

---

# INTRODUCTION

## ENTANGLED FAR RIGHTS

### A Russian-European Intellectual Romance in the Twentieth Century

*Marlene Laruelle*

Since the early 2010s and more visibly since the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, Russia's support for the European Far Right—and for conservative and populist leaders more globally—has become a cornerstone of the West's perception of Moscow as a “spoiler” on the international scene. Russia is now perceived as a danger to “established democracies”: its support for far-right politics is interpreted as part of a broader strategy that also includes supposed meddling in elections and referendums—the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, Brexit, and the Catalonia referendum, among others.

Many observers expected that Russia, if it chose to intervene on the European political scene, would reactivate Soviet soft power toward the European Left. The fact that Russia's most fervent supporters are now to be found on the right of the ideological spectrum therefore came as a surprise.

Two key points explain the present reality. The first is that the European Left has undergone dramatic changes since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although the European Left's stance on international affairs may share some ideological features with Russia's position—such as being anti-NATO, cautious toward transatlantic institutions, and reluctant to see a too neoliberal European Union gain more power over nation-states—both are deeply divided on societal issues. Both the “old” Left, which maintains a certain proximity to communism, and the “new” Left, as it has emerged in Greece, Spain, and among many an-

tiglobalization movements, are very liberal in terms of gender values and militant on environmental issues—two elements that either do not speak to Russia’s current regime or even directly clash with its ideological positioning. If there are indeed some sections of the European Left that (for geopolitical reasons) support Russia’s policy today, a far larger segment sees Russia as a country with which it is difficult—or even impossible—to partner.

The second point, which is at the center of this volume, is that the European Right and Far Right have always had Russophile tendencies, but these were obscured during the Cold War, when rightist forces were decidedly anti-Communist. However, being anti-Communist did not mean being anti-Soviet, let alone anti-Russian. Being anti-Soviet without being anti-Russian is quite easy to reconcile, and was indeed a posture shared by many on the Cold War-era European Far Right who admired prerevolutionary Russia, whether for its autocratic regime or for the prominent role given to Orthodoxy. The fall of the Soviet Union, they believed, would result in the rebirth of an “eternal” Russia whose ideology would ally with far-right worldviews.

Being anti-Communist and not anti-Soviet is a more complex relationship to decipher. It requires understanding that for a segment of the European Far Right, the transatlantic world that emerged after 1945 was seen as more destructive to “authentic” European identity than the risk posed by communism. For all those who were vividly anti-American and who hoped for the rebirth of an independent, unified, and “white” European continent, the Soviet Union was far from the worst danger and could even be seen as a potential ally. As early as the late 1970s, figures such as Jean Parvulesco, a Romanian-born émigré who was close to the New Right, claimed that the Soviet Union’s destiny was to save the white race.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, some far-right groups were impressed by the colossal forces unleashed by the Bolshevik revolution and could not help seeing similarities with interwar fascist regimes, including Nazi Germany. On the Russian/Soviet side, meanwhile, there was a complex magnetism toward the European Far Right.

This edited volume traces the “intellectual romance” that existed between European Far Right groups and their Russian/Soviet counterparts during the long twentieth century, their mutual borrowings, distorted interpretations, and phantasmagorical readings of each other.<sup>2</sup> It complements an earlier volume, *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Russia–Europe Relationship* (2015), that investigated the role of the notorious neo-Eurasianist and neofascist geopolitician Aleksandr Dugin in cultivating contacts with the European New Right and, directly

or indirectly, opening the way for the Russian authorities to find new fellow travelers among European Far Right groups.<sup>3</sup>

The Second World War continues to shape our perception of the relationship between the European Far Right, especially its fascist and national-socialist components, and the Soviet Union: the conflict was a fight to the finish between the two so-called totalitarian regimes. This memory is cultivated in Europe, and even more so in Russia, where the 27 million Soviet citizens who died fighting the German enemy are revered as national heroes and saviors of humanity. Alternative memories exist, but they remain marginal. In the Baltic states, Poland, and now Ukraine, the authorities, along with a large part of the historian community, have come to criticize this conventional reading of the war. They prefer to emphasize what they see as the shameful collaboration between the Soviet and Nazi regimes associated with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939–1941 and the mutually influenced patterns of violence in the occupied territories. These memory controversies have gained visibility in recent years, especially with the 2014 Ukrainian conflict, and have become an integral part of countries' foreign policy toolkits. The Putin regime warns against the threat of a "fascist junta" in power in Kyiv, while the Poroshenko government, following a trend that has grown in Ukraine since the Orange Revolution in 2004, puts the Nazi and Soviet pasts on an equal footing.

This volume investigates how diverse elements of the far-right repertoire have traveled between the European and Soviet/Russian spaces. This approach can sometimes be perilous due to the semantic confusion around the term "fascism." If the scholarly community has reached partial agreement on how to define it,<sup>4</sup> the use and abuse of the term in the public space, the lack of terminological consistency, its name-calling value, and countries' varying sensitivities based on their own memories of the Second World War make it difficult to study the term's transnational aspect, as well as its persistence throughout the twentieth century. In the United States, Europe, and Russia, "fascist" is used in the political and intellectual arenas as an epithet to identify and denounce enemies. The derogatory implication is so strong that the notion of fascism has become an insulting label that sometimes bears no connection to the actual ideological positions. In Soviet and post-Soviet culture, the semantic space of fascism is even more complex. The consensus around the Soviet Union's defeat of fascism remains the critical driver of Russia's social cohesion even today, and the mere suggestion that some Soviet citizens or contemporary political groups might refer to fascism positively is offensive to majority public opinion.

This volume has to face another significant methodological problem, namely its location at the intersection of diverse disciplinary approaches. It finds its inspiration in the trend of building a European transnational history that keeps the focus on pan-European phenomena, cultural transfers, and mutual borrowings beyond the borders of the nation-state. It also hopes to rehabilitate Russian intellectual history as an integral part of the European history of ideas and to affirm how much Russia has contributed to Europe's modern history, both as an object of debates and as an actor itself.

Beyond this broad framework, this book combines multiple ways of looking at the Far Right. Some chapters belong to intellectual history: they investigate how concepts critical to far-right ideology circulated in the wider Euro-Russian space. Others explore political history: they follow groups of activists, not concepts, people who had to decide in extreme political circumstances whether to ally with or fight against fascist regimes. A third set looks at individual trajectories and personal networks—it must therefore take into consideration the complexity of human life, the occasional contradiction between friendship and ideological commitments, and the evolution of political stances over time and space. Indeed, context matters: referring to fascism as a doctrine in a nonfascist state is not comparable to supporting the state ideology of Mussolini's Italy between 1922 and 1943 or Hitler's Germany between 1933 and 1945.

In the study of the transnational circulation of the far-right ideological repertoire, it is striking to note our knowledge gap regarding the Soviet space. Research may have been limited due to the heavy weight borne by the notion of *fashizm* in the post-Soviet space: many local scholars may, until recently, have engaged in self-censorship, intentionally avoiding this sensitive and potentially offensive topic. In the "Western" world, academic production likewise remains fragmented. The Soviet-German case remains the best known: a developed body of literature exists about the *Sonderverhältnis* (special relationship) between Germany and Russia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It covers the comparative approach to the two so-called totalitarianisms that emerged after the end of the Second World War, conducted under the influence of Hannah Arendt until Ernst Nolte touched off the *Historikerstreit* of the late 1980s, as well as more recent studies of the "image of the other" and "entangled histories." Walter Laqueur carried out pioneering research for his book *Russia and Germany: A Century of Conflict* (1965), which goes beyond diplomatic history in an attempt to capture the feeling, on both the German and the Soviet sides, of a profound interaction and competition of cultures.<sup>5</sup> Leo-

nid Luks recently added to this literature with an edited volume, *Zwei Sonderwege? Russisch-deutsche Parallelen und Kontraste (1917–2014)* (2016), that compares the Russian and German traditions of *Sonderweg*.<sup>6</sup>

Since the collapse of the socialist bloc and the Soviet Union, historical research has progressed enormously. The opening of Soviet archives allowed for the filling in of many previously blank pages, among them the “Holocaust by bullets,” the Soviet occupation of Polish and Baltic territories, the Nazi occupation of Soviet territories, and collaborationism on all sides. Recent works include, among others, *Fascination and Enmity: Russia and Germany as Entangled Histories, 1914–1945* (2012), edited by Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander M. Martin.<sup>7</sup> If German Russophobia has been well studied, German Russophilia has also become an object of research in recent years, with convincing demonstrations that a strong attraction to Russia was present across the political spectrum during the Weimar Republic.<sup>8</sup>

These entangled Russo–German histories contribute to a better understanding of the context in which intellectual and political interactions took place. Yet they cannot tell us the full story of this unknown page of European history. The case of France, for example, remains largely unstudied, a situation that is paradoxical, given the importance of the Russian émigré community in Paris, but also explicable, as that group remains reticent to expose its critical role in connecting the Russian and French Far Rights, and the alliance of some of its members with Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union. With the exception of John J. Stephan’s book *The Russian Fascists: Tragedy and Farce in Exile, 1925–1945* (1978),<sup>9</sup> which focused on the history of Russian fascists in Manchuria and the United States, we are still missing a detailed history—based on archival works, memoirs, and diaries—of the mutual attraction between the European and Russian Far Rights throughout the twentieth century.

This work identifies different phases of dialogue and cultural transfer between what can loosely be called the far-right ideological repertoire and Russia/the Soviet Union. Both terms must be understood in a broad and fuzzy sense. In “far-right ideological repertoire” we include the movements that preceded the regime-fascism that was instituted in Italy in 1922 and in Germany in 1933; the German Conservative Revolution, which provided, wittingly or not, the intellectual framework of national socialism; the Nazi ideology of the war years; and the so-called postfascist movements of the Cold War, which attempted to revive the fight for the unity of white Europe. This work takes “Russia/the Soviet Union” to mean prerevolutionary Russia; the emigration of the interwar period; the terri-

tories that were occupied by the Soviet and Nazi armies between 1939 and 1945; and the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, as well as its dissident cultures. We leave aside post-Soviet Russia, which was the focus of the earlier volume and of a forthcoming monograph.

Four chronological phases shape the structure of the book. However, this volume does not seek to advance a linear analysis of these interactions across time—the whole twentieth century—and space—the whole of Europe and the Soviet Union. Instead, and more modestly, it sketches some critical historical moments, intellectual interactions, and personal trajectories.

Schematically, interactions around the far-right ideological repertoire can be divided into three concentric circles. The innermost circle is comprised of a small group that was openly collaborationist with Nazi Germany. This attitude could be found among European volunteers on the Eastern Front and was also a minority position among Russian émigrés and Soviet citizens living under Nazi occupation during the war.

The middle circle is structured around the notion of the Third Way, imbued with several ideological nuances and undertones. The Third Way doctrine allowed certain Russian political and intellectual groups to engage in discussion with their European counterparts during the interwar decades. During the Cold War, some Western European Far Right groups used it to display a paradoxical philo-communism or philo-Sovietism largely devoid of ideological content but aimed at promoting a conservative European continental unity against the transatlantic liberal “West.” The term Third Way has seen a genuine revival with the collapse of the Soviet Union and offers a fascinating unifying metanarrative for Russia’s ideological experiments around the notion of National Bolshevism. The latter concept has been repeatedly reinvested and remastered at different historical times—interwar, Cold War, and early twenty-first century—and in different national contexts. National Bolshevism is the term used to label Ernst Niekisch’s theories of a Third Way for Germany, but it also describes Nikolai Ustrialov’s vision for the future of Soviet Russia, and since the 1980s a section of the European New Right has claimed the label, too. In the 1990s, the term enjoyed a second renaissance in Russia with the birth of the National-Bolshevik Party of Eduard Limonov (and, initially, Aleksandr Dugin). National Bolshevism thus encapsulates the complex relationship between Russia/Bolshevism/the Soviet Union and ideologies that share some elements of “fascism,” but is still waiting for a historian to study it in its *longue durée* and its multiple iterations.<sup>10</sup>

The outermost circle brings together an array of prerevolutionary and

Soviet ideological movements and figures with some beliefs that, in one way or another, may be considered to belong to the “ideological DNA” of the Far Right. This third circle displays high semantic confusion and encompasses the largest, most heterogeneous coalition of doctrines in time and space.

This volume focuses on two critical historical moments of this third circle. The first is that of prerevolutionary Russia, fertile soil for neo-Slavophile doctrines cultivating a reactionary utopia that closely resembled European protofascist ideologies, and for a strong far-right popular movement, the Black Hundreds (*Chernaia sotnia*), considered in many respects Russia’s first fascist movement. The second is the three decades following Stalin’s death (1953–1985). While several authors—including Walter Laqueur, Alexander Yanov, and Stephen Shenfield, among others—have traced the evolution, on the Soviet side of the Iron Curtain, of doctrinal elements that can be associated with the Far Right, it is difficult to assess the degree of their interaction with their European counterparts. In many respects, direct borrowings and entanglements were limited and/or clandestine, such that they are often discoverable only through memoirs, diaries, or interviews.

In this volume, we address two fertile zones and cultural niches in the Soviet Union where some doctrinal elements of the far-right repertoire were cultivated. The first was the specific case of ethnologist and historian Lev Gumilev (1912–1992), a semi-official, semi-dissident figure whose theories of ethnicity and territory share many tenets with the European New Right, though without any personal connections or interactions. The second belongs to Moscow’s underground Bohemia, which in the 1960s–1980s rediscovered the esoteric aspects of fascism and national socialism, in particular Julius Evola’s “spiritual racism” and neo-pagan Aryan theories. The dissident Yuzhinskii Circle, analyzed here, became the main conduit for introducing Far Right theoreticians to late Soviet Russian culture.

As with any edited volume, this book explores the complexities of the topic but does not pretend to exhaust it. The assembled chapters do not attempt to provide a full and comprehensive picture; instead, they discuss some pieces of a very large puzzle and open new fields for research. Although this volume offers only sketches of a history still to be written, with multiple intellectual ramifications to be explored, we hope to contribute not only to a reassessment of the transnational aspect of European history and Russia’s legitimate place in it, but also to an expanded perspective on the state of contemporary affairs. The cross-fertilization between the Russian and European Far Rights goes deeper than shared

posturing and lexicon; it is founded on more fundamental perceptions of what nations, nation-states, and the world order should be. The current honeymoon between Russia and European Far Right has its roots in the “intellectual romance” this volume discusses.