Introduction

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I

The concept of political legitimacy has hitherto tended to occupy a rather modest place in the historiography of twentieth-century Europe. In contrast to the attention paid by historians of pre-modern and non-European societies to issues of political culture and, more especially, to the ways in which the exercise of power by all rulers, be they sacred or secular, putative or actual, has to be located in a complex matrix of conventional beliefs, rituals and practices,[1] historians of contemporary Europe have tended to regard issues of political legitimacy as of secondary importance compared with other more tangible factors. Political power in Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been perceived by historians as being the product of an amalgam of ideological projects, forms of state (internal and external) aggrandisement and nationalist struggles for emancipation. Modernity – so it seems to be assumed – transformed the exercise of power, creating both new needs and justifications for active government and massively increased resources to bring these to reality, as well as flattening much of the pre-existing undergrowth of *ancien régime* convention and pre-industrial tradition. Government became incommensurably stronger, but also simultaneously starker. In the new world that emerged between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries, the powerful forces of ideological or national messianism and the democratic (or assumed) mandate of the people lifted state power to new heights. Consequently, governmental authority flowed remorselessly downwards through the new structures of civilian and military bureaucracy and legal authority, reducing social organisations, local communities and above all the

[1] See the illuminating discussion in John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially 13–80, and Michael J. Braddick and John Walter, 'Introduction. Grids of Power: Order, Hierarchy and Submission in Early Modern Society', in Michael J. Braddick and John Walter, eds., *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Submission in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8–9. See also Thomas Metzger, *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

individual citizen to the role of disciplined, though not necessarily powerless, subjects. Legitimacy, in so far as it surfaces in such accounts, is regarded as having been largely constructed by rulers themselves and subsequently conveyed by the modern institutions of social control – notably mass education, conscription and state propaganda – to the population. Thus, French peasants were made into Frenchmen, Russian workers into agents of Bolshevik power and German bureaucrats into functionaries of the Nazi state.[2]

The focus on the material, visible and immediate scaffolding of power has been particularly evident in studies of the decades of upheaval between the First World War and the settlement that followed the Second World War. The perception of these decades as (in Eric Hobsbawm's formulation) an 'age of catastrophe', when an amalgam of ideological, social and inter-national civil wars swept uncontrollably across the European continent has focused the attention of historians on the radical instability of political regimes and consequently their dependence on the direct props of state power or the less visible building-blocks of class alliances.[3] The unprecedented challenges imposed on both rulers and ruled by the dictates of modern warfare from 1914 onwards could hardly fail to strain the complex multilateral relationships between national (or imperial) regimes, local governments, social institutions and the citizens. In some cases, these bonds managed to hold firm; in others they degraded into a crude balance of material force or were simply burst asunder. In these latter cases, mobilisation provoked counter-mobilisation, and tested the state authorities' monopoly of violence as well as their stamina in asserting their rule over insubordinate or revolutionary populations. Most obvious in wide areas of central and southern Europe in the years immediately following the First World War, this direct and often violent competition for possession of the instruments of state power never entirely disappeared over the subsequent decades.[4] A culture of 'regime struggle' was latent or manifest, in which the regimes which emerged victorious were those that got ahead in the race to build their institutional bureaucracies, direct their resources for war (be it internal or external) and mobilise or lull their populations into support.

There is much that is right and necessary about this dominant historiographical approach. The outcomes of the two world wars, as well as of the civil wars in Russia, Spain and Greece, are incomprehensible without an understanding of the material sinews that underpinned the success of the victors.[5] The famous dictum

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[2] This is, broadly speaking, the interpretation persuasively presented by Michael Mann in *The Sources of Social Power*, Vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), esp. 723–39. For a stimulating if rather diffuse critique of the materialistic account of political power in the modern age, see David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

[3] See, for characteristic examples, Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), 136–41; Gregory Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism or Social Democracy. Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), esp. 7–11.

[4] Dirk Schumann, 'Europa, der Erste Weltkrieg und die Nachkriegszeit: eine Kontinuät der Gewalt', *Journal of Modern European History*, 1 (2003), 24–43.

[5] Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London, Pimlico, 1996); John Barber and Mark Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front 1941–1945: A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (London and New

of Joseph Stalin that whoever occupies a territory determines its social and political system might have lacked subtlety but it encapsulated a certain truth about the material culture of modern state power.[6] Indeed, as recent historical writing has well demonstrated, many of the problems encountered by the parliamentary regimes of the interwar years and the relative success of their authoritarian and fascist challengers were as much expressions of a crisis of the material structures of government as of any broader ideological conflict. Mundane but crucial issues of taxation, state finance and social policies have in this respect made a welcome return to the centre of a historical debate too long preoccupied by the ideological appeal of 'fascism.'[7]

Yet, for all its strengths, this materialist emphasis also has its shortcomings. It tends to privilege the autonomy of the state as a collective machine imposing its dictates and forms of regimentation on society, and neglects the ways in which the structures of modern state power were themselves embedded in complex grids of social relations. In particular, the emphasis placed on what one might term the 'self-made' history of the state has tended to draw attention away from the nexus of social and cultural values in Europe's political cultures from which the state derived its authority but which also constrained it.[8] We believe that the most adequate term for this somewhat amorphous reality is 'legitimacy'. Briefly stated, the essays in this special issue, and the collective project from which they are derived, take as their intellectual point of departure the hypothesis that concepts of what constituted the legitimate exercise of power were an important factor not only in buttressing the power of rulers but also in imposing limits on that power. Problems of terminology are legion, and are complicated further by the different resonances that legitimacy assumes in Europe's different languages. In using the term we are, however, concerned to regard legitimacy not as a fixed quality against which particular regimes can be measured but as an evolving set of socio-cultural values which were influenced partly by the legitimating actions of rulers but also by the attitudes of the ruled. Thus, though legitimacy was related to the legitimating actions of rulers, it also remained separate from it.

The role that concepts of legitimacy played in the political history of twentieth-century Europe clearly varied over time and place. In the more settled political cultures of northern Europe, legitimacy often served as a 'shock absorber' that buttressed the constitutional exercise of power and blunted the damaging impact of social and ideological conflicts. In many other European states, however, legitimacy

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York: Longman, 1991); Angela Cenarro, 'Elite, Party, Church. Pillars of the Francoist "New State" in Aragon, 1936–1945', *European History Quarterly*, 28 (1998), 461–86; David Close, 'The Reconstruction of a Right-Wing State', in David Close, ed., *The Greek Civil War, 1943–1950. Studies of Polarization* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 156–89.

[6] Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), 105.

[7] Robert Moeller, *German Peasants and Agrarian Politics 1914–1924. The Rhineland and Westphalia* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Douglas Forsyth, *The Crisis of Liberal Italy: Monetary and Financial Policy 1914–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Robert Paxton, *French Peasant Fascism. Henri Dorgères' Greenshirts and the Crises of French Agriculture 1929–1939* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). The more ideological approach to fascism has been championed by Roger Griffin: see the debate in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37 (2002).

[8] Braddick and Walter, 'Grids of Power', 10.

was much more contested. In Germany, for example, few would question that many of the problems encountered by both the Nazi regime and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) lay in the ways in which both regimes were perceived, as a consequence of their origins, ideological precepts and daily actions, to be illegitimate by certain sections of German society. The 'crisis of legitimacy' that one might argue, with a certain hyperbole, haunted the exercise of governmental power in Germany from 1918 to 1949 or indeed 1989 was, moreover, far from unique. Similar issues came to the fore in most European societies at some point, or indeed at more than one point, during the multi-layered conflict between opposing armies, ideologies, ethnic groups and political forces that we term the Second World War. From the beginnings of the Spanish Civil War in summer 1936 to the conclusion of the bitter wars in the Greek mountains and the Polish and Ukrainian borderlands in the late-1940s, states were conquered or liberated, societies divided or destroyed, old elites deposed and new elites created. Amidst these conflicts legitimacy was overturned, contested and remade. Relations between rulers and ruled evolved rapidly in response to military events but also more slowly, as citizens responded to emphatically new forms of rule on the basis of pre-existing notions of effective, just and legitimate government. Indeed, the very destructive nature of the wars of military conquest, armed political struggle and ethnic persecutions that took place during the long night of the Second World War tended to emphasise the *décalage* between the new ideologies and methods of the rulers and the more traditional mentalities of the ruled. The erosion of state structures in occupied and liberated areas of Europe encouraged a localisation of political life in which modern citizenship often took second place to more long-standing concepts of the local community. With the end of the war in spring 1945, so this parenthesis in national political life gradually came to a close. New regimes were established, 'normality' was restored and, at least in the democratic culture of postwar western Europe, new forms of social contract established between rulers and ruled.

The era of the Second World War, and more especially the destructuring of political life which it produced, thus provides a privileged vantage point from which to glimpse the otherwise often invisible networks of political, social and cultural values which defined legitimate government in twentieth-century Europe. In the more stable political landscape of Europe in the decades following the war, issues of legitimacy were less immediately visible but perhaps no less pervasive. The crises of communist rule in the GDR in 1953, in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968, as well as the collapse of the French Fourth Republic in 1958, demonstrated the vulnerability of even the most imposing apparatuses of state power to the gulf that could emerge between a political regime and its population. How far the communist regimes of central and eastern Europe ever succeeded in acquiring legitimacy is of course a complex question.[9] But so too is the issue of whether the democratic nature of the regimes of postwar western Europe rendered them legitimate in the eyes of their populations. Political behaviour did indeed become more routinised and

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[9] See the discussion in Mark Pittaway, *Eastern Europe 1939–2000* (London: Arnold, 2004), 63–85.

social institutions were drawn much more closely into the structures of corporatist negotiation. But the widespread contestation that developed in many European societies in the later 1960s and the early 1970s revealed the limits of the postwar socio-political consensus, while the substantial expansion of the supra-nation-state level of European political decision-making during the final two decades of the century once again raised issues of a 'crisis of legitimacy' within European political culture.[10]

II

The relative neglect of the concept of legitimacy in the field of contemporary European history has had the consequence that much of the writing on the subject has emanated from political scientists. The works of Juan Linz, Rodney Barker and others have done much to illuminate the structures of legitimation upon which the regimes of the contemporary era have based their authority, and deserve a wider audience among historians.[11] For many of these writers, the conceptual framework provided by Max Weber remains the essential point of departure. His famous threefold distinction of the sources of legitimacy as lying in tradition, charisma and bureaucratic state organisation, as well as his insistence that legitimacy was located not in legal or historical fact but in the *belief* of the ruled in the legitimacy of their rulers, has strongly influenced the way in which the phenomenon has been framed and analysed.[12] Hence, writers such as Barker and François Bourricaud have followed Weber's lead in demonstrating the futility of normative approaches to legitimacy which seek to arrive at judgements about regimes on the basis of a checklist of the attributes of 'good government'.[13] Given the inevitable heterogeneity of such attributes, they have pleaded for a reorientation of attention away from what Barker terms the 'metaphor' of legitimacy to the more tangible processes of legitimation. All rulers, as they rightly argue, engage to a greater or lesser degree in a continuous process of self-legitimation, drawing on a wide variety of legal, historical and ideological props to justify their rule to others and perhaps more especially to themselves.[14] However, as the sternest recent critic of the Weberian framework, David Beetham, has energetically argued, the concentration on legitimation can be unduly self-limiting. Thus, when applied to a particular historical context, it tends to focus almost exclusively on the actions of rulers

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[10] Daniel Wincott, 'National States, European Union and Changing Dynamics in the Quest for Legitimacy', in Anthony Arnull and Daniel Wincott, eds., *Accountability and Legitimacy in the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 487–96.

[11] Juan Linz, 'The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes. Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibriation', in Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), esp. 16–18; Rodney Barker, *Legitimating Identities: The Self-Representation of Rulers and Subjects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[12] Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenter Roth and Claus Wittich (New York: Bedminter Press, 1968), 212–99. See also Wolfgang Mommsen, 'Max Weber's Theory of Legitimacy Today', in Wolfgang Mommsen, *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989), 44–9.

[13] Barker, *Legitimating Identities*; François Bourricaud, 'Legitimacy and Legitimation', *Current Sociology*, 35 (1987), 57–67.

[14] Barker, *Legitimating Identities*, 19–26, 106 and 140.

and, more particularly, on how they manage, or do not manage, to persuade their subjects of their legitimacy as rulers. Legitimate rulers, by this somewhat tautological account, are those who succeed in convincing their subjects that they are legitimate. As a consequence, the larger (and more historically and culturally important) question as to how far the perception of a ruler within a particular society is determined by the values current within that society tends to remain unexplored.[15]

Beetham's rejection of the Weberian emphasis on legitimation leads him to propose a different approach which seeks to measure the strength or weakness of legitimacy in a given society in terms of the practice of power, the evidence of consent and, perhaps most importantly, the extent to which the actions of the rulers can be justified in terms of the values current within society.[16] Whatever the arbitrariness of certain of his categories, there is much in Beetham's concept of 'legitimacy-in-context' with which historians can readily sympathise. Legitimacy has not, as Beetham rightly argues, been in twentieth-century Europe an 'all-or-nothing affair', dependent on legality or a Lockean founding social contract between rulers and ruled. But nor has it been simply a product of a top-down process of legitimisation by state authorities. Catapulted into power variously by elections, revolution, military victory (or defeat) or social conflict, rulers and regimes throughout the twentieth century set about legitimising their occupation of power by plundering indiscriminately and somewhat opportunistically the bran-tubs of legality, historical precedence, national identity and ideology. The success or failure of such ventures was, however, a more complex matter than the skills of the rulers and the resources of their bureaucrats, propagandists and policemen. Much also depended on the degree of convergence between the regime they were seeking to create and the expectations and norms of the society within which it operated. Or to cite again the reported words of Stalin to the postwar Polish prime minister, 'Communism on a German is like a saddle on a cow.'[17]

Building on the work of Beetham as a well as of historians of other societies and periods, it therefore seems possible to construct an approach to the phenomenon of legitimacy which regards it not as the fulfilment of a list of criteria but as a dynamic reality which existed in the critical space between rulers and ruled. The actions of regimes helped to contribute to their own legitimisation (or the inverse) by constructing their own legal rituals, forms of popular endorsement and propagandist accounts of their origins and ideology. At the same time, however, concepts of what constituted legitimate political power existed within European societies beyond the control of rulers. These concepts were neither universal nor uncontested. Indeed, opposing definitions of legitimate power could, and did, coexist within the fractured polities of several European states. But more common in the mature and complex political landscapes of mid-twentieth-century Europe was the coexistence of overlapping concepts of legitimacy that, rather like the accretions

[15] David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 7–25.
[16] Beetham, *Legitimation of Power*, 12–20.
[17] Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, *The Rape of Poland. Pattern of Soviet Aggression* (New York and Toronto: Whittlesley House, 1948), 79.

of successive geological periods, lay somewhat imperfectly on top of each other. Some of these were essentially historical in nature: legitimate government was that which was or, more frequently, could plausibly claim to be the heir to an unbroken process of succession and adaptation. Some, in contrast, were more legal or contract-based: legitimate government was that which derived from a founding constitution ratified by the assent of the people or their duly constituted representatives. Others, again, drew their strength from less formal but no less tangible realities: legitimate government was that which derived from the will of the nation, the people, the *Volk* or a universal or more particular God. But some, too, were focused less on origins than on performance: legitimate government was that which behaved according to recognisable standards of predictability and equity, and which was seen to meet more or less efficiently the collective and individual needs of the populace. Common to all of these notions of legitimacy was, however, an inescapable element of inconsistency and muddle. The textual clarity of law and the rhetorical simplicity of declarations by political leaders gave way to the much more murky textures of socially rooted norms and assumptions in which the traditional and the modern, the democratic and the anti-democratic and the secular and the religious were intertwined.

The fuzziness of the concepts of legitimacy embedded in twentieth-century Europe's political cultures militates against any simple or universal model of what constituted legitimate government. Legitimacy was felt more than it was thought, and its constituent elements differed considerably within and between Europe's political boundaries. Notions of legitimacy in, for example, Denmark in the 1930s and 1940s were very different from those prevalent in, say, Spain or Switzerland. There was in this sense no common European culture of legitimacy, with the consequence that any historically rooted study of the phenomenon is necessarily also an exercise in comparative history. Nor was legitimacy an unchanging phenomenon. One of the most striking features of the crisis years of the 1940s was the way in which concepts of what constituted legitimate government evolved and reformulated themselves within national and local communities in reaction to events. Thus, in the defeated states of western Europe in 1940, legitimacy lay less in legal continuity than in the ability to adapt to new circumstances and political realities. This could be done in various ways: by reaching back to old ideological values, by accepting the need to adopt new forms of political organisation or simply by providing demonstrably fair and efficient government. However, by the end of the war, legitimacy had come to be located primarily in possession of the sacred conch of a revivified patriotism. Skilful pretenders to power, above all de Gaulle, were highly conscious of the evolutions in these concepts of legitimacy, and adapted their political discourses accordingly.[18] None of the many putative or actual rulers of Europe during the 1940s was, however, able to direct or channel these evolutions. Their role was essentially that of pretenders

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[18] In addition to the article by Denis Peschanski in this collection, see Andrew Shennan, *Rethinking France. Plans for Renewal 1940–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), esp. 53–68; Jean Touchard, *Le gaullisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 53–69.

seeking to adapt to the subtly shifting patterns of legitimacy within different national political cultures.

<div align="center">**III**</div>

A historical approach to the phenomenon of legitimacy within European societies over the twentieth century will therefore necessarily be in a number of key respects different from the approaches privileged by political scientists. First, and perhaps most obviously, historians are by temperament and training inclined to emphasise specificity and complexity and to reject any overarching model of legitimacy which neglects the differences between Europe's political cultures and their evolution over time. Second, the emphasis placed by historians on durable social and cultural realities leads them to be less 'ruler-centred' in their approach to the making of legitimacy. Rulers are engaged in the politics of the possible and, though they could influence substantially the way in which they and their actions were perceived by their subjects or citizens, they were not able to bring concepts of what constituted legitimate government entirely under their control. Third, historians are always alert to the danger of reading backwards into the past with the assumptions of the present. Therefore, to assume on the basis of contemporary values that liberal-democratic regimes possessed greater legitimacy earlier in the century than alternative forms of government would be to risk making anachronistic assumptions about the value structures current within European societies earlier in the century.

If this approach suggests ways in which historians of twentieth-century Europe might bring a distinctive perspective to bear on the analysis of the phenomenon of legitimacy, it should be stressed how inserting legitimacy into the political history of mid-century Europe also changes, if only modestly, the nature of the questions which historians ask about the political evolutions of this period. What we might term rather glibly the 'struggle for legitimacy' in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s helps to reorientate our attention from the series of short-term ruptures that marked the history of Europe during the war years towards more gradual changes in the political cultures of Europe. It requires stepping back from the discourses of rulers in order to capture the more elusive commonplace assumptions about the nature of just political power that were rooted in European political culture.[19] It also implies directing our attention away from national events to the structures of local life. The priority of local reality in wartime has become a prominent theme of much of the recent historiography.[20] The realities of foreign occupation destroyed or marginalised national authorities and established new boundaries, even severing contacts between closely neighbouring towns.[21] Most profoundly, however,

[19] For similar comments see Watts, *Henry VI*, 11 and 15.

[20] Characteristic examples are Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains. In Search of the German Occupation, 1940–1945* (London: Macmillan, 2002); Jan Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Stanley Aschenbrenner, 'The Civil War from the Perspective of a Messenian Village', in Lars Bærentzen, John Iatrides and Ole Smith, eds., *Studies in the History of the Greek Civil War 1945–1949* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1987), 105–25.

[21] György Konrád, *Geluk* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2002), 11.

the experience of war narrowed personal horizons, giving a new pre-eminence to the local *Heimat* defined by the visible communities of family and neighbourhood. It is in this local arena, in relations between individuals who knew each other by face, origin and reputation, that one glimpses most clearly the interaction between rulers and ruled, and consequently the role that concepts of legitimacy played in influencing the actions of the succession of invading, occupying and liberating forces and the responses of populations.

This also suggests the ways in which analysis of the phenomenon of legitimacy can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the success and failure of the different forms of regime that existed in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. The substantial and highly sophisticated historiography, for example, of popular attitudes in the Third Reich and, more recently, the GDR has tended to focus on the rather uncertain concept of 'public opinion'. Thus much energy has been expended on attempts to draw dividing lines between support, conformity, dissent and ultimately resistance within the German dictatorships and, in the particular context of the Third Reich, the degree of popular consent among the population to policies of social and racial exclusion.[22] Such assessments of public opinion are, however, no more than uncertain aggregates of a wide range of divergent and often contradictory opinions, and risk considering particular attitudes in isolation from the grilles through which they were formed. Thus, whether regimes such as the Third Reich or the Pétainist regime in wartime France were 'popular' is perhaps a less important question than how far they succeeded in being perceived by the mass of their populations as 'legitimate'.[23]

This issue of legitimacy arose much more acutely in the case of those many states that came during some period of the Second World War under Axis or Allied occupation. Historians have long recognised that the failure of the primarily German occupation regimes in wartime Europe was a more complex process than simply a matter of patriotic or ideological rejection of German and Nazi rule. The rejection of the foreign body of German Nazi occupation was sharpened and accelerated by the way in which the policies of the German occupiers, to the despair of many of their erstwhile supporters, seemed to be based on a wilful disregard for local conventions and sensitivities.[24] Consequently, German rule, and that of their extreme collaborationist allies, was in the end not merely unwelcome or resented; it also came to seem, in many areas of occupied Europe, profoundly illegitimate. Whether this was in any sense inevitable, given the cumulative radicalisation of the wartime Nazi state,

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[22] See, notably, Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich. Bavaria 1933–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), esp. 373–7; Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship. Inside the GDR 1949–1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), esp. 129–50 and 271–86; Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[23] See also the important study by Pierre Laborie, *L'opinion française sous Vichy* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1990).

[24] For an interesting example of such remarks, see the speech given by the Belgian New Order journalist Raymond De Becker on 3 September 1943 to the staff of his newspaper *Le Soir*: Raymond De Becker, 'Conférence rédactionnelle au *Soir*', PL 1, Centre d'Etudes et de Documentation Guerre et Sociétés Contemporaines, Brussels.

is perhaps less important than what it serves to reveal about the continued relevance of norms of legitimate government amidst the chaos of wartime Europe. This was not universally the case. In Poland, the German policy of random coercion and terror dissolved concepts of political and social community while in its eastern borderlands the succession of Soviet, German and again Soviet occupations transformed the occupying force into merely one player in a bloody and multidimensional contest between competing ethnic and ideological movements. In this brutal universe, the spiral of terror and counter-terror gradually excluded any reference to individual or collective norms of morality.[25]

Elsewhere in Europe, however, the impact of the war, though locally often horrifically violent, did not result in a 'meltdown' of collective political and social values. Indeed, one important reason for the enduring fascination of the years of the Second World War for historians lies in the juxtaposition of extreme forms of behaviour and the continuation of the quotidian rituals of community life. In this situation, where nothing was the same but much remained the same, the tacit boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate forms of rule remained tangible.[26] The German occupiers, the local representatives of civilian government, Allied emissaries and the Resistance movements that gradually emerged all became caught up in a complex nexus of unwritten codes of behaviour in which recognition of the dictates of war went hand in hand with the rejection of some forms of behaviour, such as the execution of hostages, which were perceived to violate norms of acceptable behaviour. This remained the case after the end of the war, both in those areas liberated from German rule and in those newly subject to Allied rule. In both cases a wide array of military, returning émigré, internal, Resistance and local authorities confronted each other, none of which could claim an incontrovertible right to rule. In the subsequent settling out of the new structures of governmental power, many factors played a role. But underlying the transitions of the liberation period, norms about what constituted legitimate authority contributed to defining the nature of the solid but also rather constrained democratic culture of western Europe in the postwar decades.[27] Authoritarian alternatives had often discredited themselves in the adventures of the war years and at the same time had inspired wide-ranging

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[25] Jan Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation. The Generalgouvernement 1939–1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 202–3; Timothy Snyder, 'The Causes of Ukrainian – Polish Ethnic Cleansing 1943', *Past and Present*, 179 (May 2003), 197–234; Karel C. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair. Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[26] Among other case studies, see Tzetvan Todorov, *A French Tragedy: Scenes of Civil War, Summer 1944* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1996).

[27] The origins of the postwar social and political order has rightly emerged in recent years as a major *chantier* of historical research. Typical examples include Richard Vinen, *Bourgeois Politics in France, 1945–1951* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Martin Conway, 'Democracy in Postwar Western Europe. The Triumph of a Political Model', *European History Quarterly*, 32 (2002), 59–84; Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, eds., *Life after Death. Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s* (Washington, DC, and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Dominik Geppert, ed., *The Postwar Challenge 1945–1958* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press and German Historical Institute, 2003).

introspection about the deficiencies of the prewar political structures.[28] The durability of the postwar regimes of western Europe, however, lay perhaps less in their democratic credentials than in the manner in which they combined the rituals of democratic participation with the provision of what was widely regarded as effective but also legitimate rule. Government was judged partly on its principles, but also partly on its results, notably the way in which the post-1945 regimes succeeded in promoting policies of reconstruction that were widely considered to be fair and viable. In contrast, in both southern Europe and in those states of central and eastern Europe that came within the Soviet sphere of influence, there was much less sense of a definable terminus to the mid-century struggle for legitimacy. One of the major challenges faced by both the communist regimes of central and eastern Europe and the post-civil war regimes in Greece and Spain was therefore the need to supplement their occupation of political power and their provision of many of the components of effective government with their achievement of a broader degree of legitimacy in the eyes of their respective populations.

IV

The virtues of a historical approach to the phenomenon of legitimacy in mid-twentieth-century Europe are, we believe, demonstrated by the articles presented in this special issue. They have no pretension to completeness, or indeed to uniformity. Rather, we believe that their diversity, both in terms of subject matter and methodology, demonstrates the different ways in which analysis of the problem of legitimacy can enrich our understanding of Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. Given the radical diversity of the wartime experience, it is unsurprising that the phenomenon of legitimacy operated in different ways in the states of Europe. In some states, of which Denmark is the most striking example, the continuity of political institutions left little space for alternative pretenders to power to acquire any political legitimacy. At the other end of the spectrum were 'civil-war states' such as Greece, Italy or Hungary, where, as Mark Pittaway persuasively argues in his contribution, intense political polarisation meant that there was no agreed concept of what constituted political legitimacy.[29] Different again were those states such as France and Belgium, analysed respectively by Denis Peschanski and Nico Wouters, where political legitimacy was contested between different contenders for power, each of which sought to build upon different forms of legitimacy. In both cases, however, the failure of Vichy regime and of the New Order political forces in Belgium predated the collapse of German military authority and had sources more profound than the evolution of the war. The

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[28] See, e.g., Mike Smith, 'Neither Resistance nor Collaboration: Historians and the Problem of the *Nederlandse Unie*', *History*, 72 (1987), 251–78; Iselin Theien, 'Norwegian Fascism 1933–40. The Position of the *Nasjonal Samling* in Norwegian Politics', D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 2001, 242–317.

[29] On Greece and Italy, see notably John Iatrides, 'Greece at the Crossroads 1944–1950', in John Iatrides and Linda Wrigley, eds., *Greece at the Crossroads. The Civil War and its Legacy* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 1–30, and Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Milan: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991), esp. 221–5.

failure of authoritarian political projects and of structures of German occupation rule was, however, not universal. As Wouters notes, some New Order mayors succeeded in acquiring legitimacy in the eyes of their populations, and the important case study of the Trieste region presented in his contribution by Gianmarco Bresadola demonstrates that in this special case even in the final years of the war German occupying forces could exploit local situations to acquire a certain legitimacy. Just as the loss of legitimacy by German occupation forces was not inevitable, so the success of their democratic successors was not inevitable. The essay on the political trials in Czechoslovakia by Ben Frommer demonstrates the way in which the efforts of the postwar regime under the presidency of Edvard Beneš to build a new legitimacy out of the prosecution of the wartime political and economic elite failed because of the disjuncture between their actions and the perceptions of the population.

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