

RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM: ALIENATION AND NEOLIBERALISM IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

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Master of Research in the Faculty of Arts**

**Tara Maree O'Neill
BA (Modern History, International Relations)
Department of Politics and International Relations
Faculty of Arts
Macquarie University
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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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Tara O'Neill

Date

ABSTRACT

Australian RWE has been under researched within the political discipline from the perspective of alienation and in the context of contemporary neoliberalism. Scholarship instead focus on broader studies of the far right and populist parties, with recent research being produced from counter-terrorism and security studies disciplines as opposed to the social sciences. Identified is a changing focus within RWE investigation and practice to apply political theory in a focus on the influence of structural and material conditions on extremists. Utilising a Marxist lens and Gramscian hegemony against the backdrop of the Australian neoliberal state, this thesis argues that RWE is a symptom of alienation experienced within a capitalist state, however this must be understood within the context of neoliberal capitalism and the challenges social and digital media create. Concepts such as ecofascism within Australian RWE are found to be indicative not only of far-right values but issues unique and central to mainstream Australia such as settler colonial legacies and national identity.

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THESIS INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to address the contemporary political phenomenon of right-wing extremism within the social, economic and political forces of this historical period while acknowledging the material conditions that have matured through centuries of globalisation and rapid technological advancement. The pervasiveness and complex nature of the digital age means the concept of alienation in digital labour and social media studies. However, the phenomenon of Australian right-wing extremism (RWE) itself is under researched outside of security studies and criminology disciplines despite it's connections with the digital space particularly through the rising Alt-right movements. Focus on RWE within Australia is also less extensive than in other industrialised neoliberal states such as the US and Europe. The most significant bodies of work in extremism in Australia are from outside the politics and international relations disciplines. This thesis also identifies within the literature review and in studies cited within the third chapter a shifting agenda within RWE academia and in the work of extremism prevention practitioners to focus on structural and material conditions in preventing and understanding extremism in general.

As such this research sits within not only a growing theoretical debate within political science as to the usefulness of a critical Marxist application of alienation but also in impressing the importance of a Marxist position at all when discussing Australian RWE as a political phenomenon. In discussing a Gramscian application of hegemony the social, political and economic context that both RWE actors and the broader far right discourse exists within is addressed. Themes such as ecofascism and colonial legacies that permeate contemporary RWE are addressed in the third chapter in order to begin to tackle the uniqueness of the Australian context. This is with the goal of discussing the thesis question posed as to whether contemporary RWE in Australia is a reaction to neoliberalism or whether it can be viewed as a natural progression of alienated and estranged workers under late capitalism. This thesis frames the question within the structuralist logic of the role of the state in maintaining neoliberalism, Australia's unique antipodean social, economic, historical and political context and Marxist alienation as renewed in critical theory. Ultimately, this framework posits that although

Australian RWE exists within a unique context in comparison to other nation-states which merits exploration, and the market first dominance of neoliberalism has indeed permeated neoliberal democracies, the underlying conditions which lead to extremism remain due to capitalism and explained via alienation.

CHAPTER 1 - LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction

The literature review will situate the political phenomenon of right-wing extremism (RWE) within the specific context of contemporary Australia with reference to the historical development and adoption of extremist ideologies amid mainstreaming of far-right discourses. Australian RWE sits within a post-colonial context that holds geographical, historical and regional implications. It also exists in an era of digital reach that enables these extremist networks infinite expansion within and beyond state borders. This digital environment that has become the focus of much scholarship on what is termed the alt-right, far-right or extreme-right and is also allowing new pathways of connecting online extremist behaviour and social capital to issues of labour and alienation. The consequences of increasing wealth disparity in the neoliberal era are not a uniquely Australian phenomenon, however the way in which it has impacted RWE groups and discourse call for assessing how this social, political, and economic context has developed in the Antipodes. The literature review will introduce themes that will be further explored in the third chapter of this thesis including ecofascism, alienation in online environments utilised by RWE and nuances of modern Australian society under neoliberal capitalism. The relevance and usefulness of framing REW against the societal backdrop of neoliberalism and neoliberal capitalism will be discussed. Lastly, a Marxist and Gramscian theoretical approach to RWE will be introduced to illustrate the potential of an alienation framework in connecting aspects of alienation, neoliberalism, and extremism in contemporary Australia. This thesis emphasises that it is the relationship between neoliberalism and alienation within contemporary Australia that is most relevant in understanding contemporary RWE and the structural conditions in which it exists.

This is to situate the thesis question posed as to whether contemporary RWE in Australia is a reaction to neoliberalism and how this can be viewed as a natural progression of alienation within a neoliberal capitalist society as opposed to previous periods such as regulated capitalism. The literature review frames RWE within

contemporary Australia, indicating that this under researched area contains a unique social, economic, historical, and political context. Most of the work in political science this area in Australia focuses on broader far right discourse and right-wing populist groups however RWE remains the focus within disciplines such as counter terrorism, security studies and criminology. There is also growing inquiry and a renewal of interest in a Marxist application of alienation and its application in social and political issues (Overseen 2021; Evans 2022). Given that globalisation, technological development and growing economic crises only increase the enduring concept of alienation within its myriad forms and interpretations will only increase in academic investigation across different disciplines (Kalekin-Fishman et al. 2015, p. 927). Relevant to the study of alienation, the unique characteristics of neoliberal capitalism in comparison to earlier periods such as regulated capitalism are highly criticised within RWE narratives and also instrumental in understanding what larger societal issues.

Recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent protests have reinvigorated focus in RWE particularly in the United States, however there remains a significant research gap in addressing these events from a structuralist perspective within a Marxist lens in an Australian setting. Particularly in framing the actions of RWE groups from the perspective of alienation and as a response to neoliberalism. There is a tendency to focus on RWE within the lens of security studies, while political theorists focus on broader far right movements as opposed to RWE specifically.¹ This introduces the research gap this literature review and subsequent chapters will illustrate and the potential framework for further inquiry into Australian RWE. For example, although RWE in the Antipodes is not as extensive or destructive as some international examples it also operates as a case study of what a neoliberal state that carries a complex colonial past may produce on its fringes.

1.2 Situating Right-Wing Extremism in the Australian context

¹ This identified research gap is discussed and explained further in the literature review however please note examples such as the leading theorists specifically focusing on RWE are from Australian security studies such as Campion (2019, 2021, 2022), Hutchinson (2021), Gillespie (2020). Additionally Australian theorists who focus on populism and far-right movements such as Moffit (2017), Sengul (2021), Busbridge (2020).

According to leading counter-terrorism theorist Campion (2022), historically the roots of the extreme-right in Australia can be separated into two different categories: international fascism and grassroots ethnonationalism. After the economic uncertainty of the first world war extreme-right ideologies such as fascism and nationalist socialism/Nazism would also begin to gain traction among communities not only abroad but within Australia (ibid 2022, p.212). Unlike other terrorism threats, the goals of the extreme right have been driven by a vision to fundamentally alter the political and democratic order in Australia, transforming it into an authoritarian state that enforced societal conformity at the expense of personal freedoms and alienate ethnic and religious minorities in Australia (Campion 2022, p. 238). RWE groups in Australia have origins in being both international and domestic, maintaining and developing connections with the extreme right globally (ibid 238).

Australia's multiculturalism is often touted as a success however uneasy tensions within the far-right have been demonstrated in recent decades. The arrest and imprisonment of the extreme-far right figures in the 1990s did not dispel the ideologies which persisted in fragmented subcultures that would arise throughout the 90's and 2000's however the mainstreaming of these discourses would increase drastically after the events of September 11th, 2001, in the wake of the new 'War on Terror' with the enemies of the extreme far right expanding to include all Muslims and those of middle Eastern appearance. Permanent socioeconomic insecurities fostered by neoliberalism also assisted in providing an opening for the far-right through popular racialized narratives of solidarity and belonging (Saul 2018, p. 589). One of the most infamous examples of this amid community tensions is still the Cronulla riots in which a series of text message chains organised a plan to gather at Cronulla beach in a show of force of white Australians against ethnic Australians with 5000 people gathered in the violent clash. The magnification of this by shock jocks such as Alan Jones who repeated text messages on air such as "Come to Cronulla this weekend to take revenge. This Sunday every Aussie in the shire get down to North Cronulla to support the leb and wog bashing day" and inflamed the situation calling Middle Eastern Australians "grubs" and stating, "we don't have Anglo-Saxon kids out there raping women in Western Sydney" (Campion 2022, p. 362). Not only did the event highlight the role of tabloids and mainstream media in a violent racially motivated attack but the Howard government of the day refused to recognise that racism may have been a factor and did not adequately

address the contribute of white supremacist groups (Campion 2022, p. 363). The Australian government's move to maintain social cohesion and an assertion of law and Australian values in 'solving' antagonisms such as these, however these values like modernity, liberal democracy and secular humanism remain vaguely defined as does the 'great success' of Australian multiculturalism (Lewis et al 2019, p. 974).

As it is often used interchangeably with RWE within discussion, the term alt-right can be understood as an umbrella term for radical right social movements active primarily within anglophone states (Ganesh 2020, p. 892). In Australia specifically, assessments of the most active RWE groups emphasise the new 'radical right' is not a homogenous movement, instead, the different groups are positioned on a wide ideological spectrum of extremism. This includes conservative anti-immigration, anti-Islam groups, far-right, neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic and white supremacist groups (Dean et al 2016, p. 139). A thematic analysis of contemporary RWE manifestos and statements led Campion (2019, p. 212) to identify two primary discourses within Australian RWE ideology, the first being ethnocentric discourses that elevate a white identity tied to colonialism posited against the risk of immigration and multiculturalism. The second narrative being structural discourses where the current political and economic system is defined as 'dysfunctional and oppressive'. Australian government agencies such as the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) single out isolated actors as opposed to cohesive right-wing extremist groups. The director's 2022 Annual threat assessment posits

"we are seeing individuals and groups that don't fit on the left-right spectrum...instead they're motivated by a fear of societal collapse or a specific social or economic grievance".

This thesis' intention to connect alienation and neoliberalism within the Australian context identifies with this second identified narrative of the disillusionment of the current political and economic system, with the aim that interrogating how neoliberalism impacts Australian RWE may provide insights such as how some forms of extremism are still inherently connected.

Additionally, as outlined in the introduction, in not approaching RWE in Australia from a Marxist or structuralist perspective within the context of neoliberalism, existing approaches may miss situating this within a uniquely Australian context shaped by

political, economic and social factors. These themes are already being highlighted in existing studies such as the above that link the clashing of RWE and mainstream values in Sweden or in the level of acceptance of right-wing ideology such as in the Australian-Canadian study. Although existing approaches certainly consider environmental and social factors (Campion 2019; Hutchinson 2020) they generally remain observations that are not extrapolated into reviewing specific structural conditions such as increasing inequality. For example historical factors and context are considered in works by leading RWE experts such as Campion (2022) in a review of the history of terrorism within Australia, however there remains that research gap in analysing RWE groups beyond a descriptive account by applying political theory. This thesis aims to build a theoretical case for examining RWE in this way in future empirical applications.

1.3 Counter-terrorism, security studies and policy discourse

There is in recent years a new emphasis within counter terrorism and policy discourse for the need of widening the scope of what counts as ‘violent extremism’ in Australia in the current climate of alt-right and populist actors that draw on ideas of national chauvinism and traditional ideas in both public and private spheres. Reports such as the recent Victorian parliament inquiry into RWE in Victoria found that far-right and anti-feminist sentiment are mutually reinforcing and feeds into ‘aggrieved entitlement’, anger towards ‘the system’ and a normalisation of extreme views of women and gender (Agius et al 2022, p. 2). These sentiments are highly visible in online RWE networks both domestically and internationally based and will be reviewed further in the third chapter of this thesis in the context of alienation, neoliberalism and the Australian context.

Measures and policies introduced in western democracies to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism (PRVE) and while initially developed to counteract international Islamist terrorism these measures now impact a large range of single issue movements such as animal rights, environmentalism, separatism as well as militant Islamic extremism (MIE), right wing extremism (RWE) and left wing extremism (LWE) (Jamte & Ellefsen 2020 p. 192). A Swedish study of PRVE practitioners found they positioned their interpretation of the type of extremism they were facing depending on what clashed the most with mainstream values in Sweden. Practitioners expressed that values

associated with LWE were radicalised mainstream values and therefore more legitimate in a liberal democracy, while MIE and then RWE clashed the most (Jamte & Ellefsen 2020, p.208). However some interviewees noted that values associated with RWE groups had become more widespread and normalised in Sweden and other European countries which meant that people from RWE milieus did not face the same level of exclusion they did a couple of decades ago from the general public (Jamte et al 2020, p. 209).

Australian right-wing groups are located within their own socio-historic and political context which characterise both the movement itself which dictates whether a society tolerates, acknowledges or accepts a social movements ideology, behaviour and objectives or rejects these values (Hutchinson et al 2021, p. 19). In a cross-national comparative analysis of 59 Australian and Canadian RWE groups on Facebook, it was found that as the Australian RWE groups overwhelming preference for passive online engagement this suggests they perceive themselves to be in an environment that is more accepting of important aspects of Australian right-wing ideology and objectives. Conversely in the Canadian groups they used more active forms of online engagement as to increase social mobilisation (Hutchinson et al 2021, p. 20). As the findings from studies such as the above illustrate the importance of situating RWE within its historic-socio context in order to understand how their actions reflect the wider society in which they operate.

1.4 Antipodean populism and the settler-colonial context

RWE needs to be discussed in a broader context of far-right movements, populism and right-wing politics in order to be understood within modern Australia. For example, Australia embodies a unique ‘antipodean populism’ that grapples with the legacy of settler-colonial violence and a multicultural future (Moffit 2017, p. 15). Populists in Australia seek to protect the existing wealth, political rights, and the status of “the people”, generally along a rural/urban divide that sees the land and suburbs as white and cities as multicultural (Moffit 2017, p. 13). Right-wing populism has also tended to dehumanise those considered non-peoples (Fisher 2020, p. 388). Similarly, Australian RWE’s empathize ethnocentric narratives of white identity, and white heritage and seek to impose an ‘authentic white nativism’ on an immigrant nation (Campion 2019, p.

208). The mainstreaming of populism in the politics of contemporary Australia means that populist parties have trouble distinguishing themselves from the major parties who are appropriating issues around immigration and cultural identity themselves (Moffit 2017, p. 7). Additionally, right-wing populist discourses have become increasingly present in the mainstream media, which remains a tool utilised in broadcasting far-right ideological propaganda. An example of this is the Australian national news broadcaster Channel seven being granted “exclusive access to a secret meeting” with “right-wing activist” leaders of far-right groups United Patriots Front and True-Blue Crew to discuss the “African gang crisis” (Hutchinson 2019, p. 5). As such is difficult to speak about RWE specifically without acknowledging its place within a larger spectrum of far-right movements, radical right, ‘alt right’ and more mainstream right-wing discourses within media and politics in Australia and internationally. Australia does experience transnationalisation of extremist ideas from the fringes of the American far right however while internet and social media are often framed as the primary drivers of this, the relationship between mainstream news media and online media is a symbiotic one not to be underestimated (Busbridge et al 2020, p. 724). This unique Australian context lends to the argument that the social, economic, historical and political context is relevant when situating RWE in the neoliberal era.

1.5 Environmental politics and RWE

“I think the only thing scarier than a far-right, racist movement that denies the reality of climate change is a far-right, racist movement that doesn’t deny the reality of climate change.” – Naomi Klein, 2019

“...the environment is being destroyed by over population, we Europeans are one of the groups that are not overpopulating the world...The invaders are the ones overpopulating the world. Kill the invaders, kill the overpopulation and by doing so save the environment.” - Brenton Tarrant’s ‘The Great Replacement’ 2019

A developing area of academic research in environmental politics of climate change and sustainability that connects with the increasingly dystopian themes touted by RWE actors is that of ecofascism. Environmental and climate politics in connection with the

far right has also taken centre stage in political and social commentary amid the growing global climate crisis as renowned author and climate activist Klein (2019) highlights in the above quote in an interview discussing the far right's embrace of white supremacy in connection with the climate crisis. Due to its multiculturalism, waves of immigration, and settler-colonial history, Australia serves as a fertile environment to draw on ecofascists' goals of restoring their ecological harmony based on racial segregation. This kind of thought is demonstrated in the words of the Christchurch terrorist perpetrator Brenton Tarrant; self-labelled ecofascist. This is due to the increasing activity of ecofascists in the far-right space both online and offline, both internationally and in Australia and NZ region. Ecofascism within the Australian context is a 'reactionary and revolutionary' ideology that pursues the regeneration of an imagined white Australian people through a return to a romanticised vision of the natural order (Campion 2021, p. 2). Just as RWE study sits within a broader web of far-right, radical-right and right-wing politics focuses, similarly the concept of ecofascism has been criticised as an insufficient notion to account for the complexity of the far-right and needs to include overlapping aspects such as national populism and conservatism (Balsa-Lbubarda 2020, p. 2). In this way there is again an emphasis on the need for connecting themes within RWE with intersecting concepts.

Ecofascists argue that the unnatural forces of modernity such as industrialisation, urbanisation, materialism and individualism, immigration and multiculturalism have disrupted an imaginary and romanticised ecological harmony that exists in a mythical past (Campion 2021, p. 2). RWE groups and actors that embody ecofascist ideals provide an example of the contradictions within these movements and the narratives posited align with an increasingly catastrophic reality of late capitalism and estrangement of alienated workers. These are also themes characteristic of the themes of the broader political right within Australia. The concept of cities as multicultural and the country as white is concealed in the rural/urban split, and this concept of "mainstream" Australians continues to characterise antipodean populism (Moffit 2017, p.11). As it characterises mainstream media and politics in Australia it is also present within RWE materials such as Brenton Tarrant's manifesto 'The Great Replacement'. Critical inquiries into Tarrant's manifesto argue that he provides support for left-leaning economics such as greater unionisation of workers and increase in the minimum wage in neoliberal western countries (Eshan et al 2020, p.6). Tarrant also criticises cheap

labour into western countries as encouraged by the profit-driven interests of private capital subsequently placing 'narrative populations under demographic and cultural threat (ibid). This clear link between RWE materials, Australia's multicultural context and the material consequences of neoliberalism will be further investigated in the third chapter to frame the contemporary context in which this groups still operate.

1.6 Neoliberalism

The term neoliberalism was coined by Austrian economists Friedrich von Hayek and Ludwig Von Mises in 1938. Today, neoliberalism is a somewhat debated term however as a political philosophy it is the view that a society's political and economic institutions should be strongly liberal and capitalist, supplemented by a constitutionally limited democracy with a small welfare state (Vallier 2021, para 1). Neoliberals are democratic but stress that limitations of democracy should be in protecting freedom and promoting economic prosperity while being sceptical of what they deem excessive government regulation and spending (ibid). 2) This is the definition of neoliberalism or neoliberal thinking the thesis discusses. In Australia, the recent COVID pandemic has emphasised the mantra of "personal responsibility" in communications from public health authorities and government with critics noting the economic barriers of purchasing masks, overly broad campaigns or COVID tests mean that an Australian's income and postcode determines their safety during the pandemic (King 2022, para).

Globally, there continues to be a surge in regressive and emancipatory right-wing responses to the crisis of financialised capitalism resulting in the rejection of neoliberal policy and hegemony amid issues of social inequity, poverty, and suspicion of existing political and economic structures (Fraser 2018, p. 77). Discussion around the rising of a universal new right has also been debated as either counter-hegemonic to, or a condition of, the economic globalisation under neoliberalism (Worth 2014, p. 153). In Marxism, ideology is reduced to bourgeois ideology and used to maintain and legitimatise the unequal and exploitative relationship between the dominant and subordinate classes and in doing so conceals real genuine social contradictions while normalising and naturalising class domination and exploitation (Cammaerts 2015, p. 525). Harvey (2007) outlines how principles of neoliberalism like freedom and liberty are abandoned

when they conflict with the class project. For example, the transformation of the US Republican party where a large segment of a disaffected, insecure, and largely white working-class was ‘persuaded’ to vote consistently against its material interests on cultural (anti-liberal, antiblack, antifeminist and antigay) nationalist and religious grounds (Harvey 2007, p. 30). Marxists would argue that the unequal power distribution in neoliberal democracies is not a new phenomenon however in comparison to previous periods of capitalism, neoliberalism’s evolving nature which will be further discussed in the theoretical chapter and with further contextual examples in the third chapter of the thesis.

Humphry’s (2019) periodises stages of neoliberalism in Australian history into four phases to allow analytical separation of different historical periods of change and to account for the local, international and the changing strength of a neoliberal hegemony (p 75). These stages include a proto-neoliberal stage from 1973-1983, a vanguard neoliberal stage from 1983-1993, a neoliberalisation stage from 1993-2008 and a neoliberal crisis stage from 2008 onwards (Humphrys 2019, p.77). In their focus on the state-civil society relationship to investigate the association between the Price and Incomes accord and the neoliberal project in Australia; Humphry’s’ emphasises the separation and dialectical unity of the state and civil society to make their approach applicable to modern states of advanced capitalism (2019, p.19). Stages of neoliberalism have also been framed as an institutional form of capitalism presiding from approximately 1980 and replacing an earlier form of regulated capitalism. This was accompanied by economic and social deregulation and results in the disappearing of the ‘middle class’ (Kotz 2018). This relationship between civil society and state will be further expanded upon in the following theoretical chapter as well as the relevance of comparing regulated capitalism and neoliberal capitalism stages in investigating Australian RWE.

1.7 Marxism and Gramsci within the far-right

‘Gramsci understood the need of culture as an undercurrent... you have high tide and low tide and these are somewhat like the polls we experience with our

several political movements. But we need to get to the underside... the stream under the tides... the deep stream, where power can be institutionalised in a much more stable manner...we're creating not just a political narrative and political alliances, but cultural and societal alliances' – Thierry Baudet (leader of Forum voor Democratie) 2019

Increasingly international right-wing intellectuals refer to Gramscian ideas to support their own arguments, in what has been termed 'right-wing Gramscianism'. Thierry Baudet, leader of the Dutch right wing populist party Forum voor Democratie, self-proclaimed nationalist and conservative refers and quotes Gramsci in October 2019 as above. Baudet is described as waging a hegemonic battle in breaking open the political order from the inside (Sioen 2021, para 1). Where there is admiration for Gramscian or Marxist applications there is also criticism and a desire to push a narrative of a small critical left against a wider mainstream Australian community and this is demonstrative of the wide range of beliefs and ideologies within the global far right movements. Hostility towards minorities is evident in the trans nationalisation of the conspiracy of 'Cultural Marxism', the narrative in which a small group of Marxist critical theorists conspire to destroy Western civilisation, which has spread from the fringes of the American far-right has been embraced across the spectrum of the contemporary right and invoked by far-right figures in the United Kingdom and Hungary as well as Australia (Busbridge 2020, p. 723).

The commodification of politics and social services has increased cynicism and apathy towards neoliberal elites while encouraging popular resentments based on the specific social policies that recognise women, migrants, and the poor. Critical theory as a post-Marxist discourse is a category of academic thought that involves theoretical scholarship which interrogates the structures and discourses of power. Hegemony is the conception of societal power not as a forceful power but rather one that operates based on the consent of the governed that flows based on historical moments or blocs and when hegemony is weak other cultural groups may create their own hegemonic principles (Garlitz et al 2021, p. 4). A further unpacking of hegemony with a Marxist-Gramsci approach will be extended in the theoretical chapter in order to demonstrate its usefulness in application to RWE in the third chapter.

1.8 Alienation

‘The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him.’ - Karl Marx 1844

The concept and application of alienation within scholarship continues to be debated and it remains a concept applied and understood differently within different disciplines. Marx’s reworking of the Hegelian dialectic from the realm of ideas to its material foundations in political economy and application of alienation allowed a socio-political interpretation of this term beyond a label of a distressed psychological state (Kalekin-Fishman et al 2015b, p. 918). However, the concept of alienation even if viewed specifically in a Marxist lens itself has not developed in a linear manner, which is also attributed to late publication of previously unknown texts containing Marx’s reflections of alienation (Musto 2010, p. 80). Within this thesis alienation is presented as an inevitable consequence of capitalist society and it’s key relevance is how it serves to flesh out alienation within a neoliberal period characterised by unprecedented digital access which is approached in detail in later chapters. The position of an individual feeling alienated or lonely is often cited as a predicator for radicalisation or recruitment within counter-terrorist theory however the capital-labour relationship explained within alienation theory posits the view that every individual under capitalism is already alienated.

After the second world war, critiques of mass media and consumerism expanded applications of alienation to the sphere of consumption. Marcuse (1969 quoted by - Fishman & Langman 2015, p. 919) argues that late capitalism was calculated to incorporate individuals into an ‘administered society’ in which the individual was alienates from their real needs and instead chose between hedonism, consumerism or sexuality instead of liberation. Archibald (2009) found that with the increasing significance of leisure and consumption led to workers centring the place of work less, caring less about work and therefore less alienated and deprived. At the same time as

consumption became commercialised, mass produced and not within individuals control aspirations can be frustrated and alienation enhanced.

Theories of alienation can generally be divided into two main strands: the Hegelian/Marxist investigating capitalist societies and labour and the existentialist discourse. One of the first major work since the 1970's on alienation was in Jaeggi's 2014 book which combines these methods defending the importance of the concept with a focus on ethical philosophical critique, while moving away from a sociological analysis of political economy and socioeconomic causes such as capitalism/wage labour (Kalekin-Fishman & Langman 2015, p. 924). Jaeggi proposes that alienation can be understood instead as a particular form of the loss of positive freedom and that the problem of freedom and alienation is centrally concerned with ways of appropriating one's own life (2014, p. 36).

However, rather than conceiving alienation as an inherent component of social organisation a renewed Marxist approach explains alienation as the specific outcome of capitalist mode of production and stresses the importance of an analysis of capitalism distinct from sociological descriptions (Oversveen 2022, p. 452). In reference to his 1844 Manuscripts, Marx's account can imply that alienation is not a purely negative or critical concept and does comply with the totality the moral interpretation implies (Marx 1975, 388 quoted by Sayers 2011, p. 293). Further to this, the stage of alienation can exist within the process of emancipation as the stressful state of alienation drives the potential for a higher unified form of society (Sayers 2011, p. 293). In this way alienation cannot be interpreted as an abstract and universal moral concept as it is a historically specific condition inherently linked to capitalist conditions of labour (Ibid, p. 302). Further to this, in structuralist theories, alienation is understood as an inevitable outcome of the social order whether individuals are aware of their situation or not (Kalekin-Fishman & Langman 2015). In the example of social media in which users are creating value by communicating, exchanging media like photos as alienation decreases, exploitation increases as does emphasis on individualistic entrepreneurship (Faucher 2018, p. 65). The increase in user productivity aligns with many of the virtues of neoliberal capitalism: workers who are malleable and atomised as opposed to fixed, secure and united by solidarity and collectivity. This, in turn, opens up more opportunities for the capitalist to engage in exploitative behaviour.

1.9 Conclusion

This literature review has addressed the relevant literature within the discourse around broader far right movements internationally and domestically within an Australian context. It has introduced related concepts such as ecofascism, digital alienation and the importance of viewing RWE as uniquely situated in Australia's social, political, historical context. These concepts will be further explored in subsequent chapters in the effort to illustrate the potential within the gap in political approaches can deepen understanding of this phenomenon's connection to neoliberal society. In referencing the current shift within security studies literature to viewing wider structural conditions experienced by extremists as important in preventing radicalisation the review shows that a Gramscian application of hegemony is increasingly relevant in understanding Australian RWE.

The following chapter will continue to organise this theoretical framework within the sphere of alienation, hegemony and neoliberalism drawing on Marxist and Gramscian theory. In the third chapter of the thesis the narratives outlined by RWE groups and present in Australia will be shown to align with the symptoms of late capitalism, alienation, and the consequences of neoliberalism. The literature review has indicated that the discourse surrounding RWE in Australia is undergoing a period of renewed focus on structural conditions when approaching extremists as practitioners and in security studies and that this approach should also be reflected within the politics discipline by reflecting on the material conditions of neoliberalism. Change within applications of hegemony and especially alienation within Marxist and critical theory inquiry but also within policy and security approaches to combatting RWE on structural fronts accepting the relevance of material conditions in radicalisation and extremism prevention.

Chapter 2 - THEORETICAL

2.1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to address the contemporary political phenomenon of right-wing extremism within the social, economic and political forces of the current historical period while acknowledging the material conditions that have matured through centuries of globalisation and increasingly rapid technological development. As

discussed in the literature review, the complexity of the digital age means the concept of alienation in digital labour and social media remains a burgeoning discussion across humanities disciplines. However, the phenomenon of Australian RWE itself is under researched outside of security studies and criminology disciplines in comparison to other states. As illustrated there exists a significant body of literature on the far right in Australia, however the most significant bodies of work in extremism are from outside the politics and international relations discipline. As such this research sits within not only a growing theoretical debate within political science as to the usefulness of a critical Marxist application of alienation but also in impressing the importance of a Marxist position at all when discussing Australian RWE as a political phenomenon. Instead of diagnosing, predicting, and profiling individual extremists, it addresses the social, political and economic context that both RWE actors and the broader far right discourse exists within.

This is with the goal of discussing the thesis question posed as to whether contemporary RWE in Australia is a reaction to neoliberalism or whether it can be viewed as a natural progression of alienated and estranged workers under late capitalism. This thesis frames the question within the structuralist logic of the role of the state in maintaining neoliberalism, Australia's unique antipodean social, economic, historical and political context and Marxist alienation as renewed in critical theory. Ultimately, this framework posits that although Australian RWE exists within a unique context in comparison to other nation-states which merits exploration, and the market first dominance of neoliberalism has indeed permeated neoliberal democracies, the underlying conditions which lead to extremism remain due to capitalism and explained via alienation.

2.2 Neoliberalism

'Here we see an emerging symbiotic relationship between one increasingly inadequate regime response to the problems of capital accumulation and another increasingly extreme response to the most irrational desires and prejudices produced by capital accumulation' – Davidson and Saull 2017

As discussed in the literature review, neoliberal ideology embraces a highly individualistic concept of society. The revival of the far right as a force within electoral politics is based on its apparent economic solutions to waves of crisis that have left the working class fragmented and disorganised. The far right appeals to voters by positioning themselves outside the consensus and their influence over mainstream right parties causes damage to the stability of the capitalist system inadvertently such as the UK 'Brexit' from the European union or the halt in migration from Mexico with the Trump presidency (Davidson 2017 p. 13). Neoliberal ideology glorifies market relations as the pathway not only to allocating resources efficiently but to human freedom which is identified as free choice among alternatives in markets without any constraint or coercion (Kotz 2018, p. 2).

The neoliberal view of the state is paradoxical in that the market relations and private property that it idealises requires and assumes a state actor, as private property does not exist in nature and requires a state or institution to protect it (Kotz 2018, p. 2). Neoliberal ideology therefore does not call for no state but advocates for a state with limited functions pertaining only to the protection of private property and the enforcement of contracts, maintaining the order necessary for market relations and providing state national defence (Kotz 2018, p.2) The role of the state is essential in framing the connection of neoliberalism to far right movements and extremism in Australia. Criticism on the commodification of politics and social policy is often directed to neoliberal states such as the United States with commercial prisons and lacklustre social welfare program. This commodification of politics and social services in developed countries has rendered populations vulnerable not only to neoliberalism but to right wing populism and discourse (Putzel 2020, p. 422). It is within this environment enabled by the state in Australia that forms the framework in which RWE and 'extremist' discourse that is often found in the mainstream, is able to operate. The Gramscian understanding of the state is "the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (Gramsci 1929-35 p. 22). In this way, the state is not a unitary actor but instead a mechanism to ensure compliance. A socio-cultural authoritarianism that embraces anti-elite populism or anti-establishment discourse characterizes most of contemporary RWE discourse and there is a division from support for the state on some matters. RWEs groups, for instance, will

view the state as "an enemy of the people" if it tries to impose coercive measures against libertarian populist beliefs (de Lint & Praino 2022, p. 3). RWEs will want to see more action taken by governments, especially the federal government, to address perceived crime rates, support rural issues, and, through links to right-wing populism, support the military and defence. They will want to see less action taken by governments to provide resources and services to improve urban infrastructure and poverty (de Lint & Praino 2022, p.3).

2.3 Neo-liberal capitalism and alienation

Capitalism is an economic and social order developed in Europe following the feudal order at the end of the Middle Ages and which developed into industrial capitalism during the 18th and 19th centuries through technological advances and high concentrations of capital (Jaeggi 2016, p. 46). Marx's critique of capitalism attempts to explain the normative faults of capitalism beneath the objective and impersonal cover of the capitalist economy and the contractual relations of civil society. (Jaeggi 2016, p. 57). If Neoliberalism is conceptualised as a historical variant of capitalism it is based on the exploitation of one class by another and maintain the interests of the ruling class. In Marxism, ideology is reduced to bourgeois ideology and used to maintain and legitimise the unequal and exploitative relationship between the dominant and subordinate classes and in doing so conceals real genuine social contradictions while normalising and naturalising class domination and exploitation (Cammaerts 2015, p. 525). As capitalism develops the social and technological basis of production are increasingly reshaped into forms compatible with capital's economic interests. This is not only the development of machinery in the industrial revolution to increase productivity of labour and commodification of emotions, but the creation of a neoliberal subject compelled to view their own capabilities and relationships in terms of market value (Overseen 2021 quoting Foucault 2008; Harvey 2017; Hochschild 2011). In Marxist thought, alienation is grounded in the relationship between labour and capital with products being estranged from producers in two ways: appropriated as private property and transformed into a social force that operates outside the producers control and against their interests (Overseen, 2021 p. 447).

Neoliberal capitalism became the dominant form in the world beginning around 1980 and replaced the earlier form of capitalism that had prevailed through post WWII era through to the 1970s. Previously states, trade unions and corporate bureaucracies had played the major role in regulating economic activity confining market forces to a lesser role (Humphrys 2018). In neoliberal capitalism the capital-labour class relation takes the form of capital striving to fully dominate labour and there is no compromise as there is under the previous regulated capitalism period. Economic deregulation was accompanied by social deregulation, referring to the loosening of environmental, occupational safety, consumer product safety regulations and the privatisation of public functions such as selling of state-owned enterprises. Conceiving capitalism as not only an institutionalised social order but as a historical social order that changes over time and embodies different characteristics as it moves through new regimes of accumulation. Regulated capitalism of which the same period approximately is referred to as state-managed capitalism by Fraser. In contrast to today's neoliberal capitalism or 'financialised' capitalism which Fraser describes as a regime of universalised expropriation (Fraser & Jaeggi 2018).

Marx located the distinct separation between the state and civil society and that between political and social relations as emerging historically with the rise of capitalist modernity (Humphrys 2018, p. 24). This collapse of Keynesian social-democratic consensus would mean Gramsci's reworking of Hegelian and Marxist ideas would become increasingly applicable in the neoliberal era (ibid, p.29). Australian enterprises such as Telstra, the Commonwealth Bank and Qantas have been privatised since the late 1980s as well as areas such as prison and immigration detention centres, accompanied by deregulation and increasingly minimal government intervention or oversight (Miragliotta et al 2016, p.119). Australian political commentators such as former Labor treasurer Wayne Swan argue that the Hawke/Keating agenda cannot be simplified purely as neoliberal but as 'Australian Laborism' predating the third Way ideology and focusing on activist fiscal policy and commitment to full employment (Swan 2017). Within the period preceding neoliberal capitalism the thought of separation and antagonism between state and civil society would have seemed unrealistic from their experience of mass trade unions, electorally successful social democratic parties and large scale intervention in capitalist economic life (Humphrys 2018, p. 29).

When viewing Australian period now it is useful to position this contemporary period this against the regulated period as comparative context. Although there was still inequality within regulated capitalism era, the disappearing middle class formed within the neoliberal era as a small part of the wage-earning class did well while the vast majority did not. The encouraged solidarity among workers under regulated capitalism is not present within the neoliberal capitalism period which promotes individual pursuit of self-interest at the expense of others which tends to lead to wage inequality (Davidson 2017).

2.4 Marx, Gramsci and hegemony

Dialectical materialism is the philosophical foundation of Marxism that regards reality as a single historical process of material development unified by its material constitution and connections. However isolated individual segments and aspects may be they continue to maintain essential relations with one another and with the historical process as a whole (Novack 1940). Marx's dialectical method allowed him to argue for a new kind of politics that can overcome alienation, secure human freedom and overcome the divided existence of humanity in making politics imminent to social life (Sneider 2016). In Gramsci's working of this concept, the integral state idea, according to Gramsci, explained the specific interaction between the state (political society and the state apparatus) and civil society (atomized social interests and their relationships). Instead of viewing the integral state as a "identity" between the two (i.e., identical to one another) or as a "fusion" (i.e., different yet united), he saw it as a dialectical unity (Humphrys 2018, p. 31). Civil society and political society are better understood as distinct sites of social practice rather than as geographical locations. Civil society is the setting for hegemonic practise, whereas political society is the location of direct domination. Gramsci is endeavouring to think through the state question explicitly in advanced capitalist countries, where there is a more complicated interaction of economic, political, and institutional forms to create a "integral unity of capitalist state power." In this way, processes of consent (hegemony) in civil society are just as significant to the integral state model as blatantly coercive state rule (domination) (Humphrys 2018, p. 31).

According to Marx the state is an integral part of class society that is not capable of standing neutrally and benevolently above all particular interests. The state is only necessary due to the antagonisms class societies generate and sustain among individuals, who come together only within an illusion of a political community and pseudo solidarity, illustrated by the reality that the powerful and wealthy within this system have the power to sway the state to their own interests (Horowitz 2010). Further to this, the argument has been posed by theorists that the very notion of hegemony itself in relation to neoliberalism and the capitalist values it embodies has led to a post-hegemonic status of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism exists as a natural and invisible state of affairs, concealed by liberal media, while liberal democracy becomes increasingly geared towards protecting capitalism and property rights above citizen interests (Cammaerts 2015, p. 523).

Gramsci introduced the concept of hegemony to explain the conundrum Marxists had previously struggled with which was why do the majority accept their subordinate position and obvious exploitation willingly (Cammaerts 2015, p. 525). Hegemony operates not as a coercive or forceful power but rather power that operates on the basis of consent of the governed, ebbing and flowing throughout historical blocs. In this way while internet and social media can easily be framed as the primary drivers of far-right discourse within Australia or elsewhere the relationship between mainstream news media and online media is symbiotic. Some of the most pervasive and prominent points have been made by conservative right-wing actors within mainstream media and politics e.g. the Safe schools program. As such far right tropes and ideas within Australia gain momentum beyond the fringes (Busbridge et al 2020, p. 724). As Cox (1983, p.162) has reflected on, Gramsci's reflections are always considering his own historical context, this is the strength of his "historicity". In this way, within this argument it is important as to not consider RWE in Australia in a vacuum. When viewing conditions of alienation in a digital age, accelerated during the recent pandemic period, there will be differences with other far right extremist movements throughout other historical periods in Australia. While Marx held Hegel as the most advanced theorist of the modern state he challenged the idea that the state could truly express universal social interest mediated between a civil society of particular interests and the modern representative state (Humphrys 2018 p.24). Instead he argued that the state legislature was incapable

of bridging the divide between individual and universal interests, instead emphasising the contradiction that the state itself is also a competing interest.

Disillusionment with the current political and economic system as “dysfunctional and oppressive” is a discourse also identified within contemporary RWE manifestos and statements (Campion 2019, p. 223). One theorist Gillespie asserts that an important characteristic of far-right ethnic groups within Australia is the emergence of a different kind of nationalism from preceding groups labelled “defence nationalism”. Defence nationalists’ primary goal is not to realise their political projects but instead to construct themselves as self-ordained “privileged subjects that do the nation’s defending” (2020a, p. 998). Gillespie (2020b) argues that subjects are not pre-existing individuals belonging to a particular group or class who have been alienated by neoliberalism, instead, individuals are formed by processes of neoliberalism itself. Using Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, he argues that it can be explained that by using fantasies of law and nation defence nationalists elevate the nation to the status of the “Other” – the guarantor of knowledge and meaning, while attempting to alleviate their own neoliberal anxiety (Gillespie 2020b, p. 83). Through attempts to defend the nation they forge a communion with other “defenders” in which they imagine themselves as privileged hyper national subjects (Gillespie 2020a, p. 998). It is therefore because of the nation’s insecurity they find their own created security within their defender role.

Instead of conceiving alienation as an inherent part of human agency or social organisation the Marxist approach within this thesis insists on explaining alienation as the specific result of capitalist mode of production (Overseen 2021, p. 452). Marx also accepted Hegel’s claim that we are alienated because of a flaw in our society (Evans 2021, p.129). As such instead of an existential concept of alienation or a focus on the individual via psychoanalysis a focus on material productions and relations may explain RWE’s development within Australia and potential connection to neoliberalism. An example would be the argument that within neoliberal societies individuals are not equally free because most can be compelled to make inequitable contracts with capitalists to secure a living and this is intrinsically linked to power asymmetries with owning property (Lepori 2019, p. 469). When discussing a contemporary RWE group situated within contemporary Australia’s asset economy then the behaviour of these defence nationalists will differ from other nation-states and through historical periods of

capitalism. In defence nationalism contemporary RWE, far right and defence league groups are argued to have liberated themselves from appropriation by constructing this parallel nation of which they are the only subject.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony was influenced not only by Marx, the Italian socialists, the early international communist movement, Croce, Machiavelli but his own reading of historical and social reality such as Jacobinism which he extends from the French revolutionary movement to others (Boothman 2008, p. 213). Since his approach encapsulates these different aspects and emphasises the relevance of the current historical period it is useful in highlighting the need to view RWE within this specific contemporary context in Australia. A critical theory of hegemony brings attention to questioning the established order of the world while calling institutions and social and power relations and their origins into question (Cox 1981, p. 129). Reality is not the physical environment of human action but also the institutional and ideological context that shapes thoughts and actions with hegemony filtering through structures of society, economy, culture, gender, ethnicity and class (Bieler 2004, p. 87). Passive revolution indicates how 'restoration becomes the first policy whereby social struggles find sufficiently elastic frameworks to allow the bourgeoisie to gain power without dramatic upheavals' (Morton 2007 quoting Gramsci 1975).

Gramsci understood hegemony as a process whereby the dominant class in society reaches a harmonious relationship with the lower or 'subaltern' classes by regulating the norms and conditions embedded in society thereby achieving stability under these unequal forms of capitalist production (Worth 2014 p. 158). Gramsci is proposing to think through the state question explicitly in advanced capitalist countries, where there is a more complicated interaction of economic, political, and institutional forms to create an "integral unity of capitalist state power." Hegemonic consent is only attained when it wins the hearts and minds of a public, as Gramsci emphasised in his classic analyses of civil and political society. At the levels of civil and political life, a "war of position" represents the struggle to prevail in the "battle of ideas," so to speak. Ideological practises are here challenged, reshaped, and accepted using a wide range of cultural and social techniques. Therefore, the far-right may be considered as both a component that can strengthen this hegemonic relationship and as someone who is

fighting a positional battle against the current incarnation of neoliberal capitalism. (Worth 2014, p. 159).

Authoritarianism is not the exercise of brute coercive force but can also be observed in the reconfiguring of state and institutional power in an attempt to insulate specific policies and practices from social and political dissent (Bruff 2016, p. 107). Bruff (2016, p. 108) posits authoritarian neoliberalism as a response to the wider capitalist crisis and the strengthening of the state as a symptom of its increasing weakness during significant crises of legitimation since 2008. Structuralist Marxists see social structures as shaping human actions not individuals. The most prominent structural Marxist thinker is Louis Althusser who was a leading intellectual of the French communist party and a leading pioneer of a Marxist critical stance. His work is wide ranging in influencing aspects of post-Marxism such as critical realism and discourse analysis and his concepts often employed in order to envision alternative explanations (Lewis 2022, para 1). Althusser criticises Gramsci's conception of hegemony in that they are idealist and normative. Althusser made a distinction between his own concept of ideological State apparatuses and Gramsci's idea of the hegemonic apparatuses. In contrast to Gramsci, who described these apparatuses in terms of their effects, Althusser contended that these apparatuses must be characterised in terms of their causes. (Sotiris 2017, para 32).

This thesis aligns with the outlook that it is in Gramsci's focus on the historical context is essential in framing any analysis of political phenomena. Authors such as Mavcaferri claim Gramsci's "historicity", that is the historical perspective and awareness that was an inherent element of his thinking has been increasingly set aside within the application of his concept of hegemony in the anglophone context (2022, p.2). Gramsci's historical significance can be found in his conception of a "theory of history and politics" whose main goal was to analyse groups of events and processes in order to provide a framework for comprehending the "political situation." This "evolutionary logic" focuses on the processes within social, political, and economic movements, which could be institutionalised and changed by a methodical intellectual presentation. According to this perspective hegemony is a process that is related to history as a type of situated praxis and is made up of a variety of temporalities that are not deposited as successive stages of historical development but rather as a matrix of cultural and

political cross-negotiations, in which hegemonic apparatuses and intellectuals play a dialectical role (Mavcaferri 2022, p. 2).

2.5 Alienation

The preceding explanation of neoliberalism in the Australian context, hegemony and the relationship with civil society and the state frame the Marxist application of alienation within this thesis. Research in the Marxist tradition is derived from the point of view that alienation is inherent in capitalist structures is conducted holistically and contextualised historically (Kalekin-Fishman & Langman 2015, p. 922). A Marxist reading allows the connection of alienation to capitalism by exposing its structurally and systematically alienating features (Fraser & Jaeggi, p. 116). It is along this vein, contextualised within its historical period and situated within a critical materialist Marxist framework this thesis investigates the phenomenon of RWE in Australia and alienation of these groups within a contemporary neoliberal society. In reviewing the connections between neoliberalism, state and alienation within a structuralist lens in application to a uniquely Australian context.

One component of the theoretical portion of the thesis rests on the framework of alienation as described by Marx (1844) as the four aspects of alienation that occur within a class society:

- 1) Alienation of the worker from their own labour and therefore alienation from the products of their labour.
- 2) Alienation of the worker from the act itself and process of production. They do not benefit from productive activity and labour, only as means of survival.
- 3) Alienation of the worker from their “Gattungswesen” (species-essence) or their innate creative potential for self development and fulfilment, instead selling their labour/time as a market commodity.
- 4) Alienation of the worker from other workers, from their own ‘species-being’, the relationship between humans is within a competitive labour market within capitalist society, not within a collective effort for any common good/outcome. This is also termed alienation from humanity itself.

The first aspect of alienation explains that the more the worker exerts themselves in their labours, the more powerful the world of alien objects becomes and the poorer the worker's own inner world. Marx (1844, p.29) compares this to religion in that "the more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself". In this way the worker has put his own life into the object and now his life no longer belongs to him but the object. As Marx describes

"his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him" (Marx 1844, p. 29).

In the second aspect workers are alienated from the activity itself of labour. The unpleasant experience of work is forced such as in the way classic economic conceives of work, however for Marx this is characteristic specifically of alienated labour and a feature of only specific historical and social conditions, the point being that labour does not need to have this character (Sayers 2011, p.290). In framing alienation as a feature of a specific historical and social period it is the connection to capitalism which could be further extrapolated that alienation is more potent under a financialised capitalism or heightened under conditions of neoliberalism.

The third aspect illustrates the state of de-humanization occurring during alienation. As Horowitz (2010, para 11) describes 'to alienate my labour-power, to be forced to sell it as a commodity on the market, is to lose my life-activity, which is my very self...it is to become other than myself'. For Marxists, as with the previous aspect this is something that is still historical and social rather than something metaphysical or existential (*ibid*). As much contemporary far right and extremist dialogue occurs online through social media platforms which will be later explained as utilising unpaid digital labour individuals are participating in this sphere in work and leisure time but even in what they believe to be activist or creative work. Marx's assessment of estranged labour as an object confronting the worker as an alien force performs two important tasks for capitalist mode of production. Firstly, it imposes itself on the leisure and free time of the worker, impacts the 'Gattungswesen' of the worker by portraying celebrity-hood as the goal of social labour. Secondly it falsifies a social life based on identities created from trivialities (Saha 2021 p. 60).

The fourth aspect details the alienation of the worker from others and from society. As Horowitz (2010 para) describes, in the market environment antagonism among individuals increases and every other individual may become a necessary obstacle for the worker e.g., a customer, a client, creditor, debtor, employee, employer or a rival. Marx (1975, p. 331). details this as:

“through estranged labour man not only produces his relationship to the object and to the act of pro-duction as to alien and hostile powers; he also produces the relationship in which other men stand to his production and product, and the relationship in which he stands to these other men”

This is to say that economic forces have decimated communal bonds, individuals are atomized, and economic forces take on a life of their own. It is important to note again this is within alienated labour under capitalism specifically not inherent in labour (Sayers 2011, p. 291). This aspect may be most helpful in analysing RWE movements and groups in the following chapter as it is this environment that is cited in previous work on RWE manifestos. A recent thematic analysis of RWE manifestos and statements led a leading terrorism scholar Campion (2019, p. 212) to identify two primary discourses within RWE ideology, the first being ethnocentric discourses that elevate a white identity tied to colonialism posited against the risk of immigration and multiculturalism. The second is structural discourses where the current political and economic system is defined as ‘dysfunctional and oppressive’. It is within this second discourse that the themes of alienation and exploitation are most relevant, and in the first that the unique antipodean context of a postcolonial Australia is essential to understand RWE.

When strengthening the relevance of alienation in assessing contemporary political problems particularly in an inequitable neoliberal era, it is essential to take the stance that alienation and exploitation are two interrelated conceptual tools of Marx’s criticism of capital. As shown in the literature review, this correlation has often been seen as instead antithetical instead of complimentary. However, the concepts of alienation and exploitation are strongly correlated given that in a Marxist analysis the result of exploitation is infact alienation. If individuals are exploited, they are also alienated. One study asks if social media users are exploited and therefore alienated by connecting the pursuit of social capital to alienation (Faucher 2018, p. 64). Focusing on the four facets

of alienation this is also simplified to “what I do, what I make, who I relate with, who I am” (ibid p.63). As Marx argues as capitalism develops the social and technological basis of production are increasingly reshaped into forms that are compatible with capital’s economic interests. The third chapter will investigate the place of social capital and online alienation in connection with increasingly online forms of RWE.

2.6 Conclusion

As examined in this chapter, the theoretical discussion reiterates the need for historicising and reviewing material conditions experienced by RWE groups in an Australian context. The mainstreaming of far-right discourses, market forces specific to Australia and the unique antipodean populism experienced in settler colonial societies must be considered in tandem with aspects of alienation and the exploitation within neoliberal states. In contrast to theories conceiving of alienation as universal and inescapable, a Marxist alienation theory produces empirical predictions for example alienation increasing along with productive and technological development, increasing economic inequality and those most vulnerable to market forces (Overseen 2022, p. 454). The concept of alienation is particularly useful when framed within its historical period especially comparatively to other periods of neoliberal or capital. The framing of neoliberal capitalism, the state and Gramsci’s conception of hegemony assist in understanding the depth of structural conditions surrounding RWE. The following chapter applies these theoretical considerations in understanding the themes of contemporary RWE in Australia with a focus on the social and material relations connections between neoliberalism, exploitation and alienation and how these manifest not only within RWE narratives such as ecofascism but broader far-right topics.

Chapter 3 - ‘THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT’

3.1 Introduction

Gramsci paid specific attention to the role that different religions, national cultures, literatures and forms of folklore played in articulating distinct meanings within certain orders (Gramsci 1985, 1996: 25–29). – Worth 2014 (

In understanding the manifestation of RWE in Australia moving forward it is necessary to understand that these larger themes of religion, gender and race have fed into RWE narratives from wider society. This chapter is not intended to provide an exhaustive account of any the following themes within Australia's neoliberal state but to indicate the potential in applying Gramscian and Marxist inquiry into not only RWE actors but their social, political and economic context. The Australian parliament website acknowledges that far right extremism is not a new phenomenon but has recently emerged as a growing threat to national security. In addition to their reputation for conspiracy theories and anti-government animosity, these organisations have racial and ethnic animosities (Grant 2022, para 1). In considering using a Marxist application of alienation and Gramscian application of hegemony it is also relevant to ground these within their own historical context as to not consider concepts in an abstract way. This is the strength of Gramsci's 'historicism' (Cox 1983, p.163). Relevant to the study of alienation, the unique characteristics of neoliberal capitalism in comparison to earlier periods such as regulated capitalism are highly criticised within RWE narratives and are therefore instructive in understanding what larger societal issues. As such this chapter outlines major themes within RWE groups and situates their origins within modern Australia.

3.2 Ecofacism in the Antipodes

'... a reactionary and revolutionary ideology that champions the regeneration of an imagined community through a return to a

romanticised, ethnoppluralist vision of the natural order. - Campion
(2021, p.2)

Due to its complexity, the Australian far-right movement is difficult to categorise. It has included a variety of groups, from the conservative to the overtly fascist. (O'Shea 2017, para 6). The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) explains defines the term right-wing extremism, as 'the support for violence to accomplish political ends pertaining to ideologies, including but not limited to, white supremacism and Neo-Nazism.' (Grant 2022, para 1). This section will focus on the concept of ecofascism within contemporary RWE and its connections to contemporary concepts of neoliberalism and alienation experienced under late capitalism. Although the Australian context offers its unique considerations, RWE does not exist in a vacuum and ideas that have been circulating into Australia from its colonial inception continue to transcend virtual borders in the digital age. As discussed in earlier chapters, the focus of investigating RWE in contemporary Australia is often in diagnosing, predicting, and profiling individual extremists. A reoccurring theme in online communities and of perpetrators of extremist violence have made explicit reference to narratives of ecofascism. As outlined in the literature review there is a persistent narrative in RWE materials based on disillusionment of the current political and economic system. Ecofascists argue against the unnatural forces of modernity that in their eyes have disrupted an imaginary and romanticised ecological harmony from a mythical Australian past (Campion 2021, p. 2). RWE groups and actors that embody ecofascist ideals provide an example of the contradictions within these movements and the narratives posited align with an increasingly catastrophic reality of late capitalism and estrangement of alienated workers.

Examples such as the late 1970s/80s National Action (NA) and the Australian Nationalist Movement (ANM) would incite a surge of extreme-right violence in Australia in previous decades. The NA targeted Asian Australians with street violence, intimidation campaigns, storming the Uniting Church, firebombing union members cars, and harassing LGBTQ communities (Campion 2022, p. 225). Jack van Tongeran, who led the splinter group ANM greatly admired Adolf Hitler and the operations of Nazi Germany, having travelled to meet with neo-Nazi figures in the United States, United Kingdom and Europe and would lead the ANM in fire-bombing, drive-by

shooting and mass theft for the next decade (ibid 226). Recently formed far-right groups recognise the importance of maintaining a public and virtual presence however social media offers far-right extremists a safe virtual public sphere to discuss far-right ideology, operating in an exclusive and often anonymous capacity.

Mainstream media assisted in broadcasting far-right ideological propaganda as the Australian far-right amplifies their social media presence by provoking mainstream media stories themselves. The increasing activity of ecofascists in the far-right space on and offline both internationally and Australia and NZ region mean that Australia's multicultural state, waves of immigration and settler-colonial origins act as a fertile environment to draw on ecofascists goals of restoring their ecological harmony based on racial segregation. Along this vein, the extremist end of the right-wing spectrum embodies the same tensions but in conjunction with ideologies such as ecofascism which radicalise and seek to justify these discourses that have been mainstreamed in mainstream media and right-wing politics. The Christchurch shooter Australian Brenton Tarrant self-described himself as an eco-fascist, as did the later El Paso Walmart shooter in the US inspired by his manifesto and actions (Hughes et al 2022, p. 1001). Despite their predilections for a romantic return to natural order, ecofascist groups and individuals have created a notable digital footprint within Australian and international communities to recruit and communicate these ideals.

Ecological fascism or ecofascism has been studied as the intersections of ecology and fascism within the Nazi party and its contemporary equivalents of far-right German movements, noting that modern far right groups are updating old themes of nationalist, mystical and misanthropic nature in drawing 'a distinct ideological legacy from their fascist forebears' (Hughes et al 2022 quoting Biehl p. 998). Ecofascists argue that the sacred unity of humanity and nature are disputed and corrupted by the decadent forces of modernity such as uncontrolled population growth (particularly of ethnic populations), mass immigration and then the resulting environmental destruction from urbanisation and industrialisation (Campion 2022, p. 372).

In Christchurch, New Zealand on March 15, 2019, an Australian far-right extremist Brenton Tarrant fatally shot 51 people in two mosques demonstrating the deadliest terror attack in New Zealand's history. The 28-year-old Australian gym trainer with no

previous criminal history was active on extreme far right forums and live streamed his attack on Facebook. (Macklin 2019, p. 18). Tarrant's horrific livestreamed actions are cited as an example of the ultimate extreme outcome of these discourses within RWE and aligned communities in which he also active in. The United Patriots Front (UPF) included members primed for violence, in July 2015 one member enroute to a Reclaim Australia rally in Melbourne found to be in possession of firearms, another member arrested for firearms, steroids, drugs (ibid 368). In 2017 the UPF reformed as the Lads society: an outwardly white nationalist organisation emphasising white identity, brotherhood and community while opposing what they viewed as a decaying and degenerate modern society. They insist on their followers following strict regimens of exercise, purifying body and minds, train martial arts and established a fight club (Campion 2022 p.369). Brenton Tarrant defended the group as the 'leading ethno-nationalist group within Australia' and on inheriting over \$500,000 on death of father donated to the extreme right domestically such as the UPF, and internationally such as German and Austrian identarian movement while travelling to North Korea, Russia, and Ukraine (Campion 2022, p. 370).

Ecofascists look to a future in which ecological harmony is synonymous with racial segregation, and in settler societies they celebrate heroes in primordial landscapes to insist on exclusive claims on territory (Campion 2022). Tarrant hoped to ignite and energise this sentiment with the Christchurch attack. And the ex UPF members group Lads Society's Melbourne chapter has since reformed in Melbourne under the umbrella of neo-Nazi organisation National Socialist Network (NSN) continues to embody the ideas of Tarrant. Ideas such as opposing modern society as a degenerate departure from natural order, antisemitic and population/demographic conspiracy theories arch as the 'great replacement' and provoking race war in Australia is goal of organisation (Campion 2022, p. 378). The overarching argument in Tarrant's manifesto 'The Great Replacement' authored before the Christchurch attack is the view that white people are being replaced in Western countries against their will in not only a demographic but sociocultural sense (Eshan & Stott 2020, p.6). Tarrant was fixated on birth-rates, demanding "If there is one thing, I want you to remember from these writings, it's that birth-rates must change" (Macklin 2022 p. 981). The definition of ecofascism is a collectivist political regime that uses authoritarian measures to achieve its major goal of 'protecting nature' (Zimmerman et al 2016, p. 64). In the 1970s American neo-

Malthusian environmentalists Ehrlich and Hardin concluded that only authoritarian political regimes could prevent human overpopulation from causing a global “tragedy of the commons” (Zimmerman quoting Ehrlich & Hardin). Overpopulation discourse is a central narrative of the far right and is also emphasised in neo-Malthusian narratives of climate change that are deeply connected to anti-immigration, militarist, and racist world views (Schultz 2021, p. 490).

3.3 Facism in Australia’s past

In discussing ecofascism it is important to note it is not the first emergence of this ideology in Australian history. The history of the far right in Australia is parallel to the history of the ruling apparatus of state, business circles, military and police with the far rights, historically the main leaders having been selected from the upper echelons of society such as the wealthy and military (O’Shea 2017, para 2). Far right activity can be traced back to white Australia’s colonial origins however one notable example of fascism specifically was the proliferation of far-right groups within the onset of the Great Depression in 1931-2. The election of the Lang Labor government mobilised these forces when the state politician announced plans to suspend interest payments to British bondholders, reduce interest on Australian government borrowings and replace the gold standard in an effort to alleviate poverty at the time (O’Shea 2017). Lang’s unpopularity within the right extended to London where the Daily Telegraph labelled him “the Mad Dog Premier of New South Wales” and in Lang’s own words he aimed to ‘put the people of New South Wales before the British plutocrats’. The most powerful far right organisation the Old Guard with members drawn almost exclusively from the economic elite of the state prepared for a counter-revolutionary mobilisation and its split into the less secretive New Guard key objective was in bringing down the Lang government. A trial run for an anti-government uprising happened in March 1932 where the New Guard assembled outside of a court appearance of their members and in doing so opposed to NSW police which was not a success. Overall, the revolution was not necessary as the state governor sacked Lang before he was removed by force however this was an example of the lengths the far right would approach in order to protect the economic, political and social interests of the NSW ruling class of the time and the ‘Empire’ (O’Shea 2017).

This aligns with Gramscian thought that in the face of counter-hegemonic challenges during times of crisis such as this period of the 1930s, the bourgeoisie and capitalism will adapt and configure with a view of safeguarding and reasserting capitalist interests. (Cammaerts 2015, p.525). Even though Lang was a democratically elected premier his actions and interests did not align with imperial or economic elite values. In this case groups such as the New/Old Guard were striving to maintain a hegemonic order that was reflective of the dominant interests of society. The influence of continental European style fascism was not widely embraced by the far right who were careful to stay away from any association with foreign (except for British) characterisations of right wing power. Outlined early in the thesis is how contemporary RWE groups still harbour fears of immigrants or foreigners encroaching on a fabricated Australian identity.

As the discussion in earlier chapters has indicated thus far, the phenomenon of right-wing extremism needs to be discussed in a broader context of far-right movements, populism and right-wing politics in Australia. RWE actors and online communities may darkly romanticise and verge on the mythical imaginary of a white ecological harmony however these sentiments are consistent within larger far right movements and populism in Australia. Although Australia is highly urbanised the bush and the land still hold a mythical position in its national identity and the agriculture and primary industry plays a large role in its economy (Moffit 2017, p.11). Coded in the rural/urban divide is the idea of cities as multicultural and the country as white and this idea of “mainstream” Australians continues to characterise antipodean populism (Moffit 2017, p.12). Ecofascists believe that indigenous populations such as in Australia failed to manage and defend their land and push romantic myths of the frontier via pioneers, bushrangers, and a right to land via ‘right of conquest’ (Campion 2022, p.372). In this way, the Australian far-right’s ultra-nationalistic identity is composed of its own unique racial and conceptual components that distinguish it from other groups internationally. Alt-patriotism is the accommodation of racial heterogeneity as long as members act according to the concept of whiteness and Australian cultural values, uniting far-right ideologues in synchronising efforts against other “threats” such as Muslim immigration (Hutchinson 2019, p. 10).

3.4 Alienation and RWE discourse

'The final END of society is accelerating; that the entire foundation itself is so thoroughly corroded; and that there is no longer any place to go hide'

James Mason 1980

'The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him' Marx 1844 p.29

As discussed in the literature review, the concept of alienation is approached differently across disciplines and in its meanings and in counter terrorism discourse in Australia the interpretation of alienation as vulnerability, loneliness, and willingness to join these groups for social reasons is often a focus when diagnosing individuals and their radicalisation. However, the increasingly harsh brand of individualism driven by neoliberalism, globalisation and economic insecurity as illustrated during the recent COVID-19 pandemic is a characteristic of larger material conditions. Ecofascists believe that as society is beyond salvaging the entire order must be destroyed to rebuild from the ashes (Campion 2022, p. 375). To expand on the above quote from Marx (1844) on alienation, the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects he creates and the poorer his inner world becomes. Marx's core ideas on alienation function as an interrelated whole. It can be simplified to this: what I do, what I make, who I relate with, who I am. Each of these facets of alienation differs in degree and expression pending the qualities and conditions pertaining to each person, productive capacities, and labour arrangement. Marx's analysis points to how these may differ in terms of class, and he spends most of his time focusing on the proletariat as the class most negatively impacted by the conditions of alienation (Faucher 2018 p. 63). The second quote is from a book which has enjoyed fringe popularity within the online extreme right in Australia is *Siege* from American neo-Nazi James Mason in the 1980s which reiterates these sentiments that the current society is unsustainable and doomed to collapse, and the role of the individual is to hasten its collapse (Campion 2022, p. 373).

Murdock (2021, p. 248) argues that ecofascism along with imperialism, racism and sexism is present within corporate global environmental conservation; ‘deeply embedded within and indebted to the colonial origins of Euro-Western environmental philosophy and ethics. Further to this, critics point to decades of environmental focus and advocacy in the First World amid the outsourcing of industrialisation and pollution to the largely nonwhite Global South (Thomashow 2016, p. 67). A Marxist view maintains that the state is necessary only because of the real antagonisms class societies generate and sustain among individuals. The state is unable to be a neutral actor as an integral part of class society it is incapable of neutrally administrating above all interests. Tarrant’s manifesto criticises cheap labour funnelling into western countries as encouraged by the profit-driven interests of private capital subsequently placing ‘narrative populations under demographic and cultural threat (Eshan et al 2020, p. 6). Tarrant’s manifesto also goes on to support for left-leaning economics such as greater unionisation of workers and increase in the minimum wage in neoliberal western countries as encouraged by the profit-driven interests of private capital subsequently placing ‘narrative populations under demographic and cultural threat (Eshan et al 2020, p. 6). As addressed in the theoretical section of this thesis, the current period of neoliberal capitalism has resulted in economic and social deregulation. Therefore, while the outcome of alienation present is a result of capitalism it does embody these specifically neoliberal features such as the privatisation of state owned enterprises and the emphasis on individualism. If neoliberalism is conceptualised as a historical variant of capitalism it is still based on the exploitation of one class by another to maintain ruling interests (Davidson 2018).

This discussion on ecofascism has highlighted the complexity of RWE within the Australian context and how broader social, economic, and political themes of the far right are instrumental in understanding how material conditions contribute. Australian RWE discourse emphasises themes within ecofascism that are already embodied within a settler state that romanticises nature and citizenship under a predominantly white cultural Australian identity. As the aforementioned quote from neo-Nazi Mason suggests, there is ‘nowhere to hide’ from the deterioration present within neoliberal democracies and this fear is embodied and weaponised within RWE’s targeting of non-white demographics and remains reflective of the broader rights conservative agenda.

3.5 Social Media, Online Capital and Digital Labour

As capitalism develops Marx argues that the social and technological basis of production are increasingly reshaped into forms compatible with capitals economic interests. This also extends to the commodification of emotions in new forms of labour such as the creation of a neoliberal subject who is compelled to view their own capabilities in the terms of market value (Overseen 2021, p. 447). As discussed in the literature review, trends in contemporary extremism mean that the online space is incredibly active and relevant within the far right and RWE groups. It has been argued that the pursuit of online social capital accumulation is intrinsically linked to social digital alienation in that the numeric indicators such as likes, and followers confer a sense of value and currency related to the general economy of users on a social media site and reflect value of the user. The user themselves is an abstract representation of themselves, a digital object through which they produce content in an effort to accumulate social capital. (Faucher 2018, p. 68). This concept is reflected in counter terrorism studies of RWE online groups as sample comments from online forums reflect a disconnect between public external propaganda communications and interpersonal group communications (Dean et al 2016, p. 135). That is, the insider perspective when acting as an infiltrator to these groups as opposed to appealing to their public face reveals more honest opinions and reflects this need for saving face or maintaining social capital online even within RWE circles.

Although social media promises delineation via the chance for self-expression and cultivation of online communities and relations this actually provides the means for exploitation by monopolised online platforms as users provide more value communicating frequently and sharing photos, viewing adds as they do. In this way even as the feeling of alienation in a general non-Marxist sense decrease, exploitation is increasing. The increase in user productivity aligns with ordained virtues of neoliberal capitalism such as workers who are adaptable, flexible and fragmented as opposed to fixed, secure and united by solidarity or as a collective e.g., unions (Faucher 2018, p. 65). The re-emergence of Engels concept of ‘social murder’ has also been posited within the topic of digital labourers particularly unpaid social media users. That is that “digital labour perpetuates capitalist exploitation by disrupting of the possibility of working-class solidarity, erosion of social relations and creating conditions that make

social murder and social violence possible” (Saha 2021 quoted by Medvedyuk et al 2021 p. 38). In this way the online space in which contemporary extremists within Australia engage their members is not free from capital accumulation and exploitation. Further to this, as previously highlighted, online alt-right and RWE movements themselves utilise strategies that can be better understood under Gramscian framework, that is, constructing whiteness as a repressed cultural identity and creating normative meanings that whiteness is under attack.

If building online social capital reflects and reiterates capital accumulation, users can be argued to be producing themselves as branded digital objects at the mercy of an artificial online economy. This illustrates again how it is impossible for nationalists or extremists to separate themselves or elevate themselves as subjects outside of this environment. In building their communities of detailed online networks over traditional social media sites they are participating in this.

3.6 US/Alt Right and Australian context

In analysing RWE behaviour and networks on social media platforms theoretical applications such as critical discourse analysis are often utilised to identify ideology and themes through language. This is a particularly popular starting point for research into US based alt right and new right groups discourse and recruitment strategies. One such study on the alt-right movement ‘Proud Boys’ analyses the groups use of internet memes and propaganda in constructing a collective identity based around ‘Western ideals’ in socialising young men into their extremist ideology (DeCook 2018, p. 502). The Gramscian understanding of the state is “the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (Gramsci 1929-35 cited in Hoare & Smith 1971, p. 22). This is important to consider in an Australian context in which far right discourses have been mainstreamed and in the usefulness of assessing RWE and larger right-wing spectrum within Australia and in the increasing flow of information across online extremist networks within states such as the US.

There is also a growing discourse of applying Marxist theory or concepts in understanding RWE and far-right movements. The term of alternative-right or “Alt-right” was authored by Richard Spencer the leading spokesman of the movement in the US, heavily influenced by the French New right which emphasises the rights of white ethnocultural groups, he coined the term alt-right in 2008 in order to separate himself from mainstream American conservatism (Bar-On 2021, p. 44). One twitter analysis of the American ‘alt-right’ argues that the white supremacist group has adopted a Gramscian approach to politics in that they are actively working to normalize whiteness as a repressed cultural identity through embracing identity politics and equating their struggles with those of women, ethnic and other minorities (Gallaher 2020, p. 249). In this way, the mainstreaming of the alt-right is important to recognise, described as a Gramscian view that believes cultural change in normalising unpopular ideas is needed to precede institutional change (Gallaher 2020). The alt-right’s favoured discourse of constructing whiteness as a state of marginalization and oppression is a product of decades of white supremacist organising, far right ideology and narratives in the United States and Europe (Ganesh 2020, p. 892). Although not labelled as Gramscian, this conclusion can also be drawn from studies connecting the far-right and populist radical right with online white supremacist groups in Australia. One study which examined a senate motion ‘It’s OK to be white’ made by Australian far-right politician Pauline Hanson in 2018, comparing the framing of the ‘deliberately innocuous’ slogan was in league with such anti ‘Black Lives Matters’ movements as ‘All Lives Matter’ and ‘Blue Lives Matter’ (Sengal 2021, p. 2).

However, neoliberalism does not seem to produce a universal approach for far-right populist and political parties and actors between states. In a thematic analysis of the social policies of populist right parties from several nations, Fenger concluded that in contrast to the other states, only the US Republican party and populist movement under Donald Trump embraced radical liberalism and individualism instead of state importance and welfare chauvinism (2018, p. 204). The concept of the American Right embodying a unique approach is supported by theorists such as Kiely who suggest that Trump won cross-class appeal based on his challenge to contemporary globalisation with a ‘complementary and contradictory embrace of paleoconservatism and neoliberalism’ (Kiely 2021, p. 335).

3.7 Australia's settler context

Those on the far-right fringes of the political spectrum refer to the Anzac legend as an important element of Australia's 'civil religion'. Commemoration of wars and military actions up to hundreds of years in the past are common within the online mobilisation of RWE groups globally from the 11th-13th century Christian Crusades often cited in an alleged war against Muslim invaders. (Peucker et al 2021, p. 190). The ecofascist Brenton Tarrant described his killing spree in manifesto as 'revenge against Islam for the 1300 years of war and devastation' brought upon Western civilisation (ibid). The use of Anzacs in Australia to portray a nostalgic yet ambiguous image of national identity posited to be under threat from outsiders that is maintained not only within extremist manifestos as above but within broader societal narratives. The 'statue wars' overseas landed in Australia amid bitter debate in 2017 and the words 'change the date' and 'no pride in genocide' was sprayed over foundation of Captain James Cook statue in Hyde Park Sydney. Ex Liberal Coalition prime minister Tony Abbott politicised the issue claiming political correctness and right wing commentator Keith Windschuttle claimed the vandalism of the statues was an attack on the legitimacy of settlement and return to the History Wars (Gregory 2021, p. 11). It is important to understand this historical-political context when understanding the positioning of RWE groups as in opposition to what they term as destruction of an Australian identity. It is suggestive of the post-colonial tensions that invigorate both sides of the political spectrum and in terms of the previously discussed 'White Australia' that needs to be defended from "invaders". As ecofascists see 'White Australia' as the true occupiers of this continent based upon a misguided idea of conquest ongoing public debates such as the future state of these statues serve to further invigorate RWE narrative of being under attack.

Recent reviews have demonstrated that authoritarianism, nationalism and anti-democracy are the values that most strongly correlate within RWE and evidence suggests these are prevalent among military veterans in Australia (de Lint & Praino 2022). It has been discovered that veterans and members of the military on active service participate in RWE in the United States with some RWE organisations have

even been founded by people with a military experience. In particular, the relationship between RWE, which is composed of authoritarianism, nationalism, and anti-democratic attitude, and martialization, defined as nation framing through soldier indoctrination, has been questioned (de Lint & Praino 2022).

Australia has been increasingly criticised by dissenting voices for social policy where it increases inequity or impacts vulnerable groups negatively, a good example of this being the controversial work for the dole jobseeker program. However, as illustrated in the previous chapter, in Australia this discourse remains within mainly online apart from centrist to left publications. As a former Job Australia policy advisor recognises

“it is poorly resourced and ineffective and does not provide choice or empowerment to job seekers... neoliberal informed social policy has determined that unemployed can be conscripted to unpaid [or severely underpaid] labour.”
(Casey 2019).

It also illustrates the issues faced by indigenous Australians within this system. A recent example being the discovery of tens of thousands of remote welfare recipients still completing mandatory work for the dole hours that were dropped from their obligations after 2021 years budget. The National Indigenous Australians Agency showed that almost half of the 42, 514 on the program attending a CDP activity amid concerns the mandatory nature of the program being dropped was not communicated (Gooley 2022).

This example echoes the concerns that conservative ideology within neoliberalism and in the new right reactions embody the potential to become increasingly disciplinary and punitive (Fisher 2020, p.38). It also impresses the relevance of alienation experienced by those paid, unpaid or underpaid within Australia’s liberal democracy in that individuals would continue non mandatory work either knowingly or unknowingly. Similarly in importance, as detailed further in the following chapter, RWE groups in Australia, and indeed broader far right discourses dehumanise those considered non-peoples or non-citizens. Utilising the four conditions of alienation with the example of the work for the dole policy communication failure and view through one aspect of alienation, such as ‘alienation from other labourers’, there would be vastly different considerations for the participants who are regional, remote and predominantly

indigenous than inner city counterparts. In Australia, thematic assessments of the most active RWE groups emphasise the new 'radical right' is not a homogenous movement, instead, the different groups are positioned on a wide ideological spectrum of extremism. This includes conservative anti-immigration, anti-Islam groups, far-right, neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic and white supremacist groups (Dean et al 2016, p. 139).

3.8 Religion in Australia

'Through aggressively marketing themselves both individually and through cross-promotion of clergy as an elite class, pastor-preneurs have managed again to set themselves apart from the laity as the stewards of salvation' (Possamai & Tittensor 2022, p.161).

As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, Churches, unions, and schools are examples of institutions that make up civil society and which Gramsci observes are often regarded as being private or non-political. Gramsci's objective includes demonstrating how civil society's methods of creating and structuring human relationships and consciousness are profoundly political and should be seen as essential to maintaining class dominance (Mastroianni 2017, para 4.). Although Australia is a secular society, religion is still strongly represented including within previous prime ministers such as Scott Morrison. Morrison had strong connections with the division of Christianity known as Pentecostalism, which emphasises a moral conservatism, individual morality and historically less concerned with structural issues such as inequality, racism and sexism (Jennings 2021, para 12). Neoliberalism has been argued as an expression of euro Christian colonialism and while the average middle class individual in a neoliberal society may self-identify as secular, their social milieu has historically occupied a overtly Christian presence, which have had specific and ongoing consequences in the case of indigenous populations (Green 2021, p 2).

Australian Pentecostal churches have been at the forefront of a shift to digital religion particularly during the COVID pandemic with major churches Hillsong, Planetshakers and C3 showing high levels of digital engagement and a strong social media footprint

(Possamai & Tittensor 2022, p. 161). This inclination to reference Australia's Judeo-Christian past has increased along with the nation's growing religiosity in the Australian parliament, and this has frequently come at the expense of Muslims and other religious minorities (Possamai & Tittensor 2022, p. 185). Howard and his government targeted Muslims by creating a dichotomy between what constituted true Australians and those who were a threat to our way of life. In fact, the citizenship test and the strict border protection measures put in place in the wake of the Tampa affair in 2001 were intended to stigmatise immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers—many of whom were from Afghanistan and Iraq, two nations that Australia purposefully assisted in the "war on terror" in destabilising (ibid 187).

3.9 Moving forward within a changing approach to RWE

As found in a recent study of the connections between martialisation and RWE in Australia.

'In order to effectively mitigate right-wing extremist violence, it is necessary to profile multiple or longer radicalization pathways. Where governmental policy is indifferent to accumulated structural causes (that is, causation prediction that pays attention to the social, economic, and political situatedness of the individual), it is unlikely to produce complete results.'

(de Lint & Praino 2022, p.17)

In depth interviews conducted with ten Canadian former right-wing extremists sought to generate knowledge on the link between the internet and violent extremism and the interactions between on and offline worlds of violent extremists (Gaudette et al 2022, p1340). The study results show that the Internet ultimately facilitates processes of violent radicalisation by allowing people to immerse themselves in extremist content and networks, regardless of how they are first exposed to violent extremist beliefs and organisations (Gaudette et al. 2022, p. 1351). Former extremists also held the view that the Internet can work as a portal for people to engage in violent extremist acts offline, bridging adherents in the online and offline world, frequently through the online promotion of offline events (e.g., concerts, rallies, protests, and gatherings).(p.1351).

This is also supported within studies focusing on the threat of misogynistic violence such as “incel” culture which is connected with alt-right circles and increasingly popular in north America poses threat to other anglophone industrial states. Primary programs aim to intervene in the development of extremist violence through setting social norms and encouraging social cohesion. They aim to develop community awareness and solidarity at the population level (Tomkinson et al 2020, p. 160) This support of primary techniques that target entire communities to be at least as useful in terms of saving lives as secondary approaches, which are typically thought to be the most effective kind of intervention (de-radicalizing specific at-risk individuals) (Tomkinson et al 2020, p.160).

In neo and post-Marxist accounts ideology is articulated in ways that go beyond class-reductionism and is inclusive of other forms of oppression according to race, gender, sexuality; which gives nuance to the ‘rigid determinism’ which posits class and material conditions as determining the nature of the superstructure (Cammaerts 2015, p. 525). These structural inequalities specifically relate to Australian RWE narratives. Reports such as the recent inquiry of RWE in Victoria found that far-right and anti-feminist sentiment is mutually reinforcing and feeds into ‘aggrieved entitlement’, anger towards ‘the system’ and a normalisation of extreme views of women and gender (Agius et al 2022, p. 5). The report suggested that top-down approaches specifically targeting anti-gender violence as a public threat or security issue and bottom up approaches such as countering misinformation as well as replacing the emotional support networks far-right groups provided alienated men (ibid). These studies show both the relevance in investigating the online networks between extremists and the importance of a structural approach in theorising about RWE in order to encapsulate the socio-economic influences.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined that Australian RWE movements have changed within the neoliberal capitalism period however the symptoms of alienation presented are not a new phenomenon. It has also shown how the Australian period is uniquely conditioned because of colonial past and the mainstreaming of far right discourses. This has been indicated within mentioned studies of RWE activists and their comfortability in expressing far right sentiments in passive ways because of societal acceptance in Australia as opposed to Canada for example. How these symptoms present however is new under neoliberalism as it permeates not only economic sphere and is not limited by borders but expands infinitely in an era of globalisation and extensive virtual networks.

As outlined earlier within the literature review, the approach of structural and community wide approaches is an increasing objective within counter terrorism and extremism studies. In line with this “bigger picture” approach scholarship this chapter has argued that within RWE and far right studies the historical, political, economic, and social context of Australia is essential in understanding RWE as not just an extreme manifestation of the far right, but as a reflection of the many issues that hold weight in the mainstream Australian community such as immigration, the environment and legacies of colonialism. that are present within RWE rhetoric. This is also consistent with a Gramscian theory of cultural hegemony in which the worldview held by the ruling class is embedded within society, that is the beliefs, explanations and values form the worldview.

CONCLUSION TO THESIS

As the literature review introduced, Australian RWE has been chronically under researched within the political discipline in comparison to broader studies of the far right and right-wing populism. As the studies cited in the third chapter have shown, recent scholarship within disciplines such as counter terrorism and security studies are now adopting a structural approach in understanding extremism and are acknowledging material conditions more than ever before. Further to this, practitioners who work in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism are also accepting the need to focus on population and community level intervention in industrial neoliberal states, as opposed to diagnosing of individual actors. The theoretical chapter showed that in contrast to theories conceiving of alienation as universal and inescapable emotional state, a Marxist alienation theory produces empirical predictions for example alienation increasing along with productive and technological development, increasing economic inequality and those most vulnerable to market forces (Overseen 2022, p. 454). This is why the concept of alienation is particularly useful when framed within it's historical period especially comparatively to other periods of neoliberal or capital accumulation and in the context of a far-right that develops in digital spaces. In line with this widened approach the third chapter has shown that within RWE and the Australian far right the historical, political, economic, and social context of Australia is essential in understanding RWE as not just an extreme manifestation of the far right, but as a reflection of the many issues that hold weight in the mainstream Australian community such as immigration, the environment and legacies of colonialism.

Concepts such as ecofascism highlighted within Australian RWE are found to be indicative not only of far-right values but issues unique and central to mainstream Australia such as settler colonial legacies and national identity. This emphasises the potential for political inquiry into RWE that embraces critical and Marxist approaches in understanding the effects of alienation and neoliberalism that reoccur consistently within RWE narratives. There is also significant potential in further research in positioning Australian RWE in comparative contexts with reference to the narratives of the far-right within those states, particularly in comparison with other Anglophone states. Further to this, histories and comparisons of extremism and terrorism in general in Australia are only recently gaining traction in light of renewed activity during the COVID pandemic and in the migration of US based groups over online networks.

Australian RWE may not be as extensive or violent as other states however its connections to the broader far-right in Australia, increasing digital presence and embracing of environmental issues to justify narratives such as overpopulation only become more dangerous in the neoliberal era. The decades to come are predicted to bring catastrophic climate change, global displacement of people, economic inequity and supply chain issues themes such as ecofascism that are utilised within RWE are likely to only gain traction among an increasingly alienated people under neoliberal capitalism.

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