FASCIST IDEOLOGY
TERRITORY AND EXPANSIONISM IN ITALY AND GERMANY, 1922–1945

ARISTOTLE A. KALLIS

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**FASCIST IDEOLOGY**

_Fascist Ideology_ is a comparative study of the expansionist foreign policies of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany from 1922 to 1945. One of the most extensively debated features of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany was their propensity for aggressive, large-scale territorial expansion. From the initial goal of revising the post-1918 territorial settlement to its culmination in the Second World War, territorial expansion became a defining characteristic of the two regimes’ ideologies and policies, and played a crucial role in their eventual collapse in 1943–5.

_Fascist Ideology_ provides a comparative investigation of fascist expansionism by focusing on the close relations between ideology and action under Mussolini and Hitler. With an overview of the ideological motivations behind fascist expansionism and their impact on fascist policies, this book explores the two main issues which have dominated the historiographical debates on the nature of fascist expansionism: whether Italy’s and Germany’s particular expansionist tendencies can be attributed to a set of generic fascist values, or were shaped by the long-term, uniquely national ambitions and developments since unification; and whether the pursuit of expansion was opportunistic or followed a grand design in each case.

This book is a fascinating study of the expansionist visions of Hitler and Mussolini and it enlightens our understanding of the dynamics and evolution of the fascist policies of Italy and Germany to the end of the Second World War.

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FASCIST IDEOLOGY

 Territory and expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922–1945

 Aristotele A. Kallis
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Back in 1996, my grandmother, who had been born in the dying moments of the nineteenth century, asked me why I had become engrossed in the study of something so unreservedly negative and spiteful as fascism. I uttered something about the constructive remembering of the past, the need to try to understand what you reminisce without being enchained by animosity. She could not read, but I am sure that she would have loved to see this work completed. My parents, on the other hand, never asked such questions. Instead, they supported my choices in every way imaginable without a mere hint of reservation, in spite of the numerous sacrifices that they entailed for them. Without their kindness, understanding and generosity this book would have still been a distant, unfulfilled dream for me. To them, and to the memory of my grandmother, this work is dedicated.

For the contents of this book, and for any error of fact or judgement, I alone am responsible.
ABBREVIATIONS

ANI Associazione Nazionalista Italiana
CGII Confederazione Generale d’Industria Italiana
DBFP Documents of British Foreign Policy
DDI Documenti Diplomatici Italiani
DDF Documents Diplomatiques Français
DDP Deutsche Demokratische Partei
DGFP Documents on German Foreign Policy
DKG Deutsche Koloniale Gesellschaft
DNVP Deutschnationale Volkspartei
DVP Deutsche Volkspartei
FZ Frankfurter Zeitung
NSDAP Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
OO Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini
PO Politische Organisation (NSDAP)
PNF Partito Nazionale Fascista
PPI Partito Popolare Italiano
PSI Partito Socialista Italiano
SA Sturm Abteilung
Scritti Scritti e Discorsi di Benito Mussolini
SPD Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
SS Schutzstaffeln
VB Völkischer Beobachter
INTRODUCTION

More than fifty years after the end of the Second World War, interwar fascism still remains an extremely slippery terrain for research. Notwithstanding the numerous works on, and interpretations of, various aspects of the fascist phenomenon, fascism remains a ‘conundrum’ for historians and political scientists alike. Lack of conceptual clarity, competing methodological approaches and failure to generate a solid theoretical framework for research have contributed to a conspicuous absence of a lasting consensus about what ‘fascism’ really represents. Undoubtedly, recent developments in research have produced a more sophisticated methodology and a reasonable distance from the rigidity of many pioneer interpretations. The postwar ‘moral’ obligation to castigate fascism as an aberration – of national histories, of the whole European civilisation, of capitalism and industrialisation, of modernity, of the human psyche – has subsided, thus allowing for an acknowledgement of fascism’s complexity, ambiguity and seductiveness. The plurality of approaches, however, neither produced unequivocal answers to the most fundamental questions about the nature of fascism, nor fostered any tendencies for consensus building in key areas of research. We are still left with a plethora of mystifying questions that resist clear-cut responses: about the nature of fascism, about the utility of a generic definition or a comparative approach to it, about its geographical and historical boundaries, about its ideological significance, about its place in national and European history, about its relevance to our past and future.

For a comparative study of the expansionist policies of the Italian and German ‘fascist’ regimes, the challenge of conceptual and methodological clarity embraces all the above complex issues, but is also magnified by a series of other questions intrinsic to a general theory of foreign relations. It is not coincidental that research on the two regimes’ expansionist policies has generated heated controversies and passionate exchanges. Emphasis on the dissimilar characteristics, structures and conditions of the two regimes appears to have rendered comparison and synthesis obsolete, if not methodologically questionable. Even for many of those interpretations that still subscribe to a generic notion of ‘fascism’, expansionism is often re-
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garded as that vital *differentia specifica* which draws the final frontier of comparability.\(^3\) The extreme racialist *Weltanschauung* of the Nazi regime with all its well-documented excesses (anti-Semitism, total war, genocide) has frequently served as the basis of the argument that the German case is *singular* and, therefore, defies categorisation. Rather than fostering the impression of similarity, expansionism has become a major liability for the comparative approach to generic ‘fascism’.

On a more theoretical level, the study of fascist expansionism has stumbled upon a series of controversies about the process of foreign policy making. The growing popularity of the ‘primacy of domestic affairs’ thesis has cast its shadow upon the relation between *ideology* and *action* in foreign policy. Emphasis on the latter’s role as a diversion from domestic deadlocks or as an effective mechanism for consensus building (the social imperialist thesis) has obscured the relative autonomy of foreign policy making, especially in regimes whose leaders showed such an obstinate interest in the formulation of foreign policy. In turn, this has undermined the value of ideology in shaping foreign policy strategies and in guiding actions in this field. Differences of opinion about whether the expansionist policies of the two regimes were ideological, opportunistic or diversionary have again served to underline their dissimilarities; and thus torpedo the validity of comparison. In general, research has treated the Nazi regime more seriously than its Italian counterpart. The destructive force of Nazi policies, the brutality in implementing them and the rigidity of the regime’s expansionist objectives have fostered an interest in the ideological aspects of Nazi territorial policies.\(^4\) Such an interest is more limited in the case of the Italian expansionist policies, whose ‘flexibility’ and constant re-orientation have been widely seen as reflections of an unprincipled, non-ideological handling of foreign affairs. The examples of A.J.P. Taylor, I. Kirkpatrick and D.M. Smith are indicative of a historiographical trend which had its roots in the polemical accounts of G. Salvemini but was subsequently pushed to extremes in its depiction of Mussolini’s regime as the apotheosis of propaganda without substance or conviction.\(^5\) However, the uncertainty about the role of ideology in shaping fascist foreign policies simply reproduces the lack of consensus that underlies the theory of foreign relations in this field – a lack of consensus about the ideology–action relation that originates no less from the elusiveness of the notion of ideology, upon which such a theory is conceptualised.

In this sense, the comparative stance of this study, and its focus on Italy and Germany as legitimate case studies for the analysis of fascist expansionism, are far from self-evident choices. To state the obvious, namely that only the Italian and German interwar regimes nourished expansionist millenarian ideologies and possessed the material capabilities to implement them in an aggressive style, is completely different from claiming that fascist expansionism was derived from a fascist ideological commitment to territorial expansion or that such a commitment was a generic element of the fascist worldview. Before embarking on such a course, however, it is vital to consider two pivotal methodological prerequisites: first, why it is meaningful to re-
establish the validity of a generic concept of ‘fascism’, which in itself legitimises a comparative approach to its different – and idiosyncratic – manifestations; and second, why the scope of such an approach should be limited to these two countries – Italy and Germany – and to that specific span of time, the interwar period.

The validity of a comparative approach to fascism: Italy and Germany

In one of his last writings, Tim Mason criticised the lack of a ‘longer historiographical perspective’ in the recent studies on National Socialism. The ‘decline of the Fascist paradigm’, he argued, and the emphasis on the singularity of the Nazi regime have obscured the fact that ‘National Socialism was a peculiar part of something larger’.6 In a similar vein, Ernst Nolte concluded one of his most ambiguous and controversial essays by berating the futility of the recent trend in historiography to ‘demonise’ National Socialism, presenting it as ‘unique, singular’ and unparalleled in every respect.7 Notwithstanding the dubious methodological and historical validity of his analysis,8 Nolte expressed a reservation towards the direction of research on National Socialism that was essentially shared by Mason: namely, that focus on the genocidal and destructive aspects of National Socialism ‘makes critical distance [from fascism] more difficult’.9

Where the two approaches radically diverge, however, is in their prescriptions for the broadening of the research focus. While Nolte’s main objective was to relativise the destructive force of National Socialism by locating precedents and antecedents outside the context of the fascist regimes, Mason called for constructive comparisons in the framework of a generic ‘fascist’ paradigm. The significance of his analysis, however, lies also in his suggestions for the content and samples of such a comparative approach. Mason does not express nostalgia for the traditional definitions of generic ‘fascism’ (for example, the ‘totalitarian’ approach). The revival of the ‘fascist’ paradigm for him has to be constructed upon a new conceptual basis that would guarantee the soundness and validity of comparison. In this respect, there is only one candidate for a comparative analysis of National Socialism: the underexplored reservoir of Italian fascism. Nolte’s comparisons with such disparate cases as Pol Pot’s Cambodia and the slaughter of the Armenians are ‘extraneous to any serious discussion of Nazism; Mussolini’s Italy is not’.10

In the face of the unpopularity of comparative analysis, there have been systematic attempts to provide the kind of comparison that Mason suggested. The Italian and German regimes have become the focus of some comparative approaches to fascism in the 1980s and 1990s. S. Payne’s work,11 R.A.H. Robinson’s studies on European fascism12 and, more recently, A. De Grand’s, R. Eatwell’s and R. Bessel’s comparative analyses13 have placed the discussion of a generic concept of ‘fascism’ on a more sound theoretical platform. Bessel’s effort, especially, divulges
through its title the challenge and power of the suggested comparative approach: namely, that there is as much to learn about the nature of fascism from the similarities as from the differences in the ideology and policy of the ‘fascist regimes’. R. Griffin’s authoritative study *The Nature of Fascism* (1994) has built confidently upon this dual significance of comparison. Griffin constructs a clear and elaborate ‘ideological minimum’ for a fascist paradigm (a ‘palingenetic’ form of extreme nationalism in the form of a ‘third way’ between liberalism itself and socialism), and then tests its validity against the different representations of this minimum in the various fascist movements and regimes. In spite of a debatable broadening of focus to extra-European and post-1945 phenomena, the author devotes most space to the Italian and German fascisms, thus acknowledging their primary relevance to any discussion of a generic concept of ‘fascism’.

In the field of foreign policy, the limits of the comparative sample have somehow been determined by history itself in a *de facto* manner. Of all potentially ‘fascist’ regimes only the Italian, German and Japanese systematically pursued expansionist policies. It was, however, the earlier convergence between the former two, and their closer political co-operation in promoting the goal of a new territorial map in Europe, that has focused the attention on the Italian and German cases. E. Wiskemann’s work has underlined the significance of the German–Italian alliance for the implementation of the fascist ‘new order’. In a similar vein, J. Petersen’s study has examined the origins of the two regimes’ politico-ideological convergence in 1933–6 and provides insight into the nature of the Axis alliance, while F.W. Deakin has focused on the significance of the alliance during the Second World War. Yet, for these comparative – and many other singular – studies, Axis expansionism reflected the triumph of Nazi ideology and policies over a weaker Italian regime that was dragged to aggression and war against its initial political intentions. In this respect, the work of M. Knox is unique in its analysis of the expansionist penchant of the Italian and German regimes. Knox has pinpointed the origins of this common propensity in comparable ideological traditions of indigenous nationalism (myth of the nation, glorification of national history, cult of violence and war, and so on), in the personal visions of the two leaders, as well as in the idiosyncratic circumstances of the interwar period in the two countries. He has also formulated a common theoretical framework which helps to incorporate expansionism into the internal logic of the two regimes. The political and ideological relevance of expansion is established here in two ways: first, horizontally, as a common denominator between the two regimes’ *Weltanschauungen*; and second, vertically, combining the propensity for territorial expansion with the desire for ‘conquering’ (that is, transforming in a radical direction) the domestic system. Knox’s thesis, granting equal gravity to the ideological value and political functionality of expansion in the Italian and German cases, provides a strong defence for the value of a comparison between them. At the same time, however, it does not explore the link between the two regimes’ propensity for expansion and the generic ‘fascist’ values that underpinned or radicalised it. Such a radicalisation, according to Knox, emanated from the need to speed up the process of domestic consolidation and to free the two leaders...
from the last remaining vestiges of the old order. This assertion is undoubtedly correct, in the sense that successes in foreign policy provided the two fascist leaderships with the necessary prestige and political self-confidence to challenge traditional institutions and establish their primary role in foreign policy decision making. However, radicalisation resulted from a spectacularly high level of consolidation of fascist power and not from a need to achieve it. Even in Italy, where the preservation of the institutional role of the Crown and of social allegiances to the Catholic Church survived the strengthening of Fascist power, there is little evidence that the regime’s shift to an aggressive foreign policy accelerated the process of domestic transformation. Obviously, in the extraordinary circumstances of a major military conflagration, both regimes (and especially Nazism) initiated experiments with new forms of rule that would have been barely conceivable in a semblance of peace. In the end, though, the interpretation of fascist expansionism presupposes a clarification of the relation between ideology and action. Knox’s highly sophisticated comparative analysis seems to cope better with the long-term ideological legacies of each fascist regime than with the generically ‘fascist’ ideological determinants of the radicalisation of fascist expansionism in the late 1930s. In this sense, his interpretative stance is somehow reminiscent of the traditional justification for a comparison between Fascist and Nazi expansionism – namely, that we should examine them together simply because they seem comparable, served similar political functions or were pursued concurrently.

This study aims to examine fascist expansionism in each regime on two levels: first, as ideology, both in its links with long-term traditions in the two societies since unification and in its relevance to specific ‘fascist’ values; and, second, as a process of translating intentions into action through the influence of domestic and international factors. The unique expression of expansionism as both thought and action under the two regimes sets them apart from other quasi-fascist cases, where expansion remained a utopian ideology or was practised outside the framework of a coherent ideological system. In this sense, comparison provides an opportunity to test two main hypotheses – first, whether the two regimes’ idiosyncratic propensity for territorial expansion and their expansionist policies were underpinned by specifically ‘fascist’ ideas; and, second, whether the ideology and practice of territorial expansion by the two fascist regimes displayed a degree of programmatic coherence and commitment to the realisation of a concrete long-term vision.

**Ideology and action: a puzzling relation**

The dualism between ideology and action constitutes a pivotal element of the fascist systems, not only in the sphere of foreign policy but generally in every aspect of fascist thought and policy. Yet, the nature of this dual relation in fascism has traditionally been an area of heated controversy and debate. Again, the origins of this controversy lay in a general lack of consen-
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sus about the role of ideology in the process of foreign policy making. In spite of many attempts to present the ideology–action problem in fascist regimes as a special feature of ‘fascism’, this debate remains part of a wider discussion on domestic and foreign policy making. Perceiving fascist foreign policy as an extreme expression of this theoretical problem might satisfy intentions to mythify or demonise fascism as a completely unique phenomenon; it does not provide, however, a constructive methodological point of departure for understanding fascism itself. The intricate relation of ideology and action is not the exclusive privilege of the study of fascist foreign policies; it is, in fact, not even limited to the theory of foreign policy in general. Instead, it remains a philosophical and political riddle in all systems and spheres of policy, domestic and foreign. Fascism enters the debate as an aspect – however unique – of the wider problem, in the same way that fascism is in itself an aspect of our wider social, political and intellectual history.

Two different debates – the first about the programmatic or opportunistic/diversionary character of fascist foreign policies, the second about the continuities of fascist expansionist policies with previous national aspirations – have dominated our perceptions of the fascist phenomenon. We may dismiss their crude polarisation and cut across their artificial barriers, but we can neither disregard it nor refrain from using their terminology as a point of reference. With regard to the ‘programmatic’ or not substance of fascist foreign policy, the existing literature has treated the two regimes rather differently. The Nazi regime has been regarded as more ideological and consistent in its expansionist pursuits. Hitler’s fanatical exposition in Mein Kampf and his unwavering commitment to rearmament and reckless activism have formed the basis of the so-called intentionalist approach. H. Trevor-Roper’s rigid conception of Hitler’s ideology as a ‘blueprint for power’ was followed by K. Hildebrand’s and A. Hillgruber’s notion of a ‘stage-by-stage’ plan for territorial expansion. G. Schubert located the ideological origins of Hitler’s foreign policy in the 1920s, a view shared by G. Stoakes who regarded the period 1919–25 as pivotal for the evolution of Hitler’s worldview. Even more flexible intentionalist arguments, such as A. Bullock’s distinction between ‘consistent aims’ and ‘opportunistic methods’, underlined how such ideological aims underpinned the regime’s foreign policy making and were never contradicted by tactical vacillations. However, the intentionalist orthodoxy has been challenged from a variety of viewpoints. A.J.P. Taylor’s classic and controversial interpretation rejected any ideological substance in Nazi foreign policy, arguing instead that expansionist goals were shaped according to traditionally German objectives and were pursued in reaction to inauspicious international developments. H. Rauschning and H. Mommsen share the conviction that Nazi foreign policy originated from an unprincipled and blind pursuit of absolute power, devoid of any particular objective or strategy. Mommsen also underlined the social imperialist function of territorial expansion, especially in appeasing the radicalism of the Nazi party’s old fighters, while T. Mason echoed a similar argument when he described Hitler’s foreign policy as a reaction to domestic pressures in a ‘barbaric variant of social impe-
rialism’. According to Mason, these internal deadlocks prompted a radicalisation in the Nazi expansionist policies which culminated in the invasion of Poland as a desperate move to divert attention from the terminal crisis of the German economy in 1939.26

By contrast, the ‘traditional’ interpretation of the Italian Fascist foreign policy has underlined the opportunistic, non-programmatic and diversionary character of Mussolini’s expansionist plans.27 Total rejection of the notion of a programme forms the basis of G. Salvemini’s classic accounts, which emphasise both the improvising and the propagandistic nature of the Duce’s foreign policy making.28 D. Mack Smith, who dismissed Mussolini as a ‘cloud-cuckoo-land’ amateur and presented his whole policy as fraudulent, has echoed similar views.29 More moderate was the analysis of E. Di Nolfo, who nevertheless detected no clear ideas in the regime’s foreign policy in the 1922–30 period.30 Social imperialist connotations pervade G. Rochat’s extensive writings on Fascist military policy, stressing that expansionist ventures were aimed at increasing the regime’s domestic security.31 In a similar vein, F. Catalano linked the radicalisation of the regime’s foreign policy from 1935 onwards with the mounting economic crisis which hit the country later than other European countries.32 However, a growing number of historians have attempted to overcome the absence of a Mussolinian Mein Kampf and to trace an ideological consistency in the regime’s foreign policy which could unify the relatively quiescent 1920s with the aggressive expansion in the 1930s and the decision to enter the war in 1940. G. Rumi dated the origins of a programme in the early 1920s, while M. Knox and P. Alatri agreed on the existence of a general disegno finale (living space in the Mediterranean) which was formulated in the mid-1920s.33 Although most of these approaches acknowledged a high degree of continuity between liberal and Fascist expansionist goals, they attacked the idea that Fascist foreign policy changed objectives and style in the 1930s.34 Instead, they underlined an internal continuity and consistency in Mussolini’s revisionist objectives, rejecting the notion that the radicalisation of Fascist expansionism in the 1930s was the exclusive result of Nazi influence or mounting domestic deadlocks.

The second historiographical debate, focusing on the degree of ideological and political continuity between pre-fascist and fascist aspirations and actions, proved in many ways even more controversial. After an initial period dominated by the tendency to discredit fascism completely, to present it as an aberration due to short-term anomalies and to place the whole fascist chapter in a historic parenthesis,35 research turned to the idea that a certain degree of continuity existed between the emergence of fascism and pre-1918 historical trends in the two societies. Unsurprisingly, in a postwar period dominated by endeavours to reconcile Italian and German societies with the ‘uncomfortable’ fascist experience and to reconstruct feelings of national pride in a more positive, constructive direction, references to such a continuity hit raw nerves. In general, this argument appeared to insinuate that fascism was much more an integral part of long-term indigenous ideological and political developments than most were willing to admit. With regard to foreign policy, this new interpretive angle explored the hypothesis that
fascist expansionism could be linked to a continuity of aggressive expansionist traditions, evident in Italy and Germany since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This revisionist approach to the problem of how to historicise fascism reached its peak in Germany in the 1960s with the so-called ‘Fischer controversy’. The idea that Nazism might have simply exaggerated intentions and aspirations which had dominated German policies since Bismarck had a tremendous impact on German historiography, generating acrimonious debates (for example, the Fischer–Ritter exchange) but also opening up new directions in the research on the course of German history. In Italy, the notion of continuity between Liberal and Fascist foreign policy has been an even more sensitive suggestion, given the ideological tendency of anti-Fascist tradition to present Fascism as an ephemeral aberration of national history. When the Australian historian R.J.B. Bosworth alluded to a clear line of continuity between Liberal and Fascist expansionist aspirations, there was an angry reaction and criticism from a series of Italian historians in defence of the singularity of Fascism. The legacy of ‘liberalism’ in post-unification Italy and the country’s ‘victory’ in 1918 rendered a revisionist retrospective analysis of long-term authoritarian structures and aggressive expansionist intentions much more difficult than in Germany, where the Wilhelminian Reich had been discredited after the First World War. The ‘orthodox’ interpretation of the historical transition to Fascism, articulated by distinguished Italian historians such as R. Vivarelli, has treated Italy’s 1915 intervention in the European conflict as a legitimate expression of her long-term ‘great-power’ aspirations. It was the ‘failure of liberalism’, as Vivarelli claimed, that created the conditions for a fundamental discontinuity in Italian history, opening up a political faultline which Fascism manipulated and widened in the interwar years. The apparent continuities between the anti-liberal character and aggressive hyper-nationalism of the intervento movement in 1914–15 and the expansionist discourse of Fascism were greatly played down in favour of treating Mussolini and his movement as a major historical deviation.

At the same time, the revisionist historiography on Nazi Germany tended to be rather dismissive of the aggressive motivations behind Fascist Italy’s policies. In his customary exaggerated style, A.J.P. Taylor presented Hitler’s expansionist worldview as a routine re-articulation of post-unification German nationalism (see Chapter 6), but had very few (and largely disparaging) things to say about Mussolini’s foreign policy. For Taylor, Fascism was a travesty that could hardly be compared to the destructive madness of Nazism. This argument was perfectly in line with the attempts of various Italian historians to employ a variant of the ‘continuity’ thesis in a totally different direction, to draw a definite line between the traditions of Italian and German nationalism. F. Chabod’s study of Liberal foreign policy found discontinuities where Fischer had encountered causality: the liberalism of the patriarchs of modern Italian nationalism and politics (Mazzini and Cavour, for example) was hardly comparable with Bismarck’s conservatism and Wilhelminian authoritarianism and militarism. In his controversial interview with M. Ledeen, R. De Felice found in the Fascist ‘movement’ a set of ‘positive’ goals which were progressively
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distorted by the excesses of the ‘regime-model’ of Fascism. Although long-term continuity was regarded as irrelevant to the understanding of why Fascism emerged and seized power, it could nevertheless shed light on why Fascism failed to follow Nazism on its path of unbounded aggression and destruction. The ‘radical’ political model of fascism, as epitomised by Nazism, was alleged to have faltered on the Italian traditions of liberalism, individualism and ‘kindness’.43 Ironically, the findings of the revisionist historiography on German history were partially endorsed in order to rebuff similar inferences for modern Italy and Fascism.

The plan of the study

It becomes obvious that any notion of an ideologically conditioned and programmatic foreign policy has to be established against three major objections. The first is that expansion as a policy option had little to do with the general fascist worldview and was mainly the result of long-term national aspirations which fascism simply emulated and pursued further. The second is that the two fascist leaders were not in a strong position domestically which would enable them to shape and dictate foreign policy according to their beliefs and visions. The third is that fascist expansionist policies were dictated by shortterm developments and traditional aspirations, thus lacking both internal cohesion and long-term objectives upon which they eventually converged. The following analysis of territorial expansion in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany is structured according to these three separate aspects of the ideology–action problem. On the level of ideology, fascism is analysed as a ‘nationalism plus’ phenomenon, which blended radical elements of each country’s nationalist tradition with a specific novel commitment to a fascist new order. In this sense, a conjunction of comparative analysis of fascism with a parallel scrutiny of national history in the long durée is needed. Chapter 1 examines the ideological traditions in the Italian and German post-unification societies and shows how fascist ideology achieved an ideological fusion of pre-existing radical traits in a new synthesis (updated with the experience of the Great War) with an increased emphasis on action and a determination to unite reality with utopia. Chapter 2 studies the expansionist ideologies of the two fascist movements–regimes as coherent systems of thought, combining a number of generic, abstract underlying features (historic living space, elitism, cult of violence, unity of thought and action) with idiosyncratic, concrete articulations of expansionism according to long-term autochthonous traditions and aspirations.

On the level of foreign policy making, Chapter 3 analyses the domestic framework of foreign policy decision making. It lays emphasis on the leader-oriented character of the two fascist systems, and assesses the evolution and dynamics of the triangular political struggle between fascist leaderships, traditional elites and fascist parties to inform and shape the foreign policies of each regime. Chapter 4 examines the practical forms of the two regimes’ expansionist foreign
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	policy (revisionism, colonialism, irredentism) and explores the transition from limited border policy to the more aggressive and ambitious expansionist rationale of the second half of the 1930s. In the context of this analysis, three separate issues are addressed: the continuity between pre-fascist and fascist expansionist policies, the continuity between early and later fascist expansionism, and the correspondence between fascist ideology and action. On the same theme of radicalisation, Chapter 5 examines the importance of the exclusive political–diplomatic relation between the two fascist regimes for the evolution of their more radical expansionist policies in the second half of the 1930s. It examines the process of fascism’s internationalisation, and analyses how both rivalry and co-operation between the two fascist regimes contributed to the radicalisation of their expansionist objectives and policies. The account of fascist foreign policies in these chapters is neither chronological nor exhaustive. Instead, emphasis is placed on a series of key decisions of each regime which serve as case studies for examining developments in the above three main areas (decision making, ideological consistency and cumulative radicalisation within the Axis alliance).

Finally, Chapter 6 concentrates on the Second World War as the culmination of fascist expansionism. Here the emphasis is on the period between the summer of 1939 and 1942, when the two regimes’ radical expansionist ambitions entered the most crucial stage of parallel implementation. Again, the analysis investigates the ideological/non-ideological character of decision making, the programmatic relevance of the decision to wage war to the overall framework of each regime’s expansionist policies, and the way in which ideological intentions interacted with structural factors (domestic organisation, material capabilities, co-operation within the Axis alliance). Although 1941–2 signified the relegation of what was intended to be an ideological campaign to desperate war making, the chronicle of fascism’s trajectory to defeat and eventual collapse during 1943–5 is briefly reviewed.
Without doubt, the fascist phenomenon has dominated the postwar debate about the course of modern Italian and German history. The domestic and international impact of fascist policies drew attention to the conditions which facilitated the appeal of fascism in Italy and Germany, and to the factors which contributed to the radicalisation of its ideology and political practices. Despite the differences in the level of economic development, as well as in the social and political structures of the two countries, the fact that they shared the experiences of late state formation and belated modernisation may shed new light on their similar historical trajectory in the interwar years. Without discounting these significant differences in the economic and social conditions between Italy and Germany, it seems that the ‘late-comers’ theory has provided a better starting point for the understanding of the similar long-term propensity of the two systems for territorial expansion than the theories of uneven economic or political development. According to this theory, expansion was a means of both accelerating the pace of domestic development, enhancing the international prestige of the ‘late-comers’ in their pursuit of ‘great power’ status, and breaking free from the limitations (political, economic, geographical) that their belated arrival had placed upon them. Instead of focusing on the differing long-term socio-economic features of the two systems (as modernisation theory does, making a sharp distinction between the more advanced German society and the essentially backward, agrarian Italian equivalent), the ‘late-comers’ thesis places emphasis on the similar motivations generated by the common desire of the two newly unified states to establish their position as political ‘great powers’ in the European system.

There are, however, questions particular to each country’s historical trajectory that the above theory cannot answer convincingly without recourse to specific national developments and to the impact of external factors on national politics. Although pre-1918 Italian and German expansionism was motivated by similar aspirations (great power status, completion of unification, social imperialism) and forces (emergence of radical nationalist organisations, deterioration of international relations, opportunities offered by the First World War), these factors were crystallised and subsequently affected national histories in a host of different ways.
Given that the appeal of fascism in the two societies owed most of its strength to the way in which fascism processed, and responded to, national past (see Chapter 2), it is interesting to examine first how these pre-1918 developments shaped Italian and German nationalism (and its expansionist discourses, in particular). The following analysis briefly reviews the arguments that lend validity to the ‘late-comers’ thesis, paying particular attention to the symbolic significance of territory for the two states as a result of the specific pattern of their state-formation (aggressive territorial reconstitution of a historic nation). It accounts for the radicalisation of the expansionist ideologies and policies of the two countries in the years immediately preceding the First World War, offers a brief analysis of the various prewar expansionist arguments, and finally examines the impact of the First World War in relation to its ideological legacy and political influence upon the nationalist/expansionist discourse in the two societies.

‘Late-comers’ and the symbolic significance of territory

Unification and the importance of territory

The patterns of state formation followed by Italy and Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century present two crucial similarities. First, they drew their legitimacy from a liberal nationalist tradition which had pursued the goal of national unification as the platform for domestic development and international power. In Italy, the Mazzinian principle of self-determination in 1848 had given rise to the vision of a ‘new’ republican, democratic Italy as the heir to the glorious Roman empire, with a historic mission in the Mediterranean area. In Germany, the Frankfurt parliament of 1848 had emphasised the urgency of national unification in order to abolish the authoritarian structures of the German states, to provide an efficient basis for social and economic modernisation, and to create a German state as a great power in the political vacuum at the heart of Europe. The second similarity concerned the specific political motivations behind the process of state formation. In both countries, this process was instigated by one state that had achieved political and economic power, as well as a certain diplomatic position in the European system. Prussia in Germany exploited its political prestige amongst the smaller German states and its great military potential to achieve its goals on its own, while Piedmont in Italy took advantage of the antagonisms among the European powers in order to offset its military incapacity, which had hampered its aspirations in 1848–9. In order to provide legitimacy to their expansionist plans and to their struggle against foreign dominators, both states invoked the principle of self-determination and gradually put forward the ideal of national unification.
On the international level, the great power ambitions of the two ‘late-comers’ were inevitably conceptualised in the pre-existing pattern of territorial domination, in Europe and overseas. Nationalism entailed a perception of power that could only be measured in comparison with other states of high international standing. These states – primarily Britain and France – had long ago developed a network of colonial possessions that offered them protected markets, raw materials and prestige greater than Italy and Germany. This had been a time-consuming process, and the two new states had to copy the old imperial states under great pressure of time and with severely limited political or geographical flexibility. In this respect, the ‘late-comer’ theory offers valuable insight into the importance and the problems of expansion for the new Italian and German states in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. On the one hand, the late experience of state formation in Italy and Germany meant that the two unified states had to abbreviate a whole process of social, political and economic development – that had taken centuries in the case of their main competitors, Britain and France – into a few decades. Only this would enable them to compete on equal terms with them for the attainment of their great power aspirations. They also had to adhere to an already existing pattern of competition amongst states (economic, political), to a restrictive concept of the European balance of power, and to a geographically limited sphere of potential expansion. The pressure of time meant that they had to hasten for the few remaining territories (the best lands had already been appropriated by the British and French, and also by the Dutch, Portuguese and Spaniards) before even having resolved the problems of domestic economic development and decided on the priorities of expansion. On the other hand, they were aware that they had started from a territorially underprivileged position and with a growing domestic pressure for establishing a commanding role in the international system. Territory became a *sine qua non* for the political ascendancy of the new states and for the prestige of the domestic ruling forces against the growing challenges from both left and radical right.7

The prestige factor gradually overshadowed the economic significance of expansion, in the sense that the remaining options were not necessarily the most economically or geographically beneficial ones for the states, but had to be exploited for reasons of international competition.8 Political pressure for expansion meant that economic and social needs had to be adapted afterwards to the – often limited – opportunities offered by the seized territories. At the same time, economic infiltration, both in European and overseas territories (informal imperialism) was often seen as something more than a goal in itself. It was also a form of political investment for future expansion in those areas, when circumstances would be favourable. Economic exploitation of colonies was often a very costly enterprise, with little support from industrial and economic interests in the metropolis, and became the subject of severe criticism.9 Criticism was, however, mainly directed against ineffectual or limited expansion, not against expansion as such. Failure in one field simply increased the appeal of the other forms of expansion. With the
exception of the socialist left, territorial aggrandisement remained high on every other political agenda. The plethora of expansionist arguments that emerged after unification in Italy and Germany reflected a symbolic significance of territory which was more important than the political or economic considerations behind expansion.

Thus, we arrive at a widely disregarded common element which underlay the idiosyncratic expansionist tendencies of the two states and remained a constant long-term factor in the ideology of Italian and German nationalism. The process of Italian (1859–70) and German (1866–71) national unification had not taken place in a geographical or political vacuum. In both cases, it involved the incorporation of populations inhabiting territories under foreign rule. It rested upon political control of territories and this, in turn, presupposed territorial conflict. Ultimately, unification entailed the expansion of Piedmont and Prussia at the expense of international ‘enemies’ and against the opposition of domestic antagonists. At the same time, because the concept of an Italian or German ‘nation’ had predated state formation, it was extremely difficult for the new states to claim a real ‘nation-state’ status once they had opted for the ‘small’ territorial solutions. In the 1870s the two states declared their territorial ‘satiation’ in Europe, despite growing awareness that the ethnically incomplete unifications had increased the popularity of irredentism and had produced a stronger pressure for expansion outside the European system. In this way, however, they did nothing to allay a growing feeling that, although the ‘nation’ was the basis of state formation, the state had abdicated its responsibility to incorporate all populations and territories which formed part of this ‘nation’. Voices advocating expansion and an ethnically and territorially ‘complete’ unification proliferated and became increasingly vocal. The pressures upon the governments for tangible manifestations of national prestige and the need to combat the post-unification disillusionment in the two countries strengthened the link between domestic and foreign policies. Territorial concessions came to be seen as the ultimate political and economic solution to domestic grievances. The fact that these aspirations were temporarily diverted to colonial antagonism did not preclude a return to territorial conflicts in Europe, should more auspicious circumstances arise. After 1900, with the gradual disintegration of the European balance of power, these suppressed ambitions were once again on the agenda and eventually led to a war that was essentially a territorial struggle on the continent.

The emergence of radical nationalist organisations

This long-term symbolic significance of territory in post-unification Italian and German history lends considerable credence to the ‘late-comers’ theory. However, explaining the radicalisation of the expansionist policies of the two countries in the years up to the First World War requires the examination of another crucial development: the emergence and mobilisation of radical
nationalist organisations. The process through which the ideological developments on the radical nationalist right affected the conduct of foreign affairs in the two countries was a highly complex one. On an ideological level, the transformation of the nationalist movements in Italy and Germany into imperialist organisations, with beliefs in the transcendental power of the nation and a growing aggressive tone in their territorial programmes, largely predated the political emancipation of the two movements. In Italy, the turning point in the ideological transformation of the nationalist right was the foundation of the Italian Nationalist Association (Associazione Nazionalista Italiana, henceforward ANI) in 1906. The new organisation aimed to give political expression to the ‘new’ nationalist ideology that had made its appearance after the traumatic defeat of the Italian armed forces at Adowa, Ethiopia in 1896, in an attempt to restore faith in the capacity of the new Italian state to acquire the prestige that its glorious past justified. The ANI became an umbrella organisation for the various nationalist groups, covering a wide spectrum from radical ideologies of imperialism to the liberal exponents of irredentism. It attempted to provide a synthesis of the different nationalist ideologies into a uniform programme for domestic rejuvenation and international ascendancy, and thus to justify its political function as the main representative of a nationalist renaissance in contrast to the ‘old’ bankrupt official nationalism of the Italian state. In Germany, such an umbrella organisation did not theoretically exist, with a number of new groups emerging in the first decade of the twentieth century and a fairly even distribution of membership figures among them. However, the central role occupied by the Pan-German League (Alldeutsche Verband) in the representation of the radical nationalist viewpoint since the 1890s rendered it a mirror of the ideological developments in the whole German radical nationalist movement. The intensification of the aggressive character of the organisation under the leadership of Heinrich Class reflected the emergence of a new trend in German nationalism. This trend supported a confrontational foreign policy against the other European states, a revival of the imperial glories of the German nation and an extensive territorial agenda for expansion, mainly in Europe but also overseas.

The radicalisation of expansionist arguments: irredentism, continental expansion versus colonial expansion, conquest versus economic infiltration

The radicalisation of territorial politics in the years prior to the First World War dramatically affected the way in which expansion was conceptualised in Italian and German society. Although traditional arguments for territorial aggrandisement (irredentism, colonial expansion, economic infiltration, ‘living space’) continued to dominate the debate in the two countries, their content underwent a long-term transformation. The shift to confrontational policies was reflected in the radicalisation of previously moderate arguments (irredentism) and in the priority
given to continental expansion and territorial conquest (as opposed to overseas expansion and informal imperialism). We shall now turn to these separate expansionist arguments and examine the process of their radicalisation, their contribution to the aggressive spirit which led to the First World War, and their legacy to the post-1918 expansionist ideologies in the two countries.

**Irredentism**

The historic origins of irredentism lie in the liberal nationalist ideology of the nineteenth century. The term (derived from the Italian *irredenta*, meaning literally ‘unredeemed territories’) signified the desire of an ethnically homogeneous yet scattered population to be incorporated in the same political unit, the nation-state, on the basis of national self-determination. Clearly, the dream of a complete unification of the Italian and German peoples presupposed a political vacuum in central and eastern Europe, namely the absence of strong states occupying territories and controlling peoples claimed by the ‘new’ states. This was not the case, however. Powerful neighbouring states (France and the Habsburg empire in the case of Italy, the same two plus Russia in the case of the German Reich) placed territorial restrictions upon the plans of Cavour and Bismarck for a complete national unification. This led to a political compromise which had two characteristics. On the one hand, it did allow the establishment of the Italian and German states as nation-states, representing politically the Italian and German historic nations in the European system. On the other hand, the ethnically incomplete unifications prompted the formation of national *irredenta* outside the frontiers of the two states. In this sense, the post-unification irredentist claims of Italian and German nationalism reflected an attempt to resume the interrupted process of national and territorial unification by non-aggressive, liberal means (see Chapter 2).

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, irredentism acquired a new popularity within the wider nationalist discourse of the two countries. In Italy, the Mazzinian vision of a unified Italian state, based on self-determination, survived in various nationalist organisations which emerged in the three last decades of the nineteenth century. The story of all these organisations (Pro-Italia Irredenta, 1877; Dante Alighieri, 1889; Trento e Trieste; Pro Patria and others) followed a similar pattern until the turn of the century. Largely confined to intellectual circles, with a relatively small membership and a non-aggressive character, they advocated the ideological and ethical priority of irredentism over all other forms of territorial politics (such as colonialism). Anti-Austrian sentiments – inheritance of the bitter *Risorgimento* struggle since 1848 – made the irredentist claims to Trento and Venezia Giulia politically more important than the claims to the south-eastern coast of France. The early alignment, however, of the Italian state with the Triple Alliance (along with Germany and Austro-Hungary) rendered territorial expansion at the expense of the Habsburg Empire impossible. Italian governments from 1876 onwards
endeavoured to play down the importance of irredentist agitation in the country, while taking active steps to limit the influence of nationalist organisations, especially in the north-eastern provinces.\textsuperscript{20} It has been argued that the shift of attention to Africa (implemented mainly by the Minister of Colonies Manzini and the Italian Premier Crispi in the last quarter of the nineteenth century) was a substitute for the impracticality of irredentist claims.\textsuperscript{21} Such an assertion, however, is anachronistic, since irredentist ideology did not occupy a prominent position on the expansionist agenda before the first decade of the twentieth century. Before that time, even irredentist organisations acknowledged the political necessity of the alliance with Austria.\textsuperscript{22} In the same vein, official Italian foreign policy aimed to uphold the European balance of power, accepting the political necessity of a strong state at the heart of Europe (Habsburg Empire) at the expense of the principle of self-determination which underlay the formation of the Italian state.\textsuperscript{23}

Similarly, the formation of the Pan-German League in 1893 reflected – as its title suggests – the ideological popularity of the irredentist argument in post-unification Germany, but was initially confined to an aspiration not involving immediate political action. The right of all the German Volk to belong to the same state was a demand shared not only by nationalist organisations, but also by liberal and non-conservative circles of the German society.\textsuperscript{24} This right, however, did not amount to a questioning of the European territorial map, especially since expansion could be pursued in other, less aggressive forms, in colonies or through economic infiltration in Europe. Until the first years of the twentieth century there was a flexibility in the ideologies of Lebensraum: economic or territorial, living space could be claimed anywhere without subverting the overall territorial settlement. Thus, irredentism remained marginal to the territorial debate in Germany until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Increasing European instability, in conjunction with nationalist mobilisation in the two countries during the decade before the war, transformed the context of irredentist ideology and provided it with a new political significance. In Italy, the ‘new’ nationalist movement rejected the mediocrity of the post-unification Italian system and advocated instead an expansionist policy as part of a rejuvenating process and a completion of the Risorgimento. The policies of the Italian governments after the defeat at Adowa in 1896 remained focused on the task of domestic reform, renouncing irredentism as ‘sentimental rhetoric’, incompatible with the country’s strategic interest in strengthening the Triple Alliance.\textsuperscript{25} This dogma did not change significantly even after the vehement nationalist reaction to the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (formally an Ottoman territory) by the Habsburg Empire in 1907, when the Giolittian administration was severely criticised for playing down any Italian claim for territorial compensation.\textsuperscript{26} The chasm, however, between the ‘legal’ and ‘real’ Italy (Italia legale and Italia reale, government and people) was growing constantly.\textsuperscript{27} The ideological
synthesis in the framework of the ANI provided the conceptual platform for incorporating the liberal irredentist argument into a wider programme of territorial aggrandisement. Especially after the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the imperialist wing of the ANI acknowledged the political utility of irredentism. A small liberal irredentist group, under the leadership of Sighele, joined the ANI, aiming to preserve its ideological autonomy in the context of this anti-Giolittian nationalist conglomeration.28

By 1910, however, the incompatibility between the aggressive imperialist wing and the narrow ‘liberal’ irredentism of Sighele’s Irredentists prepared the ground for a final struggle for the soul of the ANI. The Libyan campaign (1911–12), which Giolitti authorised in the aftermath of the Second Moroccan Crisis (1911) in order to claim the last remaining north African colony, marked a turning point in the fate of irredentist ideology in Italy. The Irredentist group within the association reacted against this broader imperialist campaign that treated the irredenta as part of a historic claim for the restoration of Italian rule in the Mediterranean. Yet, by the Congress of Rome in 1912 the Irredentists had been completely marginalised, first ideologically and then politically, following the withdrawal of Sighele from the Association.29 Consequently, anti-Austrian irredentism survived in the new Italian nationalist ideology, but only after having made two irreversible concessions.30 First, the programme of the ANI reduced it to one of several elements of territorial policy, thus facilitating the synthesis of colonial, imperialist and liberal expansionist goals. Second, by its absorption into the militant expansionist spirit of the ANI, irredentism assumed confrontational implications which facilitated its conceptualisation in terms of international territorial rivalries. This in turn made possible its adoption as official foreign policy of the Italian state in 1915, as part of an aggressive expansionist programme in contrast to the initial liberal inspiration of the concept.31

Similar tendencies characterised the irredentist ideology of the German völkisch nationalist movement which revolved around the Pan-German League. The proposition that the unification of 1871, involving the concept of a Kleindeutschland (‘minor Germany’, excluding Habsburg territories inhabited by Germans), was territorially incomplete acquired a new political significance in the decade before the war.32 Of course, the main current of German irredentism, namely the union with the German population of the Habsburg empire, was politically unrealistic in the context of the Triple Alliance. However, the deterioration of European international relations after 1905 – starting with the First Moroccan Crisis – provided three further stimuli to the development of a stronger irredentist element in German nationalist ideology. First, the limited gains from colonial expansion re-focused territorial policies on the European continent, thus providing ideological currency for the ideas of a central European union (Mitteleuropa), in economic or even annexationist terms.33 Second, the collapse of Russian–German relations led to ruthless policies of Russification of the German minorities of
the Tsarist empire, thus provoking the interest of the German nationalist movement in the fate of Germandom outside the frontiers of the Reich. Third, the irresponsible and self-centred policies of the Habsburg empire infuriated German nationalists to the degree that they even wished for a quick war, in order to cause the collapse of the Dual Monarchy and thus redeem the German territories and populations of the Ostmark.34

In the remaining years before the outbreak of the war, the idea that the existing German state was a Vorstaat, a transitional stage in the process of state formation,35 was coupled with the economic and defensive necessity of territorial expansion in central and eastern Europe. As in the case of Italy, the overlapping of irredentist claims with imperialist plans for the economic and political domination of vast areas of the continent provided a synthetic ideological platform for aggressive territorial expansionism. Irredentism was placed in the wider context of a Lebensraum (living space) policy, echoing the millenarian obsessions of the völkisch nationalist movement for the historic mission of Grossdeutschland. As in Italy, the radical nationalist organisations in Germany accomplished a remarkable ideological preparation for combining the claim for colonial expansion with irredentist objectives, in order to achieve both national development and international prestige. They plucked irredentism out of its liberal context and reintroduced it as a prerequisite for national power in competition to other European states. This meant that irredentism acquired a political role in international rivalries and was directed in an aggressive manner against the territorial integrity of those states still holding the irredenta within their frontiers.

**What expansion? Continental versus colonial expansion, formal versus informal imperialism**

Throughout the period between the 1880s and the First World War, ideological and political controversies emerged about the most beneficial type of expansion. These controversies involved official government policies, organisations not affiliated to a political party and public opinion in the two countries. The dilemma between continental and colonial expansion permeated the expansionist debate in Italy and Germany, and produced a rough polarisation which survived the First World War. This was understandable, since on a theoretical level the two expansionist arguments represented different perceptions of national prestige and different philosophies about how expansion could aid the goal of national development. The advocates of colonialism regarded overseas expansion as combining territorial expansion and economic growth without destabilising effects for the European balance of power. They also supported the idea of colonial possessions as a symbol of great power status, thus enabling the ‘late-comers’ to achieve equality of standing with the other European great powers.36 For them, European stability was a prerequisite for the fruitful advance of national goals, and they hoped that colonial expansion would, in the long run, deliver more substantial politico-economic benefits than any