

The Rise of Neo-Illiberalism

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Abstract

This paper expands on the notion neo-illiberalism, signifying a symbiosis between neoliberal capitalism and variegated illiberal nationalisms, offering deeper reflections on its geopolitics, key drivers, and conceptual puzzles. It is argued that the West has entered an age of political illiberalization, replicating political operating logics of variegated illiberal(izing) regimes elsewhere, corroding domestic institutions and the western-dominated international liberal order, constituting an historic geopolitical shift. Although centrist parties have been variably attracted to the far right, particularly seeing center-right parties reinvent themselves as nationalist challengers to the ‘globalist’ status quo, in power they mostly radicalize the neoliberal encasement of capital, transforming a range of liberal-democratic institutions, procedures, and rights into illiberal political fortifications. Neoliberalism’s illiberal mutation has been realized amidst the intersections of rampant financial offshoring and digitization defining contemporary capitalism, allowing billionaire-class factions to ‘hack’ liberal-democratic governments and operating systems. With the rollout of data-driven technologies increasingly requiring the rollback of liberal protections by design, the fusion of digitizing capitalism and illiberal nationalisms is increasingly escaping accepted notions of liberalism.

Keywords

Authoritarianism, Capitalism, Liberal democracy, Liberalism, Neoliberalism, Surveillance.

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Introduction¹

Is our democracy in danger? It is a question we never thought we'd be asking [...] We've spent years researching new forms of authoritarianism emerging around the globe [...] But now we find ourselves turning to our own country (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 1).

Where many observers initially saw the votes for Brexit and Trump as a(nother) death knell for neoliberalism, the idea that the status quo has instead reinvented itself has since gained currency. For example, scholars of populism see the Davos elite “cosying up to the far right” (Mudde 2019a), and view the resurgence of nationalism as mere “pantomime” performed by the established order (Mueller 2019a). Likewise, scholars of neoliberalism argue that right-wing nationalists “in no way challenge neoliberalism” (Dardot and Laval 2019, xiv). The supposed challengers to the status quo are actually “neoliberalism’s populist bastards” (Slobodian 2018b), seeing hyper-capitalists and nationalists join under “market-nativist ideology” (Piketty 2020, 888), based on blends of “illiberal politics and neoliberal governance” (Sparke 2020, 95). The edited volume *Mutant Neoliberalism* is dedicated to the subject, capturing neoliberal continuities and changes in the subtitle “market rule and political rupture” (Callison and Manfredi 2020).

As argued elsewhere (Hendrikse 2018), the votes for Brexit and Trump herald a synthesis between neoliberal capitalism and the (quasi-populist) nationalist far right, captured in the notion *neo-illiberalism*. To recap, my hypothesis is that the West has entered an age of political illiberalization, replicating political operating logics familiar to variegated non-western illiberal and illiberalizing regimes. This development is characterized by brazen political attacks on the core liberal-democratic framework within which western neoliberalism has been born: besides efforts to sideline parliaments and subject the rule of law to arbitrary executive power, larger societal counterpowers like independent academia and media are equally under threat, alongside a variegated range of individual rights. Besides corroding domestic institutions,

moreover, the rise of neo-illiberalism heralds the demise of the transatlantic or western-dominated international liberal order, hence constituting an historic geopolitical shift.

Importantly, although we may live *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* (Brown 2019), neoliberalism does not lie in ruins. Instead, we are witnessing another mutation, as western neo-illiberal governments do not fundamentally diverge from preceding neoliberal economic policies (e.g. tax cuts, deregulation, and so forth) whilst building illiberal political fortifications around their economies, arguably strengthening the “encasement” of global capital (Slobodian 2018a). If anything, the votes for Brexit and Trump signal the extent to which concentrated wealth (Piketty 2014) anchored in private law (Pistor 2019) has come to assume unprecedented sway over daily life. In fact, it might be argued that core infrastructure underpinning contemporary capitalism resembles a neoliberal wet dream, as it effectively has become invisible and lawless amidst intersections of financial offshoring (Fernandez and Hendrikse 2020) and proliferating digitization (Fernandez et al. 2020), seeing financialized capital accumulation blend with the logics of “surveillance capitalism” (Zuboff 2019) – if we can still speak of capitalism *at all* (e.g. Wark 2019). From within this novel architecture, (competing) billionaire-class factions have embraced technological capabilities to ‘hack’ political operating systems (Pomerantsev 2019), igniting and accelerating variegated processes of political illiberalization to protect and boost profits, wealth, and power.

To explain how we ended up here, I first contextualize the political ruptures engulfing neoliberalism’s Anglo-American heartlands, trailing political developments elsewhere. Next, I discuss how mainstream political parties once constituting neoliberalism’s “extreme center” (Ali 2015) are unevenly embracing the illiberal far right (Mudde 2019b), synthesizing novel neo-illiberal alliances. Zooming in on capitalist development, specifically rampant digitization and financial offshoring fueling the rise of a global billionaire class, I explain how and why neo-illiberalism is rising today. Returning to the (geo)politics of the present, I focus on the world’s neo-illiberal(izing) superpowers, featuring numerous nationalists and self-proclaimed ‘Leninists’ vying for power, indicative of a wider political, economic and cultural convergence. In conclusion, I make the case for the term neo-illiberalism. Specifically, by anchoring digitizing (post-)capitalism in illiberal nationalist projects, today’s world order is increasingly escaping accepted definitions of liberalism, besides “progressive neoliberalism” (Fraser 2017) also

including “authoritarian (neo)liberalism” (Bonefeld 2016; Bruff 2013), validating the rise of neo-illiberalism.

Recalibration

In much of Africa and the former Soviet Union, and in parts of Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Americas, new regimes combined electoral competition with varying degrees of authoritarianism [...] Electoral manipulation, unfair media access, abuse of state resources, and varying degrees of harassment and violence skewed the playing field in favor of incumbents. In other words, competition was real but unfair. We characterize such regimes as *competitive authoritarian* (Levitsky and Way 2010, 3, emphasis original).

As the world more or less embraced the logics of neoliberal capitalism following the Soviet Union’s demise, non-western political operating systems were widely expected to transform in the image of the West (Fukuyama 1992) i.e. adopting free and fair elections, along with broader constitutions of checks and balances, not least the rule of law, and a variegated set of basic, civil, constitutional, fundamental, individual, and/or universal rights. All these features are ultimately enacted to realize liberalism’s core premise: the guarantee of individual freedom. What has emerged since, however, is better viewed as an ensemble of *illiberal democracies* (Zakaria 2003) or, in what is arguably a better term, as *competitive authoritarianism* (Levitsky and Way 2010), where nominally liberal-democratic institutions are abused to serve particular rather than universal ends. Moreover, states such as China never embraced the premises of liberal democracy, and instead developed political operating systems where “neoliberal elements interdigitated with authoritarian centralized control” (Harvey 2005, 120; see Weber 2018), reflecting institutional configurations from Singapore, Chile and other regimes where markets have been cultivated under authoritarian orders. Following Milanovic, “communist revolutions conducted in societies that were colonized or de facto colonized” (2019, 67) have often given rise to *political capitalism*, a political operating system defined by a strong state guiding private-sector development, unbound by the rule of law to the arbitrary benefit of elites.

Although mass upheavals periodically suggested otherwise, from ‘color revolutions’ in Eastern Europe to the ‘Arab spring’, overall the non-West has increasingly come to reject liberal democracy since the new millennium, instead opting for aforesaid political operating systems. Neoliberal reforms advocated under the ‘Washington Consensus’ often consolidated illiberal incumbents, from Indonesia (Hadiz and Robison 2005) to the Americas (Corva 2008). As argued by Ong (2006), neoliberal reforms have often been incorporated as “exceptions” to illiberal orders. Following Indian economist Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar, commenting on the lasting illiberal practices of pre-Modi India, “what is often called neoliberalism is better called neo-illiberalism” (Aiyar 2011).² Where neoliberal ‘shock therapy’ paved the way for illiberal Vladimir Putin in early 2000s Russia, more recently non-western liberal democracies including Brazil, India, the Philippines, and Turkey, have all witnessed illiberal shifts. Moreover, new leadership in fundamentally illiberal polities also tightened political rule, whether Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, or Xi Jinping in China. What unites these and other regimes is the mobilization of variegated nationalisms, giving rise to illiberal politics, steadily subjecting the (liberal-democratic) constitutions of their respective states to ‘strongmen’ rule, whilst preserving or deepening their particular neoliberal ‘plug-ins’ to the global economy. Borrowing from Aiyar (2011), perhaps such regimes are better understood as variegated neo-illiberalisms.

Since the buoyant 1990s, incessant neoliberalization has been a global phenomenon, next to the establishment of multilateral organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) heralding far-reaching domestic reforms in both core and periphery, of which the constitutionalization of private law and central bank independence stand out (Braun 2020; Dardot and Laval 2019). In so doing, western liberal democracies were equally transformed to advance the rule of markets and private property, increasingly coming at the expense of representative democracy and judicial equality, i.e. liberalism’s progressive political premises. As noted by Wendy Brown, “what is crucial is that the liberalism in what has come to be called neoliberalism refers to liberalism’s economic variant ... rather than to liberalism as a political doctrine, as a set of political institutions, or as political practices” (2003, 39). That said, neoliberalism’s undemocratic nature long remained disguised under celebrations of freedom, fear of terrorism, and mountains of debt (Streeck 2014). Although the financial crisis of 2008 trashed western

neoliberalism's self-evident aura, giving rise to more authoritarian neoliberal fixes (Bruff 2013), it was not until the mid-2010s that western neoliberalism became interdigitated with brazen illiberal politics.

The Brexit vote in 2016 saw liberal internationalism — championed by the EU and the Obama administration — take a double blow: first, the Brexit vote, followed shortly afterwards by the election of Donald Trump as US president [...] The nationalist tide is flowing just as strongly outside the West. President Xi Jinping's promise of a "great rejuvenation" of the Chinese people is his version of Mr Trump's pledge to "Make America Great Again". In Russia, Vladimir Putin's presidential rhetoric is all about making Russia great again; it is the same in India, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi promises cultural and national revival (Rachman 2019).

Despite media narratives suggesting otherwise, the votes for Brexit and Trump were fundamentally *incumbent driven*. As argued by Jan-Werner Mueller (2019b), "no right-wing populist has yet come to power anywhere in Western Europe or North America without the collaboration of established conservative elites", reverse engineering illiberal politics and policies long familiar elsewhere. It is therefore that Levitsky (this time with Ziblatt) has written *How Democracies Die* (2018), covering similar ground as his earlier study (Levitsky and Way 2010), albeit now focusing on the West. Although neoliberalism's Anglo-American heartlands have become the trailblazers of this development, boosting the confidence of 'strongmen' worldwide, the wider West has not been immune. Although each European Union (EU) member state has nationalist parties, Hungary's self-proclaimed 'illiberal democrat' Viktor Orbán stands out, having aligned parliament, judiciary, media, and academia to his *Fidesz* rule since the start of the 2010s (Scheiring 2020) – a project bankrolled by EU funds and protected by the center-right European People's Party (EPP) (Gebrekidan et al 2019). Although some believe Orbán offers a "social nativist" alternative to neoliberalism, in contrast to (neo-illiberal) "merchant nativist" Trump (Piketty 2020, 875), Hungary is locked in the EU's neoliberal straightjacket, and has in fact radicalized economic neoliberalization on the back of political illiberalization (Hendrikse 2021).³ The Orbán virus has since spread to Poland, and is increasingly corroding the EU core – not undoing but illiberalizing the neoliberal project (Mulder 2019). Where Piketty identifies a "clash between conservative liberals and conservative

nationalists” (2020, 647), the outcome is arguably better understood as a novel right-wing *alliance* between neoliberals and illiberals.

A New Synthesis

[A] new synthesis is currently mainstreaming throughout the Western world: call it undemocratic illiberalism, or *neo-illiberalism*. Where preceding waves of neoliberalization fueled the undemocratization of liberal democracies, the rise of the radical right threatens to illiberalize the neoliberalized heartlands [...] Crucially, instead of undoing neoliberal globalization, (the threat of) political illiberalization might equally shield the economic core of the neoliberal project from popular resistance, effectively functioning as its toxic protective coating (Hendrikse 2018, emphasis original).

Since the 1990s heydays of western neoliberalism, center left and right jointly exercised government power, constituting neoliberalism’s “extreme center” (Ali 2015). Following the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent austerity policies, however, popular frustration gave rise to political alternatives threatening centrist rule: where leftist challenges emerged from Greece to the US, fueling the demise of the center left, the center right reoriented itself rightwards, signaling the breakdown of the center (Graeber 2020). Following Mudde’s *The Far Right Today* (2019b), mainstream (chiefly center-right) political parties have steadily embraced positions of the (quasi-) populist far right. Interestingly, the radicalization of centrist ‘undemocratic liberals’ (i.e. neoliberals) into ‘democratic illiberals’ challenges Mudde’s earlier work on populism (2004), which paints these categories as opposing ideal types. Today, however, they are in synthesis: that is to say, in understanding ‘undemocratic liberalism’ as referring to the neoliberal encasement of capitalism (Slobodian 2018a) – *the global/private economic domain* – and taking ‘illiberal democracy’ to refer to illiberal (re)organization of government – *the national/public political domain* – these supposedly opposing categories form an integrated whole.⁴

Although the traditional far right might rally against the economic status quo (Worth 2014), the appropriation of far-right discourse by incumbent coalitions of neoliberal politicians and established media assures that the ‘backlash’ will not fundamentally challenge neoliberal

capitalism, as these actors typically elevate cultural issues like identity instead. For example, discussions around freedom of movement are restricted to limiting the movement of immigrants, less about limiting goods and services, whilst restricting global capital mobility – neoliberalism’s holy grail – is not discussed at all. In adopting far-right positions, the radicalizing center right supplements its ‘subtle’ liberal racism with explicit illiberal expressions (Mondon and Winter 2020), revealing a willingness to forsake its erstwhile adherence to “progressive neoliberalism” (Fraser 2017) i.e. the set of individual rights the center left attached to the centrist package in exchange for their commitment to build neoliberal capitalism. The fact that the center left co-created neoliberalism, and many ‘Third Way’ centrists remain adamant to defend the broken center, enables the radicalizing right to assume the role of challenger, and – in co-production with the media – manufacture the myth that the status quo is ‘leftist’, next to progressive rights problematizing the constitutional makeup of liberal democracy itself. Added up, what emerges are carefully-crafted illiberal narratives that disguise the centrifugal forces of neoliberal capitalism as a key driver of societal frustration, instead putting the blame for those effects elsewhere e.g. on minorities, women, or the left. In attacking independent academia and media, moreover, neo-illiberalization ‘disrupts’ the ways in which liberal democracies come to produce objective truths, which for example enables the denial of climate breakdown.

Much like its centrist predecessor and competitor, the making of neo-illiberalism varies across states. Post-communist Eastern Europe, for example, has proved a fertile laboratory for political illiberalization, lacking postwar memories of liberal democracy whilst growing disillusioned with neoliberal Europe (Krastev and Holmes 2019). As argued by Brown, the “rhetoric of democracy and the shell of liberal democratic institutions remain more important in the imperial heartland” (2003, 49). Here too, the manufacturing of neo-illiberalism depends on the institutional context: for example, where the US Republicans have radicalized themselves in a two-party electoral system (although appropriating the energy of the Tea Party), a variety of radicalizing center- and far-right parties typically work towards a similar systemic outcome in multiparty systems. Also, it should be noted that neo-illiberal syntheses have been long in the making: in France and Italy, for example, illiberal nationalism arose alongside their neoliberal makeovers, giving rise to *Illiberal Politics in Neoliberal Times* (Berezin 2009). Likewise, the

US alliance between economic liberalism and political conservatism is traced back decades, seeing neoconservatives and the religious right compromise with the center left during the 1990s. With Trump, however, the conservative constellation undergirding neoliberalism has come to reject the centrist compromise, instead reaching out to the uncompromising (religious) right, including “the traditionalist or Burkean conservatism of the American paleoconservatives, whose antistatism, anti-Semitism, and aversion to racial democracy made them ill-suited to any compromise with the New Deal left” (Cooper 2017, 19-20; see Dreher 2020).

In the right-wing neoliberal imaginary, free-market capitalism is not displaced but anchored ever more deeply in conservative family structures and a group identity (Slobodian and Plehwe 2020, 105).

Where the rise of neo-illiberalism chiefly is a story of a radicalizing center right, the center left has also looked to the right to reinvent themselves, such as the social democrats in Denmark, whereas progressive causes have also been colonized by the right. In the Netherlands, for example, the “fusion of free market ideas and cultural conservatism” required an engagement with “an overwhelming progressive common sense” (Oudenampsen 2018, 13), leading to *The Conservative Embrace of Progressive Values*, allowing the radical right to present itself as guardian of the ‘Dutch values’ it long rejected, such as same-sex marriage. Added up, in reaching out far right whilst adopting progressive values as your own, the centrist proposition can be replaced with alternative alliances through which neoliberal capitalism might be rejuvenated. Although the rise of neo-illiberalism constitutes an elite project aiming to seduce working classes, it chiefly attracts more affluent middle classes (Kuper 2020), being largely comprised of asset-owning ‘boomers’ rather than indebted ‘millennials’.

Where productivity gains are no longer sought, the goal becomes defending private wealth and keeping it in the family. This is a logic that unites the international oligarch and the comfortable *Telegraph*-reading retiree in Hampshire [...] This suggests that support for Johnson [...] is a symptom of prolonged financialisation (Davies 2019a).

Global Capitalism

Following waves of ‘rollback’ and ‘rollout’ neoliberalism during the closing decades of the twentieth century (Peck and Tickell 2002), the new millennium ignited neoliberalism’s long

mutation into neo-illiberalism, as its interlocking drivers were set in motion back then. Next to the terrorist attacks on US soil, igniting the mainstreaming of the far right (Mudde 2019b), the year 2001 saw China enter into the WTO, now meeting in Doha after the battle of Seattle, heralding a larger geographical shift in global capitalist development, captured by Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neill's BRIC acronym (2001).⁵ Besides seeking new markets, rent-seeking capital came to collectively inhabit the invisible tax-free *offshore world*, turning into the core operating system of financializing capitalism by the 2000s (Fernandez and Hendrikse 2020), seeing offshore funds from across the globe engulfing cities like London, igniting spending sprees on real estate, football clubs, media conglomerates, and political influence. Besides fueling organized crime and corruption (Kendzior 2020), the budding offshore world allowed for spectacular corporate fraud leading to the demise of US energy giant Enron, whose accounting gimmicks provided the template for the financial crisis later that decade. In parallel, the early 2000s gave birth to digital platforms (Fernandez et al. 2020). Invented by Google as “an automated architecture that operates as a one-way mirror”, *surveillance capitalism* has since grown into “the elaboration of behavioral surveillance as a full-blown logic of accumulation” (Zuboff 2019, 81), steadily enmeshing itself with global finance and national political operating systems.

Importantly, all these developments reinforced one another: where digitization accelerated capitalism's tendency towards monopoly and offshore anonymity, allowing businesses and elites to evade their tax obligations, turbocharging wealth inequality to new heights, bisecting social contracts in both core and periphery; digitization equally allowed for the online spread of far-right conspiracies, whilst digital infrastructures matured without any regulatory constraint following the 2001 enactment of the US Patriot Act. Meanwhile, the ensuing war on terror accelerated the neoliberal enmeshment of public and private interests, turning into a bonanza for corporate contractors (Hendrikse and Sidaway 2010) – some of whom would come to play key roles in manufacturing neo-illiberalism during the mid-2010s via micro-targeted ‘psyops’ (psychological operations) and related acts of cyber warfare.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, both digital and offshore realms fused to constitute an *extraterritorial* capitalist system of sorts, turning elites invisible whilst subjecting the rest of society to mass surveillance. Habitually described as a world of ‘dark money’, ‘phantom

investments’, and ‘shadow banks’, these terms wholly understate their central role within contemporary capitalism. Among other things, this is the world where the financial crisis of 2008 was manufactured, where banks kept toxic financial products off their balance sheets. Likewise, this is the world where today’s trillion-dollar tech companies reside, along with the key building blocks of an integrated web of corporate structures owned by an ever-shrinking faction of ultimate beneficial owners – foremost a billionaire class of some two thousand individuals and families (UBS and PwC 2019), for whom the offshore world effectively has become their home (Harrington 2016; Hendrikse and Fernandez 2019). Accordingly, this is also the world where neoliberal “corporate power is overlain by – and mutating into – oligarchic power” (Monbiot 2019), which in turn is typically entwined with state power.⁶ Importantly, oligarchy does not merely define the BRIC countries – it increasingly characterizes the West itself, seeing billionaire activists infiltrate politics, such as the Koch brothers effectively taking over the US Republican Party (Mayer 2016).

The oligarch’s interests lie always offshore: in tax havens and secrecy regimes. Paradoxically, these interests are best promoted by nationalists and nativists. The politicians who most loudly proclaim their patriotism and defense of sovereignty are always the first to sell their nations down the river. It is no coincidence that most of the newspapers promoting the nativist agenda, whipping up hatred against immigrants and thundering about sovereignty, are owned by billionaire tax exiles, living offshore (Monbiot 2019).

Besides unmasking the faulty premises of neoliberalism, the 2008 financial crisis was initially anticipated to be the death knell of financialization. Defying expectations, however, the spell of market-based finance spread globally under the tutelage of the G20, giving rise to what Gabor (2020) aptly calls *The Wall Street Consensus*, effectively reworking and rebooting neoliberalism’s Washington Consensus of yesteryear. Besides advancing financial globalization, this development model “aims to leverage the model of surveillance capitalism”, seeing financial and state actors in the developing world embrace the premises of ‘financial inclusion’ to “map, harvest and monetize digital footprints via behavioral analytics to render the poor ‘bankable’ through an ‘all data is credit data’ approach” (Gabor 2021, 22). In the developed world, meanwhile, financial institutions jumped on the financial technology (fintech) bandwagon to

become tech savvy and counter the threat of ‘disruption’ (Hendrikse et al 2018). In both core and periphery, the quest to unlock data and expand surveillance fuels these developments.

Where Silicon Valley long enjoyed an unrivalled status, the 2010s marked the arrival of Chinese tech players having matured under the tutelage of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), giving impetus to Trump’s trade war, which is better viewed as a *tech war* to protect Silicon Valley. With “the Big Techification of everything” on the horizon (Fernandez et al. 2020, 13-14), the struggle is about fifth-generation (5G) mobile communications and artificial intelligence (AI) systems upon which the future data-driven economy will be organized. As finance and technology merge, western financial lobbyists have voiced concerns over Chinese platforms such as Alibaba and Tencent, which they describe as a combination of all US platforms “rolled into one” whilst operating “with a tight link to state objectives” (IIF 2018, 1). Admittedly, the difference is stark: where a Facebook-led consortium confronted many difficulties in developing a digital currency (Murphy and Stacey 2019), China’s central bank has developed its own alternative, and the CCP has ordered China’s banks and tech platforms to adopt it (Del Castillo 2019a). As first-mover advantages and scale are key in the digital ‘winner-takes-all’ economy, western regulators have become wary. As Facebook argues, the US government needs to step in, otherwise “our financial leadership is not guaranteed” (Zuckerberg quoted in Del Castillo 2019b).

Having rolled out digital surveillance at home, the Chinese are exporting their technologies abroad (Foroohar 2019, 258), whilst ramping up tech collaboration with Russia (Bendett and Kania 2019) and the other BRICs, for example developing payments and communications systems (Hamilton 2019). Meanwhile, although a key US ally in the global tech war (Sharma 2020), India seeks to replicate some of China’s achievements, seeing Modi embrace fintech solutions to anchor his Hindu-nationalist control: where less than fifteen percent of India’s 1.35 billion population had bank accounts in 2014, that number has grown beyond a billion following the rollout of digital biometric identification systems (Gilchrist 2018), seeing Modi “converting India into a surveillance state” (Sharma quoted in Kazmin 2018). Similar developments can be identified the world over. In sum, at the dawn of the 2020s *The New York Times* outlined three competing visions shaping the rollout of surveillance capitalism. Where

“China is moving fast and breaking things”, and the EU prefers to make “a moral point around surveillance and consent” with regard to digitization:

[T]he United States, with its powerful tech companies, is caught in the middle, trying to weigh ethical concerns while still pushing forward on innovation for fear of being left behind by China (Warzel and Thompson 2019).

Nationalist ‘Leninism’

Though China may be ‘moving fast and breaking things’, it should be noted that this ethos has long guided Silicon Valley (Taplin 2018), where asking for forgiveness trumps begging for permission. US tech companies constantly test what is possible, with little regard for basic decency or the law, with the aim to ‘disrupt’ established business practices. Importantly, with western neoliberalism steadily turning neo-illiberal, this ethos has come to infect the art of government. Brexit, for example, is an ongoing process of disrupting conventions and procedures – from shunning press conferences to shutting down parliament. As *The Economist* noted, “[t]he Tories’ disruptive strategies would not be out of place in Silicon Valley” (2019).

The neoliberal attack on the social [...] is key to generating an *antidemocratic culture from below* while building and legitimating *antidemocratic forms of state power from above*. The synergy between the two is profound (Brown 2019, 28, emphasis original).

Tech platforms have transformed traditional media and politics over the latter decade. Not only have Facebook and Google become major players in political advertising, they also embed their own employees in political campaigns (Feroohar 2019, 230-231). Meanwhile, an ecosystem of novel actors has matured upon and around these platforms, propelling the cause of the far right: besides murky techno-political actors like bots and troll farms financed by dark money, by the mid-2010s an elaborate network of digital media had been established, among which Breitbart Media arguably is the most prominent. Financed by US billionaire Robert Mercer, and directed by the far-right ideologue Steve Bannon, Breitbart emerged as a meta-political project to popularize far-right culture (Maly 2018). The subsequent mainstreaming of far-right narratives and their online pundits by ‘legacy’ media, whether billionaire-owned corporate media or public broadcasters, brought these online culture wars and warriors into the established arena of mass-mediated politics (Brooks 2020). The votes for Brexit and Trump

underscore the profound synthesis of “antidemocratic cultures from below” – however faux the street credibility of tech algorithms and their billionaire funders are – and “antidemocratic forms of state power from above” (Brown 2019, 28).⁷ As the Trump campaign’s digital director aptly concluded: “Without Facebook, we wouldn’t have won” (Theresa Hong quoted in Foroohar 2019, 233).

Brexit and Trump are entwined. The Trump administration’s links to Russia and Britain are entwined. And Cambridge Analytica is one point of focus through which we can see all these relationships in play (Cadwalladr 2017).

Cambridge Analytica (CA) was another company utilizing Facebook to generate votes for Brexit and Trump. Where most accounts zoom in on the roles of Bannon and Mercer, the fact that CA was born out of Strategic Communications Laboratories (SCL) is often overlooked.⁸ SCL was a company with ties to UK and US military and political elites, and effectively operated as “a mercenary propaganda agency” during the war on terror (Ramsey 2018). Like David Cameron who fathered Brexit, and Boris Johnson elected to ‘get Brexit done’ (along with a host of British media editors), Alexander Nix – SCL executive and CA founder – was schooled at Eton: the breeding ground for the British establishment (Osborne 2018). Where CA microtargeted so-called ‘persuadables’ in swing states with propaganda tailored to psychological profiles harvested from Facebook, SCL has been involved in political campaigns for decades.⁹

Where neo-illiberal governments variably (aim to) control media through cronies and loyalists, their entanglement is lubricated and amplified through tech (Davies 2019b). Where Bannon moved from CA to the Trump campaign and into the White House, another line can be drawn from the White House to CA, travelling via Palantir Technologies, another data-analytics company, owned by US tech billionaire Peter Thiel (Cadwalladr 2018). Thiel is not only a Trump supporter and advisor, but also a board member (and early investor) of Facebook. The controversy around Facebook allowing fact-free political advertisements are linked to Thiel, who has been streamlining personal relations between Zuckerberg and Trump (Glazer, Seetharaman and Horowitz 2019). Besides Thiel at Facebook, another Trump-supporting billionaire recently sought to take control of Twitter (Pengelly 2020) – Trump’s medium of choice to launch attacks on his political opponents and the ‘fake news’ media. Besides being dubbed the “Fox

News White House” (Mayer 2019), it is not unreasonable to maintain that the world’s first Twitter presidency also occupied a Facebook White House.

The rise of neo-illiberalism has been marked by the digital fingerprints of tech companies and murky advisory firms the world over. In Brazil, for example, Bolsonaro’s rise was lubricated via WhatsApp-mediated memes (Avelar 2019), whereas the Philippines’ Duterte was an early adopter of Facebook’s capabilities, avoiding press conferences whilst streaming his messages online (Etter 2017) – a communication strategy since adopted elsewhere. Once in power, moreover, neo-illiberal ‘strongmen’ corrode liberal-democratic operating systems like ‘disruptive’ tech directors, and embrace the opportunities of the digital age to anchor their illiberal rule. For example, the encrypted Facebook-owned messaging service WhatsApp was recently hacked in India, Facebook’s largest foreign market, allowing Modi to track political opponents (Sabbagh 2019). Yet again, notwithstanding India’s digital acumen, or Russian hackers sabotaging the 2016 US presidential elections (Greenberg 2019), to fully grasp the potential of digital technology we need to redirect our gaze towards Beijing, where the rollout of “networked authoritarianism” (MacKinnon 2011) offers a glimpse into the future.

The first two years of the Xi Jinping administration saw a thorough reconfiguration of internet governance. This reconfiguration created a centralized and integrated institutional framework for information technologies, in support of an ambitious agenda to place digital technologies at the heart of propaganda, public opinion and social control (Creemers 2016).

A senior advisor of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) describes the CCP as a “machine for ensuring continued political control” not guided by Marxism, but rather by “a curious mixture of Leninism plus nationalism”.¹⁰ For those projecting revolutionary hopes onto Beijing, it ought to be remembered that China rejected the premises of both the French and Russian revolutions on Tiananmen Square (Wang 2006). Reconfirmed by recent developments in Hong Kong, the CCP’s strategies “to discredit and dismantle the liberal values baked into the existing global architecture are incredibly ambitious” (Greer 2020). Crucially, although not informed by China’s Cultural Revolution but rather by the legacy of May 1968, the West’s nationalist far right is currently chasing similar ambitions, namely the rejection of “two major emancipation movements – socialism and liberalism” (Baudet quoted in Gehrigier 2019).

Accordingly, what emerges is a remarkable *global convergence* in political ideologies and strategies, which is also reflected in the accompanying cultural narratives.¹¹

Lenin [...] wanted to destroy the state, and that's my goal too. I want to bring everything crashing down, and destroy all of today's establishment (Steve Bannon quoted in Radosh 2016)¹².

As the digital realm plays a key role in mixing Leninism and nationalism, Creemers speaks of “cyber Leninism” in analyzing China's rampant digitization (2017). With the votes for Brexit and Trump, a similar mixture of cyber Leninism plus nationalism has put its mark on the West, which in turn is the result of ongoing right-wing culture wars informed by the Marxist teachings of Antonio Gramsci (Maly 2018). Incumbent center-right parties across the West have come to radicalize themselves under tech-obsessed self-proclaimed ‘Leninist’ ideologues cheerleading nationalist projects, who are ultimately guided by the aim to build techno-political machines to ensure continued political control not unlike the CCP. To ‘disrupt’ liberal democracies and the liberal world order, neo-illiberal narratives assume an anti-establishment façade, notwithstanding the fact that incumbent politicians and media drive the process, adamant to ‘bring everything crashing down’, framing the core institutions of liberal democracy itself as ‘enemies’, ‘saboteurs’ and ‘traitors’ who ‘ignore the will of people’.

The old rules were gone. Honesty didn't matter. Parliamentary scrutiny didn't matter. Honour didn't matter. You could do what you like. It was Tory Leninism: all-out war, with no basis for consistency, or coherence, or basic moral disposition. It was as if Conservatism had its spirit sucked out of it – the desire to preserve – and replaced by a burn-it-down political puritanism, towards an end that no one could ever really explain (Dunt 2019).

Conclusions

Where security becomes both natively digital and neoliberal, Orwell might be a better guide to the future than Hayek (Hendrikse and Sidaway 2010, 2040).

Despite narratives of rupture, there is much to suggest that neoliberalism will carry on much like before: although multilateral neoliberal ‘globalism’ is giving way to nationalist “neoliberal secessionism” (Slobodian and Plehwe 2020, 101), the accompanying political ruptures

have been chiefly pursued to deepen market rule (Callison and Manfredi 2020). For example, the divorce of Britain from the EU might ultimately *advance* global economic integration.¹³ As Britain is effectively nationalizing EU legislation (a stepping stone towards global standards; see Bradford 2020), Brexit might in time deliver a new interface between neoliberal globalization and illiberal nationalisms e.g. a legal template to politically anchor Gabor's *Wall Street Consensus* (2021) in a G20-based neo-illiberal world order. As argued by Babic, commenting on the crisis of the liberal world order, "[t]he double nature of nationalist discourse as legitimizing both national renaissance and international re-ordering makes it particularly interesting" (2020, 14).

But if neoliberalism continues to thrive, in whatever shape or form, why advance the notion neo-illiberalism? The short answer is that neoliberalism has fallen prey to its own failure *and* success. First, having lost its ideological lure in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, heralding the end of consensual neoliberalization along centrist lines, neo-illiberalism can be viewed as a political 'fix' to continue and protect the neoliberal project through different means. Second, the fact that this *is* possible underscores neoliberalism's spectacular success, as it has produced a billionaire class with not only the capability of dominating the political process, but to take it over: having broken the power of labor, steadily giving rise to rightless workers operating in an increasingly lawless gig economy, with capital demolishing social contracts by collectively fleeing into offshore anonymity, the rise of neo-illiberalism sees neoliberalism's ultimate beneficial winners aim to buyout government itself i.e. "neoliberalism's final frontier" (Klein 2017).

The neoliberal endgame comes with intra-elite fractures and recompositions, both at national and global scales. Powerful factions of mobile finance capital, for example, supported the vote for Brexit, whereas fixed industrial capital was generally against it. On a global scale, billionaire-class coalitions and intrigue reveal close links between different neo-illiberal(izing) regimes and their billionaire backers – next to the US and UK these typically involve Israel, Russia, and Saudi Arabia (Kendzior 2020, 97).¹⁴ These linkages underscore that national and global scales are inherently entwined, with (national) state space increasingly functioning as platforms to manage (global) private interests, seeing the rise of "state capitalism" (Alami and Dixon 2019) provide sovereign cover for capitalist elites. Embracing the technological

capabilities offered by digitizing capitalism, moreover, billionaire-class factions vying for global power not only aim to increase surveillance over civil society, both at home and abroad, but also over each other (Matsakis and Newman 2020). With private interests corrupting governments and the international state system, falling prey to wannabe autocrats and power-hungry oligarchs, liberal operating systems give way to illiberal regimes. And although neoliberal technocrats might fulminate against oligarchs turning states into personal thieftoms, neoliberal policies in no way challenge oligarchic power, as central banks merely turbo-charge the value of their assets to new heights. In fact, such political rivalries obscure a persistent organic unity, even if their interests diverge.¹⁵

[T]he liberal tradition is constituted by *the sum of the arguments that have been classified as liberal, and recognized as such by other self-proclaimed liberals, across time and space* (Bell 2014, 689-690, emphasis original).

Notwithstanding the many difficulties surrounding the notion *liberalism* (Bell 2014), in this conclusion I foreground two dominant-yet-competing views, covering a sizeable part of the broad liberal spectrum: the first is a mainstream, normative or political understanding of liberalism, broadly centered around the notion of liberal democracy (see Doyle 1997), whereas the second understanding is based on a critical, empiricist or economic view, roughly equating liberalism with advancing markets and protecting private property i.e. capitalism, shared by early neoliberal thinkers such as Ludwig von Mises (see Bonefeld 2016) and Marxist scholars alike (e.g. Losurdo 2011; Zevin 2019). Where neoliberalism's illiberal turn might be self-explanatory from the first perspective, I argue that its prospect looms equally large from a critical viewpoint, validating the notion of neo-illiberalism over *authoritarian* (neo)liberalism (Bonefeld 2016; Bruff 2013).

Importantly, *if* democracy is integral to your particular understanding of liberalism, you need to account for the fact that the western rise of neo-illiberalism is merely radicalizing the neoliberal breakdown of liberal democracy: where preceding waves of neoliberalization insulated *economic* policymaking from democratic interference, neo-illiberalization adds *political* illiberalization to the mix, seeking to relieve executive power of various constitutional constraints (Hendrikse 2018, 170). As such, where preceding waves of neoliberalization unfolded under a veneer of *rational* governance, unfolding across (crumbling) centrist rule –

technocratic, dull even – more or less staying within the bounds of legality defined by liberal-democratic norms, rules and procedures, neo-illiberalization is remarkably brazen in its objectives and tactics, and is realized via blatant lies and *irrational* justifications, digital manipulations, and illegal tactics, unfolding in seemingly chaotic and decidedly non-consensual manners.

In so doing, neo-illiberalism aims to finalize to the neoliberal demolition of liberal democracy, seeking to undo the “constitutional liberalism” (Zakaria 2003, 19) and/or “progressive neoliberalism” (Fraser 2017) having shaped up in the liberal-democratic void (Mair. 2013), by singling out remaining constitutional constraints and progressive rights as elite ploys hampering ‘the will of the people’. For example, where decades of neoliberalism hollowed out the public sector, including justice departments and public prosecutors, the rise of neo-illiberalism heralds the moment where these functions fall prey to takeover, seeing the rule of law absorbed by arbitrary executive power (Milanovic 2019). As predicted by Brown, “liberal democracy cannot be submitted to neoliberal political governmentality and survive” (2003, 46). Where the rule of law collapses under executive rule, along with parliament and wider societal counterpowers, liberal democracy gives way to illiberal political operating systems. This all raises the question: *if* democracy is integral to your understanding of liberalism, then you ought to rethink the liberal credentials of neoliberalism. Was neoliberalism not illiberal to begin with?

Marxist scholars have little patience for what they regard to be a false idea of liberalism (e.g. Losurdo 2011), soaked in twentieth-century ideology (Bell 2014). Following Zevin, for example, the history of “actually existing liberalism” (2019, 391) is not a story of constructing and protecting democracy, but about *constraining* democracy in the service of empire and finance capital. Not only is liberalism’s anti-democratic nature confirmed by many other scholars (e.g. De Dijn 2020), this understanding of liberalism is also supported by early neoliberal thinkers themselves: ultimately, liberalism is about advancing free markets and – above all – protecting private property, as argued by Von Mises (see Bonefeld 2016), which needs to be guaranteed by “a liberal dictator” if under threat (Hayek quoted in Farrant et al 2012). Although this seems wholly illiberal from a liberal-democratic point of view, if this critical understanding informs your idea of liberalism then you might well take issue with the notion neo-illiberalism, and opt for the notion authoritarian neoliberalism instead (Bruff 2013).

[U]nder authoritarian neoliberalism dominant social groups are less interested in neutralizing resistance and dissent via concessions and forms of compromise to maintain their hegemony, favoring instead the explicit exclusion and marginalization of subordinate social groups through the constitutionally and legally engineered self-disempowerment of nominally democratic institutions, governments, and parliaments (Bruff 2013, 116).

Undeniably, neo-illiberalism builds extensively upon authoritarian neoliberalism. For example, both notions are indebted to Stuart Hall's *The Great Moving Right Show* (1979). That said, neo-illiberalism seeks to move beyond authoritarian neoliberalism to account for the developments outlined in this paper. In particular, rampant digitization is threatening to transform authoritarian neoliberalism into novel forms of *totalitarian* rule, which in contrast to authoritarianism seeks to control all aspects of life and is therefore generally considered illiberal (e.g. Arendt 2017 [1951]; Popper 2011 [1945]). Coming back to Hall (1979), for example, under neo-illiberalism *The Great Moving Right Show* merges with the digital trickery detailed in the 2019 Netflix documentary *The Great Hack*, where unknowing electorates have become subject to non-stop surveillance and extensive behavioral manipulation, a development ultimately corroding liberalism's essential guarantee of individual freedom, suggesting that rampant digitization is increasingly threatening to pull authoritarian neoliberalism towards totalitarian ends.

A decade ago, 'Twitter revolutions' across the periphery suggested that technology would be "the liberator rather than the oppressor" (Morozov 2011, 5). Since the votes for Brexit and Trump, however, the realization has dawned that "surveillance as a full-blown logic of accumulation" (Zuboff 2019, 81) is cementing symbiotic relations between tech platforms and the nationalist right, as it allows for the accumulation of both financial *and* political power. Across the globe, the rollback of liberal democracy is increasingly accompanied by the rollout of "techno-nationalism" (Foroohar 2019, 255), understood as "an alliance between authoritarian states and these large, data-rich IT monopolies" (Soros 2018), whereby the symbiosis between political power and capital accumulation invokes images of China.¹⁶ This suggests that the nature of capitalism has fundamentally changed, challenging its economic liberal underpinnings: for example, to what extent can we speak of Smithian free markets when digital platforms are anchored in both corporate and state monopolies, having become unavoidable rent-

seeking and ever-surveilling interfaces for (social) exchange (Fernandez et al. 2020)? Alternatively, how does the wholesale dispossession of personal data square with Lockean notions of private property, as the product of one's own labor? As argued by Wark, "[t]here is really something qualitatively distinct about the forces of production that eat brains, that produce and instrumentalize and control information" (2019). Accordingly, if your idea of liberalism equates with capitalism, and the latter is morphing into something worse, might neoliberalism not be mutating too?

[S]urveillance capitalism takes an even more expansive turn toward domination than its neoliberal source code would predict [...] Though still sounding like Hayek, and even Smith, its antidemocratic collectivist ambitions reveal it as an insatiable child devouring its aging fathers (Zuboff 2019, 518-519).

Differing from fin-tech-state relations in the West (Hendrikse et al 2019), China enmeshes processes of "market development and political consolidation" (Gruin 2019, 27), enabled by the illiberal configuration of the Chinese state geared towards full-spectrum control. In contrast, liberal democracies have been designed to prevent the exercise of absolute power. That said, *the rollout of data-driven technologies increasingly requires the rollback of liberal protections by design*, in order to make way for a political economy based on mass surveillance and AI. In this regard, the China model is one of many future neo-illiberal templates. As argued by Bartlett, for example, "[t]he looming dystopia to fear is a shell democracy run by smart machines and a new elite of 'progressive' but authoritarian technocrats" (2018, 7).

Forsaking spatiotemporal nuance for the sake of conceptual parsimony, we might tentatively formulate the following: where China and the wider non-West opened up economically in the image of the US and the wider West with the advent of neoliberalism, the contemporary rise of neo-illiberalism heralds the moment wherein the US and the West are politically closing up in the image of China and the non-West. Amongst others, this development suggests that the center of capitalist development has shifted: where non-western peripheries assumed core characteristics along a process of upwards semi-peripheralization, the reverse process has unevenly hit parts of the West (Wallerstein 1979). Resultantly, "as western economies have become more Latin American in their distribution of incomes, their politics have also become more Latin American" (Wolf 2019). Put differently, whilst western right-wing nationalists

typically celebrate the imperial glory of yesteryear, neo-illiberal imperialism might well be coming home to roost.

Instead of presenting itself in Maoist clothing, and behind self-styled ‘Leninist’ façades, the rise of neo-illiberalism actually reminds of that other totalitarian and hence illiberal strain against which twentieth-century liberalism has defined itself: *fascism*. And although it is argued that even fascism has been historically pursued to safeguard liberal capitalism (Landa 2010), contemporary “pre-fascism” (O’Toole 2018) haunting the West is arguably the result of a capitalist system escaping its liberal ordering principles, heralding an age of “digital feudalism” (Teixeira Pinto 2019), or “technofeudalism” (Durand 2020). With empire steadily gravitating towards China, and finance capital increasingly being absorbed by tech, “the sum of the arguments that have been classified as liberal” (Bell 2014, 689) is subject to corrosion. As both liberal democracies *and* modern capitalism are increasingly absorbed by new forms of accumulation and power, curtailing variegated checks, balances, and rights steamrolling liberalism’s core premise of individual freedom, one can only wonder at what point we ought to stop calling an illiberal(izing) world order liberal.

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Notes

1] The original manuscript for this paper was submitted in early 2020, days before Europe went into lockdown to limit the spread of COVID-19. As such, the impact of coronavirus is not discussed here. That said, the pandemic seems to herald a new chapter in the rise of neo-illiberalism, threatening to anchor its logics and make its rule endemic. Amongst others, government strategies to contain or mitigate the virus have accelerated geopolitical, economic and cultural shifts outlined in this paper, finally seeing key economic policies slowly divert from neoliberal dogma. Posing an incredible challenge to core premises of liberalism, moreover, the coronavirus paradoxically allows the illiberal(izing) right across the West and beyond to disregard public health under the guise

of individual freedom and liberty, whilst shifting the blame for illiberal policies – now vital to protect human life instead of capital – elsewhere. A shorter, popular version of this paper reflects on the early impact of coronavirus. See: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/neoliberalism-is-over-welcome-to-the-era-of-neo-illiberalism/>

2] Where Aiyar coined the term neo-illiberalism (2011; see Hendrikse 2018), in the West the term was introduced by Henri Astier (2016), whose analysis is diametrically opposed to my perspective, for I certainly do not regard Nigel Farage and Donald Trump “champions of struggling workers” breaking up the economic status quo.

3] As argued elsewhere (Hendrikse 2018), although Trump and his copycats promise a nationalist renaissance by elevating protectionist policies, prior to COVID-19 the main art of the neo-illiberal deal was to pretend to do things differently, like presenting neoliberal tax cuts and deregulation as “a whole new way of doing business” (White House 2020), or reworking the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) “with just enough minor symbolic differences to lend plausibility to the idea that something has changed” (Piketty 2020: 890).

4] Interestingly, where Brown argues that far-right nationalism “yield formations dreaded by the founding neoliberal intellectuals” (2019: 60), Slobodian (2019) identifies a neoliberal family feud.

5] The acronym stands for Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Pointing to strong BRIC growth relative to the West, O’Neill argued that “world policymaking forums should be re-organized and in particular, the G7 should be adjusted to incorporate BRIC representatives” (O’Neill 2001).

6] Oligarchy is defined as rule by the few, as opposed to democracy (rule by the many) or autocracy (rule by one). In practice, billionaires encircling autocratic governments, some of whom operating as informal satellites to boost the extraterritorial reach of autocratic states, are also referred to as oligarchs.

7] Amongst other things, the profound synthesis between antidemocratic culture from ‘below’ and state power from above is embodied in Trump’s embrace of the far-right meta-conspiracy theory QAnon, which first emerged online in late 2017, having steadily mainstreamed since via established media and politics. See: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/>. In general, conspiracy theories are often used by autocrats to bend the truth and ridicule criticism (Kendzior 2020).

8] The contemporary status of SCL and CA (both liquidated) is murky, leading to offshore shell companies in Delaware and Hong Kong linked to the daughters of Robert Mercer (Witt and Pasternack 2019).

9] As documented in the 2019 Netflix documentary *The Great Hack*, SCL’s political activities are traced back to post-apartheid South Africa, a time when the centrist proposition undergirding neoliberalism had not yet crystallized. Having since been involved in dozens of elections worldwide, prior to the votes for Brexit and Trump the company was involved in the 2015 election of Argentinian oligarch Mauricio Macri.

10] The IISS advisor is Nick Inkster, a former British intelligence agent. See: <https://soundcloud.com/theiiss/episode-23-the-rise-of-china-technology-and-a-sino-centric-world-order>.

11] For example, at the height of the 2015 European ‘refugee crisis’, which fueled the mainstreaming of far-right narratives across the West, China saw the rise of its own Alt-Right vocabulary for ‘libtards’ or ‘regressive liberals’, with derogatory terms like baizuo (白左) i.e. ‘white left’ popping up across the blogosphere. Specifically, “Merkel was the first western politician to be labeled as a baizuo ... Hungary, on the other hand, was praised by Chinese ‘netizens’ for its hard line on refugees, if not for its authoritarian leader” (Zhang 2017).

12] Likewise, Boris Johnson’s former advisor Dominic Cummings was habitually described as a Leninist. See: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/09jpSjVUpQ/dominic_cummings_battle_for_downing_street.

13] Where far-right narratives typically portray Brexit as a clash between nationalists and neoliberal ‘globalists’, it is argued that both camps come from the same neoliberal family (Slobodian and Plehwe 2019; see Harmes 2011 on ‘neoliberal nationalism’).

14] Take the resumé of media baron Rupert Murdoch’s ex-wife Wendy Deng, knotting together Chinese, Russian,

and US regimes through personal relationships and alleged affiliations (see Kendzior 2020).

15] I thank Anton Jäger for this particular observation.

16] Where China's late 1970s embrace of capitalism is said to have turned a totalitarian Maoist state into an authoritarian Hayekian one, albeit "with Chinese characteristics" (Harvey 2005: 120), it might be argued that the rise of Xi and the rollout of the CCP's unprecedented digital strategy to control every aspect of social life (Kobie 2019) is bringing its erstwhile totalitarian character back to life.

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Biography

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