Editors' Introduction

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"È questo il fiore del partigiano morto per la libertà"
—"Bella ciao"

Italy. Lebanon. Turkey. Chile. Iraq. India. And back to Italy. The anti-fascist song "Bella ciao" (1944) has become a sine qua non of the sociopolitical protests that have animated city squares throughout the globe. While certainly different in nature and objectives, those manifestations express a deep-seated frustration with the political establishment, fueled by rising inequality on the one hand, and economic stagnation on the other. "Bella ciao," while born out of the struggle against the Nazi-Fascist regime, has been able to extricate itself from both spatial and temporal boundaries.[1] Already in 1960, at the funerals of five workers killed by police forces during a strike in Reggio Emilia, the song made its first appearance outside its original context.[2] It then became further popularized during the political unrest of 1968. But the popularity of "Bella ciao" does not stop with the end of the counterculture. It echoed once again, this time in a more official setting, in 1984 at the funeral of the anti-fascist secretary of the Italian Communist Party, Enrico Berlinguer. In 2019, "Bella ciao" returned to the Italian squares and was heard, among other songs, in Bologna, Modena, Palermo, and Genoa, thanks to the newly formed anti-Salvini movement known as "6000 sardine."[3] Most recently, in early January 2020, protesters in Mumbai invoked the anthem during a protest in opposition to the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act, a move by the reigning Bharatiya Janata Party to define Indian citizenship through religious affiliation.

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The popularity of "Bella ciao" well beyond 1945 hints that its historically anti-fascist message of freedom from oppression continues to echo at present across the globe. The existence of this song in places that have experienced neither the crises of interwar Europe nor the horrors of World War II invites us to ask whether the two political ideologies that generated "Bella ciao," fascism and anti-fascism, can exist outside Europe and after 1945. The articles collected in this issue of *Radical History Review* undertake, in one form or another, the challenge posed by the transnational and transhistorical nature of "Bella ciao," by considering what fascism and anti-fascism look like after World War II.

Contemporary media would certainly have us believe not only that fascism is alive and well today, but that it is on the rise. Political leaders from Erdoğan, Modi, and Bolsonaro to Putin and Trump have all been demonized by the media as "fascist." A Google search at the beginning of 2020 for "Trump and Fascism" returns no fewer than 10 million hits, about half of which ask whether he is one, while the others simply declare him as such. Leaders such as former secretary of state Madeleine Albright have written about the topic, as well as the (in)famous Yale historian Timothy Snyder, who has mongered fear in the form of the books *Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*, and *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. So too—and on more solid ground—has his colleague, the Yale philosopher Jason Stanley.[4] The ease with which the F-word is employed today against people and ideas with which one does not agree is undoubtedly not what the Holocaust survivor Primo Levi meant when he cautioned that "every age has its own fascism," nor is it what we propose as fascism in this issue.[5] Like those who sing "Bella ciao" today, Levi was responding to current oppression in his time—American imperialism in Vietnam and the rise of military dictatorships in South America—more than his past experiences in surviving the Nazis and Auschwitz. The conundrum that today's global rise of the radical right presents us, then, is how to utilize the rhetorical value implicit in the word *fascism*, the word that Levi understood as capable of inspiring a reaction against oppressive forces, without, however, misusing or, worse, abusing it to the point of becoming desensitized to it. As historian Roger Griffin said of Trump, "You can be a total xenophobic racist male chauvinist bastard and still not be a fascist."[6]

How to define fascism has been a dilemma since, perhaps, the inception of the fascist movement in 1919. Even Giovanni Gentile, philosopher of the National Fascist Party (PNF) tasked with the challenge of tracing its ideological confines, preferred to avoid giving fascism any fixed contours.[7] In order to help contain the ontological nature of fascism, scholars of generic fascism have inherently viewed the geographic location (Europe) and time period (1919–45) in which fascism existed as discrete, even if there are some nuanced differences in how they define the term: Ernst Nolte's emphasis on a "fascist minimum," Emilio Gentile's three-dimensional understanding of fascism, Roger Griffin's differentiation between Fascism and a

generic fascism, and Robert Paxton's emphasis on political action as much as rhetoric.[8] However, the reticence to move beyond strict geographical boundaries has created a certain definitional hierarchy that has besieged the field of fascist studies in the last decades, which excludes movements that shared enormous similarities with interwar European fascism but did not fit the time frame or the geographical limits. Only recently have we witnessed historians of fascism explore, in the words of Federico Finchelstein, the "global connections that were essential for fascist ideology to travel (or replicate itself, so to speak) from one side of the ocean to the other."[9] In Finchelstein's transatlantic analysis of Italy and Argentina in the 1920s and 1930s, fascism becomes a transnational ideology, one that "resists standard geohistoriographical categories."[10] Interestingly, as the field of fascist studies began to open to the possibility of considering movements outside Europe as fascist, the 2008 economic crisis unleashed a sense of fear and precarity that has resulted in a comeback of rhetorical strategies and political practices that the media has, for the most part, erroneously labeled as fascist. To be clear, fascism has recently reemerged as a hegemonic discourse, albeit in the form of what semiologist Umberto Eco in a 1995 essay aptly called "Ur-fascism" or eternal fascism. It is not so much that fascism returns but that fascism, due to its rhetorical infinitude, had never really ceased to be. Eco, by pointing to the limitlessness of fascism, reveals why scholars of fascism needed to circumscribe this phenomenon both temporally and spatially in order to productively study it. To that extent, the object of their works was not fascism per se, but what could be referred to as historical fascism—limited to Europe and to the years 1919–45. At the same time, the idea of an Ur-fascism allows for fascism to exist beyond those same limits. Eco acknowledges that there is a set of characteristics to be shared in order for a movement to be called fascist; but the ontological confusion lies in the fact that these elements contradict each other.[11] Enzo Traverso, for example, uses the prefix *post* before *fascism* when speaking of the rise of the radical right in recent years.[12] *Postfascism* in Traverso's analysis hints simultaneously at two ideas: first, the necessity of having a historical fascism to which we can compare today's radical right movements, and second, that despite perhaps being eerily similar to those of the interwar period, they are not *yet* fascist. Traverso's idea of a force in flux, of the possibility, not yet fulfilled, of becoming fascist, speaks to Eco's eternal fascism insofar as both accept that movements generally labeled as radical right can always become fascist, despite taking place after 1945.

This "fascist potential" in our current political climate has urged scholars of fascism to become more publicly vocal. In doing so, their views on historical fascism have become clearer and reveal that for most of these Anglo-American scholars, three features are crucial for a historical fascism to return: revolution, violence, and crisis. The first, many historians agree, has not quite happened—at least not yet. Trump may claim that "politicians are all talk and no action," but as historian Jeffrey Herf points out, Trump does not openly attack institutions of democracy or

democracy itself as Hitler and Mussolini once did.[13] Paxton, Griffin, Matthew Feldman, and Stanley Payne agree.[14] Italian Fascism and National Socialism promised the end of democracy and the creation of a new "fascist man." "Payne emphasizes that fascism is 'a national project that is revolutionary and breaks down all the standards and all the barriers'"—or at least it aspired to do so.[15] Beyond revolution, the scholars above have pointed out historical fascism's focus on violence as a barometer for its return, and here, too, they remain wary of such a possibility. For them historical fascism did not just espouse and incite violence; rather, violence was a core philosophy at the heart of those regimes. The violent ideology of Marinetti's Italian Futurism or Georges Sorel's philosophy were key to the development of Italian Fascism—as was a selective reading of Nietzsche to Nazism—but no such deep claim can be made for most of the radical right today. The revolutionary violence that spawned historical fascism was the result of crisis, or more accurately, a constellation of crises. For historian Geoff Eley, we cannot understand the creation of Italian Fascism or National Socialism without the crises of World War I and its outcomes: total war, Bolshevism, revolutionary insurgency, mass trade unionism, growing communist and social democratic parties, and a wave of political democratization. In short, the nuances of history—like those that created fascism—do not repeat themselves. Or at least, notes Eley, "crises of a similar kind never mirror each other exactly."[16] With such a statement, Eley sums up much of the recent public discussion by historians of fascism on our contemporary world. Fascism was something that existed during the interwar years. It looked and acted a certain way, even if it had national idiosyncrasies. What we are witnessing today is not yet fascism per se—not "exactly." "But," as Herf notes, "there's still plenty of room for discomfort."[17]

Consequently, scholarly understandings of anti-fascism have also been subjected to the strict interwar framework and often focus on specific, European, examples, such as the Italian Resistenza.[18] However, such a rigid approach to what Zeev Sternhell has described as the ideology of an alternative modernity that rejects secular and democratic values risks diminishing the impact that fascism, and anti-fascism, have had on the political upheavals of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[19] While 1945 is an important watershed for dividing two supposedly different eras, it does not function as a concrete barrier, and ideas are bound to spill over. Thus, while we do recognize that there exists a set of characteristics proper to interwar fascism, which from here on we will call historical fascism, this issue of *Radical History Review* acknowledges the necessity to expand our understanding of fascism and anti-fascism beyond 1945. For rather than completely disappearing after the war, both fascism (and the far-right politics it influenced) and anti-fascism persisted over the following decades, albeit frequently in very different forms and contexts.

The historical memory of the defeat of the Axis powers has served to validate those anti-fascist struggles that came before it while simultaneously delegitimizing

those that followed. If the combatants of the Spanish Civil War were dubbed "premature anti-fascists," then the absence of historical scholarship on postwar anti-fascists implicitly reduces them to the status of "belated anti-fascists."[20] Apart from a handful of studies of postwar anti-fascism in Britain by Nigel Copsey, Dave Renton, and others, the English-language literature written by professional historians on postwar anti-fascists confronting the far right is minimal.[21] More has been written about the use of anti-fascist rhetoric and symbols by postwar groups and movements that had broader agendas, such as the Black Panthers or various socialist and communist political parties, to condemn prevailing structures of power,[22] but many scholars have dismissed radical deployments of anti-fascism as gross distortions of the concept's historical meaning. Much of what exists on postwar anti-fascism focuses on issues of historical memory.[23] This lack of attention paid to postwar anti-fascism (especially that which has been directed toward explicitly far-right politics) by professional historians motivated Mark Bray (one of this issue's coeditors) to publish *Antifa: The Anti-fascist Handbook*, a transnational study of militant anti-fascism in Europe and North America.[24] Among Bray's goals with the book was to take seriously the elements of continuity that have existed between interwar and postwar fascism and far-right politics and anti-fascism (without ignoring the important transformations they have undergone) and to make an argument for the historical importance of the anti-fascist resistance of "marginal" groups and communities in recent decades. Along these lines, we offer a Curated Spaces feature from the Interference Archive that includes anti-fascist material from its collections, along with a necessary reflection on the logistics of showing politically controversial material to the public.

The anti-fascist song "Bella ciao" has shown us that its boundless power lies in its message of freedom from oppression, more so than in a circumstantial understanding of its lyrics. Similarly, although the word *fascism* carries within it an almost abysmal capacity for political oversimplification, it also possesses an undeniable rhetorical value whose function as a catalyst for action against forms of political, economic, and social oppression deserves our attention. While the self-proclaimed anti-fascism of movements protecting oppressed communities in the second half of the twentieth century has often been discarded as politically irrelevant or bombastic, due to the strict definition associated with fascism, the articles collected in this issue reveal instead its potential, even when operating on the margins. At times, those margins have been cultural, as Stuart Schrader's review essay on anti-fascism, punk, and Rock Against Racism demonstrates. Moreover, the essays of this issue explore how seemingly isolated movements have actually forged links across continents to produce incredibly diverse political alliances. By integrating anti-imperialism into the conversation about anti-fascism, Antonino Scalia's analysis of Italian Communist internationalism and Michael Staudenmaier's examination of

the Latinx Left show how the tendency of scholars to isolate anti-fascism (or fascism) in discrete boxes often misses how such politics are always overlapping with other forms of struggle (and domination). Certainly, historians should never accept such anti-fascist, anti-imperialist argumentation (or any other form of argumentation) at face value, but such scholarship suggests that perhaps we can recognize the oversimplifications of some postwar anti-fascist arguments while also teasing out their rhetorical value for the purpose of making more fundamental points about the common imperialist foundations beneath colonialism—explicit fascism and postwar imperialism in Vietnam, for example. Such commonalities become evident when reading Rosa Hamilton's article on the London Gay Liberation Front and its coalition with disparate movements across Western Europe, and Cole Rizki's piece on the transhistorical alliance between Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo and *travestí* activism in Argentina. In her Intervention piece, Vivian Shaw explores how global anti-fascism is invoked in contemporary Japan, creating what she calls a culture of "liberal anti-fascism." If the common enemy of these groups had been called something other than fascist, these connections might not have materialized.

Many of the insights available to us through the study of postwar anti-fascism can be generated by tracing how the struggles of "marginal" anti-fascists and their allies can nuance our understanding of broader political dynamics concerning identity, migration, and community formation, and simultaneously how dissecting postwar radical analyses of capitalist authoritarianism that deploy notions of fascism can reveal aspects of continuity between far-right politics, imperialism, and historical fascism despite the presence of rhetorical excesses. Fascism becomes a positive category insofar as it promotes common struggles and the easy identification of a common enemy. The leaders of those movements acknowledged this and chose to use the word *fascism* in spite of the likelihood that some of them may not have believed that what they stood against was textbook fascism. Notably, the power of labeling a political force as fascist also works the other way around, as Benjamin Bland's concluding piece on the British Radical Right and its attempted alliance with Qathafi's Libya shows.

We understand that a generous understanding of fascism, once it is not temporally bounded in the ways scholars have often assumed, risks generalizing and normalizing a phenomenon that has specific characteristics. To this end, in our Teaching Radical History section, Giulia Riccò discusses rewriting Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* as a way for the students to bridge the gap between the oversimplification of fascism and its dogmatic sophistication. At the same time, we also recognize that *why* the movements discussed in this issue chose to self-identify as anti-fascist holds a certain value that cannot be dismissed simply because their use of *fascism* does not adhere to the one devised by academics. If before the presidential election of 2016 the thorny issue of defining *fascism* seemed to concern only the ivory tower, with the arrival of Donald J. Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Matteo Salvini, Narendra Modi, Marine Le Pen, and their like on the international political scene,

the necessity of rethinking our definitions of *fascism* and *anti-fascism* has become all the more urgent and public.

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Notes

1. For more on the song's origins, see Bermani, *"Guerra Guerra ai palazzi e alle chiese . . ."*
2. Malara, "'Bella Ciao,'" 62.
3. Balmer, "A Can-Do Challenge? Italian 'Sardines' Take On Salvini."
4. Albright and Woodward, *Fascism*; Snyder, *On Tyranny*; Snyder, *Road to Unfreedom*; Stanley, *How Fascism Works*.
5. Levi, "Un passato che credevamo non dovesse ritornare piú."
6. Roger Griffin in Matthews, "I Asked Five Fascism Experts Whether Donald Trump Is a Fascist."
7. Gentile, *Origini e dottrina del fascismo*, 41.
8. Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche*; Gentile, *Il fascismo in tre capitoli*; Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*; Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*.
9. Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism*, 8.
10. Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism*, 9. For another study of transnational fascism, see Hofmann, *Fascist Effect*, a study of Italian-Japanese intellectual relations between the 1920s and 1940s.
11. Eco, "Ur-fascism."

12. Traverso, *New Faces of Fascism*.
13. Herf, "Is Donald Trump a Fascist?"
14. Matthews, "I Asked Five Fascism Experts Whether Donald Trump Is a Fascist."
15. Payne in Matthews, "I Asked Five Fascism Experts Whether Donald Trump Is a Fascist."
16. Eley, "Is Trump a Fascist?"
17. Herf, "Is Donald Trump a Fascist?"
18. For example, Pavone's masterpiece, *A Civil War*.
19. Sternhell, "How to Think about Fascism."
20. Eby, *Comrades and Commissars*, 420.
21. Renton, *When We Touched the Sky*; Copsey, *Anti-fascism in Britain*.
22. Vials, *Haunted by Hitler*.
23. García et al., *Rethinking Antifascism*; Plum, *Antifascism after Hitler*.
24. Bray, *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook*.

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