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# The Intellectual as Culture Warrior

## *Metapolitics and the European New Right*

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### Abstract

A major development on the European far right since 1945 is the turn to a ‘metapolitics’ supposedly influenced by the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci. Metapolitics, in this sense, deemphasizes electoral politics in favor of intellectual activism and the pursuit of ‘cultural hegemony’ as a prelude to seizing political power. This article examines the metapolitics of the European New Right (ENR) from a new theoretical and historical perspective. It argues that the literature of the US ‘culture wars’ better explains the ENR’s practice than any reception of Gramsci. And it presents ENR metapolitics not as the strategic reformulation of interwar fascism but as part of a broad transatlantic backlash against the leftist successes of the 1960s. This approach better accounts for ENR intellectuals’ function as ‘culture warriors’ specializing in demonization and mastery of the tools of public discourse.

### Keywords

culture war – metapolitics – European New Right (ENR) – American New Right – 1960s – public intellectuals – Alain de Benoist (1943–) – Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937)

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Three hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets.

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

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It is a commonplace to observe that the European New Right (ENR) practices a ‘metapolitics’ indebted to the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). The crux of this metapolitical strategy is activism in the cultural and intellectual fields in order to achieve the ‘hegemony’ that Gramsci believed was a necessary precondition for political power. The ideological revolution—the conquest of hearts and minds—must precede the political revolution.<sup>1</sup> In his 1977 magnum opus, *View from the Right*, Alain de Benoist, the French New Right’s leading thinker, expressed the importance of what the group, by the early 1980s, would call ‘right-wing Gramscianism’. ‘All the great revolutions of history’, de Benoist argued, ‘have only served to *transpose into facts* an evolution already realized, in an underlying way, in the spirit . . . One of the tragedies of the right . . . is its inability to comprehend the necessity of the *long term*. The French right . . . has not grasped the significance of Gramsci. It has not seen how *cultural* power threatens the apparatus of the state.’<sup>2</sup>

Reverence for Gramsci extends to Europe’s current crop of right-wing populist politicians, whose anti-liberalism and rejection of globalization overlap with (indeed, are often influenced by) ENR philosophy. Among those who

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- 1 The ENR’s idea of ‘metapolitics’ is distinct from the political vision expressed in aesthetic production, which Peter Viereck explores in *Metapolitics: From the Romantics to Hitler* (New York: Knopf, 1941), from the redefinition of politics as a mode of thinking that Alain Badiou argues for in *Metapolitics* (London: Verso, 2012), from Martin Jay’s notion of an anti-politics of post-apocalyptic expectation in ‘The Metapolitics of Utopianism,’ in *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), and from Anthony James Gregor’s methodologically oriented *Metapolitics: A Brief Inquiry into the Conceptual Language of Political Science* (New York: Free Press, 1971). For an overview of the term’s many meanings, see Bruno Bosteels, ‘Metapolitics,’ in *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*, ed. Mark Bevir (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2010), 878–880.
  - 2 Alain de Benoist, *View from the Right: A Critical Anthology of Contemporary Ideas*, vol. 1 (London: Arktos, 2017), 6–7. Italics in original. See also *Pour un ‘gramscisme de droite’*, Acte du XVI<sup>e</sup> colloque national du GRECE (Paris: Le Labyrinthe, 1982).

claim to have learned the lessons of Gramsci is Thierry Baudet, leader of the Dutch far-right party *Forum voor Democratie* [Forum for Democracy]. Here is Baudet speaking at the American Freedom Alliance conference in October 2019:

Antonio Gramsci was a far greater revolutionary than Lenin. I think the great Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci, when he was writing about power in the 1920s in Italy, he said that we shouldn't be merely taking over power such as the Leninists had done in Russia because power can be toppled, revolutions can be orchestrated, governments can change, but we need to get . . . into the institutions of society. And then [Gramsci] used an incredible metaphor . . . He said the electorate and power comes and goes like the tides of the sea. You have high tide and low tide, and these are somewhat like the polls we experience with our several political movements . . . But we need to get to the undertide, the stream under the tides of the sea, the deep stream, where actually power can be institutionalized in a much more stable manner.<sup>3</sup>

Other Gramsci-inspired calls to infiltrate the 'undertide' are not hard to find. Writing in 2019, Mark Sedgwick identified this fixation on metapolitics as a major thread connecting the dozen or so most influential far-right intellectuals behind today's growing threat to liberal democracy.<sup>4</sup>

My purpose in this article is not to question the ENR's reception of Gramsci—a fact correctly noted by many commentators and repeated ad nauseam by ENR figures themselves. My aim, rather, is twofold: first, to highlight how selective this reception is and, consequently, how limited the Gramscian framework remains for understanding the movement's actual metapolitical practice; and second, to argue that ENR metapolitics is better understood in terms of the theoretical perspective devised by researchers of the culture wars in the United States. Most important in this respect is the American sociologist James Davison Hunter's pioneering 1991 work, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. As several commentators have pointed out, Gramsci has always been more invoked than studied by the New Right.<sup>5</sup> But my perspective is not that of a partisan of Antonio Gramsci attempting to rescue him from

3 Thierry Baudet, 'National Sovereignty as a Force for Freedom,' *YouTube*, October 12, 2019, 17:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpV5BL8RtOI&t=1041s>.

4 Mark Sedgwick, introduction to *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), xxiii.

5 Volker Weiß, *Die autoritäre Revolte: Die Neue Rechte und der Untergang des Abendlandes*

'bad Gramscians' on the right. (Cross-ideological receptions are legitimate and certainly not new—and they often come with blind spots.) Instead, I point to the limitations of Gramsci for grasping ENR metapolitics in order to underscore what name-dropping Gramsci accomplishes for ENR writers, who have proven adept at shaping the cultural beliefs that underpin a nation's legal, economic, and social realities. My argument in this article should be seen as an effort to bring the scholarship of the US culture wars to bear on ENR metapolitics. I draw chiefly from Hunter's *Culture Wars* and, on the European side, from programmatic texts by some of the ENR's most vocal metapoliticians: Alain de Benoist, Guillaume Faye, Daniel Friberg, Martin Sellner, and Thor von Waldstein.

To help us see the ENR's 'Gramsci' discourse from a new angle, I first lay out a right-wing tradition of thinking about the 'undertide' of politics—a discourse about the cultural foundations of power that makes reference to Gramsci unnecessary and thus a peculiarity in need of explanation. I then provide an overview of post-1960s right-wing political reaction in the US and Europe (a backlash in which the ENR takes part) and discuss Hunter's understanding of 'culture war', including his argument for Gramsci's limited relevance to that project. In the article's third section, I look at the ENR's metapolitical writings in detail with an eye to the usefulness of Hunter's framework for understanding the meaning of these works. Finally, I offer some thoughts on the benefits of reconceiving ENR metapolitics along culture war lines.

### The Roots of Right-Wing Metapolitics

Claims for the primacy of ideas, culture, mind, or spirit in political life are by no means uniquely leftist, nor did they originate in the twentieth century. Indeed, the word 'metapolitics' gained currency not with Gramsci, who never used the term, but with the counterrevolutionary enemy of the French Revolution Joseph de Maistre. In his *Essai sur le principe générateur des constitutions politiques* [*Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions*] (1814), de Maistre wrote, 'It is said that the German philosophers have invented the word Metapolitics to be to Politics, what Metaphysics is to Physics. This new term appears to be very happily invented to express the Metaphysics of Politics, for there is such a thing; and this science deserves the profound attention of observers'. Here metapolitics names the deep basis of political order—the

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(Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2017), 57–59; Rob van Kranenburg, 'Whose Gramsci? Right-Wing Gramscism,' *International Gramsci Society Newsletter* 9 (1999): 14–18.

myths, values, and often tacitly held ideas that make up ‘the hidden foundations of the social edifice’.<sup>6</sup> According to de Maistre, the acid of Enlightenment *philosophie* hollowed out the cultural foundations of the Old Regime well before 1789 and had to be opposed in kind, in the realm of ideas and mores.

The sharpest nineteenth-century critics of the left’s democratic ideals—figures such as de Maistre, Juan Donoso Cortés, and Friedrich Nietzsche—were profoundly aware that the cultural ground was shifting beneath their feet. These critics not only rejected liberalism’s progress but saw it as the expression of a spiritual sickness that must be healed before a more wholesome world could emerge. While they did not write about the ‘hegemony’ of egalitarianism and individualism, it is what they feared. For Donoso, liberalism and socialism sprang from Enlightenment rationalism’s ‘revolt’ against God; they represented the satanic spirit of *non serviam* loosed upon the world, the product of man’s refusal to ‘consent to any other sovereignty except his own.’<sup>7</sup> The only way out of the crisis created by the abandonment of divinely sanctioned hierarchy was a return, via dictatorship if necessary, to the religious culture and presumed harmony of medieval Catholic civilization. For Nietzsche, the problem was different—the flowering of equality from seeds planted by the Judeo-Christian ‘slave revolt in morals’—but it was no less epitomized by the French Revolution, whose moral universe would have to be refused in order to recover real human dignity, which is grounded in the striving of elites for nobility, self-mastery, and cultural creation. The alternative was Zarathustra’s ‘last men’, the herd-like denizens of modern society who have ‘invented happiness’ but have no strength for great things.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to recognize the rhetorical dimension of such anti-liberal nineteenth-century writings: they are not disinterested theoretical critiques of reason or morality but rather the cries of prophets in the cultural desert—cries intended to awaken and mobilize readers.<sup>9</sup> They have an instrumental quality

6 Quoted in John B. Halsted, ed., *Romanticism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1969), 197. The term was coined by the liberal thinker August Ludwig von Schlözer. See Manfred Riedel, ‘Gesellschaft, bürgerliche,’ in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2, eds. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1975), 719, 754–755.

7 Antonio Regalado García, ‘The Counterrevolutionary Image of the World,’ *Yale French Studies* 39 (1967): 98–118, quote at 99. The quote is from Donoso’s *Essays on Catholicism, Liberalism and Socialism* (1851).

8 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 34, 54; and *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1982), 129–130.

9 On the rhetorical and counterrevolutionary dimensions in Nietzsche, see Ronald Beiner, *Dangerous Minds: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Return of the Far Right* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), ch. 1, esp. 22–24. For Donoso’s penchant for hyperbole and catas-

that is thoroughly metapolitical. And, like ENR metapolitics, they are scathing in their attacks, apocalyptic in their diagnoses, and uncompromising in their demands. Under the influence of figures like Nietzsche, the late nineteenth century saw a proliferation of such ‘cultural despair’ writers, whose rhetoric of rage and fondness for oracular pronouncements shaped public support for a new demagogic style of ultranationalist politics.<sup>10</sup> Charles Maurras, head philosopher of the royalist organization *Action française* (founded in 1899), expressed this metapolitical tack when he quipped that it would be ‘necessary to first “monarchize” the nation before considering the restoration of the monarchy’.<sup>11</sup>

The instrumental outlook of the nineteenth century’s culture warriors was continued in the twentieth. As Fritz Ringer noted, the early twentieth century saw a flood of cultural criticism produced by Germany’s educated establishment, its ‘mandarin’ intellectuals, who confronted the ‘soulless’ age of masses and machines in a mood of tragic loss that influenced public language. ‘By the early 1920’s, they were deeply convinced that they were living through a profound crisis, a “crisis of culture”, of “learning”, of “values”, or of the “spirit”’.<sup>12</sup> The more radical of these cultural conservatives gravitated to Weimar’s Conservative Revolution (CR), where they lent credibility to the revolutionary nationalism that came to power with Hitler in 1933. The writings of CR thinkers like Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt articulated this malaise and have rightly been described as metapolitical in the philosophical foundation they endeavored to provide for a radical alternative to Weimar liberalism.<sup>13</sup> This was metapolitics as high theory, practiced (mostly) by insiders and intended to steer a revolution they believed already underway.

The ‘interregnum’ strategy pioneered after 1945 by Armin Mohler, Ernst Jünger, Julius Evola, Heidegger, and others was similar, only more patient. Centered on publishing, it worked to disentangle CR thinking from its implication

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trophism, see R.A. Herrera, *Donoso Cortes: Cassandra of the Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995).

10 See Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974).

11 Quoted in Tamir Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 35.

12 Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990), 3.

13 See Matthew Feldman, ‘Between *Geist* and *Zeitgeist*: Martin Heidegger as Ideologue of “Metapolitical Fascism”’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6, no. 2 (2005): 175–198; Jeff Love and Michael Meng, ‘Heidegger’s Metapolitics,’ *Cultural Critique* 99 (2018): 97–122; and Matthias Lievens, ‘Carl Schmitt’s Metapolitics,’ *Constellations* 20, no. 1 (2013): 121–137.

in the Nazi disaster and to keep the creed alive during the reign of liberalism and communism that had settled on postwar Europe—a dark age they believed would one day yield to a new order led by a resurgent right.<sup>14</sup> No figure did more than Jünger to craft a style that could cultivate the sensibilities of readers and lure them away from progressivism's false ideals. This was anti-Enlightenment activism as an aesthetic project. 'New ideas are not introduced politically or philosophically but rather artistically', Jünger wrote in 1981. 'From there revolutions develop'. 'The New Right', Horst Seferens observed in 1998, 'counts not on parties but on an aesthetically mediated substitution of perception and values; it does not seek to gain political power by the fastest route but indirectly by winning cultural hegemony'. Seferens traced (with scant mention of Gramsci) the metapolitical influence of Jünger's aesthetics on the post-1945 German right. Jünger served such ends by immersing readers in a world in which liberal societies feel oppressive, rationalist science is exposed as hollow, and cultured elites pursue esoteric knowledge amid the decadence, laboring for civilizational rebirth.<sup>15</sup>

The extent to which ENR thinking about metapolitics is rooted in such right-wing soil—in writers like Nietzsche, Mohler, Schmitt, Heidegger, and Jünger, among others—can be seen in a collection of dialogues published in 2015 by the German New Right publisher Antaios. Götz Kubitschek, Antaios's founder, spoke of his youthful resistance to the pressure 'to be left', applied through ubiquitous platitudes about 'human rights' and 'the unjustly privileged', and of his 'hunger for the other language and the other view of things'. Kubitschek found this hunger satisfied above all in Mohler, a tireless critic of the liberal West German public sphere; Antaios pays Kubitschek's debt forward as a metapolitical venture serving new generations. Martin Lichtmesz, another participant in the dialogues, claimed (paraphrasing Jünger) that the 'historical gulfstream' has blown powerfully leftward since 1789. Even the radical left offers 'no real opposition' to the mainstream, Lichtmesz argued, because it 'represents the same values that are already metapolitically the total consensus'. Only the far right goes 'against the grain', refusing to echo the 'great "emancipatory" and liberal pathos' and its calls for 'more democracy'.<sup>16</sup>

14 On the interregnum reformulation of metapolitics, see Feldman, 'Between *Geist* and *Zeitgeist*', 189–194; Armin Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland, 1918–1932* (Stuttgart: Friedrich Vorwerk, 1950), 11–33; and Horst Seferens, *Leute von übermorgen und von vorgestern: Ernst Jüngers Ikonographie der Gegenaufklärung und die deutsche Rechte nach 1945* (Bodenheim: Philo, 1998).

15 Seferens, *Leute von übermorgen*, introduction and ch. 10, quotes at 243, 247.

16 Ellen Kositzka and Götz Kubitschek, eds., *Tristesse Droite* (Schnellroda: Antaios, 2015), 23–24, 35, 70–71.

The European New Right has been profoundly shaped by the Conservative Revolution's anti-liberal animus.<sup>17</sup> But in recent decades the ENR's metapolitical project has gone beyond these earlier efforts at literary or philosophical influence to embrace a manipulative stance toward the public sphere, one familiar to students of the US culture wars and only superficially related to what might be described as Gramsci's optimistic pedagogy of the masses. Historical context matters. Like America's right-wing culture warriors, ENR metapoliticians are conditioned by the changed media environment of television and the internet. And both groups are influenced by their position in the wake of the New Left of the 1960s, whose victims they believe themselves to be. ENR members resemble many American culture warriors in their performative anti-leftism, styling themselves rebels and truth tellers, bravely battling the leftist hegemony imposed by the sixties' generation. Like other media-savvy culture warriors on the right, the ENR has absorbed the signature culture war move of flipping the script, slandering the left in the same terms—as intolerant, totalitarian, extremist, and even racist—used by the left to smear the right.

Right-wing metapolitics in the internet age is encapsulated in the Breitbart Doctrine, which holds that 'politics is downstream from culture' and seeks to change narratives and opinions by stoking outrage with sensationalist reporting. The doctrine's author, the rabble-rouser Andrew Breitbart, creator of an eponymous website that taught the US right how to wage culture war online, believed new media offered new means to weaken old media, and with it the left's hegemonic grip. But while *Breitbart News* became an innovative platform for anti-liberal grievance when it launched in 2005 (and embraced some ENR themes through the mediation of the US alt right), Breitbart's claim that changing politics means first changing culture was a right-wing trope already two centuries old.<sup>18</sup>

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17 On continuities between the CR and ENR, see Julian Göppfarth, 'Rethinking the German Nation as German "Dasein": Intellectuals and Heidegger's Philosophy in Contemporary German New Right Nationalism,' *Journal of Political Ideologies* 25, no. 3 (2020): 248–273; Weiß, *Die autoritäre Revolte*, chs. 1–2; and Klaus-Peter Hufer, *Neue Rechte, altes Denken: Ideologie, Kernbegriffe und Vordenker* (Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2018), 78–125.

18 Joshua Green, *Devil's Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Nationalist Uprising* (New York: Penguin, 2017), quote at 86; George Hawley, *The Alt-Right: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 187–189, 192–193.

### Anti-Leftist Backlash and the Rise of the Culture Wars

Given the frequent description of metapolitics in culture war terms, it is surprising that the scholarship on the US culture wars has remained off the radar for researchers of the European New Right.<sup>19</sup> ‘The phrase “cultural war” is equivalent to metapolitics’, Tamir Bar-On writes in an article on the alt right’s debt to the European New Right, without noting the phrase’s resonance in contemporary US politics.<sup>20</sup> In this section I argue that James Davison Hunter’s portrait of US culture warriors as ‘knowledge workers’ wielding an arsenal of polarizing rhetorical weapons provides a better account of ENR metapolitics than Antonio Gramsci’s portrait of ‘organic’ intellectuals vying for cultural hegemony in a struggle to achieve the workers’ revolution. Whereas Gramsci theorized in an interwar context dominated by the question of why communism failed to stop fascism, Hunter theorizes within the same problem space that has shaped the rise of the ENR since the late 1960s. The overriding question now concerns not the failure of the proletariat to seize power but the limits of pluralism and tolerance within liberal democracy, a question that has gained urgency in the wake of the cultural liberalization of the sixties and its interlocking crusades against racism, sexism, and the ‘establishment’. Today’s culture wars are best understood as campaigns in the public sphere to extend the progress (or roll back the disasters) of that turbulent decade.

European New Right literature is a veritable cry of pain against the nightmarish world created, so it imagines, by the leftist generation that came of age around the year 1968. ‘The ideology of the ‘68ers has infected Europe’, laments Markus Willinger, author of *Generation Identity*, a manifesto of the youth-oriented ‘identitarian’ branch of the ENR. Willinger charges the ‘68ers with all manner of evils, from destroying faith and family to discarding the thick cultural identities necessary to supply meaning to human life. Faced with this ‘crisis of the European spirit’, Willinger issues a ‘declaration of war against everything that makes Europe sick and drives it to ruin, against the false ideology of the ‘68ers’. ‘For us, your multicultural society means nothing but hatred and violence. In the name of “tolerance” you hunt down all who criticize you . . . We live in the world you dreamt of, yet this world disgusts us.’<sup>21</sup>

19 A brief account connecting the alt right, New Right, and metapolitics to the broader US culture wars is Angela Nagle’s *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2017), ch. 3.

20 Tamir Bar-On, ‘The Alt-Right’s Continuation of the “Cultural War” in Euro-American Societies,’ *Thesis Eleven* 163, no. 1 (2021): 44.

21 Markus Willinger, *Generation Identity* (London: Arktos, 2013), 14–19.

But for all its assaults on the spirit of '68, the ENR is no less a child of the sixties. Institutionally, the movement was born in 1968, with the establishment of the think tank *Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne* [GRECE; Research and Study Group for European Civilization], which brought together de Benoist, Dominique Venner, Pierre Vial, and other ultranationalist intellectuals eager to infuse the French far right with new blood. 'The events of May 1968', Tamir Bar-On observed, 'imbued many GRECE members with a strange cocktail of shock and envy for the leftist student radicals. They were especially impressed by the sophistication of the Marxist cultural theories and the idealistic fervor of the students battling in the barricades'. That millions of ordinary people were also caught up in the sixties' rebellion further 'convinced Benoist and company that the liberal-left held the key to power in France, since it now supposedly controlled the schools, universities, media and the thinking of the key state elites'. From the beginning, GRECE sought to reverse the left's takeover. 'What is metapolitics?' asked the title of the group's inaugural seminar in November 1968, thus introducing what became the nomenclature for its culture war strategy.<sup>22</sup>

Research on the ENR's ties to the student movements and New Left theorizing of the 1960s has made clear that the relationship goes beyond rejection to encompass appropriations and imitations too. This includes efforts to seize the 'counterculture' label away from the left.<sup>23</sup> The infatuation with Antonio Gramsci (and, less prominently, with other leftist cultural theorists such as Louis Althusser and Noam Chomsky) is another aspect of that influence. It also includes the ENR's style of thought—grandiose, self-righteous, embattled, absolutist—a mindset that partakes of the uncompromising and utopian strains of the 1960s radical left. In a 1998 retrospective, Maurice Rollet, one of GRECE's founding members, denounced the 68ers as sellouts and vowed that the ENR would carry on the radical flame. '[W]e will always be there; for Europe and our Gods . . . We who did not commit treason! . . . We who did not abandon our youthful ideal.'<sup>24</sup> Rollet's moralizing rejection of a corrupt system indeed mirrors the revolutionary fervor of the 1960s New Left.

22 Bar-On, *Where Have All The Fascists Gone?*, 33–35; and Tamir Bar-On, 'Transnationalism and the French Nouvelle Droite,' *Patterns of Prejudice* 45, no. 3 (2011): 203–204.

23 See Weiß, *Die autoritäre Revolte*; Thomas Wagner, *Die Angstmacher: 1968 und die Neuen Rechten* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2017); Quinn Slobodian, 'Anti-'68ers and the Racist-Libertarian Alliance,' *Cultural Politics* 15, no. 3 (2019): 372–386; and Eliah Bures, 'Beachhead or Refuge? The Rise and Dilemma of New Right Counterculture,' *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 14, no. 2 (2020): 19–64.

24 Quoted in Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 60.

'Backlash' is a useful formula for making sense of the anti-sixties origins of the US culture wars.<sup>25</sup> But here, too, the image fails if it does not make room for the way conservative culture warriors absorbed gestures and attitudes from the leftist enemy. Andrew Hartman captures this dynamic in *A War for the Soul of America*, detailing how neoconservatism's reaction against the New Left 'helped draw up the very terms of the culture wars'. The neoconservative culture warriors who came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s—figures such as Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz—were convinced that the sixties' counterculture had pitched the United States into a tailspin of moral decline. At the same time, many were unable to escape the stamp of postwar leftism picked up from their own early dalliance with Trotskyism and other strains of leftist anti-Stalinist thought. '[F]uture neoconservatives developed habits of mind that never atrophied', Hartman notes. 'They held on to their combative spirits, their fondness for sweeping declarations, and their suspicion of leftist dogma. Moreover, long after they had eschewed political Marxism, they maintained the analytical Marxist tendency for diagnosing problems in relation to root causes, internal logics, and overarching structures'.<sup>26</sup> Neoconservatives pushed back against the radicalism of the 1960s in characteristic ways. They disparaged the counterculture as driven by 'arrogant contempt' for traditional ways of life. Neoconservatives cast the advocates for liberal change as an elitist 'new class' hostile to the interests of ordinary Americans. And they raised dark fears about the despotic designs of New Left movements, which were accused of wanting to silence dissent.<sup>27</sup>

The movement known as the 'American New Right' that came to prominence in the 1980s, associated with Ronald Reagan and Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority (and supported by neoconservatives), also channeled the energy of the radical left. This 'New Christian Right', Axel Schäfer argued, 'was predicated less upon resentment against the cultural changes of the 1960s than upon the ability to merge the insurgent styles and rhetoric of the period with a forceful and unambiguous embrace of the dominant liberal capitalist order'.<sup>28</sup> The conservative strategist Paul Weyrich embodied this new 60s-inflected right. 'It is a war of ideology', Weyrich declared of the crusade to reverse America's leftward

25 See Kim Phillips-Fein, 'Conservatism: A State of the Field,' *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (2011): 723–743.

26 Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019) 38–40.

27 *Ibid.*, 50–54.

28 Axel R. Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 6.

drift, 'it's a war of ideas, it's a war about our way of life. And it has to be fought with the same intensity, I think, and dedication as you would fight a shooting war'.<sup>29</sup> In a fiery speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention, Patrick Buchanan likewise fulminated against the 'amoral' legacy of the 1960s. Conservatives, Buchanan warned, found themselves in 'a cultural war as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself'.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, the point is not to equate US neoconservatives or Reaganites with the European New Right on every ideological point (only the latter are foes of liberal democracy); rather, it is to see the ENR within the context of a transatlantic right-wing reaction against the very real cultural shifts of the 1960s, one that often echoed the New Left's heated language.

The best guide to the symbolic politics of cultural war—and, by extension, to the practice of ENR metapolitics—is the sociologist James Davison Hunter. In his pathbreaking 1991 book, *Culture Wars*, Hunter agrees with the central premise of metapolitics. '[P]olitics is, in large part, an expression of culture', he writes. 'At the heart of culture, though, is religion, or systems of faith. And at the heart of religion are its claims to truth about the world'. Culture warriors are intransigent because they are fighting over 'different conceptions of moral authority, over different ideas and beliefs about truth'. In Hunter's nonpartisan analysis, he sees the fundamental battle line running between orthodoxy (committed to 'an external, definable, and transcendent authority') and progressivism ('defined by the spirit of the modern age, a spirit of rationalism and subjectivism').<sup>31</sup> Progressives, Hunter observed elsewhere, favor innovation, experimentation, and 'further emancipation of the human spirit and the creation of an inclusive and tolerant world'. The orthodox, by contrast, seek 'deliberate continuity with the ordering principles inherited from the past'; they long for 'the reinvigoration and realization of what are considered to be the very noblest ideals and achievements of civilization'.<sup>32</sup>

Culture war is the struggle to mobilize supporters on behalf of these contradictory moral visions. Hunter writes:

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29 Quoted in Richard Viguerie, *The New Right: We're Ready to Lead* (Falls Church, VA: Viguerie, 1981), 55–56.

30 Patrick Buchanan, 'War for the Soul of America,' *C-SPAN*, August 17, 1992, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4761707/user-clip-buchanan-war-soul-america>.

31 James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 44, 49, 57, 63.

32 James Davison Hunter, 'The Enduring Culture War,' in *Is There a Culture War? A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life*, eds. E.J. Dionne, Jr, and Michael Cromartie (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 14–15.

[B]ecause each side operates out of a fundamentally different conception of moral authority . . . neither side will ever be able to persuade the other of the superiority of its own claims. Positive moral argument may have some sway over the ambivalent, but by itself it would not go very far toward inaugurating a new moral crusade . . . As a consequence, the struggle to gain legitimation requires something besides positive moral persuasion. Inevitably it entails the existence of an enemy to stand against. This is the *negative face* of moral conflict: the deliberate, systematic effort to discredit the opposition.<sup>33</sup>

The public realm is the theater of cultural conflict, its combat the campaigns of demonization on which legitimation depends. The progressives (heirs of the 1960s left) and the orthodox (their opponents) assail each other according to what Hunter terms ‘the discourse of adversaries’. The grammar of this discourse will be familiar to anyone who has followed the news during the last half century. Hunter identifies six core characteristics: 1) ‘Defining the enemy’—*they* are dishonest and vicious extremists; 2) ‘Monopolizing the symbols of legitimacy’—*they* threaten our traditions and institutions; 3) ‘The specter of intolerance’—*they* are aggressively biased; 4) ‘The totalitarian “threat”’—*they* are incipient despots; 5) ‘The temper of animosity’—*they* are proper objects of fear and resentment; and 6) ‘The drift toward bigotry’—*they* violate standards of acceptability and must be excluded. On the other side of this divisive and sensationalist rhetoric is a virtuous *we*—the silent majority, the defenders of hallowed ways of life, the unjustly victimized. A hallmark of the discourse of adversaries is ‘symmetry in antipathy’: partisans on the left and right traduce each other in functionally identical ways in response to perceived threats to their respective communities. Hunter stresses that this is a rhetorical, not moral, equivalence, though any attempt to build a case for one side must be made ‘in language that itself is vulnerable to the polarizing tendencies of the contemporary cultural division.’<sup>34</sup>

It is important for our consideration of metapolitics that Hunter finds Antonio Gramsci an astute analyst of cultural conflict. This is because Gramsci correctly grasped that the struggle for the cultural influence that underpins political power is waged by intellectuals. ‘Every social group’, Gramsci argued,

33 Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 136.

34 *Ibid.*, 156–158. Hunter does not consider what is likely the case, namely, that orthodoxy’s concern for stability, authority, and tradition means that a fixation on enemy ‘Others’ plays a greater role in identity formation on the right. See Lawrence Rosenthal, *Empire of Resentment: Populism’s Toxic Embrace of Nationalism* (New York: New Press, 2020), ch. 1.

'coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields'.<sup>35</sup> Just as feudalism and capitalism produced intellectuals who justified the relations of production and gave those systems voice, so must the proletariat create, 'organically', its own intellectuals to raise workers' class consciousness and lead them to victory.

The problem addressed by Gramsci's notion of 'organic' intellectuals was the characteristically Marxist one of theory and practice. Would the knowledge that directs the revolution come from outside the proletariat, brought by a priestly intelligentsia with roots in other social classes? Or would it arise from within the ranks of workers themselves? The question mattered because Gramsci understood that the dominant group in society depends on intellectuals as stewards of the 'hegemony' that ensures 'consent given by the great masses of the population'.<sup>36</sup> Making the revolutionary leap to communism in countries like Italy, where civil society was strong, would require the mediation of intellectuals. Gramsci placed his trust in those he believed would emerge organically out of the working class. But he also hoped for the aid of those 'traditional' intellectuals who, though formerly organic in relation to other classes, were now largely autonomous and could make common cause with the proletariat. Writing from prison in Mussolini's Italy, where he died in 1937, Gramsci came to focus on the construction of 'a prefigurative counter-hegemony, which would undermine the power of bourgeois ideology over the masses through a process of political education'.<sup>37</sup> Though Gramsci's sprawling *Prison Notebooks* lend themselves to diverging interpretations, there is strong evidence to read his concept of hegemony as geared toward consensus, coalition-building, and intersubjectivity; it entailed building a new speech community through a collaborative process of education in which intellectuals, too, have something to learn. "The popular element "feels", Gramsci insisted, 'but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element "knows" but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel'. The goal was a fusion of the two elements, an 'intellectual-moral bloc which can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the mass'.<sup>38</sup>

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35 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 5.

36 *Ibid.*, 12.

37 Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 165.

38 Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 331–332, 418.

None of these central themes in Gramsci's oeuvre, which arise from its Marxist foundations, enter into Hunter's theory of post-1960s culture war. 'Gramsci is closer to the truth', Hunter concedes, 'in showing that the conflict is primarily among different kinds of intellectuals and knowledge workers'. But he also notes that Gramsci remained committed to 'the idea and reality of proletarian revolution' in a way that limits the applicability of his work to today's culture wars. 'In this light', Hunter remarks dryly, 'perhaps the most Marxist observation one could make is that this is a conflict over "the means of cultural production"':<sup>39</sup>

In Hunter's analysis, the people who matter most to that conflict have little in common with Gramsci's schema of organic and traditional intellectuals. Rather, they are the knowledge workers with the practical skills to shape how reality is defined in the public arena: lobbyists, lawyers, freelance writers, journalists, editors, publicists, community organizers, media personalities, movement activists, religious leaders, policy specialists at think tanks, and managers of social and political organizations. 'The contest to define reality, so central to the larger culture war', Hunter writes, 'inevitably becomes a struggle to control the "instrumentality" of reality definition. This means that the battle over this symbolic territory has practically taken shape as a struggle to influence or even dominate the businesses and industries of public information, art, and entertainment'.<sup>40</sup> Culture war is about wielding the tools of the public sphere.

### ENR Metapolitics as Culture War

'The political goals of the New Right can largely be summarized by two central concepts: the intellectualization of right-wing extremism through the formulation of an intellectual metapolitics, and the pursuit of a (right-wing) cultural hegemony'.<sup>41</sup> Samuel Salzborn's assessment of the ENR could be extended to much of today's right, which seeks to disparage experts and subvert knowledge-producing institutions, evident, for instance, in the outrage targeted at universities and newsrooms as hotbeds of 'cultural Marxism'.<sup>42</sup> Intellectual work has never been more important to right-wing politics.

39 Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 64, 330–316.

40 Ibid., 60, 226.

41 Samuel Salzborn, 'Renaissance of the New Right in Germany?', *German Politics & Society* 34, no. 2 (2016): 38.

42 See Cynthia Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), ch. 5.

But what kind of intellectuals are these culture warriors? Without attempting to review the copious literature around ‘intellectuals’—a term popularized in the 1890s during the Dreyfus Affair, when editors and writers such as Georges Clemenceau and Émile Zola defended the innocently accused Jewish artillery officer Alfred Dreyfus—we can simply highlight the question of legitimacy. Whence derives the intellectual’s authority to pronounce on public affairs? Are they artists or scholars with a duty to speak truth to power, as Clemenceau and Zola claimed? Have they attained scientific insight into the course of history, as Marxists maintained? Can they be ‘free-floating’ and detached from narrow class or political interests, as Karl Mannheim hoped? Culture warriors may share some of these features, but they are best defined along the lines analyzed by Hunter’s *Culture Wars*: they are, on the whole, neither traditional scholars nor famous writers with the cachet to command public attention; rather, they are knowledge workers whose claim to authority rests, effectively if not in name, on their skill in wielding the tools of the public sphere to demonize and scapegoat. The legitimacy of culture warriors is the legitimation provided by culture war: conjuring the enemy.<sup>43</sup>

No one better exemplifies the culture war knowledge worker than the French New Right’s Alain de Benoist. A prolific writer and publicist—as of 2010, he had penned over a hundred books and two thousand articles and was serving as an editor at several ENR publications<sup>44</sup>—de Benoist is also the figure most responsible for metapolitics’ ‘Gramscian’ sheen. Yet given how often de Benoist and his acolytes talk about Gramsci, it is startling to discover how little they have to say. In *View from the Right*, de Benoist devotes a brief chapter to Gramsci’s life and works. Predictably, he endorses Gramsci as a ‘theoretician of “cultural power”’ who grasped that civil society ensures ‘people’s *mental adherence* to a worldview’, which in turn ‘consolidates’ and ‘justifies’ state power. Of the ethical, pedagogical, linguistic, and radical-democratic dimensions of Gramsci’s thought the reader finds almost nothing. His sole utility to de Benoist is captured in the latter’s gloss that, for Gramsci, ‘the “shift to socialism” is channeled neither through a putsch nor through direct confrontation but, instead, through the *subversion* of minds’. Here we find de Benoist’s true

43 Introductions to the issues surrounding ‘intellectuals’ are in Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), and Benjamin Wurgaft, *Thinking in Public: Strauss, Levinas, Arendt* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). See also Tamir Bar-On’s conclusion to *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?* which considers ENR intellectuals in light of Julien Benda’s charge that all modern intellectuals are politicized.

44 Jean-Yves Camus, ‘Alain de Benoist and the New Right,’ in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 73.

concern: the weakness of liberal society and the means to undermine it. 'It is specifically in liberal regimes that subversion enjoys the greatest freedom of action', he explains, 'because, being pluralistic, these regimes are characterized by a weak consensus that fosters the interference of intellectuals into political struggles'. He then adds: 'The activities of the intellectuals contribute to the destruction of the general consensus, with the dissemination of subversive ideologies adding to the intrinsic flaws of pluralist regimes. Yet the more one reduces the consensus, the stronger the ideological demand (which the activities of intellectuals must then meet). The *ideological majority* thus finds itself inverted'.<sup>45</sup>

The soundness of this analysis is open to debate. That it rests on a very 'truncated Gramsci', shorn of his Hegelian-Marxist dimensions, is not.<sup>46</sup> De Benoist may enjoy the irony of decoupling Gramsci, a communist thinker, from the cause of global egalitarian revolution to which he gave his life. In *View from the Right*, he decries 'the progressive homogenization of the world, extolled and effected by two thousand years of egalitarian ideology'.<sup>47</sup> In a later work, *Manifesto for a European Renaissance* (1999), he lays the blame for today's 'unprecedented menace of homogenization' on the shoulders of a rootless 'Liberal New Class'—ENR lingo for the 68ers in power—whose ideal is to become 'a citizen of the world'.<sup>48</sup>

Though resolutely anti-Christian, de Benoist has mostly avoided the anti-semitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of crude scapegoating endemic to far-right circles.<sup>49</sup> But he is a master of the culture war jujitsu that turns a blow against the opponent. Vexed that the left denounces the right as racist, de Benoist reverses the charge by invoking 'differentialism'. The left's 'universalist anti-racism', he argues,

only acknowledges in peoples their common belonging to a particular species and it tends to consider their specific identities as transitory or of secondary importance. By reducing the 'Other' to the 'Same' through a strictly assimilationist perspective, universalist anti-racism is, by definition, incapable of recognising or respecting otherness for what it is.

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45 Alain de Benoist, *View from the Right: A Critical Anthology of Contemporary Ideas*, vol. 3 (London: Arktos, 2019), 108, 112–115. See also the similar discussion in de Benoist's *Kulturrevolution von Rechts* (Dresden: Jungeuropa Verlag, 2017), 65–81.

46 Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 35.

47 De Benoist, *View from the Right*, vol. 1, 2.

48 Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier, *Manifesto for a European Renaissance* (London: Arktos: 2012), 32–33.

49 Camus, 'Alain de Benoist,' 78.

Differentialist anti-racism, to which the New Right subscribes holds that the irreducible plurality of the human species constitutes a veritable treasure . . . For the New Right, the struggle against racism is not won by negating the concept of races, nor by the desire to blend all races into an undifferentiated whole.<sup>50</sup>

This is a highbrow way of saying that the real racists are those who thwart a community's desire to preserve its ethnic purity. A critic of mass immigration, de Benoist champions 'ethnopluralism', an upside-down multiculturalism that amounts to a coded nativism, translating 'xenophobia and intolerance into liberal-democratic universalist language'.<sup>51</sup>

*Manifesto for a European Renaissance* is an erudite dirge on the ravages supposedly wrought by liberalism and Marxism, the ENR's principal foes. Terminal decadence is located across the board: dying communities, threatened cultures, vanishing traditions, unlivable cities, sclerotic welfare states, distant bureaucrats, the ravages of the market, the domination of technological thinking, the desecration of nature. Reasonable arguments can be made on multiple sides of these issues. But de Benoist, like all culture warriors, has little time for a nuanced appraisal of contrary evidence. Despite approving calls for a 'dialogic perspective of mutual enrichment', the *Manifesto* tends ineluctably to a breathless portrait of the 'crisis of modernity' and a highly uncharitable caricature of its left-liberal authors. The ENR's authority to supply remedies for these ills hinges on de Benoist's skill in depicting the enemy, whose crime is nothing less than the destruction of civilization.<sup>52</sup> Defamed as a crypto-fascist (a charge he denies), de Benoist has perfected culture war's discourse of adversaries. He casts universalist values as a fantastical 'utopia', only to expose them as the sure road to hell.<sup>53</sup> Though de Benoist's writing is calm and rational on its face, its net effect is utterly hyperbolic, as though the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and McDonald's in Beijing amounted to the eradication of all *différence*.

Few in the ENR are as mild-mannered as Alain de Benoist. The gloves come off in Guillaume Faye's *Why We Fight* (2001), which makes use of another staple of the discourse of adversaries: the totalitarian threat. Blaming a leftist 'intellectual-media managerial class' and its 'phobia of the people', Faye argues

50 De Benoist and Champetier, *Manifesto*, 34.

51 Kevin Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 103. See also Alberto Spektorowski, 'The French New Right: Differentialism and the Idea of Ethnophilian Exclusionism,' *Polity* 33, no. 2 (2000): 283–303.

52 De Benoist and Champetier, *Manifesto*, 12, 19, 34.

53 *Ibid.*, 13.

that the 'West's pseudo-democracy is actually a neo-totalitarian oligarchy. A soft totalitarianism has, in effect, been installed under the guise of "democracy".<sup>54</sup> The Austrian Identitarian Martin Sellner echoes the charge, citing the totalitarian theory of Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski to portray a liberal Europe in the grip of creeping totalitarianism, whose elements 'are ever more in evidence'. 'The clearer a countermovement to *Multikulti*, globalization, One World, and immigration becomes', Sellner writes, 'the more vehemently our opponents clarify: we never really had "the choice"'.<sup>55</sup> This is the legitimacy-conferring culture war two-step: the barbarians are at the gates, and we are their persecuted victims. De Benoist, too, proclaims the 'total' character of liberal society, 'which unfortunately is not always free from totalitarian temptation'.<sup>56</sup> How this squares with his picture of a fragmented and vulnerable liberalism is hard to say. Such inconsistencies make plain that this is about polemics, not serious analysis.

Unlike de Benoist, who avoids direct political involvement, Faye and Sellner are happy to blur the line between metapolitics and politics. In *Archeofuturism* (1998), Faye offers the following candid criticism of the French New Right:

In our *metapolitical* 'Gramscian' strategy, we had simply overlooked the fact that the cultural battle Gramsci promoted was associated with the political and economic battle of the Italian Communist party, and as such did not take place 'in the void'. But unfortunately we had never actually read Gramsci . . . Ours was only braggadocio, pseudo-Gramscism. In order to prove effective, ideological and cultural action must be supported by concrete *political* forces which it integrates and extends.<sup>57</sup>

Faye's call for tighter coordination of intellectual-cultural and party-political work would be more faithful to Gramsci if it had anything to do with class conflict, good-faith consensus building, or intellectuals' 'organic' ties to a social group and its economic activity. As it is, what Faye is calling for is a nakedly instrumentalist political activism that resembles far more the 'movement' poli-

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54 Guillaume Faye, *Why We Fight: Manifesto of the European Resistance* (London: Arktos, 2011), 46.

55 Martin Sellner, *Identitär! Geschichte eines Aufbruchs* (Schnellroda: Antaios, 2017), 136–139.

56 De Benoist, *Kulturrevolution*, 65.

57 Guillaume Faye, *Archeofuturism: European Visions of the Post-Catastrophic Age* (London: Arktos, 2010), 29. Ellipsis in original. Karlheinz Weißmann makes a similar argument in 'Politik und Metapolitik,' *Sezession* 57 (2013): 38–41.

tics of post-1960s American culture warriors like Paul Weyrich and Jerry Falwell (people who needed no detour through Gramsci) than it does the proletarian struggle of the 1920s.

Martin Sellner agrees with Faye that undermining liberalism's cultural hegemony will not be accomplished in the 'ivory tower' alone.<sup>58</sup> In a 2019 editorial, Sellner considered whether right-wing populist parties like Germany's AfD were another 'opium for the masses', providing false hope that Europe's crisis could be solved by liberal-parliamentary means. What is necessary, Sellner concluded, is a kind of double infiltration: the visibility of right-wing populist parties can do the metapolitical work of popularizing ENR terms and ideas in the broader culture, while ENR metapoliticians labor to steer such parties even further to the right. 'The existing . . . political parties, cultural associations, and organizations in the right's camp are no obstacle for the metapolitician', Sellner argued, 'but rather the soil for cultivation, where he wants to sow his ideas'.<sup>59</sup> The increasing openness with which populist far-right politicians echo ENR themes—including the Dutch politician Thierry Baudet's paeon to Gramsci—indicates that this double infiltration is well underway. Indeed, the line between party politics and intellectual metapolitics appears to be breaking down: Baudet's party, Forum for Democracy, began in 2015 as a conservative think tank committed to defending the Dutch way of life, a reminder that politics via culture slips easily into politics about culture.<sup>60</sup> The boundary has long been permeable anyway. As Armin Mohler wrote in 1985, far-right parties such as Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front act 'like a ploughshare, making new strata receptive to the ideas of a New Right'.<sup>61</sup> And as the border between politics and metapolitics becomes more porous, the ENR—once a strictly intellectual movement—becomes more diffuse.

Perhaps the most unapologetically instrumentalist culture warrior is the Swedish publicist Daniel Friberg. In *The Real Right Returns* (2015), Friberg rehearses the same potted story of Gramsci's life to illustrate the same simple

58 Sellner, *Identitär!* 104–105.

59 Martin Sellner, 'Ist Rechtspopulismus Opium fürs Volk?', *Sezession*, June 4, 2019, <https://sezession.de/61232/ist-rechtspopulismus-opium-fuers-volk>. See also Hartwig Pautz, 'The German New Right and Its Think Tanks,' *German Politics and Society* 38, no. 4 (2020): 51–71.

60 See Merijn Oudenampsen, *The Rise of the Dutch New Right: An Intellectual History of the Rightward Shift in Dutch Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2020). Oudenampsen stresses that the importation of ENR ideas into Dutch politics and the country's rightward turn in the 1990s and 2000s 'cannot be understood in separation from the profound political changes of the 1960s and 1970s', 196.

61 Mohler, foreword to de Benoist, *Kulturrevolution*, 26.

‘metapolitical’ point: that one must control the ‘cultural determinants of political authority’ before one can hope to ‘topple a political apparatus’. ‘Metapolitics’, Friberg explains, ‘is about affecting and shaping people’s thoughts, worldviews, and the very concepts which they use to make sense of and define the world around them . . . The left has long since learned to fight in this manner, and until quite recently it was virtually unopposed on the metapolitical battlefield.’<sup>62</sup> (As we have seen, the notion that the right is a newcomer to metapolitics is decidedly false.) The subtitle of Friberg’s book is *A Handbook for the True Opposition*, and he devotes over half its length to the practical business of resisting the left’s ‘persecution’ (waged by the mainstream media’s ‘nasty little sadists’) and shaping a counter-narrative purged of the left’s ‘false worldview’. He recommends litigation, denials, boycotts, counterattacks, and even learning martial arts.<sup>63</sup>

Friberg’s agenda for hacking the public sphere is legitimized by his no less grandiose sense of victimhood. ‘After more than half a century of retreat, marginalization, and constant concessions to an ever-more aggressive and demanding Left’, Friberg writes, ‘the true European Right is returning with a vengeance.’<sup>64</sup> This is the ENR as a noble giant, roused to unavoidable combat by the biting swarm of a perfidious left. Friberg is well equipped for the job of reverse-engineering the enemy’s victory, which he traces to the post-World War II decades and the left’s ‘long march through the institutions’ in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>65</sup> As the book’s preface points out, Friberg has ‘a great deal of experience in the trenches of Europe’s New Right.’<sup>66</sup> After experimenting with skinheadism as a teenager, Friberg encountered, in 2004, the works of ENR writers such as Alain de Benoist, which he found intellectually rigorous and a ‘politically formidable alternative to white-power jingoism’. The entrepreneurial Friberg subsequently founded a series of music, publishing, and internet ventures, including the websites *Motpol* and *Metapedia* (a far-right alternative to Wikipedia). It is a media empire that represents metapolitics as a multidimensional assault on the public sphere. The most important venture is the publishing house Arktos. Created in 2009, Arktos bills itself the foremost publisher of the ENR in English and is today almost certainly ‘the largest retailer

62 Daniel Friberg, *The Real Right Returns: A Handbook for the True Opposition* (London: Arktos, 2015), 23–24.

63 *Ibid.*, 37–38, 40, 55.

64 *Ibid.*, 1.

65 *Ibid.*, 5.

66 John Morgan, preface to *Real Right Returns*, vii.

of radical right literature in the world'.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Friberg, a right-wing mogul, promoter, publicist, and author, actually approximates one important aspect of Gramsci's ideal of the organic intellectual. He combines traditional learning and rough eloquence with an insider's technical know-how in the new digital-age industries shaping the economy, what Gramsci termed 'active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, "permanent persuader"'.<sup>68</sup>

Daniel Friberg also embodies the tension between what we can call, to abbreviate Hunter's framework, the three discursive modes of culture war: Grievance, Action, and Truth. He charges the left with a near-total 'usurpation' of media, schools, and cultural institutions; with destroying 'Europe's primal culture' through a hedonistic consumerism; and with enabling 'the influx of masses of immigrants', who push out the 'ever-more rootless and culturally impoverished Europeans'.<sup>69</sup> Yet Friberg implores Europeans to take up the same 'Gramscian' tools of the left, to turn the weapons of cultural power against the enemy, to impose the right's own domination. What hallows this tale of woe, what makes its plea for retribution more than a cynical bid for power, is the appeal to Truth. For all the unvarnished instrumentalism of *The Real Right Returns*, Friberg finds it necessary to lace his text with the grounding claims of reality and morality. Only the 'politically correct haze', he insists, can obscure that the right's 'description of reality is more in line with what people actually experience in everyday life'. 'We traditionalists and Rightists', Friberg declares, 'represent the eternal ideas and values that are now returning across a broad front'.<sup>70</sup> A culture warrior *par excellence*, Friberg shifts constantly between the seemingly contradictory demands of Grievance, Action, and Truth—justifying propaganda in the service of 'reality', urging righteous hands to wield sinister tools, and bullying from the moral high ground of victimhood.

This balancing act also marks the work of Thor von Waldstein, another culture war 'knowledge worker' associated with the German New Right. In his 2015 essay *Metapolitik*, Waldstein checks off the milestones in Germany's conquest by the left—a list that again signals how tightly the ENR's victimization narrative is woven into its metapolitics. His enemies include postwar denazification (1945–), the Marxist cultural revolution (1968–), multiculturalism (1990s–), and 'gender mainstreaming' (2000s–). 'What characterizes all these programs',

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67 Benjamin Teitelbaum, 'Daniel Friberg and Metapolitics in Action,' in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 265, 269.

68 Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 10.

69 Friberg, *Real Right Returns*, 5, 19.

70 *Ibid.*, 7, 16, 25, 39.

Waldstein claims, 'is that they succeeded in getting Germans to willingly say goodbye to the way of life, basic convictions, and character of their fathers and forefathers, and to embrace a lifestyle where once universally acknowledged values like nation, *Volk*, family, faith, loyalty, humility, [and] willingness to sacrifice are at best rendered laughable, if not outright defamed as proto-fascist'. In a twist on the 'totalitarian threat', Waldstein declares that today's German Federal Republic is a greater danger than the East German dictatorship of yore—while the latter oppressed Germans, the former is liquidating the German people itself through mass immigration.<sup>71</sup> Here the moral imperative of the culture warrior's reality discourse comes to the fore, vindicating what would otherwise be merely a how-to manual for right-wing revenge. According to Waldstein, what legitimizes the metapolitician's hijacking of the public sphere is self-defense against nothing less than a slow-moving genocide, an annihilation planned by a leftist 'priesthood of intellectuals' driven by 'pathological hate for their own people'.<sup>72</sup>

Waldstein is clear that 'manipulation' explains Germans' acceptance of the status quo. The scale of this injustice justifies aggressive manipulation in return. Right-wing parties alone, he believes, cannot bring transformative change. What is needed is the 'cultural basis' that would allow an aroused and fed-up public to refuse 'dialogue with the official political cartel'. The metapolitics that prepares this cultural ground, he argues, must recognize human beings as creatures of feeling: 'Man . . . worries about his existence, he fears the future, he feels hatred for his enemies, he is ready to sacrifice his life when something great is at stake'.<sup>73</sup> Here, Waldstein gets to the heart of cultural conflict. As Hunter puts it, the struggle is not abstract but deeply personal and totalizing, encompassing 'thoughts, emotions, beliefs, activities, and relationships'. In culture war, 'nothing less is at stake than . . . an assurance that life is as it should be'.<sup>74</sup> *Metapolitik* hitches this existentialist anthropology to a performative strategy aimed at undoing the left's politically correct 'language dictatorship'. According to Waldstein, the left uses PC language to delegitimize traditional values; thus the German New Right must cultivate provocation and refuse to abide by political correctness, which only stages the battle on the enemy's field.<sup>75</sup>

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71 Thor von Waldstein, *Metapolitik: Theorie-Lage-Aktion* (Schnellroda: Antaios, 2015), 16–17, 20–21.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., 17, 27, 32–37.

74 Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 52.

75 Waldstein, *Metapolitik*, 40–47.

Refreshingly, Waldstein largely drops the encomium to Gramsci, preferring to cite theorists like Arnold Gehlen, Carl Schmitt, and Max Weber, whose concept of authority (*Herrschaft*) he invokes to explain how those who are subjected to power can also affirm its exercise.<sup>76</sup> That Gramsci is easily sidelined in Waldstein's account of metapolitics in favor of mostly right-wing thinkers suggests that the penchant for name-dropping Gramsci, so prevalent in the ENR as a whole, is better understood within Hunter's culture war framework. To talk of Gramsci, the theorist of political power via cultural means, is both to signal Grievance (the alleged leftist takeover) and to call for Action (the reversal of that crime by the same methods). 'Gramsci' names the right's victimhood and its path to retribution. This, far more than any ties to Gramsci's Marxist writings, is the truth of 'right-wing Gramscianism'.

### Conclusion: Reconceiving ENR Metapolitics

In this article I present ENR metapolitics as another version of the transatlantic 'culture wars' unleashed by right-wing reaction against the 1960s, and I argue that scholars of the US culture wars offer a useful framework for understanding this metapolitical work. In conclusion, I want to offer four arguments for the value of reconceiving ENR metapolitics along these lines. First, while de Benoist's notion of 'right-wing Gramscianism' is accurate up to a point, it is the point spelled out by James Davison Hunter. Detached from Gramsci's Marxist foundations, the phrase amounts to the banal claim that the right's intellectuals are important to the cultural shifts that sway political outcomes. By contrast, Hunter's 'discourse of adversaries' better illuminates the central role that enemy 'Others' and existential threats play for the far right, and his view of 'knowledge workers' better captures the ENR's desire to subvert the public sphere. The ENR's talk of Gramsci both identifies the leftist enemy—the 1960s as a Marxist plot—and justifies manipulation of the public sphere as a means of revenge.

Second, the ENR's talk of Gramsci and other leftist radicals bespeaks an effort to appropriate the intellectual gravitas and rebel chic of the revolutionary left. Borrowing leftist buzzwords like 'cultural hegemony' helps the ENR to claim, dubiously, that they represent a new departure, not just a break from stodgy mainstream conservatism and old-school Nazism but a new synthesis that is neither right nor left in the traditional sense—*ni droite, ni gauche*.<sup>77</sup>

76 Ibid., 12–13.

77 See Tamir Bar-On, 'The French New Right: Neither Right, nor Left?', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 8, no. 1 (2014): 1–44.

In this sense, ‘right-wing Gramscianism’ is akin to what Nils Gilman dubbed ‘avocado politics’—the effort by the far right to justify a brown (i.e., fascist) policy core through leftist-seeming packaging (in Gilman’s case, the ‘green’ of environmentalism).<sup>78</sup> There is no need to accept the ENR’s strategic self-presentation, which belongs to the effort to seize the instrumentality of reality definition that Hunter finds characteristic of culture warriors. To talk of the ENR’s ‘Gramscianism’—or to concede leftist terms like democracy to Baudet or anti-racism to de Benoist—is to do the ENR’s culture war work for them.

Third, the synchronic perspective offered here—foregrounding metapolitics as part of a transatlantic wave of right-wing panic over the 1960s—is not just useful as a corrective to ENR writers’ self-flattering posturing as Gramscian revolutionaries. It also complements the otherwise correct diachronic assessment of ENR metapolitics as a reformulation of fascism for a post-fascist age. This view holds that ‘palingenetic ultranationalism’, the apocalyptic yearning for collective rebirth that fueled interwar fascism, faced very different opportunities for expression in the democracies of the West after 1945. No longer viable as a charismatic mass movement, fascism fragmented into three camps. Roger Griffin characterized these as ‘right-wing democratic parties with an anti-democratic, illiberal subtext; minute associations of violent activists and self-styled cadres harbouring and sometimes carrying out revolutionary fantasies; [and] dispersed intellectuals and artists who spurn [political] activism and confine themselves to a “purely” cultural or theoretical role.’<sup>79</sup> There is no question that ENR metapolitics—the third of Griffin’s three camps—shares a genealogy with fascism in precisely this way. Viewed, however, in a broader post-1960s context, as a species of conservative cultural agitation against that decade’s legacy, metapolitics takes on a new hue. It can be seen not just as a stealthy attempt to keep the spark of fascism alive but as another source of the right-wing tales of liberal decadence that make up a broadly shared conservative culture war mentality. Given the practical goals of culture war activism, it is no surprise that ENR metapolitics has become more directly political over time.

Finally, this point is important because it turns our view of metapolitics on its head. The predominance of culture war–style framing within a society—the

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78 Nils Gilman, ‘The Coming Avocado Politics: What Happens When the Ethno-Nationalist Right Gets Serious about the Climate Emergency,’ *Breakthrough Journal*, no. 12 (2020), <https://thebreakthrough.org/journal/no-12-winter-2020/avocado-politics>.

79 Roger Griffin, ‘Between Metapolitics and “Apoliteia”: The Nouvelle Droite’s Strategy for Conserving the Fascist Vision in the “Interregnum”,’ *Modern & Contemporary France* 8, no. 1 (2000): 37–38.

obsession, that is, with winner-take-all battles for the fate of civilization or the soul of the nation—is not only a possible sign of the New Right’s metapolitical success but also as a precondition for a popular reception of the ENR’s radical version of those themes. When politics is absorbed by hot-button issues like abortion, immigration, ‘political correctness’, and the proper depiction of the past (including questions of national guilt), it is a boon time for the ENR and its US offshoot, the alt right, whose stark binaries and existential pathos match the culture war mood. Culture war debates like the Islamic headscarf controversy in France are not created by the ENR alone. But they produce a public receptive to the ENR’s nativist alarm about a ‘great replacement’ of white Europeans. It is because culture war–style framing is often shared by mainstream conservatives and the right-wing fringe that it can be a pathway of radicalization along the lines advocated by ENR metapolitics. The far right, Cas Mudde observed, is not always alien to ‘mainstream’ values but more often represents extreme versions of widely held beliefs.<sup>80</sup> As we have seen, at the level of catastrophist talk, the mainstream right and extremist right frequently speak the same language. This common culture war framework can prime mainstream conservatives to be receptive to ENR claims that sound similar in their disparagement of the left but aim at far more radical goals. If ENR metapolitics is culture war work, the ‘culture wars’ also make ENR metapolitics easier to realize.

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80 Cas Mudde, ‘The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy,’ *West European Politics* 33, no. 6 (2010): 1167–1186.