Debunking Transnational Fascism: A Critical Historical Perspective

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Introduction

The concept of transnational fascism in early to mid-20th century historiography has been thought to have reached consensus, and therefore should be met with extreme skepticism. The simplistic view that correspondences between fascist regimes constitute a transnational movement neglects the reality that ideas, including fascist ideologies, have always transcended boundaries without necessarily forming unified, global movements. Fascism, deeply embedded in specific national contexts, emerged in direct opposition to international coordination and transnational initiatives, aligning more with tribal self-interest than with universalist ambitions. This essay challenges the prevailing deconstructionist historiographical approach, which often critiques national paradigms while sparing internationalist humanism. To correct for this, this paper will seek to redefine fascism on its own terms and then prove that fascism is by definition anti-transnational. To substantiate these claims, this paper will analyze historiographical reviews, primarily from the *Brill Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, and scrutinize the introductions of multiple works on what has been termed 'transnational fascism,' as well as investigate definitions of fascism from fascists themselves. It is noteworthy that the academic discourse has not reached a consensus on the notion of transnational fascism, and that this is a positive for the marketplace of ideas. This paper contributes to the ongoing discourse, seeking to be part of the movement that challenges the drift towards a consensus on transnational fascism. By offering a more nuanced understanding that situates fascism within the complex interplay of local and global dynamics, rather than as a monolithic transnational threat, this essay aims to realign the historiographical narrative with a more accurate representation of fascism's historical role, with significant implications for the present.

The “Consensus”

In his article "The Transnational Consensus: Fascism and Nazism in Current Research," published in "Contemporary European History" in 2020, Ángel Alcalde critically examines the evolution of historical study, highlighting a methodological shift from national to transnational perspectives, particularly in the context of fascism and national socialism. Alcalde contends that the emergence of transnational history in the 1990s marked a significant departure from nation-state-centric analyses, emphasizing cross-border interactions, exchanges, and the

movement of ideas and people, contributing notably to the development of global history.[1] Alcalde purports that the historiography of fascism and national socialism has greatly benefited from these transnational insights. This shift has transformed the understanding of these ideologies from isolated, nation-specific phenomena to a broader, interconnected global context. He notes the transition from a comparative to a transnational perspective in fascist studies. Earlier comparative approaches tended to isolate and compare fascism within individual nation-states, whereas the transnational perspective recognizes the dynamic, interwoven nature of fascist movements and regimes across borders, highlighting processes of transfer, mutual inspiration, hybridization, and interaction among different fascist entities.[2] Further, Alcalde critically observes the limitations of traditional focus on nation-states or international relations, deeming them inadequate for fully understanding fascism's historical evolution. He argues that a transnational approach reveals crucial levels of interaction, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of fascism's expansion and development over time and space.[3] The mission of Alcalde's article is to revolutionize the understanding of fascism and national socialism. He aims to argue that the history of these ideologies has undergone a significant re-evaluation due to transnational history, emphasizing the need to view them as part of a global phenomenon influenced by transnational exchanges and interactions. Alcalde advocates for moving beyond the conventional comparative approach, calling for a more nuanced understanding that recognizes the complexities and interconnectedness of fascist movements globally. Thus, the article positions itself as a critical examination of how the transnational approach has reshaped historical understanding of fascism and national socialism, moving away from isolated, nation-centric interpretations to a more interconnected, global perspective.

Alcalde never explicitly defines transnationalism; however, his usage of the term allows for an inferred definition based on the characteristics he attributes to fascism as a transnational phenomenon. He notes that fascists and Nazis perceived their ideologies as transcending national borders, suggesting an identity or mission beyond individual nations. Alcalde states, "Fascists, Nazis and fellow travellers most often perceived their ideologies, movements and regimes as

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[1] Alcalde, Ángel. "The Transnational Consensus: Fascism and Nazism in Current Research." Contemporary European History, vol. 29, no. 2, 2020, pp. 243
[2] Alcalde, Ángel. "The Transnational Consensus: Fascism and Nazism in Current Research." Contemporary European History, vol. 29, no. 2, 2020, pg. 244
[3] Ibid.

phenomena transcending the bordered limits of nation states."[4] This perspective indicates a collective, cross-border dimension to fascist ideologies. Alcalde further highlights the ideological unification across nations, mentioning, "From the seminal post-war moment when fascism was created in Italy, fascists and anti-fascists everywhere saw themselves as part of something larger."[5] He underscores the strategic importance of international cooperation among fascist leaders, "Ideology operated as uniting factor, and the leaders of every movement and regime were conscious of the need for establishing contacts and alliances."[6] Additionally, he points out the use of a collective European identity by fascists, "Visions of 'Europe' became mobilising tools for fascists across borders, especially during the period of Nazi domination of the continent in the early 1940s." Alcalde encapsulates this in the idea of a 'transnational consensus,' suggesting that this consensus on fascism's transnational nature reflects a historical reality acknowledged by the fascists themselves.

Fascism without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945, by Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, parallels Ángel Alcalde's perspectives on the transnational aspects of fascism. The authors argue that fascism was both a transnational movement and perceived as such, encompassing comparative studies, transfers, and entanglements. Bauerkämper et al. contend, "First, fascism was a transnational movement...Second, fascism was perceived as a transnational phenomenon...Third, fascism can be analyzed from a transnational perspective."[7] Their evidence includes the frequent meetings of fascist leaders and functionaries from different European states for ideological exchanges and common initiatives, emphasizing fascism's nature as a transnational political and social practice. They assert, "Leaders as well as minor functionaries and members from different European states or movements met on innumerable occasions...thus, despite its...ultranationalism, fascism needs to be understood as a transnational political and social practice."[8] They also note the shared opposition to democracy, liberalism, communism, and socialism, alongside the use of uniforms and the common disdain for Jews and the Soviet

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[4] Ibid., pg. 251
[5] Alcalde, Ángel. "The Transnational Consensus: Fascism and Nazism in Current Research." Contemporary European History, vol. 29, no. 2, 2020, pg. 251
[6] Ibid.
[7] Bauerkämper, Arnd, and Grzegorz Rossoliski-Liebe. Fascism Without Borders : Transnational Connections and Cooperation Between Movements and Regimes in Europe From 1918 to 1945. New York: Berghahn Books, 2017. pg. 2
[8] Ibid.

Union as indicators of transnational coordination.[9] The authors discuss globalization's impact on historiography since the 1990s, advocating for viewing history as a web of interactions and exchanges: "The more recent debate on investigations of cross-border transfers...has promoted transnational history since the 1990s...the world should be better viewed as a web of interactions, encounters, and exchanges."[10] They also highlight Mussolini's universalist ambitions, transcending Italy's borders to promote a new transnational European Fascist civilization: "Although Mussolini and his lieutenants initially emphasized the national character of Italian Fascism, their political ambitions clearly transcended the borders of Italy...They busily propagated the model of a new transnational European Fascist civilization."[11] The book thus presents a detailed analysis of fascism's transnational characteristics, aligning with Alcalde's ideas and contributing to the understanding of fascist movements as interconnected across national borders.

In his article "Universal Fascism and its Global Legacy. Italy's and Japan's Entangled History in the Early 1930s," Daniel Hedinger examines the transnational aspect of fascism, particularly focusing on its global emergence in the 1930s and its manifestations beyond Europe. Hedinger begins by positioning fascism as a global phenomenon in the early 1930s, challenging the Eurocentric view that primarily considers Italian and German fascism as the central hubs of the movement. He contends, "I will show that the pattern of influence in the early 1930s was certainly not limited to a single West-East direction and that fascism cannot be understood as a merely European phenomenon."[12] Hedinger discusses Mussolini's exportation of fascism, intended as a model for other countries and supported through various institutional and propaganda mechanisms, such as the establishment of the Centro di studi internazionali sul fascismo and the Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma. "This new, exportable fascism was to serve as a model for other countries...A Centro di studi internazionali sul fascismo [Centre for international fascist studies] was established in Lausanne."[13] The spread of fascism to Japan, Hedinger argues, was less about the effectiveness of Italian propaganda and more about Japan's

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[9] Bauerkämper, Arnd, and Grzegorz Rossoliski-Liebe. Fascism Without Borders : Transnational Connections and Cooperation Between Movements and Regimes in Europe From 1918 to 1945. New York: Berghahn Books, 2017. pg. 3
[10] Ibid. pg. 6
[11] Ibid. pg. 8
[12] Hedinger, Daniel. "Universal Fascism and its Global Legacy. Italy's and Japan's Entangled History in the Early 1930s." Fascism 2 (2013): pg. 141
[13] Ibid. 145

own political context, especially following the Manchuria occupation and subsequent international criticism. "In this light, Italian Fascism's global ambitions met with a rapid and often enthusiastic response in Japan...turning to fascism was an obvious step to escape international isolation."[14] However, Japan's fascination with fascism was short-lived, as it quickly became associated with political terror and non-Japanese elements. Hedinger notes the shift towards uniquely Japanese ideologies, "But for Japan's fascism boom...fascism was increasingly associated with political terror and internal revolution...Other catchwords which emphasized Japan's distinctiveness and independ- ence now became (once again) fashionable…Shōwa ishin, kokutai, kōdō oder ōdō [Shōwa restoration, the body of the nation, the imperial path/rule, righteous/imperial rule]."[15] Japanese fascism eventually adopted a universalist form, aiming for a reordering of not just East Asia, but the entire world, as illustrated by the term Hakkō ichiu. "They initially called for the reordering of East Asia...this final goal is exemplified by the term Hakkō ichiu...which became fashionable towards the end of the decade."[16] Hedinger posits that the evolution of Japanese fascism into a universalist form prompts a comparison with the stereotypical notion of fascism. He states, "It is tempting to conclude that Japan had thus developed its own specific form of universal fascism."[17] Yet, he argues that this adaptation of fascism, infused with a unique Japanese essence, was as idealistic and unattainable as the Italian efforts to propagate a universalized form of fascism, "However, this universalized version of Japaneseness proved to be as utopian as the Italians' attempts to universalize fascism."[18] This comparison implies that the universal nature of any manifestation of fascism is somehow proof that fascism generally is a universalist ideology.

A Defector

Tomislav Dulić, in his article "Fascism and (Transnational) Social Movements: A Reflection on Concepts and Theory in Comparative Fascist Studies," provides a critical perspective on the concept of transnational fascism, focusing on the distinction between transnational knowledge transfer and transnational organization. Dulić challenges the prevailing notion of fascism as a

[14] Hedinger, Daniel. "Universal Fascism and its Global Legacy. Italy's and Japan's Entangled History in the Early 1930s." Fascism 2 (2013): pg. 147-8
[15] Ibid. 151-2
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid. 152-3
[18] Ibid.

transnational movement by scrutinizing the specific definitions and phraseology used in the field. Dulić argues that the absence of supra-national organizations during the era of 'classic' fascism precluded the formation of a 'transnational public space' for fascist movements. He states, "The lack of supra-national organisations...prevented the emergence of a ‘transnational public space’ where fascist movements could have participated."[19] According to Dulić, fascist entities were more engaged in state-based international 'knowledge-transfer' than in actual transnational organizing. He explores the complexity of transnational social movements (TSMs) and their relation to national movements, state authorities, and international organizations. Dulić notes, "What is at stake is to understand if transnational movements act outside the framework of national movements...or if they coordinate and provide legitimacy for national movements and organisations."[20] This analysis helps differentiate between transnational activism and international cooperation. Dulić discusses key characteristics of social movements, such as their lack of formalized decision-making procedures and their goal-oriented nature, often dissolving or transforming after achieving their goals. In contrast, political organizations have structured decision-making processes and focus on servicing specific constituencies or clients. He also mentions 'party movements' or 'movement parties,' which bridge the gap between social movements and political organizations. A significant distinction made by Dulić is between transnationalism and international cooperation. He explains, "One way of explaining the difference...is to depart from the Latin etymology and view trans-nationalism as political activism ‘above’ or ‘beyond’ the national level."[21] In contrast, international cooperation occurs 'between' or 'among' state-based entities. Dulić further contends that once fascist organizations like those in Italy or Hungary monopolized power and became the regime of a state, they ceased to function as movements: "From the fact that fascist organisations and regimes...controlled ‘all collective resources’, it follows that fascist networks would cease to make up movements after monopolising power."[22]

To better understand the differences between transnational social movements as opposed to domestic social movements and political parties, Dulić proposed the following matrix as a structured approach to understanding the dynamics of transnational social movements (TSMs)

[19] Dulić, Tomislav. "Fascism and (Transnational) Social Movements: A Reflection on Concepts and Theory in Comparative Fascist Studies." Fascism 10 (2021): pg. 202
[20] Ibid. 206
[21] Ibid. 216
[22] Ibid. 208

and their distinction from state-based social movement organizations (SMOs). Dulić's model is designed to articulate how international networks of movements surpass jurisdictional boundaries and may influence multiple governments in pursuit of a 'common good' within a 'transnational public space.'[23] In his matrix, Dulić outlines the presence of governments, the limits of polities within states, and the boundaries of state jurisdiction.

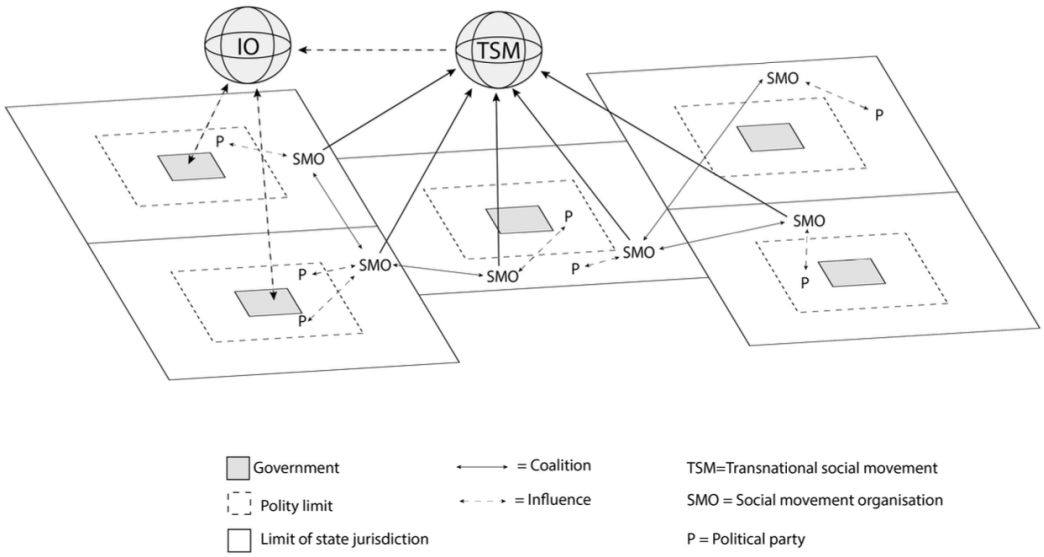

FIGURE 3 Matrix of Transnational Social Movement Activity.

Dulic TSM Matrix[24]

SMOs operate within these limits, forming coalitions and seeking to exert influence on political parties or individuals to impact government policies. However, adding to this is the concept of TSMs, which are composed of various state-based SMOs. Unlike traditional state-based movements, TSMs do not possess direct legal influence over national polities but can influence a variety of international bodies, potentially affecting international law and regulations. Dulić notes, "The tsm is instead a network of state-based smo's, through which it might affect national polities, although it may also influence governments through international organisations (io) such as the UN."[25] TSMs leverage their network of SMOs to impact national politics, and while they can influence international organizations, they are at a disadvantage if states refuse to implement suggested regulations due to the sovereignty of executive powers. The matrix also reflects that

[23] Dulić, Tomislav. "Fascism and (Transnational) Social Movements: A Reflection on Concepts and Theory in Comparative Fascist Studies." Fascism 10 (2021): pg. 217
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid. 218

SMOs can utilize references to international or transnational movements to legitimize their demands on authorities. Dulić emphasizes the potential influence of TSMs on political opportunity structures, mobilization structures, and framing processes. An SMO in one country can affect another SMO in a different country through a third SMO or directly through the TSM, illustrating a complex web of influences and interactions.

Dulić's conclusion in his analytical exploration of transnational fascism challenges the prevalent use of the term 'transnational' within the academic discourse. He argues that classifying fascism as a transnational movement encounters theoretical inconsistencies, particularly because the transnational spaces were virtually non-existent during the interwar period.[26] Moreover, argues Dulic, the fascist ideology's fundamental opposition to any form of internationalism that would diminish state sovereignty complicates its fit within the concept of transnationalism. Dulić's nuanced analysis differentiates between genuine transnational activities and what is, in essence, international knowledge transfer among state-based or governmental entities. He astutely notes, "This is not to say that one cannot use the term ‘transnational’ in a different way to denote what essentially is international knowledge-transfer..."[27] By doing so, he acknowledges the practical exchange of ideas across nations, yet he cautions that expanding the term 'transnationalism' to encompass such exchanges may blur critical distinctions between actions 'above' or 'beyond' the state and the international exchange of knowledge with no broader objectives.[28] Dulić's work is commendable for its refusal to conform to academic groupthink, offering instead a clear-eyed reevaluation of the terms and concepts commonly deployed in the field of fascist studies.

Although Tomislav Dulić's essay is overall commendable for its incisive examination of transnational and social movement theories in the context of fascism, there remains an underlying discomfort with the notion of fascism as a social movement. Dulić grapples with significant questions of the applicability of defining fascist entities as social or political movements, and whether social movement theory can enhance our understanding of the emergence, development, and transformation of fascist entities, including their cross-border cooperation.[29] Social movement theory, which offers insights into how groups mobilize to

[26] Dulić, Tomislav. "Fascism and (Transnational) Social Movements: A Reflection on Concepts and Theory in Comparative Fascist Studies." Fascism 10 (2021): pg. 226
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid. 203-4

advocate for or resist societal change, might seem at odds with the traditional top-down, imposed nature of fascist movements. The goals of social movements typically involve a push for societal reform or resistance against perceived injustices and can span a broad ideological spectrum. In contrast, fascist movements are traditionally thought of as being steeped in authoritarian and nationalist ideologies, advocating for dictatorial control, the suppression of opposition, and strict societal regulation. Dulić's hesitation seems rooted in the discrepancy between the grassroots, often democratic ethos associated with social movements, and the authoritarian, top-down characteristics of fascist movements. This tension suggests a reluctance to categorize fascism, traditionally understood as imposed from above, as a social movement, which by definition, arises from collective action and shared grievances among the populace. The essay reflects an academic discomfort with reconciling the participatory, movement-based dynamics of fascism with its historically top-down implementation, indicating a broader skepticism within comparative fascist studies about the extent to which fascism can be analyzed through the lens of social movement theory.

"Fascism" as Grassroots and Anti-Transnational

Having established a working knowledge of the current academic discourse on transnational fascism, we are prepared to challenge the prevailing transnational conception of fascism. Utilizing the evidence and arguments presented by the above historiographers, as well as the self-definitions and counter-arguments provided by fascists themselves, this work seeks to articulate an alternative framework. It posits that fascism, rather than being a coherent transnational movement, is more accurately described as a grassroots and organic phenomenon. This perspective considers fascism as a reactionary mindset capable of spreading across national boundaries, yet it emphasizes that fascism's local manifestations are distinct, often mutually exclusive, and inherently non-universalist and anti-transnational. In doing so, we aim to redefine the narrative of fascism from a supposed international collaboration to a pattern of local responses that, while echoing each other in sentiment and method, remain fundamentally separated by their unique national identities and objectives.

Mussolini's definition of fascism reveals a deep-seated critique of the academic tendency to focus primarily on the movement's external expressions—its institutions, policies, structures, and enforcement mechanisms—while often neglecting the underlying mindset or attitude that is

foundational to it. Academics largely discuss fascism in terms of its downstream manifestations, rarely delving into the ideological and spiritual attitude that underpins these outward forms. Mussolini himself highlighted this oversight, emphasizing that fascism, at its core, is a spiritual attitude:

> *"Thus many of the practical expressions of Fascism such as party organization, system of education, and discipline can only be understood when considered in relation to its general attitude toward life. A spiritual attitude. Fascism sees in the world not only those superficial, material aspects in which man appears as an individual, standing by himself, self-centered, subject to natural law, which instinctively urges him toward a life of selfish momentary pleasure; it sees not only the individual but the nation and the country; individuals and generations bound together by a moral law, with common traditions and a mission which suppressing the instinct for life closed in a brief circle of pleasure, builds up a higher life, founded on duty, a life free from the limitations of time and space, in which the individual, by self sacrifice, the renunciation of self-interest, by death itself, can achieve that purely spiritual existence in which his value as a man consists."*[30]

If we interpret fascism as embodying a stance against humanism, individualism, and materialism, where one's identity is not that of an isolated individual but as a member of an ancestral lineage and a person of a people with certain duties, obligations, and a willingness to sacrifice for those people over others, then it inherently opposes the tenets of transnational universalist globalism. Fascism does not compete with universalism on the same terms; rather, it represents a counter-force that obstructs universalist aspirations of global dominance. Its 'universalist' aspect lies in its proliferation across diverse locales, yet it always maintains a distinct cultural and ethnic identity specific to each people it encounters. Mussolini posits that in the fascist view, each group is ethnically and culturally unique, with an immediate ancestral lineage taking precedence over any shared human ancestry. Thus, fascism's roots in the distinctiveness of lineage and people render it incompatible with universalism as expressed in liberal democracy, communism, or even Catholicism, which are aimed at all of humanity. Fascism's version of universalism could only be realized if the particular people it represents were to conquer and assimilate all others. Mussolini's perspective underscores that fascism is fundamentally a movement of distinct peoples and traditions, rather than a universally applicable doctrine.

In my recent investigation into Ukrainian nationalism, I stumbled upon the figure of Dmytro Dontsov, a Ukrainian integral nationalist/fascist who was prominent in the interwar and

[30] Mussolini, B. (1932). The Doctrine of Fascism. San Jose State University. Retrieved from https://sjsu.edu/faculty/wooda/2B-HUM/Readings/The-Doctrine-of-Fascism.pdf

early WWII periods. The recent historiographical effort of Trevor Erlacher's biography *Ukraine in the Age of Extremes* attempts to position Dontsov within this transnational framework, highlighting his travels and intellectual exchanges across borders.[31] These accounts suggest that Dontsov, often labeled a fascist, hypocritically engaged in transnational activities that seemingly conflicted with his staunch nationalism, portraying him as an international actor despite his extreme nationalist stance. However, Dontsov himself resisted such categorizations in his writings, rigorously critiquing the association of fascism with what was then termed 'internationalism' (bolding is mine):

> *"Opponents of nationalism want to grind it to dust, they are supporters of violence and terror, they seek the dictatorship of their clique, even if not of their own people, over the nation without and against its will, they try to impose foreign ideals on the nation - but they wrap themselves in a toga of political innocence, nobility and humanity! This is their delusion and cowardice, the cowardice of ideology before the onslaught of a new faith that will become dominant tomorrow. Neither reaction and freedom, nor violence and humanism are what separates the two "ersatz religions" that are waging a life-and-death war with each other. Nor the fact that "generals and capitalists" are on one side, and "the people" are on the other, because the masses of that people are clearly turning away from Marxism. What then separates these two camps? Actually, the dogmas of their faith! Opponents will say yes, so does fascism have ideals that are the same for all movements that march under its banner?* ***So, it turns out that fascism is also an international movement? So, nationalism is a movement based on a single model? No! The nationalist movement is a European movement, but not an internationalist one.*** *The ideas of 1789 remain in many countries of our continent, in many of them anarchism prevails in its various forms - socialism, communism, radicalism.* ***What is surprising when the reaction of healthy peoples against a common danger shows some common features?*** *Protestantism was also directed against the same enemy, and because of this it took the form of a pan-European, but not an internationalist movement. Luther and Zwingli were at war with each other, and German Protestant pastors with Dutch ones. Cardinal Richelieu supported Protestant Germany in the war with the Catholic Habsburgs. I****n our time, there is also not always an agreement between the "ersatz religions" of nationalism, as it should be if they had an internationalist character. There is no law of international solidarity of fascist movements.*** *One fascism can even aspire to a protectorate over others, like France over the Catholic and Sweden over the Lutheran German princes during the 30-year war, because* ***not all European conflicts are exhausted by the war of "ersatz-religions" among themselves, but within each nation this war is a fact of great weight and, as such, a universal fact."***[32]

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[31] Erlacher, Trevor. 2021. Ukrainian Nationalism in the Age of Extremes: An Intellectual Biography of Dmytro Dontsov. Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University. pg. 8-10

[32] Dontsov, Dmytro. "Combined Translated Works." Translated by Nick Chimicles using Google API. Earth: Mirror. "The Age of Religious Wars"

The historical precedents mentioned by Dontsov offer a compelling lens through which to examine the non-universalist nature of fascism, despite its seemingly widespread influence. His invocation of Protestantism's pan-European movement against Catholicism illustrates how a collective stance against a common adversary does not necessarily equate to a universalist ideology. Protestant reformers like Luther and Zwingli, despite their shared opposition to Catholic orthodoxy, were embroiled in theological conflicts, exemplified by their divergence over the Eucharist. Similarly, Cardinal Richelieu's strategic alliance with Protestant Germany against the Catholic Habsburgs during the Thirty Years' War underscores the pragmatic, non-universalist alliances shaped by political exigencies rather than ideological concord. Dontsov's comparison is instructive today, particularly when contrasted with the notion that democracies, united by a transnational humanistic liberalism, do not tend to conflict with each other due to shared ideals (proverbially: ‘democracies don’t fight democracies;’). This stands in contrast to fascist regimes which, while allied in World War II, did not do so out of a common ideology but rather a convergence of self-interests. As Dontsov elucidates, "There is no law of international solidarity of fascist movements. One fascism can even aspire to a protectorate over others..." The alliances formed were not the product of a universalist movement but rather tactical partnerships born of rational calculation (proverbially: ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’). Thus, the historical nuances Dontsov presents, although certainly anecdotal and counterable, suggest that fascism, manifesting in various national contexts, was driven by distinct, often conflicting objectives, marking it as inherently non-universalist. These historical instances where entities within the same oppositional stance to a universalist force were at odds with each other further elucidate the nature of fascism as a movement deeply rooted in national and particularistic identities, rather than a cohesive, transnationalist doctrine.

The argument presented by Bauerkämper, suggesting the use of uniforms as evidence of fascism's transnational character, in fact displays the distinct national *differences* among ‘fascist’ movements. The assertion that uniforms served to impress and intimidate, thus signaling a unified transnational movement, glosses over the nuanced and specific historical contexts from which these symbols of power emerged.[33] Uniforms in fascist regimes, far from being uniform themselves, were deeply embedded in the historical and cultural narratives of each nation. For

[33] Bauerkämper, Arnd, and Grzegorz Rossoliski-Liebe. Fascism Without Borders : Transnational Connections and Cooperation Between Movements and Regimes in Europe From 1918 to 1945. New York: Berghahn Books, 2017. pg. 3

example, the Nazi uniforms, tailored and form-fitting, were steeped in historical German military traditions, designed to convey a sense of power and authority reflective of a distinctly German military heritage, with Hugo Boss being a significant manufacturer. Italian fascists donned black shirts, not as a general symbol of fascism, but specifically referencing the *Arditi*, a World War I elite force emblematic of Italian valor and martial prowess. Similarly, Japanese officers' carrying of samurai swords was not a generic fascist statement but a continuation of a venerable national tradition, connecting modern military might to the country's samurai heritage. The symbolism adopted by each regime also underlines this point. The Italians embraced the *fasces*, a symbol of Roman imperium, indicative of their ambition to resurrect the glory of the Roman Empire. Nazi Germany adopted the eagle, a callback to the heraldry of the *Reichsadler*, while Japan's use of the rising sun flag connected its modern military endeavors to a symbol historically used by feudal warlords during the Edo period. These distinct sartorial and symbolic choices reflect a broader pattern where fascist movements, while sharing certain ideological threads, expressed their aims through deeply rooted national symbols and traditions. The specific past and cultural legacy of each country were imprinted on the very fabric of their uniforms, demonstrating that the adoption of such attire was less about transnational unity and more about reinforcing national identity and aspirations. This underlines a crucial aspect of fascism as a social phenomenon: its manifestations were tailored to resonate within national narratives, rather than conform to a homogenized, transnationalist aesthetic.

Additionally, by examining the linguistic variations of fascism across different cultures, it becomes evident that there was no universally accepted term for the ideology, reflecting its adaptation to local contexts. The linguistic divergence is particularly notable in Japan during the early 20th century, where initially used terms like "fassho" or "fashizumu," as discussed by Hedinger, were eventually eschewed in favor of more culturally resonant expressions. This linguistic shift was not merely semantic but signified a deeper alignment of the ideology with specific national and cultural identities.[34] Terms such as "Shōwa ishin," "kokutai," "kōdō," and "ōdō," deeply embedded in Japanese historical and cultural lexicon, supplanted the foreign terminology, thereby embedding the fascist ideology within the unique fabric of Japanese societal norms and historical narratives.[35] This pattern of localizing fascist terminology was not

[34] Hedinger, Daniel. "Universal Fascism and its Global Legacy. Italy's and Japan's Entangled History in the Early 1930s." Fascism 2 (2013): pg. 151-2
[35] Ibid.

unique to Japan. In Italy and Germany, the respective terms "fascismo" and "Nationalsozialismus" (Nazism) were coined, reflecting distinct cultural and historical influences unique to each nation. These terms, while denoting ideologies with common fascist elements, were deeply intertwined with the respective nation's identity, culture, and historical context. The Italian term "fascismo" derives from "fascio," meaning a bundle or league, historically symbolizing strength through unity, a concept deeply rooted in Roman imagery. The German "Nationalsozialismus" combines nationalism with socialism, uniquely catering to the German socio-political context of the early 20th century. The absence of a universal term for fascism across different nations underscores the ideology's inherent adaptability and its capacity to integrate into various national narratives. This linguistic diversity highlights how fascism, while maintaining core characteristics such as authoritarianism and nationalism, was significantly shaped and defined by the local cultural, historical, and linguistic context in which it developed.

The divergent ambitions of fascism's local manifestations challenge the notion of a singular, transnational fascist entity. Each instance of fascism harbored universalist aspirations, yet these were confined to the triumph of a specific people, like a player's singular victory in a game of Sid Meier's Civilization. The fascists, much like players in the game, aimed for their nation to emerge as the dominant global power. Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan each sought to reshape the world in their image, reflecting the end goal of their particular version of civilization, which inherently meant their visions were mutually exclusive. If fascism were part of a globally coordinated movement with a universal goal, the rhetoric would be uniform across these regimes, advocating for a world unified under fascism itself, not under distinct nationalistic variations of it. However, the Nazis spoke of a global Aryan hegemony, the Italians envisioned a global revival of the Roman empire, and the Japanese aimed for a world order under the rising sun—each vision, while universalist in its own right, is in direct conflict with the others. Such exclusivity negates the possibility of a collaborative transnational movement; making fascism not about creating a new world order but about dominating the world as separate entities, vying for supremacy. This dynamic contrasts starkly with the universal aims of communism or liberal democracy, where the goal is the worldwide proliferation of a singular ideology, not tied to national or ethnic supremacy. The goal of a communist Ukraine isn't to spread Ukrainian communism globally, nor is the goal democratic France to make the world French-Democratic; rather, these ideologies seek to promulgate a system of governance and

social organization universally. The fascists, conversely, were not unified in a fight for a common cause. The Allies fought for freedom and democracy, the communists for a proletarian revolution, but the fascists' goals were fragmented along national lines—the Nazis for the Aryan race, the Italians for Italian resurgence, and the Japanese for imperial expansion. Each fought for the preeminence of their nation and people, collectively against a universalist ideal but not *for* a universally 'fascist' ideal. The Montreux fascist congress of 1934 stands as a testament to this lack of international unity; both Japan and Germany notably abstained from attendance, a revealing choice that underlines the disparate objectives of each regime.[36] The failure of this congress further exemplifies the fragmented nature of fascism, with each iteration more focused on its nationalistic ambitions than any collective, transnational fascist front. Fascism, therefore, in its essence, does not have a single, unified goal but is an ideology of particularism, striving for the glory of one's own nation above all else.

Conclusion

The prevailing academic portrayal of fascism as a transnational movement appears increasingly disjointed from historical reality and the fundamental definitions of fascism. The effort to cast fascism as a globally unified entity seems driven more by contemporary discourse needs than by factual accuracy. Bauerkämper's citation of George Orwell and Karl Loewenstein's observations of fascism's cross-border interchange and universal claims does little to substantiate a genuinely transnational nature of fascism.[37] Instead, it reflects a modern reinterpretation, projecting contemporary fears onto historical phenomena. The irony lies in the universalist critique of fascism's supposed 'missionary efforts,' paralleling the very tactics of secular academics and liberal humanists who, much like their religious predecessors, engage in global ideological propagation. They envision a terrifying fascist world system, unaware of their role as emissaries of a global universalist liberal humanist system. This perspective deems any deviation from universal norms — any true regional and tribal distinction or assertiveness — as an existential threat to the global order. The hypocrisy in denouncing fascist regimes for their missionary work is striking, as it mirrors the messianism and conversion efforts that fascism initially emerged in

[36] Hedinger, Daniel. "Universal Fascism and its Global Legacy. Italy's and Japan's Entangled History in the Early 1930s." Fascism 2 (2013): pg. 152-3

[37] Bauerkämper, Arnd, and Grzegorz Rossoliski-Liebe. Fascism Without Borders : Transnational Connections and Cooperation Between Movements and Regimes in Europe From 1918 to 1945. New York: Berghahn Books, 2017. pg. 5

response to. As various global actors question the enforcement of the internationalist approach (e.g., Russia, China, BRICS), labeling these movements as a unified transnational conspiracy against the democratic international order exemplifies a classic universalist reaction. This mindset risks overextending and indefensibly defending the boundaries of the international community, failing to recognize that challenges to universalist ambitions are not only natural but inevitable. In this context, modern far-right groups are conveniently painted as movements with global ambitions, providing a pretext for combating them on a global scale. The historical attempt to universalize fascism, displays a longing of historians and contemporaries to fit alt-right movements into neat matrices and acronyms that can then be labeled, targeted, and destroyed. Yet, this approach disregards the spontaneous and individualized nature of nationalist reactions historically to modernity and presently to the digital age. The belief that stifling transnational information flows or cutting off the intellectual heads of these ideologies will prevent the emergence of neo-fascist or far-right movements is a misguided one, historically unfounded and potentially dangerous in its justification of censorship and control of information. This selective application of deconstructionism to every tradition, culture, hierarchy, and social norm, except for its own, reveals a blind spot in internationalist humanism, failing to critically examine its assumptions and implications. The insistence on a transnational fascist threat, therefore, seems less an objective historical analysis and more an ideological weapon of information warfare and academic gaslighting in the present.

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