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Violence and Consensus in Fascism

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Following the boom in Anglo-American research on fascism since the 1990s, comparative studies on fascism have gained renewed significance in continental Europe as well. Fascism, recent literature shows, cannot be defined according to a static catalogue of characteristics. The newer research is concerned more with processes and a comparison of the various paths taken by fascism. Scholars are now taking fascist self-descriptions and self-representations more seriously than previously. In addition to symbols, rituals and political actions, attention is now also focussed on the transnational entanglements, transfers, and relationships of fascist regimes, including their contacts, how they perceived each other, and their relations of exchange.

With war and racism as focal points, the transnational entanglements between the fascist regimes and movements in Germany, Italy, Hungary, Rumania, Austria and Croatia from the 1920's to the 1940's should be studied more intensively in future. We will also need to explore the after-effects of colonial experiences on the formation of fascist empires.

Current research on fascism will need to understand the violently charged politics of fascist regimes from the perspective of "governmentality" (Foucault) in order to combine techniques of government with societal processes of subject formation. Violence and consensus were two faces of the same coin regarding fascist-populist regimes, which relied on a society of self-surveillance and denunciation. Culling, extermination, and violence presented themselves as complements to the racist intention to take the life of one's "own" people in hand and improve it. Only by posing as the custodians of life and survival could the fascists formulate their claim to control, regulation and mass murder.

The fascists' radical nationalist, participatory violent terror had by no means only destructive elements, but also helped to create order. The fascists believed that they could create life and order only by killing people or letting them die. The fascist obsession with feasibility and reorganization was not just

potentially unlimited and anti-individualist, it also became radicalized in and through the violently charged events of the war of annihilation.

The fascist association between vitalism and death, between the obsession with feasibility and the belief in destiny, between active "social engineering" and mythic-sacred idealization, between the invocation of allegedly timeless natural laws and driven action imperatives (acceleration dictatorships) was part of a consistently governmental policy of regimes. The interconnection between the war of annihilation and reorganization of the people, domestic policy mobilization and repression, and an order constructed through destruction dovetailed with a regime that combined populism with hierarchy, conservative stasis with mobility, and the formation of the will with military drill.