



RECENSÃO

Fascism and Ideology: Italy, Britain and Norway,
by Salvatore Garau,
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Análise Social, 225, LII (4.º), 2017

ISSN ONLINE 2182-2999

EDIÇÃO E PROPRIEDADE

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GARAU, Salvatore

Fascism and Ideology: Italy, Britain and Norway,

New York and London, Routledge, 2015, 298 pp.

ISBN 9780415732192

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This book by Salvatore Garau is a very useful work for those interested in knowing more about the dynamics of fascist ideology. It is the result of a doctoral dissertation supervised by David Cesarini, the recently deceased historian whose field of expertise was the Holocaust and other aspects of Jewish history.

With 298 pages, the book is divided into two main parts, each of them with three chapters, plus an introduction and a conclusion. The first part deals with Italian Fascism (which is seen as a case of success, that is, a case in which the fascist movement actually attained political power) in both its movement and regime phases, while the second part deals with the British and Norwegian cases (seen as examples of failure, for these fascist movements were unable to conquer political power on their own).

As Garau states in his introduction, he agrees with the idea that ideology is one important key to grasp the phenomenon of fascism, even though he does not reject paying attention to its political practices. Thus, he adopts three perspectives of looking at ideologies, including the one that sees fascism as run through by meta-political drives, and the one that sees it as a question of mentality and ethos. The third perspective is the one that sees ideology as “a space where political concepts

were developed and negotiated” (p. 11), the result of a complex process of syncretization and redefinition of different concepts and elements drawn from most varied political traditions.

These three perspectives, so Garau argues, are useful to understand fascism’s ideological dynamism (that is, the contradictory drives that could lead the movements to either radicalism or to compromise with existing institutions, either to totalitarianism or to an authoritarianism more similar to the one espoused by its conservative conflicting allies), and its “aggregative power” (its capacity to aggregate different elements from several political traditions). In order to fully grasp these two aspects, the author introduces three further concepts: a) fascist maximum, which refers to the full ideological extent of fascist movements and the different factions that existed within them; b) totalitarian inclusiveness, that is, the ability of fascist movements to incorporate elements of different ideologies while claiming that they were the only ones able to rightly interpret them and put them into practice; c) ideological ubiquity, the ability to apparently occupy different positions in the political spectrum (in both its left and right sides), and due to that gain support from the most disparate groups. It is with the

help of these concepts that Garau intends to grasp a better understanding of fascist movements in Italy, Britain, and Norway, their dynamism and ideological fluidity.

The first chapter in Part I, “At the roots of Fascism’s Ideological Fluidity”, deals with the process of ideological transformation and conceptual redefinition that preceded the origins of Fascism and took place in a period of profound changes in several political traditions. Here, Garau mentions the elitist, radical, and organicist type of nationalism espoused by the *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana* (ANI) and the producers-focused revolutionary ideology of National Syndicalism, whose main goal was to fuse socialism and nationalism. Garau’s main argument is that, even though these ideologies evolved in a post-liberal direction, their main themes and political concepts had roots in the Italian liberal tradition, which represents a departure from Sternhell’s (1994) thesis that these new forms of nationalism advocated an utter revolt against liberalism.

The next chapter, “Totalitarian Inclusiveness: Italian Fascism from Marginality to Mass Movement, 1919-1922”, focuses on the movement phase of Italian Fascism. Making use of the concept of totalitarian inclusiveness, Garau argues that the Fascist movement set up its ideology in a dynamic process that included contradictory tendencies. In this movement phase, Fascism was first influenced by the Futurist artistic movement and the ex-soldiers known as *arditi*, who gave it a metapolitical drive prone to advocate radical change and a mentality

that favored direct action. As to the ideological morphology (the doctrine), it was first influenced by concepts coming from National Syndicalism and later by more conservative tendencies that started to grow from 1920 onwards.

Continuing the analysis of the complexity of Fascist ideology, the chapter “The Laborious Search for a Balance: Italian Fascism as a Regime, 1923-1939” distinguishes the main ideological factions that were part of the dynamism of fascist ideology: Radical Fascism (with its violent war-like mentality), the Normalizers (who thought that Fascism should accommodate existing liberal elites and institutions), and National Syndicalists (who advocated a non-statistic corporatism and the fusion of workers and employers in the same corporations). However, the faction that contributed the most to form the ideological morphology of the regime was the one espoused by Nationalists like Alfredo Rocco who came from ANI and favored a statistic form of corporatism. The process of finding a balance between all these contradictory visions is therefore fundamental to grasp the complexity of Fascist ideology and the totalitarian inclusiveness that was at its core.

Having dealt with one example of fascist success, Garau then proceeds in Part II to the analysis of two fascist movements that were unsuccessful: the British Union of Fascists (BUF), led by Oswald Mosley, and the Norwegian Nasjonal Samling (NS), led by Vidkun Quisling. The chapter “Into the Arms of Fascism: Left, Right and New Combinations of Political Concepts

in Britain and Norway, 1923-1933” points to the existence of an ideological fluidity in these countries that was similar to the one experienced in Italy prior to the coming of the fascist movement. Thus, Garau mentions radical nationalist right-wing organizations like the British Fascisti and Fedrelandslaget. Likewise, it is possible to find some people with a leftist past that followed a path close to that of Italian National Syndicalists.

The next chapter, “Building an Inclusive Political Platform: The British Union of Fascists and the Nasjonal Samling, 1932-1934” studies the initial evolution of the ideology of these movements, pointing to their obsession with national crisis and decline, their violent mentality, and the ideological inclusiveness the main goal of which was to attract people coming from all sides of the political spectrum. Garau also argues that their programmatic incorporation of the most successful aspects of the Italian regime resulted paradoxically in a factor that helps explain how their failure for it deprived the movements of the flexibility and adaptability that was fundamental to aid Mussolini’s conquest of power. Finally, the last chapter, “Between Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism: From Expansion to Implosion, 1934-1939”, deals with the internal dialects that characterized both of these movements, distinguishing between authoritarian/conservative and radical/totalitarian factions that were predominant in different phases.

One of the strengths in Garau’s work is that while accepting the currently generalized standpoint that ideology is

a key to understand Fascism, it does not stick to a static view that tries to summarize fascism in a few fixed concepts or ideal-types. On the contrary, when pointing to its metapolitical drives, ethos, inclusiveness, and ubiquity, Garau shows us a dynamic and fluid process of constant ideological redefinition. He thus avoids falling into arguments like the ones espoused by Sternhell (1994), who defended that the movements were somehow purer than regimes in which compromise was necessary: according to Garau, both compromise and adaptability were at the core of Fascism in all of its phases. Likewise, he does not separate between “real” revolutionary fascists and conservative road-travelers (as Griffin (1993) is sometimes prone to do): conservatives and radicals were both a part of the fascist dynamics and the contradictions, and balancing between these and other factions is a fundamental component of movements and regimes.

We can say that in Garau’s study Fascism becomes a “living” phenomenon, one that evolved and changed according to different influences and internal contradictions, a phenomenon led by a metapolitical drive and a specific mentality to which could be added doctrines coming from different groups and individuals. While not rejecting the concept of a “fascist minimum” he goes further and uses the notion of “fascist maximum,” and it is exactly here that the main contribution of Garau’s work to fascist studies resides, for in this way he can have a clearer grasp of the totality of the ideological visions that were contained within a movement.

Future studies could test this methodology further and use it, for example, in an important case, the absence of which can be seen as one of the weaknesses of this book: we refer to the case of German National Socialism.

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