

# Book Review: Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy by Andrea Mammone

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*In Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy, Andrea Mammone details the establishment and evolution of transnational networks of the extreme right in France and Italy from 1945 to the present day. The book addresses a number of key topics, including decolonisation and the events of 1968, whilst also emphasising the importance of the exchange of ideas, personnel and strategies across national borders. Jeff Roquen finds this a timely work of scholarship deserving of a wide audience.*

**Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy. Andrea Mammone. Cambridge University Press. 2015.**

Find this book: 

On 20 April 1945, Adolf Hitler turned fifty-six years old. In contrast to previous years, his birthday sparked only a modest celebration as the collapse of the Third Reich neared with each passing hour. Confined to a bunker underneath Berlin, the once vaunted Führer alternated between periods of stolid resignation and fits of unbridled rage. As the Red Army approached the gates of the city, he received more unwelcome news. His Italian ally, Benito Mussolini, had been put to death by an angry mob in Milan. Sensing little time remained, Hitler and his longtime girlfriend, Eva Braun, married in a surreal ceremony and committed double suicide as husband and wife less than two days later on 30 April. Fascism was dead. Or was it?

*In Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy, Andrea Mammone meticulously investigates how small coteries of intellectuals not only reconstituted, but also insinuated new strains of fascist thought into the social and political fabric of Europe in the post-World War II era. The result is a work of profound significance to understanding the past – and the present.*

Unlike George Mosse, Zeev Sternhell and other noted scholars of fascism, Mammone de-emphasises theory and focuses on history. Nevertheless, the author uses the introduction to define neofascism as containing ‘a sense of crisis and national decline, a fascination with a glorious past, a process of historical revisionism [...] a demand for a stricter “law and order” system, [and] a belief in the (usually white-only) European (also cultural) superiority’ (16).

Through the first chapter, the author skillfully traces the rapid re-emergence of fascism in the wake of the collapse of the Axis powers. While a team of Allied jurists prosecuted Nazi conspirators for crimes against humanity at the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg (1945-46), Italian Minister for Justice, Palmiro Togliatti, and ‘the High Court of Justice’ in France offered amnesty and leniency respectively to a significant number of fascist collaborators. Unsurprisingly, enough cultural and political space existed to allow more than a dozen men, including Giorgio Almirante, to establish the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) on 26 December 1946 in Rome. To the north, Jacques Isorni, who served as a legal adviser to Marshal Philippe Petain, the disgraced Premier of Vichy France (1940-44), founded the *Union des Nationaux Independants et Republicains* (Union of Independent and Republican Nationalists (UNIR)) a few years later. Rather than marginal obscurity, the MSI and UNIR both attracted support and successfully contested elections at several political levels.

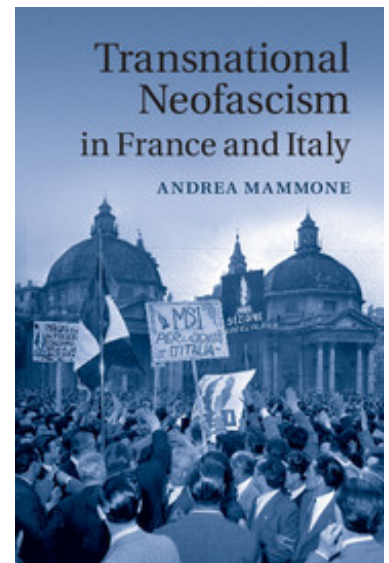




Image Credit: Giorgio Almirante ([Wikipedia Public Domain](#))

Despite the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), neofascism thrived through the 1950s. In Chapter Two, 'Regenerating Right-Wing Extremism', Mammone incisively demonstrates how small circles of reactionaries exchanged ideas and organised across the Franco-Italian border. Of all the expositors of pan-European fascism, perhaps no one was more central or influential than Julius Evola (1898-1974). Born and raised in Rome, Evola gained a degree of intellectual prominence with the publication of *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* (Revolt against the Modern World) in 1934. Two decades later, anti-communist bands of disaffected Italian youth embraced his anti-Enlightenment views and called for a vanguard of counterrevolutionaries to replace the democratic-egalitarian state with a universal society based on 'tradition, idealism, spiritualism, counter-revolution, and hierarchy' (67).

Beyond appealing to the young and impressionable, Evola's political thought merged with likeminded, neofascist creeds and came to organisational fruition with the creation of the MSI splinter group *Ordine Nuovo* (New Order (ON)). To connect with networks in Italy and wider Europe, ON established a 'study center dealing with foreign relations and exchanges' and published works in a variety of languages. Concurrent to the rising tide of right-wing activity in Italy and subsequent to a gathering of notable neofascists in Malmö, Sweden, in 1951, several neofascist organisations arose, including *Mouvement Social Europeen* (European Social Movement (MSE)), *Nouvel Ordre Europeen* (New European Order (NOE)) and the outward-looking *Europe-Action* (EA) in France. Neofascism was on the rise, but how did such fringe ideas survive the onslaught of the mass democratic rebellion of the late 1960s? In Chapters Four and Five, Mammone delivers both salient and surprising answers to this question.

May 1968 was a month and year that shook the world. In France, an unprecedented wave of protests and strikes erupted and seemed poised to overthrow both the government and the entire socio-economic order. At the forefront of the movement, an alliance of students and workers – many of whom had been inspired by neo-Marxist ideas – provoked President Charles de Gaulle to call for new elections. In a pro-Gaullist mass counterdemonstration in support of 'order against anarchy' in Paris on 30 May, neofascists discovered the perfect rhetorical tool to counter progressive change. While MSI leader Almirante re-positioned his organisation as a more centrist bulwark against leftist radicalism and succeeded in expanding the influence of his party, MSI-inspired *Ordre Nouveau* (established 1969) gained traction with the French electorate by casting immigration from North Africa as a threat to civilisation. These insidious scapegoating techniques ultimately proved effective and generated new political strategies. Indeed,

one prominent French neofascist 'umbrella' group, *Nouvelle Droite* (ND), hosted a conference on Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) in order to appropriate and apply his concept of 'cultural hegemony' – the ability to dominate the realm of thought in society – for right-wing ends.

On 5 October 1972, decades of transnational collaboration between neofascists reached a milestone with the creation of the *Front National* (National Front (FN)). In its slogan '*Front National – Avec nous avant qu'il ne soit trop tard*' ('With Us, Before It Is Too Late') and its use of the MSI tricolour flame symbol, FN sought to unite rightists in an anti-communist, anti-immigrant coalition. After years of promoting their thinly-veiled ultra-nationalist and racist platform *préférence nationale*, longtime FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen managed to earn nearly five million votes in the 2002 presidential election. Although Jacques Chirac retained the presidency, neofascism had triumphed in its ability to profoundly impact national and Continental politics more than half a century after Hitler's death in Berlin.

Considering that a plethora of far right parties in Europe, including Golden Dawn (Greece), Swiss People's Party (Switzerland), Freedom Party (Austria), Party for Freedom (Netherlands) and Northern League (Italy), now seek to emulate [FN and its co-optation of mainstream politics](#) as well as [the apparent adoption of neofascist ideas by the presumptive nominee of the US Republican Party, Donald Trump](#), *Transnational Neofascism* is a timely and scholarly monograph deserving of a wide audience. In exposing the stealthy existence of neofascism since 1945, Andrea Mammone has successfully produced a transformational study by moving beyond theory and onto the solid ground of history.

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**Jeff Roquen** is an independent scholar based in the United States. [Read more reviews by Jeff Roquen.](#)

*Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.*

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