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Analysing Fascist Discourse

European Fascism in Talk and Text

Edited by

Ruth Wodak and John E. Richardson

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Analysing Fascist Discourse

This book focuses primarily on continuities and discontinuities of fascist politics as manifested in discourses of postwar European countries. Many traumatic pasts in Europe are linked to the experience of fascist and national-socialist regimes in the 20th century and to related colonial and imperialist expansionist politics. And yet we are again confronted with the emergence, rise and success of extreme right-wing political movements, across Europe and beyond, which frequently draw on fascist and national-socialist ideologies, themes, idioms, arguments and lexical items. Postwar taboos have forced such parties, politicians and their electorate to frequently code their exclusionary fascist rhetoric.

This collection shows that an interdisciplinary critical approach to fascist text and talk—subsuming all instances of meaning-making (e.g. oral, visual, written, sounds) and genres such as policy documents, speeches, school books, media reporting, posters, songs, logos and other symbols—is necessary to deconstruct exclusionary meanings and to confront their inegalitarian political projects.

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European Fascism in Talk and Text

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1 European Fascism in Talk and Text—Introduction

Ruth Wodak and John E. Richardson

DISCOURSE STUDIES, FASCISM, AND THE/REWRITING OF HISTORY

Since the late 20th century, much research in Discourse Studies (DS) and Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) has analysed the many dimensions of national and transnational ‘identity politics’ and started to investigate how the discursive construction of such identities draws on collective and individual memories, on hegemonic and common-sense narratives, and on myths which are proposed as constitutive for national identification. Indeed, one might claim that the entire field of ‘language and politics’ in postwar Europe since the 1960s and 1970s was triggered by the urge to grasp the influence of persuasive rhetoric in and on totalitarian regimes and related major catastrophes in the 20th century, thus trying to come to terms with the traumatic pasts in Europe and beyond (Postoutenko, 2010; Wodak and Auer-Boreo, 2009).

Of course, many of these traumatic pasts in Europe are linked to the experience of fascist and national-socialist regimes in the 20th century and to—sometimes—related colonial and imperialist expansionist politics (Judt, 2007; Snyder, 2010). In this book, we focus primarily on *continuities* and *discontinuities* of fascist politics and experiences as manifested in text and discourse of all kinds in postwar European countries. We believe this to be a most relevant and timely topic as we are confronted with the emergence, rise and success of extreme right-wing populist parties across Europe and beyond (e.g. Wodak, KhosraviNik, Mral, 2012; Harrison and Bruter, 2011; Schweitzer, 2012) which frequently draw on fascist and national-socialist ideologies, themes, arguments, topoi and lexical items as well as idioms. Usually, however, such intertextual relationships are not easily detected, as postwar taboos have forced such parties, politicians and their electorate to frequently code their exclusionary fascist rhetoric (Richardson, 2011; Wodak, 2007, 2011a, b).

This is why we endorse an interdisciplinary critical approach to fascist text and talk subsuming all instances of meaning-making (e.g. oral, visual, written, sounds) and genres such as policy documents, speeches, school

books, party/movement media, posters, songs, logos and other symbols. We also emphasise in this book (and all chapters) that instances of text and talk (in this wide sense) have to be contextualised adequately to be able to illustrate intertextual and interdiscursive relationships explicitly. Moreover, we attempt to trace the trajectories of fascist text and talk into the 21st century via the systematic analysis of processes of *recontextualisation* (Heer et al., 2008; Richardson and Wodak, 2009a, b).

Investigating fascist and national-socialist language use is, of course, not new; as early as the 1940s, close links between general research on language and studies on political change were established, mainly in Germany. Linguistic research in the wake of National Socialism was conducted primarily by Victor Klemperer (1947, 2005) and Rolf Sternberger et al. (1957), who both paved the way for the new discipline of *Politiolinguistik* (Schmitz-Berning, 2000). Klemperer and Sternberger sampled, categorized and described the words used during the Nazi regime; many words had acquired new meanings, other words were forbidden (borrowed words from other languages, like *cigarette*) and neologisms (new words) were created (e.g. Maas, 1985); similar language policies labelled as *langue du bois* were adopted by the former communist totalitarian regimes (Wodak and Kirsch, 1995). Controlling language in this way implies an attempt to control the (minds and thoughts of) people. The novel 1984, by George Orwell was, of course, another significant point of departure for the development of the entire field (Chilton, 2006).

All these studies were influenced by the massive use of propaganda during the Second World War and in the emerging Cold War era, in the 1950s. After 1989 and the end of the Cold War, more research was dedicated to the assessment of the Communist era and the so-called *transformation* (or *transition*) in Central and Eastern Europe (Galasińska and Krzyżanowski, 2009). Overall, it became apparent that most societies have experienced traumatic events in their past, whether war and war crimes, revolution, torture or mass killing and rape which were frequently denied or swept ‘under the carpet’ (Judt, 2007)—official rhetoric wanted to make ‘a *clean break*’ and move on to the future (Blommaert, 2005; De Cillia and Wodak, 2009a, b; Ensink and Sauer, 2003; Steinmetz, 2011; Wodak and De Cillia, 2007; Wodak et al., 1990, 1994). Nevertheless, these experiences were and are passed on to future generations in the form of collective and individual memories that serve to construct hegemonic narratives (Assmann, 2009).

Thus far, a great deal of academic work has examined the various ways that societies may remember traumatic pasts and may use knowledge and understanding of these pasts variously as a therapeutic tool to cleanse and to reconcile, as a way to achieve closure and allow societies to ‘move on’ or (least frequently) as a way to honestly and openly face a shared history of mutual violence (Achugar, 2008; Assmann, 2009; Anthonissen and Blommaert, 2006; Verdoolaege, 2008). However, the discourses of contemporary

fascisms frequently act as a form of ‘*anti-memory*’, revising, reformulating, reclassifying and on occasion openly denying the trauma and violence that arises inexorably from fascist ideological commitments.

The chapters in this book reflect the range of these debates and argue that a more context-sensitive ‘definition’ of fascism is required, in contrast to theorists searching for a ‘one-size-fits-all’ fascist minimum (see chapters by Bar-On, Posch et al., Musolff, and Woodley in this book). That said, certain political realities are shared by all countries across Europe. Understandably, the Nazi industrialisation of mass murder during the Second World War has meant that, since 1945, there is little electoral cachet in labelling a party or movement ‘fascist’. This political landscape has led to two perpetually recurring strategies for fascist parties across Europe: *dissociating* themselves from fascism and *rehabilitating* it. Parties taking the second route necessarily consign themselves to a position outside democratic politics, leading the party down a pseudo-revolutionary path, trying to secure power through violence and ‘street politics’ (see chapters by Kovács & Szilágyi, McGlashan, Rudling, and Shekhovtsov in this book).

Fascist parties seeking power through the ballot have universally adopted the first political strategy—explicit verbal dissociation from fascism, in terms of both political and ideological continuities. In Britain, this approach was initially exemplified by Oswald Mosley and the Union Movement (Macklin, 2007; Renton, 2000). The fascist euphemistic commonplaces that the British Union of Fascists used before the war—such as ‘national unity’, ‘common culture’ and ‘strong government’—were rebranded and relaunched after the war as “a synthesis of the best elements of fascism and of the old democracy” (Mosley, n.d.: 17). So, in the discourse of Mosley’s Union Movement, which was launched in 1948, fascism was now referred to as ‘European Socialism’, the free-to-be-exploited Empire became a united ‘Europe-Africa’ and single-party rule became “definite, conscious and economic leadership” (Skidelsky, 1981: 495–6; see chapter by Richardson in this book).

Similar ‘*rebranding*’ has since taken place across Europe, wherein parties with fascist political predecessors—including the Austrian FPÖ and BZÖ, the French FN, the German REP and NPD, the Portuguese CDS/PP and PNR, the Spanish PP, the British BNP and several others—both *orientate towards* and *simultaneously deny* any continuity with the arguments and policies of previous movements (see chapters by Beauzamy, Mădroane, Marinho and Billig, Pinto, Richardson, and Engel and Wodak in this book). The result is an intriguing and often contradictory mix of implicit indexing of fascist ideological commitments accompanied by explicit denials of these same commitments.

It is, however, apparent that many answers to overarching questions have not been provided to date. How do fascist ideologies re-emerge? Are there any continuities, and how do these become apparent? Are these manifestations context-dependent and in which ways? Which functions do such continuities fulfil in contemporary politics?

COMPARING AND/OR EQUATING? DEFINING 'FASCISM'

Judt's seminal book *Post-War* (2007) presents a comprehensive and detailed account of different aspects of the world's responses to (the aftermath of) the Second World War. He succeeds in illustrating how specific and, indeed, diverse the responses in various countries were and are to the salient traumatic experiences of the past. In this vein, Pelinka (2009: 49) argues that

[i]n dealing with war crimes and crimes against humanity, three different, sometimes conflicting patterns have been developed since 1945. The three patterns can be distinguished according to their different guarding principles: Justice: Perpetrators must be brought to court and convicted. Truth: All major aspects of the crimes must become known to the public. Peace: At the end of any process, social reconciliation must become possible.

He continues that "on the short run, neglecting justice and truth in favour of peace and reconciliation may have a positive impact on stabilizing democracy in a peaceful way; but on the long run, such a neglect has its price especially regarding social peace"(ibid.).

More specifically, Pelinka (2009) claims that, on the one hand, "without comparing the quality and the quantity of evidence, any debate about conflicting narratives is losing any kind of academic liability and responsibility" (p. 50); thus *comparison* should take place, always in a context-dependent way. On the other hand, however, comparisons should not lead to any *equation* of traumatic events. Thus, Pelinka emphasises that

Fascism is not Fascism is not Fascism. Too easily the term fascism is used to blur significant differences between different regimes. Spain under Franco is not Italy under Mussolini is not Austria under Dollfuß is not Portugal under Salazar is not Hungary under Horthy—and they all are not Germany under Hitler. All these different types of fascism or semi-fascism have a lot in common—non-democratic rule, oppression of political opponents, ending the rule of law. But the intensity of suppression as well as the existence of a monopolistic mass party make a lot of difference—not to speak of the Holocaust which is the decisive quality of Nazism and not of fascism in general. (ibid., p. 53)

Careful deconstruction of many current debates about the past in different parts of the world illustrates indeed that certain terms become ubiquitous—such as 'Holocaust' and 'fascism'. Following Pelinka's argument, certain terms can lose their distinctiveness when used to label similar but very different events and experiences in different national contexts. Such terms can tend to be employed like 'empty signifiers', and their context-dependent meanings become blurred. Hence, research about past events necessarily

has to consider the *sociopolitical and historical contexts* of each experience and avoid undifferentiated generalisations.

Related to this, Milza and Bernstein (1992: 7) argue that “No universally accepted definition of the fascist phenomenon exists, no consensus, however slight, as to its range, its ideological origins, or the modalities of action which characterise it”. Indeed, for the past 80 years, there has always been variability and disagreement about how to classify or define fascism. These disagreements have themselves shifted, so the arguments of the 1930s were different to those of the 1960s, different again to the debates now and shaped in part by the histories, debates and current political realities in different national contexts. Nevertheless, a sense remains that there must be an ideological core—or collection of essential fascist political traits—that allows us to recognise and identify fascism *qua* fascism—or, at minimum, a group of “definitional characteristics of the genus fascism, of which each variety is a different manifestation” (Griffin, 1998: 2). Accordingly, since the 1970s, there have been repeated academic attempts to codify the plurality of what fascism ‘really’ was—and perhaps is—and what the aims and characteristics of a fascist political movement may be. Central to these discussions were a number of debates which have yet to be resolved: Was fascism an ideology or a system of rule? Was fascism limited to a period until 1945—a mini-epoch—or is it a system or an ideology that has survived the end of the Second World War? Is fascism modernising or conservative? Is fascism revolutionary, reactionary or counterrevolutionary? To what extent was fascism a generic phenomenon, with various permutations within one unified ideological family? Or were different regimes the product of different indigenous conditions and political and historical traditions?

Moreover, theorists have argued variously for the specific clarificatory advantages of adopting psychological/ psychotherapeutic, sociopolitical and ideational approaches to analysis. Taking each in turn: should we regard fascism as an aberration? As a product of crisis and disease in society (Gregor, 1974/1997: 28) or of “blackest, unfathomable despair” (Drucker, 1939: 271)? Or as a reflection of the ‘prejudiced personality’ of fascist leaders and their supporters (Adorno et al., 1950)? Within work advancing sociopolitical and socioeconomic frames of reference, fascism has been given a bewildering variety of contradictory classifications and placed at almost all points on the ideological spectrum: as a counterrevolutionary movement of the extreme right (Renton, 1999), as the extremism of the centre (Lipset, 1960), as a synthesis of both left and right offering a combination of “organic nationalism and anti-Marxist socialism” (Sternhell, 1986: 9) or as a particular form of totalitarian government, which shares key features with the Communist left (Friedrich, summarised in Kitchen, 1982: 27).

Third, following the waning of the ‘totalitarianism’ explanation of fascism, a body of work developed that approached fascism primarily as an ideology and aimed to extract the ideological core of “generic fascism that may account for significant and unique similarities between the various

permutations of fascism whilst convincingly accommodating deviations as either nationally or historically specific phenomena" (Kallis, 2009: 4). Ernst Nolte (1968) developed the first 'fascist minimum' (defined as anticomunism; antiliberalism; anticonservatism; the *Führerprinzip*; a party army; and the aim of totalitarianism), and his objective (though not his theoretical approach) was then developed in novel and fruitful ways by others—amongst them Juan Linz, Stanley Payne, Roger Eatwell and Roger Griffin. Such work reaches its apotheosis in the work of Griffin, whose one-sentence definition of fascism—"Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism" (Griffin, 1991: 26), or, "formulated in three words: 'palingenetic populist ultra-nationalism'" (1998: 13)—is, truly, a minimal fascist minimum. Indeed, the extreme brevity of his definition drew withering comments from Paxton (2005: 221), who suggests that Griffin's "zeal to reduce fascism to one pithy sentence seems to me more likely to inhibit than to stimulate analysis of how and with whom it worked."

There is, in short, an almost insuperable volume of work on fascisms. De Felice (1991), for example, lists 12,208 books and articles in a bibliography devoted to Italian Fascism, generic fascism and the history of the Second World War; Rees's annotated bibliography on fascism in Britain—published in 1979—lists 608 publications on/about British fascism alone and a further 270 written by fascists themselves. Given this outpouring and the ways that such theorisation has, in part at least, reflected broad trends in Western geopolitics (particularly post-World War II), it should come as little surprise that one's definition of fascism (or, indeed, Fascism) is as much a reflection of the political commitments of the writer—and, specifically, his or her perception of scholarship on fascism and its role in praxis—as the material or historical 'facts on the ground'. As Woodley (2010: 1) has put it, the so-called new consensus in fascism studies developed by 'revisionist historians' such as Griffin "is founded less on scholarly agreement than a conscious rejection of historical materialism as a valid methodological framework." On the one side of the argument we find the challenging polemics of Renton (1999: 18), demanding "how can a historian, in all conscience, approach the study of fascism with neutrality? . . . One cannot be balanced when writing about fascism, there is nothing positive to be said of it." On the other, there is Griffin (1998) as the Pied Piper of the new consensus, who argues that historians should "treat fascism like any other ideology" (p. 15), in that it can be approached and defined "as an ideology inferable from the claims made by its own protagonists" (p. 238).

Thus, the study and analysis of fascism are contested territories. One justification for using the generic term 'fascism' is that it enables appreciation and comparison of tendencies common to more than one country and more than one period in time—and also that it helps draw out the interconnections between these different periods in time. But, we would argue, any appropriate theory of fascism must begin with the idea that fascism must

be interpreted *critically*. A critical approach means that we need to take a step beyond the immediate and take into account detailed analysis of the social, political and cultural factors, as well as the significance of ideas and arguments (Iordachi, 2010); to look at what fascists *do* as well as what they *say*; and to closely examine the dialectical relations between context and the text/talk of (assumedly/potentially fascist) political protagonists.

DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL CHANGE—INTERTEXTUALITY AND RECONTEXTUALISATION

The chapters in this book are based on an integration of Pelinka's argument, with concepts from CDS. In this context, the notions of '*intertextuality*', '*recontextualisation*' and '*entextualisation*' lend themselves for further theorizing (Blommaert, 2003; Wodak and Fairclough, 2010).

An important assumption common to various approaches to CDS, and Discourse Studies in general, is that *processes of social change* are in part processes of *change in discourse* and that change in discourse may, subject to certain conditions, have constructive effects on processes of social change more generally. The challenge is to develop *theories of social change* which coherently integrate relations between discourse and other elements of the social process, as well as methodologies for focusing specifically on these relations, and the particular place and impact of discourse, in interdisciplinary research on social change (Fairclough, 1992; Heer et al., 2008; Kovács and Wodak, 2003; Krzyżanowski and Wodak, 2009).

(Critical) Discourse Analysis is concerned with the analysis of texts in relation to other elements of social processes—written texts, spoken interactions, 'multi-semiotic' texts which combine language, visual images, music, symbols, and so on. Texts are the relatively stable records of the discourse element of social events (also, in a broad sense, including actions, interactions and happenings). Insofar as discourse analysis focuses on texts in researching relations between discourse and other elements of social change, the theoretical and methodological challenges involve simultaneously addressing (a) relations between discourse and other social elements (i.e. 'mediation') and (b) relations between social events/texts and more durable, more stable or institutionalized, more abstract levels of social reality: social practices and social structures. Moreover, since events and texts are linked to, affected by and have effects on other events and texts in different places and at different times, a further challenge consists of developing ways to address (c) broadly spatial and temporal relationships between events and texts (see Wodak and Fairclough, 2010, for more details).

Spatial and temporal relationships between texts include relations of *recontextualization* whereby texts (and the arguments which they deploy) move between spatially and temporally different contexts and are subject to transformations whose nature depends upon relationships and differences

between such contexts. Recontextualization as one of the salient linguistic processes governing historical change is concretely manifested in the *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity* of texts. Recontextualization is thus frequently realized in the *mixing* of ‘new’ elements and ‘old’ elements, such as particular old words, expressions, arguments, *topoi*, rhetorical devices and so forth, and new discourses and genres.¹ During processes of change, conflicts between different agents and strategies usually include *struggle* between discourses and may lead to the *hegemony* of particular discourses, argumentative standpoints or ideologies manifested in these discourses. Within this approach, the focus needs to be not only on individual events (and texts) but also on *chains of events* (and chains of texts) and on the effects of agency and strategy in shaping events (and texts) over time (Wodak and Fairclough, 2010).

Struggles for hegemony, which can thus be reconstructed in a longitudinal way, also require very subtle context-dependent analyses. In this way, the *theorization of contexts* becomes crucial to any dialectic analysis (e.g. the ‘four-level model of context’ [Wodak, 2001]; see chapters by Kovács and Szilágyi, McGlashan, Mădroane, Musolff, Richardson, and Engel and Wodak in this book). We assume that such changes occur on several levels at different times and with different speed (or sometimes not at all); thus, *non-simultaneity* needs to be accounted for in differentiated, context-dependent ways. These intricate and complex processes also suggest the necessity of the concept of ‘*glocalization*’: of understanding how more global processes are being implemented, recontextualized and thus changed on local/regional/national levels (see Wodak, 2010). Such observations are particularly salient regarding the ideologies and moments of European fascism, given the ideational and interdiscursive relations that exist—synchronically and diachronically—between parties and traditions across a wide number of European nations—relations that are expressed and revealed through, *inter alia*, discursive processes of revision, reinterpretation, recontextualization, rehabilitation and open mimetic reproduction. These social processes also take place simultaneously in different spheres, domains and social fields, as well as through relationships between them and between events and texts within them.

SUMMARIZING THE BOOK

This book explores ‘the dis/continuities of fascisms’ from a discourse-analytic perspective. It is obvious that all dimensions and levels of language and communication can be functionalized in revisionist ways to achieve a particular ‘re/writing of history’ and the continuity of different fascisms. This book aims primarily at raising awareness of the ‘power of the written and spoken word’ in all public and private contexts in our lives, which requires careful and critical reading/listening and viewing in order to understand the implied frequently controversial and conflicting meanings.