

Griffin, Roger – Loh, Werner – Umland, Andreas (eds.):
Fascism Past and Present, West and East. An International
Debate on Concepts and Cases in the Comparative Study
of the Extreme Right. With an Afterword by Walter
Laqueur, Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2006, 520 pages,
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Research into fascism is an important part of contemporary political science as well as historical science. Despite several decades of research and many publications, many questions and answers about the essence of fascism still remain open. There exist various conceptualizations and approaches to the study of fascism, and the community of researchers is very heterogeneous. The new round of debates about fascism may be found in a new book edited by Roger Griffin, Werner Loh and Andreas Umland. The book is bilingual but chiefly in English, with only some texts in German.

The editors have decided upon an atypical but interesting structure for the book. The main section is an article by Roger Griffin entitled "Fascism's new faces (and new facelessness) in the post-fascist epoch". Following this is a discussion featuring critical contributions from David Baker, Jeffrey M. Bale, Tamir Bar-On, Alexander De Grand, Martin Durkham, Roger Eatwell, Peter Fritzsche, A. James Gregor, Klaus Holz and Jan Weynand, Siegfried Jäger and Alfred Schobert, Aristotle A. Kallis, Melitta Konopka, Bärbel Meurer, Philip Morgan, Ernst Nolte, Kevin Passmore, Stanley G. Payne, Friedrich Pohlmann, Karin Priester, Sven Reichardt, David D. Roberts, Albert Scherr, Robert J. Soucy, Mario Sznajder, Andreas Umland, Leonard Weinberg and Wolfgang Wippermann.

The first response to the criticism has been included in Griffin's article "Da capo, con meno brio: Towards a more useful conceptualization of generic fascism". This article is followed

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by another round of discussion. The second response is found in Griffin's article "Grey cats, blue cows, and wide awake groundhogs: Notes towards the development of a 'deliberative ethos' in fascist studies". The second debate in the book, between Andreas Umland and A. James Gregor, deals with the thoughts of Alexandr Dugin. The afterword is written by Walter Laqueur.

Griffin's first article searches for fascism's definitional core, which is "consistent with the 'new consensus' that has grown up in Anglophone fascist studies" (p. 29). According to Griffin, its "main contestable features" are:

- a) its methodological premise is derived from Max Weber's theory of the "ideal type" which rejects Marxist, essentialist, or metapolitical notions of the "fascist minimum";
- b) it identifies this minimum in a core ideology of national rebirth (palingenesis) that embraces a vast range of highly diverse concrete historical permutations;
- c) while fully recognizing the singularity of Nazism, the application of this theory to the Third Reich categorizes it as an outstanding example of a fascist regime;
- d) its application to the post-war era identifies new variants of fascism that have evolved a long ways from its inter-war manifestations, notably those associated with the Third Position and the New Right;
- e) it postulates a major organizational transformation within post-war fascism since its extensive "groupuscularization", namely the emergence of "rhizomic" qualities" (p. 29).

Criticism of Griffin's thesis is mostly aimed at the very vague definition of the fascist minimum. According to Alexander de Grand, "Griffin frees himself from the lists of attributes that other historians use by limiting the linkage to one point in ideology. In the end, he is going to return to the position that each movement might be better understood if studied separately or, in Angelo Tasca's words, to define fascism is to write its history" (p. 97).

Ernst Nolte, among others, argues that the reduction of fascism to the "Nationale Wiedergeburt" is also valid for Mao Tse Tung (p. 162). Several authors criticize Griffin's attempt to classify as fascist various highly heterogeneous actors, including the American "leaderless resistance" groups and individuals on one hand, and the French Nouvelle Droite on the other. Stanley G. Payne asks: "Was the American libertarian anti-statist terrorist Timothy McVeigh representative of a permutation of the mythic core of fascism, or something more analogous to a kind of libertarian anarchist terrorism that has a much older pedigree than fascism, generic or otherwise?" (p. 177).

In his answer to the criticism of various authors Griffin writes that he wants to distinguish “between generic fascism as a political science concept and as a historical concept” (p. 276) and that he wants “for historiographic purposes to identify three distinct (ideal typically constructed) periods in fascism’s evolution as a historical force, pre-fascist (1880–1918), fascist (1919–1943) and neo-fascist (1944–), each of which was/is conducive to different ideological and organizational manifestations” (p. 276). In answer to the second round of criticism, Griffin summarizes the importance of the debate for the future development of fascist studies (p. 411-457). The debate about Aleksandr Dugin is a subsidiary part of the book.

The famous fascism researcher Walter Laqueur writes relatively sceptically about the future of fascist studies in his afterword: “Fascism in Europe has had its hour, whether it has a chance in other parts of the world is a moot question; there could be all kinds of very violent mass movements but whether they will be fascist (or clerical fascist) I doubt – not only in view of the strong religious element in these movements ... Who will be tomorrow’s historians and political scientists, and what will be their priorities? I somehow doubt that fascism will figure as highly as it does today.” (p. 503)

Despite Laqueur’s scepticism, it could be relevant to research fascism in the contemporary social sciences, as well, among other reasons to analyze (neo-fascism) as a part of broader movements in the context of inter-cultural disputes. For these purposes, it is important to find an acceptable conceptualization of this phenomenon. Griffin’s theses are an interesting contribution to the debate; however, as a definitive conceptualization of fascism, they are not acceptable.

His search for the definition of fascism solely in the ideological dimension is too narrow. It is important to combine historical and strategic aspects with the ideological. The “fascist minimum” might also be taken to include the self-definition and self-identification of fascist subjects. National rebirth is an important part of the fascist identity but it does not exist in isolation. In the current politics of fascist subjects, pan-nationalist and pan-Aryan concepts are even more influential.

The classification of Nazism as a part of fascism is acceptable, considering, among other things, the current context of close cooperation among neo-fascist and neo-Nazi organizations in Europe. The use of the term (neo-)fascism for the contemporary New Right has a limited sense. It is important to find real neo-fascist structures with connections to historical fascism; however, neo-fascism and neo-Nazism are only parts of the contemporary extreme right. Some political streams (“law and order” and anti-immigration populism) have occupied a similar position within

the political spectrum of some countries as former fascist formations, but these new parties and movements are not (neo-)fascist (e.g., Liste Pim Fortuyn or Schill-Partei).

The discussion of fascism and fascism studies is still topical. From this point of view, the new publication is an outstanding contribution to the research into fascism and the extreme right. The main topics of this book should be discussed in academic circles and at university seminars. The influence of this publication on fascist studies will be comprehensively evaluated by future scholars. Already today, however, the conception and results of this book may be judged very positively.