

"New Age fascism": review of an exercise in Marxist defamation

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"New Age" is a (by now obsolescent) container term referring to a galaxy of post-Christian religious groping, with various sources of inspiration including humanistic psychotherapy, Hindu-Buddhist meditation, Sino-Japanese "gentle" martial arts, Tantric-Taoist transformation of sexuality, astrology, holistic medicine, and some more. Its cradle was undoubtedly the late-19th-century Theosophical Society, which "conjoined religious syncretism to esotericism on the one hand and liberal idealism on the other. (...) Theosophy generated much bizarre metaphysics, absurd pomp and petty factionalism, but it also exerted a surprisingly invigorating effect within the lives of many adherents. And its political influence, too, appears to have been largely benign; Theosophy allied itself not just with moralizing personal betterment but also with pacific internationalism and the self-determination of colonized 'natives'." (Frederick Crews: "The consolation of Theosophy", part 2, *New York Review of Books*, 3-10-1996) Yet, this movement is accused of being the cradle of National-Socialism.

The alleged Nazi angle of the New Age movement is a favourite theme of Communist scholars looking for crypto-Nazis to "expose", and for ways to reduce every debate to an "anti-fascist" issue (*reductio ad Hitlerum*) in order to recreate forever the moral power equation of the 1940s when democratic anti-Communists like Churchill were forced to support Stalin; and of Evangelicals trying to score points against competitors on the religion market. Thus, on an Evangelical website I found a jubilant review of a book by a German Marxist, Peter Kratz, which uses all the tricks to amalgamate the New Age phenomenon with Nazi ideology: *Die Götter des New Age*, Elefant Press, Berlin 1994. To Christian peddlers of this book full of Communist deceit and hate, who effectively pretend ignorance of Peter Kratz's ideological moorings, I may point out that he frequently cites Lenin, murderer of millions of Christians, as his doctrinal point of reference.

As one example of his amalgamation technique, the opening paragraph describes the presence of both grim neo-Nazis and mild New Age types at the *Externsteine* (Germany's counterpart to Stonehenge) during summer solstice: "Long ago, someone has hacked out a cell in one of the rocks, and a hole in the cell's front wall [through which the rising sun's first ray will fall], no one knows when. For neo-Pagans and esotericists, Nazis and New-Agers, it was the ancient Germanics who did it." (p.11) Though the question is in itself apolitical, and though there would be nothing wrong with Germanic authorship of the solstice hole (except for anti-Germanic racists), Kratz uses it to put Nazis and New-Agers in the same corner, as he will continue to do throughout his book.

In this case, he is simply wrong: while Nazis may attach great importance to ethnic identity and often claim Germany as the Indo-European *Urheimat*, the freewheeling spiritualists whom he labels "New-Agers" care little about it. They generally accept the conventional wisdom about such historical details, i.c. that the solstice-hole at the *Externsteine*, like Stonehenge, was probably pre-Germanic, either Celtic (the southern

half of Germany, like England, had been Celtic before being germanicized) or more likely pre-Celtic and pre-Indo-European, or what Nazis would call "non-Aryan". Many Pagan remnants in the European landscape are "Old European", dating back to before the Indo-European invasion from the east, and New-Agers generally prefer the purportedly matriarchal Old Europeans to the patriarchal Indo-Europeans.

Like many contemporary "anti-fascist" publications, Kratz's book has as its single aim to damage as many people and movements as possible by tainting them with Hitler connotations. Laird Wilcox, an American anti-racist activist of long standing who got tired of the verbal hate crimes committed in the name of anti-racism, writes of antifa "watchdog" groups that they "are aggressively hostile and have as their specific mission to defame, degrade and ultimately destroy their opponents. For Watchdogs, there is nothing to debate and the only issue of real significance is how much harm they can inflict on their enemies". In Wilcox' experience, their methods to "ostracize targeted individuals and groups" include "establishing 'links-and-ties' (i.e. footnoted guilt by association), discerning their 'hidden agenda' and 'true motives'" (L. Wilcox: *The Watchdogs: a Close Look at Anti-Racist "Watchdog" Groups*, Olathe KS 1999, quoted by reviewer Frank Miele, *Skeptic*, 2000/1, p.92). This applies quite neatly to Kratz's book.

His argumentation follows the typical pattern of conspiracy theories: "Mr. A is a member of club B, he also met Mr. C who knows Mr. D, therefore Mr. D is an accomplice of club B". (Marcel Hulspas and Jan Willem Nienhuys: *Tussen Waarheid en Waanzin, Een Encyclopedie der Pseudo-Wetenschappen*, Scheffers, Utrecht 1997, entry *Grote Samenzwering*, i.e. "great conspiracy", p.138.) Thus, after citing some "tree of life" imagery from recent New Age writings, which in turn refer to the tree as a favourite cosmic symbol of the Native Americans, he reveals that tree imagery was also used by racist and nationalist ideologues in the 19th century and even by a Nazi biologist, who elsewhere also ranted against the Jews, ergo to talk of trees is Nazi and racist. After all, when you hear *Stamm* (tree's trunk), "the notion of *Ab-stamm-ung* [descent, genealogy] readily comes to mind"! (p.165) From tree to bloodline to eugenic massacres: by this free association, a sick Communist mind can turn the most innocent piece of greenery into a Nazi gas chamber. This way, Kratz can blacken every premodern culture as fundamentally Nazi, for practically all peoples use tree symbolism, from the Germanic *Yggdrasil* (meaning "Odin's horse" and being an "ash-tree whose roots and branches join heaven and earth and hell", --*Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 7th ed., OUP, Delhi 1986, entry *Yggdrasil*) to the Jewish *Etz-Chaim*, "tree of life".

While we are at it, let us note that symbolism from the Jewish mystical tradition (Qabala) is an integral part of Theosophical and New Age syncretism. By contrast, if you visit anti-Jewish websites, you will find "qabalistic" used as a term of contempt encapsulating the alleged Jewish secretiveness and deceitfulness. Since anti-Semitism was the core concern of the Nazi movement, it should be obvious that the respect which Theosophists and New-Agers pay to the Jewish tradition, and the carefree innocence with which they incorporate it into their syncretism, are decisive arguments against the alleged Nazi agenda of these movements.

But even where Kratz makes valid points about ideas allegedly held in common between alleged Nazis and New-Agers (holism, organicism, environmentalism, animal protection), these fail to prove his main thesis, viz. "that New Age and fascism are identical in essential ideological components and that both serve, in their similar objective practical

consequences, the interest of capital". (p.31; Kratz even opposes the common belief that the Nazis merely "misused" ideological elements of holistic or theosophical thought: in his view, the Nazis made a logical use of elements which are intrinsically identical to Nazi thought, which implies that if New-Agers were to come to power, they would only be consistent with their beliefs if they re-enacted the Nazi crimes. This is an interesting case of how Marxists fight back against, rather than ride the wave of, New-Age-related trends like environmentalism. Clearly, Kratz has provided inspiration to N. Goodrick-Clarke's vilification of environmentalism in his book *Hitler's Priestess*.)

Thus, it may well be true that Romantic love of nature was or is a trait of both the New Age philosophy and of the personal philosophy of some Nazis; but it is unclear how that would be a ploy to serve capitalism, and more importantly, it fails to confer the really important traits of National-Socialism onto the New Age movement. If Hitler's name has become a synonym of horror, it is not because he passed laws to protect rare flora and fauna species.

Kratz's design is to show that certain New Age themes or mere buzz-words (e.g. "holism") were already used by fascist or otherwise rightist people, and then to deduce the grim warning that if we let New Age people continue to do their thing, we will all land up in Auschwitz. But this is obviously untrue. Whatever similarities Kratz may discover or invent, New Age at the very least differs from National-Socialism in the one respect which explains Auschwitz: it rejects violence. That the Nazis killed many people was not due to their penchant for animal protection, but to their belief in the rightness of violence.

Thus, "holism" was a term launched by the Afrikaner politician Jan Christiaan Smuts (as discussed by Kratz, p.150) in his book *Holism and Evolution*, 1925, a worthy precursor of the New Age recuperation of modern science by spirituality, e.g. Frithjof Capra: *Tao of Physics*, 1975. Smuts was a racist in the paternalistic sense (Rudyard Kipling's "white man's burden"), like most non-Nazi Europeans then were, but not in the destructive Nazi sense. Contrary to Kratz's claim (p.167), Smuts was an *opponent* of the Afrikaner *Nasionale Party* which was to institute Apartheid after its election victory in 1948.

The one ideological choice of National-Socialism (and even more of Communism) which was crucial in making its mass-murders possible, was its glorification of armed struggle, its readiness to pursue its political goals over numerous dead bodies. That is a decisive difference with the much-maligned "New Age" movement, which, if nothing else, is certainly a pacifist movement. Having worked in a New Age bookstore, organized some New Age events and attended many more in my twenties (after my Marxist and before my skeptical period), I know the type: perhaps a bit narcissistic, perhaps intellectually sloppy, but quite well-meaning and at any rate mild and harmless. Possible wolves in the New Age landscape are at worst charlatans, conmen, swindlers, but not mass-murderers. Precisely this thorough non-violence explains the conspicuous syncretism of the New Age scene: all traditions and innovations are deemed worthy of existing, something worthwhile is assumed to operate in all of them, none should be fully rejected, let alone exterminated. It is, on the part of Peter Kratz, a despicable calumny to impute a Nazi mentality and Nazi designs to the New Age people.

And it doesn't stop there. Among other fundamental differences, a relevant one for this political discussion pertains to authority: in contrast with the Nazi "leader principle", the New Age movement is antiauthoritarian. Its defining principle is precisely that everyone

is free to explore and experience whatever resonates with him at that point in his evolution. Mostly in reaction against the suffocating authority of Christian dogma, New Age people are freewheeling consumers on the market of religions and lifestyles, accountable only to their "higher selves", not to any political dictator. New Age is also multi-racial, mixophilic and globalistic (which is why it is actually despised by the extreme Right, a conspicuous fact which expert Kratz manages to overlook), it talks a lot of community but is quite individualistic, and it dismisses the hypermasculine bravery cult of the Nazis in favour of soft feminine values. It is about as foreign to the regimented goose-stepping SS boots as you can get.

Today, most people in the New Age scene, to the extent that they hold political opinions, cherish vestigial Leftist attitudes. At the Anthroposophical schools, which have come under fire because their founder Rudolf Steiner has made some racist remarks, most parents are voters of the Green parties, which nowadays are explicitly Leftist and pro-multiculturalist. If you scratch any (including non-Anthroposophical, non-New Age) pre-1945 authors deep enough, be sure to find some racism or anti-Semitism. Recently, peripheral anti-Semitic passages were purged from Agatha Christie's detective novels, and in the case of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, such a whitewash would even make the plot unrecognizable; but that is no reason to ban Shakespeare or Agatha Christie from our libraries. Should Arabs ban the writings of Ibn Khaldun, or Jews those of Maimonides, because somewhere buried in their influential works, they also wrote that blacks are subhuman? Yes, Steiner held racist opinions, along with Voltaire and Marx and Disraeli and most contemporaries, but it is morbid to reduce his work to that quite peripheral aspect. And at any rate, in today's practice there is simply no racism in Steiner-minded circles.

Many of the similarities which Kratz claims to have found are factual but harmless. It is quite true that the New Age movement shared some elements with the Nazis, as did the Communists, the New Deal socialists and many others; the question is *which* elements. Even if it were true that New Age physicist Frithjof Capra shared with disreputable racist ideologues a belief in "intuition" as a valid means of knowledge (Kratz, p.135, mentions Houston Stewart Chamberlain), this would still not lead to the violent excesses of National-Socialism as long as it didn't cross the threshold from principled non-violence to the self-righteous acceptance of violence as the right method.

Let it for example be true that some alleged Nazis, like some New-Agers, were inspired by a pantheism captured in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's notion of "the cosmic Christ", as Kratz shows of 1930s Nazi-related ideologues Herbert Grabert and Wilhelm Hauer. (p.302) Heterodox Catholic philosopher Teilhard was very popular among modern Christians as much as among New Age people (who are generally not anti-Christian even if they object to Church authority); his idea of an emerging convergence of the consciousness of all sentient beings in a future "point Omega" brought the Christian notion of Salvation down into the course of history, which to fringe ideologues like Wilhelm Hauer resonated well with Adolf Hitler's notion of "providence", of a divine presence in history, itself a non-theistic version of Biblical "salvation history", of God's involvement in the history of His people. So what? Numerous harmless dreamers have entertained such ideas, they cannot help it if some camp followers of the Nazi movement also liked them. Vegetarians cannot help it if Hitler too reportedly shunned meat; more pertinent is that the communities which have practised vegetarianism for thousands of years, such as the Gujaratis, have no record of genocide,-- on the contrary, they have an

extremely low crime rate and are welcomed in the West as "model immigrants", forming the very best argument against the xenophobic association of immigration with disorder and violence.

Kratz's own Marxism did not share many of the philosophical assumptions of the Nazis, yet it was similarly (actually, ten times more) murderous. These philosophical profundities are just not the point. Whom should I rather encounter: a New Age dreamer who paints Buddhist swastikas on the walls of his meditation room, or a People's War Group Communist who has orders to eliminate the class enemies? New Age can share with Hauer or Chamberlain any amount of verbiage it wants; I still won't mind running into a New-Ager in a dark alley. The reason is precisely that New Age implies a commitment to soft values, to harmlessness. By contrast, Communism is a dangerous enemy, even if its militants show knee-jerk reactions of hatred when shown Nazi terms or symbols, because in spite of all its differences, it shares with National-Socialism the crucial elements of self-righteousness, subordination of human lives to political goals, and belief in violence as the acclaimed motor of world history.

Peter Kratz's book is an evil book. It obscures the crucial likeness between Hitlerian National-Socialism and Marxian International-Socialism while creating a smokescreen of immaterial likenesses, mostly imaginary but anyhow unimportant even when real, between ruthless National-Socialism and harmless New Age philosophies. Tainting harmless and well-meaning people with the Hitler brush is unambiguously evil, it is today the worst possible case of the one sin which all religions condemn: calumny. To Christians who promote this hate literature, it may be good to recall that *diabolos*/devil means "the calumniator".