Dictatorship revisited: consensus, coercion, and strategies of survival

Paul Corner*

Department of Social, Political and Cognitive Sciences, University of Siena, Italy

The article examines certain of the more recent perspectives on twentieth- century dictatorship, looking in particular at the complex relationship between the dictator and the people. Extending its range beyond that of the 'classic' totalitarianisms, the paper argues for a more nuanced approach to the question of popular support for or resistance to regimes and suggests that many of the old binaries concerning popular attitudes need to be revised, with a consequent readjustment of the roles often attributed to violence, to ideology and other cultural factors, and to the varied seductive attractions of mass mobilisation. While pointing to the difficulties of reaching any very definite conclusions in an area characterised by ambivalence and ambiguity, the paper attempts to suggest certain variables related to popular behaviour that may have determined the degree to which regimes were able to impose domination.

Keywords: dictatorship; popular opinion; consensus; coercion; totalitarianism; everyday life

Introduction

Few would dispute that the nature of popular responses to dictatorship continues to be one of the central questions of twentieth-century history. Christopher Duggan's last book, *Fascist Voices* (2012), was aimed directly at this issue. How, why, and to what extent people relate to regimes with totalitarian pretensions are questions very far from being resolved. Opposition is not difficult to explain, but why people appear to go along with these regimes and why they participate actively, at times apparently enthusiastically, in operations now generally condemned by history – popular participation in the realisation of the Holocaust is the most obvious example – continues to be something of an enigma. Answers to the problem generally stress the strength of consensus and the force of coercion, with emphasis varying between the two. But the enigma remains. Indeed, if we extend the time range to the twenty-first century we can appreciate very readily that popular responses to domination seem often to defy rational explanation.

What is the relationship between consensus and coercion? We might begin by looking at the question of consensus from the point of view of the regime itself. Does it want consensus, and if so, why? There can be little doubt that all regimes attempted to gain as much popular support as possible. In the Italian case, Mussolini made it clear on many occasions that the regime aimed at achieving a consensus among the population. Rather surprisingly, given the implications of much of his very considerable work, Emilio Gentile recently questioned the degree to which this pursuit of consensus was central to the operation of the regime, arguing that Italian Fascism aimed simply to maintain power, that it did this through force, and that consensus was a secondary consideration

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*Email: prcorner@gmail.com

(Gentile 2014, 673).[1] While Gentile is obviously right in a kind of absolute sense – no regime aims deliberately to relinquish power – this affirmation does rather contradict what is generally understood to be one of the basic characteristics of totalitarian (rather than authoritarian) regimes in mass society, which is the capacity of the regime to mobilise the population, to encourage and if necessary enforce participation, and to create some kind of sense and some kind of appearance of national unity of purpose. This is much more than the simple exercise of domination.

Perhaps it is necessary to define better what we mean by consensus, because consensus should not be confused with consent. In the context of Italian Fascism I take consensus to mean, in very general terms, the capacity of the regime to carry the population with it in the process of re-engineering society. This includes the creation of a disposition among the population to go along with the project (with big question marks around the words 'disposition' and 'go along with'). It was this capacity that was central to the totalitarian project of unmaking and re-making society. And in this sense consensus meant much more than the public acclamation that was used by the regime for its self-image and for its international reputation; it was the realisation of a social control that envisaged an active role for the population in the realisation of the objectives of the regime.

Over the past 30 to 40 years we have passed through the examination of popular attitudes in terms of first, 'helpless *victims* of repression' and then, when some concessions were made by the anti-fascist front to the idea of consensus, to 'passive consensus' – essentially a top-down vision of the operations of power in which the people are subject to domination and do not rebel – to a position which now recognises the existence of *agency* in the population, even in conditions of repression, and which therefore tends to put in doubt those interpretations that depend almost exclusively on the ideas of coercion, subordination and simple passivity. The concept of agency inevitably complicates the very straightforward picture of rulers on one side and oppressed on the other. If the people have the capacity for action and reaction in relation to the regime, it becomes essential to understand how that capacity is achieved and how it is constituted, how it is developed, and how it is put into use. Thus individual subjectivities come into play in a way they had not before. In short, attention has shifted, first, from the mechanisms of repression to those mechanisms used to realise consensus – what Konrad Jarausch (1999) has termed the 'soft stabilisers' of dictatorship – and, second, from the message that the regime attempted to communicate to the ways in which that message was or was not received, interpreted, or even rejected. It is in this last respect – that of reception – that the real question of how individuals related to the oppressive regime is located.

Violence and the 'liberal subject'

A major consequence of this shift in approach has been that the rigid consensus/coercion binary of opposites has been challenged and much modified. However, before we move to consider these changes, it is necessary to say something about the role ascribed to that 'hard stabiliser' of would-be totalitarian regimes – violence. Necessary because the 'cultural turn' of the 1990s, with its emphasis on ideology, belief, and political religion, often tended to ignore the conditioning role of violence in the retention of power by Nazis and Fascists or else spoke primarily of the symbolic significance of violence. In Italy, in particular, the emphasis on cultural factors, combined with the forgiving effects of the myth of *'italiani brava gente'*, produced a vision of fascism that often seemed almost to exclude the role played by violence, either towards Italians or towards others. In similar fashion (but dependent on different factors) certain works on Nazi Germany suggested levels of spontaneous support for Nazism that belied the intimidatory effect on the mass of the population of the Gestapo and the Kripo. This position, best illustrated by the conclusions of Robert Gellately, who wrote of a 'self-policing' German society (Gellately 1990, 2001), has been

contested more recently. Both Ian Kershaw and Richard Evans have insisted, as Kershaw put it, that 'the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of spontaneous popular support for Nazism' and that, in the examination of popular opinion, the enormous implicit threat of extreme violence provided the context which conditioned all behaviour (Kershaw in Corner 2009, 36; Evans 2016, 116–17). It is necessary to insist on this implicit threat. As Geoff Eley has written, 'to be put into place, the [Nazi] system required its founding act of violence, laying down a powerful climate of fears for the future' (Eley 2013, 41).

For Italy, Michael Ebner (2011), Giulia Albanese (2001, 2006), and Matteo Millan (2014) have helped to bring violence back to the centre of the picture. They show, for Italy, what is more generally true, which is that all regimes of this type began with extreme violence and that violence did not end with the conquest of power. Whatever happened after the seizure of power in respect of the realisation of consensus, coercion was never absent from the picture; indeed, it was always present as a conditioning factor on action and opinion. This climate of intimidation was the common feature of all regimes. But – and this is the central point of the new approaches to the question of consensus – people lived, moved, talked – in short expressed agency – within this climate of fear. Rather than coercion *or* consensus, therefore – one or the other – we may have something much more like consensus *and* coercion operating at the same time, or even – as we might put it – consensus *within* coercion.

However, there is a risk in returning to an insistence on the role of violence. The risk is that popular reaction to domination will always be seen in terms of *resistance* to that domination, thus positing the possibility of only two positions – that of the 'true believer' (for whatever reasons) and that of the resister. There is no middle ground. This would be, in a way, a return to the Cold War view of totalitarian societies, where the default position of the individual was assumed to be that of the private 'liberal subject', striving always for western–style freedom and democracy. In reality, by recognising the continuing capacity for the exercise of agency among the population, despite the permanent controlling presence of violence, we open the field for more nuanced interpretations of popular behaviour which do not correspond to the traditional binary of acceptance or resistance.

Criticism of the rigid 'believers or resisters' formulation has appeared among historians of the Soviet Union (but has not been limited to that history), where the questioning of analyses of popular behaviour, based on what Anna Krylova has termed the 'tenacious liberal subject', has sparked debate (heavily influenced by readings of Foucault) about the extent to which the individual can be considered 'autonomous' of context and the extent to which individuals are formed instead by the circumstances in which they live (Krylova 2001). Put more straightforwardly, is Stalinist man *actor* on the scene, in some way separate from social conditions in the Soviet Union, thus *choosing* conformity for convenience on the basis of an autonomous private consciousness, or is he rather *product* whose perceptions and self-understandings (and choices) are generated by the regime itself (Fitzpatrick 2009, 21)? Or is he a bit of both?

Consensus and everyday life: ambivalence and ambiguity

This rather complicated formulation brings us to the central issue of the ways in which people lived, thought, and participated under conditions of domination. And here we come to questions about the degree to which the regime's message filtered down to society and the extent to which the message was received/accepted/rejected/reinterpreted by the population. Penetration and colonisation are the two words used frequently in this context, referring to the capacity of the regime to penetrate society with its values and the degree to which the world in which people lived from day to day was 'colonised' by the regime, thus generating among the population an effective

'internalisation' of the values of the regime. In this respect there are few straightforward answers, partly because under most of the regimes the message changed over time according to circumstances – this is very obvious in the case of Italy between the 1920s and the 1930s – provoking changing reactions, and partly because what has been referred to so far very loosely as 'the population' was of course in no way homogeneous, with different social groups reacting in different ways. And there might be differing reactions from men and from women.

But to return more directly to the question of consensus. When conceived as that condition among the population which permits the regime to survive and to move forward in the pursuit of its objectives, the word consensus might frequently be exchanged for conformism. Conformism is generally seen as being one of the chief characteristics of mobilised and regimented populations; you had to behave in a certain way at certain times and you did what you were told. This raises the question of motivation. Why people decided to 'go along with the regime' is often difficult to assess because motivations could range from deep belief in the regime, through self-interest, to indifference, and to fear. Moreover we have to remember that all regimes went out of their way to create dependency, often through the control of scarce resources, and people could not avoid recognising this condition of dependency if they wanted to live a 'normal' life. Inevitably, dependency assured collaboration with the authorities – the need for a licence for your shop, a certificate for your pension, all decided on the basis of political criteria. Such things created unavoidable complicity. And, by the same token, people could hardly forget that dictatorship, through its system of rewards, could also be a resource.

In Italy people who hated Mussolini still enrolled their children in the youth organisations because of the fear that not to do so would seriously harm their – the children's – future prospects. Which is an indication of the fact that, as we have already noticed, in regimes of sticks and carrots, conformism and obedience might also stem from the prospect of reward, from the possibilities revealed by entering what Tim Mason called the 'supermarket' of seduction that dictatorships put into operation (1991). Again to make reference to Italy, Fascist handouts to the poor – the Fascist equivalent of the Nazi Winter Aid – depended on the documented good behaviour of those poor, just as the selection of the children to go to the summer *colonie* at the sea depended on the good behaviour of the parents. To be selected to work at Fiat in Turin in the 1930s often depended on a good family record; the local party kept tabs on almost everyone and the sins of the father were frequently visited on the sons. Clearly, unavoidable complicity was a condition likely to stifle open criticism of the regime, although the level of complicity was likely to vary from regime to regime. It is difficult to think of anything in Fascist Italy which acted in the same, everyday way, in inducing complicity as the 'Heil Hitler' salute in Nazi Germany (do I salute or do I dare not salute?), or as, in the Soviet regime, the need for the the ex-kulak, now industrial worker, to try to believe in all waking moments his or her invented biography.

The history of everyday life has tried to chart and understand levels of penetration of official discourse and reactions to that penetration. Here the work of Alf Lüdtke has been of great importance in pointing up the mixed, confused, indeterminate nature of popular reception and reaction (1995, 2016). In pursuing the social history of subjective meaning, Lüdtke has constructed micro-histories of popular attitudes and behaviour, concerning mainly the workplace and the household, in an attempt to answer much broader questions relating to the relationship between people and power. His conclusions tend to show that there was often no direct line of communication, no precise one-to-one relationship between dictatorial discourse and response. For those who were neither totally committed to the regime nor ardent resisters, the world was made up of 'coping and collusion' (two of Lüdtke's favourite words) – that is, surviving on the *least unfavourable* terms – and this process of survival could encompass many different attitudes

almost simultaneously. Lüdtke speaks of 'the simultaneities of obedience, resistance, and silently keeping out of the way. For individuals that meant: to consent, to put up with, to go along with – but also to 'duck', to evade, to distance oneself, even once in a while to oppose, none of which brought either lasting or necessary contradictions' (Lüdtke, quoted from the German in Eley, 2013, 85). With the utilisation of the concept of *Eigensinn* (more or less, personal affirmation of identity), Lüdtke also examines the ways in which non-compliant attitudes to a repressive regime could stem from motives of personal affirmation, the need to create and affirm a personal 'space', that was in a way pre-political and related to personal identity, but which might nonetheless condition attitudes towards the regime.

What is striking about Lüdtke's work is the way in which he seeks to understand the extent to which the regime succeeds in 'saturating the spaces' of everyday life through the study of micro-political contexts of everyday existence. This is far from being what Tony Judt rather unfairly called in another context 'the mindless scraping of the historical dustbin' (more or less social history with the politics left out, Judt 1979, 67). Rather, Lüdtke argues that what people do on a day-to-day basis, and in particular what they do more or less unthinkingly 'in myriad conscious and unconscious ways' – is a much better indication of the impact of the regime in the sense of the internalisation of the values of the regime – than are the open and formal declarations of loyalty or dissent to be found in personal diaries or other formulaic documents. He paints a picture of everyday life through the use of terms like navigation, negotiation, mediation, reinterpretation, showing the degree to which the impositions of the regime were *filtered and sometimes altered in their significance* in their passage from enunciation to some form of response – indications of the capacity of the everyday to modify and often distort official impositions. This might occur for personal reasons, for purely pragmatic considerations, or, as more recent studies have shown, because of the influence of long-established beliefs or traditions (Corner 2012, Ferris 2012).

The problem for the historian is, of course, that these indications frequently point in different directions at the same time. There are very few black-and-white answers and for most of the time we remain in the realm of ambivalence and ambiguity – two of the words that most characterise this field of study. People accepted some things and rejected others and were rarely consistent. This is the realm to which Jan Plamper refers when he writes of the Soviet official who cried profusely at Stalin's funeral in the morning and spent the afternoon recounting anti-Stalin jokes to his friends (Plamper 2009, 2015). Alexei Yurchak notes the same phenomenon in the USSR of the 1970s and 1980s: 'For great numbers of Soviet citizens, many of the fundamental values, ideals, and realities of socialism were of genuine importance, despite the fact that many of their everyday practices routinely reinterpreted the announced norms and rules of the socialist state' (2005, 283). In the same way it was possible to love Mussolini but hate the daily experience of Fascism (Corner 2012, ch.10.1).

Public and private spheres

Sometimes attempts have been made to resolve these ambivalences by resort to the public/private divide – public behaviour in the piazza being one thing, private behaviour, often within the family, another. To some extent this distinction may have justification. Certainly police and Fascist party informers in Italy complained persistently that they found it very difficult to penetrate the family and, being somewhat paranoid, they were very suspicious of what was being said around the kitchen table. It is interesting to note, in passing, that the informers were particularly worried about what the women of the household were saying because, as one of the informers put it, 'it is the views of the woman of the household that count'.

However, asserting too rigid a division between public and private probably leads us to underestimate the degree to which the private sphere was reshaped by the regime. So many things within the family would be related in some way to the requirements of the dictatorship. The degree to which you allowed or encouraged your children to participate in the activities of the regime might be one issue for the family. A problem facing anti-fascist families in Italy was that children loved the uniforms of the youth organisations, and, quite apart from the political implications, the uniforms were expensive and put strains on many household budgets. Demographic policies obviously invaded the private sphere. And in the GDR there was almost a deliberate compensatory cultivation on the part of the regime of the virtues of the modest home comforts of private life – the East Germans being induced in this way to 'exchange their freedoms for fridges' as Ralf Dahrendorf caustically put it (1965, 287).

But the more serious problem about postulating the separation of the two spheres of public and private is that it implies that people were constantly doing one thing but thinking another, with the clear implication that there was a conflict between the two and that everyday life was a permanent process of simulation. This brings us to the 'as if' factor – people wearing masks, behaving 'as if' they were true believers, while in reality thinking very differently, or simply not thinking or believing anything. As Vaclav Havel suggested with his illustration involving an imaginary Prague greengrocer, the perception of conflict between the public utterance and the private thought might not be present, or, at any rate, it might not worry people; the greengrocer was happy 'to live within a lie'. By putting up the sign 'Workers of the world unite' everyday in the shop window – something he did not believe in – he could satisfy the authorities and cheerfully go on selling cabbages without a further thought (Havel 1978, 132–139). In short, while nobody would deny that there was an important element of play-acting in the public aspects of most regimes, to assert a total separation between public and private would be to ignore the very attitudes revealed by the history of everyday life, which sees processes of adaptation, adjustment, navigation, accommodation, and reinterpretation which necessarily involve both the public and the private spheres (Corner 2016a, 2016b).

A further and interesting gloss on the public/private binary has again been provided by Yurchak, when he argues the 'depoliticised world' of *late* socialism saw young people accepting the ritual – the obligatory party meeting, the obligatory demonstration in the town square (and there were sanctions for non-attendance) – as an inescapable and constituent part of life, and not feeling that they were in opposition to that kind of ritual or that it was totally pointless. Rather they lived it as a kind of enabling passport to what was more interesting and more enjoyable – having performed the socialist ritual, they could then even spend time living in their 'imaginary West', as Yurchak illuminatingly describes it. The important point is that young people did not experience the two spheres as being in opposition to each other. The formal and the normal coexisted and were not seen as being in conflict; the formal ritual was inescapable and the inescapable was – eventually – seen as normal (2005, 282–285).

Again the binary represented by consensus/coercion does not seem to operate. What we have here, as described by Yurchak, is very clearly consensus and coercion operating together to produce something that looks like a real internalisation of the formal ritual – the values the ritual represented were accepted and not resisted – despite the fact that everyday practices routinely reinterpreted, often even disregarded, many of the norms represented by that ritual. This is a rather different position from that often attributed to the 'depoliticised' and purely passive Soviet citizen of the final decades of the USSR. But whether this is what was going on in Fascist Italy, for example, in the 'depoliticised world' of the 1930s remains very much an open question. The reports from Fascist officials complain repeatedly about the *esteriorità* of provincial Fascism – all

show and no content, what Havel called 'a world of appearances masquerading as reality' – and this would suggest limited levels of penetration. However, caution is necessary here because it is precisely the history of everyday life which suggests that the ways in which regime values and practices penetrate the population may be more usefully identified in the interstices of daily life than in obvious public conformity and empty public declarations. In this sense, and in a negative way, the widespread alcoholism present in the Soviet Union among older generations may be interpreted in two ways – in part an obvious desire to 'take distance' from an oppressive reality, but also in part an indication that the world of domination was so all-encircling that the only possible way out, short of suicide, lay in the alcoholic coma (Erofeev 1992).

But if, as in this last example, actions speak louder than words, in others language may be a good indicator of internalisation, although here as well there are difficulties. Does the fact that the Soviet workers described in Stephen Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain* learn to 'speak Bolshevik' when talking to the authorities indicate an unreserved internalisation of the Soviet system, or is it not rather an able stratagem, using the rhetoric of the regime in order to gain concessions from the regime (Kotkin 1995, 198)? The same quandary faces those reading the carefully-worded *Eingaben* petitions of the citizens of the GDR. In fact the whole question of internalisation is complex and very often subject to the same reservations concerning ambivalence and ambiguity that we have already noted above. Jochen Hellbeck's work on Soviet diaries is fascinating, but it is not at all clear that the kind of internalisation he is able to demonstrate in the case of Julia Piatnitskaya, who chooses the party over her husband *in order to protect her own communist identity,* is relevant to other regimes in which such total personal identification with the regime is not required for survival (Hellbeck 2006, 1).

Shades of grey

As already suggested, the constant use of words like ambivalence and ambiguity indicates that we are in an area characterised not by black-and-white contrasts but by many shades of grey. In this context is it really possible to talk about consensus? Can we say anything useful about popular attitudes to power? Perhaps it is important to note that the ambiguities and ambivalences of the population describe positions adopted *within* the scheme of the regime, not outside it. Complicity, collaboration, compromise, non-compliance, reinterpretation, taking distance, are all actions and attitudes that permit survival on the least unfavourable terms but they do not constitute active *resistance* to the regime, which takes place outside the limits established by the regime. Lüdtke (2016) makes this point rather reluctantly, observing that what he obviously sees as the admirable capacity of the German people for adjustment and adaptation, for successful navigation around the hurdles set by the Nazi regime, did not in the end challenge the continued existence of the regime because individual survival on the least unfavourable terms did not conflict with the overall objectives of Nazism. No doubt this is true and, in this sense, one can talk about a consensus *despite* a frequent disconnect between party/state directives and the reactions and behaviour of the people. But this prompts a further question: is this kind of consensus enough to satisfy the requirements of the regime? Here the risk may be that of setting the bar too high. As Emilio Gentile (2014) suggests, it is possible that the survival of the regime and of its exercise of power was really all that was in question in Italy. Yet, if the real objective of the totalitarian regime is to penetrate society, colonise and saturate spaces, and persuade the population to read the world through the lens provided by the regime itself, then this kind of 'minimum' consensus constructed around individual stratagems of survival is hardly adequate for these objectives. The ambiguities and the ambivalences represent barriers to such penetration and prevent the 'definition of reality' by the regime itself.

Emotional communities

Finally it has to be said that this picture of a kind of consensus formed within the framework of violence, formed within a picture of constant 'ducking and diving, colluding and coping' on the part of the population, tends to ignore the emotional appeal of the regimes, which might be felt strongly at the same time as all the ducking and diving was going on. To some degree the distinction here is not between the private and the public but between the personal pragmatic day-to-day interest and the collective dream, and the two could coexist, even if sometimes in apparent conflict. Buying meat on the black market in the Soviet Union in defiance of state regulations did not prevent you from sharing the socialist collective dream. Ian Kershaw writes that the '*affective* integration of a national community', based on a very powerful implementation of the inclusion/exclusion binary, was one of the principal instruments of Nazi appeal in establishing a collective identity (1983; 2009, 43). Just being part of the Nazi movement gave security and identity. This process of identification would correspond to the formation of what Barbara Rosenwein has called an 'emotional community' and comes very near to what Christopher Duggan is suggesting for Italian Fascism in his *Fascist Voices*, where it is Mussolini, rather than Fascist ideology, who creates the 'fascist emotional community' (Rosenwein in Plamper 2010; Duggan 2012). Clearly the cult of the leader is a very important factor in assessing this kind of emotional response.

The creation of such an emotional community would, of course, constitute a major factor in promoting consensus among the population, as long, it has to be said, as the national emotional community of the regime does not clash with other pre-existing and more powerful emotional communities. Rosenwein specifies that, while it is true that an individual can belong to different emotional communities, expressing different emotional norms, it is important that those norms should not be radically different from each other. Was this the case in Fascist Italy? Was the emotional community of Turin, of Siena, of Palermo, stronger and expressing radically different norms from the always rather fragile emotional community of the Fascist nation? The question is legitimate, even if the measurement of the strength of emotions is far from easy and emotions are notoriously variable over time. Yurchak suggests that, for Soviet youth in the 1970s and 1980s, emotions directed towards the glorious socialist future – the emotional community of socialism – had become sterile, a fact that pushed young people to seek 'real' emotion in other, more Western-orientated, directions.

If we accept that consensus occurs *within* the framework of coercion but is, nonetheless, made up of attitudes that are in many cases not in accordance with the discourse of the regime in question, the fact that these attitudes fall short of resistance, which is located outside the framework of the regime, may help to explain the long-term survival of many regimes. But, just as people's behaviour is ambiguous and ambivalent in respect of the regime, so the conclusions we might draw from this behaviour are also ambiguous. On the one hand we have the fact that people tend to adapt to and accept – with a thousand qualifications to that 'accept' – dictatorial domination rather than resist it. This is the bad news. The good news might be, perhaps, that domination seems never to be total, that the capacity of people to react remains at least partially intact and that it is this capacity to react which makes domination less effective than it might otherwise be. However, the extent to which that capacity of reaction operates is conditioned, to a great extent, by the degree to which the regime has succeeded in 'defining reality' for its subjects; the more reality is defined and that definition is accepted by the population, the less will be the reaction. Effective reaction depends on the perception of where domination lies and of how it is made up, and if that perception is not present then reactions to domination are likely to be weak or non-existent.

A concluding example might be drawn from the film *The Truman Show*, in which Truman Burbank, who without knowing it exists in a completely totalitarian environment, is nonetheless convinced that he lives in the best of all possible worlds because power has defined his reality perfectly and total control has succeeded in masquerading as total freedom.

Note on contributor

Until partial retirement in 2015 Paul Corner was Professor of Contemporary European History at the University of Siena, where he was also (and, for the moment, still is) Director of the Centre for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes. His publications include the edited volume *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes. Fascism, Nazism, Communism* (OUP 2009), and *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini's Italy* (OUP 2012). He has recently edited, with Jie-Hyun Lim of Sogang University, Seoul, *The Palgrave Handbook of Mass Dictatorship* (Palgrave Macmillan. London 2016).

Note

1. Gentile writes '... from its origins to its demise, Mussolini and the Fascist Party founded their power not on consensus but on force and on the obligatory regimentation of the masses. Nor did they aspire to a legitimacy founded on consensus, as if they had become converts to democracy.' Formal institutional legitimacy is a different matter from consensus and here Gentile is undoubtedly correct. At the same time, the plebiscites, the propaganda, the frenetic activity of the provincial PNF organisations – not to mention the heavy surveillance of the population through spies – does indicate that a great deal of time and effort was spent in channelling popular opinion towards Fascism and in monitoring that opinion. If the foundation of Fascist authority was certainly force, the continuing exercise of that power seems to have owed a lot to the formation of some kind of consensus.

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Italian summary

L'articolo prende in esame alcune delle più recenti interpretazioni del rapporto esistente, nei regimi 'totalitari' del ventesimo secolo, fra il dittatore e la popolazione e mette in dubbio quell'interpretazione più tradizionale che mantiene che gli atteggiamenti popolari siano delineati o da resistenza o da conformismo obbligato. Pur insistendo sull'importanza della violenza implicita ed esplicita che caratterizzava le attività dei regimi, l'articolo cerca di indagare i vari modi in cui venivano espressi gli atteggiamenti popolari, spesso caratterizzati più da strategie di sopravvivenza che non da posizioni di accettazione o di resistenza, così riflettendo un'ambivalenza e un'ambiguità nei confronti del regime. Nelle conclusioni si analizzano i modi in cui tali atteggiamenti possono aver influito sulle capacità di dominio dei regimi.