Democratic Discourse as the Foundation of Fascist Ideology:  
Interpreting the simultaneously illiberal and democratic thought in the work of  
Charles Maurras and Oswald Mosley 

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History 

by 

Kelsi A. Bryant 

Dr. Christopher Church/Thesis Advisor 

May 2019
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

We recommend that the thesis prepared under our supervision by

Kelsi Bryant

Entitled

Democratic Discourse as the Foundation of Fascist Ideology: Interpreting the simultaneously illiberal and democratic thought in the work of Charles Maurras and Oswald Mosley

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Dr. Christopher Church, Advisor

Dr. Barbara Walker, Committee Member

Dr. Dennis Dworkin, Committee Member

Dr. Miriella Melara, Graduate School Representative

David W. Zeh, Ph.D., Dean, Graduate School

May-2019
Abstract

The majority of studies on fascistic thought center on fascism in Germany or Italy and, as a result, fail to fully encapsulate the way fascistic thought appears in states that are more grounded in democratic experience. Consequently, our ability to analyze recent extremist right-wing activity - such as the popularity of openly racist political candidates like Donald Trump or Marine Le Pen, or the recent terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand - is limited. This thesis adds to the understanding of fascistic discourse as it manifests in historically democratic communities by analyzing the work of French proto-fascist Charles Maurras and British fascist Oswald Mosley. Considering each of their published works from before the end of World War II, this study suggests that these authors use the language of democracy to articulate and justify their illiberal agendas. This argument adds nuance to the ongoing project of defining and understanding fascistic thought and provides an alternative framework of analysis for recent extremist activity.
Acknowledgements

I want to first thank my advisor, Dr. Christopher Church, for his constant guidance and encouragement, both personally and professionally. His willingness to make himself available whenever I needed, meeting me off campus on a weekend or by email at 10:00pm, speaks volumes about his commitment to his students. I deeply respect and admire him, and hope to one day inspire my students like he does. Without him, this thesis would likely remain incomplete.

I also want to express my gratitude for the support I have received by the rest of my committee members over the last three years. Dr. Barbara Walker, Dr. Dennis Dworkin, and Dr. Mirella Melara each have given me valuable feedback as I have developed as a student and academic, and I have grown immensely from it.

This project has given me a profound appreciation for the unfailing support of my family and friends. My family, though far away, has kept me going when I doubted myself most through their constant words of encouragement when I needed it, and their confidence in my abilities. My friends, who welcomed me in with open arms and open hearts when I moved here, made sure that I remained grounded and cared for despite the unpredictability of life and the magnitude of this project.

I would finally like to thank my partner, Jeremy Campbell, for being a pillar of strength and love throughout the final months of writing of this thesis. Thank you for learning to love Taylor Swift and for knowing when to play “Shake It Off” when I needed a break. Thank you for bringing me coffee and making dinner, and for all of the hundreds of other ways you have loved and supported me. Thank you for reminding me that I could always do this.
Chapter One

On March 15, 2019, a peaceful morning of worship at Al Noor Mosque in New Zealand was violently interrupted by a white nationalist terrorist, who began shooting indiscriminately in an attack he had planned for two years. By the end of his spree, 49 people were dead. Minutes before the attack, the shooter had posted his manifesto titled “The Great Replacement” on 8chan, a site designed to house content that no other website would allow. The 74-pages, apparently an abridged version of his original manifesto, explained his ideology and reasoning behind the attack with the hope that other white nationalists would be compelled to action because of it. His work speaks to the concerns and ideology of white nationalists today, but it is also shockingly grounded in fascistic thought of the early 20th century. While we like to think that fascism was defeated by World War II, the shooter’s incredibly racist and brutal rhetoric becomes even more alarming when he claims that “The person from history closest to my own beliefs is Oswald Mosley.”

Mosley was the most prominent fascist politician in Britain, but he is not often thought of as a relevant fascist thinker in most studies today.

Steve Bannon, former political advisor to the American president and editor of ultra-conservative news outlet Breitbart News Network, has gone on record supporting the political views of the widely unknown proto-fascist French intellectual Charles Maurras. Like Maurras, Bannon sees a division between “the ‘fake’ legal country” and the

---

“authentic country of the people.” Maurras and Mosley both reflect non-democratic political traditions in two places often considered the bastions of modern democracy: France and Britain. The rise of these lesser known fascistic authors suggests that the apparent love affair with 20th century ultra-conservatives is not just superficial. Radicals have begun to look beyond just big names in search of the language to articulate their political philosophy for contemporary politics. The attack in New Zealand indicates the deadly consequences of the revival of this literature, but it is not an isolated instance, and we can find similar ideas in more mainstream movements like the UK Independence Party which fueled the vote for Brexit or the French National Front which put forth the nearly-successful presidential candidate Marine Le Pen in the 2017 election. This thesis will suggest that both Maurras and Mosley articulated similar authoritarian and identitarian solutions through the use of democratic language, which makes their return today more palatable to alt-right and identitarian movements seeking to distance themselves from fascism’s Nazi heritage.

Modern media illustrates that despite the contemporary democratically-minded world we live in today, there is a public audience for fascist thinkers like Maurras and Mosley. Maurras works have been translated and published by Arktos, a company which falsely portrays itself as a non-partisan center to “provide a voice for individuals and viewpoints who are often overlooked by the mainstream, but who offer original and challenging alternatives to our prevailing culture that cannot be found elsewhere.”

---


subject matter of their publications make their extremist, right-wing, and conspiracy-minded leanings clear. Similarly, Black House Publishing, LTD in London claims to publish works that “‘freedom loving’ liberals, and the ‘politically correct’ have sought to silence,” and yet they also claim that “As a publisher we have no agenda beyond publishing works that mainstream publishers dare not handle…we do not publish works that advocate or promote xenophobia, homophobia, or racial hatred.” This claim is ironic considering they have published at least five of British fascist Oswald Mosley’s most popular works.

Social media and popular culture also evidence the quiet return of these fascistic authors. A 1975 interview with Mosley on Thames Television has garnered over 300,000 views on YouTube over the last three years, with comments lauding him as a hero, or as having “perfected fascism.” He is set to be portrayed in the English gang drama “Peaky Blinders,” and it is rumored that the show will have the character give Mosley’s Manchester “Free Trade Hall” speech. No TV show could do the same for Adolf Hitler, even if done as a critique, without being criticized for giving fascist ideology a platform. This suggests that the taboo around fascist authors is waning. While Hitler and Mussolini are still off-limits, lesser known fascists are re-emerging and becoming more accepted in popular culture and popular political ideology.

---

The new face of ultra-conservatives, whether it is Bannon’s casual support for Maurras or the hip and non-intrusive violent conservatism of the Arktos website, marks an attempt to revitalize the radical right by updating the thought of early twentieth century intellectuals to the modern era. Separate from the question of whether or not any modern state is actually heading towards political fascism is the undeniable fact that fascism’s radical ideas are making a comeback. This leads to the question: what was it about anti-establishment, anti-democratic thought that captured the political imagination of both the early twentieth century and the western world today?

Most analyses of fascism advise us to be wary of fascist practice. However, we should be just as wary of the existence of fascist ideas enveloped in the language of democratic discourse. The existence of fascistic practices is not the same as the existence of fascist ideology, and the existence of fascist ideology should not be dismissed because eventually it will inspire real-world consequences. Fascism has often been classified or defined by the existence of certain features (anti-Semitism, paramilitary organizations, etc.), and academics have often run into issues where those definitions feel insufficient to fully explain fascism. Redefining fascism is not the focus of this paper. Instead, I would like to argue that even if fascism is defined by practice, it is not just the existence or success of an overtly anti-Semitic, fascist political party and its paramilitary organization that we should keep an eye out for. We should first begin to identify and be concerned about support for illiberal policies using the language of democracy, especially when a fascistic version of democratic discourse is used to attack democracy itself, since it is this thought that precedes violent and illiberal action. This kind of illiberal rhetoric appears to
be familiar and safe to committed democrats, yet ultimately advocates for violent xenophobia and nationalist action.

This thesis will look at the thought of individuals who considered themselves to be fascist, and who others considered to be fascist, in the early 20th century. Specifically, I will use a close textual analysis to explore the thought of French intellectual Charles Maurras and British politician Oswald Mosley in order to highlight the way their fascistic ideas are framed by the discourse of democracy. The second and third chapters of this thesis will explore the way the fascistic ideas of Maurras and Mosley, respectively, are couched in the language of democracy, making their violent and dangerous ideas feel safe and comfortable to their democratically-minded audience. Both authors seemed to exhibit paradoxical thought. Maurras was a defender of the Catholic Church, but was agnostic. He advocated for a return to monarchy, but did so through the use of the language of democracy. Likewise, Mosley proposed an authoritarian and corporatist system, but articulated his vision as a champion of the will of the people. These thesis aims to understand how these authors reconciled these seemingly opposite views by redefining certain aspects of democratic discourse for illiberal purposes. The epilogue of the fourth chapter will bring this conversation back to the present day by looking at how modern radical right movements either use the language of Mosley and Maurras directly, or similarly use the language of democracy to facilitate their horrific political agendas. The incorporation of democratic discourse to explain the “value” of racism by today’s Alt-Right movement should be just as concerning as overly fascist practices.

Exploring Charles Maurras’ proto-fascism illustrates that using democratic language to justify illiberal ideas can set a dangerous precedent that makes illiberalism
more palatable. Maurras was the philosopher behind the reactionary and conservative journal *Action Française* shortly after its inception in 1899 and remained so until his arrest in 1944, though the journal was most active between the end of World War I and the early months of the Vichy Regime. In response to World War I and eventually France’s occupation during World War II, he advocated for a stronger national government in the form of a monarch that could protect the French from the next military threat. He wrote a number of published books, including *Mes idées politiques; Enquete sur la monarchie*; a compilation of his essays in five volumes titled *Dictionnaire politique et critique; Pour un réveil Français; L’Ordre et le Désordre*; and *Verité, justice, patrie*, among a great many others, not including the hundreds of articles he published in *Action Française*. After the end of World War II, he was sentenced to a life in prison and *Action Française* was one of the only journals banned for its collaboration with the occupation regime. Peter Fysh and Jim Wolfries argue that genuine fascism did exist in France during the 1920s, and that these fascist ideas enable the comparison between French fascism in the 1920s and French fascism today in the form of the National Front. Though they saw Maurras as a proto-fascist whose relevance was dominated by the anti-Semitism of the Dreyfus affair, I would argue that his fascistic thought was more cohesive than just an anti-Semitic agenda. Standard definitions of fascism based on practice justify his label as a proto-fascist, but his ideology still prepared the French population to understand illiberal ideas as a logical progression from democratic discourse.

Comparatively, Oswald Mosley was the standard bearer for British Fascism in the 20th century and demonstrated that the use of democratic discourse to support illiberalism may take a different form, but still makes racist ideology easier to accept. If we use the
conventional division of failed and successful fascism to consider Mosley, he would clearly be considered the leader of a failed fascist movement. The BUF had 50,000 members at their peak but were dwarfed in following by other parties. However, his rhetoric has long outlived his political ventures, which suggests that he is tragically more significant than his failures would suggest. Mosley warned of an impending national financial crisis and, through the language of democracy, called for a stronger government that was better equipped to protect British citizens from unemployment. By no coincidence, the government he proposed was also one that was willing to pursue violent exclusionary action to protect the homogeneity of the will of the people. By the time Mosley founded the BUF, the unemployment crisis he warned about in 1930 had arrived in the midst of the Great Depression, and as he had predicted the state was ill-prepared to resolve it. The British Union of Fascists was the primary fascist league in England and believed in the need for authoritarian leadership to effectively deal with this emergency. Throughout his years as a career politician before and during World War II, Mosley published numerous speeches and books including *The Greater Britain* (1932), *Fascism: 100 Questions Answered* (1936), *We Fight for Freedom* (1936), *Tomorrow We Live* (1938), *Fascism for the Millions* (1936), *Britain First* (1939), and oversaw the publication of *The British Union Quarterly*. He continued to publish after the war in defense of his support for Fascism, including the publication of his autobiography in 1968 titled *My Life*, in reference to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. Mosley’s work exemplified the use of democratic discourse for illiberal ends, regardless of his official political success.

It is impossible to know whether Mosley and Maurras were code switching, using the language of democracy to gain a political following, or using this language because
they actually believed they were carrying out a better version of democratic tradition. In either case, what matters is that they were using the language of democracy to explain their political goals. In countries with a long history of democracy like France and Britain, illiberal thought is all the more surprising and concerning. We can trace the language of democracy used by Maurras and Mosley to the Enlightenment view that the people have a will and are sovereign, even though they advocate for distinctly violent and anti-democratic policies. Maurras and Mosley’s answer on how to best govern for the will of the people resulted in a reorganization of the ideas behind democracy into a specific authoritarian, populist, and anti-Alien framework. If repeated today, this dangerous cocktail of anti-liberal values with the language of the will and popular sovereignty has the potential to make racist and violently nationalistic ideas palatable within a political sphere shaped by democratic norms.

**Methodology**

Historians of fascism have traditionally operated from a division between successful and unsuccessful fascism, where success is based on fascist practices rather than just fascist ideology. Robert Paxton’s *Anatomy of Fascism*, which laid the groundwork for many future studies of fascism, argued that fascism exists in stages, and that “successful” fascism has only occurred in Nazi Germany and Mussolini’s Italy. He noted that only the fascist groups which existed in a democracy that are willing to dilute their ideological purity in favor of gaining real political power were able to continue their momentum and become mainstream, as was the case in both Germany and Italy. Those that were not able to capitalize on their momentum to semi-legally gain power either remained a fringe group or were eliminated by a moderate government. He also suggests
that Fascist intellectuals do not predispose countries to Fascism, since some countries
with a strong intellectual foundation for it (France for example) failed to fully develop
into a Fascist state. Those that moved beyond “Stage One” and obtained real power,
however, were destined to self-destruct. Paxton argued that a key to Fascist movements
was their state of perpetual revolution. This constant “emergency state” of increasingly
radical revolution (i.e. war) allowed their rhetoric of absolute triumph or absolute despair
to seem more realistic. However, he argued, this inevitably results in a self-induced
implosion of the state as the stakes become so high that the state chooses to fail
completely rather than give up or take a step back from their inflammatory rhetoric.

The problem is that the definition of successful fascism based on practice is
insufficient to identify the fascist ideology that exists before practice. It seems that
Paxton would only consider Fascism to be “real” if it succeeds in obtaining control over a
government, and that lack of government control means that it has “failed.” However,
this does not recognize the prevalence of deeper intellectual trends that gave birth to
Fascist values. Peter Fysh and Jim Wolfries do this with the National Front, arguing that
it is their ideology, paired with their history that earns them the label of fascism in the
modern era.7 To use the word loosely, I would argue that there is a common “zeitgeist,” a
common ideological denominator, that exists before the semi-concrete values of
community and nationalism which are used so adamantly by fascist groups. Fascism as a
state policy could be labeled as failed or successful, but that label does not encapsulate
the cultural sense that the existing states were disillusioned about how the world really

worked. Paxton treats intellectuals as the leaders of society, as the Great Men leading the Fascist charge. I would argue that intellectuals are more accurately interpreted as representatives or products of their environment in the vein of Gramsci’s organic intellectuals, not necessarily innovative outliers. Gramsci envisioned the role of organic intellectuals as identifiers and purveyors of “common sense” ideology, those aspect of the dominant class culture perpetuating capitalist control that could be found in daily life.  

Our analysis is limited by thinking that we think we can stop fascist ideology by stopping fascist practice. The vision of fascism as “successful” or “failed” based on actual political power supports the interpretation of fascism as an aberration of democracy. The common analogy that stems from this division is that of a virulent fever or a cancerous aberration - something which can be prevented or stopped through our action against it. The concept of body politics isn’t in itself problematic, but the assumption that fascism is curable and preventable is. The treatment of illnesses such as a fever or a cancer, which are viewed as temporary and potentially curable, focuses on the eradication of the foreign contaminant or removal of a diseased part of the body. Using this analogy to describe fascism is at best misleading, and at worst blatantly excusatory. When the treatment plan for cancer is applied to politics, it often yields disastrous consequences, since it requires the differentiation between “the body,” and “the problem” or “the enemy;” that which is natural and that which must be exterminated. Tellingly, this is a distinction some doctors encourage among cancer patients, as it allows them to view the disease as something they can conquer if they have a strong enough will to do so.

---

Likewise, the common belief is that if a people have the will to identify and eradicate fascist practice - through humiliation, vilification, or violence – then a “successful” fascist state can be prevented. This leads us to think that if fascist groups are prevented from gaining political power, then their harm to the state can be kept at a minimum. Even if they do gain some political power, their damage can be mitigated by neutralizing their ideology through heavy dilution with moderate ideology. Thus, the success of a fascist group to gain power is the result of other people in the political body failing to rid themselves of the diseased part.

Trying to understand and control fascism through practice alone fails because it can’t encapsulate the ideology that inspired such practice. Therefore, to better understand fascist thinkers, we should consider their ideas alongside the discourse of democracy that informs the authors’ worldview. The problem with the analogy of fascism as a disease is that it lacks the language to describe the very real influence of fascist groups and intellectuals which exists beyond the official and legal system. It presents a static definition of fascism and limits our analysis of fascism to its practices rather than its ideology, preventing us from considering fascist ideology as a natural reaction to democratic discourse. Using Foucauldian discourse analysis to consider this subject can remedy this lack in prevailing historiographical trends. Instead of treating the number of members in a paramilitary organization, which in Mosley’s British Union of Fascists never topped 50,000, or the lack of elected fascist officials as an indication of failed fascism, this paper will consider the ideological foundations of fascist thinkers and why they can appeal to seemingly normal people with no obvious extremist tendencies. Doing so uncovers the lurking danger of fascistic thought, which seems to reach beyond the
official ranks of fascist parties in the form of more anodyne rhetoric denouncing immigration and internationalism.

The discourse of democracy is rooted in enlightenment principles. After the French Revolution, the enlightenment values of the will of the people, popular sovereignty, and social contract theory became ubiquitous. One could not engage in a conversation about politics without at least acknowledging these concepts. Rousseau was a key figure in describing the elements that would become foundational to the discourse of democracy, particularly his conception of the general will and popular sovereignty. By the time Mosley and Maurras were writing, all political thinkers were in some way or another responding to these ideas, even if they were not directly engaging with Rousseau’s writing. Therefore, it is relevant for this thesis to briefly explain how Rousseau conceived of the general will.

He described the general will as the legislative part of a state, since it wills the design and creation of law. By contrast, the executive part of a government puts the will into action by formally acting on and enforcing the laws that are willed. The executive aspect of a government works through magistrates, which can be few or many in number. The more condensed the governing body, the greater the power and ability to effect necessary change: “Hence the more numerous the magistrates, the weaker the government.”9 The more condensed the magisterial body, the less of a risk that the individual magistrate would subvert the general will to his or her own, since their responsibility to the whole is not shared, and therefore stronger. It is important to note

that Rousseau did not believe that the general will can be divided or represented. He wrote: “My argument, then, is that sovereignty, being nothing other than the exercise of the general will, can never be alienated; and that the sovereign, which is simply a collective being, cannot be represented by anyone but itself – power may be delegated, but the will cannot be.”

Rousseau noted that a good government is that which effectively acts in accordance with the general will and the sovereign, but that not all good governments had to be democracies.

Rousseau also emphasized the importance of homogeneity to the legitimization of the general will. Individuals may have had competing ideas on what they felt was best for themselves, and by proxy what was best for the nation, but, according to Rousseau, there is only one course of action that is truly the general will: “It follows from all this that the general will is always in the right and always works for the public good; but it doesn’t follow that the people’s deliberations are always equally correct.”

The individual will should always be subverted to the general will of all, since the general will by proxy was what was best for the individual. Even if the general will advocated for high taxes, for example, to which the individual was opposed, the benefit of being in a society overall outweighed the drawback of higher taxes. Those who advocated for something other than what was best for the nation as a whole were either not part of the nation, or they were disillusioned and needed to be educated about what was actually best for the nation. As we will see, the primacy of homogeneity in fascist thought exists in contrast to the values of heterogeneity and diversity within liberalism. The Rousseau-ian foundations in the

---

10 Ibid., 69.
11 Ibid., 14.
discourse of democracy today ironically sets the stage for the fascist critique of “parliamentarian hypocrisy” through the debate over the importance of homogeneity. The chaos and indecision of parliaments incited concern among fascists that the homogenous general will had been corrupted by foreign influence and is, in their view, now “recklessly” heterogenous, resulting in potential indecision and inaction in the face of crisis.

Democratic discourse includes a conception of liberty, though liberal democracy views this as negative liberty, whereas fascist intellectuals tend to prefer positive liberties much like the far left. The definition of liberalism is problematic and illusory, with entire fields within Political Science dedicated to the subject. James Kloppenberg made an effort to historicize “liberalism” in his work *The Virtues of Liberalism*, where he posited liberalism as one of negative freedoms, i.e. freedom “from” something, such as constraints on personal liberty, but with the assumption that if one is legally free to do it then the social, cultural, or economic restraints preventing one from exercising this freedom are irrelevant. Leftist criticisms of liberty are founded in the identification between the freedom “from” something and the freedom “to” something – not only should you be free from constraints on personal liberty but be free to have a healthy and stable life, through the right to affordable housing and health care, for example. Here, social and economic realities are taken into consideration when evaluating whether one is actually able to practice the right to free speech or personal liberty. This leftist critique is shared with fascist ideology, which argued that the liberty to a good life for a nation’s

---

citizens is the purpose of a state, and that this liberty is more important than the liberty of free speech, for example, or the liberty of those not in the nation. In the most recent presidential elections in the US and France, there were a surprising number of voters who turned from the more socialist candidates to the far-right ones rather than to the remaining moderate left candidate. The far left and the far-right shared similar understandings of the world around them, just with different solutions. Keeping in mind the debate between negative and positive liberties, this study will consider the way Maurras and Mosley defined and understood liberty as part of their use of democratic language to justify illiberal ends.

In fact, Fareed Zakaria has suggested that democracies do not have to be liberal at all. Zakaria is a political theorist and author who popularized the term “illiberal democracy” in his 1997 article “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy” in Foreign Affairs, and he expounded on this concept in his 2003 best seller The Future of Freedom. Zakaria argued that liberty must come from structure, and that democracy is a good thing but too much democracy can lead to chaos and a breakdown of the system, i.e. the system that protects and enabled true liberty. He explored the differences between constitutional or classical liberalism and democracy, which are so often misconstrued as the same thing in the west. The assumption that a democracy is inherently liberal, and that liberty exists only when there is democracy, prevents us from truly exploring the nature of problems in purportedly democratic states like those in the middle east, Russia, or China. Zakaria writes: “We assume that no problem could ever be caused by democracy, so when we see

---

social, political, and economic maladies we shift blame here and there, deflecting problems, avoiding answers, but never talking about the great transformation [of cultural democratization] that is at the center of our political, economic, and social lives.”  

Though Zakaria primarily used his idea of illiberal democracies to consider the current political system in the Middle East, it is a useful tool to consider the nature of fascistic thought and its provenance from democratic tradition, specifically the language of liberty in democratic discourse.

The concept of participation in democratic discourse is not a fixed equivalent to electionary procedure, which allows the idea of participation to be used and redefined by fascist authors for illiberal ends. Pointing to Russia and China, Zakaria defined illiberal democracies as those that “mix elections and authoritarianism.” Here, he equated democracy with elections, which were “the rule of the people.” Such a definition is common among political theorists and political historians alike. However, James Kloppenberg’s concept of participation found in his work Toward Democracy is more flexible: “Modern democracy is rooted in the shared assumption that all citizens should have the capacity to shape their own lives within boundaries established by the standards and traditions of their communities, and that all citizens should be able to participate equally in shaping those standards and revising those traditions.” Notably, Kloppenberg did not specify that participation must mean elections. The possibility that these two ideas - participation and the election system - could be separated is a distinction which was

---

15 Ibid., 91.
16 Ibid., 18.
earlier identified by fascist authors. Nazi polemicist Carl Schmitt, contemporary of Mosley and Maurras, suggested that a democracy is a government that is for the people, though not necessarily by the people. Schmitt believed that people participate in the state by informing and creating the common will, which the government (potentially an authoritarian one) promotes. He writes: “dictatorial and Caesaristic methods not only can produce the acclamation of the people but can also be a direct expression of democratic substance and power.”\(^\text{18}\) He advocated for the authoritarianism of Nazi fascism by presenting non-quantifiable participation through the will of a people as the true manifestation of democracy. The resulting problem with this illiberal reinterpretation of participation is the question of where to draw the line of who is included in the people.

The ideological complications resulting from the practice of citizenship have plagued the discourse of democracy from the beginning, and by its nature created division which can make room for the illiberal value of inequality. Nations are inherently exclusive by deciding who is in them and who isn’t, whose well-being they are responsible for, and whose they are not. The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens*’ claim that “Men are born and remain free and equal in rights” was fine and inspirational, until progressives began to ask who exactly that applied to.\(^\text{19}\) All men could be born free and equal, but the French state could not be concerned with the freedom or equality of everyone; the line has to be drawn somewhere. By rejecting all forms of legal privilege, aristocrats were no longer separated from the people and were subject to the


same taxes as everyone else. However, so were French Jews, who had previously been exempt from paying taxes to the Catholic church. Vigorous debate ensued about maintaining some form of privilege to continue to exclude French Jews from the rest of the nation, or to commit to the values of the Enlightenment and include them as citizens. This also inspired debate about the role of women, people of color (and slaves in particular), actors, and people who were poor or did not own property. These debates illustrated the paradox of citizenship which has tormented the discourse of democracy since its inception, and which illiberal thinkers have been able to capitalize on to justify racist and violently exclusive action.

Perhaps the earliest example of this in late modern history is the period of the French Revolution known as the Terror. When both civil and foreign war threatened the revolution, the primary ruling power passed de facto from National Convention to the Committee of Public Safety led by Maximilien Robespierre. In this crisis, emergency power was transferred to a smaller, authoritarian body which could act decisively to prevent the destruction of the nation. The committee’s chosen method of control was terror, executing everyone who even remotely could have some connection to revolutionary resistance. Even once the main period of crisis has passed, the committee continued to execute potential political enemies in the name of maintaining peace and protecting the revolution.

Edmund Burke wrote in concern of the chaos of the French Revolution, and condemned their overzealousness for popular sovereignty, which he predicted could

---
20Ibid., 80-139.
easily lead to mob rule and excessive violence. Burke was not entirely against the enlightenment principle of popular sovereignty, since he did support the American Revolution, but believed that the French monarchy was a stable embodiment of the French will and revolutionaries were overreacting. It is ironic that Burke’s critique of the French Revolution culminated with the Terror of Robespierre, even though it was led by a strong leader. It is Thomas Carlyle, often referenced by Mosley, who wrote: “Cannot one discern, across all democratic turbulence, clattering of ballot-boxes, and infinite sorrowful jangle, needful or not, that this is at bottom the wish and prayer of all human hearts everywhere and at all times, ‘Give me a leader’” The stability that came from a strong leader or an ancestral monarch paired with the legitimacy of popular sovereignty is enabled through the homogeneity of the people.

Fascists claim to use race to inform where they draw national lines, but recent work by Michael Omi and Howard Winant illustrate that race is culturally constructed. In their groundbreaking work, Racial Formation in the United States, Omi and Winant expertly present race as a very real phenomenon that has a tangible impact on individuals, while also looking at race as specifically not-grounded in objective physical differences. Instead, they employ a Marxist framework to consider race as grounded in social and historical choices made by the ruling class to maintain their position of power. They note that “Our theory of racial formation emphasizes the social nature of race, the absence of any essential racial characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories, the conflictual character of race at both the “micro-“ and the “macro-social”

---

22Thomas Carlyle. Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, collected and republished (Boston: Dana Estes & Company, 1869), 75.
levels, and the irreducible political aspect of racial dynamics.”\textsuperscript{23} The cultural construction of race proves that while fascist intellectuals claim that they are concerned with a specific race, they are actually concerned with the cultural construction of their race. Those who fit a preconceived notion of what it means to be a “good” Frenchman, or a “good” Briton can be included: one needs to be white, employable, Christian, and heterosexual.

Enthusiasm for the nation can make up for a lot of things, such as being atheist or gay, but it cannot make up for not being white. The pro-French efforts of a person who is black, for example, are appreciated, but will not actually earn them a place in the Nation. Likewise, someone who is clearly white but proudly rejects traditional gender roles is considered to be part of the nation, but as a “bad” citizen who needs to be rehabilitated or educated on the error of their ways. In this way, fascists use skin color and cultural norms to define who is and is not a part of the nation. Considering race as a construct allows us to better examine the nationalist rhetoric of exclusion and consider why fascists draw national lines where they do.

Democracy can be understood as a practice, and therefore the illiberalism within democracy can also be practiced. Another tradition in the study of democracy that this study will use is that which Margaret Lavinia Anderson proposed in \textit{Practicing Democracy}. Building on the work of Dankwart Rustow, who explored the transition of authoritarian societies into democratic ones, Anderson argued that “people learn democracy only by practicing.” By using records of voting practices in Imperial Germany, she illuminated a considerable gap in the \textit{Sonderweg} thesis of the

exceptionalism of German democracy, and suggests that Germany did, in fact, have significant experience with democratic traditions by the time of the Weimar Republic. The underlying assumption of her argument about democracy is that democratic practices are likely (often inevitably) to lead to democratic society.²⁴ Both she and Rustow are interested in the transition into democracy, although the same principle of “democracy as a practice” can be used to consider the ways that fascism can be practiced in a nominally democratic state. Since the ideology that informs these practices exists before action is ever taken it is important to understand the way we talk about these practices, and the influence that potentially has on later, illiberal action.

For example, the emergency powers clause in democratic governments suggests that fascists reconciling the language of democracy to support illiberal ideas is not inherently anti-democratic. Schmitt pointed out that every constitutional democracy has a clause which suggests that in the case of an emergency, the power of the parliament, the supposed representative body of the people, will be yielded to a single individual. The more emergency powers are relied upon to solve a national crisis, the more a nation practices illiberalism. This clause provided the means for Julius Caesar to gain dictatorial power over the Roman republic, and Robespierre over the National Convention of 1792. In the United States today, emergency powers take the form of executive orders. While normally these are intended for immediate military engagements or similar, these have increasingly been used to push through legislation thought to be in line with the will of the people to cut through the red tape of bureaucratic inefficiency. The destructive nature

of World War I can be seen as leading to a perpetual state of emergency in France and England, resulting in the sense that one leader, whose voice could rise above the cacophony of others, was preferable to the disorganization of parliamentarianism. By incorporating this authoritarian answer in democratic discourse, nineteenth century republicanism had essentially practiced the means of its own demise in the early twentieth century.

Limiting our study to the practices of successful fascism prevents us from fully understanding the problematic ideology that exists before overtly fascist action. This thesis will overcome the limitation of prioritizing “successful” fascist by considering the thought of “unsuccessful” fascists Charles Maurras and Oswald Mosley. Their use of typically liberal concepts within democratic discourse to articulate their racist and dangerously aggressive nationalism made it easier for democratic audiences to understand and relate to. Enlightenment philosophy has dominated the discourse of democracy since the French Revolution, especially Rousseau’s conception of the general will and popular sovereignty, as well as the ideas of liberty, equality, and citizenship. This discourse is also influenced by democracy’s experience with parliamentarism, the role of war on social and economic experience, and the increasingly global world. Looking at which aspects of the discourse of democracy have stayed the same, been rejected, or been changed within fascist ideology provides us with a fuller understanding of the zeitgeist of fascism in the early 20th century, as well as its connections to extremist thought today. This thesis will build on the traditions of the history of ideas and conceptual history by considering the discourse of democracy and the illiberalism evident in the works of Charles Maurras and Oswald Mosley.
Conclusion

There is a tradition of anti-democratic, anti-establishment, illiberal, and authoritarian thought among fascist intellectuals well before fascist parties come to power. Looking at fascism as a political practice is a worthwhile endeavor in certain instances; the study of fascist parties and their maneuvers to obtain legal power is undoubtedly valuable and significant. But these fascist parties and their supporters do not arise out of nothingness. Anti-democratic sentiment stems from specific frustrations with an existing democratic system and, in the thought of Maurras and Mosley, that frustration was paradoxically articulated using the language of democracy that they were reacting against. Most importantly, they felt that the will of the popular sovereign could not be effectively expressed if it was a heterogeneous and diverse cacophony of voices. This emphasis on the will of the people led to their perceived need to obsessively exclude the Other from participating in the creation of the will. Maurras’ solution was a return to monarchism, a system which could advance the general will of the people without the disastrous existence of what he saw as the tyranny of the majority and tyranny of money under republicanism. Likewise, Mosley’s solution to the disillusionment with parliamentarianism in England was distinctly English in its call for a corporate system and Anglo-centered imperialism. The fascist governments they advocated for built upon the exclusionary nature of citizenship and representation, the emphasis on their nation’s particular general will, and adherence to popular sovereignty. This suggests that Mosley and Maurras did not understand their fascistic thought as antithetical to democratic discourse, but instead as a logical extension of it: their solution to the faults they
perceived in parliamentary democracy was a profoundly illiberal form of democracy, grounded in the violent creation of national homogeneity.

This study contends that Oswald Mosley and Charles Maurras supported illiberal democracy: the rejection of liberal and democratic values for the express purpose of reimagining a more “authentic” system based on only limited aspects of liberalism and democracy. The fear of the state’s inability to deal with the social, political, and economic crisis of the post-war era re-inspired conservatives to create a system that they believed would better serve the general will of the people by reevaluating the current discourse and identifying the aspects that they saw as contradictory and needed to be adjusted. The language of democracy used by Maurras and Mosley to indict the existing system and propose a new solution made their racist and extremist ideology feel more familiar and palatable to a democratic audience. In this way, the discourse of fascism did not change that of democracy, but the discourse of democracy shaped the discourse of fascism. In short, the works of Mosley and Maurras illustrate that the illiberalism within the discourse of democracy can legitimize the anti-democratic and fascist ideology it fears the most.
Chapter Two

“It will bring up, I am sure, grand pleasure and beautiful emotions!”

Speaking of the 2018 Book of Commemorations, these were the fateful words of the French Minister of Culture, Francoise Nyssen, before the ensuing political scandal of her career. The French state publishes an annual book of commemorations - of which Nyssen is in charge as the Minister of Culture - to recognize significant individuals in their history including saints, activists, and philanthropists. However, the 2018 edition stirred a significant amount of controversy over its original inclusion of early 20th century intellectual, journalist, and anti-Semite, Charles Maurras. The reading of his literature is unlikely to stir up “great pleasure” or “beautiful emotions” among many dedicated republicans, and yet he was included in this official list of celebrated French men and women. The justification for his presence in the book was to commemorate his impact on French politics during the interwar period and World War II. However, when the book was published there was a huge outcry based on the way the book of commemorations paid homage to individuals, rather than just remember them. In the end, every mention of Maurras was removed from the book.

This is not the only instance of Maurras or other authoritarian populist intellectuals returning to the public eye, which suggests that the language of democracy alone is an insufficient safeguard from fascistic thought. The controversy of the book of commemorations came on the heels of Marine Le Pen’s nearly successful presidential run in 2017. The French National Front (FN), the party of both Marine Le Pen and her father,

finds its roots in the conservatism of Maurras in the 1940s, making the celebration of Maurras in recent years all the more concerningly relevant and questionable. Fysh and Wolfries argue that despite the caution of truly labeling modern political parties as fascist, the FN is fascist because “the combination of doctrine, strategy and organization add up to an enterprise, which...aims at the destruction of democracy itself.”26 This is paired with the undeniable rise in anti-Semitic violence, such as the destruction of Jewish cemeteries by breaking tombstones and painting swastikas over the sites. The works of Charles Maurras specifically have become more popular in the last decade, and republications of his books in both French and English have begun. The reappearance of Maurras and fascistic ideology in popular media spurs questions about the effectiveness of our response at preventing the increased popularity of this thought, and whether our response is getting at the root of the problem.

A study of the proto-fascistic ideas of Charles Maurras can help illuminate the answers to this question. The extent to which fascism in France existed in the early 20th century has been hotly contested, but a study of the subject is hardly complete without at least referencing Maurras’ brainchild, L’Action Française. Though the extremist journal printed around 150,000 copies at their peak, their circulation was much larger; they were a major influence for the ideology and passions of the right during the interwar period and World War II.27 The popularity of L’Action Française is a unique blend of French royalism, traditionalism (i.e. anti-Semitism and racism), and populism, but this thesis will

argue that it also reveals deeper truths about discourse of democracy as understood by Charles Maurras and his supporters. At first glance, royalism during the interwar period and during Vichy could be viewed through the traditional lens of Orleanists vs. Legitimists, those who supported monarchy because of the supposed security of rule by educated elites, and those who supported monarchy because of the divine right of a King to rule over his people as a reflection of God’s love. However, neither of these views come close to explaining Maurras’ royalism. Maurras was not in search of a time machine to take the French back to 1788 - I would argue that his monarchism was just as grounded in democratic traditions as it was against it. Even though he rejected Rousseau and his influence on the French Revolution, he still worked within a political framework that perceived popular sovereignty as the only power that could legitimize a government. The perceived need for efficiency and the ability of one individual to represent the will of an entire nation was foundational to his ideas, and the prioritization of the nation and the will of the people is indicative of the influence of liberal democracy. For Maurras, the purpose of the government was to protect and develop national strength through military preparedness and nationalism, which included the active expulsion of the dangerous other from an otherwise homogeneous national community. The work of Charles Maurras illustrated that fascist thinkers participate in the language of democracy, making it more familiar and palatable to those who would otherwise not support their offensive political agenda.

**Historiography**

Since French fascism is considered to have “failed,” it has generally been taken less seriously by historians than it has in other European states. This line of
historiographical work can be associated with Robert Paxton’s general thesis that fascism exists in stages, and only states where fascist groups obtain the majority of political power are truly fascist states. His analysis of Vichy in *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* looks at the extreme right in France during World War II. Here he argued that Vichy is best understood as an attempt to minimize the struggle and destruction of German occupation, rather than as opportunistic or imported fascism. Following the political moves of the temporary government to determine the underlying goals, Paxton’s work emphasized the role of elites and professionals during the occupation. While the foundations of fascist politics were present in France and motivated the shift away from the Third Republic, overtly fascist groups were not the ones who ultimately held power or benefitted from the Vichy regime. Thus, as a fascist state it failed. Comparative frameworks often serve to diminish the pervasiveness and persuasiveness of far-right ideology within the French democratic state compared to places like Germany or Italy. Historians such as William Shirer, Alastair Hamilton, Robert Soucy, or Shlomo Sand all considered the political events of the early 20th century by working from a perspective of the relative superficiality of anti-parliamentarian thought and viewed fascistic thought as an aberration of democracy. There is a general sense that, while there was an intense emotional commitment existed among the small group of supporters for the *Action Française* and other related organizations, fascistic thought was not a substantial force in the general populace since it had failed in gaining objective political power.

Fascism in France is inevitably compared to German Nazism because of the occupation, which limits the analysis of illiberalism in Maurras as a genuinely French-inspired movement. The problem with these types of historiographical works is that as a
whole is that they become, in a way, teleologically driven. Germany is understood to be the truest form of fascism, and instances of French fascism are graded on a scale based on that. Because there is a general agreement among historians that fascism did not become a major player in France the way it did in Italy or Germany, looking at the elite ideologues who supported the national revolution is sufficient for understanding the role and extent of rightist extremism among citizens. The portrayal of Vichy as a distinct break from the Third Republic enabled historians to place the blame almost solely on political actors who were responding to the economic and foreign crisis of losing to Germany. Apathy among citizens is viewed as submissive resistance to the national revolution rather than subdued acceptance. However, considering the thought of Maurras as a transformation and continuation of the values of the Third Republic brings the liberal value of the political will of the general public back into the conversation.

French illiberalism has been portrayed as fleeting, which does not reflect its deeper relevance and potential appeal. William Shirer’s *The Collapse of the Third Republic* paints an almost harmonious picture of France after World War I. As an American correspondent living in France after the war, his description of the immediate post-war period is one of optimistic prosperity and confident conquerors, with unrest only slightly visible under the surface. Rather than internal tension, he identifies the problem within France as an issue with their alliances between the US and Britain. It was growing tensions between the former allied powers that allowed Germany to overtake France so quickly in the summer of 1940 and enabled the Vichy Regime to appear. He wrote that the collapse of the Third Republic was an event where “Frenchmen hoped not only to alleviate the bitter consequences of defeat but to wipe out their country’s admittedly
imperfect democracy, which, though it had heaped honors and favors on...they had long despised, and which now, in its agony, they scorned, claiming that it was responsible for the terrible defeat.”

He did consider the issues present throughout the Third Republic, such as tensions between the left and right, monarchists and republicans. However, he generally suggested that their rejection of democracy was only partially grounded in legitimate concerns and that it was the political crisis which ensued after their defeat which was the nail in the coffin for the Republic. His study, which is based primarily on anecdotal experience and public information, stressed the political history of the elites with less of a focus on economic or social concerns to explain the fall of the Third Republic.

Likewise, Alastair Hamilton’s *The Appeal of Fascism*, which provided brief analyses of fascist interwar intellectuals in Italy, Germany, France, and England, treats French fascism as fleeting and fails to fully explain the rise of anti-parliamentarianism. The western world in the early 20th century did perceive themselves to still be in crisis in the post-World War I era, but even more significant is the language they used to articulate the nature, cause of, and solution to the crisis. On the subject of Charles Maurras, Hamilton writes: “Like all movements which made it their policy to denounce the evils of democracy, the *Action Française* thrived in times of crisis- when the blame could be put on democracy – and wilted in moments of prosperity.”

He pointed out the centrality of anti-parliamentarianism to the perceived crisis, but his explanation of why

---

democracy was the problem is insufficiently arbitrary. He equated the possibility that blame could be put on democracy with the fact that it was put on democracy. While this is in part due to the breadth of his study and inability to delve deeply into each intellectual, it is also indicative of his underlying assumption that an intellectual’s agreement or rejection of anti-parliamentarism was some kind of innate and unfounded belief rather than a logically derived choice.

Historians have treated French fascism as unnatural to French nature and suggested that it was either imported or unrealistic as a legitimate political movement. The internal politics of the Action Française and its sister fascist associations were traced in Robert Soucy’s two-part series on French fascism. He argued that French fascism must be considered alongside its close relationship to and support by Mussolini’s fascism, and that the limited support for the Action Française was because of their commitment to royalism. However, since his focus is on elite political history, he is less concerned with the question of why supporters were drawn to fascistic thought. This work suggests that those who supported fascistic politics were already strongly committed to royalism or fascism, and just had trouble finding an appropriate organization to ally with. Similarly, Shlomo Sand’s essay, “A Flirt or a Love Affair? French Intellectuals between Fascism and Nazism,” began by arguing that as a victor in the war, a “‘satiated’ colonial empire,” and a country which had already experienced major social revolution, there was no room for a massive fascist revolution or movement.

---

the way there was in Italy or Germany.\textsuperscript{31} He imagined fascist intellectuals as disillusioned, “common” rebels lashing out at the system.\textsuperscript{32} More so than the aforementioned authors, he epitomized the dismissal of fascist individuals and minimized genuine support for the values of the national revolution.

The industrial revolution certainly had an impact on French anti-parliamentarianism, but its effect should not be overstated. Kevin Passmore attributed the anti-parliamentarian trend to a sense that the government should be filled with “competent” politicians, where competence was synonymous with the “real” experience of blue collar-esque work. He argued that the proposed solution among rightist anti-parliamentarians was not to do away with representative politics, but to make competent experts on life – those who truly lived and worked and struggled, rather than living above reality in an office - part of the political system. Passmore suggests that anti-parliamentarism of the 1940s is characterized by the desire to merge the efficiency of industrialization with politics. He noted that: “Competence, as the term was deployed in the anti-parliamentarian discourse of the 1930s, owed much to its fusion with theories of rationalized management during the Great War,” and identified the root sense of crisis among elites as that of a fear of the inefficiency of democracy.\textsuperscript{33} The rise of efficiency in the post-war period can be attributed to the development of systems such as Taylorism and Fordism, which idolized industrial efficiency and came to dominate the intellectual


\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 96-97.

landscape. But the benefit of efficiency within industry was the improved possibility for
the production of wealth, a goal which is not necessarily the purpose of a nation. To
understand the vision of competency and expertise within the sphere of the political in a
culture, one must first identify the goal of a state, i.e. the will of the people and who is
included in it. Additionally, while Passmore suggested that it was the lack of consensus
and the inefficiency of democracy which enabled the demise of the Third Republic in a
period of crisis, he did not make the connection that the association between strength and
homogeneity among fascists was ultimately supporting illiberalism through democratic
discourse. Heterogeneity, lack of consensus, and inefficiency, while at times
inconvenient, had been a constant in democratic systems since their inception, yet it was
only after World War I that this reality became an insurmountable concern for authors
like Charles Maurras. This suggests that there is more to the appeal of fascistic and
authoritarian thought that cannot be fully encapsulated by Passmore’s argument.

**Foundations of French Fascism**

French fascism of the early 20th century was primarily influenced by Boulangism, the Dreyfus affair, and – perhaps most importantly – World War I. Maurras’ thought operated within a theater of existing French conservative alliances, anti-Semitism, sense of impending crisis, colonial instability, and acceptance of hierarchy and homogeneity. These are the problems which Maurras felt he was solving through his advocacy for the return to monarchy using the language of democracy. His election to the *Académie Française* gave his ideas added weight and respect, which lent itself to support for the

---

34 Ibid., 158.
Action Française during the Vichy Regime.\textsuperscript{35} His answer to the problems in France and his relationship with the Vichy government illustrate that he was not a political or intellectual outlier, but that his ideas appeared relevant and timely to his audience despite their dangerously illiberal and anti-democratic nature.

The Boulangist movement in the late 19th century brought together right-wing movements, establishing the groundwork for later cooperation between them. French Boulangism of the 1880s, as discussed by Ze’ev Sternhell and William Irvine, lent itself to fascist movements of the later decades through the political networks it created. French General Georges Boulanger rapidly developed a cult-like following in the 1880s and 90s and found support among both the left and the right. After secretly pledging his support for the Comte de Paris, a pretender for the French throne, Boulanger’s political endeavors were more directly supported and financed by French monarchists. In 1889, he handily won the electoral seat in Paris, and conservatives conspired to have him elected to every seat in the state, in effect staging a coup d’État. Concerned, republicans drafted a bill to prevent any individual from standing for election for multiple seats at the same time. Rather than respond to this challenge by capitalizing on his popularity and working to create a plebiscite to control the government, Boulanger fled the country, effectively undoing any ground conservatives had gained through the populist General.\textsuperscript{36} While the Boulangier Affair marked one of the last hurrahs of conservative power before Vichy, it did serve to unite monarchists and right-wing conservatives, developing the social and

\textsuperscript{35} Samuel M. Osgood, \textit{French Royalism since 1870} (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 158.

political connections between the two that would later be used by interwar royalists.\textsuperscript{37} The ability to fuse the language and goals of conservatives and monarchists reasserted itself in Maurras’ royalism, which drew from these existing ties between the two sides to develop its base of support.\textsuperscript{38}

French anti-Semitism provided a launching point for Maurras’ political relevance. Since the French Revolution of 1789, France oscillated between radical tolerance for Jews and extreme anti-Semitism. After the revolution, Jews were declared citizens of France with no additional legal privileges: they voted in elections and paid taxes to the state just like everyone else. This was very different from the continued political exclusion of Jews nearly everywhere else in the Europe at the time. However, France also witnessed some of the most public anti-Semitism in Europe through the Dreyfus Affair of 1894-1906. This military scandal re-popularized conservatism, and established anti-Semitism as a defining feature of right-wing politics. The political disgrace brought deep rooted anti-Semitism and nationalism to the forefront of everyday conversation, and it is no coincidence that the Action Française, edited by Maurras, was established in the middle of this crisis in 1899. The existence of a German spy who had infiltrated the French army general’s office was discovered in 1894 and, among the many possible culprits, German-speaking and Jewish Captain Alfred Dreyfus was accused based on highly subjective evidence. Lieutenant Hubert-Joseph Henry, charged with examining the evidence against Dreyfus, forged a letter that would become the main point of evidence against the Captain. Though Henry’s forgery was revealed, Maurras celebrated his


patriotism for attempting to exclude Jews from the political and national body by any means necessary.\textsuperscript{39} Dreyfus’ indictment was used by the right to bolster the myth that Jews were behind “exploitive capitalism” which destroyed French traditionalism and culture.\textsuperscript{40} Anti-Semitism again resurfaced in France when Jewish refugees flooded the country due to German anti-Semitism, exacerbating existing insecurities about employment opportunities among the \textit{petit bourgeoisie} and creating a willing audience for conservative anti-Semitism during the interwar period.\textsuperscript{41}

The Dreyfus affair did more than just reignite anti-Semitism in France. Jeremy Popkin suggested that the public scandal established the precedent of influencing national politics through popular opinion rather than elections. This idea is useful to understanding Maurras’ preference throughout the early 20th century for inflammatory journalism rather than the daily grind of official political change. Popkin’s argument can also serve to weaken the assumption that the lack of overtly fascist politicians in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century means that there was a lack of fascistic thought in France as a whole. Maurras portrayed Jews as nation-less “cosmopolitans” who could not be trusted, regardless of any “façade” of national pride which they might present. Maurras’ illiberal and anti-Semitic interpretation of the exclusionary aspect of the will of the people still supported fascistic thought, even if there was no major National-Socialist party to show for it.

\textsuperscript{39} Charles Maurras, \textit{La Democratie Religieuse} (Paris : Nouvelle Librarie Nationale, 1921), 278.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 246.
France experienced a strong sense of continued crisis because of the war which extended even after the Versailles Treaty was signed. As a victor in the Great War, France faced the 1920s seemingly united. Bravery on the front lines had ensured that democracy triumphed over the Wilhelmine Reich. However, perhaps more than any other allied power, France experienced an extreme level of dissonance between the knowledge and the feeling that they had won the war. With upwards of 1.3 million non-civilian deaths and over 6 million non-civilian casualties, the image of a country full of strong, youthful, healthy men was shattered.\(^{42}\) Without able soldiers returning to the workforce, French industry suffered and was unable to quickly bounce back after the war.\(^{43}\) Twenty-five thousand miles of trenches had been dug along the eastern edge of the country, which does not include the square miles of land between and around the trenches that were impacted by aerial bombs and tanks.\(^{44}\) The massive amount of war debt resulted in drastic inflation and a general economic crisis.\(^{45}\) Physically, demographically, and economically, the landscape of France was completely altered. The Versailles Treaty signaled French supremacy alongside the US and Britain, but everywhere Frenchmen looked they saw a continued crisis.

France had become accustomed to strict hierarchical government during the crisis of war, which challenged the assumption that the return to a diverse and inefficient


\(^{43}\) Ibid., 221.

\(^{44}\) Paul Fussell, The Great War in Modern Memory (New York: Oxford University Press), 96.

parliamentary system was preferable. To Maurras, World War I illuminated the dangers of democracy that had previously been unrealized or thought to be unrealistic. The evolution of the totality of war during World War I blurred the line between periods of war and periods of peace. Without a clear distinction between the two, the feeling of crisis during war did not completely go away and the discomfort with the inefficiency of democracy, which was justifiable during a period of war, extended past the signature of the Versailles Treaty. Because of the long-term nature of intense warfare, French citizens had become adjusted to and more comfortable with a more authoritarian and less representative system. In France the union sacrée, an agreement between the left and right to avoid ideological conflict within the society during the war in the name of patriotism, further embodied this idea. While unhappiness with the government was present, it ultimately illustrated that these internal conflicts were not in France’s best interest and should therefore take a backseat to the real issues at hand: survival against foreign threats - against the other. National strength ultimately came from ideological unity within the political body, not merely from their military strength. Political efficiency in the form of strict authoritarian hierarchies had become the norm between 1914 and 1918, rather than the exception. As such, the existing democratic discourse struggled to explain the turn away from hierarchical policy when the crises seemed to persist - intellectuals such as Maurras began to question the explanation that an authoritarian version of democracy was acceptable during a war out of necessity, but unacceptable during a period of peace.

The monarchy of the Ancien Regime was corporatist and justified power through the theology of the divine right of kings. The revival of Aristotle’s Great Chain of Being
during the Renaissance provided the ideological foundation for this and proposed that the world was a hierarchy of spiritual existence, which ultimately resulted in the assumption that certain corporate identities were closer to God than others. For example, male heirs to the throne were “chosen” by God to be born into that position as a sign of their spiritual enlightenment, and therefore served as God’s representative of paternal care and love to his people. This theology turned any rebellion against a king as heretical, and also justified legal distinctions based on a corporatist structure. People related to their King and the state through their corporate identity, not as individual citizens. The concept of a dangerous foreign Other, of someone who was completely exterior to the nation and threatened its will and therefore its sovereignty, did not exist under the monarchy of the Ancien Regime. The King could pass laws applicable only to the Other, and there would be no need to grapple with the universal individualism inherent to modern democracy.

The French Revolution reversed this system of privileges by declaring each person to be a citizen of the nation, to whom laws applied equally. As discussed in the first chapter, this led to the ongoing debate of citizenship in the discourse of democracy. Maurras is known to have vehemently rejected Rousseau and Enlightenment philosophy, writing: “I hate Rousseau because of the harm that he has done to France and humankind, the disorder, the mess he brought in everything, and especially to the spirit, taste, ideas, mores, and the politics of my country.”\textsuperscript{46} He blamed Rousseau for France’s turn to universal equality and parliamentarianism that, in Maurras mind, has compromised the nation’s ability to protect her people from disaster. However, for Maurras in particular,

\textsuperscript{46}Charles Maurras, “Jean-Jacques “Faux prophète,”” \textit{L’Action Française}, April 16, 1942, \url{https://maurras.net/textes/50.html}
this complicates any kind of support for monarchy. The divine right of kings to rule was no longer be theologically sound unless the whole concept of citizenship is abandoned, the danger of the Other to the general will rejected, and the state returned to a purely corporatist system. As a result of the Enlightenment, political legitimacy through spiritual hierarchy no longer had any social or political currency among the people. If political hierarchy were to be defended, it had to be done outside of the historical reliance on spiritual hierarchy.

Though Maurras despises the principles that led to the French Revolution, he cannot help but use them to articulate his position since the political discourse of his day had come to only accept popular sovereignty as the legitimizing force in government. To rationalize his support for monarchy he paradoxically pulled from the aspects that appealed to him from the ideology of the Ancien Regime as well as from the Enlightenment that brought about its end. Maurras grew up in the Catholic Church, but he had been an agnostic since young adulthood. He did not believe in the theology behind the divine right of Kings, nor did he agree with the Enlightenment values of equality and negative liberty. However, in Maurras’ mind, political hierarchy, as evidence by the Catholic Church, could provide the efficiency, clarify, and strength needed to act on a shared vision across large territories. To frame this vision in a way that could appeal to the public, he used the language of democracy which they were familiar with.

The unspoken question of how to protect the nation from crisis prompted a call for change from both the left and the right, but the leftist answer proved to be inadequate through the tenure of Leon Blum. The sense of crisis and need for change inspired a political polarization within France, and both the radical left and the radical right
experienced a rise in interested and active members. However, because of the way
internal conflict had been thought of and minimized throughout the Great War, the rise in
activity among the left and the right did not signal a healthy return to democratic
heterogeneity. Instead it suggested that small conflicts had been set aside and that one
side or the other understood the “real” problems of the government. Their differences
were not minor political distinctions but dire, in that one or the other had “correctly”
identified the biggest threat to the French nation. The leftist answer at first had a greater
appeal after the French Section of the Workers’ International (SFIO) and the Communists
joined forces against the fascist right in 1934. The semi-unified left still found itself
confused about the extent to which it was willing to integrate with the systems and values
of liberal democracy, but nevertheless took advantage of their popular support to launch
Leon Blum into office. The industrial strikes of 1936 fueled, and were fueled by, the
left’s popularity, and the Communist movement gained a mass of supporters among the
industrial proletariat. The idolization of Blum as the savior of the left is similar to the
appeal of authoritarianism on the right. The hope that one individual who accurately
understood the needs of the people could cut through all the bureaucratic red tape to
effect change was not exclusive to conservatives. However, Blum’s inability to
adequately deal with the economic crisis which faced the country after the war resulted in
his resignation in 1937.

---

48 Ibid., 243.
49 Ibid., 244.
50 Ibid., 245.
The left’s commitment to equality and egalitarianism prevented them from bouncing back from their failure, unfortunately lending credence to the value of the rightist answer. The right can, and did, scapegoat the “other” – the outsider and instigator who was exterior to the nation and desired to disrupt the well-being of the French nation. If the right succeeded in establishing an authoritarian monarchy and the monarch failed to adequately deal with the economic crisis, the right could maintain their support for the monarch by blaming his failure on the Jews, or the Germans, or whoever the most appealing enemy was at the time. Equality and the sovereignty of the will of the people are equally democratic values, but the left prioritized equality among all people over the will of the French citizens, which limited their potential scapegoat targets. They were more likely to let the blame for political failure rest on themselves rather than push it off to someone else, and regrettably the ensuing lack of confidence in leftist politics after Blum’s resignation coincided with the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy, precisely when the left needed to be at their strongest.

Postwar debates over colonialism made a place for Maurras’ illiberal, anti-Other sentiment. During the interwar period in France the Empire was at its geographical height, even if it was at its administrative low. There was little coherence on internal policies towards the empire, and strong debate over the value of associationism versus assimilationism. Still reeling from the devastation of World War I, France did not have the energy or money to invest in the colonies to maintain the appearance of strength and authority. This was problematic for the French imperial project, since its weakness opened the door for anti-colonial sentiment to fester and grow in many of its colonial holdings. Places like Algeria, the future site of France’s most intense struggle for colonial
rule, were concerned about the paradox of democratic equality and citizenship which had dominated war propaganda with the inequality inherent to colonialism. Maurras and his followers advocated for “separate cultural spheres,” and famously supported the slogan “La France aux Français.”  

While the French Revolution had done away with legal racial division and declared every citizen French, the divide between white France and non-white France remained, particularly in the colonies. They rejected cultural mixing, which would weaken the integrity of French national character, but supported imperial pursuits because it was in the best of interest of the French “race.”

Maurras’ work was the leading intellectual force within a wider array of conservative work, including that of Edouard Drumont, Maurice Barres, Maurice Pujo, and Leon Daudet, suggesting that he was not an innovative outlier but a semi-mainstream “organic intellectual.” Barres rose to prominence during the Boulanger Affair and remained a strong supporter of Monarchy for the rest of his life. He was a close friend to Maurras and collaborated with him on two works, titled *La Cocarde* and *Le Drapeau*.

Dumont, perhaps the most anti-Semitic of the five, was a widely read journalist in the late 19th century. He was particularly popular during the Dreyfus Affair in France, and he founded the Antisemitic League of France which also capitalized on the publicity of the Dreyfus trial to portray all French Jews as the enemy. Both of these authors passed away before the peak of *L’Action Française* during the second world war, in 1923 and 1917 respectively. They served as mentors to Maurras and influenced his ideological

---

51 Martin Thomas, *The French Empire Between the Wars* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 139.
foundation. Daudet and Pujo, on the other hand, were Maurras contemporaries and close professional companions. Leon Daudet and Maurras worked together to popularize *L’Action Française*, and Daudet was popular enough to dabble in official politics.\footnote{Britannica Academic, s.v. "Leon Daudet," accessed October 1, 2018, https://academic-eb-com.unr.idm.oclc.org/levels/collegiate/article/Maurice-Barr%C3%A8s/13473.} Maurice Pujo was co-founder of *L’Action Française* and became Maurras’ main partner after Daudet’s death in 1942, but he was also the leader of the newspaper’s young people’s paramilitary organization, *Le camelots du roi*.\footnote{Michael Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic: Sorel, Barres, and Maurras* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959).} While Vichy was not a monarchist government, Maurras’ influence on it should not be underestimated. *L’Action Française* had likely been read by all conservatives at one point or another, and Maurras’ power was as an author who connected rightist leaning citizens together.\footnote{Richard Vinen, *Unfree French* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 74.} His royalist solutions may not have attracted as many adherents, but his indictment of parliamentarianism did. It is significant to note that Maurras was not alone, he had strong support among the general population, but he also had the support of other radically conservative intellectual elites.

**Maurras and French Fascism**

Our aim is to understand how Maurras, though a dedicated monarchist, used democratic language that was familiar to French citizens to make his extremist and horribly racist agenda feel familiar and acceptable. Like Gramsci’s “organic intellectuals,” populist authors such as Maurras have the unique position of being intellectual elites whose ideas resonate and reflect popular values and worldviews among the masses. His works should not, and here will not, be interpreted as leading popular
opinion through rational argument, but as intensifying popular thought through reflection. Maurras was not a great man with “great” ideas so much as he was an average man who used the democratic understanding of the will of the people and popular sovereignty to articulate his appalling solutions.

Maurras’ perceived impending military crisis required national strength to prevent, which meant violent and aggressive anti-Semitism and authoritarianism. The power and totality of World War I had a lasting impact on French citizens, including Maurras. For him, war was no longer the temporary interruption of peace, but peace the precarious interjection into war. He felt that major conflict was inevitable, and denying this fact was to deny the reality of human nature. Maurras wrote: “For those who see things and not words, the flea of war is born from the natural forces of life.”\[56\] and later writes: “To reason as if it was enough to destroy in us - or in some of us - the instincts, wills, and forces of war, is precisely to neglect that which dominates the rest of our instincts.”\[57\] Our warlike instincts dominate all of our behaviors – they are at the core of our being and can only be hidden from view for so long. The assumption of the eventuality of war is the foundation for much of right-wing politics in the interwar period and during World War II.\[58\] Considering the destructive nature of conflict, Maurras felt that military preparedness and national strength should be the primary concerns of the state. Through the appearance of national strength, provisional peace could be maintained for longer. The question, then, is what did Maurras understand as “national strength”?

\[57\] Ibid, 139.
Eugen Weber argued that the extreme right in France prioritized military preparedness over anti-Semitism and nationalism prior to, during, and after World War I, beginning after their temporary jump in popularity during the Boulanger and Dreyfus Affairs. However, I would argue that in the work of Charles Maurras anti-Semitism and nationalism were necessarily part of the move toward military preparedness.

The crux of this is the existence of unity and homogeneity. For Maurras, the strength of a nation required an ideologically and culturally homogenous body and, more importantly, it required that they acted on this. He writes: “It remains only for the conscious French to act so that his will is done and not another: not the will of the oligarchy, nor the will of the stranger.” Maurras understands his royalism as an attempt to embody the will of the homogenous French people. Each state has their own distinct national character, their own hegemonic identity, which must be allowed to guide political action. In his work on the idea of decentralization, he wrote:

The successes of the uprooted in Paris and in the provinces have solidified the New Right sentiment, which one can call identitarian, and thereby strengthened this new party we call national-federal. Everywhere the interests of the land or the interests of the race are felt. There are important reforms to be made that will make the natural forces free… Soil, blood, tradition must everywhere execute their moral influence and balance.

Maurras is concerned for the well-being of everyone who is racially French – but those who do not “feel the interests of the breed” are not included. National character is based on the traditions and culture of a people, which are carried by blood and not just by

practice. Consensus and homogeneity are not things a state can create through education; they are things that exist subconsciously among each member of their nation and which the state must bring to the surface. In this way, despite his rejection of Rousseau, Maurras’ pairs the language of democracy with identitarian and racist nationalism, using the concept of the will of the people to justify the need for homogeneity.

Rejecting the liberal value of diversity, Maurras argued that homogeneity illuminated those who are included in the national body and those who are exterior to it. For one person to perfectly represent the nation, consensus and a unified general will is not only ideal but necessary: “The French state will not be known as less than one.” He believed that when outsiders - those not included in the national body - are included in the political body, heterogeneity and internal strife result. Through the vigilant expulsion of outsiders from the national and political body, the state can function more efficiently and effectively:

A community remains as long as interests supporting friendship, or union, among its members exceed those forces of enmity or division. The police and courts are instituted to punish, reprimand, and if necessary, exclude those in a community who show to their comrades the face of a wolf, which should be reserved only for the common enemy.”

Maurras’ blurred and somewhat circular understanding considered that those who shared the same sense of common knowledge and vision for the people, were the people. Those that disagree are either outsiders to the otherwise unified whole, or they are disillusioned or misled about the reality of the world, rationalizing the violent exclusion of the Other by the state for its own protection through the language of democracy.

---

62 Ibid., 43.
Maurras is known primarily as a royalist but his agnosticism and rejection of oligarchy suggests that his support for monarchy cannot be understood in the same way as most of the royalist camp. Support for the monarchy had been divided into the Legitimists and the Orleanists. Legitimists called for monarchy on religious grounds and the divine right of a monarchy, whereas Orleanists supported a monarchy based on the appeal of a re-established aristocracy. However, Maurras’ royalism did not fit into either of these groups. He did have a strong foundation of support among Catholics, despite the denunciation of the *Action Française* by the Pope. But Maurras was not Catholic, and though he admired the efficacy of their religious hierarchy, he never personally held convictions about the divinity of a monarch. Similarly, he strongly resisted the return of an aristocracy because of their attachment to money over national loyalty. The monarch was more than a unifying figure which could bring together the people, but rather a result of internal homogeneity. Maurras wrote: “He personifies the necessary reaction,” followed shortly by “nothing will be done without the conciliation of the people...There is no historical position comparable to that of the prince, who can choose and direct so clearly all the dispositions, minds, characters, and heredities.” Maurras’ vision of a royalist state is the embodiment of the democratic value of a government for the people, while making the illiberal point that this did not necessarily mean a government of or by the people. Maurras essentialized democracy to match the perceived need for efficiency.

while maintaining a government that worked for the general will, not the will of a privileged few.

Similarly, Maurras accused parliamentary democracy for not being able to act on the homogeneity of the nation, which means it is unable to embody the national strength of the people the way a monarch can. He believed that national strength is inspired by the “national character” of its people, but is ultimately determined by its willingness to act on such knowledge: “I will not cease to repeat that the French have two natural duties: to rely on the patriotism of their country and to trust in its intelligence.”

Maurras’ political manifesto, *Mes idées politiques*, articulated his frustration with Parliamentarianism, since he saw it as a conglomerate of divided voices, directed by whoever had money to buy the system, and did not trust in its own intelligence and national strength. French republicanism was democracy by name and aristocracy in practice, and “everywhere where homogeneity does not exist, that is to say, in the majority of cases, the aristocratic republic is destined to a rapid failure.”

In *Enquete sur la monarchie*, he emphasized that the failure of French republicanism to put the safety and security of its citizens above their own internal discord has led to the ruin of the French people. For Maurras, a weak nation was one where a hundred voices were vying for control of the government. He felt that what was needed was a government with clear direction, relying on the national strength of the people. He argued that it is for the well-being of the nation that they should eliminate as much uncertainty as possible and return to a transparent monarchy, where only the motivations of one individual need be questioned. Maurras’ anti-

---


individualism makes his support for royalism seem contradictory when the monarch is viewed as acting only on individual will. However, his ideology is more cohesive when considering his view of a monarch as acting on the will of the people and the popular sovereign, not against it.

Maurras’ conviction that parliament is corrupted by those with money coincided with his conviction that money (and those who have it) are not interested in the well-being of the French people. Further, the control of the state by a-loyal aristocrats whose actions were dominated by personal financial gain inhibited a nation’s ability to actually know their position and allies on the world stage. When money, rather than the national will, directed the actions of the state, there could be no guarantee that the state was serving the needs and well-being of their nation. In his essay on the future of the intelligentsia he wrote: “One can assassinate the Tyrant who is abusive; but money is harder to target and eludes vengeance. Impersonal, superficial, and volatile, it rules indifferently as either a friend or an enemy, a compatriot or a foreigner.”68 The rule of money is not only potentially antagonistic to the purpose of any state but is also potentially the reverse of Maurras’ vision for national strength. It has no loyalties and engenders no national unity. The anti-Semitism that was stirred up by the Dreyfus Affair is at home within this conservative ideology, as the worn out and malevolently oversimplified association between Jews and finance capitalism was still disappointingly popular. Maurras argued that people who were Jewish were the ultimate Other threatening their homogeneity because of the stereotypical association of Jews with

money and his belief in the ridiculous conspiracy theory of international Jewish capitalism. The diagnosis of money as the means of manipulation posits those who have and control money as prime suspects of otherness. If Maurras felt that there could be certainty about the loyalties of Jewish financiers, then his perception of their influence in the financial sector would not have been so concerning to him. However, his racist and unfounded belief that people who were Jewish benefited from global capitalism while everyone else suffered caused him to doubt their “true” national identity and loyalty. This was expanded on by other, even more anti-Semitic authors, such as Louis-Ferdinand Celine or Urbain Goheir, further demonstrating the expansion of long held anti-Semitic beliefs because of the way it fit with the language of the other and the perceived sense of crisis.

The concept of liberty clearly illustrated Maurras’ use of the language of democracy to explain his illiberal position. The two concepts of negative and positive definitions of liberty are often credited to Isaiah Berlin’s essay, “Two Concepts of Liberty” in 1958. However, Maurras described his dissatisfaction with liberty defined as freedom from limitations over 50 years prior, in 1904. He wrote: “[The liberal] adversary spoke well of liberty, but not like them, not in the sense which they define the word. They imaged a negative liberty, the absence of the yoke. And he was thinking of a completely different freedom, rule, and balance of their life.”⁶⁹ Fascistic thought is often viewed as against liberty or as an oppressor of freedom. For Maurras, though, it is important to understand that by defining liberty thought a positive conception was the problem, not

---

⁶⁹ Charles Maurras, “La vie démocratique,” *La Gazette de France* Jan 14, 1904 [https://maurras.net/textes/100-1.html#la-vie-democratique](https://maurras.net/textes/100-1.html#la-vie-democratique)
liberty itself. Limiting freedom of speech, for example, was ultimately preserving “true” liberty. This evidences that though Maurras’ political ideology is deeply illiberal, he justified his work through the language of democracy, in this instance by considering liberty with an illiberal definition.

The understanding of liberty as that which ensures a good life for citizens and the ability act on one’s free will after being freed from institutional barriers is part of why both the left and the right in France appealed to the same kind of demographic. Both sides envisioned a government that reflected the will of the people and would work to ensure they were not limited by their circumstances in the pursuit of their well-being and happiness. However, the leftist understanding of who were included in the people was more grounded in class structures and claimed to fight for the working class instead of those with power. Maurras’ rightist answer was to blame outsiders rather than those in power, which meant his rhetoric could appeal to the working class as he could to people of any class, so long as they were “French.” Maurras wrote: “We are royalists and as a result trade unionists: the king is the born-president of all the professional or local republics which comprise the nation.”

His equivalence between a king and president suggests that his vision for a monarchy in France is in essence just a desire for a strong leader who can act upon the collective will of the people. He is using the language of democracy, in this case, that of presidents and trade unions, to express his solution to the struggles in France.

https://maurras.net/textes/140.html
Maurras’ fascism was particular to France and French national will, which meant he did not support German Nazi-ism or the occupation, even if he supported Vichy. While many of Maurras ideas resemble those of German national socialism – the vision of a single leader who could embody the will of the nation, for example – and while Maurras did support the occupation regime, he did not support German Nazi-ism. He advocated for any system that had France’s best interests in mind, and he (rightly) feared that Germany was only looking out for their best interests. Like Germany, Maurras operated from a sense of limited world resources. He felt that there was not enough for every nation to thrive, and so every state had to be strong enough to defend what they had and take what they needed.\textsuperscript{71} His fear of limited resources fueled his rejection of the liberal value of international equality and prioritization of the well-being of the French people alone.

Maurras’ support for royalism was engaged with the language of democracy through his illiberal conceptions of the will of the people, the exclusionary nature of citizenship, and the need for government to pursue positive liberties for the people. The sense of impending crisis and inevitability of war led to Maurras’ obsession with fortifying the nation against the intrusive Other. He believed that internal tensions and corruption were exterior to the nation and needed to be eliminated for the well-being and strength of the nation. Nationalism, military preparedness, and the exposition of the corrupt and belligerent Other were one in the same. For him, if measures were taken to pursue national homogeneity, then the state could respond through improved efficiency

as internal tensions diminished within the national body. His support for authoritarianism was not born out of an outright rejection of democratic discourse, but a rejection of the inefficiency of parliamentarianism while maintaining support for a government that is loyal and responsive to the general will. Maurras’ ideology builds on the idea of the sovereignty of the people, but did not end in a constitutional monarchy, where the will of the head of the state is viewed as wholly separate from the will of the people. It instead ends in a monarchy where the head of the state is able to perfectly exemplify and protect the will of the homogenous nation. He anti-democratic ideology did not completely disregard or reject democratic discourse but responded to the complexities of democratic discourse with illiberal solutions.

Conclusion

Maurras fear and frustration with parliamentary inefficiency and resultant choice to emphasize the illiberal interpretations of the nation and the will of the people illustrates the way fascistic thought stems from democratic discourse. Concerns about inefficiency are present and expected during war, which is why almost all modern democracies have a clause for acceptable authoritarianism during an exception from the norm, during a period of crisis. Because of this, the move toward a more authoritarian system rather than a more democratic system seemed to be the safer, more familiar approach. Where parliament divided the general will through representation and prevented it from being acted upon, Maurras’ solution was to un-divide the will through a single individual who could act quickly. Through an analysis of the language he used to support his claims it becomes evident that he did not look at former French monarchies through rose-colored glasses, nor did he advocate for such a system based on the way it would support the elite
and reestablish the French aristocracy. His politics were not grounded in an Aquinian relationship between heaven and earth, and the possibility that a monarchy is the truest reflection of God’s relationship to his people. Instead, Maurras’ royalism justified authoritarianism based on the need for efficiency and the ability of one individual to represent the will of an entire nation when the nation had been cultivated to a state of complete homogeneity. For Maurras, the purpose of the government was to protect and develop national strength through military preparedness and nationalism, which included actively identifying the “us” and the “other” to protect the homogeneity of the French will. He blended the language of democracy with his fascist solution of a decisive and strong leader which he believed France needed to protect them from some inevitable impending crisis. While other historians have defined fascism based on the existence of paramilitary organizations or official political power, those are secondary effects of the core of Maurras’ fascistic thought, which is the understanding that national homogeneity must be actively and aggressively protected at any cost for the benefit of the nation’s strength and well-being. In this way, Maurras’ ideas should be valued as fascistic in nature, and the support and influence he experienced should not be dismissed solely because it occurred in a historically “democratic” state.
Chapter Three

Perhaps even more so than Maurras, Oswald Mosley is re-appearing within popular media, evidencing that the language of democracy alone is an insufficient barricade against fascistic thought. When one considers the most influential fascist writings, one first thinks of works by Adolf Hitler or Benito Mussolini, or even Charles Darwin if read incorrectly. And yet, as mentioned in the introduction, the manifesto of the Christchurch terrorist and self-proclaimed fascist named Oswald Mosley as “the person from history closest to my own beliefs.”

Oswald Mosley - whose fascist movement in Britain was relatively insignificant compared to the movements in Germany, Italy, and France - is the one intellectual he references. Despite his limited following in the early 20th century, Mosley has paradoxically gained notoriety within the American Alt-Right today. For example, Elliott Kline, the former right-hand man to the leader of the National Policy Institute, chose the name “Eli Mosley” as his alt-right alias because of Oswald Mosley’s action oriented agenda.

8chan, the true dredges of the internet and the ideological breeding ground for right-wing thought, hosts a “fascist” page, which lists three of Mosley’s books – more than any other author - in their shortened reading list for more information on fascism. The fact that right-wing extremists are not only familiar with Mosley but are turning to him as their beacon to

---

inform their political agenda suggests that Mosley’s articulation of the problems that he saw with the early 20th century resonate strongly with today’s extremist right-wing organizations.

Mosley’s articulation of anti-Alienism and his presentation of fascism as a different form of democracy specifically appeals to rightists today. Mosley advocated for the creation of a political system that reflected the will of the people without the supposed corruption, hypocrisy, and inaction of parliamentarism. He argued that the general will of the English, for which he was concerned, was best executed by a system of corporatism where elected officials from each sector serve as true magistrates in the view of Rousseau, advising as experts in their field but never advocating for anything other than the general will. To know the general will, Mosley also placed emphasis on anti-Alienism and intentional political exclusion for the proper cultivation of the nation. His emphasis on action and Anti-Alienism are the aspects of his ideology that the Alt-right and other extremists identify with the most. They view immigration as the primary threat against their perceived people (people who are white) and believe that the existing parliamentary system is unequipped to resolve that problem. As an anonymous 8chan member writes: “Fascism supports democracy, but a different method of democracy. i.e. mosley’s [sic] plans” Mosley, and the modern right-wing radicals to whom he appeals, believed that democratic discourse supported the primacy of the general will and the

---


cultivation of the nation along ethnic and cultural lines, rather than just legal ones.

Mosley’s lack of political success during his time should not exclude him from serious conversations about the definition and understanding of fascism, since his ideology offers a unique perspective on the discourse of democracy and fascism in the early 20th century.

Mosley’s ideas and their appeal can be better understood as starting from democratic discourse. Mosley is the most widely known British fascist, though the British Union of Fascists (BUF) lagged behind the Action Française in membership and following, even at their peak. However, studying Mosley’s ideology and his understanding of fascism provided useful insight into how individuals navigate their frustration with parliamentary democracy, especially right-wing groups in Britain and abroad. Mosley’s close connections with and approval by Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler confirm that while Mosley’s brand of fascism “failed,” it had the same foundations as “successful” fascism. His re-emergence today demonstrates that the turn toward aggressively violent anti-immigrant, authoritarian, extremist thought does not exist because individuals are born predisposed to fascistic thought, but is instead made possible because the presentation of those solutions is built from the discourse of democracy and is therefore seen as more agreeable.

**Historiography of Mosley**

Like the historiography of French fascism, the perception that British fascism failed has resulted in fewer serious studies of Oswald Mosley’s work. Historians are subjects of their own history, and the obsession with fascism stems from the fear that it could happen again and the attempt to prevent its success. Consequently, studies often center on those instances of fascism which had the greatest social and political impact. It
is assumed that studying the fascistic thought that affected the most change is more useful in terms of identifying the “red flags” of fascist practice. Mosley’s fascism, although in a state with a long history of democratic values, is less valuable, and therefore less studied, because there are fewer instances of popular and obvious fascist action. Other trends in the historiography are to study the BUF within a comparative framework to communists, anti-fascists, or fascists, instead of considering it on its own merit. Comparative analyses limit themselves by unduly focusing on the aspects of Mosley’s fascist that are most similar or most different from their other subject matter, rather than explore the entirety of his ideology. Generally, the historiography of Mosley has reduced his fascism by portraying it as incompatible with British character or by emphasizing the nature and cause of it “failure.”

The portrayal of Mosley’s fascistic thought as incompatible with British character is grossly excusatory and prevents us from acknowledging the danger that fascistic thought could appeal to anyone, especially when democratic discourse is used to explain and justify a highly illiberal version of democracy. Some scholars attribute the failure of the BUF to the incompatibility of fascism with British character or tradition. Matthew Worley is the most recent major scholar on Oswald Mosley and argued that while British fascism was home grown rather than imported, it was still greatly influenced by German and Italian models. He understood Mosley’s failure as an inability to connect with the

---

77 It is worth noting that Robert Browning’s *Ordinary Men* used a case study of the actions of Nazi prisoners to argue that anyone is capable of committing violent and fascistic acts. This analysis should not be limited to anyone in Germany, which makes the premise of describing British character as unsuited to fascistic action grossly excusatory.

concerns of the general public, and as a result of Mosley’s personal lack of charisma and vision. Similarly, Richard Thurlow argued that the BUF’s “raison d’etre” was to close down all other political parties if it ever got the chance,” and emphasized their anti-establishmentarianism. Thurlow argued that the influence by foreigners weakened the British Fascist movement, but failed to identify the irony of fascism, often characterized as intensely nationalistic, as being seen by fascists themselves as an international movement. Mosley’s nationalism was not counteracted by his relationship to Hitler and Mussolini. It was validated in Mosley’s eyes as a mass movement against the corruption and decadence of the era. W.F. Mandle’s Anti-Semitism and the British Union of Fascists, published the same year as Mosley’s autobiography, restricted the BUF to its anti-Semitism and argued that though racism in Britain certainly existed at the time, it was not as virulent as it was in Europe because of Britain’s relative political stability. Appealing to racist tendencies among Englishmen was enough to gain some political ground, but “racism pure and simple is incapable of winning an electoral victory.”

Likewise, Robert Benewick’s analysis, titled The Fascist Movement in Britain, continued the historiographical trend of definition fascism by its violence and revolutionary-ism, which he believed were irrelevant and incompatible with British character. This historiographical trend of reductionism does not present a complete ideological explanation of Mosley. While the violent nature of fascism as it existed in Europe may not have appealed to “British character,” an authoritarian movement which called for the

81 Ibid., 71.
cultivation and protection of the English against the “other” did appeal to many Englishmen, and it is the reasons for that which this paper aims to study.

Historians have generally focused on the aspects of Mosley that are most objectionable to consider explanations for his downfall, rather than explore to reasons for his appeal. “Unsuccessful” fascism is seen to be worth studying to understand why it failed more so than to grasp the nuances of the discourse of fascism. British fascism, even more so that French fascism, is taken less seriously and often disregarded as true fascism altogether. David Stephen Lewis’ 1987 work titled *Illusions of Grandeur*, illustrated this by focusing specifically on why British fascism did not “succeed.” Though he did not fall into the trap of viewing it as incompatible with British character or as a negligible foreign import, he attributed its failure to internal conflicts and Mosley’s own personal leadership failings, the timing and political situation in Britain, and to the success of anti-fascist movements.Likewise, Dave Renton’s *Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and Britain in the 1940s* focused on British fascism’s anti-Semitism and the state’s tolerance for fascist organizations. He argued that despite the state’s inaction, grassroot anti-fascist organizations were what led to the demise of fascism in the 1940s. Gary Love, following Paxton’s methodology, attributed Mosley’s failure to the imbalance of ideological purity and political practicality. This focus on why British fascism “failed,” however, directs the focus to only the aspects of the ideology that are the harbingers for

---

84 Dave Renton, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and Britain in the 1940s* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, inc., 2000), 144.
failure – only those that people seem to reject the most. The aspects of Mosley’s fascism that are thought to have caused it to fail become more prominent, and the aspects that brought it success are viewed as secondary. The perception of Mosley is skewed to assume his ideology will fall flat, since the understanding of his work emphasized the unappealing facets of its historical failure. A full and complete understanding of his work is important regardless of whether the fascistic thought in question has succeeded or failed during his time, especially in light of his re-appearance today.

The comparative framework between Mosley and non-fascists limits the study of Mosley’s work as it is. Other works consider Mosley within a theatre of other ideology which tends to confine the study of Mosley’s ideology to the aspects which are in some way relevant to this comparative framework. Stanley Payne’s in his book *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* dedicated not even three full pages to the subject of British fascism and dismissed the impact and influence of Mosley and the BUF because there was no real “need” for revolutionary action. Payne’s work is one of many in the historiography of the BUF that do not give the same weight to British fascism as historians give to German or Italian fascism. Richard Griffith’s analysis considered Mosley in the context of the English communist movement at the same time, which led him to fail to consider Mosley’s work as he intended it. For example, Griffith argued that Mosley did not have Britain’s best interest in mind and relied on Mosley’s comment that he would “call on his followers to fight ‘if the life of Britain was threatened’”


statement with the assumption that Germany was threatening the life of Britain. Mosley, on the other hand, did not have that same assumption. The meaning of this quote all depends on who “Britain” is defined as, and what is seen to threaten it. For Mosley, occupation by Germany as a pan-Europeanist fascist revolution to establish a collaborationist government like that in France would not be viewed as a threat to the nation. However, continuing the globalism that supposedly allowed foreign monied interests to determine the wealth, happiness, and security of the British people would be. This misrepresentation of Mosley’s argument prevents Griffith’s readers from grasping the alarming familiarity of Mosley’s work from within democratic discourse.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the failure of Mosley’s politics makes it easier to consider his works as less objectionable. Robert Skidelsky’s biography of Mosley was finished in 1975, still five years before Mosley would pass away. The biography, though rich in details of Mosley’s justification of his actions, generally came across as a defense for the politician’s choices. Skidelsky is intrigued by the way Mosley built upon Keynesian economics and traced the thread of liberalism through the early 20th century, and as such is less concerned with the moral implications of Mosley’s racism and extremism. Skidelsky essentially suggested that a-moral economics could remain a-moral, regardless of the ideologies they were encompassed within, and missed the opportunity to consider the way a-moral economics could be and were used as part of ideologies which did have moral implications.\(^\text{88}\) Skidelsky portrayed Mosley’s fascism as

---

something that was defensible – not quite as bad as continental fascism. This, in its own way, was also a reductionist argument.

The vision of Empire in Britain as constructed is paramount to understanding the particularities of Mosley’s thought. Upon first introduction, his works do not seem nearly as aggressively nationalistic as the work of other fascist intellectuals in Germany, Italy, or France. He focused more on the need for an authoritarian leader to pursue economic strength than to pursue military strength and envisions the British Empire as paternalistic civilizers. The difference in Mosley’s nationalism did not mean, however, that he was not a nationalist. To fully grasp the nuances of his patriotism, it is important to understand the historiography of race and Empire in Britain. The history of Britain was for many years synonymous with the history of England. Among intellectuals and historians, there was little credit given to considering the Empire outside of the English mainland, nor to challenging the view of English culture as that of white men. Post-Colonial studies developed out of the work of authors like Franz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak, and coincided with the development of Cultural studies and the New Left in Britain. Early post-colonial scholarship on Britain began as cultural Marxist studies and was strongly influenced by Stuart Hall through his leadership of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. The idea that the experience of colonizers and the colonized were constructed rather than static opens the door to studying how identities are created, and the interplay of multiple constructed identities within a culture. However, Hall’s analyses were still Marxist in that he viewed class, race, politics, and culture as structurally

90 Ibid., 65.
different entities which were not necessarily linked in a society.\textsuperscript{91} Paul Gilroy, a student of the Centre, expanded on Hall’s work, and notably wrote \textit{There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation} (1987). Gilroy rejected Hall’s commitment to Marxist analysis, and suggested that race could not, and should not, be understood as secondary to class as a mode of analysis.\textsuperscript{92} He also argued for non-Eurocentric approaches to history and began the shift toward studying the colonial experience through the eyes of the colonized rather than the colonizers.

The concept of British empire and Britishness is constructed through otherization via gender and race, which suggests that Mosley’s otherization is not antithetical to democratic discourse in Britain. Linda Colley’s \textit{Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837} (1992) remains a classic work on the subject of British identity because of the way she explored the aspects of British experience that bound people together (namely Protestantism, self-interest, and war). Britishness was defined by perpetual otherization through those three vehicles. Catherine Hall popularized the analysis of gender alongside race and the colonized experience in the construction of “Britishness” in her works, such as \textit{Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender, and the British Reform Act of 1867} (2000). Her integration of gender, race, and national identity was followed by other great works such as Phillipa Levine’s \textit{Prostitution, Race & Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire} (2005). For them, gender and race were often constructed by the same means of otherization against white males. Women, children, and people of color were portrayed in British culture as weaker, submissive, and less intelligent. They

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 166.
\item \textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 166.
\end{itemize}
were equally in need of a respectable male force to lead, i.e. dominate, them for their own benefit. In return, when white British men associated with women or people of color, especially women of color, as equals they blurred the lines between a “good” white British man and anyone else. He was demeaned and challenged as a-moral. Mosley’s work did not reflect the actual multiculturalism of Britishness throughout the Empire, and while he addressed the colonies in his writing his view of what it means to be British is closely connected with what it means to be a white, male Englishman.

Like gender and race, the construction of Britishness through otherization also builds on a tradition of anti-Semitism, which Mosley’s ideology builds on. The scholarship of English Jews has focused on the pressure of assimilation and the question of whether Jews felt they could or could not assimilate into English culture. Because of Britain’s religious tolerance, the nature of anti-Semitism in England took a backseat to the study of their economic and social status. However, there is overlap in the methodology of post-colonial studies and the methodology of studies of English Jews: both cases must consider the way their subject matter was used to strengthen British identity by comparison to the other. While for many years the multiculturalism of the British Empire remained offshore and out of sight, the existence of the other on the motherland in the form of English Jews was present for decades and integral to the formation of British identity. In many ways, Mosley’s view of English Jews is an indication of his general anti-Alienism. However, like Maurras, since Mosley’s critique of 20th century politics rested on corruption by monied powers, his conspiratorial and deeply racist association between the banking and finance industry and the English-
Jewish community resulted in his disturbing accusation of Jews as the ultimate target of otherization.

Despite Mosley’s lack of official political power, his fascist ideology is worth studying in its own right because of the way he used democratic discourse to justify his ideas, and because of how this language resonated with right wing movements today. What is significant about Oswald Mosley and the BUF, and what made them worth studying, is the fact that in one of the perceived strongholds of democracy there existed a fascist movement. It is not insignificant that the first country to declare war on Germany in 1939 would also house ideological support for the Nazi Party. One could dismiss this fact and say that, of course, every country surely had its own fascist movement at some point. But the universal existence of fascist thinkers, even in the most “democratic” of countries, is exactly the point. The BUF did not gain widespread support, but their rhetoric had the potential to appeal to the British population at large and does appeal to the authoritarian right today because of the way it built upon the accepted democratic discourse. The international similarity between different fascist movements makes it equally important to study all instances of fascism, not just those that “succeeded” to determine the most encompassing understanding of what fascism meant to the early 20th century. The historiography on Oswald Mosley presents a clear opportunity for looking at the ideological foundations and logic of his work without giving weight to why his ideas did or did not “fail,” while also not losing sight of the danger that these ideas have.

Foundations of British Fascism

The narrative of the danger of a corrupt and inefficient parliament was less applicable in England which meant Mosley’s fascism looked different, but did not mean
it was irrelevant. Britain’s introduction to democracy came about very differently than in France, which began with a violent shift from the absolutist monarchy to the parliamentary democracy during the French Revolution. Britain experienced a gradual transition from absolute monarchy to parliamentary democracy and had operated under a constitutional monarchy since 1688. They felt a sufficient amount of representation with the government, along with the sense of stability and strength that comes from a singular monarch. The British government was created on behalf of the monarch and supposedly acted on the will of the people in place of the monarch. This system allowed for the concept of strong authoritarian leadership through the monarch but diluted their power through parliamentarism. However, Mosley still believed that parliament was riddled with corruption and inefficiency. Though originally a member of the Conservative party, he moved to identify as an independent, and then as a member of the Labour Party before he dramatically denounced the existing parties altogether to found the New Party in 1930. For Mosley, it was not that one party or another was lacking the right policy to make parliamentary democracy work, it was that parliamentary democracy in general was flawed. The persistence of the British monarchy prevented the sense of chaos that pervaded German and French parliamentarism, but it still embodied the inefficiency which fascistic thought sought to avoid.

The crisis that Mosley felt the British needed to be protected against was economic, rather than militaristic, in nature, but he still felt change was needed to avoid an impending emergency. The fallout from World War I in Britain was very different from the fallout in France. Britain had the title and the feeling of being the victors: their towns were not destroyed, they suffered much fewer casualties, and their debt was not
crippling in the same way as France’s. British citizens emerged from the war with the sense of camaraderie and national community, and a belief that when they pulled together, they could conquer any foe. The initial post-war boom as soldiers returned from war suggested that Britain would come out of the war relatively well. However, the economic crisis and Great Depression that followed challenged the perception that the government was able to lead the country to success through democracy and debate. During the Great War, Britain had taken themselves off of the gold standard to maintain economic stability through the upheaval of war. The gold standard had seemed to work well for British economics prior to the war and there was a general consensus that the state should return to it as soon as possible. Due to inflation, though, it was not in Britain’s best interest to return to the gold standard until the exchange rate between the US and Britain was closer to its pre-war standard. Either the deflation of the pound – potentially increasing unemployment rates - or inflation of foreign currency needed to occur. The short-lived economic boom after the war and expected continuation of price increases in the US led Winston Churchill as chancellor of the exchequer to, perhaps preemptively, return to the gold standard in 1925. This ended up compromising trade and increasing unemployment by the late 1920s significantly more compared to other states in the post war period. Sean Glynn and John Oxborrow make the argument that Britain's economic issues were made worse by London’s influence on national economic policy, and on the rejection of Keynesian economics in favor of orthodox policy, which accepted high rates of unemployment as a necessary cost of the stability of returning to the gold standard. Even after the rejection of the gold standard in 1931, orthodox economic policy
that resisted economic planning remained the norm. Mosley’s foundation in Keynesianism early on in his political career enabled him to anticipate the economic danger which presented the country and led him to doubt the ability of a parliament to make the changes he believed were necessary.

To understand Mosley’s ideological foundations, it is useful to consider the Enlightenment philosophies that provided the rationale for modern democracy. The question of the best way to govern has been the subject of political philosophy since Aristotle, who argued that the purpose of one’s life was to practice being moral. To him, the government was supposed to rule for the common good, which meant allowing citizens to pursue the highest level of morality possible. For Hobbes, man is, at our core, self-interested. In the state of nature, our self-interest creates a chaotic world dominated by violence and war. Therefore, it is ultimately in our self-interest to create a social contract, which ensured a state of peace for us to pursue our own well-being. Hobbes’ social contract leads to the rule of a sovereign monarch to enforce peace between men, and even if the monarch uses force it is still preferable to the state of nature. Locke suggested that the social contract was necessary to settle disputes between families and create a civil society based on law. His vision of government, too, was to ensure the well-being of those involved and allowed for the possibility of revolt against the system when the government no longer upheld the people’s interests.

Mosley articulated a conception of popular sovereignty based on what he called the “will of the people,” a concept that resonated strongly with Rousseau’s “general

---

will,” even though he never directly engaged with the philosopher in his writings. Most importantly, like Locke, Rousseau articulated the idea of popular sovereignty – that ultimately the people are the source of power for the government, and that the government’s responsibility is to the sovereign. Rousseau built upon Locke’s philosophy by adding the concept of the “general will.” Rousseau argued that the will of the people is not created by majority consensus so much as it is something that already exists and must be discovered and acted upon. Those who disagree with the suggested communal will are either outside of the community or disillusioned about what the general will actually is. When it did not act in accordance to the will of the sovereign, it de-legitimized itself and needed to be replaced. Though Mosley did not reference the “general will” specifically, Rousseau’s thought had become ingrained in the nature of political conversation and could not be escaped. Whether he intended so or not, democratic discourse would have recognized the articulation of his ideas through the “will of the people.” In Britain, after the American Revolution, questions about representation and the best way to govern had become intrinsically linked to Enlightenment philosophy, dominated by Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. As a result, Mosley’s rhetoric incorporated the language of democracy to explain his ideas, which made it easier for British citizens to relate to.

Mosley’s ideas built upon the class and national identities of most British citizens. Class identity was strong among the English working class but paired with an equally strong sense of national identity that prepared them as an audience for Mosley’s ideas. During the interwar period there was no sense that the Labour Party or the Conservative Party alone could truly understand or represent the working class struggle, and thus, as articulated by Andrew August, the working class was not strongly tied to either party:
“Class identity did not lead to consistent support of a particular political movement or party, but this should not blind us to the continued salience of class in the lives of working men and women in Britain on the eve of the Second World War.”

Elitist politicians were not experiencing the same struggle for work or food that the working class knew well, which meant that classism was less likely to strengthen political identity one way or the other. The national economic policy and return to the gold standard was in the best interest of elites and financiers of London, decided upon by politicians of both parties, but the resulting unemployment crisis disproportionately affected the working class. As such, political loyalty was secondary to local and national identities after a citizen’s class identity.

Communism and fascism in Britain both appealed to the same working-class demographic, but the statistics on fascist support suggest that the rightists answer initially resonated more with those looking for change. British communism was the biggest threat to British fascism despite their ideological similarities on the correct interpretation of liberty. More so than the fascist policies in other countries, Mosley’s system organized along corporate lines shared the value of Trade Unions and workers’ rights. Evan Smith cited Phil Piratin’s *Our Flag Stays Red* when he wrote: “Mosley’s BUF ‘stuck a chord’ with the working class in East Lindon, because the people ‘were living miserable squalid lives,’ either unemployed or in low-paid jobs and living in slums”

In 1934, the BUF boasted a membership of 40,000. While not much, it was still greater than the 5,800

---

95 Ibid., 232.
members of the communist party in 1934, or the 11,500 in 1936.98 Yet through grassroots anti-racist tactics, they were able to organize a protest of 100,000 against the fascists in what is now known as the “Battle of Cable Car Street,” which resulted in the Public Order Act.99 This suggests that the pro-left movement was not synonymous with the anti-right and that, while many were against Mosley’s fascism, they weren’t necessarily satisfied by the leftist answer either. Richard Thurlow argued that the state’s policing, or lack thereof, of fascist events, demonstrated that it was the organizational actions by communists, not the state, that ultimately helped to limit the influence and support for fascism before the Public Order Act and outbreak of World War II.100 This greatly limited Mosley’s ability to plan rallies to gain support, but did not mean that his thought would not have appealed to British citizens if he had the audience.

Mosley’s agenda presented solutions to his perception of the impending financial and unemployment crisis, but he responded to the post-war breakdown of the British Empire. The Empire grew significantly after the Versailles Treaty. They gained control of much of the Middle East, as well as some territory in Africa. Britain was still fascinated by the exoticism of the Empire, and explorers like T. E. Lawrence or Gertrude Bell were popular figures of the era. Lawrence’s Seven Pillars of Wisdom was published in 1926, with an abridged version published a few years later. It was immensely popular and served to reaffirm the “otherness” of the people who populated Britain’s colonial holdings. English people viewed their pursuit of Empire as a benevolent colonizing

mission, bringing civilization and class to otherwise savage and backwards peoples. However, the growth of the British Empire was, in many ways, superficial. The additions in the Middle East were protectorates rather than under direct control of the Empire, they lost control of most of Ireland, and the nationalist independence movement in India led to serious tensions about Britain’s commitment to self-determination discussed in the Versailles Treaty. It is against this backdrop that Mosley presents his fascist vision of the British Empire.¹

As Maurras was embedded in an intellectual community, so too was Mosley far from being intellectually isolated. He often referenced the works of Thomas Carlyle and John Maynard Keynes throughout his works as intellectual predecessors. Alexander Raven Thomson was a Scottish philosopher and intellectual who is considered to be the primary ideologue behind the BUF’s radical newspaper, and is cited by Mosley through his works. Most significant is Mosley’s connections to Mussolini and Hitler. In his autobiography he claims they did not share similar ideologies, but comparing the agendas of the Mussolini’s Fascist party, Hitler’s National Socialist party, and the BUF would suggest that this claim is an attempt to distance himself from the horrors of World War II rather than a true statement. In fact, Hitler attended Mosley’s wedding to Diana Mitford, and Diana was often invited over to Hitler’s flat in Munich for lunch when she was in town.¹⁰¹ Mosley had met with Mussolini a number of times, until the Italian leader took offence of his secret marriage to Diana in Germany and severed their relationship. Had Mussolini survived the war they likely would have resumed their relationship, since

Mussolini apparently claimed that cutting Mosley off was one of his mistakes in life. Mosley’s professional and personal relationships with these two fascist leaders suggest that even though Mosley’s fascist party in Britain did not gain the same kind of notoriety, it was at least in the same vein as those that did.

**Mosley and British Fascism**

Mosley was much clearer about his conviction that the authoritarianism he proposed was a beneficial extension of democratic discourse, using the language of democracy to indict the system and propose a fascist solution instead. For him, the purpose of any good government was to serve and protect the well-being of the citizens of their nation. However, the way “citizens,” and “well-being” are defined influences the nature and policy of his proposed government. The liberal definition of well-being is to have absolute liberty of speech or religion, but the illiberal conception is to prioritize positive liberty, such as freedom from classism. Citizenship is a legal distinction, but one which is highly subjective; it could be based on wealth, race, religion, gender, age, or any number of other highly contentious factors. Nationhood is often, though not necessarily, synonymous with statehood, and this too plays a part in a Mosley’s vision of government. All of these factors affect the determination of how “best” to serve and protect the well-being of the citizens of the nation, and by default also determined the treatment of non-citizens. Mosley’s use of these concepts of citizenship and liberty, even though he redefined them, made it easier for individuals who grew up in a democratically-minded world to understand and relate to his radical and brutal policies.

---

His vision of a National Council, a board of directors, per se, for the government would be concerned with the well-being of the entire national body instead of an elector’s select constituents. Mosley’s corporatism saw representatives as those who would advise on their sphere of knowledge and expertise to benefit the whole national body, without dividing the actual will of the people. In theory, a parliament should be able to act in this manner. However, his recent experience after the war had shown Mosley that the number of elected officials and the possibility of foreign interests buying their allegiance in parliament fostered chaos, indecision, and inefficiency. Fascism, as understood by fascists themselves in the 1930s, was about the consolidation of power into fewer representatives who were charged with “representing” the whole general will rather than a small part of it.\textsuperscript{103} Inefficiency and chaos were not just inconvenient; they were dangerous—they prevented Britain from being able to respond quickly to their circumstances. During the war, the ability to act quickly, whether it was taking cover during a bomb raid or taking advantage of Germany’s weakness after targeting Russia, was an absolute necessity. Mosley’s perceived need to act quickly and efficiently after the war as well indicated his belief that the crisis Britain faced from the rest of the world never subsided.

Mosley’s political theory grappled with the desire to create a system that accurately reflected both British character and how the world “really” worked. In Mosley’s view, corporatism did just that, by designing a distinctly British system where national pride and corporate identities are the primary factors in the pursuit of the will of

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 24-25.
the people. Mosley was disillusioned with elite politics and concluded that those who understood how the world “really” worked (i.e. the working class) should be more closely integrated in the policies of government. He proposed that a representative, essentially a corporate magistrate, should be elected from each area of labor to speak as a knowledgeable expert on the functions, experiences, and needs to those in their field.\footnote{Ibid., 28.}

Coal miners, dock workers, weavers, and bankers, for example, would each have someone elected from their ranks to inform decisions regarding their field that could not made knowledgeably or efficiently by an outsider. Decisions regarding coal mining would be heavily influenced by the representative for coal mining, and so on. In this system, even mothers would have their own representative so as not to be left out or represented by their husbands on maternal matters, or on matters of national morality for which they were seen as responsible. However, he also wrote in \textit{Fascism for the Millions}: “All sectional interests must be subordinated to the national interest; no one section must use its power for its own selfish purposes.”\footnote{Oswald Mosley, \textit{Fascism for the Million} (London: Black House Publishing Ltd., 2017), 2.} These elected officials would advise on their area of expertise, but they would be doing so to ensure that the proposed National Council could be aware of all aspects of a decision before deciding on what was best for the entire nation and enforcing that will through a centralized authority. This system is the political extension of post-war realism and the importance of corporate identity particular to British culture, which is why fascist policy in Germany or France did not include representation through corporate means.
Mosley’s disillusionment of elite politics stemmed from his belief that the inefficiency with parliamentary democracy left it vulnerable to foreign influence, distraction, and inaction. The potential for inefficiency in the parliamentary system, Mosley assumed, was a breeding ground for foreign influence to prevent the complete success of Britain. He maintained that exterior financiers were able to capitalize on bureaucracy to take charge of making decisions that would not benefit the British people, and that foreigners with legal citizenship had infiltrated the parliamentary system and corrupted it to a point of uselessness: “Government is paralysed by the maintenance of a parliamentary system…When the government elected by the people is incapable of rapid and effective action private and vested interests assume the real power of Government, not by vote or permission of the people, but by power of money dubiously acquired.”

He surmised that foreign interests were able to ensure that Britain failed economically while other states thrived. Mosley argued that the actions and existence of British citizen with foreign interests in mind were not neutral – they were always and inherently malevolent to British interests. He also criticized the way decentralized local governments interrupted the pursuit of the national will. The directives of a centralized government depended upon local governments carrying them out. This meant, according to Mosley, that a local area could disrupt the will of the entire nation because they, in particular, disagreed with the will of the people as a whole, or through negligence.

Mosley justified his corporatist system using the concept of the will and popular sovereignty, which made it feel like an accepted extension of democracy. Mosley argued

---

107 Ibid., 10-11.
that parliament could not be the best system to represent the people since it could so easily be corrupted and misdirected, and the solution was, in essence, a “dictatorship of the people’s will.” His believed that proposed system would cut through the red tape of decentralization and bureaucracy and would also reflect the true national will, ultimately serving to best protect and advance the British nation. Instead he suggested that a dictatorship could be established that would be able to carry out the will of the people more efficiency:

Fascism is not Dictatorship in the old sense of the word, which implies Government against the will of the people. Fascism is Dictatorship in the modern sense of the word, which implies Government armed by the people with power to solve problems which the people are determined to overcome… Fascism is Leadership of the people with their willing consent along the path of action which they have long desired.\(^\text{108}\)

He conceptualized dictatorship, not as a single individual in power, but popular sovereignty in power. Authoritarianism and dictatorship are often assumed to serve the interests of the individual in charge, which, democratic states which pride themselves on representing all people within the state, is the justification for their rejection. However, if a dictator (or a dictatorial National Council) is trusted to act solely in the general interest of the general will, then it is no longer antithetical to democratic theory. Limiting the representatives which make decisions for the state and ensuring that the representatives accurately reflect the needs of those they represent allows the state to make decisions quickly and efficiently, which is at the core of Mosley’s understanding of fascism.\(^\text{109}\)

Mosley also used the language of democracy to support redefining liberty to more closely resemble positive rather than negative liberty. Generally, in the existing


\(^{109}\) Ibid., 28.
parliamentary discourse, so long as an action did not harm others within the state, an individual had the liberty to do whatever he or she pleased. The equality of democracy is similarly understood to be equality of negative liberty. However, it is important to understand that Mosley’s biggest critique of Rousseau’s enlightenment philosophy was his vision of equality, or how equality in Rousseau’s work had been interpreted: “I believe personally that if he is properly read, Rousseau meant equality of opportunity.”

Though fascism is often viewed as an enemy of Liberty, Mosley argued that parliamentarism was the enemy of true liberty. Fascism may not prioritize negative liberty, but parliamentarism did not prioritize positive liberty which was far more egregious. He believed the inaction of parliamentarianism prevents people from enjoying personal liberty (work, food, private happiness, etc.): “By our very insistence upon liberty, and the jealous rules with which we guard it, we have reached a point at which it has ceased to be liberty at all”

A dominating feature of Mosley’s ideology was his concern over the growing unemployment crisis, and he believed that fascism would better protect a man’s right to work, food, and happiness in his private life by limiting his liberty in public life. In this way, Mosley used the concept of liberty in the discourse of democracy to suggest that the purpose of government was to ensure the right to work over any other form of freedom, since it would best enable private liberty.

Mosley believed that different races had different wills, so only those who were truly British should make up the national will and be considered citizens. Mosley had an

---

issue with the fact that the political participants—the legal citizens—were not comprised solely of those who, he believed, were part of the English nation. He was interested in creating a movement based on “British character” alone – foreigners and other members of the Empire could be political participants so long as they conformed to this supposed national character, otherwise they would be excluded from legal citizenship.\textsuperscript{112} “The people” were primarily defined by race, ancestry, and character, not by legal definitions which could be bought out by “monied foreign interests” (i.e. people who were Jewish, according to Mosley). Essentially, the will of the people would be made known through democratic means, but the definition of the people did not follow the same principle of citizenship outlined by existing democracies. For Mosley, the people were defined by general character and the belief that certain races naturally act in different ways, and therefore have different general wills.

Those who are unemployed because they are lazy are not in the British will based on Mosley’s system, and therefore all British people should either have a job (or be willing to take one) or be excluded from the national will. Mosley’s idea that representation should occur through one’s class and corporate identity is founded on underlying assumptions about morality, national identity, and unemployment.

Unemployed citizens can be divided into two categories: those who are associated with a particular field and not able to find a job due to market conditions, and those who are not associated with any field at all. If one is associated with a particular field, then even when unemployed one is represented by their field’s elected official. This representative is

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 20.
\end{flushright}
responsible for communicating the needs of their field, including the needs of the unemployed in their field and how market conditions need to change to improve employment rates. Those who are unemployed and not associated with any field, however, do not have a specific representative. By this Mosley is suggesting that the unemployed who have not contributed to the nation are not a part of the nation, and therefore do not get to participate in politics or in the pursuit of the general will. He considers a hard work ethic to be a characteristic of British identity and moral code, and if one lacks this characteristic then one is not truly British.

According to Mosley, it was the state’s responsibility to remove those not in the British will, which justified extreme anti-Alienism and anti-Semitism. The State should pursue the general will, asserts Mosley, and it should also be the enforcer of the morality of the general character (i.e. race) it claims to represent. They are both responsible for acting on the general will and understanding the general character enough to include only the right people in determining this general will. Mosley wrote that “If an action does not harm the State, or other citizens of the State, and if it leaves the doer sound in mind and body, it cannot then be morally wrong.” Morality is defined by the general will, and the general will is both defined by and interpreted by the State. However, the State is not viewed as an entity with power or sovereignty in reality. What was moral was a latent truth that needed to be discovered by the state before it could be acted upon, but the truth varied between different communities of people, so the State had to work to make sure it was “discovering” the truth for only those people they were responsible for. In this way,

\[113\] Ibid., 51.
“the people” is defined culturally, but constructed as essential. Assuming that the state was doing its job and keeping those who did not have the best interests of the nation from political participation, Mosley believed that the general will would be pure and unadulterated in its unanimous desire for whatever was best for the nation. The discussion and debate of parliamentarism becomes unnecessary if everyone in political body represents the same general will, in the Rousseau-ian sense.

Mosley used morality to Otherize the “foreigner” and justify their expulsion from the nation, though because morality is constructed through race this is, in reality, thinly veiled racism. Mosley’s nationalist rhetoric, and more importantly where those national lines are drawn, was strongly influenced by England’s relationship with its Empire. On one hand Mosley advocated for a more tolerant national makeup than other Fascist authors, writing: “for we dedicate ourselves to service of an Empire which contains many different races and any suggestion of racial persecution would be detrimental to the Empire we serve.”\footnote{Oswald Mosley, Tomorrow We Live (London: Black House Publishing Ltd., 2017), 42.} However, he is not opposed to the exclusion of certain people: “In particular, those who have indulged in practices alien to British character and tradition must leave these shores.”\footnote{Ibid., 43.} A citizen could pay taxes and participate in the system, but if they acted as foreigner and did not have Britain’s “best interests” in mind, then they were no true citizen of Britain and could rightfully be extricated. Theoretically, instead of drawing the line of who is included based on race, it is based on character. However, as many historians of race have pointed out, race is constructed through culture and character just as much (if not more than) skin color or national origin. The construction of
race and the nature of England’s bond with their colonies led to a state where, to the English working class, the working-class non-white person was just as much of an “other” as the middle-class Englishman.¹¹⁶

Likewise, Mosley’s anti-Semitism is also grounded in language of otherization and comparison to the “moral” character of true British citizens. Since he ascribed to the conspiracy of international Judaism secretly controlling the world through finance, he did not think most British Jews had earned their wealth in their own right. He assumed most British Jews were involved in this international conspiracy against British well-being and doubted their loyalty to English interests. In his question-answer format book, Fascism, 100 Questions Asked and Answered, he writes: “Will Jews, who are deported, be able to take their money with them?” and, responding to his own question, replied “They will be able to take anything they have honestly earned.”¹¹⁷ He stereotyped people who are Jewish as dishonest, a trait which is unfitting to British character. Therefore, his anti-Semitism it is not on Christian or even necessarily financial grounds, but, in his eyes, on the grounds of morality and the construction of British character.

Responding to the insecurities about the Empire, Mosley saw their otherness as justification for their subjugation to the benefit of the English. This view of politics seriously conflicts with the established rhetoric concerning the Empire that all imperial citizens were equal participants in the British nation. However, it is more forthright about the exploitative relationship between England and her colonies. Though British fascism

acknowledged the right of each nation to create for themselves a government that is representative of their own national character, this applied to other colonial powers such as Germany and Italy. It did not apply to those nations which were not strong enough to defend themselves from colonization. While Mosley did regard the English civilizing mission as a valuable pursuit, he emphasized that the purpose of the imperial holdings is primarily for the well-being of the British (by which he means English). He noted: “This is the Golden Rule of Fascism: All problems must first be approached with the aim of putting the interests of Britain First. After Britain, we put the interests of the Empire. Where there is a conflict of interest, whatever is best for the British people must prevail.”

Full citizenship should not be granted to all members of the Empire, and their interests should be considered but never prioritized over the general will of actual citizens. Compassion for “lesser races” is inherent to British character, so the state would not make a decision that negatively impacts the dominions without good reason, but neither would they subvert the English general will to the general will of any of the “Dominions,” as he calls them. For Mosley, the colonies are distinctly separate from the English homeland, and the Empire exists primarily to serve the homeland.

Mosley’s ideology can only be fully understood by considering the way he defined citizenship and nationhood, and the relationship between the two. He argued that citizenship should only be granted to those within the nation, and those within the British nation exhibit, among other things, the characteristic of hard work. According to Mosley, it is important that citizenship be actively regulated to keep foreigners out of political

\footnote{Oswald Mosley, \textit{Fascism for the Million} (London: Black House Publishing Ltd., 2017), 1.}
participation, since they would corrupt the general will of the British to a point where the state, acting on behalf of the general will, no longer has the interests of the British at heart. If this is done, and foreigners are not excluded from the general will, then parliament is unnecessarily chaotic and indecisive. The general will, if properly pruned in Mosley's view, will be singular in its desire for whatever is best for the British nation, i.e. private liberty though the state’s concern for positive liberty, even at the cost of public liberty. Debate and party alignments become superfluous, and as such a more efficient system is made possible. Mosley saw his incarnation of corporatism as this more efficient system, and he believed that it was the system most fitting to British character.

Conclusion

Mosley's ideas supported anti-Semitism, anti-alienism, authoritarianism, efficiency, realism, and nationalism using the language of democracy to do so. Like Maurras, Mosley’s fascism has previously been understood as adversative to democracy, and his lack of political success in Britain led historians to place more emphasis on the aspects of ideology that caused the movement to fail, rather than on studying his work as he intended it. For Mosley, the British state was responsible for pursuing the will of the British people. To do so, it had to ensure that the only political participants in establishing the will were truly British and held Britain’s national interest to be the primary goal. Mosley understood his English nationalism and his desire to maintain the British empire as intrinsically linked: imperial pursuits improved the well-being of the English people, so long as there was no confusion that imperial subjects were not a part of the people. Anti-Semitism was built on the anti-alienism and fear of internationalism, which Mosley saw as antithetical to the will of the people. Mosley’s system differed from
other fascist states in its corporatism rather than direct dictatorship, since he felt this system was more authentically British in character. In British culture, class and corporate identity create the boundaries for national identity, resulting in a different general will and subsequent political system than other countries. At its core, Mosley’s philosophy is an attempt to represent who he believed the British people to be as efficiently and genuinely as possible. This is not at odds with democracy, but a perversion of democratic discourse with profoundly tragic effects for those Mosley otherized.

Mosley believed in a specific understanding of popular sovereignty and democratic discourse that placed the well-being of the people above universal equality and liberty, even at the cost of violent physical exclusion from a nation, themes which appeal to the radical right today. By understanding Mosley’s fascism as grounded in and extending from democratic discourse, his revival on the radical right becomes clearer. Mosley did not see democracy as contradictory to anti-Alienism, nor do supporters of modern radical right policies. Extremists like the terrorist in New Zealand identified with Mosley’s articulation of the dangers posed by immigrants to people who are white and felt called to commit horrific acts to cultivate the general will of what he believed should be a white nation. Mosley’s fascist thought is not just a conglomerate of anti-Semitic, anti-parliamentarian, authoritarian ideas, they are carefully constructed reactions to the perceived failures of parliamentary democracy, which is why the language of democracy alone is insufficient to protect the modern world from it.
Chapter Four: Conclusion

Democratic discourse is often informed by liberal definitions of liberty, the will of the people, and citizenship, but fascist discourse builds from the language of democracy by redefining these terms for an illiberal, authoritarian, anti-Semitic, and populist agenda. Democracy is typically situated in direct opposition to other systems, such as monarchy or fascism. It is the political equivalent of a “clash of civilizations,” where democracy is understood as the morally upright civilizing force and anything else is insurrectionary and backwards. Yet this view fails to fully historicize modern support for non-democratic systems.

An overwhelming conviction that national crisis loomed pervaded the thought of both Mosley and Maurras, which amplified the urgency of the extremist solutions in their work. Maurras feared another militaristic threat which could wreck as must destruction on the people and geography of France as World War I. His felt that the lack of a hierarchical structure in parliamentary systems prevented clear and strong leadership to quickly make the necessary decisions to defend a county, which he argued could be remedied through a monarch. Mosley feared an impending unemployment crisis in Britain and believed that the state had been bought out by foreign monied and Jewish interests, and therefore was not truly interested or capable of protecting the nation from economic crisis. The sense of a continued emergency after the war in both of their works justified, in their view, a turn toward radically aggressive and violent solutions.

Both of these ideologues were fearful of heterogeneity, particularly after World War I, because of the belief that internal division and debate prevented a strong leader from defending against catastrophe. Strength was closely associated with efficiency,
which led to reflection and indictment of the inefficiency of parliamentarism. We can best understand Mosley and Maurras’ issues with parliamentarism by considering the influence of Rousseau and Enlightenment philosophy to democratic discourse. Based on the definitions presented by Rousseau, the theory of parliamentarianism could be understood as dividing the general will of the entire nation into local general wills through representatives. In effect, this meant that elected officials had to fight for the general will of their region against the general will of another region, rather than both advocating for the general will of the combined nation. Mosley and Maurras suggested that the regular, health debate of a diverse republic was instead dangerously chaotic and meant that the nation was divided against herself and unable to adequately defend against exterior threats, whether militaristic or economic in type. These fascistic thinkers were convinced that the “chaos” of parliamentarianism proved that foreign monied interests (i.e. Jews) had been able to gain a foothold in national politics, hijacking the national will by buying elections, further ensuring that the nation could not defend herself. They both believed in a certain level of anti-individualism, and believed that true liberty was liberty to work, health, and happiness. These liberties were best affected through a fascist organization, where the government was focused on the well-being of their people - as in, those who informed the general will. Homogeneity in political opinion indicated non-otherness, whereas difference in opinion or culture suggested that one was not a part of the internalized will of the people and justified the expulsion of the Other.

Maurras turned to royalist ideas and advocated for a monarch to lead the nation and embody the will of the people, and a more decentralized structure of administration (not representation) through magistrates. Mosley envisioned a corporatist system to
ensure decisions were advised by those who knew most about the subject of the decision, but also the state to be led by one strong leader to promote efficiency within the system. Such centralization of power did not necessarily depart from democratic tradition, even if it relied on illiberal and perverse definitions of who is included in the creation of the popular sovereign. In Rousseau’s terms, they advocated for unifying the general will to be acted upon by a single figurehead, who could then create a system of magistrate-ship to administer - but not represent – the general will. This was acceptable during a period of crisis in the form of emergency power, setting the precedent of an individual leader being able to embody the will of the people. The significance of this vision of authentic good government was a renewed need to guarantee only those within the nation were included in determining the general will, preventing the influence of foreign monied interests. As a result, fascists advocated for aggressively and actively identifying “the other” to safeguard the integrity of the will. Anti-alienism, including anti-Semitism, and the conviction that foreigners could not truly have the best interests of the nation at heart were a result of the need for homogeneity in the general will within these fascistic works.

Epilogue:

By studying the ideas of fascists like Maurras and Mosley, we are able to get a more complete picture of how early 20th century fascists presented their ideas, and why the language of democracy does not seem to be enough to prevent a return of fascistic ideas today. Through this analysis we find that Mosley and Maurras used the language of democracy to talk about their vision for a safe and better future. Whether they used this language to fool people into believing their ideology or actually saw it as an extension of democracy is beside the point, since the argument of this thesis is that they did use
democratic discourse to justify their ideology. In this way, fascist ideology finds its roots in the discourse of democracy, making it seem less foreign to individuals looking for a solution to their frustration with parliamentarism. The provenance of fascist thought from the language of democracy made it more acceptable and palatable to those whose worldview is similarly grounded in democratic discourse but who had serious fears about the world around them. Fascist ideology’s articulation of the diagnosis of the problems in the world feel familiar enough to democratic individuals that the correlating fascistic solutions feel less radical and extreme. In this way, the existence of democratic language alone or an individual’s commitment to it is not, in itself, a sufficient defensive measure to prevent fascistic ideology from taking root, and subsequently inspiring fascistic action.

Considering the use of democratic discourse to justify racist fascist in Maurras and Mosley enabled us to look at the same premise in modern politics. The fascistic relationship between the importance of the will of the people and the necessity to exclude the Other from the general will is evident within certain political groups in the United States, Britain, and France. Rather than calling modern politics fascist because it checks off certain boxes from a list, we can use this relationship framework to compare modern politics with the politics of self-proclaimed 20th century fascists.

Looking at American politics, we find that the rhetoric of the Alt-Right, and of Trump to some extent, do exhibit this fascistic ideology. John McNeil’s 2016 article in the Washington Post graded Trump’s rhetoric based on 11 attributed of fascism, on a scale of zero to four “Benitos.” It was one of many articles and accusations against Trump and his supporters that their ideas were fascist, and that Trump had the potential to become the Hitler of the modern era. According to McNeil, overall, he scored lower than
other world leaders, as of October 2016. The article follows the same structure as historian’s past, defining fascist by its hyper-nationalism, militarism, glorification of violence and readiness in to use it in politics, fetishization of youth, fetishization of masculinity, leader cult, lost-golden-age syndrome, self-definition by opposition, mass mobilization and mass party, hierarchical party structure and tendency to purge the disloyal, and theatricality. While Trump may score higher in a number of categories today compared to 2016, this structure for analysis depends on popularity and violence as primary defining features of fascism, even though the level of popularity or fascist practice is not an accurate gauge for the prevalence of fascist ideology.

However, the democratic election of Donald Trump as a populist leader, his immigration ban, the end of DACA, and “The Wall” between the US and Mexico all seem incredibly racist and against our democratic traditions, yet they are supported by a large number of citizens. It is no coincidence that the Alt-right, and most notably the president of the National Policy Institute Richard Spencer, considers itself the reason that Trump was elected. The optimism that one individual can save the nation and cut through the chaos, instability, and corruption of parliamentary democracy to protect the nation from the Other was clear in the 2016 American presidential election and remains a common intellectual thread within extremist politics. The increased number and intensity of violent attacks on the perceived invader – the Other who has infiltrated the nation - seems less random when one considers the way democratic language has been and can be used to support horrible and racist policies.

The American Alt-right uses digital communities to share and promote old ideas in new clothes. While the internet enables a greater variety of extremist politics, perhaps
resulting in more divisions within extremist views, the internet also enables the ability to connect extremists across thousands of miles and build strength through community.

While obviously the fascistic thought of the 1930s and 40s is not resurrected verbatim in modern politics, we do see similarities in the radical solutions advocated by Mosley and Maurras and the racist and extremist solutions people propose today. The Alt-Right in the United States is one of the most outspoken fascist-leaning associations. Emboldened by digital communities through places like Stormfront, Reddit, 4chan, and 8chan, as well as a whole host of alternative news sources, the Alt-Right has gained a strong foothold in modern American politics. For example, more than any Russian hacking scheme, the Alt-Right believes it was their mobilization of the internet against Hillary Clinton and for Donald Trump that resulted in his election. They recognize that Trump is not a fully Alt-Right, identitarian politician, but they nevertheless understood him as a politician who could promote an agenda that is influenced by them. More than any other candidate, they felt like he understood the “dire” need to protect the nation from immigrants, from the invasive Other. In a podcast between some of the major players in the Alt-Right movement, Spencer says: “The Trump victory did legitimize us. I think that’s maybe the way that it was an unqualified victory in the sense that he was our candidate and he wasn’t the cuck or the conservative Kennedy. He was ours; we chose him from day one. And he won and was legitimized proving that our message is more powerful and reaches people.”

---


Charlottesville riots by refusing to condemn them, and the Alt-Right themselves viewed early Trumpism as emblematic of unspoken national support for their cause.

The Alt-right is reusing the ideas of 20th century fascists like Mosley and Maurras, evidencing that the existence of democratic language alone is insufficient in preventing the rise of fascistic ideology. The Alt-Right is closely tied with the publishing company Arktos. Altright.com, the website domain shared by the National Policy Institute and Arktos, includes a suggested reading list on their “about” section. This list contains authors such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Carl Schmitt, Kevin McDonald, Alain de Benoist, and more. Almost all of these titles are published by Arktos, which sells reprinted copies of classic fascist English authors, translations of many French and German fascist works, and works by modern right-wing ethno-nationalists. The extensive inventory of Arktos and the Alt-right’s connection to it destroys the myth that the Alt-right in the US is filled with uneducated bigots who should be dismissed as deplorables and not taken seriously. The Alt-Right has built an intellectual community for themselves with both professional and amateur political philosophers writing in defense of their ideas. Their beliefs are grounded in rationality yet fueled by subjectivity and internalized fears about the Other, which is precisely what makes them so dangerous. This is also why the campaign to disarm the Alt-Right by belittling the movement has proved so ineffective.

Other radically racist political groups also see Trump as a harbinger of success for identitarian politics. Pat Buchanan, former political advisor to Nixon, Ford, and Reagan,

14th, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kH7CjtEHgel&bpctr=1552619548.  It is also worth noting that Spencer does not ever clarify which Kennedy he is referring to in this quote, but it may be Justice Kennedy who often acts as a swing vote.
and contributor to revisionist magazine *American Renaissance*, wrote: “In these countries, the common denominator is that the nation comes first, and that political system is best which best protects and preserves the unique character of the nation…And there are matters, like the preservation of a unique people and nation, that are too important to be left to temporary majorities to decide.” He shared the understanding that the general will of a nation is not best represented by parliamentary democracy and has been warning against the impending crisis of immigration to national character and economic stability for decades. While he wavers on his support for Trump because of his tendency toward chaos, his call for a stronger leader to defend the nation from crisis elucidates the opportunity for Trump’s extremism to flourish if presented correctly. The Pioneer Little Europe project, which hails Buchanan as a grounded political philosopher and has connections with the British National Party, advocated for a “Stormfront on the streets.” The author of the manifesto, Michael Barrett, argued that in order to create the world they want, white nationalists need to claim a geographical foothold in their countries to provide community support for their shared vision. While he did not focus on the leadership of these smaller communities, he frequently referenced the Roman political organization and the role of the American president as commander and leader of military forces as something to strive for. It is this kind of thought that has been and will continue to be influential in American politics if this rhetoric is not combated in a way other than dismissal or derision.

This is not inconsequential to the real-world effect of identitarian politics, and Trump’s rhetoric validates incredibly racist and violent politics and actions. Since Trump’s presidency began, individuals within the Alt-Right have become emboldened in
their efforts. According to the Anti-Defamation League, all 50 deaths by extremists in 2018 were linked to white supremacy. This included the high school shooting in Parkland, Florida, and the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting which, combined, account for 28 of the 50 deaths. While we are inclined to describe these tragedies as “senseless acts of violence,” this misrepresents the perpetrators intentions and justification. In the case of the Tree of Life attack, just before he began the shooter posted on social media: “HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in.” This anti-Semitism stems from a fear that the external Other will lead to the diminished well-being and ultimate death of one’s perceived nation. The shooter in the 2019 Poway synagogue attack, was motivated by the Christchurch terrorist’s manifesto, which was itself modeled after Mosley’s work. It was also influenced by the Renaud Camus’ Great Replacement theory, which blended Catholicism with racist extremism and has found great popularity among the French New Right. White nationalist terrorists today see liberal democracy’s commitment to equality and inclusion is a threat that needs to be solved by men of action instead of waiting for a solution to come.

The return of this kind of extremist fascistic thought suggests that the language of democracy won’t prevent or end it, so we need another tactic. The ideological grounding

---


123 Ibid.
of the American Alt-Right evidences that extremist-motivated attacks are not likely to be quelled by any punitive action from the existing political system, or dismissal by the media. The Alt-right believes that they are the only ones who understand the way the world really works, and that everyone else is an invader or deluded. The use of democratic language to articulate and support racist and radical solutions masks the truly awful and horrific conclusions of this ideology until it is carried through to its logical conclusion. Despite the seemingly moderate and non-violent agenda of both the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in Britain and the National Front (FN) in France compared to the Alt-Right in the US, further study illustrated that both of these parties house deep-seated fear of the Other because of the need for a homogenous and strong national community. By identifying the root causes of identitarian and nationalist politics and by reconciling how those politics are extensions of democratic language, we can propose different, more inclusive, and less violent solutions to those who would otherwise be attracted to this fascistic ideology.

The UK Independence Party, led by Nigel Farage, sought support for Brexit by appealing to popular sovereignty. They worked hard to establish themselves as a valid political party which advocated for UK’s independence from the EU. While they never had as much power as Labour or the Conservatives, they did gain enough in the early 2010’s for Prime Minister David Cameron to include a call for a referendum on the subject in his election campaign. Even though Cameron was anti-leave, he intended the referendum as a way to put the subject to rest and curb UKIP support. Recent analysis of Brexit support considered the unfair financial cost of staying in the EU as the principal
explanation for Brexit’s success. While this is certainly a factor, reviewing the social media outlets of UKIP’s leave campaign, “Leave.EU” add more to the story. Scrolling through their tweets prior to the vote evidences concerns that the EU’s unemployment crisis will bleed over to the UK, that the remain political elite are liars and hypocrites – unable or unwilling to follow through on promise to change if they stay, and, perhaps most strongly, the concern that remaining in the EU is a front to democracy. On June 11, 2016, the campaign posted “This referendum is not about specific outcomes, such as the economy, immigration, trade or security. It’s about deciding who determines those outcomes. We need to decide who should run the United Kingdom; either the British People, or the EU with people from 27 other countries that we don’t elect and cannot remove.” This was not their only post sharing their concern with protecting democracy even that day. Support for the referendum, while often viewed as a threat to democratic cooperation between nations, should instead be viewed as a logical attempt to pursue modern democratic principles of representation and popular sovereignty.

One can find the same kind of rhetoric from the official “Vote Leave” campaign. On June 21, 2016, they posted “We must #VoteLeave on Thursday for democracy,” pairing it with a 2002 quote from Jeremy Corbyn: “If the entire European economy is under the control of one group of bankers, what hope is there for democracy in Europe?” MP Boris Johnson, whose quotes are frequently tweeted by Vote Leave, wrote a lengthy diatribe on Facebook advocating for leaving on June 20th, noting “It is we who want to give power back to the people. It is we who want to stand up against the corporatist and

elitist system that will never admit its mistakes. That is why we believe in democracy.”

While Vote Leave’s expanded slogan to “Take Back Control” identifies the desire to take back control of money, economy, borders, security, and taxes, the underlying idea is that the UK needs to take back control over their democracy and their right to create policy for their own nation. The fear that EU democracy is corrupted by corporate elites and bankers should not be dismissed, as it bears remarkable similarities to the fears which drove early 20th century fascists.

Though UKIP’s agenda under Farage was racist but not overtly violent, the logical conclusion of illiberal conceptions of popular sovereignty and the will of the people is violent anti-Otherism and will eventually be shown as such. Considering this, the devolution of UKIP over the last year, becomes all the more intriguing. Following the Brexit referendum, Nigel Farage stepped down as party leader of UKIP, explaining that after achieving his political goals he wanted to spend more time on personal pursuits. The party struggled to find a permanent leader for a few months before settling on Gerard Batten. Under Batten’s direction the party has started to focus less on obtaining elected positions and more on grassroots “street activism.” The English Defence League’s (EDL) founder and former leader Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, commonly known as Tommy Robinson, is now serving as advisor to Batten, perhaps explaining UKIP’s shift toward anti-Islamic extremism. The most recent UKIP manifesto, for example, begins by outlining their desire to be a populist party, and included a section describing their stance on “Islamic Extremism” – a new addition from the last manifesto, published in 2017.

The more violent, less official shift in UKIP recently is indicative of the blend between popular sovereignty, the will, and anti-Otherism, and is not surprising when we look back at Mosley and Maurras for comparison. Despite having been the backbone of the party for the better part of his 25-year membership, Farage resigned from UKIP altogether in December of 2018, citing their recent policy change to accept former EDL and BNP members (i.e. Tommy Robinson) and changes in party ideology. In his letter of resignation, published in The Telegraph, he writes: “The party of elections is quickly becoming a party of street activism, with our members being urged to attend marches rather than taking the fight to the ballot box.”126 He was shocked that the party who rationally advocated for taking back control of their country’s democracy and independence could so drastically shift toward extremist rhetoric. But using the understanding of fascistic thought elucidated through this paper, this shift is less unexpected. The intensification of anti-immigrant policy toward anti-Islamic policy, and the dissent against the political establishment toward the rejection of it altogether is the path one could expect for a party like UKIP. Through more extreme, they still put forth the fear that outsiders compromise the ability for a government to truly pursue what is the best for the people – whether economically or culturally. For UKIP, the initial step in solving this fear is the call for Britain to regain control of their policies from the EU, and the second step is regaining control of British politics themselves and prevent further infiltration from outsiders. The recent history of UKIP illustrates the divide between us

and them inherent to democratic discourse can be expanded on and intensified to become
gnostic and extremist.

In reverse from UKIP, FN was notoriously racist and anti-Other, but they recently been working to roll back their negative public image to gain votes. The French National Front party has been a symbol of French nationalism for decades. Led by Jean-Marie Le Pen until 2011, the party rejected the European Union and loose immigration policies. He is known for his support of the collaborationist government and famously said that the Holocaust was a “detail of history.” The FN advocates for” traditionalist values,” which here mean anti-Semitism and anti-Arabism. He was replaced as party leader by his daughter Marine Le Pen, who attempted a process of “de-demonization” for the FN. They expelled members who were known to have associations with violent and extremist groups or who made overtly racist remarks, and even went so far as to expel Jean-Marie Le Pen from the party in 2017. They have stepped back their public anti-Semitism and have intentionally sought out the French-Jewish vote.127 Most recently, Marine Le Pen has changed the name of the party to the National Rally, hoping that a new name could remove the barrier of prejudice against the old party to gain electoral support.

Generation Identitaire (GI), on the other hand, is a French identitarian group which has never denounced their radically racist and violent agenda of remigration. Generation Identitaire (GI) is a French nationalist and identitarian movement with a history of violent action against non-white people. Their agenda is centered on the policy of remigration: forcing non-white residents and citizens to move back to their country of

ancestral origin. Since their inception in 2012 they have occupied a Mosque for several
days calling for a referendum on ending immigration, they have attempted to block illegal
immigrants from crossing the Mediterranean through their “Defend Europe” mission, and
they have attempted to block immigrants from coming through a mountain pass on the
French-Italian border. In addition to these large-scale demonstrations, Al Jazeera
revealed that many of their members participate in street attacks on French-Arabs and
support more drastic violent efforts. The GI’s basic fear is the “Great Replacement” of
“ethnically French” citizens. The “Great Replacement Theory” was originally described
by Renaud Camus in 2011, who argued that French Catholic citizens were allowing
themselves to be replaced by Arab immigrants through relaxed immigration policies and
low birth rates. This theory was also the phrase far right-extremist and terrorist in the
New Zealand mosque attack used to title his manifesto, signaling that today’s extremists
see no conflict between Maurras’ “Catholic” monarchism and Mosley’s corporatism.

In defense of democracy, FN secretly advocates for the policy of identitarianism,
racism, and remigration proposed by GI. The deradicalization of the FN would have been
a good example of derision and democratic influence working to minimize populist
racism, but Al Jazeera has revealed that there are deeper connections between GI and FN
suggesting that this deradicalization is merely a facade. Al Jazeera published a two-hour
documentary in December 2018 of one of their investigative journalists who had
infiltrated GI for six months. They found that despite Marine Le Pen’s attempts to

128 “What is Generation Identity,” Al Jazeera News, December 10, 2018,
129 “Generation Hate: French far right’s violence and racism exposed,” Al Jazeera News, December 9,
181208155503837.html.
publicly de-demontize the National Front party, the FN’s internal policy is much closer to the radical views of GI. Marine Le Pen recently posted “In the elections #Europeennes2019, the French have a choice on how to make society: to accelerate savage globalization, or radically change course in defense of the Nations, democracy, and localism!” Yet Al-Jazeera’s journalist recorded video identifying GI members who served as assistants to FN parliamentarians, or who claimed to be speech writers and members of security detail for the FN, clearly supporting violent racism.

The strongest indictment of collaboration between GI and FN is from recordings taken at a known GI bar in Lille the night before the FN congress. Here, the journalist films FN member, Jean-Francois Pedrono; General Secretary of the National Front, Nicolas Bay; close friends and advisors to Marine Le Pen, Nicolas Crochet and Frederic Chatillon; former FN leader, Eric Dilles, and his wife, FN MEP, Sylvie Goddyn; and Marine Le Pen’s MEP replacement from the FN, Christelle Lechevalier, all speaking in favor of GI policies. Lechevalier says: “Most Frontist politicians, like most National Front leaders, hold identitarian views. It’s just that the part line right now forbids us from following the identitarian line,” and “We are fighting for the identitarian line. We fight for our identity, our culture.” Goddyn says of the two groups: “We have the same objectives” When the undercover journalist asked Crochet if the FN supported the

---

130 Marine Le Pen, Twitter, posted April 5th, [https://twitter.com/MLP_officiel/status/1114229935290355712](https://twitter.com/MLP_officiel/status/1114229935290355712).
133 Ibid., 39-17-39:19.
policy of remigration, he said “Yes, it will happen. If we win, it will happen.” This shocking documentary reveals the deeper connections between the National Front and Generation Identitaire and exposed their true agenda and ideology. In defense of democracy, the party of Marine Le Pen secretly advocates for a policy of identitarianism, racism, and remigration. For the FN, the fear of the Arab Other has led to a hatred of the European Union, which they believe do have the interests of the French people in mind. Using the language of democratic discourse and the practice of parliamentarianism, the FN intends to create a stronger divide between “Us” and “Them” to protect ethnically French citizens from internal destruction by the Other. Despite Le Pen’s attempts at de-demonization, the ideology of the party remains fascistic at heart.

By considering the ways in which fascist ideology builds from the discourse of democracy, we can understand what to look out for in how modern right-wing radicals navigate their diagnosis to the ills of their world, and how to understand their solution to it. By broadening the study of fascism from focusing on a practice-oriented scale or checklist based on paramilitary organization or official political power to studies based on ideological organization, we can better identity proto-fascist associations or individuals before they gain following or act out violently. Recognizing how the language of democracy inspires and is used by fascists also enables us to create valid critiques of this ideology as a means of de-radicalization instead of attempting to do so through humiliation or ostracization. Reconsidering fascism in this way can also help deconstruct the myth that fascism was a horrific tragedy of the early 20th century that

cannot be repeated. By educating ourselves on the potential relationship between fascism and democracy, we preemptively defend ourselves from its influence even in times of crisis.
Bibliography


109

----. “Amis ou Ennemis ?” Gazette de France, September 23rd, 1901. 
https://maurras.net/textes/103.html.


----. « Le Bien de tous. » L’Action Française, March 24, 2908. 
https://maurras.net/textes/140.html.


----. The Future of the Intelligentsia & For a French Awakening. Translated by 

https://maurras.net/textes/122.html.

----. “Jean-Jacques Rousseau’ faux prophète.” L’Action Française, April 16th, 1942. 
https://maurras.net/textes/50.html.


----. Votre bel aujourd’hui : dernière lettre à Monsieur Vincent Auriol, président de l’Ive 

----. « La vie démocratique. » La Gazette de France, January 14, 1904. 
https://maurras.net/textes/100-1.html#la-vie-democratique.


----. Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered. London: Black House Publishing, 


----. “The Philosophy of Fascism.” Speech, March 22nd, 1993. Oswald Mosley – Briton, 


Additional Social Media Platforms used for Research:

- Reddit.com
- 4chan.org
- 8ch.com
- Twitter.com
- Facebook.com