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Anti-Fascism in Historical Context

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Both historically, as well as in the present day, those drawn to fascism and the extreme right have created activism that operates on a number of levels, from the local, to the national, to the transnational. While academic analysis has traditionally focused on the local and national approaches, many scholars are now also trying to capture the ways extreme right populists and fascists have cultivated a transnational dimension. Archival collections, such as the Searchlight Archive, are particularly useful here, as they contain a wide range of source material created by groups, documents that indicate their international dynamics of racial and national extremism.

Examining the ways such extreme right organisations have developed links across national borders is becoming seen as crucial to interpreting their worldview, and what they want to achieve. For example, analysis of the transnational dimensions of the extreme right allows us to see how these types of movements try to overcome issues of marginalisation within a single national milieu through fostering powerful senses of international solidarity. Often their agendas stretch to idealised reordering of the globe, not merely a nation. In the era of the internet and affordable travel, contemporary extreme right activists are also increasingly able to create and sustain networks of activism that are no longer restricted by borders. However, while growing and changing, this tendency to operate transnationally is nothing new. The history of the transnational extreme right can be seen in the very early forms of fascism that developed after the First World War. Italian Fascism in particular had a complex, and often supportive, relationship with other fascist groups that emerged across Europe. For example, in 1928 Mussolini founded the International Centre of Fascist Studies, headed up by a British fascist, James Strachey Barnes, someone who also

promoted the idea of Universal Fascism through a number of books on the topic. While the fascists that emerged in France, Spain and elsewhere in the 1920s and 1930s were keen to draw on elements of Italian Fascism, they also sought to maintain their own national identities. By 1933, Italy's Fascist regime founded the Action Committees for the Universality of Rome to help develop this transnational agenda. This initiative culminated in a major conference of fascists from thirteen countries, held in Montreux, Switzerland, in December 1934.

However, as expert on fascist ideology Roger Griffin notes of this episode, the problem was finding common ground on what they actually stood for. Divisions emerged over issues such as: attitudes towards Jewish people; approaches to a fascist engagement with Christian churches; ideas on a fascist economic policy; the correct way to conceptualise race; and exactly where national borders should be drawn. In other words, while there was a common agreement to engage with a sense of internationalism among Europe's many fascists of the 1930s, discovering meaningful shared principles proved all but impossible.

A notable absence from the Montreux gathering was Germany's Nazi regime, which had come to power a year earlier. Arnd Bauerkämper, among others, has explored how, despite Italy's efforts in the 1920s and early 1930s to promote transnationalism, it soon became subservient to Germany's dominant position as the leading fascist regime in terms of Europe-wide influence. While both of Europe's fascist regimes of the 1930s, Italy and Germany, supported the rise of the authoritarian regime in Spain under Francisco Franco, Nazism's biological racism and anti-Semitism found greater influence in places such as Austria, Romania

and Hungary. Germany's position of influence grew further during the early period of the Second World War. However, its domination of Europe did not always lead to the rise to power of local fascists. Anton Mussert's National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands is a good example here of a fascist movement largely side-lined and manipulated during German occupation. Nevertheless, other fascist leaders could find themselves more clearly empowered as a result of the Nazi regime, in more or less significant ways. While Ante Pavelić's Ustaše was given a lot of freedom in Croatia, Vidkung Quisling had little real influence over Norway.

Interwar European fascists extended their influence across the Atlantic as well. Ahead of the Second World War, organisations such as the Fascist League of North America drew together many Italian-Americans supporters of Mussolini during the 1920s. The German-American Bund, founded in 1936 and sympathetic to Nazi ideology, meant that European fascism developed another type of presence in America, promoting deeply anti-Semitic messages. Meanwhile, American figures from Henry Ford to Charles Lindbergh, as well as groups such as America First, also fostered sympathy for fascist agendas in the USA. Similarly, British fascists were influenced by the fascists of continental Europe, and sought to develop native versions. These spanned Rosa Lontorn-Orman's British Fascists, founded in 1923, to Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, founded in 1932 and even renamed the British Union of Fascists and National Socialists between 1936 and 1937. Like most interwar fascist organisations, the British Union of Fascists did not survive the Second World War.

While interwar fascisms and extreme right movements were often larger in scale, their post-1945 descendants

have almost always been marginalised. In terms of revolutionary forms of fascism, such organisations have more or less always existed only at the level of groupuscules, although parties such as Greece's Golden Dawn in recent years suggest a fascist vision of national rebirth can still develop widespread legitimacy in some circumstances. Parties that have dropped a fascist agenda, and become more integrated into democratic political systems, have been more successful, and these too have been keen to network internationally.

In the years immediately after the Second World War, some interwar fascists certainly tried to articulate their messages in novel ways. Often this occurred as intellectual debates focused on how to recast the ideology for new times. Some of the important innovators in new forms of fascism included Maurice Bardèche. He was the brother-in-law to notorious French collaborator Robert Brasillach, and in books such as *Nuremberg ou la Terre Prommise* (1948), helped to start the discourse of Holocaust denial, a theme later taken up later by figures such as David Irving who, notoriously, has networked tirelessly across Europe and America to promote this agenda. Meanwhile, like Bardèche, British fascists of the 1940s started to generate a new, Europeanist outlook to rebrand their political ideology for a new era. In particular, Mosley promoted the themes of Europe-A-Nation and Europe-Africa, which were a recasting of his earlier fascist ideas. Instead of focusing on Britain, Mosley now talked about creating a new role for Europe as a whole, one that would allow it to stand in opposition to both American capitalism and Soviet Communism.

At the same time, Italy also saw a strong follow-on party emerge from its fascist tradition, the Italian Social Movement. By the 1950s, such efforts to

reconfigure fascism in Italy were developing into new transnational institutions, such as the European Social Movement that was created in 1951. The European Social Movement was an extension of the Italian Social Movement that also drew together internationalist fascist ideologues such as Bardèche and Mosley, as well as Per Engdahl, a Swedish fascist active in the 1930s and who had supported the Axis during the Second World War. The European Social Movement fell into decline by the end of the 1950s, never fully able to transcend its Italian roots, while Mosley sought to continue some of its energies through the National Party of Europe. Its Declaration of Venice, from 1962, again showed some high ambitions for creating a new form of transnational fascist-inspired politics, although the National Party of Europe ultimately proved a failure as member parties, including the Italian Social Movement and Germany's National Democratic Party, showed only limited commitment. A number of other transnational fascist networks have developed since the 1950s. For example, in 1962, British and American neo-Nazis, such as Colin Jordan and George Lincoln Rockwell, founded the World Union of National Socialists (WUNS). This was a network that aimed at bringing together neo-Nazis across the globe, including in Argentina, Canada, France, Germany and Australia. Activities included the cultic celebration of the Nazi era, exchanging ideas on how to retool Nazi themes for a new time through publications such as *National Socialist World*, as well as fostering a sense of international comradeship. While this network largely fell into decline by the early 1970s, America's current National Socialist Movement claims that it still continues the tradition of the WUNS. More recent examples of transnational neo-Nazi culture include the Blood & Honour music network, which was again founded in Britain in 1987 and now has variants across the world, including in Germany and America.

Transnational activity allowed the recasting of fascism and Nazism through networks like WUNS, as other types of extreme right activity also grew from international exchanges. Andrea Mammone has examined the ways extreme right cultures, including some fascists, in Italy and France interacted in the postwar period, helping to generate a new political repertoire of greater contemporary significance. In particular, he has explored how, at the end of the 1960s, a French party inspired by the Italian Social Movement, *Ordre Nouveau*, was able to develop by talking up threats posed by North African migrants, while around the same time the *Nouvelle Droite* also emerged in France. Led by Alain de Benoist, among others, the latter styled itself as a new intellectual tradition, and recast fascism by borrowing Gramscian notions of hegemony, to offer new ways of presenting an extreme right racist and even revolutionary agenda. French intellectuals also drew on Italian figures, such as Julius Evola, yet created a new strand of right wing extremism. Mammone shows how Italian influence on France was clear again in 1972, when Jean-Marie Le Pen's *Front National* was founded, tellingly drawing on the logo of the Italian Social Movement to create its own tricolour flame, while also borrowing from its wider political agenda.

In the decades that have followed, France's *Front National* has inspired many populist radical right and extreme right parties in Europe, from the *Freedom Party* in Austria to the *British National Party* in the UK. The ways academics have studied how these parties have developed transnational relationships includes looking at the emergence of political groupings in the European Parliament. These have included the short-lived *Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty* group, which in 2007 drew together the *Front National*, alongside the *Greater Romania Party*, Belgium's *Flemish Interest*,

and Austria's Freedom Party. Its members also included Alessandra Mussolini, granddaughter of Benito Mussolini, who quickly offended Romanian members, leading to the group's dissolution only months after its founding. More recent examples of European collaboration also include: Alliance of European National Movements, founded in 2009, which included the Britain National Party; Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy, founded in 2014 and led by Nigel Farage of the United Kingdom Independence Party; and Europe of Nations and Freedom, founded in 2015 and dominated by Marine Le Pen's Front National, alongside Italy's Northern League and the Netherlands's Party for Freedom.

While the story of the rise of the populist radical right has clear transnational elements, the growth of new types of revolutionary extremists in the past generation has also been international in scope. American neo-Nazi cultures in particular have become steeped in a need to export their agendas. For example, since the later 1980s, the ideas of David Lane, a US neo-Nazi who was active in the criminal neo-Nazi organisation The Order, has impacted on European forms of neo-Nazi ideology. His 14 Words slogan – 'We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children' – is now synonymous with contemporary neo-Nazi sympathies in Europe, as well as in America.

Meanwhile, the American white supremacist website Stormfront, founded in 1995 and which has been used by many neo-Nazis, neo-fascists and others sympathetic with extreme right agendas ever since, also identifies itself through the slogan 'White Pride Worldwide'. Its contributors engage with each other across borders, and in a number of languages.

As the online environment has grown, so new networks of transnational activism have also emerged. In the 2000s and 2010s, newer, loose networks of activism

have increasingly been focused on protesting against Muslim communities. Typically presenting Muslims in hysterical and stereotypical ways, as supporters of terrorism and engaged in attacks on white communities, groups including the English Defence League (EDL) and Germany's Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes (PEGIDA) have typified this growth of a new wave of street-based anti-Muslim extreme right activity. Often collectively called the Counter-Jihad movement, there are clear transnational elements here as well, from shared websites, such as Gates of Vienna, to efforts to export movements from one country to another.

Some of Europe's newest extreme right groups now operate in very overtly transnational ways. The Generation Identity movement, for example, has national organisations in France, Germany, Italy and Britain. These Generation Identity activists are supported by online publishing houses, including Arktos, whose website offers key ideological texts for sale in multiple European languages, as well as allowing younger generations to access in translation older books used during the Nazi era, alongside new editions of books written by fascist intellectuals, such as Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist. This 'Identitarian' tradition also stretches across the Atlantic, as Richard Spencer, who notoriously coined the term 'Alt-Right' in 2009 to rebrand his neo-Nazism, identifies strongly with the European 'Identitarian' movement. Spencer and his associates steep their more overt white supremacist variant of Identitarian politics in an idealisation of America's (white) European roots.

A final important example of transnationalism comes in the form of some of the most recent developments in extreme right terrorism. Looking at Britain alone, several cases exemplify this. Thomas Mair, who killed the MP Jo Cox in June 2016, read a wide range of literature produced by American neo-Nazi

organisations, especially the National Alliance. Another terrorist active in Britain was Pavlo Lapshyn, who in 2013 murdered an 82-year-old Muslim man, and detonated three bombs in the West Midlands. Lapshyn was a Ukrainian national who had been in the UK for just a few days before he started his attacks. He also posted material from the American neo-Nazi scene, including images of the book *The Turner Diaries* (1978), as well as pictures of the American terrorist Timothy McVeigh, on his social media site.

In sum, the history of the extreme right points to a long-term interest in groups fostering international links and developing transnational networks. We can see this in the interwar era, when important parts of fascist culture were fostered within transnational networks, helping to establish a Europe-wide fascist tradition. Meanwhile, the development of new forms of fascist, and wider extreme right, agendas after 1945 have also often been achieved, in part, through transnational exchanges, which span extreme neo-Nazi networks to the growth of the populist radical right. Finally, the most recent trends of anti-Muslim right street marching groups, extremist youth movements, and acts of extreme right hate crime and terrorism, can all be seen to have a transnational element.

As with the gathering at Montreux in 1934, these subsequent examples of extreme right transnationalism still show that individual groups tend to disagree as much as they inspire each other when they engage in transnational exchange. Despite such problems, the ongoing need to find ways of evoking a mood of fighting a common cause is likely to lead to many new forms of transnational extreme right activity emerging in the coming years.

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