Article

JCH

Journal of Contemporary History
2015, Vol. 50(4) 750–767

DOI: 10.1177/0022009415594757
jch.sagepub.com
SAGE

George L. Mosse and Walter Laqueur on the History of Fascism

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Abstract
The history and analysis of fascism has been a major theme of the first half century of the *Journal of Contemporary History*, and was a key interest of its founding co-editors, George L. Mosse and Walter Laqueur. Both made important contributions to the field, but their approaches were quite different. Mosse began his work on fascism earlier and, in a manner consistent with his other research, emphasized cultural and ideological aspects. He was arguably the first to draw attention to ideology as a coherent aspect for study and inaugurated the 'cultural turn' in the historiography of fascism long before this became generally fashionable. Mosse was a pioneer in research on popular culture and the visual arts in this area, as well as on the role and character of myth, developing what some scholars have termed an anthropological approach. He also expanded treatment of the development of racial thought and made a major contribution to studying the psychology and culture of nationalism and mass mobilization. Walter Laqueur entered the field somewhat later and stimulated work on the origins and comparative history of fascism. His books were not as innovative in methodology as those of Mosse, but broader in scope and chronological treatment, and sometimes more narrative in structure. Laqueur extended the inquiry to Russia and to the Middle East, areas in which he was a specialist, and also examined the possibilities of neofascism after 1945, as well as its relation to Islamism at the end of the twentieth century.

Keywords
fascism, Germany, ideology, Italy, nationalism, nazism

The opening number of the *Journal of Contemporary History* was a theme issue devoted to 'International Fascism 1920–1945.' It reflected the broader 'fascism debate' developing at that time and exemplified a major focus of the *JCH* for

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many years to come. Fascism,[1] however, had not been an early interest of either of the founding co-editors. George Mosse had initially dedicated himself to English intellectual history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while Walter Laqueur opened his career as a Sovietologist. Mosse, however, had begun his shift more than a decade earlier, when he accepted a new position in the History Department of the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1955 that enabled him to teach modern European cultural history.[2]

A Jewish émigré who had fled Germany at the age of 14 in 1933, he had long subordinated his perplexity about National Socialism to the search for a cultural focus in earlier English history, before a decade's success as professor of history in the United States of America gave him the confidence to return to his roots. At Wisconsin, a senior colleague offered him a contract in the Rand McNally history series that he edited, proposing that Mosse write a new cultural history of nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe.

This provided his first opportunity to treat fascism, to which he devoted two chapters, one on Italy and the second on Germany, brief surveys that broke a certain amount of new ground in their emphasis on the roles of myth, mysticism and propaganda.[3] In this early writing, however, the net of fascism was cast very broadly, so that Franco, Salazar and Dollfuss all fit as fascists.

Mosse had an opportunity to reach an elite audience when he was invited to present the first of a new series of 'Department Seminars' in the Stanford History Department for the fall semester of 1963. This was attended not merely by leading lights of the History Department but also by an unusually distinguished group of Europeanist scholars who held fellowships that year in the Stanford Institute, including Karl-Dietrich Bracher, Juan Linz, Peter Gay and several others. The theme of the seminar was 'Intellectual Foundations of National Socialism,' with particular emphasis on fascist ideology, which, contrary to then-established wisdom, Mosse held to have existed in a relatively coherent form that was central to the understanding of the phenomenon. Spirited discussions ranged over many issues in what was perhaps the most sophisticated and extended debate on fascism to have occurred to that point, though the stenographic record of the seminar meetings was never published.

Mosse had to deal with extensive criticism, for he by no means convinced all the participants that fascism had possessed a coherent ideology. Some questioned his rejection of a socioeconomic interpretation, but he insisted that, contrary to the dominant notion, fascism was not 'merely a quest for power,' for it revealed what he called 'ideological sincerity.' In the chapters published two years earlier, he

1 Following my customary practice, fascism and fascist will appear in lower case when referring to the generic phenomenon, and when given in upper case refer to the Italian National Fascist Party and its various manifestations in Italy.

2 G.L. Mosse, *Nazism: A Historical and Comparative Analysis of National Socialism* (Oxford 1978), 27.

3 *The Culture of Modern Europe. The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries; An Introduction* (Chicago, IL 1961), 341–76.

had endorsed Hermann Rauschning's concept of a 'revolution of nihilism,' but at Stanford he rejected such an approach, insisting that National Socialism, 'far from being purely nihilistic,' had a 'positive ideology' and was 'essentially a religious movement' that created a kind of secular religion, based on myth, race and ritual, which could not be dismissed as an irrelevant 'hodgepodge.' Like all ideologies, it revealed internal strains and contradictions, but that did not prevent it from being a foundation of the movement, without which the latter could never have achieved success.[4]

His first major published research on fascism followed a year later, in the form of a detailed study of nineteenth-century German *völkisch* culture, an inquiry into the cultural origins of National Socialism.[5] Earlier, in 1961, Fritz Stern had published a study of three leading *völkisch* ideologues,[6] but Mosse's work treated a much broader range of *völkisch* culture, not merely in print but also in the visual arts, marking a shift in the data and methodology of fascist studies. The inaugural number of the *Journal of Contemporary History* in 1966 was designed to provide a new focus on fascism as a general European phenomenon. Since so much attention elsewhere had been devoted to Germany, Nazism was largely excluded from the discussion, which presented only one article on Italy, devoting most of the space to the lesser-known movements. Mosse himself began the number with a comparatively short piece on 'The Genesis of Fascism,' which summarized the interpretation of fascist culture and doctrine on which he had been working for the past five years and more. He clearly identified the origin of the key ideas of fascism in 'the attack on positivism and liberalism at the end of the nineteenth century.' Much of the article was devoted to the fascist search for a new morality, which Mosse emphasized nonetheless meant for society as a whole the return to bourgeois morality. This conclusion, which he reiterated again and again in his writings, would be one of the more controversial aspects of his approach. It was not inaccurate but might have been clarified by pointing out that all modern revolutionary movements which achieve power end up by promoting a form of traditional morality for society as a whole, since they can find no other basis, in the long run, for structuring a coherent society capable of reproducing itself. Left unresolved in this formulation was the issue of a new morality for fascists themselves, and whether the movement's activism and vitalism were simply to be tamed by an authoritarian structure.

That, Mosse thought, did not seem to be the case, for fascist vitalism was not merely to be tamed but to be channeled in the service of the nation. Missing in this brief discussion, an excellent analytic summary as far as it went, was a full

4 Preceding quotations from the well-documented study by K. Plessini, *The Perils of Normalcy: George L. Mosse and the Remaking of Cultural History* (Madison, WI 2014), 52–5,

5 G.L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Ideological Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, NY 1964).

6 Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, CA 1961).

consideration of the fascist doctrine of violence, a unique concept that, at least in philosophical terms, distinguished fascism from other radical movements.

The relative absence of Germany from the inaugural number did not imply any lack of focus on that country by Mosse personally, for within months he brought out his critical anthology *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich* (1966), by far the most wide-ranging presentation of that theme to have appeared, a book that remains in print even in the twenty-first century. At the time, many would have held that its title constituted an oxymoron, for during the two preceding decades the most common conclusion had been that Nazism lacked any serious cultural life. Mosse showed that this had not been the case, providing critical introductions to Nazi writings on a dozen or more key themes. These ranged from art and culture to the nature of the Nazi revolution, family, womanhood and society, racism, myths and heroes, science, education and Christianity, the university, citizenship and class structure. This became a key sourcebook and accomplished much to reorient the understanding of the relationship between Nazism and culture.

At approximately the same time appeared the English edition of Ernst Nolte's *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* (1964), translated as *Three Faces of Fascism*. Mosse's review followed very soon, published at the close of 1966 in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*.[7] Nolte's book was the best and most ambitious effort to that point to develop a single coherent concept of generic fascism. Whereas Mosse's approach was cultural, Nolte made use of the history of ideas. Mosse praised the German historian for having carried the conceptualization of generic fascism a major step forward, yet criticized individual points, especially the presentation of the reactionary French monarchist movement, Action Française, as one of three basic faces of fascism. Mosse was surely correct in this criticism, though at that time no one had developed a clear taxonomy of the authoritarian nationalist movements in Europe during the first half of the century. He also maintained that Nolte defined fascism too much in terms of negatives and antitheses, first in his emphasis on anti-Marxism but even more in his insistence on its purported resistance to transcendence. Mosse thought it important to emphasize that 'fascism worked with a transcendence of its own.' It sought to achieve a new secular religion, with ideals transcending the realities of the moment, taking up again a point that he had emphasized in *The Crisis of German Ideology*.[8]

Mosse continued to expand his methodology, reaching another conceptual turning point in 1969. In February of that year the editor of the *American Historical Review* asked him to review three recent works on the history of anthropology. Mosse accepted the assignment and, though he was never a genuine theoretician, turned the occasion into the nearest thing to a programmatic manifesto that he was ever to write. This marked the beginning of what Emilio Gentile,[9]

7 'E. Nolte on *Three Faces of Fascism*,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 27, 4 (Oct.–Dec., 1966), 621–5.
8 See also the discussion in Plessini, *Perils of Normalcy*, fn. 8, 244.
9 Especially in his book-length study *Il fascino del persecutore: George L. Mosse e la catastrofe dell'uomo moderno* (Urbino 2007).

Roger Griffin[10] and Karel Plessini[11] would call his 'anthropological turn' in the study of fascism. It did not reflect a sudden change, for he had been moving in that direction throughout the decade in his emphasis on fascism as a kind of secular religion, in the incorporation of popular culture as well as intellectual history, and in the emphasis on visual arts and representational propaganda. In the 1969 review, however, he explicitly embraced the methodologies of anthropology and psychology, as well as esthetics, to understand mass culture and mass movements, and he would remain faithful to this agenda for the remainder of his career.[12]

Later he would write that 'the chief problem facing any historian is to capture the irrational by an exercise of the rational mind.'[13] This would mean that scholarly work 'has to operate with the instruments of rationality in a so largely irrational world, it has to recapture the irrational rationally and thus it is in danger of getting it wrong.'[14] At the same time, he corrected the common tendency to associate the irrational or non-rational with nihilism *tout court*, for fascism was not nihilistic but had its own peculiar value system.[15]

A key aspect of this approach was to understand the nature and use of myth, something that the non-theoretical Mosse did very well in empirical and eclectic terms, though he never developed any broad concept of myth. His own approach he called, not inaccurately, 'a history of perceptions.'[16] In a letter of 1990, Emilio Gentile pointed out to Mosse that he employed the concept of myth in two different ways, which one is tempted to term the authentic and the inauthentic, the first involving the 'irruption of the sacred' in a living faith, the second a cynical propaganda manipulation.[17] Mosse acknowledged this problem without hesitation, saying that

> I have never been able to get a satisfactory definition of myth, and as far back as 1960 Leonardo Olschki... told me that my use of myth was very problematic. Myth is both artificial and a sincerely held belief. I don't think that they exclude each other.[18]

10 'Withstanding the Rush of Time: The Prescience of Mosse's Anthropological View of Fascism,' in S. Payne, D. Sorkin and J. Tortorice (eds), *What History Tells: George L. Mosse and the Culture of Western Europe*, (Madison, WI 2004), 116.

11 The best account of the significance of the review of 1969 will be found in Plessini, *Perils of Normalcy*, 56–9.

12 It has sometimes also been said that this was influenced by his personal experience with the mass hysteria exhibited in public political protests at the University of Wisconsin between 1966 and 1970. While that may have been the case, what in fact took place was a logical evolution and deepening of his earlier methodology.

13 G.L. Mosse, *Masses and Men: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York, NY 1980), 15.

14 In a public lecture in 1980, quoted in Plessini, *Perils of Normalcy*, 71.

15 Properly speaking, nihilism would be what came after fascism on the one hand and modern rationalism on the other, arriving in the form of the Post-Modernism of the late twentieth century.

16 Plessini, *Perils of Normalcy*, 65.

17 Gentile to Mosse, 12 September, 1990, quoted in Plessini, *Perils of Normalcy*, 224.

18 Mosse to Gentile, 15 October, 1990, in *Perils of Normalcy*, 64.

At the same time, he always emphasized that myth alone had little significance, for everything depended on the necessary political, social, cultural and economic conditions, together with leadership and organization, to enable myth to blossom as the belief of a significant group of people.

Talking with ex-Nazis in West Germany became an important source, and of these by far the most significant was Albert Speer, with whom he apparently first made contact in 1971, five years after the latter had been released from prison. There was considerable written correspondence, as well as quite a few personal conversations, between the two over the next six years, though Mosse was mildly embarrassed on those occasions in which he was seen eating with Speer in a cafe, for Germans often came up to the latter to ask for an autograph, and Mosse assumed that they must have thought him to be a Nazi, as well. The questions that he put to Speer were above all technical ones about Nazi esthetics and the approach to meetings and other public activities. What he learned about the practicalities and the esthetics of Nazism only deepened his own interpretation, as well as his appreciation for the roles of art, architecture and mass organization.[19] Speer in turn was greatly impressed by Mosse's empathy and insight into Nazism, and paid him the (somewhat two-edged) compliment of being the only scholar who really understood National Socialism.[20]

As a German Jew, the Holocaust was never far from his consciousness, but he did not begin to approach it until the 1970s. Though he never wrote a single article on the Holocaust itself, he came to devote considerable attention to its background and origins. Initially he was as perplexed as anyone else concerning how such categorical genocide could have developed in an advanced and modern European country. As a scion of the German *Bildungsbürgertum*, he had been taught to honor the Enlightenment, but by the 1970s he had developed much more awareness of what he called its 'dark side,' under the influence of Jakob Talmon and the philosophers of the Frankfurt School. From the beginning, he had been aware of the similarities between the Jacobins and later exponents of revolutionary terror, but at first thought of the former as an aberration. By the 1970s he had come to see the dangers lurking in the categorically abstract thought and depersonalization promoted by the Enlightenment, which had produced the first modern racial classifications. This seemed to mean that the potential for the Holocaust was more deeply embedded in modern Western thought and politics than he had realized.

This eventually resulted in *Toward the Final Solution* (1978), a path-breaking history of racial thought, particularly as it developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Mosse saw racial thought as a product of the depersonalization and abstract rationalism generated by the Enlightenment,[21] but also as a result

19 On the relationship with Speer, Ibid., 87–90

20 As relayed by Mosse in private conversation.

21 Yet there were also definite limits to his indictment of the Enlightenment, for in conversation he rejected the broader interpretation of the Enlightenment's negative influence presented in L. Birken, *Hitler as Philosophe: Remnants of the Enlightenment in National Socialism* (Westport, CT 1995).

of the search by some in Western society to achieve order amid the chaos of rapid change. He also thought the urge for conformity and what he liked to term 'respectability' had a good deal to do with it. The book was invaluable as a primer on the development and growing radicalization of racial ideas, yet the link here and elsewhere between the Holocaust and 'bourgeois respectability' run amok invited considerable criticism, linked as it was to his identification of fascist morality with bourgeois morality. It was pointed out that the ideal fascist and the ideal bourgeois could scarcely be equivalent and that bourgeois respectability was at least as strong in Britain and some other countries as in Germany. This peculiar theme had long been present in his writing, sometimes significantly qualified and sometimes not, but became more prominent in later years both in the treatment of fascist and fascist-related themes and in social and cultural studies.

During the 1980s Mosse wrote less about fascism and turned increasingly to the history of sexuality and to the political symbolism stemming from the First World War. As he said frankly in his posthumous memoir, earlier he would not have felt free to write about the history of sexuality or to recognize his own homosexuality, for that might well have cost him his career. Only during the last decade or so of his life was he fully 'out of the closet.' During this last period he became a pioneer in the new field of the history of sexuality as earlier he had been in other areas, particularly in his books on *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (1985)[22] and *The Image of Man* (1996). These later works pressed the critique of bourgeois respectability to a climax, and also made clear the existential compulsion behind his argument, which with regard to the origins of fascism never made much sense, as was pointed out even by leading scholars very sympathetic to his work, such as Emilio Gentile, Saul Friedländer and Steven Aschheim.[23] The ways in which he sought to explain the apparent contradictions in fascist morality were not very convincing, referring to greater 'Machiavellianism' and the predominance of 'split personality.' Such observations are not inaccurate, but are inadequate. He never recognized sufficiently the moral relativism of modern revolutionary movements as a genus (or other tendencies in this direction in modern culture generally), combined with the common need of all such movements in power to restore order.

Mosse's last major writings on fascism were products of the later 1970s, though important articles would continue to the end of his life. *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (1975) expanded the work on political symbolism

22 Republished by the University of Wisconsin Press four years later under the title *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*.

23 Plessini observes: 'He was conscious of having overstressed in the 1970s and 1980s the role played by respectability in the Final Solution, and he attributed this to his "anger" over the strictures imposed by respectability upon his own life. There is, however, another aspect of his personality that must be accounted for: the deeply provocative nature of his works. His shocking assertion about the "ideal bourgeois" must therefore be analysed in the light of the complex relations among autobiography, intellectual development, and the role of agent provocateur he liked to play.' *Perils of Normalcy*, 119. See the further discussion of this problem in 120–31.

that he had begun years earlier, examining monuments and festivals and the esthetics of political organizations in Germany in modern times. Five years later came the collection *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality*, a volume of 15 articles, all but one of them published during the 1970s. In 1976, on the tenth anniversary of its inaugural number, the *JCH* published another collection of articles on fascism. The best of these, together with his new article 'Toward a General Theory of Fascism,' Mosse republished in 1979 under the title *International Fascism: New Thoughts and New Approaches*. Later, a series of articles from the 1980s were republished in the collection *Confronting the Nation: Jewish and Western Nationalism* (1993).

Arguably the most important item in the latter book was 'Fascism and the French Revolution' (first appearing in the *JCH* in 1989), which updated his view of fascism and the Enlightenment. Despite the rejection of the earlier revolution by most fascists, he found important common features between the two, both of which were voluntarist in the extreme, reflecting the modern emphasis on the will, and both were manifestations of 'the people worshiping themselves.' Both represented utopian rejections of traditional culture and the Biblical heritage of Christianity, and both emphasized the estheticization of politics. The Jacobins initiated 'the age of modern mass politics' that would be further elaborated by the fascists, and anticipated the use of festival and song, and the creation of sacred spaces. This book also republished the article on 'The Political Culture of Italian Futurism,' which had appeared in the *JCH* in 1990 and constituted Mosse's most discrete study of the cultural origins of Italian Fascism, which had been more modernist in style than most of its German counterparts.

Another milestone in the investigation of origins was the volume *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (1990), which advanced the study of war memorials, a theme Mosse had first taken up more than 15 years earlier. It refocused attention on the impact and character of memory of the First World War. He rendered the German term *Kriegserlebnis* as 'the myth of the war experience,' establishing the term in English usage, as the book anticipated and stimulated what would soon become a new trend in 'memory studies.'

Finally, in 1999, some months after his own death, there appeared Mosse's final collection of studies on fascism under the title *The Fascist Revolution: Toward A General Theory of Fascism* (1999). This brought together a series of some of his most notable articles, ranging in time of original publication from 1961 to 1996, most of which had never been reprinted, such as the path-breaking 'The Occult Origins of National Socialism,' which had originally appeared in *The Journal of the History of Ideas* in 1961, and 'Fascism and the Avant-Garde,' first published in German in 1980.

The posthumous volume was introduced by a revised version of the article 'Toward a General Theory of Fascism' that had first appeared two decades earlier. A true general theory never emerged, since Mosse was a self-defined historian of perceptions and never a grand theoretician or system builder, and he said more modestly that he hoped to offer further 'building blocks' toward a general theory or

understanding of fascism. There were important aspects of the study of fascism that he never took up at all, ranging from systematic discussion of the fascist doctrine of violence to its political history and sequences, from fascist militarism to the nature of totalitarianism or the place of the comparative history of fascism within the broader history of modern revolutionary mass movements. He refused to deal with totalitarianism, which he deemed a propaganda device invented by the Italians and later a polemical concept exploited by the Cold War, despite its importance in the work of the two leading historians of Italian Fascism, Renzo De Felice and Emilio Gentile, to both of whom he was very close.

Mosse's main contributions to the study of fascism are twofold, first as a key pioneer in opening the 'fascism debate' of the 1960s and 1970s, in terms both of his own highly original work and also in his promotion of broader discussion and of research and publication by others. The second lay in his own emphases, interpretations and methodology, nearly all of which emerged during the 1960s, even though not fully developed in some aspects until the 1980s. His initiative was important in championing the concept of a generic fascism and in achieving the empirical and analytic breakthroughs which revealed that fascist ideology, rather than being an intrinsic oxymoron, was a distinctive and indispensable part of fascist movements. He did path-breaking work on fascist culture and inaugurated the 'cultural turn' more than two decades before it became popular in the study of fascism and other aspects of modern history. His development by 1970 of an 'anthropological' approach was equally original, leading to a series of studies on myth, crowds, meetings, art, esthetics and liturgy. Altogether, this reoriented and broadened the study of fascism more than did the work of any other scholar, though a number of historians developed the model of a more unified single concept that he never achieved. His primarily cultural and anthropological methodology, however, by its very nature did not embrace the broader comparative analysis or taxonomic approach of the political scientist.

Mosse was a scout and a pioneer, not the consolidator and developer of the new territories that he was often the first to explore. He made fundamental innovations in the genesis and study of fascist ideology, popular culture, mass movements, secular religions, racism, Jewish history, the history of sexuality and of national monuments. He rarely repeated himself, but for nearly 60 years moved on restlessly to new themes and new subject matter. His capacity for innovation and new insights has rarely been paralleled.[24]

24 It is worth pointing out that the country in which the greatest enthusiasm for Mosse's work has been registered is neither the United States of America nor Germany, but Italy, where its *Rezeptionsgeschichte* has been unparalleled. The principal book-length studies by Italian historians include E. Gentile, *Il fascino del persecutore: George L. Mosse e la catastrofe dell'uomo moderno* (Urbino 2007); D. Aramini, *George L. Mosse, l'Italia e gli storici* (Milan 2010); K. Plessini, *The Perils of Normalcy: George L. Mosse and the Remaking of Cultural History* (Madison, WI 2014); and L. Benadusi and G. Caravale (eds), *George L. Mosse's Italy: Interpretation, Reception, and Intellectual Heritage* (New York, NY 2014). One appreciates the great fascination felt by young Italian historians for Mosse's achievements, but one would also like to see them give evidence of having truly digested it and of getting on with their own work.

Walter Laqueur, with whom he collaborated closely for more than three decades, could hardly have been more different. About all they had in common was that both were Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany and both had enormous energy, imagination and creative drive as historians. Mosse was born into great wealth in the German capital, Laqueur a scion of the provincial middle classes. Mosse's exile was timely, well subsidized by his family and provided him with an elite education at Harvard.

Laqueur barely escaped with his life and scarcely attended university, very much the self-made man and scholar. Their private lives were also dissimilar. Mosse was a gregarious academic, though for most of his adult life a closet homosexual; Laqueur more withdrawn, though a devoted husband and father; Mosse a cultural historian of ideas, styles and perceptions, Laqueur much more oriented toward political history, and narrative and systematic analysis. Mosse pioneered interpretations and methodological innovation, though after leaving the early modern period behind these were always focused on central and western Europe. Laqueur's methodology varied comparatively little, but covered a broader range of countries, continents and themes.

Laqueur was not as much of a pioneer in fascist studies as Mosse, and at first approached them rather tangentially through his work on Russia and Germany. His book *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (1962) did not discuss National Socialism as such, but treated one of its distant sources and was the first study in English of the youth movement. Another work, *Russia and Germany: A Century of Conflict* (1965) was the first to treat the broader relationship between the two major continental powers of the century, dealing among other things with the peculiarities of Russian authoritarianism, the early inception of a radical right in Russia, the influence of Russian ideas and Russo-German émigrés on early Nazism, and the German movement's obsession with anti-Sovietism. Whereas George Mosse's Europe largely ended at the Elbe, Laqueur would eventually pioneer the extension of fascist studies into Russia.

His first book on fascism per se appeared in 1976, as Mosse's work on fascism was nearing its height. Laqueur's intention was to present the most complete book on fascism to appear thus far in a single volume, a goal largely achieved by *Fascism: A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (1976), which he edited but to which he contributed only a one-page introduction. It provided the fullest treatment yet seen, with a chapter on Italy, three on Germany and individual chapters on Eastern Europe, Western Europe and even on Latin America. In the latter Alistair Hennessy treated the region's radical populism in conjunction with what little there was of generic fascism. The book immediately played a significant role in the 'fascism debate' then nearing its height. Probably the most important part was the 120-page opening section by Juan J. Linz, somewhat obliquely titled 'Some Notes Toward a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective.' By that time Linz had become one of the world's top scholars on fascism, though his work was mostly dispersed in articles. His monograph in

Laqueur's volume was the best comparative politico-sociological study of fascism of that time.[25]

Another key contribution was the 65-page chapter by Zeev Sternhell on 'Fascist Ideology,' the first major work in English by the Israeli political scientist. This provided the first fully focused and systematic account of the origins of fascist ideology in what Sternhell termed 'the intellectual revolution of the 1890s.' As early as 1961 Mosse had drawn attention to the roots of fascist doctrine in the intellectual revolt of the late nineteenth century but had never treated it so completely. Sternhell advanced the first integrated presentation of the cultural, literary and intellectual currents that made possible the emergence of fascist ideology.[26]

As co-editor of the *JCH*, Laqueur continued to work with Mosse to publish new material by other scholars on fascism, but did not return to the topic in a major study for more than 15 years, until after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Few scholars took such intellectual advantage of this momentous change as did the Sovietologist Laqueur, who turned out a series of eye-opening new studies, such as *Fate of the Revolution: Interpretations of Soviet History from 1917 to the Present* (1987), *Stalin: The Glasnost Revelations* (1990) and *The Dream that Failed: Reflections on the Soviet Union* (1994).

The book that broke completely new ground was *Black Hundred: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia* (1993). Few other historians would have been able to undertake this task, for it ranged over a full century of Russian history to provide an extensive account of the origins of right radical Russian nationalism, and of Russian protofascism and neofascism. It dealt with political radicalism among Russian émigrés, Soviet nationalism and the revival of Russian nationalism in the late Soviet years, the new antisemitism and the proliferation of radical nationalist and protofascist groups during the early 1990s. It revealed that the new-style Russian antisemitism managed to achieve unprecedented heights of conspiracy thinking with its scheme of the Holocaust as a Zionist plot to rid the world of poor Jews who were a financial burden for rich Jews, all the while directing Germany toward the destruction of Russia, with the ultimate goal of world fascism dominated by wealthy Jews. By 1995 one small Russian democracy institute identified a total of 42 different nationalist parties or societies in Russia, though, as it would turn out, the architect of a new Russian nationalism and authoritarianism

25 At that point the papers of the 1972 Bergen conference on 'The Social Basis of Fascism,' to which both Linz and I contributed, had not yet been published, but later appeared as S.U. Larsen, B. Hagtvet and J.P. Myklebust (eds), *Who were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen, 1980). Most of Linz's key works on fascism were reprinted in Spanish in 'Fascismo: perspectivas históricas y comparadas,' which constituted volume four of his *Obras escogidas*, edited by J.R. Montero and T.J. Miley (Madrid, 2000).

26 Laqueur would much later touch on aspects of this in his article 'Fin de Siècle: Once more with Feeling,' which appeared first in the *JCH* and then was reprinted in his collection *Fin de Siècle and other Essays on America and Europe* (New Brunswick, NJ 1997).

would turn out to be none of the above but simply the Russian government itself,[27] once the reins were handed over to Vladimir Putin. Since then the literature on Russian putative fascisms has grown considerably, but Laqueur's work remains seminal. It has been thoroughly updated in his wide-ranging new book *Putinism. Russia and its Future with the West* (2015). This is the best current work on twenty-first century Russia, a remarkable achievement for a 94-year-old scholar.

His last book on fascism, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future* (1996), was the broadest single work on the topic attempted by either of the co-editors. Like most historians, Laqueur avoided any precise definition of generic fascism on the grounds that this was too complicated, since there were too many different variants. Both claims were obviously valid, up to a point, but, if that were absolutely the case, how might the reader be sure that all these examples belonged to one political genus? Thus, as is common in fascist studies (and certainly in the work of Mosse, as well), broad issues of taxonomy were eluded, though many individual problems were discussed.

Laqueur took his readers through historical fascism with briskness and precision in a long chapter totaling 90 pages. The highlights and conclusions were scarcely unique by that time, though always clear, convincing and well-substantiated. Laqueur agreed that fascism was primarily a historical European problem, because only European countries in the interwar era offered the combination of opportunity for mass mobilization together with a major political and cultural crisis and the necessary cultural components. He denied that the triumph of fascism was merely due to economic stress, pointing out that the latter was equally or more severe in other countries where fascism did not win out, whereas the trough of the crisis had already passed in both Italy and Germany by the time that the fascists seized power. The social basis of fascism was discussed in some detail, together with the similarities to and differences from communism.

Laqueur gave fascist doctrine due importance, labeling it 'nationalist, elitist, and anti-liberal,' but differentiating it from the radical right because of its fundamentally revolutionary thrust. Racism was seen as an important variable, rather than intrinsic to all fascism. He treated key differences between the Italian and German movements, in terms of the importance of the myth of the nation and of the state for the former, and of race for the latter. Unlike some, Laqueur warned that not every idea and ingredient found in fascism was wrong just because it was used by fascists, and agreed with his co-editor that fascism was not truly nihilistic, as was so often claimed, but was based on a strongly held belief system and even a kind of perverted morality.

Eight pages devoted to 'The Leaders' focused on Mussolini and Hitler, their similarities and contrasts. Laqueur emphasized that the emergence of such talented and destructive personalities was to some extent a 'historical accident' that cannot

27 In May 1995 this institute invited a number of Western scholars, including Eugen Weber and myself, to a conference in Moscow to discuss the danger of neofascism in Russia. Most of us were not Russianists, but we came to the conclusion that none of these small competing groups was likely to constitute a primary threat, which was more likely to come from the Russian state itself, depending on how its government evolved. Social scientists often fail to make accurate predictions, but that one we got right.

be explained by the positing or analysis of purported objective conditions. There were others with somewhat similar ideas who never achieved anything, and only the study of a very complex set of circumstances that includes many different variables can explain their rise and success. It will not do to dismiss them as flukes or mediocrities who took advantage of circumstances, for they managed up to a point to shape their own circumstances.

Nor did the cults surrounding these leaders reflect anything unique about fascism, for the cults of personality were in key respects greater in the Soviet Union (where such things began in the final days of Lenin), China and North Korea. In the analysis of fascism, it is important to distinguish between what is common to diverse revolutionary mass movements and totalitarian regimes on the one hand, and unique to fascism on the other.

The roles of the party and of the state were key, analyzed for both countries in terms of basic similarities and possibly even more important differences. There was no attempt to discuss the broader phenomenon of totalitarianism, which Laqueur, like Mosse, believed could be misleading, and he had little use for the concept of Hitler as a 'weak dictator,' noting that he was always able to get the state to concentrate resources on the matters he thought most important, whether or not ultimate success was achieved. Laqueur agreed with many scholars that Fascist Italy was never 'quite totalitarian,' and showed no interest in Gentile's concept of Italian totalitarianism as a means or process rather than a goal or structure. Laqueur also accepted the interpretation that the two regimes possessed a certain 'polycratic' structure in so far as they were never fashioned into a single coherent bureaucracy.

Laqueur did not take up the interpretation of fascism as political religion, though he recognized that it had cultic and liturgical features. He made a clear distinction between the policies of communism, which sought to control and repress all religion, and fascist or partially fascist regimes which adopted a different approach, seeking in various ways to exploit or accommodate religion, at least in the short term. There was clearly no such thing as a generic fascist policy toward religion. The two major movements/regimes were divided between radical abolitionists and accommodationists, with the latter predominating. Both Hitler and Mussolini held radical long-term ambitions toward religion, but believed they could only be implemented once full victory had been achieved. Conversely, in Spain, Romania and Croatia the movements and regimes were overtly religious and officially Christian, despite the cognitive dissonance involved. Were they less fully 'fascist'? That would be correct in the Spanish case, but not necessarily in the others, pointing up the variations in the political genus.

Laqueur found terror and propaganda of approximately equal importance in developing and maintaining the two principal fascist systems, though the degree of terror was much less in the Italian case. In a formally legal sense, repression was even more arbitrary in Nazi Germany than in the Soviet Union, though its scale within Germany was considerably less. Once it was extended to conquered Eastern Europe, repression became more extensive than in any other revolutionary system. Laqueur seemed less certain that there was anything structurally unique about

fascist propaganda. 'Soviet propaganda—appealing, on the whole, less to emotion—depended somewhat less on the use of symbols and rites than the Nazi propaganda did. But the difference was not overwhelming, and they shared considerable similarities in style and content.'

He found nothing uniquely 'bourgeois' about the social appeal of fascism, whose strength, by comparison with communism, lay in its capacity for cross-class mobilization. There was a large following among the middle classes, but that was true of many political parties. Many blue-collar workers became fascists but fascism was never a worker movement per se (save perhaps momentarily in Hungary in 1939). At times there was considerable support among the rural population, but that varied considerably.

There was never any uniform content to fascist culture. Nazi policy insisted on 'positive content' based on race, idealism and patriotism, rejecting most modernism, but Laqueur points out that what it denounced as *Kulturbolschewismus* was equally proscribed under the Bolshevik state. Italian Fascist policy was more tolerant, and much more accepting of aspects of modernism. It insisted primarily on formal compliance, not on total uniformity, as in Germany or the Soviet Union.

Laqueur observed that 'there has never been a regime in history that has not had at least some achievements to its credit, and fascism was no exception.' The fascist regimes rested, in fact, on a great deal of popular support, even though Nazi Germany knew few years of peacetime development before throwing itself into war. Laqueur agreed with Mosse that most of the population in Italy and Germany sought 'order and stability,' which the new regimes seemed to provide, while achieving full employment and, in the German case, rapid recovery from a relatively long-continued depression.

Laqueur referred to the policy decision in both major fascist regimes to postpone the complex transformation posited by doctrine and ideology to a later date, after final victory had been won at home and abroad. The 'reversal of revolutionary priorities,' compared with communism, was a fundamental feature, and there would be no fully consummated 'fascism in one country' until the final triumph. Hence the effort to provide both butter and guns, and relative stability (or, in Mosse's vocabulary, 'respectability'). This meant much more freedom in consumption, private lives and culture than under Stalin. Popular entertainment, for example, expanded several times over.

Conversely, the climax and radicalization of fascism produced by the war received little attention in this final work, though, unlike most who treat the theme, Laqueur devoted space to defascistization. He noted in passing that the most effective enemies of the fascists were the right authoritarian regimes, which often simply suppressed them. The most severe measures taken against fascists in the West were not those adopted by the powers that occupied Germany, but the purges in liberated France and Italy, most notably at the hands of communists. There were nearly 10,000 summary executions in France and possibly a slightly greater number in Italy. Laqueur also observed that fascism would inevitably

become subject to historicization. This would be particularly the tendency on the right, while the left continued to lean on socioeconomic approaches.

Unlike in most general accounts, considerable space – more than 50 pages – was devoted to neo-fascism. The search for neofascists has been ongoing since the late 1940s, due above all to the broad use of the term as a pejorative, though such a discussion involves major issues of definition and taxonomy. By the 1990s, it was clear that there have been a long series of groups that have sought to revive and/or redefine fascist doctrine, even though no individual party with these characteristics ever became a major force in any country. Indeed, the only one that lasted for many years and enjoyed a certain mass following was the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI). Unlike the situation after the First World War, a 'dearth of new political ideas' set in after 1945. This resulted in the adjustment or moderation of old ideas, and even the MSI had to give way in the 1990s to the decidedly post-fascist Alleanza Nazionale.

The same may be said for the Front National in France, so that any political initiative worth discussing turns out to be rightist and populist, and always lacking key ingredients of fascism. Genuine neofascism never achieved significance because, historically, there had been an inoculation effect, and, secondly, because of the enormous change in circumstances, the unique crystallization of events in the 1920s and 30s being something that cannot be repeated. There was a countercultural rightist lifestyle among small minorities ('skinheads'), there was naturally and inevitably growing hostility to uncontrolled immigration by inassimilable and potentially subversive groups, and there was growing antisemitism on both left and right, but none of this amounted to the revival of generic fascism. Any obsessive search for the latter seemed likely to end in confusion and conflation.

The final section of the book, nearly a hundred pages devoted to 'Postfascism,' was probably the most original. It did what historians have normally not been willing to do, moving beyond recent history into future projections that investigated the new kinds of authoritarianism and political violence at the end of the twentieth century. These new forces may have little connection with generic fascism, stemming not from a direct neofascism but from analog movements. Laqueur found the most likely future for new forms of violent, authoritarian politics, at least partially akin to fascism, in what he termed 'clerical fascism.' In this connection he introduced the term 'fundamentalism,' which he claimed has 'similarities' to fascism, but then adduced as only evidence the Ku Klux Klan, which was a pressure group and not a political movement, and never gave rise to any fascism. The term itself is technical, and may pertain to certain kinds of believers in any religion or ideology, most of whom are apolitical. Laqueur quickly corrected himself, accurately observing that:

> fundamentalism per se cannot be equated with fascism. In many cases it is primarily backward looking and conservative. In some cases fundamentalism is mainly cultural, and in others it is defensive—the reaction of a minority confronting a lay majority or another majority religion.

He was on firmer ground in pointing out that the term *clericofascisti* was coined in Rome and northern Italy in 1922 by small numbers of Catholics who sought 'a synthesis of Catholicism and fascism.' This current continued after the establishment of the new regime and was not killed even by the official modus vivendi between the Catholic Church and the regime in 1929, but continued as a very minor opinion down to 1943.[28] The term would also be applied to other right authoritarian Catholic groups in diverse parts of Europe, some more, some less fascistic, and some not fascistic at all.

What Laqueur was really interested in was the convergence of religion and radical authoritarian politics beyond the Western world, found in various forms in the Middle East, Africa and Asia (and possibly in Eastern Europe). Early on, Laqueur was much more sensitive to this than most Europeanists, because his work embraced the Middle East as well, and also because, as one of the world's preeminent historians of terrorism, he had always dealt in detail with non-Western terrorism. Predominantly, such an inquiry must focus on violent and terrorist Jihadism among Muslims.[29] His observation that as a trans-national movement (or movements) Jihadism is 'the only major force in the world' fomenting violent and transformative expansionism was even more the case two decades later.

He began by isolating the features that violent Jihadism shares with fascism, which include its anti-Western, anti-Enlightenment character; its renunciation of the values of liberal society and of human rights; and its emphasis on the collective rather than the individual; its elite leadership and dictatorial government; its widespread use of propaganda and terror; its all-embracing and aggressive character; and its fanaticism and missionary zeal.

This list would require refinement and qualification, since most of it would apply to communism and to a number of other ideologies, some of them even modernist. About all it tells us is that Jihadism is another violent and despotic form of revolutionism, even if in key respects much more anti-modernist than the standard Western revolutionary movements.

Laqueur rejected the term 'Islamic fascism' because there are also fundamental differences between Jihadism and fascism. The latter is fundamentally nationalist and Jihadism tends to be trans-national. Fascism sought to make use of religion instrumentally whereas Jihadism is a direct form of religiosity, however extreme and inhumane. There is a qualitative difference in the opposition to modernity. Twenty-first century Jihadism strives to be fully reactionary in a utopian manner and might be more usefully compared with violent radical traditionalists in other cultures. Laqueur also pointed out that, unlike fascists, Jihadis, in their extreme puritanism, do not appreciate the need to entertain the masses. Even the approach

28 D. Aramini, 'The Myth of 'Christian Rome' and the Institute of Roman Studies: An Attempted Synthesis of Fascism and Catholicism,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50, 2 (April 2015), 215–33.
29 The terms Laqueur uses somewhat confusingly are 'Islamic radicalism' and 'political Islam' or simply 'Islamism,' but there are several types of these latter, some non-violent, so that I have substituted the more precise term 'violent Jihadism.'

to violence is different because Jihadis, however sadistic and murderous in practice, do not normatize violence for its own sake in the same way as many fascists.

Yet, 'if radicalization, for whatever reason, should continue in the Islamic world, the fascist trend will become stronger.'

Some hold that both fascism and Jihadism are political religions, but Laqueur contended that 'Islamism is not a religion but an ideology based on religious elements who see as their main function a revolt against the West and modernity.' This might be compared with Emilio Gentile's formulation nearly a decade later that Jihadism is not a political religion but the radical politicization of a real religion. In somewhat similar fashion, Laqueur would later write that 'there could be no lasting understanding between fascism and religion because both were based on exclusive and holistic *Weltanschauungen* staking claim to the whole human being in all respects.'[30]

Yet Laqueur concluded in 1996 that 'Islamic radicalism resembles Fascist Italy... rather than Nazi Germany... Its ultimate fate thus must be that of Mussolini's Italy...,' a somewhat puzzling conclusion. One might think that the fate of the Jihadis would be more similar to that of the Nazis, as they continually add to their roster of foes and, unlike Italian Fascists, seek an absolute apocalypse.

He then pointed out, more convincingly, that the regime which came closest to a kind of neofascism in the 1990s was Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist dictatorship in Iraq – secularist, instrumental in its use of religion, ultra-nationalist, a one-party regime that was totalitarian in its structures (though retaining private property), highly militaristic and aggressive, militantly anti-Jewish and devoted to the cult of personality. At the end of the twentieth century, that was certainly the nearest example that might be found.

The final section concluded with a survey of the relationship between religion and nationalism and the radical right in Russia and Eastern Europe. Ultimately, the pickings turned out to be slim, and at one point Laqueur concluded that communism,

> stripped of its atheist elements and nationalist rather than international,... could again be a serious contender in the struggle for power in various countries. Such Communism reborn would be similar, however, in many respects to a revived fascism or to radical religion.

Here it may be objected that Vladimir Putin's Russia might be the best example, yet that comparison reveals many shortcomings. Putin was not brought to power by a political movement but was simply appointed autocratically, his state party more

30 See http://blog.oup.com/oubpkug/2006/10/the_use_of_the_.html. In this blog Laqueur slightly redefines the 'striking parallels' between Jihadism and fascism in terms of 'the populism, the anti-Westernism, the anti-liberalism, the anti-Semitism, its aggressive, expansive, anti-humanist character, the interpretation of Islam as both a religion and a totalitarian political-social order which provides answer to all problems of the contemporary world.' Yet he still concluded that to define Jihadism as '"archaic fascism" is a contradiction in terms.'

resembles that of military dictators than a mass-based, ideologically revolutionary fascist movement, and his regime, however autocratic, is not totalitarian, and its stance in ideology, religion and morality is that of authoritarian Russian traditionalism rather than of any radical new creed. In general, the persistent search for a viable neofascism has spilled much ink over more than half a century without registering a single genuine success.

Though ever resistant to any precise attempt to define or reach a broad comparative taxonomy either of fascisms or non-fascisms, Laqueur had little patience with proponents of pan-totalitarianism or the convergence of fascism and communism, insisting that the former was not overly influenced by the latter or even dependent on opposition to it. Fascism must still be seen in historical perspective as a distinct genus, but characteristics of all different kinds of radical groups overlap, and he was skeptical that the exact form of historical fascism could ever rise to significant power again. When he concluded that 'the fascist label will have to be replaced by one or several others at some future date, ... until they are provided, it is preferable to stick to the old,' he seems to imply that this might only be a benchmark for purposes of comparison or contrast.

This unusually wide-ranging book was published in the same era as Francis Fukuyama's notorious *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), but the perspective of Laqueur was almost exactly the opposite. The historian can only study recent past phenomena and trends, with the apprehension that violent authoritarian movements, whatever their exact form, may have a flourishing future.