Editorial Introduction: Contextualising British fascist community building since 1945

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In Britain, the history of fascist groups and organisations shows us that these have been of marginal relevance to the nation's politics.[1] So why study them? While fascists in Britain have never broken 'broken through' to the political mainstream, and have rarely even held anything other than low-level elected positions, their politicised cultures are nevertheless important to document and analyse. The history of British fascism should not be dismissed by historians as an 'oxymoron', as once was the case in the work of Stanley Payne.[2] Regards the study of interwar forms of British fascism, historians from Julie Gottlieb to Thomas Linehan have already had a lot to say about the organisations such as the British Fascists and the British Union of Fascists, alongside other groups.[3] Yet historians have failed to fully capture the equally fascinating and important history of fascism after 1945.

Perhaps some of this relates to historical conceptualisation, and the tendency to see fascism as tied to a specific interwar epoch, and a phenomenon primarily relevant to Italy, Germany and perhaps only a few other European countries before 1945.[4] Yet this 'epochal' perspective misses the ways fascists have developed many groups, networks and vocal ideologues who have subsequently reworked the ideas found in interwar contexts and developed new variations of the ideology and praxis.[5] Consequently, some historians of fascism at least now seek to 'decentre' fascism studies from being primarily the study of a narrow range of interwar case studies, and now seek to find its roles in wider contexts, both temporally and geographically.[6]

Moreover, there are many people, including in the United Kingdom, who claim to be both fascist and have been impactful in the twenty-first century. Countering the politics of the 'extreme right' has become central the policy agendas such as Prevent. This raises important questions for historians. If fascists remain active in contemporary times (and they do), how should we contextualise such a growth of new generations of increasingly vocal political groups, fascist networks, and political cultures in the twenty-first century? One key point to make is that fascism never really went away after 1945, yet the complex histories of continuity, development, and recalibration of fascist praxis between the 1940s and the present

day remain only partially mapped.[7] Fascists, including in Britain, after 1945 found themselves operating in far more hostile circumstances but this does not mean they do not have a history that needs to be satisfactorily documented. After the horrors of the Holocaust, fascists sought to challenge dominant narratives that assumed the ideology has been discredited, and have attempted to engage with a wide range of contexts to help establish new legitimising narratives for their core ideas. In Britain, throughout the postwar period energetic, radicalised and distinctly fascist activism has been a constant feature, sometimes operating at a largely unnoticed level, and at other times impacting far more profoundly, such as in the 1970s with the growth of the National Front, or in the 2000s with the (relatively speaking) electoral successes of the British National Party. Currently, a number of people in the United Kingdom have been convicted of terrorism charges related to their engagement with proscribed fascist groups such as National Action and likeminded phenomena.[8] In the years since the end of the Second World War, British fascists have developed a complex set of counter-cultural groups, transnational networks, forms of fascist cultural production, and forged an intergenerational alternate community of sustained activism. The articles in this special issue help to shed fresh light on these important yet often neglected cultures of British post-1945 fascism and point to some new areas for future research.

To begin the special issue, I have written and article that explores the importance of emotion in such British fascist community building since 1945, and here I argue there is a fascist emotionology that needs more careful consideration. Specifically, I focus on the role of a radicalised, future focused form of nostalgia, what I have called 'futural nostalgia', to explore how generations of British fascists have looked backward to evoke bittersweet senses of a lost time that gives emotive power to hopeful projections of a new future to come for an in-community of white British people. The history of emotions is a growing field of interest in fascism studies, and this article also engages with current debates over the ways in which radicalised senses of temporality are discussed in fascist milieus. Moreover, as with the other articles in this collection, this analysis draws extensively from British fascist literatures based in the University of Northampton's Searchlight Archive, a unique collection of many cultural artefacts collated by the antifascist campaigning organisation *Searchlight* magazine from the 1960s onwards.

Having examined this intergenerational dynamic through a wide range of figures and groups, Daniel Jones's article considers ways British fascist community building was developed

through John Tyndall's magazine *Spearhead*. Tyndall was an important leader of the National Front and later founded the British National Party. Jones focuses attention on the magazine's publicism during the 1970s, a time when *Spearhead* was a leading publication for the National Front. Its primary audience was those already attracted to the National Front and *Spearhead* offered such readers a deeper sense of the politics of British fascism. Jones's article explores how the publication discussed themes such as women and gender, opposed permissive attitudes towards homosexuality, and commented on issues of faith. These discourses were part of a process of community building that Jones describes as a distinctly fascist 'para-family'. In other words, British fascist publicism sought to project an alternate sense of community, to appeal to those who felt this was somehow lacking.

Following this discussion of a more widely-read example of British fascist print culture, Clive Henry then offers a deep dive into the esoteric writings of a specific ideologue active within British fascist cultures, David Myatt – a figure who is also now finding a new audience among many young, contemporary neo-Nazis. Henry's focused examination on the writings of a specific ideologue again uses the history of emotions to consider Myatt's vision for a new community, framing both the regulation of emotion and the expression of emotive themes as central to his presentation of such ideals. While Myatt can hardly be described as a popular writer, even in British fascist contexts, he certainly acts as a representative example a niche within intellectualised fascist and extreme right cultures that imagine an alternate vision of the world based on creating a new Aryan order. Myatt can be taken as a someone who typifies wider trends in developing idiosyncratic fascist 'solutions' based on a stark outlook that considers the modern world as a place that has gone profoundly awry and so in need of elemental reordering.

Finally, Siobhán Hyland explores the history of British fascism through the lens of its most vociferous opponents, communities of antifascists. As her discussion highlights, the history of antifascism also remains under-developed and requires more nuanced and careful research. Building on some of the few academic historians of British anti-fascism, Nigel Copsey and David Renton, Hyland highlights how a variety of antifascist practises have developed, and that these relate to a broader set of anti-colonial and anti-racist political communities that emerged in the post-1945 years in Britain. Antifascist communities have certainly engaged in militant activity, but Hyland seeks to point to the much wider repertoire of activism developed by those who identify as antifascist as well as many others who have also helped

engender cultures of antifascism in post-1945 Britain. For Hyland, exploring modes of community building is central to the study of antifascism.

The growing study of fascism in post-1945 Britain, as elsewhere, then, is one that can be framed around considerations of senses of community. As discussed in the first three of these articles, fascists themselves use evocative, and often specifically emotive, themes to help activists imagine alternate forms of community, typically recalling a seemingly lost past as well as a time to come in ways that resolve perceptions of a dying or lost community in the present. Fascist literatures are crucial ways to explore and understand these visions of alternate communities. When examining such cultures so immersed in potent messages of aggression and animosity towards those deemed to be threats to such idealised communities, it is important to understand these contexts that have also inspired and shaped varieties of activism working towards a more inclusive society in post-1945 Britain, as discussed in Hyland's final article of the special issue. Finally, the wider point that cuts across all of these articles is that historians have an important role to play in piecing together the stories of postwar fascism in Britain and those who challenged it, as well as the wider histories of far-right politics. By doing so, historians can become active in informing debates about the nature of the political extremisms from the right that have become increasingly prevalent in the present day; studying the recent past of British fascists helps develop our understanding of where contemporary extremist cultures have come from and how they can be resisted.

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[1] For a dated yet still often relevant survey of this 'failure', see: Mike Cronin, *The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

[2] Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 304.

[3] Key texts here include: Julie Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement 1923 -1945* London: Bloomsbury, 2021); Julie Gottlieb Thomas Linehan, *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004); Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism, 1918-39: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Tom Villis, *British Catholics and Fascism Religious Identity and Political Extremism Between the Wars*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002); Kenneth Lunn and Richard Thurlow, eds., *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Inter-War Britain* (London: Routledge, 2016); Richard Griffiths, *What Did You Do during the War?: The Last Throes of the British pro-Nazi Right, 1940-45* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); Paul Stocker, "'The Imperial Spirit': British Fascism and Empire, 1919-1940," *Religion Compass*, 9.2 (2015), 45–54; Liburd, Liam J, "Beyond the Pale: Whiteness, Masculinity and Empire in the British Union of Fascists, 1932-1940," *Fascism*, 7.2 (2018), 275–96.

[4] For example, this perspective structured Robert Paxton's influential study of fascism: Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London: Penguin, 2005).

[5] For an overview here see: Roger Griffin, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018) ch. 5.

[6] Griffin, Roger, "Decentering Comparative Fascist Studies," *Fascism (Leiden)*, 4.2 (2015), 103–18 .

[7] Excellent texts that include or focus on the postwar history include: Graham Macklin, *Failed Führers: A History of Britain's Extreme Right* (Abingdon: Routledge Group, 2020); Nigel Copsey, *Contemporary British Fascism: The British National Party and the Quest for Legitimacy*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan,

2008); Nigel Copsey and Matthew Worley, eds., *Tomorrow Belongs to Us: The British Far Right since 1967* (London: Routledge, 2018); John Richardson, *British Fascism: A Discourse-Historical Analysis* (Stuttgart, Germany: Ibidem-Verlag, 2017); Nigel Copsey and John E. Richardson, *Cultures of Post-War British Fascism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Martin Durham, *Women and Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1998); Paul Stocker, *Lost Imperium: Far Right Visions of the British Empire, c.1920-1980* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021); Shaffer, Ryan., *Music, Youth and International Links in Post-War British Fascism The Transformation of Extremism* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017); Joe Mulhall, *British Fascism after the Holocaust: From the Birth of Denial to the Notting Hill Riots 1939-1958* (London: Routledge, 2021).
[8] John Jupp, 'From Spiral to Stasis? United Kingdom Counter-Terrorism Legislation and Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, (2022), 1–21.