

The Rise of Far-Right Civilizationism

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Abstract

In recent years the rise of far-right politics in North America and Europe has called into question the stability and cohesion of the so-called liberal international order. Scholars and commentators have argued that this swelling configuration of reactionary social forces threatens the future of western hegemony within a 21st century global capitalism. This essay reflects on the role of transnational organizations, organic intellectuals and elite actors in shaping the modern far-right movement. This essay will discuss the rise of a transnational ideology of the contemporary far-right which I call ‘far-right civilizationism’. This far-right ‘hegemonic project’ seeks to challenge the centrist global governance model of ‘neoliberal cosmopolitanism’, which has been dominant in the West since the end of the Cold War. The reactionary worldview of far-right civilizationism represents an alternative elite grand strategy for world order, purposed to refurbish elite hegemony during a period of profound structural crisis.

Keywords

international political economy, new right, elites, neoliberalism, globalization, transnationalism

Introduction

Critical theory-inspired theorizations of the far-right and fascism have resurged in the wake of a rising tide of far-right wing politics in North America and Europe in recent years. Scholars across the social sciences have long connected far-right politics to the nationalist, racist and xenophobic tendencies endogenous to the former colonial powers, often linking the modern resurgence of reactionary politics in the West to economic crisis and social anxieties produced by globalization. Far fewer, however, have investigated the dense transnational top-down elite networks which operate as a global vanguard for the far-right (Caiani, 2018; Rydgren, 2007). This essay will analyse the contemporary far-right’s transnational networks and organic intellectuals within the transatlantic bloc of states (United States, United Kingdom, EU) and describe their shared assumptions regarding world order.¹ I will focus primarily on the ideational aspects of global governance and the role of intellectuals and transnational elite actors in contributing to the rise

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and normalization of the far-right in the mainstream political discourse of states within the so-called liberal international order.

This essay will argue that rather than posing a radical or revolutionary break from the decades-old neoliberal model, the new far-right project, labelled here as far-right civilizationism (FRC), represents an alternative elite strategy to manage the current ‘interregnum’² of neoliberal world order and reproduce US-centred transnational hegemony in the midst of growing public dissatisfaction for elite rule. The objectives of far-right elites are not only directed towards the national sphere, but rather they seek to *refurbish* the ideological superstructure that serves to legitimize both the global capitalist system and the supremacy of the transatlantic bloc within it. This far-right program is not one of systemic/socioeconomic transformation, but rather narrowly targets what its followers believe to be the hypocritical, naïve and cynical forms of cosmopolitanism or ‘globalism’ which the West’s liberal institutions claim to champion.

Organic Intellectuals, Transnational Elites and Hegemonic Crisis

The 20th century Italian Marxist political theorist Antonio Gramsci argued that it is the ‘organic intellectuals’ who determine and express the hegemonic ideological assumptions of a particular social formation and are intimately connected to the composition of its dominant class segments. Gramsci (1971: 10) noted that while intellectuals are forged within all social groups, they are *most extensively* developed within the dominant segments of society. Stephen Gill (2012: 30) notes that the role of organic intellectuals is to:

[A]rticulate the goals and legitimate the actions and institutions of the ruling elements of a given society, seeking to stabilize the basic relations between rulers and ruled, simultaneously marginalizing and incorporating opposition. One function of these organic intellectuals is to depoliticize fundamental questions relating to the nature of capitalism, transforming political debates into technical questions directed at appropriate means rather than at questioning the fundamental ends of the capitalist system; they represent accumulation through the commodity form and markets as if it were common sense.

The most significant initiatives in the foreign policy of advanced western liberal democratic states during the post-war period have been the result of organized and well-funded collective elite projects. These projects are constructed through research and policy-planning initiatives and involve organic intellectuals in the form of think tanks, political parties, transnational forums, Ivy League research institutes and individual scholars (Gill, 2012: 514; Shoup, 2015). In an era of global capitalism, these actors ‘not only produce knowledge that informs and legitimizes neoliberal governance, they also mobilize that knowledge through extensive elite networking, thereby helping to form a strategic consensus within the dominant class’ (Carroll, 2013: 3). Kees van der Pijl (1995: 107) offers a method from which to analyse these actors, arguing:

We should view these networks as channels of cultural synchronization and informal policy discussion and preparation [. . .] Transnational elite networks in this context play a role as ‘international political parties which operate within each nation with the full concentration of international forces’.

The crisis of neoliberal capitalism requires restructuring the historical structures of world order, including its institutions and prevailing ideas (Gill, 1995). The so-called neo-Gramscian or transnational historical materialist approach to global political economy is crucially concerned with transcending the state in its analysis of power, hegemony and class. This approach to world order pioneered by Robert Cox (1981, 1987, 1992, 2001) analyses ‘state–society complexes’ and seeks

to uncover the synchronic and diachronic aspects of profound socio-political transformation with a conceptual framework that looks to the changing nature of hegemony, ‘historic blocs’³ and world orders. Cox’s method looks to sets of social forces (ideas, institutions, material capabilities), forms of state and world orders – all of which characterize different long-term historical structures, some hegemonic, or relatively stable, and others relatively unstable or under conditions of crisis (Mittleman, 1998).

A ‘hegemonic crisis’ describes a situation where the previously hegemonic class fraction is challenged or unable to provide a leadership role within world order. It is in this context of crisis that space is created for elite intellectual entrepreneurs to propose an alternative ‘hegemonic project’, designed to replace or reconfigure the prevailing ideas of the existing order (Ougaard, 2013: 25). In recent years, the rise of far-right social forces in the transatlantic bloc of states represents growing discontent with the contemporary structures of political leadership. Multiple crises have created conditions for a refurbishing of the ideological basis of elite rule in the West, specifically the relative decline of the United States since the 1970s; rising inequality linked to the global financial crisis in 2007–8 and the European sovereign debt crisis in 2010; the 2015 European migration crisis; and contradictions surrounding numerous US/NATO military interventions following 9/11.

The neoliberal global governance model/social theory has undergone a series of crises and transformations since its inception in the early 20th century and can be divided into more specific governing programs, which correspond to particular elite interests, intra-elite class struggles and the historical period. The concern of this paper is directly related to the transforming logic behind contemporary neoliberal world order, or its ‘imperial common sense’, a doctrine that assumes:

[T]he maintenance of structures and practices of global inequality that permit the USA and its principal allies to consume the lion’s share of global resources in ways that are often violent, unjust and unsustainable and associated with the intensified exploitation of human beings and nature. (Gill, 2012: 506)⁴

Neoliberal Cosmopolitanism and the Extreme Centre

The term ‘neoliberal cosmopolitanism’ (NC) was initially coined by British international relations scholar Peter Gowan (2001) to describe the neoliberal *grand strategy* for capitalist world order which emerged in the post-Cold War period and became hegemonic during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The concept of NC is used to capture a foreign policy project that has sought to universalize the Anglo-American traditions, norms and institutions that promote liberal internationalism and neoliberal governance (Gowan, 2001: 79). One can associate the assumptions of NC with the majority of centrist establishment political party structures and liberal institutions within western capitalist states since the end of the Cold War. Its economic strategy can be described as promoting a ‘compensatory liberal’ or ‘neoliberal structuralist’ form of global governance, permitting limited forms of state intervention while always stressing the virtues of free and open markets (Carroll and Sapinski, 2016; Gill, 1991). The economic program of NC acknowledges that contradictions, imperfections and externalities related to global capitalism must be remedied through certain forms of planning and international coordination so as to preserve the system as a whole. For major NC proponents such as billionaire Hungarian-American investor/philanthropist George Soros (2000, 2002) it is both market fundamentalism (belief in the market’s tendency towards equilibrium) and nationalism which represent the most imminent challenges towards the development of a functioning liberal democratic capitalist world order, or an ‘open society’ in the 21st century.⁵

The assumptions of the NC project fit comfortably within a spectrum of claimed party orientations ranging from modern socialist and labour parties, to liberal and ‘moderate’ conservative parties. Tariq Ali (2015) labels the western elites who have largely adopted the NC consensus as

the 'extreme center'. For decades, this 'moderate' establishment political class and its broad set of shared assumptions towards governance have made traditional ideological signifiers (namely between the economic Left and Right) redundant within mainstream democratic process. The ideological spectrum of the NC spans from US neoconservative hawks such as David Frum, William Kristol and Robert Kagan, to the 'Third Wayism' of New Labour under Tony Blair and extending even as far as to modern social democratic parties within advanced capitalist states. The global governance model of NC is the expression of Francis Fukuyama's (2006) 'End of History' thesis (first published in 1992) where western liberal democratic capitalism represents the final stage of human government.

The epistemic communities that support NC have become institutionalized within advanced liberal democracies over recent decades, establishing dense networks of socialization where foreign policy elites, corporate leadership structures and transnational capitalist classes can forge a shared strategic political framework. The organic intellectuals of NC can be found within elite forums, consultancies and think tanks (Trilateral Commission, Brookings Institute, Eurasia Group, World Economic Forum, Bilderberg Group and the Council on Foreign Relations); private non-profit organizations/foundations (Open Society Foundations, Ford Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation); as well as major liberal media organizations (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, NBC, CNN, CBS, CBC, BBC). The interests of transnational corporations, banks and major tech companies (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix, Google) are often affiliated with this social and political agenda. Major scholars and public intellectuals supportive of the broad NC agenda towards world order include (but are not limited to) Zbigniew Brzezinski, George Soros, Bernard Henri Levy, Fareed Zakaria, Thomas Friedman, Francis Fukuyama, Ian Bremmer, Samantha Powers, Richard Haass and Michael Ignatieff.

The foreign policy of NC is one of the defining features and has sought to redefine sovereignty within the international community. For NC, national sovereignty is understood as privilege and is to be revoked when a state fails to uphold the norms of human rights and liberal governance both foreign and domestic (Gowan, 2001: 80). For this group, support for liberal institutions, multilateralism and notions of human rights and global citizenship serves as the basis of consent for US geopolitical dominance and neoliberal socioeconomic order. The states and institutions that regulate highly unequal forms of world trade engage in forced regime change and permit the rapid movement of global capital – seek to cynically attach these policies to an ideology and vocabulary of liberal freedom and the 'responsibility to protect' universal human rights (Bartholomew and Breakspear, 2009). For Gowan (2001: 84), the institutions that uphold these new international liberal norms serve to veil the unilateralist imperialism of the United States/EU through new supra-state institutions and forums such as the UN, NATO, IMF, G7, G20 and WTO.

For decades, a major pillar of consent for NC has been rooted in liberal immigration/refugee policy. While supporters of NC vary in regard to the extent to which this free movement should be permitted, the perception within far-right circles is that the so-called globalist liberal elites are actively campaigning and funding transnational support networks for refugees and immigrants as a means to undermine national sovereignty, drive down domestic wages and dilute the cultural and ethnic homogeneity of nation-states. One example of an NC elite who has attracted a bulk share of vitriol from the far-right is George Soros. His blatant anti-nationalism, support and advocacy for refugees and progressive causes through his Open Society Foundations, as well as his staunch pro-EU stance, have made him the target of numerous far-right (and often anti-Semitic) conspiracy theories, specifically in the United States and Europe. These conspiracies have become canon for far-right social forces and have entered into the rhetoric of major political parties across the transatlantic bloc. An extreme example is found in Soros's native Hungary, where the far-right government of Viktor Orbán successfully passed a package of anti-refugee legislation informally named

as the ‘Stop Soros’ plan, in defiance of EU laws and human rights advocates. While few liberal elites go as far as Soros in their material support for refugees, the NC worldview formally opposes the rise in cultural nativism, nationalism and populism in recent years that has emerged in response to the rise in global migration flows. Proponents, however, rarely go as far as to critically interrogate the role of their own NC ideology in fostering the conditions which have produced migratory flows – specifically their advocacy for military interventions in the global South in the name of democracy and human rights.⁶

The Far-Right’s Globalists and the Nationalist International

Following Brexit and the election of Donald Trump in 2016, Geert Wilders, leader of the far-right Dutch Party for Freedom, proclaimed the dawn of a ‘Patriotic Spring’. The series of events in Europe which followed the rupture of Trump and Brexit in 2016 support Wilder’s claim: Matteo Salvini of Lega Nord was elected to Deputy Prime Minister of Italy in 2018; Marine Le Pen won 33.9% of the vote in the second round of French presidential election in 2017; AfD won 12.6% of the vote in 2017 and attained 94 seats in the Bundestag for the first time in its history; the Dutch Party for Freedom became the second largest party in the House of Representatives in the Netherlands; Fidesz led by Viktor Orbán won a supermajority in Hungary’s 2018 election; Andrzej Duda and the PiS Party control both parts of Polish Parliament as well as the Presidency, causing the EU to attempt to invoke Article 7 and revoke its membership for attacks on judiciary; Heinz-Christian Strache, leader of the far-right Freedom Party, served as Vice Chancellor of Austria between 2017 and 2019 and came in third in the 2017 election; Swedish Democrats are now the third largest party in Sweden, receiving 17.53% of the vote in the 2018 general election.

In recent years far-right social forces have transcended the boundaries of any singular nation-state, achieving previously unimaginable levels of influence in the political processes of states across the LIEO. Rather than simply a spontaneous, organic or grassroots nationalist phenomenon, this new far-right movement has produced transnational networks and inter-class alliances with the assistance of influential elite actors. For years, a transnational alliance of far-right parties, media organizations and social movements has emerged in North America and Europe and is regarded by some to be a budding ‘nationalist international’ (Mammone, 2017). Transnational anti-EU political party coalitions, anti-refugee think tanks and political groups within the EU parliament in recent years include Identity and Democracy (formally The Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom⁷), Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy, and the European Conservatives and Reformists Group. Transnational solidarity between these reactionary political parties and elites indicates their common desire to manage and co-opt popular social anxieties during the current moment of crisis and to redirect them towards antisocial activities (e.g. anti-refugee activism).

In contrast to the formal far-right political party coalitions discussed above, covert transatlantic elite networks have also emerged and have provided material support for far-right neo-nationalist movements and political figures. In 2016, major pro-Brexit organizations in the United Kingdom cooperated and coordinated with key figures within the Trump presidential campaign – specifically Nigel Farage, the former leader of the far-right political party, UK Independence Party (UKIP), who formed an alliance with far-right American billionaire, computer scientist and hedge fund manager Robert Mercer. For years, Mercer has donated millions to far-right Republican politicians and media organizations in the United States, including Breitbart News to which he has donated over \$10 million. During 2016, Mercer, with the help of his daughter Rebekah Mercer (head of the Mercer Family Foundation, board member of the Heritage Foundation and currently a member of Trump’s executive committee), donated major funds and services to both the successful Leave.eu

campaign in the United Kingdom and the Donald Trump presidential campaign. The Mercers even went so far as to bankroll the operations of the data mining/analysis company Cambridge Analytica to service the two campaigns. The sophisticated psychological operations funded by the Mercers were designed to reorganize political leadership of the dominant capitalist states in the United States and Europe.⁸

Elite class forces associated with the new far-right upsurge have both infiltrated/cohabitated the existing institutions of the 'globalizing elite' (Gill, 2008: 154), while simultaneously developing separate transnational organizations and institutions designed to challenge the centrist liberal establishment political structures of the West. These elite far-right actors, such as the Mercer Family, are beneficiaries of financialization and neoliberal globalization, while also deeply critical of the cosmopolitan cultural norms that have been a pillar of consent for transnational hegemony. This group is critical of the liberal elite's support for multiculturalism, universal human rights and multilateralism and seeks to replace these liberal social and cultural norms, with a new basis of popular consent based primarily in a civilizational nativism. This far-right project then involves the absorption of reactionary class groups and sub-ideologies viewed as functional to the reproduction of transnational capitalist hegemony. These elite class segments of the far-right believe that neoliberal economic governance is best achieved through an authoritarian and chauvinistic state-societal complex, rather than a cosmopolitan 'open society'.

Conditions of global economic crisis have led political forces of both the left and right to challenge the compatibility of democracy and capitalism (Streeck, 2016: 74). Rather than evaluate the legitimacy of a capitalist system facing systemic contradictions, elites on the far-right have targeted the utility of democratic governance. Peter Thiel, the Silicon Valley billionaire founder of PayPal and Palantir Technologies, and Trump campaign party delegate, is symbolic of this explicitly anti-democratic elite. A radical free-market fundamentalist, Thiel has questioned the compatibility of 'liberal freedom' and democracy. In favour of the former, Thiel is openly nostalgic of the 1920's Gilded Age and has voiced opposition to basic democratic demands for social welfare and mainstream liberal cultural norms including multiculturalism and the role of women within contemporary society.⁹ While publicly bemoaning the culture of the liberal elite, this has not prevented Thiel from climbing to the top of the world's most secretive and exclusive 'globalist' institutions or 'transnational power-bloc', including the Bilderberg Group, of which he is the member of the steering committee.

While, for decades, traditional capitalist elites have been much more comfortable with centrist political parties and institutions, more recently some have noted how particular fractions of 'pure liberal' and 'free market conservative' elites have been drawn to far-right politics. Doug Henwood discusses how elites involved in the private equity industry are for the most part passive towards the long-term fate of the firms they own, or the macro-economy. Rather, these actors seek to accumulate as quickly and with as little regard as possible for the larger implications of their accumulation or the impact on society writ large (2016: 287). The fraction of the billionaire class who supported Trump in the 2016 presidential campaign were said to be predominately linked to finance, insurance, real estate and energy sectors who saw Trump's corporate tax cuts, nationalism and disregard for the environment as an irresistible proposal for their particular capitalist class interests (Foster, 2017). Similarly, the Leave.eu pro-Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom was led by libertarian social forces and conservative elites linked to UKIP, who claim that the contemporary EU serves as a bureaucratic impediment to a true free-trade regime.¹⁰

While its networks currently pale in comparison to long-established and heavily funded transnational institutions and organizations linked to NC, the far-right movement has effectively mobilized an immensely influential base of support for its reactionary political program and has been notably underestimated by the NC elite establishment. Moreover, these transnational

organizations and social networks have attempted to mirror those of the NC, even going as far as developing alternative academic institutions.¹¹ An example of such transnational institution on the far-right is The Movement, a group founded by Steve Bannon, the former Goldman Sachs banker, founding member/former executive chair of Breitbart News and former chief strategist to the Trump administration. Bannon created The Movement to be a non-profit organization which would mirror and compete with Soros's Open Society Foundations – but with a reversal of its cosmopolitan and universalist objectives. For Bannon's The Movement, the goal is to eliminate the migratory flows of refugees throughout Europe through lobbying for hardened borders, restrictive immigration and mobilization of nationalist/civilizational forms of political identification.¹² The vision for world order guiding The Movement and alike groups/organizations is the subject of the following section.

The Rise of Far-Right Civilizationism

FRC represents an alternative vision for capitalist world order, which has achieved growing legitimacy in mainstream political discourse due to the relationship between the 2007–8 financial crisis and decades of NC leadership. Reactionary social forces with deep roots in the transatlantic bloc of states have adopted xenophobic and authoritarian explanations for the complex anxieties produced by decades of centrist neoliberal global governance and decades of military interventions in the global South. FRC is the ideology uniting these social forces, and its model for world order has been articulated by far-right elite intellectuals from above, as well as an online vanguard, regarded sometimes as the new 'Gramscians of the Right' (Nagle, 2017), who are currently on 'the long-march through the institutions' and seek to replace the veil of cultural cosmopolitanism and liberal internationalism (which they often refer to as 'Cultural Marxism') with a celebration of jingoism and explicit western chauvinism. For its followers, FRC symbolizes a coherent and realizable break from an elite 'globalist' agenda which they view as dominant within the policymaking circles of advanced transatlantic liberal capitalist states.

The far-right, much like the far-left, is fraught with ideological divisions which make the task of identifying core unifying themes sometimes difficult. Angela Nagle (2017) notes key areas of division within the new far-right (sometimes referred to as the 'alt-right'), with issues surrounding the importance of racial identity often dividing the more radical from the less radical subsets. Variation in regard to the vision for political economy also ranges between individuals, groups, organizations, political parties – with some factions oriented towards a version of market fundamentalism; and others opting for some form of welfare chauvinism and economic nationalism as insulation from global market forces. Liz Fekete (2018) also notes the differences between the practices of the extreme right (neo-fascist street movements) which is involved in violence and direct action and the radical right (the formal political wing) which has sought legitimacy within establishment political institutions.

Acknowledging these differences, an overwhelming majority of actors connected to the broad FRC movement share fundamental assumptions about world order, which include the imminent threat posed by immigrants/refugees; preference for authoritarian or strong-man style leadership; openly chauvinistic conceptions of western civilization; mythic or revisionist historical claims¹³; conservative Christianity or Paganism; antipathy towards mainstream liberalism and 'political correctness' (especially within universities/colleges and corporate media); Islamophobia; opposition towards taxation and the bureaucratic state; climate change denial; antifeminism and support for traditional gender norms; Euroskepticism; anti-Marxism; a critique of certain forms of military intervention, namely attempts towards state-building and humanitarian intervention. The FRC project uses the language of populism to form a simplistic Manichean 'us vs. them' narrative to

describe the ‘little guy’s’ struggle against cosmopolitan elites, as well as groups, cultures, classes and peoples which it views as alien/parasitic to the nation-state, specifically refugees and Islam. The base of popular support for FRC is often said to be found in the majoritarian ethnic group, suburban/rural, middle-class or petite bourgeois segments of the population.

The social forces linked to the new FRC project have effectively coordinated and communicated solidarity online, creating informal and formal transnational identities and networks through social media and web-based forums (4chan, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Gab, reddit). These online communities have helped energize and proliferate the base of support for various transnational far-right movements, including civil society and street violence movements (Génération Identitaire,¹⁴ PEGIDA, Soldiers of Odin, Proud Boys); think tanks (National Policy Institute, Robert Taft Club, Institute Social Studies Économiques & Politiques); sophisticated media organizations (Breitbart Media, Infowars, Rebel Media, Red Ice); and even direct action criminal operations such as the C-Star Ship, an anti-migrant vessel seeking to physically block migrants from crossing the Mediterranean. While one may belabour the differences between various far-right entities throughout history, G.M. Tamas (2000) notes that the crucial element which links modern ‘post-fascist’ far-right movements with the fascisms of the interwar period is a fundamental hostility towards any notion of universal citizenship.

The foreign policy doctrine of the FRC can be most contrasted to NC in this philosophical rejection of liberal universality in combination with an ontology of civilizational blocs, much of which it owes to Samuel Huntington’s 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’ Rather than sharing in Fukuyama’s celebration of global liberal democracy at the turn of the 21st century, the world order described by Huntington was one in which civilizational identity and culture would drive local, international and global forms of social interaction and replace the ideological conflict which animated the Cold war. Huntington specifically underscored the fault line between the western and the Islamic civilizations – a cleavage which has been attractive to modern far-right leaders such as Steve Bannon who often invokes notions of a ‘Judeo-Christian West’ contending with both Islamic civilization and a rising China.

While often affiliated with American neoconservatism, it is important to note that Huntington’s political philosophy shared little in common with the Wilsonian neocons affiliated with the think-tank Project for a New American Century (PNAC) – often described as the central architects behind the George W. Bush administration’s 2003 war with Iraq. A life-long Republican, Huntington displayed far less optimism than Bush-era neocons Robert Kagan, William Kristol or Elliot Abrams about the prospects for western-style democracy emerging in the Middle East. The PNAC’s advocacy for the Iraq War was rooted in the assumption that Islamic society and the West are not fundamentally different; a universalistic liberal democratic notion, which represents a repudiation of Huntington’s deep reservations about democracy and his preference towards authoritarian forms development in the global South; sentiments explicitly expressed in his 1968 text *Political Order in Changing Societies*, as well as his 1975 Trilateral Commission paper *The Crisis of Democracy: On the Governability of Democracies* (Crozier and Huntington 1975; Huntington 1968; Caldwell, 2009; Gill, 2012). For far-right social forces across North America and Europe, the authoritarian realism and civilizational ontology presented in Huntington’s work was not only a sober reflection on the status of global affairs during the post-Cold War era, but represents an ideal model for world order – one of ‘closed civilizations’ rather than an ‘open society’.

Huntington’s influence on the far-right is not only found in his theory of geopolitics and suspicion of democracy, but also in his contempt for the cosmopolitan political culture of global elites (a group with whom he often rubbed shoulders). During the 2018 Munk Debate with David Frum, Bannon lambasted a liberal global elite which he describes as the ‘Party of Davos’. Bannon’s ‘Party of Davos’ is a reworking of Huntington’s ‘Davos Man’, a term which was developed in his

National Interest article ‘Dead Souls: The Denationalization of the American Elite’ (2004a). Huntington used this concept to describe the membership of global summits such as the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where an alienated ruling class of ‘gold collared workers’ meet to discuss how to steer world affairs towards their material interests with little interest in the sovereign democratic interests of the citizens of their respective nation-states. In a similar vein, Huntington (2004b) also abhorred multiculturalism, which he described as an anti-western ideology advocated by these same alienated cosmopolitan elites, spending his final years sounding the alarm about the perils of mass immigration into the West.

Limiting or restricting legal and illegal immigration is the primary policy prescription of the far-right and is the praxis of FRC’s base ideological assumptions. Far-right politicians and organizations in both the United States and Europe have channelled latent social anxieties and insecurities linked to neoliberalism and globalization towards the securitization of the foreign ‘other’.¹⁵ Rather than address structural issues related to global political economy, the modern far-right movement invokes an apocalyptic interpretation of mass migration, specifically in Europe during the 2015 European migrant crisis. However, this ideology did not simply emerge organically out of the events of 2015, but rather is a reformulation of an older far-right conspiracy theory, one which can be found in British MP Enoch Powell’s 1968 ‘Rivers of Blood Speech’ as well as French novelist Jean Raspail’s *The Camp of the Saints* (1973),¹⁶ where imminent ‘Third World’ invasion through mass immigration and porous borders are implicated as the primary cause of social, economic and cultural decay in the West. The ideas which mobilize the contemporary far-right are not simply those of interwar fascists, but include prominent western intellectuals, politicians and artists in the post-war period.

In recent years, similar themes are found in the writings of celebrated British neoconservative author, journalist and public intellectual Douglas Murray. In his bestselling book *The Strange Death of Europe* (2017),¹⁷ Murray echoes many of Huntington’s postulations, telling a story of liberal elite betrayal, where the western political establishment has ignored the national/civilizational interests of its populations through (1) support for mass migration from non-European nations, while not addressing Europe’s negative birth rates; and (2) devaluing and ignoring Europe’s Christian culture and unique civilizational identity. In the book, Murray (2017: 239) describes far-right anti-Islam street protest movements such as PEGIDA and EDL in a sympathetic tone and criticizes the public condemnation these groups have received from their liberal governments. Murray also attempts to rescue the legacy of Powell and Raspail by awarding a prophetic wisdom to their sensationalist warnings. Acclaim for Murray’s thought has been widespread, and ranges from liberal French public intellectual Bernard Henri-Lévy, who claimed him to be ‘one of the most important public intellectuals today’, to authoritarian anti-immigrant hardliners such as Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who went so far as to promote *The Strange Death of Europe* on his Facebook page in Spring 2018.

It is yet to be seen whether the FRC project is able to overcome the deep contradictions of its grand strategy for world order, namely: (1) the economic differences pitting the anti-free trade nationalists against the market fundamentalist libertarian factions of the far-right; and (2) the deep geopolitical tensions between various political parties and nation-states within the transatlantic bloc.¹⁸ Resolving these internal tensions, however, may be less pertinent to the overall success of the FRC project than appearing to be less contradictory than the NC model.

New World Order?

While many NC commentators and scholars argue that a return to nationalist and civilizational identity is antithetical to an open global market society, this sentiment is not common to all

neoliberal thought. Quinn Slobodian (2018: 156) notes how Wilhelm Röpke, the foundational 20th century neoliberal/ordoliberal thinker and second president of the Mont Pelerin Society, argued that:

[T]he disciplining function of the open world economy would be accompanied by the retrenchment of civilizational blocs in response to what [Röpke] called ‘Hannibal at the Gates,’ evoking an earlier moment of the West under threat [. . .] A morally strengthened Fortress Occident would arise as a necessary defense against the emboldened populations of the non-West, unanchored as they were from the moral community that bound the West.

While himself a German citizen, Röpke became an influential figure within the US New Right during the immediate post-war period, primarily due to his willingness to combine neoliberal economic assumptions with moral and spiritual justifications for the Christian West’s hegemony/centrality within world order. Röpke believed Western civilizational supremecism and neoliberal social theory to be complimentary, and as such not diametrically opposed or mutually exclusive ideologies.

While far-right ideology often promotes a Euroscepticism, what is rarely proposed is a full dismantling of the EU. What is much more often recommended is a refurbishing of this institution by devoting its resources towards protecting ‘Fortress Europe’ where the weaker states on Europe’s periphery are transformed (or colonized) into becoming highly securitized holding pens for migrants attempting to enter northern Europe (Kouvelakis, 2018). What is absent from the far-right’s vision for the EU is any form of pan-European political integration which could potentially transform the European economy along social democratic lines. Röpke argued that European integration through the European Economic Community and other regional supranational political structures would weaken the global power of the market, by ‘building a moat with the outside world’. He argued strengthening such institutions would empower social democratic tendencies in Europe and the postcolonial world as a means of remedying historical injustice and market-induced intra-regional inequalities – a situation which he warned would evolve into the creation of ‘Eurafrica’ (Slobodian, 2018: 156). From a neoliberal standpoint, a return to national autonomy in the European economy could then block these social democratic tendencies and potentially act as a bulwark for even more disciplinary competitive federalist regime, one where weaker capitalist states would seek to attract foreign investment through exploitative corporate tax rates and the deregulation of labour and environment. Adam Harmes (2012: 70) notes: “From a public choice view, international tax competition enhances welfare by constraining government from growing inefficiently large. Whether implemented at the regional or global levels, the neoliberal case for internationalism justified the same way as market-preserving federalism.”

Xenophobic and authoritarian assumptions have a long tradition within neoliberal social theory. Examples include James M. Buchanan’s support for segregationist policies in the American South; Wilhelm Röpke’s support for South African and Rhodesian apartheid; Milton Friedmans’ support for the Pinochet regime in Chile; Murray Rothbard’s support for the neo-confederate movement and Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke’s campaign in Louisiana’s 1991 governor race. Extremist factions of transnational neoliberals have long found common ground with reactionary sub-ideologies and forms of authoritarian rule as a means of achieving the institutional access necessary to implement their ultra-libertarian policy proposals (Maclean, 2017; Slobodian, 2018). This is perhaps why influential far-right political operatives such as Steve Bannon and Nigel Farage have combined the anti-regulation and pro-market rhetoric of the Tea Party Movement and UKIP with xenophobic justifications for imposing draconian restrictions on immigration into the United States and the United Kingdom. Assuming the rise of FRC represents a departure from the political project of neoliberal social theory would be to ignore this history as well as the present reality.

Conclusion

The growing popularity of the far-right and its extreme proposals is due to the failure of ‘neoliberal cosmopolitan’ governance to alleviate the material anxieties linked to the crisis of neoliberal globalization. The hegemonic project of FRC is one of renewal; it is a strategy to *prevent* contemporary crisis from inducing a systemic transformation away from neoliberal globalization and the capitalist mode of production. Carroll (2013: 17) notes:

[T]he prospects for democratic transformation of global capitalism hinge precisely on the creation of an historical bloc aligning segments of the cadre class—social professionals, scientists and engineers, artists, journalists, and scholars—with subalterns on the receiving end of various forms of domination.

The formation of a truly alternative world order is then dependent on the construction of a new hegemonic project for the global Left, with spheres of operation strategically oriented towards reforming both state power and the transnational arena.

In recent years a silver lining has emerged within the current interregnum. It might be that during this period of rising authoritarianism and xenophobia a greater tolerance for progressive national as well as transnational left alternatives has emerged. Reason for a cautious optimism can be found in the DiEM25 (Democracy in Europe Movement 2025), championed by former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, which promotes an anti-austerity social democratic political alternative to reform existing institutions of the EU. Moreover, the rising popularity of self-proclaimed democratic socialist leaders such as Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom and Bernie Sanders in the United States has posed a significant challenge to the centrist mainstream political party structures of the UK Labour Party and US Democratic Party. Increasingly these political party establishments have been forced to engage with a growing constituency of voters who are not haunted by the Red-Scare or lulled by the centrist mantra ‘there is no alternative’ – and often too young to remember them.

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Notes

1. This essay focuses on the transatlantic bloc with the assumption that ‘cross-national contacts are more typical of the most institutional and resourced organizations’ found in states with far-right movements that tend to be more internationally oriented such as the United States, France, and Britain (Caiani, 2018: 399). This is not to discount similar tendencies occurring outside the West, including the social forces which brought Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency in Brazil, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, as well as Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel.
2. Antonio Gramsci’s (1971: 276) concept of ‘interregnum’ is used to describe a phase in which a particular order is dying (or in a state of crisis/decline) and the new order cannot yet be born. Gramsci states that it is during this period of crisis that a variety of ‘morbid symptoms’ tend to emerge within society.
3. Overbeek (2004: 15) defines the concept of ‘historic bloc’ as ‘the configuration of and socio-political structures that maintained and reproduced the social order in historically specific periods’.
4. Kees van der Pijl (1984: 32–33) notes:

[T]he success of a particular class strategy depends on the degree to which it succeeds in realigning the existing configuration of forces on the basis of a keen assessment of the objective trends in the sphere of capital accumulation. Of course, a thorough realignment of forces will involve the disorganization of some classes or class fractions [. . .] Class formations crystalize because the contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the relations of production makes itself felt, and is responded to, in specific 'local' forms, which again become part of a whole in a sequence and a pattern dictated by the concrete configuration of sequence and a pattern dictated by the concrete configuration of these 'local' contexts.

5. Far from a critic of capitalism and free markets, Soros (2000) cites Fredrich von Hayek (who he views as woefully misunderstood) alongside his mentor Karl Popper as a major influence on his 'open society' framework.
6. A clear example of this is found in contemporary Libya, where the 2011 UN-sanctioned US/NATO 'humanitarian intervention' and no-fly zone resulted in the fall of the Gaddafi regime. Libya has since been transformed into a failed state, ruled by competing warlords, with the Mediterranean coast transformed into the largest port for human trafficking from Africa into Europe.
7. The MENF was established in 2014 where it eventually evolved into the political group Europe of Nations and Freedom, entering European Parliament in 2015 and was succeeded by Identity and Democracy. Its membership consists of figures from such far-right political parties as Freedom Party of Austria, Alternative for Germany, National Rally, Finns Party, Danish Peoples Party, Flemish Interest and Lega Nord.
8. Carole Cadwallader of *The Guardian* (February 27, 2017; May 7, 2017) has investigated the coordination between Robert Mercer and Nigel Farage, and more broadly the Trump Campaign and pro-Brexit campaign, through their shared use of private data-analytics firms such as Cambridge Analytica and AggregateIQ. These firms target potential voters and dispense misinformation.
9. Thiel even coauthored a book with David Sacks called *The Diversity Myth* (1995), a scathing polemic against the multiculturalism of elite academic institutions.
10. While criticisms regarding EU bureaucracy and over-regulation are prevalent within elite pro-Brexit circles, the British Social Attitudes survey showed that concern about migration was the driving motivation for the majority of British citizens who voted in favour of leaving the EU in 2016 (Harding, 2017).
11. Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, a former Front National MP and niece of Marine Le Pen, has developed an alternative post-secondary school for future far-right leaders called The Institute of Social Sciences, Economics and Politics, which plans to open its doors to students from September 2019.
12. Since 2018, formal membership of The Movement includes Lega Nord led by Italian Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, National Rally (formally National Front) under the leadership of Marine le Pen, and the Peoples Party of Belgium. While not formally members, Geert Wilders of the Dutch Party for Freedom and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán have displayed interest in the group.
13. Zygmunt Bauman (2017) has called this 'Retrotopia', which deploys a revisionist historical narrative which celebrates colonial and imperial history.
14. An undercover investigation by Al Jazeera in 2018 revealed deep connections between the Lille branch of Génération Identitaire and the leadership of National Rally <https://www.aljazeera.com/investigations/generationhate/>
15. Geoff Eley (2015: 211) notes:

What gives this new politics of the right traction, of course, is the underlying disorder of societal dislocation associated with contemporary economic change – less the immediacy of crisis since 2008 than the still-unfolding consequences of fundamental capitalist restructuring since the 1970s. Such change produces exactly the multifarious anxieties about boundaries whose interconnectedness xenophobia then readily cements.

16. On multiple occasions, Trump's White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon has cited French writer Jean Raspail's xenophobic 1973 novel *The Camp of the Saints*, as an inspiration for his philosophy towards immigration and refugee settlement. The novel also influenced French far-right author Renaud Camus

and the ‘The Great Replacement’ conspiracy theory which has been influential within far-right circles in Europe and North America (Alduy, 2017; Camus, 2017; Ofir, 2017).

17. In his most recent book *The Madness of Crowds* (2019), Murray warns of rising insurrection of left wing politically correct activists seeking to radically transform the institutions of the state and civil society. Murray’s book remodels a much older theory of so-called ‘cultural Marxism’, which has long history in far-right thought (Mirrlees, 2018).
18. Cooperation with the Russian state has created tensions between the more pro-Putin fractions on the far-right, such as French National Rally’s Marine Le Pen, and the more Russia-sceptic far-right leaders found in the post-soviet Visegrád states.

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