

Hard power and soft power in the reality and the  
memory of Mussolini's Italy

*Hard power e soft power* na realidade e na  
memória da Itália de Mussolini

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*HARD POWER E SOFT POWER  
NA REALIDADE E NA  
MEMÓRIA DA ITÁLIA DE  
MUSSOLINI*

Este artigo explora o complexo legado do regime de Benito Mussolini em Itália, centrando-se na interação entre hard power e soft power ao longo da sua ascensão e queda. Nomeado primeiro-ministro em 1922, Mussolini rapidamente estabeleceu uma ditadura marcada pela repressão violenta, nomeadamente após o assassinato do deputado socialista Giacomo Matteotti em 1924. O seu governo culminou numa desastrosa aliança com a Alemanha nazi durante a Segunda Guerra Mundial, que levou à sua destituição em 1943 e à sua subsequente captura e execução pelos combatentes da Resistência em 1945. O artigo investiga o percurso póstumo de Mussolini, revelando como os seus restos mortais se tornaram um ponto de discórdia e de comemoração entre os apoiantes do fascismo italiano. A narrativa destaca a natureza multifacetada da sociedade italiana durante e após a guerra, dividida entre apoiantes do nazi-fascismo, membros da Resistência e a maioria indiferente. São também discutidas as implicações da ideologia de Mussolini – fascismo, totalitarismo e corporativismo – e a sua ressonância contemporânea. Examina criticamente a utilização incorreta do termo “fascismo” no discurso político moderno, estabelecendo paralelos entre o legado de Mussolini e os líderes atuais, como Donald Trump e Vladimir Putin. Em última análise, sublinha o impacto duradouro do regime de Mussolini na identidade italiana e as complexidades da sua memória nos contextos históricos e atuais.

**Palavras-chave:** Mussolini; Fascismo; Memória; Legado; Extrema-direita.

*HARD POWER AND SOFT  
POWER IN THE REALITY  
AND THE MEMORY OF  
MUSSOLINI'S ITALY*

This article explores the complex legacy of Benito Mussolini's regime in Italy, focusing on the interplay of hard and soft power throughout its rise and fall. Named Prime Minister in 1922, Mussolini soon established an oppressive dictatorial regime, especially after the assassination of the socialist MP Giacomo Matteotti in 1924. His rule culminated in a disastrous alliance with Nazi Germany during the Second World War, leading to his ousting in 1943 and subsequent capture and execution by resistance fighters in 1945. The paper looks at Mussolini's posthumous journey and reveals how his remains have become a point of contention and commemoration among the loyalists of the Italian Fascist regime. The narrative highlights the multifaceted nature of Italian society during and after the war, divided between Nazi-fascist supporters, members of the Resistance, and the indifferent majority. It also discusses the implications of Mussolini's ideology – fascism, totalitarianism, and corporatism – and their resonance today. It critically examines the misuse of the term “fascism” in modern political discourse, drawing parallels between Mussolini's legacy and current leaders such as Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. Ultimately, it highlights the enduring impact of Mussolini's regime on Italian identity and the complexity of its memory in both historical and modern contexts.

**Keywords:** Mussolini; Fascism; Memory; Legacy; Far Right.

*HARD POWER ET SOFT POWER  
DANS LA RÉALITÉ ET LA  
MÉMOIRE DE L'ITALIE DE  
MUSSOLINI*

Cet article explore l'héritage complexe du régime de Benito Mussolini en Italie, en se concentrant sur l'interaction entre le hard power et le soft power tout au long de son ascension et de sa chute. Nommé Premier ministre en 1922, Mussolini a rapidement établi une dictature marquée par une répression violente, notamment à la suite de l'assassinat du député socialiste Giacomo Matteotti en 1924. Son règne a culminé avec une alliance désastreuse avec l'Allemagne nazie pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale qui a conduit à son éviction en 1943, puis à sa capture et à son exécution par des résistants en 1945. L'article se penche sur le parcours posthume de Mussolini, révélant comment sa dépouille est devenue un point de discorde et de commémoration parmi les partisans du fascisme italien. Le récit met en lumière les multiples facettes de la société italienne pendant et après la guerre, divisée entre les partisans du nazisme-fascisme, les résistants et la majorité indifférente. Il examine également les implications de l'idéologie de Mussolini - fascisme, totalitarisme et corporatisme - et leur résonance contemporaine. Il étudie de manière critique l'utilisation abusive du terme « fascisme » dans le discours politique moderne, en établissant des parallèles entre l'héritage de Mussolini et les dirigeants actuels tels que Donald Trump et Vladimir Poutine. Enfin, il souligne l'impact durable du régime de Mussolini sur l'identité italienne et les complexités de sa mémoire dans les contextes historiques et modernes.

**Mots-clés :** Mussolini ; Fascisme ; Mémoire ; Héritage ; Extrême droite.

Benito Mussolini was appointed Prime Minister of Italy by King Victor Emmanuel III on 30 October 1922. His regime soon back-dated itself by a couple of days, proclaiming the Fascist 'March on Rome' had brought 'revolution' to Italy on 28 October. On 3 January 1925 Mussolini spoke decisively to the Chamber of Deputies refusing to apologise for his followers' violence.<sup>1</sup> It had been especially manifested in the kidnapping and murder of the moderate socialist deputy, Giacomo Matteotti, seized from the streets of Rome on 10 June 1924. That oration and the repression of opposition press and persons which directly followed it are generally accepted as the moment when the *Duce* or *DUCE* (Leader) as he was now always known, became a fully-fledged dictator.<sup>2</sup> Mussolini held office until 25 July 1943 when, given the disasters of Italy's Second World War, entered on the Nazi German side on the ill-omened date of 10 June 1940, he was dismissed by the King and then arrested.

However, on 8 September 1943, Victor Emmanuel and his new Prime Minister, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, bungled their attempt to get out of the war, fleeing south to avoid capture by the vengeful Germans invading Italy from the north. On 12 September, the Austro-German *SS-Obersturmbannführer* (lieutenant colonel) in the *Waffen-SS*, Otto Skorzeny, rescued the *Duce* from his latest imprisonment in the Apennine mountains east of Rome and escorted him to refuge in Germany. Thereafter, Mussolini was restored to rule across that northern segment of Italy controlled by the Germans in the humiliating role of puppet dictator. By November 1943 this last version of Fascism was given a legal basis as the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (Italian Social Republic), with its ineffective ministries scattered around the territories technically under its control. In common parlance, the RSI took the name of the 'Salò Republic', derived from the small town beside Lago di Garda near where Mussolini and his surviving family resided.<sup>3</sup> Italy became the site of vicious conflict, whether between the Germans and the slowly advancing Allies or among Italians themselves in a version of civil war. The Italian people split three ways. There were those who either from fanatical devotion to Nazism or a hard-line patriotism, disgusted that the King and Badoglio had betrayed their nation by signing an armistice with the Allies, fought for a 'Nazi-fascist' R.S.I. There were those who assembled in the 'Resistance', determined to achieve their freedom in parallel with the Allies. Committed to communism or socialism or republicanism or Catholic or liberal democracy or monarchy, they were often uneasy bedfellows. They were certainly so after 1945. Finally, the majority of Italians, the *attendisti*, tried to wait out the bloody events that assailed their everyday lives and leave the detail of their country's political system to the future.

The war was lost. On 27 April 1945 Mussolini was apprehended by the Resistance at a village on Lake Como. He was wearing a German uniform, indeed a Nazi-fascist as he endeavoured confusedly to locate asylum north of Milan. The next day he was shot

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<sup>1</sup> Benito Mussolini, *Opera omnia* ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, (Florence: 1951-63), Vol XXI, pp. 235-241. This is part of the first 36 volume edition of Mussolini's works, 1951-1963. It was later amplified by a further eight volumes, published by Giovanni Volpe Editore, Rome, 1978-1980.

<sup>2</sup> For an opposed view, see the work by the major current Italian historian of the Fascist regime, Emilio Gentile, *E fu subito regime: il Fascismo e la Marcia su Roma* (Rome: Laterza, 2012). He and I rarely agree on our interpretations of the past and the present.

<sup>3</sup> By now, perhaps prompted by Italy possessing in Giorgia Meloni a Prime Minister who had been a teenage neo-fascist, the museum at Salò has opened a wing on the R.S.I. See <https://museodisalo.it/> (accessed 11 August 2024)

by communist partisans. His corpse, that of his last lover, Claretta Petacci,<sup>4</sup> and those of his key followers, after being abused by a vengeful crowd, were hung derisively upside down in Piazzale Loreto, a suburban square near Milan railway station.

The story was not quite over. Initially, Mussolini had been buried anonymously in the Musocco cemetery. From there, on Easter Sunday 1946, he was exhumed by a Fascist loyalist, Domenico Leccisi and some associates.<sup>5</sup> Thereafter, while Italy was convulsed by a referendum on the monarchy (on 2 June it resulted in a narrow and, in some places, disputed vote for a Republic), the corpse was successfully hidden. It was only discovered on 11 August, crammed into a box in the beautiful Certosa di Pavia. It was minus bits that had fallen off when the *Duce's* remains were pushed over the wall at Musocco. Earlier some brain slivers had been removed by American medical psychologists, troubled by how anyone could oppose their world views.

Mussolini was now buried again, this time in the Capuchin chapel at Cerro Maggiore, outside Milan. But, in 1957, with the prompt of a family connection – the latest Christian Democrat Prime Minister, Adone Zoli, sprang from the lands around Mussolini's birthplace, Predappio – the *Duce* was transferred to the family tomb at the San Cassiano cemetery just out of the *paese*. Mussolini's widow, Rachele, who did not die until 30 October 1979, presided over this re-assertion of family piety. Predappio and San Cassiano were destined to remain sites of pilgrimage and reverent memory for those Italians who have continued to admire the *Duce* and reject the findings of Anti-Fascist historiography.<sup>6</sup> By now the burial site is amplified at the nearby Villa Carpena,<sup>7</sup> an estate developed by Rachele and Romano Mussolini (1929-2006), the youngest child of her marriage, who, somewhat oddly for a Fascist, built a post-war career as a jazz pianist. Two of Romano's daughters, the half-sisters, Alessandra and Rachele, have kept Mussolini commemoration alive in a familial sense over the last decades of Italian political history.

So much, then, for Mussolini the man and a simple biography.<sup>8</sup> But, in understanding the myth and memory of Italian Fascism,<sup>9</sup> it is necessary to probe more than the single figure of the dictator, however crucial he remains in any recollection of his regime. Three words need introduction and analysis: fascism, totalitarianism and corporatism

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<sup>4</sup> For account of their relationship, with telling evidence about the confusions and contradictions of the ageing *Duce*, see R.J.B. Bosworth, *Claretta: Mussolini's last lover* (London: Yale University Press, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> For a splendid account of the journeying of the corpse, see Sergio Luzzatto, *Il corpo del Duce: un cadavere tra immaginazione, storia e memoria* (Turin: Einaudi, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> For a careful report on this view of Fascism, see Paul Corner, *Mussolini in myth and memory* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.casadeircordi.it/> (accessed 11 August 2024).

<sup>8</sup> In Italian there is still much detail to be enjoyed in the more than 6000 pp. and unfinished 'biography' compiled by Renzo De Felice from the 1960s to the 1990s: *Mussolini* (8 vols.), (Turin: Einaudi, 1965-1997). However, it is more a top-down account of the regime and its antecedents than a personal biography. In English, cf. R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (rev. ed.) (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) and, most recently, Peter J. Williamson, *Duce: the contradictions of power: the political leadership of Benito Mussolini* ((London: M. Hurst, 2023), which is a study of political theory and so not a personal story. For my own parallel works focusing more on the regime than on its leader, see R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: life under the dictatorship 1915-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2005) and *Mussolini and the eclipse of Italian Fascism: from dictatorship to populism* (London: Yale University Press, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> I shall always call it Capital F- Fascism and not small f- fascism. The latter will signify attempts to give the word generic meaning.

(or corporativism). The first two originated in Italian and have spread into every language as proof of the *Duce's* 'soft power'. Somewhere in the medley, the words nationalism and racism need exploration, too.

I shall start with fascism. In 2024 it is a word of promiscuous everyday, or rather every minute, use. When I began writing this article in August 2024, Sheikh Hasina was being hunted out from two decades' authoritarian rule in Bangladesh. Her opponents were soon on the web confidently asserting that she had been a fascist.<sup>10</sup> In the United States, the garrulous and strenuously non-academic Donald Trump has not eschewed suggestions of personal dictatorship, even while he carelessly charges Kamala Harris with being both a fascist and a communist, words which mean little from his mouth except truly awful.<sup>11</sup> In turn, he has been labelled a fascist by his academic critics.<sup>12</sup> His sometime advisor, Steve Bannon, has not hidden his 'fascination' with Mussolini although, more intellectual than his boss, he derides loose use of the words fascism and populism.<sup>13</sup> From his left, so serious a historian of the regime as Ruth Ben-Ghiat has written a popular account of dictators, which starts with Mussolini but is designed inevitably to end with Trump.<sup>14</sup> She steers away from getting bogged down in the massive and fruitless definitional debates about F/fascism, instead gleefully depicting the sexist lubricity of many dictators (ignoring the fact that the democratic American politicians, John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton, might win gold medals in that field).

Vladimir Putin is also often called a fascist, although sometimes the charge is more focused on his supporters.<sup>15</sup> In an article in the *New York Times* two years ago, Timothy Snyder, the eminent American historian of the 'Bloodlands', those territories of Eastern and Central Europe which were so brutally devastated in the 'long Second World War',<sup>16</sup> argued that Putin was indeed a fascist.<sup>17</sup> The word is especially freighted in that part of the world given that the USSR fought its 'Great Patriotic War' against 'fascism' (фашист) for reasons that I shall discuss below, even though Nazism was the actual invader and

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.quora.com/Is-Bangladesh-under-the-rule-of-Hasina-a-classic-example-of-fascism> (accessed 11 August 2024).

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/aug/17/trump-pennsylvania-rally> (accessed 18 August 2024).

<sup>12</sup> For an intelligent reckoning, see <https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/why-we-cant-stop-arguing-about-whether-trump-is-a-fascist> (accessed 11 August 2024). For my own account of the debate in its earlier days, see R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini and the eclipse of Italian Fascism*, pp. 9-31. In my home study I have from 2016 a cartoon image of Trump dressed in a Fascist uniform and wearing a helmet as Mussolini was most often portrayed in the latter years of his regime. Trump is labelled '*Il Douche*'.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/steve-bannon-mussolini-fascination-populist-facist-donald-trump-us-a8259621.html> (accessed 17 August 2024).

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Strongmen: how they rise, why they succeed, how they fall* (London: Profile, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Robert Horvath, *Putin's Fascists: Ruskii Obraz and the politics of managed nationalism in Russia* (London: Routledge, 2021). In fact, given their radical racism, they sound more like Nazis than Italian Fascists, at least during the first decade of the regime. Another neologism, *Ruscism*, has also surfaced in pro-Ukrainian circles, merging the words racism and fascism. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/22/magazine/ruscism-ukraine-russia-war.html> (accessed 20 August 2024).

<sup>16</sup> For this concept, see R.J.B. Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima: history writing and the Second World War, 1945-1990* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/19/opinion/russia-fascism-ukraine-putin.html> (accessed 13 August 2024); cf. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

most directly responsible for tens of millions of deaths among the peoples of all the Russias. In calling Putin a fascist, Snyder was linking the Russian leader and his invasion of Ukraine to the Second World War and giving scholarly backing to the common view that the current enemies of the West are as evil and needing to be totally opposed as were Germany and its allies after 1939. It is therefore easy to find websites claiming that Iran is governed by fascists or neo-fascists.<sup>18</sup> In Snyder's mind, and by now ubiquitously, Fascism, or rather fascism, has merged with Nazism, always to be bent on genocide.

The other members of what George H.W. Bush labelled the 'Axis of Evil' (thereby again evoking the history of the good and the bad in the Second World War), are still grouped as the enemies of the 'West'. North Korea and China are much more likely to be damned as totalitarian than fascist, but still carry echo from Mussolini's regime. Paradoxically, Putin alleges that Zelensky and his associates in the Ukraine are deeply penetrated by 'Nazism', with that word predominating over occasional Russian accusations that the Ukrainians are soft on fascism.<sup>19</sup>

From where did this word, F/fascism, of current use and over-use, come? On 23 March 1919, the Milanese ex-socialist but, from October 1914, interventionist journalist, Benito Mussolini, summoned a diverse but pro-war group of 120 men (nine women joined them) to a meeting at a building on the Piazza del San Sepolcro in central Milan. It had been lent for the occasion by the Jewish and Masonic businessman, Cesare Goldmann (1858-1937). Mussolini there founded what he called the '*Fasci di combattimento*', which might be roughly translated as Returned Servicemen's Group. The word *fascio* (plural *fasci*) evoked memory of the *fasces* of classical Rome, in a country where such appeal was frequent across the political spectrum. Such eternal *romanità* (Roman-ness) had its most grandiloquent expression in the Monument to Victor Emmanuel II, first king of Italy, sometimes derided as the *monumentissimo*. It had been built beneath the Roman Capitol and was inaugurated during the fiftieth anniversary of the new 'Liberal' Italian nation state in June 1911.

Before 1914, the most notable adoption of the term *fascio* had been by socialistoid peasants in 1890s Sicily campaigning against the authoritarian rule of Sicilian Liberal and nationalist Prime Minister (and later Fascist hero), Francesco Crispi. But, in 1919, one careful historian has identified sixteen organisations that were using the term across a range of causes.<sup>20</sup> The two most obvious progenitors of the *fasci di combattimento* were the *Fasci d'Azione rivoluzionaria*, a grouping of intellectuals and journalists, including Mussolini, who, from January 1915, demanded Italian entry into the war, and the *fascio parlamentare di difesa nazionale*, who, in 1917-8, worked for national recovery after the defeat at Caporetto, while demanding a global acknowledgement of Italian national greatness.

The story of the Fascists in Italy became better organised and disciplined on 9 November 1921 when Mussolini returned to command of the movement after a well-judged resignation from its quarrelling ranks. He now established the *Partito*

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<sup>18</sup> See <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/post-fascism-and-the-islamic-republic-of-iran/> (accessed 13 August 2024).

<sup>19</sup> See <https://tass.com/politics/1681165> (accessed 13 August 2024).

<sup>20</sup> See R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy*, pp. 121-2.

*Nazionale Fascista* or National Fascist Party. Its secretaries, after 1922, were the men most directly given the task of imposing the *Duce's* rule and so Fascism on their country.

The *Fasci di combattimento* had begun with radical-sounding programmes, republican, not monarchist, anti-clerical and so hostile to papal power in Rome and Italy, and syndicalist, that is, with a pro-war variety of socialism that remained opposed to a capitalist bourgeoisie keeping its wealth and social and political power untouched. Gradually, however, these ideas were rejected or qualified and, by 1922, the ideology behind the March on Rome had dwindled to a populist nationalism plus a set of negatives rejecting Marxist socialism and what was viewed as Liberal softness and corruption.

Soon, however, a new word, 'totalitarian', entered the vocabulary and asserted itself as the fundamental definition of the dictatorship. In a speech at La Scala, Milan, on the third anniversary of the March on Rome, 28 October 1925, Mussolini proclaimed that he led a nation where 'our formula is the following: everything in the State, nothing outside the State and nothing and no-one against the State'. Fascism, he added, was no longer merely a 'Government' but was installed as a 'regime' in every *paese* across the nation.<sup>21</sup> True to his claim, since January, his officials had begun creating a 'totalitarian' state where only one Party, the Fascist, survived, where there was only one Trade Union, the Fascist one, and free thinking must be superseded by the Fascist idea. Opposition to such principles was tracked by active and ruthless secret police who were not limited by the safeguards of Liberal law. Capital punishment, which had been ended in Italy in 1889, was now restored to menace all Anti-Fascists.<sup>22</sup> However, the head of this organisation, a man who surveyed the regime's rule with Mussolini every day, was a career bureaucrat, Arturo Bocchini. His deepest beliefs were scarcely ideological. He often seemed as pleased to patrol Fascist dissidents (in-fighting in the P.N.F. never ceased) as Anti-Fascists.

*Totalitario* was a neologism, literally meaning, with either iron simplicity or silly boasting, 'totally total'. It had been coined by the patriotic, liberal-democrat, Anti-Fascist and parliamentarian from Salerno, Giovanni Amendola, early in 1923. He sharpened the meaning over the next months, by autumn that year applying it to a regime which intended to control the future and was determined to inculcate a single credo.<sup>23</sup> But he did not live to see its full practice; a vicious Fascist beating in Tuscany in 1925 led to his death in exile at Cannes on 7 April 1926.

The word was destined to spread well beyond its origins in Southern Italy, during the 1950s guiding Cold War historians and political scientists who accused Hitler and Stalin and soon Mao of being much the same as each other, all the total enemies of freedom and the capitalist 'West'. That is how the word survives today. The web assures us that, currently, Turkmenistan, North Korea, Afghanistan, and Eritrea are totalitarian states, while China tends that way.<sup>24</sup> In Western discourse, it is usually North Korea, with its

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<sup>21</sup> Benito Mussolini, *Opera omnia* Vol.XXI, pp. 422-7.

<sup>22</sup> For the classic account of the building of the totalitarian state, see Alberto Acquarone, *L'organizzazione dello stato totalitario* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965).

<sup>23</sup> See R.J.B. Bosworth, *Politics, murder and love in an Italian family: the Amendolas in an age of totalitarianisms* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 86-7.

<sup>24</sup> See <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/totalitarian-countries> (accessed 13 August 2024).

alarming access to atomic weapons, that, under its idiosyncratic communist monarchy, is seen as the most outright and threatening case of totalitarianism.

Italy does not get treated as a particularly significant in such analyses. In the 1950s, those who built lasting models of the meaning of totalitarianism rarely focused on its first origins in Mussolini's regime.<sup>25</sup> With some paradox, historians of Italy, by contrast, have continued to divide over the character of the totalitarian state and its society under Mussolini. Some depict a regime which all but fully controlled the most intimate aspects of Italians' personal lives and largely succeeded in its boasted purpose and violent practice<sup>26</sup> to make the words 'Fascist' and 'Italian' identical in meaning. Another group of historians, by contrast, has detected vast changes in the regime over time, as well as many variations and limitations in how Italians experienced Fascism. I am very much of this persuasion, convinced that there were huge gaps between theory and practice in a country where, even in Rome, two other monarchs, the doubtless timid and repressed King Victor Emmanuel III (but supplemented by a numerous and publicity-conscious royal family) and the assertively authoritarian Pope Pius XI, until his death on 10 February 1939, contested the primacy of Mussolini's charisma and purpose. Moreover, such massive forces as class and gender difference, regional, local and family loyalties, and a continuing deep belief that politicians' words and legal systems never altogether meant what they said continued as strands of Italian history in the *longue durée*. They were only partially infringed by everyday Fascism.<sup>27</sup> Within Italy, Mussolini's hard power always had actual limits.

Paul Corner, an Anti-Fascist historian of English background but living and working in Italy, has underlined the variability of support for the regime across time. In his view, Fascism had already lost maximum backing well before its invasion of Ethiopia and the resultant lurch towards the sometimes contentious alliance with Nazi Germany and a version of Fascism which was meant to be harsher and certainly was more populist. Corner and others have also noted the continuing divisions among leading Fascists over what their time in power should best entail. Mussolini himself, Corner emphasises, 'oscillated between irritation and indecisiveness on many of the questions relating to factionalism'.<sup>28</sup>

Recent work has also exposed the corruption that was engrained in the dictatorship's practice. The high life of Party bosses frequently ensured that ordinary Italians did not allow their minds to be taken over by Fascism.<sup>29</sup> *Confino*, that is, relegation to some poor paese in the South, meant to be the severe and didactic punishment for those who transgressed Fascist verities and treated by some historians as a classic case of 'ordinary violence',<sup>30</sup> was scarcely met with popular surrender. Rather, families reacted as families might, regularly appealing to their social higher-ups, be they from the Church or royal

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<sup>25</sup> For background, see R.J.B. Bosworth, *The Italian dictatorship: problems and perspectives in the interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 55-7.

<sup>26</sup> For a recent and, in my view, exaggerated account of this kind, see John Foot, *Blood and power: the rise and fall of Italian Fascism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> In this regard, see especially R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini and the eclipse of Italian Fascism*.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Corner, *The Fascist Party and popular opinion in Mussolini's Italy* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 125.

<sup>29</sup> For example, see Paolo Giovannini and Marco Palla (eds), *Il fascismo dalle mani sporche. Dittatura, corruzione, affarismo* (Rome: Laterza, 2019)

<sup>30</sup> See Michael Ebner, *Ordinary violence in Mussolini's Italy* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

family, friendly Fascists or Mussolini and his own wife and children. Moreover, punishment, except for the most sturdily intransigent Anti-Fascists, was often conditioned by amnesties. They were formally prompted by what propaganda at that moment was maintaining to be some great regime triumph. Yet they reinforced a deep belief that words, in Fascist Italy, never possessed a simple and militant meaning. *Furbi* (smarties) could always hope to re-define them, and thus Fascism as it impacted their lives in their own interest.

Before examining Racism and Fascist empire, and Corporatism and the Fascist style welfare state, I shall briefly reflect on the meaning of Anti-Fascist. Earlier in this paper, I noted that the Soviets fought their Second World War against 'fascism', not Nazism. In the Marxist political dictionary, fascism was the senior term.

Mussolini, when young, was a prominent socialist, by 1912 elevated to the editorship of his party's national daily paper, *Avanti!* However, in October 1914, he deserted his own family history – his father, Alessandro, had been a socialist, renowned in his home region of the Romagna. By his change of track in October 1914 to favour his nation's war entry, Benito Mussolini marked himself as a traitor to his party and its ideals, what in my native Australia is evocatively called a 'rat'. This betrayal of socialism was expanded during the process of Mussolini's seizure of power when 3000 Italians, two-thirds of them Anti-Fascists, in majority from what had become the nation's three rival socialist parties, were murdered by Fascist 'squadristi' (similar urban or provincial killings occurred through the restive early post-war years in many European countries).

It might be noted that, as Emilio Gentile has shown, Mussolini and Lenin more than once displayed their intellectuality in not totally hostile rhetorical battles with each other.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, long after the Russian chief's death, Mussolini, in his own private thoughts, never completely forgot his youthful hostility towards, and envy of, the 'bourgeoisie'. Already in 1931, in the unlikely setting of Naples, he had announced: "in so far as domestic policy is concerned, our order of the day is this: "Go decisively towards the people"<sup>32</sup> By the later 1930s, his ever more populist regime, locked ever more irrevocably into alliance with the Nazis,<sup>33</sup> devoted much propaganda to damning soft bourgeois habits. The credibility of this half evocation of social revolution was fretted by the evident greed of most Fascist chiefs. Similarly, at the regime's summit, while Rachele kept to being a woman of the people, Mussolini's son-in-law, Minister of Foreign Affairs and seeming potential successor, the chubby Galeazzo Ciano, preferred golf to more militant forms of exercise. The *Duce's* last lover, Claretta Petacci, daughter of the Pope's doctor, wore Paris perfume and fashions rather than more local and humdrum products.

Ignoring such potential complexity in the regime's revolutionary practice, the March on Rome was greeted by conservative observers as a glorious victory against socialism, a triumph over what Winston Churchill labelled 'the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism'. Even after Hitler had become German Chancellor, Churchill was willing to salute Mussolini's 'incarnate genius'. He thereby demonstrated how the conservative world accepted that a dictator like the *Duce* was no bad ruler for a people as wayward as

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<sup>31</sup> Emilio Gentile, *Mussolini contro Lenin* (Rome: Laterza, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Benito Mussolini, *Opera omnia* vol. XXV, pp. 48-51.

<sup>33</sup> For a fuller exploration of these themes, see R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini and the eclipse of Italian Fascism*.

the Italians were believed to be. His 'Fascism' did not threaten their ideal of the world order. It was Italian and not global in nature.<sup>34</sup> As Robert Vansittart, Permanent Under-Secretary at the British Foreign Office, stated in July 1933: 'Fascism has never represented the least danger to this country'.<sup>35</sup> More reactionary politicians, like Engelbert Dollfuss in Austria (murdered by local Nazis on 25 July 1934 – a day which also carried its omens) or Gyula Gömbös in Hungary (who, admiring Mussolini's strong reaction to the Dollfuss killing, thought that he should be nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize),<sup>36</sup> were glad to find international shelter as friends of Italy, as was King Zog of Albania (until 1939). Soon, the glare of Nazism, the greater wealth and reputation of Germany, that is, Germany's hard power, began to obscure and eclipse Fascism's soft power in the process that was to culminate in the ever weaker Italy becoming Germany's 'ignoble second' in World War II, a parody reiteration of the relationship between Imperial Germany and Austria-Hungary in World War I.

After 1922, Fascists were always ready to speechify against Marxism, and Marxists knew that Fascism was the last and most violent embodiment of wicked bourgeois rule: 'the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist element of finance capital'.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, when it came to hard and not soft power, Italy and the U.S.S.R. pursued realistic policies towards each other certainly until the Ethiopian war and almost up to the Nazi invasion on 22 June 1941, about which the Italians were not informed beforehand but which they dutifully petitioned to join. Deep into the 1930s, the Italians were cheerfully selling military products to the U.S.S.R. and exchanging expert information on navies and poison gas.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, Marxist theory did list 'fascism' as the workers' most evil enemy and ideology therefore ensuring that 'fascism' became the enemy that the Soviets had to defeat after 1941.

With some short-term paradox, it was in the liberal democratic world that brutal invasion of Ethiopia made the greatest difference, abruptly ending parliamentary conservative admiration for Fascism, and reviving and extending an Anti-Fascist alliance that could unite communists, socialists and liberals. Anthony Eden, the liberal Tory from December 1935 to February 1938 in charge of Britain's foreign policy, decided that Mussolini was a cad and a bully, a 'complete gangster whose word meant nothing', perhaps even the 'Anti-Christ'.<sup>39</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, a feminist journalist from the famous radical family in the U.K., led public opinion elevating Haile-Selassie to sublime virtue in contrast to the Fascist regime's murderous and illegal use of poison gas during (and after) its invasion. Later, her son, Richard, who made a post-war career in Addis Ababa, curiously became a major inventor of the Ethiopian nation through works which treated

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<sup>34</sup> See Rosaria Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino: la politica estera fascista dal 1931 al 1940* (Rome: Bonacci, 1980), p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Vansittart papers, 7 July. 1933 (Public Record Office, London).

<sup>36</sup> R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini and the eclipse of Italian Fascism*, p. 177.

<sup>37</sup> Palmiro Togliatti, *Lectures on Fascism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), p. xii. The discerning leader of the Italian Communist Party also claimed that Fascist ideology was a 'chameleon', cynically designed to bind rival elements in the movement together (p. 10).

<sup>38</sup> See J. Calvitt Clarke III, *Russia and Italy against Hitler: the Bolshevik-Fascist rapprochement of the 1930s* (Westport Conn., Greenwood Press, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini and the eclipse of Italian Fascism*, pp. 188-190.

Haile Selassie's state as though it had a past as long as time itself. His histories also presented a united nation and not a complex empire, while continuing to portray the invasion of Ethiopia as the 'first aggression' of the fascism that was to be defeated in World War II.<sup>40</sup>

In our current world, a generic Anti-Fascism, with little or no reference to Italy, has flourished ever more mightily, notably in the United States. It is called 'Antifa', the loss of the last five letters reflecting the confused meaning of fascism in our days. In its turn, the Antifa movement has been contested by rightist forces who are likely in 2024 to favour the return to the White House of Donald Trump.<sup>41</sup> Maybe the loud disputes about contemporary fascism and Anti-Fascism have prompted filmmaker, Joe Wright, to make a 'serial biopic' on Mussolini as the 'Son of the Century'. Wright promises to encourage his audiences to be seduced by the *Duce's* demagogic skills and only gradually to perceive that they are becoming supporters of violence and murder. Wright's work is due to be premiered at the Venice Film Festival this September. Whether its promise to 'dunk the viewer straight into the bath of blood, sweat and male testosterone that gave rise to the cult around the man his followers called *Il Duce*' will amount to serious historical analysis remains to be seen.<sup>42</sup>

What has been established in this paper so far is the way that the words, Fascism and Anti-Fascism, have not died with Mussolini's execution in 1945 but are very much alive and well in current political debates, some serious, some direly superficial. Let me now deal with the issues of war and racism more purposefully than I have so far managed. The most simplistic view of F/fascism is that it is and was perpetually warmongering (and deeply racist) As one popular historian has recently put it: 'Italy went to war repeatedly in the 1920s and 1930s'.<sup>43</sup>

Should the decades be thus merged? There is no doubt that, from the attack on Ethiopia in October 1935, Italy did move from one aggression to the next. In July 1936, Mussolini sent Fascist arms and men to assist General Franco's Catholic, militarist and Spanish-style fascist (Falangist) side in the bloody Spanish Civil War. On Good Friday 1939, Italy invaded Albania and hunted out King Zog who, for a decade, had been Fascism's loyalish client there. It then annexed the country to what was now called Victor Emmanuel III's empire, although Italy's actual rule involved much compromise with the segment of the country's ruling elite willing to collaborate with their new rulers. There was certainly no German-style genocide planned or achieved there.<sup>44</sup> Finally, if with nine

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<sup>40</sup> There are many examples, but see Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1998); Sylvia Pankhurst: *artist, crusader: and intimate portrait* (New York: Paddington Press, 1979). Sylvia Pankhurst, *Ethiopia: a cultural history* (Woodford Green: Lalibela House, 1955).

<sup>41</sup> For introduction, see Mark Bray, *Antifa: the Anti-Fascist handbook* (Hoboken NJ: Melville House Publishing, 2017) and, in response, Natasha and Jason Devine, *The Compleat Anti-Antifa Handbook* (Morrisville NC: Lulu press, 2020).

<sup>42</sup> For some introduction, see <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/17/atonement-director-joe-wright-on-his-new-mussolini-biopic-m-son-of-the-century#:~:text=Interview-,I%20want%20the%20audience%20to%20be%20seduced'%3A%20Joe,Wright%20on%20his%20Mussolini%20biopic&text=He%20built%20up%20violent%20paramilitary,country%20into%20a%20bloody%20war.> (accessed 18 August 2024).

<sup>43</sup> Keith Lowe, *Naples 1944 and the making of Post-War Italy*, (London: William Collins, 2024), p. 172.

<sup>44</sup> For more detail, see R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini and the eclipse of Italian Fascism*, pp. 202-5.

months delay, on 10 June 1940 Italy did join the Nazi side and followed it into the later conflicts with the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. in what had duly become World War II.

This record might indeed seem a tale of constant war-making and it is true that, from start to finish, the regime's propaganda stentoriously praised war as man's proper and best calling. Yet some qualifications are needed. Doubtless the aggressions were clustered. But Liberal Italy had made aggressive war in 1866 against Habsburg Austria (it lost but was rewarded with Venice and the Venetia because its Prussian allies won). In 1870, it attacked the Pope in Rome and overthrew his lingering temporal power. In the late 1880s and 1890s leading to the defeat at Adua on 1 March 1896, it invaded Ethiopia and sought to expand its small (aggressively occupied) empire in Eritrea and Somalia. In 1911 it assaulted the Turkish provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, initially without bothering to declare war, and there established the colony of 'Libya', the name, with Liberal *romanità*, resuscitated from classical times. Finally, on 24 May 1915, Liberal Italy initiated hostilities with Austria-Hungary (waiting until August 1916 to add Imperial Germany to its enemies). In its thereby idiosyncratic First World War, the Italians suffered 750 000 military and civilian deaths, 50% more than those who died in the Fascist war of 1940-5. In sum, while Italy survived as the 'least of the Great Powers', all its wars were begun aggressively. In these circumstances, it is legitimate to ask whether Fascism made much difference to Italian behaviour in world politics.

What of the 1920s and the charge that Mussolini was then always at war? Here it is time to reflect on Fascist empire and the racism that, by 1938, had turned into vicious and legally pervasive Anti-Semitism. It is already plain that *The Economist*, major journal of practical liberalism, was not unusual when it greeted the regime's lavish celebration of its tenth year in office, its *Decennale*, with the praise that Mussolini had made Italy 'a steadying influence in the bedlam world' of the present.<sup>45</sup> Yet the regime had engaged in plenty of military action during its first decade, not in Europe of course, but in its empire. Imperial war was waged in Libya, only feebly won before 1914, largely lost during the European war, and then regained with much brutality through the 1920s (a beginning went back to the months, February to October 1922, when Giovanni Amendola was Minister for Colonies).

When I wrote the first edition of my biography of Mussolini, I made plain that the dictatorship had been responsible for the premature deaths of a million men, women and children.<sup>46</sup> It is a horrific figure, although far less than the casualties of Nazism, Russian or Chinese communism and not so much more than the toll of various liberal democratic imperialisms. Half a million of the tally are composed by Italian civilians and soldiers killed during the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, with an unknown number of the victims of Italian arms needing to be added. But the other 500 000 were slain in the various parts of the Italian Empire, Libya, and what from 1935 to 1941 became *Africa Orientale Italiana* (Italian East Africa), merging Eritrea, Somalia and the Ethiopian empire.

The Ethiopian story is especially notorious. Both in battle, and in never altogether successful efforts to impose its rule on a vast territory varied by ethnicity, language,

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<sup>45</sup> *The Economist*, 29 October 1932.

<sup>46</sup> See R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London: Arnold, 2002), p. 35.

religion and geography, Italy paid no attention to the Geneva Protocol which it had signed in 1925 banning the use of gas in warfare. When, on 19 February 1937, Ethiopian partisans tried to assassinate Viceroy, Rodolfo Graziani, at a ceremony in Addis Ababa, Fascists were encouraged to run wild through the city for three days and may have massacred 30 000 Ethiopians.<sup>47</sup> After the war, the returned regime of Emperor Haile Selassie claimed that the Italians had murdered 760 300 of his people, although he was remarkably forgiving of those Italians who remained in his territories. More active in their assertions on the subject were the Pankhursts, where Sylvia quickly added another 300 000 to her original tally of 460 300.<sup>48</sup>

More work is needed on this subject. It must raise such difficult issues as black on black killings during these years. The Italians were always supplemented by ‘*ascari*’, their coloured troops from Libya, Eritrea and Somalia; it is clear, for example, that the barbarous murder of Coptic monks at the monastery of Debra Libanos on 21 and 26 May 1937 – some 2000 died – was given over to Moslem *ascari*.<sup>49</sup> Even more complex will be analysis of the yawning divisions within Ethiopia, an empire whose approximate borders had been achieved under the reign of the Emperor Menelik (1889-1913). There a sense of identity and levels of modernisation fluctuated well into the twentieth century. Italy never fully conquered this empire, and the Duke of Aosta, royal successor to Graziani, was attempting to rule with the assistance of approved local ‘chieftains’ on the model of other, older, European empires, until A.O.I. fell apart to ragtag imperial British forces in 1941-2. Here lacking is a proper study of the extent to which Italian Fascist imperial theory and practice differed from the older European empires of Britain and France or of Spain and Portugal, with their pro-Fascist rulers, General Francisco Franco and the Catholic economist, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar. Certainly, when Richard Pankhurst scrutinised British imperialism in Kenya, he found plenty of vicious racism there.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Mussolini never visited AOI; he did make two trips to Libya (in 1925 and 1937) with predictable fanfare. A case needs examining of the extent to which Italian imperialism 1922-1947 was as much Italian as it was Fascist. I use the end-point 1947 because many Anti-Fascists, led by liberal intellectual, Benedetto Croce,

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<sup>47</sup> The most recent account is Ian Campbell, *The Addis Ababa massacre: Italy's national shame* (London: C. Hurst, 2017).

<sup>48</sup> See Sylvia Pankhurst, *Italy's war crimes in Ethiopia: evidence for the War Crimes Commission* (London: Walthamstow Press, nd), p. 2; *The Ethiopian people: their rights and progress* (Woodford: New Times and Ethiopia News Book Department, nd [1946]), p. 12. Her tally has recently been accepted by John Foot, although rounded down to 750 000. See J. Foot, *Blood and Power*, p. 215. Cf. also Richard Pankhurst, ‘Italian Fascist War Crimes in Ethiopia: a history of their discussion from the League of Nations to the United Nations (1936-1949)’, *Northeast African Studies*, 6, 1999, pp. 83-140. Angelo Del Boca, the first Italian to engage in serious analysis of Fascist imperialism, cut the total to about half that approved by Foot and the Pankhursts. See Angelo Del Boca (ed.), *Confini contesi: la Repubblica Italiana e il Trattato di Pace di Parigi (10 febbraio 1947)* (Turin: EGA, 1998), p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> For details, see Ian Campbell, *Holy War: the untold story of Catholic Italy's crusade against the Ethiopian Orthodox Church*, (London: C. Hurst, 2021). The book is dedicated to the memory of Richard Pankhurst.

<sup>50</sup> Richard K.P. Pankhurst, *Kenya: the history of two nations* (London: Independent publishing, nd [1954]). For a scholarly study of post-1945 British imperial killing, see Catherine Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: the brutal end of British empire in Kenya* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005). Her black death toll is reckoned at between 160 000 and 320 000.

then thought it disgraceful that Italy was being asked to surrender its pre-Fascist empire at the Peace of Paris.

The drastic racial legislation, which characterised the last years of Fascism and probably reflected its choice of Nazism as an ally but was certainly not ordered from Berlin, suggested that the peoples of Ethiopia could not expect great benefit from Italian rule, even if Mussolini dreamed of a 'black army' of 500 000 men which could 'dominate Africa'.<sup>51</sup> Ethiopians never, however, faced genocide of the Nazi type.

Furthermore, recent research has shown that in A.O.I., as in Libya, Italian colonists did not always possess the deeply Fascist sense demanded by their government. Rather than constituting a modern Caesarian legion of pioneer farmers, they tended to congregate in large towns, especially Addis Ababa, and gain a cosy living from doing the sort of things they might do in any metropolitan *città*. They disliked local Fascist chiefs and their money-grubbing, and were inclined to mutter 'if only the *Duce* knew'.<sup>52</sup> Roberta Pergher has made a detailed study of Libya where Italian rule had been imposed by Badoglio and Graziani. The two Fascist and Italian generals continued in Ethiopia the ruthlessness which had characterised Italian rule in Libya through the decade from 1922.<sup>53</sup> It was in turn accompanied by much practical racism in determining the social roles of the varied population of Libya during the later 1930s. But, again, Pergher has shown the way that Italian settlers developed their own methods to survive and flourish. It was by no means the same as that decreed or intellectualised about in Rome.<sup>54</sup>

The victims of Fascism were at their most numerous in the Italian Empire but Italy has rightly been seen as a participant in the Holocaust. More than 7000 Italian Jews, who in the past had been a notably patriotic element of the national population, were, under the R.S.I., deported to the East and murdered. The Germans directly controlled this process, but Italian officialdom assisted in the categorisation of Jews in Italy and ordinary Italians were often ready to identify their neighbours and send them to their deaths.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, from 1938 onwards, Mussolini's dictatorship passed harsher and harsher Anti-Semitic legislation, stimulated by the steady hardening of racial laws in the Empire and amplified by the spread of Anti-Semitism in many European countries. Some historians have argued that Mussolini was always, certainly *in pectore*, a racist,<sup>56</sup> and there can be no doubt that, by the late 1930s, the regime was using 'race' steadily to harden its requirements for citizenship. Yet, such a charge must explain away the occasions when Mussolini ridiculed racial 'science' and German deep beliefs. He was, after all, a journalist, with opinions on everything, and ones that could readily change from one

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<sup>51</sup> Giuseppe Bottai, *Vent'anni e un giorno (24 luglio 1943)* (Milan: BUR, 2008), p. 137.

<sup>52</sup> See Emanuele Ertola, *In terra d'Africa: gli italiani che colonizzarono l'impero* (Rome: Laterza, 2017).

<sup>53</sup> And did so with the approval of the doyen of French imperialists, Field Marshal Hubert Lyautey. See R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini and the eclipse of Italian Fascism*, pp. 120-1.

<sup>54</sup> See Roberta Pergher, *Mussolini's nation-empire: sovereignty and settlement in Italy's borderlands 1922-19439* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>55</sup> For summary, see Simon Levis Sullam, David I. Kertzer, Oona Smyth and Claudia Patane, *The Italian executioners: the genocide of the Jews in Italy* (Princeton University Press, 2020). One survivor, Primo Levi, wrote an account of his experiences in what may be the greatest book of the twentieth century. See Primo Levi, *If this is a man and The truce* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979). Stuart Woolf, a distinguished historian, was his translator.

<sup>56</sup> See notably Giorgio Fabre, *Il contratto: Mussolini editore di Hitler* (Bari: Dedala, 2004).

week to the next. The American historian, Shira Klein, has noted how those Italian Jews who escaped to settle in post-1948 Israel, were often nostalgic about their lives in (Fascist) Italy and saw nothing particularly the matter with their then country's imperial policies.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, we need briefly to consider the nature of the Fascist 'Corporate State', that is, a regime which pledged to bring welfare to its people and demonstrate that it had an economic model more virtuous than those of socialism or liberal capitalism. On 23 April 1927, just as Mussolini was announcing Fascist triumph: 'every form of opposition in Italy is broken into pieces, dispersed, finished: mere dust',<sup>58</sup> the regime promulgated its *Carta del Lavoro* (Labour Charter). In thirty articles the Charter promised to bond capitalists and workers, peasants and landowners, rich and poor, thereby cementing the Fascist State's 'moral, political and economic unity'. The worker union (there was to be only one) and bosses' confederations were fused in a way that allegedly eliminated unnecessary conflict and exploitation. Since work of whatever kind, 'intellectual, technical or manual', was a 'social duty', under the State's ultimate supervision but without petty interference in production (since 'private initiative' in that field was the 'most efficient and useful to the national interest'), the new Italy, with what was soon also being hailed as 'new' men and women, was to be a corporate state and society.<sup>59</sup>

I do not have space for detailed examination of the reality of corporatism. Suffice it to say that, while the dictatorship existed, it was lavishly praised at home and abroad. Giuseppe Bottai, the Fascist minister who most aspired to be an intellectual and who was most involved in its crafting, claimed, after Mussolini's fall, that it could have leavened the Party's totalitarianism with its own potentially 'vital pluralism'.<sup>60</sup> Back in July 1935, just before Ethiopia, Bottai argued in a prestigious liberal American journal that Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal had much in common with the Corporate State in insisting on helpful guidance of capitalism by government.<sup>61</sup> Praise for the Italian model is easy to find in other 1930s commentary, be it from professional economists<sup>62</sup> or from such rightist politicians as Oswald Mosley (before he accepted that Nazi soft and hard power was much greater than Fascism's), Colonel O'Duffy's Blueshirts in Eire, Vidkun Quisling in Norway or General José Félix Uriburu, when he launched a military coup in Argentina in September 1930.<sup>63</sup> Two years earlier, *The Economist* asserted that corporatism was 'one of the most remarkable experiments in history', in February 1932 adding that it was the

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<sup>57</sup> Shira Klein, *Italy's Jews from emancipation to Fascism* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); for my own summary of the matter, see R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini and the eclipse of Italian Fascism*, pp. 228-232.

<sup>58</sup> Benito Mussolini, *Opera omnia* vol. XXII, p. 379

<sup>59</sup> For the text, see Alberto Acquarone, *L'organizzazione dello stato totalitario*, pp. 477-481.

<sup>60</sup> Giuseppe Bottai, *Vent'anni e un giorno*, p. 107.

<sup>61</sup> Giuseppe Bottai, 'Corporate State and N.R.A.', *Foreign Affairs*, 13, July 1935, pp. 612-624. *The Economist* had seen similar parallels already on 27 May 1933; Gaetano Salvemini, *Under the axe of Fascism* (London: Gollancz, 1936), pp. 147-154.

<sup>62</sup> For a classic example, see Paul Einzig, *The economic foundations of Fascism* (London Macmillan, 1933), where he argued that a Corporate state, in its functioning, did not need a dictatorship and sharply separated Mussolini from Hitler's early days in Germany. The book has recently been republished by the Contemporary rightist Lulu press (2021).

<sup>63</sup> See Colin Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1961), pp. 73-4; Maurice Manning, *The Blueshirts* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970), pp. 75; 100; Oddvar K. Hoidal, 'Vidkun Quisling's decline as a political figure in pre-war Norway, 1933-1937', *Journal of Modern History*, 43, 1971, p.452; David Aliano,

'corporate bridge' between capital and labour which explained why Italy had not suffered more in the Depression. Adolf Hitler, by contrast, avoided suggestions that Germany could benefit from the Italian model.<sup>64</sup>

But, even in the inter-war period and certainly afterwards, predictable questions arose about the gap between the theory of corporatism and its practice. Luigi Einaudi, economist and politician dismissed it as 'an ill-digested abracadabra of slogans which changed rapidly according to the whim of the dictator'. For Anti-Fascist historian, Gaetano Salvemini, it was the regime's 'Great Humbug'.<sup>65</sup> Matters might be further complicated if, in the post-1945 world, the most successful economies and societies of Europe, Germany and the Scandinavian countries, were examined as followers of some of the principles of Corporatism.

The other arena where debates about the nature of Mussolini's dictatorship continue to flourish relate to the way the Fascist bureaucracy worked. Such organisations as the *Opera nazionale per la protezione della maternità e infanzia* (O.N.M.I.; National body to protect mothers and babies) lasted for more than a generation after 1945. The *dopolavoro* (after-work association) was probably modelled on the policy of the capitalist Westinghouse company but did bring opportunity for leisure and after-work learning previously not available to Italian workers. On the other hand, all such organisations – 381 new (over-staffed, over-paid and low producing) *enti statali* came into existence between 1919 and 1945<sup>66</sup> – could not be relied on to spread evenly across what remained a varied country in employment and wealth. All were equally likely to be vitiated by political interference. Fascism, in other words, provided a Fascist welfare state that was better than nothing but carried the contradictions and failures that always beset Mussolini's rule in Italy.

It is time to end. There can be no question that a memory of Benito Mussolini and his Fascist, if Italian, dictatorship lives on in our present world. Just what the dictator's ghost makes of the massive variety of claimed influence from the *Duce's* soft power might be a complex question. But the Fascist regime, in its inglorious European, imperial and, often enough, Italian Second World War, as well as its lack of much economic achievement leading to such failure,<sup>67</sup> did end the nation's doubtful career as the least of the Great Powers. Neither Italians nor others should evoke it as a model for anything worthwhile. And the evocation of 'fascism' in our current world to mean anything directly connected with Mussolini's dictatorship should be viewed with scepticism.

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*Mussolini's national project in Argentina* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), pp. 155-6. There are many other such examples.

<sup>64</sup> Gerhard Dobbert (ed.), *L'economia fascista: problemi e fatti* (Florence: Sansoni, 1935), pp. 1-2.

<sup>65</sup> Luigi Einaudi, 'The Future of the Italian Press', *Foreign Affairs*, April 1945, p. 506.

<sup>66</sup> Guido Melis, *La macchina imperfetta: immagine e realtà dello Stato fascista* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2018), p. 399. Melis provides much important detail on the actuality of Fascist life.

<sup>67</sup> For background, see Vera Zamagni, *The economic history of Italy* (Oxford University Press, 1993).

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