

CONFERENCE REPORT

Fascism, Radicalisation and War, 1914–1950s— Occupation, Counterinsurgency, Collaborationism, Civil War: The Seventh Convention of the International Association of Comparative Fascist Studies (ComFas)

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The seventh convention of ComFas—the International Association for Comparative Fascist Studies—was held between the 28 and 30 May 2025, at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It was led by the research group GRECS (the Grup de Recerca en Guerra, Radicalisme Polític i Conflicte Social) and was the culmination of their work exploring the history and dynamics of warfare. Conference coordinator Javier Rodrigo opened the event, and he explained how warfare offered a crucial way to understand the history of fascism. With this in mind—and drawing on Mussolini's claim that Fascism was a 'permanent state of war'—the conference sought to understand how both the idea and the reality of warfare played a central role for both fascist movements and regimes. Researchers from diverse fields, methodological backgrounds and regional specialisms explored this complex issue throughout the conference, highlighting the importance of the topic as well as addressing the difficulties in delineating the contours of a specifically 'fascist' sense of war.

Authoritative keynote talks were delivered by Alex J. Kay, Michelle Gordon, Miguel Alonso, and Christian Gerlach. These helped to bring focus to this complex area, and further problematised it. Kay examined the contexts for violence and genocide during the Second World War, highlighting the relationship between revolutionary ideology and violent conflict primarily in the Nazi case, as well as pointing to a need to rethink precursors other

than colonialism to fascist violence. Gordon focused principally on the relevance of prior colonial context and argued for the need to consider not one but rather a range of 'boomerangs' returning to Europe from empires, which were settings that established an 'archive of violence' for fascists to draw upon. Alonso, meanwhile, noted the location of the convention, reflected on the Spanish context and the Civil War, and stressed the need to consider Spain as an important case study of fascism moving from civil war to the status of a regime. Finally, Gerlach explored themes raised in his wider work, such as the book *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (2010), to locate fascist violence in wider contexts of extreme brutality toward civilian populations, and from this suggested there was little by way of innovation in fascist warfare. Many of these themes were also discussed by keynote speakers, joined by Aristotle Kallis and Constantin Iordachi, in a roundtable discussion examining the core themes of the conference.

Keynote talks provided an important range of perspectives from established figures in the field, but one of the strengths of ComFas conventions has been their ability to bring new perspectives from research students and early career researchers, as well as more established voices. The conference was well attended and featured a wide range of panels, such as those themed around gender, paramilitarism, dictatorship and ideologies. While too many to summarise in a short conference report, individual contributions drew out the complexity of the topic, raising issues of influence, periodisation, masculinity, sexuality, and temporalities, among others, as key themes for thinking about fascist attitudes to warfare. Discussion in panels was often lively, as well as based on high-quality contributions from presenters.

There were some limitations to the event, as the conference's timeframe was restricted to the period up to the 1950s. In future, it would be beneficial for more recent studies of fascism to be included as well. Despite this, some talks did raise contemporary resonances, such as the links between Nazi-era ideals and contemporary incel cultures. Moreover, conference papers were also focused mainly on European-based examples of fascism, despite some excellent explorations of the Japanese case in particular. The global dynamics of fascism still require further analysis, and it would be beneficial to see future conferences be able to include more papers that can respond to calls to 'decentre' fascism studies.

The seventh ComFas convention pointed to the continued vibrancy of comparative fascism studies. It also underscored the need to redouble efforts to continue these conventions and further institutionalise the study

of themes central to ComFas and this journal. Particular congratulations are therefore needed for the conference organisers: Javier Rodrigo, David Alegre, Francisco Morente, Joan Pubill, and Margalida Roig, all of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; Maximiliano Fuentes, of the Universitat de Girona; Giorgia Priorelli, of the Universitat de Girona; Miguel Alonso, of Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid; and finally, ComFas organisers Constantin Iordachi and Aristotle Kallis. We thank them all for their work putting together a vibrant three days and look forward to the next ComFas convention.