Decentering Comparative Fascist Studies

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Abstract

This article challenges a tendency that grew up in fascist studies in the 1930s to treat Fascism and Nazism as the only authentic expressions of fascism, and to evaluate and understand all other manifestations of the generic force as more or less derivative of them and hence of secondary importance when understanding ‘the nature of fascism’ as an ideology. This has created an artificial location of each fascism as being either at the core or periphery of the phenomenon, and has reinforced a Eurocentrism that leads to parallel movements in Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and South Africa to be neglected. It calls for wider acceptance of the realization that researching movements that did not seize autonomous power, such as the Croatian Ustasha, the Romanian Iron Guard, or the Transylvanian Saxons, can enrich understanding of aspects of Fascism and Nazism, such as the role of racism, eugenics, anti-Semitism and organized Christianity in determining the ideological contents ad fate of a particular fascism.

Keywords

peripheral fascism – generic fascism – diffusionism – endogenic phenomena – anthropological turn

‘Peripheral Fascism’: A Problem of Self-Image?

Shakespeare's Juliet famously asked ‘What's in a name?’ However, a collection of academic essays under the title ‘Fascism on the European Periphery’ immediately sets up not just a paradoxical interference pattern for the mind seeking to engage with it, but a serious conceptual hurdle to the possibility of approaching topics which fall within this field of study without distorting preconceptions.
This is because a ‘peripheral sphere’ in whatever area of phenomena implies marginalization in both spatial relations and significance. It smacks of afterthoughts, of ‘sowhatness’. It poses the danger that from the outset readers will not give what they are reading their undivided attention — unless, that is, they are that somewhat effete type of intellectual who prefers glosses and commentaries to the actual text, for example liking T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land for its footnotes. What is better, living in the city centre, whether the cultural, historic, or business centre, or in Suburbia, in Metroland, in the Styx? Who would choose the ‘banlieue’ rather than the ‘Rive Gauche’; to be beyond ‘the pale’ rather than where the elusive ‘it’ is at? Why choose to specialize in studying something intrinsically classified as of secondary importance?

It is the term ‘periphery’ that is the nub of the problem. In IT-speak a ‘peripheral’ expands the host computer’s capabilities without becoming part of it. It is exchangeable, upgradable, expendable. In the 1970s the historical social scientist Immanuel Wallerstein divided the world economy into core countries, and semi-periphery or periphery countries. The core specialized in higher skill, capital-intensive production, while the ‘rest of the world’ was left to get on with low-skill, labor-intensive production and the extraction of raw materials. Similarly the ‘periphery’ is the marginal, fuzzy area in our field of vision around the objects we are physically and mentally focused on. When the protagonist goes ‘out of focus’ in Woody Allen’s film Deconstructing Harry (1997) it was a symbol of his acute sense of being peripheral to his own life, and hence a cipher for the anomic and absent centre of modern existence. So a peripheral fascism is by definition a support act to the headline group, a sideshow, a cluster of minor characters in the drama of modern history whose names may appear in the theatre programme, but do not warrant a biographical profile of their individual achievements to date.

Following this logic, why should anyone but the most assiduous or obsessive devotee of comparative fascist studies spend time on a mere epiphenomenon such as Finnish, Latvian, or Portuguese fascism — unless, of course, they are Finnish, Latvian or Portuguese historians? It ‘stands to reason’ that the central plot, the main dish, the top billing in this field are Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany which together formed the Rome-Berlin Axis. These are the only two states which were extensively, if not completely, made in the image of fascism defined as a revolutionary form of nationalism (at least according to the now dominant academic consensus about the meaning of this once highly contentious term). The world’s many contemporary monarchical, military, and personal dictatorships in the period 1918–1975 with fascist ‘trappings’ can be dismissed as crude emulations and plagiarisms of them because of their blatant lack of revolutionary credentials, at least by all but the most intransigent
Marxists. All other ‘real’ fascist movements failed in their attempt to conquer power except perhaps for some brief moments of power sharing as a junior partner. They were abortive. They were not ‘the real thing’.

Fascist Italy retains its importance because, however much a failure as a vector of the social transformation and the imperialist destiny it craved to be, it put ‘fascism’ on the map as a generic concept and movement, even if the precise nature of these generic properties has been bitterly contested till the last decade. It was also a serious and sustained attempt to establish an alternative state system both distinct from and deeply contemptuous of liberal democracy and Soviet communism, one based on the regenerative power of organic nationalism and the charismatic power of the leader. Nazi Germany — whose fascist status is ever less disputed by experts despite the idiosyncratic positions on this issue that persist in some quarters¹ — is important because of its chilling accumulation, within just a few months of the Machtergreifung, of unprecedented political, productive, military, and ideological power on the basis of its own, biologically racist variant of organic nationalism and the iron determination of its most fanatical leaders to realize the racial revolution to the last drop of blood. This enabled Hitler to cock a snook at the international community and conjure up, to the ecstatic applause of millions of previously desperate citizens of the doomed Weimar Republic, the illusion of a reborn Germany, or at least a nation undergoing protracted birth pangs in the genesis of a millennial Reich. Within the space of twelve years it had united all ethnic Germans, conquered — through a ruthless deployment of violence not seen since the days of the Mongols — an enormous European empire, and was soon to embark on the systematic extermination of Jews and other categories of human beings considered ethnic or ideological enemies of a reborn, racially purified Volksgemeinschaft.

Like stars imprisoned in a binary orbit of unequal masses, the two regimes shine out their baleful light on modern history, eclipsing the sprinkling of smaller fascist stars in the inter-war period, some, like those of the Pleiades, almost too faint to be seen with the naked eye from the standpoint of conventional scholarship. Conceptualized like this, the many abortive fascisms of inter-war Europe can easily be seen indeed as ‘peripheral’, relegating studies concerned with them to a marginal significance a priori through an act of self-definition. This banishment to the margins has been standard practice in fascist studies for decades, distorting the proportion of scholarly attention and resources given to ‘abortive’ fascisms.

¹ I have in mind particularly Zeev Sternhell and James Gregor.
Out on a Limb

To take a classic example, George Mosse, though he was arguably the trailblazer of all the intelligent, genuinely scholarly comparative fascist studies that has taken place since the 1960s, nevertheless devoted the absolute minimum of attention to ‘peripheral fascisms’ in applying and refining his ‘general theory of fascism’, which was extensively based on Nazism. Even in the mid-1990s Stanley Payne, yet to be superseded as a conceptually sophisticated historian of generic fascism in all its many inter-war permutations, still categorized Italian and German fascism as ‘the dominant type’, while Falangism and the Iron Guard are classified as ‘marginal’.

This is an intriguing subliminal merging of the politico-military language of dominance (mastery, power) and subordination (subjugation, weakness) with the spatial one of centre and periphery.

Twenty years later Philip Morgan still found it necessary to challenge the normative assumption that ‘the Romanian Iron Guard was the strangest and craziest and most idiosyncratic of interwar European fascisms, largely because of its heretical religious Orthodoxy.’ No less revealingly, his article forms part of a debate in the journal East Central Europe — hosted by Constantin Iordachi of the Central European School, a major authority on the ‘peripheral’ fascisms of Hungary and Romania — on the theme ‘Fascism in East Central and South-Eastern Europe: Mainstream Fascism or “Mutant” Phenomenon?’

Formulated in the terms of normalcy and mutation, the theme of ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ fascism becomes linked to another, more sinister metaphorical discourse, more eugenic in tone, based on the idea of (healthy) norms contrasted with aberrant variants. Following through the logic of such tropes, the theme of peripheral fascisms could be recast into talk of ‘stunted’ and ‘aborted’ as opposed to ‘fully developed’, or even ‘mature’ (healthy?) fascisms. Such imagery lends itself in turn to being applied to Paxton’s quasi-biological scheme of fascism’s life-cycle set forth in The Anatomy of Fascism as an organic entity potentially passing through phases of growth and maturation, though often not ‘surviving’ the stage of an infant movement, or even being still born.

In this proliferation of biological tropes it is perhaps curious that little use has been made of the arboreal metaphor that came to Juan Linz, another of the elder statesmen of comparative fascist studies, when he called Nazism ‘a distinctive

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2 Stanley Payne, A History of Fascism, 1914–1945 (London: UCL, 1995), 466.
3 Philip Morgan, ‘Studying Fascism from the Particular to the General,’ East Central Europe 37 (2010): 336.
4 Robert O. Paxton, The Anatomy of Fascism (London: Allen Lane, 2004).
branch grafted on the fascist tree.\textsuperscript{5} One who did use it was Primo Levi, who wrote of Nazi hatred as ‘a poison fruit sprung from the deadly trunk of fascism.’\textsuperscript{6} Yet the use of this metaphor in such a historical context has obvious pitfalls. If ‘tree’ refers to Italian Fascism, then it implies all the other fascisms could be seen as distinctive branches, or limbs of that tree, some of them, like the British Fascisti, barely more than twigs. However, these were hardly ‘grafted’ onto it so as to merge with Mussolini’s political act of creation to the point of becoming organic extensions of it. Nor did Nazism ‘spring’ from a spurious organism called fascism. Nor, to stay with the gardening imagery, were individual fascisms somehow grafts taken from that poisoned tree\textsuperscript{7} and planted in other sites to grow or more often than not to wither on the vine (unless Nazi occupation acted as a temporary grow-tube for indigenous fascisms).

Both interpretations imply an approach to fascism reminiscent of the (now refuted) ‘diffusionist’ theory that held that the pyramids of the Aztecs and Mayas had somehow ‘come’ from Egypt (or vice versa), and were evidence of direct cultural transmission through migration or contact. Instead it is clear that they are to be seen as similar, but independent and autochthonous, endogenic manifestations of the archetypal human imagination’s striving to give architectural shape to and confer sacrality to ‘empty’ space and time by creating magic mountains of stone, whether in the form of ziggurats, cathedrals, totem poles, minarets, or pyramids.

Yet, the genetic fallacy, reinforced by the etymology of ‘fascism’ from Mussolini’s movement (and its false but propagandistically effective derivation from the Roman \textit{fasces}), that all fascisms are to be seen as local mutations or

\textsuperscript{5} Juan Linz, ‘Some Notes towards a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspectives,’ in \textit{Fascism: A Reader’s Guide}, ed. Walter Laqueur (London: Wildwood House, 1976), 24.

\textsuperscript{6} Primo Levi, \textit{If This is a Man} (London: Sphere Books, 1987), 396.

\textsuperscript{7} It is almost comic to see the use made by the neo-Con Mark Noonan of the arboreal metaphor to discredit Barack Obama’s brand of democratic liberalism: ‘Liberalism, as I’ve said, rests upon the falsehood that Man is perfectible by men. That our problems stem not from our fallen nature, but from the unjust systems and that if we can just change the system, we’ll change ourselves. Heaven on earth will result.

From that initial folly has stemmed all the rest – and thus liberalism, socialism, communism, fascism and Nazism are branches of the same, poisoned tree. Of course, to point any of this out – especially in a best-selling book – is to irk the liberals to no end. They insist that things like Nazism and fascism have nothing to do with liberalism – in spite of the obviousness of the relationship.’ M. Noonan, ‘Liberal Fascists Go Insane over “Liberal Fascism”’, accessed October 9, 2015, http://blogs4victory.wordpress.com/2010/01/28/liberal-fascists-go-insane-over-liberal-fascism/.
national adaptations of the DNA of Italian Fascism, is persistent. It still lingers on, for example, in evolved form in Wolfgang Wippermann’s insistence in his world survey of fascism that Italian Fascism is to be treated as the ‘real type’ (as opposed to ‘ideal type’) of fascism. This is to ignore the possibility that each fascism is generically related, and may even consciously derivative of foreign models in emulating Fascism or Nazism, or — as in the case of Oswald Mosley’s BUF — both, but not because of some spurious ‘blood’ kinship or ‘sap’ connection representable through a genealogical tree.

In fact, the fascist ‘family’ is Wittgensteinian rather than Darwinian. Different forms of inter-war fascism, once the (now old) ‘new consensus’ ideal type of it as a modern form of revolutionary ultra-nationalism is applied, are more fruitfully seen as representing similar politico-cultural responses to parallel, though unique, constellations of national, political, and historical crisis. These emerged against the background of what was perceived globally as a ‘crisis of (Western liberal or Spenglerian) civilization’ spreading throughout the developed world in which the expansion of democracy and capitalism was no longer assumed to be a vehicle of progress, and could even be seen as the carrier of disaster, a politico-cultural pandemic to be stopped. The term ‘fascism’ was able to gain currency as the term for a new generic ideology on a par with communism only because Mussolini’s movement was (correctly) seen as the first ‘successful’ manifestation of a non-communist, indeed anti-communist and national revolutionary bid to create a ‘new state’ and political culture that was not unique to Italy.

Fascism thus had no trunk, no limbs, no grafts. Nor was it ‘conceived’ in pre-war France and ‘born’ in Italy, as Zeev Sternhell maintains. Rather ‘it’ is a collective term for a number of largely endogenous species (variants) of a new twentieth century genus of ultranationalism, where the ‘genus’ is an ideal type, not a biological organism, and all botanical imagery is strictly metaphorical. All of the different species are, by their very nature as expressions of xenophobic nationalism, unique manifestations of a particular political culture and history. All of them share the universal ‘gene’ (meme?) of human mythopoeia that makes its most ardent victims believe fanaticly in rebirths, in cyclic temporal schemes, in the dawning of new ages after calamitous crises, in the nation

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8 This is the conceptual basis of Wolfgang Wippermann, *Faschismus: Eine Weltgeschichte vom 19. Jahrhundert bis heute* (Darmstadt: Primus, 2009).
9 For the Italian manifestation of this international revolutionary movement see Emilio Gentile, *Il mito dello stato nuovo* (Bari: Laterza, 2002).
10 Zeev Sternhell, with Mario Sznajder, Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).
as a phoenix that rises from the ashes of a degenerate age. It follows that fascism’s palingenetic vision of national rebirth shaped by the apocalyptic imaginaire of popular re-awakenings, ethnic resurrections, and racial crusades against decadence is unique to the twentieth century, but it is mythic core is probably as old as human culture itself.

Such an atomized, polycentric political context for the genesis of fascism precludes the idea of a ‘centre’ surrounded by a periphery within which minor or abortive palingenetic nationalisms are spawned. Rather each national culture in inter-war Europe, and some outside Europe, produced a different habitat which was more or less receptive to the growth of a native variant of revolutionary nationalism, a variant which may well have been partly shaped by ‘Nazi-Fascism’, but could not be cloned from it to become a movement of any significant populist momentum.

A Dramatic Rescue from Conceptual Confusion

Inter-war fascisms took the art of spectacular, theatrical politics to unprecedented heights. It is thus appropriate that it is a modern play that offers clues to a heuristically valuable conceptual framework to deal with individual movements of revolutionary nationalism which extricates us from the tangle of spatial, normative, and biological metaphors crowding round the idea of ‘peripheral fascisms’. The play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead was, appropriately enough, first produced at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1966. In it a youthful Tom Stoppard had taken two minor characters from Shakespeare’s Hamlet, both utterly marginal to the action to the point where neither we nor they know who is Rosencrantz and who Guildenstern, and placed them at the centre of the tragedy, so that most of the all-too famous action and monologues take place ‘off stage’. By deliberately reversing the point of view of Shakespeare’s play, Stoppard creates a dark farce in which the pair, in almost Beckettian manner, attempt to work out the socially determined ‘plot’ in which their lives are enmeshed. Comprehension of this, they feel, would surely make sense of their (fictional) lives and overcome their feeling of profound arbitrariness and superfluity. However, their bid to defeat contingency is doomed since they are written out of the plot and die (off-stage) before the play’s climax, leaving the brief, inconsequential narrative of their lives to resemble the ‘tale told by an idiot’ described in one of Macbeth’s more famous soliloquies.

The play is a brilliant study of humanity’s existential dilemmas by a Czech writer who, like Conrad, was a foreigner who had to ‘conquer’ the English language to forge his own identity. But precisely because he was initially so marginal
to a mainstream (British) culture, he achieved an ‘unnatural’ mastery of the language and culture thanks to an acute ear for of its mysteries and ironies inaudible to native speakers. It is also a memorable play because, with a wit, profundity, and lightness of touch beyond the ken of any French post-structuralist, it deconstructs not just *Hamlet*, or Shakespearean tragedy, but the whole Aristotelian tradition of using ‘great men’ as laboratory guinea-pigs for art’s forensic exploration of human nature and its contested potentialities of good and evil.

Before ‘modern’ drama these were generally held to be only capable of disclosure *in extremis* and *de profundis* by studying the rise and fall of heroes, and by anatomizing their greatness and tragic failings through poetic prose. It is this ‘classic’ principle that is exemplified in Schiller’s *Wallenstein* trilogy (1799) where the first part, *Die Piccolimini*, deals with the ‘little’ soldiers in the general’s camp on the eve of one of the decisive battles of the Thirty Year’s War, and has no other function than setting the scene for the ‘real’ drama of a ‘great man’ who leads the army. This concerns the moral conflicts in the soul of General Albrecht Wenzel Eusebius von Wallenstein that are precipitated by his inner and external struggle with fate, the central conflict in every sense for Schiller’s age.

By contrast Stoppard’s play is a work of demystification and black comedy which simultaneously allows a traditional, familiar cultural artefact and object of study, in particular the Renaissance concept of exemplary fates, to be revisited from an entirely different angle. By making the periphery the centre, *Hamlet*, Shakespeare, and the neo-classical aesthetic canon itself, along with the moral and cultural baggage they have accrued down through the centuries and which was found so reassuring by ‘bourgeois’ audiences, are interrogated. They are radically defamiliarized in a way faithful to the Brechtian concept of *Verfremdung*, but now with existentialist rather than Marxist intent. As a result, the reflective spectator is freed from the tyranny of the clichés spewed forth by ‘great literature’ and can re-engage critically with the object of investigation, a process which Bertolt Brecht calls ‘eingreifen’, to ‘intervene in’ and challenge what previously seemed a set of self-evident, and hence unimpeachable truths.

By deliberately adopting a fluid, dynamic, multi-perspective (post-modern?) stance on peripherality we are empowered to become more aware of the ambivalence of some of the earlier metaphors we have used to characterize it. Run-down, derelict areas of towns can be ‘regenerated’ and gentrified, B-sides of records can come to be seen as classics (e.g. Bob Dylan’s *Gates of Eden* and Dave Brubeck’s *Blue Rondo à la Turque* were both released as vinyl B sides), and groups such as *The Rolling Stones*, *Genesis* and *Radiohead* were once support acts for now forgotten bands before they became international icons. Even more important in the present context, every member of a Wittgensteinian ‘family’ of phenomena can be scrutinized in its own right without there being
any sort of hierarchy based on one component considered the ‘original’ version or the matrix of all the others, and thus acting as a sort of pater familias.

Certainly in zoology, though elaborate evolutionary trees exist to map relationships of descent and kinship, the discipline has long overcome the anthropocentric fallacy that particular species of animals are somehow more ‘central’ than others just because they are more or less common or closer to ‘us’. Every organism is important and fascinating biologically in its own right, not just as a permutation or aberrant variant of another or its place in the scheme of things pictured as a miraculous ‘tree of life’. Even in cultural anthropology remarkable progress has been made over the last century to overcome the Eurocentric myths of a humanity made up of advanced and primitive, progressive and primitive blocks of culture and divisible into distinct ‘races’. In the pernicious form of White Supremacism and Aryanism such myths have inflicted incalculable suffering in modern history, and continue to do so in the subliminal relegation of large chunks of humanity to the status of the less-than-human on the basis of assumptions reminiscent of Hegel’s dismissal of Africa as having ‘no historical part of the world’ since it lacked ‘development’.

In the context of historiography, too, this radical shift of perspective can also cast new light on some stale conceptual frameworks. For example, Wallerstein’s understanding of the global economic system in the 1970s in terms of ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ harmonized all too well with the dominant paradigm operated by an entire academic industry in the US concerned with development and modernization from the American perspective of economic and military imperialism. This assumed all countries were following the pattern established in the West, with everyone either ‘catching up with’ the US or remaining in a subordinate position as the providers of raw materials and labour for the inexorably accelerating rate of mass production within the ‘advanced’ consumerist West, which found itself (or was it a ‘manifest destiny’?) ‘self-evidently’ in the vanguard of material and human progress on grounds which were implicitly (and often not even so implicitly) xenophobic.

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11 Hegel provided a classic instance of such cultural solipsism when he declared in 1832: ‘At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it – that is in its northern part – belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there an important transitional phase of civilization; but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World’s History.’ Georg Hegel, The Philosophy of History (New York: Dover, 1956), 99.
It is now clear that such a picture owed more to mythic, crypto-imperialist imaginings and probably crypto-racist narratives than scientific analysis, betraying a collective hubris on the part of the West vis-à-vis a world that was ‘othered’ into subliminal categories of ‘barbarian’, ‘primitive’, ‘backward’. It was an attitude that had taken root in Europe at least since the (European and Christian) Middle Ages, and has proved almost Ptolemaic in its fixity despite its counter-factuality.

_Eppure si muove_. The last few decades have proved not through theory but hard economic facticity that the centre of the world economic system is mutable and moveable. Tectonic plates bearing the global economy are now shifting Europe and US inexorably to the periphery of the world’s industrial production and economic growth, while key sectors of Asian countries float to the (polycentric) centre on equally ineluctable currents of magma. What used to be a European-US driven globalization process is paradoxically reversing the roles of leaders and subordinates through its very momentum in a way reminiscent of Joseph Losey’s 1963 film _The Servant_ (in which an employee takes over control of the household and its former master), producing anomy on an industrial scale in the former colonizing world. However, when ‘the centre does not hold’, it does not necessarily mean that, as W.B. Yeats pronounced in his poem _The Second Coming_ (1919), that ‘mere anarchy is loosed upon the world’. Rather, as Stoppard shows us, it may simply mean that reality is polycentric and that another perspective can be ‘strategically’ made the centre for understanding the general phenomenon.

**The Decentred Study of ‘Peripheral Fascisms’**

So what can a non-arboveal, non-diffusionist, not ‘Axis-centric’ view of the topic contribute to a field of comparative fascist studies traditionally dominated by tacit assumptions that a number of manifestations of fascism are ‘peripheral’ and only two are central? For one thing it highlights the degree to which so many of the characterizations of generic fascism have been based on the existence of a spurious entity that could be termed ‘Nazi-Fascism’ (not to be confused with ‘nazifascismo’, the term used in Italian historiography to refer specifically to the functional alliance of the Nazis with Republican Fascists in the last phase of the war in Italy). This has led to the tendency in the past for definitions of generic fascism to be an amalgam of traits belonging to Fascism and Nazism as regimes — ignoring all other movements as secondary — as if they had been put into a blender to make a single entity.

Thus in _The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought_, Alan Bullock’s definition of fascism lists terrorism and a readiness to ‘liquidate rivals without
regard to the law\textsuperscript{12} as one of its definitional traits, even though this certainly does not apply to Fascism after 1925, while at the same time it fails to recognize the far more salient common element of fascism, such as the struggle for national rebirth (with or without a terror apparatus) and the quest for a new man. The classic expression of this distortion, though, is Ernst Nolte’s \textit{Three Faces of Fascism},\textsuperscript{13} whose focus on Fascism and Nazism to extract the supposed metahistorical ‘essence’ of the whole genus was supplemented only by a study of the \textit{Action française}, meant that other fascisms were endowed with the same invisibility as Africa for Hegel’s panoramic but tunnel vision of human-kind’s historical development. Yet Charles Maurras’s movement was far from being a complete expression of revolutionary populist nationalism, and was at most a precursor of some types of fascism which absorbed a strong Christian component from the prevailing social and political culture (e.g. in Hungary and Spain).

One major inference from our considerations, then, is that a putative form of fascism is to not to be examined through the distorting lens of a spurious hybrid entity ‘Nazi-Fascism’. Instead it should set out from a concept of generic fascism which does not privilege particular traits that on closer examination prove to be peculiar to, or simply most developed in Fascism or Nazism (e.g. corporate economics, imperialism, eugenics, biological racism, anti-modernist aesthetics).

A second inference is that there is a need for a spate of concentrated scholarly effort conducted in a collaborative, comparativist spirit with results available in English (the \textit{lingua franca} of comparative fascist studies) to address another unfortunate effect of Nazi-Fascist centrism in fascist studies. This is the extreme paucity of sophisticated analyses of fascist movements in a number of non-Axis countries in which they did not gain a significant degree of autonomous state power. It is a dearth not helped in the case of a number of Eastern European movements by the fact that the countries concerned were for over three decades under a Soviet rule. For both ideological and bureaucratic reasons this severely retarded the evolution of genuinely historiographical and productively comparative scholarship in the study of national manifestations of generic fascism, while simultaneously making research largely inaccessible to (and useless to) to Western scholars.

\textsuperscript{12} Alan Bullock and Stephen Trombley, \textit{The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought} (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), 309.

\textsuperscript{13} Ernst Nolte, \textit{Three Faces of Fascism: Action française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism} (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966).
This unfortunate situation only compounded the effects of the language barrier which already existed for most Anglophone historians even with respect to areas hosting fascism outside the Soviet empire, such as Finland, the Netherlands, Afrikaner South-Africa, Chile, and Brazil. For decades there were thus only tantalizing slivers of knowledge and analysis of indigenous fascism movements available to the English-speaking public about non-Axis fascisms. Though arguably language barriers would have been overcome more readily if subliminal assumptions regarding fascism’s central and peripheral zones had not been deeply entrenched.

As the Uppsala conference of November 2011 on which this collection of essays is based demonstrated so clearly, things have now moved remarkably since the dark days when Mussolini’s biographer, Renzo de Felice could confidently assert that fascism was an exclusively European and inter-war phenomenon,14 and that Fascism had a progressive ideology born of the Enlightenment while Nazism was a backward-looking, anti-Enlightenment worldview with no project for a new man!15 There is now a new generation of younger scholars active in countries traditionally poorly covered in surveys of inter-war fascism who are by temperament ‘comparative historians’ and, even when the focus of their research is narrow, display a refreshing interest in the existence of related phenomena in contemporary history which can enrich their understanding of their subject. They know in their bones that historical research of extremism in a unique national context demands a developing awareness of current debates, of the transnational and transcultural dimension of the investigation, of the importance of refining key definitions for pragmatic rather than theoretical purposes. It requires a disinterest passion for studying the particular that opens the mind to the general.

With this approach they do not feel out of their comfort zone to explore indigenous and ‘small’ manifestations of revolutionary nationalism as local, unique permutations of a generic phenomenon in a way that many of their forebears might have felt beneath them. They adopt a collaborative rather than a territorial approach to historiography. They are multilingual and communicate (often for an Anglo-Saxon academic disconcertingly well) in English, not as a colonial language but as the koine of collaborative scholarly effort. As intelligent empiricists, they broadly subscribe to the ‘new consensus’ on fascism on the basis of its heuristic value, and not as an act of faith or a trendy

14 Renzo de Felice, Interpretations of Fascism (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 10.
15 Renzo De Felice, Fascism: An Informal Introduction to its Theory and Practice (An Interview with Michael A. Ledeen) (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Book, 1978).
post-structuralism. They understand intuitively that a concern to define fascism as the precondition for writing about its history is a legitimate academic activity, and not the search for a ‘holy grail’, or a ‘lodestone’ as some of our more conceptually challenged colleagues have maintained in the past. Nor does the resulting ideal type constitute ‘essentialism’. Nor does a concern with fascism’s ideology constitute a ‘culturalism’ which ignores its ‘real history’, only an important prerequisite to making sense of that history.

This new generation of scholar seems to commute effortlessly between different languages and different national and international cultures in a refreshingly transdisciplinary spirit as an integral part of their work, and thus remain young in spirit (even if not always in age!). They realize intuitively that even if the fascisms they are working on may be classed as ‘peripheral’ within the old, curiously unscholarly ways of conceptualizing fascism, they are simultaneously central in the Stoppardian sense. Indeed, apart from their intrinsic ‘idiographic’ value to reconstructing unique events in the inter-war period so crucial to their nation’s history, resources devoted to them may well prove to have ‘nomothetic’ value as well to comparative fascist studies by refining the understanding of the generic phenomenon.

Towards a New Era of Fascist Studies!

On this speculative basis is it possible to entertain (suspiciously palingenetic) hopes of a new phase in fascist studies heralded by the conference of forward thinking specialists held for two days in an inner sanctum of academia redolent with tradition under the aegis of the venerable University of Uppsala in November 2011? Building on what was achieved there it entirely feasible that in-depth studies of such movements as the Romanian Iron Guard, the Croatian Ustasha, the Hungarian Arrow Cross, the Transylvanian ‘Aryan’ Saxons,16 or South Africa’s Ossewabrandwag, if carried out in a comparative spirit — and especially if informed by the ‘new consensus’ — could help ‘comparativists’ understand more about the relationship between secular political extremism, political religion, religious politics, and (Christian) faith. They could also shed light on the dynamics of cultural and biological racism, national and international currents of xenophobia, bureaucratized and spontaneous violence, populist and state

16 For an example of how fruitful it can be to study a ‘peripheral’ and almost totally neglected form of fascism in depth see Tudor Georgescu, The Eugenic Fortress: The Transylvanian Saxon Experiment with National Regeneration in Interwar Romania (Budapest: Central European University Press, forthcoming 2016).
issues of identity, and the generation of palingenetic myths from national histories within both Fascism and Nazism.

Similarly, the study of fascism in countries such as Finland and Spain could serve to refine understanding of general patterns involved in the processes by which inter-war states under powerful but very different pressures from hostile revolutionary forces from the communist left absorbed or resisted currents of revolutionary nationalism from the revolutionary right. To take another example, greater knowledge of Brazilian fascism, whose myth of Braziliananness was a celebration of the nation’s unique blend of races rather than of any ‘pure’ or ancient race, could provide new insights into the Fascist and Nazi initiatives to socially engineer an alternative modernity through the mobilization of popular notions of a beleaguered identity and a reborn national community. It may also highlight new aspects of the process by which during the inter-war period notions of cultural and civilizational crisis can be found all over the developed world fuelling speculations about the imminent birth of a new humanity.

Furthermore, greater knowledge of all the fascist movements who never achieved power could lead to deeper understanding the role played by marginality in the study of fascism, not in the geopolitical sense of ‘core and periphery’, but in a temporal, ontological, and cultural anthropological sense. In Modernism and Fascism—because of considerations of space a deeply Axis-centred work—I explored the thesis that the background condition of permanent anomie and transitional temporality (liminoidality) created by modernity, when it was combined with objective, localized socio-cultural crises occurring within a ‘Westernized’ nation, could in the peculiar conditions of inter-war Europe (and in outposts of Europeanized civilization abroad) breed movements which attempted to restore a sense of sacred centre and transcendence to social existence and historical time by mobilizing the forces of nationalism and racism, cultural or biological, as the basis of a new type of modern state and a ‘new man’. However, in contrast to Bolshevism, the quest for a ‘rooted modernity’ meant that elements of highly mythicized and selective edited national histories were integrated into ultranationalist bids to bring about an anthropological and cultural revolution not within ‘humanity’, but within a particular geopolitical space and ethnicity (even if conceived as a multi-ethnic one as in Brazil), imagined as the homogeneous ‘nation/state’.

The result was the attempt to establish a political culture fusing archaism with hypermodernity in a way which caused many scholars in the past to misread fascism’s futural temporality as a form of reactionary ‘anti-modernism’.

17 Roger Griffin, Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
Now, however, comparative fascist studies of a non-Axis-centric kind have grown to a point of maturity where, when focused on fascisms once regarded as marginal, they could help deepen understanding of fascism as a bid to transcend the increasingly liminoid phase which liberal capitalist modernity had entered since the mid-nineteenth century, and the acute sense of civilizational and historical collapse that prevailed after the 1914–18 war. Fascisms aimed not just to defend the traditional order from liberal anarchy and communist destruction, but in the words of Hermann Broch's magnificent trilogy on modern anomie, *The Sleepwalkers*, ‘make time and space anew’ within a new modernity.¹⁸

To adopt this approach within a radical reassessment of the value of ‘peripheral fascisms’ to understanding the ‘centre’ clearly encourages the cautious accommodation of the ‘anthropological turn’ promoted in contrasting ways by George Mosse,¹⁹ Emilio Gentile,²⁰ Peter Osborne, and Modris Eksteins.²¹ It also locates fascist studies securely within other topics for research into extremism where the perspectives of cultural anthropology are valuable, such as totalitarianism (understood as the bid by state leaders to use their power to engineer an anthropological and temporal revolution); modernist studies (at least those which have outgrown a narrow fixation with aesthetics and art); the emergence after 1945 of new forms of fascism, racism, and ethnocentrism, some entirely ‘cultural’, uniquely adapted to the conditions of post-war Europe and cultural globalization; and the rise of powerful new currents of politicized religions, in particular Islam, and of terrorism more generally.

Such developments ensure that fascism will continue to be an integral part of modern historical and political studies, not ‘at its heart’, of course, but certainly making its own contribution in a way reminiscent of the UK’s actual relationship to the EU rather than Tony Blair’s curious notion that it could be spiritually if not geographically ‘at the heart of Europe’. Long gone (and good

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¹⁸ Hermann Broch, *The Sleepwalkers: A Trilogy* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), 647.

¹⁹ See Roger Griffin, ‘Withstanding the Rush of Time: The Prescience of Mosse’s Anthropological View of Fascism’, in *What History Tells: George L. Mosse and the Culture of Modern Europe*, ed. Stanley G. Payne, David J. Sorkin and John S. Tortorice (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

²⁰ Simonetta Zamponi emphasizes the social anthropological aspect of Emilio Gentile’s *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997). Simonetta Zamponi, ‘Review of “The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy”; *History of Religions* 40, no. 2 (2000): 196–198. Accessed October 9, 2015, http://www.academicroom.com/bookreview/sacralization-politics-fascist-italy

²¹ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000).
riddance!) are the days when a senior US academic could attempt to banish comparative fascist studies from the human sciences all together in an article in *American Historical Review* which pronounced the topic dead by solemnly declaring that ‘Fascismo [he meant ‘fascism’] has no meaning outside Italy.’ In the meantime the present volume should convince readers that indigenous fascisms in hitherto neglected areas of inter-war Europe and beyond should only be referred to as ‘peripheral’ with the use of apostrophes.

22 Gilbert Allardyce, ‘What Fascism is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept,’ *American Historical Review* 84 (1974): 367–388.