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‘Defeat, Victory, Repeat’: Russian Émigrés between the Spanish Civil War and Operation Barbarossa, 1936–1944

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Tens of thousands of White Russians were forced to leave their country after 1920. Many of them were career officers and soldiers imbued with anti-communism, who were then hired by diverse armies. They acted as transnational soldiers of the counter-revolution during the interwar period. This article analyses the trajectory of some dozens of them, who volunteered for the Francoist army in 1936–8 during the Spanish Civil War. Afterwards, many of them joined the ranks of the Spanish ‘Blue Division’ as interpreters to take part in the invasion of their home country by the Germans. Their experience as occupiers was highly ambiguous and oscillated between disappointment and nostalgia once they perceived that the objective of the invasion was not to liberate Russia from communism, but to enslave the country and its inhabitants. However, once they returned to Spain, they cultivated a hero myth of their past experience and regarded themselves as winners.

The ‘European civil war’ that started after 1917 and peaked in the Second World War comprised a constellation of civil conflicts and paramilitary violence. Apart from the Irish Civil War (1922–3), as well as some border disputes, all of them were a confrontation between followers of the Russian Bolsheviks, communists and social revolutionaries, on the one hand, and upholders of the liberal-conservative order and the Christian faith, on the other. Since the Russian Civil War of 1917–22, flanked by the Finnish Civil War of 1918, the ‘Reds’ had confronted the ‘Whites’, although the latter label had become dated by the late 1930s and thus was of little use during the Spanish Civil War (1936–9), which became perhaps the most symbolic conflict of this period.¹ The ideological clash that took place between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries in 1917–22 was effectively bound to morph into a European confrontation between fascism and anti-fascism, although both terms usually covered a broad diversity of political groups. The Spanish conflict was the last link in a chain of wars, which also became a precursor to the all-encompassing world conflict that began in September 1939.²

Most of these conflicts took place within the borders of established states, or on the ruins of the previous empire. Nevertheless, each war acquired a transnational dimension once foreign volunteers from other parts of Europe became involved. They were motivated by the desire to fight back against the ‘Whites’ or the ‘Reds’ who had previously defeated them in their own countries, as well as by transnational solidarity, ideological fervour, military adventurism and sometimes professional careerism. Between the early 1920s and the mid-1940s, transnational war volunteering contributed to turning civil wars into broader European conflicts. From German volunteers who joined the Whites in

¹ Enzo Traverso, *Fire and Blood: The European Civil War (1914–1945)* (London: Verso, 2017); Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End* (London: Penguin, 2017).

² For the malleability of the term ‘Anti-fascism’, see Hugo García, Mercedes Yusta, Xavier Tabet and Cristina Climaco, eds., *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory, and Politics, 1922 to the Present* (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2016).

Finland (1918), to the more diverse example of the International Brigades fighting for the Spanish Republic in 1936–8,³ thousands of soldiers spent the best years of their lives fighting abroad under a foreign flag, which they imagined as their own by virtue of ideological solidarity, or simply because they saw it as the first step to later defeating the same enemy in their homelands. As was also the case in previous centuries, the motivations for joining foreign armies or volunteering in external wars varied from ideology to the lust for adventure and combined material interests with masculine ideals of heroism.⁴ They were former military–imperial elite men who had lost their powerful positions and often lived destitute lives in foreign societies that looked upon them with contempt.

‘Anti-fascist’ transnational soldiers became a well-known feature of the interwar period in Europe.⁵ Their origins can be traced back to the nineteenth century, as foreign volunteers joined the ranks of liberal–revolutionary and republican armies in Europe and the Americas, and historiographic perspectives of them have enjoyed a great renewal.⁶ However, with the exception of the foreign legions and European volunteers who joined the Wehrmacht and the Waffen SS between 1941 and 1945,⁷ the existence of the inverted mirror of that phenomenon, the trajectories of ‘White’ and later ‘fascist’ transnational volunteers in Europe and other continents prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, has been largely neglected. A possible reason for this was that their numbers were much lower, as demonstrated by the meagre volume of Irish, French, Portuguese, Latin American and other European volunteers who joined the Francoist side from 1936 to 1939. They went to Spain essentially to defend two key values: anti-communism and the Christian faith. However, their experience, alongside thousands of conscript soldiers sent by Italy, Germany and Portugal also reflected a broader phenomenon: the diffusion of transnational fascism. Volunteers often acted as agents of cultural transfer between different fascist and para-fascist movements in Europe and beyond, although the results of that contribution may have been less defined than expected by the actors themselves, partially due to conflicting contemporary interpretations of the ‘essence’ of fascism and anti-communism.⁸

An often-forgotten protagonist of the transnational counterrevolution in the interwar period were the White Russians. The destruction of the Russian Empire and the establishment of the Soviet state was accompanied by a swathe of violence.⁹ The Whites (this term covered a diversity of political currents, and ethnic and social groups, from Georgian nationalists to socialists), having lost to the Bolsheviks in the civil war of 1917–22, constituted a broad diaspora, whose figures remain disputed, but comprised at least two million people dispersed in different waves.¹⁰ The culture of defeat, combined with the experience of exile, produced a fanatical group of Russian émigrés wandering across Europe in search of a military mission. Thousands of White Guards became military adventurists,

³ René Skoutelsky, *Novedad en el frente. Las Brigadas Internacionales en la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2006).

⁴ On the difficulty of separating ideological motivations from careerism and lust for adventure, see Nir Arielli, *From Byron to bin Laden: A History of Foreign War Volunteers* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 66–93.

⁵ Nir Arielli and Enrico Acciai, eds., ‘Trajectories of Antifascist Volunteers from the Spanish Civil War to the Second World War’, dossier in *War in History*, 27, 3 (2020), 341–516.

⁶ See several examples in the collections edited by Christine G. Krüger and Sonja Levsen, *War Volunteering in Modern Times: From the French Revolution to the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), as well as in Nir Arielli and Bruce Collins, eds., *Transnational Soldiers: Foreign Military Enlistment in the Modern Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). For the ‘Garibaldian’ tradition, see Enrico Acciai, *Garibaldi’s Radical Legacy: Traditions of War Volunteering in Southern Europe (1861–1945)* (London: Routledge, 2021).

⁷ Jochen Böhrer and Robert Gerwarth, eds., *The Waffen SS: A European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁸ Judith Keene, *Luchando por Franco. Voluntarios europeos al servicio de la España fascista, 1936–1939* (Barcelona: Salvat, 2001); Christopher Othen, *Las Brigadas Internacionales de Franco* (Barcelona: Destino, 2007); Miguel Alonso Ibarra, ‘Guerra civil española y contrarrevolución. El fascismo europeo bajo el signo de la Santa Cruz’, *Ayer*, 109 (2018), 269–95. On transnational fascism, see Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, eds., *Fascism without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945* (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2019).

⁹ On the civil war in Russia, see Jonathan D. Smele, *The ‘Russian’ Civil Wars, 1916–1926: Ten Years that Shook the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Mark D. Steinberg, *The Russian Revolution, 1905–1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 99–121 and Alexandre Jevkhoff, *La guerre civile russe: 1917–1922* (Paris: Perrin, 2017).

¹⁰ Philipp Ther, *Die Außenseiter. Flucht, Flüchtlinge und Integration im modernen Europa* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017), 204–8.

participating in a host of conflicts on any side that would even remotely act out their own agenda: militant anti-Bolshevism. Alongside politicians in exile, refugees in Paris, Prague and other major European cities, intellectuals and writers, White Russians became the harbingers of fear of a Bolshevik revolution, as well as transnational agents of the spreading of anti-communism. They published journals and books, and articulated propaganda networks that, at certain moments, also influenced the development of diverse expressions of fascism and right-wing authoritarian movements, from France to Germany.¹¹

Not all the White Guards remained active militarily and sought a conflict in which to immerse themselves, although the majority retained the mentality of professional soldiers. While some fought by conviction, others were simply mercenaries. These two positions also overlapped. To list some examples, in December 1924, about a hundred Russian émigrés took part in overthrowing the Albanian prime minister Fan Noli, the leader of the June revolution of that same year. In Manchuria, hundreds of Whites sold their services to various petty warlords with anti-communist views. And about seventy White Guards fought for Paraguay in 1932–5, during its war with Bolivia. However, the bulk of the Russian military expertise in exile was to be found in the French army: between 1920 and 1940, nearly 10,000 Russians fought under the flag of the French Foreign Legion. Russians accounted for 12 per cent of the Legion's overall strength.¹²

In this article, the attitudes of the Russian military diaspora towards the Spanish Civil War and the ensuing Soviet–German war will be addressed. This will be combined with an analysis of the diverse trajectories of Russian White Guards in exile, which will draw on personal sources such as memoirs and diaries. Focus will then be placed on a minor group of no more than 200 people, with rough estimates. Through the examination of a huge base of previously unused sources, from war diaries to letters and memoirs in Russian, US and Spanish archives, the multifaceted trajectories, motivation and experiences of those Whites who took part in the Spanish Civil War on the Francoist side will be examined. With the German invasion of the Soviet Union, dozens of survivors embarked on a new adventure. Contrary to the expectations of many White Guards in exile, the Germans did not allow them to enlist in the Wehrmacht. Only a minority had managed to return to Russia as interpreters and auxiliary personnel in Spanish, French, German and Italian units that participated in the 'European Crusade against Bolshevism'. It rendered the Russian war experience of this latter group an almost unique transnational adventure, which had finally taken them back to Russia in the uniform of the invaders, something that made this group different from other Russian exiles, as well as from both anti-fascist and anti-communist volunteers. Those who returned to their homeland as invaders in 1941–2 also experienced continuities and discontinuities between the Russian and Spanish conflicts, as well as the completely different character of the German–Soviet war. The arc of their experience was one of expectation, violence and ultimately frustration. How did they reflect on this in war diaries, memoirs and letters? How did they react to the changes that had taken place in Russia after their exile? Was their worldview influenced by their transnational experience after 1920? This article argues that the Russian transnational exiles were the only defined stateless group among Francoist volunteers, rendering their case of military adventurism, a contribution spanning two wars and memory of self-

¹¹ Nikolaus Katzer, 'Der Weisse Mythos: russischer Antibolschewismus im europäischen Nachkrieg', in Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, eds., *Krieg im Frieden. Paramilitarische Gewalt in Europa nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013), 57–93. See also Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Entangled Far Rights: A Russian–European Intellectual Romance in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh, KS: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), as well as Marla Stone and Giuliana Chamedes, 'Naming the Enemy: Anticommunism in Transnational Perspective', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 53, 1 (2018), 4–11.

¹² Vladimir K. Abdank-Kossovskii, 'Rossiiskie ofitsery v izgnanii', *Voенно-Istoricheskii Zhurnal*, 2 (1996), 91–2; Robert C. Austin, *Founding a Balkan State: Albania's Experiment with Democracy, 1920–1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 146–56; Aleksandr V. Okorkov, *V boiakh za Podnebesnuu. Russkii sled v Kitae* (Moscow: Veche, 2013); Lucía E. Giovine Gramatichof, *Aporte de los inmigrantes rusos al desarrollo del Paraguay* (Asunción: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2009); Christian Köhler, *Die Fremdenlegion. Kolonialismus, Söldnertum, Gewalt 1831–1962* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013), 35–6.

perceptions, unique. The story of Russians fighting for Franco and later in the Wehrmacht demonstrates that the Russian Civil War, and not the successive military engagements, was far more decisive and formative an experience for them, leaving an indelible mark on the exiles' mentality. Every time, the Russian veterans strived to continue the same struggle in which they had participated decades previously, and the clash of 1917–22 therefore represented for them a matrix for all future wars. The three conflicts in which they engaged were inevitably interpreted, examined and appropriated through the lens of the (in their mind) ongoing *Russian* civil war and ultimate national interests. The considerable time gap, the cessation of the civil hostilities and the many differences between each war were ignored or reinterpreted in the same fashion.

The White Diaspora and the 'Gallipoli Spirit'

Around two million people left the former Russian Empire between 1917 and 1922, departing for Central Europe through Finland, Norway, Poland and the Baltic States; another avenue of survival was the Black Sea. The pivotal stage of this exodus was the evacuation of the Crimea by General Piotr Wrangel's army in November 1920. The Russian squadron gathered up 150,000 men, women and children.¹³ Part of the fleet remained in the Dardanelles, while other ships ended up under French protection in Tunisia. Cossack units, numbering about 50,000 people, were maintained on the Greek island of Lemnos until October 1921, when the I Army Corps (about 26,000 men) landed on the Gallipoli peninsula, where it essentially interned itself in an improvised camp. Civilians ended up in similar conditions in the suburbs of Istanbul.¹⁴

Despite the hardships, the Whites transformed their defeat into a symbol of military struggle and a prophecy of its renewal. This was how the 'Gallipoli spirit' and a messianic consciousness of unbending warriors was conceived. Many of these had left the camp as early as the end of 1920.¹⁵ Yesterday's soldiers and officers scattered throughout the world. A sizeable portion of them found refuge in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, while others made it to Czechoslovakia, Western Europe and other countries. The main centre of this diaspora was France where, by 1930, from 100,00 to 200,000 former Russian subjects had settled, a significant number of whom resided in Paris.

The core of the White army that managed to survive became the basis for the Russian All-Military Union (*Russkii Obshchevoinskii Soiuz*, ROVS), founded in September 1924. Its goal was to maintain troop cadres and their command element in order to once again call them to the colours for war against the Soviets.¹⁶ The ROVS consisted of sections, which served as administrative subdivisions. Each section was broken up into subsections and each unit had its own command.¹⁷ Unions and societies were not just circles for nostalgic veterans, but also mutual aid associations. While operating alongside religious, professional and educational establishments, these organisations breathed life into the special micro-society that was the fellowship of patriots of a lost country. They formed their own public sphere, woven from headlines in Russian newspapers, gatherings of young people and their own calendar and ceremonies. The Whites saw themselves as the last pillars of imperial Russia, the spiritual source from which their motherland must draw hope for its own future.¹⁸

Everyday life outside the Russian parallel society was prosaic. The majority were forced to look for work in the civilian economy. From the juridical point of view, the Russian émigrés were seen as stateless persons who refused to become Soviet citizens. In order to allow undocumented refugees to move

¹³ Nikita Kuznetsov, *Russkii Flot na Chuzhbine* (Moscow: Veche, 2009), 104.

¹⁴ Konstantin M. Ostapenko (eds. Vitalii E. Koisin and Aleksandr A. Konvalov), *Lemnoskii dnevnik ofitsera Terskogo kazach'ego voiska, 1920–1921* gg. (Moscow: Sodruzhestvo 'Posev', 2015).

¹⁵ Anatol Shmelev, 'Gallipoli to Golgotha: Remembering the Internment of the Russian White Army at Gallipoli, 1920–3', in Jenny Macleod, ed., *Defeat and Memory: Cultural Histories of Military Defeat in the Modern Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), 195–213.

¹⁶ Mitrofan I. Boiarintsev, 'Epokha 1937–1965 gg.', 33–4, in Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Bakhmeteff Archive, Mitrofan I. Boiarintsev Papers, Box 1.

¹⁷ Paul Robinson, *The White Russian Army in Exile, 1920–1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 99–100.

¹⁸ Paul Robinson, 'Zemgor and the Russian Army in Exile', *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 46, 4 (2005), 719–37.

throughout Europe and beyond, in 1922 Fridtjof Nansen, a Norwegian diplomat who was High Commissioner of Refugee Affairs with the League of Nations, drew up a certificate later known as the Nansen passport.¹⁹ In Paris, Berlin, Prague and Istanbul, the White Russians transformed certain neighbourhoods into ethnic enclaves. In the French capital they became carpenters, taxi drivers, waiters and factory workers.²⁰ The Russian refugees caused outbreaks of xenophobia and curiosity amongst the locals.

The endless ideological, cultural and ethnic variety of the Russian emigration was the Achilles heel of the émigré diaspora.²¹ For at least twenty years, many military emigrants considered their struggle unfinished, as the cult of defeat became their unifying motive. They lived in the hope of a ‘spring campaign’, an intervention in the Soviet Union. But the years passed and the Soviet state grew in strength. The 1930s brought a new schism regarding which strategy to choose. Two options emerged: to cooperate with foreign powers pursuing the goal of destroying the Soviet state, or to follow one’s own independent path. It was at this time that two currents were noted: the ‘defencists’ and the ‘defeatists’. The former saw any cooperation with any interventionist foreign power as outright treason. The latter maintained that, for the sake of crushing Bolshevism, any means were acceptable. Many officers still dreamed of an alliance with the United Kingdom and France. Others considered joint collaboration with the rising fascist powers to be unavoidable. The majority of military men, as well as adherents of monarchical and radical right-wing views, held the ‘defeatist’ position.²² Fanatical anti-Bolshevism stirred them to take part in any conflict where the slightest pulse of anti-communism and the fight against communists could be detected.²³

‘It’s Strangely the Same’: General Franco’s Russian Soldiers

Up until July 1936, the presence of White Russians on Iberian soil was minimal. Since 1917, the Spanish authorities had maintained a restrictive stance toward the subjects of the former czarist empire. The Madrid government was afraid of the penetration of revolutionary elements, be they Bolsheviks, Mensheviks or anyone else. According to census data for 1930, 171 Russians resided in Spain and were mostly concentrated in Barcelona and Madrid. They were tradesmen, industrialists or members of the free professions, while a few were engaged in translating Russian literature.²⁴ In 1922, the Spanish war ministry sounded out the prospect of the large-scale recruitment of exiled White Guards for the Spanish Foreign Legion, which had been created in Northern Morocco two years earlier. Several dozen Russians and some Ukrainians had knocked on the doors of the Spanish legations in Prague, Sofia and Tunis. However, the fear of revolutionary infection, due to the Russians’ possible contacts with conscript soldiers, as well as the shortage of means, put an end to the plan. Therefore, by the early 1930s, barely thirty-two Russians served in the Spanish Legion.²⁵

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 held great symbolic significance for Russians abroad. It seemed as though the temperature of the Spanish conflict was rising according to already

¹⁹ Martyn Housden, ‘White Russians Crossing the Black Sea: Fridtjof Nansen, Constantinople and the First Modern Repatriation of Refugees Displaced by Civil Conflict, 1922–1923’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 88, 3 (2010), 495–524.

²⁰ Michael Esch, *Parallele Gesellschaften und soziale Räume. Osteuropäische Einwanderer in Paris, 1880–1940* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2012); Robert H. Johnston, *New Mecca, New Babylon: Paris and the Russian Exiles, 1920–1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988).

²¹ Nikolaus Katzer, *Die Weisse Bewegung in Russland. Herrschaftsbildung, praktische Politik und politische Programmatik im Bürgerkrieg* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), 495–532.

²² ‘Informatsionnyi list Alekseevtsev’, *Vestnik Obshchestva Gallipoliitsev*, 38, 24 Aug. 1936.

²³ Iurii S. Tsurganov, ‘Istoriia antibol’shevistskoi emigratsii v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voiny v dokumentakh Gosudarstvennogo arkhiva Rossiiskoi Federatsii’, in Kirill Aleksandrov, Oleg Shevtsov and Anatol Shmelev, eds., *Trudy II mezhdunarodnykh istoricheskikh chtenii, posviashchennykh pamiati professor General’nogo shtabe general-leitanant Nikolaia Nikolaevicha Golovina. Belgrad, 10–14 Sentiabria 2011 goda. Sbornik statei i materialov* (St. Petersburg: Skriptorium, 2012), 290.

²⁴ Mikel Aizpuru, ‘Ciudadanía e inmigración: los exiliados rusos en España, 1914–1936’, *Ayer*, 78 (2010), 171–93.

²⁵ Miguel Ballenilla, *La Legión 1920–1927* (Lorca: Fajardo el Bravo, 2010), 86–8, 111, 364.

familiar aspects of the Russian socio-political schism.²⁶ All of this fits into the picture of a pan-European civil war, in which communists and anti-communists fought to the death. One leit-motiv rapidly took shape in the speeches of those who took arms against the Spanish Republic: everything revolved around the purported responsibility of the Soviet Union for the outbreak of the conflict and the Spanish Republicans' dependence on Stalin. There was talk of a war of 'Spaniards against Russians', and a new Reconquest against a foreign invasion, supported by native traitors. These arguments recalled those employed by the White Russians during 1917–20. In the opinion of many militant Catholics and radical conservatives, the defence of the Christian faith and European civilisation itself was at stake in Spain.²⁷

The outbreak of the Spanish conflict greatly influenced the White Russian diaspora and old disagreements continued with renewed zeal. The 'defencists' and leftists (Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries and others) condemned the military uprising, comparing it to the Kornilov revolt of August 1917 against the Russian provisional government. In contrast, on 19 July 1936, the ROVS expressed their support for the Spanish rebels. News about the murder of priests and the defiling of churches in the Republican rear awoke a feeling of solidarity in the emigration's right wing. The ROVS and other groups wished to show the entire world that this was not a conflict of Spaniards versus *Russians*, but of 'national' Spaniards against the international *Reds*.²⁸ However, even among the rightists, voices could be heard that favoured a policy of non-intervention.²⁹ General Mikhail F. Skorodumov replied from Belgrade that the struggle in Spain corresponded to the knightly ideal of the Russian officer.³⁰ This debate became the harbinger of the choices made by the sides in the coming world war.

In the summer and autumn of 1936, individual Russian volunteers, on their own initiative, began to arrive in Spain. Only a few, more often already connected with the country, established themselves right away.³¹ Individual Russians arrived in the autumn, but the reception was cold. Igor K. Sakharov contrived to arrive from Germany; after a failed attempt, he finally made it to Spain, where he joined the Foreign Legion. The battalion commander met him with the cry of 'You Russians, White and Red, have no business here.'³² The main flow began in 1937. Among those who illegally crossed the border were two generals (Anatolii V. Fok and Nikolai V. Shinkarenko), two colonels (Nikolai N. Boltin and Vladimir A. Dvoichenko) and several captains. Fok was filled with great enthusiasm: 'Those of us who will be fighting for Nationalist Spain . . . against the Bolsheviks will in this way carry out their duty to White Russia.'³³

Insofar as many White Guards spoke French, the Francoist command proposed uniting them with French legitimist volunteers, but the Russians did not take to this idea. In the end, a significant portion

²⁶ Aleksandr A. Pchelinov-Obrazumov, 'Obraz ispanskoi respubliki (1936–1939) v presse rossiiskoi politicheskoi emigratsii', *Naucnye vedomosti Belgorodskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, 25, 1 (2013), 44–51.

²⁷ Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, *!Fuera el invasor! Nacionalismos y movilización bélica durante la Guerra Civil española (1936–1939)* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2006), 180–9, 245–61; Enric Ucelay-Da Cal, 'Ideas preconcebidas y estereotipos en las interpretaciones de la Guerra Civil española: el dorso de la solidaridad', *Historia Social*, 6 (1990), 23–46; Hugo García, *The Truth about Spain: Mobilizing British Public Opinion, 1936–39* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010).

²⁸ Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 38, 84, 152.

²⁹ For example, the Paris-based monarchist historian Anton A. Kersnovskii: Anton Kersnovskii, 'Nikakikh Ispantsev', *Tsarskii Vestnik*, 521, 21 Sept./4 Oct. 1936; 'Ispanskie Dela', *Tsarskii Vestnik*, 517, 24 Aug./6 Sept. 1936.

³⁰ Mikhail Skorodumov, 'Nikakikh Ispantsev', *Tsarskii Vestnik*, 524, 25 Oct./12 Nov. 1936; 'O Don Kikhotstve!', *Tsarskii Vestnik*, 527, 15 Nov./2 Dec. 1936.

³¹ For instance, the cuirassier Georgii A. Staritskii, who belonged to the monarchist party Spanish Renewal (*Renovación Española*). Biographical note, Staritskii family archive (Andorra).

³² Iurii Koreiskii, 'S Vostoka na Zapad. Iz Istorii RNNA', 19–20, in Columbia University, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Bakhmeteff Archive, Michael Schatoff Papers, Box 1, Folder 'REM-Koreiskii, Iur.-MS'.

³³ Konstantin K. Semenov, 'Litsom k solntsu: uchastie beloemigrantov v Grazhdanskoi voine v Ispanii (1936–1939)', in Nataliia F. Gritsenko, ed., *Ezhegodnik Doma russkogo zarubesh'ia imeni Aleksandra Solzhenitsyna* (Moscow: Dom russkogo zarubesh'ia imeni Aleksandra Solzhenitsyna, 2010), 49; Aleksandr V. Okorokov, *Russkie Dobrovol'tsy* (Moscow: OOO 'Avar-konsalting', 2004), 109.

of those newcomers joined the Carlist traditionalist volunteers' units or *requetés*, whose religious fervour, traditionalism and extreme monarchism coincided to a great degree with what the emigrants believed. The most numerous groups of Russians joined the *Tercio* (regiment) of the Aragonese Carlists *Doña María de Molina*. In May 1938, this unit included thirty-five Russians.³⁴ However, the material situation of the volunteers was precarious. Moreover, the Russian military ranks of the Whites were not recognised. Other Russians linked up with various sub-units of the Francoist army on their own up until 1938. In July 1937, a dozen immigrants were fighting in the ranks of the Italian Expeditionary Corps (*Corpo Truppe Volontarie*, CTV).³⁵

There were also various groups of non-Russian nationalists who supported the uprising against the Spanish Republic. The Armenian general Arsen Torkom proposed to Franco that he should recruit the astounding figure of 300,000 of his fellow countrymen in the diaspora, because Spain was fighting for the very same goals as had the first Armenian republic in 1918–20. A similar position was adopted by Georgian émigrés who believed that a victory by the rightist forces would weaken the Bolsheviks and would hasten the independence of Georgia.³⁶ In September 1936, Mikhail A. Tsulukidze, a member of the 'White George' organisation, arrived in Spain, and for the next five months observed the 'process of the rebirth of a great nation' at the front. Six Georgians from the Union of Georgian Nobility left France and from November 1936 fought in the *Tercio de Navarra*.

From the beginning, members of the ROVS attempted to create a separate Russian sub-unit to take part in the fighting in Spain. They imagined that Russian volunteers under Russian command would become the first spark from which a new army, capable of uniting the scattered national forces, should have arisen. Franco's general headquarters heard out the ROVS' proposals, which had been laid out by its chief, General Evgenii K. Miller. At the end of December, a ROVS delegation visited Franco in Salamanca. The émigrés requested money for the hiring and passage of at least 2,000 soldiers. However, the *caudillo* himself declined these proposals, agreeing only to accept those who were members of the ROVS into the ranks of the Spanish Legion. If there proved to be enough of these, then it would be possible to create their own sub-units.³⁷ Some weeks later, the ROVS issued an appeal to its members to sign up as volunteers to fight in Spain. However, the effect proved insignificant: no one responded in Bulgaria, and only two in Yugoslavia, while another one later arrived from Romania, one from Italy, and another two from Czechoslovakia.³⁸ Therefore, France became the main 'supplier'. The volunteers would gather in groups of eight to ten men in the Society of Gallipoli Veterans in Paris, and from there would head towards the south, where they would cross the frontier. The border along the Pyrenees was locked up tight and those Russians who did not possess French exit visas had to make their way across at their own peril.³⁹

However, a 'mole' working for the Soviets had penetrated the Union's leadership.⁴⁰ As a result of a leak, on 16 April 1937, Captain Maksimovich's group was arrested while crossing the frontier, after

³⁴ Anton P. Iaremchuk II (ed. Vladimir N. Azar-Azarovskii), *Russkie Dobrovol'tsy v Ispanii, 1936–1939* (San Francisco, CA: Globus, 1983), 26, 81. According to Shinkarenko, twenty-seven Russians served in this *tercio* in the Spring of 1938: 'Cuesta de la Reina (oktiabr' 1937 goda). I posleduiushchee', 83-A, in Stanford University, Hoover Institution Archives (HIA), Nikolai V. Shinkaarenko Memoirs (HIA/Shinkarenko), Box 4, Chapter VI.

³⁵ Keene, *Luchando por Franco*, 290–4.

³⁶ Nikoloz Dzhavakhishvili, 'The Spanish Civil War and the Georgian Emigration (1936–1939)', in *Georgian Diplomacy: Yearbook of the Research Centre of History of Georgian State and Folk Diplomacy of the Tbilisi State University in the Name of Ivane Dzhavakhishvili* [in Georgian] (Tbilisi: Tsugamba, 2003), vol. 10, 469–80.

³⁷ Petr P. Savin, 'Gibel' generala E. K. Millera (ne vymysel, a istoricheskaia byl')', 3, 8 (HIA Petr P. Savine Papers [HIA/Savin], Box 1, Folder "Gibel" generala Millera'. See also Vladimir V. Markovchin, 'Nesostoiavshiisia soiuz: ROVS i grazhdanskaia voina v Ispanii', *Izvestiia Iugo-Zapadnogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Ser. 'Istoriia i pravo'*. 22 (2017), 96–101.

³⁸ Lampe to Shinkarenko, 23 July 1939, State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), R5853, opis' 1, delo 67, list 285.

³⁹ Othen, *Brigadas Internacionales*, 169–71; Iaremchuk II, *Russkie Dobrovol'tsy*, 2–3; Semenov, *Litsom k solntsu*, 59–61; Boris S. Permikin (ed. Sergei G. Zirin). *General, rozhdennyi voinoi. Iz zapisk, 1912–1959* gg. (Moscow: Posev, 2011), 144–5.

⁴⁰ Pamela A. Jordan, *Stalin's Singing Spy: The Life and Exile of Nadezhda Plevitskaya* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 144–5.

which the ROVS cancelled the dispatch of volunteers.⁴¹ However, up until 1938, individual Russians continued to make their way to Spain. In mid-1937, Franco's General Staff once again reviewed the question of creating a separate Russian unit.⁴²

All this did not prevent the White community in exile from exalting the 'heroic deeds' of their comrades in Spain. The Brussels-based journal *Chasovoi*, the main outlet of the Russian military diaspora, illuminated events in detail on its pages. The conflict was named the 'Spanish–Soviet War'; Franco's forces were the 'Whites' and the Republicans the 'Reds', directed from Moscow. They printed letters from Russian volunteers in Spain, which emphasised the similarity in the experience between the old and new civil wars.⁴³ A Russian legionnaire ascribed to Stalin the overall leadership of the Republican side and assumed that the same disciplinary measures were employed as in the Red Army fifteen years earlier; he also believed that in Spain the battle was for 'the faith, culture and all of Europe'.⁴⁴ Anti-Semitic notes were also heard: 'There's no speculation, because there are no Jews.'⁴⁵ The extreme right activists of the Russian National Union of War Participants (RNSUV) followed a similar line: 'The Spanish war is continuing in our time the pictures of that which we observed in Russia during the Kornilov campaign.'⁴⁶ The tone of the ultra-right émigrés coincided with the émigrés of other nationalities. In March, the Georgian Amilakhvari wrote a letter to the mouthpiece for the small Fascist Union of Georgia:

We Georgians, who now serve within the ranks of the Carlists, are happy in that we are granted the opportunity, if only here in Spain, in the mountains of Navarre, to do battle with the bearers of ideas that destroyed our Motherland. The hour is not far off when the bell of liberty for our country will ring out.⁴⁷

The Russian volunteers were distinguished by a high degree of motivation. Some fell in combat and were glorified as martyrs. Among the defenders of the position of Quinto de Ebro in August 1937, during the Republican Army offensive in Belchite, were Lieutenant Iakov Polukhin and General Anatolii Fok.⁴⁸ The 'fallen heroes' of Quinto were raised high by Francoist propaganda and were collectively bestowed the highest award. They were also remembered in emigration.⁴⁹ When Nikolai Ivanov, a member of the small Russian Imperial Union-Order (RISO), was killed in March 1939, RISO's members came up with a special greeting in his honour.⁵⁰

Three months after Franco's victory in April 1939, all the Russians were officially demobilised. Four months later, a group led by Colonel Nikolai Boltin met with Franco himself. Their goal was that the Russian veterans be allowed to join the Spanish Legion as officers, which some in the end actually did.⁵¹ Those who remained on Iberian soil received Spanish citizenship and were given modest jobs in the army and the national militia, dependent on the Spanish fascist party, Falange (*FET de las*

⁴¹ Iaremchuk II, *Russkie dobrovol'tsy*, 18; Savin, "'Gibel" generala E. K. Millera', 12.

⁴² Keene, *Luchando por Franco*, 304–5; Vladimir V. Markovchin, 'Na sluzhbe Ispanii: missiia general Shinkarenko', *Izvestiia Iugo-Zapadnogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Seriiia 'Istoriia i pravo'*, 22 (2017), 135–44.

⁴³ 'Grazhdanskaia voina v Ispanii', *Chasovoi*, 185 (Feb. 1937); N. Belogorskii, 'Privet ispanskim "Kornilovtsam"'. San Jago! Espana!', *Chasovoi*, 172 (Aug. 1936).

⁴⁴ Keene, *Luchando por Franco*, 298.

⁴⁵ 'Pis'ma iz Ispanii', *Galipoliiskii vestnik*, 51, 18 Aug. 1937.

⁴⁶ Iu.F. Semenov, 'Mirovaia Revolutsiia', *Signal. Organ Russkogo natsional'nogo soiuzna Uchastnikov voyny*, 1 (1937), 20 Feb.

⁴⁷ Aleksandr Amilakhvari, 'In Spain. Towards Bilbao', *Kartlossi. Organe du nationalisme intégral géorgien* [in Georgian], (1937) 2–3.

⁴⁸ 'Iz pisem iz Ispanii', *Galipoliiskii vestnik*, 60 (1938). 1 June; Arthur H. Landis, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (New York, NY: Citadel Press, 1967), 276, 279.

⁴⁹ 'Iz Frantsii v Ispaniiu. V dva razdel'nykh priema', two additional pages with no numbers, HIA/Shinkarenko, Box 3, Chapter XVI; 'Pamiati russkikh v Ispanii'. *Galipoliiskii vestnik*, 88 (1940), 1 Oct.

⁵⁰ 'Istoriia Rossiiskogo imperskogo soiuzna-ordena: 1929–2009', *Impertsy. 80 let RIS-O. 1929–2009* (n.p.: no publisher, 2009), 16–17.

⁵¹ Iaremchuk II, *Russkie dobrovol'tsy*, 177–8.

JONS).⁵² All in all, the Russians had been a small part of the international contingent of Franco partisans. There were fewer than 200 White Guards, while the Italians numbered 79,000 and the Germans 25,000 (mostly non-line troops), nearly 10,000 Portuguese, 2,000 French, 700 Irish and 300 Latin Americans.⁵³ According to the maximum figures, from 150 to 170 White Russians fought for Franco, of whom 19 perished and many more were wounded.⁵⁴ There were also 285 Russians who came to fight for the Republic from various countries, although not all of them were part of the Russian émigré diaspora. Moreover, the Soviet Union sent to Spain dozens of military advisers, as well as 351 tank crew and 770 aircraft pilots.⁵⁵ For the right-wing Russian émigrés, the victory of the Francoists raised their hopes for a triumphant return home.⁵⁶ However, the diaspora proved to be fettered by a multitude of factors that brought this to nought.⁵⁷

Some Russian exiles also sought to make sense of what they had witnessed, while comparing it with the White Army's past experience in the Russian civil war. A good example of this was Baron Boris S. von Ludinghausen-Wolff, who had fought in a Carlist *tercio*. He analysed the 'new' Spain and concluded that the matter lay in unity of command, as well as in updating the monarchist legacy: 'There should also be one political party in Russia, which takes everything healthy from Italian, Spanish and German Fascism and all that is applicable to the country. The task facing Russia is to unite the monarchical past with contemporary fascism'.⁵⁸ Moreover, Franco's victory became a further stimulus for the unification of the 'defeatists', who wished to crush the Soviet Union at any price. As Staff Captain Anton P. Iaremchuk II wrote in June 1939, they had known victory over 'the enemy of our Motherland'. This gave them 'the right to believe that communism, which has enslaved our great and beautiful Motherland – Russia – will fall and that the Russian tricolour will once again wave over the Russian land'.⁵⁹ Lieutenant Pavel Rashevskii revealed his own dreams for the future to a Carlist volunteer: 'As soon as we end the war in Spain, we will move against the French Reds. . . . And then all together – Italy, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and France, as brothers in civilisation – will take on the cursed tyrants of my country, my native Russia.'⁶⁰ Undoubtedly, Iaremchuk and Rashevskii were incapable of recognising their own political and military helplessness. In 1939 there was not the slightest reason to think that the land road from Madrid would lead to the red stars of Moscow.

'Sandcastles': Russian Émigrés and Operation 'Barbarossa'

In the early stages of German National Socialism, the Nazi party and Russian émigrés maintained contact in Munich.⁶¹ They shaped in Hitler, to a certain degree, the perception that there was a close

⁵² See files in Archivo General Militar, Ávila (AGMAV) 6205/119 and 24017/2.

⁵³ For updated figures, see Alonso Ibarra, 'Guerra civil española', 272.

⁵⁴ Konstantin K. Semenov, *Russkaia emigratsiia i grazhdanskaia voina v Ispanii, 1936–1939 gg.* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2016), 103. Boltin mentioned in 1940 that seventy-two men arrived in the country, 'almost all of whom were Russian army officers', of whom thirty-four perished in battle. See Nikolai Boltin, *Memoria*. Madrid (1940), 19 Apr. (AGMAV, 24017/2).

⁵⁵ Many French, Canadian and American volunteers were actually émigrés from Eastern Europe or the children of migrants. See Konstantin K. Semenov, 'Pervyi opyt antifashistskoi bor'by-beloemigranty v armii Ispanskoi respubliki', in Konstantin K. Semenov and Mariia I. Sorokina, eds., *Rossiiskaia emigratsiia v bor'be s fashizmom. Mezhdunarodnaia nauchnaia konferentsiia*. Moscow (Moscow: Dom russkogo zarubezh'ia imeni Aleksandra Solzhenitsyna, 2015), 59–60.

⁵⁶ Shinkarenko to Lampe, 12 May 1939 (GARF, fond R-5853, opis' 1, delo 67, listy 380–2); Colonel Kondrat'ev to Staff Captain Iaremchuk, 24 Apr. 1938, in Ob'edinenie Chinov Kornilovskogo Udarnogo Polka Records (HIA/OCKUDP), Box 1, Folder 1.

⁵⁷ Robinson, *White Russian Army*, 225.

⁵⁸ Letter to parents, 827, 5 Apr. 1939, Columbia University, Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Bakhmeteff Archive. Anton A. Kersnovskii Papers (BAR Ms Coll/Kersnovskii), Box 1. Kirill M. Aleksandrov was kind enough to point out this source.

⁵⁹ Staff Captain Iaremchuk II, 'Poslednie tuchi rasseiannoi buri (lichnye vospominaniia dobrovol'tsa Ispanskoi voiny)', 17 (Globus Publishers Records [HIA/Globus], Box 7).

⁶⁰ José Sanz y Díaz, *Por las rochas del Tajo. Visión y andanzas de guerra* (Valladolid: Santarén, 1938), 102.

⁶¹ Michael Kellogg, *The Russian Roots of Nazism: White Emigres and the Making of National Socialism, 1917–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

connection between Judaism and Bolshevism. During the period up to 1924, the Nazi leader himself allowed for a certain variation on a theoretic alliance between national Germany and a reborn monarchist Russia as a ‘barrier’ to communism. However, these tenets evaporated quite quickly. Anti-Semitism, the hierarchy of genetically defined racial origin, and the idea of expanding ‘living space’ towards the East became the basic lines in *Mein Kampf*.⁶² Although the Russian ‘defeatists’ were people of rightist convictions, the racial–biological worldview was only adopted by a small group of émigrés.⁶³ Furthermore, for the ‘defeatists’, the loss of the ‘people’s soul and culture’ was more terrible than any loss of land. Correspondingly, even German Nazism appeared as a sort of alternative. In their view, the Germans were the only people capable of destroying Stalin; moreover, Germany would not be able ‘to swallow and digest’ Russia, insofar as ‘the biological strength of the Russian people was unconquerable.’⁶⁴

The Nazi leadership was sharply negative toward the idea of Russian émigrés serving in its armed forces.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the struggle between diverse offices within the Nazi state’s polyarchy created some ‘windows of opportunity’. The émigrés managed to find interlocutors in them, which made it possible to satisfy some requests. In this fashion, many joined the ranks of the Wehrmacht as interpreters, drivers and construction workers. However, Nazi Germany’s war against the Soviet Union was a campaign for the systematic extermination of the enemy. According to the National Socialists’ convictions, the Slavic peoples were not entitled to their own state system and their lands were to be colonised.⁶⁶ As early as March 1941, the Nazis excluded any possibility of including émigrés in the planned invasion. The Germans believed that it was unlikely that, after twenty years away from their homeland, they would be accepted by the Russian population: according to the Wehrmacht high command (OKW), if the ‘Bolshevik state’ was replaced by ‘a nationalist Russia’, sooner or later this state ‘will once again oppose Germany’.⁶⁷

Unaware of these premises, the ROVS chiefs attempted to offer their services to the Wehrmacht. In May 1941, the chief of the semi-autonomous ORVS,⁶⁸ General Aleksei A. von Lampe, placed his organisation at the German army’s disposal.⁶⁹ Within one month, operation ‘Barbarossa’ began and many fascists, Catholics and radical anti-communists of Europe believed that the German divisions were the force that would finish off Soviet power. There was a deluge of various proposals to create foreign units. On 30 June, a meeting of representatives from the Nazi party, the Foreign Ministry, the OKW and the SS took place in Berlin. Here were confirmed the general directives for dealing with foreign volunteers against the Soviet Union in accordance with a clear-cut ethnic hierarchy. Exception was made only for Russian émigrés and Czech collaborators: their proposals to volunteer were to be rejected. German embassies received instructions to refuse Russian émigré requests.⁷⁰

⁶² Thomas Weber, *De Adolf a Hitler. La construcción de un nazi* (Madrid: Taurus, 2018), 328–33.

⁶³ Robinson, *White Russian Army*, 219.

⁶⁴ Boris A. Khol’mston-Smyslovskii, *Izbrannye stat’i i rechi* (Buenos Aires: Rossiiskoe voenno-natsional’noe osvoboditel’noe dvizhenie im. gen. A. V. Suvorova, 1953), 6.

⁶⁵ Fedor L. Sinitsyn, ‘Sovetsko-germanskoe ideologicheskoe protivoborstvo na okkupirovannoi territorii SSSR: natsional’nye i religioznye aspekty’, PhD Thesis, Institute of Russian History, RAN (2017), 107.

⁶⁶ For an updated overview, see Christoph Hartmann, *Operation Barbarossa: Nazi Germany’s War in the East, 1941–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), as well as Alex J. Kay, *Empire of Destruction: A History of Nazi Mass Killing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021).

⁶⁷ ‘Eintragung im Kriegstagebuch des Wehrmachtführungsstabes im OKW über die Ziele und Methoden des in der Sowjetunion zu errichtenden faschistischen Okkupationsregimes, 3. März, 1941’, in Erhard Moritz, ed., *Fall Barbarossa: Dokumente zur Vorbereitung der faschisten Wehrmacht auf die Aggression gegen die Sowjetunion (1940/41)* (Berlin: Deutscher Militärverlag, 1970), 285–7.

⁶⁸ At the end of Oct. 1938, under German pressure, the ROVS’ II (German) section, was transformed into the ‘independent’ Association of Russian Military Unions (ORVS).

⁶⁹ Mikhail Shkarovskii, *Die Kirchenpolitik des Dritten Reiches gegenüber den orthodoxen Kirchen in Osteuropa (1939–1945)* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 117.

⁷⁰ ‘Niederschrift über die Sitzung im Auswärtigen Amt vom 30. Juni 1941 über die Freiwilligen-Meldung in fremden Ländern für den Kampf gegen die Sowjetunion’, 4 July 1941 (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin,

However, in the ensuing years, hundreds of White émigrés collaborated with Germany in different capacities, from intelligence operatives to appointed leaders of Russian communities in different occupied countries. In spite of this, the ‘defeatists’ in the ROVS were full of joy. Grandiose plans were proclaimed for the return to ‘national life’ and an eternal ‘union’ between Germany and (the future) Russia.⁷¹

‘From Madrid to Novgorod’: Russian Émigrés in the ‘Blue Division’

On 22 June 1941, Francoist Spain maintained its non-belligerent status, which dated back to 1940. Though formally neutral, the Spanish state did not hide its deep sympathy towards the Axis. The Falangists and radical fascists who passionately wished to make their contribution to the imposition of a ‘New Order’ in Europe launched an initiative to create a voluntary expeditionary corps. A good portion of the Spanish Army, the mass of Catholics and anti-communists shared this Germanophilia. Franco made a Solomonic decision: to dispatch to the Russian front a division of volunteers comprising army officers and NCOs provided by the Spanish army, and rank-and-file soldiers recruited by the Falange. The division was to become part of the Wehrmacht on common terms, although with its own juridical norms. In less than three weeks, the first contingent of volunteers had been gathered. A total of 17,000 men departed for the front at the beginning of July. The first group consisted heavily of Falangists, anti-communist Catholics and everyday opportunist veteran NCOs hoping to move up the career ladder, and professional army officers with similar motives. Among the first volunteers was no small number of people who had undergone political persecution in the Republican zone, as well as numerous Falangist university students.⁷²

For those White émigrés who had remained in Spain after 1939, the opening of recruiting stations by the Falange became that cherished opportunity to finally carry out their long-held dream of crossing swords with the ‘main enemy’. Enthusiastic groups of Russian exiles existed in almost every occupied European country. One large group of émigrés enrolled in the *Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme* (LVF),⁷³ some joined the Wehrmacht’s Walloon Legion (*Légion Wallonie*), while others enrolled in the Italian Expeditionary Corps (*Corpo di Spedizione Italiano in Russia*, or CSIR). After the 638th French Regiment, it was precisely the Wehrmacht’s Spanish 250th Division, otherwise known as the Blue Division (*División Azul*), that contained the greatest number of White émigrés.

Shortly after the attack on the Soviet Union, some Russian Whites approached the German embassy in Madrid. Nikolai Boltin handed over a memorandum on behalf of twenty-nine war veterans who had been awarded Spanish citizenship. However, the embassy quickly informed the petitioners that Berlin did not wish to see such gentlemen in its army. Boltin then proposed procuring his comrades-in-arms as propagandists, but this latest proposal went unanswered.⁷⁴ Yet the Russians came by two routes. On 28 June, Boltin also sent a letter to the ministry of the Spanish army with a list of eighteen ‘volunteers of Russian descent’, who very much wished to attach themselves to the ‘Crusade for the liberation of Russia from the common enemy’. Five days later he sent a new list, increasing the number of names to twenty-eight men. Some Russians had already signed up as volunteers.⁷⁵

PAAA, Box 708, Geheimakten, 504/4); ‘Richtlinien für den Einsatz ausländischer Freiwilliger im Kampf gegen die Sowjetunion’, 6 July 1941 (BA-MA, RW 19/686).

⁷¹ Johannes Baur, *Die russische Kolonie in München, 1900–1945: Deutsch-russische Beziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 295; Oleg Beyda, ‘Re-Fighting the Civil War: Second Lieutenant Mikhail Aleksandrovich Gubanov’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 66, 2 (2018), 245–73 (here, 254–6).

⁷² See Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, *The Spanish Blue Division on the Eastern Front, 1941–1945: War, Occupation, Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022).

⁷³ Oleg I. Beyda, *Frantsuzskii legion na sluzhbe Gitleru, 1941–1944 gg.* (Moscow: Veche, 2013), 273–95.

⁷⁴ *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, 1918–1945*. Serie D: 1937–1941, Vol. XIII. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 69; report by Heberlein, Madrid, 22 July 1941 (PAAA, Sammlung der Berichte, Madrid 553/3, Folder 761).

⁷⁵ Letters from Nikolai Boltin. Madrid, 28 June 1941 and 3 July 1941 (AGMAV 2005/3/2/18; 2005/3/2/21).

The Spanish military did everything possible to get around the Germans' instructions. Berlin explained once again that White Russians could not be accepted into service, except for those who had a Spanish passport. There were eighteen of these in Boltin's list, while there was simply no data on the others. The Army General Staff sent the lists to General Agustín Muñoz Grandes, the recently appointed commander-in-chief of the expeditionary corps. Everything points to the fact that Muñoz Grandes made the decision to ignore the German prohibition. Therefore, he accepted all Russian émigrés who wished to serve. As Iaremchuk II noted, 'the Germans were forced to swallow the pill'.⁷⁶

The fact was that the Spanish division needed the Russians. Hardly anyone in the Spanish Corps had any knowledge of the Russian language. The White Guards might have been weary but they demonstrated enormous enthusiasm. Georgii Staritskii joined the division and was subsequently sent as a translator to the 269th Infantry Regiment's second section. Aleksandr V. Bibikov and Vladimir I. Kovalevskii served in the Falangist militia in the Basque province of Guipúzcoa – both volunteered for the division. One of them wrote in a local Falange daily that they were ready to continue 'on our steppes' the campaign begun in 1936. The author finished his tirade with the slogans 'Long live national Russia!' and 'Up with Spain! (*¡Arriba España!*)'.⁷⁷ The Spanish Legion's forty-six-year-old Lieutenant Ali (Sergei) Gurskii-Magometov had served in two Carlist *tercios*. He approached Franco for permission to join the German army. His motives were a mix of anti-communism, nationalism and a certain dollop of anti-Semitism:

When the Fuhrer [sic], Hitler, declared war on the communists, Bolsheviks and Jews, who defeated my Motherland, and who stepped foot on Russian soil, I considered it my holy duty as a former Russian officer and patriot to immediately leave for there in order to once again assist, with my strength and knowledge, the liberation of my former Motherland from the horrible terror of communism.⁷⁸

Two White émigrés, who had lived in Spain before 1936, were also admitted. Igor Perchin was the son of Russian émigrés and grew up in Madrid. Sergei Ponomarev settled in Barcelona and had been a member of the Falange since 1934. Another two requests were made to join the division, sent from two Russians from Bucharest and Morocco.⁷⁹ Finally, there was a small group of those officers who were turned down. They left much later as translators for the Italian army in Russia.⁸⁰

'Bygone Natures': The Ambiguous Experiences of 'Russian Spaniards' in Russia

White émigrés were an absolute minority in the Blue Division.⁸¹ Most of them served with division, regimental and battalion staffs so that their relations with private soldiers at the front were not always particularly close. The Spanish veterans themselves only mentioned their Russian comrades-in-arms episodically. They were usually regarded as exotic individuals, who behaved in an old-fashioned, aristocratic manner; but some also perceived how strange the situation was for the former émigrés back in a land that had so profoundly changed. In the autumn of 1941, the Falangist leader Dionisio Ridruejo wrote the following entry about his Russian colleague, Aleksandr Bibikov, in his war diary: 'I

⁷⁶ HIA/Globus, Box 1. A. Gabrieli [Anton P. Iaremchuk II], *S ital'ianskoi armiei v Rossii. Moia posledniaia (chetvertaia) voina*, 83–4.

⁷⁷ 'Carta abierta a Jaime de Urbino', *Unidad* (1941), 3 July.

⁷⁸ Letter of M. Ali Gurski. Madrid, 23 June 1941 (AGMAV 2005/3/2/33).

⁷⁹ *Relación de los voluntarios rusos con expresión de sus empleos y antecedentes*, n.d. (July 1941), AGMAV 2005/3/2/3; Iaremchuk II, *Russkie dobrovol'tsy*, 365–9, 372.

⁸⁰ Oleg Beyda, "'Rediscovering Homeland": Russian Interpreters in the Wehrmacht, 1941–1944', in Amanda Laugesen and Richard Gehrmann, eds., *Communication, Interpreting and Language in Wartime: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 131–52.

⁸¹ Andrei V. Elpat'evskii, *Golubaia diviziia: voennoplennye i internirovannye ispantsy v SSSR* (Moscow: Aleteia, 2015), 109–19.

sometimes notice how he, taciturn and sad, would go out for a long walk. . . . I understand, or at least can well imagine the feelings of this man regarding his Motherland, her suffering cities and fields.⁸²

The few testimonies of those undergoing occupation described the émigrés who arrived with the Spaniards in an entirely different light. One Soviet writer claimed that the exiles served in the gendarmerie's sub-units and took bribes, and one of them would flog prisoners.⁸³ At least one émigré writer, Lev Fabritsius, mentions in his work Russian translators working for the Spaniards. In his novel, *The Belago Family*, the main hero is the Soviet prisoner Anton, who is interrogated by a former captain in the White army, now serving the Spaniards as a translator. Anton's initial contempt is replaced by interest in and sympathy for the émigré, with whom he discusses the past.⁸⁴

The outstanding role of only a few dozen translators in relations between the occupiers and those occupied made them noticeable figures in the eyes of the population torn by the war. The rare unofficial testimony available to us emerged, for the most part, from the pens of Soviet collaborators. Boris A. Filistinskii became acquainted at the end of 1941 with the Russian translator Konstantin Goncharenko. The émigré told him that he had imagined before returning in 1941 that the peasants 'must be some kind of special, completely brutalised Bolsheviks or either complete martyr, as they portray on old icons, and that the women and girls . . . have been hopelessly debauched'. The picture he gave now was different: Russian peasants

proved to be just people: they sing songs, gay, carefree and simple. Of course, they use cunning and try to trick you, but this is all the good: they see us as foreigners, as enemies. As for the women and girls, I'd like to see how the French and German women meet their conquerors! These are just amazing . . . No, I can't get enough of Russia!⁸⁵

Another example of the Soviet citizens' quite contradictory observations is the diary of Olimpiada G. Poliakova, a woman living in Pavlovsk, who actively cooperated with the Germans. From August 1942, sketches appear in her diary about the coexistence between Soviet people and the Spaniards who arrived in the town. She singled out two from the many émigrés she came across. The first, Aleksandr A. Tringam, won her over with his refined manners. His opposite was Lev G. Totskii, 'a vulgar thief'. During interrogations, Totskii purposely translated incorrectly the statements by civilians and set up those whom he did not like. He was not averse to taking the last of his impoverished fellow countrymen's things.⁸⁶ The complexity of the relations between the White émigrés and the Soviet population is also described by Ivan E. Bratysenko, who lived near Novgorod. Ali Gurskii-Magometov was to him an 'unfinished-off' White Guard, but he did save Bratysenko's family by driving off drunken German soldiers who tried to break into his hut one night. However, another émigré, Staritskii, made a negative impression on him because of his aristocratic arrogance:

He said that he knows that his buildings in Kursk are in one piece and that he will soon once again be their owner. I asked him where he was born. He replied: 'You know my surname? I am Prince Staritskii. All of the Tver' province's Staritskii district is our home estate and I, of course, will receive ownership.'⁸⁷

On their own, the Russian exiles from the Blue Division left only a handful (less than five) of short sources. The longest and most important are Vladimir Kovalevskii's memoirs of the years 1941–2,

⁸² Dionisio Ridruejo (X. M. Núñez Seixas, ed.), *Los Cuadernos de Rusia: diario 1941–1943* (Madrid: Fórcola, 2013), 189–90 (entry of 30 Sept. 1941).

⁸³ Pavel N. Luknitskii, *Leningrad deistvuet: frontovoi dnevnik*, Book 3 (Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1968), 488–90.

⁸⁴ Lev Fabritsius, *Sem'ia Belago. Roman* (Toronto: Samizdat, 1984), 7–11.

⁸⁵ Boris Filippov, *Izbrannoe* (London: OPI, 1984), 151–3, 155–7.

⁸⁶ 'Svershilos'. Prishli nemtsy!', in Oleg V. Budnitskii, ed., *Ideinyi kollaboratsionizm v SSSR v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2012), 138–9, 146–8, 156.

⁸⁷ Ivan Bratysenko, 'Ispantsy, nemtsy, balalaika: iz vospominanii', *Chelo: al'manakh*, 18, 2 (2000), 83.

which remained unpublished until 2019. This testimony stands out as an exception, not only because of its voluminous nature, but also due to the uncharacteristically negative description of the Spanish military and particularly of the occupation practices of the Blue Division.

Unlike many exiled brethren, who still believed that the German invasion rendered an opportunity to liberate and restore the ‘old Russia’, Kovalevskii arrived at an epiphany about the nature of the war – it was the extermination of Russia, not its redemption. He observed critically how German and Spanish soldiers plundered the peasants, mistreated them and despised their claims for food. Moreover, he also came to the conclusion that Russian traditional culture had not perished under the yoke of the communists, as many of the exiles believed, and that the true motivation for the civilians’ and soldiers’ resistance to the invaders was patriotism:

More than once, I [asked] the question: is the Soviet regime really so hateful to the Russian people . . . ? Or perhaps these are all cock-and-bull stories circulated by the Germans in order to justify their policy of conquest and the future resettlement of Russia? In this case, we who have come here are playing a more than ugly role, betraying our motherland and serving the enemy. And this doubt caused me much torment.⁸⁸

This was no small realisation since the concept of any perceived ‘guilt’ was consistently cancelled in the military exile culture of remembrance. Acceptance or even allowance of such a perception inevitably led to uncomfortable questions and doubts. In late 1941, Kovalevskii participated in the anti-partisan sweep that ended up in a summary execution; despite an attempt to save the Soviet prisoners, the émigré was made to witness the tragic fates of former Red Army men.

This death shook me to the depths of my soul . . . Did I have the right at my age, having lived, been worn out and disappointed in everything and not expecting anything from life, but chiefly tired, tired of life and wanderings and betrayed illusions, to kill (after all, I essentially killed those three Russians who had surrendered to me) a life just beginning . . . ? I must bitterly note that I am falling lower and lower. And my line of conduct is moving further and further from the best ideals of humanity.⁸⁹

Kovalevskii also realised how his motherland had become a strangely alien place. His own life effectively and entirely fell through the cracks of the conflicts he was shaped by, and now Kovalevskii was able to relate to but unable to connect with the Soviet Russians, the Spaniards, or even his own Russian brothers-in-arms.⁹⁰ On return to Spain in the spring of 1942, he was a broken man who felt guilty for having enlisted in the Spanish Division of the Wehrmacht. On the contrary, most of his Russian brothers-in-arms were proud of their Blue Division tenure. What mattered to them was the unflinching loyalty to the anti-Bolshevik cause, which in turn informed the way they approached their role. They portrayed the relations with the local population as unconditionally heart-felt. In this respect, they reproduced many elements of the narrative of the ‘chivalrous’ Blue Division, which was characteristic of the Spanish veterans from the 1950s on.⁹¹

The Allies’ pressure on the Franco regime, accompanied by the decreasing influence of Falangists in the course of the dictatorship, led to a new development. In September 1943, Madrid ordered the

⁸⁸ Xosé M. Núñez Seixas and Oleg Beyda, eds., *Ispanskaia grust’: Golubaia diviziia i pokhod v Rossiiu, 1941–1942 gg.: vos-pominaniia V. I. Kovalevskogo* (Moscow: Nestor-Istoriia, 2021), 154.

⁸⁹ *Ispanskaia grust’: Golubaia diviziia*, 166–7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 145–6, 170.

⁹¹ Thus, Tringam remembered that in Nov. 1941 he was quartered in the home of a woman with two children. Some months later he saved her life during a bombing raid. Sometimes these evaluations intersect: according to Rudinskii’s memoirs, Tringam tried to help the peasants in the village and saved a captured Red Army soldier from camp and the latter became his orderly. See Vladimir S. Rudinskii, ‘S ispantsami na Leningradskom fronte’, *Pod belym krestom*, 3 (1952) Sept.

withdrawal of the Blue Division. As a consolation prize for Hitler, they left a much smaller formation: the Spanish Volunteer Legion (Blue Legion), in which a couple of White Russians also remained. The performance of this simultaneous game did not suit the Allies: new demands followed, and Franco was forced to recall the Legion as early as March 1944. Most Russian translators returned to Spain along with the bulk of the Blue Division and stayed in their adoptive country for the rest of their lives.

Conclusions: Victory in Defeat?

The fates of the White Russian war veterans after 1945 in Spain were varied. Some withdrew into private life. Others continued to live as soldiers and others, like Gurskii-Magometov, broadcast on anti-communist radio, which had been created under the aegis of the Spanish government. The Spanish wrapped up the Russian section in the 1960s, while retaining programmes in other Eastern European languages.⁹² General Shinkarenko made peace with the collapse of his personal hopes of promotion to a higher rank. In 1957 he summed up the results:

Both Fok and I assumed that in Spain there would finally accumulate a great number, as many as a thousand or fifteen hundred of our volunteers. From then we could form at least a Russian brigade and this brigade, which was combat ready, would later serve as the basis of the war for Russia. A necessary basis, for all of the unions and organizations proved to be good for nothing. . . . A thousand or fifteen hundred of our White Russians. . . . What an illusion and self-deception. . . . And now, in the present, all of this is meaningless.⁹³

After 1945, the Russian exiles stoutly cultivated their nostalgic view of past wars, all the while bitterly recognising that, as opposed to the anti-communists in Spain or Finland, their side lost absolutely everything in the war against the Soviet Union.⁹⁴ In a peculiar fate of memory, the war of 1936–9 became the sole victory among a string of Russian defeats. The year 1939 became the cornerstone for positive memories, from which a new self-perception was drawn: that of winners among losers, among the Spaniards, whose Blue Division fought a losing war, and among the Russian brothers in exile who were not present for Franco's victory in 1939. In the spring of 1950, Von Lampe took a trip to Madrid, where he met with members of the ROVS residing there and envied their self-image: 'They, just like us, who were not victorious on the White front of the civil war in Russia, were the victors on the White side of the Spanish front of the civil war.'⁹⁵ Some Whites also associated on their own with their fellow Spanish comrades. Like their Spanish comrades, they avoided mentioning the diverse facets of the war of extermination that they witnessed in their homeland and constantly emphasised that their participation in the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Wehrmacht was not triggered by the same objectives as the Germans.⁹⁶

The 'Spanish' White Russians were a small group of anti-communist transnational volunteers. They were certainly not decisive for Franco to win the Spanish Civil War, but they acquired some prestige among their comrades. Their war experience in Spain reaffirmed their existing beliefs

⁹² Konstantin K. Semenov, 'Russkaia sektsiia Ispanskogo radio kak instrument antisovetskoi bor'by', *Elektronnyi nauchno-obrazovatel'nyi zhurnal 'Istoriia'*, 8, 10 (2017), available at <https://history.jes.su/s207987840001993-1-1> (last visited 13 July 2020).

⁹³ Chapter XVI, 'Iz Frantsii v Ispaniiu. V dva razdel'nykh priema', 248 (HIA/Shinkarenko, Box 3).

⁹⁴ As one war veteran wrote, 'Fate smiled upon the Spanish Whites: they triumphed. It was cruel to us: we have only recollections of past valor and . . . innumerable and unknown graves scattered across all the countries of the earth'. 'S chest'iu pavshie v Ispanii', *Gallipoli, 1920–1950 gg. K tridsatiletiiu vysadki 1-go Armeiskogo korpusa v Gallipoli*, 14.

⁹⁵ Aleksei A. von Lampe, 'Al'kazar', in ed., *Puti vernykh* (Paris: n.p., 1960), 204.

⁹⁶ As Tringam wrote in 1968, 'Russians joined this division not in order to kill their fellow Russians, but in order to help Russians in their fight against both the Germans and the Communist-Bolsheviks. And all of those who were there . . . sought to ease the sufferings of their fellow Russians, who stood between two fires.' Aleksandr Tringam, 'Kratkaia istoriia uchastiiia russkikh emigrantov v grazhdanskoi voine v Ispanii za beluiu ideiu', 6–7, Central Armed Forces Museum of Russian Federation, Archival Fund (TsMVS RF-DF. 4/47. 762/1).

(anti-communism and upholding of tradition), although they did not create myths of ‘fascist warfare’ like the most fanatic members of the Italian CTV.⁹⁷ They were older than the average transnational volunteers of the 1930–40s and had gained combat experience as highly idealist combatants and also as professional soldiers. Moreover, their experience was quite unique. While most exiled White Guards died abroad without setting foot on their homeland ever again, some dozens of them enjoyed the opportunity to return to Russia in the ranks of the Blue Division. But, unlike many anti-fascist volunteers (Germans, Austrians and Italians) who returned home as heroes after 1945, the ‘Spanish’ White Russians experienced a strange homecoming, as translators and officers of an invading army that aimed at enslaving their native homeland, which they believed they were liberating. In that sense, their lives came full circle. Returning after two decades abroad, yet retaining the unflinching anti-Bolshevism, they were granted an opportunity to learn just how quickly and profoundly Russia had changed, and how increasingly difficult it was for them to separate their motherland from the communism they swore to fight against. This is further proof of how political views and perceptions of homeland become ‘frozen’ in some exiled diasporas, particularly among the first generation of émigrés, while further generations come to terms with the prevailing political conditions in their distant homeland.⁹⁸ This fact creates a challenge for returning exiles to embrace or at least make uneasy peace with the profound changes on home soil. Moreover, although some of the White Russian émigrés, at least those who left their homeland between 1917 and 1921, reflected in political terms about how Francoism or National Socialism could help reinvigorate their projects for a future liberated Russia, most of them retained loyalty to the basic ideological core: a structure forged in 1917–22 that was permeated by anti-communism. In the end, they had largely remained old-fashioned imperial nationalists fighting for their lost cause in a world where fascism and new racial worldviews were gaining ground.

The paths taken by this group of volunteers also highlight that, despite all sufferings and experiences, they still had some choices. While some of the Russian returnees after 1942, like Kovalevskii, had difficulties in adapting to a new life in peacetime, others were characterised by an astonishing capacity to reinvent themselves and to assimilate to their host society. As Mark Mazower has stated, the Russian exiles from 1917–22 were a unique example of an expatriate community that gets dissolved after seven decades.⁹⁹ The ‘Spanish’ White Russians were no exception. Only sporadic references to the émigrés remain in Spanish post-war culture.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, their experiences remain as a multi-dimensional example of exile, volunteering, return and new exile. They also represent in a nutshell how divergent were motivations for enlisting in a distant war under a foreign flag: from anti-communist fanatics to professional militiamen, the White Guards who made their way to Moscow through Madrid (and back) seemed to pursue a common goal – the final victory over the Bolsheviks. To that end, stateless Russian soldiers became true cosmopolites of war.

⁹⁷ For a comparison with the Italians in Spain, see Javier Rodrigo, *Fascist Italy in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (London: Routledge, 2021), 135–68. On the Irish volunteers, see Robert Stradling, *The Irish in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939: Crusades in Conflict* (Manchester: Mandolin, 1999), 23–42.

⁹⁸ This is a typical feature of long-enduring exiles: see Peter Mandaville and Terrence Lyoons, eds., *Politics from Afar: Transnational Diasporas and Networks* (London: Hurst, 2012), as well as Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁹⁹ Mark Mazower, *What You Did Not Tell: A Russian Past and the Journey Home* (New York, NY: Other Press, 2017).

¹⁰⁰ In 1961, the novel *Alcuneza’s Solitude*, written by the diplomat and war veteran Salvador García de Pruneda, was published. One of the secondary characters is a Russian cavalry officer. In June 2012 an Orthodox cross was erected and consecrated to the memory of the White Russian volunteers on the top of Cerro del Contadero hill, near the village of Checa (Guadalajara): <https://sierraaltotajo.es/civil/cruz-ortodoxa-del-contadero-checa> (last visited Feb. 2023).