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National Populism and Fascism: Blood and Soil against Globalization

Parallel but opposed to the globalist visions of liberalism and Marxism, the rejection of the global has a long history. This chapter examines anti-globalization positions articulated on the right end of the political spectrum. It traces the development of these ideas from the long tradition of European anti-universalism while also identifying new conceptual and rhetorical shifts espoused by parties, movements and intellectuals representing national populist and fascist thought.

Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment

The two ideological families that I have discussed so far, namely liberalism and socialism, sprang from the same source: the Enlightenment. Thus, even though many important differences divide the two broad worldviews, they coalesce on the fundamental assumption that human beings are of equal value and essentially the same nature regardless of time and place. Consequently, both liberals and socialists are committed to universalism and take for granted the possibility of one set of ethical standards to guide all peoples and to thus unite humankind in a global civilization. While liberalism and socialism have elevated universalism to the status of one of the key organizing principles of Western civilization, this universalist outlook has not been left unchallenged. The rise of the Enlightenment provoked an intellectual reaction that Zeev Sternhell described in suggestive terms: ‘the man of the Enlightenment wanted no less than to recreate the myth of Prometheus. His immediate enemies replied by appealing to Providence, to destiny, to history and to the profound roots of the collective subconscious’ (2000: 143).

In this chapter my focus is on the right-wing anti-globalism which developed from the early denunciations of the Enlightenment. More specifically, my analysis engages with anti-globalist interpretations advanced within the territory of what is conventionally termed the extreme right, and in particular within two ideological currents which belong there: national populism and fascism. To make sure that ideological continuity between early anti-universalist ideas and the contemporary extreme right is clearly shown, I begin with a brief historical summary of relevant, mostly nineteenth- and early twentieth-century contributions. Subsequently, I explain the meaning of the concept of the extreme right, shed light on several differences between national populism and fascism, and discuss, in a comparative way, their anti-globalist arguments. The last section provides an account of conceptual changes that have taken place in this ideological milieu and that have followed a shift from traditional nationalism to a new post-nationalist orientation. The objective of the chapter is to demonstrate that whereas the shift is indeed significant, its consequences for the values and logic of extreme right ideologies are not as disruptive as is sometimes suggested. While hopes, aspirations and identities that in the past were articulated primarily in national contexts are no longer restricted to the national level, they are still recognizable as integral to their host ideological traditions thus demonstrating that the change of the territorial referent does not have to cause an evaporation of ideological distinctions.

The transition described here – from a nationalist to transnationalist, civilizational orientation – has not occurred, at least not to a comparable degree, outside the European extreme right. That is why I have limited the core of my analysis in this chapter to relevant discursive inputs by contemporary European groups and individuals. The following discussion of historical genealogies of the extreme right is likewise restricted to three most distinctive European cases: France, Germany and Britain.

The anti-Enlightenment tradition of the right: A historical sketch

The French Revolution of 1789 is a useful symbolic marker of both the Enlightenment and the reaction against it that saw counter-revolutionaries striving to find ways to restore absolute monarchy and its concomitant aristocratic social order. While the counter-revolutionary reaction was in this instance provoked by a particular set of circumstances, it can also be seen as an expression of a more durable,