



Kevin Passmore

# FASCISM

A Very Short Introduction

OXFORD

## Fascism: A Very Short Introduction

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Kevin Passmore

# FASCISM

A Very Short Introduction

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Fascism has an enigmatic countenance because in it appears the most counterpoised contents. It asserts authoritarianism and organises rebellion. It fights against contemporary democracy and, on the other hand, does not believe in the restoration of any past rule. It seems to pose itself as the forge of a strong State, and uses means most conducive to its dissolution, as if it were a destructive faction or a secret society. Whichever way we approach fascism we find that it is simultaneously one thing and the contrary, it is A and not A...

José Ortega y Gasset, 'Sobre el Fascismo' (1927)



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# Preface to the second edition

Since 2002, when the first edition of *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction* was published, a double shift in method has transformed the field. Then, the objective was to produce an exact definition of fascism (a ‘model’ or a ‘typology’), which would encapsulate its key features. This definition would allow us to identify fascist movements, normally assumed to be national variants of the same ‘thing’. Now, scholars doubt the usefulness of a definition of fascism, even if it was possible to agree on one. Instead, they urge us to explore how and why the term was actually used by people in the past and for what purposes. They also doubt that the world can be broken up into national cases, given the enormous fluidity of economies, ideas, and human migrations. Fascism is now being studied as a ‘transnational’ phenomenon, and we can ask how protagonists transferred the term across national frontiers.

The first edition of *Fascism* reflected my partial awareness of the drawbacks of definitions but in the end, I invoked these problems only to produce one of my own. Consequently, while the chapter structure and some sections of the new edition are unchanged, the argument and much of the content is completely new.

Like the first edition, this book synthesizes an enormous range of scholarship, and it remains impossible to express fully my debt to

those upon whose work I have drawn. Of the scholars whose work I singled out for special thanks in the first edition that of Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ipperman remains essential. Above all, the new edition bears the imprint of the ideas of the French political scientist Michel Dobry, who has done so much to revise the way that scholars understand and use concepts and categories.

My ideas have been sharpened in early morning discussions over coffee with Hugh Compston. My thanks are due to Garthine Walker, who read the entire manuscript, to the anonymous readers for their incisive comments, and to Emma Ma for her encouraging editorship.

Following convention, I have used 'Fascism' to refer to the Italian movement and regime and 'fascism' to refer to the generic concept.

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