Back to European Fascism

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Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 429 pp., £17.99 (pb), ISBN 052153856.

Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 321 pp., £8.99 (pb), ISBN 0141014326.

Nancy Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times. The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 2003), 265 pp., £13.95 (pb), ISBN 0691089701.

Didier Musiedlack, *Mussolini* (Paris: Presses de Sciences PO, 2005), 436 pp., €16.15, ISBN 2724608062.

Paul H. Lewis, *Latin Fascist Elites. The Mussolini, Franco and Salazar Regimes* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 209 pp., $85.95 (hb), ISBN 027597880X.

European fascism continues to attract a considerable degree of attention, as witnessed by the publication of many works over the past few years. Recently the comparative study of fascism has centred increasingly on its ideological and cultural dimensions, at times becoming 'ideology-centred'. We could even say that, at least on a superficial level, the analysis of so-called 'generic fascism' has moved from a 'sociological' to a more 'political' perspective, giving both ideology and culture much more importance than previously. On the other hand, this area has become more restricted in disciplinary terms with historians clearly dominating, while sociology and political science seem to be abandoning the subject.[1]

Michael Mann's *Fascists* represents a welcome return from the best traditions of comparative historical sociology towards the analysis of fascism and its role in the crises and collapse of democracy. This book restores 'society and politics' to the centre of the study of fascism. Deviating slightly from his major work, *The Sources*

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1 With some exceptions that are connected to studies of the crises and fall of democratic regimes, as in the case of D. Berg-Schlosser and J. Mitchell, eds., *Conditions of Democracy in Europe, 1919–39: Systematic Case Studies* (London: Macmillan, 2000); and, from the same editors, *Authoritarianism and Democracy in Europe, 1919–39: Comparative Analyses* (London: Palgrave, 2003), as well as Bermeo's book which is reviewed here. See also Giovanni Capoccia, *Defending Democracy. Reactions to Extremism in Interwar Europe* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

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of Social Power (1986, 1993), Mann utilises the vast academic literature on fascism to provide an analysis of both the phenomenon and the conditions for its success. This book asks the classic questions: who were the fascists, how did they grow and who supported them, and what are the conditions most conducive to their taking power? Through an examination of six cases in which fascist movements were important in overthrowing the liberal democratic order, and where they obtained power as either the dominant political force or as a junior partner, Mann attempts to construct a dynamic model that is not merely a taxonomy of fascism.

Like Mann's study, the historian Robert O. Paxton's *The Anatomy of Fascism* is also a critical reaction to some aspects of the 'ideological centrism' of recent years. Because it was written by a historian, criticism of 'culturalism' is more present in Paxton's book, the author of which is more marked by the 'fascistology' debates than is Mann. By claiming that 'what fascists *did* tells at least as much as what they *said*' (a stance that has been criticised by historians such as Zeev Sternhell and Roger Griffin), Paxton attempts to locate the ideas in their rightful place.[2]

It would be reductionist to say that Paxton's work is a development of his article, 'The Five Stages of Fascism'; however, in strictly theoretical–methodological terms, that is exactly what this is.[3] What Paxton has achieved in this book – which is the culmination of several years' research and teaching and is destined for a much greater audience than just the specialists – is to present a global vision of the fascist phenomenon in a more developed and sophisticated manner than before. The book's structure follows the five stages cycle: (i) the creation of the movements; (ii) their embedding in the political system; (iii) the seizure of power; (iv) the exercise of power; and (v) 'finally, the long duration, during which the fascist regime chooses either radicalisation or entropy' (p. 32). According to Paxton, this creates a simpler illustration of how fascism 'far from [being] static, was a succession of processes and choices', requiring different conceptual tools for each stage.

What is fascism?

I readily confess that I do not know where the tendency for 'short definitions' of fascism comes from. Such definitions are obviously central to the functionality of an analysis: however, some are little more than sound-bites. There has, to my knowledge, been no similar obsession in the study of communism or democracy. Nevertheless, neither Mann nor Paxton can resist the temptation that captured their predecessors. Despite this, however, these works are much richer than the definitions and, particularly in the case of the former, the definitions represent the anchor in a sophisticated set of hypotheses concerning the success or failure of fascism. In other words, they are instruments of study that structure both the analysis and the narrative.

Mann begins his book with a definition of 'fascism in terms of [the] key values, actions and power organisations of fascists. Most concisely, *fascism is the pursuit of*

2 See the indirect critique by Zeev Sternhell, *New York Review of Books*, 52, 8 (12 May 2005), which comments on Adrian Lyttelton's review of Paxton (*New York Review of Books*, 51, 16 (21 October 2004), and the very critical review of Roger Griffin in *American Historical Review*, 109, 5 (2004), 1530–1.

3 See Robert O. Paxton, 'The Five Stages of Fascism', *Journal of Modern History*, 70, 1 (1998), 1–13.

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a transcendent and cleansing nation-statism through paramilitarism' (p. 13). The five key terms, some with internal tensions, are nationalism, statism, transcendence, cleansing and paramilitarism. Given that many of these concepts are relatively consensual, it is not necessary to introduce them in any great detail:

1. *nationalism*: the 'deep and populist commitment to an "organic" or "integral" nation';
2. *statism*: this is concerned with goals and organisational form. The organic conception imposes an authoritarian state 'embodying a singular, cohesive will [as] expressed by a party elite adhering to the 'leadership principle' (p. 14). Mann is well aware of the tensions between 'movement' and 'bureaucracy' and confirms that 'fascism was more totalitarian in its transformational goals than in its actual regime form' (p. 13);
3. *transcendence:* this is the typical *neither/nor* of fascism as a 'third way'. Mann stresses that the 'core constituency' of fascist support can be understood only by taking their 'aspirations to transcendence' seriously. 'Nation and State comprised their centre of gravity, not class' (p. 15);
4. *cleansing:* 'Most fascisms entwined both ethnic and political cleansing, though to differ[ring] degrees' (p. 16);[4]
5. *paramilitarism*: both a key fascist value and an organisational form. Just as many analysts have done before him, Mann stresses that 'what essentially distinguishes fascists from many military and monarchical dictatorships of the world is [the] "bottom-up" and violent quality of its paramilitarism. It could bring popularity, both electorally and among elites' (p. 16).

This is not too far from other definitions of fascism, such as Stanley G. Payne's 'typological description', to give only one example.[5] Mann states that the diverse combinations of this definition can result in 'more-or-less' fascist movements, but that he does not have the imagination to 'plot fascist movements (each one obviously unique) amid a five-dimensional space' (p. 17). However, one of the problems with the functionality of his definition is that it talks of different units, at times referring to parties or movements, at others referring to political regimes, and sometimes referring to both.

This same problem is also present in Paxton's book, given that 'a definition that does full justice the phenomenon of fascism must apply to the later stages as effectively as it does to the earlier ones' (p. 206). Paxton provides the definition at the end of his book:

> Fascism may be defined as a form of political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victim-hood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but

4 His study of this subject has in the meantime been published; see M. Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

5 Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 7.

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effective collaboration with traditional elite groups, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion. (p. 218)

Paxton views fascism 'primarily as [a] political phenomenon'. However, his attempt to obtain a balance between the various stages in the definition is very difficult to achieve, since it is not part of a rigorous 'anchor', thereby underlining the need to use different conceptual tools for each stage. 'Fascism in action looks much more like a network of relationships than a fixed essence' (p. 207).

There are some points common to both definitions, with the first being the trilogy: ideology/collective action/organisational forms. In different ways, they both criticise the 'cultural-linguistic turn'. In his explicit criticism of Roger Griffin, the author of the influential book, *The Nature of Fascism*,[6] Mann claims that 'without power organisations, ideas cannot actually do anything', meaning that we must therefore add to its values, 'programs, actions and organisations' (p. 12).

I do not believe that it is worth spending much time discussing the 'ideology versus political praxis and institutions' debate that exists amongst 'fascistologists', a debate that has already achieved parochial proportions. In the past, some historiographic polemics about the relative importance of ideology were significant, particularly on the rejection by some Marxist historians of the importance of ideas in Italian fascism, for example, or on the relative strength of French fascism.[7] Some of these discussions, such as the debates regarding the concept of totalitarianism or about 'fascism versus authoritarianism' as the characterisation of the right-wing dictatorships of the period, were more general in nature.[8] Almost all of these debates had an ideological component, although the majority of the most noted historians of fascist ideology developed definitions of fascism that also integrated the type of party and form of regime.[9] Developing a synthesis of these debates in 1995, Payne noted that the 'complexity of fascism cannot be adequately described without recourse to a relatively complex typology, however laudable the principle of parsimony may be'.[10]

6 Roger D. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter, 1991). See his review of *Fascists*, in which he states that Mann 'adds nothing substantially new to the sociological comparative approach of Juan Linz nearly three decades ago', considering his definition 'an anti-climax', in *History Today*, 54, 11 (2004), 78.

7 For more on the so-called 'Sternhell debate' concerning French fascism see António Costa Pinto, 'Fascist Ideology Revisited: Zeev Sternhell and his Critics', *European History Quarterly*, 16 (1986), 466–83. See also Roger Eatwell, 'On Defining the "Fascist Minimum": The Centrality of Ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 1, 3 (1996), 303–19.

8 See Juan J. Linz, *Authoritarian and Totalitarian Regimes* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000); *Fascismo, autoritarismo, totalitarismo* (Rome: Ideazione Editrice, 2003).

9 For example, Emilio Gentile defines Italian Fascism as 'an *experiment in political domination* undertaken by a *revolutionary movement* ... that aspires toward a monopoly of power and that ... constructs a new state based on a *single party-regime*, with the chief objective of *conquering society*'. Cf. 'Fascism and the Italian Road to Totalitarianism', paper presented to 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences, Oslo (6–13 August 2000), 3. See also Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo. Storia e Interpretazione* (Bari: Laterza, 2002).

10 Payne, *History*, 5.

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Where, who, how and why?

More consensually, and in agreement with many historians, Mann considers fascism, to use Roger Eatwell's expression, as being 'European-epochal', and a variant of authoritarian reactions in the context of crises.[11] Nevertheless, despite fascism there 'was set aside a single large geographical block of authoritarian regimes' where 'notions of general crisis do best at explaining the general authoritarian surge, less well at explaining the rise of fascist movements' (p. 48). It is in the context of the democratic crises of the interwar period that he could have incorporated Nancy Bermeo's excellent work, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, into his analysis. This is a book that she herself defines as 'a comparative political history' of the role of ordinary citizens in the breakdown of democracy.

Bermeo analyses seventeen cases of authoritarian take-over in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s, testing the polarisation thesis.[12] This classic model of 'polarised pluralism', which was developed by the Italian political scientist, Giovanni Sartori, states that 'party systems (and the party elite) must restrain the forces of polarity inherent in political democracies. If party systems fail to constrain both the ideological range and the number of parties . . . centrifugal forces will tear democracy apart' (p. 19). While this does not negate the validity of the thesis according to which political actors, when they group themselves in opposing and distant ideological camps, vacate the middle ground and leave democracy vulnerable to collapse, Bermeo shows that ordinary people are 'the "masons of polarisation" ' in only a very small number of cases. 'Mass defections to extremists parties are rare' (p. 5). Elite polarisation is, therefore, much more important in the breakdown of democracy.

In order to substantiate her argument, Bermeo examines two levels of polarisation: private polarisation, such as changes in voting preferences; and public polarisation, including mobilisations and counter-mobilisations in public space. Her conclusion is that the fall of the democracies was mainly 'stories of elite failure' (p. 6). To verify the classic hypothesis of polarisation, there must be in each democracy 'relevant anti-system parties' that are situated 'two poles apart' on the left–right spectrum, 'mutually exclusive, bilateral oppositions flanking the democratic governments that fail', and, most importantly, the 'enfeeblement' of the centre and the 'prevalence of centrifugal drives over centripetal ones' (p. 52). Ordinary citizens, as voters, would desert centrist parties and transfer their allegiance to the extremes. Nonetheless, only the second characteristic is present in virtually all cases; rather unhelpfully, however,

11 Roger Eatwell, 'Towards a New Model of Generic Fascism', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 4, 2 (1992), 161–94; *idem*, 'European Fascism? Approaches and Definitions', in Stein U. Larsen, ed., *Fascism Outside Europe* (New York: SSM-Columbia University Press, 2001). See also Aristotle Kallis, 'The "Regime-Model" of Fascism: A Typology', *European History Quarterly*, 30 (2000), 77–104.

12 Nancy Bermeo's work examines the European experiences of the period between the two world wars, and the Latin American experiences of the 1960s and 1970s; however, only the introduction and first part of this book will be reviewed here. Some other reviews of this work are more concerned with the Latin American aspects; see, e.g., W. Rand Smith, *Latin American Politics and Society*, 46, 3 (2004), 131–4, and Frances Hagopian, 'What Makes Democracies Collapse?', *Journal of Democracy*, 15, 3 (2004), 166–9.

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it is also present where democracy survived. Elsewhere, polarisation is much more obvious among the elite and in the public space.

Bermeo well illustrates the conservative elite's over-reaction to what she calls 'polarisation in public spaces'. For Mann, too, 'class does matter, profoundly, if in a rather peculiar way'; hence the upper classes greatly exaggerated the dangers, 'reaching for the gun too abruptly, too early' (p. 25). Yet this cannot explain fascism, 'since only a few countries in this zone actually generated mass fascism, and they did not normally do so at the initiative of the upper classes' (p. 25). As Bermeo notes, 'the rise of fascism and the fall of inter-war democracies are not synonymous processes. In fact, using the cases of fascist victory as a base for generalisations about the breakdown of democracy can be highly misleading' (p. 22).

Whereas Bermeo deals with all the cases in which democracy broke down, Mann looks at where authoritarianism emerged victorious, where fascism emerged as a variant of authoritarianism, and where it played an important part in the downfall of democracy. The strength of fascism-as-a-movement was greater in Germany, Hungary, Austria and Italy, where fascists arrived in power with varying degrees of social and political support. Spain, on the other hand, was chosen to exemplify a case in which 'fascism remained the subordinate member of the authoritarian family' (p. 30). Mann also examines macro-theories concerning the crises of democracy and the rise of the dictatorships, seeking those that are also operatives for fascism. He successively tests the hypotheses related to the economy, politics and ideology, even although with some lack of precision and a fluid prose that is full of exceptions.

There is a very large number of studies correlating dictatorships with the degree of economic development. In empirical terms, and with Germany as the exception, it would seem that 'the rise of authoritarianism was mainly a problem for the less-developed countries of inter-war Europe', although 'the largest fascist movements were found at all levels of development'. It would seem, therefore, that fascism is unrelated to levels of economic development (p. 51).

The relationship between fascism and class conflict has led to the publication of a profusion of academic studies. For Mann, it 'is less profit than the defence of property that motivates the capitalist class', and 'property was associated in the ideology of the time with two fundamental desirable social values: order and security' (p. 63). Perhaps 'because of the role that ideology plays in defining "interests" more broadly than rational-choice theory suggests' (p. 63), Mann finds five reasons for the overreaction. These are all well known: the 'security dilemma'; the vulnerability of the property rights of agrarian landlords; the threat to the 'caste-like autonomy' of the military by the left; the reaction of the churches to the secularism of the left; and, finally, 'geopolitics also marked the problem of order' (p. 356). In the military arena, which is often underestimated in the social sciences, Mann notes that some of the links are with the First World War; yet here the most operative dimension is the 'link between military and ideological power, that is, on the rise of paramilitary values'.

We could go on, but the problem is that many of the cleavages previously analysed are those of authoritarianism in general. As Mann recognised, 'the major divide – both conceptually and geographically – was between liberal democracy and forms of rightist authoritarianism' (p. 90). Where, then, do the fascists fit in? Clarity is

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not Mann's strength, and in his conclusion he considers that they were 'nurtured among the authoritarian rightists', even if they were 'distinctive'. Thus, 'neither their organisation, nor their values [were] allowed to be simply a vehicle for class interests. Organisationally they were a "bottom-up" movement, not a top-down one. And they were driven in "radical" directions by their own core values' (p. 358). However, characterising fascism along these lines does not explain its success in all cases. As Mann himself recognises, it is much easier to generalise about the causes of the rise of authoritarianism than it is for the rise of fascism.

Fascists is more interesting for its attempted characterisation of the 'social settings' that led to the growth of fascism than it is for the analysis of the regimes and their institutions. Mann frames the growth of fascism around four crises that are associated with the four sources of power: 'war between mass citizens' armies; severe class conflict exacerbated by the Great Depression; the political crises arising from the attempts of many countries at a rapid transition toward a democratic nation-state; and a cultural sense of civilisational contradiction and decay' (p. 23). While all four crises weakened the ability of elites to continue leading, fascism offered solutions for them. Despite having different causes in each country, fascism 'was strongest where we find distinct combinations of all four' (p. 23). Mann then concentrates on the three core 'fascist constituencies', including the fascist values and organisations identified earlier and which resonated most strongly, and therefore came to 'organise actual fascist movements' (p. 26). Here Mann includes the broad category of 'followers' – both fascist militants and the electorate.

1. *Constituencies favouring para-militarism:* in all cases, the fascist core consisted of the two successive generations of young men who came of age between the end of the First World War and the late 1930s. These men were the product of the 'modern' and 'moral' socialisation of two institutions – secondary and higher education and the armed forces – which were 'encouraging militarism'.
2. *Constituencies favouring transcendence*: the class composition of fascism is complex and variable. More important is its localisation in the economic sector: 'fascists tended to come from sectors that were not in the front line of organised struggle between capital and labour', thereby favouring a movement that would transcend class struggle (p. 27).
3. *Constituencies favouring nation-statism*: 'Fascists were at the heart of either the nation or the state ... locations were similar across countries. Soldiers and veterans above all, but civil servants, teachers and public sector manual workers were all disproportionately fascist' in countries with mass fascism (p. 27).

It is within this framework that Mann analyses the national examples. While I am unable here to do justice to his chapters on the five case studies, all of which are extremely rich in information and analysis (even if a little confusing at times), his final conclusions do not explain the fascists' success satisfactorily.[13] In the Italian

13 Some reviewers (e.g. F. H. Adler in *Comparative Political Studies*, 38, 6 (2005), 733) have noted various errors of fact in Michael Mann's book. It is natural for some mistakes to be made in a comparative

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case, it was 'intense class struggle, post-war paramilitarism, and a weakened old regime'. In the German case, paramilitarism was again important; class conflict, though relevant, was not dominant. Unlike Italian Fascism, Nazism was also a popular electoral movement, 'thus Nazi transcendent nation-statism was sufficiently popular to bring it to the brink of power' (p. 362). Austrian fascism was divided between two rival fascist movements: '[t]he para-militaries of both parties attempted coups, but got into power only with the help from the military power of the state' (ibid.). Hungarian and Romanian fascism only emerged during the mid-1930s, well after the threat from the left, 'thus fascists had no capitalist bias; indeed they became rather proletarian in their composition. In both cases para-militarism was used more as an electoral tool than to repress rivals or to seize power'. In the end the military triumphed over paramilitary power, and radicalising authoritarians triumphed over fascists. Only the chaos of the final years of the war allowed the fascists a brief, doomed victory' (p. 363). In the Spanish case the 'old regime experienced the least disruption among all the case studies, and so conservative authoritarians, not fascists, dominated' (ibid.).

While the explanation for each case requires local factors, are there 'common factors determining the power of fascists'? One of the least important factors was the 'threat of the working class'. In relation to the strength of fascism, the main attraction for militants was centred on its ability to trap young single men within fraternal, hierarchical and violent 'cages'. Fascism also attracted substantial electoral support that was based on a combination of the first three of Mann's fascist characteristics: statism, nationalism and class transcendence. In the end 'the popularity of fascism was greatly affected by the political strength and stability of old regime conservatism, which, more than liberal or social democracy, was fascism's main rival' (p. 364). In conclusion, 'fascism resulted from the process of *democratisation* amid profound war-induced crises' (p. 365).

Paxton is less ambitious in his analysis of the factors behind the success of fascist movements. His chapters dealing with the emergence of fascism underline the fact that fascism was a 'latecomer'. He notes that there is one precondition: mass politics. Recruitment to and the social bases of the fascist movements are dealt with in fewer than four pages. His principal goal is to avoid the 'false trails', namely to study fascism 'by its origins'. He examines two successful examples (Italy and Germany) and one unsuccessful (France), as well as brief regional and national studies (the Po valley, Schleswig Holstein and France) to illustrate the conditions that nurtured fascist movements. Paxton's general direction is well known, but it lacks structure and fails to prioritise among violence, nationalism and polarisation. The strength of his analysis, however, is in the elegant examination of the processes and context of fascism's rise to power. As he states, 'fascist success depends as much on allies . . . as on the special qualities of the movements themselves'. It is exactly because of this that he dedicates

study such as Mann's; however, a more attentive editor could have eliminated many. I will limit myself to indicating two errors: Portugal was not neutral in the First World War, but fought on the side of the Allies, suffering large numbers of casualties in the process (67); Mann also talks of the Spanish Third Republic when it was, in fact, the Second Republic (363).

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one chapter to the 'final essential precondition of successful fascism: decision-makers ready to share power with fascist challengers' (p. 86).

Describing the classic examples of Italy and Germany, Paxton begins by telling us what did not happen: electoral majority or victorious insurrections. He attempts a 'non-deterministic' description that underlines what it was that fascism offered to the conservatives (such as a mass following, new faces, a 'magic formula' for weaning workers away from Marxism, overcoming disorder) that made them reject other alternatives and 'choose the fascist option' (p. 102). To put it briefly, 'the fascists offered a new recipe for governing with popular support, but without any sharing of power with the left, and without any threat to conservative social and economic privileges and political dominance. The conservatives, for their part, held the keys to the door of power' (p. 104). It was, therefore, a pure exercise of elite rational choice: the 'revolution' came after the seizure of power.

Paxton and Bermeo agree that the crises of democracy and fascism are far from being a marriage. In the middle of the crises, it is the decision of the conservatives that was at the root of fascist success. 'All that is required to fit [Paxton's model] is polarisation, deadlock, mass mobilisation against internal and external enemies, and complicity by existing elites' (p. 116). But why is it, 'if [when] conservatives could rule alone, they did', that they decided to call for the fascists? As almost all writers before him, Paxton, like Mann, recognises that 'conservative regimes of all sorts have provided unfavourable terrain for fascism to reach power' (p. 111). However, in the Italian and German cases, the crises favoured the fascists, and they were co-opted into power. Paxton seems to rely a great deal on elite choice: 'it works better to see the fascist seizure of power as a process: alliances are formed, choices made, alternatives close off'. Crises may have made the space available, but it 'was the unfortunate choices [made] by a few powerful establishment leaders that actually put the fascists into the space' (p. 118).

Exercising power

Paxton dedicates half his book to the functional operation of the new political power in Italy and Germany. He does so in a way that is coherent, with his characterisation of 'Fascism in power [as] a compound, a powerful amalgam of different but marriageable conservative, national socialist and radical right ingredients, bound together by common enemies' (p. 206). Following the 'dual state–polyocracy' route that is an analytical tradition of studies of Nazism,[14] and attempting new applications of the same, particularly in relation to Mussolini's Italy, Paxton distinguishes the regimes according to the 'tensions' between the four poles of power that he developed in his 1998 article as 'the four-way struggle for dominance':

> The fascist leader; his party (whose militants clamoured for jobs, perquisites, expansionist adventures, and the fulfilment of some elements of their early radical programme); the state apparatus (functionaries such as police and military commanders, magistrates, and local governors);

14 E. Fraenkel, *The Dual State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941).

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and finally civil society (holders of social, economic, political, and cultural power such as professional associations, leaders of big business and big agriculture, churches, and conservative political leaders). These four-way tensions gave these regimes their characteristic blend of febrile activism and shapelessness. (pp. 123–4)

Some of these poles are not well defined by Paxton, and they vary between the article and the book. This is so with regard to the armed forces, which disappear in the book to be amalgamated under the item 'civil society', a term that aggregates 'organised interests', including the churches. Nevertheless, the hypothesis remains very fruitful. From this perspective he compares the two dictatorships, concentrating on charismatic leadership and the 'tug-of-war' between the fascists and the conservatives, the leaders and the party, and the party and the state. While the perspective may not be new, he illustrates the functional dynamic of fascism in power in relation to these axes with great analytical and comparative elegance. More importantly, he stresses that these are the fundamental differences from other variants of authoritarian rule that did not experience these tensions during the period. I am, perhaps, a poor critic of Paxton, because I have to admit that I identify myself with his hypotheses.

This perspective has already been used to analyse German Nazism.[15] Paxton, however, believes that Italian Fascism can also be interpreted 'as an Italian version of the dual state' using the same tools, although Mussolini had to 'accord far more power to the normative state than Hitler did' (p. 122). For Paxton, although Hitler's and Mussolini's style of rule were different, charismatic leadership is one of the identifying traits of fascist dictatorships. While Hitler has been the subject of countless studies, biographies of Mussolini only recently experienced a surge with the publication of two voluminous works about the Italian dictator.[16] The French historian, Didier Musiedlack, who is the author of an excellent study of the Fascist political class,[17] has written a concise biography of Mussolini. This study is particularly interesting because it is not so much a narrative biographical study but is mainly concerned with the construction of the myth of Mussolini, his charismatic affirmation and his place in the functioning of the Fascist regime. Musiedlack is close to Paxton in his constant references to the role of the institutions in the construction of the 'myth of the Duce', in the decision-making process and in the incomplete 'dual state'.

In this biography, Mussolini's transformation from head of government to Duce and the 'sacralisation' of his person are particularly well illustrated. It was a task of both the propaganda apparatus and the party, which was the principal source of power independent of the old elites – the king included. As Musiedlack notes, 'before the Fascist Party, Mussolini's attitude is, in a certain sense, always coherent: denying the party parity with the state and, *a fortiori*, any idea of the supremacy of the party over the state'; however, 'State and party encounter their unity in the context of

15 See the pioneering works by M. Broszat, *The Hitler State* (London: Longman, 1981); H. Mommsen, *From Weimar to Auschwitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); and N. Frei, *National Socialist Rule in Germany: the Führer State, 1933–1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

16 P. Milza, *Mussolini* (Paris: Fayard, 1999); R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London: Arnold, 2002).

17 D. Musiedlack, *Lo Stato Fascista e la sua Classe Politica, 1922–1943* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003).

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a personal union around the leader' (p. 317). To use Hans Mommsen's typology, Mussolini was a 'strong dictator', who centralised a large proportion of decision-making and concentrated ministerial portfolios in his person, even if by the end of the 1930s he was obliged to coexist with 'a system of legislative production that, even while reformed, was maintained' (p. 390).

As Musiedlack has noted, studies of the decision-making process and of the fascist governing elite are scarce. The old and rich tradition of elite studies in political science can tell us much about the structure and operation of political power in the dictatorships that were associated with fascism, whether through the characterisation of the socio-professional structure or by the modes of political elite recruitment that expresses the extent of its rupture and/or continuity with the liberal regime, the type of leadership, the relative power of the institutions in the new dictatorial system and other aspects that we have discussed above. This is what Paul H. Lewis, a political scientist and author of two pioneering works on the ministerial elite of the Iberian dictatorships, has done.[18] In his book *Latin Fascist Elites* he conducts and develops these studies to include Italian Fascism. It is strange that while there are a large number of studies of Italian Fascist leaders, there has been, to my knowledge, no comparative study of contemporaneous south European regimes.[19]

Lewis's book is very informative, and not only does its structure enable us to observe the changes in government composition, but it also presents a convincing periodisation, as well as an operative classification that is based on the studies of Harold D. Lasswell (technocrats, 'politicians', military) in order to observe the relative weight of the institutions in the composition of the elite.[20] This same framework is used for the three regimes, thereby enabling interesting comparisons.

The ministerial elite of consolidated Italian Fascism was overwhelmingly dominated by men who had been Fascists from the very earliest days, almost all of whom, with the exception of military officers, were also members of the Fascist Grand Council. Main entry points to a ministerial position until the 1930s, besides membership of the Grand Council, were either through the ranks of the Fascist Party (PNF), or through the provincial federations in which the PNF occupied a dominant position. The corporatist apparatus was yet another source for recruiting

18 See P. H. Lewis, 'The Spanish Ministerial Elite, 1938–1969', *Comparative Politics*, 5, 1 (1972), 83–106; *idem*, 'Salazar's Ministerial Elite, 1932–1968', *Journal of Politics*, 40 (1978), 622–47. Spanish social science has produced a large number of excellent studies of the political elite and the structure of power during Francoism. See R. Chueca, *El Fascismo en los Comienzos del Régimen de Franco. Un Estudio Sobre la FET-JONS* (Madrid: CIS, 1983); M. Jerez Mir, *Elites Políticas y Centros de Extracción en España, 1938–1957* (Madrid: CIS, 1982); and A. Cazorla Sánchez, *Las Políticas de la Victoria. La Consolidación del Nuevo Estado Franquista (1938–1953)* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2000).

19 In the majority of cases, the more recent studies carried out in the same vein include Salazarism and Francoism, but not Italian Fascism. See P. T. de Almeida, A. C. Pinto and N. Bermeo, eds., *Who Governs Southern Europe? Regime Change and Ministerial Recruitment* (London: Frank Cass, 2003). In addition, see E. Gentile, *Fascismo e Antifascismo. I Partiti Italiani fra le due Guerre* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2000), and G. Adinolfi's recent effort, 'The Fascist Ministerial Elite', *Portuguese Journal of Social Science*, 3, 2 (2004), 91–102.

20 H. D. Lasswell and D. Lerner, eds., *World Revolutionary Elites: Studies in Coercive Ideological Movements* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965).

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the ministerial elite, and one that came to dominate during the second half of the 1930s. The least significant recruiting ground was the civil service, and the very few who took this route still had to be vetted by the various Fascist organisations that were involved in public administration.

Reshuffles of the ministerial elite were common practice, and it was rare for any minister to serve more than three years. Mussolini tended to accumulate ministries for his own person, and at times was responsible for up to six portfolios. Il Duce was inclined to place loyal Fascists he could trust in the important interior and foreign ministries, but he remained wary of the PNF's power, subordinating it to his control and limiting its access to the state. The claim that the ministers 'were only technical collaborators with the head of government' was progressively promoted, although this does not mean that an exclusively bureaucratic career had somehow been transformed into a preferential route to ministerial office. Lewis's study confirms Emilio Gentile, who showed that the 'political faith that had been demonstrated through an active membership of the PNF, and by obedience to the Party's orders, always prevailed over the principle of technical competence', in the selection of the elite.[21] The Fascist Party and its parastatal organisations were to remain determining factors in access to a ministerial career, even when the power of the ministries was limited by the dictator and the single party.

Not surprisingly, 'Salazar's Portugal went to the opposite extreme', with a cabinet that was dominated by technocrats, and Franco was somewhere in the middle (p. 180). What is interesting in Lewis's study is that it illustrates quite well the greater weight of the PNF in the selection of the elite, the rapid abandonment of the coalition character of the fascist governments and a more centralising type of leadership. As Lewis states, 'more than Franco or Salazar, he (Mussolini) ran a one-man show' (p. 184). The relatively large number of Fascist ministers without a university education (21.8 per cent) also illustrates the greater predominance of political activists, compared with the social and professional elitism that was later more apparent in Salazar's and Franco's dictatorships, although it would be an exaggeration to state that 'Mussolini's brand of fascism was the most anti-establishment' (p. 193).

At the end of *The Anatomy of Fascism* Paxton assesses the 'fascist revolution' regarding the relationship between programme and praxis: 'In no domain did the proposals of early fascism differ more from what fascist regimes did in practice than in economic policy' (p. 145). Thus there was little anti-capitalism and a largely intact social structure. However, this was different with regard to the 'totalitarian' control of civil society. Paxton is perhaps being a little excessive when he states that the 'fascist regimes tried to redraw so radically the boundaries between private and public that the private sphere almost disappeared' (p. 144). However, it seems obvious that this is an area in which the fascists differed from the other right-wing dictatorships of the period. As Musiedlack has noted, it was necessary to wait for several years before the historiography was able 'to see the fascist party that, in 1942, had a membership of

21 Gentile, *Fascismo*, 240.

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27 million Italians, recuperate the place that was its: the key of the mechanism of the organisation of fascist totalitarianism' (p. 303).

Paxton also illustrates the radicalising pulse of fascism in power through an analysis of its themes and agents within the two regimes, but could it be that '[t]he radicalisation stage shows us fascism at its most distinctive' (p. 169)? Here, as we have seen above – and regardless of the two styles of rule – the relationship between the leader and his 'army of followers' is the motor. 'Fascist regimes embrace radicalizing impulses from below' (p. 153); however, the expansionist wars appear to be the determining element. If in the Nazi case the question does not leave any doubts, it is only more recently that these aspects have been 'grouped' in historiography as a symbol of the internal radicalisation of the Italian regime: the Ethiopian war, the 'totalitarian leap' (*svolta totalitaria*) and racist legislation against Jews (even if it could not be compared in extent with that of Germany).[22] At this final stage, wrote Paxton, 'comparison is hardly possible: only one fascist regime really reached it' (p. 169).

While the assumption of power was only possible with the support of other conservative and authoritarian groups, the nature of the leadership and its relationship with the party appears to be the fundamental variable. As numerous historians have observed, the crucial element 'is to what extent the fascist component emancipated itself from the initial predominance of its traditional conservative sponsors and to what degree it departed – once in power – from conventional forms/objectives of policy-making towards a more radical direction'.[23]

Both Mann and Paxton have produced excellent comparative studies, integrating the most recent empirical research and offering appropriate interpretative hypotheses. The former concentrates on the conditions which led to the growth of fascist movements, and the latter studies the processes which were involved in their seizure of power and the nature of the resulting regimes. It is Paxton's work, however, which has successfully managed to identify, in the 'tensions' affecting the functioning of the regimes, the distinguishing characteristic of what we call 'fascist regimes'.

22 See F. H. Adler, 'Why Mussolini Turned on the Jews', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 39, 3 (2005), 285–300.

23 Kallis, 'The "Regime-Model" of Fascism: a Typology', 96–7. See also Carl Levy, 'Fascism, National Socialism and Conservatives in Europe, 1914–1945: Issues for Comparativists', *Contemporary European History*, 8, 1 (1999), 97–126.

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