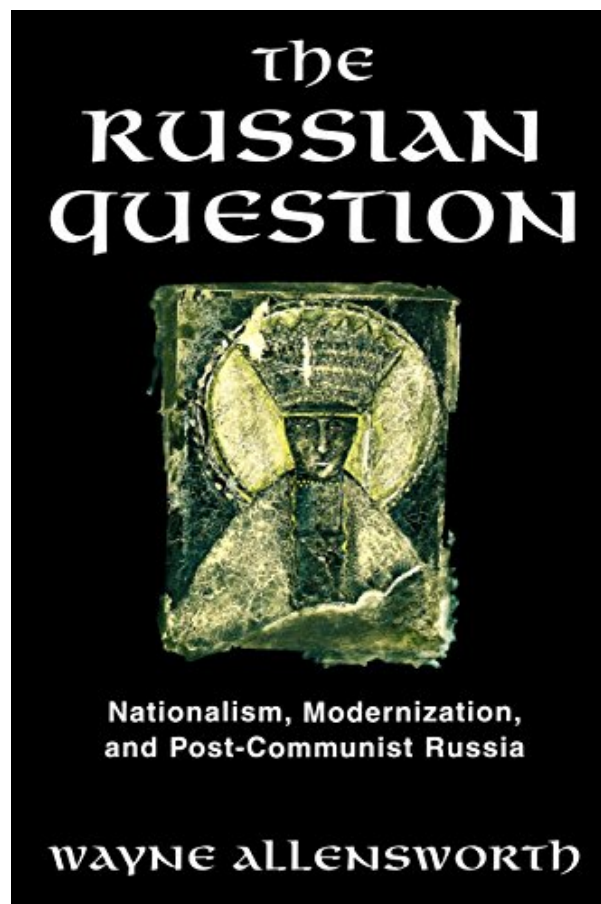


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Review

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'Who are we?' is a question that has haunted Russians for centuries. The crisis of identity that underlies Russia's efforts to answer that question and the country's attempts to grapple with modernity—the invention of an alien civilization—is explored in this timely book. Russia's response to the universal challenge posed by modernization's erosion of community has been to fall back on that most enduring bond of human association—the kinship tie—as Allensworth here defines as nationalism. The author draws on rare Russian sources to explore the various ways nationalists have responded to modernization and to chart a likely course for Russia's future development. From National Bolshevism to Christian nationalism, from Zhirinovskiy to Solzhenitsyn, this study ties the ideas and ideologies of nationalism to the question that produced them and cements their connection to the crisis of modernity.

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About the Author

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Excellent overview on the contemporary Russian right

By Andreas Umland

Allensworth has produced a good continuation to John B. Dunlop's writings on Russian nationalism under the Soviet regime, and Walter Laqueur's seminal monograph "Black Hundred". Until Allensworth, these ground-breaking studies had only been supplemented by an insightful, yet not sufficiently detailed English-language essay on the post-Soviet scene by Alexander Yanov ("Weimar Russia"), and a few more detailed

overviews in German (e.g. Leonid Ivanov) and Russian (Vladimir Pribylovskii et al.). Now Allensworth has partly closed this gap for the English reader.

After a concise, but informative review of the history of Russian nationalism since the late 18th century, the author provides well-researched presentations and insightful critique of the ideas of Solzhenitsyn, late and post-Soviet Christian nationalism, the pre- and post-Soviet Black Hundreds, emigre, Soviet and post-Soviet National Bolshevism, Zhirinovskii, the Russian neo-Nazis, the post-Soviet nationalist intellectual debate, and post-Soviet reform nationalism. His theoretical basis for dissecting and juxtaposing these varieties is mainly the sociological and anthropological literature on the sources and nature of nationalism, above all on the debate between the "structuralists" (emphasizing the functionality of nationalism), and "primordialists" (emphasizing the constituent role of national identity for human identity). The summary of this debate given as an introduction is worth-reading by itself, and provides Allensworth with some useful theoretical and conceptual tools with which to decipher and interpret the messages of the various Russian nationalist agendas. Allensworth's book can thus be characterized as a good addition to both, the methodology of studying Russian nationalism, and its theoretical comprehension. The quality and breadth of his empirical analysis of post-Soviet Russian nationalism makes it one of the best comprehensive overview of this spectrum in the 1990s available in English today.

In spite of its innovativeness, usefulness and general reliability, the concepts and typologies which Allensworth uses to define, characterize or summarize the various brands of Russian nationalism are not always well-chosen. The theoretical literature on the origins and development of nationalism and its relation to modernization, is by itself not sufficient for capturing the basic distinctions between various right-wing political agendas. Allensworth has, to be sure, provided an important guide to a consistent structuring of political spectra in general and the Russian party-system in particular, by explicitly associating the concept of the "left" with universalism (including internationalism and, in the Russian context, liberalism) and that of the "right" with particularism (pp. 26, 112). However, his few references to some writings on human nature - among them a disputed essay by Nobel Prize winner Konrad Lorenz ("On Aggression") - provide only little guidance on how to further sub-divide in an informative way the right in Russia and elsewhere.

Unfortunately, Allensworth tries to conceptualize the permutations of Russian nationalist ideology without paying much attention to the theoretical literature on ideologies. Whereas he is able to make at least some, partly useful suggestions concerning the differentiation of different types of conservatism (the instrumental vs. content-type), his disregard of the literature on generic and comparative fascism (e.g. Payne, Griffin, Eatwell) confuses his argument about some of his most important cases. When he uses the term, it is not entirely clear whether he refers to Italian Fascism or generic fascism. For instance, it remains in the dark what he exactly wanted to communicate when writing that Nikolai Lysenko's National-Republican Party's less developed racism is "blurring the line between protofascist and proto-Nazi organizations [the latter concerning, above all Alexander Barkashov's Russian National Unity - A.U.] in post-communist Russia." (p. 237) According to the findings of comparativists, there have been elements of racism in Italian Fascist ideology too. Nazism, according to the emerging consensus among theorists, should be conceptualized as a variety of generic fascism. Neither the program of the RNU nor that of the NRPR are "proto-" - i.e. not yet fully developed - ideologies. Both agendas are detailed prescriptions for political action, and how to build a future Russian state.

Equally, it is not clear why one would distinguish between Zhirinovskii's agenda and that of - what Allensworth has conceptualized as - the "national revolutionaries" represented by, above all, the RNU. Zhirinovskii has explicitly spoken of a "national revolution" too. Allensworth misses here an important dividing line within the Russian extreme Right by not explicitly introducing the category of mimetic fascism which could be usefully applied to the RNU. There is little use to give credit to the RNU's claim that its

employment of the swastika represents a genuine attempt of reviving either an ancient Orthodox or a Russian pagan symbol (p. 225). The swastika and other related symbols or ideas of the RNU are simply copies from Germany, should be identified as such, and be seen as the most important feature of this organization. Herein (and not in the degree of the RNU's radicalism, as suggested by Allensworth) lies the crucial difference to Zhirinovskii and other Russian fascists who have been more cautious in their usage of non-indigenous elements.

In spite of these and some other confusing conceptualizations, Allensworth's study is an important step forward in the belated scholarly interpretation of one of the more disturbing developments in post-Cold War politics.

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