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International Fascism and the Allure of the 'Third Way' in Interwar Greece

Aristotle Kallis | ORCID: 0000-0001-6711-1969
School of Humanities, Keele University, Keele, UK
a.kallis@keele.ac.uk

Abstract

The rise and victory of Italian Fascism in the first half of the 1920s passed Greece by. Yet soon afterwards the international experience of 'fascism' found more receptive audiences within the prodigious dissident 'third spaces' where more and more mainstream Greek political actors chose to operate in the interwar period. This article explores the dynamics of the ideological and political formation of 'third ways' in interwar Greece, paying attention to the interplay between international stimuli and local contextual singularities. In these thirding spaces 'fascism' was understood and operationalised in very different, subjective, and ever-shifting ways by each of these actors. It was regarded mostly as *a* potential component of diverse thirding processes/solutions and rarely as *the* desired outcome thereof. This explains why fascism came to inform a range of very different thirding projects in interwar Greece—from pursuing rupture and renewal to aspiring to status quo-affirmation; from liberal to conservative to authoritarian visions; from searching for a short-term 'remedy' to envisioning a long-term radical transformation.

Keywords

Greece – fascism – interwar period – third way – dictatorship – parliamentarism

The Allure of the 'Third Way'

As the intellectual and political ferment of the last quarter of the nineteenth century exploded into a maelstrom of new possibilities for radical change in the first decades of the twentieth century, the field of ideologies entered into

a more intense phase of flux. Established political binaries of left and right—individualism versus collectivism, class versus nation, democracy versus dictatorship, freedom versus duty, consensus versus revolution—came under scrutiny, piercing their otherwise prohibitive dividing lines and inviting a host of alternative possibilities that boldly cut through and resynthesise them. This was a time characterised by an unusual profusion of perceived political schisms and apostasies, cross-overs and conversions.[1] The belief underpinning all these dramatic shifts was that existing ideological adherence and dogmatic path-dependence could no longer guarantee the promised path towards secular salvation.[2] Therefore, alternatives would have to be forged through mining and alchemising ideas from different, even fiercely competing ideological traditions and lineages. As a result, ripples of heterodox thinking defied and destabilised existing ideologies by challenging their associated orthodoxies.[3] Each of these rebellious voices questioned the ability of—some or all—established political projects to deliver effective solutions to pressing challenges and sought to propose radical alternatives by mediating, revising or rejecting existing ideological binaries.[4] When viewed together, however, they marked the emergence of a broader dissident dynamic that brazenly challenged all kinds of normative assumptions about politics.

Against this backdrop of ideological volatility and rebelliousness the notion of a 'third way' became in vogue in numerous accounts of the intellectual and political history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Generally, third ways are based on a triadic scheme, where two opposing, supposedly irreconcilable or otherwise disparate canonical positions are brought or forced selectively together as part of a political dialectic to form a new (third) alternative, essentially heterodox solution deemed more desirable in the current circumstances. Not only has the 'semantic structure of *thirding*' remained mostly tied to a static spatiality of conventional dialectics (thesis × antithesis = third-way outcome) but it has also overwhelmingly been linked to specific models of left-right synthesis or transcendence and has been judged mostly by its outcomes. Thirding processes, however, are promiscuous, continuous, and

1 Lester R. Kurtz, 'The Politics of Heresy,' *American Journal of Sociology* 88, no. 6 (1983).

2 Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007).

3 David D. Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979); Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

4 Steve Bastow, James Martin, *Third Way Discourse: European Ideologies in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

self-reproducing; they stretch much wider than mere left-right polarities and can include a host of other dualities, not all of which are based on contradiction;[5] they involve not just the extreme scenarios of synthesis (the middle path) or transcendence (neither-nor) but also other, more subtle forms of intermediation and revision; and they do not simply end, since their putative third-way outcomes can be transformed quickly into norms involved in further thirding processes.

Therefore, rather than imagining thirding as a confidently traced path*way* across normative political families, I argue that the trope of multiple and dynamic 'third(ing) spaces' in the interstices of recognised ideological/political categories is a significantly more helpful spatial metaphor. These spaces are formed because existing norms and conventions have come to be regarded by dissident actors as lacking or have been discredited altogether in their eyes. Their *raison d'être*, however, is to form a discursive and organisational space where old totem poles can be smashed if needed, where rules can be rewritten, and from where radical alternatives can be pursued. These spaces are typically redolent with yet-fuzzy new possibilities that have now been unlocked—but not yet (fully) charted—by the actor's rejection of earlier dichotomies and orthodoxies.

Within the field of fascism studies the trope of the 'third way' has served as an invaluable asset in terms of granting fascism ideological autonomy and originality; and this is why it is now widely recognised as one of the core ideological components of generic fascism.[6] Yet, in presenting fascism as *the* 'third way' of interwar politics—a canonical post-liberal alternative situated either between or beyond revolutionary left and conservative-authoritarian right—we may have inadvertently narrowed down and flattened a prodigious, heterogeneous, and supremely volatile field of political interplay and rogue alchemy.

5 Steve Bastow, James Martin and Dick Pels, 'Third Ways in Political Ideology,' *Journal of Political Ideologies* 7, no. 3 (2002): 270–273.

6 David D Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe: Understanding the Poverty of Great Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 181; Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); Roger Griffin, 'Fascism's Modernist Revolution: A New Paradigm for the Study of Right-Wing Dictatorships,' *Fascism* 5, no. 2 (2016): 105–229, https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00502002; Roger Eatwell, 'Reflections on Fascism and Religion,' *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 4, no. 3 (2003): 158; Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right Nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); David D. Roberts, 'Myth, Style, Substance and the Totalitarian Dynamic in Fascist Italy,' *Contemporary European History* 16, no. 1 (2007): 1–36; Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo: Storia e Interpretazione* (Bari and Rome: Laterza, 2013); Gianpasquale Santomassimo, *La Terza Via Fascista: Il Mito del Corporativismo* (Rome: Carocci, 2006).

These dissident thirding processes not only predated the historical emergence of fascism but also stretched much further than the relatively narrow field of *ni droite-ni gauche* 'national socialists' or angry interwar radical nationalists. They also continued to drive fresh ideological/political mobilities within and across seemingly bounded categories throughout the 1920s and 1930s, with diverse third-way propositions appearing as native solutions but then circulating across national boundaries and constantly interacting with context-specific ingredients to produce a constant stream of new thirding revisions and syntheses.[7] Therefore, rather than approaching fascism as the outcome of particular genealogies of left-right dissident intermediation, rather than seeing it as the product of either dissident synthesis or total rejection of existing ideological binaries, I see instead 'thirding' processes as one of the key drivers of fascism's continuous ideological and political reinvention, reproduction, mobility, and protean adaptability.[8] Studying these complex processes, rather than simply their assumed outcomes, can shed invaluable light on fascism's continuous interactions with a host of contemporary ideological and political projects stretching from the authoritarian and the conservative right to the liberal centre, within and across different local contexts.

In this article, I explore how this broader thirding dynamic unfolded in interwar Greece and how it generated volatile ideological and political spaces that became supremely receptive to fascism. This is undoubtedly a challenging brief. Greece has been peripheral to the historiographies of interwar European fascism and authoritarian right. When it registers at all, it is mostly in relation to the 4th of August dictatorship headed by Ioannis Metaxas (1936–1941). Even this example, however, has been largely treated as marginal in the history of fascist ideas, movements or even regimes, in most cases classified as a case of 'pseudo' or 'failed' fascism, more akin to an old-style authoritarian dictatorship and lacking in any genuine fascist ideological underpinnings or social traction. In fact, for a long time the case of Greece has been treated as an awkward oddity in the histories of interwar fascism—one among a few countries in the interwar period to record no genuine fascist movement of any social or political

7 David D Roberts, 'How Not to Think about Fascism and Ideology, Intellectual Antecedents and Historical Meaning,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 2 (2000): 185–211; Aristotle Kallis, 'Working across Bounded Entities: Fascism, "Para-Fascism", and Ideational Mobilities in Interwar Europe,' in *Beyond the Fascist Century: Essays in Honour of Roger Griffin*, eds. Constantin Iordachi and Aristotle Kallis (Cham: Palgrave, 2020): 73–99. On the mobilities of ideas see James Allen-Robertson, David Beer, 'Mobile Ideas: Tracking a Concept through Time and Space,' *Mobilities* 5, no. 4 (2010): 529–545.

8 Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 116.

significance.[9] I argue, however, that, while fascism was broadly regarded as a foreign phenomenon with limited relevance or utility for the specific conditions of (interwar) Greece, its ideas and observed practices gained significant traction in the 1920s, and especially 1930s, as part of diverse thirding ideological projects and political processes. In fact, the appeal of the third way in interwar Greece turned out to be particularly strong and wide-ranging, fed by a series of intense polarities that went beyond the conventional left-right or democracy-dictatorship divides and involved other deep fractures that were either specific to or particularly resonant in Greece at the time.

I examine a number of dissident Greek political actors from the 1920s and 1930s who sought to alchemise their own version of a distinctly Greek 'third way' as a viable response to a wide range of existing local and international polarities seen as incapable of delivering optimal solutions to contemporary challenges. In this volatile context 'fascism' was understood in very different, subjective, and ever-shifting ways by each of these actors (as radical spiritual force of renewal; as order-preserving dictatorship; as an alternative to parliamentary democracy; as an effective policy toolkit for the fight against communism; as the template for a national organic state; and so on). Not only the subjective understandings of 'fascism' were varied and fluid but the international experience was constantly producing new experimental templates and translations, many of which were products of thirding projects elsewhere. These variations and differences notwithstanding, however, 'fascism' in interwar Greece was regarded mostly as *a* potential component of diverse thirding processes and rarely as *the* desired solution or outcome thereof. This explains why fascism gained traction as part of very different thirding projects in interwar Greece—from pursuing radical renewal or rupture to defending or boosting the status quo; from liberal to conservative to authoritarian visions; and from searching for a short-term 'remedy' to envisioning a long-term radical transformation.

Of 'Third Ways' and 'Third Spaces': The Case of Interwar Greece

In one of the classic accounts of interwar fascism Norberto Bobbio argued that fascists could construct a meaningful case for the political distinctiveness and radical novelty of their movements on the basis of a reckoning with the two

9 E.g. Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (London: UCL Press, 1995), 317; Aristotle Kallis, 'Neither Fascist nor Authoritarian: The 4th of August Regime in Greece (1936–1941) and the Dynamics of Fascistisation in 1930s Europe,' *East Central Europe* 37, no. 2–3 (2010): 303–330.

dominant ideologies of the right and left at the time—liberalism and socialism respectively. In the first instance Bobbio's triadic scheme did establish fascism as mapping a de facto radical 'third way' between and beyond the left-right binary. However, he then proceeded to distinguish between two different currents within the family of interwar fascisms—one 'conservative' (*conservatore*) and another 'subversive' (*eversivo*).[10] This distinction reflected the fundamental political split between revision-as-continuity, on the one hand, and radical departure towards a wholly 'new order', on the other. For Bobbio, however, there was a distinct *fascist* 'third way' (and here he did use the Italian translation of the term—*terza via*—for the first time). This was a kind of third way *within* his fascism—as a radical intermediation and synthesis between known dichotomies of individual-collective, revolutionary-counterrevolutionary, democracy-dictatorship, nationalism-internationalism, capital-labour. Bobbio's 'third way' was intrinsic to his family of interwar fascism; a 'synthesis between the old and the new', between its subversive and the conservative ideological streams.[11]

The allure of the 'third way' in interwar Greece was charged by all these tensions, at once rooted in the peculiarities of the local historical context and subjected to external stimuli that interacted with native palingenetic trends to open up new, previously unfathomable or inaccessible ideological and political possibilities. Stanley Payne has commented that Greece 'had the most disturbed political history of any country in Europe during the early twentieth century'.[12] The traumatic experience of the 1915–1917 'National Discord' (the political, constitutional, and in the end also military conflict between the king Constantine I and the liberal prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos that split the country down the middle in every sense) had left a legacy of bitter political and social polarisation, pitting Liberal Venizelists against conservative-royalist anti-Venizelists. But it was the humiliating rout of the Greek armed forces in Asia Minor in 1922 that reset political expectations and created a definitive terminus in Greek interwar history.[13] In so many ways the war for Greece ended not with the victory of 1918 but with the crushing defeat in Asia Minor in 1922 that

10 Norberto Bobbio, *Dal Fascismo alla Democrazia: I Regimi, le Ideologie, le Figure e le Culture Politiche* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1997), 86.

11 Bobbio, *Dal Fascismo alla Democrazia*, 94 and 108; Cf. Norberto Bobbio, *Destra e sinistra* (Rome: Donzelli, 2015).

12 Payne, *History of Fascism*, 139.

13 Vassilios A Bogiatzis, 'The Longing for a "Conservative Revolution": German Influences over the Greek Inter-War Politicization of Technology and Science,' in *Nazi Germany and Southern Europe, 1933–1945: Science, Culture and Politics*, eds. Fernando Clara and Cláudia Ninhos (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 105–119.

put an end to the long-standing fantasies of territorial expansion and national greatness that stretched back to the nineteenth-century 'Great Idea'. Behind a semblance of continuity the period that followed and lasted until Metaxas's coup in 1936 (the so-called Second Republic, 1924–1935) was also fraught with tensions and bitter polarities, teeming with third-way explorations and possibilities.[14]

The Venizelist/anti-Venizelist polarisation continued to be one of the defining features of the political scene in the 1920s, with the Liberal party dominating most of the elections (with Venizelos returning properly to power in 1928–1932) and the opposition conservative Popular Party becoming increasingly hostile to the Liberal party and especially its figurehead.[15] Yet the ferocity of the party-political dichotomy subsumed two further crucial polarities at the heart of Greek politics in the interwar period. The first was the constitutional issue (monarchy versus republic) that was formally resolved by the referendum of April 1924 with a 70% victory of the anti-monarchical forces. The monarchy/republic dichotomy mapped to a significant extent on the Venizelist/anti-Venizelist fault line but there were notable exceptions, including the group of disgruntled Venizelist army officers who led an abortive pro-royalist coup in 1923;[16] and the efforts of a section of the anti-Venizelist press to distance itself from the disgraced king Constantine I.[17] The coup was only one of many, successful and abortive, military/dictatorial attempts to intervene forcefully in the political process during the 1920s and 1930s.[18] This highlights the second fundamental polarity of Greek interwar politics—the question of parliamentary democracy versus dictatorship. This division barely mapped on any other polit-

14 Despina Papadimitriou, *Από τον λαό των νομιμοφρόνων στο έθνος των εθνικοφρόνων, 1922–1967* [From the law-abiding people to the nationalist nation, 1922–1967] (Athens: Savvalas, 2006), 76–119. For the history of the Second Greek Republic see George T. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922–1936* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1983).

15 Christos Hadjiiosif, 'Κοινοβούλιο και δικτατορία,' [Parliament and dictatorship] in *Ιστορία της Ελλάδας του 20ού αιώνα*, vol B2: *Ο Μεσοπόλεμος 1922–1940* [History of Greece in the 20th century. Vol B2: The interwar period 1922–1940], ed. Christos Hadjiiosif (Athens: Vivliorama, 2003), 37–123.

16 Thanos Veremis, *Οι επεμβάσεις του στρατού στην ελληνική πολιτική, 1916–1936* [Military interventions in Greek politics, 1916–1936] (Athens: Alexandria, 2018), 132.

17 Konstantinos Demertzis, 'Επί της εσωτερικής κρίσεως—Μέρος Β,' [On the domestic crisis—Part B] *Politeia*, 15 October 1922.

18 Ioannis Daskarolis, *Στρατιωτικά κινήματα στην Ελλάδα του Μεσοπολέμου (1922–1935)* [Military movements in interwar Greece (1922–1935)] (Athens: Gnomon, 2012); Yaprak Gürsoy, *Between Military Rule and Democracy: Regime Consolidation in Greece, Turkey, and Beyond* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017).

ical cleavage, with fierce critics of parliamentarism (whether programmatically or targeting the flaws of its operation in interwar Greece) and supporters of dictatorial deviation populating both Venizelist and anti-Venizelist camps as well as royalist and republican political constituencies. But this was also a polarity that was particularly sensitive to international stimuli, including the crisis of democratic-parliamentary regimes in other parts of Europe, the rise of fascism as a regime model, and the proliferation of dictatorships across Europe in the interwar years.[19]

Fascism entered the field of political options in Greece only very gradually in the course of the 1920s. The dramatic events leading up to the March on Rome and the appointment of Benito Mussolini as prime minister in the autumn of 1922 largely passed the country by. Given that the March occurred little over a month after the crushing defeat of the Greek forces in Asia Minor, the country's attention was directed at the peace negotiations with Turkey and the challenges involved in absorbing the stream of desperate refugees from Anatolia. Inevitably then the earliest examples of third-way discourse in post-1922 Greece reflected a preoccupation with a very different—and much narrower—political agenda at the time. Against the backdrop of bitter recriminations for the management of the military campaign in Asia Minor that had discredited the anti-Venizelist coalition in power during 1920–1922, a number of new political movements (for example, the short-lived National Awakening and the Political Coalition of the Working Classes) appeared on the political scene in an attempt to relaunch the anti-Venizelist political cause and make it relevant in the new post-1922 reality.[20] Faced with a growing popular anger at the mismanagement of the war with Turkey and fearing a new era of dominance by Venizelos and his Liberal Party, prominent anti-Venizelist figures argued that only the utmost degree of national unity and cross-sectional talent could defend national interests at that critical juncture for the humiliated and deeply divided Greece.[21]

19 Kurt Weyland, *Assault on Democracy: Communism, Fascism, and Authoritarianism During the Interwar Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 193–313; Kurt Weyland, 'Fascism's Missionary Ideology and the Autocratic Wave of the Interwar Years,' *Democratization* 24, no. 7 (2017); António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis, eds. *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014).

20 Hadjiiosif, op. cit, 45; Yannis Margioulas, 'Η εφημερίδα 'Πολιτεία', 1917–1933' [The newspaper 'Politeia', 1917–1933] (MA Dissertation, University of Crete, 2014), available at https://elocus.lib.uoc.gr/dlib/5/b/c/metadata-dlib-1462778697-307705-4769.tkl

21 Constantinos Zavitsianos, 'Προς νέας πολιτικάς τρίβους,' [Towards new political paths] *Politeia*, 9 October 1922.

It was against this backdrop that the name of Ioannis Metaxas came up as a possible third-way solution capable of preventing the political obliteration of the anti-Venizelist camp.[22] In many ways the retired general was an unlikely candidate for any third-way initiative, given how much invested in the pro-monarchical anti-Venizelist politics of the previous decade he had been. His decision, however, to distance himself from the anti-Venizelist establishment in 1920–1922 and his criticism of the military campaign in Anatolia meant that he could be regarded as a respectable outsider. The 'Metaxas solution' gained momentum in August-September 1922 but had ran out of political steam by October, mocked by Venizelists and condemned by anti-Venizelists as an attempt to divide the right. This development convinced Metaxas to launch his Freethinkers (*Eleftherofrones*) party as an unashamedly third-way political solution that sought to bury the bitter legacy of political polarisation. Again he positioned himself as a political outsider ready to turn against the intransigents of the two major political parties.[23] While remaining true to his royalist beliefs, seeing the monarchy as the supreme guardian of national unity and continuity, he now advocated a 'middle' path between monarchical and popular sovereignty.[24] Interestingly in all this early discussion the example of the Italian *fascisti* movement was conjured up—and rejected—as the wrong model of popular mobilisation against the status quo that the Greek third-way alternative ought to avert.[25]

How much of a resourceful maverick Metaxas was would become clear in the following, politically turbulent months. His efforts to stage a spectacular political comeback seemed all but wasted when he colluded with the abortive 1923 coup to restore the monarchy but he was rehabilitated surprisingly quickly as an always flexible and credible political interlocutor. By 1924 he appeared to have subscribed to the new republican constitutional order, his party widely regarded even by moderate Venizelists as a dependable potential coalition partner. In 1926–1928, when the elections returned a more or less even split result between the Venizelist and anti-Venizelist parties, he was instrumental in supporting the solution of a national unity government, working together even

22 See the active promotion of the 'Metaxas solution' in the arch-Liberal newspaper *Elefthero Vima* (e.g. 9 September 1922); and in the renegade—and fiercely pro-thirding—*Politeia* ('Δήλωσις Μεταξά,' [Metaxas's statement] 10 September 1922 and 'Κυβέρνησις προ παντός,' [Government above anything else] 12 Sptember 1922).

23 Ioannis Metaxas, *Το προσωπικό του Ημερολόγιο* [His diary] (Athens: Govostis, 1980), entry for 4 March 1923.

24 *Politeia*, 13 October 1922.

25 Filaretos, 'Η φωνή της εργαζόμενης Ελλάδος,' [The voice of working Greece] *Elefthero Vima*, 7 July 1922; see more generally Margioulas, op. cit., 30–50.

with moderate Venizelists.[26] Venizelos's return to power in 1928–1933 did put an end to Metaxas's conciliatory attitude and turned him into an increasingly vocal opposition figure but did not substantially alter the basic parameters of his declared decision to work within the framework of the republican parliamentary system or his efforts to fashion himself as an alternative political solution to the mainstream anti-Venizelism of the Popular Party establishment. Even when the Free Thinkers party lost electoral traction after the peak of 15.78% in the 1926 polls, shrinking to 1.59% in 1932 and becoming eclipsed by the growth of the mainstream-conservative Popular Party (33.80% in the 1932 elections), Metaxas resisted increasing pressures from the right to dissolve his party and join the anti-Venizelist coalition under the Popular party, maintaining that he would not sanction a 'return to the old party system'.[27]

The Venizelist camp had its own third-way mavericks too. Georgios Kafantaris, a prominent Liberal who served (briefly) as prime minister in 1924 and subsequently as foreign and finance minister, founded his own party in 1928 (Progressive Liberals or simply Progressives). Kafantaris was a fervent supporter of the republican constitutional order in the 1920s but he remained an independent voice critical of the last years of Venizelos's rule (1928–1933). A committed parliamentarian, he was supportive of political initiatives to overcome the divisive legacies of the National Discord and achieve, through synthesis of a wide range of different views, a new political reality that would do away with the old parties and their tired leaderships.[28] This is why he chose to work together with figures across the political divide (including Metaxas) as part of national unity cabinets at times (e.g. 1926–1927) when the parliament was too fragmented and divided to give a clear mandate to any single party or even coalition. In 1932 he responded to Venizelos's refusal to accept a similar unity solution and in protest formed a new party with the title *Triti Kastastasis* [Third Situation]. Like Metaxas a decade earlier, Kafantaris overestimated the attractiveness of his alternative third-way political proposition for a bitterly divided electorate, his party failing to achieve an electoral breakthrough in the polarised atmosphere surrounding the 1932–1933 polls. Again like Metaxas, however, he was unable to conceptualise a 'third way' involving a rupture from

26 Grigorios Dafnis, *Τα Ελληνικά Πολιτικά Κόμματα, 1821–1961* [The political parties of Greece, 1821–1961] (Athens: Galaxias, 2017), 138–145; Anastasia Mouka, 'Οι Οικουμενικές Κυβερνήσεις στον ελληνικό Μεσοπόλεμο και ο Τύπος' [The National Unity Governments in interwar Greece and the press] (MA Dissertation, University of Athens, 2000), available at https://pergamos.lib.uoa.gr/uoa/dl/frontend/el/browse/2914885

27 Metaxas, [His diary], entry 28 August 1926, 478.

28 Hadjiiosif, '[Parliament and dictatorship],' 105.

his political origins—in his case, from the Venizelist electoral camp to which he always belonged albeit as an (internal) dissident and opposition force. This explains why, in spite of his rather critical stance vis-à-vis Venizelos as political leader, he remained tied to the Venizelist coalition and even supported the abortive Venizelist military coup d'etat of 1935 that was organised by general Nikolaos Plastiras with Venizelos's blessing.[29]

Another, though very different mainstream third-way agent was Alexandros Papanastasiou. He too was a key figure of the Venizelist camp but pursued his own version of a third way by appealing to the more left-leaning, non-Marxist constituency of the broader Venizelist electorate. Papanastasiou supported every initiative for a national unity cabinet in the 1920s, advocating the modernisation of the Greek state and economy while also being fiercely critical of Venizelos's return to the political forefront.[30] As leader of the Worker and Peasant Party he emerged as one of the most eloquent voices of a kind of progressive anti-Venizelos Venizelism, republican and democratic (something that explains his fierce opposition to the 1935 Venizelist coup attempt) but at the same time trying to reimagine the functioning of the liberal-parliamentary system as a force of political consensus, arbitration, and alleviation of social tensions.[31] His very own thirding horizon was inclusive and synthesising rather than consumed by neither-nor fantasies. Forming in the interstices of traditional Greek politics, Papanastasiou sought to carve a distinct path between an introverted, expansionist Greek nationalism, on the one hand, and the universalist aspirations invested in modern political ideologies such as liberalism or democratic socialism, on the other.[32]

29 Georgios Dafnis, *Η Ελλάς μεταξύ δύο πολέμων, 1923–1940* [Greece between the two world wars, 1923–1940] (Athens: Κακτος, 1997), II, 295.

30 Michalis Psalidopoulos, 'Ο Αλέξανδρος Παπαναστασίου ως οικονομολόγος,' [Alexandros Papanastasiou as Economist] in *Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός* [Venizelism and Bourgeois Modernisation], eds. Giorgos Mavrogordatos and Christos Hadjiiosif (Heraclio: University of Crete Publications, 1988), 337–340.

31 Christos Hadjiiosif, 'Η βενιζελογενής αντιπολίτευση στο Βενιζέλο και η πολιτική ανασύνταξη του αστισμού στο μεσοπόλεμο,' [The Venizelist opposition to Venizelos and the political overhaul of the bourgeois ideology in the interwar years] in *Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός* [Venizelism and bourgeois modernisation], eds. Giorgos Mavrogordatos and Christos Hadjiiosif (Heraclio: University of Crete Publications, 1988), 446.

32 Alexandros Papanastasiou, 'Εθνικισμός,' [Nationalism] *Επιθεώρησις των Κοινωνικών και Πολιτικών Επιστημών* [Review of the Social and Political Sciences] 1, no. 1–2 (1916): 4–45.

Fascism and the Pursuit of a 'Greek Third Way'

The experience of fascism remained either absent from or marginal to these early pursuits of third-way alternatives in interwar Greece. This had a lot to do with the initial impression that 'Fascism' was a country-specific (Italian) phenomenon—and therefore alien to and irrelevant for Greece as a solution. With the notable exception of the Greek communist left that adopted the term 'fascism' in a generic sense from the beginning, during the first half of the 1920s references to Italian Fascism often used the exact translation of the Italian name ('fascisti'). Even when these references were sympathetic or even occasionally admiring, the term 'fascisti' was used to highlight a contextual difference between the two countries that rendered a mimetic Greek fascism inappropriate and undesirable. To be sure, faced with the prospect of a humiliating defeat in Asia Minor and a subsequent political implosion in the summer of 1922, some right-wing newspapers called for a kind of 'Greek fascisti', as a defence force against the perceived enemies of the nation (the socialist left and the Venizelists waiting to get back to power and exact revenge on the Greek right).[33] Yet even the most positive references to the spirit of the early Fascist *squadrismo* rarely indicated a desire to emulate the ideology or revolutionary political activism of the Italian squads. Instead they exuded an admiration for the 'fascisti' as fervent young 'patriots' unwilling to live with political stasis and determined to take the defence of the nation against perceived enemies (external but also internal) in their hands in the face of the state's political inaction and paralysis.

Such a critical assessment of fascism as a 'foreign' ideology and radical movement persisted well into the 1930s. It did not stop, however, a growing number of dissident commentators to evince admiration for its record and to praise its political effects. With party divisions becoming more and more acrimonious in the early 1930s new projects pursuing some kind of Greek third way gained traction, feeding from a sense of proceeding disaffection with the status quo of the Second Republic and increasingly craving for some kind of rupture. By that time 'fascism' had crept one way or another into these debates, too prominent a political force to be ignored or cast aside as an irrelevant oddity. Although there were very few attempts at or calls for direct emulation, a growing number of otherwise critical observers were now more willing to ascribe to it some

33 Articles published in Greek newspapers in the summer of 1922 in particular (a time of gloom for the impending military defeat in Anatolia) referenced the 'fascisti' in this positive light. See for example 'Squads of Greek fascists must be formed,' and 'Go forward, fascisti!', published in the daily *Protevousa* on 2 and 28 June 1922.

degree of political utility. In 1933 a new magazine titled *Idea* made its appearance as a vocal proponent of a 'third situation' that would allegedly put an end to the socio-political divisions and the perceived cultural decadence of modern Greece. *Idea* was not a political publication in the strict sense of the word; its editorial team featured the journalist Spiros Melas, the young novelist Giorgos Theotokas, and the thinker Giannis Oikonomidis. Yet the three editors saw the magazine as a platform through which to promote a new vision for the country, driving a wedge between existing ideological or party-political dichotomies. In his personal correspondence with the poet Giorgos Seferis Theotokas claimed that the magazine was an act of idealistic third-way mischief: 'We are seeking a replacement for capitalism but in such a way that it will not destroy the march of civilisation and drown culture, plunging us all in a suffocating mechanistic barbarism, more akin to a new Middle Age.'[34]

What exactly Theotokas meant by medieval 'barbarism' was communism—both as international phenomenon and as distinctly Greek problem. In spite of the editors's efforts to present the magazine as a completely novel voice and vision for interwar Greece,[35] the kind of thirding dissident discourse that *Idea*'s editorial team expressed was otherwise situated within a fervidly anti-communist political space.[36] Such a categorical rejection of materialism provided the third-way discourse of its editors with a negative point of reference but did little to clarify what Theotokas meant by 'a *genuinely new* political direction'.[37] Here the views of the editors diverged. Oikonomidis openly expressed a degree of admiration for Mussolini and the Italian fascist experiment.[38] He praised aspects of Italian fascism as valuable for 'politically immature countries'. He also noted that fascism acquired, over time, admirable ideological and political coherence, to the point that it could be regarded as a universal political ideology and model. By contrast Theotokas was critical of both communism

34 G.P. Savvidis, ed., *Γιώργος Θεοτοκάς & Γιώργος Σεφέρης*: *Αλληλογραφία* (*1930–1966*) [Giorgos Theotokas and Giorgos Seferis: The Correspondence (1930–1966)] (Athens: Ermis, 1981), 62–63.

35 The editors made clear in the first issue that they were not interested in mere syntheses and mediations of existing polarities but in a cultural, social, spiritual, and political transcendence—'Βασικές Αρχές' [Basic principles] *Idea* 1, no. 1 (1933): 1–2.

36 Spiros Melas, 'Στην καρδιά της κρίσης,' [At the heart of the crisis] *Idea* 1, no. 4 (1933): 227.

37 Giorgos Theotokas, 'Πολιτικά Ιδεώδη,' [Political ideals] *Idea* 2, no. 14 (1934): 59; see also Ekaterini Papari, 'Ελληνικότητα και αστική διανόηση στον Μεσοπόλεμο, 1922–1940' [Greekness and bourgeois intellectuals in the interwar period, 1922–1940] (PhD diss., University of Athens, 2016), 186.

38 Giorgos Oikonomidis, 'Ο ρόλος των διανοουμένων στη σύγχρονη κοινωνία' [The role of the intellectuals in modern society] *Idea* 3, no. 14 (1934): 67; and 'Η κρίση της δημοκρατίας II' [Crisis of democracy II] *Idea* 2, no. 12 (1933): 321–332.

and fascism since he claimed that they were predicated on a fanatical rejection of individual freedom. He believed, as Oikonomidis also did, in the power of 'young' dissident intellectuals to chart radically novel paths for the future that promised to liberate the country from the ghosts of the past and the 'rot' of the present (a metaphor that Theotokas developed from the pages of *Idea*).[39] Starting from a principled defence of bourgeois liberalism and parliamentarism he grew increasingly impatient with the way in which the parliamentary system operated in the country and reached the conclusion that it was not only beyond reform but actually blocking the way to the 'new' regenerative movements that he evangelised. At this point, however, his ostensibly equidistance from communism and fascism started to crumble. The dissident energies that he could witness in Fascist Italy—for example, the radical intellectual currents of Futurism, the embrace of modern technocracy, and the maverick innovative streak of quasi-corporatist alternatives—rendered in his view fascism a more enticing source of radical inspiration. His celebration of 'Greek specificity' (*ελληνικότητα*) as the only productive source for the 'revolution'[40] may have prevented him from fully embracing foreign models; and he was dismissive of other contemporary 'third-way' discourses that derived from openly pro-fascist or pro-national socialist constituencies of the Greek interwar right.[41] However, for Theotokas 'fascism' was already an integral part of thirding processes already underway that could not be ignored or easily dismissed; not *the* answer to the current (Greek and broader European) crisis but perhaps part of *a* 'Greek' solution. Melas too called for a 'revolution' that would spring from the 'young' forces of the Greek spirit. He explained that neither communism nor fascism could be meaningfully imported into Greece because they were alien to the Greek spirit and history. Instead his 'revolution' was the work of a 'new creation . . . beyond

39 Giorgos Theotokas, 'Υπάρχει κάτι σάπιο στην Ελλάδα,' [There is something rotten in Greece] *Idea* 1, no. 10 (1933): 199–201.

40 Giorgos Theotokas, *Στοχασμοί και Θέσεις: Πολιτικά Κείμενα, 1925–1966* [Reflections and positions: Political texts, 1925–1966], vol. A (Athens: Estia 1996), 185. More generally, Yannis Papatheodorou, 'Ο Γ. Θεοτοκάς στην εποχή των άκρων,' [Giorgos Theotokas in the age of extremes] *Nea Estia*, no. 1784 (2005): 976–985; Michalis Limperatos, 'Η ματαίωση της διαδικασίας εκφασισμού της ελληνικής κοινωνίας στον Μεσοπόλεμο,' [The thwarting of the fascistisation of Greek society in the interwar years] *Tetradia*, no. 60 (2011), available at https://tetradiamagazine.gr/2011/issue60/lymperatosmixalhs/614/#_ftnref130; and Paschalis Kitromilidis, 'Τα όρια του ελληνικού φιλελευθερισμού: το παράδειγμα του Γιώργου Θεοτοκά,' [The limits of Greek liberalism: the example of Giorgos Theotokas] *Διαβάζω*, no. 137 (1986): 37–40.

41 The example of the daily newspaper *Estia* is one that Theotokas explicitly criticised. See '[Political ideals],' 57–58

the parroting of foreign slogans and moulds'.[42] Yet his third-way thinking often referred to the Italian precedent, evincing a desire for a Greek equivalent of Italian Fascism.[43]

By that time of course 'fascism' had already disrupted the international political landscape to the point that it was impossible to ignore it. Whether as part of the perceived problem or as blueprint of the thirding solution or, in most cases, as somewhere in-between the two, it had graduated into an established and tried political alternative that demanded a response, whether hostile or enthusiastic or conditionally sympathetic. The potential for the kinds of ideological and political crossovers, dissident syntheses, and rogue rejections that are the hallmarks of the third-way mindset was significantly stronger, very often generating patterns of strategic convergence across the spectrum of mainstream political camps. The result was that third spaces expanded in political scope as well as popularity as the normative value of existing options disintegrated in the face of mounting perceived crises and multiple dissident responses. As part of this process 'fascism', the erstwhile rebellious disruptor that had graduated into constituted power in Italy, could also be regarded as a political norm.

Fascism and/as Dictatorship in Interwar Greece

This gradual entry of fascism into the mix of political norms catalysed a whole new range of thirding possibilities in the 1920s. The dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera that was established in Spain in 1923 provided the first politically successful example of a thirding process pursued by traditional authoritarian stakeholders in power willing to express open admiration for, and then learn from, the then fledgling Fascist regime in Italy in order to defend the monarchical and military status quo from the attacks of the left and from the alleged corruption of the parliamentary system. Interestingly Primo de Rivera claimed that his dictatorship was an extreme measure, a necessary but supposedly brief 'parenthesis' as he called it that would allow him to address the emergency situation and cure the country before a supposed return to normality.[44] Here then was a new political life for fascism—not as a revolutionary

42 cf. Spiros Melas, 'Ο αγώνας μας: Η επανάσταση του δημοτικισμού,' [Our struggle: The revolution of the demotic language] *Idea* 1, no. 11 (1933): 257–262.

43 Spiros Melas, 'Ο αγώνας μας: ανάγκη για επανάσταση,' [Our struggle: Need for revolution] *Idea* 1, no. 10 (1933): 193–198.

44 Alejandro Quiroga, *Making Spaniards: Primo De Rivera and the Nationalization of the Masses, 1923–1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 36.

cult of mavericks and anti-establishment rebels pursuing a vision of rupture but as a useful order-affirming template for a curative political exception that the strong anti-communist/socialist impulses of the interwar liberal and conservative status quo were increasingly willing to countenance in the interwar period.[45]

The trope of an urgent 'exception' in the form of a shock 'therapy' and as a lesser evil to crisis, chaos, and other feared disasters reached new audiences and gained traction among mainstream political constituencies. It enabled a number of conservative and liberal actors with an opportunity to embed, however selectively, aspects of the fascist experience into their political discourse and/or practice. This was a kind of thirding project that aspired to a revision of, and continuity with, the status quo rather than a dramatic break from it. It was thus driven by a desire to strengthen and improve on existing arrangements rather than to shatter them.[46] In this context thirding engaged with fascism in a conditional, reflexive, and pragmatic way, approaching it not as an ideological package but as a tested toolkit from which usable new fixes could be extrapolated and adapted to specific local contexts. For sympathetic mainstream political actors the primary attraction of fascism was its practical and strategic value, not its intellectual qualities or quasi-utopian aspirations. There was also far less of a belief in the moral appropriateness of fascism and even less of a conviction that fascism could be a universal short-term remedy for a world ravaged by decadence and crisis. Even when fascism was conjured up in some kind of positive sense, this was because, it was claimed, fascism had proven to be efficient, effective, and beneficial in dealing with local challenges and restoring order. It could thus be useful as part of a new interim political strategy—but it also came with perceived limitations, flaws, and dangers.[47] From this perspective the third-way process involved adapting the fascist experience by translating and recontextualising aspects thereof to fit different local conditions in order to mitigate its perceived negative elements and to maximise its perceived advantages.

45 Aristotle Kallis, 'The "Fascist Effect": On the Dynamics of Political Hybridizationin Inter-War Europe,' in *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, eds. António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), 18.

46 Dick Pels, *The Intellectual as Stranger* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

47 Zachary Elkins and Beth Simmons, 'On Waves, Clusters, and Diffusion: A Conceptual Framework,' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 598, no. 1 (2005): 33–51; Thomas Ambrosio, 'Constructing a Framework of Authoritarian Diffusion: Concepts, Dynamics, and Future Research,' *International Studies Perspectives* 11, no. 4 (2010): 375–392.

In Greece this subset of third-way processes that looked to fascism as a useful political remedy for fixing the status quo mapped handily onto two of the major political fissures of the interwar period—primarily the Venizelist/anti-Venizelist political dichotomy and, later (especially in 1933–1935), the parliamentarism-dictatorship debate. The earlier positive citations of the fascism-qua-movement as inspiration for a resurgence of Greek 'patriotic' activism faded away and were gradually replaced by an increasingly more positive assessment of fascism-in-power as an effective and successful template for restoring order, crushing the left, uniting the country, and pursuing national greatness. Support for an authoritarian parenthesis traversed both the conservative-liberal and the royalist-republican political fault lines, primarily because this solution was conjured up as a useful strategy for propping up the fortunes of one camp against the other. What is more striking, however, is the degree of publicly expressed consensus by a wide range of mainstream political actors regarding the use of the dictatorial exception as a last-ditch 'cure' for the ills of the parliamentary system. Venizelos himself defended aspects of the fascist embrace of dictatorship in Italy, with the necessary caveat that the particular problems confronting Greece at the time were too different to justify a similar (dictatorial) solution.[48] The main problem with fascism, according to Venizelos, was its incompatibility with the contemporary Greek political culture that was supposedly based on the acceptance of parliamentary democracy. Yet he also highlighted the political utility of at least some of the fascist methods in exceptional circumstances, as a harsh but supposedly necessary temporary corrective to the dysfunctionalities of parliamentary democracy. Oikonomidis reached a similar conclusion in an article published by *Idea* in late 1933—but following a very different logic. For him fascism (in Italy) had accomplished a remarkable 'regenerative work' that attracted a lot of admiration outside Italy even by those who otherwise rejected the 'terroristic methods that [Mussolini] as dictator is using'. Yet even a fascism freed from such extreme methods could not be an appropriate remedy for the Greek predicament because Oikonomidis was convinced that fascism worked only in 'politically immature societies' and was thus unsuitable for a country like Greece with a supposedly long and unique tradition of respect for democracy and freedom.[49]

Could it be, however, that parliamentarism too was unsuitable for the conditions of interwar Greece? At a four-day conference on the parliamentarism-

48 Quoted in Mark Mazower, *Η Ελλάδα και η Οικονομική Κρίση του Μεσοπολέμου* [Greece and the interwar economic crisis] (Athens: MIET, 2009), 347.

49 Yannis Oikonomidis, 'Η κρίση της δημοκρατίας II,' [The crisis of democracy, II] *Idea* 2, no. 12 (1933): 328–329; cf. similar comments by Melas in '[Our struggle: The revolution of the demotic language],' 261.

dictatorship conundrum organised by the newly established Panteion University in Athens in May 1932, speakers clashed on the merits and flaws of the two political systems. The university's cofounder and director, Georgios Fragoudis, well-connected with the Liberal party and with Venizelos personally, wondered whether the parliamentary system was a poor fit for the particular conditions of the Greek political culture; and whether its poor institutionalisation in Greece made a dictatorial 'exception' desirable.[50] Other speakers went further, presenting parliamentarism as altogether alien to the Greek national character, arguing instead for a different kind of third way involving a dictatorial exception that would be otherwise rooted in the constitutional order. The precedent of Article 48 of the Weimar constitution was also quoted favourably as an example of how to manage such a temporary deviation in exceptional circumstances within the parameters of a parliamentary system.[51]

The most striking trend among the wide range of speakers at the conference was that, whether critical or sympathetic or enthusiastic, they equated the future of dictatorship with Mussolini's 'prototype' authoritarian regime in Italy. Those praising the Italian example juxtaposed the supposed effectiveness of the Fascist dictatorship to the chronic divisiveness and paralysis of western parliamentary democracies of the early 1930s.[52] Fragoudis went as far as crediting the Fascist regime with having 'successfully eradicated the negative traits of the Italian people and revitalised the nation'.[53] But even many of those arguing the case in favour of parliamentary democracy could not resist the temptation to praise—profusely or obliquely—Mussolini as the architect of a new political alternative even if they considered his regime inappropriate for the Greek context at the time. Such a 'new' kind of dictatorship, full of disruptive and revitalising power, could become the template for a short-term dictatorial parenthesis in the name of fixing and saving the parliamentary system itself.[54]

The idea of a temporary dictatorial deviation, supposedly in defence of democracy and political stability, gained even more purchase across the mainstream political spectrum in the 1930s, in the shadow of the two failed Venizelist coups of 1933 and 1935. In the context of this discussion, it seemed impossible not to talk about 'fascism' as a *novel* form of authoritarian regime that

50 *Δελτίου της Παντείου Σχολής των Πολιτικών Επιστημών* [Bulletin of the Panteion School of Political Science], 7-8-9 (1932): 26.

51 Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago and New York: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 14–16.

52 [Bulletin of the Panteion School], 43–44.

53 Ibid., 6.

54 Spyros Marketos, *Πώς φίλησα τον Μουσσολίνι! Τα πρώτα βήματα του ελληνικού φασισμού* [How I kissed Mussolini! The first steps of Greek fascism] (Athens: Vivliorama), 320–328.

had somehow revitalised the dictatorial formula and, judged by its perceived results, had proven to be ruthlessly efficient and effective. Could it also be—or become—useful as a short-term shock treatment for the ailing Greek democracy, however? In early January 1934 Andreas Mihalakopoulos, leader of the Conservative Liberal party that formed part of the Venizelist coalition, praised Fascist Italy for having 'risen to the occasion and will leave behind a glorious legacy in the annals of their history'. The Italian government, he added, ensured that 'the patient was saved and reclaimed their strength by deviating from the parliamentary orthodoxy'. He thus concluded that, even if the parliamentary democracy is the best guarantee of freedom, 'in extraordinary circumstances even parliamentarism [ought to be] limited for the good of the whole [community]'.[55]

Mihalakopoulos made the above statement in response to the question 'parliamentarism or dictatorship' posed by the mainstream conservative daily newspaper *I Kathimerini* [The Daily]. He was one of twenty-six politicians who were invited to participate in the public dialogue that populated the first page of the newspaper over nine consecutive days in January 1934—a motley crew spanning the entirety of the interwar political spectrum from extreme anti-Venizelist to fervent Venizelist and from staunch democrat to former/aspiring dictator. Kafantaris defended the normative value of parliamentary democracy and called for a coherent strategy for reforming its institutions as a far better alternative to any dictatorial 'exception', underlining once again the relevance of his earlier proposal for a 'third situation'. Metaxas, on the other hand, produced one of the most detailed answers, arguing that the parliamentary system had run its historical course and was set to disappear as a political paradigm. The only meaningful question, according to Metaxas, was under which conditions this would happen. He saw two possible outcomes—one, negative in his opinion (the onslaught of communist revolution) and a more positive one (the emergence of what he called a 'national state').[56] Even more enthusiastically in favour of dictatorial deviation was Theodoros Pangalos, another maverick pro-Venizelist general who orchestrated a military coup in 1925 and remained in power as dictator for little over a year. For Pangalos parliamentarism was nothing short of a fraud, claiming that its irreversible, total eclipse by dictatorship was inevitable.

Nevertheless, speakers who otherwise rejected altogether the parliamentary system—as norm or in the particular way that it was functioning in the Second Republic—and considered it beyond repair shunned direct references to fas-

55 Georgios Kafantaris in 'Dictatorship or parliamentarism?' *Kathimerini*, 6 January 1934, 1.
56 Ionnias Metaxas in 'Dictatorship or parliamentarism?' *Kathimerini*, 6 January 1934, 1.

cism in Italy, Germany or elsewhere. Even Giorgios Mercouris, leader of the so-called National Socialist party and the person chosen by the Italian Fascist authorities to represent Greece at the 1934 congress for the formation of a Fascist international in Montreux, Switzerland,[57] proposed the 'temporary replacement [of the parliament] by a corporatist chamber capable of restoring order, progress, justice, and solidarity' without explicitly mentioning the fascist regime. The only case of a contributor who invoked the precedent of fascism as a positive example was Giorgios Kondylis. By 1934 Kondylis, the erstwhile military man and former arch-Venizelist of the 1920s, had reinvented himself as a staunch critic of Venizelos and a key partner of the post-1933 anti-Venizelist coalition government. His renegade political career included the founding of a maverick political party in 1923 (National Democratic Party, renamed National Radical Party in 1928), his involvement in a counter-coup that removed Pangalos from power in 1926, and his primary role in the organisation of anti-communist para-military formations especially in the north of Greece.[58] Kondylis was the indisputable star of *Kathimerini*'s public debate as he penned four separate—and progressively lengthier and more detailed—opinion pieces. In his view parliamentary democracy had exhausted its historical capital, crushed by the regenerative forces of fascism in Italy and Germany, having failed to tame the supposedly unruly human nature and to provide a meaningful forum for the resolution of differences within a modern society. Dictatorship, on the other hand, was a blunt instrument but in capable hands it was also a supremely effective strategy for overcoming crises and establishing order in society. He singled out the example of Fascist Italy as a resounding success, largely attributable to the charismatic qualities and 'creativity' of Mussolini, but he also praised king Alexander I of Serbia who presided over a royalist dictatorship since 1929 and the leader of Turkey Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. He concluded that Greece could only benefit from a version of dictatorial rule that allowed a single leader to rule with very limited control from a consultative legislative assembly.[59]

57 For CAUR and the 1934 Montreux conference see Marco Cuzzi, *L'Internazionale delle Camicie Nere* (Milan: Mursia, 2005). For Mercouris's role in CAUR see, in addition, Eleftheria Manta, 'The "National Socialist Party of Greece" and Its Contacts with Italy: Contribution to the Study of Greek Fascism,' *Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica* 9 (2012): 89–108.

58 Marketos, op. cit., 206. The communist daily *Rizospastis* provided ample coverage to the events in the northern city of Drama and elsewhere, openly accusing Kondylis of planning a 'fascist' squad-like organisation. See for example 'Φασισμός στη Δράμα,' [Fascism in drama] *Rizospastis*, 28 September 1934.

59 See his series of articles in *Kathimerini*, 10 to 13 January 1934.

Within two years from participating in *Kathimerini*'s public debate, Kondylis would be dead. Yet in the meantime he had led the efforts to crush the March 1935 Venizelist coup and then, months later, had staged his own coup (this time against the elected prime minister Tsaldaris, leader of the Popular Party and head a right-wing anti-Venizelist coalition that Kondylis had also joined), seized power, and masterminded the restoration of monarchical rule. In the summer of 1935 he also visited Rome in his capacity as minister of war, meeting with Mussolini and lavishing praise on the Italian regime. While in Rome Kondylis went as far as predicting that 'fascist clusters [already formed in all countries] will sooner or later prevail everywhere', using the example of Germany (a regime that, as he put it, 'imitated' the Mussolinian one).[60] And yet even he stopped short of openly embracing fascism as *the* de facto optimal solution for the Greek predicament, pointing to the structural differences of the Greek political system and the absence of a charismatic personality who could provide the solution to the crisis.[61] Not unlike Mercouris, who had also visited Rome and met with Mussolini a year before, Kondylis believed that the Italian Fascist model was not entirely appropriate—as a blueprint to be adopted in toto—for the particular challenges facing Greece.

The rest of the interlocutors expressed positions that ranged from strong support for the parliamentary system to criticisms of the way in which parliamentary democracy had been operating in post-World War I Greece. Most prefaced their opinion piece by stating their programmatic preference for democracy over dictatorship, no matter how necessary or inevitable the latter may become in extraordinary circumstances. Yet dictatorship as a temporary fix or last-resort exception was no longer taboo for them. Perhaps the most eloquent illustration of the muddled political space in which mainstream politicians roamed in the mid-1930s was provided by prominent liberal politician Georgios Papandreou. As a key speaker at the 1932 conference at the Panteion University, Papandreou had provided a robust defence of democracy—as the norm of modern democratic politics—and of parliamentarism—as a functional, if imperfect, institutional arrangement to ensure the democratic expression of different views. His own contribution to *Kathimerini*'s debate on dictatorship was not essentially different. Dictatorship could never be a positive choice, Papandreou argued; the only conceivable scenario that could render it useful, justifiable, and preferable to parliamentary democracy was as a strategy for dealing with a serious crisis that threatened the very integrity of the state—and

60 'Ο Κονδύλης υμνητής του φασισμού,' [Kondylis praises fascism] *Rizospastis*, 10 July 1935.

61 Kondylis, 'Τα ηθικά ερείσματα μιας δικτατορίας στην Ελλάδα,' [The moral bases of a dictatorship in Greece] *Kathimerini*, 13 January 1934.

even then only as a temporary, exceptional measure with a view to restoring a robust democratic order as soon as possible. Papandreou reviewed a range of other countries under dictatorial rule but concluded that the extent of the crisis facing these countries could not be compared to the Greek situation. In his view the revival of the debate about the desirability of dictatorship was driven by imitation of foreign trends—a shorthand for fascination with the Italian and (more recently) German experiences. And yet, Papandreou's otherwise robust defence of parliamentarism was already unfolding within a volatile space haunted by the extremes of, in his own words, 'anarchical democracy and suffocating tyranny'.[62] This loaded language made allowances for a possible 'useful' dictatorial exception as a last resort in spite of the excessive character of most contemporary dictatorships. In the wake of two Venizelist coup attempts and with many other counter-plots hatched up by Kondylis, Metaxas or other anti-Venizelists in the 1933–1936 period, the belief that there was a grave threat to the state overwhelmed the impulses to defend democratic normality and undermined the argument that the Greek parliamentary system was effective enough to defend the democratic order against the escalating crisis.

This was a debate increasingly suffused with the grimmest hyperboles and superlatives, warning of an impending catastrophe—political paralysis, corruption, institutional disintegration, social implosion, and revolution—that by the mid-1930s was unfolding at the very heart of mainstream political discourse in 1930s Greece. A few days before kicking off the parliamentarism-dictatorship debate, the editor of *Kathimerini* Giorgios Vlahos had declared that the situation was beyond remedy with normal democratic means, calling instead for harsh and violent corrective action to suppress once and for all the 'wicked, sick, destroyed' Venizelist side.[63] Beyond a relatively small circle of openly pro-fascist sympathisers (e.g. Kondylis in the 1930s, Mercouris) and newspapers (for example, *Estia* or *Esperini*), most conservative/liberal mainstream political agents and commentators rarely conjured up 'fascism' as a normative way forward, presenting it instead as a useful template for similar radical corrective solutions tailored to the Greek crisis. Whether as inspiration for a supposedly temporary dictatorial 'exception' to restore order and 'purge' the wicked political system or as a set of tools that could be adapted selectively for use in Greece, 'fascism' skewed contemporary understandings of a political 'exception' in the form of a dictatorial departure. If for the likes of *Estia* (formerly belonging to the Venizelist camp but shifting its loyalties and progressively moving to the

62 Papandreou in 'Dictatorship or parliamentarism?' *Kathimerini*, 6 January 1934.

63 Giorgios Vlahos, "Ετος πείρας πικράς,' [Year of bitter experience] *Kathimerini*, 1 January 1935.

extremes in the early 1930s) talking about fascism in direct correlation to the National Socialist regime (including its extreme antisemitism) in Germany was no longer taboo by 1935,[64] others were more interested in and supportive of international examples of third-way political-institutional translations of fascism such as the regimes in Portugal, Poland or Turkey as more usable and flexible alternatives that could be relevant to the Greek situation. Metaxas, who—as a seasoned entrepreneur of the thirding spaces that emerged in interwar Greece since the 1920s—engineered so successfully his political comeback in 1935 and eventually seized power in the summer of 1936, was the most eloquent proof of how dynamic these processes had become in the 1930s and how much suffused with 'fascist' ideas they had become in the process.

Conclusions

Amidst the rollercoaster experience of the military campaign in Anatolia and the bitter recriminations from the disastrous defeat that followed it, 'fascism' initially found few political opportunities to grow in Greece and limited interest from either radical or mainstream political agents. This changed, however, in the course of the 1920s and even more so in the first half of the 1930s. Although fascism continued to be overwhelmingly viewed by most commentators as a foreign phenomenon with limited relevance to the specificities of the Greek historical and socio-political context, more and more mainstream political actors in Greece gradually came to see it as a significant political norm that could not be ignored or dismissed. It was much less 'fascism' as a renegade hypernationalist movement of action and mostly 'fascism' as a novel and successful form of dictatorial/post-liberal regime with a rapidly growing international register of admirers and disciples that the overwhelming majority of Greek political actors became interested in. Regardless of whether these actors judged it as appropriate or not, as useful or not, as a positive inspiration, as a source of political learning, even as a model, or conversely as a threat and nightmare, 'fascism' came to matter, casting an ever-larger shadow on Greek politics.

While Greece witnessed very few and indeed largely inconsequential fascist(-like) movements or parties in the interwar years, it proved supremely fertile ground for third-way processes and projects. In addition to intensifying international left-right polarities, the 1920s was a period of intense local divi-

64 'Προς νέους ορίζοντες,' [Towards other horizons] *Estia*, 24 May 1935; cf. Papadimitriou, op. cit., 101.

sions (Venizelism-anti-Venizelism, republic-monarchy, liberalism-nationalism etc) that fuelled the desire for, and imagination of, diverse third-way projects. In January 1934, the daily *Esperini* commented on the bewildering proliferation of self-proclaimed 'third-way' political projects in the country, counting no less than fourteen such initiatives active at the time.[65] The international experience of fascism found a more hospitable and fertile milieu in these volatile and burgeoning thirding spaces. Very few Greek political actors were actually interested in any single national model of fascism as *the* solution, *the* third way, the future political blueprint for addressing Greece's problems. Instead fascism served mostly as one, increasingly attractive, *useful* source or ingredient in a range of far more complex third-way alchemies. 'Fascism' could be the inspiration for anti- and pro-status quo solutions; a fix to the parliamentary system or a radical alternative to it; the recipe for a short-term deviation or the strategy for a long-term profound transformation; the driver of a radical rupture with the past or the promise of revival of the most cherished national traditions. Yet it gradually became an integral component of *mainstream* political discourse and gained more consequential traction among dissident conservative and liberals than among radicals. By the time that the conservative daily *Kathimerini* decided to host the nine-day 'parliamentarism or dictatorship' public debate in early 1934 'fascism' had become an integral part of the normative political discourse by proxy, adding fuel to the growing willingness of mainstream actors to consider liberal parliamentary democracy as a spent force or seeing in the dictatorial alternative the benefits of a harsh-but-necessary short-term remedy for restoring order and confronting the revolutionary left. Metaxas's dictatorship did turn out to be the most dramatic and enduring authoritarian departure in Greece's interwar history.[66] Yet the distinctive third-way 'solution' that the 4th of August regime came to represent was one of many potential formulas alchemised inside a heterogeneous dissident 'third space' in interwar Greece, upon which the unfolding international experience of 'fascism' exerted an ever-stronger influence in the 1930s.

65 'Η πραγματική και ειλικρινής "Τρίτη Κατάστασις"' [The real and honest 'third situation'] *Esperini*, 7 Janary 1934.

66 Mogens Pelt, 'The Establishment and Development of the Metaxas Regime in the Context of Nazi Fascism, 1936–1941,' *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 2, no. 3 (2001): 143–172.