

RICHARD SAULL, *Capital, Race and Space, Volume 2: The Far-Right from 'Post-Fascism' to Trumpism* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2023)

Richard Saull's second volume tackling the convoluted history of the far-right in the modern world swiftly resumes from fascism's crushing defeat following the Second World War and proceeds in examining its legacy. In parallel with fascism's moral and political discreditation, the Western world underwent several structural changes with strong impact on the development of the far-right, ranging from decolonization to the erasure of the "cultural-ideological proxies of racism" (p. 2). The reconfigured liberal, democratic, capitalist world order at the onset of the Cold War grounded itself on the uncontested American hegemony. As in the first book, the narrative insists as much on continuities as on ruptures, providing a volume length examination of the post-war political order through the lens of far-right "as an organic and constitutive element of the liberal-capitalist order rather than being exogenous to it" (p. 5).

Continuities follow a fourfold structure, encompassing the persistence of former fascist cadre in key areas of post-war societies (military, judiciary, bureaucracy); the flourishing of neo-fascist strands within liberal and conservative elites, particularly in the United States; the inability of states to properly address far-right violence; and the contribution of far-right tropes in the formation of the post-war American political and economic system. The far-right is portrayed as having played an integral part in the post-war liberal order, in the para-political sense of a dormant force prone to populist mobilization against the left – not merely the genuinely malignant USSR, but also left-wing entities of democratic orientation. Following the internal political shifts of Germany, Greece and Italy, there is an insistence upon how they coopted former fascist vectors into their respective reconstructions, while denying (with covert US support) the same chances to leftist political competitors. To that end, American intervention is labelled as a form of Gramscian "passive revolution," as well as a para-political strategic field in and of itself, "outside and beyond the public state" (p. 30). The narrative interprets the Cold War as the context of an emergent "historical bloc" which brought on "the restoration of the class power of capital" (p. 34) into a political culture including the remnants of fascism. The most blatant examples are identified in the participation of the neofascist MSI, coupled with the constraints inflicted upon the PCI in early post-war Italian reconstruction, as well as in the insertion of a plethora of former Vichy collaborationists into the workings of the Fourth Republic, alongside Gaullists.

A particularly resilient fountainhead of extremism is distinguished in the persistence of political violence, a tool of systemic preservation unleashed against the spectre of radical (i.e., left-leaning) transformation, in order to prevent a "new and alternative political centre of gravity further to the left" (p. 43). Later dynamics engaging the establishment and terrorist factions are

perceived in terms of collusion, with states making instrumental use of violence to instil an authoritarian climate and to contain prospective leftist advancements. For example, in Greece, this translated into the military coup of 1967 and the collapse of democratic rule. Moreover, an additional function of far-right violence for state usage was to quell post-colonial unrest, as was the case of France's handling of the Algerian crisis with the cooperation of openly far-right entities (the OAS).

The persistence of the racial motif is examined in the post-war United States by expanding upon the first volume thesis, which identified a partial overlap between the far-right and the liberal visions on race integral to the American polity. Hence the ostensible racialization of American anti-communism at the beginning of the Cold War, coupled with the (post)colonial racism of a political economy whose exploitative capitalism was rooted in centuries of slavery. American hegemony is said to have relied on a "unity of opposites" (p. 60) between establishment liberal internationalism and far-right forces, ominously announced by McCarthyism. This nefarious power structure projected a permanent connection between the revolutionary left-wing and the anti-colonial liberation movements, tarnished with anti-Semitic conspiratorial accusations, in the intellectual tradition which superposed Jewish and Marxist identities. Grand theories of racialization are further explored in the context of the New Deal, particularly given its tense reception in the South, requiring political compromises with the racist Southern Democratic elites and implicitly bringing to the forefront of American politics the crusading spirit of the Cold War, along with an entrenched segregationist agenda. Contrasting this reality with the "northern-industrial technological Fordism," Saull distinguishes another instance of uneven and combined development at play (p. 74).

A more decisive step towards the contemporary far-right is later brought by neoliberal globalization, particularly from the 1980s onwards, with an insistence on the inner workings of the Thatcher-Reagan global order. The hegemonic "Anglosphere" appears as a harbinger of a far-right political aggregation that fragilized the entire neoliberal construction. While capitalist democracy had previously registered upheavals (the oil crises, the malfunctions of the Bretton Woods and GATT mechanisms, the limitations of Keynesian economics), the advent of Thatcher and Reagan as dominant world actors would inaugurate a new fault line between national governments and supranational control institutions, only intensified following the sudden collapse of the communist archenemy. Central to this dynamic was the fundamentally anti-collectivist stance of neoliberalism and its inherent hostility to social welfare, appropriated by the far-right in yet another synchronization with the establishment.

A detailed description of neoliberal economics follows its convoluted course beginning with the inter-war years, which laid foundations to its anti-statism and anti-collectivism, its cult of individual freedom, private property and the market. This staunch opposition to statism and collectivism conflated the social engineering projects of Nazism and Stalinism with the New Deal and Keynesian economics, in a tremendous intellectual stretch that explains, in part, the propensity of the far right to embrace it. Authoritative neoliberal figures (von Mises, Hayek, Friedman) are indicted, despite of their undeniable anti-dictatorial spirit, for the conjunctural endorsement of a 'limited democracy model' whenever the absolute freedom of the market was

presumably under threat (as demonstrated by Hayek and Friedman notoriously cooperating with the Pinochet regime).

The ideopolitical dimension of neoliberalism is displayed by its technocratic ideal of politics, amplified during Reagan and Thatcher by the rightward shift of the New Cold War. In the United States, its origins are uncovered through a thorough examination of racial tropes in the political imaginary of the right, from the times of Wallace, Nixon and the GOP of the 1960s, when a “privatized racism” reflected the “limits of liberalism” (p. 108), up to the political targeting of organized labour and racial minorities in the 1980s. The entrenchment of neoliberalism meant that American cultural identity itself was renegotiated in a “racialized framing of moral economy” (p. 114). The same prism is then applied to Britain, where the far-right is again not regarded as developing organically from below, but as nesting “within the security apparatus and para-political dimensions of the British state and elements within the capitalist class” (p. 119). Thatcher’s challenge in maintaining inner stability, particularly the confrontation of organized labour, is perceived in the same logic of “legal and semi-legal,” para-political and far-right inviting positions. With regards to continental developments, European integration is similarly conceived as the fulfilment of “a distinctly neoliberal vision of technocratic regulation” (p. 140), with all the derived metamorphoses: single market, unique currency, integrated banking, coordinated policies ran by non-elected governance structures, an overall transnational recalibration of capital.

Discussing the “socioeconomic topography” of neoliberalism, the analysis emphasizes the fragmentation of the working class, allowing for major inroads of the far-right, who speculated improper representation, cultural frailty and the weakness of the political left to claim the role of flagbearer for a revised “national labour,” to which it could only deliver “welfare-nativism and anti-migrant rhetoric” (p. 145). Transformations of the base came along with metamorphoses of the elite, withdrawn from democratic oversight, supranationally technocratic and increasingly decoupling “neoliberal capital” from “subaltern classes” in manners unprecedented in history.

As far as how this concatenation of forces has dramatically altered the morphology of the far-right, the analysis provides a layered typological description of its configurations. The first component of this new landscape is the social base, purportedly constituted of the petty bourgeoisie and various categories of workers, with Saull’s overemphasis on class persisting to the point of anachronism. Far-right entities are said to appeal exclusively to disengaged segments of the working class, promoting a rhetoric of hostility to both “monopoly capital” and “monopoly of labour” (p. 165). Next comes ideological social conservatism, with inextricable racial underpinnings, falling back on traditional notions of hierarchy, order, family, gender roles, ethnicity, and, with renewed force in a post-9/11 world, the Judeo-Christian tradition. Therefore, social conservatism becomes a *Weltanschauung* in itself, a “racialized ontology and epistemology” (p. 167) which claims to decipher the world, while keeping clear of the “fascism” label. Subsequently, “welfare nativism” is described as an attempted monopoly on welfare, conditioned on ethnic grounds and restricted to outsiders, an additional bridge of neoliberal and far-right visions. Another vital component of the framework, political economy stands as a major

vehicle for electoral breakthrough, especially when neoliberal mechanisms undergo financial crises, fuelling “inward looking” models hostile to internationalism and promoting protectionist agendas focused on “national capital.” The international plain is itself explored systemically, with extensive processes such as European integration comprehended in terms of a continuous expansion of forces above and beyond traditional governments in the spheres of the judicial, legal and fiscal. It is a neoliberal direction vehemently denounced by the far-right, in its attempts to portray itself as a genuine defender of democracy against globalizing elites.

A particularly complex issue concerns the status quo of liberal democracy, formally defined as ‘post-fascist’, a label that Saull takes issue with. The main achievement of the far-right in the broader neoliberal context is admitted in its ability to ingrain itself into the democratic fabric, playing by new rules, but subliminally entertaining the prospect of fascist revival. The nominal embrace of democratic functions happens “in a way that fundamentally challenges some of the key values and institutions of *liberal* democracy” (p. 190), since far-right populism is fundamentally alienating, intended to disenfranchise societal segments deemed as external. Moreover, when gaining power, either in coalitionist form or on its own, it sets to alter democratic systems not by replacing them with full-blown dictatorship, but more subtly: through increases in executive grants, limitations to the judiciary, subordination of the legislative or crony capitalism (as exemplified by Hungary under the rule of Orbán’s Fidesz).

The tremendous shift of the ’07-’08 crisis is depicted at length as the quintessential failure of the neoliberal establishment, providing a fateful jolt to the far-right, who rhetorically framed the financial maelstrom as the ultimate breakdown of an “elitist, cosmopolitan neoliberalism that the far-right had been vilifying for decades” (p. 198). Revisiting Gramsci, the analysis adopts the notion of “organic crisis” as the critical interpretation of an event to be perceived not as an endemic, cyclical misstep of capitalism, but a more profound shift in underlying hegemonic power structures, indicating the fall of the bourgeoisie and the scrape for an alternative power locus. However, in a contradictory note, the author also claims that “the core ideological assumptions and policy operations of neoliberal political economy have largely remained in place” (p. 200), as did the ambiguities of the relationship between the far-right and neoliberalism. The housing crisis of ’07-’08 is connected, in a wide temporal arc, to various shocks felt by the hegemonic Western capitalism, from the convulsions of the 1970s to the recent advancement of China within the Anglosphere.

Various national case studies fill the rest of this final section, with the list opened by the American far-right and the Trump phenomenon. Not perceived as a deviation of democracy per se, given its undeniable continuities, Trumpism is nevertheless thought to reveal “the most likely form that a contemporary American fascism *will* assume” (p. 219). Even though Trump himself is expedited as a far-right demagogue and authoritarian motivated by personal financial gain, noteworthy insights concern the heterogenous support he received from the Alt-Right, an integral component of his base and a clustered melange of “paleo-conservative fascist ideology and conspiracy theories” (p. 222). A painstaking reconstruction of the American political and economic landscape illustrates how the financial crisis paved the way for the rise of Trump, with the “post-crisis political economy” encompassing the steep decline of certain regional socio-

demographic forces, the relentless rise of China, the psychological sense of “terminal decline and existential angst” (p. 229) affecting the working class in particular and the amplification of racial disparities. On this dark background, Trump arose as the providential outsider, the agent of “re-enchantment” in a Weberian sense, a “neo-Randian John-Galt who embodies the combination of personal liberty and nihilism” (p. 235).

The second case study tackles Brexit through the same lens of structural neoliberal crisis, in turn “an outcome decades in the making,” given the long-standing hostile dynamics engaging sections of the United Kingdom and the institutional ecosystem of the European Union. With Euroscepticism gaining ground among conservative forces, the steady rise of the populist UKIP or the radical BNP and the failure of establishment policies to mitigate stringent needs of the population, a far-right Brexit current aggregated. Its ideological tropes revolved around the purported plight of ‘cultural Marxism’, cosmopolitanism, elitism and immigration, inducing the moral panic that anticipated the result of the referendum. In the long run, these developments are explained via the long-established trope of the “revolt of the left-behinds” (p. 272), internal divisions surviving the Brexit moment. The trials and tribulations that followed the exit process, accounted for in detail, only fomented polarization and populism, perpetuated a sense of internal distrust and haphazard policy development and brought to the forefront politics characters (May, Johnson) unequipped to address the profound structural shifts which the referendum had generated.

Completing the trifecta of far-right crises, the struggles of the European Union are approached as critical moments of neoliberalism, the refugee crisis and the dysfunctions of the Eurozone reinforcing “the anti-EU, populist and nationalist and anti-migrant politics associated with far-right political currents” (p. 280). Rather misguidedly, a conspicuous trajectory towards authoritarianism is identified at the heart of the European project, with the downside of integration illustrated by particular national dynamics: the government of Greece confronting the infamous “troika” (the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund) in a purportedly defining instance of uneven and combined capitalist development; the Italian establishment defending against “Frankfurt, Brussels and Berlin” intervening into its inner political workings; France fragilized by economic unevenness and splintered politics, turning it into a playing field of supranational technocracy; Germany with its capitalist development embedded into European oversight mechanisms etc.

These complex national instances are then detailed in a final set of case studies. Germany comes first, with the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) described as an unprecedented phenomenon in post-war German politics, reflective of the disillusionment with and rejection of the traditional political scene. The AfD associated itself with grass roots identitarians such as Pegida, openly embraced a racist agenda, gained substantial regional concentration in small urban and rural areas of the GDR and combined “ordo-liberal orthodoxy and anti-immigrant populism” (p. 310). In France, the Rassemblement National (RN), the rebranded version of the Front National, surged to unprecedented heights, outperforming traditional party structures, while being hardly kept at bay by the “radical-centrist populism” of Macron (p. 312), and propelling the anti-immigration and anti-Muslim far-right sentiment into the ideopolitical

mainstream. Moreover, it attempted a confiscation of the republican ethos and “a cultural-civilizational language typical of the neoliberal far-right” (p. 313), cynically speculating a context of political alienation, spatial disconnect and economic disparity (as denounced by the Gilets Jaunes movement). In Italy, a stronger historical presence of the far-right in the governing process, from the strongman persona of Berlusconi to the breakthroughs of the Lega or Fratelli d’Italia, now found company in social-populist surges such as the Movimento 5 Stelle. The replacement of Berlusconi’s populist showmanship with the centrifugal tendencies advanced by the Lega under Salvini, in a logic of “proto-welfare nativism” hostile to the centralism of Rome and the backwardness of the south, brought the far-right into an age of open alliances with neofascist factions (Forza Nuova, Casa Pound) and fear-mongering on migration. Arguably, the most severe crisis of the continent and the most aggressive response to it are found in Greece, with the breakthrough of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn, following a brief and disastrous governing spell by the far-left Syriza. Singular among far-right entities in the contemporary neoliberal climate, the Golden Dawn openly acknowledged fascist affinities, employed paramilitary violence, vehemently criticized “the dismembering of democratic processes within Greece through the Troika diktats” (p. 334) and, in the author’s account, exposed the undemocratic biases of a state only willing to target the radical left as a quasi-existential threat.

These specific instances are meant to illustrate that the contemporary far-right did not simply emerge as a consequence of the ’07-’08 moment, having benefitted structurally from the “mutating neoliberal crisis” (p. 340) and its austerity derailments. The conclusions assert that the far-right is presently more embedded than ever into the political mainstream, having been legitimated, under the canopy of neoliberalism, throughout the 20th century. Saull takes it as far as to affirm that the far-right has become a shaper of the “ideo-political content of liberal democracy” (p. 343), similar to the way previous ideological forces such as conservatism and socialism had been assimilated by liberal modernity. While far-right vectors (the AfD, the RN, the Lega) have openly renounced extreme positions (such as the dissolution of the EU or the exit from the Eurozone), nationalist protectionism remains a key issue threatening to tear apart continental unity. Added to these are the complexities of a perpetually morphing international scene, varying from climate change to the environmental policies or the omnipresence of China, posing perhaps the most severe threats Western supremacy ever encountered.

Certainly bleak, these conclusions are consistent with the overall tone of the massive two-volume endeavour. Overall, Richard Saull’s ambitious task, while impeccably documented, falls prey to an analytical overstretch. Despite occasionally managing to provide insightful historical examinations by relying on classic left-wing intellectual models, it suffers from a degree of dogmatism and determinism that the Marxist academic field still struggles with to the present day.

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