

CRISIS & CRITIQUE

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The New Right

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The New Right
Volume 11/Issue 1, 2024

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Introduction: The Nouveau Right

Frank Ruda & Agon Hamza

Prelude:

Earlier this year, *Crisis and Critique* lived through its 10th anniversary. To date, we have published twenty-three issues (including the one that you are about to read) and are working on another issue scheduled to appear later this year. *Crisis and Critique* as a project is expanding beyond its initial idea, both in terms of its scope and in the range of elements involved.

Both concepts of “crisis” and “critique” remain of immense political and philosophical importance. Our premise is that we should not be too hasty in assuming that we already know what these two concepts mean or ascribe a too stable substance to either. Starting from this reflection, we edit every issue such that we invite authors to discuss its topic from the perspective of the present, because we assume that neither “crisis” nor “critique” have a transcendental or transhistorical status and therefore we do not attribute them a pre-given or predetermined unchangeable status.

The main aim of *Crisis and Critique* is to be a platform that addresses and discusses the most pressing philosophical, theoretical, political, scientific, psychoanalytical, religious, and artistic topics openly. Our editorial policy aims to abide by strict and rigorous scholarly principles where each author is not a representative of a group or an identity but speaks exactly as they think, namely for her- and himself.

* * *

According to many accounts of the contemporary political world we're confronted with a new political phenomenon, something that is sometimes referred to as the new right, and maybe we should – having the *nouveau riches* in mind – speak of a *nouveau right*. But even with the nomenclature problems begin. Is this right actually new and if so, what is new about it? From a certain moment in time onwards – 1789 – “right” and “left” were categories that were used to describe political positionings (actually, it first was a seating order in the National Constituent Assembly where the “radicals” sat left and the aristocrats sat right). Yet, these terms have frequently been challenged and in more recent decades described as being effectively, i.e., practically useless and theoretically disorienting. Not everything that moves is red (or left) (“tout ce qui bouge n'est pas rouge”), as the French once put it. Is the current resurgence of a “right-wing tendency”, of a novel “right-wing extremism” (Adorno) just another instance of this long-lasting disorientation?

Walter Benjamin is believed to have once remarked that the emergence of any fascism is the result of and thus caused by a failed revolution. If we take this as a basis for an analysis, then we are led to infer that the emergence of the new right must be the direct result of the failure or disappearance of revolutionary attempts or of emancipatory politics since the decline of Soviet Union (certainly pre-1989) which was mediatically epitomized in fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The rise of right-wing populism

is, in such a reading, a symptom of the weakness of the present politics of emancipation, and therefore not – or certainly not only – of the potency of the right. But the emergence of the new right raises additional issues and questions: these concern its relation to both “the left” and the “earlier” existing or the “previous” right.

While “the left” appears to be today a meaningless signifier, the “right” is strangely presenting us with a particular turn of the screw of disorientation. The left does represent or articulate neither an alternative nor a danger to capitalism and its newest ideological supplements and defense mechanisms. And, echoing Marx, we might venture to claim that the nouveau right conjures the language of the left and many of the talking points of previous emancipatory positions, appropriates them and transforms them into non-emancipatory policies that are then – different from previous emancipatory attempts – even implemented and realized, so that they effectively change the world (into what Alain Badiou describes as a “non-world”). Today, it is the far-right (leaders) who speak of and to the working class, address exploitation, the poor, national liberation, breaking the dominance of big corporations, et cetera, whereas the ultimate horizon of politics for the left appears to be embodied in the idea of *recognition* (of identities). Even though recognition is not necessarily a problematic category in itself; the problem with it in today’s world springs from its dominant interpretation, which suggests that one has to seek recognition from those who rule. But what does this become when those who rule are not the nouveau riches, but the *nouveau right*, those who rule only because there is a failure on and of the left? The situation here becomes again topsy-turvy.

In addition to these components of disorientation, the emergence of the nouveau right also poses the question of its relation to the previous (embodiment of the) right itself. What does the “new” right, retroactively, make us understand about its previous iteration? Are we here not confronted with a peculiar paradox: there is supposed to be some kind of novelty in a position that stands for the absence of novelty? Here methodological caution seems key: one ought to avoid too swiftly seeing and identifying something new in old categories that does not – at least not without proper analysis – apply to it. It can be part of a general disorientation, if one were to describe the “nouveau” right immediately as fascist, because it is precisely this very concept that can sometimes obscure and obfuscate the newness of the political, ideological or cultural phenomena we are confronted with. We might simply be facing something quite different. Its proponents might be figures that belong to a properly new ideological phenomenon or to a reinvention of it. Could it (not also) be that we do not yet have the correct terminology to name this current – or is the nouveau right ultimately just an ideological revenant? Could it not also transform classical right-wing positions and ideology, including fascism and produce an ideologico-politico mixture that makes all of its compo-

nents worse? This is not meant as a relativisation of highly reactionary and dangerous ideological and political positions. Rather this new current, spreading throughout the world so quickly and taking on multiple different shapes, *could* turn out to be also truly catastrophic (and already started to demonstrate its destructive potential all over the globe).

But here a difference to previous fascisms emerges: in the last century, fascist regimes abolished formal representative democracy and ruthlessly imposed their new order. That this is not yet the case with the nouveau right. This could be (at least partially) a consequence of their political and ideological incoherence. They do not want to get rid of the established order and impose their own vision – because they often do not seem to have one –, rather they pretend to be the new order within the existing framework in the form of the restoration of an old(er) order (which often is nothing but an invented tradition, in Eric Hobsbawm felicitous term). This might be why one features of the nouveau new right is the postponement of achieving their central aims (building a wall, etc.). This does not mean that they are not doing anything; but it means that delay and postponement is an inbuilt aspect of their political operativity.

They inhabit a sphere created by saturated opposition between the liberals and the “deep state”, between the “leftists” and the corrupt elites, even though the nouveau right are frequently quite close (or identical) to the latter. How can such an inconsistent and disorientating heap of ideological elements be successfully represented as a (fake) politics for / of the people? Is this contemporary politics new opium for the people? And is – in this sense – populism a crucial component of the nouveau right? It presents itself as being in principle sceptical of political representation and thereby also of representative democracy, but – paradoxically – in the name of a (fake) reference to the people and the nation (which should be made great again). The nouveau right thereby feigns to speak directly for the people and this even affects the form of general public discourse itself: the nouveau right is repeatedly using the supposedly vulgar language of the common (wo)man, they are breaking – implicit – discursive rules wherever they can and thereby appropriate what once was a subversive privilege of the left. But this fake discourse of the *vulgus*, where subversion becomes conservation, starts to affect the entire political edifice, the entire discursive universe of politics. What is to be done with this politico-ideological pile?

The present issue of *Crisis and Critique* seeks to address this problem from a variety of different angles and deals with a variety of international phenomena. We tried to bring together thinkers who are courageous enough to face this ideologico-political shift in the present world and provide their very own approaches, answers and problematizations.

Frankfurt/Prishtina, June 2024.

Senectus Mundi – Fascism Without Futurism: The Aging of the Western Population

Franco Bifo Berardi

Abstract: In the past century Fascism was essentially based on youth, expansion, futurism. Now it is rather expression of impotence of an old declining white population.

Keywords: Fascism, population, West, war

I'm seventy-five years old, and in the last years I've become the main subject of my own research. Not because I'm particularly selfish or narcissistic, but because I think that understanding senescence is the best way to go to the heart of the western psychosis.

The reason why I have decided to reflect on the process of becoming nothing, the slow inexorable disintegration of the body, the dysphoric perception of the bodily self, the desperation that proceeds from the loss of autonomy..... is not (only) personal.

As far as I know the psycho-political implications of the unprecedented aging of the average white population has not been thematized by philosophers, or political thinkers of our time.

One century ago, in the years following the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire, Oswald Spengler wrote a book about the decline of the West (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*).

He was interested in the spiritual decline, that was widely thematized by the writers and artists of the *Finis Austriae*.

I'm not so interested in the spiritual, much more in the bodily and psychological dimension of this decline.

I have engaged in this embarrassing self-analysis because I think that here lies an important key to understand the contemporary descent of the western white world into a sort of psychological marasmus that explains self-defeating choices like the American wars on Afghanistan, Iraq and most disastrously, the war in Ukraine, and also explains something of the reactionary turn of the political spectrum of the parliaments of Europe, and, most important, of the population of the European countries. And not only of these.

The conjoined effect of prolongation of life and decreasing birth rate have created an unprecedented situation at the psychological level, but also at the level of political attitudes: loss of memory, mental confusion, marasmus, and finally, furious aggressiveness for the humiliation and impotence that the fall of energy has provoked.

The presidential race in the US is marked by the cruel spectacle of two old men who are exchanging insults on the brink of senile dementia: it is the best depiction of the descent into a chaotic nightmare.

Since the end of the past century western strategists have chosen Ukraine as the place for a final confrontation with the declining potency of Russia, destroyed by the conjoined effect of neoliberal reform and plundering of the national resources. Then came Putin, who decreed to reverse at all costs the Russian decline; so after 2014 the Ukrainian issue became the test bench of the Russian self-assertion.

Just before the Russian invasion, in a TV interview, Hillary Clinton promised to provide a new Afghanistan to the Russian President, as a revenge for the support that the Kremlin had given to Donald Trump. The new Afghanistan was located in Ukraine, of course.

Ukrainian people were cannon fodder for this American political game.

Furthermore, the war at the Eastern border of Europe was an unmissable opportunity for the Biden administration: the conflict allowed the breakdown of the economic relations between Russia and Europe, particularly between Russia and Germany.

Eventually the war in Ukraine has turned into a catastrophe for Zelenskyy, for the American instigators, and for the European sponsors.

First of all, it is a human catastrophe for the Ukrainian people, whose future has been destroyed in the name of rancid ideals of national pride.

Secondly it is an economic catastrophe for the European countries, particularly for Germany, while the Russian economy has rapidly recovered, turning into a system of war economy.

Finally, it is a strategic catastrophe for the West as a whole, because it has accelerated the convergence between the enemies of the West, Russia and China, while failing to isolate Moscow at the international level.

The Ukrainian is an inter-white conflict, opposing the “free world” and the Russki-mir, two worlds that are similarly declining in demographic terms, two worlds where senescence has become the main trend at the cultural and psychological level.

The despair of the white culture worldwide (the loss of energy, the loss of mental focus, well known features of impending senility): this is the mental background of the (apparently) unstoppable ascent of the ultra-reactionary movement worldwide.

Dynamics of the Nazi-liberal wave

In order to interpret the rise of rightwing parties in most countries of the West, political thinkers and commentators employ the categories they have at their disposal: democracy, liberalism, socialism, fascism and so on...

But these words do not capture the essence of the process, which is not so new at the level of ideological enunciations, whilst it is radically new in its anthropological and psycho-cognitive dimension.

The traditional dynamics of parliamentary democracy and social struggle appear to have been overcome, as if a cyclone of unprecedented

strength swept away the defenses that society built after the Second World War.

But the cyclone is not made (only) of nationalist rhetoric or racist assessments: it is made of senescent despair and furious revenge against the senile humiliation. The impotence of will in front of ungovernable phenomena like mass migration, climate change and precarity of labor: this is the fuel of that rage.

Can we identify what is happening as a return of the historical fascism? I don't think so: fascism and nationalism are the rhetorics, the ideology, the postures and so on. But the psycho-political substance of this movement is far away from the bold aggressive Futurist stance.

Futurism was the aesthetic projection of a young population of aggressive males, conquerors, invaders, who pretended to be the bearers of civilization. Now the posture is the reverse: fear of being invaded by hordes of migrants, fear of future, exhaustion. And panic.

What is emerging is a phenomenon of gigantic scope, which cannot be explained in political terms because it is rooted in the techno-anthropological mutation.

One may criticize my insistence on senescence as a key to understand the reactionary wave by pinpointing that many young people are among those who vote for Trump for Meloni and for Javier Milei. Actually, when Milei celebrated his triumph on December 10th 2023, the square in front of the Casa Rosada was filled with young people chanting Libertad Libertad!

This is true. But my definition of senility is not limited to the chronological age.

I refer to the disease that permeates the cultural sphere, the disforia that permeates self-perception at the social and sexual level, as Paul Preciado has observed in *Disphoria mundi*.

I refer to the psychopathologies spreading among the whole of the western population, particularly among youngsters, clearly visible in the explosion in consumption of drugs like Fentanyl.

In recent years psychiatrists have denounced an unprecedented increase in anxiety, depression, and panic syndrome among those who have been born in the new millennium.

Certainly, the Covid pandemics has accelerated the trend, fueling dysphoric unease, loneliness, and a sort of phobic sensibilization to the body of the others.

At the same time the connective mutation of technology, particularly of communication technology, has provoked an effect of mental distress and cognitive disturbance.

The post-alphabetical mind is less and less able to discriminate true and false enunciations: the widespread diffusion of fake news is not a novelty in the history of politics and communication. What is new is the inability of the social mind to distinguish information from bullshit.

The post-alphabetical mind is less and less able to construct an individual path for processing information and living experience. This ability in fact depends on available processing time, and time is scarce as the unceasing flow of info-input destroys the ability of critical processing.

In the case of young people who spend six, eight hours in electronic environments, time for critical processing and for emotional elaboration of the information input is reduced to zero.

The distinction between truth and falsity of statements is not only made difficult, but is irrelevant, as when you are in a gaming environment. In such an environment it makes no sense to approve or disapprove of the violence of the green men invading the red planet. Doing so would only lead to losing the game.

The connective configuration of the contemporary mind is increasingly indifferent to the distinction between true and false, between good and bad.

This is in my opinion the anthropological framework of a mutation that cannot be reduced to politics, and will not be cured (only) by political action.

The New Right Machinery

Andrea Cavalletti

Abstract: The aim of this article is to provide an answer to the question about the New Right by applying the “mythological machine” model developed by the Italian mythologist and Germanist Furio Jesi. According to Jesi, the production of stereotypes, conspiracy theories, or the exploitation of mythical-religious images for political purposes are typical of the machine’s activity. Consistent with this activity is, evidently, the production of the resentful petty-bourgeois mass and – according to our hypothesis – the maintenance of its original “paradox”: it is a mass that feels oppressed by the same apparatus that maintains it as such by fabricating and organizing its resentful sense of oppression. From the point of view of the New Right, this vicious circle obviously turns to a virtuous one; for us, instead, truly debunking this trick means destroying the conditions that make it effective and productive.

Keywords: New Right, Mythological machine, Mass, People, Walter Benjamin, Furio Jesi.

1.

If we do not believe or are not interested in believing in a technical self-definition, can we really believe in the existence of a “New Right”? Is this adjective “new” referable to the wing that at any cost, using any means, has always worked for the preservation of the conditions of domination and exploitation? Whatever the answer, the risk is to fall into the habit (an old vice, in truth) of always looking for “new” phenomena to understand, that is, of believing in the myth of novelty (the positive term) which necessarily replaces everything that has been written and passed down (the negative term, the not-new). This myth is based on the linearity of progress, and therefore on the presumption that the old phenomenon is the one already understood, while the new one is the unusual one that we need to understand. In other words, we should understand a change, a novelty whose conditions, however, we assume are already known. Such a conception of novelty is evidently paradoxical, but its *raison d’être* is the same force of habit that hides this evidence. In fact, the very idea that there is always something new is nothing else than the claim that events always follow the same order, that is, the claim to introduce the usual into the unusual, the stable into the unstable: it is always the same, old idea of an always identical renewal impulse. As far as our problem is concerned, this idea is the other side of the conception of fascism as an “eternal phenomenon”, a definition perhaps not incongruous but to be used with the utmost caution, since it is precisely fascism (whether “old” or “new”) which defines its concepts with the particle *Ur-*.

In the 1970s, when Italian fascism (whose continuity was represented in parliament by the Italian Social Movement) imposed itself on the political scene as a new one, or neo-fascism, the mythologist

Furio Jesi described in his book *Cultura di destra* (*Right-wing Culture*) “the most characteristic and widespread element of right-wing culture” as a “truly cadaverous immobility that pretends to be a perennial living force”. Quoting Oswald Spengler’s expression “ideas without words”, Jesi described right-wing ideology as a “linguistic or mythological machine” that works by spreading a dense network of clichés, stereotypes, commonplaces, formulas which seem clear precisely because they don’t need to be understood. In this way, every word is here reduced to a simple intermediary of what is before all words, as if every word alludes to something that must not be said, a secret that has always been shared by the subjects, and therefore defines them as belonging to a specific group.

The mythological machine always *alludes* to a myth, to something that dates back to the most remote past (identity, homeland, origin, Blood and soil). In other words, it offers tales of the myth (mythologies) which refer to the myth and at the same time hide it. The machine gives us the mythologies of which its surface is made, and at the same time alludes to the unverifiable presence of myth within it. In some ways, this linguistic and cognitive model recalls Foucault’s famous description of the disciplinary dispositif of the Panopticon, in which the unverifiable presence of the guardian at the center of the tower ensures that the prisoners always feel controlled. Likewise, for the functioning of the mythological machine it is not essential that the existence of its content be certain: it is instead required that this existence be simply possible, that is, unverifiable. And if in Bentham’s model the coercive condition strictly excludes the possibility of not believing in the presence of the guardian at all, in the case of the machine, i.e. in the absence of coercion, believing or not believing in the existence of the myth is not really an alternative. The full efficiency of the machine corresponds to its absolute indifference towards the dichotomies true/false, belief/unbelief. What it claims to contain must instead be simply credible, not absolutely true but possibly truthful or plausible. Regarding anti-Semitic racism, for example: those who believe in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion care little about their authenticity. The conspiracy does not have to be a proven fact, but simply a possibility. The machine therefore does not operate on the level of political lying and political action which requires lies: it works on the level of rumour, which, so to speak, acts on actions and influences them. And if “the point beyond which lying becomes counterproductive” always arrives, if “the attempt to get rid of facts”¹ is ultimately fallacious, the mythological machine does not run these risks.

Right-wing culture is therefore conspiracy culture by definition. In Jesi’s terms, it is the culture or language made of ideas without words and that is of allusive words, with a capital letter: Nation, Family... but also: Freedom, Revolution². As Jesi explains, “Most of the cultural heritage, even of those who today do not want to be right-wing at all, are right-wing cultural residues [...] It is useless and unreasonable to be scandalized by

the presence of these residues, but it is also necessary to try to know where they come from”³. Mythologies can change and renew themselves, but the machine continues to function in its own way. To be more precise (and a bit repetitive), it is precisely the novelty that hides the immobile centre, alludes to the origin, to the very distant or unverifiable past. Moreover, the machine can be compared to the Panopticon because it is the Columbus’s egg in the order of what Karl Kerényi called the “technicalization of myth”. It automatically and maximally efficiently carries out the production and exploitation of mythologies for political purposes. Now, as we know, political mythologies are produced to influence the masses: the functioning of the mythological machine is therefore nothing but the production of the “mass” itself. We could say that the mythological machine produces – or helps to produce – the mass-man, and we could also define it as a device of subjectivation capable of operating on a large scale.

In this sense, right-wing ideology is always old and always new, because mythologies renew themselves and change when necessary, at the positive or negative pole of the tireless device: mythologies of well-being or security, mythologies of free speech, mythologies of unlimited Credit or Debt, mythology of immigrants who are “poisoning the blood of the country”, mythologies of the Great Replacement and the American way of life, mythology of the Christian heterosexual family and Aryan Heritage...

2.

What is a mass, that is, the product and at the same time the acting subject of the mythological machine? In 1936 Walter Benjamin described the masses as petty bourgeoisie whose essence is purely psychological.

the mass as an impenetrable, compact entity, which Le Bon and others have made the subject of their “mass psychology” is that of the petty bourgeoisie. the petty bourgeoisie is not a class; it is in fact only a mass. And the greater the pressure acting on it between the two antagonistic classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the more compact it becomes. in *this* mass, the emotional element described in mass psychology⁴.

This non-class, this compact mass or mass as such, this “sociological freak of nature”, is the multitude of customers brought together by the capitalist market, whose casual aggregation, marked by mutual antagonisms, is, for the subjects themselves, simply perturbing: “in *this* mass, the emotional element described in mass psychology is indeed a determining factor – whether they give vent to war fever, hatred of Jews, or the instinct for self-preservation”⁵. But this disturbing closeness of individuals who are extraneous to each other can be rationalized by them as “‘fate’ in which the ‘race’ is reunited” (Benjamin), or, we could also say, as identity or identity

of “the people”. The internal disintegrative forces are therefore directed against the foreigner, also perceived as “the hidden enemy among us”.

Returning at this point to Jesi’s model, we could say that the mythological machine works as an instrument capable of producing and directing these forces. Their active origin is the difficult or impossible integration of the single individual into the collective, that is, that feeling of mutual aggressiveness of customers which cannot and must not be appeased but rather exploited and oriented towards a target which the machine is always capable of fabricate. Heading towards this enemy is a mass, a simple multitude, which however calls itself a people, i.e. it is presumed to have a single will. However, and again at the risk of repetition and obviousness, we must be clear: the mass as such is not a natural phenomenon, it is an historically characterized product. It is the mass of individual consumers, isolated, selfish, competing with each other but united in the space of the capitalist market. The mass that rationalizes this condition and recognizes itself as “the people” therefore results from further manipulation. This work of fabrication is carried out and controlled through mythological projections (and a coherent practice of intimidation and persuasion) by the state apparatus: “the people” are in fact nothing other than the subject of state sovereignty.

But on the other hand, a perfect transformation of the mass into a people can never be achieved, since the market always needs customers, and the antagonistic and competitive character of the latter contradicts the unitary character of “the people”. The internal conflict of the multitude (or the mutual competition of individual subjects brought together by the capitalist market), thus corresponds to the continuously unresolved tension between “mass” and “people”. In other words, it is the contradictory tendency of the multitude of individuals who contest as oppressive and illiberal the very apparatus that should constitute them as “the people” i.e. as the organized unit that they claim to become (even as they protest).

3.

The mass – or the crowd – is a split being and, as has been noted many times, it is an ephemeral being (“a ray of light brings it together; a downpour disperses it”, wrote Gabriel Tarde – and Elias Canetti will echo him: “rain is the crowd in the moment of discharge, and stand also for its disintegration”⁶): but *it is split because its ephemerality depends precisely on its claim to be durable*. The capitalist market economy, with its state superstructure, is the historical a priori of its peculiar, unstable or “unsociable sociability”. Therefore we must also recognize here the classic opposition, highlighted by Hobbes, between the people and the multitude (“the multitude against the people”). As we read in De Cive (XII, 8),

The people is somewhat that is one, having one will, and to whom one action may be attributed; none of these can properly be said

of a multitude. The people rules in all governments. For even in monarchies the people commands; for the people wills by the will of one man; but the multitude are citizens, that is to say, subjects. In a democracy and aristocracy, the citizens are the multitude, but the court is the people. And in a monarchy, the subjects are the multitude, and (however it seem a paradox) the king is the people. The common sort of men, and others who little consider these truths, do always speak of a great number of men as of the people, that is to say, the city; they say that the city hath rebelled against the king (which is impossible), and that the people will, and nill, what murmuring and discontented subjects would have, or would not have, under pretence of the people stirring up the citizens against the city, that is to say, the multitude against the people⁷.

We have quoted Kant's famous formula above. But now we must also remember the words written by Carl Schmitt precisely about Hobbes' theory and the passage from the multitude (i.e. the state of nature or the war of all against all) to the people (i.e. the civil state): "men who gather in anguished enmity they cannot overcome enmity, the premise of their coming together"⁸. *Furthermore, we cannot forget that the Hobbesian opposition has also been described several times in the jargon of political sociologists. With reference to modern democracy and Le Bon's mass psychology, this was brilliantly done by Theodor Geiger:*

Democracy is not at all the government of many (ochlocracy), but rather the government of all [...] When Le Bon speaks simultaneously of the "power of democracy" and the "power of the masses", he does nothing but confuse demos and plethos (ochlos), democracy and the square. Democracy is particularly unstable in its intellectual structure; an oligarchy cannot develop very well under democratic forms [...], nor can an ochlocracy arise from it without affecting democratic forms. In real democracy, which is extremely rare, there is no ochlos. This only arises where democracy begins to fail due to the leader problem.

In a democracy the whole is the bearer of a planned, organized and legal policy. The politics of the street is a politics of resentment, whose subjects are *oi polloi*, a politics whose essential characteristic is precisely the rejection of legal and constitutional politics.

[...] And the feeling that every bond must become slavery somewhere leads to the denial of the conscious bond, of the legal system in general. All the masses are anarchists. In the spirit of Tönnies, we could say: it is the return to the will of those who despair of the arbitrary order – and the obvious paradox of this will is the sociological tragedy of the masses⁹.

If, as has been observed, the complete transformation of the mass into a people is unattainable, expressions such as “paradox”, “sociological tragedy” describe – in the same logical scheme – an unsolvable stalemate. In fact, we are dealing with two sides of the same coin: *the voice of the people will never be a seditious murmur precisely because the mass will never form a unity, because a multitude of individuals gathered together will never ultimately have a single voice*. Therefore the “people” as an efficient concept of state logic paradoxically exists since the multitude will never be a people. It is therefore perfectly logical and necessary that, from the perspective of capitalism, an attempt to respond to this situation is individualist anarcho-capitalism. The fact that this ideology reacts to the mass’s realization of its tragic paradox is demonstrated by its first whiny statement: “the State is not ‘us’”¹⁰. When the fundamental affirmation of anarchism (“the State is that organization in society which attempts to maintain a monopoly of the use of force and violence in a given territorial area”¹¹) is associated with the clarification according to which “State necessarily lives by the compulsory confiscation of private capital, and [...] is profoundly and inherently anticapitalist”¹² is obviously because neither the State nor anarchy, but Capital is the true source of this murmur that now tries to make its own weakness a strength, its problematic dispersion in discordant individual voices the solution to its problem. Of course, this magic trick can only have some success on the State stage.

On the other hand, to the impossibility of constituting mutually antagonistic subjects into a people, one can only respond – as Schmitt did – by offering the myth of the identity of the people and of the enemy: one could believe that this response is given in good faith, because it is the response from those who cannot help but believe in the people; however, it is the response of the preventive counter-revolution, i.e. of those who, intimidated or not, trust in the force of the state apparatus and must safeguard it at any cost. The two poles, mass and people, are in fact nothing other than the two functional poles (in their more or less latent tension) of the state machinery: firmly maintaining the ability to govern in their sometimes very turbulent field of tension is what we give to the very name of government or “art of government”.

The two historically characterized and collaborating extremes of this continuously oscillating system are: – the prevalence of the demos, organized and legal democracy in Geiger’s sense; – the prevalence of the crowd, the disintegrating madness of the mass which however necessarily takes the form of the state, this once totalitarian. The latter is undeniable evidence, something that had already appeared obvious to Ortega y Gasset:

it rather confounds one to hear Mussolini heralding as an astounding discovery just made in Italy, the formula: “All for the State; nothing outside the State; nothing against the State.” This alone would

suffice to reveal in Fascism a typical movement of mass-men. Mussolini found a State admirably built up – not by him, but precisely by the ideas and the forces he is combating: by liberal democracy. He confines himself to using it ruthlessly [...] Through and by means of the State, an anonymous machine, the masses act for themselves¹³.

This action, truly typical of the masses, certainly does not deny but confirms and brings their “tragedy” to the extreme. Now mythically identified with the people or the state, the masses, believing in this myth, cannot now help but turn against themselves, gripped by the madness of war, in an impetus that is both destructive and self-destructive.

4.

This quick sketch, it will be said, shows at most some aspects of the ancient twentieth-century phenomenon, but the new right is something very different, just as it is true that capitalism does not remain the same over the centuries.

Let us then look at the present circumstances. It has been repeatedly reported that democratic liberalism is crumbling and that two new forms are emerging in its place: on the one hand, illiberal democracy or identity democracy without rights (e.g. Orbán’s Hungary), on the other anti-democratic global liberalism (radical European or American neoliberalism). As has also been very recently and appropriately observed, this situation does not correspond to a true dichotomy between the two systems but to a “bipolar equilibrium”¹⁴. For our part, we can infer that this balance, dangerously stretched to the extreme limit of conflict, is actually possible within the framework constructed by liberal democracy itself (a background that only the truly dichotomous situation would eliminate from the scene). The bipolar balance, however, maintains it and also exists within the two systems, which then undergo mutual influences, confirming in one sense or another the paradox of the mass: democracy without rights must strengthen its defenses (authoritarian and police) against the pressures of a latent democratic mass; illiberal democracy, for its part, is not internally pacified, nor are the last semblances of liberal democracies (just think of the current neo-Nazi threat in Germany).

Benjamin, the heterodox Marxist, quoted in 1936 the old, reactionary Le Bon. According to the same logic, we could perhaps still remember Ortega y Gasset and his “señorito satisfecho”¹⁵: dissatisfaction is a luxury that the self-satisfied man can afford; it is only the negative mark on the scale of satisfaction, which can even reach (and there is no contradiction in this) the extreme of real poverty. The chronically dissatisfied mass, which murmurs against the State, is always and only the mass-people paradoxically united in mutual disagreement and always directed in a more or less violent and explicit way against the weakest, the last of

the earth, both when it democratically claims “its” civil rights or even the rights of the capitalist individual against the excessive power of the state or, on the opposite pole, when it votes for far-right parties or even unleashes its violence by joining fascist groups. The petty-bourgeois mass of satisfied-dissatisfied customers nourished by “right-wing culture” will never experience a situation of true contradiction. At the same time – this is its paradoxical and even tragic aspect – it must at all costs prevent the true contradiction from maturing. For the multitude of dissatisfied and insecure customers who protest or murmur against the state, the chains could in fact never be radical. And the chains will never be radical as long as the machine alludes to ideas without words by spreading conflicting – but therefore ultimately coherent – mythologies (Homeland, Soil, Tradition, Identity... but also: Democracy, Freedom, Rights, Progress...).

5.

The concepts of class, revolutionary class, class struggle, which Benjamin contrasted with that of the fascist crowd, enjoy very little credit today. But the error is in the gaze, one could reply: the “radical chains” cannot and must not appear in the dominant perspective of the masses, or of the “planetary petty bourgeoisie in which all the old social classes are dissolved”¹⁶.

On the other hand we still have to ask ourselves whether our interpretative framework is useful or completely useless for understanding the “New Right” theme, or rather the novelty as such. This inability could in fact correspond to a conditioning of the mythological machine. The risk, which Jesi himself warned against, is that of taking the model too seriously, and therefore paradoxically being fascinated by it in this way.

Let’s try to return again, from this point of view, to the current circumstances and refer to an example taken from the news of very recent times. In an article published a few weeks ago (in the April issue of “Le monde diplomatique”), the French-Israeli essayist Marius Schattner reflected on the words used by Binyamin Netanyahu after 7 October, and above all on the question of their actual, real novelty. As is known, in fact, “at a press conference in Tel Aviv on 28 October 2023, and in a letter of 3 November to IDF soldiers who praised their ‘fight against the murderers of Hamas’”, the Israeli prime minister quoted the passage from Deuteronomy (25.17): “Remember what Amalek did to you”. The use of this rhetoric evidently corresponds to the claim to affirm the novelty or unprecedented character of the ongoing conflict, giving it “a religious gloss”. But it is precisely against this claim that Schattner re-established the rights of the reality principle. In fact, as he points out, “such language [...] predates the reaction to the Hamas atrocities of 7 October”. The Israeli authorities have used this rhetoric for several years, “albeit less overtly”:

during Operation Cast Lead in 2008–09, the IDF's chief rabbi Avichai Rontzki urged the soldiers of 'God's army' to show no mercy towards the enemy, invoking the wars of conquest in Canaan, the Promised Land. And in 2014, during Operation Protective Edge in Gaza, General Ofer Winter [...] wrote in an official dispatch, 'History has chosen us to spearhead the fighting against the terrorist Gazan enemy which abuses, blasphemes and curses the God of Israel's [defence] forces'. At the time, such statements from a high-ranking military officer caused a scandal and cut short his military career¹⁷.

It therefore seems that the "novelty" consists in this: to unfold in the most blatant way, political-religious rhetoric must find its opportune moment. This moment was offered by the unprecedented violence of the October 7 attack, which also has an undeniable mythological character, opposite and corresponding.

On the same newspaper page, Anne Waeles calls into question the historian of Judaism Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, author of *Exil et souveraineté*. Also recalling Gershom Scholem's warning about the dangers and ambiguities of modern Hebrew as a national language, Raz-Krakotzkin underlined that the ideology of the far-right settlers (represented today by the ultranationalist religious wing of the Israeli government) is consistent with a long-term political attitude, i.e. with the exploitation of Judaism implemented by Zionism for the purposes of its secular messianism. The settlers' approach – he wrote – "is no different from that of the secular Zionists; they simply took it to its logical conclusion"¹⁸.

6.

At this point, to outline a conclusion, let's go back to considering the "mythological machine" model once again, and let's try to shift our gaze from today's news to yesterday's.

In a 1968 article, titled *The Arabs and Israel: Political and spiritual Zionism*, Jesi opposed his reluctance to spiritual Zionism's reliance on the state as the means or path to the spiritual goal of Zion. He expressed the doubt that that path towards the spiritual goal of perfection could instead stop precisely in the State of Israel, which like all States was then and will always be fatally involved in a complex game of political interests. Beyond this, Jesi also harshly criticized political Zionism which, being foreign to religion, drew propaganda elements from it: he expressed his

repugnance towards any political exploitation of myths or religious beliefs, [...] repugnance towards the behavior of men like David Ben Gurion, an erudite connoisseur of biblical texts, but notoriously a secularist, who is willing – when political reason demands it – to wear the ritual shawl and pray in public¹⁹.

If our concern today with Netanyahu's rhetoric is akin to the feeling of revulsion felt by Jesi almost sixty years ago, it is not because it is old and not new. If this happens, it is because yesterday as today the machine operates by referring historical current events to a mythical past, that is, transforming today's enemy into the "eternal enemy". In this way, it projects that Ur-past onto the actuality of the present in order to fabricate it. In this way, again, right-wing culture – "a truly cadaverous immobility that claims to be a perennial living force" – has never ceased to renew itself.

In other words, the machine operates by manipulating historical time: it continuously makes novelty appear, placing it in relation to an eternal phenomenon. Is it therefore invincible or indestructible? Just asking this question means in a certain sense already triggering the mechanism and therefore effectively giving in to its enchanting power. Instead, as Jesi has pointed out, "it is necessary to destroy not machines themselves, which would reform like the heads of the Hydra, but rather the situation that makes machines real and productive. The possibility of this destruction is exclusively political..."²⁰.

The answer to the question of the newness of the right wing, and to the problem and dangers of the new right, lies in the question of destruction. Every destruction that remains internal to the functioning of the machine is in fact condemned to failure, inanity, resentment or to the sacrifice of themselves and others (war fever, hatred of "strangers" and so on). However, it is possible not to be surprised by the presence of residues of right-wing culture, even where we might least expect them. It is possible to analyze the functioning of the machine, and, consequently, also see what the conditions of this functioning are. Finally, and consequently, it is possible not to be in solidarity with these conditions and with the role they assign to us. Only this possibility coincides with a *truly new* type of solidarity, which will be truly and positively destructive.

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- 4 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Second Version)' in *Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935–1938* (Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings eds) (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), p. 129.
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- 7 Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive or The Citizen* (Sterling P. Lamprecht ed.) (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), p. 135.
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- 12 Ibid., p. 42.
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- 18 Anne Waeles, 'Zionism's cooption of Judaism', in *Le Monde diplomatique* (april 2024), p. 10. See also Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *Exil et souveraineté. Judaïsme, sionisme et pensée binazionale* (Carlo Ginzburg pref., Catherine Neuve-Église trans.) (Paris: La Fabrique, 2007).
- 19 Furio Jesi, 'Gli Arabi e Israele. Sionismo politico e spirituale', *Resistenza. Giustizia e libertà* (march 1968), p. 3.
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Ziofascist Violence and the Nakba 2.0: Jouissance and Necrocapitalism in the Consolidation of extremist Messianic Zionist far-right Ideology

Jamil Khader

Abstract: This article traces the consolidation of the power of the extremist messianic Zionist far-right ideology in the settler-colonial apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state over the last decade. I argue that Ziofascist violence is not an aberration or a fringe movement in the history of the Zionist settler-colonial and apartheid project, but a constitutive feature of Zionist colonial ideology. It reflects the whole fabric of the settler colonial Jewish apartheid ethnocratic state. Unlike liberal Zionism, extremist messianic Zionist far-right ideology does not dress its intentions in the rhetoric of humanism and “democracy.” The article analyzes the reproduction of Ziofascism not only in relation to the libidinal investment in a theocratic dictatorship and its call for the new Nakba, or Nakba 2.0. It also examines Ziofascism in the context of an old history of a symbiotic relationship between far-right messianic Zionism and international fascist movements and its important structural position in advancing the interests of the necrocapitalist U.S. empire and the global capitalist class that sustain the Zionist settler-colonial and apartheid project. The article demonstrates that these interlocking factors instrumentalize the genocidal logic of the Zionist settler-colonial and apartheid project, by reducing Palestinians to the status of a disposable surplus population and relegating them to the “zone of non-being.”

Key words: Ziofascism, Nakba 2.0, genocide, jouissance, necrocapitalism

“It is inconceivable that those who oppose fascism throughout the world, if correctly informed as to Mr. Begin’s political record and perspectives, could add their names and support to the movement he represents.”

Albert Einstein, Letter to *The New York Times*¹

“I may be a far-right person, a homophobe, racist, fascist, but my word is my bond.”

Israel’s Far-right Finance Minister Bezael Smotrich²

1. Israel’s Drift to Authoritarian Capitalism: An Illiberal “Jewish Democracy” and the Populist Nationalist Model

Two important events happened towards the end of July, 2019 in Israel: The settler-colonial apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state of Israel passed its new Jewish nation state law, which has been in the making for over two years now.³ In addition, Hungary’s anti-Semitic Prime Minister Viktor Orban made a two-day visit to Israel.⁴ Despite the international uproar over the law, critics did not link these two interrelated events together, even though both events attest to a radical shift towards authoritarian, fascist governance in the alleged “only democracy in the Middle East.”⁵

As an apartheid settler-colonial ethnocratic state, Israel can no longer suppress or manage the contradictions that have accelerated its development into a racist apartheid state. These contradictions include its ethnocratic Zionist settler-colonial ideology, ethno-religious particularity in all its ambiguity (Jewish as a referent for both ethnic and religious identities), and the secular, egalitarian democratic ideals to which it has paid lip services for seven decades. In the larger picture of world politics today, moreover, traditional liberal democracies are becoming an obstacle to the power realignments in the region and around the world, forcing the settler-colonial apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state to find new ways to fit into the structural changes that the neoliberal global capitalist system is currently undergoing. Indeed, Israel emerged as the only winner of the Helsinki summit.⁶

In this context, the law inaugurates the Israeli ethnocratic settler-colonial state as an illiberal religious-based democracy and apartheid state, while Orbán's visit confers legitimacy on it within the global power shifts today especially, the rise of far right populist nationalist movements in Europe and the USA. This calls for inventing new strategies for universalizing the Palestinian struggle for freedom.

Illiberal Jewish democracy

Despite the uproar over the new law, this basic law did not introduce anything new in the way things have been done in Israel. Rather, this law merely enshrines the de facto colonial and apartheid realities in the Israeli ethnocratic settler-colonial state into a de jure status (law). At one level, therefore, this new law makes it possible to put the last seventy years of Israel's ethnocratic history of ethnic cleansing and apartheid politics into their proper context. Hence, this law has nothing to do with safeguarding Jewish identity, tradition, homeland or even Western civilization. Rather, it exposes the history of the Israeli ethnocratic settler-colonial regime in all its brutal realities, by revealing the suppressed ethno-nationalism that drives such regimes.

However, the attitude towards this constitutive apartheid and colonial history has always been expressed in terms of a "fetishistic disavowal"—we all knew what was really going on, but all the same.⁷ Thus, when Palestinian Knesset member Ahmad Tibi announced the "death of democracy" in Israel as a result of this law, it must be pointed out that it has been dead all along.⁸

Oren Yiftachel, a renowned scholar of Israeli ethnocracy, convincingly argues that Israel's democratic charade covers up a deeper ethnocratic apartheid structure.⁹ Such a structure, he points out, requires the institutionalization of racial laws that can guarantee Jewish supremacy and hegemony. Equality (before the law) and the redistribution of resources and rights become an elusive dream that will always be undermined at both symbolic and legal levels.

Thus, when Prime Minister Netanyahu states that “Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, and respects the rights of all of its citizens,” he is evidently obfuscating the oxymoron that is an ethnocratic democracy. The rights of all citizens in such an ethnocratic polity can be neither respected nor protected, since the “only democracy in the Middle East” is based on securing the privileges and rights of one particular ethno-religious identity only. The hierarchical and exclusivist principles of the Israeli ethnocratic settler-colonial state stand on the opposite end of the universal and egalitarian ideals of any secular polity that deems itself the state of all its citizens.

The fact that Arabic was also demoted into a “special status” language in this law discloses the implicit common belief that Arabic is the “language of the enemy.” Any illusions about multicultural relations and coexistence will consequently be exploded. Indeed, activists have long dismissed the multicultural façade in this ethnocratic scene for what it really is: in a playful pun on the Hebrew word for coexistence (*doo-qiyum* in Hebrew), they sarcastically call it “dookie.”

The Populist Nationalist Model

It is no coincidence that the law was passed at a time when the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban was visiting Israel and meeting with Netanyahu. Orban’s visit does not simply stop at consolidating the Israeli government’s ties with the European far right. As a symbol of the European far right, Orban provides a blueprint for Netanyahu on how to suspend traditional liberal democracy and replace it with a religious-based democracy.

In a radio interview in May 2017, Orban called for “building an old-school Christian democracy, rooted in European traditions.”¹⁰ This “illiberal democracy,” as he called it in a famous 2014 speech, is grounded in a belief in “the importance of the nation” and a vigorous opposition to “any supranational business or political empire.”¹¹ In the same speech, he also rejected the “Western European dogmas” that suggest that people should be “free to do anything that does not violate another person’s freedom.” The government has every right now to undercut freedom.

These illiberal ethno-religious democracies are sustained by a unique combination of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. First, they posit themselves as defenders of the West against “Muslim invaders”—Muslim immigrants and refugees for Orban and radical and militant Islam especially, Iran, for Netanyahu.¹²

Second, they are getting mileage out of obscene abuse of anti-Semitism. While Orban has been condemned for his blatant anti-Semitism, he still considers himself to be a hard core supporter of Israel.¹³ On the other hand, the Netanyahu government has been courting anti-Semitic clergy and public figures and hunting down anti-Zionist Jewish individuals and organizations.¹⁴ The deal here will ensure Israel’s silence over the

crackdown on the freedoms of immigrants and refugees in Europe, and the European silence over Israel's oppression of the Palestinian indigenous population not only in the occupied Palestinian territories, but also inside Israel proper now.

It is also supported by the exclusion and isolation of the Palestinians. On his recent visit, it was reported, Orban did not schedule talks with any Palestinian leader, in a break with EU protocols.¹⁵ Moreover, there is a clear investment in Putin's Russia that conceals a more dangerous trend towards legitimizing oppressive authoritarian regimes.

The confluence of these events will make it easier for Israel and its allies to complete the liquidation of the Palestinian cause (and any reference to resistance and steadfastness) and carry out their land swaps and transfer plans, however partial, for the Palestinian Arab population in Israel proper. This will not make it easier, as some believe, to criticize Israel and show its true colors; rather, it makes it urgent for all those who believe in the universality of struggle to start linking the Palestinian struggle for freedom to the struggles of other disposable groups that are affected by these global far right regimes around a more fundamental antagonism.

2. The Rise of Ziofascism and the Impossible Third Intifada

The savage and irrational lynching of Mohammad Abu Khdeir on July 2, 2014, will prove to be a turning point in the history of the Palestinian struggle for freedom and human dignity.¹⁶ The seventeen year old Palestinian teenager was abducted on his way to the dawn prayers, brutally beaten up, forced to drink gasoline, and was incinerated alive by members of La Familia, a terrorist Jewish mafia affiliated with the racist Jewish soccer club, Bietar Jerusalem, and the extremist messianic Zionist far right ideology. Moha¹⁷mmad's barbaric lynching inadvertently provides the Palestinian struggle with a much needed and undivisive universal symbol, around which the hearts and minds of people all over the world can be aligned.

Mohammad has become Palestine's Emmitt Till, the fourteen-year African-American teenager whose brutal murder is considered to be the spark of the civil rights movement in the US, at least in Mississippi. Mohammad has become the "sacrificial lamb" for the new Palestinian non-violent resistance movement, making it possible for the world to identify with the humanity and the suffering of the Palestinians. It will generate a new wave of international solidarity campaigns, intensifying the BDS movement and other forms of non-violent resistance to the Israeli apartheid state and Zionist settler colonial project in Palestine around the world.

Mohammad's barbaric lynching shines the spotlight on the extent of institutionalized racism in the apartheid Israeli state. The Netanyahu government and the Israeli mainstream establishment have created an institutionalized racist environment that tolerates and encourages

these barbaric acts against Palestinians. They have also allowed many of these terrorist crimes to go unpunished. The pervasive realities of Jewish terrorism, fascism, and the culture of hate against all non-Jews in historical Palestine, explode the myths of ontological Jewish victimization (the Jews as the “ultimate victim” of history) and the Israeli apartheid state as a peaceful country.

What’s more, the terrorist attacks of these Jewish extremist groups on Palestinian children, including abduction, running over, and lynching, could not have happened unless there is a systematic war going on in the apartheid Israeli state against Palestinian children.¹⁸ Tariq Khdeir, Mohammad’s Floridian fifteen-year cousin, was beaten unconscious by Israeli soldiers and over a half of the Palestinians arrested by the apartheid Israeli military and police forces in the civil disobedience and unrest that ensued after Mohammad’s lynching have been minors. According to human rights groups, moreover, about 60 percent of the Palestinian casualties of recent Israeli attacks have been minors.

More importantly, Mohammad’s brutal lynching reveals a new troubling trend in the radicalization of Israeli Jewish society. Extremist and terrorist Jewish groups are more willing now to take the law into their hands, in order to make up for the perceived inability of the Netanyahu government to maintain their repression campaign of the Palestinians and realize their dreams of Greater Israel more efficiently and rapidly.¹⁹ As the cracks in the edifice of the apartheid Israeli state become more visible under the pressure of international condemnation, state power seems to be shifting into the hands of Jewish terrorist groups.

According to these extremist terrorist groups, the hegemonic structures of apartheid control, occupation, colonization, and warehousing that have been used to mediate between the exclusive Jewish state and the occupied Palestinians, can no longer manage racial relations in accordance with their nationalistic Zionist ideology, prompting them to take matters into their own hands.²⁰ Their response then is to create a lynching culture that has taken private and communal forms of extra-legal violence. Needless to mention, these modalities of violence are not an irrational aberration in the apartheid Israeli state but must be considered as a constitutive part of the immoral and illegal apartheid Israeli state itself.

In the most recent fascist “Jerusalem Day” march, for example, this lynching culture assumed a clear ritualistic and festive communal character akin to the public spectacles (or picnics) common in the American South.²¹ A Palestinian commentator, passing into the middle of a “Jewish supremacist hate-fest,” describes the mood of a mob “drunk with power and capable of inflicting the worst against “the other” – the Palestinians.” In fact, he soon realizes that this mob, which comes from all walks of life in the apartheid Israeli state, was playing a game, ““spot the Arab’ game – if one Arab was seen, a call was made to the crowd and the

mobs moved to charge against the person, with no reaction whatsoever from the Israeli forces.”

Jerusalem Day turned out to be nothing more than a fascist pornfest for maintaining collective Jewish supremacy over the Palestinians through an orchestrated campaign of terror and intimidation under the protection of the Israeli army and border police. In a culture that views Palestinians as sub-humans and animals, who are “uncompassionate by nature,” murdering Palestinians and Arabs becomes, as the authors of the racist book “Torat Ha’Melech,” or “The King’s Torah,” a religious duty. The authors of this book, Rabbi Yitzhak Shapira and Rabbi Yosef Elitzur, maintain that Jewish law justifies “killing babies if it is clear that they will grow up to harm us, and in such a situation they may be harmed deliberately, and not only during combat with adults.”²²

It is a miracle that this spectacle of power did not end with the death of Palestinian passers-by, even though Palestinians were caught on camera barely escaping these vicious vigilante mobs. However, the recent barbaric lynching that claimed Mohammad Abu Khdeir’s life exposes the existential threat that racialized forms of extra-legal violence pose for Palestinians in the only democracy in the Middle East. These interpersonal forms of violence assert the power and prowess of sociopathic private citizens over individual Palestinians that are, nonetheless, invested in national symbolism. The apartheid Israeli society is slipping into a primitive stage, in which terrorists, vigilantes, and mobs renew their covenant with their god, as the “chosen people”—to use Menachem Begin’s words, the “master race” and “divine gods on this planet,” and their bonds with other co-nationals through human sacrifice.

It is not surprising, then, that these sadistic terrorist acts are packaged in religious rhetoric. Much like in apartheid South Africa and the American Jim Crow regimes of racial terror, religious discourse has been used to sanctify these terrorist acts and the regimes of racial violence that they represent. In particular, pathological Islamophobia plays a major role in the formation of this culture of racialized violence in the apartheid Israeli state. In both private and public forms of lynching, mobs have been reported to chant not only “death to Arabs,” but also “Mohammad is dead,” in reference to the prophet Mohammad.

This religious rhetoric also betrays the sexual anxieties that Israeli Jews have about their own virility and masculinity as well as the Palestinians’ alleged excessive hypersexuality. Calling for avenging the murder of three Israeli teens, Rabbi Noam Perel, the secretary general of the World Bnei Akiva youth movement, wrote: “The government of Israel is convening for a revenge hearing which is not about mourning, the master of the house has gone crazy at the sight of the corpses of its sons, a government which will turn the army that was searching into vengeful soldiers, soldiers that will not stop at 300 Philistine foreskins.”²³ The biblical myth, according to which the future King David brought back

200 foreskins of the ancient Philistines he murdered, is used here to reassert Jewish sexual and political supremacy. Modern forms of lynching are meant to replicate the ancient barbaric war rituals that negate and dehumanize the Palestinian male Other through castration and the emasculation.

Mohammad's barbaric and savage lynching will not incite a Third Intifada. The objective political, cultural, and social conditions on the ground in the occupied territories and the Gaza strip preclude the eruption of such a revolutionary event.²⁴ Nonetheless, Mohammad's tragic death has managed to mobilize Palestinian youth all over historical Palestine in a way that even the daily violations of the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque has not. Palestinians can translate the energy of civil disobedience and public unrest into moral and political victories in the international court of public opinion, capitalizing on the formidable popular strength of their non-violent anti-apartheid struggle.

More importantly, Mohammad will become a "sacrificial lamb," making it possible for the world to identify with the humanity and the suffering of the Palestinians. It will generate a new wave of international solidarity campaigns, intensifying the BDS movement and other forms of non-violent resistance to the Israeli apartheid state and Zionist settler colonial project around the world.²⁵

3. Israel's Far Right Paramilitaries Are Fueling Even More Attacks on Palestinians

On May 11, 2021, hundreds of local residents in Fureidis, the town where I live, some 20 kilometers to the south of Haifa, came out to demonstrate against the attacks by Jewish supremacist and fascist groups on the Noble Sanctuary (Haram Al-Sharif) and the pending eviction of Palestinian families from the east Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah.²⁶ Videos shared on social media showed demonstrators blocking the intersection, burning wooden crate boxes, and waving Palestinian flags.

Two days later, the fourth war on Gaza had escalated, reports of a paramilitary group linked to Otzma Yehudit ("Jewish Power"), a far-right political party; and Lehava, a far-right Jewish organization (others say it is an Israeli riot dispersal police unit), marched on the main highway outside the town, firing tear gas and stun grenades at a handful of protesters who destroyed a light post at the entrance of the town. Local residents also reported that *mista'arvim*, undercover police operatives, have been deployed in the town to arrest suspected activists and quell the "internal intifada."

In the so-called mixed Jewish-Arab cities, the Israeli police have been working in cahoots with these fascist paramilitary militias to lynch Palestinians in the Arab ghettos (originally called concentration camps) and quell the "civil war" in these segregated cities.²⁷ The police have shot at passersby, broke into homes, and physically assaulted men, women and

children. Social media is full of videos and audio recording of concerned Palestinian citizens calling the police to complain about these militias and ask for their intervention, to be met only with apathetic responses or termination of the call.

The Israeli government has also instated a state of emergency, placing the local Palestinian populations under curfews, lockdowns and administrative detention. The Shin Bet (Israel's "internal security" service) has been mobilized to quell the protests, using the same surveillance technology they have used during the COVID-19 pandemic to track citizens as well as other "intelligence-collecting capabilities" to identify protesters and "locate, arrest, investigate and put the perpetrators on trial."²⁸

As opposition grows across the world against Israeli apartheid, it is important for observers to understand the role that fascist paramilitary and Jewish supremacist political parties play in fueling the violence across historic Palestine.

Far Right Groups Call for Attacks "Without Compromises"

The leaders of these groups make no effort at hiding their intention to widen the divisions within Israeli society and between Israelis and the Palestinians.²⁹ In an interview on May 10 with Ynet news, the leader of Jewish Power, Itamar Ben Gvir, stated tongue-in-cheek that his mission on the so-called Jerusalem Day was not to calm things down and de-escalate, but to accelerate the contradictions.³⁰

In their political platform, Jewish Power calls for a total war against those who oppose Israel, "without negotiations, without concessions, and without compromises." They advocate for a shift in Israeli military strategy from "defense to attack, from the policy of 'enemy containment' to the destruction and annihilation of the enemy."

Jewish Power and Lehava's philosophy is based on ultra-nationalism and "Jewish capitalism." Jewish Power and Lehava demonize Palestinians everywhere and incite violence against them, should they fail to accept second-class citizenship and declare their loyalty to the Jewish state. Their goal is the forcible expulsion of the Indigenous Palestinian population and their resettlement in the surrounding Arab countries, supposedly "their countries of origin."

Jewish Power's leaders glorify violence against Palestinians and call for the formal annexation of the West Bank, including Al-Aqsa Mosque, that can pave the way for a one theocratic Jewish state. By removing the "enemy" within, Jewish Power claims it can reduce the military budget and renew the welfare state.

The Israeli authorities are under no illusion regarding the origins of this spiraling wave of violence and Ben Gvir's role in it. For example, Israeli Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai has unequivocally blamed Ben Gvir and held his party Jewish Power and Lehava responsible for the violence in Sheikh Jarrah, Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, and the riots in mixed cities.³¹

He stated: “The person who is responsible for this intifada is Itamar Ben Gvir. It started with the Lehava protest at Damascus Gate. It continued with provocations in Sheikh Jarrah, and now he is moving around with Lehava activists.”

However, Jewish Power and Lehava do not, as Shabtai claims, undermine police work. Rather, the Jewish Power and Lehava militias operate under the protection of the Israeli police, especially in so-called mixed cities. What’s more, Israeli authorities have displaced the violence of these militias and blamed it on the Arab residents. In fact, the mayor of Lyd compared protests in his city to Kristallnacht (a Nazi pogrom against Jews that took place in 1938).³²

When Israeli mainstream voices (as well as some on the left) bemoan the dissipation of the dream of “coexistence” in these cities, they ignore how the Jewish supremacist and fascist groups have been working on gentrifying Palestinian neighborhoods and appropriating more land. They have established religious settlements modeled after West Bank settlements through the Biblical Seeds movement and other organizations.³³ As the internationally renowned rapper Tamer Nafar said, “Maybe we look at the word coexistence differently. But so far there is only one side, the Jewish side.”³⁴

4. Zionist Settler-colonialism 2.0: The consolidation of messianic Zionist far right ideology

Uri Avnery has long noted the “religious character” of the struggle over the Zionist settler-colonial project.³⁵ This fundamental contradiction is inherent to a state that defined itself as both exclusively ethnic and democratic.³⁶ However, as the internal contradictions that rip the apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state escalate, the religious / secular divide has emerged as the fundamental antagonism.³⁷

As Michael Marder notes, moreover, the Haredi population is growing twice as fast as the overall Israeli population, making it likely for far-right coalitions “to become a constant feature of Israel’s political landscape.”³⁸ In fact, a well-funded government taskforce, chaired by the leader of the homophobic party Noam, has been tasked with “strengthening Jewish identity – a well-known code for encouraging Orthodox beliefs and observance.”³⁹

The ultimate goal of this messianic Zionist far-right ideology, along with its emerging “new settler” movement (Zionist settler-colonialism 2.0), is the establishment of a halachic theocratic state (the equivalent to Shari’a law), even though the concept does not exist in Jewish law.⁴⁰ In this state or kingdom, Jews have an “exclusive and inalienable right” over all parts of historical Palestine, based on the principles of Jewish supremacy and the subjugation of goyim under their racist theocratic rule.⁴¹

The question of the status of the Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority looms large in this ideology. While the hegemonic Ashkenazi

establishment stalled and thwarted any resolution to the Palestinian question through deliberately failed peace talks, extremist messianic Zionist ideologues do not equivocate about annexing all of historical Palestine under their control, with total disregard, even contempt, for international law.⁴²

In this apartheid theocratic dictatorship, according to Smotrich's manifesto, Palestinian Arabs cannot have a place in their indigenous homeland.⁴³ Instead, they should either accept their inferior status as "resident aliens," if they choose to remain, or be exterminated by the military, which "will already know what to do."

As such, these extremist messianic Zionists openly call not only for the destruction and expulsion of the Palestinians, but also for "slaughter, pogroms, and total annihilation."⁴⁴ They only diverge on the methods to achieve these horrific goals, with some endorsing vigilante acts of revenge, while others promote the mobilization of the Israeli occupation forces.

As if the Ongoing Nakba, the smaller acts of Jewish terrorism and ethnic cleansing, is not enough, extremist messianic Zionist settler-colonial ideologues have been advocating for another major cataclysmic Nakba, not only in the occupied Palestinian territories but also within the borders of the apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state. The Huwara-style Jewish settler-colonial terrorism and the attacks on the Stella Maris Monastery are just the beginning of this ominous trend.

The European Ashkenazi Zionist establishment (liberal Zionism) seeks to resolve these contradictions, especially the status of the occupied Palestinian territories in extremist messianic Zionist ideology, by restructuring the political and legal theaters and reintegrating the religious Zionist camp into its hegemonic structures.⁴⁵ Netanyahu's confident prediction that the "opposing sides will mesh" implies that the European Ashkenazi Zionist establishment will eventually incorporate extremist messianic Zionist ideology back into its fold.⁴⁶ To paraphrase Ilan Pappé's recent insightful comments, it is not "Judea" (or the Kingdom of Judea and Samaria, as others have called it) as a substitute for "Fantasy Israel," but "Judea" in the service of "Fantasy Israel."⁴⁷

Although the European Ashkenazi Zionist establishment has expressed concerns about the rise of "Jewish terror," the establishment continued to support Jewish terrorism by providing military cover for their terrorist attacks on Palestinians. These warnings were issued only because the establishment (the Shin Bet in this case) sees a correlation between Jewish terrorism and Palestinian resistance.⁴⁸

Extremist messianic Zionists, however, have been emboldened by their ascent to power, the world community's complicity in Israeli war crimes, and the normalization of relations with the Arab world that whitewash Israeli violations of human rights.

More importantly, the global rise of authoritarian capitalism has consolidated this extremist messianic Zionist ideology. Global capitalism

is seeking alliances with fascist movements, in order to undermine and do away with democratic structures of governance that try to mitigate or hinder the extractive accumulation of capital and surplus value. Unsurprisingly, extremist messianic Zionist ideologues have adopted the same playbook used by fascist movements worldwide. They employ the fascist distinction between the people and the enemy (“us/them”) and terms such as “wokism,” activist judges, and the “deep state” to criticize the “leftist attack on national unity” as part of their language.

Despite the hit to the country’s credit rating and the devaluation of the shekel, it is thus expected that global capital will continue investing in the apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state, especially if or when these fascist messianic movements take over. In an interview with Bloomberg, Netanyahu dismissed the “noise in the short-term markets,” expressing his full faith in the “clarity in the long-term markets.” In fact, announced investing 7.2 billion dollars in Israel’s economy, which will “contribute about \$13.9 billion to Israel’s gross domestic product.”

Some commentators believe that the clashing socio-political and economic visions that structure liberal Zionist ideology and extremist messianic Zionist ideology can only be resolved in either a civil war or a military coup that will preserve the apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state as a “communitarian democracy.” Ironically, the same was said about the “breakdown of trust” between the military and Netanyahu’s government in 1996.⁴⁹

Nonetheless, ideological and identification crises in settler-colonial Zionist ideology have neither lead to political dissensus nor to a mass exodus. There is a broad consensus across all forms of settler-colonial Zionist ideology, even among the right-wing architects of the judicial overhaul, that the mythic communitarian democracy, aka the apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state, must always maintain its “liberal” veneer.

Extremist messianic Zionist ideology has merely accelerated the process of reconfiguring the structures of European Ashkenazi “illiberal” democracy into a full-fledged authoritarian capitalist state in line with international trends. The autocratic rule in the occupied Palestinian territories will become the governing model in the apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state, ditching any semblance of democratic rule, however illiberal it has been.

Enjoy your revenge: from ideological identity to surplus enjoyment

Underpinning this extremist messianic Zionist discourse lies a shift in ideological structure—from a commitment to the cause of Zionism to a pursuit of its rewards or obscene surplus enjoyment. As Slavoj Žižek explains, ideology operates on two levels: On the one hand, there is the explicit ideological identity or discourse that appeals to the subjects, engaging them as followers of a particular cause.⁵⁰

On the other, there is the implicit message of ideology that is never directly stated, but through which subjects are incentivized to enjoy at a deeper level, if they continue to adhere to the cause. In essence, this excessive enjoyment serves as a bribe or a reward that a community bestows on its subjects for their loyalty and adherence to the rules.

In this extremist messianic Zionist discourse, the surplus enjoyment (killing Palestinians, driving over them, burning their homes, evicting them from their homes, confiscating their lands, building settlements, destroying their olive trees, Judaizing Al-Aqsa, etc.) becomes explicitly articulated. While these forms of surplus enjoyment were previously viewed as an exception in official Zionist discourse, they are now considered as the norm.

One commentator unpacked the essence and the covert messaging of this hegemonic extremist ideology.⁵¹ For him, the idea boils down to the following: “If a Jew wants land, it is his. If a Jew wants property, it is his. Every shekel given to a non-Jew is a waste. Every right given to a non-Jew is given to him conditionally, as long as it does not conflict with the needs and wishes of a Jew. Not every Jew, by the way. It is important to clarify: these are the Jews who are considered to be the holy vessels on whom the Spirit of God rests according to their claim, and they represent the entire nation, even if the majority of the nation disagrees with them.”

Zionist settler-colonial ideology is increasingly shaped by this explicit message, through which messianic Zionist ideology entices its subjects with the promise of obscene surplus-enjoyment, if they continue to adhere to this ideology. This explicit appeal to excessive forms of enjoyment is further sustained by discourses of victimization and grievance that settlers peddle in response to Palestinian resistance.

The Protests are the Obverse Side of the Judicial Reforms

Herein lies the truth not only of the judicial reforms but also the statewide demonstrations in the apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state. The judicial overhaul is the brainchild of the right-wing think tank, Kohelet Policy Forum, which is funded by the American billionaire Arthur Dantchik. The Huwara pogrom, as one commentator aptly put it, is the embodiment of these reforms.⁵² He added that “the intention appears to be to undermine the rule of law and foster an environment of lawlessness under the Palestinian Authority.” Moreover, neutralizing judicial oversight is the “first crucial step towards realizing” the extremist messianic Zionist dream of a halachic theocratic state.

Similarly, the secular demonstrations opposing these judicial reforms reveal the inherent anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian ideology of the apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state. Protests organizers have insisted that these protests are an internal Jewish affair, and thus have intentionally excluded Palestinian Arab voices from these protests. They have also made it clear that neither the occupation nor the apartheid legal

system inside this “illiberal democracy” is a part of their campaign. The brawls between the anti-coup protestors and the anti-occupation activists resulted in the exclusion and silencing of the latter.⁵³

Although some fringe groups have tried to bring attention to the occupation to these anti-coup demonstrations, they are politically and ideologically ambiguous, to say the least. These groups are made of a disparate collection of army rejectionists/ objectionists, leftists and former establishment figures (ex-Mossad and military personnel). In their platforms, they are concerned about the humanitarian abuses and war crimes that the occupation military is committing in the occupied Palestinian territories. They do not even call for an end to Jewish supremacy and apartheid on both sides of the green line or propose any just solution to the Zionist problem. It seems that they would settle for a more humane occupation.

Moreover, some protests were held in the settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, but again protestors were more concerned about the toxic brand of Judaism that messianic settlers represented and the privileges they enjoy, more than they were concerned about the occupation or the apartheid regime they seek to perpetuate.⁵⁴ In fact, one of the protestors revealed not only that her soldier son served in Huwara, but also that somehow she “didn’t vote for a party that supports the settlements.”

In fact, the liberal Zionist establishment has used these demonstrations to witness to the vibrant democracy that the apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state is supposed to be. As Žižek says regarding the massive demonstrations against the US attack on Iraq in 2003, the establishment used these protests to legitimize its war. Hence, Žižek calls these protestors “beautiful souls,” because they did not only do nothing to prevent the war, but they also refused to see their complicity in the evil around them.

Moreover, some protestors have been more interested in aestheticized and commodified forms of resistance, inspired by Margaret Atwood’s dystopian *Handmaid’s Tales*, than in genuine emancipation for all. Such aestheticized and commodified forms of resistance clearly try to frame the threat of extremist messianic Zionist ideology as a nightmarish intrusion of unreal (fictional) power structures into the alleged rational democracy, in which they live.

Needless to mention, aestheticized and commodified forms of resistance can be easily coopted by consumerist capitalist culture that values surfaces and the superficial. Moreover, they turn activism into a marketable product and a passive form of engagement. As such, they risk losing sight of the political economic structures that underlie the violence pandemic, failing to serve the cause of liberation and emancipation.

These self-delusions merely perpetuate the mythic foundations of “the only democracy in the Middle East.”⁵⁵ Indeed, there is nothing transformative or emancipatory about these demonstrations. They

merely reflect the unwavering determination of the European Ashkenazi establishment to maintain its Jewish supremacy, power, and privileges.

Needless to mention, this Supreme Court itself has played a major role in upholding racist and discriminatory laws against its Palestinian Arab citizens and Palestinians under occupation alike. It clearly favored apartheid rule over “human rights.”

In line with international trends, it is not only expected that Palestinian resistance will continue to be delegitimized as anti-Semitic. Rather, Zionist vengeance and retaliation will be rebranded as the true resistance movement to Palestinian and pro-Palestinian «wokism.»

For international activists, socialist, and other social justice advocates, merely denouncing Zionism as “a racist, imperialist, settler-colonial project” is not sufficient. Activists must also emphasize how official secular Zionist settler-colonial ideology has been repackaged in messianic Zionist terms that glorify revenge, pogroms, and ethnic cleansing, without any acknowledgment of, or apology for, their crimes.

5. Frankenstein in Palestine: Ziofascism in Necrocapitalism

In his internationally renowned novel, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the Iraqi writer Ahmad Saadawi offers a deeply evocative and harrowing portrayal of the devastating human toll of the American invasion of Iraq. He tells the story of the junk dealer Hadi Al-attag who pieces together a creature, the Shisma (the whatsitsname), from different body parts of the victims of American imperial violence and the sectarian violence it engendered.

In the novel, Hadi goes to the mortuary to retrieve the body of his close friend Nahem Abdaki after he was killed in a terrorist car explosion in Baghdad. The man’s body had been mangled and torn into parts, which were tangled with his horse’s flesh and the body parts of other victims.

In the mortuary, Hadi could not find the complete corpse; none of the corpses there were whole. He was shocked to find out that “the bodies of explosion victims were all mixed up together and to hear the mortuary worker tell him to put a body together and carry it off— take this leg and this arm and so on.” The junk dealer does just this, and ‘reconstitutes’ his friend into a body that becomes the body of the Whatsitsname.

Saadawi’s fictional narrative was inspired by the true story of a young Iraqi man who walked into the morgue to collect his brother’s body.⁵⁶ The man was shown one body part in the corner and was told to take whatever he wants from the body parts around the morgue and “make yourself a body.”

Strange corpses

In a harrowing echo of Saadawi’s narrative, the reality of the Israeli genocide in Gaza, which has claimed over 36000 precious Palestinian lives and over 81 thousand wounded, presents a gruesome tableau of dismemberment and death. In this “open-air graveyard” and “hell on

earth,” the amount of dismembered and mutilated bodies, flying body parts, unrecognizable bodies, incinerated bodies, flattened bodies, amputated bodies, tortured bodies, and stolen body parts, is unimaginable. In a recent interview with Open Democracy, the Palestinian writer Susan Abulhawa described the stories she heard from women in Gaza “as though they were torn from the script of a Hollywood horror film.”⁵⁷

Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza is increasingly centered around the decimation of the racialized Palestinian body. The images of five decapitated babies and the grieving fathers who were displaying their headless bodies to the world, coming out of the most recent massacre in Tal as-Sultan in Rafah, testify to the barbarity of the Israeli genocide in Gaza. In yet another “tragic incident,” Israel dropped 2000 pound bombs on this displaced people camp, courtesy of the Biden administration, in an area it has designated as a “safe humanitarian zone.” A Palestinian medic described how they retrieved a “large number of child martyrs from the Israeli bombardment, including a child without a head and children whose bodies have turned into fragments.”⁵⁸

The number of dismembered and decapitated bodies in Israel’s genocide in Gaza is unprecedented. According to an Al Jazeera Net report, “The percentage of intact bodies is only 10%. Most of the bodies are cut and torn, and 20% of them are difficult to recognize, mainly due to the large number of tearing and dismemberment, and the loss of the persons’ features.” In March, Aljazeera released footage of an Israeli military drone stalking four unarmed civilians in one of Israel’s “kill zones” and blasting them into bits.

Personal testimonies in Aljazeera report reveal how bodies arrive in pieces. The supervisor of the morgue at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central Gaza Strip reported that “One day, a bag of body parts came to me. In it, I found livers, pancreas, and spleen. It was the first time in my life that I saw these body parts.” Two American surgeons describe the impact of the powerful American-supplied bombs that Israel is raining on the victims’ bodies.⁵⁹ They mention burnt bodies that “resembled blistered hotdogs more than human beings, shredded to pieces such that they can only be buried in mass graves.” They also describe how not only shrapnel but also “rock, floors, and walls” are lodged into victims’ bodies, “penetrating skin with waves of dirt and debris.”

The severe dismemberment and destruction of bodies in Israel’s latest genocidal war are very different from previous wars. One witness notes, “All corpses are strange. We have not seen these scenes before. We have not seen these dismembered body parts and these hollowed-out skulls. Sometimes skulls come hollowed out from the inside. The head is broken and completely hollowed from the inside. There is nothing in it. Shattered skulls, dismembered children. We saw it in this war, it’s all strange.”

The most traumatic scenes for him, however, are the ones involving martyred children. “Seeing the bodies of young children torn apart is a

painful thing, and these scenes are repeated before our eyes, and I dream about them at night, as if they are a video tape repeated before my eyes. We cry for them and cry about our condition, but we do not know what to do.”

Documenting and Writing (on) the Body

The dismemberment and mutilation of these bodies has been so extensive that they have become impossible to identify. Authorities and families have resorted to symbolic and literal acts of resistance and mourning to ensure that each victim is acknowledged and remembered as a human being, not just as a statistic.

As bodies pile up, the Palestinian Health Ministry employees photograph the victims and document the distinctive signs of their bodies by the bombing date. They want to make sure that the deceased are not lost to anonymity. The unidentified and unrecognizable bodies, however, are buried in mass graves of the unknown, before stray animals gnaw at the corpses and gather around them.

Many Palestinian families in Gaza have also routinely resorted to the controversial act of writing their children’s names on their bodies to confront the ghost of the anonymous shroud and “unidentified martyr.”

As a mother of three explains to Al Jazeera Net, “I found myself forced to write their names on their bodies in light of the occupation’s deliberate targeting of civilians, children, and women. No one is immune.” She also explained the reasons she inscribed their names on their bellies, because “the limbs are most likely the first thing a missile destroys.”

Other mothers doubt the effectiveness of writing their children’s names on their bodies. One mother noted that “there is no place in the body that is protected from the missiles that melt the flesh and turn it into pieces, as appears in the video clips.” For this mother, the utter destructiveness of the weapons used against them underscores the futility of any attempts to preserve even the smallest trace of identity. No action—no matter how desperate—can provide any measure of safety or identification for her children in the event of an attack.

Genocidal starvation

This war on the Palestinian body has reached its apogee in the overt genocidal mass starvation that the settler colonial and apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state has engineered against the displaced local population in Gaza. According to recent polls, 68% of the Jewish Israelis support starving Gaza children to death. Barbaric Israeli settlers have attacked, blocked, and vandalized aid trucks to prevent them from delivering humanitarian aid and food to a starving population.⁶⁰

This mass starvation war has escalated to a situation in which “93 percent of the people in Gaza are facing ‘crisis levels of hunger’ and a quarter of the population of the strip faces ‘catastrophic hunger and

starvation.” U.N.’s special rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri, condemned this starvation war as a “war crime.” Because of this famine, Aryeh Neier, the co-founder of Human Rights Watch and a Holocaust survivor, is now convinced of Israel’s genocidal intentions.

In this starvation war, the Israeli military destroyed the sources of livelihood and created conditions of food scarcity, forcing displaced Gazans to mix animal fodder and bird feed into whatever flour they can get to make bread. Moreover, the Israeli military has prevented international aid and food convoys from entering Gaza, depriving Palestinians access to food. Moreover, the recent attack on the World Central Kitchen convoy is meant to force other international aid organizations to suspend their activities in Gaza and intensify the starvation of the indigenous population.⁶¹

They have also committed a few of what have come to be known as “flour massacres” against Palestinians they have been starving, while collecting food aid. As one commentator speculated, “trucks laden with food might well have been bait in order to enable the waiting tanks, snipers and troops to cruelly eliminate these starving, unarmed youths en masse.”⁶²

In the context of a genocidal war, starvation is not merely about depriving Palestinians of food or preventing them from accessing the essentials needed for survival. By destroying the health and water infrastructure in Gaza, the Israeli military has also created the conditions for the spread of infectious diseases that make possible the “deprivation of food unto death.” Consequently, the number of deaths attributable to malnutrition and dehydration has climbed.⁶³

Israel’s starvation campaign has escalated and intensified past the starvation policies the settler colonial regime has been using to limit access to food during its blockade on Gaza. In addition to rationing food and banning “non-essential luxuries” such as coriander and instant coffee, but not frozen salmon and non-fat yogurt, the Israeli military made precise calculations of Gaza’s daily calorie needs, based on the average daily requirement of 2,279 calories per person. Now, however, Palestinians in Northern Gaza live on 245 calories a day, the “equivalent of a cup of cooked rice.”⁶⁴

Live Laboratory for Necrocapitalism

The decimation of the racialized Palestinian body in all its forms and the current campaign of deliberate genocidal starvation campaign are a part of the Nakba 2.0. This Nakba can be described as a total genocidal war Israel’s settler colonial regime, sustained by its messianic ideology, is waging against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza strip under conditions of necrocapitalist irrationality.

In the current restructuring of global capitalism, Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza and the tens of thousands of decimated bodies it produced are symptomatic of a broader, more disturbing trend in neoliberal politics

namely, necrocapitalism. Neoliberal capitalism is grounded in an economy of death that pursues the accumulation of wealth through genocidal technologies of death that monetize dead bodies and dismembered body parts.⁶⁵ Saadawi's novel registers this necrocapitalist irrationality through its fantastic creature the Shisma.⁶⁶ As the Palestinian surgeon Dr. Ghassan Abusitta said, "Israel is the tip of the genocidal iceberg," and can be only understood in the context of the Western "genocidal axis."⁶⁷

While European colonial powers historically structured their domination of colonized peoples globally around death, this has evolved into a new stage of unrestrained mass industrial killing that turns death into a major source of generating wealth and profit. This genocidal necrocapitalist system leverages imperial wars, settler colonialism, apartheid, racism, patriarchy, sectarianism, and other forms of hegemonic domination, to reduce bodies to disposable commercial objects. Such power structures conceal the true nature of necrocapitalism, even as they expand its coffers.

In Gaza, Western imperialism is expanding its necrocapitalist wealth. These activities seek to put in place geopolitical and economic plans, especially the gas fields in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria as well as the new regional trade connectivity project and perhaps the Ben Gurion Canal scheme, through technologies of death that decimate the indigenous population and monetize their bodies.

In the necrocapitalist system, moreover, Palestinians in Gaza and their bodies have been used as objects and commodities that generate wealth and profit for the settler colonial and apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state and the global capitalist class that supports it. Israel is already making profit out of these technologies at the Singapore Airshow, the most important arms trade show in Asia.

Palestinians are thus viewed as subjects in a "live laboratory" for testing Israel's military technologies of death.⁶⁸ These military technologies thrive on the destruction of the racialized Palestinian body and the commodification of death. Israel's "mass assassination factory" is usually first tested in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially Gaza, before it is exported to the world in exchange for money and political support in international organizations.

These new military technologies of death, developed with the complicity of major tech corporations such as Google, include predictive policing technologies and combat drone programs called "Alchemist," "Gospel," "Lavender," and "Where's daddy?" that "use geographical, human, and signal intelligence to generate target recommendations for troops and military officials and to pinpoint strike targets."⁶⁹ Consequently, these error-prone AI systems marked 20 civilians killed for lower ranking Hamas members, and up to 300 for seniors. On average, the "most moral army" in the world accepted a 100 civilian targets for every Hamas official target with minimal human verification.

Gaza has also become a testing ground for drone-mounted robot dogs and remotely controlled bulldozers. In addition, they have tested Smart Shooter's "SMASH Dragon" armed drone system, which "eliminates both static and moving targets with extreme precision using assault rifles, sniper rifles, 40mm, and other ammunition." This is a part of the high-tech "frictionless" oppression of Palestinians.

Under necrocapitalist conditions, Palestinians have also become a source for a lucrative organ trafficking industry in the Jewish apartheid state. Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor raised concerns that Israel, "the biggest hub for the illegal global trade in human organs," was harvesting organs from confiscated corpses and corpses exhumed from mass graves in Gaza. After these bodies were released by Israel, medical experts found "vital organs such as livers, kidneys and hearts, alongside cochleas and corneas, were missing." Although Israel has previously denied harvesting organs from dead Palestinians, calling such accusations "anti-Semitic," Israeli doctor Meira Weiss asserted that harvesting organs from dead Palestinians dates back to 1996. She also noted that these stolen organs were used in "medical research at Israeli universities and transplanted into Israeli patients' bodies." Moreover, skin was allegedly taken from the bodies of dead Palestinians and African workers and stored in the Israeli Skin Bank to treat Israeli soldiers with burn injuries.⁷⁰

Under these necrocapitalist conditions, Palestinian lives have become worthless and a part of the disposable surplus population. Palestinians in Gaza, as William Robinson argues, are not only seen as useless for transnational capital.⁷¹ Moreover, in their history of resistance and armed struggle, they also threaten the foundations of the necrocapitalist system. Genocide is then one way for the ruling classes "to develop and extend new systems of mass social control and repression."

This dehumanization of Palestinians is grounded not in the Othering of the Palestinians, but in their relegation, in Franz Fanon's words, to the "zone of non-being."⁷² In this zone, Palestinian lives are not worth the recognition in the imperial Western media the way an Other is recognized. As Dalia Hatuqa posted, "There was more uproar over a debunked story of decapitated babies than there is over actual ones shredded to bits, burnt alive, decapitated & left alone in a hospital to die and get eaten by maggots. This is a product of the dehumanization of Palest. by the West - media included."

What's worse, Palestinian lives have become so worthless in the eyes of the imperial Western media that a genocidaire writer for the Atlantic shamelessly argued that "it is possible to kill children legally." In response, Francesca Albanese posted on X, "What kind of monsters have we become? Justifying the killing of children as "human shields" is the ultimate justification of Israel's genocidal logic and the endorsement of its "humanitarian camouflage", with civilians -even babies in incubators-

becoming abstractions between the self-perceived righteous and the perceived threat to be annihilated.”

Solidarity under necrocapitalism

Speaking about the racialized Palestinian body under necrocapitalism on this Memorial Day is incomplete without linking it to Aaron Bushnell’s heroic, yet controversial, self-immolating act. Bushnell served as a cyber defense operations specialist with the 531st Intelligence Support Squadron in the US Air Force, but held anti-imperialist views and believed in Palestinian liberation. His act was the second such self-immolation act in response to the Gaza genocide in the U.S.

His act of solidarity with the Palestinians must be understood in relation to the same necrocapitalist irrationality that has claimed the lives of over 33 thousand Palestinians thus far in this genocidal war, in addition to over 76 thousand wounded. Under necrocapitalism, even the lives of American soldiers mean nothing and are not a priority for the capitalist class in the US empire.

As he livestreamed his act on his way to the Israeli Embassy where he committed his selfless sacrifice, Bushnell made two main points. First, Bushnell declared his refusal to be complicit in the Gaza genocide. However, his refusal was not an individualistic stand, but reflected the majority position on the unapologetic complicity of the Biden administration in Israel’s genocidal war and their leading role in its management.

As Vetsaboutface, Veterans committed in the fight to stop U.S. imperialist violence, stated on Instagram, Aaron’s “opposition to the unjust violence against Palestinians is the majority position” and “that thousands of Veterans and Military agree with what Aaron said.” In fact, the majority of the American public disapprove of Israel’s genocide in Gaza.

Biden’s Zionist credentials and complicity in genocide are well known. Not only that his ambassador at the UN implicated the Biden administration in “the final solution” in Gaza, Biden himself had expressed no qualms about killing innocent civilians. He once told Menachem Begin, “he would go even further than Israel . . . even if that meant killing women or children.” Begin, whom Einstein called fascist who was once Britain’s most wanted terrorist, “disassociated [him]self from [Biden’s] remarks,” telling him, “No, sir; attention must be paid. According to our values, it is forbidden to hurt women and children, even in war... Sometimes there are casualties among the civilian population as well. But it is forbidden to aspire to this. This is a yardstick of human civilization, not to hurt civilians.”⁷³

Begin’s mythic portrayal of the Israeli military as “the most moral army” notwithstanding, Biden did not apologize and do not expect him to apologize for his genocidal intentions that serve the geopolitical and economic interests of the American empire. He once stated that he would never apologize for his support for Israel’s actions and considered the

bilateral assistance the US gives to Israel as “the best \$3 billion investment we make.” He also added that “If there weren’t an Israel, the United States of America would have to invent an Israel to protect her interests in the region.”

Since October 2023, the Biden administration has approved and delivered on more than 100 arms sales to Israel and sent troops to kill Palestinians in Gaza. Despite Biden’s fake outrage at the killing of the seven international aid workers for World Central Kitchen, his administration approved the transfer of thousands of bombs on the same day these workers were assassinated.

Under these necrocapitalist conditions, Biden’s humanitarian gimmicks have become an absurd and cruel joke. His grotesque plan to build a maritime humanitarian corridor and pier in Gaza, an idea proposed by Netanyahu, is just another ploy to gaslight the international community, weaponize aid, force the evacuation of Palestinians by sea, and enable the settler colonial and apartheid Jewish ethnocratic state to finish the genocide, while absolving it of its responsibilities. Israel, after all, will be the one inspecting the goods in Cyprus and managing the “security” for the port. Even some aid boxes Biden has airdropped on Gaza ended up killing the same starving Palestinians they were allegedly meant to help. In a dialectical Hegelian twist, his humanitarian assistance has become death.

Moreover, Biden doubled down on his complicity, by requesting that Israeli officials give written assurances that they will use U.S. weapons in accordance with international law. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who compared Palestinians to “human animals,” signed these assurances. Critics lambasted the absurdity of this idea, stating it “could have been ripped from the satirical newspaper *The Onion*.”⁷⁴ Critics have also made a link between Biden’s gaslighting strategies and the fundraisers that Pro-Israel megadonors Haim Saban and Casey Wassermann hosted for Biden to the tune of 42 million dollars.

This explains why the Biden administration even considered its abstention vote on the ceasefire resolution at the UN Security Council as “non-binding.” They not only rejected describing this move as a shift in Biden’s approach and policy towards Israel. They also accused United Nations special rapporteur Francesca Albanese as anti-Semitic for her report in which she described Israel’s ongoing genocide in Gaza as the culmination of a “long-standing settler-colonial process of erasure.”

The second major point Bushnell made in his act was the clear link he drew between his auto-cremation and the fate of Palestinians, highlighting the ontological precarity and disposability of the body under necrocapitalism. As an anti-imperialist activist, Bushnell was able to see that his “extreme act of protest” was “not extreme at all,” “compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonizers.”

In his anti-imperialist politics, Bushnell knew the impact of the

American produced and funded weapons that Israel drops in Gaza on the bodies of their Palestinian victims. These weapons include precision-guided munitions, small-diameter bombs, and other weapons such as the “meat grinder” AGM-114R9X Hellfire missile, which ripped into the bodies of civilians like the one that Israel dropped outside Al-Shifa hospital.

Ultimate Sacrifice

Herein lies the ultimate sacrifice Bushnell made. Like Medea, his action suggests an emphasis on the universal through which solidarities can be formed.⁷⁵ By self-immolating in his military fatigues, Bushnell not only negated his particular military identity and the expectations associated with his role and responsibilities as an active member of the United States Air Force.

More importantly, he engaged in a deeper, more existential negation of the frameworks and values that underpin the existing necrocapitalist world order. His very act of extreme protest became a critique of the system itself.

Hence, we need to reject the imperial Western media erasure and demonization of his sacrifice, which was immediately framed and dismissed as a case of mental illness. We also should renounce any third worldist anti-colonial rejection of his sacrifice on account of his military service and race, despite his anti-imperialist politics.

Similarly, the anti-colonialist reaction to Biden’s outrage and the outrage of the Western establishment political class over the killing of the seven WCK volunteers is misguided. It does not merely point to the racist system that values the mournable lives of white people over the disposability of Palestinian lives and the lives of other brown people. Rather, these politicians are outraged because they cannot obscure the truth that nobody is secure in the necrocapitalist genocidal machinery any more, except perhaps for members of the global capitalist class. In this sense, Chef José Andrés is correct to say that this is “a war against humanity itself.” Skin color is not a defense against the threat of necrocapitalism.

No matter how his act is judged, Bushnell’s selfless act has begun to inspire other acts of solidarity. On Easter Sunday Air Force airman Larry Herbert initiated a hunger strike outside the White House to protest against the deliberate starvation of the Gaza children. Anti-Zionist Jewish and student coalitional organizing on American campuses vigorously enact these ideals.

Despite the draconian measures used to censure, demonize, and dox them, student coalitional organizing represent the best traditions in American education. It is not only that Palestinian and anti-Zionist Jewish students activists are working together, but the National Students for Justice in Palestine (NSJP) has been significantly funded by Jewish organizations such as the Bafrayung Fund.

Like Bushnell, this coalitional organizing shows a new common

denominator around which people, those who are directly affected and those who are unconsciously affected by necrocapitalism, can rally. They show that solidarity can be formed on the basis of our structural position in necrocapitalism and ability to renounce the necrocapitalist system that permits genocides and instrumentalizes them for its expansion. By failing to act now, there will be no allies left when they come for you.

- 1 Mitralias 2023.
- 2 Bachner 2023.
- 3 Halfbinger and Kreshner 2018.
- 4 Trew 2018. On the collaboration between Zionists, fascists, and Nazis, see Werleman 2017 and Karoui 2023. In fact, Schneider 2024 argues that Israel's illiberal democracy has become a model for the far right around the world.
- 5 The slide into fascism was an inevitable consequence of the Zionist identification with Western colonialism and its religious messianism. Zionists established a religious-nationalist movement that, according to Rinon 2019, manipulated messianic ideology to fashion the new Jewish identity.
- 6 Chafets 2018.
- 7 Žižek 2006
- 8 Middle East Monitor 2018.
- 9 Yiftachel 2006.
- 10 Sputnik International 2018.
- 11 Tóth 2014.
- 12 Agerholm 2018; Ahren 2018.
- 13 Pfeffer 2018.
- 14 Tibon 2018; Landua 2018.
- 15 France 24 2018.
- 16 Wikipedia contributors 2024a.
- 17 On the history of the extremist messianic Zionist far right movement, see Shahak and Mezvinsky 2004; Kaplan 2005; Pedahzur 201; and Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde 2020.
- 18 Abunimah 2002.
- 19 Chomsky 2013.
- 20 Halper 2012.
- 21 Abunimah 2014.
- 22 Cook 2010.
- 23 Hartman 2014.
- 24 Hilal 2014.
- 25 Weiss 2014.
- 26 Wikipedia contributors 2024c.
- 27 Aljamal 2021.
- 28 Tol staff 2021b.
- 29 Carlstrom 2017; Elizur and Malkin 2013.
- 30 Cook 2021.
- 31 Tol staff 2021a.
- 32 Zhao 2021.
- 33 Rapoport 2015.
- 34 *The New York Times* 2021.
- 35 Avnery 2006.
- 36 Araj 2023.
- 37 Shelah 2023; Matza 2023;
- 38 Marder 2023.
- 39 Maltz 2023.
- 40 Rothenberg 2022.
- 41 Keller-Lynn and Bachner 2022.
- 42 Kurtzer-Ellenbogen 2023.
- 43 Smotrich 2017.
- 44 Niv 2023.
- 45 Sharvit 2023.
- 46 Fritzhand 2023.
- 47 Papper 2023.
- 48 Fabian 2023.
- 49 Horovitz 1996.
- 50 Žižek 1999a.
- 51 Kleinberg 2023.
- 52 Kleinberg 2023.
- 53 Sella 2023.
- 54 Maltz 2023.
- 55 Haas 2023.
- 56 Hankir 2018.
- 57 Abulhawa 2024.
- 58 Abushamla 2024.
- 59 Sidhwa and Perlmutter 2024.
- 60 Tondo, Taha and Burke 2024.
- 61 Abunimah 2024.
- 62 Beeley 2024.
- 63 Conley and de Waal 2019.
- 64 Zhang 2024.
- 65 Khader 2023.
- 66 Khader 2024.
- 67 Abusitta 2024.
- 68 Loewenstein 2023.
- 69 Abraham 2024.
- 70 Black 2009.
- 71 Robinson 2024.
- 72 Portes 2024.
- 73 Oren 2011.
- 74 Conley 2024.
- 75 Žižek 1999b.

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Afterword to Transgression: Theses on Houellebecq

Vincent Lloyd

Abstract: Michel Houellebecq is often associated with right-wing populism, but his writing and thought resist this categorization. By examining major themes in Houellebecq's work, including religion, love, eroticism, and liberation, we are able to appreciate the critical intervention he makes against both simplistic liberalism and populisms. A generation after Michel Foucault lauded Georges Bataille's transgressions, Houellebecq asks what it means to write, think, and organize when transgression is powerless.

Keywords: Michel Houellebecq, Georges Bataille, religion, desire, eroticism, loneliness

Michel Houellebecq is among but not of the nouveau right.

Houellebecq is not a conservative. He is not a populist. He is not a libertarian. He is not an influencer. But it is reasonable to associate Houellebecq with each of these labels. He professes – in his own voice and in the voice of his characters – to have sympathy with workers, nationalists, and advocates of free expression. He is a celebrity, even if he does not exactly have disciples. It is tempting to explain: Houellebecq is an artist, not an ideologue. He expresses and drives forward popular sentiment in a way that stands at a distance from that sentiment. This is correct, but too easy. It is true that artists stand perpendicular to, not separate from, the political currents of the day – and it is true that artists always stumble, sometimes grotesquely, when speaking of the political significance of their work. But the nouveau right has a distinct ability to pull toward it those adjacent to it. This combines with its disinterest in art to make Houellebecq's position surprising and intriguing. Thus, Houellebecq's ability to remain ambivalently positioned with respect to the nouveau right is an invitation to think more carefully about both Houellebecq and the contemporary political formations he and his work traverse.

Transgression is again the currency of the day.

The charisma of the right-wing populist, what distinguishes them from the left-wing populist (if we are to use these crude abbreviations), is that their distinctive gift, their magnetism, is connected to their power to transgress. In their fabulations, society was once healthy, then it embraced the excesses of the 60s, which were really new forms of dogma that went under the label of freedom, and the task of the thoughtful, freedom-loving patriot today is to pierce those dogmas, bringing us back to the greatness that came before. The task of the political leader is to model what it looks like to pierce dogmas: with cutting words, mockery, irony, and with select symbols of the past. The nouveau right takes pleasure in transgressing the calcified "liberation" of elites, enjoying the contradictions it exposes and so gathering power itself. Houellebecq would seem to embrace

such fabulations and such performance, but without interest in power. If anything, the Houellebecqian move results in destitution. His superb skill at piercing the contradictions of liberalism unleashes a kind of cold pleasure, not the hot pleasure (and eros) unleashed and channeled by the nouveau right. For Houellebecq's challenge to the promise of liberation is not fueled by the pleasure of transgression but by the exhaustion of transgression. For him, it is necessary to toy with the limits and paradoxes of our purported freedoms, but the symbols of the past are just as ridiculous as the certainties of the present. Whatever pleasure and power might be promised by transgression has nowhere to go; transgression is flaccid.

Like Georges Bataille, Houellebecq finds critical power in the erotic.

The nouveau right is, like any movement, powered by organizing desire as a means to organize people. Men aspire to be men, strong and virile; women to be women, strong and tender. The powers that be, abbreviated as "liberalism," are blocking these aspirations, making men soft and weak, making women choose between strength and tenderness. The appeal to sexual energy has even more force than the appeal to nostalgia, which is ultimately subordinate to it – a truism across the history of the right, manifesting differently in each age. This is why Bataille was so often confused with the fascists who were his contemporaries: for him, unleashing the materiality of desire, the body parts yearning and transgressing and desecrating, held the power to reorganize society and, subordinately, history. But Bataille portrayed these forces as essentially destructive, unmaking subjectivity and unmaking sovereignty. The erotic pull of fascism was – is – constructive, building up the social body through the libidinal pull to submit to and pleasure in a greater whole. On this point, Houellebecq stands with Bataille against the fascists. Something like the erotic is, notoriously, all over Houellebecq's prose. As for Bataille, it is the materiality of the erotic that suffuses Houellebecq's prose, quasi-anatomical descriptions of body parts and their configurations. The materiality of the erotic, in Houellebecq, is a reduction of the erotic to the material. However, just as for Bataille, encountering the erotic in Houellebecq's novels results in demystification, pulling away the illusions that make plausible a social whole.

Unlike Bataille, Houellebecq does not paint the erotic as a path beyond the social.

Bataille is, as he advertises, a theologian turned upside down. He turns away from the wisdom of the world in favor of something better, truer, and more beautiful, but the path he takes is descent rather than ascent, transgression rather than purity. (The nouveau right is neither theological nor atheological; it is essentially selfish, mobilizing pieces of the theological imagination to tell a story about satisfying the desires of

the self.) Houellebecq writes in an age during which the erotic has been evacuated of feeling even as its presence has proliferated. Dating apps, sex clubs, tourism, art projects: they all spread out the erotic and, in so doing, subject it to the logic of the social world at large. What was once a promise of transcendence has become calculated, one set of options and accessories among the many that the world presents to us. Consequently, the inequalities of society are reproduced in the domain of the erotic. The distribution of sexual pleasure is like the distribution of money: there are some with much and some with little, and there is a deep arbitrariness about it all. The materiality of the erotic flows freely across lines of racial and national borders, but not without replicating the asymmetries that those borders mark in all domains. In short, what was a peculiar path to liberation for Bataille has become, a half-century later, just one more tightening of capitalism's constriction on our forms of life.

Houellebecq cares deeply about the '60s, much more than the nouveau right.

It is, in fact, liberals who are the most invested in the legacy of the '60s, along with the rapidly diminishing number of traditional conservatives. Barack Obama, Tony Blair, and many of the other liberals who rose to prominence around the turn of the millennium present themselves as rightly navigating the excesses of the '60s. As Obama puts it explicitly in one of his books: the '60s was a divisive time because it was the time of rebellion against an overbearing father. Some children imitate the father, others reject everything he says. By now, we have grown up: we can take what we need from the past and leave behind what we do not. We can come into our own. We can embrace the new freedoms to express ourselves, to live the way we like, without living in communes and burning bras, and draft cards. What Houellebecq and many others point out is that what results from this dynamic is not a well-adjusted adult, like the '50s but better. To the contrary, what results is a new kind of human being, one who has internalized the logic of the free market, the logic of the corporation: the freedom to pursue more for oneself in a context of scarcity. The nihilism that is so often attributed to Houellebecq is really an indicator of the limits of our imagination, for Houellebecq does reject neoliberal man, '50s man, and the two opposing postures of the '60s – but those four stances need not form the limits of how we can see the world. On this point, yet again, Houellebecq differs from the nouveau right, for that movement sees only continuity between the '60s and today. It sees the subject of capitalist desire as the savior of both. For the nouveau right, the '60s is the '80s. Reagan and Thatcher were the true models of freedom – and of the excesses of freedom. Now that we have matured, we can see that we need not embrace or reject outright free markets; indeed, the free market may be at odds with the subject of capitalist desire. With that subject, now mature, always front and center,

the nouveau right purports to shape markets in the interest of the worker-capitalist, the farmer-capitalist, the homemaker-capitalist – disavowing its actual beneficiaries, the rich.

**Religion alone promises happiness, for Houellebecq,
and it is an empty promise.**

For Bataille, the erotic and religion were inextricable. Bataille did not reject religion, he offered better religion, which he accessed by attending to the way religion actually unleashes rather than regulates the power of the erotic. For Houellebecq, at the turn of the millennium, the erotic has been fully captured, but religion is still a source of energy. When secularism and capitalism march in lockstep, religion is the only source of genuine transgression. This is an idea that Houellebecq toys with in the several forms religion takes today, or in their ideal types: Catholicism, Islam, and New Age. Each promises happiness, each disappoints – each in a different way. Each titillates. The power and possibility of religion is not so much in its embrace of tradition or even in its sociality, but rather in its promise, and in how that promise is felt. Capitalism promises pleasure; religion promises happiness. Which is really to say: religion, at its best, cleaves pleasure from happiness. Religion (especially Islam, in Houellebecq's view, but ultimately all religion) fails in this task, but the task remains essential. Bataille has no resources for distinguishing pleasure from happiness: if there is a difference, in his account, it is quantitative rather than qualitative. The nouveau right similarly fails to make this distinction: religion sanctions and organizes pleasure, and the result is, supposedly, happiness. It is up to you to choose which religion, which regime of pleasures, makes the most sense, though you do need one, lest you regress into the bad infinity of freedom unbound.

**While the promise of religion ultimately disappoints, in
Houellebecq's view, he remains committed to faith and,
consequently, to something like love.**

It is obviously false to say that Houellebecq writes love stories, and it is also obviously true. In the midst of eros evacuated of feeling, in an age when humans are little more than subjects of capitalist desire, the force of religion comes from the way it sanctions action that is unmotivated by reason or desire. This is also the downfall of religion, for it sacrifices mystery to explain itself in terms of reason and desire. What Houellebecq (himself, in his literary practice, and his characters) seeks is faith itself, motivation to persist despite good reason to give up. In other words, Houellebecq is doing more than toying with faith because it reads as transgressive in our age, as Žižek and a generation of European and North American theorists often seem to do. Houellebecq presents faith as something like a strange virtue, a habit that is developed in spite of rather than out of surrounding social forces. It is a habit that has, as its

prerequisite, the clearing away of mystifications. Seeing the world so bared, as Houellebecq's aging male protagonists come to do, the pressing question is why to persist, and the practice that results is persistence – not glamorously, not adventurously, but nevertheless, persistence. Mixed in that persistence is, more often than not, heterosexual love, its memory and its lost promise. Love reminds these men, in a quite Christian way, that faith may not be reasonable or desirable, but it is warranted, for the capitalist subject is not all there is. Here we are in an entirely new landscape than that of the nouveau right, which essentially traffics in mystifications and their symbols, manufacturing reason and desire entirely at odds with the practice of faith (and blocking the possibility of genuine love).

Houellebecq is, at the end of the day, a philosopher of law.

As odd as it may seem, the closest French thinker to Houellebecq from the first half of the twentieth century may not be Georges Bataille but is instead Simone Weil. Bataille has an entirely instrumental view of law: it is an instrument that allows for transcending and so transforming the world through its transgression. For Weil, law (paradigmatically for her, the laws of mathematics), which is to say *the thing to do*, is all we can cling to, and what we must cling to. The task, for her, is to shed the mystifications of the social so that we simply do the thing to do. When that is our practice, we are open to grace. We cannot save ourselves. Whether grace is something we experience or not is outside of our control. The only thing we can do is work on ourselves, over and over, to identify and purge the way our desires and reasons are shaped by the great beast which is society. So, too, with Houellebecq: in his characters and in his aesthetics, he takes as his task stripping away illusions so we can see people doing what they do, doing the thing to do. (Such actions, of course, are not insulated from the social, but the important thing is that they are not justified by the social; they are brute facts, brute laws.) Aesthetically, Houellebecq expresses this with flat, mechanical prose, even across scenes and times. Substantively, Houellebecq commits himself to the primacy of sociology, against psychology and critical theory. He does not aspire to unmask mystifications in order to show their genuine cause, in some mental or social pathology. He unmasks them in order to enter the realm of pure law. He poses the question, philosophically serious but so often dismissed as juvenile: once we realize that most of what we do is simply what one does, how are we to continue? As with Weil, Houellebecq's answer is to submit ourselves to law, to do what one does, because one has faith – that perhaps there is something like grace, grounded in love.

The political challenge of the age is to demonstrate that loneliness need not be apolitical or anti-political.

This is crystal clear in the case of Weil, and her age is not so different from ours. In the case of Houellebecq, rejecting politics is one component

of the rejection of mystification, and so of capitalist subjection. However, the artist should not be trusted as an interpreter of their work, and it is always rather embarrassing when they attempt to occupy this role. Houellebecq's novels are not really *about* loneliness, or about the alienation of the aging European man. They are about the realization that, almost all the time, we are doing what one is to do. Houellebecq need not make arguments against the mystifications of the age; he need not *critique*. He represents, in a voice that complements the content represented. In this, he has been enormously successful. He is, in fact, the great French novelist of his generation. And his books are read. They are wildly popular. The question of merely doing-what-one-does resonates broadly, not just with aging European men. Houellebecq's novels are not popular because of their sex scenes, or for their romances, or for their science fiction. The reason for their popularity is the combination of aesthetic and content that mirrors the present age, and gives voice to frustration with the options before us – the options marked as political. It would be misleading to say that Houellebecq's readers form some new sort of community, a community of singularities, along the lines debated by Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy. Rather, the popularity of Houellebecq marks a dissatisfaction with the political landscape as it is presented to us, an openness to voices and practices that would radically reconfigure our world. This is precisely the moment that creates an opening for the nouveau right.

Houellebecq invites us to read against transgression, not for transgression.

Since Houellebecq first rose to popularity, the charisma of the transgressive has reached still greater heights, or depths. Social media has moved from text to image to video, and mainstream media are increasingly integrating social media practices into their platforms. This dynamic feeds the nouveau right, whose buzz gains as influencers and their followers gape at the apparent transgressions of the left and contradictions of normcore liberals. In the same but opposite way, it feeds the left. And moderates (that is, traditional liberals and conservatives) become all the more self-satisfied as they gape at what they view as the extremes. From *Elementary Particles* to *Submission* and beyond, Houellebecq teaches his readers to bracket the emotional jolt transgression is supposed to produce, looking instead at what is done, what one ought to do. Early in *Platform*, the protagonist Michel apologizes to a police inspector for being “a disappointing witness.” The inspector responds: “‘All witnesses are disappointing,’ he said. I pondered this aphorism for awhile. Before us stretched the endless monotony of fields.” In an important sense, this exchange points to the very heart of Houellebecq's writing, and his relationship with readers. All witnesses are disappointing, which is not the same as saying that witnesses should

stop looking or speaking, or that inspectors should stop recording. Rather, it is from this place of coolness that we find – not revolution, not complacency, but scientific calculation tethered to wild imagination. From this place, we learn to live forever, born anew into a world that no longer depends on the articulated power of the old.

Houellebecq need not be a white man.

The cringe that Houellebecq's name evokes in some circles is directly attached to the sense that his work is so white, so European, so masculine (or misogynistic, if the two are not taken as synonyms). This is at least half the reason that Houellebecq is associated with the *nouveau right*: they, too, are seemingly excessive in these respects. In the obvious sense, Houellebecq does have certain demographic characteristics, and it may be that his readers do, too. But Houellebecq is also directly addressing the state of the conversation in Black, decolonial, feminist, and queer studies, conversations that in some ways are turning again to the '60s, or to an age of transgression, and that are, consequently, mismatching the lived experience of those they purport to represent. Black studies scholars, for example, are excited about Bataille, seeing in his work a way of undoing the libidinal forces that structure anti-Black racism through illicit forms of desiring that challenge the tangle of sovereign self, sovereign state, and white supremacy. Queer theorists, a couple stages further along, ask what comes after the anti-normativity that they have so long taken as foundational, that they have taken to be definitive of queerness – and struggle to answer this question in theoretical and political ways that are not crudely pragmatic. In these various fields, theorizing runs away from experience, with a result very much like that depicted by Houellebecq with respect to bourgeois Western Europe. The result, in both cases, is a political field frozen with options that speak to no one beyond an intellectual elite, and even there it is no more than false consciousness. Which Black Americans does “fugitivity” really describe, and to which queer lives does “negativity” actually speak? When political options dramatically mismatch experience, the ground is fertile for new political movements to emerge, for the *nouveau right* to emerge. The reading practices and, to put it rather romantically, ascetic practices that Houellebecq describes, and the faith that he lauds, may be the only defense against the next phase in the development of the *nouveau right*, which is already upon us: its embrace of multiculturalism.

What the Right Gets Right: Exceeding the Good

Todd McGowan

Abstract: The key to the appeal of right-wing populists is their insistence of excess at the expense of the good. They take up the capitalist imperative of excess and use the expert's advocacy for the good as a way of demonstrating their own commitment to excess. This is the lesson that right-wing populism has to teach the project of emancipation: Not giving up on knowledge but reimagining knowledge itself as a form of excess rather than as a social good.

Key Words: dialectic of enlightenment, right-wing populism, excess, the good society,

Dialectic of Progress

The question of how progress engenders reactionary movements has preoccupied thinkers since the middle of the twentieth century, when the most destructive reaction manifested itself. The first great attempt to make sense of what nourishes reactionary politics is Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. For Adorno and Horkheimer, progress always entails a vicious underside of violence, an underside that they see manifesting itself the manipulations perpetuated by Odysseus, the perversions celebrated by the Marquis de Sade, and the prevarications unleashed by the culture industry. The forces of enlightenment operate forcefully, imposing themselves on anything that puts up resistance. In the view of Adorno and Horkheimer, the engine of progress is its own reaction, a logic that reaches its apogee in the Nazi death camps, where we see that industrialization doesn't just produce easier living but also mass murder. Adorno and Horkheimer measure progress negatively, as the continued expansion of the forces of domination and destruction. For them, the reactionary response to progress lies inherent within it.¹

Chantal Mouffe approaches the question from a different angle. She contends that efforts to improve society run aground when the forces of progress abandon politics. Without a sense of political antagonism, people turn away from progressive movements and embrace right-wing populism because it preserves the antagonism that makes political struggle worthwhile. Without antagonism, political struggle ceases to be a satisfying venture and loses adherents. As Mouffe puts it, "envisaging the aim of democratic politics in terms of consensus and reconciliation is not only conceptually mistaken, it is also fraught with political dangers. The aspiration to a world where the we/they discrimination would have been overcome is based on flawed premises and those who share such a vision are bound to miss the real task facing democratic politics."² Mouffe links the rise of right-wing populist movements to the progressive abandonment of politics, the attempt to transform political antagonism into a question of morality. The defeat of this populism requires an

insistence on what Mouffe calls agonistic political struggle. In contrast to Adorno and Horkheimer, she has a clear idea of how to respond to the threat of right-wing populism and a clear theory about what leads to its rise—the repression of political antagonism.

What both of these analyses miss, however, is the relationship between right-wing populism and the capitalist society in which this populism appears. Although Adorno and Horkheimer along with Mouffe have a Marxist bent to their thinking, they don't theorize populism as a response to the capitalist society and the demands that it makes. The right-wing populist leader is a specifically capitalist phenomenon, one that would be inconceivable in an earlier epoch. To make sense of right-wing populism, one must take the basic imperatives of capitalist society as the point of departure.

The emergence of capitalism entails a fundamental reorganization of the social order, a change in its structuring principle. Capitalism orders society around the promise of excess rather than any conception of the good, which is what previous societies privileged in a variety of ways. The good might have been survival, social cohesion, the reinforcing of a hierarchical structure, or even the maximization of pleasure. But under capitalism, the good becomes marginalized relative to excess. The production and consumption of an excess outstrips any consideration of what might be good for oneself or the society. Better to make an additional million dollars than ponder the negative effects of dumping toxic waste. Better to get the best deal on a new smart phone than worry about the plight of the workers who made it. In capitalist society, everyone aspires for too much, for a pure excess that has no regard the good of the society. Under capitalism, everyone must worship at the altar of excess.

Excess is the motor for capitalist society in a way that it isn't in previous societies. This gives capitalism its uniqueness relative to other social forms that take some idea of the good as their central principle. Capitalist society centers around the commodity form, which contains the promise of pure excess.³ We invest ourselves in selling, distributing, and purchasing commodities because each commodity seems to provide access to this excess. Although no one actually obtains a pure excess, it nonetheless structures everyone's existence in the capitalist universe. Politics becomes the struggle to determine how we should distribute excess. One engages in political activity for the sake of the excessiveness it promises, not for any social good. This is what the right-wing populist understands in a way that other political actors don't.

The right-wing populist sees where the appeal of politics lies. This figure doesn't offer a path to a good society but promises followers a taste of the pure excess that inheres in the commodity form. Although capitalist society holds out the ideal of a pure excess, no one can attain this ideal. Every excess is tainted and evanescent. The most excessive commodity is never excessive enough to eliminate my status as a lacking being. No

matter how excessively I act, there always seems to be someone a little bit more excessive. This is why the wealthiest capitalists constantly seek to outdo each other in how much they accumulate or in how far into outer space they travel or in how large their yachts are. There is no winning at the game of pure excess, but the failures it engenders serve only to encourage people to commit themselves to it with ever more fervor. This fervor goes far beyond the wealthiest capitalists and infects everyone who partakes in capitalist society. It is what right-wing populists stake their campaigns on.

Populism tells people why they aren't enjoying the excesses that capitalist society promises them. The focus of this political movement—from Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey and Narendra Modi in India to Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Donald Trump in the United States—is on the barriers to excess. By proposing to eliminate these barriers, the populist leader points supporters toward a future of pure excess that awaits them, which is precisely the imaginary future that inheres within the commodity form itself, the future that the commodity never delivers. The right-wing populist leader responds to the failure of the commodity form by doubling down on excess. While this image of pure excess is a lie, the idea of structuring politics around excess is instructive.

The great lesson of right-wing populism is the same as the great lesson of capitalist society: it is excess, not the good, that drives us as subjects. The deception of capitalist society and of right-wing populism does not lie in the emphasis that each place on excessiveness but in the image of pure excess that they proffer. When we grasp the necessary impurity of our excesses, the requisite admixture of lack with every excess, we propose an alternative form of politics (and of society) that nonetheless displays fealty to the lesson that populism teaches. The effective counter to right-wing populism's pure excess is not an insistence on the good but an insistence of excess's impurity, an insistence that there is only a lacking excess. Rather than acting as a barrier to excess, it is our status as lacking beings that makes it possible for us to be excessive. Because we lack, we act excessively in response. This recognition is the key to changing our relationship to excess and thus changing our political terrain. When we come to this point, we no longer need the enemy that the right-wing populist props up to sustain the image of a pure excess that this enemy blocks. The subject of lacking excess doesn't return to the good as its ideal, but it approaches excess in a distinctly non-capitalist way. It envisions progress itself as excessive and no longer as a good. But to arrive at this position, one must fully assimilate what right-wing populism has to teach.

The Evils of Expertise

The right-wing populist has numerous targets. Foreigners, immigrants, and minorities are always among those who receive the opprobrium of the

right-wing populist leader. In a certain sense, each of these targets has a clear logic to it, even if the attacks on them are thoroughly ideological and disingenuous. These groups are different manifestations of outsiders that threaten—at least psychically—the status of those who strive to belong to the society and yet experience their belonging under siege. If the state border loses all ability to keep people out, those on the inside will lose the identity that derives from their status as citizens. While the fear is unrealistic, it identifies a logical threat. The danger that the immigrant represents is not difficult to conjure up, which is why no right-wing populist avoids it. The same is true for the foreigner insofar as a foreign invasion would also imperil the identity of citizens. But these targets do not reveal the secret of right-wing populism.

The most instructive figure on the enemies list of the right-wing populist is the expert. All right-wing populists pose experts as part of the various groups that pose an existential threat to the social order. Experts of all stripes are fodder for populist attacks—from health experts and economists to political experts and climatologists. No matter what their orientation, the right-wing populist insists that the expert is a threat. We should take stock of how this target appears, especially in contrast with the immigrant or the foreigner. Experts are already part of the social order and don't threaten to undermine it. Quite to the contrary, experts are the champions of the good. They use knowledge for the sake of helping individuals and society to progress. Ultimately, the expert wants to make society better, to create a structure in which progress has advanced to such an extent that it has eliminated unnecessary human suffering. They want what is best for their social order. And yet, the right-wing populist identifies them as a threat to this order every bit as pernicious as the immigrant.

Experts are not the targets of right-wing populism because they have what others want. They don't have an outsized share of the society's wealth, nor do they pose a threat to the society's well-being. In fact, sustaining and improving its well-being is the aim of their expertise. They want to do their part to create a better society. It is the very illogic of the populist disdain for the expert that renders this disdain instructive.

Right-wing populist leaders target experts because they are the proponents of the good, a good that in each case requires us to tame our excessiveness. Experts tell us that we must restrain a certain excessive behavior for our own good or for the good of the society. We shouldn't drink too much to avoid a heart attack. We shouldn't eat too much to avoid diabetes. We shouldn't go out at the height of a pandemic to avoid dying. Or so the experts tell us. According to the expert's advice, our individual good life depends on not drinking, eating too much, or exposing ourselves unnecessarily to a deadly virus, on restricting our excessiveness. To give in to excess is to resign oneself to an early death.

The same holds true collectively. Today, experts make clear that the climate catastrophe has become an existential threat for humanity. The

excesses of capitalist modernity have heated the planet to such a degree that it will soon become uninhabitable. Excess has disrupted weather patterns, brought unforeseen cataclysmic events, and killed off untold numbers of species. Climate experts now warn us that the failure to act immediately will exacerbate the destructiveness and bring about the irreversible downfall of humanity. Although mainstream political figures attempt to account for this threat with (inadequate) policy changes, right-wing populists disdain the warnings. Sarah Palin's cry, "Drill baby drill," represents the apogee of this position. It doubles down on the excessiveness of carbon emissions in the face of expert warnings about the imminent threat that they pose.

Taking the side of excess against the good, as the right-wing populist Palin does when she leads this chant, threatens to accelerate the warming of the planet driven by the burning of fossil fuels. But this excessive destructiveness, this doubling down on a resource that threatens humanity's survival, is not a barrier to the attractiveness of Palin's position but essential to it. Followers find satisfaction in the excesses of "Drill baby drill" because this chant challenges expert knowledge about what's good for us. As a good right-wing populist, Palin understands that she must make a challenge to the expert central to her political activity.

When right-wing populists take power, they do not do so because they are experts but because they pose a fundamental challenge to all expertise. They govern in an authoritarian manner, but not as political experts. As a result, what would be a political misstep for the professional politician—for the political expert—becomes an indication of the populist's lack of expertise and commitment to excess. The sex scandal or the impolitic remark adds to the appeal of the right-wing populists because it reveals an excessiveness untamed by expertise.⁴ They rule as non-experts, which is why they often find themselves in opposition to experts in their own government, what they might derisively refer to as big government or the deep state. They aren't part of the ruling apparatus of experts.

The problem with the expert's exhortation for the good is that the good is not the organizing principle of capitalist society. Capitalist society centers around the production and consumption of excess, not around any type of good. The good exists in this society only as what one sacrifices to be excessive. We have a good today so that we have something to go beyond in the pursuit of excess. One sacrifices one's health for the sake of overeating, or one destroys the habitability of the planet to augment one's profit. Experts tell us what we should or shouldn't do so that we can find an excess by going beyond their restrictions. This is the dynamic that the right-wing populist picks up on and exacerbates.

Right-wing populists emerge in the wake of capitalism's failure to provide the excess that it promises. A pure excess looms as the ideal that everyone chases, but no one reaches this ideal. The right-wing populist

realizes that people desire an explanation for their failure, an explanation that provides a way of keeping the ideal intact despite its impossibility, an explanation that doesn't require them to give up on capitalism itself. This is where the populist introduces the expert. Experts play the heavy. Their adherence to the good in the face of a society focused on excess explains people's failure to attain this excess for themselves. Experts do their part in the universe of right-wing populism just by virtue of how good they are. The better they are, the more of a threat to excess they appear to be.

Singing on Key

Although the expert advocates restraining excessiveness for the sake of the good, the right-wing populist points out the threat that the expert poses to our ability to be excessive at all. The expert's call for a good society becomes, in the populist vision, a lethal threat to our excesses because it aims at reversing our calculus. If experts get their way, we'll privilege the good and marginalize the sources of excess, which will lead to a deleterious transformation of the social order. Following this path far enough leads to a good future utterly bereft of anything to make it enjoyable. Nowhere is the expert's attack on excess more evident than in the case of Peter Singer, the quintessential expert (and a significant philosopher). In all his many books and public pronouncements, Singer advocates the good by warning us to abandon our excessiveness. The warning about the dangers of excess is the one constant in Singer's work. It is consonant with his expertise.

As a utilitarian ethicist, Singer engages in multiple calculations about our excessiveness and ways that we should curb it. At no point in his philosophy does Singer come out on the side of excess. He is a thinker of the good. He calls for restricting our consumption of meat so that animals can have a better existence. In Singer's view, the problem with eating meat isn't just the cruelty that it inflicts on animals but its extreme wastefulness. Eating meat is intrinsically excessive, no matter how modestly one does it. This argument is as important to Singer as what he says about animal suffering, which he also views as detracting from the good. Eating animals is far too excessive and wasteful for us to justify it. As Singer points out in *Animal Liberation*, "the food wasted by animal production in the affluent nations would be sufficient, if properly distributed, to end both hunger and malnutrition throughout the world."⁵ Singer never addresses the value of the enjoyment that this wasteful excess produces simply by virtue of its status as excessive. The value of excess doesn't enter into Singer's calculation, which is what tells us that he's an expert.

Singer's emphasis on the good leads him so far as to dismiss human life as an unnecessary excess when people can no longer live well. He argues for saving resources spent on the severely disabled in order to use those resources on persons capable of a good life or even on animals capable of a good life. The excess that we spend on treating those whose

situation is hopeless, Singer contends, is a wastefulness that comes at the expense of the good. We should not waste resources to keep alive a child who can't survive past infancy or those with severe mental disabilities. To do so is to act excessively, to be needlessly wasteful. In every situation, for Singer, the good should trump the wastefulness of excess. At every point where our society acts excessively, he argues for restraining this excess and bringing it under control.

In the name of the good, Singer calls on all middle and upper class people to restrict their excessive consumption so that they can give to relief organizations. By limiting their own proclivity for excessiveness, they can promote the good of others and help to create a better society. Singer gives the example of forgoing new clothes for the sake of famine relief. He writes, "When we buy new clothes not to keep ourselves warm but to look 'well-dressed' we are not providing for any important need. We would not be sacrificing anything significant if we were to continue to wear our old clothes, and give the money to famine relief."⁶ As this example shows, if we restrain our excessiveness just a little bit by curbing our consumption, we can do a lot of good in the world. We give up a little bit of excess that enables us to make major advances toward the good of others. Rather than advocating ways to help people enjoy their excessiveness more heartily, Singer insists on the necessity of restricting their excessiveness in order to promote the good. In this way, he exemplifies the expertise that offers perfect fodder for the right-wing populist. If experts like Singer did not exist, right-wing populists would have to invent them.

The chief barrier to Singer's project seems to be simple human selfishness. We enjoy an excess for ourselves in lieu of sacrificing so that everyone can enjoy a good society. It appears as if our selfish devotion to hoard too much of what society produces for ourselves impairs the good of everyone. But this misses the real threat that experts such as Singer represent—and the reason why right-wing populists target them. What the expert proposes is a radical realignment of capitalist society. Expert advice, even something as simple as advice on one's diet or sleep patterns, implicitly asks us to privilege the good over excessiveness. In this sense, every piece of expert advice is a challenge to the way that capitalist society organizes itself, a challenge to the absolute prerogative that excess has under capitalism. Most of the time, capitalist society uses the expert's conception of the good as a means for conceiving excess. We know what is excessive not just because excess labor went into its production but because experts tell us that it is not good for us.

Given his commitment to the good, Singer should be a thorn in the side of capitalism, which is a system that depends on what exceeds the good. And yet, Singer's ethical pronouncements manage to fit perfectly within the structure of capitalist society. Despite his radicality concerning eating animals and condemning obscene wealth, he is not a proponent of radical politics. His advocacy for the good simply provides excessive

capitalist subjects with a site where they can be excessive. Experts give advice knowing that it cannot be followed while we remain within the capitalist universe. The right-wing populist reveals the threat that they pose to capitalist society if they were to be effective.

Singer gives away a considerable amount of his earnings to charity. He is genuinely a good person (as he himself points out).⁷ But he does not restrict his own excessiveness with this giving. Rather than having a job that condemns him to at least forty hours of mindless labor per week, Singer, like all experts, has a career that he pays him to be excessive. He earns a salary for engaging in philosophical speculation and for discussing philosophy with students. These activities are not socially beneficial. Despite sacrificing a hearty amount of his income, Singer never sacrifices the excess that accompanies his position as an expert. This would require him ceasing to be an expert. When one looks at how experts actually live in contrast with the followers of the right-wing populists who critique them, it is difficult not to believe that the populists have a point. Even when experts don't live in opulence—again, Singer is clearly not a hypocrite—they enjoy the excesses of their own expertise more than the good society that they promulgate.

It is also clear that Singer enjoys the excessiveness with which he reproves society for its excesses. Like proselytizing evangelical ministers enjoying the sins that they condemn through the act of condemning them, Singer can get off on meat and cheese through his repudiation of them.⁸ And as he describes the excesses of the billionaires who purchase lengthy yachts instead of helping the hungry, Singer is able to enjoy the excessiveness of the yacht much more than its unfortunate owner. Singer and his fellow experts may sacrifice their tithe to the proper charities, but they don't appear to be sacrificing all their excessiveness along with their money, which is why they make an easy target for the populist leader who rails against them.

But whether or not experts really partake in excess through their condemnations of society, they are important for the position that they occupy, not for how they experience their lives. In the act of championing the good and warning about the dangers of excessiveness, experts give us a map for how to be excessive. By telling us what not to do, they illuminate what we can do to reach excessiveness. Singer informs us that it's not good to eat animals so that the excess of doing so becomes clear. He tells us to live more humbly so that we can enjoy buying an SUV. Singer would forbid the obscene excess under his regime of the good, making him and his fellow experts the perfect target for the right-wing populist. The expert's alternative of an enjoyment-free capitalism holds an appeal only for those who can find excessiveness in their work—that is, only for the experts themselves. Unlike the people he chastises, Singer can easily give up his excess income because he lives a life replete with the expert's excessiveness that most capitalist subjects cannot access.

Through the example of Singer, one can see the clear opposition between the expert and the right-wing populist. Singer advocates the good, while Palin would have us believe that she holds the keys to excess. Singer counsels restraint, while Palin argues for throwing caution to the wind. Singer champions the attainment of the good through limiting ourselves, while Palin calls for abandoning all limits. Singer's insistence that we shouldn't eat meat for the sake of the planet's inhabitability meets Palin's injunction to drill. The path of the right-wing populist cannot be the path of emancipation, but the path of the expert is just as much a dead end, no matter how genuine and noble Singer's intentions. It leads only to political defeat and can never achieve the good society that it promises. Its image of the good is just as illusory as capitalism's image of pure excess. One must find a different path.

Sleeping with the Enemy

When Chantal Mouffe examines the lessened appeal of the emancipatory project relative to right-wing populism, she imagines a form of emancipatory politics that incorporates the populist's insistence on antagonism. To do so, she has recourse to the thought of the Nazi sympathizer Carl Schmitt, who insists that the distinction between the friend and the enemy is the *sine qua non* of all politics.⁹ In Mouffe's translation of Schmitt's rightist definition of the political for her own purposes, the essence of politics becomes agonistic struggle. The difference between agonism and antagonism is that the former doesn't view the opponent in the struggle as an enemy to be defeated but as an adversary to be convinced. This is how Mouffe tries to integrate the appeal of right-wing populism into an emancipatory politics. A step in this direction is requisite if the project of emancipation is not just to throw its hands up in defeat.

But the project of emancipation cannot adopt the visage of right-wing populism. It cannot have an authoritarian structure or identify an enemy to create political consolidation. At the same time, this project must learn the lesson that right-wing populism teaches about what motivates subjects politically. If it is not to doom itself to perpetual marginalization and failure, emancipation must invest itself in excess every bit as much as right-wing populism does. Politics is always an excessive activity.

This cannot mean giving up on the link between emancipation and the Enlightenment. The hostility to knowledge and embrace of stupidity that characterizes the right-wing populist cannot come to characterize the project of emancipation without utterly dismantling that project. It is not coincidental that when Marx and Engels enumerate their list of the aims for emancipatory politics in *The Communist Manifesto*, they include free universal public education. Without knowledge, all emancipation is unthinkable. Those who dismiss education as oppressive either willingly or unwittingly take the side of the forces of reaction. There can thus be no

question of the project of emancipation turning its back on knowledge in the fashion of the right-wing populist.

The task for the emancipatory project is to integrate right-wing populism's insistence, its rejection of the good, without abandoning the heritage of the Enlightenment, without rejecting knowledge. This necessitates reconceiving knowledge itself. To examine how this might work, let's look at a joke that Slavoj Žižek is fond of often repeating. Time travelling communists go back to question Marx, Engels, and Lenin about their sexual preferences. They ask each of them, "Do you prefer just having a spouse or also having a mistress?" Marx, who has a pretty traditional understanding of sexual morality, opts for just a spouse. The free spirit Engels says that he wants a mistress. Lenin, known for his hardheaded discipline, surprisingly claims to want both a spouse and a lover. The astonished questioners ask, "Why?" Lenin responds, "I can tell my spouse that I'm with the lover and the lover that I'm with the spouse, while on my own I can learn, learn, learn." This joke holds the key to reconceiving emancipatory knowledge on the basis of an understanding of right-wing populism's appeal.

What stands out about Lenin in this joke is that his insistence on the importance of knowledge over sex doesn't treat knowledge in the way that the expert does. In this imaginary Lenin's conception, knowledge is not on the side of the good. He doesn't dismiss sex as politically or socially useless or champion learning for its utility. Instead, he places knowledge on the side of excess. As the joke frames it, learning is more appealing than sex with one's spouse or with one's lover. It exceeds these other activities in its enjoyability. Lenin opts for education not because it is good for him but because it satisfies in the same way that sex does but even more so, at least according to the joke. Learning isn't good for us. It can even be sexier than sex. We learn not to bring about a better world but for the libidinal thrill that it provides thanks to how it allows us to exceed ourselves. The importance of education is not its role in producing a better society but the site that it gives us to be excessive. One theorizes not for the sake of a better social arrangement but for the sake of theorizing in itself. Like every excessive activity, learning in an end in itself, not a good that contributes to a better end. It is only through this dissociation of education from the good—the alignment of education with excessiveness—that we can bring the excessive appeal of the right-wing populist into the project of emancipation.

The joke also reveals that Lenin is on the side of emancipation rather than that of the right-wing populist (in case we didn't know already). We see this not because he forgoes sex for the sake of education but because he values learning over ignorance. The project of emancipation does not have to reject right-wing populism's appeal to excess, but it must reorient where we conceive of this excess. Making clear that learning is a site for excess offers a way to adopt the formal appeal of the right-

wing populist without succumbing the populist's political deceptions. As an excess, learning is always impure because it is inextricable from the sacrifice that it requires. Insisting on learning as an impure excess rather than as a good that we should pursue is the way that emancipation can make itself attractive to those who succumb to the wiles of the right-wing populist.

- 1 Because he grasps the dialectical structure of progress, fellow traveler of Adorno and Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, envisions the revolutionary act not as an act that moves history forward progressively but as one that arrests this oppressive movement. In "On the Concept of History," Benjamin claims, "What characterizes revolutionary classes at their moment of action is the awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode." Benjamin 2003, p. 395. Envisioning revolution as the interruption of progress is Benjamin's theoretical response to the dialectic of progress and reaction that Adorno and Horkheimer chronicle.
- 2 Mouffe 2005, p. 2.
- 3 Marx theorizes capitalism's focus on excess in terms of surplus value. According to Marx, capitalists don't exploit workers because they place their own good over that of those they employ but because they pursue the production of surplus value, which only the exploitation of workers can accomplish. It is not the capitalists' selfishness that renders capitalist society oppressive but their commitment to the excess embodied in surplus value.
- 4 One of the most striking aspects of the political phenomenon of Donald Trump in the United States was the consistency with which political experts proclaimed an end to his political career after a certain revelation of excess—from bragging about his own sexual violence to mishandling the Covid pandemic—only to see his popularity hold steady and even grow. The display of excess is not an argument against the right-wing populist but the basis for this figure's appeal. The more experts criticized this excess, the clearer its appeal became.
- 5 Singer 2009, p. 166.
- 6 Singer 1972, p. 235.
- 7 See Singer's self-assessment of his moral status relative to others at the end of his interview with *The New Yorker* in Singer, 2021.
- 8 This is also a self-critique. As a vegetarian, I have indulged in this form of excessiveness many times.
- 9 Despite his avowed reactionary politics, Schmitt provides a fecund source of inspiration for thinkers on the Left because he focuses much more on the formal features of the political situation and not the content. In addition to insisting on the distinction between the friend and enemy as the fundamental form of political struggle, he theorizes the sovereign exception as constitutive of every legal order. The content of the sovereign—what constitutes this figure—does not play any significant role in Schmitt's thought. It is for this reason that Mouffe and Giorgio Agamben can insert his thought into their philosophies without believing that they are betraying their political commitments.

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Capital and Paradise: The Invention of Nature by the Nouveau Right

Clara Ramas San Miguel

Abstract: The 21st century is a melancholic century: even Internet aesthetics promise the return to a new naturalized cottagecore paradise. This work examines how the nouveau right formulates a paradoxical melancholic imperative: the perpetuation of the capitalist accumulation regime and the return to an impossible lost community (reinvented from capitalism) as an escape from that same thanatic regime of capital. This paradise appears as a Golden Age built upon the image of present losses: naturalized notions of family, nation and territory. Following Marx, this study explores how the capitalist second nature produces the temptation to return to an “original” nature. This is the ultimate fetish of the commodity: the exit from the commodity. The nouveau right knows and exploits this by aiming to re-produce nature itself as a lost paradise, an amusement park and a cosplay of tradition. But this is the essence of our timem and it works because it is the dream of capitalist abstraction and exhausted modernity. It works precisely because it is impossible: like a specter.

Keywords: nature; second nature; Golden Age; melancholy; commodity fetishism; Karl Marx; paradise.

Girls in floral dresses planting their own gardens, reading among the stalks and gathering huge bouquets of flowers. Women in pink dresses, aprons, buns, and perfect manicures baking homemade cakes. Landscapes of farms, meadows, mountains, streams, and forests. Fruits, little plants, lambs, cottages, and flowers—above all, many flowers. Pastel tones, green, white, and pink. This is our aesthetic landscape in 2024. Cyberpunk is no longer in fashion. Or at least, it is not as popular as cottagecore. Vaporwave is dead, long live cottagecore. A few decades ago, the escape from capitalism to the imaginaries of the internet returned the magnified image of that same capitalism. The cyberpunk landscape presented the immediate future of actually existing capitalism: *Akira*, *Matrix*, *Blade Runner*, *Ghost in the Shell*. The desert of the real as the domain of a machinic industrial capitalism that biopolitically administers the cultivation and exploitation of human bodily energy. Artificial intelligences embedded in bodies that struggle with the promise of not entirely forgetting the flesh. Vehicles, screens, and chips that test the millennia-old definitions of love and death. Cyborgs that deal with the old definitions of the Western subject: autonomy, free will, or moral consciousness.

But not anymore. Internet aesthetics no longer revel in an industrial or virtual imagery but seek to recreate a simple and idyllic life in a rural and countryside world, accompanied by traditional gender and family roles¹. The internet promises us the pleasure of contemplating a non-alienated world. In a word: natural.

Do this aesthetics represent an outside to capitalism? They are, on the contrary, its most refined version. They are the outside of the system produced by the system itself. Nature is today's new Paradise... promised by the internet algorithm. Svetlana Boym already prophesied in 2001 about the relationship between the internet and the naturalized Paradise. The heart of the feeling of nostalgia, Boym argues, is the relationship between distance and intimacy. The abolition of physical distances achieved by virtual technology has redefined what it means to feel at home, but without abolishing the idea of home. Quite the opposite, the internet recovers a pastoral imaginary:

Technology is not a goal in itself but an enabling medium. While nostalgia mourns distances and disjunctures between times and spaces, never bridging them, technology offers solutions and builds bridges, saving the time that the nostalgic loves to waste. [...] The Internet also took over elements of pastoral imagery and "Western" genres (e.g., the global village, homepages and the frontier mentality). The new media redefined the architecture of space with a 'superhighway,' villages and chatrooms—all evidence that the Internet foregrounds pastoral suburbia and the romance of the highway and domestic morality tales over the ruins of the metropolis.²

Alongside the ruin of the metropolis, the internet always promised domestic morality and pastoral suburbia. Our accelerated and hyper-technologized capitalist world produces the need for a return to the natural. This return to origins seemingly contains the possibility of salvation. But it is a salvation programmed and fueled by the very system that tears society apart. The nouveau right captures this longing and formulates a paradoxical imperative: exit from capitalism and return to the natural (reinvented within capitalism). The return to a Nature virtually invented as the promised Paradise is the fundamental form of political reaction. But in capitalism, "Nature" is expressed in many ways. Who are these new melancholics of the nouveau right? What does this reactionary imperative of returning to nature consist of? Is such a return even possible? How does it relate to the context of advanced neoliberal capitalism? Why, in general, does the escape to this pastoral Paradise called "Nature" seem an inevitable destiny of modern society?

1. The Nouveau right and the Praise of the "Natural"

The nouveau right did not invent this aesthetic, but it certainly draws from it. And for good reasons. In their discourse, we encounter a praise of "the natural," with a special emphasis on the "natural family," but also, to pose it in a renewed Weilian fashion, the "need for roots." One must only hear Giorgia Meloni: "Yes to the natural family, no to the LGBT lobby. Yes to sexual identity, no to gender ideology." "Biological" sex and the "natural"

family are the foundations of the advocated community, the pillars of the desired order. New conservative female influencers spread their message on social media in favor of the traditional feminine role of stay-at-home wives and young mothers to fight the social collapse brought forth by “cultural Marxism.” These roles are explicitly addressed as “natural,” and the cottagecore aesthetics are much appreciated. Vladimir Putin declared 2024 the “Year of the Family” as the last bastion of Christianity against the corrupt West. The nouveau right sustains a very specific agenda concerning both local power and international alliances but does so by referring to “natural” instances that should entail a centuries-old teleology of its own.

New reactionary discourses propose to abandon the corrupt “modern” life and return to rural environments. The simpler life of our ancestors, with their clear gender and class roles, is missed³. Traditional marriage is believed to work as an antidote for the void of the fragmented subject and the consumption of bodies. Women, so they argue, face chronic dissatisfaction due to feminist emancipation and should return to domestic life and motherhood. In a word: freedom is thought of as a retreat, an escape from the social and political; identity is pre-political. The nouveau right understands and feeds the contemporary longing for a return: it appeals to a sort of virgin Nature as the last refuge against the steel storms of neoliberalism, against our harsh accelerated times.

All these discourses capture the real effects of capitalist logic and redirect them towards solutions that bolster a conservative morality. To that extent, they can capture the discontent of a part of the left in the face of the difficulty not just of overcoming but even of minimally reforming neoliberal capitalism. They resonate in harmony with a leftist sensibility, but the fundamental note of the chord is conservative. To the extent that it has updated this discourse with the language of social networks, it can appeal to an increasingly younger audience. Recreations of the rural world are exhibited in TikTok videos; the supposed tradwives who should bring back a traditional lifestyle appear sexualized and objectified according to contemporary culture; new entrepreneurs on Instagram advocate a return to a self-sufficient lifestyle isolated from modern life.

2. The Golden Age and the New Melancholics of the Nouveau right

What is this Nouveau right and why is it gaining so much traction? The neoliberal model is showing signs of exhaustion. On a deeper level, the “decline of the West” has been declared for at least a century. In the face of this decline, reaction emerges. Our present is marked by an epidemic of melancholy, a longing for community and a shared past⁴.

The Nouveau right offers a response to this era of uncertainty and loss. It postulates a Golden Age where we were truly at home, a time when we supposedly had something we have now lost: a homeland, a

family, a religion, a social class, values, a gender identity⁵. This supposed original plenitude could now be recovered to redeem our current state. Returning to it would allow us to build a solid, full, substantial identity, free of cracks, brimming with meaning and content. If we were there once we can be there again: it is possible to recover the homeland, the family, the community, the values. The mission for the future is to replicate the uterine and original Golden Age. The scheme is theological: once we were in the Creator's womb and the Garden of Eden; now we are in the Fall, in Sin, in degeneration, in degradation; but there is a way to save ourselves, to recover our original state of fullness and beatitude. The origin as salvation and goal. The Nouveau right thus projects its own loss onto a Golden Age⁶.

This idea of a Golden Age, as a way of coping with loss, is an exercise in melancholy⁷. Today, the Nouveau right leads an army of melancholics who are at war with the present and their own loss. Slavoj Žižek astutely stated in a 2000 text that we were on the threshold of the "century of melancholy." Indeed. Following the classic distinction by Freud in *Mourning and Melancholy* revisited by Kristeva in *Black Sun*, melancholy is understood here as the inability to lose or let go of the loved object⁸. The subject remains attached to the wound of their loss like a living dead, burying their libido in it, incapable of finding a new object of love. Freud suspected the link between the melancholic position and narcissism; as Žižek states, the melancholic believes that their bond with the object is the only form of authenticity. They see themselves as the sole and true custodians of the lost object. Their only mode of relating to the object is that of ownership, not even of desire.

Here we see an interesting twist on the common notion that we are in a narcissistic era. Inspired by Christopher Lasch's diagnosis in *The Culture of Narcissism*, a certain common sense today would decree that we are still in a postmodern era of narcissism fueled by woke culture, individualistic and consumerist hedonism, the "snowflake" generation and identity politics. Perhaps the narcissism of the late 20th century relates to the consumer individual Lasch speaks of, but the narcissism of the early 21st century involves a different melancholic subjectivity. This subjectivity revolves around the authenticity of their bond with the object and the feeling of grievance if threatened. The homeland, family, or values belong to them and no one else. New voices or subjects disputing the inherited ideas of nation, gender, or class are perceived as an offense for those holding or desiring unquestioned positions in power structures. Privileged think of themselves as the new victims. Desire as private property of the object, victimhood of the privileged and loss of privilege as a personal offense: our narcissistic era brings forth aggrieved melancholic subjectivities that pretend to turn their offense into a restitution of the object.

3. On Nature and Origin

It is difficult to argue that this melancholic Golden Age existed as a concrete stage in a specific past, especially because the complaint about the decadence of the present lineage and an alleged original knowledge of the Ancients is as old, says Kant, as History or even as old as the oldest of poems, that is, religion⁹. But the Golden Age can also be shifted to a sort of normative ideal that, although may not have concretely existed in chronological time, is “natural”: what should be. The Golden Age can be thought of as Paradise, the Garden of Eden or an uncorrupted Nature full of order and meaning; the lost state is better than the present because it was “natural.” Nature and origin function thus as unity and source of normativity for the Nouveau right. Decadence and degeneration are thought of as the corruption of a previous state of natural purity. Before, there were “natural” families; there were “natural” communities. Capitalism, postmodernity and wokeness would, in contrast, be unnatural.

Today, the return to the “natural” is thought of as the definitive form of authenticity in general. As Gilles Lipovetsky argues, in an early phase of modernity, authenticity was sought outside the economic and social sphere, in a realm of values and ends that the individual had to give themselves to self-construct¹⁰. A rebellious phase of our recent modernity built around the counterculture of the 60s and 70s considered that this self-production of an authentic self could only take place through a radical and sharp opposition to all forms of standardized culture. The goal was to abolish capitalism and change life. Liberation occurred against the sphere of consumption, social conventions and fashion. Nowadays, on the contrary, concludes Lipovetsky, authenticity is measured in consumption. The objective is to access authentic goods without leaving the sphere of consumption, in an “obsessive demand for authentic signs”: healthy food, artisanal products, organic and local goods, experiences outside the city, traditional rituals.

In the imagination of the nouveau right, as we saw above, the natural has a clear anchor: the family. Put in the Hegelian systematic language, the truth and meaning of State and civil society are found in the family; but in family understood, unlike Hegel, with an emphasis not on its ethical dimension, but on its natural one. In their nativist view, the familiar bonds bear a connection to territory: a nation is defined by soil and bloodlines, so immigrants and non-traditional individuals or families are regarded, more or less explicitly, as second-class citizens. Thus, the Nouveau right holds a belief: it is possible to access things as they are “in themselves”. It is possible to fully subordinate the State and civil society to the “natural” atom: the family and its soil¹¹. It is possible to abandon the commodity regime to return to a virgin nature. It is no coincidence that Spengler sought to diagnose the alleged decline of the West by unraveling its “organic” meaning¹². What is the secret of this cult of the natural? What is its meaning in times of capitalism?

4. Capitalism and the “Double Movement”

Let us take a step back. Apparently, Walter Benjamin once remarked that the emergence of any fascism is the result of a failed revolution. The disappearance of revolutionary politics since the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent incapacity of the left to defeat the Thatcherian “There is no alternative” surely played a role. But we must also turn to the old *dictum* by Horkheimer: whoever is not willing to talk about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism. There are indeed aspects internal to the dynamic of capitalism which foster reactionary politics. In line with this, we cannot understand the current forms of the nouveau right without considering the nature of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. These notes should function as framework for the subsequent analysis of the reactionary claim for a return to the “natural”.

I would like to highlight two aspects that follow from Horkheimer’s assertion. First, fascism was an authoritarian and violent solution to the internal contradictions and crises of capitalism: crisis of valorization and accumulation, class struggle, the advance of the workers movement and the threat of socialism. Dictatorship and war economy were the solutions to restore property and production relations in favor of the capitalist class.¹³ Second, as Polanyi intuited, the fascist solution can also be understood as a defensive response of a society subordinated to the market as the only instance of organization¹⁴. Unlike other historical societies, which embedded the market in political, social, or communal relationships, capitalism has sought to produce social material from the objectified and anonymous logic of exchange. The fascist reaction to capitalism’s internal crisis can be interpreted as an attempt to re-embed that capitalist structure in communal instances such as the *Volksgemeinschaft* or race.

This is a necessarily vain attempt, as Hegel demonstrated, since the modern principle of civil society has definitively made any form of substantial ethical community unviable. But the attempt persists precisely, as a specter, in its impossibility. Polanyi coined the term “double movement” to refer to the dialectical process of marketization and social protectionism. In this sense, classical fascism is characterized by an impossible and contradictory “double movement”: both salvation of capitalist relations of production and property and promise of their subordination to “higher” organic “spiritual” instances that have already been *de facto* abolished by capitalism itself. However, their spectral character does not diminish their effectiveness. The fascist phantom community is all the more effective the more impossible it is: like the repressed that can never be made present and yet conditions, as absent, as impossible, the actual.

Even today, despite all the very important differences with historical fascism, we find this contradictory “double movement” in the nouveau right: the perpetuation of the neoliberal accumulation regime and, at

the same time, the promise of an impossible community as an escape from the thanatic regime of capital. Exhausted bodies, depleted natural resources, torn societies, geopolitical instability: the level of tension that capital imposes on its resources for valorization requires increasingly authoritarian solutions where democracy itself might be sacrificed. At the same time, and precisely for these reasons, the temptation to return to an organic ethical community organized around family, morality or religion appears. That organic community is what the *nouveau* right thinks under the name of “the natural.” The *nouveau* right thus fulfills two contradictory imperatives regarding global capital: perfecting it and fleeing from it. Just as in the past, the phantom community determines the impossible real society. The lost phantom ethical community appears as a Paradise, since we inhabit the ruin of the modern metropolis.

5. The Fetishism of Nature and its Secret

We arrive at our next and broader question: How do capitalism and nature relate to each other? Here must recall an indication from Marx: the commodity is filled with metaphysical subtleties and theological residues. The commodity is anything but obvious. Even less obvious is what could be an outside of the commodity. The commodity rewrites everything around it: the State, the family, history, even nature itself. The relationship between commodity and nature is anything but obvious. Marx offers some clues to decipher them.

Firstly, Marx asserts that modern capital breaks with nature as the foundation of social organization: “In all forms where the ownership of land dominates, the relationship with nature is still predominant. In those where capital reigns, the socially, historically created element predominates. [...] Capital is the economic power that dominates everything in bourgeois society.”¹⁵ Marx contrasts the historical regime of exchange value with the pre-capitalist *naturwüchsig* agrarian organization, which emanates, originates or grows from nature. Capital signifies the irruption of a historical element that inaugurates a rupture from nature and inaugurates the possibility of its domination in the form of an all-powerful economic power. Its cellular form is the commodity, with its double character of use value and exchange value. Accordingly, the objectivity of value is a social, non-natural objectivity: “In direct contradiction with the sensibly crude objectivity of the body of the commodity, not a single atom of natural matter is part of its value objectivity. [...] So far, no chemist has found exchange value in the pearl or the diamond.”¹⁶

But this does not mean that nature is definitively suppressed in the regime of modern society. On the contrary. It returns recoded. In the middle of the explanation of commodity fetishism, we find a surprising phrase. Marx speaks of “natural forms of social life.”¹⁷ Had he not affirmed that capitalist society is an historical form which abolishes all forms of *naturwüchsig* society and immediate relation with the land? Had not the

pre-modern organic *naturwüchsig* community been definitively liquidated in the chapter of the *Grundrisse* “Forms preceding capitalist production”? Moreover, Marx states: “The exchange of commodities begins where communities end.”¹⁸ Why do “natural forms of social life” reappear in the heart of Book I? Obviously, the “natural” that has returned in *Capital* cannot be the one abolished by capital in the *Grundrisse*.

There is a form of the natural at the heart of capital, but it cannot be the nature abolished by capital. Capital may well have abolished pre-modern nature, but there is a specifically modern form of nature. Namely a *second* nature: historical and social processes appear cloaked in the appearance of nature. Habit and repetition have turned into “natural” what is social and historical, so much so that it seems like there was never anything other than capitalism. The entire capitalist society appears to the modern individual consciousness not as a social creation, but as an external, uncontrollable and ungovernable (second) nature. Capitalism did not always exist, but once it exists, it seems like a natural phenomenon. Social life appears under “natural forms”.

How is this possible? Let us start with the very form of capitalist objectivity, the commodity form. The social objectivity of value that wraps the materiality of things is paradoxical. It depends on social relations but appears only as the property of things¹⁹. The social character of labor is realized in capitalism through the mediation of things: through exchange. There are no directly social relations. Private individuals only become part of the whole as owners of commodities that they exchange – including, of course, their own labor power. The commodity thus appears as the ultimate fetish, as a magical object, with a life of its own, capable of governing the fate of human beings. Money, the lord of all things, more powerful than parliaments and assemblies; we, mere cogs in the gears of market laws. It would seem that there is something in commodities, money, and capital that empowers them to determine the entire destiny of society. But it is not any property of theirs, but our own social forces reflected in relations between things²⁰. Capitalism is thus a realm of inversions. Nature is reified and society is naturalized. Modern society is, Marx asserts, an “enchanted, inverted, and upside-down world” where persons function as mere things, pieces of a mechanism, while Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre haunt as social characters²¹. Persons are objectified and things are personified. Capital and the commodity, not citizens, constitute the *dramatis personae* of the modern society.

Therefore, social forces and their metabolism do not appear in capitalism as directly social, but constitute a blind and automatic process as if governed by natural laws.²² As a consequence, as Marx emphasizes in Book III of *Capital*, the entire capitalist process is covered with an appearance of eternity: it appears not as a historical and transitory mode of production, but as the only possible form of society. The systematic functioning of expanded reproduction erases the wound of its origin,

the so-called primitive accumulation: violence, theft, and plunder. What is a social and historical organization takes on the solidity and fixity of a natural phenomenon. The paradox completes and capitalism itself, which emerged by abolishing the *naturwüchsig* society, appears as the natural and original organization of society in general; so it is portrayed by the classic and vulgar political economy. Their naive gaze considers commodities and money as objects “being” value and the market as “natural”, without considering the historical processes that have produced these premises. Capital thus appears, finally, as a second nature: “The forms that turn the products of labor into commodities and that naturally presuppose the circulation of these already possess the firmness of *natural forms of social life* before men strive to explain not the historical character of these forms, which they already consider immutable, but their content.”²³

6. Puy du Fou, or Lost Nature as Theme Park

But second nature is not even the final form of capitalist. The modern era is the era of division and rupture: the genuinely modern problem is, as Kant knows, how synthesis is possible. How are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible, how is experience possible, how is civil society possible: three ways of asking the modern question. In all of them, the secret of a blind synthetic activity that occurs behind the immediate consciousness of the individual and that, we will ultimately discover, makes the individual and its experience possible in the first place²⁴. What we find as primary is already the mediated product of a blind activity. Accordingly, even the most immediate forms of individual consciousness presuppose the totality of the social production process. But that totality is not accessible without critical work. The bourgeois individual has always lost the totality in advance. As Marx said: the exchange of commodities begins where community ends. There are individuals, there is social metabolism, there are *a priori* syntheses, but there is no community. The second nature of value allows to explain the constitution of a modern social totality. But that totality is also constituted as the apparent loss of something irrevocably left behind.

Thus appears a temptation that accompanies modernity as its double: to recover what was lost with its own foundation, to return, in some way, to the non-modern. This romantic temptation of return lurks over capitalism. Marx’s analysis of the commodity fetish allows us to understand the incurable romantic temptation of modern capitalist society. If modernity is (self)foundation, it is thereby and simultaneously a postulation of what was lost with it. This does not mean that modern consciousness has ever actually *been* in that lost state and can now return to it. Modern consciousness does not precede loss: it is the *product* of loss. Only retrospectively does it long for and invent what it is not itself²⁵. There is no origin, only loss. But precisely of that constitutive loss lurks the

temptation to recover it²⁶. Over modern society hovers the unavoidable temptation to return to an organic unity. This is the “natural” community that the nouveau right longs for, demands and paints with premodern strokes. This nature is not an original nature: it is the product retrojected from loss. But precisely for that reason, it is all the more indelible.

The melancholic nouveau right is a pure modern product. Its starting point is unequivocally the loss, which can be attributed to Original Sin, woke culture, capitalism, modernity, postmodernity, the market, mass society, feminism, globalization, neoliberalism, or others. The result is one at the same: our natural, innocent, original state is lost, and the bet is that it can be recovered. Thus, the thesis of the nouveau right is not so much a defense of what is present but rather the need for a recovery of something lost. And hence the double paradoxical gesture of the nouveau right: the capitalist framework is never questioned and is taken as unsurpassable, and at the same time we must regress to “the natural”. But, as we have seen, this first natural was definitely abolished by capitalism itself. The nouveau right then projects an idea of the natural starting from its present state.

This third form of “the natural” claimed by the nouveau right is the origin projected from the wound of Modernity itself. The nouveau right is prey to a form of fetishism: it believes it can access the very things themselves, their “natural” being, before their decadence began. “Nature” is where we return from the Fall. The nouveau right considers it possible to emerge from modern decadence and re-achieve a sacred and direct marriage with the things themselves: to recover family, homeland and the past as they were before, when they were “natural”, in a blissful brotherhood between past, origin, nature and duty. The nouveau right believes it can return to what its own modern existence left behind: as if, as Mishima said in *Confessions of a Mask*, one could witness the scene of their own birth. This third “nature” is, for the melancholic, the ultimate fetish, the ultimate fantasy: the return to the lost Paradise.

Of course, there is no such path of return. There is no return behind the wound of origin. “The effort to recreate [a rustic lifestyle] also constituted the tacit acknowledgment that it had disappeared.”²⁷ There is a temptation of return only because there is a state of loss. As Hegel asserts in his *Aesthetics*, we inhabit “the world of prose,” where there is no longer any community, no longer any polis.²⁸ But capitalism offers the melancholic, instead, another possibility, the possibility of the definitive pastiche: turning tradition, nature, and community into an amusement park. Capitalism allows for the production of the ultimate fiction: an outside of capitalism. Capitalist allows for a production of the Golden Age.

Fortunately, we don’t need to invent examples, because capitalist reality has been inventing better than us for a long time. “*L’Histoire n’attend que vous*” reads the motto of the historical theme park Puy du Fou. In this park, spectators can be transported to the most glorious

events of European history, with exquisite sets and carefully crafted theater and pyrotechnic shows. The park belongs to the entrepreneur, viscount, conspiracy theorist and conservative eurosceptic politician Philippe de Villiers, currently a member of Eric Zemmour's party *Reconquête*.

Does Puy du Fou achieve what it supposedly promises, namely, to transport the spectator to the great events of past centuries of European history? Rather, it achieves something else, which is what it actually promises. "*L'Histoire n'attend que vous*": Puy du Fou does not promise to take the spectator to History. It promises to bring History to the spectator. It promises to twist and shape History so that History waits for the spectator and not vice versa. History as delivery for the customer. History packaged at your doorstep like a delivery food. Does Puy du Fou thus manage to place History at the feet of the spectator? No, nor does it pretend to. Puy du Fou subjugates history to turn it into a warm doormat where the spectator can place their feet. Turning nature, tradition, history into doormats for the consumer to feel something warmer than the icy highways of capitalist accumulation: that is the project of the melancholic nouveau right. The point is not to "return" to natural history or natural community or family. The point is to invent them for and by the anguish of a world that has abandoned us. This is the secret intention of the nouveau right and the reason why it works: not to return to the natural, but to turn the natural into a reproduction.²⁹

Conclusions. Paradises Lost and New

In the hieroglyphic that is modern society, "nature" is said in many ways. In the paradoxical functioning of capitalism, nature is at once suppressed, posited and longed for. Capitalism rewrites the entire relationship with the world. There is no longer a direct connection to nature but neither to the social organization as whole. Modern society has split itself from the individual: in Hegel's words, "the existing world of freedom has become unfaithful to the better will"³⁰. In capitalist conditions, the world is unfaithful to the individual. The individual is divorced from freedom, imprisoned in the individual cells of the system of needs. The world of existing freedom is definitively lost and, even though it is his product, he cannot recover it. The social world now appears to the individual not as the seat of freedom but as "a huge accumulation of commodities," a second nature, both close and alien, which would not exist without his participation, but whose rules subject his as subject and not as agent. Marx, as if anticipating Adorno and Horkheimer's dialectic of Enlightenment, explains how modern instrumental reason, which sought to dominate nature, ends up becoming a second nature that objectifies and reifies the subject itself.

This capitalist second nature immediately produces the temptation to return to an "original" nature. Capitalism produces, in addition to commodities, its most refined product, its own negation: the lost paradise.

This paradise is the nature that the nouveau right yearns for: a natural family, a natural community, a natural nation, ordered by a more or less confessed vertex, God. Capitalism produces what it itself annihilated: a Golden Age to return to. The Golden Age is a projection from our constitutive situation of loss. Nature is only the illusion of an outside of the system produced by the system itself³¹. Origin is only the wound in the present. Community is only the illusion of a return produced by the wound of loss itself. The melancholics asked for the organic communities and received cottagecore produced by an algorithm. Nature is literally turned into an amusement park which should function as a center of gravity for all possible sense and destiny; but, in the end, a fake artifice instead of a sacred genesis, a product instead of a sanctuary, a pastiche instead of salvation.

There would be an intuitive response to this: the return to the natural is a failure because the traditional, the organic, the communal, can never emerge by any act of will. If it ever existed, it certainly did not arise from a purpose of recreation or from a decision. It miraculously occurred, like the beauty of a rose, which cannot be forced. Its magic was precisely, if it ever occurred, its unfounded character: its re-foundation is its ruin. Strictly speaking, a traditional family cannot be restored. A homeland cannot be recreated. Reproducing Nature is a contradiction. The result is a re-production, a re-creation. Authenticity cannot be gained by reproduction, because the very definition of authenticity is that it should not be forced, produced, or performed.

However, this argument, although not false, misses the point and runs the risk of becoming unwillingly romantic. It does not properly understand the contemporary moment. There were never so many churches as after the death of God, just as there was never such a fierce war of values as in our Weberian era of value polytheism³², or never so much renewed faith as in nihilism. Accordingly, there was never so much (fake) nature as in contemporary capitalism. The nouveau right understands the present moment. It is not enough to point out that the ancient gods and natures no longer exist. The nouveau right is not really interested in the natural... and therein precisely lies its strength. The nouveau right is not an outdated position belonging to another era, but the most refined product of our own. The secret intention of the nouveau right is not to return to nature, but to re-create it. The secret bet of the nouveau right is that, indeed, we are in nihilism, but it does not matter. Its aim is to produce a fake nature, an amusement park of traditions, and a pseudo-community. What better wrapper for nihilism than a gaudy artificial paradise?

The epic and classicist aesthetics adopted by the nouveau right are a postmodern pastiche and by no means a rescue of lost essences, a cosplay of false naivety in the ruined world of late capitalism. But that is its strength. In reality, the melancholics are the ultimate postmodern, because they believe in the performative power of language: they believe

they can artificially produce what was once natural or given, if it ever was. They believe that a voluntarist gesture can replace the sediment decanted from the alleged authenticity of a tradition, that the repeated word can perform the effects it names. Their defense of Nature and Tradition is the ultimate performance. Their work of art is the utterly postmodern work of art: fake Nature and the performance of Tradition³³.

The nouveau right's bet works because it is the dream of capitalist abstraction and exhausted modernity; it brings forth the new nuptials of an individual, as Hegel said, abandoned by the world –we have not abandoned the world; the world has abandoned us. It works because it is the fantasy of reconciliation, Modernity attending to and appropriating its own birth. It is the definitive turn: the production of reality itself in a world dominated by technology, code, financial capitalism, and artificial intelligence. "It will be no easier getting rid of the corpse of reality. In desperation, we shall be forced to turn it into a special attraction, a historical tableau, a nature reserve: 'Coming to you live from reality! Visit this strange world! Experience the thrill of the real world!'"³⁴ Reality as a nature reserve and ultimate attraction is today's most precious relic. Thus, if science and civilization have captured every last atom of the universe, reserves are closed away from science and civilization to allegedly present the virgin nature frozen in its purity.

Nature, equally produced as everything else but appearing as virgin and authentic, is the ultimate fetish: it masks the desert in which we live. Nature has never been more alive. It lives today in the community, in the family, in the nation, in the land as dreamed of by the nouveau right. It lives because it is impossible. Nothing is more alive than a specter. Nothing is more alive than a specter turned into hologram. Nothing is more alive than the artificial paradises of cottagecore on social media and postmodern "traditional" families and nations. This is the lifeblood of the nouveau right and therein resides its power.

- 1 "What qualifies as traditional isn't precise—the only requirement is that it derive from a mythical, unspoiled version of history and celebrate clearly defined masculine and feminine archetypes." Darby quoted in Leidig 2023, p. 183.
- 2 Boym 2001, p. 346- 348.
- 3 This even allows for a patina of apparent multicultural sensitivity. For example, former speechwriter on Ron DeSantis' campaign, Nate Hochman, highlights that Native American tribal jurisdictions have not legalized same-sex marriage and that, according to some tribal leaders, "gay and lesbian couples should leave the reservation because they thought marriage equality was a 'white man's way of thinking'." Hochman 2023.
- 4 This melancholy appears as the other side of the postmodern reconfiguration of time: the present as a pure simultaneity in which the past and the future can be imported. Grevenbrock et al. 2022.
- 5 A detailed analysis in Ramas San Miguel 2024a.
- 6 "Thus were casualties of neoliberal deracination mobilized by the figure of their own losses mirrored in a nation lost: this figure drew on a mythical past when families were happy, whole, and heterosexual, when women and racial minorities knew their place, when neighborhoods were orderly, secure, and homogeneous, when terrorism was outside the homeland, heroin was a black problem, and a hegemonic Christianity and whiteness constituted the manifest identity, power, and pride of the nation and the West." Brown 2019, p. 41.
- 7 And not nostalgia, which can be defined as a longing for what is lost with the consciousness that it will never return. Nostalgia loves what is lost *as lost* and *because* it is lost. On the contrary, as Julia Kristeva has shown, the fundamental trait of melancholy is the inability to accept loss. Melancholics believe they can replicate in the present the mythical community lost in the past.
- 8 Kristeva 1992.
- 9 Kant 2018.
- 10 Lipovsky 2021.
- 11 As if ignoring Antigone's lesson; because, as Judith Butler but also Hegel himself clearly shows, there is no political bond without the "divine law" or the private realm of family and kinship, but the opposite is also true: this realm is only an abstraction of the actual ethical unit, and Antigone plays her role not as a pre-political advocate of familiar bonds, but as a political "masculine" figure with deed and word which Hegel equates with none other than Socrates and Jesus. Neither of both sides can be abstracted from the other, and the fall of the polis is also the fall of the spontaneous, "natural" sphere of the divine law (and its corresponding binary gender division). Hegel's Antigone represents a political limit to the familiar and a (repressed) bodily limit to the political. Hegel is, as George Steiner states, a "dramatist of meaning" because he understands the intrinsic tragic impossibility of every unity. See also Zupančič 2023.
- 12 Thus begins the text: "Is it possible to find in life itself—for human history is the sum of mighty life-courses which already have had to be endowed with ego and personality, in customary thought and expression, by predicating entities of a higher order like "the Classical" or "the Chinese Culture," "Modern Civilization"— a series of stages which must be traversed, and traversed moreover in an ordered and obligatory sequence? For everything organic the notions of birth, death, youth, age, lifetime are fundamentals—may not these notions, in this sphere also, possess a rigorous meaning which no one has as yet extracted? In short, is all history founded upon general biographic archetypes?" Spengler 1926.
- 13 Wallat 2015, 244 y ss.
- 14 Polanyi 2024.
- 15 Marx 1983, p. 21. My translation in all non-English texts.
- 16 Marx 1962, p. 98.
- 17 Marx 1962, p. 99.
- 18 Marx 1962, p. 102
- 19 "As soon as these proportions acquire, by force of habit, a certain fixity, it seems as if they sprout from the inherent nature of the products of labor; as if, for example, 1 ton of iron contained the same value as 2 ounces of gold, just as 1 pound of gold and 1 pound of iron contain an equal weight, despite their different physical and chemical properties." Marx 1962, p. 89.
- 20 The concept of fetishism is at the core of Marx's concept of value. For a justification and an in-depth exploration of Marx's understanding of inversions, reifications and forms of appearance in capitalism, see Ramas San Miguel 2024b.
- 21 Marx 1964, p. 838.
- 22 "In the exchange relations of its products, which are accidental and always fluctuating, the socially necessary labor time for their production violently imposes itself as a regulating natural law, in the same way that the law of gravity imposes itself when a house collapses on someone." Marx 1962, p. 89. The ground form of this movement is the spiral, infinite (bad Hegelian infinite?) movement of the expanded reproduction of capital, M-M'.
- 23 Marx 1962, p. 99, my underlining.
- 24 This is the second via of demonstration of the *a priori* for Kant. It is not necessary, argues Kant, to resort to the sciences to prove that there are *a priori* judgments: experience itself

- already presupposes them, for where would experience itself get its certainty otherwise? Kant 1998a, B5 p. 138.
- 25 “Here we have the properly Hegelian matrix of development: the Fall is already in itself its self-sublation; the wound is already in *itself* its own healing, so that the perception that we are dealing with the Fall is ultimately a misperception, an effect of our skewed perspective – all we have to do is to accomplish the move from In-itself to For-itself: to change our perspective and recognize how the longed-for reversal is already operative in what is going on”. Žižek 2008, p. 78-79.
- 26 Language itself is a product of this temptation to overcome loss, as is its perhaps most refined product, metaphysics: the temptation to convey the primal Thing In Itself beyond the already constituted subject: “To transpose corresponds to the Greek *metaphorein*, to transport; language is, from the start, a translation, but on a level that is heterogeneous to the one where affective loss, renunciation, or the break takes place. If I did not agree to lose mother, I could neither imagine nor name her. [...] The wager of conveyability is also a wager that the primal object can be mastered; in that sense it is an attempt to fight depression (due to an intrusive preobject that I cannot give up) by means of a torrent of signs, which aims precisely at capturing the object of joy, fear, or pain. Metaphysics, and its obsession with conveyability, is a discourse of the pain that is stated and relieved on account of that very statement.” Kristeva 2024, p. 32 and 52-53.
- 27 Tanner 2021, p. 173
- 28 A suggestive reading in Jameson 1974.
- 29 “The more we value natural foods, the more hyper-technological facilities increase to produce them: the authentic is no longer the antinomy of artifice, it has entered the era of ‘clean’ technoscientific production.” Lipovetsky 2021, p. 248.
- 30 Hegel 1991, §138 p. 166.
- 31 “There is no nature, only the effects of nature: denaturalization or naturalization”. Derrida cited by Butler 1993, p. 12.
- 32 Brown 2023.
- 33 “But what about the opposite strategy, which resides in strengthening local traditions in order to make colonial domination more efficient? No wonder the British colonial administration of India elevated *The Laws of Manu* – a detailed justification and manual of the caste system – into the privileged text to be used as a reference for establishing the legal code that would render possible the most efficient domination of India. Up to a point, one can even say that *The Laws of Manu* only became the book of the Hindu tradition retroactively.” Žižek in Žižek, Ruda and Hamza 2018, p. 38.
- 34 Baudrillard 2008, p. 42-43.

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Familiarism. Archaic Futurism of Radical Conservatives and Latin–American Feminist Specters

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Abstract: A renewed coalition between neo-liberalism and conservative forces is visible today, particularly in reactionary discourses against the so-called “gender ideology”. A renewed familialist morality is once again taking the scene of political antagonisms and public discourses. However, the phenomena we are witnessing today are part of a long and complex genealogy in which three tendencies are intertwined:

- 1) Capital’s advance to subsume labour (paid and unpaid) along with its class struggle against all forms of workers’ and popular organisation.
- 2) Based on old colonial traces, it requires a reinforcement of colonialist racism. But this should not be thought of in terms of a “reminiscence” of pre-capitalist forms of life, but as the necessary effect of capitalist reproduction in its renewedly non-capitalist “peripheries”.
- 3) Forms of under-wage, neo-colonial slave and unpaid reproductive labour constitute the point of convergence of historical processes of racialisation and genericisation of marginalised (albeit massive) population sectors, in the service of the expanded reproduction of capital on a global scale. Within this confluence, the return of familialist morality must be seen both as a renewed strategy of capital - particularly since the dictatorial processes of the 1970s - and as a sign of its current systemic crisis, which shows itself to be a peripheralisation of the world and an expansion of post-dictatorial culture from the margins towards the so-called central countries.

We can thus understand the strategic role of feminist movements in Latin America and also understand why they are the target of attack by the international right-wing vanguards.

Keywords: social reproduction, postdictatorship, Latin-American feminism, familiarism

A renewed paradoxical coalition between neo-liberalism and conservatism has become visible nowadays, notably in reactionary discourses against the so-called “gender ideology”¹, in which ultra-liberal so-called “libertarian” positions turn into traditional discursive forms of anti-liberal conservative morality.²

Moreover, it could be said that a renewed familiarist morality takes the stage of political antagonisms and public discourses and constitutes the field of a renovated encounter between the previous liberal-right forces and the more traditional ultra-conservative tendencies (Collazo and Pulleiro, 2019; Anzorena, 2009; Schuster, 2018; Verbal, 2022). This may look quite original in many regions, however, it should be recalled, as David Pavón Cuellar (2018) has recently done, that in Latin America, the partnership between pro-capitalist modernising tendencies, especially in the economic sphere, and extremely conservative and anti-democratic positions in political, moral and cultural terms, is more than a century old.

It is worth recalling that in Mexico, from 1913, the Mexican Catholic Union contributed political activists to the anti-revolutionary cause. In Argentina, in 1919, the Liga Patriótica (Patriotic League) was created, a parastatal organization formed by the sons of wealthy sectors to hunt down immigrants suspected of participating in workers' organization processes, especially those with anarchist affiliations, coming from the convulsed Italy or deported after the experience of the Paris Commune. In many cases, conservative positions of a segregationist and even xenophobic nature were adopted by the same representatives of the intellectual field who a decade earlier advocated a liberal modernization of American societies. In the 1930s, conservative groups of a nationalist and Hispanic-inspired nature in various Latin American countries fed off the ideology of Spanish Falangism, with varying degrees of influence on the political and cultural scene. In some cases, during this period, the liberal-conservative coalition experienced internal distancing and contradictions. Shortly afterwards, and since the post-war period, however, their interventions have converged once again, when they aligned their outlines with the anti-communist ideology of the Cold War.

In short, it could be said that these types of expressions never left the scene and that, in fact, they had a strong influence during the military dictatorships that shaped the region during the second half of the century.³ The counter-revolutionary organisations that actively participated in actions deployed in the framework of Plan Condor and in the various forms of state terrorism, acting as paramilitary forces, in the intelligence services or as ideologues in the media, educational and cultural spheres and universities can be recalled in this regard: Bandeirantes in Brazil, the Triple A (Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance), the so-called Caza Tupamaros in Uruguay, the Acción Patriótica in Colombia, Mano Blanca in Guatemala, are some of its exponents.

The aim of this essay is not to concentrate on a historicization of these specific trajectories. A history of the processes that converge at different moments in the 20th century in this articulation between heterogeneous fractions of the dominant sectors requires a genealogical analysis that considers diverse historicities articulated in an overdetermined way, in order to identify the specific determinations of each juncture and each country. However, it is interesting to recognise, in somewhat more global or abstract terms, a common singularity that is structural to the Latin American capitalist periphery and that runs through the specific forms of each conjuncture. This makes it necessary to consider aspects of a more structural nature in order to understand the contradictory confluence between liberal-modernising forces and ultra-conservative and even anti-liberal forces. Understanding this structural dimension of the contradictory articulation between liberalising tendencies and anti-liberal tendencies is key to understanding the current anti-feminist onslaught in our region.

To put it briefly, the processes of liberalisation required and driven by the expanded reproduction of capital, especially in its imperialist forms, coincide in exposing their contradictory matrix in the form of internal limits to the liberal-modernising tendency itself, which, at the same time, requires and feeds racist social relations and an anti-liberal morality of a conservative-heteropatriarchal nature.

In a broad, non-economicist sense, this crossroads can be linked to that already famous one posed by Gunder Frank, when he argued that:

...historical research shows that contemporary underdevelopment is largely the historical product of past and present economic and non-economic relations between underdeveloped satellites and today's developed metropolitan countries. Moreover, these relations are an essential part of the structure and development of the capitalist system on a world scale as a whole (1967, p. 160).

This already classic idea in dependency theory and in the broader field of Latin American Marxism can be tested to explore the current revival of the liberal-conservative alliance in the region, especially with regard to anti-feminist activism, to reveal the extent to which the impulses of regressive and illiberal ideologies converge in the current strategy of reproduction of capital.

This strategy is conceived by David Harvey (2007) as a new regime of reproduction characterised by forms of violent dispossession and by some feminist theorists as a resurgence of neo-colonial processes of original accumulation (Federici, 2010).

In this framework, focusing the question on the paradoxical coincidence of liberalising and ultra-conservative tendencies in Latin American history allows us to understand the current relevance of the so-called “conservative”, “punitive” (Davies, 2016) or “neo-colonial” (Federici, 2010) of global neoliberal capitalism and to trace in it the resumption - in the form of a furious anti-feminist activism - of an old alliance that is rooted in its structural and expansive dynamics of reproduction, as Rosa Luxemburg ([1913] 2012) pointed out early on.

However, this entails some significant consequences. The first of these is that what various theorists from central countries conceive of as a feature of a late stage of the neoliberalisation of capitalism - by which I mean the emergence of anti-democratic discourses that are confrontational with the classical liberal ideology of civil and personal rights (cf. Brown, 2020) - has a history in Latin America as long as its name itself. This forces us to ask ourselves whether it might not be necessary to reverse, at least for once, the epistemic logics that tend to identify the theoretical and analytical production of the central countries as the production of a “general” conceptuality applicable to the “particular cases” offered by the peripheral regions. Indeed, so it is my belief. The

question that concerns us demands starting from a theoretical elaboration inquiring into the forms adopted by the reproduction of capital in the “marginal” zones, in order to understand the contradictorily anti-liberal, anti-democratic, racist and semi-slavery character of modern capitalism “in general” and of neo-liberalism in particular.

The second consequence is that, posing the question in this way, it loses epistemic value and analytical rigour to assume the novelty or originality of the so-called “new” right. Because in the peripheral regions, the processes of tendential subsumption of non-capitalist social relations to the logic of the reproduction of capital, which from the beginning have involved non-capitalist forms of political repression, non-wage or sub-wage forms of economic exploitation, relied on racist, segregationist, anti-egalitarian and anti-democratic ideologies which are far from endorsing the legal-political ideology of the bourgeois states of the central countries (cf. Grüner, 2010; Tristán, 2022; Federici, 2010). In these regions of global capitalism, the “new right” has never been new. Its emergence is that of an archaic restitution within the peripheral countries, although now - and perhaps this is what is so new - projected onto the central countries that think of themselves as beacons of modernization. This is the lesson that Latin America - along with other “backward” regions - can teach the world today.

This means that these phenomena, appearing again today in the form of this coalition between representatives of the confessional ultra-right, conservative political spaces, negationists and defenders of the dictatorships of the 1970s and the Spanish Franco regime, with representatives who present themselves as young men, NGO staff, legislators, members of foundations, even influencers on social media⁴, must be understood within a long and complex genealogy that marks the singular history of Latin America, but which must be taken into consideration in order to understand the global processes of the expanded reproduction of capital.

In this alliance we clearly see how three tendencies are knotted together:

- 1) An advance of capital to subsume labour (paid and unpaid) along with its class struggle against all forms of workers’ and popular organisation.
- 2) This global vanguard is built on old colonial traces and, therefore, requires a reinforcement of racism and colonialism. But this should not be thought of in terms of a reminiscence of pre-modern or pre-capitalist forms of life, but as the necessary effect of capitalist reproduction in its renewably non-capitalist “peripheries”. In this sense, and modifying a little the classic thesis of Rosa Luxemburg, it is not a question of thinking the reproduction of capital as a tendential expansion on a previously existing non-capitalist space (which would be a pre-capitalist reminiscence), but as a process of spatialization and temporalization that produces zones

and relations as non-capitalist (or less than capitalist), according to the needs of a new regime of reproduction. In short, it is necessary to think of a spatialization that actively primitivizes social relations, at the service of “capitalist development”.

3) Finally, this capitalist-racist alliance has a key foothold in familialist morality, in gender inequality and in the production and reproduction of hetero-patriarchal relations. The forms of sub-wage, neocolonial slave and unpaid reproductive labor constitute the point of convergence of the historical processes of racialization and genericization of marginalized (though massive) sectors of the population, at the service of the expanded reproduction of capital on a global scale.

This overdetermined articulation of oppressions, inequalities and hierarchies of gender, race and class becomes especially palpable throughout Latin American history. It is in relation to this that we can understand the strategic and particularly sensitive role that the feminist movements of this region play and also understand why they are the targets of international right-wing attacks; why the referents of the so-called new right, be they traditional confessional sectors or renewed opinion leaders, have dedicated and still dedicate so much effort to prevent or hinder the conquest of the abortion right in various countries or the consolidation of educational forms attentive to sexual and reproductive health.

Family and capitalism

Feminist theory is a key to understanding that the alliance between conservatism and liberalism is not a conjunctural novelty. As Melinda Cooper emphasizes in *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (2017, p. 17), the “family question” offers a privileged ground to address the processes of apparently paradoxical alliance between “liberal” and “conservative” forces for more than a century. In this respect she takes up Reva Siegel’s idea, according to which the legal history of the modern family can be understood, rather than as a progressive liberalization, as a process of preservation through transformation, in which gender and generational hierarchies are reestablished under new, perhaps more democratic, though no less implacable, legal structures.

Now, as we have suggested in the previous section, a consideration of historical transformations placed in the capitalist periphery compels us to critically question the remnants of the Eurocentric philosophy of time that is trafficked in the character of “survivals” attributed to social relations that are not immediately capitalist, when thinking of the coexistence of “progressive” (modernizing) tendencies with tendencies towards the “preservation” of the old.

If, from Latin American feminism, we take up the proposal to think of underdevelopment as an effect of development, we should also be

suspicious of any primitivization of patriarchal relations as “survivals” of pre-modern relations and ask ourselves instead about the active production of these so-called primitive relations within the framework of the transformations of global capitalism. To put it another way, from Latin America we can think of the processes of primitivization as processes framed within the expanded reproduction of capital. And this sheds a different light on the current resurgence of familialist morality in our region, as well as the resurgence of racial segregationism.

From a decentered approach to the relations between class, race and gender, such as the one proposed here, the movement of transformation of capitalism in its various moments can be approached in a complex way.

Thus we can review the process of transition from absolute surplus value to relative surplus value, which occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century, resulting from the limitation of the working day and the emergence of the notion of productivity. This process, as S. Federici has shown, has a strong impact on the emergence of the figure of the proletarian housewife and the separation between productive and reproductive work. But there is more: at the same moment in which the (invisible) relationship between paid and unpaid labor is consolidated in the form of the gendered division of labor, new imperialist distributions of the world are also consolidated, bringing with them other forms of unpaid surplus labor formally subsumed to capital in the framework of the international division of labor. Forms of semi-slave labor considered proper to countries considered “underdeveloped” whose non-capitalist relations in necessary coexistence with the expanded reproduction of capital, complexify the temporality of the capitalist world system.

This leads us to consider the overdetermination of the gendered division of labor by the international division of labor and to note that whatever the “housewife” or “mother of the family” may be, it cannot be thought of as a homogeneous figure between central and peripheral countries. This is something that black feminists have noticed early on. But we even find it much earlier in Flora Tristán’s memoirs from her visit to nineteenth-century Peru (2022).

What is interesting to underline here is that the “survival” of conservative hetero-patriarchal relations responds to a complex and decentered temporality, since it is subordinated to the temporal contradiction of the “development of underdevelopment”. In this sense, the links between capitalism and patriarchy are not “contemporary” but structurally dislocated in relation to the links between capitalism and racism. To put it another way, in the capitalist periphery, the sex-gender division of labor is modulated by the international division of labor, in such a way that the processes of generization and racialization affect each other, in their links with the strategy of expanded reproduction of capital over non-capitalist zones of production and social reproduction,

tendentially subordinated to the dominance of capitalist relations of production.

Finally, this organization of the problem allows us to return in another way to the transformations in the framework of the processes of neoliberalization of capitalism in order to question the causes of the return of the familiarist morality in its conjuncture and the differential strategic role of these processes of right-wing radicalization in Latin America.

The first point to be considered is that the actualization of the “family question” is associated with the reformulation of the question of Human Nature that each crisis of reproduction of capitalism has brought with it. Testimony to this is the attention paid by Gary Becker, 1992 Nobel laureate in economics, celebrated neoliberal theorist, author of *Human Capital* (1984), to the so-called “domestic economy” in his *Treatise on the Family* (Becker, 1987).

Melinda Cooper (2017) finds in Becker the marks of the alliance between neoliberalism and conservative familialist morality that allows us to think the constitutive plot of the neoliberal historical bloc.

Becker’s interest in the reelaboration of an economic theory that takes into consideration what Nancy Fraser calls the new “regime of reproduction” with two salaries (2015), is based on the reformulation of intrafamilial relations for economic theory; it is about, as the author warns, the economic consideration of the collaborative and conflictive aspects of conjugal and filiation bonds. We cannot fail to read in this concern of a Chicago School economist for divorce, birth planning, contraception, etc., the traces of a strategy of capital aimed at understanding and processing in its terms the new family forms, heirs of significant transformations in the field of sexuality after the cultural schism of the sixties in the West. Yet there is something else: a reading from a perspective situated in peripheral countries requires us to pay attention to the differential treatment of the “family form” that this strategy implies and that can be read in some passages of Becker’s studies. To put it in another way, the family morality re-driven by capital on a global scale in the framework of the consolidation of a new regime of reproduction coinciding with late capitalism is not uniform for central and peripheral countries.

Reading Becker’s book from a peripheral perspective, we find that his economic studies not only economize family relations by discarding the classic theory of a single income per household, which leads him to pay attention to gender differences within the domestic space. Becker also introduces variables such as “children of quality” or “children in quantity” to quantify differential family planning strategies between families in rich and poor countries.

This differential approach, which is conceptually formulated in Becker’s economic theory, is identified in a series of concrete historical processes in *Patriarcado y acumulación a escala mundial*, written by Maria Mies (2019). In this study, Mies pays special attention to the differentiated

strategies of capital in reproductive matters and to the way in which, under the same idea of social “modernization”, policies of liberalization of reproductive relations in central countries are drawn up towards the beginning of the 1970s, while “traditional” heteropatriarchal forms are reinforced (or produced) in peripheral countries, in order to guarantee, through the ideas of *domesticity*, the precarization of hiring conditions.

Hence, a complex question of a strategic nature arises concerning the chances and limits of processes of internationalism when one considers how, as Mies shows, the so-called third sector organizations from central countries, dedicated to “empowering” African, Asian or Latin American women through microcredits for traditional handicraft manufacturing or agricultural production, played a key role in these capital reproduction strategies. Considered as activities carried out by “mothers of families”, they could legitimately be made precarious. In George Caffentzis’ (2013) analysis, the precarization of certain forms of labor - in our terms, their actively produced primitivization - restores forms of absolute surplus value in the twenty-first century and is correlative to the emergence of a new form of surplus value which he calls “surplus value by transfer” and which is based on the capacity of certain fractions of capital to parasitize surplus value from others whom it subalternizes and pauperizes. This subalternization of the productive fractions of capital responds to a need for the global reproduction of capitalism. The author recognizes this logic especially in the capital associated with the extraction and production of energy, but undoubtedly also acts in financial capital and in the capital of communicational and digital technology itself, which share with the first the same capacity to transversalize the economic and social processes.

According to the theoretical and analytical coordinates I propose here, it is possible to recognize the differential role adopted by the relations of solidarity between the neoliberalization of capitalism and the restitution of familialism in its peripheral zones, and this leads us to consider current forms of violence - and especially patriarchal violence in the capitalist periphery - as a symptom of a conjunction of diverse crises with heterogeneous temporalities:

1) the crisis of the imperialist distribution of the world in force since the end of the 19th century, when the passage from forms of absolute surplus value to forms of relative surplus value coincided with the establishment of internal divisions in the field of productive labor and the marginalization and subalternization of important zones of the (peripheral and domestic) economy under forms of sub-wage exploitation.

2) The crisis of the specific regime of reproduction rehearsed since the 1970s in the framework of the homogenizing and unhindered expansion of the capitalist world-system, under the globalizing utopia. This crisis

coincides not only with a renewed expansion of forms of absolute surplus value, but also with the emergence of new forms of “surplus value by transfer” which once again place the question of social reproduction at center stage. Around the question of reproduction, once again, the vanguards of capital dream of the replacement of a large part of the labor force - this time with a technological breakthrough based on algorithms and artificial intelligence - while rehearsing their renewed laws of population, involving familialist policies, biological management, metaphysical theories on the human condition, manipulation of the frontier between nature and culture and everything within their reach to arrange the articulation between new regimes of technical division of labor with renewed regimes of reproduction of life.

From this diagnosis we can draw some conclusions. First of all, it allows us to think of the present moment as that of a systemic crisis rather than that of a total war. It is not a question of denying current or future wars, but of thinking of them as a symptom of a collapse rather than a victory of capital.

Secondly, we can avoid finding in any resistance to feminism, whether deliberate or not, the expression of an “enemy” (unique, homogeneous and pre-existing to the dispute). Instead, we can begin to think that the positions engaged in the struggle are the effect of compositions that take place at multiple levels articulating heterogeneous levers. This is because the relations between capitalism, patriarchy and racism cannot be thought of as “abstract relations in general” but rather situated in specific conjunctures in which there are relations of overdetermined articulation, that is to say, concrete relations of combination, hierarchy and contradiction. The political analysis of the concrete situation thus allows us to move beyond the classic controversy over the delimitation of the “main enemy” to embrace the idea of the struggle as an overdetermined process of composition whose strategy cannot be traced in abstraction or in a general way in terms of a friend-enemy binary logic, but rather calls for an analytical and strategic intelligence around tactical alliances and obstacles.

In the third place, thinking about the strategic aspects of the struggle, under conditions of structural complexity such as those that characterize dependent social formations, opens an incomparable opportunity to produce an epistemological leap in the field of critical thought that reveals itself to be politically strategic and without which, I dare say, leftist thought remains captured by analytical categories of the 20th century, while the vanguards of the global right have already launched their program of political imagination for the 21st century. In this sense, the long tradition of Latin American, African and Asian critical studies can open up a series of considerations that challenge the functioning of Eurocentric schemes as pure models for theoretical and political thought. But fundamentally, it allows to bring into play in the

analyses and diagnoses, and not only as titles or intentions, a historically articulated perspective of oppressions that puts into virtuous connection the description of effects and the question of causes. An imperialism in crisis calls for an anti-imperialist reformulation of our theories. And the “underdeveloped” world can give clues to the future, because sometimes the future comes from behind.

Finally, the mobilization of a perspective from the margins with pretensions of universality can shed a new light on global processes and show that, just as familialist morality makes its reentry into the framework of the cultural policies of the Latin American dictatorships of the South (cf. Rodríguez, 2009), breaking liberalizing tendencies of sex-generic relations of the 1960s while deploying its counter-revolutionary violence with the Third World and national liberation struggles, so too can it be seen as a fundamental axis of the reproduction of capital in the framework of neoliberalism. I propose to call this tendency postdictatorial culture and to think of it as a fundamental axis of the reproduction of capital in the framework of neoliberalism. The exposure of the post-dictatorial face of the utopia of globalization is the clearest symptom of the current crisis of capital reproduction whose expansion works (contrary to what is usually thought) from the peripheries towards the central countries. It is a conjuncture that we can characterize as the “peripheralization of the globe” and that reveals itself in forms of feminization of labor, precarization of life and primitivization of social bonds under new logics of racialization and domestication that destroy the coordinates with which modern capitalism imagined public space and the relations between the public and the private, nature and culture, the educated and the plebeian.

This allows us to understand the strategic character of feminist struggles in the capitalist peripheries as a cause of global concern and a beautiful coven of specters.

- 1 The phrase “gender ideology” can be found in such places as *Lexicón: Términos ambiguos y discutidos sobre la vida familiar y la cuestión ética* (2003), prefaced by Cardinal López Trujillo, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family. The entry on “gender” in this document is written by the theologian Jutta Burggraf, who points out an affinity “between gender ideology and an ‘individualist anthropology of radical neoliberalism’ that can be traced back from Judith Butler’s contributions to Engels, Simone de Beauvoir and the Frankfurt School to locate human nature and the family as the nucleus of heteronormative reproduction as the target of the ideological threat (Gago, 2019, pp. 211-212).
- 2 In this regard, it is enough to recall a short excerpt from the anti-liberal speech given by Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán on 22 July 2023 at the Summer University in Bálványos, Transylvania: “Liberal constitutions do not describe a world of attachment, but of detachment; they do not seek to affirm something, but to reject something, in the name of individual freedom. Our Constitution, however, affirms that the place where our children will live is our homeland. It affirms our identities as men and women because that is what we call family. It also affirms our borders because then we have the power to say with whom we want to live. When, in 2011, we created the new constitution - a Hungarian, national, Christian constitution, different from other European constitutions - we did not take a bad decision. In fact, let’s say we didn’t take it wrong, but we made the right decision because, since then, we have been beset by the migration crisis, which clearly cannot be dealt with on a liberal basis. And then we have an LGBTQ+, gender offensive, and it turns out that it can only be repelled on the basis of community and child protection” (Roger-Lacan 2023).
- 3 Although the authoritarian and repressive processes of the 1970s had as their motivation and effect processes of ultra-liberal “modernisation” of Latin American societies, because they involved profound restructuring of economic relations that to a large extent anticipated the global trends of neoliberalisation of capitalism, this does not prevent us from noticing the substantive gravitation of ultra-conservative sectors, institutions and individuals in these same processes of supposed modernisation.
- 4 For a closer approach to the various manifestations of this scene, multiple materials can be reviewed. In the case of Argentina, for instance, Agustín Laje’s video “15 lies about abortion” (*15 mentiras sobre el aborto*); in Mexico, the website of organisations such as the *Frente Nacionalista Mexicano*; in Brazil, the book *O Cristão e a sexualidade* by Bolsonaroista pastor Silas Malafaia; in Chile, Axel Kaiser has published books such as *La tiranía de la igualdad. Por qué el igualitarismo es inmoral y socava el progreso de nuestra sociedad*, among many others.

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The “Nouveau Right” in Italy: Notes on the Governance of Limitless Warfare

Alessandro Russo

Abstract: It is not at all coincidental that the rise of the “Nouveau Right” coincides with the prodromes of the coming world war. After the close of the Long Sixties, the end of previous perspectives beyond capitalism led to the end of the so-called parliamentary dialectic of left and right and, at the same time, prepared for a new era of war. The “Nouveau Right” in Italy now performs the functions of “proxy governance” of the war on behalf of the US government. After the decomposition of parliamentary parties and the end of the previous political conditions that limited the wars of the twentieth century, state power is in the hands of the war itself.

Keywords: “Nouveau Right”, war, “proxy governance”, capitalism

In *Crisis & Critique*’s issue on “Future of Europe,” I argued that the current “government of the euro” results from the crisis of the twentieth-century parties. Can the “New Right” be said to be a phenomenon of the same order? In part, it is, but compared to four years ago, when a dark future for Europe could already be predicted, the situation has worsened.

When the euro was created, the European parliamentary parties, those on the left in the lead, unanimously subordinated themselves to the new authority to receive in return a legitimacy they had lost, chanting in chorus, “Europe demands it of us.” For more than 30 years, the euro has been the actual government of Europe. Today, the remnants of those parties all kneel before the authority of what we can call the “government of war” and do so in the name of even more vacuous slogans such as “in defense of the West” or “democracy versus autocracy.” In the past two years, European states have been drawn into the prodromes of a new world war, in which the decomposition of the twentieth-century party system emerges even more nefariously. Europe’s monetary unification has been replaced by a military unification in preparation for the next world war.

However, this is not just about subordination to US military supremacy, which is the most apparent aspect of the foreign policy of European states. What is taking place before our eyes is a profound change in the very nature of war. It is no longer the “continuation of politics by other means,” as in Clausewitz’s classic formula, nor the Foucauldian inversion of politics as a continuation of war. The era of war as a continuation of itself, or “limitless war,” as military theorists call it, has begun.¹

An epochal change occurred in warfare as it has been constituted since the Neolithic period with the first state organizations and specialized military apparatuses. The new warfare is no longer that of all previous millennia; it does not have the conclusive goal of subduing an enemy but has as its essential strategic orientation the absence of any conclusion of hostilities. The current war is a war without end.

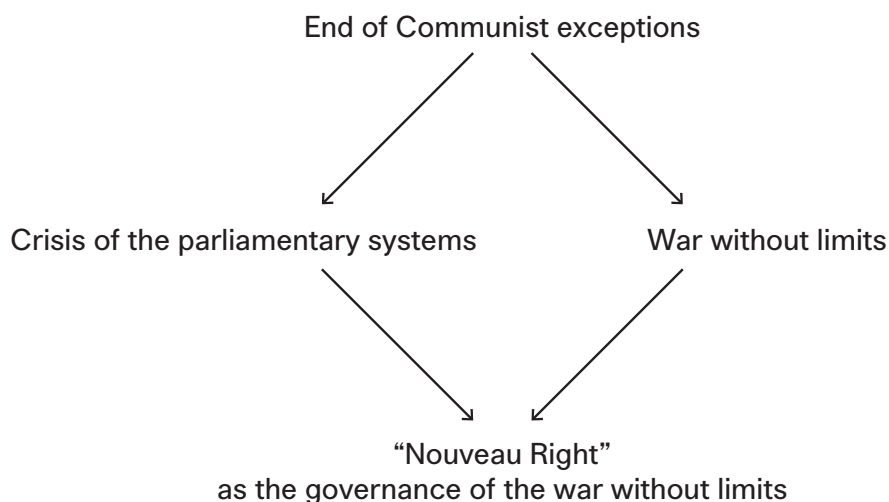
Upstream of this epochal change is the end of communist exceptions, which had been the main factor in limiting the wars of the

twentieth century.² The end of communist exceptions is also upstream of the twentieth-century party crisis and the end of the difference between left and right in parliamentary systems. In the era of limitless war, parties are no longer in government, but war rules the world.

The “Nouveau Right” in Italy is the name we can give to the undoing of the parties of the twentieth century and, at the same time, to the governance of unlimited war.

I propose a tentative map of the problem here.

Tentative map of the present-day government of war



The crisis of parliamentary systems

It is not at all coincidental that the rise of the “Nouveau Right” coincides with the prodromes of the coming world war. Ultimately, a decisive condition of the new war is the end of the parties. Of course, left and right constituted different positions, but the horizon for both was the existence of a beyond capitalism. After the close of the Long Sixties, the end of previous perspectives of an overcoming capital, sanctioned by the restoration of capitalism in China and the collapse of the Soviet Union, leads to the end of the so-called parliamentary dialectic of left and right, and at the same time prepares for a new era of war.

Right and left—beyond the far from negligible origins in the French Revolution—have existed in modern parliamentary systems in the era of capitalism “disrupted” by communist exceptions. There have been three eras of capitalism, which we might call respectively: original, disrupted, and restored. There was an original capitalism that Marx and Engels dissected with unparalleled analytical depth. Then, there was a long epoch

of capitalism disruption, produced by theories and political experiments pointing to beyond capital since the *Communist Party Manifesto*. Capitalism has been encircled for a century and a half by communist experiments. With the end of those experiments came the triumph of fully restored capitalism from the late 1970s to the early 1990s.

At the time of communist exceptions, the left, at least in words and with various distinctions, looked positively at these possibilities, the right did everything to avert them, and the center worked to make those disruptions compatible with capitalism.

Moreover, the original condition of the twentieth-century parliamentary systems, with the mass parties replacing the “parties of notables,” was the legalization of the workers’ parties and trade unions, that is, the “left”, with positions ranging from gradualist reformism to revolutionary path. At the end of the era of “disrupted” capitalism, the crisis of the parliamentary system began with the undoing of leftist parties.

The Italian situation illustrates critical aspects of restoring capitalism “purified” from the alterations suffered during the previous era. This process parallels the crisis of parliamentarism up to the current “governance of war.” Although the latter is embodied by the “Nouveau Right,” the left’s role in this restoration process has been decisive.

In Italy, the crisis of the party system that arose after World War II became apparent very early. The Communist Party began its self-dissolution, literally, the day after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Its collapse was followed closely by the collapse of Christian Democracy and the Socialist Party, leading in 1994 to the first right-wing government with neo-fascist ministers inside. Since then, there has been a succession of left- and right-wing governments with alternating facades but substantial continuity in foreign and domestic policy.

Reviewing the main “merits” of leftist parties and governments in dissolving any distinction with the right over the past decades may be helpful.

The “merits” of the left in foreign policy...

Since the 1990s, all parliamentary parties have manifested complete subservience to the US interventionist strategy in foreign policy. The US bombing of Serbia took place with the direct support of the D’Alema government, head of the former Communist Party. The invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and the interventions in Syria and Libya all had the staunch support of both left and right governments, including the sending of troops.

One term of comparison can be Italy’s foreign policy on the Middle East, particularly on the contrast between Israel and the Palestinians. Until the 1980s, Italian governments (then hegemonized by a centrist party, the Christian Democrats) held a position of relative independence from US interventionist strategy and even diplomatic support for the PLO. In

October 1985, the Italian government even went so far as to refuse the US Air Force the use of the Sigonella base in Sicily for military operations in the Middle East. Last January, faced with the IDF's accusation, later revealed to be false, of Hamas' control of UNRWA, the Italian government did not wait a single day to cut off funding to the UN refugee organization, obeying the decisions of Israel and the US without a peep.

Today in Italy, there is a far-right government, yes, but on the war in Ukraine and the war in Gaza, the left has never said or done anything different from the right. It has approved all the military aid packages to Kyiv and has not made a single proposal for peace negotiations or armistice. On the Gaza massacres, the left is a masterpiece of obliviousness. The Democratic Party even prevents Palestinian flags from being brought to the demonstrations it organizes.

The left is fully organic to the right on the terrain of military policies and the arms industry. The current defense minister of the right-wing government was formerly the boss of Leonardo, Italy's top arms manufacturing company with a vast international business volume. The Democratic Party has an entire presence in Leonardo with leading figures. The former interior minister of the Democratic Party, Minniti, is directing the arms traffic to the Middle East. He is the same one who led the war against migrants from Africa and set the agreements with Libya for the strengthening of the coast guard, that is, patrol boats hunting for migrant barges, and the strengthening of detention centers in which migrants arrested at sea or in the desert are held and tortured. Other more or less famous names in the Democratic Party are full members of the governing bodies of Leonardo, which in turn is an integral part of the Italian government's foreign and military policy.

... and in domestic politics

In domestic politics, the dismantling of the welfare state and the war against nomadic proletarians have been conducted with equal conviction by all the governments of the past three decades and more.

Today, the left in opposition sometimes criticizes the decline of public health care, on which the right is particularly active, but this decline begins much earlier. To cite just one linguistic symptom, it was the left that, in order to manifest its "ideological modernity," renamed public hospitals "Aziende Sanitarie Locali," "Local Health Corporations." Corporations, it is understood, that are subject to profit and loss criteria like any other company. The current privatization of public health care bears a leftist stamp.

The same happened with schools and universities. It was the "reforms" of a Democratic Party minister, a former "left-wing" communist, who later felicitated that those of the Berlusconi government were in line with his. Today's result is a university and school inspired by disciplinary and meritocratic pedagogical criteria, research subservient to the

needs of the capitalist market, rigidly top-down governance, and the indiscriminate use of precarious teachers.

The area where the left has made its most significant contribution to the reestablishment of capitalist command has been dismantling previous legislation in defense of labor. Leftist governments desired and vigorously supported a series of laws implementing new forms of precarious work. The so-called “Treu package” in a leftist government inaugurated them in the mid-1990s, and the “Jobs Act” of the government led by Renzi brought them to fruition.

Harassment against proletarian nomads has been a constant endeavor of both the left and the right. The laws tightening them wanted by the left (the Turco-Napolitano law) have been essentially confirmed by right-wing governments (Bossi-Fini law). The war against migrants that the Meloni government is waging today is the same war that Interior Minister Minniti of the Democratic Party was waging.

For more than thirty years, the left, basically the products of the disintegration of the Italian Communist Party, has been doing the most essential work for the restoration of unchallenged capitalist rule. Today, the right is adding the finishing touches to a job already well done.

The rise to power of the right-wing

The rise of the right-wing to power in Italy today, in addition to modeling itself on the empty cast of the ruins of the left, is the result of long-term historical conditions dating back to World War II. Although “Fratelli d’Italia” is usually considered “neo-fascist,” it should be pointed out that its pedigree, far more than Mussolinian in origin, goes directly back to the Italian Social Republic, also known as the “Republic of Salò,” named after the town that was the seat of the puppet government installed by the German occupiers in northern Italy between 1943 and 1945.

At the origin of Fratelli d’Italia is the Italian Social Movement, which, from its name, traced that of the “Italian Social Republic,” a party founded after the war by figures directly responsible for the worst persecution of partisans and Jews in the service of the Nazi occupier. Continuity is explicitly claimed by the “tricolor flame” in the symbol of Fratelli d’Italia, the same flame that towered in the insignia of the Social Movement. The flame symbolizes the resurrection of the fighting spirit from the ashes of the Republic of Salò. It is as if the Democratic Party’s insignia still featured the “hammer and sickle,” which has been conveniently replaced here by the “tricolor” as well.

Paradoxically, despite being the result of the overt crisis of parliamentary parties, Fratelli d’Italia is the only one to claim filiation from a party of the previous era. It should be added that from its founding until the early 1990s, the Italian Social Movement was excluded from full recognition in the parliamentary framework, not so much because of its pro-Nazi past but mainly because it was not part of the “constitutional

arc” that is, of the parties that had drafted the new republican Constitution after World War II.

The whole institutional recognition of the Republic of Salò’s heirs thus occurs when the parliamentary party system unravels and the perimeter of the “constitutional arc” loses all value. This passage also consumes the inherent weakness of the vision of the anti-fascist partisan guerilla war that the Italian Communist Party had cultivated since the postwar period. In the narrative of Italian communists, the Resistance had essentially been the prelude to the reestablishment of the parliamentary system that Mussolini’s fascism had abolished. This view of the Resistance obscured two fundamental aspects.

First, the partisan war had been a mass mobilization aimed at a profound political and moral regeneration of Italy that was not limited to restoring the pre-fascist party system. For the standard Italian Communist Party narrative, what of the Resistance did not flow into the mainstream of the reconstitution of the parliamentary system was not worthy of political attention. They had been, at best, naive utopians unable to measure up to reality. Among them, the most significant example was the Action Party. This small formation significantly contributed to the partisan war but was crushed by the complete reestablishment of the parliamentary system.

Moreover, the party system after World War II is in no way the resurrection of the parties of the 1920s. The critical difference is that since the mid-1940s, parliamentarianism in Italy has been closely shaped by Cold War conditions. The two main parties, the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats represented the geopolitical interests of the “two blocs,” dominated by the USSR and the US. Italy was a buffer zone, and the Yalta Accords provided that neither of the two hegemonic powers would exercise supremacy there. This situation did not exclude intense contrasts, but parliamentary cohabitation was ultimately based on Cold War balances.

It is precisely the end of the Cold War and, in particular, the effects on the Italian Communist Party of the collapse of the USSR that led to dismantling the parliamentary system and allowed the neo-fascist party to enter the governmental framework. Gone is the reference to the existence of a beyond capitalism that structured the parliamentary dialectic overridden by the Cold War. At the same time, the rhetoric of the Resistance as a prelude to renewed parliamentarianism is emptied. Thus, any ideological obstacle to full institutional recognition of the descendants of the collaborators of the Republic of Salò also falls.

The government of endless war

The rise of Fratelli d’Italia resulted from a long process, the stages of which are not worth reconstructing here. However, it must be said that Giorgia Meloni’s coming to power was also very timely in today’s initial phase of the New World War, given Italy’s conditions of vassalage to

US strategies. Italy in 2024 “hosts” as many as 120 military bases with a US military presence (ten years ago, it was half) and officially over a hundred U.S.-owned nuclear bombs (so undoubtedly many more). This figure confirms how bipartisan the condescension to the demands of the US interventionist strategy has been for many years and how long the preparations for the ongoing war in Europe have been.

How is it that since the Russo-Ukrainian war, an explicitly right-wing apparatus has come to power in Italy, while the left, which also gave full assurance of supporting every US decision, as actually it has continued to do, is now in “opposition”?

In election rituals, which are, in fact, regulated by specialized marketing, the performance of the “left” is focused on “respect for differences,” with particular attention to sexual desire orientations, as well as a firm battle in favor of “assisted suicide.” The left promises freedom in sex and death.

In contrast, the “right” performance has two vital points. First, it presents itself as outside the “Palace.” It is a *trompe l’oeil* because Fratelli d’Italia has always had leading figures in the power system, but having been in parliamentary opposition throughout the previous legislature, it can play the character that flogs the discredit of the party system, those on the left in particular.³

The other atout of Fratelli d’Italia is the flag of “Italian identity.” Its name is the title of the national anthem, evoking the spirit of the Risorgimento, but it has now reshaped in terms of “sovereignty.” The Ministry of Agriculture is called the “Ministry of Food Sovereignty.” It is a relatively easy game because Italians love national cuisine.

If one descends from the electoral stage to the terrain of operational decisions, the “Nouveau Right” fully embodies the drive for unlimited war. “National sovereignty” actually means full compliance with US decisions. Hence, unconditional support for Ukraine with constant sending of arms “until the recapture of Crimea.” In the Middle East, military supplies and strict diplomatic support for Israel, of course, in the timeframe and manner determined in Washington. Italian military missions in the Red Sea and even the South China Sea follow American ones. Fratelli d’Italia’s collaborationist vocation, inherited from the Republic of Salò, manifests itself vis-à-vis the US imperial power, of which Italy is a *de facto* protectorate.

The left on this ground has no chance to compete with the right. It shares the line with the Meloni government and supports its military and diplomatic decisions in parliament. However, it is in a subordinate position because it cannot directly command an endless state of war, mainly for reason of electoral image. This is a dead-end path that will mark the further decline of the left and the enslavement of Italy to US decisions.

Thus, we have a “Nouveau Right” in Italy that now performs the functions of “proxy governance” of the war on behalf of the US

government. After the decomposition of parliamentary parties and the end of the previous political conditions that limited the wars of the twentieth century, state power is in the hands of the war itself.

How can new political conditions be invented to stop an interminable war like this? The urgency of the question is great, the space of possibilities is narrow.

- 1 I refer mainly to Fabio Mini's enlightening analyses in dialogue with the two well-known Chinese military theorists, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiaoshui. See his afterword to Qiao Liang, *L'arco dell'impero*, Gorizia, Leg Editions, 2021.
- 2 The October Revolution stopped World War I, partisan guerrilla warfare and the USSR's Patriotic Warfare were decisive actors in bringing World War II to a conclusion, and communist experimentations prevented the Cold War from becoming an actual generalized military confrontation. With Claudia Pozzana, we argued this theme in "Facing WW4," *Continental Thought and Theory*, vol. 4, 2023, No. 1.
- 3 The ruling coalition comprises three formations outside the parliamentary system established after World War II. Fratelli d'Italia represents the previous situation, the final phase of fascism. The other two, Forza Italia and Lega, represent the post-Cold War situation. One is the corporate party created by Berlusconi, and the other emerged in the 1990s as a secessionist movement in northern Italy.

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A Molecular Counter- Revolution: Psychic Crisis and Fascism from a Global South Standpoint¹

Vladimir Safatle

Abstract: This article aims to understand the rise of the global far right from the concept of fascism as a molecular counterrevolution. This requires a critical analysis of both the proposed uses of psychological concepts to account for the structural dynamics of fascism and the possible articulation between psychic crisis and fascist social responses. On the other hand, it is a question of privileging a perspective from the global south in the hope that the periphery of capitalism can reveal, in a more evident way, processes that are only now beginning to be felt in the central countries.

Keywords: far right, fascism, authoritarian personality, narcissism, resentment, leftism.

*Social change in the future
will be absolutely inseparable from
a multitude of molecular revolutions
at the level of the economy of desire.*
Felix Guattari

On September 7, 2021, Brazil was the scene of an impressive far-right popular demonstration, which set itself up as a pressure machine against the judiciary and legislative powers. The demonstrations were accompanied by a truckers' strike that threatened to de-supply the country. Rumors of a state of siege circulated, the president of the Federal Supreme Court was forced to ask for explanations about the real intentions of the then president. The following day, the president himself sent a "Declaration to the Nation" in which he pledged to respect the remaining institutions in the country. But at the end of the letter, there was a signature: "God, Fatherland, Family".

The signature was perhaps the most important part of the Declaration. For the first time in Brazilian history, a President of the Republic ended a Declaration to the nation with the motto of integralism, the old Brazilian fascist party. Facts like these were received by public opinion and the press with a certain indifference or as the expression of an anecdote. As if a repressed matrix of our history had emerged in front of us, but that it would be better to throw it back below the zone of perception.

For a long time, talking about Brazilian fascism seemed like some kind of rhetorical license that was more suited to political mouthpieces than analytical texts about the national situation. One wonders how much effort it takes to forget that, in the 1930s, Brazil was the country with the largest fascist party outside Europe. A country that saw the National Integralist Alliance reach 1,200,000 members, that saw its greatest leader, Plínio Salgado, run for president in 1955 and, even after the suicide of Getúlio

Vargas and the end of the Second World War, achieve 8.28% of the valid votes. This same country saw former integralists such as Admiral Augusto Rademaker and Brigadier Márcio de Sousa Melo stage a coup within the 1964 coup d'état and set up a military junta in Brazil at the most violent moment of the military dictatorship, 1969. It's worth remembering that Augusto Rademaker would go on to become vice-president in the Médici government. In other words, there is a line of connection that runs from national fascism to the 1964 military dictatorship and it shouldn't surprise us that the most radical sector of the supporters of that dictatorship, upon returning to the Brazilian government under Jair Bolsonaro's auspices, will gradually end up assuming their original connections.

This enormous presence of a fascist movement among us, with developments beyond the period before the Second World War, must initially be credited to structural factors of state violence. Let's remember how many of the technologies of extermination and segregation in operation in the fascist and Nazi governments of the 1930s were initially developed in colonial administrations. Concentration camps, for example, first appeared in South Africa's colonial wars and in Spanish colonialism in Cuba. Speeches about the need for "government over inferior races" were enunciated by administrators of English colonialism in the Arab world (such as Lord Cromer). European imperialism between 1884 and 1914 was, as Hannah Arendt will say, a "preparatory stage for the catastrophes to come"². Its expansionism linked to surplus capital and the displacement of "surplus populations" from colonizing countries required the transformation of racism and indifference to its "administrative massacres" into a fundamental piece of government. In other words, there is a historically organic relationship between fascism and colonial technologies. This relationship could not fail to mark a country like Brazil, which has served as a global necropolitical laboratory, that is, which even after independence will preserve the colonial logic against its own people, as if it were the case of continuing government practices through an "internal colonialism" against dispossessed sectors of the population.

However, an exercise in intellectual honesty forces us to admit that these explanations are necessary conditions, but not sufficient conditions. They can serve to explain the adherence of the ruling classes to a fascist ideology that appears to be an important part of the defense of their interests. But they are insufficient to explain the impressive popular support for projects of this nature, especially at the present. In the absence of a more complete analysis of the phenomenon, we are usually content with explanations based in some kind of deficit, i.e. those that aim to put popular adherence to fascism down to the shortcomings of the agents, such as "the inability of the masses to act in their own interests", "lack of understanding", "moral deviations", "barbarism", etc. Thus, in recent years, there has been a proliferation of explanations based on moral deficiencies (hate speech, anger at the new so-called

class mobility, “evil”), cognitive deficits (obscurantism, religious blindness, cultural backwardness, fake news) or psychological deficits (resentment, death drive, among many others). Such explanations serve much more to reassure us of our supposed moral and intellectual superiority than to provide precise tools for analysis and action.

It would then be the case to say that, in the face of the current collapse of liberal democracy, we will see both insurrectionary processes and authoritarian counter-revolutionary dynamics in an increasingly resilient way. These two phenomena must be studied in their affirmative dynamics. The defensive systems that authoritarian restoration puts into circulation cannot be put down to moral or cognitive limitations. They must be understood as clear expressions of the effective exhaustion of alternatives, both in the official discourses supporting liberal democracy and in the modes of contestation characteristic of progressive thought. In other words, the authoritarian restoration, what we call a “counter-revolution” because it unifies revolutionary ruptures and restorative preservations of collapsing orders³, points to real exhaustions and contradictions in the historical cycle of liberal democracies. Its catastrophic responses do not hide the precise awareness of problems and the absence of apparently viable alternatives. That’s why we won’t be able to counter it with moral preaching or intellectual disqualifications, but by using our analytical skills to recognize both its indication of real contradictions and the need to redirect the targets of the popular indignation that fascism has imprisoned.

But before we begin, let’s remember that many people have been outraged by the use of the concept of “fascism” in this context, seeing it as a rhetorical strategy with little analytical power⁴. In this respect, let’s remember that it’s not a question of expecting the same characteristics of historical fascism to emerge again in the present⁵. But this doesn’t mean that the analytical use of the term is banned. In the same way, nobody believes that the use of the term “republic” presupposes an absolute identity of predicates between, for example, the Roman republic, the French republic of the 19th century and the Brazilian republic. That doesn’t stop us from operating analytically with the term. There’s no reason why we can’t operate with the same logic when it comes to the uses of the term “fascism”. In this sense, calling what haunts us “fascism” is a way of pointing to real risks and trends that can gradually emerge in the whole of society, especially in countries that have a history of strong fascist movements. They show us how, from a certain point onwards, there can be no neoliberalism without the risks of fascism.

In this article, I would like to insist that the analysis of fascism requires the mobilization of a dual perspective. It must be able to articulate socio-historical analyses and analyses of the libidinal economy. These socio-historical analyses need, in turn, to account for structural causalities, which unfold over long-term historical periods, and contextual

causalities, which concern the system of contemporary facts that trigger fascist responses. Analyses of the libidinal economy, on the other hand, need to account for what we could call “molecular crises” if we want to mobilize a term put into circulation by Deleuze and Guattari. This is a way of insisting that we cannot explain a phenomenon like fascism by appealing only to the description of crises in the macro-structure of classes and their interests. There is always a second crisis that must accompany the first, namely a crisis in the forms of reproduction of the normative dynamics of bodies, desires, sexuality and identifications. It is the conjunction of these two crises that produces something like fascism.

From our background

But let's start with what we might call the structural factors of Brazilian state violence. In this respect, let's remember how Brazil was a country created from the implementation of the economic cell of the primary-export slave plantation on American⁶. Before being a settlement colonization, it was a matter of developing, for the first time, a new form of economic order linked to export production and the massive use of slave labour. Let's remember how the Portuguese empire was the first to engage in the transatlantic slave trade, reaching a position of quasi-monopoly by the middle of the 16th century. 35% of all slaves transported to the Americas went to Brazil. Since the slave-owning latifundia was the basic cell of Brazilian society, and Brazil was the last American country to abolish slavery, it is not strange to think of the country as the greatest experiment in colonial necropolitics in modern history.

In fact, the colonial dynamic is based on an “ontological distinction” that will prove to be extremely resilient, even after the demise of colonialism as a socio-economic form. This distinction is fundamental to the social indifference that characterizes fascism. It consists of the consolidation of a system of sharing between two regimes of subjectivation. One allows subjects to be recognized as “persons”, while the other leads to subjects being determined as “things”⁷. Those subjects who achieve the status of “persons” can be recognized as bearers of rights linked, preferably, to the capacity for protection offered by the state. As one of the consequences, the death of a “person” will be marked by grief, mourning and the social manifestation of loss. They will be the object of narrative and commotion. On the other hand, subjects degraded to the status of “things” (and the structuring degradation occurs within slave relations, although it usually remains even after the formal end of slavery) will be the objects of a death without tears. Their death will be seen as carrying the status of the degradation of objects. It will have no narrative, but will be reduced to the numerical quantification that we normally apply to things. Those who live in countries built on the colonial matrix know how normal this situation is when, even today, they open newspapers and read: “9 dead in the latest police intervention in

Paraisópolis”, “85 dead in the Belém prison riot”. The description usually boils down to numbers with no history.

It is not difficult to understand how this naturalization of the ontological distinction between subjects through the fate of their deaths will be a fundamental device of government. It perpetuates a dynamic of undeclared civil war through which those subjected to the maximum economic spoliation, to the most degraded conditions of work and pay, are paralyzed in their strength of revolt by the generalization of fear in the face of state extermination⁸. It is thus the armed arm of a class struggle in which, among other things, obvious markers of racialization converge. For it is a question of making this ontological distinction pass within social life and its daily structure. Subjects must, at all times, realize how the state acts on the basis of this distinction, how it operates explicitly and in silence.

In this sense, let's note how this necropolitical dynamic responds, after the demise of explicit colonial relations, to strategies for preserving class interests, in which the state acts towards certain classes as a “protector state”, while acting towards others as a “predator state”⁹. We can find in the naturalization of these matrices of state violence the fertile soil for the development and rapid growth of national fascism. On the one hand, it strengthens the ongoing militarization of society. A society organized by periodic administrative massacres, by police slaughters aimed at reminding sectors of the population of their condition as “killable without tears” needs to justify its violence through the imaginary of constant risk against “good citizens”, it needs to elevate fear to a central political affect. This works as a justification for organizing society in the form of the “right to self-defense” and, ultimately, in the form of armed militias¹⁰. On the other hand, this same logic feeds indifference and social disaffection. It creates a block on any possible emergence of generic solidarity, naturalizing the logic of social predation.

There is another point to be made if we want to understand this social predisposition to fascism within Brazilian society. We know of a certain narrative that sees fascism as a kind of social regression, in the sense of an archaism that emerges as a reaction to the transformations brought about by the processes of modernization. In this view, fascism would appear as a kind of revival of archaic ties to the earth in the face of a cosmopolitan world, like the insistence on organic notions of community and identity against the necessarily plural and multiform march of our liberal societies. It would be the fruit of resentment against the questioning of long-naturalized privileges, as well as the obscurantism that does not allow itself to be overcome by enlightenment and science. In all these cases, fascism appears as a kind of reversal of history. As if we were facing a refusal of modernization.

But we could ask ourselves how incorrect and ideological this understanding and use of notions like “regression” is. For there is a way of approaching the problem that would allow us to be a little more precise.

Far from being a regression to unsurpassed forms of archaism, fascism is the realization of potentialities immanent to progress. Far from being a regression to the confines of barbarism and obscurantism, it is one of the potentialities immanent to enlightenment itself. In other words, it is the expression of the violence and contradictions produced by the very process of capitalist progress. The dialectic of enlightenment must be taken seriously.

In this sense, it would be interesting to think about why, in countries like Brazil, fascism can be associated with “genuine liberals” who always see it as “the lesser evil”. We have to ask ourselves how the topic of progress plays out in countries with a colonial tradition. Since progress is understood as a process of modernization, we must remember that the analysis of any political concept requires an “agonistic” perspective. In other words, we must always ask ourselves: “Against whom are the concepts mobilized?”. So, against whom were progress and modernization mobilized in Brazil? This question allows us to clarify the meaning of the terms and the need for their real consequences.

In Brazil and throughout Latin America, “progress” has always been the weapon aimed at those who represented “archaism”, non-insertion into the productive world of capitalist work and its primary-export logic. “Modernization” was always raised against those who would sink us into a supposed lethargy, a supposed lack of balance and order, because they represented a tacit refusal to accept the dictates of the labor society. The naturalization of the imperatives of the labor society forced us to see societies whose economy is not organized for the extraction of surplus value and the self-valorization of capital as the very expression of a refusal to develop. Thus, modernization always appeared as the justification for imposing the colonial order, as the call not to weep over the ruins of what that order destroyed, not least because it came to “civilize”, to “educate”, to “save”, to “develop”. It’s not hard to see the violent matrix of this process. Above all, it’s not hard to see the symbolic violence, the same violence that is even more brutal and long-lasting than physical violence. Progress should be made without any form of identification with what progress itself destroys.

It’s not strange that this progress prepared fascism. For it demanded the deepest indifference and absence of solidarity towards those who saw no progress in the glorious march of national progress and its logic of continuous primitive accumulation. It demanded the erasure and disappearance of everything that didn’t submit to it. Such modernization is achieved through violent subjugation and the erasure of genocides. If Brazil shows in this way how progress is realized as barbarism, it’s not because we have some kind of historical deficiency. It is because, as part of the logic of capitalist production, we have made explicit what is the condition for European progress in its irreducible extractivism and primitive accumulation. A condition that “under normal conditions” could

be displaced to those lands about which we don't have much information, where we don't really know what's going on. Countries in which the rational principles of Western social modernization "could not be applied properly". In fact, this "inconvenience" is completely convenient and necessary. Without it, "progress" would not be possible anywhere. And if this same fascism returns to Europe from time to time, it's because this logic tends to become widespread. For it has always been one of the figures of progress.

Making the authoritarian nature of neoliberalism explicit

This discussion serves to introduce more adequately the thesis of the contemporary resurgence of fascism in certain specific places in the system of world capitalism. Even if we are dealing with a global process, we need to understand why it is consolidated in certain specific places. These places have their own causalities, even if they are connected to structural processes. The analytical challenge is to understand how global processes produce effects in specific places. Certainly, the analysis of the rise of the extreme right in Italy, India, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, the Philippines and the USA involves the reconstruction of other fields of structural factors.

In this sense, we can say that the specificity of Brazil as a socio-political place is the open, regular and superlative character of its state violence, which is the result of the permanence of social structures typical of colonial capitalism. As I have tried to argue, its roots must be sought in the permanence of the ontological distinction between subjects inherited from slave society and in the brutality of its ever-continuing process of primitive accumulation¹¹. But this is what we could call the "structural condition" for the resurgence of fascism. We also need a set of "contextual conditions" linked to the recent past. In the Brazilian case, this is linked to the exhaustion of the New Republic and the consolidation of the dynamics of a "conservative revolution" linked to the rise of an openly authoritarian neoliberalism between 2016 and 2022.

The exhaustion of the New Republic is a slow process that has marked Brazilian history over the last ten years, and which signifies the exhaustion of a political horizon of coalitions and major alliances. This exhaustion is accelerated by Lulism and its crises, which culminated in 2013 with large demonstrations and a series of strikes. At the base of Lulism is the belief that it would be possible to manage Brazilian capitalism through one-off adjustments that would allow the illusions of the "pact within the state" between businessmen, the financial system, organized sectors of the working class and, especially now, organized sectors of the struggles for recognition. This pact will collapse for the first time due to internal contradictions, due to the inability to achieve the equality it promised, beyond localized adjustments. It will show a limit to "Latin American progressivism" that Brazil will dramatically embody. I have developed this hypothesis in other works¹².

Lulism will return in 2023 as a last resort against a proto-fascist government that very nearly didn't get re-elected. With regard to this return, I would simply like to point out that it does not in itself call into question the thesis of the end of Lulism. History knows several processes that return after their end, creating very specific phenomena of repetition and political and social paralysis. But the current situation is too undefined for us to launch peremptory hypotheses about this return of the Brazilian left and its unfolding.

Here I would like to insist on another point, namely how the retraction of the horizon of transformation proper to the Brazilian left¹³ leads, among other things, to the consolidation of authoritarian neoliberalism as a "revolutionary" alternative to the closure of the historical cycle of national pacts and its disappointing balance. The figure of authoritarian neoliberalism with a fascist association appears as an alternative of rupture with a strong capacity for popular and insurrectionary adherence. This adherence is explained by the fact that, within the political clash, it provides a paradoxical discourse of strengthening autonomy and freedom as a way of achieving emancipation. This is the "revolutionary" character of the process.

In this sense, let's look at how the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism promises to transform Brazil into a "freer" country. In other words, we won't understand anything about this phenomenon of authoritarian restoration if we don't understand how "freedom" appears here as a fundamental normative horizon. This conception of freedom is mainly expressed through notions such as self-ownership and entrepreneurship¹⁴. It is, in its own way, a response to a real perception, namely that there is no more room in capitalism for macro-structures of protection. As Wolfgang Streeck rightly points out, contemporary capitalism, with its combination of continuous low growth, chronic indebtedness and exploding inequality, has entered an irreversible process of decomposition, as it is unable to guarantee any form of systemic stability, without there being any other consolidated alternative to replace it for the time being¹⁵. Attempts to reissue the social pacts that enabled the advent of the welfare state have proved unsustainable because the working class has no longer been able to accumulate the strength to demand compensation against the irreversible process of strengthening the dynamics of primitive accumulation and concentration of income. What's more, the very notion of the "welfare state" hid the "malaise" that it needed to preserve in order to survive. It's enough to see how the European versions of the *welfare state* are creations that are sustained by the preservation of colonial dynamics through the plundering of masses of immigrants without rights or in a precarious situation of rights.

Bolsonaro's response is the standard response of neoliberalism: it's no longer about trying to create macro-structures of protection by pushing the economy away from the principles of free competition and the

capitalist free market. It's about extending individuals' "capacity to choose" by allowing them to fight, through their supposed merits and decisions, for their own survival. In other words, it's about strengthening the illusion of individuals as forums for decisions and deliberations, which also implies putting the costs of impasses and failures on their backs. Following this logic, school would pass to individuals (through home schooling), health would pass to individuals, security would pass to individuals (who can and should carry guns). In the same way, all obligations of solidarity with the most vulnerable groups are gradually annulled, as they are tacitly understood as obstacles to the individual struggle for survival.

This dissolution of social obligations of solidarity appears as a response to the social fear produced by the precariousness resulting from globalization, the loss of the political sphere of intervention in the economy and the type of social alliance that a certain "progressive neoliberalism", as Nancy Fraser will say, has been able to put into circulation¹⁶. Fraser's thesis points to a real problem for the global left. Unable to provide a credible alternative for the creation of effectively universalist macro-structures of protection, moving into a field in which its economic policies operate on the basis of accepting the principles of "respect for contracts", "fiscal balance", "entrepreneurship" typical of its opponents, unable to even put into circulation themes that have characterized the struggles of the left for more than a century (self-management of the working class, radical limitation of wage inequalities, radical extension of free services, direct democracy, etc.), so-called progressive governments have been able to put into circulation themes that have characterized the struggles of the left for more than a century.), so-called progressive governments were faced with a twofold operation: the preservation of the gains and economic logics of the most financialized sectors of the economy and the compensatory development of recognition policies towards historically dispossessed social groups. It was the effective work of the left to use these recognition policies as the only sector in which it had substantial differences to show. This contradictory movement ended up producing a certain form of "alliance" described by Fraser as follows:

an alliance between the main currents of the new social movements (feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism and LGBTQ rights) and service-based, high-potential 'symbolic' business sectors (Wall Street, Silicon Valley and Hollywood). In this alliance, progressive forces are effectively united with the forces of cognitive capitalism, especially financialization. However unintentionally, the former lend their charisma to the latter. Ideals such as diversity and empowerment, which in principle could serve different ends, now shine through policies that have devastated manufacturing and the livelihoods of that middle class that would once have been open to those fighting for such ideals¹⁷.

This alliance ends up serving the fascist discourse of the need for a country that is more popular and no longer subjugated by its cultural elite and its ways of life. It allows for a new inscription of the political division between the elite and the people. It will not be the division between the dispossessed masses and the national rentier elite, between the rural working class and agribusiness. Rather, the division will be between the people and the country's cultural elite: those who would allegedly live off the benefits of the state, who would be ensconced in universities, who would dream of imposing their ways of life, their successful "globalism" and their conceptions of sexuality on the people. This was already a constituent strategy of integralism and consisted of affirming that the true elite was not the one that held economic capital, but the one that held cultural hegemony and cultural patterns "foreign to our people". This strategy was also present in German Nazism, where two of the major topics of mobilization were the risk of "cultural Bolshevism" and "sexual Bolshevism". This strategy returns, but now in a potential alliance with economic capital itself in its new "monopoly with a diversity committee" version.

If we accept the reality of such a contradiction, we should limit the analytical scope of the discourse of fascism being fueled by the resentment of former holders of privilege against the social ascension of new groups. There is a basic sociological problem that precedes this psychological description, namely the fact that these former holders of privilege are now, in the majority, economically vulnerable, precarious, dispossessed groups with no horizon of protection. The social rise of new groups is seen by them as threatening, mainly due to the lack of effective universalist policies to protect and strengthen the various sectors of the working class.

In this way, the contemporary combination of neoliberalism and fascism provides a dramatically terrible response to a real problem. It uses the discourse of freedom as self-ownership, as the strengthening of individual decision-making forums, to disengage the state from any form of compensatory policy, thus creating the illusion of a more "equitable" situation. Since freedom is the property I have of myself, then the second step is almost natural: owners don't just enjoy their property, they undertake, they produce more property. This is helped by the fact that even on the left, discourses linked to "entrepreneurship" as a form of social emancipation have circulated and continue to circulate, whether in the form of "peripheral entrepreneurship", "entrepreneurship of the multitude", among others. This consolidates the social perception that emancipation only has one path, namely in the field of competition. And if this is indeed the case, we can expect nothing different from a Hobbesian struggle in which sovereign power is, this time, embodied by Capital.

Against this, it would be necessary to insist that "freedom" is not a predicate that we apply to "individuals". There is simply a categorical mistake here. There are no free individuals because "freedom" is a

predicate that we can only apply to social bodies. Free individuals cannot exist in non-free societies, not least because freedom is not a disposition of conduct, nor a structure of thought, but a system of social actions and practices. Only in a free society is such a system of actions possible. The notion of freedom based on entrepreneurship and free enterprise is simply a fraud. Entrepreneurship is not a form of freedom, but of servitude. It is the violence of reducing all social relations to relations of competition and the understanding of all experience as capital that is “invested” in.

The limits of the authoritarian personality concept

This way of approaching the problem serves to deflate the psychological concepts that have come to colonize the political discussion about the resurgence of fascism. This deflation is necessary not in order to abandon the libidinal dimension of the problem, but to define its structure more clearly. These concepts are often linked to properly moral criticisms of fascism. They should be avoided because they presuppose that their enunciators are in a supposedly privileged and assured moral position or that they speak from a place of guaranteed psychological maturity.

One of these concepts, which initially seemed to be one of the most useful, was the “authoritarian personality”¹⁸. The idea was to defend a form of correlation between authoritarianism and a “psychological type”, a certain form of personality whose etiology could be psychoanalytically described. In a similar way to clinical categories such as obsessive neurosis, hysteria, paranoia, the authoritarian personality could be identified, singularized and be the object of prophylactic forms of social intervention.

This notion of an authoritarian personality has a certain genealogy which, in its own way, goes back to the social criticism of the first generation of the Frankfurt School and its quest to analyze the libidinal structures of fascism and anti-Semitism. Since Erich Fromm’s pioneering studies in the early 1930s on the adherence of the German working class to Nazism, based on an analysis of the links between the “emotional impulses of the individual and his political opinions”¹⁹ which could be based on a supposed “sado-masochistic character” of the subjects, the Frankfurtians took upon themselves the task of using the psychoanalytical and psychological framework to understand the forms of social authoritarianism. In this spirit, we will find debates on the structure of the authoritarian family in its relation to fascism in *Studies on Authority and the Family*, edited by Max Horkheimer in 1936, and from then on we will see a series of studies and texts that will culminate in *Studies on the Authoritarian Personality*, by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson and Nevitt Sanford, and in the series of books, edited by Horkheimer and Samuel Flowerman, entitled *Studies on Prejudice*.

We can understand these works as the necessary expression of the complexification of a theory of revolution. Because fidelity to the process of revolutionary transformation does not only require a theory of

the possibility of the emergence of revolutionary subjects. Rather, it also requires an understanding of the process of transforming revolutionary tendencies into counter-revolutionary subjectivities. In other words, as Marx showed us in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, a theory of revolutionary uprising is inseparable from a theory of the possibilities open to counter-revolution. To this end, these Frankfortian studies sought to mobilize the contradictions immanent to the process of socialization and individuation in modern societies. In this sense, they opened up a fruitful avenue by insisting on the psychic predisposition to a fascist-style reaction. On the other hand, the discussion about the existence of an authoritarian personality allowed us to talk about fascism without having to link it to the existence of a fascist state, since we are talking about a potentiality inscribed in subjectivities. It is the assumption of the existence of an authoritarian personality that leads Adorno to state: “the survival of National Socialism in democracy is potentially more threatening than the survival of fascist tendencies against democracy.”²⁰

It should be noted that the possibility of the existence of an authoritarian personality was not exclusive to the Frankfurtians. In 1943, influenced by Fromm, Abraham Maslow wrote about “the structure of the authoritarian character”²¹ with the aim of identifying who would be the “friends” of democracy and the “enemies” to fight. In 1933, following a path all of his own, Wilhelm Reich had described fascism from a psychoanalytic study on “the authoritarian structuring of man” in which the notion of “character” was fundamental. Regarding the notion of character, Reich recalled that the ego’s defense mechanisms, as well as its character traits that make up the core of the psychological personality, are constituted in the same way as symptoms. That’s why:

The form of the ego’s reactions, which differs from one character to another even when the contents of the experiences are similar, can be traced back to childhood experiences, in the same way as the content of symptoms and fantasies²².

In the analysis, we are dealing with resistances which are manifestations of character traits or “a person’s way of existing”²³ which is expressed in their system of reactions and regularities. When analyzing fascism from the point of view of character structure, Reich mobilized the relationship between the social archeology of sexual repressions, the constitution of the authoritarian family and the production of psychic personality. This reminds us that Reich, along with Fromm, was one of the first to insist that there is a fascist personality, that fascism could describe a form of personality.

But let’s note an important difference between the projects of Reich and the Frankfurtians. Take, for example, a statement by Max Horkheimer in the preface to *Studies in Prejudice*:

Our aim is not just to describe prejudice, but to explain it in order to help eradicate it. That is the challenge we would like to meet. Eradication means re-education, scientifically planned from a scientific understanding of how we got there. And, in a strict sense, education is, by its nature, something personal and psychological. For example, once we understand how the experience of war can, in certain cases, strengthen personality traits predisposed to group hatred, educational remedies follow logically. In the same way, exposing the psychological tricks in the agitators' arsenal can help immunize their potential victims²⁴.

Horkheimer places the description of the authoritarian personality within a reeducational and prophylactic project. It would be possible, through education and enlightenment, to prevent the prevalence of certain personality traits, to immunize victims from the effect of agitators. This presupposes a type of action that does not fail to bring us back to certain current demands, namely the belief that the mobilization of shared principles of current democratic life could provide the basis for a prophylaxis against authoritarianism. As if today's society were in a position to eliminate the "authoritarian deviations" that seem to come from somewhere outside. Reich knew, at least, that action on the structures of the authoritarian character was not possible without a global transformation in the hegemonic modes of socialization. This would amount to a real revolution, in this case, a "sexual revolution" that would call into question our entire socio-historical model of repressive socialization of drives.

This, shall we say, pedagogical illusion based on the emancipatory potential of enlightenment will be confronted, within the work of the Frankfurtians themselves, with a more structural and complex thesis, namely that there is an authoritarianism in the very conception of personality²⁵. This means that the personality, as a form of organization historically constituted in the West, is in itself a rigid, static structure, for which there is no unity and coherence of conduct without segregation, there is no identity without the violent denial of its relationship to difference. This thesis is found mainly in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in its chapter on anti-Semitism. In it, we find the authors mobilizing a genetic understanding on the modern Self in order to expose its naturally authoritarian character, its necessary denial of mimetic affinities with the non-Self, exploring to this end the Freudian understanding of the proximity between the dynamics of the constitution of the Self and the structures of paranoia. This understanding will be developed extensively by Jacques Lacan when he insists that the personality as such has a paranoid structure. Its cognitive structure is projective, its identity and unitary organization is narcissistic and defensive, its dependence on the other is constantly denied and unknown.

If we take the *Studies on the Authoritarian Personality*, we will find an operational definition of personality as “predisposition to response”, as a “disposition to behave”, “susceptibility” linked to a “structure” which, although always modifiable, is usually very resistant to fundamental changes. Hence statements such as:

Personality remains *behind* the behavior and *within* the individual. Personality forces are not responses, but *predisposition for response*; whether or not a readiness will produce an explicit expression depends not only on the situation of the moment, but on what other predispositions stand in opposition to it²⁶.

The idea was to identify who would be prone to fascist propaganda and discourse. Why are certain individuals more likely to respond in a fascist way to social conditions of crisis? However, perhaps such an objective is simply unattainable because it has to mobilize such a large number of variables to describe the shift to authoritarianism, many of them not exactly linked to a personality structure, that it becomes a chimera. On the other hand, the notion of “predisposition”, of “susceptibility” is epistemologically fragile because we cannot precisely define the external conditions that, if present, will necessarily actualize a possibility. That would be to fall into a necessitarian perspective, but now a kind of “psychological necessitarianism”.

As if that weren't enough, it's not clear that the authoritarianism of the agents depends on a continuously recurring pattern. We know of changes in structure and changes in behavior based on changes in the social situation. We know of “regional authoritarianisms”, i.e. authoritarian behavior only in specific situations. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that “non-authoritarian personalities” cannot develop authoritarian behavior in certain contexts and in front of certain groups. Let's note, for example, how the example given by Adorno of a “genuine liberal” is someone who sees no problem in saying: “I could even marry a black man if he had white enough skin”²⁷.

However, the *Studies* may end up fulfilling another function. At one point, the text recognizes that personality patterns that have been dismissed as ‘pathological’ may turn out to be “nothing more than exaggerations of what was almost universal beneath the surface of that society”²⁸. This statement, which is closer to what we can derive from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, if taken emphatically, brings us face to face with what may be the true contribution of a discussion of this nature. The idea of a pathological formation as an exaggeration of general traits is the exact way in which Freud describes the relationship between normal and pathological. He even uses the metaphor of the pathological as a broken crystal that reveals the grooves always present in the crystal. But being faithful to such an understanding could lead us to question the sense of singularizing a

“type” of personality that would define general patterns of authoritarian behaviour. What we might call an “authoritarian personality” is, in fact, an explanation of the normal balance of socialization and individuation processes in our society. Which is an even more significant thesis.

Let’s take one of several possible points in this discussion. If we admit that one of the main socialization systems in contemporary capitalist societies is the culture industry, then it shouldn’t surprise us to see how paranoid and complotist narratives, structures of stereotyping and functionalization, are the natural element of its products, they are the normal narratives of the discourses that make it up²⁹. In the same way, the logic of personality as a “typology” is an objective fact within such socialization systems.

If this is the case, we must draw the consequences of living in an era of the collapse of alternative political grammars, that is, an era in which political communication is organized based on the general dictates and modes of determination of the most fetishized sectors of the culture industry. In such an era, even the left communicates without questioning the modes of visibility and organization of discourses specific to the culture industry. We are in the era of the “instagram left” and this has consequences. One of them is the generalization of personality structures that are organized based on the discourse characteristics of the culture industry. Stereotyped, functional personalities that act out paranoid logics. And it’s no coincidence that some of the main leaders of the far right have come from entertainment (Trump, Berlusconi). Bolsonaro, for example, became nationally known thanks to his participation in television programs of ... humor. Humor is a central element here, because it’s a question of operating identification with such leaders in a “cynical” way, in the sense of identifications that are “mere appearances” and which, in this way, allow the most violent discourses to circulate, to produce effects, without the agents describing themselves as actually involved. This is essential in order to sustain the violent structures of the personality without demanding the price of an ethic of conviction³⁰. All this shows us how the culture industry is the natural language of the far right and perhaps it is no coincidence that it is growing again at the very moment when cultural criticism no longer seems to make sense to hegemonic sectors of the left.

In this sense, the real fact worthy of research would not be the existence of an “authoritarian personality”, but of subjectivities with a strong critical potential in relation to their own authoritarianism. In other words, the starting point of the *Studies on the Authoritarian Personality* is, in a way, “upside down” if we accept various elaborations by the Frankfurtians themselves. Rather than *specifying* a certain type of personality, it would be a case of *generalizing* authoritarian traits to any and all personalities. And it would also be a case of describing the socio-historical coordinates that produce the conditions for the expression of

the inherent authoritarianism of the personality in fascism, in order to arrive at the effectively specific case, namely that of a subject sensitive to the authoritarianism of his/her own personality.

This shows us how personality cannot serve as a normative horizon for defining normal maturation structures. Effective maturation is linked to forms of integration of what was expelled from the personality so that it could be constituted as a unity and structure of synthesis. There is a dialectic within this process in which the individuation promised by the constitution of the personality only really begins where it ends. Because the ability to integrate what has been expelled from the dynamics of unification with a view to the constitution of the personality is the fundamental mark of a non-defensive realization of identity, of the possibility of a non-violent psychic synthesis that is the beginning of other forms of subjectivity. In this sense, we could say that it would only make sense to speak of “authoritarian personality” to describe those situations in which the subject’s conflict in relation to their own personality is no longer possible.

If we accept this point, it would be the case to say that, far from being some form of explosion of irrationality and social regression, fascism was the realization of a psychological structure that had been born as if it were the subjective condition for the implementation of normative demands of social freedom and maturation, but which had necessarily been inverted into its opposite. A chapter in the history of the inversions of reason into a principle of social domination³¹.

A psychic crisis

And here I would like to end by emphasizing how fascism operates under the sign of a double crisis. I spoke earlier about the socio-economic crisis to which authoritarian neoliberalism is a possible response. It unfolds at, let’s say, a macro-structural level. However, for us to have fascism, it is necessary for this crisis to be coupled with another, namely a crisis that unfolds at the micro-structural level. Fascism depends on a concomitant double crisis. In the case of this second crisis, we can talk about “micro-structural decompositions”, i.e. those that occur at the level of social norms that sought to manage sexuality, bodies, reproductive relations within the family, among others.

These decompositions at the micro-structural level, in other words, these impossibilities of the material reproduction of hegemonic forms of life at the micro-structural level, were thematized by the Frankfurtians in the early 1930s through the topic of the “weakening of the Self”, the “decline of paternal authority” and the consolidation of the “authoritarian family” as a desperate reaction to the collapse of patriarchy. They make up something we could call a “psychic crisis”. This crisis comes from the collapse linked to the historical impossibility of sustaining the illusion that the identity, synthetic unity and integrity of the modern Self was not

the result of the internalization of a “system of scars” and segregations. Hence the impossibility of sustaining the production of such an identity through the traditional strategies of normalizing paternal identifications.

The historical causes for the exhaustion of the belief in the organicity of the unity of the Self and its identity, which would provoke what we call here a “psychic crisis”, are various. The pressure for real equality coming from the communist movements since the Soviet Revolution has helped to call into question the segregationist and colonial foundations of modern individuality. “Sexual Bolshevism” (a wartime term coined by the Nazis) warned the German family against the supposedly destructive effects of gender equality and the communist disenchantment of the family. The decomposition of traditional orders, in a key that brings us back to the “suffering of indeterminacy” described by Durkheim, should also be remembered³². The rise of off-center expression in the field of aesthetics should also not be overlooked, especially for a regime that took “Entartete Kunst” so seriously. In other words, this is a multifactorial phenomenon.

A transformative strategy would consist of assuming this decomposition and taking it as the driving force behind the emergence of forms of subjectivity to come. But another possible strategy involves internalizing a defense mechanism against this weakening. This will consist of developing narcissistic identifications, defending the shaken social positions of authority, defending the irreducibility of “individuals and families” on the basis of a narcissistic logic. The fragility of the Self will be compensated for by specular identification with a narcissistic, rigid image of oneself, elevated to the position of authority. An authority that is both virile and caricatured, phallic and cynical, a mixture of brutality and self-delusion, since it would be impossible to annul the historical awareness of its demise. Thus, we will have what Adorno called: “the enlargement of the subject’s own personality, a collective projection of himself, rather than the image of a father whose role during the last phase of the subject’s childhood may well have decayed in today’s society.”³³.

Adorno explores this trait to talk about the structure of identification with fascist leaders. The fascist leader is not constituted from the image of the father, but from the narcissistic image of the subject. For this reason, he mobilizes the concept of the ‘little big man’: “a person who suggests, at the same time, omnipotence and the idea that he is just another of the people, a simple, rude and vigorous American, uninfluenced by material or spiritual wealth”³⁴. Someone who is not constituted from the image of a normative ideal, but who appears on the scene of omnipotence with the same clothes as us, with the same inabilities, who supposedly speaks “like us”, with the same rages and “outbursts”. Hence the well-known image, provided by Adorno, of Hitler as a mixture of King Kong and a suburban barber.

If we accept this approach, then we should ask ourselves whether it is possible to defend the existence of a psychic crisis that is characteristic

of our time. This means describing a set of processes that place the psychic structure at a point of necessary transformation or violent defense. In this sense, let's note how the same movement to reconstruct the forms of circulation of bodies and the visibilities of desires that seeks to be colonized by so-called progressive neoliberalism is not reduced to just that. It potentially poses new libidinal arrangements and new forms of relationships that can be experienced in an anxious and distressing way, as it calls into question the very notion of psychological identity. On the other hand, neoliberalism is a way of managing psychic suffering, of displacing social contradictions onto individual forums, as if individuals and their supposed powerlessness were solely responsible for their inhibitions, symptoms and anguish. This situation can strengthen a crisis that, once again, can lead subjects to a defensive and reactive way out. That Brazil is currently the country with the highest number of cases of anxiety disorders in the world and one of the highest rates of diagnoses of depression (13.5% of the population) is something that should not be overlooked in this context. It shows how we are in a privileged place of intensification of psychic crises that provide an important element for the consolidation of adherence to the junction between fascism and neoliberalism.

Finally, I'd like to clarify the repeated use of the term "counter-revolution". Anyone who talks about counter-revolution is talking about another offensive and revolutionary force on the march. In fact, I would like to insist that we live in an insurrectionary era, except that "insurrection" is something that can occur in two opposite directions.

Regarding the insurrectionary nature of our time, with its sequence of revolts that began in 2011 with the Arab Spring and continues today, let's remember a Latin American case. In 2021, Colombia was faced with unprecedented demonstrations that took to the streets, causing the government to abandon a tax reform project that once again passed on the costs of the pandemic to the poorest. In the face of this, former right-wing president Alvaro Uribe called on his people to fight against a "dissipated molecular revolution" that was taking over the country.

The term had its *raison d'être*. For years, Latin America has experienced a series of popular uprisings whose strength has come from unprecedented articulations between a radical rejection of the neoliberal economic order, uprisings that at the same time tension all the levels of violence that make up our social models. The images of struggles against the tax reform, led by trans people asserting their social dignity or unemployed people barricading themselves in with feminists, explain well what "molecular revolution" means in this context. It means that we are facing uprisings that are not centralized in a line of command and that create situations that can reverberate, in a single movement, both the struggle against naturalized disciplines in the colonization of bodies and the definition of their supposed places, and against macro-structures of labour dispossession. These are uprisings that operate across the

board, calling into question, in a non-hierarchical way, all levels of the structures of reproduction of social life. Against this, Brazil mobilized the insurrectionary force of a popular fascism. In Brazil, the insurrection has changed sides and is taking place, among other things, against the possibility of the emergence of a popular sequence like the one we saw in Colombia. Against this fascist insurrection, we still don't have a political response to the problem.

- 1 I would like to thank The New Institute/ Hamburg for the stay in 2022, which allowed me to develop the ideas in this article.
- 2 ARENDT, 2020, p. 187
- 3 Let's remember Reich, who said: "*Fascism* is not, as people tend to believe, a purely reactionary movement, but it presents itself as an amalgam of revolutionary emotions and reactionary social concepts" (REICH, 2005, p. 17).
- 4 See, for example, DARDOT and LAVAL, 2019; PAXTON, 2016; RILEY, 2018 or the concept of 'post-fascism' in TRAVERSO, 2019
- 5 However, it's important to remember that fascist regimes were known even after the end of the Second World War. Franco's dictatorship (1936-1975) in Spain, as well as the apartheid regime in South Africa (1948-1994), to take just two examples, would hardly be outside an analytical definition of historical fascism, even though they were not regimes animated by the war of movement. They are proof of the possibility of the "administrative normalization" of fascism.
- 6 FURTADO, 2020
- 7 On the ontological distinction between "persons" and "things" in slave relations, see ESPOSITO, 2016
- 8 On the topic of civil war as a "normal" social situation, see above all PELBART, 2018
- 9 On the figure of the "predator state" see, for example: CHAMAYOU, 2010
- 10 As Elsa Dorlin reminds us: "Throughout the slavery period, the disarmament of the enslaved was accompanied by a real disciplinization of their bodies to keep them defenseless, which imposed the correction of minimal acts of martiality. This process has as its philosophical principle what is most characteristic of the servile condition: enslaved people are those who have neither the right nor the duty to preserve themselves. Consequently, disarmament must be understood as a security measure for free populations, but more fundamentally, it establishes a dividing line between subjects who are masters of themselves, solely responsible for their own preservation, and the enslaved, who do not belong to themselves and whose preservation depends entirely on the goodwill of their master" (DORLIN, 2019, p. 45).
- 11 For an analysis of the continuous nature of primitive accumulation and its logic of prolonged civil war, see ALLIEZ and LAZZARATTO, 2021.
- 12 See SAFATLE, 2022. See also FELDMANN and SANTOS, 2021.
- 13 Diagnosis made, among others, by ARANTES, 2008
- 14 On the lengthy analysis of this point, based on a precise understanding of Bolsonarism, see mainly NUNES, 2022.
- 15 STREECK, 2015
- 16 See FRASER, 2017
- 17 Idem, p. 104
- 18 An extensive and precise discussion of the authoritarian personality can be found in FERREIRA, 2018
- 19 FROMM, 1980. p. 110. For a discussion of Erich Fromm's first collaborations with the Institute for Social Research, see: JAY, 1996.
- 20 ADORNO, 1996, p. 30
- 21 MASLOW, 1943
- 22 REICH; 2001, p. 53
- 23 Idem, 2006, p. 56
- 24 HORKHEIMER and FLOWERMAN, 1949, p. 13
- 25 This is a thesis shared to some extent by Peter Gordon, for whom: "The AP study, I will suggest, developed two distinct lines of argument. The first of these, the "official" discovery of the research program, comprises the basic message that MacWilliams reiterates in the passages quoted above, namely, the claim to have identified a new "psychological type." The second argument is rather more sobering and radical in its implications: it suggests that the authoritarian personality signifies not merely a type but an emergent and generalized feature of modern society as such." (GORDON, 2017, p. 47)
- 26 ADORNO et alli; 2021, p. 79
- 27 Idem, p. 592
- 28 Idem, p. 82
- 29 Let's remember, for example, the Adornian approximation between astrology columns in newspapers and paranoid delusions in ADORNO, 2006.
- 30 On the relationship between cynicism and fascism, see chapter three of SAFATLE, 2008.
- 31 An important example of the heterodox rooting of Nazism in our value systems can be found in CHAPOUTOT, 2014.
- 32 DURKHEIM, 2003
- 33 ADORNO, 2015, p. 418
- 34 Idem, p. 421

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Fascism ex nihilo

Marcia Sa Cavalcante Schuback

Abstract: The present article discusses the new form of fascism which I have called “the fascism of ambiguity” from the viewpoint of the void of resistance and revolution. The void is considered not as lack of resistance and revolution but as the experience of “after” resistance and revolution, as a post- condition to which fascist desire of form responds through a dynamics of unsensing senses and meanings. The article engages with both Hannah Arendt and Claude Lefort reflections on the void of resistance and revolution and sketches a path towards a thought of the unforming.

Keywords: Fascism of ambiguity, void, resistance, democratic revolution, Hannah Arendt, Claude Lefort, unformed.

“The more we are assailed by the Nothing that yawns around us like an abyss or also from a thousandfold Something belonging to society and the activity of men that formlessly, soullessly and lovelessly haunts us and disperses us, the more passionate, intense and violent must be the resistance from our side. Or must it not?¹

The rise of extreme right movements in the last years in Europe and abroad is not surprising. Michael Löwy calls this rise “spectacular” and describes it as a “phenomenon without precedent since the thirties”². These words seem to affirm this “spectacular” rise as an unexpected repetition of what was supposed to have been overcome or at least domesticated, namely, totalitarianism, in its three historical forms: Fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism. In the same vein, although from different political and ideological positions, it has also been stated that “national conservatism ... is the return of the repressed”³. Without developing the use made by Freud of this psychoanalytical concept, again it is the figure of a return which immediately is brought as response to what is supposedly a surprising event. The assumption of a repetition and a return, the insistence on the backward and regressing movement as response to the surprising rise of the “right” in a contemporary moment dilacerated by “wrongs”, say perhaps more about the difficulty of grasping the present moment than about the phenomenon to be investigated. In the attempt to seize the contemporary moment in its specific mode of seizing us as contemporaneous, and to develop a “logical analysis of the concrete situation”, the French philosopher Gérard Granel proposed in the 90s that the thirties are still *devant nous*, an expression which rendered in English as “The thirties are still before us”, shows the ambiguity of today, of being a before which is still ahead, before us. With Granel’s words: “There is no question of saying that Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism, such as they were in history, only seem to have disappeared, but in reality, wait, behind the

door of the future, in order to sneak up behind us”⁴. And even if one would insist that fascism has unquestionably been defeated, what Arendt called “the archi-evil of our time” is far from having been eradicated since “its root are strong and they are called Anti-Semitism, Racism, Imperialism”⁵.

The surprising (re)emergence of the extreme “right” has received multiple designations: new, extreme, ultra, far, radical right or al-rightism. Some prefer to call it new conservatism, right-wing populism, or authoritarianism. And others consider that we should use the term “fascism,” even if it has a new form. Enzo Traverso employs the concept of “postfascism,” arguing that “the concept of fascism seems both inappropriate and indispensable for grasping this new reality”⁶. Alberto Toscano uses the term “late fascism”⁷. In my view, the variety of labels does not correspond to the observed diversity of this rightism⁸ but rather to the difficulty of conceptually seizing the contemporary moment, since it is from our present moment that this surprising rise unveils its novelty. It is a theoretical problem about how to think the contemporary moment without continuously referencing the past, since what is missed is precisely what is incomparable in the present. Beyond the recurrent questions such as: Is what we see at the present a repetition or a continuation of totalitarian forms and desires of the past? Is it a development of repressed fascist drives or a collapse of the democratic form? Another question: why is our contemporary moment so opaque? In fact, the underlying problem in the attempts to grasp the new in relation to the past is the astonishment regarding what has been called the “crisis” of democracy and the insight in how democracy can be destroyed from within. How can fascism and Nazism survive *within* democracy and not only as a tendency *against* democracy, is a question that Theodor Adorno had posed⁹. What is most surprising in this rise seems to be the insight into the collapse of democracy in the age of global automation, the age of *cyberocracy*¹⁰, the age in which the meaning of “total” and “totality” can hardly be separated from totalitarian automatism, and which is “totally” pervaded by the anxiety about the future of democracy and with the future of the future, when climate crisis, global poverty and misery, genocidal wars and the threat of total destruction of life destroy any possible hope for a future. To face these questions, and above all to reach the formulation of a question for our present, it seems necessary to first try to seize the present moment as present.

The present moment is commonly understood to be after a before and before an after. It is ungraspable since it is what seems to only be possible to grasp afterwards, *nachträglich* being itself the expectation for the coming and hence also at the same time *vorträglich*. It is *nachvorträglich*. The awareness of the present historical moment is an awareness of a connection to the past and the future, the introjection of a representation of time as a line of succession, a chronological representation of time. What could be considered as the specificity of the

present is however that it is *between* past and future. In which sense shall we understand the betweenness of the contemporary?

In the 50s, after her first visit to post-war Germany, Hannah Arendt put together what she called “six exercises of political” thought under the title *Between Past and Future*¹¹. In this book, she does not begin from the topic of totalitarianism – which is one of her main theoretical questions – but, somewhat surprisingly, from the experience of a void. Not the void of nothingness, nor the void of nihilism, nor the loss of God and of all beliefs, but the void of an accomplishment: the void that emerges when resistance achieves its goal and liberation from oppression is fulfilled. The preface of *Between Past and Future*, where the contemporary as *between* past and future is addressed, begins with a quote by the French poet René Char, a famous member of the French *résistance* during World War II. The quoted verse reads: *notre heritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament* [our inheritance was left to us by no testament]¹². More literally, our inheritance is not preceded by any testament. The inheritance Arendt refers to is not the one of a totalitarian past but of *Résistance*, of resistance, of the very acting for liberation which becomes itself a past when liberation is achieved. Besides, or rather together with, the inheritance of a *totalitarian past* there is an inheritance of *resistant past*. Indeed, this inheritance also shows that the past signifies the overcoming, or leaving behind, of both totalitarianism and resistance. In this text by Arendt, the resistant past is the one which is left to us without any testament. It remains a question if all past leaves us in such a way. Once achieved, acting for liberation liberates from acting. She describes this shift from action for liberation into liberation from action as the “loss of a treasure”, the treasure of being immersed in action, the treasure of the experience of fighting, which for her was the experience of always sitting beside the empty chair of freedom. The image of an empty chair in which freedom is set down defines freedom as undetermined and open. The question that emerges with this shift is what to do with the void installed by victory, a question that can be equally put in relation to every revolution, indeed that emerges in relation to every “post” condition, post-revolution, post-war, post-resistance, post-modernity¹³. The void demands to be fulfilled. René Char is a powerful example of Arendt’s thesis that the void, which emerges from the liberation of acting, is a demand, namely an appeal to thought. Arendt says that when René Char was writing during the last months of the Resistance, “when liberation – which in our context meant liberation from action – loomed large, [he] concluded his reflections with an appeal to thought for the prospective survivors no less urgent and not less passionate than the appeal to action of those who preceded him”¹⁴. The void of action, of resistance demands a contrary movement, no longer from thought to action as before but from action back to thought. Not “back” in the sense of turning back to what was left behind but turning the eyes away from the directedness toward a future – thus acting for liberation has freedom beside it, sitting in an empty chair, on one side, and, on the

other, the perspective of future and hope; “back” in the sense of turning back to this void, discovering this void; a turning back which urges thinking.

To describe this appeal to thought after experience, meaning in the void of experience, which is identical to the void of resistance, the void of the liberation of action –, Arendt reads Kafka. She reads the last of a series of notes from the year 1920, published under the title *Er, He*,¹⁵ because according to her Kafka occupies “the most advanced position” in terms of a “breath-taking reversal of the established relationship between experience and thought”¹⁶. Arendt interprets Kafka’s note as the “scene” of a battleground on which two forces, the past and the future, fight one another. Between them, a man whom Kafka calls “He”, must battle the other two forces, namely the past and the future. She considers that there are in fact three battles going on simultaneously: the fight between past and future, and the fight of the man in-between with each of them. In her reading, “the fact that there is a fight at all seems due exclusively to the presence of the man, without whom the forces of the past and of the future, one suspects, would have neutralized or destroyed the other long ago”¹⁷. Arendt reads this parable as a certain mistake or perhaps illusion, if one recalls Freud’s distinction between both¹⁸, made by Kafka when situating the man called “He” outside human time, in a certain Archimedean point from which the battle between past and future is being performed, and from which an overcoming could be reached. At the same time she reads the parable as the space of thought in the void of experience, in the void of resistance, a space between, which she describes further as a diagonal force, a parallelogram of forces “whose origin is known, whose direction is determined by past and future, but whose eventual end lies in infinity”, a metaphor she considers “perfect for the activity of thought”.¹⁹ Arendt brings these metaphors to address the gap of time between past and future as the “contemporary condition of thought” and embraces it as the sign of a non-time which necessarily exists in time. For Arendt, this renders possible the discovery that both past and future are infinite, that they are “clashing waves”, and that the thinking human existence stands its ground *between* them, indeed a ground without ground. Kafka embodies the most advanced position in the “breath-taking reversal of the relationship between experience and thought” insofar as his literature is a confrontation with a void which arises from the experience of having no way out, nor a way back, but having still to reach this point. Recalling Kafka’s own words: “*Von einem gewissen Punkt angibt es keine Rückkehr mehr. Dieser Punkt ist zu erreichen*”²⁰. Regarding this void or point of no return, it appeals to more than just thought. It is an appeal to think *otherwise*, to reverse in a breath taking – Paul Celan spoke about *Atemwende*, a breath-turning²¹ – the relationship between experience and thought, something Arendt recognizes in Kafka’s literature. Thus, for her Kafka is the experience of a “thought-event”, of a “thought-landscape”, who describes how a thought

is being thought. She embraces for herself this task when affirming the need to write exercises of [political] thought, and to write in the form of essay, since “the essay as a literary form has a natural affinity to the exercises I have in mind”²². This is how she receives the theoretical demand of the post-experience condition.

Arendt’s exercises of thought in this preface suggest that our contemporary moment of post-totalitarianism is the moment of a void, the void left by a long history of liberation and resistance, thus addressing this question from the viewpoint of anti-totalitarian struggles. The hypothesis I aim to sketch out in the present article is that the “surprising” uprise of “extreme right-wing movements” today should be rather grasped from the explosive energy of the void of the contemporary moment, the void of post-experience. These movements are strategies of conquest rather than movement whose aim is to fulfill the void, the void left when action for liberation liberates from action. It is a conquest by fission. This is in fact the void of a post-revolutionary condition. In line with Arendt, it could be said that after-revolution there is not really a counter-revolutionary tendency that serves as a control mechanism to ensure the outcomes of revolution or as reaction against revolution. After a revolution, what emerges is the void of the liberation of revolutionary action. Here, we could recall the thoughts on “democratic revolution” developed by the French political philosopher Claude Lefort, one of the first to engage with Arendt’s thoughts in France. One of Lefort’s main theses, sustained and developed throughout his work, is that modern democracy is the outcome of a regicide, the toppling of the sovereign figure of the “One”, of “indivision”, an overwhelming event which opened a symbolic “void place”. Drawing on Tocqueville’s thoughts on the democratic revolution, Lefort considers that the modern birth of democracy was however not only a revolution, which “shacked entirely the hierarchical building of society based on a ‘natural’ distinction among the beings of a society, a distinction sacralized through myth and religion”²³ but above all the ‘mutation’ of a symbolic other”²⁴, a new position of power. The death of the monarch as the incorporation of the symbolic order of the One exposes the mutation of its symbolic order. What emerges symbolically in this mutation called modern democracy is not really the “Many” as counterpart of the One but a “void place”. “...What emerges is the new notion of the place of power as void place”²⁵. This place is called “void” because neither an individual nor a group can be consubstantial to it; it is about a place which is “infigurable”, neither outside nor inside; it is about a totally “symbolic instance” which cannot be localizable in reality²⁶. Society, adds Lefort, now finds itself challenged by the loss of fundament, by anarchy, in the sense of having no ground²⁷. Modern democracy is the event of the loss of all anchors of certitude²⁸. Democracy is hence nothing but risk; in Lefort’s words, democracy is “wild” and “savage” since this void place is not only non-domesticable but a place of the non-domesticable. Drawing on his thoughts of the void place symbolically installed by democratic

revolution we would like to argue that new totalitarian formations, in our new liberal democratic age, not only “give place to institutions, modes of totalitarian organization and representation”, but are aggressive attempts to conquer, to occupy and invade the symbolic order of the void of the One, of anarchy, or space of indetermination, which is the symbolic order of freedom. An important lesson from Tocqueville, which orients in some senses Lefort’s concept of “wild democracy”, is the “ambiguities of the democratic revolution”²⁹ in every domain of social reality when “equality” of conditions rather than freedom become the axial force of revolution. Social bonds, political institutions, individuals, mechanisms of opinion, forms of sensibility and forms of knowledge, religion, right, language, literature, history, etc., everywhere the democratic revolution practices, in Lefort’s words, “a kind of digging into the flesh of the social”³⁰. It is the digging of the tremendous ambiguity of, on the one hand, being no long subjected to ancient nets of dependence, liberated from minority and thereby free to self-determination and autonomy, as Kant famously proclaimed, vowed to freedom of judgement and acting according to the own rules but, on the other, having no anchors of certitude, searching for agglutination with the many in the attempt to escape from the dissolution of her identity; on the one hand, conquering her right to expression and communication and, on the other, subjecting herself to an anonymous power. “The new affirmation of the singular is erased under the reign of the anonymous; the affirmation of difference (of beliefs, opinions, costumes) under the reign of uniformity; the spirit of novelty becomes sterile in its “jouissance” of material goods; everywhere the pulverization of historical time; the recognition of the semblable by the semblable get damaged with the emergence of society as abstract entity”³¹. Equality of conditions equating uniformization, homogenization; instead of the monarchic embodiment of the one, the emergence of the one- dimensionality of every separated and differentiated one. For Lefort, this ambiguity, inherent to the void place opened by the symbolic murder of the One, is the gift of modern democracy, gift in the double sense of present and poison. Thus, it is from this void that both totalitarian formations and plural forms of resistance and struggle for liberation of oppressive conditions arise.³² To the socialist phenomenologist Lefort, freedom is in its heart desire for being. These conditions must however be “deciphered” through a work of detachment from dominant and rival ideologies³³.

In both Arendt’s exercises of political thought on the void of resistance and Lefort’s thoughts on the mutation of the symbolic order operated by modern democracy in which the One is replaced by nothing, we find some answers to the question of how and why new liberal democracies not only “elect” fascist and extreme right politics but how this new form of fascism is perhaps the most violent form of conquest, of occupation and invasion of the symbolic order of a void place. In this sense, we can speak of *fascism ex nihilo*.

How to conquer a void? How to occupy it, how to invade it? For sure, by crashing it. In a very surprising text from 1897, the French poet Paul Valéry address these questions in terms of the conquest of the vague and haphazard place of creation. The void is a recurrent motive in Valéry's poetics, understood as the force of what does not exist³⁴. It appears as O. in his notions of the vague, of chance, of the blank paper. In the article I am referring to, called *Une Conquête Méthodique*, [A Conquest by Method]³⁵, Valéry grasps the phenomenon of "total obedience, the constant devotion to some simple, jealous, and formidable conception – strategic in form, economic in aim, and scientific in its deep preparation and in the extent of its preparation"³⁶ which defines the event called Germany after Bismarck, Germany as the name which epitomizes a new world order, the order of technical-industrial capitalism, the world totally "made by" this order, the order of the "made by". He depicts this total obedience and devotion as an "action" which differs from "ours" liberal democratic, in the sense of individual actions sometimes independent, sometimes contradictory, one regarding the other blindly protected by the State. The new order of total obedience is rather "a massive power that acts like water, now by shock and fall, now by irresistible infiltration"³⁷. The movement is geological and uncontrollable. Through this geological metaphor, Valéry describes the formation of an "economic army", ruled by a tremendous discipline which is capable to connect individual action to the action of the whole, so that each isolated point is totally connected to all points of this potency so that the maximum of wealth from all points of the world can return to every of its parts³⁸. It is the discipline that results in "total obedience". This action, argues Valéry, is not by any chance; it is "trained", it involves the whole body of knowledge, which must suffer a tremendous revolution, the revolution of specialization, the development of a society of experts, the experience of "continuous reason", the incorporation of knowledge into industrial production. Every knowledge must become applicable. And everything must follow knowledge redefined as applicability. Science must become applied science. The human genius is completely replaced by a humanity driven by a constant desire, a mediocre reason totally confident in reason. "This man will do what is required. He will reflect without passion, he will carry out enumerations so complete and reviews so general "that all objects and facts will serve him, and finally enter into his personal calculations"³⁹. This is only possible because this nation, meaning in the text Germany, has done in the economic sphere the experience of "unremitting reason", to say, of "method". It is the methodic conquest of the conquest by method. Valéry describes as a visionary the roots of totalitarianism as a "conquest by method" of all domains of existence, conducted by the formation of an economic army, that is, of how economy compels by its own structure militarization and total mobilization, and hence how economic and military are irresistibly infiltrated⁴⁰. And the law is: "plan and bring about inequality"⁴¹. In a more literal translation, inequality must be organized.

Therefore everything is about method: the future and the possible must be calculated; the studies of probability and statics dominate every domain of study, thus the work of chance and the poetics of the vague – that is every void, the force of the non-existent in existence, must be eliminated; from the military point of view, inequality is organized through number, the more weapons, the more armies, the more soldiers as possible, the goal is the biggest and biggest wholes ; commercially, through the market, whose work is to produce the less expensive product, the search is for the smallest and smallest, to each single on. The mystery of each one, of inequality must be organized both by extension – more and more and by reduction – smallest and smallest, an organization that has to be accomplished macroscopically and microscopically. Both, the military and the commerce aim to “crash all resistance”⁴². Inequality means here the ambiguity of the singular in its incomparability which as number is organized in homogeneity building new hierarchies of power and order. Following the method of continuous reasoning, which becomes the method for every possible method, each branch of knowledge is submitted to total analysis, every culture, every territory, and science proceeds as strategic knowledge: war is made in every simple domain of life. The tremendous isomorphism between the military form and the economic form transforms knowledge into applicability, indeed into “research” and “rapport”. “...Segmentation, classification, the imposition of discipline on the objects of knowledge is the reigning principle”⁴³. Instead of inventing the form of an object, the research inquires: “this form is given by the taste of the future consumer”⁴⁴. One of the outcomes of this militarization and economization of knowledge , of the spirit, of art and literature, of singular existence as Valéry stresses, is not only total obedience but the disappearance of a gap, of a void for disobedience, for the extraordinary, which for Valéry is intimately connected to the experience of how the vague and chance works, for their “poetics” – indeed for how the action is *in actu*, the disappearance of a sensibility for how action acts, how creation creates, how thinking thinks, and last but not least for how theory theorizes. Indeed, in the regime of the conquest of the void by method, what disappears is the void of resistance, of revolution, which is the void for emerging the conditions for an advent of freedom. That is why, he considers, that to resist the methodic conquest of the void, whose aim is to render void the creative energy of the void, it is also necessary a “theory of theory”⁴⁵.

The conquest by method of the void can be expanded as the birth of modern bureaucracy if we accord to bureaucracy the meaning proposed by Lefort in his early works as the formation of a new ruling class. Departing from Marx’s and Weber’s accounts on bureaucracy, Lefort defines bureaucracy as a process, the process of bureaucratization in which a new social structure grows. Contrary to Marx who considered bureaucracy a “parasite phenomenon”, Lefort sees it a “necessary” phenomenon insofar as it is a type of organization not only of the state but of the whole civil

society. If he can agree with Weber's reflections in what concerns the way bureaucracy effectuates the depersonalization of the individual, renders every affair public, transforms the finality of the state – of the apparatus – into private finality, and is a fundamental axe in the process of capitalist rationalization, he insists critically that Weber did not recognize the constitutive traits of bureaucracy rooted in its social structure. Bureaucracy, which reached according to him its utmost "perfection" in soviet totalitarian regime is the formation of a new social dominant class and a new form of domination as well. By means of bureaucracy the whole society becomes politized, indeed everything becomes political in a way that politics lose its meaning. It embodies by means of a disembodied power another class oppression, another effectuation of power⁴⁶.

Lefort has the merit to have shown how the bureaucratic machine works for building a new social organization, with a new ruling class, and his analyses are helpful to see that new fascist "leaders" are bureaucrats which act as simulacra of leaders. Bureaucracy is a machine of simulation, a "mask of law and of impersonality" behind which it is possible to attest to a "proliferation of unproductive functions, a game of personal relations and the delirium of authority"⁴⁷. It is a machine that works dispersing infinitely activities in uncountable services, departments, paperwork, in continuous new structuring, new polices, new formulas, shattering everything, for the sake of ruling if it did not rule, as an invisible ruler impossible to be killed. This can be understood in the sense that instead of incorporating the symbolic order of the One in the monarch, in the one body or nation, bureaucracy becomes a power which conquer, occupy and invade the void place of democracy with an abstract machine of papers, formulas, instances, of a system in which the one who is ruled by superior instances becomes herself a ruler, so that power is structured by the ruling of the being ruled. The bureaucrat is always a being-ruled who gest a small power capable to submit, subject and destroy individual life.

The bureaucratic machine is necessarily technocratic, or at least must appear as technocratic, in the sense of possessing and thereby legitimating itself with technical expertise and the demand of development of competency. The bureaucratic-technocratic machine is the analogical version of automation and automation the most totalitarian formation aiming to conquer the void place of democracy. What the recent rise of extreme right-wing movements, unthinkable without the cybertechnology of information, present is the rule of *cyberocracy*, the high technological unfolding of bureaucratic-technocratic rule. In the amplitude of a new form of power in which the being-ruled is what (called who) rules, autonomy and automation coincides: autonomy becomes automation and automation autonomous. The developing of technologies of automation which correspond to the unfolding of technologies of information into cyberocracy is crucial to understanding the rise of extremism in the 21 century⁴⁸. This huge matter deserves, of course, special discussion. What interests us is

why these new forms of right-wing extremism arising from and performing the cyberocracy of extreme new liberal democracy should be called fascist. Thus, if it is about extremism then it should be acknowledged that it is new liberal democracy that is extreme and these new “movements” can be seen as the very extremism of new liberal democracy.

In a previous work in which I tried to justify why we should speak about a new form of fascism rather than any other label, I accounted for the inspiration I received from the writings of Pier Paolo Pasolini and how he inspires us to think⁴⁹. Pasolini insisted in calling new liberal democracy a new form of fascism. The predicative discursive act here involved: new liberal democracy *is* a new fascism, which is considered by many a great provocation and by others a big mistake. But Pasolini departs from a comparative procedure in relation to the past – with historical fascism which he called “paleofascism” and from the stereotypical ideological beliefs. He departs from a cine-poetic vision of the contemporary moment. He also departs from a vision of the void. But this time, of the void of resistance, understood as the disappearance of resistance, something that can be thought together with Valéry’s notion of “total obedience” which in its turn is accomplished by cyberocracy. Pasolini differs from Lefort who saw in May 68 a concrete experience of the emergence of a gap, a *brèche*⁵⁰, the opening of a space of resistance in which the democratic “play of possibilities”, of its rhythm rendered possible to envisage in the closeness of cybersociety, the openness of being, the principal non-achievement of everything.⁵¹ Pasolini saw everywhere signs of the void of resistance when resistance insisted in restoring historical forms of resistance. It is not about a pessimist vision contra an optimist. It is rather about the urgency he saw of inventing new forms of resistance. The new form of fascism he recognized as new liberal democracy, structured on a mutation of capitalism itself, on cybertechnological “revolution”, on mass media consumption is unpredictably new because it captured resistance imposing the restoration and repetition of forms of resistance. Thereby it empties resistance, replacing it with a form, following the logic of the form of merchandise. Pasolini recognizes this novelty through his senses, when experiencing the disappearance of fireflies in the Italian landscape which are for him flashing lights of resistance to the extermination of life within life which broadly defines fascism. In his narration, “something had happened”, which I suggest can be understood as the event of the mutation of everything into “whatsoever”, indeed a continuous whatsoever of everything, indeed a process of rendering every sense, meaning and value empty of sense, meaning and value when transformed in whatsoever sense, meaning, and value. I called this a process of ambiguation of every sense, meaning and value, in which resistance and that what is to be resisted confounds, mix, loses any content. The emptying of the sense and meaning of people, of life, of the human, of existence, of sensibility, of the body, of soul, of politics, through their circulation, exacerbation, short, ambiguation

is in fact the emptying of the sense of sense itself, of the value of value, of the truth of truth⁵².

The void of resistance perceived by Pasolini is for sure to be understood as the activity of nihilism itself. Thus, nihilism as Nietzsche so deeply saw is not a state but an activity, an activity that both activates and pacifies at the same time the void of senses and values. “God is dead”, “everything is permitted”, these almost proverbial nihilistic utterances do not say merely that the structure of meaning, and values is disrupted and dissolved, leaving the world solely in a vacuum of meaning and value. They can only be said from within a general economy of meanings, senses, and values which, through continuous ambiguity. It is from this voiding activity that fascism arises as the accomplishment of new techno-mass medial liberal, cyberocratic democracy. Understood in this sense, it becomes clearer what Pasolini called “cultural genocide”, “anthropological mutation”, and “loss of linguistic ability” as the decisive features of this new form of fascism. The void of resistance saw and sensed by Pasolini in the disappearance of the fireflies in the landscape is about the emptying of senses, meaning and values, which structures a new form of socialization which destroys social reality but above all reality itself.

Thus, at stake in what I am calling “the fascism of ambiguity” is the destruction of reality. Cyberocracy, the automation of bureau-technocracy, replaces reality with simulacra, with forms of contents which empties contents and not only forms without contents. It belongs to it the complete fixation on images and not least on self-images. There is a lot of talk about ‘image fixation’. Historical fascism needs strong images, meaningful figures and symbols, the image of Führers, Duces, the leader must be in public places, public places must be rebuilt as a monumental architecture to reinforce the ideal of strength. Symbols must form a bond of identity that must touch everyone in such a way that everyone can identify with the leader, with the nation, with a mythologized history and an aestheticized memory and thus get a self-image that shares with their own, i.e. which through the same identification process made themselves equal. In newfascism, the fascism of today, the fascist identification process becomes different because it is based on being and identifying first and foremost with one’s own narcissistic self-image, with a media “image”. Here mythologizing is replaced by simulation, everything becomes an *as-if it were itself*: the state exists now “as if” it were a state because it is a business, a corporation; nation exists “as if” it were a nation because it is first and foremost about a “branding”, the leader is “as if” it were a leader because the one who rules, rules in the capacity of being ruled, i.e. being ruled and dominated - by a technological-automating-economic order - is what rules and dominates. Today’s fascist leaders imitate images of previous leaders, the neo-fascists imitate the former fascist, the symbols do not just imitate old symbols but precisely the forms of symbols. In an age like ours where symbols are drained and empty - it is the symbol itself

that is imitated; in a time like ours in which form itself has lost form, it is the form that must be imitated, and this in order to “give the impression” that our formless world has a form, “as if” it had a new form. The new is only the simulation of form, of meaning, of value, of reality. Thus it is by means of showing, performing, viralizing forms of sense which empties the sense of sense, forms of values which empties the value of values, forms of meaning which empties the meaning of meaning, without values, rendering the search for meaning, for sense, for values meaningless, senseless, without value. Fascism no longer needs to impose univocal meaning, univocity; now it appropriates ambiguity, which has been a resistant response after the war [see for example the defense of ambiguity by Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Lévinas, a. O]. Rendering everything ambiguous it is the action of resistance itself which is appropriated and emptied.

Pasolini was very lucid about the appropriation of the actions of resistance by the new form of fascism, by neofascism, as he called it. He followed the various movements of resistance against oppression, as we can see in his work and nonetheless in his documentary work *La Rabbia*⁵³. He grasps the struggle between the language of hate, which is the language of Modernity, the language of oppressive exterminating power, and the language of anger, the language of resistance. Without discussing further here the subtle tension between hate and anger and their languages, it is noteworthy to remark that Pasolini was untiring in his search for a language of resistance against the way he defined neofascism as extermination of resistance something that took place in contemporary forms of annihilating not only the appeal to thought but also the language of experience, sensibility, embodiment.

It is for him about discovering the tiny distinctions between the language of hate and the language of resistance, which new mass media and technological capitalism reduce to the same, imposing the order of ambiguity in whatsoever meaning.⁵⁴ This appeal to distinction what is rendered ambiguous through homogenization according to the capitalist law of “general equivalence”, can be read for instance in another poem, called “Anticommunist Youth Marches in Rome”:

If you shout long live freedom without humility
 you're not shouting long live freedom.
 If you shout long live freedom without laughter,
 you're not shouting long live freedom.
 If you shout long live freedom without love,
 you're not shouting long live freedom.
 You, children of the children, are shouting
 long live freedom
 with contempt, with hatred, with rage.
 So you're not shouting long live freedom!
 There's a true freedom and a lying freedom,

but it's better to be heroes of true freedom.
 Know this, children of the children,
 you who shout long live freedom
 with contempt, with hatred, with rage⁵⁵.

He fought with language against language, film against film, poetry against poetry, scrutinizing thereby how language, sensibility, embodiment are destroyed by the technification, reification, mass-mediatization and consumption of language, sensibility, bodies and thought. His struggling strategies such as writing in a dialect that was not his own, of filming in Africa and India, of repeating Dante's desire of becoming poet in times which not only avoid poetry but witness the void of poetry accomplished by poetry itself, as we can read in his project of writing a Divine Mimesis [*La Divina Mimesis*], as a rewriting of Dante's poem⁵⁶, are in many aspects actions like the one of the innocent young man running through the center of Rome, amidst the intensive traffic, with a flower of paper in the hand, who at the end was killed when a car runed over him, whom Pasolini depicted in his short film, *La Sequenza dei Fiori di Carta*⁵⁷. Also in similar way as Kafka, it is more about reaching the point of no return than trying to reactive, retore or repeat past forms of resistance, to reach the point where our times are already in and discovering the subtle small flowers of difference, spread as wild herbs in the camps of existence, like millions of immigrants, exiled and expulsed nameless bodies lying in the streets of the world.

After the war, in the 60s René Char meditated a lot on the verses by Rimbaud, the poet contemporaneous with the Commune of Paris, which read: *La poésie ne rythmera plus l'action. Elle sera en avant*,, "Poetry will no longer beat *within* action; it *will be before* it"⁵⁸. He also looks back to his years of resistance and reflects on how action is blind and only poetry sees. None of the thinkers discussed here deny action. But they all know that the appeal to action today needs more than action. It needs to act upon action itself, it needs in this sense a "poietics", the difficult task to let poetry be before action since it "sees" the urgency that action act upon itself. It sees that inside the vertiginous exterminating violence of the fascism of ambiguity, it is action itself that must be enacted, that making must be made beyond any idea and practice of production. Poetry, in the old sense of a doing sees that it is the doing itself that must be done. Poetry is before action in the sense that it names the courage to face the void as void, with the courage of becoming oneself like the firefly of Victor Hugo, which keeps hovering even if very briefly over the abyss of our time, the courage to stand in "an absent pillar", [*sur une colonne absente*], like Henri Michaux's trembling lines of presence.

This text is dedicated to Adauto Novaes

- 1 Friedrich Hölderlin. »Je angefochtener wir sind vom Nichts, das, wie ein Abgrund, um uns her uns angähnt, oder auch vom tausendfachen Etwas der Gesellschaft und der Tätigkeit der Menschen, das gestaltlos, seel- und lieblos uns verfolgt, zerstreut, um so leidenschaftlicher und heftiger und gewaltsamer muß der Widerstand von unserer Seite werden. Oder muss er nicht?« Letter to his brother from 2th November 1797. *Sämtliche Werke*. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, begonnen durch N. v. Hellingrath, fortgeführt durch F. Seebass und L. v. Pigenot, 2. Bd. (1794-1798), Berlin, 2. Aufl. 1923, S. 420.
- 2 Michael Löwy. "Dix thèses sur l'extrême droite en Europe" in: *Les nouveaux droits extrêmes*, Lignes 45, octobre 2014, p. 163.
- 3 This is a quote by the conservative journalist John O' Sullivan, <https://quadrant.org.au/magazine/2022/10/national-conservatism-the-return-of-the-repressed/>
- 4 Gérard Granel. "The Thirties Are Still Before Us: Logical Analysis of the Concrete Situation", *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* Volume 25, Number 1, 2004, p. 117.
- 5 Hannah Arendt, "The Seeds of a Fascist International", in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: formation, exile, and totalitarianism*. 1. pbk ed. New York: Schocken; 2005. p. 150.
- 6 Enzo Traverso. *The New Faces of Fascism*, London/Ny: Verso, 2019, p. 4
- 7 Alberto Toscano. Notes on Late Fascism, April 2, 2017, <https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/notes-on-late-fascism/>
- 8 Michael Löwy in the cited article considers that this extreme right is very diversified, op. cit., p. 163. Despite so many different labels and different origins, they have in fact the same shape: they are all not only nationalist, chauvinist, xenophobe, racist, hate for whatsoever "other", antisemite, extra-Europeans, sexists, homophobes, misogynists, etc, but are "shaped" digitally, virtually.
- 9 Theodor W. Adorno. "The Meaning of Working through the Past", in *Critical Models: Intervention and Catchwords*, ed. Lydia Goher, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 90.
- 10 The concept of Cyberocracy was coined by Dennis David Ronfeld in a memorandum written 1978 and developed in a paper from 1985 for internal uses of RAND corporation, "an organization formed immediately after World War II to connect military planning with research and development decisions". "Cyberocracy, Cyberspace, and Cyberology: Political Effects of the Information Revolution" 1991, RAND Corporation. Retrieved 12 Dec 2014.
- 11 Hannah Arendt. *Between Past and Future*. New York: The Viking Press, 1961.
- 12 René Char, "Feuilles d'Hypnos" in *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1983, p. 190.
- 13 See also Andrey Platonov's novel "The Return" in *The Return and Other Stories*, London: The Harvill Press, I thank Tora Lane for drawing my attention to this novel by Platonov and also Irina Sandomirskaja for her inspiring thoughts on "post" condition developed in her seminars on "anachronism" at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (Cbees), at Södertörn University, Sweden.
- 14 Hannah Arendt, op. Cit., p. 9
- 15 Er, He, the English translation by Willa and Erwin Muir appeared for the first time in English in *The Great Wall of China*, NY, 1946. For the German Original, see Franz Kafka. *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol 5,
- 16 Hannah Arendt, op. Cit., p. 10
- 17 ibidem
- 18 Sigmund Freud. The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud Vol. 21 (1927-1931) *The future of an illusion*; Civilization and its discontents and other works. Repr. London: Hogarth; 1964[1961].
- 19 Hannah Arendt, op. Cit., p. 12.
- 20 Franz Kafka. <http://www.kafka.org/index.php?ohg>
- 21 Paul Celan *Der Meridian: Endfassung, Entwürfe, Materialien*. 1. Aufl. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp; 1999, eng. version *The meridian: final version - drafts - materials*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press; 2011.
- 22 Hannah Arendt, op. cit., p. 15.
- 23 ibidem
- 24 Ibidem, p. 17. See also, "La question de la démocratie" in: *Essais sur le politique*, XIX-XXe siècle, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986, p. 27. Lefort's concept of mutation is very much indebted to the work of Adauto Novaes in Brazil, cf. <https://artepensamento.ims.com.br>
- 25 Ibidem, p. 18.
- 26 Ibidem, p. 18
- 27 The French political philosopher Miguel Abensour has shown the connection between Claude Lefort's thoughts on wild democracy and Reiner Schürmann's concept of anarchy, see for instance, "Démocratie sauvage" et "principe d'anarchie" in *Les Cahiers de Philosophie* 18 (Lille) (1994), eng. version "Savage democracy and 'principle of anarchy'" in *Journal for Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Volume 28, Issue 2
- 28 Claude Lefort, "La question de la démocratie", op. cit., p. 30
- 29 Ibidem, p. 24
- 30 Ibidem. Lefort used Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh in order to conceptualize the body disembodied of the symbolic order of the One.
- 31 Ibidem, p. 25.
- 32 Ibidem, p. 17.

- 33 Ibidem, Lefort was a double critical of both right and left radical positions and of their rivalry.
- 34 “Que serions-nous donc sans le secours de ce qui n'existe pas?” in: “Petite lettre sur les mythes”, *Oeuvres I*, Paris: Gallimard, 1957, Paul Valéry, p. 966
- 35 Paul Valéry, “Une Conquête méthodique” in *Oeuvres I*, op. cit., eng. Version Paul Valéry, “A Conquest by Method” in: *History and Politics*, transl. by Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews, in *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, Volume 10, NY: Bollingen Foundation, 1962. In the following, page numbers are referred to the English version.
- 36 Eng p. 48
- 37 Ibidem, p. 49
- 38 Ibidem, p. 48-49.
- 39 Ibidem, 52
- 40 It is obvious that the Minister of Defense “chosen” by Putin must be an economist.
- 41 Paul Valéry, op. Cit., p. 54
- 42 Ibidem, p. 55.
- 43 Ibidem, 62
- 44 ibidem
- 45 Ibidem.
- 46 Claude Lefort. *Éléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie*, Genève/Paris: Librairie Droz, 1971, p. 308.
- 47 Ibidem, p. 303.
- 48 The to an extent that we could speak of “extremist midiasphere”, see João Cezar de Castro Rocha. <https://portalcioranbr.wordpress.com/2024/02/25/dissonancia-cognitiva-coletiva-e-midiosfera-extremista-joao-cezar-de-castro-rocha-democracia-em-perspectiva-ppgh-uerj/>
- 49 See my *The Fascism of Ambiguity*, London: Bloomsbury, 2022.
- 50 1968, Lefort, together with Edgar Morin and Jean-Marc Coudray wrote a reflection on May 68 aiming to develop a theory at the eye of the hurricane. See Morin E, Lefort C, Coudray J. Mai 1968: la brèche : premières réflexions sur les événements. Paris: Fayard; 1968. Twenty years later, 1988, they edited anew the former reflection adding another one twenty years later, now with Cornelius Castoriadis also as co-editor, see, Morin E, Castoriadis C, Lefort C. Mai 68: la brèche : suivi de Vingt ans après. Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe; 1988. In his own reflections after 20 years, Lefort writes that 68 was about “...the opening of a gap that ensures a new circulation of individuals and a new exchange of thoughts. This is one of the faces of the revolutionary phenomenon. I don't light it to celebrate wild democracy. I am not unaware of its ambiguous nature, the danger that it entails in failing to ignore the symbolic articulations that command the link with reality, the relationship with others, the distinction between the registers of thought and language, whatever the social system. In May 68 I find the sign of what appears to me in the revolution, on the one hand, as innovation or renewal, emergence of a new public space, liberation, and, on the other, as confusion or dissolution of the fundamental references of social life. Those who retain only burlesque behaviors and speeches from May 1968, to ignore the salutary shake-up of conventions, should resume the study of revolutions...”.
- 51 Claude Lefort. “L'idée d'être brut et d'esprit sauvage”, in *Sur une Colline absente autour de Merleau-Ponty*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978, p. 44.
- 52 See, my *The Fascism of Ambiguity*, op. cit.
- 53 See Pier Paolo Pasolini. *La Rabbia*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3GBa09Mg_s and the beautiful essay by George Didi-Huberman. *Film, essai, poème, La Rabbia*, de Pier Paolo Pasolini.
- 54 See Pasolini's Poem, “Gerarchia”, in *Da Trasumanar e organizzar* (1971).
- 55 Pasolini. “Anticomunist Youth Marches in Rom” in *La Rabbia/Anger*, transl. Cristina Vitti, Tenement Press, 2022, <https://lithub.com/two-poems-by-pier-paolo-pasolini-translated-by-cristina-vitti/>
- 56 Pasolini, *La divina mimesis* (Milano: Mondadori, 2019).
- 57 <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=pasolini+sequenzi+di+un+fiori+di+carta&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:d4c55401,vid:7Fst4xc6xc8,st:0>
- 58 Arthur Rimbaud. Letter to Paul Demeny, from 15 May 1871, <https://my-blackout.com/2019/03/03/arthur-rimbaud-letters-1870-18719-sean-bonney-letter-on-poetics-after-rimbaud/>

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Post-Fascism: Facism as Trans- Historical Concept

Enzo Traverso

Abstract: What does “fascism” mean at the beginning of the twenty-first century? The word conjures a dark interwar landscape of violence, dictatorship, and genocide. Such images spontaneously return to our thoughts as we again see the rise of the radical right on a global scale, from Europe to the US and Brazil. Yet, fascism has changed its skin. It ostentatiously exhibits typical fascist features – authoritarian and charismatic leadership, hatred of democracy, contempt for law, derision of human rights, open racism (notably against Blacks, Latinos, and Muslims), misogyny, homophobia – but the old fascist rhetoric has been abandoned: the post-fascist movements depict themselves as defenders of national identities threatened by globalization, mass immigration, and Islamic fundamentalism. A hybrid phenomenon, this “post-fascism” is neither the reproduction of the old fascism nor something wholly new; it remains in suspension between an unknown future and a haunting past.

Keywords: fascism, post-fascism, violence, populism, xenophobia, anticommunism

In recent times, fascism has exceeded the boundaries of historiographical debate, where many observers thought it had been definitely relegated, and spectacularly came back to the political agenda. The tendency is global. Since the 1930s, the world has not experienced a similar growth of the radical right-wing movements, which inevitably awakes the memory of fascism. At the beginning, the phenomenon appeared in continental Europe, with the rise of the Front National in France and other far-right movements in the countries of the former soviet bloc. Today, far-right parties are strongly represented in almost all European Union countries, sometimes as governmental forces. The success of Alternative für Deutschland and Vox show that Germany and Spain are no longer exceptions. In the most recent years, the wave became a tsunami and overflowed other continents, with the election of Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Nabendra Modi in India, and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines. Nationalism, racism, xenophobia and authoritarianism have become highly contagious. Everywhere, the ghosts of fascism reappear and reopen old debates: are we coming back to the 1930s? Does the concept of fascism capture the novelty of our situation?

As Reinhart Koselleck reminded us, there is a tension between historical facts and their linguistic transcription. This does not only mean that concepts are indispensable in order to think a historical experience. This also means that they can transcend it and be used in order to apprehend new realities, which are connected to the past through a web of memorial continuity. Historical comparisons—fascism is one of their privileged realms—come out from this tension between history and language; they are often extremely fruitful, but they establish analogies

and differences rather than homologies and repetitions. Sometimes, they reveal that old concepts no longer work and have to be renewed.

Today, this entanglement between past and present displays an ambiguous semantics: on the one hand, almost nobody openly endorses fascism—Bolsonaro is the exception that confirms the rule—and most observers recognize the differences existing between the movements of the radical right and their ancestors of the 1930s; on the other hand, any attempt to define this new phenomenon implies a comparison with the interwar years. In short, the concept of fascism seems both inappropriate and indispensable for grasping this new reality. This is why I prefer to speak of *post-fascism*, a definition that emphasizes a chronological distance and locates what is happening today in a historical sequence shaped by both continuity and transformation. Chronologically, this right-wing constellation comes after classical fascism and belongs to a different historical context; politically, it cannot be defined without being compared to classical fascism, which remains a foundational experience. On the one hand, it is no longer fascism; on the other, it is not completely different; it is something in-between. The concept of post-fascism certainly does not answer all open questions but corresponds to this transitional step.

We should not forget that the category of fascism has been frequently used after the Second World War. In 1959, Theodor Adorno wrote that “the survival of National Socialism *within* democracy” was potentially more dangerous than “the survival of fascist tendencies *against* democracy.” In 1974, Pier Paolo Pasolini depicted the anthropological models of neoliberal capitalism—at that time still embryonic—as a “new fascism” in front of which the regime of Mussolini appeared irremediably archaic, as a kind of “paleo-fascism” (with similar arguments, Umberto Eco spoke of “Ur-Fascism”). And ten years ago, many historians who tried to interpret Berlusconi’s Italy recognized its intimacy—if not its filiation—with classical fascism. Of course, there were enormous differences between the founder of a totalitarian state and a successful businessman who owned several TV channels, but Berlusconi’s plebiscitary conception of democracy and charismatic leadership strongly evoked the fascist archetype. And Berlusconi was a modest forerunner of Donald Trump.

Therefore, fascism is not only transnational—or transatlantic, according to Federico Finchelstein, the historian of Argentinian fascism—but that it is also trans-historical. It is collective memory that establishes a link between a concept and its public use, which inevitably exceeds a purely historiographical dimension. In fact, this is true for many of the concepts in our political lexicon. Saying that the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany and France are democracies does not mean to posit the identity of their political systems, neither to pretend that they would correspond to the Athenian democracy of Pericles’ age. In the twenty-first century, fascism will neither take the face of Mussolini, Hitler and Franco, nor hopefully the form of totalitarian terror, but there are many ways to

destroy democracy. The ritual reference to the threats to democracy—barbarians at the gate: a trope hammered by all the media since the emergence of Islamic terrorism—forgets a fundamental lesson of the history of fascism: democracy can be destroyed from within.

The rise of the radical right is not the only analogy that we can make with the situation between the two world wars. Other similarities are evident and have frequently been emphasized, from the lack of an international order to the concentric waves of the economic crisis of 2008. The global chaos of the 1920s and 1930s depended on the collapse of the nineteenth-century “European concert,” whereas nowadays it results from the end of the Cold War and its bipolar world. As we know, international instability always raises the demand for strongmen. Sometimes, the entanglement of crisis and instability produces events that turn into tragic repetitions. Think of the refugee crisis of 2015, which recalls of the Evian conference of 1938, when Western democracies concluded that they would not receive the Jews who fled from Nazi Germany.

These parallelisms are significant, but they intertwine with some crucial differences that complexify and problematize the comparison. In this talk, I would like to stress the most relevant of them: violence, anticommunism, utopianism, racism, and the attitude of the economic and political elites.

Violence

The first difference is obvious, but this is a not good reason either to ignore or to overemphasize it. Violence was central in both the ideology and practice of classical fascism. It was a product of the “brutalization” of continental Europe during the Great War, speaking with George L. Mosse. War shaped the realm of politics by transforming its language and its means of action. In many countries, especially those that had been defeated, the state monopoly of legitimate violence had been radically put into question and politics had taken arms. Many parties created their own militia. Today, on the opposite, most radical right leaders are accustomed to appearing on our television screens; they no longer inflame hysteric crowds or attend mass rallies in which their followers march dressed in uniform. Amongst their activists, violence is the exception—like the Utoya massacre of 2011 or the Charlottesville car attack six years later—not the rule. Post-fascism has emerged after seventy years of peace in most Western countries. Thereafter, its relationship with democracy is different and it does not exhibit a “subversive” character. The West was able to “export” violence outside of its borders, mostly in the Middle East, and is accustomed to depict one of its creatures—terrorism—as an external threat. But this is a form of exorcism.

Anticommunism

A fundamental pillar of classical fascism was anticommunism. After the Great War, anticommunism was the crucible for the transformation of nationalism from a conservative to a “revolutionary” right: Mussolini defined his movement as “revolution against revolution.” Today, after the collapse of real socialism and the end of the USSR, anticommunism has lost both its appeal and its meaning. Sometimes it survives—think of Bolsonaro’s campaign against “cultural Marxism”—but has become marginal. This has some considerable consequences. A powerful boundary that in the past separated fascism from the laboring classes no longer exists. Thus, Le Pen, Salvini, Orban and Trump have reintegrated the working class into a nationalist imagination. Of course, they refer to a “national” working class (without immigrants), mostly composed of white men, but they pretend to defend them against globalization. They claim a kind of ethnically circumscribed welfare state opposed to a neoliberal policy of privatization. A significant obstacle has fallen down. In a historical perspective, post-fascism could also be seen as the result of the defeat of the revolutions of the twentieth century: after the collapse of communism and the embrace of neoliberal reason by most social democratic parties, radical right movements have become, in many countries, the most influential forces opposed to the “establishment” without showing a subversive face and avoiding any competition with a demobilized left.

This change is far from being anecdotal. In the 1930s, fascism was unable to conquer the laboring classes, which remained pervaded by a socialist culture and organized by left-wing parties and unions. A solid wall separated their values, identities and languages; they expressed different rituals and symbols. When it came to power, fascism could not integrate the labor movement into its own social and political system; it was compelled to destroy it. Today, this cleavage has disappeared. In many European countries, the former bastions of the left have become, with a spectacular reversal of the traditional electoral landscape, the strongholds of far-right parties.

The radical right claims the classic populist paradigm of the “good” people opposed to the corrupted elites, but has significantly reformulated it. In the past, the “good” people meant an ethnically homogeneous rural community opposed to the “dangerous classes” of the big cities. After the end of communism, a defeated working class struck by deindustrialization has been reintegrated in this virtuous national community. The “bad” people of post-fascist imagination—immigrants, Muslims and Blacks of the suburbs, veiled women, junkies and marginal men—are merged with the leisure classes that adopt liberated customs: feminists, LGBTQ, antiracists, ecologists and defenders of immigrant rights. On the opposite spectrum, the “good” people are nationalist, antifeminist, homophobic, xenophobic, and nourish a clear hostility towards ecology, modern arts and intellectualism.

Anti-Utopianism

Post-fascism belongs to a “post-ideological” age shaped by the collapse of the hopes of the twentieth century and it does not break a new regime of temporality which, speaking once again with Koselleck, is deprived of any “horizon of expectation.” In the 1930s, fascism claimed a “national revolution” and depicted itself as an alternative civilization opposed to both liberalism and communism. It announced the birth of a “New Man” who would have regenerated the continent by replacing the old and decadent democracies. On the contrary, post-fascism does not have utopian ambitions. Its modernity lies in the means of its propaganda—all its leaders are familiar with television advertising and communication—rather than in its project, which is deeply conservative. Against the enemies of civilization—globalization, immigration, Islam, terrorism—the radical right only claims a return to the past: national currency, national sovereignty, “national preference,” stopping immigration, the preservation of the Christian roots of Western countries, gender hierarchies, defense of family, etc.

From this point of view, the new radical right is more neoconservative than fascist; it belongs to the tradition of “cultural despair” (the *Kulturpessimismus* described by Fritz Stern) rather than to “conservative revolution,” which projected aristocratic and antidemocratic values into a future political order (a peculiar mix of obscurantism and idealized technology). Think of the ideologue of *Alternative für Deutschland*, Rolf-Peter Sieferle. He wrote a pessimist pamphlet in which he complained about the decadence of Germany, dominated by cosmopolitan and post-national values, and completely reshaped by Habermas’s idea of “constitutional patriotism.” After publishing his intellectual testament, *Finis Germania* (2017), he committed suicide. In short, this is not the trajectory of a “redeemer.” He reminds once more of the resigned discourse on “decadence” elaborated by Arthur Gobineau and Oswald Spengler in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries rather than the modern call for revenge and regeneration embodied by Maurice Barrès and Ernst Jünger, the thinkers of “integral nationalism,” “total mobilization” and the advent of the era of new “militiamen.” Their anti-modernism is antipodal to the proclivity to aestheticizing of politics so typical of classical fascism.

In fact, there is a striking symmetry between the lack of futurity in both post-fascist and radical left culture. The eclipse of the myth of a “Thousand-Year Reich” or the rebirth of the Roman Empire corresponds with the end of the socialist utopia. There is no equivalent today to the competition between Bolshevism and fascism to conquer the future that so deeply shaped the 1930s. This competition which, according to Ernst Bloch, took place in the unconscious and the dreams of the masses, belongs to the first half of the past century. Whereas many left-wing movements like Occupy Wall Street in the US, 15-M in Spain or la Nuit debout in France tried to build a new project for the future, post-fascism

fills the vacuum left by a disappeared “horizon of expectation” with a reactionary retreat into the past.

Xenophobia

A common feature of the radical right is xenophobia. A hatred of immigrants shapes their ideology and inspires their action. They transform “immigrants” into “infiltrated enemies,” foreign bodies that threaten the health of a national community. Globalization has engendered a series of powerful reactions, very diverse and often antipodal. Out of all of them, post-fascism is certainly the most regressive: a revival of ethnic nationalism. It rejects cultural pluralism in the name of monolithic identities and disclaims cultural, racial or religious pluralism. It transforms Georg Simmel’s paradigm of the stranger into Carl Schmitt’s figure of the enemy. The search for a scapegoat is a constitutive element of fascist discourse, and post-fascism does not divert from this path, but it is an innovator more than a follower: the main target of its hate are no longer the Jews, rather the Muslims. This shift from anti-Semitism to Islamophobia is a significant change that deserves to be analyzed.

Fascism was strongly anti-Semitic. Anti-Semitism shaped the entire world-vision of German National Socialism and deeply affected the varieties of French radical nationalisms; it was introduced in the laws of the Italian fascist regime in 1938 and even in Spain, where the Jews had been expelled at the end of the fifteenth century, Franco’s propaganda identified them with the Reds as both enemies of national Catholicism. Of course, in the first half of the twentieth century, anti-Semitism was wide-spread almost everywhere, from the aristocratic and bourgeois layers—where it established symbolical boundaries—to the intelligentsia: many of the most-read writers of the 1930s did not hide their hatred of the Jews. Today, however, Muslim immigrants have replaced the Jews in racist discourse. Racism—a scientific doctrine based on biological theories—has been replaced by a cultural prejudice that emphasizes an irreducible discrepancy between “Jewish-Christian” Europe and the Islam world. Traditional anti-Semitism, which shaped all European nationalisms for over a century, has not disappeared—periodic neo-Nazi attacks against synagogues and Jewish schools in both Europe and the United States prove its persistence—but has become a residual phenomenon or has transmigrated from the right to Islamic fundamentalism. As in a system of communicating vessels, prewar Anti-Semitism declined and Islamophobia increased. In fact, there is a certain continuity in this historical transfer. The post-fascist representation of the enemy reproduces the old racial paradigm and, like the former Jewish Bolshevik, the Islamic terrorist is often depicted with physical traits stressing his otherness.

In one century, the intellectual ambition of the radical right has significantly diminished. Nowadays, there is no equivalent of *Jewish France* by Edouard Drumont (1882) or *The Foundations of the Nineteenth*

Century (1899) by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, nor the essays on racial anthropology by Hans Günther of the 1930s. The new nationalism has not produced writers like Louis Ferdinand Céline and Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, not to speak of philosophers like Giovanni Gentile, Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt. The cultural humus of post-fascism is not nourished with literary creation—except perhaps Michel Houellebecq’s *Soumission* (2016), which depicts France in 2022 transformed into an Islamic Republic—, rather with a massive campaign to win media attention. Many political and intellectual personalities, television channels and popular magazines that cannot be qualified as fascist, have contributed to building this cultural humus. We could remember the enflamed prose of Oriana Fallaci on the Muslims who “reproduce themselves like rats” and urinate against the walls of our cathedrals.

George L. Mosse had pointed out that, in classical fascism, spoken words were more important than written texts. In an age in which the culture of words and images channeled by television and the social media has replaced textuality, it is not astonishing that the post-fascist discourse spreads first of all through the media, assigning a secondary place to literary productions (which become useful—like *Soumission*—insofar as they are transformed into media events).

We may observe many significant similarities between today’s Islamophobia and fin-de-siècle anti-Semitism, in a pre-fascist era. But we should distinguish between France and Germany. After the Dreyfus Affair, French anti-Semitism stigmatized Jewish immigrants from Poland and Russia but its main target were the senior officials (*juifs d’Etat*) who, under the Third Republic, occupied very important positions in the bureaucracy, the army, the academic institutions and the government. Captain Dreyfus himself was a symbol of such a social ascension. At the time of the Popular Front, the target of anti-Semitism was Léon Blum, a Jewish dandy who embodied the image of a Republic conquered by the “Anti-France.” The Jews were designated as “a state within the state,” a position that certainly does not correspond to the present situation of the Muslim minorities that still remain hugely underrepresented inside the institutions of European countries.

Thus, the comparison would be more pertinent with Wilhelmine Germany, where the Jews were carefully excluded from the state machine just as the newspapers warned against a “Jewish invasion” (*Verjudung*) that was putting into question the ethnic and religious matrix of the Reich. Anti-Semitism played the role of a “cultural code” that allowed Germans to *negatively* define a national consciousness, in a country torn by rapid modernization and urbanization, where the Jews appeared as its most dynamic group. In other words, a German was first of all non-Jewish. In a similar way, today Islam is becoming a cultural code that allows Europeans to find, by a *negative* demarcation, their “lost” national identity, threatened or engulfed in the process of globalization.

Sometimes, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia coexist in the post-fascist discourse as two complementary rhetorical figures. The most striking case of this combination is found with Viktor Orban, the chief of the Hungarian government, who denounces a double threat: a financial conspiracy organized by a Jewish elite from Wall Street (the usual target of his speeches is the banker George Soros), and a demographic threat embodied by mass immigration: “Islamic invasion.” While less explicit than Orban, similar arguments are often suggested by other far-right leaders of Central and Western Europe. But we should not neglect the multiple contradictions of such xenophobic rhetoric: Orban, as well as Trump, Bolsonaro and other far-right leaders, has a very good relationship with Israel, which he considers as a powerful anti-Islamic bastion (and as a useful intermediary between the Visegrad group and the US). Think of Matteo Salvini, the leader of Italian radical right, who became internationally famous when, as Ministry of the Interior, he impeded ONG ships of refugees from reaching the shores of Sicily. One month ago, over the course of just one week, he both participated in mass meetings against immigrants and organized a conference against anti-Semitism in Rome with the Israeli ambassador as a distinguished guest.

In France, the myth of “Islamic invasion” was first formulated as a literary trope that quickly turned into a slogan: the “great replacement” (*le grand remplacement*). The inventor of this figure of speech—the “Islamization” of France—is Renaud Camus, a writer who does not hide his closeness with the National Front. Fifteen years ago, he complained in his journal about the overwhelming Jewish presence in the French cultural media; in the following years, he shifted his focus to the Muslims, the actors of the “great replacement.” Camus belongs to the old school of French conservatism. His complain about the disappearance of eternal France has the anguished taste of Léon Bloy’s pamphlets. The most popular advocates of the theory of the “great replacement,” however, are two public intellectuals: Eric Zemmour and Alain Finkielkraut. Zemmour has devoted to this topic a very successful book—500,000 copies sold in six months—titled *The French Suicide* (2015). Finkielkraut is the author of another best-seller, *L’identité malheureuse* (“the unhappy identity”), in which he depicts the despair of a great nation faced by two calamities: multiculturalism and a mistakenly idealized hybridity (the French “melting pot,” the *métissage* of a France “Black-Blanc-Beur,” i.e. Black, White, and Maghrebian: a national image that became very popular after the French victory of the football World Cup in 1998).

Put in a historical perspective, the myth of the “great replacement” reveals some astonishing affinities with a classic anti-Semitic stereotype. This discourse does not differ very much from that of German nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1880, Heinrich von Treitschke, the most respected German historian, deplored the “intrusion” (*Einbruch*) of the Jews into German society where they shook the customs of *Kultur*

and acted as a corruptive element. Treitschke's conclusion was a note of despair that became a kind of slogan: "the Jews are our unhappiness" (*die Juden sind unser Unglück*). This catchphrase was appropriated by National Socialism in the 1930s. In fact, Finkelkraut's and Treitschke's "unhappiness" have the same roots: a similar discontent in the face of modernization and globalization combined with the search for a scapegoat.

In the US, the equivalent of the "great replacement" is Donald Trump's slogan "America first" which, like its French homologue, has an interesting genealogy recently analyzed by Sarah Churchwell. Words have their own history of which even their speakers may not be conscious. Robert O. Paxton, a distinguished historian of fascism, pointed out that, despite his frequent almost fascistic behaviors and assessments, Donald Trump has probably never read any book on fascism. Nonetheless, his slogan is burdened with a large and heavy past. Until the First World War, "America first" was the mantra of isolationism; it evoked a spirit of selfishness and the conviction that national interests should be defended regardless of any external circumstances. But the Great War was a turning point. Since the early 1920s, this catchword took a different meaning, until it condensed the claims of a new nativism that, according to many contemporaries, expressed the features of a possible American fascism. Pushed forward by the anti-Bolshevik "red scare" and the rise of the KKK, which reached at that time its highest influence, "America First" was reinterpreted in terms of biological racism. The United States had to protect itself from mass immigration, an external threat coming from Southern and Eastern Europe that was modifying the biological bases of its civilization. Italian, Polish, and Balkan peasants, as well as Eastern Jews were destroying Nordicism, the pillar of traditional, i.e. wasp America. The US equivalents of Chamberlain, Drumont, Barrès and Maurras, were the eugenicist Madison Grant, the author of *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), and Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (1920). Both of them announced a future of decadence for a nation that, because of immigration, could not remain a "homogeneous population of Nordic blood." This huge campaign resulted in the National Origins Act of 1924, enthusiastically supported by the KKK, that reduced immigration by more than 80% by fixing national quotas corresponding to the average of each nation in 1890, when the immigration wave from Southern and Eastern Europe was just starting.

In the age of the New Deal, this wave of racist nativism disappeared, until its spectacular come back with Donald Trump. Thus, it is not very difficult to sketch the historical background of his speeches against Latino and Muslim immigrants. In January 2018, he shocked the public opinion when he declared that the United States should stop receiving "all these people from shithole countries" like Africa and Haiti instead of admitting "more people from places like Norway." In 2018 like in 1924, stopping

immigration was “a matter of life and death for America,” the condition “to make America great again.”

The Return of the Colonial Repressed

Islamophobia, however, is not a simple ersatz for the old anti-Semitism, insofar as its roots are old and it possesses its own tradition, which is colonialism. In Europe, colonialism had invented a political anthropology based on the dichotomy between citizens and colonial subjects—in French the legal categories of *citoyens* and *indigènes*—that fixed social, spatial, racial and political boundaries.

The colonial matrix of Islamophobia gives us a key for understanding the ideological metamorphoses of post-fascism, which has abandoned the imperial and conquering ambitions of classical fascism in order to adopt a much more conservative and “defensive” posture. It does not wish to conquer, rather to expel (even to the point of criticizing the neo-imperial wars carried on since the beginning of the 1990s by the US and its Western allies). Whereas nineteenth century colonialism wished to accomplish its “civilizing mission” by seizing and appropriating territories outside of Europe, postcolonial Islamophobia fights against an interior enemy in the name of the same values. Rejection replaced occupation, but their motivations did not change: in the past, conquest aimed to subjugate and “civilize”; today, expulsion aims to “protect” civilization. This explains the recurring debates on secularism and the Islamic veil, especially in France, that led to Islamophobic laws prohibiting it in public places. This consensual agreement on a neocolonial and discriminatory conception of secularism has significantly contributed to the legitimization of post-fascism in the public sphere.

I pointed out the neoconservative character of post-fascism, but this tendency is shaped by many contradictions and should not be interpreted as a return to Joseph de Maistre.

Emerging from within a consolidated political tradition of liberal democracy and an anthropological model of possessive individualism built by market societies, post-fascism has broken with the fascist ideal-type and, in many cases, claims the legacy of the Enlightenment. In the post-totalitarian age of human rights, this gives it respectability. Classical colonialism had taken place in the name of progress and universalism; this is the tradition with which post-fascism tries to merge. It does not justify its war against Islam with the old and today no longer receivable arguments of doctrinal racialism, rather with the philosophy of Human Rights. Marine Le Pen—who has clearly distanced herself from her father on this issue—does not wish to defend exclusively the native French against immigrants; she wishes to defend also women against Islamic obscurantism. Homophobia and gay-friendly Islamophobia coexist in this changing radical right. In the Netherlands, feminism and the gay rights have been the flags of a violent xenophobic campaign against

immigration and the Muslims, carried out first by Pim Fortuyn and then by his successor Gert Wilders.

Elites

The last significant difference between classical fascism and post-fascism lies in the position of the global elites. In the 1930s, the fear of communism pushed them to accept Hitler, Mussolini and Franco. As several historians have pointed out, such dictators certainly benefited from the many “miscalculations” made by statesmen and the traditional conservative parties, but there is no doubt that without the Russian Revolution and the world depression, in the middle of a collapsing Weimar Republic, Germany’s economic, military and political elites would not have allowed Hitler to take the power. They despised Hitler because of his plebeian origins, his fanaticism and his hysterical style—more than for his racism or anti-Semitism—but they preferred him to Bolshevism and were ready to welcome him as a providential man in front of the threat of a new Spartacist revolution. Today, *toute proportion gardée*, something similar could happen in the American elections. The global elites are neither protectionist nor interested in stopping immigration, and don’t share Trump’s culture or style, but unlike in 2016, when they supported Hillary Clinton, this time they would probably endorse Donald Trump against Bernie Sanders.

In Europe, the situation is different. There, the interests of the economic elites are much better represented by the European Union than by the radical right. The latter could become a credible interlocutor and a potential leader only in the case of a collapse of the euro that would push the continent into a situation of chaos and instability. Unfortunately, we cannot exclude such a possibility. The European Union elites remind the “sleepwalkers” at the edge of 1914, the holders of the “European concert” who went to the catastrophe completely unaware of what was happening.

During the inter-war years, the liberal democracies looked at the rise of fascism with an ambiguous attitude made of a mix of incomprehension and complacency, whose major expressions were the non-intervention of France and the UK during the Spanish Civil War and their concessions to Hitler at the Munich Conference in 1938. A similar ambiguity seems to be repeating itself today, with many episodes of collusion between the radical right and the traditional right in several countries from Southern and Central Europe. In the European Parliament, the followers of Victor Orban are allied with those of Angela Merkel¹, and in Thuringia, just a few days ago, the CDU and AfD allied against the left before being disavowed by Merkel herself. These episodes confirm that post-fascism is an unstable constellation and may change in the future, but until now the radical right has grounded its legitimacy in its rejection of neoliberalism. The global elites are cosmopolitan; they embody a form of economically and culturally post-national universalism that, as Wolfgang Streck pertinently

points out, has engendered, by reaction, “a form of anti-elitist nationalism from below.” Post-fascism was able to give a political expression to this fearful resentment.

The roots of today’s radical right-wing movements are old, but their rise was fueled by the economic crisis that has dramatically revealed the symbiotic relationship between political elites and financial elites. Since the 1990s, i.e. since the end of the Cold War, both left and right government forces have embraced neoliberalism as a kind of *pensée unique*. This is the main premise of the spectacular increase of the far right, which has finally appeared as an alternative. Thus, I fear that the defense of the establishment is not the answer to post-fascism, just as the elites of the 1930s were unable to stop the rise of fascism. The radical right, one could say, is the undemocratic answer to the process of “undoing democracy” carried out by neoliberal reason. In a famous aphorism of 1939, Max Horkheimer wrote that “If you don’t want to talk about capitalism, then you should be silent about fascism.” Today, one could say: “If you don’t wish to talk about neoliberalism, you should be silent about post-fascism.”

Populism

Considering the significant differences between historical fascism and its epigones which I mentioned above, some scholars suggest to depict the latter as populists. Populism, they argue, is a new correlation of charismatic leadership, political authoritarianism, rejection of pluralism, ethnic nationalism, mythical views of sovereignty, xenophobia and racism often translated into discriminatory laws. We can agree with this definition. In the public discourse, however, populism is too often a source of confusion and misunderstandings. Today, it is weaponized by the elites themselves as a kind of “immunizing tool.” Since there is no alternative to neoliberal reason, all its critics are automatically stigmatized as populists. In a similar way, during the Cold War the term totalitarianism was used in order to “immunize” the so-called “free world:” communism was interchangeable with fascism and all critics of market society and liberal democracy were totalitarian enemies.

If populism is a rhetorical dispositive that consists in opposing the virtues embodied by a mythical “people” to the corrupted elites, there is no doubt that most contemporary far right movements are populist. Such a definition, however, simply describes their political style, without grasping their content. And this content can be very different. In Latin America, for instance, there is a long history of left-wing populism that used demagoguery and often—particularly in recent times—took authoritarian features, but its goal was primarily to include the lower classes into the social and political system by assuring them some fundamental rights. In Western Europe, right-wing populism is xenophobic, racist, and claims policies of exclusion. Since the nineteenth century, we have experienced a Russian and an

American populism, a great variety of Latin-American populisms, a right-wing and a left-wing populism. Now, if populism means that Donald Trump is interchangeable with Bernie Sanders, Podemos with Vox, Marine Le Pen with Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and Evo Morales with Jair Bolsonaro, I think it becomes a useless concept. Populism is a chameleonic word: when the adjective is transformed into a substantive, its heuristic value dramatically drops. Very often, populism is a word that reveals the contempt for the people by those using it in order to disqualify their adversaries. This is why I think that post-fascism is a more pertinent definition.

In conclusion, considering fascism as a trans-historical concept does not mean to posit its eternal character or envisage its repetition. In the twenty-first century, it cannot appear but under a new guise and, as I indicated at the beginning of my talk, we probably will need new words to depict it. If fascism is trans-historical, it is first of all because it is much more than a simple historiographical object. It is also a realm of memory and it is as such that it affects our present and our political imagination. Commemorating the Holocaust is useless if it does not help us to struggle against the racism of the present. Studying fascism would be similarly pointless if it does not instill into us the consciousness that democracies are fragile conquests, that sometimes they implode, and that the history of the twentieth century is also the history of their disintegration.

¹ This text was written before the European elections and within a different setup of governmental power, that is a different political conjuncture than that of today.

USA, Israel, France: How Democratic Institutions Become Trojan Horses for the Far Right

Sophie Wahnich

Abstract: What now seems to be recurring, albeit with some novel aspects, is that the rise in anti-democratic extremism has found an ideal home at the very heart of the institutions and governments of these so-called democracies: United States, France, Israel. It is from within these democracies that the aforementioned gains are first being gradually eroded before disappearing entirely (without meeting almost any resistance), in a war of positions that has turned social movements into an antiquated and pointless maneuver war.

The United States, Israel and France are three emblematic examples of how democratic institutions can be subverted by certain forms of corruption or what will here be called counter-hegemony. The institutions that claim to guarantee freedom and public liberties are attacked head-on by supposedly democratic governments.

Keywords: democracy, hegemony, counterhegemony, far right, war

Endgame counter-hegemony

1. The form of politics made up of fake news, manipulations of all kinds, untimely reversals and all-out manipulation of the symbolic has spread like wildfire, and is now visible all over the planet. But is there really a new far right, or are we sadly at the end of a process of anti-political, anti-enlightenment and fundamentally anti-democratic takeover? A process in which «the West» is the watchword, capable of rejecting all ethics, all morality, but also all knowledge, on the pretext of ultimately saving a supposed white Western civilisation in its mythically original historical location. Europe, white America, the Judeo-Christian cradle.

This watchword ‘the West’, or Western civilisation, circulates from Trump’s America to Macron’s France, not to mention Netanyahu’s Israel. Of course, each place uses the term differently, but what is constant in all cases is a way of shattering the boundary between democracy and anti-democracy, making the notion not just of democracy but of the extreme right more confused each time.

2. After all, democracy did not originate in France, the United States and Israel, despite them being emblematic places where democracy developed successively over the course of revolutions, gains in civil rights, women’s rights and gay rights, gains in foreigners’ rights, public freedoms and social rights, demands for equality for all citizens and social demands to combat poverty. What now seems to be recurring, albeit with some novel aspects, is that this rise in anti-democratic extremism has found an ideal home at the very heart of the institutions and governments of these so-called democracies. It is from within these so-called democracies

that the aforementioned gains are first being gradually eroded before disappearing entirely (without meeting almost any resistance), in a war of positions that has turned social movements into an antiquated and pointless maneuver war.

3. Gramsci takes the distinction between maneuver warfare and war of position from Clausewitz. If the Russian revolution could be said to be a maneuver war in the fact that it seized the state apparatus, Gramsci imagined that the revolution in countries like Italy would be a war of position, by snatching the support of the minds alienated from their own interests from the bourgeoisie. If the first model of rupture is that of insurrection, the second represents a kind of water-lily revolution in which one plant ends up invading the whole landscape, altering its ecology. In the second model, the confrontation with the state is only the final part of a now molecular strategy of political conflict in which businesses, the press, religious organisations, schools, the arts and so on must be culturally colonised. Gramsci was thus putting the superstructures, ideology and praxis that enabled the bourgeoisie to shift the balance of power and gain influence over the humble to new use, disalienating the oppressed almost in spite of themselves, by ultimately asserting one form of influence against another. Gramsci also speaks of a «passive revolution», underlining the ambivalence of this type of political process. It's about colonising minds.

4. His words did not fall on deaf ears. In 1969 the intellectuals of the new French right, including Alain de Benoist, created the GRECE, the «Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne». Their aim was to oppose the mixture of Judeo-Christian culture and Marxist ideology in the French intellectual and academic world. They make no secret of the fact that they learned from Gramsci when he said that violence is not necessary to lead and win a revolution. The real challenge is to transform people's consciences through a dialectic of consent and coercion. GRECE regularly states that it wants to «fight more with ideas and astuteness than with force». As is the case in Gramsci, hegemony will be produced by intellectual workers who have the specific task of dismantling the values of the society they want to radically transform. In that sense, GRECE is competing with Marxism for a cultural renaissance of the West. There will be a pagan and a Christian version of the West. On the pagan side, a culture of pure Aryan blood. On the Christian side, a different, imaginary blood, a mixed blood that would extend the empire of the mystique of Christ while at the same time making the idea of non-exogamous marriages unbearable. As for same-sex marriages, they are not even conceivable within this purview, since they are not destined to reproduce.

5. The United States, Israel and France are three emblematic examples of how democratic institutions can be subverted by certain forms of corruption or what will here be called counter-hegemony. The institutions that claim to guarantee freedom and public liberties are attacked head-on by supposedly democratic governments.

The conquest of first-rate institutional powers

6. In the United States, the election of Donald Trump in 2016 initially left spectators stunned and incredulous as an orange-haired buffoon staged a takeover first of the Republican Party and then the American presidency. But tensions really rise once he managed to tip the balance of the Supreme Court. When the institution that is supposed to guarantee American democracy is itself in danger of adopting white supremacist positions, American democracy is in danger.

7. The Supreme Court has nine judges, each of whom was appointed for life by a President of the United States, and then received the approval of the Senate. Traditionally, US presidents appoint political figures or legal professionals whose political and ideological positions they share. Donald Trump appointed three of these judges, and installed a Supreme Court that is on the right and extreme right of the political spectrum. That is to say that six of the nine judges appointed for life are now from his Republican camp.

8. But this could not have happened without a prior institutional transformation, for while the President nominates, the Senate must confirm or reject this nomination. In 2017, Donald Trump's Republican Party, which has a majority (52 seats out of 100) in the Senate, voted to lower the threshold needed for a confirmation from 60 to 51 votes, in order to prevent the Democrats from blocking the nomination of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court. The shift to a simple majority vote means that the President is no longer obliged to appoint judges who are capable of uniting people across party lines.

Each judge appointed to this institution which is key for the political life of the United States can transform the face of American society with regard to major issues.

9. The right to abortion has been directly attacked. As of 24 June 2022, abortion is no longer a federal right, instead it is up to each individual state to decide to ban or authorise abortion. This is a victory for the religious right, which is hostile to the 1973 Roe ruling which legalised abortion for all American women wishing to have an abortion. «It's God's decision», declared Donald Trump in the face of this historic step backwards for

women's rights. «God» for fifty years of methodical struggle waged by the religious right. The right to same-sex marriage and even contraception are also now on the chopping block.

10. On another front, on 30 June 2022, the Supreme Court limited the power of the federal government to act against climate change. The six conservative justices stripped the Environmental Protection Agency of the power to issue generalized rules to regulate emissions from coal-fired power plants. «The Court has stripped the Environmental Protection Agency of the power Congress gave it to respond to the 'most pressing problem of our time'», according to magistrate Elena Kagan. Bearing in mind that the six hottest years on record have been in the last decade, we can legitimately conclude that, rather than protecting democracy, the Supreme Court has opted to protect the interests of the coal industry. In a supposed populist move, they have opted to keep electricity prices low at the risk of a de facto policy of death. Viva la muerte? Except when you're fighting for abortion and contraception, or when you're supposedly fighting for «respect for life and privacy» and the constitution...

11. So we can see how certain civil liberties are ended as the result of a process of cultural counter-hegemony. Examples of this include various forms of supremacism against the universalist left, the religious right taking action against people's sovereignty over their own body and sexuality, and climate scepticism against scientific facts. Then the process is exacerbated at an institutional level : reducing the Senate's veto rights, appointing increasingly extremist judges to the Supreme Court, and extremist decisions made by the Supreme Court.

12. Let's move on to Israel. The recent judicial reform sought by Netanyahu's government is also aimed at making authoritarian government decisions absolute. The government's aim is to bypass any judicial review of its own decisions. There are several stages in this process. In 2021, the Prime Minister was on trial for fraud, breach of trust and corruption involving wealthy associates who had invested in the media. In November 2022, he invited the most extreme religious politicians into his camp in a bid to secure a majority in the fifth elections in four years. This coalition wants to place strict limitations on the powers of the Israeli Supreme Court, the last line of defence for the independence of the judiciary in the face of a Parliament that openly advocates hatred and sexism, and wants to turn a chauvinist religion into the new pillar of Israeli society. A number of draft laws have been put forward to push through a radically anti-democratic reform. This would do away with the independence of the only institutional counterweight to the elected majority, which acts as a Supreme Court and an administrative, civil and criminal court of appeal.

13. The first law concerns the appointment of the fifteen members of the Supreme Court. Currently, these are chosen by a group of judges, deputies and lawyers under the supervision of the Minister of Justice. Under the new law, a second minister and two citizens would replace the lawyers, giving the government a majority of five votes out of nine. The second law aims to reduce the Supreme Court's permission to invalidate or amend laws which are contrary to the country's constitutional laws. The lawyer leading the government's fight is Simcha Rothman, of the Religious Zionist Party, a Jewish supremacist who defends settlers in the West Bank. The transformation of the judiciary will not only make it impossible to dismantle settlements which have been occupied in the Palestinian territories since 1967, but will authorise the outright annexation of the West Bank, or what people like Rothman call the «Judea and Samaria Area».

14. The moderate, let's say centre-left mayor of Tel Aviv, Ron Huldai, warned on 13 February 2023 that «dictatorships do not return to democracy, except in a bloodbath». President Isaac Herzog called for the reform to be put on hold, in order to first achieve a «broad consensus». In fact, week after week, Israeli society resisted the reform in demonstration after demonstration. The President – a cautious man of the left – is so aware of the dangers that he has gone beyond his ceremonial duties, so aware is he of the danger: «I have the feeling - we all feel it - that we are very close to a collision, perhaps even a violent one. Both sides must understand that if only one side wins - whichever side that may be - we will all lose.» In an article translated into several languages, two leading figures in the Israeli army, Roy Riftin (retired Brigadier General) and Joab Rosenberg (retired Colonel), published an article titled «The threat to Israel originates from its very government» (13 April 2023 in *Le Monde*). According to them, «Israel's government is threatening to institutionalize intolerance and smother democracy by passing laws that current and former attorneys general describe as effectively a self-coup, with the gravest of consequences for Israel's national security and the regional stability.» In hindishgt, we know how right they were to issue such a warning. National security was undermined as never before on 7 October 2023.

15. France might appear to be in a different category: didn't it just constitutionalize the right to abortion? Didn't its Constitutional Council recently reject a large part of Darmanin's law on immigration? To concede this would be to remain blind to what are essentially subterfuges. The devil is in the details, and as with the purloined letter, all you have to do is look.

16. Let's start with some interesting details. The former French Minister for Education has her children in a private Catholic school that does not respect the laws of the Republic. This school is sexist, as it opposes the right to free sexuality and abortion. Considering this last detail,

can it really be insignificant that she was entrusted with this post? Gerald Darmanin, the current Minister of the Interior, was educated in traditionalist Catholic schools, whose fundamentalist, sexist and homophobic positions he readily adopts. Darmanin has a history with figures like Christian Vanneste on the fringes of the right and extreme right. In 2008, he contributed to the far-right monthly *Politique Magazine*, the press organ of the Action française royalist party, which is inspired by Charles Maurras and linked to the Restauration nationale movement. More recently, in December 2022, during a debate on the immigration reform bill, he quoted the monarchist historian Jacques Bainville, a benchmark figure for the far right. Of course, l'Action française distanced itself from these remarks, which were considered to be highly confusing. But confusion is the hallmark of a Trojan horse. Finally, senior civil serviceman Fabrice Leggeri, a 55-year-old senior French civil servant, and a graduate of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, who headed Frontex (the European Union's border control agency) from 2015 to 2022, resigned following a disciplinary investigation. He has recently announced that he is joining the Rassemblement National (RN) for the European elections in June 2024. He will be third on Jordan Bardella's list. According to him, the RN has a concrete plan for combating the flood of migrants, which the European Commission and the Eurocrats do not see as a problem, but rather as a project.

17. So the dividing line between the traditionalist positions of the French far right and the state is by no means airtight. But beyond that, the President himself is fuelling the confusion in the minds of those ready to give themselves over to RN. Elisabeth Borne, his Prime Minister, said of Marine Le Pen: «I don't think we should trivialise her ideas; her ideas are always the same. So now the Rassemblement National is putting on a show, but I still think it's a dangerous ideology (...) inspired by Philippe Pétain, head of the Vichy regime who collaborated with Nazi Germany». Faced with this historical reminder, Macron replied «You won't succeed in making millions of French people who voted for the far right believe that they are fascists.» It is unwise to choose moral arguments that also happen to be historical arguments. What is the moral of history? According to President Macron, this type of argument is outdated. We need to respond to the RN by addressing the country's challenges without lies or denial.

18. It is in the name of the absence of denial that the President is defending the Asylum and Immigration Act, which toughens legislation on foreigners. After the impact of Le Pen on the mind, we now see the impact her politics has had on the law. For example, work permits will be restricted to unfilled job vacancies, and only to high-pressure occupations in sectors struggling to recruit, as defined on a regional basis. But even

more symbolic, Gérard Darmanin is in favour of the restrictions on l'Aide Médicale d'Etat (AME, or Government Medical Aid, which helps migrants get access to health care) put forward by the right and the far right. In January 2021, Marine Le Pen proposed replacing it with emergency vital aid, because according to her "it sometimes happens that an illegal immigrant is treated better than a French person, who pays contributions and is not reimbursed in full". In reality, the AME is only granted to illegal immigrants who earn less than €810 per month for a single person, just like the complementary health insurance scheme for French citizens. Health Minister Aurélien Rousseau warns: "This is a major public health issue. The aim of the AME, and of health care coverage, is to intervene before the situation becomes too serious, particularly for all infectious diseases. Tuberculosis, hepatitis, we're going to spread diseases. Spain, which tried this reform, later retracted it». Three thousand healthcare workers have called for the AME to be defended. Yet this was of no avail, as it went against the wishes of a large part of the Macronist troops, who are not backing down. The right to asylum itself is becoming increasingly complex.

19. In fact, in this country, it is often said that it is now time to try a de-diabolised Rassemblement National (RN), since there is no longer any morality which can intervene to pass judgement on it. After all, in the 2022 legislative elections, there was no anti-RN Republican front. Nor was there any morality. It is possible to send back to back LFI and the RN as two extremes where in 2017, LFI was declared protest ... In 2017, E. Macron had said «Not taking a position de facto helps Madame Le Pen». In 2022, he defended a case-by-case approach. At the time, all left-wing leaders criticized the majority for not taking a clear enough stand against the far right. As a result, 89 RN MPs were elected to the National Assembly, making it the largest opposition group. On 29 June 2022, two MPs were elected to prestigious posts in the Palais-Bourbon: Vice-President of the National Assembly. This election, which was won by an absolute majority in the first round of voting, included votes from the presidential camp. As a direct consequence of the massive influx of MPs from Marine Le Pen's party, this new historic development is not creating any unrest, regrets or remorse in the camp of the presidential majority formed by Renaissance, MoDem (Democratic Movement) and Horizons.

20. With the European deadline approaching, it must be admitted that re-diabolisation is going well. But despite the new law, the RN is defending the same economic policy as the majority, and is hardly making any social promises, but instead merely raising the spectre of immigration. There's nothing new in the show, the guignol is predictable, and the role-playing of the objective partners equally so.

A dialectic of consent and coercion

21. In his essay “Critique of Violence”, Walter Benjamin first distinguishes between two types of violence: law-founding violence (legislative power) and law-preserving violence (executive power). Within this conservative form of violence, he makes a further distinction between executive or legal violence, which has no new purpose, and police violence. The essence of the latter is described as ignoble because it both conserves and creates law (with the right of disposition and ordinance), and juxtaposes executive and legislative power, which makes police power discretionary. Only virtue can serve as a limit to the police. On 26 Germinal year II, Saint-Just opposed the profession of henchman to the virtuous police officer, since only virtue can limit this discretionary power, in which law can become confused with fact. «The police was founded on false principles. It was thought to be a job for henchmen: not at all; nothing is further from severity than harshness, nothing closer to fright than anger. The police have walked a fine line between these two extremes.”

22. Today, police everywhere are witnessing a situation in which democracy is under attack by the very people who are supposed to protect it. Upholding public order requires both that people are able to live in relative safety as well as to safely express democratic conflictuality, thus protecting public freedoms.

23. In France, the police, who have won over the RN in a startling manner, are undermining their democratic function without being sanctioned. While this is not entirely new, it has become increasingly the case ever since the executive has been able to bypass a general assembly vote and initiate a state of emergency, thereby allowing the police to act without the scrutiny of a judge. The slogan “Police everywhere, justice nowhere” is finding more and more backing whether during the demonstrations against the Loi Travail, the Gilet Jaunes, or in the climate movement. The violence against the demonstrators in the Gilets Jaunes reached such extremes that doctors issued a statement of concern, as did Michèle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. She told the Human Rights Council in Geneva that “the demonstrators” were calling for a respectful dialogue and genuine reforms. And yet, in several cases, they were being met with violence and excessive uses of force, arbitrary detentions, torture and even, according to some reports, extrajudicial executions: “we encourage the French government to continue the dialogue and urgently call for a thorough investigation into all reported cases of excessive use of force”.

24. In Israel, the movement against Netanyahu's judicial reform has taken the form of recurring demonstrations against what is seen as a decision that could put an end to the democratic nature of the Israeli political system. In July 2023, the police were filmed violently beating demonstrators and photos with the names of the police officers were distributed by students denouncing these practices. Instead of prosecuting the police officers, the students were prosecuted for "insulting civil servants", "defamation" and "inciting violence", and branded as anarchists. The Minister for National Security, Itamar Ben Gvir, one of the members of the government from the extreme religious right, declared his full support for the police officers, who he described as "heroes", while opening a judicial investigation into one of them in order to show his support. Since coming to power, the same government has sought to create a national guard that is free from legal constraints and obeys only elected representatives. There is an ongoing conflict between a national police chief who asserts that the police must only obey the law, and this Minister of Internal Security – who is responsible for the border police and the police and is therefore the hierarchical superior of the previous minister – who claims that in a democracy, the police must only obey elected representatives. In this case, the government would have absolute power, being bound neither by the reform of the justice system nor the police.

25. In the United States, the murder of African-American George Floyd on 25 May 2020 in Minneapolis has become the emblem of police violence. In this city, black people are 8.7 times more likely to be arrested for minor offences and account for 60% of those killed by the police between 2000 and 2018. And yet, according to a Reuters study of 3,000 complaints of misconduct against Minneapolis police between 2012 and 2020, 9 out of 10 did not result in any disciplinary action. In fact, in Minneapolis, the police do not answer to the city council but to its very right-wing union, the powerful Minneapolis Police Federation (MPF). There is no class warfare within this union, since both senior and junior officers are part of it. While the Democratic mayor bans military training, the MPF pays for this training for its members. Bob Kroll, who has been in charge since 2015, has been the subject of twenty internal investigations and has only been disciplined three times. The same man describes demonstrations against racism and police violence as "terrorist". He supports Donald Trump and appears unassailable. Impunity is thus at the heart of so-called legitimate state violence.

End of story: the imbroglio paves the way for the fall of democracy

26. Georges Balandier analyses imbroglio both as the exercise of cunning in politics and as a mode of intervention in the symbolic order. The imbroglio is an effective strategy which is pursued for its own sake insofar as it makes the facts on which the debates are based disappear. By labelling those who defend democracy as terrorists or anarchists, by making people forget that it is dubious coalitions that allow you to be in power and not a silent majority, and by subverting the institutions that guarantee democracy – the supreme court, parliament, the police – the imbroglio takes hold. Concepts disappear, such as the republican arc in France, while others reappear, such as the legitimacy of killing terrorists. When no one is sure of their reasoning, reality becomes shrouded in a thick fog. It becomes possible to sell off the lives of human beings and the life of the planet by a process of military rearmament and by rolling back all the resolutions taken in the face of the environmental crisis. Viva la muerte?

27. The disappearance of reality as such in an era of post-truth and falsification leads to the very impossibility of making history a reference point and of writing the history of the present, because no one knows where the referent of political discourse lies.

If the art of the historian is to cross-reference sources, will the artificial intelligence that has been promoted in the last few months as the supreme tool for cross-referencing all available data be capable of cross-referencing the true and the false, while distinguishing between them, or will it consider the value of truth to be a sheer multiplicity of occurrences? Will historians remain cops of the referent, or will they become cops of the AI figures?

28. When history becomes impossible to make, it also means that democratic politics is disappearing or has disappeared. Without a sufficient retrospective, it becomes difficult to enlighten citizens who, whatever they think about it, are reduced to rolling the dice when it comes to choosing the next representatives, or to seeing the political arena as a deregulated market where you have to try every product and every way of avoiding the rules.

In the United States, impunity is becoming a founding principle for Trump. He has already announced that if elected, he will pardon himself for his involvement in the assault on the Capitol. In Israel, for Netanyahu, political survival in the face of the justice demanded by a people that is still combative legitimises an alliance with the extreme religious right which is capable of the worst. And in France, who will unravel the murky game of variable-geometry de-demonisation of the RN?

A Return to the New and a Journey to the Old: Looking Backwards, Sideways, and Forwards at the Right from the Left in a World of Mirrors

Benjamin Zachariah

Abstract: An analysis of what constitutes the new far right today involves reflecting on the drifting of what was once the left, via collectivist, culturalist, and communitarian thinking, towards what we might now call a postleft; and on the movement of politics to the right, such that an earlier centre-right formation might look like a very leftist one by today's standards. We need to look a little more closely at the mutual leakages of ideas between what was formerly left and right. The right, historically, has been good at piggybacking on the language of the left; but now, the new far right has been able to return to an old language of fascism and a *völkisch* imagination, in part enabled by a postleft's adoption of antirational politics and a victimhood claim as the basis of legitimation. A reprise of the concerns of fascisms in their 'core' period, when their central had not yet been discredited after the defeats suffered by the iconic fascist powers in 1945, is now possible; 'neo'-fascisms had had to hide this connection, but could return to their older language as the counter-language of the left vanished.

Keywords: new right, far right, postleft; shibbolethics; voluntary Gleichschaltung; fascism; *völkisch* nationalism, Bonapartism, populism

Introduction, c. 2024: Where are We?

At moments of defeat, the Old Left, or the remnants of it that keeps its own company over doleful glasses of cheap beer and acidic wine in greasy bars, return to the iconic moments of defeat that dominate our lives; and inevitably, to the dramatic opening passages of Karl Marx's 18th Brumaire:¹ first as tragedy, then as farce; and then, in descending order, slapstick and limerick, epigram, epithet, and pun. But the keystone of the archway of these strange discussions without external support is of course repetition. And this is part of a series of questions before us: how new is the New Right? Does the New Right see itself as, call itself, or identify with, that term? Is Far Right a better one, and does it matter that neither this, nor 'neo-fascist', are actor-centric categories? Are we, the pretend-remnants of an Old Left that hasn't the language to speak to a new-new 'left' that has abandoned both the old and the new left, the best-placed to make any of these judgements? How many of us actually exist, outside of the six people in a bar? If we are to be denied the smug satisfaction of self-pity, and rise above it to see why we are sitting here today thinking about the New Right, what is to be done, and who is to do it, we might need a few historical reflections to orient ourselves.

How does the new far right relate to older far rights? Does the collapse of all plausible left positions and alternatives after the end of the Cold War owe anything to the attacks of an older right, or bear some responsibility in the growth of a new right? (To the latter part of this question, we can emphatically answer 'yes'; and this essay is largely

concerned with the ‘how’ part of that question.) Can we use the ‘f’ word to describe these new rights: are we in a new age of neo-fascism, or do we see a return to old fascism, admittedly with variations and disguises? How internationalist, or national, are these new rights? Do they collaborate? To what extent does this have to do with democracy, or with populism? Is any of this facilitated by new media in a new age? Do they have new mythologies of history, or mythologies that they call history, and do they have a vision of the future? All these questions seem a bit slippery when we’re told that left and right make no sense in a post-ideological age, where alliances are affective and allusive, and in a moral world where vegan extremists in Europe see affinities in the allegedly superior culturally-vegetarian population of India, unable to read the upper-caste exclusionary markers of the claim to purity contained in Brahmanical dietetics.

How would we place our theoretical vegan on a spectrum of left to right? What this essay attempts to do is to look at manifestations of far-right or new far-right politics from the perspective of left attempts to understand far-right formations; the confusions and crossovers this entails; and contemporary manifestations of far-right formations. Simultaneously, of course, we are looking at a series of self-definitions or subjectivities of and from the left, some more and some less self-conscious. This is a clumsy approximation in both its aspects: Pierre Bourdieu once reminded us that the field of cultural production is both ‘a series of positions’ and ‘a series of position-takings’ at one and the same time, in a reciprocal and mutual acknowledgement;² and Werner Heisenberg pointed out that it was impossible to track the velocity of a particle and to ascertain its position at the same time (his ‘uncertainty principle’).³ Both point to a situation in which a left analysis of the right involves a good deal of self-reflection on the shifting meanings of what it is to be on the left; and so it shall be with this essay.

Drifting Parameters

This much we know, and we wouldn’t have had to leave our barstools to find out: ‘right’ makes more sense terminologically at the moment than ‘left’. Instead of a left, we are witnessing instead a drift away from what was once the left, via collectivist, culturalist, and communitarian thinking, through identitarianism, to ‘woke’, all of which bears little resemblance to anything we’d recognize as ‘left’; let us call them, for the purposes of this set of arguments, the postleft.⁴ And increasingly, it is easy to make fun of or discredit what passes as the left, and still, to some extent, calls itself that name: every ridiculous act of a group of people without a movement but with increasingly radical and impossible emotive slogans can be equated by their detractors with ‘the evils of communism’ and used to demonstrate that at the very least, it is now conservatives who are on the side of reason.

The ‘right’, or at least those starting from the conservative end of the spectrum (the left of the right) identifies itself as opposing the left, which

in turn is identified as those with affective, irrational, and ‘woke’ positions. It is a claim of a centre-right that it has more sensible and practicable political positions than anyone on the left, and for the first time in my lifetime, this doesn’t look as far-fetched. And they claim this even as the entire political spectrum moves to the right: The United States’ Democratic Party, the most diluted version of anything that has, relatively speaking, been called ‘left’ (of an admittedly right-wing system: Gore Vidal called it a system of one party with two right wings)⁵ has not had a plausible candidate for the Presidency in living memory who has looked even mildly progressive since Michael Dukakis in 1988. That’s a matter of political preferences, for sure: Walter Mondale and Geraldine Ferraro’s campaign for 1984 might count as progressive because of Ferraro’s gender, and Mondale’s centrism might look in retrospect to be quite left of the current Democratic consensus on who can be a plausible candidate, but even the arch-Republican Ronald Reagan would now be to the left of the Democratic Party’s self-proclaimed mainstream. And the fact that those of us who (once upon a time?) identified as Left are rummaging in the dustbin of history for these examples demonstrates the extent of the problem.

But that’s not what we mean by ‘the new right’. This has meant more or less everything from economic neoliberalism of a Ronald Reagan-Margaret Thatcher-Milton Friedman variety, post-Cold War conservatism, late anticommunism, political anti-liberalism, anti-immigrant xenophobia, or various other populist positions, with or without popular movements to go with them. It is the latter part of this spectrum, from political anti-liberalism onwards, that has recently become a concern, more accurately now referred to as the far right, and whose existence is of concern to this essay in particular. Here there is a problem of populism and the muddling of political registers. Especially with the somersaults and affective antics of the artistes once known as the left, one does not quite know how to place political tendencies. In a particular case like Israel/Palestine, it’s hard to know whether support for a frankly murderous organization, opposition to the collective punishment and massacres of an entire population, two-state solutions of various description, or the ethnic cleansing of Jews, is the aim of the multitude; and which of these, based on their forms of reasoning, should be considered a left or right position. In the absence of such clarity, it is also hard to know how to classify those demonstrating (as a movement? a coalition of tendencies?). This confusing scenario provides a welcome gift both to conservatives and neo-fascists, in allowing them to depict the activists involved as ‘left’ or ‘communist’, with the additional claim, sometimes true, that (sections of the) left have historically had anti-Semitic tendencies. The corollary drawn by conservatives is from the famous ‘horseshoe theory’ of politics: an extreme right and an extreme left end up reasonably close to each other.

The corollary drawn by a far right is more interesting: in Germany, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) can channel a not-entirely-

unfounded fear of radical Islamist mobilization, various frankly anti-Muslim sentiments, a defence of *Leitkultur*, the dominant culture of the true nation (though the term is borrowed from the perfectly legitimate conservatives, the Christian Democrats and the Christian Socialists), the usual demographic panics of a majority with a fear of becoming a minority, and diminishing material prosperity, and combine it with a German language of legitimacy that centres on the protection of its Jewish minority, its responsibility to the state of Israel, and the allegedly 'Judaean-Christian roots' of German culture.⁶ Sooner or later, its opponents argue, or its instrumental and provisional supporters fear, the AfD and its associated demos will turn on the Judaean parts; but for now, its primary generic enemy being Muslims can provide temporary relief. Its relationship to formal democracy is complicated: supposedly rooted in the demos ('*wir sind das Volk*', as the East German demonstrations running up to 1989 proclaimed), its exclusionary logic vis-à-vis 'outsiders' ('*wir sind ein Volk*', shortly afterwards) becomes quickly clear, even if its commitment to formal elections is maintained. A populist right uses democratic means to attempt to come to power; whether it is always attempting to use democracy to destroy democracy, or needs formal democracy to establish strength of numbers, might vary from case to case. Whether the new right is a movement, or whether it relies on picking up support from disaffected people feeling abandoned by more traditional political party-positions is an additional question. This became evident in the closeness of the 'Querdenker' to one another, mobilised during the Covid pandemic: comprising a strange conglomerate of environmentalists, vegans with bodily purity fears, vaccine conspiracy theorists, right-wingers, and former Antifa hippies, and loosely organised by right-wing and frankly neo-Nazi groups whose claims to being anti-statist have not been tested yet. The conglomerate was symptomatically embodied in the celebrity chef who became jocularly known as 'Attila the Vegan', who was more of a decoy than a figure actually symbolizing leadership of a 'movement'.⁷

Trying to work out a clear genealogy of these formations, whether we call them fascist, or neo-fascist, or not, is complicated. The trouble with fascism as a term is that it's no longer a self-description, just like 'the new right' or 'the far right': but those we call fascist or the new right or the far right are quite likely to call their *opponents* 'fascist' in return, or as a pre-emptive strike: they *know* it is a discreditable term for a discredited movement. In an age of self-identifiers as legitimation, that's not very useful. In what follows, I'd like to examine the dynamics of drawing upon past and future that enable neo-fascism to journey to the old, and return, renewed, to the new. But in order to do so, we shall need to look at drifting lefts and rights from the core period of fascism to the present day, and from an old and new left to a postleft that has fallen off the edge of the world, or has dropped off one end of the Mercator Projection, and begins to show its face on the other side.

If left and right are to be seen as meaningful relational categories, we need to look a little more closely at the mutual leakages: after all, victimhood claims, to take one theme associated with the postleft, have been made on behalf of the Germans as a whole by National Socialists, of the 'white working classes' by Trumpists, and of people of colour, indigenous peoples, all the states of the 'Global South', women, or various non-normative sexual preferences or self-identifications, by the postleft; and of course this does not begin to exhaust the possibilities of plausible victimhood narratives. One would be hard-pressed to make practical alliances that work across all these victimhood categories, even with the invocation of now-ubiquitous 'intersectionality' claims.⁸ And so many post-left positions are merely reactive: we didn't, for instance, know what 'Critical Race Theory' really was, but because 'the right' was against it, the postleft had to endorse it, write university syllabi for it, and now we have a new beast.⁹ For the postleft, 'we' are what 'they' are not, but it is more than possible that there are shared languages at play. But now for something completely different. Or not.

(Neo-)Fascisms Historical and Contemporary

Does the far right of today's world merit the use of the 'f' word? Does it claim that genealogy, or does it have that genealogy thrust upon it? The study of individual (neo)-fascisms within their own self-proclaimed territories has its limitations because of their propensity to work well with 'outsiders', and of the propensity of outsiders to work well with them.¹⁰ We need a quick, if preliminary, definitional digression here: what are we willing to call fascism, and is a new right inclined towards fascism? We can see a continuum from an ethnocentric or *völkisch* nationalism to fascism(s), and a tendency to draw upon ideas (sometimes in disguise) from fascism's 'core period', from after the First to the end of the Second World War; but the ideas, as individual particles, had existed since the late nineteenth century at least, finding a conjunctural moment after the Great War in which to realise themselves collectively as fascism: these ideas formed the abstract bundle that made up the remodelled Roman fasces.

Two sets of distinctions thereby become important: First, that between fascism *in search of* state power, at the stage of mobilization, ideological proselytization, and the building of a movement; and fascism *in possession of* state power,¹¹ at which point it is important not to confuse state capacity with fascism. This, in the second iteration (and in all subsequent iterations), is often missed, given that we have so long studied fascism's most destructive phases, in possession of state power, and its most successful points of history: Auschwitz, not a beer-hall putsch. The second set of distinctions concerns fascisms observed in their 'core' period, at which point their central tenets were in the process of being created and stabilised, and had not yet been as widely discredited as they had been after the defeats suffered by the iconic fascist powers in 1945;

and fascisms after their core period, which made them 'neo'-fascisms.

Here, the Indian example can be instructive, because its fascism had never been properly discredited as fascism, though its politics has been seen as sectarian, occasionally violent (its most successful moment was the murder of Mohandas Gandhi in 1948), and 'communal', which in Indian-English usage is a divisive and not a mutually binding category: it cleaves people from people, rather than cleaving people to people. The Hindu fascist paramilitary, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), now runs a government, a huge network of schools, and is in control of extra-statist violence. Founded in 1924, the RSS has had a nearly-uninterrupted existence for a hundred years.¹² Its political wing, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has been in power first from 1998 to 2004, and then again from 2014 to the present. It has only recently become relatively common for journalists, activists, and academics to refer to the cluster of organisations around the RSS, the *Sangh Parivar* (literally, the 'family' of the Sangh), as 'fascist', though it was common enough to refer to them by that name before 1945, or for the RSS or its political affiliates to affiliate themselves to fascism or National Socialism before 1939, and in some cases even between 1939 and 1945.¹³ India had also had other fascist ideologies or movements that cannot merely be assimilated to an early history of the *Sangh Parivar*: among 'communities' of Muslims, or Zoroastrians, or in secular manifestations, at home in India, and across the world in alliance with specific fascist states or an implicit international fascist order.¹⁴ But fascisms, like capital, tend towards forming monopolies, with the mutually assimilable fascisms or proto-fascisms being subsumed in the larger whole.

This is a logic that works well in a movement that relies at least implicitly on numbers and intimidation: the majority fascism wipes out minority fascisms. The RSS and its '*parivar*' are now without any fascist or near-fascist competitor. Other neo-fascisms, in other countries, had to follow a longer road, before their older vocabulary, previously discredited, had made the necessary detours and their languages of legitimacy remodelled; and perhaps it eventually became politically legitimate to revive the old vocabulary in order to use it again; or for the modified vocabulary to do the work of the old. India, with its overlap of a fascist and 'spiritual' imaginary, could become a hideout and recovery resort for the regrouping of fascists (the international side of which was represented by the Greek fascist who took the name Savitri Devi and her young fascist followers into the 1960s).¹⁵

Proto- or quasi-fascist regimes, or hybrid state formations that took advantage of the fascist and wartime expansion of the state's interventionist role in far more things than before the Depression and did not push back to a pre-war position, also complicate the picture of what constitutes a fascist regime, with Portugal and Spain managing to hide in the Cold War as benign fascist dictatorships to be tolerated by

the Western Bloc in their own interests, like Greece; and with Peron and Peronists able to be adopted, in their own times and after, as fascist-influenced, but with progressive or 'left' components.

We often lack the analytic tools to study these trajectories, perhaps due to the tension among legalistic, historical (and therefore often retrospective), and activist antifascist approaches to defining fascism. Legalistic delimitations of fascism emerged in the context of the end of the Second World War, where a central concern was to find grounds to prosecute members of fascist regimes. But a narrowly legal set of definitions tends to be in conflict with contemporary antifascists' understandings of and debates about the nature of fascism, which sought to understand the appeal of fascist ideas and their ability to generate mass movements.¹⁶ Antifascists were therefore interested in a *continuum* rather than a crucial *dividing line* separating fascists from non-fascists. Professional historians have also tended to restrict their definitions of fascism because of fears of 'concept inflation'.¹⁷ This often accompanies the trend towards pinning fascism down as a phenomenon 'in its own times',¹⁸ which then requires the prefix 'neo-' for later versions.¹⁹ Given that public debates were internationally connected, and every great power was watched by other great powers and lesser powers, and Europe's colonies, dependences, or areas of informal imperialism watched their own and rival or aspiring metropolises in the age of competing empires and imperialisms, fascism 'outside Europe'²⁰ and inside it is a distinction that cannot make sense. This view produces a lazy relativism or moral comparison of colonialism and fascism that produces what we might call a 'concept deflation'.

Fascists themselves sought to communicate and work with each other,²¹ through active proselytization by fascists or their sympathizers, or through particular contacts – The family of ideas that coalesced into fascism at the conjunctural moment of the 1920s had been around for some time, at least since the latter part of the nineteenth century,²² and contemporary observers in the heyday of fascism had already been able to point out that the division of human beings into *Herrenvolk* and *Untermenschen* (or equivalent hierarchical ideas) had not needed the Italian Fascists or the German National Socialists: in India, for instance, ideas of caste, moral duty, and destiny had been adequate to this task,²³ mapped onto ideas of a hierarchy and evolution of races provided by the Theosophists, who were as much a late imperial Russian or an Austrian as a North American or Indian phenomenon.²⁴

Fascism was a family of ideas, with common (though often disavowed) roots, intellectual underpinnings, styles and organisations of movements, and sometimes even a strong overlap of personnel. Fascists and pre-or proto-fascists (the latter terms being less useful or necessary if we think in terms of a continuum) shared world-views and ideas in communication that took place across regional and national boundaries,

somewhat awkwardly, given that fascists claimed the unique genius of their particular nation. They shared much common ground in terms of romantic irrationalism, the concept of the intrinsic inequality of human beings of different types, or the transcendental nature of violence.

A *fascist repertoire* of ideas does not make its appearance all at once, or together (as appears to be implied in the renowned but often static formulation of a 'fascist minimum').²⁵ Different elements of that repertoire can be mobilized at different junctures, in response to a specific political situation. This repertoire tends to include a claim to an organic and primordial nationalism – the idea that the nation is in blood and soil, and everyone who belongs has to share that origin, or at least to defer to those who do, and to submit to being the tolerated outsiders; and it aspires to a controlling statism that disciplines the members of the organic nation to act as, for and in the organic nation (they are a nation, but they had forgotten and need to be carefully taught that lesson). Then again, that nation must be purified and preserved by cleansing it of its impurities (which has implications for those who had expected to be tolerated in exchange for quietism), which presupposes the identification of a generic enemy within. In the service of purifying and preserving this organic nation, a paramilitarist tendency towards national discipline is invoked, simultaneous to inciting a sense of continuous crisis and alarm about the potential decay of the organic nation if discipline and purity is not preserved. The use of political violence is supposed to be purificatory.

As fascist movements develop across the world, lesser movements take on the forms of their more successful cousins, in a 'voluntary *Gleichschaltung*'²⁶ – *Gleichschaltung* was of course the 'synchronisation' or forcible coordination of organisations and institutions in Germany to conform to Nazi ideology, and I use the qualifier 'voluntary' in a deliberate oxymoron. Each fascist movement, however, simultaneously maintains that it is unique and represents the authentic genius of its *Volks*. This disavowed affinity allows for inter-fascist collaboration (a phenomenon that is often more visible in the era of 'neo'-fascism, but is older and more widespread than we think). This phenomenon can distract from the fact that various fascist movements across the world have their own autonomous origins and existence, in some cases with prior and separate worlds that did not require the movement that gave us the generic name to already have come into existence.²⁷ Some of this prior existence, in the form of mobilization or ideas, can be brought to bear on the new situation; and the Indian case, for instance, of looking to the Italian Fascists to learn how to train their paramilitary gangs,²⁸ or the instances of Indians working within institutions that served Nazi ideology,²⁹ might be two contrasting institutional cases that show how mutual borrowings worked, beyond the better-known examples of Nazi borrowings from supposedly Indo-'Aryan' mysticism or symbolism, the best-known being the *Hakenkreuz* or Swastika.³⁰

Völkisch Imaginations

This is an outcome of the common origins of romantic nationalisms in *völkisch* thinking. *Völkisch* is an adjective that indicates a community of blood, soil and race, and is a product of a nineteenth century romantic nationalism, which is implicit and remains embedded in the apparently new positions taken and invoked – a compulsory collective community of organic belonging. The idea of a *Volk* originated in German romanticist imaginings of the German nation. It was anti-rationalist, ethnic, racialised, anti-Semitic, and organicist, and it glorified all things it could claim as Germanic: this, at least, was the notion of *Volk* that prevailed, as the statist, egalitarian, and assimilationist aspirations that also informed some notions of the *Volk* that were not racialized or organicist died out. The extent of *völkisch* commitment to paganism, or to religion at all, is a matter of variations and emphases among its followers.³¹ ‘*Volk*’ and ‘*völkisch*’ translate back into English, both as noun and adjective, rather harmlessly, as ‘folk’; but they have racial connotations in German that they do not necessarily have in English. *Volk* is also a reasonable and literal translation of the English qualifier ‘folk’ as in ‘folk music’, which also has populist potential, and a practical history of populist usage. But *völkisch* is not a concept that is often encountered in the English-speaking world, which has been remarkably resistant to using the categories of romantic nationalist and later National Socialist self-ascriptions to other contexts. This has perpetuated at least a residual German(ic) exceptionalism that has survived critical interventions refuting the *Sonderweg* arguments that claimed a special (and distorted) German national path of political-historical development that inexorably led to Nazism.³² Not all adherents of *völkisch* ideas made their way over to fascism(s); and not all *völkisch* nationalists could articulate the difference between a nationalism of civic belonging and of ethnic chauvinism in a coherent manner.

Here, issues begin to get a little more muddy, as time goes by. Perhaps as a result of the primarily English-language (and US and North American) origins of many of their political issues, the postleft’s acceptance of what we’d now call decolonial and postcolonial assertions of the special rights of their particular peoples’ subjectivities are not seen as sharing an intellectual genealogy with European romantic nationalisms’ celebrations of the particular genius of each individual *Volksgeist*, the spirit of a people.³³ (For those unfamiliar with these sometimes threatening concepts, it might be worth a quick definitional digression again: ‘Postcolonialism’ indicates a state usually after the end of formal colonial empires, in which certain intangible effects of the colonial condition persist – the fused prefix ‘post’ in postcolonial, as in postmodern, and in our provisional neologism in this discussion, postleft, is not a chronological marker.³⁴ ‘Decoloniality’ is a slightly later term, which refers to the need to undo the effects of colonization that persist into the present, and in particular to see the world from beyond the confines of

‘the West’, undoing (at least in writing) the Eurocentrism that, it is alleged, still characterizes dominant forms of knowledge, knowledge-production, and social control mechanisms.) But the worlds of romantic nationalism and its latter-day supporters were far from sealed to one another, each interacting in a public domain that freely borrowed ideas from one another, across spaces, and across times.³⁵ Most romantic nationalists read Herder, directly or indirectly through his popularisers and translators, and reproduced his ideas.³⁶ Today’s postleftists could be conscious Herderians, or be of his party without knowing it.

The legacies and afterlives of these origins can be seen in latter-day postleftists’ implicit acceptance of the distinctness of ‘cultures’, and the legitimacy of arguing from these differences. The early origins of ideas or debates can be forgotten and then later rediscovered in a way as to suggest a newness that misleads their own protagonists. If the postleft and the far-right share tendencies to make exceptionalist arguments under the label of ‘culture’, crossovers are easier, as acts of misrecognition as well as acts of ideological affiliation; and the uncommitted can be forgiven for not recognizing the difference.

Shibbolethics

One way to understand how this works, is to understand what we shall call *shibbolethics*. (A shibboleth, for those whose Old Testament knowledge isn’t up to scratch, is, according to Judges 12:5-6, a life-and-death password, a word that has to be pronounced, and pronounced correctly, in order to demonstrate that you’re not an outsider. The consequences of failing to do so can be fatal: biblically, it appears to have led to the death of 42,000 Ephraimites).³⁷ The contemporary art of shibbolethics is one in which you demonstrate the ability to use the right shibboleths when required to do so: you say the right thing to the right people at the right time (invoking a number of formulaic socio-political positions) in order to demonstrate to them that you are morally and ethically on their side. The shibboleths you use have the purpose of implying an entire set of assumptions, beliefs, and arguments that can be inferred from the words, phrases, or passages that you use. (This, perhaps, is what retrospective aficionados of the late French philosopher Michel Foucault might also refer to as a ‘discourse’, only a discourse is *not* supposed to be voiced, as its power depends on its ability to remain an *implicit* structure, if we still wish to distinguish Foucault from the Foucauldians).³⁸ And the point of the use of shibboleths is that they are necessary signals, in order to establish the users’ moral and ethical credentials within a community of believers (‘meat is murder’; ‘from the river to the sea’; ‘black lives matter’; ‘critical whiteness’; ‘virtue signalling’, ‘Israeli apartheid’). It goes without saying that these shibboleths can actually represent sincerely held positions, with shades and subtleties; but no external observer can read intention, only proclaimed intention, and there’s often no room in a shibboleth for

more than a few words. They tell the listener precisely nothing about the beliefs of the pronouncer of the shibboleths. They ease the way for those who will use them. And they can be used by people who don't believe a word of them. But that hardly matters: we cannot, for the most part, have access to the intentions of particular persons, and perhaps in some cases they cannot either; we only have their publicly avowed positions to deal with. And here's where the problem of conforming to a language of legitimacy comes in. We would often find out only in retrospect whether the proclaimed principle, expressed in correct shibbolethical language, is a cover (free speech claims for hate speech) or is actually adhered to, on the basis of particular acts of usage; that is, only in retrospect.

While we all agree that the conflation of the 'woke' with the left, in particular by an increasingly polemical and confident right, has been unfortunately inadequately refuted by those who consider themselves on the left, it might be worth noting how the journey from left to woke was accomplished. Because there is a left route to what we're here provisionally agreeing to call postleft: it's the legacy of a Stalinist shibbolethics: how to say the right thing to make sure you're saving your neck. This has various versions: self-silencing, in advance of being denounced; and afterwards, self-denunciation, though that was no guarantee of survival. There's a Chinese set of variations: In the Maoist version, 'revolutionary self-criticism' (Mao Zedong wasn't particularly happy with Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation speech, since he had been the inheritor of Stalinism) was a duty; in the Cultural Revolution, old scores could be settled by placing a person outside of a mob-induced consensus, which had little to do with Marxist theory or any political principle, but was supported and policed by a mob ever-ready to intimidate and ritually humiliate those who stepped outside that consensus. The need of a self-identified 'left' to perpetually police its internal purity, owes a little to survival tactics developed in these times: let someone else be denounced, by Party, movement, or General Secretary; or, in less organized times, by social media, hashtag, and decolonial academic.

A shibbolethicalised language becomes opaque to questions of political position, because they are meant to prevent debate, to fix a moral position rather than a political one in terms of loyalty to a cause; and intellectual life becomes a matter of partisanship. It is in this context that one recognizes how the dividing lines between postleft and neoright are blurred: both use affective categories rather than reasoned arguments; loyalty to a position excludes even an engagement with inconvenient points of view that are pre-categorized as not on our side; if the wrong message is delivered, the messenger gets shot.

Psychohistory, Bonapartism, Fascism

But this formulation recalls, or anticipates, two sets of reflections on history and its trajectories that belong together. The first of these

formulations is a remark in Isaac Deutscher's biography of Stalin, in which he describes the Great Purges and its aftermath as the outcome of a perceived threat from without: the authoritarianism of the Stalinized Soviet Union owing much to a threat-perception from the world outside it, with the rise of Fascism and Nazism and the course of the Spanish Civil War, which greatly enabled the establishment of an authoritarian system, and with it, the cult of personality of Stalin.³⁹ This remark should probably be read alongside Sigmund Freud's wry remark from 1930, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, that the Soviet Union would run out of bourgeoisie to use as internal enemies, and then would be faced with the necessity of finding new enemies.⁴⁰ The second formulation, perhaps more relevant to worlds of loyalty, is the dilution of a radical movement as it establishes itself as legitimate authority, restoring itself to authority. The anointing of a radical teacher or movement or ideology as a god, the killing and deification of the father, and the consequent taming of a revolution is the theme of *Eros and Civilisation*⁴¹ and a New Left position on the creation of figures of authority and the surrender of freedom out of a fear of freedom became the concern of a number of Frankfurt School and later Frankfurt School thinkers, from the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* and into their American exile.⁴²

Psychoanalytic Marxism,⁴³ as it came to be known in the 1960s, was 'psychohistory' for short. The term is borrowed from, or shared with, a movement described in an iconic work of science fiction, which, if it hasn't a great deal in common with its historiographical namesake, contains an inconvenient message on the telos of history that the Old Left, still steeped in some forms of Marxism, could have understood. In Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy, written between 1942 and 1949,⁴⁴ Hari Seldon, the founder of psychohistory, a predictive science of history for the future, charts out the paths of human history for the generations to come.⁴⁵ But his science does not work if people know what is in store for the world beforehand. Seldon therefore decides that his findings for the future be hidden from its subjects, to be revealed by himself, as he posthumously appears before his public in the form of a hologram, at opportune moments at which it is relevant to explain to humanity where it now is, and where it is likely to go.

Told at the wrong moment, in too much detail, and over too large a time-frame, Seldon's predictions could disrupt themselves by affecting their own variables (a version, more sophisticated, of the time-traveller's experience of going back in time and killing one's own father). As it is also a statistical science, psychohistory isn't very comfortable with large-scale exceptions to the rule either. And this is where a mutant appears, to change the laws and trajectories of psychohistory: the Mule, able to feel and control the emotions of others, whose life and abilities are not predicted by Seldon in his scheme, whose evil ambitions to empire interrupt the progressive scheme of Seldon and his Foundation so much that Seldon's holographic communications begin to make no sense in

the time of the Mule: he is wrong about present conditions, and it can be inferred that the plausibility of his predictions are wrong. To cut a long series of short stories short, the Galaxy panics; and therefore, society has to rise up and stop the bastard,⁴⁶ without the help of the helpful predictions of the psychohistorians. But when the Mule is indeed stopped, and Seldon's next broadcast is awaited with scepticism, when it does appear, it seems, to everyone's surprise, that psychohistorical equilibrium has been re-established. The trajectories of history have returned to where they ought to be, humanity is where Seldon predicted it should be, and could begin to take his predictions seriously again.

When it was written, the allegory of the *Foundation* trilogy was too close to recent history for anyone to miss, soon after the Second World War and the defeat of Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler; and the books were written originally as interconnected short stories between 1942 and 1949. With the Mule being a mutant and an aberration, the restoration of the trajectories of psychohistory was to be expected thereafter. The trilogy's similarities to a Stalinised Marxist telos, where fascism and Nazism were aberrations, soon to be lost from historical significance, but preserved as an abstract threat in the background that could be used to reiterate the continued relevance of really existing socialism, and the progressive path of a soon-to-be-Soviet Man in the socialist fatherland, whence Progress would migrate to the rest of the world, could easily be read into it. The uncomfortable question that remained, and remains for the few people who have concerned themselves with Asimov and Marx(ism), was whether Asimov believed that there were laws of history that could have predictive purposes, or whether Marx did, or Marxists did. At least Hari Seldon's optimism about the predictability of mankind's future is constantly called into question by Asimov's narrative itself. But this is an uncomfortable allegorical reminder that the Old Left, whether its Marxist side, or even during its late, post-bolted-horse Popular Front manifestation, didn't have an adequate answer to the question of why Fascism existed at all.⁴⁷

Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy and Karl Marx's *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* can be read together in terms of their political visions. The Karl Marx who allegedly provides a teleological history of progress certainly cannot be found in the *18th Brumaire*. Marx has much to say about how not to compare historical phenomena across times and spaces.⁴⁸ The *18th Brumaire* is not an optimistic text, and as with many texts of the left or of Marxism drawn from the experiences of defeat, might have more to say to us today than the texts of optimism. It is a tale of the defeat of ordinary working people, their exhaustion, and their subordination to the authority of the state. But was Louis Napoleon Marx's Mule? Human beings make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing, not from free-floating pieces of history; and Marx was clear that Louis Bonaparte was not exceptional, and not a man of talent. On the contrary, 'the class struggle in France created the circumstances and

relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero's part'.⁴⁹ The Mule's power derives from his capacity to manipulate opinion; Louis Bonaparte, in manipulating the memory of his famous uncle, might be seen to be doing something similar. Marx's own disclaimer about future relevance notwithstanding, if we should like to postulate the history of something we might now call 'populism' from his observations in the 18th *Brumaire*, they would not be completely misplaced; the tendency of people to act against their own interests.

The 18th Brumaire gives us the term 'Bonapartism', and is, I suspect, an influential background presence in various debates among Marxian-educated leftists on the nature of fascism, it also presents the conditions of failure of class consciousness and a case study of a class acting against itself (a class in itself not for itself but against itself?). Perhaps at least it is a predecessor to some of Antonio Gramsci's writings on 'the southern question' in Italy and the role of its peasantry in sustaining Fascist power.⁵⁰ Bonapartism is not Fascism, we know already, though perhaps we need to return to the 18th *Brumaire* and ask whether there is more to be learned from this text than we thought, and why exactly it is not. The nineteenth century is also not the twentieth century; and the debates within Marxism on the nature of fascism were truncated and distorted by Stalinism and the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1938, and we cannot in all honesty glean the theoretical or methodological foundations of the 1935 Dimitrov Line on fascism from anything other than a late realisation of 'facts on the ground', given the mysteriously self-censored nature of Comintern discussions at the time, in a context in which Stalin's great purges were around the corner, and expulsions, assassinations and (self-) denunciations were on the rise.

It was perhaps Leon Trotsky who made most use of the concept of Bonapartism in the twentieth century. Writing in 1934, he saw Bonapartism as an 'intermediary' stage on the way to fascism. For Trotsky, the basis of fascist power, and Bonapartist power, was the mobilization of the petty bourgeoisie in the interest of the ruling class, and imbued with a hatred of the proletariat: 'Just as Bonapartism begins by combining the parliamentary regime with fascism, so triumphant fascism finds itself forced not only to enter into a bloc with the Bonapartists, but what is more, to draw closer internally to the Bonapartist system'. There was a preventive aspect to Bonapartism, to return to 'order' in a situation of intense class conflict, creating a 'military-police dictatorship' that is 'barely concealed with the decorations of parliamentarianism'. But it has no programme of its own. The bourgeoisie's resort to Bonapartism was to discipline the extreme wings of the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie: they needed the threat of fascism, but in the last analysis, the disorder created by the fascists was more than they wanted. Once fascism came to power, however, it had itself to discipline its followers, and would (Trotsky believed) revert to Bonapartism. Thus, Bonapartism and fascism

were related and not incompatible forms: 'Having arrived in power, the fascist chiefs are forced to muzzle the masses who follow them by means of the state apparatus. But while losing its social mass base, by resting upon the bureaucratic apparatus and oscillating between the classes, fascism is regenerated into Bonapartism'. There is thus a pre-fascist and a fascist Bonapartism; fascism, once it captures state power, must become the party of order against itself, and against its own movement.⁵¹

Whether this is an accurate understanding of fascism after seizing state power and fascism as a movement is doubtful; it may echo a bourgeois self-understanding of a strengthening of anti-democratic forces to dampen or defeat a socialist or communist upsurge, only to be controlled again. Perhaps this view shares too much of an economic-driven politics that isn't able to take political mobilization sufficiently seriously: it is the economic interests of a ruling class that produce fascism as an effect of the former's crisis, which means that the crisis-ridden capitalist's interests lead the fascists. That the fascists might instead recruit capitalists from a position of strength as a mass movement, supported by an ethnicised, *völkisch*, national, 'socialism', is less appealing;⁵² it also very reluctantly allows for the choices of ordinary people, pre-ordered as workers and peasants, to act or vote against their own interests.

Trotsky also saw Stalinism as a form of Bonapartism, drawing on the first Napoleon, his original coup of 18th Brumaire 1799, and the post-'Thermidorian' consolidation of bourgeois power from 1794 rather than on the third Napoleon's reprise in Marx's tersely phrased historical palimpsest of tragedy and farce: the turn of events that led to the French Revolution's consolidation of authority and of the gains of the bourgeoisie after 1794. The question of Bonapartism, Trotsky wrote in 1935, was one 'not of historical identity but of historical analogy, which always has as its limits the different social structures and epochs'. And: 'The present-day Kremlin Bonapartism we juxtapose, of course, to the Bonapartism of bourgeois rise and not decay: with the Consulate and the First Empire and not with Napoleon III'. By his calculations, Soviet Bonapartism was based on protecting the state and its regime not only from 'feudal-bourgeois counterrevolution' but also, crucially, from the working masses themselves. It followed for him that if its overthrow did not come from the masses themselves, 'as the conscious act of the proletarian vanguard', then 'in place of Stalinism there could only come the fascist-capitalist counterrevolution'. And while Trotsky takes 'forces of production' seriously in analyzing what sort of regime could be supported in given conditions, he didn't reproduce the mechanistic understanding of a 'capitalism in crisis' and capitalists using fascism to get itself out of its mess; Trotsky took political forms too seriously to do this. Stalinism, then, was a pre-fascist Bonapartism.⁵³ The question of the family resemblances of opposing ideologies can be raised from these

discussions, in the manner that Deutscher had,⁵⁴ and in a subtler manner than any theory of 'totalitarianism' can provide.⁵⁵

The insight from Marx's *18th Brumaire* for a history from below worth returning to, in a number of contexts, is this: the desire of a group, a class or a 'nation', 'to return from the perils of revolution to the flesh-pots of Egypt' – the renunciation of the possibilities of freedom and liberation, and to return to the safety of unfreedoms. The repeated message of the *18th Brumaire* is that of the bourgeoisie's fear of the freedoms it has given *itself*, lest they be used by others – or by themselves. This might indeed foreshadow the psychoanalytic Marxism of Wilhelm Reich, or of Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse later on, or the insistence, earlier on, by Alexandra Kollontai, that modes of production do not in any automatic sense change social relations.⁵⁶ As human society develops to a stage where new freedoms are possible, it is the dead hand of previous generations whose weight on the shoulders of the new stops them in their tracks, afraid of the freedoms they can exercise, sending them scurrying for the shelter of forms of unfreedom that they feel safer in. Kollontai in the Soviet 1920s was less than sanguine that the changes experienced by the young Soviet Union would automatically remove old prejudices about the role of women in society; Reich in the Weimar 1930s would merge psychoanalytic insights about self-repression with Marxian concerns about alienation.⁵⁷ By the time Fromm wrote in 1941 about the escape from freedom, and Marcuse in the 1950s and 60s about the Revolution restoring the father figure and thereby destroying itself, a mechanistic view of the revolutionary proletariat was only the official window-dressing of Stalinised communist parties.

The Marx of the *18th Brumaire* did not, unlike Lenin after him, imagine a vanguard who could see better and quicker than most: he could only see clearly in retrospect. The two Foundations postulated by Isaac Asimov or Hari Seldon, comprising two separate vanguards of intellectuals who are expected to preserve and guide human civilization into the future, are fallible entities that fail to do what they are set up to do, eventually coming into conflict with one another. The two Foundations, in finding out about one another, in fact, damage the Seldon Plan, which has to be restored by the Second Foundation allowing the first Foundation to imagine the destruction of the Second: two vanguards are one too many. But the first vanguard suspects the continued existence of the other because the Seldon Plan, which is postulated upon both Foundations, appears to continue to hold: the telos of psychohistory continues, in the vanguards' readings, and they must decide whether this is because of or despite them.

In his later years, as he continued his imaginary journey with the Foundation, Asimov turned to the myth of Gaia, a planet named after a collective consciousness, which unites the First and Second Foundations, imagines an entire galaxy with a single consciousness, and merges the separate strands into a united collective consciousness.

That idea of human life as an organic and coordinated whole is either an environmentalist's fantasy or a fascist's dream.⁵⁸

Conclusions: The New Far Right and the Sharing of Languages

It is still possible to recognize a far-right movement when one sees it: there is a mobilization against the foreign and alien elements within the body politic; intimidation, aggression, and violence characterize the clearing of neighbourhoods, the implicit exclusion of a generic enemy from public space. These, in countries of the self-defined 'global north', get noticed when they are led by the usual suspects: white, mostly male and aggressive. We can draw upon a recognizable *völkisch*-fascist genealogy to understand such a movement, even when the more explicit ideological pronouncements that make a movement readily assimilable to fascism are absent. Movements of a kind that don't explicitly appear to be right, or that appear broadly speaking to be based on good intentions and morally upright premises, of inclusion, speaking for the weak, are less easily identified with a 'left', which used to be characterized by a willing suspension of particular characteristics in the interests of secular solidarity. Though you might still find a self-declared left bloc at a demonstration or two that refuses identitarian affiliations, it's more than likely that these postleft conglomerates are ideologically more amorphous.

Religiously-motivated mobilization, even when of a radical nature, are misrecognised by well-meaning people of the postleft as 'cultural' self-determination. At least since the anti-Iraq War demonstrations of 2002-2004, what was at first a cynical left-Islamist alliance or understanding has moved on to a misreading of Islamic radicalism as a potential ally, and the distinction between 'Islamophobia' and opposition to radical Islamism is in danger of being erased. This is a distinction which is more important to Muslims, people of colour, and minorities, than it is for a 'majority community' in the 'global North'; because it is the former's lives that it primarily affects. In the 'global south', of course, these good-and-evil binaries that are superimposed on to religious or ethnic belonging make much less sense, and can only be sustained in the face of 'white guilt'; if these themes are mobilized in the global South it is because the necessity to place an entire society, civilization or nation on the moral high ground is being mobilized by states in the interest of its right to repress its own people without interference from without. Because radical Islamism, radical Hinduism, murderous Buddhism in Sri Lanka or Myanmar, is a framework of experience that doesn't suggest to inhabitants of really existing countries, rather than their shorthand representation in 'the West' or 'the 'global North', that religiously-motivated groups are benign. Secular non-white people, as individuals, or organised in groups, in the 'West' are often assailed by white postleftists who abhor their hostility to 'their own culture' or their 'Islamophobia'. And it goes without saying that it is above all white postleftists or second- and third-generation diaspora PoCs who insist that

those who don't believe, on the strength of their empirical knowledge, that all Jews in Israel are white and therefore settler colonialists in the authentically 'Arab' Middle East are disrupting the narrative.

I offer no references for the above; anyone who has left the safety of their computer screen to engage in any political activity in the twenty-first century will know what these observations are based on, although there might be some differences of observation or emphasis; the point to be made here is that one can recognise an explicitly far-right movement in its period of action. It's less easy to recognize anything that comes from any recognizable left tradition: the postleft has different genealogies, less of thought and more of affect. The post-Cold War world did a good job of erasing the received wisdom of left movements. Vestigial issues that were once traditional leftist ones are picked up by populist right-wingers.⁵⁹ The right, historically, has been good at piggybacking on the language of the left: rights for ordinary people, trade union issues (jobs, standards of living, but for the authentic *Vol/k*). The left and the language of the right is a more complicated question: a long-standing 'moderation' question has been that of a non-radical left chasing the far right rightwards in order to make themselves electorally palatable (and sometimes in the process leaving the centre-right standing to the left of them or appearing to be to the left of them – think of the Labour Party in Blairite Britain, and David Cameron defeating Gordon Brown by appearing to be to his left).

Drawing a clear line between postleft and far-right languages is more difficult. Take a central issue of our times such as The Environment, and you will find that left and right positions are inexorably mixed up: a romantic urge to return to a pristine idea of 'nature' is intermingled with pragmatic and principled positions, reminding us of earlier connections of green themes and Nazism.⁶⁰ If evangelical zeal and the moral politics of the ethical consumer dominates political self-positioning, it is easier for that self-positioning to move to the right or to any other position. Collaborating right and far right groups and parties are now a regular phenomenon in the European Parliament, often among parties without a commitment to the European Union at all. Competing far rights often provide a complementarity for one another – in a reciprocal cycle that perpetuates one radical positioning as it legitimates another.

- 1 Marx 1852.
- 2 Bourdieu 1983
- 3 Heisenberg 1927
- 4 Neiman 2024
- 5 Vidal 1975
- 6 AfD 2017
- 7 Wachter 2022
- 8 Crenshaw 1989 is responsible for this term, but it has been projected backwards and forwards in time.
- 9 Sawchuk 2021; Reveland 2021
- 10 Wagenhofer 2010
- 11 Bach and Breuer 2010.
- 12 Anderson and Damle 1987; Anderson and Damle 2018; Sarkar 1993; Casolari 2000; Casolari 2020; Banaji 2013; Zachariah 2005; Zachariah 2014; Zachariah 2015a, Zachariah 2015b.
- 13 Zachariah 2013.
- 14 Nicholson 2015
- 15 Goodrick-Clarke 1998
- 16 Rosenberg 1934.
- 17 Kershaw 2004
- 18 Nolte 1963.
- 19 Zachariah 2019
- 20 Larsen 2001
- 21 Zachariah 2014
- 22 Sternhell 2008
- 23 Roy 1938
- 24 Goodrick-Clarke 1994; Kurlander 2013
- 25 Griffin 1991; Eatwell 1996.
- 26 Zachariah 2014; Ledeen 1975
- 27 Finchelstein 2010
- 28 Casolari 2000
- 29 Zachariah 2013
- 30 Goodrick-Clarke 1994; Kurlander 2013
- 31 Puschner 2001; Breuer 2008
- 32 Blackburn and Eley 1984
- 33 Zachariah 2019
- 34 Young, 2001; Young 2003; Zachariah 2019
- 35 *Goodrick-Clarke 1994.*
- 36 Zachariah 2015b
- 37 Judges 12:5-6
- 38 Foucault 1972 [1969]
- 39 Deutscher 1949
- 40 Freud 1930
- 41 Marcuse 1955
- 42 Makavejev 1971
- 43 Marcuse 1955; Reich 1933; Fromm 1941
- 44 Asimov 1951; Asimov 1952; Asimov 1953
- 45 The following paragraphs are a revision and reconsideration of Zachariah 2022
- 46 Brecht 1941
- 47 Dimitrov 1935
- 48 Marx 1869
- 49 Marx 1869
- 50 Gramsci 1971
- 51 Trotsky 1934
- 52 Arthur Rosenberg 1934; Banaji 2013
- 53 Trotsky 1935
- 54 Deutscher 1949
- 55 Arendt 1951
- 56 Kollontai 1909; Kollontai 1920
- 57 Reich 1932; Reich 1933.
- 58 Asimov 1982
- 59 On the distinction between a populist left taking short-cuts to mobilization and a populist right using democratic numbers to weaken or abolish democracy, see Finchelstein 2017. But can we recognize this in advance, or do we see it post-ex facto?
- 60 Uekoetter 2006; Brüggemeier 2007.

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Disavowal In Crisis: The Israeli Far Right and the End of Liberal Zionism

Zahi Zalloua

Abstract: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's religio-nationalist government is redefining the right at home and abroad. Unleashed, it is no longer giving the appearance of playing by the rules that one would expect liberal democracies to adhere to. The Israeli government bucks national and international laws. From its judicial coup within Israel to its terror-inducing raids in the Occupied West Bank to its genocidal campaign in Gaza, Netanyahu's fascist coalition is not only making its Western supporters uncomfortable, it is also, and more importantly, exposing the illiberal and eliminationist core of Israeli politics that the perceived opposition between political Zionism and liberal Zionism tends to obfuscate. I trace political Zionism's cannibalization of its "liberal" twin, attending to the ways it has rendered inoperative the fetishist disavowal that kept liberal Zionists and Western powers more or less content with the status quo, that is, with the Occupation on cruise control. Fetishist disavowal, as Octave Mannoni defines it, follows the pattern, "*Je sais bien, mais quand même*; I know very well, but all the same...." This logic accounts for the way in which "a belief can be abandoned and preserved at the same time." In the case at hand, the logic of fetishist disavowal paints a soothing picture: *We know very well that Israel must reach a compromise with the Palestinians, that it must not be seen as an apartheid state, but all the same, we believe in Israel's unique claim to be at once democratic and Jewish.* Yet the Netanyahu government's stark brutality has thrown Euro-American disavowal into crisis, for Israel is openly engaging in the type of violence that international law was created to prevent. This violence so blatantly violates international norms that it can no longer be so easily disavowed; the fetish is losing its power to dull the urgency of intervening to enact change.

Keywords: Fetishist disavowal, liberal Zionism, Gaza, settler colonialism, the Occupation, anti-Semitism

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's religio-nationalist government is redefining the right at home and abroad. Unleashed, it is no longer giving the appearance of playing by the rules that one would expect liberal democracies to adhere to. The Israeli government bucks national and international laws. From its judicial coup within Israel to its terror-inducing raids in the Occupied West Bank to its genocidal campaign in Gaza, Netanyahu's fascist coalition is not only making its Western supporters uncomfortable, it is also, and more importantly, exposing the illiberal and eliminationist core of Israeli politics that the perceived opposition between political Zionism and liberal Zionism tends to obfuscate. I trace political Zionism's cannibalization of its "liberal" twin, attending to the ways it has rendered inoperative the fetishist disavowal that kept liberal Zionists and Western powers more or less content with the status quo, that is, with

the Occupation on cruise control. Fetishist disavowal, as Octave Mannoni defines it, follows the pattern, “*Je sais bien, mais quand même*; I know very well, but all the same....” This logic accounts for the way in which “a belief can be abandoned and preserved at the same time.”¹ In the case at hand, the logic of fetishist disavowal paints a soothing picture: *We know very well that Israel must reach a compromise with the Palestinians, that it must not be seen as an apartheid state, but all the same, we believe in Israel’s unique claim to be at once democratic and Jewish.* Yet the Netanyahu government’s stark brutality has thrown Euro-American disavowal into crisis, for Israel is openly engaging in the type of violence that international law was created to prevent. This violence so blatantly violates international norms that it can no longer be so easily disavowed; the fetish is losing its power to dull the urgency of intervening to enact change.

But examining fetishist disavowal’s crisis tells us more. The American government’s unconditional support of Israel—along with the internal fractures and reactionary entrenchments it is provoking—tells us something about its racial politics at home, about America’s failure to reckon with the Indigenous genocides and chattel slavery on which it is founded, and whose afterlives continue to shape life in the nation. What we are seeing in Israel—a hyper-racialized existence lived under occupation (racialized *because* it is lived under occupation)—echoes what we see in the US because both nations have emerged from similar, though distinct, settler colonial histories. The US’s unconditional military and political support for Israeli carnage in Gaza tells us something about the colonial core of America’s politics, a core orientation, I would add, that does not come as a surprise for the Global South or for North America’s internally colonized and segregated communities. Not unlike Israel’s faltering fetishist disavowal, liberal America’s fetishist disavowal—*I know very well that structural racism exists, but all the same I believe in the American dream, in America’s manifest destiny, that we can follow our better angels,* and so on—is facing a challenge of its own from the far right.²

In the following pages, I want to examine more closely the psychic life of liberalism in the wake of such challenges, through recent examples of liberal attempts to recuperate the fetish, to stave off the collapse of disavowal and the reckoning that such an upheaval demands. To do so, I first take up recent work by French-Israeli sociologist Eva Illouz, which I see as representative both of broader tendencies in public discourse and of the tenacity of investments in a particular vision of the Israeli state. The crisis in fetishist disavowal, I argue, opens up an opportunity to embrace an anti-colonial politics, but this will not come about without struggle. The life of fetishist disavowal is long, while the perpetuation of liberalism’s fantasies continues to feed the power of an ultranationalist and racist far right that liberalism ostensibly abhors and opposes.

In forging a parliamentary coalition with extreme-right parties, Netanyahu has drawn severe critiques from citizens across the center-left

spectrum in Israel, who are alarmed by the sharp turn toward illiberalism manifest in the coalition's political agenda, most visibly in its attempts to reduce the power of the judiciary. Eva Illouz, who publishes fairly frequently in the center-left *Haaretz*, has pushed this critique farther than most by extending it to the Occupation itself. In a 2014 article titled, "47 Years a Slave: A New Perspective on the Occupation," Illouz writes, "What started as a national and military conflict has morphed into a form of domination of Palestinians that now increasingly borders on conditions of slavery."³ Likening Israel's treatment of Palestinians to chattel slavery is a powerful analogy and a disconcerting one for liberal Zionists in particular, who are committed to democratic norms and universal human rights. In this piece, Illouz attempts to unsettle the social coordinates of her fellow Israelis so that the *knowledge* of the inhumane Occupation is not contained and rendered toothless, but might become life or world-altering.

After October 7 one might have expected Illouz to pursue this analogy further, in the vein of Norman Finkelstein, who compared Hamas's attacks to a "slave revolt," of the type exemplified by the enslaved Nat Turner, who in his revolt in Southampton, Virginia, in 1831, "killed a lot of white people, civilians in a rampage."⁴ The point here, of course, is not to celebrate violence for the sake of violence, but to show how butchery has historically been met with butchery (and this butchery has in turn been met again with even greater butchery). But Illouz does not follow Finkelstein; in a series of articles she takes the opposite tack and unleashes ire on the global left for its attempts to contextualize and explain Hamas's violence, which she views as minimizing or relativizing the attacks. Like many center-left Israelis, Illouz has "sobered up."⁵ Disillusioned by the scale and intensity of Hamas's incursion, she makes axiomatic that the evil of Hamas has no context, and undertakes to save the universalist left from what she characterizes as its "post-colonial" hijacking. Liberal-leftist Zionists in Israel are dismayed, perplexed, hurt, and enraged, struggling to process not only the stunning brutality of Hamas's October 7th attacks, but what they perceive as an ungenerous, indifferent, or even malicious response by the global left. For Illouz, the global left's failure to take a stronger stance against Hamas shows that its scrutiny of the Jewish state stems from a "carefully formulated ideology, and part of a far broader alliance between religious Islam and the 'post-colonial' left."⁶ Islam, as the object of Western powers' demonization, finds an ally and a receptive hearing from the left; the latter, suspicious of Western hegemony, is all too eager to defend the former's cause to the rest of the world. But much of Illouz's argument against the global left relies on a familiar pattern of objections leveled at pro-Palestinian activists,⁷ who are frequently alleged to embody a "new anti-Semitism."⁸ Illouz objects, for example, to the singling out of Israel for its nationalism (the Why-are-you-picking-on-Zionism? argument) and the Left's failure to stand up to Islam's abuses (the Why-are-you-defending-the-

indefensible? argument). The Hamas attack and its purported support among leftist circles crystalized, for Illouz, what she calls the Left's "moral and intellectual bankruptcy."⁹ Why? Because the global Left failed to stand with Israel. Leftists unforgivably turned their back on Jews and channeled their care toward the "Arabs," the Palestinian population. The titles of Illouz's articles take on an increasingly alarmist and accusatory form: from "The Global Left's Reaction to October 7 Threatens the Fight Against the Occupation" (November 11, 2023) to "How the Left Became a Politics of Hatred Against Jews" (February 3, 2024). In these *Haaretz* articles, Illouz seeks to delegitimize the global left, first, by charging its champions (including Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek) with a hatred of Jews, and, second, by undertaking to de-postcolonize the left, that is, to expose its anti-Semitic proclivities, to dismiss its explanatory framework, and expunge its interpretive biases when it comes to Palestine/Israel.

Illouz indicates her disdain for post-colonial studies by putting quotation marks around the "post-colonial" in the phrase "'post-colonial' left."¹⁰ This left, we're told, is promoting and nurturing a "nihilist art of paranoia and exclusion,"¹¹ relishing in dividing the world crudely into two sides, victims and victimizers (with Jews now permanently occupying the position of the victimizer). Illouz relies on Aviad Kleinberg to take down postcolonial theory. Kleinberg's article "Are All Israelis 'Colonialists' Who Deserve to Die?" echoes the moralizing and contemptuous tone of Illouz's writings. For Kleinberg, postcolonial theory has bewitched today's readers; its excessive skepticism negates all the gains of a more nuanced account of received knowledge. According to Kleinberg's vision—which veers on the caricatural—postcolonial skepticism has given way to a self-righteous dogmatism, where a Manichean logic prevails: "the West is the victimizer and everyone else its victim."¹² Such "selective vision,"¹³ Kleinberg warns, simplifies global matters. Kleinberg's manufacturing of outrage falls flat. Let's consider some remarks by Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, two founding figures of postcolonial theory. Said constantly argued against a "politics of blame" that turns your own status as victim into a weapon, and instead insisted that the heart of any solidarity movement must be animated by a critical impulse—"never solidarity before criticism," as he put it.¹⁴ And Spivak likewise warned against the Western self's impulse to fetishize the non-European other, and to arrogate to itself the problems of complexity. By this Western logic, Spivak explains, "the person who knows has all of the problems of selfhood. The person who is known, somehow seems not to have a problematic self. These days . . . only the dominant self can be problematic; the self of the Other is authentic without problem . . . This is frightening."¹⁵ Rather than endorsing a rhetoric of authenticity or pure celebration of the non-Western difference, postcolonial theory underscores that such gestures come at a political and hermeneutic cost.

While viewing herself as a defender of Enlightenment values invested in forging a "just peace" between Palestinians and Israelis,

Illouz was nevertheless distraught by the left's instance that Hamas's attacks did not materialize out of thin air. The belief that Hamas's brutal assault "did not occur in a vacuum" was itself read as an anti-Semitic observation insofar as the condemnation of Hamas was qualified by the impulse to understand the attacks and cast the Palestinian condition in a different light. Offended by this line of argumentation, Illouz intervenes in an attempt to shame the global left and set straight its path, which, again, has been derailed by anti-colonial thought, by post-colonial theory and its morally dubious historicizations:

If we use "context" as an analytical tool to explain and understand, how far should context go? Should we, for example, invoke the context of murderous antisemitism, which has given rise to Zionism, thereby making it drastically different from all forms of settler colonialism? Should we include in our contextualization the fact that the Jerusalem mufti Amin Al-Husseini supported the Nazis and their Final Solution and that, as such, losing Palestine was a part of the redrawing of maps after World War II?¹⁶

It is not clear where Illouz stands on these specific examples. Are they alternative frames for understanding context (that is, do they supplement post-colonial reasoning and thereby reshape the conclusions the analyst should draw)? Or are they exaggerations to be dismissed, pointing to the futility of contextualizing itself? Illouz's first alternative contextual example has merit and should be introduced in any discussion of Palestine/Israel. The fact that many Jews turned to Zionism as a way to escape anti-Semitism in Europe is deeply important for understanding the settler-colonial context. Like Said, I believe that it is ethically and politically paramount for Palestinians to *understand* the libidinal and material appeal of Israel (which includes a recognition of Jewish suffering). For Zionists, Israel symbolized and continues to symbolize a place of belonging where their safety would not be contingent on the whims of majoritarian rule. But this line of argumentation has its limits. The history of anti-Semitism cannot justify the Zionist dispossession of the Indigenous population and mass ethnic cleansing of their villages. When Zionism becomes an exclusive attachment to historic Palestine (the dream of a Greater Israel, or Eretz Israel)—so that from the river to the sea, all that you will see is Jewish sovereignty—Zionism morphs into an unabashed racism.¹⁷ But Zionism's origins as a liberation movement for Jews cannot be forgotten. Without grasping the passion for Zion, as Jacqueline Rose might put it, understanding (the actions of) your oppressor will always be unnecessarily incomplete.¹⁸ You can (must) acknowledge Jewish suffering, and yet still situate Hamas's attacks in the context of settler colonialism, where Zionism operates as an ideology and collective fantasy that fuels the settler-colonial project. This project has taken to weaponizing the horrors

of the Shoah to silence critics of Israel, and has reached absurd realities: even using the word “Occupation” to describe Israel’s relation to the Palestinian people supposedly “gives credence to the modern blood libel that fuels a growing anti-Jewish hatred around the world, in the United States, and in Hollywood”¹⁹ (as stated in an open letter from over 450 Jewish creatives and professionals, responding savagely to Johnathan Glazer’s condemnation of the Occupation in his acceptance speech after winning an Oscar for his Holocaust film, *Zone of Interest*²⁰).

Illouz’s second alternative contextual example is ridiculous. It takes the form of an argument that spoils of war go to the winners. Except that the Palestinians, at the time British colonial subjects, were not defeated in World War II, nor were they responsible for the Nazi murders of six million Jews. Illouz concocts a scenario in which Palestinians could be held responsible for their dispossession. The claim that *some Palestinians are worse than Hitler and that’s why their claim to the land is forfeited* is not by any stretch a credible context for understanding the present situation. Rather, it colludes with the Israeli right’s demonization of Palestinians. As Illouz is aware, Netanyahu made just such an inflammatory statement in 2015, trafficking in racist fabulations and claiming that a Palestinian, Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, was responsible for giving Hitler the idea to exterminate the Jews, when Hitler merely wanted to relocate them.²¹

I want to linger a bit more on the question of suffering and the ways in which contextual layers must be seen not simply as oppositional but rather as interlocking or enmeshed with each other. The fact of suffering (the fact that a people has suffered) does not transform a group or its members into ethical subjects (the International Court of Justice’s ruling that the Israeli state is plausibly committing genocide gives the lie to the Israeli military’s claim to be “the most moral army in the world”). Rashid Khalidi comments on the cruel irony of tragic victims becoming the vicious victimizers of others, and this insight applies to Jews as well as to Palestinians: “many of [the Israelis] descended from victims of persecution, pogroms, and concentration camps, have themselves been mistreating another people. We thus find that the sins done to the fathers have morally desensitized the sons to their sins toward others, and have even sometimes been used to justify these sins. (Many Lebanese would bitterly say the same thing about the behavior of the PLO in Lebanon between the late 1960s and 1982).”²²

Context is no excuse. Context is not straightforward causation. The turn to context represents a concern with understanding, not justification. To disavow the material conditions of the Occupation, to assert that there is no context to the Hamas attacks, leads to the Nazification of Palestinians and genocidal consequences: evil must be annihilated. In Orientalist fashion, it is to confirm, as Odeh Bisharat notes, that “the Palestinians were simply born bloodthirsty beasts, and

that the 56-year-old occupation and the state of perpetual, suffocating refugeehood had no connection to or impact on their behavior.”²³ It is to confirm that Palestinian psychology is “perverse,”²⁴ that Palestinians exist outside of history, that they are and will always be the same, and that there can thus be no encounter with them other than a violent one. Isn’t this the ideological lie that Netanyahu and his far-right cabinet sold to a sympathetic world, horrified by the events of October 7? The desire to bracket context stems from a deep-seated unwillingness to confront the uncivilizing forces of settler colonialism, from a failure to reckon with Zionism’s inextricable link to a settler supremacist mindset. Palestinians are not born angry; their anger is a *response*, as Andre Lorde would put it, to anti-Palestinian racism, to the Zionist settler’s motto of “*racial elimination*,”²⁵ to the Occupation, to the caging of Gazans, and so on.

The call for context disconcerts liberal Zionists. Why? Is the worry that when we contextualize and examine the situation, the question, “Do you condemn Hamas?” will lose its rhetorical efficiency? Currently, the accusatory question, “Do you condemn Hamas?” is fully naturalized in mainstream media in the West. To be a legitimate interlocutor—to be on the side of “humans,” not “human animals”²⁶—you have to begin by firmly responding Yes to the question. If you hesitate or refuse to answer, you are deemed an anti-Semite, a cheerleader for Hamas, or worse than Hitler. Here Palestinian citizen of Israel Tamer Nafar puts his finger on the ideological trap set by the question: “I have no difficulty expressing empathy to anyone who’s been hurt; the problem is with political statements, since in order to embrace this terrible pain, one has to line up behind Western leaders and global media outlets, which embrace Israel emotionally and politically, as well as sponsoring its army. These are the same bodies that ignore our pain and which have always funded its erasure.”²⁷ This is the double bind: to be against the suffering of innocent civilians in Israel *and* to refuse to ignore the Jewish state’s “organized inhumanity”²⁸ of Gaza and align oneself with the same forces that contribute to the systematic demonization and suffocation of the Palestinian people.

When Judith Butler similarly attempts to reorient the discussion to the colonial situation so that a more generative exchange can be had, they are bitterly criticized and dismissed.²⁹ Declining to label Hamas a terrorist group, Butler, during a panel discussion in France on anti-Semitism, its instrumentalization, and revolutionary peace in Palestine, sought to understand the group’s attacks as instances of anti-colonial resistance: “I think it is more honest and historically correct to say that the uprising of October 7 was an act of resistance. It is not a terrorist attack and it is not an antisemitic attack. It was an attack against Israelis.”³⁰ To see only anti-Semitism in the deadly assault is a flagrant disavowal of the settler-colonial context. Butler is, in some ways, reiterating Sayegh’s *cri de guerre*, “rights undefended are rights surrendered.”³¹ Hamas is defending the rights of the Palestinians against an eliminationist Zionist settler regime.

If a Zionist hermeneutic dehistoricizes and converts all uprisings into instances of anti-Semitism, another attack on Jews because of their Jewishness—and thus draws a straight line from the Third Reich to Hamas—Butler dispels Zionism’s phantasmatic machinery by situating Hamas’s violence firmly in the context of the Occupation, in the struggle for freedom and dignity. The uprising marks a pre-existing or originary violence; it “comes from a state of subjugation, and against a violent state apparatus.”³² To better understand Hamas’s attacks—if for no other reason than prevent future ones—we need to examine “the political structure and the violence structure from which that uprising emerged.”³³ If we bracket these structures from critical purview, all we see, and project, is a timeless or ontological hatred of Jews; we never understand Palestinian *actions* as *responses*, or instances of counter-violence, to the Occupation. Again, unless you believe that Palestinians who join Hamas are “simply born bloodthirsty beasts” (to be summarily eliminated), you have to look at their actions, their psychic states, in a broader political context, in the stultifying and humiliating reality of the Occupation. Moreover, acknowledging Hamas as a movement committed to armed struggle against a colonial occupier does not in and of itself constitute an endorsement of the *form* that those actions take (such as the tactic of targeting of civilians). But it does enable a different debate to unfold, which historicizes the shifting identities of Israelis and Palestinians as they relate to the ebb and flow of the Occupation: “Let’s at least call it armed resistance and then we can have a debate on whether it’s right or did they do the right thing.”³⁴ Armed resistance indexes an invader and reorients an interpretive gaze modeled and manufactured by Western power and mainstream media. The message is simple: our gaze cannot solely be engulfed by Hamas’s actions.

On multiple occasions, Butler has explicitly condemned the horrific violence of Hamas’s attacks. Seeing Hamas as engaged in armed resistance “neither romanticizes their atrocities nor justifies their actions.”³⁵ Butler stresses that “we can, and must, disagree with the tactics of such a movement, and that my view is that the atrocities committed then, and the genocidal actions of the State of Israel, are both to be opposed.”³⁶ Still, it is easier to distort and cry foul. There is a sadistic enjoyment and virtue signaling in going after anti-Zionist Jewish intellectuals who actively disidentify with the state of Israel and work to reconfigure the interpretive scene and political landscape. For instance, Cary Nelson, in his typical belligerent fashion, indicts Butler for their anti-colonial reasoning, denouncing it as “irredeemably antisemitic.”³⁷ All resistance to Israeli state violence, including peaceful protests (with a very strong vocal Jewish presence among the activists), become instances of “genocidal intention,”³⁸ even transforming a call for ceasefire into a call for the destruction of Jewish lives. Despite Butler’s stated preference for the non-violent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, they do not foreclose the question of armed struggle. Rather, as they state,

it is important to ask those who defend Hamas as a movement of armed resistance how they situate this armed resistance within a history of armed struggles, and what, if any, conditions would have to be met for the laying down of arms. One obvious answer is that Israeli state violence would have to end. If Israeli state violence is the condition of possibility for armed resistance, then the cessation of that violence would doubtless produce another political constellation.³⁹

It is that other “political constellation” that fetishist disavowal wants to eclipse and keep at bay: *I know very well that the Israeli government is committing state violence, but all the same I don’t believe that we need another political configuration; Israel in its current form can accommodate the Palestinian desire for self-determination; reconciliation is possible; after Netanyahu we can resume the peace process and talks of a two-state solution.*⁴⁰ By never assuming the consequences of the knowledge of state violence (that the Israeli government in its default mode is committing a slow genocide), liberal Zionists are not able to imagine nor agitate for an alternative political constellation.⁴¹

Jewish privilege is what is at stake here. The privilege to mourn and the privilege to subjugate implicate one another. Under a Zionist/Western horizon, normative ontology elevates the Israeli Jew but degrades the native Palestinian. The former, especially in its Ashkenazi/white form embodies/overrepresents the “Human”⁴² while the latter is pathologized, reified, and ascribed a “wholly human Other status,” as Sylvia Wynter might put it.⁴³ When the grievability of Israelis is premised on the ungrievability of Palestinians turned into “depthless savages,”⁴⁴ when Palestinian life as such is not experienced or seen as grievable—it is a life lacking human rights—but rather as corrupt and disposable by Israelis and the Global North at large, what are Palestinians and activists defending Palestine to do? A concern for history remains unwelcome in the aftermath of October 7. Nor is there an appetite for imagining the existing political constellation otherwise. There is no daylight between center-left Zionists and far-right Zionists when it comes to reckoning with settler colonialism. The latter is far more belligerent in its opposition, but the former is catching up. One disavows the need for decolonization; the other transforms it into an anti-Semitic slur.

Aligning a group, movement, or cause with terrorism is a sure way to cancel it.⁴⁵ But here there seems to be a willful amnesia vis-à-vis Israel’s own brushes with terrorism. Menachem Begin, father of the right-wing Likud party who was elected Prime Minister in 1977, had, during the Mandate period, led the Zionist paramilitary organization Irgun, which targeted British installations and personnel, including kidnapping and executing soldiers (out of impatience with the British timetable for independence) and Arab civilians, including shootings and bombings

of pedestrians, cafes, and buses (in an effort to clear non-Jews from the contested land). “No one who stands athwart the path of Zionism is immune from Zionist vengeance,” writes Fayez Sayegh.⁴⁶ And as Gilles Deleuze reminds us, terrorism was constitutive of Zionist nationalism under the British Mandate: “Zionist terrorism was not only directed against the British, but against the Arab villages that had to be erased.”⁴⁷ Interestingly, for our purposes, here, Begin objected to the British’s labelling of Irgun as a terrorist group, rhetorically asking: “what has a struggle for the dignity of man, against oppression and subjugation, to do with ‘terrorism’?”⁴⁸ Begin waxes poetic on terror, opposing it to the noble Zionist fight for freedom, the desire to drive out “tyrannous rulers” and their reign of fear:

The historical and linguistic origins of the political term “terror” prove that it cannot be applied to a revolutionary war of liberation. ... A revolution, or a revolutionary war, does not aim at instilling fear. Its object is to overthrow a regime and to set up a new regime in its place. In a revolutionary war both sides use force. Tyranny is armed. Otherwise it would be liquidated overnight. Fighters for freedom must arm; otherwise they would be crushed overnight. Certainly the use of force also wakens fear. Tyrannous rulers begin to fear for their positions, or their lives, or both. And consequently they try to sow fear among those they rule. But the instilling of fear is not an aim in itself. The sole aim on the one side is the overthrow of armed tyranny; on the other side it is the perpetuation of that tyranny. The underground fighters of the Irgun arose to overthrow and replace a regime. We used physical force because we were faced by physical force. But physical force was neither our aim nor our creed. We believed in the supremacy of moral forces. It was our enemy who mocked at them.⁴⁹

Both agents of terrorism and freedom fighters traffic in fear, but whereas the former deploys it to pacify those they subjugate, the latter makes use of it to bring about a new order of things, freed of tyranny. If, today, Britain and the rest of the Global North have embraced Begin’s view, accepting Israel’s brand of state terrorism as a legitimate use of violence, the label of Zionist terrorism more accurately captures what is happening from the standpoint of Zionism’s Palestinian victims.⁵⁰

So, when Butler asks us to pause, to question the language we use and how we frame the problem (since bad formulations often lead to worse solutions), they are not obfuscating or muddying the interpretive waters. Quite the contrary, they are pushing us to think: Isn’t Hamas introducing fear in the occupiers’ lifeworld, in “their positions, or their lives, or both,” in order to bring about a “new regime”? If the question has any plausibility, which I believe that it does, then the October 7th uprising,

as Butler observes, is better understood as an act of armed resistance.⁵¹ When liberal Zionists bemoan Butler and others for elevating Hamas's actions, they perhaps don't realize that they are recycling the discourse of the far right. Journalist Etan Nechin, for instance, claims to attend to the complexity of the situation: "Butler's method glosses over the personal impacts of the conflict, and instead generalizes the situation into broad, unchanging categories of oppressor versus oppressed. Butler's approach fails to acknowledge the complex realities on the ground, where the lines between oppressor and oppressed blur and challenge these simplistic distinctions."⁵² This is a perfect example of deploying "complexity" as an ideological ruse, distracting us from a confrontation with the real Israel, marked by the violence of the Occupation.

A settler-colonial framework does not crudely simplify matters, but it does point lucidly to an antagonism at the heart of Palestine/Israel: the opposition between Native and settler. Saying the situation is "complex" constitutes what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call "settler moves to innocence": "those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all."⁵³ As Patrick Wolfe argues the impulse to deny the Native/settler binary reflects a "settler perspective."⁵⁴ It neglects to see that the Zionist invasion is precisely a "structure not an event,"⁵⁵ not something that can be fixed and relegated to a tumultuous Israeli past. Bizarrely, Nechin even accuses Butler of an accidental Orientalism: "Butler inadvertently adopts an Orientalist stance, too. By casting Palestinians, Arabs, and people of color in a perpetually conflictual role, Butler's narrative brands these groups as inherently confrontational."⁵⁶ It is not a question of "casting Palestinians, Arabs, and people of color in a perpetually conflictual role" but of bearing witness to their refusal to accept the existing reality (the Occupation, New Jim Crow, Apartheid). And if the colonized desire for freedom from the yoke of Zionist colonialism is deemed Orientalist, would Nechin extend this observation to Menachem Begin and the Jewish revolt against British imperialism?

Illouz, Nechin, and others, who are equally worried about the shrinking Israeli left, swiftly dismiss a line of thinking coming from "lazy left intellectuals" for its too-easy adoption of a settler-colonial framework, for uncritically putting front and center the colonial situation in their engagement with the Hamas attacks (which itself seems to feed the perception that this engagement constitutes an unqualified defense). Here we can contrast Illouz's move to innocence—Israeli Jews are not simply settlers but victims as well, and we're not really settlers, since "there has been an uninterrupted Jewish presence in Palestine since antiquity"⁵⁷—with the perspective of Indigenous activists and scholars from Turtle Island (North America). From the standpoint of the Red Nation, a collective committed to the liberation of Indigenous peoples from capitalism and

colonialism, the affinity between their condition and that of Palestinians is striking. Shortly after October 7, they issued an open letter stressing their support of and commitment to Palestinian resistance:

The settler states that dispossess and occupy our lands support Israel in dispossessing and occupying Palestine. We see and feel the strength of Palestinian families in the face of the quotidian violence of the Israeli apartheid regime. Colonized peoples have the right to defend themselves and to resist colonial violence. We support Palestinian liberation and their right as an oppressed people to resist colonialism and genocide.⁵⁸

Resistance against the occupier and the desire for freedom are not to be pathologized.⁵⁹ Indigenous solidarity has everything to do with context, that is, with the material realities imposed by the settler regime. It does not mean that their condition is identical, only that they share in their struggle against an eliminatory logic that seeks their erasure by whatever means necessary (siege, starvation, transfer, and so on).

In addition to exceptionalizing Israel (Israeli settler reality/history is unlike any other settler states), Illouz believes that you can decouple Zionism from “Jewish fascism,” from its corrosive religious-messianic excesses.⁶⁰ A secular Zionism would duly underscore Zionism’s origins as a movement of liberation and legitimize the existence of Israel as a place of security for all Jews around the world while still treating its Palestinian population with dignity. And if Jews are currently unsafe in Israel (and abroad), the blame lies not in Zionism’s intrinsic aggressivity but in its capture by religious fanatics who are currently in political control (and the global left is not helping by its attempts to delegitimize the idea of Israel). If Zionism is not essentially characterized as a racist ideology or a collective fantasy of subjugation that rationalized the colonization of historic Palestine, Illouz can paint a less compromised image of the Israeli state.

Illouz is by no means alone in making such arguments. Howard Jacobson also dismisses the charge that Israel is a colonial/racist project. And he equally frames the question of settler colonialism around the left and Jewish hatred. He distinguishes between a Palestinian anti-Semitism and a leftist anti-Semitism, and finds the latter more offensive: “That many Palestinians have been indoctrinated into the grossest forms of Jew hate is—let us say, so as not to have a fight—understandable. That students at elite Western universities should submit without a whimper to the same indoctrination is not.”⁶¹ In one swoop, Jacobson naturalizes Palestinian anti-Semitism, hinting that they can’t know any better, but Western students should. The title of the article, “The Founding of Israel Wasn’t a Colonial Act—a Refugee Isn’t a Colonist,” announces the wrongheadedness of this *ressentiment*-infused intervention. We’re told the author is “furious,” “afraid,” and “defiled”—the Palestinians and their

leftist supporters display only hateful rage since, presumably, the reality of anti-Semitism does not temper but instead encourages their anger at Israel and its settlers. Jacobson dismisses the charge that Israel is a colonial/racist project. As he smugly affirms, “Fleeing from pogroms isn’t colonizing.”⁶² Yes, fleeing for your life doesn’t make you a colonist, but it does if you, tacitly or actively, found and support a state that sought and seeks the dispossession of an Indigenous population. It is an inconvenient truth if we turn to Zionism’s founding architects. Vladimir Jabotinsky, speaking unambiguously in 1923 from the position of an invading sovereign settler:

My readers have a general idea of the history of colonisation in other countries. I suggest that they consider all the precedents with which they are acquainted, and see whether there is one solitary instance of any colonisation being carried on with the consent of the native population. There is no such precedent.

The native populations, civilised or uncivilised, have always stubbornly resisted the colonists, irrespective of whether they were civilised or savage....

Every native population, civilised or not, regards its lands as its national home, of which it is the sole master, and it wants to retain that mastery always; it will refuse to admit not only new masters but, even new partners or collaborators.⁶³

Likewise, Israel’s first prime minister David Ben-Gurion, in a letter to his son Amos, articulates this very settler-colonial plan: “A Jewish state on only part of the land is not the end but the beginning.... The establishment of a state, even if only on a portion of the land, is the maximal reinforcement of our strength at the present time and a powerful boost to our historical endeavors to liberate the entire country.”⁶⁴ Though Ben-Gurion recognizes Indigenous resistance to the partition of historic Palestine (“If I were an Arab I would have been very indignant”⁶⁵), Jewish dominion over the land is the goal: “Palestine is grossly under populated. It contains vast colonization potential which the Arabs neither need nor are qualified (because of their lack of need) to exploit.”⁶⁶ Even Jabotinsky’s colonizing Zionism imagined a continued presence of Palestinians in historic Palestine. He acknowledges the impossibility of their erasure: “I am reputed to be an enemy of the Arabs, who wants to have them ejected from Palestine, and so forth. It is not true. Emotionally, my attitude to the Arabs is the same as to all other nations—polite indifference. Politically, my attitude is determined by two principles. First of all, I consider it utterly impossible to eject the Arabs from Palestine. There will always be *two* nations in Palestine—which is good enough for me, provided the Jews become the majority.”⁶⁷ For later Zionist right-wingers like Netanyahu following in the footsteps of Jabotinsky—“the radical heirs of Jabotinsky,”

as Seth Ackerman puts it—two nations in Palestine was no longer good enough for them.⁶⁸ The right's attitude has changed. A Greater Israel—the fascist one-state solution—now constitutes the Israeli political horizon (what used to be considered only the fringe right's). For the Israeli far right, ejecting Palestinians, for the purposes of territorial expansion, is now both militarily possible and highly desirable.

And let's not forget the work of Israeli historians, like Ilan Pappé, who have convincingly shown that Zionist leaders, from the beginning, were planning to erase Palestinians from the contested land. As Pappé points out, Zionist leaders, in 1948, adopted Plan D (Dalet in Hebrew), a military blueprint for ethnic cleansing. The Dalet Plan emerged as:

both the inevitable product of the Zionist ideological impulse to have an exclusively Jewish presence in Palestine, and a response to developments on the ground once the British cabinet had decided to end the mandate. Clashes with local Palestinian militias provided the perfect context and pretext for implementing the ideological vision of an ethnically cleansed Palestine. The Zionist policy was first based on retaliation against Palestinian attacks in February 1947, and it transformed into an initiative to ethnically cleanse the country as a whole in March 1948.... When it [the mission] was over, more than half of Palestine's native population, close to 800,000 people, had been uprooted, 531 villages had been destroyed, and eleven urban neighbourhoods emptied of their inhabitants.⁶⁹

Pappé does not mince words; the Dalet plan constituted a full-blown agenda of physical removal of Palestinians from their homeland, a "clear-cut case of an ethnic cleansing operation, regarded under international law today as a crime against humanity."⁷⁰

If the argument that people fleeing pogroms are not colonialists is less than convincing, Jacobson draws a distinction between Israel and its settler excess. Jacobson can then proceed to make inconsequential statements like "the building of settlements on the West Bank is indefensible,"⁷¹ which he, in turn, qualifies immediately by claiming that the Palestinians are to blame for their displacement and suffering. Why? Because their violent actions have hardened the hearts of Israeli Jews: "If something hard entered the Israeli soul, it was not unconnected to the seeming promise of an eternal war with a Palestinian people for whom co-existence with Jews appeared all but unthinkable. Hateful as they are, the settlements were not written into the small print of Zionism. They belong to history, not principle."⁷² Aside from blaming the victims, I agree: today's Zionism is not the consequences of a necessity. Zionism is not by definition a hateful machine. In Saidian terms, Zionism, like any other "ism," is a worldly matter, subjected to the struggle for meaning. But in its recurring historical manifestations, it comes to gain a material

force and an inexorable logic of its own; in this respect, we can speak here of colonial time, of a Zionist futurology. We can extrapolate an Israeli aggrandizing sovereignty, a merciless drive for territorial expansion, working its way toward a Greater Israel or a historic Palestine without Palestinians. In other words, I see continuity between the early Zionists, the Dalet Plan of 1948, and the current Settler Movement constituting the core of the Israeli far right. Liberal Zionists might object that this is not their narrative of Zionism, that among their ranks stand people who actively seek to challenge the march of the right's ruthless Zionism.

Alon Schwarz's 2022 documentary *Tantura* might serve as a case in point. Though it dares to engage the taboo topic of the Nakba by returning to the destruction of the Palestinian village Tantura, the documentary treats the problem of ethnic cleansing as one of acknowledgment rather than accountability⁷³:

We must do this [acknowledge the past] while seeking ways that will allow for a reconciliation and an end to the conflict. Acknowledgment is the basis of everything. Without acknowledgment, the war will continue. We need to come up with new ideas. Zionism must upgrade its operating system if it wants to survive. Taking responsibility doesn't mean returning the refugees to Tantura and deporting the kibbutzniks of Nahsholim—which now stands on the site of the village. There are other ways.⁷⁴

Undoubtedly, but what, more precisely, are these other ways? Reparations, the decolonization of Israel...? No, it is again an alarmist attempt to resurrect the two-state solution. Indeed, the two-state solution as "reconciliation" has everything to do with "rescuing settler normalcy," "rescuing a settler future."⁷⁵ What Schwarz fears is an unjust one-state solution which would erode Zionism at its core: "Zionism today is destroying itself in a rush to a single binational state from the river to the sea. The Jewish state has no future if the oppressive rule over the Palestinians continues and if the land will not be divided to form two states."⁷⁶ My riposte to Schwarz: the Tantura massacre, and the settler violence that marks it, is not an aberration or exception to the Zionist dream, but constitutive of it, part and parcel of its "operative structure."⁷⁷ Zionism is inextricable from its colonial reason. If Schwarz urges his fellow Zionists not to repress the fact of the Tantura massacre, there is no suggestion that knowledge of it will alter the social coordinates of Israeli lives in any significant way. Schwarz is asking his fellow Israelis to "upgrade [Zionism's] operating system," not erase its racist programming. No politics follows this acknowledgment, from "woke Zionism." Guilt, maybe; but hardly any genuine sense of responsibility. Zionists are not being asked to curtail, let alone dismantle, their Jewish privilege or priority. No concrete actions are in fact required of Israeli Jews; you can

still be a Zionist, you just have to recognize that Israel's founding involved crimes against humanity. And since the founding violence of nations is not unique to Israel, an acknowledgement of it does not in itself threaten Israel's place among Western nations. By extension, those who keep insisting on Israel's original violence/sin must be anti-Semitic.

Again, what worries Schwarz's liberal Zionism the most is not the right's repression of Zionism's dark chapters and myths. What it desperately seeks to exclude from the realm of possibilities is a *just* one-state solution from the river to the sea.⁷⁸ The idea unsettles liberal Zionists because it casts them as accomplices to an openly supremacist regime, implicated in a national romance of racial elimination. No, Schwarz pursues the path of an introspective and sensitive Zionism,⁷⁹ and, in this respect, he can have his cake and eat it too. Schwarz can acknowledge Israel's vicious chapters (and thus gain the moral high ground vis-à-vis political Zionists who are aggressively phobic about the Nakba) and he can proceed with his life without any existential crisis or major disruption. No need for reparation nor redistribution. Israel remains Jewish and democratic.

In their own distinct ways, Illouz, Jacobson, and Schwarz seek, in the words of Lara Sheehi and Stephen Sheehi, "to recuperate and validate the legitimacy of sovereignty of a settler state."⁸⁰ Each dreams of an Israel capable of reigning in the state's fascistic and expansionist tendencies. Jacobson and Illouz are more ferocious in demonizing the leftist critics of Israel. Jacobson can even claim that it takes more "moral courage" to castigate Palestinians, since "right now it takes none to castigate Jews"⁸¹—a surprising statement given the Zionist-inflected McCarthyism reverberating across university campuses in the Global North.⁸² Schwarz, for his part, wants change without change; he wants a self-reflexive Zionism that acknowledges its past wrongs but without any real accountability, without any gestures toward decolonizing Palestine/Israel. The three exhibit "settler moves to innocence." What we get in Illouz, Jacobson, and Schwarz is obfuscation at its best: *Israel is not really a settler-colonial state; plus, our own origins begin in trauma and anti-Semitism; yes, we are mistreating Palestinians (how do you respond to a terrorist group like Hamas?) but we are not committing genocide.*⁸³ *Yes, we did terrible things in the past (ethnic cleansing in 1948) and in the present (the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank; Netanyahu's mismanagement of the Gaza war), but Zionism can be redeemed and brought back to align with the ideals of the European Enlightenment.* Or, formulated in the language of fetishist disavowal: *We know about Israel's past and present violence done to Palestinians, but all the same we don't believe the facticity of Israel exhausts or overrides Zionism's ethical core and thus what Israel could be.*

Illouz, in particular, ironically ends up in Netanyahu's camp.⁸⁴ The anti-colonial left is an anti-Semitic left. The possibility of engaging with the

Palestinian question, of getting her liberal Israeli audience to think more critically about “the elephant in the room,”⁸⁵ that is, the Occupation, is foreclosed. Worse, Illouz suspends critical thinking in the name of bearing witness to the suffering of Jews: *don’t hijack the event, blame Israel, and rob me of my/people’s pain*. For Illouz, “the true left, the only one, is the one that recognizes the intractability of certain conflicts because it refuses to privilege the rights of one people to the detriment of another.”⁸⁶ I find this vision of the Left lacking any attention to antagonism. Hamas becomes the new political fetish of center-leftist Zionists, a phantasmatic image of the enemy whose purpose is to cover over the true antagonism: Native versus settler. What makes the Palestine/Israel “conflict” intractable stems for the wrong-headed belief that we are dealing with a conflict—and not an antagonism—that is resolvable within the existing Zionist order of things. There is nothing leftist in failing to deal with the “bigger elephant” in the room: settler colonialism.

All of Illouz’s notable work in making Palestinian duress and misery visible to Israelis crumbles; what ultimately matters is not Palestinian lives (collateral deaths). October 7 is about Jewish life and death, and only about Jewish life and death. Anti-colonial reason, in its hunger to understand the situation, in its refusal to accept the image of Palestinians as intrinsically anti-Semitic and barbaric, betrayed the Jewish people. I see this reaction to the anti-colonial left as marking a cultural shift. A fetishist disavowal no longer seems to be operational in it. What once operated in the form *I know very well about Palestinian misery, but all the same I believe in Israel’s universalist aspirations, I believe in an Israel after Netanyahu* now becomes *I know very well about Palestinian misery, that the Occupation is grotesque, but all the same I don’t care. In this moment, when it comes to trauma, my kin come first*.

Illouz keeps insisting on the universalism of her Zionist position, but it is an anxious universalism, a universalism in crisis worried that Israel as such (and not only its right-wing governments) will lose credibility and be deemed an enemy of universal thought. She feels betrayed, blames this leftist abandonment on the left’s paranoid hermeneutic, that is, on its reflexive anti-Zionism and simplistic binarism. Her strike at the anti-colonial left is an attempt to reset the moral high ground. This is a universalism that effortlessly opens to a Zionist muscular nationalism or, as Odeh Bisharat put it, to the “warm (and suffocating) embrace of ultranationalism.”⁸⁷ Ultranationalism is a form of tribalism and does nothing to challenge Israel’s anti-Palestinian collective psyche. The Shoah and October 7 trump the Nakba and the Occupation—as if it was a matter of choosing.

The ultranationalism nurtured and weaponized by the Israeli far right does not need fetishist disavowal to sustain its operation. Ultranationalist logic is explicit: *we know very well about the 1948 Nakba, and we now want to complete it in the annihilation of Gaza*. Their anti-peace plan is

total security through merciless conquest. Normalizing colonial subjugation is its business. Liberal Zionism, on the other hand, needs it desperately to sustain its life, its settler innocence, to keep the unbearable realities/atrocities of genocide at a distance. The global left should welcome the cleavage between the two positions, which can prompt a reframing. The false choice between political/religious Zionism and liberal/cultural Zionism was always a fake opposition, an ideological ruse that makes liberals feel good about their support of a settler state, and occludes their collusion with a genocidal state. For many Palestinians and their anti-colonial supporters, the choice has always clearly been between a muscular and expansionist Zionism on the one hand, and an anti-colonial struggle on the other. It is up to the rest of the world now to take their stand.

- 1 Mannoni 2003, p. 70.
- 2 A post on X from the progressive Jewish organization IfNotNow brings the racial politics of the US and Palestine/Israel into sharp dialogue. The statement captures the porous fault lines separating liberal Democrats from their far-right counterparts, highlighting the political motivation behind the oppositions to Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Boycott, Divest, Sanction (BDS) movement: "The fanatical anti-CRT and anti-BDS movements are one and the same: a desperate attempt to hide historical and current reality, to police free speech when it threatens nationalism" (IfNotNow 2021). Both CRT and BDS trouble a collective psychic investment in the existing order of things. Racially sensitive liberals are happy to publicly decry the anti-CRT legislation emerging across the nation, but are tacitly willing to join the same guardians of white supremacy in supporting anti-BDS bills. Liberals in the US back CRT, but block BDS by actively supporting anti-BDS legislations aiming to delegitimize the pro-Palestinian movement. I believe that we need to read the generalized liberal hostility toward BDS not as ignorance about the subject matter (the Palestinian narrative still lacks visibility in Western corporate media) but as evidence of liberal complicity and collusion with an anti-Black world, casting doubt about the liberal support of and commitment to CRT. White liberals are in favor of cosmetic changes. You can talk about Black suffering, celebrate and honor Black history as much as you want, but don't ask white America to give up on the American dream and its claim to exceptionalism, to confront police brutality and the mass incarceration of Black and Brown bodies (in the end, liberals are by no means hostile to the racialized "Law and Order" narrative)—in short, don't ask us (white Americans) to give up our privilege or priority. President Joe Biden can talk about introducing new economic policies targeting Black folks, but they will fall short from facing "the gaping wounds of racial economic injustice" (Black Lives Matter 2024) Why? For the liberal Left, America, not unlike Israel, is *not* a racist state or project. See Zalloua 2024.
- 3 Illouz 2014.
- 4 Salvatori 2023.
- 5 Majadli 2024.
- 6 Illouz 2024a.
- 7 To be fair, Illouz has refused to demonize critics of the Israeli state, arguing against anti-BDS legislation, though she herself did not agree with the BDS movement. But the global left's reaction to the Hamas attacks has soured her position.
- 8 Zalloua 2022.
- 9 Illouz 2024a.
- 10 Slavoj Žižek notes Illouz's slippages into interpretive "vulgarity" when describing Judith Butler as an "'intellectual' in quotation marks." Žižek counters: "although I had many disputes with Butler, whatever she is, she is an intellectual in the full sense of the term" (Žižek 2023). Likewise postcolonial theory—though not without limitations—is not to be summarily dismissed. With an eye for the persistence of colonial bias and reason in the contemporary landscape, postcolonial theorists—like Said, Spivak, and Achille Mbembe—have played a crucial role in provincializing Western philosophy and its preoccupations, creating, in turn, an intellectual space for thinking non-European difference and the Palestinian question (Zalloua 2017).
- 11 Illouz 2024a.
- 12 Kleinberg 2023.
- 13 Kleinberg 2023.
- 14 Said 1996, p. 32.
- 15 Spivak 1990, p.66.
- 16 Illouz 2023a.
- 17 For Fayeze Sayegh, Zionism's racist proclivities were present from the get-go, set on a collision course with the "inferior" native Palestinians: "Zionist *racial identification* produces three corollaries: *racial self-segregation*, *racial exclusiveness*, and *racial supremacy*. These principles constitute the core of the Zionist ideology" (Sayegh 1965, p. 22).
- 18 Rose 2005.
- 19 Shoard 2024. Center-left Zionists typically see the "conflict" between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis as a 1967 problem—the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories after the Six-Day War must come to an end. The letter's line of reasoning comes straight out of the Israeli far-right playbook, not what you would expect from liberal Hollywood. The anti-colonial Left agrees: 1967 is not the problem. Rather, it locates the source of the Palestine/Israel antagonism in 1948, in the Zionist settler invasion.
- 20 The specific portion of Glazer's comments that critics have seized upon (and often misquoted) is the following: "We stand here as men who refute their Jewishness and the Holocaust being hijacked by an occupation which has led to conflict for so many innocent people, whether the victims of 7 October in Israel or the ongoing attack on Gaza." What Glazer is denouncing here is not his Jewishness but the instrumentalization of Jewish suffering (symbolized by the Shoah) for the justification of Palestinian genocide. In disidentifying with a genocidal Jewish state, Glazer refuses to have his art contribute to the cynical logic of Zionism that, on one hand, sacralizes Jewish suffering, and, on the other, discounts Palestinian suffering.

- Avowing the latter suffering, and having that knowledge alter one's identity, is precisely what liberal Zionists tend to decline to do, preferring instead to isolate the constitutive role of the former suffering in their day-to-day lives. See Klein 2024. In poignant response to the open letter, over 150 Jewish Hollywood professionals signed a letter in support of Glazer's Oscars comments. The signatories reject the Zionist forced choice, affirming: "We should be able to name Israel's apartheid and occupation—both recognized by leading human rights organizations as such—without being accused of rewriting history" (Shafer 2024).
- 21 Illouz neglects to mention that historians immediately refuted Netanyahu's claim that the Mufti of Jerusalem gave Hitler the idea for the Final Solution in 1941. See Rudoren 2015.
 - 22 Khalidi 1997, p. 5.
 - 23 Bisharat 2023.
 - 24 Lara Sheehi and Stephen Sheehi argue that the Palestinian's "perverse" state is explained as either "due to the backwardness of Arab culture or, from a more sympathetic perspective, 'stunted' as a consequence of 'trauma,' 'war,' or occupation" (Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, p. 11). Palestinians are damaged either by the backwardness of their own processes of culturalization or as the debilitating effect of colonial subjugation in the occupied territories. In both instances, the humanity/subjectivity of the Palestinians is politically compromised. The latter explanation may be less Orientalist, but it reifies the victim status of the Palestinian, evacuating any sense of Indigenous agency—they *couldn't do otherwise*.
 - 25 Sayegh 1965, p. 27.
 - 26 Speri 2023. <https://theintercept.com/2023/10/09/israel-hamas-war-crimes-palestinians/>.
 - 27 Nafar 2023.
 - 28 Ackerman 2024, p. 16.
 - 29 Illouz 2024a; Nechin 2024; Peled 2024; Kraus 2024; Nelson 2024.
 - 30 Butler 2024b; see also Butler 2024a.
 - 31 Sayegh 1956, p. 46.
 - 32 Butler 2024b.
 - 33 Butler 2024b.
 - 34 Butler 2024b.
 - 35 Butler 2024a.
 - 36 Butler 2024a.
 - 37 Nelson 2024. Nelson's accusation of anti-Semitism must be turned back on its vindictive accuser. In policing Butler's speech, deemed beyond the pale, Nelson displays what Žižek names "Zionist anti-Semitism," insofar as the latter is infuriated by the former's deployment of their Jewishness to denounce Israel's colonial subjugation and state violence (Žižek 2014, p. 6; see also Massad 2013).
- By disidentifying with the Zionist settler-colonial regime, and lending their voice to the Palestinian cause of liberation, Butler refuses to accept the state of Israel as the authority over Jewish matters (unlike Netanyahu's narcissistic reading of the Holocaust imperative "Never Again," Butler reads it as interpellating you—as a Jew—to prevent rather than authorize the genocide of Palestinians). They labor instead to decouple Judaism from Zionism, so that another political configuration of Palestine/Israel might emerge.
- 38 Butler 2023.
 - 39 Butler 2023.
 - 40 Žižek 2006, p. 56.
 - 41 Žižek 2006, p. 53.
 - 42 Wynter 2003, p. 260.
 - 43 McKittrick 2015, p. 47; see, also, Kashani 2023.
 - 44 Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, p. 206.
 - 45 Illouz urges the global Left to cancel Butler, that is, to not let them "usurp" the Left in their support of Hamas (Illouz 2024a).
 - 46 Sayegh 1965, p. 30.
 - 47 Deleuze 2006, p. 241.
 - 48 Begin 1977, p. 91.
 - 49 Begin 1977, pp. 90–91.
 - 50 Said 1979.
 - 51 There is also a tendency among Zionists to reclaim the idea of terrorism. Then Prime Minister Ehud Barak said, "Had I been a Palestinian I would have joined a terrorist organization" (Mendilow 2003, p. 209). Consider also the article by Ben Hecht, the militant Zionist Hollywood scriptwriter, "Letter to the Terrorists of Palestine," in which he praises the terrorist actions of the Zionist paramilitary groups in Mandate Palestine (Žižek 2008, p. 119).
 - 52 Nechin 2024.
 - 53 Tuck and Yang 2012, p. 10.
 - 54 Wolfe 2013, p. 257.
 - 55 Wolfe 2006, p. 388.
 - 56 Nechin 2024.
 - 57 Malcom X condemned and ridiculed the popular Zionist narrative that cast Jewish Indigeneity as a justification for settler colonialism: "Did the Zionists have the legal or moral right to invade Arab Palestine, uproot its Arab citizens from their homes and seize all Arab property for themselves just based on the 'religious' claim that their forefathers lived there thousands of years ago? Only a thousand years ago the Moors lived in Spain. Would this give the Moors the legal and moral right to invade the Iberian Peninsula, drive out its Spanish citizens, and then set up a Moroccan nation where Spain used to be, as the European Zionists have done to our Arab brothers and sisters in Palestine?" (Malcolm X 1967). As Illouz notes, Jews did maintain a presence in the country of Palestine, but let's

recall that when the 1917 Balfour Declaration was made Palestinian Arabs comprised roughly 95 percent of the land's inhabitants. Britain's decision to create a national Jewish homeland in historic Palestine was issued without the consultation of the Indigenous Palestinian people. And contrary to Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, who infamously remarked in 1969 that "There was no such thing as a Palestinian. It was not as though there was a Palestinian people They did not exist" (Khalidi 1997, p. 147); Khalid Rashidi documents an awareness of Palestinianness or Palestinian identity, at the end of the nineteenth century, that existed prior to the encounter with Zionism, though it was subsequently marked by it. In this sense, Palestinian identity, writes Rashidi, "developed in spite of, and in some cases because of, the obstacles it faced" (Khalidi 1997, p. 6; see also Sayegh 1965, p. 4). Contemporary claims regarding Jewish metaphysical Indigeneity must be heard in the context of Golda Meir's attempts to discredit Palestinianness, painting Palestinians as merely Arabs who call themselves "Palestinians." See also Aranguren, Barrilaro, and El-Kurd 2024.

58 The Red Nation 2023.

59 Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, p. 96.

60 "For those who, like me, define themselves as Zionists—believing that, despite its iniquities, the creation of a Jewish national home was legitimate and necessary—writing these words—Jewish fascism—is shocking. But a number of facts leave no choice" (Illouz 2022).

61 Jacobson 2023.

62 Jacobson 2023.

63 Jabotinsky 1923.

64 Ben-Gurion 1937.

65 Ben-Gurion 1937.

66 Ben-Gurion 1937.

67 Jabotinsky 1923.

68 Ackerman 2024, p. 29.

69 Pappé 2006, p. xii–xiii.

70 Pappé 2006, p. xiii.

71 Jacobson 2023.

72 Jacobson 2023.

73 See Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, p. 131.

74 Schwarz 2022.

75 Tuck and Yang 2012, p. 35.

76 Schwarz 2022.

77 Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, p. 126.

78 A just one-state solution might be the only political constellation capable of dissolving or transcending the Native/settler binary. But there is no new political constellation without a reckoning with settler colonialism. This is why Lydia Polgreen's argument about settler colonialism and its obsession with Indigeneity misses the mark. Polgreen juxtaposes a problematic social media discourse, reminiscent of Illouz's and Kleinberg's

objections, to a simplistic postcolonial binarism ("in this analysis, there are two kinds of people: those who are native to a land and those who settle it, displacing the original inhabitants. Those identities are fixed, essential, eternal") with a desire to be forward looking, moving beyond the vicissitudes of decolonization. Polgreen turns to Fanon and Edward Said for conceptual support, and ends her article with the observation: "Liberation requires invention, not restoration. If history tells us anything, it is this: Time moves in one direction, forward" (Polgreen 2024). Yes, I agree "liberation requires invention," but there is no liberation without decolonization, which is precisely Fanon's point. Unless you want to turn Fanon into a "toothless revolutionary," decolonization is a precondition, a "tabula rasa," for invention (as in the creation of a "new man") (Fanon 2004, p. 1, 239). Fanonian decolonization is clearly not interested in the recovery of a pristine past, in a time prior to the colonial encounter. Decolonialization is an "agenda for total disorder" (Fanon 2004, p. 2), and, in the context of Palestine/Israel, the disorder will most likely take the form, at least in part, of armed resistance against the settler-colonial order of things (the BDS movement can obviously also contribute to this disorder, casting Israel as a pariah state—for its theft of land, systemic subjugation of Palestinians, and flaunting of international law—to the global community). Likewise, Said's vision of a just one-state solution must be set against the failures of the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis, which yielded the Oslo Accords. The absence of a reckoning with settler colonialism transformed the Oslo Accords into "an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles" (Said 1993). Urging a move beyond the settler/Native binary leaves intact the asymmetrical structure between Palestinians and Israel. Neither Fanon nor Said wanted to end with that binary, but they both recognized that there is no liberation without facing the bewitching wickedness of coloniality. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis without the latter confronting the government's displacement and dispossession of Palestinians *and* expressing a commitment to change the colonial situation (before co-existence comes co-resistance), demanding to decolonize to Palestine/Israel (along with both people's collective psyche—whence the necessity of decolonizing the minds of the Native and settler in order to transcend the Manichean logic operative in settler colonialism).

79 With Schwarz's self-reflexive Zionism, we can observe a shift from the "shoot and

weep” genre of Israeli cinema to “ethnically cleanse and weep”; the remorse happens only belatedly when it doesn’t really matter, when there is opportunity not for accountability, but for some surplus-enjoyment in righteousness, that is, in feeling good about feeling bad.

80 Sheehi and Sheehi 2022, p. 116.

81 Jacobson 2024.

82 Saba 2023; Strub 2023; Kane 2023; Marcetic 2023; Montag 2024. Illouz 2023b.

83 Illouz 2023b.

84 Michaeli 2024.

85 Open Letter 2023.

86 Illouz 2024a.

87 Bisharat 2023.

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The Hologram of Conflicting Universalities

Slavoj Žižek

Abstract: This paper discusses the contemporary notion of universality. It argues that today, we do not live only in a world which is less universal than we think (since we are all caught in particular cultural universes) - we are simultaneously *more* universal than we think since we are all caught in trans-cultural global capitalism.

Keywords: universality, Marx, society, individuals, antagonisms.

Lately the notion of universality started enjoying a bad reputation – the predominant commonplace is that a position which presents itself as neutral-universal effectively privileges a certain (heterosexual, male, Christian...) culture: “universal human rights are effectively the rights of the white male private owners to exchange freely on the market, exploit workers and women, as well as exert political domination...” This, however, is only half of the story: today, we do not live only in a world which is less universal than we think (since we are all caught in particular cultural universes) – we are simultaneously *more* universal than we think since we are all caught in trans-cultural global capitalism.

The question to be asked here concerns the emergence of the very form of universality: how and in what specific historical conditions, does the abstract Universality itself become a “fact of (social) life”? In what conditions do individuals, for example, experience themselves as subjects of universal human rights? Therein resides the point of Marx’s analysis of “commodity fetishism”: in a society in which commodity exchange predominates, individuals themselves, in their daily lives, relate to themselves, as well as to the objects they encounter, as to contingent embodiments of abstract-universal notions. What I am, my concrete social or cultural background, is experienced as contingent, since what ultimately defines me is the “abstract” universal capacity to think and/or to work. The modern notion of “profession” implies that I experience myself as an individual who is not directly “born into” his social role - what I will become depends on the interplay between the contingent social circumstances and my free choice. In this sense, today’s individual has the profession of being an electrician or professor or waiter, while it is meaningless to claim that a medieval serf was a peasant by profession. In certain specific social condition (of commodity exchange and global market economy), “abstraction” becomes a direct feature of the actual social life, the way concrete individuals behave and relate to their fate and to their social surroundings. Universality becomes “for itself” only insofar as individuals no longer fully identify the kernel of their being with their particular social situation, only insofar as they experience themselves as forever “out of joint” with regard to this situation: the mode of appearance of an abstract Universality, its entering into actual existence, is thus an extremely violent move of disrupting the preceding texture of social life.

Universality-for-itself is thus to be opposed to any notion of organic totality, of a Whole in which every particular element has its allotted place: in a totality, its universality becomes for itself in one of its elements which cannot achieve full identity in it, which lacks a proper place in it, i.e., whose particular identity is thwarted, which cannot actualize itself in its particularity. For radical feminism, for example, women (not men) stand for universality insofar as they are prevented from fully becoming what they are (with regard to their immanent potentials). This brings us to the problem of Jewish identity. In his *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger characterized Jews as a failed nation, a rootless nation with no land, just prone to calculation and manipulation – however, what Heidegger ignored is that the very fact that Jews were “failed” as a nation was what made them great, a stand-in for universality.

So what happens when the traditional anti-Semitism which perceived Jews as deracinated/rootless people is rendered problematic since Zionists themselves begin to evoke the traditional anti-Semitic cliché of roots, or, as Alain Finkielkraut wrote in 2015 in a letter to *le Monde*: “The Jews, they have today chosen the path of rooting.”¹ It is easy to discern in this claim an echo of Heidegger who, in his *Spiegel* interview, posits that all essential and great things can only emerge from our having a homeland, from being rooted in a specific historical tradition. The irony is that in today’s Zionism we are dealing with a weird attempt to mobilize anti-Semitic clichés in order to legitimize Zionism: anti-Semitism reproaches the Jews for being rootless, and it is as if Zionism tries to correct this failure by belatedly providing Jews with roots... No wonder that many conservative anti-Semites ferociously support the expansion of the State of Israel. The problem is that now Jews act as if they can have a cake and eat it, too: they have a land and state, but they still maintain the claim to universality. This tension unfortunately makes Israel a failed state.

What we see these days (April 2024) in Haiti is the extreme case of a so-called failed state: illegal criminal gangs took over the public space and control 80% of the country. But are the West Bank settlers who threaten Palestinians there, physically attacking them, stealing their land and ruining their crops, plus who are doing this while the Israeli army and police is observing them, not yet another case of illegal gangs openly violating the law and as such not only tolerated but even supported by the (Israeli) forces of law? No wonder this is going on when Israeli minister of security commanding the police is Itamar Ben Gvir convicted by an Israeli court for anti-Palestinian terrorism... The sad lesson of such a role of criminal gangs is that today Western democracies are less and less fully applicable even in the developed West: if we measure a failed state by the cracks in the edifice of state power, as well as the heightened atmosphere of ideological civil war and the growing insecurity of public spaces, then Israel and even the United States are on a fast-track to become one.

Such a confused situation elicits a desperate search for some ideological form that would maintain social stability. The first obvious

candidate is, of course, religion. Marx's well-known characterization of religion as the "opium of the people" nonetheless remains all too naïve. It is true that radical Islam is an exemplary case of religion as the opium of the people: a false confrontation with capitalist modernity which allows the Muslims to dwell in their ideological dream while their countries are ravaged by the effects of global capitalism – and exactly the same holds for Christian fundamentalism. However, there are today, in our Western world, two other versions of the opium of the people: the opium and the people.

The reference to "people" functions today as a fuzzy populist dream destined to obfuscate our own antagonisms. And, last but not least, for many among us the opium of the people is opium itself, the escape into drugs. Chemistry (in its scientific version) is becoming part of us: large aspects of our lives are characterized by the management of our emotions by drugs, from everyday use of sleeping pills and anti-depressants to hard narcotics. We are not just controlled by impenetrable social powers, our very emotions are "outsourced" to chemical stimulation. The stakes of this chemical intervention are double and contradictory: we use drugs to keep external excitement (shocks, anxieties, etc.) under control, i.e., to de-sensitize us for them, and to generate artificial excitement if we are depressed and lack desire. Drugs thus react to the two opposed threats to our daily lives, over-excitement and depression, and it is crucial to notice how these two uses of drugs relate to the couple of private and public: in the developed Western countries, our public lives more and more lack collective excitement (exemplarily provided by a genuine political engagement), while drugs supplant this lack with private (or, rather, intimate) forms of excitement – drugs perform the euthanasia of public life and the artificial excitation of private life. The country whose daily life is most impregnated by this tension is South Korea, and here is Franco Berardi's report on his journey to Seoul:

Korea is the ground zero of the world, a blueprint for the future of the planet. /.../ In the emptied cultural space, the Korean experience is marked by an extreme degree of individualization and simultaneously it is headed towards the ultimate cabling of the collective mind. These lonely monad walks in the urban space in tender continuous interaction with the pictures, tweets, games coming out of their small screens, perfectly insulated and perfectly wired into the smooth interface of the flow. /.../ South Korea has the highest suicide rate in the world. Suicide is the most common cause of death for those under 40 in South Korea.

What Berardi's impressions on Seoul provide is the image of a place deprived of history, a worldless place (the term was introduced by Alain Badiou). Even Nazi anti-Semitism, however ghastly it was, opened up a world: it described its critical situation by positing an enemy which was a "Jewish conspiracy"; it named a goal and the means of achieving it.

Nazism disclosed reality in a way which allowed its subjects to acquire a global “cognitive mapping”, and opened up a space for their meaningful engagement.

Perhaps it is here that one should locate one of the main dangers of capitalism: although it is global and encompasses the whole world, it deprives the large majority of people of any meaningful cognitive mapping. Capitalism is the first socio-economic order which de-totalizes meaning: it is not global at the level of meaning. There is, after all, no global “capitalist world view,” no “capitalist civilization” proper: the fundamental lesson of globalization is precisely that capitalism can accommodate itself to all civilizations, from Christian to Hindu or Buddhist, from West to East. Capitalism’s global dimension can only be formulated at the level of truth-without-meaning, as the Real of the global market mechanism. No wonder millions are exposed to the unbearable superego pressure in its two aspects: the pressure to succeed professionally and the pressure to enjoy life fully in all its intensity.

This brings us to Alexandre Kojève, the great interpreter of Hegel from 1930s to 1950s who saw the moment of the “end of history,” the highest form of social order, first in Stalinist Russia and then in contemporary Japan. If Kojève were to be alive today, he would have chosen South Korea² – why? South Korea is arguably THE country of free choice – not in the political sense, but in the sense of daily life, especially among the younger depoliticized generation. The choice we are talking about is the indifferent choice of moderate daily pleasures, the choice among options which don’t really matter: what one listens to and reads, how one dresses, how one socializes and eats, to which foreign country one goes for a holiday... There is a recent movie that perfectly depicts the stance of such a post-political disengaged individual: *Perfect Days* (Wim Wenders 2023, a Japanese-German coproduction) in which Kōji Yakusho plays Hirayama who works as a toilet cleaner in Tokyo, fully content with his simple life. Following a ritualized daily rhythm, he repeats it daily from dawn, and dedicates his free time to his passion for music, in his van to and from work, and books, every night before bed. Japan comes closest to South Korea in this trend to depoliticized disengagement – even the immensely popular Japanese eco-Marxist Kohei Saito advocates the motto “slow down” (the title of his last book).

This new generation mostly doesn’t care about big issues like human rights and freedoms or the threat of war – while the world still notices the aggressive pronouncements of the North Korean regime accompanied by nuclear threats, the large majority in South Korea just ignores them. Since the standard of living of the large majority is relatively high, one comfortably lives in a bubble. North Korea is the opposite: permanent mobilization and emergency state, no free choices, life focused on how to confront the Enemy... To counter this indifference of the youth, which is spreading also in China, Xi Jinping recently lauded Chinese civilization for

its long and continuous history that stretches back to antiquity, saying that it has shaped the great Chinese nation. He emphasized that it is imperative to comprehensively improve the protection and utilization of cultural relics and better preserve and carry forward cultural heritage.³

This is why one should closely follow the writings of Wang Huning, a current member of the Chinese Communist Party's Politburo Standing Committee and the director of Central Guidance Commission on Building Spiritual Civilization. Wang is correct in emphasizing the key role of culture, of the domain of symbolic fictions. The true materialist way to oppose the topic of the "fiction of reality" (subjectivist doubts in the style of "is what we perceive as reality not just another fiction?") is not to strictly distinguish between fiction and reality but to focus on the *reality of fictions*. Fictions are not outside reality, they are materialized in our social interactions, in our institutions and customs – as we can see in today's mess, if we destroy fictions on which our social interactions are based, our social reality itself begins to fall apart.

Wang designated himself as a neo-conservative – what does this mean? Wang sees his task in imposing a new common ethical substance, and we should not dismiss this as an excuse to impose the full control of the Communist Party over social life. Wang is replying to a real problem. 30 years ago, he wrote a book *America against America* where he perspicuously noted the antagonisms of the American way of life, including its darker sides: social disintegration, lack of solidarity and shared values, nihilist consumerism and individualism...⁴ Trump's populism is a false way out: it is the climax of social disintegration because it introduces obscenity into the public speech and thus deprives it of its dignity – something not only prohibited but totally unimaginable in China. We will definitely never see a Chinese high politician doing what Trump did publicly: talk about how large his penis is, imitating a woman's orgasmic sounds... Wang's fear was that the same disease may spread to China – which is now happening at the popular level of mass culture, and the ongoing reforms are a desperate attempt to put a stop to this trend.

It is easy to perceive in the ongoing Chinese campaign a tension between content and form: the content – the establishment of stable values that hold a society together – is enforced in the form of mobilization which is experienced as a kind of emergency state imposed by the state apparatus. Although the goal is the opposite of the Cultural Revolution, there are similarities in the way the campaign is done. The danger is that such tensions can produce cynical disbelief in the population. More generally, the ongoing campaign in China seems all too close to the standard conservative attempts to enjoy the benefits of the capitalist dynamism but to control its destructive aspects through a strong Nation State pushing forward patriotic values.

Here also enters the new populism – is the best metaphor to be used to designate our crisis not that of Huntington's disease? Its typical

first symptoms are jerky, random, and uncontrollable movements called chorea - chorea may be initially exhibited as general restlessness, small unintentional or uncompleted motions, lack of coordination... Does an explosion of brutal populism not look quite similar? It begins with what appears as random violent excesses against immigrants, outbursts, which lack coordination and just express a general unease and restlessness apropos "foreign intruders," but then it gradually grows into a well-coordinated and ideologically grounded movement - what the other Huntington (Samuel) called "the clash of civilizations." This lucky coincidence is tell-tale: what is usually referred to under this term is effectively the Huntington's disease of today's global capitalism. According to Huntington, after the end of the Cold War, the "iron curtain of ideology" has been replaced by the "velvet curtain of culture." Huntington's dark vision of the "clash of civilizations" may appear to be the very opposite of Francis Fukuyama's bright prospect of the End of History in the guise of a world-wide liberal democracy - what can be more different from Fukuyama's pseudo-Hegelian idea that the final formula of the best possible social order was found in capitalist liberal democracy, than a "clash of civilizations" as the main political struggle in the XXIst century? How, then, do the two fit together.

From today's experience, the answer is clear: *the "clash of civilizations" IS politics at "the end of history"*. The ethnic-religious conflicts are the form of struggle which fits global capitalism: in our age of "post-politics" when politics proper is progressively replaced by expert social administration, the only remaining legitimate source of conflicts are cultural (ethnic, religious) tensions. Today's rise of "irrational" violence is thus to be conceived as strictly correlative to the depoliticization of our societies, i.e., to the disappearance of the proper political dimension, its translation into different levels of "administration" of social affairs. If we accept this thesis of the "clash of civilizations," the only alternative to it is the peaceful coexistence of civilizations (or of "ways of life," a more popular term today): forced marriages and homophobia (or the idea that a woman going alone to a public place call for a rape) are OK, just that they are limited to another country which is otherwise fully included into the world market.

The New World Order that is emerging is thus no longer the Fukuyamaist New World Order of global liberal democracy but a New World Order of the peaceful co-existence of different politico-theological ways of life - co-existence, of course, against the background of the smooth functioning of global capitalism. The obscenity of this process is that it can present itself as a progress in anti-colonial struggle: the liberal West will no longer be allowed to impose standards on others, all ways of life will be treated as equal... The last moment of the "end of history" was Fukuyama's dream of global liberal-democratic capitalism, and with the September 11 attacks, that era came to an end.

Decades ago, Ayatollah Khomeini wrote: “We’re not afraid of sanctions. We’re not afraid of military invasion. What frightens us is the invasion of Western immorality.” The fact that Khomeini talks about fear, about what a Muslim should fear most in the West, should be taken literally: Muslim fundamentalists do not have any problems with the brutality of economic and military struggles, their true enemy is not the Western economic neocolonialism and military aggressiveness but its “immoral” culture. The same holds for Putin’s Russia where the conservative nationalists define their conflict with the West as cultural, in the last resort focused on sexual difference (Russia recently defined LGBT movement as a terrorist organization).

While the new populist Right advocates a clear vision (return to traditional values against LGBT+ demands, reassertion of ethnic identity against immigrant threats and multiculturalism in general, etc.), the moderate Left is more and more simply disappearing: unable to propose a vision that would mobilize people, it often takes refuge in Cancel Culture excesses. Our global situation should thus be read as a hologram: there is no longer one notion of progress dominating (even the economic development is losing this role), we live in an era of the superposition of different futures, of different universalities (universal visions of progress). So the main options today are: remnants of the Fukuyama dream, direct religious fundamentalism, and especially what I cannot but call a moderately-authoritarian soft Fascism: market capitalism combined with strong state mobilizing nationalist ideology to maintain social cohesion – think of Modi’s India.

My suspicion is that these options will not work against the threats we are facing today, and that a new form of Communism will have to be invented. The urgent task imposing itself is that of universal solidarity and cooperation among all human communities. There is no higher historical necessity that pushes us in this direction, history is not on our side, it tends towards our collective suicide. As Walter Benjamin wrote, our task today is not to push forward the train of historical progress but to pull the emergency break before we all end in post-capitalist barbarism. The ongoing crises which resonate with it and with each other in a complex interplay. This interplay is uncontrollable and full of dangers, and such a risky situation makes our moment an eminently political one.

Our present situation is the one described by Cixin Liu in his sci-fi masterpiece *The Three-Body Problem*⁵: a scientist is drawn into a Virtual-Reality game “Three Body” in which players find themselves on an alien planet Trisolaris whose three suns rise and set at strange and unpredictable intervals: sometimes too far away and horribly cold, sometimes far too close and destructively hot, and sometimes not seen for long periods of time. The players can somehow dehydrate themselves and the rest of the population to weather the worst seasons, but life is a constant struggle against apparently unpredictable elements, so

that although players try to find ways to build a civilization and attempt to predict the strange cycles of heat and cold, they are condemned to destruction.

Do the latest disturbances in our environment not demonstrate that our Earth itself is gradually turning into Trisolaris? Devastating hurricanes, droughts and floods, not to mention global warming, do they all not indicate that we are witnessing something the only appropriate name for which is “the end of nature”? “Nature” is to be understood here in the traditional sense of a regular rhythm of seasons, the reliable background of human history, something on which we can count that it will always be there. Now that God or Tradition can no longer play the role of the highest limit, nature takes over this role. But what kind of nature will this be? Even when we imagine global warming, we are aware that we are approaching a new world in which the signifier “England” will designate a barren dry country, while the “Death Valley” will designate a big lake in California. However, we still picture it as a new stability, with “regular and repeatable weather patterns”:

“once humanity reaches the limit of carbon output, Earth’s climate stabilizes at a new, higher average temperature. This higher temperature is overall bad for humans, because it still leads to higher sea levels and more extreme weather events. But at least it’s stable: The Anthropocene looks like previous climate ages, only warmer, and it will still have.”

However, recent researches find it more probable that “Earth’s climate leads to chaos. True, mathematical chaos. In a chaotic system, there is no equilibrium and no repeatable patterns. A chaotic climate would have seasons that change wildly from decade to decade (or even year to year). Some years would experience sudden flashes of extreme weather, while others would be completely quiet. Even the average Earth temperature may fluctuate wildly, swinging from cooler to hotter periods in relatively short periods of time. It would become utterly impossible to determine in what direction Earth’s climate is headed.” Such an outcome is not only catastrophic for our survival, it also runs against our (human) most basic notion of nature, that of repeatable pattern of seasons.

Although our planet has only one sun around which it circulates, our predicament could be called “a six-crises problem”: ecological crisis, economic imbalances, wars, chaotic migrations, the threat of AI, disintegration of society. Although the underlying cause of these crises is the dynamic of global capitalism, the interaction of crises leads to chaos which is no less unpredictable than the situation on Trisolaris. Do these crises strengthen each other or does their interaction offer some hope – say, a hope that the ecological crisis will compel us to move beyond capitalism and war to a social order of global solidarity? Although Cixin Liu imagines wonderful and/or terrifying new scientific and technological inventions, he is fully aware that the basic dimension of our crises is social, the coexistence of different civilizations as well as the antagonisms

within each civilization. So, the solution will also have to be social (a new social organization of our societies), not just technological.

The first thing to do today is therefore to act according to our predicament: to prepare for the forthcoming emergency state(s). The paradox is that acting like they will happen in all their dimensions (from ecological catastrophes to wars and digital breakdowns) is the only way to have even a chance to prevent them from really happening. In this sense, the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk recently said: "I know it sounds devastating, especially to people of the younger generation, but we have to mentally get used to the arrival of a new era. The prewar era."⁶ He is right, although not unconditionally - the situation is still open, and what we should say is, to be more precise: "If a new world war will happen, it will be clear that it has begun back in 2022, and that its deployment was necessary." Why this strange paradox of retroactivity? Maybe quantum mechanics offers a solution here.

In recent quantum mechanics, the notion of hologram plays an important role: the image of an object that catches not only its actual state but also its interference pattern with other options that were lost when the actual state imposed itself. While I am, of course, not qualified to pass a scientific judgment on these notions, I find it irresistible to apply them to human history. Perhaps the supreme example of holographic history is provided by none other than Marx. Marx is not an evolutionist, he writes history "top-down," i.e., his starting point is the contemporary global capitalist order, and from this point, he reads the entire history as a gradual approximation to capitalism. This is not teleology: history is not guided by capitalism as its telos, but *once capitalism emerges*, it provides the key to the entire (pre)history – here enters Marx's well-known story (in *Grundrisse*) of linear development from prehistorical societies through Asiatic despotism, Antique slavery, and feudalism to capitalism. But, again, there is no teleological necessity in this development, it results from a series of contingent collapses of superpositions.

Quantum waves describe "the world at some kind of preexistence level"⁷ since what exists in/as our reality are only the outcomes of the collapse of the quantum superpositions. At this preexistence-level, particles "follow all possible paths when they move from one point to another"⁸: in a double-slit experiment, "individual electrons follow not one but every possible path from the gun to the screen. One path takes the electron through the left slit, another through the right, back out through the left, into a U-turn, and through the right slit once more."⁹ Could we not say the same also about how a subject's sexual identity is formed? It (mostly) "collapses" into a particular form (gay, hetero man, lesbian...), but to understand how this form emerged we have to accept that the subject enacted all possible forms, and that these "superposed" forms continue to echo in the final form.¹⁰ Along these lines, Richard Feynman proposed the path integral formulation which replaces the classical notion of a single,

unique classical trajectory for a system with a sum, or functional integral, over an infinity of quantum-mechanically possible trajectories to compute a quantum amplitude. The path integral formulation thus suggests that “our reality is a sort of blending – a sum – of all imaginable possibilities”.¹¹

In a collapse of the wave function, other possible superpositions do not simply disappear, they leave their traces in the result (in / as the single reality that emerges in a collapse). Does something similar not hold for political struggles? When a peaceful negotiation wins over armed resistance, armed resistance is inscribed in the result. Our media like to mention as the two successful negotiated solutions the rise of ANC to power in South Africa and the peaceful protests led by Martin Luther King in the US - in both cases, it is obvious that the (relative) victory of the peaceful negotiations occurred because the establishment feared the violent resistance (from the more radical wing of ANC as well as of the American Blacks). In short, negotiations succeeded because they were accompanied by a superposed ominous threat of armed struggle.

What David Graeber and David Wengrow propose is to abandon capitalism as the “peak” from which we regress to the past that leads to it - the interest of works like *The Dawn of Everything*¹² is that they provide a kind of quantum superposition to the actual early development of civilization: a big well-organized state (Incas) which (for some time, at least) did not follow the line of neo-lithic centralization, state authority and class distinctions. The split of the Inca society into its “anarchist” version and authoritarian version thus captures the moment when through a kind of Darwinian struggle, two superposed social orders were fighting for predominance, and the authoritarian one won.

Along the same lines, we could read some Marxist historians pointed out that the explosion of capitalism in early modernity was conditioned by (the contingent interaction of) two not connected factors: the availability of surplus financial wealth (mainly gold from Latin America), and the rise of dispossessed “free” individuals through the privatization of commons – the surplus wealth was “invested,” used to employ and exploit dispossessed workers. But this combination was in no way predestined: history could have taken a different turn, with the dispossessed poor enslaved or mobilized as a threat to the existing order, with the surplus of gold just bringing about its devaluation, etc.

We can see here how right Jacques Lacan was when he pointed out that progressive evolution is a new form of teleology. The true break of teleology is only a top-down history which conceives the linear progress as a retroactive fact, as the outcome of a backwards-projection of our standpoint into the past. In a quantum-holographic history, this retroactivity is rendered visible, and all superpositions that were present in the past and were erased through their collapse are rendered visible again. In this sense one can even say that Walter Benjamin, in his *Theses on History*, proposes a holographic notion of history in contrast to the

predominant progressist-evolutionary version: a present revolution redeems the past, i.e., it re-actualizes past superpositions lost in their collapse towards a ruling ideology. Such a direct contact between the present and the past is timeless in the sense that it by-passes the temporal causal network connecting the past and the present:

“The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth.”¹³

How can we read this claim without committing ourselves to anthropocentric-teleological thinking? As we already mentioned, the answer was indicated by none other than Marx who, in his introduction to *Grundrisse*, wrote:

“Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allows insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it, etc. Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape. The intimations of higher development among the subordinate animal species, however, can be understood only after the higher development is already known.”¹⁴

In short, to paraphrase Pierre Bayard,¹⁵ what Marx is saying here is that the anatomy of the ape, although it was formed earlier in time than the anatomy of man, nonetheless *plagiarizes by anticipation the anatomy of man*. There is no teleology here, the effect of teleology is strictly retroactive: *once capitalism is here* (having emerged in a wholly contingent way), it provides a universal key for all other formations. Teleology resides precisely in evolutionary progressivism where the key to the anatomy of man is the anatomy of ape.

Along these lines, one can also understand why Kant claims that, in some sense, the world was created so that we can fight our moral struggles in it. When we are caught into an intense struggle that means everything to us, we experience it as if the whole world will collapse if we fail. The same holds also when we fear the failure of an intense love affair. There is no direct teleology here: our love encounter is the result of a contingent encounter, so it could easily also not have happened. But once it does happen, it decides how we experience the whole of reality. When Benjamin wrote that a big revolutionary battle decides not only the fate of the present but also of all past failed struggles, he mobilizes the

same retroactive mechanism that reaches its climax in religious claims that, in a crucial battle, not only the fate of us but the fate of God himself is decided.

Holography thus implies that the whole is a part of its part, i.e., that a part is composed of all the (other) parts of its whole. Capitalism is only a part of history, a moment in the global development, but it imposed itself as the prism through which we see the entire development as steps gradually leading to it. True history is thus not a gradual development of parts, but a series of shifts in how its “whole” itself is structured. We don’t change the past facts, we just locate them into a different symbolic context, we change their meaning. So we do not have a Whole which comprises its parts: each part comprises multiple universalities between which we are forced to choose.

Our predicament confronts us with the deadlock of the contemporary “society of choice.” We pride ourselves for living in a society in which we freely decide things which matter. However, we find ourselves constantly in the position of having to decide matters that will fundamentally affect our lives, but without those decision having any proper foundation in knowledge. This is properly frustrating: although we know that it all depends on us, we cannot ever predict the consequences of our acts – *we are not impotent, but, quite on the contrary, omnipotent, without being able to determine the scope of our powers*. While we cannot gain full mastery over our biosphere, it is unfortunately in our power to derail it, to disturb its balance so that it will run amok, swiping us away in the process.

- 1 Finkelkraut 2015
- 2 I follow here the suggestion of my Korean friend Alex Taek-Gwang Lee
- 3 I follow here the suggestion of my Korean friend Alex Taek-Gwang Lee
- 4 Wang 1991
- 5 Liu 2015
- 6 Tusk 2024
- 7 Hertog 2023, p.88
- 8 Ibid., p.90
- 9 Ibid., p.91
- 10 I owe this thought to Jacqueline Rose.
- 11 Feynman 2023
- 12 Graeber and Wengrow 2021.
- 13 Benjamin 2005
- 14 Marx 1973.
- 15 Bayard 2009.

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Interview with Alberto Toscano: The Fascism of Our Times

Agon Hamza & Frank Ruda

1. Thank you for talking to us about your most recent work and your thoughts on the recreation, reemergence or simply presence of new forms of reaction, reactionary and obscurantist positions in the contemporary situation. We would like to start with an observation and a rather big question. The observation is one with which you also begin your 2023 book *Late Fascism* with, notably the worldwide proliferation and ascendancy of far-right movements and parties. The question is: What speaks for and what speaks against classifying them as fascist (as is so often and so frequently done in an unreflective manner)?

Thank you for initiating and hosting this conversation, and for your indefatigable work with *Crisis and Critique*. To draw up a double-entry ledger without remainders, we would need preliminary to stabilise our definition of fascism, an operation which I think – and argue in the book – poses some challenges, since it tends to deny that fascism is, to quote the Ecuadorian Marxist sociologist Agustín Cueva, ‘open to historicity’. But if we take as our yardstick the fascist movements and regimes that shaped the Second Thirty Years’ War in Europe, two principal disanalogies come to mind. The first is both sociological and subjective in character: contemporary reactionary formations are not, by and large, mass movements recruiting, *inter alia*, veterans of total war into para-military organisations and political parties with a capillary penetration into everyday life, civil society and state apparatuses. Though the *Männerbund* hasn’t disappeared entirely, the contemporary far Right is predominantly an electoral amalgam of publics that are fragmented or ‘gelatinous’ (to borrow a Gramscian adjective), not a machine to vertically organise a militant membership from the summits of the state all the way to the neighbourhood and the street. It operates in a social field marked by disaffection and disaffiliation, and while it can powerfully crystallise sad passions of all sorts, it does not offer counter-revolutionary forms-of-life in the same way its forebears did. Which brings me to the second disanalogy: while it trucks in the palingenetic tropes of historic and generic fascism – *reconquistas*, renaissances, redemption and revanches, ‘make X great again,’ and so forth – it is ultimately more in the business of *conserving* or *restoring* privileges or statuses real and imaginary, than in that of promising a future, however archaic, or fashioning a New Man. While prone to recycling some of the *topoi* of the revolutionary conservative intelligentsia of the first half of the twentieth century, its primary manifestation, as I’ve noted elsewhere, is to be a protest vote for the status quo.¹ These disanalogies can be connected to the dearth of revolutionary anti-capitalisms menacing the established order, which the far Right would then be obliged to counter by a kind of inoculation or inverted mimesis. The lack of a credible emancipatory anti-systemic challenge explains much of the conservatism in both the

practice and imaginaries of the far Right – though we also should not underestimate how much the twin pressures of long-term economic stagnation and protracted climate crisis combine to massively narrow any horizon of political expectation. The exclusionary, and if need be violent or exterminatory defence of a finite and beleaguered privilege is the *leitmotiv* here, not a sacrificial utopia of national or racial domination. A big caveat is in order here: this rough sketch principally speaks to the late fascism of the ‘Global North’. While many of these tendencies are planetary, I think that we would need to recalibrate our optic and our categories to account for the singularities of far-Right politics in geopolitically crucial settings such as Russia, India and Israel, all of which have recently been the object of vivid debates about the applicability of the fascist problematic. The further consolidation of Russian authoritarianism in the context of the war on Ukraine has prompted Ilya Budraitskis², for instance, to see in Putin’s regime a *sui generis* fascism without ‘movement’, while both India and Israel (whose convergence³ has been the object of much recent analysis) manifest an integration of delegated militia, mob and settler violence into ethno-racial state projects which is a far tighter fit for classical definitions of fascism than anything we might find on the shores of the Atlantic.

2. You argue in the book that fascism structurally comes with what Ernst Bloch once called a ‘swindle of fulfilment’ but also raise the question if this is even any longer the case for contemporary fascist dynamics (in the sense that previously there was or at least might have been in it an emancipatory impulse, which it translated and fundamentally misarticulated, but that it nevertheless needed as a mobilizing force). The swindle then consisted in promising change but actually performing the operation of social reproduction (qua mobilizing an antagonism in the superstructure that pretends to be one of and in the base). Does the contemporary new right, in your view, still work through such an operation (and we are here only extrapolating from one account you give of fascist movements)?

I think the utopian energies of the contemporary Right – which after all is a symptom of its age, or its conjuncture – are mostly rather feeble, with the salient and aforementioned exceptions of the fundamentalist religious justification for projects of Jewish and Hindu supremacy, that is to say of utopias of domination, purification and expulsion in which redemption is always shadowed by the possibility or fantasy of genocide. Even these formations, however, are structured by the pettiness (in the sense both of ‘petty bourgeois’ and ‘petty sovereign’) of what I termed antagonistic reproduction, namely the prosaic interest in excluding racialised and stigmatised others from material goods, property, social space, etc. In that sense, the swindle of fulfilment – the illusion that reactionary rule will satisfy deep-seated desires for abundance or freedom, its character as

a ‘perverted utopia’ – can manifest as the fulfilment of the swindle, so to speak, namely as cover for base acts of dispossession and appropriation. This is the sense in which, to cite two famously controversial books on the aetiology of National Socialism, we may be dealing more with *Hitler’s Beneficiaries* than with *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*. This gets back to something I was trying to articulate in my first answer, namely that the successes of the contemporary far Right are, for the time being, predicated on not demanding any transformative changes to the behaviour or selfhood of its supporters. In effect, much of its propaganda is precisely based on the claim that ‘liberal metropolitan elites’, ‘the Left’, ‘woke capital’, etc. are demanding disruptive transformations to everyday life, whether by limiting a fossil-fuel based imperial mode of living (whence the projection of sinister traits onto everything from veganism to induction stoves), or by questioning the heterosexual family as the keystone of the social order (whence the orchestrated moral panics around transness, ‘gender ideology’, etc.).

3. What do you, against this background, make of the contemporary right-wing talking points about remigration? For example, the German right-wing had a secret gathering near Berlin a while back and started discussing this as a political strategy, which when it came out created a mild scandal, but the very electorally strong Austrian right wing party is openly discussing remigration plans, England is already openly planning deporting as well - against all even jurisprudential opposition - to Rwanda; and we can certainly also recall that the Germans in the 1930s planned to for a while move the Jewish population first to Poland into Ghettos, to bring back Germans into the Reich but ultimately also to move them to Madagascar. Is there a fascist geo-politics that remains the same (or is this part of the way fascism draws on racism and could you say maybe a word about that as well)?

Calls for the ‘voluntary repatriation’ of racialised groups and for the deportation of minorities, migrants or refugees have been part of the repertoire of the far Right in Europe for a very long time. What is more striking now is how they have become the purview of the ‘mainstream’ conservative Right, increasingly indistinguishable from its formerly toxic cousins. Taking a broader view, I think we can remind ourselves that the formation of the modern capitalist nation-state has been accompanied not just by biopolitics broadly construed, but by a practice and ideology of population transfer and partition, which has eventuated in countless instances of ethnic cleansing (both Michael Mann’s *Dark Side of Democracy* and Mark Mazower’s *No Enchanted Palace* are instructive on this score). To the extent that fascism is a particularly pathological expression of this history, I think we can also periodise it in ways that

might illuminate our current predicament. 'Classic', interwar fascism is a late-imperialist phenomenon, in which relative laggards like Germany and Italy try to create the conditions for settler-colonialism in the age of monopoly capital, so to speak – witness the Generalplan Ost, or Italy's efforts at colonisation in Lybia and the Horn of Africa. What many commentators in the 1960s and 1970s try to theorise as a 'new fascism' was not just a new type of counter-revolution negatively determined by the new revolutions of the world sixties, it was also, as the Polish Marxian economist Michael Kalecki saw in his 1964 essay 'The Fascism of Our Times', mainly driven by 'the potential emancipation of the oppressed nations, or decolonization in the broad sense'. Kalecki gives as a major example the fascism of settlers fighting for a 'French Algeria'. If we think of how that counter-revolutionary project to maintain White supremacy in the 'overseas territories' directly nourished the French far Right, from the OAS to the Front National, we can also reflect on how the expansionary project of settler-colonialism morphed into the rearguard efforts to defend it and how this in turn fed the reaction against the 'post-colonial' transformation of the metropole. Racial fascism can thus mutate from expansionary to exclusionary forms, with the irony that the heirs of political ideologies that strove to enact a 'great replacement' – of the native by the settler – now reanimate century-old panics about 'the rising tide of colour'.

4. The 'fascist virus' (Polanyi), as you show in one of the chapters of your book, comes with a peculiar ability of fascism to align itself to the concept of freedom and even more with what could appear as its opposite, namely liberalism. Fascism is, as you argue, not the obverse or opposite, but fully compatible with liberalism: it mobilizes the latter's authoritarian dynamic for a seemingly rebellious cause, which is what you call the authoritarian rebel (and it brings back to mind – but with an uncomfortable twist – Hobsbawm's book on 'primitive rebels') and which allows for even more authoritarianism that feels rebellious but ultimately is fully compatible with economic gain (Götz Aly has elaborated this argument quite extensively with regard to German fascism). What does all this mean for the role of the state – as fascism is still about state-control? In other words, what is an anti-state-statism?

I don't wish to claim, in an *a priori* manner, a secret identity or symbiosis between liberalism and fascism, but rather to reflect on how 'actually-existing' liberalism has been haunted – as Domenico Losurdo argued, borrowing from George Frederickson – by '*Herrenvolk* democracy', or by what Ernst Fraenkel analysed as a 'dual state', with its normative and prerogative halves, on either side of lines of colour, class and colonisation. The critical and historical question that preoccupies almost all the thinkers

I draw on in my work, from Herbert Marcuse to Cedric Robinson, from Theodor Adorno to Angela Davis, from W.E.B. Du Bois to Ruth Wilson Gilmore, is how the potentials for fascization are seeded and harboured by capitalist societies whose dominant ideology has been some variant of liberalism. The ascendancy of the anti-state state – a conception advanced by Gilmore which has the signal advantage of moving the discussion from an internal ideological history of neo-liberalism to the political economy and geography of the (racial) state – offers another angle through which to periodise fascism and fascist potentials, and to break the ultimately comforting identification of fascism with ‘statolatry’ or totalitarianism. It was in this vein that I also sought to underscore those moments in interwar fascism itself which presage our ‘neoliberal’ present, namely by attending to how Mussolini at the time of the March on Rome explicitly identified fascism with an ultra-liberal political economy that required state and para-state violence to be made safe from the interferences of class struggle. In this connubium between ‘strong state’ and ‘free economy’, fascism proper can shade into a host of authoritarian liberalisms and neo-liberalisms. The classification and political diagnosis of these reactionary capitalist formations was a particularly lively and urgent field of debate among Latin American Marxists and dependency theorists faced with the military dictatorships of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, something which I’ve tried to explore in a recent article for *South Atlantic Quarterly*.⁴

5. What is the difference between the new right and historical far-right movements and parties? Between the new right and “traditional” fascism, if there is such a thing? We are asking this because we would like you to tell us more about what precisely defines what you call “late fascism” (apart from the fact that it means to think what fascism through the perspective of its history)?

My preceding answers have hopefully sketched out some of the axes along which we can explore analogies and disanalogies, continuities and discontinuities, not least by trying to periodise fascism itself with the aid of other historicising parameters (colonialism/decolonisation, liberalism/neoliberalism, industrial/post-industrial, etc.). ‘Traditional’ fascism was already ‘late’, in the sense of characterising regimes emerging in polities that were belatedly trying to force themselves into the planetary politics of inter-imperial and (settler-)colonial competition (Germany, Italy, Japan). But it was also a formidably consequential effort to modernise the institutions and technologies of state power and mass politics at a moment when there was an ample consensus that the liberalism of the nineteenth-century could no longer serve a hegemonic function in an age of intensified class conflict and ‘global civil war’. ‘Lateness’ today has a different valence. It speaks to the fact that as a ‘fix’ for capitalist crises the contemporary projects of the far Right – animated as they

are by many of the same energies and myths as their antecedents – are particularly feeble, we could even say obsolescent (which is not to say inconsequential or harmless, far from it). The persistence of daydreams about ‘national capital’, sterile campaigns for increased natality of ‘native’ populations, or, even more grotesquely, reactionary narratives about a resurgent ethno-national ‘working class’ (‘the forgotten men and women’, etc.) – all of this is far more delinked from the ‘base’ than the (murderous and in their own way belated) projects of autarchy and revanchism that defined traditional fascism. Paradoxically, the contemporary far Right, when it is not simply advocating for the authoritarian defence of current ethno-national entitlements, draws on tropes familiar from the history of fascism (e.g. the Great Replacement) to turn nostalgically to the social compact that defined *post*-fascism (the *trentes glorieuses* of ‘Fordism’, *before decolonization*).

6. This year marks the 110th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War. Today wars and violent conflicts are present in almost all areas of the world: the Middle East, Africa, Europe, not to mention the civil wars in Haiti or Myanmar, etc. And other wars are looming. What is your assessment of this situation against the background of new right movements and parties gaining successes everywhere? Some commentators have compared our contemporary situation with that of the pre-First World War conjuncture. With the recent wars, however, this comparison does not seem to hold anymore.

In the European panorama, it is worth noting that classic liberals, conservatives and some social democrats are much more bellicose when it comes to the war in Ukraine than the far Right (while they all converge on apologies for Israel’s exterminatory war on the Palestinian people). The far Right is still animated by rhetorics and imaginaries of social violence and social war – namely against migrants – but it is largely indifferent to the *Kriegsideologie* that was so critical to reactionary subjectivity (and not just to fascism) in the run-up and aftermath to the Great War. Today’s reaction wants security at all costs, but the costs are devolved onto others. ‘Sacrifice’ is not a major term in its lexicon (this is also true of the increasingly fascistic language of Israeli settler-colonialism, whose exterminatory violence is exacerbated by an aversion to the casualties that come with boots on the ground – much as we saw with the US in Iraq and Afghanistan).

7) 2024 is election-year in India, Russia, Europe, the US, the UK and other places. New right movements are aligning their forces in what we might call a paradoxical internationalism of nationalists. The left seems weaker than even 50 years ago. What do you think could change this situation (if anything)?

In the short run, and in the sites you list, I don't glimpse any particularly hopeful prospects. In part, this is because of the underlying pessimism and cynicism that marks the structure of feeling of this far-Right turn, namely the sense that in a world of economic stagnation, diminishing opportunities and looming (or indeed present) catastrophes, securing one's precarious privileges and perquisites (real, symbolic or imaginary as they may prove to be) is the only game in town. To the call 'Don't despair! Organize' one may want to respond that our conundrum is how to 'organize despair'. As I put it in a recent article⁵: 'if we recognize that this worldwide reactionary political cycle is an effect of the cramping of our political horizons, then our response must be different. We might need to think about German philosopher Walter Benjamin's call [borrowed from Pierre Naville] to "organize pessimism" and what that looks like today: not offloading the pathologies of contemporary capitalism onto the wretched of the Earth, nor looking for scapegoats to assuage our dread, but collectivizing our catastrophic condition – realizing that the imaginary security of a few can't be bought at the cost of the disposability of most of humanity. In the conspiratorial imagination of today's far Right, we can glimpse, as in a funhouse mirror, what the Left we need looks like. To the far Right, the Left is an agent of monumental change: on the brink of destroying the oil industry, abolishing prisons and police, undermining private property and upending white Western civilization. In other words, the Left of the far Right's nightmares is systematically undoing the causes of so much of our misery – it is organizing despair.' As the massive disjunction and even antagonism in the US between the arena of 'progressive' politics and the wave of pro-Palestine encampments has recently foregrounded, the electoral domain, while it is an understandable focus of energies (not least in terms of the profoundly regressive consequences of far-Right legislation on climate, reproductive justice, social rights, and so on), is a profoundly inhospitable one for radical emancipatory projects, especially when these lack real, which is to say threatening, social power (as Mario Tronti once put it, at the 2006 Historical Materialism conference in London, 'we must make the capitalists afraid' again). That kind of social power has only been (precariously) provided by moments and movements of rupture, most recently, and very imperfectly, in the long and fractious wake of the financial crisis of 2007-8.

8) Do you think that there is a (historical and / or political) responsibility of the left in the genesis of the new right? We are thinking here, *inter alia*, of Benjamin's claim that every fascism is the result of a failed revolution.

I would be wary of harping on responsibility in terms of guilt, not least because of the dubious masochistic pleasures the Left takes in

dwelling on its errors; but I certainly think that Benjamin's dictum can be empirically corroborated and remains an important guidepost for analysis. Somewhat churlishly, we could say that late fascism is the result of a whole host of failed (or absent) *reforms*. It is perhaps not an accident here that much of the far Right's culture wars – beside trying to raise psychological wages nothing is done about the stagnating monetary ones – are focused on reformist politics (on ecology, gender, diversity, rights) which it systematically and wilfully misrecognises as radical or even revolutionary (multiculturalism is taken for Maoism, and so on).

9) To end, we would like to return to another trope repeatedly brought up in discourses on the new and old right. It is a question, so to speak, about the (new?) aesthetics of the new right. Is there a relation between the new right and the idea that fascism effectuates an aestheticization of politics?

On the culturally aspirational fringes of the far Right (from Bronze Age Pervert to *flashwave*) there are some desultory efforts at aestheticization that don't exactly compete with Jünger, Marinetti or Mishima, to put it all too mildly. In this arena especially, I think late fascism reveals itself as a pathetic but not innocuous pastiche of its forerunner.

Frankfurt/Prishtina/Vancouver
June 2024

1 Toscano 2024a
2 Budraitskis 2022
3 Gopalan 2023
4 Toscano 2024b
5 Toscano 2023

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