



# *Movements and Ideas of the Extreme Right in Europe*

Positions and Continuities

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## Introduction

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The term “extreme right” continues to be in common usage, and is frequently employed in political discourse, in the media, and in academic debates. Although it lacks a generally agreed upon definition, the term seems to be more popular than ever. There are many reasons for this. The recession currently crippling several European countries has led to a heightened awareness of the possibility of a political crisis, and of the implications of increased support for extreme right-wing parties. Additionally, in the past couple of years Europe has been plagued by severe acts of terror, with perpetrators expressing extreme right world views. In November 2011 German police uncovered the National Socialist Underground (*Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund*, NSU), a terrorist group responsible for the murder of nine immigrants and one policewoman as well as several other violent attacks between September 2000 and April 2006. The xenophobic murders, and the extended period of time it took for German authorities to uncover the terrorist cell, have sent shock waves through German society, and the group’s possible connections are now under investigation. Anders Behring Breivik’s terrorist act on 22 July 2011 was not only the greatest crime committed in postwar Norwegian history; his bomb attack and murderous killing spree in a political youth camp on an isolated island were carried out in order to draw attention to his political “manifesto”. The judicial process against Breivik earlier this year received worldwide attention and sparked renewed debate in Norway on the processes of radicalisation.

When using the term extreme right as a common denominator for the organisations and actors discussed in this anthology, we are well aware of the scientific and public controversies regarding its meaning and definition. Nevertheless, we believe that it is the most useful and precise collective term for all the subjects analysed here.

In the social sciences, most notably political science, there has been a number of attempts at supplying a scientific explanation, many of which partly contradict each other or exist in parallel. In this context Richard Stöss, the German political scientist and expert on right-wing extremism, has concluded that “[t]here is no generally accepted definition and in particular not just one theory of right-wing extremism”.<sup>1</sup>

In Germany during the decades after 1945 the phenomenon of right-wing extremism was understood as an aftermath of National Socialism, and therefore it was not perceived as an object for academic research in its own right. From the 1980s onwards this attitude began to change, particularly in the face of a new wave of extreme right-wing violence at the beginning of the 1990s that escalated into the

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1 Richard Stöss, *Rechtsextremismus im Wandel* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2007), 14.

xenophobic and murderous attacks in Hoyerswerda, Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Mölln, and Solingen.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, Anglo-American researchers initiated academic studies much earlier, particular in terms of research on fascism. During the 1940s Theodor Adorno, the sociologist and leading representative of the so-called *Frankfurter Schule* who had himself escaped to the US from National Socialist persecution, was already developing the theory of authoritarianism with his research group. Their work, which was heavily influenced by the National Socialist experience, resulted in the publication of *The Authoritarian Personality* in 1950, which gained worldwide attention.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1970s the idea of extremism – from both left and right – has become a permanent part of the public discourse, increasingly replacing the older concept of radicalism.<sup>4</sup> However, there is no consensus among scholars on the use of these concepts, and the terms right-wing extremism and right-wing radicalism are still used interchangeably with terms such as neo-Fascism and neo-Nazism.<sup>5</sup> The academic discourse about extremism is still very much influenced by the controversy surrounding its classification, an ambiguity which also applies to the use of the words left and right.

In 1994 Norberto Bobbio, the renowned Italian philosopher and historian, made a contribution to this debate with his internationally-recognised study *Destra e Sinistra* (Right and Left).<sup>6</sup> Instead of the words right and left, he makes use of the terms extreme egalitarian and extreme anti-egalitarian on one axis. On a second axis he places the words authoritarian and liberal at opposite ends of the scale. Using this conceptualisation, the extreme right is characterised by Bobbio as anti-egalitarian authoritarianism and the extreme left as anti-liberal egalitarianism, highlighting the struggle against liberty as a common feature.

Since right-wing extremism is perceived first and foremost as a collective term, superordinate definitions within political science describe this phenomenon by emphasising a vast number of overlapping and contradicting characteristics, such as

2 In the early 1990s several pogrom-like attacks on immigrants and asylum seekers shook German society. In Hoyerswerda and Rostock-Lichtenhagen, both in the former East German Republic, attacks on immigrants and asylum seekers took place in September 1991 and August 1992. In November 1992 three Turkish immigrants, including two children, were killed in arson attacks in the northern German town of Mölln. In May 1993 a similar event took place in the north-western town of Solingen, where arson attacks on Turkish immigrants killed five people, including three children. These incidents received worldwide attention and became a synonym for right-wing extremism.

3 Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950).

4 Researchers such as the German political scientist Armin Pfahl-Traughber have even argued for the removal of the word radicalism as an alternative to the word extremism. See Armin Pfahl-Traughber, “Extremismus und Terrorismus. Eine Definition aus politikwissenschaftlicher Sicht”, *Jahrbuch für Extremismus- und Terrorismusforschung* 2008, 18.

5 See e.g. Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Rechtsradikalismus: Randerscheinung oder Renaissance?* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1980).

6 Norberto Bobbio, *Destra e sinistra. Ragioni e significati di una distinzione politica* (Rome: Donzelli editore, 1994).

excessive nationalism combined with imperialism; the rejection of the right to freedom and the rights of equality; the struggle against democratic-pluralistic systems based on the sovereignty of the people; the wish to establish an authoritarian or totalitarian state; a racist, xenophobic and anti-Semite ideology; the belief that indigenous society and culture is under threat from foreign elements; and the conviction that people are principally unequal.<sup>7</sup> The latter point, the rejection of the principle of equality among all human beings, proposes a hierarchy in which one's own race or nation is placed highest. In addition, Islam's alleged threat against the Western world is playing an increasingly important role within the extreme right – especially since 11 September 2001 and the increase in Islamist terrorism.<sup>8</sup>

The concept which defines both left- and right-wing extremism, alongside the minimal definition of a constitutional democracy, has played an important role within research on extremism. Nevertheless, this theoretical approach is still heavily debated.<sup>9</sup> While it locates the extreme right outside the democratic order, defining it first and foremost by the wish to abolish the existing democratic system, right-wing radicalism is perceived as a more moderate version of the same philosophy, sharing a number of the same goals but supporting the idea of democracy. However, right-wing radicals claim that democracy is flawed and does not work for the true benefit of the people; rather, it functions to support and maintain a secluded political elite.<sup>10</sup> This approach has also been adopted in recent Norwegian research in the post-Breivik era, using the term right-wing extremism primarily in relation to the established political democracy. Those who want to replace the political system in Norway, whatever methods they wish to use, are classified as extremists.<sup>11</sup> In

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7 See Stöss, *Rechtsextremismus im Wandel*, 24ff; Hans-Gerd Jaschke, "Rechtsextremismus", Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, September 19, 2006,

<http://bpb.de/politik/extremismus/rechtsextremismus/41889/rechtsextremismus> (accessed September 25, 2012).

8 Cf., among others, Bernt Hagtvet, "Høyreekstremismens forvandlinger", in *Høyreekstremisme. Ideer og bevegelser i Europa*, eds. Øystein Sørensen, Bernt Hagtvet and Bjørn Arne Steine (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 2012), 320-342.

9 This is especially the case concerning the use of the terms right-wing and left-wing extremism. Cf. e.g. Christoph Butterwegge, "Extremismus-, Totalitarismus- und Populismustheorien: Ideologien zur Diskreditierung der Linken. Eine Grundsatzkritik an ihren analytischen Defiziten, verborgenen Interessen und politischen Implikationen", *Jahrbuch für Extremismus- und Terrorismusforschung* 2009/2010, 33-60; Wolfgang Wippermann, "Politikologienbetrug. Ideologiekritik der Extremismus-Legende", *Standpunkte* 10 (2010), 1-7. See also Wolfgang Wippermann, *Totalitarismustheorien. Die Entwicklung der Diskussion von den Anfängen bis heute* (Darmstadt: Primus, 1997); Uwe Backes and Eckhart Jesse, *Politischer Extremismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1996); Uwe Backes, *Politische Extreme. Eine Wort- und Begriffsgeschichte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

10 This definition is also the basis for the work of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*): The radical is still acting within the democratic order. Cf. Pfahl-Traughber, "Extremismus und Terrorismus", 18.

11 See Øystein Sørensen, Bernt Hagtvet and Bjørn Arne Steine, "Forord", in *Høyreekstremisme. Ideer og bevegelser i Europa*, 7-13.

contrast to this, researchers such as the political scientist Roger Eatwell do not limit the term right-wing extremism to an attitude towards constitutional democracy.<sup>12</sup> This makes it possible to define parties such as the Austrian FPÖ or the French Front National as representatives of the extreme right.

As with the lack of consensus on what constitutes the extreme right, “fascism”<sup>13</sup> as a generic concept has proven to be equally elusive. The term fascism has been in scholarly use since the 1920s, but without an agreed-upon definition. There are many reasons why it has been difficult to arrive at a working definition of this ideology. Political convictions, especially the belief that fascism was nothing but a defence of capitalism against the inevitable victory of the working class, have muddied the waters considerably. The lack of acknowledgment that fascism contains more than negations (for example, anti-Marxism, anti-Liberalism, anti-Egalitarianism), or the belief that it was a mishmash of other political ideas without an ideological core of its own, have resulted in and continue to contribute to a considerable lack of interest in finding a working definition of fascism. In addition, many scholars labouring in the field have been convinced that the various fascist movements, such as Nazism in Germany and the Iron Guard in Romania, are too unique and too heavily integrated within their specific national histories to be considered as part of a generic fascism. Others argue that a collective term encompassing various fascist movements would necessarily be too broad to have any analytical meaning.

Conventionally, historical fascism has been regarded as a product of a unique historical period and as a result of the upheavals surrounding the cultural pessimism of the 1890s, the “nationalization of the masses”, the First World War, and the Russian Revolution. Scholars are in agreement that this distinct historical period ended in 1945. However, the core ideological values and world views which were part of historical fascism were not erased, even though the fascist regimes were toppled and the currency of fascist policy and thought reached its nadir in the European post-war settlement.

With a growing consensus within research on fascism, there has been renewed effort towards trying to find the core values of the ideology – values that are independent of fascism’s various manifestations in specific times and places. This process began in the 1960s, and an early attempt to arrive at a common definition of fascism – a “fascist minimum” – was attempted by Ernst Nolte. His definition, which centres on anti-Marxism and “resistance to transcendence”, has been con-

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12 See e.g. Roger Eatwell, “Ten Theories of the Extreme Right”, in *Right-Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Peter H. Merkl and Leonard Weinberg (London/Portland: Frank Cass, 2003), 47-73. See also Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2000).

13 As has become standard, we use lower-case for fascism in general and upper-case for the ideology, movement, and regime in Mussolini’s Italy.

troversial, but it spurred debate and was therefore an important preliminary stage.<sup>14</sup> Further contributions that took fascism and fascist ideology seriously and analysed it on its own account were made by Eugen Weber, George L. Mosse, Walter Laqueur, Zeev Sternhell, A. James Gregor, and Juan Linz in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>15</sup> Even in the absence of a working definition, comparative fascist studies flourished in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>16</sup>

Since the early 1990s, Roger Griffin has made important contributions to the search for a working definition of fascism.<sup>17</sup> Griffin's approach has been to narrow fascism down to an ideal type which formed the basis for different manifestations in various ideological, organisational, and political terms. To Griffin, the core value, or *genus*, of fascism is its "paligenetic ultra-nationalism": The insistence on national rebirth and renewal in a time of perceived decadence and decline. This approach emphasises the revolutionary, organic, and modernising elements of fascism, as well as its insistence on the mobilisation of the population, setting it apart from authoritarian regimes. Similar or congruent definitions have been developed by other leading scholars, and this new consensus allows for the individual ideologies, movements, and regimes to be treated simultaneously as both unique and as permutations of a generic fascism.<sup>18</sup> However, this interpretation has not been immune to criticism.<sup>19</sup>

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- 14 Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche. Action française, der italienische Faschismus, der Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Piper, 1963). English edition: *Three Faces of Fascism. Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965).
- 15 Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism. Doctrines of Revolution in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1964); George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology. Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964); idem., "The Genesis of Fascism", *Journal of Contemporary History* 1 (1966), 14-26; idem., *The Nationalization of the Masses. Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: New American Library, 1975); Walter Laqueur, ed., *Fascism. A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1976); Zeev Sternhell, "Fascist Ideology", in *Fascism. A Reader's Guide*, 385-399; A. James Gregor, *The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism* (New York: Free Press, 1969); idem., *Interpretations of Fascism* (Morristown: General Learning Press, 1974); Juan Linz, "Some Notes towards a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective", in *Fascism. A Reader's Guide*, 13-78.
- 16 Cf. Stein Uglevik Larsen, Bernt Hagtvet and Jan Petter Myklebust, eds., *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1980).
- 17 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter, 1991); idem., ed., *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London: Arnold, 1998); idem., "The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (or manufacture) of Consensus Within Fascist Studies", *Journal of Contemporary History* 37 (2002), 21-43.
- 18 Roger Eatwell, *Fascism. A History* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995); Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London: Allen Lane, 2004). Also in general agreement is Walter Laqueur, *Fascism. Past, Present, Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- 19 See Roger Eatwell, "The Nature of 'Generic Fascism': The 'Fascist Minimum' and the 'Fascist Matrix'", in *Rechtsextreme Ideologien in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Uwe Backes (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003), 93-137. Particularly severe in his criticism is A. James Gregor in "Roger Griffin, social science, 'fascism' and the 'extreme right'", in *Fascism. Past and Present, West and East*.

Recent developments in the understanding of fascism make it easier to discuss its continuity into post-war Europe, especially as this new understanding is based on ideology rather than political style or institutions. Different permutations of generic fascism have moved into the metapolitical sphere, although they retain the core values of “palingenetic ultra-nationalism”. Common across the post-1945 manifestations of fascism is that they are all a long way from demonstrating the political mass-mobilisation of the interwar years, since the political, social, and economic environment in post-war Europe is radically different. These fascist “groupuscules” work to destroy the liberal-democratic, globalising, and multicultural order. They belong to political and ideological subcultures, finding a niche in unconventional, “uncivic” political space, and they are decentralised and autonomous, although they often have informal transnational links.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the broad definition of generic fascism has been used as an analytical tool to discuss a very broad and heterogeneous range of political activism in the post-war period, ranging from the “intellectual”, anti-liberal, and ethnopluralist French Nouvelle Droite and the violent, anti-immigration sectarianism of the English Defence League to the counter-jihadists on internet sites such as “Gates of Vienna” and political terrorists such as NSU and Breivik.

This volume reflects positions and continuities which encompass the space of a century. Even with the development of generic fascism, we still believe that the term extreme right – when used carefully – still has utility as an analytical term. Especially when taking into account ideological positions and continuities over an extended period of time, from the end of the First World War to the first decades of the twenty-first century, we feel that the approach to generic fascism has become too narrow to be utilised as a common analytical description of the themes and problems discussed in this book.

Kerstin Bornholdt’s opening contribution to the volume reflects on the relations between systems of body movements and political ideologies, asking the question whether specific exercise forms are “empty vessels” or more adequate for certain political systems than others. The following chapters analyse political movements and pressure groups that were important in shaping extremist opposition to the liberal-democratic order, but which did not belong to the fascist creed themselves. Stefanie Schrader discusses the German Völkisch People’s Party, an attempt to give the heterogeneous *völkisch* movement a political representation in the new German Republic. The topic of Alessandro Salvador’s contribution is the political and ideological development of the veterans’ league *Stahlhelm*. Both of these movements vehemently opposed the Weimar Republic and envisaged some kind of national, or even racial, renewal and rebirth, but at the same time they lacked a

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*An International Debate on Concepts and Cases in the Comparative Study of the Extreme Right*, eds. Roger Griffin, Werner Loh and Andreas Umland (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2006), 115-122.

20 Roger Griffin, “Fascism’s New Faces and New Facelessness in the ‘Post-fascist’ Epoch”, *Erwägen – Wissen – Ethik* 15/3 (2004). See also Ami Pedazhur and Leonard Weinberg, “Modern European Democracy and Its Enemies: The Threat of the Extreme Right”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 2 (2001), 52-72.

revolutionary impetus, making a generic application of the term fascism unfitting. However, they had an undeniable influence on other fascist permutations, including the Nazi movement, which is discussed in Anders G. Kjøstvedt's chapter. The NSDAP, together with other fascist movements, was convinced that it had found a modern solution to modern challenges, a theme that is further discussed in Matthew Worley's chapter on Oswald Mosley and his decision to launch a fascist movement in Britain. Moving forward to the Second World War, Nicola Karcher explores the difficulties connected with collaboration in Norway, and the attempts by a fascist regime in power to bring into line associations that were more or less affiliated with Nazism's ideological obsession with the Nordic countries.

Other contributions to this volume show us how the delimitations between the broad interpretation of generic fascism and the extreme right may become blurred. Elisabetta Cassina Wolff and Martin Finkenberger discuss two important figures, Julius Evola and Johann von Leers, who both retained the core values of their political convictions, but only one of whom was able to remain relevant in the changed political climate of post-1945 Europe.

Continuing into the contemporary period, additional contributions discuss political parties and associations that are linked to and have ideological touching points with generic fascism, but who still remain outside this paradigm themselves. Gideon Botsch argues that there is good reason to emphasise the levels of continuity within the extreme right scene in postwar Germany, despite frequent claims to the opposite in most work on the subject. Important issues within the aspect of continuity and points of contact within the extreme right outlook from a historical perspective are similarly raised in Felix Wiedemann's contribution, analysing New Age-inspired modern racists and their obsession with the witch trials of Early Modern Europe. Astrid Dypvik's chapter puts the contemporary German extreme right into perspective by analysing the role played by the Federation of Expellees and its participation in the German postwar debate on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and by discussing its partially overlapping topoi of interpreting the suffering of German civilians in the aftermath of the Second World War in line with the interpretation of the extreme right party NPD.

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