomes a colony, he said) was to mobilize the power of Italy's population—its numbers, its vigor, especially if the gender system was completely overhauled to create New Men and New Women, its urban traditions, its deep imperial-colonial roots in Rome and the Mediterranean, the cradle of Western civilization. Foucault plays with the contrast between Machiavelli and the limited concept of power wielded by the Prince—to get the people's consent and protect his borders from invasion (*sûreté*) of Greco-Roman tradition, and that of the absolute monarch, who worries over the circulation of capital, complexity of towns, reproduction of people, and control over the territory (*sécurité*) he identifies with Botero and the Judeo-Christian tradition of pastoralism. That is what he calls governmentality.

Anyway, I found the notion generative enough to want to speak of a specific form of fascist governmentality. This presents itself radically anti-liberal, it makes claims based on the rights of the nation as a biological people. It measures up global hierarchies on the basis of race; it assesses claims to resources internally on the basis of value in reproduction and production; it taps into religious, political, and political economic atavisms, to Europe as a crusading people, Europe as a horde to legitimate its wars. claiming Italy's primacy to defend white races of Europe, going deep with historical reference to revive mercantilist tradition, and pastoral relationship of absolutist monarchy with the population.

From that premise, I have been reflecting on fascist Italy as a rising hegemon: what are the national resources he could invent/mobilize? What are the public goods he could claim to offer a world in crisis? What were the issues/flaws of the global system he could exploit?

To respond to the first question, I see fascist governmentality completely versed and immersed in western traditions of political rule. Tapping into the best and brightest of the nation's elites (with all due attention to the biases and losses to anti-fascism), Mussolini develops an integral imperialism that has multiple dimensions: to reclaim 2500 years of Greek, Etruscan, and Roman colonialism as models; to ally the Catholic Church to its own vision of universal empire, in its role as protector of the new state of the

Vatican and by aligning itself with the Church's own counterreformation against modernism; to undertake vast projects of domestic colonization, involving security operations against brigands and mafia, land reclamation, and the foundation of scores of New towns; to promote ethnographic imperialism, mobilizing politically the Italian diaspora of 9 million or so people; to build a commercial trade empire, backing Italian capital in the Balkans and subsidizing ship construction and air transport investment to make Italy a major hub of transatlantic and trans-Suez traffic; to constantly challenge the principles and substance of the Versailles colonial settlement, international legal principles, and mandate system, while working out a project of hegemony that extended through Mediterranean Europe and contemplated a vast Italian sphere of influence in EuroAfrica that would connect Italy's conquest of Libya to its colonies in the Horn of Africa, and be rounded in 1935-1936 with the conquest of the Empire of Ethiopia. This had fascist Italy building up a giant voluntary militia force, alongside of the regular military establishment, to project military might and at war for all but two years of the two plus decades it was in power.

Social inventions are generally considered a hallmark of rising hegemonies. From reading some of the leading social scientists studying fascism from the interwar period, we might include the following, aside from the mass party-militia, anti-liberal population politics without negative eugenics; integral colonialism, clerico-fascism (in the sense of aligning the State with the Church's counterreformation) corporatism, fascist warfare (1935-1936), the Axis, and perhaps the very notion of the European New Order.

Nazi Germany is the elephant in the room here. Down to 1936, Fascist Italy was the mover and shaker. Mussolini invented the term "Axis" And both regimes contributed to reconfiguring Europe as a New Holy Roman Empire. However, since Rome, the Italian peninsula had never figured as the home base of European empire, it had always ended up in fragments, pieces hived off, subordinated to a succession of other empires. And so it ended up by the end of 1943, the south under Allied military occupation, the north, the richest of the vassal states of the Nazi Fortress Europe.