

BRITISH FASCISM AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

This book explores the policies and ideologies of a number of individuals and groups who attempted to relaunch fascist, antisemitic and racist politics in the wake of World War II and the Holocaust.

Despite the leading architects of fascism being dead and the newsreel footage of Jewish bodies being pushed into mass graves seared into societal consciousness, fascism survived World War II and, though changed, survives to this day. Britain was the country that 'stood alone' against fascism, but it was no exception. This book treads new historical ground and shines a light onto the most understudied period of British fascism, whilst simultaneously adding to our understanding of the evolving ideology of fascism, the persistent nature of antisemitism and the blossoming of Britain's anti-immigration movement.

This book will primarily appeal to scholars and students with an interest in the history of fascism, antisemitism and the Holocaust, racism, immigration and postwar Britain.

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BRITISH FASCISM AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

From the Birth of Denial to the
Notting Hill Riots 1939–1958

Joe Mulhall

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For my Mum and Dad



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INTRODUCTION

By the time the cannons fell silent across Europe in 1945 the leading architects of fascism were dead. Mussolini was hung upside down from a metal girder in the Piazzale Loreto and Hitler hurriedly cremated after swallowing a cyanide capsule and shooting himself in the head. With much of Europe turned to rubble, few families left untouched and the newsreel footage of Jewish bodies being pushed into mass graves seared into societal consciousness, most understandably thought that fascism would die with its founders. Despite all this, fascism survived World War II, and though changed, it survives to this day. Despite being the country that 'stood alone' against fascism and whose national myth is forever entwined with the idea that it sacrificed so much to oppose it, Britain is no exception here. In 1946 the British journalist, author and anti-fascist Frederic Mullally stated that, 'In the midst of the uncertainties and hazards of war, here we thought, was one thing that could be taken for granted: fascism had had its day in England; there could be no "come back"'.¹ Yet the truth is that during the war years there were fascists in England working to keep the flame alive, and even before the killing had stopped British fascists were readying themselves to relaunch in the hostile postwar period.

Many contemporary historians have argued that the start of the war marked the end of prewar British fascism, while some go further and state that it marked the end of British fascism all together.² However, in truth the search to find a definitive endpoint for interwar fascism and a clear start point of the postwar movement is a fruitless one. The lines between the two blend into each other beyond distinction as British fascism continued through the war years and into the postwar period making the division into pre and postwar a false paradigm. As Graham Macklin argues in *Failed Führer's* 'the ongoing centrality of race, racism, and anti-Semitism, within the racial nationalist tradition reinforced a seamless continuity' between the two periods.³ In reality the history of British fascism is best understood as an unbroken thread and a continual holistic tradition with a traceable lineage that runs *through*

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the war years and into the postwar period. By understanding the phenomenon as continuous, the war and immediate postwar years take on a new significance, shifting from an abstract, irrelevant and often overlooked period in the history of British fascism, to a flame carrying period that kept the ideas of prewar fascism alive. It was the transition phase and training ground when the baton of British fascism was passed on to those individuals who later achieved unprecedented success with the National Front and then the British National Party. Only by understanding fascism in the immediate postwar period can we properly understand the much more influential far-right movements that emerged decades later.

While British fascism is best understood as an unbroken thread, the world of the 1950s was of course very different to that of the 1930s, especially in terms of the political climate in which the fascists were operating. It goes without saying, for example, that the postwar world was a measurably more hostile climate in which to propose fascism. This had obvious effects on the scale of the postwar movement but also its ambitions. In the 1930s many believed the world was their oyster and the march towards fascism was inevitable and unstoppable. While some of the more deluded activists were unaffected by the war years, many tempered their ambitions in the immediate postwar period to the mere survival of the movement. However, while it is important to highlight these discontinuities, what is most interesting is just how similar the postwar British fascist movement was despite the fact that it operated in such a different world.

This book tells the story of this period, when British fascism was at its lowest ebb. It provides an in-depth analysis of the core ideological beliefs and priorities of the various ideologues and fascist organisations that existed in the immediate postwar era. It explores the policies and ideologies of a number of individuals and groups that attempted to re-launch fascist, antisemitic and racist politics in the wake of World War II and the Holocaust. It shows how the war, the revelation of the Holocaust and the advent of non-white immigration into Britain, forced a change in the ideological priorities of Britain's far-right, shedding new light onto the most understudied period of fascism in Britain, while simultaneously adding to our understanding of the evolving ideology of fascism, the persistent nature of antisemitism and the blossoming of Britain's anti-immigration movement.

One of the central questions it sets out to answer is: how did some people remain unmoved by the horrifying revelations of the Holocaust? How after news of Belsen, Auschwitz, Treblinka, Belzec, Buchenwald and Chelmno did so many refuse to turn away from fascism and antisemitism? For many fascists, the answer was simply denial: denial of the gas chambers, denial of mass murder, denial of the six million dead. This book shows how British Holocaust denial actually pre-dates its Franco-American counterparts giving British antisemites the ignoble honour of being the very first to properly deny the Holocaust, laying down the blueprints for the denial industry that lasts to this day.

Despite their best efforts to deny the truth of the Holocaust, however, many British fascists understood it remained the primary roadblock to the resurrection of their besmirched ideology and looked for alternative ways to escape the political

ghettos to which they had been confined. The immediate postwar period saw the arrival of large scale non-white immigration, provoking a racist societal reaction and a glimmer of hope for beleaguered fascists. However, while British fascists were the first to deny the Holocaust they were surprisingly slow when it came to seeing the opportunities provided to them by non-white immigration. Now in an age when any immigration will be met by far-right outrage, the arrival of Windrush in 1948 from the West Indies provoked little or no reaction from most of the far right who remained preoccupied with antisemitism. With time however, they came to see it as their best recruiting tool, shifting towards anti-black racism. Sadly, this research further challenges the idea of a tolerant country with a racist fringe and shows how Britain's far-right were often following societal racism, not leading it.

Another reason why overlooking the immediate postwar period is folly is that a number of British fascists in the period produced works that sit amongst the most influential fascist texts ever produced in the UK. Oswald Mosley's 'Europe a Nation' theory, Francis Parker Yockey's neo-Spenglerian tome *Imperium*, as well as the conspiratorial antisemitism produced by A.K. Chesterton all remain in print to this day. Some of the works produced in this period provide rare examples of British fascist ideas being exported as well as imported. Fascistic ideas in the postwar period moved to and fro across borders making it imperative to take a transnational approach to the study of this period. Extensive archival research, especially in America – notably the private archive of the Armenian American Avendis Derounian – resulted in some exciting revelations regarding the extent of far-right transnational cooperation in the period. Holocaust denial and fascist networks across the Atlantic, Europe and the beleaguered British Empire are all highlighted showing how far-right people and ideas operated internationally.

Building on existing scholarship of this period, this book fills in the blanks and sheds important new light onto the least studied period of British fascism. By looking at the moment when the movement was arguably at its lowest point, we can better understand the survival instinct of fascism. If fascism didn't die with the gas chambers it's likely that nothing will kill it, revealing its ability to change and adapt and the persistence of prejudice and hatred.

Literature review

The historiography of fascism is vast in both breadth and depth covering almost all conceivable angles and oddities. Ranging from fundamental questions like 'what is fascism?' and studies of national variations in ideology, organisations, individuals, style and period, through to more specialised and niche scholarly endeavours covering everything from fashion,⁴ football,⁵ cinema,⁶ sex, opera,⁷ literature, art, culture and women⁸ under fascism. The study of anti-fascism has its own extensive historiography⁹ though not anywhere near as encompassing as that of fascism itself. However, despite the abundant and ever increasing canon of secondary literature devoted to the 'Fascist Century',¹⁰ it falls short of comprehensive, and gaps remain that still demand scholarly investigation.

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In the case of British fascism finding such a gap can prove challenging due to the seemingly oxymoronic situation where the mass of published work is indirectly proportional to the scale of the historical phenomena. W.D. Rubinstein stated that, 'Seldom indeed, has so much ever been written about so little'¹¹ while perhaps the leading historian of British fascism, Richard Thurlow, conceded that, 'rarely can such an apparently insignificant topic have been responsible for such an outpouring of ink'.¹² Stanley Payne made his evaluation of the importance of British fascism crystal clear in his mammoth *A History of Fascism* by dedicating fewer than two pages to the interwar British movement, arguing that it 'never escaped total insignificance'.¹³ However, charges of 'insignificance' are ordinarily based on a narrow notion of what constitutes significance, namely being in power or electoral success. While the electoral performance of the vast majority of both prewar and postwar fascist organisations has indeed been dismal, the same cannot be said about the British National Party, which peaked in 2010 with two members of the European Parliament and over 60 councillors. If one believes that there is a direct and unbroken line both ideologically¹⁴ and in some cases with respect to personnel,¹⁵ from the interwar 'classic' fascism, through the postwar period right up to contemporary times, as this book does, then British fascism has had periods when it has escaped electoral insignificance. In addition the failure to break through into the political mainstream does not necessarily determine irrelevance. The far right has always had a gravitational pull that has the ability to shift the centre ground of political discourse further to the right on issues such as immigration and identity.¹⁶ Furthermore, many British fascists rejected democratic politics altogether in favour of direct action,¹⁷ meaning solely measuring importance through electoral success is of limited use.¹⁸ Anyone who remembers the London nail bomb campaign carried out by David Copeland in April 1999 or taking note of the record number of far-right terrorism arrests in 2019 would certainly challenge any charge of irrelevance.

The existing historiography of British fascism is at present an uneven one with a 'bias towards the 1930s (BUF), 1970s (NF) and 1990s (BNP)'.¹⁹ Roger Griffin states in his Oxford Reader on fascism that,

there has been a conspicuous lack of scholars prepared to trace the continuity between interwar and postwar fascism, either at an organizational or ideological level. . . . Almost without exception monographs or edited volumes on the subject have focused on events up to 1945 (usually in Europe), and have been content to confine their reflections thereafter to a few perfunctory remarks or a superficial chapter at most. For the period after 1945 the subject has fallen into the domain of political scientists and journalists.²⁰

Since then however both Graham Macklin and Dave Renton have produced monographs that have begun the process of filling in this hole in the historiography by focusing on what one might call the 'forgotten years' of British fascism. Renton

correctly states in the introduction to *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s* that,

One further reason for writing about British fascism as it existed in the 1940s is simply that nobody else has. The existing literature on the period is scanty, especially when compared to the literature on fascism in the 1930's or the 1970's.²¹

Despite both Renton and Macklin having begun the much-needed investigation into the immediate postwar era, it still offers the exciting opportunity to tread genuinely new ground.

Currently, Graham Macklin's *Very Deeply Dyed in Black* provides the most comprehensive existing work to tackle this period and succeeds in its stated aim of providing 'a firm empirical foundation from which further studies into the nature of postwar British fascism can be launched'.²² Indeed, this book builds directly upon this firm foundation. Unlike much of the literature that treats this period as an epilogue to the history of interwar fascism or a foreword to studies on the National Front and the British National Party, Macklin demonstrates the unbroken lineage of British fascism between the pre and postwar periods showing how, 'the re-emergence of the Mosleyite movement provided an important personal and ideological bridge'.²³ Focusing primarily on Oswald Mosley and the Union Movement, Macklin explains the tentative early steps of postwar fascism as its attempted to re-launch itself amidst the 'stink of humiliating defeat'.²⁴ Interestingly, he builds upon the ideas of Roger Eatwell and offers a 'unique micro-case study of how "coterie charisma" ensured the survival and comparative triumph of fascist ideology over adversity'²⁵ with strong emphasis being placed on the importance of the internment of some British fascists during WWII. While not confined to the immediate postwar period, there is also much to learn from Macklin's more recent book *Failed Führers: A History of Britain's Extreme Right*.²⁶ This enormous and important work is a prosopography that tells the history of the British far right through the biographies of its six principle figures, including Leese, Mosley and Chesterton. This work, likely to become the definitive work on British fascism for some time, spans both the pre and postwar careers of these key individuals, meaning its revelations in relation to the immediate postwar period are scattered throughout this book.

Dave Renton's book, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s*, is the only other full-length monograph dedicated solely to British fascism in the immediate postwar period. Notably, he explores the contributing factors that resulted in the 'remarkable' rebirth of fascism in the face of 'a broad anti-fascist consensus, shared across the whole political spectrum, from the left wing of the Communist Party (CP), to the right fringes of Conservatism'.²⁷ Renton argues that despite public hostility, fascism underwent a bell curve of success between 1945 and 1951 that peaked during the troubles in Palestine (1947–48) but had retreated back by 1951. As its name suggests, Renton's book also investigates both popular and state

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anti-fascism in the same period, giving the work a balanced and comprehensive feel. More recently, Daniel Sonabend's book on the 43 Group, *We Fight Fascists*, has shed much needed new light on anti-fascism in the late 1940s, tactfully correcting some of the inaccuracies in Morris Beckman's autobiographical account of the period.²⁸

In addition to the two full-length monographs by Renton and Macklin, numerous other historians have tackled the immediate postwar era in a plethora of shorter articles, chapters or sections of chapters. The earliest such work is actually a 1965 political science book called *The British Political Fringe: A Profile* by George Thayer, which investigated a wide array of contemporary marginal political movements, extremist parties and groupuscules from across the political spectrum. Thayer profiled Oswald Mosley's Union Movement, A.K. Chesterton's League of Empire Loyalists and what he calls 'the Neo-Nazis', namely Colin Jordan, John Bean, Martin Webster and John Tyndall. The relevant chapters of this lucid and thoroughly readable book may not be as detailed, illuminating or thoroughly researched as later academic works, but they are interesting for two reasons. First, through a series of fascinating anecdotes of personal meetings Thayer gives the reader an insight into the personalities and demeanours of many of the primary individuals covered in this thesis, including Tyndall, Jordan, Mosley and Austen Brooks of the LEL. However, more important is how clearly he portrays both the ideological and personnel links between the prewar fascists and those who went on to be the future leaders of the postwar far right. For example, Thayer explains that, 'The high priest of postwar neo-Nazism was Arnold Spencer Leese'²⁹ and that 'If Hitler was [Colin] Jordan's God, then Leese was his spiritual father'.³⁰ Interestingly, writing in 1965 it seems that Thayer saw no need to break British fascism into pre and postwar, instead treating the phenomenon of British fascism as an unbroken lineage. Through a series of short biographical vignettes, it becomes clear that the immediate postwar period was an incestuous yet often fractious ideological school that saw the nurturing of the flickering flame of British fascism, a flame that unbeknown to Thayer at the time of writing was to burn much brighter in the decades to come.

In stylistic contrast to *The British Political Fringe* is the rather dry yet informative article "'Tell me chum in case I got it wrong. What was it we were fighting during the war?'" The Re-emergence of British Fascism, 1945–58' by Nicholas Hillman that appeared in *Contemporary British History* in 2001. Of all the published work covering the same period as this book, Hillman's short article is the most aligned, as,

It considers what sort of people supported fascism after 1945 and argues that those who remained active were part of a continuous ideological thread linking the nascent fascism of the 1920's, the British Union of Fascists and the plethora of neo-fascist groups formed between the 1950s and 1990s.³¹

Hillman considers the re-emergence of fascism and identifies the need for further detailed work into the period and, while recognising Renton's contribution to

the historical record, criticises it for working in an ‘inappropriate Marxist framework’.³² The article interestingly summarises the ‘views and impact’ of Mosley, Chesterton and Leese, concluding that Mosley’s ‘Europe a Nation’ policy situated him firmly within the mainstream of continental fascism but resulted in his influence on postwar British fascism falling ‘a long way short of the impact of Leese and Chesterton’.³³ These short introductions are a useful starting point from which to launch the far more detailed ideological analysis within this book.

Far more abundant than specific works on the immediate postwar period are chapters within broader works on British fascism.³⁴ As is to be expected these vary in both relevance and quality. Among the more recent additions to the expanding cannon is Nigel Copsey and John E. Richardson’s edited volume – *Cultures of Postwar British Fascism*.³⁵ Building on Julie Gottlieb and Thomas Linehan’s earlier collection of essays – *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far-right in Britain* – it adds a much needed postwar perspective to the ‘cultural turn’ in generic fascist studies. Some of these ideas, especially Janet Dack’s contribution on ‘cultural regeneration’, are discussed in the ideologies chapter of this book.

Most interesting among this plethora of relevant literature is the work of the doyen of the history of British fascism, Richard Thurlow. Both the primarily historiographical *Fascism in Modern Britain* and the chapter ‘New Wine for Old Bottles’ in *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley’s Blackshirts to the National Front* offer intriguing hypotheses on postwar ‘neo-fascism’. Unlike Macklin, Renton or Hillman who emphasise continuity, Thurlow argues that ‘Classic fascism died in 1945’³⁶ and instead emphasises the revisionist nature of ‘neo-fascism’. While accepting that Arnold Leese’s bias ‘hardened significantly’,³⁷ he does strongly insinuate a major revision in the nature of Oswald Mosley’s postwar ideology, primarily in reference to its Europeanisation. However, this shift is discerned via a phenomenological approach that relies too heavily on the public pronouncements of Mosley himself. Renton far more convincingly argues that,

In terms of core politics, anti-communism, anti-socialism, eugenicism, elitism, racism, and a belief in the use of force against its opponents, in the destruction of trade unions and in the abolition of democracy, the Union Movement was little different from its predecessor, the BUF.³⁸

Most likely, the actual truth lies somewhere between the two views.

Far more convincing, however, are Thurlow’s views on the fascist revisionism of A.K. Chesterton, rightly concluding ‘that his antisemitism showed important changes’.³⁹ While in the British Union of Fascists, Chesterton wrote his most visceral antisemitic tracts in a series of articles for the *British Union Quarterly*, which were later compiled into his infamous work *The Apotheosis of the Jew*. Much of his interwar antisemitism takes a racial form and could be construed as quasi-genocidal.⁴⁰ He referred to Jews as ‘a rabble race’ and ‘blood-cousins of the maggot and the leech’.⁴¹ While there is no doubt that he remained a vehement antisemite, even after the Holocaust, the tone and style changed.

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If one is to properly understand Chesterton it is imperative to engage with the two biographies, David Bakers *Ideology of Obsession* and the more recent *A.K. Chesterton and the Evolution of Britain's Extreme Right, 1933–1973* by Luke LeCras.⁴² The former has useful biographical information and focuses mainly on Chesterton's road to becoming a fascist in the 1930s while LeCras focuses more on the postwar period of his career, emphasising his 'status as a transitional figure who played a substantial role in the survival and evolution of Britain's extreme right across two distinct periods'.⁴³ The work of Paul Stocker, who deals specifically with the British far-right, empire and imperial decline is also useful for understanding the politics and Chesterton and the LEL. He fills in a hole in the postwar historiography by exploring Mosley's Union Movement and A.K. Chesterton's League of Empire Loyalists, 'relationship with imperialism and more specifically, decolonisation' in the postwar period.⁴⁴ His thesis also spans the war years, starting in the 1920s and finishing in 1963, providing further evidence to the unbroken thread between the pre and postwar British far right.⁴⁵

One area that Thurlow covers well but is surprisingly only given a cursory reference in Renton's book is the major impact of non-white immigration beginning in the late 1940s.⁴⁶ Thurlow argues that,

There can be little doubt that fascism would not have survived as a political irritant in Britain after 1945 if those who adopted revisionist forms of the prewar doctrine . . . had not latched on to the problems created by the influx of new commonwealth immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁷

Macklin is in accord stating that Mosley's activists in Notting Hill during the race riots had 'inadvertently discovered the formula around which fascism could emerge from the political ghetto'.⁴⁸ Likewise, Roger Eatwell writes that Mosley believed immigration would be 'the populist issue that would lead him triumphantly back to centre stage'.⁴⁹ Hence the lack of in-depth scholarly work into the effect of the birth of non-white immigration on Britain's embryonic postwar far right is surprising and something this book sets out to correct.

Where focus on early non-white immigration on British fascism does exist, it is overwhelmingly focused on Oswald Mosley and the Union Movement.⁵⁰ Stephen Dorill's lengthy and thoroughly informative biography of Mosley, *Blackshirt*, though primarily weighted towards the prewar period, does venture into Mosley's postwar career, shedding new light onto the effect of the so-called coloured invasion.⁵¹ Dorill clearly articulates the opportunist nature of the UM's tactics in Notting Hill following the riots in 1958, stating:

Mosley's UM did not spark off the riots, nor was it responsible for them . . . but in the atmosphere of hostility which began to surround migrants it provided "a vocabulary and a programme of action which shaped the resentments of inarticulate and disgruntled people".⁵²

The role of other contemporary far-right groups is far less documented than that of the UM. Martin Walker's 1977 work *The National Front*, still to be bettered, does tackle the role of what he calls the 'dissident graduates of the League of Empire Loyalists who were simultaneously active in Notting Hill'.⁵³ He investigates the role of John Bean's National Labour Party (NLP) and Arnold Leese and Colin Jordan's White Defence League (WDL), albeit only briefly. In addition some of the literature that deals with race,⁵⁴ ethnicity and the immigrant experience also briefly touches upon the racial nationalists of the period. For example, Edward Pilkington's *Beyond the Mother Country* explains how Notting Hill 'became one of the centres of the postwar fascist revival'⁵⁵ and proceeds to analyse the role of the NLP, WDL, LEL and the UM in the Notting Hill riots. 'The fascist groups did not so much create racial hatred, as exploit and encourage it',⁵⁶ he argues. However, as with much of the secondary literature that only pays a cursory glance to this subject, it is often interesting but lacks the in-depth primary research included here.

With a view to discerning if anti-immigration actually replaced antisemitism as the primary ideological focus of British fascism or whether it was simply viewed as more politically expedient, it is necessary to read Thurlow's work in conjunction with Michael Billig's work on the later National Front. Thurlow states in reference to the postwar period that, 'If antisemitism was toned down in comparison to prewar attitudes, more strident racial views were noticeable'.⁵⁷ Billig argues that the ideology of 'neo-fascism' developed an anti-immigration superstructure on top of a core of a Nazi Nordic base.⁵⁸ Thurlow adds that, 'Whereas members were recruited, typically as a result of an anti-immigration campaign, this exocentric appeal was deepened to indoctrinate members into the inner-core ideology of the movement'.⁵⁹ Martin Walker, when discussing Colin Jordan's 1950s White Defence League, stated that, 'For Jordan, the great advantage of the immigration issue was that it made people think in terms of race and thus be more sympathetic to his anti-Semitic propaganda'.⁶⁰ Similarly, Edward Pilkington points out that John Bean's National Labour Party, 'still lingered on the theme of the "Judaeo-Communist-Masonic plot" . . . but the target of its invective had shifted from the "Jewish Red Peril" to the new "Coloured Peril"'.⁶¹ This duality, with an anti-immigrant 'superstructure' with an antisemitic 'core' would become the norm for the British far-right for decades to come, but it was developed in the immediate postwar years.

Defining fascism

Of all the unanswered questions of our time, perhaps the most important is: What is Fascism?⁶²

The vast canon of scholarly literature dedicated to fascism is ever growing, which makes the study of the relatively virgin turf of the immediate postwar period in Britain all the more appealing. However, any attempt to provide a brief précis of the thousands of books dedicated to other countries, regimes or aspects of fascism

would be wholly unsatisfactory, if not pointless. However, over the last 20 or so years a field often called ‘fascism studies’ has emerged with a view to distilling a satisfactory definition of the term itself. The vast and complex nature of the debate has led, as Payne derisively states, to the great majority of scholars making ‘little or no effort to define the term and simply assume that their readers will understand and presumably agree with the approach, whatever that may be’.⁶³ To avoid such a charge it is necessary to provide a critical précis of the broad arguments and dip a toe into this seemingly endless debate to outline what is meant by fascism in this book.

However, fascism is a constituent part of the broader far right, making it first necessary to explain what is meant by the umbrella term under which it sits. While ‘far right’ is a very broad term, those within it are united by a common set of core beliefs. Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg point out in *Far-Right Politics in Europe* that:

Far-Right movements challenge the political system in place, both its institutions and its values (political liberalism and egalitarian humanism). They feel that society is in a state of decay, which is exacerbated by the state: accordingly, they take on what they perceive to be a redemptive mission. They constitute a countersociety and portray themselves as an alternative elite. Their internal operations rest not on democratic rules but on the emergence of “true elites.” In their imaginary [sic], they link history and society to archetypal figures . . . and glorify irrational, nonmaterialistic values. . . . And finally, they reject the geopolitical order as it exists.⁶⁴

Though ‘far right’ is a useful umbrella term, its broadness makes it necessary to split it further into its constituent parts; the democratic radical right and the extreme far right. The social scientist Cas Mudde explains that the extreme far right ‘rejects the essence of democracy, that is, popular sovereignty and majority rule’, while the radical right ‘accepts the essence of democracy, but opposes fundamental elements of *liberal* democracy, most notably minority rights, rule of law, and separation of powers’.⁶⁵ While not all, most on the radical right can simultaneously be described as ‘populist’, which Mudde describes as

a (thin) ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the pure people and the corrupt elite, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.⁶⁶

While fascism makes up part of the extreme far right it still requires a definition of its own. However, first, if the term is to retain its usefulness, the long-term trend of dilution to little more than a vague epithet must be rejected to avoid elastication beyond tension; something that George Orwell understood as early as 1944:

It will be seen that, as used, the word “Fascism” is almost entirely meaningless. In conversation, of course, it is used even more wildly than in print. I have

heard it applied to farmers, shopkeepers, Social Credit, corporal punishment, fox-hunting, bull-fighting, the 1922 Committee, the 1941 Committee, Kipling, Gandhi, Chiang Kai-Shek, homosexuality, Priestley's broadcasts, Youth Hostels, astrology, women, dogs and I do not know what else.⁶⁷

However, despite the slovenly bastardisation of a deeply serious term, the word fascism has not been debased beyond usefulness for the classification of political individuals or organisations, despite what some historians argue. Gilbert Allardyce stated that, 'Fascism is not a generic concept. The word *fascismo* has no meaning beyond Italy'.⁶⁸ Such nominalism deserves to be rejected because as Robert O. Paxton rightly states, 'The term fascism needs to be rescued from sloppy usage, not thrown out because of it. It remains indispensable. We need a generic term for what is a general phenomenon'.⁶⁹ Neither the frequent incorrect use of the term nor the diversity of the phenomenon is cause enough to discard it all together.

Fascism is unquestionably one of the great ideological monoliths that, along with communism, socialism, liberalism, democracy and conservatism, helped shape the turbulent history of the 20th century. Yet it is a far more amorphous concept than most of its contemporary ideological rivals. Mussolini's *The Doctrine of Fascism* and Hitler's *Mein Kampf* lack the crystalline thought of the *Communist Manifesto*, Lenin's *What is to be Done?* or Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* and fail even to rival the debased Stalinist orthodoxy outlined in *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*. In short, though there was no shortage of willing candidates, Alfred Rosenberg among them, fascism had no Marx. Nor are there fascist works to rival the influence of the writings of Locke, Burke, Malthus, Ricardo or Smith in the formation of the liberal political tradition, especially not in terms of literary merit. This lack of a primary ideologue or foundation text makes a definition of fascism both highly necessary yet intrinsically allusive.

The nature of fascism further complicates attempts to reach a consensus-based definition. Jose Ortega y Gasset, the Spanish Nietzschean proponent of perspectivism, described fascism as 'simultaneously one thing and the contrary, it is A and not A'.⁷⁰ Kevin Passmore elaborates on this premise by asking,

How do we make sense of an ideology that appeals to skinheads and intellectuals; denounces the bourgeoisie while forming alliances with conservatives; adopts a macho style yet attracts many women; calls for a return to tradition and is fascinated by technology; idealizes the people and is contemptuous of mass society; and preaches violence in the name of order?⁷¹

The search for a definition of an ideology that seems contradictory in nature and has emerged in numerous different forms depending on the geographic location and the socio-economic, historical and political environment in which it emerged has existed almost as long as the term itself. Indeed, as Ernest Mandel once observed, 'The history of fascism is at the same time the history of the theoretical analysis of fascism'.⁷² Even 22 years after Mussolini had seized control of Italy,

Orwell identified the difficulty of distilling a single consensually derived definition. He asked, ‘Why, then, cannot we have a clear and generally accepted definition of it? Alas! we shall not get one – not yet, anyway’.⁷³ Since then, as stated by Paul Preston, ‘the study of fascism becomes every year a more daunting and bewildering task’,⁷⁴ and the consensus definition that Orwell sought remains elusive. However, the pursuit of consensual definition of a general or ‘fascist minimum’ remains an important task. By drilling down and finding the key patterns common to all different putative fascisms, one identifies fascism as a distinct phenomenon, and thus individuals and groups can be described as fascist or non-fascist by ‘disinterested’ academics or even non-fascists and anti-fascists, irrespective of what the individual or group claim themselves.

Before delving into the often heated debates that seek to result in a consensual general theory of fascism it is necessary to touch upon the one intellectual and academic tradition that has long been in agreement and for whom this debate has rarely been an issue. Marxist scholars have long been in agreement that fascism is a reactionary movement born out of a crisis in capitalism and formed as a bulwark against the proletarian forces of communism. Although most historians addressing this debate today either deride or more likely simply ignore the Marxist approach, to do so is folly, as it is not without merit. After all it was often Marxists who first wrestled with the nature of fascism and were first alive to its dangers. In 1935 in the face of growing fascist hostility towards Marxists across Europe, the Communist International provided their definitive definition of the ‘enemy’:

Fascism in power is the open, terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, the most chauvinistic, the most imperialistic elements of finance capitalism.⁷⁵

Georgi Dimitrov in his report to the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International added that,

fascism is not only bourgeois nationalism, it is fiendish chauvinism. It is a government system of political gangsterism, a system of provocation and torture practiced upon the working class and the revolutionary elements of the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, and the intelligentsia. It is medieval barbarity and bestiality, it is unbridled aggression in relation to other nations.⁷⁶

Dimitrov’s visceral definition lacks the calm, detached and useful objectivism of many later attempts to define fascism, yet when one considers it was stated in 1935, before the Spanish Civil War and nearly a decade before Soviet troops passed through the gates marked *Arbeit macht frei*, its prescient emphasis on the barbarity and chauvinism of fascism must be noted even though its emphasis on fascism as a tool of capital was flawed.

Marxist approaches⁷⁷ provide useful additions to our understanding of fascism for several reasons. While seemingly unpopular and increasingly moribund, the consideration of a class analysis for historical phenomena remains important. Fascism

as an ideology was forged among the fires of the 20th century's social struggles, and unquestionably many were awoken to its supposed charms by their fear of a possible proletarian uprising. Hence, Marxist definitions temper the notion of fascism as a radical ideology and as Passmore concedes, 'have shown that the revolutionary discourse of fascists cannot be taken at face value'.⁷⁸ This alone is enough to make Marxist definitions of fascism worthy of comment. Furthermore, Marxists have been alive to the continuing existence of fascism in the postwar period, (one of the contentions of this book) and, as Griffin points out, are 'spurred on by the conviction that fascism cannot be safely consigned to "history", but is a latent tendency in all modern states'.⁷⁹ While not an exclusively Marxist assertion, the desire to avoid confining fascism to the time-bound shackles of the interwar years has obvious advantages to any historian of the postwar period.

The value of Marxist approaches primarily lies in their ability to help explain the cause of fascism rather than providing an adequate definition. Marxist definitions are unquestionably retarded by their determination to describe fascism as the last stand of capitalism against the march of history towards socialism. The result is that any semblance of radicalism in fascist ideology is disregarded out of hand. Even if one takes the major leap of faith and accepts the proposition that the primary aim of fascism's ultra-nationalism was to divide transnational working-class loyalty, one is still left with no explanation for Nazi human experimentation, the eradication of the disabled or antisemitic conspiracy theories. The major fault with Marxist definitions of fascism is their failure to accept 'the possibility that these goals were pursued for reasons unrelated to the (supposed) logic of capitalism'.⁸⁰ Thus, almost all Marxist definitions are hindered by their assumption that fascism's ultimate, possibly even only, purpose was the defence of capitalism and Marxists' refusal to concede that the left does not have a monopoly over revolutionary movements. Hence, while Marxist definitions have some value they are also unsatisfactory.

Thus, it is within the liberal tradition that the search for an acceptable, consensual definition has made the most ground. In 1998 the perennial lack of consensus led Roger Griffin to prematurely proclaim the emergence of a new consensus in fascist studies. Despite later admitting his declaration had been mischievously designed to manufacture consent,⁸¹ it is fair to say that Griffin's 'emerging paradigm and the "cultural" interpretation of British fascism has dominated recent historiography on the subject'.⁸² However, while Griffin's definition is currently the most successful, it is not alone in adding value to this sprawling debate. Stanley Payne, the author of major works on the Spanish Falange, offers a 'typological definition' which, while not perfect, has significant taxonomic value. Payne's aim is to offer 'a wide spectrum description that can identify a variety of allegedly fascist movements while still setting them apart as a group from other kinds of revolutionary or nationalist movements'.⁸³ To arrive at his definition he identifies three broad categories each with numerous addendum; the three categories are *Ideology and Goals*, *Fascist Negations* and *Style and Organization*.⁸⁴ The advantage of Payne's taxonomic definition is its ability to be both flexible yet rigid when required. It is particular enough to distinguish between fascist and non-fascist organisations but

allows numerous movements other than the Nazis in Germany and Mussolini's Fascists to be labelled as fascist. In addition, his tripartite definition's inclusion of the fascist negations, namely anti-liberalism, anti-communism and anti-conservatism, as part of a wider definition, is most useful. The inclusion of the 'anti'-dimensions of fascism is imperative to any grounded definition, as it is fascism's oppositionism, whether towards capitalists, communists, Jews or immigrants, that has significantly contributed to its appeal and success. However, Roger Eatwell criticises Payne's emphasis on the fascist negations, stating:

It is more helpful to see that fascism's negations were partly propagandistic and stemmed from the fact that – as a “latecomer” to the political spectrum to adopt Juan Linz's fertile term fascism tended to attack existing ideologies and groups as a way of defining “space” for itself.⁸⁵

Eatwell argues that the negations are better viewed as part of the 'style' of fascism and as part of its ideological desire to split the world into 'us' and 'them'. His criticism leaves one wondering how the antisemitic murder of six million Jews can be more helpfully described as 'partly propagandist'. The relegation of such an important aspect of the reality of fascism is unwise. As is the danger with the whole of this debate, it can sometimes be dominated by academic abstraction and thus become too distant from the reality of fascism as experienced by society, and for this reason alone the emphasis on fascism's negations is apposite and necessary. That said, fascism should not be categorised solely as an anti-phenomenon or as revolutionary nihilism. When discussing the general characteristics of fascism, Renzo de Felice talks of a negative common denominator and asks if there are any common positive goals to be found.⁸⁶ Such a definition is unsatisfactory in the same way that solely describing communism as anti-capitalist would be.

Despite its many positives, Payne's suggested definition has had only limited success when attempting to garner the requisite academic support to form a working consensus. Griffin labels the definition as a cumbersome conceptual framework and complains that it 'marks out fascism as a genus of political energy which is unique in apparently requiring its self-professed ideological goals to be supplemented by its “style” and “negations” before they can serve as an adequate basis for a definition'.⁸⁷ While he is right to label Payne's tripartite definition as 'cumbersome', his second charge is less valid. In many ways fascism is a unique ideology, as shown by the major problems reaching a consensual definition, hence to criticise an attempt for its 'unique' tripartite approach seems unfair.

The major problem with Payne's definition lies in its reliance upon the historical features of fascism, which ultimately, as Ernst Nolte points out, provides the label of fascism with an epochal significance limited to the interwar years. Payne himself states that, 'Specific historic fascism can never be re-created', though he does concede the possibility of 'partially related forms of authoritarian nationalism'.⁸⁸ Hence, Payne's definition becomes unworkable for any historian who desires to 'illuminate further the protean timelessness of fascism',⁸⁹ which is a core aim of

this book. Payne is not alone in emphasising the need for a working definition to encompass historical contextualisation. Robert O. Paxton offers the following definition of fascism but adds the caveat that it ‘encompasses its subject no better than a snapshot encompasses a person’.⁹⁰ He states that,

Fascism may be defined as a form of political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.⁹¹

While a useful definition of the interwar fascist movements, its precise and detailed nature curtails its usefulness as a general definition for fascism. Paxton argues that definitions should be ‘grounded in a proper historical understanding of the processes at work in past fascisms, and not by checking the colour of the shirts or seeking traces of the rhetoric of the national-syndicalist dissidents of the opening of the twentieth century’.⁹² He disregards the notion of a comparable fixed essence of fascism or ‘fascist minimum’ and calls for fascism to be understood as a ‘process’ to be studied contextually. Instead of comparing rhetoric, ideology or style when labelling postwar groups as fascist, Paxton suggests one asks:

Are they becoming rooted as parties that represent major interests and feelings and wield major influence on the political scene? Is the economic or constitutional system in a state of blockage apparently insoluble by existing authorities? Is a rapid political mobilization threatening to escape the control of traditional elites, to the point where they would be tempted to look for tough helpers in order to stay in charge?⁹³

Paxton’s emphasis on historically grounded questions inhibits any historian who wishes to describe postwar movements as fascist by narrowing the definition with unnecessarily rigid contextual caveats that go too far and produce time-bound shackles.

It is unsurprising then that those definitions that rely less heavily on historical contextualisation and instead propose an ‘ideal type of generic fascism’ that fits no case exactly but rather provides an amalgamated ‘essence’ have come closest to achieving consensus.⁹⁴ The conundrum of defining a sprawling, diffuse and deeply varied historical phenomenon with a single term is overcome by the adoption of an ‘ideal type’. Coined by Max Weber, the ‘ideal type’ does not exist empirically but rather as an intellectual abstraction and promotes common properties in favour of uniqueness to create a ‘general’ genus. Weber states, ‘In its conceptual purity this thought-picture cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality, it is a utopia’.⁹⁵ Unlike Payne’s taxonomic definition, the implementation of an ideal

type to describe generic fascism creates not a definitive definition but a heuristic one. As Griffin points out, such definitions 'serve not to describe or explain facts as such but to provide tentative conceptual frameworks with which significant patterns of facts can be identified, casual relationships investigated and phenomena classified'.⁹⁶ It is the acceptance of an 'ideal type' of generic fascism that overcomes many of the problems that cling to definitions weighed down by over-historical contextualisation.

However, while the rejection of time-bound historical definitions is most welcome, the question over how to define a fascist 'ideal type' is by no means an easy or, unsurprisingly, a consensual one. Roger Griffin defines 'generic fascism' as a 'genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism'.⁹⁷ The key innovation here is his addition of the term 'palingenesis' to describe the fascists' vision of national rebirth, which he argues in his book *Fascism* is a 'visceral longing for radical change and regeneration which can be explained only partially by objective socio-political forces of crisis and has a deep symbolic and psychological dimension'.⁹⁸ Importantly, Griffin's definition correctly challenges both the Marxists' denial of a revolutionary component to fascism and earlier liberal approaches, which defined fascism solely by its negations.⁹⁹

Despite garnering a modicum of consensus, Griffin's definition continues to face criticism for his 'zeal to reduce fascism to one pithy sentence'.¹⁰⁰ Others, such as Eatwell, for example, have criticised Griffin, believing that his 'emphasis on myth plays down the rational side to fascism's ideology'. He also notes that Griffin's focus on palingenesis 'introduces a confusion between ideology and propaganda' and that his inclusion of the term 'populism' is too vague.¹⁰¹ In its place Eatwell offers his own definition stating that fascism is:

An ideology that strives to forge social rebirth based on a holistic-national radical Third Way, though in practice fascism has tended to stress style, especially action and the charismatic leader, more than detailed programme, and to engage in a Manichaean demonisation of its enemies.¹⁰²

As with Griffin's definition there is much to be admired in Eatwell's effort as they share many of the same virtues. It too is an attempt to distil the essence of fascism and provide a heuristic definition of a general genus. In addition, there is a conscious lack of interwar context-dependant features such as those present in Paxton and Payne's attempts. However, as Macklin correctly points out, the centrality of 'rebirth' to his own definition makes his criticisms of Griffin's use of the term 'palingenesis' rather confusing.¹⁰³ Despite this, the emphasis on ideology, the mention of third way economics and importantly a subtle nod to fascism's negations with the incorporation of 'demonization of its enemies' makes Eatwell's definition a passable alternative.

However, while no definition of this complex political theory will ever be perfect, Griffin's is no doubt the best we currently have, and in the words of Walter

Laqueur, it ‘might be difficult to improve on’.¹⁰⁴ Amongst its many virtues is its flexibility when it comes to postwar fascism. Eatwell, for example, has commended Griffin’s efforts for having the ‘advantage of not being locked into a specific time period, thus avoiding the error of seeing fascism as essentially an interwar phenomenon’.¹⁰⁵ Similarly Macklin rightly states, the benefits of Griffin’s effort are ‘obvious to any historian of postwar fascism wishing to define the movement they have under their microscope as “Fascism” in the generic sense regardless of their agreement with the cultural primacy of Griffin’s “fascist minimum”’.¹⁰⁶ In this sense its flexibility and broadness are unquestionably a virtue.

Though Griffin’s ideal type definition sheds fascism of its interwar chains and allows for the existence of postwar fascist incarnations, it opens up an ancillary debate regarding the prefix ‘neo’. In short, if fascism can and does exist after 1945, is it the same as prewar fascism, or is it a fundamentally different and ‘new’ form of the same genus? Like the term ‘fascism’ itself, neo-fascism and neo-Nazism are often used without thought. Many journalists, anti-fascist activists and even some scholars seemingly add the prefix ‘neo’ simply to indicate ‘recent’ rather than distinct or ‘new’ in comparison to ‘classical’ fascism. Lazily, there is a tendency to describe anything from 1945 onward as ‘neo-fascism’ without seeking to explain what, if anything, about it was ‘new’. Take for example the 1991 collection of articles *Neo-Fascism In Europe*, the introduction of which offers no explanation of what is actually ‘new’ about the fascists they discuss beyond a reference to their self-definition as ‘neo-Nazis or neo-Fascists’.¹⁰⁷ In reality, as Mudde points out, ‘They were mostly described as “neo-fascists,” but there was really not much new to them’.¹⁰⁸

However, while there was very little that was ‘new’ about the fascists themselves, the world in which they operated was significantly different. Griffin correctly states that,

Between 1945 and 1955, the international political, social, economic and cultural order underwent structural changes no less profound, rapid and unexpected than those that combined in the wake of the First World War to create the original conditions for fascism to burst unannounced and unscripted onto the stage.¹⁰⁹

These new postwar conditions were no doubt different and also less fertile for the growth of fascism, with Griffin describing them as ‘lethal for fascism as a credible alternative’.¹¹⁰ However, none of this means that what emerged after the War was not fascism. In *Failed Führers* Macklin rightly explains that while the ‘epochal’ conditions ‘ceased to exist after 1945’ and postwar fascism lacks ‘the broader economic and existential crisis from which it derived its “significance” during the interwar period this does not mean that post-war variants have ceased to be “fascism”’.¹¹¹ If one moves a cow from a field to a barn it still remains a cow. However, the question remains whether the change in conditions precipitated a large enough mutation in fascism thereby warranting the use of the term neo-fascism. In the case of Britain, it absolutely did not.

While most who use the term ‘neo-fascism’ do so to describe postwar fascist movement, others place the change during the war years. Camus and Lebourg, for example, argue that there is a ‘Fascist spectrum . . . based on international chronology’ that identifies three periods: ‘an ideological gestation before 1919; the Fascism of 1919 to 1942, which, to be sure, unfolded in several phases; and then a neo-Fascism from 1942 on’.¹¹² They argue that the shift from Fascism to neo-Fascism occurs when ‘the Third Reich decided to re-orient its propaganda along a Europeanist axis’ and when in contrast to its precursor, ‘privileged society over the state, Europe over the existing nations’.¹¹³ While interesting, there are several issues with pointing to 1942 and the shift to Europeanisation as the birth of a neo-fascism. First, while they accept the pre-existence of ‘supernationalist fringe elements’ between 1919 and 1941 it isn’t particularly clear why they identify 1942 as a more significant shift. It is certainly true that there were pan-European fascists well before this such as Georges Valois in France during the 1920s and 1930s.¹¹⁴ Italy also had its own tradition of fascist Europeanism with Julius Evola publishing essays on ‘The European Idea’ and the need for a ‘European Law’ in 1940 and 1941.¹¹⁵ In Germany as early as October 1939, Werner Daitz, a member of Alfred Rosenberg’s Foreign Policy Office of the NSDAP, established the ‘Society of European Economic Planning and *Grossraumwirtschaft*’, which called for continental European unity under German leadership. Also in the early years of the war Nazi policy makers including Karl Ritter, an economic adviser, met in the Foreign Ministry to discuss ‘European *Grossraumwirtschaft*’ (a large economic sphere of interest).¹¹⁶ These ideas were then adopted by Reich Economics Minister, Walther Funk, in June 1940, who subsequently presented Göring with his proposals for the ‘New Order’ on 6 August 1940.¹¹⁷ All of this suggests the idea of a ‘Europe over existing nations’, which Camus and Lebourg point to as the birth of neo-fascism, as not being particularly ‘new’ in 1942.

Even if one accepts the idea that such a shift did occur it remains unclear why 1942 is chosen as the primary year when one might be better pointing to 1943 when it became official policy of the Republican Fascist Party in Italy and a call for the ‘realisation of a European community’ was explicitly stated in the Manifesto of the Republic of Salò.¹¹⁸ Alternatively, one might point to even later in the war when Alfred Rosenberg and Daitz floated new ideas involving a united Europe¹¹⁹ or in the writings of Karl Heinz Pfeffer, president of the German Institute for Foreign Affairs, who wrote in 1944 that ‘Europe today knows that it is a single entity’.¹²⁰ In short, pan-Europeanism has always been a component of fascism with varying levels of influence at different times, and even when at its most popular amongst fascist ideologues, it generally failed to replace more traditional ultranationalism amongst normal activists.

In truth, when discussing the immediate postwar years, especially in Britain as outlined in this book, the continuities of people and ideas far outweigh any novelty or change. There is certainly no definitive schism in 1945 that sees the ‘birth’ of a new type of fascism. The hostile postwar world in which fascists found themselves

operating was no doubt very different and did, in certain cases, result in superficial changes – but not sufficient enough to warrant the use of the term ‘neo-fascism’. That is not to say that in later decades, when superficial changes were matched by more genuine structural and ideological shifts, that the term ‘neo-fascism’ might be of more use. One would better point to the generational change that happened several decades after the war or the more genuine modernisation projects undertaken by some European fascist parties towards the end of the century. Or perhaps one might argue that the revolutionary changes brought about by the digital age and the new fundamentally transnational far-right movements such as the post-9/11 anti-Muslim movement or the so-called alt-right better suit the term ‘neo-fascist’.¹²¹ However, in the years covered in this book, continuity far outweighs discontinuity, making the use of the term ‘neo-fascism’ unnecessary and inaccurate.

Methodology

It is necessary to engage with the debates around a definition due to the methodological ramifications that can result. One such example is Dave Renton’s contribution to the debate as part of his criticism of ‘liberal historians’.¹²² He argues that:

in order to justify their idealist definition, the historians assert that fascism, as a movement, was one where fascist principles or ideas determined fascist action. . . . Theirs are flawed histories inextricably linked to definitions of fascism offered by fascists themselves; thus they do not constitute a critical theory of fascism.¹²³

Renton suggests a need to ‘break out of the prison of ideas’ and to base any understanding upon a ‘historical foundation’. However, his argument creates a paradox, which he fails to address. He decries the ‘closed or implicit’ consensus that the age of fascism is dead¹²⁴ while simultaneously calling for the time-bound historical shackles that come with a contextually derived definition. Despite this he does raise an important methodological challenge, namely that the ‘liberal’ historians overemphasise the role of ideas when seeking to understand fascist movements. As this book is both a study in the field of the history of ideas and is based in the immediate postwar period when many fascists did not call themselves fascist and a difference between what they publicly stated and how they actually acted is discernable, Renton’s methodological challenge must be considered.

While Renton has discussed this methodological question with direct reference to fascism studies, these debates have raged for decades in the wider history of ideas field. Scholars such as Dominick LaCapra have called for a direct reading of texts that refuses to reduce them to examples of larger concepts. However, the work of Quentin Skinner, a historian of political thought, emphasises the importance of context. Skinner argues that it is necessary to ‘situate the texts we study within such intellectual contexts as enable us to make sense of what their authors were doing

in writing them'.¹²⁵ When summarising the work of Skinner, Anthony Grafton stated that he:

had set out to erect a new discipline in which context – the local matrices within which texts were forged and read – and language – the language of humble pamphlets and bold speeches, as well as that of canonical texts – took center stage.¹²⁶

In addition, John Tosh states that, 'Context is at least as important as text when coming to terms with an original thinker in the past'.¹²⁷ Of course, the problem is that when one writes about 'context' this is also a form of 'text'. The work of Skinner and others such as Bernard Bailyn, which emphasises placing the text in context, ensures that historians of fascism can avoid one of the major potholes of the field. The danger of concentrating on just the ideas of fascist thinkers and detaching them from the reality of the phenomenon as experienced by its millions of adherents and victims is that it could bestow on these ideas an unwarranted legitimacy. As Roger Griffin has noted the result could be that an

exercise originally conceived as casting light on the internal logic and dynamics of fascism in the spirit of "know thy enemy" might assume revisionist connotations: stressing its ideological cohesion could unwittingly rationalize and normalize it.¹²⁸

Thus, when engaging in a history of ideas, especially when the ideas in question are fascistic, it is imperative not to detach the texts in question from the context in which they were created and the reality on which they had an impact.

On the other hand, it is important not to become reductive and negate the impact of fascist ideas on fascist actions all together. Rather a balance must be struck. As Stephen Bronner has explained:

Political theory should never serve as the handmaiden of political practice. But it also should never simply sever its ties with history. It would thereby deny the obvious, relegate its insight into the realm of metaphysics, and – most importantly – truncate its ability to illuminate reality.¹²⁹

Bronner rightly goes on to state that a 'work is reducible to neither its text nor context. To ignore either is to undermine the political relevance of the given theory'.¹³⁰ When researching fascism it is important to find a route between Renton's dismissal of the importance of ideas and ideology and an understanding of fascism solely as an idea. One must accept and point out the discrepancies often visible between fascist thinkers and fascist reality, which challenges the utopian ideas with the often dystopian realities, which simultaneously doesn't become reductionist and relegate fascism to nothing more than a reactionary mass movement.

The sources used in this book reflect these methodological concerns. To understand the ideologies of the period it draws heavily on the many publications, pamphlets, newspapers and books of the groups and ideologues themselves to understand the ideas in question. In line with the increasingly prevalent ‘cultural turn’ in fascism studies this book also seeks to explore what can be learnt from the novels of the ideologues discussed. However, a critical approach is adopted to the sources produced by fascists themselves, which is a necessary precaution. Some such as Van Donselaar, Fleck and Müller and Eatwell have shown how when looking at fascist parties there is often a ‘front-stage’ and a ‘back-stage’. The former is a comparatively moderate façade displayed to the public that masks the true more extreme reality.¹³¹ With this in mind extra scrutiny is required when analysing the texts produced by fascists for public consumption. Their public declarations and publications must therefore be approached critically and placed in their proper context as well as being checked against other contemporary sources. As such, this book combines the study of ideas with the reality of actual events and behaviours as documented by anti-fascists, the state and the wider press. In short, it is important to adopt a critical approach that doesn’t rely solely on the words of the fascists themselves nor solely on those who opposed them.

Notes

- 1 Frederic Mullally, *Fascism Inside England* (London: Claud Morris Books Ltd, 1946), 84.
- 2 See: Jim Wolfreys, ‘The European Extreme Right in Comparative Perspective’, in Andrea Mammone, Emmanuel Godin and Brian Jenkins (eds.), *Varieties of Right-wing Extremism in Europe* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 21; Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 370; S.M. Cullen, ‘Political Violence: The Case of the British Union of Fascists’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28:2, 1993, 243–268, 245; Colin Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (Tiptree, Essex: Barrie and Rockliff, 1961); Alan Sykes, *The Radical Right in Britain: Social Imperialism to the BNP* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 92.
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- 148 Statement is paraphrased from the French: 'Il serait trop long de citer ici tous ceux qui, bien avant moi, se sont élevés contre l'injustice du procès de Nuremberg. Dès la fin du procès, des intellectuels et des journalistes anglo-saxons protestèrent'. In Maurice Bardèche, *Nuremberg II ou les Faux Monnayeurs* (First published 1950) (This version: Internet, le Secrétariat international de l'Association des Anciens Amateurs de Récits de Guerre et d'Holocauste (AAARGH), 1998), 5. <https://ia902703.us.archive.org/6/items/NurembergliOuLesFauxMonnayeurs/MBNur2.pdf>.
- 149 Statement is paraphrased from the French: 'Presque à la même époque, le duc de Bedford en Angleterre et P.O. Tittmann aux Etats-Unis faisaient paraître deux brochures extrêmement violentes et fort solidement documentées'. In, Bardèche, *Nuremberg II ou les Faux Monnayeurs*, 5.
- 150 Statement is paraphrased from the French: 'Je passe sur les arguments traditionnels contenus dans cette brochure, sur la partialité du tribunal, sur les condamnations portées ex post facto lege, sur les crimes de guerre alliés, sur la malhonnêteté fondamentale du procès lui-même. Je ne retiens que les passages qui concernent le national-socialisme et ceux qui concernent la falsification des témoignages et des preuves'. In, Bardèche, *Nuremberg II ou les Faux Monnayeurs*, 40.
- 151 Bardèche, *Nuremberg II ou les Faux Monnayeurs*, 29–37.

- 152 Statement is a paraphrase from the French: ‘Mais, pour la première fois dans ce livre, on voit un auteur aller bien au-delà de ces objections habituelles. En dénonçant le jugement de Nuremberg comme une opération politique destinée à justifier les vainqueurs, il en dénonce aussi le caractère d’opération de propagande, préparée et préméditée, exactement comme ce fut le cas pour d’autres opérations de propagande de la seconde guerre mondiale’. In Bardèche, *Nuremberg II ou les Faux Monnayeurs*, 29.
- 153 Statement is a paraphrase from the French: ‘C’est également dans ce livre que, pour la première fois, on voit un écrivain accuser les armées et les gouvernements alliés d’avoir commis eux-mêmes les atrocités pour lesquelles ils ont condamné les chefs militaires et politiques allemands. Reprenant point par point les griefs de l’acte d’accusation, Montgomery Belgion complète ainsi, à sa manière, la documentation du Ministère public allié’. In Bardèche, *Nuremberg II ou les Faux Monnayeurs*, 31.
- 154 Montgomery Belgion, *Epitaph on Nuremberg: A Letter to Have Been Sent to a Friend Temporarily Abroad* (London: The Falcon Press, 1946), 86–87.
- 155 Belgion, *Epitaph on Nuremberg*, 88–89.
- 156 Belgion, *Epitaph on Nuremberg*, 50–51.
- 157 Belgion, *Epitaph on Nuremberg*, 54–55.
- 158 Belgion, *Epitaph on Nuremberg*, 85.
- 159 Victor Gollancz to Liddell Hart, in Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black*, 187, n. 122.
- 160 Statement is a paraphrase from the French: ‘Des critiques militaires anglo-saxons, comme Liddell Hart ou Voigt, des généraux anglais comme le général Morgan ou le général Fuller, des personnalités ecclésiastiques, n’hésitèrent pas à se montrer aussi sévères pour les bombardements alliés que pour les camps de concentration hitlériens’. In Bardèche, *Nuremberg II ou les Faux Monnayeurs*, 6.
- 161 Statement is a paraphrase from the French: ‘Le major général Fuller peut écrire dans son livre Armament and History quelques-unes des condamnations les plus accablantes contre les Alliés’. In Bardèche, *Nuremberg II ou les Faux Monnayeurs*, 6.
- 162 Ulick Varange [Francis Parker Yockey], *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics* (London: Westropa Press, 1948), 533.
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- 165 Coogan, *Dreamer of the Day*, 162.
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- 67 When asked about the reports of Nazi atrocities 84% believed them to be ‘True’ while a further 9% believed them to be ‘True, but exaggerated.’ *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935–1971, Volume One 1935–1948* (New York: Random House, 1972), 504.
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- 71 Austin App, *Histories Most Terrifying Peace: Thirteen Reprinted and Original Articles* (San Antonio, TX: Austin App, 1947), III.
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- 74 Raven Thomson to Austin App, 6 January 1950, AJAC, Box 5, Folder 1948 ? + Publications, #8817–84–11–06.
- 75 Atkins, *Holocaust Denial as an International Movement*, 154–155.
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- 77 Dr Michael F. Connors, *Dealing in Hate: The Development of Anti-German Propaganda* (London: Britons Publishing Company, 1966), 87–88.
- 78 Geo. Deatherage to H.H. Beamish, 25 February 1946, ADC, Beamish H.H. England File. This was also the case with Beamish and Adrien Arcand, leader of the Canadian Movement with whom Beamish was in contact with in 1946 for the first time since ‘the fall of 1939’. See Adrien Arcand to H.H. Beamish, 18 June 1946, ADC, Beamish H.H. England File.
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- 87 Report on Mrs Nesta Webster, By A.S., January 1945, ADC, Domville – Fuller – Webster (England) File.
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- 89 'Captain Archibald M.H. Ramsay, M.C', *The Cross and Flag*, 14:4, July 1955, 20.
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- 91 'Captain Archibald M.H. Ramsay, M.C', *The Cross and Flag*.
- 92 'Word From England', *The Cross and Flag*, 14:2, May 1955, 10.
- 93 'Jews in the News', *The Cross and Flag*, 13:4, July 1954, 9; 'Gothic Ripples', *The Cross and Flag*, 13:9, December 1954, 9; *The Cross and Flag*, 13:10, January 1955, 14.
- 94 'The Jews Still Have the A-Bomb and the H-Bomb', *The Cross and Flag*, 13:7, October 1954, 3, 30.
- 95 'Arnold Leese', *The Cross and Flag*, 15:1, April 1956, 11.
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- 101 Editor's Note to A.K. Chesterton, 'The New Kuhn, Loeb International', *The Cross and Flag*, 14:11, February 1956, 28.
- 102 'European Letter', *The Cross and Flag*, 14:6, September 1955, 26–27.
- 103 For example see, Jack Blake, 'European Letter', *The Cross and Flag*, 14:9, December 1955.
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- 105 *National Renaissance Bulletin*, May 1958, 5. *Jewish Ritual Murder* was also sold by The National States Rights Party in their newspaper *Thunderbolt*. See: George Thayer, *The Farther Shores of Politics: The American Political Fringe Today* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 40.
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- 113 Carlson, *Cairo to Damascus*, 37.
- 114 Articles by C.H. Douglas and extracts from *The Social Creditor*, compiled and published as, 'Know Your Enemy: The Financier-Socialist Plotters', *The Broom*.

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