



RECENSÃO

*Dittature mediterranee.
Sovversioni fasciste e colpi di Stato
in Italia, Spagna e Portogallo,*
de Giulia Albanese,
por Romain Bonnet

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There exists a great *problématique* that is acutely observable: the Southern European Question, that includes at the very least Portugal, Spain, and Italy, and that is vital in understanding modern European history. However, almost nobody has dared to use a comparative method to grasp its multiple complexities. Almost a century after Pirenne and

Bloch's pioneering pleas for comparative history, it remains "a contested method" as Heinz-Gerhard Haupt noted in an eponymously-named article. It is in this context that we welcome Giulia Albanese's *Mediterranean dictatorship* (title), which compares the 1920s *fascist subversions and coups d'États in Italy, Spain and Portugal* (subtitle). Although, in many

ways, Portugal is more of an “Atlantic” than “Mediterranean” country, geographically, the “Mediterranean” dimension has to be understood in a persisting *longue durée*, through which European and global scales are necessarily imbricated, while politically the contemporary Revolutions and counter-revolutions have to be thought of in relation to one another.

One of the author’s main theses precisely underlines “the imitative process between the three countries (...) the impact of the March on Rome on the Spanish and Portuguese politics, but also the coup d’État of Primo de Rivera on Portugal”, appearing particularly significant “the role of Italy as detonator of the crisis, but also as an example of a new political model” (p. xx1). Political and organized violence contributed greatly to the Fascist line-break in Europe, which allowed “recasting bourgeois Europe” (p. xvii). Methodologically, a “parallel observation, comparative and transnational” is proposed, to “increase our knowledge of each of the three contexts, and more generally of European history during this period” (p. xx). This demonstration, partly based on secondary literature, is completed by original sources (Vatican archives, parliamentary debates, and newspaper articles). The author elaborates a careful overview of the political dimensions (parties, parliaments, politics, factions, tendencies, waves of protests, etc.). “A particular attention is paid to Portugal” (p. xx) and Giulia Albanese confesses that during her comparative research this country appeared to her as

“a fundamental stimulation” to “read and reread the Spanish and Italian events” (p. xx).

The book is divided into four chapters. They follow a chronological plan: first, the First World War; second, the immediate postwar; third, the Seizure of Power of anti-democratic movements; and finally, the Stabilization of Dictatorships. The last three chapters are shaped in a similar way (which derives from the author’s “parallel observation”): first, the Italian situation is analyzed; second, the Spanish reality is observed; third, the Portuguese context is evoked; finally, the three countries are examined comparatively. The last chapter includes five pages of conclusions (pp. 209-214).

The book and its conclusions highlight the role of political violence in relation with State institutions and parties (p. 210). Indeed, organized and institutionalized violence is indispensable in order to understand this crucial juncture of a Europe “on horseback” between the long nineteenth and the short twentieth century. As a “movement”, and as a “political strategy”, Italian Fascism “represented an element of great innovation within the European political framework” (p. 210). Within the latter and at this scale it was a distinct “catalyst for the attention of conservative and reactionaries” (p. 211). However, compared to the Italian case, the forms of the coups and dictatorships differed in “the two Iberian countries” (p. 211).

It would be extremely useful to complete this comparative observation, to consider the trans-periodicity of the

Iberian Empires built from the fifteenth century on. Which role did imperialist ideology play in the Spanish and Portuguese actors who, from the military institutions, perpetrated the coups d' États of 1923 and 1926? In turn, the "original spirit" of the "Statuto albertino" (the 1848 Piedmonts Kingdom Constitution, that fascists did not need to change fundamentally, p. 212) could be historicized even more carefully. Through more comparative histories, the institutional control by national "oligarchy" as "a phenomenon more relevant in Portugal, and in general in the Iberian peninsula (...) than in Italy" (p. 93) could be understood even better. Charles Maier's thesis on the "restoration to power of the European bourgeoisie during the 1920s" which is highlighted in the conclusions (p. 214) could be combined with Arno Mayer's one on the persistence of the old regime. Would it not be possible, within a broader European oligarchical and institutional framework, to compare the role played by the King in 1922 Italy and 1923 Spain, with the one played by the army in Portugal in 1926 (p. 176)? In Portugal and Spain a certain "institutional continuity" (p. 176) was maintained, although combined with the Italian Fascist "full model" (p. 177).

Moving from the political to the economic dimensions, until late in the twentieth century Southern Europe remained largely rural, and marked by the complexities of the great properties that governed these areas. Giulia Albanese evokes the "international consideration" according to which Portugal, Spain, and

Italy were not "fully able to govern themselves through liberal institutions"; and to which "their dictatorial experiences, with the ones of central and eastern Europe, corresponded to justified exceptions due to their economic and cultural backwardness" (p. 214). By comparing even more carefully the predominant rural worlds of Southern Europe, would it not be possible to understand even better the meaningful link mentioned between Capital (whose land property is part of) and symbolic Capital (linked to dominant representations within the international symbolic sphere)?

The exponential increase of rural violence in Southern Spain during the so-called *trienio bolchevique* of 1918-1920 (unprecedented until the *biennio rojo* of 1931-1933) is qualified as "series of agrarian conflicts of local character, not very politicized" (p. 65, 66). An even more detailed comparative-as-European analysis of the said rural violence could lead to an empirical enlargement of the concept of "political". The Italian situation during the so-called "biennio rosso" of 1919-1920 offers other elements of comparison. A bottom-up perspective paying attention to actors' practices would allow the reader to better understand the social logics involving institutions (parties, syndicates) presented as "intercept[ing]" (p. 66, 90) the movements of protest. This institutional dimension is linked to a conceptual one. "The political forces which can be qualified as antisystem" (p. 179) above all lead us to question: in interwar Europe, what did so systematically appear so systematized?

The author rightly stresses (p. 67, 90) the concomitance between the emergence of labor rights and the rise of political violence within the national frameworks. Seen especially in the Portuguese case (p. 94, 103, 145), the resistances to the first post-World War legal emergence of a progressive tax system (more redistributive and democratic, breaking with the principle favoring the social reproduction, and the patrimonial dynasties) could probably be observed in a broader European scale. Besides, at least from the late nineteenth century on, an “element of continuity between the three countries” lies in the “political corruption to guarantee the stability for the groups of power at the governments” (p. 10), before the post WWI crisis “of system” (p. 11). It would be extremely interesting to analyze from the bottom up the local-as-national and supranational clientelistic practices (Portuguese *rotativismo*, Spanish *turno*, Italian *trasformismo*, p. 10-11), not only within the political and electoral centralized spheres, but also within the networks and sociabilities of the economic one.

In the conclusions, Angelo Tasca's famous definition is quoted: “to define fascism means grasping it while it is becoming” (p. 211). In the epilogue of his *La naissance du fascisme. L'Italie de 1918 à 1922* (Paris, Gallimard, 1938), Gramsci's collaborator at the *Ordine Nuovo* also explicitly noticed the determinant role played by rural oligarchy in the interwar Romanian, Bulgarian, and Yugoslavian shifts to the extreme right. Furthermore, he clearly mentioned the absence of a

redistributive agrarian reform as a cause that paved the way to Fascism in Italy, Germany, and Spain. Thus, from this comparative point of view, the Southern European dimension echoes the Eastern one. It involves the Iberian, Italic, and Balkan peninsulas. The European *mezzogiorno* (and not only the Italian one) was “mainly latifundist” (p. 52), as the Danubian plains were too. How did recrudescence violence and radicalizations happen in these European areas?

Liberal ideologies and institutions are sometimes presented in excessive rupture with the Fascist phenomenon “antiliberal more than reactionary” (p. 209). Tasca's analytical definition rather underlined their continuities. Of course, due to the polysemy of these concepts, the difficulty could hardly be reduced through a vivid and pleasant historiographic narrative, such as the one proposed. The “heterogeneous liberal galaxy” (p. 60) mentioned for the Italian case evokes the liberal continuity and complexity at the European scales. In front of 1926 events, from the heart of the Liberal Empire *The Times* noticed that “Portugal followed Italy, Spain, Greece, and Poland” to “bring a regime ‘which does the things’” (p. 171).

Furthermore, the 1921 apparently low impact of fascism in the *mezzogiorno* (p. 60) seems to echo the liberal persistence. In 1919, contrary to a northern Italy marked by the unprecedented vote in favor of socialists, the parliamentary hegemony of liberal forces was largely maintained in Southern Italy. The liberal (and southern) politician Antonio Salandra, who engaged Italy in the Great

War, accepted early negotiation with fascists (p. 118). Their actions were initially “supported and funded by sectors of the liberal conservative ruling class, land-owners and entrepreneurs, who hoped to use this movement and to control it politically” (p. 61). Besides, “a part of the liberal world” (p. 133) also supported the General Primo de Rivera coup, only eight months after the March on Rome in which Italian fascists also benefited from the King’s mediation (p. 128). As we have tried to show in this review, another merit of this comparative history on Southern Europe is that it leads to other comparative histories involving several historiographic districts (social, political, cultural, conceptual, etc.).

With *Dittature mediterranee* Giulia Albanese provides an innovative historiographic contribution. In the first sentence of her acknowledgements, the author confesses that “the idea of this book was born ten years ago while I was writing my Ph. D dissertation at the European University Institute” (p. 215). Unique in our global academic world, this European institution, funded mainly by European states and citizens, necessarily encourages the historiographic practice

of the comparative method. However, if many researchers arrive at the EUI with a comparative project, fewer ultimately achieve a comparative history; and even fewer still pursue this scientific curiosity as a long-term endeavor. Indeed, the increasing production and reproduction of fashionable short-term turns logically tend to reinforce the commodity of the dominant, exclusively national, and/or specific historiographic frameworks. For example, and as the author rightly noticed, certain current historiographic productions are still based on the reproduction underestimating the attention dedicated to “European countries considered as peripheral” (p. 3). This is one more reason to greet and recommend Giulia Albanese’s pertinent comparative history of European societies.

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