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Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe*. trans. J.-M. Todd. Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017. 320 pp. Notes, acknowledgements, index. \$29.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780674971530

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Upon reading Jean-Yves Camus's and Nicolas Lebourg's *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, one cannot but be reminded of another sweeping panorama of the European Far Right, Cas Mudde's *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (2007.) As a pendant to the latter's comparative institutional analysis of European radical right-wing parties, Camus and Lebourg catalogue from a historical ideational perspective the multiplicity of far-right regimes, parties and movements to have emerged in Western and Eastern European countries. Rather than portraying the Far Right as an ideologically and programmatically singular, homogeneous and coherent political phenomenon, they painstakingly illustrate its manifold and diverse nature, fragmented between distinct and even competing ideational currents and traditions as well as variable institutional and social forms.

The book's Introduction grapples with specifying the European Far Right as an identifiable political current whilst accounting for the considerable ideological, programmatic and praxis-driven variation within it. At base, this current is defined by the conceptual and discursive trope of organicism, "the idea that society functions as a living being" (p. 21). Tracing its origins to French counterrevolutionary thought and German romantic ideology, the Far Right embraced legitimist ideals which, in the wake of the defeat of 1870 in the Franco-Prussian War, would become fused with an essentialist, communitarian and obsidional--i.e. "closed"--conception of the nation asserted in contrast to the universalist or "open" rendering of nationhood predicated on the voluntary, contractual and individualist conception of citizenship inherited from the French Revolution. This "closed" nationalism, often paired with a "socialist" programmatic content, aimed to safeguard the unity and harmony of the national community against the predations of a rootless and "cosmopolitan"--read Jewish--capital, thus introducing anti-Semitism as a unifying rhetorical trope that facilitated the synthesis of formerly left-wing and conservative elements behind a socially leveling and order-restoring "revolutionary right-wing" program. This "national socialist" program,[1] predicated on an increasingly ethnicized and defensive vision of the national community, was lent succor by a German *völkisch* romantic conception of nature that rejected Enlightenment rationalism combined with the pseudoscience of anthropological and biological racism. Thus was laid the basis for, on one hand, the revolutionary nationalist conceptions of Fascism and Nazism, which harbored not only national but European or even world-historical ambitions, and on the other, national populist or

conservative traditions that remained tethered to the territorial, political and cultural spaces of the nation state.

This last point adumbrates two key conceptual distinctions underlying the book. The first is ontological in nature and can be surmised by the difference between “nationals” (*les nationaux*) and “nationalists” (*les nationalistes*). It highlights the tension between a conservative authoritarian project aiming to restore a hierarchically ordered society within the organic confines of the nation state, and an expansionary revolutionary project aiming to extend this transformative national socialist or fascist nationalism to the European—or even Eurafrican—civilizational space. Historically enshrined in Italian Fascism and German National Socialism, these political currents testified to the international diffusion and linkages of the revolutionary nationalist phenomenon, thereby underscoring the importance of the cross-national exchange of ideas, symbols and tropes linking diverse far-right groups and movements at the continental and even global levels.

This ontological distinction is accompanied by a second set of empirical distinctions dealing with the institutional and organizational emanations of far-right politics. At a first level, there are the differences to be noted between different types of far-right political regimes, notably national conservative regimes (Franco’s Spain, Salazar’s Portugal, Pinochet’s Chile) and nationalist revolutionary regimes (Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany). These distinctions focus on the regime’s preservative versus transformative vocation as well as the external versus internal orientation of its ideological and programmatic focus. At a second level, one can distinguish between such regimes, which are the practical and structural incarnations of the Far Right in power, and the organizational and cultural manifestations of the Far Right conceived as political movements. This distinction highlights the gap between the ideological and programmatic aspirations animating the latter and the constraints and compromises of power that limit the ambitions and practices of the former. Similarly and more broadly, this empirical differentiation between the institutional incarnations of far-right movements and their sociocultural expressions is also to be seen between structured political parties and organizations of the Far Right (e.g. the increasingly powerful national populist parties emerging across the contemporary European democracies) on the one hand and the social networks and intellectual currents that carry far right ideas in a more institutionally and programmatically diffuse manner than their partisan counterparts on the other. These two empirical distinctions underlie the rest of the analysis, which successively focuses on the various ideological and discursive forms and tropes that characterize various regimes, parties and movements of the Far Right, culminating in a consideration of the political significance and possibilities of the latter considered in their most impactful contemporary incarnation, the national populist parties that have risen to the fore across Europe.

Accordingly, chapters one to four discuss the ideological currents and tropes that have characterized far right parties and movements since World War II, respectively addressing the Far Right’s attempts at ideological and programmatic renewal in the immediate postwar period (chapter one); the theme of white power as the ideological framework for the global national socialist movement and by extension the far right more generally (chapter two); the hegemonic metapolitical project animating the New Right (*Nouvelle Droite*) to conceptually pave the way for the Far Right to achieve power (chapter three); and the role of religious “integrist” or fundamentalism as a core intellectual current of the European Far Right (chapter four). Chapter five analyses the emergence and character of the national populist parties, which combine to

various degrees and in different proportions the ideological motifs and tropes depicted in the previous four chapters. A number of general characteristics stand out. First, these parties represent a state-based national versus pan-European nationalist iteration of the Far Right. Likewise, contrary to the revolutionary, systemically transformative ambitions of the latter, national populist parties accept the formal rules of the democratic game and seek a conservative restoration of a bygone and mythologized organic social and political order. They call for reestablishing the latter through an anti-elitist and anti-pluralist affirmation of the popular weal—often incarnated by a representative charismatic leader—in order to save the nation from the predatory designs of a self-serving and corrupt economic and political establishment and the foreign or “cosmopolitan” agents that do their anti-national bidding. Initially less anti-immigrant than attuned to the geopolitical divisions of the Cold War and the imperative of resisting the domestic advance of Communism, the general opposition to non-European immigration as a mobilizing theme in order to marshal the support of the losers of economic dislocation wrought by the end of Fordism and the postwar boom would only come later.

According to the authors, the advance of national populism in its present guise followed a three-stage process which variably played out in different Western European countries. In the 1970s, it harnessed voters’ rejection of the welfare state and the “confiscatory” fiscal regimes required to finance it (Scandinavia). The 1980-90s saw it channel the rise of xenophobia against novel movements of extra-European immigration, often linked with the assertion of national liberal economic programs (France, Austria, Belgium, Scandinavia). Finally, since 2001 the national populist right has begun to espouse the “clash of civilizations” thesis in the form of anti-Islamism, increasingly combined with a pseudo-liberal “national security hedonism” (the aforementioned plus the Netherlands, Switzerland and Italy) (pp. 198-99).

Several lessons emerge from the analysis. First of all, national populist parties remain more electorally popular as anti-system protest formations than once they are forced to assume the responsibilities of power and the inevitable compromises it entails. The latter experience serves either to diminish their electoral attraction (as in the case of the FPÖ in Austria) or can even lead to their political extinction (as in the case of the Movimento Sociale Italiano/Alleanza Nazionale in Italy). This points to the need for such parties to maintain the subversive charge that underpins their appeal. Conversely, according to the authors, national populist parties that have successfully shared power without losing their identity have reconciled themselves to Euroliberalism—or never abandoned their initial commitment to neoliberal economic values—whilst securing concessions from the majority ruling parties regarding curbs on immigration and accession to citizenship. Thus, they have been able to entrench their status as the foremost guardians of the nation’s sociocultural, indeed ethno-cultural, identity. From this standpoint, the national populist phenomenon is less a function of a structural economic crisis translating the desire for greater equality within the sovereign confines of the nation state than the translation of a generalized demand for authority on the part of social groups hardest hit by the cultural transformations attendant upon the shift from industrialism to post-industrialism and the advance of globalization.

In this sense, the experience of national populism in Western Europe can be distinguished from that of the Far Right in Eastern Europe, which is covered in chapter six. Reflecting at one level the ethnic and national mosaic of peoples in evidence across Eastern and Central Europe, ethno-nationalism, often predicated on religion, is universally accepted as the legitimate principle of national appurtenance in these countries in contrast to the contractual and

voluntary conception of nationality obtaining in the West. Likewise, the difficulties attendant upon the post-Communist transition to liberal capitalism and democracy in these states, combined with their relative economic under-development, bred powerful social and political resentments among the losers of that transition while leaving behind substantial socioeconomic strata, notably large peasantries, possessed of traditional and authoritarian values. The result was a sporadically high electoral demand for far-right parties in these countries, particularly after the general enthusiasm wrought by the fall of Communism was replaced with widespread disillusionment over the great inequalities generated by the transition to market economies and the perceived fecklessness and corruption of democratizing elites. Thus, in contrast to Western Europe, where the Far Right is portrayed as representing a postmodern authoritarian backlash against postindustrial and globalized modernity, in Eastern Europe it is presented as much more of a materialist political phenomenon reflecting the socio-structural complications bound up in the transition to free market capitalism and liberal democracy.

The foregoing taxonomical analysis of the Far Right begs certain questions as to its ontological status and partisan potential, specifically in its national populist guise. The electoral effectiveness of the latter's call for direct plebiscitary democracy and its accompanying anti-elitist discourse in order to restore a mythologized organicist and homogeneous society is indisputable in both Western and Eastern Europe. However, the root causes of its appeal still remain to be fully adduced. The authors conceive of national populism as a postmodern phenomenon that is coextensive with the reaffirmation of a preternatural white or "Western" Judeo-Christian identity in the face of ever encroaching non-Western immigration flows facilitated by demographic globalization. As such, the Far Right is not to be seen as a political symptom of economic or socio-structural crisis, but rather as the product of a much broader crisis of identity bound up in the shift from industrial to post-industrial society. Yet, there are a number of problems with this interpretation which the authors fail to address. First and most obviously, national populism, whose origins they themselves trace back to the 1880s, antedates the shift from industrial to post-industrial society and the passage from an era of material scarcity to one of abundance that is held to underlie the advent of the identity-based postmaterialist politics of which national populism is the supposed reactionary exemplar. By the same token, it is hard to overlook the coincidence between the latest surge of far-right parties and movements and the current crisis of global capitalism, which was augured by the 2008 financial crash and followed by the deepest global economic downturn—the Great Recession—since the Great Depression of the 1930s. In countries such as France where the Far Right is already implanted, for example, the Front national's recent electoral progression on the basis of an interventionist and protectionist program that cuts against the grain of over three decades of economic liberalization suggests the salience of economic factors in the party's success. Likewise, the FN's core appeal among industrial and service-sector workers, the dynamics of socioeconomic peripheralization coextensive with the FN vote, and the fact that the party attained its best scores in the former industrial heartlands of northern and northeastern France hardest hit by deindustrialization and unemployment, also appears to underscore the role of such factors in its resurgence.

More broadly, might not the national populist phenomenon also be part of the broader emergence of populism across Europe in response to the European debt crisis which has pitted deficitary peripheral countries against surplus core countries within the EU? The authors reasonably attribute the surge of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn in Greece to the fraught economic and political conditions that overtook the country in the wake of this crisis, but by the same

token is it not worth pointing out that the national populist Alternative für Deutschland in Germany, currently the largest opposition party in the Bundestag, was initially constituted by ordo-liberal economists advocating the country's departure from the euro on the grounds that it should not have to pay for bailouts of the peripheral Eurozone countries? Similarly, it is hard not to see the hand of socio-structural factors in political developments further afield, most notably the Brexit referendum vote of June 2016 and the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency a mere four months later, on the back of a program combining economic nationalism and anti-immigrant xenophobia. Here too, the social profile of Leave and Trump voters suggests the importance of socioeconomic factors. In England in particular, the Leave vote was disproportionately concentrated in the most economically deprived parts of the country—the North, the East and the Midlands—and within these areas among the white working class. Meanwhile, due to the U.S.'s electoral college system, Trump won principally through his appeal to white working class and lower middle class voters in the economically deprived rust belt. More generally, can it really be considered an accident that the most pronounced political shifts towards the populist right have occurred in the U.S. and the U.K., the most economically neoliberal and socially unequal political economies among the advanced democracies? At the very least, these correlations warrant addressing such socioeconomic factors when making the claim that national populist parties are primarily a post-materialist or postmodern political phenomenon, the support for which personal identities and cultural values are more important in explaining than voters' personal economic circumstances and diminishing life chances and social status.

This consideration abuts on the broader theoretical question of national populist parties' relationship to power and how the experience of the latter is likely to impact their development. If, as the authors argue, their electoral support is predicated on their maintaining a "subversive" anti-systemic charge, it is not clear how this condition is to be reconciled with the recommendation that, should they hope to accede to power, national populists need to adopt "credible" policy positions and embrace "Euroliberalism" in order to convince voters of their economic competence. Indeed, the embrace of anti-immigration sentiment on the part of mainstream governing parties might actually end up posing an existential risk to national populists by stripping them of the sole remaining factor of political supply that distinguishes them within the system of partisan competition. As the FN's recent experience in France has shown, in such a context the espousal of an anti-system economic stance—i.e. economic illiberalism—may make political sense and, far from eliminating them from electoral consideration, may actually serve to further national populists' goal of achieving power.

The foregoing are less criticisms than suggestions for how the authors might build on this study going forward. In no way do they seek to detract from their impressively comprehensive and nuanced historical inventory of the European Far Right, painted in its full ideological and organizational complexity.

NOTES

[1] Zeev Sternhell, "National Socialism and Antisemitism: The Case of Maurice Barrès," *Journal of Contemporary History* 8(4)(1973), p. 47.

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