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On Fascistization: Mussolini's political project for Franco's Spain, 1937-1939

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Abstract

‘Single Party, single militia, single worker’s union, on these three pillars the great Spain of tomorrow will be built’, wrote Mussolini to Franco in August, 1937, only four months after the new Single Party, Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las JONS, was created. From the Duce's point of view, all the political tools developed to achieve a brilliant present and a greater future were the result of Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War. The political implementation of fascism, the single party, corporativism, propaganda, and economic modernisation were considered to have been **derived** from Italy's military and diplomatic involvement in Spain. But, surprisingly, that political presence has largely been undervalued by historians examining the political construction and nature of Franco's Spain. This paper re-evaluates the importance, and limits, of Mussolini's political project in Spain: fascistization.

Keywords

Fascism, Spanish Civil War, fascistization, Falange.

In December 1942, General Francisco Franco opened the III National Council of the Falange with a speech charged with political, theoretical and doctrinal content, according to the highest Italian diplomatic representative in Spain. In his comments to Mussolini, the Fascist ambassador Francesco Lecquio saw in the words of *El Caudillo* ‘elements of eternity and immortality’ and ‘unity of sentiment and purpose’ with the doctrine and thinking of *Il Duce*. The ‘National Revolution’ initiated by Franco’s rebel forces in 1936 was connected with the union of social aspirations and the cult of the nation that conformed the great ‘synthesis of the Fascist Revolution’.ⁱ In 1942 this union was fighting against a common enemy: communism.

The Fascist ambassador in Spain did not base his opinion on some happy twist of fate but rather on pride in what he considered a job well done. As this article will reveal, Mussolini considered Franco’s Spain to be a land of doctrinal confluence, political influence and strategic integration. Accordingly, Il Duce had a very precise political plan for Franco’s Spain, which he deployed parallel to the diplomatic, military and armament aid that proved fundamental to the Rebel victory in the Spanish Civil War. He called it *fascistization*, and its objective was to make Spain an integrated power in the league of fascist nations. Through conspiratory support against the Spanish Second Republic and intervention in the 1936 coup d’état, Italian fascism was very present in the political construction of Franco’s Spain: in the 1937 creation of the Falange Española Tradicionalista (FET) y de las JONS Single Party, in reinforcing Franco’s power throughout the Civil War, and in defining the political nature of his regime.

Mussolini’s war in Spain

Italian intervention in Spain involved much more than military participation in the war. According to Italian testimonial and documentary sources, it also involved explicit and resolute combat in vigorous defence of European fascism, intended to attract Franco’s Spain to the fascist gravitational pole. Italian political influence in this ‘New’, emerging Spain was all-encompassing and decisive, according to Italian testimonies and documents. In their words, the Single Party was a project of the head of propaganda of the Italian *Corpo di Truppe Volontarie* (Corps of Volunteer Troops, CTV) Guglielmo Danzi; the union between the Falangists and the *Requetés* (Carlist militia) was the idea of Roberto Farinacci; corporativism and the Labour Charter (*Fuero del Trabajo*) corresponded to the demands of Galeazzo Ciano; the educational reforms of Sáinz Rodríguez copied the Gentile Reform; and Franco’s first government was conceived by Mussolini himself, who, in his own words, pursued the fascistization of Spain through the war. Along with his military intervention, Mussolini sponsored explicit political action in Spain that would transform the institutional architecture of the nation under Franco.

Surprisingly, historiography on European fascisms has scarcely addressed and generally undervalued the fascist influence in Franco's Spain, both in the analysis of its national processes and from the perspective of generic fascism. This is so even though the latter recognizes aspects such as cultural transfers or spheres of military intervention as crucial for defining the fascist phenomenon. The importance of the Italian intervention in the political configuration of the 'New' Spain is very present in the work of Morten Heiberg, but not in the classic work of Coverdale, the common academic framework in English (despite its being written in the seventies) for the Italian intervention in Spain. The seminal biography of Mussolini written by De Felice openly underestimates Italian political penetration in Spain. Similarly, the historiography on international fascism, including works by authors such as Paxton, Griffin or Payne, largely invalidates the definition of 'fascist' for Franco's Civil War Spain, as it does not consider fascism the product of cultural, ideological or identity transfers, such as those that, in my opinion, one can find through direct research in Spain. In spite of their internal or personal differences and diverging assessments of the Spanish reality (which, in fact, hinged on those of Il Duce), all those involved in Mussolini's diplomatic and political network in Spain sought to set in motion the 'dominant thinking of the Fascist Government, which could thus be summarized: to fascistize Spain'. Here, I have no pretence of exploring every aspect of a topic open to debate, but I do intend to analyse, using the political, cultural and military agents of Mussolini in Spain as primary sources, what may be understood historically – as a historical process and experience – by the term fascistization.ⁱⁱ Rather than an intermediate stage between fascism and authoritarianism, fascistization, understood as the proactive process of construction, consolidation and radicalization under fascist dictatorships, was Mussolini's main intention in Spain, along with military support for Franco. Both elements, in fact, were directly interrelated.

Political and doctrinal intervention as such did not take shape until after Italy engaged in a massive national military intervention in Spain. In 1937, Mussolini's Italy became *de facto* a third bellicose force in the Civil War: a move that bears the marks of a long-range scheme (Rodrigo 2016). Beyond nurturing and financing aspirations against the Spanish Second Republic, Mussolini is known to have been fundamental in the evolution of the events of 1936. Among the elements that served to determine the intervention of Italy in the coup of July 1936 was undoubtedly the intent to establish an alliance of fascist powers that would combat popular fronts in Europe and (as would have been indicated at that time) bolshevism on Spanish soil. When it came to deciding Italy's participation in the war on the side of the Rebels, Mussolini had a great deal of political information at his disposal, thanks to his ambassador Orazio Pedrazzi, his consular agents and the *Servizio Informazioni Militare* (SIM) in Madrid, Barcelona and Africa. Among his personal papers, he kept a letter written from prison by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the National Director of the explicitly

fascist party known as the Falange Española de las JONS. As a reminder of the heavy political weight of the mobilization of July 1936, which ended with the sending of Italian agents, pilots, airplanes and military technicians to get Franco's Army of Africa forces to the mainland to assist in the attack on Madrid, on 21 July Franco personally communicated to Il Duce his intention of establishing a 'Fascist-type republican' government. It would be 'adapted to the Spanish people' after the 'hard but necessary fight to avoid a Soviet state' (which I tend to think sincere, though Heiberg considers it opportunistic).

The first Italian intervention in Spain was thus laden with strong political content. There is no other way to interpret the agreement of all sources regarding the decisiveness of the anti-communist (anti-popular front would be more correct) variable in the resolve to intervene in Spain in late July 1936. Hegemonic control of the Mediterranean, which is almost always used as the great explanatory factor, also implied reinforcement of the totalitarian state, easier access for Fascist adventures in Africa, and the gradual but unstoppable establishment of a great axis of dictatorships united in the seemingly fundamental aims of extirpating socialism and expanding territorially at the expense of undeveloped countries. Anticommunism as a narrative permeates virtually all the literature – including history – relevant to the Italian presence in the Spanish war. In Munich, on 25 October 1936, without explicitly mentioning communism (there was no need), Ciano himself explained the Italian and German support of Franco as the defence 'with all our forces of the sacred heritage of European civilisation in its great institutions, based on the family and the nation; institutions on which our civilisation is founded [...]'. According to Mussolini, 'blind terror' had accompanied the republic and democracy since 1789 (Sumsel and Sumsel 1951-63, 97-98).

Il Duce, for whom Franco's cause was not a military insurrection but a 'holy, national and legitimate uprising as was the Independence of 1808', was not merely commenting on the Spanish politics of the day. However, the political influence of Italian fascism, at least until 1937, does not really appear as a coordinated effort by political, diplomatic and military actors seeking to implicate themselves in the political construction of the 'New' Spain; rather, it resembles a series of attempts to acquire small spheres of influence – very much determined by the growing importance of military intervention – with which Mussolini and diverse Italian agents in Spain began to weave their own agendas. The exception was Mallorca, where Arconovaldo Bonaccorsi, the consul of the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* (the fascist voluntary militia) was sent at the request of the Rebel forces on the island. There, the self-proclaimed 'Count Rossi' tried to import the most visible forms of squadron fascism in terms of organization, agitation and radicalization, but without attending to the need for political, cultural and identity penetration. In the summer of 1936, Bonaccorsi, according to his own calculations, organized several marches through Palma of some 15,000 fascists in *balilla* (the Opera Nazionale youth movement) uniforms; in an attempt to abolish

the class struggle and strikes, he had also created commissary stores and worker confederations with no legal framework; and he had intervened in the labour market and founded a Falangist militia, which was compulsory for those between 17 and 60 years of age, along with the Balilla (8-12 years) and Avanguardia (13-19 years) youth sections. Apparently, all three Bonaccorsi's political projects failed and he attributed it to Spanish inefficacy, military intrigue between him and his circle of counsellors and a lack of fascist energy and faith. 'This revolution in Spain is made up of military bosses',ⁱⁱⁱ he would say. Not even the Falange, the only movement Bonaccorsi identified with fascism, had a defined social programme: 'they undoubtedly prefer the Hitler movement to that of Mussolini'.^{iv} Yet, as an Italian sacrifice to save Spain, he argued that Italy should remain in Spain as the 'Nazione Dominatrice', the dominant nation: politically and militarily, but above all economically (Quartararo 1977, 29).

Leaving aside the experience in the Balearic Islands, which clearly locates the implicit geostrategic objective of Fascist intervention in the coup d'état, Mussolini rapidly deployed a political action plan for a Francoist Spain that was decidedly 'in need of assistance' and direction beyond the military sphere. In fact, when the failure to take Madrid converted the planned coup d'état into a long war, he authorized his agent Guglielmo Danzi, head of the *Ufficio Stampa*, or Press Bureau, of the fledgling Italian Military Mission in Spain and a personal friend of Ciano, to work closely with the *Generalísimo* Franco in order to influence the political structure of the 'New' Spain. Evidently, he counted on great and sincere receptivity on the part of the emerging para-state. In December 1936, the Rebel Technical Council of the State, which Ramón Serrano Suñer – Franco's brother-in-law and the political factotum of the *national* Spain – described as a 'military field camp' devoid of political content, asked the Italian embassy for all kinds of propaganda material, including both academic materials for high-level scientific-technical studies and popular materials for diffusion on topics such as corporations, the *dopolavoro*, teaching or assistance. The package included large lithographs and mid-size photos of Il Duce, photos of Fascist officials and films from the *Istituto Luce*. There were fifty-one of these films by March of the following year, in addition to four prepared *ex profeso* and dubbed into Spanish: *Assistenza fascista ai lavoratori*, *Come il popolo ama il suo Duce*, *Protezione maternità e infanzia* and *Bonifica morale e materiale*, at a total cost of 150,000 lire.^v In December 1936, Nicolás Franco also petitioned the Italian embassy to send to Salamanca as quickly as possible a 'competent authority in areas of union corporativism to assess the Spanish situation and lay the bases of corporativism'.^{vi} The old corporativism of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923-30) could no longer serve as a reference. The reference point for the new Europe that Spain aspired to belong to was Mussolini's Italy.

In this context of political receptivity, as the differences between *Requetés* and Falangists grew deeper (as Cantalupo indicated to Ciano in December 1936),^{vii} Il Duce sought to guide the

‘completely disoriented’^{viii} political elite towards uniting their forces into a great national party. This effort would be carried out by Franco in a manner consistent with the strategic, military and diplomatic assistance received, since he was considered ‘the only fascist in Spain’ and holder of power and authority, as Filippo Anfuso indicated in November 1936. For Anfuso, Ciano’s personal secretary and head of cabinet for the Italian Ministry of the Exterior, it was evident that the surest bet was on a sufficiently ‘catechized’ future ‘Generalísimo’ who would manage to integrate the political parties into a single national one if, after its ‘cruel conflict’ (Coverdale 1975, 123), Spain was to avoid falling into rigid feudalism and clericalism that would eventually lead to further bloodshed. This idea of the integration of all political parties was implied in surprisingly early references to the ‘domestication’ of the Falange. Its actual domestication clearly remains open to diverse readings but is fundamental to understanding the Italian fascistization project for Spain. Perhaps the best-known theory explains the result of the Civil War in the Rebel rearguard as the denaturalization of a Falange that was itself seen as the sole repository of fascism in Spain. This theory inevitably questions the fascist nature of Franco’s Spain, even between 1937 and 1941. Italian reports by Danzi after interviewing José Millán Astray, however, point in a different direction: fascistization would occur through the creation of a national party under the control of the ‘healthy’ and conveniently purified political forces. Domesticating the Falange would involve their accepting integration into a great ‘national party’ headed by Franco himself as guarantor of authority: an unalterable condition that resists any other interpretation. In all reports, the centrality of Franco as the leader and national cohesive element is abundantly clear.^{ix}

So, in December, the requirements of a single Head – Franco, the ‘*ottimo condottiero*’ – a single party and a single militia were already being addressed in an agreement that the Head of State was expected to sanction ‘with an unappealable decision’, which would then be given legal form. With this, Franco would unify the state, ‘which externally would manifest the red beret of the *Requeté*; the blue shirt of the Falange; the Roman salute; the Yoke and Arrows as its symbol; a single national flag.’ Inwardly, the state would consist of ‘God and Catholicism (with no disagreements); one Fatherland; the Regime; one Head or Regent; social structure; national syndicalism and the corporativist system’.^x It is important to look again at the dates of these reports: they are not from April of 1937, when the Falange and the Traditionalists became formally unified. Documents from Cantalupo, the least enthusiastic Fascist agent deployed in Spain with regard to Franco, indicate that the process of creating a political architecture to integrate these ‘healthy’ counter-revolutionary forces began *four months earlier* than the party-militia unification, and apparently three months prior to Franco’s acceptance of Danzi’s political plan. In January of 1937, Danzi himself suggested to Franco, the supposed head of a military camp state, that in light of this definition of the political nature of the ‘New’ Spain, he should consider organising a vast

propaganda programme, including anti-bolshevist conferences, programmes on Radio Salamanca, and a substantial film campaign. The intent was to create an 'atmosphere of understanding and sympathy for Fascism in the Spanish working classes', for whom the word was 'synonymous with slavery, terror and injustice'.^{xi} He even suggested that Franco's Spain host a World Anti-Bolshevik Congress. Behind all this propagandistic set-up were the *Comitati D'Azione per la Universalità di Roma* (CAUR), which gave a propagandistic narrative to Italian fascist intervention in Spain.^{xii} This substantiates the early, direct institutional influence of Fascist Italy on 'national' Spain. Reports indicate that the political groundwork Mussolini had entrusted to the Press Secretary had been effective; Danzi wrote to Ciano on 9 January 1937 that 'General Franco has followed my suggestion and decided to found a political association headed by himself.'^{xiii}

In this political context, Il Duce decided not to indiscriminately support any single tendency for constructing the state party, in hopes that this might 'lead Franco [...] to a fusion of parties [...] which in all truth would definitively establish the bases for the fascistization of Spain'. The intent was to ensure the 'future activity of Italy in the Iberian Peninsula with extensive, solid, and lasting bases', established by the regime of the 'New' Spain, which was expected to be 'faithful to us and docile from its spiritual and legislative inception'. Fascist Spain would then be largely dependent on Italy, due to its political influence and especially its military involvement.^{xiv} Fascistization would not occur as Farinacci had imagined it: by convincing Franco to copy institutions from Italian Fascism. Rather, it should be a joint response mechanism, controlled by Mussolini, involving politics, the media and the secret services. Political reports from early 1937 indicate that fascistization implied diplomatic control of Franco, a single military command for the three fascist powers and political influence.^{xv} The need to create a state party echoed the history of the Italian National Fascist Party, which, according to Cantalupo, had not come about through fusion but by 'absorption, just as Mussolini had done with the Italian nationalists'.

It is therefore important to highlight that for the Italians, at least in their reports, the fascistization of Spain involved not explicitly supporting any single political faction, though they preferred the Falange as the 'state and action party-militia'. Another political envoy to Spain, the Comendador Ernesto Marchiandi, pointed out that creating a single party would move Franco towards the foundation of the corporative state. He indicated to Tullio Cianetti, President of the *Confederazione Nazionale dei Sindacati Fascisti dell'Industria*, that until this occurred, Spain would lack the 'synthesis capacity required for the most elementary totalitarian institutions'. Such disunity complicated 'our focused and interventionist action in domestic politics'.^{xvi} Mussolini's plan was clear: to consolidate Franco's power into a strong patriotic front (following the example of the PNF), absorb national parties, and offer social policy guarantees such as the abolition of privileges, distribution of uncultivated land, laws protecting traditional guilds, guaranteed minimum

salaries, institutes for social provision and hygiene at work, the creation of ‘dopolavist’ institutes and reinforcement of the obligation to work (Saz 1996, 150). In January 1937, Danzi and the Falangist leader Vicente Gay set to work on a programme to assist the creation of a ‘unitary political, spiritual, and corporative block’ on which to build the future totalitarian state.^{xvii}

Through this initiative, the Head of Propaganda of the MMIS indicated that same month that General Franco would become the ‘founder of vast reforms and seeker of the fusion of the parties in a political organism aligned with the Fascist party’. He would found reforms and fuse parties to create a new one with a ‘a Fascist or fascistoid’ doctrinal and political tendency upon which to base a ‘government and State Party called the Falange’,^{xviii} according to Franco’s brother, Nicolás Franco. The fascists always sought to support parties that used a rhetoric of ‘popular bases’ (rather than those seeking a return to the ‘good old days’). The name chosen three months prior to the decree that unified the parties clearly reveals the most relevant Rebel political force, one often considered trivial in the ‘military camp State’ context. These ‘special conditions’ made it the ‘subject of mobilization’ and membership, the magnetic pole for attracting the ‘red hordes’ and thereby the agent for seizing power (Gallego 2014, 443).

‘Single party, single militia, single workers’ union’

Obviously, the Italian political intervention in Spain was far from being unproblematic, both from the Italian perspective and the Spanish perspective. There are good examples of this in the Italian memorialistic literature. Most first-person memoirs of legionnaires who wrote during or just after the war consist of sweetened or exaggerated propagandistic constructs, but not without interpretative interest. Books in this category were mainly written by committed volunteer fascists such as Lodoli and Lajolo, and, in their opinion, the Spain they had liberated proved to be rather frustrating, while the Italy they returned to was bourgeois, grey, conformist and lacking military fascist voluntarism. They may have exaggerated their numbers and relative importance or interpreted events in excessive, laudatory and self-justifying ways that placed the brave and daring ‘we’ – the valiant fascists – in sharp contrast with a disgusting ‘they’ (Lodoli 1939, 38) – the cowardly scum. However, military documentation suggests that ‘they’ also extended to Spaniards in general; even their comrades in arms were considered poor, backward, proud, naïve *hidalgos*. The first report written by Roberto Farinacci during his 1937 political mission was revealing in this regard. In spite of his doubts regarding its fascist qualities, it was clear to him from the beginning that the coup was profoundly brutal and the political cleansing in the rearguard was shaping the ‘New’ Spain. ‘Let us not be deceived’ about ‘the efficiency of our political work’: blood was being shed in the midst of ‘widespread indifference’, and everyone spoke of ‘firing squads ‘in the same

way they talked about the cinema'. Spaniards could agree on nothing but to 'massacre each other daily'.^{xix}

Farinacci thus inaugurated a written propensity toward moral superiority, Italian supremacy and disgust or disdain for Spaniards that would colour most fascist agent and informer reports on Spain. The population had seemingly become accustomed to the sanguinary climate; no one was in a hurry to 'end this carnage'. Indeed, many 'wear mourning clothes' but 'speak with indifference of how their brother, son or husband has been shot'. Farinacci indicated to his friend Mussolini that mass shootings were problematic for the Italians, who had come neither to quench Spanish bloodlust nor assist in vengeance, but to defend fascism from communist attack. The race to exterminate in equal numbers made barbarism almost a sport, but the Spaniards only wanted the comfort of 'food, siestas and leisure'. The cafés were always full, you couldn't get a seat in the bullfights, and no one grasped how the fate of Mediterranean civilization – which safeguarded the 'ancient history of Spain' – was at stake in this combat.^{xx} Within this context, the March 1937 Fascist defeat in Guadalajara acted as a multiplier element. It is still a topic not supported by the documentation that Italy lost political influence after the defeat of Guadalajara. On the contrary: after the defeat, Mussolini intensified the Italian presence in Spain. There were Spanish soldiers and officers satisfied by the Italian military defeat, but it was never a generalized phenomenon. And in fact, the defeat was read from Italy in terms of lack of Spanish military and political preparation: Mussolini would have to achieve total victory, not 'despite Guadalajara, but because of Guadalajara'.^{xxi}

The single party and political unification came about through a process of trial and error in which not everyone agreed on everything. Franco's strength actually resided in the support of the emerging Axis. Along with his growing prestige in public opinion and among the troops, Franco would achieve his greatest legitimacy through recognition by Italy and Germany, stemming especially from the great military, diplomatic and moral support of the Italians: help that was given emphatically 'to him personally'.^{xxii} 'These people have gunpowder for brains',^{xxiii} Danzi concluded, and, in this context, the only hope was a Franco who had been evangelized and indoctrinated in fascism, a recipient of military aid and thereby debtor to fascist powers. In February, this motivated Manuel Hedilla, the National Head of the Falange, to call for a new charismatic leader in Spain, incarnated in the 'youthful, strong and typically Spanish spirit of Generalísimo Franco', to whom he pledged full loyalty. The Carlists also saw the influence of the Italian embassy in a positive light, which explains why Javier de Borbón openly declared his admiration for Mussolini in a letter to him.^{xxiv}

In this context of trial and error, just between the victorious offensive in Malaga and the failed one in Guadalajara, Roberto Farinacci was sent to Spain from 3-19 March. Renowned

Fascist, former General Secretary of the PNF and member of the Grand Council of Fascism, he was sent by Il Duce to mediate the postures of the Fascist agents in Spain and to assist in the design of a fascist party along the lines of what he had helped create in Italy. The note of introduction to Franco identified him as a pioneer of fascism, fighter for the race, valiant officer, and maimed aviator from the African war who had come to Spain to present his ideas for the future. However, his meetings in Salamanca with Roatta, Franco, Hedilla, Cantalupo, Giménez Caballero, Nicolás Franco, the Count of Rodezno, Eugenio Montes and Agustín de Foxá were problematic: he belittled the Embassy and confronted Hedilla, who had expressed irritation to Cantalupo, stating: 'Does Mussolini think we are idiots?' According to the Ambassador (who found his 'exclusive' competencies being encroached upon), Farinacci also caused a fair number of people to question Mussolini's motives. For some, as Cantalupo remarked, alluding to his contacts in the General Headquarters of Franco, it seemed that Il Duce had sent Farinacci to set the Falange against Franco and create an opposing Falangist current. For others, his objective was to convince the traditionalists to strengthen ties with the reactionary French right wing. Though he managed to unite all sides in greater or lesser dislike of himself, he successfully divided the Italian political agents in Spain. Danzi informed that Cantalupo had become invidious: he systematically opposed any Italian political envoy to Spain and saw Farinacci's mission to Spain as 'a political error and offence to his dignity'. This rivalry undermined the fascistization work. In a clear attempt to discredit Farinacci to the 'Generalísimo', Danzi reminded Nicolás Franco that this false hero had actually lost his hand fishing with grenades in Africa. Farinacci, who fancied himself ambassador to Spain, stirred up some of the most notorious confrontations in the Italian rearguard and was the only one to get Danzi and Cantalupo to agree on anything: that he was 'an illiterate fool'.^{xxv}

Fool or not, Farinacci called several political meetings at the highest level in a Spain that seemed to him a 'total chaos'. According to his reports, on 4 March he was able to see Franco, whom he described as a timid political dwarf who lacked the profile of a leader and who if 'younger and uglier would look like Puppini, our Minister of Communications'. In his estimation, *Generalissimo* Franco had no clear vision for the future Spain, beyond winning the war, establishing an authoritarian government to 'cleanse Spain' of any who had had direct or indirect contact or sympathies with the Reds and implementing a corporativist programme like those 'in Italy, Germany, Austria and Portugal'.^{xxvi} Farinacci thought that the first priority was to 'create the nation', a task that could not be entrusted to Falangists or *Requetés* because they lacked worthy leaders. The next step would be to lay the doctrinal foundation of a Spanish National Party that would unite all political forces and be oriented 'toward the working classes', which Franco had shown interest in. The inexperience of those entrusted with the 'New' Spain became evident to Farinacci in his interviews with Hedilla, who seemed open to meetings with the *Requetés* regarding

the creation of a 'new national movement that Franco should consider valuable and useful'. Then there was Nicolás Franco, the government factotum, who must have 'treasured many of my suggestions' – to the point of asking for them in writing – regarding 'authoritarian and totalitarian' reconstruction policies, social programmes, mother and child care or assistance and improvement of the material and moral conditions of the working classes through wage increases, a forty-hour work week, promotion of the military industry and public employment, or new agrarian policies. However, it became abundantly clear to Farinacci that what Spain needed would require seizing greater political power.

Soon after, Cantalupo wrote that in his judgement, the generalized political disaster and Franco's antipathy for the Falange and its leader, combined with Hedilla's incompetence and obstinacy regarding integration into a great national movement more favourable to the traditionalists, could only be resolved through resolute intervention by Mussolini. The ambassador understood that Il Duce had called them to order and was implementing a political action plan parallel to the military support that had been given.^{xxvii} Whether he understood correctly or not, there are sufficient indications pointing to the possibility of an intervention from Rome that would put an end to the political uncertainty in the Rebel rearguard. In fact, besides Danzi (with whom Franco may have met during the writing of the Unification Decree), the Falangist Ernesto Giménez Caballero was also considered a faithful collaborator and enforcer for Il Duce. All of them together apparently exercised considerable influence – though it seemed forced to the point of exaggeration at times – over the political configuration of the regime that took shape in Salamanca. Danzi, after talking to the Head of Propaganda for the Falange, Tito Menéndez Rubio (who asked him to meet with Hedilla), indicated that the Falangists were becoming more and more 'convinced fascists' in the Italian sense and less in the German sense: believers in a 'totalitarianist Italianophile policy'. In other words, they were under the protection of 'Mussolini's spiritual paternity'. The ascending political influence of Il Duce was consistent with the fact that he had founded the first fascism in power and – especially – with the level of Italian military involvement on behalf of Franco and the 'national' Spain. Danzi commented how the Falangists had reduced everything to the idea that Germany had made Hitler but Mussolini had made Italy.^{xxviii} From this position of influence, Cavalletti, the Italian Consul in San Sebastián, could affirm that the 'national movement' had embraced 'the main lines of the Fascist revolution', a revolution that would require a definitive power grab.^{xxix}

There may be some truth in an informant's comment from early April that Franco 'has never understood anything about politics', and was thus in need of an external influence that would impose on him the execution of 'bold social reforms' and a 'unitary and completely military wartime conduct' in order to get out of a 'grave and uncertain' situation.^{xxx} It is unclear whether, to

end the political chaos and perhaps the uncertainty, this political unification was forged in the following few days (Gallego 2014, 456-479). The definition of its contours and budgets had been in process since the beginning of the year. In his reports, Danzi takes much of the credit for it, with personalized excesses that, at the very least, cast doubt regarding the veracity of his account.^{xxxii} He indicates that, on 17 April, during the political upheavals in Salamanca, he met with Hedilla regarding the *Requeté* response to being absorbed by the Falange. In regards to a possible revolt, Danzi stated that 'It would not be difficult to put it down'. Hedilla replied, 'You are right. I will go to the Generalísimo and say: "Ready for orders"'. Later, Nicolás Franco called and invited him to lunch. If what was indicated in another report is true, that same night, 'General Franco called me to his headquarters and together we have drawn up the fusion of the parties into one'.^{xxxiii} This implies that both brothers were together. To end the vigil, at 3:00 in the morning, Nicolás 'began to take notes' that, in his own words, were 'fatted up like a pig' and served as the basis for creating the Unification Decree.^{xxxiii} For Tulio Rispolti, it was a Spanish version of the fusion of the Italian nationalists into the *Partito Nazionale Fascista*: the 'reconstruction of a unitary, social and imperial sentiment' (Rispolti 1942, 244).

We know it was not that easy. After the Decree had been published and he saw the composition of the National Council of the incipient *FET y de las JONS* party, Danzi spoke with Hedilla, who said that the unification was, in fact, 'the demise of the Falange' and that he would resign because he could not be in a Council with 'counts who wake up at 11 in the morning'. Since he did not buy the Italian's argument that standing down would play into the hands of international anti-fascism, as a last resort Danzi offered Hedilla a move to Italy. More than a few informants indicated that the unification had simply postponed the problems, that the party was weak, poorly organized and entirely unprepared to act in this situation. Likewise, Franco, who only apparently tended towards fascism, was not the right person to resolve internal, military, and social problems simultaneously. The unification was little more than a 'scrap of paper' for Danzi, who soon after was removed from Spain for overstepping his authority, according to Mario Roatta^{xxxiv}. In spite of the union representing the "New" Spain, for which so many had 'offered up their lives', no one understood unification as the 'categorical imperative' that would give Spain a 'clearly and purely Fascist authoritarian government' for purifying the 'soul of the Spanish people'. However, behind their surfeit of metaphors (the soul, the people, the nation, the spirit, etc.), fascist political agents were advancing an explicit programme of active influence dictated by Mussolini himself. Il Duce's vision was very clear: the Fascist party could not be a pure minority; it had to represent an entire National Movement. Beyond the symbolic questions and issues regarding the balance of influence with the Germans (who openly supported Hedilla), the Italian General Staff reports seem to indicate that in Rome the internal issues of the Falange and the single party were of little interest. 'Since the

intention of Rome is to support Franco', whom Il Duce thought capable of keeping bolshevism from 'setting foot in Spain or the Mediterranean', their position with regard to the unification of parties was to 'find out what they are thinking in order to support their candidate' (Sumsel and Sumsel 1951-63, 184). Therefore, since Franco's candidate was Franco himself, there was little concern about 'resistance to the unification'.^{xxxv}

This is the key to the entire affair. The problem surrounding the creation of *FET y de las JONS*, and the disunion that prevailed in the party in the summer of 1937, was almost a logical outcome of the way in which unification came about. However, it was also exactly the outcome Mussolini had in mind for the fascistization of Spain. Even if the Falange were, as Giménez Caballero put it, effectively the 'shadow of a shadow' and unification 'a dream', the situation would remain controllable and no political issue would lead to public disorder. An anonymous Italian informant commented that, except for recently occupied areas, the internal situation of *national* Spain in June was satisfactory: the single party was temporarily amalgamated, Franco wielded great authority and the atmosphere was good.^{xxxvi} In fact, compared to the enemy rearguard, the political situation in the Fascist rearguard was mostly non-conflictive and facilitated the work of exercising influence over the new central elements of the single party and its National Council. Only this overall process can explain the authority with which Ciano wrote on 5 May: 'Inform General Franco, with regard to his government programme, that perhaps it is now time to adopt the *Carta del Lavoro*'. This preceded another Mussolinian suggestion that Franco take advantage of the first anniversary of the coup d'état to form a government.^{xxxvii}

The *Fuero de Trabajo*, or Labor Charter, would take almost another year to develop, but would have what Il Duce considered an Italian imprint, as did many other actions aimed at designing the political architecture of Franco's Spain. The EIAR (*Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche*) indicated that when the National Council of the Falange created a commission to study the bases for the corporatist organization of the Spanish state, the Italian embassy placed an urgent order for 250 'Aquila' wall posters about corporative laws, twenty copies of Il Duce's speech on the topic and a large number of corporatist propagandist tracts.^{xxxviii} The day before the meeting of the National Council to discuss the text – in which dozens of amendments (especially traditionalist ones) were made – Marchiandi met with several council members to 'enlighten them' regarding the Italian *Carta del Lavoro* and to establish some solemn principles for future development, which would fully justify 'the ideal reasons behind the Italian intervention in Spain'. Though it captured the political nature of the 'New' Spain, the final Work Charter was, according to Viola, a doctrinal disaster that lacked 'the clarity that is of capital importance in a document intended to permeate the future regime of Spain'.^{xxxix} Rather than solid confirmation of social reform policies, it was a compendium of nice words with no practical application. No one could

define what a vertical union of producers actually was. Nevertheless, though not so clear as the *Carta del Lavoro*, it contained ‘its founding principles’.^{xi}

The Italian embassy openly supported and facilitated the work of council member Pedro Sáinz Rodríguez, National Delegate for Culture, and his plan for ideological and cultural penetration. According to Viola, the education and cultural reform plan took inspiration from the Fascist Gentile reform, which, in addition to transforming the Spanish School in Bologna into a centre for studies on fascist public and social order, would construct the theoretical corpus of the ‘New’ Spain (Morente 2005). Sáinz Rodríguez asked the Italian embassy for books and information on a wide variety of topics: from the administrative structure of the MinCulPop (Ministry for Popular Culture) to primary, baccalaureate, and university education, physical and pre-military education, the national theatre, opera, educational theatre, conservatories, dance troupes, musical bands, national and mobile libraries, radio, ethnography, folklore, cinema, etc. The Ministry understood the complexity of the petition, but did everything possible to accommodate it in light of the possibility of placing a ‘Fascist stamp on cultural and artistic manifestations of the New Spain’.^{xli}

In addition to theoretical material, Fascist Italy sent a diverse group of technical experts from its ministries to Spain. In January 1938 Starace received an invitation from Raimundo Fernández Cuesta, the General Secretary of the Falange, for a delegation from the PNF to visit Franco’s Spain. The request was fulfilled by General Tomaso Bottarti, Consul Ludovico Ferraudi, General Giuseppe Manni and the honourable Livio Gaetani and Luigi Scarfiotti.^{xlii} Franco Angelini, President of the *Confederazione Fascista dei Lavoratori della Terra*, also visited Spain at the invitation of the Ministry of Agriculture, in July 1938, to assess the agricultural situation, exchange ideas with Falangist representatives and establish collaborative agreements. He told Viola that these were more political than technical visits, in response to a fundamental petition of the Minister and the Secretary of *FET y de las JONS*: to study ‘the work and agrarian orientation of our National-Syndicalist Revolution’ and make public ‘the guidelines that fascist doctrine has put into practice in this area of national activity’.^{xliii} Collaboration and learning increased with the sending of technicians and professionals to Italy, such as the 200 Spanish teachers sent to learn Italian methods in November 1938. José María Pemán, Eugenio Montes and Pilar Primo de Rivera attended the closing session of this special course, and Pedro Sáinz Rodríguez took advantage of the trip to ‘orient Spanish educational reform to follow in [Italian] organizational footsteps’.

In Rome, the Marquis Alfonso de Zayas awaited them, the former provincial head of the Falange in the Balearic Islands and (since June) representative of the *FET y de las JONS* to the Fascist government. A month earlier he had been invited to the mass in Rome commemorating the fifth anniversary of the Falange and fallen Falangists and legionnaires in Spain. Penetration and

influence was exercised even in these rather low-profile details and others that proliferated before the end of the Civil War. Welfare duties organized by the Spanish Office, such as camps for Spanish children in Italy in 1937 and 1938, or the convalescence in Italy of wounded Spaniards or the several boatloads of food to Catalonia and Alicante following their military occupation, demonstrated the importance of these bilateral political relations in both countries and political regimes. This was the extent of the Fascist success in Spain. Those such as Danzi or Farinacci, who each had tried in their own way to import logics, loyalties and identities equivalent to those of the Fascist Ventennio returned to Italy disappointed. Time and again their idealist, vanguardist, squadron-style, mobilizing, population-nationalizing fascism crashed against the reality of the Rebel rearguard in the Civil War. A clear example of this was Italo Jullioti, an extreme Fascist in charge of the *Fascio Raffaele Tarantini de Sevilla*, a branch of the Southern Spain Delegation of the *Fasci Italiani all'Esterio*. His political reports to the Minister Dino Alfieri are replete with fascist lingo, generalizations, metaphors and judgements that mix political 'climates' with what 'the masses need' or a 'superior civilization'. From his perspective, to fascistize Spain was to civilize it.^{xliv} Beyond the self-sufficient politics of metaphor, his words were very misplaced and reflected 'perceptions' of Fascist Italy based on the treatment he received, especially in reference to the unification being a betrayal of the falangism of 'Antonio [sic] Primo de Rivera' and the 'falangist minority that has understood Mussolini'. This amounted to a dagger in Il Duce's back. Spain, he said, needed a Mussolini, but Franco was to Il Duce what 'a sergeant of logistics was to Napoleon'. However, his beloved Duce gave no signs of agreement. As he had already indicated in October 1937, Mussolini openly affirmed that the European states were on a fascist path, even though they claimed the contrary. Each would have its own fascism, its 'complex of doctrines, methods, experiences and achievements' adapted to the needs of each people. The context and needs of Franco's Spain were very clear. Though not the dominant nation on Spanish soil, as Bonaccorsi had demanded, Fascist Italy did become the central political reference for the construction of the 'New' State. Sustained by his bellicose temper and the belief that establishing fascism did not involve supporting a faction but allowing a great national party, Mussolini could feel satisfied about his work in Spain for years to come, at least until 1943.

Conclusion

In the words of Giuseppe Bottai, in wartime the fascists may or may not supply arms, but 'they cannot not supply ideas to the peoples who fight'.^{xlv} Apparently, the first immediate effect of Fascist political intervention in Spain was to supply these ideas; the Italians also served as the custodians of the successful path of fascistization and were thereby guarantors (through ideological

influence, diplomatic aid and military weight) of the conditions for implanting fascism in Spain. The issue of Fascist political influence in Spain thus merits informed reconsideration. It must be removed from the sphere of mere anecdote and restored to its own territory: one that extends beyond political conversations in corridors or private meetings with consular consultants to include ideological and cultural penetration, propagandistic pressure and, most of all, everyday experience. The Civil War was the facilitating frame for fascism and determined its process and outcomes. However, the success or failure of Italian penetration in Spain depended heavily on what was understood by ‘fascistize’. In my opinion, for the Italians it did not mean implanting but rather influencing and transforming. Evidently, it did not mean importing the national organizational model of the fascism operating in Italy, or supporting the party that most closely approached fascist ideas – the Falange – though many agents in Spain concluded thus. To fascistize meant rather to influence the configuration of a regime born in the specific context of a civil war and support its leader with weapons and the force of political influence. This leader would create national unity, victory and empire, causing the various counter-revolutionary, anti-communist and anti-democratic tendencies to converge and flow together. This regime and war were followed with ‘fraternal understanding’ from Italy for three basic reasons: ‘affinity of ideals’, complementarity of the ‘mission’ of Spain and Italy in Europe, and because ‘Italy had first and single-handedly combatted the same danger’.^{xlvi}

The anti-communism of the fascist powers in Spain was not merely propagandistic; nor did the Italians dedicate ‘very little’ (Ranzato 2006, 66) to the task of fascist cultural penetration. Vito Baltrani wrote in his book *Antirussia*, in 1939, that, from his perspective, Italy had already become the bishop on the chessboard, defending European civilization from ‘Bolshevik materialism’ that, unlike fascism (which had defeated them), had bounced off the walls of the Old World. ‘Mussolini, Hitler, Pilsudski, Salazar, Franco, Mosley’ and the other eminent leaders of fascist-based movements knew perfectly well that they were called not only to national reconstruction but also to endow the peoples with a common faith that only fascism could offer (Zani 2008, 227). As Mussolini himself indicated after the fall of Barcelona in January 1939, this ‘splendid victory [...] is another chapter in the history of the New Europe we are creating. Franco’s magnificent troops and our intrepid legionnaires have defeated more than Negrín’s army. Right now many of our enemies are biting the dust’.^{xlvii}

In sum, fascism became a first-order political culture in Europe thanks to its immediate context of geopolitical, economic, employment or moral crisis. Much of this success can be attributed to cultural transfers in the form of political cultures, common mythologies and geostrategic relations within Europe. Italian fascism built a cultural network dedicated to ensuring its centrality in the New European Order, which was ratified by Mussolini’s intervention in the war

in Spain. Reproduction in Spain of many elements identified with the Fascist regime – from the single party to social organization (women, youth, students, workers), from hierarchy and obedience as a form of socialization to corporativist policies – points to the circulation of convergent ideas. Satisfaction regarding the outcome of the political process of the spring of 1937 was categorical; on 13 August 1937, Mussolini congratulated Franco for his political successes with the words: ‘Single Party, single militia, single worker’s union, on these three pillars the great Spain of tomorrow will be built’.^{xlviii} The fascistization that Mussolini sponsored in Spain would not focus on penetration, acceptance, imposition, adaptation, purging and contamination but on influence, leadership, armed support, common objectives, common enemies and confluence in a Catholic counter-revolutionary movement. Mussolini had spoken.

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ⁱ Archivio Storico Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASMAE), Affari Politici (AP), busta (b) 61.

ⁱⁱ The basic historiography of Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War includes Coverdale 1975, Heiberg 2004, and Preston 1999. From a military perspective, Rovighi and Stefani 1992 and Alcofar Nassaes 1972, 1976 and 1975. An excellent review on the debates of the seventies is Smyth 1978. More recent, Sullivan 1995. Pro-Franco and anti-communist visions are present in Gelli and Lenoci 1995, Romeo di Colloredo 2012 and Griner 2006.

ⁱⁱⁱ ASMAE, Gabinetto (GAB), b795.

^{iv} Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores (AMAE), Archivo de Burgos (AB), Legajo (L) 1460, carpeta (c) 6.

^v ASMAE, AP, b23. Among the fifty-one films sent were *Il cammino degli eroi*, *Campo Dux*, *Sotto il segno del Littorio*, *Camicia Nera*, *Giornate del Duce a Milano*, and *Per la protezione della stirpe*. Almost all were about the occupation of Ethiopia. The first one specifically devoted to the Spanish Civil War was *Arriba Espana* [sic].

^{vi} Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Ministero deglo Interni (MI), Polizia Politica, b251.

^{vii} According to the Ambassador, the first group involved a tight group of well-organised aristocrats and capitalists with propaganda resources and front-line combatants. They were contentious and perplexed by the fact that the

Vatican did not clearly side with the Rebels. The Falange at that time had no clear leader after the death of José Antonio Primo de Rivera but still had a large membership, a modern social programme and great popularity amongst workers.

- viii Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (USSME), Fascicolo (F) 6, 327.
- ix This is so in all reports except those of Italian Ambassador Roberto Cantalupo, who evidently hated Franco and considered him an effeminate and 'feudal' general who represented the 'past' and would only bring an 'ephemeral tranquility' at an enormous price in bloodshed: USSME, F18, b9. Though he deemed Franco lacking in aptitude for leading the process, his fascist interpretation of the Spanish political situation disqualified both the 'traditionalist opportunists', who represented what Mussolini had fought against in his fascist revolution, and Manuel Hedilla, head of the Falange and leader of a movement 'completely devoid of culture'. Unfortunately, this left only Franco, who had generally shown himself to be 'a man who was loved but deficient in ideas and more so in sentiments, almost unread, with ambitions that scarcely reached beyond family [...] foreign to the modern Europe: the least Fascist imaginable' and also not trustworthy in 'virility and loyalty': ASMAE, Ufficio Spagna (US), b10.
- x ASMAE, AP, b20.
- xi USSME, F6, 327.
- xii ASMAE, US, b13.
- xiii ASMAE, US, b27.
- xiv ASMAE, US, b10.
- xv ASMAE, AP, b14.
- xvi ASMAE, US, b29.
- xvii ASMAE, AP, b14.
- xviii ASMAE, US, b10.
- xix ASMAE, US, b2, USSME, F18, b2, ASMAE, US, b1: Farinacci's reports to the Fascist Gran Consiglio and notes about his meetings with Spanish relevant politicians.
- xx Idem.
- xxi USSME F6, b335.
- xxii USSME, F18, b2.
- xxiii ASMAE, AP, b14.
- xxiv ASMAE, US, b10. On Carlists, Peñalba 2014.
- xxv ASMAE, US, b25 and b10. ASMAE, GAB, b461.
- xxvi ASMAE, US, b2, USSME, F18, b2, ASMAE, US, b1.
- xxvii ASMAE, US, b10.
- xxviii ASMAE, US, b10.
- xxix ASMAE, AP, b14.
- xxx USSME, F6, b336.
- xxxi Danzi is, surprisingly, non-existent in pro-Francoist García Venero 1970 or in Chueca 1983. Both Danzi and Italian intervention in political terms are irrelevant for Rodríguez Jiménez 2000, Peñalba 2009, Thomàs 1999, 2001, 2014. See Preston 1994, 315.
- xxxii USSME, F6, b334.
- xxxiii ASMAE, US, b27.
- xxxiv ASMAE, US, b10 and USSME, F6, b336.
- xxxv USSME, F6, b334.
- xxxvi USSME, F6, b336.
- xxxvii ASMAE, GAB, b461 y USSME F18, b7.
- xxxviii ASMAE, US, b27.
- xxxix ASMAE, AP, b14.
- xl ASMAE, AP, b34 y USSME, F6, b336.
- xli ASMAE, AP, b34.
- xlii ASMAE, US, b11.
- xliii ASMAE, US, b27.
- xliv ACS, MinCulPop, GAB, b75.
- xlvi Giuseppe Bottai, "Sul piano imperiale", *Critica Fascista*, September 1, 1936.
- xlvi ASMAE, US, b11.
- xlvi *Il Messaggero*, January 28, 1939.
- xlvi USSME, F6, b334.