Global Identitarianism

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INTRODUCTION

The term *Identitarianism* and the adjective *Identitarian* are relatively new additions to the vocabulary of far-right studies. Until quite recently they were mostly present in minority studies under the umbrella of identity politics. However, since the turn of the millennium in Western Europe, these terms have risen in prominence as a self-identification marker for a kind of activism among certain intellectuals and youths that prioritizes not only the demand for recognition of the cultural and ethnic identity of autochthonous populations but also its inherent and ancestral distinction from nonnative and non-European cultures and peoples. At its core, then *Identitarianism*, is an Ethnicity First – and Europe First – sociocultural movement.

The rise of Identitarianism is inseparable from Europe's demographic winter - the dramatic drop in the birth rate and the aging of the European native population - which in tandem with the phenomena of mass immigration into Europe and the growth of foreign-born populations and cultural and religious diversity, serve as the setting in which groups of Identitarians see themselves not simply in a run of the mill political battle but in a transcendental civilizational struggle in which the literal survival of European cultures and peoples is at stake. Group survival mindset is at the center of Identitarian activism – focused not on abstractly "universal" attachments such as those to humanity broadly construed despite national, ethnic, and racial distinctions, but geared toward the particular territorial, cultural, and ethnic traditions and heritages constituting 'traditional' Europe and its peoples. If what defines a liberal society is the promotion of individualism and individual liberty, Identitarians believe that in order to carry out the salvation of Europe, group interest must overcome self-interest – tribalistic sentiments of belonging and ethnic loyalty must be reborn and renewed, and today, in order to reverse Europe's tragic downfall into submission and decadence.

Ultimately, Identitarianism is about ethnic politics. It is about who and who does not belong to the community of Europeans. For Identitarians, *this* is the vital issue, running deeper and being

more fundamental than superficial discussions about ideologies or the left–right political spectrum. Identitarians may, and in fact often do, position themselves on the political right, but they brand themselves as the "true right" – in order to distinguish themselves from the fake, mainstream right that, like the left, has been found guilty – for economic and /or ideological reasons - of the decades-long multicultural/multiethnic transformation of European societies that they see as an existential threat to the physical existence of its peoples and to the continent's identity. For Identitarians both the liberal right and the progressive left are part of the same system – a system that, in the Identitarian worldview, destroys cultures and kills peoples. So, the Identitarian movement seeks a reset, and a new beginning, that respects and protects – and is based upon – the historical ethnocultural makeup and traditions of European peoples.

Identitarians believe that they are engaged in a cultural combat that is laying the groundwork for such restoration and regeneration. Whether through books and conferences or street and digital activism, they believe that the road to power is paved with wins and successes in the battle of ideas – only by subverting the morality and hegemonic ideas promoted by the dominant elites it is possible to conquer the spirits and minds of the wider population. At heart, Identitarianism is about power – and how to get it. The end goal is to change the system from within by means of a tactic of "entryism" – bringing people and ideas outside of the political mainstream into existing political parties and movements, penetrating not just nationalist and populist formations but also gaining a foothold in mainstream political and media forums, and increasing the overall Identitarian market share. Such a diffusion of Identitarianism can be accomplished both through the work of individuals and through the advance, within the system, of the Identitarian canon, its themes and narratives.

What this circulation process means is that Identitarianism should not be confined to physical groups that brand themselves as *Identitarian* – especially because ideas, concepts, narratives, particularly in the current age of high-speed information sharing, have multiple ways and channels of travelling beyond their original sources and entering the ideological platforms and discourses of other political formations. An universally held article of faith within the Identitarian movement – the Great Replacement, or the replacement of the ethnic make up of European populations by non-Europeans – is the best example of such a propagation effect. It is the most prominent Identitarian theme—one that, in some Western countries, escaped the fringes to gain increasing media spotlight and gradually creep into the center of political discourse. The fact that eminently Identitarian "Great Replacement Theory" - which Identitarians consider not as a theory but rather as a statistical fact and empirical reality –is becoming a topic of debate (whether in efforts at acknowledging it, at debunking it, or rejecting it) is a metapolitical victory and their biggest

success in the cultural battle toward ushering in a new Identitarian age. Relatedly, a second Identitarian article of faith that flows directly from the first is the concept of Remigration – the policy of "sending back" non-European populations to their ethnic countries of origin, starting with illegal immigrants. For Identitarians, if the Great Replacement is the diagnosis, Remigration is the cure. This Identitarian "fix" has not yet had the same impact as the Great Replacement in political and public debate, but Identitarians see it as the inevitable and ultimate solution to ceasing and reversing the perceived slow-motion ethnic cleansing of European populations.

In Western Europe the growing salience of issues of immigration, Muslim presence, and multiculturalism – in short, the rising presence within Europe of a visible non-European "Other" – helped raise questions about who "we" are as a people, and heightened the urgency felt by Identitarian activists to form transnational bonds with other Identitarians. Pan-Europeanism has been a major driver of Identitarian networking. This was a key dimension of the youth movement Generation Identity – which "opened" branches in several European countries and was particularly active in the second decade of the current century. At heart these activists felt that all ethnic Europeans are faced with the same threat – the displacement and replacement in their own lands by peoples of non-European origin. So, they either put aside petty nationalisms and rivalries in order to fight together or face the threat of perishing alone. This civilizational call for unity (the ethos of "we are in this together"), however, extended not only beyong these specific youth groups; rather, it continues to be a crucial dimension of Identitarians in and outside of Europe, whether they are intellectualls, activists, or both. In the Identitarian mindset, pan-Europeanism is not therefore only confined to geography; it also refers to the European peoples themselves. Therefore, it reaches to the territories outside of the home base – in ethnic and cultural solidarity with populations of European origin.

By virtue of this sense of *Europeanness* writ large, there is a wide-reaching dimension to Identitarianism. Of course it adapts to different contexts – in terms of imagery and rhetoric – but this view of a physical and spiritual link among Europeans remains. In North America, it blended with what became known as the Alt-Right and acquired a distinguishable and openly racial dimension as part of White Identity Politics – which in turn influenced the rise of a more americanized version of Identitarianism in Europe in the form of a European Alt-Right network.[1] Yet, the issue of White Identity Politics in the European context remains an open-ended question – it may exist in a latent manner, not being fully activated yet. However, the hypothesis exists that White Identity across European lands may increase in importance in the future. The combination of the impact of mass immigration—the decades-long arrival of non-Europeans mostly from Africa and Asia in Europe coupled with the present low birthrate among Europeans —could, in principle,

if these dynamics continue unabated, intensify Identitarian pan-European mechanisms of ethnic and racial solidarity and self-defense – meaning, the portrayal of Europeans as "whites" as opposed to the non-Europeans, identified as "non-whites." For the moment, this scenario remains speculative – as a possibility that may invite further scholarly inquiry.

In Western countries, the diffusion of Identitarianism has faced robust obstacles and challenges. Accused by government agencies and watchdog groups of extremism – and of inciting tensions between different ethnic and religious groups - individuals and groups associated with Identitarianism have encountered a myriad of anti-activism measures that have included the issuing of governmental travel bans, banishment from the financial system, prosecution for hate speech, and even dissolution, as happened with the original Generation Identity in France. An even more ominous development has been deplatforming, or kicking people and groups off social media. This is especially deleterious for Identitarians of any kind because of the heavy use that they make of the Internet for indoctrination, recruitment, mobilization, and funding. The suppression of their techno-activism eats away at Identitarian indoctrination, at its goal of creating a counter-cultural power, and at the visibility and impact of their agitprop and activism in general. Alt-tech platforms have been used as a substitute for many individuals and groups, but they have proven – at least for now – to be poor substitutes for the presence and influence that Big Tech social networks have provided in the not so distant past.

Outline of the Book

Global Identitarianism offers the first global overview of the Identitarian movement that first began spreading within Europe in the earliest years of 21st century with the self-declared aim of protecting the ethnic and cultural identity of Europe from the onslaught of globalism and mass immigration. It gathers a wide range of scholars who have worked at length in the field of Identitarianism studies. Several variants of this phenomenon are examined all over Europe, North America, and South America – as for Western Europe we have not presented chapters on the French or Austrian Identitarian youth movements as these have already been covered extensively in the literature, and have focused instead on lesser-known, at least in English language, case-studies.[2] The book also analyzes the movements' networks and the circulation of themes, ideas, activists, and practices both online and offline - within Europe and beyond - as well as the relationships between this movement and larger society.

The first section of the book is dedicated to Europe. It opens with Marta Lorimer's chapter on the "pre-history" of civilizationism[3] – a tenet of Identitarianism - in the discourse of far right

parties. *Civilizationism* is a neologism that is making headways in recent literature to describe a transnational ideology rooted in the idea of Europe as a distinct ethnic-cultural-historical civilization that should be preserved as such. Lorimer shows that the idea of a "European identity" played a role in archetypal parties such as the Italian *Movimiento Sociale Italiano* and the French *National Front.* Europe as a delimited, bounded community and civilization was an important complement to the respective national identities; moreover, both parties, like Identitarians today, made a clear distinction between the European Union and Europe, or the "real" Europe. Alice Blum's ethnographic exploration of the German Identitarian youth movement reveals the dynamics of its organizational identity and the ways that members are bound into the collective through narratives and experiences of marginalization and resistance, ideas and values, lifestyles, rituals, and artifacts. All of these gave German Identitarian youths a sense of community and belonging distinct from the wider German society, and this feeling of community and belonging was a major reason, at least for a period, of their success in attracting young people to their ranks. Next, Mathias Hee Pedersen focuses on the Danish case, where young Identitarians have kept the movement in its classic form – modeled from the early Generation Identity organization. As argued by Pedersen, the Identitarian group has been the most successful case in terms of propaganda and mainstreaming of Identitarian themes – benefiting from a more favorable and conservative Danish media environment, they were treated as a legitimate voice in the immigration debate. Contrary to Denmark, as Riccardo Marchi and Gabriel Guimarães argue, Identitarianism has not met any sort of comparable success in Portugal, even if there have been attempts, both in street activism and in digital activism, to emulate European counterparts. It remains to be seen whether the growth of populations of foreign origin and increased immigration will open an opportunity in the foreseeable future for local Identitarian voices and groups.

The second part of the book centers on transnationalism and networking within the Identitarian movement. The first two chapters rely on social movement theory to analyze the transnationalism of the Generation Identity network. Damla Keşkekci and Anita Nissen survey the dynamics and impact of the various "Defend Europe" missions as a key component of young Identitarians' repertoires of contention, while Marion Jacquet-Vaillant analyzes the creation and diffusion – online and offline - of an Identitarian activist network, while also highlighting the multi-level limits it faced. The diffusion of the Identitarian movement was also hindered, as noted by Maik Fielitz in his chapter, by Internet censorship and deplatforming. For a movement that relies heavily on digital activism this development crushed its growth, limiting their presence, influence and wider impact on the public.

The next section is concentrated on North America. D.J. Mulloy traces the roots of the Alt-Right, and the lingering and growing fears of white displacement and replacement that helped to nourish its rise. Mulloy sees in it a renewing of old ground and a rebranding of old-style White nationalism. He further believes that there is a significant constituency for Identitarian White nationalist politics in the USA. Alexandra Minna Stern, in her chapter on the organizational failure of Identitarianism in the US, shares a similar belief. Even though organized, European-style Identitarianism failed to take off – due to context, infrastructure, and leadership failures – Identitarian themes of dispossession and replacement have been gaining currency in the country. Taking a digital ethnographic approach, Amy C. Mack looked at an Identitarian Canadian group and their goal of protecting Canadians of European heritage from the demographic and cultural changes of the country by promoting rurality and settler ancestry as the ultimate and distinct sources of Canada's identity. Mack further argues for the need to look at the local and national expressions of Identitarianism as it adapts to contexts, in rhetoric and imagery. Although centered on two American Identitarian figures, Josh Vandiver's chapter on the online and offline network known as the Manosphere explores a wider transnational movement that lays out the ethical and philosophical groundwork for living a "masculine" life enmeshed in "brotherhoods of conquering men." Designed to appeal to young men, tired of their western corrupted homelands, devoid of virility and heroism, the Manosphere, as with other anti-bourgeois and anti-decadence movements of the past, appeals to a life of fire, *thumos*, and essentially Faustian in its search for new frontiers.

Moving to Oceania, more precisely to Australia, Imogen Richards and Callum Jones map out the ideological resemblances and practical associations between Australian political actors and European Identitarians. Great Replacement and Remigration themes abound in this activist network. Richards and Jones stress the context-adaptive nature of Identitarianism – as with the case of Canada, Identitarianism has adapted to Australia's settler history and imaginary, making it at the same time more challenging for activists to invoke "indigenous" privilege in the same way that their European counterparts do.

The phenomenon of glocalized Identitarianism – of Identitarianism's adjustment to local contexts – comes to the fore in the South American chapters. In Brazil, as argued by Odilon Caldeira Neto, where Identitarian groups are still in an embryonic phase, the ideology and myth of a "racial democracy" as a central component of the country's national identity is an obstacle to the full development of a European-style Identitarianism. At the same time, in the Southern Cone region, Boris Matías Grinchpun shows that in Chile – a country where there has been a diffusion of Identitarian authors in far right milieus – local groups who are particularly active in the digital

sphere, although influenced by global Identitarianism, forged their own autochthonous version and vision.[4]

Notes

[1] See Zúquete, José Pedro "Beyond America: The rise of the European Alt-Right" in Contemporary Far-Right Thinkers and the Future of Liberal Democracy, edited by James McAdams and Alejandro Castrillon, London: Routledge, pp: 207-222

[2] For examples see, Zúquete, José Pedro The Identitarians: The Movement Against Globalism and Islam in Europe, Notre Dame University Press; Lawrence, David, Mulhall, Joe and Simon Murdoch, The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century, London: Routledge, 2020; Petra Mlejnková. 2021. "The Transnationalization of Ethno-nationalism. The Case of the Identitarian Movement," intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics, volume 7, no. 1, pp. 136-149; Richards, Imogen. 2022. "A Philosophical and Historical Analysis of "Generation Identity": Fascism, Online Media, and the European New Right," Terrorism and Political Violence, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 28-47; Nissen, Anita. 2022. Europeanisation of the Contemporary Far Right: Generation Identity and Fortress Europe, London: Routledge.

[3] See Brubaker, Rogers. 2017 "Between Nationalism and *Civilizationism*: The European populist moment in Comparative Perspective," Ethnic and Racial Studies, Volume 40, Issue 8, pp. 1191-1226; Also, Bassin, Mark. 2022. "'Real Europe', Civilizationism and the Far Right in Eastern Europe," in The Many Faces of the Far Right in the Post-Communist Space: A Comparative Study of Far-Right Movements and Identity in the Region, edited by Ninna Mörner, Huddinge: Södertörns högskol, pp. 15-22

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