



BRILL

FASCISM 11 (2022) 59–86

F A S C I S M

JOURNAL
OF
COMPARATIVE
FASCIST
STUDIES

brill.com/fasc

Ghostbusting Fascism?

The Spectral Aspects of the Era of Fascism and Its Shape-Shifting Relationship to the Radical Right

Roger Griffin | ORCID: 0000-0002-6626-2818

Emeritus Professor, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK

rdgriffin@brookes.ac.uk

Abstract

This article seeks to exorcise some of fascism's more haunting taxonomic horrors by focusing on the multiple 'phantasmagorical' aspects of comparative fascist studies which thwart attempts to achieve definitive resolutions of such nebulous and contested issues as its relationship to the radical right. It first considers the lasting traumatic effect on collective memories resulting from the catastrophic scale of inhumanity and casualties generated by the Third Reich and the war needed to destroy it. It argues that the dark psychological shadow cast by World War II, along with Marxist essentialism and the speculative component of all conceptualization, has made mapping the relationship between fascism and the contemporary radical right particularly fraught not just with ideological controversy but even subliminal psychological factors that subvert objectivity. It then suggests how the difficulties such issues pose to modelling the relationship can be overcome by the consistent application of widely agreed ideal types of the key phenomena to establish the intricacies of fascism's morphological adaptation to postwar realities and its often subtle interactions with new non-fascist forms of right. On this basis a complex but comprehensible and heuristically researchable relationship between fascism and the radical right looms into view which is spectral in a sense that owes more to natural science than the supernatural.

Keywords

fascist era – ideal type – spectral fascism – populism – identitarianism – New Right

The Collective PTSD Caused by the Fascist Era

There are several factors which make analysis of the relationship between fascism and the radical right, the theme of the COMFAS conference that is the genesis of this article,¹ particularly problematic and contentious. It is nowadays hardly innovative to integrate social psychological and even psychoanalytical categories into historiographical explanations.² Yet readers may find it unusual to find parapsychological perspectives introduced into this topic, if only metaphorically, to highlight the presence of some subliminal stumbling blocks for those seeking definitional rigour and taxonomic precision in this area of research. Initially the focus will be on some of the barriers to getting to grips with 'fascism' conceptually, on the premise that this is the precondition to addressing effectively its relationship to the 'radical right' in the way this article proposes. We will do so by exploring several factors that cloud forensic understanding through the semantic lens of paranormal phenomena in order to underscore the futility of searching for objective, universally agreed and clearly delimited categories of phenomena in this fraught area of political studies.

The first of these is the collective trauma caused by the phenomenon being investigated, fascism, whose catastrophic impact on humanity in the form of the Axis assault on the very foundations of human society and coexistence still distorts perceptions of contemporary history some seventy five years after the end of the Second World War. Arguably the sheer, literally inconceivable, scale of the crimes against humanity committed in the name of the Third Reich and its allies, particularly Imperial Japan, in order to bring about a civilizational order based on their concept of national and racial superiority, plus the extreme destructiveness of human life caused by the Allied war to defeat fascism in Europe and the Far East, still cast a deep shadow of unprecedented suffering and moral evil over the way the right-wing politics in the postwar period is instinctively experienced. The unconscious effect might be compared to living in a house where you know a particularly brutal murder or tragic

1 Third COMFAS Convention, 'Fascism and the Radical Right: Comparison and Entanglements,' online convention from Central European University PU, Vienna, 25–27 September 2020, http://comfas.org/Events/index.php?article_id=57&Major%20Past%20Event:%20Third%20ComFas%20Convention,%2025--27%20Sept.%202020.

2 For an outstanding example see the many materials on the Library of Social Science website which invoke psychological and psychoanalytic paradigms to explain historical phenomena related to modern war and totalitarianism, <https://www.libraryofsocialscience.com/>, accessed 8 September 2021.

suicide has taken place in the past. According to some parapsychologists, and in particular what is known as ‘stone tape theory’, the violence produces an effect called ‘residual energy’,³ leaving psychic traces which undermine or interfere with the experience of the present’s three-dimensional solidity for those who come after, at least if they belong to the category known as ‘sensitives’. Even if ‘residual energy’ is only helpful as a metaphor, it is worth postulating that the cataclysmic violence and many millions of mostly unrecorded human-made atrocities of the fascist era have created a ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ (PTSD),⁴ vicarious for those millions who were not immediate victims of events or were born after them but no less palpable in the way we perceive postwar socio-historical realities associated with any form of political fanaticism and extreme violence generated by fundamentalist nationalist or religious convictions.

The hallmark of PTSD is that ‘fear-associated brain circuits overreact to cues that are similar to—but *not the same as* [my emphasis]—features of a past traumatic experience’, as when ‘the sound of a passing car’s backfire might trigger a response in someone who has been traumatized by gun violence’.⁵ Being rooted in evolutionary instincts of fear and self-preservation in the limbic circuitry of the brain, the overreaction to anything faintly resembling interwar fascism could never be eliminated from the subconscious memories of subsequent generations, even in countries not directly affected by the war or Nazi occupation, simply through the reinstatement after 1945 of constitutional democracy, relative prosperity and security, dizzying technological progress, and a feeding frenzy of popular materialism and consumerism within the more privileged strata of the ‘West’.

This under-researched phenomenon of collective inherited PTSD,⁶ in this case induced from an era in which in the course of little over five years an

3 Malvern Panalytical, ‘Ghost theory,’ *Materials Talks blog*, October 29, 2015, <https://www.materials-talks.com/blog/2015/10/29/ghost-theory/>, accessed September 8, 2021.

4 For a study of collective PTSD at work in another context see Y. Neria, et al., eds., *9/11: Mental Health in the Wake of Terrorist Attacks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

5 Kevin S. LaBar, ‘The Brain Overreacts to Cues Not Directly Linked to Negative Experiences,’ *bbrfoundation.org*, 5 February 2016, <https://www.bbrfoundation.org/content/ptsd-brain-overreacts-cues-not-directly-linked-negative-experiences>, accessed September 8, 2021.

6 For another example, see Helen Carr’s article ‘How the Spectre of the Black Death Still Haunts Our Collective Memory,’ *The New Statesman*, March 6, 2020, <https://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/coronavirus/2020/03/how-spectre-black-death-still-haunts-our-collective-memory>, accessed September 8, 2021. Carr argues that contemporary reactions to the Covid-19 pandemic are still overdetermined by fears originating during medieval plagues. Some have suggested that the universal fear of rats (musophobia) also stems from unconscious memories of medieval plagues erroneously attributed to rats rather than the lice they carried.

estimated seventy to eighty five million people met violent deaths at the hands of fellow human beings, or about 3 per cent of the world's population at the time, and several times that number of survivors endured appalling physical and mental suffering, has arguably been to impart an emotional, affective charge to the term 'fascism'. It is this psychological load which arguably triggers its inappropriate use in response to events which only have the faintest resemblance or literal similarity to the phenomena that characterized the fascist era. The symptom of this trauma is a tendency to label as 'fascist' any form of authoritarian politics (even in liberal democracies!), oppressive regime, or even simply overbearing individual behaviour, remotely reminiscent of inter-war dictatorships and their militaristic and terroristic regimes and totalitarian practices, even in the most lukewarm, watered-down, and comparatively anodyne versions of overweening, dogmatic attitudes.

As a result, not just populist racist movements and authoritarian nationalists with no revolutionary aspirations, such as Lukashenko, Erdogan, and al-Assad, but even elected right-wing politicians such as Thatcher, Bolsonaro, Orbán, and Modi, not to mention Trump and more recently Putin, are all liable to be dismissed as fascist in the media and social media as a gut-response to their egomaniacal, illiberal or autocratic tendencies rather than as a sober political or academic judgement. A caricature showing Trump as a ridiculous version of Mussolini or Hitler may resonate with opponents and satirists, but it is more revealing about the emotional aftershocks that the seismic events of 1933–1945 still produce decades later than about the precise nature of his politics, temperament or worldview.

It is a situation that brings to mind one of Marx's most famous assertions, that 'A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism' which opens the Communist Manifesto of 1848. He infers from the fact that opposition parties are constantly being decried by ruling elites as 'communist' and that the police forces of the *ancien régime* and French Republic are so intent on 'exorcizing' this ghost, that 'Communism is already acknowledged by all European powers to be in itself a power'. He presents the Manifesto as responding to the need for actual communists to 'meet this nursery tale of the Spectre of Communism with a Manifesto of the party itself', and so dispel vain imaginings with the real thing. Nowadays political opponents and movements perceived as anti-democratic and subversive are no longer likely to be accused of communism but of fascism, which to judge by the international media now haunts not just Europe but the whole of the so-called 'Free World'.⁷ However, there is

7 Curiously, in an unpublished and undated paper on 'The Myth of Fascism: Use and Misuse of a Political Construct', a Toronto reference librarian and keen student of fascism,

an obvious difference in the nature of the visitation. Whereas communism in 1848 represented what in *A Christmas Carol* Charles Dickens calls ‘The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come’, fascism in the twenty first century, at least as a world-historical event, is mercifully now ‘The Ghost of Christmas Past’, not the vision of what might be, but a revenant of global bestiality permanently lurking in the wings of social reality to haunt us.

This is surely the deeper psycho-cultural significance of the way fascism in its most destructive manifestation, Nazism, has become a routine trope in popular culture for triggering a Pavlovian sense of dread. A classic example is an episode of the *X-Files*⁸ where in a convoluted plot Mulder and Scully are whisked back to 1939 in a Bermuda Triangle time-warped and help thwart psychopathic SS troops searching for ‘Thor’s Hammer’ (which turns out to be a scientist and not a sacred object). Then there are the two episodes of Indiana Jones—*Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *The Last Crusade*—where ‘our’ hero finds himself pitted against (and naturally outwitting single-handed) entire battalions of Nazis carrying out expeditions to track down first the Ark of the Covenant and then the Holy Grail presumably on behalf of Himmler’s *Ahnenerbe*, his institute for reconstructing the heritage of the Aryan master-race. In *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, he actually finds time to attend a Nazi rally and book-burning ritual in Berlin on his way to becoming a reluctant anti-fascist Rambo epitomizing the victory of individualism, scholarship and irony over the dark forces of group-think, irrationalism, and humourless fanaticism.

Tony Rocchi, draws the same parallel, when he writes ‘A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of the return of Fascism to Europe. A search on Google with phrases such as “fascism returns to Europe” or “rebirth of fascism in Europe” or “revival of fascism in Europe” turns up hundreds if not thousands of articles and opinion pieces devoted to this theme, particularly after the 2014 elections to the European Parliament. But are we dealing with a reality or is the much-proclaimed return of fascism a spectre taking on epic proportions?’ Available at https://www.academia.edu/21951137/The_Myth_of_Fascism_misuse_of_a_political_construct, accessed September 8, 2021. A published article that I found, subsequent to writing mine, uses the same metaphor is Nidesh Lawtoo, ‘Lawrence Contra (New) Fascism,’ *College Literature* 47, no. 2 (2020): 287, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2020.0020>, which opens ‘A phantom haunts, once again, the contemporary world: the phantom of fascism’. The article was also written before the publication of a major monograph on the inflation and abuse of ‘fascism’ as a journalistic and social sciences term. The book reinforces in impressive detail the main thrust of the argument presented here, despite its perceptibly different premises about the threats to democracy posed by multiculturalism and Islamization and more nuanced treatment of the relationship to fascism of the New Right, populism and identitarianism: Jeffrey Bale and Tamir Bar-On, *Fighting the Last War: Confusion, Partisanship, and Alarmism in the Literature on the Radical Right* (Washington D.C.: Lexington Books, 2022).

8 *Triangle*, third episode of the sixth season of *The X-Files*, November 22, 1998.

Meanwhile the *Harry Potter* cycle of novels and films can be seen as a thinly veiled allegory of the eventually apocalyptic conflict between Pure-bloods, who strive to establish themselves as Masters of the occult Universe, and the Mudbloods who, especially in their Muggle or mixed blood form incarnated in our trinity of heroes, Harry, Hermione, and Ron, are the true stewards of humanity endowed with superpowers of their own to defeat evil. The Death Eaters' assault on the Ministry of Magic and mass arrest of its bureaucrats on the orders of Voldemort (apparently a figure which Rowling based on a blend of Stalin and Hitler) is clearly modelled on a Gestapo raid on a liberal state apparatus. Similarly, both the Snatchers roaming the countryside to arrest Mudbloods and the Mudbloods Relocation Programme to transport confirmed Muggle-borns to specialised ghettos so as to separate them from more pure-blooded wizardkind patently summon up (at least to parents) gruesome vicarious memories of the operations of Nazi death squads in Eastern Europe and the deportation of Jews to ghettos in preparation for the Final Solution. Nazism and fascism lurk in the collective postwar subconscious, and it is little wonder that well over fifty horror films and scores of violent video games such as *Ghosts of War* and *Wolfenstein* have been set against the background of the Third Reich and the Second World War, overtly exploiting Nazism as a universal trope for horror, ruthlessness and sadistic cruelty.⁹

The disturbing presence of Nazism in many subliminal imaginings of the 'dark side' of human nature and even metaphysical reality is implicit too in the ubiquity of the Swastika as the most 'successful' logo of ideologically motivated hatred in history, and the probability that few would have challenged the demonizing assumptions behind the title chosen for a 2003 TV mini-series on the formative phase of the Führer's political career: *Hitler: The Rise of Evil*. When such information is placed alongside the continued colloquial use of 'fascist' as an insult for anyone displaying even mild authoritarian or megalomaniacal tendencies (as in 'health fascist', 'fashion fascist', 'climate fascist') it is clear that as a psychodynamic force interwar fascism did not die in 1945 but instead became 'undead'. The result is that as a twentieth and twenty first century *nosferatu*,¹⁰ fascism defies any rationalistic hopes that an impermeable membrane can be inserted by an only partially secularized and partially scientized modern consciousness between the events of 1919–1945 and the present. However dead the

9 'Nazi Horror Movies,' *Allhorror.com*, <https://www.allhorror.com/subgenre/nazi>, accessed September 8, 2021.

10 Nosferatu, a synonym for vampire, is widely but erroneously assumed to mean 'undead' in Romanian but turns out etymologically to be itself a ghostly word with no linguistic substance.

past may be on the historian's autopsy table, it is a living force with a spectral presence not just as a source of political myth and identity even centuries later (as the central role of national and racial foundation myths in the ideology of fascism repeatedly illustrates), but in the subliminal substratum of our collective being. Heroic myths of suprapersonal immortality seem to be part of the DNA of the human imagination. Few attending British memorial services for the dead of two world wars will turn a hair when they are assured in the stanza taken from the 1914 poem *For the Fallen* that those who died for the country 'shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old./ Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn./ At the going down of the sun and in the morning/ We will remember them.'

The neurological well-springs of the imagination, the dream faculty, the fear reflex, the subconscious, indeed the way the entire 'reptile' brain functions, seem to belong to another temporality and reality altogether from those of the conscious mind, one where metaphors can symbolically abolish a meaningless death for those we love or honour, and a reverberating echo of past terrors can crystallize round a single word that summons up a collective memory of catastrophes that occurred even before our own life-time. 'Fascism' is no ordinary term of the political lexicon: for non-fascists it can still open an empathetic portal in the mind for the entry of a haunting revenant of the original suffering its most fanatical converts induced in their victims, the unimaginable events of calculated inhumanity now disembodied and consigned to limbo, to cross back and forth at will between past and present, inner and outer, fantasy and reality, the dead and the living. Once the word 'fascism' became so shrouded in painful historical memories and imbued with connotations of bottomless horror it was imparted with a negative affective charge that still seriously compromises rational attempts to use it forensically as a neutral, anaemic social scientific concept drained of the lifeblood of real events and personal experiences. Fascism combines the characteristics of a neutral political concept with the power of a curse or evil spell which conjures up shadows of the nameless henchmen and their victims from the liminal space between rationality and myth, memory and fantasy, past and present.

A Host of Ghosts?

The intrinsically spectral quality of fascism has been compounded by at least two other factors undermining its potential to be used as a consistent, substantive, solid term without the fuzzy definitional boundaries that obscure its relationship to the radical right. For the many schools and variants of Marxist

studies and activism devoted to fighting it, fascism is regarded as capitalism's evil twin, the real totalitarian, murderous Hyde that lurks behind its Dr Jekyll persona of simulated progressive, liberal humanism. In the back of the socialist mind it is a lurking presence ready to take over from Capital's seemingly benign but inauthentic alter ego whenever society enters a period of structural crisis which allows the radical left to mount an effective challenge to its hegemony. There is a wide variety of Marxist models to explain the process through which capitalism's democratic mask slips or is ripped off to reveal a murderous, hate-filled *Doppelgänger* (another recurrent topos of horror narratives with its own psychological fascination),¹¹ but they all share the premise articulated by Max Horkheimer: 'Whoever is not prepared to talk about capitalism should also remain silent about fascism', because the first subsumes the second.¹²

There is a specific ghostly aspect to the Marxist theory that fascism is the form assumed by capitalism once it is existentially threatened and forced to shed its benign disguise, like the voracious but patient wolf not in sheep's but grandma's clothing in *Little Red Riding Hood*. It thereby acquires a property which in Japanese folklore is associated with preternatural creatures called *obake* and *bakemono*, namely that of shapeshifting. According to circumstances, it is capable of assuming both a relatively progressive, liberal and openly an oppressive, destructive iteration, or both at once. One case in point is the decision of early nineteenth century Britain, at a time when it was becoming more liberal politically at home, to abolish the slave trade in 1817 despite fierce opposition from many, in their own minds, God-fearing English plantation owners. Yet the political masters did not make the ownership of slaves illegal for another sixteen years, after which slavery on the plantations continued in other forms for decades. Socialists could point out that even in its most liberal phases the British political system has always continued to preside over mass poverty, deprivation, and exploitation in its larger cities.

11 See Otto Rank, *Der Doppelgänger: Eine psychoanalytische Studie* (Vienna: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1914); Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

12 It may be an example of academic synchronicity at work that in 2020 Pluto Press (London) published *Spectres of Fascism: Historical, Theoretical and International Perspectives*, edited by Samir Gandesha, a collection of essays reflecting on the 'return of fascism' understood in a traditional Marxist sense as a permanent potential of capitalism now being brought to the fore internationally because of its deepening structural problems. I became aware of this publication only at the final draft stage of the present essay. For budding students of rival theories of fascism it would instructive to compare Gandesha's introduction with the present article based on an alternative, non-Marxist theory of fascism.

It is consistent with such glaring examples of what George Orwell called 'doublethink' if Marxist analysis suggests that during the Second World War capitalism had no difficulty becoming schizoid once more. On the one hand it forged an international alliance to fight the combined fascist states of the Axis which caused the 800,000 deaths among the American and British armed forces. Contemporaneously, having reached an accommodation with the Third Reich in the 1930s, German capitalism had no scruples about setting up the Buna artificial rubber factory within the barbed and electrified perimeter fences of the Auschwitz camp complex and supplying labour to the Daimler Benz bomber engine plant from the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women. From a Marxist perspective it should not come as a shock to learn that IBM's German subsidiary supplied the SS with the latest punched card technology to keep track of its soaring numbers of detainees in the first phase of mass internments so that the very first prisoner tattoos were in fact IBM Hollerith numbers.¹³

Given that capitalism is such a Janus-faced phenomenon, it is certainly an attractive proposition to approach fascism as one of the two contrasting personae revealed in its most severe episodes of DID, its Dissociative Identity Disorder.¹⁴ It might, for example, cast some light on how two of the most brutal exterminatory (putative) fascist societies, Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, were able to make the transition from totalitarianism to hypercapitalism so rapidly and relatively painlessly after 1945. However, once fascism is assumed to be endemic to all capitalist societies, it makes it impossible to put clear water between fascism and the radical right for the purposes of taxonomy and political analysis. Instead, capitalism can be envisaged by Marxists as moving freely along a self-lubricating sliding scale of systemic corruption which stretches all the way from the enlightened social liberalism of Nordic countries to the structurally unjust liberal democracies such as the UK, the US, and from there centripetally across further Dantesque circles of social inferno for persecuted minorities, left-wingers, and genuine secular or religious humanists designated

13 Edwin Black, *IBM and the Holocaust: The Strategic Alliance between Nazi Germany and America's Most Powerful Corporation* (New York: Crown, 2001).

14 DID is 'characterized by the maintenance of at least two distinct and relatively enduring personality states. The disorder is accompanied by memory gaps beyond what would be explained by ordinary forgetfulness'. Certainly, the way liberal states are so prone to enter a radical state of denial about its own abuses of human rights when criticizing 'undemocratic' states is suggestive of such pathological 'memory gaps'. 'Dissociative Identity Disorder,' *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissociative_identity_disorder, accessed September 8, 2021.

'illiberal democracies',¹⁵ such as Hungary, Russia, Turkey, or a country such as Bolsonaro's Brazil. Here twelve million are condemned to live in *favelas* sometimes a few hundred meters from the ghettos of the superrich patrolled by security forces to keep the poor at bay, while the capitalism from which they profit does its best to destroy the rain forest for ever in collusion with the government, corrupt local authorities, and desperately poor farmers.

But in Marxist analysis the parameters of capitalism's capacity for collaboration with systemic inhumanity do not stop there. The metaphysically sideward but morally downward slide continues on via an assortment of ethically perverse constitutional or nakedly authoritarian regimes until it reaches the equivalent of Dante's ultimate hell, the 'centre of the earth' where Satan reigns eternal and where the Third Reich took up residence for twelve years. Here Capital was able to reveal its core sociopathic, demonic essence by embracing the prospect of the racial state becoming the major shareholder or backer in its activities,¹⁶ and hence seizing the opportunity, once suitably Aryanized, to unshackle itself from humanistic scruples (frequently dismissed by the theorists of the Third Reich as 'Gefühlsduselei' or 'wishy-washy sentimentality').

This 'conscious uncoupling' from empathy and moral conscience, enabled capitalism's henchmen to profit ruthlessly and 'terroristically' (as the Dimitrov definition of 1935 already specified)¹⁷ from its attempts to realize Nazi dreams of a vast European empire based on enslavement, persecution, and extermination. It was a Faustian bargain which allowed an engineering company such as Topf und Söhne to vie with others in their sector to win state contracts to showcase the latest technology in building the most efficient ovens for extermination camp crematoria and gas chamber ventilation units of the reborn Germany. For the far left, some of the fascist trademarks of capitalism's perpetuation under any form of right-wing administration can be easily read into

15 Jason Dozier, 'What Exactly is Illiberal Democracy?' *Global Risks Insight*, May 28, 2016, <https://globalriskinsights.com/2016/05/what-is-illiberal-democracy/>, accessed September 8, 2021; Cas Mudde, 'Populism in the Twenty-First Century: An Illiberal Democratic Response to Undemocratic Liberalism' *Penn Arts and Sciences website*, [2021], <https://amc.sas.upenn.edu/cas-mudde-populism-twenty-first-century>, accessed September 8, 2021.

16 Christoph Deutschmann, 'Capitalism, Religion, and the Idea of the Demonic,' *MPIfG Discussion Paper*, no. 12/2 (2012), <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/58258>.

17 'Fascism is the power of finance capital itself. It is the organization of terrorist vengeance against the working class and the revolutionary section of the peasantry and intelligentsia. In foreign policy, fascism is jingoism in its most brutal form, fomenting bestial hatred of other nations.' Georgi Dimitrov, statement to the seventh World Congress of the Communist Third International. Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Definitions_of_fascism, accessed September 8, 2021.

leading politicians as diverse as Margaret Thatcher, the Le Pens, Recep Erdogan, Donald Trump, Nigel Farage, Vladimir Putin, and even the Party Chairman of Communist China and North Korea.

The upshot is that since Mussolini founded the first *Fascio* in March 1919, Marxist ‘schools’ of fascist studies have bequeathed a myriad ghost stories dramatizing how the socialist struggle for justice has been repeatedly thwarted by the forces of capitalist ‘reaction’, but nowhere more ruthlessly and blatantly than under ‘fascist regimes’. These are far more numerous for a Marxist historian than for one of a ‘liberal humanist’ predisposition since they include movements and states that non-Marxists would see as belonging to the ‘radical right’ or as forms of conservatism devoid of revolutionary intentions, and hence as deeply anti-fascist.

The fact that Marxists and non-Marxists can continue to disagree so axiomatically about the definition of fascism leads us to the final spectral aspect of fascist studies that we want to consider: the insubstantial, shapeshifting nature of conceptualization itself. Though etymologically concepts serve in the human sciences to ‘hold onto’ or ‘grasp’¹⁸ an essential element of a process, a phenomenon or its properties, they do not in the least resemble the sadistic grabber machines found in amusement arcades and fairgrounds in plastic booths piled high with tempting (to a child) cuddly toys. These at least are solid mechanisms which repeatedly act out the charade of trying to gain purchase on a physical object. It is a charade because the springs of the metal claws have been deliberately weakened so that few toys are ever picked up for more than a few tantalising seconds. It takes a few seconds thought to recognize that the idea of ‘grabbing hold’ in an intellectual or cognitive sense is a metaphor for a mind bogglingly complex cognitive process,¹⁹ which science has shown is

18 In German ‘greifen’ is to ‘grip’, ‘ein Griff’ is ‘a handle’, while ‘begreifen’ and ‘Begriff’ mean ‘comprehend’ and ‘concept’ respectively. The stem of ‘comprehend’ and ‘apprehend’ is ‘hend’ meaning to ‘get’, related to ‘praeda’, the ‘prey of an animal’, and a derivative of ‘prehendere’ (where the prefix ‘pre’ may imply a preliminary act of cognitive planning and intent before ‘taking hold’) is ‘prehensile’ as in a monkey’s prehensile tail. ‘Hendere’ has an Indo-European root which surfaces in German ‘vergessen’/Dutch ‘vergeten’ (where memory’s retentive power is lost) and the English ‘get’ in its many senses, one of which is to cognitively seize hold of a fact or explanation, make sense of a situation, or understand a person, as in ‘I just don’t get it’, ‘do you get my meaning’, or ‘you don’t get me’.

19 An entire institute has been set up at Yale ‘to understand brain and mind at all levels—from molecules and cells to circuits, systems, and behavior’ through interdisciplinary research programmes that bridge the psychological, biological, and computational sciences cognition. ‘At Yale, new neuroscience institute to unravel the mysteries of cognition,’ *Yale News*, February 16, 2021, <https://news.yale.edu/2021/02/16/yale-new-neuroscience-institute-unravel-mysteries-cognition>, accessed September 8, 2021.

intimately bound up with one of the great mysteries of the universe: human consciousness. One of the more famous Western attempts to solve the many riddles it poses was Descartes' dualistic theory which treated the mind as what the philosopher Gilbert Ryle called sarcastically 'the Ghost in the Machine' and which now seems extraordinarily simplistic in the light of the modern realization that the thinking I of 'cogito ergo sum' may itself be a pragmatic fiction or illusion of infinitely subtle neuropsychological processes needed by the brain for operational purposes: perhaps a neurological not a metaphysical ghost.

The spectral aspect of human consciousness carries through to the relationship between concepts and the world which emerges from the explorations by thoroughly secularized intellects, such as that of Max Weber. Long before the rise of modern neuroscience and cognitive psychology, he had become fascinated by the insubstantiality and arbitrariness of the terms through which human science attempts to model the world in all its aspects, and in particular the mismatch between the singularity of a generic concept ('Gattungsbegriff') and the infinite multiplicity of the phenomena which it is generally used to describe and analyse. His investigations into the methodology of conceptualization and the empirical basis of objectivity in research led him to his proposition that concepts can be understood as 'ideal types', which he defines thus:

An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation [*Steigerung*]²⁰ of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified thought construct. In its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a utopia.²¹

Once a generic concept is understood as a mental construct which can integrate and synthesise even 'absent' phenomena, which does not correspond exactly to any singular reality empirically, and is ultimately a utopia, the product of 'idealizing abstraction',²² it starts to acquire a curiously unreal, phantas-

20 'Exaggeration' or over-emphasis of a trait, as in a caricature.

21 Max Weber, 'Die "Objektivität" sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis,' *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialforschung* 19, no. 1 (1904): 22–87. Passage cited at L. Harvey, 'Ideal Types,' *Social Research Glossary*, <https://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/socialresearch/idealtypes.htm>, accessed July 2020.

22 Juraj Halas, 'Weber's Ideal Types and Idealization,' *Filozofia Nauki* [The Philosophy of Science] 24, no. 1 (2016): 5–26, <https://www.fn.uw.edu.pl/index.php/fn/article/view/807>, accessed September 8, 2021.

magorical quality. What compounds the dematerialization of simplistic notions of objectivity and 'hard facts' further is the way that scientists have come to see the material world since Weber, who lived, mentally at least, in a pre-Einsteinian and pre-Freudian universe. He might have taken heart from the following statement by Arthur Eddington, who helped popularize the state that avant-garde scientific knowledge had reached in the 1920s in *The Nature of the Physical World*. In it he declared that 'the stuff of the world is 1928 mind-stuff'. He goes on:

It is necessary to keep reminding ourselves that all knowledge of our environment from which the world of physics is constructed, has entered in the form of messages transmitted along the nerves to the seat of consciousness . . . Consciousness is not sharply defined, but fades into sub-consciousness; and beyond that we must postulate something indefinite but yet continuous with our mental nature . . . It is difficult for the matter-of-fact physicist to accept the view that the substratum of everything is of mental character. But no one can deny that mind is the first and most direct thing in our experience, and all else is remote inference.²³

Later Stephen Hawkins, one of the foremost innovators in understanding and communicating to non-scientists the universe being revealed by post-Einsteinian science, published *The Dreams That Stuff Is Made of: The Most Astounding Papers of Quantum Physics and How They Shook the Scientific World*.²⁴ The book is a collection of essays on pioneers of astro- and quantum physics which demolishes as comprehensively as the bubble chamber of a particle accelerator any lingering 'solid' notion of a mind that can create concepts that correspond in an unmediated way to an objective material universe outside our heads. Recent progress by astrophysicists in mapping the surprising distribution of dark matter in the universe,²⁵ continuing bewilderment about the nature of dark energy,²⁶ speculation about 'light dark' matter, and the radical implications of quantum physics for the existence of anything resembling a 'reality'

23 Arthur Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons 1928), 276–281.

24 Stephen Hawkins, *The Dreams That Stuff Is Made of: The Most Astounding Papers of Quantum Physics and How They Shook the Scientific World* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2011).

25 Pallab Gosh, 'New Dark Matter Map Reveals Cosmic Mystery,' *BBC News*, May 27, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-57244708>, accessed September 8, 2021.

26 NASA, 'Dark Matter, Dark Energy,' <https://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-is-dark-energy>, accessed June 11, 2021.

comprehensible by the human mind certainly do nothing to make the cosmos seem any more solid and conceptually comprehensible.²⁷

Fascism as Hamlet's Ghost

We have now considered the way the traumatic impact of the war against fascism (which the Western Allies and the USSR believed was the rationale for engaging in the Second World War though for deeply divided ideological and political reasons) has combined with Marxist assumptions about the nature of fascism as the totalitarian alter ego of 'liberal' capitalism. The result has been to imbue the term 'fascism' for the radical left with connotations both of an evil regime of systemic inhumanity and of a pathological iteration of late capitalism to be destroyed in the name of humanity's socialist future. The prevalence of these associations of fascism in the decades since 1945 has been to demonize fascism and identify it with a militant struggle against humanity and humanism (connotations it also acquires in Ernst Nolte's theory of 'practical and theoretic resistance to transcendence').²⁸

The result is that the left has tended to approach questions relating to fascism with an emotive (and humanistically justifiable) charge of demonizing and 'othering' hatred that has severely compromised academic precision in its application to movements and especially regimes. This situation has also generally prevented 'objective', or at least heuristically valuable, taxonomic distinctions to be made by the left between fascism and the radical right. The task of making such distinctions has been further compromised by the considerable act of subjectivity and creativity involved in the formulation, definitions and application of *all* generic concepts—even unemotive, value-neutral ones—which was highlighted by Max Weber, and last but not least both the baffling nature of mind, matter, and the cosmos and the cognitive processes demanded to make sense of them, which are simply beyond the limited human powers of understanding.

Given this convoluted situation, therefore, it was almost inevitable that fascist studies after 1945 was more than usual impacted by the Babel effect that arises when a wide variety of rival approaches grow up to interpret a major

27 E.g. George Musser, 'Quantum Paradox Points to Shaky Foundations of Reality,' *Science*, August 17, 2020, <https://www.science.org/content/article/quantum-paradox-points-shaky-foundations-reality>, accessed September 8, 2021.

28 Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), 565–566.

social issue or historical phenomenon, with many different voices speaking different mutually unintelligible ideological discourses and proposing different 'concepts' to grasp hold of the 'same' phenomenon.²⁹ Especially in the virtual world of the social media and the blogosphere where anarchy reigns supreme, innocents trying to form a consistent picture of fascism's relationship to the radical right would soon find themselves more bewildered than they were in the first place. In this unregulated and deterritorialized space, 'fascism' is frequently used with a swashbuckling indifference to definitional nicety or consistency so as to discredit a vast array of diverse regimes, leaders, movements and policies, some formally democratic but overtly anti-socialist and anti-liberal in nature (e.g. Viktor Orbán, Jair Bolsonaro, Recep Erdogan, Narendra Modi, Vladimir Putin), but others intent on replacing liberal democratic systems altogether, such as Bashar al-Assad's Syria, Pol Pot's Cambodia, Xi Jinping's China, and Kim Jong-Un's North Korea. It also allows leaders to discredit each other, as when Recep Erdogan condemns the fascism of Israel and Europe,³⁰ or when Nigel Farage accused the Scottish nationalists who interrupted a press interview in an Edinburgh pub of being 'fascist scum'.³¹

In short, as a historical actor postwar fascism seems to have had till recently much more in common with the melting insubstantiality of *Hamlet's* ghost than with the fleshly solidity of Hamlet himself, whose words and actions continually imply an underlying method operates behind the histrionic displays of apparent madness. Since the defeat of the Axis, after two decades of manifesting itself with extraordinary in-your-face visibility in uniformed, charis-

29 In *The Nature of Fascism*, I used the metaphor of the elephant and the blind man to convey this situation of the proliferation of different images and incompatible theories concerning the 'same' phenomenon.

30 Nine d'Halluin, 'Erdogan qualifie Israël d'État "le plus fasciste et raciste au monde", Netanyahu lui répond,' *Le Figaro*, July 24, 2018, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2018/07/24/01003-20180724ARTFIG00153-erdogan-qualifie-israel-d-etat-le-plus-fasciste-et-raciste-au-monde-netanyahu-lui-repond.php>, accessed September 8, 2021. Luca Romano, 'Erdogan attacca ancora: "Europa fascista e crudele"', *Il Giornale*, March 21, 2017, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/mondo/erdogan-attacca-ancora-europa-fascista-e-crudele-1377426.html>, accessed September 8, 2021.

31 'Farage a contestatori, feccia fascista,' March 17, 2013, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, <https://www.lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it/news/mondo/460057/farage-a-contestatori-feccia-fascista.html>, accessed September 8, 2021. Such abuse of the term has a long history: German communists famously called Social Democrats 'social fascists', Stalin was dismissed as 'red fascism' by anarchists, left communists, and a wide range of social democrats, and in the past both Mao Zedong and the Gang of Four were accused of 'feudal fascism' by leaders of the Chinese Communist Party. This article was written before Russia's war against Ukraine's 'Nazi' leadership provoked a flurry of press comment about his alleged but misattributed 'fascism'.

matically led paramilitary and high-profile party organizations, such as the Fascist Party and NSDAP, as well as in the most fully developed and invasive form of totalitarian regime, The Third Reich, in the interwar period, fascism has been constantly shapeshifting, fading in and out of focus and physicality like a character in the TV series *Haunted*. It has either been lurking on the extremist margins of society or impersonating mainstream democratic parties; pretending to be 'metapolitical', concerned only with preserving ethnic and cultural 'difference', or fomenting street violence through carefully staged mass rallies; adopting the 'neutral' guise of academic historians in order to deny Nazi criminality and the Holocaust or aping the vitalism of punk rock by inserting violently racist lyrics into its music; using public forums to uphold the democratic 'right to identity' and 'freedom of speech' or clandestinely orchestrating xenophobic hatred through online propaganda and recruitment campaigns; shamelessly courting mass public support to become 'populist' by infiltrating legitimate radical right movements or abandoning any bid to be 'popular' by operating in subterranean cells dedicated to carrying out spectacular acts of terrorist violence; uncritically adopting the perverted discourse of Nazism or developing bizarre blends of occultism, conspiracy theory and apocalypticism to preach the imminent age of global race war like a Satanic variant of evangelical religion.

In becoming so protean, fascism has been constantly passing through the walls of the definitional prisons which academics 'experts' build to confine it and keep it in its place, thereby making a mockery of carefully crafted definitions and licensing the indiscriminate use of the term by journalists and self-styled political pundits. As the novelist Nikolai Chernyshevsky pondered in his 1863 novel and Vladimir Lenin asked again in his famous 1902 pamphlet in a very different historical context, 'What is to be done?' How can such an elusive, protean, Quixotic political force be apprehended and comprehended sufficiently for its relationship with the non-fascist radical right to be established with any hope of forging a workable consensus among academics, counter-extremism experts, and newspaper leader writers? The 1984 film *Ghostbusters* showed how a leftfield band of scientists thinking outside the box could use the latest understanding of the paranormal to make money by tracking down and capturing ghosts in New York. Well, despite the cynicism and incomprehension of some established historical 'experts' in the field, a small but growing international collaborative network of human scientists has been performing a similar task for the comparative study of fascism which allows it to be conceptually 'captured' and its relationship to the radical right to be modelled, at least for heuristic research purposes, without a profit motive or a catchy soundtrack.

Resolving the Taxonomic Dilemma: Another Spectral Aspect of Fascism

Our investigation of the psychological, ideological and methodological hurdles to delimiting fascism taxonomically has established a cluster of factors that complicate attempts to establish its relationship to the radical right with any precision: the post-traumatic impact of the war on the collective memory which triggers subliminal flashbacks to the fascism of the Axis at the least hint of authoritarianism and repressive or fanatical forms of nationalism; the Marxist or far left tradition of treating fascism as the evil *Doppelgänger* of liberal democratic capitalism; the utopian, insubstantial, ethereal dimension of all concepts; and the shapeshifting and extensively invisible or virtual forms that fascism has adopted since 1945.

But it has also identified an effective methodology which enables academics to leapfrog such hurdles in a feat of academic athletics,³² and with a measure of semantic closure and consistency, namely through the application of Weberian ideal types, based on a broad measure of consensus among specialists in the field, which make their entanglements visible and allow researchers to loosen the taxonomic knots they have formed. Fortunately, the key ideal types needed for this exercise, namely for fascism and the radical right, demand far less soul-searching and epistemological agonizing than the conceptual issues involved, thanks to the substantial work already carried over many decades by specialists in their study, at least in the context of the Anglophone Human Sciences which focus on the Europeanized world.³³

After seven decades of confusion and contention about the nature and definition of fascism in non-Marxist circles, an academic consensus started emerging in the 1990s pioneered by the likes of George Mosse, Stanley Payne, Zeev Sternhell and Emilio Gentile that it was best approached as a revolutionary variant of extreme, illiberal nationalism that sought to establish a new order based on a new type of socio-political and cultural-anthropological system. The reborn post-liberal nation would expunge the perceived weakness, chaos

32 An analogy reminiscent of Tom Stoppard's classic 1972 play *Jumpers* which dramatically explores the metaphorical relationship between linguistic philosophy and (somewhat mediocre) gymnastics display.

33 With this unusual coinage I hope to convey the areas of the world whose societies became substantially modernized along European lines in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century of Europe, with a high degree of secularization, urbanization, and involvement in the nexus of world trade and international communications, which together allowed the emergence of 'Western' political forces such as socialism, liberalism and various forms of right-wing ideologies as the basis of state power and social cohesion.

and decadence from the democratic order and liberalism held to be destroying the nation from within, repel or defeat the nation's ideological enemies threatening it from without, and proceed to institute a new era of civilization which would transform the relationship between human beings and nations. Many formulations of this conception of fascism have been offered, but they converge on the recognition that the central mobilizing myth of fascism in the Sorelian sense is that of renewal, regeneration, or in my own terminology 'palingenesis' combined with an extreme form of nationalism which is incompatible with liberal democracy but which does not preclude international networks and alliances.³⁴ The diffusion, especially among younger researchers, in many national and cultural contexts of an understanding of fascism as the ideology and attempted enactment of a vision of the future nation in terms of 'palingenetic ultranationalism' has helped form the conceptual paradigm of the journal *Fascism* and the international association COMFAS with which it is linked, and has begun to exert perceptible influence on research into the historical and contemporary right not just in Europe and the US, but Latin America and Japan.³⁵ It is an intriguing sign of its growing hegemony outside the Marxist tradition that this theory is beginning to inform the self-understanding of some fascists. For example, on the online forum of the infamous Iron March website—that was instrumental in radicalizing right-wing fanatics and fostering fascist terrorist groups such as US Atomwaffen Division and Antipodean Resistance in Australia—one of the founders of National Action, Benjamin Raymond, talked of interwar fascist movements as products of a 'militant reaction against communism with palingenetic nationalist ideals'.³⁶

34 For a more detailed exposition of this part of the 'story' of comparative fascist studies see Roger Griffin, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018) chs. 2–3. The theory was first formulated as a one-sentence definition in my *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter, 1991): 'Fascism is a political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of palingenetic ultranationalism.' This phrasing was subsequently paraphrased by other academics, such as Roger Eatwell, Stanley Payne, Michael Mann, and Robert Paxton, and a variant of the palingenetic concept of fascism is frequently encountered on websites, though it has yet to fully 'break into' the world of dictionary definitions, let alone of journalism and social media.

35 Gabriela de Lima Grecco and Leandro Pereira Gonçalves, eds., *Fascismo Iberoamericanos* (forthcoming); Walter Skya, *Japan's Holy War: The Ideology of Radical Shintō Ultrnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Roger H. Brown, 'Perceptions of Fascism and the New Bureaucrats in Early Showa Japan,' *Saitama University Review* 54, no. 1 (2018): 69–103. Available at <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/199686411.pdf>.

36 'Daddy Terror', *Iron March Exposed*, 2019, <https://www.ironmarch.exposed/post/144088>, accessed 21 September 2021. This source of the quotation has now been removed from the web. It consisted of a series of leaked postings from the Iron March Forum. The

Once this ideal type is adopted, the first stage in the process of clarifying the relationship between fascism and the radical right is complete, since it specifies that in order to qualify as a permutation of fascism, an ideology, movement or regime must have a latent or patent anti-systemic and revolutionary agenda to transform society and initiate the nation's rebirth, a process that axiomatically rejects the humanistic premises and fundamental freedoms postulated by liberalism and the constitutional premises of a functioning or 'healthy' pluralistic democracy. This definitional criterion then relegates the 'radical right' to a systemic and non-revolutionary segment of the range of right-wing political forces which are opposed to mainstream liberalism and hostile to the internationalist ideals of social democracy and revolutionary communism. It is important to recognize that this radical right, which is tendentially anti-fascist, since it distances itself from revolutionary anti-systemic agendas (though it may ally or associate itself with fascism for tactical purposes) can operate both within a constitutionally democratic system (as in pre-totalitarian Italy) or an authoritarian system (as in Franco's Spain) which has abolished democracy and moved radical right values from the periphery to the centre of political norms. In other words, once definitional clarity has been created or adopted about the ideal type of fascism, a sort of amoebal split occurs, at least ideal-typically, in which the term 'radical right' becomes a separate ideological organism with its own independent life.

The practical consequences for modelling the fascism/radical right relationship in the interwar period in this way are elegantly illustrated by Stanley Payne, one of the precursors of the 'palingenetic' paradigm of international fascism, in his *A History of Fascism 1914–1945* (1995). His groundbreaking *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (1980) had already recognized the revolutionary nature of its project for the renewal of society but set out the 'anti-dimension' of its ideology first in his three-part 'typological definition of fascism', as if its premise and driving force was primarily destructive and reactionary rather than revolutionary. In the new book, where he offers his own one-sentence definition of the palingenetic theory, the 'positive goals' are now logically placed first, before the 'anti-dimension', which is thus presented as a logical function or consequence of the 'pro-dimension' identified in Payne's list of the regenerative policies that flow from them.

post referring to palingenetic was originally posted on February 1, 2013. On the background to the leak see: Jacques Singer-Emery, Rex Bray, 'The Iron March Data Dump Provides a Window Into How White Supremacists Communicate and Recruit,' *Lawfare blog*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/iron-march-data-dump-provides-window-how-white-supremacists-communicate-and-recruit>, accessed April 22, 2022.

It is on the basis of this clear embrace of the palingenetic ideal type of fascism that Payne is able to draw up a table providing examples of the three 'faces' of what he calls the post-1918 authoritarian and nationalist 'new right': fascist, radical right and conservative authoritarian movements and leaders. To take one example, he illustrates the schema in the case of Weimar Germany with the NSDAP for fascism, Hugenberg, von Papen and the Stahlhelm for the radical right, and Hindenburg, Brüning and von Schleicher for the conservative right. It is a taxonomic scheme that recognizes the revolutionary aspirations of 'genuinely' fascist movements such as the Falange, the Portuguese Blue Shirts and the Brazilian Integralists, and consigns dictators such Franco, Salazar and Vargas to the radical conservative right, albeit of a radical and modernizing variety which identified with the 'fascist era' rather than siding with what radical nationalists of all complexions saw as the 'doomed' liberal democratic era or the 'nihilistic' Bolshevik alternative for the future.

It is perhaps ironic in the context of this article that Payne's pioneering schema endows fascism with yet another spectral attribute: it proposes that fascism is to be conceived taxonomically as occupying one segment of a spectrum within the political right characterized by the revolutionary nature of its project of total political, societal, cultural and anthropological renewal. It is this inclusive and exclusive definitional trait in the interwar period that makes fascism's relationship to the 'other' rights relatively easy to schematize and tabulate.

In the postwar period, too, the situation initially seems similarly straightforward. For example, the foremost expert on the contemporary far right, Cas Mudde, makes the taxonomic distinction between fascism and the radical right in terms very close to those applied by Payne to interwar politics when he states that historically, in the interwar or classic 'fascist era', fascism is a form of 'totalitarianism' in which every aspect of life is to be 'controlled by party/state'. It rejected democracy in search for a 'Third Way' that went 'beyond liberalism and socialism' and wanted to realize 'a national rebirth' to 'create a new man'. It celebrated violence and war as means of 'purifying and regenerating' the nation and the state. He argues that fascism's postwar and contemporary equivalents may have adopted new organizational and ideological forms but adamantly retain their anti-systemic (i.e. revolutionary) stance. By contrast 'the illiberal democracy which populist radical right parties try to establish is of a special kind, namely an ethnocracy, a *nominally democratic regime* (my emphasis) in which the dominance of one ethnic group is structurally determined'.³⁷

37 Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2019), chapter 7. Cf.

In short, the radical right seeks to bring about palingenesis from within the existing system or status quo by de-liberalizing it rather than destroying and replacing it.

When these criteria are applied to the postwar Europeanized world it soon becomes clear that a number of forms of 'far right' have arisen since the war which are clearly of anti-systemic and revolutionary intent: notably neo-Nazism both in its local national³⁸ and international³⁹ forms, and right-wing terrorism, whose palingenetic mission is spelt out when the rationale for the attack on society proclaimed in an online manifesto (as in the case of Anders Breivik and Benton Tarrant) or is clear from the evidence of its sources of inspiration.⁴⁰ To that extent a significant proportion of the contemporary 'radical right' can be treated as taxonomically distinct from the fascist segment of the political spectrum because less far 'to the right' and less extreme and totalizing in the policies they campaign for to enact their hatreds than revolutionary fascists (e.g. neo-Nazi terrorists).

The structural reason for the collapse of the popular support base for new forms of fascism in relation to the 'populist' radical right since 1945 is the drastic

Cas Mudde, 'Interview #36: The Far Right Today,' *POP: Political Observer on Populism*, October 21, 2019, <https://populismobserver.com/2019/10/21/interview-36-the-far-right-today-cas-mudde/>, accessed September 8, 2021. It is typical of the conceptual confusion of the 'bad old' pre-consensus days of research into this area that in his extraordinarily comprehensive *The Radical Right: A World Dictionary* (Burnt Mill: Longman, 1987), Ciarán Ó Maoláin identified over fifty far-right groups active in Britain under the heading 'radical right', making no lucid distinction made between those who were 'extreme right' still working within the democratic system, and the 'fascist' ones calling for a political revolution.

38 For example the British National Party under John Tyndall, whose thinly veiled autobiography *The Eleventh Hour* (London: Albion Press, 1988) makes no secret of how he modelled his mission on Adolf Hitler's efforts to bring about a racial revolution in Germany.

39 For example WUNS, the World Union of National Socialists, founded by the British neo-Nazi Colin Jordan and the US neo-Nazi George Rockwell in 1962.

40 For example the well documented debt of Timothy McVeigh and David Copeland to the apocalyptic scenario of racial war fictionalized in William Pearce's *The Turner Diaries* (1987), Tom Maier's consumption of the journal *The National Alliance* founded by Pearce, and the links of terrorist cells such as the UK National Action and Sonnenwaffen Division to the openly Nazi Iron March website whose secret archive was recently dumped, allowing its revolutionary mission to overthrow liberal democratic society to be studied. See Jacques Singer-Emery, Rex Bray, 111, 'The Iron March Data Dump Provides a Window into How White Supremacists Communicate and Recruit,' *Lawfare*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/iron-march-data-dump-provides-window-how-white-supremacists-communicate-and-recruit>, accessed September 8, 2021. The ideology of a terrorist cell such as National Socialist Underground needs no such detective work to classify.

shrinking of political space⁴¹ for revolutionary forms of racism and nationalism in the wake of the Second World War. The sheer scale of the inhumanity revealed by the liberation of the Nazi camps combined with the rapid (and unexpected) recovery of liberal democratic government and consumerist capitalism, not to mention the powerful anti-Soviet and anti-totalitarian ethos cultivated in the so-called 'Free World' after the war had made the prospect of national and racial revolution repugnant to the vast majority of citizens.

Yet More Spectrality!

If that were the end of the story of the radical right's relationship to fascism the taxonomy of the far right would hardly be problematic and this article hardly worth reading (or writing). But probing further it soon becomes clear that events of the postwar period fascism have demonstrated another one of its ghostly aspect, that of transambulation, the ability of spirits to walk through walls, the equivalent of what at a molecular level is known by physicists as 'intangibility'. This is perhaps the quality of postwar fascism that poses the most challenging taxonomic challenge to contemporary scholars and political analysts: the fact that it can assume disguises that allow it to infiltrate and apparently reside within the democratic (non-revolutionary) spectrum of the right, effectively using it as a 'host' in the way a virus takes over a healthy cell in order to survive and propagate and conceal its revolutionary and destructive goals.⁴²

To be clear, several interwar fascist movements assumed a semi-democratic guise alongside their paramilitary formations and stood for elections to increase their popular base and conquer state power 'legitimately': notable examples are the British Union of Fascists, the Romanian Legionaries of the Archangel Michael (under the name *Totul pentru Țară* or the 'Everything for the Country'), The Arrow Cross Party-Hungarist Movement, and of course, the

41 A concept first formulated by Juan Linz in the context of interwar Europe. See Juan Linz, 'Political Space and Fascism as a Late Comer: Conditions Conducive to the Success or Failure of Fascism as a Mass Movement in Inter-War Europe,' in *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism*, eds. Stein Ugelvik Larsen, Bernt Hagvet and Jan Petter Myklebust (Bergen and Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1980).

42 This image is not to be read as the demonizing of fascism through the use of pathological metaphors, a recurrent feature of the propaganda techniques used by the Nazis to dehumanize Jews and other alleged 'enemies' of national rebirth and license their extermination.

Italian Fascist Party and the National Socialist German Workers' Party. However, none of these parties in either programme or style made any secret of their revolutionary agenda which was in any case apparent from the paramilitary formations and propaganda that formed an integral part of the 'movement'. By contrast, there are several tactics adopted by postwar fascist organizations to assume a democratic disguise with which they cross practically undetected back and forth over the threshold between revolutionary illegal and democratically legal politics. They can be summarized as: a) revisionism; b) the New Right; d) identitarianism; e) entryism; and f) social mediatization.

Revisionism in the context of the far right refers to what is also known as negationism or Holocaust denial, whereby in its more subtle, pseudo-academic form the format, style, and scholarly apparatus of orthodox academic books, conferences, and articles are exploited to simulate legitimate historiographical methodology and argumentation. The aim of the subterfuge is to conceal the racist, neo-Nazi, and antisemitic subtext, namely the attempt to win the battle for the collective memory of the events of Nazism, the Second World War, the mass persecutions and mass exterminations and so effectively elide and redact them from history. Here the extreme fascist right transambulates between democratic and anti-democratic values by impersonating the cultural ethos of liberal academia in order to rehabilitate racial hatred and exonerate historical Nazism and Fascism of the guilt they share (deeply unevenly) for their millions of crimes against humanity, at the same time feeding the doublethink of contemporary right-wing racists and fanatics.⁴³

The European New Right is a generic term for the uneven presence in many European states of 'cultural' or 'metapolitical' forms of revolutionary right and 'differentialist' racism which, emulating the example of Alain de Benoist's *Nouvelle Droite* which emerged in France in the 1960s, decided to abandon overt racist, 'Aryan' fascism to be able to enter the citadel of humanist democracy with the Trojan Horse of a generous addition to Universal Human Rights: the 'right to identity'. However innocuous and liberal it sounds, such a right in the hands of racists and ultranationalists serves to euphemize the assault on the promotion of multiculturalism and the influx of refugees in a multi-ethnic and multifaith society as a 'white genocide' and the destruction of the identity of the indigenous population, which implicitly acquires the connotations of a pure, homogeneous race. The result is a 'differentialist' racism cloaked in the language of liberalism and presenting itself as 'metapolitical', but whose

43 Matthew Feldman and Paul Jackson, eds., *Doublespeak: The Rhetoric of the Far Right Since 1945* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2014).

implementation could only mean in practice state enforced apartheid, persecutions, and mass-deportations legalized by modern versions of Nuremberg Laws. Though its fascist origins are now well disguised, the hidden agenda of the European New Right is to achieve cultural hegemony for ideas that would replace liberal democracy by a totalitarian ethnocracy still masquerading as a modern liberal state based on 'rights', or what is known in German as a *'Rechtsstaat'* postulated in Kantian liberal state theory.⁴⁴ In the last few years, the identitarian movement, exemplified by France's *Génération Identité*, has brought the New Right's pseudo-intellectual concern with the erosion of a mythicized 'cultural identity'⁴⁵ into the streets where it similarly transambulates between liberal notions of 'rights' and patriotic ideas of belonging and the extreme right rejection on racist grounds of basic liberal principles of human equality, multi-culturalism and social justice, spawning factions which openly espouse violence and can be seen as permutations of neo-fascism adapted to a stable multicultural democracy.⁴⁶

Both the New Right and the Identitarian Movement are symptomatic of a broader movement within postwar liberal democracies to assert the primacy of the rights of the ethnic majority over minority rights which has given rise to powerful movements of 'radical right-wing populism' such as the Front National/Rassemblement National, Alternativ für Deutschland, Lega—formerly Lega Nord—(Italy), Fidesz (Hungary), Dansk Folkeparti (Danmark), and Vox (Spain). Such parties are accurately termed 'radical right' because they do not set out to replace the constitutional system with a totalitarian new order or 'racial state', but rather make distinctions between human beings and their legitimacy and desirability as citizens of a state illiberally according to their original birthplace, ethnicity, culture, or religion. Inevitably, radical right populist parties offer ideal temporary accommodation or a permanent 'safe house' for fascist groups and individuals and encourage a covert form of fascist 'entry-ism' into the democratic political sphere.

This can be seen from the following examples: the temporary alliances or rapprochement formed between the French neo-fascist right and the populist Front National (now Rassemblement National) at various times in its past;⁴⁷

44 Tamir Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right: Alternatives to Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2016).

45 The title adopted for the official party magazine of the neo-Nazi British National Party launched under Nick Griffin when he wanted to 'modernize' it and give it the appearance of a radical right-wing populist party in the 1990s.

46 José Pedro Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe* (Paris: Notre Dame University Press, 2018).

47 Nicolas Lebourg, 'Le Front National et La Galaxie des Extrêmes Droites Radicales,' in

the activities of the now banned neofascist Flügel (wing) of the populist Alternativ für Deutschland led by Björn Höcke and Andreas Kalbitz;⁴⁸ the alliance of the neofascist Casa Pound with Salvini's Lega in Italy in the xenophobic *Prima gli Italiani* movement;⁴⁹ the dominant role in the People's Party Our Slovakia of the neo-Nazi Marian Kotleba, elected mayor of Banská Bystrica, until he was condemned to four years for his extremist views; the entanglement of neo-Nazi Hungarian István Györkös's with two illiberal democratic parties, first the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP), then the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik); and the complex relationship of the populist Svoboda party to Ukraine's Nazi collaborationist past and the fascist segment of the country's broad far right spectrum. Donald Trump's relationship with the 'alt-right' spectrum is to be seen in this context, namely an entanglement between various permutations of radical populism, bizarre anti-democratic conspiracy theories and overt fascism, allowing free transambulation between the two technically distinct segments of the political spectrum.

All such examples underline how porous membranes have become between fascism and the radical right in some countries in an age where fascist extremism is not only illegal but psychologically taboo for the vast majority of Western citizens, while at the same time populist resentment of 'others' is openly promoted by legally constituted movements. The rise of the populist radical right using democratic freedoms to express fears of loss of identity and being 'overwhelmed' by foreign migrants, ethnic minorities, and diverse cultural and religious traditions, has led to xenophobia and racial hatred being normalized and policies advocated that deny human beings their democratic freedoms of thought, expression, ethical convictions, and religion, thereby driving a wedge between the fragile historical synthesis of 'liberalism' and 'democracy'. The result is that twilight of ambiguity and doubletalk has descended like a sudden bank of Kingian⁵⁰ sea fog over lucid political discourse relating to nationality, identity and belonging, a moment in the transition to night which is termed

Les Faux-semblants du Front National: Sociologie d'un parti politique, eds. Sylvain Crépon, Alexandre Dézé and Nonna Mayer (Paris: Presses de Science Po, 2015).

48 Andreas Kemper, '... die neurotische Phase überwinden, in der wir uns seit siebzig Jahren befinden': Zur Differenz von Konservatismus und Faschismus am Beispiel der 'historischen Mission' Björn Höckes (AfD) (Thüringen: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2016). Available at <https://th.rosalux.de/publikation/id/3961/die-neurotische-phase-ueberwinden-in-der-wir-uns-seit-siebzig-jahren-befinden>.

49 Giulia Chielli, 'Neofascist Characters in Search of an Author: The Special Relationship between Italian Neofascism and Salvini's Populism' (forthcoming).

50 An allusion to Steven King's novel *The Mist* (1980).

in French 'entre chien et loup', since a dog can easily be taken for a wolf and vice versa according to the disposition and mood of the observer, an ambiguity that spawns examples of Orwellian 'doublethink'. When the party manifesto of the AfD tells its voters 'Islam does not belong in Germany' it has simultaneously a 'radical reading' (asking the state to stop further migration from Islamic countries and take measures against 'Islamization'), but also a fascist one, legitimizing acts of discrimination, violence, and persecution against Muslim communities as in the first stages of Nazi antisemitism.

Moreover, much of AfD party propaganda can be shown to contain a fascist subtext, deliberately evoking nostalgia for Third Reich history and policies. One example is its election poster showing the AfD leader at the time, Frauke Petry, tenderly holding her young baby and asking 'Und was ist Ihr Grund für Deutschland zu kämpfen?' [And what is your reason to fight for Germany?] The exoteric (barely 'democratic') meaning is that only ethnic Germans constitute Germany's 'true' population and that non-ethnic Germans are a threat to be defended (fought) against. Esoterically, however, there is an allusion here to the recurrent topos of Nazi propaganda that a woman's primary function is to breed a new generation of healthy Aryan Germans. Under the Third Reich those in ethnically or culturally 'mixed' marriages or relationships were guilty of the capital crime *Blutschande*,⁵¹ producing '*Mischlinge*' (half-castes) who corrupted the nation's racial purity. Equivalent instances of such esoteric fascism can be found in all radical right populism, or even non-radical populism, as when Farage's UKIP used an anti-immigration photomontage plagiarized from Nazi propaganda.⁵²

Finally, there is the extensive impact which the universal rise of online social media exerts on the far right by creating a virtual, unregulated cultic milieu for the expression of far-right thought, hate speech, racially inspired utopian, occultist and apocalyptic fantasies, and conspiracy theories, one which knows absolutely no censorship, academic rigour, or liberal constraints.⁵³ Cyberspace

51 Originally 'adultery', but after the Nuremberg Race Laws it was perverted in Nazi newspeak to mean the 'blood disgrace' of a 'race traitor'.

52 Media Mole, 'Nigel Farage's anti-EU Poster Depicting Migrants Resembles Nazi Propaganda: Ukip's Lowest Point in Its Campaign for Brexit,' *New Statesman*, June 16, 2016, <https://www.newstatesman.com/2016/06/nigel-farage-s-anti-eu-poster-depicting-migrants-resembles-nazi-propaganda>, accessed September 8, 2021.

53 Fielitz Vietz and Marcks Holger, *Digitaler Faschismus: Die sozialen Medien als Motor des Rechtsextremismus* (Berlin: Duden, 2020). Fielitz Vietz and Marcks Holger, 'Digital Fascism: Challenges for the Open Society in Times of Social Media,' *Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies Working Paper Series*, June 1, 2019. Available at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/87w5c5gp>.

establishes no taxonomic boundaries, so that academic attempts to compartmentalize the cyber-right into neat categories meet with frustration, and the task of disentangling fascist from the radical right is more than usually Sisyphean.

The Ghost of a Chance?

Despite the taxonomic problems posed by the last group of transambulatory far rights we have considered, the application of the distinction between a revolutionary fascist right and a radical but not anti-systemic one is still to be recommended as a working principle for those engaged with this topic. Applying it consistently avoids the terminological sloppiness and conceptual chaos that prevails not just in the media and in the minds of the general public, but regrettably in the work of some of the more conceptually challenged researchers and historians of right-wing extremism. For one thing respecting the distinction might prevent well-intentioned but intellectually lazy or poorly informed academics and journalists of liberal persuasion from repeatedly raising the spectre of a return of fascism when discussing populist xenophobia, and actually examine the ideologies and programmes of political movements with a more informed and critical mindset.

Greater focus on the ideas of the right and their practical implications if ever enacted would make it more difficult for covert fascists to assume the guise of right-wing populists or infiltrate populist parties. It would also reveal the hidden agenda of systemic inhumanity contained in the New Right's 'metapolitical' assault on multiculturalism and what is dismissed contemptuously as 'panmixia',⁵⁴ whose enforced reversal would inevitably lead to social breakdown and racial violence on a par with Nazi Germany. As it is, the New Right's godfather, Alain de Benoist, claims his now international movement is not a 'political phenomenon' but 'a philosophical and theoretical school of thought', so that academics who draw attention to its fascist subtext can be dismissed as 'idiots' with impunity.⁵⁵

Most important of all, the approach to distinguishing fascism and the radical right we have proposed might also encourage journalists and counter-extremist agencies (e.g. state entities monitoring extremism such as the *Verfassungsschutzamt* in Germany) to look more critically at what goes on within populist

54 Random breeding not constrained by social, ethnic, or moral considerations.

55 Tamir Bar-On, 'A Response to Alain de Benoist,' *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 8, no. 2 (2014): 123–168.

parties with a view to spotting elements within them that cross the line from the legality of the radical to the illegality of the extreme, and be more alive to the threat to liberal democracy posed by apparently harmless cultural/intellectual movements such as the European New Right and by apparently non-political movements such as identitarianism. After all both Anders Breivik and Benton Tarrant were demonstrably influenced not just by interwar fascism but by the rise of radical right populist Islamophobia and identity politics.

Finally, this approach might encourage concerned humanists or militant defenders of basic civil rights to stop being fixated with fascism, and to look beyond labels in their struggle for a more just society. Since 1945 fascism has withered as a political force to become just one of the many enemies to the establishment of an ecologically sustainable and socially just world, and not the gravest danger to it. But given the minimal influence exercised by academic journals on the 'proper' use of terms in public discourse, the sheer impotence and irrelevance of intellectuals, no matter how 'public', as agents of social change, realistically there is not the ghost of a chance that the sloppy use of the term 'fascism' and vagueness of the terms 'populism' and 'radical right' will be modified by this article. Yet however impotent scholars may remain to impose 'fascistically' a conceptually rigorous and heuristically valuable definition of fascism on the international community, we surely owe it to another spectre of the mind, 'historical truth', to train our eyes to tell the populist dogs from the neo-fascist wolves with their magician's wardrobe of sheep's clothing.