



International Fascism and Imperialism in Africa during the Interwar and War Periods: Actors, Motivations and Goals

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ABSTRACT

This paper revisits the history of black fascism and imperialism in Africa. It addresses the startling fact that many African actors in the interwar and war periods sympathized with fascism, seeing in its ideology a means of envisioning new modes and approaches of African resistance to European imperialism. This was because their motivations and goals clashed with the new orders projected by Japan, Italy, and Germany, which linked the possibility of internal, national change to the necessity for an external, imperial, and reorganization of the world. In all three countries, fascism, whether of the assimilationist or genocidal kind, recalled previous colonial experiences in Africa. As far as international fascism was concerned, the regimes in Tokyo, Rome, and Berlin invoked a redistribution of colonies as a measure that would guarantee the economic survival of their nations. Japan aimed to expand in Asia; Italians demanded a larger foothold in East Africa and, during the Second World War, in the Mediterranean; Nazi Germany earmarked eastern Europe. This explains why, Afro-fascist countries and movements in South Africa, Italian Libya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Egypt benefitted from international fascism by exploiting its weaknesses to negotiate for their independence from fascist dictators and regimes. The paper argues that mid twentieth-century imperialism and interwar fascism were interrelated strategies to harmonize the unstable relationship between Afro-fascist regimes and Axis powers. It reaffirms that imperialism and fascism exercised the highest degree of violence and had the most destructive impact on world history during the interwar and war periods. Through an examination of recent scholarship, this article offers a new conceptual interpretation of the link between fascism and imperialism. In so doing, it adds to our understanding of the interwar period by breaking down the neat boundaries between fascism and imperialism in Africa.

Keywords: Afro-Fascism, Imperialism, Interwar and War Periods, Independence, Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a revival of interest in the study of international fascism and imperialism in Africa during the interwar and war periods. This renewed search for a paradigmatic model of fascism originated as a reaction to the trend of overstating specificity[1], of studying fascist phenomena in the *longue durée* and the need to address the startling fact that many African actors in the interwar and war periods sympathized with fascism, seeing in its ideology a means of envisioning new modes and approaches of African resistance to European imperialism. This was because their motivations and goals clashed with the new orders projected by Japan, Italy, and Germany, which linked the possibility of internal, national change to the necessity for an external, imperial, and reorganization of the world. Instances of resistance against Italian and Nazi occupation in Africa were exaggerated to create the image of unified nations fighting fascist tyranny and standing up to African values[2].

Fascism has been a modern political movement and ideology imported to Africa by the regimes in Europe. It has its roots in a long history, going back to the interwar and war periods, but expressed itself as a right-wing force in the twentieth century. In Africa, fascism remade political orders, nationalist projects, and geopolitical rivalries. The return of fascism in the twenty-first century including in the global south is a crucial challenge for social analysis, given the political stakes. A neofascism embracing an ultra-nationalism, authoritarian capitalism, even religious fundamentalism in some instances, brings serious challenges to both liberal democracies and left politics in Africa.

As far as international fascism was concerned, regimes especially in Tokyo, Rome, and Berlin invoked a redistribution of colonies as a measure that would guarantee the economic survival of their nations. Japan aimed to

¹ Aristotle A. Kallis, "The 'Regime-Model' of Fascism: A Typology", *European History Quarterly*, London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, SAGE Publications, Vol. 30(1)2000, 77-104.

² Patrick Bernhard, "Borrowing from Mussolini: Nazi Germany's Colonial Aspirations in the Shadow of Italian Expansionism", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41:4 (2013): 617- 643.

expand in Asia; Italians demanded a larger foothold in East Africa and, during the Second World War, in the Mediterranean; Nazi Germany earmarked eastern Europe. This explains why, Afro-fascist countries and movements in South Africa, Italian Libya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Egypt benefitted from international fascism by exploiting its weaknesses to negotiate for their independence from fascist dictators and regimes[3].

As far as Africa is concerned, European colonialism and imperialism informed fascism, in significant ways, both in terms of ideology and as a system of rule [4]. To assess continuity between colonialism, imperialism and fascism, one needs to pay attention to the nature of affinities [5]. Are they to be found in colonial practices of certain nations, or imperialism as a global system with its many, often contradictory, practices? If so, how does such an interpretation affect the historiography of fascism? Fascism is a truly European ideology that cannot be easily divorced from other ideological traditions, such as liberalism, which were important for the perpetuation of colonialism and imperialism in Africa [6]. While fascism is often seen as being alien because of its indescribable crimes against humanity, it did not only represent novelty to its contemporaries. It also signified familiarity, acting on a continuity of European colonial understanding of Africa during the interwar and war periods [7].

The paper argues that mid twentieth-century imperialism and interwar fascism were interrelated strategies to harmonize the unstable relationship between Afro-fascist regimes and Axis powers. It reaffirms that imperialism and fascism exercised the highest degree of violence and had the most destructive impact on world history during the interwar and war periods. The paper starts by clarifying certain terms and concepts on fascism and imperialism, highlights the history and spread of international fascism in Africa, focuses on the actors, motivations and goals of international fascism and imperialism in Africa, examines the impact and challenges posed by fascism and imperialism in Africa. Through an examination of recent scholarship, this article offers a new conceptual interpretation of the link between fascism and imperialism.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

For better understanding of international fascism and imperialism in Africa during the interwar and war periods, this paper starts by briefly examining the meaning of fascism, international fascism, imperialism, interwar and war periods. Fascism is a complex ideology. The word "fascism" comes from the Italian "fascio," meaning a bundle or group, and is considered a term for a militant brotherhood [8]. Benito Mussolini coined the term "fascism" in 1919 to describe his political movement [9]. What constitutes a definition of fascism is a highly disputed subject that has proved complicated and contentious. Historians, political scientists, and other scholars have engaged in long and furious debates concerning the exact nature and meaning. Benito Mussolini sees fascism as a political philosophy, movement, or regime that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized government headed by a dictatorial leader [10]. Robert Paxton, a professor emeritus of social science at Columbia University in New York who is widely considered the father of fascism studies, defined fascism as "a form of political practice distinctive to the 20th century that arouses popular enthusiasm by sophisticated propaganda techniques for an anti-liberal, anti-socialist, violently exclusionary, expansionist nationalist agenda"[11]. Other definitions, Paxton said, rely too heavily on documents that Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler and others produced before they came to power. Lachlan Montague, a Melbourne, Australia-based writer and researcher of fascism, economic history in the interwar years, argues that "Fascism is definitely revolutionary and dynamic." To him, some definitions of fascism, such as Zeev Sternhell's description of it as a "form of extreme nationalism" are too broad to be useful [12]. Though fascism can be difficult to define, all fascist movements share some core beliefs and actions. International fascism therefore refers to a political philosophy, movement, or regime nursed and transported internationally to other continents, that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition.

³Reto Hofmann, "The fascist new-old order," *Journal of Global History* Cambridge University Press (2017), 12, 166–183.

⁴Jürgen Zimmerer, "The birth of the Ostland out of the spirit of colonialism: a postcolonial perspective on the Nazi policy of conquest and extermination" *Patterns of Prejudice* 39:2 (2005): 197–219.

⁵Alexander Gerschenkron, "On the Concept of Continuity in History", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 106:3 (1962): 195–209.

⁶Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton 1994).

⁷Fritz Fischer, *From Kaiserreich to Third Reich: Elements of Continuity in German History, 1871-1945* (London, 1986).

⁸R.Griffin, &M. Feldman (Eds.), *Fascism: Critical concepts in political science* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁹Benito Mussolini, "The Doctrine of Fascism" (1932), available online at <file:///H:/Fascist%20International/The->, accessed 26 July 2021 at 12: 35 pm.

¹⁰Dennis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 170.

¹¹Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Penguin Books Limited, 2004).

¹²Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Scholars have faced a lot of difficulties defining the term imperialism. The difficulty is not that there is no single definition of imperialism. Rather, there are about as many definitions of imperialism as there are authors who have written on the subject. They vary from those that refer to one specific form of imperialism, mostly Europe's nineteenth-century colonial expansion, to others that give a very general meaning to the word. John Darwin has succinctly defined imperialism as the "sustained effort to assimilate a country or region to the political, economic or cultural system of another power"[13].

In historical studies, imperialism generally refers to the policy of European countries, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, aiming at the expansion of their power and influence over other continents like Africa. It is in this context that the term imperialism originated and began to be used as a political and historical concept. Historically speaking, the word imperialism is therefore obviously closely associated with colonialism. While colonialism was only used to refer to one specific form of alien rule, namely, the colonial one, imperialism acquired a wider meaning and included various other forms of influence over alien nations and states, for example, the financial influence of Italy and Germany in Africa. Imperialism is therefore a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonisation, use of military force, or other means. Feuer identifies two major subtypes of imperialism; the first is the "regressive imperialism" identified with pure conquest, unequivocal exploitation, extermination or reductions of undesired peoples, and the settlement of desired peoples into such territories, an example was fascist Italy and Germany in Africa. The second type identified by Feuer is "progressive imperialism" founded upon a cosmopolitan view of humanity, that promotes the spread of civilisation to allegedly backward societies to elevate living standards and culture in conquered territories, with the allowance of a colonised people to assimilate into the imperial society, an example being the British who claimed to give their subjects a number of advantages in her African territories [14]. In this article, imperialism is used in the sense of its initial meaning, that is to say as a term to indicate the extension of formal or informal, mostly Italian and German fascist rule over African countries during the interwar and war periods[15].

In the context of this paper and that of the history of the Twentieth Century, the interwar period was the period between the end of the First World War on 11 November 1918 and the beginning of the Second World War on 1 September 1939, while the war period starts with the outbreak of the Second World War and extends to the end of the Second World War in 1945. Despite the relatively short period of time, these periods represented an era of significant changes with the spread of fascism worldwide [16].

HISTORY AND THE SPREAD OF FASCISM IN AFRICA

Scholars have tended, until recently, to treat both inter-war Fascism and Anti-Fascism as almost exclusively European. But over the last decades there has been a strong development of studies approaching Fascism from an African perspective, especially in regard to Italian and German African colonies, and of studies of transnational Anti-Fascist campaigns and movements. Fascism in Africa refers to the phenomenon of fascist parties and movements that were active in Africa.

Controversies and contradictions exist whether political movements and governments in Africa could be considered indigenous fascist regimes. Swiss historian Max-Liniger-Goumaz, a scholar on African history, has identified multiple African regimes as being examples of the phenomenon of "Afro-fascism", including: Francisco Macias Nguema's regime in Equatorial Guinea, Mobutu Sese Seko's regime in Zaire, Idi Amin's regime in Uganda, Gnassingbe Eyadema's regime in Togo, and Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime in Ethiopia [17]. Also, the Coalition for the Defence of the Republic has been regarded as a Rwandan Hutu fascist party which was responsible for inciting the Rwandan Genocide[18].

Similarly, Payne contends that while a one-party nationalist dictatorship may have been seen as the model in some African states, none of these states can genuinely be considered fascist because the single parties which control them usually have a small membership and they often do not exist at any more than a basic functional level, their political economies do not follow the corporatist or national syndicalist models which define fascism and there is no philosophical or political culture of fascism, because such African regimes are highly pragmatic and they are even non-ideological in

¹³ John Darwin, "Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion," *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 112, No. 447, June 1997, 641-642

¹⁴ Lewis Samuel Feuer, *Imperialism and the Anti-Imperialist Mind* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1986), 3.

¹⁵ Jon Wilson, "Niall Ferguson's Imperial Passion", *History Workshop Journal*, No. 56, Autumn, 2003, 175-183.

¹⁶ Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

¹⁷ Michel Ugarte, *Africans in Europe: the culture of exile and emigration from Equatorial Guinea to Spain* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 25.

¹⁸ Christian P. Scherrer, *Ongoing crisis in Central Africa: revolution in Congo and disorder in the Great Lakes region: conflict impact assessment and policy options*, Institute for Research on Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution, 1998, 83.

nature [19]. These opinions clash with that of the American historian and political scientist, Robert Paxton, a fascist scholar, who rejected the idea that there have been indigenous fascist movements in Africa, claiming that there have been no prominent examples of fascist regimes amongst Third World dictatorships[20]. In line with Paxton, Roger Griffin rejects the notion that fascism existed in Africa (outside South Africa) by arguing that African dictatorships do not seek the mass mobilization of their populations which is necessary for a regime to be called fascist, and African political groups could not construct unifying nationalist paligenetic myths (another precondition for true fascism) because African national borders were often arbitrarily set by colonial powers and tribal, religious and ethnic loyalties are frequently much stronger than national identities are [21].

Concerning the spread of fascism, this study admits that, fascism existed in most Italian and German colonial territories and that, many African actors in the interwar and war periods sympathized with fascism, and exploited its weaknesses to resist European imperialism. Fascism survived in South, North and East Africa during the interwar and war periods. South Africa's status as an independent country dominated by the white minority meant that it shared a number of characteristics with Europe whilst also having an institutionalised form of racism in the apartheid system. As such it proved a fertile ground for the development of groups inspired by European fascism. Some fascist movement and political groups emerged in South Africa during the interwar and war periods. Example include the South African Gentile National Socialist Movement, a pro-Nazi elements organised by Louis Weichardt in 1932, soon became known as the Greyshirts, enjoyed some support and continued after the Second World War. The other main fascist group was the Ossewabrandwag(OB), founded in 1939, a group also inspired by Adolf Hitler [22] Also, the New Order, emerged in 1940 under the leadership of former cabinet minister Oswald Pirow. After the Second World War, Pirow became an important figure in neo-fascism [23].

Fascism also spread in North Africa , especially Italian North Africa and French North Africa. In Italian Libya, Benito Mussolini, sought to gain popularity by presenting himself as a defender of Islam, and as such, formed a Libyan Arab Fascist Party to which indigenous people were admitted. In Italian Ethiopia in East Africa, resistance was much fiercer and fascism did not take root. In both colonies, though, fascist youth movements were formed under Italian tutelage, that is, Arab Lictor Youth and Ethiopian Lictor Youth [24]. In French Algeria, French Protectorate of Tunisia, and French Morocco, there was high level of movement with France. Indeed, as early as the 1890s the proto-fascist Antisemitic League of France was active in Algiers. Most of the fascist movements and regimes in these countries followed the models of fascist groups in Europe and praised Italian fascism and Nazism, although they largely supported existing elites[25]. From 1940 to 1943, during the Second World War, Italy attempted to conquer Egypt and Tunisia to enlarge the Italian North Africa. Indeed Axis's military advances in North Africa allowed Italy to lay claim to significant portions of western Egypt: Italian fascists anticipated creating a client Kingdom of Egypt under Italian control from 1941 to 1942 and successively claimed Tunisia from 1942 to 1943. In 1930s Egypt the Young Egypt movement, known as the Greenshirts, became important and within the Egyptian Army, General Aziz Ali al-Misri (1878-1965) was noted for his fascist sympathies, to the extent that he was dismissed as Chief of Staff in 1940 [26].

International fascism spread to Italian East Africa (Italian Eritrea, Italian Somaliland and Italian Ethiopia) and German East Africa (now Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania).Fascist colonial policy in Italian East Africa had a divide and conquer characteristic. In order to weaken the Orthodox Christian Amhara people who had run Ethiopia in the past, territory claimed by Eritrean Tigray-Tigrinyas and Somalis was given to the Eritrea Governorate and Somalia Governorate. Reconstruction efforts after the war in 1936 were partially focused on benefiting the Muslim peoples in the colony at the expense of the Amhara to strengthen support by Muslims for the Italian colony [27]. In German East Africa for example, The Coalition for the Defence of the Republic (CDR) has been described as a Rwandan Hutu Fascist political party responsible for inciting the Rwandan genocide. The CDR refused to operate within the law nor cooperate with other Rwandan political parties[28]. In British East Africa, parallels have frequently been drawn between Hitler and Uganda's Idi Amin and it has been claimed that Amin's admiration for Hitler was so great that he even intended to build a statue of him. Robert Paxton, a scholar on fascism, has stated, that from an ideological standpoint he shared little or

¹⁹ Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-45* (USA: Routledge, 1995), 514-515.

²⁰Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 2004, 191

²¹Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (USA and Canada: Routledge, 1991), 157.

²²Christoph Marx, "The Ossewabrandwagas a Mass Movement, 1939-1941", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, June 1994, 208.

²³G. Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black - Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism after 1945* (New York: IB Tauris, 2007), 84-85.

²⁴Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 352

²⁵Payne, *Fascism in Europe, 1914-45*, 2001, 45.

²⁶R.J.B. Bosworth, *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 499.

²⁷Roland Sarti, *The Ax Within: Italian fascism in action* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974).

²⁸Christian P. Scherrer, *Ethnicity, nationalism, and violence: conflict management, human rights, and multilateral regimes* (Ashgate: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2003), 328.

nothing with proper fascism, sharing only cruelty and anti-Semitism with Hitler [29]. From the above, it becomes glaring that, fascism that started in Italy extended to Africa and later became a global phenomenon.

INTERNATIONAL FASCISM IN AFRICA: ACTORS, MOTIVATIONS AND GOALS

Several national and international actors were involved in propagating fascist and imperialist ideas in Africa during the interwar and war periods. These actors had different motivations and goals. The main international actors of fascism were Italy under Benito Mussolini, and Germany under Adolf Hitler.

The importance of Africa to the national histories of Germany and Italy, especially during the interwar and war eras of fascism, is a call for concern. As a geographic space and an abstract place, Africa provided a meeting point and as a source of motivation for these two fascist regimes. It is a place about which and in which Nazi German and Fascist Italian ideas and practices of race, space, fascism and imperialism converged. It is here that we can move beyond the international and identify a transnational flow of information between Germany and Italy and between Africa and the European continent. Recognizing the importance of Africa to both of these fascist regimes, and the transnational flows of information created around it, challenges our understanding of the motivations and goals of international fascism.

The main motivation and goal of fascist Italy and Germany during the interwar and war periods in Africa was to reconcile the nation with capital. In the 1930s, when economic dislocation threatened the supposed harmony of national communities to an unprecedented degree, fascist regimes in Italy, and Germany developed an array of policies to reconcile the nation with capital. The second goal of international fascism was to repressed ‘internal enemies’, reserving particular brutality for those, such as Jews, whom they accused of undermining the nation, or those threatening capital, usually communists. The third was to promote social policies to foster harmony, including leisure activities, sports, and cultural events. Moreover, and crucially for the purpose of this article, they deployed strategies that were redolent of nineteenth and twentieth centuries imperialism. In all the two countries, fascism, whether of the assimilationist or genocidal kind, recalled previous colonial experiences in Africa. In addition, as a goal, fascism offered a solution to fix the void left by imperialism when it could no longer reconcile, or was considered to be unable to reconcile, nation and capitalism in the interwar period in Africa. In doing so, fascism subsumed imperialism. Much as when Marx described this process in the making of capitalism, so also in the passage from the era of imperialism to that of fascism, we can observe that fascism took over processes and institutions that originated outside, or prior to, its own historical moment. More specifically, to paraphrase Harry Harootunian’s rendering of subsumption, fascism co-opted or harnessed non-fascist practices and institutions, making them work for fascism [30]. A vast imperial ‘repertoire’ permeated interwar politics, economics, and culture, and fascism liberally drew from it. Fascism could not have become the force it did without access to the ideas, discourse, and experience of imperialism, both that developed by individual countries and the global one

Many fascist international movements and actors were motivated by imperialistic goals in Europe, Africa and Asia. For instance, Benito Mussolini’s imperial ambitions were directed at North Africa, and his armies invaded Ethiopia in 1935. Adolf Hitler of Germany hoped that his drive toward the east (*DrangnachOsten*), by conquering eastern Europe and Russia, would not only prove the racial superiority of Aryans over Slavs but also provide enough plunder and living space (*Lebensraum*) to overcome continuing economic difficulties at home. Polish fascists advocated retaking all the lands that had ever been ruled by Polish kings, including East Prussia. Finnish fascists goal was to create a “Greater Finland” at the expense of Russia, and Croatian fascists advocated a “Greater Croatia” at the expense of Serbia. Japanese fascists preached military conquest on behalf of their plan for a “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.” French fascists were strong defenders of the French empire in Indochina and North Africa, and during the interwar period they attracted considerable support among the ruling European minority (*colons*) in Algeria. Portuguese fascists waged colonial wars in Guinea, Angola, and Mozambique. Syrian, Iraqi, and Egyptian fascist movements also supported territorial expansionism. However, there were some “peace fascisms” that were not imperialistic, such as the Integralist Action movement in Brazil [31].

During the interwar period itself, fascist motivation and propaganda was able to sway and frighten public opinion, and as such, most Europeans believed in the effectiveness of fascist interference in Africa[32] Since that time, most scholars have proven that Mussolini who was the main actor of international fascism in Africa was not perfectly successful in his propaganda and military efforts within Africa, using the outcry against fascist atrocities in majority-

²⁹Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 2004, 191.

³⁰ Harry Harootunian, *Marx after Marx: history and time in the expansion of capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 13–15.

³¹ D. Baker, “The Political Economy of Fascism: Mythorreality, or Mythandrealty?”, *New Political Economy*, Vol. 11 (2006), 227–50.

³² Gabriel Peri, *Ombres du fascisme sur l’Afrique du Nord: collection d’article parus dans l’humanité après une enquête en Afrique du Nord* (Editions du Comité populaire de propagande : Paris, 1938), 1-6.

Muslim North African countries as case studies of their logical foundations [33]. Here, Islamist rhetoric at face value undermines the importance of North African political events and movements, especially those of a nationalist nature. Additionally, the role of European imperialism and interwar power politics is particularly essential in understanding the true motivations of the elites who vocalized disapproval of the fascist regime [34].

Broadly speaking, fascism's goal was to constantly struggle against other nations - "the enemy" - using often-violent nationalist rhetoric. Furthermore, the ideal fascist regimes in Africa depended on authoritarianism to eliminate internal dissent, as the interests of the collective body superseded the interests of the individual [35]. The fascist movement began in the early 20th century, inspired mainly by aggressive nationalism, but the social context refined it into an authoritarian ideology; mainly, the insecurity following World War I and the rapid change in the world economy made fascism appealing to those who were disillusioned by classical liberalism and traditional nationalism [36]. This disillusionment did not only apply to young European men just returned from the Great War and frustrated with the continent's economic state, but also applied to the elites of Northern Africa who were more than ready to modernize their contemporary societies. The fascist ideology also incorporated aggressive nationalism and sought to spread its influence through military coercion, as is the case in the Northern African country of Libya. Ultimately, fascist ideology, although by origin a European concept, managed to seep into Northern African political thought through peaceful and military methods during the years 1920-1939 [37].

For Italians, the appropriated concept of "mare nostrum", a concept developed from nostalgia for the Roman Empire, gained a degree of popularity due to Mussolini's propaganda. According to Ruth Ben-Ghiat, the desire for an Italian empire - this mare nostrum - emerged from the worry that a vague, encroaching foreign threat would dilute the "European-ness" of Italy, and that it was Italy's duty to colonize and modernize Africa in order to dominate the "other" [38]. The methods utilized in this endeavor were mixed and contradictory, as the fascist regime used methods ranging from propaganda to genocide to take over the areas of Africa that it intended to annex into its empire. The former two methods, however, will be the focus for now, as Mussolini attempted to use propaganda in order to promote the concept of an Italian empire amongst the Italian people themselves; in 1934 during the second quinquennial Fascist assembly, Mussolini stated: "Italy's historical objectives have two names: Asia (the Near East) and Africa... These objectives of ours have their justification in geography and history" [39].

The motivations pushing the Italian fascist regime to make itself present in Africa, peaceful or otherwise, therefore originated in the popular belief that Italy was destined to re-manifest the Roman Empire in order to bring modernity to the native peoples and to crush any possibility of Arab invasion. The idea of "mare nostrum" led Mussolini to present himself as "La Spada dell'Islam", or as the hero of the Muslim people. The concept of fascism did appeal to Northern African intellectuals who were disillusioned by their contemporary systems; the general poverty of North Africa, paired with African subjugation to British and French colonialism, created a dissatisfaction amongst academics that in some cases fostered admiration for European fascism.

Egypt in particular had a disappointing experience with democracy and was still in a state of harsh poverty and thus, the authoritarian, modernizing economic system of fascist regimes held some charm in certain Egyptian intellectual circles [40]. In Tunisia, the nationalist end of European fascism was the most ideologically appealing, but Tunisian elites tended to use the Italian fascist regime's foreign funds to their own advantage rather than openly promoting its ideology, and simply tolerated the fascist regime's existence because it benefited the Tunisian nationalist movement. Despite the controversial nature (and actions) of Italian fascism and the differing reactions to fascism in Northern Africa, the system therefore held at least some appeal toward Egyptian and Tunisian elites [41].

³³ Israel Gershoni, and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2009), 1-12.

³⁴ Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1965) 172.

³⁵ Richard Gunther, "The Collapse of Parliamentary Regimes: Prologue. 19th Century political ideologies and the left-right continuum", Lecture given at The Ohio State University, 25 September 2015.

³⁶ Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism: Doctrines of Revolution in the Twentieth Century* (London: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1964), 20-24.

³⁷ Manuela Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad: Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940* (Routledge: New York, 2006), 36.

³⁸ R. Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), 1-5.

³⁹ D. Susmel (eds), *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, Vol. XXVI. (Florence: La Fenice, 1953), 191-192

⁴⁰ Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad*, 36.

⁴¹ Anna Baldinetti, "Fascist Propaganda in the Maghrib", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37(3)2014, 434-35.

Many African actors in the interwar and war periods were dictators whose motivation was to sympathized with fascism and also to later resist European imperialism. Their main goal was to negotiate their dependence and interdependence from fascist states in Europe. They also saw in it an opportunity of envisioning new modes and approaches of African resistance to European domination in Italian, German, Portuguese, Belgian and British colonies in Africa. African dictators and fascist regimes that helped in diffusing fascist ideologies and tenets as seen above included Francisco Macias Nguema's regime in Equatorial Guinea, Mobutu SeseSeko's regime in Zaire, Idi Amin's regime in Uganda, Gnassingbe Eyadema's regime in Togo, and Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime in Ethiopia [42]. Also, the Coalition for the Defence of the Republic has been regarded as a Rwandan Hutu fascist party which was responsible for inciting the Rwandan Genocide [43].

Two main categories of local Actors became involved in the diffusion of fascism in the interwar period in Africa. First, fascist adherents who saw fascism as *the norm in toto* (or as a more or less fixed set of organically interconnected norms) to be diffused locally as well as transnationally. Second, more critical and selective norm entrepreneurs who perceived the 'fascist' external sources as a set of partly independent norms and inventive practices that could be appropriated and translated more flexibly and critically into their local context, on the basis of each one's perceived degree of cultural salience and capacity for facilitating better outcomes [44]. In the former scenario, diffusion was driven to a significant degree by genuine fascination, often in spite of any forensic assessment of cultural match or any expectation of enhanced payoffs for the local agents whereas, in the latter case, it was principally a mechanism for maximizing dividends and making the most of a situation of changed international conditions not of their own making. Such agents 'read fascism' through their particular filters and made a critical input in the process of norm localization, adapting the external reference to fit not just their own intentions but the particular cultural attributes of their national context and the audience that they may need to convince[45]. All this does not mean that leaders of radical movements were instantly or unconditionally attracted to the allure of fascism, however they chose to perceive it. In spite of their emotional bias, they remained supremely strategic political actors who subjected external norms to scrutiny in terms of their congruence and utility for their particular national context and audience. Apart from Africa, elsewhere, conservative authoritarians like general-turned-political fascist actors like Ioannis Metaxas in Greece (head of the '4th of August' dictatorship in Greece in 1936–1941), Karlis Ulmanis in Latvia (instigator of an anti-parliamentary coup in 1934), and Antonio Salazar (the prime minister of the Portuguese dictatorship with the longest term in office, from 1932 to his death in 1974) adopted and adapted external 'fascist' norms on the basis of an alternative reading of their original intentions and expected outcomes[46]. For them, while some 'fascist' norms appeared of dubious value or even potentially dangerous to them, others seemed eminently useful, albeit very often in ways that did not fully conform to the intentions of the norm initiators themselves.

Africa also recorded a deeper paradox in the history of interwar fascism. Local radical nationalist actors appropriated and recontextualized external models of fascism as an organizational, ideological, and political norm in their fight against the left, liberals, conservatives, and forces of the 'old' authoritarian right redeployed the diffused norms against local fascists themselves [47]. In this scenario, the African actors' engagement with fascist norms was underpinned by a constructive and restraining rationale alike. On the one hand, the (however selective and qualified) translation of external norms generated or facilitated new modes of, and opportunities for, action; on the other hand, it was deployed as an acceptable alternative to current practices while also proscribing other, more radical options also suggested by the diffused external norms. This form of pre-emptive and selective adoption of 'fascist' norms in order to deploy them (also) against the fascists themselves was part of a technique geared to 'immunizing' the political status quo against more radical or revolutionary challenges [48].

IMPACT OF FASCISM IN AFRICA

The fascist movement born in Africa after the First World War desired revolutionary dictators, who would transform Africa into new civilization, using force when required. Yet, the impact of fascism on Africa was not uniform. From the perspective of the African population, fascist rule was experienced varied according to social class, political orientation, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnic origin. For large numbers of Africans, an oppressive fascist regime brought economic hardship and/or a loss of basic human rights. For others fascism appeared to bring stability, well-being,

⁴² Ugarte, *Africans in Europe*, 25.

⁴³ Scherrer, *Ongoing crisis in Central Africa*, 83.

⁴⁴ E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (New York, 1960), 642.

⁴⁵ A. P. Cortell and J. W. Davis, Jr., "Understanding the Domestic Impact of International Norms: A Research Agenda", *International Studies Review*, Vol. 2 (2000), 65–87.

⁴⁶ A. Kallis, "The 'Regime-Model' of Fascism: A Typology", *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 30 (2000), 77–104.

⁴⁷ A. Kallis, "Fascism and the Jews: From the Internationalisation of Fascism to a 'Fascist Antisemitism'", *Holocaust Studies*, Vol. 15 (2009), 15–34.

⁴⁸ F. G. Nunez-Mietz and L. Garcia Iommi, "Can Transnational Norm Advocacy Undermine Internalization? Explaining Immunization Against LGBT Rights in Uganda", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 61 (2017) 196–209.

national honour and disgrace (epitomized in the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936 by Italy). The impact of fascist rule to an extent also varied according to geographical location, reflecting a historical divide between the north and south of Africa, and between rural and urban areas.

Fascism outwardly transformed African society, as evident in the creation of one-party states, which claimed to penetrate all facets of life, whether the economy, education, leisure pursuits, or the family and private life. The one-party state, single-party state, one-party system, or single-party system was a type of unitary state in which only one political party has the right to form the government, based on the existing constitution[49]. In Africa during the period of fascism and imperialism, all other parties were either outlawed or allowed to take only a limited and controlled participation in elections. Sometimes in other fascist states, dominant-party system, unlike the one-party state, allowed dictators during democratic multiparty elections, to manipulate or put in place existing practices or balance of political power that effectively prevented the opposition from winning power. In Africa, these fascist inclined parties were many: Party of Togolese Unity formed in 1962 in Togo, National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development formed in 1973 in Rwanda, Socialist Destourian Party formed in 1964 in Tunisia, National Liberation Front formed in 1962 in Algeria, Movement for the Social Evolution of Black Africa formed in 1962 in Central African Republic, Arab Socialist Union formed in 1962 in Egypt, Cameroon National Union formed in 1966 in Cameroon. In Africa, proponents of one-party state argued that the existence of separate parties ran counter to national unity and represented the class struggle against fascism.

It led to the rise of African dictators in the interwar and war periods who sympathized with fascism, seeing in its ideology a means of envisioning new modes and approaches of African resistance to European imperialism. The 5th Pan African Congress, held in Manchester in 1945, was seen as a major landmark in the achievement of African independence. A number of future African independence leaders and fascist dictators attended, including Hastings Banda, later President of Malawi, Kwame Nkrumah, later President of Ghana, Obafemi Awolowo, later Premier of the South West Region Nigeria, and Jomo Kenyatta, later President of Kenya. In the following fifteen years, the majority of African countries gained their independence, with a peak of 17 countries in the year 1960.

It favoured the rise of apartheid in Africa. Apartheid has sharply halted the progressive historical trend towards African liberation. In South Africa for instance, the fascist state has applied the most brutal repression to prevent the realisation of the national aspirations of the proletarian African majority. Fascism's role was to develop a system of administration which would penetrate deeply into the masses, to destroy all their organisation and to eradicate their consciousness gained in the class struggle. The name given to this system of administration was Apartheid. Theoretical and applied Apartheid were certainly not the creations of petty-bourgeois fascist intellectuals, like Dr. Verwoerd[50]. The system for the super-exploitation of African labour was developed for the mining capitalists by the supreme imperialist Rhodes and it became known as "segregation". The task of the fascist state was to carry segregation to its extreme, a job well fitted to fanatical fascists.

Imperialism and fascism exercised the highest degree of violence, disgraced some African States and had the most destructive impact on Africa history during the interwar and war periods. For instance, Italy was prepared to disgrace Ethiopia, gain back glory lost during the first Italo-Ethiopian War fought between Italy and Ethiopia from 1895 to 1896, which ended with the defeat and humiliation of mighty Italy. During the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, also referred to as the Second Italo-Abyssinian War, fought between Italy and Ethiopia from October 1935 to February 1937, Italy defeated and disgraced Ethiopia, gain back its prestige and established imperialistic and fascist rule in Ethiopia during the interwar period. The conquest of Ethiopia marked the starting point of a new racist and fascist policy in the colony, and the promulgation of a series of racial laws aimed at creating a segregationist environment within the colonial territory[51]. For instance, the 1936 decree on the administration of the empire definitively ruled out the possibility of indigenous subjects obtaining Italian citizenship. In the same year, local people were denied access to bars, cinemas or public transport used by Italian citizens. In 1937 any form of conjugal union between colonisers and colonised was forbidden, a bar that was extended in the following year to include marriage between Italians and people belonging to 'any other race' (including Jews.) Finally, in 1940 a new law defined the juridical status of mixed-race offspring, who were now to be counted among the natives; there was to be no possibility of their obtaining Italian citizenship or of their being legitimised by the Italian parent[52].

CONCLUSION

⁴⁹William Roberts Clark, Matt Golder, Sona Nadenichek Golder, *Principles of Comparative Politics* (SAGE, 2012).

⁵⁰*The Star*, 30 November 1946.

⁵¹ Barbara Sorgoni, "Racist discourses and practices in the Italian Empire under Fascism", Available online at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280315671>, 21 September 2021.

⁵² R. Grillo, J. Pratt (eds), *The Politics of Recognizing Difference Multiculturalism Italian-style* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2002) 41-58.

This paper has examined the dynamics of international fascism and imperialism in Africa during the interwar and war periods. It has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubts that, the actors, motivations and goals of fascism in Africa, were unique and in most instances clashed with the new orders projected by fascist regimes, especially in Italy and Germany. The paper has demonstrated that, the main goal of African fascist actors in the interwar and war periods was to sympathized with fascism, exploit its weaknesses and ideologies as a means of envisioning new modes and approaches of African resistance to European imperialism and to negotiate for their independence from fascist dictators and regimes. In addition, fascist regimes in Europe invoked a redistribution of colonies as a measure that would guarantee the economic survival of their African by exercising the highest degree of violence which had the most destructive impact in Africa during the interwar and war periods.