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# Rethinking Fascism

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Andrea Di Michele and Filippo Focardi

## Introduction

The international dimension of the Fascist phenomenon has been a constant source of enquiry in historiography. Historians have questioned regularly, from different standpoints, whether it is right to see Fascism as a phenomenon definable as general, with a set of essential features identifiable across numerous European countries between the two world wars, or conversely, whether it is wrong to look for a single formula in sundry movements and régimes that took shape in different contexts and were characterized by obvious national peculiarities. In the main, scholars have dwelt on the global nature of the Fascist response to the multi-faceted crisis of liberal democracy that arose between the wars, studying points of contact, analogies and mutual influences, but no less, looking at the differences between the various Fascist movements and régimes in Europe.

The success of comparative perspective in the study of Fascism has had highs and lows, flourishing especially in the period between the two world wars, but also during the 1960s and 1970s, after which there was a lull, and subsequently a renewed interest<sup>1</sup>. Multiple aspects have been debated, including the figure of the leader/dictator, the ideological and programmatic profile of Fascist movements, the use of violence, racism, the imperial dimension of Fascist régimes prior to and during the second world war, as well as consensus, the transformation – imagined and/or implemented – of fundamental State structures, and others besides. All of these are topics that have combined steadily to push the discussion beyond purely national confines.

Latterly, the comparative perspective has been accompanied by a transnational approach that concentrates on the modalities – formal and informal – of mutual influence and collaboration, circulation of ideas and practices, contamination of

<sup>1</sup> To mention just some of the useful digests on the historiographical debate: R. De Felice, *Le interpretazioni del fascismo*, Bari 1969; W. Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism. A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography*, Berkeley CA / Los Angeles CA 1976; H.-U. Thamer / W. Wippermann, *Faschistische und neofaschistische Bewegungen. Probleme empirischer Faschismusforschung*, Darmstadt 1977; G.L. Mosse (ed.), *International Fascism. New Thoughts and New Approaches*, London / Beverly Hills CA 1979; E. Nolte (ed.), *Theorien über den Faschismus*, Königstein/Ts. 1979; S. Payne, *Fascism. Comparison and Definition*, Madison WI 1980; C. Casucci (ed.), *Interpretazioni del fascismo*, Bologna 1982; E. Collotti, *Fascismo, fascismi*, Firenze 1989; W. Wippermann, *Faschismustheorien. Die Entwicklung der Diskussion von den Anfängen bis heute*, Darmstadt 1997; A. Kallis (ed.), *The Fascism Reader*, London / New York 2003; R. Griffin (ed.), *Fascism. Critical Concepts in Political Science*, 5 vols., London / New York 2004; A. Bauerkämper, *Der Faschismus in Europa 1918–1945*, Stuttgart 2006; T. Schlemmer / H. Woller (eds.), *Der Faschismus in Europa. Wege der Forschung*, München 2014; G. Albanese (ed.), *Il fascismo italiano. Storia e interpretazioni*, Roma 2021.

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languages and behaviours within the multifarious galaxy of European Fascist elements<sup>2</sup>. Phenomena such as transfer, cooperation, and even competition between different Fascist-inspired régimes and movements have been placed at the center of more recent international historiography. Given that these were movements typified, *inter alia*, by manic and aggressive nationalism, collaboration was not always straightforward. National interests, or disagreements connected with frontiers and minorities, led on occasion to irremediable divisions.

This book takes up the stimuli of new international historiography, albeit focusing mainly on the two régimes that undoubtedly provided the model for Fascist movements in Europe, namely the Italian and the German. Here too there is a long tradition of research, conducted by German and Italian historians (and others too), which has led authors to produce comparative studies either of a general nature<sup>3</sup> or dedicated to single aspects, such as policies concerned with culture, with social life and working men's clubs, colonial and settlement projects, squadrist violence, the structure and organization of police forces, etc.<sup>4</sup>.

The idea behind this publication was to start with a historiographical assessment of the international situation, vis-à-vis studies on Fascism and National Socialism, and then concentrate on certain aspects that are essential to any study of the two dictatorships, namely the complex relationships with their respective societies, the figures of the two dictators and their relations with one another, and the role of violence, first in rising to power, then in building and consolidating régimes. Compared to other multiple-author publications on the same subjects, this volume reaches beyond

2 A. Bauerkämper, *Between Cooperation and Conflict. Perspectives of Historical Research on Transnational Fascism*, in A. Bauerkämper / G. Rossolifski-Liebe (Hrsg.), *Fascism without Borders. Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, Oxford 2017, pp. 355–363. See also A. Costa Pinto / A. Kallis (eds.), *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, London 2014.

3 Typical examples are Ch. Dipper / R. Hudemann / J. Petersen (eds.), *Faschismus und Faschismen im Vergleich. Wolfgang Schieder zum 60. Geburtstag*, Vierow bei Greifswald 1998; M.G. Knox, *To the Threshold of Power, 1922/33. Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and National Socialist Dictatorships*, vol. 1, New York 2007; A. Nolzen / S. Reichardt (eds.), *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland. Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich*, Göttingen 2005; W. Schieder, *Faschistische Diktaturen. Studien zu Italien und Deutschland*, Göttingen 2008.

4 A. Hoffend, *Zwischen Kultur-Achse und Kulturkampf. Die Beziehungen zwischen "Drittem Reich" und faschistischem Italien in den Bereichen Medien, Kunst, Wissenschaft und Rassenfragen*, Frankfurt a.M. 1998; S. Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde. Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im italienischen Squadristismus und in der deutschen SA*, Köln / Weimar / Wien 2002; D. Liebscher, *Freude und Arbeit. Zur internationalen Freizeit- und Sozialpolitik des faschistischen Italien und des NS-Regimes*, Köln 2009; P. Bernhard, *Konzertierte Gegnerbekämpfung im Achsenbündnis. Die Polizei im Dritten Reich und im faschistischen Italien 1933–1943*, in "Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte", 59, 2011, pp. 229–262; P. Bernhard, *Hitler's Africa in the East. Italian Colonialism as a Model for German Planning in Eastern Europe*, in "Journal of Contemporary History", 51, 2016, pp. 61–90; N. Bassoni, *Haushofer e l'Asse Roma-Berlino. La geopolitica tedesca nella politica culturale nazi-fascista*, Roma 2020.

the time-frame encompassing Fascism and National Socialism experiences, directing the attention of the reader also toward the period subsequent to their demise. This is done in two ways. On the one hand, examining the uncomfortable architectural legacy left by dictatorships to the institutions and the democratic societies that came after the war: a legacy thick with symbols and reminders of those régimes, with which they have had to come to terms at different times and in different ways. In short, the post-Fascism "management" of Fascism, of its traces in the living body of society, and of the policies of memory. On the other hand, the book addresses an issue that is extremely topical and very much alive both in the strictly historiographical and political science debate, and in the journalistic sphere, that is to say, to what extent can the label of Fascism be used to identify political phenomena of these current times, such as movements and parties of the so-called "populist and souverainist right", which to a greater or lesser degree explicitly emulate aspects of the Italian and German dictatorship experience during the interwar years.

The idea for this book was prompted following an important occasion for debate and historiographical reflection afforded by the annual conference of SISCALT (Italian Society for Contemporary History of the German Language Area) entitled "Ripensare i fascismi / Neue Analysen zu Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus" (Rethinking Fascism and National Socialism), held at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano from November 22 to 24, 2018, of which the proceedings are partially reported in this volume.

In the first paper, Arnd Bauerkämper looks at how German historiography on national socialism has evolved from post-WW2 to the present day. To provide reference coordinates on the theme most widely explored and discussed by German historians, Bauerkämper sets out certain salient thematic nodes and traces the main steps of the historiographical debate: the question around the roots of national socialism, with reflection (now passé, but long animated hitherto) on the relationship between the Nazi régime and capitalism, and that inherent in the theory associated with the idea of the "German Sonderweg"; then the question of how Nazi Rule operated, with the contrast between Intentionalists and Functionalists, its progress followed through to the resolution of this dichotomy in more recent studies; and finally the focus on researches applying a comparative approach, from earlier studies still concerned with the sphere of totalitarianism, to the paradigm shift of more recent studies on Fascism as a transnational phenomenon. According to Bauerkämper, German historiography on national socialism has followed the main trends of international historiography, but at the same time been influenced not least by social changes and by the growth of cultures of memory in Germany. From this standpoint, the increasing weight attributed to remembrance of the Shoah appears to have acted as a brake on the comparison of Fascism and Nazism, notwithstanding the prominence of this tradition in studies by German authors. In the view of Bauerkämper, there remains ample scope for exploration of the ways in which national socialism engaged with and was transferred to Fascist and authoritarian parties and régimes in Europe.



The next contribution, by Roberta Pergher, discusses the transnational dimension of fascism, throwing light equally on the positive elements of this historiographical approach and on certain of its limits. An original perspective is offered by more recent studies, such as those of Spanish author Angel Alcalde, who proposes a “reconceptualization” of Fascism “as a single transnational and global phenomenon that violently expanded throughout Europe and beyond by processes of transfer, mutual inspiration, hybridization, interaction, entanglement and cross-border exchange”. As Roberta Pergher observes, “scholars now see Fascism not as a movement that originated in Italy but as a set of ideas and aspirations that originated in different places at the same time”. The new transnational viewpoint has allowed a more detailed look at relations between Fascist Italy and national-socialist Germany, and offered a broader scale of observation regarding the multivarious processes of interaction and exchange between the different political and social actors involved in the perspectives opened up by Italian Fascism (starting from the corporative model), identifiable not only with Latin space in the Mediterranean (mainly the Spain of Franco and the Portugal of Salazar), but also in Latin America and the United States, or in Japan. As Pergher notes, the strength of the transnational approach also encompasses its weakness. In effect, given the insistence on a “global right”, and the existence in the 1920s and the 1930s of multiple contacts and hybridizations between subjects of the variegated European and extra-European right, describable as a nebula of Fascist, pro-Fascist and Fascist-oriented forces, one is faced with the “ontological problem of defining Fascism”. This does not require a return to the sterile game of finding definitions for Fascism, however, but an effort to pinpoint how the crisis of liberal democracy developed during the interwar period and identify the more or less anti-democratic and violent responses provided by régimes or political groups that engaged with Fascism.

In the second session, Frank Bajor retraces the long road that culminated in “a comprehensive social history of the Third Reich”, in which space is also given to the historiographical debates on the *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community). Attention is focused on the 1980s, a true historiographical workshop marking the start of a period that would produce fertile and innovative research trends. Bajor identifies six of these: studies on “resistance and persecution”, which widen the perspective from forms of organized opposition to Nazism (*Widerstand*) to “social forms of non-conformity” (*Resistenz*), as documented in the major research project entitled *Bayern in der NS-Zeit* (“Bavaria in the Nazi Period”) promoted by the Institute for Contemporary History of Munich; the tradition of studies on the Nazi politics of racist persecution (eugenics, enforced sterilizations, euthanasia), with the focus on “forgotten victims” such as the so-called “asocials”, the homosexuals, the Sinti and Roma peoples; the productive historiographical season of the *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life) documenting the active involvement of the German people in social practices promoted by the Nazi régime; a picture that emerges similarly from the oral history studies that flourished in the 1980s, and particularly notable in this genre, the project coordinated by Lutz Niethammer on the Ruhr from the 1930s to the 1960s; and finally, the contribution made by

the history of women, merged ultimately with the history of gender, and the contribution made by the history of persecution, initiated in the 1980s but destined to prosper in the 1990s, which spotlighted persecution as a “social process” that involved German society, and not only a “political process, executed by Nazi institutions or the party”.

Paul Corner, in his contribution, dwells on the historiographical “repositioning” of Italian Fascism, which in these past twenty years has been brought into the mainstream of studies on European totalitarian régimes. Both international and Italian historiography had long made a distinction between Fascism and other totalitarian régimes like Nazism and Communism, adopting a standpoint that hinges on the characterization of Mussolini as a buffoon-like figure, and of Fascism as a “cardboard totalitarianism”. In a new season of studies, dating from the 1990s, one saw attempts to look beyond this Italo-centric view of Fascism, and consider it simply as one of a family of European totalitarianisms. This came about, according to the author, under the influence of a “cultural turn” that produced a crop of studies in Italy concerned with the ideology and culture of Fascism, albeit not always able to distinguish between the self-depiction and the reality of the régime. This trend of giving emphasis to the cultural aspects of Fascism was followed by a reorientation of studies that focused attention on the violence and the repressive and coercive capacity of the régime, bringing research on Fascism back into the mainstream of the very latest international historiography. Indeed, scholars began to formulate the same questions already posed in attempting to understand the complex relations between régime and society in the case of Nazism and Communism. For example, to what extent did Fascist ideology penetrate hearts and minds? Or more generally, how had people ‘lived’ the régime? Thus, light was thrown on the “shifting compromises” that characterized the relationship between Italians and the Fascist dictatorship; researchers explored the dynamic between center and periphery, highlighted the dimension of corruption and clientelism, showing not least how much the “Old Italy” remained alive within Fascism. All of this led observers to question the schematic image of a mass popular consensus for Fascism, generated by the supposed merits of the régime (reclaimed wetlands, trains running on time) and by its similarly supposed “good-naturedness”. An image which, though given the lie on the evidence of research, still remains firmly rooted in the Italian collective memory.

In the section dedicated to dictators, Wolfgang Schieder sees the relationship between Hitler and Mussolini as being fundamental to the alliance between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Schieder stresses how Hitler’s rise to power cannot be understood without bearing in mind the model provided by Fascist Italy and by the Duce. Following the march on Rome (seen by Hitler as a turning point in history) and the establishment of the Fascist régime, the Führer developed a genuine “veneration” for Mussolini, enthralled as he was by the “successful political practice of violence” of which the Duce had been a master. From the mid-1920s onwards Hitler made repeated attempts to establish contact with Mussolini, even expressing readiness to take a step back on the question of South Tyrol, which did not please many within his party. But



only in 1934 did Mussolini agree to a meeting with Hitler in Venice. Time would then be needed for a political rapprochement between the two countries following the 1936 war in Ethiopia and the creation of the Rome-Berlin Axis, before Hitler's efforts to gain political recognition from Mussolini were finally crowned with success. The reference is to the State visits exchanged by the two dictators in 1937 and 1938, which were organized as a veritable "staging of a political friendship", the significance of which went well beyond that of a traditional diplomatic collaboration. The trust and friendship shown by Hitler toward Mussolini would persist thereafter for the entire duration of the war, notwithstanding the uneven nature of the German-Italian alliance was soon to emerge, dominated by the stronger German partner, and despite Italy's lamentable proficiency at waging war, which the Führer saw as being attributable to the interference of the monarchy and the inadequacy (not least racial) of the Italian people. In effect, Hitler continued to rely on "friend" Mussolini, freeing him from the hands of the "traitor" Badoglio and placing him at the head of the Italian Social Republic. In reality, as Schieder observes, from first to last, the much-vaunted friendship with Mussolini was primarily a tool used by Hitler to further his political interests.

Richard J.B. Bosworth considers the figure of the Duce and starts with a key question: how is it – given Fascist Italy's disastrous war and the barbaric crimes of the régime (a million victims, reckons the author) – that "so many Italians cling to a positive image of their dictator?" According to Bosworth, the blame for the debacle of the Second World War was conveniently shoveled by the Italians onto the shoulders of Hitler, whilst the loss of the colonies post-1945, which had the effect of removing Africa from the mind of Italians, meant that any reckoning for Fascist crimes committed there, especially in Libya and Ethiopia, would be unlikely. The author goes on to offer a number of reflections on the régime and on certain perceptions it has left. Notwithstanding the repressive actions reflected in internment, registration *en masse* of opponents, and political exile, it emerges that the recourse made by the régime to capital punishment – on the basis of existing data – was far less than by Nazi Germany, by Franco's Spain and by the Soviet Union of Stalin, and even less than by democratic countries like Great Britain and the United States. It is however on the figure of the dictator that Bosworth focuses his attention, looking for the reasons behind his success both as Duce during the twenty years of Fascism, and thereafter, in the fond memory that many Italians cultivated for him when the war years were over. There is the strong private image of Mussolini which combines the personality of the "family man" with that of the "conqueror" of female hearts. The public image is that of a ubiquitous Duce travelling the length and breadth of the country, visiting every tiny village, managing with his charisma to make up for the limits betrayed by the "imperfect machine" of cumbersome Fascist totalitarianism with its "confused decision-making structure". In the eyes of Bosworth, it is this Mussolini, the charismatic Duce, who still today provides a possible model for many aspiring or potential dictators.

In his piece dedicated to Adolf Hitler, Gustavo Corni reviews the principal stages of the historiography dedicated to the figure of the Führer. The path is one that begins

with literature published prior to 1945, in particular the "classics" on Hitler by Konrad Heiden and Hermann Rauschning, and the more general studies on Nazism by Franz Neumann and Ernst Fraenkel, which would have a strong influence on subsequent historiography. Then in the post-war years comes the season of studies defined as "Hitlerism" by Corni, that is to say the many and various contributions, of chequered scientific value, preoccupied with the "demoniacal" figure of the Führer considered as the true "core" of Nazism; a trend that in some ways constituted a response to the extensive body of Anglo-Saxon and French literature – from Lord Vansittart to Edmond Vermeil – which saw Nazism as being a natural step in the history of Germany, under the banner of militarism and authoritarianism. The author then concentrates on two major biographies of Hitler that have been benchmark reference sources for the historiographical debate: a first by Alan Bullock, published in 1952, and a second by Joachim Fest, which appeared in 1973. These improve on earlier works, as attention is focused on the interplay between the subject, Hitler, and the social, political and cultural milieu in which he operated. Following another historiographical season marked by the clash between Intentionalists and Functionalists, divided precisely on their assessment of the role played by the Führer within the national socialist system, Corni looks at the two most recent biographies of Hitler: by Ian Kershaw, in two volumes (1998-2000), and by Peter Longerich (2015). Central to the important work by Kershaw is the crucial question concerning the "nature of power" wielded by Hitler, which the English historian addresses by way of an approach he refers to as "working towards the Führer". Longerich rejects a "mere charismatic interpretation" of Hitler, the author instead highlighting the talent of his subject at orchestrating the political game from the early 1920s onwards. Thus, one sees the close links between the political action of the Führer and his ideological vision.

The book proceeds with a section dedicated to the features and the role of violence in the two régimes. Sybille Steinbacher addresses the theme of violence in its most radical and organized manifestation, as deployed by National Socialism in the concentration camp system. She does so by focusing on the concept of "spaces" in violence, i.e. the importance taken on by the spatial dimension in the study of extermination policies conducted by the Nazi régime. In particular, it was following the so-called "spatial turn" that increased attention was given to the spatial context in which the practice of violence was conducted, underscoring just how much its features and its radical impact were influenced thereby. While not discounting the cognitive potential of a space-oriented approach to the study of extermination policies, the author draws attention to the vagueness and semantic confusion created by the concept of "spaces" applied to violence, interpreted variously as geographic, cultural or metaphorical.

Fascist violence is the topic discussed by Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi, who in a historiographical review reconstructs its genealogy, its distinctive features, its transformation, in the shift from anti-system violence to state-sponsored violence, one of the pillars by which the régime was upheld. Fascist paramilitary squadristism – which owed much to the war experience of many among its members, inured to the daily use of



violence and struggling to find a place for themselves in postwar society – become a fundamental element in the rise of Fascism, especially given its capacity to dismantle structures and conquests of the socialist movement. With Fascism, violence became a habitual tool of political life, asserted and extolled. Many of the most attentive observers picked up immediately on this novel feature, which curiously, by contrast, had long been neglected altogether on the historiographic level. Having seized power, the exercise of violence (physical and psychological) was implemented reutilizing and refining a series of repressive instruments that originated in Italy from the late 19th century, and creating entirely new structures and institutions. But the culmination of Fascist violence was seen during Italy's many wars: colonial wars, the Second World War and then the civil war between 1943 and 1945.

The section dedicated to the architectural legacy left by the two dictatorships begins with a piece by Albert A. Feiber and Thomas Schlemmer, who reconstruct the extraordinary events of Obersalzberg, the small town in the Bavarian Alps that Hitler began to frequent in the 1920s and selected thereafter as his *buen retiro*. He bought a property there during the period when he became head of the government, and from that moment the whole area underwent a huge transformation. Obersalzberg and its environs went swiftly from being Hitler's private summer residence to functioning as a veritable hub of Nazi power, an off-limits area able to accommodate several thousand persons, provided in rapid time with services and infrastructures. It soon became Hitler's preferred location for important diplomatic meetings, before and during the war, with the imposing mountain landscape designed to overawe visitors. The events of Obersalzberg seem to encapsulate certain elements of a general nature that typified the Nazi dictatorship: the violence to home-owners in the neighborhood, who were bought out compulsorily by the Nazi authorities, and above all to the thousands of forced laborers used in the area, mainly during the war, to build tunnels and air-raid shelters; the cult of the leader, fueled not least by frequent visits, "pilgrimages", to places associated with the Führer; and the maniacal attention given to setting the stage on which Hitler's political and diplomatic action took place. The war over, Obersalzberg became one of Germany's most popular, but also most controversial tourist attractions. Only much later, in 1999, did the Dokumentation Obersalzberg permanent exhibition curated by the Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin ensure that the true historical context of the place would be recaptured, stripped of any mythical aura. The next two pieces are dedicated to the Fascist architectural legacy in Italy, and the problem of how "Fascism in stone" should be managed.

Paolo Nicoloso makes a singular journey through Italy following the fall of Fascism, showing us the markedly varied fate met by buildings and architectural symbols erected by the régime. Depending on the case, there were demolitions, the removal of conspicuous symbols, or total preservation with no action taken of any kind. The determining factor was the local context, for example Gorizia, in the Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral (Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland), occu-

Slovene Home Guard to blow up a shrine erected by the Fascists to honor the fallen of the First World War: a victim of German attempts to redraw the ethnic balance between Italians and Slovenes. In an Italy emerging from war defeated and wounded, the notion of destroying hundreds of buildings put up by the régime for whatever purpose would have been unthinkable, even though they bore the clear stylistic imprint of Fascism. And in effect, in almost every case, these buildings continued in service, perhaps inevitably with a change of use, as happened with local party headquarters, or those where the activities of Fascist youth organizations had been based. So it was that public offices of the new democratic state found themselves housed in buildings often typified by the unmistakable monumental style of the Fascist era, which consequently were assured the permanence to which they aspired from the start. An even greater paradox is reflected in the two huge projects left unfinished by the Fascist régime in Rome – Via della Conciliazione with access to St Peter's, and the E42 complex, known today as EUR – which were completed by Republican Italy, with decisive input from architects formerly in the service of the régime.

The section dedicated to architecture ends with a piece on the particular case of Bolzano, presented by Andrea Di Michele. The population of this city in South Tyrol, an Alpine region annexed to Italy after the First World War, includes a large majority of German speakers. It is an area not without interest in view of its general history between the two world wars, given the tension that existed between Fascist Italy and Germany – first Weimar, then Nazi – caused by the plans for Italianization of the area that the Mussolini régime had in mind. One of the tools used to bring about a major change in the ethnic and cultural identity of the area, and Bolzano in particular, was indeed architecture. During the 1920s a victory monument was erected in the city, supported by imposing fasces, endorsing the supremacy of Italy in the First World War and the conquest of territories south of the Brenner pass, whilst during the Second World War a giant bas-relief was applied to the façade of the party headquarters, representing the triumph of Fascism, with the figure of Mussolini on horseback at its center. Di Michele reconstructs the vicissitudes and intentionalities of these architectural creations, commenting especially on the unease caused by their presence in the postwar period and on recent museumification and historical contextualization initiatives, which appear to have mitigated the political and ideological influence they still had, dividing local political forces and speech communities.

The book concludes with a section that looks at current affairs, at the right-wing political phenomena now widespread, and the legitimacy of equating these with Fascism. Roger Griffin tackles the question at its roots, pointing out that in order to determine whether or not parties and movements today fit into the universe of Fascism, one has to begin with a clear definition of what Fascism is understood to signify, based on an analysis of its historical precedents. He considers that from contemporary comparative research into Fascist history, there would be broad agreement in defining Fascism as a revolutionary, ultranationalist movement that seeks to bring about a radical transformation of society, one that has shown a great capacity for



ideological adaptation and for change, discernible not only between the two world wars but after 1945 as well. A central theme is the “regeneration” of a nation seen as having been corrupted by internal or external elements. However, in the communications media and in political debate, most noticeably, the adjective Fascist is used all too casually, with simplistic and generic denigratory intent. In reality, most parties and movements defined as extreme right in places almost everywhere around the world seem to fit a profile more of populist than of Fascist forces, as they do not generally have aims definable as revolutionary and anti-systemic.

This would appear also to be the view of Marzia Ponso, who in her analysis of Germany’s New Right uses the concept of populism, the roots of which were put down long before National Socialism, that is to say within those anti-liberal and conservative currents present back in the 19th century. In short, a re-emergence of the *völkisch* nationalist tradition, the aim of which was to strengthen the ethnic identity of the national community, which felt itself under threat from enemies without and within. Along with this continuity of a precise national tradition, one has elements in common with other populist phenomena present inside and outside of Europe, but also themes and languages already used by National Socialism. While not explicitly identifying with that historical experience, political and cultural voices in the *Neue Rechte* make blasé and much criticized use of concepts and terms that hark back to those times and would have been considered unutterable in former decades of German democratic life. These same voices also claim the right of Germany to cast off the perennial sense of blame for crimes committed by the Third Reich, and to pursue its national interests more robustly. Together with links to a precise political and ideological tradition, there are elements of innovation in these political parties and movements, reflected in the forms and content of their political action, and not least in the recycling of practices and figures associated with the left. Hence, an appreciably fluid and animated political and cultural milieu, with strong links to the tradition of the pre-Nazi national right, somewhat cavalier in its relations with the Nazi past, which feeds off a sense of alarm felt by more and more sections of society at the “mass immigration” taking place, and with a demonstrable capacity for innovation in the ways that it operates and communicates.

The final contribution in the book is by Matteo Albanese, who looks at two political movements in Italy – CasaPound Italia and Forza Nuova – which declare a direct link to the historic Fascist era and to post-1945 Neo-fascism. They do so from two slightly different perspectives: Forza Nuova a more conservative position, inspired by a strictly catholic outlook; CasaPound Italia concerned more with social questions, and in particular with the right to housing. With the Communist threat gone, their common enemies are now foreign immigration, in this case a threat to the core identity of European peoples, but also communitarian Europe, seen as the domain of financial capitalism, inimical to the interests of the people, with more or less open manifestations of anti-Semitism. Anti-capitalism, anti-globalization, racism, ultra-nationalism and the use of violence are merged together in a cocktail that is nothing new in this day and age, but had in effect already been a feature of Neo-fascist campaigns from the late 1960s.

## And Bauerkämper German Historiography on National Socialism in Its Transnational Context

### 1. Introduction

More than a century after the end of the German Reich, Friedrich Meinecke's slogan continues to be used to describe the movement about the Nazi movement: "The shock of the German people was not only in the Second World War, but in the history of the German people, which began in 1933 and ended in 1945. In this sense, the German people were not only a victim, but also a perpetrator."

### I. Fascism and Nazism in a Transnational Key

The book is a collection of essays by a number of authors of a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. As early as the 1930s, the German historiography on the Nazi movement and the Holocaust has been a field of intense scholarly activity.

More recently, the field has been enriched by a number of new contributions, including the work of the author of this book, who has been able to draw on a wide range of sources and methods to provide a new perspective on the Nazi movement and the Holocaust. The book is a valuable contribution to the field, and it is hoped that it will be widely read and discussed.

1. F. Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Faschismus* (München, 1934), pp. 10-11. See also F. Meinecke (ed.), *Die deutsche Geschichte und Gegenwart* (München, 1934), pp. 461-481.

2. H. Mommsen, *Die deutsche Geschichte*, 10 vols. (München, 1964-1977), vol. 10, pp. 1-10.

3. W. Hinder, *Die deutsche Geschichte*, 10 vols. (München, 1964-1977), vol. 10, pp. 1-10.

4. See A. Hildebrand, *Die deutsche Geschichte*, 10 vols. (München, 1964-1977), vol. 10, pp. 1-10.

5. H. A. Kohn, *Die deutsche Geschichte*, 10 vols. (München, 1964-1977), vol. 10, pp. 1-10.