Portraying Fascism as a Colonial Understanding of Europe

How Continuities of Imperial Expansion Shaped Fascist Ideology and Practices

MA-thesis in History

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Abstract

Within the context of the scholarly debates over fascism, this thesis explores continuities between the colonial and fascist periods in European history. There is much confusion among scholars about how to define fascism: whether it should be considered a comprehensive ideology or merely a system of rule. What most agree on, however, is fascism’s animosity towards democracy and plurality. This is often conceptualized as a rejection of the pillars of Western civilization built on the ideas stemming from the Enlightenment and liberalism. Yet, such a view obscures the fact that these “pillars” are embedded in European colonialism. Thus, as a European ideology, fascism cannot be easily divorced from other ideological traditions, such as liberalism, which were important for the perpetuation of colonialism and imperialism. While historical fascism is often seen as being alien because of its indescribable crimes against humanity, it was not only novel also but familiar to its contemporaries. It acted on a continuity of a colonial understanding, not only of the world but of Europe as well.

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first introduces the theoretical framework by exploring the concepts of continuity and periodization and their use in historical representations and narratives. The second analyzes the diverse scholarly interpretations of fascism and shows how reevaluations of historical periodizations have influenced new critical understandings of fascism. The third develops the argument about the structural relationship between colonialism and fascism with references to recent historical scholarship. From a broader perspective, the aim here is to do two things: first, to demonstrate how changes in historical narratives and interpretations coincide with social change, challenging master narratives; second, to argue that a critical reevaluation of periodization leads not only to an opening of the historical narrative but also to an alternative understanding of fascism.
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Introduction

Yes, it would be worthwhile to study clinically, in detail, the steps taken by Hitler and Hitlerism and to reveal to the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that without his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler inhabits him, that Hitler is his demon, that if he rails against him, he is being inconsistent and that, at bottom, what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not crime in itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa.

(Aimé Césaire)\(^1\)

It should be possible for us to control this region to the East with two hundred and fifty thousand men plus a cadre of good administrators. Let's learn from the English, who, with two hundred and fifty thousand men in all, including fifty thousand soldiers, govern four hundred million Indians. This space in Russia must always be dominated by Germans. Nothing would be a worse mistake on our part than to seek to educate the masses there. It is to our interest that the people should know just enough to recognize the signs on the roads. At present they can't read, and they ought to stay like that. But they must be allowed to live decently, of course, and that's also to our interest. We'll take the southern part of the Ukraine, especially the Crimea, and make it an exclusively German colony. There'll be no harm in pushing out the population that's there now.

(Adolf Hitler)\(^2\)

In 1952, the Martiniquan anti-colonialist intellectual and politician, Aimé Césaire was the first to argue that fascism was a form of colonialism brought home to Europe to roost. At the same time, the European political climate was characterized by “forgetting.” There was no interest in dwelling on a problematic past that would contradict the founding myths of the new political regimes. Questions about the complicity of traditional elites in bringing fascists to power, about popular support for fascist regimes, or about extensive collaboration in occupied territories, were dutifully ignored. It was considered more important to prevent segments of political elites from being seen as the abettors to fascist crimes. Instances of resistance against Nazi occupation in Western Europe were exaggerated to create the image of unified nations fighting

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1 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, Translated by Joan Pinkham (New York 1972), p.3.
fascist tyranny and standing up to European values. Two of the remaining colonial powers, Britain and France, used the defeat of fascism to embark on violent campaigns against anti-colonial movements in a desperate attempt to hold on to their last colonial possessions. Aimé Césaire’s argument that fascism was something very European in its brutality and connections to colonialism rhymed badly with those Europeans who wanted to “unremember” and to move on. Indeed, Adolf Hitler’s own wish to learn from the British colonial empire was in direct contradiction to the postwar interpretation of fascism in Western Europe. It would seem that something larger was at play here, that a European history of colonialism had shaped the imagination of the biggest evil the continent had seen.

In this thesis, I argue that colonialism and imperialism informed fascism, in significant ways, both in terms of ideology and as a system of rule. To assess continuity between colonialism and fascism, one needs to pay attention to the nature of affinities. Are they to be found in colonial practices of certain nations, or colonialism as a global system with its many, often contradictory, practices? If so, how does such an interpretation affect the historiography of fascism? Fascism is a truly European ideology that cannot be easily divorced from other ideological traditions, such as liberalism, which were important for the perpetuation of colonialism and imperialism. While fascism is often seen as being alien because of its indescribable crimes against humanity, it did not only represent novelty to its contemporaries. It also signified familiarity, acting on a continuity of European colonial understanding.

Although the thesis draws inspiration from anti-colonial thinkers and concepts of continuity, it is first and foremost a historical study. The main emphasis is on exploring the historiography of fascism, in general, and historical studies that claim continuity between colonialism and fascism, in particular. Given the wide scope of the project, I will have to put some limits on the exploration of philosophical thoughts of individual thinkers. Similarly, I cannot analyze all the changes the concepts—I use—went through with time. I will, nevertheless, try to account for the complexity of the topic by approaching it from a broad perspective, while simultaneously accounting for its nuances and ambiguities. The account will be limited to ideology and system of rule in Italy and Germany. The word fascism will be used interchangeably here to describe both varieties; the term Nazism refers to specific descriptions of German fascist rule and ideology.

The thesis will substantiated through the use of the concept of continuity. Situating myself in the historiography of fascism, I seek guidance from present historical research on structural affinities between colonialism and fascism. In 1962, economic historian Alexander Gerschenkron pioneered the historical study of continuity as a concept. He was keen to point
out that continuity was not something that waited to be discovered in the source material. Rather, through a methodological framework continuity could be posed as a series of questions to be answered in historical research. In turn, the case for continuity had to be made through such research.\(^3\) Closely related to this interpretation was the issue of constructing historical time or more specifically historical periodization. Historian Ludmilla Jordanova argues that periodization risks naturalizing certain assumptions in historical understanding. To achieve breakthroughs in historical scholarship, previous periodizations often have to be reevaluated.\(^4\) This is especially true when it comes to the history of Nazism. In the 1960s, historian Fritz Fischer broke with the traditional periodization of German history to put forward a new understanding as to how Nazi foreign policy had continuities stretching back to the Kaiserreich. His intervention challenged conservative and traditional historians who saw the Nazi regime as a break from a glorious past. At the center of Fischer’s inquiry was to question an accepted periodization, thereby also convincingly showing a continuity of foreign policy goals between the two regimes.\(^5\) Historians like Fischer became part of a historical tradition that later became associated with the German Sonderweg or special path. Its leading proponent, Hans-Ulrich Wehler argued that the rise of Nazism had to be understood by the particular historical trajectory Germany took during the 19th century. According to this argument, the powerful position of a feudal elite in agriculture and industry and the absence of a liberal bourgeoisie meant that Germany was more receptive to an anti-democratic authoritarian future. Germany diverged from the “normal path” of liberalism and democracy, which Britain, France, and the United States had embarked on. It was not until with the Federal Republic in the post-World War II period that Germany reclaimed its “normality.”

This narrative was questioned on different levels by different scholars. On one issue there was little change between the two Sonderweg varieties: the narrative was Euro-centric and largely disregarded the long and problematic history of colonialism. Political theorist and philosopher Hannah Arendt problematized the idea of Western exceptionalism by enquiring in what ways colonialism was instrumental in shaping future totalitarian regimes and racial hatred. These ideas were, however, often overlooked by scholars dealing with her theories on totalitarianism.\(^6\) Together with anti-colonial philosophers, Arendt introduced new ideas on how

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the “normal” European historical trajectory might have created a groundwork for a establishing a colonial continuity with fascism. Thus, the issue of continuity came back into play. However, in these analyses, there was a tendency to marginalize fascist ideology and how it managed to garner mass support. Instead, fascism was explained by its social character. The rise of fascism became an indicator of lost opportunities for democratization or modernization. Another way was to focus on how traditional elites colluded to get fascists into power. From such perspectives, few scholars viewed fascism as a serious ideology. This changed with several ideological and cultural historians from the 1960s leading up to today. For them, the question of how to define fascism was not about its social character or its system of rule, but rather about its ideas or about how fascists envisioned their society in their ideological works. Historians, such as Zeev Sternhell and Roger Griffin, traced fascism’s roots back to the French and Italian national syndicalists. Generic definitions or ideal types were constructed to answer the persisting confusion of what really constituted fascism. Radical aspects of fascist ideology were emphasized to distance it as a system of rule from authoritarian conservative or military regimes. The anti-democratic origins of fascism were situated both on the Left and Right, but mostly to the Left due to the emphasis on radical and populist ideas.

The main opposition to fascism was often found in the Enlightenment tradition and liberal democracy. These ideological strands were often idolized as the most constant force against fascism. Thus fascism’s relation to the longer historical tradition of colonialism, and liberalism’s role in it was sidelined. In recent years, several scholars have revisited long-term historical perspectives and analyzed, specifically, how the history of colonialism may have influenced the development of fascism. Historian Jürgen Zimmerer argues that German colonial knowledge and practices constituted continuities that proved important during the Nazi era. Historian Patrick Bernhard takes a different approach, arguing that the continuity between colonialism and fascism mainly manifested itself in the admiration that Nazi officials had for the modern Italian fascist colonies in Africa. Thus, the question of how continuity between colonialism and fascism should be conceptualized remains open. Should it be seen as specific colonial practices of certain nations that were particularly murderous, for example the German genocide of the Herero and Nama? Or is it more fruitful to look at colonialism as a global

system that had many different and often contradictory practices? I argue here while similarities in terms of acts and events can be illustrative, continuity is best explored as a structural phenomenon. It is a question of how knowledge and practice were transmitted and at what level, they changed through this the process. Ishay Landa has criticized ideological historians of fascism for adopting a one-dimensional and teleological understanding of liberalism, which places it in total opposition to fascism. In contrast, he stresses that within liberalism, there was an anti-democratic tradition, which was not at all at odds with some of the basic assumptions of fascism. For example, fascism was seen by economic elites as safeguarding the status quo. This does not mean that fascism was liberal, but, rather, that liberalism had important internal divisions that influenced fascism in complex ways. This interpretation plays an important part in the continuity thesis, which underpins the argument advanced here.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, historical concepts of time, periodization and continuity will be explored. Historians usually deal with change, often symbolized as events that cordon off historical time into distinguishable chapters, as ruptures in time that bring forth something new. However, change also needs to be measured against stability. In this way, questions can be asked about to what degree a phenomenon is entirely novel or whether there is a continuity with the past that must be accounted for. To answer such questions, the chapter seeks to look at the walls dividing historical periods to assess the level of change. What role do these walls, or this periodization, have in shaping historical knowledge? How should continuity be conceptualized to make it perceivable in historical research? Is it only a matter of a dichotomous relationship between change and stability?

In the second chapter the richness, diversity and contradictions of historical interpretations of fascism will be examined. To assess the influence of colonial continuities, one needs to situate the topic in the chaos emanating from the plurality of scholarly traditions on fascism. Thus, the many and monumental historiographical disputes over fascism have to be engaged with. What role did the concept of continuity play in the origins of fascism? How has the reevaluation of periodizations changed historical research perspectives? Indeed, within this enormous mass of research to what extent was fascism considered either abnormal or amorphous? Within this historiographical context, the purpose is to do two things: first, to show how changes in historical narratives and interpretations coincide with social change, challenging master narratives; second, to argue that a critical reevaluation of periodization

10 Ishay Landa, The Apprentice’s Sorcerer Liberal Tradition and Fascism (Leiden 2010).
leads not only to an opening of the narrative but also to an alternative understanding of fascism and to a new history.

In the third and last chapter, the issue of continuity between colonialism and fascism will be put to the test. I will limit myself to the fascist movements and regimes of Germany and Italy. Their brief history as colonial empires will be explored as well as their impact on the rise of fascist movements. Did fascism explicitly view itself as a continuation of colonialism? Germany and Italy were late in becoming unified national states in Europe. How did this fact affect nationalism in both countries, and what if any where the connections to the rest of Europe and colonialism in this process? What forces were instrumental in propagating colonialism in Germany and Italy? And how did the desire for colonies and territorial expansion shape nationalism and later fascism? To what degree can one argue that colonial practices and ideology informed fascist practice and ideology? What were the continuities? While many scholars have recognized fascism’s amorphous character in appropriating socialism, nationalism, syndicalism and conservatism, few have been willing to explore its linkages to liberalism. Instead of privileging liberalism as an a-historical ideology, I will analyze its role in shaping phenomena, such as imperialism, colonialism, nationalism and racism. The aim is to examine, critically, the claim that anti-liberalism represents one of fascism’s core functions. In short, there is a need to ask to what degree fascism was anti-liberal, and what it constituted.

At the outbreak of World War I, imperial powers either controlled or occupied 90 percent of the surface territory of the planet. Alone, the British Empire governed a fifth of the world and 25 percent of all inhabitants. Thus, fascism as an ideology and movement originated in a time period when European colonialism ruled supreme over the world. It is true that fascism proved to be most successful in Germany, which had a history of a failed colonial empire, and Italy, which only a limited imperial experience. Nonetheless, colonialism was a global system that reorganized the world according to European proscriptions and specifications. It was not a one-dimensional process. While Europe changed the world, colonialism changed Europe as well. Modern racism, imperialism, and the idea of white supremacy not only had detrimental consequences for colonized peoples but also for the European continent. In this sense, much of what is currently considered stereotypical fascism reflected widely-held values at the time. Fascism shared a political language with the political environment in which it operated. Yet, today fascism is often seen as the antithesis of Western

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thought of liberalism, even though many liberal thinkers subscribed to similar ideas of white supremacy. What is more, many of the earliest campaigners for colonial expansion were liberal thinkers.

After World War II, the use of new concepts, such as genocide, and other methods to study mass atrocities seriously undermined the tradition of excluding such extreme violence in historical narratives. The writing of history changed radically when the survivors of the fascist extermination war refused to forget. The Nuremberg Trials thoroughly exposed the details and the extent of the crimes perpetrated against perceived racial and political enemies of Nazi Germany. The exposure of the brutality and carnage of fascism meant that it would serve as the ultimate standard of evil. The widespread acceptance of this understanding forced the successors of the fascist political tradition to reinvent themselves by distancing themselves from their problematic past. As a result, even fascists would not call themselves fascists anymore. A Swedish Nazi leader pointedly stated that the only way for fascist ideas to survive was for the movement to abolish its name, symbols, and appearance. Another byproduct of this ideological stigmatization was the portrayal of Nazism and fascism as ruptures in the progression of European time. They were portrayed as singularities suddenly arriving on the European continent and opening up the gates of hell where ordinary human behavior and Western civilization no longer applied. The talk was of “freakish tyrannies” or inheritors of disruptive revolutionary movements stemming from the French or Russian revolutions. Thus, Nazism and fascism were defined by the opposition to European universal values, stability, and tradition. The Nazi genocidal war ensured that all future political threats where put within the framework of an anti-fascist ideology. A different vulgar Marxist interpretation saw fascists only as the stooges of capitalism, ignoring fascism’s racist politics and its ability to mobilize mass support. Such a reductionist view suggested that social groups that did not oppose capitalism could be seen as objectively fascist. This enlarged the meaning of fascism to include everything from American imperialism to military dictatorships. The reductionist and singular interpretations of fascism, which were put forward in the postwar period, failed to take into account historical continuities and disruptions. Hence, it should not have come as a surprise when anti-colonial writers challenged such hegemonic European ideas of modernity and exceptionalism in the 1950s and 1960s. Aimé Césaire, like many other anti-
colonial thinkers, saw similarities in the accounts describing carnage and atrocities under Nazism and fascism with the lived experience of many colonized peoples. More importantly, he argued that the politics of race, which provided the ideological ammunition for such mass crimes, had its origins in colonialism. Thus, fascism was not only part of the tradition of colonialism but was an extension of it. For Césaire, the neo-colonialism of his time contained unambiguous fascist ideas and practices. Such an historical perspective stood in clear contrast to the idea of genocidal fascism as an exclusively German phenomenon. Instead, it viewed fascism as a continuum, stressing its colonial origins and spotting traces of it in the period after World War II. It was a way of defining fascism as something bigger than itself—that fascism, in this sense, eclipsed fascism. This approach underpins the argument of the thesis, which seeks to shed a critical light on different periodization(s) of the history of fascism. It seeks to transcend, to some extent, the view of constant ruptures in time that divide our historical understanding into neatly presentable chapters.

A key feature of the present political condition is the rise of the extreme Right and nationalism in Europe and the United States. In many countries, parties and movements that are openly hostile to people of non-European descent are gaining popularity. Often they have problematic connections with historical fascism, and in a few cases, they have openly embraced its ideology. When this fact has been drawn to public attention, the reaction of these parties and movements has varied from either distancing themselves from fascism or attempting to rehabilitate it.\(^{14}\) Either way, the Radical Right is routinely labeled fascist by their opponents often irrespective of its ties with historical fascism. All this complicates the understanding and usage of fascism to describe political parties and movements. Historians are often asked in the media to make qualified judgements about whether specific movements, parties or individuals are fascist, even though these political groups themselves choose not to identify as such.\(^ {15}\) The elusiveness of fascism as a concept is not only a matter of present-day politics but an ongoing affair in the scholarship of history as well. It has forced some historians to compile lists of criteria that need to be fulfilled to qualify as fascist. This approach can be flawed because the lists are conditioned by their historical specificity. How can they be used to judge contemporary political movements and parties without prejudging the historical context that informed their


\(^ {15}\) One example of this was when Robert O. Paxton was interviewed on whether Donald Trump could be considered fascist, “Father of Fascism Studies: Donald Trump Shows Alarming Willingness to Use Fascist Terms & Styles”, *Democracy Now* 15 March 2016, https://www.democracynow.org/2016/3/15/father_of_fascism_studies_donald_trump (Accessed 28 April 2017).
creation in the first place? Another problem is the tendency to overuse the term fascism as a general insult or as an explanation for specific authoritarian or racist inclinations.

Despite this conceptual ambiguity, there are strong arguments for establishing connections and similarities to an older fascist discourse among parties and movements that are not openly fascist. These political organizations do not necessarily have to originate in fascism but rather in something that transcends the current historical periodization of fascism. This raises the question of whether such similarities indicate a shared ideology that cannot be limited to specific movements and parties. One can, for example, argue that fascism shares certain ideological traits, including nationalism, racism, anti-feminism and anti-Communism, with other political ideologies. These similarities are, to be sure, easy to find when ideology is explored in pure philosophical terms. But when such concepts are explored and situated historically, they become elusive due to the passage of time and to changes in historical interpretations. The ideas of continuity and discontinuity help understanding historical nuances and differences by inviting comparisons and by discouraging equivalences. If one acknowledges that not all movements that are racist and authoritarian are fascist, then it becomes feasible to explore their possible connections to, and similarities with, fascism. Much the same way, fascism can be analyzed in terms of its historical affinities with predating ideologies, that is, before it became a modern and established ideology.
Chapter 1 – Time, Periodization and Continuity

We are separated in time from our predecessors. One consequence of this separation is that history is knowledge by means of "traces" and the past is accessible to us only through marks, inscriptions, documents, archives, and the monuments of all kinds that play the role of "facts" for historical inquiry (Paul Ricoeur)\(^{16}\)

The task of a dialectical philosophy of history, then is to keep both these conceptions in mind – that of discontinuity and that of universal history. This means that we should not think in alternatives: we should not say history is continuity or history is discontinuity. We must say instead that history is highly continues in discontinuity, in what I once referred to as the permanence of catastrophe. (Theodore W. Adorno)\(^{17}\)

A key question about historical continuity is whether it transcends all periodizations or whether it is dependent on them. Another problem is whether the concept should be defined in terms of a singular stream or multiple streams. The French philosopher and historical theorist Paul Ricoeur immerses himself into theses existential dilemmas of history. He divides the conception of time into many categories. Two of them are cyclical and linear time. Cyclical time is astronomically measured and contains perennial cycles of days, weeks, months and years. Linear time is added upon cyclical time, where many years are added up to conceptualize centuries and millenniums. Thus, cyclical time has cosmic proportions, while linear time has more of a historical character. Chronology is yet another conception of time that is neither cyclical nor linear but rather amorphous in character. It ignores the separation between history and nature, as in it can be both a chronology of cosmic as well as historic proportions. Events and episodes in a chronology are defined through their relation to other episodes or events. This essentially gives it an amorphous character; it is what relates the time/chronos to the narrator’s position. Historical work makes the processes even more complex by superimposing “ages” and periodization onto chronology, thereby constructing stages or periods for specific historical purposes. The process, however, does not allow for a conception of continuity of time, or even a “direction.” Ricouer asks himself whether there can be history without some form of periodization or whether historical time is achieved at


the expense of severe self-limitation through periodization and ages.\textsuperscript{18} Such question do not, however, prevent him from conceptualizing historical knowledge as traces, whether as a cerebral, an affective or a documentary ones.\textsuperscript{19} Ricouer creates an understanding of a connectedness of temporal fields under the overall temporality of history; the different temporal fields are different towards one’s own, but they are also similar or analogous. Although human beings are separated in time from their predecessors, this separation also entails a trail of traces that are connected. Ricouer’s argument can be used to illuminate a chain of events that can substantiate a theory of continuation. Temporality in history should be seen as in relation to the temporality of contemporaries, predecessors and successors. It is the role of historians to create this form of connectedness.\textsuperscript{20} In the words of Ricoeur:

(a) the human agents who start events of which they are the authors; (b) these agents’ interpretations of their actions in terms of motives; (c) the influence of one agent on another who takes the meaning of the first agent’s action into account; (d) the regulation of projects by norms and of norms by institutions; (e) the founding of such institutions and their sediment; and (f) the continuation, breaking off, or renewal of contents so transmitted. In short, historical transmission needs to be thought of differently than as succession as it is conceived by the natural sciences, and historical method must accordingly differ from the method used in these sciences.\textsuperscript{21}

This shows the core dilemmas facing historical enterprise: the understanding of time and its periodization by historians, as well as the creation of historical knowledge through the conceptualization of traces and through continuities within and outside constructed periods.

In her book \textit{History in Practice}, Ludmilla Jordanova emphasizes that periodization is one of the most vital process the historian undertakes, for it involves, the measuring of time and name given to a multiplicity of constructed periods. It also serves an equal number of diverse purposes, with some being directly partisan/biased and others more subtle in their subjectivity. In this way, she does not want to circumvent the totality of the problematic process, but point to the conflicted nature of such processes in its relation to the past, present and future. Jordanova argues that the historian’s concern with the idea of time is of a more practical nature than that of, say, philosophers, physicists and astronomers, for he/she is

\textsuperscript{19} Ricouer, \textit{Memory, History, Forgetting}, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{20} Ricouer, “History and Hermeneutics”, 687–688, 691.
\textsuperscript{21} Ricouer, “History and Hermeneutics”, 688.
engaging with the effect of the passing of time on societies. The process of periodization suggests that the usage and inheritance of already existing periodization brings with it a conceptual, discursive and epistemological baggage. This baggage is not only of an historical nature but is also geared towards the present, bringing with it assumptions and interpretations of both.22

According to Jordanova, the shaping of assumptions on how the past should be divided and interpreted as an inheritance can be an unfortunate invisible constraint on the historian, for it naturalizes certain views of history. Furthermore, she claims that it hinders “fresh thinking,” making it difficult to adopt new perspectives. In a way, one could say that the narrative is closed off: that it limits what is possible to think and ask. Therefore, a revaluation of existing periodizations needs to be undertaken to open up, again, the narrative for critical research. It is, however, important to remember that not only historians participate in discursive production and reproduction of periodization; it is a socio-political process, in which agents from institutions and civil society are involved. An historical understanding shaped by a public history, where certain events are memorialized and given primacy, makes it hard for historians to break through and to create a new and critical narrative, which will gain acceptance. Jordanova stresses that usages of dates, chronology and periodization is not value-free information; projecting patterns onto the past makes it meaningful.23 She illustrates this perfectly with the periodization in connection to al-Qaida’s attack on the United States on the 11 September 2001: It was simply named 9/11. From this follow constructions of periodization, such as post-9/11, where the event serves a punctuation in time, a rupture/discontinuity/year-zero. Also, there follows a distinct discourse with the event, such as terrorism, Islam etc. Historical contextualization is lost when the event becomes the year zero, where no understanding of what led up to the event is entailed in the periodization.24 Therefore, periodization has a tendency to make continuity unobservable, as in the case of 9/11 hiding events that preceded the attack. I would also argue that it obscures in its tendency to conceal previous instances of American imperialism and its consequences. As Jordanova makes clear, the practice of privileging events in a historic narrative is problematic for the “choice of key events is value-laden, allowing very different stories to be told.” To her, it “helps to know what lies behind their choice and how they are acting as symbols.”25

24 Jordanova, History in Practice, p. 106.
25 Jordanova, History in Practice, p. 111.
Choices of events tie not only into periodization by creating beginnings and endings, but also by symbolizing continuities and discontinuities in relation to other periods. The French Revolution of 1789 is such an example: It is understood by many as the beginning of the modern age. Yet, “modernity” is a hotly contested term in historiography and other disciplines.\textsuperscript{26} For one thing, it is an example of the scholarly tendency to frame its periodization in a past when processes of colonialism were continued, exacerbated and intensified. As Jordanova puts it:

\begin{quote}
We now recognise the complexities of “modern” and “modernity” and the manners in which our own era is implicated in their definition. One does not have to be a postmodernist to appreciate how intricate the manoeuvres around modernity are. It is vital to recognise that here we are not in the territory of research, of finding information that will clarify the matter, but of interrogating received ways of patterning, organising and imagining the past.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Terms such as “modernization” usually point towards a specific periodization. However, historians disagree over what modernization entails and when it happened. Similarly, the periodization of the Enlightenment brings with it additional problematic concepts, such as “secularization.” This word, too, is heavily contested, not least because the 18th century was also a period of religious revival.\textsuperscript{28} Despite such examples, one should be careful about the temptation to do away with periodization altogether. It is important to acknowledge that historic periodization—concepts attributed to historic periods and the ensuing historic world view— influence our current perception of the world. Nevertheless, when exploring a continuity or stability one needs to go beyond existing, neatly divided, and constructed historical periods.

In 1962, economic historian Alexander Gerschenkron made one of the first attempts to explore and clarify, methodologically, the concept of continuity. He argued against seeing it in opposition to change, for the former has often been used to illustrate the absence of the latter. Instead, Geschenkron saw both continuity and discontinuity as illustrating a certain kind of change, which could be useful to the historian in his/her work. For him, there were two main understandings of continuity.\textsuperscript{29} The first was a “stability of certain elements in an

\textsuperscript{26} Jordanova, \textit{History in Practice}, pp. 111–112.
\textsuperscript{27} Jordanova, \textit{History in Practice}, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{28} Jordanova, \textit{History in Practice}, pp. 113–117.
otherwise changing world,” where there are correlations between historical processes that are stable and changing. The second considers stability as being essential and inherent in all human history; it concerns itself not with different kinds of change but rather sees history as permanently fixed. Gerschenkron made the case that this latter understanding is close to denying the enterprise of history altogether. An understanding of history that is changeless is as destructive to historical understanding as portraying history in terms of a change in its extreme form; the other polar extreme leaves no understanding of change because it leaves no palpable relation between successive moments. As he puts it, “the historian—at the peril of losing his subject—must be interested in historical change, that is to say, in the rates of change that lie between zero and infinity.”

Political scientist Colin Wight has expressed similar worries about the tendency to privilege change at the expense of continuity. He is more comfortable about the change/continuity dichotomy. He argues that continuity is what makes change possible and tangible; it is only in relation to continuity or stability that change can be experienced. An overemphasis on change, therefore, leads to an omission of elements that do not change. Even in the most extreme examples of change, that of metamorphosis, there still remains traces of the past. Moreover, Wight stresses that changes should not be limited to their origins in agency, just as continuity should not be limited to its origins in structure. Agents might push for change but not always under the material conditions of their choosing; likewise both agential and structural conditions can be the source of change.

The historian Siegfried Weichlein also holds that change can only be measured in relation to continuity. Whereas Wight critiqued the overuse of change as a product of postmodern/post-structural theorists, Weichlein points to the reification of continuity in the older national historiography, where it was used to suggest overarching and stable identities through the ages. When this traditional nationalist narrative withered, it was replaced by ideas of “invention of tradition” (Eric Hobsbawn) and “imagined communities” (Benedict Anderson). Weichlein is undoubtedly correct in criticizing works on German history, which divide the subject into periods with fixed and stable borders. Nevertheless, periodization comes back to haunt us because of its utility. Gerschenkron argues that if one views history

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as periodicity, as cyclical connected, and to some extent, reoccurring, one has to avoid extreme periodicity. The historian needs to set limits to what he calls “the links of the causal chain,” that is, historical continuity. Criteria are needed to comprehend the causal chain as a finite historical occurrence. Thus, the historian has to demarcate occurrences or events as the beginning of the chain. Gerschenkron takes the example of the causes of World War I where the historian might want to begin with the Franco-Prussian war;\(^{35}\) he writes that: “in all cases, it will be his task to make the selection plausible in terms of the specific strength of the causal chain that is attached, link by link, to the “original” cause. He will have to show how it compare and intertwines with other chains that run in the same direction.”\(^{36}\)

I would argue that this relates to Ricoeur’s case for an understanding of different temporal fields and its connection to the overall temporality of history. It is question of how the causal chain relates to other chains. Periods needs to be chosen to illustrate discontinuity. Geschenkron takes the example of the October Revolution and the question of how far back in time one needs to go to clarify its causes. If one pursues economic or political factors there might be different chains, different currents in the causal stream that connects to the long causal chain. Continuity needs to be seen by historians as a tool and not as something that can be discovered undisturbed in the source material. To speak of continuity is to ask questions. This is not an arbitrary decision but rather a process of cognition.\(^{37}\) In Geschenkron’s words:

> It is the historian who by abstracting from differences and by concentrating on similarities establishes the continuity of events across decades or centuries filled with events that lack all pertinence to the continuity model. It is the historian who decides how far back the causal chain should be pursued and by his fiat creates its "beginning" as he creates endogenous and exogenous events. And it is the historian's own model in terms of which changes in the rate of historical change are defined.\(^{38}\)

Gerschenkron divides continuity as a historical tool into five categories: (1) constancy of direction; (2) periodicity of events; (3) endogenous change; (4) length of causal regress; and (5) stability of the rate of change. All refer to historical change and all overlap on some points. Constancy of direction is a common trait of historical narratives; it implies changes but within the same direction, processes of growth and expansion; the direction accounts for

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\(^{35}\) Gerschenkron, “On the Concept of Continuity in History”, 202–204.

\(^{36}\) Gerschenkron, “On the Concept of Continuity in History”, 204.


\(^{38}\) Gerschenkron, “On the Concept of Continuity in History”, 208.
the continuity, increase and decrease. Thus, even setbacks can be viewed as a part of continuity. This historic outlook characterizes Whig history.\textsuperscript{39}

Scholars have offered conflicting definitions of continuity. Gerschenkron was, as noted, a pioneer in laying out a general understanding of the concept. Many scholars have, however, deviated from seeing continuity not as the opposite of change but rather as a certain type of change. Also, it could be argued that continuity is hard to substantiate without restricting the links of its causal chain. Thus, some forms of periodization need to be applied. Nonetheless, both Ricoeur and Gerschenkron are quite convincing when they argue for seeing continuity as several streams or chains that constitute different types of change, whether political or economic. A critical outlook on existing periodization is required for asking questions about continuity. Thus, by exploring the existing historiography of fascism, we can expose how periodizations of such historical narratives have naturalized assumptions, and how these assumptions have hindered fresh thinking and questions about continuity.

\textsuperscript{39} Gerschenkron, “On the Concept of Continuity in History”, 200–201.
Chapter 2 – Historiographical Interpretations of Fascism

The rich and diverse interpretations of fascism have focused on issues such as its historical roots and periodization; its ideology and practice; its economic, social and geographical spread; its cultural and gender representations; and its political continuity in the present. Few historiographical controversies have been as persistent and contentious. These conflicts started as soon as Mussolini came to power in 1922 and have been carried on ever since, both inside and outside academia.\(^{40}\) Having grown out of the multitude of European nationalist narratives and aspirations, fascist movements contained many contradictions, not least because they always had to negotiate between reactionary and radical ideas and practices. Efforts to understand and interpret fascism have led to many of the same inconsistencies, with similar attempts being made to navigate them. Historian Robert O. Paxton chooses to divide the main ones into several categories:

1. fascists as *thugs in power*—and tyrants that seduced whole peoples;
2. fascists as *agents of capitalism*, doing the dirty work of political elites by suppressing the labor movement and its aspirations for emancipation;
3. fascism as a *psychology of dictatorship*, where authoritarian personalities and sexual repression played a role in creating a fascist society;
4. fascism as an example of *failed modernization and democracy*;
5. fascism as a *mass society of mob rule*, where the murderous and hateful masses willed mysticism into reality;
6. fascism as *development dictatorship*, where dictators promoted industrial growth through forced savings and a regimental workforce;
7. fascism as a *unique movement of the middle class*, where the petit bourgeoisie revolted through resentment against both socialism and capitalism;
8. fascism as *totalitarianism*, where the one-party state left no sphere of society untouched through total exercise of power;
9. fascism as a *political religion*, where the sacralization of politics set it apart from other ideologies;
10. fascism as an *ideology*, with emphasis on fascist ideologues and original texts; and
11. fascism as a *cultural phenomenon* embedded in fascist self-identifications and presentations, and transmissions.\(^{41}\)

In this chapter, I will explore the historiography of fascism and offer a history of interpretations of fascism. Using a chronological approach, I will attempt to illustrate the ever-present vastness and diversity of narratives and explanations. I will argue that the changes in narratives and interpretations coincide with social change, challenging master

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narratives. The purpose, in short, is to present a critical reevaluation of periodization and conceptualization of fascism to challenge and open up traditional narratives as a way of promoting an alternative historical view of the phenomenon.

**Theorizing Fascism in the Interwar Period**

After Mussolini’s “seizure of power,” communist intellectuals prophesized the spreading of fascist movements to other countries outside Italy. With the rapid establishment of fascist movements and parties all over Europe in the 1920s, fascism took on the function of a general phenomenon despite widespread national differences.\(^{42}\) The work of explaining and interpreting fascism in Italy came mainly from its political opponents: communists, social democrats and, to some extent, liberals. On the international level, the Communist International, Comintern, was the first to address fascism in 1922. It saw Italian fascism as part of the wider struggle of anti-fascism. Communist theorists tried to understand the murderous fascist attacks on the social movements of the working class and peasants. Thus, it should perhaps not have come as a surprise that one of the earliest interpretations of fascism saw it as a force of, “capitalism,” “big business,” “finance capital,” “the bourgeoisie,” and “state monopoly capitalism.” This theory was even used at the time to explain Mussolini’s abandonment of Marxist-socialism before organized fascism came into being. Dissident communists would later add more complex and nuanced versions to this interpretation. The “agent of capitalism” theory became the official policy of Comintern in 1924\(^ {43}\) and in 1933, it offered the definite definition of the fascist phenomenon:

1. Fascism is the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance capital. Fascism tries to secure a mass basis for monopolist capital among the petty bourgeoisie, appealing to the peasantry, artisans, office employees and civil servants who have been thrown out of their normal course of life, and particularly to the declassed elements in the big cities, also trying to penetrate into the working class.\(^ {44}\)


Prophetically, the Comintern viewed, in 1935, fascism in terms of a preparation for a new imperialist world war, resulting in increased colonial exploitation, a re-division of the world’s territories, and in an attack on the Soviet Union.\(^{45}\) Meanwhile, viewing fascism as a tool of capitalism meant that all the other political movements that were not explicitly anti-capitalist—ranging from conservatives to social democrats—were also “objectively fascist.” This led to the notorious labelling of social democrats as “social-fascists,” banalyzing any understanding of fascism and aggravating anti-fascist efforts. This Comintern outlook was only partially changed in 1935, with the popular front policy.\(^{46}\)

For other commentators on fascism, it was the middle class, not the capitalist class, who constituted both the social base and class character of fascism. In 1923, historian Luigi Salvatorelli argued that fascism should be seen as a movement of the middle class, which had been denied status by traditional national elites. It was an attempt by the middle class to establish their interests both against the working class and the capitalist class and to reshape the Italian state in their image as white collar workers, civil servants and the professionally educated. Many socialist and communist thinkers also emphasized the middle class character of fascist movement, its members and ideas. By doing so, socialists and communists, such as Giovanni Zibrodi, Clara Zetkin and Antonio Gramsci challenged Comintern’s “agent of capitalism” theory.\(^{47}\) Other leftist thinkers, such as Julius Braunthal, August Thalheimer and Otto Bauer, who doubted the interpretative value of “agent of capitalism” theory, turned to Marx and Engel’s analysis of Bonapartism, the establishment of the Second Empire under Louis-Napoleon in 1852, to explain how a political force, such as fascism might seize state power. They claimed that the fascists were not entirely dependent on the capitalist class but also not in conflict with it. In this way, they contributed to the perpetuation of the independence of the state in and of itself.\(^{48}\)

When studying the nature of the fascist state in and of itself, several left-wing theorists, such as Ernst Fraenkel and Franz Neumann, theorized in the 1940s that it had a polycratic and conflictual nature. Fraenkel argued that Nazi Germany consisted of a symbiosis and interdependence between capitalism and Nazism, with a certain amount of conflict of interest. Capitalism represented the preservation of earlier power structures and

\(^{46}\) Payne, A history of Fascism, pp. 441–444.
\(^{48}\) Payne, A history of Fascism, p. 445.
attempts of upholding traditional norms in everyday life, while German fascism strove for domination, intervention and expansion. Neumann, on the other hand, divided the Nazi state into four conflicting power blocs, the military, the bureaucracy, and the leadership over the economy. Chaotic conflict between these elements meant that the Nazi state tended to become a non-state. He was also very critical of views portraying Nazism as a consistent ideology. To him, it was incompatible with any rational political philosophy because of its opportunism and its lack of coherence. Neumann also argued that Nazism incorporated both liberal and proletarian elements in its ideology. It was a perverted liberalism by replacing it with social-Darwinism by privileging the purity of the race over the innate rights of the individual. Nazism and fascism’s perversion of Marxist phraseology and symbolism was expressed in picturing them as proletarian races surrounded by plutocratic capitalistic Jewish democracies.

Apart from structural analysis of fascism, two separate thinkers, the social democrat Hermann Heller and the fascist James Strachey Barnes introduced an ideological analysis of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s, seeing it as a mix between non-Marxist socialism and radical nationalism. Predating the Cold War totalitarianism theory, several commentators compared, in the 1920s, Italy to the Soviet Union on the grounds that Italian fascism and Soviet communism shared authoritarian traits. Such views were espoused by a variety of commentators—from liberals, such as, Mario Missiroli, Luigi Salvatorelli, Franscesco Nitti, Luigi Sturzo, and social democrats such as Otto Bauer, to conservatives, including Waldemar Gurian and Friedrich Meinecke. Totalitarianism as a concept was coined in the interwar period by Italian liberal oppositional politician Giovanni Amendola, who criticized, in an article in 1923, the fascist drive to dominate public offices. Subsequently, other opponents of the fascists used the term on a broader scale to describe Mussolini’s quest for total control. Even Mussolini himself took up the term to glorify his own political ambitions. Amendola was murdered in 1926 by the fascist black shirts.

The “seizure of power” in Italy would also spark contemporary analyses of fascism in relation to modernity. In the 1930s, critical Marxists, such as Arkadij Gurland and Alexander Schifrin, argued that since, in their view, pre-industrial economic and social structures in Italy

49 Payne, A history of Fascism, pp. 449–450.
52 Payne, A history of Fascism, p. 447.
were the most important origins of fascism, such movements were to be expected in many eastern European countries as well. Related to issues of modernity, Franz Borkenau theorized in 1933 that fascism was a “developmental dictatorship,” seeing it as having modernizing functions and goals. The sociologist Talcott Parsons also put Germany and Italy in a special category with respect to modernity. In his interpretation, the rapid industrialization of Germany and Italy led to more acute class tensions that were not resolved by compromise due to the blocking of such efforts by pre-industrial elites.

Even psychological interpretations of fascism have antecedents in the interwar period. The most famous is Wilhelm Reich’s theory that fascism grew out of sexual repression and frustration in bourgeois society. Yet, his ideas could, in no way be substantiated, when fascism failed to become a powerful force in other large bourgeois societies, and he could not show that the Germans were more sexually repressed than other people.

As shown by these diverse theories of fascism, the understanding of fascism was controversial from the start. What is more, it was by no means limited to the scholarly community. It is useful to keep this in mind to understand better current historiographical disagreements over fascism, to recognize their origins along with the political dividing lines that shaped them.

**Post-war Recriminations and Apologetics: Western Recrimination and German Guilt**

Immediately after World War II, there was a preoccupation in Western Europe with efforts to try to explain how democracy failed in Italy and Germany. Questions were asked about the weaknesses of democratic traditions before 1914 and about how the catastrophe of World War I had bred a poisonous political climate in these countries. Many studies centered on the personal dictatorships of Hitler and Mussolini, adopting a biographical narrative of the two dictators, and framing the topic in national monographic histories. Among Italian historians, fascism was seen as a bolt out of the blue, as a parenthesis in a longer period of a development of a liberal Italy with a democratic culture that had already emerged before 1914. The famous liberal philosopher historian Benedetto Croce was among those, offering

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54 Bauerkämper, “A New Consensus?”, 548–549.
55 Payne, A history of Fascism, p. 456.
57 Payne, A history of Fascism, pp. 452–453.
such an interpretation. He even went so far as to dismiss Italian fascism as not worthy much historical attention on the grounds that was only an exception in an otherwise positive national development of Italy. In contrast, historian Renzo De Felice viewed fascism as a progressive movement with its roots in the enlightenment. In contrast to Nazism, the goal of Italian fascism was to accelerate modernization, Nazism was purely regressive and anti-modern. 59

Despite these different interpretations, the “bolt out of the blue” narrative was, to a large extent, continued by De Felice and Denis Mack Smith, both of whom wrote biographical books on Mussolini where he was seen as incarnating the Italian fascist state. 60 This hindered any deeper analysis of the structures, economy, culture, polity and social base, which made Italian fascism possible. Infamously, out of the 6000 pages, De Felice wrote about Mussolini, there is not a single attempt to estimate the number of Ethiopians killed by Fascist Italy during the invasion and occupation of Ethiopia. 61 According to some historians, this master narrative of biography and accident remains largely unchallenged by other Italian scholars today. 62

A very similar tendency existed in West Germany in the immediate post-war period. Nazism was seen as an “accident” or a break from an otherwise healthy German past. Both in Italy and West Germany, this can be interpreted as attempts at rehabilitating historical periods prior to the Nazi catastrophe. It often took on an apologetic form in response to US-UK scholarly recriminations that interpreted fascism as having its origins in a greater German past. Perhaps more important was the perseverance of historical-idealism and the Rankean tradition among German historians after the fall of Nazi regime. It was a tradition that was well entrenched within the historian profession in German universities. West German historians interpreted Nazism from a traditional political historical perspective, emphasizing personalities and events. This historical approach saw events as a consequence of men’s intentions, judged cultural developments as being shaped by men’s ideas, and viewed the state as a positive force in history. To put it differently, the state trumped society and events trumped structure. In this context, 1945 was a huge shock when it became clear that the

Payne, A history of Fascism, p. 458.
60 Bosworth, The Italian Dictatorship, pp. 6–8.
Payne, A history of Fascism, p. 458.
62 Woodley, Fascism and Political Theory, p. 3.
German state had not only been destroyed but exposed as an atrocious entity. To rationalize the catastrophe within the bounds of the then prevailing master narrative, German fascism was either interpreted as a political “accident” (“Betriebsunfall”) or as a parasitic sub-growth, originating in the French Revolution, which existed parallel to a healthy German state. Two of the greatest proponents of this thesis were historians, Friedrich Meinecke and Gerhard Ritter. They had some minor run-ins with the Nazi elite, with the latter being arrested in 1944, but they supported some of the regime’s policies. 63 The historical profession in the universities continued a long historical tradition of a nationalist and conservative outlook. In the 1920s, Friedrich Meinecke was more liberal but only a lukewarm supporter of the Weimar Republic (“Vernuftsrepublikaner”), who harbored anti-Semitic views. Gerhard Ritter remained staunchly conservative in his opposition towards the Weimar Republic. Although he, like many other conservatives, would have preferred an authoritarian regime, based on the notion of a strong state, to Nazism, he wrote, in 1936, about the “Third Reich” as a continuation of the proudest traditions of Prussian history. 64 In general, there were few conflicts between the traditional historians and the Nazi leadership. The historical profession’s conservative base meant that historians were neither particularly positive nor negative in their attitudes towards the Nazis. Yet, the conservative and primordial (Volk) nationalism of the historians arguably facilitated the Nazi project.65

After the war, Meinecke and Ritter traced Nazism to the negative forces unleashed by the French Revolution. At the same time, it was, above all, the disastrous World War I that brought forth a collapse of morality and religion, corruption and materialism all over Europe. By blaming Nazism on the war, they placed it within a European context rather than a specific German one. Meinecke argued that the fascist regime represented a degeneration of the German human spirit, while Ritter saw Hitler as a madman, a demon, which drove Germany into World War II. This narrative would remain relatively unchallenged in West Germany up until the 1960s. Nevertheless, it should also be mentioned that on the other side of the spectrum were American scholars, such as Rohan Butler, William Montgomery, and William Shirer, who made vulgar essentialist claims of a continuation thesis, with Nazism being seen as a culmination of hundreds of years of German political and cultural deviations

64 Fritz Fischer, From Kaiserreich to Third Reich: Elements of Continuity in German History, 1871-1945 (London 1986), pp. 88–89.
and mistakes, which could be traced all the way back to Martin Luther himself.\textsuperscript{66} This kind of scholarship, working in tandem with a more nuanced and less essentialist modernization approaches, paved the way for what would later become the \textit{Sonderweg} thesis. It stressed the special political, social and economic paths taken by Germany and Italy, which led to underdevelopment and ended in Nazism and fascism. Here were two extreme initial interpretations of Nazism: one was apologetic, which attempted to exonerate Germany from the responsibility of Nazism by interpreting the 12-year Hitler rule as a short period in a long German history; the other was purely recriminatory, staking out an outsized continuation theory, which in its extreme crudeness bordered on Germanophobia.

The early post-war historical interpretations of Nazism and fascism were not only influenced by the temporal proximity to World War II but also by the ensuing East-West conflict. The Cold War added another level of politicization and instrumentalization of history by the respective camps. West Germany came under immediate international scrutiny over its Nazi past after World War II, which would affect its future attempts to “come to terms with the past.” Other states, such as Italy and France, had more leeway and were quick to construct narratives of resistance towards fascism, no matter how marginal the resistance movement was in these countries. These memories of resistance meant forgetting far more important accounts of collaboration and complicity in atrocities. When the newly liberated Western states quickly set up capitalist democracies, it did not only result in the repression of communism but also conflicted with the prosecutions of war criminals. West Germany was contrasted to its eastern counterpart in this aspect. East Germany created a founding state myth of anti-fascism. Since the founders of the nation had from the very beginning resisted fascism they exonerated its population from guilt by glorifying its leadership. But initially East Germany was silent about its Nazi past just as its western neighbor: Its more authoritarian political system, with a more dominant state ideology, meant that future inquiries into its past were compromised. The resistance narrative of communist anti-fascism in East Germany would eventually be contrasted to the even more problematic resistance myth of the Wehrmacht in West Germany. It portrayed officers’ assassination attempts against, Hitler during World War II as a noble resistance effort by the military designed to reinstate democracy. This myth was amplified by the claim that the Wehrmacht had only performed honorable military service. It ignored the anti-democratic conservative ideologies of the plotters against Hitler and their own participation in mass crimes, atrocities, and the

\textsuperscript{66} Kershaw, \textit{The Nazi Dictatorship}, pp. 1–8.
Holocaust. Furthermore, this myth was upheld by a West German judiciary made up largely of the same members as that of the Nazi period. Thus, when revelations of war crimes and direct participation in the Holocaust by the Wehrmacht surfaced, West German courts acquitted a staggering 88 percent of former Wehrmacht personnel charged with war crimes. In comparison only 17 percent were acquitted in the prosecutions that happened in East Germany.\(^{67}\)

It was not only in the West German judicial system where former Nazis continued to hold important positions; several positions of significance both in the political establishment and in the economy were held by people that had a dubious Nazi past. This problematic and partial continuity between Nazi Germany and West Germany played into the hands of East German scholars who continued to subscribe to the old master narrative of the Comintern. By associating fascism with capitalism, it was seen as a potential future danger in all Western capitalist and imperialist systems, not least West Germany.\(^{68}\) East Germany had emerged out of the war with no class of professional socialist historians. The new group of historians that eventually emerged in the 1960s had been thoroughly schooled in Marxist-Leninism and the founding narrative of anti-fascism. Needless to say, they did not enjoy academic freedom and had to tow the political line. Yet, even if they were never able to work freely, East-West intellectual exchanges in the 1970s brought forth more critical, self-reflective dimensions in East German practice of history.\(^{69}\)

**Totalitarianism, and Communist-Fascist Analogies**

West Germany had its own ideological framework of anti-totalitarianism, which became the dominant paradigm in historical research in the 1950s. It was perhaps not as explicitly stated as that of Marxist Leninism in East Germany, but it was still very apparent. It was established in the West German constitution, whose explicit aim was to prevent the establishment of totalitarian systems, like the one that existed in Nazi Germany or even those of the Soviet Union and East Germany. Thus, the theory of totalitarianism—which equated fascism with communism and anti-fascism with anti-communism—became a state ideology anchored in the constitution. It predated the scholarly works of Hannah Arendt and Carl Friedrich and

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\(^{67}\) Stoltzfus and Bosworth, “Memory and Representations of Fascism”, pp. 566–569.


became a dominant idea in West German public discourse.70 Under the influence of the Cold War, totalitarianism theory emphasized more heavily the supposed similarities between communism and fascism. To be sure, it did not deny differences, but it saw far more commonalities that separated the two systems from liberal democracy. This was a break with the far more nuanced analyses and careful analogies of the interwar period. In the studies of Franz Neumann and Ernst Fraenkel, the object of study was first and foremost fascism.71 Yet, during the Stalinist Terror and after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, communist-fascist analogies became more pronounced in the United States and Britain, setting the stage for the postwar totalitarian models of writers such as Arendt and Friedrich.72

Friedrich’s *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* is one of the most influential works on totalitarianism. Based on the perspective of constitutional theory, it was more specifically a study on the mechanics of the totalitarian state and on the exercise of power. Friedrich made a list of criteria for a totalitarian state, which included an elaborate ideology, a single mass party, a system of terror, the control of the media, a monopoly of weapons and a centrally controlled economy. Ian Kershaw is critical of this model on the grounds that it represents static categories that cannot account for internal change and assumes a monolithic nature of totalitarian systems in general.73 One of Friedrich’s aims was to differentiate between what he saw as an age-old system of autocracy and a new form of totalitarian dictatorship that was dependent on modern technology. Such systems, which included both communism and fascism, claimed to be democratic through popular support. He readily acknowledged that unlike communism, fascism did not destroy state structures. But he argued that this difference was only due to the fact that Russian state collapsed before the Bolshevik revolution. In other words, it did not represent an ideological departure. Further, Friedrich saw both fascism and communism as being rooted in World War I.74

During the 1950s and 1960s, totalitarianism became, as noted, the dominant narrative in historical research of Nazism in West Germany. Nazism was studied as a totalitarian movement on par with communism. Two of the leading scholars of this school were the liberal-conservative historians Karl Dietrich Bracher and Andreas Hillgruber. They answered

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critics by arguing that theoretical approaches outside the framework of totalitarianism constituted a capitulation to previous Marxist-Leninist interpretations of fascism. To them, even theories inspired by social scientific approaches were duped by this political framework.  

A simplified dividing line between totalitarian theory and other specific fascist theories is that the former sees fascist and communist dictatorships as basically similar, while the latter considers them as basically different. Totalitarian studies have largely ignored historical developments predating the “seizure of power.” This has meant that they have overlooked the economic and social causes of fascism, the social background of fascist movements, and their relationship with establishment politics, in particular conservatism. In its comparative style, totalitarianism also misses the peculiarities that drastically set the two systems apart, such as the simultaneous collusion and tension between the Nazi party and the “old regime” and the fundamentally different ideologies between fascism and communism. 

Martin Broszat argued that the Nazi system could by no means be seen as structureless, or “structure destroying” as advocates of the totalitarianism thesis would like to have it. Hans Mommsen was also critical of totalitarianism, arguing that its focus on the state could only bring a superficial analysis of the attraction of, and support for, National Socialism and symbolized by Hitler’s charisma. In doing so, the theory played into the hands of conservative apologetics, exonerating them from responsibility, because they were deceived and charmed by a madman. Mommsen thought that the differences between, say, the German Communist Party and the Nazi Party needed to be accounted for; the Führerprinzip could not be simply equated with “democratic centralism.” The communist parties had internal policy conflicts despite the cult of Stalin, whereas the Nazi party had no internal structure to deal with similar divisions. The Nazi party thereby differed greatly from traditional parliamentary parties, even communist ones, because it was first and foremost a propaganda organization.

Other differences are not either accounted for in the totalitarian theory, such as the huge differences in economic systems and political aims. The thesis becomes irrelevant when the template for comparison is that between Stalin and Hitler. Robert Paxton has also

75 Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship, pp. 14–16.  
76 Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship, p. 35.  
77 Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship, p. 35.  
79 Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship, pp. 35-37.
argued that even a comparison of the mass killings perpetrated by the Nazis and Soviet regimes exposes critical differences that are hard to deny. The man-made Ukrainian famine of 1931 has been taken as an example of equating Stalin’s atrocities with those of Hitler. It is claimed that this amounted to a genocide against the Ukrainians. This is a problematic claim because Russians were also victims of the famine and were also persecuted. Also, Stalin killed arbitrarily those whom he saw as challenging his power and were classified as “class enemies.” It was a stigmatization that could be changed at the discretion of the leader. Yet, most of the victims were adult males and fellow citizens. Hitler condemned to death whole peoples that were considered “race enemies,” including new-born babies, along with their culture. Paxton obviously condemns both atrocities, but sees the “Nazi biologically racialist extermination” practices as being worse because not even women or children were spared. Also, the focus of central authority in relation to practices overlooks the mass base for genocide that existed in fascism, where the civilian population would take part in the killings. The Nazis were brought to power with the help of the traditional elites, while Stalin was in charge over a society that had gotten rid of them. Thus he presided over a civil society simplified through the Bolshevik revolution. Most of these scholarly concerns deal with the form of the two systems. But one should not discard fundamental differences in content between the ideologies of fascism and communism. Fascism is openly anti-humanitarian, espousing the dominance of a master race (social-Darwinism and racism), whereas communism is a radical/extreme form of an emancipatory project based on universal equality.

Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was also riddled with analytical shortcomings in its totalitarian analysis. It unconvincingly viewed, totalitarian systems as replacing classes with masses, arguing, that mass societies created the conditions for mass slaughter and atrocities in the form of a temporary alliance between the mob and elites. Arendt has also been criticized for seeing Nazi Germany as “structure destroying” and for its superficial analysis of Soviet Russia in comparison with Nazi Germany’s rich historical contextualization and broad periodization in the book.81

Arendt’s Forgotten Continuity Thesis

What is often forgotten in the critique of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is Arendt’s ambitious attempt to historicize the totalitarianism of fascism by tying it to colonialism. It is a continuation theory of sorts, between imperialism of the old colonial powers and fascist totalitarianism. It may be argued that scholars have overemphasized her treatment of totalitarianism and her critics her flawed analogies between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. It was perhaps understandable because of the Cold War context and because of the fact that anti-totalitarianism was the chief ideology of the Western powers. What is not surprising, however, is that her extremely perceptive chapters on Western imperialism and colonialism were left out by scholars from these old empires. After all, it contained a continuation theory that implicated Western civilization as a whole in the crimes of fascism.\(^{82}\) Arendt made this forcefully in the beginning or her book:

> We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain.\(^{83}\)

Thus *Origins* was one of the first theoretical works that claimed a connection between totalitarianism and colonialism. That the European ideology of white supremacy—racial as well as cultural—with origins in imperialist expansionism and settler colonialism of the 19th century could be connected with totalitarian regimes. White supremacy and colonialism generated processes of economic exploitation of much of Asia and Africa. A reevaluation of this part of her book involves exploring Arendt as a historical thinker rather than as a political philosopher. Arendt argued that the European experience in the colonial world had a boomerang effect on developments in Europe. Practices and ideologies that were applied in the colonies fed back into Europe’s intellectual and political life. The un-democratic and racist administration regime of the colonies, which forced resettlements and protogenocidal massacres, led to a strengthening of authoritarianism and racism in Europe. More specific examples were the colonial powers’ testing of aerial bombardment on colonized peoples.


\(^{83}\) Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. ix.
Hitler’s admired, for example, the might of the British Empire, and Nazi Germany’s inspiration for race laws originated in the enactment of racist laws in the southern states of the United States.\textsuperscript{84} Arendt even claimed that the German colonies in South West Africa became the training grounds for the future Nazi elite. She writes:

African colonial possessions became the most fertile soil for the flowering of what later was to become the Nazi elite. Here they had seen with their own eyes how peoples could be converted into races and how, simply by taking the initiative in this process, one might push one’s own people into the position of the master race.\textsuperscript{85}

This historical perspective was unique; no other white European academic had made use of the colonial experience to describe and explain either totalitarianism or fascism. In fact, with the exception of Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, few white European intellectuals in the postwar period concerned themselves with the colonial experience and its racial dimensions.\textsuperscript{86} This was in sharp contrast to many black and anti-colonial philosophers, such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James, who immediately after World War II questioned the tendency of seeing Nazi atrocities as anomalies of Western history. Common to them all was the criticism of defining Nazism as a national peculiarity or a system of government. To them Nazism, was a part of Western civilization that brought colonialism to the European heartland. Aimé Césaire considered Western civilization hardly worth its name; colonialism had de-civilized Europeans. Nations that colonized other nations and the civilization that justified such violence were sick. This pathology, which was expressed in moral indifference towards the suffering of colonized peoples, came back to haunt Europe through Hitler. Césaire pointedly asked for research to show that even the humanistic Christian European bourgeoisie of the 20th century had a Hitler inside him.\textsuperscript{87}

Frantz Fanon also argued that racism was not to be found in a few men but rather in a European structure of racism. Nazism had simply exposed a colonial system operating in Europe. Thus, the Nazi genocide that shocked much of the world after World War II was perhaps less shocking to W.E.B. Du Bois, who argued that similar practices had long been


\textsuperscript{85} Arendt, \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}, p. 206.

\textsuperscript{86} King and Stone, “Introduction”, \textit{Hannah Arendt and the uses of History}, pp. 4–5.

exercised against the “colored folk” globally by European Christian civilization. To C.L.R. James, the ideology of white supremacy, where the “superior race” was destined to rule the world, showed the contradictive notion of Western civilization as a force of progress. Only a “shallow empiricism” would not account Nazism as a part of Western civilization. Later James would complement Arendt’s *Origins* for its insight into totalitarianism and how it related to modern society in general. Historian Robert Bernasconi also praises Arendt’s historical thought in bringing to attention colonial continuity and connections, but is critical of her attempts to exonerate many Western philosophers, in particular Kant. Bernasconi points out that some of the greatest European philosophers, Kant, Hegel, Locke and Hume—who had for a long time been considered the epiphany of enlightenment and progressive thought—were also implicated in a philosophical tradition of racism and colonialism. Many of them did this by being silent about, investing in, or supporting the Atlantic slave trade and imperialism. Arendt places them on a pedestal of a truer Western tradition in opposition to inhumanity, when they were pioneers in an ideology of white supremacy. Their thoughts and ideas preceded later eugenic thinkers, such as Ernst Haeckel and Houston Stewart Chamberlain.

There has been much criticism of Arendt’s “boomerang effect” and her colonialism-fascism continuity theory in general. It has been targeted for offering faulty analogies and disregarding systemic differences. It has been argued that German colonialism was, for example, relatively short-lived and that it had limited impact; that Nazism did not seek offshore colonies but expansion in the East; and that Nazi society pertained to be “organic” rather than a mirror image of the German colonies. Last but not least, German colonialism was not any worse than that of the other colonial powers. Hence, colonialism was presented as an explanatory model for the rise of fascism in Germany but nowhere else. This criticism is flawed. Arendt never saw totalitarianism as predetermined through structures and paths, but rather through the particularity of causal sequences within a particular context. It might be argued that Arendt violated Ockham’s razor in that totalitarianism did not need colonialism in order to be explained. Tools of state terror, such as the secret police, did not need African colonialism as a precedent. Some scholars have even gone so far as to argue that color-coded racism should be totally separated from antisemitism in its dynamics and objectives. One could argue, however, that there is a difference in arguing for continuity

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88 Bernasconi, “When the real crime began”, pp. 54–56.
89 Bernasconi, “When the real crime began”, pp. 54, 58–61, 64.
(colonialism) on one hand, and making analogies that borders on equation on the other (totalitarianism).

There are several ways in which to respond to Arendt’s critics. They will be dealt with at some length in the next chapter. Some preliminary remarks, however, are useful at this point. To be sure, colonialism was a brief episode in Germany’s history. But one cannot disregard the great influence colonialism had as a global system on Europe in terms of economics, politics, science and culture. This influence is not limited to European countries with large colonial possessions. While Nazi Germany prioritized eastern expansion over offshore colonialism, the origins of territorial plundering in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were developed by radical nationalists in a framework and context of colonialism. Also, as I illustrated in the previous chapter, continuity does not constitute sameness. Continuity between colonialism and fascism does not exclude differences between the two phenomena. Thus, Nazi expansionism does not need to be a mirror image of colonialism for one to argue a case of continuity/ies. It is more of a question of how continuity between colonialism and fascism shaped ideology and practices. What accounted for the rise of fascism is an entirely different research topic, one which I do not dwell much on in this thesis. Lastly, while there is undeniably a difference between color-coded racism and anti-Semitism, racial politics that developed out of colonialism did not leave the age-old European anti-Semitism unaffected.

**Breaking with Historical Idealism and Totalitarianism: The Sonderweg Thesis**

Viewing fascism as either a break from an otherwise healthy historical development or simply as a form of modern totalitarianism were eventually challenged in West Germany as well. In 1961, Fritz Fischer opened up the narrative by convincingly showing that Germany’s elites had already embarked on an expansionism during World War I. Thus, he challenged interpretations which argued that Germany’s break from a “normal” development came first after World War I and with the Nazi “seizure of power.” His research also raised questions about the role of the traditional elites, in general, and about continuities in social structure and policy between Imperial and Nazi Germany, in particular. Fischer’s radical departure from the prevailing historical narrative sparked what has been dubbed the “Fischer Controversy,” which pitted him against traditional historians bent on defending the establishment view. The controversy erupted in a period, when a social science turn in history, internationally, and a growing left-wing student movement in West Germany
challenged the old conservative elite of West German historians. Coinciding with this development was the staging of war crimes trials, especially the Eichmann trial in 1960 and the Auschwitz trials of 1963. An increase in the number of history students in Germany and in the Western world, and the opening of the West German archives in the late 1950s, led a young generation of historians to new inquiries into the history of Nazi Germany. This new wave of research began in the mid-1960s and has continued to the present. It started with students, intellectuals, and young scholars who questioned dominant West German understanding of the past. It was argued that this understanding contributed to a refusal to confront war crimes and other crimes committed by the Nazi regime. Other historians followed in the footsteps of Fritz Fischer’s critical reevaluation of the master narrative. They were inspired by international theoretically-driven historical research, such as the French Annales school and that of the “new social history.” The emphasis was on structural engagements in historical research, prioritizing the concept of society at the expense of that of politics. It was, argued that the latter needed to be subordinated to the former and that classical political history was unable to advance historical understanding.

While these approaches were new and innovative in the 1960s, they became institutionalized by the mid-1970s with the founding of established historical journals. Nevertheless, they remained highly contested. Leading historians, such as Andreas Hillgruber and Klaus Hildebrand, who were steeped in classical political history, were, highly critical of the new historical approaches. They aimed their criticism at Hans-Ulrich Wehler, who had argued in favor of structural continuities between Imperial and Nazi Germany from 1870 to 1945. Although echoing a conservative tradition in German historical scholarship, they claimed that they differed from the new social historians by adopting an objective historical approach untangled by politically influenced theoretical frameworks and commitments. The right historical approach for them was from the “particular” to the “general,” not the other way around. They also saw the past as autonomous. It could be divorced from the influence of the present; thus, history could be constructed objectively if the right methods were used, or in the famous Rankean expression wie es eigentlichen gewesen. Wehler responded to this criticism by arguing that traditionalists used theoretical frameworks and made politically informed assumptions based on an overemphasis on political elites and ideas. The conflict

91 Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship, pp. 8–9.
93 Stoltzfus and Bosworth, “Memory and Representations”, pp. 573–574.
94 Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship, pp. 9–11.
between the old guard and the new was highly polemic in tone. It illustrated the main fault lines within historiography in general. The emphasis on empiricism was pitted against theoretical frameworks; agency was opposed to structure, and (scholarly) “objectivity” was put up against (political) “subjectivity.”95 The idea of locating Nazism in a deeper German past drew inspiration from previous Anglo-American research mentioned above. However, whereas this tradition emphasized a cultural and intellectual uniqueness in German history, often tying it to anti-Semitism, Fischer and Wehler focused on continuities in social and political institutions and practices. They argued that pre-industrial, authoritarian and anti-democratic structures maintained their influence in state and society.

Fischer dubbed this form of elite solidarity the alliance of “iron and rye” between heavy industry and big agriculture, which had played a key role in unleashing two world wars and in paving the way for the Nazi regime.96 Perhaps more important, Fischer saw a continuity in German history, claiming that the years 1871–1945 constituted a coherent historical period. Fischer critically reevaluated previous periodization projections, which enabled him to ask new critical questions about the past. For him, the major discontinuities were limited to two periods: first he argued that liberal bourgeois traditions were interrupted by the rise of the Brandenburg-Prussian military state from 1866 to 1871; second, he pointed to the period of 1945–1949, when a liberal democratic state was finally established in West Germany anchored in a democratic constitution. These discontinuities were far more important than those of 1888–90, 1918–19, or 1933.97 As he puts it:

Continuity, together with its antithesis of discontinuity, is such a general, universal historical category that we shall here confine our observations to a specifically German variation in the very recent modern era. All history moves along a spectrum of continuity and discontinuity, of tradition and novelty. German history is no exception. After 1866 and 1871, Germany came to experience a more recent line of continuity … this continuity retained its dominance, despite modifications and variations in intensity, until 1945 … Elements of this … continuity … was an associations of agrarian-aristocratic and industrial/big-bourgeois power elites attempting to maintain their positions against the rising forces of democracy and Social Democracy… external objective: Prussia’s hegemony in Germany … followed by the hegemony of Prussia-Germany in Europe … basis for securing a position of global power as well.98

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98 Fischer, *From Kaiserreich to Third Reich*, pp. 33–38.
But Fischer was careful to note that continuity does not equate sameness, for Imperial Germany differed fundamentally from Nazi Germany. While the former contained the outward trappings of a *Rechtstaat*, this was, of course, never the case with Nazi Germany. The continuity was maintained through power structures and ideological aims, including an eastward expansion agenda. Moreover, Fischer forcefully argued that no major disruptions took place during the Weimar Republic. Even though the monarchy had ceased to exist, the traditional elites still retained their powers. In some cases, their positions were strengthened, especially among economic elites, with an extensive concentration of capital in the form of cartels. Fischer defined the Weimar economic system as authoritarian capitalism, where the industrialists were anti-democratic and anti-parliamentarian and where strong anti-democratic traditions were sustained among the bourgeoisie. The direct interests of the economic elites were represented by the Papen-Hugenberg alliance, which joined Hitler, and in return got a share in the Nazi mass movement.99

**Carving out a Special German Historical Trajectory**

In the 1970s, the *Sonderweg* thesis, espoused most forcefully by Wehler, became extremely influential in West German historical scholarship. According to this interpretation, Germany followed a special path in historical development, which made Nazism possible there but not in the United States, the United Kingdom or France. This was because Germany had failed to develop into a mature industrial capitalist country with a politically independent bourgeoisie that identified with liberal values. Instead, it maintained rigged parliamentary institutions. The old agrarian and aristocratic-military elites kept their hegemonic position through the repression of the working class and through the manipulation of the petty bourgeoisie. The repression aggravated social conflicts following the fall of the Wilhelmine system in 1918–1919, reaching a climax in violent class strife. There were no mediating structures of democratic, emancipatory and liberal traditions, which could soothe such social antagonisms. The Weimar Republic, thus, inherited societal tensions and failed to transcend them, leading to the unstable political climate of the 1920s and early 1930s.100

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99 Fischer, *From Kaiserreich to Third Reich*, pp. 98, 74–89.
Critics of the Sonderweg thesis have argued that it portrays Imperial Germany as a simple prehistory to Nazi Germany and that it wrongly sees a unique German failure to avoid the rise of fascism as a result of flawed democratic institutions. Geoff Eley has been particularly critical of the assumption that a strong bourgeoisie automatically favors democracy, parliamentarism and liberalism. Such as teleological construction represents a reification of Western liberal trajectories. To him, what was more important for the bourgeoisie in all of Western Europe was to regulate property relations, institutionalize a capitalist mode of production and maintain civil services. Also, Eley has shown that the German bourgeoisie was stronger and more influential than claimed by the Sonderweg historians. Germany was highly modern and the second largest capitalist economy in the world by 1900. Thus, the proponents of the Sonderweg thesis overemphasize the role of traditional elites and feudal structures. Another concept associated with the “special path” was that of social imperialism. Wehler explained the function of social imperialism as diverting internal tensions and forces for change—such as class conflict and democratic ambitions—outwards to imperialist endeavors, thereby preserving the social and political status quo. Its byproduct was the propagation of nationalism, which the agrarian-industrial bloc manipulated to secure support from the population at large. This concept connects the idea of a continuity of German imperialist ambition with an idea of a continuity of the interest of the German socio-economic elite. To Wehler, social imperialism was, ultimately, the most important continuity of imperialism between the reigns of Bismarck and Hitler.

The Sonderweg controversy would eventually lead to the historians’ debate (Historikerstreit) in the late 1980s. It originated in Anglo-American research but also in other radical and dissenting interpretations of fascism during the interwar period. As noted, these interpretations had been ostracized by the conservative historical profession after World War II. The new perspectives in the 1960s revitalized the older interpretations and placed them within social history, with emphasis on missed democratic opportunities during the foundation of the Weimar Republic and on the workers’ council movement. In general, these developments shifted the focus from totalitarian interpretations and Hitler’s personal dictatorship to ideas of polycracy within the Nazi regime, where social and economic factors were singled out. This new critical history was often blamed by its conservative opponents

103 Eley, From Unification to Nazism, pp. 3–4.
for being too theoretical—and thereby left-leaning and ideological. But the critical historians confronted both the conservative tradition of West German historiography and the Marxist Leninist dogmatism of East German historians.104

The Historikerstreit Controversy

The Sonderweg thesis played a role in historicizing a specifically West German national identity projection in the 1970s. It made it impossible to seek a glorious past in a nationalist narrative by connecting it to Nazism. Scholars, such as Hans Mommsen, argued that Germany should never “move on” or abandon an active engagement with its Nazi past; otherwise, it would have destabilizing effects on the political system. Reactions to such management strategies, in the mid-1980s, culminated in the Historikerstreit. Ernst Nolte took the lead by claiming, in a newspaper opinion piece, that Auschwitz and the Holocaust constituted an “Asiatic deed” rather than a German one. Its roots were to be found in the Armenian genocide perpetrated by the Turks and the Bolshevik campaigns of purges and collectivization. These claims marked a dramatic about-turn in Nolte’s understanding of Nazism. He had previously viewed it through the lens of fascist theorizing as something closely related to other European lineages of fascist thought. Now he came to argue that Nazism was a copy of, and reaction to, the danger of Stalinism.105 This relativistic narrative was also promoted by other conservative historians, such as Michael Stürmer and Andreas Hillgruber. They feared that a construction of a German past, centering on the Nazi period, would perpetuate a never-ending West German guilt complex.106

The main protagonists in the Historikerstreit were historians born in the 1920s and 1930s; they battled it out along the lines drawn during the Fischer controversy between traditional historicism and structural analysis two decades earlier.107 Nolte went so far as claiming that Nazism was only a reaction to an even greater evil of communism. For him, this struggle constituted a European civil war. His argument echoed the Nazis’ own justification for the invasion of the Soviet Union and the following war of extermination. Unsurprisingly, Nolte’s arguments provoked a bitter debate about the singularity of the Holocaust. His arguments raised questions of whether the Holocaust was comparable to other 20th century

104 Eley, From Unification to Nazism, pp. 2–6.
atrocities. Critics argued that to interpret the Holocaust as a reaction against a Soviet “class genocide” was an abject apology of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{108}

One important contributor to this debate was philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Coming from the Frankfurter School of critical theory, he reiterated the perspectives of the Sonderweg and contested the charge against it made by the conservative historians that attempted to create a nationalist identity based on history. For Habermas, all that was good about a democratic West Germany had only happened after and through Auschwitz. Only because of the uncovering of this enormous crime was a commitment to universalist constitutional principles possible in German culture. He advocated a post-national identity projection based on constitutional patriotism. German nationalism and Auschwitz were intrinsically connected and it would be a grave mistake to forget that point.\textsuperscript{109} The historian Arno Mayer was also among the many who rejected Nolte’s claims. He argued that the myth and paranoia of “Judeo-bolshevism” was a driving force behind the Holocaust. Thus, he made anti-communism a core component of the Holocaust. Moreover, he saw the Nazi ideology as enjoying far broader support among the bourgeoisie and ruling classes in general. This tied into a larger debate over the Holocaust. Both Nolte and Mayer saw any explanation of Nazism and its atrocities as intrinsically tied to the Soviet Union, although from two polar opposite narratives, either as a preemptive strike or an ideologically informed war of aggression, thereby shifting the attention from Jews to Soviets. In addition, Mayer claimed that the genocide of the Jews arose from the war rather than being planned prior to it. Mayer’s work, like that of Nolte’s received much criticism, not only for his “functionalist” interpretation of the Holocaust but also for what some saw as his overemphasis on Nazism’s anti-communism at the expense of, and perhaps forgetting of, anti-Semitism.\textsuperscript{110}

This discussion had connections with the debate between the “intentionalist” and “functionalist” interpretation of the Holocaust and Hitler’s role in it. It centered on the question of whether the Holocaust was planned by Hitler from the start or whether it originated and developed in within competing structures of party and state during the war, leading to what Mommsen called “cumulative radicalization.” The topic was especially sensitive because it had been argued that too much comparative analysis and historical context might trivialize the singularity of the extermination of the Jewish people. But by

\textsuperscript{108} Kershaw, \textit{The Nazi Dictatorship}, pp. 248–250.  
\textsuperscript{110} Kershaw, \textit{The Nazi Dictatorship}, pp. 248–250.
stressing uniqueness and rejecting a comparative dimension, one removes the event from historical explanation in general. This remains an incomplete historiographical issue with different answers given, depending on whether the focus is on the external or internal policies of Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{111}

However, from being a relatively ignored topic, newer research has strengthened the idea that racialist politics was one of the key characteristics of the Nazi regime. It is still hotly contested whether Nazi racialism was driven by anti-Semitism or whether it represented a broader eugenic ideology that targeted a wide variety of marginalized and minority groups. Intentionalist perspectives brought with them historicist ones. The emphasis was on Hitler’s leadership and on seeing his anti-Semitism as being essential to understanding Nazism. Some have even gone so far as to deny any understanding Nazism in terms of a generic fascist ideology. Yet paradoxically, this did not stop many of them from comparing Hitler with Stalin.\textsuperscript{112}

The Fischer controversy was an important break from establishment history: It questioned previous periodizations and opened up the narrative for further inquiries. But Eley has argued, while confronting ideas of \textit{Betriebsunfall}, the new historians would eventually end up creating a new extreme position in interpreting the origins of Nazism. The \textit{Sonderweg} thesis also played into a Cold War narrative, although in a different way than totalitarianism. Nazism was pitted against a normal Western liberal historical tradition, which West Germany had finally reclaimed.\textsuperscript{113}

Although the Fischer controversy brought social science and theories of structure into historical research in West Germany, the social history of Nazi Germany was largely unexplored until the 1970s. A new generation of historians, who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s and who were inspired by leftism and feminism, set out to write the history of those previously left out in the narrative, the everyday people. Studies began to appear on the life of the working-class, experiences of women, and communal politics under Nazism. The relationship between the “people” and the regime was scrutinized, raising questions about opposition, collaboration and support and non-support for public policies. The focus was also on the ideological strands of fascism, with emphasis on anti-feminism and racism and on how they affected everyday lives.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{111} Caplan, “The Historiography of National Socialism”, pp. 567–570.
\textsuperscript{112} Caplan, “The Historiography of National Socialism”, pp. 567–570.
\textsuperscript{113} Eley, \textit{From Unification to Nazism}, pp. 232–234.
The new social history was influenced by the new working class history, for example the British history workshop, but also took its own form in what was to become known as *Alltagsgeschichte* in West Germany. Categories and concepts, such as race, gender and class, were pivotal in these inquiries, sometimes taken together to show the intersections of these power structures and sometimes used separately. The new field of women’s history of Nazi Germany is a case in point. Scholars, such as Gisela Bock and Annette Kuhn, identified gender as a dominant power structure and more important than race for the regime’s biological politics. According to this reading, women were primarily seen as victims of the Nazi anti-nativist policies, including forced sterilization programs.

In contrast, other historians, notably Claudia Koonz applied gender and race in tandem. She wanted to show that although all women were limited by the anti-emancipatory policies of Nazi Germany, those belonging to the right racial group were not only able to attain positions of power; they also participated in the genocidal policies of the regime. Koonz even argued that housewives belonging to the “pure” racial category enabled the genocide perpetrated by their men by creating a sphere of normality and rest in the home, which became a surrogate dolls house. The question of what made seemingly normal and loving husbands and sons perpetrate heinous genocidal acts was also explored. Were they ideological fanatics or merely banal careerist or perhaps acting upon peer pressure? Subsequent research by Alf Lüdtke, based on letters from Wehrmacht soldiers sent to family and friends in Germany, has shown that a clear division between the public rhetoric of the Nazi regime and the private perceptions of soldiers did not exist. Their understanding of the war was dominated by deeply held anti-Semitic ideas by a perception of their own racial superiority.115

**Generic Fascism: The New Consensus and its Critics**

In the early 1960s, Ernst Nolte had been one of the first scholars after World War II to try to refocus academic attention from national histories to a general concept of fascism. He did this through a somewhat contradictory narrative. On the one hand, he claimed that fascism was epochal; on the other, he saw fascism metapolitically. In short, fascism was both limited in

time as well as a generic ideology. Nolte also placed the writings of the fascists themselves in the center, arguing that fascists’ self-depictions should be taken seriously. The main fascist movements, he analyzed were the French Action Francaise, Italian fascism and German Nazism. To him, fascism was epochal in the sense that it was rooted in three periods: the era of world wars with a starting point in the French Revolution; the era of imperialism, which generated the conflicts climaxing in the two world wars; and the year 1917, which saw both the Bolshevik Revolution and the U.S. entry into World War I. Both the Soviet Union and the United States would later become Nazism’s greatest adversaries, even if the main burden fell on the former. Fascism was born in the era of war and wanted continued war; it represented both radical imperialism and revolutionary methods against revolution. Nolte interpreted this as signifying its epochal nature; only the concept of fascism could describe this trend, and it would have found its place in Europe even if Hitler and Mussolini had never existed. The year 1919 was especially important, with many socialist and communist revolutionary attempts in Europe, which were, then, suppressed by proto-fascist reactionary forces.\(^{116}\) Nolte offered a short generic definition of fascism, which as a scholarly tradition of fascist studies is still practiced today. He writes:

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\text{FASCISM IS ANTI-MARXISM WHICH SEEKS TO DESTROY THE ENEMY BY THE EVOLVEMENT OF A RADICALLY OPPOSED AND YET RELATED IDEOLOGY AND BY THE USE OF ALMOST IDENTICAL AND YET TYPICALLY MODIFIED METHODS, ALWAYS, HOWEVER, WITHIN THE UNYIELDING FRAMEWORK OF NATIONAL SELF-ASSERTION AND AUTONOMY [capital letters in the original].}\(^{117}\)
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Even though Nolte makes connections between fascism and Marxism, he emphasizes (in his early work) that the crimes of fascism were greater than those of communism, because its victims were totally dehumanized. Furthermore, he recognizes differences between forms of fascism and Nazism, but, to him, individual differences do not cancel out their similarities. Their origins were independent from each other, even though Hitler drew great inspiration from Mussolini. Their individual traits, however, contain almost as many similarities as differences. Nolte’s metapolitical analysis of fascism is not as straightforward. He argues that fascism is anti-transcendental in that it resists both transcendence of mind and society; it


\(^{117}\) Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*, p. 40.
rejects the transcendence of mind as the spiritual drive for liberty and the transcendence of society as social movements for emancipation. Furthermore, he claims that fascism has metapolitical connections to Marx, Nietzsche, and Weber in the resistance against transcendence. In a sense, Nolte would distinguish himself from the theorists of generic fascism who succeeded him by his emphasis on seeing fascism as backward-looking. He made the point that fascism was both anti-modern and anti-traditional, thereby setting it apart from pure reaction. Nolte’s critics argued that his theory represented historic idealism or historicism at its worst based upon his complete disregard for social-economic foundations. Indeed, Nolte rejected almost all socio-economic explanations of fascism as inadequate. This is one of his main limitations. His historical idealism and historicism enables him to put forth a grandiose metapolitical conception of fascism as a mystical force of resistance to transcendence. But it is an interpretation that becomes highly contradictory when he argues that fascism is historically time-bound by specific sociological configuration that cannot be recreated.

Another important theoretician of fascism who contributed to a generic theory in the 1960s was George L. Mosse. He also rejected socio-economic interpretations of fascism, because he wanted to stress the ideological sincerity of the phenomenon. He argued early on that one of the intellectual foundations of Nazism was fascism, a statement that was far from widely accepted in his time. Mosse’s works on fascism coincided with those of Nolte’s. Yet, while Nolte concentrated on the history of ideas, Mosse adopted a cultural approach, focusing on the appeal of fascism through its aesthetic imagery. Both Mosse and Nolte have been accused of casting their nets very broadly in terms of what constituted fascism. In his earliest works, Mosse included Franco, Salazar and Dollfuss as fascists, and Nolte puts Action Française under the fascist rubric. However, the analytical frameworks to distinguish between nationalist, monarchist and conservative authoritarianism, on the one hand, and fascism as a mass movement, on the other, was not yet in place at this time. One of Mosse’s main approaches toward the subject of fascism was to ask how it could become so popular and get such a wide support from its citizens. This question had neither been asked nor mentioned by traditionalist historians before him. He sought the answer by looking at fascism as a cultural movement, understanding not culture as a history of ideas but rather as the shaping of politics.

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at a particular time by the perception of men and women. It was a question of understanding the movement on its own terms, through aesthetics, ceremonies, architecture, and a “beauty mystique.” This also meant contextualizing fascism, not only as a new force but also as a part of a nationalism that provided the foundation for all its variations in Europe.\textsuperscript{121}

Mosse made use of nationalist narratives, such as the constructions of glorious and mystical pasts, easily understood symbols and rituals borrowed both from nationalism and the Christian church. He also referred to older regional and civic festivals of the bourgeoisie that were made to serve national concerns and later contributed to the sacralization of politics under fascism. Nationalism was essential for fascism and helped forge a collective memory, a historic mission of the nation and the idea of the nation’s regenerative power. Nationalism was tied together with the idea of expansionism, far-reaching territorial ambitions, expressed through concepts such as \textit{Lebensraum} and \textit{Mare Nostrum}. On the question of racism, Mosse believed that it was only essential for the fascisms of Central and Eastern Europe, with the Holocaust being the prime example, while acting more as an appendage to fascism in Western Europe. But he emphasized that racism should be seen as an independent phenomenon, both from fascism and nationalism, with its origins in a long continuity from the ideas of the Enlightenment. He traced its origins to 18th and 19th century scientific developments within anthropology and eugenics. Although there was, at that time, a clear scientific argument for racism based on hereditary and evolutionary theory, it also had a beauty mystique. The value of races was determined by physical characteristics, with the superior race being seen as beautiful and strong, while the inferior ones ugly, corrupted, and decadent.\textsuperscript{122}

Previous attempts at understanding fascism, which concentrated on expansion and triumph of the movement, had mainly sought clues in social structures and the economy. To these scholars, fascism lacked a coherent ideology. This gave rise to the idea of viewing Germany as being only temporarily “occupied” by fascism, while the ideas and rationalism of the Enlightenment remained dormant. Although Mosse interprets racism as originating in the Enlightenment, he also stresses the importance of not seeing it purely as an attachment to capitalism and the bourgeoisie. The aesthetics of the beauty of the superior races strengthened the symbolism of nationalist movements in addition to other symbols, such as flags and anthems. The case for expansionism was also strengthened; war became more than just war;

\textsuperscript{122} Mosse, \textit{The Fascist Revolution}, pp. ix–xviii.
it became a race war tied together with militarism and romanticism in a state of permanent war. Mosse also argues that fascism should be understood as a mass movement, using democratic rhetoric to promote its goal. Yet, the participation in rituals and activism was considered more meaningful than parliamentarism. Therefore, fascism should also be interpreted as representing revolutionary nationalist and right-wing ideology. To Mosse, ideologues of the Left could not claim exclusive rights to revolution; it was also possible to do so from the Right. Fascist ideology, after all, strived for a radical reordering of society based on a projected utopia. As Mosse puts it:

Fascism always appropriated already existing, familiar, and popular ideas while manipulating them and integrating them into its own world view. Fascism was a new political movement but not a movement which invented anything new; it annexed the long familiar and made it a part of its racism and nationalism. That was some of its real strength: it offered regeneration with security and revolution based on the already familiar.

Among Mosse’s contributions to the theory of fascism was to turn attention to its self-identification with a positive ideology, with some roots in the Enlightenment. This understanding differed from Nolte’s pure anti-transcendental view of fascism. Mosse’s argument that fascism strove for a new morality was to prove controversial. What he really meant was a return to bourgeois morality. Fascist morality was another form of bourgeois morality in its desire for conformity. He maintained that modern racism, originated in the rationalism of the Enlightenment, and was an attempt by Western societies to bring order to a chaotic world. The Enlightenment’s abstract thought and depersonalization constructed racial classifications that created the potentiality of Holocaust; this, in turn, was deeply embedded in Western thought. Seen through such a prism, it was also a question of advocating conformity or bourgeois respectability. Thus, the Holocaust was linked to a Western tradition by connecting fascist morality to bourgeois morality. Mosse also introduced concepts such as masculinity and sexuality to the studies of fascism. This approach was rooted in his own personal history; being a homosexual, he had to hide it throughout most his life for fear of losing his career in academia.

The attempt to link fascism to Enlightenment ideas or continuities has generally been frowned upon by other theorists of generic fascism. A case in point is the influential historian

123 Mosse, The Fascist Revolution, pp. ix–xviii
Zeev Sternhell, who in the 1970s contributed to the intellectual history of fascism. Sternhell situated himself both against Mosse and Nolte, while finding inspiration from both. He argued that fascism was a revolt against the Enlightenment as well as against the French Revolution. For him, it was a cultural phenomenon before it became a political ideology and its roots in revolt could be traced back to Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Thus, Sternhell also positioned himself against traditionalist historians, like Friedrich Meinecke and Gerhard Ritter, by looking at fascism not as a parenthesis in European history but rather as an integral part of European culture. Instead of representing anti-ideology, especially the anti-Marxism suggested by Nolte, fascism was a revisionism of Marxism. Curiously, Sternhell argued that this revisionism reflected both its anti-materialist and anti-rational features. This raises the question of what was really left of Marxism. This interpretation omits the fact that there were many forms of socialism that were not Marxist. Sternhell connects his revisionism to the French and Italian followers of the revolutionary syndicalist Georges Sorel. All the ideas associated with Mussolini’s Italy and other Western European fascist variations had already been laid out in the three decades leading up to 1914. Thus, Sternhell believed that fascism was not ideologically created in the interwar period but rather in the preceding epoch.

He saw France as the birthplace of fascism, which was an independent cultural and political phenomenon. It combined ultra-rightist nationalism with the tradition of the revolutionary Right. In Italy, it became a mixture of national-syndicalism, nationalism and futurism. Sternhell stressed that fascism could in no way be used as a generic concept to contain Nazism. Racism was absolutely essential to Nazism, but not to fascism. Hence, a sharp distinction should be made between the two. Sternhell maintained that anti-Semitism was part and parcel of Nazism, more so than any other antagonism. This included anti-communism, which he saw as a secondary and even a relative factor. While the Nazis had no problem with converting communists back into the regime, they would never do so with Jews. Sternhell thereby overlooked the concept of Judeo-bolshevism; and it was certainly a problem converting former communists to the movement, even if a few, such as Goebbels flirted with Marxism as a university student before joining the Nazi party. Sternhell went so far as to argue that only in Germany did racism become a core feature of the Nazi regime. Even if he acknowledged that racism was alive and well both in France and Italy, it was never a dominant ideology. Following the adoption of the Italian racial laws of 1938, Jews were still safer in Italian occupation areas during the war than under the Vichy government.

Sternhell thought that fascism was never anti-modern; it only wanted to revolt against rationalism, optimism and humanism, while maintaining technological advances. Similarly,
he argued that fascism never advocated a return to a golden age. Although fascism was revolutionary, it did not want to dismantle the market economy, eschew the profit motive or abolish private property. Nonetheless, Sternhell still makes the case that fascism was anti-individualist and anti-liberal because it rejected liberalism as a philosophy. He claims that this constituted an anti-materialism that was both directed at liberalism and social democratic democracy. Fascism was opposed to all the major enlightenment thinkers from Hobbes to Kant as well as those associated with English constitutionalism and the American and French revolutions. The eternal seed of fascism in Sternhell’s view is to be found in revolutionary syndicalism or the dissident Left. It was when Sorel stopped believing in the revolutionary potential of the working class and became an accelerationist. When it became clear that the labor movement would not usher in the revolution, class was abandoned for the sake of the nation. Although he claimed that racism was never the sole purpose of fascism, he still believed that fascism was from the very start a form of primordial, organic, and tribal nationalism mixed with social-Darwinism. Interestingly, Sternhell acknowledged that several crises within liberal ideology had led to its accommodation with modern democracy. Previously, it been a political system invented by the elite to govern society with limited political participation of the masses.  

One of the most influential historians today when it comes to an ideological history of fascism is Roger Griffin. He sought inspiration from Nolte, Mosse and Sternhell and built on their theories. He also stressed the need to take fascism seriously as an independent ideology. For him, fascism was both epochal and generic. But wanting to go further than Sternhell, Griffin conceptualizes European fascism in terms of an ideological core or principal character. Griffin’s definition of fascism boils down to only one sentence: “Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism.” Griffin puts forward this definition as an ideal type, in the tradition of Max Weber. As he puts it: “they serve not to describe or explain facts as such but to provide tentative conceptual frameworks with which significant patterns of facts can be identified, causal relationships investigated and phenomenon classified.” His definition creates an ideological or mythical core to the fascist ideology, which, nevertheless, allows for

129 Griffin, The Nature of Fascism. p. 11.
heterogeneity within the different expressions of fascism. Furthermore, Griffin adds to his
definition a number of generic attributes, which he ascribed to fascism, although they were
historically determined by how fascism functioned during its existence. One has to do with
fascism as expressed in its culture, with its initial radicalism and utopianism later retreating
into a reactionary oppressive form. The other focuses on fascism’s world view, which was
rationalized by references to historical, cultural, religious or scientific statements, while its
real power was rooted in irrationality and myth. Finally, fascism’s success should not be
ascribed to singular theories or policies of one leader but rather to its ability to interact with
other societal structures, whether ideological and non-ideological ones.¹³⁰

Griffin’s mythical core is not a form of political religion in the vein of earlier
theoreticians of fascism but rather a Sorelian politics of myth. The reason for making a
distinction between political and religious myth is to accentuate the role of the ideologues of
fascism. The paligenetic myth in Griffin’s definition is one of a myth of renewal. Thus, to
Griffin, fascism is neither reactionary nor conservative but rather revolutionary in its strive
for a rebirth of something new, with only a fleeting glance into the past.¹³¹ Populist ultra-
nationalism constitutes a form that has popular support and is based on anti-enlightenment
and integral/radical nationalism, which is targeted against both pluralism and absolutism. The
paligenetic form and ultra-nationalism are concepts that delimit each other. Together with a
revolutionary process, these concepts set fascism apart from other ideologies such as
liberalism, socialism, conservatism and religious ideologies.

Griffin describes fascism as an extremely contradictory ideology: It is populist in
intent and rhetoric but elitist in practice; it is both nihilistic and idealistic in its fascist
violence; it is anti-modern and modern in its celebration of technology; and it is reactionary
as well as revolutionary in preserving some structures, while intending to restructure others.
Together these contradictions, Griffin controversially claims, would eventually have led to
fascism’s fall regardless of its early historic military defeat.¹³² Unlike Sternhell, Griffin
classifies racism as an intrinsic part of fascism, linking it to an authoritarian state with a
homogenizing agenda as well as to racism in its earlier forms of machismo, imperialism and
colonialism. But the racism of a particular fascism is predetermined by the racialist culture
and discourse in the society it takes hold. Griffin argues that every fascism is unique due to
the specific Sonderweg of every nation, not only Germany. This does not mean that fascism

as a generic ideology becomes untenable; similar differences in ideological practice between nations coexist with other ideologies. To simply state, as Sternhell did, that the biological racism of Nazi Germany makes it a rule unto itself confuses this issue. What needs to be recognized is the wider kinship systems of historical phenomenon: understanding the fate and dynamics of Nazism as a historical phenomenon and locating its generic traits as a form of fascism. And by acting out on racism, fascism builds on preexisting xenophobia and racial persecution.\textsuperscript{133}

When it comes to Fascist Italy, Griffin makes the point that racism was strong even before the race laws of 1938. An example of this racism—and how it made palingenetic references—was the Italian campaign in Ethiopia, which was presented as a recreation of the Roman Empire. Similarly, fascist Italy’s policies towards Albania and Greece were based on the notion that the Mediterranean was to be turned into a Roman lake.\textsuperscript{134} Yet, Sternhell was not alone in rejecting Nazism as fascism due to the singularity of the Holocaust. Gilbert Allardycce made similar arguments, although rejecting all generic definitions of fascism. Newer research has shown similarities in racial policies between fascist Italy and Nazi Germany without denying the singularity of the Holocaust. Atrocities against black Ethiopians and Slavs in the Balkans were committed in the context of viewing these populations as racially inferior. Even the enactment of the racial laws of 1938 can neither be seen as simply a bolt from a blue sky or an appeasement of Nazi Germany; in fact, the laws had been thoroughly prepared, at least since 1936. Even when seeing Italy’s persecution of Jews as part of anti-Slav racism in the Balkans, historians such as Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, have argued that radical nationalism and racism were essential to fascist ideology.\textsuperscript{135}

Stanley G. Payne criticized Griffin’s “new” interpretation of fascism for what he saw as a fixation on ideology that undermined a broader ideal-typical description. Payne also argued that palingenetic and populism were categories that were hard to distinguish from other radical variants of nationalism. Kevin Passmore argued in favor of expanding the definition to account for how radical and reactionary elements merged in fascism. Many of those critical of Griffin’s interpretation were, nevertheless, influenced by it. Roger Eatwell agreed that fascism was a complex mix between the old and new and represented a national

\textsuperscript{133} Griffin, The Nature of Fascism, pp. 48, 110, 73–74.
\textsuperscript{134} Griffin, The Nature of Fascism, pp. 48, 110, 73–74.
\textsuperscript{135} Bauerkämper, “A New Consensus?”, 544.
rebirth. But Eatwell, who wanted a broader analysis on the holistic-national radical third way, rejected ideal types on the grounds that they smacked of essentialism. Eatwell saw fascism as mostly fluid but with a core of natural history, geopolitics, political economy, leadership and party activism.\textsuperscript{136}

Having already made many important contributions to fascist research, Stanley G Payne also warned against forgetting the historical context and its importance in shaping fascism. For Payne, fascism represented both a negation in its anti-liberalism, anti-communism and anti-conservatism and the aspiration to create a national authoritarian state bent on imperialist conquest. When criticizing Griffin, he also argues that palingenic and populist elements are not strong enough indicators of fascism to differentiate it from other forms of extreme nationalism. Nevertheless, he sees fascism’s revolt as a reaction to perceived political and cultural decadence and its mission of spiritual renewal as important tenets. In this way, it was palingenetic. Yet, a fixation on finding generic features of fascism purely in ideology undermines a broader ideal typical definition of fascism, where style and organization is included. And he stresses that an analysis of ideology should not be at the cost of ignoring fascist practices that often contradicted some of fascism’s more radical ideological elements.\textsuperscript{137}

This brings us to the works of Robert O. Paxton, who suggested that a static understanding of fascist ideology should be supplanted with an analysis of fascist praxis. For him, it was imperative to study, what fascists did and accomplished and the dynamics of fascism with all its contradictions. He analyzed fascism by looking at what he termed the five stages of its existence: how the movement was created; how it took root; how it assumed power; and how it exercised it, leading to radicalization or entropy. Each stage represents different socio-political circumstances that fascism, both as a movement and ideology, had to navigate successfully to survive. How ideological priorities changed with these stages. However, Paxton did not deny entirely the utility of a generic definition of a fascism.\textsuperscript{138} He writes:

\begin{quote}
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
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{136} Bauerkämper, “A New Consensus?”, 540–545.
\textsuperscript{137} Bauerkämper, “A New Consensus?”, 540–545.
\textsuperscript{138} Bauerkämper, “A New Consensus?”, 540–545.
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.139

Yet, despite Paxton’s acceptance of some generic features, he is, in general, highly critical of Griffin’s work on the grounds that it is not only necessary to account for ideological elements but also the actual anatomy, the praxis of fascism. Although Griffin acknowledges fascism’s collaboration with traditional elites, he, like many other, choose to classify the phenomenon as revolutionary. Daniel Woodley is among the critics of such pure ideological analysis, which leaves out fascist practices. Woodley sees this as a consequence of a historical idealism that separates agents and their ideological works from societal structures that were in place before they were born. Moreover, to him, hegemonic projects are attempts either to preserve or transform such structures. Nevertheless, Woodley defines revolution narrowly as an overthrow of a political system, leading to the transformation of the social relations of production (Marxist). By defining fascism as revolutionary one is forced to view its core myth in terms of a revolutionary project. Woodley is not prepared to do so, for myths are mainly backward-looking, whilst revolutionary politics points towards the future. In this case, he argues, fascism has more in common with non-fascist European imperialism than any revolutionary project.140

I would argue that Griffins ideological centrism also affects how he views the ideologies that competed with fascism, such as liberalism. Griffin has a tendency to put liberalism on a pedestal, writing about the important role played by liberal democracies in defeating fascism but also the totalitarianism of the future. He makes divisions between liberal and anti-liberal nationalism. From this pure ideological standpoint, a deeper history of liberalism and its praxis is omitted.141

Fascism as Right-Wing or Left-Wing?

The question of the value of establishing a generic ideology of fascism also raises the question of how other ideologies on the Right, especially conservatism, are related to it, not only ideologically but also in practice. Martin Blinkhorn argues that there has to be a division

141 Griffin, The Nature of Fascism, pp. 35–38.
between subjective distinction and objective reality when analyzing differences between fascism and other right-wing ideologies. Such a differentiation is needed to evaluate the level of fascism’s independence from other ideologies and that of their interconnectedness.

Blinkhorn acknowledges a subjective difference between the Radical Right as expressed through Nazism and fascism, on the one hand, and the Conservative Right, constitutional conservatism, and authoritarian conservatism, on the other. As noted, the problem of defining fascism existed already during interwar period, when diverse right-wing authoritarian groupings took root. Many identified with fascism or flirted with it. But the majority of the states of Central, Southern and Eastern Europe had right-wing authoritarian regimes that did not view themselves as fascists, even if they borrowed selectively from fascist ideologies. This level of confusion brings Blinkhorn to the conclusion that there should be a working approach toward understanding this diversity rather than a focus on creating a rigid and static definition of fascism. Other authoritarian movements on the Right need to be studied with respect to their subjective and objective relationships with fascism. Similarly, the focus should be on the collusion between authoritarian right-wing regimes with fascism.

Conservatism plays a key role here as a force for the defense of the socio-economic interests of traditional elites and as an ideology. Together with a strong authoritarian tradition of conservative thought, crises such as World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution would inform conservatism’s relationship with fascism. Blinkhorn argues that it would be absurd to claim that the NSDAP, the Austrian Heimwehr, or the Romanian student movement, owed nothing to other authoritarian ideas and organizations. Right-wing authoritarian regimes and movements differed in their degree of radicalism and violence. Some were even more anti-socialist than fascist movements; in some cases, they had a leftist ancestry or rhetoric, especially, in their early phases. For Blinkhorn, conservatism coexisted with or constituted a dominant faction within fascist regimes. In Spain, conservatives displaced fascists; in Italy, traditional elites eventually abandoned their cooperation with the fascist regime by overthrowing it. Germany was unique in that conservatives came close to being eaten by the fascist tiger they chose to ride. Because of these factors, Blinkhorn argues that the notion of a fascist anti-conservatism never eclipsed its anti-leftism/anti-socialism. An alternative interpretation would be denying the common ground and shared antagonisms that conservatism and fascism often occupied. This common ground was what made pure fascist regimes possible. Therefore, it would be faulty to try to position fascism outside the left-right spectrum, for it was clearly a right-wing ideology. Also important to remember was that the European anti-democratic right-wing did not only constitute of fascism, but rather the broader
phenomenon of European rightism. To be sure, Conservative and fascist movements, parties and ideologies held different positions, agreeing on some points and disagreeing on others. But during the period 1919–1945 convergence outweighed conflict. But this uneasy dialectic, with fascism succumbing to conservatism and conservatism embracing fascist rhetoric, spawned new types of regimes, of which pure fascist ones were the rarest.142

Concluding Remarks on the Historiography of Fascism

What is striking with the interpretations of fascism and fascist theories is that many of them end up with a Manichean structure, whereby fascism is defined in its opposition to a normative higher value. For the proponents of the “agent of capitalism” theory, the good was represented by communism; for totalitarianism, it was Western liberal democracy. This response, is of course, totally understandable, especially retrospectively, considering the heinous crimes of murder and genocide that the fascists perpetrated. Nevertheless, it risk downplaying fascism’s amorphous tendency of negotiating and navigating dominant political ideologies and their discourses, such as nationalism, racism, authoritarianism and populism. When George L. Mosse argued that fascism was a new movement that did not invent anything new, he touches on what I believe is an important point. Fascism’s elasticity has often forced theoreticians to look elsewhere. Thus, they locate its origins or roots in other philosophical traditions or focus on a historical development that facilitated fascism’s coming to power. It is an attempt to explore continuities and interconnections between the catastrophe of fascism and the society in which it originated. This is what drove historians to object, in the 1960s, to the master narrative that fascism was only an abnormality in an otherwise normal historical development, a Betriebsunfall. By questioning both the sincerity and the periodization of conservative German historians, the narrative was opened up. Continuities were established between the traditions of conservative elites and the “novelty” of the fascists. Later Martin Blinkhorn would explore the interrelationships between different groups within the broad church of the European Right. Nevertheless, the Sonderweg thesis was an example of national introspection. What was not fascist was everything that was not, specific to “mature” Western liberal democracies. Thus, the Sonderweg thesis became another Cold War tool, where the highest stage of historical development was the Western

liberal model. Similarly, many recent ideological analyses of fascism define its ideology in opposition to a normal European spiritual trajectory, emanating from Enlightenment. By doing so, one runs, again, the risk of denying fascism’s amorphous tendency. It becomes an abnormal spiritual development, which originated in a specific ideological development, French syndicalism, and which was fundamentally antagonistic to European liberal ideals.

If these historical interpretations take into account continuities leading up to fascism, they are limited to internal European developments and, then, divorced from certain European characteristics that are idealized as the antithesis to fascism. Even if the periodizations of earlier historians were questioned—if they were expanded further back—they would nevertheless be Eurocentric. They are silent on the all-encompassing issues of race, imperialism and colonialism. What happens if we dare to venture deeper, and beyond, into the abyss of European civilization, like Hannah Arendt or the anti-colonial philosophers so bravely did? Can fascism be seen as a colonial system coming home to roost? Or were there more subtle continuities in structures, actors or discourse? With a colonial perspective, what happens with the elevated position of liberalism as a timeless category against which fascism is measured up?
Chapter 3 – Situating Colonialism in Relation to Fascism

There has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism. And just as it is itself not free from barbarism, neither is it free from the process of transmission, in which it falls from one set of hands into another. The historical materialist thus moves as far away from this as measurably possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.

(Walter Benjamin)\textsuperscript{143}

Here I will venture to situate fascism, through chains of continuities, within a larger European historical tradition. This undertaking will have to face up to the views of either seeing fascism as an anomaly to European historical development or as being ideologically antithetical to European liberalism. By asking questions about continuity, I will, critically, reevaluate current periodizations, while not necessarily discarding them. To explore the role of colonialism in shaping fascism requires looking beyond single national histories of Europe to global perspectives and transnational developments. Similarly, by historicizing liberalism, I will seek to open up the narrative for new questions about a supposed normality that was abruptly disturbed by fascism. While many scholars have, to some degree, recognized fascism’s amorphous character in appropriating socialism, nationalism, syndicalism and conservatism, few have been willing to explore its linkages to liberalism. Instead of privileging liberalism as an ahistorical ideology, I will analyze its role in shaping phenomena, such as imperialism, colonialism, nationalism and racism. The aim is to examine, critically, the claim that anti-liberalism represents one of fascism’s core functions. There is a need to ask to what degree fascism was anti-liberal and what it constituted.

While it is important not to limit an understanding of colonialism to different forms of colonial rule, the specific histories of Germany and Italy as colonial empires will have to be accounted for. To what degree can one argue that colonial practices and ideology informed fascist practice and ideology? What were the continuities? What significance is attached to the fact that fascism and Nazism emerged at a time when the colonial empires of France and Great Britain were reaching their territorial peak? Both Germany and Italy embarked on the colonial project very late and only gained colonies at the end of the 19th century. Germany developed into a colonial empire in a short time, while Italy’s early colonialism was limited and was resurrected, with some success, under fascism. Germany’s history as a colonial

\textsuperscript{143} Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History”, 1940, Translated by Dennis Redmond
empire has been thoroughly researched. But the question of colonial continuities from Imperial Germany to Nazi Germany is a hotly debated topic. The same cannot be said of the Italian case. When it comes to the colonial continuities, the historiography of Italian fascism still suffers from a lack of critical tradition.

As for liberalism, a similar approach will be adopted here as Blinkhorn did with conservatism. The question will be asked in what areas did liberalism converge with fascism and in what areas did it conflict with it? What was the liberal stance towards colonialism and imperialism in Italy and Germany? And how, if at all, did it inform fascism’s imperialism and expansionism? If liberalism can be seen as having had an influence on fascism, what does that mean for a purely ideological analysis of fascism?

**German and Italian “Latecomers”: Colonialism, Expansionism, and Nationalism**

With their belated unifications during the 19th century, Germany and Italy entered the quest for colonies as latecomers compared to the long-standing colonial empires of Britain and France. Britain and France had built up their colonial possessions over centuries, offering them protected markets, ample supply of raw materials and prestige on the world stage. It was against this backdrop of inferiority that German and Italy nationalisms took root. During the second half of the 19th century, the unification movements in Germany and Italy justified their struggles on the basis of liberal nationalist ideology. National unification would be made possible through domestic development and the new states would have to become Great Powers. Thus international power and prestige was important from the outset. In Italy, nationalist ideas of a republican democratic Italy, dating back to the 1848 Revolution, were expressed in terms of a hereditary continuation from the Roman Empire. Its historic mission was to attain power and influence over the Mediterranean. In Germany, the Frankfurt Parliament complemented, in 1848, its progressive desires for abolishing authoritarian state structures and socio-economic modernization with a vision of creating a great German continental power. 144

Those German and Italian political forces that were calling for colonies in order to compete with Britain and France were aware of the obstacles contained in their geopolitical thinking. What had taken their British and French adversaries centuries to accomplish had to

be undertaken by Germany and Italy in only a few decades. Given the time pressure, domestic development had to wait. Also, the few remaining territories that were available for colonizing were subpar compared to the colonies Britain, France, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain had already claimed. Hence, the most vocal criticism against colonial expansion came from those arguing that it would not be economically beneficial. This criticism was not directed against expansion or colonialism per say. But to counter such utilitarian arguments, colonial agitators emphasized the prestige factor. Colonies had to be claimed for the sake of international standing. This became more important than the economic significance of the few remaining options. Nevertheless, territorial conquest of different sorts was high on the agenda of all political factions both in Germany and Italy, with the exception of the socialist Left. The arguments for expansionism were as diverse as their proponents and became highly influential among the nationalist movements in both countries. Contributing to such sentiments was the strong irredentist strain of German and Italian nationalism. Following the unification of Germany (1866–1871) and Italy (1859–1870), it became clear for nationalist ideologues that the countries were ethnically incomplete. Pockets of ethnic Germans and Italians resided in neighboring countries. According to this logic, the newly unified states could in no way settle for a small nation state status but had to expand their respective territories in Europe. Together with national prestige, irredentism was increasingly used as an argument in favor of acquiring colonies. The immigrants who had settled in the New World would be able to return to the new colonies as a way of preserving their national identity. While irredentism usually made claims for continental (European) expansion in the service of a dominant nationality, it was never divorced from ideas of colonialist expansionism. For the governments of Germany and Italy, irredentism was diverted into colonial aspirations and subsequently back into European expansionism, when the opportunity arose in the period from 1900 to World War I, that is, after the disintegration of the European balance of power system.

This interpretation of historical developments in Germany and Italy with its problematic and delayed relationship to colonialism has been named the “latecomers” theory. It is, however, important to complement a theory that deals with the peculiarity of Germany’s and Italy’s late entry into the colonial project, with a deeper understanding of the influence of radical nationalist movements in both countries. They became essentially

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imperialist organizations. What characterized them was their extra-parliamentary nature, working as lobbying groups across the political spectrum of the Right. In Italy, one of the largest was the Italian Nationalist Association (ANI), which was formed in 1906. It was part of a new nationalist trend following the devastating defeat of Italian forces to Ethiopia at the battle of Adowa in 1896. It advocated a policy of expansionism to reclaim prestige that a glorious past justified. ANI was a large umbrella organization of right-wing nationalist societies, which espoused ideas ranging from imperialism to liberal irredentism.\textsuperscript{148}

Traditionally scholars have classified ANI as a pre-fascist, anti-liberal movement due to its support for a strong authoritarian state. This view emanates, however, from an ideological analysis of the organization. In reality, many of its forming members came from the ruling Italian Liberal Party, who were dissatisfied with the government’s handling of foreign and domestic affairs. This liberal opposition argued in favor of a strong state and pushed for a more aggressive form of expansionism abroad and a non-compromising strategy to crush the labor movement and the Socialist Party (PSI) at home.\textsuperscript{149}

In Germany, there were many more such lobby groups, each representing certain interests or ideologies, contributing to a rich civil society. One such lobby group was the Pan-German League, which was established in 1891. Tellingly, it propagated irredentism with a strong current of radical ethnic nationalism (völkisch). While seeking confrontation with the European powers over territories on the Continent, it also spoke favorably of colonial expansionism.\textsuperscript{150} Other German lobby groups, such as the Colonial Society and the Navy League were less nationalistic when it came to continental expansion but more radical in their colonial visions. Using their large memberships to exert influence on German society,\textsuperscript{151} the ANI and the Pan-German League were important pre-fascist organizations that would later shape the ideologies and policies of the Italian Fascist Party and the Nazi Party. These organizations illustrate the deep involvement of civil society in the public debate over territorial expansionism. From the 1880s up to World War I, this debate was characterized by a division between those who wanted to prioritize continental expansion and those who fought for colonial possessions. It was a complex debate, involving different state and civil society actors, such as the navy and the army. However, their disagreement was more over

\textsuperscript{148}Kallis, Fascist Ideology: Territory and Expansionism, pp. 15–20.
\textsuperscript{150}Kallis, Fascist Ideology: Territory and Expansionism, pp. 15–16.
form than substance; neither side explicitly opposed the other’s imperialist ideas. The question was rather which type of expansion should be prioritized. Continental expansionism was, thus, justified in terms of attaining prestige among the European powers, which could, at a later date, be channeled into colonial projects.\textsuperscript{152}

Another debate was about the form of the expansion: whether it should be achieved through economic or political control as part of an informal or a formal empire. In the decade leading up to 1914, Germany and Italy shifted their ambitions from colonial expansion to European territorial aggrandizements. Italy turned away from African ventures and began focusing on the Adriatic to gain advantage over the French and British in the Mediterranean. Although the strategy was still expansionist in a colonial sense, it emphasized territorial control closer to Italy. As for Germany, the policy change occurred after the Moroccan Crisis when the government failed to dislodge British-French hegemony in the Congo Basin. Following the Navy’s inability to fulfill Germany’s colonial ambitions, the Army, successfully, used the opportunity to push for its traditional ideas of expansion on the Continent. Due to Germany’s and Italy’s unsuccessful efforts to create informal empires, both adopted the strategy of formal imperialism to realize their territorial goals. With the outbreak of World War I, Italian irredentists set their sights on expansionism in the Adriatic and South Tyrol in addition to African colonies. It was in line with Allied promises to Italy when it entered the Great War on the side of the Entente in 1915. As it turned out, few of these promises were fulfilled. Slavic peoples were given their own lands and additional African colonies were denied.\textsuperscript{153}

For Germany, World War I was seen as offering a possibility for huge territorial expansion both in the East and West. Towards the end of 1917, there had been great advances on the Eastern Front and these gains were formalized with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. But after Germany’s capitulation, the loss of the new territories fed into nationalist disappointments, which manifested themselves in the \textit{Dolchstoss Legende}. After World War I, German ideas of eastern expansion became more radical, partly in reaction to the fact that Wilhelmine Germany had had no clear expansionist strategy; it was torn between West and East, between Weltpolitik and continental expansionism.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{153} Kallis, \textit{Fascist Ideology: Territory and Expansionism}, pp. 20–25.
\textsuperscript{154} Kallis, \textit{Fascist Ideology: Territory and Expansionism}, pp. 20–25.
Before 1918, Germany and Italy followed similar historical trajectories. They were bent on imperialist ventures, sought to enjoy the fruits of Great Power status, completed national unification, adopted social imperialist strategies and became the breeding ground for movements of radical nationalism. When mainstream nationalist desires for expansionism failed to materialize after the war, they were translated into new radical right-wing forms, culminating in fascism and Nazism. As political scientist Eqbal Ahmad pointed out, it was not incidental that fascism developed in Germany and Italy. Both countries were largely “denied” their own raw material colonies and markets, when they were in the process of industrializing their economies. But to illustrate in what ways Italy and Germany were latecomers to colonialism, it is necessary to look more closely at the colonial period of the two countries. Which forces propagated colonialism and how did they affect the rise of fascism and Nazism?

**Italian Colonialism under Liberal and Fascist Regimes**

Italian colonialism started in 1869, at the Eritrean coast, with the area becoming a formal colony in 1882. The Ethiopian Empire, however, resisted the colonizers’ expansion into its territories. The Italian parliament responded to the setbacks with demands for vengeance and an escalation of colonial conquest and repression. Further colonial expansion led to the creation of the Italian colony of Eritrea in 1890. At that time, the liberal and authoritarian Prime Minister Franscesco Crisp pursued a foreign and colonial policy based on a social imperialist logic. In southern Italy, there were increased demands for substantial land reforms. Eritrea was seen as a means to solve these land problems, while getting support from the dissenting southern population. Plans for extensive settlements of Italians in Eritrea were made with the help of the liberal Leopoldo Frachetti. Huge areas of land were confiscated from the indigenous people and made ready for settlement. The Eritreans living there were largely seen as “human disposables,” with no rights and many obligations towards the new colonial overlords. There were mass killings of Eritreans and land confiscations generated resistance, which led to indigenous uprisings. As a result of Italy’s defeat in the First Italian-Ethiopian War, Crispi resigned and the colonial policy was revised. Crispi’s successor was

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the liberal Antonio di Rudinì, who abandoned settlement ideas for practical reasons. He set out to develop Eritrea as a raw material colony.

From 1908 onwards, Eritrea became a place for recruitment of colonial warriors, indigenous collaborators, who were used to conquer Somalia (1908–1910) and Libya (1912–1932). However, the new governor of Eritrea, Ferdinando Martini, still had hopes for turning the colony into an Italian settlement and for expelling the whole indigenous population. Yet, with a limited budget and resources, such plans had to be abandoned. Instead, he had to rely on a system of restricted indirect rule. This did not refrain Martini from demanding the complete subjugation of the colonized inhabitants. Intent on keeping the indigenous population underdeveloped, he was strongly opposed to interracial relationships and to the establishment of schools. He had this to say when informed of a Swedish Christian missionary marrying an Eritrean woman in 1901:

> It is absolutely necessary for the government to affirm in an open manner the superiority of the white race over the black. … The prohibition of marital union ought to constitute an insurmountable barrier necessary for the protection and maintenance of the prestige of our race. But the Swedish mission has demonstrated its lack of sentiment of such prestige.

The origins of Italian racial laws in the colonies started in 1905 with an outline that was later modified into a civil code in 1909. This legislation prohibited marriages between Eritrean men and Italian women. The children of interracial couples would be tested for citizenship rights based on racial characteristics. Subsequent racial laws under fascism would go further, but were rooted in these early policies and contained vital doctrinal traces from the 1909 legislation. Ferdinando Martini was of the opinion that the death penalty would be the only suitable punishment for indigenous people who had committed grave “blood crimes.” In 1925, Martini was among those who signed the Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals. After

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161 Olimo De Napoli, “Race and Empire: The Legitimation of Italian Colonialism in Juridical Thought”, *The Journal of Modern History* 85 (December 2013), 816.
162 "IL MANIFESTO DEGLI INTELLETTUALI DEL FASCISMO 1925", Original document and signatures reproduced here: http://www.memorieincammino.it/admin/UploadAllegatiArgomentiArchDoc/0000010/a.IL%20manifesto%20de
Martini’s time as a governor, there was a slow change to a more paternalistic form of colonial governance. It was recognized that there was a need for limited schooling. But it had to be tailored to the “infantile minds” of the colonized, so as not to give them intellectual tools, with which they could challenge the colonial order. Similar dynamics of colonialism existed in the British and French colonies. Over the course of the history of colonialism, strategies shifted from careful paternalism to total subjugation and to paternalism again. British and French paternalisms served the purpose of “assisting” colonized people to gain parity with paternal power. The notion of superiority of the colonizers continued to be the norm, and it was their might that gave them the right to rule and conquer. Thus, paternalism neither hampered nor contradicted exploitation of the colonized world. Forced labor and other forms of economic exploitation all existed under paternalist regimes. However, in the British and French colonies a colonized “elite would eventually develop. This elite could periodically perform limited criticism of colonial abuse.\(^{163}\)

Under the Italian fascist regime, Eritrea was eventually turned into a settler colony with 12 percent of the population being Italians. What followed was a more determined policy of apartheid the Italian colonies with strict racial legislation and segregation. The Italians won the Second Italian-Ethiopian War and turned Ethiopia into a colony. From 1937 onwards, several new racial laws were implemented, each one superseding the other in its severity. In the end, race mixing in any form was prohibited. Even Italian settlers were punished for socializing with the “natives,” or if they hired indigenous labor without the approval of the governor. The degeneration of the Italian race was to be prevented at all costs.\(^{164}\) During this period, Italy pursued a policy of greater expansionism, which also required total control over their colonies. Since 1911, Libya had been an Italian colony under a brutal occupation by the liberal government. With the fascists in power, a campaign of suppressing indigenous resistance began in 1932. This campaign would result in the starving or killing of a third of the population. The plan had already been prepared by the previous liberal government. There were forceful relocations of the semi-nomadic Gebel people from their fertile lands in attempts to destroy their way of life and to convert them into a low-cost labor force. It was the view of both the fascist and liberal political establishment that the nomads posed a threat to progress and were potential rebels. Therefore, such socio-economic
and cultural eradication was justified. Through an extensive system of concentration camps and with forced relocations, about 50,000 people were killed. Chemical weapons were also used in Libya and, later, in Ethiopia. In total, it is estimated that around 100,000 Berbers, Arabs and Jews, were killed by the Italians in Libya. In Ethiopia, there were also huge losses of life. The estimates of people killed during the war and occupation range from 350,000 to 760,000 people of a population of 10 million. Civilian settlements were bombed indiscriminately; there was an extensive use of chemical weapons; civilians were massacred as reprisals; forced labor camps were set up; and extensive deportation and killings of intellectuals took place. Patrick Bernhard argues that the Ethiopian War constituted the first war after World War I where a population deemed racially inferior was so brutally repressed. Also, Aram Mattioli has made the case that the war constituted a new type of unconventional colonial warfare that foretold practices in World War II.

**Italian Fascist Imperialism: Unique or Western?**

To historians, such as Davide Rodogno, Italian imperialism under fascism cannot be seen as radically different from that of other European imperialisms. Richard Bosworth goes so far as to claim that fascist imperialism did not exist, because Mussolini was obsessed with imperialist dreams that were essentially the same as his liberal predecessors. It is true that the colonial rule and repression, had been initiated by previous liberal governments. Mussolini also strived for a classical 19th century colonial empire, which was not as extreme in its racial policies as the coming Nazi empire. Inspired by the Fischer controversy in Germany, Bosworth argues that there were similarities between Italy and Germany, when it came to foreign policy continuities between the two world wars. While Italian historiography lacks its own Fischer controversy, a strong argument can be made for such a link. Not only was Liberal Italy seeking territorial advantage in Ethiopia, Albania, and Asia Minor; expansionist nationalist ideas flourished in the mainstream. The myth of Rome was highlighted, and the concept of *Mare Nostrum* was already coined. Liberal Italy contemplated war to boost

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national identity projections. This was most vividly illustrated by the institutional continuity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs between the two regimes.

Bosworth questions the assumption that fascism really changed the norms of Italian diplomacy and regressed to irrationality. Rodogno, on the other hand, wants to emphasize one difference between liberal imperialism and fascist imperialism. He argues that the expansionism of the fascists abroad was closely connected to radical fascist goals at home. The wars in Africa and Spain led to fascist radicalization, setting the stage for the racial laws enacted in 1938, which, as noted, were built on colonial legislation. Back in Italy, these colonial practices translated into anti-Slavic and anti-Semitic laws in 1938. Moreover, Rodogno also thinks that the fascist aim of conquering South-Eastern European lands, and indirectly or directly ruling its white Christian inhabitants, also sets fascist imperialism apart from its liberal predecessor. Thus, he locates fascism in a longer tradition of imperialism and expansionism, which also reflects its tension-ridden relationship with conservative forces in the military and government. Like other Italian nationalists, Mussolini used the incomplete victory of World War I as a point of reference. Italy was denied promises of expansion in the Adriatic Sea. For Mussolini, war was the driving force of history, shaped by ultra-nationalism, racism, militarism and social-Darwinism. Only through war and expansion would a true nation be created.

The period of 1922–1932 was characterized by the fascist regime’s compromise with conservative elites, which partly hindered radicalization of the regime itself. The Italian army was never radicalized to the same extent as the Wehrmacht. Even the militarized black shirts were still regimented in the army and had no freedom of action. The army retained its control and ensured the continuation of a conservative nationalist and monarchist elite. But it, nevertheless, shared Mussolini’s stance on such issues as expansionism, Italy’s Great Power status, and colonial empire. Thus, the military elite was just as beguiled by liberal imperialist dreams as Mussolini was. And although it ultimately shared a less racialized vision of empire, it executed the orders of the regime. Furthermore, the Italian army shared similarities with the Wehrmacht, the SS and the German police in the practices of anti-partisan operations, although civilian casualties were lower in territories under Italian control. The army commanders themselves encouraged their soldiers to be more brutal against the occupied peoples, especially in the Balkans, where General Mario Roatta referred to a colonial war

against barbarians. In Slovenia and Dalmatia, there was a massive internment of civilians, reflecting occupation policies similar to those executed in Libya. On top of that, the fascists had radical plans of a regional de-Balkanization, with ethnic cleansing and a future Italian settlement of the Adriatic territories.171

There are historiographical disagreements about whether Italian fascist imperialism should be interpreted as part of a general tradition of European imperialism or of a more specific tradition of fascism. Without subscribing to the view of a direct causal continuity between colonialism and fascism, Patrick Bernhard has explored the ways, in which Italian fascist colonialism in Africa informed expansionist desires and practices of the Nazi regime in Eastern Europe. He notes many instances where Nazi officials were thoroughly impressed with Italian fascist colonialism in Africa. Fascist Italy had massive settlement plans for its African colonies, aiming at carving out territorial space for 1.5-6.5 million Italians by the middle of the 20th century. Already by October 1938, Mussolini had sent 20,000 settlers abroad. For the German official Gustav Strohm, reporting back from Addis Ababa to Nazi Germany in 1938, the Italian colonial enterprise demonstrated what he termed “fascist pride.” He thought that Germany could learn from Italy in its attempts to create an empire from scratch. Thus, in the minds of many Nazi officials, the Second Italian-Ethiopian War 1935–1936 made colonialism a real possibility again.172

The new fascist regime in Italy tried to distance itself from earlier French and British forms of colonial rule. To prove themselves as better colonizers, and to justify a new type colonialism, the fascists defined their undertaking as a way of re-bonding rootless Italians through settlement in a rural environment. Colonial rural life would encourage traditional gender relations, increase nativity, and revert to a state of social stability and immobility, which had been disturbed and unraveled by urban life. Improving the Italian stock was both a precondition and justification for colonialization. It was accompanied by aspirations to create a new modern scientific colonialism with social engineering and infrastructure projects. This new scientific approach even captured the imagination of commentators and intellectuals in Britain and the United States. There were even examples of British farmers requesting that they be allowed to settle in Libya. It was seen as a logical improvement on earlier forms of colonialism, for it had a socio-political content: a utopian racial improvement rather than purely economic exploitation.173 But the greatest interest came from Nazi Germany. Italy was

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seen as a role model for latecomers that could prevail by developing their own colonialism. The aim was not only to consolidate preexisting colonial territories but also to expand them. Italy was an example of how expansionism and colonialism could be envisioned as future projects. The German Colonial Society sponsored several public lectures and publications, illustrating how Italian Ethiopia could rejuvenate German colonialism. Before 1937, British colonialism had been described in positive terms in Germany, but subsequently, Italian colonialism was seen as being far superior both in terms of effectiveness and morality. The British Empire was faulted for bringing death and misery, an immoral Pirate Empire, robbing the world. Even as late as 1942, the Colonial Society was still organizing such lectures. Bernhard argues that these colonial discourses captured the imagination of the public.

When imprisoned German soldiers were interrogated by the Allies during World War II and asked what they were fighting for, many answered either Lebensraum or colonies in Eastern Europe. According to Bernard, Italian Ethiopia was a far more important reference point in shaping the ideas for Nazi expansionism than British or French imperialism. Italy and Germany shared similar geopolitical positions and both regimes were fascist. Starting in 1920, Hitler made frequent references to Italy’s colonialism. To him, Germany and Italy were latecomers to geopolitics, having been denied colonies. Expansionism was necessary, not only to prevent overpopulation but also for völkisch reasons—for the survival of the race. Hitler admired Mussolini as a genius for creating a true nationalist state as a bulwark against bolshevism. He argued that Italy had the right to dominate the Mediterranean and that only a strong allied Nazi Germany could prevent it from regressing to older ways of thinking. Hitler also drew parallels to the racial politics of the two fascist regimes. Italian racial superiority justified its domination over subjugated peoples just as German racial superiority did in Eastern Europe.174

**German Colonialism: Practices, Supporters and Critics**

While lasting only from 1884 to 1918, the German Colonial Empire was still the world’s fourth largest colonial empire at its height. Germany ruled over large areas of land in Africa: the colonies of German South West Africa, German East Africa, Togo and Cameroon. And in East Asia and the Pacific, Germany had a colony in the Shadong Province of China, Samoa, 174 Bernhard, “Borrowing from Mussolini”, 620–626.
New Guinea, and a number of other islands. Bismarck was initially skeptical towards colonialism and was persuaded, or rather pushed into it, by powerful pressure groups and colonial adventures and entrepreneurs.\(^\text{175}\) During the 19th century, German liberals established one of the most important pressure group for German overseas expansionism. They were, above all, inspired by the westward expansion of the United States, its laissez-faire principles and its liberal political system. The social composition of this group was largely made up of entrepreneurs, merchants and academics. German-American exchanges in these groups contributed to discourses on imperialism, colonialism, territorial expansion and race.\(^\text{176}\) These social groups were often the first to claim territories on behalf of Germany, which would eventually declare them formal colonies. And it should not be forgotten that Bismarck invited the European powers to the Berlin conference in 1884, which sanctioned and formalized the Scramble for Africa.\(^\text{177}\)

The German Colonial Empire shared many similarities with the other European powers, embracing the civilizing mission and the ideology of white supremacy. Colonies proved the might and the right of the nation. There were also economic and social imperialist benefits to be gained. Additionally, as with Italy and other European powers, there was the idea of establishing large German settler colonies. Thus, Germany was part of the larger colonial project, using the same justification for colonial desires and practices. Outwardly, individual European countries tried to portray their own colonies as more humane and efficient than those of the other colonial powers. In practice, however, the European states collaborated closely with each other on a variety of colonial issues.\(^\text{178}\) One example of such cooperation was the exchange in knowledge of tactics and strategies in defeating the indigenous population in colonial wars. During the Herero and Nama genocide, the British government officially criticized German conduct, while, at the same time, having British officers stationed in their headquarters in German South West Africa who informed them of

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tactics and strategies. Thus, with the aim of maintaining white supremacy over the African population, the British and Germans colonial administrations collaborated before 1914.\(^{179}\) Many historians argue that German colonialism contained certain national particularities. While racial segregation was a feature in all the colonial systems, it has been maintained that only Germany formalized such rule in its colonies through a legal system that prohibited intermarriages and meted out severe punishment for offenders. However, this is not entirely true, for similar bans were enacted in several British African colonies.\(^{180}\) The colonized were subjected to perpetual violence in all the colonies. But historians have shown that Germany was unique in applying genocidal strategies in the 1904 war against the Herero and Nama in German South West Africa. A vibrant scholarly debate is still being conducted about whether and to what extent this genocide can be seen as the origins of the Nazi’s genocidal project.

One group of historians point to close similarities in practices and transmission of knowledge from colonialism to Nazism. Another one emphasizes the difference between the two genocides and the fact that the extermination of the Herero and Nama was not an official colonial policy. There were also broader continuities of the colonial traditions. Colonialism was not restricted to colonial territories. It affected Germany and Europe as a whole, with colonial ideologies being reproduced in political debates, popular culture and emerging new sciences, such as geography and anthropology. These were processes that continued after the fall of the German Colonial Empire, leaving many traces. Perhaps illustrating some of the most important traces were concepts, such as race and Lebensraum, which had their origins and development in colonialism as a system of thought and practice. These considerations are common within post-colonial studies, focusing on the relations and processes between the colony and metropole. The purpose is not only to explore the effects of colonialism on the colonized but also on how it changed the colonizers and their home countries.\(^{181}\)

Even though German colonialism did not last as long as that of its European counterparts, these considerations contribute to the argument that the colonial elements of Nazi rule should be investigated. In the words of historian Jürgen Zimmerer:


\(^{180}\) Conrad, *German Colonialism*, pp. 3–4.

\(^{181}\) Birthe Kundrus, “German Colonialism: Some Reflections on Reassessments, Specificities, and Constellations”, *German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany*, Edited by Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama (New York 2011), p. 36.
The project of investigating the colonial elements of Nazi rule is well suited to the fundamental questions posed by ‘postcolonial studies’, whose researchers argue that colonial history should not be regarded as a one-way street in which the non-European world was created according to European models and ideas. Instead, developments inside and outside Europe should be examined for evidence that they influenced, drove and radicalized each other. This approach connects non-European with European history in revealing ways.182

Of Germany’s colonies, German South West Africa was the only explicit settler colony, with thousands of German and European settlers living there by World War I. The German government actively promoted this settlement policy. Settlement happened at the same time as the two major ethnic groups, the Herero and the Nama, were divided and conquered. The land holdings in the colony were confiscated for the settlers to farm. The remaining territories were set aside as a reservation for the native population. Epidemics, violence and dispossession led to the rebellion of the Herero people in 1904. Together with its suppression, the Germans unleashed a war of extermination against both the Herero and Nama from 1904 to 1907.183

The general in charge of the campaign, Lothar von Trotha, called it a “race war.” It is estimated that 82% of the Herero population were wiped out or about 65 thousand people. For the Nama, it is believed that half of its population of 20 thousand were killed. Trotha claimed that he learned the tactics of racial war in East Africa, which included summary executions, the burning of villages, and mass starvation. He argued that there could be no humane war against non-humans. Trotha issued an order to his soldiers that any Herero in the territory of the German colony was to be shot, including women and children. The order was a justification of racial violence rather than its cause, since the massacres had been going on for a month already. The Germans forced the Hereros to flee into the Omaheke desert where many died from thirst and hunger. When Trotha’s killings became known back in Germany, he was recalled from duty. Nevertheless, back in Germany he received the Imperial Medal for his service and was promoted in rank. What was more, the mass murders continued in South West Africa after his departure. On the basis of the statements of intent and the practices of extermination, historians have used the term genocide for these crimes.184 The army’s

183 Conrad, German Colonialism, pp. 38–41, 83.
184 Conrad, German Colonialism, p. 84–86.
General staff’s own official history acknowledged this at the time: “Like a wild animal hunted half to death the enemy was driven from one source of water to the next, until, his will [is] gone, he finally became a victim of the nature of his own land. Thus the waterless Omaheke would complete what German weapons had begun: the destruction of the Herero people.”

Concentration camps were also established in the colony. They were the same type of concentration camp, as the Spanish had used in Cuba 1896 and the British in South Africa. Yet, the mortality rate was much higher. By one calculation, the Shark Island concentration camp had a mortality rate of 100 percent. It meant that in one year an entire group of inmates died; during the same year, many newcomers lost their lives as well. Historian Helmut Walser Smith claims that although the Nazi concentration camps were built for a different purpose, their mortality rates were significantly lower during their first nine years of operation. It was not until after the outbreak of World War II and the establishment of the extermination camps that these rates increased.

Following the extermination war, the colonial government coerced almost all remaining adult African men into forced labor, regulating their lives through strict work regiments and a racially-based identity system. The colonial society was organized through a system of racial segregation. The city Windoek was, for example, racially segregated with specific lodgings for Africans. The German legal ban on mixed marriages was enforced in its strictest form in South West Africa, forbidding all marriages between German men and African women and annulling the ones already in existence. Women and children of such mixed marriages were deprived of German citizenship and German men were denied voting rights. Coinciding with the adoption of the race laws was the settlement of over 2000 German women in the colony. Many of these women had been trained in colonial schools in Germany to prepare them for their tasks as bearers of German culture. Their task was to save the German men from “going native”, while living a domesticated life in the new colony. The German colony lasted until 1915, when it was captured by a South African invasion force.

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After World War I, the colony became a mandate and remained under South African control until 1990 when it finally gained its independence and became Namibia.\textsuperscript{188}

The German colony of Cameroon was turned into a plantation economy. There was much brutality against the indigenous peoples with land confiscations and forced labor regimes. In a series of endless scandals stemming from its tyrannical rule, the governor was finally recalled to Germany. However, the brutality continued with racial segregation and land expropriation. Togo had been a center for the trans-Atlantic slave trade for centuries, with the coastal region having been raiding centers for European slavers. As a German colony, Togo became a typical trade colony with a free trade policy and few European settlers. The Germans never had full territorial control over the colony; nonetheless, their rule was ruthless and based on notions of white-supremacy. The racial policies were often more strictly enforced there than those in the neighboring British and French colonies.\textsuperscript{189} When the French took over the colony many of the coercive and brutal policies continued, such as the policy of tax labor, forced labor as payment of taxes.\textsuperscript{190}

German East Africa was Germany’s largest colony and it was claimed by the adventurer and liberal politician Carl Peters. Peters was well known as a brutal colonial ruler even among his German contemporaries. Nazi Germany would make a movie about his life portraying him as a great hero. His ambition was to build a “German India” in Africa. The Germans initiated long military campaigns and penal expeditions to expand and consolidate their rule over the colony. This was met with fierce resistance from the inhabitants. These penal expeditions were often initiated at the behest of individual officers without prior approval from the colonial administration.\textsuperscript{191}

During the 19th century, the violence in the European colonies was visible and public, which set them apart from violence in Western Europe where it had become more hidden, rationalized and institutionalized. In the colonies, it was common to have public displays of corporal punishment and executions. Indigenous discontent eventually culminated in the uprising called the Maji-Maji War. Unlike other colonial wars, the German public knew very little about this war. The German troops used native collaborators and saw it more as pacifying a rebellion rather than a race war. Nevertheless, the war and the following famine, induced by the destruction of the means of subsistence, killed an estimated of 300 thousand

\textsuperscript{188} Conrad, \textit{German Colonialism}, pp. 41–42, 118–120.
\textsuperscript{189} Conrad, \textit{German Colonialism}, p. 42–50.
\textsuperscript{190} Zimmerer, “The birth of the Ostland out of the spirit of colonialism”, 205–206.
\textsuperscript{191} Conrad, \textit{German Colonialism}, pp. 50–54.
Africans. After the war, a progressively-minded governor tried to turn the colony into a trade colony open to African, Indian and Arabic merchants with limited administrative participation of Africans. Yet, these plans came to naught and were fiercely opposed by the German settlers.192

In the Pacific, the German colonies on the Samoa islands and in New Guinea were administered more paternalistically with emphasis on preserving native structures. The mixed marriage ban was enacted in Samoa but only a limited version of it. The local governor were inspired by the British colonial practice of separation. In New Guinea mixed marriages were widely accepted and even practiced by the governor himself. In the Pacific, the German colonial governors were recruited from the educated bourgeoisie in contrast to the German military elite ruling African territories. There were no major colonial wars. The governors wanted to achieve a gradual modernization of the islands, which was supposed to protect the “noble savages” from the excesses of the modern world. Parallel to these paternalistic intentions, the colonies developed a plantation economy that relied on imported Chinese workers. These plantation workers were treated with brutality and violence.193

In China, the German colony was the polar opposite from the Pacific ones. It was set up as a show case of the superiority of German modernization against Chinese civilization as well as the other colonial powers. There was a German-Chinese college and significant infrastructure developments. Cities in the German colony were reorganized along racial lines, which severely restricted all interactions between Chinese and Germans. Needless to say, the German rule was met with skepticism and resistance, conflict and repression. Germany fought in the Boxer War, which was one of three major colonial wars Germany waged. The Kaiser had ordered his troops to take no prisoners, and the pacification operations that followed resulted in several massacres.194

The German public debate about colonialism was quite diverse, ranging from criticism to celebration. The most stable base of support consisted of the educated bourgeoisie, industrialists and entrepreneurs. There was more ambiguity towards colonialism from petite bourgeoisie and the working class. This ambiguity was reflected in the international labor movement as a whole. The internationalist ideology of socialism was sometimes challenged racist suggestions that white workers should be protected from a competing workforce of colonized peoples and “backward races.” In general, critical voices

against colonialism were primarily directed against the brutality of the colonial officers and the wars being fought. Thus, the main complaint was more about the practice of colonialism, not its essence. Within the political sphere, the strongest support came from the National Liberals. Some of their most significant leaders were heavily involved in the colonial movement. The two Conservative parties initially shared Bismarck’s skepticism towards colonialism, but supported it when the colonies were established. During the colonial wars, conservatives were in favor of brutal suppression of rebellions, stopping short of propagating a full-scale genocide. The Catholic Center Party was critical of colonial excesses and exploitation, but positive towards the idea of the “civilizing mission.”

The most critical voices came from the Left Liberals and the Social Democrats. The Left Liberals were hostile toward territorial acquisitions, propagating, instead, free trade. Nevertheless, they would later support colonial practices for the sake of the cultural mission. The Conservatives, National Liberals, and the Left Liberals never directly argued in favor of genocidal policies against the Herero and Nama. Yet, they saw the violence as a necessary evil to achieve progress. It was more a question of accepting a policy already in place rather than proscribing it. The Left Liberals compared the African people to wild animals and proposed a reservation system modeled after the United States. The Social Democrats were active in exposing some of the most brutal colonial atrocities and their scandals. Its radical wing was critical towards colonialism as a system, portraying it as an exploitation of foreign people and as social imperialism. Nevertheless, the reform wing of the party subscribed to the popular belief that colonialism was a positive factor if practiced fairly in the name of the civilizing mission.195

With the post-colonial concept of metropole, one can transcend a traditional historical narrative of colonialism with its emphasis on how Europe acted upon the colonized world and whether it was bad or good. Viewing the metropole-colony binary in relational terms opens up the possibility of studying how Europe changed, while changing the world. It is an approach that not only explores the dynamics within European societies and metropoles; it also focuses on the influence of colonial possessions and colonial ideology on the nationalism of different European states. Framed in this way, the question becomes in what way colonies acted as laboratories for modern societies. Many practices that would have been difficult to experiment with in Europe were first tried out in the colonies, such as social engineering.

Guettel, *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism and the United States*, pp. 220–221.
eugenics, and city planning, and then later brought to Europe. Even after Germany lost its colonies, large segments of the public in Weimar Germany saw the colonies as testing grounds. Hence, a broad political consensus formed around the demand for a return of the colonies in the 1920s.

Transnationally, the colonial frontier was often conceptualized as an alternative modernity to the perceived decadence and decay of European modernity. This frontier discourse, which took many forms, can be traced to American thinkers and German proponents of *Lebensraum* and *völkisch* nationalism. In Weimar and Nazi Germany, the colonial schools continued their existence. They taught women to preserve the German race and culture and to uphold a patriarchal gender order. The colonial school Rendsburg was one such example. It was used by the Nazis to prepare women both for their future settlement in Eastern Europe and for duties in the future colonies. Thus, anti-Semitism was not the only driving force of the radicalization of German nationalism. Ideas such as *Lebensraum* and the colonial world order, in conjunction with colonial practices, such as race laws and segregation, acted together to radicalize German nationalism from the 1890s onward.196

Any engagement with the continuities between colonialism and fascism needs to take into account the relative diversity of rule in the German colonies. At the same time, it should be recognized that such diversity was overshadowed by a common denominator, namely, the transnational character of the colonial ideology and its influence on the metropole. Thus, while there were differences in colonial policies during various periods of colonial rule, they also converged and existed side by side within the broader colonial project. These policies ranged from differentiation and apartheid to integration and assimilation. The race discourse, originated in the late 18th century when colonizers started through a race discourse to differentiate between them and the colonized. But it was never monolithic, for it reflected two radically different strands: a cultural philosophy based on the notion that the races could change and a biological understanding, which viewed the colonized races as static and unable to change. In many cases, these strands merged in different colonial practices, reinforcing the contradictions between them.197

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196 Conrad, *German Colonialism*, pp. 136–152, 188.
The Question of Continuities: From German Colonialism to Nazi Expansionism and Extermination

Some of the most forceful arguments in favor of viewing Nazis expansionism as being rooted in German colonialism stems from the historian Jürgen Zimmerer. He argues that there are structural similarities between Nazism and colonialism based on notions of race and space. These similarities are important to consider when understanding Nazi politics, especially in Eastern Europe where much of the extermination policies of World War II were pursued. The Nazi genocide in the East are from a purely Eurocentric view unique and novel. Yet, to Zimmerer, they were a radicalized form of colonial practices. Nazi policies included a complete reorganization of the economy, the polity, and the very demography of those Eastern European societies. Thus, Zimmerer argues that it is misleading when conventional historiography describes it as occupation. An occupation is usually a temporary condition based on the needs of a military administration. While colonialism encapsulates more effectively the unlimited time frame of a plan to restructure those societies in a drastic way. Zimmerer even goes so far as to argue that the Nazis pursued a civilizing mission based on racial hubris.198 Zimmerer’s argument is perhaps best illustrated by a statement made by Ewald Liedecke, the official German planner for East Prussia on the day of the invasion of Poland:

There is of course the temptation, and the danger, of trying to expand the economy in accordance with German requirements. This can be done through partial measures, such as factory estates and amalgamations or the occasional new settlement, which is the way the farming community is being restructured throughout the entire area at present. But the result would be dubious and culturally worthless because, if we are to transform the German countryside, we cannot follow in Polish footsteps and allow Polish forms of settlement and land distribution to become the basis of German settlement. What is required in place of this partial policy is an act of total colonization, which takes in the entire area, turns it round and resettles it according to German ideas. And, where necessary, so-called economic assets, such as may have been invested in buildings and farm installations, will have to be sacrificed in the higher interests of a definitive German design for the area.199

By looking at the precursors to such policies, Zimmerer seeks to clarify how the perpetrators came to see them as acceptable. This attempt of understanding does not exculpate but rather exposes problems of simple periodizations as narrative devices. They usually omit deeper national roots and leave untouched the grand narrative of the enlightenment modernity. It also begs the question of whether the average German saw it as a radical break from normality.\textsuperscript{200} Notions of race and space became an important indicator of Nazi ideology and expansionism and were closely connected to concepts such as *Lebensraum* and *Volksgenossen*. They entailed the need for space for the continued existence and purity of the race. These concepts functioned in a traditional colonial dynamic, a binary division of the world between those deemed worthy to rule and those deemed worthy to be ruled. During the 500 years of colonialism, there were, of course, different stages in development and different forms of practices used to justify European subjugation of the colonized. Yet, Zimmerer argues that the defining character was still this friend-foe dichotomy, to use Carl Schmitt’s expression, with its long historic roots, pitting ancient Greeks against barbarians, Christians against heathens, and superman against the subhuman. To Zimmerer, post-colonialism has shown that these basic binary encodings are prerequisites for colonial rule. An important factor in stabilizing these binary encodings is the homogenization that has taken place within the two different groups, which also creates a distance between them. Processes of nationalism set out to define what was unique for the nation and what unified it, thereby disregarding heterogeneity among the people living within constructed national boundaries. The purpose was to create a homogenous nation and a distance towards other nations or peoples.

Nazi officials and officers acted within this logic of race and space when describing invaded territories in Poland and Russia. The justification of rule was based on a perceived backwardness of the race, an emptiness of the space, and the absence of culture. The East was a tabula rasa, which was ready for modernization by scientists and entrepreneurs. Just like the colonialization of Africa, previous existence of economic and political structures, the pre-existing state formations were totally disregarded. Like the Africans, the Polish people were described by the Germans as a nation incapable of state-building, thus being a non-historic nation. The Slavic people, in general, were described as a race of slaves, who were destined to be ruled and who would be thankful to their new masters. These attitudes and perceptions are important to understand how vastly different Eastern Europe was administered by the

Nazi regime compared to Western Europe. The Nazi Ostministerium, the Ministry for the East, was explicitly modeled after the British India Office. Zimmerer mentions several practices of the warfare on the Eastern front, which for him, illustrates its similarities to colonial wars rather than “conventional” European wars. The use of forced labor is compared to the long history of the slave trade, especially instances where Eastern Europeans were hunted down and captured for the use of forced labor. Similar practices were used in the Congo under colonialism. The same applies to the Nazi denial of Soviet POWs basic rights through starvation and summary executions, the destruction of the means of subsistence, and the creation of death zones.

The precedent can be traced to colonial rule in South West Africa and East Africa. Lothar von Trotha’s extermination war and expulsion of the Herero to the Omaheke desert can be compared to the directives of Hitler and Himmler to drive the Jewish people into the marshes of Russia, which led to the massacres in the swamps of Pripjet. Zimmerer acknowledges the uniqueness of the Holocaust with respect to the role of a strong state in administering the extermination. Nevertheless, for him, the common factor lies in the breaking of a taboo: from expressing intent to actually acting upon it. This act was first committed in the colonies. Such a perspective makes the Holocaust thinkable and executable, even though the motives for exterminating Jews and the Sinti, Roma and killing homosexuals and the handicapped were vastly different from those guiding the extermination in the colonies.

Zimmerer claims that the Holocaust was an extreme radicalized behavior rooted in colonialism, although the reason for it was new—the idea of a Jewish world conspiracy. Obviously, Zimmerer also realizes that the industrialized and bureaucratic form of extermination embodied in Auschwitz is unique, though the archaic forms of killing led to higher death rates. It could be argued from a comparative perspective that similar practices are a weak indicator of continuity. The question that should be asked is rather if such structural similarities constitute a continuity. In short, was there a transmission of knowledge and practices? Zimmerer conceptualizes this connection as transmission channels. He argues that they can be divided into three types. The first is first-hand experience. Despite the difficulty with tracing the lineages between the two systems, many well-known individuals who were directly involved in colonialism, would later become propagandists for the Nazi...
regime. Such continuities included official positions. Dr Viktor Boettcher, who was a District President in Poznan under Nazi rule, had been the Deputy Governor in Cameroon. It is important to point out that involvement in the colonial regime did not automatically translate into Nazi complicity. Some older colonialists even opposed Nazism or became so disillusioned with colonial wars that they became pacifists. Perhaps more important was the transmission channel between individuals through indirect relations such as those between teachers and students. Many doctors, scientists and academics were students in the colonies and would later become the practicing professionals of Nazi extermination project. A case in point is Richard Walther Darré, who was a student at the colonial school Witzenhausen. He was later appointed SS Chief of the Race and Settlement Office and was responsible for determining which East European children were deemed racially worthy of re-Germanization. He was also one of the main blood and soil ideologues. Moreover, settlers, farmers and experts from the old colonies were recruited for the settlement of the East. And the immediate aftermath of the invasion of Poland, colonial companies were enlisted and preferred for administrative work, because they had experience in commerce with “primitive societies.”

The second form of transmission was through institutions, such as universities and military academies. Colonial knowledge was the base for much of the population studies prior to 1933. Colonial sciences were hugely important from 1800 onwards. The colonial roots of geography, for example, were considered vital because many subfields within geography would be the base for which racial research was built on. While these continuities need further historic research, Zimmerer argues, that even though colonial research seldom came to the same radical conclusion as Nazi research, it doubtlessly paved the way for future scientists that filled the needs of the Hitler regime.

The third channel of transmission is collective memory based on the transfer of colonial memories and knowledge through monuments, education, early films, lectures, exhibitions and literature. Journalists, such as Paul con Lettow-Vorbeck and Paul Rohrbachm, expressed their colonial experience through publications. Some became bestselling books, even up to 1945, and compulsory reading material in the schools of Nazi Germany. Thus, colonial memories and fiction captured the imagination of new generations of Germans. To be sure, this trend also reflected a larger more global culture. It included the

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importance of Wild West narratives of the conqueror and the savage who was either to be educated as a servant, resettled or removed from the empty space to make way for more efficient societies. Zimmerer concludes that Germans under the Kaiserreich must have been fully aware of a rich colonial history. This knowledge was transmitted through colonial clubs, geographical societies, political parties and popular culture. Thus, ordinary Germans must have been aware of representations of racial oppression, mixed marriages, expulsion and resettlement to reservations of savage and native races. These were important elements of precursor models that informed Nazi politics. Nazi perpetrators could find justification from this rich tradition of colonialism.206

Zimmerer’s argument that the genocide against the Herero was a prehistory to the Holocaust is surely controversial. Although there are discursive and structural similarities, the differences should also be noted, such as the industrialized form of parts of the Holocaust. As historian Sebastian Conrad argues, while the killing of women and children was an acceptable byproduct in South West Africa, it was purely intentional in the Holocaust. Thus, when it comes to institutional continuities connected to genocidal practices such a link can be difficult to sustain. Neither can the Herero genocide be seen as part and parcel of German colonial policy. After all, similar genocides did not occur in other German colonies. It was initiated by Lothar Von Trotha. Nonetheless, the extermination continued without him after he left South West Africa;207 a fact that called into question the age-old historical dichotomy between agency and structure. This signifies, at a minimum, the culpability of other actors as well as a structural continuation of institutional practices.

Historian Birthe Kundrus is interested in the problem of whether there were any similarities between the violence against the Herero and that against Eastern Europeans. The genocidal practices of colonialism were also part of a coercive modernization drive. It begs the question of whether it is, at all, possible to prove a process in which a legacy of violence was passed on, taking into account different geography, history and actors. Could it be said that this is more an instance of analogy than continuity? Moreover, Kundrus asks if colonialism was the key to Nazism why no other colonial empires developed into totalitarian fascist states.208

207 Conrad, German Colonialism, p. 159–163.
208 Birthe Kundrus, “Colonialism, Imperialism, National Socialism: How imperial was the Third Reich?”,” German Colonialism in a global age (Durham 2014) p. 339.
Nevertheless, difference and change does not exclude the possibility of continuities, as is illustrated by the many examples mentioned above. But continuity should not mean a jump between specific genocidal events of 1904 to 1941. I would argue that similarities in events can be illustrative but continuity is best explored in structures. Conrad also points out that Nazism cannot be connected to a chapter of European colonialism without accounting for World War I and the interwar revolutions. Yet, World War I was neither an original sin, not a radical rupture; its brutality in technological warfare had already been acted out in colonial wars.\(^\text{209}\)

Kundrus argues that Nazi expansionism was informed by a tradition of imperialism and colonialism rather than being a part of it. The Eastern campaign was in its ambition imperial, but it never became so due to its short lifespan. Rather, it was a new system of foreign rule that broke with core elements of imperial hegemony. Kundrus also draws a line between previous colonialism and the radical *völkisch* nationalism, which developed during World War I, when large areas of Poland, Belorussia and the Baltic states were seen as territories that could be made German. This expansionism was envisioned as a historic mission dating back to the Teutonic Order and was viewed as a civilizing mission. The Nazis created their own understanding of how their project was different from the longer tradition of imperialism and colonialism, but used a colonial ideology to underpin it.\(^\text{210}\) One example of this was the usage of new terminology as a device to establish a distance from a previous colonial discourse. Eastern expansionism was more often talked about in terms of resettlement and land development instead of colonialism. The empire was to be called *Völkergemeinschaft* or *Großraum*. Nazi ideologues, such as Alfred Rosenberg, was especially explicit in this distancing, labelling French colonialism as essentially military imperialism and European colonialism, in general, as Jewish economic imperialism. Germany was, in contrast, pursuing *völkisch* imperialism, which used the non-Russian population against Jewish bolshevism. For Rosenberg, previous German colonialism was a failed attempt of imitating British imperialism.\(^\text{211}\)

Patrick Bernhard argues although Hitler favored Eastern expansionism over overseas colonies, colonialism was still used to capture the imagination of the people and also to gain bourgeois respectability. It was presented in terms of additions.\(^\text{212}\) The emphasis on the

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212 Bernhard, “Borrowing from Mussolini”; 628, 622.
specificity of Nazi expansionism compared to colonialism follows a historiographic trend that
Hannah Arendt subscribed to. It made a clear distinction between continental and overseas
imperialism. But by questioning the portrayal of Nazi expansionism in the East as
occupation, it became possible to describe the long-term goals of permanent control as
essentially colonial. The eastern populations were to be turned into a source of cheap labor
with limited access to education. In this way, colonial practices were to be transmitted on to
the East. It became possible to talk about internal colonialization and colonial forms of rule.
Nevertheless, clear definitions and demarcations are needed to determine what practices can
be considered colonial. Otherwise, there is a risk that everything can be considered
colonialism.  

Sebastian Conrad and Birthe Kundrus argue that one important difference is that there
was never a question of a Nazi civilizing mission in Eastern Europe, of elevating specific
populations. However, on the basis of Jürgen Zimmerer’s concept of Nazism having a
civilizing mission based on racial hubris, it could be argued that this is not entirely true. Some
groups of Eastern Europeans were, indeed, deemed racially fit for future Germanization
(assimilation), for example the Estonians or the Albanians. Here it is worth mentioning,
again, Richard Walther Darré, who was tasked with deciding which groups of Eastern
European children were considered racially worthy for Germanization. It was the same man
who had attended the colonial school of Witzenhausen. Nonetheless, Conrad and Kundrus
maintain it was a fundamental departure from colonial practices. For this reason, Conrad
believes that it is simply not enough to compare Nazism to German overseas colonies. To
assess the colonial dimensions of Nazi rule in the East, it should be compared to a longer
historical tradition of settler colonialism, especially in North America and Australia, which
was characterized by brutal expulsion and extermination of indigenous populations. Also,
North America was referred to in Nazi planning with respect to the restructuring of Ukraine
into settlement zones and military bases. Indeed, sociologist Michael Mann maintains that
settler colonies, where the settlers had large control over the institutions, have often been
more genocidal and murderous than authoritarian colonial governments.

In his research, Jens-Uwe Guettel makes the case for the importance of the United
States for German liberals, when propagating the need for colonies and empire. The German
liberal’s world view was early on shaped by an admiration of the United States, which was

seen by many as a role model for future liberal states. Guettel argues that this admiration was largely discontinued when the Americans entered World War I on the side of the Allies. Nonetheless, the lessons that the German liberals drew from United States were often draped in the belief that genocidal practices were sometimes unavoidable. The left-liberal Bernhard Dernburg, who became known for his progressive colonial policies, clearly acknowledged that the greatest colonial endeavor in the world, the United States, started with the complete annihilation of its indigenous peoples. At the beginning of colonial expansion in the late 19th century, German liberals saw Africa as the second best thing after the possibilities of colonies in North America was no longer attainable. This admiration had consequences for the future African colonies where the race laws were inspired by Jim Crow laws in the United States.

Contrary to popular belief, few public thinkers of the time were sympathetic towards, or romanticized, the indigenous peoples. The Germans, who propagated expansionism, saw the reservation system as necessary and rationalized the need for extermination policies in certain cases. The complicity of liberalism in this narrative is often ignored or forgotten. The omission reflects a long historiographic tradition after World War II, which sought to untangle liberalism from imperialism, colonialism, and racism. Influential scholars, such as Hannah Arendt, Louis Hartz, Richard Hofstadter, and Hans-Ulrich Wehler came to see liberalism as squarely based on universal values, sideling its darker and ambiguous ideological traditions. In its imperialistic form, liberalism was both racist and universal, celebrating such ideas as the civilizing mission. Thus, it simultaneously espoused ethnic exclusionary values as well as Enlightenment beliefs. There were, of course, democratic anti-imperialist liberals, but according to Guettel, they were a minority.\textsuperscript{216} This imperial liberalism which was infused with racist notions, was a transnational phenomenon. Important liberal thinkers, such as Thomas Jefferson, John Stuart Mill, Alexis de Tocqueville, Immanuel Kant and Alexander von Humboldt, all saw the extermination of inferior races and indigenous peoples as tragic but either as necessary or an inevitable byproduct of the march of progress for race and space. In short, liberalism in the 19th and early 20th centuries was shaped by deeply rooted and long-standing racist, imperialist, and segregational sentiments.\textsuperscript{217} To be sure, Nazi ideology was influenced by anti-Americanism and a different understanding of race and colonialism than liberal imperialism. But Hitler was captured by its imagination when he stated in 1941 that “the Volga must be our Mississippi.”\textsuperscript{218} Indeed, in Hitler’s own

\textsuperscript{216} Guettel, German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism and the United States, pp. 1–6, 30–37.
\textsuperscript{217} Guettel, German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism and the United States, pp. 41–61, 167.
\textsuperscript{218} Guettel, German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism and the United States, pp. 13–18.
private conversations and monologues, which were transcribed and later published, he made many references to both the American frontier and British colonialism. Hitler’s settlement visions for Eastern Europe are also informed by previous examples of settler colonialism.\textsuperscript{219}

For the future of Ukraine, he had this to say in October 1941:

There's only one duty: to Germanise this country by the immigration of Germans, and to look upon the natives as Redskins … In this business I shall go straight ahead, cold-bloodedly. What they may think about me, at this juncture, is to me a matter of complete indifference. I don't see why a German who eats a piece of bread should torment himself with the idea that the soil that produces this bread has been won by the sword. When we eat wheat from Canada, we don't think about the despoiled Indians.\textsuperscript{220}

Connecting the American Indian analogue to race politics, he put it this way in August 1942:

The struggle we are waging there against the Partisans resembles very much the struggle in North America against the Red Indians. Victory will go to the strong [\textit{Die stärkere Rasse wird siegen}], and strength is on our side. At all costs we will establish law and order there.\textsuperscript{221}

In July 1941, Hitler also drew lessons from British colonialism when it came to the future fate of Ukraine. In his own words:

It should be possible for us to control this region to the East with two hundred and fifty thousand men plus a cadre of good administrators. Let's learn from the English, who, with two hundred and fifty thousand men in all, including fifty thousand soldiers, govern four hundred million Indians. This space in Russia must always be dominated by Germans. Nothing would be a worse mistake on our part than to seek to educate the masses there. It is to our interest that the people should know just enough to recognise the signs on the roads. At present they can't read, and they ought to stay like that. But they must be allowed to live decently, of course, and that's also to our interest. We'll take the southern part of the Ukraine, especially the Crimea, and make it an exclusively German colony. There'll be no harm in pushing out the population that's there now.\textsuperscript{222}

\textsuperscript{219} \textit{Hitler’s Table Talk, 1941-1944: His Private Conversations}, pp. 15, 24, 34, 69, 248.

All the quotes double checked with the original German, found here: \textit{Adolf Hitler, Monologe im Führerhauptquartier, 1941-1944}, http://answers.org/atheism/Adolf-Hitler-Monologe-im-Fuehrerhauptquartier-1941-1944.pdf (Downloaded 24 April 2017).

\textsuperscript{220} \textit{Hitler’s Table Talk}, p. 69.

\textsuperscript{221} \textit{Hitler’s Table Talk}, p. 248.

\textsuperscript{222} \textit{Hitler’s Table Talk}, pp. 15–16.
Undeniably, we can see many clear continuities back to different forms of colonialism and its practices in Hitler’s own imagination about the future of Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the American involvement in World War I and U.S. alliance with Britain and France meant that general German admiration often turned into hostility and contempt. The German liberals also felt betrayed because their affection for the United States was not reciprocated. Radical German nationalists and Nazis capitalized on the connection between the German liberals and their pro-U.S. stance. For them, the real frontier was in Eastern Europe; in contrast, the liberal imperialist drives for colonies in Africa was seen as wrong-headed. Before World War I, the largest victories of German liberals at the polls had been associated with a successful election campaign, which had centered on colonialization. With the forced de-colonialization after World War I, liberals lost much of their credibility. Thus, de-colonialization contributed to the demise of liberalism in Germany.

Nazi expansionism was the continuation of the radical nationalist attitude, trying to distance itself from American expansionism and racism, even though there were similarities between two. The Nazis condemned American liberalism and individualism, whose failures were seen as reflecting weak race policies that were not built on an overarching racial ideology. Instead of imitating U.S. policies, the Nazis wanted to go beyond them. They were also unwilling to give credit to German liberals for racial segregation, because it would give credit to liberalism as well. Thus, the imagination of the frontier shifted in the 19th century from North America to South West Africa. From World War I to the end of World War II, radical nationalists and Nazis saw the frontier located in Eastern Europe. In 1918, colonial ideas were transferred to the European metropole and became significant for continental desires. The term Lebensraum, which had been coined by the popular geographer and ethnographer Friedrich Ratzel in relation to the colonies, was now used more and more about continental space. Likewise questions about race and control over race-mixing shifted from the colonial periphery to metropolitan Germany. This became especially poignant with the French African colonial troops that occupied the Rhineland. Nationalists, conservatives and liberals all used a racially and colonially informed discourse to describe it as the horror of the Rhine. It constituted black shame, a reversal of the global racial order and a threat to the white race with the chance of race mixing. During the Nazi regime, 400 children that were the offspring of relation between Germans and these African troops were sterilized.

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Jens-Uwe Guettel argues for transcending notions of rupture or continuity when it comes to the question of connecting pre-1914 liberal imperialism with Nazism. For him, liberal imperialism formed a thesis on which the Nazis could formulate their antithesis, namely continental expansion, expulsion, and extermination. Nazis saw the Jim Crow laws as an example of how weak liberalism was. The anti-Americanism of the Nazis meant distancing from pre-1914 German liberal imperialism and racism. To Guettel, a dialectic outlook better captures the tensions between pre-1914 admiration for American racism and expansion and post-1918 visions of living space in the East and contempt for the United States. It was, in short, not a straight line of historical development. For Nazism, the defeat in 1918 showed the rottenness of German liberalism. Nevertheless, Nazism needed the German Empire’s liberal colonialism as an Other, as a point of departure, vilified but necessary.226

Just as Nazism was not immune to the colonial imagination and discourse, the same applied to older forms of visions for continental expansionism and pan-Germanism. As noted, distinctions between völkisch expansionist irredentism and Weltpolitik colonial expansionism were not as clear as previously thought. Therefore, colonialism can no longer be said to have no influence over Nazi expansionism by linking it, simply, to an oppositional ideology of völkisch nationalism. Members of the Pan-German League were not only ethnic nationalists but defined national objectives in a context of imperialism. From the very beginning, the League’s ambitions were twofold: an aggressive colonial policy and a German hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe. A Greater Germany on the Continent meant that it would contain different peoples but the Germans would be dominant. Colonialization would happen in Europe by Germanizing the lesser peoples of southeastern Europe, expropriating non-German property and arrange for population exchanges with Russia. Having colonies would increase Germany’s prestige in its Great Power competition with Britain, Russia and the United States. Germany would, then, rule over Europe’s lesser peoples and the primitive peoples in their colonies.

In the early 1900s, there was a change in priorities; the colonies were now seen as secondary.227 Dennis Sweeney argues that from the ideas of social organization and remaking of colonial space in South West Africa, the pan-Germans also embraced biopolitical definitions of race. The new colonial knowledge informed the pan-Germans of the status of future subjugated peoples in Europe as opposed to the German Volkskörper that was

226 Guettel, German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism and the United States, p 222–223.
conceived as a racial collective. The Eastern Europeans would have to be defined, subordinated, managed or eradicated, as the colonial logic informed them. The Pan-German League supported and propagated more extreme settler colonial policies and spoke of the importance of maintaining the purity of the blood. They did so by referring to the Boers. Thus, the early preoccupation with race-based colonial policies paved the way for similar definitions of Eastern, Southern and Northern European peoples after 1904.

In 1905, one of their followers, the Social Darwinist theorist Ludwig Kuhlenbeck gave his first speech on the race question. He divided the world into three main races: white, yellow and black. Among the white race, there were three divisions of Germanic, Roman and Slavic peoples. Kuhlenbeck warned against race mixing and degeneration and saw Polish migrants in Westphalia as especially threatening. Only three years earlier, the League had rejected racial biological definitions of Polish people. Now Kuhlenbeck had jettisoned cultural political definitions for racial ones. Subsequently, other League leaders talked about different European nationalities in racial biological terms. With Heinrich Class, Jews in Germany became defined in biological terms. He demanded that foreigners be cleared from German soil to create empty space by evacuation. This was necessary for the sake of the health of an expanding German population. Several other colonial policies were propagated, such as segregation, race war, race laws etc. These ideas were developed further during World War I. Alliances were then built with industrial leaders towards the end of the war, who took the lead in the annexationist movement. The League was active during the war, making demands for war aims. Thus, it never had a static view of the preferred empire and was directly influenced by practices and knowledge from South West Africa. Bioracial definitions of peoples were to be used in Europe, requiring either domination or expulsion of inferior peoples. Sweeney writes:

These pan-German visions of a dynamic colonial empire and their distinctive bioracial dimensions should also prompt us to rethink interpretations of radical-right ideology as a self-contained form of ethnic nationalism insulated from the effects of globalization or as a “reactionary modernist” refusal of Enlightenment reason cast in irrational longings for a racist utopia. The pan-German right emerged out of schemas and practices of an expanding world empire and its colonizing initiatives. It defined populations as living and evolving entities in scientific terms and turned the cultivation of the German Volkskörper into the existential imperative for no less “rational” demands for

228 Sweeney, “Pan-German Conceptions of Colonial Empire”, pp. 273–278.
229 Sweeney, “Pan-German Conceptions of Colonial Empire”, pp. 279–280.
unending imperial expansion … pan-German demands for world empire informed the subsequent imperial projects of German fascism.\(^\text{230}\)

Geoff Eley agrees with Sweeney that there was no clear dividing line between continental and colonial expansionism, even though the Pan-German views were usually the most radical ones. Eley also stresses the importance of transnational perspectives during the colonial period. German scientists and politicians travelled extensively to Canada and the United States to study agricultural production and the economic position of black people in the South. These trips influenced colonial ambitions in Togo and the decision to turn it into a plantation economy that would educate and make the black population even more effectively docile. They also informed German officials about East Prussia and about how to manage the Polish population and agricultural relations in this area. Thus, there were many connections between colonialism and continental expansion. Colonialism influenced policies towards Polish enclaves in Eastern Prussian, which aimed at internal colonialization. The planning coincided with the Congress of Berlin. These policies were later enforced in Poland and the Baltic region from 1914 to 1918. By the beginning of the Great War 120,000 Germans had already settled in the eastern provinces. This is five times the number of Germans that settled in the colonies overseas.

Sure, there were important differences in the pre-Nazi settlement of eastern provinces; no mass killings or genocides took place there like in Africa. This does not signify that the system of rule was less colonial due to the fact that the German colonial empire was diverse in character. Yet, the ideas of German nationalists in Eastern Europe about the origins of cultures and nationalities went further back in time. In Africa, on the other hand, they were more novel.\(^\text{231}\) Eley argues that by now, it should be uncontroversial to place the Nazi empire within the framework of colonialism for comparison. However, he also wants to stress the specificities of Nazi expansionism, rejecting linear causal chains to connect the two. Instead, he sees connective dynamics from 1890 to 1930 when describing the genealogies of Nazism.\(^\text{232}\) In his words:

Any firm and fast distinction between colonizing expansionism overseas and landward colonialism inside Europe seems hard to sustain. Colonialism in established usage begins from the seizure and settlement of lands or trading posts and coaling stations overseas, joined to exploitation of resources and

\(^{230}\) Sweeney, “Pan-German Conceptions of Colonial Empire”, p. 280.

\(^{231}\) Eley, “Empire by land or sea?”, pp. 31–35.

people, in a framework of imperial rule and political dispossession. Most working definitions stress destruction of indigenous social relations; imposition of the colonizers’ own system of law, economy, and political rule; denial of rights of all kinds, whether as citizenship, protections under law, and the franchise or as human dignity and access to livelihood; finally of course the exercise of coercion and violence embracing extremes of mass incarceration, mass killing, and genocide. Racialized forms of the overseas colonial encounter come next, with their obsessiveness about skin color and the dangers of race mixing, practices of eroticizing, logics of “othering,” and essentialising of human differences. That describes colonial rule during the period of intensified imperialist competition among the industrializing countries before 1914. Yet it likewise offers a compelling inventory of everything the Nazis pursued in the East after 1939. Precisely these planes of equivalence between colonialism overseas and twentieth-century expansionism inside Europe itself are too clear to ignore.\textsuperscript{233}

For Eley, the question of continuity has previously been connected to a critical reevaluation of the \textit{Sonderweg} thesis, with his research showing that Imperial Germany was more bourgeois than previously thought. Instead of seeing a linear continuity between Bismarckian, Wilhelminian and Nazi authoritarianism, there was a great deal of unevenness. Nazism was not an inevitable product of previous traditions. German history could not be boiled down to a simple pathology.\textsuperscript{234} Thus, Imperial Germany’s expansionism and imperialism was a sign of its modernity rather than backwardness. This leads Eley to a somewhat dismissive attitude toward longer time perspectives for explaining the rise of Nazism. To him, Nazism should be understood within the context of the post-1918 crisis, the military defeat, and revolutions. The crisis generated by the defeat in the war led to right-wing radicalization in Italy, Germany and Hungary. Also important were the crises of parliamentary democracy in these states, where failed coalitions acted through “factionalized maneuvering for the influence over the executive” rather than supporting and developing the plurality of the democratic system. Finally, Eley emphasizes the popular appeal of the fascist ideology and the direct terror of its movement. This represented a specific interwar crisis, a “fascism producing crisis.” Thus, Eley argues that fascism should be theorized by the crisis that produced it.\textsuperscript{235}

For this reason, Eley is somewhat critical of the continuity thesis linking colonialism with Nazism. He states that the main problem is of concretization. Preferring a crisis-centered

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{233} Eley, “Empire by land or sea?”, p. 38.
\item \textsuperscript{234} Eley, \textit{From Unification to Nazism}, pp. 11–12.
\end{itemize}
analysis, he speaks exclusively about expansionism rather than colonialism as a whole. He asks what importance the compulsion for empire really had for fascism. Nevertheless, he still acknowledges what could be argued as continuity in the above quote from him. He names it, however, as planes of equivalence between colonial practices and Nazi expansionism.

Undoubtedly, the concept of continuity is hard to define and concretize. It is very vulnerable to criticism if it is conceived as simply something uninterrupted existing through other fundamental changes in time. This was the case with the *Sonderweg* thesis. Historians presented continuity as overriding previous periodization but nonetheless creating new ones in their place. Arguments were easily made against these new periodizations that saw more similarities in structures than differences. The criticism was made that history must still be seen as open and that events can dramatically change structure. Helmut Walser Smith questions this conception and the use of continuity. For him, it must be conceived more broadly how ideas and political forms can constitute traces that go across what undeniably must be recognized as sharp breaks in time. Smith deals with larger political forms such as nation, nationalism, religious exclusion, racism and violence that do not emerge squarely in the modern world but rather have long histories.

The idea of continuity does not mean that events are biased to have certain outcomes or that at a certain point change becomes impervious from influence outside the system, for example, only to be determined by specific features of the nation. Instead, Smith suggests that only by applying a long term historical reach, one that supersedes one individual’s lifetime, can we consider the influence of ideas, institutions and politics. In Smith’s case study, this becomes important to do both within German history and across it. For him, the most important continuities connected to the catastrophe of the 20th century, are not specifically German. Rather, they represent a continuity of form whether, nation, anti-Semitic violence, or the knowledge and practice of extermination. Thus, Smith finds continuity in German history over a period of time, reaching back to the Middle Ages. At the same time, he argues that the continuity does not lie in genocide but rather in the imagination and practice expulsion of peoples, cutting the ties with the other.

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237 Smith, *The Continuities of German History*, pp. 9–11.
238 Smith, *The Continuities of German History*, pp. 9–11.
In the violent 19th and 20th centuries, expulsion was made possible to consider, support and enact on a larger scale, sometimes resulting in genocide. The ideologies of nationalism, racism, and anti-Semitism discouraged and hindered solidarity with strangers, one example being the relations between Germans and Jews. But the longer continuity is important to acknowledge: between the pogroms and the more archaic forms of killing during the Holocaust. There is also a continuity of colonial practices in concentrating victims in camps or ghettos and letting them starve. Just as was the case with colonialism, there were difference among the perpetrators over how to handle the other. Radical Nazis were attritionists, arguing for gradual extermination, while economically centered Nazis were productionists propagating the use of Jews as a labor force within the ghettos. The long history of anti-Semitism must also be accounted for. Smith divides it between community-based or national-based rejection of Jews, with these two forms having interacted for the first time during the 19th century.\footnote{Smith, The Continuities of German History, pp. 233, 211–215.}

While community-based rejection dated back to the Middle Ages, the nation-based rejection originated in the 19th century. With the new German nationalism of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, there was no place for Jews being Jews. The idea was total assimilation. In the case of failure, the only option left was an older form, namely, expulsion. While violence against Jews in Europe increased during the 19th century, it was seldom deadly on a large scale. This changed with the turn and beginning of the new century.\footnote{Smith, The Continuities of German History, pp. 233, 211–215.} There were bloody and large scale pogroms in Russia and in Eastern Europe after World War I. In Germany, the change came with \textit{Kristallnacht} in 1938, but large scale public pogroms were disliked in Germany. The case with pogroms and the Holocaust illustrate that mass murder requires the state to lose control or do nothing, while genocide requires state organization.

The Nazi state made a decisive break with the history of German governments by not intervening and stopping anti-Jewish violence committed by the civilians. Thus, a continuity of anti-Semitism is not a causal link to genocide. Prior to World War I, anti-Semitism on the Right was not stronger in Germany than in France, Russia and Austria. Anti-Semitism in Germany was often radical because it was marginal. Nevertheless, a historical tradition of anti-Jewish violence should not be excluded from the question of why the Holocaust was initiated by Germany. Similarly, colonialism and slavery cannot be excluded from understanding racial exclusionary regimes of South Africa and Southern United States. The

explicit racial exclusion is what the three regimes have in common, while the acting out of genocide is what sets Germany apart.²⁴²

Heinrich Class was important in the process of marrying newer concepts of race with Jewish exclusion. In 1912, he proposed race laws that would target Jews. He combined three issues that had been up until then separate: anti-Semitism, racism, and the elimination of peoples based on the traditions of German nationalism, colonialism and eugenics. Class used the term “elimination” to describe expulsion from German soil. However, Helmut Walser Smith argues that the thought of killing was only one deduction away.²⁴³ Class’s ideas were too radical to be implemented during World War I, but other Pan-German ideas of an enlarged Germany had the chance to flourish in the Army High Command on the Eastern front. The military was also important in developing the new ideology of nationalism and racism. Both Germany and France witnessed a militarization of their societies during the late 19th century with a culture of marches and ceremonies. Also important to mention was the cult of masculinity, the willingness to fight and the acceptance of obedience. New ideas of expulsion were also possible to imagine with colonialism towards the end of the 19th century with populations being concentrated in zones or forcefully relocated to reservations. Imagining such extreme forms of expulsion became possible in Europe with World War I. Helmut Walser Smith argues, in a functionalist vein, that genocide only became possible in 1941, when there was a shift from a policy of expulsion to outright genocide. It constituted a break in history, both European and German.²⁴⁴

In conclusion, Smith’s historical inquiry can be tied together with his view on the German historiography of Nazism in general. He is critical of traditionalists and the scholars of Sonderweg. To him, both these nationally centered narratives hid more interesting transnational perspectives connected to radical nationalism, colonialism and war. Tied to this, Smith points out that the research of Eley and David Blackbourn have shown how radical nationalism arose more from liberal pundits rather than conservative elites or premodern elites. Thus, these two historical traditions underestimate racist and eliminationism ideas inherent in liberal imperialism.²⁴⁵

Indeed, the enormous influence of colonialism, expansionism, imperialism and racism on fascism and Nazism can no longer be omitted from the historical narrative. Neither can

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one ignore the historical origins of justifications for such oppressive and destructive excesses in what has later been described as progressive and liberal thinkers. Indeed, it expands our understanding of the amorphous character of fascism, seeing it as both familiar and novel. It also accentuates its origins in the broad traditions of the European Right, liberal imperialism being a prime example. This poses a challenge to generic definitions of fascism, which situate liberalism as the ultimate antagonist to fascism, thereby ignoring its historical context and its heterogeneity as an ideology. Such an interpretation makes fascism appear as extraneous to the most important of European ideologies.

Although there is reluctance of some of the above scholars to apply the concept of continuity to analyze connections or similarities between colonialism and fascism, I think it is important to remember the versatility of the concept. Gerschenkron’s understanding of continuity as a type of change rather than the absence of it is very helpful here. Indeed, there are many examples of transmissions between the two systems: between German colonialism and Nazi expansionism, liberal colonialism and radical nationalist continental expansionism, and liberal Italian colonialism and fascist colonialism. Another way is to look at the transmissions in terms of a more global process through the spread of racial “knowledge,” and policies. Undeniably, all these transmissions constitute a level of change, leading to radicalization. Nonetheless, they cannot be seen as a radical rupture or discontinuity. For it would have meant abandoning imperialism and expansionism altogether, which was never the case with fascism and Nazism.

**Fascism’s Relation to Liberalism**

I have illustrated how liberalism was a driving force for colonialism in Italy and Germany. A majority of liberal thinkers were positive towards imperialism, believing that the extermination of indigenous peoples was an acceptable cost for the march of civilization. However, the question of what to make of this fact is contested. Few scholars would argue that there was a direct causal link between liberal imperialism and fascism. Indeed, a majority emphasize important differences between the two. Nevertheless, the concept of continuity is more resilient than often given credit for. Important continuities can be traced between liberal colonialists to radical nationalists, leading up to fascist expansionism. Taking transmissions of ideology and practice into mind, there is much to support Aimé Césaire’s argument that fascism was colonialism, coming home to roost on the European continent.
The historian Ishay Landa calls into question liberalism’s exalted position as a polar opposite of fascism. He is, however, less concerned with bringing attention to liberal imperialism than with highlighting classical liberalism’s suspiciousness and resistance against democratic expansion in society. He does this by dividing liberalism into a political tradition and an economic one. Political liberalism is defined as the progressive ideas of universal individual and democratic rights. Economic liberalism is seen as privileging the market, making democratic rights secondary to property rights. This split in liberalism is well illustrated by the division in thought between Charles James Fox, who supported the French Revolution and the ideas of democratic and individual rights and tolerance, and Edmund Burke, who was devoted to the free market, opposed the French Revolution and supported the King. Burke is usually seen as the founder of modern conservatism. Yet, Landa argues that much what we take as conservative is, in its original impulse, liberal. The difference between the two traditions was brought to light by challenges from mass society, mainly from the demands for recognition and emancipation of the working class. Landa argues that liberalism created the possibility of universal emancipation, which, in turn, led to a crisis that liberalism was not able to cope with.246

The Italian fascist Massimo Rocca expressed this explicitly when he conceptualized fascism as confronting the disaster of political democracy and socialism. Thus, he saw fascism as filling a role within liberal neo-conservatism on the Right. However, Rocca was aware that this idea was controversial within the fascist movement. Clearly the fascist movement in general expressed antagonism toward liberalism. But Landa argues that fascism, nevertheless, developed within liberal society and attempted to solve the crisis of liberalism. The crisis was brought on by political liberalism, whose inclusion into the democratic system of the masses, threatened economic liberalism. Elements of fascism that have been defined as the most hostile towards liberalism, such as negation of democracy, chauvinistic nationalism, imperialism and racial war, are not historically and conceptually unfamiliar to liberalism.247 Central to Landa’s engagement with liberalism’s relation to fascism is his criticism of the ideological history of fascism, of the style of the “new consensus” in the scholarly debate. As noted, there is a tendency to emphasize the influence of left-wing ideologies on fascist ideology, such as socialism and syndicalism, while, simultaneously, leaving liberalism out of the equation. By concentrating on national-

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syndicalist, Strasserist and third way positions, fascism is often portrayed as a left-wing ideology to the point of erasing its right-wing characteristics. The portrayal of fascism as anti-liberal also reinforces the argument that it has affinities with socialism. Landa questions these links and the attempt to define fascism as anti-capitalist.\textsuperscript{248} He is especially critical of Sternhell and what he sees as the latter’s overemphasis on Sorel as the main influence on Mussolini. Instead of seeing Sorel as a representative of syndicalism, as Sternhell does, Landa points out that he was isolated from the syndicalist movement in France. Sorel was an intellectual outsider, who admired capitalists and propagated for the free market. If syndicalism is to be seen as the ideological predecessor of fascism, there is also a need to explain the absence of the idea of the general strike within the fascist movement. More importantly, by exaggerating Sorel’s impact on Mussolini’s thinking, the ideological influence of Vilfredo Pareto has been sidelined. Pareto was a big inspiration to Mussolini. He saw modern liberalism as betraying its own economic principles by including socialists in the democratic process, thereby threatening the capitalist order. His position eventually led him to anti-democratic positions, because the growing Italian labor movement was becoming a threat to economic liberalism.\textsuperscript{249} Oswald Spengler also offered a similar analysis of the development of modern liberalism. He saw political liberalism as enabling socialists to enter the political sphere and to criticize the market. The idea of universal suffrage was dangerous because it would lead to socialism. Spengler wanted to preserve capitalism with conservatism and resistance against political liberalism. Yet, at the same time, Spengler propagated what he paradoxically termed Prussian socialism, which was extremely hostile towards everything the English and German labor movement had been fighting for during the 19th and 20th centuries. It propagated lower salaries, longer work weeks, and abolishing all social welfare services. Landa argues that it had more in common with neoliberalism than socialism.\textsuperscript{250} He also points to several influential liberal thinkers all of whom were opposed to, or were suspicious of, an expansion of democracy and the emancipation of the working class. To them, such political and economic enfranchisement would pose a threat to economic foundations, such as property rights and the supremacy of the market. Capitalism was seen in opposition to more inclusive democracy.\textsuperscript{251}

\textsuperscript{248} Landa, \textit{The Apprentice’s Sorcerer}, pp. 1–7.
\textsuperscript{251} Landa, \textit{The Apprentice’s Sorcerer}, pp. 21–22, 42, 30–33.
This position included but was not limited to prominent liberal thinkers. John Locke saw democracy as limited to the propertied classes; John Stuart Mill was fearful that democracy would challenge property rights; Alexis de Tocqueville saw democracy as secondary to property rights and capitalism; and Benjamin Constant argued that only those owning property had the leisure time to understand political questions. To Landa, fascism did not need to crush liberalism but rather to meet it half-way: to recognize economic liberalism and secure property rights and capitalism.252

Indeed, it may well be argued that this is exactly what it did. Hitler always defended property rights and private enterprise of those classified as Aryans against those elements within Nazism that sought out to challenge capitalism in some form, like the Strasserists. At the same time, Hitler was vicious in his opposition to tenets of political liberalism or those democratic foundations, which he saw as being capable of destroying the economy. In this way, political liberalism was just another form of Marxism. Thus, Hitler makes a clear distinction between political liberalism and market economy under capitalism. Anti-Marxist historians of Nazism, such as Henry Ashby Turner, recognized that Hitler was not a socialist in his social-Darwinist positive position in favor of competition and private property. In this social-Darwinist vein, Hitler opposed nepotism and propagated a meritocracy. This stance led him to be highly critical of the monarchy. While conservatives saw this stance as being revolutionary, it was more an expression of protecting the state against social upheaval. Hitler saw himself as a protector of the bourgeoisie; no strong economy could exist without a strong state.253 Likewise, in Fascist Italy many self-professed liberals first welcomed the fascist take-over in 1922. The liberal Luigi Einaudi saluted the return to economic liberal policies. Even Benedetto Croce welcomed fascism, momentarily seeing it as a return to pure liberalism, a liberalism not to be confused with what he saw as democratic liberalism. At the center of this was the demand to roll back democratic concessions that liberal Italy had granted under pressure from popular movements. Liberals breathed a sigh of great relief when Mussolini did away with progressive taxation. Liberals, such as Ludwig von Mises, saw fascism as an emergency makeshift to save European civilization. Mises himself was fervently opposed to strikes, which he saw as either destructive or terroristic. In this sense, fascism was a savior for Italy.254 What should also not be forgotten is the liberal electoral

252 Landa, The Apprentice’s Sorcerer, pp. 21–22, 42, 30–33.
alliance with the fascist party in 1921 and 1924, and the liberal financial policy of the fascist regime up to 1925.\textsuperscript{255}

Landa also sees a link between the longer history of colonialism and white supremacy and different forms of liberal imperialism and settler colonialism together with the racial politics they spawned.\textsuperscript{256} In his own words:

\begin{quote}
We should thus be wary of attempts to de-familiarize or de-westernize the geopolitics or the socioeconomics of fascism/Nazism. Their absolute innovations, ideological as well as practical, were few; their carry-overs were many. Fascism was a bad weed, no doubt, but one that thrived in the hothouse of western imperialism.\textsuperscript{257}
\end{quote}

Prior to World War II, fascism was held in good regard amongst many Western political leaders. Winston Churchill saw fascism as the ultimate means of protection against bolshevism and described Mussolini as a great law-giver. Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax and Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain expressed admiration for both Hitler and Nazism, describing them as a bulwark to Bolshevism. This large scale appreciation is now often neglected. Fascism is often seen as an “affair of someone else, preferably of one’s political and ideological antagonists.”\textsuperscript{258} As Landa puts it:

\begin{quote}
It mattered little that, when fascism was still an historical reality, it was widely regarded precisely as the universal cure against socialism and communism, “the necessary antidote to the Russian poison,” again in Churchill’s words, and that whole parties, conservative and liberal, had drastically thinned and dwindled in direct proportion to the degree that the fascists had been beating up the lefties; that conservative and liberal politicians had formed all kinds of alliances with the fascists, ran with them to parliament, sat with them in coalitions, invited them to take power, while the left-wing parties, who retained their mass support almost undiminished, were being outlawed, their leaders and supporters persecuted, imprisoned, driven into exile, even murdered.\textsuperscript{259}
\end{quote}

Landa is critical of Michael Mann’s argument that fascism did not succeed in North-Western Europe because of solid liberal traditions and institutions and because of efforts by social democrats and liberals to challenge fascism. Landa asks, rhetorically and counterfactually, if

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{255} Garau, “If liberalism steps into the fascist synthesis”, 72.
\item \textsuperscript{256} Landa, \textit{The Apprentice’s Sorcerer}, pp. p. 89–98.
\item \textsuperscript{257} Landa, \textit{The Apprentice’s Sorcerer}, p. 98.
\item \textsuperscript{258} Landa, \textit{The Apprentice’s Sorcerer}, pp. 321–322.
\item \textsuperscript{259} Landa, \textit{The Apprentice’s Sorcerer}, p. 322.
\end{itemize}
this would really have been the case if England had lost the war; if it had lost its empire; if its monarchy had been turned into a republic thanks to communists; if it had been confronted with an organized militant working class; and if it had been plunged into massive economic crisis. Landa may have downplayed the severity of the economic crisis in Britain. Nevertheless, the questions he poses are worth considering. Would England have been able to resist the temptation of installing a dictator or perhaps a fascist? And would Germany have fallen to fascism if it was not for these circumstances? Indeed, as late as 1937 Churchill wrote an article on foreign affairs in a newspaper, where he expressed dislike for Hitler’s political system, but admiration for his patriotism.260 Needless to say, however, this kind of sentiment would become inconceivable for a mainstream British politician in the following years.

Historian Salvatore Garau credits Landa for separating the traditions of economic and political liberalism. This analytical framework enables nuanced exploration of right-wing elements that were important to the growth of fascism, notably, the Italian organization ANI. Garau argues that Sternhell’s ideas of a revolutionary right inspiring fascism is somewhat undermined, when one considers ANI’s important position and its strong ties to the Catholic movement. Nevertheless, ANI’s roots in liberalism does not make it exclusively liberal; other ideological elements were represented in the organization as well. Similar goes to say about syndicalism, national syndicalist were not exclusively left-wing. Moreover, the conservative forces within fascism were often the most influential ones. Garau argues that they must be considered an important part of fascism, rather than only allied with it. To him, Sternhell’s and Landa’s ideological analyses cannot be isolated from each other. Instead, they need to be combined to show how fascism represented a synthesis of socialism, nationalism and liberalism.261

Nonetheless, any future ideological account of fascism can no longer place liberalism as its ultimate antagonist. The problematic history of liberalism and its many contradictions point to the ambiguity in its ideology. It is torn between a teleological romanticized image and the brutal reality of western imperialism and colonialism. The political scientist Duncan Bell warns, however, against conflating liberalism with either Marxism or fascism, as is often practiced by American ultra-conservatives. The issue cannot be simply one of creating linkages between the different traditions. Bell argues that one needs to qualify the claim about who is to be regarded as a liberal.262 Indeed, it becomes even more complicated when

261 Garau, “If liberalism steps into the fascist synthesis”, 70–73.
historians have seen anti-democratic tendencies within the Right as a primarily conservative phenomenon, not taking into account several prominent liberals’ resistance to expansions of democracy. Indeed, a clear distinction between conservatism and liberalism is often hard to make, famous philosopher Leo Strauss wrote that conservatism is what liberalism used to be. To Bell, liberalism is a deep reservoir of ideological contradictions. It is important to include within the liberal tradition, a justification for imperialism; the limits to suffrage based on gender or race; and eugenicist attempts to perfect the race. All are part of the liberal tradition, just as the antagonism against such sentiments also exist within the liberal tradition. Just like in the case of fascists, it is important not to take people exclusively by their word. What they identify with does not necessarily correspond with the opinions they express. Thus, conservatives today hold deeply embedded liberal beliefs in terms of economics and democratic institutions.

Historian Domenico Losurdo puts liberalism within a long historical periodization and context. He argues that the British slave trade peaked during the 18th century, at a time when liberalism had already been consolidated in the settlement of 1688. Also, North American chattel slavery reached its peak in the early 19th century following the victory of liberalism in the American Revolution. Losurdo welcomes Arendt’s connection between totalitarianism and British imperialism, but is, nonetheless, critical of her forgetting of the history of the country that took her in, the United States. The deportations of indigenous peoples from their lands were implemented by the same Jacksonian America that Tocqueville commended as a model of democracy. The same can be said of the American slave trade, which represented the largest involuntary movement of people in the history of the world. Losurdo argues that the working conditions of slaves had similarities to the later concentration camps.

Losurdo also sees the lynching of black Americans as a type of pogrom. For him, the KKK was an organization that seemed to anticipate both the blackshirts and the brownshirts. The Nazis saw the racial regime of the American Southern states as not tough enough. But it can well be argued that racial classification was stricter. The “one drop of blood” rule of the South was seemingly stricter than the race requirements in Nazi Germany. Also taking into account that still in 1952 miscegenation was still a felony in 30 states in the United States, not only between blacks and whites, but other “races” as well. The transnational connections

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263 Landa, The Apprentice’s Sorcerer, p. 68.
264 Bell, “What is Liberalism?”, 691.
265 Bell, “What is Liberalism?”, 692.
of the international eugenics movement is another example of racist practices. Sociologist Stefan Kühl has shown the strong ties that existed between American eugenicists and eugenicists in Nazi Germany. Previously, it has been argued that such ties ended in the period of 1920-1940. However, Kühl shows that they continued during World War II. It was only after 1945 that the American Eugenics Society tried to rid itself of such problematic connections. Many American scientists commended the racial laws of Nazi Germany. In this light Losurdo argues against the metanarrative, or periodization, of seeing the 20th century as a new type of barbarity, which attacked an otherwise healthy and happy society. For Losurdo the horrors of the 19th century need to be accounted for.

But we certainly must bid farewell once and for all to the myth of the gradual, peaceful transition, on the basis of purely internal motivations and impulses, from liberalism to democracy, or from general enjoyment of negative liberty to an ever wider recognition of political rights. Meanwhile, the presupposition of that discourse turns out to be wholly imaginary: the community of the free asserted itself demanding both negative and positive liberty, while excluding populations of colonial origin and metropolitan semi slaves and servants from both.

While classical liberals were often hostile to expansion of democracy, Losurdo argues that violence was often necessary for fundamental social change. The American civil war brought opportunity for emancipation of black people in the United States. Similarly, the French Revolution contributed to revolts in the colonies. The Black revolution in San Domingo influenced the decision to abolish slavery in British colonies. And the Russian Revolution became a beacon of hope for colonized peoples around the world. Other liberal minded historians have countered Losurdo’s narrative by arguing that neither Britain nor the United States were in anyway meaningfully liberal before the 19th century. Duncan Bell also shows that although many liberals today celebrate John Locke as an important thinker, contemporary thinkers did not see him as such.

It is important not to minimize fascism’s explicitly stated hatred for liberalism. But it is worthwhile to put their understanding of liberalism in historical context, especially considering the ideological disagreements within liberalism as a whole. This is clearly

271 Bell, “What is Liberalism?”, 692.
illustrated by the initial liberal supporters of Italian fascism, but needless to say, this support was retracted as the fascist regimes progressed. What Landa brings to the scholarly debate is an ideological history of fascism where liberalism is not given preferential treatment. Nonetheless, like the ideological histories of fascism discussed in the historiographical chapter, it too has shortcomings based on its pure ideological analysis.
Conclusion

Fascism was not a mirror image of colonialism; rather, colonialism was an abyss into which the fascists stared. In the abyss of colonialism, the Europeans discovered what they had become. The Other they encountered or “discovered” did not inform them about the world but more about themselves. The conquered and sometimes exterminated peoples became a counter-image that justified white supremacy and its trespassing agendas. These were the traces of colonialism that resurfaced in fascism. The traces are often forgotten because of the practice of privileging historical periodization that divides Europe from the rest of the world. Such a periodization naturalizes the assumption that nothing could have preceded the catastrophe of fascism on the grounds that it reflected obscure ideologies or political developments internal to Europe. Even in comparison to such marginal precedents, fascism was seen as being truly unprecedented. According to this interpretation, fascism not only becomes incomprehensible in its heinous crimes; it also becomes easy to condemn by projecting it in sui generis terms. Yet, while fascism should be, unreservedly, condemned, it is a question of how the damnation should be formulated in a historical context.

In this essay, I have argued against a Euro-centric approach that erases the relationship between colonialism and fascism. I have pointed to several streams of continuity that affected social and economic structures, political institutions, educational systems, and cultural representations—in short, government and civil society in all forms. This “Europeaness” not only revealed a colonial imagination and knowledge, emphasizing race and space; it also prompted violent conquest in new worlds to pave the way for progress and settlement. It meant that foreign peoples could face different destinies, ranging from expulsion and extermination to assimilation and preservation. Nonetheless, their fate was always decided by the white man who acted on the presumption that colonies brought riches and/or prestige to the homeland, and that they brought progress to the colonies.

This conceptualization of the world was expressed by conservatives and liberals alike, even if their views varied in many ways. Their disagreements, however, were over form but never over content. With the exception of some radicals, few ever questioned colonialism when it was projected as a fair and just civilizing mission. The supremacy of Western civilization was unmistakable, whether it was built on biological traits not accessible to other “races” or whether it was engraved into a culture that inferior peoples were either capable or incapable to assimilate to. As I have stressed, this hegemonic ideology of colonialism shaped, in several ways nationalist movements in Europe after World War I. Through this ideology, the late
unification processes of Germany and Italy would define their rightful place in the world order of white supremacy. The future of nations was dependent on attaining prestige in the eyes of an “international community”—made up of a few dominant states—and on the securing of natural resources and markets. It required nation-building on the European continent and the acquisition of colonies. The question or prioritization—whether continental or colonial expansion should be pursued—changed with time. But both types of imperial conquest interacted and informed each other and were never divorced. Knowledge of race and space underpinned radical nationalist sentiments. Age-old xenophobia and anti-Semitism changed its character when solutions to national questions were sought in colonial practices. Radical nationalists measured themselves against the past victories and defeats of colonial empires and settler colonies. Lessons were to be learnt and perceived deficiencies were to be abandoned. But there was no departure from the tenet that might makes right.

The political landscape of Italy and Germany was, as noted, influenced by being late-comers to colonialism. In both countries, liberals were at the forefront propagating colonial enterprise and conquest. After World War I, the failures to maintain or develop the colonial empire was put at the liberal doorstep. In Italy, the fascist regime would continue and radicalize colonial practices started by liberal governments. In Germany, the Nazis would use claims for a return of colonies to gain bourgeois respectability; at the same time, Nazi ideologues would blame liberals for pursuing a wrong-headed colonial policy. The future of the Nazi regime was defined in terms of a continental expansion towards the East rather than overseas colonies. But the imagination of colonialism—as expressed in continuities in practices and knowledge on subjugated peoples—still existed. It lingered on, in the forms of traces, in the minds of leaders and soldiers alike. As Jürgen Zimmerer convincingly shows, Nazi Germany did not simply occupy Eastern Europe, for it pursued an ambitious long-term plan of settlement, displacement of peoples, and total reorganization of societies. The Nazis thought a few non-German nations could be deemed racially fit for complete assimilation. But, in general, the “East” was seen as an empty space inhabited by peoples of inferior races that should be kept in inferiority through discrimination and restrictions to education. The Jewish people, however, only had the fate of complete extermination. The bureaucratization and industrialization of the Jewish genocide was, indeed, unprecedented in world history. But, as Helmut Walser Smith points out, the more archaic forms of killing had their roots in community-based pogroms in Europe. What is more, examples of expulsion, denial of means of subsistence and incarceration into concentration camps reflected clear colonial continuities.
To be sure, as Geoff Eley argues, colonialism did not produce the political and economic crisis that led to fascism or that brought it to power. By being late-comers to colonialism, Italy and Germany were not predestined or predetermined to become fascist. As the wealth of historical research into fascism shows, colonialism does by no means offer an all-embracing explanation. There were other key factors, such as the fragility of democracy in Italy and Germany; the willingness of traditional elites and conservatives to bring fascists into power; and the great popular appeal of the fascist movements, which used the new forms and technologies of mass politics to maximum effect. Moreover, fascism cannot be associated with European colonialism without accounting for World War I and the interwar revolutions. Yet, the Great War was neither an original sin nor a radical rupture; its brutality in technological warfare had already been acted out in colonial wars. Thus, as an ideology fascism represents a clear structural continuity from a colonial understanding of the world. Territorial aggrandizement and expansionism shaped the fascist utopian imagination of Lebensraum and Mare Nostrum. Such imperialist and racist plans were intrinsic parts of Italian Fascism and German Nazism and were well illustrated by the long colonial antecedents of racial laws in both countries. No doubt anti-Semitism had independent roots outside the context of colonial racism. But colonialism—coupled with a racially-informed understanding of unchangeable differences between different peoples—meant that Jews could no longer be assimilated. Such a view underpinned new forms of expulsion and reservations, making extermination only one deduction away. These violent processes were meant to create distance and prevent acts of solidarity.

Thus, a historiography that exempts the foundations of Western civilization—whether liberalism or an Enlightenment ideology tied up with colonialism—from fascism is highly problematic. As I have shown here, liberal thinkers and politicians played an important role in propagating colonialism and expressed ambiguous, and often antagonistic, attitudes towards the expansion of democratic rights. For this reason, one can no longer see liberalism as an ultimate antagonistic force against basic fascist principles. This is not to say that fascism is intrinsically liberal. Rather, fascist ideology took root in a European setting, where liberalism’s contradictory positions had preponderant influence. When liberalism is spared of historical contextualization, when it is elevated above history, then the heritage of colonialism and its effect on the world is either forgotten or obscured. This has often been the case with ideological interpretations of fascism, such as those put forward by Sternhell or Griffin, which have tended to emphasize its irrationality. But within the framework of imperialism, early radical nationalists, the predecessors of fascism, argued, on a rational basis, for expansionism and
national prestige. It appears that what has been associated with irrationality in fascism can only be projected through such teleological arguments. Another problem arises with the lists, which historians such as Nolte or Griffin have compiled—to account for the “fascist minimum”—in an attempt define its core characteristics. They are often both epochal and generic in their descriptions of fascism. But, as Martin Blinkhorn argues, the limits and static nature of such lists often fail to grasp the full diversity of the European Right. A concept of continuity is arguably better suited to account for difference than lists. With the exception of Arendt’s analysis, totalitarianism theory of fascism also disregards the problematic long-term heritage of European liberalism. Reflecting pitfalls of a limited periodization, it offers a very short-term history. It pictures Western societies at a certain point of development in the form of liberal democracy, disregarding the social and political struggles that brought forth democratic rights and freedoms. Indeed, totalitarianism theory became highly teleological when it reached its peak during the Cold War’s darkest days. It defined Western democracies as an a-historical ideal type, a generic one, while reducing totalitarian regimes to epochal forms, such as Stalinism.

Throughout this historical inquiry, the concept of continuity has played a vital role. It seeks to transcend clear-cut compartmentalization of historical time, which was most explicitly expressed in the Sonderweg tradition. While the Sonderweg theory served the purpose of opening up the narrative, it closed it up, again, by concentrating on national peculiarities and by elevating liberalism and divorcing it from historical contextualization. A deeper understanding of continuity might circumvent such an historical impasse. Continuity ought not to be limited to a national narrative. Streams of traces needs to be detected in transnational and global processes. Evaluating colonialism’s role in shaping modern Europe is one such way. What needs to be stressed, however, in the vein of Alexander Gerschenkron, is that continuity should not be simply seen as the absence of change or be made an unusable concept by demanding sameness between two phenomena. It can span a time period of specific societal changes during which democratic rights—to take an example—can be abolished. At the same time, the concept can be tied to other types of changes, such as expansionism, economic reordering and imperialism, involving radicalization based on a continuum of key ideological tenets. In other words, levels of change can still encompass continuity, which, paradoxically, signifies stability of certain elements in a changing world.

It is true that certain facts weaken the thesis of a continuity between colonialism and fascism. The official ideologues of fascism rarely wanted to link their expansionism to colonialism. A new language was constructed to separate new territorial ambitions from a
colonial past in an attempt to account for differences in practice and knowledge. This has tempted scholars, such as Eley, to view this dynamic as planes of equivalence, or for Birthe Kundrus as being informed by imperialism rather than being a part of it. Other scholars, such as Hans-Uwe Guettel sees fascism as an antithesis to colonialism, thereby relativizing the concept of continuity. Nevertheless, there was quite clearly an imagination of expansionism, which was intrinsically connected to colonialism. Its vocabulary was transmitted most vividly by everyday officials and military personnel. They executed policies, but were not necessarily up-to-date with the latest Nazi lingua. Indeed, even Hitler himself would express this imagination in his references to colonialism. This is a reminder of the ambiguity of fascism. It wanted to portray itself as novel; yet, instead, it more often represented a reiteration and radicalization of what was familiar.

Fascist ideologues not only reinvented their expansionism by distancing it from colonialism; they also separated it from a liberal historical tradition, which was apologetic toward the tragic, but acceptable, colonial killings and extermination of indigenous peoples. Indeed, in its antagonism against liberalism, fascism could give no credit to its influence on the politics of race and colonialism. Needless to say, liberalism itself has distanced itself from its problematic past as well. This dynamic dilemma relates to our contemporary political landscape. The mouthpieces of the extreme Right, which are not self-professed fascists, lay claim to historical political thinkers of liberal and conservative traditions on the basis of the ideology of white supremacy. How does one respond to such historical borrowings by right-wing politicians advocating national communities or restricted immigration in the present? Should the racist views of such thinkers—who are often quoted for their tolerant views on other matters—be denied? I would argue not. This places before us an opportunity to recognize a Western heritage not only steeped in greatness but also in a great deal of suffering. The subterranean stream of Western history should be exposed and made visible. By doing so, we do not set out to expulse the crimes of fascism by viewing them as part of a longer historical trend associated with colonialism and imperialism and by evoking liberalism’s influence on both. The problematic roots of liberalism need to be accounted for instead of dishonestly romanticizing it as an a-historical phenomenon. Such perfidy exposes the contemporary hypocrisy of liberalism in a world shaped by inequalities between the global North and South. It contains a stream of traces that are, indeed, present even today: indigenous peoples are still marginalized and denied their way of life and the global divide in wealth is still monumental. And those peoples who will be affected the worst by the latest global threat—climate change—have already been ravished by centuries of colonialism and neo-colonialism.
I would like to conclude this thesis on a precautionary note. Although it has dealt with historical fascist movements and regimes and the traces they inherited from colonialism, fascism is still a reality in today’s political landscape. As I have noted, some movements and parties of the contemporary extreme Right—whether having roots in a fascist past or identifying with a fascist ideology—apply strategies designed to distance themselves from fascism or to rehabilitate it. It is important to be aware of these strategies and how they normalize a distorted political message. Fascism can become familiar when it is steeped in a narrative of a glorious past. Ultra-nationalist narratives create distance between peoples and fake homogeneity within a nationality; they seek to destroy diversity as such and to undermine human solidarities. We should encourage skepticism towards historical narratives of national greatness. We should ask for whom was the nation great in the invoked golden age? We should ask ourselves how these new fascist movements are informed not only by their fascist predecessors but also by the colonial tradition preceding them.

During the U.S. presidential election campaign in 2016, the question was often raised whether Donald Trump’s political rhetoric—his palingenetic populist ultra-nationalism, which was tinged with racism and sexism—constituted fascism. While many thought so, I felt that a more cautionary usage of fascism was advised. After all, Trump’s political role model is neither Hitler nor Mussolini. In fact, it is President Andrew Jackson.\(^\text{272}\) During his tenure, Jackson oversaw the Indian Removal Act of 1830, continuing the tradition of expulsion and extermination of Native Americans. How should we interpret Trump’s unwillingness to listen to the demands of Native American communities today, when they demand a stop to the construction of oil pipelines that will threaten their environment and water supply? These pipelines go through a land stolen by his liberal predecessors, of the likes Alexis de Tocqueville admired so much. Again, we are confronted with core questions about traces and continuities—about violent ideological ties between the past and present.

\(^{272}\) In a recent article in *The Guardian* Trump also expressed confusion over as to why there was a civil war in America. “Trump voices confusion over US history: ‘Why was there a civil war?’” *The Guardian* 2 May 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/may/01/donald-trump-civil-war-cause-andrew-jackson (Accessed 3 May 2017).
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