Introduction
Community, authority and resistance to fascism

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I

Increasingly, history impinges on the attention of the public through the celebration of anniversaries as conveyed by the media. In Europe at the end of the twentieth century this form of commemoration has been dominated by the fiftieth anniversaries of the origins and course of the Second World War: the appointment of Hitler as chancellor of Germany in 1933, the outbreak of war in 1939, the liberation of Europe from fascism in 1945. Commemorating recent history in this way has not been unproblematic for the leaders of post-war western Europe. Indeed, two such public anniversaries celebrated in Europe in 1994 threw the problem into sharp relief. Britain and France celebrated the D-Day landings in June with their former war-time Allies, but Germany was excluded, and commemorated alone the bomb plot against Hitler in July. In its own way, each of these events reiterated powerful points in our collective and public memory of fascism and the war. For the Allies, the conflict had been one of nation against nation and was decided on the battlefield by Allied forces and armed resistance organisations operating as adjuncts of those armies. That version of the war excluded the idea of a broader resistance to fascism on the continent (including Germany itself). For many Germans the conspiracy to kill Hitler in July 1944 symbolised the existence of the 'good German', and to celebrate it fifty years later was an important reassertion before the rest of Europe that there had been decent Germans among the country's leaders, and that Germany had a 'usable past'.[1]

The D-Day anniversary celebrations represent a nationalising of the conflict between fascism and anti-fascism which conveniently buries the social and political antagonisms which were unleashed at the end of the First World War. These antagonisms were acted out at some level in every community across the continent during the course of the next thirty years, from the revolution in Petrograd to the street battles between

Mosley's Blackshirts and anti-fascist demonstrators in London or Manchester. Similarly, the historiographical appropriation of the struggle against nazism in Germany itself by the country's compromised elites on the one hand, and political organisations on the other, eclipses the *popular* resistance against nazism before 1933 and against the Hitler regime.

Both of the commemorative occasions mentioned above furnished the opportunity for the restatement of the elite historiography of fascism and the war which had been established immediately after its end, but which has been increasingly challenged by a vigorous historiography of popular resistance since the mid 1970s, most notably in Germany itself.[2] In the light of this restatement, it seems appropriate here to restate too that alternative tradition and, through the contributions in this book, to apply it not only to Germany but to those communities in other parts of Europe where fascism was resisted.

II

Interwar fascism was a pan-European phenomenon. No country in Europe was without its fascists or fascist sympathisers, and none without its anti-fascists. The history of fascism, however, was more than the success or failure of explicitly fascist parties in national contexts. It was part of a broader European consensus on the radical right among those who had been dismayed by the political character of the Europe which emerged from the First World War: a consensus founded on uncompromising hostility to 'bolshevism' in all its perceived forms, both at home and abroad. In many parts of the continent (though less so in the British Isles) traditional state authority was in crisis, and seeking to regain the initiative from a broadly democratic left.[3] The role of fascism in this project varied according to national circumstances. In Italy and Germany fascism came to power with the support of conservative elites. But in most of eastern and southern Europe, for example, it was marginalised because traditional elites succeeded in restoring their authority by establishing recognisably modern dictatorships without the need for a populist party which could mobilise popular consent. This was effected very quickly in Hungary, for example; and in Romania the Nazis themselves dispensed with the collaboration of the indigenous fascists. But even in these societies, fascism, together with its outward trappings and its ideology, exerted considerable influence. Thus, in Greece, Metaxas' regime encouraged the Greek youth movement to adopt the full panoply of fascist uniforms and ceremonial.[4]

Sympathy for fascism, and for the broader corpus of ideas which it shared with other groups on the radical right, was thus widespread in

Europe. Mussolini and Hitler were treated with relative sympathy by conservative public opinion during the 1920s and most of the 1930s.[5] Much of this earlier sympathy was forgotten after the Second World War or, as we have noted above, suppressed by a post-fascist historiography that redefined the acute social conflicts which fascism and anti-fascism most starkly expressed as, quite simply, no more than another war with Germany. At its crudest, this is an interpretation in which only the Germans are demonised. According to A. J. P. Taylor, nazism in Germany was not an 'accident' in history (*Betriebsunfall*), or a case of 'bad luck'; rather 'It was no more a mistake for the German people to end up with Hitler than it is an accident when a river flows into the sea'. And, Taylor added: 'No civilised nation has such a record of atrocity.'[6] This is a perspective in which the nations of occupied Europe experienced a passage from repression and victimhood to a liberation in which national resistance movements performed the duty of rescuing national honour. This experience of occupation, resistance and liberation was claimed even by Austria and Italy, and the role of the resistance as a keeper of the national conscience even extends to the historiography of Germany itself.[7]

There was something to be said for this kind of historical representation after 1945. Above all, fascism was defeated in the end by the Allied armed forces. The European order which replaced it was explicitly anti-fascist, not only in its rhetoric and symbolism, but in its constitutional origins and the character of its political arrangements. Most early post-war governments across Europe were legitimated by the presence of 'resisters' in office. In Yugoslavia and Albania the resistance actually formed governments. In Czechoslovakia it was part of a leftist coalition based on the model of the pre-war Popular Front. In Italy, the resistance leader Ferriccia Parri emerged as prime minister in the country's first post-fascist coalition government in June 1945; in France communist resisters also served in the government until their expulsion in 1947 with the onset of the Cold War.[8] Thus the black and white mythology of resistance and collaboration was not only an important commemoration of the heroism of the resistance, but an essential one in constituting stable post-war national communities.

But official resistance history necessarily obscures as much as it reveals, as indeed does the general political history of the period. The years between 1917 and 1945 have been frequently summed up in simple generalisations expressive of the *histoire événementelle* of high politics, such as 'the age of the dictators' or 'the age of ideology'; and where the majority of the population appears at all, it is as a malleable 'mass' transfixed by a demagogic genius.[9] By defining fascism so narrowly we also define resis-

tance narrowly, and exclude, or conceal behind the periodisation of high politics or declared war and peace, the common experience of the majority of Europeans in the 'age of fascism'.

III

It is an axiom that these experiences were situated in the immediate community in which people lived – what Helen Graham in chapter 4 calls the *patria chica*. However, 'community' is an elusive construct, even though it is often taken for granted by historians. At its very basic level, it is recognisable as a geographical entity, such as the village or urban neighbourhood. At another level, a community can be defined by shared aspirations articulated in the prescribed goals of a political party; at a more abstract level, it can be notional or 'imagined': not only the 'imagined community' of compatriots who have never met each other, but also the putative or implied community based, for example, on gender or sexual orientation.[10] None of these communities are homogeneous constructs: all of them are socially stratified, bear fault-lines of gender or class and, whether in the case of the village or the nation, retain clear hierarchical structures of authority. What binds them together is the existence of what sociologists term a 'commonality of goals', that is, a subjective consciousness that certain overriding interests transcend their internal differences.[11] Not that a 'commonality of goals' presupposes constant unanimity. Common goals are defined instead in a continuous process of negotiation between competing groups – or communities within the community – with very divergent interpretations of what its common purpose is.

In inter-war Europe this was particularly evident in the conflicts between those espousing a republican ideal of the state (and, indeed, defending the republican state itself), and those wishing to impose or re-impose an authoritarian conservative concept of the national community. Finally, common goals might be imputed to a community by an external agent: the Communist Party activist, for example, who sought to discipline the inhabitants of the rural hill village or working-class neighbourhood and bind them to the party's own agenda.[12] Negotiation would then take place between representatives of competing sources of authority, both internal and external to the community itself (for example, village elders, political activists or agents of the state). Where accommodation was impossible, conflicts arose in the form of resistance to imposed authority of whatever kind, and this helped crystallise the common purpose of the community in the consciousness of its members.[13]

One such competing group, which was both part of the community and

simultaneously representative of, and sustained by, external forces, was fascism itself. For, although fascist parties represented national – and nationalising – movements, their emergence and rise to power were predicated upon local conditions. That is to say they were rooted in local communities. In Italy, the *Fasci* were very much regional organisations with leaderships responding to specific local conditions. Even after Mussolini came to power, localism continued to be a dominant feature. The same can be said of National Socialism in Germany where, in spite of attempts by the party leadership in Munich to impose central discipline, some degree of regional autonomy prevailed.[14] This meant that the struggle over fascism was rooted in the very communities within which it was incubated. During its rise to power fascism was able to wear down resistance at the local level and this process of attrition prepared the ground for a national take-over of power. But even when this had been achieved, fascist authority continued to be mediated – and resisted – at the local level.

For there was no 'national resistance' to speak of, even in occupied countries where a united struggle in defence of national independence has been subsequently identified by historians.[15] Michael Geyer is therefore right to locate the problem of resistance historiography in the 'posthumous act – of creating fictitious solidarities where the breakdown of solidarity had become and continued to be the insurmountable issue'.[16] Yet resistance did occur, and it was based on real communal solidarities beneath the level of the nation.

Communally based resistance to fascism was mostly spontaneous, and usually displayed what Jacques Semelin has termed 'civil goals' aimed at preserving the integrity of the community.[17] These communities were never defined in purely spatial terms. To be sure, the communal cohesion of the working-class district or the mountain village depended to some extent on its geographical dimension, and particularly its remoteness or its impenetrability to outsiders, but it also depended on the agreed acceptance of shared values or political orientation. Other types of community had no necessary geographical definition at all, but existed purely on the basis of shared interests or common assumptions. In Semelin's view, resistance is very much dependent upon this kind of communal cohesion.[18]

Semelin also believes that such resistance had to 'start from scratch'; but the contributions in this book show that communities could also call on traditions of resisting authority. And it was these local traditions that formal resistance organisations, primarily those of the European communist parties, sought to organise and channel into a nation-wide resistance. The community was thus a site where political–ideological and personal resistance to oppressive forms of authority intersected.[19]

IV

Resistance to fascism was inseparable from the revolutionary politics which had forced concessions from Europe's established rulers after the First World War. It was rooted in the defence of political gains in the face of the right's determination to reverse them. Resistance began, then, long before fascism could come to power. As Nick Howard's contribution to this collection makes clear, in Germany this conflict began during the revolution of 1918 itself. In his discussion of the servicemen's revolt at the end of the war, Howard argues that the popular challenge to authority from below was so widespread and persistent that Germany's threatened ruling class and the new socialist government were compelled to form a pragmatic alliance. He argues that by suppressing the soldiers' councils and, by extension, the radical element of the revolution, the army and republican government together disabled the potential for the resistance to the destruction of the Republic itself a decade later, leaving the way clear for nazism to triumph.

The authority of the Republic was dealt a severe body blow in 1919 from which it would not recover. For the authority of the elites was reasserted and was used to undermine the democratic polity. In spite of the limitations imposed on the Republic by the defeat of 1918–19, democracy itself had been the principal gain. It guaranteed a degree of popular control over political authority, especially in local communities, by the exercise of the vote. Where these were working-class communities, this usually meant the election of republican administrations.[20] Yet such communities, which had gained considerably from the post-war settlement, now found themselves subject to a two-fold and increasingly co-ordinated attack. In his contribution, Anthony McElligott shows how the judiciary, as one of the principal organs of the conservative state, took advantage of the multiple crises after 1930 to extend its authority over 'rough' working-class communities which were also subjected to prolonged and increasingly violent terrorism from Nazi stormtroopers. McElligott puts the case for the convergence of the authorities' agenda of intensified social control during the depression with an authoritarian political agenda for the state. Moreover there was a further convergence, he argues, between these conservative agendas and the political goals of the Nazis. He shows how, before 1933, a determined judiciary played a key role in thwarting communal self-defence against fascism by effectively criminalising the politics of working-class communities.

In Britain, too, fascism encountered resistance at the communal level. Drawing on oral testimonies, Neil Barrett's comparative study of the working-class community in Nelson and the Jewish community in north

Manchester reveals the strengths and the weaknesses of community-based strategies of resistance. Nelson was typical of the south-east Lancashire cotton towns targeted by the British Union of Fascists for recruitment during the depression years, in that Mosley's Blackshirts had very little success. Communal solidarities in Nelson proved stronger than nominal political differences that might have undermined the resistance to fascism. In Manchester, however, there were genuine political and generational cleavages within the Jewish community which made resistance more difficult. Young Jews, organised in the Communist Party and in other political groups, adopted a more confrontational activism from the outset; community elders, however, initially had reservations about the political associations of anti-fascism, not least because they threatened to undermine their own authority within the community. The belatedness of their response to the BUF, Barrett argues, was a consequence of the attempt to reassert that authority. In both cases Barrett shows the usefulness of studying local peculiarities for understanding the contours of resistance and the failure of fascism in interwar Britain.

Communal cleavages were not restricted to local communities, but proved to be a disabling characteristic of anti-fascist resistance at the national level. As we have noted above, national resistance movements rarely existed in pure form. Resistance came from a variety of disparate, often mutually hostile groups, whose cohesion in the cause of a common patriotic aim was often nominal at best. Indeed, even where a notional ideological unity appeared to exist, the reality was often more complex. Helen Graham's study of resistance and revolution in Spain illustrates the difficulties in maintaining unity within the ostensibly united front defending the Republic against Franco's military coup. Resistance came, as so often throughout Europe, from the communities which stood to lose, but which articulated and carried out their opposition through a range of divergent social ideologies and separate and distinct political parties. For most rank-and-file participants in the resistance to Franco, initial mobilisation in defence of the Republic was spurred by the possibility of changing and controlling the immediate, lived environment. But the local roots of the resistance movement, privileging community over state, rapidly came to disadvantage the Republic in the evolving conditions of the conflict. Thus while the potential for unity in defence of the Republic was strong, the historically fissiparous nature of the Spanish left and the persistence of localism prevented the formation of a genuinely united resistance. Above all this represented a failure to move beyond the *patria chica* and to '"think" the nation'.[21]

In Ireland, on the other hand, as Mike Cronin argues, the nation was a powerful and decisive rallying point for the resistance to fascism.

Cronin's study focuses on the resistance to the Blueshirts, Ireland's putative fascist movement. He highlights two different responses: the 'official' opposition from the Fianna Fail government, employing the full range of government authority at its disposal; and the 'popular' resistance from various splinter groups under the broad heading of republican socialism, rooted in communal mobilisation. After Fianna Fail's political success in 1932 and the recasting of the Irish state three years later, a 'national community' based on a near comprehensive political consensus came into existence. This not only obviated the need for a *fascist* regeneration of the nation, but also marginalised the Blueshirts, under their extremist leader General Eoin O'Duffy, to such an extent that they were eventually disowned by their own political allies.[22]

The realities of fascist power created a whole new set of power relationships and resistance strategies. The focus of Yves Le Maner's study of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais is not resistance as national liberation, but the impact of occupation on existing local structures of authority and on communal responses to such authority. Le Maner shows how the occupation was exploited by competing levels of the local state (prefectural and municipal) and political groups to reassert their own dented authority within the community at each other's expense. Moreover, the local state became a testing ground for the conflicting authority of the Germans and Vichy. Le Maner explores the ways in which the occupation modified relations between local elites and the population, and assesses the extent to which political attitudes were changed. Some local notables, especially in the countryside, were able to exploit the conditions of the occupation to reassert their 'natural' authority over local communities as the basis for a conservative post-war order.

The political vacuum that accompanied occupation was exploited by existing authorities seeking to reassert their position (often with the help of the Germans), and it also offered an opportunity to aspiring leaders. The politics of resistance was not only a matter of opposing the German occupation, but afforded the opportunity of establishing new structures of authority as the basis for a new post-war social order. Mark Mazower's contribution to this collection focuses upon the power relations within the Greek resistance movement led by EAM/ELAS to the German occupation and the quisling regimes in Athens. He argues that existing histories have represented EAM/ELAS as a sharply politicised, monolithic entity in a way which ignores the social, geographical and cultural realities of wartime Greece. Although the Communist Party clearly dominated the Greek resistance movement and sought to establish a vertical structure of authority, Mazower argues that no central control was ever established. Poor communications and village particularisms meant that local com-

manders had to improvise. The authority of the resistance movement was frequently questioned by local people even within the areas it nominally controlled. Ultimately it was the compromises of EAM/ELAS as it imposed its leadership in the mountain regions that defined the nature of resistance. Nonetheless, in Greece, as in many other parts of Europe, the experiences of individuals and resistance groups have frequently been appropriated and subsumed into an institutional historiography of resistance, not least by the Communist Party.

Such historiographical appropriation of resistance distorts the nature of historical experience and social identity. Austrian industrial workers, for example, might identify with some of the aims of the Communist Party. However, as Tim Kirk argues in his essay, the KPÖ secured conditional support only among certain groups of workers disillusioned with the Social Democratic Party. Kirk examines the different oppositional strategies, from active resistance to truculent dissent, which remained open to an industrial working class weakened by prolonged economic depression and in the absence of clear leadership after a decade of political repression. His study of the work-place community offers a reassessment of the insistence of recent research that working-class acceptance of nazism was widespread and sustained the regime in power.[23] Yet if the opposition of the working class appeared limited both in intention and impact, their communities nevertheless remained pervaded by an instinctive anti-nazism which was expressed in impromptu responses to particular policies or events.

Community consciousness was related to different kinds of authority: that of its own leaders and that suggested by external agents. It was not only that social democrats and communists asserted political authority and shaped communal identity, but also, by criminalising certain kinds of political behaviour, lawyers and policemen also imposed a cohesion. In the case of an inchoate community, externally imposed definitions might provide the first or only articulation of common identity. Hannes Sulzenbacher's reconstruction and examination of the experience of 'homosexual' men in Vienna between the wars shows how the origins of their shared sexual identity was founded on medical and criminal categories. He shows that by defining sexual norms doctors and lawyers created, from the variety of public, sub-cultural and 'hidden' sexual behaviour, distinct if unstable categories which served not only to determine the boundaries of 'normal' sexual behaviour for the police, but contributed to the development of a community consciousness. Although Sulzenbacher is critical of the notion of a 'single experience', he concludes that resistance among 'homosexual' men to Nazi repression was based on a long experience of negotiating with authority and that repression itself created

the very community it sought to shatter. It was a community whose history was suppressed after 1945, both by the authorities and by historians. Nazi anti-homosexual legislation was not repealed until 1971; until then the individual and collective experience of this community under fascism could not be recorded.

The problems of the post-war historiography of fascism are the central concerns of Philip Morgan's and Perry Willson's essays on Italy. In a critique of the *oeuvre* of Italy's pre-eminent historian of Italian fascism, Renzo de Felice, Morgan argues that while there may have appeared to be a measure of political consent for the Fascist dictatorship in Italy, it is impossible to establish that it was genuine. The difficulty, as Morgan demonstrates, is the methodological problems of defining and analysing popular attitudes under the 'totalitarian' conditions of the Fascist system which aimed at mobilising 'consent' in a repressive context. If a qualified consensus was achieved, it was on the basis of the threat of coercion and in the absence of alternatives to the organisations through which the regime sought to mobilise support. Like their counterparts in Austria, working-class communities with grievances against the regime, often economic in origin, recognised the limits of the possible and expressed their opposition, not in ways that resistance activists from the PCI might have wished, but through symbolic gestures of defiance in a tradition of dissent which predated fascism itself. Such symbolic opposition to the regime is excluded from standard histories because it does not accord with the accepted categories of resistance activity.

Historians have found it difficult to abandon their stereotypical expectations of communities with which they are unfamiliar or unsympathetic. Workers who are not violently confrontational or politically docile are difficult for historians to imagine. Similarly, the notion that the contribution to resistance of women performing 'traditional' roles can have the same value and significance as that of armed men has been difficult for them to grasp.[24] Perry Willson argues that post-war histories have recast women's experience, resituating it within traditional gendered relationships. This had much to do with the post-war reconstruction of the *pater familias* as one of the key pillars of authority and stability. Her contribution reveals how, immediately after the war, an iconography of women resisters as 'saints' emerged. While male resistance was 'real', women's resistance to fascism was relegated to the traditional role of support and self-sacrifice. Armed women are either written out or deprived of their female identity, while women in nurturing or caring roles lose any claim to be equal resisters. Willson's approach broadens the discussion of women's resistance in Italy beyond their 'contribution to the anti-fascist