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## CHAPTER IV: FASCISM

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*Fascism is not for export*

-Benito Mussolini

Fascism adopts many instrumental characteristics of authoritarianism, and is in that sense closest aligned to a dictatorship. Both are reliant on a developed state machinery, aim to limit plurality and eradicate opposition and show a profound lack of authority which they compensate by violence. Fascism however also introduces and makes use of new concepts, both instrumental as well as normative, without which the appearance of totalitarianism seems unthinkable. This is not to say to fascism is equal to totalitarianism or a less severe form of totalitarianism, but it does form a bridge between authoritarianism and totalitarianism since fascism developed many of the novel instruments and concepts that totalitarianism adopted. In this chapter we will look at what distinguishes fascism from classic forms of authoritarianism, and how these typical fascist elements contributed to the formation of totalitarianism.

Fascism is often identified by what it is mostly not, a negative typology. In the words of Juan J. Linz:

The anti-positions of fascism are essential to its understanding and appeal, but they alone do not account for its success. Fascism is anti-liberal, anti-parliamentarian, anti-Marxist, and particularly anti-communist, anti- or at least a-clerical and in a certain sense anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup>Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, p. 220.

Hugh Trevor Rope additionally claims that fascism is nothing but an 'ill sorted hodge-podge of ideas'.<sup>200</sup> A positive typology comes from Robert Paxton who states that fascism:

was a new invention created afresh for the era of mass politics. It sought to appeal mainly to the emotions by the use of ritual, carefully stage-managed ceremonies, and intensely charged rhetoric. [...] fascism does not rely explicitly upon an elaborated philosophical system, but rather upon popular feelings about master races, their unjust lot, and their rightful predominance over inferior peoples.<sup>201</sup>

Another positive typology comes from Roger Griffin, arguably one of the most prolific authors, together with Paxton, on this subject matter. Both view Nazism as being a fascist movement, I disagree with them on that issue for reasons relating to the discrepancy between fascist mentality and totalitarian ideology, on which I shall return in chapter five. Griffin defines fascism as:

A form of programmatic modernism that seeks to conquer political power in order to realize a totalizing vision of national and ethnic rebirth. Its ultimate end is to overcome the decadence that has destroyed a sense of communal belonging and drained modernity of meaning and transcendence and usher in a new era of cultural homogeneity and health.<sup>202</sup>

Another way to describe fascism is as a political movement tailor made for and emanating from the socio-dynamics of a new era which no longer revolved around the classic "-isms" or the participation of the educated few, but in contrast, focused on the rejection of all hitherto existing political systems and on the mobilization and

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<sup>200</sup> Jonathan Wolff, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (Oxford [England]; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 20.

<sup>201</sup> Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 16.

<sup>202</sup> Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, p. 182.

participation of that new social-political phenomenon ‘the masses’. Fascism’s radical rejection of all preceding political systems also entailed the rejection of the same transcendental, metaphysical truths, such as ‘justice’ or ‘divinity’ on which these systems based their ontology. Bordering therefore on the verge of complete *nihilism*, fascist movements therefore needed more than just a diffuse mentality to arouse the masses, but also realized that these same masses were not interested in a (pseudo) scientifically developed doctrine. Unlike the authoritarian and liberal political systems, which in the end were founded on a theological, metaphysical or rationalist claim to a certain universal truth, fascists ultimately approached the truth from the standpoint that truth is what the fascist *wills* it to be. This radical rejection of the metaphysical nature of ‘truth’ can be seen as a conflation of the works of three important thinkers that discovered the political virtue and transformative power of belief in untruth and irrationality. Whether it was justified or not, the fascist drew in the first place on a politicized, and in many respects bastardized, conception of some of the concepts developed in Nietzsche’s highly apolitical writing ‘Jenseits von Gut und Böse’.<sup>203</sup>

WHAT really is this "Will to Truth" in us? In fact we made a long halt at the question as to the origin of this Will--until at last we came to an absolute standstill before a yet more fundamental question. We inquired about the VALUE of this Will. Granted that we want the truth: WHY NOT RATHER untruth? And uncertainty? Even ignorance?<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> For a discussion on Nietzsche’s possible contribution to fascist mentality and Nazi Ideology see Jacob Golomb and Robert S. Wistrich, *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>204</sup> Translation into English from: Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Helen Zimmern, 4th ed. (London: T.N. Foulis, 1914). Original German in ———, *Jenseits Von Gut Und Böse: Vorspiel Einer Philosophie Der Zukunft*, trans. Peter Pütz, Neuauf. ed. ([München]: Goldmann, 1999). Chapter 1, Paragraph 1. “Was in uns will

Instead of seeking some metaphysical truth as a principal of action, or as a symbolic place of power, the fascist appealed to their interpretation of the concept of 'the will to power'. Nietzsche's 'will to power', which was highly individualistic, was turned by the fascists into a principle of collective action for the whole fascist movement, something Nietzsche must have dreaded.<sup>205</sup>

Two other thinkers that drew on this line of thought and observed the value of spontaneously occurring non-truth based beliefs on the individual and society were Vilfredo Pareto and Georges Sorel. Lee Harris commented on the importance of these authors and their impact on the fascist' instrumentalization of truth by stating that human beings have a spiritual need for 'a large set of beliefs that cannot be demonstrated logically and scientifically'.<sup>206</sup>

Sorel however went one step further and came to a 'radical innovation' when he combined the rejection of metaphysical truth with the principle of the 'will to power'. Sorel's *political myth* thereby did not rely on its truth value, but on the 'transformative effect it would have on those who placed their faith in it and the extent to

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eigentlich "zur Wahrheit"? - In der Tat, wir machten langen Halt vor der Frage nach der Ursache dieses Willens, - bis wir, zuletzt, vor einer noch gründlicheren Frage ganz und gar stehen blieben. Wir fragten nach dem Werte dieses Willens. Gesetzt, wir wollen Wahrheit: warum nicht lieber Unwahrheit? Und Ungewissheit? Selbst Unwissenheit?"

<sup>205</sup> Translated into English from: Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Original German in: ———, *Jenseits Von Gut Und Böse: Vorspiel Einer Philosophie Der Zukunft*. "was sich damals mit den Stoikern begab, begibt sich heute noch, sobald nur eine Philosophie anfängt, an sich selbst zu glauben. Sie schafft immer die Welt nach ihrem Bilde, sie kann nicht anders; Philosophie ist dieser tyrannische Trieb selbst, der geistigste Wille zur Macht, zur "Schaffung der Welt", zur causa prima. [...]so hätte man damit sich das Recht verschafft, alle wirkende Kraft eindeutig zu bestimmen als: Wille zur Macht. Die Welt von innen gesehen, die Welt auf ihren "intelligiblen Charakter" hin bestimmt und bezeichnet - sie wäre eben "Wille zur Macht" und nichts außerdem."

<sup>206</sup> Harris, *Civilization and Its Enemies: The Next Stage of History*, p. 9.

which such ideological make-believe could alter the character and conduct of those who held these beliefs'.<sup>207</sup>

Whilst defining fascism along these lines, a radical rejection of some transcendent truth and irrationality as a guide to action, does not seem very tangible, it is however the quintessence of fascism.<sup>208</sup> One of the startling characteristics of fascist movements, Mussolini's fascist being the prime example, is their lack of a coherent political agenda.<sup>209</sup>

Fascism's radical instrumentalization of truth explains why fascists never bothered to write any casuistical literature when they changed their program, as they did often and without compunction.<sup>210</sup>

What is then the relevance of fascism to totalitarianism? In addition, what is its relevance to Islamism? Fascism in many respects pioneered the *mastery of the masses* as a political force but failed to encompass them into a totalist conception of social and political organization. It appealed to a novel and distinct mentality, namely the basic emotions of the crowd, something which in content and magnitude was radically different from the mentalities used by any previous authoritarian regime.<sup>211</sup> In addition, its sacralisation of the state as the acting agent of the *volonté générale*, paved the way for the penetration of large parts of everyday life by that state, something which was undesired, if not impossible, by previous forms of

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>208</sup> Both Griffin and Paxton write extensively on this problem of defining something that defines itself by its adoration of irrational emotion and its rejection of everything outside its own ill-defined boundaries.

<sup>209</sup> Mussolini himself stated in 1920 that the fascists "do not feel tied to any particular doctrine". In a rather bold statement he replied to an interviewer who demanded to know his program: "The democrats of *Il Mondo* want to know our program? It is to break the bones of the democrats of *Il Mondo*." Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 17.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

authoritarian regime. As such, fascism can in many respects be seen as the precursor to totalitarian movements. The analysis of fascism is relevant to the study of Islamism because the basic concepts of fascism, insofar as they differ from other forms of authoritarianism, might be seen in Islamist movements as well. If we want to establish how a certain Islamist movement relates to the different forms of authoritarianism, or if it is in the process of becoming a totalitarian movement, we need to take into account the intermediary function of fascism in this process. It will therefore be analyzed what the different attitudes are in the spectrum of Islamist movements towards these concepts.

Fascist movements, as I have stated, lack a coherent pseudo-scientific and codified ideology. Instead, they appeal to the emotions of the masses and they were the first form of political organization which was tailor-made to appeal to and master the masses in that respect. In addition, no doubt due to the lack of a unifying guiding ideology, the different fascist movements that arose in Europe lacked a singular common path to political power. To analyze these differences would take us well outside the scope of this chapter so I shall limit myself to discussing the main characteristics of the fascist mentality and its relation to totalitarianism. It should be kept in mind that the movements owed their success in a great deal to the feelings of anomie, loneliness, superfluosity and the decline of national pride and honour which I have discussed previously. These perceptions of existence amongst the masses are needed as fertile soil, if the fascist movement is to be able to mobilize support. I will briefly discuss the basic mentality or *weltanschauung* that typifies the fascist movement by example of Italy's premier fascist Mussolini.

#### **4.1 Signposts of the fascist mentality**

*Anti-individualism, elitist-collectivism and state-ism*

Fascism opposes modernisms such as liberalism, individuality and democracy, perceiving them as the root cause for the decline of morality.<sup>212</sup> The argument is that individualism destroys the community and morality of man and instead creates a state in which all are equally preoccupied with their own private gain. Democracy, instead of exalting mankind, lowers the standards of existence to the lowest common denominator. Individualism, the fascists argue, thus subverts that which is good for the community. The role of the individual is therefore completely denied and man is evaluated only insofar as he contributes to the wellbeing of the collective and his ability to transform himself to the highest standards.<sup>213</sup> The general will of the people finds its expression only in the state, which itself is the expression of the historic and organic unity of a people's common will to power. In the words of Mussolini fascism is:

Anti-individualistic, the fascist conception of life stresses, the importance of the State and accepts the individual only in so far as his interests coincide with those of the State, which stands for the conscience and the universal will of man as a historic entity. [...] Outside history man is a nonentity.<sup>214</sup>

In line with the previous chapter in which I showed how the challenge of modernity resulted in liberalism or the Gnostic's speculative order, the fascists assert that it is not the individual which takes centre stage in fascist society, but it is:

The primacy of the group, towards which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to it<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, p. 181.

<sup>213</sup> Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 17.

<sup>214</sup> Benito Mussolini, 'Fundamental Ideas' in Benito Mussolini, "Fundamental Ideas," in *Twentieth Century Political Theory: A Reader*, ed. Stephen Eric Bronner (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 219-220.

<sup>215</sup> Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 41.



The collectivist and statist vision of the fascist was predominantly born out of its negative experience with modernity, a sense of 'dread of the group's decline under the corrosive effects of individualistic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences', which created the 'need for closer integration of a purer community, by consent or by exclusionary violence if necessary.'<sup>216</sup>

Notwithstanding their appeal to and reliance on the masses, the fascist agenda was by no means a mere rule of the majority. Instead, what the fascist envisaged was that the most excellent of man's qualities be the guiding rule for all members of society and that all members would be judged by their compliance to these standards. Fascism in that sense aims to create a highly elitist and hierarchical society, not based on the idea of *volk*, ethnicity, religion or class, but on national unity. It is not majoritarian due to its elitism, nor is it tyranny over the people. Rather, it is a form of society in which the weaker elements are purged and the strong are favoured.<sup>217</sup> As we will see, Islamist movements, and the radical elements thereof in particular, mirror this emphasis on strength, dedication and sacrifice, aristocracy, and the need to 'purify' the own ranks.

The allusion to Nietzsche's 'will to power' and Nietzsche more aristocratic tendencies is obvious. Mussolini also introduces here the

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> As Mussolini stated: "fascism is therefore opposed to that form of democracy which equates a nation to the majority, lowering it to the level of the largest number; but it is the purest form of democracy if the nation be considered-as it should be- from the point of view of quality rather than quantity, as an idea, the mightiest because the most ethical, the most coherent, the truest, expressing itself in a people as the conscience and the will of the few, if not indeed, of one, and ending to express itself in the conscience of and the will of the mass, of the whole group ethnically moulded by natural and historical conditions into a nation, advancing, as one conscience and one will.[...] Not a race, nor a geographically defined region, but a people, historically perpetuating itself; a multitude unified by an idea and imbued with the will to live, the will to power." Quoted from 'Fundamental Ideas' in: Mussolini, "Fundamental Ideas," p. 221.

idea of the elitist *Führer-Prinzip*, the idea that the state should be led by one man and his close associates who have the knowledge of what is good for the organic community and who lead by example. This type of governance is highly reminiscent of the basic structure of an army, which is not surprising since the majority of the forerunners of fascism were the veterans from the First World War, also known as *Fasci di Combattimento*, or black-shirts. Their experiences of the reality of the modern battlefield; devoid of honour, the anonymity of a trench grave, the technical capability of mechanical de-individualized mass killing, gave these men a sense of belonging to an avant-garde which normal society could no longer understand, and who were set to destroy the order that represented everything they experienced as being weak, hedonistic, immoral and depraved. It was the will to power of these battle-hardened men which was to set the new standard for a new society. Not surprisingly, the earliest fascist movements have often been referred to as “trenchocracies”.

Fascism sees the history of mankind as moving from absolutism and authoritarianism, which denied the individual, to liberalism which in turn denied the state its role as the ultimate expression of the conscience and will of the people.<sup>218</sup> As such the state becomes a quasi-religious entity, the quintessential instrument of mankind’s evolution towards an ‘ethical life’, the fascist state is therefore above all an *ethical state*; an ethical state which judges all of its citizen on the content of their actions and a state which punishes those whose actions do not fall in line with the ethics of the state.<sup>219</sup>

The totality of the state according to Mussolini:

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid. “ is opposed to classical liberalism which arose as a reaction to absolutism and exhausted its historical function when the state became the expression of the conscience and will of the people. Liberalism denied the state in the name of the individual; fascism reasserts the rights of the state as expressing the real essence of the individual.”

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. “No action is exempt from moral judgment; no activity can be despoiled of the value which a moral purpose confers on all things.”

[..] is all embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value. Thus understood, fascism is totalitarian, and the fascist state- a synthesis and a unit inclusive of all values- interprets, develops, and potentiates the whole life of a people.<sup>220</sup>

Although Mussolini here coins the term totalitarian in order to describe the nature of the fascist state, it should be noted that fascism lacks many of the features that typify totalitarianism. I will return to this later, but this example makes it clear why I try to draw clear distinctions in the taxonomy of totalitarianism. Mussolini might have envisioned his fascist state as being totalitarian, but he never reached that point, or showed any serious inclination to do so, in the development of his state in which it could be identified as being truly totalitarian.<sup>221</sup>

The moral decline of society, alienation and loneliness that was felt by large masses throughout Europe and, in part, the failure of conventional political currents to deal with them, became the catalyst through which fascist movements could rise to power.<sup>222</sup> Unlike the mentality of previous authoritarian regimes that centred on appeasing the interest groups, the mentality of the fascists was tailor made to mobilize the masses. Having discovered this previously untapped reservoir of political potential, the fascists appeal to the passions, frustrations and hopes of the masses through a combination of Enlightenment and counter Enlightenment ideals. Although the fascists did not venture, or even bothered, to formulate a coherent philosophy, their appeal to the basic emotions of the crowd had to be constructed from some sort of basic set of ideas which would

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., pp. 220-221.

<sup>221</sup> “[..] yet even Mussolini, who was so fond of the term ‘totalitarian state’ , did not attempt to establish a full-fledged totalitarian regime and contended himself with dictatorship and one-party rule. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 308.

<sup>222</sup> Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 107, Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, p. 183.

culminate in the supposition that the state and the state alone could bring the salvation the masses longed for. As such, one of its most prominent features was to reinvent the social body, the social cohesion that had disintegrated in the process of modernity, into the body of the national group, headed by the leader, and to which all individual rights had to be subordinated, not for the benefit of all, but for the benefit of increasing those virtues which the fascists exalted, those virtues that exemplified the fascist's disdain for modern life and which would make the group triumphant again. The later concept is known as *Palingenesis*.

### *Palingenesis and the mythical representation of history or future*

More than anything else the fascist movement embodied a violent counter reaction to the then current political and social reality which can be typified as a 'sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solution'.<sup>223</sup> By referring to a glorious, mythical and more often than not a completely over romanticized or even imagined past, they offered the people a way out of misery and deep feelings of humiliation if only they were willing to follow them.<sup>224</sup> This concept known as *Palingenesis* or rebirth, lies at the core of the fascist, and ensuing totalitarian, *raison d'être*. Its main aim is the recreation of a mythological past and can be seen in the terminology of the fascists themselves, i.e. Mussolini's second empire (the roman empire being the first) or Hitler's third Reich (following the Holy Roman Empire and Bismarck's German empire). *Palingenesis* is the epitome of a political *weltanschauung* that is, to quote Hoffer, 'wholly without reverence towards the present'.<sup>225</sup> It is this rejection of the

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<sup>223</sup> Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 41.

<sup>224</sup> Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, p. 181, Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 41.

<sup>225</sup> Hoffer, *The True Believer; Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements.*, preface.

present which defies the fundamentals of the liberal's political attitude. When a man's business is worth minding, that is when he is at home in the present, he tends not to interfere with the business of others. Conversely, those who reject the present can be rallied for a cause which is divorced from reality and which is located in some mythical past or future. Instead of being occupied with a life deemed miserable, the discontented can be rallied for a political cause which promises them salvation through self-sacrifice, absorption into a new *ecclesia* and a goal worth fighting for. 'The less justified a man is in claiming excellence for his own self, the more ready is he to claim all excellence for his nation, his religion, his race or his holy cause'.<sup>226</sup> Fascism and totalitarianism rely on the palingenetic ideal to legitimize their rule and attract members who reject their present condition. Whilst this in fascism remains in the domain of propaganda, meaning, there is no real substance to this claim, it is merely an instrument for mobilization; totalitarianism develops it into a full-fledged ideology.

Although fascism and Communism share a lot of common elements, there is an important difference with regard to the concept of Palingenesis. Western fascist movements focus their attention mainly on some glorious past or an image of a community that once was; the simple peasant life that existed before the rise of the decadent city or the romanticized ideal of a historic ethnically pure community.<sup>227</sup> Communist movements in general tend to look forward, aiming to create the 'final syntheses' of the classless society. The main exception being Pol Pot who forcibly tried to recreate a peasant society in which all traces of 'bourgeois' intellect, learning, culture and so on were destroyed.<sup>228</sup> In both cases however the ultimate aim is

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<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>227</sup> See for instance: Michael Hesemann and Hans Christian Meiser, *Hitlers Religion: Die Fatale Heilslehre Des Nationalsozialismus* (München: Pattloch, 2004).

<sup>228</sup> Henri Locard, *Le "Petit Livre Rouge" De Pol Pot, Ou, Les Paroles De L'angkar, Entendues Dans Le Cambodge Des Khmers Rouges Du 17 Avril 1975 Au 7 Janvier 1979*, Recherches Asiatiques (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), David P.

the fabrication of a society in which the people through the 'total state' act as if they were one, thereby overcoming pluralism and individualism which were seen as the hallmark of the decadent society. The mythological palingenetic representation of the past or future served as the model that had to be obtained, the 'is' being fabricated to conform to the imaginary and forever unobtainable 'ought'. The essential thing about Palingenesis, be it in its fascist ultra-nationalist form, the Nazi's *Volk*, or ethnic form, or in the Stalinist futurist form, is that it is at its core a fantasy. Whilst the fascist were aware of this being a fantasy, the totalitarian movements however, turned this fantasy into a pseudo-scientific ideology of which the party was to be the actualizing agent. Whereas Palingenesis is the fascist rallying call, a means of propaganda designed to mobilize the 'passions' of the masses, totalitarianism makes it its core value and principle of action. I will go deeper into this difference between fascism and totalitarianism and between propaganda and indoctrination in the next chapter. For now I should explain that while I refer here to the Nazi's and the communist-Stalinist I do so in order to highlight some of the elements of fascism which they incorporated. In reality the transition from fascism to totalitarianism is often gradual and the latter incorporates many elements of the former whilst discarding others along the way; more on this in chapter five.

### *Struggle and social Darwinism*

Now that we know that fascism is above all a palingenetic reaction against the ailments of modern times, the question now turns to the values and virtues which can save the nation from moral decline and restore its rightful place amongst the nations. We already saw that the fascist ideal is a highly elitist pseudo-aristocracy based around the notion of a 'trenchocracy'. What can we say about the values and virtues of that trenchocracy? How does their adoration of struggle

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Chandler, *Voices from S-21 : Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

materialize into a distinct fascist mentality that can lead to the palingenetic revival of the nation?

The impact of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution was felt far beyond the boundaries of biology and by the end of the nineteenth century had made its impact on the world of political philosophy as well. Herbert Spencer, like Comte, attempted to synthesize the different fields of scientific theories into a general systematic theory which could be interpreted to predict a final stage of mankind. Making the analogy between Darwin's theory of biology and human society, the notion that a similar mechanism might be at work in human existence began to take root. If humanity could be perceived of as a 'struggle for survival', those fittest for survival should be rewarded, a concept known as the 'positive conception of life'. Combined with Nietzsche's critique of the Christian-Jewish '*slave mentality*' that favoured the weak and denied the strong their rightful place, the idea was born that it was, above all, strength and the will to power that should be rewarded and placed at the centre stage of human existence.<sup>229</sup> Although Nietzsche's philosophy was highly individualistic and loathed all 'herd mentalities', the fascists turned Nietzsche's philosophy inside out and applied its doctrine of 'the will to power' to the masses. As such, war became the ultimate test for men, instead of avoiding war one should welcome it, celebrate it, as the purest expression of vitality and the will to power. In the words of Mussolini, fascism:

conceives of life as a struggle in which it behooves a man to win for himself a really worthy place, first of all by befitting himself to become the implement required for winning it. As for the individual so for the nation, for mankind. [...] War alone brings up to their highest tension all human energies and

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<sup>229</sup> "Life as conceived by the fascist is serious, austere, religious; all its manifestations are poised in a world sustained by moral forces and subject to spiritual responsibilities. The fascist distains an "easy life". Benito Mussolini, 'Fundamental Ideas' in Mussolini, "Fundamental Ideas," pp. 219-220.

imposes the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to make it.<sup>230</sup>

Subsequently, the Nazi's evolved this conception of social-Darwinism to the point where the physical elimination of the weak became a 'positive conception of life'. Likewise, Communism viewed those whose ideological dedication was regarded as weak, or those whom the ideology condemned to death as the equivalent of the physically unfit.

The founding idea of the mythological representation of the past or future therefore lay in the conception of life as a violent struggle for survival rather than any intellectual or theological conception of life. This also means that, at least to the fascists, the symbolic place of power no longer lay in any intellectual conceptualization of the essence of human existence, such as a vision on 'justice', not in liberal notions of 'fairness' or 'Socratic debate', but in the all permeating social-Darwinist will to power itself. This culminated in the belief that the group to which one belonged had the right "to dominate others without restraint from any kind of humane or divine law, right being decided by the sole criterion of the group's prowess within a Darwinian struggle."<sup>231</sup> Struggle, war and social-Darwinism thus became the core values of the fascist mentality. This is further exemplified in its anti-rationalism which functions as the catalyst for the fascist use of violence.

### *Anti-rationalism*

The appeal to violence, instinct and passion and the fascist interpretation of reason as being cold, soulless and running counter to man's natural instincts can be traced back to a certain degree to counter enlightenment thinking.<sup>232</sup> It is closely aligned to the concept

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 41.

<sup>232</sup> Isaiah Berlin has written extensively on this subject in amongst others: Berlin and Hardy, *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age: Their Rise and Influence on Modern Thought*.



of vitality. What fascists need is not wise men, thinkers, intellectuals, but strong men capable of imposing their will through physical force. It is related to Bergson's conception of vitality or 'élan vital' as being a mystical universal life force that needs to be expressed through action and not repressed by the tyranny of reason. It is not rational thinking that should dictate the action of men but their underlying will. This notion can also be found in Georges Sorel's book "*reflections on violence*" in which he describes the concept of the political myth. As discussed in chapter three, this myth is not the political reality but a manifestation of the will that appeals to the emotions and provokes political action. It is no longer the truth-value of a particular emotion, but the transformative effect and the capability to inspire action that determines its value. By degrading the intellect and elevating the more elemental instincts, the use of violence makes its respectable entry into the political scene. fascism "wants man to be active and to engage in action with all his energies."<sup>233</sup> The many individualist –ism's that developed out of the enlightenment seem to the fascist as being the opposite of this exertion of the will to power. One need only look at the propaganda employed by the different fascist regimes to see that what they admire is not the critical philosopher who asks questions, but the soldier, the farmer, the metalworker, those who build, construct, fabricate and act; it is the exultation of *Homo Faber*.<sup>234</sup> The intellect it seems was perceived mainly as the antithesis of the passions, of the will to live itself. Furthermore, all too critical debate would only undermine the role of the Duce and his elite corps.

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<sup>233</sup> Benito Mussolini, 'Fundamental Ideas' in Mussolini, "Fundamental Ideas," p. 219.

<sup>234</sup> Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, p. 164, Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 139. "The animal *laborens*, which with its body and the help of tame animals nourishes life, may be the lord and master of all living creatures, but he still remains the servant of nature and the earth; only *homo faber* conducts himself as lord and master of the whole earth. Since his productivity was seen in the image of a Creator-God, so that where God creates *ex nihilo*, man creates out given substance [..]"

Once the standard by which society needs to be transformed has been set, the standard is raised above all questions. It is exactly this 'knowing', the pseudo-religious absolute certainty of one's convictions, which, when combined with the concentration of political power in the state, opened the way to the total terror we have come to know of totalitarian movements.<sup>235</sup>

The anti-rationality of the fascist movements poses a problem for what Lefort called the symbolic place of power, law and knowledge. When power, law and knowledge are no longer derived from even a presumed transcendent origin, but instead are derived from irrational emotions; when irrationality itself becomes truth purely because of the ferocity and transformative power of the passions its is able to instil in man, the whole idea of knowledge and law becomes a sham.<sup>236</sup> One of the things that separate fascism from totalitarianism is that the latter, especially in its later stages of development, uses the passions of irrational emotions solely as a means of propaganda, that is, as a means to arouse the public's feelings. This however, does not mean that it lays at the core of the movements beliefs. If we want to know what these movements truly believe, and what they aim to install in society once their monopoly on power has been secured, we would have to look at the content of their indoctrination, which in many respects is the opposite of the propaganda of irrationality. I will return to this in chapter five when I discuss how the fascist propaganda relates to totalitarian concept of indoctrination and ideology. For now suffice it to say that to the fascists, anti-rationality was one of their principles of action whilst for the totalitarians it was merely a tool to arouse the passions of the masses.

### *Creative violence and existential violence*

When one combines the elements we just discussed; the feeling of a disintegrated social body, the need for an ethical state which can

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<sup>235</sup> van der Wilt, "In Search of Motive: Conceptual Hazards in the Quest for a Proper Definition of Terrorism".

<sup>236</sup> Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 40.

restore this unity and bring about its Palingenesis, the discovery of those principals and virtues which can empower the state and the man in it, the following question is: what type of action should this state deploy to achieve its goals? Why are the regimes known for their violence?

The answer lies in the concept of creative violence and creative destruction. Rather than bringing about change through rational dialogue or parliamentary debate, the fascist's appreciation of conflict, violence and war, makes these concepts cardinal virtues long forgotten by the decadent contemporary society. Violence, rather than being a deplorable aspect of life, became elevated to its most cardinal virtue. It was not seen as a force of destruction but rather as a force of creation, the logical complement of their anti-rationalism.<sup>237</sup> The appeal of violence lay in its capability to directly reshape society because of the glorification of the will to power of those who exercised it. The cost of knowing what the ultimate truth is is that it leaves the believer with only three choices. The first being to ignore the truth all together, thereby becoming a hypocrite; the second to make it a dictum only in your personal life, which would carry the air of cowardice; and the third is to make it a principal of action in your relation to the outside world, or in other words to actively pursue to convert others and reshape society according to your truth. Hoffer rightly argues:

For though ours is a godless age, it is the very opposite of irreligious. The true believer is everywhere on the march, and both by converting and antagonizing he is shaping the world in his own image.<sup>238</sup>

Whilst the liberals might have opted for the second choice, the fascist and in their wake the totalitarians opted for the third choice. Once

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<sup>237</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 215.

<sup>238</sup> Hoffer, *The True Believer; Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements.*, preface.

the dogma has been established, all that remains is to implement it in society. Moreover, since dialogue is no longer necessary due to the strength of the conviction, the process of conversion is one of violence. An important distinction between fascism and totalitarianism, and a point which forms the axis between fascist and authoritarian regimes and totalitarianism, is the nature of political violence and terror. Fascist terror is not radical terror. By this I mean that the violence employed by the fascist, despite their mythology of palingenesis and exaltation of anti-rationalism, is still very much related to real world problems. Its violence does not aim to reshape or redefine the world entire but is rather aimed 'at realism; in practice it desires to deal only with those problems which are the spontaneous product of historic conditions and which find or suggest their own solutions'.<sup>239</sup> Totalitarian violence on the other hand is ideological terror aimed at fabricating the world into the mirror image of its ideology, and thus, of a radically different nature. This essential difference notwithstanding, totalitarianism's practical agenda is basically rooted in the fascist concept of violence and employs it to eradicate opposition. Only when all opposition is vanquished does the totalitarian experiment in radical violence begin. fascism does not have this ambition.

Fascist violence was first of all directed at the opposition and those elements of the 'old order' which the fascist judged to be guilty of societies decline, liberals, Marxists and anarchists. Basically anyone who opposed the fascists and fit the bill of '*internal enemies*' could expect to meet their appetite for violence. Secondly; it was directed at all those who were unlucky enough to fall victim to the desire for conquest and the need for a symbolic prey to test the power of the fascist movement, the '*external enemies*'. It is important to note that act of being declared an external enemy does not necessarily have anything to do with any action on the side of the victim. It may just be so that the fascist state simply decides that a conquest is in its best

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<sup>239</sup> Mussolini, 'Fundamental ideas' in Mussolini, "Fundamental Ideas," p. 206.

interest regardless of any action on the side of the other country. This is a problem that Lee Harris identified with regard to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The overarching problem that fascism creates for the non-fascists is that the fascist exaltation of violence is enough to make him declare the non-fascist, or even another fascist state, an enemy. With regard to this phenomenon Harris notes:

The very concept of the enemy had been banished from, our moral and political vocabulary. An enemy was just a friend we hadn't done enough for yet. Or perhaps there had been a misunderstanding, or an oversight on our part – something that we could correct. [...] This is the major fact of our time. We are caught in the midst of a conflict between those for whom the category of the enemy is essential to their way of organizing all human experience and those who have banished even the idea of the enemy from both public discourse and even their innermost thoughts.<sup>240</sup>

In case of fascist Italy this wholly oblivious prey was Ethiopia. Although there was no real economic or military incentive, Harris justifiably argues that we should not evaluate the fascist's appetite for war in Clausewitzian terms but rather because "the fascist fantasy ideology required Italy to conquer something and Ethiopia fit the bill. [...] There is a point in which the make-believe becomes an end in itself."<sup>241</sup> In other words, the incentive was the fascist mentality of war for its own virtue. This is an important point with regard to Islamist movements who share the same appetite for violence and war in their radical interpretation of the precepts of jihad. Although jihad in Islamic terms, and certainly in its Islamist interpretation fulfils an objective goal, namely the expansion of the realm of Islam and the predominance of Islam, the Islamist literature is full of the same fascist *esthetical* appreciation of violence, struggle, submission to the leader, in this case Muhammad, and war for the sake of showing

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<sup>240</sup> Harris, *Civilization and Its Enemies: The Next Stage of History*, pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

one's devotion to the cause of Allah. One of the possible discrepancies between fascism and Islamism however is that the former seems to view these virtues as existing for their own benefit whilst Islamism still contributes them to the goal of expanding the realm of Islam, which in the end is a codified system of beliefs, something which the fascist abhorred. The main difference between fascist violence and totalitarian violence is that the former sees violence as a virtue and not much else. The latter sees violence as the foremost human action needed to fabricate mankind into the desired Utopia. Whilst the fascist have internal and external enemies, these categories are mainly constituted by opportunity and have no real foundation in ideology. Violence in the fascist concept is thus not universal or permanent. Totalitarian violence, as we shall see in the next chapter, is by definition universal and permanent. It is not a *means* to an end but a *goal* in itself. The enemies of totalitarianism are therefore something which I call existential enemies, meaning, that the totalitarian movement depends for its existence on the invention of classes of enemies. If there were no more enemies the ideology which fuels the totalitarian movement would in essence be unmasked as a lie. I will return to this in chapter five. This brings us to the next element of fascism namely the difference between a mentality and an ideology.

### *Mentality or ideology*

In chapter two I have already explained in short, the difference between mentality and ideology. Both Mussolini and Hitler insisted that their political doctrine was a mentality rather than an ideology. Hitler's distinctly fascist mentality however would later evolve into a fully fledged racial ideology which had far more complex dimensions than a mentality. The fascist mentality has a particular *weltanschauung*, a way of viewing the world and the spiritual essence of man; it shapes the fascist state according to those principles but due to its open and ill-defined boundaries lacks the characteristics that are required to direct nearly every aspect of the individuals and state's destiny. This explains why fascist violence is limited to real

world problems and totalitarian violence has a far more existential dimension. This difference is essential to understanding why fascism belongs to the realm of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, essentially, forms a realm all of its own; it is a novel form of political organization so radical that it transcends the boundaries of all hitherto known forms of authoritarianism. Whereas National Socialism as a totalitarian movement exists solely to create a *new order of being*, fascism is:

[..] opposed to all individualistic abstractions based on eighteenth century materialism and it is opposed to all jacobinistic Utopias and innovations... it therefore rejects the teleological notion that at some future in time the human family will secure a final settlement of all its difficulties.[..] It does not believe in the possibility of happiness on earth as conceived by the economist literature of the 18th century and it therefore rejects the teleological notion that at some future in time the human family will secure a final settlement of all its difficulties.<sup>242</sup>

The fascist mentality therefore has no particular canon; no codified set of political and legal philosophical principles. It elevates the virtues of violence and war for their own sake and not for some higher, transcendent goal of fabricating Utopia. This was clear even to the Nazi political theorists themselves when they stated that "Mussolini's 'ethical state' and Hitler's 'ideological state' cannot be mentioned in the same breath".<sup>243</sup> In the words of Goebbels; fascism:

Is [..]nothing like National Socialism. While the latter goes deep down to the roots, fascism is only a superficial thing.<sup>244</sup>

The fascist 'mentality' is therefore completely opposed to totalitarian 'ideology', this difference will again become important when we look

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<sup>242</sup> Mussolini, 'Fundamental ideas' in Mussolini, "Fundamental Ideas," p. 206.

<sup>243</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 309f.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

at different Islamist movements. Fascist movements still harbour a certain degree of realism aimed at the actions of man, it is concerned with the organization of man into a new social unity in the here and now whilst totalitarian movements operate from within a purely abstract or even fantasy reality aimed at the future fulfilment of some eternal transcendent decree, even at the cost of coming generations. This is something which cannot be said about fascism. I will elaborate on this in the next chapter where I deal with Arendt's concept of ideology and terror.

### *The leadership principle*

So what we now know is that fascism is a movement aimed at national rejuvenation, Palingenesis, which subordinates all individual rights to a sacralised state and whose principal of action is the supremacy of the collective's will to power for power's sake, based on an irrational mentality and its aesthetic evaluation of violence, struggle and war. The following question is thus: who gives this movement direction? The fascist mentality, as we have seen, has some religious dimensions in its language of alienation and salvation. fascism professes to be the new social body, the new *ecclesia*, in which the disinherited and outcasts are mobilized and its language of religiosity is mirrored by its incorporation of the concept of prophetic leadership. Who then is to lead this new congregation? The answer is to be found in what is perhaps the most well know aspect and most radical innovation of fascism: the leadership principle. Unlike classic authoritarianism where the king was the intermediary between transcendence and the immanent world, and unlike dictatorship or tyranny where the aim of the dictator or tyrant was mostly one of private interests or the interest of the privileged few, the fascist leadership principle endows the leader with a near prophetic status. He is not only the leader that unifies the social body in his image; he is the prophet and leader of a strictly immanent political religion, albeit a religion without scripture, gospels or even a party program. Arendt notes:



Mussolini was probably the first party leader who consciously rejected a formal program and replaced it with inspired leadership and action alone.<sup>245</sup>

The fascist leader in short, is a man of action, of charisma, a man who is able to rally the masses in his support and thus presents himself as the mystical body of social unity through which the passions of the masses can be canalized and put to the project of palingenetic national rehabilitation. He actually occupies and appropriates the seat of power and legitimizes his rule by use of an elaborate yet diffuse and non-teleological mentality based on feelings of group unity, humiliation, masculine instincts of honour and pride and the exultation and aesthetics of violence and war. The leader, in his capacity as leader of the movement is thus not only the occupier and appropriator of power, but also the source of law and knowledge. This is an important aspect; fascism has no claim to transcendent principles, to Gnostic speculations entailing an immanentizable eschatology, it merely aims to create a sacralised state which incorporates and subjugates the whole social body and instils it with a certain mentality. Because there is no extra-political point of reference which can symbolize the position of power, power symbolizes itself. Just as war and violence exist for their own sake and need no justification, so power exists for its own sake and seeks no justification. The head of the movement therefore actually and symbolically becomes the seat of power. In addition, although fascism is not known for its impressive legislative record, the same holds for the place of law and knowledge, both reside in the figure of the leader with no external point of reference since it is the leader who exemplifies all virtues that the mentality aspires to. In summary; the division between power, law and knowledge is negated in the figure of the leader.

### *Mass mobilization*

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<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325f.

The final element which rounds up this inventory of the elements that constitute fascism is Mass Mobilization. Now that we have the contours of what fascism entails, what it aims for and who is guiding it, the final question is: how do fascist movements come to power? The radical innovation of fascism lay in its discovery of the masses as the untapped resource of political power. As previously stated, fascism is primarily an anti-movement; it is against individualism, decadency, liberalism and above all Communism. Nevertheless, an agenda of anti statements and a diffuse mentality at best are not guarantees of electoral success. In fact most fascist movements that emerged in the early half of the twentieth century had very limited electoral success.<sup>246</sup> The preconditions for the emergence of fascist movements are summed up by Paxton as follows: Parliamentary and social deadlock, polarization, mass mobilization against internal and external enemies, and complicity by existing elites.<sup>247</sup> Of course; in a society without any social problems a fascist movement is not likely to have any success whatsoever, what is needed for any movement of radical opposition is a sense of decline of society and an inability of the establishment to deal with the problems at hand. The diverse fascist movements in that respect, excelled at adapting the short term strategies to these circumstances regardless of their long term intentions. This also makes these movements hard to identify at a first glance. The atmosphere in which the violent actions of the fascist could even be deemed acceptable first had to be created and until that has been achieved, the fascist movements may disguise itself in a multitude of forms. With little or no electoral support, the early fascist movements had to find a way to create an atmosphere in which the forces in society would welcome them and they found this in actively opposing the functioning of the parliamentary system.<sup>248</sup> It

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<sup>246</sup> Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 116.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid. See also the words of Goebbels in: United States. Office of Chief of Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality. et al., *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*. Volume 8, chapter 7, 8/55: "We enter parliament in order to supply ourselves, in the arsenal of democracy, with its own weapons. We

should be noted that in the time of the rise of the Italian fascist and the German NSDAP, which was still in a state of pre-totalitarian fascism, both the Italian and German constitutional state were in a state of disarray. One of the conditions to look for, if one is trying to identify potential fascist movements in a particular country, is the presence of a failed state.<sup>249</sup> With the Italian and German political scene in deadlock and a sense of social decline prevalent in society, the fascist approached the conservative forces in their respective countries in a bid to entice their cooperation and protection. What the fascist in fact are trying to achieve is to force an opening onto the political scene where there is none to be found in the parliamentary system. With socialism and especially Communism being regarded as a major threat in both Italy and Germany, the fascist movements portrayed themselves as the anti-socialist and anti-communist *par excellence*. Both in Italy and in Germany this tactic proved successful, although not due to any long term plan on the part of the allies of the fascist movements, they rather saw themselves continuously presented with a choice of either supporting the fascist or supporting the communists. In both cases, the choice was made to support the fascists.<sup>250</sup> Furthermore, since both the communists and the fascist could bolster a large amount of supporters, conflicts on the street were inevitable and actively sought. The agenda of the fascist

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become members of the Reichstag in order to paralyze the Weimar sentiment with its own assistance. If democracy is so stupid as to give us free tickets and per diem for this "blockade" that is its own affair." [...] "The parliamentary battle of the NSDAP had the single purpose of destroying the parliamentary system from within through its own methods. It was necessary above all to make formal use of the possibilities of the party-state system but to refuse real cooperation and thereby to render the parliamentary system, which is by nature dependent upon the responsible cooperation of the opposition, incapable of action."

<sup>249</sup> Stanley Hoffmann, *Chaos and Violence: What Globalization, Failed States, and Terrorism Mean for U.S. Foreign Policy* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield : Distributed by National Book Network, 2006), Robert I. Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>250</sup> Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, pp. 116-119.

however was a duplicate one. On the one hand its proclaimed and actual aim was to have violent confrontations with the communist, both for their own goals but certainly to impress their allies, but a hidden second goal was to undermine public authority. By arranging public acts of intimidation, fighting brawls with members of the opposition and even assassination, the fascist displayed their strength and gave the impression of invulnerability. In addition, it not only prevented people from joining groups that opposed the fascist but more importantly, it gave the impression that the state was incapable of stopping them, thereby further undermining the already failed states.<sup>251</sup> This pattern of deliberately creating chaos and disrupting society in order to present the fascist movement as the saviour is a hallmark of fascist and pre-totalitarian movements. The aim is to artificially create the exact circumstances of which the movements claim to be the saviour. Where there is no alienation or social chaos, it must be created by instigating hatred, a sense of loss of social cohesion, and a sense of living in a failed state. It can be witnessed in Weimar Germany, prior to the takeover by the Nazi's in 1933, in the bolshevist's destruction of civil society and in the terrorism employed by Islamists in Iraq and Afghanistan. The aim is not to defeat any objective enemy; this only comes after power is attained, but to instil with society a sense of despair and a longing for salvation.

Where a mass movement finds the corporate pattern of family, tribe, country, [...] in a state of disruption and decay, it moves in and gathers the harvest. Where it finds the corporate pattern in good repair, it must attack and disrupt.<sup>252</sup>

By actively undermining the pre-existing state and social fabric of society, civilians are increasingly put under stress to choose sides in the conflict. It is vital that the actions of Islamists in their own countries are seen in this perspective.

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<sup>251</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 360-375.

<sup>252</sup> Hoffer, *The True Believer; Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, p. 35.

From an historical perspective, the following question now became of vital importance: Who were the established interest groups going to support? As was the case in both Italy and Germany the conventional political parties were unable to escape their political deadlock, so the eyes turned towards the interest groups such as landowners, bankers, industrialists and the clergy. What all these groups had in common was their fear of Communism and the fascists thereby ensured they would win by default.<sup>253</sup>

Whilst the interest groups were won by the fascist due to necessity, a necessity that the fascists themselves had helped to create, the masses had to be won by other means. Of course, violence and intimidation played an important part in rallying support due to the fact that fascist took great pride in publicly displaying their capacity for organized violence.<sup>254</sup> Another weapon in the arsenal of the fascist movements was propaganda. Propaganda in fascist movements differs greatly from that in totalitarianism, on which I shall return in the next chapter. Its basic function is to entice the outsider to become an insider by non-violent yet psychologically coercive ways. Where violence cannot be employed propaganda substitutes for it. Propaganda can take any number of forms, it can be in the form of leaflets that are distributed at rallies, but it can also be in the form of participation in workers unions, speakers that appear at youth organizations and any number of ways in which the maximum amount of people can be reached and lured into the movement. One has to keep in mind the social conditions at that time, where the state was rapidly and increasingly in decline and the population, like the interest groups, were confronted with a choice between two, perhaps undesirable, choices: Communism or fascism, with *both* movements employing many of the same strategies. Propaganda once more is never designed to reflect a truth, much like the Sorelian myth, it is

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<sup>253</sup> Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, pp. 57-84, 117.

<sup>254</sup> Arendt comments on the nature of the SA and states: "They were organized after the criminal gangs and used for organized murder." Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 372.

designed to provoke a beneficial emotional response, in this case beneficial to the fascist movement. One technique often employed by different fascist movements was to infiltrate worker unions and play on their sympathies, organize limited strikes so as not to upset the industrial allies and make promises about future gains if the workers joined the movement. When the movement however gained their position of state power, these promises were almost never kept. Any lack of authority that derived from the break of these promises was of course swiftly substituted for by violence.

A third and final method was the use of front organizations. Front organizations, sometimes also called parallel organizations, are never part of the movement's elite but function as its respectable representation for the outside world. They are in fact copies of already existing organizations present in society but imbued with the fascist spirit and specifically set up to present the non fascist world with a respectable aura. It could take the shape of newspapers, organizations that provided help for the needy, the workers, and the soldiers, anything that would allow the fascist to further permeate the fabric of society. In essence what is happening is the twofold approach of the carrot and the stick. The front organizations are the carrot and the public displays of violence and intimidation are the stick. This facet of fascist mass mobilization will become tangible and of the utmost importance when we take a look at the ways in which Islamist organizations operate in Islamic *and* non-Islamic societies.

## **4.2 fascism and its relation to authoritarian concepts**

The concepts we found in analyzing Linz's definition of authoritarianism were the following; the existence of limited political pluralism, the legitimation of political power by a mentality, rather than an ideology, limited mobilization, a small leadership core, and limits on power.

Fascism's taxonomy answers to these criteria in the following manner. Under fascist rule, political plurality in the governing layer is ideally, but not actually, eliminated. Although the propaganda of the fascists themselves suggest that they want to form a 'totalitarian state' this is in reality not what they aim to achieve, nor can achieve. Due to their reliance on support from large interest groups, traditionally the class of landowners, industrialist and conservative parties, and their inability to rid themselves of this dependency, the fascist movement always remains in a position of having to share power with these interest groups. As such political plurality is limited but existing. Likewise; plurality in the layer of the governed is limited due to the fascist's abolition of competing social groups, but the interest of the fascist movements never attained that level of a monopoly on political and social power that plurality as such can be expected to disappear.

In its relation to the state, the fascist movement does not aim to subjugate the state to the movement but rather enters into a diffuse and unclear form of co-existence whereby the fascist occupy seats of government but are never able to purify the state of non-fascist elements, thereby remaining limited in its capability to exercise power.

Fascist rule is legitimized not by a specific party program which enjoys public support but by a mixture of one the one hand, a decidedly unpolitical mentality which appeals to romantic notions of heroism, Palingenesis, national humiliation and feelings of superiority, and on the other hand a well thought out campaign of propaganda, mass mobilization, violence, intimidation and public and political polarization lead by a charismatic single leader who himself is, ideally, the source of power, law and knowledge.

#### 4.3. Summary and relevance to Islamist movements

One aim of this chapter is to clearly mark the distinction between authoritarianism, fascism and totalitarianism. This is not only

important for understanding the totalitarian phenomenon, but also in order to understand the different political forms organization in the Islamic world. Authoritarian, fascist and totalitarian regimes all have distinct features, distinct strengths and weaknesses and thus require different strategies from those who wish to undermine or oppose them. To view these different forms of political organization as varieties of the same species would therefore be a strategic mistake. By understanding the relationship between the concepts of the exercise of power, the role of interest groups, the function of pluralism and the amount of violence a particular regime is willing and able to use, we can better understand the particular weakness of that regime. If the same concepts that we found in our study on fascism can be found in Islamist legal and political theory this would not warrant an automatic equation with fascism or even totalitarianism but it would certainly call for a further investigation into the matter.

Most of the concepts I described above are not invented by the fascists but appeared in society well before the advent of fascism. The fascist however were the first to combine these concepts into a new political mentality and mode of political organization. The origins of these concepts can be found both in the scientific method (Darwinism) and in counter enlightenment romantic notions of heroism, struggle, the will to power and the negation of the intellect and as such were products of centuries of developments in society and in the history of ideas. These concepts appear both in Nazism, which evolved directly from fascism, but also in Communism and Communism, which share many of these traits. Although many who adopt a Marxist view on totalitarianism would feverishly disagree, the works of Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot are rife with references to these very same concepts. In an organizational dimension, the fascist pioneered the role of the charismatic leader and the art of mass mobilization. Although both these features predate fascism, it was fascism that in many respects perfected them and first demonstrated their political potential. A most important novelty of fascism was that it was one of the first political movements



to discover the potential of that hitherto untapped source of political power, the masses, and was able to rally these masses to their cause. Without that novelty it is hard to conceive how totalitarianism could ever have come about. In that respect it is most important to our understanding of the potential totalitarian content of Islamist movements. As we will see later on in part two of this book, the same conditions that gave rise to these concepts in Europe exist in the Muslim world as they are increasingly confronted with modernity and the western world. The disappearance of the traditional world, the dissolution of the safety of the collective by liberalism and individualism, the rise of the masses, the often times adverse effects of industrialism on communities and the threat posed by rationalism and the scientific method to the securities of religion provoke a counter reaction akin to the one as I have described above would set out to transform society in ways that were previously unthinkable.

Bassam Tibi rightfully notices the potential for fascist or totalitarian movements in the Islamic world when he remarks:

the more rapid the social change, the more indeterminable the environment becomes for individuals as personal systems living in a state of transition, and the more marked the need for religion to maintain identity in the process of change. Change is perceived as an out-and-out threat, and a longing for the past is cultivated as a result. A restoration for what has been repressed by the alien and a yearning for a return of overlaid indigenous elements, underlie a parallel reorientation of thought aimed at political action.<sup>255</sup>

In the course of part two, we will analyze the different forms of Islamist ideologies and organizations that emerged from these social upheavals, and give them a place in the taxonomical analysis of authoritarian, fascist and totalitarian regimes. In doing so, it is hoped that a correct placement of such an Islamist ideology or movement

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<sup>255</sup> Tibi, *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe: Democratic Peace and Euro-Islam Versus Global Jihad*, p. 125.

will give us insight into its strategic interests, strengths and weaknesses. The main which should be kept in mind is that fascist movements, despite their rhetoric and violence, are *pragmatic* movements that never leave the framework of real world considerations. When sufficiently opposed they can be expected to yield to outside pressure, and their appetite for violence notwithstanding, their organizational framework and aspirations never allow for the total eradication of internal dissent. Conversely, totalitarian movements, as I will now show, operate in a radically different manner and cannot be persuaded, coerced or expected to yield to real world interest at the cost of forgoing the fabrication of Utopia. Their application of violence is not merely one of aesthetics and pragmatism but is a goal unto itself fuelled by a religious adherence to their ideology. Concessions made to that ideology would be self-defeating and thus these movements, unlike their fascist counterparts, are utterly impervious to coercion or appeasement, thus constituting an unparalleled threat to the non-totalitarian world and the societies they operate in.