

# The fascist new–old order

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## Abstract

*Contemporaries and historians alike have explained the imperialism of interwar Japan, Italy, and Germany through the paradigm of a ‘new world order’. This article critically revisits this received assumption by analysing the place of the Axis in the longer history of imperialism from the late nineteenth century to the Second World War. If we cast Axis empires – a blend of fascism and imperialism – in the larger framework constituted by the relationship between the nation and capital, it becomes clear that they were not so much the result of the peculiar national histories of Japan, Italy, and Germany, but products of larger, global forces. Through an examination of recent scholarship, this article offers a new conceptual interpretation of the link between imperialism and fascism. In so doing, it adds to our understanding of the interwar period by breaking down the neat boundaries between liberal and fascist world orders.*

**Keywords** Axis powers, capitalism, fascism, imperialism, new world order, Second World War

Axis politicians, bureaucrats, and intellectuals talked a language of ‘newness’ to designate both their domestic reorganization and their ambitions to reshape the way in which the world was governed. The Japanese ‘New Order in East Asia’, the Italian ‘Nuovo Ordine’ in the Mediterranean, and the Nazi ‘Neuordnung’ signalled, in the words of their spokesmen, a move beyond the world built on nineteenth-century liberal internationalism, individualism, and parliamentary democracy. Contemporaries agreed. The economist Karl Polanyi wrote in 1944 that the world’s fascist regimes led an upheaval against the old order.<sup>1</sup> Historians have reinforced the narrative that pitched the fascist empires against liberal democracy. They have argued that Japanese emperor-worship and militarism, Italian state-driven corporatism, and Nazi racism, all coupled with the goal to build self-sufficient polities in their respective spheres of interest, jarred with the principles espoused by Western liberalism.

But the professed newness of the Axis was tempered by much that was old. Most importantly, it is often forgotten that the world envisioned by the Axis was, just as the one they claimed to supersede, a world of nations and capitalism. Fascists prepared to destroy nations on racial grounds (as the Nazis did) or pledged to rescue them from Western colonialism (as the Japanese claimed), but they elevated the nation as one basic element of social and global organization. The second element was capital. Despite the fascists’ stock invective against

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1 Karl Polanyi, *The great transformation: the political and economic origins of our time*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001, pp. 24–30.

predatory international plutocracy and its devastating effects on the national community, Axis regimes protected private property and the accumulation of capital, provided that these periodically bent to official needs. Structurally, then, the new world order of the Axis defended the central pillar of the old liberal order – its political economy framed on the interplay between nations and capital.

There was a third element that the Axis took over from the liberal order: imperialism. This was not surprising, because since the late nineteenth century imperialism had undergirded the world of nations and capitalism. It opened new markets for Western products while securing raw materials necessary for industrialization. As Eric Hobsbawm pointed out, imperialism created the modern ‘national economies’.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, as the historiography on the imperial turn has shown, imperialism forged national identities – and nationalism. Whether it was victories over ‘natives’, colonial literature, or racial thinking, imperialist practices had a profound impact on metropolitan culture and helped to create popular consent around the nation. Imperialism thus had a dual effect on both nation and capital, contributing to naturalizing them as constitutive units in modern political and cultural history.

But this was also the goal of fascism. In the 1930s, when economic dislocation threatened the supposed harmony of national communities to an unprecedented degree, fascist regimes in Japan, Italy, and Germany developed an array of policies to reconcile the nation with capital.<sup>3</sup> They repressed ‘internal enemies’, reserving particular brutality for those, such as Jews, whom they accused of undermining the nation, or those threatening capital, usually communists. They also promoted 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-century imperialism. In all three countries, racism, whether of the assimilationist or genocidal kind, recalled previous colonial experiences in Africa and Asia. As far as international affairs were 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.

It was therefore an irony that, even as fascist regimes declared that they wanted to destroy the liberal order, they embraced liberal imperialist strategies to restore order between nation and capital. This article examines the place of the Axis in the longer history of imperialism, from the late nineteenth century to the Second World War. More specifically, it situates fascism and imperialism in the same framework constituted by the relationship between the nation and capital in order to ask to what extent the Axis was a departure from the existing liberal order. It shows that imperialism and fascism played a historically contingent, but connected, role in strengthening the link between the nation and capitalism. I argue that, although the Axis hinged on interwar developments in Japan, Italy, and Germany, it was not a *sui generis* formation because it rested on the bedrock of liberal imperialism. Axis imperialism was not the repudiation of liberal imperialism but its consummation: Axis regimes were not just destroyers but fixers of an international system whose fundamental principles – nations and capitalism – they shared. Thus relativizing the ‘newness’ of the ‘new orders’ proclaimed by Japan, Italy, and

2 Eric Hobsbawm, *The age of empire, 1875–1914*, New York: Vintage, 1987, pp. 40–2.

3 Historians disagree over the use of the ‘term’ fascism outside Italy. This article is not the place to revisit that debate. I will use ‘fascism’ in its wider meaning and apply it to the politics and ideology that emerged in Japan, Italy, and Germany in the interwar period.

Germany, this article revises the Axis as the product of global forces that originated before the fascist moment of the 1930s, and that outlasted the defeat of the fascist powers. It challenges the lingering assumption that the Axis was the product of internal pathologies of Japan, Italy, and Germany, suggesting instead that, insofar as fascism complemented imperialism, the Axis was the product of global history.

Historians have explored empirically the relationship between imperialism and fascism in individual countries, but the connection has been neither theorized nor explored across the three major Axis powers. A number of scholars of ‘transnational fascism’ have examined the so-called ‘transfer’ of fascist ideas and practices, but sustained comparative studies of Japan, Italy, and Germany are still lacking.<sup>4</sup> To shed new light on the ideological and imperial origins of the Axis, this article will adopt a synoptic approach, linking the literature on imperialism and fascism to the same conceptual problem of modernity determined by nation and capital. Doing so will provide a critical assessment of the notion of ‘fascist imperialism’ as a typology. Much as the distinction between liberal and fascist states is not absolute because both were premised on nations and capital, so the boundaries between liberal and fascist imperialism are porous. Ultimately, the article will complicate the dichotomy between the Axis and the Allies.

In the first part, I argue that late nineteenth-century imperialism and interwar fascism were interrelated strategies to harmonize the unstable relationship between nation and capital. That the two were interrelated, however, does not mean that there was a causal connection. The second part of the article demonstrates that the relationship between imperialism and fascism was flexible. Here I will provide a comparative analysis, showing how imperial and fascist strategies converged in a process of subsumption, whose aim it was to reinforce fascism. The entanglement of fascism and imperialism in Japan, Italy, and German, preceded the Axis. In the third part, I examine how this subsumption led to different configurations of imperialism and fascism in Japan, Italy, and Germany. This unevenness caused frequent misunderstandings and frictions within the Axis, but was alleviated during the Second World War. The conflict accelerated an integration of imperial and fascist forces, and contributed to the realization among the Axis powers of their shared interest in guaranteeing the survival of the old order of nation and capital through a combination of imperialism and fascism.

## Imperialism and fascism as corrective strategies

In his 1974 book on fascism, the Marxist political sociologist Nicos Poulantzas stated that ‘he who does not wish to discuss *imperialism* ... should stay silent on the subject of fascism’.<sup>5</sup> Poulantzas had recognized that the connection between fascism and imperialism was not only important but also undertheorized: clearly he was dissatisfied with the facile Comintern line that fascism was the expression of the imperialist drive of finance capital.<sup>6</sup> New theoretical

4 Notable exceptions include Benjamin G. Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist new order for European culture*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016; Christian Goeschel, ‘A parallel history? Rethinking the relationship between Italy and Germany, ca. 1860–1945’, *Journal of Modern History*, 88, 3, pp. 610–32; McGregor Knox, *Common destiny: dictatorship, foreign policy, and war in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

5 He paraphrased Max Horkheimer’s dictum that one had to remain silent on fascism unless one were willing to discuss capitalism. Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and dictatorship: the Third International and the problem of fascism*. London: Verso, 1974, p. 17.

6 As announced by the Comintern’s head, Georgi Dimitrov, in 1935, fascism was ‘the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital’. This was an extension of Lenin’s famous argument that imperialism was the direct expression of monopolistic capitalism

insight about the way in which imperialism and fascism are linked can be gained by examining them not as the crisis of either capital or the nation, but as the crisis in the relationship between those two.<sup>7</sup> For, although fascism and imperialism emerged in different conjunctures, both acted as corrective strategies when the relationship between nation and capital entered such serious moments of crisis as during the depressions that struck the world from 1873 to 1896 and in the 1930s.

The nation, understood broadly as both cultural expression of nationhood and political entity grounded in statehood, stands in a complex relationship to capitalism. On the one hand, nation and capitalism constituted a unit in which one reinforced the other. Capitalist accumulation required a protector. Early modern states served this task and, in due time, passed it on to the nation-state, its ‘placekeeper’.<sup>8</sup> Nations did so by providing the legal, cultural, and bureaucratic framework to enable capitalist extraction, sanctioning the violence necessary to enforce and maintain it. Moreover, the nation has the capacity to produce narratives of unity – and myths – where capitalism creates social conflict and tensions. For if one of the hallmarks of capitalism is its unevenness, that of the nation is its fictionalizing of a homogenous community to harmonize class tensions by naturalizing capitalist relations of production. As Karatani Kojin put it, ‘the nation is the imagined restoration of the community that was undermined by the commodity-exchange economy’.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, the fraternizing between nation and capitalism is limited because the relationship, albeit mutually beneficial, is also unstable. In moments of crisis, capitalism overtakes the nation, undoing its fiction that the national community is a natural, harmonious whole. Though anchored to the nation, capital ensures its continuation by expanding overseas and breaking down barriers between societies, even as the nation seeks to enforce borders by asserting its legitimacy in a finite territorial space (sovereignty). Polanyi himself noticed this pattern, concluding that the marriage of nation and capitalism was one prone to crisis. In coining the notion of ‘double movement’, he precisely indicated that the uncontrolled expansion of the market disrupted the social organization on which it rested, causing a ‘countermovement’ whereby society seeks new ways to protect itself. The widespread demand for labour laws and import tariffs, he argued, were symptoms of this protective response.<sup>10</sup>

Imperialism, which invoked patriotic glory through overseas expansion, and then fascism, with its call for order and authority, also promised to fix national communities. The imperialism of the late nineteenth century mediated the relationship during the Great Depression that began in the 1870s, a global crisis generated by the overproduction of commodities that led to large-scale unemployment and popular discontent with the ruling classes. The crisis overlapped with the turn to what Hobson called the ‘new imperialism’, a shift towards direct rule of overseas possessions with the intent to stake claims of sovereignty. Though Britain and

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searching for new markets abroad. Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism: a popular outline*, New York: International Publishers, 1985.

7 Liberal historiography has discussed fascism in Japan, Italy, and Germany in terms of national pathologies. See, most notably, Maruyama Masao, ‘The ideology and dynamics of Japanese fascism’, in Ivan Morris, ed., *Thought and behaviour in modern Japanese politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, pp. 25–83; Benedetto Croce, *Scritti e discorsi politici (1943–1947)*, Bari: Laterza, 1963; George Mosse, *The crisis of German ideology: intellectual origins of the Third Reich*, New York: Schocken Books, 1981.

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

9 Kojin Karatani, *The structure of world history: from modes of production to modes of exchange*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014, p. 216.

10 Polanyi, *Great transformation*, pp. 3–4, 223.

France gained the largest spoils of African and Asian territories, Japan, Italy, and Germany were quick to follow suit. As Sebastian Conrad has argued with respect to Germany, 'in its basic structures, the German empire resembled the other empires of the time'.<sup>11</sup> The civilizing mission, racism, and visions of economic gain accompanied the German, as well as the Italian and Japanese, imperial expansion at this time. The often-rehearsed argument that their imperialism was 'belated' is therefore exaggerated, for the more important point is that they shared the imperial assumptions and strategies of the other Western powers.

Contemporary observers noticed that the economic crisis and the outburst of imperialism happened concurrently, and historians are still debating the link between imperialism and economics in the late nineteenth century. While it may be true that the policies of imperial protectionism failed to raise substantial metropolitan investment in the colonies, few scholars deny that statesmen and economists hailed empires as a solution for a political economy based on free trade that had entered a profound crisis.<sup>12</sup> Imperial expansion was not the only response to the crisis but, as argued by Hobsbawm, it was an important one because in it economic and political interests became inseparable. Although free-trade imperialism still paid off better – and Western powers did continue to trade with one another – colonies were envisioned as complements to the metropolitan economy.<sup>13</sup> Building the German empire was a burden on the state's finances, and yet for colonial societies and business circles the investment seemed worthwhile in order to reach the objective of creating markets for German exports and to secure raw materials for metropolitan industry.<sup>14</sup> Japanese administrators envisioned Korean markets not only to sell surplus products but also to help balance the payments incurred by the expansion of military expenses.

The historian Jürgen Osterhammel has argued that the nineteenth century was a century of empires more than nations, which were still few compared to imperial polities, but it is important to stress that the nations that existed certainly changed their attitude towards their empires and imperialism more generally.<sup>15</sup> If *having* an empire was seen to benefit capitalist expansion, *being* an empire provided sustenance to the nation. The argument that imperialism shored up a nation's ruling class is an old one and, though it has been criticized for its simplicity, it retains some validity. In the 1950s Hannah Arendt wrote that imperial expansion legitimized the rule of European businessmen and political leaders, giving 'a new lease on life to political and social structures which were quite obviously threatened by new social and political forces'.<sup>16</sup> Later, the social historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler explained Germany's imperial expansion as a function of the elite's attempt to manage class conflict.<sup>17</sup>

11 Sebastian Conrad, *German colonialism: a short history*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 3. See also Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the nation in imperial Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

12 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of empire*, p. 59. See also Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, 'Between metropole and colony: rethinking a research agenda', in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of empire: colonial cultures in a bourgeois world*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997, p. 19. D. K. Fieldhouse famously denied that economics was a significant force in British imperialism: D. K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and empire 1830–1914*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973.

13 Hobsbawm, *Age of empire*, p. 69. In Germany, small but influential colonial associations of merchants and industrialists hoped that colonies would help weather economic cycles; they were especially vocal during the recession of 1882–6. Conrad, *German colonialism*, p. 27.

14 Conrad, *German colonialism*, pp. 95–9.

15 Jürgen Osterhammel, *The transformation of the world: a global history of the nineteenth century*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 404–7.

16 Hannah Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism*, New York: Harcourt, 1968, p. 147.

17 Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1969.

Closer to the current subject, the new imperial history has demonstrated the extent to which nation- and empire-building were ‘mutually constitutive projects’.<sup>18</sup> Traces of empire figured prominently in a wide array of metropolitan cultural practices, ranging from advertisements on biscuit tins to youth magazines, from cartoons in magazines to postcards, and from gender norms to racial stereotypes, all contributing to shaping modern national identities in Britain, France, Japan, Italy, and Germany. Indeed, as one scholar put it, the nation can be considered an ‘imperialized space’.<sup>19</sup>

Thus imperialism naturalized the relationship between the expansion of capitalism and that of the nation. In the interwar period, fascism took on the same role. In fact, fascists were more conscious of their goal to reconcile nation and capital, and much more explicit about it, than nineteenth-century imperialists. Regimes in Japan, Italy, and Germany launched policies to reform liberal capitalism, which they lambasted as outdated and responsible for the Great Depression. In one of the few comparative studies of the economies of Japan, Italy, and Germany, Stuart Woolf has shown that in the 1930s leaders of these countries discussed and devised new ways to make the economy serve the ‘national interest’.<sup>20</sup> They advocated an increased involvement of the state to tame the ‘greed’ of the capitalists. Corporatism, the much-discussed Italian response, envisaged that representatives of (officially approved) unions, management, and the state should coordinate labour relations and industrial policy. As a contemporary put it, it was necessary to bring harmony between the ‘political-territorial unity’ and ‘economic unity’.<sup>21</sup>

In line with protectionist programmes elsewhere, fascist states intervened in the planning of the economy and the running of industrial conglomerates. In Germany, Hermann Göring’s Four-Year Plan, launched in 1936, was part of economic measures to reduce unemployment and increase production of heavy industrial goods, particularly of armaments.<sup>22</sup> Japanese technocrats, many active in Manchuria and often drawing on German economic thought and models, planned for the development of chemical, military, and resource industries.<sup>23</sup> The objective of these measures was to end the reliance on free trade and to build closed economies that could withstand the fluctuations of global capital.<sup>24</sup>

Reforming capitalism was inseparable from the fascist fixation with purifying the nation. Whether they targeted communists, strikers, Jews, Koreans, or other national enemies, regimes in Tokyo, Rome, and Berlin made it a priority to redefine categories of inclusion in and exclusion from the national body, a process which involved various forms of coercion and violence. As pointed out by Tim Manson, economic policies such as corporatism were meant to

18 Cooper and Stoler, ‘Between metropole and colony’, p. 22.

19 Antoinette Burton, *Empire in question: reading, writing, and teaching British imperialism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011, p. 45. For Germany, see the essays contained in Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer, eds., *German colonialism and national identity*, New York: Routledge, 2011. For Italy, see Patrizia Palumbo, ed., *A place in the sun: Africa in Italian colonial culture from post-unification to the present*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003.

20 S. J. Woolf, ‘Did a fascist economic system exist?’, in *The nature of fascism*, New York: Random House, 1969, p. 128.

21 Lorenzo Ornaghi, ‘Corporativismo’, in Victoria de Grazia and Sergio Luzzatto, eds., *Dizionario del fascismo*, Turin: Einaudi, 2002, p. 362.

22 Richard Overy called Göring’s policies ‘economic imperialism’. R. J. Overy, *War and economy in the Third Reich*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 144–75.

23 Janis Mimura, *Planning for empire: reform bureaucrats and the Japanese wartime state*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011; Aaron Stephen Moore, *Constructing East Asia: technology, ideology, and empire in Japan’s wartime era, 1931–1945*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013.

24 Woolf, ‘Did a fascist economic system exist?’, p. 144.

give the illusion that Germany was no longer a class society but what the Nazis termed *Volksgemeinschaft*, a national community of harmonious producers.<sup>25</sup> Historians have shown how the Nazi ideal of *Volksgemeinschaft* shaped other harmonizing policies, from sports and efficiency campaigns to the killing of Jews.<sup>26</sup> In Italy, as illustrated by de Grazia, such fascist innovations as after-work activities and policies directed at women need to be seen as part of the attempt to continue the process of nationalization of Italians by building consent.<sup>27</sup> Cultural histories of interwar Japan, Italy, and Germany have suggested that the production of literary tastes, film, and aesthetics were mechanisms, sometimes top-down, sometimes instigated from the grassroots, to create identities through myths and symbols of the nation, from the image of the Duce or Führer to aesthetics of loyalty that encouraged a subject to conduct acts of violence.<sup>28</sup> Though the success of all these nationalizing policies is still being debated, it remains safe to say that fascism deployed an array of strategies to create a social and cultural basis safe for capitalism.<sup>29</sup>

Imperialism and fascism, seen from the angle of the relationship between the nation and capitalism, were separate but interconnected strategies to mediate that relationship. They were not the only ones: syndicalism and trade unionism before the First World War, the New Deal in interwar America, post-war European social democracy, and neoliberalism in the twenty-first century – all these movements and ideologies have weighed into the unit made up of nation and capital.<sup>30</sup> But imperialism and fascism stand out because they exercised the highest degree of violence and have had the most destructive impact on world history since the late nineteenth century. They were, perhaps, the most widespread, long-lasting, and appealing strategies of this kind. They were connected in that they were inherent in the framework constituted by the nation and capitalism – the nation's drive to cleanse and purify its imagined community, and capitalism's instinct to accumulate through expansion.

## The fascist solution

If imperialism and fascism performed a similar function, what exactly was the relationship between them? 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 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

25 Tim Mason, *Nazism, fascism and the working class*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

26 Historians still debate the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft* and the way in which the Nazis sought to enforce it. If, initially, they mainly considered it a propaganda tool, in the 1970s and 1980s social historians connected the Nazi social policies to the regime's desire to create consent. More recently, and controversially, Michael Wildt has argued that anti-Semitism and everyday violence against the Jews was central in forming a new sense of national community based on racial consciousness.

27 Victoria de Grazia, *The culture of consent: mass organization of leisure in Fascist Italy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; Victoria de Grazia, *How fascism ruled women: Italy, 1922–1945*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992.

28 See, for example, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist spectacle: the aesthetics of power in Mussolini's Italy*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997; Alan Tansman, *The aesthetics of Japanese fascism*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009; Alan Tansman, *The culture of Japanese fascism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009.

29 For critical assessments of the extent to which Fascist ideology permeated Italian society, see R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: life under the dictatorship*, London: Allen Lane, 2015; and Paul Corner, *The fascist party and popular opinion in Mussolini's Italy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

30 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Three new deals: reflections on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933–1939*, New York: Picador, 2007.

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.<sup>31</sup> A vast imperial 'repertoire' permeated interwar politics, economics, and culture, and fascism liberally drew from it.<sup>32</sup> 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.

The entanglement of imperialism and fascism has been documented in recent scholarship, but it has proved difficult to explain historically and theoretically. Historians of Japan, for example, have pointed out that some features commonly associated with fascism had been tested or produced in the empire. Louise Young suggests that the mass mobilization of population for the Japanese empire in Manchuria had something fascist about it.<sup>33</sup> Kim Brandt has identified fascist traits in the aesthetics of folk art, a field of knowledge developed in the context of Japanese imperialism. Technocratic planning in the empire, too, has been defined as fascist.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, scholars of European history have implicated imperialism in the policies and outlook of the fascist regimes in Rome and Berlin. The Italian imperial conquest of Ethiopia, for example, revitalized Mussolini's popularity, however briefly.<sup>35</sup> Recent studies have indicated that the conquest of Ethiopia also radicalized the Fascist regime by catalysing policies of racial segregation in the empire that inspired the 1938 anti-Semitic racial laws in Italy itself.<sup>36</sup> Mark Mazower has argued that the organization of Hitler's new order in Europe had all the hallmarks of imperial practices and policies.<sup>37</sup> It is clear that fascists thought imperially: of the world as a place of inter-imperial conflicts, and of strong nations as needing more, not fewer, imperial spoils.

To explain the relationship between imperialism and fascism, scholars have often relied on a genealogical approach, according to which policies in the empire reverberated back to the metropole. Such a 'blowback' effect was first noted by contemporaries and then developed by historians. Writing in 1902, Hobson remarked how the militarism and nationalism generated by British imperialism devastated democracy at home.<sup>38</sup> His thesis influenced Hannah Arendt, who developed some of Hobson's arguments in her study on the origins of totalitarianism, contending that nineteenth-century imperialism, and especially colonial violence and racism, presaged the ideology and policies of the Nazis against the Jews.<sup>39</sup> More recently, Jürgen Zimmerer has drawn strong continuities between the German extermination policies in Southwest Africa and the Holocaust.<sup>40</sup>

31 Harootunian, *Marx After Marx*, pp. 38–9.

32 I borrow 'imperial repertoires' from Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in world history: power and the politics of difference*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011.

33 Louise Young, *Japan's total empire: Manchuria and the culture of wartime imperialism*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999, pp. 240, 334.

34 Mimura, *Planning for empire*; Moore, *Constructing East Asia*.

35 Christopher Duggan, *Fascist voices: an intimate history of Mussolini's Italy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 249–82.

36 Centro Furio Jesi, *La menzogna della razza: documenti e immagini del razzismo e dell'antisemitismo fascista*, Bologna: Grafis, 1994. See also Giulia Barrera, 'The construction of racial hierarchies in colonial Eritrea: the liberal and early fascist period, 1897–1934', in Palumbo, *Place in the sun*, pp. 81–117.

37 Mark Mazower, *Hitler's empire: how the Nazis ruled Europe*, New York: Penguin, 2008.

38 J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: a study*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1988.

39 Arendt, *Origins of totalitarianism*.

40 Jürgen Zimmerer, 'Colonialism and the holocaust: towards an archaeology of genocide', in A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Genocide and settler society: frontier violence and stolen indigenous children in Australian history*, New York: Berghahn, 2004, pp. 49–76.



But the argument that imperialism generated fascism has clear limits. As pointed out by Pergher and Roseman, there are parallels between German imperialism in the nineteenth century and that of the Nazis, but the evidence for direct, institutional continuity is slim; these scholars argue that the ‘ethnic-nationalism’ of the Nazis was the determining factor.<sup>41</sup> Zimmerer’s argument has been criticized as overly simplistic. As for Italy and Japan, causal explanations that imperialism generated fascism appear even more perilous. Although recent scholarship has shown that Italian governments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries invested considerable energy to secure an empire, the Italian colonial empire was irrelevant to the national economy, and Italians preferred to settle in British colonies – hardly the conditions for a ‘blowback’ scenario. The Japanese took colonialism even more seriously than the Italians and, with the takeover of Taiwan and Korea, were more successful. But here, too, evidence of a linear blowback is shaky: in the 1920s Japan developed not fascism but liberalism.

If, however, we approach the relationship between fascism and imperialism as one of subsumption within the same framework constituted by the nation and capitalism, it is possible to overcome this genealogical approach. Imperialism did not predetermine fascism. Although they shared the same mission of harmonizing nation and capital, imperialism and fascism were relatively autonomous from each other because of historical contingency: they were the products of different conjunctures. Imperialism responded to the needs of bourgeois society of the late nineteenth century, fascism to those of modern mass society in the interwar period.

Simply ‘transferring’ strategies from imperialism to fascism was unlikely because there was enough ground for tension. Insofar as imperialism was tied to the liberal notion of universal civilization, it jarred with fascism’s obsession with closed community, culture, and national rebirth.<sup>42</sup> Bound up with the bourgeoisie as it was, nineteenth-century imperialism meant benefiting one class over others, and this was anathema for a populist ideology such as fascism that tried, at least in its rhetoric, to create a broad, inter-class, appeal. Imperialism offended some of the fascist sensibilities of the nation.

On a different level, however, fascism and imperialism converged. A characteristic of both was their almost boundless drive to accumulate power to enforce social order. Imperialism helped the bourgeoisie to generate economic power through industrial development and trade.<sup>43</sup> Fascism focused on the concentration of political power as something unlimited. Polanyi argued that imperialism smashed existing social structures in the colonies in order to extract the element of labour. But it is possible to make a parallel case for fascist regimes and their obsession to co-opt or destroy those social organizations, groups, and individuals that stood in the way of their imagined national *Gemeinschaft*, whether unions or national or ethnic minorities.<sup>44</sup>

If it is difficult to assert that imperialism determined fascism, neither can we isolate the two. Seeing the question as one of subsumption decentres the issue of change and continuity in favour of interrogating the complex processes of negotiation that occurred in the interwar years. Regimes in Japan, Italy, and Germany – as well as elsewhere – selectively appropriated imperial strategies. In Italy, the fascist subsumption of imperialism led to a configuration

41 Roberta Pergher and Mark Roseman, ‘Holocaust: an imperial genocide?’, *Dapim*, 27, 1, 2013, pp. 42–4.

42 Benjamin G. Martin, “‘European literature’ in the Nazi new order: the cultural politics of the European writers’ union, 1941–3”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48, 3, 2013, pp. 486–508.

43 Arendt, *Origins of totalitarianism*, p. 143.

44 Polanyi, *Great transformation*, pp. 172, 188, made this argument with regard to imperialism.

where, though not everything was new, much was presented as being new. As recent research has shown, the Italian Fascist regime took imperialism seriously from early on, embarking on imperial policies that culminated in the conquest of Ethiopia in 1935–36. ‘Being an empire’ mattered to the leadership, as opposed to having an empire, as was the case in Liberal Italy.

Mussolini’s regime tried to modernize the empire by making it into a solution to the problems of modern mass society, the crisis of capitalism, and the international order centred on the League of Nations. As argued by Nicola Labanca, Mussolini may have turned to imperialism in an ‘instrumental’ way, but his policies (and the increased colonial budgets) suggest that he intended to strengthen Fascism. Labanca has found that, as early as the mid 1920s, the Italian media were effusive about the empire – much as their Japanese counterparts enthused over the invasion of Manchuria in 1931.<sup>45</sup> Internationally, the imperial card was central for the regime’s revisionist calls. The official rhetoric declared that an imperial redistribution was necessary for Italy’s economic survival. Autarky based on imperialism may not have strengthened Italy economically but it certainly accelerated the breakdown of the international order based on free trade established at Versailles.

In Japan, fascism needed imperialism even more than in Italy because no domestic fascist movement or party came to power and enacted a clear break with the previous state. Fascist movements – both civilian ones and those based in the military – as well as fascist thinkers such as Kita Ikki, Ōkawa Shūmei, and Tachibana Kōzaburō had emerged as early as the 1920s.<sup>46</sup> But throughout that decade they did not coagulate and remained diffuse, and often disunited, in various social milieus – in the army, academia, political parties, and elsewhere.

It was the invasion of Manchuria in 1931 that accelerated a fascist ‘gathering’ at home through a process of subsumption.<sup>47</sup> The mass mobilization campaigns for settlement in Manchuria described by Louise Young, far vaster and more at the grassroots level than those mandated by the regime in Italy, served to reinvigorate national harmony at a time when cultural and political conflicts were on the rise in the wake of the Great Depression.<sup>48</sup> Pan-Asianism, an ideology of Asian solidarity that dated back to the late nineteenth century, was re-employed for fascist purposes. If originally Pan-Asianists spoke about how to liberate Asia from Western colonialism, with the Manchurian conquest Japanese fascists co-opted that discourse. For ideologues such as Ōkawa Shūmei, as well as for military and political exponents such as Ishiwaru Kanji, Pan-Asianism now meant the creation of a Japanese order in Asia. It was an order, as Mark Driscoll has reminded us, that served the purpose of continuing capitalist exploitation. Manchukuo was the biopolitical ‘lifeline’ of Japan, whose elites toyed with novel forms of technocratic planning, resource extraction, and human exploitation (from forced labour from coolies to prostitution, as well as drug trafficking).<sup>49</sup> As with technocratic forms of production, pioneered by the likes of the Nissan founder Ayukawa Yoshisuke, these

45 Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare: storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002, pp. 46, 152, 195.

46 Tetsuo Najita and Harry Harootian, ‘Japan’s revolt against the West’, in Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, ed., *Modern Japanese thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 207–72.

47 The term ‘gathering’ is used by Alice Kaplan to describe the development of fascism in French intellectual life. See Alice Kaplan, *Reproductions of banality: fascism, literature, and French intellectual life*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

48 Young, *Japan’s total empire*. Samuel Ho also observed a ‘tighter integration’ of the Taiwanese and metropolitan economies: Samuel Pao-San Ho, ‘Colonialism and development: Korea, Taiwan, and Kwantung’, in Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese colonial empire, 1895–1945*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 351.

49 Mark Driscoll, *Absolute erotic, absolute grotesque: the living, dead, and undead in Japan’s imperialism, 1895–1945*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 5.

imperial strategies gave impetus to ideological claims of ‘new order’, even though they were actually based on the established conviction that imperialism was central for the expansion of markets and the extraction of surplus value.

Subsuming a country’s own imperialist experience – often after having enhanced or revamped it – was not the only strategy for fascism. As recent research has shown, fascism had an inter-imperial gaze that ventured into subsuming practices and policies associated with liberal empires. After all, as argued by Conrad, the ‘late nineteenth-century colonialism was a pan-European project’. In envisioning the German colonial empire, Bismarck drew similar inspiration from the British East India Company.<sup>50</sup> In Japan, until the First World War, political leaders centred their foreign policy and empire on the alliance with Britain.

More comparative research is required, but visions of American imperialism straddled Japan, Italy, and Germany perhaps more than they were willing to admit. In the interwar period, the political economy envisioned by policy-makers and ideologues in Tokyo, Rome, and Berlin revealed a desire to replace the (British) free-trade economy with continental blocs on the American model. Hitler’s fondness for romantic literature on the American frontier is well known; Adam Tooze, however, has shed more light on the extent to which interwar German, and especially Nazi, elites dreamed of reforming the continental economy by creating an imperial hinterland akin to what the United States had at its disposal.<sup>51</sup> Nazi new order theorists may have anathematized American democracy, liberalism, or ‘plutocracy’, but they were eager to subsume some of the country’s imperial dimensions. Perhaps most famously, the scholar Carl Schmitt theorized the legal framework of a German *Grossraum* in dialogue with what he understood to be the historical experience – and lesson – of the United States.<sup>52</sup>

Tooze’s argument that the United States had a vast purchase on the Nazi imperial imaginary is also borne out by Japan. Takashi Fujitani and Naoki Sakai, for example, have both shown some of the commonalities in the ways in which Tokyo and Washington ruled their empires during the Second World War. For Sakai, both America and Japan had developed an ideology that was a mixture of nationalism and universalism, while Fujitani has shown how the two states ruled ethnic minorities in similar ways.<sup>53</sup> But the points of intersection began even before the Second World War. From the Versailles Conference all the way to Pearl Harbor, Japanese intellectuals, politicians, and bureaucrats feared the imperial might of America even as they idolized it. In 1919, almost two decades before he led Japan into the alliance with Germany and Italy, the young Konoe Fumimaro had travelled to Europe and America. Crossing the Atlantic made him realize that the ‘age of Europe had passed’ and that the United States ‘had reached a position of world domination’ thanks to its industrial, financial, and cultural pre-eminence.<sup>54</sup>

Throughout the 1920s, several fascist exponents looked with awe at the place occupied by America in the post-war world, pondering in particular how Japan might replicate the Monroe Doctrine. The ideologue Kita Ikki declared as early as 1919 that Japan and the United States

50 Conrad, *German colonialism*, pp. 14, 23.

51 Adam Tooze, *The wages of destruction: the making and breaking of the Nazi economy*, New York: Penguin, 2006, pp. xxiv–xxv. Tooze expanded on this argument in Adam Tooze, *The deluge: the great war and the remaking of global order*, London: Allen Lane, 2014.

52 Martti Koskenniemi, *The gentle civilizer of nations: the rise and fall of international law, 1870–1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 413–509.

53 Takashi Fujitani, *Race for empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Naoki Sakai, ‘Imperial nationalism and the comparative perspective’, *Positions*, 17, 1, 2008, pp. 159–205.

54 Konoe Fumimaro, *Ōbei kenbunroku (Record of my observations in Europe and America)*, Tokyo: Chūō bunkō, 2006, pp. 122–3.

were the only two ‘great powers’ (*tsuyoimono*) in the world. He later announced that Japan would need its own ‘divine mission, an Asian Monroe Doctrine against the West’.<sup>55</sup> The Asianist Ōkawa Shūmei, Kita’s sometime colleague, theorized that the era of ‘great powers’ had ended and that of the ‘super-great powers’ had begun. Through a bloc of Asian nations led by Japan and mirroring the American Monroe Doctrine, Japan would be able to assert its ‘living space’ (*seizon-ken*).<sup>56</sup> Michael Schiltz has shown that ‘manifest destiny’ animated even the liberal historian Takagi Yasaka, when he mused about the premises on which Japanese Manchuria was built.<sup>57</sup> Schiltz reveals that the idea of building a ‘yen bloc’ in East Asia was the result of the long-term Japanese realization that American and British imperialism was grounded on financial and monetary hegemony – hence the desire to create an alternative to the Anglo-American monetary system.

Fascism and imperialism did coexist, influencing each other but without integrating into a new totality. Much as the regimes in Tokyo, Rome, and Berlin employed a language of radical change to define their transformations – such as ‘Fascist revolution’ (Italy) or ‘New Order’ (Japan) – the process of subsumption indicates that there was much that was old, borrowed, and repackaged. To the extent that imperialism was a politics and ideology that was common to the advanced capitalist countries, in subsuming it, fascism also seized practices that were common to Britain, the United States, and France. The fascist solution to the crisis in the relationship between the nation and capital may have been most visible in Japan, Italy, and Germany, but its building blocks were global.

## Axis configurations

Viewing the fascist solution as a form of subsumption not only helps to see commonalities but also to explain national variations in Japan, Italy, and Germany. The degree to which fascism subsumed imperialism depended on what could be called a country’s imperial resilience. Japan, Italy, and Germany emerged from the First World War with different remnants of their nineteenth-century empires to form the basis for post-war reconstruction and future world power. In Japan and Italy, which maintained colonial empires in the 1920s and 1930s, regimes retooled their existing imperialism for fascist purposes and the quest to harmonize nation and capital. Fascist regimes and imperial policies were intricately connected, but relatively distinct at the same time. Not so in the Third Reich. At Versailles, Germany lost its colonies in Africa and the Pacific. Partly as a result, the Nazis deployed imperial practices on Europe and Germany itself, blurring the boundaries between fascism and imperialism to a greater extent. Thus the effect of the fascist subsumption of imperialism was not uniform. It led to a configuration of hybrid arrangements that appeared different but which, especially under conditions of war, tended to radicalize by converging onto each other.

As early as the nineteenth century, imperialism had malfunctioned as a balance between nation and capital. It was not just that imperialism failed to pay the economic dividends that it

55 Kita Ikki, ‘Bersaiyu kaigi ni taisuru saikō hanketsu (A reconsideration of the judgement about the Versailles Conference), in *Kita Ikki shisō shūsei (A compilation of the thought of Kita Ikki)*, Tokyo: Shoshi Shinsui, 2005, pp. 777–80.

56 Ōkawa Shūmei, as quoted in Ōtsuka Takehiro, *Ōkawa Shūmei: aru fukko kakushin shugisha no shisō (Ōkawa Shūmei: the thought of a restorationist-reformist)*, Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1995, pp. 145–7.

57 Michael Schiltz, *The money doctors from Japan: finance, imperialism, and the building of the yen bloc, 1895–1937*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012, pp. 20–1.

had promised. It also fuelled class conflict because the ‘protectionism’ of the era meant first and foremost the protection of capital, of private property. The widening gap between the metropolitan bourgeoisie and the working class flew in the face of the imperially charged rhetoric of patriotism. These tensions were detected by Hobson, who attacked imperialism for being too costly and for fomenting social division. It created oligopolies on one side, and an impoverished working class (‘mob’, as he termed it) on the other.<sup>58</sup> Building on Hobson, Arendt added that it appeared as though for imperialist administrators like Cecil Rhodes the nation was a ‘burden’.<sup>59</sup> The nation was seen as the puppet of markets and empires – and this helps to explain why imperialism had least purchase among the lower classes and their political representatives. At the 1904 international Socialist Congress in Amsterdam, for example, delegates worried that immigration from the colonies would harm the interest of their national working classes.<sup>60</sup> In Italy, the state struggled to convince peasants to embark for Africa.<sup>61</sup>

If Hobson criticized the wisdom of Britain’s imperial overexpansion, in Japan, Italy, and Germany, political and intellectual elites bemoaned the fact that their imperialism was insufficient to ever promise major economic and social returns to the metropole. By 1914, Rome, Berlin, and Tokyo had accumulated sizeable empires in Eritrea, Somalia, Libya, the Dodecanese (Italy), Southwestern and East Africa, as well as some Pacific islands (Germany), and Taiwan, Korea, and islands in the Pacific (Japan). Sections of these countries’ leadership, however, lamented that they had been unjustly outperformed by the British and French in the global imperial game. In Japan and Italy, nationalist opinion leaders such as Giovanni Corradini and the young Konoe Fumimaro lamented that they were ‘proletarian nations’, bereft of the imperial space necessary for the nation to thrive.<sup>62</sup> The outcome of the First World War heightened these anxieties. At Versailles, Germany was entirely stripped of its colonies; Italy, a victorious power, maintained its possessions, but failed to gain the German colonies it had coveted; Japan, also on the allied side, became a mandatory power over ex-German colonies in the Pacific, but failed to expand its empire in East Asia, as many had hoped. Leaders in those countries therefore entered the interwar period convinced that they were burdened with an imperial deficit.

Lacking an empire to fall back on (or one perceived vast enough to be functional), Japan, Italy, and Germany were particularly susceptible to a new corrective for the relationship between the nation and capital. The new solution to the old predicament was fascism. At a time of heightened class conflict and economic crisis, fascism promised to rescue the system by realigning the nation with capital, much as imperialism had done in the late nineteenth century. Fascism emerged in Italy, but quickly reverberated everywhere to some extent. Mussolini, who coined the term *fascismo* in 1919, may have set up the first fascist party and government in the 1920s, but in the early 1930s a plethora of related movements and regimes emerged across the world that many contemporaries quickly identified under the umbrella term of ‘fascism’. In Germany there were Hitler’s Nazis. Japan lacked a uniform fascist movement but fascism

58 Hobson, *Imperialism*.

59 Arendt, *Origins of totalitarianism*, pp. 134, 50.

60 Conrad, *German colonialism*, pp. 30–3.

61 Giuseppe Finaldi, “‘The peasants did not think of Africa’: empire and the Italian state’s pursuit of legitimacy, 1871–1945”, in John M. MacKenzie, ed., *European empires and the people: popular responses to imperialism in France, Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011, pp. 195–228.

62 Yoshitake Oka, *Konoe Fumimaro: a political biography*, Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1992, p. 5; Enrico Corradini, *Le nazioni proletarie ed il nazionalismo*, Rome: Casa editrice nazionale, 1911.

took root in various right-wing associations, the bureaucracy, and the military, not to mention intellectual circles.<sup>63</sup>

If fascism made inroads into Japan, Italy, and Germany, it did so under different circumstances. Poulantzas has argued that imperialism can be seen as a world chain with strong and weak links.<sup>64</sup> To build on this argument, one could add that fascism acquired a more dominant character where imperialism was weak and unable to fix the link between nation and capital. This was the case in Italy and Germany. The First World War had eliminated German imperialism in Africa and Asia. Italy maintained a colonial empire, but it was a comparatively weak imperialism, which underperformed economically and for which there was little enthusiasm at home. Hence fascism found a fertile ground for its claims to revitalize the relationship between nation and capital. Japan, by contrast, had a more established imperialism that, in fact, had continued after the First World War: throughout the 1920s Japanese elites invoked imperialism in Asia, albeit one carried out within the framework of the League of Nations and the Open Door policy in China, as a way to strengthen the country. At the start of the 1930s, Japan was part of the imperialist great powers in a way that Italy and Germany were not. This imperialist resilience therefore helps to explain why, even when fascism tightened its grip on Japan in the 1930s, the country maintained an imperial figuration.

The integration of imperialism and fascism differed in the three countries. The Third Reich went furthest in fusing the violence of fascism and imperialism, especially in eastern Europe, where the Nazis' goal to create a 'living space' revealed the nation's instinct to cleanse more brutally, just as capitalism's drive was to exploit and extract. The blending of fascism and imperialism was evident in economics. As Tooze has argued, an economic rationale underpinned the Nazi conquest of eastern Europe. Just as this area was meant to guarantee domestic affluence for Germans, so it would catapult Germany into the league of world superpowers; in the same way, the Holocaust as a war on Jews for the German nation cannot be disentangled from the wider imperial ambitions of the Third Reich.<sup>65</sup>

The ferocity of this joint project had much to do with imperial ideology. The desire on the side of Hitler and his henchmen to turn the clock back to reconquer lands supposedly once colonized by Teutonic knights was a fiction underpinned by romantic nostalgia and scientific racism.<sup>66</sup> Legally, this intermingling of imperial and fascist racism was facilitated, as Baranowski has suggested, precisely by Germany's abrupt decolonization after the First World War, which resulted in the 'obliteration' of the distinction between colonial and metropolitan law.<sup>67</sup> In Germany's hegemonic bloc, where imperialism and fascism colluded with unprecedented virulence, Nazi rulers set few limits on the exploitation of human beings, as had been the case in some African colonies in the nineteenth century. At the same time, the empire had to open – and cleanse – a boundless, empty space for the nation, in which going native was disallowed.

Italy offers a different picture. Despite Mussolini's investment in the Ethiopian conquest and the indisputable but short-lived popular enthusiasm after the imperial proclamation,

63 Reto Hofmann, *The fascist effect: Japan and Italy, 1915–1952*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015.

64 Poulantzas, *Fascism and dictatorship*, p. 17.

65 As Tooze, *The wages of destruction*, pp. xxiv–xxvi, also notes, the Nazi economic strategy in the east was a failure, as it consumed more of the Reich's resources than it produced.

66 Mazower, *Hitler's empire*, pp. 181–2.

67 Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi empire: German colonialism and imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 207. For a case study of the destructive racism in Nazi imperialism, see Wendy Lower, *Nazi empire-building and the holocaust in Ukraine*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

fascism and imperialism merged only to a degree. In some respects, they remained parallel projects. The empire in Africa looked more like an ‘appendix’ to the Kingdom of Italy, a colonial ‘addition’, than a fascist ‘palingenesis’.<sup>68</sup> It was not the leader of Fascism, Mussolini, who assumed imperial status, but King Victor Emmanuel III, whose title after 1935 was revised to ‘king and emperor’.

The outbreak of the Second World War unleashed the attempted creation of an Italian empire that shared some of the characteristics of Nazism. Davide Rodogno has argued that fascist ideology mattered more than previously assumed in the building of Italy’s ‘Mediterranean New Order’, ideologically (if not in reality) the Italian equivalent to the Nazi *Lebensraum* in the east. Although military inadequacies subordinated Italy to its Axis partner, Rodogno has shown that, as far as imperial dreaming and policies of occupation were concerned, Mussolini and his accomplices envisaged a national expansion in some of the neighbouring territories which echoed the Nazi dream of an expanded Third Reich. Slovenia, Dalmatia, and Montenegro, for example, were earmarked to be denationalized in order to be annexed into a larger Italian nation.<sup>69</sup> Still, despite the racial hierarchies implicit in this imperial project, Fascist Italy’s empire in the Balkans did not commit genocide in the way that Hitler’s rule did in eastern Europe. There were atrocities and mass killings, but Italian occupiers lacked a systematic policy of elimination of the Balkan population – whether in practice or in theory. Indeed, testifying to the lingering influence of an older imperial tradition, the Greeks, for example, were slated to be ‘civilized’, not eradicated.

Asia under Japanese hegemony presented a pattern of rapprochement between imperialism and fascism that remained incomplete. As in Europe, the impulse of war – first the one against China after 1937, and then the Pacific war – accelerated the desire to cut a new bloc out of old material. Of the manifold articulations of a Japanese new order in Asia, perhaps the vision of the intellectual Miki Kiyoshi stands out as the most philosophically sophisticated merger of fascism and imperialism. Under the banner of a ‘cooperative body’ (*kyōdōtai*), he argued that Japan would fulfil its ‘historic mission’ to unify Asia and resolve the ‘contradictions of capitalist societies’.<sup>70</sup> His stated goal, which he shared with his fellow ideologues, was to bring together Asians into a polity that eschewed the colonial organization of Western powers.

In theory and in practice, however, this was illusory. Much as for its Axis partners, the Japanese ‘new order’ was a hodgepodge of diverse strategies. Despite the rhetoric of Pan-Asianist fraternity, Southeast Asia was scheduled to remain a supplier of cheap labour and raw materials, as it had been under Dutch, French, and British rule.<sup>71</sup> As a contemporary Japanese writer observed, its populations were regarded as inferiors by his fellow soldiers. Racism was alive and well in the Co-Prosperity Sphere, but it did not lead to the genocidal policies developed by the Nazis against Jews and Slavs.<sup>72</sup>

68 Nicola Labanca, ‘Impero’, in de Grazia and Luzzatto, *Dizionario del fascismo*, pp. 660–1.

69 Davide Rodogno, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo: le politiche di occupazione dell’Italia fascista in Europa (1940–3)*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003, ch. 8.

70 Miles Fletcher, *The search for a new order: intellectuals and fascism in prewar Japan*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982, p. 111.

71 See the essays in Paul H. Kratoska, ed., *Asian labor in the wartime Japanese empire: unknown histories*, London: Routledge, 2015.

72 Ethan Mark, ‘The perils of co-prosperity: Takeda Rintarō, occupied Southeast Asia, and the seductions of postcolonial empire’, *American Historical Review*, 119, 4, 2014, p. 119. See also Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Grassroots fascism: the war experience of the Japanese people*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Korea and Taiwan were slated for integration with Japan through policies of ‘imperialization’ (*kōminka*).<sup>73</sup> Through a mix of education policies and repression, the Japanese enacted policies of assimilation designed to stamp out Korean, Taiwanese, and Chinese culture, replacing it with that of imperial Japan. These were policies that evoked the Italian plans for the Balkans, with the difference that Japan, partly because it held these territories for longer, went further in actualizing them.

Manchuria, the heart of Japan’s vaunted ‘new order’, was meant to facilitate the ‘transformation of the nation into the imperial nation’.<sup>74</sup> Japanese visionaries championed Manchukuo as a nominally independent state, premised on the coexistence of ‘five races’, and geared towards economic development. And yet, Manchuria also masked imperial hierarchies – the Japanese unambiguously ranked higher than Chinese and Koreans – and exploitation, even though, as Duara has argued, it was of the development kind that foreshadowed post-war client-state models.<sup>75</sup> The Japanese bloc thus failed to overcome older practices even in Manchuria, where the authorities concentrated their efforts on building a ‘new order’ out of imperialism and fascism.

Because the integration of fascism at home and in the empire abroad varied in each country, the result was that Japan, Italy, and Germany looked, in many ways, rather different. They were different political systems, with Nazi Germany having gone furthest in setting up an authoritarian dictatorship centred on the Führer, while in imperial Japan the shell of parliamentary institutions remained intact. Italy, despite its boisterous Duce, still maintained the monarchy. Moreover, political and intellectual elites in the three countries treasured a sense of uniqueness in their national traditions, and engaged in sometimes fierce debates over the question of commonalities with their partners. The Japanese fixation with Western colonialism, for example, cast a shadow on their understanding of Italian and German orientations. When Italian armies invaded Ethiopia, the first response among many Japanese was to criticize it as a nineteenth-century European move against non-whites.<sup>76</sup> Some Japanese officials also harboured the fear that, after Germany had defeated France, Berlin might seize the country’s colonies in Southeast Asia.<sup>77</sup>

The Axis alliance was not predetermined. But the interplay of imperialism and fascism was nevertheless crucial in forming a rapprochement because it created a grey area that laid the ideological groundwork for the alliance. Whether it was about imperializing the nation, or nationalizing the empire, fascism and imperialism joined hands to harmonize the larger relationship between the nation and capitalism by creating hegemonic blocs. The new orders projected by Japan, Italy, and Germany linked the possibility of internal, national change to the necessity for an external, imperial, reorganization of the world. By the late 1930s, the sense that the international system set up at Versailles had to be reformed was generalized. By the same token, in the wake of the Great Depression, several governments around the world

73 On ‘imperialization’, see Chou Wan-yao, ‘The *kōminka* movement in Taiwan and Korea: comparisons and interpretations’, in Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers, and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese wartime empire, 1931–1945*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. 40–70.

74 Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian modern*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, pp. 19, 61.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 247.

76 Reto Hofmann, ‘Imperial links: the Italian–Ethiopian war and Japanese new order thinking, 1935–6’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50, 2, 2015, pp. 215–33.

77 Jeremy A. Yellen, ‘Into the tiger’s den: Japan and the tripartite pact, 1940’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51, 3, 2016, pp. 555–76.



contemplated or enacted a transformation towards fascism.<sup>78</sup> Japan, Italy, and Germany stood out for aspiring to do both. Their formal joining of hands may have been tactical, but the ideological, political, and economic affinity was structural, even if leaders in the three countries were often reluctant to acknowledge that this was the case.

Although mutual suspicions were not fully dispelled, they were mitigated after the three countries found themselves on the same side in the Second World War.<sup>79</sup> The Axis, no longer an alliance on paper but also in practice, now built on the common ground that the fascist subsumption of imperialism had created. It formed an overlay built atop differing but, under the pressure and possibilities of war, rapidly converging configurations of imperialism and fascism. The Axis powers became increasingly aware of their shared interests and, as the Second World War progressed, enhanced joint projects. Collaboration with armaments, culture and propaganda, and trade: these were just some examples of an acceleration in inter-Axis new order building that was enabled by this common ground. Many of these endeavours may have been ephemeral and doomed, but they signalled nonetheless that Tokyo, Rome, and Berlin had recognized that coming together in the Axis reflected deeply held beliefs about imperialism and fascism.

## Conclusion

Imperial history and the history of fascism belong in the same field of debate, framed by the dialectic between the nation and capital. As this article has demonstrated, imperialism and fascism were separate but interrelated forces that served to harmonize a foundational relationship of modernity, that between the nation and capitalism. Fascism, which followed imperialism chronologically, set itself the goal of correcting the flaws of imperialism. It did so through a process of subsumption, reinvigorating imperial policies to forge its own identity and policies. The result of this subsumption was to create a grey area, a messy mix of imperialism and fascism. Recognizing this shared ideological space, this kinship, helps us to understand better the presence of fascism as a global strategy to complement imperialism.

It also helps us to revisit the Axis beyond the combination of three national histories that intersected, as if by chance, in a wartime alliance. Narrowly defined, the Axis was an alliance between three powers that sought to overturn the liberal world order. But this article has demonstrated that, seen in a longer historical perspective, the Axis drew some of its strategies from the era of liberal imperialism and shared with the liberal powers the goal of protecting the relationship between the nation and capital. As the writer Aimé Césaire noted long ago, liberal powers had ‘cultivated’ fascism in their colonies.<sup>80</sup> More than a distinct entity with clear-cut characteristics, fascist imperialism was hybrid.

In the last analysis, the Axis’s claims of a ‘new order’, pronounced by contemporaries and replicated by historians, need to be relativized. The newness of fascism – its solution – was to

78 For overviews of fascism around the world, see Stanley G. Payne, *A history of fascism, 1914–1945*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

79 For an analysis of the diplomatic road to the alliance see, for example, Ishida Ken, *Nichi-Doku-I sangoku dōmei no kigen: Itaria, Nihon kara mita sūjiku gaikō (The origin of the Japan–Germany–Italy tripartite pact: Axis diplomacy as seen from Italy and Japan)*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 2013; Theo Sommer, *Deutschland und Japan zwischen den Mächten, 1935–1940: vom Antikominternpakt zum Dreimächtepakt: eine Studie zur diplomatischen Vorgeschichte des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1962; Valdo Ferretti, *Il Giappone e la politica estera italiana, 1935–1941*, Milan: Giuffrè Editore, 1995.

80 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on colonialism*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000, p. 36.

retool imperialism to re-naturalize the world shaped by nations and capital. The Axis's new order supported the old order. This kinship perhaps goes some way towards explaining the cosy relationship that emerged between the former Axis countries and the United States after 1945. As the post-war American order proceeded to reshape the relationship between the nation and capitalism on its own terms, Japan, Italy, and Germany rapidly turned into Washington's closest allies, and into its economic beneficiaries.

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