

22. Mrz. 2016

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Kommentare ( 0 )

## Debating with the Nouvelle Droite: What did I learn?



This is the third article in our series *Trouble on the Far-Right*. For more information on the series, please click [here](#).

by Tamir Bar-On

I am the author of two books about the French nouvelle droite (ND – New Right): *Where Have All The Fascists Gone?* and *Rethinking the French New Right: Alternatives to modernity*. In 2014, I published a [piece](#) entitled „The French New Right Neither Right, nor Left?“. Surprisingly, the French ND leader Alain de Benoist responded with a polemical and largely ad hominem article in the same journal.<sup>1</sup> I must stress that I neither identify with a political party, nor a political movement. I do not support any ideological current. De Benoist does. He is self-described as a man of the right. Hence, he cannot even claim intellectual objectivity.

In this piece, I want to offer some comments on my debate with de Benoist. I argue that while we should strive towards intellectual objectivity, we cannot be silent in the face of falsehoods. In this respect, the ND plays a dishonest game. Its leader and other ND intellectuals feign intellectual objectivity and the platitudes of transcending right and left, but they want cultural hegemony and the triumph of their decidedly radical right-wing ideals.

Thus, I want to take the debate as an opportunity for learning. Many people told me not to respond to de Benoist. How can you respond to a neo-fascist? Perhaps I am a real liberal. Moreover, I used the debate with de Benoist to demonstrate that the ND leader is a neo-fascist with a human face. In short, fascists today no longer state that they want to re-open Auschwitz, or put on their brownshirts or blackshirts. As Umberto Eco [noted](#), neo-fascists maintain fascist core values, but do not subscribe to the violent tactics of the past. Those tactics are less acceptable in a post-WW II, post-Holocaust and anti-fascist age.

In my debate with de Benoist, I argued that the ND worldview has similarities with fascism, but it does not use open violence: 1. Antiliberalism 2. Anticommunism 3. Anticonservatism 4. An attempt to create a new, modern, self-determined, and secular culture 5. A highly regulated, multiclass, and integrated national economic structure. 6. An economic framework that uses the state to restrain capitalism, banks, and multinational corporations 7. A desire for nationalist (or regionalist) states 8. The goal of empire 9. The desire for European grandeur in the geopolitical realm 10. A positive evaluation of authors that legitimize violence, such as Carl Schmitt and Julius Evola 11. A stress on the emotional and mystical aspects of life, including traditions, Indo-European symbols, and primordial ties to the region, nation, or Europe 12. An organic view of society and extreme stress on the masculine principle.

### Nouvelle Droite: Neo-fascism with a human face?

There are no tanks to stop de Benoist's „neo-fascism with a human face“. He

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could operate freely through the dissemination of his works. He helped inspire other intellectuals, especially in Western Europe and later in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia. Interestingly, de Benoist's ND project began in 1968, the year of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia and the massive student and worker protests in France in May 1968. De Benoist and the ND were influenced by both events, insisting that a revolution is possible in advanced industrialized societies without using violence. If we want to better understand de Benoist's „neo-fascism with a human face“, we must see through what Feldman and Jackson see as the „double-talk“ of the far right and its disdain for liberal democracy since 1945.<sup>2</sup> They argue that the far right includes de Benoist's ND and it attempts at „repackaging“ contemporary ultra-nationalism in order to make it more palatable to mainstream European and American audiences.

In my previous works, I argued that the ND combined Conservative Revolution (CR), New Left (NL), and various other influences. The use of NL influences was designed to re-think the sterile legacy of fascism, reconstitute the Right after the debacle of the loss of French Algeria, and win supporters in a cultural climate which was decidedly left-wing in the 1960s and 1970s. The ND began as an intellectual movement in France in 1968 and it sought to spread its radical right-wing ideals throughout Europe. In addition, the ND saw itself as an intellectual vanguard in winning cultural hegemony from the liberal-left. It differentiated itself from political parties and extra-parliamentary (or terrorist movements) on the radical right.

In my *Rethinking the French New Right*, I proposed four interpretations of the ND: (1) the ND as a neo-fascist movement created for anti-fascist times; (2) a challenge to the traditional right-left political spectrum; (3) a variant of alternative modernity within a broader modernist framework (i.e., ND thinkers seek revolutionary alternatives to liberal and socialist variants of modernity rather than destroying all aspects of modernity); and (4) a species of the „religion of politics“ in the context of a more secular age. It is my claim that ND thinkers embody all four conceptual tools.

## Between intellectual objectivity and polemical storms: Debating with Alain De Benoist

Here are some learning points from my debate with de Benoist:

1. The battle of ideas matters. Revolutions are made by material factors, but also the battle of ideas among intellectuals and ordinary people in civil society. Both Gramsci and de Benoist would also agree.
2. In a polemical debate, our key ideas are sometimes lost or distorted; there are opportunistic lies in order to discredit the researcher (e.g., de Benoist falsely claimed that I had no contact with him); and you get pinned with labels (e.g., Metapedia, a pro-ND Web site, calls me a „leftist“ and „Jewish anti-fascist“, while I called de Benoist a „neo-fascist“). I should stress that I did not label de Benoist to discredit him, but to show historical continuity between his contemporary ideas and his support for fascist-like Conservative Revolutionaries of the inter-war years.
3. Are we ever fully objective? We can try, but I doubt it. This debate reinforced this view. Yet, in my classes as a lecturer, I teach a wide-range of perspectives, ideologies, or international relations theories. We must ultimately think critically rather than be the slaves of any political camp.
4. De Benoist is intellectually brilliant, but also nasty, caustic, and demeaning. When I noted in my response to de Benoist that the ND's „anti-racist“ stance echoes xenophobic political parties, de Benoist mocked me and used this purposefully provocative response: „This is

Ich bin Paris! Ich bin Muslim! Ich bin Nato? Die offene Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde nach dem 13. November.

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## KATEGORIEN

Außenpolitik (66)

Bürgerkriege (25)

Cyber Security (52)

Demokratisierung (14)

Drohnen (15)

Flüchtlinge (18)

Humanitäre Interventionen (15)

Innere Sicherheit (34)

Interviews (10)

Katastrophen (4)

Konferenz (31)

Militär (31)

Pandemien (2)

Podcast (7)

Popkultur (22)

Raketenabwehr (1)

Rechtsradikalismus (9)

Sanktionen (8)

Security Culture (27)

Sicherheits-Kommunikation (16)

Sicherheitskultur (240)

Sozialwissenschaft Online (72)

Stellenangebote (55)

Strategie (12)

Terrorismus (64)

Theorie (5)

Umwelt (1)

about as intelligent as saying: (1) Hitler liked dogs. (2) Tamir Bar-On likes them too (maybe!). (3) Therefore, Tamir Bar-On is a Nazi“. He resorts to grotesque name-calling without any basis. He does not like that I decipher both the exoteric and esoteric discourses (a distinction I borrow from Eatwell<sup>3</sup>) of the ND.

De Benoist and ND writings must be analyzed in terms of what is said in their texts, their „code words“ such as „Indo-European“ (instead of Aryan), „European culture“ (instead of white), and „Judaean-Christian tradition“ (instead of Jews); what they do not often write about anymore (Jews, Zionism, support for conspicuous racism); and their not too veiled sarcasm that is directed as much at their supporters as their opponents. De Benoist could have used another example to make his point, but stated that „Tamir Bar-On is a Nazi“ in order to deflect attention from his own links to racism and neo-fascism; to tell his supporters that the Jews are the real Nazis because they allegedly undermine the pagan „Indo-European“ roots of „original Europeans“ through their support for the egalitarianism of the Judeo-Christian tradition and its secular offshoot liberal multiculturalism; and to openly mock opponents as a cue for his supporters to engage in similarly outlandish discourses. I should add that I was also caustic when I compared de Benoist's ideas to anti-immigrant terrorist Anders Behring Breivik minus the use of violence.

5. I still hope to change the world, not merely Europe, which is the case for de Benoist. I still believe in administrative equality, unlike de Benoist. I want to get rid of poverty and social injustice. I am for women's rights, not a club of old European men. He only wants to „liberate“ a part of humanity, „original“ European ethnic groups. He forgets that direct democracy is a scam when it excludes those that supposedly do not belong to the political community. He wants to use referenda in order to stop immigration, refugee and asylum-seekers, and even expel non-Europeans from Europe. While the people of Europe have the right to take this direction, the recent history of the continent makes such a politics of exclusion dangerous.

## Conclusion: The intellectual and media decline of the ND

My closing line in my response to de Benoist was the following: „The ND is merely the intellectual face of what Jean Baudrillard saw as the rising tide of a white, fundamentalist Europe, which is simultaneously promoted by radical rightwing populist parties, more violent and outdated extraparliamentary forces, and, at times, by mainstream political parties.“<sup>4</sup>

In short, the apogee of the ND's strength was in the late 1970s and 1980s. Today the ND is losing its media and intellectual vitality. It seeks scandals in order to gain supporters. These polemical debates allow it to play the cult of victimhood against a supposedly „liberal-left-wing“ scholar like myself.

Despite the ND's fall from the media and intellectual spotlight in France, ND ideas on immigration, national identity, and the loss of national sovereignty are increasingly accepted by many Europeans. The question we might ask today is why has the cultural climate shifted so dramatically to the right since 1968, the year the ND was created? Is it the post-9-11 climate? The Paris terrorist attacks? The refugee crisis? The rise of radical right political parties in the 1980s and especially 1990s? The co-optation of radical right-wing ideas by mainstream parties and through coalition governments? The dramatic decline of the radical left, as Slavoj Žižek once **suggested**? The problems of the EU? Capitalist globalization and its excesses? Is it the slow cultural change in mentalities engineered by the ND? Or, the increasing

Versicherheitlichung (23)

Visualisierung (6)


Whistleblowing (8)

WikiLeaks (17)

WMD (10)

Zivilgesellschaft (67)

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orthodoxy of neo-liberal or Anglo-American New Right solutions worldwide?

For the ND, the authentic right is neither neo-liberal, nor a republican, establishment right. It is a right that hearkens back to Europe's dark past; a right of homogeneous regions, nations, and Europe; a right where internal homogeneity will be achieved through cultural and legal means. We need to be aware that fascism can return with the most innocent of disguises.



**Tamir Bar-On** completed his Ph.D. in political science at McGill University. He is the author of two books about the French Nouvelle Droite: *Where Have All The Fascists Gone?* (Ashgate, 2007) and *Rethinking the French New Right: Alternatives to modernity* (Routledge, 2013). He currently works as a Professor-Researcher at Tecnológico de Monterrey (Campus Querétaro) in Mexico. He is also a member of Mexico's National System of Researchers.

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1. The **piece** is called „Alain de Benoist Answers Tamir Bar-On.“ In turn, I **replied** to de Benoist: „A Response to Alain de Benoist“. 
2. Feldman, Matthew; Jackson, Paul (2014): *Doublespeak: The Rhetoric of the Far Right Since 1945*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Press. 
3. Eatwell, Roger (1996): *The Esoteric Ideology of the FN in the 1980s*. In: Mike Cronin (Ed.): *The failure of British fascism. The far right and the fight for political recognition*. London, New York: Macmillan Press; St. Martin's Press, p. 99–117. 
4. Baudrillard's quotation in: Baudrillard, Jean (2008): *The Perfect Crime*. London, New York: Verso, p. 135. 

 Tags: [Alain de Benoist](#), [France](#), [ND](#), [neo-fascism](#), [New Right](#), [nouvelle droite](#)

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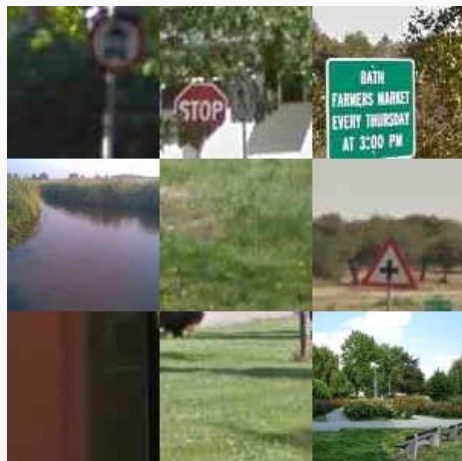
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