Beyond fascism?

Historical Parallels and Structural Specificities of Post-Socialism

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RESUMEN
La expresiónn 'fascismo' está siendo invocada con frecuencia, haciendo referencia a partidos y movimientos de extrema derecha en Europa, ciertos regímenes post-socialistas de Europa del Este y, en general, a prácticas antidemocráticas basadas en el racismo u otras formas de discriminación que no concuerdan con las costumbres de la democracia liberal. Sin embargo, aunque los fascismos históricos eran ciertamente antidemocráticos, no eran antiliberales. Así, si tomamos en cuenta que el liberalismo no está necesariamente ligado a la democracia, el polémico uso actual de la palabra 'fascismo' resulta inadecuado. En el presente artículo, evitaremos esa analogía y anacronismo, fijándonos en los aspectos sistémicos que pueden generar elementos reconocibles que propiciaron los fascismos históricos – incluyendo la transformación del Estado y la hegemonía ideológica sobre las masas decepcionadas con el socialismo –, pero que han creado nuevos patrones en Europa del Este tras las transiciones post-socialistas en términos de dominación de clase y régimen político.
Palabras clave: Fascismo, post-fascismo, Europa del Este, Unión Europea, análisis de sistemas-mundo.

ABSTRAC
The expression 'fascism' is frequently invoked in reference to far-right parties and movements in Europe, certain regimes in post-socialist Eastern Europe and, in general, to describe undemocratic practices based on racist or different forms of discrimination that do not honour the conventions of liberal democracy. However, whereas historical fascisms were certainly undemocratic, they were not anti-liberal, and if we note that liberalism is not necessarily bound to democracy, the present polemical use of the word 'fascism' appears

inadequate. In this article, we shall avoid analogy and anachronism by looking for systemic features, which generate the familiar elements that have in the past combined into historical fascisms – including the transformation of the state form and the ideological hegemony over the masses disappointed in the socialist project –, but which have formed new patterns in Eastern Europe after post-socialist transitions in terms of class domination and political regime.

Key words: Fascism, Post-Fascism, Eastern Europe, European Union, World-Systems Analysis.

RESUM

L'expressió 'feixisme' està sent invocada amb freqüència, fent referència a partits i moviments d'extrema dreta a Europa, certs règims post-socialistes d'Europa de l'Est i, en general, a pràctiques antidemocràtiques basades en el racisme o altres formes de discriminació que no concorden amb els costums de la democràcia liberal. No obstant això, encara que els feixismes històrics eren certament antidemocràtics, no eren antiliberals. Així, si tenim en compte que el liberalisme no està necessàriament lligat a la democràcia, el polèmic ús actual de la paraula 'feixisme' resulta inadequat. En el present article, evitarem aquesta analogia i anacronisme, fixant-nos en els aspectes sistèmics que poden generar elements recognoscibles que van propiciar els feixismes històrics - incloent la transformació de l'Estat i l'hegemonia ideològica sobre les masses decebudes amb el socialisme -, però que han creat nous patrons a Europa de l'Est després de les transicions post-socialistes en termes de dominació de classe i règim polític.

Paraules clau: Feixisme, post-feixisme, Europa de l'Est, Unió Europea, anàlisi de sistemes-món

Introduction

Classical Marxist accounts of historical fascisms agreed that fascisms were an extreme mode of the domination of capital, and that they transformed the state-form into a terrorist dictatorship. Fascist transformation of the capitalist state typically occurred during the crisis of the capitalist system, and at a political crisis in the labour movement. Historical advent of fascisms was analysed as resulting from two heterogeneous processes: the class re-composition of national bourgeoisie from a historical position of systemic weakness, and the class decomposition of the working masses under the hegemony of bourgeois ideology.

For some time now, the expression "fascism" has again been featuring in public discourse. This time not as an analytical concept, but as a way to describe undemocratic practices based on racist or some other forms of (mostly administra-

tive, gender- or culture-based) discrimination[1]. It seems that the expression is now used as a term of polemics against practices that do not honour the conventions of liberal democracy, and that it is mostly evoked from liberal positions. Hence its frequency in the dominant ideological apparatuses, from the Academia to the mass media. However, if we keep in mind that historical fascisms were certainly undemocratic, but that they were not anti-liberal[2], and if we note that liberalism is not necessarily bound to democracy, the present polemical use of the word "fascism" appears inadequate.

Contemporary phenomena that remind historical fascisms most often occur within the ideological dimension. While it is democratic political apparatuses and their administrations that accomplish the acts of discrimination and of selective state violence. The destruction of Yugoslav socialist federation (the post-Yugoslav states being the case study at the background of my argument[3]) is a case in point. Ideological apparatuses of federal republics (educational system, institutions of national culture, writers' associations, academic and research institutions, media) have long been organising mass support for the abolition of socialism and the destruction of the federation. Racism, orientalism, chauvinism, extreme nationalism, anti-communism, historical revisionism were important components of this ideological endeavour[4]. However, the democratic multi-party parliaments performed the decisive acts of secession and of state-nationalisation of the socially owned means of production[5]. Democratic multi-party Croatian parliament adopted in 1990 the post-socialist constitution which cancelled the formulation that "Croatia is the state of the Serbian nation in Croatia". This led to the armed revolt in the Serb-populated areas and to the ensuing war in Croatia.

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[1] The expression »fascism« has actually been used quite indiscriminately. It has been invoked with reference to far-right regimes in post-socialist eastern and central Europe, and to radical right parties and movements everywhere on the continent. Communal ideologies and organizations in India have been analysed as fascist. See: Ahmad (1993); Simeon (2012); Banaji (2016). The politics of the presently governing Bharatiya Janata Party has been called "soft fascism". Vid.: Bajpai (2014), online at: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/edit-page/Journey-towards-soft-fascism/articleshow/32863642.cms). The Islamic government that has ruled Iran since Khomeini's seizure of power is described as "clerical-fascist," and Wahhabism is often defined as being fascist too. See: Ahmad, (1998). In Latin America, Peronism has been denounced as having developed fascist features ("social-fascism"), and so were several military dictatorships.

[2] Cf. Landa (2010)

[3] I am particularly relying upon the work of González Villa (2014) and his doctoral

[4] Under the impact of this ideological offensive, I published a series of articles, summarily entitled *How Much Fascism?* in 1994 (later published in a booklet with the same title; translation into Croatian: *Koliko fašizma?*,1998).

[5] On the transformation of the "social ownership" into the "state ownership" that made possible the consequent privatisations, see: Samary (1995)

The "erasure" of the citizens of other post-Yugoslav republics from the register of permanent residents of Slovenia in 1992 was executed by the municipal administrations upon the instruction of the minister of interior[6]. We could add to the regional list of state violence the installation of the razor-fence on the Slovene-Croatian border by Slovene government in 2015; the granting of police powers to the army in 2016; the amendment to the law on foreigners authorising police to refuse the entrance or to deport "illegal aliens", i.e., the refugees, without individual examination of their case (2017). These measures were adopted through democratic parliamentary procedure, while ideological support with strong racist elements spontaneously emerged on the grass-roots level.

It seems that, at present, no radical transformation of the state-form is necessary for the liberal democratic state to perform the acts that used in the past to be characteristic of authoritarian or even fascist states. Correlatively, contemporary analogues of historical fascism seem to be marginalised towards civil society initiatives, and predominantly confined to ideological practices. It follows that we should attempt to construct a new concept of the state that could grasp the specificity of contemporary juridical-political practices. It also follows that we should conceptualise contemporary identitary practices and institutions. As a preliminary, we will examine the general features of historical fascisms and contrast them with contemporary phenomena in post-socialist countries.

A sketch of historical fascisms

According to classical analyses, historical fascisms resulted from two independent social processes: the class decomposition of working people that coincided with a crisis of national bourgeois political and ideological apparatuses; and the class re-composition of a national bourgeoisie from a position of weakness[7]. The historical fascisms occurred in semi-peripheral regions with internationally non-competitive economies (Italy, Austria, Germany), and in a situation in which the

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[6] On 26 February 1992, local administrative units, acting upon a decree issued by the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia, deprived citizens of other republics of former Yugoslavia permanently residing in Slovenia, of their status of permanent residents. This administrative action, later popularly dubbed "erasure" (since its victims were "erased" from the register of permanent residents), transformed the persons concerned into illegal aliens. Without notification and without the possibility to appeal, these persons were abruptly deprived of the legal foundations of their existence in Slovenia: their documents previously issued in Slovenia (e.g., passport, driving permit etc.) became invalid and they lost already obtained social rights. The measure hit more than 25.000 persons: however, since it was a covert act, its victims have long been unaware of each other, and the public was ignorant of the issue. See: Kržam and Breznik (2011); Breznik (2012)

[7] Zetkin (1923); Gramsci (1971); Trotsky (2000); Trotsky (1993) ; Sohn-Rethel (1978)

labour movement was receding. As Leon Trotsky emphasized, the two main antagonistic classes were undergoing profound transformations. This is why Marxist analysis could offer disparate assessments, diagnosing the "defeat" of labour (Clara Zetkin) on one side, and the "crisis of bourgeois hegemony" (Antonio Gramsci) on the other. Almost simultaneously, there occurred a breakdown of bourgeois parliamentarianism and an organizational (although not electoral) stagnation of the parties representing the working people. The antagonistic labour and bourgeois political apparatuses suddenly demitted their structural role. Consequently, the main contradiction, labour/capital, as well as secondary contradictions within the working class and the bourgeoisie, opened up for new articulations.

In Georgi Dimitrov's words, bourgeois parliamentarianism ceased to be an efficient form of bourgeois class domination[8]. In Germany, factions of capital and the bourgeoisie were looking for an alternative to the parliamentary republic, although most bourgeois milieus would have preferred that the transition occurred without the Nazis. In the last instance, the crisis of the bourgeois political system resulted from the fragmentation of Germany's capitalist national economy. As Alfred Sohn-Rethel pointed out, recently modernized heavy industry was uncompetitive on the world market, and, because of the high proportion of fixed capital, diminishing production would cost more than continuing to produce at low or no profit[9]. Accumulation of capital on a national scale was in danger and the pursuit of surplus profit by individual capital could no longer operate as the mechanism of the class-composition of the capitalist class. Capitalist class composition had to be achieved with extra-economic constraint, and production had to be reoriented toward the home market and toward manufacturing what Sohn-Rethel calls "non-reproductive values" (i.e., armaments), while the rate of profit was reestablished by the absolute production of surplus value, i.e., by increasing exploitation. This, too, had to be achieved with extra-economic constraint.

On the side of working people, the social composition of labour power[10] presented major obstacles to the class-composition of labour.[11] By the end of the

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[8] Dimitrov (1972), online at:
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm.
[9] Sohn-Rethel (1978)
[10] The concept of the "social composition of labour power" is a complement to the operaist concept of the "technical composition of labour power". In operaist theory, "technical composition" of the labour power defines the way, how submission of labour to the capital determines and models immediate producers – by submitting them to the command of the capital and by qualifying them to produce surplus-value under specific technological conditions of the moment. The concept underlines that technology is not neutral, since it is the technology of the process of production of value, and hence the technology of the submis-

Weimar Republic, around 50% of those employed worked in companies with fewer than 10 employees. Almost 17% of the workforce were "mobile wage workers"—historical predecessors of the contemporary precarious workers—moving from one short-term position to another. Women received 30 to 40% lower wages than men did. In the same period, unemployment was at 30% and increasing. The social security system of the Weimar Republic fragmented those it served, thus creating antagonisms between many of its recipients, and of all of them against the system. The Weimar system of social security had developed into an apparatus of control and discipline over the unemployed and the poor. After seizing power, the Nazis took over this apparatus and used it in their purging of "asocial" elements.

The unemployed, and some groups of industrial workers, developed a hostile attitude towards the state bureaucracy. Workers' varying attitudes towards the state, resulting from their objective social conditions, strongly affected the political organization of labour. The unemployed, dissatisfied with the bureaucratic control of the social state, tended toward the Communist Party of Germany, who programmed the destruction of the bourgeois state. Social Democrats attracted civil servants. The urban proletariat oscillated between these two parties, while the rural proletariat tended to support the Nazis. Traditional ideological divisions between Catholics and Protestants complicated the picture, Catholics tending toward Christian nationalist parties, Protestants toward the Nazis. This complex situation resulted in socio-economic and ideological fragmentation of working people, so that, despite respectable electoral successes of the Communist Party of Germany and of the Social Democratic Party of Germany in 1932 and 1933, labour sociologist Sergio Bologna could say that "there was no political Left in Germany" at the time when the Nazis came to power[12].

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sion and exploitation of labour power. On the other hand, the concept shows that the class-composition of the working people is by no means an automatic social process, as it has to be achieved through political action. (The problem-field of the class-composition was opened by Alquati (1975). The concept of the "social composition of labour power" aims at the way how capitalist class subjects the labour power as a whole within a social formation. It encompasses the juridical dimension (various types of labour relations) and attempts to theorise such phenomena as the "labour market" and its "segmentation", "fragmentation of labour" or integration of non-capitalist modes of exploitation as so many ways of social submission of labour to the capital. (We developed this concept in Močnik (2011).

[11] The following data are drawn from Bologna (1997), online at: https://libcom.org/library/nazism-and-working-class-sergio-bologna. For an analysis of German workers' political attitudes, see: Geary, (1998)

[12] See Bologna (1997)

Ideological mechanisms in historical fascisms

Extra-economic constraint is decisive both for the fascist salvation of the capital-
ist economy and for the concomitant transformation of the state. It relies on
combinations of repressive and ideological mechanisms. As repression has to be
justified, extra-economic constraint is overdetermined by ideological mecha-
nisms.

Much has been written about the fascist, and especially the Nazi manipulation of
mass psychology. Adorno's theory seems particularly productive, since it articu-
lates the social and the psychological problematics without reducing one to the
other. According to Adorno, the mechanism described by Freud by which "the
object has been put in the place of the ego ideal," frustrates the emancipation of
the subject from the heteronomous rule of the unconscious[13]. Preventing such an
"abolition of 'psychology,'" the object of desire, situated at the place of the ego
ideal, mediates the "expropriation of the unconscious by social control." In this
way, the oppressors "appropriate" mass psychology. Adorno refuses psycholo-
gistic explanations of fascism. He *situates* the psychological instance alongside
the social within his concept of fascism: "Far from being the source of fascism,
psychology has become one element among others in a superimposed system
the very totality of which is necessitated by the potential of mass resistance—the
masses' own rationality".

Adorno's non-reductionist articulation of the dimensions of fascism grasps what
Trotsky theorised as its double and contradictory nature. Historical fascisms
were both social movements, propelled by popular social radicalism, and re-
gimes of power that promoted bourgeois renewal of national capitalism. After
seizing power, historical fascisms liquidated their socially radical elements. They
engaged in repressive activities to suppress popular struggles, and developed
intensive efforts to harness "the potential of mass resistance" by appropriating
its psychological potential. To explain the ideological efficacy of fascism, we
should look accordingly not at the immediate individual psychological processes,
but at the ways in which fascism succeeds to block the "emancipation from psy-
chology" and "appropriates" it for the needs of domination.

National literature and bourgeois appropriation of individual psychologies

The bourgeois ideological complex itself provides support for the domination-
generating appropriation of individual psychologies. One of the most important

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[13] Adorno (1991)

components of bourgeois ideology is the national literary canon[14]. Processed by the scholarly apparatus, the written canon is retroactively "oralised" and transformed into a hybrid "storage language" in the sense put forward by Eric Havelock[15]. It does not operate solely through the contents of its nationalist clichés, but essentially by its form. Due to the specifically modern aesthetic ideology, the literary canon is perceived and operated as separate from its socio-historical conditions of production, and offers a stock of "eternal values" in a specifically national redaction. More importantly, it generates a particular modality of belief: in order to enjoy each work of art in particular, one has to believe in aesthetic creation in general. Precisely as in societies that practice magic, each single shaman is critically assessed on the background of the belief in magic in general[16]. The canonical reservoir of blank credulity closely communicates with the national language, as the national standard is a literary language, formed upon the products of aesthetic practices. An eventual articulation of the sphere of belief, established by the literary canon, to the sphere of knowledge, structured as national language, presents belief as knowledge and thus provides a formidable support to ideological interpellation. In psychoanalytic terms, this process may be conceptualized as the articulation of the imaginary level of the ego (beliefs) to the symbolic level of the subject (knowledge). Any process entailing the object of desire (which operates on both levels) may secure this articulation: identification (the only mechanism that Freud envisages in his theory of mass psychology), individual fantasies, anaclitic or narcissistic object-choice, fetishist denial, etc. The articulation of a dominant belief-complex (literary canon) with the dominant knowledge-institution (national language) frames individual psyches for their "expropriation," while the pluralism of the concrete modes of such an articulation provides it with a genuine mass efficacy.

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[14] Writers' associations organized by federal republics and numerous individual writers had a decisive role in fomenting and intensifying the wars that destroyed the Yugoslav federation, and writers prominently figured among the political personalities of destruction.

[15] According to Havelock, oral societies devise various techniques to preserve and transmit knowledge, like proverbs, *dicta et sententiae*, formulae, oral poetry, etc. He names this complex "storage language." Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write. Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT, 1986.

[16] The distinction between specific skepticism (typical of magic) and general skepticism (typical of science) was introduced by Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd (*Magic, Reason and Experience: Studies in the Origin and Development of Greek Science*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979), and further developed by Jack Goody (*The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989). An empirical research project based on this conceptual apparatus investigated institutional arrangements and artistic ideologies in Slovenia: Maja Breznik, *Posebni skepticizem v umetnosti* [Specific Skepticism in the Arts], Sophia, Ljubljana, 2011.

Parallels with historical fascisms in post-socialism

"Masses have lost their faith [. . .] in socialism as a whole," wrote Clara Zetkin in 1923[17]. The same diagnosis was true of historical socialisms in the decade preceding the destruction of the Berlin Wall by the people of Berlin. The class situation in historical socialisms resembled, to a certain extent, those in Italy of the early 1920s and in Germany of the early 1930s: workers' struggles were contained and fragmented, and the ruling coalitions of political (party-state) bureaucracies, ideological ("cultural") bureaucracies, and technical cadres were torn by internal conflicts.

In socialist countries, the world-systemic capitalist crisis of the 1980s combined with the acute crisis of a particular historical regime of socialist accumulation. In some respects, the situation was analogous to that in Germany in the 1930s, where, according to Sohn-Rethel, the systemic crisis of world capitalism joined the local crisis of certain industrial sectors[18]. However, if in Germany the local crisis developed in the advanced industrial sectors, in socialist countries the entire socio-economic construction was breaking down.

The double international and national economic crisis of the 1980s forced socialist countries to accumulate huge foreign debts. The "debt crisis" was a global phenomenon, since private creditors possessed enormous quantities of "petroleum" money, and encouraged governments to contract debts they were later unable to honour. Already at that time, sovereign debt was the preferred mode of "investment," since the profit rate in core areas was declining, as were capital gains in general. Inability to pay back the debt forced socialist countries to seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund, already the instrument of global capital. The IMF made its assistance contingent upon the introduction of neoliberal reforms. In socialist countries, this meant the destruction of the socialist project, the restoration of capitalism and, for the great majority of the population, precipitous decreases in standards of living and general life security. Specifically in Yugoslavia, neoliberal policies imposed by the IMF were particularly ruinous as they were one of the main pressures towards the destruction of the federation[19].

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[17] Zetkin (1923)

[18] Sohn-Rethel (1978)

[19] "In order to impose the market discipline necessary for the repayment of the debt, the IMF and the EU demanded recentralization of the Yugoslav federation. As a reward for successful reform, the EU dangled the carrot of closer integration. In practice this meant the alignment of the EU with the positions of Milošević and Great Serbian nationalism which sought to improve the competitiveness of the Serbian economy through Yugoslav recentralization.

In these countries the IMF imposed "austerity measures" to pay foreign debt, required centralization of the economy (to concentrate the value that was to be exported towards the creditors, and which strengthened labour discipline), and introduced profit seeking as the main entrepreneurial objective. The ensuing increase of exploitation intensified workers' resistance against the fragmented ruling bureaucracies, which, in response to the double pressures from working people and from international organizations, formed new coalitions by which to conduct the restoration of capitalism. As in Weimar Germany, the ruling groups searched for allies in the most reactionary *groupuscules*, those who would assist them to repress popular upheavals, and would transform the modes of oppression and exploitation.

In Yugoslavia, the recomposition of the ruling political and cultural bureaucracies (together with managerial technocrats who followed the political fraction) took a particular form, which pioneered post-socialist fascist-like politics. Since the early 1950s, bureaucracies of the ideological apparatus, institutionalized by federal republics, have buttressed their domination with a *belles-lettres*-centered nationalist ideology. During the restoration of capitalism, cultural bureaucracies merged with the political bureaucracies of particular federal republics. Together, they destroyed the Yugoslav federation and instituted independent states, which, by their mere existence, institutionalised the ideological conflation of knowledge and belief. The new political-cultural ruling groups organized popular support for the restoration of capitalism within the "nation-state" ideology. However, the constructions they actually established were identitary states that, contrary to the pluralism of the traditional nation-state, practiced internal discipline and control and ethnic intolerance. It then only took some exalted rhetoric volunteered by writers, poets, and dissidents to transpose the fascist potential of this institutional frame into really existing neo-fascism.

For both historical fascism and the post-socialist phenomena, the context was the final crisis of an economic cycle. The existing state form had been delegitimized and entered its own terminal crisis. Increasing workers' unrest remained fragmented. The ruling groups started a process of re-articulating their domination.

But the promise of EU integration also gave heart to the rich northern republics which wanted to improve their competitiveness by ditching the poor south and joining the EU. In this way, the European Union was not only the agent of the economic disintegration of SFRJ, but through promises of future political integration accelerated its nationalist disintegration." Živković and Medenica (2013) online at: http://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/balkans-for-the-peoples-of-the-balkans/.

Historical specificity of post-socialism

In 1935, Dimitrov stated : "The accession to power of fascism is not an *ordinary succession* of one bourgeois government by another, but a *substitution* of one state form of class domination of the bourgeoisie—bourgeois democracy—by another form—open terrorist dictatorship"[20].

In distinction to the 1930s, the 1990s rather *introduced* "bourgeois democracy" against local socialist political systems. However, taken abstractly, Dimitrov's formula does describe the process: "a *substitution* of one state form of class domination . . . by another form." In the post-socialist restoration of capitalism, the substitution of the "state form" was more radical than in the case of historical fascisms. While in historical fascisms it was only the state form that was transformed in order to secure the existing class domination, the restoration of capitalism after 1989 was a *transformation of the nature of class domination*, only one dimension of which was the transformation of the form of the state.

From the world-system perspective, the restoration of capitalism in post-socialist countries was the effect of a neoliberal offensive launched in the core countries of the system, and then successfully extended to the conquest of the rest of the world. In this sense, Zetkin's formula for the description of fascism catches this process as well: "the general offensive undertaken by the world bourgeoisie against the proletariat"[21].

Organised political forces were competing in the context of a consensus that the socialist project was to be abandoned and capitalism restored. Within the basic consensus, their competition reflected a complex conjuncture of social contradictions.

Fascist-like politics in the post-socialist countries *parallels* historical fascisms in the following features: the transformation of the state form; support from the weaker faction of the ruling coalition (bureaucracy of the ideological apparatuses); and ideological hegemony over the masses disappointed in the socialist project.

However, it *differs* from the historical fascism in that it is neither the salvation of the existing class domination, but the introduction of a new class domination; nor is it the destruction of the bourgeois democracy, but its establishment.

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[20] Dimitrov (1972)
[21] Zetkin (1923)

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In summary, we can say that fascist-like politics arise when there is a top-down transformation of the state form; the transformation is carried out by the weaker faction of the ruling class (or coalition); and the masses have been disillusioned by the established economic and state forms, but lack the power and the organization to change them.

Ideological mechanisms of post-socialist domination

We can now return to the ideological problem of contemporary analogues to historical fascism.

Mainstream discourse presents post-socialist fascist-likes as radical or extremist nationalism. This explanation has two major flaws:

> 1. It has a "neo-colonial" flavour, ascribing the phenomenon to a historically belated ethnocentrism and collectivist oppressiveness of post-socialist cultures or peripheral nations in general.
>
> 2. It cannot explain the difference between the emancipatory anti-imperial nineteenth-century nationalisms and the progressive nationalisms of the anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century on the one hand, or the near-fascist repressive practices of late-twentieth/early-twenty-first-century "nationalisms" on the other.

The solution is to introduce an appropriate concept of the nation. The nation is a mechanism that produces the "society effect" under the conditions of the capitalist mode of production. It brings together a society fragmented into isolated individuals, and does so without any specific ideological mediation (like religion). In this, the nation secures the cohesion for the specific capitalist mode of exploitation that has no need of the extra-economic constraint. This concept considers the national, or "mother" tongue, as the material existence of the nation, operating as the general matrix of mutual translatability of all the (ideological) discourses. Competence in the mother tongue operates as an apparently ideologically neutral knowledge that supports national cohesion. The progressive nature of the national constitution resides in its separation of knowledge from belief. Beliefs are many and pertain to the "freedom of consciousness," while there is only one integrating knowledge—the knowledge of the mother tongue. Within the nation, ideologies struggle for domination and at each moment there is one ideology that occupies this position—without preventing other ideologies from continuing to exist and to wage ideological struggle.

Although the nation is overdetermined by some dominant ideology at any moment of its history, no ideology ever succeeds in conflating belief and knowledge. Knowledge and belief remain separated, since the ideological struggle develops in the national language, its mastery being the only knowledge required for the ideological contest to continue and for the nation to reproduce itself.

When socialist ideology was no longer able to dominate, i.e., to overdetermine the national construction, in most post-socialist countries the vacuum was filled by illusions about capitalist welfare. In Yugoslavia, however, socialism had thoroughly disqualified capitalist ideology. This may paradoxically have been one of the main causes of the brutality of its disintegration.

In the absence of strong capitalist illusions, ideological domination was assumed by "*national culture*": the realm of presumably "neutral" cultural belief was directly articulated in the national language, the realm of socially cohesive knowledge. "National culture" started to operate as the secret native knowledge in the exclusive possession of the members of the community and to define the identity of the identitary individuals. When this happened, Yugoslav nations turned into *identitary communities*.

The identitary community is monistic and inwardly oppressive. Its outward stances are paradoxical: on one side it is aggressive, since it believes itself to be in possession of a secret and exclusive knowledge and culture, and feels superior to non-members and neighbours. On the other side, an identitary community is incessantly in need of recognition, and searches for an authority that would bestow it[22].

Post-fascism in post-socialism?

It seems that the analogy between contemporary phenomena and historical fascisms hides more than it reveals. Analogical thinking combines present elements according to an old pattern—and misses the specificity of the elements and their structuring. We shall avoid analogy and anachronism by looking for systemic features, which, in certain situations, generate the familiar elements that have in the past combined into historical fascisms, but which form new patterns in the present.

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[22] An influential discussion of identitary recognition is found in: Gutman (1994). However, the authors present recognition as a universal and ideologically neutral mechanism without taking into account that recognition transforms social groups into identitary communities, or is solicited by such communities.

In 1932, Trotsky linked the fascist rule to the destruction of the labour movement:

> When a state turns fascist, it does not mean only that the forms and methods of government are changed, . . . it means first of all for the most part that the workers' organizations are annihilated; that the proletariat is reduced to an amorphous state; and that a system of administration is created which penetrates deeply into the masses and which serves to frustrate the independent crystallization of the proletariat[23].

In contrast, the destruction of the labour movement in post-socialism did not result from terrorist dictatorship, but was the effect of liberal democracy. The independent class composition of working people was already hampered under socialism. The political bureaucracy claimed and enforced a monopoly over the representation of the working masses "in general." In the manner of the Hegelian dialectics of "terror," political bureaucracy disqualified—by force if necessary—any labour self-organization "in particular"[24]. On the economic level, workers' collectives were isolated from each other by state planning and later by the "socialist market."

Given the weakness of the working masses inherited from socialism, post-socialist governments, under pressure from organized transnational capital (the IMF, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the OECD, etc.), attacked labour rights, introduced a fragmented and "flexible" workforce, and dismantled the welfare state.

In most European post-socialist countries, the deal between the working population and the ruling groups seemed to entail that the working classes assume the burden of the conditions of accession to EU, and the ruling groups agree to maintain the social state[25]. A national bourgeoisie, capable to manage a nation-state, could eventually honour such a compromise. However, already during the accession, the *Diktat* of the *acquis communautaire* prevented the construction of nation-states and obstructed the class-composition of national bourgeoisies in the post-socialist countries aspiring to join the EU.

The situation is paradoxical: while the comprador faction, which in the past was prone to fascist-like politics, now seems disciplined by the EU, the factions that still attempt to compose themselves into a national bourgeoisie now operate

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[23] Leon Trotsky, "What Next? Vital Question for the German Proletariat," in Trotsky (2000)
[24] Hegel (1977)
[25] Meardi, Stanojević, et al. (2009); Stanojević (2014)

from a subaltern position—and introduce a type of politics Gáspár Miklós Tamás termed "post-fascism"[26]. The Orbán government in Hungary seems engaged in such an attempt at the top-down composition of the national bourgeoisie and the top-down transformation of the state form from EU semi-colonial peripheral state to nation-state. By securing more independence from the European Central Bank for the Hungarian National Bank, and (to a certain extent) subordinating it to government policies, the ruling coalition in Hungary has recuperated some essential levers of national sovereignty. However, the pressures it exerts upon the freedom of the media and the independence of the judiciary seem an inadequate, if symptomatic, political supplement to the basic economic weakness of the project. Much the same could be said about the efforts of the present Polish government.

Post-fascism in late capitalism?

Outside the post-socialist world, those fractions of bourgeoisie that have not succeeded in integrating into the transnational capitalist coalitions seem to lean towards post-fascist politics, as in Italy or France, and recently in the USA. In the big picture, the capitalist world-system, shaken by the long crisis begun in the seventies-eighties of the 20th century, has since not been able to establish a new equilibrium, and the world capitalist fractions are likewise torn by internal contradictions.

When weaker fractions of the capital decide to resort to selective state violence, ideologically mostly justified in the terms of cultural racism, they no more need to change the state-form. Formally liberal democracies, abiding to democratic rules and procedures, contemporary states rely upon an "organic or fundamental party"[27] that, although consisting of several nominally independent parties, organises the tacit parliamentary consensus. A revealing indication of this transformation of bourgeois parliaments into the "material existence" of the fundamental consensus is the destiny of the political parties that challenge the consensual horizon: they either remain marginal (like *Le nouveau parti anticapitaliste* in France) or blend into the *pensée unique* (as it happened to social democ-

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[26] Tamás (2001), online at: https://www.opendemocracy.net/people-newright/article_306.jsp. – Until we find a better term, this *pis-aller* should suffice.

[27] I am following the analysis in the terms of the Gramscian concept of 'organic or fundamental party' that was presented by Carlos González Villa at the seminar at the Center of Advanced Studies (University of Rijeka, Croatia) on 31 January 2017. The concept of "organic or fundamental party" was introduced by Antonio Gramsci: "Si può osservare che nel mondo moderno in molti paesi i partiti organici e fondamentali, per necessità di lotta o per altra causa, sono frazionati in frazioni, ognuna delle quali assume il nome di Partito e anche di Partito indipendente." (*Quaderni del carcere*, 17/IV, § 37.)

rats a long time ago). The metamorphosis of the liberal democratic state seems to interact with the transformation of the nation into a set of identitary communities[28].

Under this perspective, the EU is a historical innovation, a political construction that serves the ascent of the old bourgeoisies of the North into the would-be global capitalist class, and the integration of the weaker peripheral dominating groups into their comprador assistants. The EU abolished bourgeois parliamentarianism and replaced it with direct administration by bureaucratic representatives of transnational capital. It has contained the labour movement by introducing a panoply of non-standard labour relations. By its "politics of recognition," the EU "culturalised" social conflicts, fragmented working people, and encouraged pre-capitalist modes of domination (religious, ethnic, patriarchal, etc.). There is in the EU today a stubborn temptation towards the introduction of juridical inequalities, such as the failed "Bolkestein directive," the limitative arrangements concerning the social rights of the immigrant labour[29]. The EU is losing its core position in the capitalist world-system, and is struggling from a position of weakness. In the past, such a position has been the springboard of fascist politics. However, the EU has invented alternative ways of adapting. Until now, it has preferred juridical and economic constraint over direct violence, currently reserved for the refugees in "immigrant reception centres." These strategies may well be another variant of "post-fascism".

Rather than the historical fascisms themselves, it is the conceptual tools elaborated to analyse them that help us understand today's socio-political processes and their political articulations. Politics that take the nation-state as their ultimate reference and articulate both the attempts to form a national bourgeoisie

[28] Gramsci analysed this particular interaction with respect to the fascist party. His diagnosis is now true for a great majority of contemporary parliamentary parties: "[...] un grande movimento di partiti affini (che sono in realtà frazioni di uno stesso partito organico) e, nel periodo più recente, partito non di élite, ma di masse, che come masse non hanno altra funzione politica che quella di una fedeltà generica, di tipo militare, a un centro politico visibile o invisibile [...]. La massa è semplicemente di 'manovra' e viene 'occupata' con prediche morali, con pungoli sentimentali, con miti messianici di attesa di età favolose in cui tutte le contraddizioni e miserie presenti saranno automaticamente risolte e sanate." (*Quaderni del carcere*, 17/IV, § 37)

[29] In March 2004, the European Commission, under the leadership of then Commissioner for the Internal Market Frits Bolkestein, proposed a draft directive to establish a single market of services within the EU. The European Left strongly criticized it with the argument that it would lead towards social dumping. One of the criticized provisions was that migrant workers' long-term benefits (e.g., pension and unemployment benefit contributions) would be regulated according to the legislation of their country of origin. A substantially amended version was approved in 2006 and passed as a directive.

and the resistance of working people who do not recognize themselves in post social-democratic policies, may be one of the post-fascist variants. Although their ideological profile is culturalist and differentialist (rather than crudely, biologically racist), they share with historical fascisms the contradictory combination of the top-down reshaping of domination and bottom-up popular revolt, as well as their implicitly authoritarian orientation. They are militaristic, and foment regional wars (the destruction of Yugoslavia or the rise of Daesh are good examples).

The alternative transformation responds to the needs of global capital and is propelled by its transnational supports—cosmopolitan bourgeoisies, the bureaucracies of transnational organizations (like the EU, the IMF, the World Bank, and NATO), financial institutions, research and academic institutions, global cultural apparatuses, etc. Its policies are anti-democratic, oriented towards maximizing profits and destroying the achievements of social struggles of the past two centuries. Relying on juridical mechanisms and economic discipline, it culturalises its violence and repression, and exerts its belligerence in the postcolonial world. These practices form another, "trans-national" variant of post-fascism. Ironically, these economic-political constructions are containing the development of fascism proper by performing its functions, and by creating margins of violence both locally (*banlieues*, and segregated communities, for instance), and globally, in the "spheres of interest".

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