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Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe

Edited by

António Costa Pinto
Lisbon University, Portugal

Aristotle Kallis
Lancaster University, UK

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Foreword

Il ventennio parafascista? The Past and Future of a Neologism in Comparative Fascist Studies

The birth of a concept

Much of this book deals with inter-war European regimes which are neither comparable to the fully fledged fascist regimes of Mussolini and Hitler or to the uncharismatic authoritarian regimes of monarchs or generals. They thus fall broadly under the category of what some scholars term 'parafascism'.

It is over twenty years since the neologism 'parafascism' slipped into the eddying waters of comparative fascist studies with the publication of *The Nature of Fascism*. Its extensive use in chapter 5 of that volume made more of a soft plop than a splash at the time. In fact the book as a whole was greeted with a resounding silence by the academic world to the point where all the pages containing the new word would have long since been pulped but for a decision by Routledge to bring it out as a paperback in 1993, a decision which itself contained a high level of contingency.¹

Parafascism was the second innovative term coined for the analysis of fascism in its pages. The first was 'palingenetic', a term familiar in Latin languages in the study of political phenomena, but treated as an obsolescent term in theology and the study of botanical reproduction and with no political meaning in Anglo-Saxon usage according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* of the period (though my use of it has finally acknowledged in the 2012 edition as an on-line inquiry will show).² 'Palingenetic ultranationalism' has gone on to become a familiar, if still widely rejected and misunderstood, shorthand for fascism in political theory. In contrast, 'parafascism' has led a more Cinderella-like existence, rarely invited to the ball of mainstream comparative fascist studies – which makes the present volume particularly welcome. It was introduced in the following passage about the lengths to which in the 1930s a number of authoritarian regimes in Europe and Latin America went in order to mimic the external features of the two fascist regimes of the day without pursuing the 'genuinely' fascist revolutionary agenda to create a new society and a new man:

So impressive was the apparent success of first Fascism then Nazism in welding revolutionary nationalism into a 'third way' between communism and

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liberalism, that their externals were bound to be imitated by both conservative and military regimes as a cosmetic ploy to retain hegemony, to manipulate rather than to awaken genuine populist energies. The result has been described in such terms as 'fascitized', '*fascisant*', 'pseudo-fascist', 'proto-fascist' or 'semi-fascist'. I propose to use instead the term 'para-fascist', in which the prefix 'para-' connotes an 'alteration, perversion, simulation' (*Oxford English Dictionary*) of 'real' fascism as we have defined it.

A para-fascist regime, however ritualistic its style of politics, well-orchestrated its leader cult, palingenetic its rhetoric, ruthless its terror apparatus, fearsome its official paramilitary league, dynamic its youth organization or monolithic its state party, will react to genuine fascism *as a threat*, and though it may be forced to seek a fascist movement's cooperation to secure populist support or ward off common enemies (notably revolutionary socialism), such a regime will take the first opportunity to neutralize it.³

Had Google been available as a research tool in the late 1980s I would have soon realized that there were already footprints in the snow around this particular term. In December 1971 a certain Kenneth Lamott had applied it to allegedly fascistic (i.e. proto-neo-Con?) tendencies in Californian state politics, which drew flak in a reader's letter to *Commentary Magazine*. This prompted the following articulate rejoinder by Mr Lamott:

It seems to me that one source of Mr. Draper's discomfort is his desire for precision in describing phenomena that don't lend themselves to exactness. Regardless of what every college catalogue announces, politics is not a science and its study is more akin to the study of, say, the metaphysical poets than it is to the study of the moons of Jupiter. It is not mere sloppiness of thought that has led some writers, myself included, to recognize a fascist or at least pre-fascist cast of mind among a disturbing number of Americans today. Instead, we are, I think, using words in a way that is allowable within the rules of the game.

Mr. Draper displays a school-masterly testiness toward the word 'parafascism,' which I coined to try to describe what I see going on around me here in California. (My model was 'typhoid' and 'paratyphoid'—*similar in some symptoms but in fact two entirely distinct diseases*) (my emphasis) I sympathize with Mr. Draper because 'parafascism' is an awkward, ugly, and imprecise word. I don't particularly like it myself, but I haven't found a better one.⁴

I sympathize with Lamott's aesthetic misgivings here. What is particularly noteworthy is the way in his usage the term acquires pathological connotations on

the basis of 'typhoid' and 'paratyphoid', a derivation which highlights even more strongly than my etymology the idea of a generic difference between the fascist regimes in Italy and Germany and a parafascist one such as Salazar's or Dollfuss's (not to mention US Republican administrations). It is also worth noting that in the 1980s a number of articles appeared in the US characterizing Nixon's regime as 'parafascist' published in the Marxist publication *The Lobster Journal of Parapolitics*. They bore such fascinating titles as 'Fascism and Parafascism', 'World Parafascism and the US Chile Lobby', and 'Transnational Parafascism and the CIA'. However, it can be safely assumed that, true to a venerable Marxist tradition of analysis, they denied fascism any genuine revolutionary credentials, and can thus not be seen as anticipating my unwitting purloining of the term 'parafascism' to denote speciously fascist regimes which lacked the revolutionary dynamics of Fascism and Nazism.⁵

The mixed fortunes of parafascism since *The Nature of Fascism*

Since 1993 parafascism in the Griffonian sense has been generally ignored by the more traditional or conceptually challenged historians in the study of right-wing authoritarian military regimes which adopt the institutional or cosmetic trappings of fascism without its anti-conservative, *palingenetic* thrust towards a revolutionary new society and an alternative modernity. However, there have also been some noteworthy exceptions. The Irish historian Mike Cronin, for example, not only embraced the term warmly, but attempted to apply it creatively in his 1997 study of the Irish Blueshirts,⁶ extending its remit to cover movements which, even if successful in their challenge for state power, would have not created a fully-fledged fascist regime. It is worth citing his more recent thoughts on this issue which he offered in the chapter 'Parafascists and Clerics in 1930s Ireland' in a wide-ranging study of inter-war clerical fascism:

The search for a consensus in fascist studies has relied to a large degree on a combination of national studies and theoretical modelling around the ideal of a fascist minimum. In my previous work on the Blueshirts in Ireland (1997), I argued that Griffin's model (1991) could be adapted for the Irish situation. Rather than conforming to the fascist minimum, I argued that the Blueshirts were potential parafascists. That is, they never made power, but if they had done, their regime would have been para rather than fully fascist. On reflection, I still hold with the basic premise of this argument in the context of historical evidence and the associated jump into counter-factual history and theoretical modelling. However, I believe that my earlier work needs adapting given two key issues: (i) the onward march of fascist studies and the ever more sophisticated models that have been put forward and,

(ii) a failure to fully engage with the idea of clerical fascism and the Catholic context of Ireland in political and intellectual life.⁷

It was surely in part due to Cronin's book that in 2002, a decade into the term's existence in fascist studies, a brief section was devoted to 'parafascism' in *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right*.⁸ Elsewhere in Europe it was starting to make, if not waves, then some discernible ripples. For example, Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco employed it for his 2007 article in *Historia Actual Online* which, following in the footsteps of *The Nature of Fascism*, analysed the Dollfuss and Franco regimes to deepen understanding of 'the coming and implantation of fascism in Europe, as well as of the phenomenon of parafascism (a kind of regime that, although is not totally fascist, shares some characteristics and is strongly influenced by the fascism in its birth, implantation and consolidation)'. It also endorsed the thrust of the argument in my original chapter by concluding from a comparison of the Austrian 'Ständestaat' and Franquista corporate state that 'parafascism could be the norm in lieu of the exception to the totally fascist alternative in the inter-war Europe'.⁹

The multi-lingual Andreas Umland, one of the world's most important experts of post-Soviet Russian fascism from an informed comparative perspective, also reveals himself to be an advocate of the term in a book review of Michael Neiberg's *Fascism* (2006). He quotes a passage from the book on the 'totalitarian' nature of Fascism which 'call(s) into question the notion of political change in fascist regimes coming top-down from the central state', commenting that to flesh out this point the author's analysis 'would have been more persuasive had Neiberg, for instance, considered the notion of "para-fascism", as proposed by Griffin'.¹⁰

At the same time, Neiberg's text underlines just how far the use of the term 'parafascism' is from being second nature to many experts on right-wing extremism. Indeed, a survey of histories of inter-war dictatorship, fascism and totalitarianism would reveal the considerable confusion which still reigns some eighty years after the March on Rome in the taxonomy of political movements and regimes. This is due in no small part to the intellectual laziness of some self-styled 'empirical' historians (as if even the most conceptually elaborated history is not 'empirical' in its own way) whose love of primary research has all too often been accompanied by a disdain for theory and disinterest in existing approaches which would be unacceptable even at MA level. The resulting tunnel vision seriously compromises the value of their efforts as contributions to understanding history (though given the lack of a collegial, generous-hearted temperament that often accompanies such myopia it is possible they had no serious interest in contributing to furthering communal understanding in the first place!).

The academic who is a prime example of a more enlightened approach to the subject of fascism from the outset is Aristotle Kallis, the co-editor of this volume someone with a specialist knowledge of the theory of fascism, Fascist imperialism and architecture, the Holocaust, and Greece's Metaxas regime. He not only has clearly found the term 'parafascism' congenial, but was with António Costa Pinto (another 'converso' to the term's value) the main protagonists of the collaborative effort to refine the term's heuristic value in the study of inter-war political regimes which has borne fruit in this volume. He had already staked a claim in this area of research with his important 2003 article "'Fascism", "Para-Fascism" and "Fascistization": On the Similarities of Three Conceptual Categories', which went considerably beyond my initial act of improvisation in theoretical sophistication.¹¹

If cyberspace is paradoxically taken as a 'real' guide to which rival academic theories win out in the Darwinian struggle for supremacy, then the fact that the 2010 Wapedia article on 'fascism' devoted two paragraphs to the exposition of parafascism suggests a certain degree of orthodoxy has been achieved for this rogue term, despite the Neibergs, Gregors and Bosworths of the world. It states with the characteristic but spurious authority of all anonymous Web articles:

Some states and movements have certain characteristics of fascism, but scholars generally agree they are not fascist. Such putatively fascist groups are generally anti-liberal, anti-communist and use similar political or paramilitary methods to fascists, but lack fascism's revolutionary goal to create a new national character. *Para-fascism* is a term used to describe authoritarian regimes with aspects that differentiate them from true fascist states or movements. Para-fascists typically eschewed radical change and some viewed genuine fascists as a threat. Para-fascist states were often the home of genuine fascist movements, which were sometimes suppressed or co-opted, sometimes collaborated with.

The virtual scholar went on to offer an formidable list of putative parafascist regimes: Dollfuss' Austria, Metaxas' Greece, Salazar's Estado Novo in Portugal, Imperial Japan under The Imperial Rule Assistance Association, the Greek Cold War dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s, Peronist Argentina, Pinochet's Chile, Suharto's regime in Indonesia, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Apartheid-era South Africa, Islamist Iran (but curiously not Franco's Spain). Though the webpage has now disappeared, parts of it have been cited (plagiarized?) word for word in other web resources.¹²

Further research into parafascism

Given the patchy 'reception history' of the term I (re-)coined two decades ago, I would have to be in a particularly manic mood to welcome the present book

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as a triumphant vindication of that distant moment of verbal inventiveness I experienced while writing chapter 5 of *The Nature of Fascism* which gave birth to 'parafascism'. *Parturiunt montes; nascetur ridiculus mus*. Its occasional appearance in comparative fascist studies does, however, provide solid empirical evidence that for some historians at least the term retains heuristic value as a conceptual tool for helping making sense of the kinship patterns in the right-wing dictatorships of inter-war Europe. In particular it helps sort out revolutionary goats from the autocratic sheep of inter-war period. Were other equally open-minded scholars keen to build on the fascinating material assembled in this volume, I would suggest five promising lines of further enquiry.

One would be to take up the intriguing suggestion of the Wapedia article that a number of modern dictatorial or military regimes outside Europe, in particular those which combine autocratic rule with elaborate displays of pseudo-populist 'political religion' to legitimize them, could be usefully examined to establish their affinities with the 'classic' parafascist regimes of Dollfuss in Austria, Franco in Spain, or Antonescu in Romania. The Latin American dictatorships of the modern era are one case in point. Another is Imperialist Japan at the height of its campaign of creative destruction to found the 'Greater Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere' between 1931 and 1945. In fact, there are good grounds to hope that the highly complex and contested relationship of Japan under the Imperial Way Faction to European fascism might be illuminated were it to be compared not just to the Third Reich but to parafascist regimes which harnessed populist energies from above without any radical attempt to destroy traditional (in this case feudal) elites or create a New (Japanese) Man.

Then there is Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist regime, which in 1934 launched a state sponsored, palingenetic and highly fascistic New Life Movement to foster Chinese national consciousness. For too long the tumultuous events generated by the post-imperial surge of Chinese populist ultranationalism, whose leaders consciously sought to channel and organize populist sentiments in ways inspired by European fascism, have been ignored by comparative fascist studies (something I am guilty of myself). Tony Mangan's *Superman Supreme: Fascist Body as Political Icon*¹³ is a rare exception to this rule. Perhaps the application of 'parafascism' to such initiatives would be enlightening.

Another theme worth investigating is the degree to which putative parafascist regimes (including those of Latin America, China, and Japan) share a similar genesis. They first arose in the particular historical context shaped by the post-First World War collapse of liberal democracy's credibility as a viable form of government and of the Enlightenment theory of progress that underlay it. Parafascism may be seen diachronically as part of the modernizing conservative or counter-Enlightenment tradition, but synchronically its attempt to create a synthesis of tradition with fascism 'from above' is shaped by a particular constellation of forces which occurred not just in Europe, but a number of non-Western societies under the impact of global modernization. Among

these were the combined impact of the First World War and Bolshevism on the credibility of the democratic/capitalist model for the future of Western society, and the sense experienced by many foreign observers (even Winston Churchill) that Mussolini's Fascism offered a dynamic, powerful and creative solution to the problems posed by modernizing a backward nation state in an age of global instability and the threat of communism. It was apparently nationalizing the masses, harnessing populist energies and achieving the status of a modern 'Great Power' without sacrificing core elements of traditional social hierarchy and the ideologies that legitimized it.

The Third Reich added another, far more radical, expansionist and violent role-model for what could appear at the time an overwhelmingly successful bid to resurrect a country on its knees, restore national pride, and deal with a host of horrendously intractable foreign policy and domestic issues which previously had left the country divided and impotent. Both regimes had restored national pride, ended anarchy at home and state weakness on the international stage. They had orchestrated a national renaissance. By 1920 a future world based on fostering a mass society based on 'American' democracy, materialism, consumerism, individualism and secularism could represent a nightmare, a 'end of history' in a far more cataclysmic sense than that given it by Francis Fukuyama. In their different ways, both fascism and parafascism offered elites a way out of the labyrinth of modernity without surrendering to the two deadly Cs, chaos or communism.

In any discussion of parafascism, it is vital not to underestimate how tempting it was for those who despaired of liberalism and feared both Bolshevism and anarchy to see in the two fascist regimes elements of a cure-all for the ailments of modernity, at least until the mid-1930s, that is, before the horrors of war and genocide had started to unfold. They had come to embody for many members of Europe's ruling elites, whether secular or religious, the regenerative power of ultranationalism as a (Sorelian) myth and the immense potential of the 'Gardening State' as a tool of social engineering and control unencumbered by the fetters of democracy and free from the threat of communism. Together the Axis seemed to have built at the heart of Europe a fortress to combat what were widely perceived as the collective forces of anarchy and decadence, turning what had been the death throes of Western civilization into the birth-pangs of a new era. In short, the fascist regimes curved the space of inter-war politics around them away from liberal democracy and towards a plebiscitary or pseudo-plebiscitary autocracy.

As a result a situation arose as the crisis of inter-war Europe deepened where it was 'normal' for traditional elites seeking to gain control over the 'emancipatory' (for them 'subversive') forces unleashed by liberalism, democracy, trade union power and the rise of the masses to invest their hopes and dreams not in the survival of liberal democracy, now equated with a Spenglerian 'decline of

the West', but in fascist and philo-fasist regimes. Many thus set about not liberalizing society and polity, but 'fascistizing' them from above so as to harness the 'subversive' forces of the masses, and generate a new pseudo-populist basis of legitimacy for a dictatorial rule which would encourage the participation of the church, the aristocracy, big business, the bourgeoisie, technocratic elites and the 'people', while dealing ruthlessly with all 'anarchic' elements that challenged too vociferously or openly the status quo. Obviously each parafascist state was uniquely tailored to the national context. Nevertheless significant patterns of affinity are likely to be revealed from this perspective even between 1930s regimes as far apart as Vargas' Brazil, nationalist China and imperialist Japan.

A 'parafascist' modernity

This outline of a project of collaborative, transnational research into regimes using 'parafascism' as its conceptual framework and perhaps building on the present volume, already contains the seed of a third line of enquiry. It is clear from the characterization of regimes offered in the last paragraph that the focus on parafascism in the analysis of 20th century politics highlights their nature as experiments in creating a form of modern state appropriate to the nation in which they emerge. In other words, they are expressions of a quest for an *alternative* modernity, a state which could address the social, economic, political, ideological and spiritual problems posed by modernization in a form that avoided the anarchy and anomie of liberalism, the collectivization and destruction of tradition of Soviet Russia, and the revolutionary totalitarianism of Fascism and Nazism. Within this perspective parafascism moves from the periphery to the centre-stage of inter-war political history, constituting not just a watered-down, mimetic form of fascism, but a genus of regime in its own right, one not only more numerous in its permutations than the 'real thing' in Italy and Germany, but, if we think of the Estado Novo and Franco's Spain, capable of surviving the cataclysm of the Second World War and displaying considerably greater longevity than Fascism or Nazism.

At this point the study of putative parafascist regimes becomes intimately bound up with the study of modernity and its impact on radical forms of politics in pivotal works by Zygmunt Bauman,¹⁴ Shmuel Eisenstadt¹⁵ and Emilio Gentile.¹⁶ No matter how far a particular regime avoided revolutionary upheavals and preserved intact traditional social hierarchies and institutions of religious belief, its history (which in the case of Salazar's Portugal extends deep into the post-1945 era) can be seen as an ongoing struggle to modernize the nation and move dynamically 'forward' in historical time while avoiding the Scylla of revolution, left or right, and the Charybdis of liberal decadence and secularization.

Pursuing this line of enquiry would eventually lead to consideration of theories of modernism as a generic term not just for experimental aesthetics imbued with a quest to express a deeper or higher level of reality or experience (what I call 'epiphanic modernism'), but for 'programmatically modernism' as well. This term describes all attempts, social and political, to 'heal' the trauma of modernity by achieving a renewed sense of communal purpose and transcendence capable of putting an end to the corrosive impact of modernity and the constellation of forces it was unleashing that threatened (what right-wingers saw as) the fabric of society. One aspect of this process that I have explored in some detail is the way the 'liminoid' conditions generated by modernity encourage countless elaborate schemes of a new society, a new order, a new world, some of them radical (e.g. Bolshevism and Nazism), some of them conservative, but all with a marked tendency to syncretism.

Parafascism's attempted fusion of tradition with modernity is an example of just such a syncretic act of utopian improvisation typical of political modernism in its struggle to overcome 'decadence'. Any political alternative to liberal democracy born of the inter-war period that contained a genuinely regenerative sense in the minds of its protagonists, whether fascist or parafascist, is to be distinguished then from 'reactionary conservatism' or the arbitrary despotism of military or personal dictatorships lacking a futural, utopian, modernist dimension.¹⁷ Naturally, investigations in this area would in turn intersect with research into totalitarianism as a revolutionary (and palingenetic) force,¹⁸ and would help refine the distinction between totalitarian and authoritarian societies.

'Para-politics'

This latter issue is bound up with a paradox which deserves greater scholarly attention, and constitutes a fourth area of potential enquiry for the future arising from this book, the relationship between parafascism and violence. It would be reasonable to assume that since fascism is more radical in its utopianism, it would hence always be more stridently racist, more belligerent, more ruthlessly violent than parafascism. Yet episodes of violence against 'internal enemies' that occurred under Franco's Spain, Vichy France, Antonescu's Romania and Imperial Japan far outstrip the violence and cruelty under Fascist Italy at least domestically (the legion war crimes committed by Fascists abroad is another matter).¹⁹ By locating this complex topic within recent studies of genocidal²⁰ and eugenic eliminationism²¹ on the one hand, and within research into the psychology of terrorist violence as a symbolic act of 'purging' on the other, parafascist studies could enter their 'trentennio' with considerable verve.

Perhaps one clue to the blurred distinction between parafascism and fascism in terms of its violence results from the way both can share in their

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most fanatical activists a Manichaean mindset which ‘splits’ the universe into a realm of ‘Good’ and ‘Healthy’ and a realm of the ‘Bad’ and ‘Evil’ which must be purged in order for society (‘the world’) to be regenerated and a new era to begin.²² The collaborative, interdisciplinary and international research programme that this topic demands is fully consistent with what I have described elsewhere as a ‘new wave’ of scholarship²³ which takes it for granted that specialists working on the same problem are potential collaborators, not enemies, and that their work is complementary not in competition. After all, generic concepts and approaches are heuristic devices disclosing partial knowledge, and should thus where possible be ‘clustered’²⁴ to produce a composite explanatory and taxonomic paradigm, and not treated as reified essences precluding other approaches and producing a ‘unidimensional’ rather than a pluralistic perspective.²⁵

Finally, the prefix ‘para-’ in political taxonomy is itself perhaps worthy of more consideration. In particular, building on the premise of *The Lobster Journal of Parapolitics* shorn of its Marxist assumptions, it would be intriguing to explore whether other mainstream ideologies have not given rise to ‘para-’ versions of itself, notably the travestied version of communism (‘communism from above’) in the whole Soviet Empire, Romania, North Korea, Ethiopia and Albania). Is it pushing the argument too far to suggest that liberal democracy itself has produced ‘para-versions’ of itself in the past? Candidates would be Germany’s Second Reich under the Hohenzollern, several phoney democracies in Latin America (e.g. Brazil, Argentina in certain periods), numerous ‘democratic republics’ in post-colonial Africa and Milošević Serbia. It might even be argued that liberal democracy temporarily became para-phenomena under the Bush and Blair administrations that went in with guns blazing to ‘liberate’ Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist (and parafascist) regime and Taliban Afghanistan, only to install two satellite para-liberal regimes, grim travesties of the ‘real thing’. There might even be a case to be made for ‘para-totalitarianism’, when society adopts the external totalitarian features of social engineering (propaganda regime, terror apparatus, leader cult etc.) not to pursue the utopia of a new society, a new man and a new civilization, but as a technique of social control. The regimes of Pinochet, Ceaușescu, the GDR, North Korea, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and Mugabe’s Zimbabwe might be good places to test-run this concept (and there is of course no reason why a regime might not be both para-fascist or para-communist *and* para-totalitarian simultaneously).

In short, parafascism may still prove its worth as a heuristic device after two decades in which it gave few signs of vitality. In the meantime, it is enough that a group of historians from a number of European countries are using it in this volume to reappraise the relationship between fascism and several authoritarian regimes who have for too long have crouched in the shadows of Fascism and Nazism. They have thus been treated, in anglophone historiography at

least, as political Cinderellas, marginal to the cataclysmic events unleashed by the Axis powers. Perhaps this volume will encourage historians to see them instead as not just pale imitations of fascism, but as examples of a *fourth way*, an alternative to democracy, communism *and* fascism, with its own distinctive solution to the legion problems of modernity.

Roger Griffin
Oxford Brookes University, UK

Notes

1. This unusually enlightened editorial decision was only made because one of Routledge's commissioning editors got car trouble on the way to a meeting and read Pinter's hardback edition in a garage waiting room with an enthusiasm doubtless partly fuelled by intense boredom.
2. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/136330?redirectedFrom=palingenetic#eid> (accessed 5 January 2013).
3. Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London, Pinter, 1991, pp. 130–131.
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Contributors

Goffredo Adinolfi is a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology at the Lisbon University Institute, Portugal. He received his doctorate from the University of Milan, Italy. He has published mainly on Italian and Portuguese fascism, including *Ai confini del fascismo: Propaganda e consenso nel Portogallo salazarista (1932–1944)* (2007), and 'The institutionalization of propaganda in the fascist era: The cases of Germany, Portugal and Italy', *European Legacy*, 17 (2012).

Gerhard Botz is Professor Emeritus at the University of Vienna, Austria and director of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Historical Social Science (Salzburg and Vienna). He has been visiting Professor at the University of Minneapolis, Stanford, and at the EHESS, Paris; and Director of oral history projects on Mauthausen survivors and Nazism. He is the author and editor of several books, among others: *Politische Gewalt in Österreich 1918–1938* (2nd ed. 1983); *Jews, Antisemitism and Culture in Vienna* (1987, German 3rd ed. 2002); edited *Reden und Schweigen einer Generation* (2nd ed. 2007); *Kontroversen um Österreichs Vergangenheit* (2nd ed. 2008); *Nationalsozialismus in Wien* (5th ed. 2011).

Roger Eatwell is Emeritus Professor of Comparative European Politics at the University of Bath, UK. He has written extensively on fascism and the post-1945 extreme and populist right. Recent publications include: 'Fascism', in M. Freeden et al., eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (2013) and 'Fascism and Racism', in J. Breuilly, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Nationalism* (2013).

Roger Griffin is Professor of Modern History at Oxford Brookes University, UK. His major work to date is *The Nature of Fascism* (1991). His other publications include *Fascism* (1995), *International Fascism: Theories, Causes, and the New Consensus* (1998), *Fascism* (edited with M. Feldman, 2003), *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (2007), and *Terrorist's Creed: Fanatical Violence and the Human Need for Meaning* (2012).

Constantin Iordachi is an Associate Professor of History at the Central European University, Budapest. His research focuses mainly on comparative approaches to historical research, totalitarianism, mass politics and nationalism in Central and South-Eastern Europe. His publications include *Charisma, Politics*

and *Violence: The Legion of the 'Archangel Michael' in Inter-war Romania* (2004); and *Citizenship, Nation and State-Building: The Integration of Northern Dobrogea in Romania, 1878–1913* (2002). He is the editor of *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives* (2009).

Aristotle Kallis is Professor of Modern and Contemporary History at Lancaster University, UK. His recent book publications include *National Socialist Propaganda in the Second World War* (2005), *Genocide and Fascism: The Eliminationist Drive in Fascist Europe* (2009), and *The Third Rome, 1922–43: The Making of the Fascist Capital* (2014).

Javier Luque obtained an MA in Constitutional Law from the Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales and a PhD in Political Science from the University of Granada, Spain. He has worked as a Researcher in the Department of Political Science at the University of Granada. He has published several works on elites, leadership and regional politics in Spain.

Miguel Jerez Mir is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the University of Granada, Spain and responsible of the Andalusian research group in political science. He has published extensively in the field of empirical analysis of elites, parties and interest groups in contemporary Spain. His publications include *Elites políticas y centros de extracción en España, 1938–1957* (1982), and recently the chapters 'Executive, single party and ministers in Franco's regime, 1936–45' (2009), 'Ministros y regímenes en España: del Sexenio Revolucionario a la monarquía parlamentaria' (2013) and 'Los diputados en la nueva democracia española, 1977–2011: pautas de continuidad y cambio' (2013), the last two co-authored with Juan J. Linz.

Mogens Pelt is Associate Professor in International History at the Department of History, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. He is author of a number of book and articles including *Tobacco, Arms and Politics, Greece and Germany from World Crisis to World War, 1929–41* (1998); *Tying Greece to the West: American, West-German, Greek Relations, 1945–1974* (2006) and *Military Intervention and a Crisis Democracy in Turkey: the Menderes Era and its Demise* (2014).

António Costa Pinto is Research Professor at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, Portugal. His research interests include fascism, authoritarianism, political elites, democratization and transitional justice in new democracies. He recently edited *Ruling Elites and Decision-Making in Fascist-Era Dictatorships* (2009); *Dealing with the Legacy of Authoritarianism. The 'Politics of the Past' in Southern European Democracies* (with Leonardo Morlino, 2011) and

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Rethinking the Nature of Fascism (2011). He is the author of *The Nature of Fascism Revisited* (2012).

David D. Roberts is Albert Berry Saye Professor of History, Emeritus, at the University of Georgia, USA. Recent publications include *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe* (2006); *Historicism and Fascism in Modern Italy* (2007); ‘“Political religion” and the totalitarian departures of interwar Europe’, *Contemporary European History* 18, 2009, pp. 381–414; and ‘Reconsidering Gramsci’s Interpretation of Fascism’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16, 2011, pp. 239–255.

Jason Wittenberg is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley, USA. He is the author of *Crucibles of Political Loyalty: Church Institutions and Electoral Continuity in Hungary* (2008) and many articles on inter-war central and Eastern Europe.