

Matthew Feldman

## **Subjects and Occasions**

Articles, Comment Pieces, and Reviews on the Far Right  
and Other Matters

Vol. 1

Edited by Karim Mamdani

# The Best of Scholars and Scholarship in the Humanities

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Matthew Feldman

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For Dan Stone  
Scholar and Mensch



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# Introduction

*Kate Yanduganova*

How did fascism emerge, and why did it gain such popularity? How did the population of European countries allow the Holocaust to happen, and how do we deal with this legacy? Does fascism persist today, and, if so, where and how? Matthew Feldman, a historian of radicalism, has dedicated decades to grappling with these complex questions. While no single answer suffices, this new collection of Feldman's shorter works compiles insights and perspectives that are crucial to enhancing public understanding of different forms of radicalism, especially far-right movements, fascist ideology, and terrorism. It includes pieces from many different outlets, which have been roughly grouped into several sections. Attentive readers will enjoy finding continuities and echoes between the chapters.

This volume features a diverse array of content, including book reviews, interviews, op-eds, academic articles, and reports for monitoring organizations. Its topics span from archival studies and poetry analysis to justifications for legal enforcements, such as the arrest of Pavel Durov in France—a reflection of Feldman's expansive intellectual output. While some selections exhibit continuity with his previous essay collection from 2020, *Politics, Intellectuals, and Faith*, the present volume presents a much more varied spectrum of Feldman's concerns and methodological approaches.

In his work as a literary scholar, Feldman analyzes modernist poetry and fiction, examining how these artists' opinions on public lives shaped their creative works. He is interested in the representation of European worldviews, such as modernist art or fascist politics, particularly during the first

half of the twentieth century. This focus naturally extends to the historical dimensions of Feldman's research: he traces the genesis of extremist movements, exploring the circumstances under which fascism developed and gained popularity in 1930s Germany, its transformations in postwar Europe, and its seeming contemporary resurgence, manifested in individual terrorist acts and echoed in some policies of authoritarian Western governments. Notably, Feldman does not delve deeply into Islamist terrorism. Instead, he posits that the current 'Islamist scare' is largely attributable to the 'othering' of Muslims—in the United States, Western Europe, and Latin America—by an increasingly global far right, including its most radical elements, despite, and later as a reaction to, horrific events like 9/11. Feldman offers insights into the construction of fear and anger on the political right, revealing the radicalization networks that underpin far-right attacks. In many instances of political and xenophobic extremism, Feldman finds it possible to reconstruct the context that allowed these ideologies to capture minds, ultimately culminating in acts of violence. His most forceful assertion is that no terrorist acts in isolation—there is always a propaganda network and an exchange of ideas that inspire and continuously support extremist operations—even if the 'terrorist cycle' might be undertaken alone, as with self-directed terrorism (ignoring the performative aspects of terrorism, later British policy calls this 'self-initiated terrorism'). This perspective explains Feldman's interest in modern media, as he illustrates how extremist ideas are propagated both by traditional media like books and through newer digital channels, including popular forums such as Telegram. Feldman concludes with "a call to civil courage," emphasizing the importance of everyday vigilance and community cohesion. On the latter, key point, while extremism cannot be eradicated