

THE NATURE OF FASCISM
REVISITED

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For my son Filipe

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Preface and acknowledgements

The topics explored in this book relate to empirical research and theoretical reflections on fascism I have been conducting for some time. Over the past few decades, the historiography of fascism has integrated contributions from political science as well as the historical research that partially erased segments of the para-Marxist ‘economicist’ approach dominant during the 1970s, and which did not do justice to the many perspectives on the autonomy of ideology in political and cultural change.¹ 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, and some of the old cleavages remain 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.² As Adrian Lyttelton noted, ‘the greatest advance (over recent decades) has certainly come from taking fascist values and ideology seriously.’³

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 very 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.⁴ On the other hand, the ‘big world’ of 20th-century dictatorships has again become an important field

- 1 D. D. Roberts, ‘Fascism, Marxism, and the question of modern revolution’, *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no 2, 2010, pp. 183–201.
- 2 For an overview see A. C. Pinto, ed., *Rethinking the nature of fascism*, London, 2011.
- 3 A. Lyttelton, ‘Concluding remarks’, in Pinto, *Rethinking*, p. 272.
- 4 M. Mann, *Fascists*, Cambridge, 2004.

of study.⁵ Some of the interwar authoritarian political institutions expanded across the world following the end of the 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.

In recent years social science literature has returned to the matter 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.⁶ 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’ The essays in this book point in that direction, reassessing such dimensions as decision-making and institutions, legislatures, and parties, which are most typically integral to a dictatorial regime.

Chapter one, ‘Fascists: A “revolutionary right” in interwar Europe,’ is intended for the general reader and seeks to present a descriptive and analytical overview of the state of the art in respect of European fascism.⁷ Since the 1930s many observers and researchers have regularly returned to the classic questions: Who were the fascists? How did they grow? Who supported them? And what were the conditions most conducive to their rise? The structure of this chapter follows the three-stage cycle of fascism: (1) the creation of the movements and their role in the interwar political spectrum, (2) the seizure of power, and (3) the exercise of power. In the conclusion I present the hypothesis that certain characteristics of fascism in power are the common patrimony of 20th-century right-wing dictatorships, with some even prospering after the ‘end of fascism’ in 1945: the ultra-nationalism, the communitarian and/or corporatist relationship between the state and civil society, the single party, and the anti-communism. These themes are developed systematically in the chapters that follow.

5 N. Ezrow and E. Frantz, *Dictators and dictatorships: Understanding authoritarian regimes and their leaders*, London, 2011.

6 J. Gandhi, *Political institutions under dictatorships*, Cambridge, 2008; M. W. Svobik, *The politics of authoritarian rule*, New York, 2012.

7 Originally published in N. Atkin and M. Bidiss, eds, *Themes in modern European history, 1890-1945*, London, 2009, pp. 215–41.

Chapter two, 'The origins of fascist ideology: The Sternhell debate', revisits the theme of fascist ideology.⁸ The subject of the ideological origins of fascism has mobilized a considerable number of historians and the 'ideology versus political praxis and institutions' debate is still very much present in the field. Some of these works were anticipated by the theses systematized by the Israeli historian Zeev Sternhell. His work, however, is part of a specific interpretative approach that tends to focus on the contributions of ideological families not traditionally associated with fascism, as in the cases of socialism or of revolutionary syndicalism. These authors tend to consider there to be a strict separation between fascism and the conservative right, and they focus on the revolutionary character of its ideology and political practice as well as in its left-wing origins. However, even within this current of thought we find a vast spectrum of positions among which the provocative theses of Sternhell were individualized. His major works, and especially his book *Neither left nor right*, gave rise to a very interesting debate in 1980s.⁹ For Sternhell, the crisis of liberalism at the time of the eruption of the masses into political life produced fascism as an ideology. The name did not yet exist, but its corpus was already formed. All Sternhell's work is aimed at proving this double genealogy through a study of the contributions made by its various agents. Chapter two is an overview of this debate and a critique of the ambiguities running through Sternhell's work.

Chapters three and four provide a critical overview of new interpretations based on two review articles in which some major works on fascism are debated: Michael Mann's *Fascists* and R. O. Paxton's *The anatomy of fascism*.¹⁰ The first book asks the classic questions: Who were the fascists? How did they grow? Who supported them? And what are the conditions most conducive to their taking power? Mann attempts to construct a dynamic model that is not merely a taxonomy of fascism. Like Mann's study, *The anatomy of fascism* is also a critical reaction to some aspects of the ideological centrism of recent years. Because it was written by a historian, criticism of culturalism is more present in Paxton's book, with the author more marked than Mann by the historiographical debates. By claiming 'what fascists *did* tells us at least as much as what they *said*' (a stance criticised by historians such as Sternhell and Roger Griffin), Paxton attempts to locate the ideas in their rightful place.

8 Originally published in *European History Quarterly* 16, 1986, pp. 465–83.

9 Originally published in French, his major works were later published in English as *Neither left nor right: Fascist ideology in France*, Princeton, NJ, 1995 and *The birth of fascist ideology*, Princeton, NJ, 1995 (with M. Snajder and M. Asheri).

10 Originally published in *Contemporary European History* 15, no 1, 2006, pp. 103–15, and 21, no 2, 2012, pp. 287–300.

If Mann's research concentrates on the conditions leading to the growth of fascist movements, Paxton's studies the processes involved in their seizure of power and the nature of the resulting regimes.

The comparative study of European fascism, whether as a movement or as a form of political regime, has undergone a remarkable empirical development, albeit within 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. Para-fascism, semi-fascism, clerico-fascism, 'fascistized,' and other adjectives have been used and abused in the historiography, albeit with some justification. In fact, as a regime type, the fascist concept has travelled neither far nor well, even within Europe.

A second limitation, debated in chapter four, 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 historians, initially with many reservations, is still not generally operationalized. However, the most important challenge will be the chronological and thematic enlargement of the comparison. In fact, Italian Fascism and German National Socialism provided powerful institutional and political inspiration for other regimes; their types of leadership, institutions, and operating methods already encapsulating the dominant models of the 20th-century dictatorship at least in three domains: personalised leadership, the single- or dominant-party, and the technico-consultative and corporatist political institutions. These are the themes addressed in the remaining chapters.

The central concerns of chapter five, the concluding chapter of a book resulting from a research project on charisma and fascism, and written with my colleague and friend Stein U. Larsen, were to decide on how a distinct ideological color or event determined what kind of charisma a particular leader exerted or will develop, whilst being put at the head of a distinct fascist movement or regime.¹¹ Did all fascist leaders behave in the same manner? And did they convey the same message to their national movements and audiences? More directly, can we claim ideology, with its national characteristics, was the main determining force of the fascist leaders? While in a very embryonic form, we seek to answer this question with what we have called the charismatic triangle, which illustrates the distinction between three aspects of the

11 A. C. Pinto and S. U. Larsen, 'Conclusion: Fascism, dictators and charisma', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 7, no 2, 2006, pp. 251–7. This is the conclusion of a collective work in which some of the themes are yet to be developed; however, it seemed to me useful to republish it unaltered here.

charismatic 'calling': the individual leader, the followers, and the triggering event. In order to succeed, all dictators depended upon the interplay within these three fields. Firstly, the dictator must install himself as a charismatic figure; then they must appeal to their followers as a charismatic leader; finally, they must locate or invent an event demanding an unusual response or solution. Every fascist dictator had to possess some individual abilities that made them extraordinary: they needed followers to understand or appreciate and to connect these qualities. Finally, there must be a situation or an event requiring these unusual abilities, or which call for the reconstruction of the regime in such a way as to allow the application of new solutions to problems. The charismatic triangle stresses the interplay between these poles.

Chapter six, 'Ruling elites, political institutions, and decision-making in fascist-era dictatorships' has a long history. It began as an article and became better known following a debate with D. D. Roberts.¹² Some years later the article became the basis for a project on the theme, which gave rise to a book.¹³ The basis for this research project emerged with the creation of the ICS dataset on the fascist elite, which includes complete prosographical data on the ministers of Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Franco's Spain, and Salazar's Portugal. This chapter explores an underdeveloped area in the study of fascism and right-wing dictatorships, *viz.* the structure of power. As monocratic regimes, dictatorships have been characterized as 'the selectorate of one': the dictator, whose power remains significant. However, dictators do not rule alone, and a governing elite stratum is always formed below them. The old and rich tradition of elite studies can tell us much about the structure and operation of political power in the dictatorships 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. Analyzing four regimes associated with fascism (Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Franco's Spain, and Salazar's Portugal) from this perspective, chapter six investigates the dictator-cabinet-single party triad from a comparative perspective.

12 See A. C. Pinto, 'Elites, single parties and political decision-making in fascist-era dictatorships', *Contemporary European History* 11, no 3, 2002, pp. 429–54; D. D. Roberts, 'Comment: Fascism, single-party dictatorships, and the search for a comparative framework'; and my reply, 'State, dictators and single parties: Where are the fascist regimes?', *Contemporary European History* 11, no 3, 2002, pp. 455–61 and 462–6.

13 A. C. Pinto, ed., *Ruling elites and decision-making in fascist-era dictatorships*, New York, 2009.

In the seventh and final chapter ‘Fascism, corporatism, and authoritarian institutions in interwar European dictatorships’, we examine the role of corporatism as a political device against liberal democracy, a device that permeated the political right during the first wave of democratization, and especially as a set of authoritarian institutions that spread across interwar Europe and which was an agent for the hybridization of the institutions of fascist-era dictatorships. Powerful processes of institutional transfers were a hallmark of interwar dictatorships, and here it is argued corporatism was at the forefront of this process, both as a new form of organized interest representation and as an authoritarian alternative to parliamentary democracy. The diffusion of political and social corporatism, which with the single-party are hallmarks of the institutional transfers among European dictatorships, challenges some rigid dichotomous interpretations of interwar fascism.

* * *

While some adaptations have been made to the texts included in this volume, it is important for the reader to be aware the chapters were written independently and that there will inevitably be some repetition, particularly of citations and references.¹⁴ With that out of the way, I would like to record my thanks to those colleagues and friends to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. The first are, naturally, Stanley G. Payne and Juan J. Linz, from whom I have learned a great deal on the themes addressed in this book and with whom I have debated and discussed several of the topics contained herein.

Chapter one was revised at the invitation of Nicolas Atkin, and has also benefited from the careful comments of Michael Bidiss. Chapter two, on the Sternhell polemic, was discussed with Stanley G. Payne, Martin Blinkhorn, and the late George L. Mosse. I later had the opportunity to collaborate with Zeev Sternhell, with whom I maintain frequent dialogue. During this period, Emilio Gentile, one of Italy’s more renowned historians of fascism, was also an active presence in many of the projects I had developed.

Some of these chapters were also discussed with an informal working group on fascism that met regularly in the Institute of Social Science of the University of Lisbon, of which Aristotle Kallis, Michel Dobry, Roger Eatwell, Roger Griffin, Stein U. Larsen, Didier Musiedlak, Stephen Fischer-Galati, and Gerhard Botz were the most regular attendees, and who were joined more recently by David D. Roberts, Constantin Iordachi, Kevin Passmore, John Pollard, Giulia Albanese, Adrian Lyttelton, Miguel Jerez Mir, Mary Vincent, and Goffredo Adinolfi. I would also like to mention Philippe

14 For example, this is the case with definitions such as those by Mann and Paxton, which are outlined in chapter one and then repeated and explained in chapter three, and in some other cases that will be evident to the reader.

C. Schmitter, author of several pioneering studies on corporatism, both comparative and in relation to the Portuguese case. I have constantly come across his writing ever since my time at Stanford and Florence in the 1980s and can say that his work has always been a source of inspiration to me.

I would also like to thank the Institute of Social Science of the University of Lisbon and the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology for their generous support for the research for chapters six and seven (grants PTDC/HAH/65818/2006 and PTDC/HIS-HIS/100544/2008), and Stewart Lloyd-Jones of CPHRC Editorial Services, who originally translated most of the material in this book from Portuguese, for editing the texts and preparing them for publication. Finally, I would like to record my gratitude to Routledge, Sage, and Cambridge University Press for authorizing the republication of chapters one and five, chapter two, and chapters three and four, respectively.

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Lisbon, August 2012