

Neocofascism: The Example of the United States

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*Humankind alone is no longer the focus of thought, but rather life as a whole. This striving toward connectedness with the totality of life, with nature itself, a nature into which we are born, this is the deepest meaning and the true essence of National Socialist thought.*¹

—Ernst Lehmann, 1934

*We are a special part of the natural order, being in it and above it. We have the potential to become nature’s steward or its destroyer. European countries should invest in national parks, wilderness preserves, and wildlife refuges, as well as productive and sustainable farms and ranches. The natural world—and our experience of it—is an end in itself.*²

—Richard Spencer, 2017

In a context of increasing concern regarding global warming and its effects on human society and our planet’s biosphere, environmentalism is expected to become one of the central political issues of the next decades. The emergence and success of green movements and parties, a logical consequence of such situation, is already a reality in several Western countries. Although there are differences between those movements, in general they share values such as progressivism, liberalism, equalitarianism, and respect for democracy.

Yet this hasn’t always been the case in the past, and it won’t necessarily be the case in the future. History shows us that the protection of the environment against human intervention and the idea that the human being is part of the natural world are far from being a monopoly of any single worldview. In fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century it was difficult to associate such tendencies to a particular ideology.³

Although today ecological radicalism is generally associated with leftist worldviews, its radical right counterpart, ecofascism, remains a reality in a series of contemporary political groups and it could be a political force to be reckoned with in the near future in countries such as the United States. This article starts from the assumption that political demands (such as environmentalism) only express concrete content after being located within a discursive system, a view introduced by the poststructuralist theorist Ernesto Laclau.⁴ This means that ecological radicalism cannot be a priori associated with any particular ideological movement. Therefore, the fact that the radical right “uses” it cannot logically be denounced as a deceitful appropriation. A similar view is formulated by Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier (although on a different basis),

¹ Ernst Lehmann, *Biologischer Wille: Wege und Ziele biologischer Arbeit im neuen Reich* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1934), 10-11.

² Richard B. Spencer, “What It Means to Be Alt-Right. A meta-political manifesto for the Alt-Right movement,” *AltRight*, 11 August 2017, <http://archive.fo/vuZGm> (accessed 7 October 2019).

³ Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecofascismo: Lecciones sobre la experiencia alemana* (Barcelona: Virus Editorial, 2019), 48.

⁴ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), 86-87.

the authors of what has become the reference publication on ecofascism.⁵ Only this “relativist” framework can guarantee a rigorous and objective examination of ecofascism and prevent ideological biases.

This article is divided in two sections. The first is a brief history of the genesis of ecofascism and an analysis of the core ideas of its doctrine. It will trace the origins of this branch of fascism that began to form in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century and that was highly influential among certain sectors of the NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei*) until the fall of the Nazi regime in 1945. This section will also focus on analyzing what kind of ecological radicalism was formulated by the early ecofascists and what were its connections with racist and authoritarian discourses.

The second section centers on an illustrative case study that can point up some of the key characteristics of neoecofascism, the contemporary version of ecofascism, and how they compare to the latter’s. It will focus on the United States, a country that has witnessed a rise of radical right groups and discourses in the last decade⁶ and in which several terrorists have included ecofascist remarks in their manifestos, as we shall see further on. Finally, the differences between the many right-wing environmentalist stances will be outlined in order to avoid the semantic inflation of the term “ecofascism.”

⁵ Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascismo*, 54.

⁶ Thomas J. Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 2.

The Origins of Ecofascism: The German National-Romantic Synthesis

Ecofascism was first and foremost an offshoot of Romanticism, an intellectual movement whose impact on Germany during the nineteenth century is impossible to exaggerate. In political terms, Romanticism was primarily a reaction against the Enlightenment and its core assumptions. To put it baldly, to reason, individualism, and civic communitarianism the Romantics opposed a celebration of introspection and the emotional, a nostalgia for a lost community (be that ethnic or religious) and an emphasis on rootedness against cosmopolitanism and universalism.

That being said, it is important to note that Romanticism was and is a complex and rich cultural movement that gave origin to several and often contradictory tendencies on both ends of the political spectrum.¹ In fact, even critics of Romanticism, who tend to condemn it as part of the so-called Counterenlightenment, such as Isaiah Berlin² or Tim Blanning,³ admit that its alleged negative influence on modernity and liberalism needs to be nuanced. Moreover, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that, as authors like Zygmunt Bauman,⁴ Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer⁵ have noted, some of the key ideas that emanated from the Enlightenment (such as instrumental reason) were also pivotal for the fascist movement. Be that as it may, this work will focus on the Romantic currents that paved the way for the advent of ecofascism, therefore concentrating on some forms of Romanticism at the expense of others. The connection between Romanticism and fascism has been pointed out by

¹ Frederick C. Beiser, *El imperativo romántico: El primer romanticismo alemán* (Madrid: Sequitur, 2018), 64.

² Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 107.

³ Tim Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution* (London: Penguin Random House, 2010), 8.

⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

⁵ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

the main authors of the fascism studies field, such as Roger Griffin,⁶ Emilio Gentile,⁷ George L. Mosse,⁸ Zeev Sternhell,⁹ Stanley G. Payne¹⁰ and Robert Paxton.¹¹

Germany was the nation in which, according to Biehl and Staudenmaier, ecofascism was first articulated.¹² The German Romantics played a key role in shaping their country's nation-building project (it is not by coincidence that one of the first German intellectuals who promoted nationalism was Johann Gottlieb Fichte, a philosopher highly influenced by the Romantics)¹³ and they did so by opposing the kind of nationalism that was being formulated by the French revolutionaries at the time. To civic and contractual nationalism, the German Romantic nationalists of the nineteenth century opposed a union based on ethnicity and a shared and unique culture,¹⁴ a solution related to the fact that there was a high degree of political and territorial fragmentation of the Germanic lands, a situation that made it difficult to find common institutions and political authorities. Lacking the political, these thinkers turned to the ethnic.

This led some nationalist thinkers to differentiate between German nationalism (ethnic and Romantic) and French nationalism (civic and liberal), a distinction that was advocated mainly by French scholars and that has been partly contested since its formulation.¹⁵ The idea that the German nation was being built with too much emphasis on irrational, ethnic, and xenophobic elements is not a contemporary view, for it was already pointed out by nineteenth-century thinkers. Such is the case of Federico Chabod, an Italian historian who drew a distinction between the German *Volk* based on spiritualism and racial identity) and the liberal and contractualist idea of the nation that had emerged in France and Italy.¹⁶ Ernest Renan, one of the most important theoreticians of nationalism, shared this view and pointed to Romanticism as a dangerous ingredient in nation-building processes.¹⁷

⁶ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 52.

⁷ Emilio Gentile, "Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, no. 3 (2004): 326-75.

⁸ George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Towards a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1999), 32.

⁹ Zeev Sternhell, *El nacimiento de la ideología fascista* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1994), 6

¹⁰ Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 35

¹¹ Robert Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 17.

¹² Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascismo*, 15.

¹³ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, 95.

¹⁴ George L. Mosse, *Les racines intellectuelles du Troisième Reich: La crise de l'idéologie allemande* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 24.

¹⁵ Raphaël Cahen and Thomas Lanwehrlen, "De Johann Gottfried Herder a Benedict Anderson: retour sur quelques conceptions savantes de la nation," *Sens Public*, 2010, www.sens-public.org/article794.html (accessed 7 October 2019).

¹⁶ Federico Chabod, *L'idea di nazione* (Bari, Italy: Editori Laterza, 2008), 68-74.

¹⁷ Alessandro Campi, *Nación. Historia de una idea y de un mito político* (Madrid: Sequitur, 2019), 183.

It is in this historical context that the two most important ideological movements for the advent of ecofascism appeared: *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil) philosophy and *völkisch* (which literally means “folkish,” although the translation of the word *Volk* is hard to make outside the German context)¹⁸ movement.

The notion of *Blut und Boden* emerged in the late nineteenth century and initially referred to literary and cultural trends rather than to political tendencies.¹⁹ The core idea behind this slogan is that the two main components of a nation (here understood as an *ethnos*, not as a *demos*) are a shared ascendancy (and thus a series of racial common traits) and a shared territory. Those two components are only distinguished for conceptual purposes, for they are actually two inseparable and integral parts of the national soul or spirit (*Volksgeist*) that permeates the totality of the territory of the nation and its inhabitants. This nostalgic longing for transcendent unity is one of the strong points of the Romantic anthropological project.²⁰

This means that nature, which had been restored by the Romantics as an active and mysterious force against rationalist and scientificist postulates, is presented as a part of the nation. The *Volk*, its national community and its territory are one, bridged by a metaphysic and nationalist understanding of the world. Men (here, German men) are thus completely rooted in their fatherland, and their character is supposed to mirror the landscape in which they were born. This allowed some nationalist thinkers to posit that whereas the Germanic peoples were inward-looking, mysterious, and spiritually rich (inasmuch as they lived in a dark territory full of dense forests), the Jews were a materialistic and mundane people because they came from the deserts (and they also were uprooted and inevitably cosmopolitan insofar as they had abandoned their original land).²¹

The key idea here is that according to the Blood and Soil creed, there is a metaphysical symbiosis between the *Volk*, its culture, and nature.²² Inasmuch as nature is part of this *Volksgeist* it logically becomes something that needs to be protected, not because it is a vulnerable part of our biosphere or because exploiting it is dangerous in economic terms, but because it is part of the nation. This is the core belief behind the ecofascist concerns towards nature, a belief related to identity anxieties rather than to a progressive longing for environmental justice. It is clearly connected to the Romantic critique of industrialization and urbanization as well as to modern idealizations of the natural world,²³ although here an essential nationalist element is added. Nature is portrayed as a source of mysticism that cannot be understood rationally and that

¹⁸ Mosse, *Les racines intellectuelles du Troisième Reich*, 42.

¹⁹ Robert Cecil, *The Myth of the Master Race: Alfred Rosenberg and Nazi Ideology* (New York: Dodd, 1972), 165.

²⁰ Beiser, *El imperativo romántico*, 65.

²¹ Mosse, *Les racines intellectuelles du Troisième Reich*, 198.

²² *Ibid.*, 69.

²³ Tim Cloudsley, “Romanticism and the Industrial Revolution in Britain,” *History of European Ideas* 12, no. 5, (1990): 611-35.

is closely connected to the national ethos of a concrete territory. It is therefore “nationalized.” Thus, defending nature is logically akin to defending the nation and the *Volk*.

This synthesis between naturalism and Counterenlightenment ideas was formulated mainly by Ernst Moritz and Wilhelm Riehl.²⁴ Moritz was a German nationalist who advocated a homogeneous society based on medieval values (which mainly are, according to him, authority, spiritualism, and corporatism) and who fueled the growing xenophobia against the French in the context of the Napoleonic Wars.²⁵ In 1815 he wrote a diatribe against industrialization in which he defended the interconnectedness of nature, the human being and social community.²⁶ Riehl for his part was a folklorist who insisted on the romantic idea that nature is somehow more genuine and real than society²⁷ and on how the *Volk* is inevitably rooted to a particular territory. He defended a return to traditional hierarchies and to an organic political system,²⁸ thereby anticipating some of the core assumptions of National Socialism.

This amalgamation of nature and society soon became instrumental for the most reactionary among German nationalists. Raoul Heinrich France, a German botanist and philosopher, formulated in 1920 the idea of *Lebensgesetze*, positing that nature and social arrangements were inevitably based on the same premises (inasmuch as, following again the romantic *Weltanschauung*, the cosmos is an organic unity and thus every part of it is connected to the others).²⁹ This had the implication that society would logically need to be based on hierarchy, racial division, patriarchy, and the principle of survival of the fittest. Furthermore, it implied that human beings were not necessarily special creatures, a mindset that anticipated some of the most brutal expressions of Nazism according to Robert Pois.³⁰ The notion of *Lebensgesetze* also entailed that nature needs to be saved from harm, for not doing so would mean not recognizing it as part of the cosmic and mystic unity that was so important for France and his disciples.³¹ As Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc, and Thomas Zeller note:

Homeland and nature protectionists saw it as their task not only to protect rare plants, endangered animals, and natural monuments, but also to preserve local customs and national traditions, following the dictum “keep the German people [*Volkstum*] strong and wholesome.” What kept Germans powerful and pure, in turn, was the strength Germans drew from preserving

²⁴ Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascismo*, 16.

²⁵ Klaus Vondung and Stephen D. Ricks, *The Apocalypse in Germany* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 112.

²⁶ Amy Standen, “Meine Grune Nation,” *Ecology Center*, 15 July 2006, <https://ecologycenter.org/terrainmagazine/summer-2006/meine-grune-nation/> (accessed 8 October 2019).

²⁷ Mosse, *Les racines intellectuelles du Troisième Reich*, 71.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁹ Beiser, *El imperativo romántico*, 127.

³⁰ Robert A. Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 25.

³¹ Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascismo*, 26.

their traditions, monuments, and land. Volk, homeland, and nature were intertwined.³²

The *völkisch* movement, the other main ideological precursor of ecofascism, appeared during the late nineteenth century as well. This was a period of nation-building (the country was finally unified in 1871) and rapid industrialization in Germany. The rivalry with France, as mentioned, had prompted an intellectual response against the *philosophes* and their rational and scientific worldviews. According to George Mosse, the movement was apolitical when it emerged, not because of a lack of political views, but in the sense that it didn't have clear political goals.³³ Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that there wasn't a united *völkisch* movement, for "instead of a single, organized political force, an uncoordinated collection of *völkisch* groups and individuals emerged"³⁴ and that the common ground of these groupuscules "was limited to agreement that the German nation should be based on the concept of the German *Volk*, defined in racial terms."³⁵

The *völkisch* movement embraced a worldview whereby nature was far from being mechanic or dead (as some scientificist thinkers propounded) and claimed that it should instead be thought of as a living and mystic entity (a view, as mentioned, defended by the German Romantic philosophers) that could represent a spiritual antidote to industrialization and modern life. To urban life and capitalist modernity, some *völkisch* writers and poets opposed the idea of an idyllic German nature by creating the *Heimatkunstbewegung*³⁶ (Homeland Art Movement), from which emerged the *Wandervogel* group (literally, bird of passage), which was part of the important German Youth Movement, an organization highly influenced by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.³⁷ The *Wandervogel* organized group hikes for young people as a protest against modern society and soon became a source of anti-Semitic and ethnic nationalist ideas.³⁸

Originally neither the *Blut und Boden* nor the *völkisch* worldviews espoused a scientific form of racism. This is because they had as one of their core assumptions a rejection of rationalism and science, which they associated with modern decadence and materialistic disenchantment. Their anti-Semitism was spiritual and metaphysical, and therefore more related to thinkers such as Julius Evola³⁹ than to Arthur de

³² Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc, and Thomas Zeller, (Eds.), *How Green Were the Nazis? Nature, Environment and Nation in the Third Reich* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 7.

³³ Mosse, *Les racines intellectuelles du Troisième Reich*, 55.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Guy Turlamain, *Völkisch Writers and National Socialism: A Study of Right-Wing Political Culture in Germany, 1890-1960* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2014), 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁷ Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany: 1890-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 113-14

³⁸ Mosse, *Les racines intellectuelles du Troisième Reich*, 45.

³⁹ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 52

Gobineau or Houston Chamberlain.⁴⁰ Rather than pseudoscientific conferences, these movements preferred to celebrate the summer solstice and other Nordic pagan festivities.⁴¹ In a nutshell, they had more in common with Helena Blavatsky's esoteric Theosophy (who gave birth to the more overtly racist Ariosophy a few decades later)⁴² than to scientificist worldviews.

These romantic nationalists thought that the German race was unique inasmuch as it was homogeneous and divine, and therefore not corrupted by foreign elements. Wilhelm Riehl, whom we have identified as a "proto-ecofascist," compared the Germans to a tree, well-rooted in the soil but pointing to the sky (i.e., to the spiritual).⁴³ Yet when at the beginning of the twentieth century (and especially after the First World War) these ideas were politicized they inevitably lost some of their mystic and spiritual traits and partly embraced the by then mainstream scientific biological worldview. The fact that during the interwar period so many of the young participants of the *Wandervogel* movement fled to far-right and proto-Nazi parties such as the DNVP (*Deutschnationale Volkspartei*), the German Socialist Party (*Deutschsozialistische Partei*), or the Pan-German League (*Alldeutscher Verband*) is symptomatic of a shift in the objectives of the *Völkisch* movement. According to George Mosse, 1918 can be considered the year of the political systemization of the *völkisch* ideology,⁴⁴ roughly coinciding with the first steps of the convulse Weimar Republic.

It is hardly surprising that these ideas ended up permeating some sectors of the main German fascist party, the NSDAP. The man charged with incorporating them into the Nazi rule context was Walther Darré, a pioneer in environmentalism who might be the most famous among all the ecofascist ideologues and politicians. He was politicized at an early stage of his life when he joined the *Artamanen Gesellschaft* (a *völkisch* group who propounded a return to nature in order to escape modern urban society) and became an agrarianist.⁴⁵ During the 1930s Darré turned into the most prominent member of the Blood and Soil movement and claimed that the German land needed to be protected both against the Jews and against uncontrolled industrialization.⁴⁶

Darré defended the need of restoring the connection between *Blut* and *Boden*, i.e., between the German *Völk* and its territory, thereby promoting imperialist goals related to the idea of *Lebensraum* (inasmuch as after 1919 millions of Germans were living outside the frontiers of their original country, mainly in Poland and Czechoslovakia),

⁴⁰ John P. Jackson, Jr., and Nadine M. Weidman, "The Origins of Scientific Racism," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, n° 50 (Winter, 2005/2006), Vol.8 : 66-79

⁴¹ Mosse, *Les racines intellectuelles du Troisième Reich*, 294.

⁴² Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence in Nazi Ideology* (London: TPP, 2004), 33.

⁴³ Mosse, *Les racines intellectuelles du Troisième Reich*, 75

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 385.

⁴⁵ Heather Pringle, *The Master Plan: Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2011), 40.

⁴⁶ David Patterson, *Anti-Semitism and its Metaphysical Origins* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 137-38.

anti-Semitic views (inasmuch as he posited that Jews, who weren't part of the *Volk*, needed to be expelled from German soil) and also environmentalist and social policies (insofar as both the *Volk* and its biosphere were deemed worthy of protection). In 1933, he became Reich minister of food and agriculture, a prestigious position he held until 1942.

Darré was the most fervent intellectual of the so-called green wing of the Nazi party, which counted among its members other important figures such as Fritz Todt, Alwin Seifert, and Rudolf Hess.⁴⁷ Darré, Todt, and Seifert managed to implement some environmentalist policies, mainly related to organic agriculture, reforestation, protection of endangered plants and animals, and industrial and commercial restrictions. This led inevitably to a series of confrontations with important Nazi politicians who weren't particularly enthusiastic about ecological measures, such as Martin Bormann, Joseph Goebbels, and Reinhard Heydrich.⁴⁸ After all, the environmentalist tendencies within the National Socialist ideology were only a part of a complex and often contradictory worldview, and issues were continually aroused when it came to translating them into concrete policies.⁴⁹

This was the brief history of ecofascism, a doctrine inspired by Romanticism, nationalism, and racism that appeared in Germany (although it had followers in other countries, such as Italy)⁵⁰ and managed to have an important impact on the Nazi regime. Far from being a cynical manipulation of noble intentions, German ecofascism was a genuine environmentalist ideology, although one deeply intertwined with violent, imperialist, and racist views. There was a sincere will to protect the German environment within the green wing of the NSDAP, despite its rationale being totally at odds with today's green parties' political projects. That being said, Hitler wasn't particularly enthusiastic about his party's green wing, and the importance of ecofascism within the regime was limited, as Anna Bramwell has shown.⁵¹

After 1945 the fascist doctrine and its supporters were swept away by the calamitous defeat of the Axis at the end of the Second World War and became marginal throughout the West. Yet this didn't imply the end of ecofascist tendencies. As we shall see, today ecofascism is going through a process of rearticulation, especially in the United States. How does this new ideology, which will be called neofascism, differ from the original doctrine? How has it adapted to the contemporary era? Could it become a mass movement or a mainstream ideology in the future, as was the case with the Blood and Soil ideal and the small *völkisch* movements a century ago?

⁴⁷ Biehl and Staudenmaier, *Ecofascismo*, 43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁹ Frank Uekötter, "Green Nazis? Reassessing the Environmental History of Nazi Germany," *German Studies Review* 30, no. 2 (2007): 267-87.

⁵⁰ Rubén Domínguez Méndez, "La batalla del grano y los valores del ruralismo," *La Razón Histórica: Revista hispanoamericana de Historia de las Ideas* 22 (2013): 36-47.

⁵¹ Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 51.

The Alt-Right, a Neofascist Movement

If today there is a country in which neofascism (which is the word conventionally used to refer to fascist movements and ideologies after 1945)¹ is a relatively flourishing ideology, it is the United States. This article will employ the definition of “fascism” formulated by Roger Griffin, who defined the so-called “fascist minimum” (i.e., the core aspects of the fascist ideology that apply to every form of fascism) as

[A] genuinely revolutionary, trans-class form of anti-liberal, and in the last analysis, anti-conservative nationalism. As such it is an ideology deeply bound up with modernization and modernity, one which has assumed a considerable variety of external forms to adapt itself to the particular historical and national context in which it appears [Fascism] seeks to end the degeneration affecting the nation under liberalism, and to bring about a radical renewal of its social, political and cultural life as part of what was widely imagined to be the new era being inaugurated in Western civilization.²

Drawing from this definition, it is possible to identify several American political organizations and intellectuals as neofascist. The group that stands out in this respect is without question the Alt-Right (an abbreviation of “alternative right”), a cluster of loosely connected intellectuals, online groups, and activists who profess anti-democratic, anti-liberal, anti-conservative (it is important to highlight that the Alt-Right is genuinely different from the rest of the right, including the so-called Alt-Lite),³ white nationalist, racist, and patriarchal views.⁴ This movement began to form at the beginning of this decade when Richard Spencer (its most visible face) launched *The Alternative Right* webzine. The Alt-Right shot to fame in 2016 when Donald Trump chose Steve Bannon (the editor of *Breitbart News*, which he described

¹ Walter Laqueur, *Fascism, Past, Present and Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 93.

² Roger Griffin, “The Palingenic Core of Generic Fascist Ideology,” in Alessandro Campi (Ed.), *Che cos’è il fascismo? Interpretazioni e prospettive di ricerche* (Rome: Ideazione Editrice, 2003), 97-122.

³ “From Alt Right to Alt Lite: Naming the Hate,” *ADL*, 16 June 2016, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/from-alt-right-to-alt-lite-naming-the-hate> (accessed 8 October 2019).

⁴ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 115.

as the platform for the Alt- Right) as his campaign director. At that moment this radical movement “went from obscurity to infamy,” in the words of Thomas Main.⁵

Despite the fact that some of its idiosyncratic features make the Alt-Right a peculiar movement (e.g., its dispersed organization, the continuous use of irony, its presence online, and the consequent use of internet codes) that shouldn’t prevent us from seeing it as a political group with a well-articulated ideology that can be systematically analyzed.⁶ In fact, we have previously noted that both the *völkisch* groups (who originally tended to be apolitical) and the Blood and Soil ideology were initially a myriad of dispersed stances and organizations, before they were articulated into more consistent worldviews. The type of neofascism that we are witnessing today might be at the moment in a “preparadigmatic state” similar to the one that existed in pre-1914 Europe, when despite the blossoming of radical right groups across the European continent, there wasn’t a corpus of ideas capable of homogenizing and structuring the groups.

Moreover, some of the Alt-Right’s extravagant elements might be in fact more politically rational than they seem. For example, the continued use of ironic detachment is probably due not only to the fact that the Alt-Right’s online community is inhabited by young people for whom this rhetorical device is essential, but also to a conscious will to engage in radical positions without confronting the social consequences that derive from doing so.⁷ *The Daily Stormer*, a website associated with the Alt-Right, stated in its (leaked) guidelines for potential authors that “the tone of the site should be light so that the unindoctrinated can’t tell if we are joking or not.”⁸ As Jason Wilson points out, irony and comic ambiguity are clearly “discursive weapons” in the hands of the Alt-Right.⁹ In fact the movement’s neo-ecofascist stance (which is analyzed below) has also been filtered through irony and internet codes, giving birth to mottos such as “save bees, not refugees”¹⁰ and to groups such as The Pine Tree Gang,¹¹ whose members use the pine tree emoji as an identity marker.

In any case, the existence of outlandish and particular traits within the Alt-Right’s discourse doesn’t imply that the movement shouldn’t be associated with ideologies

⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷ Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis, *Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online* (New York: Data & Society, 2018), 11.

⁸ Ashley Feinberg, “This is the Daily Stormer’s Playbook,” *Huffington Post*, 15 December 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/daily-stormer-nazi-style-guide_n_5a2ece19e4b0ce3b344492f2 (accessed 6 October 2019).

⁹ Jason Wilson, “Hiding in Plain Sight: How the ‘Alt-Right’ is Weaponising Irony to Spread Fascism,” *The Guardian*, 23 May 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/23/alt-right-online-humor-as-a-weapon-facism> (accessed 8 October 2019).

¹⁰ Susie Cagle, “‘Bees, Not Refugees’: The Environmentalist Roots of Anti-Immigrant Bigotry,” *The Guardian*, 16 August 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/aug/15/anti> (accessed 7 October 2019).

¹¹ Jake Hanrahan, “Inside the Unabomber’s Odd and Furious Online Revival,” *Wired*, 1 August 2018, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/unabomber-netflix-tv-series-ted-kaczynski> (accessed 8 October 2019).

from the past, but that it is a new manifestation of them. In fact, rather than it being a decentralized fascist organization that uses memes and thrives online what should shock us is a contemporary fascist organization that acts exactly as its predecessors from the interwar period. The Alt-Right is just the twenty-first-century expression of an old phenomenon. For example, although some might point to the fact that today there's not a fascist mass party in order to justify their skepticism towards the existence of contemporary fascism, Roger Griffin noted in 2008 (two years before the emergence of the Alt-Right) that present-day fascist organizations are “groupuscular” and rhizomatic and focus on spreading their ideas rather than on creating competitive political parties.¹²

This fits with Thomas J. Main's view of the Alt-Right as “not a constituency with political goals but an intellectual movement that shapes how people think about politics.”¹³ Such shift from mass mobilizations to small-group influence is related to one of the most important contemporary thinkers of the radical right: Alain De Benoist. Partly drawing from Antonio Gramsci's ideas on politics and culture, De Benoist and other thinkers from the *Nouvelle Droite* developed the plan of articulating a meta-political approach to politics, i.e., one based on a will to carry a cultural struggle that affects the whole political sphere instead of creating a political party that would stand in general elections. This implies favoring small but influential organizations over mass parties, although these are of course the main political actors that need to be influenced.

Although neofascism had a relative success (given the adverse historical context) in the United States during the 1950s and the 1960s, the Alt-Right didn't evolved from such ideology. Thomas J. Main, arguably the author of the most important work on the Alt-Right's ideology, emphasizes that the Alt-Right is not the product of American neo-Nazism, but of paleoconservatism. Paleoconservatism is a branch of conservatism that, in opposition to neoconservatism, took a drastic turn in the mid-1980s and developed four major themes: a radical rejection of liberal democracy, anti-Semitism, racialism, and anti-Americanism.¹⁴

This means that the members of the Alt-Right derive their ideals from thinkers such as Paul Gottfried rather than George Lincoln Rockwell (the famous neofascist who founded the American Nazi Party in 1959), although American neo-Nazism remains an important influence within the movement.¹⁵ Despite being an offshoot of conservatism, paleoconservatism is undoubtedly part of the radical right. Gottfried, for example,

¹² Roger Griffin, “Fascism's New Faces (and New Facelessness) in the ‘Post-Fascist’ Epoch,” in Matthew Feldman (Ed.), *A Fascist Century: Essays by Roger Griffin* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 228.

¹³ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 115.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵ Spencer Sunshine, “Will Decentralization of Neo-Nazism Spur More Right-Wing Terrorism?,” *TruthOut*, 18 March 2019, <https://truthout.org/articles/will-decentralization-of-neo-nazism-spur-more-right-wing-terrorism/> (accessed 5 October 2019).

went as far as to praise Mussolini as the founder of a more acceptable type of fascism, allegedly significantly different from the German.¹⁶

The passage from paleoconservatism to the Alt-Right, headed by Richard Spencer, is therefore not a passage from a moderate form of conservatism to a radical one, but a significant qualitative change between two forms of right-wing radicalism. A historical analogy might be pertinent to clarify this. It could be said that the difference between the paleoconservatives and the Alt-Right is parallel to the one between the *Konservative Revolution* and the Nazis. Undoubtedly, thinkers such as Oswald Spengler, Carl Schmitt, Moeller van der Bruck, Ernst Niekisch, or Edgar Julius Jung were essential influences for the NSDAP, but they certainly didn't share all of its ideas, nor can all of them be considered fascists.

¹⁶ Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 59.

The Alt-Right and Neoecofascism

The Alt-Right has its own “green wing,” although inasmuch as ecofascism is today more marginal than it was a century ago (and fascism itself is incomparably weaker), it is inevitably not as well-organized as its German precursor. However, we should bear in mind that the formation of the ecofascist ideology in Germany took decades to materialize. This could also be the case of a new form of ecofascism (which has been labeled in this article simply as “neoecofascism,” following the diachronic distinction between fascism and neofascism), of which only the first steps can be observed at the moment but that could flourish in a context of global warming and environmental anxieties.

Such context is a truly transformative one, for climate change represents a challenge for the whole political and economic system. The unequivocal scientific evidence presents a world of rising global temperatures, warming oceans, glacial retreat, rising sea levels, and extreme climate events. The global character of these dangers and their capacity of quick disruption will defy not only our sociopolitical systems, but also our worldviews and some of our most basic assumptions. Capitalism will have to adapt to this bleak picture, and if it fails to do so, it will be naturally challenged by both the radical right and the radical left. In such circumstances it is inevitable that the totality of the political spectrum becomes aware of these challenges and modifies strategies accordingly, incorporating both a cognitive map of the situation and a series of potential solutions to it.

American neoecofascism is already adapting to this condition. Richard Spencer himself pointed at the importance of the environment for the Alt-Right in the 2017 manifesto *What it Means to be Alt-Right*.¹ In that brief proclamation, after outlining the centrality of race and anti-Semitism within the Alt-Right’s ideological program, he refers to man’s relationship with nature. Just like the Romantics and *völkisch* thinkers, he states that a human being is part of the natural order, although he considers it as “being in it and above it,”² thereby manifesting the tensions between right-wing hierarchism and naturalism, two tendencies that were already in opposition in early German ecofascism, as noted by Frank Uekötter.³ According to Spencer, “the natural world—and our experience of it—is an end in itself,”⁴ which means rejecting the conser-

¹ Richard B. Spencer, “What It Means to Be Alt-Right: A Meta-Political Manifesto for the Alt-Right Movement,” *AltRight*, 11 August 2017, <http://archive.fo/vuZGm> (accessed 8 October 2019).

² *Ibid.*

³ Uekötter, “Green Nazis?” 271.

⁴ Spencer, “What It Means to Be Alt-Right.”

vative view of nature (based on aesthetic contemplation and economic exploitation)⁵ and embracing ecofascist postulates.

As Matthew Phelan notes, Spencer’s ecofascist proclamations are not only the assertion of a series of ideas but also a stance against other views within the American radical right, such as “the idea that climate change is a hoax, that the environmental movement is a crypto-socialist bid for state intervention (effectively, the Koch-funded Tea Party line).”⁶ This tension between those who spread conspiracy theories that point to the left and to certain elites and neocofascists will most likely be the main cleavage within the contemporary radical right regarding climate change and environmental protection. In any case, the popularity of the environmentalist movement (Richard Spencer himself praised Greta Thunberg recently)⁷ and the undeniable scientific evidence invite to foresee a radical right that pays attention to such issues rather than a “denialist” one.

The Alt-Right has also shown interest in other contemporary political issues related to the environmentalist movement. One of them is food consumption. As Vasile Stănescu has shown, the Alt-Right has engaged in several debates concerning diet and vegetarianism.⁸ One of the positions that have resulted from such a rapprochement with contemporary dietary concerns is a cult for milk consumption as a synonym of masculinity and racial purity that reproduces some nineteenth-century colonialist stances.⁹ Others have embraced vegetarianism (as famously did both Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler) or veganism, insisting on their online messages on how such dietary option is a proof of Aryan strength and connectedness with all living beings rather than something that belongs to “pacifistic hippy caricatures.”¹⁰

Some of these positions are strongly influenced by neopagan and mystic currents.¹¹ This commitment with mythical discourses can be found in prominent Alt-Right figures. Such is the case of Greg Johnson, the editor-in-chief of Counter Currents Publishing, one of the pillars of Alt-Right publishing.¹² In 2011, while reviewing a book that fantasizes about Hyperborea (the mythical polar land that is supposed to be the original

⁵ George Lakoff, *Política moral: Cómo piensan progresistas y conservadores* (Madrid: Captain Swing, 2016), 85-87.

⁶ Matthew Pelan, “The Menace of Eco-Fascism,” *The New York Review of Books*, 22 October 2018, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/10/22/the-menace-of-eco-fascism/> (accessed 5 October 2019).

⁷ NPI/RADIX, “The McSpencer Group—September 19, 2019,” YouTube video, 1:12:35, 29 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmimLyi67fQ> (accessed 6 October 2019).

⁸ Vasile Stănescu, “‘White Power Milk’: Milk, Dietary Racism, and the ‘Alt-Right’” *Animal Studies Journal* 7, no. 2 (2018): 103-28

⁹ *Ibid.*, 105

¹⁰ Alexis de Coning, “Why So Many White Supremacists Are into Veganism,” *VICE*, 20 October 2017, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/evb4zw/why-so-many-white-supremacists-are-into-veganism (accessed 7 October 2019).

¹¹ Mike Wendling, *Alt-Right: From 4chan to the White House* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 7.

¹² Colin Daileida, “Meet the Pillars of the White Nationalist Alt-Right Movement,” *Mashable UK*, 26 August 2016, <https://mashable.com/2016/08/27/alt-right-white-men-pillars-of-movement/?eu-rope=true#78pihcKDkSqD> (accessed 7 October 2019).

home of the Aryan race), Johnson stated that the movement needed to focus on myths rather than in facts insofar as “myths, unlike science and policy studies, resonate deeply in the soul and reach the wellsprings of action. Myths can inspire collective action to change the world.”¹³ This statement is as well a diatribe against “the insufficiency of backwards-looking conservatism and data-driven empiricism to preserve and elevate our race.”¹⁴

It is therefore hardly surprising that this neofascist revival has developed links with American neopagan circles that engage in environmentalist stances. Groups such as the Wolves of Vinland (a Norse neopagan organization based in Virginia), who promote white nationalist and male chauvinistic views, have been found to have links with the National Policy Institute, headed by Richard Spencer.¹⁵ The Asatru Folk Assembly, another neopagan group, has also prospered thanks to the emergence of the Alt-Right.¹⁶ The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) characterizes these groups as neo-*völkisch* and links their ideas to “ideals and myths that are derived from the *Völkisch* movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”¹⁷ These organizations share with their ideological forebears a view of nature as a redeemer from the evils of modernity and urban life, along with a patriarchal longing for an uncivilized lifestyle that can liberate forces that are allegedly repressed in modern society.

It is also symptomatic that Richard Spencer has created special links with movements such as the Nordic Resistance Movement (*Nordiska motstandsrorelsen*),¹⁸ a Nordic supranational association (established in Sweden, Norway, and Finland) that emphasizes the importance of environmentalism and thereby continues the ecofascist enterprise.¹⁹ This neoecofascist connection with the Nordic countries is far from trivial. Finland is the home country of Pentti Linkola, an influential (and openly ecofascist) thinker whose works advocate dictatorship and downsizing population and who claims that “everything that we have developed during the past one-hundred years needs to

¹³ Greg Johnson, “Hyperborean Home,” *Counter Currents Publishing*, July 2011, <https://www.counter-currents.com/2011/07/hyperborean-home/> (accessed 8 October 2019).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Betsy Swan, “Inside Virginia’s Creepy White-Power Wolf Cult,” 13 April 2017, *The Daily Beast*, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/inside-virginias-creepy-white-power-wolf-cult> (accessed 6 October 2019).

¹⁶ Shannon Weber, “White Supremacy’s Old Gods. The Far Right and Neopaganism,” *Political Research Associates*, 1 February 2018, <https://www.politicalresearch.org/2018/02/01/white-supremacys-old-gods-the-far-right-and-neopaganism> (accessed 8 October 2019).

¹⁷ “Neo-völkisch,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/neo-volkisch> (accessed 8 October 2019).

¹⁸ Maria Murriel, “White Nationalism in Sweden has a Long History. Now It Also has Partners in America,” PRI, 3 May 2017, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-05-03/white-nationalism-sweden-has-long-history-now-it-also-has-partners-america> (accessed 8 October 2019).

¹⁹ Maria Darwish, “Green Neo-Nazism: Examining the Intersection of Masculinity, Far-Right Extremism and Environmentalism in the Nordic Resistance Movement,” (Master’s thesis, University of Oslo, 2018).

be destroyed.”²⁰ An unknown thinker outside Finland, Linkola’s renewal of ecofascist postulates is becoming more and more popular in Alt-Right circles.²¹

This mystic and neopagan road to neoecofascism allows us to better understand the growing cult of Savitri Devi (a central figure within post-1945 ecofascism) among alt-righters.²² Savitri Devi (born Maximiani Portas) was an important representative of postwar esoteric fascism²³ as well as a committed advocate of animal rights and “deep ecology,” a philosophy that stresses nature’s inherent value. She claimed that Hitler was a Hindu avatar (i.e., the incarnation of Vishnu and therefore a kind of semi-god) and even disseminated Nazi propaganda in West Germany in 1948, before engaging with the international neofascist movement (meeting George Lincoln Rockwell on several occasions) and then moving to India with her husband, a Bengal Brahmin who shared her ideological convictions regarding the common Aryan ancestry of Indo-European societies.

Savitri Devi could act as an intellectual bridge between ecofascism and neoecofascism, for her ideas are capable of pursuing the ecofascist enterprise that started at the end of the nineteenth century while at the same time being appealing to today’s and tomorrow’s right-wing radicals. Furthermore, her works on animal rights and environmentalism (*The Impeachment of Man*,²⁴ written in 1959, being the most important among them) go beyond the nineteenth-century Romanticism professed by the aforementioned German thinkers and can connect with contemporary New Age and biocentrist ideas.

But the influence of Hindu mysticism (an important source of myths and ideas for the German *Blut und Boden* movement)²⁵ among alt-righters goes beyond Savitri Devi’s peculiar amalgamation of deep ecology, Hinduism, and Nazism. Julius Evola (born Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola), an important intellectual of postwar fascism, is also popular among the American radical right. Evola held a kind of spiritual and metaphysical racism more similar to the most mystic factions of the *Blut und Boden* groups than to biological racism (which he criticized).²⁶ He posited that twentieth-century Europe was going through the Kali Yuga, an era of chaos and decay according to the Hindu tradition, and that Hitler and Mussolini represented a possibility to end it

²⁰ Pentti Linkola, “Pentti Linkola: Ideas,” *Pentti Linkola*, http://www.penttilinkola.com/pentti_linkola/ecofascism/ (accessed 6 October 2019).

²¹ Jason Wilson, “Eco-fascism is Undergoing a Revival in the Fetid Culture Of the Extreme Right,” *The Guardian*, 19 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2019/mar/20/ecofascism-is-undergoing-a-revival-in-the-fetid-culture-of-the-extreme-right> (accessed 7 October 2019)

²² “Savitri Devi: The Mystical Fascist Being Resurrected by the Alt-Right”, *BBC News*, 29 October 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-41757047> (accessed 8 October 2019).

²³ Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, 88.

²⁴ Savitri Devi, *The Impeachment of Man* (Newport: Nontide Press, 2008)

²⁵ Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, 54.

²⁶ Paul Furlong, *The Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (London: Routledge, 2011)

and restore the rule of the Aryan race.²⁷ Therefore, it was necessary to “ride the tiger of modernity” to overcome this “age of dissolution.”²⁸ Julius Evola was surprisingly praised by Steve Bannon²⁹ and his idea of the Kali Yuga has become a meme among alt-righters (who created images of a surfing skeleton with the message “Surf the Kali Yuga”).³⁰

This Evolian understanding of the Kali Yuga, whose reception is, like that of other radical ideas, both genuine and somewhat ironic, leads us to a key component of neofascism that represents yet another similarity with its ideological forebear, i.e., the idea of pessimism, closely related to the notions of decadence and palingenesis. It was probably introduced into the radical right by Oswald Spengler³¹ (under the inspiration of Friedrich Nietzsche) at the beginning of the twentieth century and became a commonplace for right-wing radicals ever since. According to Roger Griffin, both the sensation of decadence and pessimism (associated with modernity’s malaises) are central to fascist ideology.³² In his analysis of George Sorel’s works as the intellectual origins of fascism, Zeev Sternhell points at the importance of pessimism as well.³³ The idea of inevitable decay leads fascist thinkers to imagine an apocalyptic rebirth generally associated with a national (or ethnic) resurgence.³⁴

The most prominent Alt-Right figures have expressed this sensation of decay on several occasions. According to Richard Spencer the situation of the United States can be compared to the decline of the Roman Empire, and such decline is orchestrated by elites who “want a world without roots . . . a world without meaning . . . a flat grey-on-grey world, one economic market for them to manipulate.”³⁵ He has also defined U.S. society as being perverse and decadent and the United States as a diseased country.³⁶ Against this dramatic situation he propounds the creation of a “white ethno-state on

²⁷ A. James Gregor, *Mussolini’s Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 2005.

²⁸ Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul* (VT: Inner Traditions, 2003), 7.

²⁹ “Steve Bannon Cited Italian Philosopher Who Inspired Fascists,” *The New York Times*, 10 February 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/10/world/eur0pe/bannon-vatican-julius-ev0la-fascism.html> (accessed 8 October 2019).

³⁰ Blake Smith, “The Alt-Right Apocalypse: Hindu Eschatology and the reactionary Mind,” *Marginalia*, 17 August 2017, <https://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/alt-right-apocalypse/> (accessed 6 October 2019).

³¹ Mark Sedgwick, *Key Thinkers of The Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), xvi.

³² Griffin, *Fascism and Modernism*.

³³ Sternhell, *El nacimiento de la ideologia fascista*, 71.

³⁴ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 8.

³⁵ Richard Spencer, “Spencer Speaks! The Transcript,” *Radix*, 9 December 2016, <https://radixjournal.com/2016/i2/2016-i2-9-spencer-speaks-the-transcript/> (accessed 7 October 2019).

³⁶ Graeme Wood, “His Kampf: Richard Spencer is a Troll and an Icon for White Supremacists. He was also My High-School Classmate,” *The Atlantic*, June 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/06/his-kampf/524505/> (accessed 7 October 2019).

the North American continent . . . a reconstitution of the Roman Empire.”³⁷ Such new civilization “would be, to borrow the title of a novel by Theodor Herzl (one of the founding fathers of Zionism), an *Altneuland*—an old, new country.”³⁸

Climate change, with its pessimistic prospect of natural disasters and social chaos, is a great opportunity for this kind of discourse to thrive. After all, fascism grows from the seeds of fear and turmoil, which is why Roger Griffin refers to it using the theological concept of *creatio ex profundis* (an act of creativity defying the unknown, or the chaotic).³⁹ This sense of apocalyptic decline was shared by *völkisch* thinkers at the end of the nineteenth century who saw the natural world being threatened by the industrial revolution and capitalism.⁴⁰ It is not hard to imagine the return of such discourses, which didn’t fade away after the Second World War but were rearticulated by important radical right thinkers such as Ernst Jünger⁴¹ and, as mentioned previously, by esoteric fascists such as Julius Evola and Savitri Devi. The fascist tradition already harbors an important focus on decline and pessimism but, more important, it has produced an amalgamation of such mindsets with environmental anxiety. Thus the radical right, as the Alt-Right is proof of, possesses a great “ideological reserve” for the ongoing climate change distress, and it is already making use of it in order to radicalize American right-wingers, especially the youngsters. As Jeet Heer pointed out:

This combination of a white nationalism with angst about the prospects for human survival is a perfect recipe for radicalizing young right-wingers and taking Trumpian themes to a new level of extremism. Instead of the merely restorationist day-dream of “making American great again,” the extreme right is using social media agitprop and the propaganda of the deed to harden young white Americans for a global race war fought over diminishing resources. The very real dangers of climate change provide race war fantasists the dystopian background they need to give urgency to their violent agenda.⁴²

That said, American neofascism faces at least two important challenges in comparison with its ideological forebears. First, the demographic structure of the United States has little to do with nineteenth-century Germany. Ecofascism was professed

³⁷ Richard Spencer, “Facing the Future as a Minority,” *Radix*, 28 September 2016, <https://webrecorder.io/pharosclassics/pharos-doing-justice-to-the-classics/20190723144623/> <https://radixjournal.com/2016/09/2016-9-28-facmg-the-future-as-a-mmority/> (accessed 8 October 2019).

³⁸ Spencer, “Facing the Future as a Minority.”

³⁹ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 160.

⁴⁰ Mosse, *Les racines intellectuelles du Troisième Reich*, 37.

⁴¹ Elliot Neaman, “Ernst Jünger and Torments of Steel,” in Mark Sedwick, *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 15

⁴² Jeet Heer, “After the El Paso Massacre, the Choice is Green Socialism or Eco-Fascism,” *The Nation*, 5 August 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/el-paso-mass-shooting-fascism/> (accessed 8 October 2019).

mainly by members of the urban middle class, who romanticized rural life and the figure of the traditional peasant, but the challenge for contemporary neocofascists is that such world seems to have faded away in Western societies. Agricultural mechanization and technological advances have reduced agricultural workers to a minority, and one in which immigrants play an important role. Yet it remains possible to appeal politically to this social group, as Trump has done on several occasions.⁴³ This is because political imaginaries are de facto autonomous from social reality, as the “imagined nature” created by the young *völkisch* militants shows.

The Alt-Right could focus on ideal representations of rural American life, as opposed to the lifestyle of the “coastal elites,” a well-established ideological trope in the United States,⁴⁴ although that would imply a heterogeneous implementation in geographic terms. Be that as it may, it is clear that contemporary neocofascists might have to engage in New Age forms of Romanticism rather than in idealizations of rural life, inasmuch as we now live in a “rurban world” (i.e., a system in which rural and urban spaces are interpenetrated) in which it is increasingly difficult to identify and romanticize the country life.

Second, contemporary notions of nature are different from the ones that emerged in the wake of industrialization. German Romantics reacted to both industrial capitalism and scientific rationalism by “reenchanted” nature, thereby perceiving it as a source of mystic energies that couldn’t be understood from a positivist point of view. It is evident that this view of nature still operates today, but in a more marginal way. Modernity meant the demystification of the world, but such a shift was accompanied by the birth of new political metanarratives and spiritualist (and often orientalist) reactions, whereas postmodernity has made those difficult to develop. Among the three main representations of nature according to Serge Moscovici (organic, cybernetic, and mechanistic),⁴⁵ the first (defended by the Romantics) seems to be the least popular, which makes it difficult to spread the idea that there’s a mystic unity among the nation, the *ethnos*, and the “national” natural world. That said, the capability of nationalism to bridge heterogeneous elements (e.g., nature and patriotism) shouldn’t be underestimated, and neocofascists might be able to do so in the future.

⁴³ Philip Martin, “Trump, Immigration, and Agriculture,” *Choices* 32, no. 1 (2017): 1-5.

⁴⁴ Judith Kapferer, “Rural Myths and Urban Ideologies,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 26, no. 1 (1990): 87-106.

⁴⁵ Serge Moscovici, *La société contre nature* (Paris: Union Générale d’Édition, 1972).

Right-Wing Environmentalism beyond Neoeconfascism

Although this article focuses on the Alt-Right, there are other movements that integrate environmentalist and radical-right or right-wing stances in their discourses. For example, among conservative environmentalists it is relatively easy to find the idea that immigration and overpopulation are to blame for environmental collapse. These ideas are sometimes disseminated by single intellectuals who, despite having links with right-wing organizations, don't offer such a consistent worldview but instead will propound concrete ideas or policy proposals for years to come. Rather than overtly neofascist views (which tend to be revolutionary, idealistic, and ultranationalist), these authors present their proposals as pragmatic solutions to environmental and economic problems. Although they are closer to conservatism than to fascism, their views can easily be assimilated and appropriated by more radical groups and could become a gateway to these.

The most famous among such thinkers is probably John Tanton, the recently deceased founder of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). Although he has been included in the list of contemporary ecofascist by several pundits,¹² he should be seen instead as a conservative environmentalist. Apart from advocating eugenics³ and funding several anti-immigration organizations, Tanton is known for his articulation of xenophobic and environmentalist stances. According to him, in order to protect America's biosphere it is imperative to stop mass immigration, inasmuch as overpopulation is a threat to nature.⁴ This idea is shared by Jared Taylor (a white nationalist with links to the Alt-Right), who wonders "how can we possibly claim to be fighting environmental degradation or hope for energy independence when we im-

¹ Tess Owen, "Eco-Fascism: The Racist Theory that Inspired the El Paso and Christchurch Shooters," *VICE*, 6 August 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/59nmv5/eco-fascism-the-racist-theory-that-inspired-the-el-paso-and-christchurch-shooters-and-is-gaining-followers (accessed 7 October 2019).

² Pelan, "The Threat of Eco-Fascism."

³ Maria Santana, "Hard-Line Anti-Illegal Immigration Advocates Hired at Two Federal Agencies," *CNN*, 12 April 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/04/11/politics/trump-administration-immigration-advisers/index.html> (accessed 8 October 2019).

⁴ Jason L. Riley, "The End of an Anti-Immigration Environmentalist," *Wall Street Journal*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-end-of-an-anti-immigration-environmentalist-11563921859> (accessed 7 October 2019).

port a million or more people every year?”⁵ Tanton and his ecoconservative supporters were influenced by the neo-Malthusian ideas that spread throughout the United States during the 1960s,⁶ which are a good example of a potential intellectual bridge between different forms of right-wing environmentalism inasmuch as the control of population growth can be used for multiple ideological purposes.

These views have partly infiltrated American environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club.⁷ Tanton himself was part of the club and actively tried to turn it into an anti-immigration political organization.⁸ His efforts were not in vain, for until the 1980s the Sierra Club was in fact a promoter of the idea that there is a correlation between mass immigration and environmental damage.⁹ The internal debate of 1997-98 was of major importance not only for the Club, but also for the anti-immigration-environmentalist synthesis. In it a group of members claimed that in order to protect the American environment not only must there be a reduction of natural population growth but an end of immigration would also be necessary. The focus was not only on immigrants, but also on national minorities deemed to be “poorly educated and highly fertile.”¹⁰

Among ecoconservatives contemporary demographic and social anxieties are thereby linked to a concern for environmental well-being, a path that some right-wing governments are starting to follow. This is already the case in Austria,¹¹ Hungary,¹² and Poland.¹³ It would not be surprising if some of these turn into a form of ecoauthoritarianism whereby some forms of illiberalism and social control are justified in the name of preventing or fixing environmental problems. Environmental authoritarianism is for

⁵ Taylor, *White Identity*, 286.

⁶ Sebastian Normandin and Sean A. Valles, “How a Network of Conservationists and Population Control Activists Created the Contemporary US Anti-Immigration Movement,” *Endeavour* 39, no. 25 (2015): 95-105.

⁷ Susie Cagle, “Bees, not Refugees.”

⁸ Hop Hopkins, “How the Sierra Club’s History with Immigrant Rights is Shaping Our Future,” *Sierra Club*, 2 November 2018, <https://www.sierraclub.org/articles/2018/11/how-sierra-club-s-history-immigrant-rights-shaping-our-future> (accessed 9 October 2019).

⁹ Matthew Sussis, “A Brief Chronology of the Sierra Club’s Retreat from the ImmigrationPopulation Connection (Updated),” *Center for Immigration Studies*, 14 August 2018, <https://cis.org/Sussis/Brief-Chronology-Sierra-Clubs-Retreat-ImmigrationPopulation-Connection-Updated> (accessed 8 October 2019).

¹⁰ Ben Zuckerman, “The Sierra Club Immigration Debate: National Implications,” *Population and Environment* 20, no. 5 (1999): 401-12.

¹¹ Christopher F. Schuetze and Katrin Bennhold, “Head-Scarf Ban and Carbon Taxes: Austria Gets an Unlikely Government,” *The New York Times*, 2 January 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/02/world/europe/austria-kurz-greens-coalition-government.html> (accessed 7 October 2019).

¹² Nijat Eldarov, “Hungarian President Calls for Fight against Climate Change to Reduce Migratory Pressures,” *Emerging Europe*, 5 October 2018, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/hungarian-president-calls-for-fight-against-climate-change-to-reduce-migratory-pressures/> (accessed 8 October 2019).

¹³ Marc Santora, “In Poland, Nationalism with a Progressive Touch Wins Voters,” *The New York Times*, 10 October 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/10/world/europe/poland-election-law-and-justice-party.html> (accessed 10 October 2019).

now absent in the West, but it is already a reality in China, where climate distress and a high degree of air pollution have justified top-down solutions without any mechanism for channeling public involvement within the process.¹⁴

However, the ecoconservative and the ecoauthoritarian intertwinements between the *ethnos* and the environment, although part of the illiberal tradition, seem to be somewhat “disenchanted” and rationalized, inasmuch as they are presented with socio-economic arguments rather than a transformative point of view. This is a key difference between neocofascism and other right-wing ecologist tendencies. Whereas neocofascists yearn for a radical cultural change whereby our conceptions about race, nature and the nation would be swept away, right-wing environmentalists seem to merely address concrete environmental issues from their ideological point of view. Yet as mentioned (it is important to emphasize the dynamic and elastic potential of environmentalism) these differences don’t prevent a transfer of ideas between groups whose ideological frontiers have historically been porous.

Indeed, political ideas are always open to resignification and reappropriation (this is, as mentioned, the methodological premise of this article), and environmentalism is becoming a great example of it. For instance, some neofascists find inspiration in apocalyptic perspectives described by authors that are far from being radical rightists, such as Paul Ehrlich.¹⁵ Ehrlich (who was also influenced by neo-Malthusianism) stated that overpopulation was leading the human race to mass starvation and all kinds of social distresses and eventually put the focus on mass immigration.¹⁶ As with some of Petti Linkola’s eliminationist ideas, Ehrlich’s could influence ecofascism as a pessimism booster, but he will fail to become part of the solutions this ideology proposes. This is because, as we have already pointed, out ecofascism (and more broadly fascism itself) is a utopian ideology that, in the face of a terrible sense of decay and hopelessness, proposes a nationalist palingenesis. Therefore it can feed on demographic anxieties and environmental fears, but it won’t embrace any nihilistic “solution” inasmuch as its pessimistic mindset is limited to criticizing the world it seeks to overcome; it cannot (logically) permeate its transformative political project.

Environmentalism has also intersected with market-oriented ideologies associated with laissez-faire economics that have little to do with neocofascism. Such is the case of what might be called econeoliberalism, i.e., the branch of neoliberalism that sees environmental problems as a product of state intervention. Their solution is in the

¹⁴ Xiao Tang, Weiwei Chen, and Tian Wu, “Do Authoritarian Governments Respond to Public Opinion on the Environment? Evidence from China,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 15, no. 2 (2018): 266-81.

¹⁵ Maddie Blaaw, “The Rise of Ecofascism: A New Deadly Motivation for the Far-Right,” *The Rising*, 18 August 2019, <https://therising.co/2019/08/18/the-rise-of-ecofascism-a-new-deadly-motivation-for-the-far-right/> (accessed 6 October 2019).

¹⁶ Edward P. Lytwak and Albert A. Bartlett, “Rejoinder to Daily, Ehrlich, and Ehrlich: Immigration and Population Policy in the United States,” *Population and Environment: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 16, no. 6 (1995): 527-537.

hands of consumers and entrepreneurs. Erik Swyngedouw refers to econoliberalism as “the privatization of climate” whereby “the field of neoliberal economy is widened.”¹⁷ Economists such as Robert Costanza and Monica Grasso, for example, refer to the environment in utilitarian and economic terms such as “eco-system services,” “natural capital stocks,” or “the economic value of the planet,” and advocate for market-oriented reforms of our relationship with nature.¹⁸ Such views can be found in important international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the United Nations. For example, in 2008 the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) launched its “Global Green New Deal,” a set of proposals that underlined the importance of technological innovation, micro-credits, liberalization, and economic growth.¹⁹

Right-wing environmentalist stances in the United States have found another niche beyond political organizations and ecologist clubs: terrorism. Right-wing terrorism accounts for the majority of attacks that took place within the country in the last decade²⁰ and an important number of them were inspired by environmentalist positions. This was the case of Patrick Cursius, the author of the El Paso shooting of August 2019, who in his manifesto (posted on 8chan, a website frequented by alt-righters and other supporters of the radical right) showed concerns for the environment and blamed immigrants and “urban sprawling”²¹ for climate change. The Christchurch shooter, who was an inspiration for Cursius, went further and directly defined himself as an ecofascist in his manifesto.²²

Both were partly inspired by a book that has become a sort of Bible for the contemporary Western radical right: *The Great Replacement* (*Le grand remplacement*) by Renaud Camus. In this book Camus warns about the fact that white European people are being consciously replaced by immigrants in order to create a more compliant pop-

¹⁷ Erik Swyngedouw, “Apocalypse Forever? Post-Political Populism and the Spectre of Climate Change,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 27, nos. 2-3 (2010): 213-32.

¹⁸ Robert Costanza, Ralph d’Arge, Rudolf de Groot, Stephen Farber, Monica Grasso, Bruce Hannon, Karin Limburg, Shahid Naeem, Robert V. O’Neill, Jose Paruelo, Robert G. Raskin, Paul Sutton & Marjan van den Belt, “The Value of the World’s Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital,” *Nature* 387 (1996): 253-60.

¹⁹ UNEP, “Towards a Green Economy,” *Sustainable Development*, 2011, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=126&menu=35> (accessed 9 October 2019).

²⁰ Daniel Rueda, “La (no tan) nueva cara del terrorismo en Estados Unidos,” *Agenda Pública*, 12 August 2019, <http://agendapublica.elpais.com/la-no-tan-nueva-cara-del-terrorismo-en-estados-unidos/> (accessed 8 October 2019).

²¹ Owen, “Eco-Fascism.”

²² Bernhard Fohtner, “Eco-Fascism: Justifications of Terrorist Violence in the Christchurch Mosque Shooting and the El Paso Shooting,” *Open Democracy*, 13 August 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/eco-fascism-justifications-terrorist-violence-christchurch-mosque-shooting-and-el-paso-shooting/> (accessed 8 October 2019).

ulation consisting of replaceable individuals lacking any national or ethnic identity.²³ This conspiracy theory (which is far from being groundbreaking as a radical right idea) is based mainly on demographic anxieties, but it includes ecological concerns as well,²⁴ which has led Clément Gutern to speak of *écologie intégrale*²⁵ (integral ecology, as in ‘integral nationalism’, the ideology developed by Charles Maurras) inasmuch as there is an integration of social, demographic, national, ethnic and environmental concerns.

But the most notorious example of right-wing environmentalist inspiration for terrorist attacks is undoubtedly Ted Kaczynski, better known as Unabomber, the author of several attacks between 1978 and 1995. Kaczynski’s manifesto, *Industrial Society and Its Future*, is a harsh critique against industrialism and leftism that echoes several environmentalist views and fears that were present in late nineteenth-century Germany. In it Kaczynski also criticizes feminism and technological progress.²⁶ It is curious that he was influenced in part by left-wing intellectuals such as Herbert Marcuse and Jacques Ellul. Kaczynski’s work has become “one of the most well-known rhetorical artifacts endorsing environmental extremism,”²⁷ and he is today praised in Alt-Right circles.²⁸ His ideas are difficult to classify, for he held an eclectic approach to environmental issues, but he remains part of the radical right, an ideological family in which, as this article has shown, different and often contradictory stances can coexist.

²³ Tony Le Pennec, “Grand Remplacement: une théorie qui s’adapte aux haines des temps,” *Arret sur Images*, 19 March 2019, <https://www.arretsurimages.net/articles/grand-remplacement-une-theorie-qui-sadapte-aux-haines-du-temps> (accessed 7 October 2019).

²⁴ Graham Lawton, “White Nationalists are Perverting Environmentalism to Smear Migrants,” *New Scientist*, 14 August 2019, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg24332435-300-white-nationalists-are-perverting-environmentalism-to-smear-migrants/> (accessed 8 October 2019).

²⁵ Clément Guntern, “L’écologie du Grand Remplacement,” *Le Regard Libre*, 23 February 2018, <https://leregardlibre.com/2018/02/23/lecologie-du-grand-remplacement/> (accessed 8 October 2019).

²⁶ Brooke Adams, “Unabomber’s Manifesto,” *Desert News*, 11 April 1996, <https://www.deseret.com/1996/4/11/19236101/unabomber-from-his-tiny-cabin-to-the-lack-of-electricity-and-water-kaczynski-simple-lifestyle-in-mo> (accessed 7 October 2019).

²⁷ Brett A. Barnett, “20 Years Later: A Look Back at the Unabomber Manifesto,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 6 (2015): 60-71.

²⁸ Brenden Gallagher, “Why Far-Right Communities Love the Unabomber,” *The Daily Dot*, 3 September 2018, <https://www.dailydot.com/layer8/far-right-unabomber/> (accessed 6 October 2019).

Conclusions

Although today it represents a marginal political current, neocofascism is likely to become increasingly important in the coming years or decades, like other forms of right-wing environmentalism. This is because environmentalism is already developing into a meta-ideology, at least in Western countries. Here we use Andrew Heywood's definition of meta-ideology as "a body of ideas that lays down the grounds upon which political and ideological debate can take place."¹ This implies that environmental stances are likely to be part of practically every ideological position in the near future in one way or another, to the extent one can foresee. Therefore, rather than a confrontation between environmentalists and antienvironmentalists, what may lie ahead is an encounter between competing environmentalisms.

This polymorphous aspect of environmentalism is why it is important to differentiate between the various forms of right-wing environmentalism in order to avoid overusing neocofascism, as has always been the case with "fascism." At the moment, the ecofascist revival cannot be considered a well-articulated ideology, but this doesn't imply that it doesn't have the potential to become one. Let's not forget that German ecofascism only became a consistent worldview after the First World War, following decades of ideology building and contradictory moves.

The conditions in which ecofascism thrived at the beginning of the twentieth century (e.g., the spread of romantic ideas, nationalism, ecoanxiety, environmental distress, xenophobia) are alive and well today, even if the romantic impulse has lost momentum. Moreover, the West is witnessing a series of nationalist turns that can potentially normalize or legitimize radical ideas that were taboo until recently, and the economic and geopolitical prospects for the future do not invite us to imagine a stable political landscape. Neocofascists have to face tremendous political and cultural obstacles, but they also have a historic opportunity to reinvigorate a series of ideas that can connect with highly contemporary issues. It is difficult to predict how things will be in the future, but one thing is for certain: neocofascism, in a more or less residual way, will be part of it.

¹ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 26.

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