

Rethinking the Nature of Fascism

Comparative Perspectives

A. Costa Pinto

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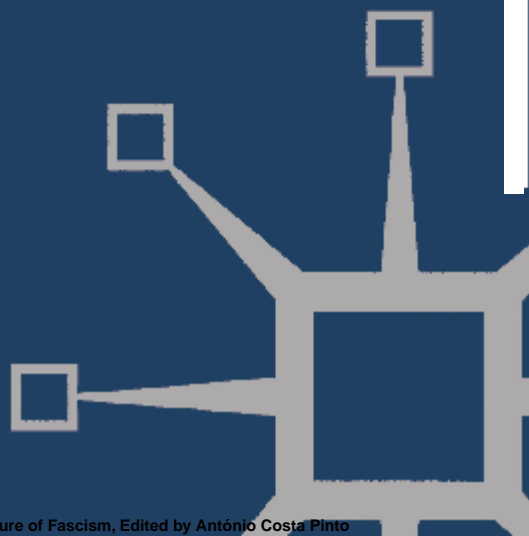
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Also by António Costa Pinto

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Rethinking the Nature of Fascism

Comparative Perspectives

Edited by

António Costa Pinto

*Professor of Modern European History and Politics,
University of Lisbon, Portugal*

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Editorial matter, selection, introduction and chapter 9

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Foreword © Stanley G. Payne 2011

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Foreword

Stanley G. Payne

The study of fascism has occasionally been likened to the historiography of such major developments as the French Revolution or the Reformation, even though such analogies are, in some respects, inappropriate since the influence of fascism was both more limited and more purely negative and destructive. However, they do serve to highlight the fact that fascism was a major historical development, and always one of the most slippery to deal with. In no other phenomenon of modern history has the issue of multiple ‘interpretations’ received so much attention—a diversity of analysis that is likely long to continue.¹ Although Roger Griffin, not inaccurately, posited a kind of limited consensus by the mid-1990s, unsurprisingly this has been rejected by some scholars.²

Broad new treatments of fascism will continue to appear, focused and structured in diverse ways: by concept, theme, phase, chronology, level of development, emphasis on national characteristics, reinterpretation of major aspects and frequently by synecdoche (taking the part for the whole). Not uncommon are critiques that do not propose a new overarching interpretation but which point out pitfalls in the existing approaches and suggestions for analytic improvement—a good example of this is provided by Michel Dobry’s study in the present volume. There will be no end to this discussion, since the study of fascism will remain primarily in the hands of ‘idiographic’ historians who will never relinquish their grasp of the particular, while ‘nomothetic’ scholars will not want for further critical theoretical perspectives.

The consequence will be that full consensus is not likely to be achieved in the near future. It is important always to repeat that—except for Italy—fascism was never a ‘thing’ or an empirical object, and that it can only be posited and exploited as a model or an ideal-type since ‘fascism’ never really existed as a discrete entity. This still does not seem to be fully grasped by many commentators.

What seem to be the principal problems or lacunae in the study of fascism at this point in the twenty-first century? Although a great deal has been accomplished during the past 40 years, many issues remain. The conclusion that the various fascist movements did indeed possess ideologies has been conceded by many analysts for some time. It is still pointed out that ideological contradictions were numerous, but that in

no way obviates the preceding conclusion since few ideologies are bereft of contradictions and virtually all students of fascism have recognized that, if anything, the genus registered even more contradictions than most radical movements.

Systematic study of ideology has nonetheless been rare; the leading exception being A. James Gregor's *The Ideology of Fascism*.³ The chief defect of this work is that it synthesizes fascist ideology much more completely than any fascist ideologue ever did, so that it has always stood not merely as the leading individual study of fascist ideology, but also as the only truly systematic ideology of fascism. It scarcely has competitors dealing with other fascist movements, since inclusive and systematic ideological study remains, at least, a partial lacuna.

It has also, to some extent, come to be accepted that fascist movements were revolutionary, so the title of George L. Mosse's posthumous *The Fascist Revolution* no longer came as a surprise in 1999.⁴ As Griffin has pointed out in the present volume, it is further appreciated by many specialists that the key revolution of fascism was neither political nor socio-economic but, in the Mossean presentation, cultural or, in Emilio Gentile's felicitous term, 'anthropological'. Here again the insights have rarely been systematized, so that complete studies of the character of fascist revolutionism remain wanting.

During the past 20 years, more has been achieved in the area of fascist culture than in any other major subfield. The prophet was indeed George L. Mosse, as Griffin has pointed out so well, although it was not until the general 'cultural turn' of historiography in the 1980s that any significant number of scholars was willing to follow him. Mosse's influence was also limited—in part by his style of exposition, which was full of insights but which was never completely systematic and never attempted to showcase a specific general theory.

Cultural historians of the past 20 years have added any number of case studies, although these have sometimes come at a significant price as they have involved not merely the study of the aesthetics of fascism but in some cases have tended to reduce fascism simply to the level of aesthetics—as Gentile has warned. The key work in this area, which has raised the study of fascist culture to a higher level, is Griffin's *Modernism and Fascism*.⁵ This book completes the case for fascist modernism, but also highlights the need to carry such research into other fascist movements.

More work is still appearing rapidly in this subfield—particularly with regard to the two principal cases—but there is still very little study of fascism within modern ideologies in general from the eighteenth century

onward. Earlier works, such as Mosse's 'Fascism and the French Revolution' and Lawrence Birken's, *Hitler as Philosopher*, have few followers despite all the criticism of the Enlightenment in recent years.⁶

The same may be said for attempts to situate fascism within the broad genus of the nationalisms that have received so much attention. Was there really something unique about fascist nationalism? Was it simply more 'extreme' than other nationalisms? Did it harbour an inherent tendency toward 'genocide'—as Aristotle Kallis argues—stemming first from what Mark Neocleous has termed the 'xenophobic' tendencies of nationalism? Was the indubitably genocidal nationalism of the Young Turks (CUP—Committee of Union and Progress) also in some way 'fascist'?

The time has also come for a new look at fascism and the political right. There has been a great deal of publication in this area but, once more, little systematic study. A recent work, Hermann Beck's *The Fateful Alliance*, is an indication of the considerable amount of research and analysis that remains to be done in this area.⁷ Fascism was a movement more of the 'right' than the 'left' because of its stress on nationalism and inequality, but of course it was not at all a movement of the right in the standard sense.

All studies emphasize the importance of war and violence, yet once more careful and complete investigation is usually lacking. The anecdotal references that frequently appear are of little use since in most cases they are already well known. What exactly was the presentation and evaluation of violence in fascist doctrine? I am aware of no systematic investigation—even with regard to the principal cases. It was awkward even for a fascist-type movement to argue that violence itself was an unalloyed virtue, and so that presentation was usually rather more complex. The situation with regard to war was clearer and simpler on the doctrinal level, but what was the role of war in politics, planning, image presentation and propaganda, where the issues were not so simple? In this regard, as in others, it is important to pay attention to the lesser fascisms as well. Finally, the fundamental issue of fascism and the military has received only a limited amount of attention, but it merits more.

What of the relationship between fascism and communism and of their similarities and differences? What does this tell the analyst about fascism? The more one looks into this issue, the more complex it becomes. It has been approached in two different ways. One is the history of the relations between the two movements, sometimes subsumed under the rubric of 'European civil war'; the other is the 'comparison approach', which seeks—with varying degrees of success—to compare and contrast.⁸ A very great deal of work remains to be done in this area.

The problem of fascism and religion has sometimes been overlooked, although John Pollard has attempted to resituate this issue in his helpful article. This needs to be analysed within a broader framework of church-state relations in modern polities, where the difference from communist regimes becomes apparent. Despite their development of the terminology, fascist regimes did not adopt the totalitarian approach that sought the direct subjection and control of the churches under a militantly atheist system. To some extent, they followed the approach of rightist authoritarian regimes, often fudging the issue of religious identity and seeking rather to appropriate religion for their own purposes and to channel it: religious affiliation and party membership were almost always allowed to overlap. This was a different project from that of the rightist authoritarian regimes, which to a much greater degree respected the autonomy of the churches and provided yet another example of the differences between Germany and other fascist states or movements. It is also a further instance of the reversal of revolutionary priorities between the Soviet Union and fascist states.

Was there a 'fascist economics'? While Norman Kogan rejected the concept 40 years ago, analytically the matter is not quite so simple. It would refer to comparative systems of nationalist corporatism or nationalist socialism, such systems having numerous political and structural points in common, so that it is analytically coherent to treat them as a distinct subset of economic policies.

Among the secondary European cases, that of Spain is by far the best studied, while the East European examples remain the most problematic since few Western scholars have the linguistic range to be able to carry out new work on them. However, by the same token the greatest rewards for new research probably lie in this area.

It becomes increasingly difficult to present new synthetic analysis of generic fascism due to the exponential increase in the literature. However, this also stems from the mesmerizing effect of National Socialism, since nothing else in fascism can remotely compare with its historical significance. As indicated above, it remains extremely important to avoid synecdoche in fascist studies as elsewhere. If there is no willingness to do so, it would be better to cease to presume to speak of generic fascism. This has usually been the central analytic problem—aside from the sheer complexity of trying to get things right—and it is likely to remain so in the future.

The study of fascism has long presented probably the most severe problem in comparative historiography. It is not surprising that all recent efforts to contribute to the general theory or model consist in varying forms of analytic commentaries rather than integrated historical

accounts. The ‘new consensus’ of the 1990s may have been limited indeed, but it has only been extended and/or modified in specific ways and certainly not replaced. Pointing out that fascist movements went through a series of phases or sequences does not present a new paradigm: new studies extend the plateau achieved in the late twentieth century, but thus far do not transcend it.

Significant new achievement will rest on the results of noteworthy new research, on the willingness to work in the broadest comparative context, and to eschew synecdoche and to move beyond standard emphases into new areas and new analytic themes.

Notes

1. R. Griffin and M. Feldman’s five-volume, *Fascism*, London, 2004, is destined to long remain the classic and most inclusive anthology.
2. R. Griffin, ed., *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*, London, 1998, especially pp. 1–22.
3. J. Gregor, *The Ideology of Fascism*, New York, 1969.
4. G. L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism*, New York, 1999.
5. R. Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a New Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, London, 2007.
6. G. L. Mosse, ‘Fascism and the French Revolution’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 1, 1989, pp. 5–26, subsequently reprinted in Mosse, *Fascist Revolution*, pp. 69–93; L. Birken, *Hitler as Philosopher: Remnants of the Enlightenment in National Socialism*, Westport, 1995.
7. H. Beck, *The Fateful Alliance: German Conservatives and Nazis in 1933. The Machtergreifung in a New Light*, Oxford, 2008.
8. Perhaps the best-known work is Ernst Nolte’s *Der Europäische Bürgerkrieg, 1917–1945: Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus*, Frankfurt, 1987, although it is more a parallel account and a history of mutual relations than a comparative history. The concept of ‘European civil war’ is developed more effectively—if briefly—by E. Traverso, *A ferro e fuoco: la guerra civile europea, 1914–1915*, Bologna, 2007. There is of course a sizeable literature in German, Russian and English on relations between Germany and the Soviet Union, and a much briefer literature—mainly in Italian—on relations between Fascist Italy and the Soviet Union. Achievements of the comparative approach have been somewhat limited. By far the best effort is that of R. Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler’s Germany, Stalin’s Russia*, New York, 2004. By contrast, I. Kershaw and M. Lewin, *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison*, Cambridge, 1997, consists largely of separate studies of aspects of each regime.

Acknowledgments

This book is the result of an informal working group on fascism that meets regularly in the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon. The group has always brought together political scientists and historians, and the dialogue between them has not always been easy.¹ Here, the challenge was to rethink the study of fascism 40 years after the publication of Stuart Woolf's *The Nature of Fascism*.

The contributors to this volume met in Lisbon to participate in a workshop entitled 'The nature of fascism 40 years on', at which the first version of the chapters published here were discussed. The editor would like to thank Stuart Woolf and Adrian Lyttelton for their participation and for providing a bridge between the two books, and Stanley G. Payne, who followed closely the labours of the workshop, despite being unable to attend, for his foreword. The editor would also like to thank the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon and the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (grant PTDC/HAH/65818/2006) for their generous support, and Stewart Lloyd-Jones for editing the texts ready for publication.

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Note

1. A previous publication resulting from the work of this group is A. C. Pinto, R. Eatwell and S. U. Larsen, eds, *Charisma and Fascism in Interwar Europe*, London, 2007.

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John Pollard was educated at the universities of Cambridge and Reading. He is a fellow in history at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and professor emeritus of modern European history at Anglia Ruskin University. He has published extensively on Catholicism, the history of modern Italy and the papacy. His publications include *The Vatican and Italian Fascism, 1929–1932* (1985), *Money and the Rise of the Modern Papacy: Financing the Vatican, 1850–1950* (2005) and *Catholicism in Modern Italy: Religion, Society and Politics since 1861* (2008).

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1

Introduction: Fascism and the Other ‘-isms’

António Costa Pinto

This book revisits the major themes of research into, and interpretation of, the nature of fascism that have been developed since the 1970s. European fascism continues to attract a considerable degree of attention, as the continuous publication on theme testifies. During the past 20 years the comparative study of fascism has concentrated increasingly on its ideological and cultural dimensions, at times becoming ‘ideology-centred’. We may even say that the analysis of so-called ‘generic fascism’ has moved from a ‘sociological’ to a more ‘political’ perspective, giving both ideology and culture much more importance than was previously the case. On the other hand, this area has become more restricted in disciplinary terms, with historians clearly dominating over sociologists and political scientists.

When, in 1969, the British historian Stuart Woolf published, under the title *The Nature of Fascism*, a balance of the main research tendencies concerning fascism, the situation within the social sciences was very different; indeed, so much so that a simple description of his main headings highlights the difference.¹ The first part of the book’s four parts (covering politics, society, economy and culture) was dominated by a blend of theories of totalitarianism and modernization; in the second some Marxist ‘class’ determinisms were very much present; the third part, which contained Tim Mason’s brilliant essay ‘The primacy of politics: politics and economics in National Socialist Germany’, was much more nuanced; while the fourth part was dominated by George L. Mosse’s pioneering ‘Fascism and culture’. The division between historians and political scientists was as clear then as it is today; however, the main turning point of the last decades was, without doubt, the cultural turn in fascist studies, which has helped refine earlier approaches and inspired new work.

As Stuart Woolf recognized in the 1960s, 'the basic division undoubtedly lay between the historians and the social scientists'.² However, despite this, he also noted that 'at least in the study of fascism, history provides more than the raw material for the elaborated model-building of the sociologists and political scientists, while the historians can but openly acknowledge their debt to the insights of concepts suggested by the social scientists'.³

During the last decades, the historiography of fascism has integrated not only contributions from political science, but also the historical research that eliminated, for good, the 'para-Marxist' 'economicist' approach that was dominant during the 1970s, and which did not do justice to the many perspectives on the autonomy of ideology in political and cultural change. Of course, many of the changes are also limited to reflect the impact of new social science paradigms and the emergence of more culturalist interpretations. The 'ideology versus political praxis and institutions' debate amongst 'fascistologists'—a debate that has already achieved parochial proportions—is still very much present in the field, as we shall see below.

The culturalist 'new consensus' on generic fascism that Roger Griffin saw in the late 1990s 'left many historians cold', and some of the cleavages are still very much present, as we shall clearly see in this book.⁴ However, the emergence of new themes for research, such as that of symbolic and political mobilization, of violence and genocide, of women or of the relationship between fascism and religion, has been important. As Adrian Lyttelton notes in his conclusion, 'the greatest advance [in the last decades] has certainly come from taking Fascist values and ideology seriously'. New analytical models, such as those of gender or of 'political religion', have also enriched the most recent research and it is interesting to note that all these themes are absent in *The Nature of Fascism*.

Although historians dominate current research, it is likely they will continue to be influenced by other social science disciplines in the future. For example, Juan J. Linz may be the political scientist who has left the biggest mark on the historiography of fascism in recent decades, and Michael Mann's *Fascists* represents a welcome return from the best traditions of comparative historical sociology towards the analysis of fascism and its role in the crises and collapse of democracy.⁵

As Stein Larsen notes in the first chapter of this book, 'there are important aspects in the empirical development of fascism that are analytically interesting without having much to do with "fascism" as such. Therefore, we shall welcome students studying fascism who are

theoretically oriented towards other fields of study.’ On the other hand, authoritarianism is again an important field of study, particularly within political science. After the so-called ‘third wave’ of democratization at the end of the twentieth century had significantly increased the number of democracies in the world, the survival of many of the dictatorships based both in the old communist world and in traditionalist and anti-communist North Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and the emergence of new dictatorial regimes, have had an important impact.

Taking as starting point the dictatorships that have emerged since the beginning of the twentieth century—mainly those that were institutionalized after 1945—social science literature has returned to the big question of the factors that led to the survival and downfall of the dictatorships and dictators, which the fascist regimes did not escape. These included the regimes’ capacity to distribute resources, divisions within the power coalitions, the political institutions of the dictatorships and the cost-benefit analysis of the rebellions; classic themes of the rational choice approach finally invade the theme.⁶

As another ‘-ism’ of ideologies and political regimes, comparison should not be confined just to phenomena labelled ‘fascist’ and, as we shall see below, the authors sometimes disagree both in theoretical and methodological terms, offering readers the chance to engage in the debate. As Stanley G. Payne notes in his foreword, ‘in no other phenomenon of modern history has the issue of multiple “interpretations” received so much attention—as with fascism—a diversity of analysis that is likely long to continue’. Highlighting existing lacunae and suggesting new research routes, Payne claims that significant new achievements will depend on the results of noteworthy new research and on the willingness to work in the broadest comparative context.

* * *

This book is divided into two parts. The first part, ‘Fascism and the Social Sciences’, makes a global critical assessment of the interpretations of and research into fascism. The political scientists, Stein Larsen and Michel Dobry, are, each in their own fashion, critics of the ‘genetic approach’ and culturalism in fascist studies, stressing that fascism, just as any other subject being studied in the social sciences, needs theoretical and methodological approaches that are not so very different from those used in the study of other movements and political regimes.

Larsen, in his ‘Decomposition and Recomposition of Theories: How to Arrive at Useful Ideas Explaining Fascism’, provides us with an

excellent introduction into how fascism has been analysed within the social sciences, noting research models that have been used in the past and, especially, introducing us to a very Popperian direction for studies towards 'emergence' as an analytical concept. He writes, 'There are two reasons for the need for a comprehensive reorientation of research on comparative fascism. The first is the need to abandon the genetic approach and provide an opening for emergence thinking.' It is also very true that there are important aspects in the empirical development of fascism that are analytically interesting without having much to do with 'fascism' as such. Therefore, 'we shall welcome students studying fascism who are theoretically oriented towards other fields of study'. We must also encourage scholars of fascism to move beyond their traditional realm and work on comparable matters that may be theoretically relevant for obtaining an understanding of their 'terrain' in an explanation of fascism.

Dobry, in his chapter provocatively entitled 'Desperately Seeking "Generic Fascism": Some Discordant Thoughts on the Academic Recycling of Indigenous Categories', utilizes case studies on the debates surrounding French fascism to criticize a 'classificatory approach' that is so 'essentialist' that it separates fascism from all other movements and right-wing authoritarian regimes and blocks its analysis. Much of the debate over the existence or non-existence of fascism in France is dominated by this essentialist paradigm, which is based on '*a priori* classification' to include and exclude from fascism many of the radical right movements of the interwar years and, based on this 'finality' perspective, to condition the outcome so that 'social conservatism translates, or may translate, into an authoritarian orientation which ultimately leads to the establishment of authoritarian regimes, while fascism on the other hand, is compelled by its very "nature" to adopt a "revolutionary" orientation, leading inevitably to the establishment of "totalitarian" systems'. Much of Dobry's chapter is dedicated to the deconstruction of this classificatory approach that continues even today, and which 'treats fascism as a species apart, endowed with a radically different "nature" or "essence" from that of other authoritarian movements, and more specifically movements of the radical, conservative or extreme right'.

The alternative for Dobry would be to 'bring the category or concept of fascism back home, that is, back to the situations or "contexts" in which political actors actually used it, back to the struggles in which they had to define others as well as define themselves': in other words, to 'think in relational terms', to use the comparative method seriously, leading to the 'methodological normalization of these phenomenon'.

Both Larsen and Dobry are critics of some of the dimensions that have characterized the debate over the nature of fascism, particularly that of the most recent ‘cultural approach’, which is well presented in the following essay. In fact, Roger Griffin’s contribution, ‘Fascism and Culture: A Mosse-Centric Meta-Narrative of how Fascist Studies Reinvented the Wheel’, is perhaps the most interesting defence of the ‘culturalism’ that has dominated many recent studies of fascism. Beginning with George L. Mosse’s pioneering chapter, ‘Fascism and Culture’, which appeared in Woolf’s book, Griffin traces the long journey in the reassessment of the significance of ‘ideology’ and of ‘culture’ in the study of fascism, which have often been rejected or underestimated in comparative studies.

It may seem strange at the beginning of the twenty-first century that there are no twentieth-century European history manuals that do not stress the central role of the great ‘-ism’ ideologies in the political mobilizations of the time; however, the truth is that this process was very gradual. The hegemony of some variants of Marxism within the social sciences was certainly responsible for part of this blockage, as was the extreme politicization of research in some national historiographies. However, a diffuse ‘rational choice’ *avant la lettre* certainly has its place.

Griffin, who has been an important author in the area since publishing his comparative study in 1991, provides a historiographic overview of this slow and tortuous journey, remaining in the company of Mosse’s influence.⁷ He shows how ‘comparative fascist studies underwent a transformation to the point where all but a few recidivist Marxists deny that at the heart of interwar fascism lay the revolutionary agenda of purging the existing nation of decadence and creating a new total culture’. While it is clear that it ‘will continue to be historians who retain a profound scepticism about the culturalist approach’, the truth is that this has finally entered full maturity as a heuristic approach.

The second part of the book introduces the new themes and analytical approaches that have marked recent years. Kevin Passmore’s contribution, ‘Theories of Fascism: A Critique from the Perspective of Women’s and Gender History’, takes seriously the challenge of the preceding chapters that ‘we must break the link between categorization and explanation’, with a model essay showing how the theorists of fascism must learn something from women’s and gender history.

Through his critique of some of the dimensions of the ‘political religion’ approach to fascism, particularly those that ‘use a gendered understanding of progress and mass psychology to make the political religion the core of fascism’, Passmore seeks to prove that the ideology of fascism has no ‘core’, and that ‘the history of fascism [is] played

out through the practices of a disunited movement, allying and opposing other movements in varying contexts'. He then tentatively suggests that women's and gender history—as exemplars of the historical method more generally—may help us conceptualize fascism differently, and indeed to rethink the notion of a 'theory' of fascism.

Independently of whether or not it is a form of 'political religion', fascism had to confront the dominant religions in Europe at the time, and John Pollard concentrates on some specific aspects of the interaction between fascism and religion that have been the subject of attention by historians in recent decades—the attitude of the leadership and membership of fascist movements towards religion, the ways in which fascist regimes engaged in processes of 'sacralizing politics' and the appeal of fascism to Christians: in particular, the phenomenon of 'clerical fascism'.

Whatever the beliefs of individual members and leaders, the major interwar fascist movements and regimes increasingly presented themselves as an alternative religion in order to give greater emotional appeal and force to their core ideas: the state and the nation in Italian Fascism and race in National Socialism. This process of 'sacralization of politics' is also discernible in 'lesser' fascisms, such as the Romanian Iron Guard/Legion of the Archangel Michael, which he also examines.

The two following contributions tackle different dimension of the relationship between fascism, ideology and violence. Roger Eatwell's 'Ideology, Propaganda, Violence and the Rise of Fascism', deals with fascism's ascension within two broad frameworks: he seeks to show fascist ideology was especially sophisticated in terms of its views concerning propaganda and mass persuasion, seeking to deploy a variety of other themes and selective appeals. Secondly, while fascists saw violence as an important part of their armoury in the quest for power, both ideological and tactical conceptions of violence owed more to rationality than nihilism or religious fanaticism. He takes examples from the two countries in which major fascist movements emerged—Germany and Italy—with brief comparisons with two countries in which fascism remained a relatively marginal political force—Britain and France—although, in the latter, fascism enjoyed a notable cultural presence, and France has even been viewed as the seedbed of fascist ideology. He concludes by stressing that 'fascism is better seen as a political rather than cultural movement [...] whose organization and tactics need to figure prominently in both ideological analyses of "the nature of fascism" and more concrete analyses of why fascism succeeded, and failed, in specific national contexts'.

Para-militarism, as Michael Mann stresses, is both a key fascist value and an organizational form, and in recent years the discussion on the brutalization of politics after the First World War has been a central theme in research on interwar Europe.⁸ This issue was highlighted for the first time by Mosse before being developed by other scholars. In these studies, the origins of the brutalization of politics was related to the psychological and social impact of the use of arms and of life in the trenches and with mass mobilization caused by war. These reflections had two very important effects: they reopened the discussion on political violence, and gave it a place in international historiography. They also gave impetus to the reconsideration of the relationship between the birth of fascism and the presence of the languages and practices of violence during the interwar period.

Guilia Albanese's contribution, 'Political Violence and Institutional Crisis in Interwar Southern Europe', analyses the relationship between the development of various kinds of political violence, the spread of discourses favouring dictatorship and the crisis and fall of the so-called liberal institutions, using Italy, Spain and Portugal during the 1920s as case studies. In his introduction to *European Fascism*, Stuart Woolf identified a distinction between the fascisms of the 1920s and 1930s that still needs to be developed, and studying these three experiences of political violence and fascist regimes can fill the gap by analysing how political violence linked these two phases.

In the following chapter, 'Ruling Elites, Political Institutions and Decision-Making in Fascist-Era Dictatorships: Comparative Perspectives', the editor of this book explores an underdeveloped area in the study of fascism: the structure of power. The old and rich tradition of elite studies can tell us much about the structure and operation of political power in the dictatorships that were associated with fascism, whether through the characterization of the socio-professional structure or by the modes of political elite recruitment that express the extent of its rupture and/or continuity with the liberal regime, the type of leadership and the relative power of the political institutions in the new dictatorial system. Analysing four regimes associated with fascism (Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Franco's Spain, and Salazar's Portugal) from this perspective, the chapter investigates the dictator-cabinet-single party triarchy from a comparative perspective, concentrating mainly on the changes in the locus of decision-making power, to conclude that the most appropriate explanatory hypothesis for the variations within those dictatorships that have been associated with fascism is the presence or absence of a independent fascist party during the period of transition to a dictatorial

regime and, once the regime is institutionalized, the role of the fascists in the single party.

In the last essay, 'Fascism, "Licence" and Genocide: from the Chimera of Rebirth to the Authorization of Mass Murder', Aristotle Kallis deals with the complex relation between fascism and genocide. He initially asks if it is a simple coincidence that the escalation, radicalization, and extension of aggressive 'eliminationism' in interwar Europe unfolded in tandem with the rise and diffusion of fascism? His main thesis is that 'certain ideological and political facets of what we have come to associate with the concept of fascism did facilitate, unleash and radicalize the elimination of particular "others" in the particular circumstances of interwar and Second World War Europe. Yet, this happened only where a certain potential for elimination against such particular "others" already existed, be that in the form of cultural traditions, collective prejudices, and/or recent memories. This was the absolute limit to fascist agency, whether ideological, political or both.'

Kallis suggests three ways in which interwar fascism entered the process and made a crucial contribution to it. The first pertains to the long-term relevance of fascism to the evolution of nationalist debates and identity-building processes in each community. The second dimension of fascist agency rests on its nationalist discourses across the continent, nurturing and radicalizing the exclusionary lines *vis-à-vis* particular 'contestant others'. The third and final form of fascist agency refers again to legitimizing elimination, but on a far more concrete, radical and action-oriented basis. If generic fascist ideology gave intellectual ammunition to extreme utopias inherent in nation-statism, then Nazi Germany in particular provided a powerful model for the systematic elimination of the 'other(s)' on a comprehensive scale and in a lethally systematic, effective way. Nazi agency was both direct and oblique—unequivocally and directly authorizing eliminationist violence, then spearheading it, but also allowing it to happen or evolve by stating its *a priori* benevolent indifference.

Genocides will always need aggressive majorities mesmerized by utopias of wholeness and purity and imbued with allegedly justified hatred against some other group in their midst, but they only happen when, in specific historical circumstances, existential hatred and then violence appear not just necessary but also permissible as means to a seemingly desirable end—in this case, a perverse utopia of a national community living without 'others', in full and uncontested sovereignty.

In his conclusion, Adrian Lyttelton notes that 'rather than resting within the bounds of a new consensus, historians should work towards

a new, provisional synthesis which succeeds in integrating the cultural and ideological approach with the study of fascism as a new, emergent system of power, and a new sociological approach which studies the reception and conditioning of fascism by its host societies, while accepting that fascist movements were active and autonomous agents of change'. This is also the course this book suggests.

Notes

1. I have used the American edition, S. Woolf (ed.), *The Nature of Fascism*, New York, 1969.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
4. See Roger Eatwell's chapter (Ch. 7).
5. See J. J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, Boulder, 2000; and M. Mann, *Fascists*, Cambridge, 2004.
6. See, for example, J. Gandhi, *Political Institutions under Dictatorships*, Cambridge, 2008.
7. R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London, 1991.
8. M. Mann, *Fascists*, Cambridge, 2004.

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Part I

Fascism and the Social Sciences

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2

Decomposition and Recomposition of Theories: How to Arrive at Useful Ideas Explaining Fascism

Stein U. Larsen

The title of Eric Hobsbawm's book indicates how two new types of political movement—communism and fascism—were shaping the destiny of Europe and of the world during the twentieth century.¹ Therefore, it was and remains important for the social sciences (including history) to analyse and to seek to understand how these movements and ideologies came about, how they made their impact and what happened in their aftermath.

In contrast to scholarship on comparative fascism, in the study of global communism (an ideology that remains political powerful in some corners of the world) it was often seen as a positive movement, and when based on Marxist ideology it was, at times, also defined as a 'scientifically-based ideology' that sought to prove the necessity of the historical development of our societies. It was, in a sense, immunized from scholarly debate by Marxist philosophers and left-wing social scientists.

The Cold War prevented a sober and well-developed discussion of the definition and theory of communism as an ideology, as a political movement or as a regime. Too much was at stake when the Western powers faced the Soviet Union and communist states in Asia and elsewhere in the contest for world power. Today the situation is somewhat different: we now really have a great task ahead of us to strip off the former 'immunization' and attempt to study communism as a comparative, global and also politically destructive phenomenon.

Fascism, however, was mostly seen by scholars—even those within the regimes—as an alien and distasteful movement with an extremely provocative ideology directed at discrediting different people because of their supposed mental weaknesses or their race, while simultaneously

elevating others to the position of superior people with a hereditary right to rule over others. This attitude may have led to an underestimation of the strength or 'inner logic' of fascism as both a movement and an ideology. 'Enlightened' philosophers who declare fascism was not an ideology, but rather a movement of cynical people, overlook the immense ability of psychological mobilization, the intriguing logic of evolutionary thinking and the unmeasured success of utilizing the national feeling of unfairness with the Versailles Treaty that prevented the defeated nation from being 'one amongst equals'. We have much to learn from such a serious analysis of fascism, instead of just labelling it as a movement for fools and idiots.

These then are some introductory remarks to the following elaboration of certain aspects of the theoretical analysis of fascism proper.

Fascism: The definition and the theory

When facing a conference audience or a single colleague interested in fascism, one often experiences a smile emerging when offering a brief conceptualization of fascism. The contention of the impossibility of defining fascism is widespread and based on some wonderful idea that when 'the essence' of fascism is definitely discovered, one may develop the final definition in the form of a nice set of words that explain the concept. However, the perceived trouble in defining fascism in this semantic sense is the same in every field of social science—including history. There is no fully agreed and empirical 'safe' verbal formulation of concepts like democracy, feudalism, class or development, etc. Often mistakenly, this does not reflect emptiness or less success in new and fruitful findings within these areas of research, but less care about semantics and 'essentialist' definitions.

Definitions should, in my opinion, be regarded as nominal, temporal and, in a sense, fluid. This means we are left studying phenomena we only vaguely and intuitively view as belonging to the same class. However, the main thing is not the semantically correct wording of the phenomena under scrutiny, but the joint—often intuitively based—co-understanding of dealing with the same phenomena. Thus, we have to base our research on criteria of comparability that are not exact and which may even be changing during the project: a situation that textbooks on methodology describe as being 'not proper'.²

To meet this unsatisfactory situation some scholars of fascism have offered 'list-definitions' of varying length, comprising: the fascist 'minimum', the fascist 'average' and the fascist 'maximum'.³ The inclusion

and contents of such lists are of course not arbitrary, but there is not always a genuine theoretical rationale behind them—they merely serve as pedagogical devices to indicate that important topics should be included in the study of fascism. That is a reasonable goal, but it has to be understood only within that particular context. My opinion is that we can live very well with a situation in which we have not solved this definitional difficulty. I would also be happy to see an end to the amusement over the semantic question.

During recent times some of our colleagues have offered definitions—or rather ‘approaches’—to the understanding which, when discussed in the right way, may convey new insight in how to study fascism, but not to formulate theories. In 1991, Roger Griffin constructed a definition of fascism as ‘a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism’.⁴ He then lists a series of ten generic attributes that are important for the analysis of fascist ideology, where all seem necessary for its complete analysis. In 1992, Roger Eatwell formulated what he termed ‘a spectral-syncretic distillation of different phases of fascism’ in which he lists many and varied items belonging to fascism as a general phenomenon.⁵ What he seems to have in mind is to include the analysis of all aspects of fascism that are not restricted to the pre-1945 period, and to Europe—even if that is the main focus.

In 1995 Payne raised the idea of a ‘“retrodictive” theory’ of fascism.⁶ Robert Paxton told us that there was a connection between ideas (visceral feelings) and actions (‘they knew what they wanted’), and gave us a list of nine items characterizing fascism.⁷ These four colleagues, who have spent a long time publishing work on fascism, have all been ultimately caught up with the challenge of writing a closed sentence that can define fascism by providing lists of examples known from the literature, and have more or less explicitly ‘explained’ fascism only loosely, in the way I like to think about theories.

In contrast to these efforts, but also relying in the insight they offer, I find it very important to address the apparent confusion of the words ‘concept’ and ‘definition’. In my view, a concept is an expression that conveys one’s internal identification of a phenomenon. This concept can then be expressed in words, giving us a verbal (or formal) definition of it. The link between the phenomena itself—the internal identification and written definition of it—is well described by Ogden’s triangle.

A good correspondence between the three is thought to be important for human communication; however, the link within the triangle is not

mechanical—rather, it is based upon assumptions of coherence, which necessarily have to be premature. The importance for me is, therefore, to point to the difference between a written definition and the internalized idea of the phenomena—the concept. This difference is very important, but is not so easy to pin down in exact words.

In some works on fascism we see how the concept and theory of fascism is reduced in order to identify and explain it, for example through expressions of fascism as ‘the agent of capitalism’, ‘the middle class revolt’ or ‘the developmental dictatorship’. Behind these expressions we may find ideas of how fascism came about (theory) or what fascism comprises (definitions). In the first case, one may think the expressions can be reduced to a theoretical statement, just like this one—because of the inherent danger throughout the capitalist world many capitalists would support the fascist movements/leaders to protect their interests, thus making the fascism its ‘agent’. This is a theoretical statement because it explains why the capitalists supported fascism, but it is hardly a definition of fascism. This form of words may convey a theoretical explanation—‘substantial sections of the middle classes supported fascism and thus contributed to its success’—and the third case could be rewritten as ‘acceptance of fascist leadership and support for fascist movements were more common in societies that were trying to catch up with the more advanced and modernized societies that were geopolitically close to them’.

These three expressions are theoretical statements: they are not definitions of fascism. In textbooks on methodology, fascism would be ‘the dependent variable’ to be made operational within the theoretical statement.

If we confuse the idea of a ‘concept of fascism’ with a ‘definition’ or ‘theory’, then we will have difficulty assessing and discussing the results of scholarly research on fascism. We can of course have a concept of a ‘theory’ (how to explain fascism) and a concept of a ‘definition’ (how to identify fascism)—as well as internalized notions about them—but we have to separate them in the analysis, otherwise everything will be confused and we will not know what we agree or disagree about.

As stated above, I am not concerned about having an accepted semantic definition of the concept of fascism, and I am also not interested in a similar well-written sentence as the theoretical statement of ‘my theory’ of fascism. There will always be regress in defining primitive concepts in a sentence that will constitute the main hypothesis or theory. My contention is, therefore, that it is not possible, still less necessary, to devise an elegant sentence that will appear as *the* theory of fascism.

However, we do have to distinguish between ‘definition’ and ‘theory’ because they are two different logical entities, but we shall be content with sentences or formulas that are somewhat vague, not semantically ‘clean’ and which may be open to many misunderstandings. What really matters is the substantive findings they lead to.

The trained scholar in the field of research on fascism will immediately recognize the ‘novelty’, the ‘richness’ and the ‘wealth’ of the logical construction found when the research is presented and ready for critical scrutiny. A great deal of the debate on definition, concept and theory is therefore unimportant as long as it is not concerned with discovery and substantive content. A clever debate at a conference might win the audience with some appeal to elegance of a definition and a ‘theory’, but it can undermine gains made in the laborious research field.

One theory explaining different phenomena?

The movement-regime controversy and the importance of two different theories

In general, much of the present insight into fascism was available from the very beginning of fascism in European history. With the development of the fascist movements and regimes, contemporary understanding of them was soon revealed by intelligent observers (both supporters and opponents). Therefore, and as several students on fascism have admitted, postwar scholarship on the theory of fascism has largely been concerned with refining and reformulating the pre-1945 literature. Much new empirical research has been done that gives substance to earlier hypotheses on the growth of fascist movements as well as on the functioning of the regimes, however, the basic thinking of the roots/genesis, the public support, the strategy and the ideology versus political praxis, etc., were known from a very early stage. Modern ‘fascistology’ has done a lot to summarize, compare and synthesize former thinking, but a really new theoretical breakthrough has not taken place. Why is this the case? How shall we approach this problem—if indeed we perceive it to be a problem?

Part of the answer can be located by the comment that greeted the publication of Michael A. Ledeen’s interview with Renzo De Felice in 1975, in which De Felice highlighted the difference between the fascist regime and the fascist movement. While the latter was received with some ‘moderate understanding’, the former was treated with the usual

negative connotations. Giving a positive evaluation of aspects of the fascist movement was the main reason for the anger towards De Felice and the accusation that he had 'rehabilitated fascism'.⁸

Now the main point for me is not to engage in the 'rehabilitation debate', but to underline the need to separate the understanding of the concept of fascism into different components. I am aware of the difficulty of condemning fascism as a force of evil altogether, by splitting the understanding and theorizing over fascism into separate stages, acting through various policies and by looking at ideology different from praxis when conducting war. However, in the time perspective we may relax some of the tensions involved in this strategy when aiming at improving our theoretical tools. It is indeed important to combat neo-fascism and any political movement that may appear in the future resembling fascism, but we need—at least in different situations—to separate politics and analyses.

De Felice has a powerful argument when he says there was a qualitative difference between the fascist movement as it developed before 1925, and fascism as a regime in the subsequent years. During the fascist dictatorship the party and its auxiliary organizations remained in the background while the fascist state was the dynamic force in politics. I can see the important political argument that as soon as we start to dissolve fascism and analyse it as different components—not treating it as one, coherent evil—we may lose sight of some political realities. However, in my opinion, it is obvious that the behaviour of a newly formed fascist party, which seeks public support, is substantively different from its behaviour when in power. It is not difficult to locate individuals with sound and rational intentions who would join the party at the beginning, but who then either leave it or seek to change it when its ugly dictatorial nature becomes apparent.

The fascist party leaders in various national contexts may have had different ideas and perspectives as to their goals and actions before they became engulfed in the power struggle and before the impact of the assumptions many others cast upon them began to work. In the Italian context, the debate over the movement-regime controversy has some similarities to the German *Historikerstreit* (historians' debate) in which, among others, Nolte went so far in his efforts to 'explain' Hitler that he was thought to be 'excusing' the Nazi leader while making a comparison of Stalin's gulags and Nazi concentration camps. The delicate border between politics and social science and between 'explanation' and 'apology' is important to identify and defend when confronted with the expanding media intrusion in modern societies.

The strategy to analyse fascism in its different components—like the distinction between movement and regime—has important consequences, and I will suggest some alternatives in order to get a firmer grip on the analysis of those who supported the fascist movements in the different countries.

The micro-macro perspective in explanations of fascism

When reporting on voting studies of fascism the conclusion is often limited to very simple statements like ‘the success of the NSDAP [Nazi party] was an expression of the extremism of the centre’.⁹ However, this statement is so vague and open to various interpretations that it does very little to help with an understanding of the theoretical dynamics of, for example, Nazi voting. Let me, therefore, comment briefly on three levels of analysis and the possible conclusions to be drawn from them, thus stressing the need to come down to a more explicit form of theoretical explanations. By doing so I do not deny the importance of petit-bourgeois support for fascism, but I intend to break the theoretical analysis into its component parts, otherwise it would only stand in the form of a truism with an unclear theoretical status and a bewildering form of empirical support.¹⁰

Effects of homogeneous context: The Tingsten law

From many studies of the so-called neighbourhood effect, the impact of homogeneous or heterogeneous social context show how political impulses spread differently and with different speeds depending on both the impulse for and degree of homogeneity.¹¹ One of the earliest and most well-known theories concerning effects is the law of social gravitation—or the Tingsten law (named after the Swedish political scientist who formulated it as an explanation of the cumulative effect of voting for labour parties in working-class districts).¹² The greater the constituency’s working-class population, the higher the labour vote. The mechanisms involved were both the ease of spreading and accepting labour propaganda in a thickly labour populated area, the feeling of class solidarity feeling (to act in conformity) and the relevance of the labour party programme to the working class. However, the point was not to achieve a gradual (linear increase); rather it was the exponential growth of labour voting with the certain level of working-class density.

In Tingsten’s original formulation he did not explicitly state how the relationship would manifest itself, but Figure 2.1 demonstrates the logic of his theory. We shall imagine that in a constituency in which the

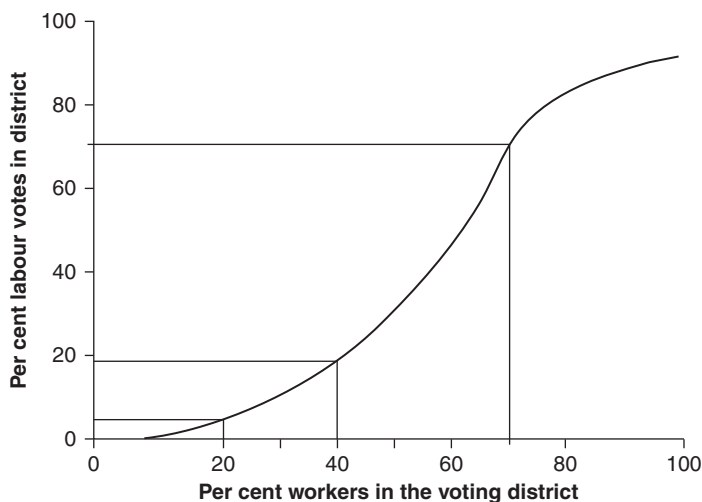


Figure 2.1 The Tingsten law of social gravitation

proportion of the working-class population is less than 10 per cent, workers' support for labour parties will be nil. One then sees a gradual increase in the labour party vote as the proportion of workers in the area increases, until suddenly the 'take-off' into exponential increase begins when workers comprise around 40 per cent of the constituency, with the curve flattening when the proportion reaches 70 per cent. There will always be some protest votes among workers who do not trust 'their' party. The clue here is the 'take-off point' and the gradient of the curve. As the constituency becomes increasingly homogeneous it suddenly sets off forces of an exponential kind. The Tingsten law, therefore, is not only a general statement claiming that the more workers there are in a constituency then the more votes there are for labour parties—which would be a simple statement of correlation—but a law about the specific effect of homogeneity on political outcomes under given neighbourhood conditions.

The curve corresponds to the formula y (per cent labour vote) = $a + bx^2$ (x being density/per cent workers, in the district). The figure is drawn to illustrate the following relationship: with less than 10 per cent workers the labour party gets no votes, when the proportion of workers increases from 20 to 40 per cent, the labour vote increases to 15 per cent. The exponential increase is exemplified when the proportion of workers increases from 40 to 70 per cent, which corresponds

to a 60 per cent increase in labour party votes (that is, 60 per cent: $15/20 < 60/20$). In the figure showing Schwackendorf in Angeln, with its 94.4 per cent, the German National Socialist Workers' Party (NSDAP—Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) was first.

The creation of a better theory of fascist support is to signal the importance of the local conditions from where fascism could begin and then specify under which mechanisms it took off with unprecedented success. There are two important 'classical studies' from Germany that examine this problem from two different perspectives.

The first assumes the ecological conditions are favourable for Nazism, the other how local Nazi strategies were important for winning power in the local town. The first is Rudolf Heberle's study of the Geest area in western Schleswig Holstein.¹³ His general ecological analysis of social structures favourable for Nazi support very clearly bears out the negative correlation between conservative support and Nazi vote—the more the conservatives lost, the more the Nazis gained. These findings were particularly evident in areas in which there was no political polarization. However, where the working class was relatively strong, the Marxists parties were also strong, and their adversaries—the conservatives—were also a strong counterbalancing force. The 'polarization thesis' thus gives plausibility to the stability of the traditional, strategic competition—and with increasing polarization during the development of the economic crisis, the stronger the alliance between class and traditional class parties would become. As a newcomer, the Nazi party had no space.

Heberle's study then had to demonstrate that the Nazis, when entering the scene, had to look for space in the non-polarized small towns in which the class division was less acute (see Figure 2.2). In Schleswig Holstein, the NSDAP achieved its best results in all of Germany, with Heberle citing data showing overwhelming support for the Nazis, which at the 1932 election ran close to 100 per cent. However, the theoretical clue in the analysis is found in the few remarks he wrote on the differences between the small homogeneous towns versus the more status-divided ones.

In the small Geest village of Schwackendorf in Angeln, the NSDAP obtained 94.4 per cent of the votes cast—a result only found since in postwar communist states. In that village, Heberle reported from interviews that the 'farmers had agreed among themselves to join the NSDAP in a body [...] the farmers wanted to maintain the political unanimity of the village out of a spirit of neighbourliness'.¹⁴ He thereby proved, with perhaps a very unique case, how the forces of homogeneity within

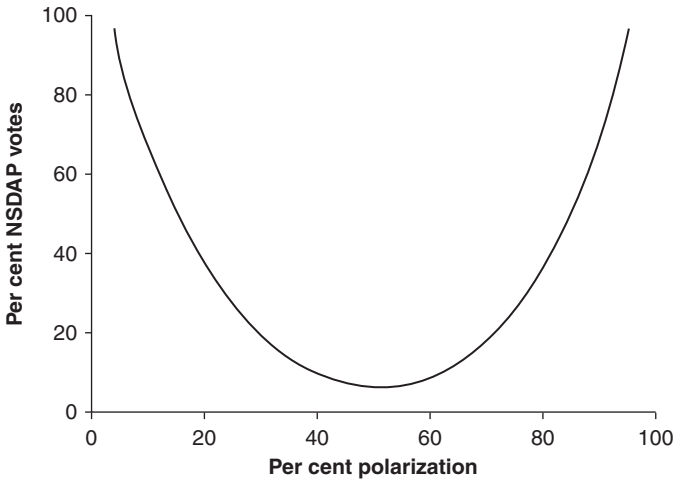


Figure 2.2 The law party polarization and Nazi vote

a relatively narrow geopolitical space could give extraordinarily strong exponential results.¹⁵

From this illustration, and taking into account the other premises presented above, we can formulate the following empirical proposition as a fascist maxim: electoral support will come from homogeneous areas/constituencies with a low level of polarization and with open availability of political communication. With a high level of polarization, class competition freezes the vote market, communication will be zero and the NSDAP will not enter the geopolitical space and profit from the Tingsten effect.¹⁶

This interpretation casts more light on Heberle's general conclusion as to how 'the classes that were particularly susceptible to Nazism were neither the rural nobility, big farmers nor the rural proletariat; rather, it was the small-farm proprietors who were the rural equivalent of the lower middle-class or petite-bourgeoisie (*Kleinburgertum*) that formed the backbone of the NSDAP in the cities'.¹⁷ Yes, small proprietors did give support to Nazism, but mainly in non-polarized surroundings and with explosive effects in those places in which they could communicate their political interests within a homogeneous space.¹⁸ With this theoretical proposition we can move on to comparative studies of fascism's success in other national and historical contexts as well as in the studies of the local electoral success of parties and movements other than fascism.¹⁹

The second study of local areas I will comment on is William Sheridan Allen's 1965 survey, which was revised and enlarged in 1984.²⁰ This was followed by several local studies within the German context, but it was the first to focus on the strategic moves of the local party for the takeover of political power in the rapid development of Hitler's success before 1933.²¹ While Heberle's study emphasizes the structural conditions for local Nazism, Allen penetrates into the role of organizations and individuals. Nazism did not emerge on its own: it was planned and carried out by actors. What were then the basic elements of this power-success, both in theoretical terms and in the local area?

Northeim, a town in the middle of Germany, resembled any other German small town at the time of the Nazi breakthrough. Compared to some of the homogeneous Geest towns Heberle studied, 'Allen's town' had a very strictly class-divided society. It was kept in political and social balance through various mechanisms of traditional values and an interdependent economy based on income from the public services (mainly due to employment on the railways) and the surrounding agricultural market.

Within the social structure and the political institutions there was potential for polarization that was not present in Schwakendorf, for example. This potential for polarization resided in the tripartite division of society, with 37 per cent belonging to the working class, 32 per cent to the lower middle-class and 31 per cent to the upper middle- and upper-class (this final group representing 4 per cent of the population), that was not reflected in the local party system.²² The Social Democrats (SPD—Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) attracted most of the working class (although there was a small communist presence) and competed with several parties that directed their appeal to members of the other classes. Northeim was settled and peaceful, however, its society was divided with 'the many clubs and societies cement[ing] individual citizens together. Without them, Northeim would have been an amorphous society. Yet few of them cut across class lines.'²³ Even with a very small NSDAP, which emerged in 1922, there was no sign of disruption before 1930, 'yet behind the facade of calm prosperity, conditions were developing that would stimulate a growth of Nazism in the region'.²⁴

In a thrilling exposure, Allen relates the story of how Northeim was turned into a Nazi town through the intensified polarization of the local scene. In contrast to what happened in Geest, where the small farmers unanimously agreed to join the Nazis in a more or less unconscious reflection of social structures, Northeim's inhabitants were forced into it by a cleverly controlled and highly detailed guided takeover. Through

street battles, letters to every voter and the careful and brutal penetration of most organizations and institutions, the NSDAP's vote in Northeim rose spectacularly: 2.3 per cent in 1928, 28.2 per cent in 1930, 50.2 per cent in the March 1932 presidential election, 56 per cent in the April 1932 presidential election, 62.3 per cent in July 1932, 59.3 per cent in November 1932 and 62.7 per cent in 1933.²⁵ The electoral success proved the town represented an important case for the development of a theoretical proposition of fascist growth.

The curve represents the formula y (per cent Nazi votes) = ax^2 (per cent polarization) + $bx + c$ (with $a > 0$). Polarization is defined as the sum of the proportion of votes for the two largest parties (not including the NSDAP). When polarization approaches 100 per cent, the two largest parties get all the votes, and when approaching zero the pluralization and equalization between many parties approach infinity. The least optimal level of polarization for Nazi votes may be around 50 per cent, which will leave the NSDAP with the lowest percentage of the votes. The curve has to be judged as a prognosis for the coming election in which polarization was high in one election. The potential for the NSDAP to penetrate the ranks of the weaker of the two largest parties during the next election—and particularly to win over the third social class within the tri-polar class polarization of the community—would be strong. The figure illustrates that the potential for the NSDAP was strong when polarization was high (explained directly by the polarization law), and when it was low (explained by the Tingsten law). In the figure, the village Schwakendorf in Anglen is represented by the number 1 (no polarization), while numbers 2 and 3 represent villages of moderate polarization: Muensterdorf (26.9 per cent NSDAP) and Laegerdorf (24 per cent NSDAP), while number 4 (Daegeling) has high polarization and also high a NSDAP vote (78.7 per cent). Northeim is represented by the number 5 (59.3 per cent NSDAP). The figure can thus be used to explain the effect from the polarization thesis (direct) and from the Tingsten thesis (indirectly and in homogeneous contexts).

Allen himself gives a straightforward answer to the question of what is to be learned from Northeim's experience during the Nazi years. In the first place, it is clear an essential arena in the Nazi electoral surge and seizure of power was the local level, and the critical figures were local Nazi leaders. 'The major initiative came from the local leaders [...] there would have been no Nazi revolution in Northeim, at least not of the totality that has been described here, without an active and effective local organization.'²⁶ At the same time Allen connects the actor-organizational effect to the 'active division of the town along class

lines'. With the depression, the memories of a lost war and the myths about their counterparts among the opposing classes, the new actors found surprisingly fertile soil for the Nazi creed that allowed the small local arena dynamics to develop as they did.

The studies by Heberle and Allen leave us with two different explanations for fascist success: the exponential rise in the Nazi's support in very homogenous districts and the support through intensified polarization. Both are, in a sense, structural propositions, but Allen's study places a greater emphasis on the political actor-perspective. Heberle informs us of the effect caused when the social context becomes increasingly equal (the Tingsten law), while Allen focuses on how powerful class divisions can be manipulated by a clever political strategy. Neither has solved the theoretical issue for once and for all, but they have both shown we have to abandon any hope of achieving a simple explanation for fascism.

Success breeds success: Legitimacy by passing thresholds—or bandwagon effects

There may be various challenges in giving theoretical explanation both to types of local success and 'national swing'; however, there also seems to be a special effect coming from the fascists' ability to prepare future 'wins' by present 'gains'. The wave of fascist victory seems in some sense to be self-explanatory when the first and second thresholds are passed. The very dynamic of 'being on the increase' seems important but somewhat difficult to grasp theoretically. The tendency can also be observed among other movements of very different political ideologies, such as the growth of socialist and communist parties in specific periods of their history. Between 1910 and 1930 there was an immense increase in electoral support for socialist and communist parties, mainly as a result of a shift from liberal parties and as a consequence of newly enfranchised voters. However, is there a meaningful theoretical explanation for the statement 'success breeds success'?

When we look at Figure 2.3 below we can see that the unsuccessful fascist parties in Denmark and Norway never achieved 'take-off'. The birth of these parties was greeted enthusiastically in several parts of the countries' societies, but the voting never took off to their benefit. In Denmark, the National Socialist Workers' Party (DNSAP—Danmarks Nationalsocialistiske Arbejderparti) obtained 0.4 per cent in 1932, 1.0 per cent in 1935, 1.8 per cent in 1939 and 2.1 per cent in 1943. In Norway the National Union (NS—Nasjonal Samling) received 2.3 per cent in 1933 and 1.8 per cent in 1936. They were, therefore, unable

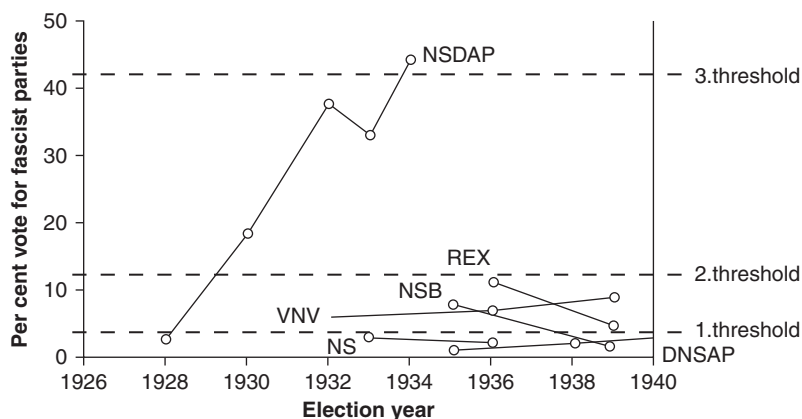


Figure 2.3 Passing thresholds among fascist parties, three thresholds and one 'winning wave'

to start on a 'winning wave'. From inspecting these two countries is it possible to envisage a threshold at around 4 per cent?

The Belgian and the Dutch fascists did better from the start, but they also did not become 'winners'. While the Dutch National Socialist Movement (NSB—Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging) obtained 7.9 per cent in their first national election in 1935, they fell back to 1.8 per cent in 1939 (although the Flemish National Union [VNV—Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond] in Flanders experienced a steady increase in support: from 5.9 per cent in 1932 to 7.1 per cent in 1936 and 8.3 per cent in 1939). The Belgian Rex Party obtained a surprising 11.5 per cent in 1936, falling back to 4.4 per cent in 1939. From the results of these parties we can probably define the second threshold to be approaching 12 per cent.

The prime example of the 'winning wave' is of course Germany and the NSDAP. The take-off for Hitler's party was indeed a complete success and the world still wonders how this could have happened over such a short period of time. On the other hand, one also wonders what would have happened had there not been so many elections. Would the NSDAP have been able to endure the long periods waiting for new elections, or would the other parties have had enough time to reconsider their strategies and, perhaps, join in defensive coalitions against the newcomer?

The six lines connecting the plots in the figure represent the DNSAP, NS, VNV, NSB, REX and NSDAP. The three horizontal lines are the thresholds for party growth.

The main point in this section is, however, to speculate over how success breeds success. From American election studies ‘the perception of a winner leads people to follow the bandwagon’ has been demonstrated empirically as an important effect. Passing thresholds thus gave the NSDAP an image of success, and this success, along with the efforts made by the party to become a legitimate actor on the scene, persuaded many Germans to vote for them—even if their habits and structural interests should have led them to do otherwise.²⁷ How can we build a sound theory that can explain the dynamics of riding the ‘winning wave’?

Let me first try to conceptualize a theory while focusing on the passing of thresholds. If a fascist party does not pass the first threshold after its second election, it will not achieve the legitimacy to pass on to the next (e.g. Denmark and Norway). If a party jumps above the first threshold in its first national contest, it will need an extraordinary impulse and a quick new election before other parties are able to regroup and counteract it (e.g. Belgium and the Netherlands). If the party jumps from below the first threshold and above the second in one ‘wave’, it will go on with very strong legitimacy and with every chance of making a decisive breakthrough and obtaining a real landslide. When passing the third threshold the party will also win a parliamentary majority, as happened in countries with quite different types of electoral system (43 per cent of the vote will normally give more than 50 per cent of the representation). The important condition for all three propositions includes a quick succession of elections that will keep tensions high and maintain open a space of opportunity for the newcomers. But what do the thresholds represent? What makes a party able to pass them? These are the real theoretical questions.

To explain the growth of fascist party votes one needs the structural, actor and event variables, along with the ‘spurt’, the ‘bandwagon’ and the ‘success breeds success’ variables. This brings us to the year from May 1929 to September 1930 in Germany, and not 1932, where the strongest research focus on the NSDAP vote has concentrated. The growth from 1928 to 1930 was 15.7 per cent, which was lower compared to the 19.1 per cent growth from 1930 to 1932. However, it represented the passing of the two lower thresholds in one election, and the 1930 victory really was a highly unexpected breakthrough. Space does not permit me

to go into details of the ‘spurt’ in the NSDAP’s election results between 1928 and 1930.

However, Jürgen Falter notes the importance of the anti-Young Plan referendum in December 1929, which came very shortly after the Great Depression started following the Wall Street crash of 24 October 1929. Yet he also notes that the beginning of the NSDAP’s upsurge was already visible in some of the local elections that had been held in 1928 and 1929.²⁸ Hamilton puts a lot of weight on the NSDAP’s efforts to penetrate into the rural areas where the other political parties maintained only weak party structures. He also points to the electorate’s ‘left-turn’ at the 1928 election that resulted in the Social Democrat, Hermann Müller, forming the government and which encouraged the right to embark on some harsh anti-government propaganda.²⁹

Thus there are several relevant historical events and factors that can be brought into the explanation. The main theoretical idea is to attempt to explicitly formulate how they worked together to reinforce each other and produce the exceptional NSDAP result in such a short space of time. Interestingly, Hamilton has compared the growth of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in Saskatchewan and the Norwegian Labour Party (DNA—Det Norske Arbeiderparti) in the same period. They may compare well with the success of the NSDAP, however, the important point of his suggestion is that one may perhaps better explain the events in Germany by looking at comparable phenomena elsewhere.³⁰

The accelerating dynamics in ‘spurt’ elections do have a similar context in different elections, and one may also compare how thresholds become important because of ‘anti-spurt’ strategies from combined political forces that attempt to counter the ‘winners’. Thus, can fascist success perhaps be best explained by looking at other phenomena? It cannot be understood without the often unexpected comparison from other studies elsewhere on a different topic but with similar dynamics.

The role of one-variable explanations and theoretical falsification: A. James Gregor’s valuable but failed effort

One of the early comparative examinations of fascist theories was that of A. James Gregor. Gregor’s book is flawed by polemics and its provocative tone, a tendency he continued in later works, however, his goal and the focus of his analysis are to be commended. He sets out to critically examine four of the classical and two of the modern approaches offered in the literature. He says that ‘to “understand” “fascism” we require a reasonably precise definition, plausible generalizations and a

body of substantive theory'. He also wants to use Mussolini's Fascism 'as the test case of interpretive adequacy' and 'pursue the analysis into the treatment of the putative "generic fascism"'.³¹

In all of Gregor's examinations of the definition of fascism he fails to come up with a viable proposal. He also claims that most of the effort of what he calls 'explanations' (in quotation marks, of which he makes extensive use throughout his text) are 'eclectic accounts [...] maximally insulated against counter-evidence and disconfirmation. If some part of the interpretation is faulted, emphasis can be readily shifted to some other aspect of the complex "explanation"'.³² In one part of the discussion he calls for 'a collaborative effort between historians, empirically oriented analysts and generalizing social scientists', and concludes by stating, 'we cannot claim, however, to have a compelling theory of Fascism, much less a compelling interpretation of "fascism" or "totalitarianism" [...] There is little prospect that the near future will deliver a fully competent theory of Fascism.'³³ The only chance Gregor seems to envisage will be the support from social science that is 'rigorous in its demand for inter-subjective evidence and internal consistency, and eminently and unalterably corrigible in its substantive and normative judgements'.³⁴

Even though I have conducted the examination of the various theoretical approaches to fascism differently from Gregor, I do agree with many of his critical points of view and to his overall assessment of the situation as it was at the beginning of the 1970s. Since then some more vigour has appeared in the literature towards empirical analyses under a more explicit theoretical framework. However, there is as yet no single theory of fascism and, as Gregor also admits, and as I have repeatedly argued here, there never will be. However, my reasons for holding this view are different from Gregor's—this one-theory notion is not the most fruitful way to find an explanation of fascism.

The main difficulty in Gregor's analysis is connected to his mono-causal explanation and the ensuing discussion of evidence, as well as his effort to devise a theory that can explain fascism in its entirety: a point illustrated in Table 2.1.

This brief summary does not, of course, give full credit to Gregor's broad-scale examination of the extensive literature he has examined, but my point is to highlight the problem of mono-causality in his approach. What the table reveals is a perspective on the explanation of fascism in which the independent variables compete in giving the correct answer. It is a typical either/or model of explanation, and not a 'both-that-and-the-other' model. The rise of fascism was not *solely*

Table 2.1 A synthesis of Gregor's analysis

| | Empirical evidence | Counter-evidence |
|--|--|--|
| Moral crises bring fascism | Scant or tautological | Fascists were not immoral |
| Psychological disability as disposition for fascism | Impossible to identify empirically | Explains too much and leads only to diffuse predictions |
| Amorphous masses are created/create fascism, breakdown of civil society | True that organizational interests failed to counteract the fascist mobilization | Rootlessness was prevalent among many others, not just the fascists |
| Intensified class struggle leads to fascism | Fascists are seldom agents of capitalism; they are often autonomous | Mussolini was independent of the capitalists |
| Delayed industrialization brings fascism to surface | Delayed industrialization did breed authoritarian rule to support competition | Italy's economy grew steadily and fascism produced no totalitarianism |
| Communism/fascism have the same roots and bring same effects on the regime | Communist and fascist regimes 'hang together in historic space' | Totalitarianism is only vaguely defined and cannot be detected empirically |

caused by either moral crisis or class struggle, but was caused by both, as well as by the other variables mentioned in Gregor's scheme. It is a hopeless effort to try to explain fascism using only one causal variable at a time.

The explanation of the fascist takeover and regime collapse: Combining the Bonapartist thesis and the mass theory thesis with a restatement of how the equilibrium comes about

The need to 'protect' social science from Marxist ideological influence has become much less acute since 1989. This new situation makes it psychologically easier to feel free to learn from and to get acceptance of Marxist scholarship's ideas on fascism. One of the most interesting theoretical formulas proposed by Marxists is the Bonapartist theory on the 'breakdown of democracy', or rather on the 'establishment of dictatorship'.

The Bonapartist theory has to be understood as a theory that will not explain recruitment to fascism (i.e. who were the fascists), but which provides a theory explaining the conditions favourable for fascist takeover (i.e. regime-theory on the macro level). Since the fascist takeover resembled many previous and subsequent takeovers, it is also relevant for providing an explanation for other forms of *coup d'état*; that is, to be a general theory of breakdown or *coup d'état*.³⁵

Karl Marx did not explicitly formulate the theory in his *Eighteenth Brumaire*, but he wrote the history of the French republic from 24 February 1848 to 2 December 1851 in such a way as one can discern the logic of the process in theoretical terms.³⁶ He pins down how the bourgeois political parties lost their power by splitting into fractions and by underestimating the tactics and strength of Napoleon III's manoeuvres, leading the political arena to stalemate and a power vacuum. Another way to describe the historical situation prior to the coup is to look upon it as a political equilibrium in which no single power (or class) had sufficient strength on its own to pursue its will against the others, and thus opportunities for the single authoritarian president to enforce his dictatorship as a political power above the classes are produced.

In Marx's analysis, Napoleon III reigned in the name of the *petit*, isolated and individual plot-peasants; however, instead of fulfilling their needs by redistribution through increased taxes on other classes, he strengthened the control of the state bureaucracy (which he then used for his own purposes) by increasing taxes on those already heavily taxed: the poor peasants. Through extensive centralization of the state, they were again politically pacified, but they did keep him in power through the instruments of plebiscites (with full male suffrage) that were controlled by him. At the same time, the other parties were unable to reintroduce legislative and constitutional institutions to check the dictatorship, leaving him in power when very few Frenchmen wanted him to stay. The Bonapartist theory is, therefore, one that explains how political equilibrium may lead to a political breakdown, where the situation as such may have led to an exchange of power—at different intervals—between the competing classes.³⁷

In the Marxist interpretations of the Bonapartist theory, Mussolini and Hitler were compared to Napoleon Bonaparte, and Marxist-inspired writers attempted to identify which class could be seen as the substitute for the French plot-peasants in the two respective countries. The problem was then to establish if a political equilibrium had existed before the March on Rome and before 30 January 1933 in Germany—important preconditions for the two coups.

There has been much dispute concerning the relevant empirical evidence, but the Marxist analysis of the internal class conflict and in whose interests (class interest) the dictatorships were acting were agreed upon. The industrialist class was in the first phase of Nazism in Germany and was granted great favours over the left (which was more or less annihilated), while the bureaucracy (and a large part of the Wehrmacht) was increasingly brought under Hitler's control. However, it remains dubious whether the German case can be said to be fully explained by the Bonapartist theory. The Communist International—with August Thalheimer—was more interested in explaining Hitler as an agent of the capitalist class than it was of having him portrayed as an independent force acting on a separate programme and for different goals within a political equilibrium made possible by Germany's domestic and external situation at the time.³⁸

However, the main point of mentioning the Bonapartist theory here is to stress the difference between explaining regime change or takeover and theories explaining the susceptibility of some individuals to fascism. The same can be argued when discussing the mass society theory. The essential focus in this theory is to explain how the masses as a political force can set forces in motion that bring down the political regime, and the comparable opportunity of a charismatic leader, through a direct appeal to the masses beyond traditional organizations, to seize power and exercise dictatorial control.

William Kornhauser provides the best expression of the mass society theory.³⁹ Briefly stated, Kornhauser explains the breakdown of democracy by referring to the 'availability' of the masses for 'charismatic manipulation' from above and the corresponding 'availability' of the elites for 'mass manipulation' from below. The crucial factor in the explanation is the identification of the disintegration or the ultimate weakness of the intermediate layers of society to 'protect' the two from the direct influence upon each other. It is thus also an interest group theory explaining the macro effects of group strength and structures within modern societies. A great deal of the mass society theory is concerned with the 'masses' and directed towards explaining the causes and consequences of 'massification' for the individual and society in general. There is not so much about 'civil society', in the modern sense of the concept, as an explanation of weakness or strength of communist societies before and during the transition to democracy after 1989. The emphasis on individual *anomie* (Durkheim) and on the 'dangers' posed by mass behaviour (Ortega y Gasset) may lead attention away from the central point of the organizational/institutional aspect of the theory.

'A society is a mass society to the extent that both elites and non-elites are directly accessible to one another by virtue of the weakness of groups capable of mediating between them.'⁴⁰ This is the main statement in Kornhauser's theory, which is a shorthand expression directing attention to the importance of the organizational, intermediate level of every society: between the rulers and the ruled. If the organizations and social institutions disappear, the 'social community' disintegrates and people become a defenceless mass susceptible to any form of tyrannical rule. Like the Bonapartist theory, Kornhauser's theory explains how people are deprived of the opportunity to act in their own interests because of the non-availability of means for political action. The causes behind the breakdown of the organizational intermediate level in Germany in the early 1930s and the deprivation of the masses from political power in France in 1851 represent the structural and historical forces (economic crises, rapid social change and external impulses). The triggering effect is the disappearance of the political opportunity, available to the people through their parties and organizations, to gain political control over the emerging dictators.⁴¹

Both these theories may also be used to explain why dictatorships and totalitarian regimes—that we would not describe as being fascist—come about. For example, if we look at the way the Belorussian dictator, Lukatsjenko, was able to appeal to the rural masses and thus gain an opportunity to dissolve the country's democratic institutions after 1995, we can use a combination of the Bonapartist and mass society theories to explain his achievement. Lukatsjenko got his initial political opportunity through his appeal to the non-organized masses (create a 'false impression of political power': Bonapartist theory) and made the masses available (mass theory). He went on to destroy those institutions and organizations that were capable of preventing his continuous direct access to the masses (by dissolving the intermediate levels).⁴²

Gregory Luebbert and Barrington Moore: How to analyse the historical interaction of structures in various national settings

There are two very different theories that have something in common in attempting to explain the success of fascism: Barrington Moore's path analysis of the historical routes to fascism, communism and democracy,⁴³ and Gregory M. Luebbert's more recent theory of class equilibrium as basis for democratic breakdown and fascist takeover.⁴⁴

In both cases we are dealing with theories that emphasize the choice of political alliances in the political development of the various societies. Moore's theory is based on the long-term effects of bourgeois class revolutions against the control of the rural sectors, while Luebbert's is concerned with the short-term interwar alliances between liberal and socialist parties. Allow me to briefly replicate the content of each theory in order to illustrate how these theories represent two very different approaches to understanding fascist success.

Moore explains why Germany and Japan became fascist while Russia and China became communist, and France, the United States and the United Kingdom developed democratic forms of governments. The crucial factor was the extent and timing of the commercialization of agriculture before the bourgeois commercial class revolution came about. Where the landed aristocracy joined with a (strong) state bureaucracy, but where a limited state-controlled industrial revolution took place, fascism was the outcome. Where the landed elite joined with a (relatively weak) state bureaucracy, which kept (or contributed to keeping) the commercial/industrial revolution to a minimum, a communist regime resulted. Where the landed elites, first allied to the state bureaucracy, and after having been outweighed by the bourgeois industrial elites, capitalist democracy was the outcome.

It was the commercialization of agriculture that was important in the capital formation, while the speed of industrialization was the structural component determining regime outcome. However, the decision to begin—or not to begin—commercialization and the 'destruction of the peasant, feudal economy' was made by the landed elite actors. The sequence was as follows. At a particular moment in time the landed elite chose an alliance and the policy of agricultural commercialization of agriculture that, after 200 years, determined the political power of the bourgeoisie and the peasantry. The early, strong commercialization destroyed the power of both the peasants and the landlords, which both disappeared as social classes. There was no peasant revolution in the United Kingdom, France or the United States. In Germany and Japan, moderate commercialization meant farm labourers and peasants remained numerous, albeit strictly controlled, and the fascist revolt came from above. In China and Russia, where commercialization was weak, the state very weak and the peasantry numerous, the revolution came from below, installing communist regimes.

Luebbert's theory intends to explain why some democratic regimes became fascist (Germany, Italy and Spain), why some continued to be liberal, hegemonic democracies (United Kingdom, France and

Switzerland) and why others became social-democratically governed democracies (Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Czechoslovakia). The clue to the different developments he assigns to the cohesion or fragmentation of the middle class, and the farmers' willingness to engage in coalition-building.⁴⁵ Where the liberals were able to maintain their hegemonic political force they were able to guarantee competitive democracy. Where the liberals were politically divided and the middle class fragmented, democracy would function only if it was possible to establish an alliance between labour and farmers outside the fractionalized and shrinking liberal camp. However, where the middle class was fragmented, the liberals fractionalized and the working class hostile to the farmers, one would get an alliance between sectors of the middle class, the right and the farmers that would lead to fascist dictatorship.

The overall explanatory variable in Luebbert's theory is, therefore, the incongruence between the social class equilibrium and the political partisan equilibrium. By the end of the First World War, all the countries examined had become democracies with almost similar voting and constitutional rights for every adult citizen, albeit they were carrying different social, cultural and other historical (cleavage) traditions. Thus, there emerged different party systems (with some countries having distinct agrarian parties), elite configurations and environments for obtaining political compromises. The red-green alliance was thus an example of such a compromise between the town and the country, a necessary link that could keep the political equilibrium viable.⁴⁶

The theories presented by both Barrington Moore and Luebbert represent two macro-social or macro-historical attempts to 'map' how structural conditions determine the outcome of the regime configurations during the interwar period. Both also include an element of elite-choice, even if this factor seems to be underplayed in favour of the macro-structural preconditions.⁴⁷ The difference between these theories and, for example, the so-called middle-class thesis is that the latter is only a vague indication that the middle classes everywhere were more susceptible to fascism than other classes. However, the proportion of the middle classes in Western European countries at that time was not so different—the British middle class was not much smaller in proportion to its German equivalent—that it can bring out a sensible explanation as to why Germany and not the United Kingdom fell victim to fascism. On the other hand, one can freely choose a historical difference other than the commercialization of agriculture—for example, the extent of colonial empire—and from there develop a 'path' explaining why countries that were rich in colonies did not become fascist regimes

(United Kingdom, Belgium, France and the Netherlands), while those with almost no colonies (Germany, Italy and Japan), or which had lost the colonies they had, became fascist regimes (with Portugal and Spain being important exceptions).

The idea behind my discussion of the two macro-theories is to illustrate the necessity of deconstructing the question of the theory of fascism into its separate parts. In every European country in which fascism appeared it did so as a result of very much the same stimuli, in modern societies that had very much in common. However, the outcome of fascist success and/or failure was very different: as much between countries as within them. In this situation, the macro-theories have an important message in their efforts at providing an explanation, however, they cannot explain it all. They provide some of the building blocks we need, but we require many others. Neither Barrington Moore nor Luebbert are 'wrong' in the sense of having proposed theories with an incorrect logical structure or having been falsified by empirical proof, however, they are incomplete—at least concerning actor choice—since they are proposed as single-variable propositions that explain fascism.⁴⁸ As I have already argued, and as I will continue to argue, we must reach beyond that stage.

Fascism as emergence: An alternative to generic explanations

Many scholars have been concerned about what they perceive to be a generic interpretation of fascism. This perspective is in some ways borrowed from other fields such as comparative literature, where one tries to explain works of fiction and the author's perceptions within a novel as arising from a 'generic root'. One can find here the seed that became the tree. Generic interpretations from such a perspective may be useful and revealing because they confirm our experiences of daily life: you have to invest money to receive interest; you have to study to get good marks; the farmer has to sow in order to reap. However, in modern societies the connection between cause and effect is not so readily visible, and the seed that produces the tree is not as concrete a phenomenon as one may think. That is why I will introduce the concept of 'emergence' as a tool for discussing fascism's beginnings.

The roots of fascism are often exemplified as extending to the French Revolution and are embodied in the strong anti-liberal and pro-nationalist emotions throughout Europe. One may also state that communism (Marxism) has the same 'root', but it developed ideologically

as anti-national and anti-liberal.⁴⁹ Conservatism was also anti-liberal in Europe and, to some extent, anti-nationalist—varying with the cultural traditions within different countries.

Thus, several contradictory political ideologies have the same root or genesis, but with ‘generic’ beginnings one will often see reference to some ‘local conditioning’ in a person, a group of people or an event.⁵⁰ Most authors who use the term ‘generic fascism’ are generally concerned with ‘fascism’ rather than with ‘generic’.

When Stanley Payne devoted a full chapter to ‘generic fascism’, he seemed to admit there exists no ‘absolute generic identity’ when referring to the journal *Antieuropa* from 1929.⁵¹ When discussing the obvious analogy to biological taxonomy he first says ‘the term generic has been used simply for general illustration and in conformity with verbal convention’, and then writes that ‘the term generic fascism is used only in a tentative sense and is not intended to indicate that fascistic [sic] movements constituted a specific, delimited “genus” altogether distinct from other possible “genera” of political movements, or that there was a necessarily direct and identifiable genetic relationship between them’.⁵² From these brief quotations, the impression of a strong lack of clarity persists as to how the ‘genetic’ approach or definition may be understood. It will only be meaningful with reference the biological metaphors of ‘genus’, ‘permutations’, etc. in the evolutionary taxonomy, but so far with no fascist, evolutionary theory at all. What if we drop the term ‘generic’ altogether?

In Juan Linz’s discussion of the growth of fascism he is emphatic that the questions concerning the ‘birth’ and the ‘success’ of fascism have to be analytically separated.⁵³ Fascist movements ‘sprang up all over the world’ he says, but in some countries they became victorious and the important analytical questions have to be very different to give meaningful answers. His most interesting theoretical proposition in the article is what we can call the ‘crystallization hypothesis’. Where there was no political space and fascism arose as a latecomer it could succeed (and only there did succeed) in a liberal, democratic and crises-ridden society when the main political forces crystallized into two opposing blocs both unable to defend the system (disloyal opposition) and unable to provide the compromise necessary to solve the salient issues of crisis.⁵⁴ The importance of his analytical distinction between birth and growth clearly underlines how the distinctiveness of social and historical traditions in individual countries were decisive for fascist movements at their beginnings, but that the initial impulse had nothing whatsoever to do with national peculiarities.

From this point we can now move towards a discussion of ‘emergence’ as an analytical concept. In the natural sciences there has been a long tradition of attempting to conceptualize ‘newness’ in the explanation of physical phenomena formulated either as ‘hidden variables’⁵⁵ or ‘emergence’ from unidentified causes.⁵⁶

Karl Popper devoted a great deal of attention to the analysis of how new ideas or theories came into being. This was part of his programme for explaining or defending the position of non-determinism in the physical as well as in the social world. In outlining his theory of the ‘World 3’ of objective knowledge he said our theories arise from problem-solving in the practical world and through the evolutionary confrontation with reality they have survived as non-falsified entities in World 3. Since this chapter is not intended as an extensive treatment of Popper’s ideas, I will only pick up one important element of his thinking.⁵⁷

The application of evolutionary analogies in social science has produced various forms of critics. Surely, modern sociobiology demonstrates clear parallels with pre-fascist racist thinking as well as neo-fascist flirting with these serious issues. However, the concept of emergence in connection with an explanation of the birth of fascism does not include propositions about organic evolution, rather, it is primarily concerned with how evolutionary theory can explain past and not future evolution, and—most importantly—how permutations can be seen as new and general impulses in evolutionary development. This is the important perspective to be introduced in the overall understanding of fascism.

The weakness of the ‘generic’ approach to fascism may lie in its propensity to think of Italy as its place of origin. The term fascism was first used in Italy, the first movement created with the name *fasci* was organized there and it was in Italy that Mussolini established the first fascist dictatorship in 1925–6. According to De Felice it is also not right to compare and to call other movements and regimes fascist for the same reason. Therefore, many scholars think the only natural strategy is to examine Italian history in order to locate and define the species/genus. Of course, the study of Italian Fascism is extremely interesting and valuable for insights into fascism’s ideology and praxis. However, with emergence-strategy thinking we can see that not only did fascism not begin in Italy, but—at least with the simple logic that is often used in the ‘generic’ analysis—that its roots are also to be found elsewhere, if they can be traced at all. Therefore, I shall outline a few examples of how the emergence-strategy may liberate us from some of the

previous difficulties in elaborating theories relating to understanding fascism:

- a) Fascism was born as a response to specific political problems (see Popper's emphasis on problem-solving within the evolutionary approach) and was a general, non-country specific impulse. These problems were connected to the impact of the ideas from the French Revolution (important in France), to those rising out of the impact of the Industrial Revolution (important to the United Kingdom), to ideas connected to the spread of imperialism and the uneven distribution/speed of the economy in Europe (important for Russia, Italy, Romania and Hungary, albeit for different reasons), to the geopolitical concentration of global political power (in Germany, Spain and Portugal, again for different reasons), to new or impending nationhood/sovereignty (in Norway, Finland, Yugoslavia and Ireland).
- b) Fascism was a new response that could not be predicted from previous political experiences, such as social groups, ideas, forms of organization, regimes, etc, but which was dependent on the propensity of the situation.
- c) Fascism, when finding its evolutionary niche, defined its political context/surroundings according to competing political forces. It had to 'read' the evolutionary agenda in order to define a niche and compete as a latecomer for political space.
- d) Fascism survived as a political force when it was able to define a niche, and disappeared or was isolated to become a sterile force, depending on the political agenda within each country.
- e) The different forms of fascism depended on the political context, and since no political context in Europe was similar, fascism had to be different. There were also characteristics of the fascist impulse that demonstrated antagonism between the different fascist personalities, movements, regimes and ideas.

From this very short and suggestive outlined strategy, or logic of research, I hope I have communicated the importance of the 'emergence' perspective for future research on fascism. The importance of this approach is not only to shift the focus away from the Italian context when explaining the birth and the growth of fascism, it also leaves open direct links to possible former historical developments, and thus may be better suited for the exploration of functional equivalents.

When Karl Popper formulated the basic rationale behind his propensity theory of evolution, he emphasized the importance of situational logic and the propensity of the historical situation for newness in future development.⁵⁸ Most situations or historical events do have different (and hidden) propensities to create new trends of development. However, instead of stating in every situation that ‘anything goes’, as one popular philosopher phrased it, a theory of the emergence of fascism will focus on how the general propensity for the birth of fascism was not determined, but that development after its ‘birth’ was dependent on social, historical and cultural factors. Emergence thinking, therefore, is open to indeterminism in terms of the ‘beginnings’ of a social phenomenon, but it also includes a determining logic when explaining its endurance and growth.⁵⁹

This way of thinking may shift attention and refocus research on fascism in different directions, opening it up for theory-building on a new scale. There is no doubt fascism was a new phenomenon in the twentieth century, and even if the Marxists looked upon it as a natural outcome of capitalism and intensified class struggle they had not—indeed, could not—have envisaged it as the behemoth it later proved to be in one particular national context.

The new strategy towards a theoretical synthesis: The proposition inventory

There are two reasons for the need for a comprehensive reorientation of research on comparative fascism. The first is the need to abandon the genetic approach and provide an opening for emergence thinking. Many scholars of fascism have realized the fruitless nature of the demand for an all-embracing genetic definition, and I have argued for the need to build theories of fascism by not separating the analysis of the Italian case from the general phenomena. The second reason is the ever-growing amount of empirical research on fascism being carried out, often very explicitly connected to already well-formulated propositions. These findings have to be brought together in a well-designed proposition inventory project. Here, I suggest some ideas as to how this inventory may be organized in order to facilitate a system of ‘mapping’ empirical findings, coupled to theoretical propositions or hypotheses. I do not intend to present this an inventory for *the* theory of fascism, but for different aspects of the fascist phenomenon—some of which have already been mentioned above.

Let me briefly illustrate the construction of such a proposition inventory by suggesting some fields of entry:

a) Fascist ideology:

Internal logic and weighting of items: What are the most important items in the minimum list and how can one find substitutes? How are different items on the ideology minimum weighted against each other? Is racism more important than anti-communism? May a fascist ideological profile be ordered according to the rank of items? What are the items within the ideology that are in contradiction with each other? Which items can be left out without destroying the 'fascist taint'?

Support for ideological profiles: Were young fascists more attracted to vitality and rebirth while older fascists were more prone to accept order and discipline or seek revenge from previous national humiliations? What ideological items were impossible to present in which contexts and under what circumstances? How did the clash between ideology and political praxis take place during the change from movement to regime and within a movement on decline?

b) Recruitment:

Trends and composition of recruitment: Who were the founders of the movement and who filled the ranks? How did recruitment change when the number of members grew rapidly? What was the typical trend in the early, the second and third wave of recruitment? How does opportunist recruitment (in power) compare to *alte Kämpfer* (old soldier) recruitment? When did the catch-all character of the fascist movement become visible and how shall it be properly described empirically?

Layers of recruitment: What kind of difference do we find between leaders and followers in fascist movements? How did the fascist elite compare to elites in other political movements? Did the composition of the elite change when the movement seized power, and what were basic differences before and after?

c) Fascist policy/praxis:

Electoral strategies: Which electoral campaigns worked well and which did not in the years during which the fascist parties experienced political take-off? In what contexts and districts did the fascists completely fail in their campaigns, and where did they achieve unexpected success? In what way were violent anti-fascist campaigns successful or not in preventing the success of voting for fascist parties? How did the aesthetics of the fascist marches, the staging

of electoral meetings and the use of symbols in mass propaganda produce different results in different contexts, and what role did nationalism play in the propaganda?

Organizational strategies: How did the fascist elite run their movements and handle internal divisions? What were the most common tactics used to infiltrate civil organizations and take over their leadership? How were fascist leaders able to mobilize non-fascists to work for their cause? When struggling against trade unions or workers' associations what were the most and the least efficient means to achieve success? How did the fascist elite finance their movements, and in what way could financial institutions support their operation?

d) Regime behaviour:

Nationalization/Gleichshaltung of the masses: How well did the regime succeed in repressing the opposition and integrating civil society and public institutions into unified action? In what way was public money spent in order to support purely party activities and what were the fiscal and monetary thresholds for public spending on fascist policies? What role did the fascist party have in national fascist regimes and in occupational fascist regimes? Which sectors of civil society were most easy or most difficult to reorganize towards fascist influence and control?

Institutional efficiency: To what extent was regime control a matter of the leader's charisma or the spirit of ideology? How did the leader handle elite-divisions and prevent polycentrism in the running of the state? In which areas were the security police most or least efficient in disclosing resistance, securing leader control and preventing or stimulating competition within the elite? In which areas were fascist-created institutions more efficient than in others, and for what reasons?

e) Comparative differences/similarities:

East-west and north-south regional variations: What were the main differences between fascist movements recruiting in rural and authoritarian Central and Eastern Europe and their counterparts in industrial and modern Western societies? In what way did the regime structure in a country give greater or lesser opportunities for fascist movements to grow? What were the most and least successful coalitions and alliances between fascist movements and leading parties or groups across Europe? Under what conditions can we define a Southern, an Eastern, a Northern and a Western type of fascism?

Timing and diffusion of fascism: In what way did the late-coming fascist movements imitate the first appearance on the scene? How

did the various fascist regimes influence each other? Did Mussolini's regime stamp its imprint on all the regimes established at a later date, or did the newly created regimes seek to distance themselves from it? How much did the operation of a fascist regime depend on the national context, on the timing of takeover or on the fascist party's political elite?

This list can quite easily be extended and further subdivided. Indeed, I would have preferred to present the inventory as a true hypothesis-linked inventory with a systematic suggestion of empirical relevance and findings, and not as I have done here present a simple list of isolated questions of interest. However, my idea is to outline what is needed now if we are to be able to proceed down the correct theory-building track. Any proposition inventory has to be carried out as an international project with several specialists, and cannot be an armchair project based on any individual's personal library. It does not preclude ongoing research projects in different countries and on different research topics, but it requires a great deal of information on the less cited and lesser-known empirical findings that exist in academe and elsewhere.

Conclusion

There can be no single theory for fascism during the period 1918–45, which was really a multifaceted phenomenon. Therefore, my recommendation is not to look at easy ways out, such as by dropping a new 'definition' of fascism that uses a varied selection of words: one fancier than the other. One cannot explain the Nazi regime's terrible actions in executing the Holocaust by citing electoral statistics, and nor can one explain the Nazi dictatorship's polycentrism through ideological components that refer to Germany's defeat in the First World War. On the other hand, the success of fascism is 'connected', which means there are some inner links that a careful theoretical and empirical analysis must discover.

There are important aspects in the empirical development of fascism that are analytically interesting without having much to do with 'fascism' as such. Therefore, we shall welcome students studying fascism who are theoretically oriented towards other fields of study. They can research and attempt to understand how Nazism turned ordinary policemen into monsters when they were brought to Eastern Front, or how the success of the newcomer party, the NSDAP, in successive elections, with brief intervals and a high tide of economic depressions, could

infiltrate solid urban bourgeois and rural agricultural districts with such ease. They can then move on and use these findings in the analysis of other fields of social science research. We must also encourage scholars of fascism to move beyond their traditional realm and work on comparable matters that may be theoretically relevant for obtaining an understanding of their ‘terrain’ in an explanation of fascism.

This is the main challenge for the coming age of fascist studies. I have argued that the first task will be to compile, extract and make an overall proposition inventory of findings on fascism. Such an inventory will make it easier to prevent us from reinventing the wheel and will clarify which themes have been well documented and which are less thoroughly studied. It will also force us to adopt more explicit formulations of what we conceive to be ‘a theoretical proposition’ from the more obscure concepts I suggested at the beginning of this chapter.

What I will suggest as a useful strategy for theory-building in the future consists of two different operations. Firstly, the decomposition of previous analyses of fascism into different propositions (the proposition inventory); secondly, a more flexible and profound reconstruction from many pieces of theoretical insight of what may be a ladder to a theoretical understanding of the aspects of comparative fascism. It may never be possible to explain the presence of one type of fascism, or the changing phenomena of fascism in one country—‘you cannot explain Nazism in Germany 1918–45 through one theory’. When this has been agreed upon, we may gradually weld the various propositions together. It is not useful to begin ‘from the top’ in the search for a new definition or generic concept—that has proved to be a futile project whether it is done by determining a new name for the phenomenon or by ‘writing its history’, as the Italian communist dissident Angelo Tasca once claimed.

Finally, when the new theoretical platform has been established, its significance will not be limited to the field of fascism: it certainly will have theoretical implications for a wide range of social phenomena not originally envisaged by the students of fascism proper.

Notes

1. E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short 20th Century, 1914–1991*, London, 1994.
2. This opinion is expressed in several works discussing theories of fascism. For example, in his article, ‘What Fascism is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept’, *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 2, 1979, pp. 367–98, Gilbert Allardyce denies the existence of a ‘generic concept of fascism’, and arrives at the following conclusion: ‘there is no such thing as fascism per se;

there are only the men and organizations that carry the name. When they were defeated, or when their moment was over, fascism passed into history with them' (p. 385), and 'fascism must become recognized as merely a word within this limited period as well, indefinable beyond the individuals and organizations that it is used to identify' (p. 388). However, see also the replies from Stanley Payne and Ernst Nolte, who write 'From the multiple forms come multiple interpretations, the consequence of which would be not abandoning the concept, but differentiating among the forms to arrive at a historical description that is as comprehensive as possible' (p. 394). In his *Interpretations of Fascism*, Cambridge, 1977, Renzo De Felice says 'We can deduce from the individual manifestations of fascism a general notion of the phenomenon... [But] a more extensive, rigid study tracing other [than what is old and new] aspects of fascism, or even other characteristics sometimes labelled as fascist, to a single common denominator would be as difficult as it would be distorting' (p. 11).

3. The idea of a fascist minimum was first introduced in E. Nolte, *Die Krise des liberalen Systems und die faschistischen Bewegungen*, Munich, 1968, and S. G. Payne, 'The Concept of Fascism', in S. U. Larsen, B. Hagtvet and J. P. Myklebust, eds, *Who Were the Fascists: Social Roots of European Fascism*, Bergen, 1980, pp. 14–25, made a list of 14 traits that were the 'minima' common to all fascist movements. However, the problem of an all-inclusive definition or list of fascist traits was illustrated by the 'Botz-Kienzle controversy', in which the main point in the dispute between the legacy of fascism in Austria was the extension of different traits to be included in the list of items Austrians should react to in an opinion poll. With a very long list, hardly any Austrians (0.01 per cent) had fascist leanings, but with a short list containing just a few important traits, almost 30 per cent of Austrians were shown to have strong fascist leanings. By the 'long-list method' even Hitler and Mussolini would not have been declared fascists. See G. Botz, 'Janus-Headed Austria: Transition from Nazism as Restoration, Continuity and Learning Process', in S. U. Larsen, ed., *Modern Europe after Fascism: 1943–1980s*, New York, 1998, pp. 339–77.
4. R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London, 1991. He defines the palingenetic myth as being derived from palingenesis (*palin* = anew, *genesis* = creation), meaning 'arriving at a new beginning' (pp. 32–3). This way of defining fascism has some similarity with the idea of rediscovering the past, for example, through the nostalgic nature of fascist thought.
5. R. Eatwell, 'Towards a New Model of Generic Fascism', *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 4, no. 2, 1992, pp. 161–94.
6. S. G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945*, London, 1995. Ch. 15, entitled 'Elements of a retrodictive theory of fascism' states 'it should be possible to arrive at the constituents of a kind of retrodictive theory of fascism: that is, an elucidation of the particular circumstances that would have existed in an early twentieth-century European country in order for a significant fascist movement to have developed [...] The elements of such a retrodictive theory would include many factors, including the cultural, political, social, economic and international (Table 15.1).' The table mentioned contains a list of 22 items that may be relevant, but with no priority or 'strength' among them in relation to explanatory power.

7. R. O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, New York, 2004, pp. 219–20.
8. M. A. Ledeen, ed., *Fascism: An Informal Introduction to its Theory and Practice*, Cambridge, 1976, and M. A. Ledeen, 'Renzo De Felice and the Controversy over Italian Fascism', *Journal of Contemporary History* 11, 1976, pp. 269–83. For comments on this event see B. W. Painter Jr, 'Renzo De Felice and the Historiography of Italian Fascism', *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 2, 1990, pp. 391–405.
9. In *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, London, 1995 [1983], p. 177, S. M. Lipset formulated the thesis: 'data from a number of countries demonstrate that classical fascism is a movement of the propertied middle classes who normally support liberalism'. However, later studies by M. Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919–1945*, Cambridge, 1983, and by W. Brustein, *The Logic of Evil: The Social Origin of the Nazi Party, 1925–1933*, New Haven, 1996, states that 'the principal aim of the second explanation of Nazism we consider [the extremism of the centre] is that joiners came primarily from the lower middle-class' (p. 20). However, there is difficulty in deriving conclusions of voter support by analysing membership data.
10. De Felice, *Interpretations*, p. 176, clearly states fascism was limited to interwar Europe and that it was mainly a middle-class phenomenon. However, as already demonstrated in Kater, *The Nazi Party*, P. Manstein, ed., *Die Mitglieder und Wähler der NSDAP, 1919–1933*, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1990, and Brustein, *Logic of Evil*, the working class was heavily represented within its ranks from the beginning. It has been something like a wishful myth—perhaps inspired by those who suffered most from fascist horrors—that the working-class was 'clean'. However, it is a common observation in all parties and political movements of any size that they are run by the middle class.
11. For a general introduction to discussion of the neighbourhood effect, see P. J. Taylor and R. J. Johnston, *Geography of Elections*, London, 1977, pp. 221–69. R. D. Putnam's study, 'Political Attitudes and the Local Community', *American Political Science Review* 60, 1966, pp. 640–54, is also one of the important 'classical' studies seeking to make the thesis theoretically meaningful and empirically relevant.
12. H. Tingsten, *Political Behaviour*, London, 1937. An important critical discussion of the law is found in L. Karvonen and K. Grönlund, 'Tingsten's Law of the Social Centre of Gravity', *Law and Structure* 1, 1995.
13. R. Heberle, *From Democracy to Nazism: A Regional Case Study on Political Parties in Germany*, New York, 1945.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 108, no. 78.
15. In Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, we obtain a direct impression of this group effect within small areas. See the brief discussion of the theme by S. U. Larsen, 'Concluding Remarks on Fascism and Literature: Meeting-Points and Divergences', in S. U. Larsen and B. Sandberg, eds, *Fascism and European Literature*, Lausanne, 1990, p. 428.
16. Heberle, *From Democracy*, pp. 110–11, no. 80, presents a table in which in the two polarized towns of Muensterdorf and Lagerdorf, the NSDAP obtain only 24–27 per cent, while in Daegeling they received 78.7 per cent.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 112. On the vote and recruitment to the NSDAP in rural areas see the early study by C. P. Loomis and J. A. Beegle, 'The Spread of German

- Nazism in Rural Areas', *American Sociological Review* 11, 1946, pp. 724–34. Richard Hamilton (*Who Voted for Hitler?*, Princeton, 1982, pp. 361–85) has also elaborated on the rural and small town support the Nazis received, as well as on Heberle's study, *From Democracy*, pp. 26–8, 31–2, 42–4 and 449–51.
18. An important critic of Heberle's analysis is R. Rietzler, *Kampf in der Nordmark: Das Aufkommen des Nationalsozialismus in Schleswig-Holstein [1919–1928]*, Neumünster, 1982. Rietzler argues Schleswig-Holstein's location on the border created a special mentality encompassing many of the Nazi's ideological programmes, and it was this mentality that prepared the ground for the strong pro-Nazi sympathy. In his 1962 book, *Politische Strömungen im Schleswig-Holsteinischen Landvolk, 1918–1933*, Dusseldorf, Gerhard Stoltenberg supports Heberle's assertion that the Nazi vote in that area was a protest vote against the Weimar Republic. See also Brustein, *Logic of Evil*, pp. 103–4. Brustein believes the farmers were being self-interested when they voted for the NSDAP, and that it was not simply a protest vote against the alternatives.
 19. S. S. Nilsson, 'Wahlsoziologische Probleme des Nationalsozialismus', *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft* 110, 1994, pp. 295ff, discusses the parallel to NSDAP's success in the Geest districts with the Nasjonal Samling's success in some Norwegian rural (Telemark) constituencies in 1933. A more specific discussion of this comparison and the best empirical documentation are found in A. S. Ottestad, *Politiske Alternativer i en Krisetid: Stortingsvalget i 1933 i Telemarks Landdistrikter og Tilslutningen til Nasjonal Samling-Bygdefolket*, unpublished manuscript, Oslo, 1977, and in the chapters about Norway in Larsen, B. Hagtvet and Myklebust, eds, *Who Were the Fascists*, pp. 595–677.
 20. W. S. Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1922–1945*, New York, 1965.
 21. See J. H. Grill, 'Local and Regional Studies on National Socialism: A Review', *Journal of Contemporary History* 21, 1986, pp. 253–94, for an interesting summary of some of these studies.
 22. Allen, *Nazi Seizure of Power*, pp. 16–18.
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
 25. *Ibid.*, Table 5, pp. 316–17.
 26. *Ibid.*, pp. 295–6.
 27. T. Abel has described several of the obstacles NSDAP members did have to overcome on their road to power. See T. Abel, *Why Hitler Came to Power*, New York, 1986 [1938], especially pp. 99–110, in which he describes the various types of ban issued from public offices, churches and from opponents: 'Between 1930 and 1932, several hundred National Socialists were stoned, shot or knifed to death by communists and members of the Iron Front' (p. 105). See also Brustein, *Logic of Evil*, particularly the section entitled 'Disincentives of Joining the NSDAP' (pp. 167–76), in which he uses the information to argue for the thesis that it was in individuals' rational interest to join the NSDAP (a 'risk' party), despite the problems involved.
 28. J. Falter, *Hitlers Wähler*, Munich, 1991, pp. 29–30, 33, 123–5.
 29. 'Perhaps the most decisive move undertaken by the National Socialists in the period 1928–32 was their turn to the countryside', Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?*, p. 363. For a discussion of the left-turn, see pp. 482–3.

30. It is from the idea of how intelligent leadership can work that Hamilton develops what he calls a new mentality (by the media) and tries to explain its contribution to the NSDAP's success ('Die Meinungsklima- Hypothese' in Falter's words. See Falter, *Hitlers Wähler*, pp. 325–39).
31. A. J. Gregor, *Interpretations of Fascism*, Morristown, 1974.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 242–3.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
35. J. Düffer provides a very interesting discussion of the relevance of the theory in explaining Hitler's accession to power in Germany in its various stages. See J. Düffer, 'Bonapartism, Fascism and National Socialism', *Journal of Contemporary History* 11, 1976, pp. 109–28. The author gives partial support to the theory in terms of explaining Hitler's freedom to act independently of the classes that brought him to power, but he also states these classes were never completely subdued by the dictator.
36. K. Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in K. Marx, ed., *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. 8, Berlin, 1972.
37. W. Wippermann gives a brief introduction to the Bonapartist theory, with several references to the discussion on the German case and on Southern Europe (Miklós Lackó). See W. Wippermann, *Fascismustheorien: Zum Stand der Gegenwärtigen Diskussion*, Darmstadt, 1989, pp. 65–70. See also 'Bonapartismustheoretische Momente in der Auseinandersetzung mit den Problemen des Fascismus, Totalitarismus und Populismus', W. Wippermann, ed., *Die Bonapartismustheorie von Marx und Engels*, Stuttgart, 1983, pp. 201ff.
38. D. Beetham provides an interesting discussion of the difficulties within the communist intellectual debate on finding a uniform acceptance of the theory. See D. Beetham, *Marxist in Face of Fascism: Writings by Marxists on Fascism from the Interwar Period*, Manchester, 1983, pp. 26–30, 33–7. This collection includes A. Thalheimer's, 'On Fascism' ('Über den Fascismus', *Gegen den Strom* 3, nos. 2–4, 1930, pp. 187–95) and L. Trotsky's, 'Bonapartism and Fascism', *The New Internationalist*, August 1934, pp. 214–21, which are two of the more important contributions to the debate.
39. W. Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society*, Glencoe, 1959.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 228.
41. B. Hagtvet provides an elegant discussion of the mass theory. See B. Hagtvet, 'The Theory of Mass Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic: A Re-examination', in S. U. Larsen, B. Hagtvet and J. P. Myklebust, eds, *Who Were the Fascists?*, pp. 66–117. Hagtvet holds the view that empirical evidence from Germany before Hitler's takeover does not prove membership decline or dissolution of the strong organizational networks. However, the intermediate organizational level in Germany was stalemated through the intensified class antagonism and, instead, the general evaporation of the intermediate structures stiffened into immobile segments (*zuillen*) that were gradually, and with little resistance, captured by the Nazis, thus proving Kornhauser's theory—albeit via an important reformulation.
42. K. Koktysh, 'Belarussian Transition: When Mass Society Acts', unpublished paper, Department of Comparative Politics, Bergen, 1999.

43. B. Moore, *Social Origin of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, New York, 1966. D. Smith provides a very useful introduction and evaluation of Moore's in 'Discovering Facts and Values: The Historical Sociology of Barrington Moore', in T. Skocpol, ed., *Vision and Method in historical Sociology*, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 313–55, with a brief, but illustrative bibliography of Moore's works, reviews and of works influenced by Moore.
44. G. M. Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism or Social Democracy: Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe*, Oxford, 1991. Luebbert refers to this as the Moore-Gerschenkron thesis when he discusses Alexander Gerschenkron's *Bread and democracy in Germany*, Berkeley, 1943, as a forerunner to Moore's book.
45. Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism or Social Democracy*.
46. The oft-quoted example of the preventive effect of the red-green alliances in the Scandinavian countries during the 1930s overlooks the fact these compromises emerged only *after* the menace of fascist mobilization was over. Therefore, the more important conclusion regarding what prevented greater fascist mobilization in Scandinavia was the ability of the conservatives to prevent their most serious rival from trespassing into their space. See Luebbert's discussion of the effects of these alliances in which he points to the fact only the Czech agreement produced any real change of economic policy to the benefit of the farmers. Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism or Social Democracy*, p. 291. For an interesting paper that tests Luebbert's thesis see J. E. Roemer, 'Distributive Class Politics and the Political Geography of Interwar Europe', Department of Economics Working Papers, University of California, Davis, nos. 98–07, April 1998.
47. Moore illustrates this in his conclusions on the United Kingdom, when he says, 'Finally, policies that were necessary as well as possible became facts because influential leaders saw and handled problems accurately and in time. There is no need to deny the historical significance of moderate and intelligent statesmen', B. Moore, *Social Origin*, p. 39. However, when interpreting adverse cases, statesmanship seems less important: the countries that turn fascist seem to have done so because of the inability of the politicians to act together. G. M. Luebbert, on the other hand, openly admits his theory is structuralist: 'leadership and meaningful choice played no role in the outcomes [...] Some social and political contexts encouraged leaders to build alliances across specific social groups; some compelled them to do so; some prohibited them from doing so or made it highly probable that they would fail if they tried. I have found little evidence that similarly situated leaders responded differently—or at least with different levels of success—to similar inherited inducements and constraints. Given the non-replicability of the experiences, which amounts to saying there is no evidence that different leaders, as long as they aspired to lead successful movements, would have made different choices' (Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism or Social Democracy*, pp. 306–7). See also his discussion of the contingent choices of two leaders: the Swedish leader Karl Staff and Italy's Giovanni Giolitti, who both failed in their efforts at liberal-socialist integration because of 'the structure of their social-political situations' (Ibid., pp. 156–7).

48. Another critique of Luebbert's theory is presented by W. Brustein who, rather than focus on the leaders' choices or structural conditioning, uses what he calls a rational choice approach—the German family peasants acted in their own self-interest and supported the party that promised the most to them. See Brustein, *Logic of Evil*, pp. 99–101.
49. Robert Paxton noted this anti-liberal heritage and criticizes the fact that 'most authorities treat generic fascism in a static manner' (the minimum essence). Instead, he advocates the celebrated social science functionalist (process) approach and, in line with my own view, advises us to look for functional equivalents to fascism during the three phases of the 'cycle'. This approach does not only involve the usual 'generic fascism' but also other non-fascist, but functionally equivalent, entities. See R. Paxton, 'The Five Stages of Fascism', *Journal of Contemporary History* 70, 1998, pp. 1–23. See also Payne, *History of Fascism*, p. 8, in which he even goes back to the Enlightenment in search of fascism's intellectual roots. The idea of the historical root was revitalized during the bicentenary celebration of the French Revolution. See, particularly, G. L. Mosse, 'Fascism and the French Revolution', *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, 1989, pp. 5–26.
50. Several authors have used the term 'generic fascism' to deny or legitimize a unified nucleus at least in fascist ideology. However, when applying it, as Mosse did in his chapter entitled 'The Genesis of Fascism', it turns out to be a very loose description of fascism's several traits. See W. Laquer and G. L. Mosse, eds, *International Fascism 1920–1945*, New York, 1966. H. A. Turner also uses 'generic' in different ways: 'generic term', 'generic concept', 'generic label', 'generic category' and 'generic phenomenon', where he seems to think of 'generic' as synonymous with 'similarity'. See H. A. Turner, 'Fascism and Modernization', in H. A. Turner, ed., *Reappraisals of Fascism*, New York, 1975, pp. 132–3. Another author occupied with the term 'generic' is Roger Griffin who applies a new label—the 'palingenetic myth' as the common denominator of fascist ideology. He advances this as a 'concise definition' for the construction of an 'ideal type' using the reference to Max Weber's methodological language. However, he does deny the existence of any empirical reality of fascism as a 'genus' as it only conforms to a heuristic definition ('construct'). See R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London, 1991, p. 26.
51. Payne, *History of Fascism*.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 465, n 6.
53. J. J. Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, and Re-equilibration*, Baltimore, 1978, p. 153.
54. Linz notes the essential role of opposition forces: when the semi-loyal opposition (the German National People's Party [DNVP—Deutschnationale Volkspartei] and other conservative groups) sided with the disloyal opposition (the NSDAP), the breakdown of Weimar democracy was inevitable (*Ibid.*, pp. 27, 36–8). See also J. J. Linz, 'Political Space and Fascism as a Late-Comer: Conditions Conducive to the Success or Failure of Fascism as a Mass Movement in Interwar Europe', S. U. Larsen, B. Hagtvet and J. P. Myklebust, eds, *Who Were the Fascists?*, pp. 154–6.
55. Hidden-variable theory attempts to explain why identical experiments in quantum mechanics give different results, making only probability

predictions possible. The idea is then to search for an underlying general theory that will explain why only probabilities can be established and which has nothing to do with conventional experiment errors. In other words, are there some deterministic mechanisms ('hidden') in quantum mechanics that have not yet been discovered. Emergence has to be understood as 'a property of the whole, while not being easily derived from the individual units comprising it'. 'Every resultant is either the sum or a difference of the co-operant forces [...] The emergent is unlike its components insofar as these are incommensurable, and cannot be reduced to their sum or their difference.' See G. H. Leves, *Problems of Life and Mind*, London, 1875, p. 412. Or 'the arising of novel and coherent structures, patterns and properties during the process of self-organizing in complex systems' (J. Goldstein, 'Emergence as a Construct: History and Ideas', *Emergence: Complexity and Organization* 1, 1999, pp. 49–72). Two examples are given. First, a hierarchical organization is one example that can generate emergent behaviour (a bureaucracy may behave in a way quite different to that of the individuals in that bureaucracy) but perhaps more interestingly, emergent behaviour can also arise from more decentralized organizational structures such as a marketplace. In some cases the system has to reach a combined threshold of diversity, organization and connectivity before emergent behaviour appears'. Secondly, 'an ant colony. The queen does not give direct orders and does not tell the ants what to do. Instead, each ant reacts to stimuli in form of chemical scent from larvae, other ants, intruders, food and the build-up of waste, and leaves behind a chemical trail, which in turn provides stimuli to other ants. Here each ant is an autonomous unit that reacts depending only on its local environment and genetically encoded rules for its variety of ant. Despite the lack of centralized decision making, ant colonies exhibit complex behaviour'. See also K. R. Popper, *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*, Oxford, 1972; K. R. Popper and J. C. Eccles, *The Self and its Brain: An Argument for Interactionism*, London, 1977.

56. Popper, *Objective Knowledge*; Popper and Eccles, *The Self and its Brain*.
57. The propensity theory was first formulated in K. R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Theory*, London, 1957, but more fully elaborated in his *Realism and the Aim of Science: From the Postscript to the Logic of Scientific Discovery*, London, 1983. On the idea of the relevance of the propensity of a situation without actually testing it see K. R. Popper, *Realism*, p. 282, no. 2. In his most recent publication on the topic, Popper tries to distinguish between actual probabilities and propensities: 'Propensities in physics are properties of *the whole physical situation* and sometimes even of the particular way in which a situation changes. And the same holds of the propensities in chemistry, in biochemistry and in biology', K. R. Popper, *A World of Propensities*, Bristol, 1990, p. 17. He thereby seeks to underline the idea of indeterminism in the real world and focus on accidents and unpredictability. However, he is also very much against a relativistic interpretation of forces in the social world, and he wants to leave predictions of future events based on chance and unexpected 'mutations'. Nevertheless, when an event takes place—such as the birth of fascism—it definitely does have important causal effects.

58. See N. Tilley, 'Popper, Historicism and Emergence', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1982, pp. 59–67. Even though Tilley is very critical of the use of Popper's emergence-thinking in terms of its ability to establish only theories of 'the formal processes of transformation', he admits the importance of how 'new things and events occur, with unexpected and indeed unpredictable properties'. Therefore, he indicates the difficulty of making theories of future development (we cannot know what will be new)—because of emergence—but we will try to solve new problems with our tried-and-tested theories of the past. Thus, no theory can predict the future, but it can be a means to solve future problems when the events appear to be similar to those of the past. Thinking in terms of the emergence of events or new phenomena in the future, and understanding them once they have happened through the use of theories developed from past experience, thus constitutes a double challenge for the social sciences.
59. B. Berelson and R. Steiner, *Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings*, New York, 1964, is a very good illustration of the idea I have suggested for hypotheses and findings on fascism.

3

Desperately Seeking ‘Generic Fascism’: Some Discordant Thoughts on the Academic Recycling of Indigenous Categories

Michel Dobry

This chapter addresses some of the problems faced by both social scientists and historians when they attempt to think in comparative terms about the phenomenon we habitually assemble under the heading of ‘fascism’ and, more especially, when they attempt to ‘theorize’ these phenomena.¹ The problems I will deal with here—and in the limited space of this chapter I cannot deal with all the problems—derive from two conceptions of the research process, two basic assumptions that are widespread among historians of fascisms, and indeed across the social sciences as a whole.

The first of these is the belief that this process—namely the construction of theories seeking to account for (i.e. explain) historical phenomena such as fascisms—should have as its starting-point and as its final objective the classification of the phenomena under consideration. In this particular case, that means classifying them (or not) under the label ‘fascism’. Furthermore, to achieve this, the favoured (indeed, almost obligatory) procedure is to construct a definition of these phenomena or of the concept to which they supposedly correspond.

The second belief, usually closely linked to the first, concerns a different analytical issue, again not unique to the study of fascisms—namely the appropriation for academic purposes of ordinary or, so to speak, indigenous, categories or concepts, with all that entails. Now, however tempting it may be to develop these more or less sophisticated reconfigurations and stylizations of the concept of ‘fascism’, there is

reason to doubt how useful they are likely to be as interpretive and explanatory instruments. After all, as every researcher would acknowledge, the category of fascism is the product of the actions, struggles and the self-identification of the political actors themselves, whose priorities certainly did not include developing the term into a research tool.

These conceptions or beliefs constitute an intellectual process which, however widespread, is nonetheless seriously counterproductive, at least when it comes to the comparative analysis of fascisms and neighbouring phenomena. This process, which assumes that classifying these phenomena is the same thing as making them intelligible, will for the sake of convenience be referred to in the pages that follow as classificatory reason (*raison classificatoire*). To help dissect this approach and reveal the problems it creates, I will often refer—the paradox is apparent rather than real—to what is reputed to be a negative case of fascism: namely the French case.

One of the peculiarities of movements of the radical-right in interwar France was, of course, that they often refused to recognize themselves under the label ‘fascism’. I will also make use of another device which, as well as being a powerful critical tool, offers some solutions to the intellectual dead-ends and pitfalls endemic to classificatory reasoning when it sets out to analyse and theorize ‘fascisms’. I refer to the features of an approach that I believe to be an alternative to classificatory thinking: the *relational perspective*.² This approach resolutely refuses to analyse fascist movements (and indeed those that rejected the label)—or their ideologies or cultures—as entities in themselves, in isolation, separated from the social spaces or fields and the competitive or conflictual relationships in which they acted and defined their identities as well as their ideologies, separated from the situational logics, the variations of conjuncture and the practical contexts in which they were embedded.

As we shall see, the adoption of this analytical approach has significant, perhaps disagreeable and certainly disconcerting, consequences for some specialists in this field of research. Indeed, it is conceivable the social and historical sciences—in order to give a proper account of these phenomena—will have no other option but to abandon the illusion that a theory of fascism is either useful or even possible.

Thinking from the outcome

In the pages that follow, the expression ‘French case’ will be used not only for what happened in France between the wars, but also for the strange interpretation proposed by a group of French historians

when addressing the growth of French radical-right movements during this period. They explain the absence of any 'real success' by fascism in France by French society's supposed 'allergy' to fascism. This interpretation—which I have called the 'immunity thesis'—exhibits in concentrated form virtually all the errors and misconceptions that can possibly be committed in the comparative analysis and eventual theorization of fascist phenomena.³

One of these errors is crucial for the present discussion. My attention was first directed towards it by the analyses of the political crisis of February 1934 and by what immunity thesis historians deduced from the result of this crisis, or more specifically of the actual *journée* of 6 February 1934. This result, the outcome of the crisis, is well-known: after more than a month of street mobilizations initiated by various movements of the radical-right (first and foremost Action Française, in response to the Stavisky scandal) the political regime of the Third Republic did indeed survive for a few more years. The day after the 6 February events, that veteran of party politics, Gaston Doumergue, was called on to form a new government. The leagues did not seize power and the formation of the Doumergue cabinet put an end, if not to all agitation (demonstrations, counter-demonstrations and even street violence continued well after 7 February), then at least to what was experienced and understood by the actors as a major political crisis. This outcome was quickly interpreted as a 'failure' of the radical-right.

From this failure, from this survival of the Third Republic, our historians have derived conclusions both about the 'nature' of the events themselves and about their significance for the analysis of the French authoritarian right's movements between the wars. Thus, the events supposedly demonstrate the leagues' lack of political radicalism or, put another way, the respectable moderate 'conservatism' of those involved in the mobilizations, their 'lack of seriousness' (because only 'authentic' fascisms—those that *succeeded*, that seized power—deserve to be taken seriously, it would seem), the political incompetence of their leaders (or their 'lack of charisma'), the incoherence of their programmes, the absence of any structured ideology, the impracticability of their ambitions, the weakness of their social foundations and the 'simulated' character of their struggles. Finally and crucially, the events prove France's 'allergy', its cultural 'immunity', to fascism.

In other words, and here we get to the nub of the whole interpretation, nothing in the events themselves or in the mobilizations that produced them bears the remotest resemblance to the processes that in other countries produced fascist or even plain authoritarian regimes.

Defining fascism: The centrality of the Italian and German cases

It is on this basis that these historians have elaborated their definitions of 'authentic' fascisms: largely in opposition to what they believe to have observed in the French case. The salient feature of these definitions is that they identify the 'authentic' with the 'finished' or 'complete'. That is to say, these definitions—some admittedly more developed than others—all have at their core those characteristics that resulted from the seizure of power by the Italian Fascists and German National Socialists and their subsequent construction of a distinctive regime or power system.⁴ It is this criterion that allows these authors to classify the movements of the French radical-right in the 1930s: that is, to oppose them to 'authentic' fascism. The other criteria of these definitions are very loosely framed, thus facilitating a random quest for any kind of difference between the processes and phenomena that produced this kind of outcome and those which, as in 1930s France, produced another kind of outcome.

Here we touch on an aspect of my argument that goes well beyond what it seems fair to call the fantasies of the immunity thesis. When we look at these 'fascist' phenomena and the authoritarian impulses of the interwar period, our gaze is automatically drawn by what I would call the centrality of Italian Fascism and German Nazism. This centrality is easy to explain and, to a certain extent, justify. The consequences, both short- and long-term, of the seizure of power by the Italian Fascists and, above all, by the Nazis, were gigantic and dramatic. But even leaving these consequences aside, these movements and their successes were matters of considerable importance for their contemporaries. For many, they were the source of practical anxieties, and for numerous others they served both intellectually and practically as models (needless to say, at first contemporaries did not have extensive knowledge of these phenomena and, initially at least, they did not really understand what they were dealing with).

Now, the centrality of Italian Fascism and German Nazism is a gigantic trap for all those investigating our subject. The problem arises as soon as attempts are made—and this is almost an unreflective routine for scholars—to define fascism (in the singular). The trap lies, first of all, in the temptation of using what supposedly defines fascism, namely 'authentic' or complete fascism, as the standard or reference point against which to measure other authoritarian movements and, in particular, as an instrument for gauging the 'seriousness' or vigour of

this or that other movement or the ‘threat’ they posed for democratic institutions.⁵ The fundamental point I am making here, as the reader will no doubt have recognized, is that these observations have much wider resonance and that the immunity thesis is not alone in being seriously handicapped from the outset by this aspect of its classificatory obsession. Indeed, it is an impediment for most debates on the subject of what was or is ‘fascism’ (or, as we shall see, even fascisms in the plural).

This centrality of successful fascisms, namely Italian Fascism and Nazism, is thus at the heart of most attempts to define or theorize so-called ‘generic fascism’, and partly explains why such attempts run into a blind alley. It is, of course, true that, whereas proponents of the immunity thesis based their definitions of ‘authentic’ fascism crudely and simplistically on the Mussolini and Hitler regimes, many other authors took the elementary precaution of distinguishing movements they deemed fascist from regimes that were given the same label. In debates in this field of research, at least outside France, this has long been the case; however, even if we remove from definitions of fascism those features that are supposedly more or less specific to fascist regimes, this is still not sufficient to avoid the underlying difficulties that I am seeking to unravel here. For these difficulties, whose effects are certainly not limited to the analysis of fascism, are linked to the presupposition there is a direct, self-evident and incontrovertible causal link uniting the motivations and actions of actors on the one hand, and, on the other, the ultimate outcome that may emerge. For researchers, the outcome is a veritable *interpretation-attracting focal point* or magnet and, as we shall see, this is an intellectual pitfall with multiple consequences.

It is evident, for example, in most of the investigations inspired by the methodological decision to identify the ‘fascist minimum’ in a combination of ideological traits that are supposedly characteristic of fascism in general. These investigations owe their rather fragile cognitive plausibility solely to the circular argument that these traits can indeed be found in the Italian and German cases—from which they were extracted in the first place.

The extension subsequently given to the generic concept depends simply on the desire to include in the universe of fascisms, or indeed exclude from it, this or that historical example, this or that national variant or this or that organization (do we wish the list to feature the Italian Social Movement [MSI—Movimento Social Italiano], the Basque ETA [Euskadi Ta Askatasuna], the French Front National, some radical

Islamist movement or British skinhead group, the American Ku Klux Klan and what about the Cambodian Khmers Rouges?).

The only condition is that the cases of Italian Fascism and German Nazism must fit the concept. Thus, we have the definition of fascism that insists on the themes of 'rebirth' or 'regeneration' in its ideology and discourse (or, as some would have it, the 'palingenetic' ideology).⁶ The point can also be verified in another way, by noting that specialists in this field have reacted very negatively to certain other definitions of fascism which, although they may be equally focused on the ideological features of fascism—as in the case of Sternhell's definition,⁷ for example—nonetheless have the singular trait of excluding Nazism from the universe of fascism.

There is a further trap to guard against. These difficulties cannot simply be avoided by abandoning a definition based on its ideological or cultural features, on its negations or on its objectives as advertised in ideological formulations and in the discourse of fascist leaders, and replacing it with a more extensive definition: one that completes these previous elements by adding less discursive and more practical traits, such as the style of action and the forms of organization. Nor can they be avoided by distancing oneself from the quest for generic fascism in a purely rhetorical fashion. This is what Robert Paxton has recently tried to do—though it must be said without any great display of sociological imagination—by converting ideological and discursive features that are to be found in current definitions of 'generic fascism' into traits that supposedly belong on the register of affects or mobilizing passions.⁸

In all of these cases, the only reason these definitions appear to be adapted to their object and remotely plausible is because they correspond to features that can easily be identified in the German and Italian cases, from which, once again, they have been directly derived.

A very peculiar theoretical import

The centrality of 'successful' fascisms, the Italian and the German, in the construction of the definitions of fascism allows us to perceive more clearly what exactly these definitions are and what their place or function is in the research process. First of all, what seems crucial here is the rather naïve notion shared by many scholars in the social sciences—and I am not talking only of historians—that in order to understand phenomena like fascisms it is necessary to develop something akin to what contemporary epistemology would call an operational definition of the phenomena under consideration.

Thus, in the construction of most current definitions of fascism, and especially those that are most popular, there is clearly a desire from the beginning to extract a definition of fascism or generic fascism that the researcher believes can be achieved by simple 'empirical' observation of characteristics that seemingly differentiate these phenomena from others. That is, a definition that is believed to be 'free', neither tied to a specific causal relationship nor to pre-existing theoretical systems.

This is precisely the procedure invoked and, apparently at least, followed by Stanley Payne who called it 'an inductive inventory of characteristics', allowing him to arrive at what he calls a working definition of generic fascism.⁹ This working definition, like many other definitions in this field of research, seems to emerge naturally from a more or less detailed summary of the similarities and disparities between different historical cases across a range of dimensions and variables. As Carl Hempel vigorously insisted some time ago, this conception of how to construct definitions and concepts constitutes a serious delusion, that—when seeking to explain phenomena, and especially when the explanation aspires to a certain level of generality or theoretical scope—one can or should have recourse to definitions or concepts that are supposedly free of pre-existing theoretical systems. Or to use his words, free of 'theoretical import'.¹⁰

It is tempting to explain the theoretical impotence and the repeated impasses encountered by contemporary conceptualizations or theorizations of fascism by blaming the effects of this common example of the operationist illusion. It is all the more tempting because so many authors in this field of research openly claim that their definitions of fascism are in some way theoretically 'neutral'.

I would certainly not dispute that the operationist illusion or, to be more precise, the belief of these researchers in the virtues of definitions free of all theoretical import, has significant consequences in this regard, but this is far from being the whole story and it should not distract us from the essential point that in the field of the study of fascism the difficulties linked to the absence or relative weakness of an explicit and consistent theoretical import are, in effect, accentuated by the presence of an import that is uncontrolled, often unconscious, and which operates by being taken for granted.

It is the sort of import that the scholar sometimes regards, wrongly, as purely empirical. It is not purely empirical, but only in this very peculiar sense: it consists of a massive *importation of causal imagery embedded in the categories and taxonomies of everyday language* or vocabulary. This

is precisely what comes into play in the construction of more or less generic definitions or concepts of fascism, and we already had a pre-sentiment of this process when discussing the intellectual attraction exercised by successful fascisms: the centrality of Italian Fascism and German Nazism in the construction of definitions.

Thus, it is far from insignificant for the understanding of the phenomena denoted by the word 'fascism' that it first emerged as a label in the course of political struggles rather than intellectual enquiry and, furthermore, that it was used as a resource in these struggles. Of course, the category fascism, like many others (authoritarianism, conservatism, revolution, etc.), interests us because it carried meaning for the actors involved (indeed, it was often a bone of contention in their labelling competitions or struggles, and as we shall see these struggles have some relevance for the point at issue here).

The problem lies in what happens when these spontaneous and intuitive fragments of historical reality are then picked up by scholars for their own purposes: what happens when these categorizations and taxonomies are made the starting point or the governing principle for the identification of different types of phenomena, for the selection of 'facts' and causal linkages; when they are made, in fact, into the primary instrument of research.

In short, when we try to make sense of the phenomena indicated by the word fascism, this academic appropriation of indigenous categories is anything but harmless or neutral. What is worse, when we borrow from ordinary language the very elements that are the most uncertain and ambiguous—vague boundaries, implicit subtexts, confused taxonomies—and do this without realizing it, we also introduce something new to what, in the practical world of political actors and their struggles, only exists in a flowing, unstable, flexible, adaptable and malleable state. We *harden* something that is, in everyday social life, soft and fluid, and we thus risk producing pure artefacts. But, above all, we thereby harden the boundaries between phenomena and processes which, in the categories or concepts of ordinary language, are indicated in a much less systematic and more tentative way, and because of this we tend to *deduce the substance from the substantive*.

Behind these categories, these concepts and these words, we tend to identify corresponding 'natures'; to each category indicating a result we tend to associate a nature or essence that is peculiar to it and which we conceive from the start to be radically different from those associated with historical phenomena designated and differentiated by other words, categories, concepts or ideal-types.

This is why we should also be wary of one feeling that may emerge from at least some of the attempts to ‘theorize’ fascism by proposing a supposedly ‘generic’ definition (like those of the ‘fascist minimum’ type): at first sight, in these attempts definitions of fascism might appear to have a purely ornamental function in the sense that the scholar is apparently content to offer a definition without any pretence of, thereby, trying to explain anything. One possible excuse for this operation would be that the definition, as in zoology, serves to identify the beast. Out of charity one might be tempted to turn a blind eye to this type of usage. However, charity would not be appropriate even in this ornamental or zoological use of definitions. Because the latter has been shaped by the intellectual attraction of successful fascisms, there remains the underlying idea that the beast is dangerous.

There is a related reason why charity does not apply here. In the analysis of fascisms and other types of authoritarian movement, the classificatory approach and its *modus operandi*, based on the academic appropriation of indigenous concepts that are then dressed up and more or less formalized into ‘operational definitions’, is fraught with consequences. The hidden import drives historians, sociologists and political scientists to adopt, as they strive to interpret or theorize these phenomena, intellectual procedures that are both essentialist and historicist.

We are, of course, dealing here with something quite commonplace in the social sciences: phenomena, processes and historical realities that might be relatively close, related or similar will—mainly because classification has been heavily constrained by the outcomes that resulted from these phenomena or processes—be analysed, dissected and even theorized *as being governed by different laws*. Their social ‘underpinnings’ will be presented as being diametrically opposed, and they will each be attributed a specific historical dynamic that, it goes without saying, will be entirely and ‘naturally’ different.

A world of essences

The above point is confirmed in the context of the immunity thesis by the judgement meted out to the ideologies and programmatic formulations of the French radical-right between the wars. This is one of the key themes of the immunity thesis, which likes to insist on the ambiguity, confusion and imprecision—in sum, the vagueness—of these ideological formulations.

For the sake of argument let us provisionally accept the charge, even if very serious qualifications would seem necessary—after all, the doctrinal systems developed by Action Française or by Valois' ephemeral *Faisceau* are not entirely lacking in coherence.¹¹ However, the main feature of this 'essentialization' of the two types of ideology is not so much the sharp boundary the immunity thesis draws between the supposedly strong and coherent formulations associated with 'authentic' fascisms, and the vagueness and weakness of those attributed to the movements of the French radical-right. It lies rather in the conclusions—the *causal propositions*—the historian then feels entitled to draw from this. Can we seriously believe this supposed ideological imprecision is one of the decisive factors in the leagues' lack of political success as, for example, in the outcome of February 1934: that this imprecision has the intrinsic property of preventing the radical-right from achieving power? And that the ideological formulations of 'authentic' fascisms have the radically different characteristic of guaranteeing success?

One has only to reflect on the absence of ideological systematization in Italian Fascism, not just at the movement's birth, but right up until Mussolini's accession to power (if indeed we can even talk of ideology in any meaningful sense at all for this period, which I doubt), to perceive how absurd this whole hypothesis is. However, it provides essential underpinning for the immunity thesis, as can be seen also if we shift our attention from ideological formulations to a neighbouring field: the programmes of the authoritarian movements.

Here I am quite happy to concede to the proponents of the immunity thesis that the programme of La Rocque, to take just one example, is indeed absolutely inconsistent, bland, vague and devoid of originality: testimony to what may indeed be described as a doctrinal void. This lack of project would be vigorously denounced by some leading figures in the *Volontaires Nationaux* (a satellite organization of the *Croix-de-Feu*), the so-called *Maréchaux* whose social manifesto had been discarded by La Rocque.

The visible objective of this manifesto was to indicate the paths, not always legal ones, that would lead the movement to power, and it reflected the political impatience of this group of young cadres—and probably of many others. Should we, therefore, regard this programmatic and strategic imprecision as the reason for the 'historic failure' of Colonel de la Rocque's venture and, indeed, that of the whole French radical-right? It is almost as if the immunity thesis were content simply to endorse and adopt as its own the verdict of the defecting *Maréchaux* about the movement they were leaving: that the whole

operation 'lacked seriousness'. It is as if these historians have simply chosen to ignore the fact that the 'authentic' fascisms were not necessarily equipped with detailed programmes or roadmaps before they gained power.

Thus, Hitler found himself in a similar situation in 1926: facing a powerful internal challenge led by Gregor Strasser and Goebbels and the virtual absence of programme—the 1920 programme was, with good reason, seen as extremely vague—and of any clear strategic plan of action. Hitler, who had a very different social and psychological profile and different personality traits from La Rocque, nonetheless resisted the challenge every bit as vigorously as the latter.

In both cases, what was at stake was not just the need to avoid having to define too clearly how power would be achieved—for Hitler the experience of non-legal channels such as the Munich putsch, was still fresh in his mind and he had learned his lesson—but also control of the movement and, as Ian Kershaw has pointed out with regard to Hitler, the need to preserve the status of charismatic leader in the eyes of his followers.¹² All of this has absolutely nothing to do with some supposed irreducible difference of 'nature' between reactionary conservatives and revolutionary fascists.¹³

Turning to non-discursive practices, exactly the same problems arise on the issue of the participation of radical-right movements in electoral contests. The analysis has focused in particular on the French Social Party (PSF—Parti Social Français). In a climate still marked by the Popular Front's electoral victory and the ensuing mass strikes, the PSF—formed after the dissolution of the French Social Movement (MSF—Mouvement Social Français) (the umbrella for the Croix-de-Feu and its satellite organizations) by Léon Blum's government—enjoyed considerable success, transforming the competitive structure of the political space of the radical-right (the PSF becoming the dominant force), and no doubt having an impact well beyond this segment of the political spectrum to judge by the burgeoning membership figures that probably exceeded 800,000.

However, the proponents of the immunity thesis have no hesitation—methodological or otherwise—in seeing La Rocque's apparent adoption of an electoralist line and his avowed intention of competing in elections as proof, *par excellence*, of the henceforth indisputably democratic nature of the new party—a party of the 'modern right' no less, or perhaps just a rather anodyne 'boy scouts for adults': to see it as proof of the immense distance separating the PSF from foreign 'fascist models', or even from other groups of the French authoritarian right.¹⁴ In other

words, the forced mutation of Colonel de La Rocque's group into a political party is supposed to have removed in the space of a few weeks all the ambiguities that in the opinion of most of these authors characterized the Croix-de-Feu in the previous period.

A rudimentary historicism

This essentialism also has another remarkable dimension, another agenda, which consists of attributing to each particular outcome—for example what emerged from the crisis of February 1934—a particular historical path, differing in every respect from historical paths that elsewhere led to other outcomes—for example the slide into authoritarianism or the successes of 'authentic' fascisms.

The agenda is, in short, to show that in the French case—right from the preconditions of its emergence, from its origins—the process that led to the outcome of February 1934 was equipped, almost genetically, with a nature—the immunity or allergy of French society to fascism—which in turn was fulfilled in this outcome. This is not an insignificant point, for it also clearly reveals another aspect of the use of classificatory reasoning in this field of research, namely, that for each different type of outcome—be it seizure of power by the fascists, survival of democracy, drift towards an authoritarian regime, etc.—there must necessarily be types of historical path specific to each of these outcomes and different from the trajectories accompanying other types of outcome. As we have seen, this usually leads proponents of the immunity thesis to a distorted vision of the processes and historical trajectories that, in Italy and Germany, engendered different outcomes.

In fact, even leaving aside the extreme case of the immunity thesis, we are forced to recognize that the classificatory approach always contains powerful *historicist* assumptions (in the sense used by Karl Popper), albeit unacknowledged or shamefaced.¹⁵ From this perspective, the outcome gives sense and direction to the historical process or event, so there is no room for the possibility that what tilts the balance towards this particular outcome rather than another might be something quite marginal: that local or minor factors may sometimes have huge effects and may even thwart the heavy structural trends. The focus of the scholar's attention on the outcomes quite simply blinds him to the—at least—frequent contingency of these outcomes, to the fact these outcomes are produced by chance combinations between multiple series of determining factors, between separate and heterogeneous causal chains. All this simply means that it is unacceptable to subscribe to the notion that outcomes

and their peculiarities (success or failure for example) provide the key for explaining the processes, events, institutional configurations and historical sequences that brought them about.¹⁶ In other words, *we must escape from the illusion that these outcomes summarize, encapsulate or reflect the processes that produced them.*

This illusion is all the more pernicious because it tends to shape the scholar's whole empirical approach, since the outcomes define the historical intrigue they construct or, to be more precise, define the selection of historical 'facts'.¹⁷ Actually, on closer examination we see that a double selection is involved. First, selection occurs in the historical depths of each outcome: the researcher, by a sort of regressive analysis using the outcome and its specificity as a starting point, will then select those historical facts they consider pertinent for the emergence of this result and its 'specificity': in other words, *they will make the facts converge towards this result.* Secondly, because the definition of fascism will have been based on fascist successes in Italy and Germany, another process of selection will trace the frontiers of that set of cases deemed to belong to the universe of fascism or 'authentic' fascism.

Indeed, the selection of facts in the historical depths of each case will be permanently constrained by this second selection: the selection of historical cases judged to have the same 'nature', or as belonging to the same species and therefore as comparable with one another. It is from the combined effect of this double selection process that the scholar derives specific historical paths or specific natural histories which, in classificatory approaches, are then linked to each type of specific outcome. This is how fascist phenomena are credited with historical paths that are supposedly specific to them, and which are, of course, radically different from those associated with other phenomena whose natures are deemed different.

The good form of fascism

The examination of these two traits allows us a clearer insight into one of the other ways in which the scholarly study of fascism is constantly vulnerable to indigenous representations. To return to the example mentioned above of the PSF, we see easily enough how the classificatory posture of the immunity thesis leads to the patently absurd suggestion that the nature or essence of fascism—Italian or German—implies a refusal to participate in electoral processes or to use the arena and resources of electoral politics, and instead to focus all its activity on street violence.¹⁸ It is both disturbing and significant that even when

they sense that this line of argument is untenable—recent works on La Rocque’s movement all accept, however reluctantly¹⁹ and whatever their interpretive stance, that it was far from democratic²⁰—proponents of the immunity thesis nonetheless make much of the fact that La Rocque rejected (if indeed he ever really considered) any attempt to seize power by *coup de force*. It is equally disturbing that they still insist on a fundamental difference of nature between the displays of force of La Rocque’s movement and the ‘unruly behaviour’ of ‘authentically’ fascist movements.²¹ La Rocque’s highly organized and disciplined deployments were indeed distinctive, but (and this does not seem to be widely understood) this was, above all, because the leader of the PSF made the tactical choice to differentiate them from the street mobilizations of the other leagues and formations of the French radical-right.²²

This recourse to crude dichotomies presents us with a phenomenon that remains relatively unexplored in the academic analyses of fascism, and which I will merely touch on here. I refer to the often considerable impact on such analyses of a process in which a set of stereotypes of what fascisms are and of how true fascists can be recognized has gradually crystallized over time and become embedded in common parlance: a set that can be analysed rather in the style and in the vocabulary of the *Gestalttheorie*, as the ‘good form’ of fascism. It is interesting to note in passing that these representations even affect those who today deliberately identify themselves with ‘authentic’ fascisms—the Italian and German versions—and who often seek to tailor their own individual or collective identities by reproducing features corresponding to these stereotypes across a whole range of practices, not only sartorial, and sometimes even involving physical stigma.

Clearly, these same stereotypes are to be found in the categorical and multiform assertion—certainly not confined to French historians alone—that there is an *unbridgeable difference of nature* between social conservatism and ‘authentic’ fascism. This difference is, at least in the more sophisticated versions of the immunity thesis, socially rooted: it refers us back to very different social classes or groups, which in turn are the basis of radically different political orientations. Thus, social conservatism translates, or may translate, into an authoritarian orientation that ultimately leads to the establishment of authoritarian regimes, while fascism, on the other hand, is compelled by its very nature to adopt a revolutionary orientation, leading inevitably to the establishment of totalitarian systems.

Conservatism and ‘authentic’ fascism are also incompatible in practice: the differences of nature engender a dynamic of opposition between them of mutual hostility, rejection or confrontation. No less

symptomatic is the fact that, for all the attempts of specialists to finesse the issue of Italian fascism, the ‘good form’ of fascist and fascism nonetheless includes anti-Semitism among the bundle of characteristics and binary oppositions that make it up. Thus, partisans of the immunity thesis go to great lengths to demonstrate, page after page, how the PSF was entirely free of suspicion on the issue of anti-Semitism—in itself a highly contestable claim, as we now know.

The net conclusion from all these representations is simple: fascism is essentially the province of *déclassés*, of the marginalized, of ‘frustrated upstarts’, of ‘lost soldiers’, of ‘brutes’ or indeed the unemployed. It necessarily has an extensive ‘proletarian’ or at least ‘plebeian’ following, and for this reason it is necessarily revolutionary—at least at the outset. It has nothing to do with the property-owning strata, with *les notables*, the members of social elite or even with peasants (at least, not with those who own their own land), nothing to do in other words with the well-off, the educated and cultivated, the socially well-integrated, those with their niche in the social hierarchy—the right-minded and respectable.

The continuing importance of these representations is reflected in the fact that even today, when the myth of the fundamentally plebeian or proletarian character of Italian Fascism and German National Socialism has long since disintegrated, we continue to find in analyses of the 1930s, Doriot’s Parti Populaire Français (PPF—French Popular Party), on the one hand, and La Rocque’s PSF, on the other, presented as opposing ideal-types.²³ We find this tendency even among historians who ostensibly seek to distance themselves from the classical formulations of the immunity thesis; the recourse, as a key argument for classifying La Rocque outside the category of fascism due to his social and psychological profile. Supposedly it is ‘his origins, his formative influences, his personality’, coupled with his attachment to Christianity, that rendered him unreceptive to the appeal of fascism: the PPF, a movement born of a split in the Communist Party, and its leader Doriot, ‘a man of the people from a profoundly left-wing background’, in this respect served explicitly as a point of contrast: as ‘counter-proof’.²⁴

Classificatory reason and the ‘functions’ of fascisms

We are now in a better position to understand how classificatory reason operates. First, it draws impassable boundaries between phenomena designated by substantives that are somewhat rashly borrowed directly from the practical world of indigenous categorizations. On the basis of this particular form of empirical import it then attributes to these phenomena fixed essences and natures. Finally, not content with this, it

ascribes to these natures or essences a whole imagery of causation—historical trajectories or laws of historical development that are supposedly typical to each; in this perspective, the historical trajectory of true or ‘authentic’ fascism will by necessity and by nature be radically different from the trajectories of phenomena designated by other substantives or categories. The essentialism of classificatory reasoning is not static or simply ornamental, it is inherently dynamic, inherently causal, even when this is ignored or denied, and even though this causality is often expressed in rather vague or at least imprecise terms. What is more, all these elements tend to function as a sort of *grammar* for the study of fascism, the constraints of which permeate—albeit unevenly and with varying effect—this whole field of research.

The pervasive influence of this grammar is evident even in those generalizations that, on the face of it, appear most anxious to avoid the zoological pitfalls of attempts to conceptualize the ‘fascist minimum’ and the essentialism underpinning such conceptualizations. Thus, in a recent work to which I have already referred, Robert Paxton adopts a position that at first seems to resemble the relational perspective, claiming to take account of the extreme diversity of the historical phenomena that we call fascisms, of their plural character and of the need to study them in their contexts.²⁵

What makes him vulnerable to this grammar—and this is the source of most of the formidable difficulties facing his attempt to theorize fascisms (in the plural)—is derived from his belief that, despite everything, fascist phenomena nonetheless present a specific and perfectly identifiable set of historical or sociological traits, producing specific forms of historical dynamics *that are not to be found in other types of phenomena*, even neighbouring ones, and that it is these traits that explain the historical dynamics peculiar to fascisms.

Essentially, Paxton leaves his explicit definition of fascism aside, a definition that, it will be remembered, is centred on mobilizing passions and the ideas that are linked to them (the author perhaps sensing he would find it rather difficult to establish plausible causal links with what these mobilizing sentiments are meant to have produced). His conceptualization, in fact, adopts a deliberately ‘functional’ stance, and his perception of the diversity of fascisms takes shape in the description of a ‘cycle of fascism’ composed of several distinct stages, each denoting a particular historical phenomenon.

Paxton distinguishes five such stages: ‘(1) the creation of movements; (2) their rooting in the political system; (3) their seizure of power; (4) the exercise of power; (5) and, finally, the long duration, during which the

fascist regime chooses either radicalization or entropy.' I will not insist here on the blind alleys this idea of a cycle of fascism will run into on the question of what links the various phases of the cycle together. I have already referred to the difficulties associated with historicist perspectives and with the habit of using the outcomes of the Italian and German cases as the starting point for reflection on fascism or fascisms.

The fact is that despite the adjustments made to this 'cycle of fascism' idea in response to criticisms of its earlier versions (notably by the author of the present chapter) Paxton's conceptualization does not manage to break with the tradition of natural history.²⁶ If, as I suspect, each of these stages is nonetheless its indispensable pre-condition—even if it does not automatically lead to the following stage—then there is only one simple but worrying conclusion that can be drawn: that it would only be possible to observe phenomena or processes belonging to a particular stage of fascism in cases where movements had correctly, and in the right order, gone through the previous stages.

To put it in more empirical terms, the observation of the stage of the rooting of a fascist organization in a particular competitive political space would only be possible in a previous stage where fascism had already existed for a minimum period, albeit as a small group in an intellectualized and 'ideologized' form, indicating a new way of looking at the world. To be frank, I fear such a perspective cannot even fully account for the original Italian version of fascism, and if it cannot cater for that case then the cycle of fascism is no more than a rhetorical device devoid of content.

However, we have still not touched on the essential point, and here the impact of the grammar referred to above is remarkable. How, indeed, should we decide what is peculiarly fascist about the phenomenon or process corresponding to each stage?

The answer to this question, which is the intellectual lynchpin of the whole edifice, seems to lie in Paxton's so-called 'functional' approach. What does this mean? While he does not really define the functions performed by fascisms in their different stages, it is not hard to discern their key features from the illustrations he offers of movements that may (or may not) be described as fascist on the basis of the functions that may be attributed to them.

In schematic terms, these illustrations seem to me to point towards an effectively functional definition of fascisms, a definition articulated around the following elements: the needs of conservative elites regarding what may generally be described as the maintenance of social order; situations where, for diverse reasons, the state is not able to carry out

this function—that is to satisfy these needs (clearly this is a soft functional perspective); recourse by the elites to a sort of *substitute* for the force and authority the state cannot provide, namely, the fascists.²⁷ This approach inevitably leads Paxton to re-import the gross *social prejudices* embedded in the essentialist vision of fascism: namely, that there is a social gulf between the naturally conservative dominant elites and the social composition of their auxiliary troops, and that it is only with reluctance that these elites are forced into alliance with people who necessarily come from a different social world.

Not surprisingly, this strategy, apparently designed to avoid the pitfalls of theories of ‘generic fascism’, leads Paxton into different and probably no less serious difficulties. First of all, it is not as easy as all that to extract the functions attributable to first-stage fascist currents or movements (do they always really see their own position as that of auxiliary forces in relation to the dominant elites, or indeed the state, or even in terms of promises to fulfil such functions?) from this configuration of relationships. For the subsequent phases, this functional definition of fascisms, in fact, closely resembles traditional *instrumental* conceptions of fascism that are not confined to authors influenced by Marxism, far from it (indeed, it is no surprise to find that this manipulative view of things is also widely shared among the social elite itself—based no doubt on the self-same social prejudices).²⁸ To focus for one last time on the French case, this return to instrumentalist perspectives is not without irony.

Contrary to the intentions of Paxton, who has no desire to break with the classifications proposed by the immunity thesis, his functional perspective seems especially relevant to the PSF, whose leader, along with a substantial section of the membership, *explicitly* conceived their own role (when required, at the famous ‘H-hour’) as that of an auxiliary force capable of supplementing or, if need be, substituting the forces of order against the ‘collectivist’ menace. This vision of their role persisted even under Vichy, despite the regime’s repeated refusal of the constant and insistent offers of service from the PSF’s *Chef*.

Stratagems of distinction, political competition and classification struggles

As we have seen, it is not that easy when analysing fascist phenomena to avoid the lures and snares of classificatory reason. As a first step in this direction I would propose a little trick, a useful practical recipe or formula: *bring the category or concept of fascism back home*. That is,

back to the situations or contexts in which it was actually used by political actors, back to the struggles in which they had to define others as well as themselves.

In this way, one begins not only to see the extent to which the intellectual endeavours of scholars may be directly dependant on taxonomies and concepts lifted unreflectively from the context of political struggles, but also to discover that the actors involved in these struggles are often much less easily duped than researchers by the classifications they adopt. Thus, the immunity thesis vigorously denounces certain categorizations produced by political actors—its favourite target being the very extensive usages of the term fascism made by those who opposed it on the left, the ‘anti-fascists’. At the same time, however, it endorses certain other denunciatory categorizations without any attempt at critical distance—for example, the verdicts proclaimed by dissidents within authoritarian movements who expressed their impatience at what they saw as the procrastination, the lack of vigour or the conservatism of these movements, whether it be the young leaders of the *Volontaires Nationaux* mentioned above or many others besides.

As for the aesthetes of literary fascism and their judgements, the veritable fascination these seem to hold for our historians in their classificatory endeavours would be a worthy research topic all on its own. The paradox is that this willingness to either denounce or borrow the categorizations produced by the actors co-exists with an insidious indifference, indeed a total lack of interest, in how the actors of the radical-right—or indeed anyone else involved in the struggles that produce these labels, definitions or everyday political categorizations—*classify* themselves or others, and how they manipulate or *play with these classifications*. It also indicates a lack of interest in what might be at stake in the use they make of these classifications. Yet, the use these actors make of these categorizations, especially in struggles over classification, and the constraints that shape these uses and struggles, provide us with the best means for understanding how the movements of the radical-right position themselves in relation to the label ‘fascism’—and that, of course, is not the same thing as their positioning in relation to ‘fascism as such’: its programmes, its ideological formulations, its tactics, achievements or successes.

This elementary recipe allows a genuine shift in the line of enquiry. Thus, to take *Action Française* as an example, perhaps the pursuit of greater historical understanding is not best served by the question ‘was or was not the *Action Française* “fascist” or “authentically fascist”?’ but rather by this quite different question: ‘why, *at a particular moment* (for

example the period that followed Mussolini's seizure of power), *in a particular conjuncture, in a particular configuration* of the political game and political forces in France, did the Action Française, whose leaders were from the outset deeply (and durably) sympathetic to Italian Fascism, choose—despite this attraction—to declare that it was not “fascist”?

This shift of perspective involves thinking differently about the use of labels, but also beyond that about the *identity-construction* of movements, about the positions they adopt, their programmes, their tactics, their alliances and, in many respects, even their ideological formulations. It involves thinking about them not in terms of essences or natures that the scholar is tempted to assign to each of them, conceived ‘in itself’, in isolation (and thus measured ‘in itself’ against ‘authentic’ fascism, as defined by the scholar), but instead (primarily, though not exclusively) in terms of their relationship to the competitive social spaces or fields in which the movements operate and define themselves, their relationship with other movements also operating there and with the specific constraints and competitive structures of these social universes. Finally, it involves thinking about them in their relationship with the changing historical conjunctures that affect these competitive settings.

Here we have one of the keys to explaining the repeated refusal of many of the leaders of these movements, from Action Française to the PSF, by way of the *Jeunesses Patriotes* and, let us not forget, even Doriot for quite some time, to describe themselves as fascist.²⁹ The rather naïve question of how ‘sincere’ these refusals were is best ignored at this point, even though many historians like to discuss it. It detracts from the much more fruitful question of the *constraints* placed on the movements of the authoritarian right by the social and political fields or spaces, and the historical conjunctures in which they operate and define themselves.

The conclusion proponents of the immunity thesis draw from these refusals is, as we know, that the ‘natures’ of these movements are radically different from those of ‘authentic’ fascisms. They thus fail to recognize how, throughout this period, political actors developed a sense, based on both perception and experience, of what could and could not be said in the public arena, a sense partly derived from the war and the prominence of veterans in these arenas.

They also fail to recognize the constraining effects of the ferocious nationalism that shaped the environment in which the *droites nationales* competed with each other. In other words, they fail to recognize one

of the central dilemmas facing the *droites nationales* in their ideological formulations: the dilemma of the authoritarian nationalist. Here are men who want and believe themselves to be nationalists and germanophobes, but who at the same time are seduced (too weak a term in many cases) by authoritarian movements and authoritarian solutions in precisely those neighbouring countries that seek to undo the gains of the French military victory of 1918.

This explains the ideological *bricolages* invented precisely to overcome this dilemma: a situation the analysis of ideologies commonly confronts. It involves the often quite systematic construction of what I have analysed as distinction deviations, gaps or disparities (*décalages de distinction*) that serve to differentiate them from the ideological formulations of the Italian Fascists and, more importantly, from those developed by the German Nazis. It also involves a variety of attempts to ‘Gallicize’ these ideologies, including the very economical solution chosen by Valois, who sought to demonstrate that, far from being imported, they had their intellectual roots firmly embedded in France itself (and on this point, Sternhell has perhaps simply followed his lead).

Of course, these were not the only factors in the way fascism was ‘received’ in France, but we should still guard against essentialist interpretations. Thus, for example, Action Française and its core leadership might well have quickly become fascinated by the Italian ‘example’, but that did not stop them from claiming an original identity and, quite simply, seniority, anteriority and paternity—at least intellectually—in relation to what had occurred in Italy. The point at issue here is not Action Française’s recruitment base or its ‘conservatism’, but the self-image the movement’s leaders, and especially its intellectuals, sought to cultivate. And as it was necessary to find ideological divergences—the Italian Fascists being in no hurry to acknowledge their ‘debt’—so the ideologists of Action Française questioned Mussolini’s ‘state idolatry’ and ‘legalism’ (he not having yet dismantled parliamentary institutions).³⁰

The preceding observations allow us to see more clearly how the whole question of the ‘reception’ of Italian fascism in France is probably misplaced.³¹ Few if any of the partisans of the immunity thesis would nowadays venture to deny the attraction, the fascination or the magnetism exercised by these foreign models—denial would be absurd so explicit are such sentiments in the discourse of the radical-right, and indeed beyond, at least towards Italian fascism. But our historians wilfully fail to acknowledge that labels and identities, and indeed public images, ideologies and worldviews, are themselves connected with the daily tactics, stratagems, calculations, positional configurations

and *local stakes* or issues at work in the various competitive fields or social spaces, again mainly local, in which those who use such resources usually act.³²

The reception of foreign fascisms is not necessarily always defined and driven, or given its meaning and purpose, by some sort of relationship with Italian Fascism, or later German Nazism: even Valois, when he defined himself as a fascist, probably did so first of all because of rivalry with the old Action Française. Once again, we can also see how imprudent it is to regard the ferocious (and not only verbal) struggle between Action Française and Valois' Faisceau as proof of some imagined insuperable barrier between social conservatism and fascist radicalism.

Valois' venture was openly covered by the leadership of the mother organization (although his sympathy for fascism was already quite evident), and this remained the case until it became clear he was seeking to build a *rival organization* that threatened, not without some initial success, to capture the Action Française's clientele, militants and financial support.

Consequently, far from presenting a neat picture with thick frontiers between backward-looking conservatism and fascist radicalism, relations between the leagues—even their so-called ideological vagueness—look more like a sort of action system or configuration in which each adopts a position in relation to the position of others: a system based on interdependence that conditions and often constrains the behaviour of each participant.³³

One of the major deficiencies of the immunity thesis lies in its inability to recognize that in the run-up to February 1934, a particular zone of the French political field began to achieve a degree of autonomy, a zone in which original political enterprises entered into competition and conflict with one another, diversified and took organizational shape. Their originality lay in the fact that all of these organizations concentrated most of their activity in the extra-parliamentary arena.³⁴

There is clearly a close link between the development phases of this zone and political situations in which the left, albeit moderate, was in government: first, the period 1924–6 (around 1926 the organizations that occupied this political space must have accounted for some 150,000 members); then the period following the elections of 1932, during which a number of formations emerged, widely different in importance but apparently all reflecting some sort of generational change. On the eve of February 1934, the organizations of the radical-right collectively mobilized some 300,000 members, often more militant than those of

the parliamentary right: clearly we moved well beyond an esoteric world of small, ineffective groupuscules.

However, in the years that followed, this growth was to assume dimensions of a quite different order, a genuine convulsion affecting the whole spectrum of the radical-right (and indeed, well beyond). The competitive structures of this particular zone of the political space were, after 1936, decisively transformed by the emergence of a *dominant pole*—massively dominant in fact—the PSF. Colonel de La Rocque's organization quickly made its mark as a political force to be reckoned with in the field of electoral competition and legitimate politics, a vital consideration if one is to properly understand the stratagems of distinction used by its leader: notably La Rocque's refusal to join the Front de la Liberté—as well as the bitter struggles that set him at odds with virtually all other groups of the radical-right.

It is the failure—first to understand how virulent this competition was and how high the stakes were, and secondly, to recognize how the structures of political competition had been transformed—that lies behind the massive misinterpretation of the coalition that took shape *against* the PSF during this period (and especially during the *Pozzo di Borgo-La Rocque* court case): namely the over-hasty deduction that it was provoked by La Rocque's alleged 'moderation'. It is hardly surprising that this very broad defensive coalition, extending from Doriot's PPF and Action Française to significant sections of the parliamentary right, was regarded by supporters of the immunity thesis as an 'unnatural' alliance.

Conclusion

Those comparative studies of fascist phenomena that adopt the classificatory approach—and as we have seen, that means most of them—continue to treat fascism as a species apart, endowed with a radically different nature or essence from that of other authoritarian movements and, more specifically, movements of the radical, conservative or extreme right. In their efforts to make this claim more plausible they also tend to attribute to phenomena deemed fascist, causes and effects that are supposedly specific to them. None of these claims has any foundation.

To say this is not strictly new, indeed it has been said repeatedly in debates on fascism for at least 30 years, but it is equally applicable to the most recent attempts to theorize the fascist minimum and 'generic fascism'. So the first point to underline in concluding this chapter is that these persistent theoretical inadequacies require explanation, and

they can largely—though not exclusively—be explained by the *modus operandi* of classificatory reason, the diverse mechanisms of which I have endeavoured to deconstruct here.

Given the difficulties encountered by various strategies seeking to present fascism as a set of phenomena so distinctive as to merit separate analytical treatment, it is very tempting to decide, like Gilbert Allardyce, that use of the word ‘fascism’ does little to advance our knowledge, and that it would be best to use it only when referring to a specific and unique historical phenomenon, namely the original fascism: Italian Fascism.³⁵

This solution is attractive in some respects, and Allardyce is justified in his very severe critique of the diverse attempts to theorize ‘generic fascism’. However, I would not draw the same conclusions as him, neither as regards the use of the word itself (as we shall see later), nor, above all, on the issue of whether it is useful or possible to think about these phenomena as more than just individual historical singularities: in other words, to adopt a perspective that has aims and ambitions at the theoretical level.

If social scientists—and historians who accept the challenge of thinking comparatively—are right to hope their efforts are not in vain, then it is because the classificatory approach *is not the only option* and it is possible to find ways of avoiding its intellectual pitfalls and cul-de-sacs.³⁶ In the context of this chapter I will do no more than briefly evoke the following four remedies:

1. *Think in relational terms*

This remedy derives from observations made earlier in this chapter. There is another reason why the solution proposed by Allardyce does not respond adequately to the problems addressed in this chapter. To restrict usage of the word ‘fascism’ to its place of birth is to evade an important question: should a historian or any practitioner in the social sciences be so willing to award such a privilege of virtually exclusive rights to those who first used the word—and who, as Allardyce himself recalls, had such trouble themselves in defining what they meant by it. Is it not useful to take account of the multiple struggles between diverse actors about this word and its uses, especially as a political label? From this point of view there seems to be no good reason to limit the analysis solely to the inventors (nor indeed just to those who called or call themselves fascists—others, anti-fascists in particular, having contributed just as much to these struggles and to the production of the multiple meanings attached to this word).

Contrary to what Allardyce proposes, I feel *we should accept the element of fluidity or vagueness in the word 'fascism'*, that to attempt to reduce it is itself a methodological error: in other words, that the conflicts over the word and the labels should not be separated from the object, a procedure that admittedly tends to change how the object itself appears to the researcher. This effectively means changing perspective on fascist phenomena or, to be more precise, systematically replacing classificatory reason and essentialist conceptions of fascism(s) with a *relational perspective*, elements of which have been expounded in the course of this chapter.

To neutralize or dispel the classificatory research posture and the attendant temptation of essentialism means, first of all, perceiving a movement, a party or intellectual group and its constituent actors, in terms of their relations with other parties or groups and other actors, in terms of the ways they are *positioned* or *disposed*—something they cannot always fully control—in competitive social spaces such as the 'fields' or 'sectors' of institutional politics, and also in the extra-parliamentary arena. It also means understanding them in terms of their relationships, which vary according to different conjunctures, with actors located in different social fields, spheres of activity or sectors. This in turn requires us to be able to apprehend these variations of conjuncture and the impact they may have on the political spaces or fields in which these movements evolve, define themselves and act.

To think in a relational way is to refuse to see fascist movements and their competitors who do not wear this label only through their world-views, their ideologies, cultures or programmatic declarations. Ideas and systems of ideas do not exist, and certainly do not operate, in isolation like self-contained autonomous entities hovering in a state of suspension above society. In reality, ideas cannot be separated from the multiplicity of social relationships in which seemingly very similar formulations may often take on different meanings for the social actors involved. These meanings in turn may constrain or condition their perceptions, their expectations, their definition of situations, their interpretation of what is happening and, therefore, their actions. To think in a relational way also involves distancing oneself from all those mechanistic (and essentialist) forms of sociology, namely, those that insist on ascribing what political parties or groups *are* (in their immutable inner beings, their essence) and what they *do* (their political practices, as well as their self-definitions), to the natures attributed to their supposed 'social bases' (see, for example, the question discussed above of the intrinsically plebeian nature of fascist parties, and, in contrast, the

non-fascist character of movements whose members and leaders do not exhibit these social attributes).

2. *Forget the fascist successes*

This second remedy specifically concerns the results—the successes—of Italian and German fascisms and the role of these results on our understanding of what fascist phenomena are and are not. We have seen just how far these results shape our perspective on fascist and other neighbouring phenomena and, more importantly, we have seen how this intellectual fascination with the results has decisively influenced what most scholars in this field regard as the key task: the construction of a generic definition of fascism.

There is only one way to escape the pernicious effects of this fascination with the results on our efforts to understand these phenomena and to avoid the intellectual pitfalls of what is in the end, as we have seen, merely another example of the historicist faith in the laws of history. Even if the challenge may seem daunting, and even if the procedure threatens to perturb our routine ways of thinking, we should make the methodological decision *to put the results in parentheses*.

The implication behind this procedure is that—contrary to what appears to be common sense, particularly scholarly common sense—when we try to understand these processes or events we should never make it our main objective to explain their outcomes.³⁷ I realize this implication is not easy to accept, but all the other options that have been explored or imagined are, in my view, illusory.

3. *Change the enigma*

In other words, this implication means the analysis of fascist and other neighbouring phenomena can only acquire some explanatory potential if the question of *what is to be explained* is constructed differently.

At this stage of the conclusion, it would seem useful to restate more clearly where the entire discussion so far has led us in this respect. If the failure of approaches that adopt the *modus operandi* of classificatory reason is indeed a failure of theory, then this is not simply due to bad luck or the lack of talent of those involved (often there is no such deficiency). The problem lies precisely with this *modus operandi*, through the intellectual hold exercised by the successes of Italian and German fascisms and by the indigenous categories and taxonomies that make it inevitable such approaches will produce historicist explanations.

In other words, as long as we put our faith in the efforts of scholars who are caught up in the snares of classificatory reason, there is no reason to think that something worth calling a ‘theory of fascism’—a

theory with some real nomological scope—is even remotely possible. What is possible, however, are other approaches, other questionings that seek to explain something other than the outcomes, and which recognize the need for a controlled reorganization of the range of phenomena that one decides to bring together or, if preferred, to compare.³⁸ In other words, a reorganization clearly and firmly attached to an explicit theoretical perspective, rather than one derived from indigent categorizations and taxonomies (to give two elementary examples: to confront phenomena demonstrating charismatic domination, or the situational constraints affecting new entrants into the political arena, which means comparison would not be confined just to phenomena labelled fascist).

4. *Compare the incomparable*

To clarify this perspective still further, I must finally return to the way we perceive the various forms of fascism and authoritarianism that materialized during the twentieth century. Our perception is a special one, it would be absurd not to admit it, because today we find these phenomena repugnant in their abjectness, in the horrors they perpetrated and, indeed, in their everyday routine conduct. When the social sciences seek to interpret them, these phenomena appear to display specificity, an irreducible historical singularity demanding an exceptional approach or method, or else demanding consideration as processes and phenomena that should be treated apart, that should be compared only with one another precisely because they had such monstrous consequences. Herein rests a vast illusion that contributes heavily to feeding the belief in the analytical specificity of these phenomena and processes, and what necessarily separates them from other types of process or phenomena.

The remedy seems simple to me, at least in principle, namely, the *methodological normalization* of these phenomena.³⁹ In particular, this normalization means not deciding too quickly that the processes or phenomena under consideration need to be examined separately, or that they are necessarily governed by exceptional factors, laws, causations or determinisms. It means not isolating them right from the start, simply on the basis of definition (as, for example, in most of the attempts to conceptualize ‘generic fascism’), from other processes and phenomena, perhaps very similar, which in the end produced different outcomes or effects.

To return to what was said above, in the present state of research on authoritarian or fascist movements this also means that we should not hesitate *to compare* what at first sight and according to common sense

appears to be *incomparable*.⁴⁰ This allows us to adopt a research stance in which, instead of starting with some definition of fascism, or even fascisms, we configure our object in a different way—one that does not immediately deprive the scholar of the possibility of finding something that is not a mere facsimile of the definition produced at the outset.

By good fortune, we already know how this can be achieved.

Notes

1. This chapter was translated into English by Brian Jenkins.
2. Concerning the analysis of authoritarian and fascist movements, the initial formulations of this relational approach are to be found in M. Dobry, 'Février 1934 et la découverte de "l'allergie" de la société française à la "révolution fasciste"', *Revue Française de Sociologie* 30, nos. 3–4, 1989, pp. 511–33. See also the English translation of this essay in B. Jenkins, ed., *France in the Era of Fascism: Essays on the French Authoritarian Right*, New York and Oxford, 2005, pp. 129–50.
3. This immunity thesis, first formulated by R. Rémond in *La droite en France de 1815 à nos jours*, Paris, 1954, was systematized later among others by S. Berstein, 'La France des années 30 allergique au fascisme: A propos d'un livre de Zeev Sternhell', *Vingtième Siècle* 2, 1984, pp. 83–94 and 'L'affrontement simulé des années 30', *Vingtième Siècle* 5, 1985, pp. 39–53. As a result of the successive adaptations and modifications made to this interpretation in response to the criticisms it has received, the immunity thesis has now become an unstable entity and a moving target for those who discuss it. The authors who support it shift their emphasis from one set of symptoms of the 'allergy' to another in a quite unprincipled way according to the circumstances and the audience. For an extensive discussion of the diverse aspects of this historical interpretation, which resembles the most apologetic brand of official history and is henceforward discredited in the research community, see in particular the various contributions brought together in M. Dobry, ed., *Le mythe de l'allergie française au fascisme*, Paris, 2003, and Jenkins, *France in the Era of Fascism*.
4. For a detailed analysis on this point, see Dobry, 'Février 1934'.
5. The immunity thesis consistently confuses two points that need to be separated for the purposes of analysis. Whilst ostensibly addressing the question of the label 'fascism' (from which, of course, it seeks to exonerate the organizations and activists of the French radical-right), it constantly slides towards another question: namely, their supposed social and political *marginality*, as if the answer to the first question was somehow made more plausible by the answer to the second. This confusion is not unique to the immunity thesis: it is typical of classificatory reason as a whole.
6. For a good example, see R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London, 1991. In such cases the most striking feature of a definition may be its sobriety—it can sometimes be expressed in a single phrase—and its most visible effect is that once applied to historical reality it brings within its compass an extremely large number of movements or ideological currents. There are few movements of the more or less nationalist type (and the point is not

restricted to nationalists) that do not include in their discourse some kind of reference to national rebirth or regeneration. To a significant extent, the theoretical 'validity' and effectiveness claimed by this approach is based on this extended compass and the broad amalgamations it allows.

7. Z. Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire, 1885–1914: les origines françaises du fascisme*, Paris, 1978.
8. R. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, New York, 2004.
9. S. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945*, London, 1995. Significantly, the author justifies this procedure for constructing his working definition of fascism as a general type or 'generic phenomenon' by explicitly referring us to the following quotation from Stinchcombe: 'Whenever a large number of variables go together, so that specific values of one are always associated with specific values of another, the creation of typologies, or sets of type-concepts, such as the chemical elements, is scientifically useful' (A. L. Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, New York, 1968, p. 44). One of the many problems raised by the use of this reference is that Payne seems to forget the quotation explicitly concerns the construction of theories, and that one of the main criteria for judging the utility or scope of typologies or concepts is, according to Stinchcombe, that they are useful for the formulation of theories, and that one can associate other phenomena with them as specific causes or effects (p. 55), which, as we know, is unfortunately very far from being the case (a point of which Payne occasionally seems aware).
10. 'In the contemporary methodological literature of psychology and the social sciences, the need for "operational definitions" is often emphasized to the neglect of the requirement of systematic import, and occasionally the impression is given that the most promising way of furthering the growth of sociology as a scientific discipline is to create a large supply of "operationally defined" terms of high determinacy and uniformity of usage, leaving it to subsequent research to discover whether these terms lend themselves to the formulation of fruitful theoretical principles. But concept formation in science cannot be separated from theoretical considerations; indeed, it is precisely the discovery of concept systems with theoretical import which advances scientific understanding; and such discovery requires scientific inventiveness and cannot be replaced by the—certainly indispensable, but also definitely insufficient—operationist or empiricist requirement of empirical import alone.' C. Hempel, *Fundamentals of Concept Formation in Empirical Science*, Chicago, 1972 [1952], p. 47.
11. Some outrageous simplifications still need to be avoided. The idea that the ideologies of 'authentic' fascism are essentially coherent and well-articulated entities is debatable in the case of German Nazism and probably absurd in the case of Italian Fascism—certainly prior to the seizure of power. Are we so certain that the addiction to the past, the 'reaction against modernity', the 'retrograde' attitudes that some choose to regard as specific to the ideological formulations of the French authoritarian movements were really completely absent, for example, from the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, especially in all that it owes to the *Völkisch* ideological universe? It should also be noted that this alleged vagueness did not prevent the emergence of certain key elements of ideology (anti-parliamentarism, hatred of democracy and of *la gueuse*—the Republic) forming in a way the 'hard core', the

- common foundations of the ideological formulations of the French authoritarian right, as well of those of the smaller groups to which the immunity thesis much more generously attributes the label 'fascism'.
12. I. Kershaw, *Hitler*, New York, 1991, p. 44. The fact that the immunity thesis, probably because of the 'failure' of Colonel de la Rocque, has not taken this aspect of his political enterprise seriously is entirely due to the constraints of the intellectual approach I am seeking to describe.
 13. I wish to make myself as clear as possible at this point. With regards to the French case (though this observation does not apply only to this case), my rejection of the classificatory approach *does not* mean that one should now start applying the labels fascism or 'authentic' fascism to those political movements or currents that the immunity thesis has hitherto sought to clear of any stigma and any suspicion of kinship or proximity to Italian Fascism and/or German Nazism. Nothing is to be gained for the purposes of greater understanding of these historical phenomena by classifying these movements differently from the way they classified themselves. What is at stake in the present chapter, and in the approach it embodies, is simply to think differently about these movements. These observations also apply fully to the PSF and its *Chef*.
 14. In response to criticisms, some immunity thesis authors have tried to shift the classification of the PSF towards authoritarianism, which now seems to function as a kind of purgatory between fascism, with its links to totalitarianism, on the one hand, and democracy on the other.
 15. K. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, London, 2004.
 16. For a more extensive development of these points, see M. Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, Paris, 2009 [1986].
 17. On the notion of historical intrigue, see P. Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, Paris, 1971.
 18. The same is true of other related arguments advanced by proponents of the immunity thesis. For example, Rémond notes 'the fact that it was after its transformation into a political party that Colonel de la Rocque's movement had its greatest success', and deduces from this the democratic motivation of those who identified with La Rocque as soon as he seemed to 'sincerely endorse' the institutions of the Third Republic (see Rémond, *La droite en France*, pp. 214–5); once more, a simple comparison with the tactical choices and electoral successes of the Nazis in Germany should have encouraged a more prudent interpretation.
 19. J. Nobécourt, *Le colonel de La Rocque, 1885–1946, ou les pièges du nationalisme chrétien*, Paris, 1996. The author, a former journalist who does not conceal his sympathy for the subject of his biography and who seeks to protect his 'memory', plainly fails to appreciate the implications of the numerous documents he has access to, which, in fact, heavily contradict the interpretation he puts on them.
 20. K. Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism: The Right in a French Province, 1928–1939*, Cambridge, 1997; R. Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933–1939*, New Haven and London, 1995; W. D. Irvine, 'Fascism in France: The Strange Case of the Croix-de-Feu', *Journal of Modern History* 63, no. 2, 1991, pp. 271–95; D. Leschi, 'L'étrange cas La Rocque', M. Dobry, ed., *Le mythe de l'allergie*, pp. 155–194; S. Kennedy, *Reconciling France against*

- Democracy: The Croix-de-Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927–1945*, Montreal and Kingston, 2007.
21. P. Burrin, *Fascisme, nazisme, autoritarisme*, Paris, 2000, p. 258.
 22. On the style of these displays of force as a tactic in the construction of a distinctive identity, see Dobry, 'Février 1934', and, for a more developed analysis, Leschi, 'L'étrange cas La Rocque'.
 23. See, in the increasingly abundant literature on this issue, the recent clarifications provided in R. Bessel, ed., *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts*, Cambridge, 1996.
 24. See, for example, as a late variation on the immunity thesis, Burrin, *Fascisme, nazisme, autoritarisme*.
 25. Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*.
 26. On the problems posed by explanations in terms of natural history, see Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, ch. 2.
 27. Incidentally, this also means that this 'functional' conception becomes completely irrelevant once the analysis turns to stages four and five, and probably even to stage three.
 28. For a presentation and discussion of such conceptions in connection with the case of Nazism, see I. Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, London, 1985, ch. 3. See also M. Dobry, 'Hitler, Charisma and Structure: Reflections on Historical Methodology', in A. C. Pinto, R. Eatwell and S. U. Larsen, eds, *Charisma and Fascism in Interwar Europe*, London, 2007.
 29. See in particular L. Kestel, 'De la conversion en politique: genèse et institutionnalisation du Parti populaire français', unpublished doctoral thesis, Université Paris I, 2006. For many of them, not only Doriot, these 'refusals' could co-exist with significant vacillations. For the Jeunesses Patriotes, see Soucy, *French Fascism*.
 30. See B. Goyet, *Charles Maurras*, Paris, 2000; and B. Jenkins, 'L'Action Française à l'ère du fascisme: une perspective contextuelle', in M. Dobry, *Le mythe de l'allergie*. See also J. Blatt, 'Relatives and Rivals: The Response of the Action Française to Italian Fascism, 1919–1926', *European Studies Review* 2, no. 3, 1981, pp. 263–92; E. Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France*, Stanford, 1962. These can usefully be complemented by the reflections of Juan Linz on the movements he imprudently calls 'proto-fascist', notably his 'Political Space and Fascism as a Late-Comer', in S. U. Larsen, B. Hagvet and J. P. Myklebust, eds, *Who were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism*, Bergen, 1980.
 31. On this point, see the subtle analyses of B. Goyet, 'La "Marche sur Rome": version originale sous-titrée. La réception du fascisme en France', M. Dobry, *Le mythe de l'allergie*, pp. 69–105.
 32. It would also seem partisans of the immunity thesis require movements of the French radical-right not only to define themselves more clearly than Italian Fascism did, but also to accomplish their task totally, immediately and openly. In a way, these historians thereby *abolish time*, that is to say, they ignore the period of 'apprenticeship' that familiarized members of the leagues and many others—notably their adversaries—with the Italian, and later the German, 'experiments', the lessons they drew from this process, the historicity of their perceptions and their political stances.

33. Several recent works have shown how easily, despite their ideological differences, members of movements on the French radical-right moved from one organization to another, sometimes even in whole groups. See Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism*.
34. Contrary to the anti-electoral prejudice at work in the immunity thesis, the traditional concentration of French radical-right movements on mainly extra-parliamentary activity—at least until 1936—often had a specific *political cost*. It was precisely in the key periods for the radical-right, the critical conjunctures, that contacts with certain sections of the parliamentary right were made more open and gained legitimacy, thus making the leagues—these ‘disloyal oppositions’—appear potentially ‘co-optable’ into the political process at the very moment at which these leagues were demonstrating unequivocally and concretely in the street their commitment to extra-parliamentary action. Evidently, in such circumstances, the maximization of political benefits depended on the capacity to act simultaneously in both the extra-parliamentary and the legitimate political arena. If ‘French fascisms’ did have a weakness, perhaps it lay first and foremost in the obstacles—including their own reluctance—that made it so difficult for movements of the radical-right to intervene effectively in electoral politics.
35. G. Allardyce, ‘What Fascism is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept’, *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 2, 1979, pp. 367–88.
36. Allardyce’s solution might seem perfectly acceptable to quite a few of them who, as we all know, are often content to construct a singular story leading to a singular outcome or consequence or, to put it another way, are content to narrate a singular historical ‘intrigue’ without the remotest desire to seek explanations that have resonance beyond the specific historical event under consideration.
37. Under these conditions, students of these phenomena might even hope to be able to analyse history *in the making*, that is to say the actions and perceptions of actors at the moment of their engagement in events, always bearing in mind that these actors do not know, when they act, the direct outcome, let alone the long-term effects of the processes in which they are involved.
38. For a more general discussion of these questions, see M. Dobry, ‘Ce dont sont faites les logiques de situation’, in P. Favre, O. Fillieule and F. Jobard, eds, *L’atelier du politiste: théories, actions, représentations*, Paris, 2007.
39. Needless to say, this form of normalization is strictly methodological and is quite the opposite of any political justification of these phenomena, such as one finds at work in the hazy conceptions of Ernst Nolte, a prime example of the genre.
40. On comparing the incomparable, see Veyne, *Comment on écrit l’histoire*; and Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*.

4

Fascism and Culture: A Mosse-Centric Meta-Narrative (or how Fascist Studies Reinvented the Wheel)

Roger Griffin

Fascism as an 'anti-culture'

Nearly 50 years had passed since the formation of the first *Fasci* in Milan when the University of Reading's Graduate School of Contemporary European Studies chose 1967 as the year to host first a series of lectures on the form taken by fascism in different countries and then an international symposium on its 'nature'. Yet, in all that time, outside the Marxist camp a profound lack of consensus had reigned about its taxonomic and definitional characteristics (the 'fascist minimum') that the organizers, Stuart Woolf and Adrian Lyttleton—despite their impressive entrepreneurial skills in assembling so many of the A-team of fascist studies at the time—could do little to dispel.

One reason for this was fascism's sheer novelty as a particularly violent new kid on the block of modern politics, whose sudden appearance and incalculable impact on European history, even at the time, prompted the anti-fascist writer Giuseppe Borgese to observe in 1934:

Not a single prophet, during more than a century of prophecies, analysing the degradation of the romantic culture, or planning the split of the romantic atom, ever imagined anything like fascism. There was in the lap of the future, communism and syndicalism and what not; there was anarchism, and legitimism, and even all-papacy; war, peace, pan-Germanism, pan-Slavism, Yellow Peril, signals to the planet Mars; there was no fascism. It came as a surprise to all and to themselves too.¹

Another factor may have been that the generational trauma of the Second World War had not yet faded to a point at which the topic was no longer dominated by the nightmare of the Third Reich. This made it difficult for most scholarly minds reared in the Enlightenment tradition to accept that a coherent 'positive' ideology underlay a historical force that in its Nazi incarnation caused destruction and crimes against humanity on such an unprecedented and unimaginable scale.

The psychological block thus caused was reinforced by the prevalent preconception in both Marxist and non-Marxist circles that fascism was, at bottom, an 'anti-phenomenon' rooted in pathological patterns of nation-building or middle-class angst about modernity, socialism, communism and the anarchic rise of the masses. Either way, it was tempting to perceive it as something irrational, barbaric or nihilistic that did not really 'belong' in an 'advanced' modern European civilization; it is significant that the cover chosen for *European Fascism* reproduces a 1932 anti-fascist cartoon portraying Nazism as a skeleton in Nazi uniform raising a Hitler salute to an ecstatic mob.

Whatever the reasons, between the 1920s and 1970s fascism was generally seen, in Emilio Gentile's words, as 'a total historical negativity, an aberration away from the development of European society and culture'. Hence, 'fascist ideology and fascist culture did not exist. Fascists were thugs and opportunists at the service of class reaction and in the defence of vested interests'.² Still sealed in a parallel ideological universe, the Marxist tradition of fascist studies remained stunted for its own reasons. Though far older than the liberal one and, by the 1970s, increasingly variegated and sophisticated, it had yet to break out of the incantatory spell of Max Horkheimer's mantra that 'he who does not wish to speak of capitalism should be silent about fascism'. This resulted in a deeply ingrained inability to recognize the determination of hard-core fascists not just to 'preserve' capitalism from the assault of socialists, but to harness its energies to its own populist bid to transform the nation, a project which, as I will stress later, suggests fascism was an attempted revolution—and not a mere counter-revolution—in its own right.

What makes this tunnel vision particularly perverse is that so few would-be left-wing intellectuals took the lead for their investigation of fascist culture from Antonio Gramsci's theory of 'cultural hegemony', a concept he had evolved precisely to account for fascism's success in maintaining itself in power despite the absence of the objective historical conditions in which to do this.

By preferring such blunt instruments as Trotskyist class analysis or a Benjaminian understanding of aesthetic politics purblind to the real

structural affinities between fascism in power and actually existing (i.e. Soviet) socialism to Gramsci's sophisticated heuristic device, most postwar Marxist scholars have found themselves in a cul-de-sac of their own making when engaging with the concrete realities of the dynamics of fascist culture in Italy and Germany. They remain in deep denial about the substantive similarities between the political culture of Mussolinian, Hitlerian, Stalinist and Maoist societies as forms of totalitarian or 'gardening' state. There is thus a certain irony in the fact that it took a non-Marxist expert on Gramsci, Walter Adamson, to write a groundbreaking account of the continuity between the revolutionary cultural projects of the Florentine avant-garde and fascism's revolutionary political projects.³

Because of such endemic methodological blind spots, neither academic camp was predisposed at a gut-level to take radical issue with the assumptions behind Benedetto Croce's pointed attack on Giovanni Gentile's *The Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals* (1925) that had argued vociferously for fascism's credentials as the basis of an inspiring new ethical system and religious faith for all Italians and, by implication, an entirely new culture.

For Croce, his fellow neo-Hegelian's rapturous tract merely 'confronted the unbiased reader with an incoherent, bizarre mish-mash of demagoguery and appeals to authority [...] blasts against culture, and sterile nods in the direction of a culture *devoid of the necessary premises*'.⁴

In one way or another, postwar academe generally reinforced the Crocean disdain for the notion any form of fascism could produce a culture. 'Fascist culture' was thus an oxymoron, an axiom summed up in the observation of Norberto Bobbio—Italy's most eminent postwar political philosopher, who had joined the illegal liberal opposition to Mussolini in 1942—'Where there was culture, there was no Fascism; where there was Fascism there was no culture. There never was a Fascist culture.'⁵ It is a remark that underlines how close proximity to or direct involvement in historical events does not guarantee incisive historiographical insight into them—even in a highly gifted intellectual.

The prescience of Mosse's 'culturalist' understanding of fascism

Yet it is precisely on the issue of the very possibility of a fascist culture that one contribution to the volume *The Nature of Fascism* arising from the Reading symposium stands out from the others by describing fascism in terms that seem completely in tune with the thinking

on the subject 40 years on. Indeed, its significance has, if anything, been enhanced rather than diminished by the subsequent evolution of fascist studies: to a point where re-reading it now endows it with an almost prophetic quality concerning the direction fascist studies would eventually take. George Mosse's essay 'Fascism and the Intellectuals' demonstrates that by the late 1960s he was already operating a sophisticated 'culturalist' interpretation of fascism *avant la lettre*.⁶

Moreover, it can be shown that he had been steadily elaborating this conceptual framework for more than a decade as a loner, working assiduously against the grain of the historiography of the day to present fascism as a serious bid to establish a new type of society, the very basis of which was provided not by an alternative state system or economic structure, but by a new 'total' culture uniquely adapted to the nation being transformed.⁷

The essay highlights the provocative nature of its central thesis at the outset by suggesting Croce's rejection of fascist intellectuality was typical of a liberal tendency to realize the danger fascism posed to individual freedom 'without ever understanding the movement itself'. In contrast, Mosse takes at face value claims of fascist intellectuals that they looked to fascism to 'realize the ultimate values in society' and inaugurate a 'new non-materialistic age' by restoring 'culture as well as society': both of which had lost their 'totality' under the impact of modernity and entered a profound phase of decadence. This goal would be achieved by a new type of state prepared to implement policies designed to revitalize the primary function of the nation as 'a repository of culture'.⁸ The utopian longings of fascist intellectuals crystallized in the myth of the 'new type' of man who 'had released within himself the creative forces of his own soul and through strength of will would usher in a new world'. 'Fascists came to believe that theirs was a spiritual revolution which through a new type of man would renew the nation and the world.'⁹ However, the massification of fascism within the party and the contamination of the movement's original radicalism by middle-class values and instincts helped doom the two fascist regimes to failure.

Given the prevailing tendency within the historiography of the time to treat fascist culture as, at best, peripheral to the fascist era and, at worst, a 'non-topic', it is worth dwelling for a moment on the genesis of the highly original approach to the phenomenon of fascism Mosse applied in this essay.¹⁰ Its first fully fledged exposition is to be found in his *Culture of Western Europe: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, published in 1961. At the time, he was in the midst of morphing from

a historian of medieval and Reformation Europe to an expert on fascism and Nazism. His autobiography, *Confronting History*, alludes cryptically to one major element of continuity between the two phases of his career: namely an emphasis on the factor of historical change constituted by systems of belief ('faiths') and 'perceptions', independently of their truth or falsity.¹¹ This led him to the realization that 'a person's habit of mind is not only dependent on historical reality, but is also formed by aspirations and dreams, a realm which fascism and the Nazis captured only too well'.¹² It is precisely this 'habit of mind' and shifting world of human perceptions that Mosse identified with 'culture', and whose evolution into radically conflicting worldviews and values over the last 200 years he undertook to trace in his history of the culture of modern Western Europe—a curious remit, seemingly conceived to omit a thorough treatment of contemporary Soviet Europe.¹³

In approaching modern history in this way, Mosse was, by his own admission, applying a familiarity with the dominant role played by 'theological thought as well as religious practices' in the Reformation: something he saw as providing a key to understanding the inner dynamics of 'modern civic religions, such as nationalism in its various forms—including fascism' that flourished in the only superficially secularized habitat of Western modernity.¹⁴ He realized that such an ideocentric approach to history—based on the principle of what he would later call 'methodological empathy'—was suspect to conventional historians, and the justification he gave for it in his autobiography now assumes a particular resonance in the post-9/11 world:

Perhaps I have seen the world too much through the eyes of its faiths, but then the times in which I lived have been dominated by belief systems, by an almost fanatical devotion to civic religions and there are few credible signs that this will change.¹⁵

The fruit of this approach to the cultural conditions of modernity was that Mosse's chapter on fascism in his overview of modern culture already treats fascism and Nazism as two permutations of a revolutionary utopia driven by a Sorelian myth of imminent national revival, in which spiritual regeneration and new political forms would converge to produce a cohesive national community, an organic state and a new man.

Characteristic of fascist praxis (which in 1961 Mosse still saw realized in Dollfuss' Austria, Salazar's Portugal and Franco's Spain—a position from which he would distance himself in time) was the birth of what

he calls a 'new art form': namely the mass rallies, spectacles and rituals staged to celebrate the advent of the fascist era in the life of the nation. Such assemblies were 'religious rites' in which the atomized masses were rescued from the threat of *anomie* induced by modernity by being symbolically welded into a community by a shared historical vision—something Mosse regarded as a true 'cultural innovation'.

In the context of the subsequent history of 'fascism and culture', it is revealing that Mosse's introduction presents his survey of the forces that have shaped modern European history—which includes nationalism, racism, liberalism, conservatism and Marxism—as an example of what Stuart Hughes called 'retrospective cultural anthropology'. In short, in 1961, Mosse is already applying a concept of generic fascism as a form of cultural politics and political religion—one utterly opposed to Walter Benjamin's concept of fascism's 'aestheticization of politics'—because he saw it not as a reactionary bid to depoliticize the masses, but as integral to a *revolutionary* project of national rebirth that is epitomized in the striving to bring about, at every level of national life, an anthropological transformation that was more socio-cultural than socio-economic in nature.

From the vantage point of the end of the twenty-first century's first decade it is remarkable that, for more than seven decades, so many historians could not even *methodologically* empathize with what someone like Charles Lindbergh deluded himself into seeing in 1936. Nazism was, for him, one of the cleansing waves he believed regularly course through history and, riding it and channelling it, Hitler had removed decades of dangerous debris from his country's cultural and ethnic landscape and 'committed Germany's best minds to the advancement of science, aviation and technology'.¹⁶ They were no less receptive to the significance of the words that, in her bestselling epistolary short story *Address Unknown* (1938), the US author Kressmann Taylor put into the pen of Martin Schulse when writing from Germany to his childhood friend, Max Eisenstein—a German Jew now settled in the United States—to indicate his conversion to Nazism:

If I could show you, if I could make you see—the rebirth of this new Germany under our Gentle Leader! [...] In defeat for 14 years we bowed our heads [...] But now we are free men. We rise in our might and hold our heads up before the nations. We purge our bloodstream of its baser elements. We go singing through the valleys with strong muscles tingling for a new work—and from the mountains ring the voices of Wodan and Thor, the old, strong gods of the German race.¹⁷

Hundreds of thousands of Americans responded powerfully to a slim volume made up of a fictitious exchange of letters tracing how an 'ordinary' German succumbed not just to the racism of Nazi utopianism, but to the vision of a reborn nation purged of decadence to the point of severing the affective bonds between himself and other human beings on the grounds of his ethnicity. Its success highlights just how curiously dysfunctional the historical imagination of most academics and intellectuals were both before and after the war in understanding the psychology of fascism compared with that of the general, non-academic public.

Mosse was the exception. Despite his intense personal feelings about the subject, he dispassionately reconstructed the Nazi 'attitude' to history, the 'aspirations and dreams' that informed their policies, their institutions and their actions. This, he came to realize ever more clearly, was the belief, testified in myriad primary sources, that Nazism was the catalyst to and vehicle of a total cultural, anthropological revolution in Germany: a goal obvious to anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear, producing a torrential ideological and liturgical discourse that most historians stubbornly dismissed simply as 'propaganda', 'mystification', 'barbarism' or plain 'nonsense'. Mosse had realized what non-academics intuitively 'knew' and so many historians could not grasp: each fascism was bent on bringing about its own cultural revolution in order to create a new society and a new man.

An alternative narrative of fascist studies

The striking originality of Mosse's 1961 chapter on fascism, when set against the ethos dominating the historiography of interwar Europe at the time, suggests a heretical version of conventional accounts of the genesis and evolution of fascist studies.¹⁸ In various English-language versions of this Mosse hardly gets a look in: A. J. Gregor's *Interpretations of Fascism* (1974) does not deem him worth mentioning and Renzo De Felice used the famous interview he gave to Michael Ledeen on fascism in 1975 as the occasion on which to make some methodologically challenged remarks about the alleged differences between Mussolini's and Hitler's regimes that displayed a profound ignorance both of Nazism and of Mosse's work.¹⁹

It is particularly ironic that the resulting publication became far more famous than the genuinely insightful interview held about Nazism by Ledeen with Mosse himself two years later.²⁰ In a like manner, Mosse is relegated to a handful of footnotes in the 816 pages of *Who*

Were the Fascists? (1980), being ignored just as much by Stanley Payne in the opening essay, 'The Concept of Fascism', as by Bernt Hagtvet and Reinhard Kühnl in their wide-ranging 'survey of paradigms' in Chapter 2.

In case it might be thought that, as a German refugee from the Third Reich, Mosse's ideas would be received better in the land of his birth, the evaluation of his significance by Wolfgang Wippermann in the early 1970s in his wide-ranging survey of international fascist theories is revealing. When Wippermann comes to summarize Mosse's theory of fascism he is clearly out of his depth: he correctly highlights his argument that a key component in the genesis of fascism was the revolt of a younger generation that experienced the modern world as chaotic, distressing and alienating, and thus strove to realize the myth of a new community and a new man; however, he quite misleadingly dismisses Mosse's interpretive strategy as a 'disturbingly positive evaluation of fascism'.²¹ What Wippermann has not grasped is that Mosse is by no means *endorsing*, let alone justifying, fascism—something unthinkable for an academic who, as a boy, was driven into exile by a regime that then proceeded to enact a genocidal campaign against his race, and whose whole family had been persecuted in the name of purging Germany of decadence and parasitism. Instead, Mosse is applying a conceptually elaborated *anthropological* approach to historical causation. This stresses the need to penetrate into people's historically conditioned anxieties and dreams in order to understand the key emotions and beliefs informing their actions on the stage of history in particular conjunctures of circumstances and events.

Perhaps the most revealing testimony to Mosse's almost invisibly low profile in the pioneering phase of fascist studies is provided by Zeev Sternhell, whose annotated bibliography to his essay 'Fascist Ideology' in *Fascism: A Reader's Guide* (1976) refers to Mosse's *The Crisis of German Ideology* to stress the uniqueness of Nazism as a variant of fascism, but without even mentioning his publications on generic fascism. Yet it devotes four pages to an elegant, but devastating, critique of Nolte's *Three Faces of Fascism* which, he points out, had been hailed in reviews by a galaxy of major academics (including Mosse himself) as a 'very great book'.²²

This evaluation is particularly surprising given the extraordinary degree of convergence between Sternhell's and Mosse's theory of fascism as an attempted cultural and anthropological revolution, notwithstanding the Israeli scholar's perverse insistence that Nazism's ideology was too 'biological' for it to be treated as a member of the fascist family. His

Ni droite, ni gauche, a full-scale application to interwar France of the theory presented in his chapter for Laqueur's reader's guide, contains such 'Mossean' pronouncements by French fascist theorists as 'this revolution for the sake of the nation and civilization will be a total revolution: a cultural revolution, an anti-bourgeois revolution, a "communal revolution", a "spiritual revolution [...] in tune with the drama of the times and of our souls"'.²³

Nor were fascist studies necessarily more kind to Mosse as a theorist of generic fascism in the far less benighted 1990s. In *A History of Fascism 1914–1945* (1995), his close colleague Stanley Payne pays tribute to his brilliance without, however, modifying the core definition he had offered in *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (1980) to make it more culturally oriented.

Gregor's new edition of *Interpretations of Fascism* (1997) still stubbornly ignores the rich corpus of Mosse's analyses of generic fascism. It is characteristic of the distorting lens offered by Michael Mann in his bid to re-vision generic fascism in *Fascists* (2004) that there are but two fleeting references to Mosse in the construction of own purportedly 'new' ideal type of the concept, despite its conspicuous debt to the Mossean approach. Even Aristotle Kallis's impressively comprehensive *The Fascist Reader* (2003) includes a selection from Nolte's *Three Faces of Fascism* but nothing from Mosse and, like Mann, Kallis reduces Mosse's impact on early fascist studies to his recognition that fascism had some form of coherent ideology.

Emilio Gentile's highly perceptive chapter on Mosse's theory of fascism in the collection of essays dedicated to his achievements as a historian is thus being, if anything, euphemistic when he observes that his 'cultural approach that took seriously the ideas of Fascism and Nazism' were 'received with some diffidence' by his profession.²⁴ In many cases they were not 'received' at all, but remained unread and simply ignored. Had the minds of the international academic community, working feverishly to digest the catastrophic history of interwar Europe, been less closed to Mosse's insights when his first publications came out, the *Historikerstreit* in Germany over the possibility of and appropriate strategy for historicizing the Third Reich—and its more muted equivalent in France and Italy—may have taken an entirely different and far more productive course.

Yet, however much attention was focused on Nolte's metapolitical lucubrations in the 1960s and however little on Mosse's far more accessible and insightful culturalist approach, the subsequent impact of the German's approach on both historians and theoreticians of fascism in

practical terms have proved to be as good as nil. Though the German historian Friedrich Pohlmann could still wax embarrassingly lyrical about the genius of Nolte's theory four decades later, it is difficult to find a solitary analysis of fascism that actually applies his 'meta-historical' definition of fascism as 'practical and theoretical resistance to transcendence' to the empirical investigation of fascism as a concrete historical phenomenon in all its singularity (indeed it would be useful to see how such an abstruse definition *could* be applied practically as a taxonomic device).²⁵ Significantly, when, in his article on conceptualizing the post-1945 extreme right, Diethelm Prowe defended Nolte's concept of fascism's 'resistance to transcendence' to challenge my insistence that it strove *for* transcendence, he made no attempt to subsume it within a working definition of 'classic fascism'.²⁶ Retrospectively, the substantive results of Nolte's bid to explore 'fascism in its epoch' recall the diaphanous garments in Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tale, the *Emperor's New Clothes*.

However, beneath the radar of the self-appointed pundits of the political sciences of the 1960s and 1970s a silent revolution in fascist studies was already well under way, the full implications of which could only be generally identified or appreciated in the first decade of the new millennium. If three texts by Mosse are taken into account: the chapter 'Fascism' in *The Culture of Western Europe* (1971), *The Crisis of German Ideology* (1964) and *Nazi Culture* (1966), and two by Eugen Weber: *Varieties of Fascism* (1964) and his chapter 'Romania' in *The European Right* (1966), it is clear that at the very time Nolte's hermetic account of the 'fascist minimum' was achieving notoriety, there were already works available that saw generic fascism characterized by a mobilizing myth of national revival and cultural regeneration, setting it apart from reactionary or conservative movements and regimes—even those as dynamic as Maurras' Action Française, which Nolte had analysed as one 'face of fascism'. Moreover, membership of the family was already being extended beyond Nazism to include Doriot's Parti Populaire Français (PPF—Parti Populaire Français), Szálasi's Arrow Cross movement and Codreanu's Iron Guard, while being restricted in respect of the dictatorial regimes in Spain, Portugal and Austria.

With hindsight, what deserves to be heralded as a pivotal—though invisible—moment in the evolution of fascist studies was the seminar on Nazism held at Stanford and attended by such luminaries as Dietrich Bracher, Juan Linz, Hugh Seton-Watson and George Mosse. It was 1963, the very year when Nolte's *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* first appeared. Though the proceedings of the symposium were never

published, we know—thanks to Emilio Gentile’s research in Mosse’s archive—that Mosse wrote extensive notes for the occasion. In the file marked ‘What is fascism?’ we read statements that at the time would have been heretical for some, if not downright unthinkable, and which were at variance with the assumptions of his symposium colleagues. Fascism is characterized as ‘an authentically revolutionary movement’ that did not set out to change, and did not change the existing ‘social and class structure’, but was ‘a revolution of the spirit’ that aspired ‘to create a new way of thinking: a new man’. In short, fascists ‘wanted to revolutionize man’²⁷ in what was simultaneously a cultural and—to use Emilio Gentile’s happy expression—an *anthropological* revolution.²⁸

The external manifestation of this sea-change in thinking about fascism occurred three years later on the auspicious occasion of the first issue of the *Journal of Contemporary History*, edited by Walter Laqueur and George Mosse and dedicated to ‘International fascism 1920–45’. Mosse’s own contribution, ‘The Genesis of Fascism’, ensured the journal’s inaugural issue became a showcase—not just for the new discipline of comparative fascist studies, but for the culturalist theory of fascism, even if most potential ‘buyers’ were looking elsewhere. Consistent with his earlier pronouncements on the subject, Mosse treats fascism as a revolutionary movement in its own right on a par with Marxism (and not just as a response to Marxism as Nolte would have it), born of the crisis of liberalism and positivism as well as of a generalized revolt against the decadence and *anomie* of the *fin de siècle*, of which the political malaise was a further symptom. Distinct from conservatism (Franco is now seen as ‘destroying his fascist movement, the Falange’), it aspired to use the mobilizing power of myth to create a new type of dynamic, youthful, organic national community in which a ‘religious’ form of politics would revitalize the arts, restore spirituality to national life and produce a New Man. It was a form of politics in which ‘cultural expressions of the true community moved to the forefront as symbols of the new society’.²⁹ In short, ‘Fascism was a revolution, but one which thought of itself in cultural, not economic terms.’³⁰

Looking back on this stage of his career in his autobiography, written on the threshold of retirement, Mosse showed himself fully aware of the originality of his ‘culturalist’ approach at the time. He himself locates the main methodological breakthrough in his understanding of fascism not in *The Crisis of German Ideology*, which ‘can still be read as part of a traditional history of political thought’, but in *The Nationalization of the Masses*, which he started in 1972 and published in 1975. It is in this work that he claims to have successfully applied ‘the definition of culture as

the history of perceptions' offered in *The Culture of Western Europe* by showing how 'Nazi self-representation [...] interacted with the hopes and dreams of a large section of the population': hopes and dreams of national unity that long predated the rise of Hitler.³¹ Mosse claims it was *The Nationalization of the Masses* that opened the way to serious analyses of the Nazi and fascist cults, including Gentile's *Sacralization of Politics*.

Against this, it must be placed on record that Gentile arrived at his own form of culturalist understanding of fascism independently of Mosse, applying a far more anthropologically informed and less 'aesthetic' concept of culture, and certainly arrived at his conceptualization of 'sacralization of the state' independently of any input from Mosse's works.

Similarly, Klaus Vondung's highly original investigation of Nazism's 'cultic' politics in *Magie und Manipulation* (1971), which is unaccountably never referred to by Mosse, despite its profound congruity with his own work, was conceived, researched and written independently of Mossean influence.³² What is incontrovertible, however, is that Mosse's elaboration of a culturalist approach to modern political ideologies from the late 1950s onwards put him in the position to formulate the first fully fledged synoptic theory of fascism in which the phrase 'fascist culture'—far from being an oxymoron—fast-tracked the researcher to the very heart of the phenomenon.

The occasion for the full elaboration of this theory was Mosse's editorial introduction to the volume *International Fascism*, published in 1979. 'Towards a General Theory of Fascism' presents fascism as a 'cultural movement' offering its followers a 'proper attitude towards life, encompassing the ability to accept a faith, the work ethic and discipline, but also receptivity to art and the appreciation of the native landscape' and satisfied the longing for a 'new sense of community'.³³

By sharing this worldview, followers' lives would be imbued with a sense of community and transcendent purpose, thus transforming them into the new men of a new historical era. A year later Mosse published an anthology of essays, *Masses and Man*, many of which offered revealing case studies in the application of this approach to specific aspects of Nazism and fascism.³⁴ The 1979 essay is deliberately reprinted practically unchanged in another anthology, *The Fascist Revolution*, which was to be his last publication on fascism. Significantly, the pieces he selected for this work from his vast *oeuvre* made a cumulative case for seeing fascism as a primarily cultural phenomenon while also demonstrating just how much this had been a constant theme of his work on fascism for nearly four decades.

The dog-years in the study of fascist culture

According to our 'alternative' history of fascist studies, then, both the foundations and the superstructure of a sophisticated 'Mossean' interpretation of fascism in culturalist terms had already been solidly established by the time *Who Were the Fascists?* was published in 1980. A salient feature of this interpretation for the theme of this chapter is that, unlike the two major rival approaches then available that also took fascism's ideological dimension seriously, namely those proposed by Zeev Sternhell and James Gregor, Mosse's approach fully embraced Nazism in all its self-evident uniqueness as, simultaneously, the most fully developed manifestation of the generic phenomenon (a paradox, but not a contradiction).³⁵

Curiously, while Mosse's star was in the ascendant in terms of his international academic reputation, his theoretical construct was to all intents and purposes ignored as a practical heuristic device for the empirical investigation of fascism by practising historians. It stood forlornly like one of the ghostly wall- and window-less shells scattered surreally on the outskirts of some sprawling Sicilian conurbation waiting to be turned into a finished, living building. Fortunately, in contrast to those constructions, this limbo was not indefinite; it was only a matter of time before the 'Mossean' edifice would be a second home to a number of leading scholars and frequented by countless students of fascism—a turn-about, the beginnings of which he lived just long enough to witness for himself. But there were few signs of this convivial future in the decade immediately following the publication of his *International Fascism*.

As any researcher embarking on a project on generic fascism quickly found out, it was a period characterized by such radically divergent claims about the nature of fascism that the compass of a would-be orienteer in this terrain was sent spinning wildly by an excess of lodestones. Even in Mosse's own collection of essays illustrating fresh perspectives on generic fascism no collaborator actually applied his approach, and it had no discernible impact on the next joint publication of this type, Henry Turner's *Reappraisals of Fascism* (1975). Ironically, the only reference to Mosse in Turner's whole book, the first section of which is devoted entirely to 'The Interpretation of Ernst Nolte', is a brief paragraph in the chapter 'The Problem of Fascism in Recent Scholarship' by none other than Ernst Nolte himself. In contrast to Wippermann, Nolte correctly observes that Mosse's theory, as set out in the essay 'The Genesis of Fascism', is 'free of any apologetic taint' and accurately states

that 'Fascism emerges from Mosse's analysis as nothing less than one of the great European movements of renewal', a claim Nolte declines to comment on even though it flatly contradicts his own theory of 'resistance to transcendence'.³⁶ (Charles Maier's review article 'Some recent studies of fascism', published in *The Journal of Modern History* a year later—a classic example of the blind leading the blind in a darkened labyrinth where Ariadne's thread has seemingly been taken for dental floss—contains no reference to Mosse whatsoever, let alone an allusion to the fascist cultural revolution.)³⁷

As if to underline the prevailing confusion further, Turner's own essay in *Reappraisals* suggested the paradoxes of fascism's relationship to modernity could be resolved by treating it as a 'utopian anti-modernism',³⁸ a position that flew wildly in the face not just of Mosse's and Sternhell's work, but of a spate of publications in which A. J. Gregor presented it as a form of 'developmental dictatorship' seeking an alternative path of modernization to that of liberal capitalism closely related to the communist one.³⁹

Given such a glaring lack of scholarly consensus, it is more understandable that Gilbert Allardyce's article rubbishing the applicability of the term 'fascism' outside Italy was accepted for publication by the prestigious *American Historical Review* in 1979 and became more famous than the penetrating critiques that followed it in the same issue, even though its naïve methodological basis and poor empirical grasp of the topic would surely not (or at least hopefully would not) pass muster by peer-reviewers today.⁴⁰

When the Historical Association in the United Kingdom published a pamphlet on fascism in Europe in 1981, its author, Richard Robinson, simply could make neither head nor tail of the conflicting pronouncements and paradigms of the phenomenon he was researching, and concluded that 'Although enormous amounts of research time and mental energy have been put into the study of it [...] fascism has remained the great conundrum for students of the twentieth century.'⁴¹ At the time, Mosse's approach, stressing the centrality of fascism's bid to create a 'total culture', was just one voice in the cacophony of cries from self-appointed 'theory-mongers' in the street market of fascist studies bent on attracting the public's attention for their conceptual wares: its unique qualities easily overlooked by casual tourists such as Allardyce or Robinson.

Such an anomic situation was not conducive to a productive synergy between 'idiographic' historians and 'nomothetic' political scientists. Inevitably, when historians did undertake to write a monograph on

an aspect of fascist culture it more often than not betrayed profound ignorance of the ongoing debate in comparative fascist studies. They also tended to imply the unreconstructed assumption that fascism was a purely reactionary, bourgeois or propagandistic phenomenon, largely anti-modern—certainly anti-modernist in its basic ethos—and capable of producing only a travesty of culture: an anti-culture.

Reading their works today, it is as if both Mosse and (in the case of non-Nazi manifestations of fascism) Sternhell have been air-brushed from the historiography of fascism. Thus, when Edward Tannenbaum produced his book on society and culture under Mussolini in 1972 it is impossible to glean anything about fascism's revolutionary cultural project itself from the welter of data about the way 'things actually were'.⁴²

This is consistent with the fact that three years earlier Tannenbaum had written an article on the goal of fascism, which, naturally without drawing on either Sternhell or Mosse, concluded that the regime had aspired towards 'not *counter*-revolution but *another* revolution', only to state the fascists 'had nothing to offer culturally except empty rhetoric and a strained austerity in their style of public behaviour'.

This completely missed the intended role of mass organizations, 'political religion', propaganda and the appropriation of all cultural production by the regime to achieve 'hegemonic pluralism' as tools for socially engineering a new Italian.⁴³ Tannenbaum thus could not make as much progress as Philip Cannistraro who, in a 1972 article, acknowledged—without the Mossean input that would have sharpened and clarified the argument—that fascism attempted to bring about a cultural revolution that went beyond simple nationalism.⁴⁴

So poorly understood was the neglect of the generically 'fascist' cultural dimension of fascism engrained among historians that, 20 years later, Romke Visser (and peer-reviewers of the *Journal of Contemporary History*) still found it 'normal' to analyse the cult of *romanità* with no reference to generic fascism's wider revolutionary agenda for the enlisting of the past in the transformation of culture.⁴⁵ Martin Clark showed himself similarly impervious to sophisticated approaches to fascist culture in his *Modern Italy, 1871–1982* (1984). Little wonder that undergraduate texts on fascism still routinely ignored the fascist project.⁴⁶

Another telling symptom of the way the left hand of historiography often knew not what the right hand of political science was doing during this barren period of fascist cultural studies was a series of studies of Mussolini that tended to trivialize their subject matter, both by showing no interest in the social dynamics of charismatic leadership and

totalitarianism as generic phenomena, and by failing to even entertain the possibility that *ducismo* was not just a cynically manufactured personality cult understandable by focusing solely on Mussolini's inner and outer biography.⁴⁷

A structuralist approach to charisma, such as the one applied so fruitfully by Ian Kershaw in his two-volume biography of Hitler, suggests instead that, for at least a decade, *ducismo* gained a substantial degree of genuine populist momentum because the regime's rhetorical ('propagandistic') claims to be transforming Italy into a modern nation and a great power within a new historical era seemed borne out by concrete achievements in a wide range of social and political spheres.

This created a spontaneous (though ultimately superficial and fickle) populist enthusiasm for the official narrative of an ongoing 'cultural rebirth' initiated and driven by Mussolini's personal dictatorship—an impression shared by many foreign observers who might have been expected to know better, such as Winston Churchill, who once commented, 'If I had been an Italian, I am sure that I should have been wholeheartedly with you [Mussolini] from start to finish in your triumphant struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism'.⁴⁸ Without a sophisticated culturalist approach to fascism, biographers of Il Duce were left, like so many contemporaries, contemplating the man himself rather than the welter of historical conditions and supra-personal forces that converged to make his 'personal' dictatorship possible.

The conceptual shallowness with which the issue of Nazi art was treated in this period was, in a way, an even greater indicator of how little Mosse had been read—let alone understood—given that he had already produced a wide-ranging anthology of texts in 1966 documenting the existence of an all-pervasive 'Nazi culture', conceived in terms of a generic fascism he had already defined with such a high degree of theoretical sophistication in 1961. Thus, Bertolt Hinz's *Art in the Third Reich* (1979) insisted on dismissing Nazi cultural production as betraying the mindset of the German bourgeoisie's reactionary flight from modernity under Hitler.

A decade later, Peter Adam's analysis of 'the arts in the Third Reich', though less simplistic, still maintained Nazi culture was to be seen exclusively through the 'lens of Auschwitz', even if many passages of his commentary on individual paintings and buildings show he had subliminally registered the regime's paligenetic thrust towards an *alternative* culture and modernity as a decisive factor in conditioning its artistic production.

Meanwhile, histories of the Third Reich, if they mentioned culture at all outside the context of Goebbels' tentacular propaganda machine, generally showed little grasp of the dialectical relationship between the ridiculing of 'degenerate art' or the burning of decadent books, on the one hand, and the attempts to create a genuine, healthy, German and *modern* culture appropriate for the reborn, racially purged *Volksgemeinschaft*, on the other. It was precisely this relationship that was thrown into such stark relief by the Mossean perspective.

This benighted historiography could expect little help from Marxist cultural historians, whose minds were still caught in the conceptual traps laid by a group of theories precluding the recognition of any authentically revolutionary cultural productivity within fascism, whether these were George Lukács's stress on its exclusively irrationalistic dynamic, Walter Benjamin's thesis that the function of its aestheticization of politics was to create a cruel illusion of political participation or Guy Debord's insistence that it sought to reduce its subjects to passive onlookers through the hypnotic effect of the spectacular state.⁴⁹ Nor were such deeply engrained blind spots likely to be removed by the growing influence of a 'cultural turn' that, under the influence of post-structuralism, tended to reduce historical documents, ideologies and ritualized events to insubstantial texts, narratives and discourses. Rather than induce historians to engage with the horrifying degree of concrete historicity and flesh-and-blood facticity, such diaphanous entities could acquire phenomenologically for protagonists, collaborators and victims alike when translated into policies, projects and actions.

As the decade wore on, a discipline that, by 1980, seemed at least in international Anglophone academic circles to be undergoing a powerful surge towards ever greater scope, maturity and heuristic value, had collapsed like a vast soufflé. Hardly any publication displayed an intelligent interest in fascism's totalitarian bid to create an alternative culture, and the occasional work that attempted to resolve the 'fascist conundrum', such as Noel O'Sullivan's *Fascism* (1983), which focuses on the tradition of populist politics born of the French Revolution, displayed a blissful unawareness of Mosse's achievement in exploring the mass-mobilizing dynamic of fascist populism.

Perhaps an even more telling sign that a nadir had been reached in fascist studies was the 'operational definition' to which Richard Thurlow had recourse in order to identify what groups fell within his remit in *Fascism in Britain* (1987): he would consider all groups that 'called themselves fascist'.⁵⁰ It struck neither scholar that the defining characteristic of the movements they were studying was that they had all set

themselves the task of creating an alternative total 'culture' based on the myth of the organic nation.

Given the depressingly uncollaborative *Zeitgeist* prevailing in this field of studies it comes as no surprise to find that in their introduction to a courageous special issue of the *Stanford Italian Review* dedicated to 'Fascism and Culture',⁵¹ the co-editors, Jeffrey Schnapp and Barbara Spackman, felt it necessary to stress that 'some contest whether there could be such a thing as fascist culture', and regret that for such sceptics fascism has come to be 'an increasingly undifferentiated' term embracing fascism and Nazism.⁵² Schnapp then tellingly opened his own contribution to the journal thus: '*Fascist modernism*. The phrase still has the power to produce a certain turbulence on the lips, as if the pairing were unnatural', before proceeding to construct a powerful empirical argument to show how natural the coupling was in the case of Italian futurism and fascism.⁵³

By contrast, Richard Golsan's editorial introduction to *Fascism, Aesthetics and Culture* (1992) identified the common assumption that 'fascism and culture are antithetical terms' as one of the two major problems making the undertaking hazardous, without proceeding to argue for a deep elective affinity between the two.⁵⁴ In this climate, the general scholarly neglect of Furio Jesi's *Cultura di destra* (1979), a scintillating work on the mythic universe of both interwar and postwar fascist movements convergent with Mosse's work—though written from the background of a deep concern with anthropological and literary mythopoeia—was predictable on both linguistic and conceptual grounds.⁵⁵ After all, the first of several major books and articles by another Italian scholar, Emilio Gentile, exploring the fascist revolutionary bid to bring about a new state, a new man and a new culture in Italy also fell on deaf ears, despite the outstanding quality of the archival research they subsumed. By contrast, the familiar Mussolini-centric focus of Renzo De Felice's work had assured his international fame and influence among 'orthodox' historians of fascism.

Tim Mason's plaintive question 'Whatever happened to fascism?', prompted by yet another exclusively Nazi-centric conference on the Third Reich held in Philadelphia in 1989, registered the utter disarray of comparative fascist studies and their failure to have achieved any substantial heuristic value to 'empirical historians'. At the time, his own analysis of Nazism was as far away as ever from recognizing that if the Third Reich asserted the primacy of politics over economics, this was because fascism asserted the primacy of *culture* (in the totalizing 'Mossean' sense) over *politics*.

The new spring in idiographic studies of fascist culture

However, even as Mason was making apparently forlorn pleas for Nazism to be located within a ‘much larger’ historical process, a warm zephyr was blowing through the bleak landscape of fascist cultural studies. After 1989, a trickle of sophisticated studies of specific aspects of fascist culture, compatible—whether wittingly or not—with the Mossean paradigm, turned into a steady flow of publications, only a flavour of which can be offered here. Three outstanding examples of a sustained collaborative enterprise, increasingly common in the 1990s, which arrived at a comparative understanding of fascist culture were Günter Berghaus’s collection of essays on fascist theatre, which contained his own seminal discussion of its anthropological dimension; the travelling exhibition ‘Art and Power’ and its accompanying catalogue (1995), several of the essays in which fully corroborated the heuristic value of Mosse’s approach; and a comparative study of fascist culture in Italy and France containing a nuanced discussion of fascism’s relationship to culture in terms that would have been incomprehensible to Norberto Bobbio or Gilbert Allardyce.⁵⁶

Highlights (from an Anglophone perspective) in the cultural understanding of fascism were the special issues dedicated to the topic in the *Stanford Italian Review* and the *Journal of Contemporary History*; Walter Adamson’s essays on the Florentine avant-garde’s intimate relationship with early fascism; Richard Etlin’s panoramic history of modern Italian architecture that documented how modernist utopianism was fuelled rather than dampened by Mussolini’s regime; a series of seminal publications by Mark Antliff exploring the relationship between culture and fascism in France and between fascism, modernity, and modernism; and Emilio Gentile’s *Il culto del littorio*, his prize-winning book on totalitarianism’s relationship to political religion, and his collection of seminal essays on fascism and modernity: publications that cumulatively have given Anglophone historians no excuse for delaying a serious engagement with his works any longer.⁵⁷

Also symptomatic of the long overdue paradigm shift to a ‘culturalist’ approach to fascism—a development that still drew a condescending and ill-informed response from the self-appointed pundit of fascist studies, Richard Bosworth⁵⁸—were a number of penetrating analyses of fascist cultural production by Jeffrey Schnapp; Marla Stone’s groundbreaking analysis of the role of fascism’s ‘patron state’ in cultural production; and Emily Braun’s monograph on Mario Sironi—the first in-depth

exploration of the intimate relationship between a passionately original modern artist and fascism's totalizing cultural project.⁵⁹ In it, Braun was able to report: 'At present it is difficult to distinguish between studies of Fascism and those of Fascist culture, so intertwined have become the concepts of politics and aesthetic', an assertion inconceivable 20 years earlier.⁶⁰

The cultural turn was also bearing edible fruit in this sphere, with analyses of aspects of fascism informed by post-structuralist methodology, which, unlike Andrew Hewitt's doggedly Marxian application of it, corroborated its revolutionary assault on traditional artistic and political culture by going beyond simplistic notions of the 'aestheticization of politics'.⁶¹

Notable in this context are Barbara Spackmann's examination of the rhetoric of virility under Mussolini, Mabel Berezin's exploration of the role of spectacular politics in fascistization and Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi's wide-ranging investigation of the 'aesthetics of power in Fascist Italy', which consciously applies a 'cultural approach to the study of fascism [...] founded on a notion of narrative as inter-subjective discourse that takes place within a social space and historical time'.⁶² All three draw extensively on Mosse and Gentile while giving culturalism their own post-structuralist spin.

Three works in particular stand out in this respect and point to a mature 'culturalism': a productive synthesis between the pre- and post-cultural turn in the historiography of fascism: Ruth Ben-Ghiat's *Fascist Modernities*, each of the chapters of which explores another facet of the nexus between aesthetic and political culture under the regime, fully recognizing its bid to realize an alternative modernity, temporality and culture; Claudio Fogu's *Historic Imaginary*, which lays bare the way the culture-transforming impulse to 'make history' at the heart of the fascist worldview took concrete form in the mythic images of the unfolding revolution supposedly occurring in national life through a creative use of exhibitions and state ceremonies; and, perhaps most significantly of all, the various essays collected in *Donatello among the Blackshirts*, all written with a sophistication unthinkable even a decade earlier, let alone before the 1990s.⁶³

Despite the extreme variety of themes investigated, all these scholarly contributions share a broadly convergent methodological grasp of the nexus between modernity, modernism, culture and revolution at the core of state policies designed to 'fascitize' Italy—however travestied or disastrous in their implementation. In particular, Spackman, Falasca-Zamponi and Fogu were prepared to read against the grain of

Benjaminian theory and explore the aestheticization of politics under fascism—not as a cover for reactionary politics, but as a technique for winning popular consensus for the transformation and regeneration of society. The substantial body of work produced in this ‘new wave’ has meant the days in which historians had recourse to contorted oxymorons—such as ‘utopian anti-modern modernism’ and ‘reactionary modernism’—to conceptualize the fascist assault on the status quo now seem mercifully distant.

A welcome sign that, in the meantime, the Italian historiography of fascism that had once ignored Mosse and Gentile was finally coming of age was the appearance of works in the homeland of the historiography of fascism itself, such as Pier Giorgio Zunino’s study of fascist ideology and Angelo Ventrone’s account of the genesis of fascism in the aftermath of the First World War.⁶⁴ Both recognized the extent to which fascism was born of a cultural crisis for which it saw itself as a drastic remedy, the inauguration of a new phase in Western civilization, a radically *future* project of societal transformation no matter how anchored in a mythicized and idealized national past.

It is perhaps inevitable, given the fury of the Third Reich’s onslaught against degenerate culture, deep-seated preconceptions about its fundamental nihilism, or moral evil and stubborn convictions about the uniqueness of Nazism, that the wind of change in Nazi studies has been more of a refreshing breeze than a purging gale. Mosse’s *Nazi Culture* (1966) and Vondung’s *Magic and Manipulation* (1971) had no immediate heirs, and perhaps even more remarkably, Modris Eksteins’ *Rites of Spring* (1989)—a groundbreaking and widely acclaimed cultural history of the modernism endemic to German society in the early twentieth century—was universally ignored by orthodox historians of the Third Reich.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, a handful of publications since 1990 may come to be seen as seismic tremors betokening more radical shifts in perspective to come. These include a collection of wide-ranging essays on the Nazification of art; a radical reinterpretation of the German cinema; Peter Fritzsche’s provocative claim for the fundamental modernism of the Nazis; and, perhaps the most ambitious and sustained challenge to the old paradigm of Nazi culture, Eric Michaud’s 1996 work on the cult of art in Nazi Germany, which was first published in English in 2004 (the time lag is perhaps significant).⁶⁶ Another eloquent sign of a sea-change in the ‘orthodox’ historiography of Nazism was Michael Burleigh’s book on the Third Reich, which delivered on its promise to be ‘a new history’ by making the concept ‘political

religion' central to its analysis and taking seriously Nazism's claim to create piecemeal a new society inhabited by new men in a new historical era.⁶⁷

Even Richard Evans, despite his profound scepticism about the value of concepts such as 'generic fascism' or 'political religion' to Nazi studies, called the last chapter of *The Coming of the Third Reich* 'Hitler's Cultural Revolution', at the end of which he states that what mattered to the Nazis above all was race, culture and ideology:

In the coming years, they would create a whole new set of institutions through which they would seek to remould the German psyche and rebuild the German character. After the purges of artistic and cultural life were complete, it was time for those German writers, musicians, and intellectuals who remained to lend their talents to the creation of a new German culture.⁶⁸

These words—from a British empiricist keen to distance himself from comparative fascist studies, theories of totalitarianism and political religion—are probably an even greater historiographical tribute to the pervasive influence of the Mossean paradigm than the plaudits of a self-appointed theorist of generic fascism. There is an old joke about parents watching their son, a new army recruit, marching in a military parade to martial music and commenting: 'Look! All the soldiers are out of step except our Harry.' Well, now it is historians who deny or ignore the cultural dimension of fascism who are out of step, and not those who acknowledge it.⁶⁹

A major event in the growth of archival knowledge of artistic culture under the Third Reich suggests that, before long, even more conventional historians will find themselves unwittingly walking in step to the tunes of George Mosse, Emilio Gentile, Klaus Vondung and their closest associates.

The American scholar, Gregory Maertz, has photographed and catalogued some 10,000 German paintings, many strikingly modernist in aesthetic technique, which were safely hidden out of sight and mind at the end of the war;⁷⁰ their irruption into the public domain will inevitably lead to a major re-evaluation of the modernity and authentic creativity of Nazi art in a way that can only reinforce the relevance of a culturalist, Mossean perspective to the understanding of Nazism, revealing further inadequacies in the analyses of Nazi painting proposed by Hinz and Adam, which were based on fewer than 700 of the most overtly

propagandistic specimens released by the US military authorities shortly after the war, not to mention defective conceptual premises about the nature of Nazism itself.

What should also help historians penetrate further than ever before into the dynamics of Nazi culture is a velvet revolution that has been taking place in the study of generic fascism.

Fascism and culture: The prospects for deeper understanding

The second, more serious, obstacle to the historical engagement with fascist culture identified by Richard Golsan in the early 1990s was that ‘of defining fascism itself’—‘opinions differ widely, even among those who acknowledge the existence of a fascist ideology, as to precisely what that ideology comprises’. How far removed his own instinct was from the approach Mosse had advocated three decades earlier is indicated by his suggestion fascism may be ‘contradictory in its very essence’.⁷¹ In the years that have elapsed since these remarks, comparative fascist studies underwent a transformation to the point where all but a few recidivist Marxists deny that at the heart of interwar fascism lay the revolutionary agenda of purging the existing nation of decadence and creating a new total culture. Even those who balked at the idea of an emerging ‘new consensus’ first posited in the reader *International Fascism* (for example, A. J. Gregor, Martin Blinkhorn, Robert Paxton and Michael Mann) have formulated idiosyncratic definitions broadly compatible with Mosse’s 1961 chapter proposing that the core fascist vision was that of renewing the nation by creating a new ‘total’ artistic, social, political and ethical culture purged of decadence.⁷²

As a result of this process of convergence and realignment, however surreptitious and grudging by the time Mosse published *The Fascist Revolution* in 1999, the culturalist theory of fascism that informed the essays it collected had become a mainstream position—and in some respects the majority view—among historians and political scientists, as reflected in its adoption in the electronic resources most often consulted by the new broadband distance learner, such as Wikipedia and the Microsoft Encarta encyclopaedia. As I argued in ‘The Primacy of Culture’, Anglophone academe had taken a whole 40 years to painstakingly reinvent the definitional wheel Mosse had first assembled in the late 1950s, which placed cultural regeneration at the hub of the fascist revolution.⁷³

A more auspicious sign for the prospects of an ever deeper understanding of the relationship between fascism and culture than any theorizing about generic fascism is the way ever more 'idiographic' articles are appearing that take the central importance of fascism's culture in interpreting the concrete realities associated with its particular manifestations for granted, without reducing its politics to 'discourses' and 'grand narratives'. This is particularly true of studies of the British Union of Fascists, which have undergone a renaissance thanks to the application of a culturalist perspective.⁷⁴ A recent essay on the relationship between Romania's interwar avant-garde intelligentsia and the Iron Guard by Maria Bucur suggests that here too is rich terrain to be explored.⁷⁵ An even more significant pointer to the enrichment of the historiography of fascism by the application of a culturalist approach is Mark Antliff's in-depth study of the intimate relationship between the French avant-garde and French fascism, Michael Golston's investigation of the intersection between modernist aesthetics, fascism and the latest research into both race and rhythm.⁷⁶

It was partly in the hope of adding new dimensions and more extensive sociological and anthropological underpinnings to highly imaginative projects of this type that I embarked on my extensive investigation into the relationship between modernism and fascism.⁷⁷ Such works provide abundant evidence that, after years of marginalization and neglect, culturalism in fascist studies is at last going 'global': not because any particular school of thought or individual theorist has achieved 'cultural hegemony', but because of the self-evident heuristic value of approaching fascism from the perspective of an attempted cultural revolution.

How will the exploration of fascism's cultural dimension develop as the new millennium unfolds? Clearly there will continue to be historians who retain a profound scepticism about the culturalist approach. Ian Kershaw and Richard Evans, for example, both reject the value of the concept 'political religion' and the relevance of fascist studies to their work on the Third Reich, even though the histories they write provide exhaustive empirical vindications of a sophisticated culturalist approach in their own specialism. It can be anticipated that as a new generation of researchers engage with the relatively neglected fascist movements of countries such as Brazil, Sweden, Finland, Holland, Norway, Hungary, Croatia and South Africa a welter of data relating to an attempted cultural revolution will be unearthed. A whole new area will also open up once the approach is applied to studies of the metapolitical tradition within the post-1945 extreme right, as can be inferred from the title

of one of the studies of the new right by a fellow traveller, Michael O'Meara.⁷⁸

As fascist studies become more interdisciplinary, more anthropologically streetwise, more refined in their understanding of the nexus between ultra-nationalism, totalitarianism, political religion, the quest for an alternative modernity and modernism itself, of the rampant syncretism inevitably shaping the formulation of fascist ideology, and of the complex of socio-political factors conditioning the strength of fascism's mobilizing, 'charismatic' appeal both to the masses *and* to the avant-garde, then 'culturalism' could finally enter full maturity as a heuristic approach.⁷⁹

Exciting new vistas should open up once scholars more regularly join up their thinking about aesthetic, technocratic and political modernism as complementary aspects of culture rather than living in mutual exile and incomprehension.⁸⁰

One unlikely, but feasible, process that would further enrich this trend would be a much overdue *rapprochement* between Marxist and non-Marxist historians in recognizing, from different sides of entrenched ideological divides, that the fascist quest for cultural hegemony—no matter how backed up by techniques of dominion and, in the Nazi case, terror—was part of an attempt to engineer alternative modernity which, in its own terms, was revolutionary, no matter how unacceptable these terms are to socialists.⁸¹

Further fruitful synergy could come about if both camps were prepared to collaborate proactively in exploring the striking parallels existing between the cultural projects and the social forces unleashed by their attempted realization by fascism, Nazism, Bolshevism and Maoism. A major contribution to such an exciting development would be the confluence of a neo-Benjaminian understanding of the aestheticization of politics under *all* totalitarian (and hence revolutionary) regimes—left and right—with the sophisticated understanding of fascism's cultural dimension made possible by judiciously blending insights drawn from Mosse, Sternhell, Gentile, Payne and, more recently, David Roberts.⁸²

Even without such a surreal turn of events, the time may not be too far off when it will be possible to turn Horkheimer's famous dictum on its head by stating 'Whoever does not want to speak of culture should be equally silent on fascism.' As things stand, the phrase 'fascist culture' has already—for all but the most recalcitrant academics—lost the power 'to produce a certain turbulence on the lips, as if the pairing were unnatural'. Soon 'fascist modernism' may sound equally euphonious.

Acknowledgment

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Notes

1. G. Borgese, 'The Intellectual Origins of Fascism', *Social Research* 1, no. 4, 1934, pp. 475–6.
2. E. Gentile, 'A Provisional Dwelling: The Origin and Development of the Concept of Fascism in Mosse's Historiography', in S. G. Payne, D. J. Sorkin and J. S. Tortorice, eds, *What History Tells: George L. Mosse and the Culture of Modern Europe*, Wisconsin, 2004, pp. 53–4.
3. W. Adamson, 'Gramsci's Interpretation of Fascism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41, no. 4, 1980, pp. 615–33; W. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory*, Berkeley, 1980.
4. B. Croce, 'A Reply to the Intellectuals', in J. Schnapp, ed., *A Primer of Italian Fascism*, Lincoln, 2000, p. 306. Emphasis added.
5. Remark made in an interview with *L'Espresso*, 26 December 1982, cited in R. J. B. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship*, London, 1998, p. 155.
6. G. L. Mosse, 'Fascism and the Intellectuals', in S. Woolf, ed., *The Nature of Fascism*, London, 1968, p. 206.
7. For a meticulous reconstruction of the evolution of Mosse's theory of fascism, essential reading is E. Gentile, *Il fascino del persecutore: George L. Mosse e la catastrofe dell'uomo moderno*, Rome, 2007.
8. Mosse, 'Fascism and the Intellectuals', pp. 207–9.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
10. G. L. Mosse, *Confronting History*, Wisconsin, 2000, p. 178.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 176–7.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
13. This is, of course, a highly particular and partial definition of 'culture'. For a survey of its polysemic nature and complex relationship to 'ideology' see R. Griffin, 'Ideology and Culture', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11, no. 1, 2006, pp. 77–99.
14. Mosse, *Confronting History*, p. 178.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 348–9.
17. K. Taylor, *Address Unknown*, London, 2002, p. 24.
18. G. L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe: The 19th and 20th Centuries. An Introduction*, Chicago, 1961.
19. R. De Felice, *Fascism: An Informal Introduction to its Theory and Practice. An Interview with Michael A. Ledeen*, New Brunswick, 1976.
20. G. L. Mosse and M. Ledeen, eds, *Nazism: A Historical and Comparative Analysis of National Socialism. An Interview with Michael A. Ledeen*, New Brunswick, 1978.
21. The phrase is *eine peinlich wirkende positivere Beurteilung des Faschismus*. W. Wippermann, *Faschismustheorien: Zum Stand der gegenwärtigen Diskussion*, Darmstadt, 1976 [1972], p. 125.

22. Z. Sternhell, 'Fascist Ideology', in W. Laqueur, ed., *Fascism: A Reader's Guide*, Harmondsworth, 1979, pp. 386–7, 395–9. For further evidence of the neglect of Mosse as a theorist of generic fascism in this period see the essays by J. J. Linz, E. Weber and F. Carsten in *Fascism: A Reader's Guide*; the essay by B. Hagtvet and R. Kühnl, 'Contemporary Approaches to Fascism: A Survey of Paradigms'; and S. G. Payne, 'The Concept of Fascism', S. U. Larsen, B. Hagtvet and J. P. Myklebust, eds., *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism*, Oslo, 1980.
23. Z. Sternhell, *Ni droite, ni gauche: L'idéologie fasciste en France*, Paris, 2000, p. 406.
24. Gentile, 'A Provisional Dwelling', p. 52. Gentile's essay is indispensable for understanding the genesis of Mosse's culturalist approach to fascism in the late 1950s. For an extended and profound analysis of his interpretation of modernity and the rise of political religions and its relationship to his personal biography, see Gentile, *Il fascino del persecutore*.
25. F. Pohlmann, 'Der faschistische Proteus—Eine fortschrittliche Aufklärung aus England über das Wesen eines vielgesichtiges Phenomens', *Erwägen, Wissen, Ethik* 15, no. 3, 2004, pp. 339–42.
26. D. Prowe, "'Classic" Fascism and the New Radical Right in Western Europe: Comparisons and Contrasts', *Contemporary European History* 3, no. 3, 1994, pp. 289–314.
27. G. L. Mosse, handwritten notes for the conference 'The Intellectual Foundations of National Socialism', file titled 'What is fascism', cited in E. Gentile, *Il fascino del persecutore*, p. 66.
28. E. Gentile uses this expression in *Le religioni della politica: fra democrazie e totalitarismi*, Rome-Bari, 2000.
29. G. L. Mosse, 'The Genesis of Fascism', *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 1, 1966, pp. 19–20.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
31. Mosse, *Confronting History*, p. 177.
32. K. Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation: Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus*, Göttingen, 1971.
33. G. L. Mosse, 'The Fascist Revolution: Towards a General Theory of Fascism', first published in G. L. Mosse, ed., *International Fascism: New Thoughts and New Approaches*, London, 1979, pp. 1–45. This quotation is taken from the version reprinted in R. Griffin and M. Feldman, eds, *Fascism*, vol. 1, *The Nature of Fascism*, London, 2003, p. 150.
34. G. L. Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality*, New York, 1980.
35. Z. Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983; A. J. Gregor, *The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics*, Princeton, 1974.
36. E. Nolte, 'The Problem of Fascism in Recent Scholarship', in H. Turner, Jr, ed., *Reappraisals of Fascism*, New York, 1975, p. 35.
37. C. Maier, 'Some Recent Studies of Fascism', *The Journal of Modern History* 48, no. 3, 1976, pp. 506–21.
38. H. A. Turner, 'Fascism and Modernization', in H. A. Turner, ed., *Reappraisals of Fascism*, New York, 1975. Turner's argument is subjected to withering critique in A. J. Gregor, 'Fascism and Modernization: Some Addenda', *World Politics* 26, no. 3, 1974, pp. 370–84.

39. A. J. Gregor, *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship*, Princeton, 1979.
40. G. Allardyce, 'What Fascism is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept', *American Historical Review* 84, no.2, 1979, pp. 367–88.
41. R. A. H. Robinson, *Fascism in Europe, 1919–1945 (Appreciations in History)*, London, 1981, p. 1.
42. E. Tannenbaum, *The Fascist Experience: Italian Society and Culture, 1922–1945*, New York, 1972.
43. The phrase 'hegemonic pluralism' is from M. Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy*, Princeton, 1998; E. Tannenbaum, 'The Goals of Italian Fascism', *The American Historical Review* 74, no. 4, 1969, pp. 1183–204, 1204.
44. P. Cannistraro, 'Mussolini's Cultural Revolution: Fascist or Nationalist?', *Journal of Contemporary History* 7, nos. 1–2, 1972, pp. 115–39. Roland Sarti's attempt, written in the same period, to decide whether fascist modernization was traditional or revolutionary cried out equally loudly for a culturalist, Mossean dimension. See R. Sarti, 'Fascist Modernization in Italy: Traditional or Revolutionary', *The American Historical Review* 75, no. 4, 1970, pp. 1029–45.
45. R. Visser, 'Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of the Romanità', *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, no. 1, 1992, pp. 5–22.
46. For example, J. Whittam, *Fascist Italy*, Manchester, 1995.
47. For example, C. Hibbert, *Benito Mussolini*, London, 1975; D. Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, London, 1981. This is perpetuated in R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini*, London, 2002—a work that shows both disdain for and ignorance of the potential contribution comparative fascist studies could make to understanding Mussolini's rise and fall. The praise lavished on this biography by so many historians, and its popular success, emphasizes the gap that still exists almost half a century after the rise of comparative fascist studies between 'common sense' (and ultimately mythic) perceptions of the phenomenon of the 'great man' and an approach that seeks a multi-factorial, sociologically informed and, hence, truly *historiographical* understanding of charismatic authority.
48. See R. Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933–1939*, Oxford, 1983, p. 14.
49. G. Lukács, 'Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline', in R. Livingstone, ed., *Essays on Realism*, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 23–32, originally published as 'Grösse und Verfall des Expressionismus', *Internationale Literatur* I, 1934, pp. 153–73. The thesis expressed in Benjamin's concept of the 'aestheticization of politics', was first formulated in his 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', which was originally published in French. See M. Horkheimer, 'L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproductibilité technique', *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*; G. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, London, 1970.
50. R. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918–1985*, Oxford, 1987, pp. xv–xvii.
51. J. Schnapp and B. Spackman, eds, *Stanford Italian Review* 8, nos. 1–2, 1990.
52. *Ibid.*, 'Introduction', p. 2.
53. J. Schnapp, 'Forwarding Address', *Stanford Italian Review* 8, nos. 1–2, 1990, p. 53.

54. R. Golsan, *Fascism, Aesthetics and Culture*, Hanover and London, 1992, pp. x–xi.
55. F. Jesi, *Cultura di destra*, Rome, 1993. Jesi's contribution to understanding the mythic structure and esoteric aspect of the fascist vision of history has yet to be recognized to this day.
56. G. Berghaus, ed., *Fascism and Theatre*, Oxford, 1996; G. Berghaus, 'The Ritual Core of Fascist Theatre: An Anthropological Perspective', in Berghaus, ed., *Fascism and Theatre*, pp. 39–71; D. Elliott, D. Ades, T. Benton and I. B. Whyte, *Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators, 1930–45*, London, 1995; M. Antliff and M. Affron, eds, *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, Princeton, 1997; M. Antliff and M. Affron, 'Art and Fascist Ideology in France and Italy: An Introduction', in Antliff and Affron, eds, *Fascist Visions*, pp. 1–24.
57. *Stanford Italian Review* 8, nos. 1–2, 1990; *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 2, 1996; W. Adamson, 'Fascism and Culture: Avant-Gardes and Secular Religion in the Italian case', *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 3, 1989, pp. 411–35; W. Adamson, 'Modernism and Fascism: The Politics of Culture in Italy, 1903–1922', *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 2, 1990, pp. 359–90 (these essays were subsequently expanded into a major book, W. Adamson, *Avant-garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism*, Cambridge, 1993); R. Etlin, *Modernism in Italian Architecture, 1890–1940*, London, 1991; M. Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, Princeton, 1993; M. Antliff, 'La cité française: George Valois, Le Corbusier, and Fascist Theories of Urbanism', Antliff and Affron, eds, *Fascist Visions*, pp. 134–70; M. Antliff, 'Machine Primitives: Philippe Lamour, Germaine Krull, and the Fascist Cult of Youth', *Qui Parle* 13, no. 1, 2001, pp. 57–102; M. Antliff, 'Modernism and Fascism: French Fascist Aesthetics between the Wars', O. Hjort, ed., *Re-thinking Images between the Wars: New Perspectives in Art History*, Copenhagen, 2000, pp. 13–45; M. Antliff, 'Fascism, Modernism and Modernity: The State of Research', *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 1, 2002, pp. 148–69; E. Gentile, *Il culto del littorio*, Bari, 1993 (this book is a major investigation of the role played by political religion in the life of Mussolini's regime, and was published in English as *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, Massachusetts, 1996); E. Gentile, *Le religioni della politica: fra democrazie e totalitarismi*, Rome-Bari, 2000 (published in English as *Politics as Religion*, Princeton, 2006), the thesis of which was presented in his article 'The Sacralization of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 1, no. 1, 2000, pp. 18–55. An important article that prepared the ground for the theory he was to elaborate later was 'Fascism as a Political Religion', *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, nos. 2–3, 1990, pp. 229–51; E. Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism*, Westport, 2003.
58. Bosworth dismisses 'culturalism' as little more than a fad; in doing so he seriously misrepresents the scholarship of Emilio Gentile (whose sophistication is clearly beyond his grasp) and displays woeful ignorance with his comment that culturalism can only 'credulously report what Fascism said rather than critically exploring what it meant', suggesting such an approach may even contribute to its rehabilitation. See R. J. B. Bosworth, *The Italian*

- Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism*, London, 1998, pp. 24–9. Similar methodological Luddism is displayed in his biography, *Mussolini*, London, 2002, and his *Mussolini's Italy*, London, 2005. For a more positive, but highly condensed history of the belated scholarly engagement with fascist culture, see J. Nelis, 'Italian Fascism and Culture: Some Notes on Investigation', *Historia Actual Online* 9, 2006, pp. 141–51, available at <http://www.historia-actual.org>.
59. J. Schnapp, 'Epic Demonstrations: Fascist Modernity and the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution', in Golsan, ed., *Fascism, Aesthetics*, pp. 1–32; J. Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18BL and the Theatre of Masses for Masses*, Stanford, 1996; J. Schnapp, 'The Fabric of Modern Times', *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1, 1997, pp. 191–245; a number of essential texts relating to fascist culture are made available in J. Schnapp, *A Primer of Italian Fascism*, Lincoln, 2000; M. Stone, 'The State as Patron: Making Official Culture in Fascist Italy', in Affron and Antliff, eds, *Fascist Visions*, pp. 205–38, cf. Stone, *The Patron State*.
 60. E. Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism: Art and Politics under Fascism*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 5.
 61. A. Hewlitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde*, Stanford, 1993.
 62. B. Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy*, Minneapolis, 1996; M. Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self*, Ithaca, 1997; S. Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Fascist Italy*, Berkeley, 1997, p. 2.
 63. R. Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2001; C. Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy*, Buffalo, 2003; C. Lazzaro and R. Crum, eds, *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, Cornell, 2005.
 64. P. G. Zunino, *L'ideologia del fascismo: miti, credenze e valori nella stabilizzazione del regime*, Bologna, 1995; A. Ventrone, *Le seduzione totalitarian: guerra, modernità, violenza politica (1914–1918)*, Rome, 2003.
 65. M. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, Boston, 2000.
 66. B. Taylor and W. van der Will, eds, *The Nazification of Art*, Winchester, 1990; L. Schulte-Sass, *Entertaining the Third Reich*, Durham, 1996; P. Fritzsche, 'Nazi Modern', *Modernism/modernity* 3, no. 1, 1996, pp. 1–22; E. Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, Stanford, 2004.
 67. M. Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History*, London, 2000.
 68. R. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, London, 2005, p. 461.
 69. Another welcome sign of the times are the fruits of a concerted attempt by some German historians of the younger generation to place the history of the Third Reich in a comparative context, and so finally rise to the challenge Tim Mason set two decades ago when he asked what had happened to fascism as a heuristic concept in the study of Nazism. Criticizing the provincialism of the German historiography of Nazism and its narrow obsession with debating an exclusively Marxist, 'economist' construct of fascism, S. Reichardt and A. Nolzen have resolutely taken on board insights from British-American fascist studies in their edited collection of essays comparing fascism with Nazism in *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland: Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich: Beiträge zur Geschichte der*

- Nationalsozialismus*, Göttingen, 2005. The hallmark of this approach they see in the way 'Fascism is defined in cultural historical terms as a political style characterized by a specific culture and aesthetic' (p. 10); in doing so, the self-characterizations and self-representations of fascist movements are taken seriously and integrated into a definition of fascism that portrays it as a fusion of 'politics and culture, or rather power politics and experiential culture' (p. 11). The overarching definition the editors propose for the book is that fascism is 'a political and social praxis which articulates itself in symbols, rituals and world-views promoting a racially homogeneous *Völkisch* community' (p. 12), something they later identify with the cult of the 'new fascist man' (p. 15). Remarkably, the name George Mosse is conspicuous by its absence from the notes, even if this is an unmistakably Mossean definition and yet another unwitting tribute to his prescience as a theorist and the abiding significance of his contribution to the original 'The Nature of Fascism' symposium.
70. G. Maertz, *The Invisible Museum: The Secret of Postwar History of Nazi Art*, New Haven, 2008. See also G. Maertz, *House of Art: A Cultural History of Nazi Germany*, New Haven, forthcoming, which may well stimulate some radical (and non-apologist) revision of the preconceptions about the Führer's own aesthetic values.
 71. Golsan, *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*, pp. x–xi.
 72. R. Griffin, *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*, London, 1998; A. J. Gregor, *Phoenix: Fascism in our Time*, New Brunswick, 1999, 162, p. 166; M. Blinkhorn, *Fascism and the Right in Europe, 1918–1945*, London, 2000, pp. 115–16; R. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, New York, 2004, p. 218; M. Mann, *Fascists*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 13.
 73. R. Griffin, 'The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies', *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 1, 2002, pp. 21–43.
 74. Significant publications in this context are T. Linehan, *British Fascism, 1918–39: Parties, Ideology and Culture*, Manchester, 2000; M. Spurr, 'Living the Blackshirt Life: Culture, Community and the British Union of Fascists', *Contemporary European History* 12, no. 3, 2003, pp. 305–22; J. Gottlieb and T. Linehan, eds, *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, London, 2004; J. Gottlieb, 'The Marketing of Megalomania: Celebrity, Consumption and the Development of Political Technology in the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 1, 2006, pp. 35–55.
 75. M. Bucur, 'Fascism and the New Radical Movement in Romania', in A. Fenner and E. D. Weitz, eds, *Fascism and Neofascism: Critical Writings on the Radical Right in Europe*, New York, 2004, pp. 159–74.
 76. M. Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art and Culture in France, 1909–1939*, Durham, 2007; A. Kallis, *Rome 1922–1945. The Making of the Fascist Capital*, London, 2011; M. Golston, *Rhythm and 'Race' In 20th-Century Poetry and Poetics: Pound, Yeats, Williams, and Modern Sciences of Rhythm*, New York, 2007.
 77. R. Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, London, 2007.
 78. M. O'Meara, *New Culture, New Right: Anti-Liberalism in Postmodern Europe*, Bloomington, 2004.

79. A major work exploring aspects of this nexus from the perspective of totalitarianism is D. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in the 20th Century*, New York, 2005.
80. A pioneering publication in this respect was the special supplement to *Stanford Humanities Review* 5, 1996, co-edited by J. Schnapp and H. U. Gumbrecht, that was dedicated to 'Cultural and technological incubations of fascism'. Schnapp has blazed a trail in this burgeoning field by publishing major articles on both art and technology under fascism. Golston, *Rhythm and 'Race'* and Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism* are further contributions to what will hopefully become a productive branch of fascist studies. An example of a scholar working from the pole of technocratic modernism towards cultural modernism is M. Turda, whose collection of essays in M. Turda and P. Weindling, eds, *Blood and Homeland: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central And Southeast Europe, 1900–1940*, Budapest, 2006, is a landmark publication in its recognition of the existence of the equivalent of the German *Völkisch* cultural movement, which had both an artistic and biopolitical aspect, throughout Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century. Here too Mosse proved to be a trailblazer with *The Crisis of German Ideology*, his study of the German *Völkisch* movement as symptomatic of the response to the spiritual malaise induced by modernity as it impacted on Germany.
81. For a gesture towards reconciling Marxist with non-Marxist approaches to fascism see R. Griffin, 'Exploding the Continuum of History: A Non-Marxist's Marxist Model of Fascism's Revolutionary Dynamics', in M. Feldman, ed., *A Fascist Century: Essays by Roger Griffin*, London, 2008, pp. 46–68.
82. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment*.

Part II

New Approaches

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5

Theories of Fascism: A Critique from the Perspective of Women's and Gender History

Kevin Passmore

Nearly 40 years after second-wave feminism first challenged academe, theorists of fascism have yet to engage seriously with women's or gender history. This neglect is not entirely their fault: neither women's nor gender historians have systematized the implications of their work for understanding fascism as a category of analysis, perhaps seeing fascism studies as a domain of positivist model building, dependent upon the universalization of the male subject. From the other side, fascism theorists' neglect of women's and gender history stems, in a few cases, from a wider unfamiliarity with historical research on fascism.

It is not difficult to find abstract models based entirely on dialogue with other equally abstract models, with hardly a glance at research into the movements and regimes they discuss, let alone at the writings of fascists themselves; some cite Adorno on the nature of Nazism more readily than they do Hitler. Of course, most theorists do read historical works, yet too often they see in them only 'historical detail'—to be reworked into a theoretical interpretation. Perhaps they are influenced by the old adage that 'historians collect the facts while sociologists and political scientists provide the theory'. They appear unaware of the theoretical assumptions intrinsic to historical research, and still less of the contribution of women's and gender historians towards developing those methods.

In my view, theorists of fascism could learn something from women's and gender history. Although not my concern in this chapter, the reverse is also true; for those who write about women and gender in fascism ought to think carefully about the nature of fascism. Returning to my own purpose, I do not mean merely that theories of fascism would be

more 'complete' if they included an understanding of gender relations (although it would be pleasing if they did); rather, the critical method honed by gender historians and others allows us to understand the historical nature of fascism. This in turn exposes inherent weaknesses in those theories—not just in terms of their exclusion of women, but of their very assumptions about the nature of society and of the methods of the human sciences.

In the first part of this chapter I shall examine the intellectual roots of the model-building approach, situating it in the same intellectual matrix from which fascism and most other modern ideologies emerged. I shall focus especially on the origins and nature of the political religions approach to fascism, bearing in mind that this method purports to apply as much to communism and other fundamentalisms as to fascism. I have chosen to concentrate on it because of its presently high intellectual profile and because it connects with many other strands in fascism theory and in the social and political sciences more generally.¹ I shall argue that political religions and related theories assume a gendered dichotomy between elite and mass, and consequently between structure and agency. They invest a small male elite with responsibility for historical change; they relegate most men to the status of unreflective people whose agency at most consists in the demand for domination. Effectively, male followers are feminized and women consigned to conceptual limbo. Associated with this antimony between elite and mass is an equally radical distinction between the rational scientific observer and the objects of their study.

I shall then suggest, tentatively, that women's and gender history—as exemplars of the historical method more generally—may help us conceptualize fascism differently, and indeed to rethink the notion of a 'theory' of fascism.

Political religions theory

For Emilio Gentile, who is among those who have done most to repopularize the concept, a political religion emerges when an earthly movement or regime sacralizes a nation, state or other entity. A secular movement endowed with the trappings of a religion—a charismatic leader and his charismatic community, priests, disciples, a liturgy and forms of worship—endeavours to shape the individual and the masses through an 'anthropological revolution': the creation of a 'new man'. Since it sees history as a conflict between good and evil, fascism-as-political-religion brooks no resistance to its project.²

For the purposes of my critique, it is important to emphasize that political religions theory owes much to totalitarianism theory, which also saw fascism as an attempt to remould society through the propagation of an all-encompassing, messianic and utopian project. Indeed, Gentile sees the political religion as an essential aspect of totalitarianism.³ The latter also emphasized the diffusion of a ruling ideology, the mechanisms of control of the population and the ‘internalization’ through ritual of ‘religious’ ideologies on the part of the masses.⁴ For Gentile, the political religion operates through a combination of coercion (one assumes of those who remain enemies) and indoctrination (those who become communicants in the religion). Indoctrination operates through ‘all-pervasive propaganda’ and ‘totalitarian pedagogy’.⁵ Through these methods, the clergy of the political religion creates ‘not *occasional crowds*, but a *liturgical mass*’: in other words, the mass takes on a qualitatively different collective life.⁶

In two respects, the political religion approach purportedly differs from totalitarianism theory. The new formulation stresses the limited success of the totalitarian project ‘in practice’—a notion dependent on a problematic distinction between essence and context that, for lack of space, cannot be explored here. More relevant to the present purpose, political religions theory claims the totalitarian ideology is both imposed from above and spontaneously generated by the masses.⁷ This formulation apparently breaks with top-down history, and yet Gentile insists that political religion derives from the masses’ allegedly inherent need for religious explanations in times of change: in effect, the masses are defined by their need for simple all-encompassing beliefs. Both totalitarianism and political religions theories argue that during periods of high emotion (notably in the so-called transition from tradition to modernity), a state of ‘disorientation’ causes the emergence of new religions.⁸ This is why, Gentile stresses, that the political religion is ephemeral, for ‘the conditions of “collective effervescence” that created it become worn out’.⁹ Thus Italian Fascism would not have emerged without the First World War: ‘Fascism began as a charismatic movement produced by an extraordinary situation.’¹⁰

To sum up, the political religion emerges when deliberate indoctrination through propaganda, loaded with a charismatic charge, meets with the demand for belief on the part of the mass in circumstances of collective trauma, thus creating an emotional bond between the charismatic leaders and the led.

These notions have a long pedigree in social science, and they are generated. To justify this contention we shall look back to the intellectual

milieu from which the modern human sciences emerged. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the new disciplines of sociology, political science, history and psychology were self-consciously scientific in that they set out to isolate themselves from the passions and prejudices of their age. They rejected the deductions of earlier 'scientists' and held their own theories derived from observable facts. They cast off obvious racial and gender stereotypes—or so the story goes: the prejudices of the age were not easily discarded.

The arguably unexorcized ghost of Gustave Le Bon and his 'collective psychology' haunted the new disciplines. In his classic study, *La psychologie des foules* (1895), Le Bon argued that the crowd was more than the sum of its parts. He depicted it as an organic phenomenon, a primitive being lacking proper hierarchy in its organs, dominated by the spinal cord rather than the brain. It was marked by the atavistic instincts of primitive man.¹¹ Outbreaks of crowd hysteria resulted from the breakdown of the traditional order into an atomistic mass society. Drawing upon early theories of the unconscious and hypnotic suggestion, Le Bon argued that the crowd thought in images and so was vulnerable to hypnosis. He feared revolutionary crowds, and yet believed that an elite making rational use of 'seductive' techniques could channel the racially defined good sense of crowds in a safer nationalist direction.¹²

The parallel between collective psychologists' views of the crowd and of women are obvious, for contemporary wisdom held the view that women's brains were destabilized by the dominance of the trembling uterus over the brain, thus accounting for feminine irrationality.¹³ Le Bon wrote that:

It will be remarked that among the special characteristics of crowds there are several—such as impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgement and of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of the sentiments, and others besides—which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution: in women, savages and children, for instance.¹⁴

We may glimpse here some of the assumptions of political religions theory. It, too, implicitly distinguishes between the passive, irrational mass with its instinctive demand for religion, and the active, rational founders of the political religion. Revealingly, Gentile cites Le Bon both as one of the progenitors of fascism *and* as a one of the forerunners of political religions theory. For Gentile, Le Bon rightly 'views religion as the product of the need of the masses for some

kind of faith', and sees that it is 'a spontaneous creation of the masses themselves'.¹⁵

This potential contradiction is quite widely shared among theorists of fascism. It is often evident in the deceptively casual contention that Le Bon *recognized* the dangers of 'mass society', for it betrays the assumption that the masses really are vulnerable to manipulation. For instance, Gentile cites in support of his argument the fact that 'more and more interpretations [during the interwar years] associated the origins and success of totalitarian religions with a mass need for belief, which capable demagogues such as Mussolini and Hitler knew how to satisfy by making use of modern propaganda techniques'.¹⁶

Likewise, Michael Burleigh contends that the masses are more reluctant than the elites to abandon 'apocalyptic revolutionary illusions', and that the 'uneducated' are vulnerable to manipulation by counter-elites.¹⁷ Although he is not typical of political religions theorists in doing so explicitly, Burleigh sees decadence as an objective category rather than as a historically constructed belief. He describes contemporary society in a manner reminiscent of Le Bon and the like: he amalgamates liberalism and socialism, he judges intellectual positions on moral grounds and purports to write for 'those who may think atomistic pluralism and multiculturalism have gone too far'. Burleigh advocates a civic religion, which he sees as something like an appeal to a common Christian heritage.¹⁸ Like Le Bon, he seeks to channel the irrationalism of the mass in a liberal-conservative direction.

More typically, the influence of collective psychology is implicit. To take another example from among the many possible ones, A. James Gregor explains the receptiveness of *fin-de-siècle* Italian intellectuals to Le Bon's, Pareto's and others' thought as explicable by the fact they were 'conscious of the irrationality and suggestibility of the masses that composed both the rural and newly urbanized populations'. The masses, he argues, turned to Marxism not for intellectual or for material reasons, but because they suffered from *anomie*. Gregor underlines my point by translating the vocabulary of collective psychology into modern sociological terms: Le Bon's 'mimetism', for instance, equals '*socialization*'.¹⁹ The latter term was popularized in social science by Talcott Parsons, who derived it from a reading of Durkheim and Freud.²⁰

Indeed, if we turn back to Durkheim we find that the great sociologist's relationship with collective psychology was somewhat equivocal—he respectfully quoted Le Bon on a range of matters. He rejected racial determinism and elaborated in its place a functionalist sociology in which, nevertheless, the needs of the social body determined

the functions of constituent organs. In fact, whenever Durkheim spoke of women, he slipped from functionalism into biological determinism.

Once again, more is at stake than mere prejudice. The very structure of Durkheim's sociology was gendered. He posited a universal historical process from traditional, religious society, to modern, rational, specialized society. This narrative is gendered in the sense that society moves from a feminine-affective to a masculine-rational stage. Following Le Bon (and many others) Durkheim argued that the 'functionally useful' public-private division of labour between the sexes emerged only with modernization. Faced with the problem of why women largely adopted domestic roles in the division of labour, he could resort only to the old prejudices: he claimed women were 'less concerned in the civilizing process', and quoted Le Bon to the effect that Parisian women's brains were no bigger than those of New Caledonians.²¹ Since women did not modernize in the same way as men they could not appropriate knowledge through reason. Instead, women internalized knowledge through the repetition of religious rituals: indeed, women had an innate need for religion as a means to make sense of the world. What is more, Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Social Life*, with its interest in the achievement of social consensus through the ritualized propagation of myths and religious beliefs, depends implicitly on the assumption that masses as a whole have an innate 'feminine' need for religion.

Durkheim's suspicion of the masses is evident in his belief that the breakdown of the traditional *conscience collective* could lead to *anomie*: a sense of isolation and angst. Such worries were banal at the time he wrote. As a liberal, Durkheim more optimistically believed that the increasingly complex division of labour would generate a new 'cult of the individual', which meant, precisely, 'to be master of oneself' (*se maîtriser*). He also contended that the rural patriarchal family with many offspring represented the best protection against excessive individualism.²² As a functionalist, Durkheim argued that the good of society dictated the inviolability of the family, whatever the interests of women: hence his opposition to divorce by mutual consent.²³

At times Durkheim writes as if the masses were marked by feminine characteristics. His reputation as an apostle of the 'cult of reason', if it wasn't an oxymoron, was not undeserved in the context of the period. Yet it was easy to turn Durkheim's theory into a precursor of political religions theory, as a letter written in 1926 by his disciple Marcel Mauss suggests:

Durkheim and the rest of us after him were, I believe, the founders of the theory of the collective representation. Yet the possibility that modern societies, more or less no longer medieval, could be as open to suggestion by dances and commotions as Australians were, like a group of children, is something that, ultimately, we had not foreseen. This return to the primitive had not been the object of our thought. We were content with a few allusions to crowds, when in fact they were much more important than that. We were content to prove that the individual could find his footing and feed his liberty and independence, his personality and his critical spirit. In the end, we did not reckon with these extraordinary new means.²⁴

In fact, Durkheim systematized many of the controlling concepts later used by political religions theory: the shift from barbarism to civilization, *anomie* and internalization through ritual. He is cited approvingly by Michael Burleigh for having done so, while Gentile uses his definition of religion as dogmas, rites and ceremonies that express the nature of things and which 'perform the function of legitimizing organized society or political power'.²⁵

In the above quotation, Mauss explicitly assimilated mass behaviour to that of 'primitive peoples' and children: he had barely moved on from Le Bon's view of the crowd. Although he did not mention women, Mauss also ascribed to the mass characteristics conventionally considered to be feminine. One finds a similarly gendered structure in those aspects of Max Weber's theories that are used by political religions theorists.

Like Le Bon (and Mosca, Pareto and many others) Weber believed that all social groups were necessarily divided into leaders and led: from the family to the nation. Weber's theories of social action applied only to the elite, and he believed the masses to be incapable of rational, goal-directed activity. As such, the masses were outside the province of sociology and were to be studied by crowd psychologists such as Le Bon. Weber's concept of charismatic authority, which is so influential in fascism studies, may be understood in relation to this fundamental distinction. Weber saw charisma as the resurrection of femininity through sexual release related to the religious experience of the Holy Spirit, counteracting the rigidities of male rationality. He saw charismatic authority as arising from outbreaks of crowd emotionalism. The bond between leader and his immediate followers—the so-called charismatic community—was especially close.²⁶

Both Weber and Durkheim—with Le Bon—feared that malevolent counter-elites would manipulate the religiously inclined, feminized mass. As such, their sociology lent itself to a top-down view of history. To uncover the roots of political religions theorists' view that the totalitarian ideology is simultaneously generated from below we must turn to Sigmund Freud. His writings on mass psychology (misleadingly rendered by his translator as group psychology) owe an enormous debt to Le Bon, whom he quoted extensively. He rightly pointed out that Le Bon systematized old views of the crowd, but credits him especially with showing the importance of the unconscious. Freud's particular contribution was to demonstrate the importance of the libidinal ties within the crowd and between the crowd and the leader.²⁷

Freud saw the mass as racially primitive and childish, but did not explicitly depict it as feminine; however, notwithstanding this, his view of the crowd is closely related to his notoriously pessimistic view of women's ability to engage in goal-directed social behaviour. Freud assumed the familiar gendered civilizing process, with its parallels between individual and social development.²⁸ Although Freud's psychoanalytic theory forbade him to see the origins of progress in male biology *tout court*, he acknowledged that the greater activism of the male owed something to the vigorous nature of the sperm in relation to the reactive ova.²⁹ Civilization, like individual development, entailed 'strengthening of the intellect, which tends to master our instinctive life'. Nevertheless, as a Lamarckian, Freud believed the residues of past stages of society were laid down in the unconscious, ready to rise up in conditions of trauma.³⁰

We should also note Gentile's view that modern man cannot shake off 'ancient religious sentiment'. Quoting Mircea Eliade, he states that man's 'formation begins with the situations assumed by his ancestors', and that the majority of men still hold to 'degenerated mythologies'.³¹ Returning to Freud, this resurgence sometimes took a masculine form. In 'Why War?' he argued that primitive man was dominated entirely by the death drive, by self-interest and by the pleasure of killing. With time, man began to measure his own behaviour against an 'ego-ideal' (the conceptual ancestor of the 'superego'). When the constraints of civilization—which were weaker in the affairs of nations than they were within societies—were removed, the result was warrior brutality.³² He regretted that modern warfare afforded 'no scope for acts of heroism according to the old ideals': it forced men into situations that 'shame[d] their manhood'.³³

Freud also believed that the removal of civilized constraints produced crowd behaviour in Le Bon's feminized sense. In his mass psychology

essay, Freud returned to the arguments of his *Totem and Taboo* (1913), in which he developed Darwin's view that primitive societies had consisted of herds dominated by a powerful male. For Freud, this patriarch monopolized all the women and forbid other males the gratification of their sex drives. In effect, only the leader was fully male while the members of the herd—whether male or female—directed their erotic drives towards each other and towards the patriarch. Again, as a Lamarckian Freud believed that the repressed memory of the primal horde had been inherited by succeeding generations and that crowd behaviour, with its impulsiveness and predominance of affect, resulted from its release.³⁴ Furthermore, he contended that hypnosis 'awakens in the subject a portion of his archaic heritage'. He adds that 'what is thus awakened is the idea of a paramount and dangerous personality, toward whom only a passive-masochistic attitude is possible, to whom one's will has to be surrendered'.

He concluded that the leader of the group [sic] is still the dreaded primal father; the group still wishes to be governed by unrestricted force, it has an extreme passion for authority. In Le Bon's phrase, 'it has a passion for obedience'; in Freud's terms, the crowd substituted the will of the patriarch for the ego ideal. As members of crowds, men behaved in ways that would be unacceptable to them as individuals: as once again Le Bon had warned. Nevertheless, Freud also saw a potential source for good in the crowd. Sublimation of sex drives into identification with fellow crowd members represented a first step on the road to civilization, for it implied some repression of the demand for immediate gratification in order for each member to share in the leader's love.³⁵

We may also relate Freud's mass psychology to his theories of individual female development. He held that women's lack of a penis caused them to resent their mothers and turn their desire towards their fathers. Furthermore, this absence rendered them immune to castration fear and thus prevented them from overcoming the forbidden identification with their fathers. Accordingly, their ego ideal, their sense of justice, was stunted, like that of the crowd.³⁶ Women, like the crowd, rarely surmounted their need for male guidance: like women, the crowd demands conformity and domination and is vulnerable to hypnotic suggestion. The crowd combines passivity with sudden outbursts of emotion: it is 'impulsive, changing and irritable', capable only of simple and exaggerated behaviour. It was dominated by instinct, and for Freud instinct—the domain of the id—always entails repetitive behaviour and is contrasted with the rational action of the ego.³⁷

Durkheim and Weber elaborated their theories before the rise of fascism. Freud's interest in mass psychology was doubtless shaped by the experience of war and revolution, but many elements of his theories were in place before 1914. While interpretations of fascism resembling the fully formed political religions approach were in circulation during the interwar years, it fell to Talcott Parsons to weld the theories of Durkheim, Weber and Freud into a coherent account of Nazism in a series of essays designed to guide the Allied de-Nazification programme. He wrote these essays just as he was elaborating many of the key terms of late twentieth-century sociology.

Parsons' reading of Nazism appears more sociological than that of political religions theorists, but the theoretical assumptions are similar. In his view, the roots of Nazism lay in the harshness of the Versailles Treaty and business's desire to abolish Weimar's generous welfare systems. Yet Nazism also represented an aspiration towards a radically new type of society, departing from the main line of Western development.³⁸ It was a revolutionary mass movement 'in which large masses of the "common people" have become imbued with a highly emotional, indeed often fanatical, zeal for the cause'. Parsons continued, 'they are movements which, though their primary orientation is political, have many features in common with great religious movements in history, a fact which may serve as a guide to the sociological analysis of their origins and character'.³⁹ 'Movements of religious proselytism', Parsons explained, were most likely to develop 'in situations involving a certain type of social disorganization, primarily that early, although only roughly, characterized by Durkheim as *anomie*'.

This state was an inevitable consequence of rationalization (modernization) from which no society was immune. In Germany, *anomie* was especially pronounced because industrialization there was unusually rapid and because the German labour movement was particularly antagonistic to tradition—not least in the form of religion.⁴⁰ *Anomie* led to a state of vacillation, indecision and paralysis, or of 'over-determined' hatred, devotion or enthusiasm.⁴¹ Parsons' description of the Nazi mass is not explicitly gendered, but his characterization does not differ radically from Le Bon's; neither did he part company with Le Bon or Freud in insisting that *anomie* made people susceptible to join groups with 'vigorous *esprit de corps* with submission to some strong authority'.⁴²

Parsons' identification of this fundamentalist traditionalism with particular groups reveals the gendered structure of his theory. First, the Prussian aristocracy resisted modernization. The aristocracy defended status above all; for it (and for the bourgeoisie that mimicked its

behaviour), a person's worth was determined not by their functional utility or upon the 'romanticization of success'—as it was in the United States—but by their status. The same was applied to men's relationships with women: status, not romantic love, governed marriage and family life, and upper-class German men regarded romantic attachment to women as 'soft and effeminate'.

Finding no outlet for their romantic impulses in their work or family relations such men directed romanticism outwards into nationalism and to the pursuit of unrealistic utopias. They also sought fulfilment of romantic needs in the companionship of all-male groups, of which the comradeship of the front was the highest form. Parsons does not explicitly gender Nazism as feminine, but he detects in the sharp segregation of sexes in Germany and the intense emotion of male friendship 'at least an undercurrent of homosexuality'.⁴³ This remark may be seen in the context of the stereotypical association of homosexuality with effeminacy. That Parsons regards Nazism as an essentially fatalist movement, the antithesis of the goal-directed activism of the liberal-democratic political group, underlines this point.

If National Socialism recruited feminized men, where did that leave women? Parsons argued that German men's status consciousness made them 'authoritarian and dominating [towards women] and, conversely, to expect submissiveness on the part of their wives'. The bourgeois woman was usually a *hausfrau* (housewife)—the antithesis of the emancipated woman. Since romantic love had no part in bourgeois marriage, 'she tends to lack both "sex appeal" and other elements of "attractiveness"'. German women were attracted to their husbands for their status, not by love.⁴⁴

Given Parsons' view that German women were basically submissive, it comes as no surprise to learn he saw them as especially vulnerable to the appeal of National Socialism, a movement that, as we have seen, he characterized as a form of religious fundamentalism with a tendency towards idealistic passivity. Parsons had no empirical evidence for women's special attraction to Nazism, he simply deduced it from his conviction that women, along with youth and the lower middle-class, had incompletely modernized and were therefore susceptible to *anomie* and fundamentalist traditionalism. Furthermore, German women positively craved submission: 'from the point of view of German women, a heroic ideal could mobilize their romantic idealization of men in a pattern which adequately fitted the German segregation of sex roles, as the man in the role to which, of all roles, woman were by tradition least suited, that of fighter'.⁴⁵ Parsons arrived at the view that women

hungered after male leadership, and cast them as the epitome of the fascist crowd. Like Durkheim when speaking of women, he slides from functionalist sociology into biological-constitutional assumptions; furthermore, in spite of his insistence on the contractual nature of the family, Parsons regarded it as subject to the laws governing all social groups. He argued the leadership role taken on by men tended to emerge naturally in all small groups, including the family: an idea he took from Weber.⁴⁶

Political religions theory and gender history

The ideas described above have had a broad influence on the approaches to fascism in history and the social and political sciences since the 1950s. Parsons' interpretation anticipated the *Sonderweg* histories of Germany produced since the 1960s by a generation of historians, starting with Fritz Fischer.⁴⁷ Similar gendered assumptions may also be found in many of the typologies of totalitarianism produced by theorists from Hannah Arendt to Carl J. Friedrich, nor are they absent from certain Marxist interpretations of fascism. There are many differences between these theories: some, like Parsons', cast fascism as a somewhat unmanly refusal to embrace the possibilities of the modern world; others, like Gregor's, see fascism as a virile reaction against an insufficiently modernized society. Some focus primarily on the social conditions producing the religious ideology, while others devote their attention to the nature of the ideology itself. Whatever the case, these interpretations use the concepts of tradition and modernity, progress, *anomie*, elite and mass, socialization and internalization.

There are alternative traditions in the human sciences. Since the 1970s, sociological research has shown that participants in crowds and in political and social movements cannot be distinguished from non-participants because they suffer inordinately from *anomie*. Individuals may feel different in crowds, but then how one feels always varies according to context, and the context of a person's actions and beliefs is never just where they happen to be at a given moment. People respond to crowds in different ways that can be understood only by cautious analysis, not by off-the-peg laws. People do not become mad in crowds, they are not compelled to participate by collective folly and their behaviour is not usually extraordinary. When unusual things do happen in crowds, only a few members are usually involved. This research also shows that knowledge of a person's attitudes or instincts in one situation does not permit us to predict their behaviour in another.⁴⁸

I would argue that to understand fascism this kind of work may be used along with more explicitly methodological developments. I have suggested elsewhere that fascism theories sometimes slip, in spite of protestations to the contrary, from the claim to have provided a merely heuristic category to the assumption that the definitional characteristics actually constitute the core of the movement. This in turn encourages researchers to derive the meanings of historical actions from theoretical assumptions.⁴⁹ As Michel Dobry argues in this volume, we must break the link between categorization and explanation. We need to historicize our definitions, starting with the concept of a political religion itself. We must accept firstly that fascist leaders were many things besides the priests in a political religion and, insofar as they were the priests—which they quite probably were—they understood the faith in historically specific ways. We must ask what the religion meant to the participants and recognize that these meanings were confused and contested.

We must also break down the false oppositions upon which political religions theory depends. Here too we may draw on some alternative intellectual traditions. From sociology, we may take Anthony Giddens' view that structure and agency are two sides of the same coin.⁵⁰ From Bakhtin's literary theory comes the notion that texts are structured by an unequal dialogue. Also helpful is Toril Moi's use of Simone de Beauvoir's existentialism to break down the opposition between biological sex and gender.⁵¹ Especially relevant for my present purpose is the recognition of the need to problematize and historicize the notions of elite and masses: we must accept that neither the elite nor the masses have a monopoly on reason or unreason and, indeed, the whole notion of elite and mass is historically constructed. That does not mean society is free from inequalities of power, indeed, we must carefully examine the varieties of social and cultural capital available to historical actors.

This is not the place to develop another abstract model or 'heuristic concept' of fascism; rather, I want to suggest some of the benefits of a genuinely historical approach. I shall proceed through the exploration of a case study taken from my own work, of women in the Croix de Feu and the French Social Party (PSF—Parti Social Français). First I must stress two points: I do not deny the validity of the concept of a political religion, rather I contend that the concept needs to be historicized by detaching it from the sociological tradition described above. Secondly, while I advocate a *historical* approach, I would accept that many *historians* have unreflectingly used concepts such as internalization and *anomie*—sometimes as a substitute for genuine analysis: the intellectual differences I have described cut through the disciplines. Nor do I wish

to suggest that historians and political scientists are deliberately misogynistic, rather, the concepts deployed by some theorists force them to treat women and gender in particular ways (or implicitly to abandon the theories they profess).

Women and gender in the Croix de Feu and PSF

The Croix de Feu was formed in 1927, and expanded to perhaps three-quarters of a million members following the ‘fascist riots’ of 6 February 1934. In June 1936, the newly elected Popular Front government dissolved the Croix de Feu, but it reformed as the PSF, which recruited even more followers. There is much historiographical debate about whether the Croix de Feu can be considered fascist: suffice it to say this debate is fruitless if we hope to pin down the ‘essence’ or ‘core’ of the organization, although there are inevitably some gains and some losses in seeing it in that way. *One* of the Croix de Feu/PSF’s many objectives was to create a new society and a new man through mass mobilization and the use of force—actual or threatened—against its enemies; nevertheless, the formation of the PSF led the movement in a more moderate direction.⁵² One of the novelties of this movement was that it included a very significant number of female members: perhaps 100,000 in the Croix de Feu and 400,000 in the PSF.⁵³

Let us begin by accepting that women in the Croix de Feu/PSF may legitimately be seen as communicants within a political religion. The movement’s ideology may be seen as a secularized version of the Catholic religion: the movement’s leader, Colonel François de La Rocque, like the great majority of ordinary members, was a practising Catholic, yet he saw Catholicism as only one element of a superior *mystique Croix de feu*, which he identified with the nation. The first objective of the movement, he claimed, was to place at the head of the great wheels of state ‘men animated solely by the national spirit’. La Rocque described his followers as ‘the faithful in the same faith’: he asked them ‘who will prevail against our patriotic faith, our incorruptible poverty, our enthusiastic discipline, our cult of the dead, our passionate gift to our children’.⁵⁴ The Croix de Feu adopted all the paraphernalia of the fascist dictatorships: at monster meetings the party faithful communed with the charismatic leader and, as in some churches, women and men occupied segregated positions at these meetings. Both men and women expressed the mystical bond between leaders and led by using the fascist salute.

La Rocque’s writings had a biblical status: to use Bakhtin’s expression, they were an ‘authoritative discourse’—they had a special autonomous

status, independent of other discourses that have no power (in theory) to interfere with their code and change it, but which must refer to it, quote it, praise it, interpret it and apply it. That the women in the Croix de Feu and PSF regarded La Rocque in this way is demonstrated by this examination question for monitors in the party's children's camps: 'Do you think that a children's camp, run on the principles taught in the course, can contribute to national renovation such as it is desired by the PSF?'⁵⁵ We may assume that the answer was 'indeed, yes'.

The (theoretically) church-like structure of the movement and its iron and yet sublime discipline reinforced the subordinate position of women within the Croix de Feu/PSF. So did its military nature: another aspect emphasized by Gentile. At the head of the Croix de Feu/PSF were 'genuine veterans'—those who had spent at least 6 months in the trenches. The veterans transferred the quasi-religious culture of the First World War—which has often been seen as the matrix from which emerged the political religions of the interwar years—into the struggle of nation against communism.⁵⁶

This culture, with its millenarian eschatology, its struggle between good and evil and its barbarization of the enemy, was gendered by the conviction that soldiers—the active part of the nation—fought *for* wives, mothers and sisters. Now the veterans, backed by the younger male generation, would defend their families from communism. In turn, this highly charged set of beliefs reinforced the conviction that women were responsible primarily for the private sphere—the home—where they were responsible for bringing up children. Finally, the public-private distinction was reproduced within the movement: for men belonged to political sections while women belonged to social sections.

The official discourse of the Croix de Feu/PSF assumed women were passive creatures, motivated by feeling rather than reason. However, we must not halt our analysis at that point. In the first place, the party's discourse, however authoritative it seemed, was actually contradictory; this idealized society, this utopia, was not—as political religions theory tends to assume—an abstract notion plucked from thin air, it was fabricated from pre-existing notions, with all their contradictions. In Bakhtinian terms again, it was 'heteroglotic', containing multiple voices, including those of women. The female members of the Croix de Feu/PSF were not empty minds into which the high priests of the political religion inculcated simple ideas through repetitious ritual; women came to the Croix de Feu/PSF with quite specific assumptions and with agendas and social and cultural capital of their own.

The Croix de Feu/PSF, like fascists in Italy and Germany, believed women could best serve the nation by serving the family—that is, by

staying at home. Yet it also believed that women, through intervention in other families, held the keys to social peace: the allegedly female values of compassion would reconcile the classes. Businessmen and politicians in France had long endeavoured to use women's charitable work to attenuate the class struggle. These efforts were accentuated following the strikes of 1917–20, after which big business created a dense network of family allowance funds. In competition with state welfare legislation, operational from 1930, these funds gradually extended their activities to other types of welfare.⁵⁷ The men who promoted such activities and the women who carried them out saw them as compatible with women's essential natures: social work extended the reach of motherhood into working-class families.⁵⁸ Consequently, the state and private welfare agencies created in the 1920s hired great numbers of women.

The Croix de Feu/PSF, like the Fascists and Nazis, set up organizations with similar aims, and in so doing became embroiled in a potential contradiction. Historians have often remarked upon the fact fascists both preached domesticity and mobilized women outside the home: indeed, the Croix de Feu/PSF was quite disparaging of women who remained in the home—one activist called upon married women who were bored by life at home to engage in the 'great and beautiful mission' of voluntary work, and thereby to contribute to social peace.⁵⁹

The women themselves adapted the official ideology of the league, including its religious component, to their own ends. The 1920s had witnessed a professionalization of social work, without completely undermining the religious nature of what continued to be called a vocation. Young Catholic women had to work for state and even socialist organizations whose lay ethos they did not share and so they had to keep explicitly religious ideas to themselves.

In their training, social workers adopted ideas about the hereditary and, indeed, racial causes of social problems—tuberculosis, syphilis and alcoholism particularly: ideas that Le Bon and his ilk would not have rejected. The social problem could not, they argued, be alleviated through the ill-directed distribution of alms: it was a technical issue requiring scientific knowledge, and since the location of the problem was in the hereditary patterns of family life it was women's task to resolve it. They alone possessed the combination of sensibility and skills necessary to distinguish the deserving from the undeserving poor: professional women alone could track down hidden misery.

These beliefs brought female activists into conflict with male members of the Croix de Feu/PSF. Women accused men of distributing aid

indiscriminately, of helping ‘professional beggars’ or of using aid for narrowly political means. It does seem that men in the Croix de Feu and PSF used aid to cement already existing political relationships—they granted it only to those already within the party; women, in contrast, spread their aid beyond the movement. The leader of the Croix de Feu/PSF women, Mme de Préval, claimed that while motivated by the *esprit Croix de feu*, she had no knowledge of the precise political opinions of her social workers or of those whom they helped.⁶⁰

Professionalization did not displace religious motivations. As Bonnie Smith has shown, Catholic women who engaged in charitable activity cast themselves as the saviours of a world corrupted by masculine materialism and selfishness. They saw a change in men’s hearts as the pre-condition for political change.⁶¹

In the 1930s this moral-religious purpose was reinforced by the fact many of the women who joined the Croix de Feu/PSF had been engaged in Catholic Action. This movement had originated before the First World War but developed significantly only during the interwar years. With Catholic Action the Church abandoned its earlier strategy of defending Catholics through Catholic political parties and instead sought to re-Christianize society—especially the proletariat—‘from within’.

They would do so in two apparently contradictory ways, both of which worried some male Catholics. On the one hand, Catholic women would convert through example by living their Catholicism in whatever milieu they worked. Catholic men, and some women, feared that such excessive displays of piety on the part of women would reduce the Church’s appeal to rational men and undermine its chances of gaining concessions from moderate republicans.⁶² On the other hand, tendencies towards secularization were evident in the belief the proletariat could be recovered for the Church by demonstrating that Catholics could solve practical social problems.

Furthermore, women in Catholic Action intervened in society as female Catholics, free from the direct guidance of the Church or of male political activists. In the Croix de Feu/PSF this practice translated into the belief the Croix de Feu could be brought to power only after a long period of moral preparation, without direct reference to politics. The leader of the women’s sections forbade social workers from using aid to recruit to the party since that might suggest patriotism was founded in material want. They elaborated a sort of secularized propaganda through example that was inspired by Catholic Action. Thus women redefined the political in social, moral and religious terms.⁶³

Male activists believed that the seizure of power and a 'political cleansing' were necessary before France could be regenerated. They also used religious categories, in that they wanted to resolve social conflict through moral revolution; but their moral revolution would be initiated by the 'sacrifice' of the veterans for the nation. The paramilitary displays of the league were designed to inculcate this spirit of fraternity. Women could not openly contest the status of the veterans, but they did doubt the ability of the veteran spirit to regenerate the nation: hence, their demand that social workers should be permitted to scrutinize applications for membership from those who were not veterans.⁶⁴

As it happened, *la Rocque* increasingly favoured the women's point of view and women gradually became more influential in the party. The formation of the PSF was accompanied by a gradual decline in the recourse to paramilitary display and by a more social orientation. During the war, when many male activists were in German prisoner of war camps, the remaining men complained the party had been 'pettycoated'.⁶⁵

Thus, the *Croix de Feu*/PSF leadership mobilized women for the purpose of social pacification and of reintegrating the proletariat into the nation in a movement that may be seen as religious and as much more. The *Croix de Feu*'s male leaders unintentionally mobilized a form of activism shaped by religious and professional discourses that did not wholly accord with the official discourse of the movement. Women had historically used social work to expand the possibilities open to them and to moralize society as a whole in their own image: in effect, they competed with male activists to define the movement. These women may have idealized *La Rocque*, and they espoused a secularized religion, but their behaviour was not reducible to the mindless, repetitive, internalization of simple images in conditions of disorientation.

Conclusion

Doubtless Gentile and other partisans of political religions theory would object that I have misrepresented them, and I readily concede that they did not intend their arguments to be interpreted as I have. However, the purpose of the critical method is precisely to expose the unstated assumptions that divert an argument from its intended path. It is sometimes said that unacknowledged suppositions dictate what may and may not be said; it is more true to say that they make it impossible to assert certain things without stepping outside the logic of one's own argument.

Be that as it may, political religions theory itself espouses the critical method, for it seeks to expose logics that some fascists and more communists deny are present in their ideologies. If one lives by the sword then one must expect to die by it, and that applies just as much to me. Others will be better than I at exposing my own assumptions.

Moreover, I would not wish to contend that political religions theory has no merit. The careful research of women's and gender historians, along with a multitude of regional studies, biographies and other specialized studies, has cast much light on the varied motivations and agendas of those who participated in fascist movements. These motivations often included religious references, and these help us understand the terrifying ability of fascists to use ends to justify means. But religious ideas were 'available scripts' used consciously and unconsciously in a proportion that can only be established historically.

The research I have discussed is not merely empirical, rather, as I have suggested in my case study, it is informed—often implicitly—by categories fundamentally different to those on which the political religions approach to fascism depends. A major lesson of the case study is that there was much disagreement among those who joined fascist movements. Research in other fields bears this out.⁶⁶ There was no essential idea that united them, for even where fascists used the same language they meant different things, both to themselves and to those they addressed.

Fascism theory has long struggled with the diversity of fascist movements and has usually resolved the problem by defining some elements of the fascist movement as 'core' and others as 'contextual' or 'tactical': in fact, there is no way of distinguishing one from the other—unless one sees the definition as something objectively inscribed in history. The theories of fascism that I discussed in the first part of this chapter make that mistake, they use a gendered understanding of progress and mass psychology to make the political religion the core of fascism.

So, if there is no 'core' in fascism where does this leave those who wish to theorize it? We must accept that fascist ideology has no core: fascists drew on a range of all of its ideas that were contested and contradictory but still historically identifiable, and used them in specific historical circumstances according to a range of objectives—conscious and unconscious.

I shall end with the perhaps unsatisfactory suggestion that only their decision to belong to the same movement unified fascists. They defined themselves in opposition to rival ideologies and, since fascists were other things besides fascists, they simultaneously possessed something

in common with *all* their opponents. The history of fascism played out through the practices of a disunited movement, allying and opposing other movements in varying contexts.

Notes

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6

Fascism and Religion

John Pollard

The relationship between fascism and religion, especially during the period 1919–45 in Europe, was a very complex phenomenon and one that has still not been fully explored. Nevertheless, over the last 40 years much scholarly study has been devoted to it, in particular to the relationships between Italian Fascism, the Third Reich and institutional religion. This contribution will not cover that particular ground again in detail, but will instead concentrate on some specific aspects of the interaction between fascism and religion that have been the subject of attention by historians in recent decades: the attitude of the leadership and membership of fascist movements towards religion, the ways in which fascist regimes engaged in processes of ‘sacralizing politics’, and the appeal of fascism to Christians—in particular the phenomenon of ‘clerical fascism’.

In this chapter, use of the term ‘religion’ will not be confined to the mainstream Christian churches in Europe and North America—Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism in its various forms—but will include elements of paganism and Odinism, the religion of the Norse gods, the occult and other esoteric ideas that are sometimes derived from Eastern religions. The latter two are essential in understanding the beliefs of some National Socialists and present-day neo-Nazis.

Italian Fascism and religion

Italian Fascism in its origins was essentially anti-clerical rather than anti-Catholic or anti-Christian. Mussolini was an atheist and remained so despite his very opportunistic gestures of marrying in church and having

his children baptized. Mussolini's anti-clericalism was the result of life-long militancy in the Italian working-class movement. Other founders of Fascism who came from that movement, such as the revolutionary syndicalist Edmondo Rossoni and the anarchist Michele Bianchi, were also affected by anti-clericalism, as was Dino Grandi, whose political past lay in a republican movement that in part drew its inspiration from the Masonic anti-clericalism of Giuseppe Garibaldi. Then there were the futurists like Filippo Marinetti who had expressed his hostility to the Catholic Church and the Papacy in scatological terms: 'Throughout its history, the Vatican has defecated on Italy.'¹ But even from the beginning of the movement there were some fascists—like Giorgio Maria De Vecchi di Val Cismon, the rather brutal *ras* (boss) of Turin—who claimed to be practising Catholics.

As Fascism approached power during the early 1920s, Mussolini made increasingly opportunistic gestures towards those elements of the Italian establishment—armed forces, monarchy, business groups and the Church—without which he could not hope to get into power or even stay there. Thus, in his maiden parliamentary speech in May 1921 he declared that, 'the only universal values that radiate from Rome are those of the Vatican'.² In 1923 the National Fascist Party (PNF—Partito Nazionale Fascista) merged with the Italian Nationalist Association, an organization of pre-war origin that under Enrico Corradini, Luigi Federzoni and Alfredo Rocco had already adopted an instrumentalist attitude towards the Catholic Church that was rather similar to the policies of Action Française.³

This move away from the anti-clericalism of early Fascism, the 1919 congress of which had called for the 'de-Vaticanization' of Italy and the expropriation of the Church's property, made it possible to pursue a policy of cooperation with the Vatican that began immediately after the March on Rome and which paved the way for the negotiations in the late 1920s with Pius XI (1922–39) and secretary of state Cardinal Gasparri, which led to the signing of the Lateran Pacts in 1929.⁴

At this point even Marinetti jumped on the bandwagon. In 1931 he published the *Manifesto of Futurist Sacred Art* and in the same year futurist artists participated in the International Exhibition of Sacred Art held in Rome under the auspices of the Vatican. Marinetti tried to get round the embarrassment of this obvious *volte face* by declaring in the *Manifesto* that 'It was not [that is, it has never been] essential to practise the Catholic religion in order to create a masterpiece of sacred art.'⁵

A strong vein of anti-clericalism survived inside the Fascist movement, represented in particular by the ferocious *ras* of Cremona: Roberto

Farinacci. In order to pacify precisely this element in Fascism, Mussolini made his notorious remarks to parliament in June 1929 during the debates on the ratification of the Lateran Pacts with the Vatican: 'We have not resurrected the temporal power of the popes, we have buried it.'⁶ Mussolini himself remained an anti-clerical, and his real feelings about Catholicism were expressed by another remark he made at this time:

This religion was born in Palestine and became Catholic in Rome. If it had stayed in Palestine then in all probability it would have shared the fate of the many sects, like the Essenes or Therapeutae and vanished without trace.⁷

His anti-clericalism surfaced again in 1931 during the crisis over the Church's lay organization, Catholic Action, and then in 1938–9 during the row with Pius XI over the introduction of the racial laws when he vented his anger against Pius XI to his son-in-law and foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano.⁸ Mussolini's frustration with the Church reached its culmination during the Second World War when, in a speech to the Fascist Party leadership in January 1942, he deplored the 'pacifism' of the Catholic clergy.⁹

Italian Fascism was not essentially pagan, even if as early as 1931 Pius XI described it as a 'regime based on an ideology which clearly resolves itself into a pagan worship of the state'.¹⁰ It lacked those elements of paganism, the Norse and other religions to be found among some Nazis. The ideas of Julius Evola were the exception that proves the rule: his book, *Imperialismo Pagan*, proclaimed that 'The Roman tradition is pagan and not Christian or Catholic.'¹¹

Evola further declared that 'all of the ideas and the deepest causes of the major forms of European decadence stem from Christianity', and that 'Fascism must decide to declare the absolute incompatibility between imperialism and Catholicism, and prepare its forces for the true counter-reformation: the restoration of paganism.'¹² The fact the book was published 1 year before Mussolini signed the Lateran Accords with the Church, and that in it Evola condemned what he described as 'the subordinations of the regime to the Church',¹³ ensured that he would be a lone voice crying in the wilderness of Fascism, although he enjoyed a brief period of favour with Mussolini after the introduction of the racial laws.¹⁴ However, Evola would come into his own as the guru of the more militant and violent of postwar neo-Fascists, and still retains a strong following in Italian far-right circles today.

National Socialism and religion

The attitudes of the Nazis towards religion were rather more complex than those of the Fascists and have given rise to much greater historical controversy. There was present in German National Socialism—especially at the highest levels of its leadership—a strange mixture of anti-clerical, anti-Catholic, anti-Christian, pagan and even occult tendencies. The anti-clericalism manifested itself in hostility to all forms of organized institutional religion—particularly the Catholic and Protestant churches—since, ultimately, National Socialism sought to replace them with some kind of ersatz religion of its own creation and propagation.

That Nazism should be anti-Catholic was inevitable given the origin of so many of its ideas in pan-German and *Völkish* thought. The believers in an Aryan or Nordic ‘soul’ were invariably anti-Catholic and anti-Mediterranean in their outlook.¹⁵ Catholics (including some fascists) returned the compliment in the mid- to late-1930s by denouncing Nordic influences from over the Alps, including Christmas trees. Typical of the hostility of pan-Germanists and *Völkish* thinkers towards Rome and Roman Catholicism was the *Loss von Rom* (Away from Rome) movement of Guido von List.¹⁶ List and other *Völkish* writers in the decades before the First World War, in a dangerous mix of revival ‘Wotanism’ and ‘ariosophy’—a Germanic permutation of the theosophy of Madame Blavatsky—identified Catholic and Jewish materialism as coming from the same stable.¹⁷

Feelings within the grass-roots of the Nazi Party itself probably also reflected the innate prejudice of many German Lutherans who believed that to be German one also had to be Protestant because the genesis (and genius) of German national identity lay in the Lutheran Reformation’s revolt against Rome: a Catholic could not be a true German because his allegiances lay outside Germany.

The fact that, until 1932, many German bishops prohibited Catholics from belonging to the National Socialist party (NSDAP—Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) did not help matters. Although Hitler had strong anti-Catholic feelings he wisely remained above the fray because of his fears the religious question would be divisive for the party, especially during the *Kampfzeit*—the period before 1933. Those Nazis like Artur Dinter who campaigned strongly against the Papacy—he declared that ‘the Roman Pope’s church is just as terrible an enemy of a *Völkish* Germany as the Jew’—were isolated.¹⁸ In fact, Hitler, Himmler and Goebbels—precisely because they were apostates

from Catholicism—were also extremely hostile to it, yet theirs was an equivocal attitude of hostility tinged with a certain admiration—maybe even envy—for the way in which the Roman Catholic Church managed to enforce its authority, exact obedience and operate efficiently as an international institution; Himmler was even known to have a particular admiration for the Jesuits.¹⁹

According to Richard Steigmann-Gall, the relationship between National Socialism and German Protestantism was rather different. His argument is that, in addition to there being much duplication of membership between grass-roots supporters of National Socialism and the evangelical Lutheran churches in Germany, there were close relationships at a higher level. As evidence of this he cites the role played by such Nazi leaders as Eric Koch who, as well as being Gauleiter of East Prussia, was also president of the synod of the evangelical church there, and Wilhelm Kube, Gauleiter and co-founder of the *Deutsche Christen* (German Christians).²⁰ However, his thesis has been strongly challenged by fellow historians of Nazi Germany.²¹

What is incontrovertible is that German Lutheranism provided a fertile ground for the reception of the *Völkish* racialism that was the ideological core of National Socialism. Luther's own splenetic anti-Semitism and certain currents in late nineteenth-century liberal-protestant theology in Germany laid it open to the influence of racist ideas.

According to Blamires, 'these themes were not invented by fascist ideologues, but were already commonplace in German liberal theology'.²² It was thus possible to 'Aryanize' Christianity by rejecting the Old Testament and arguing Christ was not a Jew but rather an Aryan hero: the archetypal anti-Semitic warrior.²³ A similar process of theological mutation took place within Swedish Lutheranism.²⁴

Nazi teachers' leader Hans Schemm, when talking of Nazi ideology, could thus claim 'the hero and sufferer Christ stands in the centre', and another leading Nazi, Walter Buch, could argue 'Christ preached struggle as did no other', and make a direct comparison between the disciples and National Socialists.²⁵ On this basis, a broad if sometimes nebulous 'positive Christianity', of which the *Deutsche Christen* were the most representative group, provided a bridge between many Lutheran Christians and National Socialism. Many hoped 'positive Christianity' would provide an even bigger bridge, one that would cross the one-third Catholic, two-thirds Protestant confessional divide in Germany and thus unite its people in a true *Volksgemeinschaft*: however, Catholic universalism doomed that project to failure.

Karla Poewe has gone in a different direction from Steigmann-Gall and argued 'it was the neo-pagans within and outside of the Church who had an intense dislike of Christianity precisely because it is Semitic'.²⁶ What she means by 'neo-pagans within [...] the Church', is not entirely clear—perhaps the 'Aryan Christians'? In fact, her work is focused on Wilhelm Hauer and his German Faith Movement, which went well beyond the ideas of the 'Aryan Christians'. Abjuring his Lutheran upbringing, Hauer turned to Eastern religious sources, including the Bhagavad Gita, for the basic elements of his 'Indo-German' or 'Indo-Aryan' religion.²⁷ However esoteric—not to say exotic—Hauer's faith was, his movement had close links with leading Nazis, including Himmler, and thus had considerable influence on Nazism.²⁸

The origins of the ideas of other anti-Christian and neo-pagan elements in National Socialism were equally eclectic and exotic. Alfred Rosenberg, whose *Myth of the 20th Century* was put on the Catholic Church's Index in 1934, was inspired by 'eastern religions, Schopenhauer and the Gnostics (including Manicheans and Cathars)'.²⁹ Heinrich Himmler dabbled in even more obscure occult religion; in particular, he was strongly influenced by a variety of *Völkisch* thinkers, most notably Karl Maria Wiligut (Weisthor). Goodrick-Clarke says Wiligut made a major contribution to 'the ceremonial and pseudo-religion of the SS', including the design of the SS Death's Head ring and 'the choice of and design of the SS order-castle at Wewelsburg'.³⁰ Despite the proclivities of Rosenberg and Himmler, the pagan tendencies of National Socialism have almost certainly been exaggerated and the post-1945 plethora of sensationalist books on the theme of the 'occult Reich' has contributed to this.³¹ Hitler was very dismissive of Rosenberg and of Himmler's 'games' at Wewelsburg.

Nevertheless, given the pervasive Nietzschean influences within it, National Socialism was fundamentally hostile to Christianity, and one, therefore, cannot agree with Steigmann-Gall when he says that 'Nazism as a whole [...] never became uniformly anti-Christian, displaying deep ambivalence and contradiction by the end.'³² There was 'deep ambiguity and contradiction', particularly on the part of the Nazi leadership—and especially Hitler—but that was all part of the opportunistic tactics that characterized his implementation of policy. Hitler had, for example, endorsed the efforts of Pastor Muller and other *Deutsche Christen* to unite the 18 state-based Lutheran churches into a *Reichskirche* (a single, national German church) with himself at its head as *Reichsbischof*. It failed and, indeed, led to a split that helped produce the 'Confessing Church', some of the members of which would offer resistance to

Nazism.³³ The Nazi commitment to Lutheran unification was part of the broader process of *Gleichshaltung*—the attempt to bring all aspects of German life under the total control of the Nazi state that was not essentially different from Mussolini's laws establishing the legal status of both the Protestant and Jewish communities after the signing of the Lateran Pacts.³⁴

The agreement—*Reichskonkordat*—concluded between Germany and the Vatican in 1933 is another example of Hitler's extremely opportunistic, tactical approach to the Christian churches. Its purpose was to gain Papal endorsement for his new regime and thus neutralize Catholic political opposition. This presented Pius XI and his secretary of state, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, with a dilemma. When Nuncio in Germany (1917–29), Pacelli had appreciated the dangers of National Socialism but he had also sought and failed to achieve a concordat with the German Reich as opposed to the federal states of Baden, Bavaria and Prussia. Hardly had the document been signed than the Nazis began to attack precisely those Catholic institutions—schools, youth groups and the press—the *Reichskonkordat* was intended to protect. The Nazis went on to confiscate Church property and imprison Catholic clergy, especially members of the religious orders.³⁵

These measures drew increasing protests from the Vatican until, in 1937, the Pope issued the encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge*—a scathing denunciation of the violations coupled with severe criticism of Nazism's racial, militaristic and totalitarian tendencies.³⁶ None of this deflected Hitler from his ultimate objective of eradicating Christianity, though the need for national unity slowed down the process during the Second World War. The policies pursued by the Nazis in the Warthegau (a territory 'reclaimed' from Poland in 1939), and which bore a remarkable similarity to the 'godless' campaigns in the Soviet Union, bear out Jill Stephenson's claim that 'in Nazi Germany the churches were to be marginalized, kept under surveillance and, eventually, perhaps hounded out of existence'.³⁷

Fascism and the 'sacralization of politics'

Whatever the beliefs of individual members and leaders, the major interwar fascist movements and regimes increasingly presented themselves as an alternative religion in order to give greater emotional appeal and force to their core ideas: the state and the nation in Italian Fascism and race in National Socialism. This process of the 'sacralization of politics', as Emilio Gentile has described it,³⁸ is also discernible in

'lesser' fascisms, like the Romanian Iron Guard–Legion of the Archangel Michael.³⁹ Arguably, it was a characteristic of all totalitarian movements and regimes, including the Soviet Union where Lenin was embalmed and 'canonized' after his death and his mausoleum turned into a centre of 'pilgrimage' for millions of people from all over Russia. As Emilio Gentile and George Mosse have demonstrated, the fascist 'sacralization of politics' was not a new development; rather, it was a logical progression from the efforts of previous regimes to construct 'civic' or 'national' religions.⁴⁰

In the case of Italy, there was a 60-year tradition of seeking to construct a secular 'civic' or 'national' religion in competition with Catholicism, but the all best efforts of politicians in Liberal Italy (1861–1922)—even those of the most energetically committed anti-clerical, Francesco Crispi, with his elaborate funeral for Risorgimento King Victor Emanuel II in 1878 and the building of the 'wedding-cake' monument to him in the centre of Rome—ultimately failed to excite the popular imagination and form a permanent part of the mass, national consciousness.⁴¹

This was not an auspicious example for Mussolini and the Fascists, who nevertheless engaged in the 'sacralization of politics'. Unlike Nazi Germany, which utilized Norse or pagan myth with the full panoply of runic symbolism, Fascist Italy based most of its rituals either on the Roman Empire or on the Roman Catholic Church. Roman imagery, symbology, architectural styles, even language—as in Mussolini's title of *Duce*—permeated Italian Fascist ritual, rhetoric and spectacle. Many of the most important Fascist 'rituals'—usually military and paramilitary parades—took place along the newly constructed Via del Impero that had been driven through those parts of medieval and Renaissance Rome between the Piazza Venezia (where Mussolini's office was) and the Colosseum, which had been demolished to expose the ruins of the Forum, thus providing a fitting backdrop to the rituals of the 'Second Roman Empire'.

In its worship of *romanità*—the Roman ideals of hierarchy, obedience, courage and heroism—Fascism transformed the Victor Emanuel monument, 'the altar of the Fatherland', into an altar of Rome and established the 'birthday of Rome' on 21 April as a national holiday. Fascist ritual also owed much to the cult of the dead that swept through Italy as it did through the other former belligerent countries in the aftermath of war. Though the body of the unknown warrior had already been transported to the Victor Emanuel monument in 1921—before Fascism came to power—it was not until 1935 that a crypt was constructed within the

monument as a resting place for Italian flags and standards from the battles of both the wars of independence and that of 1915–18.⁴²

Fascism also shamelessly borrowed the concepts of communion, credo, decalogue, litany and sacrament from Catholicism and developed a 'liturgy' all of its own.⁴³ It even created a 'catechism' for the *Dottrina del Fascismo per le reclute della III leva Fascista* (The doctrine of Fascism for the recruits to the third levy of Fascism), published in 1929, which was formulated in the question and answer structure of the Catholic Church's catechism with which almost all Italian young people would have been familiar. Compare, for example, the Catholic catechism:

Who made me?
 God made me.
 Why did God make me?
 To love Him and serve Him, in this life and the next.

With:

When was Mussolini born?
 Mussolini was born in 1883.
 Of the politicians who guide the great nations of the world
 he is the youngest and the greatest.⁴⁴

Perhaps the most bizarre aspect of the 'sacralization of politics' in Fascist Italy was the development of an elite of latter-day 'Vestals'—Niccolò Giani and his comrades—who in Milan's School of Fascist Mysticism (*Scuola della Mistica Fascista*) zealously tended the sacred flame of Fascist doctrine and the cult of the *Duce* during the 1930s.⁴⁵ The school's contribution to the development of Fascist ideology was to promote the idea of Fascism as a blind 'faith' with undeviating loyalty to Mussolini as its central pillar. During the Second World War they would offer themselves up as a holocaust for Fascist victory.⁴⁶

Though Italian Fascism adopted the trappings of religion it did not fill a 'secular void' in Italian society—as was arguably the case in Nazi Germany—but it did make the movement and the regime more comprehensible and acceptable to the average Italian steeped in a living and vibrant Catholic culture. In a country that was 99 per cent Catholic and the seat of the Papacy, there was never the remotest possibility Fascism could in any sense replace Catholicism as a national religion, despite Mussolini's claims to the contrary.

Thus, when the ‘martyrs’ of the Fascist *squadristi* battles of the early 1920s were interred in the crypt of the Church of Santa Croce in Florence in 1934 and then in that of San Domenico of Siena in 1938 it was done in a synthesis of Fascist and Catholic rituals, demonstrating that Italian Fascism still sought, and obtained, the blessing of the Church for its own cult of the dead.⁴⁷ The ultimate proof of Fascism’s failure to create an alternative pseudo-religion lies in the fact that during the Second World War a patriotic form of Italian Catholicism, practised by army chaplains, provided the strongest prop to the shaky morale of Mussolini’s soldiers.⁴⁸

The sacralization of politics in Nazi Germany

The ‘sacralization’ of politics in Nazi Germany was a much more successful process than in Italy. Side by side with the more or less open attacks on organized religion—Catholic and Protestant—the Nazis engaged in a process of changing the forms and ethos of the way in which politics was conducted. It began long before they came to power in the militarization of the party during the *Kampfzeit*, as more and more men were enrolled in the Stormtroopers (SA—Sturmabteilung) and as Goebbels practised the black arts of propaganda and publicity in successive electoral campaigns, with such powerfully effective stunts as ‘Hitler over Germany’, that is the Führer descending from the clouds like a god at various sites to harangue the faithful. The massive displays of NSDAP manpower were choreographed with liturgical precision at the Nuremburg rallies, which were themselves conducted, appropriately, within the frame of Speer’s ‘Cathedrals of Light’, especially from 1936 onwards.

An even more liturgically ponderous set of rituals took place every November in Munich, in what Michael Burleigh has described as ‘a Nazified passion play’, when Hitler and the Nazis solemnly commemorated the failed putsch of 1923. It is worth quoting Burleigh’s description in full:

In the developed idiom, realized by about 1935, Hitler spoke to his veteran comrades in the Buergerbrauekeller on the evening of the 8 November. The influence of the Last Supper was just below the beery surface. Afterwards, he went through the darkened streets, lit with flames flickering from urns on the top of pylons, to the Feldherrnhalle, where the coffins of the Movement’s 16 martyrs had been conveyed on gun carriages. He ascended the steps of what was soon described as an ‘altar’, to commune with the coffins draped in swastika flags. The blood-stained original banners of the Movement were present as relics.⁴⁹

Afterwards the 'blood banner' would be used to 'consecrate' all further party ensigns.

The broader 'sacralization' of German political life—under the new regime, all activity was 'political'—took various forms. A new calendar was introduced, replacing the traditional religious commemorations with national and party celebrations. There were also attempts to compete with the churches by introducing rites of passage—National Socialist 'christenings', wedding ceremonies and funerals, all in a neo-pagan idiom. There is evidence that local Nazi officials increasingly sought to 'to supplant Christian initiation rites by force'.⁵⁰

Christenings' (or 'name consecrations') were conducted by a party official against the backdrop of an 'altar' surmounted by a portrait of Hitler flanked by vessels containing a fire and trees with a reredos of three SS (Schutzstaffel) men.⁵¹ Perhaps the most obvious sign of the permeation of neo-pagan influences in the Third Reich was the use of runes—the characters of Germany's pre-Christian alphabets—by the various branches of the Nazi Party, especially the Hitlerjugend and the SS.

The SS was particularly fanatical in its attempts to impose neo-pagan rituals on its members, and the various phases of the career progression of the SS elite were subjected to a process of neo-pagan ritualization. Indeed Goodrick-Clarke claims 'Himmler dreamed of creating an SS Vatican on an enormous scale as the centre of a millenarian greater Germanic Reich'.⁵²

But, as in Fascist Italy, the cult of the leader—the Führer—was at the heart of the process of sacralizing politics in Nazi Germany. Focusing media attention on Hitler as a messianic figure, the careful orchestration of his appearances was almost as obsequious as those surrounding Popes Pius XI and XII in Rome. Thus, during the economic and social disruption and political turmoil of late Weimar and then during the Third Reich itself, the full panoply of Nazi 'sacralized politics' was powerfully effective in giving many Germans a real sense of security, pride and belonging: helping to make them more accepting of the policies of the dictatorship.

The appeal of Fascism to Christians

Despite the scarcely veiled anti-clericalism of some fascist movements, many Christians—Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant—were strongly attracted to them during the interwar period: even some right-wing Zionists found much to praise in Mussolini's early Fascist

regime. There was a great deal that was appealing about the ideology and policies of fascist movements that accorded with the fears and aspirations of Christians, providing fruitful common ground between them. First and foremost, as Blamires explains, Christians were attracted by the fact fascists ‘professed to believe in a spiritual dimension and in ideas like that of the soul and rejected Marxist monism (and materialism)’.⁵³ The commitment on the part of almost all fascist movements and regimes to the pursuit of ‘paligenetic projects’, to the regeneration of nations from their alleged decadence, found an echo in Christian aspirations for the re-Christianization of society following the onslaughts of anti-clericalism, secularism and materialism.⁵⁴

Many Christians shared with fascists their dislike of the liberal parliamentary democracy that effectively had been imposed upon the successor states after the victory of the democracies—the United Kingdom, France and the United States—in 1918. In the economic, political and social turmoil of the early 1920s, democracy seemed a very inappropriate form of government in many countries: in any case, many Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christians had principled objections to it. Liberal democracy seemed inevitably to bring with it anti-clericalism, freemasonry and secularism, from which the Catholic Church in particular had suffered in France, Italy and Spain during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵⁵

Liberal parliamentary democracies, particularly that of Weimar Germany, also brought other ‘modernizing’ trends. The emancipation of women and relaxation of gender roles and behaviour in the 1920s were especially unwelcome in church circles. In 1930, Pope Pius XI published an encyclical, *Casti Connubi*, which reiterated traditional female roles and family structures while condemning abortion and artificial contraception.⁵⁶ Fascist Italy seemed to enshrine much of *Casti Connubi* in its revised penal code of 1932: its aggressive pursuit of pro-natalism in the ‘demographic battle’ and its ‘policy of ruralization’ accorded well with the anti-modernizing instincts of Italian Catholicism.

Above all, the churches and individual Christians welcomed the strong opposition of fascist and proto-fascist movements to communism. With its abolition of private property, its atheistic materialism as manifested in the murderous and destructive persecution of Christian churches (and other religions) and its radical social agenda—which, in the case of the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, extended to the liberalization of abortion, divorce and homosexuality—communism was public enemy number one.

Many clergy had blessed the suppression of Soviet-style revolts and regimes that appeared in Europe in the years following the First World War. For Pius XI and many other Catholic clergy and laity, the Italian Fascist *squadristi* seemed to have performed the same necessary counter-revolutionary role against agrarian socialism in northern and central Italy during Italy's 'two red years' of working-class militancy and violence after 1918, as the Freikorps had done against the Spartacists in Germany and the Baltic States and the White Guard against the Bolsheviks in Slovakia and Hungary. Hence, Fascism appeared to them as a guarantee against a renewed communist threat and for the restoration of law, order and discipline under an authoritarian regime similar to pre-war monarchical conservative governments.

Some leading German Lutheran clergy welcomed the Nazis in much the same spirit in the 1930s, after the economic, social and political turmoil of Weimar.⁵⁷ Seen in this light, Pius XI's 'marriage of convenience' with Italian Fascism after 1929 was a tactical, opportunistic move rather than a whole-hearted acceptance of what was rapidly turning into a totalitarian regime.

Clerical Fascism

The term clerical fascism (or clerico-fascism) has been used to describe phenomena as diverse as the participation on an individual basis of Christians in fascist movements, the establishment of autonomous supporting movements of Christians for fascism or even movements in which there was an essential fusion of some elements of Christian thought with fascist ideology.⁵⁸

Men as diverse as Ferenc Szálasi (leader of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Movement), Arnold Meyer (the Catholic essayist and journalist and founder of the Dutch Black Front) and Cesare Maria de Vecchi di Val Cisonon fall into the first category. More Catholic conservatives were drawn into the Italian Fascist movement as agrarian fascism spread through countryside and small towns of northern and central Italy during 1920 and 1921.⁵⁹ Others, such as Stefano Cavazzoni and Egidberto Martire, started their political careers as parliamentarians within the Catholic Italian Popular Party (PPI—Partito Popolare Italiano) before becoming clerico-fascist fellow travellers of Fascism during the early 1920s and, eventually, members of the Fascist Party.

In other circumstances, there were movements and currents of ideas in which Catholics predominated, such as the Italian National Centre (Centro Nazionale Italiano), which was essentially a political

organization supporting the PNF and one of the intermediaries between it and the Vatican in the years leading up to the Lateran Pacts of 1929.⁶⁰ Another was the Slovakian People's Party, which combined an essentially clerical and nationalist wing led by Josef Tiso and a more radical one with clearly national socialist proclivities led by Vojtech Tuka.⁶¹ Ante Pavelitch's Ustasha also attracted the support of large numbers of Catholic laity and clergy for its wartime regime in Croatia.⁶²

Arguably another example of clerical fascism was General O'Duffy's Blueshirts in Ireland, whose strong fascist sympathies were balanced by loyalty to Papal teaching.⁶³ Forms of clerical fascism were also to be found in both interwar Polish Ukraine and Serbia.⁶⁴ Even the German and Swedish brands of 'Aryan Christianity' could plausibly be described as forms of 'clerical fascism'.

However, the most spectacular form of 'clerical fascism', a movement in which Christian aspirations and values were at the heart of its ideology, was undoubtedly the Romanian Iron Guard—Legion of the Archangel Michael. It was the core belief of the Iron Guard that the Legionary Movement 'would do away with the corruption and moral decadence of the body politic', and that it was 'one of spiritual regeneration gifted by God to a people perhaps once in a millennium through its predestined leader, Cornelius Z. Codreanu—the "Captain"'.⁶⁵

Codreanu's violent movement, which drew strong support from the Romanian Orthodox clergy, was founded on the identification of Orthodox Christianity with anti-Semitism, coupled with a virulent anti-communism and hostility towards the numerous ethnic minorities that ended up in post-Versailles 'Greater Romania'.⁶⁶

'Catholic fascism'

Richard Griffiths has coined the term 'Catholic fascism' to describe Catholic responses to fascism in the 1930s. He argues Catholic intellectuals—especially in Belgium, the United Kingdom and France—looked with benevolence upon fascist movements, especially the Italian one following Mussolini's *concordato* with the Vatican in 1929 and the publication in 1931 of the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, which was seen as Papal endorsement of the corporatist, authoritarian economic systems fascist regimes offered as an alternative to a capitalism in crisis during the Great Depression and the horrors of state socialism in Russia. Griffiths cites as examples Douglas Jerrold and *The English Review* in the United Kingdom, Robert de Brasillach, Henri Massis and Emmanuel Mounier in France, and Leon Degrelle and the Rexists in Belgium.⁶⁷

To his list could be added elements of the Swiss Catholic People's Party (KVP), which 'chose to affiliate themselves to the quasi-fascist National Front'.⁶⁸ Domenico Sorrentino, biographer of Egilberto Martire, one of the leading Italian clerico-fascists, uses the term 'Catholic fascism' to describe the belief of his subject and other Italian Catholics that Fascism could be 'baptized'.⁶⁹

The next milestone in the development of 'Catholic fascism' was the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Because of the appalling anti-clerical violence of some Republican forces and the support of anti-clerical Mexico and the atheistic Soviet Union for the Republic, most Spanish Catholic forces—including the Church—lined up on the side of Franco and the Nationalists. There was then a move among Spanish Catholics towards the hitherto rather isolated fascist Falange.⁷⁰ The Spanish Civil War was undoubtedly the major moment of encounter between Catholics and fascists in Europe, aptly symbolized by a picture of Republican militiamen firing at the head of a massive sculpture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

However, the looming shadow of the diplomatic and military power of Nazi Germany in the late 1930s quickly became a solvent of 'Catholic fascism', as the Vatican took up an increasingly hostile position towards Hitler and, in consequence, cooled towards Fascist Italy. Despite the enthusiasm of Italian Catholics for the cause of Spanish Catholicism, Pius XI ensured Vatican diplomacy tread cautiously in Spain out of his fears of Nazi influence in the Iberian Peninsula.

Anti-Semitism, race and the Roman Catholic Church

The conflict between the Papacy and National Socialism was not solely occasioned by the persecution of the Church in Germany: at bottom it was an ideological conflict over racial anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism was not of itself a problem, being as general among Catholics as among Orthodox and Protestant Christians in Europe at this time and reaching into the higher levels of the Church—especially within the Jesuit order.⁷¹ Consequently, the Church's response to the introduction of anti-Semitic legislation in Germany, Hungary, Italy and Slovakia in 1938–9 was an ambiguous one, except for that of the Pope himself who publicly condemned Mussolini's racial laws.

Even Catholic responses to *Kristalnacht* in November 1938 were mixed.⁷² However, the Church drew the line at Nazi anti-Semitism, which was fundamentally in conflict with Catholic universalism; and the Vatican condemned various aspects of eugenics and racial theory

throughout the 1930s.⁷³ In particular, Pius XI's response to fascism's racist 'turn' in 1938 was to commission an encyclical from the American Jesuit, John Lafarge, condemning Nazi racial theory *tout court*.⁷⁴

Emma Fattorini's first analysis of newly available documents in the Vatican archives dealing with Pius XI's papacy confirms the picture of an ailing and embattled pontiff struggling against Nazism, Fascism and many of his closest collaborators who sabotaged his efforts at the end of his pontificate.⁷⁵ Father Gemelli of the Catholic University of Milan refused to speak out against the racial laws; the father general of the Jesuits adulterated Lafarge's work so much that the encyclical he produced, *Umani Generis Unitas*, ended with the usual condemnation of Jewish 'obstinacy'. Secretary of state Pacelli, when he was elected Pope Pius XII (1939–58), buried the encyclical for fear of starting off his pontificate by offending both fascist regimes.⁷⁶

Religion and postwar neo-fascist and neo-Nazi movements

The development of the relationship between fascism—that is neo-fascist and neo-Nazi movements—and religion since the end of the Second World War presents two rather contradictory aspects. On one hand, the phenomena of both 'Aryan Christianity' and 'clerical fascism' have persisted, although the former has done so mainly in the United States and the latter in Europe. On the other hand, there has been a strengthening of the pagan—and specifically Odinit—tendencies in some neo-Nazi movements, again particularly in the United States but also in Europe. A new development in both continents is Satanism.

The resurgence of the far right in the United States and Europe over the last 30 or 40 years has been characterized by the affiliation of some Christians with anti-Semitic, xenophobic and racist organizations. In the United States the most extreme manifestations are to be found in the Ku Klux Klan, Christian Identity Church, the Church of the Sons of YHWH—Legion of Saints and Aryan Nations churches. Theirs is a postwar version of 'Aryan Christianity', a bizarre, explosive cocktail of Christian fundamentalism, Aryan racialism and British-Israelitism, thus providing a theological rationale for racism and anti-Semitism.⁷⁷

Christian Identity is thoroughly contemporary, allegedly possessing—among other youth organizations—its own skinhead militia and 'hate rock' band.⁷⁸ On the basis of their interpretation of the Bible, members of the Phineas Priests, a splinter from this movement, have engaged in individual acts of terrorism—including bombings, robbery, murder and arson—in their relentless struggle against non-whites, abortion

clinics, gays, Jews and ZOG ('Zionist Occupation Government'), which neo-fascists and neo-Nazis believe rules America and most Western democracies.⁷⁹

In Europe, latter-day clerical fascism is to be found chiefly among traditionalist Catholics, such as the supporters of French archbishop Lefebvre, who broke away from Rome in the 1960s after rejecting the decisions of the Second Vatican Council of 1962–5, especially its liturgical reforms and declarations on Jews and freedom of religion. In France, supporters of Lefebvre (who is now dead) have long been strongly sympathetic towards Jean-Marie Le Pen and France's Front National and other far-right groups.⁸⁰

Traditionalist Catholic groups sympathetic to the far-right can also be found in Spain and Italy. In Spain, in the galaxy of fascist and para-fascist groups that emerged during the last years of the Franco regime, the Warriors of Christ the King (*Guerrilleros del Cristo Rey*) occupied an important place. Following Franco's death another movement, Catholic Anti-Communist Alliance (*Alianza Anticomunista Católica*), emerged.⁸¹

In Italy, a variety of far-right Catholic groups, such as the Christian Catholic Militia, have appeared over the past four decades, but have rarely lasted very long. More recently, another traditionalist Catholic organization, Catholic Alliance (*Alleanza Cattolica*), has closely associated itself with not only the respectable 'post-fascist' face of the Italian right, the National Alliance (*Alleanza Nazionale*) of Gianfranco Fini, but its rather less respectable face, New Force (*Forza Nuova*), which is heavily influenced by a racist neo-Nazi tendency.⁸²

In some parts of Eastern Europe, in the wake of the collapse of communism, there is a Catholicism that has barely been touched by Vatican II, even less by the liberalizing and secularizing tendencies of the West; hence, it is still to some extent permeated by anti-Semitism, hostility to Roma people and now homophobia. A similar story is evident in Orthodox countries like Romania and Russia.⁸³ In Poland, traditionalist, nationalistic Catholics found a home in the National Polish Rebirth (*Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski*).⁸⁴

However, in the postmodern and largely secular Western society of the 1990s and the early twenty-first century, the strongest religious tendency among neo-fascists and neo-Nazis seems to be a resurgence of interest in paganism, Odinism and now Satanism. As an alternative to 'Aryan Christianity', Odinism provides a religious undergirding of the white, Aryan ideology of modern-day neo-Nazism—of what could accurately be described as 'international national socialism' given its global

reach. The Swedish sociologist, Mattias Gardell, claims ‘Odinism is the fastest-growing cult among young people in the United States.’⁸⁵ It has rather been less so in Europe; nevertheless, as a ‘religion of warriors’ rather than a ‘religion of slaves’ (Christianity), it has a powerful appeal in the violently macho, skinhead subculture that provides so many young recruits to white, Aryan political groups. The interest in, and influence of, the Norse religion can be seen in the names of some of the skinhead bands, such as *Eye of Odin*, Britain, *Midgards Soner* (Sons of Midgaard), Sweden and *Odin’s Law*, Canada, in the music scene associated with these groups, variously known as ‘white noise’, ‘hate-’ or ‘race-rock’ or ‘blood and honour’.⁸⁶ Signs of the pervasive influence of Odinism are to be found in the tattoos, the jacket patches and the jewellery worn by the young neo-Nazis (almost all males) who frequent the ‘white noise’ and ‘black metal’ music scenes—the most common being Thor’s Hammer.⁸⁷

It is difficult to know just how seriously all this should be taken and whether or not it has any depth or substance to it. Is it anything more than a fashion or style of belonging? Much religiosity nowadays is precisely a case of ‘belonging but not believing’, a sort of nebulous cultural residue of religion. Consequently, the role of Odinism and paganism more generally in conjunction with the ‘white noise’ and ‘black metal’ music scenes should not be underestimated as a medium for attracting young people and exposing them to fascist and racist ideas.

Specifically anti-Christian and Satanist proclivities are strongest in the ‘black metal’ scene, although it should be stressed that just as not all ‘skinhead’ bands are racist, neither are all ‘black metal’. The epicentre of the genre is Scandinavia, more specifically Norway. Here, between 1992 and 1998, 47 church-burnings instigated by Varg Vikernes of *Burzum* and other ‘black metal’ bands were reported. Canada and the United States have also suffered from this form of neo-Nazi violence.⁸⁸ Even allowing for earlier elements of Satanism in the American racist right and the present-day activities of another anti-Christian organization—the Church of the Creator—this kind of extremism seems unlikely to win many adherents outside ‘black metal’.⁸⁹

In Italy, which probably has the most extensive and growing network of neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups in the whole of Europe, Nordic influences have made the fewest inroads. As well as the still-pervasive Catholic culture in Italy, the strong native fascist and neo-fascist traditions have also been resistant to alien influences such as paganism, Odinism and Satanism—although Odinit influences are beginning to

gain ground among young people on the 'white noise' and 'black metal' scenes. The non-Christian 'religious' influence most actively at work in the Italian far-right today seems to be a form of Evolanism—a passionate search for the spiritual, transcendent values of 'tradition'—however that is conceived.⁹⁰ Hence the extraordinary fascination—not to say obsession—since the late 1970s with the mythical worlds of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* among adherents of neo-fascism.⁹¹

Given that there are strong tensions between the Christian and pagan tendencies among today's neo-fascists and neo-Nazis, it is most fitting (and convenient) that the emblem uniting all on the white, Aryan, racist right, whether in Europe or America or the Northern or Southern hemisphere, is the Celtic cross (the swastika is banned in some European countries), because it is an ambiguous symbol. For Christians it is, of course, a powerful traditional icon, but for pagans it is a re-drawing of the old sun wheel sign of pre-Christian Europe.⁹² The fact the use of the cross originated among the Ku Klux Klan demonstrates that present-day fascism is a global phenomenon, and that the United States plays a major role in it.

Conclusion

The historiography of fascism and religion during the last 40 years has clearly established that the leaders of German National Socialism and Italian Fascism were fundamentally anti-Christian, even if, in the latter case, that tendency was more latent than actual during the early stages. Their commitment to race, the unlimited power of the state, militarism and conquest were at odds with the underlying principles of Christianity—universal brotherly love and pacifism. Hence, Aryan Christianity in Germany was an attempt to accommodate not only Nazi anti-Semitism, but its Nietzschean and social Darwinian impulses as well. The increasingly elaborate sacred rituals of the Third Reich and the Fascist regime confirm that their respective ideologies, like communism in the Soviet Union, could only find expression within the framework of ersatz religions of their own creation.

The success of Nazi policies against the churches derived from the fact Germany had already undergone a degree of secularization as a result of industrialization and urbanization, that it was divided along confessional lines, and that German Protestantism was institutionally and theologically fragmented. Italian Fascism was less successful as it had to accommodate itself to Catholicism—because of the latter's institutional

strength and its deep roots in Italian society—rather than the other way round.

While many Catholics undoubtedly succumbed to the ‘fascist temptation’, as the studies of clerical fascism demonstrate, few were prepared to follow fascism to the bitter end—the obvious exceptions being people like Leo Degrelle of the Belgian Rexist movement, who ended up fighting in the *Waffen SS*, and some of his counterparts in Flemish fascism.⁹³ In fact, most Catholics would have settled for something less radical than fascism, a form of Maurrasian authoritarian nationalism along the lines of Schuschnigg and Dollfuss’s Austria, Salazar’s Portugal or Franco’s Spain.

Catholicism survived the confrontation with fascism better than Protestantism thanks in part to the tactical manoeuvring of Vatican diplomacy, but fundamentally because of its doctrinal and organizational unity. Indeed, one could argue that there were not three, but *four* totalitarian regimes in Europe between 1919 and 1945. If Italian Fascism, German National Socialism and Soviet Communism were forms of political religion, then Roman Catholicism under Popes Pius XI and Pius XII was also a totalitarian movement/regime in terms of its ideology, organization and everyday practice. While the development of these characteristics began during the nineteenth century, the challenge of the rise of political religion after 1918 strongly reinforced them. But that is another story.

Notes

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27. *Ibid.*, pp. 77–83.
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29. Blamires, *The Historical Encyclopedia*, p. 45.
30. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, pp. 186–7.
31. I must stress that Goodrick-Clarke's book does not fall into this category.
32. Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich*, p. 12.
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84. Ibid., pp. 66–7. Like Christian Identity, they had their own racist, skinhead band.
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86. Lowles and Silver, *White Noise*, ch. 1.
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7

Ideology, Propaganda, Violence and the Rise of Fascism

Roger Eatwell

If Fascism has been nothing but castor oil and the truncheon, and not a superb passion of the finest Italian youth, the guilt is mine [...] I am responsible for this, because this historical, political and moral climate was created by me with propaganda that goes from the intervention crisis to today.

Benito Mussolini (speech inaugurating dictatorship),
3 January 1925

When I hear the term [German] high culture, I remove the safety-lock from my Browning! [*Wenn ich Kultur höre, entsichere ich meinen Browning!*].

Hanns Johst, *Schlageter*, 1933, Act 1

The ideological turn

The nature of fascism has been one of the most hotly contested issues in twentieth-century historiography. Many historians even reject the claim that a 'generic fascism' existed in interwar Europe, stressing the major differences between its main putative forms, especially the genocidal anti-Semitism of Nazism.

Yet, since the late 1990s Roger Griffin has argued that a 'new consensus' is emerging about generic fascism.¹ Shortly before, Griffin had argued the Weberian ideal-typical core of fascism is a 'palingenetic form of populist nationalism', which sought to achieve cultural rebirth.² His approach had strong affinities with earlier works by George Mosse, Emilio Gentile (who also used the term 'palingenesis') and, to a lesser extent, A. J. Gregor and Zeev Sternhell.³ However, their work was published at a time when structuralism dominated academic research, and

fascist ideology was largely seen as a mask for the interests of the middle and/or capitalist class. Griffin, on the other hand, published his *magnum opus* at a time when there was a burgeoning academic Zeitgeist concerned with the power of discourse.

Griffin subsequently sought to bolster the explanatory power of his approach by aligning with those, like Michael Burleigh and Gentile, who argued fascism was a manifestation of a fanatical political religion.⁴ According to this approach, fascism arose against a background of a 'sense-making crisis', which led the masses to seek transcendence by adopting a new identity. Griffin's latest work on fascist modernism seeks to identify the roots of this quest for a new beginning within a deep cultural malaise that afflicted parts of Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ Through the study of the views and works of a number of major German and Italian intellectuals, he highlights the growing quest for rebirth as a way of overcoming decadence.

There is no doubt Griffin's work has been a major contribution to the post-structural, cultural turn in fascist studies, which has helped refine earlier approaches and inspired further fertile works.⁶ However, its methodology—which blends a concern with the study of great texts typical of historians of ideas with a comparative approach and taste for definitions more typical of social scientists—has left many historians cold.

A recent exchange between Robert Soucy and Serge Berstein offers a good illustration of the continuing importance of national historiographies (and 'hot' academic debate). Soucy challenges the French consensus that fascism was only a marginal movement in the interwar Hexagon by portraying it as a form of conservatism, which allows large groups like the Croix de Feu to be classed as fascist. In reply, Berstein stresses the importance of a scientific approach, but makes no effort to use any form of comparative analysis to define fascism in a clear way.⁷

Moreover, Nazism and culture are still mainly seen as oxymoronic. Nazi ideology is typically viewed through a lens, the focus of which has hardly changed since apostate Hermann Rauschning wrote *The Revolution of Nihilism* (1938). Thus, Richard Bessel has recently written of Nazism that what was unique to Germany was that 'a band of political gangsters, inspired by a crude racist ideology, was able to capture power in one of the world's most developed industrial nations'.⁸

There are also significant differences of view among those who were part of the revival of fascist studies in the 1990s. For example, I have argued that the highly syncretic nature of fascist ideology means it is better analysed within a matrix rather than seen as an ideal-type. While

there were some constants in the fascist worldview, such as the celebration of leadership and belief that war was endemic to the human condition, its *Weltanschauung* could produce different responses to core questions.⁹ These included: was the *nation* based on blood or culture? Did the fascist *new man* involve the transformation of an elite more than of the masses? And was the role of the *third way state* intended to make capital responsive to the nation, or achieve a significant redistribution towards the workers?¹⁰

I will not expand on these arguments here, other than to make an important point about Robert Paxton's claim that the ideological approach is static, ignoring the changing faces of fascism from birth to final *Götterdämmerung*.¹¹ A matrix that can encompass both diachronic and synchronic differences reveals that fascism could vary notably even within Paxton's five stages of development. For example, Italian Fascism was founded by a disparate group of nationalists, linked mainly by their contempt for the liberal political order. This included former syndicalists, fringe intellectuals such as the futurist Filippo Marinetti, and those who were attracted by the charismatic appeal of Mussolini, which can be discerned even before the First World War (not least in the admiration of a young Antonio Gramsci, whose later views on hegemony in civil society echoed aspects of Mussolini's growing concern with propaganda).

Max Weber's pioneering analysis saw the charismatic leader as a man capable of arousing intense affective support at a time of great crisis. However, as I have argued elsewhere, this approach offers little insight into the rise of fascism; rather, it is more helpful to distinguish between three dimensions of charisma: 'coterie', 'centripetal' and 'cultic'.¹² The first refers to the ability of the mission-driven leader to inspire and unite an inner coterie; the second refers to the way in which propaganda can help a leader to become the embodiment of a movement, attracting remarkably diverse support by appealing both to the politically apathetic and by diverting attention from dissonant aspects of fascism's programme. Cultic charisma is more a feature of all totalitarian regimes, in which a new liturgy and symbolism depict the leader in almost god-like terms.

I will not expand on previous writings here, other than to stress that conceiving charisma in this way does not imply endorsement of political religion approaches, which in their more sweeping forms make claims such as Nazi believers inhabited 'a mythic world of eternal spring, heroes, demons, fire and sword—in a word, a fantasy world of the nursery'.¹³ While an element of cultic charisma developed among

the German masses, the Hitler myth was always multifaceted. Before 1933 this included a strong focus on his role as man of destiny who was above divisive party politics; later dimensions encompassed masterminding the economic miracle and military genius. Both before and after coming to power Hitler attracted support for remarkably diverse reasons. For example, in the late 1930s many associated him with the benefits provided (or promised) by the Strength through Joy organization (KdF—Kraft durch Freude).¹⁴ By 1939, KdF owned the largest hotel in the world and was responsible for delivering the cheap Volkswagen car: a consumer good that was designed with a simple air-cooled engine that allowed for easy conversion to military use in a geopolitical anti-communist war of expansion in the east.¹⁵

In the pages that follow I will expand on these opening comments about generic fascism by focusing on the rise of fascism within two broad frameworks. First, I will seek to show that fascist ideology was especially sophisticated in terms of its views about propaganda and mass persuasion, seeking to deploy a variety of other themes and selective appeals. Second, while fascists saw violence as an important part of their armoury in the quest for power, both ideologically and tactically conceptions of violence owed more to rationality than nihilism or religious fanaticism. Examples will mainly be taken from the two countries in which major fascist movements emerged: Germany, and the founding movement in Italy—which exerted a neglected impact on the former. Brief comparison will also be made with two countries in which fascism remained a relatively marginal party political force: the United Kingdom and France—although in the latter fascism enjoyed a notable cultural presence and France has even been considered as the seedbed of fascist ideology.¹⁶

Propaganda

In a recent work on the rise of fascism, Michael Mann accepts it is possible to identify a serious fascist ideology, stressing five main themes: nationalism, statism, transcendence, the need for the cleansing of enemies (Marxist as well as racial) and paramilitarism.¹⁷ Nevertheless, he argues that culturalist approaches to fascism accord ideology with excessive power compared to other influences (Mann has developed an 'IEMP grid', which highlights four forms of power: ideological, economic, military and political). Mann is certainly right to point to the dangers of according culture excessive power, but he largely identifies ideology with a sweeping *Weltanschauung* rather than praxis. In so doing, he fails

to appreciate that early fascist thought concerned itself more with developing a relatively sophisticated conception of the role of the political party than with the refinement of a broad programme (although specific programmatic appeals were an important part of propaganda tactics), let alone with the refinement of an underlying philosophy.

Between the founding of the Italian Fascist movement in March 1919 and the March on Rome in 1922, several of the main Fascist local *ras*, like Roberto Farinacci, Italo Balbo and Dino Grandi, became effectively full-time officials in the Fascist Party (PNF—Partito Nazionale Fascista). The party, which was formally established in 1921, was backed not only by a small army of *squadristi*, but also by staff and in some cases even local newspapers and Fascist-created unions.¹⁸ Although the term ‘movement’ remained important in propaganda, connoting dynamism and a desire to operate above the divisive old parties, organization had become central in the quest to build a mass base.

After the failure of the 1923 Munich putsch, and especially after the disappointing 1928 election results, the Nazi Party also underwent a major reorganization. One tactic included infiltrating existing civil society groups and seeking to use group norms to encourage Nazi support. The party also sought to build a nationwide organization, with regional organizers (*Gauleiter*) who in areas of strength even sought to organize at the street level to target specific concerns and issues. Propaganda was also aimed at professional groups such as doctors: around the turn of the 1930s the profession flocked to a Nazi Party that promised better conditions and wages, though the social-Darwinist aspects of the party’s ideology also appealed.¹⁹

A major target was women. One revealing election poster depicted a nurse, a young woman at a desk, and a mother and child, accompanied by the text: ‘Mothers, Working Women—We Vote National Socialist.’ This varied appeal, rather than the stereotypical depiction of the Nazi view of women’s life as based upon *Kirche, Küche, Kinder* (church, kitchen, children), helps explain why, by 1932, more women than men voted Nazi.²⁰

In the nineteenth century, European political parties had been mainly based on notables more interested in office-holding than programme, and whose election campaigns were based on clientelistic networks. However, by the turn of the twentieth century new forms of party were emerging. The most radical were socialist parties with close ties with working-class civil society organizations: a linkage that meant politicization reinforced social cleavages. Polarization was further reinforced in countries like Italy as a result of employers and landlords responding

to the rising force of the working classes by setting up various forms of strike-breaking organizations.

In political terms, the right responded with the formation of the first overtly anti-Semitic parties in France and Germany, and more populist manifestations like Boulangism, whose eponymous man-on-horseback leader advocated a war of revenge against Germany. There has been a strong tendency to portray these responses in terms of elite manipulation: for example, the Navy League has been portrayed as working in the interests of both heavy industry and the government's attempts to halt the rise of the left, while Boulangism has been seen as a final attempt to marry royalism to the masses.²¹ Certainly, right-wing elites at this time actively sought by a variety of means to defuse the time-bomb of an ever-widening franchise, including the adoption of Bismarckian social-imperialist appeals by conservative parties that had little by way of party organization outside parliament (an important exception was the British Conservative Party).

There is no doubt that some right-wing elites sought to use fascists for their own purposes. In turn, successful fascist leaders came to court establishment support. Germany and Italy provide ample evidence of both trends, unlike France and especially the United Kingdom, where the threat from the left was much less and democratic norms more firmly established. However, this point is not meant to concede that fascism was essentially opportunistic or conservative. Fascism was an attempt to create a new form of politics that was influenced by a variety of intellectual sources as well as the changing party-political scene.

In recent historiography, the old view of Mussolini as a bombastic buffoon with a hypertrophied taste for violence has largely been supplanted by an appreciation that he read widely and was a talented socialist journalist.²²

Three main thinkers are typically seen as having a key influence on the future *Duce*. The first was Friedrich Nietzsche, especially his view of the need for a superman who would overcome the decadence of contemporary society; second was Gustave Le Bon, whose early works stressed the power of forceful leaders to sway the emotional crowd; and third was Georges Sorel, who is best known as the advocate of the power of political myths. Certainly, Mussolini was influenced by all three thinkers, but it is important to add a variety of caveats to this simplistic depiction.²³

Firstly, although Mussolini certainly learned lessons from the theatrical Nietzsche-admirer, Gabriele D'Annunzio, who briefly established himself as the dictator of Fiume in 1920, his views on leadership were influenced by several major thinkers. Mussolini appears to have

attended some of Vilfredo Pareto's lectures while in Switzerland around 1904.²⁴ Certainly, Pareto's ideas about the importance of natural leaders periodically emerging from below and replacing an undynamic and unrepresentative elite impressed Mussolini.

The views of Robert Michels were also important. Michels is especially associated with his formulation of the 'iron law of oligarchy', but before 1914 he had commented on the way in which socialism in France, Germany and Italy was based on leader worship, with parties and factions taking their leaders' names. This struck a chord, as the future *Duce* came from the Emilia-Romagna, whose socialists mimicked many aspects of Catholicism, including processions and naming children after socialist 'saints'. Michels, who was later to hold a chair in sociology at the Fascist University of Perugia, went on to defend a new style of charismatic leader, one who would be both democratic in the sense of reflecting the popular will and capable of directing great tasks that were beyond the capacity of weak liberal regimes.²⁵

A second caveat is that Mussolini's views on crowd psychology—like those of Sergio Panunzio, who was also to hold a chair at Perugia—were influenced by more than just Le Bon. A crucial and neglected influence is that of Gabriel Tarde, who directly influenced thinkers such as Scipio Sighele, professor of sociology at Pisa, who undertook pioneering work on the psychology of sects and group allegiance and who held that the quest for strong leadership was a law of nature. Tarde did not present a simple picture of the crowd as an emotional and undifferentiated mass in the way that Le Bon did in his early work; rather, Tarde was interested in how to influence different sections of the public by such means as the manipulation of tradition and via new media such as the popular press.²⁶ He was also a pioneer theorist of the power of bandwagon effects. What Mussolini drew from this was the need to target appeals at specific groups, while at the same time creating a sense of an irresistible broad movement that was seeking a new order to transcend national divisions.

Thirdly, Mussolini's reading of Sorel, like that of several syndicalist leaders who turned to Fascism, such as Angelo Olivetti, meant there was a strong economic aspect to his politics. Sorel was unusual among socialists in that he stressed productivism as much as redistributivism: the need for socialism to deliver a high standard of living if its utopia was not to be refuted by more prosperous systems.

Although Mussolini's main concern was the general growth of the Italian economy to underpin Great Power imperial aspirations, he was also aware of the importance of economic policy both in terms of the

long-run popularity of Fascism and in securing its electoral take-off. Indeed, an important factor in the sudden rise of the PNF was the introduction of policies specifically targeted at socio-economic groups.²⁷ For example, agricultural day workers were appealed to through slogans such as, 'To every peasant his land [...] To every peasant the entire fruit of his sacred work.'

This promise, like much fascist propaganda, blended both affective and rational appeals. While Mussolini saw the importance of economics, he was also aware of the need to appeal to the different sides of 'man'. As he was later to write, 'Man is integral, he is political, he is economic, he is religious, he is saint, he is warrior.'²⁸

Hitler did not exhibit Mussolini's talents as a journalist, but he undoubtedly read widely. His mentors included Paul de Lagarde, who anticipated the emergence of a 'singular man with the abilities and energy' to unite the German people, and Artur Schopenhauer, whose views about the force of great men's 'will' in shaping the world were later to influence Nietzsche.²⁹ Although some of the seminal writers who influenced the emerging Nazi *Zeitgeist* were different to those who guided early Italian Fascism, the lessons drawn were often similar. For instance, Ferdinand Tönnies was another early student of public opinion, and his distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* is a further example of the way in which social and political thought around the turn of the twentieth century was turning from communities towards a concern with the isolated individual. The Nazi utopia promised to create a *Volksgemeinschaft*, which would end *anomie* and banish alienation (and those who were not part of the true racial community).

Moreover, Italian Fascism was seen as a model by many leading Nazis. One crucial interlocutor was Kurt Ludecke who, after the failure of Nazi street demonstrations in 1922, persuaded Hitler to send him to Italy, where Mussolini appears to have agreed to meet the emissary from a brother 'fascist' party.³⁰ The 1923 Nazi Munich putsch was partly inspired by the March on Rome and, after its failure, Göring, who spoke Italian well, stayed in Venice where he met Giuseppe Bastianini, the head of the PNF department responsible for liaison with foreign groups of fascist orientation. Although a key issue was potential tensions over the South Tyrol (Alto Adige), which had been ceded to Italy after the First World War, discussions also included party tactics.³¹ Another example of the impact of the Italian model can be found in a 1927 Nazi booklet on propaganda that was aimed at party cadres.³² A section on fascism lists books for sale, such as a collection of Mussolini's speeches

and a book on Mussolini and Fascism by Adolf Dresler, who was later to write a book about Mussolini as a journalist.³³ A further link was the theory of totalitarianism developed by the fascist 'court' philosopher, Giovanni Gentile, which influenced Nazi views on the total state.³⁴

Yet another major change concerned the development of the Führer cult. Analyses of Hitler's views on leadership have frequently pointed to the importance of Austrian and German forebears, especially in teaching lessons about the language and style of such leaders. Certainly, Hitler was influenced by Luger and Schönerer, especially by their use of a low rather than high political language to appeal to the masses.³⁵

However, Hitler was also influenced by the success of the March on Rome compared to failure of the Munich putsch. As well as noting the importance of establishment support, he realized Mussolini had a major national political profile. Prior to the Munich putsch, Hitler had seen himself as the *Trommler*, the drummer-boy of the coming revolution: early Nazi propaganda did not include photographs of him, as the crucial point was to stress the idea rather than the man. The dramatic change that subsequently took place is illustrated by the fact that after 1930 the Nazis were widely referred to as 'the Hitler Party'. In 1932, Hitler became the first politician in Europe regularly to use an aeroplane so he could address at least two mass rallies a day in a presidential campaign that saw other significant Nazi innovations, including the use of film and gramophone records of speeches, which carried an awareness of the leader into the remotest hamlet.

A further external influence on Nazi views was the British First World War propaganda that had demonized the 'beastly Hun', even portraying Germans as subhuman in a fashion not dissimilar to later Nazi portrayal of Jews.³⁶ Hitler specifically refers in *Mein Kampf* to the power of British propaganda, describing Prime Minister Lloyd George's speeches as 'psychological masterpieces in the art of mass propaganda'.³⁷ Moreover, Goebbels possessed in his personal library a copy of *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923), by E. D. Bernays, who had played a major part not only in establishing the pre-war American public relations industry, but also in American wartime propaganda.

While it is not clear to what extent Bernays' writings directly influenced Nazi propaganda, there are notable similarities: for example, Bernays stressed the importance of targeting a clear enemy and dichotomizing choices.³⁸ A good example of both is the Nazi July 1932 election slogan: 'Now it comes down to Bolshevism or National Socialism.' Bernays also taught the need to tailor messages to the susceptibilities of the audience. In this context, it is interesting to note that

the Nazi use of anti-Semitism as a campaign theme before 1933 was often linked to the resonance of such propaganda within specific localities and among particular groups. Although anti-Semitism is typically seen as a core aspect of Nazi ideology, it did not feature as an election issue in many areas of Nazi strength in 1932.³⁹

It is worth adding, in connection with the influence of the rise of the American public relations industry, that Mussolini's mistress, Margherita Sarfatti, had close links—after he became prime minister—with representatives of the US press, including the chief of United Press Agency in Rome, Thomas B. Morgan. Although Sarfatti's initial aim was to use these contacts to improve Mussolini's image in the United States, these links helped refine public relations techniques for more domestic consumption among key members of Mussolini's entourage.

However, it is important not to deduce from either this or the arguments above about the sophistication of fascist propaganda that Renzo De Felice is necessarily correct in arguing that, by the mid-1930s, Italian Fascism was backed by a widespread consensus.⁴⁰ As well as the need to probe whether 'consensus' means active engagement or a more passive acceptance, it is also vital to remember that Mussolini's regime had a panoply of forms of covert and overt coercion in order to minimize dissent and reinforce an appearance of conformity. The Italian Fascist state was less totalitarian than the Nazi one, in particular in its use of violence against its own citizens—but it was a dictatorship none the less.⁴¹

Violence

In a recent work, A. J. Gregor has written that no major Italian Fascist intellectual celebrated violence for its own sake, and that those who are commonly cited as champions of violence, like the futurist, Marinetti, were marginal to the movement and regime.⁴² Although a useful corrective to the continued tendency to see fascism as a 'revolution of nihilism', Gregor's claim relates mainly to the writings of fascist regime theorists like Gentile.

However, even within this context he ignores the way in which the clear Fascist commitment to an imperial war of aggression was linked to domestic socialization, especially the militarization of new generations through a panoply of youth organizations as well as compulsory military service. Indeed, the importance of military service to forging a post-bourgeois youth was deeply embedded in the radical nationalist thought of the turn of the twentieth century—a view epitomized by

Maurice Barrès' resonant epitaph for French manhood: 'born a man, died a grocer'.

Moreover, Gregor glosses over the celebration of violence in the writings of key thinkers who influenced early Italian Fascism. In particular, Sorel saw working-class violence as a necessary counter to the power the state could exert through its monopoly of the forces of law and order. This distinction between different types of violence was also central to the thought of the legal philosopher Carl Schmitt who, during 1933–4, developed a sophisticated defence of the Führer state. Schmitt distinguished between a foundational *Politische*—a fight to death between friend and enemy—and *Politik*—in which politics as usual takes place once the enemy has been expelled beyond the bounds of the political community. Whereas liberalism envisaged a politics based on rational bargaining leading to the achievement of consensus, Schmitt's friend-enemy approach accepted the inevitability of violence to resolve the irreconcilable difference, which was allegedly caused, in a large part, by liberal pluralism.

The philosopher Martin Heidegger, another late convert to Nazism, openly defended the former type of violence in a speech on the tenth anniversary of the death of Albert Schlageter, a Freikorps member turned Nazi, who was condemned to death for sabotage by the French during their 1923 occupation of the Ruhr. In a eulogy to the martyr, who had briefly studied at Freiburg University, Heidegger stated:

'Schlageter walked these grounds as a student, but Freiburg could not hold him for long. He was compelled to go to the Baltic; he was compelled to go to Upper Silesia; he was compelled to go to the Ruhr. He was not permitted to escape his destiny so that he could die the most difficult and greatest of all deaths with a hard will and a clear heart'.

In his inaugural address as rector of Freiburg University the following day, Heidegger talked of the need for universities to lead more than train, stressing the centrality of *Führung*, a key Nazi concept, as crucial to creating a new *Volksgemeinschaft*.

The precise relationship between Heidegger's thought and Nazism remains contested. Supporters have argued that Heidegger's philosophy cannot be considered fascist, and that speeches, such as the eulogy to Schlageter, at most point towards an opportunistic desire to jump on the Nazi bandwagon by contributing to 'martyrology'.⁴³ However, Heidegger appears to have genuinely admired Hitler as a leader, and to have read into Nazism traits he identified with his own quest to transform existence (*Dasein*). Moreover, as well as the eulogy to Schlageter, other speeches at this time are full of forceful language, including terms

such as 'discipline', 'fierce battle', 'fighting-community' and 'storm' (the last of these had clear connotations with the *Sturmabteilung* [SA—Storm Section, or Brown Shirts]). The language is especially interesting as Heidegger had not fought in the First World War.

Academic studies of fascist violence typically pay significant attention to the human impact of the First World War. One approach stresses the impact of fighting on Germans, which allegedly left a group of men like Schlageter psychologically traumatized and only too happy to murder and violate in groups like the *Freikorps* after 1918.⁴⁴ In other cases, the emphasis is placed more on a lingering quest to restore the deep communal bond that some had found amid the dangers of war. Thus, some early Italian Fascists adopted a slogan which was taken from the *Arditi* elite commando group: *Me ne frego* (I don't give a damn). Violence is thus seen, at best, as constitutive of individual identity and, at worst, as mindlessly destructive.

There is no doubt fascism was attractive to those who sought to preserve a world of male camaraderie, who even found violence attractive as part of this bonding: men like Hanns Kallenbach, a member of the *Stosstrupp Adolf Hitler 1923*.⁴⁵ Ernst Röhm, a *Freikorps* veteran who was to lead the SA before his death in the 1934 Night of the Long Knives, was a homosexual who clearly never adapted to civilian life after 1918. He has been described by Richard Evans as having a 'pendant for mindless violence', a man who 'had no interest at all in ideas'.⁴⁶ Certainly, Röhm's biography gives no cause for thinking Nazi leaders were 'intellectual', consisting of chapters with titles such as 'War School', 'Leader of the Tenth Company', 'The Epp Fighting Brigade' and 'The 8 and 9 November 1923' [Munich putsch].⁴⁷

However, it is also instructive to consider the case of Julius Schreck, a *Freikorps* veteran who, in the early 1920s, became the leader of the *Stabswache* (Staff Guard), which later grew into the SS. This followed the *Freikorps* in adopting the silver Death's Head symbol (*Totenkopf*). Although often seen as further evidence of the fascist death-cult, this pre-1914 symbol of the aristocratic cavalry had been adopted by elite storm troops, which included all classes, during the war. Consequently, after 1918 the *Totenkopf* was a symbol of both militarism and a new egalitarian-elitism. Similarly, the *Arditi*, the symbol of which was a skull with a dagger in its teeth, was based on a relatively classless ethos of martial superiority. In the German context, this formed part of a wider celebration of 'blood socialism', a romanticized, disciplined but egalitarian conception of communal life at the front that some sought to recreate amid the postwar chaos.

Moreover, recent historiography has tended to portray the Freikorps as part of a wider revolutionary society, in which violence was widely perceived as legitimate.⁴⁸ Indeed, the Freikorps were briefly used by the Social Democrat Party-led government (SPD—Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) to help suppress more radical left-wing groups, such as the violent German Communist Party (KPD—Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands). While it is important not to see fascist violence as a mainly defensive reaction to the left, a form of cumulative extremism took place in countries like Germany and Italy after 1918: a spiral in which one act of violence tended to produce another. In Germany, this helped induct a new generation of recruits, especially as left-wing violence grew again after the onset of depression in 1929—an important point, as most of the street fighters, by the early 1930s, had not fought in the First World War.⁴⁹

The SA had an insurance scheme for members who were injured or killed: between 1927 and 1932 claims rose from 110 to 14,005, mainly following clashes with communists. During 1930–32 several hundred Nazis were stoned, shot or stabbed to death by members of the KPD paramilitary organization.⁵⁰ The bloodiest incident immediately prior to Hitler becoming chancellor took place in July 1932, when the Nazis marched into Altona leaving 18 dead, three of whom were Nazis. However, part of the point of this incursion was to show middle-class voters that the Nazis could combat the growing KPD in a way the traditional, notable-based, *Mittelstand* parties could not.⁵¹ In Schleswig Holstein, the only region in which the Nazis won more than 50 per cent of the vote in free elections, violence was used mainly where propaganda and the penetration of civil society groups had failed. Even in a region in which there had been widespread and tempestuous farmers' protests only shortly before, violence risked losing rather than gaining support.⁵²

Hitler increasingly distanced himself from Röhm's views after the failure of the Munich putsch rejecting violence as a necessary prelude to a SA-led coup. For Hitler, the SA remained necessary to defend Nazi meetings from the left and its 'martyrs' were celebrated in quasi-religious ceremonies that especially helped bonding within the party. However, SA-initiated violence after the mid-1920s was seen by him in limited terroristic terms, as a means of intimidating the left while also placing pressure on the government. Hitler was conscious that excessive violence, especially if aimed at the state, could alienate sections of the establishment who could bring about his quasi legitimate-entry into power.⁵³ Eventually in 1933, following growing economic and political crises, Hitler was invited by President Hindenburg to become chancellor,

partly in the hope he could form a government that would cure the political disorder his own party had helped foment.

Mussolini's views on violence also changed from the pre-war era when he was a firebrand socialist revolutionary—although in his case there was a less clear-cut epiphany. A recent work has noted that in a 1918 *Popolo d'Italia* article he argued, 'violence is immoral when it is cold and calculated, not when it is instinctive and impulsive'.⁵⁴ Certainly at the time of his founding of the Fascist movement, Mussolini's views had similarities with the Arditi's self-image as a fighting vanguard (a reflection of a distinctly non-populist contempt for the typical peasant Italian soldier).⁵⁵ He sought to found the Fascist movement on a 'trenchocracy' of ex-combatants: a new elite that had emerged from a baptism of fire (ironically, his own war record was less than heroic).

However, Mussolini's views on violence were changing in a process that had begun after the failure of the socialist wave of violence during 1911–12. Among the lessons Mussolini drew from this was the need for propaganda to prepare mass opinion and the threat from the repressive power of the state.

It is not clear that, even in 1919, Mussolini sought to use violence to launch a *coup d'état*. Certainly, one of the features of his leadership—as electoral support began to grow after 1920—was his attempt to demonstrate Fascism could defeat the left that had launched a major wave of factory occupations during 1920, while controlling violence to limit the risk of repression by the Janus-like Italian state. By 1921, Mussolini even thought the long-standing tradition of *trasformismo* could lead to the PNF entering government constitutionally. This sometimes led to tensions between Mussolini and *ras* like Farinacci, who held more crude views about violence, but, in general, Mussolini managed to control violence targeted at the state, and even the centre-right parties.⁵⁶ Partly as a result, the forces of law and order often turned a blind eye to intimidation and sometimes even aided and abetted the fascists—for example, by the police or military providing trucks to launch punitive raids against socialists and communists.⁵⁷

'Only' a few thousand suffered a violent death through political violence in Italy from 1919 to 22, and these were due mainly to street battles and attacks on left-wing local headquarters (although there were some deliberate assassinations). There was nothing like the state of near-civil war that existed in some parts of Germany—such as Berlin and Munich—immediately after Germany surrendered in 1918. Even the March on Rome was not a serious attempt at a violent *coup d'état*, although Fascist propaganda later painted it as such in an attempt to

bolster Mussolini's image as a leader: actually, Mussolini had plans to flee to Switzerland had the military resisted. The March was more a *coup de théâtre*, in which the threat of Fascist violence based on a rapidly expanding movement was used to encourage a key part of the establishment to invite Mussolini to become prime minister and restore order.

Fascist violence in France similarly needs understanding both within a wider ideological context and within a more general context of threat and violence. The first truly fascist movement in interwar France was the Faisceau, founded in 1925 by the seminal proto-fascist theorist, George Valois. The Faisceau had a powerful militarist rhetoric of mobilization and 'H-Hour', which both harped back to the community of the trenches and signalled the need for action to defeat the rising forces of the contemporary left.

Valois was clearly deeply influenced by the First World War and the lessons it taught about comradeship and leadership. However, the Faisceau did not celebrate cathartic or random violence, and in his voluminous writings Valois sought to develop a serious third-way socio-economic programme.⁵⁸ Moreover, more conservative groups like the Action Française and Croix de Feu also held that violence was necessary as a defence against the growing forces of French Communism, with the intellectual leader of the former, Charles Maurras, even openly inciting violence against the leader of the Socialist Party.⁵⁹

The French case further underlines the importance of understanding how the state responded to fascism. After the riots in Paris in 1934—which were often attributed to the right, although left-wing groups were also involved—a significant section of public opinion became concerned with public order. There were strong fears France might follow Germany into a spiral of violence leading to dictatorship.

It is also important to note that, unlike in Weimar Germany, where cuts in public sectors salaries had especially harmed the SPD as the dominant governing party, in France it was the conservative Laval government that was associated with such cuts during the 1930s. Partly as a result of this, socialists controlled police unions in many areas—for example in Marseille, which, while a French Popular Party (PPF—Parti Populaire Français) stronghold, did not witness the forces of law and order tolerating fascist violence as had happened in the German and Italian cases. There was thus some justice in the claim by the fascist writer, Lucien Rebatet, that the police during the Popular Front era were faithful protectors of the 'Marxists'.⁶⁰

Many of these points about the nature of fascist violence are borne out if the focus turns to the United Kingdom. After his defection from

the Labour Party in 1930, Sir Oswald Mosley's New Party met significant street opposition from the left, which encouraged him to form the 'Biff Boys' defence group to protect his meetings. With his founding of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) in 1932, this grew into a paramilitary group with some of its young members living in barracks. However, Mosley saw this development largely in terms of creating a disciplined new elite and as necessary for defending meetings against the 'reds' (though it is important not to overstate the purely reactive nature of BUF violence).⁶¹

While the movement undoubtedly attracted some street activists seeking violence for its own sake, others came to British fascism through the economic and political case Mosley developed, which was one of the most detailed set out by any fascist party, in part reflecting Mosley's concern with economic policy while he was a leading member of the Labour Party.⁶² However, Mosley failed to see that British attitudes towards public order were changing. Whilst 'rowdyism'—even limited violence—had been a feature of pre-1914 politics, a variety of factors—not least the rise of communism and fascism abroad—meant that by the 1930s such traits were far more likely to lose support than gain it. This clearly happened after the much-publicized violence at Mosley's 1934 Olympia rally, which coincided with the Nazi Night of the Long Knives. This lost the support of the renegade Conservative owner of the mass-circulation *Daily Mail* and antagonized public opinion more generally.⁶³

After the 1936 'Battle of Cable Street', in which a provocative BUF march was met by extensive violence orchestrated by left-wing and other opponents, the Conservative-dominated government introduced the Public Order Act, which banned the wearing of political uniforms and gave the police more powers to prevent provocative meetings. Mosley was left with little choice but to pursue power through other means. These included campaigns tailored to specific localized interests, such as the decline of textiles in Lancashire where limited party resources could be concentrated, and his great white hope of the immediate pre-war era: the establishment of a radio station in Heligoland that would break the BBC's monopoly by beaming a mix of propaganda and popular music to the slumbering British people.

Conclusion

In a speech to the chamber of deputies on 3 January 1925, Mussolini announced that he alone could unite the country and put it to rights:

a proclamation amounting to a declaration of the establishment of dictatorship. The *Duce* first appears to have used the term totalitarian in a speech shortly afterwards in reference to the 'fierce totalitarian will' of Fascists, while Gentile at this time began to write of the importance of 'a total conception of life'. Subsequently, Gentile and other fascist intellectuals sought to flesh out the theory of a state that would unite both employers and workers in a common cause: an 'ethical state' that, in the words of Mussolini, 'has not got a theology but [...] has a moral code'.⁶⁴

The last point is not meant to imply that a Fascist ideology did not exist before 1925. Mussolini's speech of 3 January specifically refers to his belief in the Fascist movement's potential to become the 'superb passion of the finest Italian youth'. Well before 1925 Mussolini believed he had a special mission to create a strong Italian nation led by new men who would forge a state that could secure both prosperity and social unity. However, as the new *Duce* made clear in this speech, previously his main focus had been on establishing a powerful fascist organization rather than on delineating a broad programme—let alone the underlying fascist ideology (although this strategy was related to wider ideological issues, such as the importance of leadership and views about the role of violence within the liberal state).

This point about the importance of fascism *qua* organization can be seen by more closely examining one of the most infamous Nazi aphorisms: 'When I hear the word "culture", I reach for my revolver.' These words are often misattributed to Goebbels or Göring as part of an attempt to depict the nihilism of fascism: in fact, they come from a play written in 1933 by the Nazi intellectual, Hanns Johst, to celebrate Hitler's 44th birthday.

Moreover, the quote above is a mistranslation. The second part should read: 'I remove the safety-lock from my Browning.' This implies a possible measure of consideration, rather than the trigger-happy riposte of the unthinking killer: indeed, the only violence that takes place in the play is when a French firing-squad executes Schlageter. The fact the safety lock is being removed from an American-designed Browning is also intriguing: is this an allusion to the fact the Browning was carried by some lower ranks in US forces, whereas the Luger pistol was a German officers' weapon?

More importantly, Johst does not threaten the assassination of 'culture' in general, rather, the threat is to elitist, traditionalist German high *Kultur*. Although Nazis celebrated the *Kultur*, an idealized permanent community of blood and language that transcended Germany's ever-changing borders, this did not mean they fully accepted its passive

romanticism and the elitist complacency of the *Kultur* of intellectuals. The point was more to create an organization, a movement capable of synthesizing *Kultur* and *Technik* and of reuniting the German diaspora in a *Mitteleuropa Volksgemeinschaft*.

Fascism was undoubtedly influenced by intellectuals and cultural trends, but it plundered eclectic sources. The resulting fascist ideology was a remarkably syncretic mix, which helps explain the rise of fascism, since it was possible to read notably different conclusions into this mercurial brew. Thus, both Hitler and Mussolini were able to appeal to members of the establishment as representatives of new forms of traditional values while appealing to others as harbingers of both a new spiritual community and national prosperity.

Put another way, fascism is better seen as a political rather than cultural movement. It was a paradoxical anti-party party, whose organization and tactics need to figure prominently in both ideological analyses of 'the nature of fascism' and more concrete analyses of why fascism succeeded, and failed, in specific national contexts.

Notes

1. R. Griffin, ed., *International Fascism*, London, 1998; Griffin, 'The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies', *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 1, 2002, pp. 21–43.
2. R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London, 1991, p. 26.
3. E. Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista (1918–25)*, Rome, 1975, p. 205. See also G. L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, New York, 1964; A. J. Gregor, *The Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism*, Berkeley, 1979; and Z. Sternhell, *Ni droite, ni gauche*, Paris, 1983.
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39. See for example, W. S. Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power*, London, 1966.
40. R. De Felice, *Gli anni del consenso, 1929–36*, Turin, 1974.
41. P. Corner, 'Italian Fascism: Whatever Happened to Dictatorship?', *Journal of Modern History* 74, no. 2, 2002, pp. 325–51.
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43. See R. Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, Boston, 1992.
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53. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 471ff.
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55. The nationalist intellectual Giovanni Papini provocatively summed up the character of ordinary Italians in 1914 when he wrote that the country was founded on shit 'and shit it has remained for the last 50 years'. R. de Grada, ed., *Lacerba*, Milan, 1970, p. 305.
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57. Corner, *Fascism in Ferrara*, Oxford, 1975.
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- 'L'étrange cas La Roque', in M. Dobry, ed., *Le myth de l'allergie française au fascisme*, Paris, 2003.
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 62. See, for example, J. Becket, 'Why I Joined the Blackshirts', *Fascist Week*, 2–8 March 1934. See also D. L. Baker, *Ideology of Obsession: A. K. Chesterton and British Fascism*, London, 1987.
 63. See J. Lawrence, 'Fascist Violence and the Politics of Public Order in Britain: The Olympia Debate Revisited', *Historical Research* 76, 2003, pp. 238–67.
 64. Mussolini, *Fascism*, p. 31.

8

Political Violence and Institutional Crisis in Interwar Southern Europe

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In recent years, the discussion on the 'brutalization of politics' after the First World War has been a central theme in research on interwar Europe. This issue was highlighted for the first time by George Mosse before being developed by other scholars. In these studies, the origins of the 'brutalization of politics' were tied to the psychological and social impact of the use of modern weapons and to the effects of life in the trenches during the war, as well as to mass mobilization caused by the war.¹ This kind of analysis had two major consequences: it gave a new start to the discussion on political violence and provided it with a space in the international historiographical agenda. Impetus was also given to the exploration of the relationship between the birth of fascism and the presence of languages and practices of violence during the interwar period.²

During the years prior to the establishment of dictatorships via *coup d'état* and following the end of the First World War, Italy, Spain and Portugal experienced phases of internal conflicts verging on civil war. The reasons for and meanings of these conflicts were not the same in the three countries, but the analysis of similarities and differences among them can help build a geography of violence and of its consequences in the postwar period, and can shed new light on the history of the birth of fascism. Such an analysis can also show that the reasons for and origins of the 'brutalization of politics' are more complex than they have appeared, and that the role of the First World War in this context should be partially rethought.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the relationship between the development of various kinds of political violence, the spread of discourses favouring dictatorship and the crisis, and fall of the so-called

liberal institutions in Italy, Spain and Portugal during the 1920s. This research is particularly indebted to *European Fascism*, edited by Stuart J. Woolf, for two reasons:³ the first is that Portugal was included in this book as one of the countries that experienced a regime which was part of the fascist family; the second is that, in his introduction to the book, Stuart Woolf identified a distinction between the fascisms of the 1920s and of the 1930s that still needs to be developed, which an examination of the establishment of dictatorships in these countries can further enrich. Studying these three experiences of political violence and dictatorial regimes can fill the gap between the movement and regime phases through an analysis of the role of political violence in connecting the former to the latter.

Italy, Spain and Portugal went through different experiences of the First World War and extremely different experiences of life in the trenches: Spain did not participate in the war, and the number of Portuguese involved in the fighting was not large. Moreover, the impact of the war on Portuguese civilians was not as immediate as it was for the citizens of Italy, since the war was not fought in continental Portugal.⁴ Nonetheless, all three countries experienced an intensified use of violence during the period after 1918 and witnessed a growing sympathy for dictatorships and authoritarian regimes by a large proportion of conservative forces.

During the years following the First World War, in many European countries the political mobilization of the masses and the birth of mass parties was an essential ingredient in the crisis of liberal institutions and of the distinction within the elite and the middle class, between those eager to democratize the state and those eager to prevent its democratization. This instability provoked tensions and resulted in a growing faith in strong governments—particularly authoritarian and dictatorial ones. This happened at a time when a large proportion of left-wing forces were radicalizing their positions and challenging the state, following the model of Bolshevik Russia. These political developments, both on the left and on the right, were not so much created by external models: they tended to emerge from within liberal institutions as a result of the latter's inability to either solve internal conflicts or reconcile ideologies and political practices.⁵

At the end of the war, internal conflicts in Italy were mainly social and took place in the countryside and the factories. Rural workers claimed their right to the land they worked while factory workers struck for increased pay, more rights (such as shorter working hours) and greater organizational power within the workplace.⁶ Strikes and mass

mobilizations developed even further than in the past; however, in parallel with these developments, industrialists and landowners began to come together from 1920 to finance organized and armed anti-strike movements.⁷

Meanwhile, despite its inability to control the social and political movements, the programme of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI—Partito Socialista Italiano) was full of references to revolution as a political goal. Consequently, the PSI got progressively weaker following the creation in 1921 of the Italian Communist Party (PCI—Partito Comunista Italiano). Moreover, the power acquired by mass groupings such as the PSI and the popular (Catholic) parties contributed towards the destabilization of a traditional ruling class that was unprepared for the changes triggered by the slow democratization of liberal institutions.⁸

Nonetheless, strike and anti-strike movements, as well as socialist- and communist-led demonstrations, were not the only conflicts leading to violence and subversion. In the army, speeches and plans calling for the radical change of the political situation and the desire for military *coups d'état* did not help stabilize the political situation.⁹ These were the fruit of both the demobilization of soldiers after the war and of the military's desire to maintain the power it had acquired over the country during the war.

The government was also worried about possible new tensions concerning Italy's borders. Because of the desire to expand and ensure Italy's position on the Adriatic Sea by obtaining control of the Dalmatian coast, Istria and Fiume, and to dominate an area in which Italians formed a portion of the population (against the territorial requests of the newly formed state of Yugoslavia), the eastern frontier was a hot issue during the postwar period, particularly during the negotiations leading to the Versailles Treaty.¹⁰

The main episode of subversive incidence during the *biennio rosso* (two red years) was linked to this unsolved problem. In September 1919, a group of civilian volunteers and some officials (assisted by military officers and headed by the poet, Gabriele d'Annunzio) occupied the town of Fiume (Rijeka). This was a subversive action that ran contrary to Italy's international commitments, against the will of the Italian government and against the instructions of the area's commander-in-chief.¹¹

While it was not actively involved in the First World War, unrest also broke out in Spain as social and labour conflicts led by farmers and factory workers spread across the country.¹² As in Italy, these conflicts resulted in the reorganization of the ruling classes as a consequence of the mistrust of the state's monopoly on violence and the creation,

particularly in Barcelona, of armed squads—the *Somatèn*—that broke strikes and fought strikers.¹³ Alongside these movements, the army assumed an increasing role in both the public sphere and in politics (this increase had been evident at least since birth of *Juntas de Defensa* [Defence Committees] in 1917). This situation generated the possibility of a dictatorial response.¹⁴

However, there were also other lines of conflict in Spain, which were particularly encouraged by regionalists who claimed particular rights and specific institutions in certain areas of the country and who found themselves in conflict with the central (and centralizing) state.¹⁵ Thus, it was not by chance that places where political violence developed more fully were also those in which the social and regional conflicts coincided, particularly in the more industrially developed areas such as Barcelona, Saragossa, Valencia, Cadiz, La Coruña and Bilbao. The role of the state in these conflicts was often ambiguous: it was unable to overcome the tensions and it could not gain the trust of the conflicting groups. Where the state did take a strong stance, as in Barcelona, a local civil war broke out.¹⁶

At the same time, Portugal experienced a civil war between monarchists and republicans that was provoked by the assassination of the dictator Sidónio Pais. While this conflict, which the republicans won, demonstrated the deeply rooted divisions within the army and civil society, it also represented the end of monarchism as a political force in the country.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the political and social forces opposed to the republic still had supporters, mainly in the army and among Catholics; however, after the fall of the short-lived Monarchy of the North their goal was no longer the restoration of the monarchy.

During the 1920s and before the 1926 coup, conflicts in Portugal found their main expression through military pronouncements. From 1919 there were 11 attempted coups in a country that was already politically highly unstable, and the possibility of these coups succeeding was really very high.¹⁸ The aim of the conspirators was to change the government, ensure a greater role for the military and dissolve parliament. They were organized from within the army (even if not all members of the army were either aware of them or directly involved), but they also mobilized civilians who were not solely passive supporters.

The coup of 18 April 1925 is particularly interesting because of the support the socialists and workers gave in the defence of the state from subversive army units.¹⁹ Although the theorists of ‘reaction’ against the liberal state and the republic were civilians and intellectuals with close links to the army, there were almost no militarized squads of civilians in action during this attempt. The intellectuals supporting the coup—the

fascists, philo-fascists and nationalists—created the intellectual ground for a transformation of the state into a reactionary and dictatorial regime, and were also the link with other dictatorial experiences in Europe.²⁰

The circulation of coup projects (and, in some cases, their realization) and the aspirations towards a dictatorship were part of a political discourse that between the end of the 1910s and the 1920s was not specific to the countries discussed here.²¹ These ideas arose during the First World War as a consequence of the normal wartime reinforcement of military institutions (in Spain the colonial wars provided the impetus). Nonetheless, while Italy, Spain and Portugal had different coup traditions, the conflicts between parts of the military world and parts of the civilian world—in a situation in which boundaries between the two were neither clear nor stable, and in which liberal political institutions had been weakened—provided an impetus for the development of these practices.

Coups organized by the army and headed by civilians, coups organized by senior military officials or by small and local army units, and coups organized by civilians and supported (whether openly or not) by the army, were all possible scenarios that intersected and which indicated different strategies, possibilities of action and of political negotiation. In Italy, these plans were not often fully developed and were usually discarded before their realization, even although dictatorial aspirations and conspiracies were frequent from 1919 onwards. On the other hand, in Spain and Portugal there was an explicit politicization of the army. In Spain, the *juntas* were to become an instrument for blackmailing governments, while the politicization of the army in Portugal was demonstrated by the large number of servicemen involved in coups.²² The situation was more complex in Italy where the army had a tradition of staying out of politics, and loyalty to the king made it difficult for officers to recognize politicization existed and that it was strong. Episodes such as the occupation of Fiume and the March on Rome quite clearly demonstrate the politicization of the Italian army.

Alongside these discussions, plans, conspiracies and coups, these three countries experienced the development of violent practices among conservatives and/or nationalist groups. These practices had different characteristics and emerged thanks to different actors who helped create a fertile atmosphere for the development of authoritarianism and fascism. Conspiracies and conservative violence started coming together in the reaction to the strikes and workers' movements that began in 1917 and developed during 1919–20.

The emergence of paramilitary groups in Italy and Spain must be linked to the new attitude of the state towards strikes, and of part of the ruling and political class towards the democratization of institutions. This attitude generated divisions within the ruling class, between civilians and the armed forces, and within the conservative groups, and resulted in a radicalization of conservative forces that was parallel to the radicalization of the left. The decision of a section of the ruling class to deny their support to the industrialists during periods of industrial unrest and to not repress public service strikes, resulted in the creation, in Italy and in Spain, of privately organized squads used to confront the strikers.

From that moment on, the state's monopoly of violence was no longer accepted by either the workers' movement (and by a large portion of left-wing forces) or by conservative groups. From the outset, the new squads were used to replace the workers during strikes in the public sector (such as public transport), however, they were also used in private conflicts between workers and industrialists and between tenants and landowners. These paramilitary groups were created as squads of the Fascist movement in Italy, and were particularly effective (even in collecting money) in rural conflicts. In Spain they were organized as *Somatèn*, and operated mainly in the cities—particularly in Catalonia, although these squads had a different relationship with the army.

In Italy, the use of squads to preserve public order alongside the army and under the control of the official forces was neither explicit nor very frequent (except at the very beginning). Moreover, the army's support for the actions of the squads was not explicit and was often formally considered illegal by the government, while parts of the military continued to arm and assist the squads until the Fascist conquest of power.²³ In Spain things were quite different. The *Somatèn* was explicitly used by the army and could be mobilized by local commanders during a state of siege. Moreover, the army pressured central government to institutionalize this force as part of it and to put it under the direct control of the local commander at all times.²⁴

If one compares the political position of these forces, there is a very different degree of politicization between the two. Italian squads acted in both labour and political conflicts (even if the difference between the two at the time was not always clear), and in this respect could be subversive against the state, even as they claimed to act in the national interest. The Italian squads were a fundamental part of the Fascist movement and, later, of the National Fascist Party (PNF—Partito Nazionale Fascista).

In Spain there were no political forces of this kind capable of developing the potential of these groups. The Somatèn represented an ideological and political position without being the direct expression of any individual political force. Nonetheless, both the Italian and the Spanish movements would be institutionalized once the dictatorships had been put in place, and could thus be considered as military forces acting in the dictators' name.²⁵

The situation seems to have been quite different in Portugal where the squads—where they existed—never acquired the force they had in the other countries, and where social conflicts were mainly controlled—and powerfully so—by the government. Until 1921 the government made use of the National Republican Guard (GNR—Guarda Nacional Republicana), a force created with the establishment of the republic and legitimized as an 'independent revolutionary force'. It must be stressed that, in 1921, the GNR was radically transformed and its role reduced following its attempt, together with other military units, at a coup in which the prime minister, António Granjo, and four other people died (this episode is known as the *noite sangrenta* [bloody night]).

In Portugal, as in Spain, the most bitter conflicts preceding the dictatorship were between the military and the civil powers, with military forces—or parts of them—able to become the benchmark for the reorganization of the state. Furthermore, in these countries the practice of political assassination was common, especially in the cities, while in Italy destabilization and fear were achieved through the squads' *spedizioni punitive* (punitive expeditions). Reactionary assassination attempts were partly a response to the actions of anarchists and left-wing forces, however, they often manifested themselves either as an overreaction or as an autonomous political instrument. One can point to the murder of the Portuguese prime minister during the *noite sangrenta* and to the killings in Barcelona during the government of General Anido between November 1920 and December 1921, which resulted in hundreds of deaths (of whom more than 100 were of the National Confederation of Labour [CNT—Confederación Nacional del Trabajo]).²⁶

The effects of these different practices of violence helped these movements obtain support from public opinion and from a middle-class yearning for strong government, the end of social conflicts and the defence of private property. The military and the fascists seem to have gained power precisely because their violence was effective both at silencing revolutionary and reformist forces within society and in conquering the state and transforming it into a dictatorship in which conflict was not explicit and politics were not negotiable.

The coups took place in Italy, Spain and Portugal in 1922, 1923 and 1926. The squads formed a large part of the March on Rome: they created a political and social instability in the peninsula, while there was a diminution of left-wing and labour conflicts. As the power of the squads increased, they expressed a will to coerce the central power of the liberal state, finally leading to its downfall.

The support of the king, and his decision not to punish the illegal March on Rome and to integrate Fascists in the government—resulting in victory for the squads—was essential. However, the attitude towards Fascist squads within the government, among state prefects and even in the army, had already determined the end of the state of law.

Squads were given arms, freedom to move anywhere in the country and to commit acts of violence in the name of the state. The role of the army in this context was underlined by Mussolini's decision to grant the two military ministries (navy and army) to generals Thaon de Revel and Diaz, both of whom had previously criticized the liberal governments: the former supported the request to obtain Dalmatia and Fiume for Italy, while the latter was one of the great heroes of the recent war.²⁷

Compared to the Italian case, the coup led by Primo de Rivera was directed and executed by the military, particularly by the colonial corps. However, it demonstrated the importance of the king's role in its final legitimization: a situation that was quite similar to what happened in Italy.

There are some other differences in the Portuguese situation, in which the regime following the coup did not have an obvious dictator, largely because of the lack of a charismatic figure who could gain the support of the integralist, philo-monarchist or philo-fascist groups—although some of these forces would have an important role in the government after the coup.²⁸ As in the Spanish and Italian examples, Portugal's coup did not begin in the capital; it was a march from the periphery to the centre, with the capital opposing the advance of the rebels.²⁹ However, unlike the Italian and Spanish cases, the Portuguese coup was not the beginning of a dictatorship, but was rather the beginning of a long phase of political uncertainty as different military factions struggled for power.³⁰

Despite the differences, these experiences developed and spread, showing clear relationships among them—a fact that is demonstrated by the echo of the March on Rome in Spain and Portugal, and by the echo of the two Iberian coups (the Spanish in particular) in Italy.³¹

Intellectuals—not only of the right—and politicians in the three regimes paid careful attention and felt close to the experiences of the

other fascist countries. The circulation of violence, thoughts on dictatorships and projects, and the execution of coups in the three countries remains to be studied further, but one can clearly see the ways in which these languages and practices assumed different forms in different political and social situations, all leading to the creation of similar repressive, authoritarian dictatorships.

Notes

1. G. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, New York, 1990; A. Becker and S. Audoin-Rouzeau, *1914–18: Retrouver la Guerre*, Paris, 2000. Reaching similar conclusions in relation to Nazi violence is E. Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*, New York, 2003. See also G. Albanese, 'La brutalizzazione della politica tra guerra e dopoguerra', *Contemporanea* IX, no. 3, 2006, 551–7. For the impact of studies on the First World War, see J. Winter and A. Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present*, Cambridge, 2005.
2. A. Ventrone, *La seduzione totalitaria: guerra, modernità, violenza politica (1914–1918)*, Rome, 2003; F. Ribeiro de Meneses, *União Sagrada e Sidonismo: Portugal em guerra (1916–18)*, Lisbon, 2000; F. J. Romero Salvadó, *Spain 1914–1918: Between War and Revolution*, London, 1999. On total war see R. Chickering and S. Förster, *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914–1918*, Cambridge, 2000. A sign of this interest on political violence is also present in G. Blaney, ed., *Policing Interwar Europe: Continuity, Change and Crisis, 1918–40*, London, 2006.
3. S. J. Woolf, *European Fascism*, London, 1968.
4. Ribeiro de Meneses, *União Sagrada*; Romero Salvadó, *Spain 1914–1918*; N. S. Teixeira, *L'entrée du Portugal dans la Grande Guerre: objectifs nationaux et stratégies politiques*, Paris, 1998; M. Isnenghi and G. Rochat, *La Grande Guerra: 1914–1918*, Milan, 2004; A. Gibelli, *La Grande Guerra degli Italiani*, Milan, 1998.
5. See C. L. Bertrand, ed., *Revolutionary Situations in Europe, 1917–1922: Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Proceedings of the Second International Colloquium*, 25–27 March 1976, Interuniversity Centre for European Studies, 1977. For a general picture see M. Cabrera, S. Juliá and P. M. Aceña, eds, *Europa en crisis, 1919–1939*, Madrid, 1991; R. J. Overy, *The Interwar Crisis: 1919–1939*, London, 1994; and R. O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, London, 2004.
6. For more on Italy's *biennio rosso* see G. Maione, *Il biennio rosso: autonomia e spontaneità operaia nel 1919–20*, Bologna, 1975; P. Spriano, *L'occupazione delle Fabbriche: Settembre 1920*, Turin, 1964; Various, *I due bienni rossi del Novecento, 1919–20 e 1968–69: studi e interpretazioni a confronto*, Rome, 2006; and R. Bianchi, *Pane, pace, terra: il 1919 in Italia*, Rome, 2006.
7. E. Gentile, *Storia del Partito Fascista, 1919–1922: movimento e milizia*, Rome, 1989. The literature on the origins of Fascism in Italy is enormous, starting from A. Tasca, *Nascita e avvento del fascismo: l'Italia dal 1918 al 1922*, Bari, 1972 [1938]; and more recently A. Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in*

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9

Ruling Elites, Political Institutions and Decision-Making in Fascist-Era Dictatorships: Comparative Perspectives

António Costa Pinto

A comparative analysis of the institutions, elites and political decision-making in the right-wing dictatorships of interwar Europe highlights some of the characteristics that were to dominate twentieth-century dictatorships. While Italian Fascism and German National Socialism provided powerful institutional and political inspiration for other regimes, their types of leadership, institutions and operating methods already encapsulated the dominant models of the twentieth-century dictatorship: personalized leadership, the single or dominant party and the ‘technico-consultative’ political institutions.¹

The fascist regimes were the first ideological one-party dictatorships situated on the right of the European political spectrum, and their development, alongside the consolidation of the first communist dictatorship, decisively marked the typologies of dictatorial regimes elaborated during the 1950s.² While Friedrich and Brzezinski recognized that the single party played a more modest role within fascist regimes than it did within communist regimes, part of the classificatory debate over European fascism continued to insist—eventually excessively—on this point and theories of totalitarianism ‘deformed’ their role, often without any empirical support.³ On the other hand, many historians examining the ideology and political activities of the fascist parties viewed the transformation of these parties as institutions of power within the new dictatorships with some simplistic analyses, stressing the contradictions between the revolutionary nature of the ‘movement’ phase (prior to taking power) and the ‘regime’ phase.⁴

In the transitions to authoritarianism that occurred during the 1920s and 1930s there is no strict correlation between the abrupt and violent ruptures with democracy in Portugal and Spain and the 'legal' assumption of power in Germany and Italy, or with the extent of the break from the liberal institutions following the consolidation of their respective dictatorial regimes. Salazar, who arrived in power after a *coup d'état*, and Franco, whose ascension was the result of a civil war, both had much greater room for manoeuvre than either Mussolini or Hitler, who both achieved their positions through 'legal' routes and with the support of a conservative right less inclined towards radical adventures.⁵ The type of transition does not seem to explain the extent of the rupture with the liberal institutions and the innovation of the new institutions created by the subsequent dictatorships. Rather than in the nature of the transition, the differences between the regimes lay in the role of the party and in its relationship with the leader who dominated the transitional process.

The dictatorships associated with fascism during the first half of the twentieth century were personalized dictatorships.⁶ It is interesting to see that even those regimes that were institutionalized following military coups, and which passed through a phase of military dictatorship, gave birth to personalist regimes and more or less successful attempts to create single or dominant parties.⁷ In the majority of these cases, the inherent dilemma in the transformation of the single party as the dictatorship's 'ruling institution' into the leader's 'instrument of rule' is somewhat different than it was for the socialist dictatorships.⁸

Some authors speak of the degeneration of the party as a ruler organization into an 'agent of the personal ruler' in the case of the communist parties in power.⁹ In the dictatorships associated with fascism, the single party was not the regime's 'ruling institution'—it was one of many. It is only in the paradigmatic cases of Italy and Germany that this question was raised and resolved during the regimes' institutionalization phase. In the cases of Franco's Spain and Salazar's Portugal, the single parties were created from above as 'instruments of rule' for the leader. In the dictatorships of Central and Eastern Europe, such as Austria and Romania, and also Marshall Petain's Vichy France, some fascist movements emerged either as rivals to or unstable partners in the single or dominant party, and often as inhibitors to their formation, making the institutionalization of the regimes more difficult for the dictatorial candidates. The boundaries of these regimes were fluid, demonstrating fascism's amazing ability to permeate the authoritarian right during the 1920s and 1930s. The most paradigmatic case was, without doubt, that

of early Francoism, although Salazarism in Portugal also emulated some aspects of Italian Fascism.

Italian Fascism and German National Socialism represented attempts to create a new set of political and para-state institutions that were in one form or another present in other dictatorships of the period. After taking power, both the National Socialist and Fascist Party became powerful instruments of a new order, agents of a 'parallel administration': transformed into single parties they flourished as breeding-grounds for a new political elite and as agents for a new mediation between the state and civil society, creating tensions between the single party, the government and the state apparatus in the process. These tensions were also a consequence of the emergence of new centres of political decision-making that transferred power from the government and the ministerial elite and concentrated it into the hands of Mussolini and Hitler.¹⁰

While taking power was only possible with the support of other conservative and authoritarian groups, the nature of the leadership and its relationship with the party was an important variable. As some historians have observed, a crucial element is 'to what extent the fascist component emancipated itself from the initial predominance of its traditional conservative sponsors and to what degree it departed—once in power—from conventional forms and objectives of policy-making towards a more radical direction'.¹¹ This tension may be illustrated by the eventual emergence of a weaker or stronger 'dualism of power' that appears to be the determining factor for the typological and classificatory variations used to qualify those dictatorships historically associated with fascism, which have been defined variously as 'authoritarian' and 'totalitarian', or as 'authoritarian' and 'fascist'.¹²

The interaction between the single party, the government, the state apparatus and civil society appears fundamental if we are to obtain an understanding of the different ways in which the various dictatorships of the fascist era functioned. The party and its ancillary organizations were not merely parallel institutions; they were also central agents for the creation and maintenance of the leader's authority and legitimacy. While their impact on the functioning of the political system may be difficult to assess, the personality of the leader is of particular importance within dictatorial regimes, because while not underestimating the role of the institutions, this is central for the definition of the respective style of rule.¹³ For this very reason, the type of leader-single-party axis appears to be the fundamental element of explanation for the diminution (or not) of the government, and of an opening that favoured (or not) 'dualism' in the nature of power and decision-making: or in

other words, of the extent of the 'de-institutionalization of norms' and the bypassing of bureaucratic authoritarianism (here expressed by the dictator-cabinet-state apparatus axis) by the leader and his followers.¹⁴

This chapter analyses the relationship between the single parties and the political decision-making institutions within those dictatorships associated with fascism, focusing on the relationship between the dictators, the single parties, the cabinet and the governing elites, while also seeking to identify the locus of decision-making power and the main institutional veto players.¹⁵

Single party, cabinet and political decision-making: Locating power in fascist-era dictatorships

The political engineering of Italian Fascism in power

While Mussolini conquered power as leader of the National Fascist Party (PNF—Partito Nazionale Fascista), the subsequent dismantling of the democratic regime was slow and the reduced social and political influence of the party, and/or the political will of Mussolini, made him accept compromises with the king, the armed forces and with other institutions, such as the Catholic Church. The consolidation of the dictatorship had to involve the imposition of a greater degree of discipline within the party, whose actions during the initial phase of Mussolini's regime could threaten the compromises essential for its institutionalization.

The Italian case is an example of the seizure of power by a united political elite whose base was a Fascist party transformed into the primary motor for the dictatorship's institutionalization. However, for several years Mussolini had to work with a parliament and, until the end of his regime, he had also to work with a senate. Securing political control of the parliament was not easy during the 1920s, and the entire legislative process had to pass through both it and, until the end of the regime, the king. Musiedlak notes that 'the powerful Fascist leader of Italy had to behave as the classical prime minister of a liberal system [...] appealing for votes and fearing abstention'.¹⁶

Securing political control of the senate was a slow and complex process that involved the PNF infiltrating its way into the institution and encircling the royalist conservative elite.¹⁷ Nevertheless, while he needed the party to control institutions and strengthen his personal power, Mussolini remained suspicious of some of its sections. Unlike Hitler, Mussolini did not view the party as an army of followers: he

feared its autonomy could threaten his authority. The ambition of the single party to control society also collided with the state bureaucracy, so much so that it was not until the 1930s that Mussolini allowed the PNF to extend its control over the state apparatus.

Mussolini did at times use the party to abandon his concessions to bureaucratic-legal legitimacy. Although he lacked the opportunity to eliminate the diarchy he inherited, he never abolished the monarchy.¹⁸ When what remained of the liberal legacy was eliminated during the latter half of the 1930s and when, under Starace, the PNF proposed the conquest of civil society, Mussolini's attempts to enhance his personal and charismatic authority through the party, state and propaganda apparatus culminated in the creation of the cult of *Il Duce*.¹⁹ This represented the zenith of a movement several historians of fascism suggest signals the passage from an authoritarian to a totalitarian fascism; tendencies of both had co-existed during the consolidation of Mussolini's dictatorship.²⁰ In 1926, the PNF became the de facto single party. The 1928 transformation of the Fascist Grand Council—the PNF's supreme body since 1923—into a state institution under Mussolini's leadership marked the fusion of the party and the state at the very peak of the Fascist political system without subordinating the former to the latter. As one student of Italian Fascism has noted:

The Fascist Grand Council retained a political importance that was greater than that of the cabinet [...] In this aspect, however, the theoretical supremacy of the state over the party cannot be interpreted as the subordination of the party's organs to those of the government.²¹

The main reforms of the Italian political system began with the Fascist Grand Council, although this body—even while technically more important than the council of ministers—was formally a consultative body that met only infrequently after the consolidation of Fascism. One of the last reforms was the creation in 1938 of the Fascist corporatist chamber, of which the leaders of the PNF became automatic members. The Grand Council consequently lost its right to draw up the list of deputies with the abolition of the liberal parliament. The secretary of the PNF, who was also the secretary of the Grand Council and a government minister, was to become the second most important figure of Italian Fascism.²²

During the first years of his regime, Mussolini was afraid the party's radicalism and indiscipline would compromise the consolidation of Fascist power. Purges, the closure of the party to new members and limiting

its access to both the state and to the government were all characteristics of the dictatorship during the 1920s.²³ However, throughout the 1930s the PNF, which was by then under Starace's leadership and had been imbued with a structure that was more 'disciplined [both] horizontally and vertically', became a powerful machine used both to shape civil society and promote the ideological socialization of the *Duce* leadership cult.

Mussolini was the ruler of an often unstable balance between the party, the government and the administration, and reserved political decision-making power to his person while subordinating both the party and the governmental elite to his sole authority. Lupo illustrated this well when he wrote, 'the group of leaders that emerged from the Fascist mobilization took important steps towards the conquest of power on a path that was blocked to them by both conservative resistance and by jealousy and paranoia of Il Duce that quickly transformed into tyranny'.²⁴ From this perspective, Mussolini accumulated a large part of the political decision-making power to his own person. His cabinet was undoubtedly formally devalued in relation to the Grand Council, however, the relationship between Mussolini (who often took direct responsibility for up to six ministries) and his ministers was still a determining element of political decision-making, while the council of ministers survived as an institution. Some other institutions inherited from the liberal regime that remained largely 'un-fascistized', such as the council of state, were also to act as legislative filters.²⁵

The significant reduction in the number of meetings by both the Grand Council and the council of ministers from the mid-1930s was indicative of the increasing concentration of power to Mussolini's person: the Grand Council did not meet at all between 1939 and 1943, 'without affecting the regime's ability to function'.²⁶ However, this was the domain of the Fascist ruling elite that dismissed Mussolini in 1943; while the council of ministers also held significantly fewer meetings, at least decisions made there were ratified.²⁷

At the meeting of the Grand Council at which Mussolini was removed from office, Grandi accused him of having a personalist management style that bureaucratized and stifled the party and paralyzed the regime.²⁸ This first accusation was not far from the truth, while the second only served to highlight the progressive reduction of the Grand Council's once significant political decision-making authority.

Despite having been transformed into a centralized 'party-state' machine (as was the case for other official single parties) 80 per cent of the PNF elite had joined the movement before the March on Rome

and they did not like latecomers.²⁹ The militia was the first institution to be taken out of the party's control and placed under Mussolini's direct command. The political police was never independent of the state, although several of the mass organizations—particularly those involving youth, women and the working classes—were subjected to many different transfers. The PNF took control of the popular mass organizations, even although these organizations were initially dependent upon the ministries.³⁰ The national recreation club (OND—Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro, a cultural organization within the economics ministry), was the object of some rivalry between the ministry of corporations and the PNF before responsibility for it was finally placed with the latter in 1927 when it was the regime's largest mass organization.³¹

A similar event took place in relation to the youth organizations. Originally voluntary organizations within the PNF, responsibility for them was transferred to the ministry of education in 1929. A few years later, with Starace at its head, the party regained control of them and, in 1937, they were amalgamated into a single youth movement, the Italian Fascist Youth (GIL—Gioventù Italiana del Littorio). The monopoly over the political socialization of youth was not only a source of tension between the PNF and the state, it also involved the Catholic Church, which saw its independent Catholic Action youth organizations alternately tolerated and dissolved.³² The PNF was also involved in the trade unions. During the initial period, the PNF had its own unions over which it maintained indirect control. The complementary nature of the relationship between the state and the party was significant within the women's organizations, from the Fascist Women's Section (FF—Fasci Femminili) to Rural Housewives (MR—Massaie Rurali), in which—and after many hesitations—the party invested heavily throughout the 1930s.³³

Despite the lack of success which met its attempts to 'fascitize' the bureaucracy, political control over access to the civil service was strengthened progressively following the transfer of the Fascist civil service association to the PNF in 1931 and the introduction of obligatory membership of this association in 1937. In 1938, membership of the PNF became a necessary precondition for admission to the state apparatus.³⁴ Several other examples can be given to demonstrate the party's increasing influence within the state and of the privileges it could extend to its professional members. Newly appointed judges, whether members of the PNF or not, were obliged to attend courses on Fascist culture within the party's political education centres before they could take up their posts, while trainee lawyers were allowed a reduction of their training period, but only if they joined the PNF before they qualified.³⁵

We should not forget that alongside the central state apparatus a large para-state sector linked to the coordination of the economy and to the corporatist system was developed, a true ‘parallel administration’ in which there was greater flexibility in the nominations, but in which the nominees for positions came not only from professional civil servants, but increasingly from within an elite closely associated with the Fascist movement and its leader.³⁶

In Italian Fascism, not only did the locus of political decision-making power begin to diverge from the classical dictator-government binomial as a result of the existence of the Grand Council, but the single party was transformed into the only route into government and controlled civil society through its parallel political organization, which was at the service of the dictator and his regime and which increasingly interfered in the workings of both the state apparatus and the bureaucracy. The concentration of seven or eight portfolios in Mussolini’s hands and the erratic and volatile nature of a ministerial elite that could be (and which was) dismissed at any moment, resulted in the appointment of indecisive ministers and left a shadow over direct relations between *Il Duce* and the senior bureaucracy.

Hitler and the deinstitutionalization of the Nazi dictatorship

The Nazi dictatorship was much closer to the model of charismatic leadership and the Nazi Party (NSDAP—Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei), and militias like the Schutzstaffel (SS) exercised a greater influence over the political system. Both factors make it much more difficult to identify the location of political decision-making within Nazism.

One of the most fruitful interpretations of the Nazi political system is that which defines it as a polyocracy—a political system that consists of several decision-making centres, all of which were mediated individually by Hitler.³⁷ Such a system has many tensions—for example, between the party and its bureaucratic apparatus and the local and central administrations—however, we should not exaggerate them, since in many cases they complemented each other. This investigation has revised some of the interpretations that have bequeathed us an image of forced coherence where there was little coherence.³⁸ It is also clear the Second World War acted as a catalyst, driving events that under different circumstances would probably have followed a different path.

Hitler’s dictatorship was, in every aspect of its existence, closer to a charismatic regime than any other, and this had significant implications

for the operation of the Nazi political system.³⁹ The Nazi leader was at the head of the most powerful fascist party, and although Hitler had to overcome some opposition from elements within the NSDAP's militia—the Sturm Abteilungen (SA)—in the immediate aftermath of his rise to power, he soon made the party his 'instrument of rule'.

Hitler's style of rule caused a weakening of the authoritarian state's decision-making structure, resulting in Hitler's rise to absolute power at the head of a system in which the 'coexistence [of] and conflict [between] uncoordinated authorities very often undermined solidarity and uniformity in the exercise of power'.⁴⁰ Whether as part of a deliberate strategy or merely as a consequence of Hitler's leadership personality, this also provoked a multiplication of *ad hoc* decisions and ensured there would be no real or formal limits to his authority.⁴¹ Despite this concentration of power, Hitler's style of rule led him to immerse himself in such matters as the military and the strategic defence and expansion of the Third Reich, and to underestimate the 'command and control' dimension of the administration and of day-to-day domestic politics.

As in the other dictatorships analysed here, the Nazi cabinet was quickly transformed into a bureaucratic body totally subservient to Hitler. However, even in this compliant condition the cabinet ceased to exist as a collegiate body and political power within the Nazi regime was simultaneously concentrated in Hitler and dispersed throughout the various autonomous institutions—severely undermining the government. Regular meetings of the cabinet ceased in 1935, with even the symbolic meetings that remained coming to an end just 3 years later.⁴²

In 1937, with Hans Heinrich Lammers at the head of the Reich Chancellery, ministerial access to Hitler became more difficult as he deliberately reduced the cabinet's status.⁴³ At the same time, the office of the deputy Führer, headed by Rudolf Hess and later by Martin Bormann, and which represented the NSDAP, moved closer to Hitler. One important biographer of the German Führer noted:

Whichever way one viewed it, and remarkable for a complex modern state, there was no government beyond Hitler and whichever individuals he chose to confer with at a particular time. Hitler was the only link of the component parts of the regime.⁴⁴

The status associated with ministerial rank diminished as both a *de facto* and symbolic position of power within National Socialism with the

rapid emergence of various para-state structures with parallel powers. While the ministerial elite was more politically homogeneous, the initial pressure from several Nazi ministers to create a centralized dictatorship based on the control of the administration led to its swift weakening under pressure from the party, the SS and other parallel institutions—very often with Hitler's support. According to Broszat, in National Socialism three distinct centres of power began to emerge within a structure that was in a tense and unstable balance:

the single party monopoly, the centralized governmental dictatorship and the absolutism of the Führer [...] undermined the unity of the government and the monopoly of government by the Reich cabinet.⁴⁵

Special authorities under Hitler's direct control soon developed alongside the ministries at the same time as several political and police organizations, some controlled by the NSDAP and others by the SS, began to act independently of the government. These 'leader-retinue structures' were not only tolerated by Hitler, he actually encouraged them.

Among the former were organizations such as the German Road System, the Labour Service and others, of which the most important were those that were either more overtly political or repressive. The Hitler Youth, which remained under the party's control, was transformed into a Reich Authority independent of the ministry of education, with the objective of becoming a counterweight to both the ministry and the armed forces in political and ideological education. In a complex manner that generated innumerable tensions, the gradual removal of the police from the interior ministry into the hands of Himmler's SS is yet another example. It was transformed into an institution that was at least formally dependent upon the party and the state, but 'which had detached itself from both and had become independent'.⁴⁶ Frick's interior ministry was thus emasculated of any practical authority over the police, just as the position of the minister of labour was also partially weakened with the independence of the German Labour Front (DAF—Deutsche Arbeitsfront).⁴⁷

If the Nazification of the administration was at times more superficial than real, the creation of those organizations viewed as parallel administrations represent the most extreme examples of the subversion of an authoritarian concept of government and state within the collection of dictatorships that have been associated with fascism. Even although it had been subordinated, the appointment of NSDAP

leaders to ministerial office was—in much the same way as in the other dictatorships—a symbol of the Nazi Party's victory as it represented the diminution of the government. It is also worth noting that even although it survived as an institution, albeit with much of its legislative authority removed and controlled by the NSDAP, the Reichstag was seldom used as a legitimizing institution.

The tensions created by the legality of the NSDAP's rise to power and the rapid development of Hitler's charismatic leadership were resolved by the publication of a series of decrees conveying total power to his person. The NSDAP, even while experiencing internal crises, created a parallel structure, multiplying and upsetting the spheres of decision-making power in several areas of national and regional authority. The existence of a large administration of NSDAP functionaries was symbolic of a revolutionary strategy before a controlled bureaucracy, although according to several studies 'the Nazi leadership always relied on the old elite to maintain the essential functions of government', particularly within German territory, given that the party was more important in the eastern occupied territories.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the increasing legislative confusion that sought to interpret the leader's will represents the most extreme subversion of the traditional methods of political decision-making in the four dictatorships being studied. The NSDAP, while not achieving its ambition to secure political and ideological control of the administration, did obtain for itself a much stronger position before the government.⁴⁹

Not only did Bormann's office of deputy Führer become the most important channel to Hitler, it also secured some political control over the government through, for example, its power to veto civil service promotions. Simultaneously, the party achieved political and financial autonomy, and developed as a parallel state apparatus.⁵⁰

The Nazi Party in power was transformed into a complex organization, and many studies have pointed out that the leaders of the party 'became stuck midway through their journey toward the creation of a truly innovative, even revolutionary elite'.⁵¹ While the formal rigidity of many of the typologies labelling National Socialism as an example of where 'the party commands the state' cannot be verified, it was in Nazi Germany that the single party obtained its greatest autonomy and was the leading force in the drive to reduce the importance of the governmental and administrative elites, and in the progressive and unstable subversion of 'bureaucratic authoritarianism' in the locus of political power and decision-making. As a single party, the NSDAP represents the strongest 'shadow state' of the cases under study.

Portugal's New State: The primacy of bureaucratic authoritarianism

The Portuguese New State, which was institutionalized in 1933, emerged from the military dictatorship that overthrew the liberal First Republic in 1926. António de Oliveira Salazar, a young university professor and Catholic leader, was appointed prime minister in 1932 by the president of the republic, General Óscar Carmona, whose position was legitimized in an election held in 1928. Despite the significance of the fact the president decided not to assume the position of prime minister or to declare himself dictator, he did appoint military officers to the position of prime minister until 1932.

Salazar played no role in the 1926 coup, nor was he listed as a candidate for dictator during the final years of the parliamentary regime. Salazar's expertise was in finance and his backing by the Catholic Church and the small Catholic party made him a natural candidate for the post of finance minister; it was in that capacity that he joined the cabinet in 1928. His rise in government was made possible by the concessions he was able to demand from the dictatorship as a condition of accepting the ministerial post.

The New State's political institutions resulted from the often difficult negotiations that took place between Salazar and the military leaders—the majority of whom were conservative republicans—both within the government and the framework of limited pluralism within the dictatorship. Curiously, the first institution to be created was the National Union (UN—*União Nacional*) in 1930, a single party formed by the government within the interior ministry that served to legitimate the elimination of the political parties that had survived the First Republic—even those, such as the Catholic Party (PC—*Partido Católico*), that supported the dictatorship. Initially consisting of local conservative republican notables, the UN was soon attracting monarchists, Catholics and even some dissident fascists from Rolão Preto's National Syndicalism Movement (MNS—*Movimento Nacional-Sindicalista*)—a movement that had challenged Salazar before being banned in 1934. It was also during the final days of the military dictatorship that the republican opposition made several serious and violent attempts to overthrow it.

Once appointed prime minister, Salazar set about the task of legitimating the regime through the promulgation of a new constitution. The resulting constitution of 1933 heralded an early compromise with the conservative republicans, but its liberal principals were weak while the corporatist and authoritarian ones were strong. Rights and liberties

were formally maintained but were actually eliminated by government regulation. De jure freedom of association existed, but parties were effectively eliminated. Formally, the UN never became a single party, although it functioned as such after 1934.

As president of the UN, Salazar had final say in the nominations for parliamentary deputies, a task he took great care over during the first phase of the regime. Adopting a methodology that he was to refine, he asked for lists of names and suggestions from his informal group of advisers and from the UN leadership, often personally selecting candidates for the list.⁵²

The president, to whom the prime minister was responsible, was elected by universal male suffrage. During the first years of Salazar's rule only the president and the army posed any constitutional or political threat to his position. While the constitution retained the classic separation of powers, the chamber of deputies had few powers and the corporatist chamber had only 'advisory' functions. Before the creation of the corporations, members of the corporatist chamber were chosen by the corporatist council, which consisted of Salazar and the ministers and secretaries of state of the sectors involved.

Above all else, Salazar was a master whose manipulation of a perverted rational-legal legitimacy meant he had little need to seek recourse in a charismatic style that could rise above bureaucratic and governmental mediation between himself and the nation. Moreover, the military origins of his regime ensured his position was linked to that of President Carmona.

Salazar's single party was established within an authoritarian regime and the impetus for its formation came from the government with assistance from the state apparatus. State dependency marked the life of the party and, once its leaders had been appointed and the national assembly representatives chosen, the UN practically disappeared. In 1938 the dictator himself recognized the single party's activity had 'progressively diminished to near-vanishing point'.⁵³ Its internal structure was weak and it lacked the propaganda, socio-professional and cultural departments of other single parties. However, it did strengthen Salazar's authority, limit pressure groups and the 'political families' and integrate them into the regime while also keeping reins on the president.

Students of the New State have emphasized the impact the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War had on the nature of the regime. In response to the 'red threat' from Spain, Salazarism developed a new political discourse and symbolism, and set up two militia organizations. These

steps have often been interpreted as the ‘fascistization’ of the regime, although the single party was not a part of the new dynamics.

Several organizations, such as the regime’s militia the Portuguese Legion (LP—*Legião Portuguesa*), the Portuguese Youth organization (MP—*Mocidade Portuguesa*) and the political police (PVDE—*Polícia de Vigilância e Defesa do Estado*), were kept entirely dependent on the ministers. The National Propaganda Secretariat (SPN—*Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional*) was a general directorate within the state apparatus, equipped with its own autonomous leadership that was responsible to Salazar directly rather than to the party. The National Foundation for Happiness at Work (FNAT—*Fundação Nacional para a Alegria no Trabalho*), a modest Portuguese version of Mussolini’s OND and Hitler’s DAF, was dependent upon the under-secretary of state for corporations.⁵⁴

Salazar’s extensive centralization of decision-making authority clearly justifies the use of the expression strong dictator in any characterization of the power exercised by him. However, it is important to stress that the locus of power and of political decision-making was always with the dictator and his ministers, as it was through these that the great majority of decisions passed. In several other dictatorships, single parties functioned at least as parallel political apparatuses. However, this never happened in Salazarism, where political control was mainly effected through administrative centralization rather than through the single party. Not only was there no tension between Salazar’s UN and the cabinet-state apparatus, but neither the dictatorial system nor the political decision-making process were ever challenged by the existence of autonomous political institutions directly subordinated to the dictator.

Early Francoism and the fascist appeal

While, during their long existence, the two Iberian dictatorships eventually converged as forms of authoritarianism, their markedly different origins were clearly evident during the period being studied.⁵⁵ The main characteristic of Francoism was its radical break with the Second Spanish Republic. The product of a protracted and bloody civil war in which there were a greater number of political purges and executions than during the overthrow of any other democratic regime following the First World War, Francoism as a political system rejected the fundamentals of the liberal legacy and was inspired by Italian Fascism to a much greater degree than was Salazarism.⁵⁶ Franco set about establishing his embryonic political system within those areas that had been occupied by his Nationalists: it was a system marked by a reactionary and militaristic coalition of conservative Catholics, monarchists and fascists.

In order to create his single party, FET-JONS (Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista)—which was based around the small Spanish fascist movement—Franco forced the Falange's fusion with the Catholics and the monarchists.⁵⁷ During the civil war, the Falange lent Franco the support of its political militants and its ideology as well as its modest fascist militia in the hope that its imposed 'unification' would ensure for it 'a genuinely fascist role in the implementation of a mobilized society'.⁵⁸

However, the fascists saw their position weaken as a result of their inclusion into a single party that incorporated several 'political families'. The Francoist single party was a heterogeneous union maintaining several identities, particularly at the intermediate levels.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Franco and the victors of the civil war initially outlined the creation of a Spanish new state: one that lacked the palliatives and compromises of its Portuguese peer, even although the tentative outlines of its proposed totalitarian tendencies were to be rapidly eliminated as the defeat of German Europe became more predictable.⁶⁰

Franco's concessions to Spain's liberal past were few and far between; the dictator did not have to deal with either a president or a king, subordinate or not, and nor did he have to pervert a parliament as Mussolini had. As Stanley Payne noted, in 1939, the Spanish dictator 'was the European ruler who, both formally and theoretically, retained the most absolute and uncontrolled power'.⁶¹

Some of Franco's personal characteristics and his relationship with the institutions that constituted the base of his victory were to influence the nature of the new political system. Franco was a conservative military man expressing values of order, anti-communism, traditionalist Catholicism and an obsession with the 'liberal-Masonic conspiracy'.⁶² His relationship with FET-JONS was also more utilitarian than ideological—he was not the original party leader and neither was the Falange to be a determining factor in his seizure of power—sensitive as he was to both the armed forces and the Catholic Church (the other powerful institutions involved in founding the new regime). Despite Franco's support for the Axis during the Second World War, his intellectual background and his professional career make it difficult to position him as a fascist leader once he was in power.

Franco placed the single party under his and his government's strict control. Nevertheless, FET-JONS not only managed to create a party apparatus and ancillary organizations that were much more powerful than those enjoyed by its Portuguese counterpart, but its access to both the national government and the local administration was also greater. Despite being subordinate, FET-JONS was initially integrated

into certain administrative bodies within the state apparatus: for example, by uniting the position of civil governors with those of the party's regional secretaries.⁶³ One important struggle that was immediately lost was the attempt to retain an independent militia, which, as in Portugal, was placed under military control. However, the party did control a considerable collection of ancillary organizations, such as the Youth Front (FJ—Frente de Juventudes), the Spanish University Union (SEU—Sindicato Español Universitario), the Women's Section (SF—Sección Feminina), the Syndical Organization (OO.SS—Organización Sindical) and the Spanish equivalent of Italy's OND, the Education and Recreation Syndical Organization (OSD—Organización Sindical de la Educación y Descanso).⁶⁴ More importantly, the party retained responsibility for propaganda within the regime.⁶⁵ The intertwining of party and state notwithstanding, the coincidence of ministerial charges with the same section within the party are certainly worthy of greater attention.

The party's national education delegate was responsible for the various youth organizations, and as the occupant of this post was also always the minister of education, this minister effectively headed these organizations.⁶⁶ Propaganda, which in 1938 was the responsibility of an under secretary of state within the Nationalist government, was transferred to the single party until 1945, when it became a government task once more.

During Serrano Suñer's short spell as the leading party figure he was also the party's propaganda delegate, and when he was appointed interior minister he took the party's propaganda specialists with him, further blurring the boundaries and increasing the confusion as to where the party ended and the state began.⁶⁷ The syndical apparatus was without doubt 'an area of power reserved to the Falangists', but they were regulated by the ministry of labour. It was in this area that some of the Falangists experimented with the language of social demagoguery in a way that created tensions with the government and which led to some dismissals.⁶⁸ Generally, at least until 1945, 'the predominance of the Falange elite and military officials was obvious', particularly at the governmental level.⁶⁹

Single parties and the ministerial elites of fascist-era dictatorships

The main divergence in the characteristics of the ministerial elite of the four dictatorships being examined can be found in their political

origins. In both National Socialism and Italian Fascism the hegemony of the PNF's and NSDAP's professional politicians is overwhelming as a condition for obtaining ministerial office. We should note that there were a greater number of full-time politicians in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy than there were in either Portugal or Spain, where bureaucrats and military officials constituted the larger proportion of both Salazar's and Franco's ministers (Table 9.1). While in the Portuguese New State only a small number of the single party's leaders served in Salazar's governments, in the other three dictatorships the party leaders had a very strong presence in government (Table 9.2).

The ministerial elite of consolidated Italian Fascism was dominated by men who had been Fascists from the very earliest days, almost all of whom—with the exception of military officers—were also members of the Fascist Grand Council.⁷⁰ According to Pierre Milza, 'the inner circle

Table 9.1 Ministers' occupational background (%)

| Occupational categories | Portugal | Spain | Italy | Germany |
|---------------------------------------|----------|-------|-------|---------|
| Military | 26.7 | 41.2 | 8.0 | 10.8 |
| <i>Army</i> | 20.0 | 35.3 | 5.3 | 5.4 |
| <i>Navy</i> | 6.7 | 5.9 | 2.7 | 2.7 |
| <i>Air Force</i> | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 2.7 |
| Judge or public prosecutor | 3.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 13.5 |
| Diplomat | 3.3 | 0.0 | 5.3 | 8.1 |
| Senior civil servant | 10.0 | 11.8 | 2.6 | 18.9 |
| Middle civil servant | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.3 | 0.0 |
| Officer of state corporatist agencies | 0.0 | 2.9 | 1.3 | 10.8 |
| University professor | 40.0 | 2.9 | 26.6 | 2.7 |
| Teacher | 0.0 | 2.9 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Employee | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Writer or journalist | 0.0 | 2.9 | 6.6 | 2.7 |
| Lawyer | 10.0 | 17.6 | 6.6 | 5.4 |
| Doctor | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Engineer | 0.0 | 14.7 | 3.9 | 2.7 |
| Manager | 0.0 | 0.0 | 9.3 | 0.0 |
| Businessman, industrialist or banker | 10.0 | 2.9 | 0.0 | 2.7 |
| Landowner or farmer | 6.7 | 5.9 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Full-time politician | 0.0 | 0.0 | 70.7 | 56.8 |
| Other | 3.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 2.7 |
| N | 30 | 34 | 75 | 37 |

Note: Occupations immediately before the first ministerial appointment. Multiple coding has been applied. Percentages do not, therefore, total 100. N = Number of ministers.

Source: ICS database on the fascist elite, University of Lisbon, 2009.

Table 9.2 Political offices held by ministers (%)

| Political offices | Portugal | Spain | Italy | Germany |
|--|----------|-------|-------|---------|
| None | 56.7 | 14.7 | 6.6 | 21.6 |
| Mayor or local councillor | 16.7 | 8.8 | 12.0 | 16.2 |
| Prefect | 3.3 | 14.7 | 1.3 | 0.0 |
| Colonial governor | 0.0 | 8.8 | 5.3 | 0.0 |
| Parliamentarian | 16.7 | 32.4 | 82.7 | 51.4 |
| <i>Deputy</i> | 16.7 | 26.5 | 76.0 | 51.4 |
| <i>Peer or senator</i> | 0.0 | 5.9 | 6.7 | — |
| Member of corporatist chamber | 3.3 | 8.8 | — | — |
| Secretary or under secretary of state | 26.7 | 5.9 | 41.3 | 21.6 |
| Member of <i>cabinets ministériels</i> | 0.0 | — | 0.0 | 3.1 |
| Ministerial director | 0.0 | 5.9 | 0.0 | 10.8 |
| Local or national leader of the single party | 16.7 | 62.1 | 34.7 | 13.5 |
| Youth movement | 0.0 | — | 1.3 | 0.0 |
| Militia | 3.3 | — | 10.7 | 2.7 |
| Para-state corporatist institutions | 3.3 | 0.0 | 22.7 | 13.5 |
| Party officers | 0.0 | 0.0 | 61.3 | 48.7 |
| N | 30 | 34 | 75 | 37 |

Note: Before first appointment to cabinet. Multiple coding has been applied when ministers had held different political offices. N= Number of ministers.

Source: ICS database on the fascist elite, University of Lisbon, 2009.

of [Fascist] power was made up of about 30–40 people whose names also figure in the list of members of the Grand Council for most of this period'.⁷¹ Ministers, under-secretaries and presidents of both parliament and senate—almost all occupants of these positions came from this inner circle. Before they became members of government, the main emblematic figures of Italian Fascism—men such as Dino Grandi, Italo Balbo and Giuseppe Bottai, who were PNF *ras* (bosses) in Bologna, Ferrara and Rome, respectively—had all participated in the *squadristi*-led violence of the early-1920s.⁷² Of the few—mainly conservative and monarchist—officers of the armed forces who rose to ministerial rank during Fascism, many followed a path similar to that of Emilio de Bono, who joined the PNF in 1922 and then served in the Fascist militia before receiving a ministerial post.⁷³

Other main entry points to a ministerial position until the 1930s were either through the ranks of the PNF or through the provincial federations within which the PNF occupied a dominant position. The corporatist apparatus was another source for ministerial recruitment, and one that came to dominate during the second half of the 1930s: of the 28 presidents of Fascist federations, 14 were to become

under-secretaries of state or ministers.⁷⁴ The least important recruiting ground was the civil service, and the few who did come by this route still had to be vetted by the various Fascist organizations involved in public administration (Table 9.2).

Ministerial reshuffles were common, and it was rare for any minister to serve more than 3 years. There were very few like Guisepppe Bottai, who was moved from one ministry to the other. Mussolini tended to accumulate ministries to his own person, and at times was responsible for up to six portfolios. He was inclined to place loyal Fascists he could trust in the important interior and foreign ministries, but he remained wary of the PNF's power, subordinating it to his control and limiting its access to him while simultaneously allowing it a substantial degree of freedom in the framing of civil society. Nevertheless, the party-state tensions—whether latent or open—were almost always resolved in favour of the latter, especially within the local administrations.⁷⁵

The opinion that ministers 'were only technical collaborators with the head of government' was progressively promoted, although as we have seen this does not mean an exclusively bureaucratic career had been somehow transformed into a preferential route to ministerial office.⁷⁶ As Emilio Gentile noted, 'the political faith that had been demonstrated through an active membership of the PNF and by obedience to the party's orders, always prevailed over the principle of technical competence'.⁷⁷

The PNF and its para-state organizations were to remain determining factors in access to a ministerial career, even when the power of the ministries was limited by the dictator. The promotion of the secretary of the party to the position of minister without portfolio in 1937 was a potent symbol of the party's importance.⁷⁸

The political origins of the Nazi regime's ministers were probably the most homogeneous of the four dictatorships. If we disregard the initial coalition period, we see that 'active, official and publicized membership of the Nazi Party became a condition *sine qua non*' for access to ministerial office.⁷⁹ No fewer than 90 per cent of Hitler's ministers were NSDAP leaders, and 78 per cent of these had been party members prior to Hitler taking power.⁸⁰

However, more impressive is the 56.8 per cent of Hitler's ministers who had been political officials within the NSDAP (Table 9.1). The usual examples were Hitler, Goebbels and Hess, however, ministers such as Rust at the ministry of science and education had been party officials before the regime took power.⁸¹ Despite the fact that it was not until 1937 that Hitler established the rule that all ministers must also be

party members, the NSDAP professionals had soon established their hegemony within the government.

Although the ministerial elite came from within the NSDAP, there were significant differences in the paths followed. Once nominated, many of the ministers were to create tensions between themselves and the party's institutions, increasing feelings of mutual mistrust either as a result of party interference in the ministries or by the impression some of the ministers had only recently joined the party for opportunistic reasons. Hans Heinrich Lammers, who was responsible for coordinating the ministries, was viewed with mistrust despite the importance of his role within the state. The minister of agriculture, Walther Darré, was also a latecomer to the party, although he was more 'ideological'.⁸² Wilhelm Frick was an early member of the party, but these distinctions were to become increasingly irrelevant as such criteria were often no more than 'positional'—that is, they were used in defence of ministerial authority before agencies that were either autonomous or linked to party institutions.

With efforts to create a centralized dictatorship, such as that attempted by Frick, being blocked by Hitler, there followed a succession of conflicts between ministers and the parallel structures, even when the minister also occupied the equivalent department within the party, as Goebbels did. Secondary ministers very soon lost their access to Hitler and enjoyed more autonomy as a result. There was a great deal of stability in Hitler's ministries and very limited mobility between portfolios, however, the large majority of his ministers lost access to him, with the result their power within the overall political system and their authority to make decisions greatly diminished.

The rise in the number of ministers without portfolio, often to represent the party, was a form of compensation for those who had lost their ministerial position, and was symbolic of their lack of function. Nevertheless, despite the frequent conflicts between the NSDAP and ministerial structures, the party was not a centralized political actor, rather, it was a collection of several autonomous institutions that came together to fulfil their para-state duty.

The main characteristics of the Portuguese New State's governing elite was that it belonged to a small and exclusive political and bureaucratic group of men who almost completely dominated the senior ranks of the armed forces, the senior administration and the universities—within which the legal profession was strongly represented (Table 9.1). Very few of Salazar's ministers had been active in politics during the First Republic, and almost none had occupied any position within the republican

regime. Because of their youth some had only become involved in politics after the 1926 coup, and almost all were ideologically and politically affiliated to Catholic conservatism and monarchism. While the dual affiliation of 'Catholic and monarchist' was shared by some members of the elite, the fundamental issue—particularly in relation to the military dictatorship—was the steady reduction within the ministerial elite of those who had been affiliated to the conservative-republican parties, and a corresponding increase in those whose roots were in the monarchist camp, and particularly those who had been influenced during their youth by the Action Française-inspired royalist movement, Lusitanian Integralism (IL—Integralismo Lusitano). Those whose connections were with Catholicism also saw their numbers increase slightly. A large number had no previous affiliation, and only a small minority had come from Preto's MNS following its prohibition in 1934.⁸³ The remainder may be identified by their connections to conservative ideas associated with the more pragmatic and inorganic 'interest'-based right-wing.⁸⁴

The use of the classifications 'military', 'politician' and 'technician' allow us to illustrate an important comparative dimension in the study of authoritarian elites, and to know their sources of recruitment and the extent of the more 'political institutions' access to the government.⁸⁵ Given the conjunction of a technically competent political elite with institutions—such as an armed service containing several politicized officers, as well as participants in the regime's political organizations, in parliament and as militia leaders in the LP—Salazarism presents us with some complex boundary cases. Nevertheless, despite the Portuguese example confirming the tendency towards the greater presence of 'politicians' in the institutionalization and consolidation phases of dictatorships, followed by a process of routinization that strengthened the technical-administrative elements, the governing elite during the 1930s was more one of technicians (40 per cent) than it was one of politicians (31 per cent).⁸⁶

These results, when compared with an analysis of other indicators of the ministerial elite's *cursus honorum*, clearly indicate the diminished presence of the truly political institutions of the regime as a central element for access to the government. However, it should be noted that even the 'politicians' were tightly woven into the university elite.

As a dictator, Franco's managerial style differed from that of Salazar: the Caudillo was much less concerned with the minutiae of day-to-day government.⁸⁷ A military officer with no desire to become bogged down in the day-to-day affairs of government, Franco concentrated his attentions on the armed forces, domestic security and foreign

policy. In the remaining areas of government, he practised 'a transfer of power to his ministers', although they remained subordinate to him.⁸⁸ With respect to the more technical areas of governance, particularly following the consolidation of the regime, Franco's interventions were even fewer as he adopted the more pragmatic attitude of result management.⁸⁹

Franco's ministerial elite was relatively young in political terms, and although a substantial number had been members of conservative and fascist organizations during the Second Republic, the regime's break from its predecessor was almost total.⁹⁰

The socio-professional composition of Franco's ministers also points towards a significant degree of social exclusiveness and the near hegemony of civil servants. A significant number of ministers were involved in the legal profession, with the university elite also being present in large numbers—although not on the same scale as in Portugal.⁹¹ Another divergence from the Portuguese dictatorship can be found in respect of ministers who were officers in the armed forces. While the military presence within the Portuguese regime had not completely disappeared with the consolidation of Salazarism—where it continued within institutions such as the censorship, the political police and the militia—the Spanish regime continued to count on a large number of military officers both in the single party and in the governing elite, with 41.2 per cent of all ministers having a military background (Table 9.1).

By classifying Franco's ministers as 'politicians', 'technicians' and 'military' we are presented with a significant swing towards the 'politicians', who accounted for more than 40 per cent of all ministers during this period, with the remainder fairly evenly split between 'technicians' and 'military'.⁹² This preponderance of politicians suggests the single party had an important presence within the political system and, in particular, in the composition of the ministerial elite. The promotion of the secretary of FET-JONS to ministerial rank was an immediate indication that this represented a formal means of access to the government. The co-option of FET-JONS' leaders into the ministerial and state elite was significant: during the period in question, FET-JONS was the principal recruiting ground for the government.⁹³ As one student of the Franco elite notes: 'before occupying a ministerial post during the first decade of the Franco regime, [the candidate] had occupied six positions within FET'.⁹⁴ The second main means of access, and the only route that did not require promotion through the single party (although it did not preclude it), was through the military. A third possible route was through

the bureaucracy, although it was ‘rare for anyone to become a minister as a result of an administrative career’.⁹⁵ When we analyse the ‘political families’ (Falangists, Catholics and monarchists) within the single party we see that, until 1944, the Falange had 66 per cent of the leadership positions under its control—dominating the party. The Catholics were the second largest ‘family’, followed by the military.⁹⁶ During this period, the number of leaders whose origins were within the Falange or the military outnumbered those of the Catholics.⁹⁷ As Pi-Suner notes, ‘The existence of a single party that was quite clearly subordinate was a notable counterweight’ to other means of access to the government during this period.⁹⁸

Despite FET-JONS’ origins in the enforced unification of several heterogeneous movements, the Falange managed to exert its supremacy and ensured its position as the dominant force within the new Francoist political elite. Tensions between the party and the state were infrequent and largely episodic, and the domination of the dictator-government axis was almost total.⁹⁹

Conclusions

As monocratic regimes, dictatorships have been characterized as being ‘a selectorate of one’: the dictator, whose patronage powers remained significant.¹⁰⁰ However, the different approaches towards the resolution of what Robert Paxton has called the ‘four-way struggle for dominance’ (between the leader, his party, the regular state functionaries and institutions like the Church, the army and elite interest groups), depends fundamentally on the dictator-single-party axis.¹⁰¹

The promotion of secretaries of the single parties to ministerial positions was an expression of the parties’ symbolic value as well as an important element of political control. Only Salazarism made no mention of any superiority in the relationship between the dictator-government before the party. Within Francoism, Italian Fascism and Nazism, the presence of these party secretaries signified both their increased legitimacy before the government and their pretensions of superiority, or at the very least their equality with their ‘technico-bureaucratic’ institutions and governmental components. Their presence also underlined the parties’ pretensions to be an exclusive route to ministerial office and to other senior positions within the state apparatus; however, the single party’s ability to become an institution capable of vetoing and subverting bureaucratic authoritarianism can be found at the roots of their diversity.

With respect to the recruitment methods and political composition of the ministerial elite within the four regimes the differences are clear. The NSDAP and PNF emerge as the only source of recruitment to the government in Germany and Italy, respectively. In each country, the governing elite was chosen from a reservoir of Fascist and Nazi leaders, with few concessions being made to other avenues for promotion following the consolidation of the respective regimes. This provided the PNF and the NSDAP with the legitimacy they required. Under Franco, FET-JONS remained the dominant element, although it was much more sensitive to the other institutions, particularly the armed forces and the Church. Salazarism, which had a single party with limited influence and access to the government—despite that being its main political function—is the dictatorship that most closely resembles ‘bureaucratic authoritarianism’. As Clement Moore notes:

The party cannot establish its legitimacy, it would seem, unless it acquires some autonomy as an instrument for recruiting top political leaders. Thus, dictators who attain power through other bases of support often have difficulties creating a party to legitimate their regimes.¹⁰²

Salazar created a party, but he gave it very limited functions. The Portuguese case appears thus to confirm Juan Linz’s assertion that when the single party is weak the opportunities to become a member of the governing elite are limited ‘without belonging to one of the senior branches of the administration’ or to one of the interest organizations, since the party is only a complementary guarantee.¹⁰³ Moreover, this is the generic tendency for all political systems: in fact, ‘when the parties and the private sector are weak, public and semi-public organizations become natural sources of recruitment’.¹⁰⁴

The dependence of the mobilizational political organizations, of the party or of the government and the ministries, constitutes yet another extremely interesting indicator as it highlights the important tensions existing within the dictatorships associated with fascism. In the case of the militias, their direct dependence on the German, Italian and Spanish dictators disguises a wide variety of situations. Once again, Salazarism made the LP dependent on the ministry of the interior and ensured it was always headed by a member of the armed forces. It was only under Nazism that the SS achieved significant autonomy from both the state apparatus and the armed forces. With respect to the organizations dedicated to mass socialization—the

various youth, worker, *dopolavoro* and womens' organizations—the tension between the government and the party was an important factor within Francoism, Fascism and Nazism, with the party winning important battles—although, as we have noted above, with significant variations.

The balance made above leads us to a critique of the typological rigidity that is based in party-state relations. In the dictatorships analysed here, the single party was never transformed into a dominant institution within the new regimes—not even in Nazi Germany. In the Portuguese case, not only was the government the locus of power—taking political decision-making authority for itself—but the single party had less influence either as a means of access to the government or as an instrument for controlling civil society.

Mussolini was very distrustful of the PNF for the simple reason that his leadership over it was much more fragile than Hitler's was over the NSDAP. Nevertheless, in Fascist Italy the Grand Council and the PNF succeeded in becoming important actors in the relocation of the government's political decision-making authority—something that did not happen in either Franco's Spain or Salazar's Portugal.

It is only in Nazi Germany that the most important relocation of decision-making power to the axis leader and autonomous politico-administrative organizations is visible. However, more than the domination of the party over the state, what is being seen is a radicalization scale characterized by the diminution of the government through the construction of parallel organizations and by the limited relocation of political decision-making power. In the German case, the party did not have any centralized decision-making structures 'and lacked a leading body which could replace the cabinet' that was always blocked by Hitler, who was subject to very few institutional constraints.¹⁰⁵

The most appropriate explanatory hypothesis for the variations in the composition of the ministerial elite, its importance in the political decision-making process and as a means of access to ministerial office within the dictatorships associated with fascism is the presence or absence of an independent fascist party during the period of transition to a dictatorial regime and, once the regime is institutionalized, within the single party. The greater and more exclusive the role of the dictator-party axis, the lesser is that of the ministerial elite in the political decision-making process. Also resulting from this is the reduction in the importance of the large administrative corps in the composition of the elite and the cabinet in the political decision-making process.

Notes

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10

Fascism, 'Licence' and Genocide: From the Chimera of Rebirth to the Authorization of Mass Murder

Aristotle Kallis

Fascism and 'eliminationism': Some preliminary conceptual observations

Is it a simple coincidence that the escalation, radicalization and extension of aggressive 'eliminationism' in interwar Europe unfolded in tandem with the rise and diffusion of fascism?¹ Nobody can deny that the most extreme case studies (i.e. Nazi genocide, persecution and elimination of Jewish and Romany communities across Axis-occupied Europe, annihilation of Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia, etc.) were authorized, supervised and executed by state authorities that displayed 'fascist' leanings, if not a fully fledged fascist physiognomy. Even the collaborationist regimes installed in the aftermath of invasion by Axis forces (e.g. in Croatia in 1941 and Hungary in 1944, etc.) depended on the support of indigenous ultra-nationalist elements that in most cases had already flirted with fascism in ideological and/or geopolitical terms. Together they often precipitated, fulfilled and even exceeded whatever demands were made by the Nazi authorities in the direction of eliminating Jews, Romanies and others.

Ideas and later policies pioneered by fascist movements and regimes (and, of course, particularly by Nazi Germany) proved lethally influential in interwar Europe, affecting both kindred ultra-nationalist movements in many countries and less radicalized sections of the right, including authoritarian dictatorships.² The latter have been loosely connected to the corpus of fascism through their designation as para-fascist—a term that denotes partial, incomplete or unsuccessful 'fascistization', and indicates a fundamental departure from traditional authoritarian practices in the more radical direction charted by fascism.³

Together with the more or less undisputed fascist cases they developed, popularized and legitimized discourses of aggressive nation-statism that openly flirted with elimination and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, were behind the implementation of extreme measures of physical elimination—either by their own devices or externally motivated by more powerful and resolute allies.

This ‘continuum of destruction’ that unfolded during the 1930s and reached its horrifying apex during the Second World War was driven or escalated by its disciples, and reached its most shocking climax inside the chimera of the Nazi new order (*Neuordnung*)—a geopolitical and military order headed by Nazi Germany, but encompassing the agency and support of fascist states, regimes and movements.⁴

A heuristic link between ‘eliminationism’ and interwar fascism is by no means unproblematic or uncontested. The path that may lead to the violent elimination of a particular ‘other’ passes through four stages punctuated by three forms of radicalization: first, awareness of difference and heterophobia (fear of ‘the other’);⁵ second, the charging of this heterophobia with notions of superiority-inferiority, danger (the notion of *Gefahr*) and conflict that renders the ‘other’ an allegedly desirable and legitimate target of an ‘eliminationist’ mindset; third, the shift to a strongly desired utopia of a ‘life without (particular) others’; and finally, the legitimization of an active policy of violent elimination that may lead to protracted murderous campaigns of cleansing (genocide).

Of these four stages, fascism may claim indirect and/or partial agency with regard to the third, and a more direct one with regard to the fourth; by contrast, its original contribution to the two first stages was at best limited and restricted to that of synthesis. No one can seriously argue that fascism alone identified ‘others’, that it pioneered ‘eliminationism’, that it concocted the shift to elimination or that it invented genocide. Generating a ‘potential for elimination’ depended on a series of factors—both generic and country-specific and long- and short-term. Such a process is both long-term and context-specific, reflecting specific and highly diverse trends in the history of any given group’s identity-building. Under no circumstances could such a short-lived chapter in the history of ideas and politics in Europe as fascism be as powerful and influential as to generate in itself the murderous wave of elimination that afflicted millions during the 1930s and early 1940s.

Furthermore, the desire of a ‘life without others’—the distinguishing feature of the third stage—had been a central part of the abstract vision of ethno-exclusive, pure and homogenous nationalism long before fascist movements and regimes unleashed it upon particular ‘others’ during

the 1930s and early 1940s. This vision was nurtured by extreme hyper-nationalist undercurrents that had already appeared on the fringes of the nationalist discourses of many European countries since the turn of the century, if not earlier—even if such trends had been sidelined by less radical and more moderate nationalist ideologies until the 1920s. It had also received a strong boost by racial-scientific theories about common descent and biological organicism that had undergone a process of nationalization during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Besides, these developments were not particular to a place, national group or, indeed, confined to a single historical period. They may even be considered as at least partly ahistorical.⁶

Heterophobia has always been a crucial component of identity-building, regardless of period or region. The us-versus-them mentality refers to a psychological need for negative self-determination that has proved so powerful in any form of identity-building process. As Carl Schmitt noted, enmity and conflict are inescapable features of human association and politics.⁷ Only liberalism, he argued, attempted to replace the nature state of ‘dissensus’ with one based on consensus and universality. Antagonism and enmity, scapegoating and guilt displacement, are inherent in political and social life, the ultimate goal of which is the construction of a meaningful ‘us’ and its juxtaposition to a particular ‘them’. Such mentalities—so central to the identification and targeting of the ‘other’, are essentially ahistorical and, for this reason, generic—not the exclusive preserve of particular ideologies, political systems or national traditions.

Finally, the transition to the fourth stage (towards a unilateral policy of aggressive elimination, potentially leading to genocide) occurred only in certain cases and not automatically under the auspices of every fascist or para-fascist regime. We should also not forget that one of the paradigmatic fascist movements and regimes—Italian Fascism—displayed a strikingly whimsical relation to ‘eliminationism’. While it had no qualms about embarking on such policies in its African colonial possessions (including a genocidal campaign in Libya from 1929 to 32), it resisted the trend towards anti-Semitism until 1936–7.⁸

Even when the Fascist regime began introducing ‘eliminationist’ legislation (against the Jews in 1938), the transition to elimination remained limited and half-hearted until 1943 when Mussolini was reinstalled in the north as little more than a German plenipotentiary.⁹ All this was happening at the same time as other ultra-nationalist authorities or groups—not all of which are considered (or indeed saw themselves as) indisputably fascist—had already embarked on a pandemonium

of 'eliminationist' measures against their particular 'other(s)', with or without external instigation.

How is it then possible to construct a meaningful link between 'eliminationism' and fascism in interwar Europe? Undoubtedly, the most extensive, horrific and devastating campaign of elimination was conceived and carried out by the Nazi regime and the German armed forces, starting with the occupation of Poland and reaching a veritable paroxysm in the eastern occupied territories after the invasion of the Soviet Union. Simply put, it is impossible to talk about 'eliminationism' in the 1930s and 1940s without acknowledging the centrality of Nazi agency—both ideological and political.

I will not delve deeper into the debate as to whether the Nazi regime should be considered fascist or whether race should be seen as part of fascism's definitional core. Objections to both are well-documented, as are fruitful attempts to accommodate them into the fascist experience.¹⁰ But even in this paradigmatic case, Nazi agency cannot be separated from wider historical conditions and trends evident in Germany and elsewhere long before the 'era of fascism'.¹¹

How then can the fascist agency be accommodated into this scheme if so much was determined by long-term historical or even ahistorical forces? My central point is that certain ideological and political facets of what we have come to associate with the concept of fascism did facilitate, unleash and radicalize the elimination of particular 'others' in the particular circumstances of interwar and Second World War Europe. Yet, this happened only where a certain potential for elimination against such particular 'others' already existed, be that in the form of cultural traditions, collective prejudices and/or recent memories. This was the absolute limit to fascist agency, whether ideological, political or both.

I am therefore suggesting three ways in which interwar fascism entered the process and made a crucial contribution to it. The first pertains to the long-term relevance of fascism to the evolution of nationalist debates and identity-building processes in each community. Almost all experts in the fray of fascist studies have identified nationalism as its most crucial component.¹² Fascism was both a crucial link in the long-term development of indigenous nationalism and a short-term radical articulation of its most extreme, ethno-exclusive tendencies.¹³ As such, it was both the heir to existing (usually extreme) national trends with their own prehistory, and a catalyst for their selective radicalization in an uncompromising and aggressive ethno-exclusive direction under fascism's own brand of 'paligenetic populist ultra-nationalism'.¹⁴

The second dimension of fascist agency rests on its short-term relevance to generic historical forces at play in Europe. The escalation of the 'nation-statism', of territorial utopias, of biological theories, as well as the aggravation of geopolitical relations, the anti-communist fear after 1918, the rise and demise of liberalism, the decentring effect of modernity, the perceptions of decay and national humiliation, were some crucial elements that shaped and motivated fascism's generic ideological message.¹⁵ These catalyzed crucial changes in nationalist discourses across the continent, nurturing and radicalizing the exclusionary lines *vis-à-vis* particular 'contestant others'. Fascism's appeal in the 1920s and 1930s had a lot to do with the successful translation of these generic ideas into specific narratives that were relevant to deep-seated beliefs and current fears in each national context.

Thus, fascism popularized and legitimized previously existing but marginal or marginalized extreme prescriptions of the most aggressive branches of indigenous nationalism. It capitalized exactly on the dynamics of recent developments, played on fears or suppressed aspirations and brought them to the forefront of the interwar political debate. It crucially helped decontest them, align them with seemingly positive results for its audience in-group and remove them from the context of cultural/moral/political caveats that appeared to question their propriety. Finally, it provided a psychological space where hatred could be entertained, nurtured and enacted. In so doing, it crucially enhanced the desirability of the prospect of a 'life without others'.

The third and final form of fascist agency refers again to legitimizing elimination, but on a far more concrete, radical and action-oriented basis. If generic fascist ideology gave intellectual ammunition, prominence and kudos to extreme utopias inherent in nation-statism, then Nazi Germany in particular provided a powerful model for the systematic elimination of the 'other(s)' on a comprehensive scale and in a lethally systematic, effective way.

It was in post-1933 Germany that aggressive ethno-exclusive utopias flirting with elimination merged with biological theories of heredity and dangerous immutability, enforcing a common message of total elimination and paving the way to systematic mass murder. Thus, Nazi Germany supplied the alibi and the broad blueprint for carrying out elimination across Europe, particularly after the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939.

By proposing elimination as nationally essential, biologically urgent, politically feasible and morally justified option, the Nazi regime forged

a direct link between fascism and elimination/genocide that many kindred movements and regimes across interwar Europe were eager to heed and act upon, even if they did not necessarily endorse all of the components, arguments or methods manifested in the Nazi case.

The extraordinary internationalization of fascism in the 1930s and 1940s—as an ideological force, political system, military alliance and, eventually, ‘new order’—integrated a plethora of parallel ‘eliminationist’ agencies and projects from across the continent into a single history-making crusade of pan-European regeneration under the aegis of Nazi Germany and the fascist alliance.¹⁶

‘Ideal nation-state’, ‘rebirth’ and redemptive ‘cleansing’

By the time fascism appeared in the intellectual and political scene of Europe nationalism it had not only become the most potent form of collective identification, it had also developed into a hybrid anthropological-territorial-political concept, spelling trouble for those excluded from the process of community identity-building. A nation was a symbolic community of people, whether real or imagined, whether unified or fragmented.

A nation-state, however, was a geopolitical structure that betrayed a chimeric ambition for national homogeneity, wholeness and full, decontested sovereignty. The history of the nation-state in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe was marked by the experience of frustrated ambition, unrealized utopias and incompleteness. As a response to the gap between vision and reality the ideology of ‘nation-statism’ consumed many such states, old and new, particularly during and after the First World War. The Europe of 1920 was a continent of fiercely competing but fragmented entities, of confused identities, of numerous ‘contestant enmities’ and of a strong yearning for a ‘new (national and European) beginning’.

‘Nation-statism’ was perhaps the most significant formative influence on fascist ideology. It bequeathed each national variant of fascism an extreme idealization of the nation, a totemic benchmark of success (independent, homogeneous national state) and a radicalized discourse of ‘otherness’ that resonated with the nation’s past and present.

But fascism also articulated a counter-utopia to both liberal and socialist visions—a third-way utopia hinging on the total rebirth of the nation itself.¹⁷ In fact, fascism escalated the meaning of ‘nation-statism’ by radicalizing the connotations of each of its two constituent parts. A fascist new man making up an ideal national community, reinvented

and cleansed from allegedly alien or harmful influences, would occupy the centre stage of his own national state.¹⁸ Fascist ideology sacralized the nation and saw the nation-state as the vessel for the full sovereign empowerment of the national community.¹⁹

This notion of unbound sovereignty presupposed a campaign of redemption that was external (concerning territory and 'redeeming' parts of the nation living elsewhere) and internal (reclaiming the nation and the state in its purest form of a homogenous, ideal national community in its exclusive state). Thus, for fascism, rebirth was not just a premise of vague, utopian regeneration, but also a process of recapturing an ideal condition of national purity and wholeness: vital, urgent and realisable.²⁰

Fascism was also at the receiving end of another formative influence. Since the nineteenth century, the conventional discourse of race had been recast in ways that affected the way in which European societies perceived both themselves and others. Taxonomies of human groups had a long ancestry, at least since late-medieval times, and received a crucial boost during the age of discoveries. European contact with exotic colonial 'others' in previously unknown parts of the world strengthened the belief in an alleged European and white superiority and often resulted in the treatment of the 'other' as an inherently inferior form of life (speciation).

This, in turn, appeared to authorize a different behaviour towards non-European people that was marked by domination, denigration and often extreme violence; violence deemed unsuitable for humans, but easily deployed against these allegedly subhuman forms of existence. As the spirit of the enlightenment strengthened the prestige of science and advanced empirical enquiries into the causes of this perceived difference, the gap between European and the colonial 'others' widened dramatically.²¹ Initially, these attempts at producing taxonomies of human groups did not make qualitative distinctions between Europeans themselves.

However, over the course of the nineteenth century, the rise of national antagonisms within Europe and the popularity of social Darwinist discourses (struggle for survival, survival of the fittest) penetrated the European scene and led to a fundamental reconceptualization of both race and nation in progressively permeable terms. Nationalism capitalized on race in order to produce a narrative of common national descent from a single largely immutable biological pool, and thus to justify a vicious defence of the latter's purity and wholeness against biologically alien 'others'.

The health of the nation became coterminous with an array of biological benchmarks: strength in numbers, defence from miscegenation, selective breeding with both incentives and disincentives, as well as an orchestrated assault on the causes of degeneration. Race offered nationalism a far more useful template of time and historic continuity for the nation, as well as a legitimizing principle that was allegedly scientific, objective and incontrovertible. As the years went by, it became more and more difficult to distinguish race from nation, as the former was becoming nationalized and the latter racialized. The result of this dual process was a hybrid concept that fused the two—what I have called the ‘racial nation’—rooted in heredity and macro-history, but crucially incarnated in the existence of the modern nation.²²

Thus, the nation-state assumed an array of further roles beyond that of being the sovereign political embodiment of the national community. It also became the vessel for its collective protection against degeneration, and the engine of its rebirth in the context of the eternal struggle against other similar (perceived as threatening and/or harmful) entities.

Fascism absorbed these influences, integrated them in its own vision of national palingenesis, and affirmed the absolute primacy of the (rigidly conceived) nation. As a radical, revolutionary form of ultranationalism, fascism placed the nation at the heart of its ideological universe. In the ‘Doctrine of Fascism’ Mussolini declared that:

[We] have created our myth. The myth is a faith, it is passion. It is not necessary that it shall be a reality. It is a reality by the fact that it is a good, a hope, a faith, that it is courage. Our myth is the Nation, our myth is the greatness of the Nation! And to this myth, to this grandeur that we wish to translate into a complete reality, we subordinate all the rest.²³

The quintessential mythical core of the nation was also the basis for a new political religion that promised a superior condition for the individual, the nation and mankind as a whole. The fascist concept of nation was, as Emilio Gentile defined it, a ‘homogenous organic community, hierarchically organized [...] with a bellicose mission to achieve grandeur, power and conquest with the ultimate aim of creating a new order and a new civilization’.²⁴

In this respect, fascist ideology did not so much pioneer a new ideal vision of national regeneration as synthesize an array of inherited utopian ideas into a revolutionary vision of total conquest and

domination, and of a landmark 'new beginning'.²⁵ Its religious character was manifested in its attempt to fully subsume individual and collective energy into the nation in a way that was considered axiomatic, unbending and intolerant of any alternatives.

Hitler emphasized the organic link between race, nation (*Volk*), and land (*Blüt und Boden*—blood and soil). For him, these three concepts formed the foundations of the ideological architecture of the National Socialist regenerative project. The *Volk* was indeed the external, historical manifestation of the race, embodying a mystical union between the biological, cultural, spiritual and territorial essence of the German people.²⁶

In France, the leader of the French Popular Party (PPF—Parti Populaire Français), Jacques Doriot, claimed 'our credo is *la patrie*'.²⁷ In Romania, the leader of the Iron Guard movement, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, identified the three main components of the Romanian nation as 'a physical/biological, a material (territorial) and a spiritual heritage', all of which had to be addressed equally in the context of the movement's regenerative project.²⁸ The goal, as Codreanu defined it, would be 'to build from the ground the new, ethno-national state', in which the spiritual regeneration of the Romanian nation could be pursued and fulfilled.²⁹

Ideologues of the Legionary movement, such as Nichifor Crainic, Mircea Eliade and Mihail Polihroniade, stressed the primary role of spiritual regeneration in their brand of nationalism, which was new in its total embrace of the 'Romanian way' and its rejection of previous Western models of nationalism.³⁰ The nation—indivisible, rooted in history, united in blood and territory under the aegis of the nation state—consumed fascists across interwar Europe. It became the basis for a new faith and the social-spiritual vessel through which the national revolution would create the fascist new man.³¹

The central notion of national rebirth entailed the regeneration of both the individual member of the national community and of the community as a whole in an eminently dialectical relation. The fascist new man would epitomize an 'anthropological revolution' that would generate the building blocks of the ideal future national community.³² This new man would embody all the allegedly superior national qualities, freed or cleansed from any form of harmful influence and totally subordinate to the highest creed: the nation.³³

It was this regenerated new man who would spearhead the rebirth of the nation and at the same time flourish into the reborn national community—the one was unintelligible without the other. The fascist

vision of regeneration often went a step further, envisioning the creation of a new universal order spearheaded by fascism. This involved the integration of the nation into some higher category ('Aryan race', 'Europe', 'West'), in which it would wage or even spearhead a much more fundamental battle against universal forces of degeneration.³⁴

One theorist of generic fascism included the belief in its messianic mission in his five-point definition of fascism.³⁵ Many interwar fascist movements propagated a peculiar 'Europeanism', linking their own task of national regeneration to a wider process of revival of national cultures across the continent.³⁶

The idea of mission was indeed central to the worldview of National Socialism—and Hitler personally. It was also evident in the attempts of the Italian Fascist regime to organize the Action Committees for the Universality of Rome network (CAUR—Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma) in the 1930s, or Mussolini's intention to create a fascist international in spite of the eventual failure of the project.³⁷ However, this missionary element can be found also beyond the two core fascist regimes.

The example of Vidkun Quisling in Norway encapsulated this dualism between the national and the universal mission of fascism. On the one hand, Quisling put forward a discourse of generic Nordic resurgence that would steer 'our civilization' clear from the asphyxiating destructive embrace of 'inferior races'. On the other hand, there was an emphasis on the mission of a new Norway in laying the foundations of a novel, revived, higher European order.³⁸ Similarly, the new Hungary—according to the leader of the fascist Arrow Cross, Ferenc Szálasi—would lead the process of revival of the Carpatho-Danubian people, but only under the guidance of the 'superior' Hungarian nation that had historically fulfilled a crucial cultural mediation between East and West.³⁹

In France, the fascist intellectual and politician Pierre Drieu La Rochelle embraced a peculiar vision of European federalism as an antidote to the perceived mediocrity of Soviet communism, American capitalism and of liberal parliamentarism on the national level.⁴⁰ In the early 1930s, a group of young intellectuals from the ranks of Action Française (Jeune Droite) subscribed fully to the notion of a pan-European 'civil war' of ideologies (communism versus fascism) and expressed themselves fully in favour of a revolutionary reordering of the continent on the basis of a fascist new order.⁴¹

Thus, the fascist vision of rebirth pointed to a particular kind of utopia linking the regenerated new man not just with the idea of collective

national superiority, but also with the notion of a broader new history-making beginning. The desired and intended outcome of this vision was the creation of an ideal national state, in which the ideal, reborn new man and the regenerated national community would flourish.⁴²

However, this fascist utopia of the ideal nation-state also had a strong redemptive hue. The organic unity of the national community presupposed both a revolutionary redefinition of the community's membership and the uncompromising exclusion of those deemed alien. The two processes were indeed complementary: exclusion of 'others' fostered the unifying power of integration and solidified the community, while at the same time strengthening the bonds of inclusion in the national community (e.g. through ideas of common blood, race, history, culture, etc.) and widening the gap between the community itself and those not belonging to it. The marginality of the 'other(s)' became more and more troublesome as the specific contours of nation, state and nation-state were drawn in increasingly rigid ways.

As nationalism became oriented towards independent statehood and turned into 'nation-statism', it acquired a particular territorial domain identified with the sovereignty of the nation-state itself. This 'nation-statism' sought to identify the nation with the state, its institutions, its territorial sphere and its resources. 'Others' had no place in this equation: they did not belong to the national community by virtue of descent and culture, but they were also unwanted interlopers in the physical space of the community itself. They had to be excluded from the national community not just in social, cultural and psychological terms, but also, ideally, from the physical and political living space of the nation. This national living space was perceived as the exclusive domain of national sovereignty and the (ideally) equally exclusive property of the national community.

The diffusion and popularity of racial theories from the nineteenth century onwards made a further crucial contribution to boundary-drawing. The racialized nation, tied together by bonds of common primeval descent and biological inheritance, was a supremely rigid, closed and exclusive collective organism. It combined the notion of organic unity with wholeness and purity. Its claim to superiority depended on the unimpeded fulfilment of its potential, and this in turn presupposed the defence of its health from potentially harmful influences.

Apart from traditional beliefs in the alleged inferiority or deviousness of particular external 'others' (e.g. Jews), any form of mixing received bad coverage from pseudo-scientific research as the primary factor of

national degeneration. Thus, national rebirth became entwined with an idealized vision of national community that rested on both organic wholeness and the physical absence of the 'other'.

Redeeming the national community was both an external and an internal process. The external aspect of redemption, associated with uniting the whole nation and accumulating its perceived historic territory, had a particular resonance in interwar Europe, especially after the redrawing of boundaries in 1919–20 had caused widespread feelings of 'intense and protracted national humiliation' or disaffection in many European countries.⁴³

The dispersal of national/ethnic minorities across many, usually neighbouring, states and their imposed exile from their political metropolis (the territorial and political nation-state) underlined the incompleteness of the nation-state in both population and territorial terms. As the soil and its inhabitants (current or historic) were bound with mystical ties, the creation of the ideal national community presupposed the integration of blood and soil into the national core. Thus, the territorial 'fatherland' was an integral part of the nation. In the interwar period, an array of different arguments—from legalistic revisionism to geopolitical theories of security to symbolic irredentism to cultic blood and soil *Lebensraum* utopias—converged on the notion of expanded, redeemed space as an integral part of a future regenerated nation and an ideal nation-state.⁴⁴

If the external redemption of the national community was inclusive and expansive, internal redemption was exclusive, aggressive and potentially destructive. External redemption was about uniting and creating the whole nation; internal redemption gravitated towards the idea of 'nothing but the nation' and the attainment of an ideal condition of homogeneity. At exactly this point, an extreme notion of purity and wholeness inherent in organic nationalism intersected with the biological metaphors of cleansing, gardening and healing. Rebirth became synonymous with a diagnosis of disease and a vision of collective healing that could involve cleansing as a redemptive process.⁴⁵

The more fascism spoke of the unqualified unity and purity of the (superior) national community, the more it embraced a utopian vision of holistic national integration (the nation, the whole nation and nothing but the nation) as the fundamental prerequisite of its ideal regenerative vision, and the more it accentuated difference and otherness. This had significant ramifications for the in-group as well as for its perceived 'others'. Not only did it justify an aggressive discourse of

superiority and domination *vis-à-vis* alleged external foes, but it further denigrated those internal ‘others’ who had been excluded from the national community. The latter were now more than ‘internal outsiders’ deprived of the privileged membership of the community: they were delegitimized and inferior ‘others’ threatening the very project of national rebirth. Therefore, internal redemption had a Janus-faced quality: on the one hand, it upheld the utopia of organic national unity that was much more than the sum of its individual parts, on the other, it could also point to the direction of aggressive cleansing against internal foes where they existed and had been identified as ‘contestant others’ of the national community.⁴⁶

The causal link that fascist ideology forged between the external and the internal aspects of redemption resonated with contemporary popular fears and ambitions. With the state embarking on a holistic vision of national self-fulfilment through the creation of an ideal and all-inclusive national state, tensions and contradictions between vision and reality became painfully exposed.

As fascist ideology stressed the historic right of the national community to be the sole, sovereign owner of the national state’s resources and destiny, the existence of separate ‘alien’ minorities within the national territorial core was increasingly perceived as anomalous and frustrating. Their physical existence in the national living-space constituted an unacceptable self-repudiation of the process of total national self-fulfilment. Their freedom would be coterminous with creating a ‘state within the state’—a prospect that contravened the logic of ethnocentric, integral nationalism that fascism embraced and pursued with unprecedented fanaticism.⁴⁷ It was then a combination of utopian ambition, hyper-nationalist obsession and insecurity/fear that defined and nurtured the fascist vision of an ideal nation-state. Fascism was instrumental in aligning the vision of extreme national solidarity with that of extreme redemptive action against ‘others’ that appeared to contest the nation.

The totality of the fascist vision for an ideal nation-state often involved the violent obliteration of space in which the ‘contestant other’ could meaningfully exist in territorial, political and (increasingly) biological terms. The redemptive aspect of fascist ideology constituted more than a mere rejection of voluntaristic and pluralistic models of inclusion, primarily associated with liberal values of citizenship. It was a revolutionary act of refusing to accept reality and of believing in the possibility of a new revolutionary internal order through a process of ‘creative destruction’.⁴⁸ In this new order norms of belonging would be

steadfast and anything deviating from them would have to be purged, cleansed or eliminated.⁴⁹ As Griffin noted:

Destruction of enemies is thus neither nihilistic nor inhuman, but an integral aspect of a permanent revolution. The principle which logically follows from the mythic premises of his world view is one of destroying to build, or what one fascist thinker has called 'creative nihilism'. The fascist transforms or (in the case of Nazism) surgically removes the 'unhealthy' elements of the nation so that it can be regenerated, prunes the national tree of its dead branches and excess foliage so that it can grow better, preserves at least his segment of humanity from the ravages of decadence and the threat of being swamped' by 'inferior' cultures and races so that civilization can be saved.⁵⁰

This gardening metaphor had developed its own impressive pedigree long before the rise of fascism, through theories based on eugenics, racial anthropology and racial hygiene.⁵¹

Fascism, however, went substantially further by conflating the various imageries of exclusion already developed in its national context. From the moment fascist ideology endorsed internal redemption in one form or another as a critical prerequisite of national rebirth, elimination became a conceivable alternative, far more attuned to the perception of the racial nation as a closed, objective community threatened by dilution and contamination. This was a synthesis that was achieved in its fullest form in the ideology of National Socialism, where national 'aliens', racial 'others' and carriers of 'bad genes' were pushed to the same negative space of cleansing, and where cultural difference, racial incompatibility and biological heredity were blended into a single imagery of life-or-death battle with the German/Aryan *Volk*.⁵²

Thus, while emphasis on cleansing was a necessary feature of the fascist ideological core, it did not belong to its regenerative utopia but was regarded as its ineluctable precondition for overcoming specific impediments. Rebirth was self-referential; cleansing was a device for forcefully opening the way for it, for preparing the individual and the community for the future ideal state and for allegedly ensuring an optimal framework for national regeneration. A target common to all fascist ideologies was political opponents—communist and socialist activists, left-wing and liberal parties and generally any dissident political and social force that appeared to fascists to contest their absolute claim to truth.

National and racial ‘others’ could form part of this contestation if they had already been identified as dangerous opponents or harmful influences. This was where cleansing could prefigure a genuine potential for elimination as part of fascism’s regenerative vision and become causally linked to it. This potential for the elimination of ‘others’ existed only in the much broader fascist matrix, as a possibility and a strategy that was one amongst many, but it could also become central to fascism’s ideological vision where particular national trends and developments pointed to a form of fundamental contestation of the national community by particular ‘others’.⁵³ It was those particular national conditions (long- and short-term), as well as fascism’s own capacity for fluent, resonant synthesis that rendered the transition from cleansing to elimination more intelligible, appealing and justifiable to interwar audiences.

Fascism sought to demonstrate that the existence of allegedly threatening ‘others’ inside the nation was not just a problem, but a fundamental cause of the problem and the main obstacle to an ideal future. Removing them was not just abstract wishful thinking pointing to a vague utopian state, but the key to the enhancement of national life in a tangible regenerative direction. Thus, fascism successfully mediated the distance between decline in the present tense and rebirth in the future, linking the two causally and presenting the project of rebirth as a concrete, intelligible course of collective redemptive action that included not just violent contestation but the desired utopia of the ‘absent other’.

Fascist ideology and violence

Thinking of ‘elimination’ as a particularly extreme scenario of internal redemption and cleansing, even in utopian terms, was, of course, very different from acting along those lines. Violence—and the violent elimination of human beings in particular—was, and continued to be, taboo. An array of disincentives, whether institutional, cultural or personal, maintained a gap between (desired) utopia and (feasible or justifiable) action.

Traditional ethical inhibitions continued to determine to a large extent what was desirable or at least defensible in moral terms for the majority of the population and the policy of the state. Legal norms, the threat of coercive penalties for unlawful behaviour and the fear of retaliation from minorities or their protectors rendered the mere option of aggressive eliminationist action practically inaccessible.

At the same time, the modern discourse of individual rights and pluralism had become much more pronounced in the post-Versailles

world of minority protection, of national self-determination and liberal guarantees. However grudgingly states and their citizens tolerated the existence of minorities in their midst, however strong cultural or racial prejudices were in some national contexts, however intense the desire for ethnic homogeneity and the hatred towards 'contestant others' was becoming, a series of deterrents kept the lid on the extreme possibilities inherent in radical nation-statism and racialism.

Nevertheless, once again core generic fascist values were crucial in helping legitimize aggressive and potentially violent forms of cleansing that could point to a veritable potential for elimination. Fascism put forward a generic framework of ideas and prescriptions that nurtured and radicalized one (in hindsight) crucial process: to accept cleansing as part of a utopian and highly attractive regenerative project of envisioning the ideal nation-state, even in the most extreme form of total physical elimination. It claimed that the defence and advancement of the national community constituted the compass of individual and collective action, regardless of the relative morality of the steps deemed necessary in the process. As a result, where a threat from the community's 'others' was perceived, hatred towards those 'others' was no longer a wicked vice but an increasingly legitimate duty derived from the very privilege of belonging to the community itself—a mobilizing myth central to the paramount goals of rebirth and greatness.

As a result, interwar fascism presented a novel language of violent hatred as an eminently legitimate discourse. The fascist discourse of violence has been discussed in a variety of conceptual frameworks. Theories of totalitarianism located the extreme use of violence, surveillance and coercive power in the novel circumstances of a perverted modernity. Total terror constituted a qualitative radicalization of previous models of dictatorship made possible through the concentration of full power by the modern state and by technological advances in the twentieth century.⁵⁴

Some saw the fascist discourse of violence in the context of fascism's self-perception as a political religion, aggressively intolerant of any challenge to the validity of its own vision. Violence thus served a self-referential function of real and symbolic transcendence in a legitimate trajectory that led to the revolutionary founding of a new holistic order.⁵⁵ The pioneering work of Emilio Gentile offered a fruitful synthesis of the two interpretations, recasting fascism as 'a sacralized form of totalitarianism, which legitimized violence in defence of the nation and regeneration of a fascist "new man"'.⁵⁶ Others pointed to the

connection between the European experience of deploying extraordinary violence in their colonial domains and the gradual import of such practices into the domain of intra-European conflict.⁵⁷

Recent work by scholars of fascist studies underlined the revolutionary core of fascist ideology and suggested an understanding of fascist violence as the inevitable convulsion marking the foundation of a 'new (revolutionary) order' (both domestically and internationally) through the 'creative destruction' of its predecessor—and of all forces that appeared to stand in the way of the new beginning.⁵⁸

Such fundamental fascist ideas produced a tendency towards legitimate violence that was regarded as an integral part of the 'history-making' fascist national and universal mission, but there was a further crucial link between the ideological propensity for violence and its actual discharge by the fascist movements/regimes. In a quasi-religious way that encapsulated Emilio Gentile's notion of 'political religion', fascism predicated its own utopian vision for an ideal, reborn nation-state on a combination of decontestation and uncompromising activism.⁵⁹ The former removed any doubt about the validity of the fascist vision, nurtured a fundamental intolerance towards any alternative and facilitated the discharge of violence against its opponents; the latter pointed to a specifically fascist resolve to take its vision at face value and promote it in its totality through constant activism.⁶⁰

In the fascist worldview, activism was not simply the vehicle for the implementation of ideas and programmes, it was also an ideological goal in itself, the political externalization of national *élan*—of the will to power and prominence—as well as the necessary precondition for the spiritual mobilization of the nation and the foundation of an ideal new order.⁶¹

The consequent unity of thought and action in the fascist worldview was a reflection of the equal significance given to both elements as complementing each other in serving the long-term aspirations of the nation. It was also a sign of fascism's determination not simply to mediate between the real and the utopian, but to use the latter as the sole guiding principle and benchmark of national rebirth, liberating action from conventional moral inhibitions and aligning it to the attainment of a supremely ethical collective goal.⁶²

The suggestion that the fascist use of violence may be construed as a supremely revolutionary device for the foundation of a new national and universal order has been extremely controversial and troubling to many. In hindsight, this kind of fascist violence was responsible not just for the genocidal campaigns of the early 1940s across

Nazi-occupied Europe, but also for the chilling 'bloodless' violence of the extermination camps in Poland.⁶³

Writing during the 1920s—before National Socialism's rise to prominence—the German philosopher Walter Benjamin posited the complexity of a situation in which there was a conflict between just ends and just means. By rejecting the conventional distinction between legal (that is, sanctioned by law and legitimately exercised by the state) and illicit violence, Benjamin attempted to delineate modes of violent action that were revolutionary and uncontaminated by law.⁶⁴ In describing the latter, Benjamin used a rather ambiguous term ('divine violence'), which he juxtaposed to the even more obscure alternative of 'mythic violence'.⁶⁵ His elucidation of 'divine violence' borrowed heavily from revolutionary left-wing sources, including the notion of general strike outlined by Georges Sorel.⁶⁶ (Interestingly, Sorel was also singled out by Sternhell as one of the central intellectual formative influences on fascist ideology and a crucial ingredient of his understanding of fascism as a 'dissident revision of Marxism'.⁶⁷) However, Benjamin's suggestion that 'divine violence' is essentially both revolutionary and expiatory, ethical and essential for creating a new order came intriguingly (and unintentionally) close to subsequent understandings of the fascist perception of violence as an experience of redemption and a form of fundamentally ethical conduct. This kind of violence—revolutionary and absolute—would free the regenerated new man from the weight of the past, demolish and purify before erecting the masterpiece of a new order.⁶⁸ Roger Griffin also underlined a revolutionary function of violence in the discourse of interwar fascist movements, whereby the individual transcends reality through destruction and self-sacrifice and seeks redemption in a different sphere of time and place.⁶⁹

The immediate, uncontaminated and (self-) redemptive violence constitutes a realm of unbound sovereignty. This sovereignty is both individual and collective, reaching its apotheosis in the right to either take life or give up one's own.⁷⁰ It is precisely here that the fascist unity of utopia and action intersected with the vision of the ideal nation-state.

The sacralized nation occupied its indisputably central position in the fascist worldview as the realm of uncontested, unbound sovereignty, where any means could be justified if it served the supreme cause of national rebirth. It was the collective, diachronic nation—rather than the individual member of the national community—that emerged as the ultimate embodiment of sovereign life in fascist ideology. The apotheosis of this belief can be found in the ideology of the Romanian Iron Guard, whose leader Codreanu stressed:

The Legionary [member of the movement] [...] will be sent into the world: to live, in order to learn how to behave properly; to fight, in order to learn how to be brave and strong; [...] to suffer, in order to steel himself; to sacrifice, in order to get used to transcending his own person in the service of his people.⁷¹

The reborn fascist new man operated in a constant 'state of exception', not simply beyond law but in a history-making moment that redefined law and morality.⁷² Recourse to violence and death—whether of others or of the self—was no longer unjust since it was the manifestation of the boundless, total sovereignty of the nation to which every individual had subsumed their existence. The internal aspect of fascist violence—a formative experience in itself for the *uomo fascista* (fascist man)—would also prepare the individual for the perennial fight for the rebirth of the nation and for the legitimation of the external use of violence against 'others'. The discrepancy between the just goal of national rebirth and the putative unjust violent conduct would thus be resolved and reconciled within a wholly new revolutionary morality.

The limitless sovereignty of the fascist nation was externally hostile and would find its apotheosis in total conflict and death. It legitimized and glorified access to the negative space of otherness by using a redemptive vocabulary of exclusive wholeness and a utopia of ideal collective existence (in our case, the ideal nation-state) predicated on the absence of the 'other'. The exercise of this superlative form of sovereignty presupposed both the 'oneiric exaltation' of this utopia and recourse to the prerogative of sovereign violence.⁷³ This prospect constituted a crucial component of the fascist vision of continuous creative destruction as a revolutionary process of liberation from the political, moral, cultural and social constraints of tradition. It is no coincidence that the taboo of violence and death—whether inflicted on opponents and foes or experienced by the self—was deliberately breached from a very early stage through the collective action of the fascist paramilitary formations (Italian *squadristi*, German SA, Romanian Legionaries etc.).

Such organizations provided the first experience of what Susan Sontag called 'ecstatic communal belonging'.⁷⁴ Their members defied conventional law, transcended moral and cultural inhibitions, engaged in patterns of psychological and political experience that were traditionally inaccessible or ethically troublesome. From the first moment, the fascist paramilitary squads empowered themselves (and were subsequently empowered by their leaders) with a form of permission to think and act in ways that transcended the conventional realm of

morality and conduct. This permission was liberating for the members of the movement and open-ended enough to place them in a vortex of continuous radicalization that suited the fascist belief in permanent revolution,⁷⁵ but it was at the same time an open exhortation to the rest of the national community to fathom the new possibilities created by fascist activism and thus tease the traditional boundaries of moral behaviour.

As a liberating precedent, it sanctioned a radical psychological architecture of conflict and hatred against 'others', and rehearsed the prospect of a total form of collective sovereignty predicated on the promise of national rebirth.⁷⁶

Fascism as 'licence'

Nevertheless, every form of violence against fellow human beings is a problematic proposition for the overwhelming majority of people. With the exception of small minorities of individuals who are either morally indifferent to violence or categorically opposed to it, whatever the circumstances, the rest of the population operates in a context of 'cognitive dissonance'.⁷⁷

This state of mind is determined by fundamental conflicts between what is psychologically desirable, practically feasible, pragmatically expedient and morally justifiable. Violence against 'contestant others' may be (or may have become, depending on the circumstances) desirable to a number of people. Yet, the desirability of a life without others is usually offset by the much more profound notion of moral inadmissibility of the violent action per se, by a belief that such a prospect is impossible, by a fear of the consequences of such an action or by a combination of all these concerns.

With regard to the desirability of a violent encounter with 'others', nationalism, nation-statism and racialism had already made a significant contribution, accentuating the psychological distance between the national community and its particular 'others', often dehumanizing or delegitimizing them and fermenting negative passion against them.⁷⁸ An act of physical elimination, however, requires much more than the mere desirability of violence or its outcomes. It is not just linked to a result but also to the action itself that involves a particular repugnant (violent) method. Therefore, authorization of violence and participation in its discharge require a negotiation of the state of cognitive dissonance, whereby desirability and expediency outweigh (even marginally or in *ad hoc* circumstances) the moral, legal and political impediments

to violence or trivialize the problematic nature of the means used to achieve the desired goal.

The leap from abstract intention or desire to strong targeted passion and finally to concrete violent action presupposes a convincing resolution of the inner personal tension underpinning the state of cognitive dissonance. For genocide to take place, and for ordinary individuals to become active participants, this dissonance has to be first escalated by rendering the option of elimination more desirable or accessible. Then it has to be resolved one way or another by making the individual feel their actions are broadly consistent with their overall worldview. Cognitive dissonance may result either in the abandonment of the proposed action as irreconcilable with one's ethical outlook or in the endorsement of the action through a process of changing the parameters of the dissonance itself—by endorsing new definitions of what is acceptable in the given circumstances, by 'relativizing' the problematic nature of the action in the light of expected outcomes or by altogether evading the dissonant mindset.

Cognitive dissonance, therefore, revolves around a tension between three main considerations: the psychological desirability, practical feasibility and moral admissibility of the action. As mentioned earlier, only a very small minority of people do not experience such tensions—either because they axiomatically reject any form of violence or because they do not see violence itself as problematic.

The majority usually find themselves pulled in different directions by each of these three considerations. They may distrust, fear or even despise 'others', but have fatalistically accepted the condition of coexistence, unable to conceive of a different scenario. They may long for a life without particular (or all) 'others', but perceive this condition as utopian, choosing instead to adapt to the awkward realities of living side by side. Alternatively, they may strongly desire the prospect of somehow ridding themselves of 'others', but nevertheless refrain from any violent action against them, either because they fear sanctions/reprisals or because they consider this course of action inadmissible in spite of the ostensible desirability of its effects.

In negotiating such tensions, the notion of external, authoritative licence is crucial in turning dissonance from an impediment into an incentive to unbound freedom of passion, behaviour and action. Licence is not a positive, normative freedom to act, but an 'authorized transgression', a special dispensation that creates a new, temporary and exceptional domain of diminished accountability. Its element of permissibility refers to particular circumstances of time and space, as well

as goals and limits. Every licence redefines what is permissible in an expanded way, but it does not do so irreversibly or without caveats—conventional or new. Every new domain of licence constitutes a new moral order that is synonymous with the removal of sanctions and of accountability.

Whether authorized from above or claimed spontaneously in the absence of authority, licence makes sense only because of the awareness of the taboo nature of what it entails. However, its nature, scope and targets are determined by the authorization or by the circumstances that generated it. Like violence, it is not blind but is linked to predispositions and specific opportunities—there and then. As a form of special dispensation—exceptional in its devices, goals and particular targets—licence involved the conditional suspension of those hindrances that usually kept the exercise of sovereign violence at bay and prevented full decontestation. By removing, cancelling out or weakening constraints, it enables individuals and groups to accept the desirability of a violent scenario—even if the latter contradicts generic cultural understandings of defensible or just behaviour.

Licence may facilitate the acceptance of a particular course of violent action against a particular 'other' in a particular setting by strengthening the scenario's relative desirability and/or by reducing the force of inhibiting factors and, little by little, through precedent and repetition, it may also redefine the moral universe of an individual or community by rendering previously taboo feelings and actions less troubling and more admissible. Thus, licence can be both an *ad hoc* dispensation and a long-term strategy for preparing a group for a new form of moral conduct they would previously consider unacceptable or problematic.

Historically, societies became accustomed to specific forms of authorized 'legitimate' violence (e.g. war, police, prison and institutional punishment in general) to the point that the latter became institutionalized and the violence derived from it came to be seen as legitimate. Similarly, while violence against humans has remained taboo in modern societies, such a tenet coexisted with exceptionally violent behaviours towards groups of people who were considered inferior and almost subhuman. In the modern world, the taboo-proscribed nature of intra-human violence was greatly enhanced, yet exceptions of licence—whether normative or *ad hoc*, legitimate or arbitrary—remained, albeit becoming more and more troublesome and scrutinized.

State laws in the form of both principles and sanctions attempted to regulate violence by effectively monopolizing it and then controlling the delegation of the licence to commit it. Even in the realm of

war, where most conventional legal and moral standards of human behaviour are suspended, during the last two centuries international law has endeavoured to mitigate the seemingly unconditional licence of the combatants to kill their enemy.

In the context of eliminationist violence, however, we are talking about an exceptional form of licence that goes well beyond the established limits of legitimate violence. This licence creates a new space liberated from conventional restrictions and caveats, where the will of the individual or the community may be exercised in full, uncontested sovereignty. Licence seeps through levels of authority, flows through channels of command and empowerment, and travels fast, nurtured by initiative, precedent and opportunity. It is precisely this licence, where it is extended or becomes freely accessible, that renders the violent action possible and likely, by creating a general milieu of extraordinary, extreme permissiveness and by generating instances when this licence shapes, legitimizes and helps unleash concrete violent actions.

Licence is thus the critical facilitator of violence. Its effect is cumulative, as every new act of violence tests the limits of permissibility and often defines new, even more extreme, spaces of impunity. Facilitation of violence results not just in acts of elimination, but also in further, more extreme possibilities and new, expanded domains of permissibility. Each 'moment of licence' breeds new ones, as licence expands, mutates and deepens. The resulting violence is still anything but blind; it has a specific target group, a mandate and a particular horizon of anticipation. Yet, within this context, licence develops its own momentum, often uncontrollable and radicalizing, that breeds more and more brutal and extensive violence. It takes strong moral courage to resist the temptation of this licence and stand still in the face of authority, pressure for conformity or hierarchical duty: it takes even more actively to resist it.

Licence can take different forms: a direct order from a source of authority relieving individuals from their responsibility or accountability, an indirect exhortation for action with the promise of impunity or reward, a powerful and legitimizing precedent, conformity to a kind of behaviour already displayed by others, overriding considerations of common interest, security or self-defence—regardless of how justifiable or real they may be—or even withdrawal of any form of authority and process of accountability. Yet this is only the final form of licence, geared towards violent action against a specific 'other'. Its power and devastating potential is conditional upon the kind of long-term cultural and psychological preparation that tests boundaries and provides a space for

the psychological enactment of the fully sovereign nation, with what this may entail.

The 'other' must be established in the collective consciousness of the community as a 'contestant enemy' over a period of time. Abstract stereotypes and prejudices can only maintain their power if they are fuelled continuously by fresh cues of alleged culpability and danger. But, more importantly, this specific 'other' must have been subjected to a process of delegitimation in the eyes of a given community.

Delegitimation involves a degree of dehumanization—by either denying any worth to the group of 'others' or by ascribing to them extraordinary qualities rendering them lethally dangerous to the community. Before the dispensation to deploy violence against a target came the 'licence to hate', to exile, to deny intimacy—or even humanity—altogether. It is precisely this form of licence—to think of the mere existence of the 'other' as problematic, dangerous or harmful—that increases the desirability and moral permissibility of violent, eliminationist action against them. It was this licence that fascist ideology made available: first to its own adherents and then to the entire national community.

What I am proposing here is an analysis of eliminationist/genocidal violence as the cumulative—but conditional—result of two different licences: on the one hand, a long-term licence to hate a particular out-group and desire its elimination, on the other, a short-term licence to kill that authorizes the in-group to adopt violent practices of elimination against this very particular 'other' by suspending individual accountability and by overriding inhibiting factors. The importance of licence in the continuum of radicalization that leads from heterophobia to 'contestant otherness', to hatred and sustained violence, lies in the fact all the above conditions and processes are de facto dissonant with allegedly universal principles of human civilization and conventional morality. Thus, the stages of radicalization of attitudes leading to genocide presuppose a renegotiation and resolution (however ephemeral or even temporary) of cognitive dissonance.

The role of ideology in this continuum of radicalization is crucial. Ideology is a central component of the licence to hate as well as a decisive step in generating the licence to kill.

The first step in that direction was the extension of a licence to hate and contemplate a future without 'others' as both part and precondition of a positive regenerative ideal condition. In creating a psychological space in which the removal of the 'other' could be conceptualized and enacted as a highly desirable and legitimate expression of national

sovereignty without the burden of moral accountability, fascism tampered with the consciousness and reflexes of interwar societies. Before it came to authorize and implement policies to that effect, the taboo had already been breached on the psychological level. What had previously been perceived as a utopia that, however desirable, remained beyond moral and practical reach, had become intelligible and fathomable—a genuine and psychologically potent legitimate discourse of the wider vision of national survival and regeneration.

The fascist revolutionary vision of a new national order was conceived on the basis of total decontestation that precluded any form of accommodation with the forces that appeared to oppose or contradict it. The trajectory from desiring a homogenous and cleansed national community to endorsing violent scenarios of physical elimination was also facilitated by the particular fascist approach to violence, as both a formative regenerative experience and the expression of an ideal condition of national sovereignty.

Violence, then, was the vehicle that led from rebirth to aggressive cleansing and potential elimination, all in the context of a legitimate utopia for the nation. Given its taboo nature, this kind of redemptive creative violence was predicated on a psychological dispensation depriving particular ‘others’ from a place in the moral universe of the community and legitimizing the prospect of their elimination from its living space.

From the ‘licence to hate’ to the ‘licence to kill’: The Nazi regime, fascist agencies and genocide

In discussing the mechanisms of licence that transformed the desire to live without ‘others’ in a regenerated ideal-nation state into a psychological incentive for violent action against them, one is confronted with the exceptional agency of the German Nazi regime.

The role of Nazi agency in spearheading a campaign of wholesale murderous cleansing within the Reich and—after September 1939—across Nazi-occupied Europe, cannot possibly be exaggerated. The Nazi regime gradually emerged as the ultimate manifestation of the fascist regenerative vision, eclipsing Mussolini’s Fascist Italy and gradually emerging as the most influential template for what an allegedly ideal, fully sovereign national community involved across the authoritarian and fascist half of Europe.⁷⁹

The perception of uniqueness related to the uncompromising ambition and scope of its vision, to its extreme totalitarian political

framework, to the peerless fanaticism with which it sought to turn utopia into reality and to the brutal devices it employed to that effect. For the Nazi regime was not just more extreme in its ideological synthesis between national-racial rebirth and cleansing, it was more unscrupulous and fanatical in its praxis.

The air of permissibility generated by the extreme Nazi ideological discourses of cleansing, as well as by the political commitment of the Nazi regimes to them during the 1930s, had a crucial effect on other fascist discourses of otherness. By providing an extreme and authoritative template and precedent, National Socialism functioned (more unwittingly than consciously) as a catalyst of fascist radicalism beyond the boundaries of Germany. Through its radical initiatives it supplied an empowering licence to act, a blueprint for such action and a legitimizing precedent for both.

More and more fascist movements and ideologically kindred regimes looked to Berlin for inspiration and invoked Nazi Germany as the cradle of a revolution that would lead to a new order across the continent. Without this radicalizing and legitimizing agency, it would be so hard to imagine the parallel escalation of so many (fascist/ultra-nationalist) discourses against different national 'others' during the 1930s and 1940s, let alone the systematic campaign of genocide itself during the Second World War.⁸⁰ Furthermore, of all variants of fascism only National Socialism displayed an obsessive interest in the ultra-modern pseudoscience of race, even if the ideology of the Nazi party perceived *Rasse* and *Volk* in almost interchangeable or complementary terms.⁸¹

With Hitler's appointment as chancellor in January 1933, two totalitarian visions came together under the auspices of the Nazi regime: one political and mystical, steeped in theories of Aryan superiority for the German *Volk*, the other scientific and concerned with the biological regeneration of the *Volk* through both positive and negative (cleansing) measures. The fusion of the two visions became possible on the basis of fully empowering the nation-state with regard to all matters of life and death, cancelling distinctions between individual and community, between private and public spheres, between science, state and religion.

Both visions promised, in different ways, to deliver the totemic utopia of an ideal national community in an ideal nation-state. Their devices and prescriptions may have been very different but from the point of view of Hitler and the numerous scientists who hastened to congratulate him enthusiastically in 1933 and who worked seamlessly with the Nazi regime until the very end they were also complimentary. Through the alliance between extreme nation-statism and biological racism, between

cultic and scientific variants of totalitarianism, a genuine bio-political experiment began in 1930s Germany that spearheaded a revolutionary, total assault on every form of decadence under the aegis of the Nazi regime: first within Germany then, after 1939, across Europe.

The licence to kill became identified with Nazi Germany in what the Nazis themselves—and the historiography of the Holocaust—have referred to as the ‘final solution’ (*Endloesung*). Starting with the invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the creation of the monstrous laboratory of genocide that the General Government was, it was gradually exported to all areas occupied by Nazi forces: first in the east in the wake of Operation Barbarossa, then in the occupied western territories. The primary target of this cleansing crusade was the Jewish community. However, other allegedly detrimental racial-anthropological categories, such as the Sinti, the Roma, the Poles and the Slavs, all fell prey to the Nazi vision of a revolutionary pan-European new order. In the areas they directly occupied, Nazi forces unleashed the most devastating campaign of genocide—arresting, ‘evacuating’, ghettoizing and directly murdering millions of people—overwhelmingly, but not exclusively, Jews.

Through their own direct agency the Nazis demolished any sense of civic order, subverted fragile social relations, offered incentives to violence and removed the burden of legal accountability. Through their ideas and actions they reconfigured the moral landscape and produced a revolutionary new ethical order based on the vocabulary of an allegedly justifiable, historically urgent and creative violence. They manipulated deep-seated prejudices and recent anxieties in order to induce a radicalization of popular attitudes against specific ‘others’, but they also hastened to make clear that certain types of eliminationist violence against specific groups were highly desirable and would be unpunished or even rewarded. In so doing, they increased the desirability, expediency and feasibility of violent action, while simultaneously critically undermining the validity of moral inhibitions to the prospect of physically murdering ‘others’. They removed legal sanctions and went even further by offering tangible material or status incentives. They led by example, but also facilitated the rallying of local authorities and of ordinary people to their cleansing project.

However, there was a further and infinitely more insidious implication relating to the diffusion of fascism in interwar Europe and to the emerging sense of a common fascist mission. The power of precedent became an even more lethal and open-ended licence to eliminate that had a cumulative radicalizing effect on fascist and ultra-nationalist discourses across the continent. Ideas articulated by one fascist movement

would infuse the discourses of other kindred parties or groups in more countries.

A legal measure against a particular group of 'others' in one country would facilitate the adoption of similar, or even more aggressive, measures against the same or another group in another country. A pogrom here appeared to legitimize a similar violent action somewhere else; in fact, sometimes fascists in one country used the precedent from an earlier development somewhere else to justify their own violent exhortations or actions.

The delegitimization of a group in one country would not only contribute to the further delegitimization of that group elsewhere, but also lent further validity to the violent discourses of 'rebirth-through-cleansing' elsewhere, against different 'others', in diverse forms but to a similar effect. By 1938–9, many Jewish communities in Central, Southern and Eastern Europe were in a state of deadly siege, persecuted by fascist or para-fascist authorities, terrorized by fascist squads and killed or injured in sporadic pogroms under the benevolent gaze of the local authorities. Fascists and their allies took this licence a crucial stage further, by actively sanctioning violence and inciting brutal purges—often spearheading the process of cleansing or indirectly inciting and legitimizing it. This was a very different and far more lethal licence—not a psychological licence to hate, but a veritable licence to kill.

In this respect, the Nazi case is both paradigmatic and extreme in the totality of its cleansing vision, in the violence deployed and in the scope of its political action. However, this observation should not be reduced to a debate of exceptionalism and alleged uniqueness. The weakness of scientific and political support for extreme bio-political measures outside Germany is indeed striking, as was the holistic, limitless scope of bio-political intervention experienced under National Socialist rule. It was in Nazi Germany that a unique combination of factors occurred. It was there that the disorienting effects of high modernity—the violent reaction to the disintegration of the cosmic order that it bred, the sense of a loss of meaning and direction in which individual and collective existence could be anchored—and an explosive surplus of discordant energies that it had hosted pointed to the direction of a revolutionary decentring of history.⁸²

It was there and then that a volatile combination of high modernization and uneven liberalization created a series of imbalances, unleashing unfathomable potentials and weakening social reflexes.⁸³ However, in hindsight neither the extremity of the envisaged solutions nor the weakness of their various counterbalances was particular to

(or particularly acute in) interwar Germany. What was particular was their lethal coincidence under the authority of a regime transfixed by the prospect of fully realizing the bio-political totalitarian potential, shattering safeguards and smashing any opposition voice or alternative vision.⁸⁴

Not only did race become the signifier of national rebirth, but this very notion of race was all-pervasive and embracing. The Nazi regime imbued its ultra-nationalist discourse with an array of different understandings of race—some of which were rooted in traditional anthropological prejudice, others derived from an ultra-modern vernacular of scientism. In so doing, it articulated the most radical and far-reaching vision of racial cleansing as precondition for national and then European regeneration. It also provided a tangible expression of total national sovereignty and took the notion of serving the alleged national interest to an extreme and previously unfathomable terrain of mass violence. Even at the stage during which the Nazi regime was not interested in developments outside its borders, the radicalism of its racialist policies functioned as a licence to think and act in similar ways outside Germany. With the outbreak of the Second World War this licence became more tangible, as the Nazi/fascist new order assumed the characteristics of a new European imperial structure.

More than being simply a legitimate discourse, the licence to kill became an unfolding model of practical policy-making, the uncontested building block of a new order and a paradigm for dealing with allegedly troublesome 'others' across the board. As such, it continued its own trajectory of radicalization and functioned as a legitimizing precedent for many inside the fascist bloc and beyond.

However, the licence to kill did not emanate only from direct Nazi agency: individuals in all areas of the Nazi new order made choices, with many participating in diverse forms and to varying degrees in the project of elimination in their localities—often with little, indirect or no Nazi involvement. A significant number (though different in every country or region) joined formal networks of collaborationism and were involved as formal agents in the discharge of eliminationist violence against 'others'. Some even engaged in extreme acts, well beyond what was expected of them by the occupying authorities. Others started as passive bystanders but were increasingly emboldened or desensitized by the enactment of violence around them to the point that they seized the licence themselves and participated *ad hoc* in a grotesque carnival of violence. In all these very different settings the licence was all-pervasive, open-ended and readily available.

Apart from rendering eliminationist violence legally and politically permissible or tolerable, the sense of licence that Nazi Germany came to epitomize in the eyes of its fellow travellers and ordinary people was of crucial significance in terms of gradually lowering the threshold of the moral acceptability of physical elimination. It involved a fundamental reframing of the individual's moral landscape, a reassessment of means and ends by political groups or institutions and a crucial sense of international historic crusade for a different new geopolitical, territorial and social order. States and other social institutions, local authorities, groups and individuals from among the population all participated in the discharge of violence in order to fulfil their own utopias, satisfy their particular aspirations or vent their most extreme passions against 'others'.

Even before Nazi Germany had marched into a state, even before Nazi authorities had occupied and reorganized political and legal structures to replace the previous status quo, it was clear to populations at the time what National Socialism stood for with regard to certain minority groups and what the victory of Nazi Germany meant for them. One did not need to know the minutiae of the Nazi legislation in the Third Reich or the nature of the eliminationist experiments undertaken in the General Government after the autumn of 1939 to be convinced that the extension of the military conflict into other parts of Europe also meant the export of the racial war—primarily against the Jews. This conviction was a form of licence in itself that did not require any Nazi presence to be enacted.

The combination of this widespread belief, of long- and short-term prejudice and of the breakdown of order caused by total war provided the first space for the realization of eliminationist violence. What is more, this first impression of a Nazi licence to kill related as much to the permissibility of violent elimination per se as to the prospect of eliminating specific 'others'. If the Nazis had singled out particular groups this was an incentive to act against these as well as others depending on local and regional conditions. Thus, alongside Jews and Romanies, other racial-anthropological and ethnic groups were caught in the net of this licence: Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), Ukrainians, Poles and Russians in the east, and so on.⁸⁵

By the time the Nazi authorities had moved in and restored some form of order amid the chaos caused by military invasion, the responsibility for cleansing operations swiftly came under their full control. With the formal dissolution of local groups and the streamlining of operations, the licence became more organically linked to the Nazi authorities. Local

actions became part of a much wider project of elimination in the newly occupied territories that was far more centralized and coordinated by the occupiers.

Undoubtedly, there were very real psychological pressures to comply, to emulate and even to outperform the occupiers. Conformity, fear of possible reprisals for non-cooperation, desire for recognition and elevation of status or even a longing for safety and material betterment occupied the middle ground between coercion by the German occupying authorities and enthusiastic agreement with the Nazi vision.

Yet, in most cases, the licence was accessible voluntarily and not imposed. Individual ordinary perpetrators seized this very licence for themselves—not under direct pressure, but under an illusion of omnipotence, permissibility and unaccountability—‘as a self-actualizing act [...] and a new identity of control’.⁸⁶ They appropriated it willingly and interpreted it according to their own particular desires and anxieties. In so doing, they inserted themselves in the Nazi new order and became willing agents of the Nazi history-making project.

In addition to localized agencies of ordinary people and local authorities, most fascist/collaborationist regimes engaged in a pandemonium of violence against their own ‘others’. Their legal measures of the 1930s turned into violent campaigns in the early 1940s. Governments took the initiative on many occasions: arresting, deporting and handing over to the Nazi authorities or directly killing Jews, sometimes Sinti/Roma and, in the case of independent (post-1941) Croatia, Serbs.

Many leaders claimed after the war they acted under duress from the Nazi regime or tried to maintain a semblance of collaboration with the Nazis in order to avoid the far worse fate of annexation by Nazi Germany. However, there is ample evidence to show most of them collaborated of their own accord, exceeded any Nazi demands (at least initially) or acted regardless of any Nazi plan or direct pressure. In fact, in their relations with other fascist or ‘fascitized’ regimes, the Nazi authorities initially displayed considerable restraint, keeping up appearances with regard to state sovereignty and refraining from using pressure—even when some collaborationist regimes refused to cooperate beyond a certain point (e.g. Bulgaria and Romania after 1942).

This strategy was very effective, allowing the national governments to claim a licence for themselves by emulating and adapting the Nazi precedent, but often also going beyond it. They aligned their particular eliminationist designs with the pan-European reorganization of territories and populations carried out by the Nazi regime, they adapted and used a series of devices tested in the Third Reich (laws, coercive

policies) against their own victims and they borrowed arguments, propaganda slogans and alibis from the Nazis. By the time some of them had second thoughts it was too late to extricate themselves from the order itself without penalty. This was also the time the Nazis decided to harden their attitude by compelling their erstwhile free agents to comply with much steeper eliminationist tasks: on some occasions even going as far as using violence against them (e.g. Hungary in 1944). But the most critical processes of escalation of the project of elimination were initiated and carried through by willing institutional, collective and individual agents across Europe. Through these regimes and state institutions, the licence to eliminate was often delegated to local organizations and to the public—again in the form of indirect incitement to violence, indifference to aggressive persecution or a conscious decision not to intervene.

Finally, there were fascist (or ‘fascitized’) movements across Europe that perceived themselves as agents of the wider Nazi project. Among all forms of collaboration these movements came to epitomize a model of collaborationism that was ideology-driven, fanatical and almost unconditional. They acted as fifth columns in their own countries where their respective governments proved less amenable to the logic of the Nazi cleansing campaign. They also became the most willing collaborators of the Nazi new order when these areas were directly occupied or ‘coordinated’ into the Nazi sphere during the Second World War. Their role in inciting violence against ‘others’ among the local population, in assisting the Nazi authorities in their murderous tasks, in instigating pogroms and in making all sorts of eliminationist measures possible cannot possibly be exaggerated.

Ironically, many of these fascist movements were treated with distrust or disdain by the Nazi authorities. This explains why movements such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), the Flemish National Union (VNV—Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond) and the Rex in Belgium, the Arrow Cross in Hungary, the Iron Guard in Romania, the Perkonkrusts in Latvia, the Iron Wolves in Lithuania and the so-called ‘Paris collaborators’ in France were largely marginalized by the Nazis in favour of apparently more dependable (even if sometimes less fascist) alternatives.

However, their agency was crucial where it most mattered: in the campaign of removing undesired ‘others’ with ruthless efficiency and brutality. Their members joined voluntary police formations in large numbers and formed semi-autonomous action squads. Many among them became genuine ‘soldiers of international fascism’, fighting

alongside the Nazis in the East and West until the very end.⁸⁷ When, towards the end of the war, the Nazis became increasingly frustrated with the pace of cleansing in a number of allied or occupied countries, their leaders were deployed by the Nazis as an alternative solution in order to strengthen collaboration and expedite the elimination of unwanted ‘others’.

Therefore, the various genocidal projects that unfolded in Europe during the Second World War encompassed a wide range of agencies and synergies between the Nazi authorities, ideologically kindred or aligned states, fascist or ‘fascitized’ movements and local populations.

The atmosphere of licence was all-pervasive—largely (but not exclusively) linked to Nazi direct agency. It was this licence that subverted, ‘relativized’ or cancelled altogether the state of cognitive dissonance. The peerless historical record of genocide in the Nazi new order was catalyzed by this very climate of suspension of accountability through direct exhortation, removal of sanctions and the overall cumulative legitimizing effect of precedent. In this respect, genocide was at least as much related to the desirability of the outcome (the ‘life without others’) as it was the result of the exceptional failure or subversion of moral, political and cultural counterbalances that usually prevent this extreme course of action.

It is probably meaningless to speculate whether negative passions against ‘others’, however escalated as a result of short-term historical developments and ideological distortions, would have erupted into this paroxysm of murderous mass violence without the primary Nazi agency. If, however, genocide results from both the strengthening of the desirability of eliminating a particular ‘other’ and the neutralization of inhibiting factors, then interwar fascism in general, and in Nazi Germany in particular, had a decisive and devastating input in both processes.

The diffusion of the licence to kill: The Nazi ‘agentic order’

In order to describe this lethal diffusion of the licence to kill amongst fascist regimes, fascist movements and ordinary people I have used (and adapted) Stanley Milgram’s concept of ‘agentic order’.

Milgram’s famous teacher-learner psychological experiment in the 1960s underlined the crucial link between authority (entrenched and accepted), psychological empowerment and the discharge of extraordinary evil. Such authority convinced the participants to commit themselves to decisions and actions they would consider inappropriate or at

least problematic by accepting the notion of duty in lieu of individual responsibility and primary agency. Milgram described this substitution of primary individual responsibility as the result of an 'agentic state'. He defined this as the psychological situation in which individuals perceive themselves as integrated in a hierarchy, participating in the latter's vision and executing its wishes, both in the short- and in the long-term.⁸⁸

In contrast to autonomous agency, the participant in the 'agentic state' accepts a subordinate, ancillary position in the order and abdicates direct personal moral responsibility for their actions.⁸⁹ For Milgram, this state leads to patterns of behaviour dominated by (willing or enforced) obedience, not personal conscience and autonomous reasoning; a situation of psychological doubling that disengages the performed act from its moral implications for both the victim and the individual agent. Thus, the 'agentic state' is a crucial mechanism of personal moral disentanglement and abdication of ethical responsibility. Both these conditions are crucial for resolving the troubled state of individual or collective cognitive dissonance, and may crucially facilitate violent action.⁹⁰

As mentioned above, by the late 1930s Hitler's Germany had been established as the most dynamic and impressive representative of a new political order in Europe. Every anti-liberal, anti-communist/Bolshevik, ultra-nationalist and anti-Jewish political force in Europe fell inside the gravitational field of Nazi Germany, whether for ideological, geopolitical or pragmatic reasons. Even if most of these forces (National Socialism included) did not describe themselves in terms of fascism, they felt a sense of historic affinity that transcended national boundaries and glossed over individual differences.

By 1941 the Nazi regime and its Axis alliance appeared invincible, having subjugated most of Western Europe, neutralized the United Kingdom and invaded the Soviet Union with spectacular initial success. The defeated and humiliated Germany of 1920 had given way to a military and political superpower that was unmatched and that was intent on remaking the territorial and anthropological map of Europe. This, and the ruthless determination with which it pursued the cleansing agenda of a *Judenrein Reich*, commanded the admiration of fellow travellers and the awe of its opponents. This placed the Nazi regime in a special position of authority among the nationalist/anti-communist constituency, as a de facto leader of one of the two formidable poles of the European civil war of the interwar period.

According to Ernst Nolte, the internationalization of fascism was the by-product of a continent-wide reaction to the perceived international

threat of Bolshevism after 1917.⁹¹ After a rocky period in their relations during 1933–5, a growing rapprochement between Rome and Berlin led to the creation of the Axis alliance and to a series of further international agreements (Anti-Comintern pact, Three-Power pact, etc.), which accepted the existence of a new radical ideological-political pole within Europe, but also acknowledged implicitly the *de facto* leading role of the Nazi regime within it.

Those who rallied to the fascist cause for whatever reason did so on the basis of some fundamental ideas: anti-Bolshevism, a reaction to liberal modernity, a release from seemingly onerous international obligations (e.g. minority rights), anti-Semitism as an autonomous political platform, a promise of full unbound sovereignty and a wholesale assault on every form of perceived decadence. By the end of the decade, the European civil war had already largely divided the continent into three camps (liberal, socialist and fascist).⁹²

During the 1939–45 period, the obstinate radicalism of Hitler's regime forced everyone else to take sides in a fundamentalist either/or apocalyptic vision befitting fascism's own nature as a millenarian political religion. Thus, by the time Germany had invaded Poland and plunged Europe into the abyss of the Second World War there was a clear understanding that National Socialism and, to an extent, Italian Fascism stood at the helm of a formidable international alliance spanning a large part of the continent and enjoying strong (sometimes fanatical) support among many in all European countries. The impressive military successes of 1939–41 strengthened this belief and convinced many this was just the beginning of a wider pan-European crusade for a genuinely revolutionary new order.

The paradox of fascism's internationalization lay in the fact that fascists, albeit strongly nationalist, experienced a sense of primary loyalty for Nazi Germany (and, to a diminishing extent, Fascist Italy) that often transcended or undermined strict national interests. People like Codreanu, Degrelle, Quisling, Mussert and Deat saw themselves as the saviours of their countries, the national vanguard of a history-making project of pan-European regeneration, and 'soldiers of fascism' during the Second World War. Others rallied to the fascist cause, not out of ideological fanaticism and admiration, but out of political calculation or pragmatism in the context of a lesser evil mentality.

During the 1930s, large sections of the European right became increasingly 'fascistized' and looked to the two centres of fascist power for inspiration, leadership and legitimation. Mussolini's universalist ideas about a fascist century and Hitler's missionary zeal for a pan-European

new order meant the two regimes capitalized on this de facto internationalization of fascism.⁹³

If the Italian and German involvement in the Spanish Civil War constituted the first tangible expression of this new spirit, the formidable coalition that launched Operation Barbarossa in 1941 was its apex—and it was Nazi Germany, with its awe-inspiring record of large-scale *Lebensraum* expansion, cruel internal cleansing and new order utopianism, that did the most to legitimize a revolutionary third-way gospel to liberalism and socialism.

The sense of licence generated during the Second World War was, at the same time, the cumulative result of different agencies and the midwife of further, even more extreme ones. The domino effect of permissiveness emanated in different forms—through direct agency, through delegation of authority or through voluntary appropriation of the mandate, particularly in the circumstances of chaos that followed the Axis invasion in the East. However, the result was a catastrophic, murderous chain reaction that produced an ever-expanding milieu of permissiveness and amounted to much more than the sum of its individual components. On the one hand, the breakdown of order and the interim absence of any form of constituted power in the Eastern occupied territories generated an empowering and exhilarating sense of exceptional permissibility, of running amok in the ephemeral absence of authority and convention.⁹⁴

In this case, the licence to act had less to do with direct Nazi agency, apart perhaps from the psychological effect of the 'Judeo-Bolshevik' propaganda and the incitement of such stereotypes by local fascist/ultra-nationalist organizations operating under Nazi auspices. This situation provided a way out of cognitive dissonance, in the sense that the collapse of civic norms mitigated both the need to justify violence and the hindering element of fear of sanctions. War in itself is a domain of extreme permissibility that renders accessible an array of behaviours and actions that would be considered highly objectionable in normal circumstances, but the main collateral effect of a military conflict—socio-political dislocation and extreme insecurity—could either expand or contract the sense of space in the affected communities.⁹⁵

While, broadly speaking, in Western Europe the overwhelming majority of people saw war and occupation as an unsolicited and horrifying reversal of fortune, in the East there were instances when the discourses of (Nazi) occupation and liberation (from the Soviets, Bolsheviks and/or Jews) coalesced. This was particularly true in those areas that had been annexed by the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the August 1939

non-aggression pact signed by the German and Soviet foreign ministers, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Viacheslav Molotov. The Soviet occupation of the lands specified in the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact was initially greeted with some support, particularly from minority groups who had been subjected to the aggressive policies of 'Polonization' in the previous two decades.

However, as the Soviets annexed the Polish territories during the autumn of 1939 and the three Baltic states in the summer of 1940, installing unpopular regimes followed by a clampdown on opponents, mass arrests and deportations, whatever initial support existed turned into anti-Soviet anger. Thus, the news of the Nazi invasion in the summer of 1941 was greeted with mixed feelings by the local populations.

While this was yet another military conflict that would further dislocate life and expose people to the harsh realities of war, it also held a promise of release from the Soviet yoke. Whether as a real preference or as acceptance of a lesser evil, Nazi occupation could be construed—however mistakenly in hindsight—as an opportunity to redress the balance and settle accounts locally. But even in Soviet territories where no change of political status had occurred since the end of the civil war two decades earlier, the bitter memories of Soviet rule, of the clampdown on local/national identities and of the more recent Stalinist terror had rendered the prospect of Nazi occupation far more amenable to large sections of the local population—in the short-term as a release from the unpopular ruler, and in the longer-term as the stepping stone to national self-determination and independence. On the other hand, occupation by Nazi Germany entailed a new ruler, a new socio-political arrangement and yet another major redistribution of power. This is exactly where direct Nazi agency became a critical factor.

After occupation, the Nazi authorities embarked upon a project of reorganizing the political, social and economic structures of those areas in line with their own vision of a new order in the East. This involved a wave of eliminationist violence against 'Judeo-Bolsheviks', carried out by the occupiers and their newly established institutions (auxiliary police). However, the Nazi agency was also indirect, bringing about a new sense of permissiveness that also unleashed and radicalized a spate of local agencies to a similar effect.

After October 1939, the Nazi authorities had exploited the widespread anti-Jewish feeling in occupied Poland and incited pogroms against the Jews by explicitly claiming that 'Jews are outside the law [and] the authorities will not take sides if someone wrongs them.'⁹⁶ This form of direct licence was also prevalent during the first months of Nazi

occupation in the East and before the full organization of local auxiliary police forces on the basis of Himmler's July 1941 order. It had a lethal significance, for it perpetuated and escalated eliminationist violence even when the original causes of resentment (Soviet rule) had been eliminated. It was also instrumental in removing a strong inhibiting factor—the fear of sanctions or reprisals. Through their presence and claim of irreversible victory Nazi forces released energies that would have otherwise been contained under fear of a Soviet return and retaliation.

Nazi agency was both direct and oblique—unequivocally and directly authorizing eliminationist violence, then spearheading it, but also allowing it to happen or evolve by stating its *a priori* benevolent indifference. As Zygmunt Bauman has stressed, the sheer modernity of the Nazi genocidal project made the escalation of mass murder beyond the confines of the old Reich possible and 'contained nothing which could stop [it] from happening'.⁹⁷

It was precisely this chillingly ultra-modern Nazi vision of population management and cleansing on such a vast scale, coupled with extreme ideological fanaticism and peerless brutality, that transformed a licence to hate (perhaps profound and radicalized in the light of recent events, but latent) into a veritable licence to kill. Individual and group resentment, generic prejudice and localized grudges, ideological loyalty and harsh reality—all were subsumed into a single, wholesale murderous project under the overall control of the Nazi empire.

Unlike the ideological collaboration of ultra-nationalist and 'fascitized' groups, many individuals and small communities slid into the continuum of violence because they hated, feared or resented 'others' in their vicinity and now felt they could act accordingly. The tragedy of genocide in the East in 1939–44 lay exactly in this sense of unbound permissibility, weakening of hindrances and cumulative desensitization that made the transition to mass murder appear more appealing and justifiable—or at least less onerous and troubling to the perpetrators. The result was a web of mutually radicalizing agencies—individual, local, regional and national—stimulated by the pervading sense of anything goes, and eventually hosted under the murderous rationale of the Nazi new order. In this crucial respect, the wartime project of elimination in the Nazi new order was so much more than the sum of its constituent parts.

The Nazi agency in the genocidal convulsion of the Second World War remains indubitable. Millions perished at the hands of the Nazi authorities or in the perverse industry of death they pioneered during

the early 1940s. Yet many were also brutally sacrificed at the altar of similar ultra-nationalist and racial utopias in other parts of Europe, in areas occupied by the Axis forces or in semi-sovereign friendly countries, east and west, north and south. They were delivered to the cruelty, hatred and greed of political authorities, of voluntary police groups, of local fascist/collaborationist groups and of ordinary people—with, without or regardless of any direct fascist (Nazi included) agency.

Such mass-scale disregard for human life and viciousness had a lot to do with ingrained cultural prejudices—ancient hatreds—as well as recent sources of resentment, but the crucial momentum that catalyzed their concurrent outburst and subsequent radicalization implicates both fascism and fascists in an array of ways and processes that, in my opinion, justify the correlation between fascism and genocide probed here.

The convulsive throes of genocidal carnage with which the century of fascism expired was a fittingly devastating epilogue—not only to its ethno-exclusive fantasies of regeneration, but also to the murderous forces it had subsumed and then helped unleash. Both fundamental conditions of genocide identified here—the strengthening of the desire to ‘live without others’, the subversion of the inhibitions involved in violence and physical elimination of the ‘other’—are crucial, and fascism ticked both boxes with ruthless efficacy.

As an ideology it integrated the abstract desire to live without ‘others’ into an emotive cognitive economy of redemptive hatred and sovereign violence. As political praxis it helped redefine moral norms, demolish legal safeguards and subvert collective social reflexes. Its two licences came with convincing, mobilizing alibis, as well as promised rewards. Its boldness set liberating precedents and new empowering benchmarks for what constituted justifiable sentiment, demeanour and action, collectively and individually.

Genocides will always need aggressive majorities mesmerized by utopias of wholeness and purity, imbued with allegedly justified hatred against some other group in their midst. However, they only happen when, in specific historical circumstances, existential hatred and then violence appear not just necessary but also permissible as means to a seemingly desirable end—in this case, a perverse utopia of a national community living without ‘others’, in full and uncontested sovereignty.

Intent, will and opportunity are not enough: the mass licence (whether derived directly from a leadership, assumed through precedents or unfolding through a breakdown of every form of order) to desire the abominable, do the unthinkable and justify the otherwise

unacceptable constitutes the critical mass of the genocidal chain-reaction. The fascist chapter in the dark history of genocide serves as a cautionary tale of how this can happen and how savagely far it can go.

Notes

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11

Concluding Remarks

Adrian Lyttelton

More than 40 years have passed since the first edition of *The Nature of Fascism*. At the conference the previous year that gave rise to the volume I was a junior and overawed participant. Stuart Woolf deserves our thanks for the courageous and difficult enterprise of bringing together a group of experts from many different countries and disciplines. However, as Roger Griffin has suggested, the conference and the volume revealed that there was little common ground or agreement on how to approach the subject of the nature of fascism. The gap between theory and empirical research remained wide. Probably a present-day reader would learn more about the nature of fascism from reading the series of single-country monographs in the other volume edited by Stuart Woolf, *European Fascism*, which at least gives a reasonably comprehensive picture of the scope and variety of the phenomenon.

Who knows what a gathering of scholars 40 years from now in some other part of Europe will think of our discussion and conclusions? If one reflects on this, one must conclude that modesty is in order. I would think that such a hypothetical gathering might be critical of the paucity of references to the world outside Europe. However, I think that a certain geographical limitation in our discussions (Eastern Europe was also under-represented) can be justified in the present. If you spread your net too wide the fish may get through, and early attempts to give fascism a global status as an example of 'developmental dictatorship' made its contours still more indefinite. Fundamental differences of context cannot be ignored. When the Italian nationalists launched the slogan of the 'proletarian nation' they were not, in reality, protesting against imperialist exploitation, but against their grievance that, as a latecomer among the great powers, they were not able to obtain a satisfactory share of its

profits. China (where the slogan was known and used) was a proletarian nation in a very different sense.

Can one conceive of fascism outside a European context? The problem is still open, but it would be hard to deny at least a 'family resemblance' in some instances. Elements of fascist ideology and its symbols and practices had a global diffusion. If their reception was shaped and altered by different cultural contexts this is only a stronger version of a general truth that applies to European fascism also. There is, by now, general agreement that Japan was never a fascist state, but the relationship between the radical nationalist right and more traditional authoritarianism has striking European parallels. Fascism's global reach could be the subject of another conference.

Global perspectives, however, are important in another, more intrinsic sense. The radical dynamism and genocidal racialism of National Socialism cannot be explained without reference to Germany's pre-existing drive for global power status. The geopolitical context must be always taken into account in explaining the balance between radical nationalism and traditional authoritarianism.¹ In his contribution, Aristotle Kallis points out the importance of German military supremacy as a radicalizing influence outside Germany. He could nonetheless, I think, have emphasized more strongly the importance of war in 'lowering the threshold of the moral acceptability of physical elimination'.² War was not only a brutalizing influence and an opportunity for radicalisation, it was at the existential heart of fascism's ideology of permanent struggle.³

I would suggest that the effects of war and the perception of war are important for defining fascism's specificity. The 'palingenetic' character attributed to fascism does not distinguish it from earlier nationalist movements that also cast their discourse in terms of personal and collective regeneration. One could perhaps gain greater precision by describing fascism as a 'revivalist' nationalism: that is to say, it aimed to remedy the deficiencies and overcome the limitations of previous attempts at national integration. This was especially clear in recently unified nation-states like Germany or Italy; however, the transition to mass democracy and the fear of class conflict raised new problems for national integration in older nation-states as well.

We still need to explain why a new fascist solution emerged and proved capable of winning support. Even for non-participants, the First World War made the achievement of national integration appear more urgent. In the belligerent nations, the unprecedented military and economic mobilization of the population created the demand for a similar

ideological mobilization. ‘Total mobilization’ and ‘total war’ were the antecedents of totalitarianism. Before the war, nationalists and socialists alike had conveyed the message the world was entering a new phase of imperialist competition. The war confirmed this thesis, and radical nationalists drew the conclusion that only intensified integration of the national community through the ‘nationalization of the masses’ could ensure national survival. The sacralization of the nation and the demands that ‘internal enemies’ should be subdued and minorities assimilated were not new: they were inherent in the idealization of the national community as the supreme form of association and the recognition of the claims of national identity as superior to those of other identities. However, these conceptions achieved much greater potency in the postwar period. They were embodied by the fascist movements, which invented a new synthesis of coercion and consensus, violence and propaganda.

I would suggest also that the dialectic of fear—fear suffered and fear inflicted—needs to have a more central place in our vision of fascism. In this respect, Kallis’s paper embodies some very interesting suggestions. Recent American political research suggests fear increases the propensity to respond to appeals to core community values, rather than interests. Fascism embodied a rage for order. However, we should not conceive of this ‘order’ in a conservative sense.

The questions of war and fear are relevant for the evaluation of the ‘new consensus’. I am not sure the term is entirely fortunate. It may suggest—perhaps beyond its authors’ intentions—a greater degree of agreement than exists or is desirable. Historical analysis progresses through conflict. Roger Griffin’s earlier essay on *The Nature of Fascism* in fact makes very clear the reasons why a single ‘ideal type’ of fascism is unlikely to be universally accepted.⁴ Our interests and values will legitimately mandate different abstractions from the multifarious reality of the galaxy of fascisms. However, if one compares the state of fascist studies now and 40 years ago, it would be wrong to deny that progress has been made in identifying common problems, approaches and premises. The greatest advance has certainly come from taking fascist values and ideology seriously. Norberto Bobbio’s assertion of the incompatibility between fascism and culture is almost universally rejected: while respectable as a moral judgement, its acceptance would have closed off whole avenues of historical inquiry that have instead been profitably pursued.⁵

I agree with Griffin that Nazism was *both* generically fascist and unique, but his discussion here seems to me to stress the generic at the expense of the specific. One of the problems with the cultural approach

(as with some previous political-science analyses of fascism) is that the term 'modern' is extremely slippery and ill-defined. In one sense, the recent emergence and rapid successes of fascism make it almost tautological to say it was a modern phenomenon, but to say National Socialism aimed to create 'genuine, healthy, German and *modern* culture' begs some important questions. It discounts the evident appeal that National Socialism made to traditional German culture, such as the highly popular 'medievalizing' local festivals. How far were concerns with respectability and the 'healthy', seen as the repudiation of all 'decadent' elements, compatible with cultural modernity? Such assertions risk obscuring the very real debates over modernity versus tradition that occurred within the Nazi and fascist regimes and movements. Fascism aimed both to come to terms with modernity and to affirm an unchanging national essence. Nationalism had always been Janus-faced, looking back to history and forward to the future, and fascism heightened this contradiction. I confess to a stubborn weakness for 'contorted oxymorons' like 'reactionary modernism': of course, if the content of the terms is not specified, the antithesis has no meaning, but I think Jeffrey Herf explained what he meant by both terms.⁶

Perhaps it is the justifiable reaction of Griffin against earlier scholars who dismissed fascist ideology as unworthy of study because contradictory and inconsistent that leads him to play down the contradictions. He is, of course, quite right to point out that contradictions are present in all ideologies; however, fascist ideology differed from communist ideology in frankly admitting its logical inconsistencies and its mythic nature. For communism, it was the others that had contradictions: myths are about reconciling the irreconcilable. I am unhappy about the use of the term 'utopia' to describe the fascist project. At least in Italy, it was foreign to the fascist vocabulary and I believe that its use as an analytic term may obscure some essential features of fascist ideology. Certainly, fascism could not be both utopian and Sorelian, as Sorel was a leading critic of utopian ideas. The dynamic and agonistic characteristics of Sorel's myth are much closer to the fascist mentality than the static visions of utopian thinkers. Utopia implies a world without conflict, and a world without conflict and Darwinian selection of the fittest through struggle would not be a fascist world. Even under National Socialism, which embodied some elements of utopian thinking in its vision of an integrated, harmonious *Volksgemeinschaft*, policies of social and cultural integration had consistently to defer to the imperatives of power and military mobilization. Hitler's vision of the ideal future emphasized the need for continued vigilance and struggle: "A permanent border

struggle in the east will produce a solid stock and prevent us from sinking back into the softness of a state system based purely on Europe." War was, for Hitler, the essence of human activity.⁷

Earlier sociological interpretations of fascism that tried to explain its characteristics by reference to its social base have instead been largely discredited. First and most important, the character of a movement can only be defined by its aims and beliefs; political movements may draw on social aspirations or resentments, but they also transform them and modify the social context within which they operate. Second, sociological interpretations often engaged in a kind of circular reasoning: the fascist mentality of a particular class or group—typically the petty bourgeoisie or the middle-classes—was inferred from their support for fascism. This was a characteristic of many Marxist interpretations, but the confusion of social base and ideology can be equally well seen in Lipset's well-known definition of fascism as an 'extremism of the centre'.⁸ Third, empirical studies have shown the diversity of the social constituencies for fascist movements in different nations and even within the same nation. Moreover, studies of National Socialism, which can draw on a wealth of electoral and membership data that is simply not available for Italian Fascism and is difficult to match elsewhere, have shifted its image from that of a movement of the middle classes to that of a 'catch-all' party drawing support from all classes.

The social profile of Eastern European fascisms—in Romania or Hungary—was notably different from that of Western fascisms. Other generalizations, such as the superficially plausible description of fascist militants as 'marginal men', have not fared better. Another thesis, once very popular but which has not stood the test of empirical research, is that which identifies fascism as the expression of an atomized society of rootless individuals.⁹

The reaction against the social interpretation of fascism—which has of course been fundamentally influenced by the declining prestige of Marxism and by scepticism about theories of modernization—can be carried too far, however. If the *nature* of fascism (or, to adopt a more pluralist language, its meanings) must be defined in terms of ideology, style, ritual, practices and organization, its reception and success still need careful analysis of social contexts and interests. Michel Dobry's warning against an overextension of the use of the category of charisma to explain Hitler's appeal is relevant here.¹⁰

From a different perspective, the role of charisma in fascist movements still needs some methodological clarification. Should we include charismatic leadership as a trait in our ideal type of fascism? Why did

the cult of the leader appear to be a necessity for fascist movements? Those fascist movements that did not have a single leader capable of creating a charismatic bond with his followers had a short and unhappy life. However, this explanation is not so clear. Communism also showed a recurrent propensity for the manufacture of charisma, as with Stalin and Mao (not to mention Kim il Sung); however, it was not an *original* and *founding* characteristic of the movement. On the contrary, lip service was paid to collective leadership even after it had become a fiction, and this made it possible—and even necessary—for Khrushchev in 1956 to found his legitimacy on the denunciation of ‘the cult of personality’.

Roger Griffin dismisses with scorn Horkheimer’s famous declaration that ‘he who does not wish to speak about capitalism should be silent about fascism’. He interprets this, I think rightly, as an attempt to reduce fascism to an epiphenomenon of capitalism. The most important of the essays in the Woolf volume, Tim Mason’s essay, entitled ‘The Primacy of Politics’, though still declaredly Marxist, in fact rejected this reductive approach. Some of its arguments may now appear contorted or unconvincing, but I believe its central thesis remains valid and important. Adam Tooze’s remarkable recent work on the Nazi economy is a demonstration of what ‘the primacy of politics’ might mean in practice.¹¹ To return to Horkheimer’s phrase, one might revise it to say that ‘He who does not wish to talk about capitalism must be silent about modern society.’ If we do not talk about capitalism we risk another kind of ‘tunnel vision’, to quote Griffin. For an understanding of fascist regimes and their authoritarian relatives, their *relationship* to capitalism is still a topic of vital importance, and one that requires much further investigation. The political economy of fascism is still underexplored, in part because political and economic historians have gone their separate ways.

António Costa Pinto’s contribution points to another area in which fresh research is needed: we need to know more about the actual processes of decision-making in fascist and authoritarian regimes. Outside Germany, and perhaps Spain, these have not been studied systematically enough.¹² What were the causes and consequences of the different styles of decision-making adopted by Hitler and Mussolini? How did the collective ethos of the fascist movements interact with the ethos of established governing elites in the army, the bureaucracy, the churches, the universities, the professions and business?

Studies of recruitment are important in defining this field of investigation. However, in the examples analysed by Pinto, the identification of ‘political families’ with a shared ethos appears more important than social origin or occupation. Everyday life (to which Weberian

charisma stands in an adversarial relationship) goes on and conflicts of interest have to be resolved. Modern states cannot function without bureaucratic and economic structures based on rational principles of legitimacy. However, as Lepsius and Pinto have written, charismatic leadership aimed at 'the deinstitutionalization of norms' and the bypassing of bureaucratic authoritarianism.¹³ In the case of National Socialism, but not of Fascist Italy, this process went so far that it is difficult to speak of a coherent state.

In the case of more authoritarian regimes (e.g. Franco's Spain) is it profitable to ask: at what points in the policy-making process could fascist influences be definably exercised? In Portugal, according to Pinto, the space for independent fascist initiative was virtually non-existent since even the youth movement and the militia were controlled by the ministries, while in Franco's Spain the party did enjoy some real access to government in the regime's early years, particularly in the fields of propaganda and labour relations.

Rather than resting within the bounds of a new consensus, I would suggest that historians should work towards a new, provisional synthesis which succeeds in integrating the cultural and ideological approach with the study of fascism as a new, emergent system of power, and a new sociological approach which studies the reception and conditioning of fascism by its host societies, while accepting that fascist movements were active and autonomous agents of change. I believe that this book points positively in that direction.

Notes

1. See A. Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*, London, 2007, pp. 8–9 for Hitler's ideas and their relationship to earlier German geopolitical thinking; and M. Knox, *To the Threshold of Power, 1922–33: Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and Nationalist Dictatorships*, vol.1, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 341–2 for Hitler's formulation of 'the racialist geopolitics that henceforth constituted the foundation of his policies both foreign and domestic'.
2. However, the implication is clear in his description of the General Government of Nazi-occupied Poland as 'a monstrous laboratory for genocide'. Recent studies have emphasized the terrifying amplitude of Nazi genocidal intentions in the 'Great Racial War' as they related not only to the Jews, but to the Slavs. See M. Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge, 2005, p. 195.
3. A. Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy, 1919–1929*, 3rd edn, London, 2004, p. 367.
4. R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London, 1993, pp. 11–17, in which he defines his aim as offering a 'consciously constructed ideal of fascism which

sets out to be more heuristically useful to academic research than existing ones'. In fact, Griffin's approach, as set out here, was certainly more productive than the arid lists of characteristics that made up 'definitions' of fascism.

5. Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, p. 378.
6. J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, Cambridge, 1984. Griffin himself speaks of 'rampant syncretism'.
7. I. Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936–1945: Nemesis*, London, 2001, p. 403.
8. S. M. Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Basis of Politics*, New York, 1960. I would certainly want to revise my own description of Italian Fascist ideology as an 'unstable functional synthesis of the needs of various social groups', Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, p. 364.
9. Kevin Passmore's contribution points out that analysts of fascism as a product of mass society often uncritically accepted assumptions about collective psychology that belonged to a cultural tradition on which fascism itself drew (e.g. the writings of Gustave Le Bon). Larsen's analysis of the 'bandwagon effect' is an important corrective of earlier interpretations of the relationship between fascism and its social base.
10. M. Dobry, 'Hitler, Charisma and Structure: Reflections on Historical Methodology', in A. C. Pinto, R. Eatwell and S. U. Larsen, eds, *Charisma and Fascism in Interwar Europe*, London, 2007, pp. 19–33.
11. For Tooze's differences from Mason, see Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, pp. 321–2.
12. However, much can be learned about decision-making procedures and determinants in Germany, Italy and Japan from Ian Kershaw's book, *Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions that Changed the World, 1940–1941*, London, 2007.
13. See M. R. Lepsius, 'The Model of Charismatic Leadership and its Applicability to the Rule of Adolf Hitler', in Pinto, Eatwell and Larsen, eds, *Charisma and Fascism*, pp. 37–52.

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