Fascist Transnationalism

The Networking between the German, Austrian, and Italian Radical Nationalist Milieux during the Long 1920s

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Abstract

The article argues that contact between the German, Austrian, and Italian radical nationalist milieux through the long 1920s represented a specific form of fascist relationship-building which should be understood in terms of fascist transnationalism: a cross-border networking process that took place against the backdrop of fluid, evolving social relationships. Starting from the analysis of the mutual exclusiveness of radical nationalist mobilizations, the article highlights the analytical limits of the concept 'internationalism' when applied to early fascist relationships that developed in transnational, informal settings. Then, it makes an argument for a processual approach based on the observation of relational practices, while sketching out the peculiarities of these milieux. Accordingly, it outlines the development of the trilateral networking process between German, Austrian, and Italian organizations (*Stahlhelm*, DNVP, NSDAP, *Heimwehren*, and PNF) along its different stages. Finally, it offers an outlook on the key features of fascist transnationalism grounded in the historical analysis of this specific triangular case study.

Keywords

Brenner Pass, November 12, 1930

On 12 November 1930, the Brenner became the site of a carefully staged cross-border radical nationalist performance. On that day, the First Austrian Republic was celebrating the twelfth anniversary of its existence. However, this did not apply to the Alpine pass at the Austrian-Italian border, where men of the Tyrolean *Heimwehren* [Home Guards] in their wind jackets and feathered hats were waiting to salute the return of their most transnationally connected leader, Waldemar Pabst, from a five-month 'exile' in Italy. Born in Berlin in 1880 and raised in Prussian Rhineland, after an officer career in the Wilhelmine army, Pabst served as a captain in the German campaign against Belgium and France—initially in the field, then as first officer in several army staffs from the winter of 1914–1915 onwards. In April 1918, the *Oberste Heeresleitung* had named Pabst chief of staff of the *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division*. In this function, he led the relocation of the division in arms to Berlin under the provisional republican government, after having experienced revolution, armistice, and the end of the *Kaiserreich* as a humiliating national defeat. With his division, which subsequently expanded and was renamed an army corps in April 1919, Pabst organized one of the key forces of German counter-revolutionary activities, while his radical profile made him a key persona in Berlin's nationalist circles. In this function, he commanded the execution of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht following the suppressed Spartacist uprising in January 1919. As a coordinating figure within the right-wing federation *Nationale Vereinigung*, he was later involved in two failed coup attempts against the nascent Weimar Republic and the Treaty of Versailles: one on his own account, aborted in summer 1919; and the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch in mid-March 1920, after which he fled to Austria via Bavaria to evade arrest.[1]

Here, he soon joined the Tyrolean, and later, federal *Heimwehren* organization as a chief of staff under its first leader, Richard Steidle. In the following decade, Pabst helped to build the profile of the *Heimwehren* as strikebreaking paramilitary formations, and played a decisive role in their radicalization and transnational interconnectedness with like-minded forces in Germany, Italy, and Hungary in the 1920s. In June 1930, as part of a larger political maneuver put into action by Austrian chancellor Johannes Schober to weaken the most extremist faction within the *Heimwehren*, Pabst was arrested and expelled.

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1   Johannes Erger, *Der Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Innenpolitik 1919/20* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1967), 22–153; Doris Kachulle, *Waldemar Pabst und die Gegenrevolution* (Berlin: Edition Organon, 2007), 3–50; Klaus Gietinger, *Der Konterrevolutionär: Waldemar Pabst, eine deutsche Karriere* (Hamburg: Nautilus, 2009), 17–230.

Forced to choose a flight destination outside Austria, he opted for Venice, where in the following months he obtained financial support and cooperation from the fascist[2] regime and framed his conception of a right-wing 'white international'. Eventually, Ernst Rüdiger Starhemberg, the new *Heimwehren* federal leader and Minister of the Interior during the short-lived Vaugoin cabinet composed of members of the *Christlichsoziale Partei* [CSP; Christian-Social Party] and the *Heimwehren*, revoked Pabst's expulsion. On 12 November 1930, Pabst crossed the Brenner northwards, where his Tyrolean comrades welcomed him with military honors.[3]

Pabst is a paramount example of what recent transnational and global fascism studies address as 'brokers'.[4] Reaching across relational voids and 'structural holes',[5] brokers represent a particularly influential type of agents among right-wing 'transnational actors',[6] more generally, and are thus very well suited to serve as empirical focal points for tracing fundamental entanglements along

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2 In line with established practice within fascism studies, the substantive 'fascism' and its adjectivizations in lower case will be used in the following when referring to the historical phenomenon in its transnational appearance. When addressing its local emanations, the article will name the specific organizations, groups, or milieux involved. 'Fascism' in the upper case (commonly standing for Italian fascism) is not used here, as organizational or spatial-related denominations (such as 'PNF', 'Italian fascism', 'Italian radical nationalist milieu', 'Italian regime', etc.) offer a more nuanced framing in transnational terms. The same applies to the German-speaking cases which will be mentioned in the following.

3 C. Earl Edmondson, *The Heimwehr and Austrian Politics, 1918–1936* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1978), 29–124; Walter Wiltschegg, *Die Heimwehr: Eine unwiderstehliche Volksbewegung?* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1985), 43–62; Manfred Wichmann, 'Die Konzeption einer "Weißen Internationale" bei Waldemar Pabst,' in *Wegbereiter des Nationalsozialismus: Personen, Organisationen und Netzwerke der extremen Rechten zwischen 1918 und 1933*, eds. Daniel Schmidt, Michael Sturm, and Massimiliano Livi (Essen: Klartext, 2015), 125–140; Gietinger, *Der Konterrevolutionär*, 231–284.

4 Sven Reichardt, 'The Global Circulation of Corporatism,' in *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Europe and Latin America: Crossing Borders*, eds. António Costa Pinto and Federico Finchelstein (London: Routledge, 2019), 275–283; Daniele Toro, 'Brokerage as a Relational Catalyst for Fascist Entanglements: Waldemar Pabst's Function in the *Heimwehren*, 1920–1931,' in *Early Fascism: The Stuggle for Power in a Regional Context*, eds. Karlo Ruzicic-Kessler and Oswald Überegger (Paderborn: Brill-Schöningh, 2024), forthcoming.

5 Ronald S. Burt, *Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 32–34; Ronald S. Burt, 'Structural Holes and Good Ideas,' *American Journal of Sociology* 110, no. 2 (2004): 349–399.

6 Ángel Alcalde, 'War Veterans as Transnational Actors: Politics, Alliances and Networks in the Interwar Period,' *European Review of History* 25, no. 3–4 (2018): 492–511; Annarita Gori and Valeria Galimi, 'Hybridizing Ideas in the Latin Space: Transnational Agents and Polycentric Cross-Border Networks,' in *Intellectuals in the Latin Space during the Era of Fascism: Crossing Borders*, eds. Valeria Galimi and Annarita Gori (London: Routledge, 2020), 1–11.

their fluid development over time. However, due to their characteristic analytical focus on actors, studies on brokerage tend to obscure the broader relational dimension of such processes. This applies to Pabst's role as well. This must be interpreted against the backdrop of his and his transnational accomplices' broader social background, i.e., the informal networks that developed between the German, Austrian, and Italian radical nationalist milieux between the end of the First World War,[7] and the consolidation of the Nazi regime in Germany and its Austrofascist counterpart under chancellors Engelbert Dollfuß and Kurt Schuschnigg from 1933 onwards.

This article argues that these foundational relationships stretching through the long 1920s until the pivotal biennium 1933–1934 represented a peculiar form of fascist relationships, which will be defined as 'transnationalism': a phenomenon with structures, practices, developments, and a consistency of its own which must be distinguished from (mostly later) state-backed fascist internationalism. In doing so, the article refers to paradigmatic case studies. Rather than claiming exhaustiveness in relation to their singular specificity or concerning the broader phenomena of which they were part, the following pages offer key examples illustrating the relevance of the multilayered system of social relationships within which collectives and single actors were involved. As these case studies demonstrate, fascist transnationalism should be understood as a cross-border networking process that took place against the backdrop of a complex system of fluid and evolving social relationships. More precisely, the entanglements produced were characterized by an informal nature, a situational character, and an adaptive but ephemeral structure. These peculiarities are due to the contextual sociohistorical situation within which fascist transnationalism unfolded. This primarily concerns, on the one hand, the incommensurability of mutually exclusive, diverging, and conflicting radical nationalist horizons of mobilization and, on the other hand, the power and resource asymmetry between the Italian regime and a multitude of movements struggling for power in Austria and Germany. However, further contextual elements had a pivotal influence on the development of the peculiarities of fascist transnationalism, such as the precarious and often ineffective alignment of practices, attitudes, and sociopolitical developments within the respective nation-state-based milieux and political systems.

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7   While not discussing any immediate empirical results emerging from historical network research, the term 'network' will be used here with explicit reference to its analytical—as opposed to the metaphorical—understanding and application as outlined by Stanley Wassermann and Katharine Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Application* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 21, 71.

Starting from the analysis of the mutual exclusiveness of radical national-ist mobilizations, this article points out the analytical limits of the concept 'internationalism' when applied to early fascist relationships developing in transnational, informal settings during the long 1920s. Then, by sketching out the relevant peculiarities found in each of the national milieux, it makes an argument for a processual approach based on the observation of relational practices interlinking them across borders. Accordingly, it outlines the devel-opment of the trilateral networking process between German, Austrian, and Italian social environments along its different stages. Finally, it offers a con-cluding outlook on the key features of fascist transnationalism as grounded in the historical analysis of this specific, triangular case study.

The Incommensurability of Radical Nationalisms and the Relational Limits of Fascist Internationalism

The cooperation that Pabst forged with the Italian fascist regime before and after being 'exiled' in Venice became a heavy burden, one that soon jeopar-dized his political prestige among Austrian radical nationalists. Immediately before crossing the Brenner border, Pabst thanked the Italian authorities and fascist party dignitaries for their support (financially estimated just below a total of 15,000 Austrian shillings),[8] which they had granted him on that occa-sion. Immediately after, he publicly acknowledged his admiration for the Ital-ian regime. Afterwards, he put on his *Heimwehr* uniform and entered Austrian territory to be greeted by Steidle, paramilitaries in formation, and an official representing Starhemberg in his function as Interior Minister. The large dele-gation then traveled to Innsbruck, where Pabst's return had been staged as a shared triumph for Austrian right-wingers as led by the *Heimwehren*. Follow-ing marches, nationalist chants, and parades, the event—which was attended by members of friendly organizations—culminated in speeches held by Stei-dle and Pabst during a large gathering in the evening. The following morning, detailed press reports made the rounds about the sayings of gratitude and admiration to Mussolini's person and regime which Pabst had pronounced to Italian authorities before crossing the border. Local Pan-German and Austrian nationalists were outraged. Unsurprisingly, their critique focused on the repres-sive politics which the Italian government had implemented against South Tyroleans. Despite all attempts to dampen the affair through statements and

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8   Lajos Kerekes, *Abenddämmerung einer Demokratie: Mussolini, Gömbös und die Heimwehr* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1966), 216.

public interventions, the damage to Pabst's standing in local and federal nationalist circles was so critical that he left Austria and his service in the *Heimwehren* in less than two months. Eventually, he returned to Berlin, where he pursued his plans for a fascist 'white international' by other means. Meanwhile, his mentor, Steidle, was also facing serious consequences. In the immediate aftermath of the scandal, he was expelled from the Tyrolean *Bauernbund*, a key national-conservative league representing agrarian interests within the CSP.[9]

The deeper reasons for the eventual, but not definitive, setback experienced by Pabst and Steidle's networking activities towards Italian fascism lay in the specific historical background which had unfolded between German-speaking Central Europe and Italy in the aftermath of the First World War. Following the defeat of the Habsburg Empire and the Italian occupation advancing northwards via Trento, Bozen, and the Eisack and Wipp Valleys up to Innsbruck, the Brenner had eventually become, along with the eastern town of Tarvis, the key point of the newly redrawn border between Austria and Italy.[10] Thus, the pass had become imbued with antagonistic political meanings drawing on conflicting nationalist horizons. In the north, the defeated Habsburg Empire dissolved, while its territories of German-speaking majority populations reorganized within the 'Republic of German-Austria', proclaimed in November 1918. Less than one year later, in official fulfillment of the Treaty of Saint Germain, the young Republic recognized its new borders and forsook a potential union with the German Reich, thus finally assuming the denomination of 'Republic of Austria'.[11] In the south, the turbulent birth of the First Austrian Republic in 1918–1919 implied the formal cession of German-speaking South Tyrol to the Kingdom of Italy. Despite Italy's victory and its annexation of former Habsburg territories on the north-eastern Alpine and Dinaric border, the country saw its insatiable expectations, originally fueled by the allies in the London Pact of

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9   Edmondson, *The Heimwehr*, 118–119; Wiltschegg, *Die Heimwehr*, 157; Gietinger, *Der Konterrevolutionär*, 279–283.

10   The Armistice of Villa Giusti determined the Brenner Pass to become a section of the ceasefire line. The permanence of the Austrian-Italian border at the Brenner was politically secured by Woodrow Wilson in late April 1919 and eventually formalized by the Treaty of Saint Germain. See Oswald Überegger, *Im Schatten des Krieges: Geschichte Tirols 1918–1920* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2019), 65–76; Oswald Überegger, 'Storia di un confine conteso: La politica di interessi alleata e la decisione sul nuovo confine austro-italiano alla conferenza di pace di Parigi nel 1919,' *Mondo contemporaneo* 19, no. 1 (2023): 31–53.

11   Walter Rauscher, *Die verzweifelte Republik: Österreich 1918–1922* (Vienna: Kremayr & Scheriau, 2017) 28–140; Manfried Rauchensteiner, *Unter Beobachtung: Österreich seit 1918*, 2nd ed. (Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau, 2021), 13–78.

1915 to secure Italian intervention,[12] dampened down by political realism at the Paris Peace Conference. Disillusionment enhanced radical nationalist and irredentist action, while counter-revolutionary and strike-breaking violence drove the emergence of Italian fascism against the backdrop of civil war-like tensions.[13]

As soon as by mid-February 1921, fascist squads began ravaging South Tyrol in expeditions aimed at terrorizing the German-speaking population and destroying the symbols and infrastructure of its political self-determination.[14] By early 1923, following fascist accession to power in the aftermath of the March on Rome, the new Italian government led by Mussolini put into action the first elements of its policies against the German-speaking population; a first step towards forced 'Italianization' of the region and, more broadly, to establish fascist rule over cultural minorities in borderlands and colonial territories.[15] Thus, by the early 1920s, the Brenner had become loaded with a double-edged threshold meaning: in Austrian and German public opinion, the persecution of the German-speaking populace under foreign rule epitomized the feeling of defeat and sense of humiliation in the aftermath of the lost world war; for fascist Italy, it represented the strategic *limes* [boundary] both defending and symbolizing a borderland which had been rightfully conquered and had yet to be fully 'Italianized' so as to eventually become part of the national community.[16]

It was against the backdrop of these antagonistic contexts revolving around war experience on opposite fronts, and its diverging outcomes as epitomized by the South Tyrol question, that both the German and Italian-speaking radical nationalist milieux found a major obstacle to their mutual convergence. The case of the *Heimwehren* had not been the first, nor it would be the last time that the cooperation among German or Austrian nationalists and Italian fascism was confronted with a major backlash due to public indignation over

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12 Gian Enrico Rusconi, *L'azzardo del 1915: Come l'Italia decide la sua guerra* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), 115–147.

13 Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy, 1919–1929* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 15–93; Giulia Albanese, *La marcia su Roma* (Rome: Laterza, 2006), 19–83.

14 Stefan Lechner, 'Der Marsch auf Bozen: Faschistische Entnationalisierungspolitik,' in *Das 20. Jahrhundert in Südtirol, Vol. 1920–1939: Faschistenbeil und Hakenkreuz*, ed. Gottfried Solderer (Bozen: Edition Raetia, 2000), 41–71.

15 Alfons Gruber, *Südtirol unter dem Faschismus*, 3rd ed. (Bozen: Athesia, 1973), 20–44; Roberta Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-Empire: Sovereignty and Settlement in Italy's Borderlands, 1922–1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 55–83, 96–104.

16 Eva Pfanzelter, 'Südtirol zwischen Österreich und Italien in den 1930er Jahren,' in *Die schwierige Versöhnung: Italien, Österreich und Südtirol im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Andrea di Michele et al. (Bozen: Bozen-Bolzano University Press, 2020), 275–300.

this issue. Similar affairs impacted all key formations involved in cross-border interactions. Hitler's realpolitikal abandonment of South Tyrol from late 1922, to name one prominent case, was repeatedly met with open criticism across the political spectrum of German-speaking right-wingers and public opinion, while the Nazi regime later sustained its leader's take on the matter until the eventual German-Italian Option Agreement in June 1939.[17]

Interestingly, the intensity and recurrence of similar affairs grew along with the thickening of cross-border relationships. Another case occurred during the same days of Pabst's Brenner crossing, when an unoffical delegation of the veteran organization *Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten* [Steel Helmet, League of the Front Soldiers] was received by Mussolini during a formal audience in *Palazzo Venezia* and paid symbolical tribute to the dictator by awarding him the badge of the veteran organization in November 1930. The press of the Weimar Republic was relentless in pointing out the evident contradiction of a revanchist veteran organization celebrating a former anti-German interventionist and—first and foremost—the abuser of South Tyrol. The uproar even caught the attention of *Reichspräsident* Paul von Hindenburg, an honorary member of the *Stahlhelm*. The veteran league's leadership as well as Pabst and the *Heimwehren* were forced to recognize the blatant conflict of interest between any nationalist or Pan-Germanist stance, on the one hand, and their admiration for Italian fascism, on the other, and finally toned down their public praise for Mussolini and his regime.[18]

These and many similar efforts were shipwrecked on the insurmountable public and internal tensions emanating from the Brenner border. The problem of South Tyrol and its forced 'Italianization' represented the most important hurdle on the way to cross-border fascist fraternization between German-speaking and Italian groups—at least as long as democratic opinion leaders

17   Jens Petersen, *Hitler-Mussolini: Die Entstehung des Achse Berlin-Rom, 1933–1936* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1973), 65–73; Wolfgang Schieder, *Adolf Hitler: Politischer Zauberlehrling Mussolinis* (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg: 2017), 28–42; Sabine Viktoria Kofler, *Adolf Hitler entlarvt! Die Südtirolfrage im öffentlichen Diskurs 1920 bis 1928* (Bozen: Raetia, 2023), 75–173.

18   Klaus-Peter Hoepke, *Die deutsche Rechte und der italienische Faschismus: Ein Beitrag zum Selbstverständnis und zur Politik von Gruppen und Verbänden der deutschen Rechten* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1968), 282–292; Josef Schröder, 'Die Italienreise einer brandenburgisch-pommerschen Stahlhelm-Gruppe im November 1930: Fallbeispiel für Renzettis ungeahntes Tätigsein in Deutschland,' in Josef Schröder, *Hitler und Mussolini: Aspekte der deutsch-italienischen Beziehungen, 1930–1943* (Gleichen: Muster-Schmidt, 2007), 1–82; Ángel Alcalde, *War Veterans and Fascism in Interwar Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 207–208.

were able to allude to the discrepancy and translate this conflict of interests into political disadvantage in terms of internal affairs for all organizations involved. However, a closer look at the historical contingencies of these debacles reveals that South Tyrol was only the tip of the iceberg, hinting at the intrinsic tension emanating from the incommensurability of the mutually exclusive radical nationalist and fascist horizons of mobilization.

Even in its more radical expressions, nationalism consists of a specific political behavior and doctrine oriented toward the seizure of state power and embedded in the assumption of an unchallenged existence and inviolable primacy of the nation.[19] As a radical form of nationalism, fascism elevates these assumptions to their most extreme and violent consequences, while at the same time developing an even more fundamental dispositional orientation towards national (or race, or *Volk*) primacy in terms of the necessary regeneration of the nation into a new modern social order established through violent cleansing.[20] Thus, radical nationalism and fascism deploy the 'nation' as the key instrument to mobilize membership, supporters, and large sections of the public. Accordingly, the core effect of this alleged national primacy, extending far beyond a mere projection, consists of aggregating and directing collective political (and violent) action towards the instrumental aim of an eventual rise to power and the subsequent cleansing transformation of society.[21]

Nevertheless, and herein lies its enormous relational limitation on a transnational stage, radical nationalist mobilization cannot amend the primacy of the nation, as the latter represents a mutually exclusive doctrine and the inalienable, practice-leading disposition in radical nationalist action. Thus, the nature of fascist mobilization, despite being a tactical necessity in domestic day-to-day politics, intrinsically excluded the possibility of a multilayered or diversified mobilization on the international stage. The open pursuit of an 'inter-national radical nationalism' outside of state-backed action, hence, represented first and foremost a liability for the success of the mobilization of adherents within any domestic nationalist milieu with its self-referring attitudes and logics. This relational inhibition can be seen as a crucial dimension among the already

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19   John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 1–15; M. Rainer Lepsius, 'Nation und Nationalismus in Deutschland,' in *Nationalismus in der Welt von Heute* (Geschichte und Gesellschaft, Sonderheft 8), ed. Heinrich August Winkler (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 12–27.

20   Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 13–17; Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 288–291.

21   Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 19–22.

well-known ambiguities and points of friction limiting transnational fascist interactions.[22] As an impeding element, it substantially affected cross-border fascist relationships.

Beyond the above-mentioned public affairs revolving around South Tyrol, the incommensurability between radical nationalisms becomes evident when considering empirical evidence of internationalist attempts endorsed by the Italian regime in the 1920s and the early 1930s. The motto of 'fascist universalism' and its closely related concepts, '*romanità*', '*latinità*', and '*italianità*', already point to the insurmountable centrality of the Italian nation(-state) as a final horizon in Mussolini's *Weltanschauung*—an attitude which directly translated into political action aiming at Italian hegemony among like-minded organizations and key social groups abroad.[23] The *Fasci italiani all'estero* [FIaE; Italian Fasci Abroad], the *Centro internazionale di studi sul fascismo* [CISF; International Center for Studies on Fascism] in Lausanne, and the *Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma* [CAUR; Action Committees for the Universality of Rome] represent the most frequently discussed social formations grounded in this 'universalist', viz., hegemonic, understanding.[24]

Due to their shared imprinting, the development of FIaE, CISF, and CAUR is best suited to exemplify the key features of fascist internationalism—as opposed to transnationalism—in terms of a specific range of relational settings for international statal governance under fascist rule.[25] First, they were closely tied to a nation-state apparatus with its financial, organizational, and information resources. This means that they maintained a relevant proximity to the ver-

22 Arnd Bauerkämper, 'Between Cooperation and Conflict: Perspectives of Historical Research on Transnational Fascism,' in *Fascism without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, eds. Arnd Bauerkämper and Gregorz Rossoliński-Liebe (New York: Berghahn, 2017), 355–361.

23 Aristotle Kallis, 'From CAUR to EUR: Italian Fascism, the "Myth of Rome" and the Pursuit of International Primacy,' *Patterns of Prejudice* 50, no. 4–5 (2016), 364.

24 Michael A. Ledeen, *Universal Fascism: The Theory and Practice of the Fascist International, 1928–1936* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1972), 64–132; Gisella Longo, 'I tentativi per la costituzione di un'internazionale fascista: Gli incontri di Amsterdam e Montreux attraverso i verbali delle riunioni,' *Storia contemporanea* 27, no. 3 (1996): 475–567; Luca de Caprariis, '"Fascism for Export"? The Rise and Eclipse of the Fasci Italiani all'Estero,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 2 (2000): 151–183; Beate Scholz, 'Italienischer Faschismus als "Export"-Artikel (1927–1935): Ideologische und organisatorische Ansätze zur Verbreitung des Faschismus im Ausland' (PhD diss., University of Trier, 2001), 148–206, 287–346; Marco Cuzzi, 'Il Centro internazionale di studi sul fascismo di Losanna,' *Nuova storia contemporanea* 19, no. 3 (2015): 81–107.

25 This definition follows Madeleine Herren, 'Fascist Internationalism,' in *Internationalism: A Twentieth-Century History*, eds. Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 191–212.

tices of the regime and, accordingly, that their actions had a high chance to be subjected to more or less direct influence by key governmental actors. Second, they were organizations structured along a formal and functionally drafted rationale. This implies an internally shared horizon of action informing individuals' interactions and a clearer distinction between members and externals. Third, this organizational feature hints at the attempt to produce a consistent and lasting medium and long-term impact. Thus, internationalist formations aimed at establishing sustained, stable structures which would be able to exert influence beyond the immediate contingency of their emergence. Fourth and finally, these organizations instrumentally utilized their public appearances as a catalyst to focus attention, mobilize consent, and gain propagandistic advantages.

Through their proximity to the nation-state, clear organizational structure, attempts to create a lasting impact, and publicity, internationalist-universalist formations under a fascist or radical nationalist regime acted within a clearly formalized framework of reference. This explains why fascist internationalism has successfully served as a key category to analyze relationships between authoritarian and fascist regimes during the 1930s and 1940s. At the same time, fascist internationalism's key features utterly dissonate with the intrinsic incommensurability of radical nationalisms. Being sponsored by the regime and having a clear membership profile and operative mandate over time, universalistic organizations were impacted the most by the conflicting worldviews and national allegiances. It is evident here that fascist internationalism could not offer any shared platform, supranational mobilization, or intrinsically common space for interaction as could, for example, its socialist or liberal counterparts.[26] Furthermore, as the above-mentioned scandals around the South Tyrol question demonstrate, acting within liberal public opinion, well outside of the propagandist backing of an authoritarian regime, allowed for incongruences, conflicts, and divergences to produce reverberations intense enough to threaten or even disrupt cross-border efforts. Fascist internationalism reached

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26   Aristotle Kallis, 'From CAUR to EUR,' 364. On the varieties of socialist, communist, and liberal internationalism and their efficacy in producing a supra-national shared horizon since the nineteenth century, see Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013), 11–78; Lars T. Lih, 'Bolshevik Roots of International Communism,' in *The Cambridge History of Communism, Vol. 1: World Revolution and Socialism in One Country, 1917–1941*, eds. Silvio Pons and Stephen A. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 142–165; Patrizia Dogliani, 'The Fate of Socialist Internationalism,' in *Internationalism: A Twentieth-Century History*, eds. Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 38–60.

its limits as soon as it attempted to cross the thin red line drawn by national primacy or well-concerted regime action or support.

Beyond Incommensurability: Informal Networking between Radical Nationalist Milieux

It is no coincidence that recent scholarship has aimed at non-institutional contact spaces and informal fields of action as determining elements for the study of interwar fascisms across borders.[27] The reason for this is both method-ological and empirical. On the one hand, transnational history is epistemi-cally grounded in the attempt to transcend the analytical framework of the nation-state. On the other hand, this implies looking beyond institutional stakeholders and official functionaries—such as members of governmental or administrative bodies, ministries or agencies, diplomats, and bureaucratic functionaries—acting within a formally transmitted mandate.[28] Thus, it is by looking below the largely institutionalized dimension of the nation-state that the grey zones of transnational fascist interaction can be observed, where an underworld of opaque figures and social aggregates struggled to obtain the best possible outcome in their attempts to draw connections and retain influence between different organizations.

In this liminal zone, the primacy of domestic politics and affairs internal to specific milieux overlapped with international power relations and res-onated with organizational asymmetries as well as with individual needs and ambitions. The thickening of these multiple layers of contingency made it impossible for internationalist practices and organizations with their vertical structure and public appeal to adapt to rapidly evolving developments. Thus, beside the incommensurability of radical nationalisms, incongruencies on the international, domestic, organizational, and individual level represented a fur-

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27   For an overview, see Ángel Alcalde, 'The Transnational Consensus: Fascism and Nazism in Current Research,' *Contemporary European History* 29, no. 2 (2020): 243–252; Constantin Iordachi, 'From "Generic" to "Real-Existing" Fascism: Towards a New Transnational and Historical-Comparative Agenda in Fascism Studies,' in *Beyond the Fascist Century: Essays in Honour of Roger Griffin*, eds. Constantin Iordachi and Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Pal-grave Macmillan, 2020), 283–307.

28   Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Transnationale Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Erweiterung oder Alterna-tive?,' *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27, no. 3 (2001): 464–479; Margrit Pernau, *Transnationale Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 36–84; Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013), 36–67.

ther obstacle on the way toward cross-border cooperation. In particular, fascist transnationalism and networking were deeply conditioned by the asynchronous development of movements and regimes in different nation-states. While Italian fascism had already established and, after the turn of 1924–1925, increasingly stabilized its power base, German-speaking movements remained involved in a process of rooting within democratic political systems until the late 1920s, when changing domestic conditions eventually favored more serious attempts to seize power.[29] For the most part, interactions were the result of small-group or individual actions from below and received only minor, if any, direct steering from organizational hierarchies. In other words, local and international developments overlapped with group dynamics and were embedded within individual interaction without collective guidance or centralized leadership: fascist transnationalism consisted of informal, ephemeral, highly adaptive, and decentered relational processes taking the form of networks.

Before diving deeper into these processes, it is necessary to first understand the social environments within and between which they unfolded. Giving the fluid nature of these relationships, they must essentially be read from a processual and praxeological viewpoint. This means understanding fascism as a process embedded into practices pursuing the establishment of a projected and radicalizing nationalist social order by means of violence. In this sense, the normative projection of a cleansed and reborn community (be it framed as a nation, race, or *Volk*) represented an elusive vanishing point allowing movements and regimes to radicalize toward violent mobilization (be it paramilitary, police, warfare, or genocidal oriented) or even, in some cases, to deescalate attitudes and actions.[30]

Seen through this lens, fascist transnationalism emerges as a peculiar type of cross-border networking process embodied in relational practices and aiming at the mediation between local milieux which were rooted in otherwise mutually exclusive national, racial, and organizational mobilizations. Analyzing fascist transnationalism in its specific setting of relational practices facilitates a

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29   Robert O. Paxton, 'The Five Stages of Fascism,' *Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 1 (1998): 1–23, offers with his well-known five-stage-model (creation, rooting, acquisition of power, exercise of power, radicalization or entropy) a conceptual background to better grasp this chronological asymmetry in processual terms.

30   Sven Reichardt, *Faschistische Kapfbünde: Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im italienischen Squadrismus und in der deutschen SA*, 2nd ed. (Vienna: Böhlau, 2009), esp. 22–26; Sven Reichardt, 'Radikalisierung: Zeithistorische Anmerkungen zu einem aktuellen Begriff,' *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. 1 (2017): 68–91; Mann, *Fascists*, 13–17; Wolfgang Schieder, 'Faschismus,' in *Fischer Lexikon Geschichte*, ed. Richard van Dülmen (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), 199–221; Paxton, 'The Five Stages of Fascism,' esp. 10–11.

privileged perspective on the processual transformation of fascist entanglements in terms of the different (dis-)continuities and phases they underwent throughout their historical development. At the same time, this perspective grasps transnational activities as the embodied doings of historical actors who merged imaginaries, experiences, intentions, interests, social background, and actions into a multifaceted interplay. In this light, the practices constituting fascist transnationalism via networking can only be observed against the backdrop of their contingent, fluid, and evolving socio-cultural contexts.

For this reason, the actors' sociopolitical background plays a crucial role. For the specific case study discussed below, the different radical nationalist milieux active in the Weimar Republic, the First Austrian Republic, and the fascist Kingdom of Italy during the long 1920s formed the relevant social environment. The concept 'milieu' defines a social context produced by actors around shared cultural orientations.[31] Within the framework of transnational fascism, these milieux consisted of different social surroundings revolving around an exclusive nationalist horizon and its radical political implementation within the scope of the three nation-states. By looking at the disposition toward self-asserted national belonging in terms of a social ordering principle, it is possible to clearly distinguish between German-speaking and Italian milieux as mutually exclusive. Regarding German-Austrian nationalism, the matter was more complex. Given that a widely shared *Großdeutsch* disposition constituted a key element across (and beyond) nationalist circles of both the Weimar Republic and First Austrian Republics, at least until the ascent of the Austrian branch of the NSDAP since early 1932,[32] both German-speaking milieux can be distinguished against the backdrop of a different local framework of political action determined by separate nation-state entities of reference.

Beyond their mutually exclusive nationalist mobilizations, the potential for radicalization in all three milieux was given by the aim of reorganizing modern society as an internationally powerful as well as socio-culturally or politically homogeneous nation, race or *Volk*. Radical nationalism is distinguished from

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31   M. Rainer Lepsius, 'Parteiensystem und Sozialstruktur: Zum Problem der Demokratisierung der deutschen Gesellschaft,' in M. Rainer Lepsius, *Demokratie in Deutschland: Soziologisch-historische Konstellationsanalysen—Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 25–50.

32   Erin R. Hochmann, 'Ein Volk, ein Reich, eine Republik: Großdeutsch Nationalism and Democratic Politics in the Weimar and First Austrian Republics,' *German History* 32, no. 1 (2014): 29–52; Julie Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism and the Austrofascist State, 1933–1938* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 30–38; Edmondson, *The Heimwehr*, 16.

other forms of nationalism by its recourse to extreme practices locating violent action in the middle of political activity. Thus, it is 'radical' in that it is both 'uncompromising' and, first and foremost, subject to a process of dispositional and practical radicalization.[33] Accordingly, radical nationalist milieux constituted larger sociocultural environments in which, beside fascist organizations, a diverse range of other groups, already radical in their dispositions but not immediately practicing full-scale violent action, were active before and after the interwar period. In these broader sociocultural contexts, during the interwar years, fascism offered a peculiarly extreme set of practices which enabled it to become predominant within the larger local milieu due to its outstanding potential for radicalization. At the same time, this predominance was crucial for the diffusion of the fascist model and the subsequent emergence of authoritarian hybrid systems in the interwar years.[34]

To overcome the obstacles posed by diverging or even conflicting mobilizations and domestic political interests between the different milieux, actors resorted to a broad range of transnational practices—from mobility to inter-organizational communication via militarist symbolism and language, from the organization of shared gatherings to the sharing of intelligence information—which, despite not being peculiarly fascist *per se*, were put into action to serve the distinct political goal of informal networking. The shared arena traced by these informal, low-profile ties was the space of action through which actors could solve or bypass conflicts in a discreet manner away from international observers, political adversaries, and public opinion. Furthermore, beside discretion, the key factor uniting all practices and interactions under a shared focal point—even within the decentered horizon of networking—was represented by the mutual goal of a deeper connection between the milieux. This purpose-oriented view reflects the fact that for the most part these transnational interactions between organizations at various levels, far from being focused on ideological exchange, were particularly driven by realpolitikal needs and goal-oriented interaction: the instrumental, often opportunistic value, rather than a shared sense of belonging or ideological affinity, was the privileged rationale of transnational fascist networking. This forced actors to permanently re-evaluate their position within the network and constantly negotiate among their ties, resources, and partners according to the specific situation at hand.

33　Reichardt, 'Radikalisierung: Zeithistorische Anmerkungen,' 70–71, 78–88.

34　Aristotle Kallis, 'The "Fascist Effect": On the Dynamics of Hybridization in Inter-War Europe,' in: *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, eds. António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 13–41.

Tracing the Networking Process: Four Stages of Historical Development, 1918–1933/34

Both the necessity of constant re-negotiation and the variety of practices aimed at establishing closer cooperation become evident when considering the broad spectrum of organizations involved in the interlinking of the three milieux. While the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* [PNF; National Fascist Party] and the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* [NSDAP; National Socialist German Workers' Party] are commonly regarded as the two main political agents behind the so-called 'core fascist cases',[35] their mutual relationships made up only a section of the broader interactions operating across the three countries and thickening, despite early contacts, only after the first electoral success of Hitler's party in September 1930. Up to that date, the major German partner organizations for the PNF had been the *Stahlhelm* and, in lower measure, the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* [DNVP; German National People's Party].[36] Before the broader ascent of the NSDAP and its paramilitary *Sturmabteilung* (SA) in the aftermath of the Great Depression, the DNVP and its contiguous veteran league represented the two major organizations of the German nationalist milieu with positions—ideologically ranging from antisemitic and *völkisch* racism to revanchism and national-conservatism—which, although never completely shifting to full-scale violent action, increasingly radicalized against the democratic order during the second half of the 1920s.[37] The Austrian milieu, revolving around the paramilitary *Heimwehren* and their close ties with the national-conservative CSP, show a clear tendency toward radicalization during the same period. This disposition was eventually unleashed in reaction to the Viennese riots on 15 July 1927, when a spontaneous left-wing protest against the acquittal

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35   For a critique of the concept, see Roger Griffin, 'Decentering Comparative Fascist Studies,' *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 4, no. 2 (2015): 103–118, https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00402003; Iordachi, 'From "Generic" to "Real-Existing" Fascism', 295–296.

36   Hoepke, *Die deutsche Rechte und der italienische Faschismus*, 241–303; Hans Woller, 'Machtpolitisches Kalkül oder ideologische Affinität? Zur Frage des Verhältnisses zwischen Mussolini und Hitler 1933,' in *Der Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Ideologie und Herrschaft*, eds. Wolfgang Benz, Hellmuth Auerbach and Hermann Graml (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1993), 42–63; Wolfgang Schieder, 'Das italienische Experiment: Der Faschismus als Vorbild in der Krise der Weimarer Republik,' *Historische Zeitschrift* 262, no. 1 (1996): 73–125.

37   Thomas Mergel, 'Das Scheitern des deutschen Tory-Konservatismus: Die Umformung der DNVP zu einer rechtsradikalen Partei 1928–1932,' *Historische Zeitschrift* 276, no. 1 (2003): 323–368; Dennis Werberg, *Der Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten: Eine Veteranenorganisation und ihr Verhältnis zum Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023), 141–226; Dirk Schumann, *Politische Gewalt in der Weimarer Republik 1918–1933: Kampf um die Straße und Furcht vor dem Bürgerkrieg* (Essen: Klartext, 2001), 220–228.

of two right-wingers accused of murdering two people, accompanied by strikes and fueled by harsh and mismanaged police intervention, escalated into deadly clashes and the Palace of Justice Fire.[38]

The *Stahlhelm*, DNVP, NSDAP, *Heimwehren*, and PNF can all be regarded as central aggregators and mobilizers within their respective sociocultural surroundings. Moreover, with opportunistic or realpolitik stances being a key factor in mutual recognition and cross-border cooperation, any milieu prominence and national political weight enabled established groups to accumulate a higher degree of contacts abroad. At the same time, prominent groups and their leaderships could reach neither monopolistic control nor a central leading influence on networking activities which were largely based on decentralized, individual initiatives and constantly evolved and re-arranged according to local and international contingencies. Besides key organizations, interlinking proceeded as much through a hotchpotch of loosely related groups, clubs, cultural associations, (para-)statal agencies, individual brokers, and external supporters. The analysis of this trilateral web of constantly evolving relationships allows for a first, processual description of fascist transnationalism in its development over time. By focusing on the interplay between the changing international climate, the domestic political and milieu specific dynamics, the evolving networking practices, and the eventual outcomes of the interaction, it is thus possible to distinguish four specific stages of networking: impulse, convergence, zenith, and disruption.

The outcomes of the First World War—i.e., the defeat of the central powers, the Paris Peace Conference, and the allied occupations and control commission missions throughout central and eastern Europe—were the elements that crucially shaped the impulse stage (1918–1923). Locally, this entailed a high degree of mobilization for radical nationalist milieux north and south of the Alps. Revolutionary outbreaks and striking efforts from the left were confronted with increasingly rampant counter-revolutionary activities fueled both by veterans and new forms of violent political mobilization.[39] Networking itself started

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38   Gerhard Botz, *Gewalt in der Politik: Attentate, Zusammenstösse, Putschversuche, Unruhen in Österreich 1918 bis 1938*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1983), 141–186; Edmondson, *The Heimwehr*, 49–69; Wiltschegg, *Die Heimwehr*, 40–43.

39   Robert Gerwarth, 'Fighting the Red Beast: Counter-Revolutionary Violence in the Defeated States of Central Europe,' in *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, eds. Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 52–71; Matteo Millan, 'From "State Protection" to "Private Defence": Strikebreaking, Civilian Armed Mobilisation and the Rise of Italian Fascism,' in *Corporate Policing, Yellow Unionism, and Strikebreaking, 1890–1930: In Defence of Freedom*, eds. Matteo Millan and Alessandro Saluppo (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 242–258.

in the early 1920s, mostly on a small, individual scale, through single actors undergoing early cross-border experiences characterized by a high degree of transnational mobility.[40] Fascist accession to power in Italy accelerated mutual interest with the German far right by establishing the PNF as a role model.[41] At the same time, this growing interest in direct contacts was only a further step along the already ongoing process of early Bavarian reception of the Italian case as channeled through press reports since 1920–1921 and involving, in particular, NSDAP circles.[42] The Austrian milieu, however, maintained exclusive ties with its German counterparts of the Bavarian *Einwohnerwehren* [Citizens' Guards] and openly rejected Italian fascism.[43] In strong continuity with its war experience, the *Heimwehren* could not overcome the loss of South Tyrol and its perception of Italian nationalist forces as a threatening enemy.[44] Fully developed triangular relationships among the three milieux had yet to emerge due to the lack of opportunities on the Austrian-Italian side, while individual mediation on the German-Italian front never overcame the framework of single ad-hoc missions, as in the cases of Kurt Lüdecke, Luigi Capello, and Leo Negrelli.[45] Similarly unsuccessful or short-lived contacts during this early stage were attempted on the German-Austrian side of the entanglement. Besides Pabst, German officer Max Bauer failed to establish himself and his mentor, Erich Ludendorff, as a partner in the eyes of the *Heimwehren*. At the same time,

40   Alan Cassels, 'Mussolini and German Nationalism 1922–1925,' *Journal of Modern History* 35, no. 2 (1963): 37–57; Alan Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 162–164; Hoepke, *Die deutsche Rechte und der italienische Fascismus*, 271–276; Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini e Hitler: I rapporti segreti 1922–1933* (Rome: Laterza, 2013); Harold J. Gordon, *Hitler and the Beer Hall Putsch* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 474–475; Schieder, *Adolf Hitler: Politischer Zauberlehrling*, 1–63.

41   Schieder, 'Das italienische Experiment,' 78–79; Schieder, *Adolf Hitler: Politischer Zauberlehrling*, 17–27.

42   Ángel Alcalde, 'Towards Transnational Fascism: German Perceptions of Mussolini's Fascists and the Early NSDAP,' *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 19, no. 2 (2018): 176–195; Claire Lorenzelli, 'Un Mussolini munichois? Construction et utilisation du culte du "Duce" dans différents cercles de sociabilité bavarois (1922–1943),' *Laboratoire italien: Politique et société* 30 (2023): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.4000/laboratoireitalien.10074.

43   Horst G.W. Nußer, *Konservative Wehrverbände in Bayern, Preußen und Österreich 1918–1933, Bd. 1* (München: Nusser, 1973), 153–172, 223–233; Ludger Rape, *Die österreichischen Heimwehren und die bayerische Rechte 1920–1923* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1977), 62–111, 229–386.

44   Verena Lösch, 'Die Geschichte der Tiroler Heimatwehr von ihren Anfängen bis zum Korneuburger Eid (1920–1930)' (PhD diss., University of Innsbruck, 1986), 172–176.

45   De Felice, *Mussolini e Hitler*, 11–18, 37–40; Cassels, 'Mussolini and German Nationalism,' 145, 147–149; Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, 146–174; Hoepke, *Die deutsche Rechte und der italienische* Faschismus, 160–164, 272–274, 304–308.

Otto Pittinger's *Einwohnerwehren*, which pursued plans for a united Bavarian-Austrian paramilitary leadership as opposed to Ludendorff, eventually also had to abandon their plans.[46]

The following, relatively static period (1923–1927) saw the emergence of a more positive mutual awareness. Following hyperinflation, the Ruhr occupation, and the Hitler-Ludendorff Putsch in 1923, the consolidation of the Weimar Republic between 1924 and 1929[47] was paralleled by the growing post-revolutionary internal stabilization of the First Austrian Republic from 1921 to 1927.[48] Simultaneously, in the aftermath of the Matteotti assassination crisis, the Italian regime enhanced its dictatorial rule from early 1925 onwards.[49] For local radical nationalist milieux, this period implied a reorientation following their emergence from the turmoil of the long postwar years. The DNVP and *Stahlhelm* soon became reference points of the German right: the first, by representing an average of approximately 15 to 20 per cent of the electorate in all *Reichstag* elections between 1920 and 1928;[50] the second, through a growth in structures and membership which eventually made it the largest German right-wing paramilitary group until the emergence of the SA as a mass militia.[51] By 1926, the *Heimwehren* eventually organized themselves as a federation of regional groups under Steidle's leadership.[52] Accordingly, networking proceeded at a slower pace and was primarily grounded in the local collection of information—mostly through the press, publications, and expert circles—concerning those organizations recognized as politically close on the international stage. In absolute terms, relationships did not accelerate or thicken; but this period laid the basis for the long-term recognition of potential partners abroad. It was, for example, during these years that later key brokering figures, such as Giuseppe Renzetti in Germany, Pabst in Austria, and Philipp von Hes-

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46 Adolf Vogt, *Oberst Max Bauer: Generalstabsoffizier im Zwielicht 1869–1929* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1974), 340–359; Bruno Thoss, *Der Ludendorff-Kreis 1919–1923: München als Zentrum der mitteleuropäischen Gegenrevolution zwischen Revolution und Hitler-Putsch* (Munich: Stadtarchiv München, 1978), 197–216; Rape, *Die österreichischen Heimwehren und die bayerische Rechte*, 242–376; Edmondson, *The Heimwehr*, 28–32; Wiltschegg, *Die Heimwehr*, 35.

47 Heinrich August Winkler, *Weimar 1918–1933: Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2018) 244–374; Schumann, *Politische Gewalt in der Weimarer Republik*, 203–269.

48 Rauchensteiner, *Unter Beobachtung*, 69–88; Botz, *Gewalt in der Politik*, 87–141.

49 Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power*, 237–304.

50 Maik Ohnezeit, *Zwischen 'schärfster Opposition' und dem 'Willen zur Macht': Die Deutschnationale Volkspartei (DNVP) in der Weimarer Republik 1918–1928* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2011).

51 Werberg, *Der Stahlhelm*, 15.

52 Lösch, *Die Geschichte der Tiroler Heimatwehr*, 44.

sen in Italy, managed to eventually establish themselves as agents within their respective foreign milieux.[53]

The thickening of the contacts and the zenith of the networking process (1927–1933) were facilitated by a climate of growing crisis north of the Alpine watershed. The Vienna Palace of Justice Fire in July 1927 marked a first turning point for the radicalization of the *Heimwehren*, which soon tailored a close relationship with Italian fascism so as to obtain secret armament and economic support. Starting from 1928, through the mediation of the right-wing Hungarian government of István Bethlen and some trusted channels with the Austrian authorities and *Heimwehren* leadership in Vienna and Innsbruck, such as Giacinto Auriti, Eugenio Monreale, and Giulio Ricciardi, the Italian regime managed to provide the Austrian paramilitaries with significant financial support aimed at acquiring technical equipment and weapons in the amount of several hundred thousand shillings.[54] Shortly afterwards, the Great Depression eroded social and political stability in the Weimar Republic as well.[55] The electoral success of the NSDAP in September 1930, a further major turning point, added a new, central, and disrupting actor to the framework. Furthermore, from the late 1920s, the Italian regime had been putting into action its internationalist attempts to gain new prestige and influence abroad.[56] In 1927, it tailored the *Carta del lavoro* as a cornerstone of its global reception as a model for the

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53   Hoepke, *Die deutsche Rechte und der italienische Faschismus*, 307–311; De Felice, *Mussolini e Hitler*, 42–43; Federico Niglia, 'Il maggiore Roma-Berlino: L'attività di collegamento di Giuseppe Renzetti fra Mussolini e Hitler,' *Nuova storia contempoanea* 6, no. 4 (2002): 69–81; Wolfgang Schieder, 'Faschismus im politischen Transfer: Giuseppe Renzetti als faschistischer Propagandist und Geheimagent in Berlin 1922–1941,' in *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland: Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich*, eds. Sven Reichardt and Armin Nolzen (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 28–58, esp. 37–39; Stefan Laffin, 'Gaining a Foothold in the Weimar Republic: Giuseppe Renzetti's Activities in the Years 1925–1927,' *Storicamente* 13 (2017): 1–38, https://doi.org/10.12977/stor664.

54   Kerekes, *Abenddämmerung einer Demokratie*, 9–79; Enzo Collotti, 'Fascismo e Heimwehren: La lotta antisocialista nella crisi della prima repubblica austriaca,' *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 12, no. 3 (1983): 301–337; R. John Rath, 'The Deterioration of Democracy in Austria,' *Austrian History Yearbook* 27 (1996): 213–259; Federico Scarano, *Mussolini e la Repubblica di Weimar: Le relazioni diplomatiche tra Italia e Germania dal 1927 al 1933* (Naples: Giannini, 1996), 62–63; Ibolya Murber, 'Anfänge des Faschismus in Österreich: Ungarische Unterstützung für die österreichischen Heimwehren in den späten 1920er Jahren,' *Öt Kontinens* 2 (2016): 129–144; Federico Niglia, 'Mussolini, Dolfuss e i nazionalisti austriaci: La politica estera italiana in Austria nei rapporti di Morreale,' *Nuova storia contemporanea* 7, no. 1 (2003): 63–79.

55   Winkler, *Weimar 1918–1933*, 375–443; Schumann, *Politische Gewalt in der Weimarer Republik*, 271–301.

56   Albanese, 'Non solo propaganda,' 317–322.

reorganization of labor relationships through authoritarian corporatism.[57] It was during this stage that the spectrum of networking practices reached its broadest range. Mobility, meetings, and intelligence exchange were increasingly accompanied by the founding of international study groups and interest clubs, the staging of shared gatherings and ceremonies, an exchange of pamphlets and literature, invitations to party gatherings and events, presentations during thematic evenings, and the like.[58] Both in terms of density of contacts and their practical variety, this period represented the climax of the networking process. Along with personnel and money, practices and ideas also experienced the highest level of agility between Italy and German-speaking Europe. In all milieux, corporatism developed into a shared projection suited to synchronize visions of national rebirth.[59] At the same time, the practice of performing large, publicly staged paramilitary marches diffused as a subversive model akin to the one of the March on Rome—the March of the *Heimwehren* in Wiener Neustadt (October 1928), the Pfrimer Putsch in Styria (September 1931) and the large SA gathering and clashes in Braunschweig (October 1931) being the most prominent examples.[60]

Fascist accession to power in Germany and Austria, though epitomizing this dynamic, ushered in the eventual phase of disruption of all informal networking activities (1933–1934). In both countries, the political success and admission of fascists to state infrastructure shifted the scope of action from informal ties to diplomatic exchange.[61] At the same time, this implied a reconfiguration of

57   Matteo Pasetti, 'The Fascist Labor Charter and its Transnational Spread,' in *Corporatism and Fascism: The Corporatist Wave in Europe*, ed. António Costa Pinto (London: Routledge, 2017), 60–77.

58   Hoepke, *Die deutsche Rechte und der italienische Faschismus*, 276–303, 314–324; Hans Woller, *Machtpolitisches Kalkül*, 50–61; Manfred Wichmann, Waldemar Pabst und *die Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus 1931–1934* (Berlin: Edition Organon, 2013), 59–118; Wolfgang Schieder, *Mythos Mussolini: Deutsche in Audienz beim Duce* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2013), 60–68, 164–169, 360–366; Wolfgang Schieder, 'Faschismus im politischen Transfer,' 42–45; Kerekes, *Abenddämmerung einer Demokratie*, 9–120; Edmondson, *The Heimwehr*, 71–77; De Felice, *Mussolini e Hitler*, 135–139, 175–182; Lothar Höbelt, 'Italien und die Heimwehr 1928–1934,' in *Italien und Österreich im Mitteleuropa der Zwischenkriegszeit*, eds. Maddalena Guiotto and Helmut Wohnout (Vienna: Böhlau, 2018), 349–370.

59   Daniele Toro, 'Synchronizing Projections: Corporatism in Transnational Radical Nationalism across Germany, Austria, and Italy, 1925–1934,' *Laboratoire italien: Politique et societé* 31 (2023), forthcoming.

60   Daniele Toro, 'From the Putsch to the March: The "March on Rome" as a Practice Model in German-Speaking Europe,' in *The Global Impact of the March on Rome*, ed. Giulia Albanese (Abingdon: Routledge, 2024), forthcoming.

61   Petersen, *Hitler-Mussolini*, 112–392; Helmut Wohnout, 'Italien und der politische Systemwechsel in Österreich 1933/34,' in *Italien und Österreich im Mitteleuropa der Zwischen-*

power relationships within local radical nationalist milieux which eventually led to the dissolution of the organizational spectrum thus far involved in cross-border interactions. In Germany, the DNVP, which was directly involved in the Hitler cabinet through its leader, Alfred Hugenberg (Economy and Agriculture Minister for less than three months), as well as through minor ministerial seats, was eventually dissolved in June 1933.[62] The *Stahlhelm*, also present in the cabinet with its leader Franz Seldte (Labor Minister until 1945), was first subdivided and then dissolved within the SA between 1933 and 1935.[63] The meeting between Hitler and Mussolini in Venice in June 1934, though far from dissolving diplomatic tensions, publicly established a first, direct, and personal contact between the leaders of both fascist regimes,[64] while the purge of the SA in June and July 1934, which coincidentally led to Pabst's arrest, also signed the final act of the subjugation of the German milieu under Hitler's centralized rule.[65] Similarly, the year 1934 also marked a radical change in the framing conditions for the Austrian milieu. The suppression of the last Austrian Social Democratic resistance in February, the ratification of the Rome Protocols between Mussolini, Dollfuß, and the Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös in March, the implementation of the new Austrofascist constitution in May, and the failed Nazi putsch attempt involving the assassination of Dollfuß in July set the stage, both in domestic and diplomatic terms, for a convergence between Italy and the consolidated Austrian regime against Nazi annexationist aspirations.[66] The fierce competition within the Austrian milieu against the local branch of the NSDAP, which had been unfolding since early 1932, had already led to the ban of the Nazi organization in Austria in June 1933.[67] Shortly after, the *Heimwehren*

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kriegszeit, eds. Maddalena Guiotto and Helmut Wohnout (Vienna: Böhlau, 2018), 371–422; Nils Fehlhaber, *Netzwerke der 'Achse Berlin-Rom': Die Zusammenarbeit faschistischer und nationalsozialistischer Führungseliten 1933–1943* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2019), 72–85, 141–148.

62   Friedrich Freiherr Hiller von Gaertringen, 'Die Deutschnationale Volkspartei,' in *Das Ende der Parteien* 1933, eds. Erich Matthias and Rudolf Morsey (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1960), 543–652.

63   Werberg, *Der Stahlhelm*, 227–301.

64   Petersen, *Hitler-Mussolini*, 344–361.

65   Eleanor Hancock, 'The Purge of the SA Reconsidered: "An Old Putschist Trick"?,' *Central European History* 44, no. 4 (2011): 669–683.

66   Emmerich Tálos and Florian Wenninger, *Das austrofaschistische Österreich 1933–1938* (Vienna: LIT, 2017), 15–33; Richard Schober, *Der österreichische 'Ständestaat' und die europäischen Mächte: Von der Machtübernahme Hitlers zum Juliabkommen (1933–1936)* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2021), 201–433.

67   Tálos and Wenninger, *Das austrofaschistische Österreich*, 91–92; Winfried G. Garscha, 'Nationalsozialisten in Österreich 1933–1938,' in *Austrofaschismus: Politik, Ökonomie, Kul-*

were dissolved within the single-party system of the *Vaterländische Front* [VF; Fatherland Front], while its leadership maintained local and federal prestige roles in the regime under Dollfuß' successor Schuschnigg.[68] Thus, for all three milieux, and particularly for Germany and Austria, the year 1934 marked the end of networking activities and an eventual shift toward state-backed and institutionalized forms of interaction.

Fascist Transnationalism: An Outlook

The result of these highly contingent interactions and practices was a multi-faceted web of relationships beyond the framework of the nation-state. Along its ties, (inter-)national politics and societal developments resonated with the experiences, dispositions, goals, needs, and expectations of groups and individual actors interacting over time. The entanglement resulting from these interactions was performed via a highly unstable social structure—a transnational network—which, by virtue of its instability, was able to adapt and react to the different and rapidly evolving sociopolitical milieux it connected across borders. Thus, networking was simultaneously a product and a driving force of fascist and radical nationalist milieux and reacted in accordance with their respective domestic needs. These needs and (often conflicting) interests were continuously negotiated between actors struggling for the best possible position within the network. At the same time, the centrality of realpolitikal, opportunistic interests pivoted individual and collective action toward a field within which interaction was possible thanks to continuous renegotiations of specific needs and despite any diverging purposes or mutually exclusive national mobilization.

By observing fascist transnationalism as a system of social relations deeply grounded within its sociohistorical context and always on the verge of collapsing, it is possible to recognize some of its key characteristics: first and foremost, an informal nature, with its interactions neither formally nor institutionally enabled by a nation-state apparatus, a government, or a vertical organization; second, a situational character grounded in its dependency on the different milieu-specific, domestic contingencies, which made it highly sensitive to changes and, at the same time, highly capable of developing responses

tur 1933–1938, eds. Emmerich Tálos and Wolfgang Neugebauer, 7th ed. (Vienna: LIT, 2014), 99–119.

68   Wiltschegg, *Die Heimwehren*, 78–99; Tálos and Wenninger, *Das austrofaschistische Österreich*, 61–73.

accordingly; third, an ephemeral structure due to the fact that its interactions and power relationships continuously evolved over time, thus steadily keeping its relational structure out of balance; and finally, an aversion towards publicity and an overall tendency to maintain a low profile concerning any ties or activities.

The agents and groups (inter-)acting within the network received and reproduced these properties through the specific practices they performed. These characteristics make fascist transnationalism a peculiar form of interaction beyond the framework of the nation-state in the long 1920s, and it must be distinguished from the concept of fascist internationalism with its proximity to the nation-state, its vertical structure, its hegemonic ambition to create a lasting impact, and its propagandistic function and public appeal. At the same time, the historical development of fascist transnationalism and internationalism shows that both types of interaction converged in some cases despite their different qualities, thus producing complex overlaps. This was the case, for example, when the distinction between state diplomatic and informal action was blurred; when transnational actors reached out to gain support or influence from institutionalized internationalist organizations; or even when members of fascist governments deployed informal cross-border relationships to strengthen their position both internationally and within their own polycratic regimes.[69]

The list of exceptions and nuances could be longer, and there is no need to doubt the well-known ability of historical research to constantly confront scholarship with new, atypical cases. In this sense, too, the chronological distinction suggested here between a fascist transnationalism typical of the long 1920s and the internationalism predominant during the 1930s and 1940s should be read more as an orienting categorization based on the recurrency and prevalence of practices rather than a clear-cut caesura. Fascist transnationalism clearly intensified as a specific, historically observable phenomenon with its own consistency between 1918 and 1933–1934, but both its beginning and ending are blurred and flow in and out of its immediate historical development. One could, for example, identify traces of transnationalism in informal networking practices taking place worldwide among neo-fascist groups since the early Cold War period:[70] once again, one may argue, when and where state

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69   Fehlhaber, *Netzwerke der 'Achse Berlin-Rom'*, 45–179.

70   Andrea Mammone, *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Matteo Albanese and Pablo del Hierro, *Transnational Fascism in the Twentieth Century: Spain, Italy, and the Global Neo-Fascist* Network (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Kyle Burke, *Revolutionaries for the Right: Anticommunist Internationalism and*

infrastructures became (at least partially) inaccessible, radical nationalisms made use of informal relational patterns to connect with each other.

As this last remark suggests, the notion of fascist transnationalism offered here represents an analytical model which is rooted in the reconstruction of the German-Austrian-Italian networking during the long 1920s, but can also be applied beyond the specific historical case for which its characteristic features were analyzed in the first place. All things considered, what remains is a concept describing a specific form of fascist interaction beyond the level of the nation-state and allowing for a more nuanced characterization of informal cross-border relationships as distinguished from state-backed institutional cooperation. At the same time, it enables us to look at the close interplay between these two dimensions in processual terms as an intrinsic dynamic of fascism beyond the framework of the nation-state during and after the interwar years. More generally, this perspective on fascist transnationalism makes it possible to trace the cross-border and global development of fascism closer to its multilayered historical development.

Acknowledgments

Paramilitary Warfare in the Cold War (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 2018); Pablo del Hierro, *Madrid, metrópolis (neo)fascista: Vidas secretas, rutas de escape, negocios oscuros y violencia política (1939–1982)* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2023).