



Editorial

International Nets and National Links: The Global Rise of the Extreme Right—Introduction to Special Issue

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Work on this special issue has spanned two years, bookended by two highly media-tized, violent, extreme right-wing attacks, perpetrated on opposite sides of the globe. We began in March 2019, within days of the mass murder of 51 Muslim worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, committed by an Australian white supremacist with various international links, inspired by virtually global Islamophobia propagated via the internet (Poynting 2020). The ‘Christchurch massacre’ was itself modeled on the atrocities of 2011 in Oslo and Utøya, Norway: the sharing of right-wing racist ideology and propaganda themes was starkly obvious. Both atrocities took place in economically developed liberal democracies, though this is not so of all the rise of the extreme right, globally (populist regimes in Bolsonaro’s Brazil and Modi’s Hindu nationalist-dominated India, each with characteristic racisms, are cases in point).

The special issue comes to a close in the weeks after the right-wing nationalist siege and invasion of the Capitol in Washington, inspired by defeated president, Donald Trump, in January 2021. On 5 January, thousands of Trump supporters had descended on Washington DC, many of them unlawfully armed, and held a series of rallies denouncing the election results and demanding that Joe Biden’s election win not be certified (GW 2021). The last of these rallies, on the Ellipse, south of the White House, was addressed by Trump at around midday on 6 January. He repeated the falsehood that the election had been ‘stolen’, vowed never to concede defeat, exhorted his followers to ‘fight like hell’ to ‘take back our country’, and urged them to march along the National Mall to the Capitol to pressure Congress, and in particular Vice-President Pence, to refuse unlawfully to ratify the election result (Trump 2021).

After reaching the Capitol, the crowd rioted, the remarkably inadequate security was overwhelmed, and the building was breached. Lawmakers were evacuated, and for a time the Capitol was occupied by the rampaging mob. Outside, some built a gallows, complete with noose. In the ‘bible’ of the extreme right, *The Turner Diaries*, the noose has heavy symbolism: the insurrectionists dealt thus with left-wing ‘traitors’ (Macdonald 1978). Many participants threatened to do just that to various figureheads of betrayal; two non-white congresswomen have reported being terrorized and in fear of their lives. The rioters smashed windows, looted art and other items, stole computers and papers, and vandalized offices. Overall, four people were killed in the violence, including a US Capitol policeman, bashed with a fire extinguisher. Participants included diverse elements of the extreme right, from the insurrectionist ‘Boogaloo’ militia movement, to conspiracy fantasists QAnon, to Proud Boys right-wing nationalist thugs, to ecofascists, and a scattering of white nationalist and Nazi organizations. It took several hours for order to be restored. Improvised explosive devices and firearms were discovered in the Capitol grounds. Since the attack, there have been over 150 arrests (around 10 per cent of the first tranche being women), with this number likely to rise. In short, these were brownshirts in red caps (and the odd horned helmet), though far less coordinated.

Outside of the anglosphere, in August 2020 there was an attempt to storm the Bundestag building in Berlin by a breakaway group of several hundred far-right protesters from



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a large demonstration against coronavirus restrictions. In November, the Bundestag was also intruded upon by right-wing activists protesting against Covid-19 measures, smuggled in by 'Alternative for Germany' (AfD) delegates. These activists waylaid and harassed Left and Green members of parliament in corridors; many of whom shut themselves in their offices in fear of violence.

The neo-fascist Golden Dawn has now collapsed in Greece, with numerous cadre criminally convicted in October 2020, though two of its former leaders have managed to evade authorities. The foregoing two years have also seen right-wing coup attempts, or something very similar depending on interpretation, in Venezuela (most recently in 2020 and unsuccessful) and Bolivia (in 2019, which was later democratically reversed). The extreme right has had some setbacks globally, but is clearly on the march.

Trump's initial reaction to the Capitol violence on 6 January (still as president, albeit a 'lame duck' one) was not to condemn the mob, but to express understanding for their frustration, to deem them 'patriots' and tweet his 'love'. There have been many foretastes of this approach, an early one being the refusal to denounce the white supremacist mob whose violence led to murder in Charlottesville in 2017. Notwithstanding this history, and the violence that Trump incited in January 2021, as of the time of writing, polls indicated that he retained overwhelming support among US Republican voters, the vast majority of whom believe that the election was fraudulent. The 'basket of deplorables' has come to be indulged or at least tolerated by a great mass of respectable citizens. The 'extreme' right is nurtured by the 'mainstream' in societies where the likes of Trump are not readily identified as extreme, but rather as perversely representative. The cases of right-wing populism discussed in this special issue bear this out, several analyzing the ideological maneuvers by which the far-right presents itself as normal, decent, law-abiding (in purported contrast to those 'othered') and respectable. The assault on the Capital was an attack on the central institutions of US liberal democracy, and yet its perpetrators claimed to be acting, as their leader exhorted, to 'save democracy'.

'The people' represented in democracy are not 'the people' hailed by right-wing populism. At the heart of the extreme right lies a profound distrust of democracy (Carter 2018; Mudde 2000). The various subcultures and interconnecting milieux of the far-right dismiss democracy as a myth, a corrupt order manipulated by elites out of touch with ordinary people, or a broken system that allows the weak to rule unless the reins are 'taken back' by the strong and the deserving (Campion 2019). These themes were played upon by Trump throughout his presidency, and were rehearsed in his January 6 speech at the Ellipse—contradictorily in the name of defending democracy.

'The people' of the nation that is to be made one again, made pure again, made great again, are invariably ethnically exclusive in far-right ideology. They are imagined in contradistinction to the racialized 'Other', who disunites the nation, corrupts its culture, exploits or sponges off its 'real' people. Racism and ethnonationalism are intrinsic to the far-right. Nations founded on slavery or 'settler' colonialist expropriation (or both, as in the Americas) have distinct racisms, and distinguish those who 'belong' by othering those of the different categories who do not. Nation-states inheriting the benefits of empire, those transformed by labor migration, and so on, also have various histories of racism—and yet the ideologies of far-right racism have proven in recent decades to be remarkably transferable between these different national cultures. The 'Replacement' myth that so exercised the Christchurch mass murderer (in his case Muslim immigrants 'replacing' 'white' culture through migration, high birth rates, and liberal tolerance of difference) is a touchstone of the far-right in the US, in Australia, and in Germany, for example, whatever their different histories of racism. In recent decades, the ideological elements of this and other far-right myths are exchanged, embellished, localized and internationalized above all via the internet, and the articles here collected demonstrate this strongly.

The history of fascism shows us that right-wing, racist populism arises especially in conjunctures of crisis. The 2007–2008 Global Financial Crisis greatly exacerbated the resort to nativism and xenophobia among the casualties of neoliberalism. The racialized Other is

a convenient scapegoat for economic and social insecurities. Europe's 'Refugee Crisis' from around 2015 with the influx of asylum seekers fleeing war and displacement in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere was another occasion for a rise in right-wing extremism. The associated othering melded with ongoing Islamophobia from the so-called 'War on Terror'. Over the period of production of this special issue, the global Covid-19 pandemic has interacted with far-right politics in complex ways, as explored by Ulrike Vieten in her ground-breaking contribution to this special issue with particular reference to Germany. This has been apparent also in the US: very few attendees at Trump's rallies or at the riot at the Capitol wore facemasks, which became emblematic of despised state imposition upon individual freedoms. The anti-elitism of populism aroused hostility towards 'experts', combined with cynicism towards science and the profound anti-intellectualism characteristic of fascism, fueled by feedback loops of self-referencing internet conversations where fevered imaginations grasp at 'explanations' and remedies that might otherwise have been sought in science.

There are genuine implications for misconceptualizing the radicalization of the far-right as either offline or online. In the digital information age, these two domains must be considered mutually complementary and reinforcing. In the aftermath of the Christchurch attack, it was widely suggested that the terrorist was radicalized online or through his travels. The *Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019* chaired by Sir William Young (Young 2020) turned this assumption on its head. Instead, the Royal Commission exposed the pre-existing, localized, far-right views held by the terrorist when he was an adolescent in Australia—and long before his engagement with fellow extremists both online and offline. The subsequent online engagement via Facebook and YouTube by the terrorist represented an expanding interest in extreme right ideology and actors. The online domain, however, is rife with violent and threatening discourses, which in the case of the Christchurch terrorist, manifested as online threats towards perceived enemies two years before his eventual attack (Nguyen 2019).

Pete Simi and Steven Windisch (Simi and Windisch 2020) analyze extreme right discourses in the United States in their study in this issue, "The Culture of Violent Talk." As their analysis is empirically grounded in rich ethnographic data collected from interviews with white supremacists in the United States since 1997, it provides us with invaluable insight into the ideology behind the rise of Trumpism and its apogee at the Capitol in January 2021. Simi and Windisch investigated the culture and content of violent talk, finding that it can reinforce the value of violence and its significance to political action, provide a sense of doing, and function as an expression of frustration and anger. The culture of violent talk can serve to establish in-groups and out-groups, targets for violence, legitimize tactics, venerate individuals and groups, and establish socialization into associated norms and values. The confronting, disturbing, and often violent expressions are pervasive in extreme right culture, but do not necessarily correspond directly with the implementation of violent actions. In sum, the performative and interactional nature of violent talk amongst white supremacists may in some cases be a cathartic substitute for violent actions, and instead allow for the communication of identity, both online and offline. As we currently (January 2021) see death threats to lawmakers issued by Capitol invaders mitigated by their lawyers as mere hyperbole and misplaced humor, we can see how this ideological ambiguity can make the deplorable 'understandable' and allow it to be indulged or at least tolerated within the political-cultural mainstream.

Laura Cervi and Santiago Tejedor (Cervi and Tejedor 2020), in their contribution to this special issue, 'Framing "The Gypsy Problem": Populist Electoral Use of Romaphobia in Italy (2014–2019)', examine the Romaphobic discourse of Matteo Salvini, the leader of the right-wing populist Lega party in Italy. While xenophobic rhetoric has long been central in Lega's discourse, Salvini as its new leader made populist capital by playing upon widespread Romaphobia. He made the othering of Roma people the centerpiece of his politics, repeating the media stunt "camp visit" as an electoral campaign feature. Through the analysis of eight consecutive electoral campaigns, over a six-year period,

this article shows how Roma communities are represented in Salvini's discourse, using a combination of computer-based quantitative and qualitative content analysis and framing analysis. Casting Roma as an "enemy" living "among us" reinforces an "us versus them" opposition characteristic of populist racist discourse. "Gypsies" are framed by Lega as a threat to society and bulldozing their camps is held to be the only solution.

Ulrike Vieten's (Vieten 2020) paper in this issue, 'The "New Normal" and "Pandemic Populism": The COVID-19 Crisis and Anti-Hygienic Mobilization of the Far-Right', explores the interrelationship between the crisis of the global Covid-19 pandemic and the rise of the global far-right. Focusing on the case of Germany, Vieten examines popular protest against the strictures of state interventions to control the coronavirus pandemic. She finds a blurring of mainstream political activism with the mobilization of the racist far-right. Indeed, the 'new normal' of Covid-related restrictions may be helping to 'normalize' far-right racist populism. Further, online populist mobilizing against the state measures around the pandemic may be coalescing with offline right-wing racist rallies blaming the pandemic on immigrants and minorities.

The tenuous space between mainstream processes of political engagement and their exploitation by far-right political parties or individuals is also addressed by Nicole Doerr's (Doerr 2020) article in this issue. Doerr explores this critical convergence in "Anti-Islam, Ethnonationalism, and Gendered Images" by examining the far-right visual politics of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. This study engages in a visual analysis of campaign materials created by AfD, and in conjunction with Harris Media, an US graphic design company known for supporting the electoral campaigns of the Republican Party. Doerr finds that the campaign materials are designed to mobilize the far-right through evocative and gendered images, such as western women in swimwear, to project a racialized German in-group whose ideals and values are contrasted against the supposedly misogynistic Muslim 'other', as well as other minorities who are implied to be the out-group. This is executed without explicit racist iconography or jargon, and thus retains a veneer of respectability. Beyond the use of gender ideology, AfD also leverage a controlled version of homonationalism to imply that Muslim values do not correspond with Germany's acceptance of homosexuality. Combined, the AfD project a racialized boundary between in-groups and out-groups, divided not only by religion but also by western values. Doerr suggests that the public arena for far-right discourses is often a diffused and contradictory space, which can traverse both mainstream and extreme digital milieux.

The far-right have long been spearheaded by digital natives, adept at exploiting online spaces (Ganesh 2018). The role of women in this digital universe is, however, relatively underexplored. This the focus of Ico Maly's (Maly 2020) digital ethnography of Brittany Pettibone in "Metapolitical New Right Influencers." Maly's study examines the interplay of digital media, far-right radicalization, and mobilization through an investigation of far-right influencers such as Pettibone. Pettibone's success as such cannot only be ascribed to her media literacy, hashtag tactics, and interaction with followers, but also to her propagation of pro-Trump content during 2017. Although she began engaging on social media as an aspiring author, Pettibone gradually began to tweet more explicitly political content, the first of which was directly targeting the mainstream media, Hollywood, and the existing "political class" she positioned (in the common populist argument) as opposing Donald Trump. She soon synthesized her activity with that of other far-right activists and current events, exploiting the Podesta emails, Wikileaks, and #pizzagate. Within the space of a year, she had a substantial international following. Maly argues that such micro-celebrities are able to stretch metapolitical traditions by democratizing content creation, which in turn disrupts established and institutional gatekeepers, fundamentally upsetting existing power relationships, and contributing towards potentially radicalizing discourses online.

The online and offline spaces are not entirely divisible. Kristy Champion's (Champion 2020) article, "Women in the Extreme and Radical Right", examines the role of women in both online and offline domains. Her study examines the participation of nearly 100 women in extreme and radical right milieux. Their participation broadly

fits into six categories, which demonstrated women had been involved in extreme right activity as (1) violent actors in their own right; (2) thinkers who contribute to the universe of ideas; (3) facilitators who enable illicit activity; (4) promoters who use online and offline platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram, to disperse propaganda and materials; (5) activists who further the cause through licit activity; and, finally, (6), as being exemplars for others. This participation emphasized the activity of women who enacted, facilitated or sustained illicit (and sometime violent) operations. Female engagement with content creation and promotion has also enabled women to challenge feminist discourses, magnify ideology, and cultivate female identity and behavioral norms in extreme and radical right ecosystems. This allows them to find identity security and satisfy personal needs. As a consequence, contemporary female involvement in the extreme and radical right is hardly new or surprising: this research establishes female engagement with ideology and discourse, and participation in violent and non-violent operations, as belonging to the norm in both online and offline milieux.

In recent times both Australia and the United Kingdom have allowed far-right, racist political leaders and public figures such as the Netherlands' Geert Wilders to visit their countries and engage in Islamophobic and anti-immigrant propaganda. Far-right, white nationalist 'influencer' Lauren Southern has been banned from the UK and New Zealand, and detained for unlawful anti-asylum seeker interventions in Italy, though she was permitted to conduct a speaking tour in Australia in 2018 and is now resident in that country, engaging in regular media appearances. In such cases, supporters of these figures invariably appeal to 'freedom of speech' principles. Evan Smith's (2020) contribution herein, 'Keeping the Nazi Menace Out: George Lincoln Rockwell and the Border Control System in Australia and Britain in the Early 1960s', shows through a case study of an invited US Nazi leader, that in the post-war period, when the dangers of fascism were officially taken more seriously in these countries, the Australian and British governments moved to prohibit the entry of foreign actors who propagated far-right politics. Yet both these states allowed far-right organizations to exist lawfully in their countries. Smith ascribes the ban to 'concerns about potential public disorder and violence', but also argues that it allowed both governments to portray white supremacism and racial violence as foreign to their own countries. Given the operation of Britain's violent neo-colonial regimes of that period, and Australia's 'White Australia policy' in effect at that time, this portrayal may have had an important face-saving role in international affairs. (The Australian government's active encouragement of immigration by Eastern European ex-fascists, for their anti-communism during this period of the Cold War, was covert and publicly denied). Smith details how in the early 1960s, the American Nazi Party leader George Lincoln Rockwell was invited to visit by neo-Nazis in Australia and Britain. Both countries invoked border control and visa regulations that allowed the government to exclude proponents of extreme or "dangerous" political ideologies. Rockwell never made it to Australia, but did enter Britain unlawfully via Ireland in 1962. His official exclusion and eventual deportation became a point of reference in future debates in Britain over denial of entry and deportation of political figures.

Finally, René Leal (Leal 2020) discusses within the long-term historical context the contemporary popular uprising in Chile and its suppression by the neo-liberal government of the right. In 'The Rise of Fascist Formations in Chile and in the World', Leal analyses the foundational racism of the Chilean state in relation to Indigenous peoples, and its inherent ideology of progress and civilizational supremacy. These ideological elements were promoted by the 1973–1990 fascist dictatorship under Pinochet, which ushered in one of the first neo-liberal regimes globally. It is the hegemony of neo-liberalism that the contemporary protesters have been challenging since October 2019, in their coalition of students, workers, young people, and allied progressive forces. They have also demanded revision of the constitution imposed under the Pinochet regime, under the auspices of which the formally liberal-democratic state had been pursuing neo-liberal austerity and its repression of the recent rebellion against that. The referendum on 25 October 2020

overwhelmingly backed the demand for a new constitution; the outcome of the struggle will determine whether neo-liberalism suffers a set-back with possibly global ramifications. It could also perhaps secure the definitive defeat of the extreme right and the fascist legacy within the Chilean national space.

Collectively, the contributions to this special issue call into question the notion that the 'extreme' right wing is somehow exogenous to liberal democracies, outlying on the margins, where it might be safely tolerated in the name of free speech and other liberties, and be effectively quarantined. There is no hard and fast social-scientific distinction between the extreme right and the far-right, and the far-right can live in symbiosis with the more conventional conservative right. These links, and their institutional arrangements enable the respectabilization of the far-right and 'extreme' ideologies including racisms, while maintaining a hygienic distance from the (unauthorized) violence often motivated and indeed incited in far-right discourse.

The cases here presented also point up both the global similarities and exchange of far-right ideology (above all now via the internet), while nevertheless showing how it takes root differently according to national and local histories and cultures. This special issue further challenges assumptions that persist in the study of and commentary on the extreme right that right-wing extremism is the domain of 'angry white men'. This is not solely the case: extreme right-wing operations, activities and ideologies have flourished with the participation of women. These women are able to exert leadership and influence across local and transnational populations, challenging dominant mainstream discourses and engaging in metapolitics. This performance is tied innately to identity politics, in terms of ethnonationalism, homonationalism, and xenophobia. Within the far-right, both men and women engage in identity performances through the culture of violent talk, with figurative expressions signposting ideological commitment and allegiance. The spatial domains of this violent culture are both online and offline, which are in practice mutually complementary and reinforcing spaces for radicalization and mobilization. These milieux are no longer relegated to niche spaces or fringes, but can and do overlap with mainstream politics and politicians. If the global rise of the extreme right is to be halted, it is these overlaps that need to be interrupted.

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