



THE JOURNAL OF ILLIBERALISM STUDIES

VOL. 3, NO. 1, 2023

Institute for
European, Russian,
and Eurasian Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

illiberalism
Studies Program

THE JOURNAL OF ILLIBERALISM STUDIES

PUBLISHED BY GW'S INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN, RUSSIAN AND EURASIAN STUDIES

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The Journal of Illiberalism Studies (JIS) is a semiannual journal published by the Illiberalism Studies Program at the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES), Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University.

JIS aims to provide an intellectual space for critical analyses of the concept of illiberalism and its derivatives. The objective in setting up this new journal is to fill a gap in current academic debates regarding the treatment of the still understudied concept of illiberalism and make a contribution to its relevance for political philosophy, political science, sociology, media studies, IR, and cultural anthropology.

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Introduction: Radical Philosophies in Russia

MARLENE LARUELLE

One year after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin-backed language of war has continued to expand through new indoctrination mechanisms, as well as regular attempts by Russia's spin doctors to craft new ideational products. This collection of articles explores Russia's radical philosophies as a key fundament for the state production of extreme narratives with strong religious overtones.

Scholarship on Russia has tended to analyze the rise in power of social conservatism in Russia as an instrumental strategy by the regime to remain in power and secure consensus at home. Yet the justification for the war against Ukraine has showed that many of the ideological assumptions implied in Russian social conservative language were not opportunistic. They are deeply-seated worldviews shared within the decisionmaking circles surrounding Vladimir Putin, strong enough to influence the country's entry into war. Dmitri Uzlaner delves into the two faces of Russian social conservatism to explore its phantasmatic side, identifying several key and interrelated phantasms around the notions of lost harmony, theft of enjoyment, scapegoating, and sinking into chaos.

While Alexander Dugin has been misrepresented in Western media as Putin's gray cardinal, the Russian ideologue has contributed to an elaborate array of new doctrines, largely inspired by Western fascist or parafascist tradition and adapted for Russian consumption by a Russification of their cultural references. An understudied aspect of this has been Dugin's intellectual debt to Romanian fascist tradition and especially the *Legionary Phenomenon* (1938) by Romanian Legionary ideologue Nae Ionescu, itself inspired by Julius Evola's *Revolt against the Modern World* (1934). Jason Roberts investigates how the doctrinal construction of the *Legionary Phenomenon* heavily influenced Dugin's own writings on integral traditionalism and the so-called Fourth Political Theory. What the Russian ideologue takes from Evola and Ionescu is the link between metaphysical assumptions (that is, the epistemological paradigm) and ultranationalist conclusions, so what matters is not so much what is held to be true but *how* truth itself is demonstrated.

The role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in feeding the Russian state with religion-based arguments has been increasing with the war, that saw the Russian president presenting LGBTQ+ rights as a civilizational divide between the West and Russia—something the Church has been advancing for long. Yet the Moscow

Marlene Laruelle

Patriarchate keeps open many discursive lines to be sure to stay in synch with the state and some segments of the population. One of its ideological offspring is found in Sorok Sorokov, a youth paramilitary Orthodox movement. Adam Hanzel and Kiril Avramov investigate the Sorok Sorokov movement as the ideological pretorian guard of the Church, acting as a radicalizing outreach arm of the Patriarchate. To demonstrate this relationship, the authors developed Telegram API and web scraping tools and also utilized exploratory data analysis, natural language processing, and critical discourse analysis to establish that Sorok Sorokov operates as a radical extension of Patriarch Kirill's interpretation of "holy tradition" and address themes that the ROC cannot directly speak of.



The Phantasmatic Dimension of Culture Wars: The Case of Social Conservatism

DMITRY UZLANER

Abstract

The article is devoted to identifying and describing the phantasmatic dimension of the culture wars, in particular the phantasmatic dimension of one side of this confrontation—social conservatism. The notion of “phantasm” is used on the basis of the Lacanian tradition of social and political theory. A phantasm is understood as stereotypical, repetitive images or visions that structure the position of “culture warriors” and are the foundation on which other levels (rational, legal, etc.) are superimposed. Conservative phantasms are actualized at the moment when society undergoes a process of radical transformation, which breaks the usual systems of differentiation; it is this process that triggers culture wars. Empirical material to illustrate these ideas is the case of Russian social conservatism.

Keywords: social conservatism; phantasm; Lacanian social theory; Russia; culture wars; traditional values

Culture wars are a ubiquitous phenomenon these days. What started as a “struggle to control the family, art, education, law, and politics in America”¹ has globalized.² Now it drags into its struggles over morality issues more and more actors—from different cultures, continents, and religions. One of the relevant newcomers in these wars is Russia, which clearly sided with the social conservative position. Russian activities and ambitions in the global culture wars have already attracted much attention.³ The current essay is an attempt to uncover one of the key dimensions of contemporary social conservatism (and culture wars in general)—the dimension that could be called phantasmatic.⁴ As I draw on this concept derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, I use data derived from the study of Russian social conservatism for an illustration of my point.

Social conservative actors are powerful players in the culture wars.⁵ The Russian participation in transnational moral conservative networks has been one of the most visible in recent decades.⁶ The study of social conservatism from the angle of political sociology, political science, international relations, and social movement studies has mostly privileged a perspective according to which conservative actors are driven by rational, institutional, or ideational goals. The case of Russia’s ascent in the transnational moral conservative universe, for example, was accompanied by a learning process from Western social conservatives both in terms of institutions and in terms of framing strategies of the conservative message, in particular a framing in terms of human rights.⁷ Social conservatism, in this perspective, is about ideas, institutions, and strategies.

What we learn from the case of Russian social conservatism, however, is that the intellectual saturation of the Russian conservative position with the discourse of the global culture wars is not purely instrumental, rational and strategic. There is

1 James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); James Davison Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America’s Culture War* (New York and Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1994); James Davison Hunter and Alan Wolfe, *Is There a Culture War? A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, Brookings Institution Press, 2006).

2 Clifford Bob, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Christopher McCrudden, “Transnational Culture Wars,” *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 13 (April 2015): 434–462, <https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/mov018.30.09.2022>.

3 For a comprehensive analysis of this process, see Kristina Stoeckl and Dmitry Uzlaner, *The Moralistic International: Russia in the Global Culture Wars* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022).

4 See Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), 45–54; Jason Glynos and David Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007), 145–152. A clarification here is necessary: the phantasmatic dimension that I describe is not exclusive to socially conservative positions. It can also be traced in the opposite direction—that of social liberalism. I discuss this briefly in the final section of the paper. In general, the phantasmatic dimension of social liberalism and its main phantasms is a topic that deserves separate investigation and discussion.

5 For the American part, see Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

6 See the materials of the [Postsecular Conflicts \(POSEC\) project](#), which researched and documented this phenomenon, in particular Kristina Stoeckl, “The Russian Orthodox Church as Moral Norm Entrepreneur,” *Religion, State & Society* 44, no. 2 (July 2016): 131–151, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2016.1194010>; Kristina Stoeckl and Ksenia Medvedeva, “Double Bind at the UN: Western Actors, Russia, and the Traditionalist Agenda,” *Global Constitutionalism* 7, no. 3 (November 2018): 383–421, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s2045381718000163>; Dmitry Uzlaner and Kristina Stoeckl, “The Legacy of Pitirim Sorokin in the Transnational Alliances of Moral Conservatives,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 18, no. 2 (Month 2017): 133–153, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795317740734>; Kristina Stoeckl and Dmitry Uzlaner, eds., *Postsecular Conflicts: Debating Tradition in Russia and the United States* (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2020); Stoeckl and Uzlaner, *Moralistic International*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv307fh49>.

7 For more on this, see Stoeckl and Uzlaner, *Moralistic International*, 17–28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv307fh49>. For similar developments in the US context, see Andrew R. Lewis, *The Rights Turn in Conservative Christian Politics: How Abortion Transformed the Culture Wars* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

also another aspect, pointing to a dimension “beyond rationality,”⁸ the, so to speak, “obscene” (I will explain below why I find this strong word appropriate) side of this phenomenon. In the Russian case this other side manifests itself in narratives with clear mythological overtones—about the traditional way of life and how it is threatened by enemies that must be fought. These are stories about the Golden Age of tradition, about the forces of evil that have fallen upon it, about courageous heroes and vicious villains, about the disastrous consequences of abandoning traditional values, leading literally to the end of the world.

The two dimensions of social conservatism—the rational-strategic and irrational-mythological—could be present in one and the same person. Over several years of fieldwork in the conservative milieu with numerous interviews, I typically encountered highly educated entrepreneurial subjects with excellent networking skills and knowledge of all the flaws and weaknesses of the contemporary international legal order, which allowed them to successfully defend their conservative point of view; on the other hand, these same persons, when prompted to place their activities in a more general context, would talk about Stalin as savior of Russia from destructive ideologies (for example, from feminism), about a neo-Marxist plot to destroy traditional values, about George Soros’ and Bill Gates’ mission to subvert morality, etc. What I encountered, in short, was a strange mixture of practical rationality and mythological thinking.

Research on social conservatism necessarily puts emphasis on the rational-instrumental side of the object of study, tracing networks, organizations, and concrete activities, but it is also necessary to keep in mind the second—“beyond rationality”—dimension of this conservatism: these theories, imbued with the pathos of a heroic struggle against powerful enemies.⁹ Russia’s attack on Ukraine in 2022 and its justifications through the pathos of culture war and the mission to prevent gay-parades¹⁰—together with a lot of other ideological explanations—brought this second dimension to the foreground.¹¹ The use of such justifications for the war seriously questioned, first, the rational basis of social conservatism in Russia and, second, the existence of rational actors behind this social conservatism who are immune to its “dark” (or, as Freud would put it, “uncanny”) aspects but only use them for their purposes. By “dark” aspects I mean the pathos of an almost “cosmic war” against enemies who subvert morality for the sake of Antichrist or some other figure representing evil.

My main insight is that social conservatism certainly has a rational side, but at its core it is driven by something “beyond rationality” that we can call “phantasmatic.” This phantasmatic dimension must necessarily be kept in mind for a more comprehensive

8 It is not that easy to find a good term to define this dimension in terms of rationality. I call it “beyond rationality” in the sense of beyond our taken-for-granted understanding of rationality. At the same time this dimension seems to have its own rationality and its own logics that I call “mythological.”

9 See also Dmitry Uzlaner, “Perverse Conservatism: A Lacanian Interpretation of Russia’s Turn to Traditional Values,” *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 22, no. 2 (November 2017): 173–192, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41282-016-0036-6>; Dmitry Uzlaner, “The Logic of Scapegoating in Contemporary Russian Moral Conservatism,” in *Contemporary Russian Conservatism: Problems, Paradoxes and Perspectives*, ed. Mikhail Suslov and Dmitry Uzlaner (Leiden: Brill, 2019): 103–127.

10 Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, “In his ‘Forgiveness Day’ sermon—a slightly more sophisticated ‘globohomo’ rant—Kirill lays out an authoritarian vision in which his version of God might dominate and rule the human race,” Religion Dispatches (March 7, 2022), <https://religiondispatches.org/in-his-forgiveness-day-sermon-a-slightly-more-sophisticated-globohomo-rant-kirill-lays-out-an-authoritarian-vision-in-which-his-version-of-god-might-dominate-and-rule-the-h/>.

11 Kristina Stoeckl and Dmitry Uzlaner, “Russia Believed the West Was Weak and Decadent. So It Invaded,” *Washington Post* (April 15, 2022), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/04/15/putin-patriarch-ukraine-culture-power-decline/>.

understanding both of the culture wars and of the parties involved in them. Before I turn to an argument for the phantasmatic dimension, I give an overview over the rational and instrumental interpretations of social conservatism.

Two Main Lines of Interpreting Social Conservatism

Most approaches to dealing with social conservatism—at least of the Russian variety—usually move in one of two directions.

The first direction is that of intellectual history and discourse analysis.¹² It presents the conservative narrative as a discursive construction. Here the researcher tries to dissect this construction into elements and trace the roots of these elements. The essence of this approach is to place social conservative ideas in the context of one (or more than one) intellectual tradition, for example, in the context of the history of Russian conservative thought or global conservative thought. This gives us an understanding of where these or other discursive elements in Russian social conservatism come from, for example, why “the West” appears as an enemy, why Russia claims to be the “Third Rome,” why Russian actors aspire to rule the “Russian world” denying the subjectivity of Ukraine, etc. My main problem with this approach is that it excessively intellectualizes social conservatism—it transfers it to the intellectual, rational plane, framing our understanding of it as primarily semantic construction, a work of reason and intellect, which could be influenced by logic (arguments, facts, objections, emphasis on its intrinsic contradictions, etc.). It overly rationalizes and intellectualizes something that, in my view, is deeply non-rational, non- and even anti- intellectual.

The second direction of analysis, perhaps the most widespread and mainstream, could be called “instrumental.”¹³ It presents social conservatism as a tool behind which there is a rational agent who tries to use this tool for one purpose or another: for example, as a way to unite the population around him, if we are talking about a political leader; as a way to accumulate resources, if we are talking about a norm entrepreneur; as a way to achieve fame and influence, if we are talking about an ambitious ideologist, etc. In other words, what looks like a puzzling phenomenon would be the product of the activities of calculating actors who need and use this irrationality to achieve a rational goal. The basic premise here, which seems false to me, is that there is a rational subject who is placed outside the ideological constructs—he or she uses these ideas, but remains invulnerable to their debilitating radiance. The problem with this approach is that it is essentially an attempt to explain a seemingly incomprehensible phenomenon through a conspiracy theory—something happens because there is a group of powerful actors behind it who use it as a tool to realize their insidious designs.

These two lines of analysis do not contradict each other. In reality they are usually combined. The standard assessment of social conservatism by those who do not share its ideas goes a bit like this: social conservative narratives are created by gifted ideologues from elements of traditional religion and past ideologies in order to realize their political and sometimes personal goals. An organic fusion of two approaches.

¹² Many examples of this can be found here: Mikhail Suslov and Dmitry Uzlaner, eds., *Contemporary Russian Conservatism: Problems, Paradoxes and Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

¹³ See, for example, Elena Stepanova, “The Spiritual and Moral Foundation of Civilization in Every Nation for Thousands of Years: The Traditional Values Discourse in Russia,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 16, no. 2–3 (August 2015): 119–136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2015.1068167>.

Both approaches are very useful, but are not enough and must be supplemented by a third line of thinking. What is needed is a view that, on the one hand, would take into account the phantasmatic aspect of these constructions; and that, on the other hand, would finally give up the illusion of the existence of rational-instrumental actors who would remain immune to the ideological environment they live in. This last point is a trap that many experts on Russia have fallen into: for years they have seen the most absurd ideas blossom in Russia, but have always reassured themselves that behind these ideas there are rational and pragmatic elites, who certainly think like we do and for this reason would never take these ideas seriously, but use them only for cynical political purposes. The war with Ukraine, I believe, will destroy this myth of the rational Russian actor. Actors are not *outside*, but *inside* ideological phantasmatic narratives—their practical rationality is determined by the system of coordinates structured by these narratives. There are clear signs that such rethinking is happening—for example, leading researcher on conspiracy theories in Russia recently acknowledged that the Russian regime does not exploit conspiracy theories (as he thought earlier),¹⁴ but is *driven* by them.¹⁵

Phantasm and the Phantasmatic Dimension of Social Conservatism

When I say “phantasm” and “phantasmatic dimension,” I, of course, refer to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytically-oriented social and political theory, in particular, to the tradition associated with Jacques Lacan and those philosophers and sociologists who were influenced by his ideas.¹⁶ The key psychoanalytic intuition that allows us to expand our vision of social conservatism is the understanding of the individual as not only a rational and conscious being; rationality and consciousness are only parts, albeit key ones, of human nature. As Anthony Elliott put it, “one of Freud’s most substantial findings is that there are psychical phenomena that are not available to consciousness, but which nevertheless exert a determining influence on everyday life.”¹⁷ Human subjectivity includes a powerful multilayered dimension (what in psychoanalytic terminology is usually called the dynamic unconscious), which manifests itself in everything that people do—including their political and social imagination. Emotional, affective aspects are definitely part of this dimension, but the key concept for me in the context of the current discussion is that of “phantasm.” Phantasms can be personal, if we refer to the level of the individual subject, or political or ideological, if we refer to the level of above- or inter-

14 See Ilya Yablokov, *Fortress Russia: Conspiracy Theories in the Post-Soviet World* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018).

15 Ilya Yablokov, “The Five Conspiracy Theories That Putin Has Weaponized,” *New York Times* (April 25, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/25/opinion/putin-russia-conspiracy-theories.html>; Ilya Yablokov, “Putin Believes in Conspiracy Theories,” *Holod* (August 1, 2022), <https://holod.media/en/2022/08/01/putin-conspiracy/>, 30.09.2022.

16 For the best introduction to this tradition, see Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999); Yannis Stavrakakis, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Psychoanalytic Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 2020); Anthony Elliott, “Psychoanalytic Social Theory,” in *Routledge Handbook of Social and Cultural Theory*, ed. Anthony Elliott (London: Routledge, 2021).

17 Anthony Elliott, *Social Theory since Freud: Traversing Social Imaginaries* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 185.

subjectivity. Our thinking about social conservatism should be supplemented by the analysis of the always present phantasmatic dimension of this phenomenon.¹⁸

The concept of “phantasm” appeared as a result of the translation of Freud’s term *Fantasie* into French. The French word *fantaisie* was not considered appropriate by Freud’s translator—as it has a meaning of something light, childish, playful, while Freud meant much darker and grim aspects of human imagination: the fantasy of killing your father, etc. So the term “fantasme” was offered—and later used by Lacan—which at that time was a rare and unusual word in French language. Since then, this word became an absolutely common word.¹⁹ For this reason, I prefer the concept of “phantasm” to that of “fantasy” for similar reasons and also for the reasons of emphasizing that my line of thinking goes along the psychoanalytic lines and not just along common-sense ideas on how human fantasies and imagination function.

What is phantasm and what is its role in the maintaining of any social reality? Here I will briefly summarize the standard Lacanian position.²⁰ Let us start with the intuition of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe on the non-existence of society in the sense of “founding totality of its partial processes.”²¹ In order to decipher this idea, we have to start with a distinction between social reality “as it is” (what Lacan called the “real” register) and different symbolic representations of this reality (what Lacan called the “symbolic” register). These two registers never coincide. For example, we traditionally tend to differentiate humans along the lines of males and females—this is the symbolic register. But today more and more people tend to question this representation claiming that reality as it is (in its real register) is much more complicated. So, there is always a discrepancy between social reality as it is and our symbolic representations of it. These results in social symptoms, the breaches in the smooth fabric of social reality—the culture wars, actually, result from these breaches.

We never deal with social reality as it is (we do not have access to it); instead we deal with its symbolic representations. To a certain extent one can say that social reality is equal to these symbolic representations, at least we often take these representations for granted (not noticing that our representations are, using Lacanian concept, “not-all,” that there is something else, some unrepresented element behind them). So, this social reality (“the Big Other,” if we use Lacanian terminology) is a symbolic construction, we can even call it a fiction in the sense that it exists as long as there are

18 On the concept in clinical context, see Bruce Fink, “Fantasies and the Fundamental Fantasy: An Introduction,” in *Against Understanding, Volume 2: Cases and Commentary in a Lacanian Key*, ed. Bruce Fink (London: Routledge, 2014): 39–52. For the use of this concept in social and political theory, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997); Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*, 145–152; Jason Glynos, “The Grip of Ideology: A Lacanian Approach to the Theory of Ideology,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 6, no. 2 (August 2001): 191–214, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310120053858>; Jason Glynos, “Fantasy and Identity in Critical Political Theory,” *Filozofski vestnik* XXXII, no. 2 (September 2011): 65–88; Matthew Sharpe and Kirk Turner, “Fantasy,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Psychoanalytic Political Theory*, ed. Yannis Stavrakakis (London: Routledge, 2020): 187–198.

19 Guy Le Gaufey, “The Fight against Psychopathology: Why a Case Is Not Just a Case,” Conférence donnée à Londres le 12 février 2005 au CFAR (Darian Leader) (February 12, 2005), <https://legaufey.fr/122-the-fight-against-psychopathology-why-a-case-is-not-just-a-case-conference-donnee-a-londres-le-12-fevrier-2005-au-cfar-darian-leader-non-publie-2/>.

20 For more detail, see Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, 45–54, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203006160>; see also Yannis Stavrakakis, “Enjoying the Nation: A Success Story?” in *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics*, ed. Yannis Stavrakakis (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2007): 189–210. For criticism of such interpretation of phantasmatic dimension, see Elliott, *Social Theory Since Freud*, 173, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203496060>, and other publications by the same author.

21 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 95.

people who believe in it.²² If they stop believing in it, it will dissolve and only some material artefacts will remain (buildings, papers, road signs, etc.). This symbolic construction is based on conventions that have no ultimate grounds (as Lacan wrote, “the Other has no Other”), for this reason this construction is unstable. We live in a structured world, so to say, where there are hierarchies, rules, norms, coordinates that we follow and that give us stability, but whose structure itself is lacking any ultimate foundations (it can be restructured—and history is a witness to these dislocations and transformations).

Another important aspect is that this social reality—in its symbolic register—brings together and unites absolutely different people with different, sometimes mutually exclusive interests; for this reason it inevitably contains contradictions, antagonisms which it cannot resolve and which constantly threaten to destabilize it, to plunge it into chaos. Social reality in its established symbolic manifestations is an attempt to domesticate this antagonistic aspect, to systematize it, to frame it in a structured entity.

Social reality, as I said, is an unstable construction, almost a fiction, a collective illusion, but it is a necessary illusion, an illusion that gives stability to our identity. Human beings, in the Lacanian perspective, also have the “real register” of internal chaos that we tend to structure through different imaginary and symbolic identifications that give us a sense of stability. But this stable identity is also an illusion—if social reality is unstable, then our identity, rooted in this social reality, is also unstable. Behind this fiction of social order always looms the threat of chaos, of disintegration, both social and individual, through the sweeping away of all hierarchies and differentiations, which, like a shield, protect us from the horror of havoc and endow us with an experience of stability and certainty.

The function of phantasm, in our case political or ideological phantasm, is to conceal the flaws in any social reality, to cover the seams through which the ever-present danger of destabilizing destruction shines, to explain away the symptoms that reveal the defects of any Big Other, of any social order. Through phantasm social reality appears to be integral, whole, devoid of defects—and phantasm also explains where all the defects come from and why.²³ As Glynos and Howarth put it, the role of fantasy is “to conceal or close off the radical contingency of social relations.”²⁴ One can enumerate the most widespread phantasms of this kind in the history of human sociality: the phantasm of the lost “Golden Age,” the phantasm of the lost territories whose return would restore the harmony, the phantasm of the scapegoats (that is, of enemies, traitors, witches, carriers of alien values and ideologies, etc.). The phantasm of the scapegoat seems to be the most disturbing—the traitors are the embodiment of social negativity, they symbolically represent all the seams, the flaws that exist in the social reality. Phantasms of social negativity also include dramaturgical scenarios for purification and expulsion of the social filth that would with certainty restore the lost harmony, etc.

Phantasms are necessary elements of any subjective or intersubjective structure; they perform a function without which the whole edifice could collapse. They are

²² One can refer here to the whole tradition of discussions concerning social ontology. See John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1997); John R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²³ The classical example of this kind of analysis was presented by Slavoj Žižek in his reflections on anti-Semitism and its role in the maintaining of the Nazis’ harmonious visions of the Third Reich. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989).

²⁴ Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*, 147. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203934753>.

not rational constructions; they appear outside conscious and rational control of individual subjects. Individual subjects perceive them as something that seizes them, fascinates them, controls them, or drives them crazy. It is the background—the phantasmatic base—against which consciousness and rational activity takes place.

There is one more Lacanian teaching that is important in this context. These are not just dry discursive constructions—these phantasms are libidinally filled, energetically invested, they are permeated by what Lacan called *jouissance* (something that could be translated from French as excessive pleasure, excessive enjoyment). *Jouissance* permeates the visions of the “Golden Age,” the fantasies about expulsions of the social filth, the violent escapades against opponents, the celebration of one’s own way of life (however, always tainted by a feeling of “stolen *jouissance*”—we can no longer have as much fun as before, since part of our way of life, part of our enjoyment has been stolen from us).²⁵ Without this libidinal aspect, the culture wars would have been deprived of much of their militancy, they would have been reduced to the dull bickering of lawyers over this or that interpretation of this or that fundamental legal document.

Behind the phantasm of the harmonious social order and other phantasms connected to it lies another far more frightening phantasm: the phantasm of the disintegration of the social body—the psychotic fear of its destruction, annihilation, breaking apart into pieces. This phantasm goes together with an enormous amount of anxiety, a shield, a defense against which is the phantasm of social order, of wholeness and harmony. Utopian speculations about the always lost “Golden Age,” about the imminent regeneration of the social order as a result of the expulsion of all the scum are not rational constructs to which one clings for rational reasons, they are shields that separate the social subject from the anxiety, from the horror associated with the experience of its own disintegration, annihilation. In this sense, little wonder that conservative phantasms about the traditional way of life are almost always linked to phantasms about the world sinking into the abysses of sin and vice, about the coming Apocalypse and the triumph of the Antichrist,²⁶ about unforgivable pleasures (referring to Sodom and Gomorrah) entailing the picturesque God’s revenge,²⁷ and so on. The savoring of such images and scenarios is, as it seems, also strangely permeated with *jouissance* (that is, there is much pleasure in visualizing this Apocalypse).

What is peculiar about phantasms—the detail noticed by many psychoanalysts—is how stereotypical they are (Carl Jung called these stereotypical patterns “archetypes”). Relying on common sense one can think that phantasm as a product of human imagination is something very manifold and diverse. In reality these phantasms are usually reduced to a very limited number that are reproduced from one individual / collective subject to another. Our phantasmatic activity usually follows certain long-ago trodden paths—as if imagination is like a flow of water that goes along the well-known streambed, or a tram that is locked inside the rail route. The stereotypical character of the phantasms that we are dealing with could be easily deciphered from what was said above—each of them performs a particular function inside the machinery of establishment, maintenance, and re-establishment of social reality.

25 See Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

26 See Revelation 12:17–13:18, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+12%3A17-13%3A18&version=NRSVUE>.

27 See Genesis 18:16–19:29, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+18%3A16-19%3A29&version=NRSVUE>.

In principle, any community produces such phantasms; one might even say that they are necessary for its existence. However, at moments of social dislocations, when holes, flaws in the social order risk finally exposing its fragility and conditional character, the significance of these phantasms increases. Cultural wars are the result of fundamental social shifts.²⁸ There is certain truth in Ronald Inglehart's claim that we are dealing with profound transformations that change the basis on which human civilization has hitherto been resting: the role of women changes as well as the general gender roles patterns, parent-child relationships are evolving, we are no longer sure what family is, our morality standards are moving, etc.²⁹

However, I am much closer to Peter Wagner's position, who is not talking about processes of millennial importance, but about the next stage of the crisis of the organized modernity (1960s in the West, 1990s in Russia [where everything happens with a 30-year delay]).³⁰ This crisis seems to be special, as it is connected to the revision of some root intimate conventions that have long remained inviolate. Any culture is a system of differentiations: good/bad, man/woman, up/down, friend/stranger, etc. At the moment when this system of differentiations begins to break down, to transform itself, it triggers certain processes—moral panics, phantasms of imminent chaos, etc.³¹ As if all psychotic fears of disintegration, annihilation immediately come to the surface. The shield against this disturbing experience is the phantasm of the social order as a harmonious whole, which must be regenerated through the expulsion of the embodied social negativity (“the scapegoat mechanism” so colorfully described by René Girard).³²

So, again, phantasms—be they phantasms of harmony, of purification, of disintegration and chaos—are not a rational position in some rational dispute, they are a by-product of a fundamental social mechanism. We are facing here objective processes that run beyond the rational or even conscious will of individual subjects, who may try to resist their power (and can sometimes even succeed in this struggle), but are usually their easy prey.

The Phantasms of Social Conservatism

If we need to reduce all previously discussed to a simple definition, then I would say that a phantasm is a recurrent almost stereotypical vision that constantly emerges in narratives. One may say that these narratives are structured around these visions, that these visions are like nodal points guiding the whole process of the work of human imagination. These visions are stereotypical insofar as they perform the same functions for different people and in different contexts. Now I will move on how these phantasms manifest themselves in the social conservative discourses. While the examples below all come from the Russian context, the structure of the argument remains the same also in other linguistic and cultural contexts. All of the phantasms listed here are interconnected—they support each other and very often go together.

28 For the history of culture wars, see Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

29 Ronald F. Inglehart, *Cultural Evolution: People's Motivations Are Changing, and Reshaping the World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

30 Peter Wagner, *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (London: Routledge, 1994); Peter Wagner, *Modernity: Understanding the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012).

31 One can draw some parallels here with Roger Griffin's reflections on “anomie” in the context of the rise of fascism. See Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991), and other works by the same author.

32 See René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

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The "Golden Age" Phantasm

This phantasm is structured around the vision of an idealized condition of society somewhere in the past—or, probably, in the future. The important thing is that this idealized state is fantasized as always already lost—or not yet achieved. In the case of social conservatism this is usually a phantasm about the past—some idealized period in history when people respected traditional values and led an unspoiled moral life. The function of this phantasm is to present a certain representation of social reality in which actors' identities are rooted as harmonious and peaceful and thereby cover existing antagonisms with a veil of bucolic pictures.

This example of a phantasm of the Golden Age, an age where traditional values were ubiquitous, was presented by one of Russian pro-family actors, who represented the type that I mentioned in the beginning: a combination of practical rationality and mythological ideas. While trying to define traditional values, he elaborated his idealized vision of the Russia in the past:

What was involved? First, religiosity. Well, that is, faith in God, a practical faith, very sincere. Not a formal faith, but an active faith. And the whole absolutely consciousness, the whole way of life, it was organized on Christian principles.

... Then, of course, there was respect for elders, unconditional authority of the elders, unconditional reverence. Monogamy. That is, monogamy. Only one husband, one wife. Nowadays one still uses such a formulation as mixed-gender marriage. That's true. Yes. But back then it wasn't, because marriage was always heterosexual by default.

... Chastity as a traditional value. That is virginity before marriage. Both for men and women. It was absolutely obligatory. It had, on the one hand, been encouraged. It was approved. On the other hand, there was a punishment for those who violate it.

... And also there has always been such a traditional value as fidelity in marriage. Marital fidelity. Then, in principle, the family way of life, that is, the prestige of family. Social status has always been increased only if a person got married. That is, if a person lived without marriage, he did not have the voice in the community.

... [T]hen the norm has always been not to allow divorce. That is, as a value, it was the lifelong-ness of marriage. That is, the marriage was made for life, and there was never any question of it being dissolved, unless there were very good reasons. Very good reasons. Yes. And finally, a very, very, very, very important value, I guess, which is also a traditional value. I call it childbearing. That is, love for children. Russian family always had many children. Always. It has never been about having an abortion or avoiding having children. Families who did not have children were always pitied. There was sympathy for them. It was seen as a deep [problem], kind of a disadvantage.

... And then there is also such a notion, such a value, as intergenerational family organization. People always lived not just as a separate nuclear family, husband and wife. But grandparents, grandchildren, even great-grandchildren. That is, there was such a chain of family. It was always extended. And they lived not so much in one house as in the whole yard. That is, the eldest son usually built a house on the same property. So, it was like a kind of clan always, like a big community. It was not just a family; it was several kinship families under one roof. And they all lived with one household, one soul, that is, one way of life. In principle, no one lived any other way.³³

This vision of a “one household, one soul, one way of life,” which brings to mind the famous description of *Gemeinschaft* by Ferdinand Tönnies, is probably the essence, the very core of this conservative phantasm. But this vision of a Golden Age of the traditional family is always perceived as something that has already been lost—and here the next phantasm comes into play: the one that could be called the phantasm of the “Lost Harmony,” of the “Theft of Enjoyment / jouissance.”

The Phantasm of the “Lost Harmony” and the “Theft of Enjoyment”

The widespread motif of the stolen enjoyment was described in Lacanian terms by Slavoj Žižek.³⁴ I use this concept to designate the core of the next phantasm, which structures the vision of the reasons why the Golden Age is lost. The structure of this phantasm is similar to that of many conspiracy theories, which I also consider to be deeply embedded in the phantasmatic dimension. This is the phantasm about how we lost the harmony. It was not just lost due to natural reasons; it was stolen by some evil actors—proponents of non-traditional values. The concrete names of these actors could be different—for example, liberals, secular humanists, transnational elites, servants of the Antichrist—but the structure of this phantasm remains the same.

I decided to call this phantasm the “Theft of Enjoyment,” and not just of the “Lost Harmony,” as I wanted to point to the fact that social conservatives (at least during the public events that I have visited) constantly show the way they enjoy their traditional way of life and at the same time constantly make complaints against their opponents—that they are stealing their children, their way of life (that is, stealing their enjoyment). That is why conservatives strongly support the idea of homeschooling as well as the idea of preventing the state from meddling in family affairs—“they” must be kept away from our enjoyment.³⁵

This is how this particular phantasm is often manifested in social conservatives’ discourse. Here I take an excerpt from an interview with a very influential priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, who for many years occupied important positions in the Church hierarchy. He explains where non-traditional values come from:

³³ Russian conservative actor, interview conducted in Russian in the context of the POSEC project, Moscow, translation by the author, February 12, 2018.

³⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

³⁵ On the homeschooling movement, see Julia Mourão Permoser and Kristina Stoeckl, “Reframing Human Rights: The Global Network of Moral Conservative Homeschooling Activists,” *Global Networks* 21, no. 4 (August 2021): 681–702, <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12299>.

Non-traditional values are basically things that do not come from God, and not from eternal values, but from a social construct, a social project, from certain political, philosophical, managerial, economic and other players.

... Behind such values there is always some project, some proud and daring attempt to remake the world. I believe that the topic of changing sex is not that of a personal choice but that of a choice pressed through social processes; the topic of abandoning childbearing, of large and multi-generational families is not simply a value that is born among people, much less a value given by God. It is a project. It is a political project whose purpose is to limit the growth of the earth's population, and the erosion of homogeneous societies. These are all parts of the project. It is all a political project.

... It is a political project that is managed by one center. Part of the Western financial and political elites. And if we talk about the projects which are connected with the struggle with the population of the Earth—it is managed by certain forces since the period of Malthusianism, now these forces are more accurate than in the period of crude Malthusianism, but it is obvious that these are global processes, which are absolutely precisely managed by certain global forces. These are not spontaneous processes. This is a project that is imposed on people through propaganda, through laws, through politics, through economic mechanisms. Very much through culture and advertising even, right? This image of the lone wolf, which we see in advertising, is part of a project that aims to erode the family, to erode those ideas, those traditions that lead to the birth of many children.

All evil does not happen without the participation of evil forces, but I still think that the main actors here are people, people who are trying to become instead of God and be the architects of society and human nature so as to arrange it according to their own ideas, according to their own ideas, but also for their own economic and political interests.

... These are the global, first of all financial, and second political elites. That is, these are families like the Rockefellers and some of the political elites.³⁶

This particular manifestation of the phantasm is structured along the secular lines (though “evil forces” are mentioned), but it can also have a very vivid religious framing featuring Antichrist and its wicked servants. The phantasm of a loss at the hands of some malevolent actor leads to the next phantasm: that of scapegoat.

The Phantasm of the Scapegoat

This phantasm is most clearly articulated in the powerful almost mythopoetic images of the community which exorcises all the demons that prevent it from flourishing,

³⁶ Vsevolod Chaplin, interview conducted in Russian in the context of the POSEC project, Moscow, translation by the author, February 7, 2018.

from returning to the harmonious state. This is the phantasm of return to the lost paradise through the straight-out fight with the traitors, with the wicked enemies who stand in the way of this return.

This, for example, is how this phantasm manifests itself in the public speech of one of the activists of social conservatism, the head of the Russian NGO that specializes in the defense of traditional values. She finishes her debate with an opponent about perspectives on sexual education in Russia with a powerful vision, wherein she almost sets forth her dream, her vision of the desired future:

I love Russia. And everything is right here. All that is needed is that we simply sweep away all the garbage that was brought to us in the 1990s, we will chase away completely all this garbage with a pigpen broom, we will sweep away all this feminism, the child free movement, and then we will live happily. We will have a beautiful strong country, a traditional society, and we will live happily, not the happiness that you call happiness there, but really true human happiness. I believe in that.³⁷

These phantasmatic visions only intensified with the war in Ukraine and resulted in almost poetic images crafted by masters of this genre. Patriotic writer Aleksandr Prokhanov visualizes this phantasm in the following way:

Russia is a temple illuminated by the Fire of Grace. From the temple, frightened, blinded by the divine rays, merchants run away. Their trays are overturned. Their wicked billions are trampled. Terrified, their faces twisted in fear.

Flee from the Russian temple crowds of detractors, desecrators of shrines, that mocked the Russian altars, splashing mud on the faces of Russian saints.

At the hour of repose, a marvelous fresco opens on the wall of the Russian Easter Church. Plastered over by vile blasphemers, sealed with lime, and hung with rotten cloths, the fresco reveals a marvelous face—the miraculous image of Russia. The face is beautiful and formidable. It will comfort all who suffer and are burdened, whatever continent they are suffering on. It will inspire all warriors and noble men who trample the darkness.³⁸

In the Russian context this phantasm underpins an endless and self-repeating process of adopting one law after another aimed at limiting “non-traditionality” and punishing embodiments of it—so-called foreign agents.

The Phantasm of the Social Disintegration

The phantasm of social disintegration is, probably, the strangest one—it evidently stands out against the background of the usual conservative topics of morality, harmony, and order. In the beginning of my essay, I used the word “obscene” to describe the non-rational part of the phenomenon I am interested in. Probably, this

³⁷ “Za I protiv seks-prosveta / Zachem govorit’ s det’mi o sekse? / NENAVIZHU TEBYA?,” YouTube, October 15, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvpQHqsx3YQ>.

³⁸ Alexander Prokhanov, “Vo istinu,” *Zavtra* (April 25, 2022), <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/voistinu>.

word seemed rude, but exactly this phantasm is the reason for such a strong word when we describe the phantasmatic dimension of social conservatism.

This “obscene” part (which is also evident in the phantasm of scapegoating) is a definite sign that we are dealing with phantasmatic dimension in its clear form. As scholars writing on the phantasmatic dimension of politics put it: “empirical evidence indicating the presence of a fantasmatic object can often be identified by asking *whether or not it resists public official disclosure*.”³⁹ That is to say, the phantasmatic dimension always contains within itself something that is not easy to confess in public, something that is usually avoided—as being embarrassing or, as I put it above, obscene. The phantasm of social disintegration reveals the hidden anxiety-provoking dimension of conservatism, which is shielded by other phantasms mentioned and described above. The other phantasms are just a cover for this phantasmatic vision.

This phantasm manifests itself in Apocalyptic, obscene images and descriptions that try to symbolize the situation of disintegration, of chaos—that could result from the arrival of the non-traditional values. I will illustrate this phantasm with the help of a short novel, written by Aron Shemaier. Aron Shemaier is the pseudonym used by the Russian priest Vsevolod Chaplin, a key figure in Russian social conservative activism until his death in 2020. The novel is called *Masho and the Bears*.⁴⁰ Masho is a name that emphasizes the neutral gender of its bearer—neither female (the normal Russian female name is Masha), nor male.

This is a dystopian story about the world where all differentiations disappear: between males and females, between children and grown-ups, between human beings and animals, between human beings and technological devices, between moral and immoral, etc. The text is full of bizarre and perverse sexual details and descriptions, which reveal this priest as a man with a very rich imagination. I will give some quotes to illustrate what I am talking about.

Here is a public relations person describing his mission:

But there are values that we should never betray. One of them is taking care of the children, of their upbringing. That no one should ever dare to put gender stereotypes back into their hearts and souls. You know what I mean: the commercials of sex education programs. No matter how hard it is, they have to come out and they will come out! ... We have until the end of the year to make commercials for babies about the joys of interspecies contact, the benefits of masturbation, the transformation of a so-called boy into a so-called girl and vice versa. And clips accompanying the stimulation of erogenous zones in children under 5. And commercials for teenagers against asexuality. And clips against taboos. And clips about the newest gender—technophiles. We won't be ourselves; we'll lose our traditions if we don't make it all.

39 Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*, 148, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203934753>: emphasis in the original.

40 Aron Shemaier, “Masho I Medvedi [Masho and bears],” *Religare.ru* (2014), http://www.religare.ru/2_104432.html.

Here is the story of a zoo in this dystopian world:

At first zoophiles took a fancy to the rarity object, but then someone ... decided that having sex with animals in cages was a symbol of unfreedom and residual discrimination. The zoophiles were kicked out. In their place came sadomasochists, for whom cages were just fine. But the lovers of extreme pleasures heavily abused chemicals, alcohol, fights, stabbings, and shootings ... 95 percent of the [population] tried to avoid the zoo and bypass it as far as possible.

This is how the protagonist describes his body shape:

“Yes, I have perfected my primitive nature. To the male sex organs, I added two specimens of female organs,” replied Masho.

These are just minor examples of a whole range of obscene visions. The world, which loses all differentiations, of course, could not exist and the short novel predictably ends with a nuclear explosion, when “a terrible blow swallowed up all living and non-living things.”⁴¹

One can argue that the author wrote the novel for purely didactical reasons to illustrate the excesses of the progressive agenda. However, the reader is left with the impression that the number of obscene details that are constantly repeated and almost savored is so big that a lot of jouissance is hidden behind these alleged didactic exercises. Besides, this kind of obscene musing is a widespread and almost constant feature of social conservative lamentations. One can find multiple other examples, illustrating the same points.

The phantasm of the disintegration of the social body is probably the most frightening and anxiety-provoking one—both on the individual and on the collective level. It represents the chaos that is always looming behind any order.

* * *

Phantasms are not natural entities that could easily be pointed at and enumerated. So, the four phantasms presented above could be regrouped in another way. What is clear is that these phantasms are interconnected: some of them could be present in the narrative of this or that actor, but others could be omitted (for example, one may talk about the “Golden Age” of traditional values but omit the part about enemies who are to blame for losing it). My guess is that the remaining parts are also somewhere near—they were not presented because the interview was too short or because the actor preferred to omit some elements of the story. These phantasms and their sequence have a very clear mythological structure that we can come across

⁴¹ Shemaier, “Masho.”

in many religions—the Paradise, the Fall, and the Regeneration through Purification (which saves humanity from Hell).⁴²

The Dimension of Reason vs. the Dimension of Phantasm

As it has already become clear, social conservatism has a rational side, but also the side that points beyond rationality—the dimension of phantasm that I have described above. These two dimensions—the rational and the phantasmatic—refer to different layers of human subjectivity. In this sense they can contradict or strengthen each other. When they contradict each other, this can lead to seemingly contradictory processes: on the conscious level, one can be consciously and rationally opposed to, for example, racism, but at the crucial moment—decisive elections—side with the phantasm of a harmonious community threatened by “migrant aliens” and vote correspondingly. One can on the conscious level consciously and rationally confess adherence to gender equality, but somewhere deep inside secretly entertain the visions of a highly hierarchical order with dominant men and subordinate women (or vice versa). When they strengthen each other, then what on the surface looks like a rational position edged with some facts and arguments could be just a cover for powerful phantasms driving this position and making it totally immune to any rational critique and refutations by means of facts and logical or legal argumentation.

Social conservatism can be interpreted and analyzed from the side of rational argumentation, but it also should be seen from the phantasmatic side, from the side of phantasmatic underpinnings that envelop rational argumentation and that drive a person’s engagement in the culture war logics not only in terms of arguments, but also deep-seated emotions. The phantasmatic aspect of social conservatism is libidinally filled and permeated with *jouissance*. Attention to the phantasmatic dimensions “provide[s] the means to understand why specific practices and regimes ‘grip’ subjects.”⁴³

Let me stress the key differences between these two dimensions. The dimension of reason is aimed—ideally—at *explanation*, it is aimed at convincing of something, of justifying a certain position. The dimension of phantasm is aimed at *protection*, it is a shield that guards the collective subject from anxiety, from frightening experiences of chaos and disintegration. Phantasms protect and restore the aura of stability of the social order—and one’s identity embedded in this order—that has been shaken by profound dislocations. The phantasmatic dimension is more powerful because the aim of anxiety-avoidance is more persuasive than logical constructions and factual persuasiveness.

The rational dimension focuses on logic and argumentation. The rational position is constructed as a logical transition from one proposition to another by means of facts, legal norms, common sense, etc. The phantasmatic dimension, on the other hand,

42 My reflections can lead to a conclusion that I am equating religion and the phantasmatic dimension of social conservatism that I am describing. But this is not the case. Although religion is an important aspect of socially conservative worldviews, it is only one aspect of what religion is—or, better put: one of the faces that religion can take in contemporary society. In this sense I follow René Girard’s contrast between religion of the “sacred” (relying on the archaic patterns of scapegoating, on the logics of violently defending of the sacred values of communities) and religion that overcomes these archaic patterns (relying on reconciliation, on identifying with victims, with a persecuted minority: that is, religion as a shield against scapegoating mechanisms). This second view of religion Girard saw in the gospels, in the story of Christ’s death and resurrection. See René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001). On Girard’s ideas, see Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard’s Mimetic Theory*, Studies in Violence, Mimesis & Culture (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013); Wolfgang Palaver, *Transforming the Sacred into Saintliness: Reflecting on Violence and Religion with René Girard*, Elements in Religion and Violence (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

43 Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*, 145, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203934753>.

follows the *mythological* logic—it unfolds according to archetypal patterns, which often run counter to classical logic, known facts, common sense, etc.

To a certain extent one can say that in a moment of social crisis the phantasm plays the same role for the collective subject as what Lacan called “delusional metaphor” plays in the moment of disintegration of the individual subject’s structure—it fastens the disintegrating fabric of symbolic structure. In that moment the “delusional metaphor” is immune to any rational argumentation. Trying to change a position firmly embedded in phantasmatic dimension is a bit similar to trying to change the mind of a person in a state of delusion with rational arguments.

Final Reflections

The reflections above make my position clear enough: social conservatism is deeply embedded in ideological phantasms that appeal to the dimensions of subjectivity beyond a conscious and rational level. For this reason, it is impervious to rational arguments and even to any conscious motivations—it resonates with something deeper and more fundamental in human nature. Rational arguments can hardly affect social conservatism, because the rational dimension of this conservatism is only a superficial layer within the political phantasms of an impending chaos and the need to overcome this chaos through social rebirth/purification.

My article is called “The Phantasmatic Dimension of Culture Wars,” but I have been speaking only about social conservatism. This is for the simple reason that I have studied it. I should say that my firm belief is that the conservative position, despite certain progress in the direction of rationality, is deeply rooted in the phantasmatic dimension of human nature—this explains its resilience despite harsh criticism, logical and legal refutations, etc. The opposite side of the culture wars—social liberalism or progressivism—seems to be a much more rational position relying on facts, arguments, and common-sense reflections. This is its weakness, by the way, since the seemingly dried-up rational position is inferior to a position supported by a powerful phantasmatic dimension that engages deeper layers of human subjectivity and, in Lacanian terms, *jouissance*.

But this does not mean that social progressivism has no phantasmatic dimension. Some articulations of “identity liberalism” with “cancelling” and “safe space” practices display phantasmatic patterns of scapegoating and social order harmonization behind them—with a lot of *jouissance* invested in these activities. To put it simply, whether the phantasmatic dimension in social liberalism is weaker compared to social conservatism or of equal weight remains an open question.

Speaking of culture wars, it is impossible not to note that these are extremely dangerous forms of reaction to the kind of pluralism that our societies face today. What the Russian war makes clear is that these are not just *culture wars*, but *culture wars*, where the word “war” is no longer a metaphor, but a sound statement of fact. Overcoming culture wars, searching for alternative ways to react to antagonisms that produce them, is an urgent task for scholars, journalists, activists, etc. However, such overcoming is impossible without understanding the multidimensionality of this phenomenon, in particular, without understanding the powerful phantasmatic foundations in which rational arguments for this or that position are embedded. In this sense, for example, the strategy of so-called postsecular society,⁴⁴ the strategy of

44 Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x>.

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communication on a rational level is hardly able to work, since it appeals only to the rational side, leaving the phantasmatic basis out of sight. An adequate response to culture wars must involve not only a search for a kind of overlapping consensus in the sense of rational principles that everyone shares, but also overlapping phantasm, which can bring sides to a resonance on a much deeper level. Is this a real or a utopian perspective? I prefer to leave this as an open question.



Nae Ionescu's 1938 Legionary Phenomenon: A "Missing Link" between Evola and Dugin

JASON ROBERTS

Abstract

Little has been written about the recently translated Legionary Phenomenon (Italian, 1998; English, 2022) by Romanian Legionary ideologue Nae Ionescu. Almost nothing exists in English. The present article demonstrates that the text is consciously patterned after Julius Evola's Revolt Against the Modern World (1934) and thus constitutes an as yet unrecognized part of the corpus of fascist Integral Traditionalism. When the text was published in 1940 and republished in 1963, it was proposed as the basis for a "Legionary doctrine." Yet its late appearance relative to important Legionary texts like Corneliu Zelea Codreanu's Nest Leader's Manual and For My Legionaries makes it uncertain how much influence the text might have had on the Legionary movement during the interwar period. Ultimately, the text may be most significant for its impact not on the interwar Legionary movement, but on subsequent and contemporary fascist ideologies, such as Aleksandr Dugin's neo-Eurasianism. This article places Legionary Phenomenon in an intellectual history between Evola and Dugin, disrupting many analyses of Dugin's neo-Eurasianism with evidence that certain ideological innovations attributed to him in fact belong to Ionescu and revealing the similarities of Dugin's ideological output to Legionary Romanian fascism. Although these topics are not explored here, it likewise impacts the study of Ionescu's philosophical and theological corpus, and has implications for the theory of religion of Ionescu's student and friend, Mircea Eliade.

Keywords: Dugin, Evola, Ionescu, neo-Eurasianism, Traditionalism, Fascism

Over¹ the course of several days in May 1938,² in a makeshift detention center about ten kilometers outside of Miercurea Ciuc in central Romania, Legionary ideologue Nae Ionescu³ delivered a series of impromptu “conferences” to prominent members of the fascist Legionary Movement who were detained for the better part of eight months (April 16–November 29).⁴ Ionescu himself arrived at the camp a few weeks later than most on May 7. The leaders of the movement had been arrested as part of King Carol II’s crackdown on the Iron Guard. Ionescu, who was a journalist as well as a professor and philosopher, was interned with them for his newspaper’s public opposition to the king’s recently declared royal dictatorship.⁵ One of Ionescu’s fellow detainees, Romanian Orthodox priest and Legionary, Ștefan Palaghiță, transcribed four of the conferences.⁶ Collectively, they comprise a metaphysical rationalization of the Iron Guard’s ethno-religious fascism and a theological justification for its violence. Palaghiță’s transcriptions were first published just over two years later, following Ionescu’s death from a heart attack on March 15, 1940.⁷ They appeared serially, beginning August 11, 1940, as *Fenomenul Legionar* (*The Legionary Phenomenon*) in *Buletinul Informativ pentru Legionarii Refugiați* (*The Informative Bulletin for Refugee Legionaries*) in exile in Berlin.⁸

Despite its precarious origin (or perhaps because of it), the text gained significance within at least part of the Legionary movement. Although Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (1899–1938) had founded the Legion of the Archangel Michael more than a decade earlier in 1927, and, as such, the movement had already accumulated a certain ideological canon, including Codreanu’s *Nest Leader’s Manual* (1933) and his autobiographical *For My Legionaries* (1936), when the first of Ionescu’s four conferences was published in the Berlin *Bulletin*, it appeared prominently under the heading “Legionary Doctrine.”⁹ Furthermore, when Constantin Papanace—a former Legionary who was largely responsible for the *Bulletin*—republished the conferences

1 I would like to express my gratitude to the students who participated in our Zoom reading group on Dugin’s Traditionalism during the most isolated (and isolating) period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their curiosity drove my discovery, and their insights are mingled here with my own. I offer special thanks to D. Sergio Glăjar for first bringing Nae Ionescu to my attention.

2 Papanace’s preface to the 1963 edition of *Fenomenul Legionar* gives May 17, 19, and 21 as the dates of conferences 1–3, but no date for the fourth. See Constantin Papanace, preface to Nae Ionescu, *Fenomenul Legionar* (Rome: Editura Armatolii, 1963), 19, 23, 27.

3 Despite the fact that Ionescu was apparently not an official member of the Iron Guard, his status as a Legionary ideologue is well established. See, for example, Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography*, vol. 2, 1937–1960: *Exile’s Odyssey* (Chicago, 1988), 10.

4 Ionescu himself was arrested about three weeks later, during the night of May 7, 1938, and released for health reasons on condition of signing a disavowal of the Iron Guard and a commitment to refrain from any further instigation against the new state order. See Tatiana Niculescu, *Seducătorul Domn Nae: Viața lui Nae Ionescu* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2020), 228–31.

5 Ionescu was the owner and editor of the newspaper *Cuvântul*. Eliade’s account of Ionescu’s arrest suggests that he was probably arrested as the acknowledged ideologue of the Legionary movement, despite not officially being a member. See Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography* vol. 2, 10 and 11.

6 Papanace, *Fenomenul Legionar*, 1. Thus far, there is no specific record of Ionescu’s having delivered any additional conferences. However, in the preface to the 1963 edition, Papanace writes, “We must mention that Professor Nae Ionescu held several conferences in connection with *Fenomenul Legionar*. In the *Informative Bulletin*, however, only these four were published, which we reproduce, because, with No. 7 of September 13, 1940, when the repatriation of the refugee legionnaires took place, the *Bulletin* ceased to appear.” Papanace, *Fenomenul*, 2. Conversely, Ornea seems convinced that Ionescu delivered only the four recorded conferences. See Zigu Ornea, *The Romanian Extreme Right: The Nineteen Thirties* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1999), 217.

7 In addition to the official report that Ionescu suffered a heart attack, various rumors also circulated that he had been poisoned, etc. Mutti has gathered some of them. See Claudio Mutti, *Mircea Eliade und die Eiserne Garde rumänische Intellektuelle im Umfeld der Legion Erzengel Michael*, 2nd ed. of trans. (Kiel: Regim-Verlag, 2012), 92.

8 Nae Ionescu, “Fenomenul Legionar,” *Buletin Informativ pentru Legionarii Refugiați* 2 (August 11, 1940), 3.

9 Ionescu, *Buletin Informativ*, 3.

as *The Legionary Phenomenon* in Rome in 1963, he reiterated in his lengthy preface that “the ideas expounded in the pages that follow could serve, in large part, as the basis for a systematized Legionary doctrine.”¹⁰ Papanace, for his part, seemed to think of the conferences as a *de facto* manifesto of a Legionary party that would inevitably (re)emerge.¹¹

As dramatic as it may be that the text was transcribed (allegedly on toilet paper);¹² smuggled out of the country; published by exiled Legionaries in Nazi Germany not long before the rise of the short-lived Legionary Romanian State (September 14, 1940–February 14, 1941); and then republished 25 years later as dissident literature in Italy, that story is not the focus of this article. Rather, its concern is the striking resemblance that the text itself bears to the *Revolt Against the Modern World* (1934) of the Italian occultist and philosopher of Integral Traditionalism and fascism Julius Evola (1898–1974). I argue here that the number and quality of the similarities between the texts is such that Ionescu's *Legionary Phenomenon* must be considered, in large part, a deliberate repackaging of Evola's *Revolt*, presented as Ionescu's own ideas. However, I also identify two important differences between the texts: the framing of Orthodoxy as a Traditionalist religion and the incorporation of geographical determinism as “sacred geography.”¹³ Ionescu's two Legionary adaptations of Evola's pagan Traditionalism are especially notable because they represent the same departures that Russian ideologue and fascist philosopher Aleksandr Dugin is erroneously credited with innovating in his neo-Eurasianist Traditionalism.

My claim necessarily raises questions about the importance of Ionescu's text, which remains virtually unknown to non-Romanian-speaking scholars.¹⁴ It also raises questions about the significance of its similarities to Evola's *Revolt*, as well as questions about how—or, in fact, *whether*—the similarities have thus far escaped detection.¹⁵ I argue that while the two texts' mutual resemblance seems to have eluded much of liberal academia, it has not been lost on certain influential contemporary fascist thinkers. In fact, the identities and ideologies of those who seem to have already recognized the relationship between *Legionary Phenomenon* and *Revolt* may constitute the chief significance of Ionescu's text. Indeed, *The Legionary Phenomenon* may have more influence on contemporary fascism than it did on Legionary fascism. Thus, before proceeding to my comparison, I will make

10 Papanace, preface to *Fenomenul Legionar*, 2. “...ideile expuse în paginile [sic] ce urmează ar putea servi în mare parte, ca bază pentru o doctrină legionară sistematizată.”

11 The 1963 edition of *The Legionary Phenomenon* appeared as the ninth of a total of 26 volumes published in the “Biblioteca Verde” collection, which was founded by Papanace with the help of Nicolae Bujin and published by Editura “Armatolii” in Rome, Italy, in exile. The “Green Library” collection—a reference to the color of Romanian fascism—was devoted entirely to the dissemination of Legionary ideology.

12 Mircea Vulcănescu, *Nae Ionescu: Așa Cum L-Am Cunoscut* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992), 98.

13 In Dugin's essay, “From Sacred Geography to Geopolitics,” he distinguishes between geopolitics and sacred geography, yet he allows that what he means by traditional sacred geography is more consistent with Russian Eurasianists, Islamic fundamentalists, and “the German followers of Haushofer.” Karl Haushofer was the German general, professor, geographer, and politician whose conception of Geopolitik—including *Lebensraum*, a term which he coined—were used by Hitler to motivate global Nazi expansionism and genocide. See Aleksandr Dugin, “From Sacred Geography to Geopolitics,” *Geopolitica.RU*, 29 Oct. 2019, <https://www.geopolitica.ru/en/article/sacred-geography-geopolitics>.

14 A small portion of the fourth conference appeared in English translation in 1999. See Ornea, *The Romanian Extreme Right*, 218f.

15 Thus far, the only direct comparison I have found appears in Stanca's introductory essay in Mutti's 1998 translation of *The Legionary Phenomenon*. He writes: “For the Italian reader, the figure of the Romanian Nae Ionescu can very easily be compared to that of Julius Evola...” See Dan Stanca, “Nae Ionescu: Ovvero il Demone Perfetto,” in *Il Fenomeno Legionario* by Nae Ionescu, trans. Claudio Mutti, (Parma: Edizioni all'insegna del Veltro, 1998), 8.

the case that Dugin learned about *Legionary Phenomenon* during or before 1997 from the Italian essayist, editor, publisher, and fascist philosopher Claudio Mutti (b. 1946), who published the first translation of *The Legionary Phenomenon* in 1998.

Dugin in Praise of Ionescu

In 1997, Aleksandr Dugin hosted “Finis Mundi,” a weekly radio program about far-right and Traditionalist philosophers that lasted for only 16 episodes.¹⁶ In the fifth episode, dedicated to the influential historian of religions Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), Dugin states:

Some years ago, our dear friend Claudio Mutti met with the widow of the great Codreanu in Bucharest. That woman—beautiful even at that age and with memories of those events completely intact—shared with him this detail: the one who introduced Julius Evola to the Captain [Codreanu] was none other than Mircea Eliade, the leader of the Bucharest nest [*cuib*] “Axa” and greatest student and closest associate of Nae Ionescu, official ideologue of the Iron Guard and *greatest intellectual of our time*.¹⁷

The significance of Dugin’s surprising remarks for the study of Eliade and his thought, while obviously related, must remain outside the scope of the present inquiry. Yet his interest in Ionescu, the chief ideologue of the Romanian Iron Guard, is perhaps even more surprising. As of 1997, there were no published translations of Ionescu’s works in any language. Thus, since there is no indication that Dugin reads Romanian, let alone that he could do so in 1997, his superlative assessment of Ionescu is especially curious. That Dugin was already so enamored of Ionescu the same year he published *Geopolitics* and the year after he published *Metaphysics of the Gospel: Orthodox Esotericism* is especially interesting. Certainly, there is more than one possible explanation for Dugin’s familiarity with Ionescu, but the simplest and most likely is that Mutti—who does speak Romanian and published his own Italian translation of Ionescu’s *Legionary Phenomenon* the following year (1998)¹⁸—shared that translation with his “dear friend” Dugin before publication. Dugin, who speaks Italian, could have read Mutti’s translation.

Yet the question remains: is there more than the convenience of Dugin’s friendship with Mutti, whom he had known since around 1990,¹⁹ to tie his estimation of Ionescu to *The Legionary Phenomenon* specifically?²⁰ Still more perplexing is the question of what about Ionescu’s thought inspired Dugin to refer to him as “the greatest

16 Stephen Shenfield, *Russian Fascism: Traditions, Tendencies, Movements* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 193. See also Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 233.

17 Emphasis added. Elena Ilinoiu Codreanu (December 2, 1902–September 5, 1994). For a transcript of the episode, see Aleksandr Dugin, “Mircha Eliade: Vechnoe Vozvrashchenie (Aleksandr Dugin, Finis Mundi),” *Paideuma.tv*, November 27, 2020, <https://paideuma.tv/video/mircha-eliade-vechnoe-vozhvrashchenie-aleksandr-dugin-finis-mundi#/?playlistId=0&videoId=0>.

18 Nae Ionescu, *Il Fenomeno Legionario*, trans. Claudio Mutti (Parma: Edizioni all’insegna del Veltro, 1998).

19 Mutti was on the editorial board of Dugin’s journal *Milyi Angel* in 1991. See: Shekhovtsov, “Alexander Dugin and the West European New Right, 1989-1994,” in *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe-Russia Relationship*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2015), 36, 38.

20 Other works by Ionescu are also certainly fodder for contemporary fascist philosophy. For example, the far-right Russian press Totenburg Verlag recently published a Russian translation of excerpts of some of Ionescu’s most notable works: *Filosofia Religiei* (1925), *Curs de Metafizică* (1928-1930), and *Roza Vânturilor* (1937). See Nae Ionescu, *Iskushchenie Metafizikoi* (Moscow: Totenburg, 2021).

intellectual of our time,” particularly if *The Legionary Phenomenon* is merely a kind of paraphrase of Evola's *Revolt*. To answer these questions, I refer once again to Papanace's preface to the 1963 edition of *The Legionary Phenomenon*. Immediately after suggesting that Ionescu's ideas could serve as the basis for a systematized doctrine of the then-exiled Romanian fascist movement, he adds this caveat: “We must admit, however, that there are some ideas that would not be in keeping with the line of the Captain. One of these we would like to address in particular, because *the imperialist spirit is exalted*.”²¹ Papanace's assessment is definitely borne out in Ionescu's *Legionary Phenomenon*. Indeed, according to Ionescu,

the imperialism of a nation is justified insofar as it realizes a new cultural formula, a new spiritual formula. In other words, imperialism is justified to the degree that it wills to realize God, that is to represent a new spiritual formula of life, not to realize the Devil: Mongolians, Russians, Turks, Austro-Hungarians, Jews, for the ideal of all other peoples contrary to ours, is contrary to our God.²²

I suggest that what impressed Dugin so much about Ionescu's thought is that it proposes a solution to a major obstacle to imperialist aggression—the obstacle of Christianity.

Dugin was well acquainted with Evola's thoughts on the problem of Christianity from the latter's *Pagan Imperialism* (1927), which introduces many of the themes to which Evola returns in *Revolt*. Dugin had translated the text into Russian in 1981, albeit from an early German edition.²³ Evola's position is clear:

An Empire is such only when an immanent spirituality permeates it; but it is obvious that a real Empire of this sort cannot recognise any organisation which claims a prerogative regarding things of the spirit. It will deauthorise and supplant every Church, putting itself in its place purely and simply as true and sole Church.²⁴

For Evola (as well as Ionescu), a true empire is defined by the exercise of absolute sovereignty, of which war and conquest are the only real measure.²⁵ It is thus especially irksome for Evola that the Christian Church should be the one to bar his imperial project by “claiming prerogative regarding things of the spirit.” Because of its pretensions to universality, the Christian Church restricts the exercise of such absolute sovereignty to the extent that it condemns war between Christian nations merely for the sake of such conquest. “Christianity as such,” Evola continues, “in its primitive Semitic and revolutionary aspect, is the mystical analogue of the French

21 Papanace, *Fenomenul*, 2. “Trebuie să relevăm însă, că sunt și câteva idei care n'ar concorda cu linia Căpitanului. Pe una din acestea am vrea să o relevăm în mod deosebit, fiindcă se exaltă spiritul imperialist” [emphasis original].

22 Jason Roberts and Sergio Glăjar, “The Legionary Phenomenon: A Romanian Fascist Manifesto,” *IERES Occasional Papers*, “Transnational History of the Far Right” Series, no. 13 (February 2022): 22, <https://www.illiberalism.org/the-legionary-phenomenon-a-romanian-fascist-manifesto>.

23 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 222.

24 Julius Evola and Cologero Salvo, *Pagan Imperialism* (Gornahoor Press, 2017), 33.

25 In Ionescu, for example, “The character of the nation: *offensive* and *imperialist* par excellence, that is an organism that cannot live besides in expansion, life, dynamism.” Roberts & Glăjar, “Legionary Phenomenon,” 35. This theme is found throughout Evola's work. See, for example, Julius Evola, *Metaphysics of War: Battle Victory & Death in the World of Tradition* (United Kingdom: Arktos Media, 2011).

Revolution of yesterday, and the communism and socialism of today.”²⁶ Although he cites medieval Catholicism as an exception by dint of its alleged admixture of Roman paganism, Evola resolves that Christianity is inherently anti-hierarchical and thus anti-aristocratic.²⁷

Like Evola, Dugin sought a way to “deauthorize and supplant” the transnational (imperial) authority of Christianity regarding the permissibility of war, particularly among Christian nations. Evola’s solution is to call for “a decisive, unconditional, integral return to the Nordic pagan tradition.” He continues, “We are finished with every compromise, with every weakness, and with every indulgence toward everything that, derived from its Semitic-Christian root, has infected our mind.”²⁸ Evola’s attempt to ground his imperial fascism in mythic tribal paganism is thus logically consistent but ultimately impracticable, as it would require mass apostasy. By contrast, Ionescu’s solution maintains the operative features of Evola’s “Traditional” pagan civilization but does not require a mass reversion to paganism, merely a tribal understanding of Christianity. Ionescu explains, “I have but a single tribute to pay in life in the face of God: through the nation. If God is not only my God, if He is not a singular God, but is also the God of the Hungarians, French, etc., then I would no longer be Romanian and I would not be able to pay my tribute to God through my nation.”²⁹ Thus, when Ionescu refers to “the Orthodox,” he means only the Romanian Orthodox. His idea of Church is national (or imperial), not universal. As it turns out, it is not paganism that is the salient feature of “Traditional” pagan imperialism, but rather (crypto)polytheism.³⁰ Ionescu’s “Christian” imperialism is possible because the Christianity he describes is not actually monotheistic. By aligning “all other peoples” with the Devil, in a kind of Manichaean dualism, or with their own “national” god, Ionescu can justify the conquest of any other nation—including other Christian nations—as a holy war.³¹ This is what interested Dugin.

What Evola bemoans in the potential of Christian universalism is the same thing that preoccupies Dugin concerning the spread of liberalism in his *Fourth Political Theory*: a Fukuyama-style “end of history” that results from “unipolarity.”³² What

26 Evola, *Pagan Imperialism*, 31.

27 *Ibid.*, 29-35, passim.

28 *Ibid.*, 26.

29 Roberts and Glăjar, “The Legionary Phenomenon,” 36.

30 Concerning what I am calling (crypto)polytheism, see Dan Dana, “Occultations de Zalmoxis et occultation de l’histoire. Un aspect du dossier Mircea Eliade,” *Anabases* 5 (2007): 11-25. Dana writes: “The 1930s marked a period of gradual ‘spiritualization’ of the Romanian intellectual spectrum; the quest for the native and the autochthonous sometimes leads to manifest Dacism and excessive autochthonism. Cioran recounts a 1934 interview with C.Z. Codreanu, the charismatic leader of the Legion, during which the ‘Captain’ had ‘explained his views on how to revive the Dacian virtues.’ It was therefore necessary to de-paganize (or Christianize) the Getae religion: Zalmoxis becomes the reformer of a monotheistic, ascetic religion, dominated by elites, in an organic unity with the people, a religion which promised immortality and thanks to which the ancestors did not fear death. Praising the spirit of sacrifice of the Dacians and their ‘death for the Fatherland’ thus prefigured the legionary vulgate: its members, Christians and fanatical Romanians, love death and go to meet it, against the enemies of the Nation and of God (capitalists, Democrats, Jews, Bolsheviks, Freemasons or Atheists). The mystique of death and martyrdom are the most displayed convictions of the Legionaries, unfortunately transposed into reality.” Dana cites Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L’oubli Du Fascisme: Trois Intellectuels Roumains Dans La Tourmente Du Siècle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002), 149-150.

31 See, for example, Roberts and Glăjar, “The Legionary Phenomenon,” 36: “If the nation realizes God on the Earth, then I am only interested in the God that I live, not [the one lived by] Hungarians, French, etc. In Naples, almost every street has its own Madonna, something belonging to the street; this points to the necessity of localizing, individualizing, nationalizing God.”

32 Dugin discusses Fukuyama’s idea of an “end of history” no less than 13 times throughout his *Fourth Political Theory*, including the bizarre assertion that “some people believe Fukuyama is already a robot.” See Aleksandr Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, English ed. (London: Arktos Media, 2012), 132, <https://archive.org/details/TheFourthPoliticalTheory/page/n131/mode/2up>.

Dugin gains from Ionescu, then, is a strategy for adapting Evola's "multipolar" Traditionalist pagan imperialism to the existing beliefs (Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, etc.) of Eurasia. His concept of imperial Eurasian Civilization is thus comparable to Ionescu's imperial "Orthodox" nation. Whereas Ionescu (re)shaped Romanian Orthodoxy into a national identity for the then recently unified Wallachians, Moldavians, and Transylvanians to share, Dugin seeks to (re)unite the peoples of the former Soviet Union under a narrative of a shared "Eurasian" identity that would, in Evola's terms "deauthorize and supplant every Church, putting itself in its place purely and simply as true and sole Church." Both pagan and Orthodox Traditionalism create sovereign "nations" that are free to wage empire-building holy wars with whomever they choose.

Yet for Dugin to acknowledge *The Legionary Phenomenon* as a major source of inspiration would associate him with the very real atrocities of the Romanian Iron Guard rather than the more obscure and theoretical ideals of Evola's Traditionalism or the comparatively benign Traditionalism of René Guénon, whose writings inspired Evola. For Dugin, then, it is preferable to claim credit for "baptizing" Evola's (and Guénon's) Traditionalism than to admit he took the idea from the Legionary Christofascist ideologue Nae Ionescu, who had not—and still has not—been recognized as a Traditionalist philosopher. Unfortunately, a deeper comparison of Ionescu's philosophy of ethno-religious empire with that of Dugin is both beyond the scope of the present article and logically subsequent to the comparison I will make between *The Legionary Phenomenon* and *Revolt*. I have raised the issue of similarity and difference between Dugin's ideas and those of Evola to indicate where *The Legionary Phenomenon* interrupts the familiar narrative about Evola's influence on Dugin. I proceed, therefore, to my comparison of Evola's *Revolt Against the Modern World* and Ionescu's *Legionary Phenomenon*.

Variation on a Traditionalist Theme

Scholars recognize many similarities between Evola and Dugin, yet they have also pointed to significant differences. Given Evola's disparaging thoughts about Christianity, Dugin's Christian departure from Evola's pagan model is of interest, particularly since Dugin has made much of the place of Orthodoxy in his neo-Eurasianist Traditionalism. Dugin has also been credited with introducing a kind of geographical determinism (i.e., "sacred geography") into his neo-Eurasianist Traditionalism. In brief, where both Evola and Guénon argue that the civilizational decline of the West could theoretically also have happened in the East, Dugin connects geography and fate in a way that makes the decline of the West and the rise of the East geographically determined. As mentioned above, both of these departures from Evola's Traditionalism, which scholars currently discuss as hallmarks of Dugin's Eurasianism, are already present in Ionescu's *Legionary Phenomenon*.

By laying out the many parallels between Evola's *Revolt* and Ionescu's *Legionary Phenomenon*, I demonstrate that Ionescu's text is also Traditionalist. That is, if Ionescu has recreated the argument of Evola's *Revolt* using the same logic and *Revolt* represents a definitive example of Traditionalism, then Ionescu's text must also be Traditionalist. By revealing specific differences in *Legionary Phenomenon*, including the roles of Orthodox Christianity and geographical determinism, I show that Dugin's neo-Eurasianism departs from Evola in the same ways that Ionescu does. This in itself cannot confirm that Dugin is drawing from *Legionary Phenomenon*, but it does offer an explanation for his curiously superlative assessment of Ionescu in 1997. Establishing Ionescu's *Legionary Phenomenon* as a Traditionalist source

of inspiration for Dugin also informs the debate over how central Traditionalism is to his thought. The correlative metaphysics that Ionescu shares with Evola also connects Dugin to both of them, thereby providing insight into his broader method. Furthermore, it informs the debate over Dugin's political ideology because Ionescu's application of those ideas is not only unambiguously Traditionalist, but also unambiguously fascist. Finally, it reveals that alterations and adaptations to Evola's Traditionalism that have been credited to Dugin in fact belong to Nae Ionescu.

Ionescu's *Legionary Phenomenon* relates to Evola's *Revolt* as a sort of deliberate and truncated variation on an uncredited theme. It is not plagiarized *in sensu stricto*, but nor is it original. I suggest that the relationship is not immediately apparent because it has been intentionally obscured. While Ionescu reproduces the major argument of Evola's *Revolt*, he picks and chooses among the minor ones. Where Evola takes his copious examples from a variety of ancient and medieval sources, Ionescu argues the same points with specifically Romanian illustrations and the folksy anecdotes that were characteristic of his impromptu lecture style. The effect is a Legionary fascist manifesto that attempts to articulate the main tenets of Evola's universal "Tradition" in national terms—to locate transcendental universals in Romanian particulars. It is a variation on the theme of Evola's pagan *Revolt* "in the Romanian Orthodox style" some 60 years before the appearance of Dugin's Orthodox Traditionalism.

Such a relationship can be difficult to prove. As a musical convention, theme and variation is a showcase not of similarity, but of difference. A composer may demonstrate their skill by withdrawing further and further from the original theme in each successive variation. Yet since Ionescu fails to acknowledge the source of his chosen theme, the relationship cannot be assumed as the starting point of my argument, but only approached as a conclusion. The question thus arises of how much similarity—and of what kind—is sufficient? The answer must be the familiar, if somewhat subjective, standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt." Certainly, there are those who would be convinced by nothing less than a direct admission on the part of Ionescu. Yet a central claim of Evola's argument, which I show that Ionescu replicates, is that transcendental truths can be discerned by someone with the requisite skill. Thus, devotees of either philosopher might respond that Evola and Ionescu have simply uncovered the same eternal verities (i.e., "Tradition"). For obvious reasons, it is a convenient argument.

Despite the surface-level differences, there are at least three different categories of similarities between the texts that lend themselves to meaningful comparison and that, I believe, amount to proof beyond a reasonable doubt. First, the argument of both texts is essentially the same: it is a rejection of Western modernity in favor of an absolute (as opposed to constitutional) monarchy.³³ Second, the specific aspects of modernity to be rejected and the prescribed alternatives are conspicuously similar.

33 Evola discusses the topic of divine kingship throughout *Revolt*. Chapter 2, "Regality," deals with it explicitly. See Evola, *Revolt*, 7-15. The subject is not equally apparent in Ionescu's *Legionary Phenomenon*, though this should not come as a surprise. Ionescu delivered the conferences in a prison camp where he was interned for public opposition to King Carol II's recently declared royal dictatorship. In that case, it was the particular king he objected to, not the idea of divine kingship. See Roberts and Glajar, "Legionary Phenomenon," 26. "The king realizes that the country wants an authoritarian principle. Yet, the authoritarian principle from the time of Charlemagne is different from that of today. The authoritarian principle of our king is not that of Charlemagne. And, namely, the authoritarian principle of today is different." The theme of divine right—if not divine kingship *per se*—in Ionescu's thought has also been explored by Surugiu: "Nae Ionescu proposes two political solutions: i) the reign of *droit divin*; ii) the providential leader, ('căpetenia' in original) who is part of the nation, and stands for the collectivity. ... After supporting without hesitation Carol II, in 1935, Nae Ionescu equals [sic] the royalty with the political leader, representative of the national will." See Romina Surugiu, "Nae Ionescu on Democracy, Individuality, Leadership and Nation Philosophical (Re)sources for a Right-Wing Ideology," *SACRI: Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 8 (23) (Summer 2009): 75.

Finally, the very logic of both arguments is unusual, particularly for its time. Neither deductive nor inductive reasoning, it represents a correlative logic associated with Hermeticism and early modern magic.³⁴ Evola was one of the first repopularizers of Hermeticism after the Renaissance.³⁵ In 1931, three years before the appearance of *Revolt*, he published *The Hermetic Tradition*. At that time, Evola was the unquestionable center of far-right Hermeticism and thus the most likely model for the unusual argument in Ionescu's *Legionary Phenomenon*. It is unlikely that Ionescu, whose university appointment was in the department of epistemology and logic,³⁶ would have crafted a correlative argument out of carelessness. It is far more likely that he was throwing his own weight as a philosopher behind the revival and weaponization of Hermetic metaphysics.

Regarding the plausibility of my hypothesis, it is not only possible but entirely likely that Ionescu read *Revolt* before delivering *Legionary Phenomenon*. Whether or not Ionescu could have read the Italian original (1934), he certainly could have read the German translation, which appeared the following year (1935). Ionescu received his PhD in Germany and wrote his dissertation in German.³⁷ Moreover, he would almost certainly have learned about *Revolt* when his then-assistant, Mircea Eliade, reviewed it for the journal *Vremea* in 1935.³⁸ In any case, he would definitely have been aware of it by the spring of 1938, when he hosted a luncheon at his villa outside Bucharest attended by both Eliade and Evola.³⁹ Then, as now, it was Evola's most well-known work; he would have been introduced as its author.

Finally, it is one thing to accuse a man with no history of malfeasance of taking credit for someone else's ideas; it is another thing entirely when that man is a known plagiarist. Ionescu's proclivity for cribbing from other philosophers and passing off their insights as his own was already known during his lifetime. In 1935, his then-student, the Romanian-Jewish novelist Mihail Sebastian, recorded in his journal that Ionescu presented entire sections of Oswald Spengler's *The Hour of Decision* (1934) as his own ideas during a class lecture.⁴⁰ More recently, Alexandru George demonstrated that the first lecture of Ionescu's 1919 university course, "The Epistemological Function of Love," was an uncredited paraphrase of Max Scheler's essay *Liebe und Weltanschauungslehre*.⁴¹ Likewise, historian of philosophy Marta Petreu has identified a dozen parallel arguments from *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911) by the Anglo-Catholic English mystic Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) and Ionescu's university

34 For a brief orientation to the academic discussion of esotericism (including Hermeticism), see Karen-Claire Voss and Antoine Faivre, "Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions," *Numen* 42, no. 1 (1995): 60-62, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568527952598756>.

35 Evola was preceded by René Guénon (1886-1951), but their philosophical projects are sufficiently distinct to rule out Guénon as Ionescu's primary source of inspiration. This is addressed below.

36 Niculescu, *Seducătorul*, 112.

37 *Ibid.*, 106.

38 Mircea Eliade, *Vremea*, VIII, n. 382, Bucharest, March 31, 1935. He also mentions *Pagan Imperialism* (1928) and *Phenomenology of the Absolute Individual* (1930). For an English translation of Eliade's review, see Cologero Salvo, "Eliade on Evola's *Revolt*," *Gornahoor*, May 30, 2022, <https://www.gornahoor.net/?p=4303>.

39 Eliade, *Autobiography Vol. II*, 152. The exact date of the meeting does not seem to have been recorded. However, an article Evola published on March 22, 1938, in *Il Regime Fascista* about his interview of Codreanu, which was allegedly the same day as his meeting with Ionescu, provides a *terminus ante quem*. See Julius Evola, "Legionarismo ascetico. Colloquio col capo delle 'Guardie di Ferro,'" *Il Regime Fascista* 13 (March 22, 1938).

40 Mihail Sebastian, *Journal, 1935-1944*, (Chicago: I. R. Dee, 2000), 49.

41 Ornea, *Romanian Extreme Right*, 202. Ornea cites Alexandru George, "Nae Ionescu și Max Scheler," *România literară* 25, no. 36 (November 1992), 10.

course on *Metaphysics* (delivered 1936-37).⁴² Thus, my claim that Ionescu recreated the arguments of Evola's *Revolt* in his *Legionary Phenomenon* three months after meeting its author is far from specious. On the contrary, it provides a more likely explanation for similarities between Evola's *Revolt* and *Legionary Phenomenon* than would some suggestion of confluent innovation in Ionescu and Evola's thinking.

Method: Three Points of Comparison

Rhetorically, both Evola and Ionescu arrive at their rejections of modernity and the West as logical conclusions to their arguments. Practically, however, those arguments are the products of their objections rather than the sources of them. Both men sought to undermine Marxism and liberal democracy and to uphold an absolute—as opposed to constitutional—monarchy with their fascist ideologies, yet it is neither modernity nor the West *per se* that they reject. Rather, they “revolt” against the materialist theories of causation and coercive authority that form the basis of both liberal democracy and Marxism—the scientific method, dialectical materialism, evolution, historicism, and so on. In characteristically purple prose, Evola illustrates,

By way of introduction I will argue that no idea is as absurd as the idea of progress, which, together with its corollary notion of the superiority of modern civilization, has created its own “positive” alibis by falsifying history, by insinuating harmful myths in people's minds, and by proclaiming itself sovereign at the crossroads of the plebeian ideology from which it originated.⁴³

Evola and Ionescu each blame the humanism, individualism, and rationality that they associate with the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment and by which they define modernity. Yet Evola primarily associates this civilizational decline with modernity, while Ionescu mostly attributes it to Westernization. Both of them respond with a non-causal philosophy of history and an *a priori* assumption of cycles of civilizational decline and rebirth. Consequently, both *Revolt* and *Legionary Phenomenon* amount to arguments for a transcendently ordained feudal social order that cannot be improved through material intervention in history, only worsened by transgression against an inherent social hierarchy. My comparison of the texts follows the structure of their shared argument. I begin with their unusual logic, proceed to their respective characterizations and rejections of “modernity,” and conclude with their prescribed alternatives. Following the comparison, I address the two significant differences between *Legionary Phenomenon* and *Revolt* mentioned in the introduction: Ionescu's Christianization of Evola's Traditionalism and his geographical determinism, which ties modernity to the West in ways that Evola's *Revolt* does not. These differences between Ionescu and Evola, which simultaneously represent similarities between Ionescu and Dugin, are revisited in the conclusion.

Point 1: Correlation Implies Ontology

The shared logic of the two texts is the most significant point of comparison. Both Evola and Ionescu presuppose transcendental ideal forms of civilization that

⁴² Marta Petreu, “Istoria unui plagiat: Nae Ionescu—Evelyn Underhill,” *România literară* 27/50 (1994): 16–17. See also Marta Petreu, “Modelul și oglinda: Evelyn Underhill—Nae Ionescu,” *Momentul Adevărului*, ed. Iordan Chimet (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1996), 337–382. She explains: “I mention from the very beginning that [Ionescu's] ‘borrowing’ is as much on the level of ideas, problems, typology as it is on the level of explanatory examples, and sometimes even expressions.”

⁴³ Evola, *Revolt*, xxx.

“emerge” successively, but non-causally, within “time and space.” This mental model of transcendent-immanent pairs relies upon the correlative logic of Hermeticism: “as above; so below.”⁴⁴ The logic is relational rather than causal, like an object and its reflection in a mirror. Much as a reflection implies the existence of the object outside the mirror but is itself an effect of the mirror rather than the object, physico-temporal forms are said to imply the existence of transcendental forms but are themselves an effect of time and space. In Evola’s words, “Inherent to the idea of ‘traditional civilization’ is the idea of an equivalence or homology of its various forms realized in time and space.”⁴⁵ He is thus able to “induce” (correlate)⁴⁶ the existence of his ideal form from similar physico-temporal instantiations in varying stages of decadence. For its part, decadence is an inevitable effect of time and space, like distortions of the reflection in a mirror that has become cloudy and scratched with use.

Working from the same principle, Ionescu “deduces” (correlates)⁴⁷ the imminent emergence of a new Legionary civilization from the extreme decadence of interwar Romania. He states:

the legionary vision of reality is a formula that contains the entire manifestation of life, as it fits into history. Legionary Romania will be a political, economic, spiritual form of life different than that of today. The point of departure is history. Everything that happens happens in time and space, that is in history, in eternity.⁴⁸

Again, what Evola calls civilizations and Ionescu calls “historical forms” emerge “in history” as a consequence—property—of their correlation to a transcendent reality, but not as the effect of a physico-temporal cause. Rhetorically, then, if not in fact, neither Evola nor Ionescu derives an “ought from an is.” Rather, within the correlative frame of their respective projects, each merely proposes to uncover the nature of the transcendent and inevitable “is.”

Another important point of comparison within their shared logic is Evola’s and Ionescu’s method for divining/dictating their ideal forms of civilization. Evola explains:

What I call “traditional method” is usually characterized by a double principle: ontologically and objectively, by the principle of correspondence, which ensures an essential and functional correlation between analogous elements, presenting them as simple homologous forms of the appearance of a central and unitary meaning; and epistemologically and subjectively by the generalized use of the principle of induction, which is here understood as a discursive approximation of a spiritual intuition, in which what is realized is the integration and the

44 For a brief introduction to the topic of Hermeticism, see Wouter J Hanegraaff, “Hermes Trismegistus and Hermetism,” in *Hermes Explains: Thirty Questions about Western Esotericism: Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Centre for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam*, ed. Wouter J Hanegraaff, Peter J Forshaw, and Marco Pasi (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 1-10.

45 Evola, *Revolt*, xxxv.

46 Evola describes his method as inductive. It is not.

47 Ionescu’s logic, like Evola’s, is correlative. However, just as Evola presents his argument as inductive, Ionescu suggests his is deductive.

48 Roberts and Glăjar, “Legionary Phenomenon,” 25.

unification of the diverse elements encountered in the same meaning and in the same one principle.⁴⁹

Beneath the gilded prose, Evola's "traditional method" and "spiritual intuition" are nothing more than a version of the *cum hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy guided by confirmation bias.

What Evola refers to in the above quote as the "central and unitary meaning," he elsewhere simply calls "normality."⁵⁰ Notably, in Ionescu's explanation of method, he adopts Evola's concept of "normality" just as he does Evola's use of "relativity":

There is thus a criterion of appraising, of measuring facts, even in this relativity of history: normality. [...] Normality is itself approximate. The concepts with which we measure normality are approximate instruments. In order for us to be able to say that a fact is normal or abnormal it must first exist as fact. Historical facts group themselves in a particular place and time—they have a kind of common air; a kind of family. There are multiple facts, and this also gives the collective character.⁵¹

By asserting the necessary preexistence of the fact of normality, Ionescu also "induces" (correlates) his transcendental ideal—the second part of Evola's "double principle." He even replicates Evola's concept of spiritual intuition, explaining, "The appreciation of the defining elements is a matter of personal art."⁵²

Perhaps the most conspicuous similarity between their methods is the isolation of a single element by which the "Traditional" or Legionary civilization may be identified. According to Evola,

The caste system is one of the main expressions of the traditional sociopolitical order, a "form" victorious over chaos and the embodiment of the metaphysical ideas of stability and justice. The division of individuals into castes or into equivalent groups according to their nature and to the different rank of activities they exercise with regard to pure spirituality is found with the same traits in all higher forms of traditional civilizations, and it constitutes the essence of the primordial legislation and of the social order according to "justice."⁵³

Similarly, Ionescu explains that "a historical epoch can be identified from a constitutive element, that is the whole through the part, with the condition, though, that the historical epoch be well defined and have reached normality."⁵⁴ For Evola,

49 Evola, *Revolt*, xxv.

50 Note, for example, his use of (ab)normal on pp. xxix, 38, 67, 68, 82, 90, 157, 159, 221, 222, and 358 of *Revolt*.

51 Roberts and Glăjar, "Legionary Phenomenon," 25.

52 *Ibid.*, 26.

53 Evola, *Revolt*, 89.

54 Roberts and Glăjar, "Legionary Phenomenon," 26.

that element is the inequality of individuals: a caste system;⁵⁵ for Ionescu, it is the inequality of races.⁵⁶

The combination of “traditional” (i.e., correlative) method and “spiritual intuition” or “personal art” by which Evola and Ionescu claim to discern their ideal forms of civilization implies a specialist role—yet another point of comparison in their logic.⁵⁷ It requires a prophet-augurer to read the signs and predict the dissolution of one civilization and the emergence of another.⁵⁸ Each of them assumes this role by enumerating and interpreting signs of civilizational decadence. Though their terms sometimes vary, the themes are shared: materialism, “evolutionism,” the scientific method, democracy, and pluralism. As shared portents of the end of a civilizational cycle, they constitute the next category of comparison of the two texts.

Point 2: Harbingers of Modernity

The core of both arguments is a rejection of materialism in favor of idealism. For example, according to Evola, “In traditional societies the ‘invisible’ was an element as real, if not *more* real, than data provided by the physical senses.”⁵⁹ For his part, Ionescu disguises his preference for idealism with a misrepresentation of the “statistical method.” “In the statistical method,” he claims, “a collective imposes the law on the individual. This was known also to Plato, who said that a thing from the sensible world does not exist except insofar as it participates in the idea, which was, per Plato, an existence with true reality, while the objects, the facts, that we live were of lesser reality.”⁶⁰ Like Evola’s “traditional method,” Ionescu’s logic is actually correlative. Thus, unsurprisingly, neither Evola nor Ionescu has any use for the scientific method. Evola is clear: “I consider the so-called scientific and positive perspective, with all its empty claims of competence and monopoly, as a display of ignorance in the best of cases.”⁶¹ For his part, Ionescu simply dismisses inductive empirical science as outdated and irrelevant: “Since around the end of the nineteenth century, the experimental method is no longer worked with, only the statistical one.”⁶²

Related as it is to the inductive reasoning of the scientific method, “evolutionism” is likewise offensive to both of them. Evola makes the connection between evolution and dialectical materialism, writing, “These phenomena [Marxist revolutions] clearly illustrate that beliefs that were once taken for granted today no longer are, and that

55 For Evola’s thoughts on the inequality of individuals, see his many references to “differentiation” of individuals: Evola, *Revolt*, 24, 34, 36, 45, 56, 70, 327, 338, 339; and of the sexes: 158, 159, 164, 169.

56 “God made the races, each with a single duty, to realize the natural law that God placed in them. The parable of the talents—for this is how God is realized, in history, in the eternity of now, not in that of the future—when there will be a flock and a shepherd, realizing the natural law placed by God, like any existence issued by God. Thus, a nation must realize itself in its own natural laws.” See Roberts and Glăjar, “Legionary Phenomenon,” 34.

57 Roger Griffin theorizes this function as that of the “propheta.” He writes, “Characteristic of cultural regeneration is the emergence of a propheta (a charismatic leader) who embodies the vision of a new *nomos* (a new sect, new religion, new principle for making sense of and re-ordering society) as the basis of a new society (*communitas*).” See Roger Griffin, “The Legitimizing Role of Palingenetic Myth in Ideocracies,” in *Ideocracies in Comparison: Legitimation—Cooptation—Repression*, ed. Uwe Backes and Steffen Kailitz (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 277.

58 For Evola’s own thoughts on this, see his comments on the figure of the “seer” in Evola, *Revolt*, 243: “The figure of the ‘seer’ (*roeh*) was replaced by the figure of the one obsessed by the spirit of God. Other features of prophetism were the paths of the ‘servants of the Eternal,’ which replaced the proud and fanatical self-confidence of being ‘God’s people,’ and also an equivocal mysticism with apocalyptic overtones.”

59 Evola, *Revolt*, 4.

60 Roberts and Glăjar, “Legionary Phenomenon,” 31.

61 Evola, *Revolt*, xxxiii.

62 Roberts and Glăjar, “Legionary Phenomenon,” 30.

the idyllic perspectives of ‘evolutionism’ have come of age.”⁶³ For Ionescu, evolution is simply anathema: “History does not organize itself evolutionarily (evolution is a non-Christian idea—not an anti-Christian one—introduced to our thinking in the nineteenth century).”⁶⁴

The scientific method and theories of evolution not only contradict Traditionalist claims about material existence, but also offer a model for realizing a new social order—a model in which change may represent progress rather than decline. Predictably, then, both Evola and Ionescu reject democracy—the very notion that authority to govern is derived from the consent of the governed—as an unacceptably inductive and materialist metaphysics of coercive authority.⁶⁵ According to Evola, “The idea that the power to govern is conferred on the chief by those whom he rules and that his authority is the expression of the community and therefore subject to its decrees, was foreign to Tradition.”⁶⁶ Similarly, according to Ionescu:

At the basis of the [democratic] understanding of the world is the individual will and not the will of the nation, in the sense of collectivity, entity, synthesis, sum. Democracy did not speak about the will of the nation, for the nation is a collective being. Democracy spoke about the people, in the understanding of a majority of votes, which does not mean the will of the nation.⁶⁷

As mentioned previously, both Evola and Ionescu accept only absolute (divine) kingship as a legitimate expression of authority.

Evola and Ionescu’s mutual “revolt,” which began with a rejection of materialism, is bookended by an attack on pluralism. According to Evola, it is once again a question of the transcendent—of metaphysics. He explains:

When a race has lost contact with the only thing that has and can provide stability, namely, with the world of ‘Being’; and when in a race that which forms its most subtle yet most essential element has been lost, namely, the inner race of the spirit—compared to which the race of the body and of the soul are only external manifestations and means of expression—then the collective organisms that the race has generated ... are destined to descend into the world of contingency.⁶⁸

Working from the same principle, Ionescu explains how ascendancy is also possible: “When a people achieves consciousness of itself, it ceases to be a people and becomes a nation, that is a spiritual reality, a self-consciousness hitherto unknown.” And then, echoing Evola’s reference to a descent into the world of contingency, Ionescu adds, “There does not exist [...] obedience and defensiveness in nationalism, for the races [*neamuri*] that put themselves in that kind of position fall into serfdom.”⁶⁹

63 Evola, *Revolt*, xxviii. “These phenomena” refers to the previous sentence, in which Evola condemns, “violent and chaotic expressions typical of a ‘protest’ that wishes to be global, though it is inspired only by the contingent and terminal forms of the latest civilization.”

64 Roberts and Glăjar, “Legionary Phenomenon,” 25.

65 For Evola, liberalism and communism represent the same plebeian anti-hierarchical self governance.

66 Evola, *Revolt*, 8.

67 Roberts and Glăjar, “Legionary Phenomenon,” 36.

68 Evola, *Revolt*, 56.

69 Roberts and Glăjar, “Legionary Phenomenon,” 35.

Point 3: Traditionalist/Legionary Correctives to Modern/Western Decadence

It is not only their definition and negation of the modern West that reveals the similarities between Evola's *Revolt* and Ionescu's *Legionary Phenomenon*, but also the "Traditional" or "Legionary" alternatives they prescribe. The final category of comparison demonstrates how both thinkers replace materialism, the scientific method, evolution, democracy, and pluralism with correspondence, relativity, normality, divine authority, and empire. Because the previous sections have already incorporated some of this information, I take this opportunity to augment those points of comparison rather than repeat them.

For both Evola and Ionescu, "relativity," "correlation," and "correspondence" refer to the logic of Hermeticism—the non-causal relationship between the transcendent and the immanent, which I have previously described as akin to that of an object and its reflection in a mirror. The claim of correspondence (between the transcendent and the immanent) allows Evola to pick and choose the individual features of his transcendental truth from a (dubious) multiplicity of immanent "reflections."

The correspondences may not be noticeable from the outside; one may be taken aback by the diversity of several possible and yet equivalent expressions; in some cases the correspondences are respected in the spirit, in other cases only formally and nominally; in some cases there may be more complete applications of principles, in others, more fragmentary ones; in some there are legendary expressions, in others historical expressions—and yet there is always something constant and central that characterizes the same world and the same man and determine an identical opposition vis-à-vis everything that is modern.⁷⁰

In Ionescu, we see how this transcendental truth—once adduced—is presented as prescriptive:

Historical facts organize themselves in time, they group themselves into certain unities inside which different constitutive elements exist in a tight correlation. For every constitutive element and every individual that makes up part of a historical form, this is obligatory, while historical forms succeed one another, but do not condition one another, there does not exist causality and direction in history.⁷¹

Their claim of correspondence between the transcendent and the immanent seeks to undermine all causal logic.

Stressing his ontological point, Evola insists, "There is no objectivity and scientific causality the way modern men understand them. All these notions are unreal; all these notions are outside Tradition."⁷² Likewise, for Ionescu, "everything that happens in history—that is in time and space—is relative. Events, then, are also relative, in the understanding that they do not represent a meaning in themselves, they are

⁷⁰ Evola, *Revolt*, xxxv.

⁷¹ Roberts and Glajar, "Legionary Phenomenon," 27.

⁷² Evola, *Revolt*, xxxiv.

not produced per a particular law.”⁷³ Thus, “relativity” represents ontology without causation and replaces inductive reasoning as well as both the scientific method and evolution. Evola and Ionescu each fill the void left by the loss of the dynamic trajectory of cause and effect with the transcendental fixed point of “normality,” which represents conformity to an imagined ideal—the absence of decadence, but no possibility of progress.

Evola illustrates how this understanding of “normality” functions within his theory of knowledge, lamenting, “These causes [of the West’s decline within time and space] have not only taken away from most people the possibility of revolt and the return to normalcy and health, they have taken away the ability to understand what true normalcy and health really mean.”⁷⁴ Ionescu’s explanation likewise pertains to epistemology—what is knowable and how:

The Christian [Legionary] mentality is a realist mentality, insofar as it accepts everything as it normally appears. The world that exists, exists how it is normally, not how we want it to be. There is thus a criterion of appraising, of measuring facts, even in this relativity of history: normality.⁷⁵

At last, we arrive at Evola and Ionescu’s assertions of transcendental authority and empire (i.e., hierarchy) over democracy and pluralism. Yet it is here that Ionescu diverges from Evola in his Christianization and geographical determinism—the adaptations erroneously credited to Dugin. Regarding coercive authority, Evola distinguishes between divine and mundane authority, writing, “It is Zeus who bestows θεμιστες [*themistes*] on kings of divine origin, whereby θεμις [*themis*] or, ‘law from above,’ is very different from what constitutes νόμος [*nomos*], which is the political law of the community.”⁷⁶ In another especially conspicuous parallel, Ionescu recapitulates Evola’s parsing of the Greek *themis* and *nomos* with Romanian analogues. He explains, “The liberal state has justice. At its base is the idea of right [*drept*], which is an abstract idea. For us, people did not take heed of the justice system, but rather of moral right [*dreptate*].”⁷⁷

Both Evola and Ionescu use their arguments for a transcendental source of authority to force an imperial paradigm. The flow of authority from the transcendent to the immanent defines king and subjects alike as mutual prerequisites of national/imperial sovereignty; a people with no king, like a king with no people, can claim no transcendental substantiation. In Evola’s terms, they must “fall into contingency.” Thus, it is the shared ontology (i.e., religious belief) of the people that upholds “divine” kingship and the imperial paradigm. As Evola explains, “an empire is such only by virtue of higher values that have been attained by a given race...; only then will a race become the bearer of a principle that is also present in other peoples endowed with a traditional organization...”⁷⁸ Ironically, the “higher values” to which Evola refers represent the homogenous *belief*—if not the *consent*—of the governed in an ethnic religion (*vide*, “a given race”). The plurality that he rejects is thus primarily epistemological and secondarily biological.

73 Roberts and Glăjar, “Legionary Phenomenon,” 25.

74 Evola, *Revolt*, xxix.

75 Roberts and Glăjar, “Legionary Phenomenon,” 25.

76 Evola, *Revolt*, 8.

77 Roberts and Glăjar, “Legionary Phenomenon,” 28.

78 Evola, *Revolt*, 75.

Here, once again, the theme-and-variation relationship between Ionescu's Legionary Romania and Evola's "Traditional Civilization" is on display. According to Ionescu,

The word of Christ is one in the heavens, on the line of perfection. Yet we humans, who live in history, understand it differently—so, relatively—according to the nation we are a part of ... Therefore, each individual lives the word of God in his own way, in conformity with the absolute supreme collectivity in history, which is the nation.⁷⁹

Since it can only be lived out through the nation as the "absolute supreme collectivity in history," Ionescu's perfect "word of Christ," which is one in the heavens, represents the Christianization of Evola's Traditional pagan imperialism. Yet, as explained above, it remains in fact a tribal and crypto-polytheist Christianity. For both Evola and Ionescu, then, pluralism is impossible because within their shared paradigm, difference is inherently hierarchical. Evola leaves no doubt: "Nationality is a natural factor that encompasses a certain group of common elementary characteristics that are retained both in the hierarchical differentiation and in the hierarchical participation, which they do not oppose."⁸⁰ Different races may coexist within a Traditionalist empire. Indeed, they are necessary because the subjugation of the other is the only test and proof of transcendently ordained sovereignty. Yet difference without hierarchical distinction—epistemological pluralism—is anathema; it is the very nature—the singular hallmark—of the decadence of the West in the modern age.

Ionescu also diverges from Evola on the relationship of race to civilization or empire. For Ionescu (as well as Dugin), the geography of a race's "emergence"—and therefore also its self-realization as empire—is deterministic. In Traditionalist terms, this geographic determinism is referred to as "sacred geography." While Evola argues that a race can achieve empire only when it has "overcome itself and its naturalistic particularities," Ionescu insists that ascendance to empire results from embracing—rather than overcoming—certain "naturalistic particularities." He explains, "A nation, as an organic and spiritual collective, has certain natural laws. These need to be realized in the optimum form, for one cannot descend to transaction in their realization."⁸¹ For Ionescu, many of these natural laws are geographically determined. As he explains, a nation is a historical form, and "there exist historical forms that are pure and impure. The pure ones are born where the historical conditions are superimposed on the geographical."⁸² Elsewhere, Ionescu adds,

God made the races, each with a single duty, to realize the natural law that God placed in them. The parable of the talents—for this is how God is realized, in history, in the eternity of now, not in that of the future—when there will be a flock and a shepherd, realizing the natural law placed by God, like any existence issued by God. Thus, a nation must realize itself in its own natural laws.⁸³

The difference between Evola's "higher values" and Ionescu's "natural laws" is that Evola's ideal represents a singular transcendental truth that is not necessarily—or

79 Roberts and Glăjar, "Legionary Phenomenon," 36.

80 Evola, *Revolt*, 338f.

81 Roberts and Glăjar, "Legionary Phenomenon," 34.

82 *Ibid.*, 27.

83 *Ibid.*, 34.

not significantly—conditioned by location, whereas Ionescu’s ideal represents the same transcendental truth necessarily and significantly conditioned by its emergence in historical time and *geographic* space.

The “phenomenon” to which Ionescu refers in the title of his fascist manifesto should be understood as his particularization of Evola’s Traditionalist description of ascendance from race to empire through the alignment of belief and action. While it is presented as Orthodox Traditionalism, any substantive universality has been removed from its Christianity, rendering it effectively polytheist and thus able to accommodate Evola’s paradigm of “multipolar” pagan imperialism. Its most significant departure from Evola’s Tradition lies in connecting the realization of Evola’s ethnic Traditionalist empire to the geographic locus of its “emergence” in time and space. In the conclusion below, I address the fact that these two departures from Evola’s Traditionalism have been widely but erroneously credited to Dugin and discuss what this means for scholarship on Dugin.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that Ionescu’s *Legionary Phenomenon* constitutes a long-neglected but important part of the development of integral Traditionalism, one with significant bearing on contemporary far-right and fascist ideologies. I have also indicated that further research into Ionescu and the *Legionary Phenomenon*, specifically, should inform and disrupt important and ongoing scholarly debates about the relationship of Dugin’s ideological output to both integral Traditionalism and historical fascism. I conclude, therefore, with a review of some of the analyses most affected by the findings of this article and an indication of where existing arguments are impacted. Scholarship on other thinkers (e.g., Nae Ionescu himself, Mircea Eliade, etc.) will be similarly affected, yet such discussion must remain suspended for the time being; I focus here only on scholarly debates concerning Dugin.

Aleksandr Dugin’s interest in Traditionalism is well established and uncontested, yet there is some dispute over which—if any—aspects of his own thought can legitimately be considered Traditionalist. This debate is perhaps best understood in terms of what is perceived to be at stake, namely the mutual compatibility or exclusivity of Traditionalism and fascism. If the two are mutually exclusive, Dugin is either fascist and therefore not really Traditionalist or he is Traditionalist and therefore not really fascist. (The former position is notably represented in the scholarship of Andreas Umland and Anton Shekhovtsov, and the latter by the arguments of A. James Gregor. I address them both below.) On the other hand, if Traditionalism and fascism are in fact mutually compatible, the question can be raised as to whether Dugin’s Traditionalism is merely incidental to his ideology or whether it is somehow inextricable from his thought as a whole. For scholars like Mark Sedgwick and Marlène Laruelle, this question is important insofar as it pertains to the intellectual history of Traditionalism and because it sheds light on the development of Dugin’s political thought. However, for Dugin himself and apologists such as Jafe Arnold,⁸⁴ Dugin’s “legitimate” use of a Traditionalist paradigm would dictate that

84 Arnold is a contributor to Geopolitica.ru. See “Jafe Arnold,” Geopolitica.ru, March 7, 2016, <https://www.geopolitika.ru/en/person/jafe-arnold>. The site bears the compass rose symbol of Dugin’s Fourth Political Theory and explicitly states: “In the field of ideology, we reject all three political theories of the European Modern: 1) Liberalism, 2) Communism and 3) Fascism, considering them to be completely unsuitable for understanding the essence of those processes that develop [sic] around us in the contemporary world, and following [sic] the principles of the Fourth Political Theory.” Arnold is also a contributor to Katehon, a pro-“multi-polar” thinktank whose president is Konstantin Malofeev. See “Jafe Arnold,” Katehon, March 7, 2016, <https://katehon.com/en/person/jafe-arnold>.

any evaluation or critique accept the correlative logic of his arguments if it is to be “unbiased.” (I address these positions below as well.) All of these arguments—which I have separated into “incompatibility” and “integralist” debates—are affected to the extent that Dugin draws inspiration from Ionescu.

The Incompatibility Debate

The conversation about Dugin's status as a Traditionalist seems to have begun in earnest in 2004, when Mark Sedgwick, a leading scholar on the subject of Traditionalism, referred to Dugin as a “centrally important Traditionalist” and credited him with developing “an unusual variety of Traditionalism: Neo-Eurasianism.”⁸⁵ Over the next few years, political scientists Andreas Umland and Anton Shekhovtsov responded to Sedgwick's assessment, warning against associating Dugin with Traditionalism because it risked “providing Dugin with a pseudo-conservative veil that obscures the revolutionary-ultranationalist—that is, fascist—agenda underlying his publishing activities.”⁸⁶ They point out that Dugin's thought more closely resembles that of Julius Evola than it does the teachings of René Guénon (1886-1951), who effectively founded the Traditionalist doctrine.⁸⁷ Shekhovtsov and Umland argue for a firm distinction between Traditionalism, defined as the teachings of Guénon, on the one hand, and Evola, as a sort of corrupter of Guénon's legacy, on the other hand. They rightly distinguish between “Evola's peculiar (re)interpretation of Traditionalism” and Guénon's “original version of the doctrine,” but their argument that Evola is not a “legitimate successor”⁸⁸ to the teachings of Guénon and therefore not a Traditionalist is complicated by the fact that Guénon's “doctrine” consists *both* of an assertion of the real existence of a body of eternal and unchanging transcendental truths *and* an elaboration of its content. Although Evola breaks with Guénon over some of the content, he relies on Guénon's model of the real existence of a body of absolute truths as well as his method for divining/dictating them.⁸⁹

Exactly which part of Guénon's formula should comprise the *sine qua non* of Traditionalism is contested, so arguments over Evola's status as a Traditionalist are unsurprisingly thorny and ongoing. While the distinction between Guénon and Evola is both valid and significant, the question as to whether their differences delegitimize Evola as a Traditionalist or merely distinguish one school of Traditionalism from another amounts to an emic distinction between orthodoxy and heresy *within* Traditionalism. It requires one to decide whether to define Traditionalism as the *validity* of a sort of revelation, the *content*, the *method*, or some combination thereof. Guénon and Evola unquestionably share their rejection of the modern materialist, causal metaphysical paradigm that allows for deriving an “ought from an is” in favor of the correlative Hermetic metaphysics that support divining a transcendental

85 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 221.

86 Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland, “Is Aleksandr Dugin a Traditionalist? ‘Neo-Eurasianism’ and Perennial Philosophy,” *The Russian Review* 68, no. 4 (October 2009): 662-678, 676, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9434.2009.00544.x>.

87 “Traditionalism,” as it is discussed here, is a modern instantiation of *philosophia perennis*. Guénon's “founding” of the doctrine of Traditionalism might thus also accurately be described as a revival of *philosophia perennis*. Sedgwick notes, “The term *philosophia perennis* (Perennial Philosophy) was coined in 1540 by a Catholic scholar to describe one of the central insights of Marsilio Ficino, an important figure in the origins of Traditionalism.” See Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 193.

88 Shekhovtsov and Umland, “Is Aleksandr Dugin a Traditionalist?” 665.

89 See, for example, Guénon, *Crisis of the Modern World*, 53: “Moreover, because of the correspondence that exists between all the orders of reality, the truths of a lower order can be taken as symbols of those of higher orders, and can therefore serve as ‘supports’ by which one may arrive at an understanding of these; and this fact makes it possible for any science to become a sacred science, giving it a higher ‘anagogical’ meaning deeper than that which it possesses in itself.”

and eternal “is”—the rejection of cause and effect in favor of “normality” discussed above.⁹⁰

Both Guénon and Evola are anti-modern and both propose palingenetic cycles of decline and rebirth. The differences between them pertain to the *content* of the transcendental “is.” As Shekhovtsov and Umland recognize, Guénon valued contemplation over action, whereas Evola (as well as Dugin)⁹¹ “subordinated reflection and knowledge (the ‘sacerdotal,’ Brahmanic principle) to action (the ‘royal,’ Kshatria principle).”⁹² In brief, where Guénon is descriptive and noninterventionist, Evola is prescriptive and interventionist. Thus, in the Guénonian paradigm, the palingenesis of epochal cycles occurs inevitably, but in its own time, whereas in the Evolan paradigm, it can be accelerated by means of ideals and actions—such as the enforcement of caste systems and racial hierarchies—that political scientists recognize as ultranationalism. This is exemplified by the positive function attributed to war by both Evola and Ionescu. The significance of the difference in much of the scholarship is that while Evola’s Traditionalism meets Roger Griffin’s minimal definition of fascism as both palingenetic and ultranationalist,⁹³ Guénon’s does not.

The corresponding debate over the question of Dugin’s fascism also began in 2004, with an open back-and-forth between political scientists Andreas Umland and the late A. James Gregor (1929-2019). With Griffin, Umland had concluded that Dugin’s neo-Eurasianism was fascist.⁹⁴ However, Gregor countered that Dugin’s thought had more in common with the ideas of Julius Evola than with fascism.⁹⁵ Indeed, Gregor pointed out that Dugin’s “rejection of ‘narrow nationalism’ and his call to ‘Eurasian Empire,’ together with his appeal to the creation of a ‘traditional state’ are,” according to Dugin himself, “all inspired by Evola.”⁹⁶ He also noted that “Dugin’s convictions that world history is shaped by ‘suprarational forces’ and a ‘transcendental Idea,’ are all borrowed from Evola.”⁹⁷ In fact, Gregor asserted that Dugin’s thought, “all of it, ultimately reduces to the ‘sacral geography’ and the ‘spiritual racism’ of the occult and mystical musings of Julius Evola.”⁹⁸ For Umland, as for most scholars, Gregor’s argument that Dugin could not be fascist because of his similarity to Evola was rather self-defeating: most scholars consider Evola to be fascist even though he was generally rejected by the Fascist and Nazi parties during the interwar period and afterwards. Thus, Gregor unwittingly strengthened the argument for a reading of Evola’s thought as “generic fascism” through his careful analysis of it. In the end, Gregor convinced Umland of Evola’s influence on Dugin but continued to reject the premise of Evola’s fascism and, thus, Umland’s conclusion that Evola’s influence in fact supports a reading of Dugin as fascist.

Gregor’s claim that Evola should not be considered fascist is very much a minority opinion among political scientists, and his objections are best understood in light of his

90 See above: Guénon, *Crisis of the Modern World*, 53. “Moreover...”

91 Aleksandr Dugin, *Filosofia Traditsionalizma* (Moscow: Arktogeia, 2002), 403-58.

92 Shekhovtsov and Umland, “Is Aleksandr Dugin a Traditionalist?” 668.

93 Specifically, Griffin defines fascism as “a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism.” See Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 26.

94 Roger Griffin and Matthew Feldman, “The Nature of Fascism,” in *Fascism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, ed. Roger Griffin with Matthew Feldman (London: Routledge, 2004), 339-340.

95 A. James Gregor and Andreas Umland, “Dugin Not a Fascist? A Debate with A. James Gregor (6 Texts),” *Erwägen Wissen Ethik* 16 (2005): 426-9.

96 *Ibid.*, 427.

97 *Ibid.*, 427.

98 *Ibid.*, 428.

restrictive approach. Gregor measures Evola not against “generic fascism,” but rather against “Mussolini’s Fascism” (NB: the uppercase F), which he defines as “a form of reactive, antidemocratic, developmental nationalism that serves as a paradigmatic instance of revolution in the twentieth century” and which “featured a coherent, manifestly relevant political ideology committed to the redemption of a humiliated and retrograde people.”⁹⁹ Even so, his reasoning that Dugin’s extensive reliance on Evola likewise precludes the possibility of the former’s fascism is not only tenuous, but also complicated by Dugin’s incorporation of Ionescu’s adaptations. Moreover, the fact that *Legionary Phenomenon*—a fascist manifesto by the chief ideologue of the Iron Guard—is largely based on Evola’s *Revolt* also means that Gregor has misjudged Evola’s influence among fascist intellectuals during the interwar period. And while Ionescu’s premises are no less “suprarational” and “transcendental” than Evola’s, few scholars today would argue that Ionescu’s *Legionary Phenomenon* is anything other than fascist. Consequently, Gregor’s argument seems to be primarily a proxy battle for his own narrow definition of fascism.

The Integralist Debate

I turn now to the implications of mutual compatibility—though not necessarily affinity—between Traditionalism and fascism. Whereas the above debate revolves around what I have called the “content” of Traditionalist teachings, this one is focused on the metaphysical epistemology of Traditionalism. In other words, it pertains not so much to *what* is held to be true as it does to *how* truth itself is demonstrated. Though each for different reasons, the scholars involved in this debate are concerned with when and to what extent Dugin has genuinely argued like a Traditionalist as opposed to merely borrowing particular details and conclusions piecemeal from Traditionalist thinkers. Here I examine the positions of Mark Sedgwick, an intellectual historian and scholar of esotericism; Marlène Laruelle, a historian and political philosopher; and Jafe Arnold, a translator and publisher of Eurasianist literature and a scholar of esotericism. In their respective analyses, these scholars—like those above—represent not only themselves, but also currents in the larger debate.

For two of the three the scholars considered here (Laruelle and Sedgwick), Dugin’s status as a Traditionalist cannot decide the question of his fascism because they do not consider the two to be mutually exclusive. Laruelle has identified Dugin’s ideology as fascist independently of the question of his Traditionalism; her interest in Dugin’s use of Traditionalism is in how it relates to his ideological program. As she explains, “several intellectual tendencies manifest themselves in his thought: a political theory inspired by Traditionalism, Orthodox religious philosophy, Aryanist and occultist theories, and geopolitical and Eurasianist conceptions.”¹⁰⁰ Laruelle sees Dugin’s interest in Traditionalism as one of many influences and/or dictions within an ideological bricolage. “Above all,” she stresses, “he is striving to cover every niche in the current ideological ‘marketplace.’”¹⁰¹ Sedgwick’s view on Dugin’s Traditionalism is not dissimilar, though he clearly positions Traditionalism at the center of Dugin’s ideological project: “a form of Traditionalism that is both distinctively Soviet and distinctively Russian [...] lies at the heart of Dugin’s politics.”¹⁰² For both Sedgwick

99 A. James Gregor, *Phoenix: Fascism in Our Time* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 20.

100 Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: And Ideology of Empire* (Washington D.C., Baltimore MD: Woodrow Wilson Center Press: Johns Hopkins University Press), 108.

101 *Ibid.*, 107.

102 Mark J. Sedgwick, “Occult Dissident Culture: The Case of Aleksandr Dugin,” in *The New Age of Russia: Occult and Esoteric Dimensions*, ed. Birgit Menzel, Michael Hagemester, and Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Munich: Otto Sagner, 2011), 273.

and Laruelle, Dugin's thought is more Traditionalist at some times than at others, but unambiguously Traditionalist at least some of the time. Unlike Laruelle, however, Sedgwick, who is not a political scientist, avoids weighing in on the question of Dugin's fascism.

Arnold's preoccupation is markedly different. Like Sedgwick and Laruelle, he is concerned with Traditionalism as a metaphysical epistemology. However, he argues that Dugin has been fundamentally and consistently Traditionalist since his publication of *Philosophy of Traditionalism* (2001), if not before.¹⁰³ Arnold has criticized existing scholarship for "problematically dismissing Dugin's self-proclaimed Traditionalism as a political motive rather than a coherent worldview whose structure and context are worth studying."¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, and critically, he argues that Traditionalism is so central to Dugin's thought that it should determine the framework in which Dugin's work can be evaluated. He insists that the prevalence of attention from political scientists has "manifested itself in numerous instances of the employment of preconceived models of reified political spectra which render further scholarship on Dugin at best frivolous and at worst politically suspect."¹⁰⁵ Arnold's repudiation of "reified political spectra," along with his complaint of "a distinct lack of an adequate and unbiased conceptual framework which can hermeneutically address Dugin's intellectual corpus,"¹⁰⁶ exemplify his push for different evaluative criteria.

Rather than denying that Dugin's thought meets the criteria for multiple definitions of fascism within the "reified political spectra," Arnold attempts to rule out the possibility of Dugin's fascism by implication. In so doing, he recapitulates both Evola's and Ionescu's (as well as Dugin's own) efforts to reorient not only the criteria by which political ideologies are identified, but also those by which facts themselves are understood. He does this not by arguing that Traditionalism is incompatible with fascism within a single epistemological paradigm—as do Shekhovtsov, Umland, and Gregor—but rather by arguing that Traditionalism-as-paradigm is incompatible with the accepted causal material (i.e., "scientific") paradigm in which fascism is a meaningful construct. By way of analogy, for the same reason that a given chemical compound that is highly flammable in an oxygen-rich atmosphere may accurately be said to be incombustible in a vacuum, Arnold advocates reading Dugin "in a vacuum" (i.e., assuming a Traditionalist epistemology). To do so renders the constituent elements of Dugin's ideology "inert" without needing to deny their presence. His calls for an "unbiased" reading thus represent a covert attempt—like those of Evola, Ionescu, and Dugin himself—to hijack the epistemological paradigm with correlative Hermetic logic.

For Dugin and his apologists, the ramifications of the "integralist" debate thus concern whether existing theories of fascism can be applied legitimately—or even logically—to Dugin's philosophico-religious output. If his engagement with Traditionalism is merely allusive, opportunistic, or perhaps even just inconsistent, then the question of fascism in his thought might reasonably be left to familiar debates about fascism and their attendant definitions. In scholarship on Dugin, as previously mentioned, this often involves Roger Griffin's familiar minimal definition of paligenetic myth

103 Jafe Arnold, "Alexander Dugin and Western Esotericism: The Challenge of the Language of Tradition," *MONDI: Movimenti Simbolici e Sociali dell'Uomo* 2, no. 1 (April 2019). See especially "3. The Tradition of Language and the Language of Tradition," 41-53.

104 Arnold, "Alexander Dugin and Western Esotericism," 33.

105 *Ibid.*, 34.

106 *Ibid.*, 34.

and ultranationalism. If, however, Dugin's ideology can only be "appreciated" from an emic Traditionalist perspective—if it can be "properly understood" only once one embraces the metaphysical assumptions of Traditionalism—then a case should presumably be made to relitigate Dugin's neo-Eurasianism and "Fourth Political Theory," acquitting them of the charge (and stigma) of fascism and labeling them instead something else, something new. From the apologist perspective, then, what matters is not so much whether Dugin is, in fact, a "legitimate" Traditionalist as that he be *read* as one. Dugin and his apologists, like Evola and Ionescu before them, argue for the absolute necessity of their metaphysical assumptions (i.e., the epistemological paradigm) because they propose not to derive "an ought from an is," but rather to uncover the truth of a transcendental and eternal "is"—something only conceivable absent the possibility of "progress," which Evola, Ionescu, and Dugin all explicitly reject.¹⁰⁷ Significantly, an insistence upon the correlative logic of Hermetic metaphysics is something that Evola, Ionescu, and Dugin all share with Guénon. For this reason, I would argue (*vis-a-vis* Shekhovtsov and Umland) that defining Traditionalism by its unusual fundamental ontological assumptions rather than the specific teachings of any given Traditionalist offers the most useful etic organizational heuristic.

The strength of Laruelle's analysis is that she recognizes the difference in epistemological frameworks *without acceding* to Traditionalist calls for an epistemological paradigm shift. As she notes, Dugin "does not limit himself to a spiritual or intellectual understanding of Traditionalism. He asserts that it is in itself 'an ideology or meta ideology that is in many ways totalitarian and requires that those who adopt it accept its stringent requirements.'"¹⁰⁸ Dugin's appreciation of Traditionalism as a totalitarian meta-ideology is reflected in his paraphrase of Guénon, which Laruelle cites in her analysis:

Tradition, according to René Guénon's definition, is the totality of divinely revealed non-human Knowledge, which determined the make-up of all sacral civilizations—from the paradisiacal empires of the Golden Age which disappeared many millennia ago, to the Medieval Civilization which, in its various forms (Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Confucian, etc.) largely reproduced the parameters of the Sacred Order.¹⁰⁹

Absent from Dugin's (borrowed) definition is any identifiable ideological content. Rather, his focus is on the validity and the authority of revelation within the paradigm. Just as it is for Evola and Ionescu, the utility of Traditionalism is much more the correlative metaphysics of "truth" and the method for discerning/producing it than the specific content of that revelation in a Guénonian school of Traditionalism.

In seizing upon Dugin's reference to "meta ideology," Laruelle has left space for the possibility that even if Dugin does not always use Traditionalist sources, he may consistently use his disparate sources *in a Traditionalist way*. Her analysis has thus, I believe, held up even as Dugin has turned his attention to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger in recent years. For example, although Heidegger is not considered a Traditionalist philosopher, it may be argued that Dugin's incorporation of Heidegger's philosophy as a correlative confirmation of his "totalitarian meta ideology" is in fact

¹⁰⁷ For Dugin's rejection of the idea of "progress," see especially the third chapter of his *Fourth Political Theory*, "The Critique of Monotonic Processes."

¹⁰⁸ Laruelle, *Eurasianism*, 125.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 122-3.

Traditionalist. Indeed, Dugin's discussion of Heidegger's *Seynsgeschichte* hardly seems different from his paraphrase of Guénon on Tradition:

Seynsgeschichte is not just an area of thought or a branch of science. It is an intense effort to recognize the *message of Being* (*Seyn*) embedded in the historical process by deciphering the profound philosophical intention of those thinkers who have raised ontological questions, spoken about it indirectly, or have been silent about it (which is no less important).¹¹⁰

Whether or not Dugin has understood Heidegger, he positions himself as prophet-augurer of the transcendental authority of *Seynsgeschichte* no less than Evola does for Tradition and Ionescu does for "the Legionary phenomenon." Thus, while Laruelle is not wrong when she explains, "Dugin is never [...] a simple ideological 'reproducer.' He hopes to 'Russify' the doctrines that inspire him and to adapt them to what he calls the traditional concepts of the Russian world,"¹¹¹ I am inclined to amend her observation with the caveat that Dugin is both presenting his project in targeted diction and—like Ionescu does with Evola—disguising some of his sources in the process.

Laruelle is not the only one to see a Russification of existing ideas in Dugin's thought. Sedgwick, too, sees a certain Russianness in Dugin's Traditionalism. Of Dugin's identification as an Old Believer, he writes:

This detail makes no sense in Guénonian or Traditionalist terms, but makes a lot of sense in Russian terms, since it allows Dugin to have excellent relations with the mainstream Orthodox Church. Such a strategy gives Dugin the opportunity to take part in the political life of the Russian Federation—an activity that would have been more difficult, if not impossible, had Dugin followed Guénon's example and become a Muslim.¹¹²

How much more so had Dugin followed Evola's example and become a pagan! Elsewhere, Sedgwick explains, "According to Dugin, Orthodoxy, unlike Catholicism, had never lost its initiatic validity and so remained a valid tradition to which a Traditionalist might turn. Dugin then proceeded to translate much of the Traditionalist philosophy into Orthodox terms."¹¹³ Though Sedgwick can hardly be faulted for being unaware of Ionescu's *Legionary Phenomenon*, his analysis is also disrupted by the recognition that Ionescu's Christofascist Traditionalism is one of Dugin's inspirations. Dugin did not translate Traditionalism into Orthodox terms, Ionescu did.

Arnold, too, sees Dugin as Russifying where he has, in fact, merely borrowed liberally from Ionescu's *Legionary Phenomenon*. Yet to his credit, Arnold has identified Vasile Lovinescu's *Hyperborean Dacia* (1936-37) as the earliest substantive source text of "sacred geography" (i.e., geographic determinism):

110 Aleksandr Dugin, *Martin Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning* (Arlington, VA: Raddix/Washington Summit, 2014), 70.

111 Laruelle, *Eurasianism*, 123.

112 Mark Sedgwick, "Alexander Dugin's Apocalyptic Traditionalism" (American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, November 19, 2006), 9-10.

113 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 226.

Guénon insisted that such a “traditional initiatic science” and conceptualization of “qualitative space” existed in antiquity, but only broached the topic in passing in a few texts; Evola also briefly described “sacred geography” as an integral part of the Traditionalist worldview, but his formulation of such has yet to be reconstructed out of his numerous works; and, to my knowledge, Guénon’s Romanian correspondent known as “Geticus” (Lovinescu) was the only Traditionalist to have authored a whole substantive work on sacred geography. Dugin’s formulation and application of “sacred geography” is thus in many ways one of his original contributions to Traditionalism...¹¹⁴

It would most certainly be of interest to examine Dugin’s geographic determinism in light of Lovinescu’s *Hyperborean Dacia*, which has yet to be done. And while it is all but certain that Ionescu read Lovinescu’s contributions to the Romanian journal *Études Traditionelles*, in which *Hyperborean Dacia* was published in three parts between 1936 and 1937 (a year before Evola’s visit to Bucharest), it does not necessarily follow that Lovinescu is the source of inspiration for Dugin’s geographic determinism. It is, after all, Ionescu and not Lovinescu whom Dugin credits with being “the greatest intellectual of our time” in his *Finis Mundi* broadcast.

The restoration of Ionescu’s *Legionary Phenomenon* to its proper place in the intellectual history of Traditionalism must change the way we think about Dugin’s engagement with Traditionalism. First, current estimates of Dugin’s originality as a Traditionalist obviously have to be revisited. His presentation of Traditionalism in Orthodox terms can hardly be argued to be original, nor can his incorporation of geographic determinism (i.e., “sacred geography”). Second, since both of these aspects of Dugin’s Traditionalism have demonstrable antecedents in Romanian Legionary ideology, it is now incumbent upon scholars to reexamine his use of them in light of their originary fascist context. How much of what has been described as Dugin’s Russifying or personalizing in fact represents deliberate fascistifying?

Third, inspired in part by Umland and Shekhovtsov’s warning about the potential legitimizing effect of “Traditionalism” on evaluations of Dugin’s thought, it is worth considering whether it might be possible to distinguish between accelerationist and non-accelerationist (i.e., fascist and nonfascist) Traditionalism and address—even as non-political scientists—the relationship between certain metaphysical assumptions and ultranationalist conclusions. Indeed, it may no longer be responsible to avoid the topic of fascism within the scholarly discussion of Traditionalism. This approach would allow us to distinguish critically between Dugin’s and Guénon’s thought while still recognizing their fundamental epistemological similarity. Finally, the issue raised by Arnold regarding the centrality of Traditionalism to Dugin’s thought is also impacted. If we can agree on a core definition of Traditionalism as a correlative Hermetic epistemology, then I believe Dugin’s broader project may be as consistently Traditionalist as Arnold suggests, though I reject Arnold’s claim that one must embrace the emic correlative logic of Traditionalism in order to comprehend or evaluate it. In such a case, the various appeals to transcendental premises, along with the proxy arguments to accept them, become conspicuous as signs of this type of reasoning, as well as a valuable tool for scholarly and political analysis.

114 Luca Siniscalco and Jafe Arnold, “‘The Most Dangerous Philosopher in the World’: Luca Siniscalco Interviews Jafe Arnold on the ‘Esoteric’ Alexander Dugin,” *La Rosa di Paracelso: Rivista di studi sull’Esoterismo occidentale* 2 (2019): 100.



Patriarch Kirill's Praetorian Guard: Sorok Sorokov as Radical Outreach for “Holy Tradition”

ADAM HANZEL AND KIRIL AVRAMOV

Abstract

The central focus of this article is an in-depth analysis of the interplay between Patriarch Kirill's ideology of “Holy Tradition” and the movement Sorok Sorokov, which we consider Kirill's praetorian guard, in charge of “maintaining the order for patriarchal services”—services which include humanitarian and military assistance in Russian offensives, the punishment of non-traditional priests, and the on-site guards of patriarchal projects within the wider scope of Russkiy mir. More importantly however, and due to this privileged position, Sorok Sorokov acts as a radicalizing outreach for Patriarch Kirill's “Holy Tradition” in the digital space. To demonstrate this relationship, we employ a mixed methods approach in line with digital humanities methodology. To achieve this, we have developed telegram API and web scraping tools as well as utilized exploratory data analysis, natural language processing, and critical discourse analysis. Our preliminary conclusions are that: (1) Sorok Sorokov does indeed function as a radical extension of Patriarch Kirill's Holy Tradition and (2) that Sorok Sorokov operates as an illiberal service provider for the Russian Orthodox Church in social contexts that Patriarch Kirill cannot directly address such as war and radical, national politics.

Keywords: Sorok Sorokov, Russian Orthodox Church, Holy Tradition, illiberalism, Telegram

Adam Hanzel, MA candidate: Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies, Graduate Research Assistant: Global Disinformation Lab, University of Texas at Austin, United States
adam_hanzel@utexas.edu

Kiril Avramov, Assistant Professor, Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies; Co-Director, Global Disinformation Lab, University of Texas at Austin
kiril.avramov@austin.utexas.edu

DOI: 10.53483/XCLU3548

On January 9, 2016, Metropolitan Hilarion sat down with film director Alexei Uchitel on the Russian Orthodox Church's (ROC) television channel Spas to discuss the role of cinema in society. The discussion was cordial, as they discussed Uchitel's upcoming film *Matilda*. The film is a historical fiction recounting Tsar Nicholas II's relationship with ballerina Matilda Kshesinskaya.¹ However, after the trailer for the film was released on April 8, 2016, the Russian Orthodox Church's messaging quickly turned to disdain. Bishop Tikhon (Shevkunov) noted the historical inaccuracy of the film and equated it to "slander" of a prominent saint.² Radical Orthodox groups were also quick to react to the trailer. On January 31, 2017, members of Christian State–Holy Rus,³ led by Aleksandr Kalinin, sent threats via mail and telephone stating that "If the film *Matilda* is released, cinemas will burn, maybe even people will suffer."⁴ In Moscow on September 10, near the office of Alexei Uchitel's lawyer, two cars caught fire with calling cards next to them with "burn for Matilda" written on them. On September 23, Kalinin and two others were detained after he gave an interview to Russian news agency *Interfax* reiterating the threats his group had made.⁵ Less than a month later, another radical Orthodox group, Sorok Sorokov,⁶ took up protests against *Matilda*. On October 24, Sorok Sorokov, led by Andrei Kormukhin, sent its members to movie theaters to protest their showing the film.⁷

Admittedly, while the group Sorok Sorokov cannot be traced to any particular violent events in relation to the release of *Matilda*, the group rallies its supporters for other violent acts and illegal demonstrations. It routinely deploys its members to construction sites of future Orthodox churches, acting as bodyguards against anti-ROC protestors, building fences, attacking the temporary shelters of anti-ROC protestors, and allegedly attacking the protestors directly.⁸ Sorok Sorokov also regularly holds general Orthodox events consisting of field brawls (*Ackerkämpfe*),⁹ weapons tear downs and assembly, mixed martial arts tournaments, live music, and

1 Oftsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Mitropolit Volokolamskii Ilarion: Kino dolzhno otrazhat' deistvitel'nost' i dariť liudiam svetlye obrazy," January 9, 2016, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4346161.html>.

2 Alena Makarenko, "Skandal vokrug 'Matil'dy,' Khronika," Buro (blog), September 15, 2017, <https://www.buro247.ru/culture/movies/15-sep-2017-matilda-scandal-chronicle.html>.

3 Khristianskoe gosudarstvo–Sviataia Rus'.

4 Lenta.ru, "Aktivisty poobeshchali szech' kinoteatry za pokaz 'Matil'dy' Uchitelia," January 31, 2017, <https://lenta.ru/news/2017/01/31/threats/>.

5 Vladimir Rozanskij, "Aleksandr Kalinin, the War against 'Matilda' and Putin," PIME Asia News (blog), September 22, 2017, <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Aleksandr-Kalinin,-the-war-against-%20%E2%80%99%20Matilda%20%E2%80%99%20-and-Putin-41852.html>.

6 The name can be translated as "forty times forty," which means that members of this group want to have 1,600 churches in Moscow "again."

7 Anastasiia Golubeva, "Protiv 'Matil'dy' sobrali pochti 100 tysyach podpisov," BBC Russkaia sluzhba, July 17, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-40582707>; Ekaterina Venkina, "V Moskve pered pokazom 'Matil'dy' zaderzhali sem' aktivistov." Deutsche Welle, October 24, 2017, Politics, <https://www.dw.com/ru/%Do%B2-%Do%BC%Do%BE%D1%81%Do%BA%Do%B2%Do%B5-%Do%BF%Do%B5%D1%80%Do%B5%Do%B4-%Do%BF%D1%80%Do%B5%Do%BC%D1%8C%Do%B5%D1%80%Do%BE%Do%B0-%Do%BC%Do%B0%D1%82%Do%B8%Do%BB%D1%8C%Do%B4%D1%8B-%Do%B7%Do%B0%Do%B4%Do%B5%D1%80%Do%B6%Do%B0%Do%BB%Do%B8-%Do%BF%D1%80%Do%B0%Do%B2%Do%BE%D1%81%Do%BB%Do%B0%Do%B2%Do%BD%D1%8B%D1%85-%Do%B0%Do%BA%D1%82%Do%B8%Do%B2%Do%B8%D1%81%D1%82%Do%BE%Do%B2/a-41097583>.

8 Dmitriy Veselov, "'Torfyanka' zastoialas,'" Eclectic (blog), January 30, 2015, <https://eclectic-magazine.ru/park-torfyanka-stoyanie/>.

9 We use the German term *Ackerkämpfe*, or hooligan field brawls, as it is more suited for the performative aspect of Sorok Sorokov's events. Sorok Sorokov stages these *Ackerkämpfe* as a team-based demonstration of their ranks' fighting strength. Usually these teams line up across from each other in opposing rows and clash in the center in hand-to-hand combat. *Ackerkämpfe* complements the one-on-one mixed martial arts performances that take place at their events. See René Nissen, Kiril Avramov, and Jason Roberts, "White Rex, White Nationalism, and Combat Sport: The Production of a Far-Right Cultural Scene," *Journal of Illiberalism Studies* 1, no. 2 (2021): 19–37.

icon processions.¹⁰ Members of Sorok Sorokov, as well as Kormukhin himself, have also been seen physically attacking those they deem as bringing Western values into Russia.¹¹

This work is an analysis of the similarities and differences between the worldviews of Sorok Sorokov and the Russian Orthodox Church. Whereas other violent Orthodox groups, such as Christian State–Holy Rus, are admonished by the church¹² and punished by the state for their violent and illegal acts, the leader of Sorok Sorokov is given the medal of the Order of the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Prince Vladimir.¹³ Why is Sorok Sorokov being given preferential treatment by the ROC and how related are their worldviews? In this article we show that Sorok Sorokov and the ROC are aligned in their traditional, markedly Russian, illiberal worldviews but, contrary to Sorok Sorokov's claims to having an "original brand,"¹⁴ we provide evidence that they function as the "left hand of God" for Patriarch Kirill in affairs that the ROC is unable to address directly.

This article's first section denotes the background of these two groups' worldviews. We show how the ROC has only recently developed a monolithic, traditionalist worldview that is able to tolerate an ideological alignment with Sorok Sorokov, and what Sorok Sorokov's own views on Russia's socio-political standing are. The second section describes our mixed methodological approach. The final section consists of results, conclusions, and further discussions based on our findings. We conclude that Sorok Sorokov's ideology is not only directly parallel to the ROC's, but that they often focus these worldviews and narratives into a *specifically Russian worldview*. As the ROC is working within an interlocutor framework vis-à-vis both other traditional religious groups¹⁵ in the international sphere and the Russian state, Sorok Sorokov is the interpreter and enforcer of this traditional ideology within Russia and the so-called near abroad, as Russians refer to those states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union.

This work is also a starting point for more granular analyses of the bidirectional influence between the ROC, and the cohort of the existing and identified radical Russian Orthodox milieu. This work is accompanied by our database, which entails: (a) all of the news articles from the patriarchia.ru domain from its inception in

10 "Russia: The Orthodox Connection | People & Power," Al Jazeera English, October 19, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQR36Z7Pwn4>.

11 Evgenii Shapovalov, "Unholy Alliance," Coda (blog), June 1, 2016, <https://www.codastory.com/lgbt-crisis/unholy-alliance/>.

12 Oftsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "V. R. Legoida: Est' veshchi, k kotorym khudozhnik dolzhen podkhodit's osobym taktom i vnimaniem," February 8, 2017, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4800999.html>.

13 Sorok Sorokov, "Komykhin Andrei poluchaet medal' Vladimira Krestitelia," Sorok Sorokov YouTube channel, July 12, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gw9AdhV6OLE>.

14 Sorok Sorokov (forwarded from Russkii Demiurg), Telegram broadcast, August 23, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/21092>.

15 Standard scholarly English usage would generally understand the term "traditional religion" as denoting religious practices rooted in an indigenous ethnic community built around tradition rather than authoritative texts. However, the use of "traditional religion(s)" in this text follows Patriarch Kirill's use of the term, as it forms and informs the basis for our analysis of his socio-political worldview: that is, "traditional religion(s)" are conservative understandings of religious doctrines that ascribe authority to the ancient teachings of the saints (in the case of Orthodox Christianity) who are now held within and shaped by the Church or the Bride of Christ. According to this definition, Patriarch Kirill is willing to open dialog between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church or representatives of the Islamic world—religious groups in which there is salvation only within a conservative interpretation of these ancient teachings of the religious community in question, be they through scripture (including in the case of Islam), an institutional church (as within Russian Orthodoxy), or moral and ethical values (ultra-conservative Protestantism, which in turn derives these from its scriptures). Patriarch Kirill likely understands the general usage of the term and is attempting to co-opt the meaning for his purposes.

October 2004 up until August 2021, and (b) all of Sorok Sorokov's Telegram posts from October 2017 through July 2022.

The ROC's Management of Its Internal Diversity

To understand Sorok Sorokov's involvement with the ROC, we first outline these factions and their ideological alignment within the framework of intra-Church politics. One of the earliest works focused on the different existing factions and intra-Church groups was published as early as 1997, by Ralph Della Cava, who introduces the notion of three distinct groups consisting of ultranationalists, ecumenists, and institutionalists. Further, Della Cava argues that factional arrangements within the Church are seemingly unrelated to its socio-political standing. At the time of Della Cava's writing, Sergey Chapnin, author of publications in ecclesiastical and secular media such as *Metaphrases*,¹⁶ stated that the Church, through its factions, was unable to secure either a consensus of ideas about its present course.¹⁷ While we agree with Della Cava's argument on the social validity of these factions, we differ on his assessment, as we recognize that the Church, under the direction of Patriarch Kirill since 2009, has created a consensus on its path to its socio-political future. Our research aligns rather well with more contemporary work by scholars of Orthodoxy such as Sergey Chapnin, who notes that the existing church factions are subdued by the Patriarch, by using the extraordinary circumstances presented by crises that allow for consolidation and direct management by the Moscow Patriarchate.

Another scholar who focuses her approach on the existing factions is Irina Papkova. She explicitly defines three major factions within the ROC as liberals, fundamentalists, and traditionalists. The general consensus is that the least populous faction within the ROC is that of the liberals. Their dwindling numbers likely coincide with the turn away from liberal politics in the turmoil of the "wild 1990s." Patriarch Alexy II recognized that his push to strengthen the ROC's socio-political involvement was aligning with the goals of far-right nationalist organizations such as Pamyat (memory).¹⁸ Patriarch Alexy II, wary of a Russian neo-Nazi socio-political group forming around the ROC, declined to further grow the socio-political capital of the Church. He chose to not canonize the Romanovs and slowed down the reacquisition of religious buildings and the return of saints' relics.¹⁹ These actions weakened the liberal ROC faction even further. Yet signs of the liberals' continuation are still present in socio-political compromises found in core ROC documents. This has been described by Kristina Stoeckl in regard to the ROC's view on human rights.²⁰ An illustrative example is the presentation of individual rights found within the "Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church (2000)":

The right to believe, to live, to have family is what protects the inherent foundations of human freedom from the arbitrary rule of outer forces. These internal rights are complemented with and ensured by other, external ones, such as the right to free

16 "Chapnin Sergei Valer'evich," n.d., <http://eurasian-defence.ru/?q=node/11404>.

17 Ralph Della Cava, "Reviving Orthodoxy in Russia: An Overview of the Factions in the Russian Orthodox Church, in the Spring of 1996," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 38, no. 3 (September 1997): 387–413.

18 Most notably, Patriarch Alexy II was known for strengthening the ROC through his reacquisition of Orthodox relics and land from the state.

19 John Garrard and Carol Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 116, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9781400828999/html>.

20 Kristina Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*, Routledge Religion, Society and Government in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet States, no. 1 (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 54.

movement, information, property, [and] to its possession and disposition.²¹

During this period, the future Patriarch Kirill, who was at that time the Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, was the chairman of the Department of External Church Relations (DECR), in charge of dialog with foreign political bodies and global churches. Kirill, due to his position as the chairman of the DECR, was also granted a permanent position on the Holy Synod. Thus, he was directly part of Patriarch Alexy II's initiative of strengthening the Church. At present we can state that Kirill has picked up where Alexy II left off: that is, he has continued to build up the Church's socio-political capital. This process is most visible within the ROC's initiative dubbed "Program 200,"²² or the idea to reestablish 200 churches across Moscow. This ROC initiative was occasionally referenced as "Sorok Sorokov," or "forty forties" in English²³—a noted change in the ROC's goals from 200 churches across Moscow to 1600. The use of the phrase "Sorok Sorokov" is anything but coincidental to the radical Orthodox group known by this name.

Patriarch Kirill, unlike his predecessor, either does not recognize or does not shy away from far-right, nationalist, illiberal social movements that co-opt his traditional rhetoric in radical ways. Patriarch Kirill's adoption of the slogan "Program 200" and later "Sorok Sorokov" allows for ambiguity towards social movements such as Sorok Sorokov, and the lack of clear denunciation of their activities. By not denouncing Sorok Sorokov's co-opting of these phrases and traditionalist ideology accompanying them, Sorok Sorokov is able to act with impunity and tacit support as the left hand of God for Patriarch Kirill—the silent enforcers of his illiberal rhetoric with radical actions.

The second-most-numerous ROC faction is the fundamentalist one. Fundamentalists "invent a past they seek to relive in an attempt to counter perceived threats to religious and national identity. ... This past often denotes Pre-Revolutionary 'Holy Russia' as the yearned-for Golden Age."²⁴ The process of reinvention is crucial to this faction. While aspects of Holy Russia manifest themselves in current socio-political ideals such as monarchism, the fundamentalists do not seek a return to these ideals as they were defined within their respective historic periods. Rather, fundamentalists reinterpret these values and project them onto modern issues. Therefore, it is more appropriate to discuss fundamentalism as a form of "neo-traditionalism." One such example is the fundamentalists' position on inter-denominational church dialog. The fundamentalists contend that such dialog influences the Church by turning it towards un-Russian, pro-Western ideals, regardless of different church denominations' common Christian origins. This puts them at odds with Patriarch Kirill, who has continually worked to form inter-church dialog with other traditional religions. However, while the fundamentalists may disagree with some of the finer points of Kirill's traditionalist model, the apocalyptic nature of encroaching modernity entices fundamentalists to coalesce under his leadership.

21 Russian Orthodox Church Department for External Church Relations, "The Basis of the Social Concept," 2000, p. 26, <https://mospatusa.com/files/THE-BASIS-OF-THE-SOCIAL-CONCEPT.pdf>.

22 Oftsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Na telekanale 'Moskva-24' prodolzhaetsia tsikl peredach 'Sorok sorokov,' posviashchennyi 'Programme-200,'" September 28, 2013, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3265670.html>.

23 Oftsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Igumen Petr (Eremeev): Festival 'Sorok sorokov' vozvrashchaet Moskve traditsii tserkovnogo gorodskogo prazdnika," September 7, 2012, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/2453332.html>.

24 Irina Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 61.

The third group, the traditionalists, commonly labeled as supportive of a *pravoslavnaya derzhavnost*, or Orthodox statism, are those who feel that “the future of the Russian Federation lies in a spiritual renaissance of its people, a process that cannot occur without the active involvement of the Orthodox Church.”²⁵ The traditionalists are the most numerous faction within the ROC, headed by Patriarch Kirill.²⁶ They invoke Russian and Orthodox ideals that we define as “Patriarch Kirill’s Holy Tradition,” a more radical illiberal variation on the Orthodox Church’s definition of “Holy Tradition.”

Theologians, such as Fyodor Nikitich Romanov, Vladimir Lossky, and Georges Florovsky have interpreted Holy Tradition as “things of the past” that are inherently different from mere “traditions.” Holy Tradition originates from the hierarchy of the Church as an “authentic interpretation of Scripture ... [as] ‘Scripture rightly understood.’”²⁷ In contrast, “traditions” are merely derivatives of this truth, handed down, but ultimately opinions or mistakes not developed through the life of the Church, but outside its body or through secular definitions.²⁸ Vladimir Lossky, one of the preeminent theologians in Russian Orthodoxy, notes that “The true and holy Tradition, according to Filaret of Moscow, does not consist uniquely in visible and verbal transmission of teachings, rules, institutions and rites: it is at the same time an invisible and actual communication of grace and sanctification.”²⁹ Patriarch Kirill surely would have encountered Lossky’s works when he was in seminary, and he often invokes Lossky’s status as a great theologian in a number of his own works. Patriarch Kirill’s illiberal variation on Holy Tradition comes from its marked Russian, illiberal invocation in reaction to modernity and modernism.

Analytical Approaches to the ROC’s Socio-Political Standing

Various scholars have attempted to decipher this particular illiberal invocation by implementing different analytical frameworks. Irina Papkova, in *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, attempts to analyze this invocation through a political realist perspective. She splits her work into two major parts. The first half is an ethnographic and historical analysis of the inner workings of the ROC, where she outlines its three major factions. These factions are pivotal to understanding the nature of interaction between the ROC and outside socio-political actors. For this particular reason, we have followed Papkova’s factions model and offered a contemporary expansion on it in our introduction. In her second part, Papkova attempts to qualitatively address the degree and nature of the ROC’s involvement in post-Soviet politics by polling theological seminarians and secular university students. Her questions are accompanied by a range of preselected response options. For instance, a polled “question-answer” pair from this survey is: “Question:

25 In this context, *derzhavnost*, derived from *derzhava* (meaning “state” or “power”) may be thought of as the striving for not only a powerful, traditionalist ROC, but one that lifts up the Russian Federation through a renewal of Orthodox values. Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*, p. 47.

26 Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, p. 52.

27 Georges Florovsky, ed., “The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church,” chap. V in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, Vol. I: Bible, Church, Tradition—An Eastern Orthodox View* (Büchervertriebsanstalt, Vaduz, Europa, 1987), p. 73–92. First published 1972.

28 An example that is often cited is the Raskol, or Schism within the Russian Orthodox Church dating to the mid-17th century, in which Old Believers held that truth, rather than mistakes, was to be found in the old liturgical books. See: A monk of St. Tikhon’s Monastery, *These Truths We Hold—The Holy Orthodox Church: Her Life and Teachings* (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1986); Vladimir Lossky, John H. Erickson, and Thomas E. Bird, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

29 Lossky, Erickson, and Bird, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, chap. 8: 141–168.

Today the ideal form of government in Russia is? Answer: *Monarchy, Democracy, Theocracy, Dictatorship, Other, Don't Know, No Answer.*³⁰

We find that the use of such questionnaires raises multiple issues. For one, the answer choices provide for a narrow understanding of governance and religion from a Russian (and specifically, a Russian Orthodox) perspective. For example, a monarchy, depending on the ROC faction, can have multiple meanings and respective interpretations. Even among the hierarchy of the ROC, a single choice may or may not be chosen based on an individual's understanding of society and interpretation of the specific term. The late priest Dimitry Smirnov (1951–2020) describes how the correct monarchy would be a constitutional monarchy—similar to the ROC's position in the Russian Empire but without the element of hereditary lineage. Smirnov also notes that Russia has always and will always need a monarchy: "It's in our blood."³¹ In contrast, monarchy-skeptic Professor Andrei Zubov suggests that a monarchy is unnecessary "when a society begins to increase in its Christian self-consciousness," suggesting that each response would be influenced by the respondent's social circles.³² Papkova's method of polling similarly does not account for the distinction between types of religious engagement in Russia, which is reflected in the responses provided. Papkova, while attempting to control for religious affiliation, only outlines a distinction between Orthodoxy and "other confessions."³³

Papkova also analyzes the ROC-Russian Federation nexus through solely the framework of legislative and policy analysis. Thus, she focuses on ROC-sponsored legislation and ROC individuals' political connections and political capital. In this manner, she comes to the conclusion that while the state has clearly been integrating Orthodox symbolism and cultural capital into both the construction of its own legitimacy and the construction of a viable post-Soviet national identity, the Church is a passive actor, casually following the directives of the state.³⁴

At face value, her conclusion appears to be convincing. Indeed, less than a month after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill came out in support of Putin's narrative of the war, painting the West as aggressors against Russian ideals.³⁵ However, her conclusion assumes that the ROC holds no political clout outside of what is allotted to it by the state, a conclusion that ignores the ROC's long history of involvement in politics, military, and societal affairs. One of many examples that contradicts Papkova's conclusion can be found in Dimitry "Dima" Adamsky's *Nuclear Orthodoxy*.³⁶ Adamsky provides a detailed account of the ROC's

30 Papkova, Irina, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (Washington, DC and New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 206.

31 Mark Boden, "Democracy Is Fraud!—We Need Monarchy!—Hugely Popular Russian Priest on Top TV Show (Dmitry Smirnov)," *Russia Insider* (blog), July 23, 2022. <https://russia-insider.com/en/christianity/democracy-fraud-we-need-monarchy-hugely-popular-russian-priest-top-tv-show-dmitry>. (Note the cited post is from a rerun of a television program, likely taken in 2019 before Smirnov's death. The website either reposted the article or reported the rerun.)

32 Mikhail Suslov and Jan Surer, "The Genealogy of the Idea of Monarchy in the Post-Soviet Political Discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church," *State, Religion, and Church* 3, no. 1 (2016): 27–62, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/the-genealogy-of-the-idea-of-monarchy-in-the-post-soviet-political-discourse-of-the-russian-orthodox-church>.

33 Papkova, *Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, p. 203.

34 Papkova, *Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, p. 212.

35 Tenzin Zompa, "In Sunday Sermon, Orthodox Bishop Kirill Backs Russia's War against Ukraine," *ThePrint*, March 7, 2022, <https://theprint.in/world/in-sunday-sermon-orthodox-bishop-kirill-backs-russias-war-against-ukraine/862058/>.

36 Dmitry Adamsky, *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy: Religion, Politics, and Strategy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019).

involvement in military affairs from the dissolution of the USSR to the present. Papkova's analysis, while useful for understanding the factions within the ROC, not only misses the ROC's ideological nuances and their contexts, but also the ROC's interaction with diffused entities, the public at large, and groups that operate outside of an institutional framework—Sorok Sorokov being one such example.

Another political science approach towards analyzing the ROC's socio-political ideology can be found in Stoeckl's *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*. In contrast to Papkova's political realist approach relying on the analysis of legislation and policy, Stoeckl employs a constructivist approach to analyze the ROC's interpretation and response to shifting global attitudes towards human rights. Her analysis relies on drafted Church documents, such as the Social Concept, alongside upper-echelon Church discourse and organizations such as the World Russian People's Council. Stoeckl's approach offers a more in-depth analysis of the ROC's human rights stance and concludes that the ROC employs a "double strategy" towards social engagement: towards foreign and secular societies, the ROC appears restrained and engaging; in domestic and religious societies, the ROC's actions are polemical. For example, as Kirill positions himself as being in dialog with the West in the Russian invasion of Ukraine,³⁷ he similarly supports Putin's narrative at home.³⁸ However, Stoeckl concludes her work by stating that the ROC's official stance on human rights will ultimately be resolved in an analysis of theology because "the future trajectory of the encounter of Orthodoxy and modernity is being mapped out."³⁹

Denis Zhuravlev provides another example of a constructivist approach in analyzing the Orthodox tradition. His analysis has three steps: first, through discourse analysis of core ROC documents (the Social Concept, ROC elites' public addresses and social media activities, and popular Orthodox theologians' texts), he interprets the ideal Orthodox traditional identity. Orthodox traditionalist values are those which:

reject individual self-expression and propose the intrusion and reproduction of certain social practices within the contemplated "traditional world system" (intolerance to otherness, inclination toward authoritarianism, emphasis on following commonly accepted norms and not individual aspirations, gender discrimination, homophobia and other forms of intolerance, rejection of abortions and euthanasia, etc.)⁴⁰

Zhuravlev then examines the mobilization of these values in a context in which ethical norms are politicized, namely, the mobilization of these values in the rights of sexual minorities. He concludes that because these traditionalist values have political consequences in context, they should be thought of as not merely confessional/religious affiliation but as political theology and traditionalist in the political sense of the word.

37 Catholic News Agency staff, "Pope Francis Discusses Ukraine War with Russian Orthodox Leader," Catholic News Agency, March 16, 2022, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/250692/pope-francis-discusses-ukraine-war-with-russian-orthodox-leader>.

38 Zompa, "In Sunday Sermon."

39 Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*, p. 131.

40 Denis Zhuravlev, "Orthodox Identity as Traditionalism: Construction of Political Meaning in the Current Public Discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church," *Russian Politics & Law* 55, no. 4–5 (September 3, 2017): 354–375, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10611940.2017.1533274>.

In similar fashion, Mikhail Suslov uses a close reading of “Holy Rus” as a homotopia to describe political mobilization of theological ideals. He argues that Holy Rus, an ideal embedded with geographical and geopolitical ideals but imagined, amorphous, and decentralized, holds power due to its “crucial potential, its ability to see alternatives to the global ‘society of the spectacle.’”⁴¹

Our contribution to the literature is to investigate the ROC’s struggle with modernity and expands on and supports the approaches and conclusions of Zhuravlev and Suslov. Our analysis of the interplay between the ROC and Sorok Sorokov, while not strictly theological, reveals insights into how theological arguments are being interpreted and acted upon by other social entities. Thus, our hypothesis expands on the greater understanding of how diffused social entities act as purveyors of traditional values.

Structure, Ideation, and Activities of the Youth Movement Sorok Sorokov

Extensive research with a specific focus on Sorok Sorokov is rather limited, as most of the peer-reviewed literature scrutinizes the movement through variety of analytic frameworks that aim to capture wider phenomena where the movement is analyzed either as an actor among similar right-wing groups, or in the context of other complex processes and events. These range from civic resistance, missionary work, and digital vigilantism to right-wing militia activities in Russia and abroad. Such examples could be found in the work of Todd on political geographies and spatial politics of religious sites in Moscow,⁴² where she describes Sorok Sorokov’s opposition to the “For Torfyanka Park!” movement as a supposedly foreign-funded provocation against Russian Orthodoxy. In similar manner, a detailed account and analysis of the protests of the construction of a church in a Moscow public park is provided in Olga Reznikova’s “Guardians of Torfjanka Park” chapter in a larger volume dedicated to the ethical dimensions of modern urban life. For the purposes of our research, the most interesting statement advanced by Reznikova is the following description of the genesis and connection of the movement to the ROC and the Moscow Patriarchate:

Sorok Sorokov is a Moscow right-wing orthodox group. Like other similar groups, it does not officially act on behalf of the ROC but is financed and informally supported by it. The name can be translated as “Forty times forty,” which means that members of this group want to have 1,600 churches in Moscow “again.” The group was formed in 2013 by Andrej Kormuhin in Novospassky Monastery. On behalf of the monastery, he recruited dozens of professional boxers for the physical enforcement of the construction of new churches. The group is also partially connected with a small militant right-wing group that acts violently against migrants and anti-fascists under the name of “Molot” (Hammer), and generally with the right-wing scene. Sorok Sorokov positions itself as “orthodox patriots,” using symbols from a mixture of German Nazism and the Russian right-wing movement with references to neo-pagan and orthodox symbols at the same time. For their own purposes,

41 M. D. Suslov, “‘Holy Rus’: The Geopolitical Imagination in the Contemporary Russian Orthodox Church,” *Russian Politics & Law* 52, no. 3 (May 2014): 67–86, <https://doi.org/10.2753/RUP1061-1940520303>.

42 Meagan Todd, “The Political Geographies of Religious Sites in Moscow’s Neighborhoods,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 58, no. 6 (November 2, 2017): 642–669, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2018.1457448>.

they do not exclude physical confrontation with “enemies of the Orthodox Church.”⁴³

Attention to the movement, as one actor alongside others that are engaged in a “missionary revival” work that illustrates the relational dynamics between the ROC, the Moscow Patriarchate, and the Russian state is exemplified in the analysis of the so-called “Enteo” phenomenon in contemporary political and social life in Russia.⁴⁴ The phenomenon could be described as one of Orthodox activists who, often in opposition to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, wish “to establish the point of view of God which had been disclosed through Holy Tradition, to the most acute social issues, the all-round support of the Orthodox Church in the public space.”⁴⁵

One notable exception, in terms of consistency of focus on different modes of Sorok Sorokov’s politico-social and religious functionality, are the works of Marlene Laruelle⁴⁶ that repeatedly include and discuss the movement and its relation to conservative and reactionary ideas, and the state and Church’s interest in the popularization of martial arts as an avenue for youth outreach as well as for their practical utility in training a Church-friendly militia. Both Reznikova and Laruelle explicitly point out that Sorok Sorokov is not officially sanctioned by the ROC or the Patriarchate; however, it acts as what we term its “praetorian guard”—that is, being tacitly supported, encouraged, and financed.

Method and Materials

For the purpose of our analysis, we use Marlene Laruelle’s definition of illiberalism to frame Kirill’s application of Holy Tradition as illiberal.⁴⁷ Kirill’s rhetorical twisting of Holy Tradition is positioned as a backlash against liberalism in all its varied scripts, often in the name of democratic principles. It proposes solutions that are majoritarian, nation-centric, or sovereigntist, favoring traditional hierarchies and cultural homogeneity. It also calls for a shift from the domain of politics to that of culture in a post-postmodern manner, laying claim to a tradition of rootedness in the face of an age of globalization.

A major point of contention for Holy Tradition is the definition of freedom. Patriarch Kirill posits that liberalism has constructed an idea of negative freedom as a *freedom from*, a freedom of the individual that disconnects one from collective social norms in the name of self-determination:

By liberal we are referring to the secular, humanistic approach to the organization of society and the State, derived from Western philosophy and political thought, as perceived, learned

43 Ege, Moritz, and Johannes Moser, *Urban Ethics: Conflicts over the Good and Proper Life in Cities*, Routledge Studies in Urbanism and the City (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 274.

44 Zoya V. Silaeva and Mikita I. Fomenko, “The Phenomenon of ‘Enteo’ in the Contemporary Socio-Political Life of Russia,” *Amazonia Investiga* 7, no. 1 (February, 2018): 305–312.

45 Silaeva and Fomenko, p. 308.

46 Marlene Laruelle, “Russia’s Militia Groups and Their Use at Home and Abroad,” IFRI, April 2019, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/laruelle_russia_militia_groups_2019.pdf; Marlene Laruelle, “Ideological Complementarity or Competition? The Kremlin, the Church, and the Monarchist Idea in Today’s Russia,” *Slavic Review* 79, no. 2 (summer 2020): 345–364, <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2020.87>; Marlene Laruelle, *Is Russia Fascist? Unraveling Propaganda East and West* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), <https://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/9781501754135/is-russia-fascist-/>.

47 Marlene Laruelle, “Illiberalism: A Conceptual Introduction,” *East European Politics* 38, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 303–327, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2022.2037079>.

and developed in Western Europe and North America. ... It is this view which, in the twentieth century, formed the basis for the activities of international organizations. ...

This freedom is given to [an individual] in order for him always to choose good: "Our freedom of self-determination (*autexousion*) is a gift that cannot be forced or corrupted. We have received it in order to move in two directions: good and bad. Nothing of what God has given us for our use is evil ... the only thing that is wrong is our abuse of our capacity for self-determination."⁴⁸

Combating liberalism, Patriarch Kirill argues that the affordance of self-determination is one of *freedom to*, or the positive freedom of a collective to integrate normative Orthodox values into all domains of socio-political life. In this vein, Kirill envisions the Orthodox Church as an integral institution of a "multipolar" world where secular societies and Holy Tradition may coexist "harmoniously." Kirill posits that this "harmony" will promote fair democratic representation in global affairs and solve violence worldwide.⁴⁹ Indeed, to him, "terrorism in the twentieth century is not an inter-religious conflict ... it is a conflict between the new world order based on secular liberal values, and those who, exploiting religious and traditional values, seek to impose their own new world order."⁵⁰

This begs the question: how do Patriarch Kirill and the ROC confront socio-political actors promoting liberal values both domestically and abroad? We argue that this critical junction is where Sorok Sorokov aligns with the ROC's ideology and in turn acts as Kirill's praetorian guard and the "left hand of God." As stated on its own website, "Sorok Sorokov is a social movement, consisting of Orthodox Christians, but open to everyone who seeks to defend the Fatherland and traditional spiritual and moral values."⁵¹ This movement declares three main areas of focus in relation to the Russian Orthodox Church: (1) helping the Church implement the Patriarch's "200 churches" program in Moscow,⁵² (2) promoting a healthy lifestyle through "Orthodoxy and sport," and (3) deconstructing myths about Orthodoxy as a religion of the weak, which, allegedly, has ideologically exhausted itself and attracts nobody.⁵³

Sorok Sorokov not only assaults liberal opposition; its members routinely intimidate, threaten, assault, and attack institutions and individuals promoting liberal values through legislative, legal, or illegal methods.⁵⁴ Andrei Kormukhin describes himself as a "warrior of Christ," and describes these actions as a means to a "second baptism

48 Kirill and Russkaia Pravoslavnaiia Tserkov', "Svoboda i otvetstvennost': v poiskah harmonii," *Prava cheloveka i dostoinstvo lichnosti*, (Moscow: Publishing House of the Moscow Patriarch, 2011), p. 33.

49 Kirill and Russkaia Pravoslavnaiia Tserkov', "Svoboda i otvetstvennost'," (Moscow: Publishing House of the Moscow Patriarch, 2011), p. 38.

50 Ibid, p. 37.

51 Dvizhenie Sorok Sorokov, "Sorok Sorokov," n.d., <https://sorokorokov.ru/sorok-sorokov/>.

52 While Sorok Sorokov's mission statement says "200," this number is likely just an achievable goal within the larger discourse of "1,600." With its growing popularity it claims to have implemented various additional projects and initiatives.

53 Anna Lutskova De Bacci, "This Russian Christian Youth Movement Is Growing by Leaps and Bounds," *Pravoslavia.Ru* (blog), October 6, 2016, <https://pravoslavie.ru/97526.html>.

54 News.ru, "Sorok sorokov' obvinilo detskogo parikmakhera v propagande satanizma i zla," September 20, 2022, <https://news.ru/regions/v-lnr-zayavili-chto-izrail-nikogda-ne-stanet-postavlyat-oruzhie-ukraine/>; Valentina Rodionova, "Lider dvizheniia 'Sorok sorokov' otvetil na obvineniia v ekstremizme," *Ridus* (blog), December 3, 2021, <https://www.ridus.ru/lider-dvizheniya-sorok-sorokov-otvetil-na-obvineniya-v-ekstremizme-367841.html>.

of Russia.⁵⁵ While allegedly not acting under the direct orders of the Patriarchate, Sorok Sorokov enjoys a rather privileged position secured by the state and the ROC. Sorok Sorokov's actions, contrary to those of other radical, illiberal movements such as the "Christian State," go unpunished.⁵⁶ Its leadership has been legitimized by meetings with Duma representatives and input on legislative actions. For example, Andrei Kormukhin met with deputies of the State Duma group "For Christian Values" to discuss the legality of showing *Matilda* in Russia.⁵⁷ The group's legitimization by the ROC revolves around the fact that the patriarch has publicly acknowledged the movement. In 2015, Patriarch Kirill personally congratulated Kormukhin on his 45th birthday and presented him with an icon of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker in the same styling as Sorok Sorokov's logo.⁵⁸ Sorok Sorokov has also been conducting operations in the combat zones of Donbas precisely when ROC officials have been unable to travel to those specific locations.⁵⁹

Demonstrating further overt and covert connections between the ROC and Sorok Sorokov is beyond the scope of this work. Due to the radical nature and modus operandi of Sorok Sorokov, it is highly unlikely that the ROC will want to openly publicize this relationship. Therefore, in order to analyze the overt nature of this marriage of convenience and willful omissions from both sides, we focus on the ideological connections between Sorok Sorokov and the ROC to illustrate the nature of this dynamic. As Kormukhin says, "Our activities as traditionalists irritate many."⁶⁰ We argue that this form of traditionalism aligns with Kirill's views on Holy Tradition and is anything but irritating to him. We conclude that: (1) Sorok Sorokov does indeed function as a radical extension of Patriarch Kirill's views on Holy Tradition, and (2) that Sorok Sorokov operates as an illiberal service provider for the ROC in social contexts that Patriarch Kirill cannot directly address, such as war, sports, or radical nationalist politics.

Drawing upon Stoeckl's constructivist method, our approach is focused on the ROC's role as a "norm entrepreneur."⁶¹ As a norm entrepreneur, the ROC constructs a cognitive frame specifically in opposition to rival (in this case liberal) frames. The ROC, by calling to attention issues that hitherto have not been named, imported, and dramatized, attempts to shift public perception towards accepting other norms—namely, illiberal ones. We derive these issues from qualitative analysis of Patriarch Kirill's writings. Since 1971, Patriarch Kirill has reportedly written 66 books and countless articles on Russian Orthodoxy and society.⁶² While his writing often engages period-specific issues, for example Soviet-ROC relations, there are universal issues that are found across the whole collection. The Patriarchate published a collection of Patriarch Kirill's writings that highlights these universal issues titled

55 Radio Svoboda, "Dvizhenie 'Sorok sorokov' potrebovali proverit' na dostovernost'," December 7, 2021, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/dvizhenie-sorok-sorokov-potrebovali-proveritj-na-dostovernosti/31597612.html>.

56 Shapovalov, "Unholy Alliance."

57 Dmitriy Volchek, "Gvardeitsy RPTs," Radio Svoboda (blog), September 29, 2017, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28762569.html>.

58 Radio Svoboda, "Dvizhenie 'Sorok sorokov' potrebovali proverit' na dostovernost'."

59 LIFE, "Mashinu s Glavoi 'Soroka Sorokov' obstreliali v Donbasse," September 18, 2022, <https://life.ru/p/1524680>.

60 Valentina Rodionova, "Lider dvizheniya 'Sorok sorokov' otvetil na obvineniia v ekstremizme," Ridus (blog), December 3, 2021, <https://www.ridus.ru/lider-dvizheniya-sorok-sorokov-otvetil-na-obvineniya-v-ekstremizme-367841.html>.

61 Kristina Stoeckl, "The Russian Orthodox Church as Moral Norm Entrepreneur," *Religion, State and Society* 44, no. 2 (April 2016): 132–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2016.1194010>.

62 Biografiia Sviateishego Patriarkha Moskovskogo i vseia Rusi Kirilla, "Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill—avtor sleduiushchikh knig," n.d., <https://patriarch.patriarchia.ru/knigi/>.

Svoboda i odgovornost': v poiskah harmonii," *Prava cheloveka i dostoinstvo lichnosti*, ("Freedom and Responsibility: A Search for Harmony"—*Human Rights and Personal Dignity*). Following this collection, we propose the following analytical categories that mirror these universal issues:

TABLE 1. Socio-Political Issues Described across Patriarch Kirill's Works

Category	General description
Traditional religion in opposition to modern religion	The influence of modern social issues on theology
Russian ideology vs. Western liberal ideology	The individual in relation to societal hierarchies, through the framework of positive (freedom to) and negative (freedom from) freedoms
Secularization and tradition	The interaction between religious and secular institutions
Protestant and Orthodox religious beliefs	The features of religion that delineate Protestant, Western-backed religious beliefs from Eastern Orthodox Christian ones
Material and/or spiritual welfare	The relationship between one's own worldly objects and religious values
Civilizational models	The origins and embodiment of the foundational values of a whole society
Political identity	The intersection and magnitude of the relationship of one's identity to larger socio-political groups, institutions, or civilizations
Hierarchy of values	The hierarchical ordering of moral and social values within a social group
Economic inequality	The nature of inequality in material welfare

The ROC under Kirill has also made a move to publish its works and comments on these universal issues through the internet. In 1997, Patriarch Alexy II blessed the World Wide Web and information technology as a new possibility for Orthodox missionary work, but it was not until 2005 that the Press Service of the Moscow Patriarchate launched its official website, patriarchia.ru. On March 21, 2009, only two months after Kirill was elevated to patriarch, Kirill and the Holy Synod formed the Synodal Information Department (SID) under Vladimir Legoyda. Legoyda was also entrusted with the patriarchia.ru domain as a means to SID's pursuit of its larger plan to "form a unified information policy of the ROC, coordinate the work of diocese and synodal information units, and interact with Orthodox and secular media."⁶³ With dioceses, deaneries, and parishes already moving to deliver

63 "ZhURNALY zasedaniia Sviashhennogo Sinoda Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi ot 31 marta 2009 goda," Moscow: Russian Orthodox Church, March 31, 2009, <https://patriarch.patriarchia.ru/informatsionnaya-rabota/>.

information digitally through their own, independent websites, Kirill sought to use this department to align these groups under the ROC's hierarchical structure and ideology. Prikhod, the website builder designed by Legoyda for the SID in 2009, states that only "official" Orthodox entities could create websites, and only after they were approved by an editorial board would they be published and added to the ROC's "global map of Orthodox Churches" project: "It's easier together. It is easier to move forward, help each other, develop, learn and do it well, with an understanding of the matter. The Orthodox Internet should be presented at a decent and a serious level."⁶⁴

Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin further explains this position, stating that anonymous actors use the internet and their anonymity to influence families away from original, Church-oriented norms without repercussion. The internet can have "a huge impact on the family, sometimes posing as a threat to [the family's] safety."⁶⁵ Thus, the ROC seeks to present itself and its digital platforms as a unified Orthodox Internet sphere in order to combat encroaching Western values that target Orthodox norms and structures—Western values denoted as homosexuality, freedom of the individual from any form of collective, euthanasia, abortion, etc.

In order to acquire texts and content to be used as primary-source material for analysis, we therefore scraped two sections from patriarchia.ru, namely the sections titled "Church and Society" and "Church and State," from October 2004 through July 2021. The content of these two sections is similar to Patriarch Kirill's writings, in that they highlight contemporary (2009–2021) local and global socio-political issues. Their contents are also reactionary in that they describe how socio-political issues should be interpreted from an *illiberal Orthodox* perspective.

For example, a month after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, patriarchia.ru put out a transcribed lecture delivered by the first deputy chairman of the Synodal Department for Church Relations with Society and the Media, Aleksandr Shchipkov, which was presented at the all-Russian scientific and theological conference titled "The Bishop in the Life of the Church: Theology, History, Law." In his words, "Patriarch Kirill often speaks out on the most contested and acute problems, whether it is international conflicts, a pandemic or digitalization." In this piece, Shchipkov labels the war as a "metaphysical conflict" and exculpates Russia as the aggressor, noting that the West's "declaration" of war was meant to combat the growing idea of "Russian" as a critical component of Patriarch Kirill's view of Holy Tradition.⁶⁶

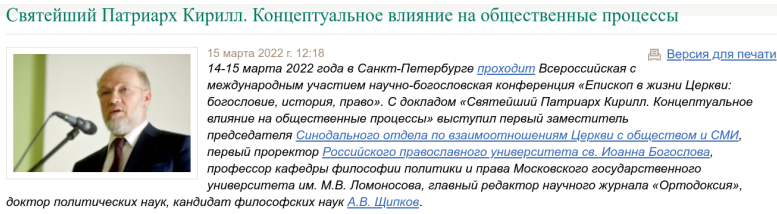
This piece is an illustrative sample of rhetorical deployment of the ROC's ideology under Patriarch Kirill. We captured this example alongside 37,444 other posts appearing on the patriarchia.ru website that showcase the unfiltered, anti-Western and anti-liberal ideology of the ROC.

64 Prikhod, "O PROEKTE," n.d., <http://prihod.ru/o-proekte/>.

65 Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Predsedatel' Izdatel'skogo Soveta Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi prinial uchastie v rabote kruglogo stola, posviashchennogo vlianiiu internet-prostranstva na zdorov'e sem'i," blog, July 2018, <http://eparhia.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5235509.html>.

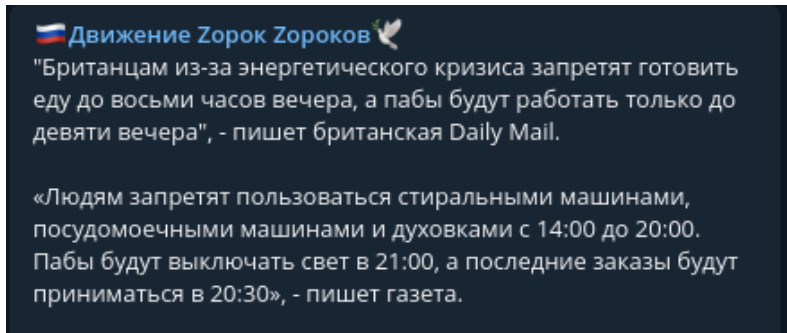
66 Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Patriarkh Kirill neredko vyskazyvaetsia po samym diskussionnym i ostrym problemam. Bud' to mezhdunarodnye konflikty pandemiia ili tsifrovizatsiia," and "Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill. Kontseptual'noe vliianie na obshchestvennye protsessy," March 15, 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5908596.html>. Note that the original source is ambiguous as to what it is referring to as "Russian." Note also that no NATO member state has actually declared war on Russia.

FIGURE 1. Illustrative sample of news from the patriarchia.ru website



Sorok Sorokov’s digital discourse is similar to the ROC’s; however, its messaging is primarily done over the Telegram platform. Telegram functions similarly to Twitter: Sorok Sorokov sends its messages as “broadcasts,” or public-facing messages presented in a timeline similar to an RSS feed. The Sorok Sorokov Telegram channel (@sorok4orussia) was created on October 13, 2017 and has been steadily growing since. At the time of writing, it has reached 63,500 subscribers with a monthly growth of 3%–5%. Compared to the rest of Russian Telegram, Sorok Sorokov does not come close to being on the top 100 most subscribed list (#100 cuts off at 652,273); however, the channel is still quite active. It posts as many as 30 broadcasts a day, and each post averages 32,000 views after one week. The Sorok Sorokov channel also has a sizable outreach within Telegram as it has been cited 43,388 times by other Telegram channels, from smaller subscriber bases to the top channels in Russia. Sorok Sorokov’s broadcasts depict third-party news pieces with added commentary through which they often depict anti-Western, anti-liberal socio-political worldviews accompanied by calls to action and thereby work as “digital vigilantes.”⁶⁷ A recent illustrative example is contained in a broadcast sent on September 3, 2022:

FIGURE 2. An illustrative example of a Sorok Sorokov Telegram broadcast



In this post, Sorok Sorokov reacts to a *Daily Mail* article⁶⁸ predicting upcoming power regulations in the UK following the Russian cut-off of oil and gas to Europe.

67 Galina V. Lukyanova, Denis S. Martyanov, and Anna V. Volkova, “Value Determinants of Digital Vigilante’s [sic] Communication Strategies,” in 2022 *Communication Strategies in Digital Society Seminar* (ComSDS), 224–227 (Saint Petersburg, Russia: Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1109/ComSDS55328.2022.9769100>.

68 Elizabeth Haigh, Mark Duell, and Arthur Parashar, “The Worst Is Yet to Come: Britons Are Told to Expect Double Digit Inflation until NEXT Winter after Ofgem’s Energy Price Cap Hike as UK Faces the Biggest Cost of Living Squeeze since the 1950s,” *Daily Mail*, August 26, 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11150389/The-worst-come-Britons-told-expect-double-digit-inflation-winter.html>.

Sorok Sorokov comments that these potential regulations are not the UK reacting to the war in Ukraine, but rather one step towards winning the battle between World Orders. For Sorok Sorokov, the West is attempting to win this metaphysical war by instilling “digital fascism” and creating “electronic concentration camps” against those with Russian ideologies.⁶⁹ Other posts by Sorok Sorokov give greater detail on this metaphysical war. Russians with traditional values as their World Order⁷⁰ are facing the “New World Order” of the West—the LGBT 4th Reich,⁷¹ globalists,⁷² transhumanists,⁷³ feminists,⁷⁴ Marxists,⁷⁵ Leninists,⁷⁶ etc.—“who, since the 19th century, destroyed the institution of a traditional, large family,⁷⁷ as the foundations of national states.” Sorok Sorokov’s Telegram posts often follow with final lines promoting a call to action. In one such instance, Sorok Sorokov promotes expansion beyond the Donbas region of Ukraine and ends the post as follows: “It’s time to call things by their proper names. Our investigators have collected a lot of evidence of this terrorist activity of [the Nazi Ukrainian State, NUS] and the structural units of this NUS, such as ‘Azov’ and ‘Right Sector’ in different states, including in the United States, are recognized as criminal or terrorist. Only under such circumstances will we begin to conduct an ideologically correct Special Operation.”⁷⁸ We collected a wide range of messaging from Sorok Sorokov, with a total of 11,719 such broadcasts.

With the two corpora (37,444 from patriarchia.ru and 11,719 from Sorok Sorokov’s Telegram channel, respectively), we then devised a means to select the most salient documents. We collected 200 corresponding religious and social terms from Runet (the Russian-language community on the internet) word embeddings to query the corpora. Word embeddings are the representations of words that are learned from surrounding contexts. For each word in a corpus, the resulting embeddings are represented as mathematical vectors in relation to the rest of the words in the corpus. We chose GeoWAC⁷⁹ word embeddings for this case due to multiple reasons. These include the size of the corpus, containing 2.1 billion words built on Runet discourse, as well as its ability “to correct implicit geographic and demographic biases. ... The resulting corpora explicitly match the ground-truth geographic distribution of each language, thus equally representing language users from around the world.”⁸⁰

Word embeddings are crucial to avoid overfitting between the two corpora. If we only choose the most popular words from within the patriarchia.ru posts, we potentially miss broader contexts that arise from the use of context-defined synonyms. An important example would be the use of “tradition.” While the Patriarchate and Sorok Sorokov both use “tradition” to mean a specifically Russian Orthodox foundation

69 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, September 3, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/32957>.

70 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, September 26, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/33533>.

71 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, September 26, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/33533>.

72 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, September 26, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/33533>.

73 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, September 26, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/33533>.

74 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 6, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16841>. Feminists are sometimes also referred to derogatorily as “me-too-ists.”

75 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 6, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16841>.

76 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 6, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16841>.

77 This is sometimes referred to as the “great reset” by Sorok Sorokov.

78 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, September 3, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/32958>.

79 Jonathan Dunn and Benjamin Adams, “Geographically-Balanced Gigaword Corpora for 50 Language Varieties,” *Proceedings of the 12th Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC 2020)* (Christchurch, New Zealand: University of Canterbury, 2020), 2528–36, <https://aclanthology.org/2020.lrec-1.308.pdf>.

80 Dunn and Adams, “Geographically-Balanced Gigaword Corpora,” 2528.

for societal norms, the use of “original” shows different stances towards origins and demographic demarcations in tradition. The ROC’s usage of “original” is used to denote a reinstating of ethnic and cultural origins in the style of Gumilevian ethnogenesis.⁸¹ One such example discusses Cossack “originality.”⁸² However, Sorok Sorokov’s usage of “original”⁸³ discusses the origins of a strong, national, Russian ideal, original in regard to previous iterations of a strong Russia. Our use of word embeddings to query our corpora not only links categorical terms between the corpora, but it also links the contexts of said terms, giving way to a more salient comparison.

We also query our corpora with the top 100 most frequent words from each corpus, which allows us to avoid overfitting on the categories. While we denoted that only using words from the corpora would lead to overfitting, there is also a possibility of overfitting by grouping documents only on our category-defined word embeddings. Due to the fact that we defined the initial words from our analytical categories, we may be missing the degree to which these documents actually talk across said categories. Thus, by using word frequencies we address (and nullify) this two-tailed hypothesis. By using word frequencies, we elevate the number of matches because we have more possible query matches. If we have a large number of matches between the corpora from word frequencies, but the ideology is more tangential to our categories, that could imply that Sorok Sorokov is either co-opting other illiberal groups or it is defining its own version of illiberalism. If the increase in matches corresponds to an increase in correlation across categories, that implies that Sorok Sorokov is a forefront force, or the *praetorian guard*, of the ROC. Likewise, should the comparison across categories drastically differ with a large number of matches, it would imply that the future of the ROC’s illiberal ideology could fracture along these differences, or worse, harden to match that of Sorok Sorokov.

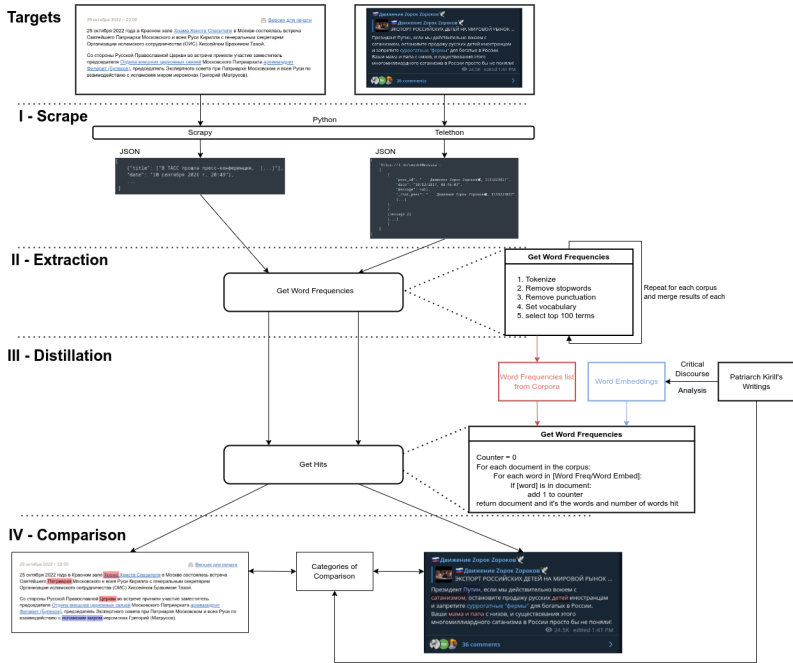
Our matching algorithm is a method of calculating keyword frequencies. Given our list of frequencies and word embeddings, we iterate over the corpora and determine if any of these terms are found within the document. We then return the document alongside how many and which specific terms were found. After iteration, we bin the top 20 documents from each corpus with the most hits and qualitatively analyze their contents. The resulting distilled corpus totals 120 documents. One drawback of this methodology is that the longer the original document is, the more likely it is to discuss the keyword and thus get a “hit.” However, we avoid this drawback because shorter documents, even if they are ideologically dense and thus would not result in as many hits, are callbacks to longer documents within the corpora that contain detailed descriptions of the ideology being espoused. Likewise, we presume that not normalizing document length will also allow us to analyze the broader contexts as in the example of the use of “tradition.” Aside from the content discourse analysis stage, we find that this method allows a more accurate analysis and comparison between the ROC’s and Sorok Sorokov’s ideological manifestations within the texts. Our methodology can be visualized in Figure 3 (below):

81 By “Gumilevian,” we mean to relate the Patriarch’s ideas of “origin” in spirituality of a people to be sui generis and a biological feature of the human organism. See Mark Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique: Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501703393>.

82 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “V Sevastopole zavershilsia II Evraziiskii forum ‘Kazach’e edinstvo,’” June 28, 2017, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4943104.html>.

83 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from ✕ ○ Posledniy Russkii], Telegram broadcast, October 31, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/34743>.

FIGURE 3. Methodology summary and research stages visualization



Results and Discussion

In order to demonstrate this dynamic, we first analyze the structural similarities and differences between the two outlets, as we acknowledge the fact that each outlet has inherently different messaging functionalities and each outlet caters to different segments of the Russian-speaking audience. These differences include the fact that patriarchia.ru is functioning as a universal information portal for all ROC dioceses across multiple languages, whereas Sorok Sorokov's Telegram channel is a direct line of communication to its followers. Patriarchia.ru's diverse broadcasting contains multiple heterogeneous sections, ranging from the repository of doctrinal documents to its "Church and state" or "Church and society" news provisions. In contrast, Sorok Sorokov's Telegram is a singular channel for interaction that combines news, commentary, and content forwarded from other Russian media platforms, be they Telegram, Vkontakte, etc. In terms of functionality, both domains perform their own agenda-setting, issue selection, and framing and saliency; however, their approaches towards the application specifics differ.

These differences affect the length and form of messaging in these domains, as the posts on Telegram tend to be much shorter than a typical news piece on patriarchia.ru. Our method takes into account these structural differences and we find that these differences of form do not impact the functionality or the aims of either outlet. Both information outlets aim to distill socio-political news and events into packets of digestible information as filtered through their respective ideological lenses. For

example, in Figures 2 and 3 above, each of the pieces describes only the most salient informational features from a broader event.

Yet these outlets' messaging style and tone differ substantially. Patriarchia.ru's style is "accepting" and "open" in a sense that it broadcasts an Orthodox ideal laden with universal norms. At face value, this universal ideal appears passive. In the Church's outreach to minority groups, for example, the ROC will often appeal to a minority group's own set of values rather than force Traditional Orthodox ones. The ROC's style avoids antagonizing groups that it believes it can bring under its aegis of socio-political concerns, or those it aligns with (such as *Russkii mir*⁸⁴). In contrast, Sorok Sorokov's Telegram channel appears to be more active and aggressive. Possibly due to the nature of Telegram broadcast channels being "joinable," Sorok Sorokov's style presupposes that its readership in its majority represents individuals who espouse pronounced, traditionalist, Russian Orthodox worldviews. The commenters also address their viewers directly, often with calls to action.

While both view the degeneration of Orthodox values as corresponding to a present state of apocalypse, the Patriarchate is proactive about preventing further breakdown.⁸⁵ At the same time, Sorok Sorokov believes that more extreme preventive measures must be adopted.⁸⁶ However, in spite of these differences, Sorok Sorokov's alignment with the ROC's worldview is quite salient. The broadcasts by Sorok Sorokov sometimes involve direct quotations from Patriarch Kirill's addresses and often direct quotes from published news articles found on patriarchia.ru. While the assumed readerships contain differences, and while the content is stylistically different, Sorok Sorokov often rehashes the ideology of the ROC and shapes the presentation of the ROC's worldview for its more direct audience.

When comparing the content captured and collected from both domains, we find that the majority of the data, across our analytical categories, exhibits significant overlaps in terms of manifested political ideation. The categories we introduced, and our qualitative analysis of the socio-political worldviews as exhibited by the two domains across said categories, are described in the following section.

Traditional Religions and Modern Religions

Both patriarchia.ru and Sorok Sorokov denote traditional theology as inherent to the foundation of the moral norms of healthy "traditional" societies. However, contact with or appeasement towards loaded policy issues, such as gender, individual rights and freedoms, or globalization, inevitably leads to a denigration of traditional religion and a direct subversion of key social pillars. The denigration and erosion of these pillars also leads to extreme social polarization, division, and rupture. The ROC's definition of Holy Tradition as stated in the introduction initially contradicts

84 "According to the statements of its numerous supporters, the 'Russkii Mir' is a concept defining the alleged premises concerning the cultural and, consequently, political unity of the post-Soviet space. What is important to bear in mind is that this community sees itself as separate and different from the West." See Michał Wawrzonek, "The Concept of 'Russkii Mir,'" *Dynamics and Policies of Prejudice from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (2018), 289, ISBN: 978-1-5275-0862-0 .

85 Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Mitropolit Volokolamskii Ilarion: My budem prodolzhat' napominat' vsemu miru o khristianskom nasledii, kotoroe seichas podvergaetsia poruganiuu," September 17, 2020, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5692387.html>.

86 Sorok Sorokov, forwarded from [ru NPKRossii - Dokumentalist Chupakhin], Telegram broadcast, November 15, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/35208>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, October 17, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/34291>.

this no-contact policy;⁸⁷ however, the ROC envisions the Church as the ultimate keeper of tradition and thus are decoding contemporary issues in a proper manner.

A good illustration of this dynamic within the two corpora is their understanding of radical Islamic terrorism. This is visible in the patriarchia.ru's depiction of radical Islam as being both a product of, and a tool of, Western political leaders. "Journalists in the West turn a blind eye to: in all countries of the Middle East where political regimes change Radical Islamists come to power with the help of Western powers who aim at the complete eradication of Christianity in the region."⁸⁸ In the ROC's view, modern religions,⁸⁹ denoted as radicalizations away from traditional religions, such as radical Islam, are thus a major threat to national security. Sorok Sorokov also interprets modern religions as a radicalization away from traditional religions. They align with the ROC in terms of radical Islam being a product and tool of Western powers to remove Christianity. While the argument may seem contradictory on its face, the comparison being made is only one part of a larger conspiratorial narrative. Both the ROC and Sorok Sorokov use rhetorical victimization in an attempt to turn identification into radicalization. The issues of the world must: (1) be connected to a larger cabal of anti-traditional elites, and (2) these must be in furtherance of the goal, either out of fear or malice, to remove traditional religions from the world. This cabal must be creating a deteriorated version of a traditional religion to destroy Christianity on multiple levels. On one level, it undermines the traditional religion of Islam. On another, it is being used to directly eliminate Christianity.

In another example, Sorok Sorokov uses the refugee crisis in Europe as an example of Western elites using radical Islam to put Christians "under lock and key."⁹⁰ Sorok Sorokov also invokes the logic of degeneration when discussing the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. "[The] Patriarchate of Constantinople, which has departed from the Orthodox faith, for anti-Christian globalists," represents the transformation of a once traditional religion into a tool for the West against the Russian Orthodox Church and Russia more broadly.⁹¹ Ukraine's shift towards the West is a threat to national security because, as Sorok Sorokov notes, this type of shift undermines traditional Orthodox dogma,⁹² which will result in the radicalization of its people.⁹³

87 Russian Orthodox Church Department for External Church Relations, "Basis of the Social Concept," p. 13.

88 Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Predsedatel' OVTsS prinal delegatsiiu nemetskikh zhurnalistov," July 23, 2013, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3117207.html>.

89 "Modern religions," as used in this article, refer to Patriarch Kirill's articulation of this term. For Kirill, these are any religions that have turned away from or deviated from their authentic archetypes, regardless of agency. The term "modern" was specifically chosen because of Patriarch Kirill's articulation of these deviations often resulting from modernity and its moral corruption. For example, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is a "modern religion" in Kirill's terms, because it has broken from the Russian Orthodox Church due to its political alignment with the West. As another example, radical Islam is considered a "modern religion" because it has deviated from the fundamental tenets of traditional Islam as a reaction to the moral decay of the West. It should be noted that the Russian Orthodox Church is not a "modern religion" because, while it is reactionary towards the West in our understanding, it sees itself as a keeper and defender of the true tradition and is therefore not reactionary, but continuous.

90 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from GOLOVANOV], Telegram broadcast, November 1, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/13902>.

91 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Pravoslavnoe Soprotivlenie Velikoy, Maloy i Beloy Rusi], Telegram broadcast, July 6, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/10830>.

92 In this case, Sorok Sorokov references specific heresies against Orthodox dogma in relation to marriage. However, it should be noted that the "illegal" granting of the *tomos* (decree of autocephalacy, or national church denominational autonomy within Eastern Orthodox Christianity) to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2019 and the subsequent messaging by Patriarch Kirill denotes the OCU as heretical regardless of direct examples.

93 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, April 25, 2019, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/3278>.

Russian and Western Liberal Ideology

Both domains are preoccupied with the issues of the inherent tension between the position of an individual in relation to a societal milieu. Both corpora focus mainly on issues related to positive and negative freedoms, or “freedom to” and “freedom from,” respectively. This preoccupation is manifested through Sorok Sorokov’s frequent calls to action that are radical outgrowths of the more passive messaging tone of patriarchia.ru.

Illustrative examples of this dynamic could be found in Sorok Sorokov’s appeal to individual ethics in decisions to get vaccinated against covid-19. The ethical appeals concern not the ethics of the singular individual, but rather the individual’s position within the framework of a larger social collective—in this sense, the Russian Orthodox collective.⁹⁴ Patriarchia.ru similarly depicts the issue of individual freedoms in its description of illicit drug use and HIV: “the use of drugs is contrary to the ‘calling to life,’ from a moral point of view, it is ‘a refusal to think, desire, and act as a free person.’”⁹⁵ A “free person” in this context has two meanings: (1) the first is that illicit drug use traps the user in a cycle of addiction in which he or she becomes unable to act at all; (2) the second is that individuals who use illicit drugs are already individualistic in the negative sense of freedom (freedom from ...) and must then be cared for in a collective sense—specifically in the care of the church and the family. Western means of combatting their addiction—replacement drug therapy and individual care and counseling—merely lead an individual back to illicit drug use. Both patriarchia.ru and Sorok Sorokov regard this Russian Orthodox collective (similar in thought to *Russkii mir*) as being afforded the freedom to draft and affirm a multipolar world order in direct opposition to globalization and the “freedom from.” In this formulation, patriarchia.ru again holds to a more passive messaging strategy, while Sorok Sorokov invokes a call to action to defend the homeland against encroaching globalist values.⁹⁶

Secularization and Tradition

As above, both information outlets intensively focus on the impact of modern ideals; however, they also focus on how the networks through which these ideals move. In the case of institutions (namely schools, but also including political institutions) both patriarchia.ru and Sorok Sorokov note that these institutions themselves do not per se corrupt an Orthodox ideal, but rather that they are dangerous due to their possibility of being bundled together with secular ideals. Likewise, these institutions can be considered as soft targets for secular actors to indoctrinate children, the core of the family unit.⁹⁷ It is particularly pronounced in the Patriarchate’s concerns about the secular education young people receive in the course of their schooling that leaves them “ignorant” of the great Russian traditions in art, literature, and culture and pushes them towards an “empty” consumer culture, and a popular culture of “the lowest quality” that has highly destructive potential.⁹⁸ Secularized institutions are corrupted in the eyes of the ROC, and both the ROC and Sorok Sorokov call

94 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, June 17, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/18936>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, June 17th, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/18918>.

95 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “V Otdele vneshnikh tserkovnykh sviazei proshla vstrecha, posviashchennaia uchastiiu Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v profilaktike i bor’be s VICH/SPIDom,” February 11, 2019, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5371475.html>.

96 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, February 7, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16325>.

97 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, May 20, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/30084>.

98 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill vozglavil zasedanie Patriarshego soвета po kul’ture,” February 20, 2020, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5594607.html>.

attention to the dangers of engrained ideals within them. In line with the ROC, Sorok Sorokov admonishes those in power rather than the institutions themselves. Schools with Orthodox teachings are the “traditional” form of education, and these are being “voluntarily and forcibly ... destroyed” through digitization.⁹⁹ These corrupted, secular institutions then baptize children into the rites and “faith” of the West, destroying countries from within.¹⁰⁰

Protestantism vs. Eastern Orthodox Christianity

Between Sorok Sorokov and the Patriarchate, only the Patriarchate explicitly brings to the forefront any differences between Protestantism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity (such as the power or function of the head of a church). This is primarily due to the difference in the function of the messaging and the perceived audiences. Furthermore, while the ROC recognizes such differences, it does not speak to them in overly critical terms, most likely in order to garner an air of authority and to maintain an alliance against secular modernity. Thus, when the ROC does discuss Western Christianity or Islam, it does so in familial terms—all forms of traditional religion, both East and West, are brothers in arms. For Western Christendom, the ROC states that both Eastern and Western versions of Christianity “have the potential for such cooperation which can bring Christian power to bear on many issues of the concerns of mankind today.”¹⁰¹ For Hanafi Islam,¹⁰² or other Eastern and Orthodox religious groups,¹⁰³ the ROC’s sentiment is the same. Eastern and Orthodox religious communities share a common traditional base that the ROC feels it must form an alliance with in order to defend against encroaching modernism and/or individual liberalism. The ROC’s logic structure for inter-religious alliance-building is as follows: (1) all forms of Christianity share an ancient truth developed by ancient church fathers; (2) modernity, in the present and in history, causes reactions and evolutions in religious thinking; (3) these reactions are distortions that lead to the fracturing of Christianity and traditional religions more broadly.¹⁰⁴

Sorok Sorokov, due to the self-selected nature of its audience, rarely speaks to this distinction. In our distilled dataset, there is only one single mention of Islam. This singular mention is made in a commentary by Sorok Sorokov on the possible reconciliation of the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches. In this instance,

99 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from RIA KATYuShA], Telegram broadcast, November 3, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/34842>.

100 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Yuriy Baranchik], Telegram broadcast, October 30, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/34704>.

101 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill vstretilsia s glavami diplomaticheskikh missii latinoamerikanskikh stran v Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” June 8, 2017, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4929055.html>.

102 Hanafi Islam differs in the ROC worldview from other forms because “radical” Islam, according to the ROC, is born from struggles with modernity and not developed from “tradition.” Thus the ROC speaks to Hanafi Islam: “we should distinguish between traditional Islam and so-called radical Islamism or, more precisely, terrorism under Islamic slogans, which the leaders of traditional Islam disavow.” Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Predsedatel’ OVTsS prinal delegatsiiu nemetskikh zhurnalistov,” July 23, 2013, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3117207.html>.

103 Explicitly stated as (Hanafi) Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism in this source. Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Predsedatel’ Otdela vneshnikh tserkovnykh sviazei prinal uchastie v otkrytii VI Vsemirnogo kongressa rossiiskikh sootchestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom,” October 31, 2018, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5294085.html>.

104 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Mitropolit Kirill: Torzhestvo po sluchaiu 1020-letia Kievskoi Rusi yavili torzhestvo Pravoslavia,” June 30, 2008, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/443064.html>. It should also be noted that religious groups in general will always present themselves as the holders of the correct church or other ecclesial tradition. What is most important here is how the ROC is positioning itself as a holder of truth that can shape geopolitics from an anti-Western perspective.

Sorok Sorokov points to the fallibility of Islamic scripture in regard to the institution of marriage.

Even though Sorok Sorokov makes the same distinctions that the ROC does, Sorok Sorokov does not make these a hallmark of its messaging. However, its position on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church implies a close following of the ROC's calls for co-belligerency. Sorok Sorokov's comments that traditional religions, such as the ancient Ukrainian Orthodox Church (under the Moscow Patriarchate), can be corrupted away from traditional values, imply that traditional religions should form a defensive alliance. Based on this position, they can disregard their doctrinal differences with Islam—so long as Islam's underlying values are interpreted in a traditional sense, they can be tolerated.

Material Welfare and Spiritual Welfare

The Patriarchate divides any individual's well-being into two categories: material and spiritual. Similarly to the distinction between heaven and its theological arrangement on Earth in the form of the church, the church delineates material welfare as a means of supporting and achieving such an arrangement in the welfare of an individual. Material welfare is anything that can be directly measured monetarily or implicitly understood, such as social status. However, it must be used to orient oneself towards the *ecclesia* (that is, the church or community of believers). When one only holds onto one's material possessions, rather than using or spending them to further the *ecclesia* one acts as a societal black hole, giving nothing in return. Such individuals threaten the *ecclesia* and are a potential source of conflict.¹⁰⁵ In Patriarch Kirill's view, this distinction falls on how an individual understands free will.¹⁰⁶ Free will allows man to act with disposition (Greek: *proairesis*) and self-determination (*autexousion*); disposition determines the rewards and punishment an individual incurs from how they use self-determination.¹⁰⁷ In other words, material wealth and consumerism are indicative of one's abuse of self-determination and they are thus detrimental to society. However, self-determination is neither "heroic" nor "moral" and must be accompanied with the correct disposition towards materiality.

Sorok Sorokov, similar to the ROC, considers materialist culture as corrosive to traditional religious values and secondary to spiritual welfare. However, unlike the ROC, Sorok Sorokov does not discuss material and spiritual welfare as malleable or navigable. Sorok Sorokov, rather, considers material welfare as the lesser of the two, but recognizes that material welfare and spiritual welfare are both means to protect "human life," "human rights," and the "moral and ethical norms" of Russians globally.¹⁰⁸ Sorok Sorokov, by not delineating the two, implies that objects of Russian culture are in and of themselves inherently spiritually Russian. This marks Sorok Sorokov as more overtly political than the ROC, as the former indicates a tolerance towards Russian-origin material culture and a disdain for "external cultural and information expansion."¹⁰⁹

105 Ofitsial'nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, "Predstoiatel' Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi prinial uchastie v zasedanii Prezidiuma Mezhreligioznogo soveta SNG," November 28, 2011, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1787386.html>.

106 Kirill and Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov', "Svoboda i otvetstvennost'," p. 71.

107 Kirill and Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov', "Svoboda i otvetstvennost'," pg. 42.

108 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 13, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16972>.

109 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 13, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16972>.

This difference highlights how Sorok Sorokov acts beyond the purview of the Church and is able to overstep theological constraints, unlike the ROC. Sorok Sorokov is able to position itself as protector of *Russkii mir* against external material and spiritual threats because it is not bound by *The Basis of the Social Concept* like the ROC is. The ROC is specifically bound by the principle of *symphonia*, which “is essentially co-operation, mutual support and mutual responsibility without [the church or state] side intruding into the exclusive domain of the other.”¹¹⁰ Because Sorok Sorokov is not officially an arm of the ROC, it can defend against the importation of Western materialist culture. In contrast, while the ROC does dictate its positions on the import of culture, cultural material, and technology, it generally avoids direct confrontation in legal or political disputes concerning these matters.¹¹¹ Thus, we witness a partial overlap between the ROC and Sorok Sorokov’s stance towards material and spiritual welfare, but Sorok Sorokov provides an actionable nuance.

Civilizational Models

The ROC loosely defines a civilization as a common group of people who share a common meaning of being. For the ROC, the meaning of being can be found in the “inexhaustible source of Orthodox faith” inherent to Russia since it is the world’s largest defender of Orthodox Christian faith.¹¹² Modern civilization stands in opposition to the Russian, Orthodox civilizational model. Modern civilization, as a godless one, attempts to find meaning in the physical world—advancing technologically, economically, and politically by cannibalizing the collective under the premise of Western individualism. Modern civilization thus also disrupts the borders between and within social groups—borders that define moral norms.

One example is the ROC’s description of Ukraine. In 2008, Patriarch Kirill described the relationship as follows: “Russia, Ukraine, Belarus – is Holy Russia. Consciousness of belonging to a single spiritual civilizational system of values is in the blood of all of us. ... We understand the importance of preserving a common civilizational space which is called Holy Russia.”¹¹³ Then, in 2019, Metropolitan Hilarion stated that Europe (and by this point, Ukraine as it was shifting towards the West) had rejected the moral foundations of European civilization—namely, Christianity—leading to an unstable development: “it is identity that sets the system of value coordinates of a particular social community. However, the main problem of modern European civilization is that it has ceased to be European. This happened as a result of the voluntary rejection by the political leadership of the European Union from the foundations of European identity, the main of which is Christianity.”¹¹⁴

Sorok Sorokov discusses civilization as it is defined in a specifically Russian context, building on the distinctions made by the ROC and showing the radicalization of the ROC’s general ideation. To Sorok Sorokov, Russia is a thousand-year-old civilization born from the Byzantine and Russian Empires. It is a civilization “permeated with

110 The Russian Orthodox Church Department for External Church Relations, “Basis of the Social Concept,” p. 13.

111 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Spor vinodelov i chuvstva veruiushchikh,” February 15, 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5901120.html>.

112 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Sviateishii Patriarkh Aleksii otvetil na voprosy ‘Rossiiskoi gazety,’” June 15, 2005, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/24886.html>.

113 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Mitropolit Kirill: ‘Torzhestvo po sluchaiu 1020-letiiia Kievskoi Rusi yavili torzhestvo Pravoslaviia,’” June 30, 2008, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/443064.html>.

114 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Mitropolit Volokolamskii Ilarion vystupil s dokladom na mezhdunarodnom forume khristianskikh zhurnalistov ‘Khristianstvo v sovremennom mire,’” September 6, 2019, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5496447.html>.

traditional spiritual and moral values, where faith, prayer, and traditions formed a single fabric of the people.¹¹⁵ Based upon Russian Orthodox Church teaching as the foundation for culture, education, economy, and law, Sorok Sorokov believes this would likewise rid Russia of its enemies, such as the Jews or black Russians,¹¹⁶ if it were to be reinstated as the basis of Russia's current national identity.¹¹⁷ In contrast, Western civilization is an attempt to build on the ruins of traditional civilizations, such as the ruins of Christian Europe: "[Western civilization's] characteristic features will be humanism, unity with nature, convergence of science and [Eastern] mysticism."¹¹⁸ The resulting "new civilization" will be a Frankenstein's monster of Western enlightenment thinking, and not be based on Christianity at all.¹¹⁹ Western civilizational models must be fought against because they lead "black Russians"¹²⁰ (and other minorities) into false ideologies and false spiritualities. Sorok Sorokov claims that this anti-Western framework was the basis for Russia's involvement in the Great Patriotic War (as the Second World War is known in Russia) and this is a continuation of this doctrine today.¹²¹

The ROC and Sorok Sorokov are well aligned at this ideological juncture—both feel as though they are defending the *Russkii mir* civilizational model. However, Sorok Sorokov advocates for physical "self-defense"¹²² in this ideological battle—a battle emphasized by the invasion of Ukraine,¹²³ but which had started 10 years ago, when Sorok Sorokov was chasing LGBT groups in Moscow.¹²⁴

Political Identity

Sorok Sorokov suggests that Orthodox values are not only a part of Russian identity,¹²⁵ but that they function as a "soft power" instrument swaying those in the secular West

115 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 8, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16866>.

116 While Sorok Sorokov rarely mentions "Jews," they often allude to them in anti-Semitic, conspiratorial terms. Sorok Sorokov will include anti-Semitic dog whistles such as "George Soros" and "cabal" in their descriptions of the enemies of Russia and Russian Orthodoxy. It should be noted, however, that Russian Orthodox dogma does not align with this anti-Semitic narrative. The use of "black Russians" as enemies is implied in Sorok Sorokov's Telegram channel as any non-white, non-Orthodox Russian citizen. Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, January 1, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/15615>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, January 6, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/15744>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, May 31, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/9002>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, December 31, 2020 <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/15490>; Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Poslednij Okop Z], January 26, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/24963>. Sorok Sorokov, [forwarded from Julija Vitjazeva], Telegram broadcast, January 11, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/24637>.

117 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, January 1, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/15615>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, January 6, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/15744>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, May 31, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/9002>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, December 31, 2020 <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/15490>; Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Poslednij Okop Z], January 26, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/24963>.

118 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 26, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/6005>. In this context, they mean Eastern mysticism specifically, but the takeaway is that any resulting synthesis between West and East results in catastrophic mutation.

119 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 26, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/6005>.

120 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Julija Vitjazeva], Telegram broadcast, January 11, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/24637>.

121 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, May 8, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/18074>.

122 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Svyashchennik Aleksandr Lemesenko], Telegram broadcast, November 9, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/35032>.

123 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Neofitsial'nyy Bezsonov "Z"], Telegram broadcast, October 2, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/33755>.

124 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, October 17, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/34287>.

125 Sorok Sorokov, being unrestricted by formal definitions, often employs "Russian" in multiple ways. For the most concise definition of "Russian" and its usage in socio-politics, see: Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, February 9, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/25245>. This is one example of many such invocations. The term has Orthodox roots; however, it is often employed opportunistically in a manner similar to the use of *Russkii mir*.

who would be sympathetic to traditionalist values. “For example, Lauren Witzke ... former senate candidate from Delaware. ... ‘I identify myself more with Russia—and Putin’s Christian values—than with Joe Biden.’”¹²⁶ Sorok Sorokov also immediately relates Western political identity features, such as gender and sexual orientation, as inorganic features. They are inorganic because they are instilled through Western liberalism which Sorok Sorokov would claim is functioning as a religious movement. In another similar instance, Ukrainian nationalists are immediately labeled as neopagans partaking in the Western conspiracy to tear Ukraine away from Russia and Orthodoxy.¹²⁷ In contrast, Russian political identities, based on Orthodox principles, are real and actionable identities:

... the time has come not for sofa wars and warriors sitting at the keyboard and sending virtual projectiles at their ideological opponents, but the time has come for the soldiers of Christ, who must prove their commitment to Christ, His New Testament and patristic teachings, that there is a lot about the right cheek.¹²⁸

Political identity is the most prevalent category within our distilled Sorok Sorokov dataset. This corroborates our understanding of Sorok Sorokov as the “left hand” or praetorian guard of the ROC. While the ROC attempts to garner support in the Duma, Sorok Sorokov mobilizes its actionable political identity that is in agreement with the Patriarchate.¹²⁹

In contrast, the ROC seldom addresses political identity directly. Of course, the ROC would also consider all forms of identity to contain religion, be it Western or traditional religion. Yet the ROC has also alluded to the ability of Orthodox principles to act as an instrument of soft power. Kirill, in his position as Metropolitan at the time, “expressed the following opinion that familiarity with these documents will demonstrate the level of contemporary theological thought in the Moscow Patriarchate and cannot fail to be attractive to thinking people.”¹³⁰ When the ROC otherwise speaks to political topics, it does not speak in its own words so much as it repeats the statements by heads of state whom it is aligned with. If the ROC does speak to politics, it does so in lofty terms that are often dated: Orthodoxy, in its “primordial spiritual values” and as “the guardian ... of our people, ... does not depend on political or other preferences and attitudes.”¹³¹ Similarly, despite the fact that the Patriarchate’s comments on the 2022 invasion of Ukraine appear political, they are still firmly grounded in theological terms that are simply not as inflammatory or direct as Sorok Sorokov’s broadcasts and forwarded broadcasts.¹³² It is possible that the ROC has become more overtly political in its messaging since around the time of

¹²⁶ Sorok Sorokov [forward from Mediasol], Telegram broadcast, May 13, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/29808>.

¹²⁷ Sorok Sorokov [forward from politika i analitika], Telegram broadcast, February 4, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/25127>.

¹²⁸ Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from KORMUKhIN [Z]], Telegram broadcast, January 18, 2018, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/1530>.

¹²⁹ Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Dremuchiy okhranitel’ Z], Telegram broadcast, October 8, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/33933>.

¹³⁰ “Mitropolit Kirill: ‘Torzhestvo po sluchayu 1020-letiya Kievskoy Rusi yavili torzhestvo Pravoslaviya.’” *Ofitsial’nyy sayt Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi*, June 30, 2008, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/443064.html>.

¹³¹ *Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi*, “Sviateishii Patriarkh Aleksii otvetil na voprosy ‘Rossiiskoy gazety,’” June 14, 2005, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/24756.html>.

¹³² *Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi*, “Patriarshaia propoved’ v nedeliu 15-yu po piatidesiatnitse posle liturgii v Aleksandro-Nevskom skitu,” September 25, 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5962628.html>.

the 2022 invasion of Ukraine; however, it is unlikely that the principles outlined in *The Social Concept* can be subverted without consequences.

Hierarchy of Values

The “spiritual” and “moral” values as prescribed in Sorok Sorokov’s broadcasts and the ROC’s domain are understandably abstract—neither the ROC nor Sorok Sorokov will delineate exactly what these values are, as they are inherent to their views of Orthodox faith and belief.¹³³ However, it should be noted that the ROC and Sorok Sorokov assign different levels of importance to certain societal strata. To the ROC, the most crucial social strata are youth and children. This group is most vulnerable to social engineering via Western propaganda, either through the internet or other forms of media. “It is necessary to remember that these are the people who will, in the near future, make the most important decisions in the economy, politics, and the social sphere.”¹³⁴ The ROC then puts traditional family values as the second most important category. Traditional family values should be propagated by family members outwards into the community. The ROC sees the family as a potential target for Western ideation and thus the family unit itself as being under pressure from Western ideation as the main cause of Russian demographic decline: “The demographic crisis which has taken over most of Europe is directly related to the destruction of traditional family values which a number of Western powers are engaged in today in the form of their leadership.”¹³⁵

Sorok Sorokov agrees with the ROC that secularized forms of media are detrimental to the family structure.¹³⁶ As a youth “social movement,” it is no surprise that Sorok Sorokov emphasizes the position of the family relative to society.¹³⁷ They describe the family as a function of the Russian *passionarnost*.¹³⁸ This *passionarnost* drives Russians to produce large families with equally passionate family members to continue this trend.¹³⁹ The family is the core of society for Sorok Sorokov. An important point of difference between Sorok Sorokov and the ROC is that Sorok Sorokov’s traditional family unit should be directly involved with structures the Church abstains from participating in, such as politics as outlined in the *Social Concept*. While the ROC implies that societal change will come from the family unit,¹⁴⁰ Sorok Sorokov explicitly defines it as the fulcrum for *other* societal changes:

133 Spiritual and moral values follow a similar use to that of Patriarch Kirill’s use of “Holy Tradition.” While there is canon law governing these values (such as *The Basis of the Social Concept*, 2000), the majority are left vague such that they can be flexibly interpreted. For the ROC, this interpretation leaves open the “left hand of God” space for Sorok Sorokov to inhabit without directly violating a more rigid set of rules. For Sorok Sorokov, they can claim to merely be following the ambiguous teachings of the Church.

134 Oftsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Proekti riada eparkhii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi poluchat podderzhku grantovogo konkursa Prezidenta RF (dopolneno),” June 22, 2020, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5652250.html>.

135 Oftsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Predsedatel’ OVTsS prinial delegatsiiu nemetskih zhurnalistov,” July 23, 2013, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3117207.html>.

136 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 16, 2018, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/1907>.

137 Sorok Sorokov claims to be a youth group for multiple reasons. First, children are the foundation of the family and are thus the main inroad to indoctrination. Secondly, its events and teachings and social groups mainly involve children ages six and up. Young children can be seen tearing down guns and young adults can be seen participating in mixed martial arts and field brawls. However, it should be noted that their social movement, like any other (such as the YMCA), does include adult participation and mentorship.

138 “Passionality,” or *passionarnost*, is considered by Gumilev to be a biological feature of the human organism, which exhibits a fundamental influence on a human’s behavior and attitude. As Gumilev states, “Every ethnos comes into being as a result of a particular eruption of passionarnost.” Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique*, p. 44–56.

139 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, February 9, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/25251>.

140 Oftsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Mezhdunarodnaia diskussia o semeinykh tsnostiakh: chto dal’she?,” September 24, 2014, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3736823.html>.

“we, the parents, must become a catalyst for both legislative and socio-legal processes in society.”¹⁴¹

Economic Inequality

The way the ROC likens economics to being both a tool and an indicator of a civilization’s moral and spiritual health. On the one hand, a declining economy can be the result of modernism and the breakdown of the family unit.¹⁴² On the other hand, it is a means of leveraging the protection of Christians globally,¹⁴³ to level “external” differences in order to push “internal” moral and spiritual matters to the forefront,¹⁴⁴ or to highlight how economic successes are built upon these moral and spiritual foundations.¹⁴⁵ While the ROC’s message is consistent, its application is very externally focused. The ROC is not introspective with regard to its influence on the Russian economy, or rather, when it is, it shifts the blame. Since the economy is external to spirit, any faults in the Russian economy are likewise attributed to external enemies (or internal “fifth columns”). However, when the ROC interacts with the economic sphere, it is doing so with the *correct* Orthodox values.¹⁴⁶ Hence, the delineation is that the economy can be used as a tool in both foreign policy¹⁴⁷ and domestically, building institutions to counter Western projects.¹⁴⁸

Sorok Sorokov, by contrast, mentions economics more often and mainly in domestic and near-abroad contexts. While it follows a similar path to the ROC in terms of an economy’s representation of foundational values, it rarely refers to it as a specific instrument. Likewise, the group differs from the ROC in describing the causes of economic failures. Its members would agree that liberalism and consumer culture denigrates Russian traditional society, but they extend this argument further. The economic woes of Russia are not only the result of external, liberal forces,¹⁴⁹ but the fact that Russia itself still has Marxist economic legacies to grapple with.¹⁵⁰ The mention of Marx by Sorok Sorokov hearkens back to the group’s conspiratorial definition of world orders. To Sorok Sorokov, “Marx-Lenin-Trotsky” is the spiritual

141 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 14, 2018, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/1881>.

142 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “V agentstve ‘Interfaks’ proshla press-konferentsiia po itogam poshcheniia Sviateishim Patriarkhom Kirillom Ukrainskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi,” July 30, 2010, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1234840.html/>.

143 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “V Moskve proshel kruglyi stol, posviashchennyi polozheniiu khristian na Blizhnem Vostoke i v Severnoi Afrike,” November 5, 2013, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3348339.html>.

144 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Predstoiatel’ Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi prinial uchastie v zasedanii Prezidiuma Mezhreligioznogo soveta SNG,” November 28, 2011, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1789047.html>.

145 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “V Sevastopole zavershilsia II Evraziiskii forum ‘Kazach’e edinstvo,’” June 28, 2017, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4943104.html>.

146 We italicize correct to emphasize that Russian Orthodoxy has fractured over its long history and that there are factions such as the liberals that, while Russian Orthodox in name, are not in line with Kirill or the traditionalists and are thus prone to failure economically and/or spiritually. In the example of digital marketplaces and media, while more liberal sectors of society may produce economic success, they are instilling sin and degradation in society. If these sectors are unsuccessful, they are so due to said degradation.

147 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill vstretilsia s glavami diplomateskikh missiy latinoamerikanskikh stran v Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” June 8, 2017, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4929263.html>.

148 Ofitsial’nyi sait Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, “Sviateishii Patriarkh Kirill vozglavil ocherednoe zasedanie nabliudatel’nogo, obshchestvennogo i popechitel’skogo sovetov po izdaniiu ‘Pravoslavnoi entsiklopedii’ i prezentatsiiu alfavitnykh tomov, izdannykh v 2011 godu,” November 12, 2011, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1672085.html>.

149 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, March 8, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16866>.

150 Sorok Sorokov [forwarded from Традиционалист из Третьего Рима], Telegram broadcast, March 6, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/16838>.

inspiration for the “neocons,” “USSR 2.0.,” and “new world order” that uses freedom of the individual as a mask for collective control.¹⁵¹ The neocons are the “most powerful group of satanists who control the world processes,”¹⁵² including economic ones. Noted individuals at the top include the Rockefellers, George W. Bush, the Clintons, Barack Obama, Bill Gates, and, of course, the Soros Foundation.¹⁵³ Their main goals are focused on the protection and promotion of LGBT people, the dehumanizing of humanity, and the reduction of the world’s population from 7.5 billion to 1–1.5 billion.¹⁵⁴ In economic narratives, Sorok Sorokov is regurgitating thinly-veiled invocations of multiple popular conspiracy theories in circulation. These conspiratorial narratives culminate in the argument that the neocons seek to destroy traditional spiritual and moral values by leveraging economic means and thus they are then able to infiltrate the Orthodox Church and near-church structures. In Sorok Sorokov’s view, this “4th LGBT Reich”¹⁵⁵ is in the process of sacrificing Ukraine for this goal.¹⁵⁶

Concluding Remarks

Across our comparative categories, it is evident that Sorok Sorokov’s ideology significantly overlaps with the ROC’s. The group also interprets and repackages the ROC’s worldview and narratives into a specifically radical, illiberal perspective. We find that this intentional focus is not only a function of Sorok Sorokov’s Telegram channel but a complement to the ROC’s more nonconfrontational messaging. As the ROC is working within an interlocutor framework to other traditional religions and the state, Sorok Sorokov is the interpreter and enforcer of this traditional ideology within Russia and the near abroad.

This specific repackaging by Sorok Sorokov is a *win-win situation* for both parties. For the ROC, Sorok Sorokov deflects any backlash aimed at the Church and the group also gives the appearance of grassroots support. Similarly, topics that the Patriarch cannot directly address, such as domestic politics, internal distinctions, and calls to action, are Sorok Sorokov’s domain of expertise. For Sorok Sorokov, it is an opportunity to achieve an elevated status and legitimacy in wider political and social circles compared to other social movements. The group openly flaunts this mentality in its Telegram broadcasts and the media interviews and appearances of their leader, Andrey “Hammer” Khormukhin.¹⁵⁷

As stated previously, this work does not represent an analysis of the direct overt and covert connections between Sorok Sorokov and the ROC. These connections are often omitted in the Patriarch’s public addresses. Rather than naming these groups, Kiril often refers to the general category of “youth groups.” We could hypothesize that these addresses include Sorok Sorokov due to the similarities we have shown above, but we do not draw these direct connections outright. However, we hypothesize that

151 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, April 13, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/28576>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, July 22, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/31799>.

152 Ibid. Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, December 30, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/24340>.

153 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, December 30, 2021, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/24335>. Regarding whom Sorok Sorokov identifies as a “neocon,” one must bear in mind that the majority of the group’s posting seems to be located within a largely conspiratorial discourse that allows for multiple contradictions to exist in parallel.

154 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, July 2, 2020, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/10662>.

155 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, May 29, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/30402>.

156 Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, July 12, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/31532>; Sorok Sorokov, Telegram broadcast, June 15, 2022, <https://t.me/sorok4orussia/30897>.

157 Russian: “Molot.”

scholars of Russian Orthodoxy and radical, far-right groups in Russia could prove such connections with the use of our database. This work primarily argues that there is a connection between the ROC and Sorok Sorokov, and proves that such connections can be validated either through the methods we employed in this work or with others. We propose that further research using named entity recognition over these datasets followed by network analyses could provide insights in this way. If one were to find an additional degree of distance from the @Sorok4orussia Telegram account and map the named entities within these channels, one could create a network map of the key individuals Sorok Sorokov is referencing.

We also point out that, while we have proven the similarities between the worldviews of Sorok Sorokov and the ROC, we have not made a determination as to what degree of influence Sorok Sorokov exerts on the broader social fabric of Russia. This type of analysis could provide answers to questions similar to: “How local is Sorok Sorokov?” The group has gone to Ukraine to “defend” Russian Orthodox churches, and it claims to have thousands of supporters across Ukraine and Russia. We propose that one can mark the actual social pull of Sorok Sorokov by combining the above network analysis with an analysis of its viewership and rebroadcasts in other channels. It is also possible to differentiate the enemies of the movement from its allies—through the application of sentiment mining, for instance. Sorok Sorokov broadcasts often list both enemies and allies; thus, when mapping these entities, it would be pertinent to analyze the sentiment of the trailing commentary.

We also propose further research from a religious studies perspective to illuminate the implications of differences between Sorok Sorokov and the ROC. If the connections to ROC individuals can be proven through the suggested methods above, and given the fact that Sorok Sorokov acts as an enforcer of traditional Orthodoxy even within the Church, it would then be possible that the ROC’s use of Sorok Sorokov will prompt a fracture within the Church. However, the reverse is also possible. If the Patriarch and the ROC lean into the Sorok Sorokov movement, it is possible that the ROC will harden or push for justification of violence in defense of its ideals akin to a justification for “just war.”

Finally, we propose a further quantitative analysis of the interaction between the Sorok Sorokov channel and the patriarchia.ru domain. For one, an analysis of these categories over time series could show the flow of information between these two information providers. While scraping data and performing content discourse analysis, we have noticed that Sorok Sorokov, at the inception of the group’s Telegram channel, was quoting older material from patriarchia.ru. As the group has gained popularity following its defense of the building of a church in Torfyanka Park, we would hypothesize that its hyperlinking to patriarchia.ru content: (1) increases over time, and (2) references newer news pieces from the ROC that are currently being discussed, rather than citing older works from the patriarchate and interpreting them. This could indicate a more overt messaging correlation between the two platforms—that is, the patriarchia.ru website, alongside Sorok Sorokov’s Telegram channel. We also propose further qualitative analysis using word embeddings created from patriarchia.ru in order to map the domain’s worldview onto other Orthodox digital spaces.

Our included database also lends itself to *natural language processing* (NLP) of religious texts. Natural language processing, including the word embeddings we used in this work, is often built on generalized speech categories—in this case, Runet. While this proves to be mostly functional in most cases, there has yet to be an

NLP model constructed and trained *specifically on religious speech*. Such a model, built from our dataset, could prove useful in discerning the degree to which Russian political speech is marked, influenced by, and contains religious undertones.

Appendix

- (1) Scraping patriarchia.ru data:
 - (a) Scraping URLs. This code, when pointed at the patriarchia.ru's news domains, grabs all of the URLs that link to news pieces. ("Church and State" is at this URL: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/news/233/>)

```
import scrapy
class QuotesSpider(scrapy.Spider):
    #spider name
    name = "rocnews"

    #yield URLs for each news page
    def start_requests(self):
        number_of_pages = 19
        for i in range(1, number_of_pages):
            url = 'http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/news/234/page{}.html'.format(i)
            yield scrapy.Request(url=url, callback=self.parse)
            i+=1

    def parse(self, response):
        page = response.url.split("/")[-3]
        news = response.xpath("//*[contains(@class, 'main')]/*[contains(@class, 'title')]").getall()
        news_links = response.xpath("//*[contains(@class, 'main')]/*[(contains(@class, 'news')) and not(contains(@class, 'top'))]/*[contains(@class, 'title')]/a/@href").getall()
        yield{
            'news_list': news_links
        }
```

Example Output of (1a) from a single news webpage:

```
[
  {
    "news_list": [
      "/en/db/text/5830952.html",
      "/en/db/text/5830920.html",
      "/en/db/text/5830190.html",
      "/en/db/text/5830172.html",
      "/en/db/text/5827779.html",
      "/en/db/text/5827775.html",
      "/en/db/text/5826537.html",
      "/en/db/text/5826087.html",
      "/en/db/text/5826094.html",
      "/en/db/text/5824962.html",
      "/en/db/text/5824195.html",
      "/en/db/text/5822892.html",
      "/en/db/text/5822888.html",
      "/en/db/text/5822877.html",
      "/en/db/text/5821064.html"
    ]
  }
]
```

- (b) Scraping data from URLs. Given a JSON file yielded from (1a), this code yields the news title, news text, and data from the contents of the page via relative xpath. The patriarchia.ru site does not have authors for these pieces.

```
import scrapy
import json

class QuotesSpider(scrapy.Spider):
    name = "rocnews_urls"

    def start_requests(self):
        urls_list = []
        # Opening JSON file of URLs and flatten into single list
        with open("test.json") as json_file:
            data = json.load(json_file)
            for i in data:
                urls_list.append(list(i.values()))
        flat_list = []
        # Iterate through the outer list
        for element in urls_list:
            if type(element) is list:
                # If the element is of type list, iterate through the sublist
                for item in element:
                    flat_list.append(item)
            else:
                flat_list.append(element)
        flat_list_2 = []
        for element in flat_list:
            if type(element) is list:
                # If the element is of type list, iterate through the sublist
                for item in element:
                    flat_list_2.append(item)
        print(flat_list_2)

        #for each URL in the flat list, parse contents
        for i in range(0, len(flat_list_2)):
            url = "http://www.patriarchia.ru" + flat_list_2[i]
            yield scrapy.Request(url=url, callback=self.parse)

        #yield (via relative xpath) title, text, and date
        def parse(self, response):
            page = response.url.split("/")[-1]
            title = response.xpath("//*[contains(@class, 'main')]/*[contains(@class, 'section')]/h1/text()").getall()
            news_text = response.xpath("//*[contains(@class, 'main')]/*[contains(@class, 'text')]/text()").getall()
            date = response.xpath("//*[contains(@class, 'date')]/text()").extract_first()
            yield {
                'title': title,
                'news_text': news_text,
                'date': date
            }
    }
```

Example output of (1b):

```
[
  {«title»:
    [«Святейший Патриарх Кирилл: Событие, свидетелями которого мы
    являемся, имеет большое духовное значение»],
    «news_text»:
    [«11 сентября 2021 года в деревне Самолва в Псковской области «, « це-
    ремония открытия мемориального комплекса «Князь Александр Невский с
    дружиной».», «На торжественном мероприятии присутствовали Президент
    Российской Федерации В.В. Путин, Святейший Патриарх Московский и
    всея Руси Кирилл, председатель «, « «, «, помощник Президента, пред-
    седатель Российского военно-исторического общества В.Р. Мединский и
    губернатор Псковской области М.Ю. Ведерников.», ««Событие, свидете-
    лями которого мы являемся, имеет большое духовное значение, потому
    что в центре деяний князя Александра Невского была идея защиты веры»,
    — заявил в ходе церемонии Предстоятель Русской Православной Церкви,
    слова которого приводит «, «.», ««Сегодня мы говорим о стране, народе,
    нашей вере. В этих словах — преемственность от той традиции, которую
    закладывали такие герои, как Александр Невский. Дай Бог, чтобы этот
    дух, внутренняя сила не покидали наш народ, чтобы никакие соблазны не
    поколебали уверенности в патриотических позициях. Александр Невский
    из глубины веков ищет любви к родной земле, к родине и способности
    ограждать православную веру от всяких воздействий, которые в современ-
    ных условиях реализуются не посредством крестовых походов, но другими
    способами. В этом месте хотелось бы сказать: Господи, храни Землю рус-
    скую!» — сказал, в частности, Святейший Патриарх Кирилл.»],
    «date»: “11 сентября 2021 г. 20:57”}
]
```

(2) Scraping Sorok Sorokov Telegram

- (a) This function is only a part of a large suite developed at GDIL, however there is no mystery that we used the Telethon API to target Sorok Sorokov. This snippet is our main workhorse, and thus included for scrutiny; for those aiming to replicate our in-house tool, functions will need to be defined to handle the serialization of Python objects returned by lazy methods of Telethon. Researchers will also need to provide their own api keys and hashes.

(3) Lemmatizing news articles:

- (a) Lemmatizing articles allows us to match documents without worrying about missing words with different morphemes. This function presupposes that the JSON file from (1b) has been split into individual documents.

```
import spacy
import os
from spacy.lang.ru.examples import sentences
#load large spacy model
nlp = spacy.load("ru_core_news_lg", disable=["ner"])
#define target file paths
source_directory = r"../sorok_ind_files/"
target_directory = r"../lemma_ru/ru_sorok_ind_lemma/"
#for each file in directory, lemmatize the document, then save it
for original_filename in os.listdir(source_directory):
    filename = source_directory + original_filename
    with open(filename) as f:
        text = f.read()
        doc = nlp(text)
        sentences_lemmata_list = [sentence.lemma_for sentence in doc.sents]
    with open((target_directory + original_filename), 'w+') as f_2:
        for sent in sentences_lemmata_list:
            f_2.write(sent)
        f_2.close()
    f.close()
```

(4) Grabbing top “hits”:

- (a) We use both pre-selected word embeddings (from GeoWAC) and word frequencies found within the corpus. Given picked dataframes of lemmatized articles, this code finds word frequencies, removes stopwords, then counts hits within the corpus and returns the top 20 documents of each. The function for hits is O_n^2 time.

(5) Word Embeddings

традиция обычай многовековой многовековой традиционный самобытность самобытный верование предок предание канон Богословие богословский теология богослов теологический вероучение теолог философия филологический православие правование Монархия монархический монарх диктатура самодержавие феодализм феодальный анархия буржуазный авторитарный владычество идентичность самоидентификация самобытность ментальность общность самосознание аутентичность государственность ценностный мировоззрение множественность Национальный национально нац региональный интернациональный узбекский международный нация общенациональный общеевропейский наднациональный Личность личностный личностно идентичность мировоззрение самосознание самоидентификация ценностный ментальность нравственность нравственный Отдельный отдельно отдельность обособленный конкретный определенный особый данный смежный специальный отдельностоящий Иерархия иерархический иерарх главенство олигархический низший монархический клановый ранг сословный божественность порядок порядке очередность регламентироваться законодательством регламентировать соответствие регламентировать законодательство порядка регламент Общество сообщество акционерный община общественник институция общественно государственно государство объединение социум Цивилизация

цивилизационный человечество доисторический древность древний предок высокоразвитый религия нация тысячелетний Идеология идеологически идеологический идеолог национализм атеистический мировоззренческий религия гуманистический марксизм доктрина ценности ценность ценностный духовность общечеловеческий образованность Неравенство равенство бедность гендерный расслоение диспропорция несправедливость дискриминация безработица дифференциация классовый Семья многодетный родственник родитель родня малоимущий чета жена близкие домочадец семейный Дети детишки ребенок детка ребятишки дитя ребеночка сынишка деточка ребенка детей Муж жена отец супруга сын свекровь супруг дочь невестка мама папа Жена муж отец дочь супруга сын невестка мама племянник племянница супруг брак супружество однополый замужество супруг сожителство брачный супруга супруги развод внебрачный гомосексуализм гомосексуальность гомосексуалист гомосексуал гомосексуальный педофилие однополый феминизм расизм ксенофобия антисемитизм Феминизм феминистка национализм шовинизм гомосексуализм эмансипация расизм радикализм атеизм либерализм гуманизм Либерализм национализм авторитаризм капитализм либерал тоталитаризм империализм радикализм либеральный демократия идеология Содомия религия жертвоприношение жертвенность невежественный распад распадаться распасться развал разложение крах разрушение перерождение вырождение отмирание деградация Развал развалить разваливать крах распад развалиться разваливаться разруха разорение перестройка схождение Деградация вырождение деградировать истощение разрушение необратимый разложение вымирание обнищание прогрессирующий стагнация Православие христианство православный католицизм ислам христианский католичество мусульманство религия монашество христианин Протестантство протестантский протестант католичество католицизм католический мусульманство атеистический православие лютеранский христианство Патриарх митрополит святейший филарет патриархкирил руськирил архиепископ патриархия архиерей патриархат патриарший Церковь православный храм церковно римско-католический церковный собор лютеранский церковь патриархат монастырь вера благочестие неверие добродетель истина божественность праведность верить смирение исповедание человеколюбие Зло сатанаСатанаinWikipedia тьма злой добро несправедливость злодейЗ диавол демон всемогущество невежество отечество отчизна родина отеческий беззаветный служение самоотверженность доблесть самоотверженный честь государственность запад восток западный север юг -восток юго-восток северо-восток северо-запад северо-восточный иран воля покорность решимость устремление повиновение решительность сознательность провидение убеждение всемогущество разумение ересь еретик догмат язычник христианство мракобесие вероучение православие инквизиция неверие невежество душа душ души сердце ванна помysel душевный дух печаль ванная статус статусный привилегия гражданство значимость авторитет признание престижность состоятельность легитимность авторитетность атеизм марксизм атеистический материализм тоталитаризм атеист национализм коммунизм сталинизм идеология большевизм демократия демократический демократизация парламентаризм верховенство плюрализм авторитаризм либерализм социализм демократичность диктатура государство страна государственно гос-во гектосударствар правительство государственность держава содружество правитель республикамолдова демография демографический социология народонаселение макроэкономика политология экономика рождаемость -экономический антропология макроэкономический грех греховный грешник грешный прегрешение гордыня

согрешить покаяние скверна благоденствие христос твердыня крепость цитадель неприступный крестоносец оплот святилище непоколебимый несокрушимый святыня бастион смерть гибель кончина умирать самоубийство умирание погибель умерший убийство несчастный смертельный воспроизведение гибель кончина умирать самоубийство умирание погибель умерший убийство несчастный смертельный колонизация колонизатор колонизировать колонист экспансия порабощение колониальный милитаризация покорение коллективизация освоение трансгуманизм гуманизм гуманистический материализм гуманизация материалистический общечеловеческий метафизический идеология либерализм диалектический секуляризм материализм православие радикализм национализм мультикультурализм идеология популяризация либерализм пропаганда коррупция коррупционный преступность взяточничество коррумпированность коррупционер антикоррупционный антикоррупциоть терроризм коррумпировать бюрократия Спорт велоспорт велоспорвать спортивный теннис атлетика физкультура баскетбол туризм футбол конькобежный благотворительность благотворитель благотворительный пожертвование волонтерство филантроп служение волонтерский спонсорство меценат спонсорский Многодетная многодетный малоимущий малообеспеченный сирота семья инвалид пенсионер единовременный -сирота льгота конфликт многодетный малоимущий малообеспеченный сирота семья инвалид пенсионер единовременный -сирота льгота воспитание перевоспитание воспитывать -нравственный социализация нравственный воспитать воспитанный воспитываться воспитательный духовность насилие жестокость издевательство пытка расизм жестокий домогательство насильственный дискриминация запугивание террор материнство отцовство деторождение репродуктивный донорство беременность усыновление женщина младенчество фертильность новорождать разврат развратный развращать оргия развратница извращение похоть безнравственный ебл порнография жестокость развод развестись разводиться бракоразводный брак расставание алименты замужество супруга супружество супруг



The Spanish and French Far Rights in Their Quest for a New Traditionalist Order

ARSENIO CUENCA NAVARRETE

Abstract

The French and Spanish far rights are going through a period of intense joint activity. In both countries, a renewed ideological framework is narrowing the gap between the moderate right and the extreme right, creating even more radical hybrids. Organized around diverse reactionary ideologies, mainly stemming from the European New Right school of thought and conservative Christianity, these two countries are part of a larger international coalition trying to establish a new civilizational order. These forces are targeting different social minorities, progressive movements, and, ultimately, the very principles of liberal democracy. This article provides a socio-historical analysis of the ideas that structure these radical geopolitical constructions in order to trace the continuity between the past, present, and potential future of important sectors of the far right in France, Spain, and beyond.

Keywords: French far right; Spanish far right; European civilization; Christian Nationalism

As intertwined as their long histories, France and Spain's reactionary movements, organizations, and minds share common traits. Inevitable, for instance, to remember the Organization of the Secret Army: a terrorist organization against the independence of Algeria, founded in Madrid by hard-liners from the French army like Pierre Lagaille, the Francoist regime resettled several of their members in Spain after their defeat.¹ While constantly influencing each other, at some points they have come to merge. Today, the exchanges between certain sectors of the French and Spanish far rights are finding points of convergence. Through ideas, authors, and political formations—gathered around publications, conferences, and think tanks—actors in both countries are building a common ground that was, heretofore, not so easy to find. During the 1980s, the French New Right influenced important authors and politicians in Spain, but its impact was limited.

Nowadays, as the remains of the New Right are being subjected to reconfigurations, partly fostered by a new wave of conservative Christianity that reinvigorates their reaction against secular Modernity as well as Islam, these far-right realms are being attracted to one another from opposite sides of the Pyrenees. This offensive is articulated by political and social elites, guided by an aristocratic claim to tradition. Furthermore, the French and Spanish far rights are playing a key role in the conception and construction of a civilizational yearning based on the union of Western Christian (mostly Catholic) nations and ostensibly including certain countries on the opposite coast of the Atlantic. Focusing on the constant struggle between progressive forces and reactionary responses, this article explores the efforts of the latter to fight back.

It is no secret that the process of defining and labeling a reactionary movement or political party is far from simple and univocal. When it comes to the subject of this article—that is, the ideological synergies structuring relations between the French and Spanish far rights—the concepts here deployed might be more useful if understood as Weberian ideal types. Ideologies related to the far right, radical right, illiberalism or conservatism, already entangled on a conceptual level, once embodied tend to dialogue and merge. Given that this article focuses on the syncretism of apparently independent—and even contradictory—political actors and discourses, restricting the individuals, publications, and institutions mentioned to rigid categories can be more obstructive than enlightening. Regarding the evolution of this subject of study, in the light of a socio-historical approach, it is convenient to conceive it as a process of continual restructuring, without cutting any of its ideological threads.² In any case, to lay certain bases that will allow for proper comprehension of the actors discussed, they will be associated with the radical right, as they navigate above the waters of liberal democracy while challenging it,³ together with espousing an ideology that stems from a dialectical conversation between illiberalism and conservatism. As far-right ideologies echo the past, the role of crossed historical references, still used as sources of inspiration for today's reactionaries, will also be analyzed.

A cultural device based on conservative Christianity—mostly built up around anti-abortion and homophobic discourse—that envisions our current society as decadent brings the French and Spanish radical rights together. This rooted Christianity has become a prolific meeting point for ideologies related to the French New Right, the

¹ See Olivier Dard, *Voyage au coeur de l'OAS*, (Paris: Perrin, 2011) & Georges Fleury, *Histoire de l'OAS*, (Paris: Grasset, 2002).

² Nigel Copsey, "Historians and the Contemporary Far Right. To Bring (or Not to Bring) the Past into the Present?" in *Researching the Far Right: Theory, Method and Practice*, ed. Stephen D. Ashe, Joel Bushner, Graham Macklin, and Aaron Winter (London: Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3224/zrex.viii.14>

³ Cas Mudde, "The Far Right Today," in *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents*, ed. Lisa Gitelman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-020-00157-5>

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reactionary school of thought that is structured around racist ethnopluralism and a rejection of Modernity.⁴ This results in a globalist far right that rallies a strong sense of nationalism, mainly opposed to Islam and framed under a civilizational order, around different geopolitical devices, including “the West,” “Europe,” “the *Hispanidad*,” and “the Latin alliance.” Stéphane François has delved into these Christian geopolitical alliances, where religion—inscribed, in an identitarian manner, in the continuity of the counterrevolution—becomes a bridge between different actors of the radical right.⁵

As tempting as it may be to spuriously attribute particular thinkers to a reactionary movement, it is noteworthy to expose, in the case of France and Spain, the existence of several connected authors, active during the same period of history, whose ideas are being deployed by today’s far right. In France, the royalist thinker Charles Maurras, leader of the journal and sociopolitical movement *Action Française*, actually talked about the notion of “Latin forces” in the prologue of a book recounting the collapse of the Spanish empire at the end of the nineteenth century.⁶ There, Maurras argued: “Let’s not talk about Spain, America or France. Let’s talk about the Latin world as the same body to organize.”⁷ As stated by the conservative and leading expert on the *Action Française* Olivier Dard, Maurras’ civilizational project relied strongly on the defense of a deeply rooted latinity and the Catholic Church.⁸ Similarly, in Spain, a group of intellectuals founded in 1931 *Acción Española*, a magazine inspired by the aforementioned French royalist publication. One of their main contributors, Ramiro de Maeztu, in his *Defensa de la Hispanidad* (1934), developed a civilizational concept close to the Maurrasian “Latin forces,” namely “Hispanidad.” Maeztu’s geopolitical notion is a racist and national-Catholic doctrine that revives the Hispanic Empire of Philip II (1527–1598) in the Americas, established at a time when Spain and Portugal were part of the same kingdom, as Spain’s sphere of influence.⁹ Maeztu’s Hispanidad, a traditionalist and elitist idea based on a hierarchy of races, is indebted to French integrism.¹⁰ The descendant of British diplomats, Maeztu worked for more than a decade as a correspondent in London. It was in England that he discovered Maurras’ royalism through authors like T.S. Hulme and G. K. Chesterton.¹¹ The latter, a Catholic conservative, is the main exponent of distributism, a Catholic socioeconomic system premised on finding a third way between socialism and capitalism.

Until recently, references to Maurras, Maeztu, and Chesterton were limited to marginal domains of the far right. Nevertheless, these national-catholic authors, along with the New Right, are arousing growing interest among the French and Spanish radical rights today. Indeed, reimaginings of these authors’ civilizational

4 Stéphane François, *La Nouvelle Droite et ses Dissidences. Identité, écologie et paganisme* (Lormont: Le Bord de l’eau, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4000/lectures.50284>

5 Stéphane François, *Géopolitique des extrêmes droites. Logiques identitaires et monde multipolaire* (Paris: Cavalier Bleu, 2022).

6 Charles Maurras, « Les Forces latines ». Preface to the work of Marius André, *La fin de l’Empire espagnole d’Amérique* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie nationale, 1922) Édition électronique réalisée par maurras.net et l’Association des Amis de la Maison du Chemin de Paradis (2011).

7 Ibid.

8 Olivier Dard, “Charles Maurras, le fascisme, la latinité et la Méditerranée,” *Cahiers de La Méditerranée* 95 (2017): 59–70, <https://doi.org/10.4000/cdlm.8880>

9 Gonzalo Álvarez Chillida, “Epígono de la Hispanidad: La españolización de la colonia de Guinea durante el primer franquismo,” *Imaginario y Representaciones de España Durante El Franquismo* 142: 103–125, <https://doi.org/10.14201/gredos.83344>

10 Luis Ocio, “La configuración del pensamiento reaccionario español: el caso de Ramiro de Maeztu durante su etapa de embajador en la Argentina,” *Historia contemporánea* 18 (1999): 347–382; Juan Olabarria Agra, “Las fuentes francesas de Acción Española,” *Historia Contemporánea* 3 (1990): 219–238.

11 Eugen Weber, *L’Action Française* (Paris: Stock, 1964).

projects are often found in this milieu. In 2020, Marion Maréchal, who has on numerous occasions demonstrated her sympathies with Maurras,¹² mentioned a “Latin Alliance” at a congress in Rome, picturing a “Southern Visegrad Group” that would be composed of France, Spain, Italy, and Portugal as well as close to the US and Russia.¹³ The ideological foundations of Vox, the Spanish political party created in 2013 as a right-wing faction of the PP, date back to the end of the nineteenth century, the period that would impact Maeztu’s work.¹⁴ Santiago Abascal, leader of Vox, has also praised Maeztu’s work, specifically *Defensa de la Hispanidad*.

As Laruelle notes, illiberalism and conservatism share a large common ground, namely their advocacy for morality and their pessimistic view of progress.¹⁵ Corey Robin accurately exposes how the conservative mind operates by focusing on its ability to adapt and evolve. According to Robin, conservative elites do not limit their ideology to the defense of the status quo, but rather commit to the Leopardian aristocratic principle “If we want everything to stay as it is, everything has to change.” Change usually comes in the form of superficial assimilation of progressive discourses and practices.¹⁶ The main leaders of *La Manif pour tous* (LMPT), the social movement that emerged in France in 2012-2013 to oppose the legalization of gay marriage, portrayed their upheaval as a “May 68 backwards” or a “French Spring” (drawing parallels with the Arab Spring of 2011).

Yann Raison du Cleuziou rightly affirms that LMPT is part of a conservative revival, expressed through an alleged heroic reaction to—often verging on adolescent rebellion against—what is perceived as a decadent, rootless society.¹⁷ This revival is grounded in a combative Christianity, an ideology that usually serves as a meeting point for the moderate right and the far right and can occasionally lead to further radicalization beyond the far right.¹⁸ When threatened by the deprived or the oppressed, conservatives mimic the underprivileged, portraying themselves as equal victims or the only true victims. They have deployed a fruitful victimization discourse according to which progressive voices—usually misrepresented as “neo-feminists,” “indigenists,” “cancel culture,” “political correctness” or “the woke”—haunt and censor them as totalitarian. Thus, conservatives disguise themselves under a rebellious varnish to claim they are victims of injustice, a discourse commonly associated with reactionary conspiratorial narratives.¹⁹

Conservatives also, as claimed by Louie Dean Valencia-García, weaponize history. Presenting facts in a distorted manner to assert their authority, they go so far as

12 Charlotte Blanc, “Réseaux traditionalistes catholiques et ‘réinformation’ sur le web: mobilisations contre le ‘Mariage pour tous’ et ‘pro-vie,’” *Tic&société* 9, no. 1–2 (2015): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ticetsociete.1919>.

13 “Le discours de Marion Maréchal à Rome devant les conservateurs européens,” *Valeurs Actuelles*, February 4, 2020, <https://www.valeursactuelles.com/politique/info-va-le-discours-de-marion-marechal-a-rome-devant-les-conservateurs-europeens>

14 Xavier Casals i Meseguer, “De Fuerza Nueva a Vox: de la vieja a la nueva ultraderecha española (1975-2019),” *Ayer*, 118, (2), (2020) 365-380, <https://doi.org/10.55509/ayer/118-2020-14>

15 Marlène Laruelle, “Illiberalism: a conceptual introduction.” *East European Politics* (0) (2021): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2022.2037079>

16 Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

17 Yann Raison de Cleuziou, “Un renversement de l’horizon du politique,” *Esprit*, No. 438 (October) (2017): 130-142; Yann Raison de Cleuziou, *Une contre-révolution catholique. Aux origines de La Manif pour tous* (Paris: Seuil, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4000/rhr.11434>

18 Gaël Brustier, *Le Mai 68 conservateur. Que restera-t-il de la Manif pour tous?* (Paris: Les éditions du CERF, 2014).

19 Elsa Gimenez and Olivier Voirol, “L’Internet des droites extrêmes. Présentation du numéro,” *Réseaux* 2 (202–203) (2017): 9–37, <https://doi.org/10.3917/res.202.0009>

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rewriting history and making up the past to legitimize their ideology.²⁰ Historical revisionism is widespread among far-right parties and authors. Nostalgia, mythologization of the past, and other revisionist devices are a key part of what the far right understands as metapolitics.²¹ If the concept of metapolitics stems from Antonio Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony—the necessity to take over the intellectual and cultural debate prior to gaining political power—for the far right it is mostly about manipulating public opinion in order to share essentialist messages.²² Historical consensus, usually embodied by academic historians and memorial laws, is one of the main targets of the far right today.²³ This is nothing new: far-right formations throughout history have manipulated historical facts to idealize their mythical past with an aestheticizing and political purpose. As Nicolas Lebourg has stated on several occasions, “the far right isn’t a program but a cosmovision.”²⁴

The Genuine Origins of the Spanish New Right: A Political and Spiritual Hybrid

Following the end of the Spanish dictatorship in 1975, a group of renowned members of the tardo-Francoist right began to take great interest in the French New Right. Before that, attempts to liberalize the regime during the 1960s decade were followed by remarkable reactionary initiatives at the root of what became afterwards the Spanish New Right. This was the case of the neo-Nazi CEDADE (Círculo de Amigos de Europa) an organization oriented to metapolitics *avant la lettre*. Created in Barcelona (1966) by radical phalangists, members of the Guardia de Franco and fascists exiles from Europe, its innovative pan-Europeanism and Wagnerism, combined with a strong defense of Catholicism, gave rise to following far right projects. Mainly through Angel Ricote, one of its main precursors, CEDADE kept touch with some of the most renowned European far right personalities at that moment like Jean Thiriart or Léon Degrelle, the latter being a key reference for them as a Christian SS Waffen, exiled in southern Spain after the end of World War II.²⁵ Degrelle was not only venerated by CEDADE and other far right marginal groups, but also held in high esteem by its main political leaders, such as Blas Piñar in Spain and Jean Marie Le Pen in France, whose French National Front kept ties with him.²⁶

At the beginning of the 1980s, several Spanish authors and politicians started publishing books and organizing around journals that echoed this reactionary school of thought. Prior to these publications the ideas of the New Right were already gaining ground across Spain, mainly through the journal *Futuro Presente*, directed between 1971-1976 by the Iron Guard exiled Vintila Horia. One of the main promoters of this new ideological endeavor was Jorge Verstrynge. One of the main promoters of this ideological endeavor was Jorge Verstrynge. Born in Tangier in 1948, the son of a Belgian sympathizer of Léon Degrelle, Verstrynge grew up in France before moving

20 Louie Dean Valencia-García, “Far-right Revisionism and the End of History,” in *Far-right Revisionism and the End of History*. *Alt/Histories*, ed. Louie Dean Valencia-García (London: Routledge, 2020).

21 *Ibid.*

22 Stéphane François, *La Nouvelle Droite et ses Dissidences*; Stéphane François, *Géopolitique des extrêmes droites*.

23 Gérard Noiriel, *Le venin dans la plume* (Paris: La Découverte, 2019).

24 “L’extrême droite est une vision du monde, pas un programme,” *Le Monde*, October 31, 2021, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/10/31/l-extreme-droite-est-une-vision-du-monde-pas-un-programme_6100478_823448.html

25 See: Xavier Casals, *Neonazis en España. De las audiciones wagnerianas a los skinheads (1966-1995)*, (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1995) & Xavier Casals, *La tentación neofascista en España*, (Barcelona: Plaza Janés, 1998).

26 Michael Conway, *Collaboration In Belgium_ Leon Degrelle And The Rexist Movement (1940-1944)*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

to Spain to pursue his university studies. After embarking on a political career, he quickly became general secretary of the People's Alliance (Alianza Popular, AP), the main conservative right-wing party after the democratic transition and the predecessor of the current People's Party (Partido Popular). In 1978, together with Horia, and other Spanish New Right sympathizers like Javier Carabias or Ángel Bayod, Verstrynge was already member of the patronage committee of the New Right journal *Nouvelle Ecole*. Verstrynge tried to bring to the party some of the core principles articulated by the New Right. At that time, the Club del Sable, a society of intellectuals and politicians linked to AP, hosted a conference with Alain de Benoist, leader of the New Right. Yet de Benoist's ideas did not permeate the conservative formation; indeed, Verstrynge has consistently stood up for social democracy, as well as defended a "mitigated humanism"—certainly difficult to find within the philosophical parameters of the New Right in France.²⁷ Nor has his political career been anything close to those of the vast majority of the members of the French New Right: Verstrynge left AP in 1986, joined the Socialist Party in 1993, and ended up becoming a member of the left-wing populist party Podemos in 2014.²⁸

In 1984, through AP, Verstrynge promoted *Punto y Coma*, a journal disseminating the ideas of the French New Right.²⁹ In charge of the editorial board was José Javier Esparza, a key figure of the Spanish far right to this day. Although AP soon ruled out further theoretical rapprochement with the New Right, Esparza remained their point of contact in Spain. As a journalist, he has contributed to a vast number of publications on the right wing and far right, including *ABC*, one of the leading conservative monarchist newspapers in Spain. From 1995 to 2000, he also directed *Hespérides* magazine, the official publication of the Proyecto Cultural Aurora, the most successful intellectual movement in Spain addressing the ideas of the New Right. However, while de Benoist's acolytes were eminently anti-Christian and neopagan, having adopted the anti-Modern precept that enlightened universalism is just a secular version of Christian humanism, Esparza has not given up on Christianity. Some of his Spanish counterparts, such as the director of *Punto y Coma*, Isidro J. Palacios, have even defended Christianity as a fundamental part of Europe's identity and cultural heritage.³⁰

Yet this cleavage has not proved to be insuperable: the Spanish New Right has kept building a genuine doctrine combining Christianity with the ideas of the French New Right. Following the end of Aurora in 2002, the cultural supplement of the liberal-conservative journal *El Mundo* published a manifesto loaded with tropes of the Nouvelle Droite that was signed—together with other intellectuals and even public personalities coming from the left wing—by journalist Javier Ruiz Portella. The manifesto, which was well received, drew the attention of several authors linked to Aurora, including Esparza, which led to the creation of the Grupo Manifiesto in 2004. This platform took over as the new melting pot for the French and Spanish Nouvelle Droite and certain members of the Spanish People's Party, among them Alejandro Vidal-Quadras, who would become the first leader of Vox, and José María Lassalle,³¹ then

27 Diego Luis Sanromán, *La Nueva derecha: Cuarenta años de agitación metapolítica* (Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2008).

28 That being said, he maintained differentialist stances characteristic of the New Right even after joining Podemos. See "Otra Vuelta de Tuerca - Pablo Iglesias con Jorge Verstrynge," YouTube video, 28:06, posted by "Basadísimos," October 20, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ll3TPUj6SpM>

29 José Luis Rodríguez Jiménez, "Historia de un fracaso y ¿de una refundación?: de la vieja a la nueva extrema derecha en España (1975-2012)," *Studia Historica. Historia Contemporánea* 30 (2012): 231–268.

30 Sanromán, *La Nueva derecha*.

31 Both Vidal-Quadras and Lassalle were at the time key members of FAES, a think tank that served as a vehicle for the ideas of the hardline wing of the PP.

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a professor at the Catholic university Centro de Estudios Universitarios (CEU) San Pablo.³²

Esparza was later hired by the TV channel *Intereconomía*. Since 2010, he has held the important role of their political and historical commentator. The channel, recently renamed *El Toro TV*, is the flagship of the media conglomerate Grupo Intereconomía, the main media platform of Catholic ultramontanist in Spain.³³ Its major shareholder is Julio Ariza, who is close to Opus Dei, an ultraconservative organization in Spain belonging to the Catholic Church. Pedro Carlos González, a researcher of the Spanish far right who also embraces far-right ideologies, once stated during a debate presented by Esparza: “I have to express gratitude that *Intereconomía* exists because it is one of the groups that has facilitated the existence of Vox.”³⁴ The relationship between the far-right party and Grupo Intereconomía is based on political understanding and investment opportunities, with Vox recently having taken over *La Gaceta*, the main media outlet of the Grupo Intereconomía. Renamed *La Gaceta de la Iberosfera*, it has become the official publication of the Disenso Foundation, a think tank affiliated with Vox.

This online publication, whose slogan is a quotation from Maeztu, regularly receives contributions from erstwhile members of the Grupo Manifiesto, such as journalist Fernando Sánchez Dragó. Its purpose is to lead a loose coalition of far-right forces under the umbrella of what they call “Iberosfera,” essentially a group of countries related to the Spanish imperial and colonial past, as well as some other like-minded actors in Europe. In October 2021, Disenso organized the Madrid Forum that ended with the signature of a manifesto, “The Madrid Charter,” by right-wing politicians from several South American countries—including José Antonio Kast (Chile), Javier Milei (Argentina), and Antonio Ledezma (Venezuela)—together with the president of Chega, André Ventura (Portugal); the president of Fratelli d’Italia; Georgia Meloni; and Marion Maréchal. When asked about this event by *La Gaceta de la Iberosfera*, the latter replied that “[I] ha[ve] always had this objective of developing the project of the ‘Latin Union,’ i.e., Portugal, Italy and Spain.”³⁵ At the second edition of this event in October 2022, former U.S. President Donald Trump spoke via video call and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki attended in person.

Intereconomía has often hosted professors from private Catholic universities, including University Francisco de Vitoria (Madrid); the University of Navarre, controlled by Opus Dei; and CEU San Pablo University (Madrid), founded by the Catholic Association of Propagandists (ACdP). These universities are developing a similar discourse around theological traditionalism. At the same time, thanks to some affiliated historians, such as José Luis Orella from CEU San Pablo, they nourish a revisionist vision of the Spanish historical consensus.³⁶ Orella belongs to this Spanish traditionalist far right, but he is not far from the New Right sphere. He has co-authored *De Le Pen a Le Pen. El Front National camino al Elíseo* (Schedas

32 Javier Muñoz Soro, “Sin complejos: las nuevas derechas españolas y sus intelectuales,” *Historia y Política* 18 (2007): 129-164.

33 *Ibid.*

34 “El profesor Pedro Carlos González Cuevas presenta en el ‘El Gato al Agua’ su libro dedicado a Vox,” YouTube video, 15:13, posted by “Redacción La Tribuna del País Vasco,” March 7, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FudilgG4M>

35 José Antonio Fúster, Rebeca Crespo, and Diego Vaquerizo, “Marion Maréchal: ‘VOX tiene razón en no caer en la moderación. La derecha que se une al centro acaba absorbida por la izquierda,’” *La Gaceta de la Iberosfera*, March 31, 2021, <https://gaceta.es/entrevistas/vox-tiene-razon-en-no-caer-en-la-moderacion-la-derecha-que-se-une-al-centro-siempre-acaba-absorbida-por-la-izquierda-20210331-0750/>

36 Soro, “Sin complejos.”

SL, 2015) on the National Rally, which has a preface by Arnaud Imatz, a French-Spanish enthusiast of the Spanish Falange and member of the French New Right. Orella is the president of the Arbil forum and a member of the editorial board of the journal *Arbil*. Currently inactive,³⁷ this journal was close to the school of thought of the Spanish New Right, although influenced by Catholic traditionalism, Spanish ultra-nationalism, and pan-hispanism.

One of the members of its editorial board, Fernando José Vaquero Oroquieta, has published in *Elementos*, the Spanish equivalent of the French New Right journal *Éléments*. Vaquero Oroquieta has also authored a book on Spanish populism with a prologue by Arnaud Imatz³⁸ and recently participated in a conference organized by Vox.³⁹ Another author associated with the Nouvelle Droite, the Argentinian Peronist Alberto Buela, contributed regularly to *Arbil* during its life and was also a member of its advisory board. Among the subjects he addressed, he dedicated several articles to the notion of *Iberoamérica*, a neo-imperialist syncretism between the ancient South American colonies and the metropolis.⁴⁰ Quoting Carl Schmitt, Buela envisions an anti-liberal, inter-continental superpower, inevitably evoking the concepts of Hispanidad and the Iberosfera espoused by Vox:⁴¹

The theme of this article is based on an undeveloped intuition for Ibero-America of the philosopher Carl Schmitt: “Against the universalism of Anglo-American world hegemony we affirm the idea of an earth divided into large continental spaces” [...] To the thalassocratic world power—that empire whose power lies in the domination of the seas, enunciated by G. Bush (father) in the U.S. Parliament in 1991 and framed in the one world project—this New South American Strategy (NES) proposes the creation of a “bridge with the European Union” and in particular with the nations that are related to us both by cultural ties—Spain, Portugal, Italy, France—and by the immense investments they have made in our region.⁴²

The French New Right: Renewed Interest in Spain

The French New Right has been subject to reconfigurations that have brought it closer to its Spanish counterparts and their political realm. What is left of this school of thought is in part organized around the Institut Iliade, a think tank conceived in 2013 after the suicide of Dominique Venner, one of the main exponents of the Nouvelle Droite.⁴³ The most renowned authors related to the Institut Iliade include

37 Even if *Arbil* magazine is no longer publishing new issues, there is some activity on the Facebook page *Foro Arbil*.

38 Fernando J. Vaquero Oroquieta, *¿Populismo en España? Amenaza y promesa de una nueva democracia*. (Barbarroja, 2015).

39 “Conferencia Fernando Vaquero // ‘Aportación navarra a la empresa hispánica,’” YouTube video, 40:57, posted by “VOX Navarra,” May 24, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrxHtZFN6WU>

40 See Alberto Buela, “Movimientos nacionales en Iberoamérica (siglo XX),” *Arbil* 113, <http://www.arbil.org/113bue1.htm>; Alberto Buela, “Nueva Estrategia Suramericana,” *Arbil* 44, [http://www.arbil.org/\(44\)buel.htm](http://www.arbil.org/(44)buel.htm); Alberto Buela, “El barroco: una clave para la identidad iberoamericana,” *Arbil* 58, [http://www.arbil.org/\(58\)buel.htm](http://www.arbil.org/(58)buel.htm)

41 Thus far, it has not been possible to establish whether it is more than a coincidence that Buela’s magazine and Vox’s initiative share the name *Disenso*.

42 Alberto Buela, “Iberoamérica como gran espacio político,” *Arbil* 119, <http://www.arbil.org/119buel.htm>

43 Stéphane François and Nicolas Lebourg, “Dominique Venner et le renouvellement du racisme,” *Fragments sur les temps présents*, May 23, 2013, <https://tempspresents.com/2013/05/23/dominique-venner-renouvellement-racisme-stephane-francois-nicolas-lebourg/>

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Renaud Camus, one of the main figures currently espousing the Great Replacement conspiracy theory; Jean-Yves Le Gallou, a former advisor of the National Rally and more recently of Éric Zemmour's *Reconquête*; and Philippe Conrad, former director of the New Right history journal *Nouvelle Revue d'Histoire* and current director of the Institut Iliade. The political figures that orbit around Iliade also include Marion Maréchal, a former member of the National Rally who is currently siding with Zemmour; and Hervé Juvin, a member of the National Rally and Marine Le Pen's advisor on reactionary ecology.⁴⁴

The Institut Iliade is engaged in an aesthetic and metapolitical struggle rather than a political one: it subscribes to the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, with a particular interest in reactionary environmentalism. Holistic cults like Hellenism or esotericism, which belong to the Indo-European tradition, are also espoused by their main authors, in the tradition of the French far right. Nevertheless, there is an open dialogue with other spiritual traditions, especially Catholicism. This renewed conservative Christianity is progressively putting aside Eastern spiritualities as Hinduism or Islam, discussed hitherto by notorious leaders of the New Right as Alain de Benoist, through authors like Mircea Eliade or Claudio Mutti.⁴⁵ Julien Langella,⁴⁶ from the Catholic identitarian groupuscule *Academia Christiana*, is read with interest at Iliade. Javier Portella, who is also close to this New Right revival, recently published an article on Iliade's portal about the Spanish Holy Week (*Semana Santa*) that sums up this dialectic between Catholicism and neo-paganism:

This is what it's all about: the miracle that takes place every year, at the beginning of spring, in the streets of so many towns and villages in Andalusia and almost all of Spain (except for most of Catalonia today): the miracle by which, under the forms and auspices of Christianity—in its Catholic version: the thing would be unthinkable under Protestantism— what resurfaces, what is reborn, alive for so many centuries, for so many persecutions, is nothing but the old sediment of “pagan idolatry,” as they called it.⁴⁷

The Institut Iliade and certain members of the Spanish New Right have developed common topics that have come to overlap. One of these is the historical revisionism of Al-Andalus, the Arabic and Islamic country of southern Europe that existed between the arrival of Berber and Arabic populations in the Algeiras Bay around 711 and the Conquest of Granada by the Catholic monarchs in 1492.⁴⁸ An idealized revival of medieval confrontations between Christianity and Islam was evoked by Dominique Venner, founder and former director of the *Nouvelle Revue d'Histoire*, during his lifetime. Venner portrayed Muslims as the absolute Other of Europe, which was, by

44 Stéphane François, *Les vert-bruns. L'écologie de l'extrême droite française* (Lormont: Le Bord de l'eau, 2022).

45 Stéphane François, *Un XXIe siècle irrationnel ? Analyses pluridisciplinaires des pensées alternatives*, (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2018).

46 Langella's book *Catholique et Identitaire. De La Manif Pour Tous À La Reconquête* (Poitiers: Éditions Dominique Martin Morin, 2017), after being published in English by the far-right Arktos publishing house, was translated into Spanish by *La Tribuna del País Vasco*, a far-right media outlet where Vaquero Oroquieta is influential.

47 Javier Portella, “La Semaine Sainte en Espagne : ou quand le paganisme et le christianisme s'entremêlent,” Institut Iliade, <https://institut-iliade.com/la-semaine-sainte-en-espagne-ou-quand-le-paganisme-et-le-christianisme-sentremelent/>, accessed May 24, 2022.

48 Alejandro García Sanjuan, “Serafín Fanjul, Al-Andalus, l'invention d'un mythe. La réalité historique de l'Espagne des trois cultures,” *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 243 (2018): 299–301, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ccm.4733>

contrast, an alleged land of heroes and knighthood.⁴⁹ After Venner's death, Philippe Conrad took over the direction of the magazine from 2013 until it ceased its activities in 2016.

A special issue from that year includes an interview by Arnaud Imatz with Serafin Fanjul on the mythical conception of Al-Andalus as a heaven of tolerance. A former member of the Spanish Communist Party, Fanjul is an Arabist and honorary member of DENAES, a far-right ultranationalist think tank founded by PP leader Esperanza Aguirre in 2006 and used as a base for the later creation of Vox. Fanjul's work has been widely criticized by his peers. First, because he presents this myth as part of the academic consensus when it is in reality barely accepted by novelists and a small group of historians. Second, because of the rationale underpinning of this revisionist endeavor—in other words, its legitimization of the concept of Reconquista, as used in Francoist national-Catholic propaganda.⁵⁰ And, ultimately, because of his weaponization of history using concepts like the *dhimmitude*, to falsely argue that non-Muslims were subject to apartheid in Al-Andalus. In the 2016 special issue, Conrad also dedicated an article to the *dhimmitude*, a term abundantly discussed by radical-right and conspiracy theorist Bat Ye'or.⁵¹ Although this concept pretends to describe the subjugated status of religious minorities in Muslim countries, not only does it do so in an essentialist and biased way, but it also serves today as a key tool among the far right for drawing false parallels with the present day.

The Institut Iliade followed a similar path to that of the *Nouvelle Revue d'Histoire* when Conrad stopped directing the magazine. After Fanjul, it was Dario Fernández-Morera's work that added fuel to this revisionist discourse: the Cuban-born associate professor at Northwestern University published a book on the issue in 2016.⁵² Fernández-Morera's book has also been severely criticized on account of its methodology, which cherry-picks idealized versions of Al-Andalus,⁵³ as well as contributing to strengthening far-right and conservative Christian narratives.⁵⁴ All the same, the text met with approbation at Conrad's Iliade. When the French edition came out in 2020, it was reviewed on their portal, praised for its reactionary tropes and false equivalences between past and present: "D'al-Andalus à l'Etat islamique, une même terreur..." ("From Al-Andalus to the Islamic State, the same terror").⁵⁵ That same year, Conrad published his own book on the subject, *Al-Andalus, l'imposture du "paradis multiculturel"* (La Nouvelle Librairie, 2020), which was subsequently translated into Spanish and published by the far-right publishing house Fides. Conrad also organized a conference about Al-Andalus, inviting Fernández-Morera, Fanjul, Imatz, and Rafael Sánchez Saus. The latter is a medievalist who serves as honorary dean of CEU San Pablo and is close to Vox. In 2019, he published *Por qué Vox* at Homo Legens, a publishing house owned by Grupo Intereconomía SA,

49 José Pedro Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement Against Globalism and Islam in Europe* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018).

50 Garcia Sanjuan, "Serafin Fanjul, Al-Andalus, l'invention d'un mythe," <https://doi.org/10.4000/ccm.4733>

51 Sindre Bangstad, "Bat Ye'or and Eurabia," in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

52 See Dario Fernández Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise* (Delaware: ICI Books, 2016).

53 Arabists defending the thesis of the interreligious utopia, like Américo Castro, are equally criticized by those historians who refute the reactionary lectures of Al-Andalus. See Alejandro Garcia Sanjuan, *La conquista islámica de la península ibérica y la tergiversación del pasado. Del catastrofismo al negacionismo* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2013) and S. J. Pearce, "The Myth of the Myth of the Andalusian Paradise: The Extreme Right and the American Revision of the History and Historiography of Medieval Spain," in *Far-right Revisionism and the End of History. Alt/Histories*, ed. Louie Dean Valencia-García (London: Routledge, 2020).

54 Pearce, "The Myth of the Myth of the Andalusian Paradise," <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003026433-3>

55 Dario Fernandez-Morero, "Le mensonge d'al-Andalus," Institut Iliade, <https://institut-iliade.com/le-mensonge-dal-andalus/> accessed May 24, 2022.

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in which he echoes the discourse of Vox and praises Falangist writer Rafael García Serrano, “who has been made to disappear from memory, like the love of his life, the Falange, by dint of contempt and concealment.”⁵⁶

Quite apart from the reactionary narratives evoking interreligious dynamics within Al-Andalus, the issue of the Reconquista is frequently discussed by Iliade, its Spanish counterparts, and others. In his *Histoire de la Reconquista* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), Conrad writes about the period during which the Visigoths fought the forces of Al-Andalus on the Iberian Peninsula. To support his argument, Conrad cites Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, a Spanish historian and one of the main defenders of this national-Catholic narrative. Sánchez-Albornoz, repeatedly criticized for his fervent Catholicism, patriotism, and even racism, is described in Conrad’s book as “the greatest Spanish medievalist of this century.” This national-Catholic propagandistic narrative, no longer supported by the majority of academic historians, has become a rallying cry for European identitarians against what they see as a new Muslim invasion of Europe.⁵⁷

Calls for another Reconquista serve diverse interests in the pan-European far-right milieu: allowing Christian countries to federate against Islam by invoking national episodes like Pelagius’ victory at the Battle of Covadonga in Spain (722) or that of Charles Martel at Poitiers (732) as part of a larger struggle;⁵⁸ inculcating a message through an aesthetic and metapolitical discourse loaded with epic imagery and heroism; and portraying themselves as the victims of a Muslim invasion to legitimize their reaction against Islam.⁵⁹

With a view to invigorating the Christian-European alliance in the face of a so-called Muslim invasion, the Institut Iliade has already held several conferences abroad: at least two in Spain and one in Italy. Needless to say, even if the historical dimension of this metapolitical venture is key, other issues that fit within the same framework are also evoked, including the Great Replacement conspiracy theory and the role of transmission for the survival of “ethnic Europeans.”⁶⁰ The first meeting in Spain was held in November 2021 in Madrid, where Iliade was introduced to its Spanish audience. The event was organized by *La Emboscadura* magazine, specifically its director, José Alsina. It was hosted at an establishment owned by Raúl Pajas, from the Ohka cultural association. In addition to Alsina and Pajas, Javier Portella from *El Manifiesto*; Philippe Conrad, Pierluigi Locchi and Solenn Marty from Iliade; and José Javier Esparza were among the speakers. The main contributors, Conrad and Esparza, had the opportunity to talk about their publications, the former presenting the Spanish edition of his book on Al-Andalus and the latter *No te arrepientas* (La esfera de los libros, 2021). In his book, described on Iliade’s portal as “anti-woke,” Esparza revived old Francoist ideas envisioning Spain “as the defensive wall of European civilization.”⁶¹ Months later, Conrad and Esparza met again in Oviedo, in

56 Rafael Sánchez Saus, *Por qué Vox. El Despertar de la Derecha Social en España* (Madrid: Homo Legens, 2019), 86.

57 Zúquete, *The Identitarians*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpj775n>

58 See Emma Demeester, “Charlemagne, l’empereur d’Occident (768-814),” Institut Iliade, <https://institut-iliade.com/charlemagne-lempereur-doccident-768-814/>, accessed May 24, 2022.

59 Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199793747.001.0001>

60 Philippe Conrad, “El Instituto Iliade para la larga memoria Europea,” *La Emboscadura*, November 22, 2021, <https://laemboscadurarevistas.com/2021/11/22/el-instituto-iliade-para-la-larga-memoria-europea/>

61 Institut Iliade, “L’Institut Iliade à Madrid,” <https://institut-iliade.com/institut-iliade-madrid/>, accessed May 24, 2022.

northern Spain, to commemorate the 1300th anniversary of the Battle of Covadonga. Heimdal Lesage⁶² from Iliade dedicated an article to this event:

The example of this fight pushes us to insubordination, to courage, to the rejection of all defeatism, to train ourselves and to give the best of ourselves. Because now it's our turn. It is up to young Europeans to be worthy actors in this long history, to be the fierce guardians of our heritage. Songs that keep the memory of past heroes alive remind us that no fight is ever lost.⁶³

Iliade remains marginal. But there are many more popular French and Spanish actors who defend similar ideas, some of them moving between different spheres, including political parties, media or think tanks. Reconquête, the party of the latest newcomer to French politics, Éric Zemmour, belongs to this universe. Through allusions to the Great Replacement and with members close to Iliade, such as Marion Maréchal and Jean Yves Le Gallou, the party seduced voters from both the French far right (the National Rally) and the conservative right.

In Spain, it goes without saying that Vox capitalizes abundantly on this narrative. The party launched its campaign for the 2019 general election in Covadonga, using an image of Don Pelayo and the slogan “Espíritu de Reconquista.” On several occasions, they have called for the official day of Andalusia to be changed to January 2, the day of the Conquest of Granada by the Catholic monarchs. Notable members of the People’s Party (PP) have also reproduced these narratives. In 2017, Esperanza Aguirre affirmed that January 2 “was a glorious day for Spanish women,” who “would not have freedom with Islam.” More recently, the president of the Community of Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, close to Aguirre, listed such national episodes as “the Romanization, the Visigoth monarchy, [and] the loss of Spain to Muslim invasion” as having “made us persevere for almost eight centuries to continue being European, free, Westerners,” as well as praising the Spanish Crown for being “universal because Catholic.”

Conservative Christians Rise in Spain and France

While the main theses of the New Right have gained some acknowledgment within the French radical right (this has been more limited in the case of Spain), a conservative renewal, influenced by Christian political values, is emerging and reinvigorating them. A new political-religious wave surfaced in both countries around 2005, with the nomination of Pope Benedict XVI, and gained great momentum during the first half of the 2010s.

In Spain back in 2005, a massive demonstration of around 166,000 people rallied against the Socialist Party’s (PSOE) passage of a law permitting gay marriage.⁶⁴ A similar, though less massive, protest followed in 2009, this time opposing progressive reform of abortion rights. The two events were organized by the Christian traditionalist lobby HazteOír, close to far-right personalities mentioned above, like Julio Ariza and José Javier Esparza; ex-PP hardliners like former Interior Minister Jaime Mayor Oreja and María San Gil, former president of the PP in the Basque

62 Just like Solenn Marty, Heimdal Lesage is a young member of Iliade. Both are part of the institute’s broader strategy of educating young leaders.

63 R. Heimdal, “Dans les pas du noble Wisigoth Pelayo,” Institut Iliade, <https://institut-iliade.com/dans-les-pas-du-noble-wisigoth-pelayo/>, accessed May 24, 2022.

64 Marta Arroyo, “Una multitud pide que se retire la ley del matrimonio homosexual,” *El Mundo*, June 20, 2005, <https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2005/06/18/espana/111911135.html>.

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Country; as well as future leader of Vox Santiago Abascal. Following their scission, Vox took over the main demands of conservative Christians that were no longer defended by their old party, namely the rejection of gay marriage and abortion.⁶⁵

On the French side, Nicolas Sarkozy's presidential campaign, starting in 2006, and subsequent administration (2007-2012), hyped up Catholic discourses related to identity and nationalism. Trying to seduce voters from the National Rally, Sarkozy spoke during meetings about "France's Christian heritage" and deployed key Christian references like Joan of Arc alongside typical far-right tropes like Maurice Barrès' uprooting (*déracinement*) or *décadence* in places charged with religious symbolism (his first rally took place outside Paris at the Mont Saint-Michel). Advised throughout his tenure in office by Patrick Buisson, a current advisor to Éric Zemmour, Sarkozy altered substantially the terms of the public debate.⁶⁶

By the end of Sarkozy's quinquennium, as well as for other less salient reasons,⁶⁷ France had become the breeding ground for a Christian militant reaction against what they saw as the degradation of their traditional moral values and institutions: family, life, and transcendence. In this context, between 2012-2013, La Manif pour tous (LMPT) emerged to oppose gay marriage. Although LMPT portrayed itself as a secular movement, it lost its non-confessional character soon after its creation and won the support of such well-known traditionalist groupuscules as Civitas or Action Française. Other groups associated with neo-paganism, such as Generation Identity, swapped to conservative Christianity during LMPT, "going from Thor's hammer to the Nazarene's cross."⁶⁸ In fact, just after the emergence of LMPT, a group of former members of Generation Identity left the organization to found the traditionalist group Academia Christiana. In the same hybrid vein, the Antigones, a feminine collective close to the Nouvelle Droite and Iliade, was established by Catholic members. The editors of *Limite*, a publication focused on ecology and degrowth born during LMPT, were also Catholic leading members of the movement. They included Eugénie Bastié and Gaultier Bès, the latter of whom had been interviewed by *Éléments* magazine.⁶⁹

When LMPT abandoned its non-confessional and allegedly apolitical nature, conservative voices gathered to provide the movement with an ideological and theoretical framework. Editorialists, politicians, and intellectuals came together to claim that what the movement fundamentally rejected was not gay marriage, but secular Modernity and the phantasmatic, libero-totalitarian system of thought (inherited from May 1968) that underpinned it.⁷⁰ Among the main theoretical spokespeople of LMPT are at least three conservative authors who are greatly acknowledged: François-Xavier Bellamy, Chantal Delsol, and Fabrice Hadjadj.

While a young member of Les Républicains, François-Xavier Bellamy proclaimed himself the emissary of a generation that does not praise "It is forbid to forbidden" and disdains May 1968.⁷¹ Chantal Delsol is a disciple of Julien Freund, a Christian

65 Casals, "Del Partido De Masas Al Partido Institucionalizado."

66 Brustier, *Le Mai 68 conservateur*; Aurelien Mondon and Aaron Winter, *Reactionary Democracy: How Racism and the Populist Far Right Became Mainstream* (London: Verso Books, 2020); Raison du Cleuziou, "Un renversement de l'horizon du politique."

67 Raison du Cleuziou, *Une contre-révolution catholique*.

68 Brustier, *Le Mai 68 conservateur*.

69 Arnaud Gonzague, "Médias: La nouvelle tribu réac," *L'Obs*, October 31, 2016, <https://teleobs.nouvelobs.com/actualites/20161031.OBS0563/medias-la-nouvelle-tribu-reac.html>.

70 See Daniel Lindenberg, *Le rappel à l'ordre. Enquête sur les nouveaux réactionnaires* (Paris: Seuil, 2016).

71 Bèllamy 2013, cited in Raison du Cleuziou, *Une contre-révolution catholique*.

Gaullist philosopher who introduced Alain de Benoist to Carl Schmitt's work and contributed to enriching the theoretical foundation of the New Right.⁷² Delsol belongs to the antimodern entente that strives to restore a Christian Catholic approach to philosophy and politics.⁷³ During LMPT, she echoed some of the landmark tropes of conservatism, namely transmission and "preservation of the future,"⁷⁴ and would later develop recurrent far-right notions such as "uprooting." Together with the late Roger Scruton, Delsol is currently a patronage committee member of the Pont Neuf foundation, a conservative think tank founded by Charles Beigbeder to serve as a meeting point for conservatives at the crossroads between the conservative right and the far right. Finally, Fabrice Hadjadj, a philosopher and playwright who was born into a Tunisian Jewish family and later converted to Catholicism, has described LMPT as a "revolt against the techno-liberal order."⁷⁵ This attitude is similar to that of *Limite* magazine, in which Hadjadj was also involved. After accusing Christianity of becoming "effeminate" in the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015, Hadjadj called for a "Christian warrior virility" to fight against Islamic terrorism.⁷⁶

The main reference points and ideas of LMPT did not go unnoticed in Spain. Years later, top member of Vox Francisco Contreras coordinated the compilation of a volume of essays about LMPT.⁷⁷ The presentation of the book took place at CEU San Pablo with contributor Jaime Mayor Oreja. The release followed an interview at the *Actual*, a media outlet owned by HazteOír, during which Contreras posited a relationship between the sexual revolution of May 1968, demographic decline in Europe, and the Great Replacement conspiracy theory.⁷⁸ The book included contributions from French authors linked to the movement, such as Ludovine de la Rochère and Jean Sévillia. Chief editor of the conservative *Figaro Magazine* and a revisionist historian,⁷⁹ Sévillia was invited in 2018 to a congress at Francisco de Vitoria University to discuss the legacy of May 1968. He was joined by Hadjadj and Tugdual Derville; Contreras and Alfonso Bullón de Mendoza, president of the ACdP, were among the Spanish panelists. For her part, Delsol was invited to the first International Congress "The Church and Culture in the Twentieth Century," organized by CEU San Pablo in 2017, and her work first appeared in a Spanish publishing house in 2015.⁸⁰ Christian publishing house Encuentro edited in 2018 the first Spanish-language book by François-Xavier Bellamy, in which he discussed transmission.⁸¹ As for Hadjadj, although he had been introduced to Spanish readers

72 Stéphane François, "Les paganismes de la Nouvelle Droite (1980-2004)" (PhD diss., Université Lille II, 2005).

73 Pierre Birnbaum, *Sur un nouveau moment antisémite. Jour de colère* (Paris: Fayard, 2015); Yann Raison du Cleuziou, "Un ralliement inversé?" *Mil Neuf Cent* 34, no. 1 (2016): 125, <https://doi.org/10.3917/mnc.034.0125>.

74 Raison du Cleuziou, *Une contre-révolution catholique*; Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199793747.001.0001>.

75 Hadjadj 2013, cited in Raison du Cleuziou, *Une contre-révolution catholique*.

76 Hadjadj 2015 and 2015b, cited in Raison du Cleuziou, *Une contre-révolution catholique*.

77 Francisco José Contreras, *La batalla por la familia en Europa: La Manif pour Tous y otros movimientos de resistencia* (Sekotia, 2017).

78 Alfonso Basallo, "Francisco J. Contreras: 'El Islam lleva las de ganar en el choque de trenes con la izquierda en Europa,'" *Actual*, February 27, 2017, <https://www.actuall.com/entrevista/familia/francisco-j-contreras-islam-lleva-las-ganar-choque-trenes-la-izquierda-europa/>.

79 Blanc, "Réseaux traditionalistes catholiques et 'réinformation' sur le web."

80 Chantal Delsol, *Populismos, una defensa de lo indefendible* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2015).

81 François-Xavier Bellamy, *Los desheredados. Por qué es urgente transmitir la cultura* (Madrid: Encuentro, 2018). Prior to that, Encuentro published in 2008 *En defensa de España*, DENAES' foundational manifesto, authored by Santiago Abascal and Gustavo Bueno.

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years before by the Christian publishing house Nuevo Inicio, he released three books between 2018 and 2019 with the Vox-linked Homo Legens.⁸²

The ISSEP: A Node of the French and Spanish Far Rights

The Spanish and French far rights took a further step toward solidifying their relationship when Marion Maréchal opened in 2020 a branch of her private school and metapolitical endeavor, the Institut des sciences sociales, économiques et politiques (ISSEP), in Madrid. Founded in 2018 after Marine Le Pen's niece left the National Rally, the ISSEP serves as a home for different figures from the worlds of business, academia, and politics. First established in Lyon, Maréchal's center includes on its scientific board former spokesmen of LMPT,⁸³ such as her close friends Jacques de Guillebon and Thibaud Collin; the right-wing paleoconservative author Paul Gottfried; Martial Bild, linked to the New Right; and Pascal Gauchon, a former member of the neofascist Parti des Forces Nouvelles. Close to Christian conservative media pundits like Geoffroy Lejeune, chief editor of *Valeurs Actuelles*, or the aforementioned de Guillebon, chief editor of *L'Incorrect*, Maréchal tries to influence the public debate and impose its metapolitical agenda, partly Christian conservative and close to the New Right, on the French mainstream.⁸⁴

The ISSEP's Spanish branch has been rather more successful. Early on, it seduced the leaders of Vox, who passed their Madrid headquarters on to Maréchal in 2020 as a venue for her project. Although she affirms that her initiative is apolitical, Santiago Abascal and Jorge Buxadé, Vox's spokesman in the European Parliament, attended the inauguration, as did Orella and Esparza.⁸⁵ The latter has been a lecturer at the ISSEP, alongside Mayor Oreja and Ariza. Just like his French counterpart, the Academic Director of ISSEP Madrid, Miguel Ángel Quintana Paz, has close ties to conservative media outlets such as *The Objective*.⁸⁶

The ISSEP functions as a think tank rather than a training school, as it specifically focuses on digital propaganda, narrative production, and top-level networking.⁸⁷ Its main concern is to connect ideas and people transnationally around common topics such as the defense of "European civilization" and its "Christian heritage." According to its French portal, the ISSEP offers a *rooted* curriculum and its staff is committed to "transmit[ting] to their students the taste for their history and civilizational heritage."⁸⁸ In Madrid, Quintana Paz puts forward a similar message, although his is explicit in that it emphasizes the role of Christianity in Western civilization.

In Spain more broadly, Quintana Paz's stances are part of a public dialogue that is emerging around Christian conservative voices, bringing together political forces

82 Fabrice Hadjadj, *Últimas noticias del hombre y de la mujer* (Madrid: Homo Legens, 2018); Fabrice Hadjadj, *99 lecciones para ser un payaso* (Madrid: Homo Legens, 2018); Fabrice Hadjadj, *Juana y los poshumanos o el sexo del ángel* (Madrid: Homo Legens, 2019).

83 Marion Maréchal's involvement in LMPT marked one of her first points of disagreement with Marine Le Pen, who wanted to distance herself from the movement.

84 Geva and Santos, "Europe's Far-right Educational Projects and Their Vision for the International Order," <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaab112>.

85 "Evento ISSEP Madrid," YouTube video, 2:44, posted by "ISSEP Madrid," September 15, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qACQJzh1r4>.

86 In the meantime, Spanish conservative media outlet Voz Pópuli is also developing close ties with the ISSEP.

87 It is telling that when asked about his reluctance to invest in the ISSEP, conservative Catholic businessman Charles Beigbeder answered, "I already have a think tank project." See Thiébault Dromard, "Charles Beigbeder: 'pourquoi je soutiens l'école de Marion Maréchal,'" *Challenges*, May 24, 2018, https://www.challenges.fr/politique/l-homme-d-affaires-charles-beigbeder-pourquoi-je-soutiens-l-ecole-de-marion-marechal_589349.

88 ISSEP, "Présentation," <https://www.issep.fr/presentation/>, accessed May 24, 2022.

from the right to the far right and channeled through Catholic academia.⁸⁹ Among the main contributions to this cause is a Spanish translation of Scruton's *Green Philosophy* (2021), with an introduction by Quintana Paz and a prologue by Abascal. For the metapolitical entrepreneurs of ISSEP, enemies laying siege to the European Civilization present themselves in different shapes and forms: "political correctness," "cancel culture," and, specifically, "woke ideology." All of these blurred ideological constructs aim to downgrade and criminalize progressive social movements—usually organized against systems of oppression beyond class, namely race, gender and sexual orientation—by making a straw man out of them.⁹⁰

Occasionally, ISSEP's metapolitical strategy takes the shape of a conspiracy theory, describing a scenario where political and academic elites are the leading advocates of intersectionality and any dissenting voice is censored. In France, these reactionary discourses began to impregnate the public debate with LMP.⁹¹ In the words of Édouard Husson, a far-right historian and lecturer at the French ISSEP, "woke goes against academic freedom."⁹² Even if the government of French President Emmanuel Macron has also led an important campaign against "woke ideology," when Maréchal joined Zemmour's party, she stated that she did so to fight Macron "paving the way to woke ideology."⁹³ In Spain, Quintana Paz is the main critique of "woke ideology," an "invisible ideology" whose objective is "to replace the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Latin world."⁹⁴

Reactionary Synergies around the *Asociación Católica de Propagandistas*

One organization linked to this milieu has recently experienced a period of intense activity: the Asociación Católica de Propagandistas (ACdP). Created in 1908 to tackle the secularization of Spanish society, the ACdP founded an in-house journal, *El Debate*, in 1911, and the CEU in 1933. The latter, an academic body, currently brings together the universities CEU San Pablo (Madrid), CEU Abat Oliba (Barcelona), and CEU Cardenal Herrera (Valencia). Most of their founders were Catholic bourgeoisie and

89 After a string of publications in conservative media outlets, some authored by Catholic intellectuals, reflecting on their role in society, a congress hosted by the University of Navarre took place to further develop the topic. Diego Garrocho, a lecturer at the Autonomous University of Madrid, traditionalist writer Juan Manuel De Prada, and Miguel Ángel Quintana Paz were among the panelists. See "¿Dónde están los intelectuales cristianos?" *Nuestro Tiempo* 710 (June-August 2021), <https://nuestrotiempo.unav.edu/es/campusuniversitario/donde-estan-los-intelectuales-cristianos>.

90 Alex Mahoudeau, *La panique woke. Anatomie d'une offensive réactionnaire* (Paris: Textuel, 2022).

91 Brustier, *Le Mai 68 conservateur*.

92 "Discours de Édouard Husson – Partenariat ISSEP / Collegium Internarium," YouTube video, 2:58, posted by "ISSEP Lyon," October 1, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzsfT197oQg>.

93 During the same speech, Marion Maréchal praised France as the "eldest daughter of the Church." See "Présidentielle : Marion Maréchal officialise son ralliement à Eric Zemmour," *Sudouest.fr*, March 6, 2022, <https://www.sudouest.fr/elections/presidentielle/presidentielle-marion-marechal-officialise-son-ralliement-a-eric-zemmour-9545836.php>.

94 Similar statements have been made by Quintana Paz in the columns of *El Debate*, a media outlet controlled by the ACdP, as well as in such intellectual spaces as the Círculo de Bellas Artes of Madrid. See José María Sánchez Galera, "Quintana Paz: 'Para el pensamiento 'woke', la reconciliación no existe,'" *El Debate*, February 16, 2022, <https://www.eldebate.com/religion/20220216/miguel-angel-quintana-paz-pensamiento-woke-reconciliacion-existe.html>; and "Wokismo, emotivismo hipertrofiado y nuevos abolicionismos," YouTube video, 2:12:36, posted by "Círculo de Bellas Artes," May 7, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZRMjUZcmNI>.

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noblemen, some of whom came from the Carlist movement, a counterrevolutionary and nationalist sociopolitical movement born in the nineteenth century.⁹⁵

In fact, Carlism is still present in the ACdP, providing a broad meeting point for the Spanish far right around Christian Traditionalism and Hispanidad. Alfonso Bullón de Mendoza,⁹⁶ president of the ACdP since 2018, is the director of *Aportes*, a history journal specializing in Carlism whose approach has been described as “Manichean and similar to that of conspiracy theories.”⁹⁷ *Aportes* brings together renowned members of the New Right sphere in France and Spain, including Imatz, Orella, and Javier Barrycoa. The latter is a professor at CEU Abat Oliba and member of the Carlist Traditionalist Communion, one of the few remaining parties espousing Carlism. Another member of the Spanish New Right, Fernando José Vaquero, praises *Aportes*’ devotion to Carlism.⁹⁸ Vaquero, who identifies the current period of crisis that Carlism is experiencing as the same as that facing Spain and the Church, is one of several authors of the New Right who dialogues with Carlism.⁹⁹

Since Bullón de Mendoza, a nobleman and descendant of generations of conservative politicians, took over as president of the ACdP, the organization’s activities have increased remarkably. On the occasion of the exhumation of Franco’s body in October 2020, CEU San Pablo organized an act that was attended by the dictator’s great-grandson, Louis de Bourbon. This Franco-Spanish aristocrat, linked to the French royalist movement, represents the legitimist branch of the French crown as he is a direct descendant of Louis XVI. During the act, Louis de Bourbon told the audience, sobbing, how they had dug up the coffin of his great-grandfather, affirming that they left the basilica “Cara al Sol,” evoking the Francoist anthem.¹⁰⁰ Former Interior Minister Jorge Fernández Díaz was also among the panelists. In September 2021, CEU San Pablo organized an event hosted by María San Gil to receive Isabel Díaz Ayuso, whose family policy for the Community of Madrid is held in high regard by

95 At that time, the Carlist movement was divided into two main currents: integrism and possibilism. While the first mostly brought together hardliners who rejected any secularization of political bodies like unions or parties, possibilists defended an approach that was more in tune with their time—one that was more concealing of the anti-clericalism emanating from the government and the workers’ movement. The founders of the ACdP were rather close to possibilism. See Pablo Sánchez Garrido, “Génesis e identidad del grupo fundacional de la ACN de JP (1904-1909),” *Hispania Sacra* 69 (139) (2017): 389–400, <https://doi.org/10.3989/hs.2017.026>; Feliciano Montero García, “La Acción Católica, Ángel Herrera y la Asociación Católica de Propagandistas,” *Laicismo y Catolicismo. El Conflicto Político-Religioso En La Segunda República, Alcalá de Henares* (2009): 159–179.

96 Bullón de Mendoza has recently coordinated, through the CEU Foundation, a seminar of historical studies on Carlism funded by the Ignacio Larramendi Foundation. This institution was conceived by Ignacio Larramendi (1921–2001), a Carlist militant who was the head of the multinational insurance company MAPFRE and one of the most influential Spanish businessmen of the twentieth century. See Fundación Ignacio Larramendi, “Celebrado el Seminario Internacional sobre Ignacio Larramendi y los estudios históricos sobre el Carlismo,” <https://www.larramendi.es/fundacion/celebrado-el-seminario-internacional-sobre-ignacio-larramendi-y-los-estudios-historicos-sobre-el-carlismo/>.

97 Jordi Canal, “El Carlismo en España: interpretaciones, problemas, propuestas,” in *O liberalismo nos seus contextos: un estado da cuestión*, ed. X. R. Barreiro Fernández (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 2008).

98 Fernando José Vaquero Oroquieta, “Carlismo: el movimiento de un pueblo católico por su rey,” *Geopolitika*, May 31, 2016, <https://www.geopolitika.ru/es/article/carlismo-el-movimiento-de-un-pueblo-catolico-por-su-rey>.

99 See “Manifiesto del Carlismo catalán: ‘La Moreneta llora por sus Requetés’ (versión castellana),” *Somatemps*; “Dossier: ‘El Carlismo,’” *Nihil Obstat* (June 2015), <https://culturatransversal.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/nihil-obstat-24-dossier-carlismo.jpg>. The interest is mutual: French-Spanish aristocrat Prince Sixtus Henry of Bourbon-Parma, leader of the Traditionalist Communion, attended a meeting in Vienna in 2014 organized by the Russian traditionalist oligarch Konstantin Malofeev; other attendees included New Right thinker Aleksandr Dugin and Marion Maréchal (see Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* [London: Routledge, 2018]).

100 “Salimos de la Basílica cara al sol: Luis Alfonso de Borbón recuerda la exhumación de de Franco,” YouTube video, 3:44, posted by “El Independiente,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcuBzC2etYM>.

the ACdP.¹⁰¹ The following month, the ACdP relaunched *El Debate*, the publication of which had ceased at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and never resumed.

Certain key figures linked to the French traditionalist sphere have been granted a space at *El Debate*. Fabrice Hadjadj was one of their first interviewees, criticizing Christian communitarianism and praising proselytism.¹⁰² Chantal Delsol's book *La fin de la Chrétienté* (Éditions du Cerf, 2021) has been reviewed by Jorge Soley at *El Debate*.¹⁰³ Because Delsol foresees in her work the end of Christianity as a civilization and due to its condemnation of communitarianism, it is read critically.¹⁰⁴ Erwan de la Villéon, director of the Puy du Fou¹⁰⁵ in Spain, also relayed an essentialist discourse about Spanish history and its identity through an interview with this media outlet. According to de la Villéon, the park do not have any ideological bias, showcasing, for instance, the Spanish Civil War "without leaning toward either side."¹⁰⁶

During the month of November 2021, the ACdP organized a congress on political correctness that resulted in the publication of a manifesto. At a conference prior to its release hosted by María San Gil, she stated that Christians must rise up against political correctness. The manifesto compares political correctness to a pandemic and a new form of totalitarianism against Christianity. Mimicking the introduction of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, it states:

A pandemic is haunting the world, the pandemic of political correctness [...] It is a new kind of pseudoreligiosity that, together with postmodern secularism, proposes the construction of a world in which Christianity is reduced to the condition of a memory, a bad memory.¹⁰⁷

This initiative preceded a larger propagandistic campaign on similar premises. While the Spanish government, led by the Socialist Party and the left-wing coalition Unidas Podemos, was debating new legislation on abortion that included a prohibition on praying next to abortion clinics, the ACdP embarked on a massive campaign advertising on the public transportation systems of several Spanish cities. The message "Praying in front of an abortion clinic is great" was displayed next to a QR code that directed users to the website cancelados.es. On this website, in videos featuring various symbols related to popular culture and protest—like Guy Fawkes masks from the film

101 Raquel Tejero, "El plan de natalidad de Ayuso considerará a los concebidos como nacidos y miembros de la familia," *El Debate*, January 24, 2022, <https://www.eldebate.com/espana/madrid/20220124/plan-natalidad-ayuso-considerara-concebidos-nacidos-miembros-familia.html>.

102 José María Sánchez Galera, "Fabrice Hadjadj: 'Puede resultar más difícil ser cristiano en el cristianismo que en el mundo moderno,'" *El Debate*, October 19, 2021, <https://www.eldebate.com/religion/20211019/fabrice-hadjadj-cristiano-cristianismo-mundo-moderno.html>.

103 Jorge Soley, "Chantal Delsol: la filósofa que anuncia el fin de la civilización cristiana pero no del cristianismo," *El Debate*, February 12, 2022, <https://www.eldebate.com/religion/20220212/chantal-delsol-filosofa-anuncia-civilizacion-cristiana-cristianismo.html>.

104 In the article, Soley mentions another interview to Delsol at *El Manifiesto*, carried out by Arnaud Imatz, in which the two dissect in greater depth the philosopher's book. See Arnaud Imatz, "El fin de la cristiandad. Entrevista con Chantal Delsol (I)," *El Manifiesto*, January 5, 2022, <https://elmanifesto.com/entrevistas/73118535/El-fin-de-la-cristiandad-Entrevista-con-Chantal-Delsol-I.html>.

105 The Spanish *Puy du Fou* is a branch of a French theme park recreating the history of the Vendée counterrevolutionaries that was founded by Philippe de Villiers, Zemmour's personal advisor.

106 María Serrano, "Queremos que los héroes de nuestros hijos sean Isabel la Católica, Séneca y los reyes godos, no Pikachu y Superman," *El Debate*, March 12, 2022, <https://www.eldebate.com/cultura/20220312/queremos-heroes-nuestros-hijos-sean-isabel-catolica-reyes-godos-no-pikachu-superman.html>.

107 ACdP, "XXIII Congreso Católicos y Vida Pública. Corrección política: libertades en peligro," <https://alfayomega.es/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Manifiesto-23-CCyVP.pdf>.

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V for Vendetta (2005)—personalities linked to the Spanish far-right milieu, including José Luis Orella, criticize the alleged censorship of certain discourses in the public sphere: fundamentally anti-abortion, revisionist, and, *in fine*, far-right discourses.

Among the most recent events organized by CEU San Pablo, the international congress “Toward a Christian Renewal”¹⁰⁸ stands out. According to its director, Elio Gallego, the aim of this international meeting was to make Europe aware of its need to return to spirituality and overcome rationalism in order to remain part of history.¹⁰⁹ Among the main panelists were François-Xavier Bédaride, Isabel Benjumea (PP), Alfonso Bullón de Mendoza, Jaime Mayor Oreja, María San Gil, Francisco Contreras (Vox), Miguel Ángel Quintana Paz (ISSEP), Chantal Delsol, and David Engels, as well as other personalities from the worlds of politics and the media in Italy, Hungary, and the United States. Engels, a far-right historian and expert on Oswald Spengler, has edited *Renovatio Europae: For a Hesperialist Future for Europe* (Blue Tiger Media, 2019). This compilation—which includes the work of several European authors, among them Chantal Delsol—advocates for a new European integration called “Hesperialism,” based on the affirmation of conservative values, to face the current challenges haunting Europe, including “mass immigration, the aging of society, the radical transformation of values or demographic decline.” During a panel at that meeting, CEU San Pablo history professor Alejandro Rodríguez, in criticizing atheist ideologies such as nationalism and communism, argued that secularization leads to violence and even genocide.

Conclusion

Considering the exchanges between the French and Spanish far rights mentioned here—around different reactionary ideologies that seem to reach variable equilibriums and, fundamentally, a civilizational project based on the notions of Latinity, *Hispanidad*, and Christian universalism—it cannot be denied that the French and Spanish far rights have similar projects. On the basis of a conservative renewal, combined with the reinvigoration of the French New Right school of thought, these projects may arouse the political and social sympathies of the moderate right and the far right. Truth be told, the political wing of this movement has suffered several major setbacks: the defeat of José Antonio Kast in Chile, the victory of Gustavo Petro in Colombia, the return of Lula da Silva in Brasil, and the poor result of Reconquête in the French presidential and legislative elections. Nevertheless, Giorgia Meloni, leader of an organization key for this entente, Fratelli d'Italia, became Italy's new Prime Minister in September 2022. Regarding Spain, Vox will face general elections in November 2023 with promising predictions according to the polls. In any case, the cultural and ideological foundations of these formations still seem relatively solid, as their intertwined trajectories continue along a well-trodden path that is historically rooted.

¹⁰⁸ Since the congress was held shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, some participants had to be absent, such as the Russians Yuri Vasylenko and Andrey Kordochkin, and the president of the Board of Trustees of the Mathias Corvinus Collegium of Hungary, Balázs Orbán.

¹⁰⁹ Nazione Futura, “We Need a Christian Rebirth of Europe: An Interview with Elio Gallego García,” *The European Conservative*, February 28, 2022, <https://europeanconservative.com/articles/interview/interview-with-elio-gallego-garcia/>.



The Comparative Economics of Neo-Illiberalism

LÁSZLÓ CSABA

Abstract

This essay aims to provide an explicitly economic explanation for the astonishing spread of economic illiberalism in the twenty-first century. Given that the twentieth century was largely a period of economic planning of various sorts, which ended in conspicuous failure, the revival of statism and micro-management of economic affairs in many—if not most—parts of the globe cries out for explanation. The paper explores why and how this trend has re-emerged and solidified in a large number of countries, their diverse factor endowments, historical legacies, cultural backgrounds, and political institutions notwithstanding. The trend has ideational as well as materialistic roots.

Keywords: neoliberalism; neo-illiberalism

The political economy of the past two centuries of capitalist development has been characterized by a paradox. Even as politicians have preached and legislated much of what a free-market economy would require, reality has been shaped by a largely illiberal set of practices, and not only in late-industrializing countries, as highlighted in Alexander Gerschenkron's classic analysis.¹ My own account of the post-Second World War period supports this insight, both in terms of theory and in terms of accounting for economic success in developing countries.²

In this article, I surveyed the experiences of Russia, China, Central European states, and developing states.³ This paper complements that research with new theoretical interpretations and new case studies: Western Europe; illiberal Central Europe, exemplified by Hungary; and the Asian success stories of poverty reduction. In India and China, two large countries with highly distinct factor endowments, we find a strikingly similar commitment to economic and political statism over the past two decades, which is the focus of our attention here. Statist illiberalism is, in itself, neither novel nor surprising—but its return is indeed perplexing.

If it is the case that unsuccessful policies are making a return, introducing a neologism, at least for the economist, on illiberal practices and supportive theories of the twenty-first century may make perfect sense. The point of using the new terminology is to set aside what we observe in the current century that is rooted in the established practices of, say, developmental states in East Asia and elsewhere;⁴ Soviet-style command economies; or Chinese economic development in the past half-century. Instead, I would argue that neo-illiberalism denotes a *new, previously unseen version of state interventionism*. This set of policies, which more often precede than follow its theoretical formulations, leads to the emergence of a new form of economic management.

According to *Science Direct*, the term “neo-illiberalism” was first introduced by the now-83-year-old editor of the *Economic Times of India*, Swaminathan Ayiar,⁵ who used it to describe the growing state intervention in his country that preceded the Modi era. The concept evolved over the decade that followed, with Reijer Hendrikse analyzing over 50 instances of its use in his broad survey article.⁶ Meanwhile, a well-reviewed monograph by Aviezer Tucker analyzes how right-wing movements can and do employ the new methods of illiberalism and how the constituent elements of classical neoliberal approaches combine to produce a new version of statism.⁷ The mirror image of “neo-illiberalism” is what Polish Minister of Finance and Vice Prime Minister Grzegorz Kolodko—one of the most vocal critics of economic neoliberalism—calls, in his recent book, “new pragmatism.” He uses this term to describe his eclectic, heterodox approach to politics, in which the state takes an activist role in bringing about outcomes that are socially and environmentally sustainable.⁸

Economic theory, the neoclassical consensus, and the theory of economic policy in particular, as propounded in good schools, tend to be a broad church. But this church, like global religions, shares some basic tenets, including an attachment to methodological individualism and a commitment to private property and civil

1 Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (New York: Belknap Press, 1962).

2 László Csaba, “Illiberal Economic Policies,” in *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, ed. Stephen Holmes, Andras Sajó, and Renata Uitz (New York: Routledge, 2021), 674–690.

3 The useful comments of Zs.I. Benczes, I.T. Berend, and I.Szelényi, as well as of the editor and an anonymous referee, are appreciated, with the usual caveats.

4 Tamás Gerócs and Judit Riez, eds., *The Post-Crisis Developmental State: Perspectives from the Global Periphery* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

5 Swaminathan Ayiar, “Neo-Illiberalism on India’s Bane,” *The Times of India*, July 17, 2011.

6 Reijer Hendrikse, “Neo-Illiberalism,” *Geoforum* 95 (October 2018): 169–172, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.07.002>.

7 Aviezer Tucker, *Democracy against Liberalism: Rise and Fall* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020).

8 Grzegorz W. Kolodko, *The Political Economy of New Pragmatism* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2022).

liberties. The general approach tends to see any form of state interventionism as lacking justification. By contrast, reliance on markets and self-regulation seems to be taken as a given in all except crisis situations. While both the classical and new versions of the dominant lines of thought—monetarism and Keynesianism—see the market as the fundamental institution of economic progress, they diverge on the appropriate role for monetary and fiscal activism.

In the current century, the economic reality on the ground seems quite different from the theory. There have been a series of compelling cases where state-owned enterprises have played a major role in bringing about economic growth⁹—albeit largely in emerging economies. But among the advanced economies, too, one may observe the revival of state activism, including the growth of re-distribution as a share of GDP and the keeping of national champions in public hands, supported by ever thicker, deeper, and more meticulous regulation (and not only in the financial sector).¹⁰

What is particularly remarkable is that state interventionism seems to have solidified, at least in Europe, long after the years of immediate crisis management (post-2008 and post-2020).¹¹ Meanwhile, the big success stories of fighting global poverty—namely China¹² and India¹³—have embarked on a path toward open and lasting statism, which entails picking winners, protecting markets, and channeling funds to those close to the political authorities rather than following any abstract principle.

The rise of statism is a truly surprising development, and not only because it flies in the face of the received textbook wisdom. The collapse of the Soviet Empire and the period of Great Moderation in the economic practices of OECD countries between 1989 and 2008 created a consensus policy view that market opening and liberalization—including financial liberalization and deepening, but also privatization in most (if not all) sectors—is good for growth in general and for poor countries in particular. As the Nobel Prize-winning economist Michael Spence elaborates, the general validity of market principles goes much deeper than the once much-discussed Washington Consensus, the one-time ultimate wisdom of international financial institutions (IFIs).¹⁴ It implies a much more thorough commitment to open-market principles than IFIs have ever called for. The evidence he cites and summarizes—in terms of both theory and empirics—is rather straightforward in this field.

From the angle of commitment to market principles, we find a series of questions to be clarified. *First*, why have countries in Central and Eastern Europe—which adopted Western-style market economies following their bitter experiences with statism dating back to the interwar period—largely turned down illiberal paths since the 2010s despite their membership of the European Union?¹⁵

9 Lalita S. Som, *State Capitalism: Why SOEs Matter and the Challenges they Face* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

10 Miklós Szanyi, ed., *Seeking the Best Master: State Ownership in the Varieties of Capitalism* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2019).

11 If one recalls President Trump's use of "helicopter money" by sending cheques directly to millions of households or West European countries' highly centralized and highly nationalistic arrangements, both in terms of vaccine purchases and introducing health-and-safety regulations, the pandemic as a trigger of statism does not require much elaboration, but is rather axiomatic. The subject of the debate on both sides of the Atlantic has been whether this is temporary or a lasting trend.

12 Renwei Zhao, *China Economic Transition Research* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021); Justin Yifu Lin, *Beating the Odds: Jump-Starting Developing Countries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

13 Prasanna Mohanty, *Unkept Promise: What Derailed the Indian Economy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2021); Ashoka Mody, *India is Broken: A People Betrayed, from Independence to Today* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022).

14 Michael Spence, "Some Thoughts on the Washington Consensus and Subsequent Global Economic Development," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 35, no. 3 (2021): 67-82, <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.35.3.67>.

15 The exceptions include the Baltics and Slovakia. But in the old EU we may list France, Italy, Greece, and Spain among those states that are more interventionist and less liberal today than they were, say, a decade ago.

Second, why has most of Western Europe—and specifically its core countries—not returned to the successful practices of Great Moderation, instead sustaining state interventionism long after the crisis has passed? This is very different from the practices of the United States, the globe's largest economy, although the latter falls outside the scope of the present analysis.¹⁶ Comparative economics must be selective if it is to retain a broader focus beyond describing individual cases.

Third, why do we observe in the large emerging markets, particularly in China and India, a trend toward more rather than less statism, when such policies have never been particularly good at enhancing social welfare in any of these nations?

The answers to these three basic questions are neither trivial nor axiomatic—not least because illiberalism and populism have been a subject of inquiry in the social sciences for at least a quarter-century¹⁷ and most of the output is highly critical of the phenomenon. Thus, our puzzle is the drift between the theoretical-normative and the observed-empirical.

Central Europe: A Relapse to Centralism

Most of the literature uses the term “postcommunist countries” or “Central and Eastern Europe” (CEE) to denote the countries that still bear a more or less totalitarian heritage. Both terms are misleading. “Postcommunist,” like “new EU members,” defines a group by what it is not, or no longer is, which is an obvious analytical weakness. Meanwhile, CEE covers a very broad area, namely the entire former Soviet bloc and the Balkans—a group of countries with wildly different histories, institutions, and cultural and political qualities. Thus, it is more useful to follow the traditional line of historiography,¹⁸ which talks of West Central Europe, which used to belong to the Holy Roman Empire; Eastern Europe, which belonged to the Russian Empire; and the Balkans and Central Europe, which is the eastern half of Roman Christianity, a sphere of parliamentary rule and religious freedom. The latter region has a long history of centralized rule, in multinational empires until the First World War and thereafter in the multi-national but theoretically “nation”-states created by the Paris Treaties of 1919-1920.

For the purposes of this paper, it is vital to sustain this delineation, since generalizations across three dozen (largely newly established) countries are by definition of limited value and have a tendency to conceal more than they enlighten.¹⁹ Here, we confine ourselves to the Central European region, exemplified by Hungary. True, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic are largely different²⁰ and Hungarian developments have a very special flavor.²¹ Still, Hungary is a suitable test case when comparing to others from the neighboring sub-region.

¹⁶ The USA has indeed witnessed a series of illiberal measures, especially in international trade during the Trump Administration, but also under the Obama Administration's fire-fighting of the Great Recession. But crisis-management measures, both in finance and trade, have tended to be revoked sooner rather than later.

¹⁷ For an extensive recent overview, see Günter Frankenberg, “Exploring the Topography of the Authoritarian: Populism, Illiberalism and Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Illiberal Studies* 2, no. 1 (2022): 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.53483/vdiu3531>, and the literature cited therein.

¹⁸ Jenő Szűcs and Julianna Parti, “The Three Historical Regions of Europe: An Outline,” *Acta Historica* 29, nos. 3-4 (1983): 131-184, <https://doi.org/10.7829/j.ctv28ob7g2.9>.

¹⁹ cf. the similar arguments made by Aleksandr V. Gevorkyan, *Transition Economies: Transformation, Development and Society in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

²⁰ Due to a number of factors, Poland has traveled a path only partially parallel to that of Hungary. Czechia, with its peculiar political structure, is also a different ball game, as is the big success story of transition, Slovakia, which has surprised most external observers with its lasting success (exemplified by its introduction of the single currency as early as 2009).

²¹ Peter Krekó, “The Birth of an Illiberal Informational Autocracy in Europe: A Case Study on Hungary,” *Journal of Illiberalism Studies* 2, no. 1 (2022): 55-72, <https://doi.org/10.53483/wcjlw3538>.

In the case of Hungary, which could and perhaps should be elaborated in a separate article, we have yet to observe a full-fledged and formal reversal of the broad accomplishments of 1989-2010. Despite its efforts, the government has been unable to effect a complete U-turn either on economic policy or on the structure of international relations (specifically NATO and EU membership). Moreover, domestic politics—including media—has remained a contested arena, even if conditions continue to shift in favor of the governing coalition and its cronies. Thus, while we do observe regression in terms of economic and political freedoms, anchored in theory in EU and NATO membership, the Hungarian model cannot and should not be equated with those of Belarus and Russia (as Bálint Magyar and Bálint Madlovics do in their recent book).²²

The reversal of pro-market and power-sharing arrangements is not exclusive to the Fidesz government. As could be documented in detail, first drifting, later pork-barrel politics, and not least efforts to dodge the spirit and often the letter of EU arrangements could be observed as early as 2005.²³ These processes received a new impetus from the changing of the guard in 2010, when the idea of creating a specifically Hungarian model for the polity and the economy—what a former member of the Constitutional Court calls a “revolutionary change”—gathered momentum.²⁴

The period between 2009 and 2013 witnessed the rise of state interventionism across the globe—and particularly in Europe. We may recall the Greek bailout operations; the stand-by agreements of such European Union members as Spain, Romania, and Latvia with the so-called Troika (the IMF, the European Central Bank, and the EU); and then-President of the European Central Bank Mario Draghi’s famous pledge in July 2012 to do “anything it takes” to save the single currency, but specifically the Eurozone’s southern members, from falling into open insolvency. National governments from Paris to Berlin were not slow to bail out big banks and corporations, offer guarantees, and provide various forms of direct assistance to “the man on the street.”

It is important to highlight that the Fidesz government has in no way emulated the practices of Germany or any other core EU nation. The commonalities end with its enhanced reliance on discretionary fiscal interventions, ad-hoc measures, and targeted intervention into economic and social processes, irrespective of rights, customs or legalistic considerations of any sort. “Quick decisions had to be taken,” the contemporary slogan went—a claim that runs counter to the Hungarian proverb “Fast work is rarely of good quality.”

A thorough overview of Hungarian economic policy is provided in the recently published monograph by István Benczes, a professor of world economy at Corvinus University of Budapest.²⁵ In what follows, I echo his line, unless specifics require arguments or facts from different or competing sources. Given the exhaustive nature of this monograph, I will generally refrain from citing the overwhelming amount of output, produced primarily by political scientists, that provides competing interpretations of the causes and nature of the illiberal turn, both within Hungary and in Central European perspective.

In October 2008 the Hungarian left-wing government was forced into a standoff with the IMF, which had created the typical kind of straitjacket from the point of

²² Bálint Magyar and Bálint Madlovics, *A Concise Field-Guide to Post-Communist Regimes: Actors, Institutions and Dynamics* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022).

²³ László Csaba, “And the First Shall Be the Last,” *Hungarian Studies* 25, no. 2 (2021): 235-248, <https://doi.org/10.1556/hstud.25.2011.2.6>.

²⁴ István Stumpf, “The Role of the Constitutional Court in the Constitutional Control of Legislation,” in *Liber Amicorum Károly Bárd vol II: Constraints on Government and Criminal Justice*, ed. Petra Bárd (Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2022), 420-430.

²⁵ István Benczes, *Gazdasági növekedés és versenyképesség—intézményi perspektívában* (Budapest: Ludovika Egyetemi Kiadó, 2022), 155-246.

view of macroeconomic policies. The caretaking Bajnai government and the new Fidesz majority in 2010–2014 were thus both largely constrained in their room for maneuver. However, while Bajnai and Co. tried to use the situation to implement overdue adjustment measures, including systemic changes, the Fidesz movement built its popularity on rejecting anything coming from the extended arms of financial capital. Resisting whatever advice came from Brussels and freeing itself from the IMF was not merely a prestige project, but a vital substantive component of the policies of the second Orbán government.²⁶

Following the agreement with the EU Commission in May 2013, unorthodoxy in economic decisions became the leitmotif of government's activities. These included the nationalization of private pension savings in order to manage public debt (in the range of 10 percent of GDP), taxing selected sectors, promoting national ownership in certain areas— primarily energy, banking, and the press—and a general reliance on ad-hoc interventions of both fiscal and regulatory nature.

The third Orbán government from 2014 to 2018 took advantage of favorable international conditions, including unilateral EU transfers (reaching about 4 percent of GDP annually), negative real rates of interest on global markets, a savings glut, and—last but not least—the recovery of European markets. By keeping the rate of investment high (close to 30 percent) and capitalizing on global price stability brought about by a variety of structural, expectational, and policy factors, the government could focus on its major priorities. This approach was summed up in the slogan “more than a change in government, but less than a change of regime.” It included the further expansion of national champions in banking, trade, and the media, as well as building up what adherents called a “national middle class”: an entrepreneurial cohort that would be both state-dependent and instrumental in serving governmental objectives. The most extreme example of the latter was the creation, in August 2018, of a huge pro-government media holding through donations by owners of their respective holdings.²⁷

Unsurprisingly, therefore, in the view of supporters of the system, it was basically pork-barrel politics—rather than intellectual or moral considerations, arguments, or quality of governance—that yielded the election victory in 2018.²⁸ The promise was “more of the same.” But this was not to be: the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the face of the world.

The third Fidesz government had already been on its way to further strengthening the executive and weakening the system of checks and balances. Centralization and the appointment of political trustees to positions of relevance had continued, in spheres ranging from cultural life to sports, from the foreign service to public and private media and universities. The fast and unstoppable spread of the pandemic unquestionably created an extreme situation—an emergency situation. However, as Zoltán Adám and Iván Csaba explain in detail in their recent article, the administration was not slow to (mis)use the situation to make permanent the extraordinary measures that were introduced to respond to the exigencies created by the pandemic.²⁹ These include the suspension of most checks and balances and the subordination of the health care system and primary education as a whole to the Ministry of Interior.

In 2020 and 2021, most countries saw an increase in governmental activism and public assistance to ailing or complaining firms and sectors. What set Hungary apart was the way in which *the exception became the rule*. The formation of the Parliament

²⁶ The first was a four-party coalition government of right-wing forces that was in office between 1998 and 2002.

²⁷ B. Bordács, “Biztosítani kell a magyar sajtót és kultúrát! *Origo*,” November, 18, 2018.

²⁸ András Láncki, “The Renewed Social Contract: Hungary's Elections,” *Hungarian Review* 8, no. 3 (2018).

²⁹ Zoltán Adám and Iván Csaba, “Populism Unrestrained: Policy Responses of the Orbán Regime to the Pandemic, 2020–2021,” *European Policy Analysis* 8, no. 3 (2022): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1002/epa2.1157>.

in May 2022 started with its self-decapitation: in light of the war in neighboring Ukraine, it empowered the government to rule by decree. Whereas in most EU countries the fire-fighting measures that had been introduced in 2020 (and by no means only the obligation to wear masks in public places) tended to be withdrawn in 2021, in Hungary the “crisis-management measures” tended to solidify and governmental interventionism gathered momentum.

Most recently, the period preceding the April 2022 legislative elections witnessed a truly unprecedented spending spree. While the central bank has sustained strongly negative real rates of interest and many elements of quantitative easing—including the program to buy bonds—are still in place at the time of writing, the state’s fiscal policy has become even more profligate. Even as GDP grew by 7.1 percent in 2021, according to preliminary data, the government deficit reached 6.8 percent and the public debt/GDP ratio hit 76.8 percent. This is a very long way from—in fact the opposite of—the proverbial Keynesian symmetry criterion, when years of expansion should close with a surplus.

In the last quarter of 2021 and the first quarter of 2022, the government embarked on an unprecedented series of investments, the thirteenth-month pension was paid, people raising children received one-off payments, and the civil service—and not just police and the military—received lavish wage increases. Net wages in the first half of 2022 grew by 15.4 percent, and in the first six months of the year, the deficit reached the sum earmarked for the full year.³⁰ In short, electoral policies played a big role in Fidesz winning its fourth consecutive election—again in a landslide that gave it the two-thirds majority necessary to make changes to the Constitution.

Thus have we reached the end of the road. While the government has gained a supermajority, sustaining its profligate policies has become impossible. Hungarian bonds are still selling on the money market, but the rate of return in July was over 10 percent, or four times that of the German Bund. The multiyear struggle with the EU overrule of law led to an Article 7 procedure in April 2022, and no money arrived from the EU coffers (except funds linked to commitments made in previous years) in 2021 and 2022. This represents a fundamental turn in the conditions of external funding, while domestic investment will have to be severely cut to re-balance the economy. As so frequently in history, political and economic rationality do not overlap, but work against each other, and not only in the short run.

Western Europe: Factors Sustaining Statism

Established economic analyses of Western Europe’s lasting growth problem, going back at least four decades, tend to find the answer to this puzzle by making reouldced to structural problems and misaligned incentives.³¹ This is often complemented by references to overregulation, neglect of capital markets, and misaligned incentives related to social value oldcednd inherited administrative practices.³² Such insights translate into calls for more rather than less deregulation; investment in research and development; appreciation for human capital and innovation, including the small-business sector; and streamlining state interventionism.

It goes without saying that these general insights apply to very different extents in different countries. Switzerland is different from Italy and its capitalism has little common with Sweden or Denmark for that matter. However, studies on countries with oldcedesifficultiies highlight certain recurring shortcomings in line with the

³⁰ Unless otherwise specified, all data on Hungary in this article come from the Central Statistical Office and National Bank of Hungary.

³¹ Anders Aslund and Simeon Djankov, *Europe’s Growth Challenge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³² Vito Tanzi, *Termites of the State: Why Complexity Leads to Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

mainstream view summarized above.³³ These include: poor-quality educational systems, which translate to low innovative capacity; overregulation of the labor market; neglect of the small-business sector, especially the segment with the potential for innovation and job creation; the misdirection of fiscal resources in ways that do not follow the principle of highest return on investment; and low administrative efficiency. In short: *weak government with weak markets, or the inverse of the East Asian developmental state.*

In part of the social science literature, Western Europe is presented as a stronghold of “neoliberalism,” however this (mostly derogatory) term is defined. Neoliberalism implies more deregulation and less state redistribution, along the lines preached (rather than practiced) by the Thatcher and Reagan Administrations in the 1980s. Yet claiming this—and resultant “reform fatigue”—to be at the root of the revival of statism in Western Europe is plainly wrong, as each of our country cases indicate.

The tendency to blame excessive neoliberalism, though widespread, is misguided, as we try to document by providing a snapshot of the major EU powers. The foremost proponent of free-market ideology, the United Kingdom, has actually left the EU. Brexit, as eloquently explained by Rudolf Adam, is hard to present as anything but a story of populism winning out over conventional economic and political rationality—a triumph of emotions over interests.³⁴ And contrary to the claims of the Brexiteers, Britain has not been transformed into a free-market society. Global Britain has yet to emerge, and with the World Trade Organization system in shambles, this is not a near-term prospect. Within the UK, while Thatcherite slogans are back in vogue, this is discourse rather than reality. Leaving the single market has created a large number of obstacles to trade and free movement of people, as anyone with proper information could testify. In short, the outcome—at least in practice—has been less, not more, liberalism. The Boris Johnson government tended to be more populist than libertarian, open as it was to lobbying and factionalism, a reality the quality press was never slow to expose.

The major political and military power in Western Europe is France. This country has never been a stronghold of liberalism. Instead, the French economic model has always been an archetypal case of *dirigisme* and state interventionism.³⁵ While many reforms have taken place—induced not least by the requirements of the economic and monetary union in its various stages of deepening—state-centric economic policymaking has never ceased. The French state has always remained extensive and has continued to undertake one of the largest re-distributions in Europe and worldwide: this reached no less than 61.4 percent of GDP in the crisis year of 2020 before declining to 59.2 percent in 2021, compared to the EU average of 53 percent and 51.6 percent, respectively.³⁶ France has one of the lowest Gini coefficients of all OECD countries, at 32.4, compared to Germany’s 31.7 and the UK’s 35.1.

The French model has always heavily relied on state coordination, on picking winners, on protecting markets and managed trade. During the 2022 presidential election campaign, President Emmanuel Macron, the leading candidate of France’s pro-European and economically liberal forces, advocated nationalizing electric energy production and fixing its price. The extreme left and the extreme right both adopted anti-market and anti-EU platforms that would have implied even more interventionism. Given that Macron’s bloc won only 244 of 577 seats in the legislative elections of June 2022 (losing the absolute majority it had enjoyed in the previous session), the limits on any pro-market policies have been clearly drawn by the

33 Luigi Burroni, Emmanuele Pavolini, and Marino Regini, eds., *Mediterranean Capitalism Revisited: One Model, Different Trajectories* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).

34 Rudolf G. Adam, *Brexit: Causes and Consequences* (Cham: Springer International, 2020).

35 Frances M.B. Lynch, *The French Economy* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2021).

36 Eurostat, “Euro Indicators Overview,” 2022, [EC.europa.eu/Eurostat/web/euro-indicators](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/euro-indicators), accessed November 10, 2022.

electorate. In short, previous efforts to introduce more market-oriented, privatizing reforms are no longer on the agenda, while dirigiste meddling in economic affairs is respectable again.

The largest and strongest economy in the EU is undoubtedly Germany. Here, the distance between discourse and reality has perhaps been the largest in the EU since the Kohl era. During that period, which culminated in the re-unification of the country, the preaching of *ordo-liberalism* co-existed with ever-increasing state redistribution and the proliferation of public regulation. The latter has occurred at a minimum of three levels—EU, federal, and Land/regional—and has been supplemented by local rules.

In the case of Germany, we have historically observed the co-existence of contrasting perspectives. In Germany, “industrial policy,” a concept so close to the hearts of the French and the Italians, has always been anathema, especially for academic economists, but also for policymakers. Likewise, trade interventionism—including the much-debated practices of the Trump Administration, which relied on targeted excises and market protection to a point that bordered on trade wars—has never been seriously considered, despite European legislation being ambiguous and soft on this area.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to portray Germany as a country of unbridled (*ordo-*) liberalism. Environmental and labor regulations abound, agricultural policy is highly interventionist, and higher education and research funding are disbursed according to highly centralized procedures (even if regions have budgetary control over their local institutions). The welfare state has historically been extensive, and collective bargaining is decisive for labor markets. The process of re-unification has led to a large number of complex and politically motivated redistributive measures, including support for the weaker East and some North German provinces (*Finanzausgleich*). The coalition governments that have held power are natural hotbeds for lobby-based bargains on many issues, and not only those related to the economy. The selection of the President of the European Commission in 2019 via an informal bargain—rather than the formal procedure of *Spitzenkandidaten*—is just one well-publicized case of such deals.

In all, Germany has a peculiar mixture of market and nonmarket arrangements. The impact of the former on shaping the principles is great, while the imprint of the latter on practical arrangements, especially ones influencing the lifestyles of millions, is also undeniable. The latter clearly reflect the conditions of mass democracy and informational society. Visibility and popularity play major roles in determining what is politically feasible, irrespective of economic or other academic considerations. The perceptible trend away from both traditional conservative values and parties with green-leftist tendencies has yielded arrangements where liberal values tend to be preached rather than practiced. The more we think about, say, the European Green Deal, with its quantitative targets for emissions reduction and phasing out carbon-based energy resources, the more dominant this line becomes.

We could go on to discuss the experiences of many other countries, but space restrictions militate against it. In brief, Italy, Spain, Austria, and Belgium would be numbered among statist models, while Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia would serve as counterexamples. Thus, without further ado, let us turn to the issue—highly contested in the literature—of whether, and to what degree, the European Union as a supra-national regulatory community is influencing the trend toward illiberalism.

The answer is, in one sense, an unqualified yes. Most Community policies are openly illiberal and top-down, following the old Franco-German administrative tradition, referring usually to different special and general sectoral principles. But top-down planning, quantitative targets, and mandatory implementation are the rule, not the exception. Studies of the Common Agricultural Policy, as well as of common

technology policy, of environmental protection, and of common defense have not managed to quantify how these initiatives have influenced the competitiveness of core Europe over the past three decades.

A considerable part of the literature is of the opinion that it is not the above policies that are to be blamed.³⁷ Rather, these scholars claim, it is the construction of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) that is at fault. In their interpretation, the straitjacket created by the EMU has been positively harmful, particularly for the weaker, Southern economies, forcing them in part into unnecessary austerity and in part into lasting stagnation of output and sub-optimal levels of employment.

In our view, this perspective is hard to square with the facts. Traditionally backward nations—like Ireland, Slovakia, and the Baltics—have shown a remarkable ability to catch up over the past three decades. By contrast, traditionally advanced countries—like Belgium, France, and the formerly rapidly converging Greece and Spain—have faltered. Quantitative comparative studies of EU membership consider the Union a lasting “growth machine.”³⁸

This line of thought is congruent with the conventional wisdom. Accordingly, being part of a large market is growth-enhancing. Being part of a currency union brings stability and is welfare-enhancing, due not least to the enhanced competition that arises from the comparability of prices and lack of transaction costs, two factors that are particularly strong in the case of the EU.

The longer the time horizon we look at, the more indirect and hard-to-quantify factors gain in significance. These include the impact of continuous importation of technology and management knowledge, two factors unconditionally appreciated by any academic theory of growth. The stronger are interfirm relations, the stronger are components of microeconomic integration, which do not require governmental meddling in their conduct, and the more palpable is their impact on the economic well-being of citizens and countries alike.

Likewise, the more we think *longue durée*, the more likely we are to appreciate the role of institutional convergence. While nobody is advocating the unification of economic systems, it goes without saying that upgrading the quality of local institutions in line with those of the advanced economies is a factor of lasting convergence. In a way, less advanced nations may free-ride on the experience of more advanced ones, saving themselves the laborious and costly process of trial and error that would be involved in finding the most suitable option for themselves.

These insights are not quite novel. Studies of economic convergence in Europe have pointed to largely similar trends for the past two centuries.³⁹ Countries that have been able to adopt successful solutions to the challenges of modernization, and also join in the process of globalization, have tended to benefit. Conversely, when torn out of these processes—whether due to interwar economic nationalism or membership in the Soviet Empire—“autochthonous” development has invariably proven to be less efficient and less competitive.⁴⁰

While acknowledging that our brief discussion of core Europe could—and perhaps should—be expanded and complemented with detail, its conclusion is

³⁷ José Magone, Brigid Laffan, and Christian Schweiger, eds., *Core-Periphery Relations in the European Union: Power and Conflict in a Dualist Political Economy* (Abingdon- New York: Routledge, 2016); Ashoka Mody, *Eurotragedy: A Drama in Nine Acts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

³⁸ Michael Landesmann and István P. Székely, eds., *Does EU Membership Facilitate Convergence? The Experience of the EU's Eastern Enlargement, vols I and II* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

³⁹ Ivan T. Berend, *Economic History of a Divided Europe: Four Diverse Regions in an Integrating Continent* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

⁴⁰ Matthias Morys, *The Economic History of Central, Eastern and South-East Europe: 1800 to the Present* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021).

straightforward. There has been a demonstrable trend toward neo-illiberalism at both the national and Community levels—and this is among the factors that explain the relative decline of core Europe compared to the US and East Asia.

The Illiberal Asian Giants Do Catch Up

The developmental state has long been singled out as an alternative to market-based mainstream thinking on development, and we have already cited recent collective volumes reflecting on the subject. From our perspective of neo-illiberalism, the real challenge is not this—since any rule tends to have exceptions—but the experiences of India and the People’s Republic of China, with their stellar and sustained growth in the first two decades of the millennium, until the global external shock of COVID-19 marked the beginning of a new era.

The progress of the two giants is best demonstrated by the fact that their progress alone has more or less halved global poverty—which was among the most important Millennium Developmental Goals. Globally, the number of people living in poverty declined from 1.93 billion in 1990 to 696 million in 2017—or from 35.9 percent to 9.3 percent of the population. The poverty rate increased due to the pandemic, rising from six percent in 2017 to 10 percent in 2021. In the case of China, official data claim that poverty—defined as the number of people living on less than \$1.90 per day—was eradicated in 2015, while just 15.8 percent of the population were living below the more stringent \$5.50 standard in 2019 (before the pandemic), according to World Bank data.⁴¹

However, more detailed studies underscore two paradoxes via detailed field studies.⁴² The first is the significant *growth of inequality*, which in the case of China is now on a par with the US, with a Gini coefficient in the range of 41. The second is the fact that both India and China are characterized by very *limited social mobility*: family/starting positions have a decisive impact on an individual’s later position on the income ladder. Both features are known to contribute to social tensions in different socio-economic contexts.

Despite all the conceivable and legitimate criticism leveled against both countries, it goes without saying that their growth performance in the first two decades of the new millennium was impressive. The upgrading of economic structures, which has yet to take place in most of Latin America and Africa, has marched on: both China and India have become post-industrial service economies. While China is the globe’s largest exporter, having overtaken countries like Germany and the US, India has become a large service center and agricultural exporter. Both countries seem to have defied the pessimism of development economists of the 1950s and 1960s.

One of the many paradoxes of the two countries has been the fact that their catchup is usually attributed, in the economic literature,⁴³ to the liberalizing policies of 1978–2012 in China and 1986–2014 in India. The conventional wisdom holds that abolishing various forms of command and control, coupled with opening up to the external world, combine to explain both success stories.

Without attempting to produce new country studies in a section of this comparative and theory-driven paper, let us recall a few points from the literature that cut against the conventional wisdom. First, in the case of China, ever since President Xi Jinping’s accession to power in 2012, political and economic centralization has prevailed over the previous practice of informal pluralism within a single-party system. Following the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan in 2019 and again from 2022, China’s zero-

41 World Bank, “Databank,” www.worldbank.databank.com.

42 Carlos Gradín, Murray Leibbrandt, and Finn Tarp, eds., *Inequality in the Developing World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

43 This is in stark contrast to the various conceptualizations of neo-illiberalism as explained at the beginning of this paper.

tolerance policy has compounded a process that started much earlier: the *slowing-down of the economy*. GDP growth peaked in 2011 at 9.5 percent, declined to 2.2 percent in 2019, and since seems to have stabilized around 5 percent. Indian growth has oscillated between 5.2 and 8.3 percent in the past decade, declining to 6.5 percent during Covid in 2021 and recovering to 8.5 percent in 2022. But the big puzzle is that this was largely due to state interventionism, coupled with directed tax cuts by the rightist Modi administration.

Part of the answer is self-explanatory: in countries at lower levels of development, *structural factors*—like high investment, import of technology, and moving people from low-productivity sectors to high-productivity ones—allow for relatively long periods of growth. Moreover, the more countries *invest in human capital*, as both China and India (but not sub-Saharan Africa) have done, the room for approximating the technological frontier expands, while the possibility of combining incremental innovation with local initiatives and letting the commercial spirit loose allow for additional growth generation. *Foreign direct investment* in both countries has tended to be relevant to structural upgrading and growth-promoting rather than flowing to the resource sector alone, as it does in Latin America and Africa.

The open global trade regime—combined with historically low interest rates for borrowing, as well as the revolution in information technology—have opened up opportunities for latecomers, opportunities that both countries have been quick to capitalize on. Political stability and commitment to the basics, if not the minutiae, of a market order have also been helpful, giving China and India an edge over Africa and Latin America.

What, then, has been the major *difference between these two statist, illiberal models* of catching up over the past three decades? The answer might be a long list of factors and circumstances. However, if we stay at the level of abstraction customary for comparative research into economic systems, we may provide a simple but telling answer. For China, the pre-eminence of public versus private property has never been in question. Official Chinese academic authors, including Lin and Zhao,⁴⁴ talk about the relevance of nonstate property within the framework of a socialist market economy. Thus, real private ownership is an exception, a subordinate phenomenon.

By contrast, India is notorious for its propensity toward over-regulation and state meddling in the economy. However, the financial sector has never been fully nationalized, nor has the trade and housing sector. In short, *India has been a state-managed economy based on the predominance of private property*. State priorities have tended to be enforced by regulation rather than nationalization.

In recent years, and especially in the course of COVID-related crisis management, these features have only been strengthened. In China, state involvement in a variety of activities—through controls introduced with reference to health risks—has prevailed and proliferated. By contrast, in India, cronyism—i.e., the picking of private winners—has been strengthened, from the purchase of vaccines to the allocation of preferential resources. This has been in line with the established approach of the Modi Administration.⁴⁵

What, if anything, is to be learned from these contrasting experiences? Perhaps we come back to the traditional dualism of *path-dependency and path-creation*. In the case of China, it is hard to overlook 3,000 years of authoritarian heritage, coupled with the country's experience of regional decentralization. By contrast, India was not a united country until the period of the British Raj (1858–1947), even if state-centered civilizations existed for comparable lengths of time. Following British rule, the single largest displacement of persons in the twentieth century took place, to

44 Lin, *Beating the Odds*; Zhao, *China Economic Transition Research*, <https://doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691192338.001.0001>.

45 Josy Joseph, *How to Subvert a Democracy: Inside India's Deep State* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2022).

and from what are now Pakistan and Bangladesh, with 17 million people forcibly resettled. Myanmar and Sri Lanka, which were also parts of the Raj, took a different road following independence. Today, India is a federal country composed of 32 states—with their own languages, cultures, and self-government—under the Delhi Administration. In short, India is more fit to be a market than anything else.

But we can and do observe the role of policy choices. Between 1947 and 1991, India pursued import-substitution and a closed-door policy. By contrast, since 1978, China has never ceased to open, albeit with changing emphases. In post-2014 India and post-2019 China, the trend toward centralization has been a political choice, not an exigency.

We must also note that while a large portion of the literature attributes the high growth rates and ensuing poverty reduction in both countries to their neo-illiberalism,⁴⁶ this interpretation appears questionable. In line with established theories of growth, countries graduating to a higher level of development may have—but are by no means doomed to—slower rates of growth, unless major institutional reforms, technology imports, and innovation allow higher rates to be sustained. As we have seen in the case of China, the consensus growth forecast is in the range of 5 percent, while for India the figure is around 7 percent (according to government estimates). Both numbers are way below the trend for the preceding decade, COVID years excluded.

The slowdown can be attributed to a series of interacting factors. First, demography is not working in favor of either country: birth rates are far below the replacement level, making aging a major concern. Second, the financial sectors in both countries continue to be repressed, immediately limiting allocational efficiency. Third, governmental interventionism—in terms of petty meddling in the conduct of economic affairs at the firm level—is demonstrably present in both countries. Fourth, there are imminent limitations on their ability to sustain high investment. In the case of India, fixed capital formation peaked in 2011 at 35 percent before declining to 28 percent by 2021. In the case of China, gross fixed capital formation peaked in 2013 at 45 percent of GDP before declining to 42 percent in 2020. Note that the latter is still a very high figure globally (the OECD average for rich countries is around 20 percent), which is a clear sign of a low level of allocational efficiency and foreshadows a further slowdown, unless the financial system is radically restructured, of which there is as yet no sign.⁴⁷

In short, the neo-illiberal model, which seem to have worked under special circumstances in past decades, shows signs of ebbing. While it would be naive to attribute a growth-maximizing attitude to the Chinese and Indian governments, it is also straightforward that a slowdown in the growth of the pie is likely to have ramifications for administrations whose major legitimating principle is improving the wellbeing of the population.

Summary and the Way Ahead

In this paper, I have conducted a comparative analysis of three models of neo-illiberalism that have been present in the twenty-first century and do not follow in an immediate and pre-ordained fashion from historical antecedents. True, illiberalism has existed throughout the two centuries of modern capitalist development across the globe. However, what we term here “neo-illiberalism” has emerged in quite diverse regions where the preceding decades were shaped by attempts to improve economic policies through stabilization, liberalization, institution-building, and privatization (SLIP). This was indeed the agenda of the old Washington Consensus, as well as

⁴⁶ In the case of China the large role of market coordination and nonstate property, and in the case of India the pre-eminence of private property and of Trump-like nationalist, targeted pro-business policies under Modi, justify the use of this term.

⁴⁷ World Bank, “Databank,” www.databank.worldbank.org.

the less explicit, but more powerful, policy experience of the Great Moderation in the OECD. Two decades of liberalism have been followed by two decades of neo-illiberalism. What makes the trend particularly remarkable that it shows up in regions with vastly different cultural backgrounds and equally dissimilar levels of development and economic structures.

In trying to decipher the puzzle, we rely on the large body of literature on populism and authoritarianism. The observation of the rise of illiberal democracy is now a quarter-century old.⁴⁸ This trend is explained, first and foremost, by social re-stratification in the age of informational revolution and globalization that has weakened the traditional middle classes, as well as, in part, by changes in the set of values shared by a large—though not yet predominant—part of modern market-based societies at various levels of development.

Second, crisis management has proven to be more complex and less efficient than postulated in most of the economic literature. In core Europe, in particular, the commitment to protecting workplaces and an unwillingness to adopt new technologies or ways of conducting business—a general *status-quo bias*—seems to preempt any major initiative to change. In the Asian giants, the clear political implications of pro-market and generally liberalizing economic change, much advocated by local and international expert groups, lie at the heart of regress. And in Central Europe, the reaction to what has been presented as an unfair and unjust outcome of systemic changes and Europeanization explains, to a large degree, the relapse to old practices of rule. In a way, we are back to the classical dilemma identified by Karl Polányi, where conflictual relations between the market economy and democratic society⁴⁹ lead to oscillations between various forms of governance. Neo-illiberalism, as defined early in this paper, has undoubtedly emerged as a previously unseen mode of governance that has taken on a distinct form in each of the three models discussed.

Third, materialistic explanations for this outcome are accurate, but only in part. As we have seen, while poverty has decreased, global inequality has increased.⁵⁰ This is a classic case where, when there is more to be redistributed, calls for this intensify and penetrate the political sphere. This time, in two of the three cases, it is right-wing nationalist governments that are managing the process. This adds the “neo” to illiberalism, which never truly disappeared from most of the globe.

Fourth, the comparative approach to the three cases justifies the use of the term “neo-illiberalism.” While the methods and arguments in support of the policy options are by no means new, the context of globalization and changes in the value system of societies—immediately transmitted by social media and the internet in general—are indeed novel and offer a powerful new explanation for the surprising turns of events in the twenty-first century.

48 Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (1997): 22-43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20048274>.

49 Iván Széleányi, *From State Socialism to Post-Communist Capitalism: Critical Perspectives* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2022), 287-309.

50 Olle Hammar and Daniel Waldenström, “Global Earnings Inequality,” *Economic Journal* 130 (632) (November 2020): 2526-2545, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ej/ueaa109>.



Book Review: *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, edited by András Sajó, Renáta Uitz, Stephen Holmes (Routledge, 2022, ISBN 9780367260545)

Maria Snegovaya

Senior Fellow, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Postdoctoral Fellow, Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University

In recent years, challenges to the liberal order have mounted as civil and political liberties around the world have deteriorated to their lowest point in over a decade. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for ensuring stability of liberal democracies across the globe. The *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism* represents an admirable and much-needed attempt to explore, conceptualize and analyze illiberalism, its theoretical and empirical dynamic, and the factors that brought about the unravelling of the current illiberal wave.

Many great scholars have contributed to this impressive endeavor. A particularly commendable approach by the book's creators is to bring together scholars from different methodological fields, ranging from philosophy and legal studies to political science and sociology. This approach allows us to explore the phenomenon of the rising illiberal trends across the world in its complexity and from different cross-disciplinary angles. This approach is particularly important for the notion of illiberalism, whose complexity "as a social, political, legal, and mental phenomenon calls for posing research questions and building frames of analysis across disciplines from the start."¹ This much-needed endeavor is very intellectually stimulating, and every reader interested in this topic will undoubtedly find something valuable for her research in this collection.

In the context of my own work on related issues, I particularly liked the insight by Leonardo Morlino in the chapter on "Hybrid regimes" in which he subdivides illiberal regime types based on their emergence into three groups: (a) the deterioration of democracy, (b) the deterioration of authoritarianism with the break of limited

1 András Sajó, Renáta Uitz, and Stephen Holmes, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 976, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367260569>.

non-responsible authoritarianism, or (c) the weakening or transformation of the personal rule that is typical of traditional regimes.² I think it is a helpful approach to categorize the various non-democratic trends by nature of the regime that precedes them. Nenad Dimitrijević's chapter on "Illiberal regime types" was also instrumental in conceptualizing non-democratic regime types. In addition, Part 4 on "Illiberal practices," in which scholars explore how illiberal leaders across different contexts manipulate and destroy the institutional framework of democracy, such as elections, parliaments, constitutions, and media, was also particularly instrumental in my research on concepts of majoritarian and pluralist democracy.

Yet the book's strengths are also its weaknesses. The ambitiousness of the initial goal and a variety of definitions of "illiberalism" used by the contributors creates confusion in the structure and content of the collection, which needs to be addressed in future publications that take on this challenging endeavor. In general, the variety of non-democratic regimes (or one can say "deviations from democracy") are notoriously difficult to explore. Essentially, when talking of non-democracies one is dealing with a residual category (everything that is not a liberal democracy), which incorporates a continuum of concepts and regime types. Some such regimes are located closer to democracies, others are closer to autocracies. One could easily rephrase the famous Leo Tolstoy quote to say, "liberal democracies are all alike, but every non-democracy is unhappy in its own way." Given that liberal democracy as a form of government has only been known to humanity for several centuries if not decades, an attempt to analyze all forms of government across human history other than liberal democracy becomes a daunting task.

While there is no one standard definition, by contemporary spread of illiberalism scholars usually tend to mean democratic backsliding over the last two decades. Illiberalism is "situated somewhere in the middle of a continuum from democracy to non-democracy, describing a move from the former to the latter."³ Hence, the real focus of the collection should predominantly be on the current illiberal trends that are undermining political and civil liberties across the world. Yet the book's multiple authors appear to disagree on definitions of "illiberalism." Instead, many chapters lump together in the analysis all sorts of non-democratic regimes. This leads to a huge variation in regimes under analysis of different colors, shapes and time periods ranging from Ancient Rome's tyranny (Nenad Dimitrijević) or theocratic regimes (Ran Hirschl) to contemporary US democracy under Trump (Samuel Issacharoff and J. Colin Bradley). Similarly, scholars treat both Russia under Putin and Russia under Yeltsin as separate examples of illiberalism. Some chapters deal explicitly with "hybrid" cases (Leonardo Morlino), others focus on full-fledged autocracies (Nam Kyu Kim) and even totalitarian regimes (Nenad Dimitrijević). Some case selections, like mentioning China in the list of cases of deteriorating democratic regimes through executive aggrandizement are questionable (Helena Alviar García and Günter Frankenberg). Many analyses do not even define what they interpret as "illiberalism" at all.

While there is an analytical value in exploring and comparing such variation of non-democratic regime types, it also makes it more complicated to identify parallels in the illiberal dynamic across contemporary regimes.

² Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, 145.

³ Marlene Laruelle, "Illiberalism: a conceptual introduction," *East European Politics* 38, no. 2 (2022), 303-327, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2022.2037079>.

In addition, one unfortunate omission of this collection is the fact that many chapters do not speak to each other. Given the variety in country cases, regime types and temporal periods under analysis, it would be a good idea for each part of this collection to begin or end with an introductory or conclusive summary of its chapters. This would help structure the amount of information being poured at the reader, as well as identify parallels and common trends across these cases. For example, in Part 5 on Government and Governance many scholars make very interesting and nuanced observations about ways in which illiberal leaders undermine checks and balances to their authority. But many of the points different scholars make are repetitive, as apparently illiberal leaders often lack creativity in undermining institutions of liberal democracy. And when reading through these cases there emerges a need for some sort of a review that would help putting all these valuable observations into perspective. For example, why do some illiberal leaders focus on dismantling media (Eileen Culloty and Jane Suiter) while others go after courts (Miroslaw Wyrzykowski and Michal Ziółkowski)? Is that a function of constraints such leaders face, a need to push forward their agenda or are there other reasons? Similarly, Part 7 on the Regional and National Variations exposes many parallels in the ways that different illiberal leaders from Montenegro (Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos) to India (Arun K. Thiruvengadam) accumulate control (including parallels in rhetorical styles, economic policies and so on). However, these differences are not summed up and contrasted against each other, which would be very helpful for readers. For example, is cooptation of religious community organizations under an illiberal leader's control specific to Turkey's type of Islamist populism (Halil Ibrahim Yenigun) or does one also notice similar patterns in, say, Hungary (Gábor Halmai)?

Another limitation is the tendency to focus on the supply side. Most chapters tend to explore primarily the considerations and strategies used by liberal actors to dismantle democracy, consolidate control and so on, i.e., they tend to look at the regime's dynamic predominantly from an incumbent's position. However, a question that often remains unaddressed is why do people in respective societies tolerate dismantling of checks and balances? Why do they (passively) accept democratic backsliding in their countries? And why in some instances do they not? Does it all come down to an incumbent's ability to deceive them or are there other considerations as well? Adding a more in-depth exploration of structural factors and demand-side dimensions would also make the analysis more causal and less descriptive.

Last but not the least, in terms of this collection's format I would recommend a bigger font. The current format is difficult for eyes, as the font is too small, and one wants to read as much as possible of this meritable collection's one thousand pages.

Overall, this collection represents an impressive and much-needed endeavor for understanding the dynamics of illiberalism across regions, countries, and time periods. Given its scope and cross-disciplinary approach, I am sure it will generate a great interest from scholars of this topic as well as wider audiences.

Mihai Varga

Mihai Varga

Senior Research Fellow in Sociology, Eastern Europe Institute, Freie Universität Berlin

Illiberalism has developed into populism's main competition for capturing political contestation in the 21st century. Compared to populism, illiberalism seems to offer the advantage of capturing a larger geographical space and also time period. Furthermore, it can be traced over two centuries and can seemingly find representative political currents on all continents. *The Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism* seeks to bring order to this diversity and approaches the concept via 61 chapters grouped in ten parts, covering theoretical issues, social preconditions, national variations, global perspectives and many more.

While the book's main aim is to explore the opposition between liberalism and illiberalism, the volume further sets out to work with a distinction between illiberalism and anti-liberalism, and between illiberalism and populism. While Stephen Holmes sees anti-liberalism as a "mindset"⁴ or "mentality"⁵ the editors locate illiberalism at the level of "political practices" of government, while in the concluding chapter illiberalism is a "social mentality or culturally entrenched pattern," or "world view."⁶ By opposing liberal individualism and universalism, according to the editors, anti-liberalism has an egalitarian stance posed against the elites and in favour of the people or nation. Illiberalism seems more extreme, denying not only universalism and individualism (as Holmes outlines in the Introduction to Part 1), but also "reason," "the Enlightenment," "truth," and "values." Although the editors also see anti-liberalism as emerging in opposition to the Enlightenment's legacy, anti-liberalism seems to have little to do (according to them) with illiberalism, whose precursors are "ideologies like populism, religious values, or communitarianism."⁷ The readers are also told that illiberalism is not authoritarianism and also not (only) populism. However, the extent to which the contributors throughout the volume can work with these distinctions varies strongly, and as outlined below they use these concepts – illiberalism, anti-liberalism, populism, authoritarianism – interchangeably.

The distinction between illiberalism and anti-liberalism is understandably difficult to work with since it would require looking for illiberalism's ideational precursors among populists and communitarians and not among anti-liberals. Instead, Helena Rosenblatt, in her chapter on the history of illiberalism, clearly identifies an intellectual tradition to precede illiberalism in Europe's inter-war generation of right-wing thinkers, from Charles Maurras to Giovanni Gentile and Carl Schmitt attacking liberal individualism and relativism. Andy Hamilton identifies important precursors of illiberalism in conservative thinkers rejecting liberalism as "insufficiently pragmatic."⁸ This perspective complicates the editors' distinction between liberalism and anti-liberalism/illiberalism since it allows for identifying illiberal versions that hardly contradict liberal constitutional principles. Nor are they necessarily opposing the Enlightenment, but "false Enlightenment," based on abstract principles rather than critical judgement.⁹ Importantly, Ulrich Wagrandl reminds us in his *Theory of Illiberal Democracy* (Chapter 8) that liberalism is not necessarily a conceptual

4 András Sajó, Renáta Uitz, and Stephen Holmes, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism* (New York: Routledge, 2021), XXII, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367260569>.

5 Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, 3.

6 Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, 975-976.

7 Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, XXIII.

8 Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, 70.

9 Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, 78.

ingredient of democracy. He outlines the contours of an illiberal democracy, anti-pluralist and anti-institutionalist but allowing free elections, even though such a democracy is hardly stable without liberal elements protecting pluralism and would slip into authoritarianism.

Note that neither anti-liberalism nor illiberalism deserve, according to the editors, the status of “theories” or coherent ideologies, as illiberalism is – if articulated via ideas and not only practices – nothing more but a collection of “fragmented rallying cries such as getting rid of elites.”¹⁰ Approaching illiberalism in this way brings it close to populism, although the editors argue that populism is but one possible “ideological” route to a non-ideological outcome – illiberalism. As pointed out further above, the two others are “religious values” and “communitarianism,” although it is highly questionable to call these two ideologies. Furthermore, the concluding chapter contradicts these claims by finding that “the sources of intellectual illiberalism are manifold,” from “antiliberal” Catholic integralists to “Nietzschean elitists” like Peter Sloterdijk, to Critical Race Studies and new left thinkers such as Chantal Mouffe.¹¹

Part III also returns to the relationship between illiberalism and populism in a chapter by Paul Blokker, who, like Hamilton, points out the conservative precursors of contemporary illiberal political formations in Europe. However, rather than seeing populism as a route to illiberalism, he reverses the editors’ perspective to see illiberal ideas as dimensions of populism. Here too, in the intellectual and political currents studies by Blokker, the main issue with liberalism for right-wing populists across the European continent is its individualism, with a conservative current and communitarian alternative to liberalism running through these populist formations. Similarly, Andrea Pető and Mabel Berezin find a common denominator among illiberal formations, Pető in “gender,” and Berezin in “identity.” Berezin explores the relationship between illiberalism and identity, reminding us that politics turns illiberal when “the cultural dimension of national belonging merges with the contractual dimensions of national organization.”¹² Just like in the Preface, however, there is a tendency to define illiberalism in such a broad way as to include very different ideologies; for Berezin, “illiberalisms” are “nationalism, populism, fascism and identitarianism.”¹³ Some of these – populism and nationalism – are “thin” ideologies, as Michael Freeden and Cas Mudde argue, and are difficult to place next to fascism; as Freeden showed, nationalism for instance can combine with any ideology, whether liberal or not.

An alternative strategy to the one of seeing how identity – or gender, in Andrea Pető’s chapter – as a concept unites variegated “illiberalisms,” is to trace the politicization of specific issues, by illiberal as well as liberal actors. Leila Hadj-Abdou follows this approach in her chapter on the politicization of immigration, while Aziz Huq performs a similar analysis of Islam. He argues that anti-Islamic discourse emerges out of liberalism’s internal conflicts “to alchemize a liberal polity into an illiberal one.”¹⁴ Depending on the perspective, liberalism and illiberalism are not as easy to separate as when assuming that what separates them is their relationship to principles such as individualism, universalism, or constitutionalism. The point of anti-Islamic discourse is that both liberal and illiberal actors participate in othering Islam; even

10 Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, XXIII.

11 Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, 978.

12 Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, 245.

13 Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, 238.

14 Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, 333.

though they come from different perspectives, they fuel a similar dynamic and might even build on each other.

Frank Furedi returns to this idea in part 6 to criticize liberalism precisely for its proponents' stance vis-à-vis those not sharing its principles. This opens the topic of getting a better picture of the support for illiberalism or illiberalism's social preconditions, leaving aside discussions of whether and how to differentiate illiberalism from anti-liberalism. Gábor Scheiring highlights the connections between socio-economic inequalities and illiberalism and shows the importance of national capitalists' support for illiberal politicians such as Viktor Orbán. Others – Stanley Feldman, Vittorio Mérola, and Justin Dollman – look at the “psychology” of illiberal supporters. However, the analysis turns here into a study of authoritarianism and its sources of popular support, prompting the question of where the line between illiberalism and authoritarianism runs and what to gain from replacing the latter with the former. In fact, many authors seem to operate with a working definition of illiberalism as contradicting or rejecting any or some liberal principles. There is a great deal of variation across the contributions about what those principles are. This would have required a more systematic treatment of the contradictions and dynamics between liberalism and illiberalism, pointing out more clearly where illiberalism slips into authoritarianism.

The work throughout Part VI nevertheless is highly relevant for a readership taking interest in the support base for specific political campaigns, from Trump voters to Brexit or pro-Orbán elites. In the case of Trump voters, the chapter by Bjarki Gronfeldt, Aleksandra Cichocka, Marta Marchlewska, and Aleksandra Cislak argues that these voters were unique in their “desire to dominate outgroups,” even though they did not differ from other voters on “other traditional conservative values.”¹⁵ The chapters dealing with economic policies of illiberal governments deliver a clearer picture of what could be specifically illiberal, documenting a strengthening interventionist – and therefore illiberal – trend, mostly in Eastern Europe's European Union (EU) member states, Russia, and China. László Csaba documents a clear break with marketization as a development policy, while Paula Ganga shows how even in EU-member states Hungary and Poland the government seeks to bring the banking sector under its control by buying up foreign-owned banks or targeting these with “special fees and taxes.”¹⁶

One observation that stands out from the book is that if one asks what the representative regions and actors of illiberalism are, then there seems to be a firm focus on Eastern Europe and Viktor Orbán, Hungary's prime minister since 2010. Throughout several parts, most chapters mention or focus on Orbán, Hungary, or Eastern Europe, turning the region – as Scheiring correctly notes – into illiberalism's main present-day experimentation site. This is understandable, as both Poland and Hungary offer the advantage for research of having illiberal politicians in power. However, a clear avenue for research would be to integrate the insights from other cases more strongly, as Csaba does by extending the analysis to include Russia and China in his study of economic policies. Bringing Russia into focus would enrich the analysis by considering concepts such as “sovereign democracy,” “managed democracy,” or “power vertical” to clarify illiberalism's contours.

In this context, one needs to ask whether the focus on Eastern Europe and Hungary is entirely warranted, and if warranted, then why did illiberalism strengthen there

¹⁵ Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, 665.

¹⁶ Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, 696.

and not elsewhere? A comparison with illiberalism in Western Europe or the US would have helped clarify this point, if one conceptualizes illiberalism not only at the level of practices breaking with liberalism, but as various ideas and theories taking issue with different components of liberalism. This can uncover a circulation of ideas and models between world regions. To give an example, one should not treat Russia's far-right thinker Alexander Dugin's work as the "locus classicus of the 'totalitarian liberalism' thesis."¹⁷ Instead, one should place this idea in the broader European context that produced it, from the earlier works of New Right theorist Alain de Benoist in France to the conservative Eric Voegelin in Germany and the United States.

In sum, caution is warranted, when arguing for clear distinctions between liberalism and illiberalism, or when singling out certain places or regions as illiberal experimentation sites. The quest for research can hardly be the delimitation of liberalism from illiberalism. Numerous contributions to the volume and elsewhere show that illiberal regimes still have liberal components. Even Russia, a case presented as paradigmatically different from anything liberal, had a fiscal and monetary policy similar to liberal economic policy elsewhere. Rather than clear separations, what is needed is a better assessment of the possible combinations and dynamic relationship between liberalism and illiberalism.

¹⁷ Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, 180.

Julian G. Waller

Associate Research Analyst, Center for Naval Analyses
Professorial Lecturer in Political Science, The George Washington University

The recent *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism* provides a thorough review of many theoretical and empirical elements that are constitutive of and related to the new social science concept of illiberalism. In doing so, the volume attempts to make coherent an inherently difficult and multifaceted conceptual space.¹⁸ The *Handbook's* considerable merits are clear, given that it makes up one of the very first efforts to comprehensively approach what a growing body of scholarship means by 'illiberalism' from a definitional perspective, how it interacts with other conceptual terms of art from social science, political theory, and the political humanities, and how it fits with the empirical record of individual country-cases of interest. The *Handbook* is thus a very welcome addition to a burgeoning sub-genre of academic research on ideology, political movements, and regime conceptualization, as well as area and country-level studies.

As with any collected volume intermeshing a variety of conceptual frameworks, theoretical lenses, and empirical backgrounds, coherence is an inherently tricky thing. This is most evident in the undeniable conceptual incongruence of what 'illiberalism' is taken to mean across sixty-one chapters. This is an understandable and expected shortcoming, and the *Handbook* wisely foregrounds an extensive conceptual discussion in the first sections of the volume, with differing understandings of illiberalism – ranging from tighter conceptualizations to residualized 'NOT-liberalisms' to temporally- or spatially-bound variations all emerging quickly from the chapter set. The tricky problem of defining illiberalism in relation to a poorly defined liberalism (which the majority of contributors also place themselves within from a normative perspective) is present throughout, although this remains less a problem so long as authors remain honest about these potential confounding elements.

As primary-level conceptual debates are and will surely remain central to the field of illiberalism studies, it is worthwhile paying attention to contributions to the volume beyond the conceptual, which are well-handled by other reviewers in this short series.¹⁹ Here, we find a varied panorama of illiberalism in the empirical world, both at the country-case level as well as through a sizeable toolbox of differing theoretical and methodological frames. Surveyed individually, the bulk of the chapters are well-written and will helpfully appeal to other researchers and students looking to explore specific interactions between illiberalism and a given case or framework context. Yet taken as a whole, some of the weaknesses of current scholarly approaches to and assumptions about illiberalism also come into view.

For example, a great deal of work concerns the country-cases of Hungary and Poland, with many other chapters that focus elsewhere seeming to still derive fundamental understandings about or patterns of illiberalism from those specific experiences. This may indeed be accurate, and there is considerable merit to understanding illiberalism as an inductively-produced concept taken from specific Eastern European political experiences. Many thematic chapters in Section V, especially

18 András Sajó, Renáta Uitz, and Stephen Holmes, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism* (New York: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367260569>.

19 See Varga and Snegovaya here, as well as Marlene Laruelle, "Illiberalism: A Conceptual Introduction," *East European Politics* 38, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 303–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2022.2037079>; Jasper Theodor Kauth and Desmond King, "Illiberalism," *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 61, no. 3 (December 2020): 365–405, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975620000181>.

those focusing on constitutionalism and the rule of law, especially rely on these cases (Landau; Uitz; Wyrzykowski and Ziolkowski; Krygier) or extrapolate to uncertain events in the Trump-era United States. Yet this does not accord particularly well with the conceptual foregrounding of the field at present, which claims far broader and more generally applicable conceptual roots.

Another point of interest is that the *Handbook* editors attempt to also address “the arguments, reasons, and facts (as reflected in scholarship) *in favor of* illiberalism” [emphasis in original].²⁰ This aspiration, however, is very uneven for most of the chapters. To their credit, they include a chapter on Christian – really American Catholic – opposition to liberalism written by a notable academic postliberal (Pappin), as well as an overview on the “Asian values” debate (Chen), and the relationship between illiberalism and democracy itself (Wagrandl). Multiple non-liberal understandings of “the people” are assessed in a nuanced way (Oklopcic) as well as culturally sensitive justifications for illiberalism in non-Western societies (Lottholz).

The failings of liberalism – defended or assumed in many chapters – are aired effectively in several key chapters (Smilova; Issacharoff and Bradley; Greene; Furedi). Furedi in particular is quite open about the potential for systematic bias in the academic literature related to the construction of the “authoritarian personality” and the possibility of motivated reasoning in ascribing illiberalism to political opponents. A chapter on psychological support for illiberal policies also very usefully provides a substantial critique of the “right-wing authoritarianism” scale commonly misused in the political psychology literature, which is often deployed in quantitative research articles on illiberalism (Feldman, Merola, and Dollman). Yet opportunities to provide a ‘steelman’ argument for illiberal approaches are missing in some fairly open spaces, such as in chapters related to the lure of theocracy (Hirschl), illiberal multiculturalism (Chin), immigration (Hadj-Abdou), or non-progressive understandings of gender (Peto; Mancini and Palazzo).

Many of the most nuanced arguments seeking to complicate a pejorative account of illiberalism across the chapters, however, are far more effective in doing so for the distinct concept of authoritarianism, which is often confused with illiberalism (see the excellent chapter on the “ideational core of democratic illiberalism” for example, in Smilova, or the discussion of “authoritarian structures in democracy” in Garcia and Frankenberg, alongside Wagrandl and others). In an exceptional chapter, “illiberal practices” are helpfully disentangled from “authoritarian practices” (Glasius), but elsewhere these are often conflated.²¹ One chapter, for example, makes the claim that parliaments in illiberal states do not have real separation-of-powers, yet ignores the fact that parliamentarism in liberal and illiberal regimes alike have structurally-fused functions as a core element to the system (Schneiderman).

The conflation of illiberalism and authoritarianism becomes even more apparent in later sections of the *Handbook*, which deal with a variety of regional and country-cases outside of the European context. Many of these chapters, such as those on China (Lai), Indonesia (Mudhoffir and Hadiz), Latin America (Gargarella), the Balkans (Sotiropoulos), and Turkey (Yenigun) are explicitly about authoritarianism itself, rather than illiberalism in any substantive way. Only a subset, such as those

20 Sajó, Uitz, and Holmes, *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*, xxii.

21 For a full treatment of “authoritarian practices,” see: Marlies Glasius, “What Authoritarianism Is ... and Is Not: A Practice Perspective,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 3 (May 1, 2018): 515–33, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiyo60>.

on East Asia (Ginsburg), India (Thiruvengadam), and East-Central Europe (Halmai) make a sustained effort to bring in the substantive theoretical claims about what illiberalism fully entails without recourse to regime issues proper.

Similarly, in later thematic chapters, illiberalism is often understood primarily as populist challenges within the EU (Bertoncini and Reynie), Brazil (Queiroz, Bustamante, and Meyer), or in relation to free trade and economic conditions (Ganga; Lee). Many of these chapters are indeed fine explorations of such issues, but they veer further away from the conceptualization efforts that introduce the volume and often have bespoke definitions fitted within, rather than relying on definitions found elsewhere.

Furthermore, the role of civil society and illiberalism is explored in a small set of cases – and is implicit in many other accounts (Bolleyer). While there is little critical space for current understandings of civil society as “NGO-ocracy,” some revealing work on the “damage” done by international organizations to national-level institutions which has engendered illiberal backlash is quite relevant (Meyerrose). Later chapters often view illiberalism as akin to “hybrid regimes” in a regime-spectrum sense (Garcia-Holgado and Perez-Linan), which replicates the strong focus on forms of authoritarianism throughout the volume. This reliance on associating illiberalism with variations on authoritarianism or populism leads to insufficient time paid to the shifting meaning of what official liberalism entails in the modern West. This leaves us with a variety of policies and attitudes being coded as illiberal (for example in regard to sexual minorities, gender understandings and relations, and non-autonomic social cohesion) that would have sat plausibly in the liberal camp only two decades prior. These sorts of operationalization assumptions would be better to be dealt with explicitly, which is in general beyond the scope of many chapter discussions.

The *Handbook* concludes with an attempt to assign future scholarly directions for the study of illiberalism, which is a useful closing marker for a heterogeneous volume (Sajo and Uitz). Here we find helpful mention of some of the key absences in the volume, including postliberal critical theory and left-oriented ‘studies’ disciplines that seem very relevant to illiberalism. This is in contradistinction with the volume’s overall focus on an empirical approach mostly dealing with right-wing coded movements, political leadership, and regime orientation. Indeed, a major lacuna of the volume is the conceptual possibilities of applying illiberalism to left-wing and critical approaches, not only within activist scholarly disciplines but also within key “reckoning” mass movements and elite tendencies that have grown substantially in the West over the last decade.

As a minor note of interest, this final chapter also includes a very brief remark defending the “human dignity” pro-life policy orientations in Poland as “not impermissible *per se* in liberal theory,” – exactly the sort of innovative, discipline-challenging argument that is otherwise absent in the substantive discussion across most volumes. While only a short example, the reticence to admit multiple non-progressive readings of liberalism means that these sorts of globally commonplace views are almost uniformly assigned to the illiberal conceptual bucket. This assignation may be appropriate, but it leaves the reader wondering whether there really is any difference between the conceptual space of illiberalism and the general political right or traditionalist side of nearly all modern societies. This is an unfortunate omission, given the overwhelming regime-level focus for many authors on connecting illiberalism to authoritarianism or at best to hybrid regimes elsewhere. If policy positions that diverge from the modern progressive consensus are illiberal,

and illiberalism is authoritarianism, this potentially leaves us (unintentionally) at a strange conceptual position indeed.

For all these criticisms, the *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism* is a major achievement and should be widely used as a collected bloc of excellent and insightful scholarship for future research. As many authors make clear, the future is unlikely to return easily to the unchallenged liberal hegemony of the immediate post-Cold War period, and there remains a great deal of ground still to cover. The editors should be commended for their work, and many of these chapters will stand the test of time as important, foundational arguments upon which new research will surely build.

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THE JOURNAL OF ILLIBERALISM STUDIES

VOL. 3, NO. 1, 2023