



Encounters with Fascism and National Socialism in non-European Regions

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Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent. Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle Against Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011, 388 pages, ISBN 9780674047549, Price 29,99€.

Ulrike Freitag and Israel Gershoni, eds. 2011. Arab Encounters with Fascist Propaganda 1933-1945. *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 37 (3), pp. 310-450, ISSN 0340-613X, Price 20.45€.

Israel Gershoni and Götz Nordbruch, *Sympathie und Schrecken. Begegnungen mit Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus in Ägypten, 1922-1937*. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2011, 320 pages, ISBN 9783879977109, Price 32.00€.

Mario Prayer, 2010. Creative India and the World. Bengali Internationalism and Italy in the Interwar Period. In: S. Bose & K. Manjapra, eds. *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones. South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 236-259, ISBN 9780230243378, Price 74.00€.

Benjamin Zachariah, 2010. Rethinking (the Absence of) Fascism in India, c. 1922-45. In: S. Bose & K. Manjapra, eds. *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones. South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 178-209, ISBN 9780230243378, Price 74.00€.

1.

"In India there are no fascists", claimed Jawaharlal Nehru¹ in an interview with the correspondent of the *Rudé Právo*, the daily of the Communist Czech Party in July 1938. He went on explaining:



Among the hundreds of millions of Indians there is hardly a person who would sympathise with the parties of the totalitarian powers. We are very well aware of what Berlin, Rome and Tokyo want but we shall never allow the forces of our national anti-imperialist movement to be harnessed to their carriage. We shall never join such powers – not even if they would be ready to support us – because their aims are directed against democracy; they want to drown the world in blood (Nehru 1976: 92).

Anti-fascist ideas strongly influenced Nehru's political views on internal and external matters. His intellectual and personal engagement with Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany made him a staunch critic of both regimes. He continuously warned his fellow countrymen about the dangers lurking in fascist ideologies and policies. Nehru's assertion in the interview, that there were no sympathies or sympathisers with Fascism² and National Socialism in India, however, did not correspond with the historical reality; a fact Nehru was perfectly aware of. Against the background of the escalating Sudeten crisis, Nehru felt it necessary to categorically reject fascism as well as any possible overtures of Rome and Berlin by depicting India as an anti-Fascist country. At the same time by using this stance, Nehru publicised his vision of India as a country that was committed to democracy in its internal political set-up and self-determination in the field of foreign policy.

Nehru's statement signifying a complete absence of any sympathy with Fascism and National Socialism leads to the question how colonised, semi-colonised and newly independent people outside Europe perceived and engaged with fascist ideologies in the inter-war period and during the Second World War? This question also concerns the reviewed texts. On a more abstract level, his statement interrogates the understanding of fascism as a global phenomenon. While classical works seem to negate this possibility by pointing at the 'failure' of European fascism outside Europe (Payne 1987: 175), other authors advocate a more open definition of fascism that also includes movements and regimes outside of Europe, albeit without agreeing to which extent the ideological roots of fascism were based pre-eminently in Europe (Larsen 2001a; Eatwell 1992; Griffin 1991: 146-148; Kersten 2009: 526-527; Zachariah 2010: 181-182).³

Next to the debates about generic notions and ideological roots of fascism, in the last two decades research has increasingly focused on



Non-European reactions to Fascism and National Socialism (see for the Arab world a.o. Gershoni and Jankowski 2010; Nordbruch 2008; Wien 2006; see for India a. o. Delfs 2008; Flora 2008; Dächsel 2006; Casolari 2002; Bhatti and Voigt 1999; Prayer 1996).⁴ One noteworthy example is the insightful edited volume *Blind für die Geschichte* which deals with the diverse perceptions of National Socialism in the Middle East and North Africa in the 1930s and 40s, but also includes two contributions on contemporary discourses (Höpp, Wien and Wildangel 2004). In this volume, the authors analyse the extent to which public spheres were sharing Fascist and National Socialist ideologies in the Middle East and Northern Africa. By examining the modes and ways of reception, the articles contribute to a reassessment of fascism as a global phenomenon.

2.

The issues addressed in the edited volume *Blind für die Geschichte* are taken up in the monograph *Sympathie und Schrecken. Begegnungen mit Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus in Ägypten, 1922-1937* by Israel Gershoni and Götz Nordbruch and in a special journal issue *Arab Encounters with Fascist Propaganda 1933-1945* edited by Ulrike Freitag and Israel Gershoni. In both the books, the academic focus is less directed towards identifying similarities and differences between the local, that is Arab movements, and Italian Fascism and National Socialism, and more towards highlighting the public perceptions and receptions of the Italian and the German regime.

Gershoni's and Nordbruch's contribution deals with Egypt in the inter-war period. Their study is based on the monograph *Or Ba-tzel: Mizraim ve-ha-Fashiam, 1922-1937* (Light in the Shadow. Egypt and Fascism, 1922-1937) written in Hebrew by Gershoni in 1999. To contribute to the current historiographical debate focusing on the relations and encounters between Germany and the Arabic world between 1933 and 1945 (for an overview, see Wien 2010; Nordbruch 2011), the authors felt it important to publish the results of the latter book in German and to complement this translation with newer findings and theses on Egypt in the inter-war period and on the perception of Fascism and National Socialism in Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon (Gershoni and Nordbruch 2011: vii-viii). In the introduction of their book, Gershoni and Nordbruch set the stage by providing an overview of intellectual



traditions and the political and social situation in Egypt before and after the First World War. Of particular relevance to them is the description of the public sphere and the pluralistic Egyptian press as influencing factors in the process of political decision making (ibid.: 21-25). Egypt gained its formal independence from Great Britain in 1922 and yet it continued to face influences and demonstrations of power by its former colonial rulers. In the next 15 years after its independence, the country was characterised by an emerging political and intellectual pluralism. Next to parliamentary-democratic principles, which did not shape exclusively but decisively the Egyptian political culture, for some intellectuals and politicians Fascism and National Socialism became interesting models of reference (ibid.: 43-44).

The authors chronologically introduce the diverse Egyptian perceptions of the Italian and the German regime in the four main chapters, explaining in detail the prevailing political developments. The first chapter covers the period from 1922 to 1930, which was characterised by the passage of the constitution and the assertion of a constitutional-parliamentary system in Egypt. However, at the same time, Egypt faced the emergence of radical-nationalist and Islamic-populist movements and of socialist and communist groups. Against this background the chapter analyses the "discovery of Fascism" amongst members of the new *Efendiyya* (the young and educated middle class), of the *Hizb al-Ahrar al-Dusturiyyin* (the Liberal-Constitutional Party) and of the nationalist *Wafd* party. According to Gershoni and Nordbruch, the contemporary debates in regard to Italian Fascism focused on the colonial policy of Mussolini, on the idea of authoritarian rule and questions of stability and order. Italy's colonial ambitions were viewed with suspicion and the majority of the participants in the debates also rejected the authoritarian models of governance (ibid.: 49-80).

Between 1930 and 1934 Egypt underwent a severe political crisis under prime minister Isma'il Sidqi. Although being a member of the Liberal-Constitutional Party, Sidqi's style of politics was criticised by many of his contemporaries as authoritarian. During his government the parliament was dissolved and a new election law was introduced that aimed at limiting the political success of the *Wafd*. Against this background, alternative political concepts were discussed in the public sphere. Especially members of the *Efendiyya*, as Gershoni and Nordbruch show, felt disaffected with the established nationalist movements and became critical towards the idea of parliamentarianism by occasionally taking



strong recourse to supposedly Islamic-Arabic traditions (ibid.: 82-104). Certain groups belonging to the Effendiyya, for instance *Misr al-Fatat* (Young Egypt) have been often described in the literature as influenced by Fascism and National Socialism. In their analysis Gershoni and Nordbruch do not deny this characterisation as these groups did utilise the methods of paramilitary organisation and military drill to instill discipline.⁵ Yet, they also reveal the complexity by questioning this rather simplistic understanding by pointing, for instance, in the case of Young Egypt, to its militant-nationalist anti-colonialism, its explicit rejection of any cult of the leader, and its efforts to ideologically distance themselves from Germany and Italy (ibid.: 129-136).

In the second chapter, Gershoni and Nordbruch also discuss two more groups that showed appreciation towards a few aspects of Fascism and National Socialism: one the socialist intellectual and political activist Salama Musa and his entourage and second representatives of the conservative establishment including members of the royal family (ibid.: 106-129). In conclusion, the authors examine the critical voices who perceived Fascism and National Socialism as a danger to the political culture of Egypt and to those who showed a strong commitment towards democracy and peace (ibid.: 140-160). Here again, some of the chosen examples reveal the difficulty of distinctly ascribing labels such as "Fascist" or "Anti-Fascist" to participants in the public debates. This is particularly true when looking at the newspapers and journals that felt obliged towards pluralistic debates and therefore included articles and comments displaying a wide range of opinions. By introducing the case of the cultural journal *al-Hilal* the authors show the existing ambivalence. *Al-Hilal* published positive reports about the purported successes of Fascism and fascistic model as alternative to a weakened democracy (ibid.: 117-118) but at the same time, it also featured articles that clearly favoured the democratic system against authoritarian rule. Some of them critically discussed the rising anti-Semitism in National Socialist Germany (ibid.: 145-150; see also Gershoni 2004: 39-72).

The years 1935 to 1937, examined in the third chapter were marked by a renewed liberalisation of Egypt's political culture visible in the return to a constitutional-parliamentary system under a Wafd-led government. However, different political currents other than the Wafd's nationalism were still influential or in the course of time gained more popularity in the public sphere (Gershoni and Nordbruch 2011: 165-176). While the internal developments influenced Egyptian perceptions



of and reactions to Fascism and National Socialism, at the international stage, as Gershoni and Nordbruch argue, Italy's war against Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia) and the National Socialist race theories left deep repercussions in the contemporary debates. Different journals and dailies followed closely the Italian aggression and published critical or neutral articles.

The author's analysis, furthermore, reveals that this engagement led – similar to the Indian case (Framke: 2012) – to intensive debates about the League of Nations, British imperialism and questions of Egypt's defence (ibid.: 183-190, 195-199, 211-212 and 257-259). While Italy's imperialist expansionism was hardly viewed positively, articles on National Socialist Germany showed greater ambivalence. Although its race theory, Nuremberg laws, rearmament and aggressive demeanour towards other states were critically discussed, Hitler's government was praised for the successful modernisation of the country (ibid.: 190-194, 199-202, 208-210 and 265-270). According to Gershoni and Nordbruch, one influential person that vocally took side with the National Socialist race theory and anti-Semitism was again Salama Musa, who also admired the German economic and social policy (ibid.: 231-246). Finally, the fourth chapter provides a conclusion that summarises the new perspectives on the interwar period in Egypt, as well as on the Egyptian engagement with Fascism and National Socialism. Here the authors also provide a short outlook on the Egyptian receptions and interactions with Italy and Germany during the Second World War.

By using often neglected contemporary Egyptian sources comprising of newspapers and journals, academic and literary publications, the authors have accomplished their aim to place the often conflicting Egyptian voices on Fascism and National Socialism in the context of then ongoing debates. They have convincingly reconstructed the diverse intellectual and political positions that were part of the Egyptian political culture in the 1920s and 1930s. In their work, Gershoni and Nordbruch depart from analysing only debates that took place in the leading political parties by including such currents, groups and individuals, who participated in public discourses about the (future) system of society beyond the parliamentary realm. Furthermore, their study clearly shows the importance to reconstruct the developments of Egyptian positions and concepts against the background of the changing national and international context. Although their approach to analyse local engagements with Fascism and National Socialism as a reflection of the political culture of



a specific area or country is not new and has been followed earlier by both the authors themselves (Nordbruch 2008; Gershoni and Jankowski 2010), the book contributes to a better understanding of the global effects and debates about Fascism and National Socialism.

The latter assessment holds also true for the special issue of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* edited by Ulrike Freitag and Israel Gershoni dealing with Fascist and National Socialist propaganda in the Arab world. The journal issue contains five thematic contributions and an introductory article by the editors explaining why it is important in their understanding to further conduct historical research about Arab responses to Fascism and National Socialism. The politicisation of the theme, especially in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict is one reason for this; Gershoni and Freitag also point out the methodological problems connected with investigations into public opinions and into the impact of propaganda. For instance, they put forth the question of how to evaluate the influence of press discussions and radio broadcasts on their readers and listeners (Freitag and Gershoni 2011: 316-324). To facilitate future research both authors call for a closer cooperation between historians and area specialists that takes into account Arab primary sources. Such a venture might also help to answer a few open questions, one of which is "to what extent did Arabs distinguish between Fascism and National Socialism". Or, "to what extent was the adaptation of certain Nazi lines of argument a wholehearted adaptation of Nazi ideology" (ibid.: 330-331).

While the five thematic contributions do not claim to give any comprehensive answer to these latter questions, they provide new insights into our understanding of the interplay between Italian and German propaganda and its Arab perception. Peter Wien's article focuses on experiences of Arab exiles living in Germany during the Hitler regime and on their post-war views. While examining the interactions of "second row political activists and intellectuals" with the National Socialist regime and in particular their utilisation for German propaganda efforts, the author carefully scrutinises (without being apologetic) the possible reasons for their "collaboration" and points to "incoherent and contradictory" pattern of responses that were often "context-bound and driven by personal needs, desires and vanities" (ibid.: 333 and 358). The contribution of Jeffrey Herf – the only German article in the journal – deals with Arab language propaganda of the National Socialist regime during the Second World War. By analysing the hitherto seldom used primary



sources from British, American and German archives, the author sheds a different light on the collaboration between Arab exiles living in Berlin, led by Haj Amin el-Husseini, and the Hitler government in the field of print and radio propaganda. The propaganda, Herf argues, was the result of the diffusion and merging of different traditions of National Socialist and Islamist ideology, particularly in regard to anti-Jewish ideas (ibid.: 359-360 and 384).

The next two articles in the journal shift their focus from Germany to Fascist Italy. Nir Arielli examines the three forces that decisively and at times in contradicting ways determined the Middle Eastern policy of Mussolini's regime. The author traces the changes in Italy's policy towards the Middle East by examining the relationship between ideology, foreign policy and colonial considerations. Starting from the 1920s when Italy's repressive policy in Libya was widely criticised by Arab politicians and the press, the Fascist regime tried to establish "a new, more conciliatory page with the Arab world" especially in the early 1930s hoping for opportunities to make colonial gains in Africa while pursuing a "more energetic policy" (ibid.: 391). The adoption of an official pro-Muslim policy and respective propaganda efforts that aimed at a non-violent penetration of the Middle East continued until 1938. During the negotiations for the Anglo-Italian treaty, however, the Fascist regime, striving for the recognition of their Impero, did not support Arab nationalist claim. The author argues in this connection that colonial aspirations and imperialist considerations took precedence over foreign policy aspects (ibid.: 390-400 and 399). With the outbreak of the Second World War these mutual limiting forces were replaced by the desire for territorial conquest by military force. Arielli concludes by pointing out that Italy's driving forces to acquire Middle Eastern hegemony did not prove successful in the end due to the lack of available means and sufficient policies (ibid.: 406-407).

While Arielli's work looks into the Italian ambitions in the Middle East, Anna Baldinetti's contribution takes a different perspective by examining Fascist propaganda in the Maghrib during the interwar period and the Second World War. In her essay, she addresses two questions: One, whether the Italian propaganda was effective and two, in which ways the nationalist forces tried to use fascist initiatives against the background of the anti-colonial struggle in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Starting with the description of various attempts by Mussolini's regime to convert the Italian communities in the Maghrib into Fascists,



Baldinetti explores in the following five subchapters the Italian and to a minor degree German propaganda measures with the British counter initiatives towards the Arab audience. In doing so, she also addresses the issue of critical and positive perceptions of Fascism in different nationalist groups (*ibid.*: 409-435). Although the reader can gain many interesting insights from Baldinetti's analysis, (s)he might at times feel overwhelmed by the variety of themes addressed for the three different case studies (Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria); a slightly different arrangement of the story would have helped here. In the conclusion the author argues that most of the Fascist propaganda efforts have turned out to be ineffective and that local collaboration with the Fascists was not motivated by any adaptation of ideology but by opportunistic reasons (*ibid.*: 436).

The last article in the journal is by Mustafa Kabha which examines the attitude of the Palestinian national movement towards Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany. By taking up this theme, the author deals with one of the deeply contested topics of Arab and Middle Eastern history, of which the central issue is whether the close collaboration of Haj Amin al-Husseini with Hitler and Mussolini can be understood as characteristic for the whole Palestinian movement (see for this topic Wien 2010; Nordbruch 2011; Mallmann and Cüppers 2006; Küntzel 2002). Kabha negates such a reading. He argues that the examination of contemporary discourses in the major Palestinian newspapers reveals complex and dynamic receptions of and engagements with Fascism and National Socialism by the Palestinian public. These were in his understanding influenced by international developments, the internal achievements of the German and the Italian regime and the emerging Palestinian problem. While Kabha does not dismiss pro-fascist voices, he lays stress on the development of a diversity of Palestinian opinions ranging from "enthusiasm and admiration for fascist and Nazi ideologies" to feelings of disappointment, animosity and rejection (Freitag and Gershoni 2011: 437-438). It is interesting to note that similar to Gershoni's and Nordbruch's findings, Kabha's results reveal local receptions that clearly distinguished between Fascism and National Socialism.

By bringing together different perspectives on local Arab encounters with Fascist and National Socialist propaganda, the special journal issue adds a newer strand in fascism historiography that addresses perceptions, receptions and interactions of fascism in non-European societies.



The diverse themes of the contributions and especially the well written introductory overview on current debates, methodological difficulties and futures research possibilities will likely make it a useful reference for anyone interested in the history of fascism or the modern Middle East.

3.

In the last few years, a substantial amount of research on Middle Eastern and North African encounters with Fascism and National Socialism has been conducted. However, on another important non-European region, that is South Asia little academic work has been done that comprehensively discusses the Indian perceptions and nature of interactions with Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany. Before introducing the two new contributions to the topic, it makes sense to present a brief account on the existing research literature. The two standard works *Indien im Zweiten Weltkrieg* by Johannes Voigt and *India in Axis Strategy* by Milan Hauner analyse India's role for the Allies and the Axis powers in the Second World War. In doing so, both the books provide some insights into the positions that Indian politicians held towards Germany, Italy and Japan (Voigt 1978; Hauner 1981).⁶

The attitude of Indian politicians towards Fascism and National Socialism is also examined in Padmalata Sharma's dissertation *Indian reaction to Fascism and Nazism* in which she looks into debates and policies of the Indian National Congress, the Congress Socialist Party and the Communist Party of India. Her analysis, however, lacks a nuanced reading of the positions held by different party members; thus Sharma argues that all important politicians of the respective parties vehemently condemned and rejected Fascism and National Socialism in the 1930s (Sharma 1994). When looking at encounters of members of the Indian National Congress with Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany, research has focused so far on three leading actors: Nehru, Gandhi and Bose. We will return to Subhas Chandra Bose in the later part of this article but Jawaharlal Nehru's views and Gandhi's meeting with Mussolini in 1931 have been analysed in some detail in the existing body of work (Weidemann 2002; Prayer 1994 and 1991; Sofri 1988).⁷

Likewise, the interactions of Hindu nationalists with Fascism and National Socialism have been addressed recurrently in the last two decades (Delfs 2008; Jaffrelot 2003; Bhatt 2001). In particular, Marzia



Casolari has analysed this issue comprehensively in her unpublished dissertation *Nazionalismo indiano, Italia e fascismo* and in her published article "Hindutva's foreign tie-up in the 1930" (Casolari 2002 and 1997). On the one hand, Indian engagements with different aspects of Fascism and National Socialism, such as foreign and youth policy have not got much attention yet;⁸ on the other Indian perceptions of German anti-Semitism have been addressed in different studies but in an eclectic manner (Egorova 2006; Bhatti and Voigt 1999; Voigt 1991).

Research has focused, furthermore, on Bengali intellectuals; especially the experiences of the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, of Taraknath Das, an Indian revolutionary and international scholar, and of Benoy Kumar Sarkar, polymath and professor at the University of Calcutta (Flora 2008; 1994 and unpublished dissertation; Prayer 1996 and 1994; Manjapra 2007; Günther 1996). The Italian historian Mario Prayer has comprehensively worked on Bengali intellectuals and their encounters with Fascist Italy. In his earlier works he has examined the history of relations between Indian nationalists and the Mussolini regime without addressing the former's perceptions of Fascism (Prayer 1994 and 1991). In two later contributions, however, Prayer takes up this question.

In an article published in 1996, he argues that the Bengali intelligentsia perceived Fascism positively owing to its cultural background and nationalism (Prayer 1996: 105).⁹ In his latest contribution "Creative India and the World: Bengali Internationalism and Italy in the Interwar Period", published in the edited volume *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones. South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas*, Prayer states that the Indian intellectuals have been the first and foremost internationalists who expected fresh impulses from their encounters with European ideologies and concepts for their anti-colonial nation building project. By analysing the interactions of Benoy Kumar Sarkar, Kalidas Nag, Subhas Chandra Bose and Rabindranath Tagore with Mussolini's regime, Prayer argues that Bengali intellectuals saw Italy as more comparable to the Indian case than other European countries; the reason he says was the belief of these intellectuals who saw India as being closer to Italy in respect of socio-economic and cultural characteristics. Italy's resurrection during Fascist rule was perceived by them, according to Prayer, as a "cultural-historical phenomenon transcending political, and even moral considerations" (Prayer 2010: 254). He furthermore argues that this "suspension of a moral judgment on Fascism and Mussolini largely derived from the



awareness that India would in any case have to follow its own path and remain true, not to a single ideology, but to its history" (ibid.).

This concluding assessment (which suggests that according to Prayer this set of intellectuals prioritised a historicist development of a nation-state over transnational search for ideological aspirations and affinities) needs further discussion. It is true that these intellectuals did search for a historicist analysis of nation building, as is evident in Benoy Kumar Sarkar's remark that it was pertinent to come up with "a sort of new notion of State where the historical heritage of India could be vindicated" (Prayer 2010: 242). But it would be going a bit too far to claim, as Prayer does, to argue that Sarkar's approach towards Italy, was only culturally, and not politically or ideologically determined.

For example, we can turn to one of the remarks Sarkar made; he wrote: "Of all the European nations, Italy, as the country that is next to us in range and intensity of modern developments, is from the nature of the case best fitted to be a guide to Young India in its attempts at modernisation in technique, economic institutions and social structure" (Sarkar 1932: 6).¹⁰ Thus, remaining rooted in the idea of the historicist notion of state building, Sarkar was open to a whole range of influences that included not only the seemingly technical aspects of modernisation and industrialisation but also those that would redo India's social fabric. The term 'Young India' itself is very interesting, which captures the double edged imagination of nation building. On the one hand it pointed to the apparent continuity with the 'old' one (and hence looking for a historicist development) but on the other it also marked a new beginning based on fundamental political, economic and social changes.

Another Bengali intellectual, Pramatha Nath Roy, who was one of the scholarship holders of the Fascist government in Rome and later became a professor at the Benares University, displayed the same intellectual aptness to combine the 'external' influences with a strong argument about their historical existence in South Asia. Roy talks in great length about the character of the corporative state established in Mussolini's Italy and sees in it the potential to offer radical solution to many of the social and economic issues. However, at the same time he felt compelled to also 'naturalise' this idea to the Indian political discourse by arguing that "The corporative idea is natural to India and promises to be a very efficient solvent of our knotty problems which can neither be solved only by introducing responsible parliamentary system of government nor by Bolshevism" (Roy 1930: 71). Therefore,



although a lot of Bengali intellectuals developed distinct concepts for India and its future that were based on the prevailing conditions and the history of their country, neither can be the attraction of the Fascist state as socio-economic reference model for India in contemporary discourses nor the fact that the historicist explanation provided a legitimising tool for assimilating or justifying international ideological and institutional admiration underestimated.

The volume on *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones* contains another article that looks into Indian encounters of Fascism and National Socialism. In his article, "Rethinking (the Absence of) Fascism in India, c. 1922-1945", Benjamin Zachariah analyses the extent to which the ideas that are usually associated with Fascism prevailed on the South Asian subcontinent (Zachariah 2010: 178). By taking into account themes such as mass mobilisation, eugenics, race and the nation Zachariah states that discipline and statist planning were if anything "the most explicit of the strands of pro-fascist arguments made in Indian circles" (ibid.: 190). Discipline was on the one hand seen as an essential precondition for a (future) Indian nation building, on the other it was viewed as a method to control and mobilise the masses (ibid.: 189; Guha 1997: 135-137).

Against the background of the Great Depression and in search of a fitting model for (independent) India, contemporary discourses concentrated strongly on concepts of economic and social planning. Zachariah has pointed out in an earlier study that debates about planning were often connected with the considerations about nation building, modernisation of the masses and the future system of government. Thus, economic planning and development became decisive factors for the unity and formation of the (independent) Indian nation (Zachariah 2005: 6). Indian intellectuals and politicians observed and discussed the development and economic planning concepts in other countries, for instance in Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany. According to Zachariah the economic successes of both the regimes were partly seen as worth emulating (ibid.: 7). Building upon Zachariah thesis about the reference function of Italy and Germany in regard to economic planning and its instrumentalisation for a successful nation building, it seems worthy to conduct further research to examine in more detail which economic policies of Fascism and National Socialism in particular were perceived as exemplary and why.¹¹

The title of Zachariah's essay leaves readers pondering over a fundamental question of whether fascism existed in India: if yes, in what



forms, and if not, then why. He addresses this question by using the 'uneasy' framework of 'Zeitgeist', which basically implies that in examining certain present-day features that are seen as constituent parts of Fascism, he believes that themes like physical culture, martial arts, discipline and obedience to a leader were stressed in many of the Indian groups belonging either inside or outside the mainstream of the national movement (Zachariah 2010: 189). These features were globally present. However, in the specific case of India, he admittedly provides a 'provisional' and 'dissatisfactory' answer, which only reflects the complexity of the question rather than the inability of the scholar. Thus, although fascism in India or its forms were part of *Zeitgeist* yet as he suggests, the historicist development of fascism in India did not mature outside the fringe groups – which are to my understanding not clarified in the text – “because the political and economic conditions for it did not exist” (ibid.: 196-197).

When discussing India and fascism, one name that frequently comes up is that of Subhas Chandra Bose, also called Netaji. Bose (1897-1945) was one of the leading politicians of the Indian National Congress and his primary goal was to achieve India's independence. The famous Bengal Congress politician C.R. Das became his political mentor in the early 1920s. After Das' death Bose was not only elected the President of the Bengal Congress, but also the mayor of Calcutta. Politically he belonged to the left radical wing within the Congress Party. Owing to his political activities in the wake of the national movement, Bose was repeatedly imprisoned by the British colonial government. In the 1930s to cure his bad health, he spent several years in Europe where he established contacts with politicians and intellectuals in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Ireland, Germany, Italy and France. After his return to India, Bose was elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1938 and again in 1939, but he soon resigned due to his differences with Gandhi and his followers. This episode led him to establish his own party, the All India Forward Bloc, which campaigned against any cooperation with the British after the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1940 Bose was held in house arrest and escaped his detainment by a flight to National Socialist Germany. Here he organised the Legion Free India and worked towards India's independence with German support. Being disappointed with the fruitless efforts, Bose departed for Southeast Asia and with Japanese support reorganised the Indian National Army. Without reaching his goal to liberate his own country from the British rule, Bose pos-



sibly died in a plane crash in Taiwan in 1945.¹²

Bose's collaboration with the Axis powers during the Second World War has produced an extensive body of research literature (see a. O. Sareen 2007 and 1996; Kuhlmann 2003; Weidemann 2002; Zöllner 2000)¹³, but there are also studies available providing a full biographical overview such as the magisterial work of Leonard Gordon (Gordon 1990). The new book *His Majesty's Opponent* by Bose's own grand nephew, the renowned historian Sugata Bose, belongs to the latter category. Sugata Bose delivers a vivid, well-written account of Bose's life and his ideas. The author, who has edited seven out of the overall twelve volumes of *Netaji's Collected Works* together with his father Sisir Kumar Bose, draws upon his impressive knowledge of the primary material, mostly available in the Netaji Research Bureau in Calcutta (Bose 2011: xi).

While one can only highly recommend this book as a fine introduction to readers interested in the history of the national independence movement in the first half of the 20th century, in regard to Bose's encounters and interactions with National Socialism and Fascism, the monograph does not provide important new insights. Bose is described in many studies as a "misguided" nationalist whose collaboration with the Axis powers revealed that he was ready to take up every possible chance to gain India's independence (Gordon 1990: 309; 370-371 and 454; Voigt 1971: 33-63; Pelinka 2005: 96-98). Other authors who were companions of Bose hold the view that he was not only a great nationalist, but also a hero of the Indian independence struggle (Werth 1971). However, Bose is occasionally depicted as a Nazi collaborator, who shared the Fascist and National Socialist ideology (Rössel 2009).

In his book, Sugata Bose does not deal directly with the question as to which extent his great-grand uncle was attracted to Fascism and National Socialism but he gives his opinion in different passages. He seems to suggest that Bose did not admire Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany and that his collaboration with the Axis powers has solely to be understood in terms of his uncompromising anti-imperialism (Bose 2011: 11). For instance, while describing Bose's efforts to mobilise millions of Indian civilians in Southeast Asia, the author declares, "he [Bose, M.F.] called for 'total mobilisation for a total war' – not to aid the Axis powers against the Allies, but to wage the struggle against the British raj" (ibid.: 4). In regard to Netaji's ideological orientation, Sugata Bose argues, that Bose favoured a form of modified socialism that would



suit Indian conditions and not blindly imitate imported doctrines. Yet, he concedes that Bose's career demanded "a constant negotiation of the global forces of imperialism and nationalism, fascism and communism" (ibid.: 11).

One proposition made by Subhas Chandra Bose in his book *The Indian Struggle* (1934) has more than once raised doubts about his ideology even amongst his contemporaries. In his book Bose writes:

Considering everything, one is inclined to hold that the next phase in world-history will produce a synthesis between communism and fascism. And will it be a surprise if that synthesis is produced in India? In spite of the antithesis between communism and fascism, there are certain traits common to both. Both communism and fascism believe in the supremacy of the state over the individual. Both denounce parliamentary democracy. Both believe in party rule. Both believe in dictatorship of the party and in the ruthless suppression of all dissenting minorities. Both believe in a planned industrial reorganisation of the country. These common traits will form the basis of the new synthesis. That synthesis is called "Samyavada" – an Indian word, which means literally 'the doctrine of synthesis or equality'. It will be India's task to work out this synthesis (Bose 1997: 351-352).

Sugata Bose argues that Bose's statement, of which he only cites the first two sentences, has to be understood as a rejection of communism as a fitting model for India. By pointing to features like its anti-religious and atheistic ideology or its lack of sympathy with nationalism, Bose, in the author's view, judged communism as not appealing for Indians. However, his remarks about fascism and his belief that both, fascism and communism in a synthesised form would play a role in India are not further elaborated upon in this biography. In 1938, Bose revoked his statement in an interview with the British communist Rajani Palme Dutt and distanced himself from fascism (Bose 1995: 2).

Not only this episode, but also several others¹⁴ are interpreted by Sugata Bose in a rather unambiguous way that strongly rejects all possible affinities of Subhas Chandra Bose towards Fascism and National Socialism. In doing so, the author in my understanding, presents a relatively simplistic account of a much complex nature of engagement which Bose nurtured with international and national ideological contexts.



The books and articles that are subject of this review contribute to the growing field of research that analyses global receptions of and encounters with Fascism and National Socialism. With the exception of Sugata Bose's biography on Subhas Chandra Bose, all other studies provide new and fresh insights into the question of how Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany were perceived and discussed by intellectuals, politicians and the press in the Middle East, North Africa and British India. Instead of starting from any ideal-typical (European) fascism or a fixed "fascist minimum", the authors rather seem to undertake a change in perspective that de-centres the European experience. Looking at the findings, two suggestions for future research come to mind: one, it seems possible and desirable to conduct collaborative research that analyses in a comparative way the encounters of different non-European regions sharing some form of dependency on or domination by the "imperialist" European powers toward Fascism and National Socialism.¹⁵ Two, it seems important to further examine the discourses and debates taking place in various "native" languages in non-European public spheres.

Endnotes

- 1 I would like to thank Nitin Sinha, Swarali Paranjape and Kerstin von Lingen for their help and their comments on earlier drafts of this article.
- 2 Jawaharlal Nehru (1890-1964) was a leading politician of the Indian National Congress and the first prime minister of independent India.
- 3 Fascism, with a capital 'F' is used for the Italian version of fascism; the latter implies a generic understanding of the term.
- 4 Stein Larsen, for instance, is proposing a diffusion model in regard to this question. Fascism in non-European regions was, according to him, derived from Europe since "much of the thinking and many of the organisational and political forms were diffused from European models" (Larsen 2001b: 717). The European models, however, he points out, "were fused into the movements and ideas that already existed, with their regional or local identities, but they never appeared as exact copies. They were Asian, African or Latin American models" (Larsen 2001b: 717). Rikki



Kersten likewise rejects the idea of fascism as an exclusive European phenomenon. She states that studies about fascism in non-western regions are often characterised by the search for non-existing features of the former or that they foreground 'cultural' differences. These examples of Eurocentric historiography, in which Europe is not the objection, but the standard of comparison, amount in her view to a form of intellectual colonialism (Kersten 2009: 526-527).

5 Due to the regional focus of the books and articles that are subject of this review, further references will mostly deal with the Middle East, Northern Africa and India.

6 In the case of 'Young Egypt', idealisations of youth and of the nation additionally contribute to this judgment (Gershoni and Nordbruch 2011: 130-132).

7 Furthermore, Johannes Voigt contributed an article on Hitler's views on India, while the renowned Italian historian Renzo de Felice published on Mussolini's political strategies towards India (Voigt 1971; De Felice 1987).

8 Framke, M. 2007. *Jawaharlal Nehrus Wahrnehmung des Faschismus und seine Auseinandersetzung mit dessen Folgen, 1933-1939*, <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/savifadok/volltexte/2007/61> [retrieved 13.05.2012].

9 I have explored these aspects in greater detail in my thesis (Framke 2013).

10 Prayer elucidates that Bengali intellectuals admired Italy as a successful model for a modern state that was able to mobilise the masses, to instill them with discipline and thus to produce social harmony. He also argues that positive perceptions in regard to the industrialisation of Italy and to the Fascist dynamism in international relations existed. The Fascist model appeared a successful repeat of the Indian Swadeshi movement and was seen as ideal addition to Indian concepts during the Bengal Renaissance (Prayer 1996: 107).

11 In this connection it seems worthwhile to also extend the analysis by including the encounters of the Bengali intellectuals with National Socialism. Benoy Kumar Sarkar repeatedly showed his admiration towards certain aspects of National Socialist ideology and policies; in regard to Hitler's economic policy in 1933, he wrote: "And nobody is likely to derive more profit as well as



inspiration from the methods and principles of Hitler's economics than the peoples of Asia bent as they are on assimilating the technique of a radical transvaluation of life's value" (Sarkar 1933: 9).

- 12 I have done this in my thesis (Framke 2013).
- 13 The circumstances surrounding Bose's death or his maybe whereabouts after August 1945 have not been clarified yet, but have rather led to ongoing disputes and various inquiries. Three official commissions, sponsored by the Government of India, could not reveal conclusively what had happened to Subhas Chandra Bose. While the first two investigations – the Shah Nawaz Committee and the Justice G. D Khosla Committee – maintained the version of the Taiwan plane crash, the third Indian inquiry – the Justice Mukherjee Commission – stated in its report in 2006 that Bose's death was staged to facilitate an escape to the USSR. However, this commission also did not find any evidence as to when and how Bose died (Roy 2012: 257 ff.; Report of The Justice Mukherjee Commission of Inquiry on the alleged disappearance of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Vol. I, http://mha.nic.in/uniquepage.asp?ID_PK=31 [retrieved 13.07.2012]). The research literature of our times has also struggled to find a convincing answer to this question. Gordon and Kuhlmann, for instance, follow the theory of the plane crash, however, one of the newest publications on this theme, which is based on archival materials from Russian archives, suggests a Soviet role in his disappearance (Gordon 1990: 538 ff.; Kuhlmann 2003: 350; Roy 2012: xxxiv ff. and chapters 7-9).
- 14 Bose established the Indian Legion in Germany in 1941 and recruited many Indian prisoners of war for it, who were supposed to fight alongside the German troops against Great Britain (Haynes 2011; Günter 2003; Oesterheld 2000). Different studies have also dealt comprehensively with the Indian National Army in Southeast Asia (Sareen 1986; Lebra 1971).
- 15 In his biography Sugata Bose mentions only one personal meeting of Subhas Chandra Bose with Mussolini in 1935. He argues that Bose's engagement with the Italian dictator derived from his pragmatic view of Mussolini as the leader of a country that had some rivalries with the Great Britain in the Mediterranean. Yet, between 1934 and 1938 Bose met the Italian dictator five



times. These meetings, according to the German historian Jan Kuhlmann, were of social rather than political nature. However, by quoting a letter that Bose sent to Mussolini on 29th November 1934, Kuhlmann provides interesting insights, suggesting that the Indian nationalist might have nurtured strong hopes for practical help from Fascist Italy. Bose wrote: "I am sure Your Excellency will never forget that India expects much help and guidance from Your Excellency. It may be that Your Excellency is destined to play an important part in the liberation of my unfortunate country, as Your Excellency has already done in the case of Italy" (AS-MAE/Gab/56 cited in: Kuhlmann 2003: 33). Being in Italy, Bose also visited different institutions of the Fascist Party to study how they worked in cooperation with the government to uplift the nation (Bose & Bose 1994: 290).

Another example is the question of the contacts that Bose had with German and Italian officials in the late 1930s after his return to India. Sugata Bose mentions one episode in which Bose had supposedly met German business people. The author stresses that during the conversation Bose had taken a critical stance towards German policies (Bose 2011: 154). The German business people, however, were the first and the second chairmen of the regional faction for British India and Ceylon of the Foreign Organisation of the NSDAP (Auslandsorganisation – Landesgruppe Britisch Indien & Ceylon). In the report that Dr. Urchs and Dr. Wulfestieg sent back to the headquarters for the Foreign Organisation of the NSDAP in Berlin, they indeed mention Bose's criticism but they also report on his suggestions that would lead to a better cultural and economic cooperation between the two countries (Urchs, O. 24.12.1938. Letter to the headquarters of the Foreign Organisation of the NSDAP. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Pol. VII, *Indien Po. 2*, R 104777).

Similarly, one can find in the records of the Italian Foreign Ministry a report of the Italian consul general in Calcutta describing his meeting with Bose in November 1938. In this document the consul reports about the proposals Bose made in the course of the conversation. Amongst others, Bose had suggested that he would like to maintain the contact with Italy and that he would try to facilitate better economic relations between India and Italy. The consul adds that Bose inquired about the possibility to



- send Indian journalists and intellectuals to Italy to study the implementation of fascism (Giuriati, C. 11.11.1938. Letter of the Italian consul general in Calcutta to the Foreign Ministry. Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Ambasciata Londra, 1861-1950, Busta 1010, Rapporti politici, colonie inglese).
- 16 See the recent article of Peter Wien. By taking up the example of the Middle East, Wien discusses if there was a generic non-European fascism or even a colonial fascism. Although he argues that any case study has to be examined in its particular local and regional contexts, Wien also pleads for a "transnational comparison with other political trends based on sound theoretical considerations" (Wien, P. 2012. *Arab Fascism – Arabs and Fascism*. Orient-Institut Studies, 1, pp. 1-11, http://www.perspectiva.net/content/publikationen/orient-institut-studies/1-2012/wien_fascism [retrieved 15.05.2012]).

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