Reply: State, Dictators and Single Parties – Where are the Fascist Regimes?

ANTÓNIO COSTA PINTO

This reply to Professor David D. Roberts' comments must begin with a methodological note. My critic quite correctly states that several of the points discussed in my article have little 'explanatory value'. Within the history and social sciences disciplines typologies and classifications are of inestimable utility, as Roberts will almost certainly point out to his students. However, they cannot be confused with explanatory models. For this latter purpose there exist models of causality and other analytical instruments for use by those who believe that history is a discipline that is much closer to the social sciences than it is to literature – which is in itself a belief that remains far from consensual. The typologies applied to modern political regimes are, fundamentally, descriptive ideal-types that tell us little about why these regimes were institutionalised and consolidated. Put briefly, these typologies serve more to explain the *how* rather than the *why*. It just so happens that *why* fascism ascended to power does not explain very many of the characteristics of its use of power once it was consolidated.

European fascism continues to be one of the most studied and debated aspects of modern history, and I do not pretend to reinvent the wheel with this article. Rather, I seek only to make a contribution towards a comparative history of the different means of *functioning* within four of the fascist-era dictatorships, and this only within one particular domain – that of the relationship between the single party, the dictator and the government – with the unique and precise objective of illustrating the eventual operational specificness of 'fascist regimes' with respect to the available classical tools, and in particular the authoritarian–totalitarian binomial. *Ceci étant dit*, I will review some of the arguments I employed in connection with this aim regarding the departures from the typical functioning of twentieth-century right-wing dictatorships associated with interwar fascism.

'Purpose' and the role of ideology

Whilst significant differences existed with regards their programmatic content, the fascist movements all shared one common ideological heritage. This is one of the few aspects in the historiography of this theme upon which there is a significant degree of consensus, and which has had the merit of proving quite convincingly that ideology matters. The most recent wave of cultural studies publications appear more dubious however, given that they increasingly exaggerate the style and aesthetics of the functioning of these political systems.

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The purpose of my article, however, is not to analyse ideological content, but rather the degree to which the fascist party was the central element of ideological socialisation and an actor within the political agenda, even when it is the state that fulfils a large part of this function. With respect to early Francoism, Roberts ironically comments that 'the party had control over propaganda. But propaganda about what?' Contrary to what he may think, the 'about what' of the Spanish FET in 1940 or 1941 was very close to Italian Fascism. He continues: 'the party had greater control over ancillary organisations of mobilisation, but mobilisation for what?' The 'for what' was also the desire to 'genuinely politicise for new collective tasks', an intent that he ascribes solely to Italian Fascism and German Nazism. The reality is much more complex than the stereotypical images of the angelic Spanish Virgin of Pilar and of Italy's scowling Mussolini. These stereotypes do not take us very far.

European fascist movements never achieved an ideological codification that was comparable to that which the communists obtained. Nevertheless, their 'revolution from the right' presupposed the mobilisation of the national community and the radical reorganisation of the modern state and its relationship with civil society, a mobilisation that was based on a sufficient number of common principles that enables us to talk about an analytically useful concept of fascist ideology and not, as some of the Marxist – and even liberal – historiography has suggested, only in empty rhetoric. Looking beyond their similarities and differences, what is more noteworthy is the 'structure of opportunity' for the implementation of elements of this fascist ideology within the framework of the institutionalisation of new regimes within which the fascists (or the fascist elements of the single party) had to rely on the elites, institutions and the ideological variants of other radical right-wing groups. The 'degree' of political hegemony within the 'limited pluralism' of the new dictatorial regime could lead to different outcomes. It is evident that ideological differences were important, but it is the 'purpose' that is crucial – whether this 'purpose' be the implantation of integral corporatism, the physical elimination of the Jews and Romanies, the construction of a 'totalitarian state', or territorial expansion. This leads me directly to the problem of the functioning of the political systems within these dictatorships.

Party–dictator–state

In my article I attempted to demonstrate that Nazism and Italian Fascism may be characterised by the creation of 'tensions' and the 'relocation' of decision-making power towards and between the leader and the autonomous political institutions – at the expense of the government and the state apparatus. Both in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, the leader progressively centralised and concentrated power in himself to the detriment of the party and the government. The party, however – even as it was being controlled – remained an army of followers, indispensable for the continually increasing use of charismatic power. Neither the government, the administration nor any other *grands corps* experienced a comparable diminution of their position under either Salazarism or Francoism.

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This circumvention of the authoritarian state's traditional operational mechanisms did not necessarily signify its radicalisation in every domain. Roberts stresses such radicalisation more than I, who sought only to underline the creation of space for political action in parallel with the state apparatus. There is no mechanical association that connects radicalisation with the 'relocation' of decision-making power from the government to the leader, the party or any other autonomous institution. An example that may belie any such connection is the level (and agents) of violence and repression: Francoism in the 1940s or, albeit for different reasons, the Argentine military dictatorship of the 1970s – neither of which experienced this 'relocation' and both of which were much more radical in the elimination of political enemies than was case within the Italian Fascist regime.

Both Hitler and Mussolini, at different moments and with differing strategies, managed to control their single parties, with Hitler permitting the Nazi party to have a greater degree of autonomy over the state apparatus than was true in the Italian case. However, where I differ most clearly from Roberts is in the idea that 'In principle, only the state – not the party – could be totalitarian and the locus for the expanded collective action that fascism was to entail.' This is a programmatic principle that was included in the discourse of Mussolini, Franco and other dictators of this period, but which did not characterise the practice of those dictatorships associated with fascism. This is truly an area in which a 'chasm' exists between programme and praxis. Without an ideologically motivated single party, it is difficult to imagine a 'totalitarian' system in twentieth-century Europe that has the state as both its locus and as the vehicle for political decision making. In clear contrast to the example of communism, the dictatorships associated with fascism promoted neither a programme nor a praxis that was designed to eliminate the fundamental economic differentiation between the state and civil society. They were instead heirs to a consolidated 'bureaucratic–legal' tradition whose destruction was limited, even in the extreme case of Nazism.

It is here that the progressive approximation towards a charismatic type of leadership emerges from the relationship between the leader and the party. I would not go so far as Aristotle A. Kallis when he states that 'the centrality of the leader in [any] fascist system's decision-making process was predetermined neither by any plans, nor by [any] clear fascist theory of the state'.[1] But if, 'at the end of the day, Mussolini and Hitler were institutionally free to choose from the available policy options and then discard policies and individuals without any obligation to accountability or consistency',[2] it was because, in the final analysis, they enjoyed a legitimacy that was fundamentally constructed by their respective fascist parties and by their elites in other institutions.

David Roberts, who knows the history of Italian Fascism very well, stresses the 'not cohesive and monolithic, but fissiparous' character of its elite in power.

[1] Aristotle A. Kallis, *Fascist ideology: territory and expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922–1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 102.

[2] *Ibid.*, 103.

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However, as Roger Griffin and Ian Kershaw correctly note, the Nazi system was also 'far from being the monolithic ''evil empire'' which it has often been portrayed'.[3] As I myself have shown in my article, the Nazi and Fascist elites also experienced important political and 'institutional' conflicts, albeit with a more homogeneous elite – both in terms of their ideology and party affiliations – than that which existed in either of the Iberian regimes.

Authoritarianism and totalitarianism: where is fascism as a political regime?

The authoritarian–totalitarian binomial has been an extremely useful classificatory tool for students of twentieth-century dictatorships. However, as Juan J. Linz – the most influential 'father-figure' of the 'authoritarian regime' ideal type – recently wrote: 'too many problems in the study of non-democratic politics remain unexplored and . . . the distinction of totalitarian systems and authoritarian regimes in my view does not provide us with the full answer'.[4] The vast number of monographs and comparative studies that have been published during recent decades have criticised this binomial: they have set conditions on it and have proposed (few and not always viable) alternatives to it, yet it continues in reasonably good health. Roberts, however, uses it indiscriminately throughout his critique, while I simply seek to demonstrate how the typological 'chasm' must be overcome when we seek to study the evolutionary dynamic of the fascist regimes.

The 'check-list' definitions of fascism are obviously static. In the majority of cases they tend to place Italian Fascism on the margins of totalitarianism, and are insensitive to the temporal dimensions. For example, a cross-analysis of the operation of the Italian Fascist regime in 1927 will probably show that it was closer to the authoritarian model and to both Salazarism and Francoism.

Roberts accuses me of tautology: in his own words, 'the stronger the fascism, the more likely the regime to be genuinely fascist and thus a radical departure'. I had attempted to avoid becoming embroiled in the classification debate, although it remains obvious to me that by comparing these four dictatorships, 'the closer to the fascist model, the greater was the role assigned to the party and its ancillary organisations'.[5] An approximation to charismatic leadership, the construction of an array of indoctrinating organisations; the attempts to bypass the state apparatus and some of the leading institutions; the existence of 'tensions' between the party and the state . . . are we not close to the distinctive operational elements of fascist regimes compared with the other twentieth-century right-wing dictatorships?

One Portuguese historian entered the market of short definitions for political

[3] Roger Griffin, 'Hooked crosses and forking paths: the fascist dynamics of the Third Reich', in Joan Mellón, ed., *Orden, jeraquia y comunidad. Fascismos: autoritarismos y neofascismos en Europa* (Madrid: Tecnos, forthcoming).

[4] Juan J. Linz, 'Fascism, breakdown of democracy, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes: coincidences and distinctions', mimeograph., 2001, 102.

[5] *Ibid.*, 40.

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regimes by providing us with the following simple phrase: 'Salazarism was fascism without a fascist movement.' Whilst not sharing this opinion, its use may nevertheless be defensible if it prompts us to take another look at the role of the non-fascist conservative parties and institutions that are considered to be the 'functional equivalents' of fascist parties during the institutionalisation of the right-wing dictatorships. To require the existence of fascists as a prerequisite for the creation of a fascist regime is a tautology. However, we must confess that it is a forgivable tautology.

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