Book Review

Mats Deland, Michael Minkenberg and Christin Mays, ed.
In the Tracks of Breivik: Far Right Networks in Northern and Eastern Europe (Berlin/Vienna: lit Verlag, 2014).

Four years have already passed since Anders Behring Breivik, apparently single-handedly, committed the most murderous and destructive terrorist atrocity by the far right in post-war Europe. In 2011–2012, particularly during his criminal trial in Oslo, there was a lively public debate in in the Scandinavian media as to whether Breivik was a fascist, or represented some other permutation of the contemporary European far right – an Islamophobic ‘counter-jihadist’; a militant, conservative nationalist; or a Christian extremist.1 Somewhat counterintuitively, since then relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted within comparative fascist studies to the implications of Breivik’s deeds, ideology, and self-proclaimed pan-European revolutionary movement.

The title of this anthology – In the Tracks of Breivik – would suggest that its primary purpose is to map the far right networks of northern and eastern Europe in relation to the terrorist acts of July 22, 2011. Even if we realize that this formulation is an unfortunate literal translation of the Swedish phrase ‘i spåren av [Breivik]’ – for which a more idiomatic English rendering would be ‘in the wake of [Breivik]’, the implication would still be that the findings of the book are located in some direct relation to Breivik and his crimes. Even the promotional blurb on the back cover, as well as the opening and closing words of the introduction, reinforce this expectation. Unfortunately, this is misleading.

In fact, this anthology has its origins in a conference held at Uppsala in March 2010, a year before the attacks in Oslo and Utøya. The various contributions thus have nothing to do with Breivik or his contacts, influences, or admirers in northern or eastern Europe. This, however, does not mean that the book

is not without its merits; it is just that this is a case where it is extremely difficult to judge by the proverbial cover.

Several of the contributors to this slim volume, such as Michael Minkenberg and Marlene Laruelle, are well-known to scholars of the far right and radical nationalism. Others are likely to be new acquaintances for readers from outside their home countries, producing an interesting mix of approaches and cases for the international readership at which this book is aimed.

The anthology consists of an introduction followed by eight chapters. These chapters fall into two rough groups: those that deal mainly with international contacts and networks of the European far right; and those whose focus is negative attitudes towards Muslims in one or more European societies. To the first category belong the chapters by Ralf Wiederer, Rasmus Fleischer, Miroslav Mareš, Marlene Laruelle, and Tatiana Golova; to the latter – those by Åke Sander, Egidūnas Račius, and Göran Larsson.

Wiederer’s chapter is an interesting mapping of the contacts between far-right websites in various parts of the world, how they link to one another, and their semantic proximities. The number of links from (and to) others is used to propose a hierarchical ranking of websites, where US and German websites often exert the most influence – not only on far-right websites in other parts of the world, but particularly on each other.

Mareš and Golova examine the transnationalism of far right movements in post-communist countries by looking at youth and music subcultures as conduits for white supremacist ideas that allow members of the Czech or Russian far right – whose nationalism has for historic reasons often been anti-German – to embrace ‘Aryan’ solidarity with German ‘white power’ neo-Nazis. Laruelle, for her part, provides a good overview of the role of Aleksandr Dugin in shaping the post-Soviet radical right in Russia, by tracing his personal and ideological networks, including those with the French Nouvelle Droite movement that fundamentally influenced many far right movements in western Europe since the 1970s as well.

Both Sander and Larsson treat the roots and forms of Islamophobia in western Europe and North America, the latter by discussing several key ‘counter-jihad’ websites. Neither of these contributions, however, is a very good fit in this collection on the far right, as they tend to be more broad discussions of anti-Muslim racism, without a clear focus on what would generally be considered the ‘far right’. Larsson even muddies the analytical and terminological waters further by referring to ‘populism’ – a concept whose relation to the far right is the object of much debate.

By contrast, the chapter by Račius is highly topical for this volume, in that the author analyses why Islamophobia is such a non-issue for the most significant
(albeit still marginal) far right political movement in Lithuania. Here it is not only the lack of Muslim immigrants and the related ‘creeping sharia’ discourse that explain this; there is also the fact that Lithuanian has a small, highly integrated, domestic Muslim (Tatar) minority, dating back to the glory days of medieval Lithuania. Nevertheless, other minority groups – Russians, Poles, and, particularly, Jews – remain strong ideological bugbears for the Lithuanian ultranationalists, irrespective of these groups’ numerical size. Račius thus offers a striking example of the paradox that far right groups might tolerate some minorities – no matter how ‘foreign’ – while actively hating others that may be just as long-standing, or culturally closer to the majority population.

Theoretically, the most interesting contribution is that by Fleischer, who posits that there was (at the time he was writing) a split of fascist movements into two camps, which he termed ‘mono-fascism’ and ‘multi-fascism’. Monofascism, as its name suggests, is based on ethnonational imperialism, and draws inspiration from the ideas of the medieval West and its struggle against Islamic expansion. This is the fascism of sovereign European nations, where only the fittest survive. Multifascism, by contrast, is civilizational, Eurasianist, drawing on supposed ancient core identities. It is anti-globalization, rather than anti-Islamization; it is counter-rather than anti-intellectual. It is ethnopluralist fascism in the manner of Alain de Benoist. Both groups, however, can embrace anti-Semitism, as the ‘Jew’ for monofascists represents the enemy within, while representing hegemonic globalization for the multifascists.

In an addenda to his chapter, written in 2014 following the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, Fleischer reiterates that this split in monofascism could have been a temporary development in the period after 9/11 and the subsequent rise of ‘counter-jihadism’. Indeed, developments in Ukraine have shaken things up in our understanding of fascist movements. The ‘Eurasianist’ Dugin acts as a monofascist Russian imperialist in relation to Ukraine. Some monofascist-type movements in western and northern Europe are becoming influenced by identitaire-style multifascism. An interesting example of this kind of shift that has taken place since the ‘Russian Spring’ of 2014 is evident in the Swedish far right: at first the monofascistic, national socialist Party of Swedes (Svenskarnas parti) supported the Ukrainian nationalists, even sending volunteers to Azov Battalion, while their domestic archrivals, the white supremacist Swedish Resistance Movement (Svenska motståndsrörelsen, with its origins in White Aryan Resistance) sided with Novorossiya. By early 2015, however, the Party of Swedes made an ideological U-turn, joining the Alliance for Peace and Freedom and earning an invitation to the pro-Novorossiya ‘International Russian Conservative Forum’ in St. Petersburg. This reorientation left the party’s own volunteers fighting in Azov in the lurch. No one from the Party of
Swedes is known to have attended the Forum, however, and the party dissolved completely in May 2015. This is just one case where the Ukraine conflict appears to be triggering a shake-up of the relationships between different forms of fascism, much like the Finnish Winter War of 1939, and confirm Fleischer’s own prediction that his mono/multi dichotomy may be a passing historical episode.

All in all, there are some solid contributions to the scholarship in this collection, and it raises some interesting avenues for future research. Nevertheless, if one is looking for a study of the transnational impact of Breivik’s terrorism on the far right in eastern Europe, a better place to start would be the recent article by Johannes Due Enstad.2

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