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WAITING FOR A POLISH MUSSOLINI.
THE CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTS OF 'FASCISM' IN EARLY
POLISH RIGHT-WING POLITICAL DISCOURSE (1922-6):
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY*

Abstract

The article presents the emergence and rooting of the concept of 'fascism' in Polish right-wing discourses, especially in the widely understood local nationalist movement of the 20th century (National Democracy, *Endecja*). According to the author, the early 1920s, and above all the period of Mussolini's gaining power in Italy, was a decisive time (*Sattelzeit* by R. Koselleck) for the reception and transfer of both fascist concepts and ideas as a transnational phenomenon. Still, it also significantly influenced the radicalisation of the native right-wing identity in interwar Poland. However, the author proves how vital the role of radical anti-Semitism was in forming indigenous right-wing discourses and their subsequent political practices.

Keywords: anti-Semitism, discourse analysis, Mussolini's Italy, history of concepts, National Democracy, Polish right-wing, transnational fascism

I
INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'fascism' first appeared in the discourse of the Polish Right in the early 1920s and remained a stable point of reference over the entire interwar period. Without much abuse, it can be accepted that 'fascism' was one of the critical terms of the right-wing political vocabulary. However, its presence, evolution and semantic limits should be perceived in a broader linguistic and cultural system,

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frequently in clash and opposition to each other, and in schemes of ideological and political connections. Understood in this way, the term has its polemical bearing and enormous discursive potential. Both the description ‘fascist’ and the concept of ‘fascism’ are part of the basic socio-political glossary of the first decades of the twentieth century;¹ ever since then, its original meaning, which described a specific ideological phenomenon, was accompanied by attempts at constructing its counter-meaning. The fabrication of its negative connotations accompanied the processes of reception and transfer of the concept.² Its numerous negative designates revealed themselves in the word’s appearance, often severely exceeding the original meaning. The history of the concept ‘fascism’ is, to quite an extent, the history of the record of political invective.³

Therefore, the term ‘fascism’ can be traced not only in scholarly dissertations, treatises, or political pamphlets. From the very beginning, it appeared in the political press, along with (to a lesser degree) diaries and memoirs, letters and daily notes. The primary objective of this essay is to evoke and explore some of the possible connotations – that is, meanings associated with the concept under discussion in the right-wing discourse. Although the period concerned is relatively short, one may attempt to assume that it was a peculiar ‘saddle period’ [*Sattelzeit*] – a breakthrough time as regards the shaping

¹ Cf. Ernst Nolte, ‘Fascismus’, [entry] in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ii: E–G (Stuttgart, 1975), 329–36.

² Cf. Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (Oakland CA, 2017), esp. chap. ‘What Is Fascism in History?’, 31–97; Paul E. Gottfried, *Fascism. The Career of a Concept* (DeKalb IL, 2013); Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism. Comparison and Definition* (Madison, 1980), 3–12. Of the classical studies around the shaping of the concept, its politisation and, subsequently, ideologisation, cf. Gilbert Allardyce, ‘What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept’, *American Historical Review*, lxxxiv, 2 (1979), 367–98. On the place and position of the concept in radical Right discourses, cf. Nigel Copsey, ‘The Radical Right and Fascism’, in Jens Rydgren (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right* (Oxford, 2018), 103–21. Of the relevant Polish studies, see Maria Zmierczak, *Spory o istotę faszyzmu. Dzieje i krytyka* (Poznań, 1988).

³ A Polish case in this respect is evoked in Irena Kamińska-Szmaj, ‘Różne konotacje nazw faszyzm, faszysta w prasie międzywojennej (1921–1923)’, *Sprawozdania Wrocławskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego*, xlix (1995). Also, cf. Hugo García et al. (eds), *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present* (New York–Oxford, 2018), 8–11.

of the socio-political language of the interwar period and its significant modifications, primarily in respect of its functions and content. Less obviously and more disputably, I assume that the said modifications have *de facto* formed the language of Polish politics in the first half of the twentieth century. The associations or blends of conceptual connotations, determined by the sign's field of associations (following the structuralist perspective and Ferdinand de Saussure's findings, among others), being the groups of words that follow a given concept, fall within the subject studied. In a different perspective, of importance is the apparent identification of networks and relationships between concepts as well as their possible and actual oppositions being associations of signs/words related to a given concept within a text. In a more general approach, the key question for me is whether the concept in question became used in comprehensive discursive practices, placed in the centre of the discursive field and thus became the key instrument in the political communication; also, whether, and to what extent, certain political groups and entire circles endeavoured to use a given concept in their arguments; and, whether the concept under discussion remained in the peripheries of public discourse.

In forming a socio-political discourse and its priority concepts, the reception, possible semantic shift, and semantic evolution seem critical. This involves ascribing, if not outright giving, newer and newer connotations to the concept appearing in the language, producing in effect new meanings or reinforcing its position and strength within the programme or, more broadly, political mobilisation within the given discourse. The tension between 'reception' from a foreign language and 'production' of a new concept seems unsolvable. As it seems, no linguistic system, that of a socio-political language, is closed up: new meanings are incessantly produced, and the process of the ascription of meanings is continuous. In parallel, it has to be accepted that the assumption that a concept is a completely open-ended piece of reality can mean or refer to literally anything is not much of use. The premise that the socio-political context is important and becomes vital for the identification of consecutive meaning-related adjustments of socio-political terms is closer to the approach herein presented. In order not to neglect the 'off-source reality' (following Reinhart Koselleck's concept), whilst permanently bearing in mind the sense of 'half-openness' that accompanies the emergence of the designate within a communication community, the context needs being possibly strictly

reconstructed wherein the concept became to take root.⁴ The stronger the concept's connection to the context, the more specific, apparently, the reconstruction of the evolution and creation of potential semantic fields of the concept and the entire socio-political discourse.

The approach proposed herein combines the chronological attitude – more specifically, the diachronic approach typical of studies in the classical history of concepts or ideas, and asynchronous attitude revealing semantic and ideological categories according to which the concept in question will be categorised in the sources. Therefore, the 'powerfulness' of its appearance is no less essential than its legibility and comprehensibility to individual members of a given communication community.

II

PHASE I: EX ROMA LUX? FIRST RECEPTIONS AND USES OF THE CONCEPT OF 'FASCISM' IN RIGHT-WING DISCOURSE

The first Polish clues of direct reception of the concept of 'fascism' appeared as early as spring 1920, on the occasion of the political riots in Italy, in which paramilitary associations set up in the spring of 1919, the so-called *fasci* (Italian, literally, 'rods'), made themselves known on a larger scale. Month by month, this quite peculiar form of a political militia – hit squads, which appeared as the formula of a new political faction – became increasingly important. After the first wave of strikes, in late 1920, the *fasci* numbered as many as 20,000 members, of whom most were active militants. By mid-1921, the organisation had almost 200,000 members. This new political phenomenon aroused interest, mainly, in European right-wing circles, as an efficient barrier in the face of political strikes and the canvassing organised by all sorts of left-wing or leftist formations – class-based trade unions, through to anarchistic and social-democratic groups and the communist parties emerging at that very time. When the socialists enjoyed their first victories in local elections, especially in northern Italy, in the mid-1920, the hit squads inflamed the wave of violence, terror, and intimidation of Left organisations and local authorities alike, on a mass scale. These new tactics gained recognition and support from a considerable

⁴ Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache* (Frankfurt am Main, 2006), 21.

affluent part of the society, entrepreneurs, and well-to-do farmers. Fascist organisations started to act as a sort of proactive self-defence against rural strikes and, later on, as a means of intimidating the disobedient revolted social groups. Characteristic of this period was also the transfer of the epicentre of political struggle in Italy directly into the streets, frequently in the form of brutal physical confrontation – the method that the fascists soon began to epitomise.⁵

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These spectacular successes aroused the vivid interest of practitioners across Europe; the efficiency of the fascist organisation triggered the will to imitate it.⁶ In the revived Poland, the trend was prominent particularly among nationalist paramilitary and anti-strike groups or formations in a broad spectrum of influence of the National Democracy; its most spectacular manifestations – among groups that emerged around the time of the Polish-Bolshevik War (1919–21).⁷ The scarce literature produced by these ephemeral groups largely prevents tracing a conscientious evolution of the concept of ‘fascism’.⁸ The available

⁵ For the key contextual information on the origins and early phases of formation of the fascist party, see Giulia Albanese, *March on Rome. The Violence and the Rise of Italian Fascism*, transl. Sergio Knipe (London, 2019), 56–80; *ead.*, ‘Political Violence and Institutional Crisis in Interwar Southern Europe’, in António Costa Pinto (ed.), *Rethinking the Nature of Fascism. Comparative Perspectives* (London–New York, 2011), 186–94.

⁶ Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (New York, 2016), 189; Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism. Italian Fascists and Britain’s Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford–New York, 2003), esp. 1–6.

⁷ Jarosław Tomasiewicz, *Naprawa czy zniszczenie demokracji? Tendencje autorytarne i profaszystowskie w polskiej myśli politycznej 1921–1935* (Katowice, 2012) points to a dozen groups, circles or milieus which, taken together, numbered a few to a dozen thousand members; among them were the Order of the Fascists, the Polish National Confederation, the Knights of the White Eagle, the Organisation for the Defence of the National Life, the Association of the Avengers and Defenders of the Homeland, the Order of the Monarchists, the Order of the Knights of the Law, and the Polish Patriots’ Emergency Squad; cf. *ibid.*, 68–9. Also, see Olgierd Grott, *Faszyści i narodowi socjaliści w Polsce* (Kraków, 2007).

⁸ These formations had no periodicals of their own; the research regarding these milieus is prevalently based on memoirs or diaries and, for some of them, on the police files; see Tomasiewicz, *Naprawa czy zniszczenie demokracji?*, 68–74. Among the major testimonies, let us mention Adam Pragier, *Czas przeszły dokonany* (London, 1966); Jędrzej Moraczewski, *Przewrót w Polsce* (1919), ed. by Tomasz Nałęcz (Warszawa, 2015); Tadeusz Dymowski, *Moich dziesięć lat w Polsce Odrodzonej*.

testimonies show, however, that the original outline of the designate got formed already at that time, whereas the individual actors and participants of the discourse were primarily aware of specific ideological nuances and the peculiarity of the Polish context set against the Italian conditions and determinants. The settlement of the new concept is well illustrated by an excerpt from the memoirs of Jan Pękosławski, the leader of the Polish Patriots' Emergency Squad [Pogotowie Patriotów Polskich] set up in the summer of 1922:

we were generally called fascists, and I have ... to explain the matter. When I conceived the idea to create a new organisation, i.e. in July 1922, not only would we have no Mussolini programme then: there was no-one to have even heard about him. At last, I could only have been suspected of following his cue only by such who do not know me any closer. – Never in my life have I patterned myself on anybody, and if I do observe the others, then I do it, and examine what is happening abroad, for the sole purpose of getting to know what should not be done; as to what ought to be done [all emphases in the present study are mine – GK].⁹

In this report, along with several similar ones, a few essential clues can be heard that characterise the functioning of the concept of 'fascism' in the Polish right-wing discourse of the early 1920s. The author emphasised that fascism was an Italian phenomenon with certain singular local features that were not fit for being directly, or in their entirety, applied under other geographical and cultural conditions. Like most other right-wing commentators, Pękosławski took note of a neutral attitude among the Italian fascists towards the 'burning' (as Polish authors commented) Jewish question and an almost complete lack of political anti-Semitism in Italy. Fascism, as this author slightly mentions, was moreover becoming a political invective with which the left-wing and centrist part of the political scene – or rather, its press background – described the nationalistic Right.¹⁰

(*Wspomnienia*) (Warszawa, 1928); and, first of all, Jan Pękosławski, *Dla potomności. Z okresu zarania naszej niepodległości 1919–1926*, with an introduction and ed. by Urszula Kozłowska and Tomasz Sikorski (Radzymin, 2016) [1st ed.: 1929].

⁹ Pękosławski, *Dla potomności*, 126. Also, cf. Dymowski, *Moich dziesięć lat*, 65.

¹⁰ Cf. Irena Kamińska-Szmaj, 'Inwektywy polityczne w relacjach międzytekstowych', in Michał Sarnowski and Włodzimierz Wysoczyński (eds), *Wyraz i zadanie w językach słowiańskich: opis, konfrontacja, przekład, Slavica Wratislaviensia*, v, 133 (Wrocław, 2005), esp. 119–25.

For the right-wing debaters, fascism denoted a higher degree of national awakening related to the developed political culture of the Italians. Significantly, fascism tended to be unambiguously and inseparably associated, since the very beginning, with the charismatic leadership of Benito Mussolini, which led some of the authors to alternately use the terms ‘fascism’ and ‘Mussolinism’.¹¹ This casual enunciation is sufficient to observe a clear need for shifting the accents in comprehending the concept of ‘fascism’: from a local Italian phenomenon into a broader, universal one, extending at least to the Western European space. In his memoirs, Pękosławski referred several more times, with hardly hidden enthusiasm, to the figure of Mussolini, pointing at such occasions to the dissimilarities between the Polish and Italian cultural contexts.¹² For him, as was the case with other paramilitary group activists, it was the Italian phenomenon that formed the major point-of-reference. The ‘Rozwój’ Society was probably the only nationalist milieu in which, after an initial wave of fascination, the interest in fascist Italy somewhat cooled down:¹³ after all, this circle identified the elimination of Jews from the public space as the precondition

¹¹ Władysław Rabski, the Popular National Union [Związek Ludowo-Narodowy, ZLN] MP and leading publicist with *Kurier Warszawski* daily, wrote: “With the first anniversary of Mussolinism approaching, it is needed that Poland well understand the core content of the great victory; that Poles realise that what has happened is not some trite revolution of the ‘Whites’ against the ‘Reds’ but instead, it is the birth of new worlds of ideas, an enormous revision of the lead-the-way doctrines of the nineteenth and the first years of the twentieth century ... not of a black idol of the reaction but of a new type of organisation, solidarity, hierarchy, and discipline ... Mussolinism is a dream of power conceived, as it were, from Gabriele d’Annunzio’s spirit; it is a Latin Renaissance; it is the apostolicity of a great humanity, a rebirth of the religion in the most sublime meaning of the word, of which the ‘Third Rome’ dreamt – the Rome of Cavour and Garibaldi”, Władysław Rabski, ‘Mussolini na ulicy Wiejskiej’, *Kurier Warszawski* (2 Nov. 1923), quoted after *id.*, *Walka z polipem* (Poznań, 1925), 517, 520; also, see [Andreis Egisto] D’Armili, ‘Przyszłość ustroju faszystowskiego (Od własnego korespondenta *Gazety Warszawskiej Porannej*, Rzym, w kwietniu 1926’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 28 (10 May 1926), 3. See also Antoni Peretiatkowicz, *Państwo faszystowskie. Bilans rządów pięcioletnich* (Warszawa, 1927), 27.

¹² Cf. Pękosławski, *Dla potomności*, 129, 189.

¹³ Szymon Rudnicki, ‘Towarzystwo Rozwój Handlu, Przemysłu i Rzemiosła’, in *id.*, *Równi, ale niezupełnie* (Warszawa, 2008), 90–103. The reception of ‘fascism’ in the Poznań-based *Przegląd Judaistyczny* (an ‘organ dedicated to exploring the Jewish question’ in 1922–4) developed in a similar spirit.

for the national rebirth.¹⁴ In their international ‘anti-Jewish front’ programme, the ‘Rozwój’ men were one of the first to have ‘discovered’ an ally in the German national socialism and Adolf Hitler himself.¹⁵

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The circle in which the reception and influence of the Italian model proved the most versatile was, however, the National Democratic camp, customarily known as the National Democracy (colloquialised as the *endecja*). This formation lumped some political organisations whose institutional and parliamentary expression was the Popular National Union [Związek Ludowo-Narodowy, ZLN]. Established in 1919, ZLN had the largest political representation in the parliament; its impact on the political life of at least a few provinces (mainly, Pomerania and Greater Poland) was prevalent. The nationalist camp had at its disposal the most extensive press system, including a broad network of its own foreign correspondents,¹⁶ which backed the introduction of new formulas and borrowings in the public debate as well as comprehensive notification of its own political background about the phenomenon taking shape in Italy. The first more detailed nationalist press’ reports contain diverse spellings of ‘fascism’, including *fasciści/faściści* or *fascyzm*, often put in inverted commas.¹⁷ The politically hot autumn of 1922 – the parliamentary election of November and the subsequent election of the President of the Republic of Poland by the National Assembly, with all its political consequences – favoured the anchoring

¹⁴ After a rapid development in 1919–23 (estimated by scholars at, roughly, 80,000 to 150,000 active members), the ‘Rozwój’ milieu went through a collapse that lasted until the economic crisis of the late 1920s. Nonetheless, Tomasiewicz is of opinion that it was ‘Rozwój’ that displayed the strongest influence of fascist ideas; see *id.*, *Naprawa czy zniszczenie demokracji?*, 153–9.

¹⁵ Tomasiewicz, *Naprawa czy zniszczenie demokracji?*, 155.

¹⁶ See Urszula Jakubowska, *Oblicze ideowo-polityczne “Gazety Warszawskiej” i “Warszawskiego Dziennika Narodowego” w latach 1918–1939* (Warszawa–Łódź, 1984), 21–4.

¹⁷ S.K. [Stanisław Kozicki], ‘Wybuch walk faszystów z socjalistami we Włoszech. Kronika polityczna’, *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 6 (June 1922), 484, 487; [Ignacy Oksza-Grabowski], ‘Uwagi. Faszyci’, *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 8 (Aug. 1922), 616–17; ‘Kongres faszystów w Neapolu. Kronika polityczna’, *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 11 (Nov. 1922), 884. Cf. Kamińska-Szmaj, ‘Różne konotacje nazw faszyzm’. Yet, *Podręczny słownik polityczny* (Warszawa, 1923) by Joachim Bartoszewicz, a prominent ZLN member, uses the term *fasciści*, 193–4.

of the concept, reflected in uniformed spelling and quitting of the inverted commas.

Before the March on Rome, the Polish nationalist press yielded a sheer inundation of mentions and larger journalistic pieces whose purport for the Italian fascism was enthusiastic.¹⁸ Among the opinion-making periodicals, Warsaw-based *Mysł Narodowa* took primacy in delivering the news on the situation in Italy. Ignacy Oksza-Grabowski, the biweekly's leading commentator (and editor-in-chief for some time), argued that fascists were essentially active and involved conservatives ("traditionalists, of a deep Italic culture"), just militant and struggle-oriented ("acting rather than talking"), putting national slogans into practice ("pure sang nationalists").¹⁹ He described fascism as "a wiggle of the Italian soul" and, at the same time, a "noble nationalism that ruthlessly breaks down everything that would stand in [its] way". For Oksza-Grabowski, who was an extreme monarchist by belief, in the spirit of the *Action Française* (he belonged to the Conservative Monarchist Organisation, among other things), a "creative nationalism" combined with "a reference to the primaeval sources" would sooner or later have caused the emergence of fascism. This author expressed his hope that "the history of Poland must flow with this current" (p. 3).²⁰ The crest of the wave of interest in the biweekly was marked with *Mysł Narodowa*'s issue dedicated to Italy, opening with a poem by Rosa di Mario, 'the Poetess of the Fascists', entitled *To Poland* and written "to the nation's honour".²¹ The Poznań-based *Przegląd*

¹⁸ See Roman Wapiński, 'Niektóre problemy ewolucji ideowo-politycznej endecji w latach 1919–1939', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, xxiii, 4 (1966). In Wapiński's opinion, voices of superficial fondness toward the Italian fascism prevailed in National Democratic journalism before 1925 (*ibid.*, p. 862). See *id.*, 'Ruchy nacjonalistyczne a formowanie się tendencji faszystowskich i parafaszystowskich', *Studia nad Faszyzmem i Zbrodniami Hitlerowskimi*, iii, 366 (1977), 231–3.

¹⁹ Grabowski, 'Różgi (Faszyści)', *Mysł Narodowa*, 32 (12 Aug. 1922), 1–3.

²⁰ As he wrote elsewhere, "The Italian fascists have become Europe's tutors" (*id.*, 'Lekcja faszystów', *Mysł Narodowa*, 3 [26 Aug. 1922], 7); "Poland must come along holding the fascist's rod", *id.*, 'Wybory. II strony walczące', *Mysł Narodowa*, 36 (9 Sept. 1922), 8.

²¹ 'Do Polski! (Wiersz poetki faszystów Rosy di Maryo z Turynu napisany w 1919 r. do czci Polski)', *Mysł Narodowa*, 45 (8 Nov. 1922), 1–2. Cf. *Rota Mamelego*, *ibid.*, 6–7; [Vocta], 'Socjologiczny ustrój państwa', *Gerarchia* [a monthly] (Aug. 1922), 7–8; 'Proklamacja faszystów', *Mysł Narodowa*, 46 (18 Nov. 1922), 15; 'Gabriele d'Annunzio', *Mysł Narodowa*, 47 (25 Nov. 1922), 9; 'Benito Mussolini', *ibid.*, 9–10; 'Mussolini a syjonizm', *ibid.*, 10.

Wszechpolski spoke in a similar spirit; its authors saw a universal message in the Italian incidents: fascism is, they believed, a “powerful reaction against the disintegration trends”, a “national movement which, in the name of rescuing the Homeland from decay, embarked on fighting against communism”.²² The *Przegląd Wszechpolski* editors believed that the situation in Italy was part of a more general wave that would spread all over Europe, while the concept of fascism described a broader, supranational phenomenon. From autumn 1922 onwards, journalistic materials on Italy were deepened by extensive personal accounts. In September 1922, Emma Chludzińska-Paulucci, the author of correspondence for *Gazeta Warszawska*, a National Democracy’s opinion-making daily, broadly argued that “fascism ... was a ‘son of the war’”, by which she understood the social and ideological genesis of the phenomenon and the new language of political communication. The paper’s permanent contributor emphasised the crucial role of war veterans and youth in the movement, identifying these two groups as those which determined its identity. Summarising, she found that fascism was opposite to liberal bourgeoisie and was, essentially, “a faith, juvenile enthusiasm, respect for the authority, courage, personal initiative, understanding of the international necessities”.²³ Another report penned by her unanimously praised the fascist idea’s revitalising influence on the political life and the rebirth of civic life progressing together with the fascists:

²² “The movement of the fascists [orig. *fascistów*] in Italy, similarly to the nationalist movement in France, is a manifestation of the reaction emerging in Europe against the flooding of the old civilisation by internal barbarism (‘Uwagi. Fasiści’, *Przegląd Wszechpolski* (8 Aug. 1922), 616–17. In the same way, in the youth magazine *Akademik*: “If it [i.e. fascism] not be a life necessity ... then it is, in any case, a phenomenon flowing from the spirit of the time ... from today’s post-war structure of political life that is gangrened by the socialist-and-Jewish international network ... Fascism is a pro-active defence – not the pokey gloved one ... a pro-active self-defence, a self-defence that, seeing no other way-out, had to resort to the path of violence ... Fascism is the nation’s response ... Fascism is ... a pro-active method whereas all the other, more peaceful methods of the nation’s self-defence have failed to be efficient”, [Zet], ‘Faszyzm’, *Akademik* (2 Nov. 1922), 62.

²³ E. Chludzińska, ‘Korespondencja z Włoch’, *Gazeta Warszawska* (14 Sept. 1922), 1, quoted after Irena Kamińska-Szmaj, *Judzi, zohydza, ze czci odziera. Język propagandy politycznej w prasie 1919–1923* (Wrocław, 1994), 171.

Excited about the spirit of fascism, the citizen must place his Homeland's interest over the interest of his party. ... A fascist is willing to be a free citizen, in a free country, and hence he demands that labour be free and considers all restrictions in this respect to be attacks against his personal freedom.²⁴

A majority of the nationalist authors perceived 'fascism', in their press statements, primarily as a *per se* anti-left(ist) movement. *Kurier Poznański*, the leading nationalist daily in Greater Poland, estimated Mussolini's victory as the Italian nation's spontaneous response to the peril impending from "anarchistic experiments of the socialist parties and formations".²⁵ Fascism was identified, almost by default, with order and reinstatement of cosmic harmony. The socialist background of the Italian fascists' leader and some of his associates was explained in terms of 'mistakes of youth' and complicated pre-war relations. The nationalist commentators' conviction about an expressly rightist character of the fascist movement would not have been infringed by *Kurier Poznański's* extensive interview with Michele Bianchi, secretary of the Italian fascist party, in which the interviewee strongly opposed the argument that fascism was targeted against the proletariat. "We are profoundly different to the socialists, after all ... for us, the ultimate goal, expressed in concrete terms, is the nation", Bianchi emphasised.²⁶ Press interventions of this sort, opinions of personages of ('internal') authority, which sought to reinforce the right-wing press readers' conviction about a 'national', rather than class nature of fascism, became more frequent and, seemingly, provided a response to the left-wing press's accusation of a 'national bolshevism' apparently characteristic of fascism. After the Polish-Bolshevik War of 1919–21, this incrimination was not without political importance or significance.

In late 1922, one of the most frequently (re)visited issues in the Polish press was comparing the political situation in post-war Italy to the political conditions of the young Polish state.²⁷ In the summer of 1922, Oksza-Grabowski coined the phrase of 'historical parallelism'

²⁴ Chludzińska, 'Interes ojczyzny ponad wszystko', *Gazeta Warszawska* (24 Sept. 1922), 1, after Kamińska-Szmaj, *ibid.*, 172.

²⁵ 'Zwycięstwo idei narodowej', *Kurier Poznański*, 233 (12 Oct. 1922), 3. Cf. 'Władza w ręce faszystów', *Kurier Poznański*, 251 (1 Nov. 1922), 2.

²⁶ 'Wywiad z M. Biancim', *Kurier Poznański* (Nov. 1922), quoted after Kamińska-Szmaj, *ibid.*, 173.

²⁷ Cf. 'Analogie między Polską a Włochami', *Mysł Narodowa*, 44 (4 Nov. 1922), 5.

of Poland and Italy, which was meant to foster the reception and diffusion of political models from the south of Europe.²⁸ The press associated with the ‘national camp’ pointed to a comprehensive shift of political power taking place in Europe, an evident example of which was, apparently, the *marcia su Roma*. On 1 November 1922, Stanisław Stroński, a leading National Christian Party [Stronnictwo Chrześcijańsko-Narodowe] politician and outstanding publicist, expressed to a crowd of followers, at an election campaign rally in Warsaw, his observation that a universal turn was occurring across Europe towards ‘national[ist]’ orientations. He referred to the events of the preceding months in France (the establishment of Poincaré’s right-wing government, in place of the socialist cabinet of Aristide Briand) and the United Kingdom (the fall of David Lloyd George and setting up of Andrew Bonar Law’s conservative government) as well as in Italy.²⁹ The fascist rule apparently heralded a more significant and, moreover, irreversible political change in the continent, which could not omit Poland.³⁰ Irena Pannenkowa counterpointed the statement by giving an illustrative image of the situation in her correspondence from Italy, published in *Rzeczpospolita*, a daily associated with the National Christian Party, in mid-November 1922:

On the eve of the opening of the new Sejm ... On the eve of the unveiling of this peculiar Babel Tower, how good it feels to listen attentively to the clear and lucid sound flowing towards us from the Apennines. Not for the pure sake of imitation, blindly and thoughtlessly – but to arouse in the Polish soul no-less inborn and no-less distinctive a creative impulse ... pure, harmonious, uniform, homogeneous and, yes, prevailing.³¹

These analogies of national experiences and contexts, with strict affinities of ideas, were repeatedly referred to by other nationalist publicists, though perhaps Adolf Nowaczyński, who was involved with most of the Warsaw rightist periodicals, did it the most eloquently.³²

²⁸ Ignacy Oksza-Grabowski, ‘Lekcja faszystów’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 34 (2 Sept. 1922), 6.

²⁹ Stanisław Stroński, *Pierwsze dziesięć lat (1918–1928)* (Lwów, 1928), 26–30.

³⁰ Cf. Antoni Marylski, ‘Wiosna Ludów’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 38 (20 Sept. 1924), 8–11.

³¹ Irena Pannenkowa, ‘Korespondencja z Włoch’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 298 (Nov. 1922), 1.

³² Adolf Nowaczyński was a permanent contributor to the dailies *Gazeta Poranna* 2 Grosze, *Rzeczpospolita*, and, sporadically, *Gazeta Warszawska*, and the bourgeois *Kurier Warszawski*; he published on a regular basis in *Mysł Narodowa*. Reprints of his articles could be found in most of the regional nationalist dailies of the

This author would usually sketch a poignantly bleak image of post-war, pre-fascist Italy – a “phase of *scourge* and *grievousness*”, a country devoured by all the possible social illnesses and pathologies always with Jews behind the scenes.³³ As he wrote, “this was an era of the utmost and complete supremacy of the *ebreacci* in the government, in the military and the spiritual, and literary life ... The intellectual life of Italy was facing a mighty approaching offensive of *disfatismo* and pornography ... garrulous deserters and communists in the parliament; Toeplitz, Mayer (sic!), the Banca Commerciale in the finances; whilst in literature, orgies of sadistic sexuality, denigration of war, army, valour, and heroism” (p. 151). “A response to this literature and these currents, and to this form of government, would have come anyway” (p. 153), he concluded. In Nowaczyński’s concept, fascism was an idea (“a rebirth of the Italian national strength ... beautiful, wise, winged thoughts ... are exerting an exciting impact on the crowds, stimulating pathos and volubility ... they are powerful factors and forces in working on the public opinion and sculpting it” (pp. 153–4) and, in parallel, a bare, ruthless and direct action. In this initial period of reception of ‘fascism’, the concept still embraced a distance towards certain aspects of the new phenomenon. Even enthusiasts such as Nowaczyński would admit that the Italians might have gone too far in using violence.³⁴

In the comparisons and juxtapositions proposed by this author in nationalist periodicals, pre-fascist Italy was labelled with piling up clusters of negative connotations: “a psychosis of disappointments, resentments, discontents, Bolshevik ague and raging fever of revolution;

time. For more on his journalistic activity with *Mysł Narodowa*, see Małgorzata Domagalska, *Antysemityzm dla inteligencji? Kwestia żydowska w publicystyce Adolfa Nowaczyńskiego na łamach ‘Mysli Narodowej’ (1921–1934)*, i “Prosto z Mostu” (1935–1939) (*na tle porównawczym*) (Warszawa, 2004), 48–63. Also, cf. Jakubowska, *Oblicze ideowo-polityczne*, 64–6. See Arkadiusz Meller and Sebastian Kosiorowski, ‘Adolf Nowaczyński. Szkic biograficzny’, in *eid.* (eds), *Z bojów Adolfa Nowaczyńskiego. Wybór źródeł*, i (Warszawa, 2012), 16–17.

³³ Adolf Nowaczyński, ‘Słowo i czyn w Italii’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 302 (5 Nov. 1922), 4–5, quoted after Meller and Kosiorowski (eds), *Z bojów*, 149–56. Also, cf. Stanisław Kozicki, ‘Benito Mussolini’, *Przegląd Wszehpolski*, 9 (Sept. 1923), 664.

³⁴ Adolf Nowaczyński, ‘Dobre i złe strony faszyzmu. II’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 52 (30 Dec. 1922). In describing the uses of terror against political opponents as part of the campaign, he would add, “These methods are recommendable only where the decline has gone too far”, *ibid.*, 173.

general dissatisfaction with everything; the period of a literal decay and downcome”) – facing the convalescent wave that was expected to be produced by fascism (“the wave of joy and national effulgence”).³⁵ Nowaczyński was probably the one who went the furthest in shedding light on the similarities and marking the differences between the Italian and Polish contexts. For this publicist, Italian fascism in that period became the fundamental point of reference in outlining his political visions. The characteristic of Nowaczyński’s journalism was also the permanent dynamic relationship between the local and the global understanding of the word ‘fascism’ and the discourse’s getting open to more and more positive connotations related to the concept. His numerous enunciations showed the potential of the period’s socio-political language in the face of the new phenomenon and responses to an emerging political formula.

Perhaps, the need to remind that an unsolved question was festering in the Italian fascism – namely, Jews (“limitless, evil, cruel, and despotic satrapy ... the Semitic internation ... a satanic Anonymous Great-Power”, p. 153) – was the most apparent in Nowaczyński’s articles. This author considered Jews to be a mainstay of the opposition and background of resistance against the fascisation of Italian society.³⁶ He meticulously pointed to anti-Semitic currents in Italian fascism, arguing that the ‘Italian revolution’ would achieve its epoch-making result with the complete removal of the Jews.³⁷ Bringing the argument down almost to the level of biological and racial categories, he indicated that fascism did not identify the fundamental threat to a modern nation – namely, the presence of Jews. A symbiotic relationship that was expected to function between the ‘Aryans’ and the Jews in the liberal democratic system always led to ‘Jewification [zazydzenie]’ of any political system. However, ‘Jews’ within a fascist movement was, for Nowaczyński, a sort of logical contradiction and moral scandal. The *Myśl Narodowa* weekly, the major Warsaw nationalist periodical of the time, editorially run by Nowaczyński, strongly cherished and

³⁵ Nowaczyński, ‘Słowo i czyn w Italii’, 151, 153.

³⁶ *Id.*, ‘Spokój na Kapitolu’, *Myśl Narodowa*, 28 (12 July 1924), 1–5.

³⁷ *Id.*, ‘Kupiec... medjolański’, *Myśl Narodowa*, 12 (22 March 1924), 1–8.]; (a.n.) [= *id.*], ‘Dynastia Toeplitz daje Polsce 100.000 lirów’, *Myśl Narodowa*, 16 (19 Apr. 1924), 11–12; Nowaczyński, ‘Spokój na Kapitolu’, 1–5; *id.*, ‘Trzechlecie “Myśli Narodowej”’, 46 (15 Nov. 1924), 3–4, *id.*, ‘Trzechlecie “Myśli Narodowej”’, 47 (22 Nov. 1924), 10–13.

developed this current.³⁸ Its commentators and journalists kept on notifying the readers about the changes taking place in the Italian political system and permanently ran an apologetic campaign in praise of Mussolini and the fascist system.³⁹

One of the key moments in the domestication and, so to put it, absorption of the concept of 'fascism' by the local Polish nationalist discourse was a reconstruction of its ideological roots in quite specific terms. Another important National Democracy's press organ, *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, which dealt with theoretical aspects, ever since its reinstatement in 1922, highlighted, in the first place, ideological affinities between Italian fascism and its nationalist(ic) progenitors.⁴⁰ Fascism was thus a logical consequence and yet another conscious stage – a legitimised heir of nationalism, as it were. The coincidence between the basic assumptions of the nationalist ideology propagated in Poland by the National Democracy and the ideological programme of the integral Italian nationalists [*Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*, ANI] was repeatedly pointed out; it was this group that the Italian movement founded its programme upon, according to the *Przegląd Wszechpolski* commentators. Hence, the concept of 'fascism' included anticommunism, anti-individualism, restricted liberty of individuals to the benefit of the nation's and state's interests, all this combined with emphasising a solid association with the local, national traditions.⁴¹ For

³⁸ Franciszek Rawita-Gawroński, 'Kwestia żydowska jako problem europejski', *Mysł Narodowa*, 46 (15 Nov. 1924), 10–13. Also, cf. Przemysław Jastrzębski, "*Mysł Narodowa*" 1921–1939. *Studium politologiczno-prasoznawcze* (Warszawa, 2012), 40–50.

³⁹ 'Styl Mussoliniego', *Mysł Narodowa*, 20 (17 May 1924), 7–8; [section: 'Cywilizacja'] 'List Benita Mussoliniego do Króla Włoskiego', *ibid.*, 101–11; 'Mussolini o ludowładztwie', *Mysł Narodowa*, 24 (14 June 1924), 11–12; 'Styl Mussoliniego', *Mysł Narodowa*, 41 (11 Oct. 1924), 12–14; 'Przegląd polityczny (Mowa Mussoliniego)', *Mysł Narodowa*, 7 (13 Feb. 1926), 106–7. Moreover, the weekly included a column entitled 'Vita italiana', whereas aspects of Italian cultural life were shown in the permanent section 'Z literatury zagranicznej'. Also, see Anna Lew, 'Interpretacje genezy włoskiego faszyzmu na łamach *Mysli Narodowej* w latach 1922–1939', *Archiwum Narodowej Demokracji*, i (2013), 93–6.

⁴⁰ Cf. Robert Kuniński, 'Przegląd Wszechpolski. 1922–1926', *Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej*, xxvi, 2 (1987), 89; Kozicki, 'Reakcja narodowa we Włoszech', *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 11 (Nov. 1922), 2; 'Benito Mussolini', *ibid.*, 9 (1923). *Mysł Narodowa* offered its readers quite similar tones; cf. Egisto de Andreis, 'U źródeł nacjonalizmu włoskiego', *Mysł Narodowa*, 17 (24 Apr. 1926), 260–1.

⁴¹ Professor Antoni Peretiatkowicz (1884–1956) of the University of Poznań, a constitutional lawyer, was the one who contributed the most to defining fascism

most of the Polish commentators, the programme to eliminate Jews from the public life seemed to be a natural element of fascism; hence, a permanent dissonance identifiable since the very beginning toward the overly weak and certainly insufficient (in the opinion of most Polish authors) exposure by the Italian fascism of the so-called Jewish question.

Another issue of importance in the attempt to describe and define the phenomenon of Italian fascism was its revolutionary and upheaval-oriented nature – an aspect that posed an intellectual problem for right-wing political commentators. Władysław Jabłonowski, the period's leading nationalist publicist, argued that the fascist movement in Italy creatively adapted the Italian national ideology and universally gave it active support from the masses: “The ideology of nationalism has given fascism the leading thoughts ... whereas fascism inspired into nationalism the spirit of belief and devotion, the fire of patriotic feelings ... gave it a host of implementers of its programme”. In this vision of the world, where power and national egoism ruled perennially, the struggle between nations was the essence of the historical process. A telling summary of this first wave of opinions and initial phase of the concept's functioning in the right-wing discourse was formulated in an editorial of the opinion-making *Gazeta Warszawska*, where the phenomenon of fascism was deemed to be the final say of the modern epoch: “Laying the foundations for the great labour of removal of the class struggle, at the same time fascism has laid an equally strong foundation for the attitudes of a new Europe that is being reborn”.⁴² The first years of the reception of ‘fascism’ in rightist circles showed that the concept was soon domesticated and, virtually, integrated into the right-wing discourse and political imagination and that unambiguously positive connotations and associations were linked to it. Although the discussion on the project, ideas, and the political system that was taking shape in Italy after the autumn of 1922 was only getting started, its framework was basically outlined in the initial period under discussion.

in this way, on the scholarly discourse level; cf. Antoni Peretiatkowicz, ‘Kryzys parlamentaryzmu’, *Ruch Prawniczy i Ekonomiczny*, 2 (1923), 237–43; *id.*, ‘Państwo faszystowskie’, *Przegląd Współczesny*, 66 (1927), 72–3; *id.*, ‘Reforma wyborcza Mussoliniego’, *Przegląd Współczesny*, 4 (1924), 331–40. On Peretiatkowicz's position in Polish receptions of Italian fascism, see Maciej Marszał, *Włoski faszyzm w polskiej myśli politycznej i prawnej 1922–1939* (Warszawa, 2007), 41–3.

⁴² [Unsigned], ‘Umierająca i nowa Europa’, *Gazeta Warszawska*, 356 (31 Dec. 1923), 1.

III

PHASE II: "TO POLAND – FROM ITALIAN SOIL": THE CONCEPTS
AND CONNOTATIONS OF THE TERM 'FASCISM'
IN THE RIGHT-WING DISCOURSE OF THE LATE 1920S

The second wave of interest in fascist Italy, and in fascism as an ideological current took place in the middle of the 1920s, whereas a few occurrences of a different sort exerted a substantial impact on this rapid renaissance of pro-fascist attitudes.⁴³ Apparently, the critical factor of a more general nature was the exacerbating social conflicts, progressing dispersal of the political scene and incessant polarisation of the political class. The functioning of several minor formations in the Left, whose political influence was never more than 20 per cent of active public opinion, generated permanent chaos and rivalry. Dominated by heterogeneous National Democratic circles, among whom a few formations were stably supported by more than 40 per cent of their voters, also the right was far from consolidation. The polarised division of the political scene made the political system unstable, causing frequent changes in parliamentary cabinets. Early 1925 was marked by a breakdown of the moderate policy within ZLN, epitomised by Stanisław Grabski,⁴⁴ against a parallel increase in the forces and circles opting for more and more radical solutions. Nationalist rhetoric spread across all these groups, with a strong anti-Semitic and anti-communist tint, and was particularly strongly highlighted among grassroots and youth formations.

The wars over borders, social and political tensions in Poland in the first years after the reinstated independence – above all, the nationwide anti-Bolshevik mobilisation taking place in 1919–20, repeatedly taking the form of a collective anti-Semitic psychosis – made

⁴³ Not only right-wing or rightist formations were affected; see Tomasiewicz, *Naprawa czy zniszczenie*, 239. Also, cf. Kawalec, *Narodowa Demokracja wobec faszyzmu*, 93. The opinions voiced by Eng. Tadeusz Dzieduszycki offered a different stance [as in *O teorję nowoczesnej sprawnej państwowości (Hoovera – Mussoliniego – Piłsudskiego). Problem państwowej władzy czwartej (obok zreformowania trzech monteskjuszowych) i społecznej siły trzeciej (względem pracy i kapitału)* (Warszawa, 1928)], which was politically situated among (neo)-conservative circles, whereas his corporative ideas were closer to Italian fascism. Cf. Tomasiewicz, *Naprawa czy zniszczenie*, 388–94.

⁴⁴ See Bergman, *Narodowa Demokracja wobec Żydów*, 85. Roman Wapiński, *Narodowa Demokracja 1893–1939. Ze studiów nad dziejami myśli nacjonalistycznej* (Wrocław, 1980), 231–4.

these attitudes almost official. Communist formations and circles were ever since embraced by a sort of ‘sanitary cordon’ and made outlaw through different forms of banning. The anti-Bolshevik fever, tinted with a radical anti-Semitism, became predominant in academic life. Exponents of the young generation, for which the experiences described above were formative, entered the public arena with growing dynamism. Their political force was attested already by the street demonstrations of December 1922, in which university students and junior-high-school students formed the basic social background; in the mid-twenties, their representatives started demanding a voice for themselves within the nationalist formation. The socio-political crisis of the mid-1920s, with its galloping inflation, depreciation of the zloty currency, joblessness and high prices, along with ethnic tensions that fed the sharp splits in the political field, led to a deepening de-legitimation of the liberal democratic system whilst, at the same time, reinforcing the search for alternative solutions.

By that time, the concept of ‘fascism’ had become stabilised in the nationalist discourse. Also, the nationalist community, which had dominated the Polish political life and public discourses of the period, had consolidated. The term ‘fascism’ took root among the nationalist elites, expressing a local form of the nationalist project (a ‘national revolution’) that was conceived in response to the communist threat – and including elements of a comprehensive response to the crisis of the liberal democratic polity. In his 1923 *Podręczny słownik polityczny* [Concise Political Dictionary], which was a sort of *vademecum* of the political language of Polish nationalist Right, Joachim Bartoszewicz defined fascism as a “powerful response of the Italian patriotism against the subversive action of international communists and Jews”.⁴⁵

No doubt, the personal evolution of Roman Dmowski, the informal leader and chief ideologist of the National Democracy, had a substantial role in the shift of interests and reception of ideological models – and, therefore, of the socio-political vocabulary from Western Europe (primarily, United Kingdom and France) toward fascist Italy as a point-of-reference. After his return from abroad in May 1920 and systematic receding from current political struggles, combined with keeping up his strict influence in the party and building his own background within it, Dmowski ever more strongly emphasised

⁴⁵ Bartoszewicz, *Podręczny słownik polityczny*, 197.

that the existing political forms had come to an end and opted for the need to have the political scene entirely and comprehensively rebuilt.⁴⁶ An element of absorption of the new experience was the ‘pilgrimages’ of nationalist politicians to Rome: starting in 1923, outstanding figures of Polish nationalism (among others, Władysław Jabłonowski, Stanisław Kozicki, Adolf Nowaczyński, Jan Załuska, Jan Zamorski, and Roman Dmowski himself) embarked on regular trips to Italy, in a quest for ideological inspiration.⁴⁷ A vision of national revival reappears across their accounts: such brightness beamed from the ‘New Italy’ that hardly any reporter was left indifferent.⁴⁸ Another

⁴⁶ Among Dmowski’s major writings of the period, the ones on post-war England and its politics as well as the working-class question stand out: *Anglia powojenna i jej polityka. Uwagi ogólne* (Warszawa, 1926); *Kwestja robotnicza wczoraj i dziś* (Warszawa, 1926).

⁴⁷ ‘Nowe Włochy. Z rozmowy z posłem Stanisławem Kozickim’, *Gazeta Warszawska*, 121 (5 May 1923), 1; also, cf. Jan Zamorski, ‘Ideologia a ideal’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 4 (5 Feb. 1927), 41–2. In 1927, Jabłonowski and Zamorski became foreign members of the fascist Istituto Nazionale per l’arte [National Institute of Arts] with its registered office in Florence. Zdzisław Dębicki, author and poet, editor-in-chief of *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, who was associated with National Democracy almost since the beginning, was fascinated with fascist Italy in a somewhat different way. He had travelled to Italy in the earliest years of the 20th century, and the country’s political and cultural life was known to him; consequently, he deemed fascism as a natural consequence of national development; cf. *id.*, *Z północy i południa: Finlandja, Włochy, Szwecja, Rumunia, Turcja* (Warszawa, 1926), 106–13 and 137–64, resp. Also, see *Dziennik Juliusza Zdanowskiego*, v: 1 Jan. 1923 to 10 May 1926, with a foreword by Janusz Faryś, Tomasz Sikorski, Henryk Walczak and Adam Wątor (Szczecin, 2014). Positively astonished by the scale and scope of the fascist upheaval, Zdanowski ascertained: “I have been to Italy, and it was made apparent to me, as I took a closer look, how difficult it would be to apply the fascist methods elsewhere. What a steel effort, what energy, strength it is that this system calls for... And, who can do it anywhere else?” (p. 215). Stanisław Kozicki comprehensively presents his reasons in his memoirs written down after the war: Stanisław Kozicki, *Pamiętnik 1876–1939*, ed., with a foreword and notes by Marian Mroczko (Słupsk, 2009), esp. chap. III: ‘We Włoszech (1926, 1927)’, 523–48.

⁴⁸ ‘Guests from Italy’ reappeared since autumn 1925 in daily notes of Jerzy Drobnik, a National Democratic young-generation politician (subsequently, member of the Camp of Great Poland’s [OWP] Youth Movement and of ‘Awangarda’, and a leading figure with the Union of Young Nationalists; see Jerzy Drobnik, *Diariusz, 7 XII 1924 do 15 XI 1931*, Poznań, Instytut Historii im. Tadeusza Manteuffla Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Warszawie, MS 70/1, 33, 55. Also, see *Dziennik Juliusza Zdanowskiego*, where Mussolini reappeared on a regular basis, since mid-1923, as a symbol of efficient government; see, for instance, p. 44.

intermediate product of the crisis and of the spread of new (including Italian) models into the space of the rightist public sphere was the advancing militarisation of the political language of the Polish political scene's largest formation.⁴⁹

Late 1925 and early 1926 saw another inundation of articles, books and extensive journalistic materials related to the political system and ideological project that was taking shape in Italy after the March on Rome.⁵⁰ It would be hard to find an issue of a nationalist daily with no references to the Italian example: without a correspondence, editorial political commentaries, longer or more casual analyses or pieces of journalism, or even short notes describing some selected fragments of the Italian system or Italian fascists in the international arena.⁵¹ *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, the National Democracy's official press organ – set up in 1925 out of a merger of the muckraking morning newspaper *Gazeta Poranna 2 Grosze* into the opinion-making *Gazeta Warszawska* – evoked examples from Italy in almost every single issue. This mechanism of reception and diffusion of Italian fascism was visible even more spectacularly in the nationalist movement's youth organisations. *Głos Akademicki* of Warsaw and *Akademik Polski* of Poznań propagated fascism on a permanent basis. Apart from perceiving the reality through the prism of fascist models, *Awangarda*, the organ of the Camp of Great Poland's [Obóz Wielkiej Polski, OWP] Youth Movement – published in Poznań since 1927 based on the former *Akademik* – directly propagated the fascist aesthetics, in almost each

⁴⁹ Cf. 'IV Kongres Wszechpolski ZLN', *Gazeta Warszawska*, 295 (1924), 2; IV Kongres Związku Ludowo-Narodowego, the Library of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Polish Academy of Sciences, Cracow, ref. no. 7826, 5. The example of fascist Italy was repeatedly referred to at the Fourth Congress of ZLN; S. Kozicki outlined a map of Europe where Mussolini-ruled Italy appeared to be the only developing country. Professor Roman Rybarski referred to Italy as an economically flourishing country ("undergoing a wonderful development in economic terms under the rule of Mussolini"), in contrast to crisis-stricken Western Europe (*ibid.*, 26).

⁵⁰ See Wapiński, 'Niektóre problemy', 862; cf. *Dziennik Juliusza Zdanowskiego*, v, 290. The author sceptically indicates that the Polish National Democratic circles tend to "daydream ... about Mussolini", sometimes without finding one's bearings in his political message (p. 290); similarly, *ibid.*, 304.

⁵¹ Cf. Jakubowska, *Oblicze ideowo-polityczne*, 99. Events taking place in Italy were reported on, in an analogical manner, by local National Democratic dailies, including *Głos Lubelski*, *Kurier Poznański*, *Słowo Pomorskie*, or *Słowo Polskie*.

of its issues.⁵² *Akademik*, the Warsaw-based organ of the All-Polish Youth [Młodzież Wszechpolska], wrote, in turn: “The looks of our youth are directed toward sunny Italy”.⁵³ In these approaches, fascist Italy was becoming the centre of a new national civilisation.⁵⁴ As Jerzy W. Borejsza, who explored the reception of Italian fascism in Poland, puts it: “When another failed attempt at Mussolini’s life was made in April 1926, thanksgiving services were held at some Polish churches on this occasion, whilst dispatches and letters were flowing to Rome”.⁵⁵ In such an approach, ‘fascism’ was the most serious, refreshing and prospective reply in the face of the collapsing and ‘stupid nineteenth century’ – as the liberal democratic order was repeatedly described, after the notorious pamphlet by Léon Daudet: “almost everything that

⁵² ‘Pieśń Faszystów (*Hej młodości, ty młodości*) / Canto dei Fascisti’, *Awangarda*, 1 (1 Feb. 1927), 7–8. The anthem of Italian fascist youth was annotated: “We are publishing this text once again, in response to the wish of a broad academic community; the sheet music is given alongside the text”.

⁵³ ‘Obowiązek’, *Akademik*, 1 (10 May 1926), 1.

⁵⁴ “Indeed, across the fields, in all the domains, it unceasingly goes from one success to the other, from one victory to other, from one prosperity to the other, from one winning to the other ... Everything that it [i.e. Mussolini’s government] has touched, went so excellently for it ... Overall, development and proliferation all along the line, tautening strengths, plumped thews, intensified labour, escalated life, and creative work”, Nowaczyński, ‘Przegląd prasy. Słońce na Tybrem’, *Gazeta Poranna Warszawska*, 46 (15 Feb. 1926), 3. Aleksander Świętochowski wrote, in turn: “Save for Italy which calmed down, put things into order, and entered the path of marvellous development, thanks to a great man who has rejected any compromise, almost the whole of Europe, through which the whirlwind of war has swept, is trembling in convulsions”, in *Liberum Veto*, 15 (10 Apr. 1926), 233; Tadeusz Rozwora, ‘Ad rem... Mistyka czynu’, *ibid.*, 237–8; Mieczysław Piszczkowski, ‘Ekspansja kulturalna Włoch’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 19 (1 Sept. 1927), 355. Cf. *Dziennik Juliusz Zdankowski*, v, 338, 344; *ibid.*, vi: 18 May 1926 to 31 Dec. 1927 (Szczecin, 2015), 25, 29.

⁵⁵ Jerzy W. Borejsza, *Mussolini był pierwszy...* (Warszawa, 1979), 172. The study recalls a cablegram sent by the leading politicians of the National Christian Club (Edward Dubanowicz, Stanisław Stroński, Tadeusz Szuldrzyński, and others) to Italy right after the attempt at Mussolini’s life. Fascist Italy was depicted as the mainstay of “civilisation, and of social and political peace in Europe”, *Kurier Poznański*, Greater Poland’s largest nationalist daily, wrote of an attempt at the “greatest man of Italy and humanity” (p. 172). Cf. [Ign.], ‘Przegląd polityczny (Po zamachu na Mussoliniego)’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 16 (17 Apr. 1926), 251: the author, probably I. Oksza-Grabowski, wrote, in reference to Mussolini’s words: “the fascist revolution ... is a complete, resolute, and final antithesis of the entire former world, democracy, plutocracy, and masonry ... [it is] fighting against the ‘immortal principles of the year 1789’” (p. 252).

the nineteenth century worshipped is now falling down and crumbling away, almost day by day, into dust ... the democratic and liberal ideas are climbing down into catacombs”.⁵⁶

As was remarked in *Słowo Polskie*, Polish Galicia’s largest nationalist daily, “fascism ... is marching today in a joyous spurt, in the utmost sense of spring-time reviving youth, to conquer the world entire – in order to rejuvenate the world and inseminate it with a great cultural creation”.⁵⁷ Zygmunt Wasilewski, *Mysł Narodowa*’s editor-in-chief, argued that “Polish fascism will heal the political life once it gets its forces organised under the leadership of the citizens who can afford to understand the public welfare”.⁵⁸ In this context, a specific alternative recurred more and more frequently in the nationalist journalistic writing, which Stanisław Grabski, a leading National Democracy figure before the Coup of May 1926, described (the most completely, perhaps) as a developmental dilemma: Moscow, or Rome?⁵⁹ The nationalist periodicals almost obsessively published suggestive comparisons between the ailing and rotting liberal order, on the one hand, and the novel fascist order, revived like Phoenix from ashes. As Nowaczyński, the eloquent commentator, figuratively put it, “there [i.e. in Italy], the nation is Carrara marble; here [i.e. in Poland], in 1926 AD, it is clay”.⁶⁰ In his correspondence cycle preceding the collection of writings entitled *Amica Italia*, Władysław Jabłonowski ascertained that fascism was an “intensified activity in the area of national expansion”.⁶¹ Apart from taking prevalence in Italian public life, he pointed to new colonial

⁵⁶ Cf. ‘Nowy sukces włoski’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 3 (3 Feb. 1926), 3; [A.E.] D’Armili, ‘Prasa faszystowska a Polska (Od własnego korespondenta “Gazety Warszawskiej)”’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 40 (9 Feb. 1926), 3; D’Armili, ‘W obronie pisarzy. Reforma włoskiego prawa autorskiego, Rzym w grudniu 1925 r.’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 1 (2 Jan. 1926), 10–11; Kozicki, *Pamiętnik*, esp. chap. ‘Le stupide XIX siècle’, 415–20.

⁵⁷ ‘Stary świat i nowy’, *Słowo Polskie*, 98 (11 Apr. 1926), 1.

⁵⁸ Zygmunt Wasilewski, ‘Polski faszyzm’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 6 (6 Feb. 1926), 81–2. Cf. this author’s coincident arguments after the Coup of May 1926: *id.*, ‘Polska – Europa – Ludzkość’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 25 (12 June 1926), 349–50.

⁵⁹ Stanisław Grabski, *Moskwa czy Rzym?* (Lwów, 1928). The thread recurs in Dmowski’s renowned essay ‘Wschód i Zachód w Polsce’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 39 (15 Nov. 1926), 131–84.

⁶⁰ Nowaczyński, ‘Przegląd prasy. Słońce na Tybrem’, *ibid.*, 3.

⁶¹ Władysław Jabłonowski, ‘Tydzień w Rzymie. Święto narodzin Rzymu – “Dzień kolonialny”’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 15 (28 Apr. 1926), 3.

conquests as another objective of fascism. It is thanks to fascism, he argued, that the Italians have been born anew, or biologically and spiritually reborn (“the strength of a tribe bustling with a mighty life is seen breaking through”); they are bringing about “an act of great importance, indeed a historical act ... of passing from a small to a grand colonial epoch” (p. 3). According to this definition, fascism is a state of universal mobilisation of all the social classes, one that altered the cultural landscape of the entire nation.⁶² The ‘New Italy’ – the phrase that returned like a boomerang in numerous press enunciations and party language – reorganised, according to the commentators, every single fragment of public life space, beginning its march with youth, universities and academic circles.⁶³ For Polish nationalists, one of the most glaring oddities of Italian sociopolitical reality of the early Mussolini period remained, infallibly, the presence of Jews in public life.⁶⁴

This picture of a blooming political community was reinforced in a collection of sketches, impressions, and reportages from fascist Italy entitled *Amica Italia*.⁶⁵ Almost all the major issues raised by Jabłonowski were illustrated with extensive quotes from Mussolini’s speeches and from addresses of fascist politicians or publicists (those “eminent crystallisers of the fascist views”).⁶⁶ In the opening essay,

⁶² Jabłonowski, ‘Tydzień w Rzymie. W ruchu i wytyczeniu. Zamiary kulturalne etc. (Od własnego korespondenta *Gazety Warszawskiej Porannej*)’, Rzym, 26 IV’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 120 (2 May 1926), 3.

⁶³ Jabłonowski, ‘Tydzień w Rzymie. Ruch wśród młodzieży uniwersyteckiej – Uniwersytety wobec faszyzmu – Wielka Encyklopedia włoska, Rzym, 1 maja’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 26 (8 May 1926), 3. Also, cf. [A.E.] D’Armili, ‘Przyszłość ustroju faszystowskiego (Od własnego korespondenta “*Gazety Warszawskiej Porannej*”, Rzym, w kwietniu 1926’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 28 (10 May 1926), 3; Jan Zamorski, ‘Nowa Italja’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 23 (9 June 1923), 2.

⁶⁴ Cf. [A.E.] D’Armili, ‘Zajścia na uniwersytecie padewskim (Od specjalnego korespondenta *Gazety Warszawskiej Porannej*)’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 34 (3 Feb. 1926), 3.

⁶⁵ Cf. Władysław Jabłonowski, *“Amica Italia”. (Rzecz o faszyzmie). Wrażenia i rozważania* (Poznań–Warszawa–Wilno–Lublin, 1926); the related quotes are from this book. For a discussion of the pamphlet, see Krzysztof Stępnik, ‘Faszofile’, in *id.*, *Publicystyka polityczna w Polsce (1926–1939)* (Warszawa, 2012), 106–11; Anna Lew, ‘Fascynacja czy akceptacja? Włoski faszyzm w poglądach Władysława Jabłonowskiego (1922–1939)’, in Tomasz Sikorski and Adam Wątor (eds), *Narodowa Demokracja XIX–XXI wiek. Koncepcje – ludzie – działalność* (Szczecin, 2008), 264–79.

⁶⁶ Jabłonowski had his Polish translation of Mussolini’s speeches published as *Mowy Mussoliniego* (Warszawa, 1926), the first volume in the ‘Biblioteka Myśli

the author, referring to the condition of Italy in 1926, stated that “The prevarications of demagogues and infertile schemes of parliamentary malaise have come to an end; the country has been extricated from the abyss of anarchy, the nation felt capable of a new life, one that heralds a luminous future of the state”.⁶⁷

This feature writer saw these developments as ensuing from a harmonious collaboration and synthesis of the activity of the providential Italian monarch Victor Emmanuel, who represented continuity and tradition; the ‘national’ (or, nation-oriented) modernity, “patriotic action of the Black Shirts”, “a great desire to change the existential conditions under which the nation has been languishing”; and, the personal role of the nation’s “indomitable leader ... who is an embodiment of the national pride and creative energy of the Ancient Rome”. The tradition was combined with authentic modernity. Jabłonowski defined ‘fascism’ as a modern project and a sort of permanent socio-political upheaval (“revolution ... is consistently developing, aiming assiduously at creating a new national order”).

Paradoxically enough, it is, essentially, a conservative undertaking (“fascism is ... the only efficient ... defender in the most critical moments of national life”).⁶⁸ To be a winning force, the ‘Italian revolution’

Narodowej series. Cf. Jabłonowski, ‘Mowy Mussoliniego’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 35 (1 Oct. 1926), 124–5. Beside this, he translated into Polish the Italian leader’s flagship publication, *The Doctrine of Fascism* (as *Doktryna faszyzmu* (Warszawa, 1934)). This author, who can be said to have earned the name of ‘honorary ambassador of fascism in Poland’ among the National Democratic intellectuals, discussed the news of the Italian cultural life on a regular basis; see Jabłonowski, ‘Wódz (Człowiek, który poszukuje; omówienie Małgorzaty Sarfatii “Dux”, nakład Gebethnera i Wolffa, Warszawa 1927)’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 18 (15 Aug. 1927), 322–4.

⁶⁷ Jabłonowski, *Amica Italia*, 12.

⁶⁸ Elsewhere, he wrote: “Fascism is, moreover, a powerful ascertainment of the value of the principles and ideals of communal life which, in an epoch of democratic illusions and socialist-international utopias, have been downgraded ... it has been a great return to what has been forgotten by the masses, wasting away and unloosening inside and around them ... being a movement that got formed in the special Italian conditions ... it expresses a certain universal yearning of the human spirit that opposes its other yearnings. All its successes and failures in this respect, all the advantages and disadvantages – and, in particular, all its experiences – exceed the limits of Italian relationships and have a general civilisation-related importance: *id.*, *Amica Italia*, 41, 51, and 97–8, resp. Fascism as a permanent ‘revolution’ was dealt with in the eleventh (and last) instalment in the series, entitled ‘The fascist revolution: its sources, paths, and orientations’ (p. 131).

was meant to march forward every single day, overcoming the difficulties and developing the national creative output. With the subsequent episode of his considerations, this author's delight with Mussolini and his role escalated. The essay entitled *Benito Mussolini i Gabriel d'Annunzio* juxtaposed the Italian leader's characteristics with those of Gabriele D'Annunzio – one of the early leaders of the fascist movement, poet and playwright, organiser of the march on Fiume, who was regarded as a precursor of the Italian fascism. Jabłonowski perceived these two figures as mutually complementary, in a way: “above all, [they are] consummate patriots whose souls are passionately and fondly dreaming ... of a mighty Italy”. It was Mussolini, though, who was a complete politician, new-type dictator and new-era activist: “the accomplisher, the unappeasable hero of the everyday fight for the nation's future and for the prevalence of the Italian nation ... like Mickiewicz's Konrad [the central character of his drama *Dziady* – The Forefathers' Eve], not only is he desiring to elate his people: he is also willing to make the whole world astonished with them, and is ready to sacrifice his life to this end, sparing no strength of himself and the others ... Mussolini's soul is entirely devoted to the affairs of his Fatherland, knowing no personal reservations when it comes to its fortune and greatness; this is not the case with d'Annunzio, though” (pp. 19–20).⁶⁹ Apart from ideology (“the warranty of Italy's material and spiritual revival”), the feature that made fascism distinct amongst the earlier political formations, was a new conception of political party. As a guest at the Fifth Congress of the National Fascist Party (21–22 June 1925), Jabłonowski reported as follows:

The Congress was weird indeed, because it did not look like a meeting of members of a political party ... but rather, like an assembly of the soldiers of an army that was mobilised for the head commanding staff to declare to them what has been done and to give them orders what to do next.⁷⁰

In this perspective, the fascist party was more than merely a tool or instrument with which to come to power: it was a transmission

⁶⁹ And, elsewhere, “Mussolini is, as a matter of fact, a better ‘democrat’ than the ex-officio democrats, for not only does he care about the good of one social class but of the whole Italian people, diverse as it is, never using it as a tool of his own career”, *id.*, *Amica Italia*, 150–2; also, *cf.* 127, 150.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

belt of a sort, a preceptor, and guardian of the holy fire of moral and political intensification:

The fascist party is the chief staff and the advance guard of the movement and the Italian revolution. It leads the field in the movement, gives the initiative and prepares the plans of action, for the execution of which it uses not only the party forces but also collaboration of all the national forces it has set in motion. Fascism ... came up as a negation of party affiliations in the old parliamentary politics-mania style – and is less and less of such affiliations as its solidification in the state advances and as it penetrates into broad zones of the nation. The fascist party is, primarily, an organ that coordinates state activities, disciplines, and harmonises the social forces, and breathes the spirit of conscious will into the nation's life. And this is indeed why the life of the Italian state and nation is increasingly growing 'fascist'.⁷¹

This nationalist commentator authorised the violence and violations practised by the fascists in politics, deeming such methods not unproductive or non-purposeful; on the contrary,

violence was there at the beginning; there is no doubt about it – but, in Mussolini's concept, such violence was good, not redundant, rescuing those who came near the edge of the abyss; violence was in place ... when masses of the seduced needed to be protected against the demoralising influence of their opponents, who have proved unscrupulous.⁷²

Jabłonowski would take up his justifications of morally legitimised violence in politics a few more times, admitting each time that fascists tended to resort to it in the state-of-necessity;⁷³ it was the fascists' violent political strategy that, to his mind, Italy owed its "rescue from the unavoidable political, social and, overall, national catastrophe".⁷⁴ Mussolini's taking over of power was, for him, an act of moral justice: "the fascists ... have snatched power from the undeserving and transferred it to the strong hands of their leader".⁷⁵ The indispensability

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 92.

⁷³ The assassination of Italian deputy Giuseppe Matteotti, which usually is taken as the point of radicalisation of Italy's fascist regime, is shown in such a spirit. Also, cf. Jabłonowski, *Amica Italia*, 169.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁷⁵ And, elsewhere, "The moment the fascist voluntary militia was set up, the elements of subversion were deprived of the delight of terrorising Italian society:

of terror in light of a nationalist discourse that used the concepts and metaphors of order and harmony, clearly visible also in Jabłonowski, took away from the fascists the odium of revolution in its leftist version. Jabłonowski was one of the first authors to enter into an overt and comprehensive evaluation of the emerging anti-fascist opposition. His diagnoses in this respect always produced a negative outcome; he found that “members of non-fascist intelligentsia do not know what they are after; they stand outside their nation’s life and history”.⁷⁶ Thus, fascism appeared as a historically aware necessity, whilst antifascism was a moral falsity and expression of helplessness:⁷⁷ “whilst belief and zeal are on the side of fascism, the camp of its opponents only disposes scheming, intriguing, treacherous weaponry of masonic lodges, and goading of international organisations”;⁷⁸ “fascism is a movement of young and energetic elements, thirsty for action and liking to fight, so it shall certainly not lay down its arms before it makes the opponents completely capitulate”.⁷⁹ This emotion-imbued apologetic voice comprises most of the tropes that appeared in the opinions of the other participants of Polish right-wing discourse in more fragmentary or piecemeal forms.⁸⁰

There is no doubt that Roman Dmowski exerted the decisive, most authoritative and far-reaching impact on the formation of the concept of ‘fascism’ and its connotations in nationalist circles. His interest in Italian politics covered the first decade of the twentieth century, and his personal contacts with several influential personages of integral Italian nationalism turned the others’ attention to the new Italian phenomenon.⁸¹ As opposed to numerous members of nationalist(ic) elites, Dmowski long remained tacit about the developments in Italy;

violence was pushed back with force, the impunity of seditionists and ravagers of social order was cut short” (*ibid.*, 174).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 112. And, elsewhere: “The intelligentsia of this fraction remained far away behind life and missed its history”, 116.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁸⁰ Antoni Wysocki, a literary critic with *Mysł Narodowa*, opined that Jabłonowski’s study “Reconstructs the spirit of the time ... Mussolini’s fascism, as Jabłonowski’s book finds most resolutely, was a historical necessity. It is Italy’s natural force, its health and future”, cf. *id.*, ‘Nauka i literatura. O faszyzmie’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 23 (29 May 1926), 333.

⁸¹ Cf. Borejsza, *Mussolini*, 171–80.

only in late 1925, he started expressing a belief that ‘fascism’ was the most serious reply to the crisis that had affected Europe, or even the entire Western Hemisphere after the First World War.⁸² Italy, to his mind, was the source of the most topical solution to an array of current problems:

Were we similar to the Italians of today, and had an organisation like fascism – and, lastly, Mussolini, doubtlessly the greatest man in Europe – there is nothing else that we would long for.⁸³

In this aspect, a two-article series, published in parallel by *Gazeta Poranna Warszawska* and *Kurier Poznański*, deserve special attention. In fact, they were reprinted by all the nationalist press and can be regarded as a symbolical closure of the quest for, and adaptation of, the concept of ‘fascism’ in Polish nationalist discourse.⁸⁴ The distinctive feature of these essays is their author’s aspiration to comprehensively clarify a particular stage of evolution of the Polish nationalist movement and to unbolt the ‘Polish national movement’ out of the deadlock (as he diagnosed it).⁸⁵ With the benefit of hindsight, these texts can be regarded as a summary of the triumphant march of fascism across the Polish rightist press of the mid-1920s. Amidst the threads of Dmowski’s extensive argumentation, his broader worldview is identifiable, along with complex motivations that led to the publication of these essays. In the first series of articles, published a month

⁸² “Europe has been haunted not by some transient economic crisis ... what has begun is a downfall of Europe, an irrevocable liquidation of the exquisite position in the world’s economic arrangement it has been holding since the nineteenth century”, Dmowski, ‘Sny a rzeczywistość’, *Kurier Poznański*, 367 (22 Dec. 1925), 1. Also, “Mussolini’s dictatorship is a great happiness for his fatherland. ... If we had a man who would be worth, be it, half a Mussolini, and were capable of generating at least a half of the organisation of the fascist type, one that would not, by no means, be a backslapping club or a mafia, I would be quite willing to accept a dictatorship in Poland”, *ibid.*, 1. Also, cf. Roman Dmowski, *Pisma*, x (Częstochowa, 1939), 24; *id.*, *Obóz Narodowy w chwili obecnej* (Warszawa, 1928).

⁸³ Dmowski, ‘Sny a rzeczywistość II’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 369 (23 Dec. 1925), 1.

⁸⁴ Cf. Pascal Trees, ‘Recepcja faszyzmu i narodowego socjalizmu w II Rzeczypospolitej’, in Ulrich Schmid (ed.), *Estetyka dyskursu nacjonalistycznego w Polsce 1926–1939*, transl. Patrycja Pieńkowska-Wiederkehr (Warszawa, 2014), 82–3.

⁸⁵ Por. Jerzy W. Borejsza, *Rzym a wspólnota faszystowska. O penetracji faszyzmu włoskiego w Europie Środkowej, Południowej i Wschodniej* (Warszawa, 1981), 152.

after the Coup of May, Dmowski explained why fascism, defined as a modern nationalism or new-type nationalism, appeared in Italy, rather than elsewhere.⁸⁶ He believed that the phenomenon resulted from several features, including those of the 'great Italian race', the persistent presence of the Italian heritage with its outstanding individualism, and a specific separation from the main centres of civilisation, which rendered the Italians resistant against civilisational decomposition. Taken together, all these factors made Italians a nation capable of carrying out a 'national revolution' ("the greatest revolution of our time: the fascist revolution").⁸⁷ In the subsequent instalments, Dmowski argued that the Poland of his time fulfilled all the conditions to make similar progress in the future. Analogically to several publicists of his time, he thought that fascism was, to an extent, determined by its charismatic leader;⁸⁸ in contrast to the others, he nonetheless believed that the uniqueness of fascism was not reducible to the dictator personally. Fascism was, instead, a higher stage of modern thought, a new form of pursuing national politics, and as such, it had to crop up, under the specified conditions.⁸⁹

The second series drew a clear distinction between nationalism and fascism whilst accepting that the latter was another stage of national

⁸⁶ Dmowski, 'Faszyzm', *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 169 (22 June 1926), 3; *id.*, 'Faszyzm. I. Dwa światy (c.d.)', *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 170 (23 June 1926), 3; *id.*, 'Faszyzm. II. Włochy nowoczesne', *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 173 (26 June 1926), 3; *id.*, 'Faszyzm. III. Indywidualizm włoski', *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 173 (27 June 1926), 3; *id.*, 'Faszyzm. IV. Istota faszyzmu', *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 176 (29 June 1926), 3.

⁸⁷ "Viewed from the fundamental political perspective, the fascist upheaval is, namely, deeper than the Bolshevik one", *id.*, 'Faszyzm. IV. Istota faszyzmu', 3; elsewhere: "Italy have to-day taken primacy over all the other nations of Europe ... Italy is undergoing a stage of fast progress and increase of their national powers, whilst the other nations are standing still or making retrograde steps ... Italy is becoming a model to follow for other nations – an example which the others try hard to imitate; the country is heading a new political current that is spreading across Europe", *id.*, 'Faszyzm. II. Włochy nowoczesne', 3.

⁸⁸ "Men of such format and type as Mussolini are a rare phenomenon in history. Such a combination of young energy, iron will, ability to rule and control individuals and masses and, with all that, of uncommon mind that embraces the state phenomena in their entirety and is capable of choosing the path in every single area", *id.*, 'Faszyzm. II. Włochy nowoczesne', 3.

⁸⁹ "The Italians are first nation to have understood this fact", *id.*, 'Faszyzm. IV. Istota faszyzmu', 3.

awareness, its more perfect and more complete state.⁹⁰ It is possible that this opinion most fully rendered the need for a clarification of the concepts and ideas. According to this concept, nationalism was already an alternative to the whole liberal democratic political order: “a strong belief in Italy’s historical destiny and, alongside it, scorn for the second-ratters governing the country, disgust for masonic liberalism and socialism, and for parliamentarism as a political system based upon fraud, brutalising the nations and degrading their forces”.⁹¹ Regarded in integral terms, nationalism was an ideological contribution that filled the form of the fascist movement with content (so it was at dawn) – “the irrevocable historical transformation, the decisive victory of the great principle”. Dmowski saw the origins of what he called ‘modern nationalism’ as a response to the Enlightenment-based order, which in the middle of the nineteenth century yielded two essential ideological currents – socialism and liberal democracy. The publicist made it clear what he identified as the significant challenge for nationalism, in the modern version: “the Jewish element, which has come to a great power in the new Europe, has the primary role in both phenomena”.

Much like fascism, Dmowski regarded nationalism as a Latin product: a product of the Roman spirit and a revindication of Roman spirituality. The ‘modern nationalism’ and, consequently, fascism expressed the heritage of Ancient Rome (‘the Roman universalism’); in Protestant countries – “those which draw inspiration from the Old Testament ... from the Jewish spirit” – it was essentially doomed to failure. In those countries which proved incapable of resisting the Jews, fascism was basically impossible.⁹² The fact that fascism first appeared in Italy was no coincidence at all: it was a natural evolution of tribal traits (named ‘racial instincts’ by Dmowski), the

⁹⁰ Dmowski, ‘Nacjonalizm i faszyzm. I. Charakter i przeszłość nacjonalizmu włoskiego’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 199 (22 July 1926), 3; cf. *id.*, ‘Nacjonalizm i faszyzm. II. Geneza nacjonalizmu’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 200 (23 July 1926), 3; *id.*, ‘Nacjonalizm i faszyzm. IV Nowe zadania nacjonalizmu’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 202 (25 July 1926), 3; *id.*, ‘Nacjonalizm i faszyzm. V. Kryzys cywilizacji europejskiej’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 205 (28 July 1926), 3; *id.*, ‘Nacjonalizm i faszyzm. VI. Nacjonalizm a współdziałanie narodów’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna*, 206 (29 July 1926), 3. For more on the series under discussion, see Michał Andrzejczak, *Faszyzm włoski i hitleryzm w publicystyce Romana Dmowskiego w latach 1922–1939* (Wrocław, 2010), 84–95; Marszał, *Włoski faszyzm*, 18.

⁹¹ Dmowski, ‘Nacjonalizm i faszyzm. II Geneza nacjonalizmu’, 3.

⁹² Dmowski, ‘Nacjonalizm i faszyzm. V. Kryzys cywilizacji europejskiej’, 3.

Italian heritage, and the local individualism. What rightist journalists and commentators tended to interpret as shortcomings of the Polish or Italian political scene, this nationalist ideologist showed as a massive crack across the European space, if not the entire Western world.⁹³ To rescue and revive the civilisation was the actual new task of the ‘modern nationalism’, a ‘nationalism that has gone on to the offensive’ – that is, of fascism.⁹⁴ Such definition of fascism organically integrated regeneration of the whole European civilisation.⁹⁵ In the first place, however, fascism had to rearrange international relations and re-establish the European order.⁹⁶ The objective that determined

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁴ “In the Europe of to-day, so different as it is from the Europe of a dozen-or-so years before, a nation’s tasks cannot be the same. Should the European civilisation yield to decay and eventually collapse, all the European nations shall collapse as well ... When this civilisation is put at threat, it is the tasks of politics, whose utmost goal is the welfare of the nation, not only to directly defend this welfare but also to defend the civilisation against decline”, Dmowski, ‘Nacjonalizm i faszyzm. IV. Nowe zadania nacjonalizmu’, 3.

⁹⁵ “When the most powerful nations of Europe are bogging down in a political stagnation; the national current, be it named nationalism or fascism, or otherwise, whilst turning down the existing liberal democratic system, ... cannot possibly confine itself to finding a resolution of the issues of the nation’s life. It must, instead, demonstrate a creative capacity in the domain of regulating the relations between nations ... to-day, it is necessary, to an extent – even more than necessary, given the unsafe situation in which our part of the world and our civilisation has been placed today”, *ibid.*, 3. Another article penned by Dmowski defined fascism as “a nationalism ... which has gone on to the offensive when it comes to winning the European order”. Also, cf. *id.*, ‘Nacjonalizm i faszyzm VI. Nacjonalizm a współdziałanie narodów’, 3.

⁹⁶ In a letter to Enrico Corradini, the founder of the Italian Nationalist Association (ANI) and a prominent fascist politician of the time, Dmowski wrote: “And this is your role, the role of Italy, to take the lead of the new Europe, or rather, of the old Europe that is heading for regaining its supremacy ... France offers a great difficulty. True, it is a Latin country, but overpermeated with the materialistic spirit of Protestants”. In this same letter, Dmowski explained why the Coup of May was not a fascist upheaval – such an upheaval would follow: “The masonry ... has carried out a coup d’état in order to rescue its role and guarantee the power for itself ... You can be sure, Sir, that – having laboured for us – it shall be replaced by a national organisation of the fascist type”, Dmowski to Corradini, Porosna, 2 July 1926, quoted after Borejsza, *Mussolini*, 177–8. In the two decades between the World Wars, Corradini was an important author and Polish press published numerous reprints of his works. E.g. *Jedność i potęga narodów*, published in Poland, transl. and with an introduction of Jan Zdzitowiecki (Poznań, 1937), as part of ‘Biblioteka

the tasks and, in fact, filled the concept of 'fascism' with meaning in a broader perspective was a proactive and apocalyptic battle against Jews, who were perceived as the social background and engine of the crisis experienced by the Western civilisation. Their removal would mean cleansing the European space of an organically inimical element.⁹⁷ Fascism, in this respect, offered a national as well as transnational approach. Despite a number of the later rationalising interventions,⁹⁸ Dmowski would not distance fascism from socialism; rather than that, he recognised the socialist-nationalist synthesis as a consequent stage of the nationalist movement's self-awareness. What is more, it was the process of institutional merger of the fascists into the Italian nationalist party that he regarded as the final sealing of the 'national' character of fascism – and the destination of the ideological development of Mussolini himself.

In Dmowski's concept, fascism was of a thoroughly, and specifically, dual nature – with its local aspect, inherent to any nationally developed community, and in its universal form, which included the tasks and obligations to be tackled by 'the modern national movement'. It was a modern formation as it sought to challenge the well-settled, established and 'safe' political identities of the early twentieth century, never promising a return to the previous state of affairs. Not only did it call into question the order of 'the long nineteenth century', as many a leftist critic emphasised, but it set an alternative solution for the future.

IV

A 'POLISH FASCIST' CASE

The emergence of groups directly referring, in their naming or organisational symbolism, to the models flowing from fascist Italy, may be

Awangardy' which was a series of the Union of Young Nationalists (an organisation of the late *Sanacja* period).

⁹⁷ "The reason for acting together will be understanding that the decay of this civilisation in one country yields a danger for the other ones", *ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁸ The recurring thread in the literature is Dmowski's initial fascination and later distance toward Italian fascism; cf. (*i.a.*) Andrzejczak, *Faszizm włoski*, 40 ff. Yet, in his political commentaries and works from the 1920s, such moments of denial are hardly identifiable. As it seems, Dmowski's views evolved as the consecutive episodes of Italian fascism unveiled. In the 1930s, he considered the German national socialism to be a more perfect version of the 'national movement'.

considered as one of the significant political phenomena of the mid-1920s. It is difficult to tell, at first glance, the number of these mushrooming formations. Without the necessary means available and anything that a mass political movement might be connected to, most of these formations appeared ephemeral; it can be accepted, with high probability, that their members joined the larger, mass-scale formations or parties afterwards.⁹⁹ This bumper crop of organisations and the popularity of diverse formulas with ‘fascism’ in their names can be ascribed, with a high degree of probability, to the snowballing authoritarian trends in Polish society.¹⁰⁰ Initially, the most dynamic among these formations was the Polish Fascists’ Party [Stronictwo Faszystów Polskich], set up in early 1926. Formed before the Coup of May, this party gained considerable popularity in the first months of its existence;¹⁰¹ taking advantage of the organisational paralysis that overwhelmed the Popular National Union, the largest right-wing party, it briskly undertook a propaganda action. In contrast to the local rightist formations, the ‘Polish fascists’ drew the patterns directly from fascist Italy. Their main press organ was *Faszysta Polski* (1926–9); all their organisational structures directly followed the Italian model.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Among the major ones, Tomaszewicz enumerates the Union of Polish Nationalists, Polish Fascists’ Party, Union of Polish ‘Lechitic’ Fascists, National Guard, and Polish Fascists’ Organisation – all emerged in late 1925/early 1926, with several dozen thousand members joining them. The Order of the Knights of the Law – Polish Fascist Organisation, set up as early as 1921, was the oldest among them, and it functioned till the decade’s end in diverse organisational fluctuations; similarly, the Union of Polish Fascists, formed in 1926, lasted until 1929. Cf. Tomaszewicz, *Naprawa czy zniszczenie*, 68–70.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 72–3.

¹⁰¹ According to O. Grott, the party’s first publications, incl. the *Faszysta Polski* weekly, had a circulation of, roughly, 20,000 copies; cf. Grott, *Faszyści i narodowi socjaliści*, 29.

¹⁰² Scholars exploring these formations point out that virtually all these formulas recalled the aesthetics of Italian fascism. *Hejnal Faszystów*, the organ of ‘Polish fascists’ of Greater Poland, wrote: “Polish fascists are... a bunch of rods, strongly cohesive, steadfast, unbroken... and the axe in the bunch is our sharp and strong springtime, it is our resolute decision to remove and castigate the social evil”, ‘Różgi liktorskie naszym znakiem’, *Hejnal Faszystów*, 2 (1926); after Grott, *Faszyści i narodowi socjaliści*, 30; Jarosław Tomaszewicz, *Ugrupowania neoendeckie w III Rzeczypospolitej* (Toruń, 2003). All the periodicals published articles and reprints from Italian magazines, translated into Polish, on a regular basis.

For the followers of these formations, ‘fascism’ meant a deepened national idea; their first public demonstrations were held under the slogans of centralisation and consolidation of a series of heterogeneous groups having the segment ‘fascism’ or ‘fascist’ in their names. The ‘Polish fascists’ soon concluded that the local version of a new political order had to mean “more than fascism in its Italian version”.¹⁰³ The Union of Polish Fascists [Związek Polskich Faszystów], for example, was active for a few months, mainly in the western part of Poland, and then renamed itself as the Union of the ‘Lechitic’ Fascists of the Republic of Poland.¹⁰⁴ The slogan of ‘revival’ was used to denote diverse forms of struggle against the political Left. This category included those who carried out and supported the Coup of May, regarded in terms of a leftist political upheaval. The ‘Polish fascists’ considered Jews and the Left to be major enemies, whereas the latter was collectively labelled with names that unambiguously pointed to ‘Jewishness’ (for instance, ‘Jewish-masonic defeatists’). There was a belief and a social vision behind such declarations whereby any ‘nationally aware Pole’ (“sincere, non-seduced, of a healthy conscience”) is inherently a fascist.¹⁰⁵ According to this concept, ‘fascism’ was a sort of political meta-organisation that attracted the entire ethnically Polish society: “fascism is a new edifice ... it is founded upon the whole of the nation. Everybody will fit in”.¹⁰⁶ Fascism also meant a consolidation of the society (“a fascist means a unionist ... he is aware that creation or maintenance of the power of a society is possible through uniting it”).

A broad catalogue of such characteristics was used by the Rev. Zdzisław Łuczycki, an activist associated with the Union of the Knights of the Law [Związek Rycerzy Prawa] and author of the booklet entitled *Jak ja sobie wyobrażam faszyzm polski* [How Do I Figure Out the Polish Fascism?].¹⁰⁷ For him, the ‘Polish fascism’ was, in the first place, an “action ... of all the strata of the Polish nation, called into

¹⁰³ Cf. ‘Program Faszystów polskich’, *Płomienie Odrodzenia. Dzwon Faszystów Polskich*, 1 (1 Aug. 1926), 1.

¹⁰⁴ After a few months, this formation officially resumed the name ‘Union of Polish Fascists’.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Na szaniec ojczyzny’, *Faszysta Polski*, 4 (9 May 1926), 1.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Od redakcji’, *Tygodnik Faszystów*, 1 (30 May 1926), 1.

¹⁰⁷ Zdzisław Łuczycki, *Jak ja sobie wyobrażam polski faszyzm?* (Lublin, 1926); all the following quotes are taken from this text.

existence by the necessary need to heal the very strained relations that have presently overwhelmed the Polish nation and state".¹⁰⁸ Significantly, 'Polish fascism', in this author's concept, was primarily of a traditional nature and basically boiled down to actions aiming at reinstating a Christian ('Divine', 'Catholic') – that is, 'natural' – order, which has been disturbed by the imposition of a democratic liberal system and by the presence of ethnic minorities, Jews above all, in the public life. For Łuczycki, 'Polish fascism' was not associated closely with its Italian model; never mentioning an example from the Italian realities, his arguments recalled no aspects of the Italian aesthetics, otherwise disseminated amongst local imitators. In this concept, 'Polish fascism' was, to a remarkable extent, a form of social movement that was meant to remove the pathologies of the local liberal democracy ("a curative against the present unsound relations in our nation and state");¹⁰⁹ in the longer run, it would be a sort of anti-Enlightenment reaction ("this instrument in God's hands ... is meant to destroy all the evil which is presently killing us, physically and morally, nationally and in terms of state").¹¹⁰ Łuczycki meticulously enumerated ten major tasks for the 'Polish fascism' to tackle, all of which referred to various moral and customs-related postulates, while most referred to the presence of Jews.¹¹¹ The author perceived them as the main opponents of 'fascism', along with political parties as a degenerate form of the democratic liberal system.¹¹² Among the many future-conjuring forecasts, the chief postulate of Polish fascism, according to Łuczycki (and the other 'Polish fascists', in fact), was to remove the influence of 'the international Jewry'.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹¹ As Tomaszewicz aptly notes, the 'Polish fascism' as portrayed by Łuczycki was basically a version of the local militant clericalism; cf. Tomaszewicz, *Naprawa czy zniszczenie*, 71.

¹¹² Another brochure by this author describing the current tasks of 'Polish fascism' was to be entitled 'Can Poland be named revived, whilst still not de-Judified?' I have not found whether such a publication has ever come out. Similar arguments, with Poland cleansed of Jews given as an example of a 'renewed' Rome, are given in Bronisław Dołęga-Ossowski, *Zażydzenie Polski jest przyczyną nieładu, nędzy i bratobójczych walk* (Warszawa, 1926), a *Polak-Katolik* daily's publication (in a brochure format).

Characteristically, along with diverse leftist opinions, this somewhat ephemeral political current came across the severest criticism from the Polish nationalist camp. It might have posed, for a while, a real threat to the local nationalism as its rival and emerging alternative. Roman Rybarski, the leading politician with ZLN and then with the National Party [Stronnictwo Narodowe], was probably one of the first to notice that a ‘modern national movement’ cannot work simply as a duplication.¹¹³ With his very positive evaluation of Italian fascism, he accused its Polish imitators of naivety and intellectual indolence. The discussion around ‘Polish fascism’ best revealed itself in the periodicals *Mysł Narodowa* and *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, where – apart from the dominant wave of enthusiastic voices – more restrained opinions appeared as well. A certain ‘Judex’, who defined fascism as a response to demagoguery and degenerations of parliamentarism, argued that there was neither a climate nor the appropriate human resources for a movement of this sort.¹¹⁴ The writer Aleksander Świętochowski, a permanent columnist with *Mysł Narodowa*, had nothing against bridling, but he asked rhetorically: “Are there any fascists in this country?”¹¹⁵

V

CONCLUSIONS

The formation of the concept of ‘fascism’ in Polish rightist discourse, which was cultivated by the nationalist Right to a significant extent, was a dualistic process. Since the beginning, which in the local cultural context means the earliest 1920s (mid-1922 marked a broad and intense wave of information on the socio-political situation of Italy), the concept reflected the duality of the thing signified. The first, virtually

¹¹³ Roman Rybarski, ‘Polityka gospodarcza faszyzmu’, *Gazeta Warszawska Poranna* (1926), 188–90; after *Amica Italia. Polscy prawnicy wobec włoskiego faszyzmu 1922–1939. Wybór pism*, selected, with an introduction and notes by Maciej Marszał (Kraków, 2004), 58.

¹¹⁴ [Judex], ‘Walka z demagogią’, *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 9 (Sept. 1925), 639.

¹¹⁵ Aleksander Świętochowski, ‘Liberum veto’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 4 (23 Jan. 1926), 57 (exemplary quote: “Some Mussolinis might perhaps be found, but there’s no fascist”). After the Coup of May 1926, Świętochowski argued that Piłsudski was merely a caricature of Mussolini. Świętochowski, ‘Liberum veto. Rokosz i jego bohater’, *Mysł Narodowa*, 25 (12 June 1926), 355.

original, meaning denoted a political movement and then a political system and ideological project formed in Italy, with its local specificity, features, and colour. The second, and possibly more important, semantic layer describes a common national anti-liberal reaction which was formed, to a large extent, in response to the revolutionary wave that manifested itself across Europe in the years 1919–23, rooted in the comprehensively negative assessment of the public scene after the end of the First World War.¹¹⁶ This second *designatum* comprises an easily identifiable vision of the imagined political world, present behind the words. The discourse in which fascism was one of the leading concepts in the political vocabulary became one of the determinants of the political evolution of Poland's greatest political camp of the time.¹¹⁷ Approached in normative categories, for the local

¹¹⁶ Cf. Peretiatkowicz, *Państwo faszystowskie*, 8 and 23, resp.; also, *id.*, 'Faszyzm', [entry] in *Współczesna encyklopedia życia politycznego z uwzględnieniem życia gospodarczego. Podręczny informator dla czytelników gazet*, 3rd revised ed. (Poznań, 1931), 68–9. The earlier literature offers the view that there were no fascist parties, factions or formations in interwar Poland whatsoever, or they were unknown at all; for a classical approach, see Jerzy Holzer, *Mozaika polityczna II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa, 1974), 469; for a strongly biased version, cf. Bogumił Grott, *Dylematy polskiego nacjonalizmu. Powrót do tradycji czy przebudowa narodowego ducha* (Warszawa, 2014), 129–32, 209–11. A scholar specialising in Polish-Italian relations takes a different view: "For the propagation of Italian fascism's models, the 'merits' of the National Democracy and the entire Polish Right outpaced those of all the Italian institutions taken together", Stanisław Sierpowski, 'Miejsce faszyzmu w polsko-włoskich stosunkach kulturalnych okresu międzywojennego', in *id.*, *Studia z historii Włoch XX wieku* (Poznań, 2012), 185; *id.*, *Stosunki polsko-włoskie w latach 1918–1940* (Warszawa, 1974), 109–11.

¹¹⁷ "Equal as to greatness but reverse as to direction is the revival of Italy. Mussolini and fascism is no miracle or coincidence but a necessity that has been prepared by Italian nationalists for the last fifty years. As is known, the whole of Mussolini's staff, since the beginning of their fascist labour, are nationalists. Like Italy used to be, Poland is presently possessed by masonry and Jews, chopped by the socialists into classes fighting each other, shaken by the movements of communism. The nationalists in Poland are getting organised and working for a bright and happy future of the nation. Their labour must be done at an accelerated pace, for Poland has heavy geographical conditions, and the invasion of the nation's enemies is stronger here than it was in Italy. Yet, a nation young and healthy, once it recognised the affair, is capable of prevailing over all the evil forces", thus, the Italian fascism is evoked as the only positive instance of the development of nationalism in Europe in one of the last programme brochures of ZLN before the organisation's dissolution in 1928, entitled *Nacjonalizm* (Warszawa, 1927), 15.

right-wingers fascism appeared to be an ideal of the new political order, the main objective of their worldview quests.¹¹⁸ In particular, the young generation of nationalists found most completely its ideals in the Italian models; in the linguistic world of the young people, there was no difference between ‘active nationalism’ and ‘fascism’. As Wojciech Wasiutyński, an eminent National Democratic publicist in interwar Poland (member of the Camp of Great Poland, National Party, later National Radical Camp [ONR] and National Radical Movement [RNR]-‘Falanga’) recollected, not overly exaggeratedly, “A significant part of the young Polish generation entered the circle of fascist influence”.¹¹⁹

Between these two vectors, one has to notice the dynamism of creation and linguistic anchoring of the concept of ‘fascism’ as a term illustrating the fundamental change in Polish political culture: be it through analysis of the mechanisms of cultural translations, transfers and borrowings between different contexts, or through local attempts at elaborating a vernacular meaning of the concept in question. As is indicated by the (only slightly mentioned herein) history of the concept of ‘fascism’ in the leftist discourse, a single term may be used to describe highly different ideas and values and, moreover, carry contradicting language connotations. Consequently, it has to be noted that politicisation and ideologisation of the concept of fascism took place in the period under discussion.¹²⁰ Insofar as for left-wing commentators ‘fascism’ usually meant a complete negation of democracy, an attempt at civic freedoms and liberties, violence and terror in politics, and dictatorship as a form of power-wielding, for most of the rightist authors, the attitude toward the concept was like a litmus

¹¹⁸ These early fascinations are explained somewhat differently in Roman Wapiński, ‘Kształtowanie się w Polsce w latach 1922–1939 poglądów na ruchy faszystowskie w Europie’, *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis Studia nad Faszyzmem i Zbrodniami Hitlerowskimi*, dclxxxvii, 9 (1985), 98, and in Kawalec, *Narodowa Demokracja wobec faszyzmu 1922–1939*, 153–72.

¹¹⁹ Wojciech Wasiutyński, *Prawą stroną labiryntu. Fragmenty wspomnień*, ed. by Wojciech Turek, with an introduction by Wiesław Walendziak (Gdańsk, 1996), 144. Elsewhere in the book, he writes: “I cannot remember when it was that I first heard about fascism. I was twelve years of age then, at the utmost. The impression was so deep that I grabbed a self-study guide to the Italian language, by Koniński, and studied it thoroughly” (p. 142).

¹²⁰ Also, cf. Peretiatkovicz, ‘Faszyzm’.

paper testing a positive approach to 'nation'.¹²¹ Among the opinions discussed herein, there is a trait related to a permanent ambivalence that countered the positive image of the Italian phenomenon: the tension between the local and universal fascism was the strongest when it came to the 'Jewish question'. This is quite a basic premise for the later evolution of Polish nationalism, with its fascination with the German Nazi, or Hitlerite, system.¹²²

Analysis of the mentions and pieces of information as well as larger forms and communication acts in the public discourse concerning the system that was getting formed in Italy, and its ideological manifestations, makes one conclude that the connotations of the concept of 'fascism' in early Polish right-wing discourse were unambiguously positive. Critical opinions, scarce and peripheral to the discourse, did not focus on emphasising the errors or wrong developmental directions of fascism: more often than not, they pointed to (usually, narrow or very narrow) aspects of systemic/constitutional solutions which were perceived in negative or ambivalent terms. The critics would usually accept that fascism was an originally Italian creation, and any of its local transplants would appear inefficient, at the end of the day. Weirdly enough, this type of criticism of fascism primarily affected its local imitations, those 'Polish fascists'. Those who made one more step forward in this criticism, seeing an element of threat in fascism, were de facto outside the nationalist camp.¹²³ All this incites

¹²¹ One of Polish apologists of fascism complained about the lack of knowledge on the 'true face of the Italian phenomenon': "Unfortunately, the opinion was even not sufficiently aware ... the reptilian correspondences sent to Poland cast slanders at the fascist government, since the essence of fascism was unknown in Poland", A. Wysocki, 'Nauka i literatura. O faszyzmie', *Mysł Narodowa*, 23 (29 May 1926), 333.

¹²² Aleksander Hertz, one of the first scholars who explored Polish totalitarian movements, regarded the Camp of Great Poland in 1930s as a local, Polish version of Hitlerism.

¹²³ Cf. Bolesław Koskowski, *Chcicie rozwoju czy przewrotu? Czyli o kilku błędach prof. Peretiatkowicza oraz o złej doktrynie wszelkich radykalistów* (Warszawa, 1929). One of the chief publicists of the bourgeois periodical *Kurier Warszawski*, which sympathised with the National Democracy, and a ZLN senator in 1922–7, criticised in this collection of essays the views of Polish followers of authoritarian solutions, giving the views of A. Peretiatkowicz as an example. Since the late 1920s, Koskowski was outside the National Democratic camp. A similar, perhaps even more spectacular, evolution was the case with Irena Pannenkowa; cf. *ead.*, *Od Cezara do Wilhelma. Studium o cezaryzmie* (Warszawa, 1929), esp. 51–81. Pannenkowa sympathised

the conclusion that the emerging system and ideological project in Italy were becoming, roughly since the earliest 1920s, the central point of reference for the right-wing discourse in Poland, and the primary object of ideological pilgrimage – whereas the differences between individual opinions or comments expressed not so much a distanced or critical approach as the whole array of approving attitudes toward the ‘modern national system’ taking shape in Italy. Visible in the socio-political rightist discourse is also how far-reaching the authors’ projections and ideas were with respect to fascism – actually, an ‘imagined fascism’ and its potential, desired and postulated functions and roles in the local conditions.

By the mid-1920s, imagined fascism started to revive, permeate, and bond together the right-wing discourse’s whole imaginative and conceptual structure. A similar rhetorical mechanism appeared for the figure of Mussolini, which in the rightist discourse of the twenties rapidly became emblematic of a new-type politician. Consequently, the value and modernity of political culture was evaluated in terms of the potential appearance of a ‘local Mussolini’. The presentation, attempts to understand and interpret Italian fascism were accompanied throughout by work on the elaboration of the ‘native’ concept of fascism. Most of the evocations were correlated with one’s own vision of development of the political scene, the role of the nationalist movement as promoted by the given author, whereas the selected material, the examples referred to and their appropriate interpretation were basically meant to confirm the author’s own worldview. Hence, the conceptualisation of fascism, its understanding and description were all informed by the given author’s outlook. Such a type of presentation of Italian fascism implied categorisation of the actors of the Italian politics depending on whether they fulfilled the ideological expectations of the author dealing with them or not. Also, there is no doubt

with the Christian Democracy in the 1930s; in 1937, she joined the managing team of the Labour Party [Stronnictwo Pracy]. For more on this particular current within the National Democracy, see Krzysztof Kawalec, ‘Nurt liberalny w myśli politycznej Narodowej Demokracji. Margines bez znaczenia, element tożsamości czy zablokowana ścieżka rozwoju’, in Jolanta Żyndul (ed.), *Parlamentaryzm – konserwatyzm – nacjonalizm. Sefer jowel. Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Szymonowi Rudnickiemu* (Warszawa, 2010), 45–52. R. Rybarski took a mediocre position in this dispute: his initial enthusiasm for fascist Italy grew more and more critical with time; cf. Rybarski, ‘O dyktaturach’, *Myśl Narodowa*, 21 (1 Oct. 1927), 381–2.

that the further evolution of Polish nationalism and, consequently, the right-wing discourse dominated by it indicated that in terms of the latter mentioned universal *designatum* and in its local format, fascism would mean another, higher stage of the development of the local nationalist movement. Therefore, it is not misuse to conclude that the victory of fascism and the shape the concept eventually took was resolutely reflected in the political discourse and on the political area when the Camp of Great Poland was getting formed.¹²⁴ This ‘fascism’, in its second universal meaning – as a potential and need for comprehensive regulation of all the aspects of social life will momentarily resound in its various reveals and configurations as part of the right-wing discourse until the end of interwar Poland.¹²⁵

As is demonstrated based on the above-quoted examples, the evolutionary direction of the given concept, its overgrowing with new meanings, stands, above all, for its constant updating, which occurs when the creators and organisers of discourse take over specific ideas and models. Or when they come across problems that are integral for the local socio-political discourse and require being named, specified, and absorbed. One such example is the role and importance of the phantasmatic ‘Jews’ and ‘the Jewish question’.¹²⁶ Alteration in the *designatum* seems to be the best graspable on the level of three types of utterance: (i) direct borrowings and receptions, as in Mussolini’s explanations of the ‘doctrine of fascism’¹²⁷ and

¹²⁴ In this spirit, see Antony Polonsky, ‘Roman Dmowski and Italian Fascism’, in R.J. Bullen, H. Pogge von Strandmann, and A.B. Polonsky (eds), *Ideas into Politics. Aspects of European History 1880–1950* (Sydney–Totowa, 1984), 132–5. Cf. Henryk Rolicki [Tadeusz Gluziński], *Cele i drogi propagandy wywrotowej* (Poznań, 1927), 62–3. The future founder of the National Radical Camp [ONR] regarded Italian fascism as “the only invigorating breeze in Europe”, 62–3.

¹²⁵ Cf. Trees, “Recepcja faszyzmu”, 87–97.

¹²⁶ Adolf Nowaczyński’s journalistic writing is the most expressive case in point: for him, the solution of the ‘Jewish question’ was one of the very basic programme tasks of modern nationalism. The fascist regime’s initial lack of interest in these issues resulted in a weaker fascination with Italy, to the benefit of the Third Reich; see Adolf Nowaczyński, *Z bojów Adolfa Nowaczyńskiego. Wybór źródeł*, ii: *W Regio Sanatorum (1926–1933)*, ed. by Arkadiusz Meller and Sebastian Kosiorowski (Warszawa, 2016); and, primarily, *id.*, *Z bojów Adolfa Nowaczyńskiego. Wybór źródeł*, iii: *W cieniu swastyki (1932–1934)* (Warszawa, 2018).

¹²⁷ Along with the numerous speeches or addresses reprinted *in extenso* by the press, the first comprehensive exposition of the views of Benito Mussolini is

their extensive discussions, interviews with Italian fascist dignitaries, activists, and journalists, excerpts from speeches of fascist politicians or their press publications – or, the translations of the *Giovanezza*, the anthem of Italian fascist youth organisation, as ‘taken over’ by various nationalist formations (the All-Polish Youth among them); (ii) diverse interventions aimed at redefining or expanding the concept by integrating new meanings against those initially known; and, (iii) attempts to create new concepts or merely clarifications, given the sense of strangeness or deep incomprehensibility of concepts in use. The model of Italian fascism, to stick to our example, incited political imagination and inspired multiple attempts – precisely because it challenged the thitherto-‘domesticated’ limits of polity, posed a challenge for the future, and seemed to be an efficient overall response. By all indications, the evolution of the concept of ‘fascism’ may be the key to understand the very phenomenon signified by it, and its presence in the culture and social language of the former half of the twentieth century. To an extent, such an evolution shows the mechanism of forgetting or tabooing the concept – or, of marginalising the problematic heritage of fascism, and of the role of the fascist idea, project, and mentality in Polish culture after the great trauma of the Second World War.

transl. Tristan Korecki

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