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Italia docet? The Relationship between Italian Fascism and Nazism Revisited

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Giulia Albanese, *La marcia su Roma*, Laterza: Bari/Rome, 2008; 294 pp.; 9788842088141, €10.50 (pbk)

Patrizia Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani: una storia sociale*, UTET: Turin, 2008; 372 pp.; 9788802079462, €23.00 (pbk)

Emilio Gentile, *Il fascismo in tre capitoli*, Laterza: Bari/Rome, 2009; 134 pp.; 9788842073239, €8.00 (pbk)

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Daniela Liebscher, *Freude und Arbeit: Zur internationalen Freizeit- und Sozialpolitik des faschistischen und des NS-Regimes*, SH-Verlag: Cologne, 2009; 693 pp.; 9783894981815, €49.80 (hbk)

Sven Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde. Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im italienischen Squadrismus und in der deutschen SA*, second edition, with new afterword, Böhlau: Cologne, 2009; 824 pp.; 9783412203801, €69.90 (hbk)

Sven Reichardt and Armin Nolzen, eds, *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland: Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich*, Wallstein: Göttingen, 2005; 283 pp.; 9783892449393, €20.00 (pbk)

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Davide Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire: Italian Occupation during the Second World War*. Trans. Adrian Belton, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006; 528 pp., 41 b/w illus. 12 maps.; 9780521845151, £77.00 (hbk)

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Wolfgang Wippermann, *Faschismus: Eine Weltgeschichte vom 19. Jahrhundert bis heute*, Primus-Verlag: Darmstadt, 2009; 366 pp.; 9783896783677 €29.00 (hbk)

I

On 21 July 1941, weeks after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, Adolf Hitler declared that the March on Rome had been one of the 'turning points in history'.¹ A month later, in August 1941, Benito Mussolini travelled across the continent to meet Hitler at his East Prussian Headquarters. From there, the two fascist dictators visited the Eastern front and inspected German and Italian troops fighting alongside each other in the Nazi racial war. The two episodes raise two significant questions. First, is fascism a useful category for an analysis of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany? And second, to what extent did the two regimes mutually influence and support each other?

Much has been written on 'generic fascism'. Most scholars have focused on the history of the ideas underlying fascism and the emergence of fascist movements, as well as, to a lesser degree, on the operation and impact of fascist regimes.² But such literature often remains at the margins of the historiography of Fascist Italy and, even more so, of Nazi Germany. Furthermore, with a few exceptions, such as Wolfgang Wippermann's textbook *Faschismus: Eine Weltgeschichte vom 19. Jahrhundert bis heute*, a study that offers a basic and clear survey of the latest literature on fascism, the existing literature does not address the extent to which fascist regimes influenced each other.³ For Wippermann, fascism was not a European, but a global phenomenon which had originated in Fascist Italy (Wippermann, 11). Scholars still dispute what fascism was and continue to develop sophisticated models and typologies of fascism, but most historians of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany do not engage with theoretical models of fascism.⁴ Work by Tim Mason and Geoff Eley from the 1980s presents a notable exception to this tendency in that it connects highly stimulating theoretical debates on fascism with the history of modern Germany and Italy.⁵

The increasing focus on Nazism's racial nature and the Holocaust seems to indicate that there exists a general understanding amongst most historians of Nazi Germany that the Third Reich was a unique phenomenon. As a result, again with only a few exceptions,⁶ many historians of the Third Reich have effectively stopped engaging with the historiography of other European countries. Likewise, as we will see, many historians of Fascist Italy treat Fascism as a more or less unique phenomenon that had little or nothing in common with Nazi

Germany, primarily because of complex Italian debates on the public memory of Fascism and the Second World War. Almost immediately after the Second World War, under the impact of the German occupation and what was effectively a civil war, most Italians believed that Hitler had dragged Mussolini into the war and that the Axis alliance had only brought Italy misfortune. Accordingly, Italian historians pay very little, if any attention to the mutual influences between Fascist Italy and the Third Reich.

Despite some recent historical work that has highlighted Fascist Italy's atrocities, there is a widespread belief in today's Italy, especially on the right, that Mussolini's regime was harmless if compared to the Third Reich, and that Nazi Germany imposed the war on Italy, thereby effectively avoiding a serious debate on the relationship between both regimes.⁷

One of the most prominent proponents of the view that Fascist Italy was a relatively harmless regime if compared to the Third Reich was the Italian historian Renzo De Felice (1929–1996). The author of the most authoritative and exhaustive biography of Mussolini,⁸ De Felice diagnosed a very basic common denominator between Fascist Italy and the Third Reich, such as their vehement anti-Bolshevism and their rejection of parliamentary democracy; yet these factors aside, he argued that there were no direct parallels between Fascism and Nazism. Somewhat paradoxically, in 1975, De Felice devoted a small book to the often troubled pre-1933 relations between Fascist Italy and the Nazis. In his rather inconclusive, but suggestive introduction, De Felice stated that more needed to be said about the highly important relationship between Fascism and Nazism. This volume, a source edition, contained documents on the increasing influence of Fascist Italy on the Nazi movement. For strategic, and to a lesser extent, ideological reasons, Mussolini was keen to see Hitler in power, but, at the same time, the *Duce* was anxious for Italy to remain Europe's leading fascist dictatorship.⁹

De Felice famously insisted that in Fascist Italy there was no home-grown racism and no systematic system of terror that was equal to Nazi repression and control. The 1938 racial laws, De Felice declared in his study of Jews under Fascism, had originated in the foreign policy alliance between Italy and Germany; the Axis, according to De Felice was a tactical, rather than an ideological alliance.¹⁰ In fact, there is clear evidence that Fascist anti-Semitism sprang from a specifically Italian trajectory of racism well before 1938, a point reiterated by Patrizia Dogliani in her excellent social history of Fascist Italy *Il fascismo degli italiani: una storia sociale* (Dogliani, 300–18). For De Felice, Auschwitz, the central point of reference for Nazism, made any comparisons between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy impossible. Needless to say, officials of the Italian Social Republic, Mussolini's dictatorship in the German-dominated parts of Italy, had collaborated with the Nazis in hunting down and handing over several thousand Italian Jews to the Third Reich where they were murdered.¹¹

De Felice's views, which some Italian commentators interpreted as falling short of a rehabilitation of Fascism, fell on fertile ground in the increasingly right-wing Italian political culture of the 1990s and early 2000s.¹² Despite the rather bleak

political context in Italy, Italian historians continue to write highly sophisticated and critical work on Fascism. Emilio Gentile, perhaps the leading Italian historian of Fascism, resolutely rejects any positive interpretation of Fascist Italy in his recent introduction to *Fascism Il fascismo in tre capitoli* (Gentile, 124–5). Nevertheless, just like many of their German colleagues, Italian historians still focus overwhelmingly on fascism in its particular national context.

II

A closer examination of the relationship between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany can offer new perspectives on fascism itself as well as on the interconnectedness of both regimes. The latter issue has, in fact, long been on the agenda of at least some historians and commentators. Since the 1940s, if not before, historians have been exploring the connections between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, decades before some historians began to conceptualize their work in the terminology of transnational history.¹³ In 1949, the British journalist Elizabeth Wiskemann, a resident of Nazi Germany until her expulsion for anti-Nazi activities in 1936, published her account of *The Rome–Berlin Axis* which focused on ‘the relations between Hitler and Mussolini’. Her account, based upon some German and Italian official documents captured by the Allies, examined the Axis alliance between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, first proclaimed by Mussolini in November 1936, but not formalized as a military pact until May 1939. For Wiskemann, Mussolini was a weak, indecisive and above all theatrical leader whose Fascist Italy was accordingly an inefficient state, incapable of mounting an effective war. In sharp contrast, Hitler was ruthless, powerful and effective, towering over a brutal and efficient dictatorship, geared towards warfare. Hitler, on the other hand, was a bully, and Mussolini, for lack of strategic alternatives, followed Hitler into the war.¹⁴

Serious scholarly work on the Axis alliance continued at a slow pace because most historians still grappled to understand how fascism had operated in its national contexts. Nonetheless, it became clear that the relationship between the two dictators and the two regimes had not been without tension.¹⁵ In 1962 an outstanding study of the relationship between Fascism and Nazism was published. F. W. Deakin’s *The Brutal Friendship*, based on German and Italian documents captured by the Allies, analysed the relationship between Mussolini and Hitler at the end of the war when Hitler installed Mussolini as head of the Italian Social Republic in the German-dominated parts of Italy, a state that was formally independent, yet in reality a Nazi satellite state.¹⁶ In this masterpiece, Deakin had little to say about the beginnings of the relationship between Fascist Italy and Nazism. While acknowledging his personal attachment to Mussolini, Hitler allegedly claimed in 1945 that Nazi Germany would have won the war if Italy had stayed out of it. However, a closer examination of Deakin’s evidence shows that Hitler probably did not say these things; in fact, Deakin’s sources are the unreliable Bormann notes of Hitler’s conversations in 1945, written in part, if not altogether by the Swiss Nazi François Genoud after the war. In any case, these dismissive

views of the Italian conduct of the war anticipated the popular post-war myth that Hitler and the Nazis would have won the war if they had not signed up with Mussolini and Fascist Italy.¹⁷

Fascist–Nazi relations were the subject of the German historian Jens Petersen's 1973 dissertation *Hitler–Mussolini: Die Entstehung der Achse Berlin–Rom 1933–1936*. This was the first comprehensive investigation of German diplomatic records on the Third Reich's relationship with Fascist Italy. Petersen argued that the Berlin–Rome Axis, announced by Mussolini in November 1936, was almost to be expected because both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, two fascist and expansionist dictatorships, were internationally isolated after risky unilateral decisions such as the Abyssinian war and Nazi Germany's remilitarization of the Rhineland and the reintroduction of conscription. Both regimes were anti-French and supported Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Effectively, they had exhausted all other possible strategic alliances.¹⁸ Petersen also underlined the troubled early relationship between Fascism and Nazism, cautioning that Fascism's and Nazism's ideological parallels did not make the Axis alliance inevitable. Relations were initially less than cordial because of mutual prejudices and territorial disputes. *Südtirol*, the German-speaking territory in Northern Italy ceded to Italy after the First World War, was a particularly thorny issue, as was the question of whether Austria should be united with Germany.¹⁹ When Petersen wrote his book in the 1970s, many historians took it for granted that Fascism and Nazism were a manifestation of generic fascism, although they did not use this term. However, since the 1990s, as we have seen, there has been increasing emphasis on Nazism as a unique phenomenon that cannot be compared to any other movement or regime, including Fascist Italy.

Next to Petersen, the work of the German historian Wolfgang Schieder has long set the standard in the field of Fascist–Nazi relations. His recent *Faschistische Diktaturen: Studien zu Italien und Deutschland* brings together 20 of his essays, most of them previously published elsewhere, on the relationship between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. For Schieder, Fascism clearly had its origins in Italy. Fascist Italy, Europe's first fascist dictatorship, provided a strategic and ideological template for Hitler and the Nazis on their way to power and beyond. However, Mussolini and many leading Fascists initially dismissed Hitler as a clown. Mussolini only began to support seriously the Nazi party strategically and financially when the Nazis emerged as a mass movement in Germany in the early 1930s.²⁰

Schieder shows that Hitler and the Nazis imitated central features of Fascism, such as the cult of the charismatic leader and the 'Roman' greeting. Schieder maintains that fascism is a useful concept to understand both regimes. Yet, he admits important differences between the two regimes. Because of its radical anti-Semitism and its quest for territorial expansion, at Nazism's core, Nazism was a radical manifestation of fascism. Nonetheless, Hitler admired Mussolini from 1922 when Mussolini was appointed Prime Minister of Italy. Particularly appealing to Hitler and the Nazis, alongside the German and European Right more generally, was the novel twofold strategy with which the Italian Fascists had secured power. First, Fascist squads covered Italy, especially in the North,

with massive political violence against the Left. Key institutions of the Liberal state were often unwilling to repress Fascist violence. Second, the Fascists were keen to conquer power through seemingly legal activity. For large sections of Italian and German society who were afraid of the Left, Fascism, a new type of a political movement, seemed a guarantor of law and order (Schieder, 379). Both Fascism and Nazism were popular movements, bringing together people from very different social backgrounds and resting upon a range of loose ideological issues, held together by the person and the institution of the charismatic leader (Schieder, 271). Still, the question remains as to what extent Nazism's genesis was really influenced by Italian Fascism, because Nazism's ideological core beliefs, stemming from radical *völkisch* thought, were fully in place before any Nazi contacts with Italian Fascists.

As Giulia Albanese reiterates in her concise book *La marcia su Roma* (the march on Rome), Mussolini travelled to Rome in a luxurious sleeping car only after he knew that the King would appoint him Prime Minister in the power vacuum which the Liberal state was unable to fill (Albanese, 110–13). Albanese emphasizes what Adrian Lyttelton argued in his magisterial study of *The Fascist Seizure of Power*, first published in 1973 and recently reissued, namely that the March on Rome was only one in a series of events in the Fascist seizure of power, a process which, for Lyttelton, lasted a decade. At a similar level, Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor was only the start of what historians later called the 'Nazi seizure of power'. Once Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor on 30 January 1933, the Nazis consolidated their power much more quickly than the Fascists had done in a massive upsurge of political violence that was much more brutal and thorough in eliminating any effective political opposition.²¹ If one takes a broader perspective, one begins to realize that in contrast to Fascism's swift rise to power from its inauspicious beginnings in March 1919 to Mussolini's appointment as Prime Minister in October 1922, it took the Nazis much longer, namely from 1919 until 1933, to take over government. Perhaps the Weimar Republic, if seen in a larger European context, was not as unstable as scholars have traditionally assumed?

What is clear is that Nazism was influenced by Fascism until 1933 and beyond in many other ways. Fascism was particularly attractive to a wide section of Italian and German societies because of its anti-Bolshevism, its purported respect for law and order, and above all its supposed integration of the old political and economic elites. The strength of Schieder's work lies in the fact that he combines the study of political transfers with comparative history (Schieder, 337, 379). Yet, more still needs to be said on the reverse direction of the transfers Schieder examines, especially about the impact of Nazi Germany on Fascist Italy, especially during the war.

Important features of Fascist Italy were clearly a model for the Nazis before and after 1933 as Sven Reichardt and Armin Nolzen point out. Their *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland: Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich* brings together some essays on Fascist–Nazi relations which are influenced by recent transnational

approaches towards history. Transfer history, as they understand it, does not stand in opposition to comparative history. In fact, one cannot repeat this point often enough. In his contribution to this volume, Schieder examines the role of the enigmatic Major Giuseppe Renzetti, a Fascist who was extremely well networked in Berlin's political and social elite. He initially cultivated good relations with the pro-monarchist (yet politically quite ineffective) *Stahlhelm*, a paramilitary veterans' organization. Fascism was attractive to right-wing groups and parties more generally because it seemingly offered an ultranationalist government, ruthless against the Left, but firmly integrated within the Italian monarchy, just as the *Stahlhelm* aimed for a restoration of monarchy in Germany. By the early 1930s, Renzetti was Mussolini's direct liaison with Hitler outside usual diplomatic channels. Mussolini and Renzetti gradually began to support Hitler and the Nazis after their first major electoral breakthrough of September 1930. The *Stahlhelm* and the national conservative DNVP would join ranks with the Nazis in the 1931 Harzburg Front, similar perhaps to the Fascist annexation of *Sempre pronti*, Luigi Federzoni's nationalist paramilitaries in 1923. Renzetti had encouraged Hitler to join ranks with the national conservatives, building on the precedent of the early years of Fascist rule in Italy, to make a Nazi takeover of power more acceptable to wide sections of society. Nevertheless, Schieder, who deserves credit for having collected Renzetti's papers from various archives, probably exaggerates Renzetti's and Fascism's significance for the Nazi seizure of power during the Weimar Republic (Reichardt and Nolzen, 28–58).

In fact, many leading Nazis were extremely sceptical and reserved towards Italian Fascism as a result of powerful German anti-Italian resentments dating back to Italy's exit from the triple alliance in 1915, seen by many Germans as a betrayal. Renzetti encouraged the *Führer* to seize power by legal means, and to reject offers to join the government as a junior partner. Hitler echoed this point of a seizure of power through seemingly legal means in October 1932, a month before the Reichstag elections, in an interview with *Il Tevere*, a radical Fascist paper. The interview was held in Hitler's office in the Nazi party's Munich headquarters which was, as the correspondent noted, adorned with a bust of Mussolini.²²

The fact that Mussolini used Renzetti as a direct liaison to Hitler from the early 1930s onwards reveals that Mussolini increasingly believed that a Nazi seizure of power was in Italy's interest. Schieder calculates that Mussolini received Renzetti on at least 11 occasions between 1925 and 1933, while Hitler saw Renzetti at least 39 times between 1929 and 1934. Hitler valued Renzetti so highly that he was the only foreigner invited to the Reich Chancellery to watch the Nazi victory parade through Berlin on the night of Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor on 30 January 1933 (Reichardt and Nolzen, 45–7, 49–50). Presumably, one is tempted to add, Hitler was only too pleased to impress Renzetti, Mussolini's close collaborator, with a display of Nazi power, especially given the Italian determination to resist the *Anschluss* of Austria.

Sven Reichardt's fine study of fascist violence in Italy and Germany, *Faschistische Kampfbünde*, also focuses on the phase in which fascism conquered

power in Italy and Germany. First published to general acclaim in 2002, this very detailed book, the author's revised doctoral dissertation, has recently been republished. Reichardt's study of the fascist militia and the Nazi stormtroopers, the SA, is resolutely comparative. It suggests that the SA emerged from its particular German context and was not really influenced by the Fascist militia (Reichardt, 17). Reichardt's study reaffirms that fascism is a useful analytical category which helps us understand common sociological patterns of Fascist and Nazi activists. For fascist militiamen and Nazi stormtroopers, keen on a distinctly masculine and virile lifestyle, fascism was less a clear-cut ideology, and more a lived practice of political violence (Reichardt, 661–96). Reichardt's study is a very sophisticated sociological analysis of fascist behavioural patterns. His study focuses overwhelmingly on the rise of Fascism and Nazism, phases in which political violence clearly kept the militia and the stormtroopers going. Yet, Reichardt could have perhaps said more about the role of political violence after 1925 and 1933/34 when Mussolini and Hitler, resisting attempts at a 'second wave' of militia and stormtrooper activism, had brought the militia and the stormtroopers more or less under their control.²³

Clearer evidence for the direct impact of Fascist policies and ideas on Nazism is provided by Daniela Liebscher in *Freude und Arbeit*. She shows that the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, the Fascist leisure organization, was a direct influence on the Nazi *Kraft durch Freude* or 'Strength through Joy' organization in terms of ideas, policies and an exchange of key staff. All these transfers took place in the wider context of international politics, Liebscher insists, following Italy's and Germany's increasing international isolation. She claims that the Italian model of organizing working-class leisure activities was a decidedly fascist model for labour and state-sponsored leisure organizations, and an attractive alternative to the ideas of the left-liberal majority of the League of Nations' International Labour Organization (Liebscher, 18). All in all, Liebscher claims that Fascism and Nazism spread their policies and ideology through a totalitarian internationalism during the 1930s (Liebscher, 615). But she exaggerates the significance of the International Labour Organization for both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. There was, in fact, no direct causal link between the Nazi establishment of 'Strength through Joy' and the International Labour Organization. Moreover, both regimes, above all ultranationalist, were essentially driven by violence and destruction, not by international diplomacy, so Liebscher's account is rather inconclusive.²⁴

Despite all these transfers, contacts and mutual influences, nobody would seriously argue that the relationship between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany was smooth. In fact, despite all Nazi enthusiasm for Fascism and vice versa, tensions, mistrust and dissonance characterized a great deal of Fascist-Nazi relations both before 1936, the year in which Mussolini announced the Berlin–Rome Axis, and afterwards, even after the signing of the May 1939 'Pact of Steel' military alliance. Effectively, the Axis alliance had become irreversible because of the parallel radicalization of Italy's and Germany's domestic and foreign policies, which led to

their international isolation. For better or worse, both countries and both regimes became more and more dependent on each other.²⁵

Fascist and Nazi propaganda couched this increasing mutual dependency in terms of the friendship between Mussolini and Hitler, which symbolized the allegedly cordial relationships between the Italian and German peoples. Yet, in reality matters were more complex. One of the clearest manifestations of Italo-German conflict was Italy's belated entry into the Second World War in June 1940. Mussolini, antagonized by Hitler's unilateral decision to attack Poland without consulting Italy, postponed Italy's entry into the war until June 1940, very much to the Nazi leadership's annoyance. Italy only declared war on France and Britain when France's crushing defeat by Nazi Germany seemed imminent. Yet, even after Italy's entry into the war, Italo-German relations, despite all the Fascist and Nazi propaganda, remained full of tension and mutual suspicion, as Malte König reiterates in his *Kooperation als Machtkampf*. His worthwhile study focuses on the often troubled Italo-German relations at the time of Italy's disastrous invasion of Greece in 1940/41 when the German Army had to come to Italy's rescue. König adds some vivid details on this largely familiar territory. For example, he shows that Italian misgivings about Nazi Germany were so deep that the Italians began to fortify their Northern border with Germany. And German officers increasingly believed that their prejudices about the inefficiency and lack of courage of the Italian Army were justified. All in all, the Axis alliance was held together by the special relationship between Mussolini and Hitler, a subject which clearly deserves more attention (König, 327–36).

How substantial and profound was the Axis alliance, then, and to what extent did the two regimes influence each other during the war? Davide Rodogno's study of *Fascism's European Empire*, now available in English, discusses Italy's Mediterranean Empire and traces Nazi influences on the Fascist occupation policies. Rodogno shows that racism and brutality towards indigenous populations such as Slavs, Greeks and French were central to Fascism's mission to construct an Italian Mediterranean Empire. He dismisses the powerful myth that Fascist Italy's occupation policies were benevolent in comparison to Nazi practice. Rodogno corrects the view that Fascist Italy did not carry out atrocities because of a combination of military incompetence and the alleged decency and humanitarianism of the Italians, summed up by the stereotype *italiani brava gente*, one of the longest-lasting Italian myths about Fascism.²⁶ Crucially, unlike the Nazis, Italian Fascists harboured no plans for racial extermination. But Italian occupation policies were extremely brutal, and included the forced Italianization, ruthless repression and economic exploitation of local populations. Rodogno is certainly right to stress Fascism's inherent racism and the sheer brutality of Fascist occupation policy. In fact, Fascist occupation policy was informed to at least some extent by earlier Italian colonial campaigns, from Giolitti's push for Libya in 1911, Fascism's conduct there in the 1920s and Fascist racial atrocities in Ethiopia in the 1930s.²⁷ Despite recent solid studies which underline the significance of racism and anti-Semitism under Fascism, one must stress that racism was Nazism's central

feature, while for Fascism it was a particular ideological strand that could be mobilized by the regime, but not the regime's central feature.²⁸ For Mussolini and many Fascists, then, anti-Semitism was above all functional. It was never one of Fascism's core beliefs. Still, as we have seen, under the Salò Republic, many officials, alongside ordinary Italians, collaborated in numerous ways with the Nazis in persecuting Jews.²⁹ Nonetheless, the key difference between Nazism and Fascism was that the Third Reich's central aim was the racial reordering and ruthless annihilation of the Jews in Europe. However, this fact does not render comparisons and analyses of the mutual influences between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany fruitless.

III

In 1922, the year of Mussolini's appointment as Italian Prime Minister, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, a right-wing German commentator who coined the phrase 'the Third Reich', insisted: 'Italia docet', 'Italy teaches'.³⁰ There were ideological and strategic exchanges between Germany and Fascist Italy, which, at least until 1933, acted as a powerful template for fascist movements in Germany and elsewhere.³¹

But what is the wider significance of these transfers for our interpretation of Nazism and Fascism? The pitfall of existing studies is that they tend to overestimate the real significance of the transfers and pay too little attention to the distinctive national peculiarities and the different pedigrees and trajectories of Fascism and Nazism. There were indeed manifold transfers between Italian Fascism and Nazism, but to what extent did these transfers cause significant historical change? For example, to what degree did Renzetti's work as a liaison between Mussolini and Hitler help bring the Nazis into power? To what degree did Hitler's admiration for Mussolini and Fascism change Nazi policy? Surely, Hitler and the Nazis could not have cared less for Mussolini's interests in the summer of 1934 when Austrian Nazis assassinated the Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss, a Mussolini protégé, weeks after the first encounter between Mussolini and Hitler in Venice. National self-interest continued to dominate both Fascism's and Nazism's actions, both before and after the beginning of the war.

It still remains unclear to what extent these transfer histories will effect an interpretative change in our understanding of Fascism and Nazism. There were, of course, some ideological and structural similarities between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and indeed, such parallels are the premise for any transfers, as Patrick Bernhard has shown.³² Most of the studies under review agree that transnational histories of fascism are not mutually exclusive with comparative history. In fact, the study of fascist transfers must consider the crucial differences between fascist regimes.³³ Despite the regime's brutal and ruthless reliance on political violence, Fascist Italy did not murder millions, as the Nazis did. The state's structure was also fundamentally different under both regimes, as Fascism incorporated the state, whereas Nazism gradually undermined it in a process of 'cumulative radicalization' (Hans Mommsen). But all in all, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany

can be studied together for compelling historical reasons as they were both manifestations of fascism. Both regimes mutually influenced each other, yet these influences were not inevitable and often full of tension, especially during the war.³⁴ Many topics are still unexplored. For example, more work is needed on ordinary Italians' and Germans' reactions towards the Axis alliance.

How to proceed? More recently, historians have proposed a history of cross-overs and exchanges, a two-way process.³⁵ However, it is time to clarify our terminology and think more concretely in terms of a history of fascist entanglement, a history that examines both mutual influences amongst fascist regimes and their interconnectedness rather than simply looking at transfers. The 'fascist entanglement' perspective also examines the significance of transfers and does not assume that all crossovers were necessarily equally important for the actors involved, paying close attention to friction amongst the actors. We must also consider national peculiarities and contexts when looking at entanglements. This new perspective will not necessarily make us rewrite the history of interwar fascism from scratch, but it will help us rethink the meaning of fascism, and, most significantly perhaps, allow us to study the mutual influences between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, thereby lifting both national historiographies from their increasing isolation and reintegrating them into the wider context of modern European history.

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Notes

1. Quoted in Percy Ernst Schramm (ed.), *Dr. Henry Picker: Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier 1941–42* (Stuttgart 1963), 133–4
2. Some of the most important studies are Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London 1993); Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York 2004); Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge 2004).
3. For a comprehensive reader of the main texts, see Constantin Iordachi (ed.), *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives* (London 2010); for a review of some recent work, see Stefan Ihrig, 'The History of European Fascism - Origins, Foreign Relations and (Dis)Entangled Histories', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 41 (2011), 278–90.
4. See for example, MacGregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War* (Cambridge 1982), 290.
5. Geoff Eley, 'What Produces Fascism: Preindustrial Traditions or a Crisis of a Capitalist State?', *Politics and Society*, Vol. 12 (1983), 53–82; Tim Mason, 'Whatever Happened to 'Fascism'?', in idem, *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class*, ed. Jane Caplan (Cambridge 1995), 323–31. See also the essays in Richard Bessel (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge 1996).
6. Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin (eds), *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge 1997); Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (eds), *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (Cambridge 2009); Kiran Klaus Patel,

- 'Der Nationalsozialismus in transnationaler Perspektive', *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* Vol. 49 (2004), 1123–34.
7. For an overview, see Aram Mattioli, *'Viva Mussolini!' Die Aufwertung des Faschismus im Italien Berlusconis* (Paderborn 2010), 142–53.
 8. Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini* (8 vols., Turin 1965–1997).
 9. Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini e Hitler: i rapporti segreti 1922–1933. Con documenti inediti* (Florence 1975), 1–6. On the wider context of pre-1933 relations, see Hans Woller, 'Machtpolitisches Kalkül oder ideologische Affinität? Zur Frage des Verhältnisses zwischen Mussolini und Hitler vor 1933', in Wolfgang Benz, Hans Buchheim and Hans Mommsen (eds), *Der Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Ideologie und Herrschaft* (Frankfurt am Main 1990), 42–64.
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