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Alain de Benoist's anti-political philosophy beyond Left and Right: Non-emancipatory responses to globalisation and crisis

Key Words – anti-politics, economic crisis, globalisation, populism, neo-fascism

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse and critique non-emancipatory and anti-political forms of opposition to globalisation and to the current Eurozone management of the global financial crisis. It will question, amongst other themes, critiques of globalisation that present themselves as mere critiques of capitalist excess or capital's 'transnational' form. This opens up the problem of the national/global antinomy as well as of responses that contain a nationalist or traditionalist element. The paper draws primarily on a critical discussion of the work of 'European New Right' philosopher Alain de Benoist. In de Benoist's writings it detects an anti-political rejection of the political divide between left and right, which aligns it with contemporary neo-fascist opposition to the Eurozone crisis. The paper will reflect upon this alignment through a discussion of Marxist critical theory, putting forward the argument that capitalist processes must be understood as non-personal domination rather than as a system of individual greed or wilful exploitation. This should also open up the possibility to re-evaluate some of the recent progressive, yet largely populist, movement mobilisations directed at the crisis.

Introduction

Traditionally, Marxist analyses of fascism have pointed to its use as an instrument for reactionary and imperialist forces tied to a merchant capitalist class. Leon Trotsky defined fascism simply as “the continuation of capitalism” (Trotsky 1940: 72). Following this, nationalism and chauvinism are to be understood as the bourgeois state’s ideological project to hide objectively existing class conflict. It is often brought in connection, including by non-Marxist analyses, with elitism, dictatorship and the *Führerprinzip*. In practice, fascist ideologies have indeed found foothold in the circles of national and industrial elites and adopted strongly authoritarian ways of political leadership. The problem here is that this neglects those forms of fascism, including elements of National Socialism, that understood themselves as opposed to at least certain aspects of capitalism, such as finance, international and speculative capital, and that rallied against established leadership cultures. Newer and more nuanced critical analyses have picked up on this point and allowed for a reading of some fascist movements as revolutionary (see Griffin 1993: 3ff).

In the most recent scholarship in fact, the revolutionary or “palingenetic” (Griffin 1993: 26) character of fascism has been noted as one of its key features. Equally, its anti-elitist appeal has been moved to the forefront of analysis, with Roger Griffin adding to his definition a “populist ultra-nationalism” (Griffin 1993: 26). In fact, this view has become so widespread that Griffin has termed it the “new consensus” in fascist studies. Nonetheless, it might be noted that Griffin’s definition leaves out certain other key features, such as the violent and racist allure that has historically been in the nature of fascism. My point here is not to provide an alternative definition, or even to pick holes in those provided by existing theories, be they Marxist or not. Rather, this paper devotes itself to a discussion of neo-fascist and other non-emancipatory discourses on globalisation and economic crisis in Europe. Here

it does point to the appeal of anti-elitism and of populist opposition to finance capitalism, coupled with the notion of a rebirth of cultural identity.

The paper offers a theoretical exploration of extreme nationalist and neo-fascist self-understandings by engaging with the political philosophy of French *Nouvelle Droite* thinker Alain de Benoist (De Benoist 1977; 1986; 1999). De Benoist's work is not an arbitrary choice. While rather neglected in Anglophone scholarship, it has been extremely influential in France. Moreover, de Benoist's emphasis on Europe including its mysticism, languages and cultures make his a body of work that is sufficiently abstracted from concrete political and national neo-fascist organising to count as the most consistent attempt to formulate a European meta-politics from the right. The issue here is not to prove, or disprove, that his work fits into a specific definition of fascism (on this question see Griffin 2000; 2001). Rather, this paper suggests that we can take something else from his writings that elucidates our understanding of non-emancipatory opposition to globalisation and crisis: the anti-political reading of the end of left and right politics.

The paper then proceeds to make sense of this 'third position' framework in the context of anti-globalisation struggles and the contemporary economic crisis in the Eurozone. In a first section I briefly contextualise the discussion of neo-fascism in Europe within the framework of economic crises. In the second section I introduce de Benoist's anti-egalitarian philosophy which charts 'economic sovereignty' over globalisation. In the third section I connect this to the question of race and culture in his work. In the fourth section I look at the role of international finance as the point of attack for neo-fascist organising in Europe today. In the final section I offer some brief reflections on some of the current progressive mobilisations against austerity and their relationship to anti-politics. While de Benoist's key texts appeared somewhat before the constitution of neo-fascist discourse and organisation

around these issues, they nonetheless speak to the questions of globalisation, Americanisation, anti-imperialism and the overcoming of left-right binaries on these issues.

Neo-Fascism and crisis in Europe

As I begin to write this paper, the United Kingdom has had its AAA credit rating cut by ratings agency Moody's, the future of the Euro is in question after the strong election results of the anti-austerity populist Beppe Grillo in Italy and Spain's youth unemployment figures have climbed to over 55 percent. Politics in Europe is undoubtedly overshadowed by crisis. And it is a multi-level crisis at that; economic, social and political. Attempts at crisis management and debt reduction via the interventions of European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund show limited success at best, but it would be short sighted to suggest that the Troika's austerity policies are not working. They are working for some. In particular, stronger export-oriented economies such as the German one are able to register stability at the expense of the labour markets in the Mediterranean. Also within nation-states there are marked differences with a largely unequal redistribution of austerity. Some sections of society see themselves benefiting from the crisis, or at least spot opportunities for doing so. Such inequalities trigger social unrest and popular social movements. Various prefigurative protest movements over the past two or three years – from Occupy London Stock Exchange to the 15-M indignados on Puerta del Sol – have contributed to an anti-elitist discourse that seeks to blame the increased wealth of the 1 percent for the decreasing living standards of the 99 percent. The omnipresence in all realms of social life of what began as a financial crisis, with its accompanying and concretely-felt austerity measures, has valorised and generalised such discourses and certainly opened up opportunities for the rightful condemnation of the increasing wealth gap. But anti-elitism has always also a darker side to it.

This has been noted in Europe especially with reference to the multiplying incidences of fascist organising and violence in Greece. In a time of crisis and austerity, the ranks of the Greek Far Right have swollen. Golden Dawn in particular has become a party that enjoys increasing popularity with the electorate, but that is also a social movement active on the streets of Athens, Thessaloniki, Patra and other major cities and in local neighbourhoods. A traditional racist and anti-immigrant logic is dominant here that has been peddled for decades. Yet the crisis and the technocratic measures that are being attempted as its solution have also created new conditions for anti-immigration messages to connect with anti-austerity sentiments (Ellinas 2013). It is no secret and no surprise that right-wing, racist and sexist language and action flourishes under conditions of social deprivation and fear of worsening conditions. But sometimes, in discussions on how the financial and economic crisis could provide an opportunity for the European Left to gain traction this is conveniently forgotten. The point is that not all responses and alternatives to neo-liberal globalisation, to austerity measures and to financial crisis are emancipatory. We need to take a serious look at the answers and solutions, as limited, reactionary and dangerous as they may be, that are provided by the Far Right and other non-emancipatory tendencies.

De Benoist's anti-egalitarianism

Protest is not necessarily progressive. This obvious statement is worth repeating at times when much of the literature on contentious politics, social movements and revolution is concerned with protest activities that seek to make the world a better, more equal, place. It is worth reminding ourselves of this fact even more so within the current context of widespread, yet seemingly ineffective, dissent directed at economic austerity measures and welfare cuts across Europe. The Left may celebrate – or at least quietly approve of – the ousting of technocratic interim leaders such as Mario Monti, or the suspicion with which increasing sections of the population view the decision-making processes of the post-democratic

European Union. However, a certain wariness is also in order when it comes to judging such tendencies as progressive, a wariness also reinforced by the successes of nationalist and Far Right populist parties up and down the European continent spearheaded by Golden Dawn in Greece.

These successes have come not despite but because of the financial and now increasingly social crisis that has swept the Mediterranean countries foremost. The solutions to the crisis put forward by the European Far Right might seem tinged with old-style chauvinism and xenophobia, but they also provide populist and in some places popular responses to elitist decision-making and to the discrediting of the financial markets. Such responses are nothing new of course. They found their last resurgence in the past decade within the context of neo-liberalism and globalisation.

It is worth focusing also on the more philosophical element to nationalist agitation against globalisation and financial crisis management. Alongside much of the more politicised nationalism sits a self-proclaimed 'metaphysical' anti-globalism that goes much deeper than an extreme chauvinist rejection of immigration, the European Union or other Troika actors. It rejects the jingoist attitudes of imperialist patriotism and does not make claims of national or European superiority. Yet, it laments 'Western capitalism' (sic) and the free market, just as it decries socialist planning. Its philosopher *par excellence* is Alain de Benoist, founder and leading thinker of the *Nouvelle Droite* in post-1968 France, and a main protagonist in the formulation of an ethno-pluralist Europe. Little known amongst the Anglophone movements for global justice, de Benoist was nonetheless an early opponent of what we today understand as neo-liberal globalisation. With his earlier engagement in French Far Right politics, the worldwide discrediting of Stalinism and real-existing socialism turned his emphasis away from anti-communism. De Benoist instead opened up an intellectual front against the 'Western world', an undertaking which allows him to claim the rapprochement

and overcoming of the traditional distinction of left and right. Years before the popularisation of an alter-globalisation movement, culminating in its coming-out party in Seattle, de Benoist's themes included the destructive and neo-colonial activities of the World Bank, IMF and multinationals in developing countries and the economic imperialism for which he lambasted the United States. According to de Benoist, opposition to austerity is neither left nor right, opposed to both capitalism and socialism, and instead finds ingrained in its identity the ancient and traditional civilizational models of the Greeks, the Romans, the Germanic and the Nordic peoples. This makes de Benoist's vision essentially neo-fascist (see Griffin 2000; 2001), though others suggest that his later work no longer embraces fascist perspectives. It tells of a primordial identity and authentic traditions, an inalienable right to sovereignty, a Nietzschean will to achieve one's destiny, and is directed explicitly against liberal universalism. For de Benoist, Europe is anti-racist, anti-colonial and ethno-pluralist, a Europe that returns to its roots and its traditions, that 'awakes' from its imperialist oppression by rationalism and universalism, free market and globalisation.

De Benoist is not representative of the kind of neo-Nazi activities and perspectives that sometimes come to the fore within Golden Dawn or similar European neo-fascist outfits. He is clearly an opponent of antisemitism and sees his 'right to difference' philosophy as anti-racist and anti-nationalist. Yet, de Benoist's redefinition of racism, ethno-pluralism, anti-colonialism and the centrality of Europe in his work make it a rich source from where to investigate the issue that the *Nouvelle Droite* take with globalisation processes. The task is to understand de Benoist's claims on their own terms and to derive a critical analysis that can in turn inform progressive critiques of globalisation and capitalist crisis.

Today, when we speak of new social movement agitation against neo-liberal crisis management, we usually cite left-wing movements such as those inspired by the events of May 1968 in Paris and elsewhere, the counter-globalisation protests of the late 1990s and

early 2000s, or the more recent anti-austerity and ‘real democracy’ protests. The legacy of a fascist movement that saw itself as revolutionary, it seems, has largely been overcome. Yet, Far Right political parties and social movements still belong to the European ideological landscape and present their own alternatives to globalisation. The intellectual movement of the New Right¹, in particular, continues to be based on and to develop conservative revolutionary thought, representing a fascist myth of a European ‘third way’.

Rejecting the principles of the French Revolution – *liberté, égalité, fraternité* – and of liberalism, the European New Right seeks to establish a society that is based on the identification with a culturally-defined collective. New Right authors, such as Alain de Benoist in France and Armin Mohler in Germany, have defined a new ultra-nationalism (or ethno-pluralism in their words) that rejects individualism and universalism for a national order of particular, yet collective, identities. The label New Right has taken prominence with the foundation of the *Groupement de Recherche et d'Etudes pour la Civilisation Européenne* (GRECE) in 1968. The French think-tank, launched by de Benoist and other Far Right activists and intellectuals, took an interest in Nordic and Germanic cultural mysticism as the basis for an ultra-conservative Europeanism. GRECE became the best known and one of the most influential New Right projects. The group initiated a wave of similar projects across Western Europe (Bastow 2002). Other important ones included the *Club d'Horloge* in France and Pierre Krebs's *Thule-Seminar* in Germany, but the ideas were also propagated in Eastern Europe (Peunova 2008) and Italy.

Importantly though, the European New Right is not a political movement as such. Rather, it engages in a battle over ideas, trying to frame concepts, and struggling for ‘cultural hegemony’ (see Woods 2007). After 1968, the New Right understood its task as a

¹ The New Right that I describe here should not be confused with the American usage of the term that refers to the neo-cons in the US administration. Rather, the term New Right in this paper is synonymous with the French *Nouvelle Droite*, or the German *Neue Rechte*.

‘Kulturkampf von rechts’, a kind of right-wing Gramscianism. Gramsci’s writings on cultural hegemony are essential to the understanding of New Right strategies (see for example Krebs 1982, though it might also be worth noting that de Benoist lists him under the heading of ‘counter-figures’ alongside other Marxist writers such as those of the Frankfurt School; de Benoist 1977), with de Benoist and others offering keen interest in the Gramscian assertion that revolution is preceded by struggle on the level of ideology; in the cultural as opposed to the political superstructure. According to Gramsci, political power would be undermined if the cultural consensus that underpinned it could be changed. Rather than situating their struggle in the political realm, the New Right contests culture in society. Hegemony, exercised through religion, education and media for example, refers to an ideological dominance or social consensus to create social cohesion and order. The New Right thus runs a strategy of breaking taboos and changing norms in mass culture, media and civil society. Most importantly, this involves gaining acceptance for patriotism and defending collective identity against the perceived perils of globalisation, Americanisation and multiculturalism. Pierre Krebs, the German New Right publicist, elaborates on the idea that cultural meta-political change is a precondition of political transformation of society: “Our strategy is dictated neither by the immediate contingencies of reality nor the superficial upheavals of political life. We are not interested in political factions but in attitudes to life” (Krebs 1982).

Ethno-pluralism and ‘cultural diversity’

Against globalisation, the New Right argues for the notion of ethno-pluralism. This concept signifies a move away from biological-racist thought, but substitutes it with the centrality of culture and identity. Biological notions of race are decidedly absent. De Benoist, for example, tries to break with conventional and colloquial definitions of race and racism as inequality and superiority (De Benoist 1999). Not all racisms, he writes, were defined via a belief in biological superiority. Many early liberal ‘theories’ of race instead postulated racial

difference and superiority based upon social conventions, habits and behaviours. Instead, we find in de Benoist's texts a justification for the difference of identity, tradition and culture. His position does not entirely abandon the idea of biological race. However, he stresses the influence, not determination, of social traits by biology (De Benoist 1999). Ethno-pluralism advocates the homogenisation of cultural communities while still insisting on their separation. 'Foreign influences' are not defined genetically or racially, but are thought to be a threat to the cultural or national homogeneity of a group. The categories of cultural groups are usually described as *Volk* or *ethnie*, which are deemed to possess a 'natural' and autochthon territory. Ethno-pluralism thus postulates a congruency between a geo-political unit and the cultural community or nation. As such, ethno-pluralism regards cultures as primordial and historically-given units with distinguishable features and defining boundaries, rather than social and historical constructs or processes that change over time. As de Benoist expresses it: 'anti-racists' should uphold "the value of difference as the prerequisite for a dialogue respectful of each group's identity" (De Benoist 1999: 47).

A key feature of ethno-pluralism is that it 'biologises' and 'essentialises' cultures to such an extent that they are turned into the functional equivalents of race. As such, ethno-pluralism shows its roots in romantic thought, drawing on analogies of eco-systems and human society, and postulating the stability of human-nature relationships as long as natural principles of social organisation are followed. Ethno-pluralism defines cultures as organic systems of a natural order. Foreign elements would threaten the naturally-existing social cohesion of any *Volk*. The alleged differences between ethnicities, cultures and races are heralded as naturally given and beneficial to the socio-ecological harmony of societies and need to be defended. In contrast to most biological racism however, ethno-pluralism does not necessarily outline a hierarchy of cultures or ethnic classifications. In theory at least, all 'legitimate' claims to territory by a *Volk* are to be supported and local or national pride

worldwide is to be applauded. All cultures are thus deemed equal in their pure forms and on their own merits, though their identities should remain clearly distinct. In reality however, in much of the New Right literature, European and European-descendent cultures are often deemed superior, based on claims of cultural purity and Aryan backgrounds.

The belief in a naturally given national or European mentality has consequences for political strategy. The New Right dodges political channels. Party or class politics are seen as the realm of egalitarians who have to convince others of their values. Instead the New Right sees European values engrained, but dormant, in Europe's collective identity. Emancipation from egalitarianism thus comes in the form of a European renaissance and in the form of a call for the 'awakening' of Europeans.

Antonio Tonini (2003) describes the European New Right as federalist, a theme that also features in de Benoist's writings. After 1945, a right-wing minority considered Europe an occupied territory. According to Tonini, they advocated a replication of the nation-state model on a supranational level. Later, with the emergence of the New Right in post-1968 France, the idea of the nation-state was abandoned for federalist alternatives, where contributions by Christian Democrats, Greens and even Socialists to the European integration process were welcomed (Tonini 2003: 108). As such the New Right discourse of the 'Europe of a hundred flags' was distinct from other Far Right politics. By then, Tonini argues, Europeanist federalism had replaced right-wing nationalism. More correctly one would have to make the point that nationalism had simply taken a 'culturalist' turn in New Right circles. Nationalism was not to be an exclusivist principle that would seek the congruency of an ethnically-defined nation and the state. Rather, culture and community were juxtaposed to individualist liberalism, whereby the New Right even adopted anarchist ideas of collective community organisation (ibid.). For Pierre-André Taguieff (1993), the New Right bases its anti-egalitarianism on the opposition to Judeo-Christianity, which is seen as foreign to

European spirituality.² De Benoist and others allege that egalitarian thinking was introduced into European society by Judeo-Christianity. Accordingly, modernity has its roots in Christianity, individualism in the doctrine of individual salvation, egalitarianism in the equal chance of all to redemption, progressivism in the idea that there is a divine plan for history, and universalism in the idea that there is a divine law that applies to everyone (De Benoist and Champetier 1999). Against egalitarianism then, the New Right posits a European collectivity based on cultural identification, defining it in terms of cultural self-determination. As Taguieff puts it:

‘The right to difference’ changed from being a means of defending oppressed minorities and their ‘cultural rights’ into an instrument for legitimating the most extreme appeals for the self-defence of a ‘threatened’ national (and/or European) identity” (Taguieff 1993: 125).

In the case of GRECE and de Benoist, this resulted in the defence of third world nationalisms and struggles directed against Western economic and humanitarian imperialism (de Benoist 1986; Taguieff 1993). De Benoist tackles the question of third world nationalism and decolonisation head on in his *Europe and the Third World: A Common Struggle*³. Here, he objects to liberal as well as to socialist projects for the ‘development’ of the ‘third world’. He fervently rejects what he calls the “ideology of human rights” and instead advocates peoples’ rights to self-defence. In his texts, the notion of human rights is synonymous with a uniform globalism, one that supposedly uproots ancient cultures and causes the death of traditional modes of life. Against this, the “people” are implored to build upon their own destiny away from the seductions of the (capitalist) West or the sirens of the (communist) East. De

² Mysticism plays an important role in the ideology of the New Right. Nordic and Greek mysticism had already occupied a central place in Nazi ideology and propaganda. New Right organisations such as the *Thule* Society are strongly influenced by this tradition.

³ The book title in the original is *Europe, Tiers Monde: Même Combat* (1986).

Benoist's anti-globalism seems to stem, in part, from a genuine sense of shock and disbelief in the face of indifference by the international community vis-à-vis the injustices towards the third world. De Benoist sees himself at home neither within the traditional Right (one that openly advocates the virtues of inequality) nor within the institutional Left (one whose concern with human rights smacks of hypocrisy and inauthenticity). Instead, de Benoist argues that at a time of cold war the third world appeared as the natural ally for the Europeans. But rather than following the logic of colonial occupation as framed by geopolitical and economic interests, he rethinks colonialism as an ideological project that had its beginnings in left-wing revolutionary movements. He cites numerous examples of communist and 'Saint Simonian' support for early colonial adventures, which are mainly based on a case for the dissemination of humanist universalism. Allegedly, early revolutionary thought led to a fateful and expansionist notion of equality: what is good and progressive for France must be good and progressive elsewhere. Later on, de Benoist credits the existence of a left-wing anti-colonial movement only with feeble and incoherent opposition to the now larger and exploitative colonial project (De Benoist 1986: 21-51). Even after 1945, he summarises the approach of the French Communist Party to the anti-colonial uprisings in the Maghreb as 'Independence is a right, but it's better not to make use of it!' (ibid.: 53) De Benoist further rejects a framing of decolonisation that was built upon a human rights discourse. Instead he professes that decolonisation was carried out in the name of peoples' rights to self-determination, therefore attesting anti-colonial movements a non-universalist and anti-equality character (ibid.: 67).

In *Europe and the Third World* and other writings we can already find themes later taken up within the global justice movement: a rejection of the Western model of economic growth (which de Benoist accuses of overriding the differences and traditions of third world nations), the increasing power of multinational corporations, or arguments for food

sovereignty. But progressive theories, with Marxism in particular, get a similar treatment for their alleged economic reductionism. De Benoist denies the centrality of class struggle that Marx and Engels attested to, and instead focuses on the primacy of peoples' struggles over culture and traditions. He laments that socialist intervention into third world politics tended to disregard the cultural aspects that determine value for people. Not that this 'solidarity' with anti-colonial struggles would extend across the borders of their rightful place, however. Immigrants to Europe, de Benoist argues, should still be returned to their home countries, thus maintaining cultural differences rather than accepting the idea of a 'melting pot'. The European New Right's ideology of the third way could specifically be upheld during the cold war era when it opposed both 'power blocs' while arguing for the cultural independence of third world nations. Today, such ideas are updated to inform a rejection of immigration and a critique of multiculturalism. The latter, New Right authors argue, is the real source of European racism. An 'authentic anti-racism' (ibid.), on the other hand, would be based not on integration and sameness but separation and difference.

Rejecting much of the dominant Far Right discourse, the New Right is thus open to an intellectual alliance between left and right (see Krebbers 1999). Jan Brinks (2005: 129) argues that "for some New Right authors, anti-Americanism is a means of overcoming the schism between the New Right and the New Left". He cites the *Canonical Declaration about the Movement of 1968* by a group of former members of the left-wing German Socialist Students Federation (*Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*) but who have turned to the Far Right:

In the '68 movement two national revolutionary movements emerged, the New Left and the New Right. The former plotted its main thrust against Americanism, the latter against Sovietism. The New Right has reached its short-term target and increasingly turns against Americanism and capitalism so that a unification of both these national-

revolutionary wings took place (Günter Maschke, Horst Mahler and Reinhold Oberlercher quoted in Brinks 2005: 129).

The beginnings of the European New Right can very much be understood as a reaction to the cultural rebellion of 1968 and thus as a counter-movement to the New Left. After 1989, the collapse of the Eastern bloc signifies a new focus on anti-capitalist ideology, with the previously anti-communist agitation having become obsolete. The end of ‘real-existing’ socialism in Europe has not only meant integration of post-communist states into the liberal-democratic framework of the European Union. It has also re-opened fascistic discourses of unification. As such, the Europeanism of the Far Right goes hand in hand with a self-understanding as a revolutionary movement against globalisation and capitalism. Its aim is to reawaken the ‘natural order’ of European culture. Not always is this order racially defined. The New Right and other right-wing discourses have shifted the focus from a biologically-determined racism to a more culturally-defined ethno-pluralism. This has allowed for increased co-operation between European Far Right parties and organisations and also shapes elements of the neo-Nazi social movements.

Financial markets and ‘decent citizens’

The attempts by neo-fascist movements to blur the boundaries between what is traditionally perceived as Left and Right have strong historical precedents also in Germany at the time of the Weimar Republic. Nationalists made strategic approaches to socialist and social democrats seeking political coalitions, a tactic referred to as ‘Querfront’ (see for example Brown 2005; Schüddekopf 1960). ‘Querfront’ tactics were also employed by the Left to approach nationalist organisations. In one famous example, the German Reichs-chancellor in 1932-33 Kurt von Schleicher sought to create a coalition of social democrats and members of

the Hitler-party NSDAP. In effect he was seeking a rapprochement of the nationalist wing of the Social Democratic Party and the socialist 'Strasser-faction' in the NSDAP. The combination of nationalist and socialist thought by Gregor and Otto Strasser still provides inspiration for contemporary neo-fascist movements and their claims that traditional left-right antinomies have become superseded. Querfront tactics still are a feature of neo-fascist mobilising against globalisation and crisis in Europe, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. The German movement against labour and welfare reform laws in 2005 provides a good example (Schlembach 2011). Here neo-fascist activists would at times attempt to join the demonstrations organised by trade unions or local anti-cuts networks. While antifascist awareness usually prevented such tactics from being successful, in some isolated cases neo-fascists were able to march side by side with left-wing and labour movement activists (Sommer 2008).

In other instances, activists have adopted the language and aesthetics of global justice and anti-capitalist movements. Instead of combat trousers and jackboots they wear the black street wear and facemasks favoured by 'black bloc' protesters, describe themselves as socialists and anti-imperialists or organise anti-war demonstrations (Schedler and Häusler 2011). A key theme that emerges and synergises such strategies is once again the move beyond overt political boundaries and the assertion of the anti-political. Themes of decency or honesty, categories of nation or people; all these posit an overcoming of class divisions and assert instead the division between an organic populace and a corrupt and often opaque leadership.

De Benoist's writings that have so forcefully outlined a nationalist and ethno-pluralist solidarity with Third World struggles, anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism have somewhat become superseded by the emergence of globalisation as a central frame for understanding global economic processes today. But also here his work can help us understand the

particular appeal that extreme nationalist politics has for a right-wing anti-globalisation movement. However, while in de Benoist's writings key antisemitic themes are missing, they make a resurgence with the critique of financial transactions and a false opposition of speculative and productive capitalism in the anti-globalisation discourse. In some instances, parts of the neo-fascist movement increasingly assert their role as the 'true' *no global* voice. And indeed, neo-fascist ideologies make a distinct case against neoliberal globalisation.

De Benoist has little original to say about the particularity of economic crisis today. However, European neo-fascists have been vocal in the expressions and opposition to crisis and neoliberal globalisation over the past decades. This is particularly so with reference to a critique of finance capitalism and associated attempts to overcome traditional left-right binaries. The history of fascist and neo-fascist organising shows that the questioning of the ubiquitous and omnipotent dominance of finance over everyday life, as has been put for example so eloquently by Occupy Wall Street, is not progressive *per se*. It can have nationalist and antisemitic backgrounds. The ubiquitous nature of finance and stock markets is put into a direct connection with individual political leaders, media personalities or economists. In the Far Right discourse, this sometimes substitutes for a more overt antisemitism.

Far Right opposition to globalisation, crisis and austerity is then more accurately described as a very partial or "foreshortened" (Postone 1986) criticism. Financial transactions and speculation are derided as 'unproductive' for the 'national economy', with a 'web' of financiers, bankers and corrupted politicians characterised as forming a secretive plot. On the other hand, such a view of economic processes fails to critique 'productive work' and industrial capital, which instead is characterised as honest and decent. Hence, neo-fascist crisis theory seeks to personalise abstract and complicated economic processes in order to lay blame and play on people's fears. In much of the extreme nationalist literature, economic

crises or the ruthlessness of the free market are blamed on Americanisation, or even on a Jewish or Zionist conspiracy that is thought to control the banks of the American East Coast. Modern antisemitism thus takes the appearance of a resistance movement, one that is even termed ‘revolutionary’ by Moishe Postone (1986). At the very least it provides a world view that grapples with understanding global capitalism. Modern antisemitism creates a discursive relationship between Jews and the spheres of money, interest and circulation.

The German political theorist Michael Heinrich (2012) draws directly from Marxian categories to put the focus of analysis on the notion of ‘greed’ that plays a central role in neo-fascist thinking. Antisemitic characterisation of Jews paint them as a social group, uprooted and errant, and as hostile to honest, physical and decent work. Instead, the image of the merchant appears as dominant in portraying Jews as nomadic and symptomatic for markets and greed. Such existence of such attributions also goes some way to explain how other groups that today have taken some of these characteristic – Roma or immigrants for example – become scapegoats for economic crises. Heinrich contends that in *Das Kapital* Marx did not have in mind the blaming and scapegoating of individual capitalists, speculators or entrepreneurs for abstract economic processes. Marx wrote that his work dealt with individuals “only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories” and accordingly one would be mistaken to “make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them” (cited in Heinrich 2012: 185).

The Marxist sociologist Moishe Postone offers a perspective that is similarly embedded within an analysis of Marxian categories and their ‘de-mystification’ as categories of social domination (Postone 1993). Postone’s analysis of the relationship between National Socialism in Germany and its antisemitism (1980; 1986) acknowledges the anti-modern element of antisemitic agitation that treated the Jew as an agent of technological

rationalisation as well the personalising tendencies that associated Jews with the ubiquitous and opaque nature of international finance capital. However, he also points to the factual alliance of fascism and German industrial capitalism. Moishe Postone (1986) finds himself much in the framework provided by Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* who write that Jews “are the scapegoats not only for individual manoeuvres and machinations but in a broader sense, inasmuch as the economic injustice of the whole class is attributed to them” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997: 174). The question of nationalism as a form of opposition to globalisation process is also raised by Werner Bonefeld, a key figure in the Open Marxism tendency: “Nationalism offers a barbaric response to globalisation” (Bonefeld 2005: 149). Accordingly, extreme nationalist groupings speak of traditional or national values that find expression in concrete, honest and physical labour. In contrast, their antisemitism is manifest in various forms of conspiracy theories that allege an intangible realm of Jewish interest in matters of foreign and business affairs, especially where these concern multinational corporations or the US government.

The theoretical separation of the political sphere from the economic sphere, which so importantly has become the object of criticism for Bonefeld, Heinrich and Postone, is also evident in the more overtly political writings of de Benoist. In a recent text titled ‘The year 2012 will be terrible’, de Benoist discusses the issue of European public debt and argues his case that nation-states “have become prisoners of the banks” (de Benoist 2011a: 1). Following the same anti-political logic that we find in the populist arguments of European neo-fascism, he brings the social implications of the economic crisis (“delocalisation, deindustrialisation, lowering of wages, precarity, unemployment”) into connection with the dominance of a “new financial oligarchy over the global economy” (de Benoist 2011a: 3) and blames private banks for taking national states and their public sectors “hostage” (de Benoist 2011a: 2).

Alain de Benoist's perspective on the economic crisis is insightful here. Just as he drew a connection between European colonialism and French revolutionary thought, he tries to establish a link between Europe's Left and 'big business'. (De Benoist 2011b: 2). Citing as an example the work of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, with its notion of a global multitude and support for 'world citizenship', de Benoist accuses the Left of an 'open borders' politics, which would have as its effect increased migration towards the labour markets of Western countries and a resulting lowering of wages for domestic workers. Here he rejects immigration as a free market project that would benefit multinational business to the detriment of the nationally-organised working class. As such he is able to paint the Left as "apologists of human displacement" and "cheerleaders for the abolition of frontiers" (de Benoist 2011b: 3) and the New Right as the true opponents of globalisation and free market ideology. Ever eager to bridge conservative and socialist intellectual traditions, de Benoist misappropriates Robert Kurz's value-theoretical criticism of Hardt and Negri (the multitude as the "self-congratulatory agent of the postmodern West") and ends by paraphrasing Max Horkheimer's famous dictum:

Whoever criticizes capitalism, while approving immigration, whose working class is its first victim, had better shut up. Whoever criticizes immigration, while remaining silent about capitalism, should do the same (de Benoist 2011b: 4).

Immigration, for de Benoist, is the "reserve army of capital" (de Benoist 2011b: 1).

Anti-austerity beyond left and right

The contemporary economic crisis in the Eurozone and growing popular discontent with its management through austerity measures (see for example Flesher Fominaya and Cox 2013) is

also the backdrop to attempts by European neo-fascist organisations to further stoke anti-political sentiments and to blur the boundaries between left and right. As an example, a recent controversy arose out of a commemorative banner, produced by the Italian neo-fascist group Casa Pound, for former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez after his premature death in March 2013. This neo-fascist provocation is of course to be understood as such: a provocation. But it is also to be taken seriously and has to be seen in the same theoretical context as the meta-political anti-imperialism propounded by de Benoist and other New Right associates. In this sense, the portrayal of nationalist solidarity with socialist reformers in Latin America is not simply a tactic to confuse and de-radicalise. It is foremost derived from a self-understanding as an anti-political force that shall not concern itself with traditional notions of class and power. Instead what we find is an affiliation to the anti-American, anti-market, anti-globalisation rhetoric and populist leadership of Chavez and others.

Of course, progressive global justice movements framed themselves not so much in terms of a *no global* politics as in terms of an *alternative* globalisation. Yet, its oppositional character lived in part through the personalisation of abstract economic processes. It levelled its critique of consumerism and capitalist production against multi-national corporations, including individual CEOs, against international regulatory and decision-making bodies on a transnational level, such as the EU, the IMF or the World Bank. Using the example of the global justice movement makes our analysis of personalisation and anti-politics beyond left and right somewhat more complex. We must note, first of all, that arguments which move beyond the traditional left-right distinction or that put an undue focus upon financial and transnational capital flows are not necessarily anti-emancipatory. Nonetheless, while in these movements, or in their more recent manifestation as anti-austerity, this has tended to be played out in a progressive manner, there has always been something problematic about this

critique of finance. Hence, we must make the distinction between an *anti-globalisation* and an *anti-capitalist* formulation of these arguments (see Bonefeld 2004).

One of the most widely discussed episodes of anti-austerity discontent was voices by street-based, deliberative social movements such as those heard at Occupy Wall Street and its global offshoots. Unsurprisingly, here too do we find discourses that seek to put the blame for financial crisis on individual bankers and speculators, on politicians as a political class, or sections of society (the 1 per cent). These ways of explaining crisis can be credited with being powerful mobilisation tools. But they equally allow for non-progressive points of contact and a seeming anti-political (or ‘post-political’; see Schlembach 2012) character. One would only have to trail the net for pictures of Occupy protests around the world to find placard and banner slogans to that effect. A recent study carried out at Occupy Wall Street confirmed that amongst the overwhelming presence of progressive and internationalist sentiments, there were also sporadic expressions of antisemitism and other reactionary tendencies (Arnold 2012). However, in the large, overt antisemitism is a subordinate and suppressed explanatory pattern both in the Left and even on the Right.

I do not want to overstate the anti-political character of many of the mobilisations that have sprung up recently in the context of a first-order financial crisis and the particular Eurozone troubles that have come with in on the continent. The vast majority of opposition activism to austerity measures is driven by values and analysis that remain firmly rooted on the Left. Public sector strikes in most countries for example are organised by the traditional trade unions of the labour movements. Other anti-cuts or anti-tax avoidance protests are initiated or supported by actors, from NGOs to individual activists, which played driving roles in the global justice movements. And while there might have been some initial concern about the anti-political nature of Occupy and its openness to a plurality of voices that included, or could have included, extreme nationalists and antisemitic conspiracy theorists,

the movement has in practice taken a path towards voicing progressive criticism of money in politics and the anti-democratic nature of current models of governance.

More than that, any changes to the traditional defence mechanism against cuts are to be welcomed. We need a more ambitious politics. The new public arenas where this plays out are increasingly online and global. Nonetheless, many of these new phenomenon, especially those that see their prime focus of activism restricted to the online world, are actually quite explicit in stressing their anti-political role. Again this has mostly noble justifications. Politics is associated – and quite rightly so – with corrupt politicians and systemic failures. Yet, the discussion in this paper of de Benoist's anti-political and anti-elitist opposition to austerity and crisis management should serve to increase our awareness of the dangers of nationalist and anti-emancipatory perspectives.

Conclusions

This paper has sought to draw up an explanatory framework for current non-emancipatory or even neo-fascist opposition to capitalist crises linked to neoliberal globalisation. This framework centres on the straddling of the political divide between what is left and what is right. It situates its focus on a tradition of radical and revolutionary movements whose criticisms nonetheless do not query the fundamental underpinnings of capitalist social relations. Rather such criticisms pick certain points of attack – often points associated with the concretising of abstract social and economic processes. This manifests itself in the personalisation of what is inherent to capitalist accumulation practices and in tactics that blame particular individuals or social groups for societal transformations.

In effect, non-emancipatory responses to the current economic crisis, as described in this paper, are concerned with protecting a particular romanticised version of capitalism from what they perceive to be foreign or inauthentic influences or excesses. They distinguish between a good, productive, national and industrial capitalism and a rapacious, speculative, global and financial capitalism. We described this antinomy as a ‘foreshortened’ understanding, though there is no indication that such an analysis would automatically lead to quasi-fascist and nationalist impulses. Nonetheless, the work of critical Marxist scholarship can shed light upon the falsity of this distinction. As Werner Bonefeld has put it: “Marx’s critique of Fetishism supplied an uncompromising critique of this dualist conception by making clear that the two, use value and exchange value, industrial capital and money capital, do not exist independent from each other but are in fact each other’s mode of existence” (Bonefeld 2004: 319).

We traced a corresponding dualist and foreshortened opposition to economic crisis in the ultra-conservative writings of *Nouvelle Droite* political theorist Alain de Benoist. Not only does de Benoist provide a perspective of globalisation and earlier colonisation processes that aims to de-politicise the question. He also situates this fundamentally in a meta-physical philosophy that seeks to overcome the divisions of left and right, and speaking geo-politically of East and West. If we take de Benoist’s anti-politics as an example, we can maybe conceptualise non-emancipatory responses to crisis and globalisation as an attempt at a regressive and system-immanent solution; in the sense that such a solution would seek to marry and resolve fundamentally antagonistic positions and structural interests. In the case of neo-fascist anti-globalisation perspectives, this involves the marrying of different class interests and their subsumption within an overriding national framework. Expressed politically, this also involves the marrying of socialist and nationalist perspectives and the overcoming of a left-right dichotomy in favour of a notion of a *Volk*, people or nation.

This is not to argue for a continuation or retreat to traditional notions of the left-right dichotomy. Today, new values are being promoted by social movements that transcend material and redistributive issues, but that at the same time also re-connect with precisely such concerns. They find themselves with only loose ties to traditional movement actors such as labour unions or political parties. They form allegiances that are ad-hoc, ephemeral and often virtual. Such a fluent and dynamic approach to mobilisation allows for gaps which can be filled at times by non-progressive actors or ideas. But the ambitions such movements represent – to be global and transnational, to strive for an equal and ecological world – are the basis upon which can come to critique ethno-pluralist, nationalist and other non-emancipatory forms of crisis solution.

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