

FORUM

Fascism at eye level The anthropological conundrum

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Abstract: Fascism in our time is emerging not as a single party or movement within a particular nation-state but rather as a dispersed phenomenon that reverberates across the continent nested within the political contradictions of the European Union. Rather than focusing on a specific group to determine whether it is or is not “fascist,” we must look at how diverse parties and movements are linked together in cross-border coalitions revealing the political ecology of contemporary fascism and the intricate division of labor that sustains it. Underwriting contemporary fascism is an “illiberal” anthropology that can colonize every expression of identity and attachment. From the motifs and metaphors of diverse folkloric traditions to the countless genres of popular culture, fascism assimilates new meanings and affective predispositions.

Keywords: anthropology of Europe, contemporary fascism, re-functioning ethnography

At eye level

In late August 1987, I had conversations with two minor political figures. These were literally the final interviews of a project that spanned the previous decade, a project set in the Friuli region of Northeast Italy (Holmes 1989). I was very curious about these two activists, but I expected little substantive from the conversations. What I overheard were hints of a cultural politics that could *not* be aligned along a simple right-left axis: a politics at odds with central assumptions

of political life of the late twentieth century. It was an inchoate politics in which the boundaries between politics and everyday life were blurred. That said, this strange way of knowing and experiencing had an unsettling trajectory, a trajectory I had not fully anticipated. Now we can give this activism a name: fascism. As I will argue, it is fascism with distinctive contemporary features that are not fully or necessarily congruent with its historical manifestation—a configuration of fascism with unusual and unsettling relevance for anthropology.



In the late 1980s, I faced the following question: How could political activists who articulated a compelling series of ambitions and aspirations—a politics that in many respects I admired—lead to something like fascism?¹ Restated, how could people who were (absolutely) *not* fascist espouse a series of agendas that could animate something like fascism(s) of and in our time (Holmes 2016)? I employed the concept of integralism to straddle this contradiction and demonstrate how seemingly prosaic aspirations could metastasize to yield a contemporary European fascism (Holmes [2000] 2010). If what we are encountering is indeed fascism, then we must address one overriding question: How and why have the most discredited ideas and sensibilities of the modern era—ideas that yielded the indelible horrors of the twentieth century—become persuasive, compelling even, in the new century?

Over the course of my career, I have observed how the figure who personifies these aspirations has shifted from the violent, racist thug (and their sympathizers) impelled by fulminating hatred to a far less obvious political figure who increasingly occupies the middle of the political landscape whose desires seem, at least initially, unremarkable. These figures are often young, civic activists who insist on the future-oriented trajectory of their politics foregrounding the moral and ethical nature of their aspirations.

Maddalena Gretel Cammelli (2015) and the activists she studied—members of CasaPound in Italy—refer to their project as “fascism of the third millennium,” and these young activists carefully scrutinize and debate the writings of Benito Mussolini and other fascist theorists and apply their insights to the manifold disenchantments of contemporary Italy.² For them, rather than a towering historical formation, fascism at “eye level” is manifest in the predicaments of everyday life, in the intimacies and antagonisms of interpersonal relations, in the cross-currents of community and livelihood (Schmitt 2016). They have shrewdly linked their fascism with something that can be termed “progress” despite its cloying invocations of the past. And

they have demonstrated how it can be relentlessly insinuated into virtually every register of taste, perception, faith, and ardor.

In this article, I examine how marginal, self-limiting activism was transformed to sustainable popular movements nested in the project of European integration. And it is this transformation that marks the end of the beginning: the time when various political insurgencies incubated across Europe can and must be confronted as “fascisms” of and in our time. This text is unconventional insofar as it relies in part on material that has already been published (Holmes [2000] 2010). This is not, however, a simple retelling of an ethnographic story but rather a re-functioning and repurposing of ethnographic material to address an urgent question of our time: How and why have marginal and idiosyncratic activism been recast as a mass political movement? In this analysis, I focus on the creative labor—the “illicit discourses”—that underwrite this transformation (Holmes 1993; Marcus 1999).

A small group of anthropologists and other social scientists has grappled with the growing influence of these parties, factions, and movements since the 1970s. Kaisa Ekholm Friedman and Jonathan Friedman (2008a, 2008b), Andre Gingrich (2006), Don Kalb (2009, 2011, 2014, 2018), David Ost (2018), Michael Stewart (2012), Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1993, 2006, 2016; Eriksen and Schober 2016; Thorleifsson and Eriksen 2018), and Lynda Dematteo (2011), to name just a few, have laid the groundwork for this kind of analysis and a talented group of scholars is expanding this undertaking: Juraj Buzalka (2007, 2008, 2015, 2018, forthcoming), Agnieszka Pasięka (2015, 2016, 2017, 2019), Maddalena Gretel Cammelli (2015), Giacomo Loperfido (2012, 2014), Kristóf Szombati (2018), Nitzan Shoshan (2016), Cathrine Thorleifsson (2017, 2019), Peter Hervik (2019), Jaro Stacul (2003, 2006, 2011, 2014), and Sabina Perrino (2013, 2015, 2017, 2018a, 2018b), again, to name only a few.

Until recently, however, the study of these dissonant activism constituted a very small and

circumscribed specialization within anthropology. What has changed is that virtually every anthropologist working in Europe finds their work touched and/or significantly altered by these unsettling circumstances. This text is for them, for the purposes of investigating fascism that unfolds in our midst, at eye level. It also seeks to establish where we as anthropologists stand in relationship to these developments. As we will see, the place of the anthropologist in this story is at times uncomfortable and perplexing (Harding 1991; Ortner 2016; Pasiëka 2017, 2019).

I will provide a “portable analytics” (Boyer and Howe 2015) for anthropologists working in Europe. It is not a comprehensive research agenda but rather a series of basic insights to orient field research. Furthermore, it is an approach that is inevitably *incomplete*, an approach that requires others working in diverse setting across the continent to elaborate on, revise, and/or reject its fundamental elements.³ This article is thus an invitation to grapple analytically with the decisive historical struggles of our time—struggles that in all likelihood will challenge how we understand the place and purpose of anthropology. I will examine the unusual route by which I explored—prospectively and retrospectively—this dissonant ethnographic landscape and the lessons I learned over many years. It is, I think, an argument for the continuing vitality of ethnography, but also an approach that introduces unexpected complications and disquietudes.

As I have suggested, there are several omissions to this approach: one is glaring. I have not directly accounted for contemporary fascists’ unrelenting obsession and vilification of Islam. In the mid-1990s, while working in London, I considered telling the story of a recrudescing fascism from the perspectives of those who were subjects of its racial and religious intolerance. I chose instead to commit myself to the task of depicting contemporary fascism from the perspective of those who were designing it. In other words, I saw my purpose as the elucidation of how the figures I was encountering were

creating a space in which the disparagement of Islam and other forms of bigotry could thrive. Cathrine Thorleifsson (personal communication) has rightly objected to this stance:

[It] . . . is important to note that while the actors propagating fascist ideas differ significantly in history, ideology, and orientation, they converge in their discursive framing of Islam and Muslims as an existential threat to (Judeo)-Christian Western civilization. At the heart of the exclusionary nationalism propagated by the radical right lie the idea that their nations are threatened by a creeping and highly aggressive process of Islamization, with Muslims becoming a key enemy of the people. Populist nationalists promise in turn to defend and protect the endangered nation, as well as European Christian culture and identity from dilution or destruction through extra-European immigration.

Bigoted and violent assaults on Muslims are not merely a despicable component of contemporary fascism but rather, as Thorleifsson avers, the materials that bind together diverse movements in every corner of Europe with a shared *raison d'être* and with an incendiary formulation of affinity and difference.

The other omission is geographic and temporal but also profoundly substantive. The most important and creative elements of contemporary fascism are emerging in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly within the Visegrád Group (Buzalka, forthcoming). Don Kalb (2018: 6) has examined in great detail how questions of class, specifically the accretion of class relations unfolding in the wake of post-socialist and neoliberal transitions, play a decisive role in contemporary political developments:

I have tried to show that the rise to dominance of a strong and organic national socialist (*strictu sensu*) Right in Central and Eastern Europe must be understood as a political outcome that is part and parcel of

class formation processes that eventuated during the post-socialist transition under EU-neoliberal tutelage . . . Class, I emphasize, must here be understood in its broad anthropological meaning, and includes in particular also the “double polarizations” of both social and cultural relationships that Kaisa Ekholm Friedman and Jonathan Friedman have been writing about in the context of economic globalization.

Kalb (2009, 2013, 2014, 2018) demonstrates how class can serve as a vehicle by which ethnographic insights generated at eye level can be scaled up to the institutional level of nation-states and the supranational level of the EU. This task seeks to achieve a long-standing aspiration of anthropological investigation: bridging systematically micro- and macroanalysis (Eriksen 2016; Friedman 2015; Wolf 1959). By situating his ethnography within the shifting social and cultural predicaments of class, Kalb can engage the unresolved circumstance of the post-socialist/liberal transition in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the proliferating injuries and injustices that continue in the wake of the global financial crisis (Shoshan 2016; Szombati 2018). Though not an omission, the impending absence of Angela Merkel from the political scene is the source of acute uncertainty. A post-Merkel Germany and EU has the potential to recast for better or worse virtually every issue discussed in this article.

Affective turn

To navigate the foretelling and retelling of this intricate history, I have drawn on the work of Raymond Williams and Marilyn Strathern. Initially, the inquiry was predicated on Williams’s (1977: 132) famous conception of “structures of feeling”: the discernment of an immanent awareness in a yet to be defined “true social present”:

We are talking about the characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone;

specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships . . . We are then defining these elements as a “structure”: as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies. These are often more recognizable at a later stage, when they have been (as often happens) formalized, classified, and in many cases built into institutions and formations. By that time the case is different: a new structure of feeling will usually already have begun to form, in the true social present.

Drawing on Williams, I pursued what became an anticipatory ethnography, an ethnographic approach by which I sought to model phenomena prospectively, to capture their likely pathways or trajectories and their unfolding dynamics. More recently, I have incorporated Strathern’s (2004: 6–7) insights on the recovery of surplus ethnographic materials:

Social anthropology has one trick up its sleeve: the deliberate attempt to generate more data than the investigator is aware of at the time of collection . . . Rather than devising research protocols that will purify the data in advance of analysis, the anthropologist embarks on a participatory exercise which yields materials for which analytical protocols are often devised after the fact . . . We may speak of anticipation by default, to be found in tools already there or in open-ended modes of study, such as “ethnography,” which allow one to recover the antecedents of future crises from material not collected for the purpose. If one were to formalize it, then it would be to anticipate a future need to

know something that cannot be defined in the present.

In between these two modes, I employed a series of other ethnographic strategies—worked out with George Marcus—some of which were designed as the fieldwork unfolded, to address specific ethnographic problems, notably on the nature of collaboration and complicity on the operation of a “re-functioned ethnography” (Holmes and Marcus 2008; Marcus 1999). The inquiry moved initially across three sites: Northeast Italy, the political and bureaucratic precincts of the European Parliament, and the urban districts of inner London and with each episode of this research the accretion of activism toward fascism became increasingly evident. What was broached tentatively in Italy was given a European cast in Brussels and Strasbourg and endowed with racist fury in London. The ethnographic details I will recapitulate have significance for the present, for an understanding of the political ecology of fascism.

Using the term—fascism—demands we fully acknowledge the formidable challenges we face. This is a very tricky business. My initial reluctance to employ the term acknowledges not just the gravity of the situation but also the inherent perils in opposing it. Opposition can inadvertently strengthen—even enhance—fascist agendas (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). Oppositional stances can themselves be employed not merely to further the ends of fascism but also to endow them with legitimacy. “Fascism” is a big word that for some is, as I learned in early episodes of fieldwork, flattering. I also realized glossing the countless movements that are gaining followings across Europe in the early twenty-first century merely as “populist” denies their histories and, more importantly, obscures the intricate relationships between and among them (Pasiëka 2017, 2019). If we look carefully at these movements, and their constituent groups and factions, it is not difficult to find clear and convincing affinities with fascist movements of the past.

Roger Brubaker (2017) has recently published an excellent analytical typology of populisms. However, the distinctions he draws, though analytically compelling, largely vanish at eye level in ethnographic settings where we must confront unruly subjects who defy our classificatory impulses (see also Berezin 2019; Buzalka 2008, 2015, 2018; Laclau 2007). My aim is thus to demonstrate how an ethnographic purview can provide a sustainable analytical approach: one that treats fascism as a *heuristic* device—rather than an all-encompassing definition—capturing this phenomenon as it is taking form with all its fugitive features and contradictory elements intact (Payne 1995: 3–19). Fascism is crafted by means of an intricate division of labor that is continental or extra-continental in breadth and scope (Perrino 2013, 2015).

Petit activism

Interviews with the leadership of the Movimento Friuli (MF) were the last task, almost a postscript, of the earlier study.⁴ The day before the trip to Tricesimo, I met with MF President Roberto Jacovissi in Udine, the provincial center. The interview caught me off guard. Unlike the conversations I had with other political figures, I spoke to Jacovissi in his home. I found his personal warmth engaging. His library was lined with books in the regional language, Friulian. Displayed were awards and citations from various organizations, acknowledging Jacovissi’s contribution to the promotion of Friulian cultural life. The walls of his house were replete with examples of local arts and crafts. The sounds and smells were familiar. Here, in the urban precincts of Udine, a middle-class household held the qualities I associated with the modest farmsteads of the countryside: boisterous children, social interchange that gravitated toward the kitchen, dark middle rooms with heavy furniture, smells of spice and oil, a familiar dampness. Through the windows came the late August light that follows the heavy

rains that mark the end of a Friulian summer. The only thing absent was the pervasive scent of wine and sweat that permeates the country dwellings. It was here I first heard talk of “Friulian nationhood” (see his nationalist manifesto in Jacovissi 1980).

The next day, I met MF General Secretary Marco De Agostini and his wife in a cafe in Tricesimo. The interview began with a brief history and prehistory of the Movimento Friuli and its founding in the late 1960s out of student demands for the creation of a university in Udine. The efforts of clerics and intellectuals, committed to linguistic and cultural preservation, were prominent in the founding of the party. De Agostini described the spirit of the movement as a party neither of the “right” nor of the “left” but rather of the “avant-garde”—a party of ideas. He talked about the MF’s Catholic roots and the “mythical socialism” that informed this political imaginary. He also portrayed a dark side to the MF’s vision, one oriented toward establishing special rights and privileges for those who are judged ethnically “Friulian”: specifically, the insistence on discriminatory preference in employment of civil servants that favored Friulani by requiring a minimum five-year residence before appointment to government positions. The purpose, which was openly expressed, was to exclude Southern Italians from government bureaus. There was also preoccupation with re-drawing borders of eastern Friuli through urban neighborhoods of Gorizia, dividing what are believed to be “Slavic”- and “Friulian”-speaking districts.

The quixotic political narrative was broken when De Agostini asserted the aspiration of the MF for Friulian autonomy: “We are Europeanistic . . . Borders are political not cultural.” He described the goal of a Friulian “nation”: as “European” but, at the same time, independent of any state (see Figure 1). The European Community was seen as the supranational context in which the movement could achieve its autonomous aspirations. Embedding ethnic autonomy within a European context—rendering the Ital-



FIGURE 1: Regionalist aspirations (© pionir).

ian nation-state largely irrelevant—represented a distinctive conceptualization of community and polity. The aspirations that informed this vision were at odds with the trajectory of Western European political development in the late 1980s. The unvoiced sentiments that pervaded rural consciousness seemed to gain rough political expression in De Agostini’s words. His vision extended further, hinting at a new political discourse on Europe—one unhinged from the civic imperatives of the nation-state. He formulated a distinctive rendering of ethnic autonomy, framed institutionally by the European Community and free of the encumbrances of any nation-state.⁵ I was struck by this formulation because it hinted at a radical political vision based on an arresting conception of Europe.⁶ Broached in these accounts, albeit in embryonic form, was a contemporary fascism that could be incubated within the project of European integration.⁷

Where does it come from?

A portable analytics

I initially referred to this politics as “integralist,” to demark a politics impelled by “inner cultural truths” and animated by aspirations at odds with the assumptions of the European Enlightenment.⁸ Specifically, I drew on three key elements of what Isaiah Berlin terms the Count-

er-Enlightenment (or the European Romantic Tradition) to encompass these sensibilities. Berlin defines these concepts with broad strokes: “populism” is simply “the belief in the value of belonging to a group or a culture” (1976: 153). He draws from Herder’s distinctive orientation to the vicissitudes of human association, an orientation that envisions patterns of association crosscut by the possibility of loss and estrangement. The stranger, the exile, the alien, and the dispossessed haunt the margins of this populism. “[Herder’s] notion of what it is to belong to a family, a sect, a place, a period, a style is the foundation of his populism, and of all the later conscious programmes for self-integration or re-integration among men who felt scattered, exiled or alienated” (196–197). Though Berlin acknowledges Herderian populism embraces views of collectivity that are not necessarily political and ideas of solidarity that need not be forged through social struggle, he is clear that populism, by taking dispersed human practices and beliefs and endowing them with a collective significance, creates singular political possibilities.

He also defines “expressionism” in expansive terms, implicating all aspects of human creativity. Yet, the definition orients analysis of society toward inner truths and inner ideals:

Human activity in general, and art in particular, express the entire personality of the individual or the group, and are intelligible only to the degree to which they do so. Still more specifically, expressionism claims that all the works of men are above all voices speaking, are not objects detached from their makers, are part of a living process of communication between persons and not independently existing entities . . . This is connected with the further notions that every form of human self-expression is in some sense artistic, and that self-expression is part of the essence of human beings as such; which in turn entail such distinctions as those between integral and divided, or committed and uncommitted, lives. (153)

Expressionism thus encompasses virtually the entire compendium of collective practices, the varied fabrications of culture, from rustic cuisine to high religion. Herder posits an inner logic and internally derived integrity to these creative enterprises and thus a unifying dynamic. “Pluralism” is for Berlin “the belief not merely in the multiplicity, but in the incommensurability, of the values of different cultures and societies, and in addition, in the incompatibility of equally valid ideals, together with the implied revolutionary corollary that the classical notions of an ideal man and of an ideal society are intrinsically incoherent and meaningless” (153). Significantly, Berlin’s rendering of pluralism can yield tolerance of difference among discrete groups with their own enduring traditions and territorial attachments. However, when cast against a “cosmopolitan” agenda based on universal values and “rootless” styles of life, it is a “pluralism” that can provoke fierce intolerance.

In its embrace of “incommensurability,” it creates a potentially invidious doctrine of difference, which holds that cultural distinctions must be preserved among an enduring plurality of groups and provides, thereby, a discriminatory rationale for practices of inclusion and exclusion. There is one more concept, alluded to earlier, that Berlin also derives from Herder that has relevance for this study: the concept of alienation. Herder’s portrayal of alienation as the outcome of uprooting, of a deracination, had enormous influence on subsequent scholarship, most notably in the theoretical writings of Marx and Engels. Berlin notes, it “is not simply a lament for the material and moral miseries of exile, but is based on the view that to cut men off from the ‘living center’—from the texture to which they naturally belong—or to force them to sit by the rivers of some remote Babylon, . . . [is] to degrade, dehumanize, [and] destroy them” (197). This view of alienation emphasizes cultural estrangement over and above socioeconomic oppression. Crucially for this text, estrangement can also be figurative: it can be instilled by the “emptiness of cosmopolitanism” without entailing any physical dislocation (198–199).

These ideas delineated by Berlin are not in themselves political assumptions, but they are postulates about the essence of human nature and the character of cultural affinity and difference that can potentially imbue fervent political yearnings and foreshadow a distinctive political economy. Berlin further notes: “Each of these three [populism, expressionism, pluralism] . . . is relatively novel; all are incompatible with the central moral, historical, and aesthetic doctrines of the Enlightenment” (153). In other words, they form the basis of a distinctive intellectual and cultural movement in European history, again, what Berlin refers to as the Counter-Enlightenment, which assumed its most sophisticated manifestation within the artistic triumphs of Romanticism and most malevolent expression in the politics of fascism.⁹ Fundamentally, the three postulates formulated by Berlin and the fourth I added represent an alternative theory of society, an alternative project of human collectivity.

Thus, integralism is a protean phenomenon that draws directly on the sensibilities of the Counter-Enlightenment for its intellectual and moral substance. Its general trajectory is toward “an organic approach to life and politics” and, to the extent that integralism relies on enigmatic “inner truths” for its legitimacy, can defy rational appraisal and frustrate external scrutiny (Mosse 1978: 150). Indeed, as one of the most formidable contemporary practitioners of integralist politics avows darkly, “there are other reasons for our fate than Reason” (Jean-Marie Le Pen, quoted in Holmes 2000: 8).¹⁰ “Integral” itself has an historical pedigree that links it with various movements associated directly with the lineages of the Counter-Enlightenment. Specifically, it has a broad association with various French right-wing intellectual movements. There is the “integral nationalism” of Charles Maurras, “integral experience” of Henri Bergson, “integral humanism” of Jacques Maritain (1950), and “integral Catholicism” of Monseigneur Marcel Lefebvre.

In general, “integralists” are seen as staunchly traditionalist or fundamentalist in their outlook.

They themselves tend to view their integralism as a defense of some form of “sacred” patrimony. There is also a more generic political designation of integralism, as in “integral nationalism,” to refer to formations of ultra nationalism that intersected, most notably in Germany with Nazism, as well as “integral socialism,” an effort to fuse “a primitive idealistic socialism and Marxist realism” (Sternhell 1996: 72). Thus, the term is generally used to designate a range of idiosyncratic “fundamentalisms,” most often, though by no means exclusively, of a right-wing provenance. Alberto Melucci (1989: 181) emphasizes this “fundamentalist” and “totalizing” character of integralist agendas, as he encountered them on the left and the right, within the Italian Communist Party and the Roman Catholic Church, respectively. He goes on to link this experience of prejudice as expressed in integralist agendas to his own scholarly interest in social movements:

Under the influence of integralism, people become intolerant. They search for the master key which unlocks every door of reality, and consequently they become incapable of distinguishing among the different levels of reality. They long for unity. They turn their back on complexity. They become incapable of recognizing differences, and in personal and political terms they become bigoted and judgmental. My original encounter with totalizing attitudes of this kind has stimulated a long-lasting interest in the conditions under which integralism flourishes. And to this day I remain sensitive to its intellectual and political dangers, which my work on collective action attempts to highlight and to counteract.

What I seek to accomplish by recontextualizing integralism explicitly within the tradition of the Counter-Enlightenment is to demonstrate how the concept can encompass far more than mere fundamentalism. This juxtaposition reveals integralism has a complex conceptual and moral

structure with deep roots and a distinctive genealogy in European intellectual history, a history that, Eric Wolf (1999: 26–27) has noted, intersects with that of anthropology:

At the root of this [Counter-Enlightenment] reaction lay the protests of people—self-referentially enclosed in the understanding of localized communities—against the leveling and destruction of their accustomed arrangements. Together these varied conservative responses to change ignited the first flickering of the relativistic paradigm that later unfolded into the key anthropological concept of “culture.”

I have suggested thus far that integralism can serve as a framework to examine how mundane forms of collective practice can be linked to sublime political yearning, how varied and contradictory political ambitions can be synthesized within an overarching integralist agenda, and how integralism can draw on a specific European intellectual tradition for its form and substance (see Loperfido 2012, 2014; Stacul 2003, 2006). Integralism thus provided the means to think our way into fascism. It is also a language that can help us think our way out of fascism, providing meaningful rejoinders to the estrangements and disenchantments it poses. In Strasbourg, I sought out a master architect of this cultural politics.

The European

I had the impression during my encounter with Jean-Marie Le Pen in May 1991 that he had recently constructed and was trying out a new “European” persona and that I was a test audience.¹¹ In other words, I sensed we were not engaged in a dialogue; rather, I was being led through a scripted set piece as he articulated the basic elements of his outlook. Le Pen was crafting, at the time of our first encounters, a story about Europe premised on an unsettling

formulation of cultural hygiene. He and his associates embraced “culture” as an instrument of radical critique, an idiom of solidarity, and the crucible of an exclusionary “social justice.” He asserted that emerging forms of alienation and estrangement signaled the retreat of the bourgeois public sphere enabling him to engage various segments and strata an illiberal public.

The presence of Le Pen and his associates at the European Parliament itself poses important questions.¹² The purely cynical view—which I held initially—was that the parliament provided the Front National party with a forum within which to articulate its resolutely French political agenda. Lacking the electoral strength to secure seats in the National Assembly, the Front National took advantage of the European Parliament’s different electoral rules and the propensity of the French electorate to view European elections as an opportunity to register protest votes, to win seats in the European Parliament and thereby gain a measure of political legitimacy. This is, no doubt, a correct assessment. However, circumstances conspired to make Le Pen a far more consequential figure in European politics.

One formulation was decisive in this transformation: By linking nationalism to the emergence of a multicultural and multiracial Europe, Le Pen and his associates defined acutely the terms of political contestation that have come to have broad relevance across Europe. Indeed, as we know too well, their inventory of political imperatives—most notably on immigration—has moved from the margins to the center of political struggle in Western Europe (see Le Pen 1989).¹³ At the same time, while maintaining a fervently French orientation, Le Pen seized opportunistically on a series of attacks against him to expand his political purview. In part, this shift was catalyzed unintentionally by the activities of anti-racist and anti-fascist movements orchestrated from within the European Parliament itself.

While aimed at identifying the serious “threat” posed by the emergence of a new wave of racism and anti-Semitism, the attacks also

gave Le Pen and the politics he articulated a powerful European identity. Two outcomes were particularly troubling: first, it provided Le Pen with a distinctive European profile that, in fact, gave him a new and expanded audience. Second, and more disturbing, it tethered the debate on a multiracial and multicultural Europe to the most noxious aspect of Le Pen's political agenda: its resonances with French fascism. The splicing of the discourse on racial and cultural pluralism in Europe to an anti-racist and anti-fascist politics perversely concedes to Le Pen the power to set the terms and parameters of struggle. Rather than marginalizing Le Pen and his associates, it may have allowed aspects of their agenda to leach into mainstream politics.

Moreover, these attacks on Le Pen missed a significantly more troubling dimension of his politics. Far more devastating than whether Le Pen is a "racist" is that he is creating a discursive field within which "racism" is increasingly difficult to define, confront, or oppose, where a multicultural and multiracial France and Europe emerge as "alien" concepts. There is another important reason Le Pen's presence in the European Parliament is of fundamental significance. If Jean Monnet and Jacques Delors were carriers of the French social modernist project from Paris to Brussels, then Le Pen is the carrier of its most ardent political critique. Le Pen understands intimately the derelictions of the French technocratic project. He knows its failures lurk materially in decaying urban centers. He has fashioned a political vision that follows the course of a faltering "science of solidarity" through the deterioration in public services, the persistence of intractably high levels of unemployment, and the proliferation of extravagant forms of corruption by politicians and public officials.

What follows are excerpts of our conversation in 1991. For Le Pen, the EU is a manifestation of this tyranny wherein "big business" and "big brother" conspire under the dissolute mantle of progress. He is convinced of the failure of the modernist ideal of progressivism, and he recognizes the emergence of new domains

of alienation inaccessible to technocratic interventions: "If power at all levels is no longer fed by moral codes, even lay or Marxist morals, it becomes a power without any faith. It then amounts to a corruption which opens the way for tyranny." Durkheim's vision of a dynamic organic solidarity as the basis of modern society is utterly compromised in Le Pen's view, since the "rebirth" of France and Europe is possible only by invoking the mysterious registers of mechanical solidarity: blood, earth, devotion, hierarchy, rootedness. It is from these symbolic elements, these inner truths, that the essential moral distinctions necessary for a rebirth of society are derived. To legitimize this illiberal construal of collectivity requires a fundamental assault on modernist constructions of "truth" (Noiriell 1996).

Truth and reality

In the face of what he believes is a proliferating estrangement, Le Pen has framed a radical critique of Europe for which he prescribes a familiar imaginary of rebirth. The critique recurs in Front National publications:

The socialist/communist left, void of energy and ideas, and the right-wing UDF [Union of French Democracy] and RPR [Rally for the Republic], which have betrayed our national values, now come together only to fight the Front National and defend their privileges and perks. Their corruption disgusts the youth and demoralizes the nation. The Front National, an assembly of patriotic, lucid and courageous men and women, embodies the fight against decadence. Today, it is the only hope for the French people. In a world full of danger which will see many unexpected changes, our country needs a government which with the strength of the people behind it will be capable of putting into action a true program for the rebirth of France and Europe. (Front

National homepage, quoted in Holmes [2000] 2010: 65)

From this general analysis, Le Pen defines a trajectory by which a diffuse populism is transmuted to an ardent integralism with overt fascist resonances. Le Pen accordingly fashions himself as a visionary who can see the true contours of reality. He discerns looming global struggles, a state of war, in which profound demographic forces are determining the fate of humankind. He draws intuitively on Michel Foucault's pivotal concept of biopower as the new adjunctive technology of his own political vision:

For several decades, I have been aware of the importance of demographic transformations converging at the end of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, I may be one of the few politicians who is aware of this phenomenon. There is a contradictory evolution of demographic forces between the North and the South: the North is becoming poorer and older; the evolution of the South explodes with a young population. Without a radical reversal of this evolution, the nations of the North will disappear within 50 years. Demographic colonization is much closer to war than economic or cultural colonization as we knew it in past centuries.

He touts a theory of globalization that recapitulates the racialized anxieties of social Darwinism and broaches what Emily Martin (1994) calls a post-Darwinism, where "culture can also operate as nature" (Balibar 1991: 22).

The non-European immigrant is evidence—indeed, the embodiment—of this unfolding conflagration. The cultural traditions of Europe, what he refers to as "natural structures," provide the only basis of resistance and refuge: "We believe human beings can and must find their self-realization in natural structures such as the family, the workplace, the city, the nation. It is these entities which are the real safeguards of human freedom and prosperity." These natural

structures are the foundations that sustain his emerging public. Order and harmony can only be achieved through the "rootedness" of family, religion, custom, language, and nation. He devises an epistemology drawn from the authority of experience, that repudiates faith in progress:

Le Pen: The Left, or leftist intellectuals, believe and claimed that scientific knowledge and technological advances would necessarily bring about human happiness. But that is not universally true! Progress may or may not bring human betterment. When this faith in progress was undermined, their dogma collapsed. Progress was the very foundation on which socialism, communism, and the Left in general, based its beliefs and convictions. There is now the profound realization that progress can kill humanity.

Holmes: But you believe this scientific orientation also displaces human values?

Le Pen: Yes, of course, but I want you to understand this clearly: it is the "idea" of progress that is at the heart of the ideology of the left. The Left believed technological and scientific progress could bring human betterment and happiness. It did not happen.

He extends this astringent commentary to what he sees as the sordid fictions and misrepresentations propagated by the media. The media, as an appendage of the political status quo, forge counterfeit realities that mask the truth of his vision and his insight. He scorns intellectualized, elite discourse in favor of the authenticity of experience and the seductions of instinct:

Le Pen: We do consider the eruption of mass media and its competition for public attention as powerful factors of social decline, but I want you to understand what was said before. If you are aware of the power of mass media and the demagogic

challenge it poses to political power, you must also see how powerful it is in breaking up the foundations of society . . . You must know that in real life, these things [immigration, crime, and corruption] create a lot of suffering for citizens, especially the underprivileged. The problems of housing, family life, education, and unemployment are felt very harshly by people. They feel real anxiety for the future. Thus, these people believe our views to be right because they accurately reflect the dilemmas of real life . . . Men perceive reality in two ways: either directly through lived experience of unemployment, poor housing, etcetera, or indirectly, thanks to the media. But when the lived facts become overwhelming, far beyond what is told in the media, you don't need the media any more.

Holmes: The message of your presentations is that politics is not merely an intellectual discourse but an instinctual engagement.

Le Pen: Of course! Absolutely true! Human beings communicate not just by their intellects alone but also by their physical sensibilities, their emotions, and their gestures. Probably the worst sin of our time is to overvalue "intellectualism" and to limit humankind to their intelligence alone.

Accusations of racism and fascism, he insists, are mere "devices" to silence him. He appeals to the listener to escape rarified ideological engagements and, instead, to reenter the sublime certainties of lived experience. He draws the listener into an intimate relationship in which kinship is conferred—not through rational disputation but through enthrallments that can be read in daily life. He postures as if to say: "Look at me: I am just like you, I believe what you believe, I feel what you feel. These things do not make you a racist; how can they make me one?"

Culture and political economy

Le Pen casts his alternative epistemology around a specific permutation of "culture" that Raymond Williams (1977: 14), like Isaiah Berlin, has traced from Rousseau on through the Romantic movement "as a process of 'inner' or 'spiritual' as distinct from 'external' development. The primary effect of this alternative was to associate culture with religion, art, the family and personal life, as distinct from or actually opposed to 'civilization' or 'society' in its new abstract and general sense." The interplay between the "inner" subjectivities of culture and the "external" abstractions of society punctuate the struggles that operate at the core of Le Pen's metaphysics: he seeks resolution by devising a national socialism. He presents himself as the "cultural physician," intervening against the alienating forces of neoliberalism and the faltering science and political economy of statist solidarity, which threaten to separate human beings from those "natural structures" that define their community of values. The figure necessary to symbolically and rhetorically mediate the national socialist synthesis is the stranger, the outsider. Historically, it was the Jew, more recently the immigrant. The "unassimilated" immigrant is an anathema to this kind of construction of society predicated on shared moral precepts, sublime cultural distinctions, and dark historical fears and aspirations. The immigrant, like the Jew, is not merely the object of prejudice and disdain in this social imaginary but also a defining instrument of political action (Mosse 1978).

It has been widely noted Le Pen has played a major role in the emergence of "culture" as a "key semantic terrain" within the politics of contemporary Europe. Maurice Bardèche, the fascist writer and brother-in-law of the notorious fascist collaborator Robert Brasillach, recognized immediately the historical significance of this semantic legerdemain: "This substitution of the idea of heredity [with the idea of culture] is the pivot on which the whole renewal of the right . . . is based. Thanks to this manoeuvre we can now recognize, even affirm,

the diversity of races, which we prefer to call ethnic groups . . . The right thus transformed by the discovery of culture, will be able to call itself anti-racist” (quoted in Wolfreys 1993: 418). Understandably, most attention has been on what Pierre-Andre Taguieff (1991b) refers to as the doctrine of “cultural incommensurability”:

[The doctrine] exalts the essential and irreducible cultural difference of non-European immigrant communities whose presence is condemned for threatening the “host” country’s original identity . . . Rather than inferiorizing the “other” it exalts the absolute, irreducible *difference* of the “self” and the incommensurability of different cultural identities . . . Collective identity is increasingly conceived in terms of ethnicity, culture, heritage, tradition, memory, and difference, with only occasional reference to “blood” and “race.” (Stolcke 1995: 4)

Adherence to this doctrine of cultural incommensurability distances Le Pen from the tradition of fanatical bigotry traceable to Arthur Joseph de Gobineau’s (1853) *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, while permitting the extreme Right to remain true to elements of Gobineau’s crude sociobiology and impassioned fatalism. What this doctrine promotes is “clandestine racism” or “differential racism” (Stolcke 1995: 4; Taguieff 1991b: 330–337).

But mere bigotry is not the goal of Le Pen’s insurgency; rather, it is a means by which he reinvigorates the national socialist insurgency. These “new” forms of prejudice, directed primarily against non-European immigrants, are cast as a rhetoric of social justice and an instrument for calibrating a wide-ranging political economy. This has been formalized in the Front National’s policy of “national preference.” What Le Pen and his associates have shrewdly discerned is that national socialism is deeply inlaid within the fabric of the modern European nation-state. It resides in the restrictive policies and practices of welfarism. The challenge for

integralists is to re-radicalize welfarism and the non-European immigrant provides the key.

The provisioning by the state of housing, education, health, and social security has always been restricted by status. The intent of exclusionary immigration policies, as institutionalized particularly in wealthier Northern Europe, has been to protect the fiscal and the national integrity of the welfare state. By establishing “national preference” at the center of his insurgency, Le Pen can refurbish social welfarism with a radical cultural hygiene. Placing the state in the service of an overarching policy of “national preference” establishes the distinctive workings of an illiberal political economy within a national socialist framework. This intervention, moreover, provides an incendiary rejoinder to the ethical and moral subversions of market forces. The immigrant is the agent, the embodiment of this occult neoliberalism that threatens France and Europe.¹⁴ And Le Pen’s daughter, Marine Le Pen, has assumed the mantle of this epic struggle fully (see figure 2).

Integral public

“What are the objectives of human societies?” Le Pen asks rhetorically. His answer is order and harmony. The “national factor” is fundamental, forged in a primordial past by people who chose to live together and whose association over time spawned well-harmonized groups. Cultural incommensurability dictates that populations should live within their own territories within their own historical borders:

Le Pen conceives of national populations as quasi-races, the attitudes and behavior of which are determined by mental or cultural forms which are fixed and unvarying, separating peoples for ever, each enclosed in their specificity. Cultural identities refer to human natures. Differentialist and cultural racism does not deny the zoological unity of man (given the criteria of inter-fertility); it confirms



FIGURE 2: Marine Le Pen with Saint Joan looming, 1 May 2013 (© Blandine Le Cain).

the essential division of humanity into quasi historico-cultural species, separated by mental barriers which can never be crossed. (Taguieff 1991a: 61)

“Order” is achieved through the fusion of national tradition and individual identity. “The *nation* is the community of language, interest, race, memories and culture in which man develops harmoniously. He is attached to it by his roots, his dead, the past, heredity and heritage. Everything transmitted to him by the nation at birth is already of inestimable value” (Le Pen, quoted in Holmes 2000: 70). This, in Le Pen’s view, is an irrefutable basis of legitimacy:

True transcendence comes from biological continuity and from it alone. It is therefore essential, in this perspective of bio-material mysticism, to safeguard the trans-individual continuity at two levels: family and nation. The integrity of the territory, the purity of identity and the inte-

grality of the heritage must be simultaneously defended. (Taguieff 1991a: 44–45)

If these domains of integrity are breached and racial mixing is permitted, according to Le Pen, then discord will inevitably ensue. “In France, there are laws that promote social egalitarianism and, as such, are responsible for the arrival of millions of immigrants from the Third World. As a general rule, we believe populations should live in their own territories, within their own historical borders. When cultural and ethnic identities are mixed, it makes for an explosive combination.” Images of the civil war in former Yugoslavia and urban violence in the United States are held out as vindication, if not proof, of Le Pen’s cultural analysis. Again, according to Le Pen, these violent outbursts are expressions of a global struggle driven by profound demographic and economic imbalances between North and South. Le Pen posits apocalyptic consequences—ethnocide—for those who do not heed the implications of the global contestation.

He postulates emerging cultural rifts—a “new metaphysics”—displacing ideologies of class struggle (see Taguieff 1991b). He casts tainted forms of egalitarianism against a vision of human freedom rooted in hierarchy: “The egalitarian movement which consists of leveling age groups, the sexes and peoples, is to be criticized in my view because it masks reality, which is based on inequality . . . The theme of equality strikes us as decadent” (quoted in Vaughan 1991: 222)

Indeed, Le Pen argues the egalitarian principles espoused by the Left led to the extension of precisely those rights and privileges to immigrants, which in turn “created the objective conditions” for racialized conflict. Again, the traditions of Europe provide the only refuge. Humans must find their self-realization in “natural structures”—the family, the workplace, the city, the nation. These are the real safeguards of freedom and prosperity and the substructure of an integral public: “By allowing the national structure to be attacked or weakened, human freedom is reduced.” New immigrants in limited numbers can be assimilated by the French nation only based on reciprocated “love”:

We understand and accept that foreigners may want to come stay here for a while, to work, to study and then go home. Or, because of their love of France—provided it is reciprocated—may want to assimilate and become French. We have no problem with this; but it is only possible when small numbers of individuals are involved, not large groups.

This does not, for Le Pen, imply a racist position:

Holmes: How do you respond to the attacks that you are racist?

Le Pen: I know lies are part of any political struggle. It doesn't trouble me because I know we're at war. It *is* war, and I try to fight it in my own way by saying, “Look at me. Come to my house; see the people

who live with me. Come to our meetings. There are black, yellow, and other [minority] men and women who attend. We never have fights there. Never, never—

Holmes: Nevertheless, various groups in French society are sensitive to your positions.

Le Pen: The establishment thinks Le Pen is hated by émigrés, but that's not true. I have friends in all countries of the world. I am godfather to a métis [mixed-blood] child from Reunion Island; I have black men and women in my house. All these people, I think, like Jean-Marie Le Pen. Many, many times, I have encountered friends, people in the street, in restaurants [presumably immigrants] who smile and call, “M. Le Pen, M. Le Pen!” It is not true that we hate foreigners. No, it is not real. We do prefer the French, the Europeans, but that doesn't mean we hate the others.

He ended his defense with the kind of defiant remark that for many listeners confirms his racism: “I won't marry a black woman just to prove I am not a racist!” This rhetorical maneuver—for which Le Pen is famous—has a deeply disturbing aim. It is intended not merely as a denial of racism but as a calculated effort to obscure the meaning and the moral force of the notion of “racism” itself. This is part of a broader strategy of broaching “the unspeakable,” a hallmark of his populist subversions, which he acknowledges unabashedly. When I asked if his appeal is based on his willingness to say things other politicians dare not say, he said: “That's it. Exactly. It is even one of our slogans: ‘Le Pen says in a loud voice what people think in a low voice’ [Le Pen dit tout haut ce que tout le monde pense tout bas].” What is unsettling about this tactic, which Le Pen practices brazenly, is that it provides a dissonant means to legitimize what are the most opprobrious aspects of his politics. He does this through an intimate artifice that draws on the authority of experience and instinct in the face of what he insists is a corrupted public sphere.

Le Pen diagnosed fundamental distortions and contradictions infiltrating the public sphere in Europe at the close of twentieth century. He sought to act on this disorder and glean power from it. In the process, he has delineated a new political imaginary. His analysis cleaves toward the axioms of identity politics, but his intervention goes much further. Le Pen argues mainstream political discourse—framed by elite representations of “social reality”—conflicts with the lived experience of an increasingly alienated public. He labors, as the cultural physician, to create the basis of a new public constituted paradoxically by the authority of “inner truths.”

Civil society, as an enduring framework mediating between the individual and collectivity, is bypassed. His social construction of “truth” is not susceptible to vigorous public scrutiny but is conveyed, as it were, on faith. Unmediated by the interplay of rational discourse, the message he conjures achieves a powerful immediacy. Thus, though Le Pen deplores the “untruths” conveyed by those who control the media, he is adept at composing alternative communications that easily and persuasively travel across this same circuitry and enter the lifeworlds of his followers. Again, what is devastating about these communications is not their “racist” character *per se* but rather the fact that Le Pen has created a discursive field—resistant to critical scrutiny—within which “racism” is increasingly difficult to define, confront, or oppose.

It is, however, the accusation that Le Pen is a “fascist” that has the most curious resonances within a weakened public sphere. To the extent that fascism has come to encompass an ultimate evil, it has served as a powerful, though surprisingly vulnerable, moral standard. By merely fashioning himself as something less than a paragon of evil, Le Pen achieves his unsettling purpose. He evades the fascist stigma and thereby discredits the left’s overall critique that is premised on the association of Le Pen’s integralism with defining elements of European fascism. Le Pen’s endeavor marks out an intimate political imaginary where there is no easy position, no outside position, from which to frame an oppo-

sitional stance. Indeed, as the Left tries to thwart Le Pen’s agenda via an elite discourse—a discourse he believes is no longer preoccupied with the authenticity of experience—it is disabled.

Le Pen insists the Left too is now burdened with a history; its program can no longer be cloaked in an unassailable faith in progressivism but must come to terms with its own wavering science, political economy, and metaphysics of solidarity. At the same time, he offers an alternative “socialism,” denuded of technocratic pretensions, that derives a social justice from the “reality” and “truth” offered by “tradition,” by hierarchy, by the “natural structures” of Europe. Le Pen’s rhetorical strategies erode the clarity of this moral stance by obscuring the peculiar status of fascism as a transcendent evil.¹⁵ “Fascism,” like “racism,” is masked within this kind of political imaginary, which focuses directly on the substance of lifeworlds, the verisimilitude of experience. It is through this artifice that Le Pen has fashioned a contentious European fascism. The third episode is concerned with how fascism is enacted splicing the political and the criminal across an urban landscape. Estrangement is experienced in one’s homeland.

Grievous bodily harm

Richard Edmonds is tall, intense, and articulate.¹⁶ At the time I met him in 1994, he was a senior figure in the British National Party (BNP). Edmonds speaks with a driving cadence. He has the habit, while answering questions, of making extended pauses during which he thrusts his face very close to the listener’s, extending his lower lip and glowering. He paced and circled around me as we talked in the BNP headquarter in South London. The crucial labor Edmonds performs is to translate integralist fears and aspirations into the vernacular of an urban landscape. His *métier* is tactical thuggery. What is at stake in his account is the social reproduction of white working-class household and community. What is resisted is the assumptions of a pluralistic nation that aligns the polyethnic boroughs

of London. He embraces a theory of exclusionary welfarism as the grounding for his racialized populism, a theory derived from a highly local politics of experience.

Although Edmonds and his fellow activists characterize their politics as “nationalist,” the scope of its purview is claustrophobic, barely penetrating beyond the boundaries of impoverished urban districts of inner London (see figure 3). He is inspired to physically confront those who embody the contradictions of “his” Britain—those who transgress its racial hygiene, its moral economy. Edmonds is an organic intellectual, with a taste for street fighting, whose vision skirts the paranoid and the delusional. His actions splice the political and the criminal. There was a series of violent skirmishes in the East End just before and immediately after the election of a BNP candidate to the Tower Hamlets Council on 16 September 1993. In several of these confrontations, Edmonds appears to have been a participant, and in one case, a principle.

An attack took place on a “black and white couple” outside the Ship pub on Bethnal Green Road, an establishment regularly frequented by BNP followers. Four men attacked the couple, roughing up the woman and brutally cutting the man’s face “to the bone” with a broken beer bottle: the sadistic form of assault is known as “glassing.” One was Richard Edmonds. He was subsequently convicted of violent disorder and sentenced to three months in prison. Questioned about the judgment, he vehemently denounced the conviction, blaming it in part on the media and the image it projects of the BNP:

Listen, if you want to talk about me then yes, I have been charged and found guilty of a very serious offense of which I will go to my grave absolutely denying. I know I am 100 percent innocent! It is to my misfortune that I was charged with an offense that I did not commit and the jury chose to believe the prosecution. I have no doubt the jury was influenced, in part,



FIGURE 3: Skinheads, “Chelsea, March 1982” (© Derek Ridgers).

by the portrayal [of the BNP in the press].
It's a vicious circle.

He insists the BNP's image has been tarnished by the media, "which are in the hands of the internationalists, in the hands of the one world order, in the hands of the liberals . . . They use their power through the media, to blacken our [the BNP's] good name . . . It's black propaganda. It's all a pack of lies." This tarnished image, he claims, was responsible for his conviction. I noted the BNP often actively undercuts its own public image:

Holmes: The Britain you seek is, above all, respectable. Yet, you let yourselves be portrayed as thuggish.

Edmonds: I understand your question entirely. But, you see, no newspaper will give us friendly coverage; no TV studio will invite us in for a nice friendly interview. We have to campaign ourselves. We have to put our leaflets into mailboxes, go out and sell our newspapers, and march in the streets. When we campaign, we are physically attacked by our political opponents, confronted and attacked. In this last election, one of our candidates lost an eye. [He was] knocked to the ground and kicked in the face with a steel boot and blinded in one eye. That received a little bit of publicity, but had it been a Labour, Liberal, or Conservative candidate who was blinded, you would still be hearing about it now. So, in practice, we find that we have to physically protect ourselves if we are to survive. So, we have to be robust in our manner of campaigning. But we always stay within the law. We always attempt to maintain discipline.

Holmes: But sometimes the discipline breaks down?

Edmonds: Nothing is perfect.

In this imperfect world, Edmonds at times finds it hard to discipline his own impulses, his own pro-

pensities to violence. When he finds himself face to face with what he identifies as "foreign bodies," it ignites the sense of collective humiliation that sustains his and his mates' obsessive rage.

Exclusionary welfarism

Edmonds made a series of crucial assertions during our conversations that suggest how a core agenda is coalescing across Europe, not just in Britain. It is, again, the fusion of nationalism and socialism he invokes to thwart what he sees as invidious transformations of his world. He starts with a classic assertion of a primal "community" or "nation" without which "men go mad." It is an indivisible, racially homogeneous community existing in memory and integral to "identity" that he values above everything else. What gives his vision of community incendiary power is its linkage to the social apparatus of the state. He predicates regimes of "community" and "nation" on the political economy of the welfare state—regulated by a racialized delimitation of citizenship—to yield an exclusionary welfarism. His pursuit of a radically discriminatory social contract establishes the basis for a resurgent British national socialism.

Public housing in particular encompasses the ambiguities of this rendering of community. It has become a setting where social justice is contested, where the social reproduction of the white working-class family is in jeopardy. For the white East Enders, the local council housing belongs to them as a community manifesting their sense of belonging. In Edmonds's equation, estate housing is "owned" by the council, so it is "owned" by the community. The right of newly arrived immigrants to England to petition for public housing, in his view, disrupts the moral economy of the white working-class estate, violating its traditional practices of succession. Under these customary arrangements, flats were transmitted within families from one generation to the next, or preference was granted to young couples seeking housing in close proximity to their parents.

The administrative priority given to housing homeless, immigrant families with numerous members, newly arrived to Britain, pits their legal claims against the traditional moral claims of “indigenous” families on the Isle of Dogs. These struggles over the integrity of the community, however, are not new. In the mid-1950s, the practices of family succession were already under threat as a result of “white English residents” from outlying boroughs being allotted housing on the Isle of Dogs. This was the source of significant outrage. As one London tenant association declared in 1954, “We are in opposition . . . to the idea that people are simply units to be moved about the face of the earth in line with the impersonal schemes of some ‘Big Brother’” (quoted in Young and Willmott 1957: 168). The “defects” in the legal application of citizenship create the mechanism by which a multiracial and multicultural Britain was created and Edmonds’s deep sense of estrangement was instilled. The great partisan in the immigration debate, Enoch Powell (1969), summarizes succinctly his rendering of the history of these deformations of citizenship in the wake of the Empire. His analysis is consistent with the BNP’s conviction that a multicultural and multiracial Britain is illegitimate.

Again, for Edmonds, public housing is the crucible of this misbegotten history. If you live somewhere, he observed, you get on the electoral rolls. Immigrants have a legal right to an abode, even if they are “illegal,” and once housed, they are put automatically on the electoral rolls conferring on them a basic right of citizenship. The fact that they are voting in numbers sufficient to win local elections, “wearing yashmaks” and “not speaking a word of English,” is intolerable to Edmonds. It confirms his portrayal of an embattled “white” community whose economic and social reproduction is threatened. It is a story he believes power brokers in Britain, committed to neoliberalism and multiculturalism, will not allow to be told. From his plausible account of an encroaching exile in his homeland, Edmonds goes on, through cascading paranoia, to envision a plot to exterminate the “white

man” that hence provides the rationale for his lurid bigotry.

Extermination

There is a tyranny to Edmonds’s memory that juxtaposes a childlike vision of London in the 1950s as a happy city within a law-abiding society against a middle-age vision of the present rife with invidious differences, cultural clashes, and societal decay.¹⁷ These same reveries oblige him to project cataclysms into the future. Despite gross distortions in his analyses, he engages in an acute assessment of contemporary circumstances in one important way. He is willing to frame his local predicament in global terms, within a wider critique of political economy.

Edmonds sees motive in the drive and the power of global capitalism: “to sack the whiteman.” Its mechanism is obvious to him; jobs are exported to the Third World, to zones of cheap labor. Chronic unemployment is the permanent outcome of this system for segments of white British society. But the external threat is matched by an internal moral vulnerability: greed, stupidity, selfishness, and weakness. These are manifest in a bankrupt political establishment whose members have opened the nation to the destructive force of immigration. The solution for these challenges is nationalism, a nationalism mediated through authoritarianism and corporatism. This means “putting white people before the power of money”: “stop the export of technology,” “stop immigration, stop the export of capital,” “stop the importation of goods manufactured in the Third World.” Edmonds has “no rancor” for businesspeople. He would let them use their energies, talents, experience, and capital, but “community values” must be supreme in his corporatist scheme:

The sort of society we want is racially homogeneous, a society free of class conflict, a society where all members are catered for and looked after, and I hope this is not too shocking for your American ears,

with a degree of socialism, whereby you have a national health service, a national education service so the poorer members of society have a decent basic level of life. If a young chap is intelligent but of poor parents, he will be able to go to the best universities in the land—even if his parents can't afford to send him there.

Our solution, summed up in one word, is “nationalism.” We value the community above everything else. We see man as a social creature who needs a community. Without a community, literally to be alone, most men would go mad . . . Men need community in all senses of the word. They need to be needed. They need to play a useful role, which certainly must include having a job, having useful employment. This particularly applies to young people. We see young people going “off the rails,” . . . I mean, degenerating. We see chronic unemployment leads to drug addiction, which is quite a problem here. Young people feel unwanted by society, abandoned by society, so they turn inward and start killing themselves with drugs.

Edmonds asserts the program of the Left, promoting multiculturalism, destroys the traditional social consensus that made Britain, as he describes it, a sort of socialist state, in which “life was quite stable and pleasant,” where the police were unarmed. He is preoccupied with street violence as a glaring and repugnant outcome of racial pluralism. He remarks specifically on the importation of a new term from the street lexicon of New York: “I remember the word ‘mugging’ only coming in to London vocabulary in 1974 or 1975.” There is more than a measure of bad faith in his aside. Edmonds’s view of the history of this term is, perhaps, definitive given that the leadership of the British National Front—the forerunner to the BNP—played, as Paul Gilroy (1991: 120) notes, a direct role in the first alarm over “mugging” and its linkage to the discourse on race in Britain.

Edmonds argues the path to multiculturalism annihilates the social contract, which sustained his memorialized Britain. Few, he insists, are willing to describe this ruinous progression. For Edmonds, the proliferation of crime, the murder of police officers, the turning of young people to drug addiction are the consequences of a pluralist society that subverts the traditional social order. Threats to the reproduction of the white working-class family and community posed by immigrants are a “life-and-death matter.” He is disgusted that militant Muslims can make direct threats against the lives of British Jews with impunity. His outrage even extended to the fatwa against “the British citizen Salman Rushdie.” It exemplifies “a whole society falling apart.” He sees the problems of the Western world accelerating at an enormous rate as multicultural principles come to dominate. He predicts cultures will succumb to clashes that are impossible to resolve. The “alien-wedge” (coined by Powell) of nonwhite immigrants threatens the existence of the white race in Britain. Edmonds “knows” that if you raise these views, they call you “a Nazi” and you risk attack without warning. The scar running down the back of his head, inflicted during his participation at a BNP rally, is for him proof of these perils.

Foreign bodies

What poisons Edmonds’s critique of neoliberalism is its identification of nonwhite immigrants, most notably Muslims, as the agents—indeed, the embodiment—of global capitalism. Each aspect of their difference (skin color, language, religion, dress, etc.) conjures the grim battle with “dark” global forces igniting Edmonds’s racist fury. Each encounter with these differences ratifies his sense of exile, his sense of collective humiliation of the white working class. The elites of post-World War II Britain, Edmonds insists, conspired to disguise the struggle through a “veil of silence.” Politicians lied, while the press reported the presence of nonwhite immigrants was temporary:

I remember the whole history of this from A to Z; except, of course, I was four years of age when the Nationalities Act was passed. I remember the first immigrants and the practical consequences. I remember the West Indians coming to London in the 1950s. I was a schoolboy, and we wondered what it all meant. The English working class, of which I am a part, had to live and work with these newcomers, and, at the time, we didn't understand it. What are they doing here? We wanted to know. I remember clearly, as a young teenager, maybe 13 years old, 1956, 1957 maybe, discussing with my parents what all this meant. Our newspapers would tell us not to worry about immigration. The immigrants would only be here for a short time. They were just learning a trade, and then they would be going home.

He added sarcastically: "I might say, for your interest, 'officially,' immigration stopped in 1961. I remember the newspaper headlines: 'Immigration Stopped.' . . . We were utterly, completely and absolutely lied to!" Only Enoch Powell, he believes, depicted the confrontation "truthfully," in a virulently nationalist idiom:

Look, anyone can talk pretty, meaningless words, but the way to judge a man is by the price he paid. Nietzsche said, "Something is only good if written in blood." I don't know if you've read Nietzsche—a dramatic phrase. In other words, unless you have suffered, [what you say] is meaningless. Now, Powell spoke out about immigration. Until then, nothing had been said. He broke the veil of silence, the conspiracy of silence and for that, he paid the price. He was immediately thrown into the political wilderness. All his chances and ambitions of being a government minister, possibly the prime minister of Britain, went out the window. He was treated as a total outcast.¹⁸

Edmonds's sense of betrayal and outrage have been rendered illicit; his claims have no "respectable" means of societal redress. He is left in a world largely stripped of mediating forms of political expression. His only recourse is to tactical thuggery, to street fighting. The South Asians he confronts are not the victims of a transnational capitalism; they are, in his view, its physical incarnation and its substance. His racism is factual and militant. Repatriation is for him the only answer. In subsequent decades, the estrangement was intensified by gentrification of these neighborhoods yielding other forms of displacement and expulsion.

Ecology of fascism

Where are we now?

In the beginning, I searched out idiosyncratic and isolated political activisms that took me, as demonstrated above, to three very different ethnographic settings. What I observed unfolding were paradigmatic expressions of what I believed to be elements of the same thing. Now, at the end of the beginning, these activisms are pervasive: they are intricately networked drawing on shared ideas and practices that resonate across the continent. From the vantage point of Europe, a continental fascism is in the making and maps on to key elements of historical fascism (Griffin 1993; Sternhell 1987). What we are faced with, however, is not a fascism that is fully manifest (as yet) in a particular state; rather, it is a radicalism that has a European provenience. Fascism in our time is emerging not as a single party or movement within a particular nation-state but rather as a dispersed or distributed phenomenon that reverberates across the continent nested within the political and institutional contradictions of the European Union. Rather than focusing on a particular group to determine whether it is "fascist," we must look at how these factions, movements, and parties are linked together, in cross-border coalitions and alliances (see current research by Buzalka

and Pasiëka) If we do so, the political ecology of contemporary fascism and the intricate division of labor that sustains it are revealed.

My initial analysis was anticipatory aimed at discerning, as Williams recommends, an immanent awareness in a yet-to-be-defined “true social present.” I had access to something like the “prehistory” of contemporary fascism, as it was coalescing, before it was fully formed politically or fully recognized or acknowledged even by its architects. In other words, I observed how marginal political figures in three diverse settings were performing the creative labor of and for the recrudescence of fascism. Now, three decades later, we can recover at least partially the surplus Strathern alludes to. And this recovery of “the antecedents of future crises from material not collected for the purpose” has decisive implications for our practices as anthropologists. What I imagined initially as an anthropological account *of* or *about* fascism revealed the anthropology operating *within* fascism. I confronted these anthropological exigencies ethnographically, in deeply held convictions concerning the nature of human collectivities aligned with distinctive understandings of individuals’ capacities to think, feel, experience, and act. Underwriting contemporary fascism is an illiberal anthropology that can colonize just about every expression of identity and attachment, every aspect of truth, beauty, virtue, and depravity. From the motifs and metaphors of diverse folkloric traditions to the countless genres of popular culture, fascism acquires and assimilates new meanings and affective predispositions foregrounding fascism’s capacities to merge, fuse, and synthesize what would otherwise be considered incompatible elements not merely those drawn from the Right and the Left.

Above all, the anthropology operating within fascism is predicated on malevolent articulations of cultural and racial affinity and difference. Adherents themselves engage in refining and repurposing just about every aspect of collective experience, every marker of social distinction, and every practice of belonging for this pur-

pose. Various strata and segments of the public are designing fascism on their own terms out of the diverse materials, old and new, circulating in their and our midst. They are all activists; their agency is decisive in impelling a self-radicalizing mind set. Rather than the “Three Faces of Fascism” Ernst Nolte (1966) so astutely portrayed, contemporary fascism has countless faces. And rather than extravagant public spectacles exalting atavistic forms of leadership, what has emerged is a recursive, screen-mediated fascism that orchestrates—with the aid of bots and trolls—the ways of thinking, feeling, and experiencing of shadow publics networked in cyberspace (Aro 2016; Graan 2018; Knorr-Cetina 1999; Perrino 2017). Via a ubiquitous technology, the intimate artifice of fascism is being produced and reproduced at eye level attaining the features of mass movements capable of getting in the heads of a broad swath of the European public.

End of the beginning

I began openly using the term “fascism,” to gloss the contemporary struggle unfolding across Europe, in mid-2014. The particular situations in Hungary and Poland loomed large at the time, but it was also the role Russia was playing in the politics of Europe, both in its militarized exploits in the Ukraine and its deployment of “weaponized information” via social media across Europe that prompted this shift (see Snyder 2018). The systematic mobilization of violence was the piece that had been missing, and it was this troubled circumstance along with the entry of political parties like Jobbik and Fidesz into governments that marked the full reawakening and return of fascism (Szombati 2018). By that time, Viktor Orbán had fully established himself as the heir to the political project initially crafted by Jean-Marie Le Pen, shifting the focus of the insurgence eastward to the Visegrád Group. Here is a concise appraisal of that transformation and, specifically, how it has altered fundamentally the dynamics of the EU:

The Visegrád bloc is an alignment of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Northeastern Central Europe) which, created in the early 1990s, used to be nothing more than a technical discussion club to smoothen the integration into the West but has now been given a coordinated Right wing sense of agency within international politics, in particular in relation to the EU, and indeed in some ways against the West, that is against the liberal state idea promoted by the West. The emergence of this nationalist conservative bloc in Central Europe generated a second geopolitical rift in the increasingly fragile edifice of the EU parallel to the North-South rift within the Eurozone. While the North-South rift hinges on international financial dependencies and issues of neoliberalism and national development models, the West-East division focuses on models of political (il)liberalism. The East poses a semi-authoritarian democracy embedded within a ethno-nationally-defined state that seeks to dominate civil society, national culture, and the economic institutions that it claims are meant to serve the well-being of that national society—banking, media, utilities, and education. The antagonist is the cosmopolitan, internationalized, multicultural idea of liberal democracy that is historically embodied in the EU and in the wealthy internationalized cores of Northwestern Europe on which the EU has historically rested. (Kalb 2018: 5–6)

This challenge has not gone unnoticed in Brussels.

On 20 December 2017, the European Commission formally triggered Article 7 of the Treaty of European Union—the “nuclear option”—in an effort to thwart the systematic violation of “the founding values (respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities)” by

the current government in Poland. This meant the European Commission was prepared to openly challenge a democratically elected government—led by Prawo i Sprawiedliwość—in relationship to its staggering program of illiberal reforms. On 12 September 2018, the European Parliament took a similar action against Hungary for its systematic violations of European values.¹⁹

There is good reason to be skeptical about the efficacy of this constitutional gambit and, specifically, the kind of sanctions the EU can or will impose to force Poland and Hungary to remedy these infringements, debasements, and blatant violations of treaty obligations. This too marks an end and beginning acknowledging openly that there are overt challenges to European values originating from within Europe—values crafted in the first instance to prevent the return of fascism—that must be formally confronted. The problems, of course, are not limited to Poland and Hungary; there are similar potential challenges to fundamental EU values broached by numerous political parties and groups in virtually every other member state. Indeed, by the late summer of 2018, there was disquiet in Sweden that its democratic social model was vulnerable as talk of “Swexit” was broached tentatively (Thorleifsson 2019). And here another retelling is apposite. In the early 1990s, I interviewed several MEPs, primarily from the United Kingdom, who identified themselves as “Euro-skeptics” at that time. Their numbers were few, but I was curious about their thinking. I quickly learned “skepticism” did not mean mere doubt or even reasoned mistrust of the EU; rather, it was a cover for a fulminating hatred of just about everything European.

This template of rage and distaste has created a platform on which the challenges to European values, particularly its liberal values, can now be relentlessly contested from just about every rural district and urban and suburban neighborhood across the continent. It is a theme that has in Central and Eastern Europe assimilated the residues of the Soviet and post-Soviet era and

render them as foundational to a volatile hermeneutics of suspicion inflected with the tyranny of nostalgia (Buzalka 2018). It is also a theme that has in the new century been radicalized by the dislocations of human beings attendant on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the “war on terrorism,” and, most prominently, the civil war in Syria. The fate of the immigrant and refugee are now at the heart of Europe, at the center of institutional struggles that will in all likelihood define politics for decades to come.

Conclusion

It is worth remembering that “fascism” in its historical guise was coalescing for at least three decades before it had a name (usually dated around 1915). It didn’t announce itself in advance; it didn’t present itself as a phenomenon for academic contemplation or conform to a neat classificatory system (Berlin 1990a, 1990b, 1990c; Eatwell 1995; Griffin 1993; Mosse 1980; Payne 1995; Sternhell 1987, 1996; Sternhell et al. 1994). In 25 or 30 years from now, historians will perhaps be better able to determine with some degree of certainty that what is coalescing around us now is in fact “fascism” or some yet unnamed type of insurgency. But for the moment, the ethnographer needs tools to grapple with the present situation, to engage analytically the entangled fears and aspirations unfolding in our midst, to link together these disparate elements, and to discern their political trajectories and our complicities with them:

Last but not least, the major enemy, the strategic adversary is fascism . . . And not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini—which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively—but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us. (Foucault 2004: xiv–xv)

At the end of the beginning, fascism is *our* problem in ways we might never have imagined. Its architecture draws directly on concepts, terminologies, and analytics that we—anthropologists—know all too well. And the challenge for us is to determine why and how fascist ideas and sensibilities have become enthralling once again, capable of recruiting young activists intent on recasting the future of Europe. If contemporary fascism can colonize just about every expression of identity and attachment, every aspect of truth, beauty, virtue, and depravity, if fascism can acquire and assimilate new meanings and affective predispositions from the motifs and metaphors of diverse folkloric traditions and from countless genres of popular culture, and if fascism has the capacity to merge, fuse, and synthesize what would otherwise be considered incompatible elements, then the task we face is daunting.

Acknowledgments

In the summer of 2009, Michael Stewart persuaded me to attend an “urgent meeting” called by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to address the sudden upsurge of violence against Roma pursued by an increasingly influential right-wing political movements in Central and Eastern Europe. I was alarmed by what I heard. Michael drew my attention to the centrality of anti-Gypsyism and the radicalisms it spawned, and for that I am enormously grateful. Agnieszka Pasięka invited me to participate in a workshop, “Transnationalization of the Far Right: The Case of Interwar and Present-Day Europe,” at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Historical Social Science in December 2016. Thanks to her invitation, I had the opportunity to partake in a discussion of contemporary fascism in continental terms, which has become fundamental preoccupation of my research. I presented an earlier version of this text in August 2017 at the MEGA Seminar sponsored by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Aarhus. I would like to thank the orga-

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Notes

1. Agnieszka Pasięka (2019: 5) has made this point emphatically: “I thus want to reiterate here the seemingly obvious argument that such an engagement also needs to translate into presenting studied people as full-fledged individuals, as people that—yes—hold ‘unlikable beliefs’ and put them into practice, but who can also be funny, ironic, self-critical, who have varied interests, skills, and roles to play. Providing such accounts is imperative given that we seem to know quite a lot about radical right-wing ideologies but very little about the people holding them, and that a study of far right too easily transforms into a study of ‘cases’ rather than of individuals with their unique stories and backgrounds.” I should also note her reluctance to use “fascist” because of the term’s potential to stigmatize and offend. Ironically, I think her work provides some of the most compelling arguments for employing the term.
2. Unsurprisingly, grappling with the full range of “youth” culture and politics represents the most important means for gaining analytical purchase on the struggles defining contemporary Europe. In addition to the work of Maddalena Gretel Cammelli, see the excellent texts by Jessica Greenburg (2014), Julie Hemment (2015) and Maple Razsa (2015).
3. For example, the current situation in the Nordic and Baltic countries, as well as the nations of the Balkans, are not accounted for herein, nor is the deep and abiding resonances of fascism in the Mediterranean world. Indeed, the violent breakup of the Yugoslav Federation and its aftermath represents *in extremis* an ominous rehearsal of the kind of issues potentially confronting contemporary Europe.
4. This section is excerpted from Holmes ([2000] 2010: 21–22).
5. By the early 1990s, this political agenda was largely assumed by the Lega Nord led by Umberto Bossi (see Dematteo 2011; Perrino 2018a, 2018b).
6. This vision has come to be referred to as the “Europe of regions” (see EC 1996).
7. My assessment of what constituted an “embryonic fascism” in the late 1980s was both impressionistic and ill defined. The working definition I employed viewed fascism as arising out of a synthesis of nationalism and socialism animated by formulations of identity based on an unrelenting discrimination of affinity and difference and thus implacably opposed to just about ever register of liberalism. How fascism would manifest itself ethnographically I left open. I expected it to emerge in unanticipated ways and by unlikely means in diverse and shifting configurations. The work of Roger Griffin and Zeëv Sternhell were particularly important in guiding my early research.
8. This section is excerpted from Holmes ([2000] 2010: 6–9).
9. The theme of the Counter-Enlightenment runs through Berlin’s entire distinguished oeuvre and serves as one of the central unifying theme of his scholarship. See Wolf’s (1999: 26–30) concise summary of the Counter-Enlightenment tradition.
10. “[Fascism] is not so much irrational as anti-rational, seeing the most distinctive human faculty not in the reason celebrated in the Enlight-

- enment, humanist, and positivist tradition, but in the capacity to be inspired to heroic action and self-sacrifice through the power of belief, myth, symbols and *idée-forces* such as the nation, the leader, identity, or the regeneration of history” (Griffin 1995: 6).
11. This section is excerpted from Holmes ([2010] 2000: 62–73).
 12. They were at the time members of the Technical Group of the European Right, which in the early 1990s was small, comprising only 14 members of the parliament. It was composed of 10 members drawn from the French Front National, two from the German *parteilos*, one from the Deutsche Liga, and one from the Belgian Vlaams Blok. Four members of the Italian Movimento Sociale Italiano—Destra Nazionale and one member of the German Die Republikaner sat with the nonattached members of the parliament, although they shared extreme right-wing views with the European Right.
 13. To grasp the centrality of Le Pen’s position on immigration, it is important to cast it against the social history of immigration in France. Again, see the excellent Noiriel (1996).
 14. Kristóf Szombati (2018) has demonstrated forcefully how many of the same techniques employed by the Front National for orchestrating an insurgency around welfare and social justice were reconstituted two decades later in rural Hungary. Provincial anti-Gypsyism based on highly discriminatory welfare practices and orchestrated by small town officials was shrewdly upscaled to encompass the entire Hungarian nation in a decisive struggle that has compromised the integrity of the liberal democratic state (Kalb 2018).
 15. Bruno Mégret said to Philip Gourevitch (1997: 148): “If we compare Le Pen to Hitler, it makes Hitler sympathetic, because for many French people Jean-Marie Le Pen is sympathetic.”
 16. This section is excerpted from Holmes ([2000] 2010: 119–127).
 17. He rejects this as an expression of mere “nostalgia,” which he foregoes as a “weak word.”
 18. This is in reference to Powell’s incendiary speech in Birmingham on 20 April 1968. Powell continued to be the most important critic of Britain’s immigration and race policies until his death in 1997.
 19. Wikipedia, s.v. “Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union,” last edited 6 January 2019, 20:26, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_7_of_the_Treaty_on_European_Union.

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