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Andrea Mammone, *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xx + 305 pp. Bibliography and index. \$99.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN-13 9781107030916.

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France's Front National (FN) won the highest number of votes in its history, as well as the first round of the regional elections, with 28 percent of the vote in December 2015. Some of the party's individual politicians, including the FN's leader, Marine Le Pen, won over 40 percent of the vote in their respective regions. The party was unable to build upon these numbers in the second round and subsequently failed to win a single region, yet Le Pen nevertheless claimed a victory due to the party's unprecedented levels of support. The French people, she argued, were with the FN.

While scholars (mostly political scientists) have analyzed Europe's premier far right party by focusing on its rise to prominence beginning in the late 1970s/early 1980s, Andrea Mammone argues that its history can only be understood within a wider European context that stretches back to 1945. *Transnational Neofascism* is one of the first historical monographs to "cross the desert" in temporal terms by focusing on the period from 1945 to the 1970s and bridge different fields through a transnational analysis of the extreme right in France and Italy. This approach enables Mammone to demonstrate that the extreme right heart of Europe shifted from Italy (in the form of the Movimento Sociale Italiano, MSI) in the postwar period to France (in the form of the FN) in the early 1980s. However, to understand this change in terms of the nation-state is misleading, Mammone argues, as webs of exchange across the Alps constantly influenced extremist ideas, organizations, publications, and activists.

This complex, challenging, and illuminating book offers both a methodology that is of interest to historians of various fields and an encyclopedic cataloging of many different neofascist individuals, groups, and parties in France and Italy. Indeed, *Transnational Neofascism* not only examines the most prominent far right groups and leaders, but also explores the "trajectories of little groups and how they disappear or migrate in other political containers" (pp. xvi). Altogether groups large and small formed a "neofascist whole" that was characterized by "transnational vectors or transmission belts" comprised of intellectuals, bulletins, activists, translated essays, strategies, and tactics (p. xvi). Conceptually, Mammone's study is influenced by Patricia Clavin's argument that transnational studies can best be understood by using a honeycomb metaphor. Mammone explains that the concept of the honeycomb "allows us to imagine a variegated and interrelated framework with movements of activists, strategies, and imaginaries within it and across it.... [It] 'also contains hollowed-out spaces where organizations, individuals and ideas can wither away to be replaced by new groups, people and innovations'" (pp. 26-27).

One of the most striking and compelling methodological approaches that Mammone takes is to consider the concept of neofascism in organic terms. In addition to the honeycomb, the entire book uses metaphors from the natural world to describe neofascism: connective tissues, fascist wind, fascist galaxy,

emotional lava, cosmology, forest, leaf, and trees. The significance, and one of Mammone's major arguments, is that the rigid definitions, classifications, and taxonomies of political groups do not withstand empirical testing. Instead, he explains, "categorizations should...take a certain degree of flexibility and be more fluid" (p. 11).

Mammone contests the idea of exceptionality in a nation-state's political culture. In particular, he questions the argument of René Rémond, who famously claimed that there were three types of conservative temperaments in France, all of which were essentially committed to a democratic political culture that left no space for the growth of fascism.[1] Rémond's ideas led to the emergence of the so-called "immunity thesis," whereby scholars such as Serge Bernstein and Michel Winock argued that, because France's political culture was fundamentally democratic, it was immune to fascism. The debate has become so passionate on the side of immunity thesis historians that they occasionally resort to ad hominem attacks and sarcasm in denouncing scholars who question the degree to which France has a political culture that is fundamentally democratic.[2] In much more measured terms, Mammone points out that, "[i]n such a classification there was space neither for fascism nor for the influence of non-French paradigms" (p. 3).

In rejecting the usefulness of rigid categories that underpin the immunity thesis, Mammone nevertheless maintains that "concise conceptualizations may be useful" (pp. 14). Here is Mammone's attempt to explain the book's conceptualization of neofascism in one sentence, which is worth quoting in full: "Ideologically and, again, transnationally, the authentic *neofascist wind* blowing across French and Italian national borders (and often beyond them) is a philosophy and movement that, not unlike fascism, combines a sense of crisis and national decline, a fascination with a glorious past, a (often implicit or covert) process of historical revivalism (mythologizing, rationalization, and justification of Mussolini, Vichy, etc.), a critique of the parliamentary process, or, to use Bardèche's words, a suspicion of the 'democratic hypocrisy,' the need of a strong state, a demand for a stricter 'law and order' system, a belief in the (usually white-only) European (also cultural) superiority along with the almost full rejection of an almost inassimilable 'other' (which can be the immigrant, but also political opponents such as leftists), a nationalism combined, when possible, with a transnational and international brotherhood that often comes from the existing webs and years of exchanges, the defense of the values of tradition, a justification of violence (this is less evident for the main parties, and is often implicit or covert, and, sometimes, only verbal or, as in the case of some contemporary groups in some regions of Europe, in the form of vigilante squads against immigrants), and possibly charismatic leadership" (pp. 16-17, Mammone's emphasis).

While it is surprising that this long list does not include gender, it is shorter than the page-long definition of fascism that was offered by Kevin Passmore in the first edition of *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction*. [3] One reason for Passmore's even more complex definition is that he was one of the only scholars who integrated gender into it by considering anti-feminism as a key characteristic of fascism. However, reflective of the historiographical evolution on the topic, when the second edition of *Fascism* appeared in 2014, Passmore rejected the possibility of defining fascism altogether in favor of a more contextual method that emphasizes how contemporaries themselves understood the concept. [4]

*Transnational Neofascism* thus diverts from a historiographical trend on fascism/neofascism in which historians insist that the concept should only be used to reveal how historical actors used the term and what was at stake when they did so. [5] Much of this work is based upon political scientist Michel Dobry's influential argument that scholars who are interested in the topic of political crisis use a *perspective relationnelle* when studying political movements and parties. [6] This approach requires a high degree of contextualization, as Dobry insists that the best way to understand political developments is to examine how political actors understood certain ideas, strategies, and tactics, including the extent to which they borrowed such phenomena from rival groups.

Several recent works on the French far right deploy Dobry's *perspective relationnelle* through highly systematic and empirically contextualized studies. For example, Brian Jenkins and Chris Millington's *France and Fascism: February 1934 and the Dynamics of Political Crisis* offers neither a definition nor taxonomy of fascism, but rather states that "measuring political movements against essentialist definitions of generic Fascism is an unproductive exercise (7)."[7] Passmore argues in a similar vein in his recent work, *The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy*. "The conventional use of categories and definitions," he writes, carries multiple dangers, which include the fact that historians conflate their own categories with those of contemporaries, assign meaning in a given moment according to how it has been categorized, and overlook how "conservatives participated in a common culture, shared with parts of the left, which each reworked in given contexts." [8]

Rather than following the *perspective relationnelle* school of thought, Mammone adopts the methods used by Robert Paxton and Federico Finchelstein, who use the fascist label to describe political groups.[9] Paxton goes further than Finchelstein in proposing a definition of fascism(s), while Finchelstein employs the concept of clerical fascism. For Mammone, Paxton and Finchelstein's scholarship is useful because both historians conceive of fascism as transnational.

For these reasons, some readers may be frustrated with Mammone's approach, which results in the grouping together of different ideas, people, and groups. For instance, Julius Evola, Maurice Bardèche, Giorgio Almirante, Alain de Benoist, the MSI, Nouvelle Droite, the FN, and Marine Le Pen are all a part of Mammone's fascist/neofascist galaxy, even though some of these actors rejected fascism (others, however, embraced it). Nonetheless, to focus only on labeling would overlook Mammone's impressive reconstruction of transnational networks of far-right activism that crossed the Alps. Mammone's complex methodology—using transnationalism to explore the influences of fascism on neofascism over a long period of time, thus undermining assumptions about a static political culture—defines the book's structure, which is organized chronologically. While Mammone's dedication to giving equal space to France and Italy is occasionally disconnected and presents the reader with a dizzying array of ideas, individuals, journals, groups, strategies, and tactics, overall, the argumentation traces a remarkable series of exchanges between far-right activists.

Chapter one explores the role of fascism in Italy and France immediately after the Second World War. Elements of fascism flourished in party structures in Italy and small groups in France largely because, Mammone argues, neither country experienced a "Nuremberg" and subsequently did not fully reconcile with the racism, deportations, and repression of Mussolini and Vichy. Indeed, the MSI—the "strongest European extreme-right party"—was created in 1946 by individuals who played a key role in Mussolini's *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (Italian Social Republic, RSI, 1943-1945) (p. 36). Fifteen former RSI officials, including Giorgio Almirante, contributed to the MSI's foundation. The MSI became the leading disseminator of corporatism, anti-bourgeois rhetoric, and anti-communism, emphasizing vengeance against the Left for Mussolini's supposed martyrdom.

Chapter two turns to institution building by examining the ideas, people, organizations, journals, pan-European organizations, and convocations that animated the regeneration of extreme-right activism in the postwar period. Mammone highlights the significance of the self-identified fascist Maurice Bardèche in France and Julius Evola in Italy. From 1952 to 1982, Bardèche founded and edited the "most important and influential extreme-right publication in post-war France," *Défense de l'Occident*, which helped to animate right-wing circles and "represented the training ground for a generation of neofascists such as François Duprat and Alain de Benoist" (p. 76). Evola contributed to the journal and what Mammone calls an "Evolian web" developed during this time (p. 73). The "web" was influenced by Evola's concept of *apolitia*, the idea that political action could be driven by "aesthetic engagement and a spiritualist self," deterritorialized nationalism, and "detachment from contemporary times and their values" (pp. 71-72, 168). Against the backdrop of the Cold War and the internationalism of Communism

and liberal democracy, these neofascists sought to present a pan-European alternative built around the defense of European civilization and identity.

Chapters three and four examine major events that shook Italy and France: decolonization brought about by the Algerian War and the revolutions of 1968. Neofascists in Italy and France believed that French Algeria represented the “bastion of European civilization.... Losing the non-European territories represented, in their estimation, a defeat for the ‘superiority’ of white civilization and a challenge to the heartiness and prestige of their European nations” (p. 95). For neofascists, the defeat of France represented the corruption of postwar democracies and their impotency in fighting communism (embodied, supposedly, by the FLN). If decolonization helped to unite neofascists in their fears about threats to European civilization, then a backlash against 1968 regenerated neofascism by helping to unite diverse factions in terms of strategy and policy. In the 1972 legislative elections in Italy, the MSI-DN coalition earned its largest vote ever: 8.7 percent, which translated to three million votes and eighty-two MPs. Almirante led the revitalization, building mass support and a fascist identity by establishing journals and associations, translating right-wing authors, and organizing study centers, seminars and international conferences. In this way, the MSI-DN served “as a model for an overall political strategy was extremely appealing for French neofascists” (p. 151). The French neofascist journal, *Rivalrol*, looked admiringly at the MSI and when the FN was created in 1972, its leaders based their own flag upon that of the MSI.

Chapters five and six explore how this new mobilizing set the stage for neofascists to articulate a novel way of thinking about identity. In this, the French Nouvelle Droite and Alain de Benoist would become the preeminent purveyor of ideas. According to Mammone, the Nouvelle Droite was influenced by Evola and promoted a “‘metapolitical’, almost spiritual, engagement, which sought to enable them to gain hegemony and legitimacy” by using belief and culture to “forge those ‘intellectual weapons that would allow us to mount an assault to the political power’” (pp. 160-161). These ideas allowed the Nouvelle Droite to develop the critical concept of differentialism, which emphasized a fundamental difference between people and cultures. Neofascists claimed that all cultures had a “right to difference” that needed to be preserved. This new ideology provided the language that allowed the FN to become the premier far-right movement in Europe by adopting fears about immigration as its top concern. Mammone explains that the FN “fully promoted the constant presence of immigration in its political discourse and as a mobilizing theme. Over subsequent years, this evolved into the most successful tactic ever implemented by a French neofascist movement...and allowed the FN to become the most appealing extreme-right party in Western Europe” (p. 193). Far-right leaders in Italy regularly invited Jean-Marie Le Pen (and later, his daughter Marine) to Italy, as Italian neofascists developed what they called “preferenza nazionale (national preference)...a theme characterized by ‘purity’ and by idealized intertemporal communities in the shape of ‘the West,’ the ‘Indo-European,’ or ‘Judeo-Christian’ civilization” (p. 217). In this way, ‘national preference’ became code for xenophobia.

While the afterword discusses the rise of Marine Le Pen to president of the FN in 2011, *Transnational Fascism* was published before the current wave of people migrating and seeking refuge in Europe, which is the largest since World War II and has emboldened the far right throughout the continent. Mammone’s fine work provides important historical context for the deep challenges that lie ahead for those who refuse to think in civilizational terms and believe instead that people from a variety of cultures can contribute to French and Italian societies.

## NOTES

[1] René Rémond, *La Droite en France, de 1815 à nos jours*, 4th ed. (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1982).

[2] The personal attacks have focused on Robert Soucy and Zeev Sternhell in particular, but include Anglophone scholars more generally. See especially Serge Bernstein et Michel Winock, *Fascisme français?*

*La controverse* (CNRS Editions: Paris, 2014); Michel Winock, "En lisant Robert Soucy," *Vingtième Siècle* 95(2007): 237-42; Michel Winock, "Retour sur le fascisme français: La Rocque et les Croix de Feu." *Vingtième Siècle* 90(2006): 3-27.

[3] Kevin Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 26.

[4] Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[5] See, for example, Brian Jenkins and Chris Millington, *France and Fascism: February 1934 and the Dynamics of Political Crisis* (London: Routledge, 2015); Kevin Passmore, *The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Laurent Kestel, *La conversion politique: Doriot, le PPF, et la question du fascisme français* (Paris: Editions Raisons d'Agir, 2012); Bruno Goyet, "La réception du fascisme en France dans les années 20," in Michel Dobry, ed., *Le mythe de l'allergie française du fascisme*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003) pp. 69-105. This vein of scholarship seeks to contextualize efforts to propose a definition of "generic fascism," by scholars such as Roger Griffin; see Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter, 1991).

[6] Michel Dobry, "La thèse immunitaire face aux fascismes: pour une critique de la logique classificatoire," in Michel Dobry, ed., *Le mythe de l'allergie française au fascisme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003), pp. 17-67.

[7] Jenkins and Millington, *France and Fascism*, 2015.

[8] Passmore, *The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy*, p. 12.

[9] Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004); Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919-1945* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010). For other examples of historians willing to use the fascist label, see Geoff Read, *The Republic of Men: Gender and the Political Parties in Interwar France* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014); Samuel Kalman, *French Colonial Fascism: The Extreme Right in Algeria, 1919-1939* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Daniella Sarnoff, "Domesticating Fascism: Family and Gender in French Fascist Leagues," in K. Blee and S. McGee Deutsch, eds., *Women of the Right: Comparisons and Interplay across Borders* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), pp. 163-176; Paul Mazgaj, *Imagining Fascism: The Cultural Politics of the French Young Right* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007); Cheryl Koos, "Fascism, Fatherhood, and the Family in Interwar France: The Case of Antoine Redier and the Légion," *Journal of Family History* 24/3(1999): 317-329.

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