

THE NATURE OF FASCISM
REVISITED

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THE NATURE OF FASCISM REVISITED

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For my son Filipe

Contents

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	vii
<i>Preface and acknowledgements</i>	ix
1. Fascists: A 'revolutionary right' in interwar Europe	i
2. The origins of fascist ideology: The Sternhell debate	29
3. New interpretations (I): The constituencies of fascism	47
4. New interpretations (II): Conceptual problems	63
5. Fascism, dictators, and charisma	79
6. Ruling elites, political institutions, and decision-making in fascist-era dictatorships: Comparative perspectives	89
7. Fascism, corporatism, and authoritarian institutions in interwar European dictatorships	119
<i>Index</i>	151

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

5.1	The charismatic triangle	82
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Tables

5.1	Forms of political legitimation	85
6.1	Ministers' occupational background (%)	108
6.2	Political offices held by ministers (%)	109
7.1	Dictatorship and corporatism in Europe (1918–45)	125

4 | New interpretations (II): Conceptual problems

Fascism continues to fascinate scholars within the social sciences, perhaps as much as communism, that other great non-democratic ‘-ism’ of the 20th century.¹ The topic also seems to be of continuing interest to the student and commercial book markets. In some cases bland repetition is the norm, but the pressure from commercial publishers often results in some excellent syntheses, even if based on secondary material, and that is not to mention the biography genre, which is always attentive to charismatic leaders and dictators – the more cruel the better. Moreover, the already voluminous academic literature on contemporary dictatorships often returns to the fascist and dictatorial regimes of the interwar period.²

During the past 20 years the comparative study of fascism has concentrated increasingly on its ideological and cultural dimensions. When in 1969 the British historian Stuart Woolf published *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.³ The first part of the book’s four sections is 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 contains Tim Mason’s brilliant essay ‘The primacy of politics: Politics and economics in National Socialist Germany,’ was

- 1 In this chapter I review the following books: R. J. B. Bosworth, ed., *The Oxford handbook of fascism*, Oxford, 2010; B. Bruneteau, *Le totalitarisme: Origines d’un concept, genèse d’un débat, 1930–1942*, Paris, 2010; D. Riley, *The civic foundations of fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain and Romania, 1870–1945*, Baltimore, MD, 2010.
- 2 However, most only include the dictatorships established after 1945. For an overview of this literature in textbook form see N. Ezrow and E. Frantz, *Dictators and dictatorships: Understanding authoritarian regimes and their leaders*, London, 2011.
- 3 S. Woolf, ed., *The nature of fascism*, New York, 1969.

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 clearer then than it is today; however, the main turning point of the last decade was the cultural turn in fascist studies, which has helped refine earlier approaches and inspired new research.

During recent decades, the historiography of fascism has integrated contributions from political science, such as the totalitarian-authoritarian binomial that invaded national and comparative research and which partially erased the 'para-Marxist economicist' approach dominant during the 1970s, without doing 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. But this new culturalist consensus on generic Fascism 'left many historians cold,' to quote Roger Eatwell, and some of the cleavages are still present. However, the emergence of new themes for research, such as those of symbolic and political mobilization, violence and genocide, gender, or the relationship between fascism and religion, has been important. As Adrian Lyttelton recently noted, 'the greatest advance (over recent decades) has certainly come from taking fascist values and ideology seriously.'⁴ New analytical models, such as political religion, were at the forefront for a short while.⁵

Although historians dominate current research on fascism, it is clear they will continue to be influenced by other social science disciplines in the future. Indeed, Juan J. Linz may well be the political scientist who has left the greatest mark on the historiography of fascism and dictatorships, and Michael Mann's *Fascists* represented 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.⁶

On the other hand, the big world of 20th-century dictatorships has again become an important field of study. Some of the interwar authoritarian political institutions expanded across the world following the end of the

4 A. Lyttelton, 'Concluding remarks', in A. C. Pinto, ed., *Rethinking the nature of fascism*, London, 2011, p. 272.

5 For a defence of the political religion concept in the study of political history, see E. Gentile, *Politics as a religion*, Princeton, NJ, 2006, and for the study of fascism, see R. Griffin, ed., *Fascism, totalitarianism and political religion*, London, 2006. See also D. D. Roberts, "'Political religion" and the totalitarian departures of interwar Europe: On the uses and disadvantages of an analytical category', and the reply of C. Levy, 'Frustrated of Islington', *Contemporary European History* 18, 2009, pp. 381–414 and pp. 415–18.

6 M. Mann, *Fascists*, Cambridge, 2004.

Second World War and as we shall see below – as another ‘-ism’ of ideologies, political movements and regimes – comparison should not be confined simply to the phenomena that have been labeled fascist. Some contemporaries of fascism had already realized that some of the institutions created by the interwar dictatorships could perhaps be durable. As the committed early 20th-century observer, Romanian academic and politically authoritarian, Mihail Manoilescu noted, ‘of all the political and social creations of our century – which for the historian began in 1918 – there are two that have in a definitive way enriched humanity’s patrimony...: corporatism and the single-party.’⁷ Manoilescu dedicated a study to each of these political institutions in 1936 without knowing some aspects of the former would be long-lasting and that the latter would become one of the most durable political instruments of contemporary dictatorships.⁸

In recent years, social science literature has returned to the question of the factors leading to the survival or downfall of the dictatorships and dictators: the construction of legitimacy, the regimes’ capacity to distribute resources, divisions within the power coalitions, the political institutions of the dictatorships, their capacity for survival, and the cost-benefit analysis of rebellion.⁹ On the other hand, the survival (and appearance) of several dictatorships after the end of the Cold War and, particularly, the increasing complexity of their institutions, has led to a new field of study into the hybrid nature of many contemporary political regimes that were already present in the political landscape of the era of fascism.¹⁰

A handbook without concepts or historiography

Compared with the careful structure of many other books in this series, the *Oxford handbook of fascism*, edited by the historian Richard Bosworth, is one of the sloppiest. Readers will be surprised to note this handbook has no conceptual or thematic entries. Ironically, while the articles are generally of good quality, without the guiding hand of the editor they tend to steer their own course. The first part of the book, ‘Ideas and formative experience,’ consists of four chapters: the first dealing with the ideological origins of fascism, which

7 M. Manoilescu, *Le parti unique: Institution politique des regimes nouveaux*, Paris, 1936, p. viii.

8 M. Manoilescu, *Le siècle du corporatisme*, Paris, 1934.

9 J. Gandhi, *Political institutions under dictatorships*, Cambridge, 2008; Frantz and Ezzrow, *Politics of dictatorships*.

10 See S. Levitsky and L. A. Way, *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*, New York, 2010.

is followed by two chapters dealing with the First World War and one chapter looking at the postwar period. There is no chapter on the interpretations of fascism, nor is there a comparative empirical examination of fascist parties in interwar Europe. Moreover, almost all of the themes are sliced up by country. The only exception in this first part is Kevin Passmore's chapter on the ideological origins of fascism before 1914, which offers a solid critique of theories of political religion on the roots of fascism and a strong defense of the heterogeneity of the origins of fascist ideology, which he considers to be an 'agglomeration of ideas taken from very different sources' (p. 29).

The second part, 'The first fascist nation,' could be an excellent textbook anthology on Italian Fascism and published independently. Comprising 14 chapters, it is the book's *pièce de résistance*. In the main they are excellent chapters addressing a wide variety of themes, from *squadristo* to the intellectuals, from corporatism to Catholicism, and from peasants to women. As a specialist on the Italian case, the editor was able to call on the services of several Italian historians and Italianists who could bring clarity to the subject. Nevertheless, there remains a lack of coherence among even these chapters. Some discuss only Italian Fascism (*Squadristo*, Culture, Peasants, Corporatism, Women, Repression, War), while others discuss Italian Fascism largely in comparison with Nazi Germany (Catholicism, Propaganda and youth, Mussolini as dictator). Nazism, the godfather of the fascist family, has no independent presence in this book, and is addressed in three comparative chapters on the Italian experience (State and society, Race, Diplomacy and war).

The fourth part, entitled 'Others,' is the most curious since it consists of one thematic chapter on communism and ten more on national experiences. As we know, organizing works such as this by country can be unhelpful: if there is no accompanying explanation of the selection of cases and of the criteria for the choices made (relative importance of the particular fascist movement, fascist and non-fascist regimes, governments of occupation, or any other reason), it is difficult to know why some countries are included while others are not.

In this book the United Kingdom is included: but why Britain's Mosley rather than Plínio Salgado's *Ação Integralista Brasileira*, the most important fascist movement in Latin America? The Netherlands are included, but why not Norway, where a fascist movement was in power under German occupation? Croatia is there, but why not Tiso's Slovakia? Japan, why not Argentina? Austria under Dollfuss, why not the Portuguese New State under Salazar?

When there is no comparative methodology and no framework within which to select cases, chance seems to dominate and the final result suffers. Even more curious, however, is the divergence of themes and chronology

between each chapter. Some, such as those on Spain and Austria, necessarily examine local fascist movements during the first phase of Francoism (until 1945) and of the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg regime, while others, for example the chapters on France and Romania, concentrate on movements rather than regimes. However, while the majority of the chapters are national case studies that end in 1945, others continue until the end of the 20th century. The chapters on the Netherlands, Hungary, and Yugoslavia and its successor states also address the neofascist movements of the 1980s and 1990s, with the latter developing the theme of relations between fascism and Franjo Tudjman's Croatia and Slobodan Milosevic's Serbia.

In part five, entitled 'Reflection and legacies,' we finally encounter the book's saving grace, Robert O. Paxton's chapter 'Comparisons and definitions,' which because his questions could (and probably should) have shaped the entire handbook perhaps ought to have been the introduction. The handbook then concludes with two chapters on fascism's legacy and the question of neofascism.

Bosworth acknowledges that, as editor, he was 'self-consciously a weak dictator' (p. 3). As an anonymous reviewer once remarked in relation to a manuscript submitted by this writer: 'Essay collections by diverse authors are always awkward creatures: they normally suffer from too diffuse a focus, and their component essays are almost invariably uneven in quality.' While not necessarily agreeing with this opinion, since such collections are often the best means of presenting the results of collective research, this reviewer suggests this handbook is no exception.

In the introduction, the editor dedicates his attention to those who appear to be his pet historiographical enemies: the historians Emilio Gentile, Roger Griffin, 'and their supporters' (p. 5). The importance of these historians should not be underplayed, as they have produced excellent work on this theme, but it is strange that after 50 years of academic studies on fascism only a critique of the theory of political religion is worthy of being highlighted in the introduction to a handbook on fascism.¹¹ Barrington Moore, George L. Mosse, Stuart Woolf, Juan J. Linz, Stanley Payne, Zeev Sternhell, Hans Mommsen, Michael Mann, and many other major scholars of fascism are absent.¹² The main theoretical schools, from the Marxist-oriented to totalitarianism, are deemed unworthy of space in the introduction.

11 According to the editor, this group promoted their ideas in the academic journal *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, but Emilio Gentile had left the journal several years before, while it also changed editors, focus, and even its title.

12 For two excellent anthologies introducing these authors and the main interpretations since the 1960s, see A. Kallis, ed., *The fascist reader*, London, 2004 and C. Iordachi, ed., *Comparative fascist studies: New perspectives*, London, 2009.

Theories of totalitarianism: The vision of contemporaries

For those who do not find what they are looking for in this handbook concerning the origins of the uses of the concept of totalitarianism, the excellent *Le totalitarisme: Origines d'un concept, genèse d'un débat, 1930–1942*, edited by Bernard Bruneteau, is well worth reading. During the Cold War, rivers of ink were spilled in academic and political tomes comparing fascism and communism, and placing them in the same dictatorship typology. However, even before the Second World War – indeed from the end of the 1920s – there was a pre-history of the use of the concept that, as Hannah Arendt noted, has resisted the passage of time very well. It is the intellectual journey of this concept that Bruneteau takes us on in this anthology of texts from the 1930s. Following an erudite general introduction, the editor presents a carefully chosen selection of texts that are always accompanied by a biography of the authors.

We know that even before Mussolini and the fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile had consecrated the term, another Italian, Giovanni Amendola, had already used it. From his exile in London in 1926 Don Luigi Sturzo, leader of the Catholic Popular Party (*Partito Popolare*), developed the foundations of a liberal theory of totalitarianism applied to fascism and communism.¹³ It was a decisive decade for the concept until the first book on the topic, Franz Borkenau's *The totalitarian enemy* (1940).¹⁴ Along with other ex-Marxists and former communists, Borkenau was one of the best analysts of the phenomenon back in the 1930s, defining it as different forms of 'revolutionary autocracies' (p. 401). Moreover, the comparative method of studying these dictatorships developed at a precocious rate within academic circles.

In the United States, George H. Sabine was quick to group single-party dictatorships under the same category in his entry 'State' in the *International encyclopedia of social sciences* (1934),¹⁵ and that is without mentioning either Hans Kelsen or Hermann Kantorowicz. Before Ernst Fraenkel developed his theory of the dual state in National Socialism in 1941, Kelsen had already made this duality the basis of his party dictatorship typology in an article in the London School of Economics journal *Politica* (pp. 354–66).¹⁶

13 See M. Schafer, 'Luigi Sturzo as theorist of totalitarianism', in H. Maier, ed., *Totalitarianism and political religion: Concepts for the comparison of dictatorships*, London, 2004, pp. 22–31.

14 F. Borkenau, *The totalitarian enemy*, London, 1940.

15 G. H. Sabine, 'State', in *International encyclopedia of social sciences*, New York, 1934.

16 E. Fraenkel, *The dual state*, New York, 1941.

By revisiting the origins of the use of the concept of totalitarianism, years before its instrumental codification during the Cold War, Bruneteau's anthology allows us to confirm Hannah Arendt's thesis that the visions of her contemporaries during the 1930s, 'would seriously resist the test of time' (p. 6). The number of times the concept is used in the *Oxford handbook of fascism* is a clear illustration of this.

Fascism and civil society: Gramsci versus Tocqueville and Barrington Moore

At least since Tocqueville, the density and mobilization of civil society is supposed to have produced vibrant liberal democracies; however, for some time research has shown civil society moving in many different directions, and not always towards democracy.¹⁷ In his book, *The civic foundations of fascism in Europe*, the sociologist Dylan Riley investigates the relationship between the density of civil society and regime types in early 20th-century Europe. He asks why it was that in countries such as Italy, Spain, and Romania (the cases studied in the book), each of which had liberal parliamentary institutions at the end of the 19th century, the intense wave of associational growth favored the implantation of fascist regimes rather than democracy.

What is missing from the *Oxford handbook of fascism* is present in a large dose in Riley's book: theories and classics from the social sciences, with the bonus of the rediscovery of Antonio Gramsci. The author does not reject Tocqueville, although he quotes Gramsci and his concept of 'hegemonic politic,' which he uses to explain the paradox of the cases in which some vibrant civil societies produced fascism.¹⁸

For Riley, the consequences of associational development for regime outcomes depend on the presence or absence of 'hegemonic politics:' where it led to fascism it was 'because it preceded rather than followed the establishment of strong political organizations (hegemonic politics) among both dominant classes and non-elites' (p. 2). That is, the development of voluntary associations tends to promote democracy, but in the absence of adequate political institutions 'this democratic demand assumed a paradoxically anti-liberal and authoritarian form: a technocratic rejection of politics as such. Fascist movements and regimes grew up out of this general crisis of politics' (p. 2). Although he does not make explicit use of the Mossean concept of the 'nationalization of the masses,' Riley comes close to it when he says the fascist

17 N. Bermeo and P. Nord, eds, *Civil society before democracy: Lessons from 19th-century history*, Lanham, MD, 2000.

18 On Gramsci and Fascism see D. D. Roberts, 'Reconsidering Gramsci's interpretation of fascism', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16, no 2, 2011, pp. 239–55.

project was concerned with making the modern state more representative of the nation than was possible with liberal parliamentary institutions (p. 11).¹⁹ Fascist regimes, he writes, not only claimed popular legitimacy, they constructed institutions conceived specifically as alternatives to electoral democracy. As another reviewer wrote, 'while agreeing that fascism was profoundly anti-liberal, he shows that its ideological core rested on claims of being more representative of the modern nation than the factional liberal democratic status quo.'²⁰ The most interesting of Riley's conclusions, then, seems to be that he stresses that rather than a high degree of polarization between the left and the right it was 'the absence of well-structured parties (that) lend great plausibility to the fascist critique of liberalism' (p. 211).

Riley finds three varieties of fascism in Italy, Spain, and Romania: 'party fascism' in Italy, where the 'nation was understood as a political project' and the party a 'pedagogical institution' to nationalize the masses; 'traditional fascism' in Spain, where 'the nation was to be represented through the family, the monarchy and the Church'; and 'statist fascism' in Romania, which was based neither on a political party nor in pre-existing institutions that supposedly embodied the nation, but which 'instead sought to constitute the nation through organization' (p. 21).

The book's main argument is an interesting and well-documented fact: the absence of well-structured parties gave fascists great plausibility in relation to their criticism of liberalism and its political class; however, the usefulness of reinventing the concepts of democracy and dictatorship and Riley's redefinition of fascism as authoritarian democracy rather than a type of dictatorship is not convincing, and neither is the tripartite traditionalist-statist-party typology. While the former is a conceptual problem – he does not use a procedural definition of democracy – the latter is more empirically confusing, since for Riley the outcome is fascism regardless of the different types of regimes-versus-movements dynamics in the three cases studied. Nevertheless, his main argument remains persuasive. As Jeffrey Kopstein notes, in Italy a fascist party could draw on an independently organized civil society, while in Spain fascists drew on traditional and Catholic associations, and in Romania civic life was always guided by the state and therefore fascist rulers drew on state institutions and state-created associations for their support.²¹

19 G. L. Mosse, *The nationalization of the masses*, New York, 1975.

20 C. Ban's review, *Journal of Politics* 73, no 2, 2011, p. 501.

21 J. Kopstein, *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no 1, 2011, pp. 205–6.

Fascist Italy revisited

In his chapter in the *Handbook* dedicated to Italy, Riley defines Italian Fascism as ‘a symbiosis of party and state,’ with the most obvious indication of this being ‘the growth of a massive parallel administration separate from the ministerial bureaucracy’ (p. 61). This more recent line of research on Italian Fascism is partially adopted by several of the contributors to the *Handbook*. Since Italy represents half of the book, it is worth developing some of the themes. While some of the articles may be little more than summaries, others are research articles in a very true sense. As Paxton notes, ‘how fascist dictators exercised their power is a fruitful matter for comparison,’ and the ‘polycratic image of fascist rule, proposed for Nazi Germany is also appropriate for Mussolini’s rule’ (pp. 558, 561). Italian Fascism pioneered a style of rule and a set of institutions – personalization, single-party, and corporatism – that were to inspire many other dictatorships. However, most recent research has noted that the tensions between political institutions controlled by the single party, the state, and para-state were a trademark of fascist regimes.

In his chapter on the role of Mussolini in the fascist dictatorship, the editor of the *Handbook* uses the old strong versus weak dictator debate on the role of Hitler to analyze the place of Mussolini in the fascist political system.²² Bosworth notes that ‘the key to Mussolini’s new form of tyranny was its basis on ideas’ (p. 367); however, with the consolidation of the regime, in the balance between repression and loyalty, Il Duce was undoubtedly a strong dictator. Thus, one conclusion deserving attention from a comparative perspective is that in the Italian case ‘the dictator’s authority was enhanced by the useful division between the Fascist Party and the Italian state’ (p. 270).²³ As another historian of Italian Fascism noted, ‘Mussolini’s authority was established on the basis of a complex system of rivalries between different agencies.’²⁴ The dictator’s rule was always based on this balance, which – as several of the chapters illustrate, was not always stable. It is therefore interesting to note how the most recent research into the Italian fascist regime, following in the wake of Ernst Fraenkel’s work, tends to highlight the ‘polycratic’ elements of Mussolini’s dictatorship. In one of the few comparative chapters,

22 On the more recent shifts of the German debate on Nazism see H. Mommsen, ‘Changing historical perspectives on the Nazi dictatorship’, *European Review* 17, 1, 2009, pp. 73–80.

23 G. Melis, ed., *Lo stato negli anni trenta: Istituzione e regimi fascisti in Europa*, Bologna, 2008, and especially, L. di Nucci, *Lo stato-partito del Fascismo: Genesis, evoluzione e crisi, 1919–1943*, Bologna, 2009.

24 D. Musiedlak, ‘Mussolini, charisma, and decision-making’, in A. C. Pinto, ed., *Ruling elites and decision-making in fascist-era dictatorships*, New York, 2009, p. 14. See also his excellent short biography, *Mussolini*, Paris, 2004.

Gustavo Corni finds parallels between the Nazi and the Fascist regimes ‘in their proliferation of centers of authority or of organisms, that often – with considerable inefficiency – drift into conflict with each other’ (p. 287). The youth organizations and the implantation of the corporatist system are also good illustrations of this.

Despite the vast academic literature on Italian corporatism, whether dealing with its leading ideologues or with its institutions, little is known about ‘how corporative institutions operated in practice’ (p. 156). Philip Morgan’s chapter is an informed introduction to the process of establishing the corporatist system that, along with other reforms, was also ‘hindered by long-running inter-ministerial disputes over areas of jurisdiction and competence’ (p. 158). Nevertheless, by the end of the 1930s, among interest and political representation organizations, Italian Fascism had a significant set of corporatist bodies and, with the establishment of the Fascist and Corporatist Chamber (Camera dei Fasci e delle Corporazioni) that replaced parliament, Mussolini’s regime came close to the corporatist model of political representation and interest organization.²⁵

The analysis of the type of repression becomes more complex if we use the binomial classification authoritarianism–totalitarianism. For Mauro Canali, the evidence of fascist repression’s explicit tendency to become genuinely totalitarian is its ‘willingness to use any form of violence to wipe out every obstacle to its acquisition of complete and unchallenged power’ (p. 226). However, while he has written an excellent study of Italian Fascism’s political police, Canali does not explain what distinguishes types of repression in totalitarianism and authoritarianism.²⁶

To put it another way: What is specifically totalitarian in the political repression of Italian Fascism? It is certainly not in its quantitative dimension. Where Canali does see it is in the ‘criminal violence against the opposition’ (p. 226), which is not much to distinguish it from other dictatorships, such as Francoism in Europe, and the Latin American regimes of Péron and Vargas, which are usually less associated with the totalitarian paradigm.

25 A. Gagliardi, *Il corporativismo fascista*, Bari, 2010, and the excellent study of para-state organisations associated with interest organisations, J.-Y. Dormagen, *Logiques du fascisme: L’état totalitaire en Italie*, Paris, 2007.

26 M. Canali, *Le spie del regime*, Bologna, 2004.

In the world of fascism with adjectives?

Para-fascism, semi-fascism, clerico-fascism, ‘fascitized,’ and other adjectives have been used and abused in the historiography, albeit with some justification.²⁷ In fact, as a regime type, the fascist regime concept has travelled neither far nor well, even within Europe, a fact demonstrated in several of the chapters containing national case studies.

In her excellent chapter on fascism and Francoism in Spain, Mary Vincent holds up the mirror to an interpretative debate that has been repeated by other historiographies, because it was in relation to Franco’s regime that the political scientist Juan J. Linz developed his ideal-type of authoritarian regime that for many decades was an essential reference in the study of dictatorships.²⁸ Albeit with slightly different contours, the discussions about the nature of the Vichy regime in France, Salazar’s Portugal and Dollfus-Schuschnigg’s Austria, dominated by the authoritarian-fascist binomial, can be invoked here.²⁹ In the case of Spain, where a civil war followed a failed military coup, a small fascist party – which in the meantime became the apparently dominant partner in the regime’s new single-party – a particular section of the military elite, a personalized leadership, and ‘fascitized’ segments of the Catholic and monarchist radical right, together formed a political regime Vincent believes to be a typical example of an old concept: ‘to call Francoism “fascitized” may be to state the obvious, but it is a far closer approximation of its natures than either “authoritarian” or “fascist”’ (p. 379). The same tensions have characterized the debates on the nature of French fascist movements and some of the classificatory ambiguities surrounding the French radical-right during the 1930s, particularly François de la Rocque’s

27 For a explicit use of these definitions see, for example, R. Griffin, *The nature of fascism*, London, 1991; A. Janos, *East central Europe in the modern world: The politics of the borderlands from pre- to post-communism*, Stanford, CA, 2000; M. Feldman and M. Turda with T. Georgescu, eds, *Clerical fascism in interwar Europe*, London, 2008.

28 J. J. Linz, *Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes*, Boulder, CO, 2000.

29 For more on these historiographical debates, see T. J. Miley, ‘Franquism as authoritarianism: Juan Linz and his critics’, *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 12, no 1, 2011, pp. 27–50; B. Jenkins, ed., *France in the era of fascism: Essays on the French authoritarian right*, New York, 2005; M. Dobry, ed., *Le mythe de l’allergie française au fascisme*, Paris, 2003; A. C. Pinto, *Salazar’s new state and European fascism*, New York, 1996; P. Pasteur, ‘“Austrofascisme” ou régime autoritaire corporatiste chrétien?’, in C. Horel, T. Sandu and F. Taubert, eds, *La périphérie du fascisme: Le cas de l’Europe centrale entre les deux guerres*, Paris, 2005, pp. 111–22. For an overview of the research and debates on Fascism in central and eastern Europe, both in conceptual and empirical terms, see C. Iordachi, ‘Fascism in interwar east central and southeast Europe: Towards a new transnational research agenda’, *East Central Europe* 37, 2010, pp. 161–213.

Croix de Feu and the Vichy regime itself, although Joan Tumblett's analysis is much faster.³⁰

Austria is clearly another borderline case in which several fascist movements and the institutionalization of the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg dictatorship fuelled a parallel debate that was also based in the fascism-authoritarianism binomial, as explained by Corinna Peniston-Bird. However, where Austria and Dollfuss are presented as being avowedly transnational is in the area of corporatism. The author acknowledges this third way also found support in Portugal, Poland, and Spain, and differentiates the Austrian Catholic corporate state from 'earlier fascist corporatist structures in Italy and (to a much lesser extent) Germany' (p. 448). In the Austrian case this was the mortar that cemented the important convergence between Dollfuss and the native fascist movement, the Heimwehr. However, the most important comparative dimension relates to the adoption of corporatist institutions, not only the forced integration of interest organization but also through the adoption of a type of organic political representation as an alternative to liberal democracy, and which extended beyond the four dictatorships cited here and which, in one form or another, created institutions that were inspired both by Catholic and fascist corporatist theory.

As the author of the chapter on Japan correctly notes, 'history is littered with ambiguity and discomfort when relativism is seen to threaten the integrity of a concept' and that of fascism, as it is used by several of the authors in the *Handbook*, slips up in some cases (p. 528). We already know Japan challenges the classificatory rationale and use of the fascist regime concept; however, the same is also true of the regimes neighboring Nazi Germany. The late Mark Pittaway, author of the chapter on Hungary, defines Miklós Horthy's interwar regime(s) as being an example of oligarchic liberalism or authoritarian liberalism, in which 'the fascist movements in the 1930s existed in a symbiotic relationship with the structures and patterns of social support for the dominant interwar regime' (p. 380). In fact, until the 1940s and the coming to dominance of the Arrow Cross Party, Hungary was a typical example of a hybrid regime in which formal democratic institutions existed and were widely perceived to be the primary means of gaining power. Pluralism is present, 'but in which the incumbents' abuse of the state puts them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents.'³¹

It is time to conclude with Robert O. Paxton's 'Comparisons and definitions,' since although he briefly restates some of the points of his book

30 R. Soucy, *French fascism: The second wave, 1933–1939*, New Haven, CT, 1995, and Albert Kéchichian, *Les croix-de-feu à l'âge des fascismes: Travail, famille, patrie*, Paris, 2006.

31 Levitsky and Way, *Competitive authoritarianism*.

Anatomy of fascism, his is by far the only chapter to design a comparative framework in this *Handbook*.³² Paxton begins with the classic question: 'Why does fascism take root and succeed in some parts of Europe and not in others?' (p. 548). While just some of the chapters in the *Handbook* analyze the answers provided by the social sciences, the truth is they are various and for all theoretical and disciplinary tastes. From Barrington Moore to Juan Linz and Michael Mann the options are many; however, the choice of these last two (and of Paxton) is the most rewarding – to 'concentrate on the short-term preconditions for fascism: the particular crises in which fascist movements found space to grow and, in some cases, reach power' (p. 552). A second analytical axis is more often cited than studied: 'How did fascist dictators exercise their power?' (p. 558) and here we must agree some old versions of the theories of totalitarianism are 'blind to the most interesting questions,' mainly because they reinforce the myth of the all-powerful dictator and downplay the ruler's relations with elites, social groups, institutions, and civil society.

For Paxton and the large majority of researchers in this area, 'despite their national variations, fascist movements and regimes share a sufficient number of common elements to sustain a general definition,' but he advise us to avoid the 'misleading static image of the phenomenon' or the search for a 'general essence of Fascism' (p. 549). In fact, there are important aspects of the empirical development of fascism that are analytically interesting without having much to do with fascism as such.

European fascism: A new research agenda?

The comparative study of European fascism, whether as a movement or as a form of political regime, has undergone a remarkable empirical development, albeit with important conceptual limitations. Today we have at our disposal a significant number of monographs and comparative studies on interwar fascist movements, even although the fluidity of the radical-right during the interwar period has at times led to the appearance of a classificatory essentialism that is only interesting when operationalized. In this respect, or rather, in the comparative analysis of the conditions conducive to the ascendancy of fascist movements in Europe, Michael Mann's opus continues to be the most interesting operational reference produced in the past few years.

A second limitation, apparent in several of the chapters in the *Handbook*, is the intuitive and dysfunctional use of the concept of totalitarianism. It is interesting to note that after more than 60 years of use, its adoption by

32 R. O. Paxton, *The anatomy of fascism*, New York, 2004.

historians, initially with many reservations, is still not generally operationalized.³³ However, the most important challenge will be the chronological and thematic enlargement of the comparison.

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 20th-century dictatorship at least in three domains: personalized leadership, the single- or dominant-party, and the technico-consultative political institutions. The dictatorships associated with fascism during the first half of the 20th century were personalized dictatorships. It is interesting to see that even in those regimes that were institutionalized following military coups, military dictatorships gave birth to personalist regimes.

The personalization of leadership in dictatorial regimes became a dominant characteristic. More than half of 20th-century dictatorships 'initiated by the military, parties or a combination of the two had been partly or fully personalized within three years of the initial seizure of power.'³⁴ However, autocrats need institutions and elites to govern, and the role these played is often underestimated given the increased centralization of decision-making to the dictators. To avoid seeing their legitimacy undermined and their authority usurped, dictators need to co-opt elites and either create or adapt institutions that are the locus of negotiation and, sometimes, decision-making.³⁵ On the other hand, as Amos Perlmutter noted, no dictatorship can survive politically without the critical support of modern elites: bureaucrats, managers, technocrats, and the armed forces.³⁶

The fascist regimes were also the first ideological one-party dictatorships located 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. While Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski recognized the single-party played a more modest role within the fascist regimes than it did within their communist peers, part of the classification debate about European fascism and the theories of

33 An excellent analysis of the relations between fascism, authoritarianism and totalitarianism is J. J. Linz, *Fascismo, autoritarismo, totalitarismo: Connessioni e differenze*, Rome, 2003.

34 B. Geddes, 'Stages of development in authoritarian regimes', in V. Tismaneanu, M. M. Howard and R. Sill, eds, *World order after Leninism*, Seattle, WA, 2006, p. 164.

35 In relation to the Italian fascist regime, see G. Adinolfi, 'Political elite and decision-making in Mussolini's Italy,' in Pinto, *Ruling elites*, pp. 19–54.

36 A. Perlmutter, *Modern authoritarianism: A comparative institutional analysis*, New Haven, CT, 1981, p. 11.

totalitarianism ‘deformed’ their role, often without any empirical support.³⁷ 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 in right-wing dictatorships from in their socialist equivalents.³⁸ In the dictatorships associated with fascism, the single-party was not the regime’s ruling institution: rather, it was one of many.

Many civilian rulers do not have a ‘ready-made organization upon which to rely,’ and to counteract that precarious position civilian dictators tend to have their own type of organization.³⁹ During the interwar period 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. However, the relationship between the dictators and their parties, particularly in those that existed prior to the taking of power, is certainly very complex. For example, Italian Fascism seems to provide a good illustration of the thesis that ‘where a party organization has developed prior to the seizure (of power) in which able lieutenants have made their careers, possibly developed regional bases of support, and command the loyalty of men who fought under them, party members also have greater ability to constrain and, if necessary, replace leaders.’⁴⁰ The center of decision-making is also very different across the dictatorships. As many case studies have shown, ‘to mitigate the threat posed by elites, dictators frequently establish inner sanctums where real decisions are made and potential rivals are kept under close scrutiny.’⁴¹

We can classify this investigation as the symbol of a new institutionalist turn in the study of dictatorships, reassessing their previously neglected dimensions, such as decision-making, their constitutions, courts, and interests associations, or nominally democratic institutions, such as legislatures, parties, and elections, which are most typically integral to a dictatorial regime.⁴² The number of dictatorships has expanded so much since the Sec-

37 C. J. Friedrich and Z. K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian dictatorship and autocracy*, Cambridge, MA, 1956.

38 P. Brooker, *Twentieth-century dictatorships: The ideological one-party states*, New York, 1995, pp. 9–10.

39 Gandhi, *Political institutions*, p. 29.

40 Geddes, ‘Stages of development’, p. 164.

41 Gandhi, *Political institutions*, p. 20.

42 See A. Schiedler, ‘The new institutionalism in the study of authoritarian regimes’, *Working Paper 215*, Mexico DF, 2009. For an overview of a ‘rational choice’ approach to the study of dictatorships see R. Wintrobe, ‘Dictatorship: Analytical approaches’, in C. Boix and S. Stokes, eds, *The Oxford handbook of comparative politics*, Oxford, 2007, pp. 363–94.

ond World War that it is perhaps time to update our analytical tools in the light of the great variety of regimes and their universals. In fact, it may be time, as Michel Dobry wrote, to ‘bring the category or concept of fascism back home:’ in other words, to ‘think in relational terms,’ and to use the comparative method seriously, leading to the ‘methodological normalization of these phenomena.’⁴³

43 See M. Dobry, ‘Desperately seeking “generic fascism”: Some discordant thoughts on the academic recycling of indigenous categories’, in Pinto, *Rethinking*, pp. 53–84.