

Nathaniël D.B. Kunkeler, *Making Fascism in Sweden and the Netherlands: Myth-Creation and Respectability, 1931–40* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).—xii, 252 pages.—ISBN 978-1-3501-9233-1.

Immediately after the empty signifier called ‘fascism’ emerged in post-World War I Italy it attracted a wider range of radical nationalists inside and outside of the European continent who by no means agreed on the concrete meaning of the political ideology to which they adhered. Consequently, there was no representative fascist movement during the interwar period. In order to modulate assumptions about the supposed failure of fascism in more or less stable liberal democracies but also to depict emic constructions and conceptions of fascism there is a need to highlight, retrospectively speaking, peripheral fascist permutations outside the Italian and German regimes. An avenue for further dissecting fascists’ cultural-political struggle over the semantic meaning of ‘fascism’ and ‘national socialism’ is by elucidating how fascist myths were produced in practice, a process of myth-making which can be understood through the concept of mythopoeia.

This is what Nathaniël D.B. Kunkeler, a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX) at the University of Oslo, Norway, has singled out in the fascinating book *Making Fascism in Sweden and the Netherlands*, which is based on their doctoral thesis written at the University of Cambridge. Kunkeler’s comparative analysis of the largest and most influential Swedish and Dutch interwar fascist parties—*Nationalsocialistiska Arbetarepartiet* [NSAP; National Socialist Workers’ Party] and *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging* [NSB; National Socialist Movement]—relies on a creative theoretical framework and extensive source material, including magazines, correspondence, diaries, books, and security files. By elaborating on mythopoeic processes so intimately linked to fascist practices, Kunkeler breaks new analytical ground by putting Swedish and Dutch fascism on the transnational map of fascist ideological mobilities, counterbalancing the conventional Italian- and German-centred geographies of interwar fascism, and drawing much-needed attention to how ‘fascism’ was dynamically co-produced by the fascist leaders and the rank-and-file.

The book consists of an introduction, a national-historical background to interwar Swedish and Dutch fascism, five analytical chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction outlines the aim and scope of the study, clarifications of core concepts (mythopoeia/myth-making, myth, respectability), highlights the study’s contribution to previous research on Swedish and Dutch fascism as well as to the historiography of fascism in general, situates the book’s comparative

focus in the 'transnational turn' of fascism studies, and presents the theoretical and methodological framework. Kunkeler's use of theory and methodology is highly innovative: the cultural pragmatism approach opens the gate to draw on a number of theoreticians of performativity, such as Jeffrey C. Alexander and Judith Butler. Besides incorporating their theories as particularly apt for comprehending fascist mythopoeic performances, Butler's ideas about gender performativity are especially relevant as they enable the analysis to pinpoint the palpable masculine aspects of fascist mythopoeia.

Chapter 1 provides some essential national context to the history of the NSAP and NSB. It is followed by three analytical chapters dealing with party apparatuses and propaganda, party leaders and charisma, and uniforms and military subculture, respectively. These chapters present findings that have previously been speculated about but are now supported with strong empirical evidence. Describing the NSAP and NSB party structures in terms of German 'carbon-copies' does not give any sense of how they operated in reality; the charismatic fascist Leader had to be constructed over time but with the result that neither Sven Olov Lindholm (1903–1998) nor Anton Mussert (1894–1946) could fully satisfy both their cadres and the respectable electorate simultaneously. Uniforms were powerful symbols and crucial aesthetic components in the parties' symbolic order, an internal mobilizing and integrating force foregrounding the imagined masculine fascist body. Besides highlighting similarities in the mythopoeic processes of NSAP and NSB, Kunkeler also identifies important differences, especially regarding outsiders' reactions. The threat of *coup d'états* came up in both countries but unlike the NSB, which faced comparatively far more practical legal repression, the NSAP was portrayed as 'childish and silly' (p. 120), and did not enjoy nearly the same amount of press coverage. Another important observation is the geographical and infrastructural contexts in relation to the leaders' personalities. Sweden is much a bigger country than the Netherlands, meaning that the military man Lindholm's annual propaganda tours took him away from the headquarters for entire seasons whereas the civil engineer Mussert was invariably found in Utrecht.

The final two analytical chapters are case studies introducing the 1935 party conventions of the NSB (in The Hague) and the NSAP (in Stockholm). Being mass meetings of the rank-and-file with their leader, Kunkeler convincingly argues that the party conventions were designed to be spectacular, holistic manifestations of fascism and thus represented the pinnacle of fascist mythopoeia.

There is much to enjoy in this book but one aspect that demands a critical eye is the seemingly normative religious parlance of mythopoeia. Despite Kunkeler's valid critique of Emilio Gentile's idea of fascism as a 'political reli-

gion' for being blurred on whether it is applied as an emic or analytical model, the same can at times be said about mythopoeia itself. This is particularly illustrative when Kunkeler suggests that the importance of identification to fascist mythopoeia lay in its means to 'realizing a fantasy' which made the party member into a privileged part of the 'holy mission' to achieve a 'predestined victory' under the guidance of a 'prophetic Leader' whereby the rank-and-file were included into an irresistible force of destiny, a 'higher truth', that transcended fiction (p. 108–109, 166). While it on the one hand is inevitable coming across such internal logics when digging through fascist primary sources, there is a need for further theoretical discussions about the relationship—and boundaries—between emic and analytical aspects of fascist mythopoeic processes without applying a terminology based on normative understandings of religion. Of course, this does not reject the validity of incorporating mythopoeic processes when dissecting fascist constructions and conceptions of 'fascism' but is rather a call for future research in comparative fascist studies to not make the valuable theoretical framework of mythopoeia fall into Gentile's previous self-made trap.

Nonetheless, with regard to the transnational turn of comparative fascist studies, Kunkeler's contribution to the field cannot be stressed enough. This study is bold, innovative, and carefully researched. Its theoretical creativity and impressive use of the Swedish and Dutch languages makes it a must-read to anyone interested in the history of fascism and political myth-making in general—perhaps especially to those previously unacquainted with Swedish and Dutch interwar permutations of fascism.

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