

## ‘The founders of a European era’? The Fascist and Falangist plans for Italy and Spain in the new Nazi order

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At the dawn of the Second World War, the successes of the Axis seemed to herald the realisation of a new anti-Bolshevik and anti-democratic European order dominated by Nazi-fascist powers. Italian Fascists and Spanish Falangists enthusiastically welcomed plans for the ‘new civilisation’ in which they were determined to participate as protagonists. This article sheds light on the roles projected for the respective countries in the New European Order in the postwar period, according to the black and the blue shirts. It also investigates the ideological and cultural foundations of the Fascist and Falangist projects related to the new continental configuration, identifying similarities and differences between them. Considering the scarcity of comparative writings about fascist movements in the Mediterranean area, the present research fills a historiographic gap.

**Keywords:** Fascism; Falangism; ideology; New European Order; imperialism.

### Introduction

Contemporary historiography dedicated great attention to the Mediterranean dictatorships that arose in the interwar period, but comparative research on these dictatorships often did not take into account fundamental differences. This is particularly true for comparisons of the regime of Benito Mussolini and Francisco Franco, given the authentic fascist essence of the dictatorship in Italy on the one hand, and the fascistised but never properly fascist nature of the *generalísimo*’s regime in Spain on the other. As a comparison of Fascism and Francoism can be misleading, what can be profitably compared are their *fascist political cultures*, namely the fascist political-ideological component within the two regimes, which is linked to the Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF – Italian National Fascist Party) and the Falange Española de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (Fe de las Jons – Spanish Phalanx of the Councils of the National Syndicalist Offensive) respectively.<sup>1</sup>

The different outcomes of the Spanish fascist (or national syndicalist) ideology and the Italian fascist ideology do not invalidate a comparison. It is well known that, unlike Italian Fascism, Falangism never succeeded in becoming a regime. The Falange was always only one of the components of the Francoist dictatorship, and attempts by the *camisas azules* (blueshirts) to make a revolutionary breakthrough in the *generalísimo*’s state ultimately failed. Franco could not allow national-syndicalism to prevail within his *authoritarian compromise* and threaten his leadership. Thus, every time the party gained ground on the national political scene, the *caudillo* cut them down to size. The merger of the Fe de las Jons with the *Comunión tradicionalista* imposed by

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Franco in 1937 has to be regarded in this sense, along with the exit from government of various exponents of radical Falangism after the failed attempt to accelerate the process of the regime's fascistisation in the spring of 1941, and the clashes between Carlists and Falangists in Begoña in August 1942. Between 1941 and 1942, the Falangist project of creating a real fascist regime in Spain was finally abolished.

Nevertheless, this project is important due to the Falange's impact on the Francoist regime from the outbreak of the Civil War until the early 1940s. It must be kept in mind that the Fe de las Jons became the 'main mass party of nationalist Spain' during the conflict and that the 'façade' of the dictatorship was 'completely, or almost completely, fascist' from 1939 to 1941.<sup>2</sup> The party – in the person of Franco's brother-in-law and Axis sympathiser Ramón Serrano Suñer, flanked by some of the most radical blueshirts – held the reins of the Interior Ministry and, later, the Foreign Affairs Ministry. Two prominent exponents of Falangism, Antonio Tovar and Dionisio Ridruejo, controlled the press and propaganda. The trade unions, and particularly the student union, were motivated by a 'genuine fascist radicalism'. The regime adopted the symbology of the Fe de las Jons, which not only organised ceremonies and public demonstrations, but also energetically committed itself to fascistising the masses, especially the youth and women, through the Frente de Juventudes (Youth Front) and the Sección Femenina (Women's Section) respectively. Moreover, at that time, the Junta Política (Political Council) of the party played a leading role on the national scene. From the end of the Civil War until the first two years of the 1940s it seemed to be the 'main instrument of the regime's political direction' (Saz Campos 2004, 162).

Spain experienced the same acceleration in the process of fascistisation as Italy from the mid-1930s. This was due both to endogenous factors, whose most glaring examples were the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and Mussolini's decision to launch the campaign in Ethiopia; and to exogenous factors, primarily the aggressive advance of Hitler's Nazi Germany in Europe. By virtue of the successes of the fascist and national-socialist revolutions within the Italian and German borders and internationally (including Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War), fascists and Falangists started to believe that profound changes were happening. At the dawn of the Second World War, they celebrated the advent of a new era, convinced that Europe was heading towards a complete and irreversible anti-democratic, anti-Bolshevik and totalitarian transformation.<sup>3</sup> The expression of a 'New European Order' – recurrent at that time – indicated precisely this: the total replacement by fascism of the system of states that arose from the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, together with a wide and radical modification of the social and political structure of the continent, to the exclusive advantage of the fascist powers.

Fascists and Falangists were determined to play a significant role in the *Neuordnung Europas* but their ambitions did not find fertile ground. According to Nazi plans, the New European Order would have been guided exclusively by Germany, in light of its presumed cultural, economic, racial and military superiority (Corni 2005, 3–12; Durand 2002, 49–91). As Enzo Collotti pointed out (2002, 69), national-socialist expansion projects were a sort of 'one-way integration of Europe', based on the primacy of the Aryan race 'with respect to a constellation of states and populations placed in order of decreasing importance, from satellites to candidates for physical disappearance, pure and simple'. The Führer was unwilling even to grant pro-German governments a secondary role, since his exclusive interest was 'German domination of the continent in order to exploit its resources for his great projects in the East, and not a kind of friendly collaboration' (Burleigh 2003, 479). As Mark Mazower (2008, 17) stressed, in Hitler's political programmes Europe existed exclusively to serve the interests of Germany. Therefore, the sovereignty and independence of its allies and collaborators as well as their political aspirations could be sacrificed at any time.

Nonetheless, analysing the fascist and Falangist positions on the New European Order is important for two reasons. It helps to reconstruct the debate on the postwar continental configuration inside the fascist front, highlighting the contribution of the Spanish fascists – long considered a negligible component within the Francoist dictatorship – to this debate. Moreover, a comparative perspective is essential to identify similarities and differences between the approaches to the New Order of the blackshirts and the blueshirts, and to evaluate to what extent there was a common cultural and ideological basis between the two Mediterranean fascist experiences.

Considering this general framework, the following questions arise: what was the role that both blackshirts in Italy and blueshirts in Spain envisioned for their respective countries in the new continental political order? In what particular way did they conceive their contribution to it? Moreover, was the project of the New European Order a natural outcome for fascist and Falangist ideology? In other words, were there any elements within the ideological universe of blackshirts and blueshirts that could justify the imperialist claims of the National Fascist Party and the Spanish Falange on the continent?

The present article will address these questions as follows. The first section will give a general overview of the Italian and Spanish positions during the Second World War, from which the new Europe of fascisms was expected to emerge. The second section will investigate the fascist and Falangist expectations concerning the participation of their respective countries in the New European Order. The third section will analyse the cultural and ideological basis on which the fascist and Falangist plans for Italy and Spain in the Nazi continental order were rooted. The last section will draw the conclusions.

### **A preliminary issue: Italy, Spain and the war for the New European Order**

On the eve of ‘Operation Barbarossa’ in 1941, all territories of continental Europe were gathered under the flag of the swastika, with the exception of Britain and the countries that had declared their neutrality. In some cases, they were ‘satellites’; in other cases, they were territories directly under German civilian or military administration; there were also numerous annexations and several German protectorates were instituted. Given the situation, it is not surprising that many began to believe in the imminent realisation of a radically new continental configuration. Among them were the Partito Nazionale Fascista and the Falange leaders, who were determined to play more than a secondary role in the postwar order established by National Socialism. A new Europe was expected to arise from the ashes of the ‘old Europe’ thanks to the purifying violence of the Second World War – a war that neither Rome nor Madrid were able to contemplate initially.

Italy was experiencing several difficulties. The autarchic policy was proving a failure. The ‘reappearance of the Empire on the fateful hills of Rome’ entailed a significant pauperisation of national resources without bringing significant benefits; rather, it left the country completely isolated at the international level.<sup>4</sup> The intervention in the Spanish Civil War further aggravated the situation, leaving Italy financially and militarily exhausted. In addition, there was a general lack of preparation by large military units, the defence of the borders against the French was insufficient, and the means were inadequate. The fact that national public opinion was ‘unanimous in detesting the Germans’ and not favourable to Italy’s participation in a war in which the country had nothing to gain and everything to lose completed the picture (Ciano 1946, 148 and 247).

Mussolini was fully aware of this situation. At the outbreak of the conflict on 1 September 1939, he adopted a position of non-belligerence. The decision to enter the war alongside the German ally was taken nine months later with absolute unscrupulousness. To a certain extent, it was a binding decision to which several factors contributed. Among them was the ‘conception

of “honour” of the Duce (De Felice 1981, 697), who told Ciano of his frustration in April 1940, saying it was ‘humiliating to sit on my hands while others were writing history.’ Mussolini was convinced that it was ‘too late to ditch Germany’ and that remaining neutral would have downgraded Italy ‘for a century as a great power and for eternity as a fascist regime’. ‘To make a people great,’ he stated, ‘it is necessary to take it into combat’. This was precisely what the head of the blackshirts did. Fulfilling the commitments made to the Reich, Italy had to ‘be alongside Germany’ in that moment (Ciano 1946, 145 and 246–251).

Ultimately, it was a political calculation that pushed Mussolini to intervene in the conflict on 10 June 1940, rather than solidarity with his ally. After the French defeat, even though he was aware of the inefficiency of the army and the general lack of preparation in the country, the Duce became convinced that he had no choice but to enter the war. In May 1940, he told General Soddu that they had to make war not when they were ready, but when they had to (Soddu 1948, 59). Addressing military summits, Mussolini emphasised the necessity that forced him to enter the conflict. This choice fell within the logic of the agreement reached with the Reich. Nonetheless, undeniably, the Duce’s fascination with the myth of a ‘new civilisation’ contributed to his interventionist decision (De Felice 1981, 309). Beyond differences between Fascism and National Socialism, the two movements had a common ground: they both were in ‘clear antithesis with all the other concepts of contemporary civilisation’ of which bourgeois democracy and Bolshevism were direct expressions.<sup>5</sup> So, motivated also by this conviction, Mussolini ended his hesitation and joined Germany on the battlefield, certain that a new civilisation – of which they must be the bearers – was about to emerge.

The situation was more complex in Spain. After the Civil War, the country had to be completely rebuilt. Bombing had destroyed many cities, the country’s social fabric was severely torn apart, the population was in misery, and the economy was in a shambles due to heavy military spending. When the Second World War began, it was inconceivable for the country to take part in the fighting, and the new government led by Francisco Franco could only declare Spain’s neutrality. Undoubtedly, it was a benevolent neutrality. The *generalísimo*, though not officially engaging in war operations, never hid his sympathy for those who had helped him defeat the republican troops of the Frente Popular. The close relationship between Madrid, Rome and Berlin was public knowledge. Even more so when – in light of the Wehrmacht’s victories on the western front and Italy’s entry in the conflict – Franco decided, on 12 June 1940, to shift to a stance of ‘non-belligerence’ and provide, albeit indirectly, technical and logistical support to the Axis.<sup>6</sup>

Falangists favoured a decisive entry into the war and were determined to gain a prominent role for their country on the world stage. They put pressure on the *caudillo* for Spain to assume its ‘historical responsibilities of an international character’ (Ramiro Ledesma Ramos 2004, 161).<sup>7</sup> According to them, Madrid had to align with the Axis powers, with which the Francoist nation was united through an ‘everlasting friendship’ by virtue of ‘the blood shed in common’ and the ‘community of renovating ideologies’ (Asensio 1940, 1). After all, the collaboration between Franco, Mussolini and Hitler had already proven fruitful in the Spanish Civil War, when troops sent by Rome and Berlin were decisive in allowing the *generalísimo* to get the better of his republican enemies. In the Falangists’ eyes, ‘the first battle of Europe, the first victory of the New Order, was won in Spain.’<sup>8</sup> Thus, once the Civil War was over, it appeared logical and necessary to them to face the second great battle for the salvation of the continent alongside the Führer and the Duce: a battle that was no longer a ‘war between nationalities or antagonistic economies, but between competing political and social ideas.’<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, domestic political factors influenced Falangist support for war mobilisation. Alignment with the Axis would have allowed the *camisas azules* to occupy the national scene

as a hegemonic force, reducing the scope for action of other components of the regime with whom they were competing for power (Ruiz Carnicer 1998, 684–685). Nevertheless, they mainly sought to capitalise on foreign policy opportunities for their country, and, in this regard, their expectations perfectly matched Franco's, since the Axis expansionist plans fed his immoderate ambition.

Diplomatic negotiations between Spain and Germany fit in this context. Their management was entrusted to Ramón Serrano Suñer, president of the Falange's *Junta Política* since August 1939 and Foreign Minister from October 1940. Considered the 'spokesman of Spanish incorporation in the Axis military enterprise' (Delgado Gomez-Escalonilla 1992, 162), he tried to convince Hitler and Ribbentrop of the advantages to the Axis powers of the involvement of Madrid in the conflict, but his attempts quickly proved unsuccessful. Despite the failure of official negotiations with Germany, Spanish involvement in the war continued to be as ambiguous as significant, as the role of the *División Azul* in Operation Barbarossa demonstrates. Created in June 1941 by the *cuñadísimo* and the Falangist hierarchs Dionisio Riduejo and Manuel Mora-Figueroa with Franco's *placet*, the *División Azul* was composed of about 47,000 people, among them enthusiastic Falangists, civilian volunteers, Spanish army commanders and senior government officials who left Spain to fight the 'Bolshevik enemy' alongside the Nazis in Soviet territory (Núñez Seixas 2016, 59–69). Ultimately, this body represented the 'symbolic means to mitigate the Falangist disappointment for Spain's failure to decisively join the World War'. Through their participation in the *División Azul*, Falangist leaders wanted to show the world their 'close affinity' with the Axis, with the clear intention of 'maintaining a favourable attitude towards the New Order progressively adopted in almost all the continent' (Delgado Gomez-Escalonilla 1992, 166). As an anonymous article in the journal *Escorial* stated in August 1941:

The presence of our comrades on the battlefield is a very eloquent sign that we do not persecute Communism just because it is our moral enemy; it is also a sign that we are finally joining the endeavours of the world, which demand the noble dedication of Peoples [...] and men.<sup>10</sup>

The *camisas azules* continued to believe firmly in the need for an alignment with Rome and Berlin, as well as in the revolutionary project of a completely fascistised Europe – something they wanted so enthusiastically that they were willing to pay for it with their blood.

### The arbiters of the new Europe?

Given the context in which blackshirts and blueshirts articulated their ideas on the new continental order, what was the role that fascists and Falangists imagined for their respective countries in post-war Europe? In Italy, the initial reflections of PNF leaders on this topic emerged in the early 1930s, once the regime was internally consolidated. At this stage, as Monica Fioravanzo (2017, 245) has stressed, fascist plans for the *Neuordnung Europas* were sketchy, to be defined better once the alliance with Germany was signed and, even more, once the Second World War had begun. Nevertheless, from the beginning it was clear that the blackshirts wanted a central role for Italy in the new European framework. They envisaged working side-by-side with Nazi Germany, to which Rome was linked through 'active and living solidarity'.<sup>11</sup> It was a 'very high mission' that only two 'spiritually rich peoples' could realise. According to party ideologues, these were the Italian and German peoples, 'recreated by the purifying wave of their respective national revolutions' and 'strengthened in the awareness of the maturity achieved and in a common destiny of imperial grandeur' (Masotti 1941, 2).

In the opinion of some fascist theorists, Rome and Berlin would reaffirm the 'irrepressible destiny of vital ethnic organisms to expand among, to dominate, to influence all minor powers, by

eliminating ... the pretensions and ambitions of small nationalities', which had been the cause of abuses of power and disorder in the postwar period (Orano 1940, 22). It was necessary to create a 'system of international coexistence that [would establish] equally for all, more effective guarantees of justice, security and peace.'<sup>12</sup> For this purpose, the two nations – bearers of 'civilisation and progress' – would be 'ready to cooperate with all other peoples of goodwill'. The latter, in turn, should show respect for the fascist and Nazi 'necessities' and 'legitimate needs', a formulation that concealed the imperialist ambitions of Italy and Germany, who wanted to extend their political and economic supremacy across the continent.<sup>13</sup>

Specifically, the fascist strategists of the new geopolitical order were confident that the conquest of Ethiopia and the annexation of Albania were only the 'beginnings' of the 'transposition' and the 'ideal and territorial dilatation' of the homeland (Orano 1940, 22). They therefore began to sketch out boundaries in the Mediterranean basin and Middle-Europe to separate the future Italian sphere of influence from the German, even if Germany remained vague about this division (Perrone 2016, 7–9). The living space of each power would comprise a 'small space', including the territory where the people of the imperial powers lived, and a 'large space' composed of the territories subject to the direct dominion of the civilising race (Villari 1941, 50–53). Individual states would disappear by being incorporated into the two large powers, which would assume leading roles and tolerate no interference.

In fact, before the outbreak of the war, Italy had begun to harbour suspicions about its ally. Mussolini's initial hopes regarding the existence of an equal relationship between the fascist and Nazi powers soon gave way to doubts and fear regarding German methods of domination. The first alarm bells rang with the annexation of Austria, a move that the Duce had initially opposed, and of which he had not even been informed by his ally until it was accomplished. With the war, the relationship between the two Axis powers became more and more unbalanced in favour of Germany, to the point that, especially after the French capitulation, it became apparent that 'Nazi expansion was a project of unlimited and exclusive domination in which Italy would have had, at most, a subordinate role' (Rodogno 2003, 78). Nonetheless, the blackshirts never ceased to claim their rightful place in the future European order, and so did the blueshirts in Spain who – similar to the Italian fascists – greeted with joy the projects concerning the creation of the New European Order, believing that Spanish participation in military operations would automatically confer on Madrid the role of an arbiter after the war.

According to national syndicalist theorists, Spain would be called, together with Germany and Italy, to 'forge the future of the continent.'<sup>14</sup> The three 'creative peoples' would take over Europe and create a sort of 'tripartite imperium' based on a 'superior total order' that would block 'the path to decadence' and restore 'justice' and 'peace' to the world.<sup>15</sup> As the historian José Antonio Maravall wrote in 1940:

Totalitarianism wants to carry out this moral order that will make Europe possible again. Totalitarianism is the reason for Europe. And for that reason, the three peoples who have made an essential contribution to it will now return to govern the other peoples of the world.<sup>16</sup>

Falangists had already made this explicit in their party programme in 1934, which stated: 'We demand for Spain a pre-eminent place in Europe.'<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, Europe was the 'international field of the new Spanish action' and the Falange an 'army of a new order' that Spain had to 'communicate to Europe and to the world'. Following this path, 'the most European of all peoples' would have finally regained the guiding function that it deserved 'because of its history and importance.'<sup>18</sup> As Antonio Tovar, one of the main people responsible for the propaganda of the regime, declared in September 1939:

It appears that a new order is taking shape ... based on the principle that there are people made to rule and people made to obey. We, the Spaniards, are people made to rule; our history teaches us this. And our duty, thus, is to now enhance our history, update it and mobilise it aggressively, with offensive style and direct action. It is only in this way that Spain will become one of the ... great units – as José Antonio sensed – called to govern the world in this century, when all fiction of freedom ... will disappear. (1941, 106–107)

The reference to the founder of the Spanish Falange, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, is significant because it was he who first proclaimed the role that Spain would assume on the world stage. ‘The democratic idea offered by the League of Nations is already decaying internationally,’ he declared in 1934, adding that the world was tending ‘again to be directed by three or four racial entities. Spain [could be] one of these three or four’ (José Antonio Primo de Rivera 1976, 306). Bearing this in mind, party leaders claimed for their country a prominent place in the future continental ‘fascist prominence’; a place that they felt they fully deserved, thanks to their ‘fundamental contribution to a victory that began to take shape in Europe on the same day that Spain’s victory became a reality in Spanish fields.’<sup>19</sup>

If both fascists and Falangists coincided in demanding a central role for their states in the New Order, at the same time they would have contributed to its realisation in their own particular way. PNF ideologues stressed Italian spiritual and cultural superiority as an essential element for the creation of the New Order. They rejected an exclusive focus on force, clearly alluding to the German politics of domination (Fioravanzo 2017, 252). They wanted to realise the ‘reconstruction of humanity’ through the diffusion of the ‘universal principles of the fascist doctrine’ and the spread of the fascist ‘spiritual entity.’<sup>20</sup> Thus, they proclaimed fascism as ‘the lowest common denominator of the European West’ and saw ‘European Fascism’ as the ‘only remedy to a chaos that threaten[ed] the foundations of Western civilisation’ (Palazzi 1934, 79–80). After all, according to party theorists, Italian Fascism had played a leading role in developing an alternative political system compared to those prevailing in contemporary civilisation, since, as Berto Ricci (1934, 578) wrote, it was an ‘Italian revolution that became universal.’ The same conviction is found in the reflections of Giuseppe Bottai (1941, 15), who wrote:

The disposition of the Italians to think, build and act on a basis of universality, already exalted in Roman times, when the *Urbe* implemented the *jus gentium*, returned to reach fruition with fascism. If you keep in mind the fascist concept of the State and its implementation, the economic and social programme of fascism, its corporate institutes, the fascist evolution of law, the fascist concept of youth education – in short, the fascist concept of life and the experience of the last twenty years – you will see not only the renewal of Italy and its enormous progress on the path of civilisation, but you will have to acknowledge that these principles, these institutes, these goals, these real facts have determined ... the renewal ... of many nations of Europe, and not only of Europe.

The theme of the relationship between the fascist nation and Europe was clearly brought into focus by Mussolini himself, who was convinced that ‘every nation [would have] “its” fascism’ soon, ‘a fascism adapted to the peculiar situation of that particular people’. For him there would never be

... a fascism exported in a standardised form, but a complex of doctrines, methods, experiences, achievements which gradually invested in and penetrated into all the states of the European community, and which represented the ‘new’ fact in the history of human civilisation.<sup>21</sup>

In summary, as Bottai (1941, 15) emphasised, ‘the universality of fascism had set itself beyond [the Italian] boundary’. The history of Italian Fascism had become ‘an essential moment in European history’ and in the history of all humanity (Maraviglia 1930, 216–217). As a consequence, the Europe of tomorrow would inevitably be fascist ‘in the logical development of events’, since the old continent would survive the crisis it experienced only by taking inspiration from

‘littorian Italy’, which would confer ‘a new social sense, a tone of life, [and] the moral secret of discipline and harmony.’<sup>22</sup> The regions subject to the control of Rome – organised hierarchically taking into account the degree of social evolution and the productive capacity of each people – would be based on the values of fascist Italy, identified by Bottai (1941, 9) as follows:

The priority and superiority of politics over the economy; the subordination of individual interests to collective ones; the right of the State to decide the economic direction of the country; the recognition of private initiative and its elevation to a function of public utility; the collaboration of classes for social order, welfare and a higher productive level.

These principles were already consolidated in the peninsula. Ultimately, the PNF was determined to impart them to the entities within the fascist imperial community.

For their part, Falangists envisaged participating in the new continental order by spreading Spanish imperial values and the Catholic tradition, which were considered the constitutive elements of *hispanidad* (Janué i Miret 2018, 99–101). More specifically, the blueshirts intended to contribute to the New European Order in two ways. First, they wanted to mediate between Europe and the former Hispanic colonies, with the clear intent of supporting the Axis cause in those territories and preventing the Latin American countries from falling under US influence. Opposing the motto ‘hispano para los hispanos’ (Spanish for the Spanish) to ‘Monroeism’, Falangists incited Latin peoples to rebel against ‘Yankee domination’ and showed them the way to salvation via a rapprochement with Spain and, consequently, with the Axis.<sup>23</sup> According to party theorists, Spain would be ‘the faithful representation’ of Nazi-Fascist Europe – ‘leader of the world’ – in South America.<sup>24</sup> They declared that Madrid would act as a bridge between the two continents by virtue of the visceral bond they believed still existed between Spain and its ancient dominions.

In this regard, the head of the Foreign Service of the Falange, Ximénez de Sandoval (1937, 193), wrote: ‘Once our race was poured into twenty American peoples, it would be absurd to ignore the force of blood.’ His words seemed to echo what the leader of the Jons, Ramiro Ledesma Ramos (1931, 1), stated: ‘Our role in America is not – nor is it equivalent to – that of a friendly people, since we will always be obliged to be something more. We are them, and they will always be us.’ These declarations were the prelude to national syndicalist claims to overseas territories, put forth in the Fe de las Jons programme of 1934. ‘Regarding the countries of Latin America’, the third point asserted, ‘we will tend to the unification of culture, economic interests and power.’ Spain had always been the ‘spiritual axis of the Hispanic world’, and, in the light of this special and preferential tie, Falangist Spain would pave the way for the Nazi-Fascist revolution across the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>25</sup>

In the New European Order, Spain’s role was not confined to that of a mediator between Europe and the Latin world. The blueshirts were convinced that the country would act as a link between Nazism and Catholicism for the continent’s spiritual reconstruction. Ruiz Carnicer (1998, 684) emphasised that some Falangist representatives – drawing on the ideas of the prophet of Spanish Fascism, Ernesto Giménez Caballero, who reconciled fascist ideology with the militant exaltation of Catholicism – saw in Christianity ‘the only way to recover the unity of the continent [which was] compatible with a German victory.’ According to them, ‘without Catholicism there [was] no Europe’ and it was the destiny of Spain to promote its diffusion.<sup>26</sup> After all, in Spain Catholicism had played a fundamental role in the birth and consolidation of the national state as well as of its empire. Therefore, the Falangists – who proclaimed themselves successors of that nation and empire – could do nothing other than incorporate, at least in part, a religious element in their ideological universe. Thus, in the early 1930s, even loyal supporters of the secular and



totalitarian state such as the founders of the Jons, Ledesma Ramos and Redondo Ortega, acknowledged that the greatness of the country was historically linked to its Catholic essence. In 1933, it was Giménez Caballero who declared that Fascism represented the ‘new Catholicity in the world.’<sup>27</sup>

After unification with traditionalists in April 1937 and the rise of anti-clerical republican fury – which gave the sense of a ‘crusade’ to the Civil War – Falangist references to Catholicism increased exponentially. From then on, the party attempted even more, not without difficulty, to integrate religion into its political thought while committing itself to retaining its revolutionary character (Saz 2003, 203 and 220). José Pemartín – who became head of the Secondary Education National Service in 1938 – argued that Catholicism was the ‘fundamental national ideology’ of the Falange (1937, 81). Similarly, party historian and philosopher, Pedro Laín Entralgo, identified it as the ‘spiritual centre that gives meaning and transcendent virtue’ to the revolutionary Falangist action.<sup>28</sup> The Catholic element in the doctrine of the *camisas azules* was a peculiarity of the Spanish fascist identity; a badge of honour for some Falangist ideologues that restated their originality compared to other contemporary fascist movements.<sup>29</sup> By virtue of this originality, the blueshirts were convinced that their contribution was essential to the implementation of the new continental order, and that they would therefore become ‘the founders of a European era’, together with Italy and Germany.<sup>30</sup>

### The cultural and ideological roots of fascist and Falangist Europeanism

The preceding analysis calls for a reflection on the revolutionary scope of the plans of the blackshirts and the blueshirts for the New European Order. The total and all-encompassing nature of these projects concerned not only the geopolitical and socio-economic spheres but also the cultural sphere.

It is precisely in the culture and in the ideology of Fascism and Falangism that the foundations for the two movements’ Europeanism were laid. The comparative analysis has highlighted that two shared understandings created the basis for the plans of the *camicie nere* and the *camisas azules* for the *Neuordnung Europas*. The first was the absolute aversion towards Bolshevism, socialism and liberal democracy. By the end of the 1930s, both fascists and Falangists were convinced that Europe had been gravely weakened by the ‘anti-systemic’ proletarian revolution and Russian imperialism, on the one hand, and by the ‘agnostic liberalism’, ‘destructive classism’ and ‘immoral capitalism’ of the English and French matrix, on the other.<sup>31</sup> These ideologies, considered the cause of the moral decay of society, were synonymous with division and represented threats to the blackshirts and the blueshirts. The fascist and Falangist revolutions had already annihilated them in their respective countries. Therefore, it is not surprising that, to party ideologues, the battle for the New European Order appeared to be the continuation of the struggles the PNF and the Falange had faced within their national borders. Bolshevism, socialism and liberal democracy had been successfully fought and eliminated internally: now they had to be defeated internationally.

The second common element at the roots of fascist and Falangist Europeanism was the ultra-nationalist foundation of the two movements and its natural evolution in an imperialist sense. The exaltation of the nation was a constant in the ideological universe of the generic fascist phenomenon (Griffin 1991, 32–39; Payne 1996, 6–14; Mosse 1999, 11; Reichardt 2002, 535–536; Eatwell 2003, 14), of which the PNF and the Falange were national manifestations. So was the empire, considered the next evolutionary stage of the nation. For Fascism and Falangism, the nation was the ‘maximum social reality’ – to which everything else was subordinate – and the empire was its

perfection, that is, the extraterritorial expression of its power, its enhancement and affirmation in the world.<sup>32</sup> Beyond the delusions of grandeur of some party figures, the discourse of the PNF and of the Falange on the empire was the physiological development of a totalitarian and authentically revolutionary political doctrine that – while trying to achieve the greatness of the nation – inevitably ended up seeking prestige even beyond the narrow territorial boundaries of the state. This was the reason for the expansionist aspirations that the blackshirts and the blueshirts tried to legitimise by proclaiming themselves the heirs of the most pure Italian and Spanish imperial tradition, not for ‘reactionary nostalgia’ or ‘antiquarian veneration’ but ‘according to political action to create the future’ (Gentile 2007, 48).

PNF theorists retrieved the myth of the Caesarean Roman empire and the colonialist tradition of the *Risorgimento*, declaring that the fascist nation – having ‘virtually the empire in itself’ – would bring ‘discipline wherever [there was] disorder and an evident or veiled rebellion’<sup>33</sup> (Pavese 1938, 604–605). Falangist ideologues boasted a direct line of descent from the Catholic kings. With the renewed emblem of the yoke and arrows of Isabel of Castille and Ferdinand of Aragon, they promised to restore national prestige and return to the people ‘the tension and dignity of empire’ it deserved (Tovar 1941, 10, 165–166). In so doing, they would realise that *unidad de destino en lo universal* (unity of destiny in the universal) so dear to the party founder, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, who traced in the nation’s history a harmony of purpose and a high endeavour that would again unite all Spaniards in the future as it had done in the past. It is evident that both the Italian and the Spanish fascists joyfully embraced the cause of the New European Order, since it looked like an exceptional opportunity for them to satisfy their imperialist goals.

These considerations make it possible to place PNF and Falange Europeanism in a transnational perspective. Fascism and Falangism shared the same ‘cultural revisionism’ (Ben Martin 2016, 4) that constituted the bedrock upon which Nazi Germany and fascist Italy created their partnership. The anti-communist, anti-liberal and anti-democratic precondition was a common ideological and cultural feature of the three fascisms. They not only wanted to build a new political and economic order but also a cultural order, with the purpose of replacing what they considered the subversive and divisive ideas of European civilisation. They wished to give a fascist outlook to the culture of the continent.

Imperialism constituted another lowest common denominator between the blackshirts and the blueshirts. They shared the understanding that recreating the Italian and the Spanish empires was the only way to save their nations from the struggles that modernity had brought on them. Once again, this was not a cultural and ideological prerogative of Fascism and Falangism. On the contrary, it perfectly fits the concept of the ‘imperial nexus’ that – according to Daniel Hedinger (2017, 185) – bound Rome, Berlin and Tokyo in a ‘trans-imperial cooperation’ and gave ideological cohesion and strength to their alliance. Comparative analysis has highlighted the fact that PNF and Falange Europeanism can be understood, beyond their respective peculiarities, within broader transnational dynamics, testifying to the strong cross-national cultural and ideological connections within the Nazi-Fascist front.

## Conclusion

The fascist and Falangist expectations of a strong Italian and Spanish presence in the New European Order came to an end with the change in national and international conjunctures. In Spain, this had already happened at the end of summer 1942, when Franco definitively silenced the most authentic fascist component within his government and replaced it with the other prominent political culture of the regime: national Catholicism. This helped the *caudillo* to distance

himself from the Axis once the fate of the war turned against the Nazi-Fascist dictatorships, and allowed Spain to survive in a postwar order ruled by the Allied powers. In Italy, the internal debate on the New Order changed progressively in the beginning of 1943. PNF leaders and theorists abandoned the project of a Europe founded on Italian spiritual primacy and dominated by imperial Nazi-Fascist powers, and envisioned in its place the creation of a ‘Europe of the nations’ (Fioravanzo 2009, 419) in which – as the Undersecretary of State at Foreign Affairs, Giuseppe Bastianini, stressed (1943, 89–92) – the position of minor states was re-evaluated and their national individualities preserved and defended. Geopolitical and economic perspectives aside, fascist discourse on the New European Order was articulated in diplomatic terms to distance Italy from Germany with a defensive aim (Fioravanzo 2009, 421). The collapse of Mussolini’s regime and the total subordination of the fascist republic of Salò to the Third Reich ended Italy’s aspirations for Europe.

Blackshirts’ and blueshirts’ plans for a New European Order were undermined by Nazi Germany even before the Axis’ military defeats in the Second World War, since Hitler’s projects of European conquest did not contemplate any division of the spoils with collaborators and allies. Nevertheless, it did not stop the *camicie nere* and the *camisas azules* from claiming a leading role in the new continental order for their respective countries. Italy and Spain would have contributed to the realisation of this order, by spreading the universal values of the Italian fascist revolution and acting as a bridge between the new Europe and the former Spanish colonies of Latin America as well as between Catholicism and Nazism. This would have represented the successful completion of the ideological and moral fight against the Bolshevik, socialist and liberal-democratic enemies that the PNF and the Falange had already defeated internally. Moreover, this would have been the natural outcome of their authentic ultra-nationalist and imperialist ideologies, whose origins the theorists of the two movements traced back to a mythical national past.

Comparative analysis has returned historical dignity to fascist and Falangist projects for the ‘new civilisation’, and brought them back to scholarly attention. Erroneously, they had long been considered subordinate to the German plans and of little relevance. On the contrary, they are significant objects of investigation because they reveal the complexity of the coeval debate on the postwar continental order, offering two interesting national versions of the transnational fascist phenomenon.

### Notes on contributor

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### Notes

1. The meaning of ‘political culture’ in Sirinelli 1998, 391.
2. All quotations are translated by the author.
3. The term ‘totalitarian’ is here used in the meaning given by Emilio Gentile (2004, 40).
4. Mussolini, B. ‘La parola del Capo’. *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 10 May 1936 (131): 1.
5. Mussolini B. ‘Alla vecchia guardia’. *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 27 March 1939 (86): 1.
6. Franco authorised the German submarines to take refuge in the Spanish ports; he allowed the Reich reconnaissance aircrafts to fly safely using the Spanish livery; he permitted the Luftwaffe to use a radio station in La Coruña; and he despatched Spanish labourers to the Reich. See Preston 1995, 360–361.
7. ‘Lo que no es nuestra neutralidad’. *Arriba*, 12 June 1940 (374): 1.

8. 'Presencia de España'. *Pueblo*, 16 September 1940 (79): 1.
9. 'La segunda gran batalla en Europa'. *Vértice*, May 1940 (32): 8.
10. 'Hechos de la Falange'. *Escorial*, August 1941 (10): 281.
11. *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini* (XXVIII), 247.
12. *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini* (XXIX), 95.
13. *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini* (XXVIII), 246–247.
14. 'Importante discurso del jefe de Prensa del Reich'. *Pueblo*, 10 August 1940 (48): 1.
15. Maravall, J.A. 'De nuevo, Europa'. *Arriba*, 17 September 1940: 3; Saz Campos 2013, 61; 'La lucha de Europa'. *Arriba*, 16 March 1940 (301): 1; Asensio 1940., 1.
16. Maravall, J.A. 'De nuevo, Europa'. *Arriba*, 17 September 1940: 3.
17. *José Antonio Primo de Rivera. Escritos y discursos. Obras completas* 1976, 478.
18. Maravall, J.A. 'Europa o antieruropa. La cuestión europea de España', *Arriba*, 2 August 1939: 3; 'Europa o antieruropa. El sentido español de lo europeo'. *Arriba*, 3 August 1939: 3; Diaz, G. 'El puesto de España'. *Pueblo*, 21 September 1940 (84): 1.
19. 'Presencia de España'. *Pueblo*, 16 September 1940 (79): 1.
20. Orano 1940, 22; Sperduti, G. 'La rinascita europea'. *Civiltà Fascista*, December 1934 (12): 1121.
21. Mussolini, B. 'Europa e fascismo'. *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 6 October 1937 (278): 1.
22. *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini* (XXVIII), 252; Mussolini 1937, 10–11.
23. '27 glosas a los 27 puntos'. *F.E.*, February 1937 (2): 82; 'Misión americana de la juventud española'. *Destino*, 7 October 1939 (116): 1.
24. 'Ley de 2 de Noviembre de 1940'. *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 7 November 1940 (312): 7649.
25. *José Antonio Primo de Rivera. Escritos y discursos. Obras completas* (1922–1936), 478.
26. 'La cultura en el nuevo orden europeo'. *Escorial*, January 1942 (15): 9–10.
27. *Ramiro Ledesma Ramos. Obras completas* 2004 (4): 154–155; Redondo Ortega 1939, 42–43; Giménez Caballero, E. 'Puntos de partida'. *El fascio*, 16 March 1933 (1): 3.
28. Laín Entralgo, P. 'Nueva unidad de España'. *Destino*, 21 August 1937 (25): 2; 'La unidad de destino en José Antonio'. *F.E.*, December 1937 (1): 80.
29. *José Antonio Primo de Rivera. Escritos y discursos. Obras completas* 1976, 305–306. See also Redondo Ortega 1939, 114–115; Albanese and del Hierro 2016, 37–64.
30. 'Los fundadores de una era europea'. *Arriba*, 10 October 1949 (477): 1.
31. Maravall, J.A. 'Europa o antieruropa. La cuestión europea de España', 3; 'La lucha de Europa', 1.
32. Gómez de Terán, J. '*L'individuo nella società fascista*'. *Gerarchia*, June 1937 (6): 338; Fernández Cuesta, R. 'Imperio'. *Vértice*, April 1938 (IX).
33. See 'Imperialismo'. In *Dizionario di politica*, II: 476; Cerasi 2014, 424–425; Perrone 2016, 4.

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### Italian summary

All'alba della Seconda Guerra Mondiale, i successi dell'Asse sembrarono preannunciare la realizzazione di un Nuovo Ordine Europeo anti bolscevico e anti democratico dominato dalle potenze nazi-fasciste. I fascisti italiani e i falangisti spagnoli accolsero con entusiasmo i piani per la 'nuova civiltà', nella quale erano determinati a partecipare da protagonisti. Questo articolo fa luce sul ruolo che, secondo le camicie nere e le camicie blu, i rispettivi paesi avrebbero dovuto svolgere nel Nuovo Ordine Europeo nel dopoguerra. Inoltre, l'articolo investiga i fondamenti ideologici e culturali dei progetti fascisti e falangisti relativi alla nuova configurazione continentale, così da svelare similitudini e differenze tra i due casi. Considerando la scarsità di studi comparativi riguardanti i movimenti fascisti nell'area mediterranea, la presente ricerca colma una lacuna storiografica.