

SEMINARIO DE HISTORIA

Dpto. de Hª Social y del Pensamiento Político, UNED
Dpto. de Hª del Pensamiento y de los Movimientos Sociales y Políticos, UCM
Fundación José Ortega y Gasset-Gregorio Marañón

Curso 2013-2014
Documento de trabajo 2014/03

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SESIÓN: JUEVES, 13 DE MARZO DE 2014, 19 H.

Lugar: Biblioteca
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Some Thoughts on Fascism and the Nation

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A broad and more or less enduring scholarly agreement on a general definition of fascism as a historical phenomenon has proven to be an extremely challenging endeavour. The variegated definitions of the fascist phenomenon as a coherent and revolutionary corpus of ideas include such concepts as ‘generic fascism’, the ‘fascist minimum’ or the ‘fascist matrix’. However, the constitutive element rarely omitted in any attempt to define fascism relates to its ideological, cultural and symbolic emphasis on the nation: more specifically, on the relevance of nationalism as a central element of the fascist worldview and culture.¹ Fascism is often regarded as the almost unavoidable consequence of the radicalization of European nationalisms; or simply as a twentieth-century outcome of a nineteenth-century form of ethnic nationalism that became increasingly chauvinistic and xenophobic. Historians of fascism were not the first to point this out. Some of the first historians of nationalism in the 1930s, and particularly during the 1940s, established a typology of the idea of nation and the development of nationalism in Europe that was strongly influenced by what they had observed in the evolution of contemporary fascist movements on the Old Continent. Fascism was thus seen as the result of a form of nationalism that contained the ‘seeds’ of conflict and exclusion from its very inception. What would later be considered a well-established scholarly distinction between the ethnic ‘Eastern European’ and the civic ‘Western European’ versions of nationalism, was elaborated in the turmoil of war and destruction provoked by fascism itself.²

Until the 1990s, most historians and social scientists who dealt with the history of nationalisms and nationalist movements commonly accepted the final decade of the nineteenth century as the beginning of a ‘mutation’. At the turn of the century, nationalism somehow morphed from a revolutionary principle associated with liberalism and the republican left to a chauvinist, imperialist and xenophobic movement of the right, or more precisely, the radical right. It was detectable in a steady transformation of the meanings ascribed to the words ‘nationalism’ or even ‘patriot’ in French culture and politics since 1871.³ In a similar way, the term *Nationalismus* has

¹ See A. Kallis, “Introduction: Fascism in historiography”, in id. (ed.), *The Fascism Reader*, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 1-47, as well as R. Eatwell, “The nature of ‘generic fascism’. The ‘fascist minimum’ and the ‘fascist matrix’”, in C. Iordachi (ed.), *Comparative Fascist Studies. New Perspectives, Rewriting Histories*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 134-61.

² See e. g. H. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1944. See also F. Hertz,

³ E. H. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality*, Cambridge: CUP, 1990, p. 121; Z. Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*, Paris: Colin, 1972; id., *La droite révolutionnaire, 1885-1914: Les origines français du fascisme*, Paris. Eds. du Seuil, 1978.

been commonly used in German-speaking historiography to characterise expressions of love for one's country that implicitly or explicitly lead to the affirmation of that nation's superiority over other nations. Hence nationalism is seen as an 'exaggeration', or sometimes as a perversion, of what is considered to be more or less healthy patriotism: the citizen's loyalty to his or her nation. It is distinguished from a *national movement*, a term reserved by Central European historians to label the striving of stateless nations towards sovereignty and/or statehood.⁴

Conversely, most scholarly traditions involving the historical and political analysis of fascism regard nationalism as a main ingredient of every form of fascism: whether based on racial ideology, impregnated by religious beliefs, or founded upon belief in the superiority of one's own nation over others. Nationalism is perhaps one of the few '-isms' agreed upon by every author and theory as a central element of the worldview and ideology (or system of ideas) associated with fascism.⁵ However, the exact relationship between the idea of nation and the ideological contents of fascism, or between nationalism and fascism as historical phenomena, have scarcely been subjected to specific, detailed analysis.⁶ The same deficiency can be sustained for definitions of 'fascistised' conservatism, 'para-fascism' and other fascist-oriented forms of authoritarian government and ideologies: from Spanish Francoism and Portuguese Salazarism to Brazilian *Integralistas* and Irish *Blueshirts*. Integral or extreme nationalism is considered a basic ideological element common to all of them.⁷ Moreover, in French, Italian or German historiographic traditions, for example, most historical analysis of fascism traces a direct line leading from nineteenth-century nationalism to the emergence of fascism. Examples include the 1910 *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana* of Enrico Corradini or the 'nationalism of the nationalists', coined by Michel Winock to reflect turn-of-the-century French authoritarian thought. In fact, proto-fascists in the earliest decades of the twentieth century were among the first to actually call themselves *nationalists*, at least in nation-states.⁸

Independently of the concrete meaning ascribed to the term nation in a doctrine asserting the right of a nation to exist as a sovereign entity, a primordial issue exists with the inherent connection that has usually been established between fascism and the nation as historical categories. In most theories of fascism the term *nationalism* (and in turn even the apparently undisputed term *nation*) is

⁴ See O. Dann, *Nationalismus in Deutschland 1770-1990*, Munich: Beck, 1993; H.-U. Wehler, *Nationalismus. Geschichte, Formen, Folgen*, Munich: Beck, 2001; M. Hroch, *Das Europa der Nationen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005; a complete overview can be found in S. Weichlein, "Nationalismus und Nationalstaat in Deutschland und in Europa. Ein Forschungsüberblick", *Neue Politische Literatur*, 2:3 (2006), pp. 265-351.

⁵ See A. Costa Pinto, "Introduction: Fascism and other '-isms'", in id. (ed.), *Rethinking the Nature of Fascism. Comparative Perspectives*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010.

⁶ Thus, some of the most recent readers for the history of Fascism do not even contain a specific entry on "Nationalism and Fascism", such as C. P. Blamires (ed.), *World Fascism: A Historical Encyclopedia*, Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2007, 2 vols.

⁷ See e. g. M. Blinkhorn (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the establishment in twentieth-century Europe*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1990.

⁸ M. Winock, "El nacionalismo francés", in J. G. Beramendi, R. Máiz & X. M. Núñez (eds.), *Nationalism in Europe: Past and Present*, Santiago de Compostela: USC, 1994, vol. 2, pp. 337-46; id., *Nationalisme, antisémitisme et fascisme en France*, Paris: Seuil, 1990

repeatedly linked to a single-issue expression of the national idea that conceives the nation as an organic reality. Criteria for the inclusion of *nationals* are not based on the individual's will but on 'objective', non-volitional criteria such as language, culture, 'national spirit', blood and soil, history, tradition, etcetera. The nation is mostly seen in fascism as a single organic entity binding people together by their ancestry. As such, it constituted the main unifying force for mobilizing the masses, in opposition to class or liberal individualism.⁹ The cult of the nation in arms, with its enduring force and eternal purity, therefore became a main ingredient of fascist ideology. The necessity of a common cause to keep the nation permanently united and mobilized also led to territorial expansionism, the pursuit of Empire and inevitably to war.¹⁰ Social conflict could be transcended through service to the nation as the embodiment of the will of the people. The cult of the nation would eliminate internal conflict, thereby enabling the national community to achieve its destiny; thanks to prior homogenisation and the fortification of its organic character through the cohesive force of nationalism.

Recent academic research on nationalism questions the basic division between 'ethnic' and 'civic' concepts of nation, and consequently accepts that almost every nationalist ideology contains elements from extremely diverse origins. The cult of the nation, and nationalism, has been shared by Republicans, Democrats, Liberals and Marxists alike. Thus, it is simplistic to reduce the term 'nationalism' to only one of its possible expressions.¹¹ However, it cannot be denied that nationalism and nationalists tend to affirm the centrality of the reified nation: its will, homogeneity and cohesion in the political agenda of a social movement, party or collective, and its priority over other social and political goals. Therefore, it has commonly been concluded that nationalism, defined as such, paved the way for the emergence of fascism, regardless of the concrete form and meaning that 'nationalism' may have assumed in different times and places. Stanley Payne, for example, asserts that fascism was essentially a form of 'palingenetic nationalism'.¹² According to Zeev Sternhell, fascism was achieved when nation, and not class became the subject of the revolution.¹³ Roger Griffin defines fascism as 'a revolutionary form of nationalism, one that sets out to be a political, social and ethical revolution, welding the "people" into a dynamic national community under new elites infused with heroic values. The core myth that inspires this project is that only a populist, trans-class movement of purifying, cathartic national rebirth (palingenesis) can

⁹ Oliver Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe, 1890-1940* (London, Palgrave, 2003), pp. 80-107.

¹⁰ See R. Griffin (ed), *Fascism*, Oxford: OUP, 1995 p. 44.

¹¹ See D. Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism. Civic, Ethnocultural & Multicultural Politics*, London/ New York: Routledge, 2000; M. Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1995.

¹² S. G. Payne, *A History of Fascism*, Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1995.

¹³ See Z. Sternhell, M. Sznajder & M. Asheri, *Naissance de l'idéologie fasciste*, Paris: Gallimard, 1989.

stem the tide of decadence'.¹⁴ Some years later, the same author summarised his concept of fascism as 'a political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism'. However, he added that this was not intended to 'denote not just an overtly anti-liberal, anti-parliamentary form of nationalism', that could adopt many non-specifically fascist forms, but 'to embrace the vast range of ethnocentrism which arise from the intrinsic ambiguities of the concept "nation", and from the many permutations in which racism can express itself as a rationalized form of xenophobia'.¹⁵

Other authors followed down this path, such as Roger Eatwell, who insisted on the idea of a 'fascist matrix' with populist nationalism as a core element, based on the idea of racial or cultural supremacy and the emotional appeal of national myths.¹⁶ This definition cannot escape the abundant ambiguities contained in the terms 'populism' and 'nationalism'. Even so, most historians concerned with providing a single concept of 'generic fascism' or a 'fascist minimum' still patently refer to the genuinely nationalist character of fascism. According to the historical sociologist Michael Mann, 'Fascism is the pursuit of a transcendent and cleansing nation-statism through paramilitarism'.¹⁷ Robert O. Paxton described the intricate relationship between nationalism and fascism in the following way:

Fascism may be defined as a form of political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.¹⁸

Likewise, Walter Laqueur also held that 'all varieties of fascism are deeply nationalistic', and that fascism resulted from mutations that occurred in extreme nationalisms from the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁹ Monographs dealing with case studies of fascist movements repeatedly include 'ultranationalist' in their titles and in definitions of the movements, but offer no precise discussion on the necessity and accuracy of that concept. The concept itself seems to be based more on an intensity gradation of emotions and practices than on strong concepts that can be distinguished from others. This is also the case with labels such as 'extreme nationalism'.²⁰

Does this imply that all varieties of nationalism are intrinsically, implicitly or potentially fascist? To

¹⁴ R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London: Pinter, 1991, p. xi, 26-37.

¹⁵ R. Griffin, "The palingenetic core of generic fascist ideology", in A. Campi (ed.), *Che cos'è il fascismo? Interpretazioni e prospettive di ricerca*, Rome: Ideazione, 2003, pp. 97-122.

¹⁶ R. Eatwell, *Fascism: A History*, London: Penguin, 1996; id., "The nature".

¹⁷ M. Mann, *Fascists*, Cambridge: CUP, 2004, p. 13.

¹⁸ R. O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004, p. 218.

¹⁹ W. Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present and Future*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997, pp. 21-27.

²⁰ See, e. g., F. Veiga, *La mística del ultranacionalismo. Historia de la Guardia de Hierro: Rumanía, 1919-1941*, Barcelona: UAB, 1989.

some historians of nationalism, and particularly ethnonationalism, they are. The tendency to regard ethnic nationalism as a potential vehicle for the emergence of updated forms of fascism gained strength with the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989-90 and the subsequent outbreak of ethnic conflicts linked to the (re)emergence of nationalist aspirations in the Balkans and the Caucasus regions. In quite a similar manner, scholarly attention was drawn to the new form of authoritarian nationalism and charismatic leadership that emerged from the ruins of 'real' socialism.

II.

Still, the most unanimously-accepted element upon which almost all scholarly definitions of fascism agree, contains a number of interpretative ambiguities that have been listed as follows.

First, most definitions of fascism more or less inevitably assume a belief in an organic nation united by ancestry and race. The basic concept of nation that underpins those definitions is generally seen from an exclusively organicist and even racial angle; and not as a (possibly) wider, more complex notion that may enhance organicist, volitive and voluntaristic ingredients alike. Academic research on fascism usually ignores the huge debate that has arisen in nationalism studies over definitions of nationalism and the nation. That is quite an exceptional oversight, as nationalism and the different categories ascribed to it (palingenetic or ultra-) are considered crucial to, and constitutive of, fascist ideology and public culture. Theoretical discussions on fascism run parallel to theoretical discussions on what nationalism is, but points of intersection are scarce.²¹

Second, any attempt to produce a general, overarching definition of fascism may be subject to as many exceptions as cases of fascist ideology and movements have been documented around the globe. The problem lies in determining whether a concept of 'generic fascism' can even be proposed. The same occurs with conceptions of nation and nationalism, which are not only subject to fragmented historical development, but also to the different embedded meanings of the words in each historiographical tradition and language.

Thus, to refer to nationalism as an ideology in the German, French, Italian or Portuguese contexts means something different than in English-speaking or Spanish-speaking contexts. There is even a difference within these linguistic categories. Nationalism does not mean the same thing in Scotland and the USA, or in Spain and Argentina. In several historiographic contexts nationalism is seen as a concept that differs sharply from patriotism. The latter is regarded positively as a civic virtue,²² and is basically considered as the potentially coercive pursuit of cultural homogeneity for a

²¹ See, e. g., the scarce attention given to the analysis of 'fascist nationalism' in some recent overviews such U. Özkirimli, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism. A Critical Engagement*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, as well as in the various books by Anthony D. Smith. See id., *National Identity*, London: Penguin, 1991, or *Nacionalismo y modernidad*, Madrid: Istmo, 2000.

²² See, e. g., M. Viroli, *For love of country: an essay on patriotism and nationalism*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.

given political unit invested with sovereignty. Yet in other historiographic contexts patriotism and nationalism are considered to be virtually identical terms. Because the term nationalism is free from normative meanings, it is often used to mean liberal, progressive or even left-wing nationalism.²³

Third, theories of fascism usually underestimate the fact that elements such as ancestry, history and soil, as well as the oft-mentioned paligenetic objective, may not be exclusive to fascist-like or authoritarian concepts of the nation. Those elements, and very similar political slogans, can also be found in liberal definitions of the nation, which usually take for granted the ‘cultural community’ within whose ethnic and territorial borders the community of consenting citizens will be built. Moreover, most nation-states underwent processes of enforced linguistic, cultural and even religious homogenization within their territories, often in the name of liberal or republican values, long before fascist movements and ideologies emerged. Since the Enlightenment, such coercive processes of ethnocultural homogenization have been regarded as compatible with progress, advancement of liberal democracy, unity of the national market and the extension of literacy and education. In other words, attempts at ‘homogenizing’ the national community may adopt different forms, can be packaged in different ideologies, and cannot be exclusively defined as a prototypical element of fascist regimes and ideologies. Eugen Weber’s classic study of nineteenth-century France clearly identified this; as did later analyses influenced by his work, which were applied to other European nation-building processes involving state agency. Nationbuilding was characterized by both persuasion and coercion.²⁴

Fourth, nationalism and the pursuit of the reified will of the nation can be found at the core of other ideologies; they are not exclusive to fascism. They have been identified as a crucial rhetorical and propagandistic weapon wielded by the Bolsheviks in revolutionary Russia, as well as by Communists during and after the interwar period. Their ideological relevance reaches far beyond sheer opportunistic interest to constitute a central point of political praxis.²⁵ Nationalism was a crucial element in the rise of liberal nation-states during the long nineteenth century. Nationalism can also be regarded as one of the main ideologies of modernity that has survived until the twentieth-first century, perhaps thanks to its extraordinary ability to meld with very diverse ideologies. Indeed, any political project developed in the twentieth century counted on the nation as a solid and reliable mobilizing structure. They may have intended to replace the nation with other

²³ See Y. Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993; R. Poole, “Patriotism and Nationalism”, in I. Primoratz & A. Pavkovic (eds.), *Patriotism. Philosophical and Political Perspectives*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, pp. 129-45.

²⁴ E. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France 1870-1914*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1976; M. Cabo & F. Molina, “The Long and Winding Road of Nationalization: Eugen Weber’s *Peasants into Frenchmen* in Modern European History (1976—2006)”, *European History Quarterly*, 39: 2 (2009), pp. 264-86. A recent reappraisal of these questions can be found in D. Laitin, *Nations, States and Violence*, Oxford: OUP, 2007.

²⁵ To mention just a couple of examples, see W. Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984, and M. Mevius (ed.), *The Communist Quest for National Legitimacy in Europe, 1918-1989*, London: Routledge, 2010.

forms of group solidarity in the long term; or claimed other elements such as class or individuals to be their crucial collective target and subject. However revolutionary they may have been, most political movements could not avoid the nation as a reality that had to be incorporated into their agenda.

If nationalism can also be understood in as a cultural and political representation of the imagined community (or nation) in the public sphere, and historians can accept a broader definition of ideology that includes *pre-existing* attitudes, emotions and mentalities that infuse ideology with a specific worldview, then it becomes evident that nations and nationalism may permeate virtually all ideologies and political projects. Almost every form of nationalism (and other utopian projects) tends to be intrinsically palingenetic to some degree, even if rebirth is often accompanied by an appeal to reform or regeneration rather than revolution.

Fifth, most relevant theories also highlight the fact that fascism does not contemplate the nation as a separate entity from the state. The state embodies the nation and the nation finds its best expression in the state. In some historiographic contexts, this may have led to the erroneous conclusion that only state-led nationalisms could develop a true fascism, while stateless nationalism could not. However, this is far from being confirmed by historical evidence. From the Flemish fascists to the Breton and Frisian collaborationists, who saw the Nazis as potential protectors of their stateless homelands, to the Croatian *Ustachi* and the followers of Andrej Hlinka's Catholic Slovak nationalists, it becomes clear that fascism could also develop within sub-state national movements seeking *liberation* (in form of independence or some form of satellite statehood) of their homelands or 'small nations' in search of freedom from what they considered foreign oppression.²⁶ Even liberal-minded ideologues of sub-state nationalisms, who may have disliked the fascist regimes of the large nation-states for seeking to conquer and subjugate smaller nations or colonial populations, could not hide their admiration for the 'little fascists' of small nation-states. Saunder Lewis, the most prominent Welsh nationalist leader in the 1930s, declared his great admiration for Salazar's Portugal. Likewise, some Catalan nationalist leaders of the 1920s warmed to the ardent flame of national pride and mobilization in Italian Fascism.²⁷ In 1944, the famous British writer and engaged antifascist George Orwell stated that, 'Nationalism is universally regarded as inherently Fascist, but this is held only to apply to such national movements as the speaker happens to

²⁶ See Y. Jellinek, "Clergy and Fascism: The Hlinka Party in Slovakia and the Croatian Ustasha Movement", in S. U. Larsen et al. (eds.), *Who were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism*, Bergen/Oslo/Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1980, pp. 367-78; G. Verbeeck, "Sprachverhältnisse und Nationalitätenproblematik in Belgien während der beiden Weltkriege", *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 40:10 (1992), pp 940-50; B. de Wever, "Catholicism and Fascism in Belgium", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8:2 (2007), pp. 343-52; A. Zondergeld, *De Friese beweging in het tijdvak der beide Wereldoorlogen*, Leeuwarden: n. ed., 1978; G. Cadiou, *L'Hermine et la croix gammée. Le mouvement breton et la collaboration*, n. p. : MangoDocument, 2001.

²⁷ See D. H. Davies, *The Welsh Nationalist Party 1925-1945. A Call to Nationhood*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press; E. Ucelay-Da Cal, *El imperialismo catalán. Prat de la Riba, Cambó, D'Ors y la conquista moral de España*, Barcelona: Edhasa, 2003.

disapprove of'. Indeed, many factions that called themselves nationalist were far from being fascist-oriented: 'Arab nationalism, Polish nationalism, Finnish nationalism, the Indian Congress Party, the Muslim League, Zionism, and the I.R.A. are all described as Fascist but not by the same people'.²⁸

Scholarly definitions of nationalism are not always clear regarding the distinctive label of 'fascist nationalism'. Authors such as Ernest Gellner tend to coincide with theories of fascism in their view of nationalism as identifying culture with nation, and nationalism with cultural homogenisation of a given territory defined as a nation.²⁹ Others see fascism as an accentuation, exaggeration or radicalization of organicist-oriented nationalism that places nationalism in the centre of the political agenda of a government or political movement. In several cases, Fascism tends to be seen as the perpetuation of nationalist mobilization far beyond the moment in which statehood or some satisfactory form of institutional recognition has been achieved. It is perhaps not by chance that irredentist nationalist mobilizations usually figured prominently among the forerunners of fascist movements. Examples include Italian claims to Dalmatia and Fiume, the National Socialist vision to annex the areas settled by ethnic Germans in East-Central Europe, or the Pan-German Nationalists of Austria-Hungary and the Austrian Republic after 1918. The conversion of sub-state nationalists into 'nationalists within the state' aiming at expanding its frontiers may also illustrate how interchangeable the values and functions of nationalist mobilization may be.

Nationalism as an ideology contains elements that undoubtedly resemble fascist politics: namely, an appeal to emotional, organic or irrational aspects alongside an emphasis on the nation's supreme will. However, several other elements that are essential to understanding fascism are not necessarily inherent to nationalism: such as the relevance of charismatic leadership, the weight of irrational thought and symbolic values, and the sacred core-value of violence as a method for purifying the nation. Nor are social Darwinism and the positive meaning ascribed to violence distinctive to fascism. All these elements were undeniably incorporated into certain key elements of nationalist *mobilization* and a very concrete conception of what the fascist nation is and should be. However, not all nationalists (whether patriots or not, assuming for argument's sake that a patriot can be a nationalist too) were necessarily fascists, even during the interwar period. Examples include the promoter of Irish independence in the 1920s and later president of the Irish Republic Eamon de Valera, and French general Charles de Gaulle.³⁰ But in the course of nationalist mobilization, some of the elements operative among nationalists (such as sub-state and ethnic activists) may present strong similarities with those used by fascists.

Nationalism can be seen as a tool for mobilization; a rational strategy for rallying supporters

²⁸ G. Orwell, "What is fascism?" [1944], reprinted in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, 1968.

²⁹ E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.

³⁰ See E. J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, London: Michael Joseph, 1995.

around a highly emotional appeal while efficiently concealing and diluting the internal divisions and political contradictions of a social movement. The mythic repertoire of nationalist mobilization offers a high degree of short-term efficiency at low political cost. It is highly instrumental in motivating collective action and settling the agenda or objectives of the common struggle.³¹ National symbols may be used by diverse actors in various contexts and can be given very different meanings; they are not *exclusive* to fascists. The fact that fascists used national(ist) symbols did not necessarily mean that the use of these symbols by other actors would lead to fascism.³²

In this we discover the difficulty of finding a general or even ‘shared minimum’ definition of the nation that might serve to describe all fascisms that emerged during or after the interwar period. Certainly all fascists disliked liberal democracy; so democratic ideas of nation, which emphasized popular sovereignty and the will of citizens, were completely out of the question. The nation was primarily defined on the elements that constituted the prevailing interpretation of the nation that was already available in the cultural and ideological repertoire of every nationalist movement, particularly of its conservative tendencies. History, language and culture were combined in different ways with ancestry, territory and religion. In German National Socialism, particular and everincreasing emphasis was assigned to race. Indeed, the biological definition of race had been predominant in German radical nationalism since the beginning of the twentieth century. National Socialism adjusted the formula, using different magnitudes of the elements already provided by a long tradition of *völkisch* tenets regarding what the German nation had to be.³³

Moreover, as we mentioned earlier, nationalism, and the idea of the nation, has an amazing capacity not only to survive throughout the modern period, but also to combine with very different ideologies. It can also be argued that Fascism ‘simply’ appropriated the nation for itself, much in the same way Communists or Republicans did. Here, the concept of nation had to be coherent with the main tenets of fascist ideology: the idea of revolution, the corporatist imagination of social order, the purity of race and the relevance of irrational values for understanding the role of the individual within a given community.

³¹ See M. Levinger and P. Franklin Lytle, ‘Myth and mobilisation: The triadic structure of nationalist rhetoric’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 7:2 (2001), 175-94; J. Elster, *Alchemistries of the Mind. Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³² O. Zimmer, ‘Boundary Mechanisms and Symbolic Resources: Towards a Process-Oriented Approach to National Identity’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 9:2 (2003) pp. 173-93.

³³ See the classic work by G. L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology. Ideological Origins of the Third Reich*, New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964, as well as P. Walkenhorst, *Nation-Volk-Rasse: Radikaler Nationalismus im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1890–1914*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007, and S. Vopel, ‘Radikaler, völkischer Nationalismus in Deutschland 1917-1933’, in H. Timmermann (ed.), *Nationalismus und Nationalbewegung in Europa 1914-1945*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1999. pp. 161-81; also H.-U. Wehler, ‘Radikalanationalismus und Nationalsozialismus’, in J. Echterkamp & S. O. Müller (eds.), *Die Politik der Nation. Deutscher Nationalismus in Krieg und Krisen 1760-1960*, Munich: Oldenbourg, 2002, pp. 203-17.

III.

Is there a specifically fascist concept of the nation? Or is it merely an updated version of the traditional concept of the nation as a primordial community bound by organic ties? In my view, as stated above, there is not a 'specifically fascist' concept of the nation, but rather a fascist appropriation of a pre-existing representation of it, extracted mainly from traditionalist thought. It is then transformed into the centrepiece of a sharply defined but rhetorically upheld 'revolution'.

Certainly, for most fascist ideologues the nation is a political community based upon primordial ties, whose members are linked by history, race, blood and/or culture. In this mixture, the notion of 'triumph of will' became increasingly significant: the will of individuals to shape a nation, independently of their civic rights. Fascists also reified the nation, considered its values to be inherently sacred and appealed to virility and masculinity as essential virtues of the national body. Furthermore, they linked the spreading of national consciousness to the development of a political religion where myths of origin, symbols and culturally homogenizing principles played a major role. These elements were already present in other nationalist movements in Europe before the emergence of fascism. However, the difference can be established in the rhetorical emphasis and discursive intensity that those elements acquired in fascist ideology and political culture. Though the existence of 'fascist nationalism' as a specific category is still a topic of theoretical discussion,³⁴ it is possible to advance some specific characteristics of the 'generic' fascist concept of the nation, and therefore of fascist nationalism. Obviously, there are almost as many nuances as national (and sub-state nationalist) cases of fascism exist.

This first involves a para-military view of social ties and the national character. The nation is not only considered to be militarized, but the military values of discipline, unity of command, blood, and sacrifice are placed above any individual rights in any form. This makes the fascist idea of a 'nation in arms' differ substantially from the French revolutionary concept of the 'citizen army' that was transmitted to liberal nationalism throughout the nineteenth century. The entire social order and the nature of its ties are cast in a paramilitary mould. Society becomes a barracks; governed not by virtues inherited from aristocratic armies, but by a national army that enhances the national spirit and embodies the 'innate qualities' of the race.³⁵

Second is a Darwinist perspective regarding national and international society, as well as the home society. From the end of the eighteenth century, nationalists lived in a world comprised of other nations, which coexisted with their own in harmony or conflict, according to the Herder's conception of a world of nations. Once a nation had achieved territorial integrity and full

³⁴ See, e. g., the entry "Fascist Nationalism" in A. Leoussi & A. D. Smith, *Encyclopaedia of Nationalism*, New Brunswick (NJ): Transaction Publishers, 2001, pp. 89-95.

³⁵ See, e. g., G. Jensen, *Irrational Triumph: Cultural Despair, Military Nationalism, and the Ideological Origins of Franco's Spain*, Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002.

development (in form of statehood or sufficient self-government), it was supposed to live amicably among other nations. However, fascism accentuates the national pride present in all classical nationalisms, elevating it to superiority. There is a hierarchical order of ‘master’ and ‘subject’ peoples, and the nation in question pertains by definition to the first group. If not, it will aspire to join that group by merit of its glorious past or possession of an overseas empire. This has led to imperialism as a natural consequence of the affirmative character of the nation: only conquest and expansion proved its strength and maintained social mobilization around the leader. Fascism incorporated and radicalized elements from the turn-of-the-century perception of ‘healthy’ and ‘sick’ nations. These were also implicit in the view of empire as a means to reinforce nation-building on the Old Continent, along with the widespread conviction that ‘civilized’ nations had the right to rule ‘uncivilized’ nations outside Europe. With fascism, this became more acute: empire and the hierarchic order of superior and inferior nations were also transferred to Europe (or to the own continent, in case of Latin American or Asian fascisms). The Enlightenment legacy of dividing lines between civilised and uncivilised peoples was transformed into frontiers between ‘master nations’ (or races) and ‘slave nations’. However, the extent to which fascist imperialism in Europe can be regarded as a transfer from European colonial attitudes towards other peoples of the world is still a subject of historiographic debate.³⁶

Third, the cult of the nation contained in generic fascism was, in theory, independent from religion, and in most cases incompatible with it. Obviously, wherever they seized power, most fascist movements arrived at some sort of agreement with the Catholic or Lutheran Church, or with both of them. But generic fascism and fascist ideology in general either ascribed God and religion a subordinate place within its hierarchy of values, which was mainly concerned with asserting the cult of the nation as the superior value of social life; or sought to gradually replace religious faith with faith in the nation in the minds of nationals. This did not prevent them from using religious symbols and practices to reinforce their political legitimacy, adopting slogans in defence of Christianity as mobilization tools —as Fascist Italy and even the Nazi regime did in the course of its war against the Soviet Union.³⁷ The Catholic faith in particular was regarded by many fascists as an extremely dangerous rival, as it was governed by the Vatican, a ‘foreign’ power residing in Rome. Even for the most Catholic (or Lutheran, Presbyterian or Anglican) fascists, religion was at least as important as the nation. Conversely, most Catholic hierarchies, from the Pope to the different national bishops, saw fascism as atheistic and godless. Nonetheless, in many cases they considered it a very useful ally to fight the evils of social revolution, and therefore sought to catholicize fascism. Such was the

³⁶ See W. D. Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism*, Oxford / New York: OUP, 1989; see also the discussion forum on “The German colonial imagination”, *German History*, 26:2 (2008), pp. 251-71, as well as M. Perraudin & J. Zimmerer (eds.), *German Colonialism and National Identity*, London: Routledge, 2010.

³⁷ See a discussion in P. Jackson, “Extremes of Faith and Nation: British Fascism and Christianity”, *Religion Compass*, 4:8 (2010), pp. 507-17.

case with certain Catholic intellectuals during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39. There is still much discussion around the concept of clerical fascism as a combination of ultramontanist and belief in charismatic leadership. Many religious reactionaries in interwar Europe adopted principles, symbols and mobilization techniques from fascist regimes.³⁸

Certainly, a host of gradations can be established among the different fascist movements and regimes. While German Nazism was more radical about replacing God with the nation as the supreme value that would command social order, it also used the additional legitimacy provided by religion to reinforce the nation. Alon Confino has recently suggested that the main objective of the Nazis was not to destroy the Christian faith, but to Germanise it by re-founding a new Christianity permeated by German ancestry. This explicit ethnification process would erode all elements of Biblical Christianity, beginning with the Jews.³⁹ Along similar lines, 'pure' Spanish Fascists were expected to place the nation above God; but the Catholic faith had helped shape the national *Volksgeist* and thereby forge the main elements of Spanish-ness throughout history. However, it was one thing to proclaim that Falangists were Fascists because they were Catholics, and a very different thing to hold that Spaniards were Catholic precisely because they were Spaniards, and not foreigners.⁴⁰ Religion was important as part of the national tradition and it reinforced national cohesion; but it was God serving the nation, not the other way round (the nation *serving* God). Fascism can be seen as a political religion, where sacredness was transferred from God to the nation and the fascist leader. This transfer was not merely a superficial replacement of names and rites; fascists aimed at transforming the nation into the real God of modernity.⁴¹

Fourth, in the relationship between the nation and the state, which was preeminent? Were both concepts used interchangeably? This is difficult to resolve, since almost every fascist movement offered its own nuances to a general tendency. The nation was neither above nor beneath the state; it was identified with the state. The nation was eternal and had been defined by history, culture, a peculiar *Volksgeist* and race (or whatever was meant by that in each national context). However, the nation had to be granted supremacy as the essence embodied by the state, which was charged with incarnating the national body and granting it social hegemony. Thus, the cult of the nation became cult of the state. Although the nation was born before the state, at that point the supreme goal of the state was to fulfil the destiny of the nation. This was a key digression from conservative or traditionalist nationalists, who regarded the nation as an independent and

³⁸ See some of the case-studies dealt with in W. Kaiser and H. Wihnout, *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918-45*, London: Routledge, 2004, as well as (more specifically) M. Feldman, M. Turda & G. Georgescu (eds.), 'Clerical Fascism' in *Interwar Europe*, special issue of *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8:2 (2007).

³⁹ A. Confino, "A World Without Jews: Interpreting the Holocaust", *German History*, 27:4 (2009), pp. 531-59.

⁴⁰ S. G. Payne, *Franco y José Antonio. El extraño caso del nazismo español*, Barcelona: Planeta, 1998.

⁴¹ E. Gentile, *El culto del Littorio: La sacralización de la política en la Italia fascista*, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2007; id., *Le religioni della politica: Fra democrazia e totalitarismi*, Rome: Laterza, 2007.

hierarchically superior entity to the state, which was merely subordinated to God.

Fifth, the idea of the nation embraced by fascists required a blind belief in charismatic leadership and the *Führerprinzip*. This implied a transformation of the role ascribed to illustrious figures, heroes, founders (inventors and creators) and fathers of the nation from how nineteenth-century conservative and traditionalist nationalist ideologues had imagined them into something that captured and carried forward the qualities of all the national heroes who had gone before: a Fascist leader. The numerous methods for effecting this transfer oscillated between making the new fascist leader an epitomized synthesis and heir to all the virtues of the founding fathers, and making that leader the (re)founder of the nation. Fascist leaders were seen as restorers of the power and prestige of the nation rather than creators of a new nation. They were regarded as torchbearers of the nation's founders; interpreting the legacy of their forerunners in the light of a new *Zeitgeist*. In so doing, they brought about a new beginning for the nation.⁴² Thus, in fascist thinking Hitler was heir to the German emperors, Friedrich the Great and Bismarck; while Mussolini would restore the glory of the Roman emperors and leaders of the *Risorgimento*. Similarly, Francisco Franco styled himself after Queen Isabella the Catholic and Emperor Charles the Fifth. However, as a figure, the fascist leader synthesized the qualities of the nation, becoming its best expression and the personification of its destiny. This was accomplished by transcending the role of sheer inheritor or restorer of national tradition and acquiring new, sacralised attributes that would reinforce his prestige and become the object of permanent mass enactment.⁴³ This frame of meaning allowed fascists to reconcile the appeal to the nation (the community) and belief in the redemptive potential of a charismatic individual born to re-incarnate the nation.

Sixth, recent research on modern national identities has brought attention to how local and regional metaphors featured in the various forms and phases of state nationalism, from liberal to communist and fascist.⁴⁴ If generic fascism really was a form of palingenetic nationalism, then placing the nation at the top of the fascist hierarchy of values did not necessarily mean that the nation had to be territorially and culturally homogenous. To fascists in Italy, Germany, France and Spain, the nation was more authentic than the state, and was defined according to its spatial components, rather than a Weberian ideal type. The purported homogeneity of the nation that was advocated by fascism does not necessarily preclude the emergence of different forms of fascist

⁴² See R. Griffin, *Modern and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; A. Costa Pinto, R. Eatwell and S. U. Larsen (eds.), *Charisma and Fascism in Interwar Europe*, London: Routledge, 2007. A specific case study that highlights the precise nature of fascist leadership and emerging cult of the nation is in P. Ballinger, "Italian Pentecost. Receiving the Word of the Italian Faith. The Development of Nationalistic Ritual at Fiume, 1919-1921", in Beramendi, Máiz & Núñez (eds.), *Nationalism in Europe*, vol. I, pp. 623-50.

⁴³ See I. Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, Oxford: OUP, 1987.

⁴⁴ A. Confino, *Germany As a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

regionalism.⁴⁵ Certainly, the Nazi regime aimed at the greatest possible degree of ideological homogenization. But regional and local variation was never absent in policy implementation. New research has also highlighted the deep ideological motivation of Nazi regionalism and its constitutive role within the spatial imagination of the regime.⁴⁶ Something relatively similar can be said for Spanish fascism. The Francoist rebel army in 1936-39 also used regionalism as a tool for mobilizing popular support in non-Castilian-speaking regions of Spain, tapping into a discourse of regional pride among the local and provincial middle classes. There was little uniformity evident in the policies of repression of vernacular languages. Fascist and conservative intellectuals presented the Spanish Civil War as a campaign to re-connect the nation to its authentic traditions, which were rooted in the countryside, in villages and provinces, in regional dialects and mores.⁴⁷ Prior to this, *Spanish fascists during the Second Republic (1931-36)* had tended to de-emphasize language and ethnicity as markers of the Spanish nation. They stressed José Antonio Primo de Rivera's idea of a 'community of destiny', united in a common mission to build a new nation through the re-enactment of Empire.⁴⁸ This belief facilitated attempts by Falangist intellectuals during the 1940s to elaborate a more Catalanian (and Aragonese) view of Spain's history. They emphasized the Mediterranean contribution to Spanish culture and sought to develop a view of Spain that some have defined as a form of fascist regionalism, albeit without the political component of aspirations to Home-Rule.⁴⁹

Regionalized nationalism was deliberately promoted as an identity construct that suited the ideological agendas of the regimes of Hitler, Mussolini (until the late 1920s), Vichy France, and to some extent Franco. Regional diversity was cast as the legacy of a pre-liberal, non-alienated, and authentic nation. Regionalism offered a form of 'blood and soil' politics that remained wedded to a comparatively realist sense of the political. The relevance of some form of regionalized nationalism can be observed at all levels of fascist dictatorships: from official policy documents down through the machinery to the minutiae of provincial popular culture, marketing and advertising. It was important to chart how the region was configured: as history, as landscape, as culture, as a space subject to planning, and as a site for spectacular or event-based politics.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ See X. M. Núñez & M. Umbach, "Hijacked Heimats. National Appropriations of Local and Regional Identities in Germany and Spain, 1930-1945", *European Review of History*, 15:3 (2008), pp. 295-316

⁴⁶ See J. John, H. Möller & T. Schaarschmidt (eds.), *Die NS-Gaue. Regionale Mittelinstanzen im zentralistischen "Führerstaat"?* Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2007; T. Schaarschmidt, *Regionalkultur und Diktatur. Sächsische Heimatbewegung und Heimat-Propaganda im Dritten Reich und in der SBZ/DDR*, Cologne: Böhlau, 2004.

⁴⁷ See X. M. Núñez, "La España regional en armas y el nacionalismo de guerra franquista, 1936- 1939", *Ayer*, 64 (2006), pp. 201-31.

⁴⁸ See J. Gil Pecharrmán, *José Antonio Primo de Rivera. Retrato de un visionario*, Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1996, pp. 304-10, as well as I. Saz, *Fascismo y franquismo*, València: PUV, 2004, pp. 265-76

⁴⁹ See I. Saz, *España contra España. Los nacionalismos franquistas*, Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2002.

⁵⁰ S. Cavazza, S., *Piccole patrie. Feste popolari tra regione e nazione durante il fascismo*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003; id., "El culto de la pequeña patria en Italia entre centralización y nacionalismo. De la época liberal al fascismo", *Ayer*, 64 (2006), pp. 95-119; A. M. Thiesse, *Ecrire la France, le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française, de la Belle Epoque à la Libération*, Paris: PUF, 1991, pp. 269-89; Ch. Faure, *Le Projet culturel de Vichy*, Lyon, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1989.

Localism and regionalism remained crucial to the understanding of the nation and its ritualistic enactment in fascist or fascistised regimes. Local ceremonies and folklore exhibitions played a new role in reinforcing the allegedly organic nature of totalitarian rule.⁵¹ The tangible political consequences of this spatial thinking, however, were riddled with contradictions. The geometry of territorial spheres of belonging in Italy or Spain was more varied and less stable than in Germany or France. Yet, the *idea* of regionalism could be invoked to combat the perceived dangers of Napoleonic-style state-building: liberalism, progressivism, and bureaucratisation. It could season politics with the desirable flavours of populism, grass-roots activism, social rootedness and ideological dynamism. The prominent role of regionalism in fascist identity politics has to be understood as a form of *modern* –though anti-liberal– spatial identity, which many fascists deliberately cultivated. This regionalism was marked by clear affinities with the discourses of *Heimat* and *Volk*. It also presented the regimes with something not offered by these other movements: a more realistic sense of the political, which prevented the notion of rootedness from sliding into purely nostalgic or other-worldly terms.

IV.

Is it more appropriate to refer to fascistised authoritarian and conservative nationalists, or is it more useful to talk about nationalist fascists? This dilemma runs parallel to the debate between the role of religion within and beside fascism. From Spanish traditionalists to *völkisch*-oriented ‘German nationals’ (*Deutschnationalen*), many conservative nationalists travelled alongside the fascists during the interwar period and throughout the first half of the 1940s; their political agendas coincided on many points. Since fascists emphasized the role of the nation in their priorities, it was not difficult to see them flanked by different types of nationalist activists whose main concern was the nation’s renewal, interpreted from an authoritarian point of view, and who held the fascists to be good patriots with identical aims. However, the idea of the nation held by fascistized conservatives was still deeply impregnated by elements such as religious confession, history or culture.

As in many political religions —though the concept of ‘political religion’ may be subject to parallel debate—, nationalism could be equated with fascism in a rather intertwined frame of meaning. The nation was not necessarily challenged by fascism; both authoritarian nationalists and fascists were mutually reinforced through collaboration. Abundant intellectual discussion and theoretical quarrelling may have taken place among the different interpretations of nation and state, and the place God should be given in relation to the nation. However, the prevailing impression among fascistized intellectuals and their travelling companions on the right was that fascist regimes

⁵¹ A. M. Thiesse, *La creación de las identidades nacionales: Europa: siglos XVIII-XX*, Madrid: Ézaro, 2010, pp. 265-81 [*La création des identités nationales*, Paris: Seuil, 1999].

and movements also made clever use of nationalism to reinforce consent and rally broader sectors of the national population around their particular goals. Fascists also used nationalism, as well as religion, as an efficient mobilization tool, yet their ultimate aim was to preserve a form of nationalism that was compatible with their worldview. For them, other specific interpretations of nationalism or competing representations of the nation served as allies, not competitors. However, it has to be pointed out that Antifascists also embraced different ideas of the nation and variants of nationalism, which served to construct a new idea of the nation as a political community after the defeat of European fascisms in 1945 and during the reconstruction of Western and Eastern Europe. In this we find what students of nationalism recognize as its Janus face: its extraordinary ability to get combined with different ideologies and political projects.⁵²

⁵² T. Nairn, *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited*, London: Verso, 1997.