

Fascists

Fascists presents a new theory of fascism based on intensive analysis of the men and women who became fascists. It covers the six European countries in which fascism became most dominant: Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Spain. It is the most comprehensive analysis of who fascists actually were, what beliefs they held, and what actions they committed. Through this evidence we see that fascism is merely the most extreme form of “nation-statism,” which was the dominant political ideology of the twentieth century. Fascists argued that an “organic nation” and a strong state that was prepared to use violence to “knock heads together” could transcend the conflicts, especially the class conflicts, rending modern society. We also see the fascist core constituencies: social locations that were at the heart of the nation or closely connected to the state, and people who were accustomed to use violence as a means of solving social conflicts and who came from those sections of all social classes that were working outside the front lines of class conflict. The book suggests that fascism was essentially a product of post–World War I conditions in Europe and is unlikely to reappear in its classic garb in the future. Nonetheless, elements of its ideology remain relevant to modern conditions and are now reappearing, though mainly in different parts of the world.

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Preface

I originally designed this study of fascism as a single chapter in a general book about the twentieth century, the third volume of my *The Sources of Social Power*. But my third volume still remains to be written, since fascism grew and grew to absorb my entire attention span over seven years. My “fascist chapter” was to be written first, since I was at that time spending a year in a Madrid institute with a fine library collection on the interwar struggle between democracy and authoritarianism. But then my research on fascism grew to the size of a whole book. I realized with a sinking heart (since this is not a pleasant subject on which to work for years) that it had to grow yet further. Since the deeds of fascists and their fellow-travelers culminated in mass murder, I had to engage with a second large body of literature, on the events centering on “The Final Solution” or “Holocaust.” I soon realized that these two bodies of literature – on fascists and their genocides – had little in common. Fascism and the mass murders committed during World War II have been mostly kept in separate scholarly and popular compartments inhabited by different theories, different data, different methods. These compartments have mostly kept them segregated from other rather similar phenomena of murderous cleansing that have been regularly recurring across the modern period – from seventeenth-century America to the mid-twentieth-century Soviet Union, to Rwanda-Burundi and Yugoslavia at the very end of the twentieth century.

All these three main forms of deeply depressing human behavior – fascism, “the Holocaust,” and ethnic and political cleansing more generally – share a family resemblance. This resemblance has been given by three main ingredients most openly revealed in fascism: *organic nationalism*, *radical statism*, and *paramilitarism*. Ideally, the entire family should be discussed together. But being of an empiricist bent, I felt I had to discuss them in some detail.

This would have generated a book of near 1,000 pages, which perhaps few would read – and which no publisher would publish.

So I have broken my overall study into two. This volume concerns fascists, centering on their rise to power in interwar Europe. My forthcoming volume, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, concerns the whole swath of modern ethnic and political cleansing, from colonial times through Armenia and Nazi genocides to the present day. The weakness of this particular division between the two volumes is that the “careers” of the worst types of fascists, especially Nazis, but also their collaborators, are broken up between two volumes. Their rise is traced in this volume, their final deeds in my other volume. The advantage of this division is that the final deeds of these fascists appear alongside others with whom they share a genuine family resemblance – colonial militias, the Turkish Special Forces of 1915, the Cambodian Angka, the Red Guards, Hutu Interahamwe, Arkan’s Tigers, and so on. Indeed, popular speech, especially among their enemies and victims, recognizes this kinship by denouncing them all as “Fascists!” – a rather imprecise but nonetheless justifiable term of abuse. For these are brutal men and women using murderous paramilitary means to attain, albeit rather crudely voiced, goals of organic nationalism and/or radical statism (all qualities of fascism proper). Scholars tend to reject this broad label of “Fascist!” – preferring to reserve the term (without exclamation mark) for those adhering to a rather more tightly structured doctrine. Since I also have pretensions to scholarship, I suppose I must ultimately share this preference for conceptual precision. But deeds can share commonality as well as doctrine. This volume concerns fascists as scholars understand the term; my other volume concerns perpetrators and “Fascists!” in the more popular, looser sense of the word.

I have greatly benefited from the advice and criticism of colleagues in writing this book. I wish to especially thank Ivan Berend, Ronald Fraser, Bernt Hagtvet, John Hall, Ian Kershaw, Stanley Payne, and Dylan Riley. I thank the Instituto Juan March in Madrid for its hospitality during the first year of research for this book, and the Sociology Department of the University of California at Los Angeles for providing a very congenial home throughout.