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PhD DISSERTATION
Abstract of the thesis

**Mussolini's political aims in the Mediterranean
and the Italian working-class movement (1933-939)**

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I.

The dissertation title of the *Mussolini's political aims in the Mediterranean and the Italian working-class movement (1933-1939)* can be deceptive, because it can give us the impression that the paper deals with only one question. In reality, it investigates two problems, so I divided the dissertation in two different, but complementary parts. The discussion about *The Italian working-class movement* is subdivided into two chapters: about *The Italian Communist Party* and about *The Italian Socialist Party (made up by reformists)*. The section *About the "cultural supporters" of Mussolini's political aims in the Mediterranean* is subdivided in 3 chapters: *Giovanni Gentile and the War*; *Gabriele D'Annunzio and the Ethiopian war: Teneo Te Africa (1936)*; and *Filippo Marinetti and the Ethiopian war: The African poem of the division "October the 28th" "Il poema africano della divisione «28 ottobre» (1937)*.

It would not have been possible to survey the reactions of the emigrated antifascist workers towards Mussolini's policy of power in the Mediterranean without examining the other side of the situation: the "cultural support" to the regime, in particular to the Ethiopian war, made by some of the greatest intellectuals of the period. We think about the unwilling support of Giovanni Gentile, and the deliberate support of Gabriele D'Annunzio and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, both with poor fascist results but exploited by the fascist regime for its own goals.

I will discuss the consent among the intellectuals of the period before the conflict with Abyssinia, a sort of agreement which was not repeated in the case of the Spanish civil war: this reflects the fact that the Spanish civil war was much more extraneous for the Italian working class than the war of Ethiopia.

Concerning the subject I must clear another question with importance: especially in the historical parts of this dissertation, I used the notion of "Mediterranean" in a large sense, including events and situations that had not been in a direct connection with the Mediterranean itself. Here I am referring to the Italian-Yugoslavian crisis of 1933, and to the two crisis of Austria of February and July of 1934. In consequence of these events, between July of 1936 and March of 1938, Austria lost its independence and was forced to a union with Hitler's Germany between 1938 and 1945. In this situation Austria was forced to share the crimes with the Nazi Germany.

I consider the first event (the crisis between Italy and Yugoslavia) as one of the reasons that led Italy to occupy Albania in April of 1939. (Albania was object of contrast

between Rome and Belgrade because of its strategic importance, although from 1927 it was a semi-colony of Italy). By mentioning the other two events (the two crisis of Austria) I intended to present the slow but inexorable defeat of the Italian foreign policy in the area of the Danube and the Balkans. (The same fact led to the handing over of Horthy's Hungary to Hitler). This political defeat in Eastern Europe drove Mussolini to see in the Ethiopian conflict not only safety valve to the internal problems of the country and a guarantee to consolidate the fascist regime, but also, and above all, a new way to maintain the power politics of Italy, whose importance was compromised and considerably reduced in Europe. To the fascist Italy it became necessary to look for revenge in Africa. This could also satisfy Mussolini's personal ambitions, who, in this case, could make himself appear as the person who finally takes revenge for the defeat of Italy in the Abyssinian War of 1896, represented by the military disaster of Adua. So we can say that the survival of the fascist regime depended on the positive outcome of the war against Ethiopia.

From this general picture could not miss the analysis of the Spanish civil war, in which the fascist Italy was involved by the Nazi Germany, and was one of the reasons for the lack of preparation of Italy in the Second World War. Moreover, for Italy, this war was the direct consequence of the Ethiopian war, which had already caused the isolation of the country in Europe, where the Alliance of Nations should have had to maintain peace but seemed to be more and more incapable of assuming this task. This organisation was in fact far too weak right from its birth which we can bring back to two main reasons: the lack of presence among its members of the United States of America, and the long exclusion of the Soviet Union which could enter the organisation only in 1934, on the initiative of France, for a long time the most irreducible anti-Soviet country.

In the second part of the dissertation, (on half way between history and literature, a kind of historical and cultural synthesis of the period), I study the "cultural supporters" of Mussolini's political aims in the Mediterranean, in three different chapters.

In the first chapter I analyse the thoughts of the philosopher Giovanni Gentile about the war itself. In his works, published between 1919 and 1943 (in a period which goes beyond the temporal limits of this dissertation), he defines this concept as absolute category: the war is considered as an inevitable way to resolve the controversies among the states, but not as a typical fascist phenomenon. I arrived to this conclusion by analysing Gentile's thoughts on this subject in his political works written in this period. I also came to declare that in his conception Gentile tries to make justice among the schematic theories that had considered Gentile for a long time as a pure and simple *philosopher of the fascism*. To avoid this

generalisation, Gentile publishes his thoughts about a fascist war (the war in Ethiopia) only towards the end of his life, reducing the vision of this war to the general category of the phenomenon: a painful but inevitable process to resolve the contrasts among the states.

In the second chapter, dedicated to one of the last works of Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Teneo Te Africa* (1936), I build up the poet-writer's vision about the war in Ethiopia. D'Annunzio, out of the great events of history and at the end of his life, tries desperately to get back to the centre of the events: he connects the Ethiopian conflict with his previous enterprises and poses as a prophet of the past. He feels sad that he could not participate personally in the war events, and defines himself as a *pilot without wings*.

In this chapter I intended to demonstrate how this late work of D'Annunzio (which could not add anything more to his reputation) had been ignored by literary criticism but studied by historians, as part of the general consent among the intellectuals created by Mussolini about his ventures in Ethiopia. D'Annunzio's book was published between 1936 and 2001 only two times, in 1950 and in 1962, and from this time on, sank into complete oblivion.

In the third chapter I analysed Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's work on the Ethiopian war, titled *The African poem of the division "28th of October"* (*Il poema africano della divisione «28 ottobre»*) (1937), work that has not been published again since the first edition.

Although Marinetti, unlike D'Annunzio, participates directly in the war of Ethiopia, his vision about this war does not correspond to the dictates of the fascist propaganda, but can be considered as more adherent to the ideas of the traditional futurism (literary, and extra-literary movement, which engaged Marinetti as its initiator and constant guiding spirit). I maintain this opinion even if we have to admit that Marinetti's vision about the Ethiopian conflict marks his adhesion to all the future wars of the fascism, from the war in Spain until the civil war in Italy of 1943-1945. To the Italian civil war he dedicated his last poetical work, *"A poetical quarter of an hour of Xth MAS"* (*Quarto d'ora poetico della X^a MAS*) (1944), written not long before his death, happened in the same year.

Marinetti's work on the Ethiopian war also obtained little interest from the literary criticism, studied only in connection with the possible links between literature and history, and used by historiography as a document of the consent among intellectuals about the Ethiopian war.

The methodology used in the present dissertation was double. In the first part I analysed the reactions of the Italian proletarian movement towards Mussolini's aims in the Mediterranean by making a constant comparison between the sources from the press of the

period (1933-1939) and the largest possible bibliography (books and articles of historical magazines) published about this problem from the 50s until 2000. This comparison was particularly necessary to determine the points where the reactions of the press, belonging to the working-class opposition, were justified, and caught the real situation, and where, on the other hand, they came from pure and simple propaganda.

In the second part of the dissertation I used three different forms of analysis.

In the first chapter, I analysed the works of the philosopher, Giovanni Gentile on the war, published between 1919 and 1943, to build up his conception about this problem. I compared the results of my research to the largest possible and available bibliography about the philosopher and his thoughts, even if I had to establish that this subject had been quite purely studied in the past.

In the second chapter, dedicated to Gabriele D'Annunzio's work on the Ethiopian war, I followed the same procedure, and intended to give an analysis of *Teneo Te Africa*, which collocates this literary work in the historical context in which it was written and published. I completed the analysis of D'Annunzio's text comparing it with the largest available bibliography, but like in the previous case, I arrived to the conclusion that in the past the problem had not been studied sufficiently. D'Annunzio's book was completely neglected by literary critics, and aroused some interest only among historians, although remaining without a complete analysis.

In the third chapter, dedicated to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's work on the War of Ethiopia, I followed a similar method, only with one element in addition: I tried to make clear the possible differences between D'annunzio's work, who remained in Italy during the military operations, and Marinetti's one, who took part directly in the war. Also in this case I compared the text with the largest possible and available bibliography about the work of the poet-writer of the futurism. I came to the conclusion that bibliography about this book practically does not exist. Marinetti's work written about the Ethiopian war - non published again since the first edition in 1937 - arouse almost no interest from literary criticism (with the exception of two cases), and just a relative interest among historians, but remained without a complete analysis.

In this dissertation I used two types of sources. For the first part, dedicated to the Italian working-class movement, I used the press of the Italian Communist Party (P.C.d'I.), particularly the daily paper "The Unity" ("L'Unità") and the magazine "The Workers' State" ("Lo Stato Operaio") (1933-1939), and the papers of the reformer Italian Socialist Party

(P.S.I.) with the two daily papers "Forward!" ("Avanti") (1933-1934) and "New Forward!" ("Il Nuovo Avanti") (1934-1939).

The most part of the communist sources had been integrated in two volumes: in the *Works of Palmiro Togliatti* (which contains a very useful discourse for the purpose of our work), and in the volume containing the *Proceedings* of the VIIth Congress of the Communist Internazionale, published in Moscow, in 1939, in English language.

In the case of the socialist sources, I consciously avoided to use the press (the daily paper "Avanti") of the Italian Socialist Party (P.S.I.) in the period between 1933-1939. Even if sometimes it happens to contain some considerable intuitions (for example the prevision of the French-Italian crisis of 1938) it tends to provide analysis that could mislead from the real situation. Although it opposes to the personal cult introduced by Stalin, sometimes reflects this in the writings of Angelica Balabanoff, secretary of the party and director of the paper. Besides, the press of the perfectionist P.S.I. wastes time arguing about useless things that many times did not help the case of the antifascism.

For the second part of the dissertation, dedicated to the "cultural supporters" of Mussolini's policy in the Mediterranean, I used the works of the philosopher Giovanni Gentile (*War and faith (Guerra e fede)* and *Genesis and structure of the society (Genesi e struttura della società)* (1943)), and the books about the Ethiopian war of Gabriele d'Annunzio (*Teneo Te Africa* (1936) and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (*The African poem of the division «28 October» (Il poema Africano della divisione «28 ottobre»)*). Some of D'Annunzio's works about the war were also integrated in *Letters of D'Annunzio to Mussolini (Lettere di D'Annunzio a Mussolini)*. The texts of the three authors were taken into consideration not only as historical sources, but above all, as sources which could help us to build up, even if in an approximate way, the *history of the mentality* of the age.

II.

As far as the new results of this dissertation, we can classify them into two groups.

For the first part of the work, dedicated to the reactions of the Italian working-class movement to Mussolini's political aims in the Mediterranean, the new results are as follows:

1. P.C.d'I. e P. S. I. (*The Italian Communist and the Socialist Party*) notice, from the beginning of the 30s, the total failure of the fascist foreign affairs, which continues the traditional way of the Italian foreign relations: in the first half of the 30s, anti-English and pro-French direction, destined for turn over between 1936 and 1939.

2. The two antifascist organizations reveal the progressive slipping of the Italian fascism into the orbit of the German Nazism, just about to affirm that the Italian foreign policy is not decided in Rome, but in Berlin.
3. They reveal the progressive loss of the Italian influence to the advantage of Germany in the area of the Balkans, the Carpathians, and in the area of the Danube in Europe. This is an important factor to understand future *colonial policy* of Italy, which will cause the attack against Ethiopia, thanks also to Mussolini's indifference towards the European problems.
4. In the case of the two Austrian crisis (February and July of 1934) both parties understand completely that the destruction of the Austrian working-class movement (February of 1934), ordered by Mussolini to Dolfuss, deprives Austria from the only force able to maintain the independence of the country. This will be confirmed by the following events between July of 1934 and March of 1938: these events, together with the annexation of Austria by the Nazi Germany, will give the occasion for the socialist and communist press to affirm that the international situation of Italy is the same as it was before 1918.
5. About the Ethiopian war the two workers' parties understand with much acuteness that the Nazi Germany finance Addis-Abeba not with the aim of causing the defeat of the fascist Italy in the conflict, but to maintain it occupied in Abyssinia, and to have a free hand in Europe.
6. Also in relation to the Ethiopian war, both the communists and the socialists talk, since 1936, about the indiscriminate use of gas in the military operations on behalf of the Italian troops. This act causes the massacre of the civil population: this circumstance has always been denied, even in the post-fascist Italy, in the name of the myth about the *good and civilizing* Italian colonialism. This fact was admitted only recently, after the opening of the military archives. The only difference between P.C. d. I. and P. S. I. in this object is that while the communists announce immediately the use of chemical arms in the conflict, the socialist party is more cautious in doing so.
7. About the civil war in Spain, both workers' parties express their conviction and prophecy that the fascist Italy does not fight for Franco and for itself, but exclusively for Hitler.
8. As to the Italian-French conflict of 1938, both the Italian socialists and the communists are convinced that this was a result of the post-Munich era, and the result of Mussolini's illusion of returning to an independent Italian foreign policy, while in reality, even this move against France was guided by Hitler.

9. As to the Italian occupation of Albania, we must say that both parties are convinced that this was the only possible Italian reaction to the complete German invasion of Czechoslovakia, and that this action will give to the fascist Italy only problems and no advantage.

These considerations, in the first part of this dissertation, are not new scientific results in an absolute sense, since they have been widely proved by historiography. The new finding is that these considerations had been formulated already in the 30s, so in the same moment while the facts to which they refer, were happening.

Concerning the second part of the dissertation, dedicated to the "cultural supporters" of Mussolini's aims in the Mediterranean, the main scientific findings are the following:

1. The study of Giovanni Gentile's thoughts about the war in Ethiopia following his development from 1919 until 1943: this has never been done before, not even by the most careful works written about his philosophical itinerary, or, at least, not have been done systematically.
2. The analysis of Gabriele D'Annunzio's book on the war of Ethiopia, work that had been completely neglected by literary criticism and taken in consideration only partially by historiography, never analysed completely.
3. The analysis of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's book about the Italian-Ethiopian conflict, also neglected by literary criticism and partially examined by historiography, never studied thoroughly.

The dissertation is divided into two different, but complementary parts.

In the first part, dedicated to the reactions of the Italian workers' movement towards Mussolini's political aims in the Mediterranean, I examine the stand of the P.C. d. I. and P. S. I. in this subject. The Italian Communist Party offers a more complete panorama of the situation, since it follows the events right from the beginning, from the Italian-Yugoslavian crisis of 1933, which does not bring any positive result for Italy, but leaves a state of tension between the two countries. Because of the support that Italy gave to the Croatian separatist movement of the *Ustascia* of Ante Pavelic, the tension between Italy and Yugoslavia would find a tragic outcome in the attempt of Marseilles in October of 1934 against Alexander, king of Yugoslavia, and would not be resolved neither by the Italian-Yugoslavian Agreements of 1937, nor by the Italian-German occupation of Yugoslavia happened in 1941.

The Italian communists also examine the two Austrian crisis of February and July of 1934: in the first case, we can find criticism against the Austrian social democrats because they could not resist to the coup of Dolfuss, ordered by Mussolini. The Italian Communist Party

expresses the conviction that the *Duce*, by ordering the destruction of the worker's movement in Austria, opened the door of Austria to Hitler. In the case of the second crisis, the analysis of the Nazi coup in Vienna, (happened in July of 1934, stopped by Mussolini, but in which Dolfuss himself remained a victim) brings to the conclusion that this was a consequence of the events of February, and will not bring the end of the Nazi attempts to occupy Austria, progressively abandoned by Mussolini to Hitler, until the annexation of March 1938. In the eyes of the Italian Communist Party this fact indicates the definitive slavery of Rome to Berlin, and a serious danger for the Italian borders as well.

The Italian Communist Party examines closely the Italian-Ethiopian conflict right from the Incident of Ual-Ual (December of 1934) and follows the developments. Palmiro Togliatti dedicated to this problem his speech at VIth Communist Internationale, the only speech on this subject in a forum with a *European orientation*. When the conflict becomes an open war from October of 1935, they follow the military operations with great attention. The communist press will not hesitate to announce the drawing back of the U.N. in front of the Italian fascism, both in the case of the massacre of civil population with bombardments, and in the case of indiscriminate use of asphyxiating gas. It also announces the Nazi plot in Ethiopia, the financial backing of Addis-Abeba to buy weapons, not with the aim of making Italy loose the war, but to engage it in Africa for the longest possible period, and to force Italy to indifference in Europe.

The Italian Communist Party was also interested in the Spanish civil war: their press revealed the new drawing back of the western democracies and the U.N. in front of Hitler and Mussolini helping Franco, who made a coup in July of 1936 against the legal government of the Republic. In this case the Italian Communist Party seems to be very harsh against the politics of non-intervention proposed by the Popular Front of France and approved by the U.N., and defines this as an intervention against the Spanish Republic. The war in Spain reveals clearly the *unequal alliance*, which was in reality the Axle Rome-Berlin, where Hitler gave the orders, carried out by Mussolini. The Italian Communist Party seems to have no confidence in the U.N. and in the western democracies, which, with the Agreements of Munich, allowed Hitler to occupy the Czech Sudeten, to destroy the Spanish Republic and to *start the Second World War*.

The Italian Communist Party gives a certain attention also to the French-Italian crisis of 1938 that represented Mussolini's attempt and illusion to regain an independent foreign policy for Italy after the Agreements of Munich. He announced absurd territorial claims at the French borders (handing over to Italy of Corsica, Gibuti, Nice, Savoy, and Tunisia.) The

members of the Party were convinced that even this move was guided by Hitler and would end with no positive result.

The Italian Communist Party ends its analysis about Mussolini's political aims in the Mediterranean with the study of the Italian occupation of Albania (April 1939). They immediately find its only motivation: it was Mussolini's reaction to the complete occupation of Czechoslovakia carried out by Hitler, since this country had been an Italian semi-colony since 1927. The occupation of Albania would give to Italy many political and military problems without any economic advantage.

The Italian Socialist Party, on the other hand, in its press offers a less complete picture of the situation, since here we can find just a small hint to the Italian-Yugoslavian crisis at the beginning of 1933. The Party has a major interest towards the two Austrian crises (February and July of 1934), not only because the coup carried out by Dollfuss eliminated another socialist party (S.P.Ö.), but also because they opened the way to the annexation of Austria. This theory will be confirmed by the events of July 1934 and March 1938, that will conclude with the German occupation of Austria. The Italian Socialists give severe critics to Mussolini's foreign policy: they accuse him of betrayal of the Italian interests in the favor of Hitler, and of bringing back the international situation of Italy to its condition before 1918. About the war between Italy and Ethiopia the opinion of the Italian socialists published in their press was not less harsh: apart from revealing Mussolini's criminal acts and the further impoverishment of Italy while financing this war, they also realize that this conquest is more virtual than real. To prove their opinion, in brief articles, and in a special column titled "Ethiopia", they try to follow the events of the anti-Italian resistance in Abyssinia during the period which goes from May of 1936 until May of 1940. The articles go on with their inspection until the date of the Nazi occupation of France, and the year of the forced cessation of the paper "Il Nuovo Avanti".

The Italian Socialist Party is more cautious in announcing the indiscriminate use of gas during the military operations, but announces clearly and loudly the massacre of the Ethiopian civil population during the bombardments of Italian warplanes, even against establishments like the hospital of the Swedish Red Cross in Dolo. In the socialist press we can find the same distrust towards the United Nations that we saw in the communist papers. The socialist parties and the international socialism itself have always considered the United Nations as the principal organization to guarantee peace, task that the organization failed to complete.

About the Spanish civil war the Socialist Party expresses similar opinion to the Italian Communist Party. First of all they reveal that Italy is doing everything possible to strangle the legal republican government of Spain. In their opinion, the politics of non-intervention followed by the European democracies made possible that Hitler and Mussolini could help Franco while the republicans could not have enough weapons to defend themselves and to win the war. Their delusion about this policy is even greater because it was proposed by the Popular Front of France, where a left coalition was at the political power, with the leader of the S. F. I. O. Léon Blum in charge. The Italian Socialist Party also notifies that the war in Spain indicates the moment when the Axle between Rome and Berlin becomes an *unequal alliance*, and as a consequence, Italy will progressively loose its independent foreign policy. To all this they add a prophecy: only Hitler will gain from the victory of Franco. The distrust towards the United Nations and the western democracies appear more and more clear: the European states, after the Agreements of Munich (when Hitler annexes part of Czechoslovakia), believe that they saved the peace, but, in reality, they opened way to the Second World War and to the end of the Republic of Spain.

In relationship with the crisis between Italy and France of 1938, when Mussolini tries to continue an independent foreign policy by presenting unacceptable territorial demands against France, the Italian Socialist Party tries to refute the fascist propaganda about Corsica and Tunisia which "want to be part of Italy". They say that if these two regions were handed over to Italy, their population would suffer from same slavery that suffocates the Italians since 1922. They also reveal that the demands to France were guided by Hitler, and only apparently represented an independent action of the Italian foreign policy.

About the Italian occupation of Albania (April 1939) the Italian Socialist Party reveals that it had no practical reason. This was only Mussolini's reaction to the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia (March 1939), which broke the balance of power created in Europe after the Agreement of Munich, and took away from Italy every possibility of action. Moreover, the Italian socialists understand the absurdity of the occupation of Albania, and that it will create further problems to the fascist Italy, that with this operation gave the demonstration of being totally unprepared in its military force.

In the second part of the dissertation, dedicated to the "cultural supporters" of Mussolini's political aims in the Mediterranean, I analyzed the work of three great intellectuals of the time. First of all I studied the thoughts about the war of Giovanni Gentile (frequently defined as *philosopher of the fascism*), published in the period between 1919 and 1943. From the political writings of Gentile I arrived to the conclusion that his thoughts form

a coherent system: from his works, published between the First World War and the Second, or edited posthumously, the war appears to be an absolute category, an inevitable instrument to resolve the controversies among the states. His thoughts do not have a fascist character, and this explains also the fact why Gentile discussed about the *fascist wars* only in one of his works, in which he defined the war in the terms of his general conception.

After the thoughts of Giovanni Gentile, I analyzed Gabriele D'Annunzio's book, *Teneo Te Africa* (1936) about the war in Ethiopia. In this work, the writer-poet in theory participates at the war, he appears as a prophet of the Italian conquest, while in reality, he is at the end of his life and out of history at that time. The book represents the reconciliation between D'Annunzio and the fascism or Mussolini himself: D'Annunzio was separated from these ideas because of personal and political contrasts and was imprisoned and isolated in Vittoriale. This is also an attempt to return into the events of real history made by a man who is now excluded from it: the poet continues to recall the memories of the *glorious past*. As a conclusion, we can declare that the book has not much to do with the fascism itself, although it was born in the consent of exaltation created by the fascism around the war of Ethiopia.

In the last part of the dissertation I analyzed the work of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, titled *The African poem of the division «28th October»* (*Il poema africano della divisione "28 ottobre"*) (1937). Unlike D'Annunzio, Marinetti takes part personally in the conflict between Italy and Ethiopia, but the work that has born from a clear futurist inspiration, and not from the ideology of the fascism. On its pages we can individuate some characteristic themes of the futurism, like the cult of speed and technology. The war itself is considered according to the ideas of the futurism formulated in 1911, in connection with the conflict between Italy and Turkey: the war is the *hygiene of the world*. Characteristic are the allusions to the conception of Ethiopia as woman to conquest, from this idea come the numerous erotic and exotic signs in the geographic descriptions of the book. Marinetti sometimes refers to the Abyssinians as inferiors to the Italians, although, like in his previous works, Marinetti admits their charm so never falls into a vulgar racism. The book, written in prose, in spite of its title, can be considered more futurist than fascist, although contains the praise of the *Duce* and the King-Emperor, as requested in the climate of consent about Ethiopia, not repeated in the case of the Spanish civil war.

As the conclusion of the dissertation, we can say that even if the antifascist worker's opposition in Italy understood that the country's foreign policy, more and more submitted to Berlin, took Italy into the Second World War, the "cultural supporters" of Mussolini's regime rejected to do so.

III.

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