



Book Reviews

European History Quarterly

2017, Vol. 47(2) 322–400

© The Author(s) 2017

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0265691417695979

journals.sagepub.com/home/ehq



Matteo Albanese and Pablo del Hierro, *Transnational Fascism in the Twentieth Century: Spain, Italy and the Global Neo-Fascist Network*, Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2016; 224 pp.; 9781472522504, £85.00 (hbk)

Reviewed by: Ángel Alcalde, *Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany*

In the last ten years, transnational perspectives have been increasingly applied to the historical analysis of fascism. Transcending classical comparisons between the ‘normative’ fascist movements and regimes – Italian Fascism and German National-Socialism – transnational research allows us to observe fascism as a single cross-border phenomenon that circulated beyond the European continent and transcended the interwar period. The transnational perspective promises a redefinition of fascism. Yet the practical difficulties involved in making transnational history, such as the time-consuming requirement of multi-archival and multi-lingual research, slow down the process of scientific production. For these reasons, this long-awaited study of the Italian-Spanish neo-fascist network by Matteo Albanese and Pablo del Hierro should be hailed as another milestone towards a new transnational understanding of the history of fascism.

With a bold title, *Transnational Fascism in the Twentieth Century*, the authors intend to state very loudly that fascism was a transnational phenomenon that knew neither borders nor chronological caesuras. Even if the book aims to provide evidence for this thesis, such a title possibly outdoes its actual content, because it is only the Italian-Spanish fascist and neo-fascist network that is placed under scrutiny – as the more accurate subtitle confirms. From the start, the authors take for granted the existence of a wide and profound network of contacts between fascist and neo-fascist individuals, political organizations and state institutions in Spain and Italy, existing between the March on Rome (1922) and the 23-F coup d’état in Spain (1981). A substantial amount of empirical evidence is given to sustain this hypothesis. Hence, however, the authors seem to infer the *global* dimensions of the network, even if the adjectives *European* and *transatlantic* might define this phenomenon more exactly. Whichever their real spatial dimensions were, transnational networks, as this book thoroughly argues, were crucial for the history of fascism and neo-fascism. The ultra-nationalist nature of the fascist ideology was not an insurmountable obstacle to the establishment

of cross-border collaboration between fascist actors from different nation-states. The authors are convinced that 'fascism, as an ideology, is transnational by nature' (3–4).

Albanese and del Hierro assert (10) that the novelty of their contribution to scholarly literature lies on their methodological approach (network analysis), and on the fact that the book allows for a better understanding of the entire transnational fascist network. Another aspect should be added. This work, while focusing on the Spanish-Italian space of the fascist and neo-fascist network during most of the twentieth century, points at the sheer importance of Spanish fascism and the Franco regime in the history of fascism, a reality too often disregarded by an international historiography that only takes Italian Fascism and German Nazism as fascist 'models'. After 1945, as this book demonstrates, the Franco regime became the lodestar of Italian neo-fascists (168) and a haven for former fascists and Axis war criminals from across the continent. In a sense, if Italian Fascism was the point of reference for extreme right ultranationalists in the 1920s, and the Third Reich took up this role after 1933, the Franco regime was the key space for allowing fascism to survive the Second World War. Unfortunately, historiography has too often put forward working definitions of fascism that seem tailored to avoid the characterization of the Franco regime as fascist. Even if Albanese and del Hierro prefer to highlight the authoritarian nature of the Spanish dictatorship, their book contributes to adding complexity to this perspective.

The book has six chapters, ordered chronologically. The two first chapters examine the origins of the Spanish-Italian fascist network and the entanglement between the Franco and Mussolini regimes. The role of Italian fascist politicians and soldiers, such as Ezio Maria Gray, General Mario Roatta, and General Gastone Gambara in forming the network is explained. However, these two chapters draw almost exclusively on existing bibliography. In my opinion, the real contribution of the book starts in Chapter 3 and continues through Chapter 6, where the workings and political evolution of the neo-fascist Italian-Spanish network are shown, combining abundant archival evidence with an illuminating reconstruction of the historical context both in Italy and Spain.

The main problem of the book is the less than perfect quality of the English language edition. The relevance of the provocative theses maintained by the authors is not always communicated in their written expression. The text may read smoothly for native Spanish and Italian readers, but, in fact, many excerpts sound like too literal translations from Spanish or Italian, even if the book was originally written in English. Errors in spelling and problems of word-choice can be found. For instance, the authors use 'network' and 'web' interchangeably as synonyms but there are important differences between these notions. Spanish and Italian editions of the book might resolve these shortcomings, and would be very welcome by specialists in the countries analyzed.