

Mapping the New Right Wave
Editorial

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Liberal democracy today is in crisis, or, more accurately, in a state of siege. Not only in the United States but in much of Europe and in many nations across the globe, we are witnessing the advent of a new era of antidemocratic politics, much of it with increasingly authoritarian features

— Wendy Brown, Peter E. Gordon, and Max Pensky, *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018)

In the past decades, we have witnessed a steady rise and increase of power, influence, and visibility of right-wing politics. Arguably, this ‘great moving right show’ as Stuart Hall once aptly called it, has been going on since the 1970s with the decline of labor parties and the emergence of Thatcherism and Reaganism, but especially since the economic crisis of 2007/2008 there seems to be a ‘new right wave’, which consists not only of a consolidation of (neo)conservative powers but also of the increasing electoral success of reactionary, far-right or downright fascist political movements. To the continuing surprise and puzzlement of many commentators, the political left has hardly been able to mobilize or orient the massive indignation that was the result of the bailouts, and of the years of austerity politics, the demolition of the public sector, and the upward distribution of wealth, that were its immediate consequences. Rather, the only serious opponent to the radical right has been the radical center. With Donald Trump out of the White House, which was mostly the result of his disastrous handling of the covid-19 crisis, the center seems, at least for the moment, to hold. But the choice between the center and the right remains, in Cornel West’s words, a choice between neoliberal disaster and neofascist catastrophe, while a serious way out of that conundrum feels for the moment far out of reach.

How to respond to the rise of the new right as it expands with electoral gains and rhetorical force in the public domain? The title of this theme issue is derived from the Dutch writer Henk

van Straten, who in an op-ed likened the current political moment to the feeling of being caught in a *wave*, heading somewhere dangerous, yet feeling unable to change its direction. Part of the dilemma Van Straten mentioned consists in the fact that many far-right political figures and movements thrive on scandal and the media attention that this generates; hence, responding in outrage to their rhetoric seems to play by their book. On the other hand, ignoring it or responding in a cool rational manner would seem to normalize the far right. The image of citizens seized in a right-wing wave hence refers both to those attracted to elements of right-wing politics, as well as those repulsed by it but unable to find anchors for resistance or to imagine viable alternatives.

The figure of the wave emphasizes aspects of the new rights' effective organizational and communicative practices. It shapes how the new right is discussed as a symptom, a threat, a result of prior forces, or a warning for future developments. It also affects the processes and forms of resistance. For individuals and collectives, experiencing the new right as a wave informs the extent to which they feel either empowered or helpless in relation to it, how hopes and fears become articulated and embodied, and so on. While the description and experience of the new right as a wave seems ubiquitous across different political settings and shared in many countries, its specific meanings and functions diverge in each context – and depending on the perspective taken. An incumbent government will articulate the wave-like character of the new right differently than a member of a right-wing youth movement; for a union member in Brazil the 'new right wave' means something different than for a union member in the Netherlands. How to critically deconstruct the wave as a way of describing and experiencing this political moment? How to explore its vital elements? How can we see across different local settings without losing a sense of their specificities?

The articles in this special issue map the rise of the new right from an (inter)national comparative perspective, with a specific emphasis on responses and (the problems of) resistance in each setting. A prepublication was already presented in our first issue of this year, in the shape of the interview that Samir Gandesha conducted with critical theory scholar and public intellectual and activist Vladimir Safatle on the situation in Brazil. The current issue is opened by Wacyl Azzouz, with an analysis of the term 'primal pseudos' in Theodor W. Adorno's philosophy of history. While Adorno's reflections on fascism and anti-semitism are of course well

known, Azzouz argues that his ideas on the concept of the nation, and the contradiction within it, are equally important for understanding contemporary forms of nationalism. Arthur Borriello's article studies the relation between the economic crisis and the rise of populism in Southern Europe. He argues that, contrary to what is often thought, economic crises did not cause populism, but rather accelerated already existing currents. With Arthur Bueno's article we find ourselves back in Brazil: Bueno considers the rise and election of Jair Bolsonaro as both an expression of and response to collective psychological malaise, what he calls a 'post-depressive authoritarianism'. He thus understands right-wing authoritarianism in line with the anxieties caused by neoliberal subject-formation. This link is further established in the article by Reijer Hendrikse, in which he further explores the concept of 'neo-illiberalism' that he coined in earlier publications. According to Hendrikse, neoliberalism itself constitutes an illiberal reassessment of liberalism, and the new forms of authoritarianism are in that regard not so much the negation as the logical effect of the neoliberal order. Janar Mihkelsaar draws on Jacques Derrida's work to develop a notion of a 'democracy to come', one that neoliberalism and right-wing populism are equally hostile towards. Natasha Rietdijk, in her article, discusses echo chambers and filter bubbles, which, although they are often considered synonymous, she claims operate quite differently. To illustrate this distinction, she discusses the way populist parties responded to the anti-vaccination movement in Italy.

The articles are followed by several essays and reviews on the theme of the new right wave. Jouke Huijzer refers back to the term neo-illiberalism that was coined by Reijer Hendrikse (and discussed earlier in this same issue), but argues that this term arrives prematurely, and suggests our contemporary state is rather one of 'ill-neoliberalism', in which neoliberalism is malfunctioning (ill) or even dying while a new system, as Gramsci famously put it, is still struggling to be born. Marc Tuters, in his essay, explores 'fashwave' music, a subgenre of vapourwave. As obscure as this phenomenon may be, Tuters shows how it exemplifies right-wing aesthetics' nostalgia for some glorious past. The issue concludes with no less than five thematically related book reviews: Guido Barbi on Jürgen Link's book on populism, Ido de Haan on Lars Rensmann's book on antisemitism and the Frankfurt School, Gijs van Maanen on Miriam Rasch's book on dataism, Stefan Niklas on the new edition of the classic *The*

Authoritarian Personality, and Caspar Verstegen on Wendy Brown's new book on neoliberalism and authoritarianism.

Against the background of the (both theoretical and political) crisis of the left, making sense of our present political moment remains for *Krisis* an urgent matter. Not only as an academic and intellectual endeavor, but also for mapping and developing political strategies (in line with Karl Marx's hope that "theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses"). Perhaps, then, it would also be a matter of specifically questioning the metaphor of political 'waves', which in itself is already a particular way of framing politics. As Theodor W. Adorno said in *Aspekte des neuen Rechts-radikalismus* (a lecture from 1964 which was only recently published):

This way of thinking, which views such things from the outset like natural disasters about which one makes predictions, like whirlwinds or meteorological disasters, this already shows a form of resignation whereby one essentially eliminates oneself as a political subject; it expresses a harmfully spectator-like relationship with reality.

Next to the special issue we publish one stand-alone article by media scholar Sebastian Scholz, who discusses the 'chronopolitics' of sensor-media. Sensors, although not as visibly present as other media forms, produce an enormous amount of data and hence have a huge impact on how we experience our world, as well as upon self-experience. Using, among others, climate-change research as a case in point, Scholz shows how sensors are facilitated through imperceptible technical micro-temporalities, thus introducing a non-human temporal configuration that he urges should receive more attention within media studies.