Russian Fascism in Exile. A Historical and Phenomenological Perspective on Transnational Fascism

Susanne Hohler
Cluster of Excellence 'Asia and Europe', University of Heidelberg
Karl Jaspers Centre for Advanced Transcultural Studies, Bergheimer Str. 58
Building 4311 Room 108, D-69115 Heidelberg, Germany
hohler@asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de

Abstract
Based on the example of Russian fascism in Harbin, Manchuria, this paper demonstrates how the concept, 'transnational' can relate to fascism in three ways: as a transnational phenomenon, as a transnational movement and in terms of the study of fascism from a transnational perspective, focusing on the relations and exchanges between fascist movements and how fascism crossed borders. One way of approaching implementing this perspective is to focus on the appropriation and adaptation of fascist bodies of thought into various local contexts. This paper argues that in this context the studies in fascism from a transnational perspective can profit from by focusing on a contemporary understanding of fascism instead of a priori academic definitions. Harbin fascists perceived fascism as a universal idea, which assumed distinct manifestations depending on the particularities of each nation. Therefore in the view of contemporaries fascism also constituted a transnational movement. In a second step this paper reflects on the question to what extend fascist studies could also benefit from the extension from a transnational to a transcultural perspective to better grasp the diverse influences on various manifestation of fascism and deepen our understanding of change and entanglements between fascist movements as well as their respective environments on a global scale.

Keywords
fascism; transnational fascism; transcultural fascism; Russian fascism; All-Russian Fascist Party; Harbin; Manchuria; interwar period

Introduction
On 1 May 1938 the Berlin-based Russian newspaper Novoe Slovo [New Word] triumphantly announced the foundation of the so-called Rossiiskii Natsionalˈnyi Front [Russian National Front], a union of the Russkii Natsionalˈnyi Soiuz...
Uchastnikov Voiny [Russian National Union of War Veterans] and two of the most important associations of Russian fascism in exile - Rossiiiskoe Natsional-Sotsialisticheskoe Dvizhenie [Russian National Socialist Movement] and the Vserossiiskaia Fashistskaia Partiia [VFP; All-Russian Fascist Party] from the city of Harbin in Manchuria. High representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in exile, editors of leading conservative Russian newspapers and leaders of several ultra-patriotic and far-right émigré organizations sent their congratulations on the occasion of the establishment, which was launched with a ceremony in the Schubert Hall in Berlin.¹ The declared goal of the front was to consolidate anti-communist forces and coordinate the fight against communism in Russia. The initiative for the foundation of the Russian National Front emanated from Konstantin Rodzaevskii, the leader of the All-Russian Fascist Party, who had called for a unification of all ‘active patriotic organizations’ for the sake of the fatherland in several Russian émigré newspapers.² It was Rodzaevskii’s second attempt to unite different Russian fascist organizations on a global scale. Already in 1934 his All-Russian Fascist Party had temporarily merged with the American-based Vserossiiskaia Fashistskaia Organizatsiiia [VFO; All-Russian Fascist Organization] founded by Anastasii Vonsiatskii. But ideological differences and personal animosity between the two men soon became evident and the union ruptured by the end of the year.³ Rodzaevskii’s second and last attempt to form a united Russian fascist organization through the Rossiiskii Natsional’nyi Front also failed due to resistance of the German government and the National Socialist Party, whom the Russian fascists actually considered to be allies. What seemed to be the prelude to a further surge of Russian fascism and the fulfillment of Rodzaewskii’s international ambitions was actually the beginning of a sharp decline. After 1938, first the Hitler-Stalin Pact and later Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union dealt Russian fascism a blow from which it would not recover.

Arguably, the story of Russian fascism, which was characterized by high hopes and bitter disappointments, as the example of the National Front shows, constitutes a rather exotic example of fascism in the interwar period. Why should we care about a few hundred or thousand ‘Russian Nazi’s’ that maybe

---

¹ ‘Rossiiiskii Natsional’nyi Front’ [Russian National Front], Novoe Slovo, 1 May 1938, 7; ‘Natsional’nyi Front’ [National Front], Novoe Slovo, 22 May 1938, 1-2; see also, ‘Novyi natsional’nyi front’ [New national front], Klich, July-August 1938, 23-27.
² See, for example, Konstantin Rodzaevskii, ‘Edinenie’ [Unity], Novoe Slovo, 18 September 1937, 4. Moreover, Rodzaevskii published his appeal in Golos Rossii [The Voice of Russia] no. 105 and the newspaper of the All-Russian Fascist Party Nash Put’.
not many people have even heard of? First, during the 1930s fascism played an important role in the process of Russian emigration and claimed several thousand devoted followers and sympathizers among Russian émigrés around the globe. Groups and organizations calling themselves ‘fascist’ existed in practically every country or locale with a Russian émigré community, including unexpected places like the Congo. In particular Argentina, France and Yugoslavia were important centers of Russian fascism in addition to the United States and Manchuria. And even though few of these numerous and often disunited groups and organizations consisted of more than a few dozen members, Russian fascism was a widespread, if not universal, phenomenon. Nonetheless, numerous conservative and ultra-right Russian émigré organizations, like the Mladorossy [Young Russians], the Natsional’no-Trudovoi Soiuz Novogo Pokoleniia [National-Labor Union of the New Generation] or the Russian National Union of War Veterans mentioned above at least temporarily professed sympathy with fascism - not least as the greatest bulwark against communism. Second, Russian fascism and, in particular, Rodzaevskii’s All-Russian Fascist Party can serve as case studies for transnational fascism or fascism from a transnational perspective. The concept ‘transnational’ has been recently introduced into the study of fascism to some extent as part of a recent trend in the humanities but also as a reaction to certain criticisms and shortcomings of fascist studies. These include, firstly, that comparative fascist studies have focused almost exclusively on self-contained entities in the form of nation-states and rarely transgressed their borders or a state-centered historiography and, secondly, the common perception of fascism as a very static concept is a consequence of the strong focus on the definition of fascism.

4) Unfortunately, in the light of the number of organizations and the contemporary perception, fascism among Russian émigrés is still pitifully understudied. For Russian fascist organizations or groups associated with fascism, see: Okorokov, Fashizm i Russkaiia Emigratsiia, 5-63; John Stephan, The Russian Fascists, 16-30. For Russian fascists in Germany see: Denis Jdanoff, “Russische Faschisten”: Der nationalsozialistische Flügel der russischen Emigration im Dritten Reich’ [“Russian Fascists”: The National-Socialist Wing of the Russian Emigration in the Third Reich] (Master Thesis Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2003); Okorokov: Fashizm i Russkaiia Emigratsiia, 335-377. For the organization Molodaia Rossiia [Young Russia], see: Viktor Ivanovich Kosik, “Molodaia Rossiia”: K voprosu o Russkom Fashizme’ [‘Young Russia’: On the question of Russian Fascism], Sovetskoe Slavyanovedenie 4 (July 2002): 21-31.

5) ‘Rossiskii Natsional’nyi Front,’ Novoe Slovo, 1 May 1938, 7.

In this paper I will show, first, that ‘transnational’ can be applied to fascism in three ways: fascism as a transnational phenomenon, fascism as a transnational movement and the study of fascism from a transnational perspective, which implies focusing on processes of exchange and appropriation. Such processes are particularly prominent where the level of interaction and exchange between different people and ideas is unusually pronounced, such as in so-called border regions, international cities and concessions, or colonies, but also in the context of migration, emigration, exile and diaspora. Therefore, Russian fascism in exile is a worthy case for the study of fascism from a transnational perspective.

In the next part I will discuss the question of how contemporary fascists conceived of fascism, using Russian fascism in exile as an example. I will show that the Russian fascists, like many others, had a multidimensional understanding of fascism. Fascism for the Russian fascists was a transnational movement and a universal idea, which assumed distinct attributes depending on the specific characteristics and particularities of each nation, its culture and history. In this context, I will argue that studies in fascism from a transnational perspective might be able to profit by focusing on a contemporary understanding of fascism instead of a priori academic definitions. In the end, I will briefly reflect on whether and to what extent fascist studies could also benefit from a transcultural perspective.

Three manifestations of ‘transnationalism’ in fascist studies

During the interwar period, and particularly during the 1930s, the notion of fascism spread throughout Europe and beyond. People and movements considering themselves fascist or national-socialists appeared not only in every European country without exception, but also in places like India, the Middle East, Latin America, Canada and Australia. This has led an increasing number of researchers to talk about a ‘global’ or ‘international fascism’ to reflect the worldwide spread and appeal of fascism in the interwar period. This notion

---


7) The existence of fascism outside of Europe is still highly controversial and rejected by many researchers on the grounds that the necessary preconditions for the rise of fascism existed only in interwar Europe. These assumptions have been in turn criticized by others, arguing, for instance, that the First World War as a global event also affected countries outside of Europe. For an extensive study on fascism outside of Europe see: Stein Ugelvik Larsen, ed., Fascism outside of Europe: The European Impulse against Domestic Conditions in the Diffusion of Global Fascism (New York: Boulder, 2001).
also reflects the perception of many contemporaries, in particular Jewish and anti-fascist groups, who perceived fascism as an omnipresent international menace. But the idea of 'global fascism' entails several problems. First, the notion of 'global fascism' emphasizes similarities at the expense of differences. The term could even suggest the existence of a global organization of some sort. Second, the actual process of the propagation fascist bodies of thought fades into the background, but fascism somehow 'migrated' from Italy over national borders to other counties and regions. Therefore, I propose considering fascism as a transnational phenomenon, because this implies both; that is, the spread of fascism across borders as well as the specific national manifestations of fascism in different countries. This perspective reflects the perception of many fascists even in the present. Many have considered themselves as parts of a more extensive global movement, which for some accounted for much of the attraction of fascism. But simultaneously they – as I will show – insisted that they pursued their very own national variations of fascism.

Approaching fascism as a transnational phenomenon demands attention to processes of exchange and appropriation, mutual influences and entanglements among fascist movements, groups, institutions and individuals beyond national borders. Looking at fascism in a transnational perspective includes differences as well as similarities in equal measure, but also exceeds simple comparison, because it implies modes of exchange and connections across (national) borders. As postcolonial studies suggests, such exchanges are reciprocal. Hence, it follows that a transnational perspective on fascism also offers the chance to reconsider what could be termed 'minor' or 'unsuccessful' fascist movements and organizations outside of Germany and Italy. Recent works on fascist interrelations have mainly either dealt with the relations and interaction between Italy and Germany proper⁸ or examined their impact on other regimes and movements. This perspective usually emphasizes the financial and ideological dependence of other fascist organizations on either National Socialism or Italian Fascism as well as how the smaller groups imitated and emulated these.⁹ But recent recognition of the reciprocity of trans-boundary and transcultural exchange and its significance to fascism and interwar Europe has resulted in growing academic interest in 'minor' fascist movements in their own right, not only as a cheap replicas of their more successful

---

⁸ See, for example: Reichardt and Nolzen, ed., *Faschismus in Deutschland und Italien; Bauernkämpfer, ‘Transnational Fascism’.*

relatives. The study of fascism from a transnational perspective therefore also suggests new lines of inquiry beyond the two fascist regimes in Italy and Germany to better reflect the historical and spatial diversity of fascism.

And finally the transnational lens can help to overcome the often criticized static view of fascism, which treats it as a monolithic and unchanging fixture. One only has to reflect on the fundamental changes Italian Fascism underwent in the 1920s and 1930s to realize that fascism has always been fluid concept. The transnational approach emphasizes processes of exchange and appropriation, which would entail a fluid concept of fascism that constantly evolves.

Several possibilities present themselves to analyze processes of exchange and entanglement, each emphasizing different aspects. One approach would be to focus on individuals, groups and networks across borders as well as the distribution of fascist literature, like Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. International organizations for the promotion of fascism, like the Comitati d’Azione per l’Universalità di Roma [CAUR; Action Committees for the Universality of Rome], and international fascist congresses could elucidate the connections between fascists groups. Such an approach would, for instance, answer the question as to how individuals, organizations, printed material and other media contributed to the diffusion of fascism.

An alternative approach would be more oriented towards the results of exchange. It would deal with questions of translation and appropriation of ideas, views, symbols and practices and, most importantly, how the idea of fascism changed when it traversed borders. How have people and movements shaped, appropriated and adjusted fascist ideas and concepts to particular cultural, historical and local contexts to create adapted versions of fascism? The answer to these questions lies in how fascists conceptualized and presented fascism as well as how they communicated and justified differences and variations. As I will show in the case of Russian fascists, people and movements

---


12) ‘Fascism’ or, more aptly, ‘fascist’ was not always a label used by opponents. Although the National Socialists and even Italian Fascists rarely referred to themselves as ‘fascist’, some ‘minor’ groups labeled themselves with exactly that term, like the British Union of Fascists, the
rarely simply chose the label ‘fascist’ without reflection. More commonly, they debated and dealt with the concept critically. They explained in detail why they considered themselves to be part of the fascist movement. The exchange, transfer and appropriation of ideas and ideologies become particularly visible in such debates, even if the sources originate from one group or (national) movement. Hence, it also follows that it might not always helpful to begin studies in a transnational perspective with a clear, fully formed definition of fascism. When dealing with processes of exchange, entanglements and mutual influence between fascist movements, the focus needs to be on their understanding of fascism, not ours.

I choose the Vserossiiskaia Fashistskaia Partiiia in Manchuria as the centre-piece of this study, since it was the largest and most important Russian fascist organization. Not only was its leader, Rodzaevskii, the driving force behind efforts to form a united Russian fascist movement, but the party, despite frequent quarrels and conflicts, exerted great ideological influence on other fascist groups, like the Vserossiiskaia Fashistskaia Organizatsiia in the United States and the Berlin-based Partiiia Rossiiiskikh Osvoobzhdenstev Dvizhenie [PRO; Party of Russian Liberators],14 which will also figure in this article. In particular in the second half of the 1930s the All-Russian Fascist Party played a central role in the Russian fascist movement. Their propaganda material, like Nash Put’ [Our Way], as well as the party’s main ideologists were widely known and read.15 Even

Imperial Fascist League, the All-Russian Fascist Party or the National Fascist Community in Czechoslovakia, or certainly at least in their writings and by association. The International Fascist Congress, which was initiated by the CAUR and held in December 1934 in Montreux, attracted representatives from dozens of organizations from across Europe. This indicates that the reflexive identification with the term ‘fascist’ was quite common, at least in Europe.

13) The Vserossiiskaia Fashistskaia Organizatsiia [VFO; All-Russian Fascist Organization] was founded by Anastasii Vonsiatskii, one of the most enigmatic figures of the Russian Diaspora and husband of a wealthy American heiress, in spring 1933. For Vonsiatskii action was much more important than any ideology. He later even freely admitted that he chose the label fascist, not because he really was a follower of a fascist Weltanschauung, but simply because it was popular. The VFO is still interesting in our context because, though Vonsiatskii might not have cared much about ideology, one of his followers, Mikhail Grott, was among the most active ideologues of Russian fascism, working for several Russian fascist newspapers in the United States, Asia and Europe. For Vonsiatskii and his organization see: Stephan, The Russian Fascists, chapter VII, VIII, XIV, XV and XVII.

14) The Party of Russian Liberators existed only from December 1933 until fall 1934. Still, the PRO presents itself as an example, because the organization’s existence falls within a period during which the NSDAP and the Nazi regime became increasingly interested in the Russian emigration as a possible propaganda tool against the Soviet Union, but before the Gleichschaltung [disciplinary conformity] of the Russian emigration. As a result, PRO, while certainly under the surveillance of the Gestapo, could still develop their ideology fairly freely as long as they did not interfere with the interests of the regime or the NSDAP. On Russian fascism in Germany see: Jdanoff, “Russische Faschisten”.

15) For publications by members of the VFP in other fascist media see, for example: Gennadii Taradanov in Fashist, October-November 1934, 20-21; December-January 1934/1935, 18; For
German propaganda specialists knew and apparently even used propaganda material produced by the All-Russian Fascist Party for propaganda campaigns in the Soviet Union and among Russian émigrés. Before elaborating the details relating to the perception of fascism in the All-Russian Party, I will give a short sketch of its history and to what extent it was aware of the European discourse of fascism.

Russian fascism in exile: the All-Russian Fascist Party

The All-Russian Fascist Party was founded in 1932 at the Faculty of Law in Harbin, Manchuria, a former Russian concession then part of the Japanese puppet state Manchukuo. Leader and prime mover of the party was Konstantin Rodzaevskii, a young émigré from Blagoveshchensk. In the course of the 1930s the All-Russian Fascist Party was able to gain a substantial following among the Russian émigré population - in particular teenagers and young adults - in Harbin and beyond. According to their own account the All-Russian Fascist Party quickly established branches in most of the bigger cities throughout Manchukuo and China, as well as in the United States, Germany, Australia, Slovakia, Argentina, Latvia, Yugoslavia, Italy, Spain, France, Morocco, Egypt, Japan, Poland, Switzerland and many others. Membership reached several thousand in Harbin alone. Third Party Congress, which took place in June and July of that year, marked the heyday of the Manchurian brand of Russian fascism in exile.

Rodzaevskii in Novoe Slovo, see, for example: ‘Istoricheskaia missiia rossiiskoi emigratsii’ [The historical mission of the Russian Emigration], Novoe Slovo, 29 May 1938, 2. ‘Flag Rossisskikh fashistov’ [Flag of the Russian Fascists], Novoe Slovo, 18 December 1938, 5. On the use of VFP publications also see: ‘Cherez mirovoe rasprostranenie – k mirovomy fronty’ [Through global distribution - to the world fronts], Nash Put’, 1 January 1937, 4; Viktor Viktorovich Lagunov, ‘Rastut, bushuiut, raskatyvaiutsia volny Russkoi fashistskoi propagandy’ [Rising, and raging rolls the fascist propaganda wave], Nash Put’, 7 January 1937, 3-4. In addition I found copies of Azbuka Fashizma, the ‘bible’ of the All-Russian Fascist Party in archives in the United States, Germany, Israel, Switzerland and Prague.


It is impossible to determine the precise numbers of members of the VFP. Estimates range from over thirty thousand to only a few thousand. Ibid., 154-155.
fascism. Over a thousand delegates from Manchukuo, Japan and China, but also countries like Morocco, Poland and the United States attended the congress and adopted a revised version of the party program. But towards the end of the 1930s the party started to disintegrate, for which many reasons present themselves. First, high expectations about the imminent fall of the communist regime raised by the All-Russian Fascist Party remained unfulfilled - Rodzaevskii had promised the fall of the communist regime by 1938 during the Party Congress in 1935. Second, the Non-Aggression Pact between the Soviet Union and Hitler’s Germany in August 1939 and the Japanese-Soviet ceasefire caught the Russian fascists in Harbin off-guard. It suddenly seemed very unlikely that Germany would attack the Soviet Union in the foreseeable future. And the situation for the Russian fascists worsened even further in 1941. The long-desired German attack on the Soviet Union did not have the expected effect, but rather the opposite. Party membership again dropped sharply in light of Russia’s ordeal, because many former followers and sympathizers felt that their loyalty should lay with their fatherland despite the communist regime. The fate of the party was finally sealed when the Japanese banned the All-Russian Fascist Party in July 1943. The Red Army marched into Harbin in 1945 and arrested most of the remaining former members of the All-Russian Fascist Party. On August 26, 1946 their leader Rodzaevskii went on trial in Moscow. He was executed four days later in the Lubyanka together with five other convicts as an enemy of the Soviet people from Harbin.

From the very beginning the Russian fascists in Harbin attached great importance to the elaboration of their party program, propaganda and ideology, especially the concept of fascism. Besides their daily newspaper *Nash Put’* and the more intellectual journal *Natsiia* [Nation], Russian fascists in Harbin published numerous books, pamphlets, essays and brochures on a wide range of topics and for different audiences on ideology and the tactics of the All-Russian Fascist Party. My main source was the magnum opus of Russian

---

20) Ibid., 130.
21) Ibid., 320.
22) Ataman Semenov, General Aleksei Proklovich Baksheev, ataman of the Transbaikal Cossaks, General Lev Filippovich Vlasievskii, a former member of Semenov’s army, Boris Nikolaevich Shepunov, an employee of the Japanese security agency *Kempei* and Ivan Adrianovich Mikhailov, the former Minister of Finance of the Omisk government and advisor of the Japanese Military Intelligence, died together with Rodzaevskii. On the trial and the execution see: Stephan, *Russian Fascists*, 351-354; Okorokov, *Fashizm i Russkaiia Emigratsiia*, 199.
23) On ideology, see, for example: Konstantin Vladimirovich Rodzaevskii, *Chto takoe demokratia* [What is democracy] (Harbin: Rossiskaia Fashist skaia Partia, 1935); Ibid., *Chto takoe liberalizm* [What is liberalism] (Harbin: Rossiskaia Fashist skaia Partia, 1935); Gennadii Viktorovich Taradanov, *Fashizm i religiia* [Fascism and Religion] (Harbin: V.N. Vasilenko, 1936); Gennadii Viktorovich Taradanov and Vladimir V. Kibardin, *Lichnost’, natsiia i natsional’noe gosudarstvo v fashistskom ponimanii* [Personality, Nation and the National State according to a Fascist Understanding] (Harbin: V.N. Vasilenko, 1936).
fascist ideology *Azbuka Fashizma* [The ABCs of Fascism]. According to the introduction the book was written to answer ‘the elementary questions arising in the mind of each Russian person when conceiving the word fascism.’ The authors of *Azbuka Fashizma*, Gennadii Taradanov and Vladimir Kibardin, were among the leading ideologues of Russian fascism. Taradanov severed as the head of the section for propaganda and agitation, while Kibardin was one of the main editors of *Nash Put*. In particular Taradanov published extensively on Russian fascist ideology and outlook in different journals and was therefore well-known in Manchuria and beyond.

The book itself was divided in three or rather two parts in the second edition. The first part dealt with general conceptions of fascism, its enemies, the Freemasons and the Jews, and the situation in the Soviet Union, while the second part mainly outlined the party’s program for a future fascist state in Russia and the tactics of the All-Russian Fascist Party. The book was structured according to a question-answer scheme with a hundred questions and answers and included a section for the reader to monitor his or her own progress in learning the basics of Russian fascism at the end of each chapter. At least in theory, all members of the party were required to study the ABCs of Fascism intensively and take regular exams. *Azbuka Fashizma* was published first in 1934 and again in 1935, including adapted versions for children and teenagers, which underlines its relevance for the party.

As a closer look at *Azbuka Fashizma* and other writings shows, fascists in remote Manchuria were quite familiar with the ideas and concepts of European fascism, especially with the writings of German or Italian fascist thinkers. *Azbuka Fashizma* itself repeatedly refers to the history and ideology of German and Italian fascism. Furthermore Russian fascists in Harbin had access to

---

25) Ibid., 3.
26) Not much is known about the early life of Gennadii Taradanov or his life in Harbin. After the war Taradanov voluntarily returned to the Soviet Union in 1947, where he was imprisoned. He was released in 1949 and started to work for *Golos Rodiny* [Voice of the Motherland], a newspaper published by the Soviet Union for Russians living abroad. Okorokov, *Fashizm i Russkaiia Emigratsiia*, 129.
27) Valdimir Kibardin was arrested after the Soviet invasion of Harbin and sentenced to twenty-five years in jail. His sentence was reduced significantly in 1955, but Kibardin died soon afterwards in a labor camp close to Khabarovsk. Some of his testimonies given in 1954 after his appeal to reduce his sentence are printed in: A. F. Kiseleva, ed., *Politicheskaiia istoriiia Russkoi Emigratsii, 1920-1940 gg: Dokumenty i Materialy* [Political History of the Russian Emigration 1920-1940; Documents and Materials] (Moscow: Vlados, 1999), 60-64.
28) See, for example: *Fashist*, October–November 1934, 20–21; December-January 1934/1935, 18.
29) All references refer to the second edition of 1935.
several, mainly German, fascist newspapers, like the *Stürmer* and occasionally published translations of articles or summaries of speeches by important members of the National Socialists in *Nash Put‘*. Besides a Russian translation of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* apparently circulated within in the Russian emigration and some excerpts were published in fascist journals and newspapers. Moreover people like Rodzaevskii and other members of the fascist movement in Harbin became acquainted with Italian Fascism during their time as students at the Faculty of Law in the 1920s, especially through the writings and teachings of Professor Nikolai Vasil’evich Ustrialov. Ustrialov wrote one of the first scholarly books on Italian Fascism in Russian and a second book on German fascism in 1933. It is known that at least Rodzaevskii attended some of Ustrialov’s lectures. Because of this pedigree, many historians misleadingly assume that Russian fascism in Manchuria was more or less a variation of Italian Fascism. I will show that Russian fascism instead differed greatly from German or Italian fascism in many respects. It combined European fascist theory with ideas about Russian heritage, politics from the last years of the Tsarist Empire and lessons drawn from the contemporary Soviet Union.

31) The *Stürmer*, edited by Julius Streicher, was very popular and among the most anti-Semitic weekly newspapers in Germany. The famous sentence by Heinrich von Treitschke ‘Die Juden sind unser Unglück’ [The Jews are our misfortune] was printed on every front page. The newspaper was heavily promoted by the National Socialists, who installed display cases at public places, called *Stürmerkasten* [Stürmer boxes], where everyone could read it for free. Randall Bytwerk, *Julius Streicher: Nazi Editor of the notorious anti-Semitic Newspaper Der Stürmer* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001).

32) Oberländer, ‘All-Russian Fascist Party,’ 170-171; for excerpts of *Mein Kampf* see, for example the American-based journal *Fashist*, June 1935, 8-10; July 1935, 12-14; October 1935, 12-15; or February 1937, 14-18.

33) Nikolai Vasil’evich Ustrialov, born in 1890, was a former member of the Cadets and supporter of the Whites in Siberia. He taught history of the philosophy of law, state law and theory of law at the Harbin Faculty of Law from 1920 until 1934. He returned to the Soviet Union in 1935, but, probably due to his past, was unable to find employment. Like so many others, Ustrialov fell victim to the great purges and was shot in 1937 for espionage and anti-Soviet agitation. For his life, particularly his time in Harbin, see: Viacheslav Konstantinovich Romanovski, ‘Nikolai Ustryalov - Professor at the Harbin Law School,’ *Far Eastern Affairs* 35 (2007): 118-125. For his ideology and outlook see: Mikhail Agursky, ‘Defeat as Victory and the Living Death: The Case of Ustrialov,’ *History of European Ideas* 5 (1984), 165-180.


Russian fascism and fascism as a global movement

The fascism that had emerged from Italy was, for the Russian fascists, ‘a global movement that manifests itself in various forms all countries of the modern world’, from Europe to the Americas and Asia.37 ‘In the Netherlands [there is the] Dutch National-Socialist Party . . . Denmark, Sweden and Norway have their national-socialistic parties . . . Switzerland has its Swiss National Union. In Czechoslovakia there is the Czechoslovak National Union of Fascists . . . Even in the United States . . . there is the Union of the Silver Shirts. Even in very distant and exotic countries there are fascist movements.’38 Fascism would finally seize the ‘whole civilized world’ and all nations. It was, therefore, a truly transnational movement.39

All fascist movements belonged to one community, sharing a set of values and convictions, and formed a global movement. According to Azbuka Fashizma this global fascist movement ‘aspires to reorganize the modern liberal-democratic (capitalist) and socialist (communist) states on the basis of: supremacy of the spirit over matter (religion), Nation and Labor (social justice) – fascism is a religious, national, labor movement.’40 Fascism was supposed to correct and overcome the flaws of liberalism, especially its materialism and individualism, as well as Marxism with its solemn focus on class and class struggle. Fascism represented a ‘third way’ between capitalism and communism based on class solidarity and labor. All fascists shared the same fundamental ideas and the same goal: ‘Italian, German and Russian fascist aspire to implement its fundamental ideas about the establishment of a state, which has its spiritual core philosophy: the principle of serving the nation and a social system, which recognizes the value of labor and class-solidarity – therein consists their commonality.’41

The Russian fascists in Manchuria clearly considered themselves to be part of this global community or transnational movement. They consistently expressed solidarity with other fascist movements, in particular during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War or the Spanish Civil War – members of the All-Russian Fascist Party in Europe even considered sending volunteers to support Franco.42 And their mouthpiece, Nash Put’, reported extensively on Italy and

37) ‘Lektsiia o fashizme’ [Lecture on fascism], Kharbinskoe Vremia, 24 September 1932, 4.
39) ‘Na Lektsii o fashizme’ [At the lecture on fascism], Kharbinskoe Vremia, 28 September 1932, 4.
40) Azbuka Fashizma, Question 2: Chto takoe fashizm, kak mirovoe dvizhenie [What is Fascism as a Worldwide Movement], 9.
41) Ibid., Question 42: Pochemu neosnovatel’no utverzhdenie, chto rossiiskie fashisty kopiruiut ital’ianskii i nemetskii fashizm ? [Why are assertions that Russian fascist copy Italian and German fascism unfounded?], 52.
Germany as well as other fascist movements to keep their readers informed about their fellow fascists. Further, Manchurian fascists and their branches tried to establish contacts with other fascist organizations, which was only partly successful. Russian fascists repeatedly tried to establish official contacts to German Nationalist Socialists in Harbin, but these attempts failed since the German government had enacted a so-called Verkehrsverbot [contact prohibition]. Nevertheless, members of the local NSDAP visited events organized by the All-Russian Fascist Party and vice versa.43

Russian fascists always emphasized that Russian fascism was not merely a copy or poor imitation of Italian Fascism or German National Socialism, but claimed that it was a ‘totally independent’ and genuine form of fascism. One could argue that this was only a self-serving declaration to counter claims that the Russian fascists were merely treacherous puppets of the Nazis – Russian émigrés certainly were not blind to Hitler’s pronounced Russophobia and low esteem of the Slavs in general. But such accusations were only directed at the All-Russian Fascist Party in Manchuria in the second half of the 1930s. For the Russian fascists, the idea of multiple national manifestations was inherent to the essence of fascism. Because the wellspring, substance and goal of fascism was the nation, its unique particularities, its past, present and future, its soul and spirit, individual national manifestations of fascism had to be different. Fascism as a world movement formed a common framework, while the nation, its historical development and current fate determined the details of fascist ideology and the actual politics of local groups. This diversity led to far-reaching deviations, as I will demonstrate based on three examples: the treatment of individual rights, as a consequence of the existence of communism in Russia; the importance of religion as a specific feature of Russianness and, consequently, Russian fascism; and the understanding of the nation as a cultural construct.

One of the main differences between Italian, German and Russian fascism was the different context in the respective countries in which the ideas were adapted and developed. ‘Russian fascism has to replace communism, while fascism in Italy and Germany have to replace a liberal-democratic state and a capitalist system.’44 These diverse starting points had to be taken into account, in particular regarding attitudes of the Russian fascists towards the individual, the question of class and class relations as well as their vision of economic policy. They could not just blindly follow the example of Hitler and Mussolini,

44) Azbuka Fashizma, Question 43: Osobyia puti rossiiskago fashizma [Sonderweg of Russian Fascism], 52.
but had to find their own way, sometimes in stark opposition to Germany and Italy. Because, argued the Russian fascists, the Russian people were suppressed, enslaved and denied any personal or civic freedoms in the communist system, Russian fascism ‘had to take the path of emancipation,’ to bestow ‘particular rights and freedoms to the Russian people’ and virtually ‘reach the same aim (as Italian and German fascism) from opposite sides.’ Specifically, the Russian fascists promised the acceptance and protection of private property, free choice of occupation, the freedom of religion and science, and even the freedom of opinion and the press. Moreover, private property and individual initiative were to be focal concepts in their proposed economic system. The Russian fascists were partisans of a planned economy, but in contrast to the communists, the state administration would be restricted to a passive industrial policy of setting general targets to guarantee proportional development in different economic sectors without imposing any detailed plans comparable to those under the Soviet government. In contrast to the Soviet Union, where trade restrictions caused dramatic resistance, there would be no restrictions on internal trade, but international trade would remain completely in government hands to secure Russia’s economic independence. Thus, the Russian fascists were at pains not only to make positive utopian claims based on national superiority, but also to distinguish these sharply in the minds of an audience already familiar with Bolshevik propaganda and practices.

Other variations between different forms of fascism were traced back to the unique characteristics of the nation or its essence, as the example of the role of religion in Russian fascism shows. Religion, or rather religiosity, was of utmost importance for members of the All-Russian Fascist Party – as is reflected in their slogan ‘god, nation, labor.’ For the All-Russian Fascist Party Russian fascism was inherently religious, because religiosity had been one of the principal characteristics by which the Russian people self-identified for centuries. It belonged to the essence of Russianness, so the true Russian fascist also had to be a firm believer in God. Consequently, the Orthodox Church played an important part in the daily life of the All-Russian Fascist Party.

45) Ibid., 52-53.
46) Ibid., Question 54: Chto daet rossiiskoe natsional’no-trudovoe gosudarstvo kazhdomu rossiiskomy grazhdaninu [What does the Russian National-Labor State give every Russian Citizen] and in particular on private property Question 72: Otnoshenie fashistov k chastnoi sobstvennosti [The attitude of the fascists towards private property], 60-61 and 77-78.
47) Ibid., Questions: 71-73, 76-78.
Regular prayers and attending services were compulsory for members. Meetings, parades or rituals were usually accompanied by prayer and singing hymns. However, in contrast to pre-revolutionary radical right groups, the Manchurian fascists did not in principle exclude non-Orthodox adherents, but rather included Catholics, Protestants, Mennonites and even members of non-Christian faiths like Islam or Shintoism. It was not terribly important what someone believed, but it was crucial that they believed. As a result, the All-Russian Fascist Party did not admit atheists, or as they put it, ‘the godless.’ Russians fascism was inherently religious, but not necessarily Christian.

For the Russian fascists, religion was a fascist phenomenon as much as fascism was a religious phenomenon because all fascists ‘proclaim primacy of the spiritual over the material’—otherwise fascism would ‘degenerate and become like Bolshevism.’ In this context, it was irrelevant that National Socialism and, to some degree, Italian Fascism had at best tense relations to their local churches. For the Russian fascists, this tension was not caused by fundamental disputes or even incompatibility between fascism and (Christian) religion, but the hostile behavior of the Christian confessions in Germany and Italy towards fascism. Because ‘Catholic parties’ and ‘protestant organizations fought fascism’ and even ‘excommunicated Catholics joining the party,’ many party members ‘turned into pronounced pagans.’ Nevertheless, Hitler ‘until today acknowledges the Christian foundation of Germany’ and ‘since fascism is not even a doctrine, but a spiritual movement’ the paganism of Rosenberg and the like ‘cannot be associated with fascism en bloc.’

The cause for the occasionally extensive tolerance of the All-Russian Fascist Party in certain areas, like religion, was the fascists’ awareness that (Tsarist) Russia had always been a multiethnic and multicultural empire. This awareness also greatly affected their perception of fascism’s most important concept - the nation. Accordingly, the Russian fascists did not define the nation along genetic or racist lines, but as a historically constituted cultural and

---

50) See, for example: ‘Kol’ Vsevyshnii s nami kto zhe – protiv nas?! VFP i Pravolavnaia tserkov’ [If his Highness is with us – Who would be against us?! The All-Russian Fascist Party and the Orthodox Church], Nash Put’, 7 January 1937, 3.
51) S. N. Bol’shakov, ‘Fashizm i khristianstvo’ [Fascism and Christianity], in Fashizm i religiïa, 3-9, here 5.
52) Ibid.
53) In reality the relationship between religion and in particular Christian churches and fascist regimes and movements, including the National Socialists was far more complex and multilayered as represented by the Russian fascists. See for example: Roger Eatwell, ‘Reflections on Fascism and Religion,’ Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions 4 (2003): 145-166; Matthew Feldman, ed., Clerical Fascism in Interwar Europe (London: Routledge, 2008); Derek Hastings, Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism: Religious Identity and National Socialism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
54) Ibid., 6-7.
spiritual unit: ‘The nation is a spiritual unity of people based on the awareness of a common historical destiny in the past, a common national culture, national traditions and so on, and the aspiration to continue their (common) historical life in the future. . . . The nation is first of all a spiritual unity.’

In contrast to a genetically based affiliation, membership in this culturally constructed nation did not come ‘naturally’, but had to be acquired or, as Rodzaevskii put it, one had to ‘turn the people into a nation’ by making them aware of their ‘common past, common national culture and traditions.’ This attitude is also reflected in the semantics of their terminology. Instead of the ethnically defined term Russkaia natsiia ['Ethnic' Russian Nation], they used the more open Rossiiskaia natsiia ['Russianish' Russian Nation], which included all peoples living in the Russian empire regardless of their ethnicity. Consequently, the All-Russian Fascist Party in Harbin welcomed not only ethnic Russians, but also many Ukrainians, Protestants and Muslim Tatars as party members. To be sure, the Russian fascists in Harbin were not entirely free of chauvinism, which is clear in how they ranked achievements in the common historical development of the nation. For example, they claimed that the Russians, Ukrainians [Malorossy - little Russians] and Byelorussians made the most valuable contributions' to the national Russian culture.

The Russian fascists in Harbin were well aware that their understanding of the nation differed considerably from the National Socialists and other fascist movements: ‘The understanding of the nation as a spiritual unit is not internalized by all fascist movements. Some fascist movements (for example the German National Socialists) have a racial understanding of the nation and believe that biological components play the main role in the development of a nation’. Nor were Russian fascists ignorant of the downside to such an understanding of the nation – the racist exclusion and even persecution of people. Despite broad rejection of the Nazis’ racism, however, this was not enough reason to ‘reject the whole [fascist] movement.’ While racism was harmful for Russia, it might be good and necessary for the German nation. For the Russian fascists, it was totally acceptable that some might have to suffer for the good of the nation, and this might have applied doubly for Germany, where the Jews constituted the main victims.

---

55) Azbuka Fashizma, Question 7: Chto takoe natsiia? [What is the Nation?], 13-14.
56) Rodzaevskii, Russkii put', 81.
57) Natsiia,1 February 1939, 2; see also: ‘Emigratsiia s VFP! – vopreki vsem inym mneniiam’ [The Emigration with the All-Russian Fascist Party - despite all the different opinions], Nash Put', 25 May 1937, 2.
58) Azbuka Fashizma, Question 49: Pochemu v rossiiskuiu natsiiu dolzhny vkhodit' vse narody, naseliaiushchie Rossiiu? [Why the Russian nation should include all people who live in Russia?], 57.
59) Azbuka Fashizma, Question 7: Chto takoe natsiia, 14.
60) Neskol'ko slov po povodu “Gitlerizma” [A view words about “Hitlerism”], Klich, November 1933, 5.
There was also no consensus on the central question of what constitutes the (Russian) nation between the various Russian fascist movements. Although the idea of the nation as a historically developed spiritual unit was principally shared by PRO, their language seems to indicate a greater similarity to the ‘biological’ understanding of German National Socialism: ‘The Russian nation is an organic union of all peoples living in Russia, which are united by a common historical past and belong to a common economic-state organism.’ \(^61\) This could represent the first absorption of distinctly Nazi ideas into the rhetoric of Russian fascists in the Third Reich. The notion of the nation as a cultural construct, as something that people have to be aware of and, in a sense, to learn fades into the background in favor of a more ‘organically grown’ unit.

The impression, that the influence of the immediate surrounding was sometimes stronger than the affiliation with Russian fascism is reinforced for example Mikhail Grott from the VFO, who lived in Konigsberg (today’s Kaliningrad) for most of the 1930s. Grott was a zealous devotee of the Rassenlehre [racial doctrine] of the National Socialists and advocated racial or genetic purity as the only way to save the nation from decline, very much like the Nazis. In an article in the newspaper Fashist, Grott wrote: ‘If one follows the historical downfall of great peoples, . . . we will see that the cause of all causes lay in the blood of the people.’ \(^62\) Such convictions were rather unusual among Russian fascists. Even the bold anti-Semitism of Rodzaevskii and the All-Russian Fascist Party was not based on racial grounds, like that of the German Nazis. Anastasii Vonsiatskii, the leader of the VFO and editor of Fashist, was indifferent to race and lineage and he was even willing to include Jews in his fascist organization as long as they participated in the national revolution. \(^63\)

But despite such deviations and ideological differences, Russian fascists acknowledged and recognized each other as part of the Russian branch of the fascist movement. The only exception being Rodzaevskii and Vonsiatskii, who slandered each other in the Russian fascist media after a merger between their organizations failed in 1935. But neither did this stop the Manchurian fascists from lamenting the death of Vonsiatskii’s deputy Kuhnle in 1941, nor from enthusiastically welcoming Grott as ‘a great Russian fascist and national journalist’ when the latter moved to Shanghai in 1941. \(^64\)

---


\(^{63}\) Vonsiatskii also entrusted a Jewish company to design and produce the uniforms for his organization, and he even wanted to place advertisements and propaganda materials in American Jewish newspapers. Stephan, Russian Fascists, 161.

\(^{64}\) Nash Put’, 24 August 1941, 8; Natsiia, 20 April 1941, 30.
The discourse over the nature of fascism within the Russian fascist movement and perception of fascism it produced illustrate how the concept was appropriated and adapted. Russian fascism differed greatly from German and Italian fascism in many respects. It was a hybrid of many strands of thought, including European fascist theory, particular interpretations of Russian heritage and politics from the last years of the Tsarist Empire as well as lessons drawn from the contemporary Soviet Union. The flexibility and adaptability of fascism, which allowed it to be lent a distinctly Russian flavor, accounted largely for the appeal of fascism for Russians in exile.

The transnational and the transcultural

In recent years the concept of transculturality or the transcultural approach has gained popularity in the humanities and social sciences, particularly in history, art history and anthropology. Behind the notion of transculturality stands the realization that cultures are never self-contained, closed unities, but constantly and reciprocally influence each other. Consequently, no culture can ever be pure; they will always be hybrid. But this hybridity and the fluid transitions between cultures complicate analyses of transculturality, because there is no fixed unit to start with. For this reason many academics understand transculturality more as a research perspective, which focuses on interactions, entanglements and exchange between two or more cultures. Cultures are formally depicted as closed unities to enable any analysis in the first place.

From this point of view, the transnational perspective described above could be understood as a subgroup or subcategory of transcultural approaches, in which the nation-state or the nation is the most important point of reference. At first glance such a perspective would conform to the central meaning of the nation in fascism, but a closer examination shows that the study of processes of exchange and entanglement between fascist movements might still profit from extending the transnational to a transcultural perspective in a few ways. First, it seems that processes of exchange, differentiation and appropriation might have been particularly pronounced and therefore visible in regions where national identity and belonging were still in flux and negotiated. These places would include, for example, so-called border regions, like the Alsace, international cities and concessions, like Harbin, and countries with a strong history of immigration, like Argentina.

65) See: Goodfellow, ‘Fascism as a Transnational Movement.’
Second, a focus on the nation, nation-state and national borders in analyzing processes of exchange might obscure other influences on local manifestations of fascism, which might be more appropriately grasped with a transcultural approach. As we have seen, the Russian fascists in Manchuria were greatly influenced by the Soviet Union regarding their policy towards peasants and workers as well as their general economic policy. They called for national ‘soviets without communists’\(^{67}\) and ‘The ABC of Fascism’ was clearly a reference to the very popular *Azbuka Kommunizma* [ABCs of Communism] written by Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenii Preobrazhenskii in 1919/20, just to give a few examples.\(^{68}\) This type of exchange is much better described in terms of a transcultural perspective.

Third, some aspects of the Manchurian branch of Russian fascism and the self-representation of the All-Russian Fascist Party can be seen expressions of transculturality. For example, their perception of Russian traditions and culture, which were the basis of the Russian nation, was quite hybrid. Not only ethnic or great-Russians, but also Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians and Tatars, with their religion, traditions, customs and history had contributed to Russian culture.\(^{69}\) In the planned fascist state, cultural, administrative and political autonomy would be granted to all peoples who participated in the ‘national revolution’ to dispel communism, and as long as this autonomy did not contradict national interests.\(^{70}\)

Forth, one could argue that some facets of fascism in general can be understood and conceptualized as transcultural, such as the idea of fascism as a third way between liberal-capitalist democracy and communism. From this perspective fascism would combine two very different cultures. The same might apply to the role of fascism as a mediator between past and present. For the Russian fascists, fascism combined ‘the best from the past,’ preserved what ‘lies at the heart of people’ and ‘remain[ed] faithful to traditions of the past’, but at the same time adapted to ‘the new needs of life.’\(^{71}\) And finally, when

---


\(^{68}\) See also: Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, ‘Russian Fascism in Harbin and Manchuria.’

\(^{69}\) *Azbuka Fashizma*, Question 49: Pochemu v rossiiskuiu natsiiu dolzhny vkhodit’ vse narody, nasel’iaushchie Rossiui? [Why the Russian nation should include all people who live in Russia?], 57. Ibid., Question 48: Chto takoe rossiiskaiia natsiiia [What is the Russian Nation], 56.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., Question 5: Chto neset rossiiskii fashizm otdel’nym narodam Rossii [What does Russian fascism entail for the peoples of Russia], 58.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., Question 6: Chto novago neset fashizm, chto staroe na sokhraniat’ [What new things does fascism entail, what does it retain from the old], 12; also see: Partiia Rossiiskikh Osvoobozh-dentsev i Tsentral’noe Ob’edinenie Rossiiskikh Natsionalistov, Ideologicheskie osnovy dvizhe-niia, here 362 and Verista, *Osnovnyia nachala rossiiskago Fashizma* (Brussel: Klich, 1938), 4.
fascism crossed national borders and even oceans, it was also traversing cultural borders.

Conclusion

As a concept, ‘transnational’ can relate to fascism in three ways: as a transnational phenomenon, as a transnational movement and in terms of the study of fascism from a transnational perspective, focusing on the relations and exchanges between fascist movements and how fascism crossed borders. One way of implementing this perspective is to focus on the appropriation and adaptation of fascist bodies of thought into various local contexts, by analyzing the respective understanding of fascism by contemporaries. Harbin's fascists perceived fascism as a universal idea that assumed distinct manifestations depending on the specifics of each nation. Therefore, in the view of contemporaries, fascism also constituted a transnational movement. Whether it would make sense to expand the transnational perspective into the realm of transculturality to better grasp the diverse influences on various manifestation of fascism is an open question. Doing so could both complicate the analysis of fascism still further, but it could also deepen our understanding of change and entanglements between fascist movements and their respective environments on a global scale.