

The Two Faces of the ‘Global Right’: Revolutionary Conservatives and National-Conservatives

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journals.sagepub.com/home/crs**Mihai Varga** 

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Abstract

Studies of the Global Right usually trace its intellectual underpinnings to the revolutionary conservative New Right and its ideas claiming to defend an ‘ethno-pluralist’ European identity from the multiculturalist threat of a ‘Great Replacement’ through immigration. A second lineage, which we refer to as ‘national-conservative’, is less explored and is more concerned with threats to moral order and the loss of moral bearing due to liberalism’s relativism. These two intellectual lineages, and corresponding political alignments, engender different political projects of the Global Right, which is not that coherent as it seems. Taking a long-term historical-ideational perspective that underlines the power of ideologies as templates, we argue that a closer look at the different *intellectual traditions* of the Global Right can help explain the contrasting political preferences for socio-economic action, institution-building and transnational cooperation.

Keywords

fascism, ideology, nationalism, conservatism, global right, New Right, sociology of knowledge

Introduction

According to a widely held assumption that emerged over the last decade, democracy is threatened by the rise of the ‘Global Right’ which shares a common set of ideas that are interchangeably termed as ‘nativist’, ‘sovereigntist’, ‘illiberal’, ‘nationalist’, ‘populist’ or ‘far-right civilisationist’ (Bob, 2012; Doval and Souroujon, 2021; Graff et al., 2019; Stewart, 2020; Tjalve, 2020; Wajner, in press; but see Art, 2020). Political actors subsumed under these terms are truly diverse and can be found in regions that range geographically from the two Americas (Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro) to Europe’s Matteo Salvini, Marine Le Pen, Viktor Orbán, Jarosław Kaczyński and Vladimir Putin. The apparent similarity of these politicians’ positions extends beyond traditional

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populist tropes of migration policy and reaches into the realm of welfare and economics, as well as to questions regarding the liberal international order and to nationalist strategies of supporting, developing or defending local capital against the alleged tyranny of international regulations (Flockhart, 2020; Ikenberry, 2018; Stewart, 2020).

Why did right-wing forces become worldwide the main challengers of the international order and its liberal recipes for economic growth, including open economies, deregulation, support for private initiative and the encouragement of foreign direct investment? After all, the rise of the populist Right was preceded by the global economic crisis in 2008–2009, which challenged neoliberalism and might have been the momentum for a left-wing pendulum swing, as many expected and some have feared. However, neoliberalism proved highly adaptable both regionally and globally (Ban, 2016; Crouch, 2011; Mirowski, 2013). What followed as a side effect during the subsequent decade was the rise of reactionary right-wing populism in many parts of the world. This populist backlash continues to receive heightened attention across the social sciences (Berman, 2021; Schäfer and Zürn, 2021), with several explanations highlighting the rise of the Right as a ‘global phenomenon’ (Öniş and Kutlay, 2020). What is common in these accounts is that they mostly consider the rise of the populist right as a backlash against the economic, political and sociocultural dimensions of globalisation (Walter, 2021). Economic conflicts, together with identity-based grievances, are often used to explain not only the uptake but also heterogeneity within the Global Right (Öniş and Kutlay, 2020). Migration waves and the temporary opening of borders, like in the Summer of 2015 in Europe, are only the most visible signs of a sense of loss of control which then reinforced calls for the restoration of (national) borders and (societal) orders.

From a political science perspective, liberalism’s demise marked the end of the post-war model of capitalism, manifested among others in the rise of different types of populist challenger parties (Hopkin, 2020; Manow, 2018). Once these parties became electorally successful, their ideas were copied also by mainstream parties (Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2020). Isomorphic processes, including cross-national imitation of successful strategies, have then amplified the global spread of right-wing populism and its ideological innovations (Miller-Idriss, 2019). This was facilitated by dense bilateral cross-party ties (Dąbrowska et al., 2019; Ramos and Torres, 2020), including the emergence of a ‘populist international’ in the European Union (EU) (McDonnell and Werner, 2020).

From a sociological perspective, the rise of the Global Right has resulted from deeper changes in the fabric of Western societies where globalisation has threatened the lower and middle classes and led to the formation of cross-class coalitions of conservative economic and cultural elites. Left and centre-left parties, the traditional electoral home of large segments of the middle and lower class, became unresponsive to these fears (Berman and Snegovaya, 2019; Calhoun, 2017; Fligstein, 2008; Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Mudge, 2018). Many of these parties lost their way with the Third Way, replacing leftist ideologies with the ‘double liberalism’ that combined the ‘economic liberalism’ of neoliberals and the ‘cultural liberalism’ of multiculturalists (Fraser, 2019; Joppke, 2021). Both liberalisms contributed to alienating different parts of their previous electorates and sparked the backlash that later contributed to the rise of the Global Right.

These literatures offer different perspectives about the causes leading to the emergence of the Global Right and its practices, including the differences between these actors. However, they pay less attention to the constitution, content and varieties of the ideas the Global Right makes use of. Taking a long-term historical-ideational perspective that underlines the power of ideologies as templates, we argue that a closer look at the *Global Right’s intellectual traditions helps explain the contrasting political preferences for socio-economic action, institution-building and transnational cooperation*. To understand this development, we need to take into account the distinct ideational heritages and lineages within the so-called Global Right. While coming from different backgrounds, since the 1970s, different right-wing intellectual traditions did concur on replacing

socialism with liberalism as the main culprit undermining (traditional) identity and normative order. Nevertheless, important differences prevailed, and the different lineages and corresponding political alignments still engender different political projects. These diverge strongly when it comes to their relation to (neo)liberalism. Thus, we argue that rather than a monolithic Global Right contesting the Liberal International Order, there are multiple and often competing right-wing projects doing so. These are – despite their mutual enmity vis-à-vis (neo)liberalism – often mutually exclusive.

These findings are relevant for three literatures. First, we provide a complementary explanation of the emergence and the differences among Global Right actors by using history of ideas approaches that focus on intellectual traditions (Alexander, 2019; Bar-On, 2021; Beiner, 2018; De Orellana and Michelsen, 2019; Deam Tobin, 2021; Drolet and Williams, 2021; Göppfarth, 2020; Griffin, 2000; McAdams and Castrillon, 2022; Teitelbaum, 2020; Weiß, 2017). Second, we contribute to work on global networks of idea production on the radical right as part of supply-side approaches focusing on organisational and intellectual resources available to radical-right-wing populists (Caiani, 2018, 2019; McAdams and Castrillon, 2022; Mammone, 2015; Ramos and Torres, 2020; Veugelers and Menard, 2018; Volk, 2019). Finally, we also add to the literature on ‘secondary policies’ of populist right-wing parties by interrogating the ideational foundations of socio-economic policies these parties implement or envision (Basile and Mazzoleni, 2020; Busemeyer et al., 2021; Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, 2019; Otjes et al., 2018; Rathgeb, 2021).

The paper is in five sections. The next section develops our ideational-historical approach further by unpacking right-wing ideational regimes. The sections to follow differentiate between two distinct historical lineages in the right-wing intellectual tradition, and highlight commonalities and differences. The concluding part re-states the importance of approaches capable of capturing the internal differences and variation characterising the Global Right.

An Ideational Approach to the Emergence of the Global Right

A rich literature in political and economic sociology and political economy addresses ideological and organisational aspects behind the decline of established political parties, often explicitly focusing on social-democratic ones. Changing ‘knowledge regimes’ (Mudge, 2018) or the lacking ability of these parties to formulate promissory, future-oriented imaginaries (Beckert, 2020) are frequently seen as a reason for their lasting agony. The policies responding to the World Economic Crisis 2007–2008 have led to increasing doubt in liberalism’s ability to keep its promises (Krastev, 2016). As Mudge (2018) shows, the adoption of neoliberal ideas by social-democratic parties in Western Europe and the United States had painful effects on these parties’ electoral credibility.

The global economic crisis and the Eurocrisis that followed exposed also the limits of a socio-economic project built on economic growth and the improvement of living standards as a result of unfettered liberalisation and deregulation, even though the main economic recipes –replacing liberalisation with austerity – did not change much. This has prompted many observers to claim that economic liberalism’s grip is far from over (Ban, 2016; Blyth, 2013; Crouch, 2011). However, experimentation with alternatives has started in several parts of the world. In Eastern Europe, for instance, increasingly vocal critics of liberalism have called for, and soon started experimenting with, developmentalist policies reminiscent of East Asian state-led development (see Appel and Orenstein, 2018; Bluhm and Varga, 2020; Buzogány and Varga, 2021; Orenstein and Bugarič, 2021). But successes of radical-right-wing parties were not limited to the semi-peripheries of the global economy. During the 2010s, radical-right actors have risen to government office in Italy, Austria and the United States. In addition, the Brexit campaign, and strong showings in national elections of far-right parties such as the *Alternative für Deutschland* (‘Alternative for Germany’,

AfD) in Germany, the Front National in France or the Sweden Democrats exposed the importance of these forces in other European countries as well. By the end of the decade, the ‘illiberal zeitgeist’ seemed to be everywhere, from China, Russia, the EU, to Jair Bolsonaro’s Brazil and Narendra Modi’s India (Kaul, 2019; Robinson, 2019).

In sociology, studies associated with the ideational or cultural turn have shown how since the 1970s, right-wing forces have been more capable of organising themselves into powerful ‘ideational regimes’ that challenged their political opponents not only over the interests that they can legitimately represent in the public sphere but also – according to Margaret Somers and Fred Block – over ‘meaning, morality, and principles of policies’ (Somers and Block, 2005; see also Centeno and Cohen, 2012; Fourcade and Healy, 2007). Studies in economic sociology and international political economy dealing with liberal or neoliberal ‘thought collectives’ (Ban, 2016; Blyth, 2007; Bockman and Eyal, 2002; Bohle, 2006; Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb, 2002; Mirowski and Plehwe, 2015b; Rich, 2010; Teles and Kenney, 2007) have shown the emergence of this *zeitgeist* to rest on intellectual and organisational infrastructures and thought collectives. The ‘thought collective’ term has been originally introduced by Ludwik Fleck (2012 [1935]) who defined it as a community of scholars interacting intellectually and developing a specific thought style. Thomas Kuhn developed the concept further by emphasising the collective production of ideas by communities of like-minded individuals. Karl Mannheim (1955 [1936]) used the related concept of ‘thought style’ to shift the focus from scientific communities to political ideologies and to the connection between political ideas and their intellectual authors’ specific generational experiences.

Following Freedén’s (2006) call to refocus political theory on the study of ideology as it leads ‘political theorists to the heart of the political’, this study emphasises the role of lineages in ideology production. Our focus is on the narratives intellectuals produce to justify or challenge existing policies (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). Ideologies often not only include references to the promise of better futures as mentioned by Beckert (2020), but also provide orientation and guidance for dealing with the domestic and international environment. Typically, the Global Right perceives this environment as being threatening. Thus, opponents are depicted as hostile but also as ‘guilty’ of present-day crises not just because of pursuing misguided and wrong economic policies, but also because of the mistaken wider ‘cultural’ or ‘civilisational’ underpinnings of their approaches.

The literature on ideologies and justification partly overlaps with scholarship on ideas in public policy and international political economy which conceptualises ideas as having multiple meanings and ranging from general ‘public philosophies’ over ‘problem definitions’ to more concrete ‘policy solutions’ (Mehta, 2010). Our focus in this contribution is on *public philosophies*, understood in the meta-political sense as broader sets of ideas aiming ‘to understand the purpose of government or public policy in light of a certain set of assumptions about the society and the market’ (Mehta, 2010: 27). While the literature on ‘thought collectives’ has predominantly focused on neoliberal networks (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2015a), we use this conceptual framework to contribute to scholarship on the intellectual lineages within the Global Right and the political alignments they facilitate (Alexander, 2019; Bar-On, 2021; Beiner, 2018; Bluhm, 2016; Buzogány and Varga, 2018; De Orellana and Michelsen, 2019; Deam Tobin, 2021; Drolet and Williams, 2021; Göppfarth, 2020; Griffin, 2000; McAdams and Castrillon, 2022; Teitelbaum, 2020; Trencsényi, 2014; Weiß, 2017). We argue that different intellectual lineages and thought collectives produce public philosophies with diverse consequences for policies and political alliances.

In what follows, we outline the two main intellectual lineages that cut across the Global Right. Most studies in the field trace the intellectual underpinnings of the Global Right to the first of these lineages, the esoteric, conspirationist and post-truth European New Right, with its ‘revolutionary conservative’ and ‘traditionalist’ heritage and its ideas claiming to defend an ‘ethno-pluralist’

European identity from the multiculturalist threat of a ‘Great Replacement’ of European peoples through immigration. The second lineage is usually referred to as ‘national-conservative’ in the United States and East Central Europe and is less explored: it is more concerned with threats to the moral order and the loss of moral bearings due to liberalism’s relativism. There are certain commonalities and differences between the two lineages. Both agree in their public philosophies on accusing liberalism of ‘economism’ and framing ‘solidarism’ as the solution, meaning more social spending on those deserving societal groups and strata that they regard as particularly relevant for national survival. At the same time, they considerably differ in the geopolitical alignments they support or envision: While the first lineage is staunchly anti-US-American, the second perceives itself as defending ‘Western civilisation’ on both sides of the Atlantic. And, even though the public philosophies we focus on do not offer any straightforward economic ‘recipes’, it is only the second lineage that has developed a syncretic perspective on how to achieve economic growth and what to finance from growth. This perspective, at times referred to as ‘social nativism’ (Piketty, 2020) draws inspiration from East Asian developmental states and has travelled via the Global Right to become an important ingredient of a new conservative socio-economic policy paradigm (Bluhm and Varga, 2020; Buzogány and Varga, 2021; Naczyk, 2021; Orenstein and Bugarič, 2021).

Ideological Lineages: Identity and Order

In what follows, we outline the two main lineages of intellectual thought that are often seen as being part of the Global Right. Usually, studies of the Global Right trace its intellectual foundations to the first of these lineages, the European New Right, which built around ideas claiming to defend an ‘ethno-pluralist’ European identity from the multiculturalist threat of a ‘Great Replacement’ of European people’s through immigration (Bar-On, 2021; Drolet and Williams, 2018; Tjalve, 2020). Both lineages agree on accusing liberalism of ‘economism’ and framing ‘solidarism’ as the solution, but otherwise differ significantly in their public philosophies and grand projects they envision.

Revolutionary Conservatism: From ‘Economism’ to ‘Solidarism’

The main intellectual lineage associated with the Global Right has been the European New Right (Bassin, 2015; Drolet and Williams, 2018; Stewart, 2020; Tjalve, 2020), emerging in the 1960s in response to the 1968 student revolts. It sought to rebuild the post-war European Right in opposition both to liberalism and to mainstream conservatism’s ‘fusion’ of social conservatism with economic liberalism. The basic New Right criticism of liberalism attacked liberalism for its ‘economism’, meaning that liberalism as a globalising force threatens ancestral identities by equating societies with markets (Schlembach, 2013; Versluis, 2014). Furthermore, liberalism (together with Marxism) was seen as a dangerous ‘crystallisation’ of ‘Judeo-Christian values’ (see, for instance, De Benoist, 2004 [1981]: 138; Krebs, 2012), with the opposition between ‘Judeo-Christianity’ and ‘Indo-Europeans’ being reminiscent of the opposition between ‘Aryans/Indo-Germanic’ and ‘Jews/Semitic’ in the writing of early 20th-century racists such as H.S. Chamberlain (Feldmann, 2014).

The New Right lineage builds on intellectual traditions close to those of the interwar extreme right, appropriating the intellectual tradition of interwar German ‘revolutionary conservatives’, such as Ernst Jünger and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (Müller, 2018). In the words of its best-known post-war representatives, Armin Mohler, revolutionary conservatism is to national-socialism what Trotskyism was to Stalinist communism (Mohler, 1954). But as a truly transnational undertaking, it did not only focus on the Germanic tradition but also partly appropriated the Romance lineage of traditionalism and opposition to modernity of Julius Evola, including its mysticism (Sheehan, 1981).

This revolutionary conservative lineage finds its reflection in intellectual currents supporting Le Pen, Salvini, parts of Germany's AfD (its *Flügel*-faction around Björn Höcke) or the US-American Alt-Right of Steve Bannon (Abrahamsen et al., 2020; Green, 2017; Michelsen and de Orellana, 2020; Teitelbaum, 2020). Although most of these political forces also incorporate numerous other influences, the New Right is the single most influential intellectual lineage that cuts across them.

The perhaps best-known historical example of revolutionary conservatism in Western Europe is the complex relationship and temporary alignment, in France, of the *Front National*, itself founded in the 1970s, and the right-wing intellectual thought collectives emerging in reaction to the 1968 student protests around the organisations GRECE (*Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne*) and *Club de l'horloge*. These latter organisations have coined numerous concepts and ideas that made an international career across the far-right network, including terms such as the New Right, Great Replacement, ethno-differentialism or ethnopluralism (Keucheyan, 2017). *Nouvelle Droite* thinkers (such as Alain de Benoist and Robert Steuckers) have also cooperated with Armin Mohler, the initiator of the post-war 'conservative revolution' concept. While these networks and associated political parties have rarely expressed open sympathy for interwar fascism, they nevertheless accused and promised to resist the 'victimisation' of fascist regimes or countries associated with them. For example, far-right politician and *Club de l'horloge* member Jean-Yves Le Gallou argued that the European 'migration crisis' in 2015 is an effect of the post-war victimisation of Germany, pushing to prove its 'repentance' by allowing the influx of refugees (Keucheyan, 2017). In general, however, the New Right as an intellectual current has rarely cooperated with political parties, as Alain de Benoist long-lasting distancing from the *Front National* (now National Rally, *Rassemblement National*, RN) shows. Rather, political forces make selective use of the ideas that these intellectuals have developed. For instance, while embracing de Benoist's idea of 'ethnopluralism' and the 'right to difference' (Lichtmesz, 2020), political forces – in France and elsewhere, from Germany to the US-American Alt-Right – sidestep other more controversial positions like de Benoist's paganism or his critique of the nation-state and opposition to nationalism.

Alignments between far-right political actors and intellectual circles are also present in Italy, Germany and Austria even if unable to claim the status of the French *Nouvelle Droite* within the European far-right scene. The Italian post-war far-right consists of a neofascist subculture that unites a fascination with Julius Evola's traditionalist and esoteric philosophy (Deam Tobin, 2021), and with Tolkienite fantasy literature (Griffin, 2000). At the same time, there were also important cross-influences from the French *Nouvelle Droite* and Spanish fascism (Albanese and Del Hierro, 2016; Mammone, 2015) and from the radical-right social movement scene. This culminated in the rise of *CasaPound Italia*, which builds on these heritages and is supportive of the far-right Lega Salvini's and *Fratelli d'Italia* (Wolff, 2019).

As in the French case, the recent successes of the far-right in Germany (AfD) has been accompanied by intellectual preparation in far-right thought collectives. For instance, the *Institut für Staatspolitik*, a think-tank and foundation publishing the journal *Sezession* and heir to much of Germany's both pre-war and post-war far-right-wing intellectual tradition (Salzborn, 2016), has successfully de-coupled the AfD from its more moderate (and more neoliberal) wing (Arzheimer, 2019; Göppfarth, 2020; Laskowski, 2018; Plehwe and Schlögl, 2014). At first sight, the AfD is still one of the most pro-market political parties on Europe's far-right fringe and very far from any principled indictment of capitalism on grounds of fomenting consumerism or engendering globalisation (Bebnowski, 2016; Havertz, 2019). Yet Björn Höcke, the leader of the AfD's far-right *Flügel* ('Wing'), has called for more 'solidarity' with poor of German ethnicity and for defending 'German' technologies (such as the Diesel engine) from the threat of EU environmental regulations and 'neoliberalism' (Gebhardt, 2020).

The German far-right thought collective around *Sezession* also maintains strong personal ties with actors within the Austrian identitarian movement that share an interest in core debates concerning right-wing cultural hegemony. Nevertheless, their influence on the radical-right FPÖ has remained limited, which is deeply rooted in a tradition of *deutschnational* fraternities. FPÖ's modernisation from a post-fascist to a right-wing populist party under Jörg Haider went together with the embracement of neoliberalism and the growing influence of the Vienna-based Hayek-Institute (Beyer and Pühringer, 2018). But after Haider's passing and the world economic crisis, the FPÖ followed the public philosophy of the French radical right. It encompassed 'solidarism' and references to economic nationalism became the party's main answer to liberal 'economism' and globalisation, making the FPÖ popular among blue-collar voters (Rathgeb, 2021).

Despite concepts such as economism and solidarism, the public philosophy produced by New Right thinkers took little interest in the production of ideas driving socio-economic policies. Such policies are only discernible from electoral programmes or from the policies of the few such parties that have entered government coalitions. Analyses of far-right parties and their socio-economic positioning tend to overlook the existing differences between and emphasise the general support for free markets espoused by these parties, and in particular, the Austrian FPÖ and Italy's *Legia Nord* (Betz, 1993). The *Legia* espoused up until the late 2010s ideas of neoliberal inspiration such as the flat tax (Siri, 2016). In the United States too, the Alt-Right combined currents sceptical of free markets with anarcho-capitalist libertarianism (Hawley, 2017; Slobodian, 2019). However, already in the early 1990s, parties closer to the New Right – Germany's *Republikaner* and Belgium's *Vlaams Blok* (close to Steuckers; Bar-On, 2011) – pursued a less neoliberal, free-market agenda. What distinguished them from other far-right formations was the social policy component, which unlike neoliberal parties regarded the welfare state to be under threat (of immigration) and sought its defence by reserving social benefits to members of the respective ethnic majorities. From 1993 on, and following the efforts of politicians close to GRECE, such as Bruno Mégret, the Front National has also abandoned its neoliberalism and turned to positions close to the New Right. It aligned its socio-economic agenda with the New Right's efforts to follow a Third Way between capitalism and communism (Bastow, 1997), stressing protectionism and the need to fight large multinationals.

However, these limited efforts of distancing vis-à-vis neoliberalism pale in comparison to the developments in the second lineage, national-conservatism, to which we now turn and that has gone furthest in developing an economic alternative to liberalism. The development of this alternative benefitted from the long hold on power of its political representatives in post-communist Europe (Poland and Hungary) and the emergence of 'pro-worker conservatism' in the United States. Given the firm standing within the Global Right of some of its most influential political representatives, this economic alternative has currently developed into a hegemonic perspective on the economy, spreading to the political forces close to the New Right.

National-Conservatism: From 'Economism' to Nationalism

The emergence of the post-war era's most influential global right-wing network goes back to the emigration of a group of German and Austrian intellectuals, such as Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises or Karl Popper, to the United States. Some have joined the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS, established in 1947), which gained influence as the first transnational network and thought collective opposing socialism and promoting economic liberalism. MPS 'fused' a defence of market economy with social conservatism, in effect being regarded as the 'conservative' school and network par excellence by the 1970s, even though notable MPS members 'abjured' the term conservative (Hawley, 2016; Mirowski, 2014; Teles and Kenney, 2007).

Meanwhile, a very different thought collective, also influenced by German emigres such as Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, was also in the making. These conservative thinkers were opposed liberalism while – at least initially – staying silent over market economy (Magalhães, 2021). Strauss, for instance, decried the ‘tyranny’ of ‘value-free’ social sciences and liberalism, an idea that would reverberate across much of the conservative Right. Followers of Strauss, usually collectively referred to as ‘neoconservatives’, would greet Ronald Reagan’s ‘Evil Empire’ metaphor and support George Bush’s ‘War on Terror’ as manifestations of a moralising turn they welcomed and that reasserted the importance of moral judgements in domestic and world politics. Strongly interventionist in world affairs, the neoconservatives were the dominant network in the US conservative movement by the 2000s (Gottfried, 2011; Hawley, 2016).

Despite frequent depictions of Leo Strauss as a supporter of liberal democracy, his embrace of liberalism remained qualified, and he saw no alternative to liberal democracy and US constitutionalism, even if deeply resenting their philosophical premises, their belief in reason and the abandonment of theology (Galston, 2009). Strauss and Voegelin played an important role infusing US conservatism in the 1950s (and later, Eastern European conservatism in the 1980s–1990s) with the idea of the ‘crisis of the West’ (McAllister, 1996) around the notion that liberal relativism is, together with communism, the major threat to the ‘West’. Following the conservative tradition of lamenting the decay of Western civilisation, rather than chastising or abandoning ‘the West’, this lineage attempted formulating a positive notion of a true ‘Western’ heritage rooted in a rejection of Enlightenment and modernity. While Leo Strauss’s influence is – rightly or wrongly – mostly associated with the rise of neoconservatives in the United States during the two George W. Bush presidencies, in Europe, it was Voegelin’s reception that would become increasingly important after World War II. Arguably, Voegelin’s indictment of ‘modernity’ was more extreme than Strauss’. He levelled accusations of ‘gnosticism’ and having an ‘eschatological mental state’ (seeking radical social change) against political projects as varied as liberalism, socialism and national-socialism (Voegelin, 2000 [1960/1974]).

Following the fall of communism, Strauss’ and Voegelin’s reception was particularly strong in Hungary and Poland. In both countries, thought collectives emerged that sought to diffuse Straussian and Voegelinian ideas.

Ryszard Legutko, a political philosopher in Krakow, would publish in 1985 a first text in Eastern Europe on Voegelin (Legutko, 1985). In 1992, he would also establish the Center for Political Thought in Krakow, Eastern Europe’s first conservative think-tank with an anti-liberal bent. In Hungary, the Századvég Foundation, which is close to the governing Fidesz party, abandoned its initial liberal stance and adopted a brand of conservatism defending national interests and seeking inspiration in the works of Carl Schmitt as well as Strauss and Voegelin throughout the 2000s. From 1990 on, the reputed traditionalist Catholic philosopher Thomas Molnar, a Hungarian émigré to the United States and a friend of Voegelin regularly returned to Budapest. These visits culminated with Viktor Orbán awarding him the Széchenyi Prize in 2000 during Fidesz’s first stint in government. During the second Orbán government (2010–2014), the newly created National Public Service University established the Thomas Molnar Institute for Advanced Studies, which concentrates on research in the field of history of ideas and theories of the state and contributes to public service training. András Láncti, the former director of Századvég Foundation and since 2016 the rector of one of the important Hungarian universities, who has been regarded as one of the main intellectual torchbearers of the Hungarian illiberal regime, had published already in 1999 a monograph about Leo Strauss. Together with Legutko, he would also launch the Centre for European Renewal, an Amsterdam-based institute holding annual meetings to establish a Europe-wide initiative to re-frame conservatism in outspoken opposition to liberalism. These efforts culminated with the ‘Paris Statement’, a manifesto issued in 2017 by 10 prominent conservative

intellectuals (Legutko and Láncki among them), opposing ‘progress’ and ‘multiculturalism’ while defending national solidarity as a basic ‘human need’.

Same as for the revolutionary conservatives of the New Right, the principled opposition to liberalism became the point of departure for an important right-wing lineage that forms the ‘national-conservative’ strand of the Global Right. While ‘national-conservatism’ is hardly a designation that Strauss or Voegelin would have endorsed, political forces in Poland and Hungary, as well as US conservatives such as Yoram Hazony, use this term as their preferred self-designation. Although opposing liberalism early on, national-conservatives initially rarely criticised capitalism or market economy as such. Their criticism of liberalism concerns capitalism’s amorality and liberalism’s pretensions of equidistance, which in their view hinders societies defining and pursuing memory politics, or from indicting past regimes, in particular communism in the case of East Central Europe (Cichocki, 2005; Láncki, 2002). Regarding market economy, the positions of national-conservatives were throughout the 1990s – same as those of US neoconservatives – largely ‘fusionist’, that is, embracing a combination of social conservatism and economic liberalism.

Nevertheless, the work of Strauss and Voegelin and their intellectual followers in the United States and later also in Europe strongly differs from the MPS’s celebration of free markets. Their insistence on moralising imperatives has prepared the ground for a statist turn, in which Eastern European national-conservatives declare the nation-state, purged of communist left-overs, as the arbiter capable of bringing about such a moralising turn. Rather than celebrating economic freedom, national-conservatives reaching from intellectuals around the Warsaw-based journal *Political Theology* – Dariusz Gawin and Marek Cichocki - to Láncki, Legutko, or Viktor Orbán’s longest-serving political advisor Gyula Tellér, build on Leo Strauss’ indictment of capitalism as ‘economism’ (Minowitz, 1993) and resent the reduction of individual needs to consumption (Bloom, 2008 [1987]; Gawin, 2006; Karłowicz, 2005; Molnar, 1967). Following Strauss, their central departure point is not the defence of freedom, but the defence of the pre-modern from liberal relativism which threatens to undermine ‘civilisation’. According to Leo Strauss,

the greatest enemies of civilisation in civilised countries are those who squander the heritage because they look down on it or on the past; civilisation is much less endangered by narrow but loyal preservers than by the shallow and glib futurists who, being themselves rootless, try to destroy all roots and thus do everything in their power in order to bring back the initial chaos and promiscuity. The first duty of civilised man is then to respect his past. (Strauss, 1959: 409)

For contemporary Central Eastern European admirers of Strauss, the nation, its founding figures and Christian religion are the main connections to the ‘past’, and upholding these is not only a way to fulfil one’s duty, but also the only guarantee for ‘freedom’:

The nation is not a political concept in Eastern Europe as it is, say, in the United States. [In Eastern Europe] [t]he nation is the highest expression of the sense of belonging, a sense of freedom, defending the roots of a culture [. . .] (Láncki, 2007: 79)

While liberal and neoliberal ideas have dominated the intellectual sphere and economic policy-making in Central and Eastern Europe for two decades after 1989, meanwhile, the intellectual followers of Strauss and Voegelin have raised to influential positions in Poland’s PiS and Hungary’s Fidesz, the two most prominent political representatives of national-conservatism in present-day Europe (Blokker, 2019; Buzogány and Varga, 2018; Mándi, 2015; Varga, 2021). They have established thought collectives within and around these two parties and these parties’ socio-economic policies ideological substance. The most prominent example in Hungary is György Matolcsy, a

self-described ‘heterodox’ economist of ‘national-conservative’ leanings who has been a key figure behind Fidesz’ economic policy from the late 1990s on, first as minister of the economy (2000–2002, 2010–2013) and then as the head of the National Bank since 2013. Matolcsy (2004) expressed early criticism of liberalism’s praise of individualism and ignorance of nationalism for development, at the same time praising the United States for the policies securing its post-war growth and expressing admiration for the developmental statism of East Asian states. Borrowing boldly from Wallerstein’s World System Theory, Matolcsy called for ‘financial nationalism’ and subordinated Hungary’s Central Bank to the government to make it ‘a part of the Hungarian national state’ (Matolcsy, 2010, 2013; Sebök, 2019: 130).

In Poland, Pawel Szałamacha of the close-to-PiS think-tank Sobieski Institute, PiS Minister of Finance (2015–2016), wrote the economics section of the PiS 2014 electoral programme. Szałamacha called for ‘re-industrializing’ the Polish economy and subordinating the service sector to the industrial sector. The state is the key actor in these processes because of its spending power on infrastructure (energy provision, transport) and military projects to boost demand for industrial products. Mateusz Morawiecki, PiS Minister for Economic Development and later Polish Prime-Minister, would seek to implement these ideas under the heading of ‘Re-Polonizing’ his country’s economy from 2016 on (Miszerak and Rohac, 2017; Morawiecki, 2016, 2017; Naczyk, 2021). Morawiecki, as well as Orbán and his economic policy experts Matolcsy and László György have repeatedly emphasised the importance of East Asia, and China in particular, not only as a strategic partner and investor, but as the key inspiration source for socio-economic policies in which states take a leading role in the economy (György, 2017; Morawiecki, 2016).

There is certainly a large step from the Straussian and Voegelinian inspirations of national-conservatives to Matolcsy’s, Szałamacha’s or Morawiecki’s defence of nationalism and industrial policies. However, the Straussian impetus is recognisable in both PiS and Fidesz heralding their political success as moralising turns. It helps its proponents recognise the threat potential of communist legacies *and* liberal transformation, and allows referring to the changes enacted by PiS and Fidesz in moralising terms, such as the ‘good order’ (*jó rend*, Hungary) and ‘good change’ (*dobra zmiana*, Poland). Both parties could build on interbellum traditions, such as ‘social solidarism’ in Poland (Kurnatowski, 2017) and the rural-populist (*népi*) tradition in Hungary. Both also claim to defend from liberals the ‘national state’ as the quintessential institution helping to protect traditions and ensure the nation’s survival (Blokker, 2019). The ‘fusion’ of moral conservatism and economic liberalism ended by the time PiS and Fidesz returned to power in the 2010s, to make way for a complete anti-liberal turn, promoting the state’s right to seek involvement in the economy (Matolcsy, 2010; Morawiecki, 2016; Sebök, 2018).

It is particularly because of this abandonment of fusionism, realising the ideal of ‘freeing the Right from free market orthodoxy’ (Cass, 2021) that the efforts of Strauss’ and Voegelin’s Eastern European exegetes and their success in the intellectual backyards of Orbán and Kaczyński would not go unnoticed in the United States. US conservatives such as Patrick Deneen, Sohrab Ahmar, Rod Dreher and Yoram Hazony have shown their admiration of Orbán and have heralded the end of the ‘fusion’ between social conservatism and economic free-marketeers. Similar positions characterised in the United Kingdom the statements of theologians John Milbank and Philip Blond, the latter better known for his 2009 plea for ‘red toryism’ (Faludy, 2020). Some of these conservatives would formulate a socio-economic programme called ‘pro-worker’ and ‘pro-family’ conservatism, seeing Viktor Orbán’s policies as paving the way for this programme. Largely overlooking the tension between pro-workerism and Orbán’s workfarist policies (Szombati, 2018), this programme bridges protectionist ideas aimed at saving US companies from international competition and regulation with the idea of giving trade unions their influence back (Cass, 2018). Despite the strength of anti-state convictions among US conservatives, these did not take issue with the PiS and Fidesz

governments' statist agenda, which includes the re-nationalisations of banks and other strategic enterprises, increased taxation of sectors with strong Western presence or as in Poland, the increase of social expenditures (Orenstein and Bugarič, 2021; Toplišek, 2019; Varga, 2021). Quite to the contrary, US 'pro-worker' conservatives distanced themselves from their fierce opposition to tax increases and criticised Trump's tax breaks (Cass, 2021).

On Similarities and Differences in Global Right Public Philosophies

Idea producers of the Global Right from both camps share a number of common and compatible discourses. These include the need to roll back the '1968 agenda', gender-related emancipation and the power of international organisations and treaties (for a rare exchange of opinions between the intellectual representatives of these two 'conservative' currents, see the Molnar – Mohler, 1978, debate). More fundamentally, both lineages oppose 'modernity' and especially liberalism; liberalism is the modernising political current that defeated communism in the Cold War and both revolutionary and national-conservatives condemn its 'economism', highlighting instead the need for 'solidarism' (Krasnodębski, 2012; Legutko, 2008). The idea of solidarity is the two conservative currents' response to liberalism and market economies, with top FPÖ, Vlaams Blok, AfD and PiS politicians proclaiming it as one of their guiding principles in countering liberalism (Grimm, 2018; Ivaldi and Swyngedouw, 2006). Representatives of both lineages also seek to appropriate conservatism as their ideological camp of choice while both currents downplay or ignore established conservative traditions. Thus, national-conservatives grew increasingly silent over the classic conservative thought of Michael Oakeshott and Edmund Burke. And the *Nouvelle Droite* rejects classic conservatism in favour of a mix of references to revolutionary conservatives such as Armin Mohler or Oswald Spengler or even left-wing thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci, Noam Chomsky or Herbert Marcuse.

A closer scrutiny of the intellectual currents of the Global Right, however, shows clear divisions between these currents, despite the periodically voiced mutual sympathy. This has much to do with the different historical and theoretical lineages that characterise their emergence. First, regarding the positioning of these forces vis-à-vis liberalism, revolutionary conservatives pursue a fundamental break with liberalism and socialism, and prefer not to interpret history from the same perspective as liberals or socialists. Revolutionary conservative thinkers prefer pre-modern myths about thousand-years-old European identity and support a cyclical or spherical perspective on history (Sheehan, 1981) in which a new revolutionary era will reconnect Europe. 'Judeo-Christianity' is the main culprit in this narrative, being accused of bringing about the 'secularisation' or 'desacralisation' of Europe (Bar-On, 2012). This builds on Armin Mohler's reception of Nietzschean philosophy and the latter's perspective on history as the fundamental idea behind the 'Conservative Revolution' (Kaufmann and Sommer, 2018). National-conservatives, in turn, have developed their historical discourse in opposition to liberalism and socialism, but valued Europe's Christian heritage over anything else. This line of argumentation is in fundamental disagreement with liberalism and socialism over the interpretation of key historical developments (such as Enlightenment, modernisation, emancipation) and political events, such as 1789, 1968 or 1989, while agreeing with these intellectual traditions over what these key events and developments are and on an anti-cyclical perspective on historical time (Mannheim, 1954).

Second, regarding the positioning vis-à-vis fascism, revolutionary conservatism is ambivalent about the extreme right and the fascist currents of the interwar years, while the national-conservative lineage clearly distances itself from fascism. Along the argumentative lines first supplied by Voegelin (2003 [1964]) and Strauss, who argued that all modern ideologies disconnect human designs from normative order (McAllister, 1996), national-conservatives equate liberalism and

socialism with fascism as manifestations of modernity. Thus, revolutionary conservatives maintain an affinity for revolution and identity, while national-conservatives for restoration and order. The first lineage perceives European nations – and with them also Europe as a whole – to be threatened in their very survival by supra-national institutions and trends erasing all ‘cultural differences’. The second lineage problematises the perceived loss of normative bearing in modern societies more generally. Where they agree is to blame liberalism for these problems.

Third, the different perception of history also leads to further differentiation regarding the geopolitical options involved in the two lineages. Revolutionary conservatives support ‘Eurasian’ political-economical constructs, largely opposed to US influence and open to cooperation with authoritarian Russia. This largely corresponds to the *Nouvelle Droite*’s intellectual proximity to Russian Eurasianism and its key intellectual exponent, Alexander Dugin; it also corresponds to the interest of some of its intellectual predecessors in Eastern mystical beliefs (Sufism being the most important of them). However, the initial rapprochement between de Benoist and Russian circles ended in the 1990s, when de Benoist declared himself to be ‘disturbed by the crude imperialism and Jacobinism of the vast majority of the so-called [Russian] “patriots”’ (Bar-On, 2013: 202). At the same time, the relationship between political forces nevertheless intensified, with Russian authorities suspected of fomenting an ‘Internationale’ of far-right forces (Shekhovtsov 2017: 45).

National-conservatives, at their turn, are wearier of the Eurasian option. The intellectual lineage established by Strauss and Voegelin has strongly defended the cultural cohesiveness of ‘Western’ civilisation, including the United States and the Western Christian majority countries in Eastern Europe. Therefore, the Russian-backed ‘Internationale’ of far-right forces left PiS and Fidesz out, despite claims of Fidesz acting as Russia’s Trojan Horse in the EU (Ambrosio, 2020; Müller, 2014). For PiS, the 2010 Smolensk air crash combined with Russia’s military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine to intensify the already existing deep distrust of Russia. Fidesz in turn, presented its relationship to Russia as a pragmatic rapprochement, troubled at times by such steps as Russia’s support for Hungary’s far-right Jobbik, the main opposition party to Fidesz.

Finally, the radical anti-liberal trust of the *Nouvelle Droite* did not lead its intellectual and political representatives towards formulating their own socio-economic agenda for securing growth. New Right ideas mainly focus on Third Way initiatives challenging the transatlantic cooperation between the United States and Canada and Western Europe. In practice, New Right politicians in Europe have combined these ideas with neoliberalism in the 1990s and with welfare chauvinism and increasingly vocal calls for economic protectionism since the 2000s, calling for their countries to protect local businesses from international competition and environmental regulation. In contrast, national-conservatives have developed a socio-economic agenda for explicit goals of securing growth. Their efforts in Eastern Europe sought mainly to affirm the state’s role as the strategic actor in driving growth, even if growth requires re-nationalisations of strategic industries or curbing the independence of central banks.

Conclusion

The ‘Global Right’ or ‘the populist radical-right’ has been approached as a broad and largely coherent intellectual current pursuing a rollback of globalisation and the Liberal World Order, reasserting the importance of the national state and characterised by the ‘explicit parade of power and pride and exclusion: of the deliberate cultivation of nationalist particularism and ethnic exclusion’ (Tjalve, 2020: 4). In other words, it can be regarded as the counter-project to transnational movements and projects (Bob, 2012). This article made a first step towards understanding the ideational differences within the Global Right. The perceived similarity of actors of the Global Right often masks different lineages and public philosophies of these forces. While the revolutionary

conservative New Right lineage perceives its ideological opponents as threatening European identity, the national-conservative lineage constructs opposing forces as threats to the moral order. The New Right's opposition to liberalism has been from its inception more pronounced compared to national-conservatives. The latter's main intellectual figures were initially rather ambivalent about liberalism: Leo Strauss' critique of liberalism maintained that liberalism would be acceptable if it would regain its principled embracement of republicanism and opposition to tyranny. By contrast, Europe's revolutionary conservative New Right rejects any common grounds with liberalism.

As similar as the actors associated with the Global Right might seem at first sight, their ideological foundations underpinning and legitimising their rise to power show that their compatibility is in fact limited. These differences are evident not only in economic and social policies but also more recently in the way the different lineages of the Global Right embrace diverging responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. In strong contrast to Donald Trump, France's RN or Germany's AfD, which have downplayed the severity of the pandemic and spread conspiracy theories, the national-conservative strand has tried outperforming liberal regimes by rolling out testing and vaccination programmes while severely limiting their citizens' freedom of movement. Similar differences can be found also in climate policy, where pro-science attitudes are stronger among national-conservatives (Schaller and Carius, 2019).

Rather than conjuring up the spectre of a common and stable front of illiberal and like-minded actors as much of the mainstream media suggests, it would be more advisable to approach the 'Global Right' as a temporary formation and analyse why these actors come together and the extent they really do. The relationship between intellectual circles and political forces deserves further scrutiny, as it would be misleading to present the alignment of intellectual and political networks as bereft of tensions and differences. Political forces tend to be more pragmatic. For instance, despite its intellectuals' sympathies with the 'West', Fidesz pursued an 'Eastern Opening' in foreign trade, seeking cooperation with China, Turkey and the Turkic states in Central Asia (Buzogány, 2017; Varga and Buzogány, 2021). Similarly, while sharing the enmity vis-à-vis liberalism with national-conservative intellectuals, Poland's PiS and Hungary's Fidesz refrain from adopting the conservative intellectuals' Straussian and Voegelinian critique of 'progress' and 'modernity' and promote quite unabashedly the 'reindustrialisation' of their countries. Furthermore, while some concepts and ideas have indeed acquired a hegemonic status within the far-right (the 'Europe of Nations'- slogan, for instance), others did not and continue to divide 'realist' far-right politicians and the 'idealist' *Nouvelle Droite* intellectuals (see, for instance, GRECE's ideas of 'anti-sovereignism' or on 'deep ecology', François and Nonjon, 2021). Further research should thus drill deeper into the dynamics and tensions between the ideological lineages and political alignments we have outlined here.

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