

# Confronting the International Political Sociology of the New Right

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Abstract: The rise of radical right-wing leaders, parties, movements, and ideas have transformed not only domestic political landscapes but also the direction and dynamics of international relations. Yet for all their emphasis on nationalist identity, on “America First” and “Taking Back Control,” there is an unmistakable international dimension to contemporary nationalist, populist movements. Yet these movements are also often transnationally linked. We argue that a constitutive part of this globality is the New Right's (NR) own distinctive international political sociology (IPS). Key thinkers of the contemporary NR have, over several decades, theorized and strategically mobilized globalized economic dislocation and cultural resentment, developing a coherent sociological critique of globalization. Drawing on the oft-neglected tradition of elite managerialism, NR ideologues have borrowed freely from Lenin and Schmitt on the power of enmity, as well as from Gramsci and the Frankfurt School on counterhegemonic strategies. Against the temptation to dismiss right-wing ideas as “merely” populist and by implication as lacking in ideological and theoretical foundations, we are faced with the much more challenging task of engaging a position that has already developed its own international political sociology and incorporated it into its political strategies.

From Brazil to Brexit, and from Trump's America to Duterte's Philippines, the rise of radical right-wing leaders, parties, movements, and ideas has transformed not only domestic political landscapes but also the direction and dynamics of international relations. This worldwide surge of right-wing sentiments and governments challenges many prevalent and deeply held expectations about the trajectories of global politics: that liberal norms and human rights will continue to spread; that economic globalization is irreversible; that international institutionalization will deepen; and that peace and prosperity will inevitably follow from human integration. Today, these commonplace assumptions and values have been increasingly thrown into question. The future looks distinctly uncertain and in many ways threatening.

This situation is compounded by a persisting reluctance on the part of many critics and observers to take the New Right (NR) seriously, a failure to engage in a systematic analysis of its projects and movements, and a continuing belief or hope that somehow all of this is just a temporary aberration. Many interpretations of the results of 2019 European Parliamentary elections represent a troubling symptom of this problem. There has been a tendency to express relief that “the full-blown [far-right] tsunami that some predicted failed to materialize” (NBC 2019). This optimistic interpretation is justified only if one's criterion for far-right success is complete triumph, underplaying the extent to which NR parties and movements have moved from the margins to the mainstream of the European and international political stage.

This collective discussion recognizes the many diverse, dispersed, and divided articulations of the Right, but we nevertheless argue that it is possible—and necessary—to speak of a globally interconnected Right. For all their emphasis on nationalist identity, on “America First” and “Taking Back Control,” there is an unmistakable international dimension to contemporary nationalist, populist movements. They are often linked, sometimes in very loose networks, other times in coordinated groupings such as those in the European Parliament. Their leaders frequently organize bilateral or multilateral

meetings—such as those run by the Turkish President Erdoğan, the Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán, and the Russian President Putin—aimed at strengthening cooperation around illiberal agendas. They adopt analogous political discourses and exhibit clear rhetorical similarities. They seek to learn from each other, and to varying degrees support one another in what they proclaim is a common cause: the defeat of global liberalism. While it might be too strong to suggest that the variegated contemporary right-wing parties and groups represent a coherent “nationalist international” (Dervis and Conroy 2018), their simultaneous worldwide rise is more than mere coincidence, and the transnationalism of the NR demands analysis.

We argue that a constitutive part of these movements’ interconnectedness lies in their own distinctive international political sociology (IPS). Key thinkers of the NR have, over several decades, theorized and strategically mobilized globalized economic dislocation and cultural resentment, developing a coherent sociological critique of globalization. Drawing on the oft-neglected tradition of elite managerialism, NR ideologues have borrowed freely from Lenin and Schmitt on the power of enmity, as well as from Gramsci and the Frankfurt school on counterhegemonic strategies. Against the temptation to dismiss right-wing ideas as “merely” populist and by implication as lacking in ideological and theoretical foundations, we are thus faced with the more challenging task of engaging a position that has already developed its own international political sociology and incorporated it into its political strategies.

Our goal in this essay is to outline key elements of the global interconnectedness of the NR by focusing on its critique of globalization and the discursive, aesthetic, cultural, and technological strategies it enables. Written in the spirit of a collective discussion, we seek primarily to open up avenues for understanding and exploration, not to offer definitive answers and watertight conclusions. We argue that a first step toward confronting the NR is to understand its international political sociology and the manner in which it seeks to dismantle both domestic and international democratic ideals and

institutions. The essay is based on the conviction that a first step toward meeting the myriad challenges posed by the NR is to understand it, and, as such, it is motivated not only by academic curiosity but also by political strategy.

## **Appropriating Gramsci: The Metapolitics of the New Right**

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In January 1979, four months before Margaret Thatcher came to power, the sociologist Stuart Hall published his celebrated essay, “The Great Moving Right Show,” in which he developed a Gramscian model for understanding the then NR and specifically what he called “Thatcherism.” Behind this phenomenon, Hall argued, was the construction of a new “populist common sense” that melded together traditionally conservative ideas about the state, race, nation, family, and duty with radical solutions for everyday problems and aspirations concerning law and order, education, and welfare-provision. In other words, what the NR offered was “authoritarian populism”: first connect with “popular needs, feelings and aspirations,” then mobilize “the people” toward changing the administrative structures of the state in ways that help you and hurt your opponents (Hall 1979, 15, 17).

Hall's model remains as relevant today as it was forty years ago but with a further twist: today's NR can be read through Gramsci in large part because it has appropriated and rearticulated Gramsci's revolutionary legacy. Right-wing Gramscianism began to develop in the early 1970s, spearheaded by the intellectual leaders of the French *Nouvelle Droite*, who argued that all great political revolutions in European history were the actualization of an evolution that had already taken place in the realm of thought and culture. Like Gramsci, they hold that revolutionary change occurs not through traditional parliamentary or extraparliamentary confrontation (a “war of movement”) but

rather through “a war of position”—a more protracted, deeper process of constructing a new ideology that resonates with, and yet modifies, “common sense” (Gramsci 1971, 235), forming the basis for a counterhegemonic project.

In the discourse of the NR, this war of position is often referred to as “metapolitics.” For Guillaume Faye, one of the founding members of the *Groupement d’Études de Recherches de la Civilisation Européenne* (GRECE), “metapolitics” is “the social diffusion of ideas and cultural values for the sake of provoking profound long-term, political transformation” (Faye 2011, 190; see also De Benoist and Champetier 2000; O’Meara 2004; Johnson 2018). By the end of the twentieth century, the Italian *Nueva Destra*, the German *Neue Rechte*, and other *Nouvelle Droite* counterparts in Spain, Belgium, Scandinavia, the Balkans, Russia, and elsewhere, had all adopted analogous metapolitical strategies, generating an impressive transnational network of publications, study groups, conferences, front organizations, and online platforms (Wegierski 1993; Teitelbaum 2017).

In the United States, for example, the expansion of these metapolitical networks was enabled and inspired by maverick intellectuals like Sam Francis and Paul Gottfried, who, since the 1980s, had been urging the “paleoconservative” movement within the American Right to adopt a cultural struggle against the liberal and neoconservative-dominated East Coast political establishment (Drolet and Williams 2019a, 2019b). Emphasizing the nonegalitarian applicability of Gramsci’s teachings, they insisted that the renewal of the American Right and its ability to exert conservative influence over public life under conditions of liberal hegemony rested on its ability to create a radical “Middle American” counterculture capable of challenging dominant state, market, and civil society institutions (Francis 1992; Gottfried 1995). This metapolitical Gramscianism is central to the strategy of diverse contemporary right-wing groups in the United States, including various strands

of “white nationalism.” As Greg Johnson (2018, 74), one of the main organizational and cultural enablers of these forces, explains:

We metapolitical radicals must think of ourselves as the vanguard of our people, as a political avant-garde. We are the ones who must summon our courage, take the risks, blaze the trails, and lead our people toward their salvation. Vanguardism must be repeatedly emphasized, because the instinct of every politician seems to do the exact opposite. Politicians are inveterate panderers and flatterers of the public mind, which unfortunately has been completely moulded by our enemies for generations. Politicians follow the people. Vanguardists seek to lead them. Politicians take public opinion as a given. Vanguardists seek to change it.

Precisely what these vanguardists seek to change varies from group to group, country to country, but it is nonetheless possible to point to a shared discourse in opposition to “elites” and global liberalism. This is more than the commonplace populist opposition between the authentic “people” and the corrupted elite. It is, as we suggest below, part of a specific international political sociology of the New Right. Certainly, it would be wrong to suggest that all the representatives of the contemporary NR are fully versed in *gréciste* teachings. Yet, NR leaders do engage in this IPS as an analytic framework, strategic guide, and rhetorical device. Thus, when former White House chief strategist Steven Bannon and his international interlocutors speak of their desire to destroy the “administrative state” and to fight “globalizing elites” (Nossiter and Horowitz 2019), they are not simply spouting rhetorical flourishes. They are reflecting a wider international sociological and political vision that provides a unifying analytic and strategic framework for much of the radical Right—even those that are not intimately familiar with its theoretical intricacies (also see de Orellana and Michelsen 2019).

## The International Political Sociology of the New Right

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NR ideologues offer a sustained analysis and critique of globalization not just as the effect of capital but as the product of a wider twentieth century transformation in social power. Drawing on managerial class sociology initially developed in the 1930s, they trace this transformation to an “organizational revolution” in industrialized societies that led to the rise and growing power of mass organizations (Berle and Means 1932; Rizzi 1939; Burnham 1941; Gouldner 1979). The result has been the continuous expansion of a transnational “New Class” of experts: “technically qualified elites that have a common interest in the continual expansion of mass organizations and the reliance on technical skills” (Francis 2015, 12–13; see also De Benoist 1996; Gottfried 2001).

In this view, the real driving force behind economic and cultural globalization lies not in capitalism or *realpolitik* as traditionally conceived by Marxists or realists but in the dynamics of “liberal managerialism” itself. The benefits of the managerial order flow primarily to the new class and, to a lesser degree, to the client groups it supports. Unlike classical liberalism, which stressed individual natural rights and sought to put strict limits on state intervention, this managerial-elite new class has a vested interest in the application of “expert” knowledge to solve social problems. Exploiting redistributionist slogans and manipulating the centralizing mechanisms of mass organization and bureaucratic expansion, this new elite and its client groups are the primary beneficiaries of contemporary liberalism's professed commitment to universal justice, equality, and human rights.

Globalization, in this interpretation, is the product of the logic of managerial rule and liberal power, of the interests and “utopia” (literally, a “no place”) underpinning liberal modernity as an epoch. Managerial liberal ideology and its institutions target “traditional” social orders and identities—both in states and globally—that oppose its expansion. Reducing individuals to economic

maximizers and values to subjective hedonism, contemporary liberalism does not enhance “diversity.” On the contrary, it flattens the world, divesting diversity of any real substantive content and social grounding, commodifying individuals and cultures, and eroding nonliberal societies and refashioning them in its image. As Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier (2000, 141) declare in the millennial manifesto of the French *Nouvelle Droite*:

In the process of globalization, Western civilization is promoting the worldwide domination of a ruling class whose only claim to legitimacy resides in its abstract manipulations (logico-symbolic) of the signs and values of the system already in place. Aspiring to uninterrupted growth of capital and to the permanent reign of social engineering, this New Class provides the manpower for the media, large national and multinational firms, and international organizations. This New Class produces and reproduces everywhere the same type of person: cold-blooded specialists, rationality detached from day to day realities. It also engenders abstract individualism, utilitarian beliefs, a superficial humanitarianism, indifference to history, an obvious lack of culture, isolation from the real world, the sacrifice of the real to the virtual, an inclination to corruption, nepotism and to buying votes.

The economic and social losers in these transformations are those who cannot or will not adopt or adapt to globalist imperatives. For NR intellectuals, one of the main consequences of globalizing mechanisms is that older, decentralized identities of particular social classes, communities, and religious and ethnic groups can no longer effectively mobilize populations for collective political action. These are the “left behinds,” those still tied to locality, who experience migration or cultural cosmopolitanism as a threat, as well as the “basket of deplorables” who hold onto tradition, to their inherited communities and prejudices, even as they are being eroded by globalization. The “left behinds” are systematically disparaged as backward, bigoted, dependent, and in need of (if they are lucky) “re-skilling” by a liberal elite, which is the condescending agent of their increasingly dire economic plight. In the words

of Keishi Saeki, a prominent Japanese NR thinker, what is made uncertain by managerial liberalism “is not only life as such, but the ability to live with cultural certainty, that is, to live with meaning” (Saeki 2005, 209–10). Liberal elites support international migration and cosmopolitan ethics, instigating wars in the name of liberal values while disdaining the very social groups who “fight the wars its leaders devise” and smirking at their traditional values and patriotism (Francis 1992, 18). In this view, the new class of global elites have abandoned civic loyalty and responsibility toward “their” specific societies in favor of transnational elite alliances (Saeki 2014, 374–75).

Similarly, destructive and disruptive effects are observed across the Global South, where the managerial state was exported under the guise of various “modernization,” “development,” and “good governance” projects. The result has been the evisceration of traditional cultures and modes of social organization. In the words of Francis, the aim was in one way or another to “minimize national, social, class, tribal, racial, religious, and kinship identities and substitute a collective, universalist, and cosmopolitan identity as ‘man,’ ‘humanity,’ ‘Humankind,’ ‘one world,’ or ‘the global village’” (Francis 2015, 471–73). Against conventional liberal wisdom and like many leftist critics, Francis argues that authoritarian rule in the Global South is not a product of “underdevelopment” but a “consequence of Western technological, economic and managerial modernization,” which has alienated managerial regimes “from their own culture and populations.”

As a corollary to this critique, the NR calls for defending the sovereign nation-state against the centralizing pull of managerial efforts to reshape those states and the global order through elite-dominated international institutions such as the UN, the EU, and NATO; NGOs; managed global capitalism; and transnational cultural and educational networks. In the words of Nigel Farage, the UK politician who spearheaded the Brexit campaign: “Voters across the Western world want nation state democracy, proper border controls and to be in charge of their own lives” (quoted in Rozsa 2016). By the same token,

populations in other parts of the world have a right to defend their distinct cultures, traditions, and nation states against the onslaught of managerial globalism.

As the dominant social form across the world, managerial liberalism unites and expresses the trans-national interests and power of elites from business, the state, and dominant cultural and educational institutions. It is intrinsically expansionist—globalizing—both organizationally and ideologically. From the perspective of the NR, we do not live in a world defined by the traditional geopolitics of national states or the contest of capital and labor. Although both play roles, they are filtered through the analytic/ideological prism of an overarching divide between a stratum of national (and increasingly global) elites wielding the power and ethos of managerial liberalism, and those dispersed and embattled forces within and across states that stand against them.

Like classical Marxism in some respects, the NR argues that liberal globalization contributes in an almost dialectical fashion to its possible overcoming. However powerful liberal structures may be, they also contain the seeds of their own destruction, generating crises in the social and economic conditions, as well as in the political legitimacy, of modern states. The combination of economic dislocation and cultural resentment provides an opportunity to reverse this situation and to form the various discontented groups into a newly self-conscious populist-nationalist, conservative movement that crosses the lines between Left/Right both domestically and internationally. By appropriating and defending traditional cultures against the perceived loss of meaning associated with managerial liberalism, the NR sees an opportunity to mobilize traditional culture to reactionary ends, while at the same time seeking to reintroduce social meaning through cultural politics.

## Constructing the Enemy and “the People”

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The NR's analyses echo many other critiques of economic globalization, but what is striking is the manner in which their sociological critique and attack on the administrative state is linked to that most useful of political devices: an identifiable enemy or, more accurately, a malleable, transposable logic of enmity toward “globalizing elites.” This can support a wide range of formulations and agendas, as well as mobilizing a set of transnationally resonating cultural strategies. The enemy is not an abstract “system” or “logic” of capital: it is the concrete figure of the new class liberal managerial elites and the client groups they support and that in turn support them. By identifying the contradictions of the global managerial order with the concrete agency of the liberal enemy in this manner, NR discourses can give political rationality to the sense of alienation and *ressentiment* amongst those who are portrayed as the predominant victims of the regime and thus help create the very agents, “the people,” capable of overthrowing it. This allows for hostility toward both certain kinds of capital and the managerial state, each of which is seen as supporting the other, as well as toward subordinate groups (such as migrants or members of the “undeserving underclass”), who are portrayed as beneficiaries of this system of power. Anti-elitism and often explicitly racist attacks are two sides of the same “intersectional” logic, given that the NR targets the “rights” the managerial state gives to the people who should not have ideas above their station.

In practically all geographical contexts, this politics of enmity is conveyed through a provocative and performative rhetoric of transgression and excess designed to subvert liberal norms of appropriate conduct and leadership. “Expert” and “politically correct” liberal conduct is derided in what might be called a strategy of authenticity (Fieschi 2019). Even if those who mobilize this strategy are themselves political and economic elites, as many are, the figure of the liberal-managerial enemy and its cultural condescension provides oppositional resources for articulating a politics of anti-elite/expert authenticity.

At the same time, the transgressive posture of NR intellectuals and politicians is justified on the grounds that the liberal elites do not actually live by their own professed standards of appropriate conduct and have, in fact, committed the worst transgression of all by decoupling democracy from the jurisdiction of the modern nation-state to the profit of a transnational community that is both foreign and hostile to the sense of national, regional, and local identity of the people. This modulated xenophobia is then cultivated by accusing the liberal elites of being too weak, relativistic, and complacent to confront the threats posed by Islamic terrorism, immigration, and other such calamities associated with economic globalization and the interventionist follies of liberal and neoconservative internationalism. In the Philippines, for instance, President Duterte built a mass constituency via the use of radical rhetoric against liberal reformism and the corrupt elite that “coddles drug dealers.” That became central to his law-and-order discourse, which legitimized a sustained attack on domestic liberal constraints and institutions as well as sharp denunciations of the UN, “hypocritical” Western countries, and human rights groups, both international and domestic, that dared to criticize his policies (Thompson 2016).

The aim of these strategies resembles that highlighted by Hall in 1979: to radicalize the terms of public debate, polarize the electorate, and render centrist politics irrelevant. In this account, the main battles are no longer between advocates of the welfare state and the defenders of finance capitalism but rather “between those who wish to preserve inherited communities and their sources of authority and those who wish to ‘reform’ or abolish these arrangements” (Gottfried 2017, 140). Or, to put it another way, between those who wish to preserve and deepen liberal and social democratic infrastructures and those who wish to dismantle these transnational and supranational processes, networks, regimes, and institutions in the name of “real” conservative alternatives. These alternatives may allow movements to make common cause across conventional Left/Right divides, as aspects of antiglobalization politics and the Brexit debates may well illustrate. Alexander

Dugin, a leading Russian conservative intellectual, captures this desire to transcend an outdated left/right dichotomy in favor of an all-consuming struggle against global liberalism. A “possible anti-globalist and anti-imperialist front,” he argues, should include all “the forces that struggle against the West, the United States, against liberal democracy, and against modernity and post-modernity . . . This means Muslims and Christians, Russians and Chinese, both Leftists and Rightists, the Hindus and Jews who challenge the present state of affairs, globalization and American imperialism . . . They are thus all virtually friends and allies” (in Drolet and Williams 2018, 304; for national context, see Robinson 2019, chap.13).

Variations on this friend/enemy strategy can be seen across today's NR. In the 2017 French presidential debate between Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron, the FN leader built the attack on her rival on the cleavage between the “winners and the losers of globalization,” depicting Macron as a “smirking banker” and an agent of the globalized order who “no longer believe[s] in France.” Explicitly comparing herself with President Trump, she maintained that, unlike Macron, she focused on defending “France as it is, ancient, with its borders and with its people who deserve better” (Bremner 2017). In a similar vein, the NR has embarked on a campaign to gain control over key EU institutions, which are allegedly in the hands of unaccountable European bureaucrats and undemocratic global capitalists (Gheciu 2019b). Seeking to build a transnational alliance of right-wing forces ahead of the May 2019 European Parliament elections, Italy's then interior minister, Matteo Salvini, and his political allies across Europe, systematically attacked the vision of European sovereignty and liberal multilateralism in the name of “forgotten” EU citizens.

The logic of a common enemy also generates a set of distinctive civilizational discourses closely linked to the NR's critique of liberal globalization and defense of “tradition,” as well intriguing variations based on its appropriation and defense of “difference.” The first of these is the most straightforward and

pervasive. In the United States, for instance, radical conservatism adopts this civilizational discourse that closely links religious faith, the nation, and white race. Emphasizing the threats posed by “Third World” immigration and the ageing demographics and declining birth rates of white populations, the NR holds that decades of liberal multiculturalism, affirmative action, feminism, open borders, and economic globalization have set the West on a path to civilizational suicide (for example, Faye 2010; also see Francis 2001; Buchanan 2002). While most of its protagonists believe that this morbid predicament is not necessarily terminal, they insist that it can only be reversed through a comprehensive anti-immigration agenda of the kind prohibited by the political correctness that mainstream conservatives have absorbed from the liberal enemy over the past decades. As Greg Johnson writes:

Like a herd of elephants being stampeded off a cliff by a tiny mouse, conservatives are destroying themselves, their values, and their nations out of fear of a single word: “racism.” Under the present dispensation, it is regarded as perfectly moral for Jews, blacks, Asians, Hispanics—everyone, really, except whites—to think of themselves as ethnic groups and to fight for their group interests in the political realm. For whites, however, that would be the sin of racism. And conservatives are willing to sin quite a lot—to lie, to break oaths, to betray their constituencies and their nations—but they'd rather die than be racist. They'd rather us die too, a decision that our enemies applaud. (Johnson 2018, 19)

In Central and Eastern Europe, figures like Viktor Orbán also seek to drive a decisive wedge between conservatism and secularizing liberalism by insisting on the connection between religion and the nation-state as a means of attacking liberalism as both decadent and dangerous. Revealingly, the new Hungarian Constitution clearly links nationhood and Christianity, and Orbán has repeatedly argued that liberal democracy needs to be replaced by “Christian democracy,” which protects “the ways of life springing from Christian culture” (Plattner 2019, 10). Similarly, in Poland, the conservative

(PiS) government has cast itself as both the protector of the Catholic Church and the defender of national identity (Prange 2017). The Estonian Conservative People's Party, in turn, opposes multiculturalism, immigration, and gay marriage. Its leader, Mart Helme, says he does not believe in liberal democracy and thinks globalists in Brussels want to erase the identities of Estonia and other countries, turning them into a uniform postnational mush. As the *Economist* reports, the party's epithet for the ideology it detests is *roosa ila*, or “pink slime”—a reference to feminism, gay rights, and, by extension, the rest of the liberal worldview.

In Japan, reactionary nationalist elements have come to the fore in conservative political culture, with the emergence of new civil society organizations, a shift within the Liberal Democratic Party (which has governed Japan for most of its post–Second World War history), and the emergence of Far-Right parties like the Japanese Innovation Party and the Party of Hope. According to these political forces, implementing a “healthy” nationalism is necessary to protect against the erosion of Japan's unique civilization and culture by liberalism, which they perceive as a foreign tradition. In particular, Japan's militaristic past is glorified as the content of traditional culture, through a domestic and international program of historical revisionism and advocating remilitarization (Takahashi 2010). Since the mid-2000s, hard-lines on immigration from Asian countries have increased alongside the emergence of exclusionist popular movements (Higuchi 2014; Chacko and Jayasuria 2018). The NR's efforts to “take back Japan,” as per the Liberal Democratic Party's campaign slogan in 2012, construes certain ideas and populations as foreign and therefore existential threats to Japan's cultural-political integrity. In Turkey, President Erdoğan's exclusionary, radical Right policies have translated into societal polarization along conservative-religious versus secular-progressive lines and have contributed to the prioritization of nationalist concerns in foreign policy-making. This has seriously complicated relations with Western institutions and leaders—with the notable exceptions of Trump and Orbán (Gheciu 2019a; Kirişci and Sloat 2019).

The rising radical Right in South America likewise militates against liberalism in favor of both conservative and neoliberal agendas in society and economics. The outstanding case in point is Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, who ascended to political power on the wings of social media, amidst an intense cultural war. Rather than immigrants, Bolsonaro's enemy figures are the corrupt liberal elite, the left-wing media, and effeminate educators working under the spell of what he calls “gender ideology” (Goldstein 2019, 255–56). Showing considerable nostalgia for dictatorship, Bolsonaro has also vowed to make the military the locus of political power in Brazil. Internationally, he moved quickly to establish links with radical conservative movements in the United States, Hungary, and Italy. Revealingly, in April 2019 Bolsonaro's son traveled to Italy and Hungary with the explicit aim of supporting Bannon's agenda of uniting the Far Right worldwide (Garcia 2019).

An intriguing variation on this dominant discourse of a straightforward opposition between liberalism and “tradition” is found in parts of northwestern Europe. Here, right-wing critics of liberalism have accused it of not being liberal enough, of adopting a multicultural relativism that undermines the achievements of liberal societies and civilization, and thus of threatening its values, including “progressive” liberal values. In the Netherlands, as Brubaker has argued, the Right has gained electoral credibility by taking up (however manipulatively or insincerely) the mantle of defending secular and even “progressive” principles, including qualified support for “liberal” causes, such as gender and LGBTQ+ rights. “Fragmentary though it is,” he concludes, “this repositioning is a striking phenomenon that unsettles conventional analytical rubrics such as ‘radical right’ and ‘extreme right’” (Brubaker 2017, 12). Similar “pink-washing” dynamics can be found elsewhere (Akkerman 2015; Beauchamp 2016; Puar 2018). Gay voters’ embrace of Le Pen in France's 2017 election chimes with Gays for Trump in the United States, while the election of Alice Weidel as the leader of the Far-Right AfD in Germany in 2017 has parallels with the appointment of Ana Brnabić as Serbia's prime minister that same year.

The civilizational discourses of the NR thus reveal not only ways of seeing similarities and connections between different national or regional settings but also a means of discerning cleavages and divergences within and between them. Rather than a simple divide of national or civilizational Selves and Others, we see a complex geopolitics of identity with the potential to support a global counterhegemonic ideology of democratic nationalism (Allan, Vucetic, and Hopf 2018, 863–64). A telling example of this is the unlikely alliance between the Franco-Beninese, pan-African, radical writer and activist Kémi Séba and key elements of the French NR, Dugin, and the Italian Five Star Movement. Séba advocates a radical racial separatism, or *ethno-differentialisme*, a position that parallels the NR's identitarian, anti-immigration discourses. It is this position that has led Dugin to describe Séba as “a hope for all the forces of multipolar resistance” (Abrahamsen 2020).

Civilizational discourse is also mobilized to connect “national people” across state boundaries. In Israel, particular effort has been made by the radical Right—which now influences policy and politics in a wide range of areas—to encourage non-Israel Jews to immigrate (in their language, “return”) to the homeland (Pedahzur 2012). In India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is increasingly interested in a Hindu Rashtra, (“Hindu polity”), a radical program for securing enduring privileges for the Hindu majority once associated with the extraparliamentary activism of the Far Right Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. In addition to support domestically, this program has gained influence in parts of the Indian diaspora, mobilizing international support for the Hindu Right in India (Kinnvall and Svensson 2010; Banaji 2013; Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot 2019).

## **The Global(ized) War of Position: Metapolitics in Action**

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Armed with a metapolitical foundation, an analysis and critique of globalization, a logic of enmity, and a strategy of political mobilization, the NR has set about building its projects transnationally as well as nationally. The NR does not claim academic objectivity, though it strongly asserts that the dynamics it points to have been ignored or elided by the Left and liberal elites that dominate academic and cultural institutions. Indeed, one might provocatively suggest that the NR takes to heart Robert Cox's (1981, 128) oft-cited declaration that “theory is always for someone and for some purpose,” claiming to speak for the values and groups it seeks to represent—and that it seeks to *create* as self-conscious, political movements. Aware of the importance of ideas and organization, its ideologues and leaders have focused on developing a concerted war of position in education, culture, and social media. Below we briefly discuss some of these strategies and platforms, suggesting that their reach and impact require further research as a means of understanding and countering the influence of the contemporary NR.

Given its belief in the importance of metapolitics, it is hardly surprising that the NR is interested in education and the propagation of ideas, and it is here that some of its most striking institutional initiatives can be found. Recent years have seen the emergence of numerous publishing houses and journals dedicated to the creation of a counterhegemonic intellectual culture. Prime among the publishing houses is Arktos, which, since its official launch in 2010, has, according to its own website, “published more than 170 titles in sixteen languages and circulated them globally.” As part of its global war of position, Arktos has published English translations of the leading French NR thinkers, including Alain de Benoist and Guillaume Faye. It has also translated the works of Dugin and issued new versions of the Italian philosopher Julius Evola and the German Oswald Spengler. Arktos also runs its own online journal and a podcast entitled “Interregnum: Discussions on Literature, Philosophy and Metapolitics from the Time between Orders.” In the United States, Counter-Currents Publishing exemplifies a white nationalist version of this campaign.

The educational endeavors of the NR are also strikingly illustrated by recent Europe-wide efforts to create a network of “finishing schools for ultra-conservatives” that now include the Lyon-based Institute of Social, Economic, and Political Sciences, founded in 2018 by Le Pen's niece, Marion Maréchal; the Milan-based School for Political Education, run by Armando Siri, an Italian politician close to the country's former deputy minister, Matteo Salvini; and Stephen Bannon's recently blocked Academy of the Judeo-Christian West. The founders of these schools express their determination to place education at the heart of their campaign to displace the liberal common sense; to train a nimble, global network of conservative elites; and thus to help build the counterhegemonic bloc needed to dismantle liberalism. In the words of Maréchal,

Our fight cannot take place in elections. We need to convey our ideas through the media, culture and education to stop the domination of liberals and socialists. We have to train leaders of tomorrow, those who have courage, the determination, and the skills to defend the interests of their people” and to displace “our nomadic, globalized, deracinated liberal system.” (Potter 2019)

These institutions are designed to strengthen and extend the transnational networks of conservative elites. Indeed, one of the stated aims behind the creation of the Lyon-based institute is “to build alliances with like-minded schools throughout Europe, the United States, Russia and China” (Sire 2019). These projects show that the NR is opening yet another battleground in its war of position against what it calls “left internationalism.”

Another key aspect of the NR's globalized war of position is its highly effective use of social media. The role of the internet in explaining the rise of the NR has generated widespread discussion (Caiani and Parenti 2015; Main 2018), and the use of algorithm-powered platforms such as Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, 4chan, 8chan, and their successors provides ideologically committed organizations and movements with opportunities to spread their

message, often in new aesthetic forms (Froio and Ganesh 2019). Identitarian Movement, a pan-European NR group that brings together *gréciste* ideas with the tactics of the Alt-Right Corporation and the left-wing Greenpeace, functions primarily through social-media-savvy stunts and digital content produced by a handful of activists (*Economist* 2016). Sensitive to the charge that their agenda is xenophobic or racist, the NR often prefers to deliver content in memes that mobilize transgressive, often coded, themes. This not only creates ambiguity and deniability through humor, satire, irony, and sarcasm but also connects its supporters as a group of cognoscenti who—in opposition to “normies” (Nagle 2017)—know the codes and grasp the core messages. In common with its predecessors in the 1920s and 1930s, the NR often exhibits a keen awareness of the power of political aesthetics that international relations needs to take seriously (Williams 2018).

Much like their civilizational discourses, the political styles of the NR offer a means of identifying both convergences and divergences between specific movements and contexts. In principle, the convergences could inspire a globe-spanning coalition of forces bent on coercing and cajoling elites and masses in multiple countries into adopting a NR ideology. Yet, as Gramsci argues, this would have to take the form of a “war of attrition, trench warfare” against existing common sense, which by definition takes decades and requires considerable economic and cultural resources.

## Conclusion

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As we write this collective discussion, we are aware of trying to frame a moving target and that the fast-paced nature and ongoing dynamics of the NR mean that many important aspects will escape our attention. Nevertheless, the political challenges of the NR to contemporary global politics demand

serious attention, and our analysis allows us to draw a few important conclusions.

To start, in order to understand today's radical Right movements, we must resist seeing them as simply the extension of fascism (Renton 2019). While definitions and distinctions are slippery and protean, the contemporary Right has “wised up” and abandoned many of the key elements of fascism (Griffin 2018; also see Steffek 2015; Herren 2016). In Europe, the best known case of this is Marine Le Pen's program of *dédiabolisation* (de-demonization), which reoriented the National Front—a party taken to be the model for the European radical Right (Mudde 2007, 41; Fieschi 2019)—away from explicit racism, Catholic fundamentalism, and vulgar imperial nostalgia and toward “common sense” claims to address the problems and aspirations of parents, consumers, and homeowners. The decision of the party to rename itself Rassemblement National in June 2018 further marks this distancing from the party's fascist past and associations with extra-legal violence and mass antiparliamentary politics. In the Euro-Atlantic region, this is now commonplace. David Renton (2019) describes this as “the convergence on the right,” where formerly “extreme” Right (defined as antiparliamentary) parties have entered electoral politics, and “mainstream” conservative parties have moved further toward the Right.

To say that today's radical conservatives are not fascist is not to say that they have abandoned all the positions previously held by the Far Right. In some cases, the renunciation of biological racism is accompanied by a rearticulation of some of its key features under the guise of evolutionary biology or even through seemingly liberal discourses of “nonracism” and “race neutrality” (Lentin 2018). In other cases, “cultural diversity” and “the integrity of cultures” are deployed to rehabilitate an ethnopolitics discredited by its association with the genocidal violence of the twentieth century, to argue against immigration, the mixing of cultures, and the cosmopolitan hybridity of globalization. “Respect for difference” is its rallying call (De Benoist and Champetier 2000).

We see the same in the culturalist rhetoric of Japanese radical conservatism, which builds on the 1960s-vintage theories of Japanese uniqueness and homogeneity (Oguma 2002).

Rather than simple “rebranding,” this convergence marks substantive shifts in ideas, organization, and strategies that obscure the NR's location on the political spectrum and make it much harder to counter than a movement carrying the historical legacy of the swastika and the holocaust. Opponents of fascism have a well-practiced vocabulary of antifascism, but the same lexicon has been found wanting in the face of the NR, which is characterized by a wide range of positions on political, economic, and cultural institutions.

At this juncture, the NR is winning some important political and ideological battles. The ramifications for world politics are considerable, not least because of the ways these developments interact with other large-scale processes. Consequently, the global interconnectedness of the NR can no longer be ignored or downplayed by practitioners and students of international politics. Its multifaceted manifestations have already modified domestic and international practices and institutions, blurred conventional divides between Right/Left, challenged established taboos, and seriously impacted trajectories in global politics. It would be impossible, within the space constraints of this essay, to formulate solutions to the complex intellectual and political challenges associated with the transnationalism of the NR. Therefore, the aim of our collective discussion has been to advance understanding of this phenomenon, to debunk the myth that the NR is no more than a collection of separate nationalist movements, and to shed light on key dimensions of its global interconnectedness. Our hope is that this will open up avenues for future exploration and debate about the NR and will also encourage scholars and practitioners to seek to identify strategies for confronting it.

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