POLITICS OF LIBERATION

Conversations with Theory and History

EDITORS: Rosa Vasilaki & George Souvlis

ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG
OFFICE IN GREECE


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INTRODUCTION

THIS EDITED VOLUME hosts a collection of essays first presented at the Politics of Liberation seminar, held in Athens since 2022 under the auspices of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung–Office in Greece. In the wake of a prolonged economic crisis, the concomitant institutional and political crisis, and the global Covid-19 pandemic and associated measures that disrupted – at least temporarily – forms of collective belonging and action, as well as face-to-face sociability, new forms of political engagement have emerged, enabled by the now omnipresent new technologies. These shifts convinced us that the conditions were ripe to reassess our current historical conjuncture. The idea of a seminar that would discuss the meaning, shape and possibilities for a politics of liberation was born out of our own need to create a space where ideas could evolve into specific proposals and where common concerns could be transformed into hope.

In our view, the world has been undergoing unprecedented transformations over the past two decades. Historical time has accelerated and thickened at the same time as a result of political, social and economic challenges which have led to new configurations of power on the global and local levels: the ongoing economic crisis, the collapse of welfare systems, the rise of obscene political leaders on the global scene, the return of nationalism, the pandemic and its instrumentalisation for the suppression of democratic rights across the world are particularly significant shifts the world has witnessed lately. While this list is by no means exhaustive, it gives an idea of the profound transition that late modernity is experiencing: fundamental assumptions of political systems in the West, such as equality, democratisation or human rights, are under systematic attack in the name of "security", "economic development", "common sense" or the protection of "our European way of life". Poverty is once again on the rise, but its demonisation seems to be on the rise too, via the re-emergence of a discourse that reproduces the unapologetic class-related discrimination of the 19th century. As we are writing these lines in March 2025, we are faced with new harsh realities, the ramifications of the end of the postwar consensus, the global rise of the far right and new forms of fascism along with the deep crisis of the global left.

The responses to these transformations have been sporadic, yet remarkable and globally resonant, such as the Black Lives Matter movement just a few years ago. The question "what is to be done?" feels more pressing than ever, as the 21st century seems to have dealt heavy blows to the egalitarian promise of the 20th century. Is

there still space for a politics of liberation in the current predicament? And what may this politics look like? In this perspective, our seminar aimed at crafting an intellectual meeting space for anyone interested in exploring alternatives for a politics of liberation. This was not just a call to examine the current forms of anti-capitalist resistance but also an invitation to reflect on challenging times and approach the issue from a multiplicity of fields and positions, such as politics, epistemology, theory, history and art. Taking Greece as our entry point for these discussions, we launched the Politics of Liberation seminar series to open up a global debate with regards to current political developments and to make the South and, in particular, Athens, where we are based, a centre for collective thinking in challenging times.

The seminar, now in its third year, has featured academics, politicians, journalists, political analysts and activists (see the appendix at the end of the volume for a full list of the participants and topics presented). The essays in this volume, presented in the seminar during the 2022–2023 academic year, are indicative of the work being done and of the multiplicity of perspectives explored. The contributors hosted in the volume offer critical and often unexpected and unconventional ways to reflect on the meaning and content of liberation in the current predicament. Their contributions range from theoretical accounts of modernity and its staple traits, such as the nation and the state, to the examination of forms of authoritarianism, fascism and the far right, the relationship between democracy and capitalism, the uneven and unequal development of political capitalism, the critique of the concept of gender itself, the experienced realities of queer subjectivities and the practical manifestations of authoritarian neoliberalism.

The volume opens with political theorist Stathis Kouvelakis, whose contribution focuses on a somewhat underestimated aspect of Marx and Engels' writings, namely, their analysis of the nation and, by extension, the national question. By reviewing a significant part with Challenging most of the relevant literature which interprets Marx and Engels' theory of the emergence of modern nations as a result of the development of the forces of production, he offers a more complex analysis analysis of their position. He does this through a close reading of Marx and Engels' texts combined to their historicised examination, which allows him to highlight the evolution and transformations of their thought. This reconstruction focuses on a concept that became central to the analysis of modern capitalist societies by the later successors of the work of Marx and Engels – the idea of the bourgeois revolution as a process of consolidating bourgeois hegemony through the establishment of modern nation-states. It is in this historical context that the potential political contests for hegemony between the various social classes develop in conditions radically different from those of premodern societies. In his analysis, Kouvelakis argues that the relation between internationalism, on the one hand, and nation-states and political sovereignty, on the other, does not operate antithetically but dialectically as the former emerges through the latter. In other words, for Marx and Engels, the global liberation of the working class presupposes the consoli-

dation of its hegemony at the level of the nation-state. However, their approach to the uneven and unequal development between industrialised countries and dependent regions of the periphery is shaped by a Eurocentric gaze that informs their perspective to a significant degree. This perspective is only bypassed when they identify these contradictions within the European continent itself, notably in the conflict between England and Ireland. Here, the liberation of the Irish working class is linked to the struggle for national independence from English domination and is grasped as a form of social revolution, articulated to a broader revolutionary process encompassing both the colonial world and the imperialist centres.

The shift then focuses to the question of anticolonial struggles, postcolonial realities and the question of liberation. Vassilis Lambropoulos, coming from the perspective of classical studies and comparative literature, engages with the hard question of what happens once liberation from colonialist forces is achieved and the now liberated subjects are faced with the challenge of self-determination. Lambropoulos addresses the disappointment with the aftermath of revolutionary anticolonial practices and, in particular, with the reproduction of structures of exploitation and exclusion which the anticolonial forces were seeking to dismantle in the first place. Lambropoulos chooses the dilemmas presented in the postrevolutionary condition in order to explore the question of liberation. Taking as an entry point postcolonial self-determination, the moment when linear time and radical beginnings converge, Lambropoulos explores the antinomies of autonomy and asks whether freedom and rule can coexist. The essay explores the tragic paradox at the heart of becoming a collective subject – the tension between collective emancipation and living under the rule of law, a contradiction that, as Lambropoulos demonstrates, makes freedom tragic. The essay departs from the tragedy of the revolution – in this particular case, postcolonial self-determination – to reflect on the core challenge of the newly liberated nation-states, namely the attempt to reconcile freedom and necessity. Questions such as the space allowed for dissent within recently liberated states or the issue of secession, that is, whether the right to self-rule extends to those who may feel not liberated within the newly established nation-states, are central for the reflection on the practical ramifications of autonomy, on the tension between abstraction (self-rule/autonomy) and experience (rule of law/constraint). To explore the antinomies of autonomy from a literary perspective, the essay turns from the concept of the tragic, to tragedy itself, and more precisely the 1960s theatre that drew inspiration from revolutionary Haiti. As Lambropoulos shows, plays like Aimé Cesaire's *The Tragedy of King Christophe* dramatise the question of freedom after emancipation and the danger of the excesses of absolute instituted power and fruitfully problematise the conundrums of liberation.

Panayota Gounari, coming from applied linguistics, offers yet another dimension to the question of liberation, through the exploration of history wars in America and more precisely, the backlash against critical race theory. Analysing the

discourse in 193 legislative bills that aim to delegitimise critical race theory across different US states, Gounari examines the recent far-right attempts to rewrite history via the silencing of black experience and history, and the political efforts to create a new "red scare". Right at the heart of this revisionist project lies the attempt to reaffirm the established hierarchies – above all, in this case, of white supremacism – which critical race theory, like feminism or postcolonialism, to refer to some of the most influential attempts at theoretical and political emancipation, sought to dismantle by bringing the subjugated histories of oppressed subjects to the fore. Gounari dissects the far-right revisionist strategy to reveal how the old arsenal of "anti-Americanism" and "anti-patriotism" has been weaponised once again to bluntly erase the history of slavery, how reversing the blame turns the victims into perpetrators for making their oppressors feel "resentful" and "uncomfortable", and how a racialised version of patriotism seeks to eradicate black experience from historical and public narratives. The deeper issue behind the backlash against critical race theory concerns history itself: history is not simply "acts committed in the past", detached from their ideological context and dissociated from their contemporary ramifications and the many ways they constitute the present and the existing hierarchies. History contains within it the seeds of the future – the very possibility of emancipation – and this is why its erasure and the apotheosis of the present, the "here and now", are key characteristics of authoritarian discourses and ideologies. It is precisely why this transformation of history from a vehicle for liberation into a tool of the ideological state apparatus – who speaks, who remains silent, who determines what histories are told and which ones remain concealed – has never been simply a question of scholarly preoccupation, but a battleground were the "order of things", as established by the West for the rest, is reaffirmed or contested. In this perspective, critical race theory indeed threatens the white, Western, colonialist worldview, as, like other critical attempts, it aims at dismantling the master's house with new tools, and to claim presence, recognition, visibility, voice and, ultimately, meaningful equality.

The next two essays, by employing Marxist concepts in their analysis, shift their focus from the 19th to the 20th century and from the field of the history of political thought to that of historical sociology. The first is by the historical sociologist Dylan Riley, who examines a question classic in sociological thought, namely the relationship between democracy and capitalism, focusing on the way in which this relationship has been shaped over the last half century. Starting from the premise that capitalism and democracy coexisted peacefully only after the end of the Second World War, he points out that this was possible because the former was then in a constant state of growth while the latter was not threatened by the working class. This balance started to shift gradually after the 1973 oil crisis, when the economic accumulation of capital slowed down considerably across the "developed" world. Under such conditions, the capitalist economy, in order to reproduce itself, cannot do so autonomously through the typical process of investment and the extraction

of surplus value from it. Instead, it requires state intervention to ensure rates of return, a process Riley describes as political capitalism. After analysing the mechanisms through which this political mediation for the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production takes place, he points out the implications that this process has for the very functioning of democracy, the most central being the evacuation of its content, since this process produces the structural condition for its delegitimisation. Riley's observation is also interesting for the type of politics produced by this new reconfiguration of the relationship between capitalism and democracy. Drawing on the work of Max Weber, he speaks of a new pattern in politics that can be summarised in what he defines as the "rise of neo-estate politics", meaning that given the stagnating overall pie of income, emerging groups are competing for a larger share of it. The left falls into the same trap too by focusing many of its struggles on the alleviation of social inequality. Riley, returning to Marx's work, points out the dangers of such a view on the part of the left and submits a counterproposal that suggests an overall project for a mode of living beyond the existing capitalist arrangements.

The next essay, by Kanishka Goonewardena, can be read as a national exemplification of what Riley describes about political capitalism, with a special focus on the case of Sri Lanka. Despite being an urban planning scholar, Goonewardena develops a problematic drawn from historical sociology. The historical account, however, of how Riley's schema is exemplified does not arise from a country in the capitalist centre but on the periphery, namely Sri Lanka. Goonewardena's analysis shows how the uneven and unequal development of political capitalism is reflected in his country. The case on which this examination of the consequences of political capitalism is based are the mass protests that took place in the Sri Lankan capital in the summer of 2022 under the banner #GotaGoHome! Starting from these protests, Goonewardena retrospectively dissects the neoliberal path that the Sri Lankan state has followed over the last half century and traces the roots of the present crisis. In doing so, he aims to deconstruct the ideological interpretations offered for the political crisis faced by the country, which tend to attribute its causes to the "people's" demands for an end to the corruption that has plagued its political system in general and, in particular, the continuation of such practices by former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa's ruling party, Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna. Goonewardena demonstrates that a critical part of the protesters, primarily from the country's middle class, were not calling for its radical reorientation but, influenced in part by individuals from the US embassy, were pushing for an agreement with the IMF, a solution that, according to the author, is part of the country's problem and not an effective response to it. According to Goonewardena, corrective measures for the country's trajectory only meaningful only if they seek to dissolve of dependency relationship created by the conditions of political capitalism. Goonewardena identifies a path forward in a small group of Marxists called the Marx School, who have formulated economic proposals aiming to end the country's dependency on

international financial institutions and organisations.

The following two essays seek to examine political ideologies, that is, fascism and populism, respectively. Historian Aristotle Kallis utilises tools from the work of Antonio Gramsci, social psychologist Michael Billing and more broadly the field of fascist studies to analyse the phenomenon of interwar fascism and its transformations over the past decade. Kallis argues that one of the effective ways to understand the enduring influence and success of the fascist phenomenon, whether in its interwar or modern versions, is to focus on the ways in which it reproduces itself in the public sphere as the "common sense" of modern societies, as something plausible that says nothing different than the average citizen. The basic reference in this effort is the Gramscian concept of "common sense", which he carefully reconstructs in the context of other concepts derived from the work of the same thinker, in order to understand both the way it functions in Gramsci's entire intellectual corpus, particularly in his effort to explain the rise of Italian fascism, as well as the ways in which this concept can have heuristic value for a more general interpretation of the phenomenon. A crucial aspect for the historical emergence of this concept within interwar fascism, Kallis points out, was the way in which it was based on nationalist ideology – and precisely its most extreme versions – which was consequently embraced by actors from different political backgrounds who eventually rallied behind the interwar fascist projects. This interpretation enables us to understand the hybrid nature and effectiveness of interwar fascist ideology, which drew on different theoretical traditions that crystallised into solid political initiatives that acted both at the level of movement and state governance. Kallis argues that fascism, as an ideology, did not disappear with the end of the Second World War but persisted in a transformed version both in the postwar context and in the crisis era we live in today. In its different manifestations, the contemporary far right uses the recipe of "common sense", or, in Marxist terms, the dominant ideology, in a slightly differentiated way, adapting it to emphasize normalised versions of nationalism, racism and conservatism. Kallis invites the contemporary left to focus its attention on these aspects and to enter into a process of hegemonic deconstruction by proposing ideological alternatives and political practices that derive from good sense, a concept proposed by Gramsci in opposition to the common sense.

Seraphim Seferiades' essay focuses on the phenomenon of "populism" and highlights the political and methodological dangers of defining the far right as such. Coming from the field of political science, his essay is of epistemological interest and draws on the concerns of the disciplines of contentious politics and social movements. His theoretical approach to the phenomenon of populism, as explored in the relevant literature, involves examining the normative foundations of the dominant perspectives while analysing their effectiveness in explaining the phenomena they seek to address. Seferiades engages with two kinds of theoretical approaches to populism: on the one hand, he examines mainstream interpretations, such as Cas

Mudde's, which mainly analyse the far right, and on the other, alternative interpretations that focus on left-wing populism, drawing from the works of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. He identifies that the former's normative versions derive from what has been defined as "post-democracy" and the latter from "left reformism". Seferiades critiques the explanatory power of these theoretical frameworks, arguing that, given their discursive focus, they not only fail to adequately explain their research object – left and right ideologies – but also obscure it by treating it as a single ideological body. He contends that they fail to ground these ideas within the historical context in which they are embedded by associating them with the political practices of the parties that claim to represent and implement them. The epistemological result, as the author points out, is a cat-and-mouse logic where nothing explains nothing and everything explains everything.

The next two contributions develop innovative thoughts around gender as a category of analysis and experience. Demetra Tzanaki, a historian of gender, offers a compelling account of the ways gender as a concept has been instrumentalised, weaponised in order to erase the very existence of other, non-binary ways of being in the world. Via a meticulous genealogy of the concept of gender itself, Tzanaki demonstrates that gender is in fact the boundary of the dehumanisation of those other, non-binary ways of being, and by consequence, contributes to the indifference towards the violence inflicted on them. Tzanaki makes a radical proposal, which is no other than abolishing, or decolonising the very concept of gender – so central to contemporary theoretical attempts at liberation. Instead of white binary sex and stable notions of nature and human life as a species, she employs a trans-intersex-black feminist lens to allow other, subjugated histories to emerge and subjugated subjectivities to be experienced and valued. As Tzanaki explains, when the borders of whiteness are crossed, human life loses its value in Western civilisation, and what is required is to transcend the "categorical" logic of whiteness, which wipes out the uncivilised, unethical androgynous-gynandrous bios, truth, and knowledge. To do so, the essay engages with the coloniality of science, the control and management of knowledge along three axes: (a) the way the ancient ethics of caring for oneself (aphrodisia ethics) entered Christian times and how modernity perceives it in relation to judicial science; (b) the way aphrodisia ethics served as the framework for puériculture and eugenics by introducing an international moral eugenic discourse of patriarchal binary sex and heterosexuality; (c) the way a global *ορθός* (correct), morally eugenic science of (social) sex, that is, gender, was a way to rationalise and perpetuate Western white dominance. For Tzanaki, the decolonisation of gender, sexuality, science, nature, animals and primates is an urgent social priority of the 21st century. The decolonisation of science, but also the radical proposal to abolish gender as a war machine of the modern state and its governmentality, emerge as a necessary theoretical move in order to build the foundations for considering all life as worthy.

An interview we conducted with activist, photographer, poet, and filmmaker

Paola Revenioti, known as Paola, a LGBTQI icon in Greece, follows. Paola made a living as a sex worker from a young age, since other avenues of formal employment are systemically inaccessible for transgender individuals. In recent years Paola was also an election candidate with DiEM25. In this interview, Paola speaks from the viewpoint of experience and exemplifies empirically what it means to be an in-between subject - impossible to classify, marginalised from society, yet with a liberated consciousness and a sharp political intuition. In her uncompromising approach, Paola makes two distinctive points concerning the left: first, she identifies the lack of a positive, luminous narrative which needs to coexist along with the critique of social ills. For Paola, the misery that plagues the attitude of the left needs to be superseded to offer an account of eudaemonia, joy and pleasure besides social criticism, at the political, aesthetic and everyday level. As Paola emphasises, the left lacks a discourse on eroticism, often making concessions to the dominant morality, a position which is not unrelated with her critique of certain left stances regarding prostitution: against the grain, Paola submits that a woman's choice to have sex as a profession must be respected, rather than being judged in moralist terms and being forced to conform to a petty bourgeois lifestyle. The second point has to do with the difficult relationship the left has had with queer identities throughout its history: Paola reminds us that only very recently and very timidly did the left open up to gendered identities that challenge heteronormativity and calls out the silencing and subjugation of LGBTQI identities to class/economic determinants. Yet, with rare insight, Paola also cautions against the mistaken belief that common experience inevitably leads to shared political consciousness: a shared gender identity does not lead necessarily to the left. Assuming one's particular identity – and that goes beyond gender to speak to all other forms of identity politics – does not entail an automatic desire for social change.

The next contribution is by Reporters United, an Athens-based network of investigative journalists, which uncovered the 2022 Greek surveillance scandal, also known as "Predator Gate" or the "Greek Watergate". The contribution gives a summary – and relevant hyperlinks – of the great efforts the team undertook to unravel the case and the government's attempt at a cover-up and intimidation through the use of strategic litigation, also known as SLAPP. What the case investigated by Reporters United reveals is not only the multiple dimensions of the wiretapping scandal but also the modus operandi of authoritarian neoliberalism. One of the first victims of the case was a journalist investigating financial crimes. When the scandal finally erupted, the government further manipulated legislation not only to cover up the existing cases but also to secure itself against future allegations of surveillance abuse. What transpires from this case, besides the attack on established constitutional rights, is the widespread fear of being monitored, the dismantling of the sense of safety provided by democratic rights, and the eventual rise of self-imposed conformity and self-surveillance. This, in turn, further embeds

the logic of authoritarian neoliberalism.

The last contribution does not come in the form of an article but as another interview, this time with Dylan Riley, who was the guest speaker for the launch of the Politics of Liberation seminar in September 2022. The interview was conducted in early March 2024, during his stay in Athens for his second talk at the seminar. The interview attempts to engage with the larger body of his work, posing questions that seek to examine the key concerns that inform it. Riley's case is interesting precisely because it testifies to the shift of a number of left-leaning intellectuals at Western universities who engaged with Marxist theoretical concerns to conceptualise their academic studies yet were mostly focused on research rather than tangible political issues until the global financial crisis in 2008. However, the intensification of political polarisation since then, due to the multiple crises that have erupted, has forced them to take a position on current political developments, placing their studies – which have acquired also a topical dimension – at the disposal of the political left, which was called on for the first time in decades to engage with the central political struggles and dilemmas of its time. Riley's take on Donald Trump's rise and political dominance bears witness to this shift while being one of most insightful analyses available to the global left not only for understanding the complexity of the phenomenon but also for creating the political obstacles that could disable crucial aspects of his administration.

Overall, the thinkers, academics, activists and journalists contributing to this volume bear witness to the political work that the Politics of Liberation seminar series sought to perform. At the same time, we believe they offer highly original pieces to the theoretical discussions on the possibility of a politics of liberation in today's world.

Last but not least, we would like to thank all the speakers and the audience who made the seminar possible, as well as our project manager, Phoebe Daliani, who believed in the idea from the very beginning and has wholeheartedly supported the seminar all these years.

CHAPTER 1

HAVE MARX – AND ENGELS – SOMETHING TO SAY ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION (AND INTERNATIONALISM)?

→ **Stathis Kouvelakis**

LET ME START with some explanations concerning the title of my chapter. There is a common wisdom on the relation between the "founding fathers" of historical materialism and the nation. Shared by non- or anti-Marxists and by most Marxists alike, this common wisdom says that Marx and Engels have little to say on the subject. "Little" does not mean here quantitatively little, since it is acknowledged that their writings include lengthy discussions of those "national questions" that were of primary importance at their time – Poland, Italy, Ireland, German unity, the "Eastern question", colonial expansion, to name just the most prominent ones. The claim is rather that in all those texts there is little, if anything, that is properly original and specific, that is, integrated into their broader theoretical framework.

A more emphatic version of this claim is that even if we admit that Marx and Engels have something specific to say on the national phenomenon, they nevertheless miss the point. Their theory reduces the nation to a mere by-product of the development of productive forces. Following this economistic version of an allegedly Hegel-inspired philosophy of history, the emergence of nations is seen as an element of progress, both a result of and a stimulus for capitalist development. The nation appears thus as historically justified only to the extent that it serves this purpose. In other terms, only peoples and social formations displaying an endogenous capacity to access capitalist modernity are entitled to a distinct nation-state existence. The nation remains, however, a secondary aspect of the broader historical process, the motor of which is class struggle. According to this view, class and nation are two mutually exclusive realities in a zero-sum game. Marx, Engels and their followers opted for the primacy of class, hence their failure to capture the dynamics of the national phenomenon.

Whether we adopt the weak or the emphatic version of the argument, the nation appears as the blind spot in Marx and Engels's theory, the source of constant and serious trouble for those who tried to build on their intellectual and political legacy. Ultimately, we are told, the reasons for this deficiency lies in Marx and Engels's internationalism. Based on the assumption of transnational interests that are common to the exploited classes, internationalism is indissociable from the primacy attributed to class conflict. It thus lies at the heart of their politics and their vision of history. From this follows, once again, the failure of Marxism as a political project, since modern history has shown that nations are a much stronger form of collective existence than class-based movements.

FOUR THESES

I now want to challenge the common wisdom on Marx and Engels's approach to the national question, as briefly sketched at the start of my chapter by developing the following four theses:

1. Marx and Engels do have a theory of the nation as a modern phenomenon, inherent to the worldwide expansion of a new mode of production, capitalism and the emergence of "bourgeois society" – a concept to be analytically distinguished from "capitalism" as a mode of production although belonging to the same historical constellation.
2. At the core of this theory lies the concept of the nation as the necessary framework through which the fundamental classes of modern society (first the bourgeoisie, then the proletariat) build their capacity to lead a broad bloc of social forces to a higher level of historical existence – in Gramscian terms, to exercise their hegemony. The nation thus appears as the expression of the unity of politics and economics, of an enlarged vision of class struggle, within a revolutionary process oriented towards human emancipation.
3. The internationalism of the exploited and oppressed groups was not understood by Marx and Engels as a negation of national realities but rather as a political struggle constitutive of a new, class-based, historical bloc which has to affirm its capacity to seize political power at a national level and thus kick-start a revolutionary process able to expand beyond its initial boundaries and challenge the world domination of capitalism.
4. Marx and Engels' vision of the nation is indeed, in its initial formulation (around the 1848 revolutionary moment), heavily loaded with Euro- and Western-centric biases, typical of the time and largely derived from the subjective position of its authors at the centre of the world's major industrial and colonial empire. The evolution of Marx's (and, to a more limited extent, Engels's) views on colonialism and the multiple paths of development of European and Western societies led them to overcome to a significant degree (but not fully) those biases.

THESIS 1: THE NATION AS A MODERN PHENOMENON

My main textual reference for these theses, with the exception of the last one, will be the *Communist Manifesto*.[1] The obvious reason is that the *Manifesto* is not simply a conjunctural piece of writing but a major *theoretical* text of the Marxian-

1 This text, as well as all other texts by Marx and Engels, will be quoted according to the *Marx Engels Collected Works* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975-2004), henceforth mentioned as MECW, followed by volume and page number.

Engelsian corpus, the first and possibly the only of that sort providing a comprehensive overview of their political thought on the eve of the 1848 revolutionary sequence.

Summed up schematically, the argument of this ultra-famous but often theoretically underestimated text, and particularly of its first part, "Bourgeois and Proletarians", is to assess the radical break in human history brought about by the emergence of a new mode of production, dominated by capital and typical of modern bourgeois society. This social form opens up an unprecedented historical possibility, that of abolition of private property and, with it, the abolition of a class-divided society.

The major novelty of these new social relations lies in their unlimited expansive character. Contrary to all premodern forms of territorial expansion, which only scratched the surface of social relations, the era of capital ruthlessly destroys all previously existing forms of production. It is the first to be able to expand at a global level, and thus the first form of concrete universality to appear in human history. To quote a key passage:

> The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations (. ...) In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.
>
> The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image. (MECW 6, p. 488)

This is one side of the process. Before moving to its obverse side, let us underline the main points of this argument which is more complex than it might initially appear.

At first, the emphasis is put on the *unifying* dimension of the process of world capitalist expansion. "Cosmopolitanism" appears here as the characteristic of capital, and refers to its capacity to cross national boundaries, to constitute a world market, and radically reshape the social fabric of every national formation. However, if frontiers are relativised, they are not abolished. Affirming the universal interdependence of nations is not the same as saying that nations disappear. It means that they are integrated in the same temporality, and belong to the same world, a world created "after the image" of the bourgeois mode of production.

The reference to Goethe's idea of "world literature" should not be misunderstood. For Goethe, *Weltliteratur* did not mean abandoning the national specificities of each corpus. On the contrary, by becoming accessible to all, each literature would be "appreciated for its distinctiveness and difference, for the instrumental colour it brings to the symphony of universal literature", to quote S. Solomon Prawer (1976/2011), the author of a classical study on the subject. "World literature" is not some kind of globalised Esperanto but the novel possibility of communication and interaction between languages and cultures.

The second point I will only briefly mention here, since I will return to it later. The process of capitalist expansion is explicitly considered as an expansion of civilisation, of "civilised" nations at the expense of the "barbarian" ones. In previously cited passage, the term civilisation is put at a distance ("what the bourgeoisie calls civilisation") but in all the rest of the text it is used without quotation marks, and the same goes for its Other, the "barbarians". The passage immediately following the previous one is telling:

> The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilised ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West. (MECW 6, p. 488)

"Civilisation" appears thus as the attribute the bourgeois, urbanised, Western world versus the nations of peasants, the colonies and the Eastern world, respectively assimilated to "barbarian and semi-barbarian countries". The process of universalisation is clearly centred around one single civilisation, which is presented as the only one able to rescue "from the idiocy of rural life". The peasantry as a social group, and, even more so, as a possible revolutionary force, is entirely absent from the *Manifesto*, which reduces it to a remnant of the premodern past. Needless to say, this vision will entail dramatic consequences for the way the national question is posed in those areas for Marx and Engels.

THESIS 2: THE NATION AS THE PRODUCT OF "BOURGEOIS REVOLUTIONS"

Let us now move to the second thesis: contrary to what is often said, the *Manifesto* does not restrict the dynamics of capitalist expansion to the unifying and homogenising effects of the mode of production. The development of this mode of production goes hand in hand with the development of a new class structure, more precisely with the rise of a new class, which draws its power from the expansion of market, from colonial trade and from the control over new productive forces. But, as Marx and Engels emphasise:

> Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class. (...) The bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie. (MECW 6, p. 488)

Clearly, the bourgeoisie *needs* the state, and this state, as explained in the *Manifesto*, has three characteristics: in its substance, it is a *class state*, its executive branch assimilated to a "committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie"; in its form, it is the *liberal*, or the "modern *representative* State", to be distinguished from the democratic state form, even in the limited sense of contemporary parliamentary democracy. Lastly, it also a *centralised* state, a state that unifies pre-existing local or regional entities and interests.

It is precisely at this point that its *national* character appears:

> The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralised the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments, and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier, and one customs-tariff. (MECW 6, pp. 488-489)

It is crucial here to distinguish the two dimensions of the process: the accumulation of capital needs a homogenised space, breaking with the feudal forms of fragmentation, a space which lays down the legal and economic conditions of accumulation: unified regulations, monetary circulation, an internal market itself connected to the world market. The creation of such a space is a pressing demand of the rising bourgeoisie in its internal struggle against the feudal conditions of production and the obstacles posed by the absolutist state. This internal struggle is also a struggle externally oriented against the bourgeoisies of other countries. For Marx and Engels, the cosmopolitan character of capitalist production is not accompanied by the rise of a

global dominant class but, on the contrary, by relations of ruthless rivalry between competing bourgeoisies, each linked to a distinct national state. However, the rise of the class interest of this new dominant group to a "national class-interest" – the combination of these terms is an indication of a more complex process – is mediated by a series of political factors and historical events.

The key notion here is that of "bourgeois revolutions", the models of which are the 17th-century English civil war and, even more so, the French Revolution, the matrix of all revolutionary events for the generation of Marx and Engels. As demonstrated by the French case, it is through a revolutionary process mobilising all the oppressed classes and groups of society that a particular class can win supremacy by presenting itself as its "general representative". This is how the revolutionary nation, the nation as the outcome of such a revolutionary process, emerges. Let us quote at this point an extract from an earlier Marxian text, his 1844 *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* – an article which can be considered as his first political manifesto:

> No class of civil society can play this role [emancipating the whole of society] without arousing a moment of enthusiasm in itself and in the masses, a moment in which it fraternizes and merges with society in general, becomes confused with it and is perceived and acknowledged as its general representative, a moment in which its claims and rights are truly the claims and rights of society itself, a moment in which it is truly the social head and the social heart. (...) For the revolution of a nation and the emancipation of a particular class of civil society to coincide, for one estate to be acknowledged as the estate of the whole society, all the defects of society must conversely be concentrated in another class (...) so that liberation from that sphere appears as general self-liberation. For one estate to be par excellence the estate of liberation, another estate must conversely be the obvious estate of oppression. The negative general significance of the French nobility and the French clergy determined the positive general significance of the nearest neighbouring and opposed class of the bourgeoisie. (MECW 3, pp. 184–185)

In the course of bourgeois revolutions, such a moment of fraternity is *both* illusory and real. It is illusory because its final point is the coming of a new form of class domination, of a new particularism practically contradicting the universalist claims of the revolution. But it is also real, in the sense formulated by Marx in his 1843–1844 text *On the Jewish Question*: "Political emancipation is, of course, a big step forward. True, it is not the final form of human emancipation in general, but it is the final form of human emancipation within the hitherto existing world order" (MECW 3, p. 155).

To mobilise around itself a broader spectrum of dominated social groups in the struggle against its adversaries, the bourgeoisie creates a space in which their

presence as subaltern, but constitutive, active, components of the new social and political order is acknowledged. In this process, the dominated classes win material advantages (for instance, land in the case of the French peasantry), political rights (general male franchise) and, more broadly, they gain their political education as autonomous actors in the great stage of history.

Therefore bourgeois revolutions, and their outcome, modern bourgeois society (in German, the term *bürgerliche* means both "bourgeois" and "civil" society) and the modern nation, mean something more than the domination of new class or of a new mode of production. They are the starting point of a process in which the active role of the popular masses is recognised and inscribed, albeit only within certain unsurpassable limits, in the material and institutional organisation of society. Their role is not restricted to a fleeting founding moment; it becomes a permanent characteristic of modern politics, which appear therefore as *constitutively national*. In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels clearly see the autonomous movement of the proletariat as the heir and continuator of this process, which it uses against its initiators:

> Altogether collisions between the classes of the old society further, in many ways, the course of development of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie finds itself involved in a constant battle. At first with the aristocracy; later on, with those portions of the bourgeoisie itself, whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry; at all time with the bourgeoisie of foreign countries. In all these battles, it sees itself compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for help, and thus, to drag it into the political arena. The bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie. (MECW 6, p. 493)

Before examining in more detail the relation between the workers' movement and the nation, let me situate briefly Marx and Engels in the contemporary debate on the relation between the state and the nation. This question usually boils down to a kind of chicken and egg dilemma on which of the two terms holds the primacy, that is, whether the (modern) state "makes" the nation or whether the second exists before the coming into existence of the first. I think that Marx and Engels's position would be a sort of "third option" in the sense that they see both dimensions are internally linked; in other terms, as constituting the two faces of a single process of "bourgeois revolutions". The nation appears thus as the "constituent power", the subjective side of the process: the "people" as the founding subject of a new political order, and the state as its institutionalised form, which of course, once stabilised, reshapes drastically the configuration of the national body politic.

This conception of the nation combines dialectically elements of historical necessity and of contingency. Nations are not natural, spontaneous or eternal, transhistorical realities but neither are they arbitrary constructions. Their emergence

draws from a whole range of pre-existing processes: economic, such as the development of capitalism; social, such as the rise of a new class structure; political, such as the centralising function of some premodern states; and cultural, such as the diffusion of certain languages. But these are just conditions for the emergence of the nation; they constitute the "prehistory of the nation", to quote a formulation of Étienne Balibar (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, p. 88). The nation is not the spontaneous outcome of the development of capitalism – although we can find some formulations, particularly in Engels, suggesting such a teleological conception. However, the guiding line of their thinking on the nation is that it emerges in the process of construction of the *hegemony* of a new class, the bourgeoisie, and, for them, at least in the 1848 sequence, this process takes a revolutionary character. The anachronistic use of the term hegemony here is deliberate. It refers to the capacity of the bourgeoisie to establish itself as *the general representative of the nation*, as the class leading society to a *new and higher form of historical existence*, and this key notion is clearly developed by Marx and Engels through the notion of *leadership* attributed to a social actor emerging as the fundamental class of a new mode of production.

This conception of course raises the question of what happens when the bourgeoisie does not play that role, which is precisely what happened in their own country, Germany. This is how Marx analyses the attitude of the German bourgeoisie in the 1848 revolution in his famous *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* article "The bourgeoisie and the counter-revolution":

> The revolutions of 1648 and 1789 were not English and French revolutions, they were revolutions in the European fashion. They did not represent the victory of a particular social class over the old political system; they proclaimed the political system of the new European society. The bourgeoisie was victorious in these revolutions, but the victory of the bourgeoisie was at that time the victory of a new social order, the victory of bourgeois ownership over feudal ownership, of nationality over provincialism (. ...) Unlike the French bourgeoisie of 1789, the Prussian bourgeoisie, when it confronted monarchy and aristocracy, the representatives of the old society, was not a class speaking for the whole of modern society. It had been reduced to a kind of estate (Stand) as clearly distinct from the Crown as it was from the people, with a strong bend to oppose both adversaries and irresolute towards each of them individually because it always saw both of them either in front of it or behind it. (MECW 8, p. 162)

Germany did not follow the French, or even the English road, and its unification as a nation happened much later in the 19th century through Bismarck's "iron and blood" policy. This opens up the question of the *Sonderweg*, the specificity of Germany's political development compared to that of the other great European powers (on this debate, see Blackbourn and Eley, 1984). But the same could be said more generally about all major capitalist countries where the mode of pro-

duction rose without going through some bourgeois revolution, for instance Meiji Japan or pre-1917 Russia. At this point, I leave open the question of how much does this make the Marxian and Engelsian conception of the revolutionary nation obsolete. What it clear, however, is that what Marx and Engels considered as the "normal" road to nation-formation ultimately proved to be rather exceptional. Or perhaps it was just one possibility among others, indicating that no single national path should be considered as the norm. As for the French revolutionary road, it was followed where Marx and Engels expected it least to happen, that is in the peripheries of Europe and in the colonial world, where struggles for national liberation and independence can legitimately be considered as standing for bourgeois-democratic revolutions.

THESIS 3: ON WORKING-CLASS INTERNATIONALISM AS A POLITICAL STRATEGY

Internationalism as an idea (since the term itself does not appear before the 1870s) is not specific to Marx and Engels's political thinking, or even to the socialist and communist movement. In the 19th century the vast majority of revolutionary democrats and of the workers' movement shared some kind of internationalist vision, essentially based on moral values: fraternity between peoples, a common love for freedom, the rejection of national oppression. That internationalism should be distinguished from 18th-century "cosmopolitanism" since it recognises the nation as a necessary mediation between the citizenry and the universalist horizon of a human species unified by those values. Marx and Engels's conception of internationalism innovates in two aspects: first, their internationalism is not dictated by a moral ideal but conceived as a necessary dimension of the struggle to overthrow capitalism, a struggle in which the role of the working class is central. In the course of this struggle, the working class has to become itself the nation in the sense of becoming the leading class, the general representative of society overcoming the limited and contradictory character of emancipation brought about by the bourgeois revolutions. Secondly, their vision of international politics is based on a realist vision of interstate relations seen from the perspective of a revolution which, as we will see in a moment, cannot remain confined within national borders.

I will focus here on the first aspect, that is, on the specificity of working class internationalism and its relation to the national role of the working class. The first and fundamental point to be made is that this internationalism is the necessary response to the cosmopolitan character of capitalism. In a world unified by this mode of production, a claim that was of course a bold anticipation at the time the *Manifesto* was written, there is a fundamental common interest among the new exploited class, which is to overthrow this system. Therefore, the unity of this class beyond national borders is necessary to defeat a system which is itself irresistibly expanding at a global scale.

For Marx and Engels, this point is of paramount importance. In the *Communist Manifesto* they raise it to the first point which distinguishes the communists from the other currents of the workers' movement: "In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they [the communists] point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality" (MECW 6, p. 497).

Nevertheless, as clarified in the first part of the sentence, the struggle of the proletarians remains a "national struggle" since their class adversary, the bourgeoisie, is organised at that level, and the strategic aim of the struggle is to seize control of the nation-state. A major consequence follows from this: the terrain of class struggle, and of its climactic moment, the conquest of political power, remains national although, from the standpoint of the proletariat, the interest at stake goes beyond national borders. This idea is formulated in the *Manifesto* as follows: "Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie" (MECW 6, p. 495).

The importance of this statement appears more clearly if we take into account that it represents a major revision of the position formulated by Engels in the text which served as a draft for the *Manifesto* within the ranks of the League of Communists, the *Principles of Communism*. In that text, written in the form of Q and A, Engels answers negatively the question of the possibility of a communist revolution taking place in one country. He goes on as follows:

> By creating the world market, big industry has already brought all the peoples of the Earth, and especially the civilized peoples, into such close relation with one another that none is independent of what happens to the others. (...) It follows that the communist revolution will not merely be a national phenomenon but must take place simultaneously in all civilized countries (. ...) It is a universal revolution and will, accordingly, have a universal range (MECW 6, pp. 351–352).

This position leads quite logically to another one, claiming that nationalities will cease to exist as such under communism. Here, Engels leaves unchanged a formulation of another preceding draft of the *Manifesto* entitled *Communist Profession of Faith*:

> The nationalities of the peoples who join together according to the principle of community will be just as much compelled by this union to merge with one another and thereby supersede themselves as the various differences between estates and classes disappear through the superseding of their basis – private property. (MECW 6, p. 103)

The *Manifesto*, most likely at Marx's initiative, marks a clear break with this kind cosmopolitan idealism. Its references to the relation of the workers and their struggle to the nation are well-known but usually quoted only in a fragmentary way.

It is therefore worthy to have a look at the full passage:

> The working men have no fatherland [Vaterland]. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation [sich zur nationalen Klasse erheben: rise to the level of the national class], must constitute itself as nation, it is so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.
>
> National separations [Absonderungen] and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.
>
> The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster. United action, of the leading civilised countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat. In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another will also be put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end. (MECW 6, pp. 502–503; translation modified).

Let us unpack these particularly dense formulations, starting with the first sentence: "The working men have no fatherland [Vaterland]. We cannot take from them what they have not got." It is often quoted to prove the alleged rejection of any positive reference to the nation by Marx and Engels. But if we accept this reading then the following sentence, explicitly calling the proletariat to become the nation and even the leading class of the nation, looks incomprehensible. How can we explain this apparent gap? Let us look first at the term *Vaterland*. Its usage was anything but anodyne or neutral in the 1848 context. In the whole period between the anti-Napoleonic wars and 1848 it was waved as the banner of the reactionary current of German nationalism. As stressed by Erica Benner, at the time, *Vaterland* has "already [become] a shibboleth of both conservatives and Romantics" who "show a preference for [this] good Germanic [word] whenever [it] could fill in for the Latin-derived 'nation' or 'patria'", two key-notions of the discourse of the French Revolution (1995/2018, p. 20). Its usage by any democratic and socialist force had become impossible.

However, putting this reference aside, we are still left with the puzzling next sentence: *"We cannot take from them* [from the proletarians] *what they have not got."* The idea here points to a previous passage of the *Manifesto*, where it is fully developed:

> In the condition of the proletariat, those of old society at large are already virtually swamped. The proletarian is without property; his relation to his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois

> family relations; modern industry labour, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests. (MECW 6, pp. 494–495)

The same idea is to be found in many of the writings of Marx and Engels of the previous years: the proletariat is seen as a force wholly *external* to bourgeois society. It appears both as the living negation of the material foundation of bourgeois society, private property, but also as immune to the whole bourgeois ideology, law, morality, religion, national character, assimilated to "so many bourgeois prejudices". Needless to say, this is a blatantly idealised image of the proletariat, presented as spontaneously revolutionary, or at least entirely ready to adopt a revolutionary position. This view will be contradicted by the developments of the 1848 revolutions, in which the attitudes of the workers will vary considerably from one moment or place and country to another. Confronted to the reality of the workers' movement in post-1848 Europe, Marx and Engels will have to revise drastically their vision of the revolutionary subject.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty of its status, the fact remains that the *Manifesto* explicitly states that, to become a protagonist in class struggle, the proletariat needs to constitute itself as the nation. Winning political supremacy, that is, seizing state power, implies becoming the leading class of the nation, thus occupying the place held by the bourgeoisie during the French and English revolutions. Marx and Engels will stick to this idea in their later interventions, particularly during the moments of revolutionary uprising.

Let me just refer to two cases. In June 1848, as soon as the news of the bloody suppression of the revolt of Parisian workers reaches Germany, Marx writes in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*:

> The momentary triumph of brute force has been purchased with the destruction of all the delusions and illusions of the February revolution, the dissolution of the entire moderate republican party and the division of the French nation into two nations, the nation of property-owners and the nation of workers. (MECW 7, p. 144)

So, the climactic moment of a revolutionary break, that is civil war, is not seen as the end of the nation but rather as its limit case. The nation undergoes an internal split into two antagonistic camps, each one claiming to be the "real nation". Marx will reiterate this position in the *Civil War in France*, commenting on the Paris Commune, which as we know started as patriotic uprising of the Parisian workers against a government leading the country to defeat and capitulation in the war against Prussia. In a single sentence, he will *combine* the "truly national" character of the commune, as the "true representative" of the French nation facing the

parasites and exploiters regrouped in Versailles, *and* its class and internationalist dimension:

> If the Commune was thus the true representative of all the healthy elements of French society, and therefore the truly national government, it was, at the same time, as a working men's government, as the bold champion of the emancipation of labour, emphatically international. Within sight of that Prussian army, that had annexed to Germany two French provinces, the Commune annexed to France the working people all over the world. (MECW 22 p. 338)

As suggested before, we find here emerging in Marx and Engels the notion of hegemony later developed by the Russian Marxists and systematised by Gramsci (Anderson, 2017). However, there remains an internal tension in the *Manifesto* between, on the one hand, a proletariat allegedly denationalised by the sheer movement of world capitalist expansion, and, on the other, the nationalisation of this class, seen as the necessary step towards the conquest of leadership and of political power.

To clarify somewhat the issue, let us go back one last time to the previously quoted key passage of the *Manifesto*: two further ideas are developed. The first reiterates the meaning of internationalism: it is the united action of the proletariat made both possible and necessary by the world expansion of capitalism and its homogenising effects at the economic level. Its goal is not the abolition of nations, or of nationalities, but, more realistically, the abolition of the sources of conflict or hostility between nations. We could object that even this vision looks excessively optimistic since it appears as a simple acceleration of an already ongoing process: the political supremacy of the proletariat, it is said, "will cause them [national separations and antagonisms] to vanish still faster". But the two final sentences brings a rectification: for this to happen, it is necessary to bring an end to the *exploitation of one nation by another.* And this, in its turn, presupposes the end of the *exploitation of one individual by another* and it will go ahead only "in proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes" (MECW 6, pp. 502–503).

It has to be underlined that Marx and Engels see the exploitation of one nation by another and class exploitation as going hand in hand. However, and this is also valid in their later work, they did not develop a proper theory of the first type of exploitation, whereas they provided an original and systematic theory for the second. As is well known, in *Capital*, Marx left unfinished the parts on the world market and on the world trade. This left a huge gap, which the Marxist followers tried to fill with the theories of imperialism, of unequal exchange or of "absolute productive advantage" (Amin, 2010; Ganguli, 1965; Lenin, 1916/1964; Shaikh, 1979, 1980).

Secondly, if we follow the strategic implications of this passage, the centre of gravity of the movement leading to the end of "the exploitation of some nations by others" lies in the so-called "civilised" countries, since it is only there, *and not in*

the exploited nations themselves, that the revolutionary action of the working class can take place.

The consequence of this thesis becomes clear in the position developed by Marx is his support of a national cause that was dear to him, and to Engels, as it was for all the socialists and revolutionary democrats of their time, the cause of Poland. In his 1847 speech at a meeting of solidarity with the Polish people held in London, Marx addressed a mainly English audience of Chartist supporters in these terms:

> Of all countries, England is the one where the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is most highly developed. The victory of the English proletarians over the English bourgeoisie is, therefore, decisive for the victory of all the oppressed over their oppressors. Hence Poland must be liberated not in Poland but in England. So you Chartists must not simply express pious wishes for the liberation of nations. Defeat your own internal enemies and you will then be able to pride yourselves on having defeated the entire old society. (MECW 6, p. 389).

We see here how Marx mixes up two quite different positions: at first, the realistic and theoretically grounded insistence on the primacy of the national form of the workers' struggle if moralising impotence is to be avoided: the first task of any internationalist is to defeat the enemy within her own country. But he adds to this something much more problematic: because of the central position of England in the world capitalist economy, the liberation of Poland has to pass first through London, not Warsaw.

THESIS 4: ON THE LIMITATIONS OF MARX AND ENGELS'S APPROACH OF THE NATION AND OF INTERNATIONALISM

This brings us to the crucial point: the Euro- and Western-centric vision of the world heavily loading the writings Marx and Engels on the nation and the international action of the working class. What Marx and, even more so, Engels saw as valid for Ireland and Poland, that is, the task of national liberation, was not valid for Mexico, Eastern Europe and the colonised world, at least not in the texts of the 1840s. Western European "great nations" (old ones, such as France or England, or ones in the process of unification, such as Germany or Italy) are seen as the model for viable state entities, thus introducing a normative bias in the analysis of the processes of national emergence. In some articles in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* of 1848–1849, Engels developed at length considerations on the Eastern European "peoples without history" (*geschichtslose Völker*), such as the Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Slovenes, Serbs, etc., which he considered as *by nature* counter-revolutionary. In these texts we can find essentialised formulations and others indicating the elimination of these peoples, as distinct collective entities, as a desirable outcome for the progress of "civilisation" and of the revolutionary cause

in Europe. The Ukrainian heterodox Marxist scholar Roman Rosdolsky (1987) has written the definitive study of this dark side of Marx's lifelong companion.

Certainly, Engels's highly derogatory and aggressive writings on Slavic peoples (except the Poles), among whom he also listed the Greeks, as did Marx (Kondylis, 1985), are dictated by his despair following the defeat of the 1848 revolutions, a defeat to which the emerging national movements of some of these peoples also contributed. But the problem goes deeper: Marx and Engels's refusal to explore the possibility of an equivalent of bourgeois revolutions in Eastern Europe cannot be understood without taking into account the extent to which they have accepted the dividing line between "East" and "West" as one separating "civilisation" from "barbarism" or "semi-barbarism", to use one of their favourite terms. This also explains their somewhat pathological Russophobia and their firm belief that behind every national aspiration of the Slavs lies the hand of the tsar, as if these peoples, being without history, were also deprived of any capacity for autonomous action. There is little originality at stake here: Marx and Engels recycle widespread cultural stereotypes and discursive patterns of their time. This is ultimately why they thought that sacrificing the national aspirations of these people was an acceptable, and even a necessary, position to be held by West European revolutionaries.

The late Engels expressed his views clearly in a February 1882 letter to Eduard Bernstein:

> We must co-operate in the work of setting the West European proletariat free and subordinate everything else to that goal. No matter how interesting the Balkan Slavs, etc., might be, the moment their desire for liberation clashes with the interests of the proletariat they can go hang for all I care. (...) Surely you [Balkan Slavs] can have as much patience as the European proletariat. When they have liberated themselves, you will automatically be free; but till then, we shan't allow you to put a spoke in the wheel of the militant proletariat. The same applies to the Slavs. The victory of the proletariat will liberate them in reality and of necessity and not, like the Tsar, apparently and temporarily. And that's why they, who have hitherto not only failed to contribute anything to Europe and European progress, but have actually retarded it, should have at least as much patience as our proletarians. (MECW 46, p. 205)

There is, however, a case that deserves a particular discussion due to its role in the evolution of Marx and Engels's thought on the national question (for a broader discussion of the issue, the indispensable reference is Anderson, 2016). It is Ireland, the prototype of a colonial situation within Europe, just next to the main imperial centre of the time, Britain. Contrary to Eastern Europe, Marx undertook, with Engels, an in-depth study of the history of the island, and in particular of the agrarian and land questions. He understood that such a study was necessary to analyse

the interweaving of the national struggle and class relations. He then arrived *at a new position*, to which he managed, at the cost of often stormy debates, to gradually rally the majority of the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA, eventually known as "the First International").

This new position can be stated as follows: in the oppressed nation, the struggle for independence cannot be dissociated from social revolution. In Ireland, this operation is "a hundred times easier", says Marx in a March 1870 memorandum sent on behalf of the General Council of the IWMA to the Federal Council of Romance Switzerland, and eventually to the Committee of the German Social-Democratic Workers' Party, because "the economic struggle there is concentrated there exclusively on landed property, because this struggle is at the same time national, and because the people are more revolutionary and more exasperated than in England" (MECW 21, p. 119). In the oppressed nation, the exploiter is simultaneously the colonial oppressor, whose economic and moral function is to "represent the domination of England over Ireland" (MECW 21, p. 120). This is why the question of land is key to the Irish struggle and its solution amounts to a radical transformation of the class structure of the colonised society. It means concretely the elimination of the class of big landowners and the *compradore* strata whose existence depends on the persistence of the colonial bond with Britain. In a letter to German members of the IMWA based in the United States, Marx writes: "in Ireland *the land question* has been up to now the *exclusive form* of the social question because it is a question of existence, *of life and death*, for the immense majority of the Irish people, and because it is at the same time inseparable from the *national* question" (MECW 43, p. 474). In a colonial situation, there is no "social question" distinct from the "national question" which is also why the struggle for national liberation takes the form of a *social revolution* – albeit not necessarily (or straightforwardly) socialist since it takes place in the countryside. In the same letter, Marx talks of the inevitability of an "*agrarian revolution* (...) if the English army and police withdrew from Ireland tomorrow" (MECW 43, p. 474).

The novel and decisive point that emerges from these elaborations is that *the national liberation of an oppressed people can only come from its own action*, and not from a prior victory of the working class of the dominant nation as Marx and Engels previously thought. The order is now reversed: as stated in the same IWMA document, written by Marx, the task is to "transform the present *forced Union* – i.e., the enslavement of Ireland – into *equal and free confederation* if possible, into *complete separation* if need be" is "the *precondition to the emancipation of the English working class*" (MECW 21, p. 121).

In a letter to Engels in December 1869, Marx is even more explicit about his own evolution:

> For a long time I believed it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working class ascendancy. (...) Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will never accomplish any-

> thing before it got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. This is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general. (MECW 43, p. 398)

The reason for this shift is thus twofold: on the one hand, the liberation of the oppressed people undermines the economic, political, military and ideological base of the ruling class in the metropolis, while, on the other, only unequivocal support for the struggle of the oppressed nation can end the internal division of the British proletariat between Irish immigrants and English workers, a "split [which] is the real secret of the maintenance of its [the English landlords' and bourgeoisie's] power". It is in the above-mentioned circular of the International that the famous formulation "the people who subjugate another people forge their own chains" appears. But this principle is no longer based on a moral norm but on a strategic vision of class struggle: "The lever must be applied in Ireland" radically reformulates the conception of revolutionary political strategy to be followed in the colonial metropolis. The internal split and ideological subordination of the working class of the imperial centre have to be broken for a revolutionary perspective to emerge and the "lever" to fulfil this task is *in the hands of the oppressed people in the colony*. We have here the first glimpse of an international(ist) process articulating the intensification of class struggle in the imperial centre(s) with the struggle for national liberation in the periphery, a struggle in which the colonised people and, within it, the peasantry appear as the decisive protagonist.

CONCLUSION

Marx and Engels' thinking on the national question and on the meaning of internationalism underwent a significant evolution as a result of their confrontation with the international situation and of their intervention in the workers' movement. Gradually an enlarged conception of the nation and of internationalism emerges, which (particularly in the case of Marx) leads them to distance themselves from the European and Western-centric schemas. Social revolution, internationalist commitment and the struggle for national liberation need to be thought as distinct but always-already intertwined struggles. They are integral components of a multifaceted revolutionary process directed against the fundamental relations of coercion and exploitation which constitute the capitalist system as a whole. Although analytically distinct, these relations do not exist, in the concrete historical totality, separately from each other. They constitute a "complex whole [that] has the unity of a structure articulated in dominance", to borrow a famous formulation by Louis Althusser (1965/2005, p. 202).

This is why, as we have seen with the case of Ireland, the struggle for national emancipation is itself a form of social revolution, although not directly a socialist one, and a revolution whose main actor is the peasantry. But this struggle appears

also as the *precondition* for overcoming the divide created by colonial ideology and racism within the working class of the dominant nation, and thus for autonomous class politics within it. It is from an anti-colonial uprising in Ireland that Marx expects the decisive impulse that would allow the radicalisation of an English working class largely subordinated politically to bourgeois liberalism: "After studying the Irish question for years I have come to the conclusion that the decisive blow against the ruling classes in England (and this is decisive for the workers' movement *all over the world*) cannot be struck *in England*, but *only in Ireland*" (MECW 43, p. 473).

The strategic implications of this position for the struggle of the subaltern classes are decisive. The national question and class internationalism are neither disconnected variables nor a zero-sum game. An internationalism that does not take into account the national dimension, and more particularly the fundamental distinction between dominant and oppressed nation, is doomed to remain politically impotent. It can even to turn into its opposite, by repressing the reality of the oppression exercised by the dominant nation, as we have seen happening so many times in the workers' movement of the great colonial and imperial powers.

But we must go even further and draw the ultimate conclusion: any victorious struggle against the domination of capital is irreducible to a moment of "pure" class antagonism. It is rather, to use once again a category elaborated by Althusser, a struggle for the fusion of the contradictions which *overdetermine* class antagonism: national oppression, to which we must add other forms, such as racial oppression which is directly linked to colonial realities and their enduring consequences. Such a fusion requires a hegemonic strategy capable of raising the subaltern classes to the position of leading society, of "becoming a nation" themselves. Therefore, in the dominant nations as well, internationalism can only become concrete through its articulation to the "becoming-nation" of the proletariat. It is only by fully taking over this task that it can oppose the internationalism of capital and build forms of coordinated action at an international level.

At a moment when the contradictions of a system leading humanity to its ruin are being exacerbated, I think that it is fair to say that such a position provides at the very least food for thought for all those who are striving to rebuild a revolutionary perspective adequate for our times.

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CHAPTER 2

THE TRAGEDY OF AUTONOMY IN THE MODERN THEATRE OF LIBERATION

→ **Vassilis Lambropoulos**

→ I am grateful to Drs. George Souvlis and Rosa Vasilaki for inviting me to contribute to the outstanding year-long seminar "Politics of Liberation", which they organised, and to this volume, both sponsored by the pioneer Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung–Office in Greece.

POSTCOLONIAL SELF-DETERMINATION IN THE 1960S

Since the main topic of this volume is liberation, I shall focus on what was arguably the last period of political liberation on a global scale, decolonization in the 1960s. During that period, many national liberation movements, especially in Africa, established postcolonial states that gained international legitimacy and recognition.

The decade started with a momentous institutional breakthrough. Adom Getachew (2020) has explained that in 1960

> seventeen African states joined the United Nations, marking the high point of decolonization in the Black Atlantic world. [As a bloc they] led the effort to secure passage of the resolution 'Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.' The declaration described foreign rule as a violation of human rights, reiterated the right to self-determination, and called for the immediate end of all forms of colonial rule. [It] offered a complete repudiation of foreign rule and rejected any prerequisites for the attainment of independence (p. 14).

Thus, self-determination was transformed from principle to human right.

This global growth of national independence also brought to the forefront debates about what liberation had entailed and achieved, which often focused on the meaning of self-rule: "Public struggles over the shape of the postwar world questioned the meaning of terms long treated as synonyms: freedom, liberty, emancipation, independence, sovereignty, self-determination, and autonomy" (Wilder, 2015, p. 5).

The exercise of collective self-rule in these postcolonial states raised major issues, such as the following five enumerated by Brad Simpson:

1. Is self-rule a general principle or a human right?
2. Is it also a political, economic, and cultural right? (Simpson, 2014a, p. 312)
3. Is it "an act (such as a plebiscite) or an ongoing process (such as the holding of elections)?" (p. 312)
4. Who has the right to self-rule – individuals, ethnic groups, national groups, all people living withing certain boundaries, or other human configurations? (2013, p. 241)
5. Who or what is a "people" or a "nation"? (2014b, p. 338)

Thus, liberation from colonialism generated major questions about the breadth of postcolonial self-determination.

Following Western models, postcolonial states sought to become homogeneous nation-states to strengthen their internal unity and external credibility.

> Many postcolonial states, especially in Africa, had arbitrary boundaries bearing little resemblance to the actual dispersal of ethnic, linguistic or cultural groups. Forging and maintaining a national identity across diverse ethnic and linguistic lines was therefore a priority for many postcolonial regimes, which viewed strong, single party states as a means to this end (Simpson, 2014b, p. 347).

However, as soon as it was launched, the creation of a pluralistic nation-state was met with staunch internal resistance from movements that challenged its national integration.

> In the decade and a half after the height of decolonization in 1960, the idea of the postcolonial state as the site of a politics of citizenship that could accommodate racial, ethnic, and religious pluralism was called into question as movements from below resisted and repudiated the majoritarian, homogenizing, and exclusionary tendencies that appeared embedded in the structure of the nation-state (Getachew, 2020, p. 179).

The loss of trust in the sovereignty of postcolonial states resulted in the crisis of nation-building. There were two major internal challenges by minority groups to homogenising self-determination, both of them manifestations of *stasis* (civil strife).

a) Dissent. Does the right to self-rule include democratic participation? State worries about volatility

> fueled suspicion of domestic dissent and motivated anticolonial nationalists to take an increasingly hostile and punitive stance toward domestic political opposition. In the context of perceived state weakness, dissent and opposition came to represent instability and subversion, which sanctioned state repression (pp. 28–29).

b) Secession. Does the right to self-rule include seceding from established and recognised states, that is, liberation from liberated populations?

> As UN member states moved to condemn colonialism and enshrine self-determination as a human right in the early 1960s, however, and as decolonization accelerated in earnest, so too did worries that cascading self-determination claims within anticolonial movements might lead to increased pressure for secession (Simpson, 2014b, p. 339).

Secession raised the danger of state fragmentation. Two of the best-known examples were the Congo Crisis (1960–1965), the civil wars that began almost immediately after the Congo became independent from Belgium and included the failed secession of the Katanga province (1960–1963), and the failed secession of Nigeria's Eastern Region under the name of the Republic of Biafra (1967–1970). A succession of secession crises such as these foregrounded the limits of self-determination as a guarantor of postcolonial sovereignty.
The official response was swift and unanimous:

> The UN, with African members in the lead, repeatedly condemned attempts by secessionist movements to redraw the borders of often fragile multiethnic states, and it explicitly or tacitly authorized the Congo, Nigeria, and other countries threatened by such movements to take actions necessary to preserve their territorial integrity (Simpson, 2013, p. 247).

Still, even when secession was not pursued, the politics of citizenship in the postcolonial state was unable to transcend the ethnic, regional, linguistic, and other divisions of its society and fulfil its egalitarian promise. As a result, "anticolonial nationalism failed to attend to internal pluralism and sanctioned authoritarianism in the name of the nation" (Getachew, 2020, p. 189).
What is worse, as Nick Nesbitt (2013) puts it,

> many, perhaps the majority, of the so-called "decolonized" areas have since the 1960s become far more colonized – by global capital, by North Atlantic military hegemony, by endemic indebtedness to the World Bank – than they ever were before their nominal "decolonization" (p. 95).

This failure may be part of a larger phenomenon. Victor Figueroa (2015) has argued that

> disappointment with the results of revolutionary anticolonial practices, particularly with the way they often reproduce the unfair structures of exploitation and exclusion that they were fighting in the first place, has been pervasive among colonial writers and intellectuals. Moreover, that disappointment and sheer exhaustion are not recent, but rather have been parcel of all revolutions, from France to the United States and Russia, and beyond (p. 20).

THE ANTINOMY OF AUTONOMY

My interest in the challenges of postcolonial governance is part of my broader research into the dilemmas of postrevolutionary autonomy, such as postcolonial self-determination. I focus on the ruptures of linear time and radical beginnings triggered by revolutions, on the openings of socio-political space created

when people rise against ruling authority to demand freedom. These are modern questions of authorisation and constitution that have been preoccupying political thinkers from Sorel, Luxemburg, Schmitt and Gramsci in the early 20th century; to Sartre, Camus and Merleau-Ponty in the 1940s; Fanon, Arendt and Castoriadis in the 1960s; Foucault, Habermas, Lyotard and Unger in the 1980s; to Negri, Butler, Mouffe and Rancière in the 2000s. More specifically, I focus on the antinomies of civic autonomy, on the fact that freedom must be self-policed. I treat the fundamental Idealist antinomy between freedom and necessity as the antinomy of *arche* (Gourgouris, 2012) as beginning and rule, revolution and institution, constituent and constituted, authorisation and authority, *stasis* (the people) and state (government), *polemos* and *polis*.

The question of the antinomy of autonomy (Lambropoulos, 2020) takes us back to the "paradox of autonomy", the hugely influential Third Antinomy of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). To Kant, freedom was the fundamental problem of philosophy and the great problem of the modern world. Kantian freedom = autonomy/self-determination = free will = will being a law to itself = will obeying its law for its own sake = will under moral law = moral autonomy. However, Kantian autonomy is paradoxical since it is both a duty and a submission. The only way to be free is to autonomously prescribe for myself the duty of autonomy, which (duty) is the free submission of my morally self-legislative will to its own law. Hence the antinomy: The realisation of freedom requires obedience to universal law. The work of practical/moral reason is to overcome the antinomy of autonomy, its inherent heteronomy, by preserving and reconciling freedom and obedience, even to make them mutually reinforcing. The inherent contradiction of *auto-nomia* is captured in its very etymology: Can freedom and rule coexist? Can a collectivity be free and at the same time live under the rule of law? This contradiction makes freedom tragic.

The concept of tragic freedom, which has been central to critical philosophy from Kant to post-anarchism,

> emerges as precisely what escapes Kant's transcendental reason – the unresolvable antinomy, the self-destructive autonomy, the contradictory self-legislation, the differentiation that cannot be sublated. With it, several pressing questions appear: [...] What happens when the demands of self-governance begin to impede self-determination? Above all, can freedom defy the rule of autonomy? (Lambropoulos, 2006, p. 29).

Friedrich Schelling, in the Tenth of his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795), experimented by putting antinomy on the stage: "Many a time the question has been asked how Greek reason could bear the contradictions of Greek tragedy." Oedipus is an illustration of this contradiction: "A mortal, destined by *fatum* to become a criminal, struggling himself against this *fatum*, and nonetheless terribly punished for a crime which was the work of destiny!" (Schelling quot-

ed in Lambropoulos, 2006, p. 37–38) Thus, we have a mortal struggle between freedom and destiny. In Schelling's view, the two are reconciled in Greek tragedy, where one's freedom is manifested through its destined loss.

Schelling argues that

> tragedy highlighted the capacity of the tragic hero to admit to a crime that is the result of destiny and to embrace the fate of a criminal. Schelling's letter asserts that the fight against the necessity of the objective power affirms individual freedom, a struggle preserved in art. [...] Schelling rejects the self-imposed laws of Kantian reason and embraces the superior logic of antinomianism, of revolt against the laws of necessity. [...] The tragic is the confirmation of a defiant will (Lambropoulos, 2006, p. 38).

The antinomy of autonomous reason is tragic because it means claiming freedom through its loss, being punished for succumbing to necessity only after a fight. The tragic conflict dramatises the dilemmas of freedom and shows how it is reconciled with (natural) necessity through the speculative unity of the antagonistic oppositions in the antinomy of universal reason. Humans can neither accept nor avoid this paradox.

> If Kant thought that a free will is a moral one, Schelling believes that a free will is a guilty one that maintains its moral integrity. Freedom consists not in the self-governance of autonomy but in the futile revolt of autonomy against heteronomy (p. 39).

THE TRAGIC IN POLITICAL THEORY

Commenting on the Kantian legacy, Bernard Yack (1986) notes that "Kant's conceptual innovations generate a new kind of longing, the longing for the realization of freedom and humanity in the world, which quickly becomes a longing for a fully human community" (p. 106). What makes it radically new is that "while Kant asks us to act autonomously, the Kantian left demands that we realize our autonomy" (p. 104). Yack discusses the "Kantian left", a group of thinkers that includes

> the most creative and influential German philosophers from Fichte to Hegel. The two characteristic left Kantian concerns are (a) the demand that man's humanity – defined in terms of autonomy – be realised in some way in the external world and (b) the need to locate and overcome the theoretical and practical obstacles to the fulfillment of this demand (p. 102).

Since the German Idealists, the idea of the tragic has acquired philosophical authority and great thematic range. Political and social theory continue to explore antinomies in tragic terms to our time. Recent representative books include (in chronological order) David M. Ricci's *The Tragedy of Political Science* (1984),

J. Peter Euben's edited *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (1986), Christopher Rocco's *Tragedy & Enlightenment: Athenian Political Thought and the Dilemmas of Modernity* (1997), Bert van den Brink's *The Tragedy of Liberalism* (2000), Richard Ned Lebow's *The Tragic Vision of Politics* (2003), Paul A. Kottman's *A Politics of the Scene* (2008), Vivasvan Soni's *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity* (2010), Peter Trawny's *Freedom to Fail: Heidegger's Anarchy* (2015), Simon Stow's *American Mourning: Tragedy, Democracy, Resilience* (2017), Richard Halpern's *Eclipse of Action: Tragedy and Political Economy* (2017), Elias José Palti's *An Archaeology of the Political: Regimes of Power from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (2017), Elizabeth K. Markovits' *Future Freedoms: Intergenerational Justice, Democratic Theory, and Ancient Greek Tragedy and Comedy* (2018), and Nicolai N. Petro's *The Tragedy of Ukraine: What Classical Greek Tragedy Can Teach us about Conflict Resolution* (2022).

Thinkers from Marx to Arendt and Camus have used tragedy to employ revolution. I will mention three characteristic views.

In Raymond Williams' view (1966), since the French Revolution, the movement of history and the action of tragedy have been closely associated: "The tragic action, in its deepest sense, is not the confirmation of disorder, but its experience, its comprehension and its resolution. In our own time, this action is general, and its common name is revolution" (p. 83).

David Scott (2004) sees "tragedy as a way of thinking about the fragility of the project of founding freedom and the fact that it has, by and large, eluded the modern aspiration to revolution" (p. 214). As we saw, this was the challenge faced by postcolonial states in the 1960s.

> And nowhere is the risk of tragedy more present, more burdensome, and more consequential than in the upheaval of revolution, the *event* of modern political action par excellence. [...] nowhere is the price of freedom mor dearly paid than in the collapse or failure of revolution when *everything* has been risked in action – and *everything* has been lost to it (2014, 63).

Alberto Toscano (2013) argues that "contradictions become tragic" only "from the standpoint of revolution, and its practice" (p. 26) in the modern period, and thus "the modern tragedy par excellence is to be found in the revolutionary process" (p. 32).

TRAGEDY AND REVOLUTION

After the idea of the tragic, I now come to the genre of tragedy. Michel Foucault (2004) argues that at the end of the wars of religion in the 17th century

> a new historical perspective opens up of indefinite governmentality and the permanence of states [...] that are not organized by reference to a reason whose law is that of a dynastic or religious legitimacy, but rather by

> reference to the reason of a necessity that it must face up to with *coups* [...]. State, *raison d' État*, necessity and risky *coups d' État* will form the new tragic horizon of politics and history (p. 266).

This is also the time when, from Shakespeare to Racine, "Classical drama is basically organized around the *coup d' État*" (p. 265). I propose that, starting with Romanticism, theatre is organised around the revolution. Modern theatre stages the antinomies of civic autonomy as a tragic *agon*, the tragedy of revolutionary governance. It dramatises moments of extreme dilemmas/irreconcilable contradictions of legitimacy as contestation intrinsic to the revolution.

At the extraordinary moment of revolution, collective autonomy is engaged in a new founding. A self-instituting society will be making now its own norms. But what will their foundation be? The tragedy of revolution, of the absolute beginning and the possible justification of its groundless actions, dramatises the search for the legitimacy of revolutionary justice (a justice that may violate both law and morality). By staging an agonism of judgments, tragedy dramatises the dilemmas of justice in a political society founded on freedom and radical immanence.

Modern tragedy is interested in the contradictions of revolt. The extraordinary event of a collective start turns tragic when the revolt faces the demands of the legitimacy of rule, when the constituting power seeking self-rule needs to justify its own way of rule. At that point, it discovers that in self-determination inhere both beginning and rule (*arche*). Tragedy stages the problems of a self-instituting society that would operate without ultimate guarantees and would live constantly with the need for self-limitation. By following the transition of revolt from a constituting to a constituted power, it reflects on what it means to institute a political community.

I argue that modern tragedy has as one of its central topics the ethico-political dilemmas of rebellion, namely revolutionary beginning caught between limitless self-authorisation and self-limiting rule. Tragedy stages the drama of the Greek *arche* in its double meaning of beginning and rule, and asks whether self-rule may control itself, whether radical autonomy may limit itself. Thus, it explores the inherent antinomy of *auto-nomia* captured in its very etymology: Can freedom and rule coexist? How can a collectivity be free and at the same time live under the rule of law? How can a constitution be both enabling and limiting?

Modern theatre is rich in historical and imaginary figures and events pertaining to revolution, such as kings like Philip II of Spain (Schiller's *Don Carlos*), emperors like Boris Godunov, presidents like Kazantzakis' Kapodistria and Césaire's Lumumba (*A Season in the Congo*), revolutionaries like Marat and Toussaint Louverture, militants (Brecht's *Measures Taken*, Müller's *Mission*, Negri's *Swarm*), terrorists (Camus' *The Just*), outlaws (Wordsworth's *Borderers*) and uprisings (Hauptmann's *Weavers*, Grass' The *Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising*). In my project, I bring into dialogue political theory and tragedy, the most political of all literary genres, in which many theorists have expressed strong interest (Schmitt in Shakespeare, Castoriadis in Aeschylus, Badiou in Racine, Negri in Euripides, Butler and Honig in Sophocles and so on.)

POSTCOLONIAL TRAGEDY

In 1969, Aimé Césaire gave this succinct account of autonomy from epic liberation to tragic possibility: "Freedom is great, winning one's freedom is great; [...] but once freedom is obtained, one must know what to do with it. Liberation is epic, but the tomorrows are tragic" (quoted in Frost & Lefevre Tavárez, 2020, p. 26). David Scott (2004) made a similar distinction between epic freedom and tragic contingency, suggesting that

> where the anticolonial narrative is cast as an epic Romance, as the great progressive story of an oppressed and victimized people's struggle from Bondage to Freedom, from Despair to Triumph under heroic leadership, the tragic narrative is cast as a dramatic confrontation between contingency and freedom, between human will and its conditioning limits (p. 135).

This position has been highly influential as it inspired many scholars to draw on notions of tragedy to discuss the postcolonial predicament. It also eclipsed Timothy Reiss' (2002) narrow view that saw tragedy and the tragic as "means of cultural dominion" (pp. 147–148). Playwrights and scholars have been doing precisely what he warned against: "To make 'others' into a tragic story is to hold different peoples hostage to the West's tale no less than does writing them into any version of western history" (pp. 144–145). Here are a few examples.

Greg Graham (2012) argues that "democratic political tragedy" is "a feature of the recent attempts to establish viable democratic societies" in postcolonies. He discusses the "tragic leadership figures" of Michael Manley and Nelson Mandela, and traces "the tragic course from solidarity and hope to despair under the weight of neoliberal regimes".

Tina Chanter (2011) has suggested that

> postcolonial dramatists have turned repeatedly to Greek tragedy in order to articulate predicaments that are fraught with the burden of drawing on a tradition that has been imposed by cultural and military dictate, and yet which is turned against itself under the pens of playwrights such as Athol Fugard and Fémi Òsófisan. Tragic commitments, including those of empire and colonialism, are thereby made to subvert themselves (p. xi).

Samuel Durrant (2012) notes that Chinua Achebe wrote that "if we are to survive as a nation then we need to grasp the meaning of our tragedy", and comments that

> to become a nation, to move beyond mere "survival", "we" (Nigerians and, by extension, Africans) must grasp the tragic patterning of the events that will have come to constitute "our" history. In retelling our history as tragedy we come to experience our being-in-common (p. 96).

Anjuli Gunaratne (2017), taking into account that, in the face of the failure of decolonisation, Césaire declared "we are in tragedy", discusses postcolonial writers who demonstrate "the importance of re-writing the history of the nation as tragedy instead of as legend" and shows how they "remember and re-work the revolutionary pasts of postcolonial nations by translating mourning into tragic performances that bridge the gap between theater and theory".

Jeremy Glick (2016) studies tragedy "as the literary form par excellence for staging the dialectic of freedom and necessity is configured theoretically from a Black radical position as the interplay between democracy, self-determination, and revolution" (p. 3).

Most recently, Ato Quayson (2021) proposed:

> The key problem for the postcolonial world [...] is the status of ethical choice in phases of transition when the old order may be changing, but a new order has not yet taken its place. It is at this conjuncture of historical transition and problematic ethical choice that I want to situate my explorations of postcolonial tragedy (p. 33).

Using a loose definition of tragedy, these scholars have discussed various works of theatre, fiction, poetry, history and cinema with great breadth and flexibility. I would like to focus on a particular category, postcolonial tragedy itself, that is, tragedy on the stage, especially plays taking place during the Haitian Revolution.

THE POSTCOLONIAL TRAGIC AND TRAGEDY IN HAITI

Haitian governance has been the pre-eminent case of the Caribbean tragic politics of revolution (Grüner, 2020, p. 205). The Caribbean "tragic politics of revolutionary and anti-imperialist enactments of sovereignty [...] search for new ways of exercising sovereignty and autonomy" (Frost & Lefevre Tavárez, 2020, p. 27). Nick Nesbitt (2008) explains one of its paradoxes:

> As a radical extension of the process of enlightenment [...] the Haitian Revolution was both a grandiose success and a failure. [...] Since Haitian slaves could participate in this global discursive sphere only by asserting their rights through violence, they ultimately remained trapped within the logic of the very will to power that the public use of intersubjective, communicative reason in the Enlightenment hoped to overcome. [...] this paradox came to haunt the revolution before it was even completed (p. 80).

The paradoxes of liberation in postcolonial Haiti have been often discussed in the context of the antinomy of autonomy. Doris Garraway (2012) points out that they were "manifested from the moment of the nation's founding, notably in the authoritarian structures of governance established for the emancipated colony and young state" (p. 3). In the Haitian project of emancipation, it became appar-

ent that "universalism may ultimately impose uniformity, legitimate oppression, or mask inequality". As Garraway has argued, "the discourse of freedom and the practice of authoritarianism in the Haitian Revolution [...] together they evidence the profound antinomies of the discourse of universalism itself, rendering it potentially problematic as a discourse of radical emancipation" (pp. 4–5).

The antinomy in Haitian revolutionary discourse consists in the coexistence of

> two types of universalism: a radically extensive universalism of the rights of man [...] and a more exclusionary form that denied Haitians and other non-Europeans cultural authority in the international sphere and justified their political and social subjugation at home. The truth of this paradox is that the first ideology legitimated the second (pp. 19–20).

The contradiction between an unconditionally extensive freedom (universal abolition of slavery) and the legitimation of militaristic agrarian plantocracy thwarted the political foundations of freedom in the new states.

The Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) has been often presented in terms of tragedy and the tragic. The subject has been attracting strong theatrical interest since the end of the 18th century.

"From 1796 through 1975, a total of sixty-three plays concerned with the Haitian Revolution were either performed or published [by playwrights] from Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States" (Clark, 1992, p. 240, plays listed in pp. 255–256). Errol Hill (1986) has amplified: "The Haitian revolution engendered more plays by black authors than any other single event in the history of the race" (p. 414). Especially

> to African-Americans, the Haitian revolution seems destined to become what the Trojan War was to the Greeks, an inexhaustible source of heroic and legendary stories that will for a long time to come supply the raw material for inspiring black drama (p. 418).

A tragic view prevailed: "Several of these writers shifted their focus from the revolutionary war to its tragic aftermath. Their plays contain the recurring themes of duplicity and betrayal among the leadership and the debilitating preoccupation with class and color distinctions" (p. 415). According to Andrés Henao-Castro (2018), the postcolonial tragedy that Haiti exemplifies

> demonstrates the limitations of conceiving of the world as *post*colonial at all. [...] By lamenting the unfinished character of the Revolution, [...] tragedy laments making the liberation from slavery untranslatable into the freedom of modernity. As [Saidiya] Hartman argues, the very language of persons, rights, and liberties, where emancipation was supposed to result in freedom, remains a mode of servitude and racial subjugation for the freed enslaved (pp. 371–372).

Now I would like to concentrate on the period with which I began my article. Here are just some of the plays from the decolonial 1960s which provided cautionary tales for newly independent states by placing the drama of decolonisation and nation-building on the stage of Haiti. The list shows that, while at the beginning of the decade George Steiner announced the *Death of Tragedy* (1961), black playwrights were working on tragedy with rare intensity and originality during the 1960s.

Edouard Glissant	*Monsieur Toussaint* (1961)
Derek Walcott	*Drums and Colors* (1961)
Enrique Buenaventura	*La Tragedia del Rey Christophe* (1961)
Lorraine Hansberry	*Toussaint* (1961)
Claude Vixamar	*Les Briseurs de chaînes* (1961)
Aimé Césaire	*The Tragedy of King Christophe* (1963)
Langston Hughes	*Emperor of Haiti* (1963, final version)
René Philoctète	*Boukman, ou Le rejeté des enfers* (1963)
C. L. R. James	*The Black Jakobins* (1967 revised 1936 play *Toussaint Louverture*)
Hénock Trouillot	*Dessalines, ou Le sang du Ponte-Rouge* (1967)

THE POSTCOLONIAL ANTINOMIES OF AIMÉ CÉSAIRE (1913–2008)

Anjuli Gunaratne (2017) would "go so far as to say that Césaire was developing a concept of 'modern tragedy' well before Raymond Williams published *Modern Tragedy* (1966)" (p. 186). The Martinican man of letters and activist Aimé Césaire (1913–2008) had a double career of unresolved postcolonial contradictions: In his two capacities he dominated the island's public life for the last half of the 20th century, advocating cultural autonomy within political heteronomy. In his cultural and political work, we see several overlapping antinomies of postcolonial autonomy: Blackness vs. communism, creole vs. cosmopolitanism, *négritude* vs. modernity, myth vs. history, primitivism vs. rationalism, local space vs. universal values. For example, as a poet, dramatist, essayist and intellectual, he supported the anticolonial black aesthetic that mobilised French-speaking writers in the Caribbean and Africa in the 1930s, which he called *négritude*. However, as a politician, he supported the French assimilationist policy and supported the process that transformed colonies into departments of France. While championing the myths and rites of African identity, he thrived in the elite French educational system. While exploring primitivism, throughout his political career he favoured departmental integration over national independence.

> Despite the massive importation of French consumerism into Martinique, he continued to argue that cultural autonomy could coexist with departmentalisation. And despite the development of Martinique as a distant outpost of the EU, he persisted in looking to Africa as the source of authenticity (Ferguson, 2018).

Specifically, in the political domain Césaire "authored (and legislated) a delicate balance between France and the Caribbean. He adamantly defended departmentalisation for its extension of administrative rights and economic protection but clearly lamented the failure to improve racial and social inequality" (Walsh, 2013, p. 124). Being fully aware of these antonomies, Césaire proposed "poetic knowledge", a modern modality of knowing through which antinomies of philosophical rationalists and scientific empiricists "are not denied but transcended" (Wilder, 2015, p. 30, p. 35). He believed that writers and artists could "creatively anticipate different ways of being (free)" (p. 242). Yet, as a politician who often changed positions and embraced contradicting identifications "he played his part in a Sisyphean political drama" with an "absurd and tragic quality" (p. 195).

Gunaratne (2020) remarks: "Africa and the Caribbean are placed side by side and read one through the other in Césaire's diasporic imaginary" (p. 185). Césaire saw Haiti as the country in the American hemisphere that best preserved practices and values of precolonial Africa that could be recuperated and disseminated by diaspora Blacks in a pan-African postcolonial world. He said:

> I love Martinique but it is an alienated land while Haiti stood in my mind for the heroic Caribbean, and also the African Caribbean. I connect the Caribbean with Africa; and Haiti, the most African island in the Caribbean, is at the same time a country with a remarkable history. The first black epic of the New World was written by Haitians, by people like Toussaint Louverture, Christophe, Dessalines, etc. (quoted in Davis, 1997, p. 75).

Césaire's "engagement with Haitian history informed his strategic orientation to politics and his programmatic writings about 'true' decolonization as a revolutionary overcoming of colonialism with indispensable political, socioeconomic, cultural, and psychic dimensions" (Wilder, 2015, p. 194).

He took a formative trip to Haiti in 1944.

> He later recalled feeling overwhelmed by the cautionary example of "this terribly complex society. [...] Most of all in Haiti I saw what should not be done! A country that had conquered its liberty, that had conquered its independence, and which I saw was more miserable than Martinique, a French colony! [...] It was tragic, and that could very well happen to us Martinicans as well" (quoted in Wilder, 2015, p. 29).

After writing a book on the historical tragedy of Toussaint (*The French Revolution and the Colonial Problem*, 1962), Césaire wrote four dramas, treating the colonial problem as a tragic predicament. Arguably the best, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, was written in 1959–1963, premiered in 1964 and revised in 1970. It integrates elements of prose, poetry, song, dance, folklore; several styles, from the tragic and lyrical to the mythical and parodic; linguistic registers; dramatic techniques, from vodou rituals to Brechtian estrangement; and poetic sources from Racine to songs in Kreyòl.

Henri Christophe (1767–1820) was a slave who gained his freedom as a young man, rose to the military rank of captain in the colonial government, joined the slave uprising in 1794, participated in many battles, and became a general in 1802, "second only to Jean-Jacques Dessalines as Toussaint Louverture's most trusted military commander" (Césaire, 2015, p. xxxi). When Dessalines proclaimed national independence in 1804 and assumed the presidency, he appointed Christophe commander-in-chief of the army. Following Dessalines' assassination in 1806, Christophe was offered the presidency of the republic, declined, seceded, became president of the black northern state of Haiti, and proclaimed himself Henry I, King of Haiti, in 1811. Unpopular for the slave plantation system he enforced during his despotic reign, ill, and fearing a coup and assassination, he committed suicide in 1820. Césaire traces his career from secession to suicide: from 1806, when he rejected the presidency of the Haitian Republic, declared himself king, and ruled the northern part of Haiti, to his suicide in 1820; and from Haiti's liberation to its descent into civil war and tyranny.

In the course of the tragedy, "in pursuing his avowed aim of upholding black dignity before the rest of the world, Christophe endorses the very values which he is supposed to have repudiated by his act of political independence" (Williams, 1977, p. 335). To take the most egregious example, the construction of the monumental Citadel at the highest point of the island protects the country from invasion and symbolises its grandeur but it is done by forced labour. "The grandeur of his vision creates an illusion that masks the toil and death that also make the Citadel a slave ship on land" (Walsh, 2013, p. 136). Increasingly, his behaviour is more akin to that of a French absolute monarch.

> *Christophe* reminded its early audiences of several African new states that, having begun as democracies, had rapidly devolved into military dictatorships. Moreover, Haiti itself had been ruled since 1957 by the dictator François Duvalier. Césaire, despite his fascination with Haiti, refused to visit between 1957 and 1986, when Duvalier's son and successor Jean-Claude was ousted from power. In *Christophe*, Césaire shows us an extraordinarily capable – and initially well-intentioned – ruler gradually losing touch with his people and, by the very means he employs to defend their freedom, becoming their oppressor" (Breslin & Ney, 2015, pp. xlvi–xlvii).

This brings to mind his words: "The black man must be liberated, but he must also be liberated from the liberator" (Césaire quoted in Wilder, 2015, p. 259).

The play dramatises the "tragic beginnings" (Clark, 1992, p. 254) of instituting statehood in decolonised Haiti and

> elicits a reassessment of the process of decolonization. In other words, what institutional, cultural, economic, social and educational models should the new nation subscribe to, having rejected, in theory, the ones that had been associated with chattel slavery, dehumanization, and denigration?" (Logan, 2016, p. 101).

The genesis of the play "coincides with the dawning of independence in Africa, at the hour when the first errors and the first disappointments appeared" (Blondel, 1990, p. 49). Césaire "had expected great things from African decolonization, only to see many of the newly independent states turn into dictatorships or military oligarchies" (Breslin & Ney, 2015, p. xxxv). "The heroes of Césaire's decolonization tragedies invite us into the history of postcolonial Africa, as if the whole work of 'civilizing' [...] contained the germs of barbarity." These tragedies, stresses Martin Mégevand (2011), "are a sort of propaedeutics to contemporary postcolonial terror" (p. 199).

Thinking about the future of his native Martinique, Césaire reflected on the question of freedom after emancipation and confronted the antinomies of autonomy. He envisioned a postimperial republicanism that transcended the alternatives of independence and departmentalisation. His legacy is

> to have remained faithful to a single axiom in the face of unmitigated and intolerable injustice: fidelity to the revolutionary imperatives of freedom, equality, and fraternity, the unknown implications of which must be at every moment interrogated and experimentally confirmed in the pursuit of the universal, undivided equality of all" (Nesbitt, 2013, p. 271).

In his writings he was interested less in historical figures (such as Toussaint, Christophe and Lumumba) "as tragic individuals than in the world-historical circumstances that conditioned their attempts to convert formal liberty into substantive freedom after the end of colonial rule" (Wilder, 2015, p. 202). He was vitally interested in future political possibilities:

> To think with Césaire and Senghor about the problem of freedom helps point beyond the limitations of an anticolonial nationalism and postcolonial criticism that, for understandable reasons, has largely focused on singularity, incommensurability, and untranslatability. [...] Thinking with them about their world and ours may be a step towards producing histories of our "now" that treat pasts present and futures past as social facts linked to innovative if imperfect political acts that anticipate seemingly impossible alternatives to existing arrangements" (p. 258).

CONCLUSION

I began this article with the challenges of postcolonial self-determination in the 1960s. The central challenge of the new nation-states was the dilemma of post-revolutionary autonomy – the effort to reconcile the limitless (freedom) and the self-limiting (necessity), self-authorisation and authority, politics and the police (Jacques Rancière). This dilemma has been discussed often in tragic terms derived from German Idealism. Among anticolonial revolutions and postcolonial predicaments, Haiti has been attracting intense attention. Seeking to approach the antinomies of autonomy from a literary direction, I proposed that modern tragedy has dramatised the dilemmas of revolution since the late 18th century, and I focused on the *peripeteia* of emancipation as staged by postcolonial tragedy. I found it remarkable that in the 1960s theatre drew on revolutionary Haiti to write tragedies of liberation. Plays like Aimé Cesaire's *The Tragedy of King Christophe* warn against post-revolutionary hubris (Lambropoulos, 2008), that is, the excesses of absolute instituted power.

Hannah Arendt wrote that action "always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries" (1958, p. 190). If revolution is a tremendous manifestation of the boundlessness of action and its lack of moderation, the insatiability of hubris is its "political temptation par excellence" (p. 191). Hubris refers to insolence of pride; it means having abundance and power and abusing them because of arrogance. Postcolonial tragedy shows how the hubris of self-aggrandising autonomy may lead from revolution to tyranny, from self-determination to heteronomy. This genre has been producing plays of remarkable power and political foresight. It deserves continued theatrical, literary, political, philosophical and postcolonial study.

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CHAPTER 3

REWRITING US HISTORY: CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND THE DISCOURSES OF HISTORICAL REVISIONISM

→ **Panayota Gounari**

On May 25 2020, Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, after apprehending George Floyd for allegedly using a counterfeit $20 bill to buy cigarettes, he pinned him to the ground and kept his knee on Floyd's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds. Chauvin did not remove his knee even after Floyd lost consciousness and after paramedics arrived and while three more officers looked on. Hours after Floyd's murder, protests erupted in Minneapolis and quickly spread across the United States and beyond, to over 2,000 cities and towns in all 50 states and in over 60 countries. An estimated 15-26 million people participated at some point in those protests in the United States. There was, undoubtedly, a massive mobilisation gaining momentum and strength.

The murder itself, and the mobilisations that followed, triggered once more discussions in schools, in workplaces and the streets about police brutality, racism, discrimination and other forms of oppression and exploitation. In this defining moment, conservatives jumped on the critical race theory bandwagon and fervently worked to shift the agenda. As issues of racial inequity were becoming part of workplace diversity trainings or were integrated in classroom discussions, the emboldened Trumpist far-right saw an opportunity: A new red scare was born. One of the key players in the debate, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, tweeted at one point: "I learned about racism, slavery, segregation, Jim Crow, and the Trail of Tears in my K-12 education. I never learned about the Holomodor, Cultural Revolution, and 100 million dead from global communism. American schools haven't 'whitewashed' history; they've 'redwashed' it" (Rufo, 2021). Instead of challenging those racist structures in the context of capitalism that generate and legitimise police brutality and relegate people of colour to the margins, America was now talking about anti-racist curricula and diversity trainings that were supposedly traumatising white people. And a new campaign to whitewash, erase and rewrite history was born.

Rewriting history is hardly new. However, we need to see this particular effort as a Trumpist legacy, where Trumpism is understood as a far-right, populist authoritarian ideological and political construction. Under the Trump administration we witnessed the legitimation and proliferation of white supremacy, sexism, corporatism, casino capitalism and militarisation, and an aversion to labour and the working class, reminiscent of fascist ideologies and practices.

At the same time, the Trump administration's discourse and policies openly legitimised a backlash on immigration (the wall on the Mexico border, travel

bans, ICE raids, deportations and family separations); a renewed nationalism and trade protectionism (America First, import restrictions, a trade war with China); an attack on social welfare (distribution of wealth upwards, tax cuts for the wealthy, slashing social programmes and dismantling social safety nets); a form of social Darwinism, and the most reactionary and violent policies in healthcare, education and labour that have adversely affected the lives and existence of ordinary people (Gounari, 2018). Yet, Trumpism has enjoyed a very high degree of support among Americans, making it an interesting far-right populist construct worth studying, as it seems to have allied classes and groups of people with radically divergent interests and class positions.

The meteoric rise of far-right authoritarianism in the United States and across the world brought the normalisation of far-right extremism and its discourses, as well as the legitimation and dissemination of "new versions of history". The narrative in these versions claims that historiography has been blowing things out of proportion in putting the blame on specific groups of people. According to this distorted narrative, it is better to avoid teaching particular elements of history because they may "traumatise" students or make them feel uncomfortable or guilty and responsible for things they should not be held responsible for (slavery, for example). What we have been witnessing is the unapologetic rewriting of history by the far-right.

This chapter delves into the critical race theory (CRT) debate in the United States and the discourses of historical revisionism it has produced. To this end, I critically analyse the discourse in 193 legislative bills that attempt to delegitimise CRT across different US states. However, the ongoing backlash against CRT is important because it goes beyond racist rhetoric or discourse. Reactionary conservatives, through legislation, have been trying to radically alter curricular content and regulate the historical knowledge produced in public schools. This process has been going on for years. This debate transcends the boundaries of education and resonates with broader politics and policies.

First, it has been mobilising people across the political spectrum, including reactionary forces, ultra-conservatives, white parents and their wealthy donors, giving the movement an unprecedented dynamic (not to mention funding).

Second, the anti-CRT backlash has been backed and funded by ultra conservative political action committees known as PACs (organised for the purpose of raising and spending money to elect and defeat candidates). These include organisations such as Fight for Schools, 1776 Project PAC, Citizens for Renewing America, No Left Turn in Education, Parents against Critical Theory (PACT) as well as conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and The America First Policy Institute. For instance, the Fight for Schools PAC is run by a GOP operative and is also backed by several affluent Republican financiers with businesswoman and benefactor Sharon Virts being the PAC's top donor, according to data from the Virginia Public Access Project. The 1776 Project PAC prides itself on "promot-

ing patriotism and pride in American history" (1776 Project PAC, 2023); Citizens for Renewing America is an advocacy group that also counts voter fraud, border security, and big government among its top issues. The Alliance for Free Citizens is an advocacy organisation that pursues state legislation and litigation on a slate of issues, including immigration, voting and transgender students' participation in sports. Finally, the America First Policy Institute is a think tank and advocacy group employing former Trump administration officials and advisers (Schwarz, 2021) that calls for a stop to CRT "indoctrination".

Third, the right is using these attacks as a tool to mobilise right-wing voters at the local level, reclaim school boards and win local, state and national elections which will allow them to pass policy to further criminalisation, voter suppression, etc. As former Trump advisor Steve Bannon has noted, "the path to save the nation is very simple. It's going to go through the school boards." That is, if people are engaged at the local level with school board politics, they will "be energized to propel Republicans in midterm elections as well" (Kingkade, 2021). Therefore, the anti-CRT debate has real, material consequences. The goal is to continue playing into Trumpism by turning racial anxiety into political energy and power. In the process, right-wing politicians aim to overturn many of the policies and victories that diverse progressive groups have struggled for – restorative justice practices, progressive inclusive curricula, black student organisations and so forth.

Finally, and most importantly, the CRT debate is turning into a hot political issue in the United States and one that is going to be on the ballot in the 2024 presidential election. It was certainly an important issue during mid-term and gubernatorial races in 2021–2022. Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin was elected, in part, on his anti-CRT platform. Republican Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who was re-elected in 2022, is a staunch anti-CRT player. DeSantis launched his bid for US President on in May 2023 and his platform built on his legislative successes in Florida that include: stopping "w.o.k.e". (Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees) activism and CRT in schools and corporations; plans to block state colleges from having programmes on diversity, equity and inclusion, and critical race theory; bills to ban diversity programmes in colleges and prevent students and teachers from being required to use pronouns that do not correspond to someone's biological sex; and book bans by making it easier for parents to challenge books in school libraries they deem "pornographic" or dealing "inappropriately" with racial issues – Toni Morison's *The Bluest Eye* being top of the list.

Without a doubt, the initial success of conservative lawmakers has been giving the anti-CRT campaign more traction, gaining support from those white segments of the population who were swayed by Trump's racist rhetoric. For the Republican party, whose goal is to solidify and conserve white symbolic and material power, CRT is the perfect enemy.

THE ANTI-CRT BACKLASH

WHAT IS CRT?

The relationship between race, racism, and power that critical race theory scholars have been uncovering and analysing seems to pose a threat to school curricula and students, according to Republicans. However, it is important to note that CRT has been gravely misrepresented and distorted in the ongoing debate. CRT's predecessors are critical legal studies (1976) that aimed at exposing the ways US law served and legitimised an oppressive social order. Harvard legal scholar Derrick Bell, in the context of the 1954 landmark Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education that ordered the end of state-mandated school segregation in public schools, used the concept of "interest-convergence", the idea that "black people achieve civil rights victories only when white and black interests converge" (Bell, 1980).

Early CRT theorists (Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams and others) argued that the white supremacy of the past lived on in the laws and societal rules of the present; they focused on the role law played in establishing, maintaining and perpetuating racial discrimination, segregation (including housing segregation) as well as racist practices in bank loans, discriminatory labour practices, inequities in education and so forth (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). They further stressed that racism is ordinary, not aberrational – it is the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of colour in the United States. In this vein, race and races are products of social thought and relations. They are not objective, inherent or fixed. They correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates or retires when convenient. Here, I want to point that there are currently different versions and embodiments of CRT across different disciplines and beyond legal studies (education, cultural studies, English, sociology, comparative literature, political science, history and anthropology).

Critical race theory has put race at the core of its analyses, presenting the history of white supremacy and revealing the systemic, legal and other mechanisms that have maintained and continue to maintain racial division and discrimination. For instance, through CRT, students might be able to grasp the context behind the nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on George Floyd's neck resulting in his death. Or why nobody has been charged and convicted for 14-year-old Emmett Till's death in 1955. Till was kidnapped, lynched, tortured and killed in Mississippi.

AGAINST CRT – A TRUMPIST LEGACY

The ongoing backlash against CRT can be understood as former president Trump's reactionary far-right authoritarian legacy. It all began when Trump started cracking down on diversity training at federal agencies that, he claimed, were using "critical race theory tenets", that "not only run counter to the fundamental beliefs for which our Nation has stood since its inception, but they also engender division and resentment within the Federal workforce" (Vought, 2020, para. 3). Clearly, in Trump's and the Republican party's account, it is the mere acknowledgment of diversity dividing the country and not the fact that diversity is built on difference, human exploitation, violence and pervasive systemic racism, as delineated in a wealth of inequity patterns. In Trump's directive, diversity training is called "divisive", "false", "anti-American", "un-American" and "demeaning" propaganda (Vought, 2020, para. 5) and, as such, it must be eradicated. As "diversity" refers to multiple and diverse groups of human beings who purportedly are the problem, the underlying assumption is that we should render these people invisible, or worse, eradicate them from our historical and public narratives. This should hardly be a surprise coming from the president who built his alliances playing nice with and giving space to white supremacists for four years. Faithful to the Trumpist manual, the former administration bluntly rejected the violent history of slavery, blaming instead the victims of this violent history for making their co-workers feel "resentful" and "uncomfortable". Trumpism has largely built on race divisions and on a racialised version of patriotism, to create the ideological confusion necessary for its sustenance, particularly with white working-class voters. This perverse race-based patriotism has been at the core of the former president's far-right authoritarian politics and discourse.

Trumpism's hate relationship with critical race theory (with people of colour, really) was better illustrated in Trump's talk on Constitution Day at the National Archives Museum in the context of the first White House Conference on History, where he had announced the creation of a commission to promote Patriotic Education with the aim of developing a "pro-American curriculum that celebrates the truth about our nation's great history" (Trump, 2020, para 23). The "truth' in his pronouncement creates the assumption that there is in place an untruthful anti-American curriculum that is not teaching the United States' great history but a different version: a "twisted web of lies" (para. 2) promoted by the left and other radicals: "Teaching this horrible doctrine to our children is a form of child abuse, in the truest sense" (para. 16) Trump said referring to critical race theory. Arguing against what he termed "toxic propaganda", "ideological poison", "indoctrination' and "cancel culture" from the "radical movement", he further attacked the New York Times' Pulitzer Prize-winning 1619 Project, a historical analysis of how slavery shaped American political, social and economic institutions. The 1619 Project is a collection of essays that present the country's history from when the first enslaved Africans were brought to America's shores and explores African Americans' con-

tributions. Trump's "Patriotic Education" instead, proposed to focus and celebrate the legacy of 1776, when American colonies declared independence from Britain. Trump singled out the late progressive historian Howard Zinn, author of *A People's History of the United States*, a groundbreaking, radical, historical account that focuses more on the contributions of ordinary people, unsung heroes and questions the hegemonic whitewashed male version of history. Obviously, the "race problem" in America is *also* a history problem.

Former president Trump also seems to have been an important player at the beginning of the debate in that he has legitimised original distortions about CRT. Journalist Christopher Rufo (quoted at the very beginning of this chapter) was the instigator when he got his hands on some diversity training slides from the City of Seattle. Rufo traced back through the citations to CRT legal scholars' texts and thought he could detect the seed of their ideas in radical, often explicitly Marxist, critical-theory texts from the generation of 1968. Conservatives engaged in cultural wars needed a new language, a new enemy. Trump made political correctness irrelevant, so CRT became the perfect villain, a "promising political weapon". "Strung together, the phrase 'critical race theory' connotes hostile, academic, divisive, race-obsessed, poisonous, elitist, anti-American," claimed Rufo in a *New Yorker* interview). In the summer of 2020, Rufo appeared on conservative commentator Tucker Carlson's show (Fox News) where he pleaded with then President Trump to stop those trainings and the next day Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows gave him a call to follow up on his idea.[1]

In March 2021, Republican Florida Governor and US president hopeful Ron DeSantis attacked CRT, calling it a politicised academic "fad' that reflects "what's really ideology, not actual facts" and asserting that there is no room (and no funding) for theories that teach "kids to hate their country and to hate each other". DeSantis argued that we should not treat each other "based on race" but rather "as individuals". Our schools, he said, "are supposed to give people a foundation of knowledge, not supposed to be indoctrination centers, where you're trying to push specific ideologies". DeSantis used the well-known conservative argument for school neutrality and criticised the educational push for anti-racist ideologies, but not the white supremacist, exceptionalist, ethnocentric ideologies that have historically dominated the curriculum, generating, in turn, even more racism in educational institutions and beyond. "What you see now with the rise of this woke ideology is an attempt to really delegitimize our history and to delegitimize our institutions and I view the wokeness as a form of cultural Marxism," DeSantis said when first floating the legislation. What's interesting, however, is that the most substantial and legitimate theoretical critiques on CRT have actually come from Marxist scholars (Cole, 2017). "They really want to tear at the fabric of our society," he insisted. For DeSantis, the analysis and understanding of race and racism in the

1 For a detailed account, see Wallace-Wells (2021).

United States, and the ways they have maintained and perpetuated systems of oppression and symbolic and material violence against people of colour, is what is truly "divisive". The underlying assumption is that there is, in fact, a "unifying' version of history ("what makes America great") and this version is, somehow, not ideological. The educational neutrality argument and the "divisiveness" narrative reveal what's at the root of the issue: It is not that conservatives do not want ideology in the schools; they simply want *their* ideology. And they want to use neutrality on their terms as they rewrite the past, reducing history to "actions committed in the past". However, choices about which histories count and are legitimised and taught is not a simple educational issue; it is a deeply political one.

ANTI-CRT LEGISLATION IN THE UNITED STATES

As of this writing, and since the backlash started (right after George Floyd's killing) there have been 193 attempts in 44 states to propose legislation that would prevent educators from teaching the role of racism, sexism and oppression throughout US history to K-12 students across the country. Of them, so far 18 have become state law and (in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah and Virginia). In line with Trumpism's racist legacy, conservative Republican lawmakers across the United States have been advancing bills that prohibit public schools and public universities from teaching that "any sex, race, ethnicity, religion, colour, or national origin is inherently superior or inferior", tenets that, according to those bills, are "often found in 'critical race theory". The bills also prohibit teaching that "individuals, by virtue of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, colour, or national origin, are inherently responsible for actions committed in the past by other members of the same sex, race, ethnicity, religion, colour, or national origin" (HB 377, lines 22-42). For instance, the Florida bill prohibits that "an individual, by virtue of his or her race, colour, sex, or national origin, bears responsibility for, or should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment because of, actions committed in the past by other members of the same race, colour, sex or national origin." Similarly Idaho legislation finds that "tenets outlined in subsection (3) (a) of this section, often found in 'critical race theory', undermine the objectives outlined in subsection (1) of this section and exacerbate and inflame divisions on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, colour, national origin, or other criteria in ways contrary to the unity of the nation and the well-being of the state of Idaho and its citizens". Iowa legislation prohibits the use of curriculum that teaches the topics of sexism, slavery, racial oppression, racial segregation or racial discrimination, including topics relating to the enactment and enforcement of laws resulting in sexism, racial oppression, segregation and discrimination. South Dakota's bill titled "An Act to protect students and employees at institutions of higher education from divisive concepts" bans the teaching of what legislators call "divisive concepts" that include:

1. That an individual, by virtue of their race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or subconsciously;
2. That individuals, by virtue of race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin, are inherently responsible for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin;
3. An individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual's race, color, religion, ethnicity, or national origin; or
4. Meritocracy or traits such as a strong work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race or sex to oppress members of another race or sex. (HB 1012)

The move to impose a far-right reactionary agenda in schools that further suppresses the histories and lived experiences of oppressed and minoritised groups is hardly new. A 2012 initiative originating in Arizona to ban ethnic studies promoted the idea that ethnic studies are teaching Latino students that they "are an oppressed minority", and that public schools should treat students as individuals, rather than endorsing "ethnic solidarity". History has always had a polarising effect in the mainstream imaginary. The reason might be that the values, beliefs, ideologies and practices, as well as the desires and fears of large groups of people, depend on and are shaped through their relationship to the past, through their gaze on it. In this relationship, humans are registered as either subjects or objects in the stories told. History is our relationship to ourselves, our families, our communities, our societies and the world. As Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (2017) has noted "there is no historical reality which is not human. There is no history without humankind, and no history for human beings; there is only history of humanity" (p. 169). In far-right authoritarian politics, where humanity is selectively attributed as a special status to specific groups of people, we have in place the construction of a history of (in) humanity.

Sarah Schwarz (2021), in Educational Week's investigation into the bills, has identified five categories of regulation:

- "Divisive" or "racist or sexist" concepts: Bans on teaching all or some of the concepts in Trump's original executive order.
- Other rules related to discussing identity: Proposals that restrict making race, gender or other social identities salient in some way (but don't use the language from Trump's executive order).
- Banning "action civics": Language that prohibits students from participating in advocacy for course credit, and limits on how teachers can talk about current events.
- Curriculum transparency: Proposals that would require schools to publicly list the materials that teachers are using.

- Prohibitions against teachers showing bias: Language that states teachers can't show political or partisan bias in the classroom.

Most legislation upholds the "principle of a colorblind society where people are judged based on their individual merits and character, not their skin color or other characteristics" (Carter, 2021, para. 19). As legal scholar Michelle Alexander (2012) has argued, colour-blindness has proven to be catastrophic for African Americans since systematic mass incarceration of people of colour in the United States would not have been possible in the post-civil rights era if the nation "had not fallen under the spell of a callous colorblindness". Alexander is worth quoting at length here:

> The deeply flawed nature of colorblindness, as a governing principle, is evidenced by the fact that the public consensus supporting mass incarceration is officially colorblind. It purports to see black and brown men not as black and brown, but simply as men – raceless men – who have failed miserably to play by the rules the rest of us follow quite naturally. The fact that so many black and brown men are rounded up for drug crimes that go largely ignored when committed by whites is unseen. Our collective colorblindness prevents us from seeing this basic fact. Our blindness also prevents us from seeing the racial and structural divisions that persist in society: the segregated, unequal schools, the segregated, jobless ghettos, and the segregated public discourse – a public conversation that excludes the current pariah caste. Our commitment to colorblindness extends beyond individuals to institutions and social arrangements. We have become blind, not so much to race, but to the existence of racial caste in America (p. 241)

What these bills mean when using "critical race theory" is really any discussion on race or any other intersection for that matter and not the actual theory. The term has become a catch-all for any conversation about historical or present inequities. The massive disinformation campaign around what CRT really is and what schools actually do, creates the ideological confusion necessary to gain supporters.

MAIN ARGUMENTS AGAINST CRT IN LEGISLATIVE BILLS

For the purpose of this study, I have collected analysed 193 legislative texts that were debated between 2020 and 2022. The explicit goal of the constructed narrative is to rally support to stop teaching CRT in schools. The implicit goal is to alter school curricula. Using argumentation strategies, these bills try to justify and give validity to their claims. In what follows, I briefly present the main arguments and patterns in these legislative attempts.

1. CRT is racist and divisive because it teaches people to hate each other. CRT teaches that "America is an inherently racist country and white Americans are stained with the original sin of racism for which they can never be cleansed. [CRT's] solution is to remake the US, abandoning our founding documents and the capitalist system."
2. Discussions around race and slavery create discomfort, guilt and anguish and other forms of psychological distress to white students.
3. An individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, cannot bear responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex.
4. CRT advocates the violent overthrow of the US government.
5. CRT is authoritarian because it imposes a certain view on school curriculum.
6. Meritocracy is the process through which people can succeed. Individuals have the ability to succeed when they are given sufficient opportunity and are committed to seizing that opportunity through hard work, pursuit of education and good citizenship. The argument is that there is equal opportunity for people of all races, gender, etc.
7. Slavery and racism are nothing more than *deviations* from, *betrayals of* or *failures* to live up to the authentic founding principles of the United States, which include liberty and equality – they are not in line with the "American values".
8. Finally, slavery and racism belong to the past. We should be looking into the future, progress, prosperity and unity.

At the core of most of the bills, including the nineteen signed into law, is language lifted from the famous September 2020 executive order by President Trump referenced earlier in this chapter. For those arguments to be credible, the CRT opponents use a distorted narrative about CRT relying heavily on the topoi of blame and guilt, history and patriotism.

What all the post-Trump bills point to is a new American racist historical revisionism. Much in the way that European historical revisionism attempted to absolve fascism of its crimes, the new American historical revisionism is attempting to absolve white privileged America from enslavement, white supremacy and violent racism and the capitalist system that made these possible. It seems that far-right authoritarianism through historical revisionism penetrates a fragile and unmoored, alienated human psyche, of people who need to believe something, to blame someone, to root themselves in a narrative, any narrative. The politics of immiseration in capitalism generate this uprooting, the sense of not belonging, not being understood and heard. Revisionism creates from fragments, what Valencia-García (2020) calls an "alternate timeline", by imposing the present on the past. In this fragmented and distorted version, people are made to recognise fragments of themselves. And this is what is happening with critical race theory in an attempt to erase slavery, white supremacy and racism from US history.

How do events acquire meaning? How are historical narratives filled with meaning over and over? As Heer at al. (2008) observe, history, as a retrospectively-composed and meaning-endowed narrative, is always construction and fictionalisation. Historical phenomena as the result of social processes are borne out of contradiction, conflict and the struggle over meaning. In this struggle, some events "will become carriers of consensual values and ideals" and will "therefore have value as objects in collective memory" (p. 1). The process of the retrospective attribution of meaning includes conflict, since decisions are being made on inclusions and exclusions and the production of specific discourses. Historical narratives are carried and reproduced through discourses in history books, films, documentaries, political speeches, legislative bills and other sites, such as social media. The different discourses produced in diverse sites through a multiplicity of texts make up collective memory. History, written or oral, official, or unofficial, distant or recent, is always a "text' of some sorts, oral, written, or other – it is impossible to escape its textual nature. Historical narratives are constantly made and remade, thought and rethought, discursively as well.

What are these "actions committed in the past" that conservatives want to exculpate? Enslavement of people, cotton fields and forced labour? Lynching, nooses and white robes? Stealing native lands and annihilating native populations? Boarding schools for Indian children? Segregated schools? What is left to teach if we erase "actions committed in the past" by members of specific groups, when human history is a history of violence and oppression and exploitation of some groups over others? How do violent facts of (very recent) history become issues of discomfort and who is uneasy about them? What is left to learn if we sterilise our teaching from the struggles and fights of humanity? And at the end, who benefits from erasing "actions committed in the past" from our collective memory? Instead of addressing the pervasive racial segregation of schools, almost 70 years after Brown v. Board of Education, and using the law to not only protect civil rights and securing racial equity, but also to undo these legal structures that still maintain and feed systemic racism (the core of CRT theory), far-right conservative legislators are simply using it to erase race so that they do not have to address it and perpetuate the existing systemic racist status quo.

And yet, black students have been disproportionately at the receiving end of school discipline or they are more likely "to be seen as problematic and more likely to be punished than white students are for the same offense" (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019, p. 8255); black males disproportionately make up prison population being six times more likely to be imprisoned than whites (Gramlich, 2020; Yamahtta-Taylor, 2016); black families disproportionately live in low-income neighbourhoods (Solomon et al., 2019) and are (disproportionately) stricken with poverty (Creamer, 2020); the poverty rate for African Americans is more than double than that of whites; African Americans are disproportionately affected by the "wealth gap" regardless of households' education, marital status, age or income; the medi-

an wealth for black households with a college degree equalled about 70 percent of the median wealth for white households *without* a college degree (Hanks et al., 2018); police killings continue unabated, at 2.5 times the rate for black men as for white men; 1 in 1,000 black men and boys can be expected to be killed by police at some point in their lifetime; and dying at the hands of law enforcement is a leading cause of death among young black men (Edwards et al., 2019); All these facts, in DeSantis and other Republican conservatives' and neoconservatives' vision of human societies must be isolated accidents of history, rather than manifestations of systemic racism. But how exactly is it to live one's life always *disproportionately* to the white norm?

The control over the collective historical narrative is central to far-right politics and Trumpism, like other far-right populist ideologies, and it has successfully integrated a dangerous historical revisionism into its muddy ideological mix. The dominant (economic) group justifies its power with stories that construct reality in ways that maintain their privilege and power. However, this is not just Trumpism at work here. It is a colonial legacy. It is racialised capitalism. It is racism rooted in the very fabric of this country, from settler colonialism to Jim Crow, to the prison industrial complex, to police brutality against blacks. The whitewashing and distortion of history has traditionally been at the core of all ideological struggles. There is a version of the past that is better left forgotten or better, erased. Wounds can be painlessly healed with a beautiful star-spangled, red-white-and-blue, shiny Band-Aid. This is historical remembrance à la carte that does not disturb neither neoconservative happy consciousness nor liberal fantasies of equality and social justice. If something is going to be remembered, it can't be painful or uncomfortable.

I will now turn to the themes and features of historical revisionism and explore how they manifest in the CRT debate, in an attempt to articulate a critical pedagogy project as a deeply historical project.

DISCOURSES OF HISTORICAL REVISIONISM

EMERGENCY TIME: UNSETTLED ACCOUNTS WITH HISTORY

The rise of authoritarianism, far-right politics and the emboldened revival and normalisation of neo-Nazi and racist ideologies are still perceived as accidents of history, as stains in the human progress. I want to bring here German philosopher and Frankfurt School affiliate Walter Benjamin's discussion on progress and emergency time.

Benjamin (1940) in his booklet *On the Concept of History*, written in the early days of 1940, challenges positivistic notions about history ("actions committed in the past") and the thesis that the past is a predictable continuum towards progress into the present, and that, as Penny (2020) notes, "the arc of history bends naturally toward justice" (para. 15). He further cautions on the danger of the return of

fascism in the human life scene. For him "progress" is not a linear path towards the improvement of human societies but, rather, the platform for the emergence of human atrocities. Fascism, often perceived as an exception to the norm of progress or an accident of history for positivistic historiography, is for Benjamin nothing but *a violent expression of the permanent state of emergency* our societies live in. If progress is supposedly where humans are unequivocally headed to, how can we explain the global, ongoing exploitation of humanity that keeps generating more poverty and greater inequity in distribution of wealth and resources? How can we explain the dark historical landscape of far-right authoritarian populism since the 1980s that culminated in the United States in the four years of Trumpism? Or the persistence of racism? When history is seen in a permanent state of emergency, then such movements and phenomena are not exceptions; they are embedded in history's violent fabric. In the revisionist historical narrative of far-right movements, progress and moving forward (get over our past) are used as ideological devices to either uproot people from their historical grounding or to whitewash and smooth out violent histories, as is the case with racism in America presented earlier. Far-right authoritarian ideologies are further normalised and function through historical narratives in complex ways and using a variety of ideological devices.

REVISIONISM

Historical revisionism is a contested term that has taken distinct content in different continents and historiographical traditions. For the project at hand, it is important to define it, understand it and identify its iterations in Trumpism as a far-right movement.

Enzo Traverso in the *New Faces of Fascism* (2019) presents a short genealogy of the term that reveals that it is, in fact, historiographical as much as it is political. It is borrowed from political theory, where it was used to either characterise reformist politics or those deviations from orthodoxy, based on wrong interpretation. When transposed in historiography, it maintained a negative connotation, designating "the abandonment of canonical interpretations and the adoption of new, politically controversial views" (p. 118). It should be noted that historical revisions per se are a legitimate process of historical inquiry, necessary to unearth and add new pieces to existing historical knowledge. The writing of human history is an ongoing, unfinished project, as is human life. Traverso notes that "each society has its own regime of historicity – its own relationship with the past" (p. 117). Revisionism is, in turn, putting both this relationship with the past and the regime of historicity into question (Traverso, 2019). Because we always write history from the present, our present gaze can change our relationship with our past. As such, the regime of historicity also comprises our relationship with the present, in that history is also taking place now. *History is also the present*. In essence, revisionism is really about "the political and ideological goals of revisions" because "many historical revisions usually accused of 'revisionism' imply an ethical and political turn in our vision of the past" (p. 124).

In European historiography, revisionism emerged as an attempt to revisit and rehabilitate fascism to equate it with communism, by looking at both as popular revolutions of the two extremes. This version of historical revisionism has further built tolerance to fascism, downplaying its atrocities after World War II, thus shifting people's perceptions and feelings about them. Far-right populist leaders in Europe capitalised on this shift to promote their political agendas. As Grigoropoulos (2019) suggests, this type of historical revisionism has not only contributed to exonerating fascism, but it has also shifted the focus of its agenda in the post war period to capitalising on the fears of the other (immigrant, refugee, etc). I will now turn the discussion into some of the characteristics of historical revisionism as they apply to the anti-CRT debate.

1. Instrumentalism of history and historical knowledge

"And it's as good as if it never happened," utters the Devil in Goethe's *Faust*, revealing his innermost principle: the destruction of memory (Adorno, 2005, p. 91). And we know well that the devil is in the details, as this phrase summarises the hegemonic conservative view of history; it speaks to the "actions committed in the past" discussed earlier, where these are seen disconnected from their effects, the agents who have "committed" them (the linguist me notes the passivisation) and the sociopolitical context where they took place (vaguely and generally "the past"). Memory is destructed and select historical narratives, as linear sequences of privileged events, are neatly tucked into boxes, attached to dates and to heroic figures, as they are washed, sterilised and polished to articulate and complement the official national narrative around "one country, one nation, one culture". At the same time, many other events and actions are "as good as if they never happened", the same way that many people and groups of people never existed. The "erasure of huge swaths of humanity is a fundamental feature of the school curriculum, but also of the broader mainstream political discourse" (Bigelow, 2018, para. 6). Or as Adorno (2005) has powerfully argued, "the murdered are to be cheated out of the single remaining thing that our powerlessness can offer them: remembrance" (p. 91).

An instrumentalist and positivistic view of historiography closes "the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory" (Adorno, 2005, p. 89). The appeal to "objectivity" and ideological purging serves as the excuse for the imposition of particular versions. Consequently, history is proceduralised, becoming a step-by-step linear methodology or a manual to describe the world. This is why DeSantis refers to "actions" and not to history: Actions are part of a historical narrative, rather than fragmented chunks that happened randomly. But randomness is what the positivistic/instrumentalist view of history promotes: As mentioned earlier, DeSantis keeps claiming that "slavery and racism are nothing more than deviations from, betrayals of, or failures to live up to the authentic founding principles of the United States". Once again, they are perceived as accidents of history.

2. Highly individualised versions of history

Historical revisionism has, in turn, produced historical relativism. Historical relativism has been legitimising an individualistic approach to history that presents subjective understandings or marginal opinions as a historical dimension of an event. This historical relativism has given rise to the phenomenon of producing highly individualised versions of history. Reactionary conservatives' solution is to avoid going into systemic issues that would have to name oppressors and oppressed, colonisers and colonised, and the systems that sustain them, the reasons and root causes, is to treat people as "individuals" in a colourblind capitalist construction, where there are no groups, no collectives, no alliances, no solidarity, just individuals working hard or not working "hard enough", trying to fight for their spot in the "American dream". Fully aligned with the individualistic capitalist ideology and the construction of the neoliberal subject, the focus is on the individual student, the psychological/biological being, disconnected from their historicity as members of particular groups that may have been historically oppressed, marginalised and robbed off the symbolic and material resources other groups have enjoyed by virtue of their skin colour. This argument further builds on a) a psychologisation of the social (student trauma) and b) the notion of meritocracy: we are all individuals and we have the ability to succeed when we are given sufficient opportunity.

As illustrated in the anti-CRT bills earlier, one of the most salient and repetitive arguments is the notion that we should treat students and each other as individuals, not as members of groups.

3. Polarisation or the myth of two extremes

The debate over CRT is further positioned as a fight between two opposing sides – what has been lying at the core of Trumpism, and other far-right and right-wing populist movements, "the political, discursive and performative dichotomy between two poles: a 'vertical distinction' created by intentional, deliberate ideological confusion" (Revelli, 2019). On the one side, we have The People, or "true people' (Wodak, 2019), that includes an "uncontaminated original purity". Republicans and their supporters claim this side. On the other side stands: a) the enemy *from above* "the left", "cultural Marxists," Democrats, "a usurping elite, a privileged gang, a hidden power", and, on the other, b) the enemy *from below* – immigrants, foreigners, travellers, refugees. This political, imaginary, ideological and social divide works top/down and cuts across left and right ideologies. Between the two groups stands the "idea of betrayal" where honest citizens, the pure people are cheated by "some abuse, some undue misappropriation, some conspiracy" (Revelli, 2019, p. 20). We have here what Marcuse (1964) has called the typical unification of opposites in discourse. In constructing the "left" as the enemy, the anti-CRT movement flips the argument made against them claiming that what is wrong with our society is wokeness and left authoritarianism. Arguments and labels historically reserved for far-right extremists and fascists are now reframed, recontextualised and directed against the left. This device further fits in the distorted idea of the

"two extremes". The two poles in this ideological construction are the extreme left and the extreme right and they are compared on equal terms: if one extreme can be bad (right) the other should also be bad (left). This is an argument straight out of historical revisionism that emerged in Europe to absolve Nazis of their crimes by equating fascism with anti-fascist communism in the theory of the extremes. Similarly, far-rightists, white parents and others project themselves as victims of left wokeness and hypocrisy.

4. Purposeful ideological confusion

In the US context, white America has been anxious to revise its own very recent history that has been particularly violent with non-whites. Examples of such revisionist narratives have been presented in the beginning of this chapter with the curricular interventions against critical race theory or with Trump's Patriotic Education. In these revisionist versions there is plenty of room for present-day white supremacy, digital aggression and the rise of neo-fascism. Familiar examples of the two extreme poles are used to equate anti-racist movements with far-right extremists, as was vividly illustrated in the Charlottesville rally.

These extreme arguments are legitimised and normalised through the creation of *purposeful ideological confusion*. Trumpism embodies a political style that meshes various ideologies and brings together "lower-middle class insecurities, while allying with core elements of the ruling class" (Foster, 2017, para. 35). This is a *thin ideology* "because it does not constitute a coherent structure of beliefs but assembles contradictory ideologemes in an eclectic fashion" (Wodak, 2019, p. 26). Trumpism brings together people who embrace any of the following: racism, white supremacy, misogynism, sexism, militarism, free markets, conspiracy theories, aversion to the system, Republican values, anti-abortion, faith, different versions of Christianity and so forth. As historian Aristotle Kallis (2000) notes, propaganda is a form of truth "reshaped through the lens of regime intentions" (p. 63). Trumpism is, therefore, selling "American truth" rather than, say, mainstream media and global conspiracy falsehood. Trumpism has not distorted truth. It has created truth: the Trumpist truth.

Revisionism has received a great boost through social media, particularly in the form of widespread conspiracy theories that are reaching larger numbers of people and acquiring new fans. According to a 2020 NPR/Ipsos poll, misinformation mostly around Covid-19, QAnon, and Black Lives Matter protests, is becoming more mainstream. Fewer than half (47%) of respondents were able to correctly identify that this statement is false: "A group of Satan-worshipping elites who run a child sex ring are trying to control our politics and media" (p. 1). Thirty-seven percent of respondents were unsure whether this theory backed by QAnon is true or false, and 17% believe it to be true (NPR/Ipsos, 2020).

Forty percent of Americans believe it is true that Covid-19 was created in a lab in China; similarly, nearly half (47%) believe the majority of Black Lives Matter protests in the summer 2020 were violent, while just 38% correctly indicated that this is a false statement.

5. Dehistoricisation

In the far-right authoritarian context of historical revisionism, dehistoricisation is a central process. Dehistoricisation manifests in the production of discourses and historical narratives that deliberately lack a historical dimension and are carried through one-dimensional language that, in turn, produces a one-dimensional historical narrative. Among many different competing historical narratives, one is to become dominant, or hegemonic, not because of some inherent qualities it engenders, but rather because of the structure and power of the evaluative process involved. And this narrative is presented as transcending history, as a-historical.

The erasure of historical thinking and the apotheosis of the present – the "here-and-now" – are core features of authoritarian discourses. One-dimensionality works as a celebration of the present, rendering the historical dimension invisible or, worse, irrelevant. The process of dehistoricisation is the antithesis of historical thinking and it manifest in the anti-CRT bills with language that claims that we should forgot the past, stop putting blame on particular groups of people and look into the future.

TRAUMA AND HEALING

As stated earlier, one of the arguments in the anti-CRT legislation is that "discussions around race and slavery create discomfort, guilt and anguish and other forms of psychological distress to white students".

The "traumatising" dimension of history aims neither at forcing humans to relive the trauma, nor to play the blame game. It is the ability to look at the horror and struggle straight in the face, to allow oneself to be affected by other peoples' lives and histories. It aims at connecting humanity with their kin, to relate at the most fundamental level: affect, the perishability and fragility of humans. What the mind and intellect might resist understanding, affect can record in the language of humanity. It speaks to the ability to imagine, to put together the picture of that which occurred and use it pedagogically. The reconstitution also requires a degree of imagination in recreating not only lives bygone but also the ambience, atmosphere, feeling about space and people: a kind of *historical aura* (Arendt, 1953).

MAKING THE PEDAGOGICAL HISTORICAL AND THE HISTORICAL PEDAGOGICAL

I have brought up earlier Benjamin's concept of "emergency situation". Emergency situation crystallises the ongoing struggle over historicity, collective memory, meaning and human practices. Because "fascism is always, apparently, the alternative future struggling to be born" (Penny, 2020, para. 8) there is another struggle for different alternative futures to be fought. And this struggle is also deeply pedagogical. In the context of emergency time, I want to articulate a proposal for a pedagogical project that puts historicity at its core.

Historicity resonates with understanding humans as actors/agents of history and looking at all knowledge and learning, whether "official" and "unofficial", in-

side, and outside schools and in multiple sites as deeply historical; it is historical in that it is a substantial element of an agentive process that has the potential to develop critical consciousness in humans. Historicity also suggests reading the past as present in a process that neither worships the past nor annihilates it, in the name of the tyranny of the present. This is a pedagogical project that challenges one-dimensionality in historical thinking in educational sites and in public discourse and debates, and brings the "disturbing elements" of time at the core of our analyses. Noah De Lissovoy (2007, 2008) distinguishes history (as a linear dominant narrative) from historicity (that redefines history as a site of possibility). Drawing on Paulo Freire's work, he structures historicity as part of the fulfilment of the historical vocation of humanisation by the oppressed where "history is a human learning and a human teaching toward liberation" (De Lissovoy, 2018, p. 12).

As the anti-CRT bills have a catastrophic impact on the public school curricula, I want to propose a pedagogy that always exists in historical terms, as a liberatory project, very much along the lines that Freire envisioned in his work. The pedagogical historical project is also a humanising project.

Along the same lines, a fundamental element in this pedagogy is the *historicisation of social conflicts*. Students and educators should have historical and current knowledge about social struggles, the ways these have been shaped historically and what they mean for their lives today. These narratives of collective memory might enable people to read the world and position themselves in it, and make the choices that would put them on the right side of history. Reflecting on our societies and social practices, we can witness critical thought becoming historical consciousness. It is this consciousness that navigates as a compass through the history of humans and humanity. To think critically means to think historically. But history is the present. So, to think historically means to think about the present in ways that are emancipatory, agential and liberating.

Critical education scholarship should forcefully address the anti-CRT debate. It must engage with the core matter of thinking historically and centre historical knowledge in our pedagogical and theoretical practices as part of a liberatory project. Often the very analyses in critical pedagogy literature are, themselves, superficial and dehistoricised and mostly serve as a vehicle for disposable progressive politics. Exploring and challenging historical revisionism and the demise of historical thinking by authoritarian far-right racialised capitalism is an important project in the framework of critical public pedagogy. It is also important to articulate a critique against forms of "progressive" politics that are only willing to accept non-threatening versions of history or that adapt to an already hegemonic narrative about class, race, gender and so forth.

Finally, it is important to capitalise on the lessons from an "anti-pedagogy"; create our counter pedagogies with courage, honesty, humility and commitment by revisiting our relationship with the past: "The past will have been worked through only when the causes of what happened then, have been eliminated.

Only because the causes continue to exist does the captivating spell of the past remain to this day unbroken" (Adorno, 2005, p. 34). To break the "captivating spell of the past", we need to develop an honest, consistent, humble radicalism that, according to Freire (2005), is committed to human liberation, and "does not become the prisoner of a 'circle of certainty'" where reality is also imprisoned. (p. 39). On the contrary, it is our grounding, in real material conditions, that prompts us to understand it and transform it.

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CHAPTER 4

THE RISE OF POLITICAL CAPITALISM, THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY, AND THE STRATEGIC TASKS OF THE LEFT

→ **Dylan Riley**

GETTING THE QUESTION RIGHT

Capitalism is an economic system in which private owners of the means of production appropriate a surplus product produced by wage labourers. The crucial point is that control over the distribution of the social surplus in the sense of the proportions in which that surplus is consumed or reinvested, and most importantly control over investment decisions, is accorded on the basis of *private ownership* (Przeworski, 1986, p. 138). Thus, a decision that has fundamentally social consequences, is removed, in capitalist society, from political control. This is true at least in the ideal typical case.

Representative democracy in contrast is a political system in which, in Schumpeter's words, "individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 269). The people or demos does not act on its own, but rather is represented through persons who act in its stead (Wood, 2016, p. 217). This hybrid, historically specific system (liberal or representative democracy) has two basic components: a set of universal legal rules according rights to all those living within a given territory, and a relatively extensive suffrage regime (Berman, 2019, p. 3; Wood, 2016, p. 229).

We ought to begin by noting that capitalism exists. Although in theory one might imagine a society in which there was basic equality in capital ownership so that everyone's income was made up of streams from capital and labour, in fact capital ownership is highly skewed. Thomas Piketty, of course, has done the monumental empirical work to show the extent of this skew. What is interesting from the perspective of a relatively strict Marxian definition is that even with his lax definition, "the sum total of nonhuman assets that can be owned and exchanged on some market" (Piketty, 2017, p. 58), it is evident that that the top 10% of the distribution owned between 60 and 70% of capital in Europe and the US around 2010 (Piketty, 2017, p. 441). The distribution would clearly be much more skewed if we defined capital in more sociological terms as effective *control* over the social surplus.

At the same time however, at least up until now, formal Schumpeterian democracy also exists. Even as we are living through a historical recession of democratic politics, the advanced capitalist world remains "free" (as does interestingly Brazil) according to the Freedom House evidence.

So that raises the basic Marxian puzzle. How is it possible that even formally democratic or representative democratic societies have been able to reproduce themselves in the face of the "basic contradiction" between "private ownership of the means of production" and mass suffrage (Przeworski, 1986, p. 133)? Why has the population, most of whom do not own capital to any meaningful extent, as for example Piketty's data shows, not abolished capitalism? If we can answer this puzzle, my hunch is that it will shed significant light on the current crisis of democracy.

There are actually four existing accounts in the Marxian tradition that have sought to answer this problem: the Leninist, the Lukascian, the Luxemburgian and the Gramscian. The first of these refers to imperialism suggesting that "superprofits" can be used to buy off workers (Lenin, 1975, p. 255). The second rests on "reification". It suggests that the commodity form encourages workers to think of themselves as isolated individuals within a system treated as fixed (Lukács, 1971, p. 197). The third position suggests that it is precisely the separation of the economic and political orders under capitalism that allows for a political democracy shorn of social equality and in which the economic class struggle is structurally separated from the political party struggle (Anderson, 1976–77, p. 28; Luxemburg, 1906, p. 53; Wood, 2016, p. 213) The fourth Gramscian account suggests that democratic capitalism has been able to survive because it meets many of the material interests of workers; under capitalism owners can appear as the bearers of the societal general interest, because their profits are the condition for economic expansion (Gramsci, 1971, p. 161; see also Przeworksi, 1986, p. 136).

These arguments are potentially compatible with one another; but two of them are particularly salient to understanding the contemporary crisis of democracy: the Gramscian argument about hegemony, and the Luxemburgian argument about the relative separation of the economic and the political. To see how, it will first be useful to take a brief tour of the history of democracy and capitalism.

DEMOCRACY AND CAPITALISM IN HISTORY

When and where did democratic capitalism emerge? Its two parts, the emergence of a liberal order based on rights, and the extension of suffrage, were of course unevenly distributed historically. Something like a legal state had been established in England by 1688, in the US by 1789, in France, Italy and Germany by 1870–1871. But even relatively universal suffrage was much slower to come. Liberal regimes with mass suffrage did not become the modal form of political rule in capitalist societies until the post-World War II era. Prior to this some liberal capitalist societies existed; but the main point about them was that they possessed exceptional advantages and they tended to have restricted or ineffective suffrage. They could either exploit the advantage of continental scale resources (US, Canada, Australia) or extensive imperial holdings (United Kingdom). In other cases they were essentially

societies of smallholding peasants and fisherman, and thus were not fully capitalist (Scandinavia). In the core European countries, particularly Germany, France and Italy, the achievement of capitalist democracy was an extraordinarily fraught process. The combination of stable democracies with clearly capitalist economies was in most cases a quite late phenomenon, essentially a post-World War II matter (Berman, 2019, p. 386; Therborn, 1977, p. 19).

It was also in the postwar period that democratic capitalism gained its particular content. It became "a social mechanism by which anyone as a citizen can express claims to goods and services which have expanded because part of the societal product was withheld in the past from the immediate producers" (Przeworski, 1986, p. 142). Democratic capitalism was thus based on a class compromise. This compromise was possible because profitability was the condition of economic expansion under capitalism. Therefore, workers had an interest in supporting profitability as long as capitalists continued to invest. Under these conditions it was rational for workers to both participate in the system of electoral democracy and to restrain their direct organisation at the point of production (Przeworski, 1986, pp. 142–143, 145, 150–151).

Democratic capitalism required a delicate balance. On the one hand, working-class organisations and political parties had to be powerful enough to elicit concessions from capitalists, and also to impose on them the demand to continue investing the surplus productively. On the other hand, they could not be so powerful that they threatened the basic ownership interests of capitalists. These two things could be brought into some kind of balance during the years of the long boom. The rapid growth of the core capitalist economies was the condition of the class compromise.

The fundamental problem that all of the main continental European countries faced prior to World War II was a working class that was too strong to allow for the smooth reproduction of capitalism within a democratic context. In that specific sense, democratic capitalism was the heir to historical fascism. But after the defeat of the fascist powers in World War II, the configuration of democratic capitalism could emerge. A learning process had unfolded in which capitalists had come to understand that democracy was not incompatible with democracy, while working-class political parties had learned both that it was potentially dangerous to push for socialisation, and that they could gain something for their add electoral base within a capitalist context.

THE SLOWDOWN IN GROWTH

The years since roughly 1973 pose a major challenge to the formula described above. For as many economic historians and economists, from a very wide array of political perspectives, have argued economic growth and growth in productivity has slowed dramatically across the advanced world over the last 50 years (Brenner,

2017, pp. 6–7; DeLong, 2022, p. 431; Durand, 2017, pp. 2–3; 2020, pp. 71–73; 2022, p. 38; Gordon, 2012, p. 13; Piketty, 2017, p. 119; Wolf, 2023, p. 124).

Figure 1. Percentage change of GDP, 1951–2021: The Conference Board Total Economy Database 2021

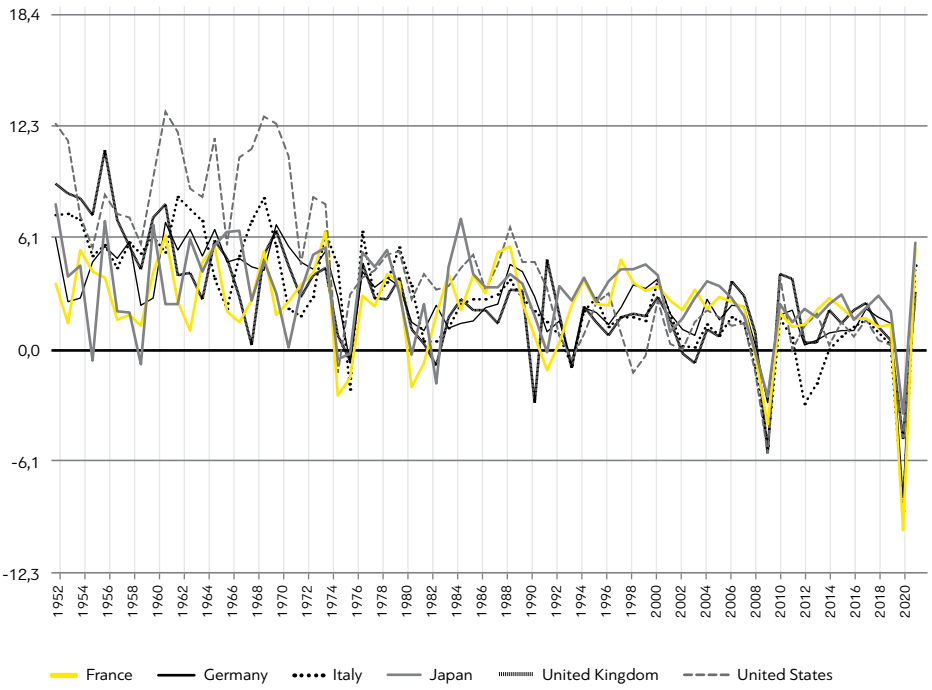


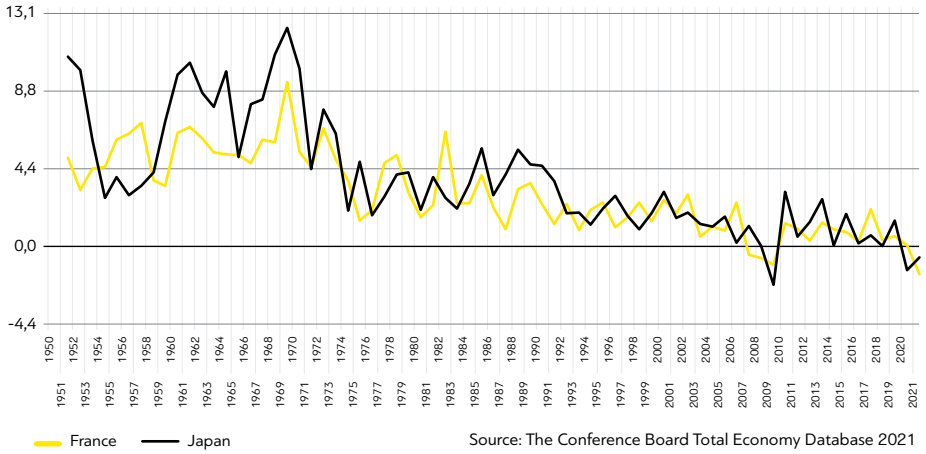
Figure 1 presents the year-by-year percentage change in gross domestic product (GDP) year-by-year from 1951 to 2021. The data is noisy, but the conclusion is pretty clear. Since the 1970s, business cycle by business cycle recessions have been deeper and recoveries have been shallower, leading to an overall slowdown of the world economy. Much of this slowdown seems to have been a consequence of the reluctance on the part of capitalists to invest (Durand, 2017, pp. 119–120; Smithers, 2020, p. 19; Wolf, 2023, p. 90). As Cédric Durand (2022) shows in Figure 2, fixed capital investment as a share of gross operating surpluses has fallen continuously since the 1970s for most countries (with a partial recovery for France).

This slowdown in investment has shown up among other ways, as a slowdown in productivity growth per hour worked. The best data for this come from two countries: Japan and France. As Figure 3 shows the percentage change in productivity growth per hour worked declined continuously from 1950 to 2021 for these two major economies.

Figure 2. Investment as a percentage of gross operating expenses

Source: Tristan Auvray, CEPN-Université Sorbonne Paris Nord; Cédric Durand, Université de Genève and CEPN-Université Sorbonne Paris Nord; Joel Rabinovich, Leeds University Business School; Cecilia Rikap, Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Ténicas (CONICET).

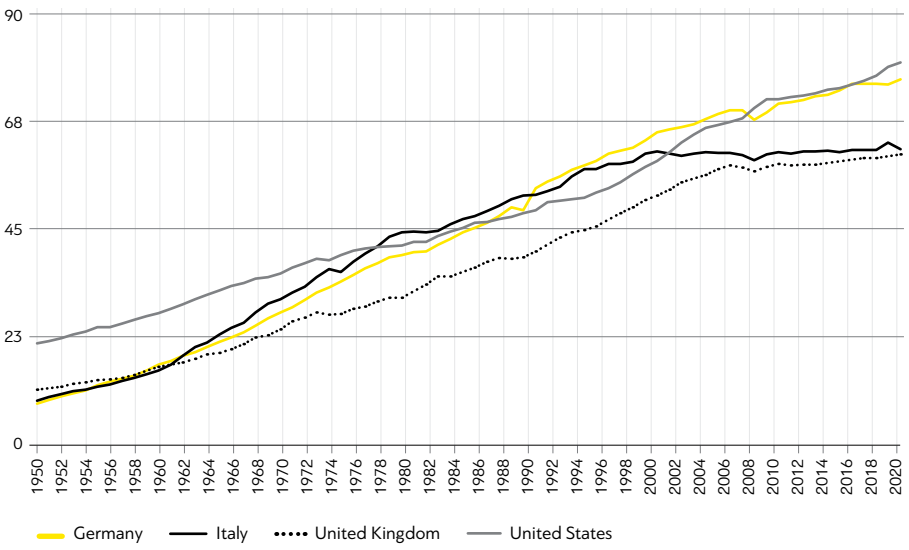
Figure 3. Percentage change in the growth of productivity per hour worked in France and Japan: 1950–2021.



Source: The Conference Board Total Economy Database 2021

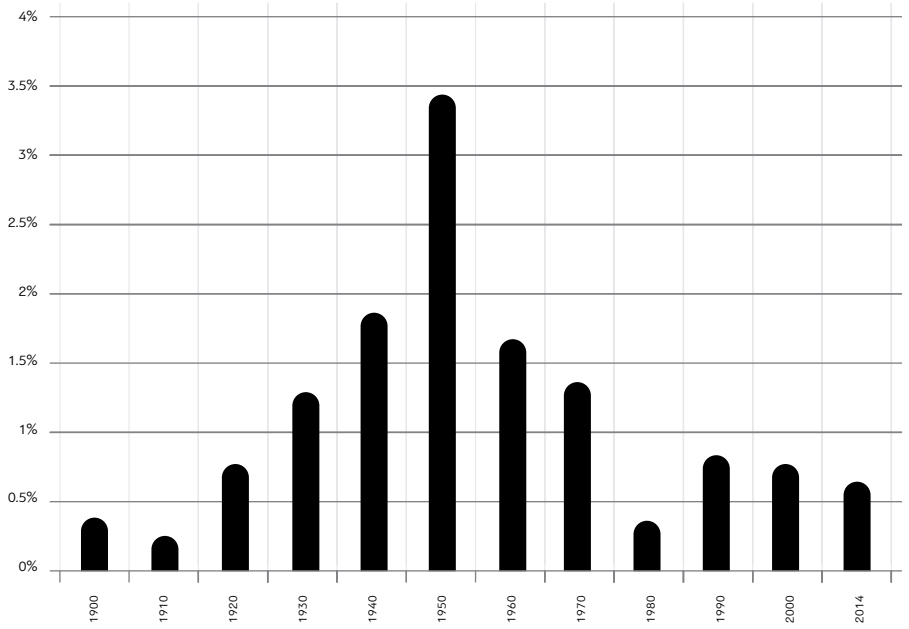
The evidence available for Germany, the United States, Italy and the United Kingdom is slightly different. It reports output per hour valued at 2020 international dollars. If we consider this measure, productivity appears to have increased more or less gradually for these four economies up until the early 1970s, when the United Kingdom and the United States shifted onto a slower growth path, while Italy and Germany continued an upward path. In the 1990s, however, the situation changed dramatically. Productivity growth in Italy, which had been more rapid than any of these four countries apart from Germany, flatlined in the early 1990s. A similar transformation set in in the United Kingdom in the early 2000s (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Labour productivity per hour worked: The Conference Board Total Economy Database 2021



Robert Gordon's *The Rise and Fall of American Growth* shows a slightly different sort of evidence. He presents a bar graph of "Total Factor Productivity" growth in every decade from 1900 to 2014 for the United States. The graph shows an upward trend with peak productivity increases in the 1950s, a decelerating trend until 1980 with quite modest recovery thereafter.

Figure 5. 10-year average annual growth in total factor productivity, 1900–2014



Note: The average annual growth rate is over the ten years prior to year shown. The bar labelled 2014 shows the average annual growth rate for 2001-14.

Source: Gordon (2016, p. 547).

Focusing in slightly more narrowly on labour productivity growth in the US, Figure 5, also from Gordon, shows four main periods: a period of high growth from 1891 to 1972 followed by a period of low growth from 1972 to 1996. This was then followed by a brief upswing productivity from 1996 to 2004 and finally a decline after that up until 2012.

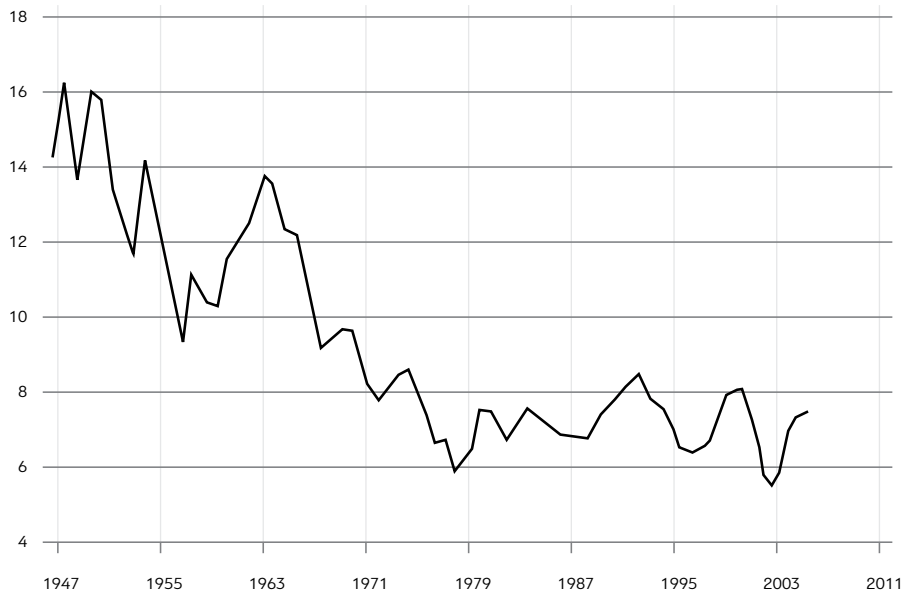
What do these data show? As Robert Brenner (1998, p. 6) puts the point, "The sharp deterioration in the economic performance of the advanced economies [...] is self-evident." In this Larry Summers (2016, p. 3) agrees with him, writing in describing the period after 2008:

> Real interest rates are very low, demand has been sluggish, and inflation is low, just as one would expect in the presence of excess savings. Absent many good new investment opportunities, savings have tended to flow into existing assets, causing asset price inflation.

Not to be outdone, Summers' student Brad DeLong (2022, p. 510) suggests that the period since the mid-2000s can be described as a "shortage of risk-bearing capacity and a hunger for safe assets on the part of insecure private investors".

The most obvious reason for this slowdown is the decline in the rate of profit from its high point in the late 1940s (Brenner, 1998; 2017).

Figure 6. US corporative profit rate, 1947–2011



Source: Shaikh (2016, p. 66).

The general low profitability regime that has characterised the capitalist economy over the last 40 years or so has made capitalists reluctant to invest in plant and equipment and has thereby slowed economic growth (Figure 6). The emergence of a large pool of excess savings and an associated long-term decline in interest rates is a manifestation of this underlying process (Wolf, 2023, p. 146). What this means is that there are insufficient profitable opportunities to invest in the real economy. What, then, has been the reaction of capital?

THE NEW ECONOMY: POLITICAL CAPITALISM

The investment decline, described above, has not been associated with a continuous fall in the profit rate, nor, of course, has it been associated with a decline in the share of GDP going to capital in the form of profit (Wolf, 2023, p. 144). What has occurred instead is that the profit rate has been delinked from productive investment in the rich world (although this may have been partially offset by accumulation outside the rich world) (Durand, 2017, p. 119). How has this been possible? To a large extent, the new capitalism that has emerged from around 1980 depends on political mechanisms to guarantee rates of return. Five major such mechanisms are evident: tax-avoidance, debt, direct state subsidies, socialisation of losses, and finally rents based on suzerainty. Here I briefly consider each in turn.

TAX AVOIDANCE

One very simple negative mechanism is tax avoidance. This occurs either through direct reductions in the tax rate, such as Trump's reduction of the US corporate tax rate, or through shifting profits to tax havens. A 2015 IMF study found that these techniques had reduced overall tax raised in the OECD by $450 billion, which formed 1% of GDP in the context of a total tax rate that only constituted about 3% of GDP for those countries (Wolf, 2023, p. 166). Indeed, in the US tax rates are now regressive at the very top of the distribution with the very highest incomes paying proportionally less than the lower income brackets (Piketty, 2017, p. 634).

DEBT

The second common mechanism is debt. Since the 1970s there has been an explosion of household debt across the capitalist world. According to Cédric Durand, households in the rich world pay between 5 and 8% of their income on interest payments (Durand, 2017, p. 86; see also Wolf, 2023, p. 150). In addition to private debt, public debt is a further source of profit. In the United States, about 40% of government bonds are now held by the top 1% of the income distribution, which is more than double the percentage from the early 1970s (Durand, 2017, p. 89). Interest payments on these bonds serve to concentrate income at the top of the distribution. Public indebtedness is a response to the eroding tax base; private indebtedness is a response the weakening power of labour as households seek to supplement consumption by taking on debt.

DIRECT STATE SUBSIDIES

The third mechanism is just a broad set of direct state subsidies. One key example is the financial sector. The profits that financial institutions have gained since the late 1990s result from the difference between the rates at which they have been allowed to borrow and the returns that they have been able to gain either through lending at higher interest rates, or through using borrowed money to speculate (Wolf, 2023, p. 151). The so-called Greenspan Put, for example, describes the Federal Reserve policy of guaranteeing low interest rates, thereby allowing investors to take on debt for speculative operations (Durand, 2017, p. 35). More generally, the policy of "too big to fail" constitutes a huge "implicit subsidy" to the banking sector (Durand, 2017, p. 98). Luigi Zingales (2015, p. 59) estimates it to be over $30 billion a year. Furthermore, when bailouts occur, financial institutions then raise "the interest rates they apply to public debt" (Durand, 2017, p. 98). Finance thereby not only benefits from the implicit subsidy described above, but also from the government indebtedness that this implicit subsidy creates. Thus, the profitability of this entire sector is doubly politically determined (Durand, 2017, p. 98).

A further important technique under this category is stock buybacks. Companies can juice returns by borrowing money either to invest in the stock market, or to buy back their own shares. The options are here are virtually endless (Wolf, 2023, p. 156).

There are also branches of the economy where returns are largely politically determined. Consider first the supposedly "private" healthcare system of the United States. In fact this sector is awash in government money, with spending having increased from less than 1% to 8.4% of GDP between 1960 and 2009. Medicare, a form of health insurance guaranteed to elderly Americans, was forced not to compete on price for pharmaceuticals in 2003, which was worth $24 billion a year to pharmaceutical companies (Zingales, 2012, p. 73). So-called "earmarks", legislative handouts to specific businesses and industries, expanded from 10 in 1982 to 4,128 in 2005 (Zingales, 2012, p. 79). Then there were the massive subsidies given to Fannie Mae, a government backed mortgage provider which played an absolutely key role in the financial crisis of 2007 to 2008 (Zingales, 2012, p. 83).

Then there are other more particular cases such as the agro-business giant Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), 43% of whose profits were linked to government subsidies and protections (Zingales, 2012, p. 44).

THE SOCIALISATION OF LOSSES

The fourth mechanism is the socialisation of losses (Brenner, 2017, p. 11). The 2007–2008 financial crisis and its response is the paradigmatic example of this process. This crisis was set off through excess lending to impoverished borrowers in the United States. This lending was made possible by an implicit government guarantee that if the loans defaulted, they would be made whole (Zingales, 2015, p. 20). Zingales points out that the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) paid out $125 billion to the nine largest banks at the same time that those very banks were paying dividends to their shareholders of more than $25 billion a year (Zingales, 2012, p. 89). So, in this case, a baldly political mechanism was being used to create an investment opportunity which when it exploded produced a further round of political support for profitability.

The most recent examples of this mechanism are the various rescue packages associated with the coronavirus. Key among these was the 23 March 2020 decision to acquire unlimited amounts of corporate debt, providing the entire corporate sector with access to liquidity at extremely low interest rates (Brenner, 2020, p. 14).

THE RISE OF RENTS BASED ON SUZERAINTY

A fifth mechanism is the various rents connected to politically enforced relations of suzerainty among firms, and between firms and customers. These new income streams are linked to an unbundling of property rights. The process is traceable in a number of different areas. Following the 1994 Marrakesh agreement which established both the WTO and the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) (Pagano, 2014, p. 1417), a period of innovation and productivity growth in information technology ensued (reflected in the productivity statistics discussed by Gordon). However, this was quickly replaced by a new regime in which control over patents became essential to firm profitability (Pagano, 2014, p. 1415–1419).

This new patent regime has created new forms of property in which certain rights are retained by the manufacturer even after the good has been transferred to the consumer. This fragmentation of rights resembles the legal distinction common in the middle ages between rights to the use of a thing and its ultimate ownership (Supiot, 2013, p. 142).

The separation of intellectual property rights from production has also given rise to rent transfers among firms. One form that this takes is the monopsony power exercised by holders of patents in the rich world vis-à-vis the producing firms where labour is cheap (DeLong, 2022, p. 477; Wolf, 2023, p. 162). This sort of relationship is also politically constituted as the central firm located usually in the rich world enters into a set of long-term restrictive contracts with its suppliers (Supiot, 2013, pp. 144–145).

Distinct from, but closely related to, the enforcement of intellectual property and the unbundling of the commodity is the emergence of platform rents. Here is how Durand (2020, pp. 127–128), using the example of the Microsoft Office suite, explains the increasing utility of a "socio-technical ecosystem" as the numbers of the system's users increases:

> Word is useful to me because it offers me a means of writing and organizing my work but above all because my editors, my colleagues, my co-authors, my students, the administration of my university and more than 1.2 billion potential correspondents also work with this software, which guarantees the integrity of the documents I want to send and receive.

The utility of a particular unit of software is not, therefore, a consequence of its performance for an individual user. Instead, the Office suite is useful primarily because it allows the user to access an ecosystem of other users. Therefore, regardless of any technical improvements, as more people use the product it becomes more useful. Furthermore, there is an exit cost for all users. If one decides to opt out of the eco-system then, aside from the cost of learning new software, there will be further costs associated with the increasing difficulty of sharing documents and communicating with one's collaborators. All of this allows Microsoft to collect a rent on the platform which bears little relationship to investment (Durand, 2020, p. 127; 2022, p. 35).

Both of these factors, control of intellectual property and platform rents, led to firm concentration exemplified by the emergence of new group of tech giants (Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon and Tencent) (Durand, 2020, pp. 50, 54–55; Wolf, 2023, p. 159).

Thus, after about 1980 capitalists were pursuing a distinctive strategy. Instead of risking their assets to invest in means of production which produced use values realised in competitive markets, they began willy-nilly to rely on the state or more broadly political mechanisms to guarantee them safe returns. This is the new environment of "political capitalism".

A NEW FORM OF POLITICAL ACCUMULATION

These five mechanisms interlock to form a coherent and *historically distinctive* pattern of exploitation relations. One piece of evidence for this new pattern is its structure of income distribution. Two figures, both from the Economic Policy Institute, and both well known, capture the situation. The first, Figure 7, shows the percentage of productivity growth per hour worked and the percentage of wage growth from 1948 to 2020 for the US. The figure shows that wages and productivity, which moved together in lock step up until the 1970s became completely delinked from one another by the 1980s. (This is not to suggest that productivity growth was particularly impressive, in fact it was rather sluggish.)

Figure 8, the second, shows the average annual wage, in 2021 dollars, of the bottom 90% of the income distribution, the top 5% and the top 1%. The figure shows explosive income growth at the top of the distribution, with virtual stagnation for the vast majority of the population.

Figure 7. Productivity and hourly compensation

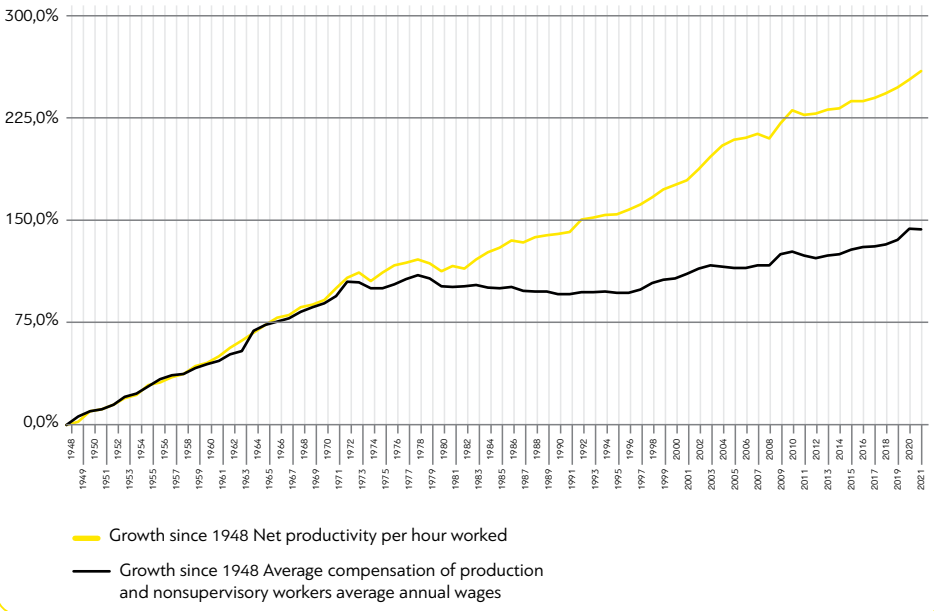
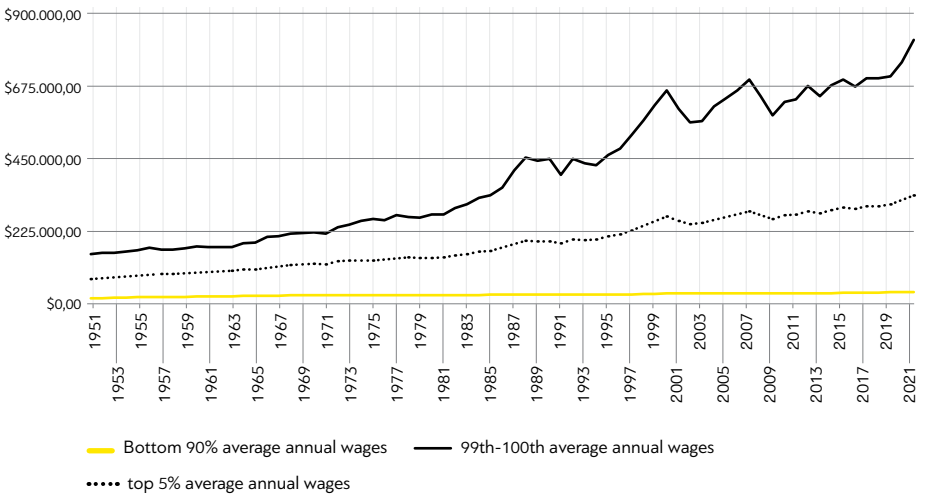


Figure 8. Average annual wages for top 1%, bottom 90% and top 5%



What conclusions can be drawn about the political economy of the contemporary period on the basis of this evidence, and that in the preceding section? It is not enough to point out that contemporary capitalism is strikingly unequal. The point is that it is a system that has produced dramatic and very narrowly concentrated gains at the very top in a context of *generalised stagnation*. It is the combination dizzying inequality, and very slow growth that marks this period most distinctively as a new structure of exploitation.

> Like any such structure, political capitalism not only features a distinctive pattern of income distribution; it also displays a particular pattern of accumulation. If the classic pattern of capitalism was associated with the purchase of commodities with a view to transforming them in order to garner a surplus (M–C–M'), under the new pattern entrepreneurs advance money to purchase political means in order to gain returns (M–P–M'). This has an obvious consequence: the accumulation of money in politics rather than in means of production. For example, Piketty points out that tax cuts create a self-sustaining cycle in which those with very high incomes invest in politics to reduce rates further (Piketty, 2017, p. 423). This tendency has gone farthest in the United States, where the top .01% of the population make 40% of all political contributions (Wolf, 2023, p. 205). Thus, there is reason to believe that some considerable portion of the social surplus is now ploughed directly into the political system, creating a self-sustaining cycle which leads to a structural transformation of the policies that can be pursued in capitalist democracies across the rich world. The key point to emphasise is that investments in politics have now become an integral part of the circuit of accumulation.

THE CRISIS OF CAPITALIST DEMOCRACY

The preceding two sections then raise a very basic issue. If the new form of capitalism is now fundamentally political capitalism in which the rate of return is determined by investments in politics, to what extent is this system compatible with Schumpeterian or formal democracy? My central hypothesis is that the emergence of this new political economy is linked to an ongoing crisis of representative democracy. There are three basic dimensions of this crisis which has played out unevenly across the rich world. The first dimension is a crisis of legitimacy. To an increasing extent, capital has lost its claim to *leadership* in the Gramscian sense; its claim to legitimacy has thereby shifted from one resting on the idea that the interests of capitalists are positively related to the interests of the entire society, to one resting on the notion that there is no alternative social order to be had. The second dimension of the crisis is the collapse of what could be broadly and imprecisely termed "social democracy", a term that includes everything from Eurocommunism to the left wing of the US Democratic Party. This collapse is largely an expression of the unravelling of progressive taxation. The third dimension of the crisis is the crisis of the state as a public institution. Let's consider each of these in turn.

THE CRISIS OF CAPITALIST LEGITIMACY

The basic political justification of private property in the major means of production is that private ownership, and the protection of private ownership, will stimulate economic growth. The point of capitalists being allowed to make decisions about how to invest the social surplus is that they will in fact invest it. Again, as Brenner puts the point, "the capitalist ruling class of the preceding epoch [...] won its leadership position in the first instance by accumulating capital and inciting growth" (Brenner, 2017, p. 14). But as Martin Wolf (2023, p. 239) puts it:

> One reason why politics has become so fraught even in countries with what seemed to be robust liberal democracies is that they were sharing losses [...] caused by the financial crisis. The fiscal austerity that characterized the post-crisis period was a particularly important source of such losses. So, too, was the prolonged period of relatively low productivity growth [...] and the longer term failure, especially in the US, to respond to adverse shocks caused by trade and technological advance.

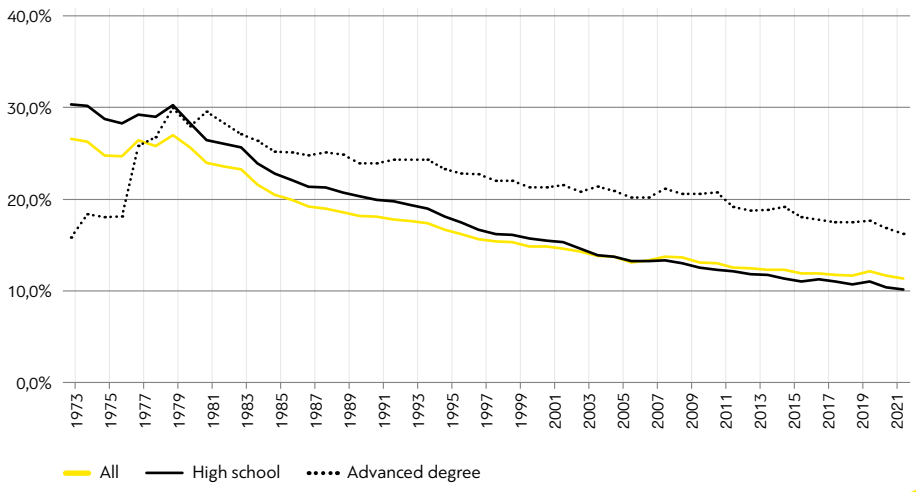
If capital does not generate growth, on what does it claim to rule rest? Increasingly from the Reagan and Thatcher experiences in the US, to Mitterrand's abandonment of his Keynesian programme in 1983 to the EU's Maastricht Treaty of 1992, the answer has been to insulate macro-economic decision-making, and particularly monetary and fiscal policy, from any mass democratic pressure. The basic point of this is that key political decisions are now justified as technocratic

necessities. This is not a positive claim to legitimacy; it is rather based on the notion that there is no alternative.

The most advanced institutional example of this new structure is the European Union. This institution is made up of four elements: the European Commission, a kind of weak executive, the basic purpose of which is to administer agricultural subsidies, the Council of Ministers, "a parallel series of intergovernmental meetings between department minsters", the European Court of Justice that oversees both the legality of the directives issued by the commission, and conflicts between national and European law, and finally a powerless and symbolic parliament (Anderson, 2009, pp. 22–23). Although initially established as a political project to bind Germany to the postwar international order, since the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which established stringent "convergence criteria" for accession to the monetary union, the EU has functioned along Hayekian lines by stripping member states of their economic sovereignty (Anderson, 2009, pp. 29–30).

The legitimation problem in the United States has not required so dramatic an institutional readjustment. The US has from the beginning had a mixed constitution under which the popularly elected House of Representatives has been hemmed in by a series of oligarchic, or straightforwardly anti-democratic counterweights (such as the Senate or the Supreme Court). From the New Deal to the 1970s, this structure was somewhat modernised as a set of agencies gave the executive more extensive regulatory powers, and suffrage finally became close to universal after the Civil Rights Movement. However, the possibility of shifting back towards a liberal oligarchy has always been present in the US, and it is has now been largely realised. Thus, the existence of this premodern liberal institutional infrastructure has allowed the US to shift rather smoothly from a "democratic cap-

Figure 9. Percentage of workers over 16 in a union (US)



italist" to an openly oligarchic system with relatively little drama, very much unlike the case of the EU.

COLLAPSE OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES AND TRADE UNIONS

The same forces that have undermined the pre-existing basis of democratic capitalism have also sapped the strength of the social democratic party and union oppositions that at one time existed within the rich world. The best evidence for this comes from the US. It's useful to begin with the evidence on unionisation rates.

Figure 9 shows the percentage of workers over 16 years old enrolled in a union from 1973 to 2021. The evidence is divided by education level. It shows a dramatic decline among all the groups, especially those with only a high school degree from a high of about 30% unionisation to the current (2021) about 10%. Interestingly the most unionised sector of the labour force now in the US are holders of advanced degrees; this a sharp, and highly symptomatic, historical reversal of the situation in the early 1970s.

Figure 10. Unionisation rates for selected OECD countries

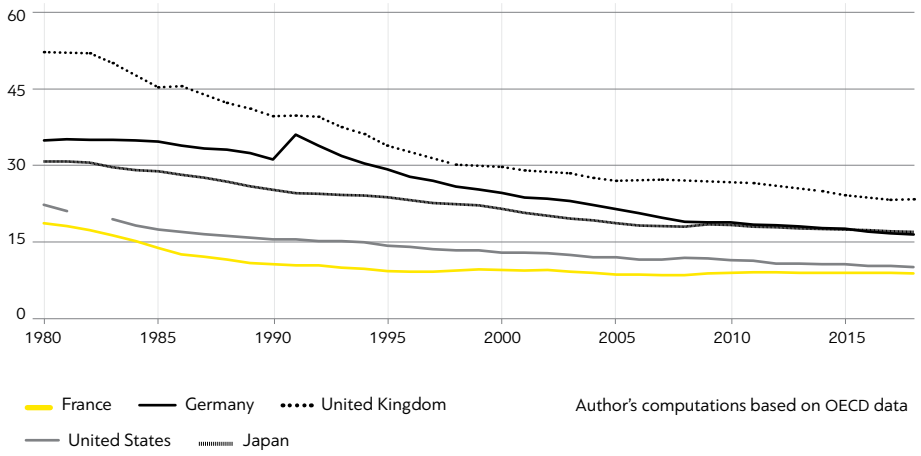


Figure 10 presents similar evidence for France, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and Japan. This demonstrates that union decline is not a US particularity, but a general phenomenon across the rich world. Indeed, the most dramatic decline in union density occurred in the United States, and the lowest absolute rate of unionisation is still France.

One consequence of this organisational etiolation has been a complete inability to maintain a link between wages and productivity increases documented

above. This process has proceeded furthest in the United States, but is probably a general feature of the rich world given the situation described in Figure 10.

Thus democracy is to an increasing extent not a social mechanism by which workers as citizens lay claim to a portion of the social surplus product (Przeworski, 1986, p. 143). Increasingly it is a political mechanism by which workers redistribute income among themselves.

THE CRISIS OF THE STATE AS PUBLIC INSTITUTION

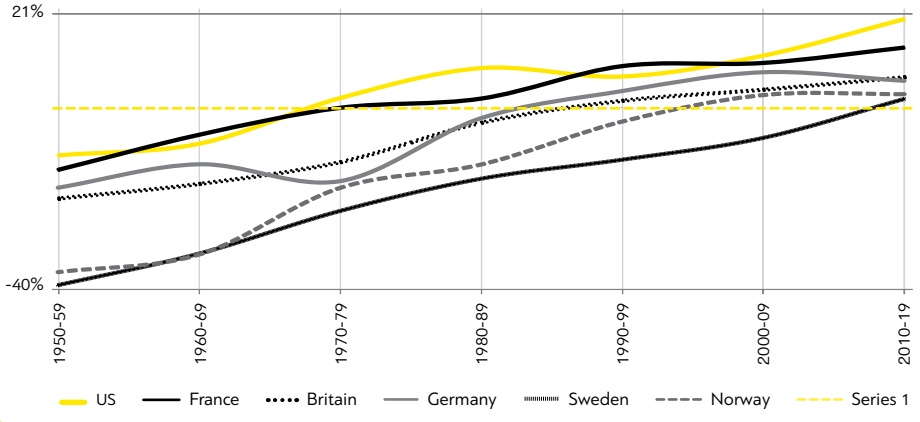
Third, given the particular nature of "political capitalism", with its heavy reliance on the state, there is in the current period a general crisis of sovereignty. The European Union again shows the development in this area most clearly. The EU itself is clearly not a sovereign entity, but closer to a suzerain that relies on the cooperation of subordinates to carry out its powers. But, especially after having lost control of monetary policy, the European nation-states are also not entirely sovereign. Sovereignty, therefore, has shifted and fragmented and now exists at a number of different levels and instances (Supiot, 2013, p. 141).

More generally given the increasing centrality of the state in sustaining profitability, the separation of economic from politics, which Wood, among others, identified as one of the structural preconditions for liberalism, is increasingly undermined. How can one speak of universal rights in the context of the socialisation of losses on the scale of the 2008 or 2020 bailouts?

THE NEW PATTERN OF POLITICS: THE RISE OF NEO-ESTATE POLITICS

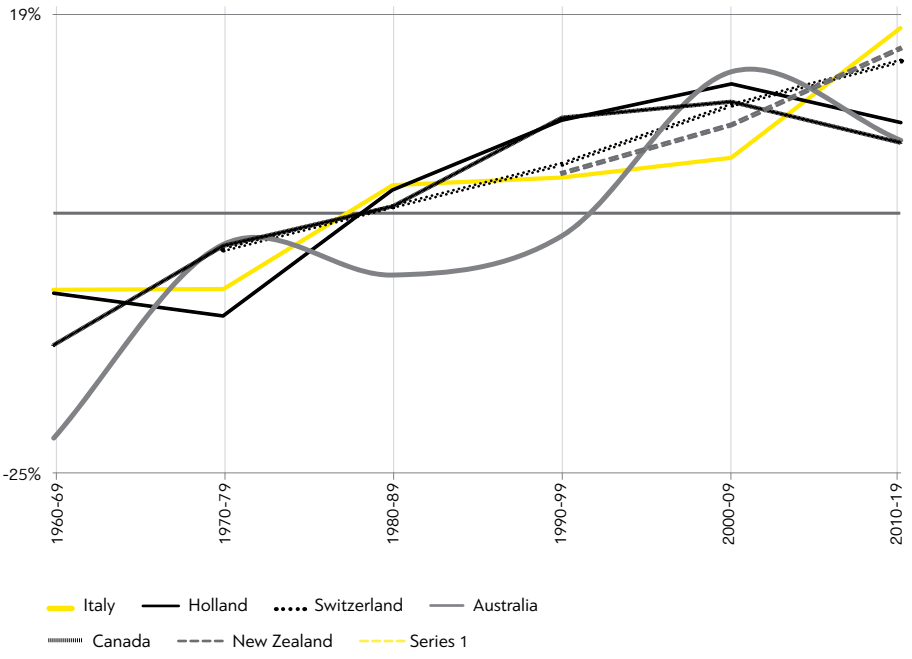
The final feature of political capitalism is the rise of a new pattern of social conflict. In the United States this often goes under the term "class de-alignment". This

Figure 11. The reversal of the education cleavage, 1950–2020: US, France, Britain, Germany, Sweden, Norway



describes a historic shift in which highly educated professionals now form the key electoral constituency for the centre-left parties while parts of the working class (in the US mostly the "white working class" but not just them) have shifted to the right. Matthew Karp, the most intelligent and well-informed writer from this perspective in the US, draws a parallel with the politics of the Gilded Age in which he argues that the two major parties "argued endlessly about economic issues, including tariffs and monetary policy" but that it is "difficult to find any class-based fault lines underneath the ruckus" (Karp, 2021, p. 99). As in the late 19th century, so in the current period, a political configuration has emerged that is characterised by a hyper-partisan conflict among political parties rooted in cultural differences. This position describes an important reality made evident by the following figures.

Figure 12. Political cleavage and education, 1960–2020: Italy, Holland, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, New-Zealand



Piketty's (2020) figures plot the difference between the percentage of the votes for left parties among the highest educated 10% of voters and the least educated 90%. Thus, when the figure is negative it implies that less-educated voters are *more* likely to vote for parties of the left, but when positive it shows that they are less likely to vote for parties of the left. The table shows a dramatic transformation across every country for which Piketty presents data, showing more educated voters shifted left, and less-educated voters shifted right (see also Lind, 2020, p. 74).

The question that arises, however, is "how should we explain this transformation"? One common strategy suggests that class dealignment is the result of a shift towards identity politics. Michael Lind (2020, p. 74), for example, writes that: "The Democratic Party in the US is now a party of the affluent native white metropolitan elite, allied with immigrants and native minorities brought together by noneconomic identity politics rather than by class politics." Karp (2021, p. 99), from a very different political perspective, seems to agree. He describes the "gendered politics of partisan identity". These, however, are descriptors rather than theoretical statements. They explain class de-alignment through class de-alignment.

The key theoretical task is to *link* the emergence of political capitalism with the new structure of politics. The first step is to take a step back and clarify what the working class, or more precisely the proletariat, is, and how its material interests are defined under capitalism. Soren Mau draws a distinction between proletarians, as all those who lack direct unmediated access to the means of social reproduction, and the "working class", which refers people actually employed in waged work. Understood in this way proletarians, defined as all those who suffer the "radical split between life and its conditions" (Mau 2023, p. 130), whether or not they are employed, undoubtedly constitute the vast majority of the population of every advanced capitalist country in the world. But this is a heterogenous group divided by gender, race, region, religion and other factors.

Even the status of being a worker, however, is obviously far from homogenous. In particular there is no reason to conflate "material interest politics" with "class politics". This is because workers under capitalism have *two* sets of material interests that derive directly from their class position. They have an interest in gaining the highest possible price for the "special commodity" which they own, that is to say labour-power, *and* they have an interest in gaining control over the social surplus appropriated by capital. In many respects it is often far more rational for workers to pursue their interests as *owners of labour power* than it is for them to pursue their interests as an exploited group vis-à-vis capital.

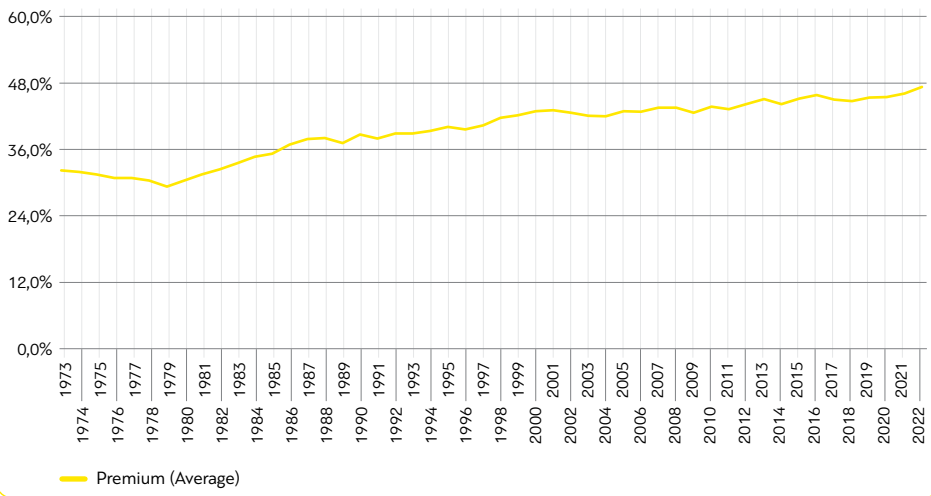
The propensity of workers to organise to defend the value of their labour power on the market can, under certain particular circumstances, lead to class politics, but it certainly need not. It is quite possible for workers to protect the value of their labour power in ways that are completely antithetical to class: for example as members of racial or ethnic groups or as holders of credentials. When workers organise in this second way they do not form a class, they form what Max Weber called an "estate" (Weber 1922, p. 180). The key point about "estates" is that although they are generally culturally marked, they have a material foundation. Thus, it is highly misleading to counterpose a *class* politics of material interest to a non-materialist politics of identity. In fact, in many respects the pursuit of one's interests in terms of "identity" speaks far more directly to individual material interests than does the pursuit of class interests.

The relationship of this to the rise of political capitalism becomes clear when one tries to explain the conditions under which workers might pursue class or estate-type politics. Class politics is an extremely costly and difficult operation. It requires coordination among groups of people who occupy quite different positions in the division of labour and in the labour market and who may have little immediate sense of themselves as a collectivity. All that can be said generally about this is that the working class's formation as a political agent is, in the first place, the result of a political struggle which has as one of its effects the formation or non-formation of classes (Brenner, 1985, p. 40; Przeworski, 1986, p. 66–67). These struggles, furthermore, must transcend the electoral arena, for electoral politics itself is one of the most power solvents of class formation since it formats politics as a series of individualised choices expressed by citizens rather than a process of collective political struggle and will formation.

The problem is that under conditions in which capitalists are increasingly extracting surplus from the population directly through political means, political struggles are likely to unfold in such a way that they re-enforce estate-type politics rather than class politics. This is because proletarians under these circumstances are fighting a basically defensive struggle, and they will tend to fall back on easily available forms of solidarity to defend what they can. In the current period, two such bases have been crucial: education; and race, citizenship status, and ethnicity.

The rationality of such estate-type strategies is evident again in widely available public data. Although the notion that we now live in an economy that rewards education rather than asset ownership is utterly false (Lind, 2020, p. 119), it is true there has been a modest but significant increase in returns to education over the past 50 years or so.

Figure 13. The college wage premium



As Figure 13 shows for the US, around 1980 college degree holders earned about 30% an hour more than those with only a high school diploma. This figure had increased to about 47% in 2021. What this strongly suggests is that, to an increasing degree, bachelor's degree holders form a particular estate within the broader wage-earning population. They can deploy their credentials to some extent to collect rents. To some extent, wage-earners with a college degree must also be able to share in the rents gained from control over intellectual property.

Figure 14. Percent gap in the black to white average wage

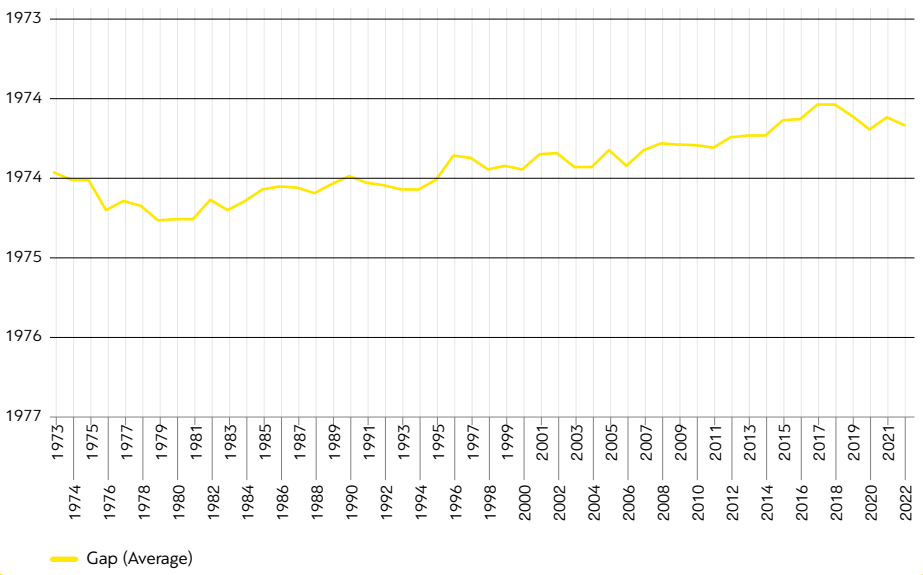


Figure 14 shows similar evidence for the main "racial" divide in the US. The wage premium for white workers was at its lowest point in 1979, but has steadily increased since then so that in 2021 white workers earned about 25% more on average than black ones. There is therefore an obvious economic rationality to defending and attacking racial closure as a basis for income gains.

The picture that emerges of the pattern of social stratification and conflict during the period of political capitalism is one of estate-type struggle among wage-earners to gain a larger share of a stagnating overall pie of income. This is the structural barrier to the pursuit of class politics in the current period.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The current political-economic landscape of the advanced capitalist world presents a hostile terrain for the establishment of the humanised society. Not only is the prospect of socialism distant, capitalist democracy itself seems to be in a terminal crisis. What can be done here is at most to formulate the form of political struggle that might lead in the direction of some slightly better outcome. The place to begin is to contrast hegemonic with redistributive struggle.

THE HIGH POINT OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

At its high point, social democratic politics in Western Europe took the form of an attempt to exercise control over the allocation of society's social surplus. Przweworski (1986, p. 181) described it this way:

> While in the early stages of the development of capital-labor relations the conflict focused narrowly on the right to struggle for wage increases, the essential feature of the social democratic, Keynesian compromise has been the attention of the working class to the actual investments out of profits.

The key point here is that this was not simply about redistribution. At its most radical, social democracy aimed to socialise and democratise investment. Of course there were many contradictions in this project, above all the fact that all social democratic governments remained firmly committed to the defence of capitalist profitability as the condition of possibility for the pursuit of their own objectives. But the Meidner plan, for example, framed the question of class formation as a problem of self-determination. It recognised that capitalist profits did not simply represent an accumulation of resources, but an implicitly collective resource, a "social power" as Marx would have said, that should be turned to human purposes. Thus the most radical social democratic projects were incipiently hegemonic.

THE PATTERN OF ESTATE-TYPE STRUGGLE

But the estate-type struggle, especially in a context in which it is increasingly difficult to tax capital, creates a self-reinforcing cycle in which each group attempts to secure its fair share of a fixed pie; the ideological counterpart is a ferocious struggle between different models of justifying inequalities, and the common social ideal is "redistribution", meaning largely redistribution within the "proletariat" broadly defined. Political struggle in the current period functions according to what Piketty (2017, p. 604) calls "a logic of rights". It is concerned fundamentally with the justice or injustice of social and economic inequalities. It seeks to either justify existing inequalities, usually through some claim to merit, or to redress inequalities usually by claiming that they are in some way illegitimate.

Schematically, the two forms of struggle can be contrasted along three dimensions: in terms of their orientations to time, in terms of their appeal, and in terms of their social visions.

Orientation to time

Hegemonic struggles are oriented to the future; they propose an image of the good society to be built which constitutes a goal. This future orientation is a strategic necessity because social alliances are most effectively formed in collective projects to *do* something. In this way, "partial and sectional demands are inserted into a coherent and articulated vision of the world, which confers on them a common meaning and goal" (Anderson, 1965, p. 242).

Redistributive struggles in contrast are oriented towards the past. They are based primarily either on a critique of a distribution of resources that has already occurred, or on the absence of recognition or both (Fraser, 2020, p. 14). The ideological medium in which political conflicts are fought is the category of "justice". The term "social justice", for example, is pervasive in the Anglo-American left. But the demand for justice as a form of politics is structurally conservative and fits well with the new "society of estates". For justice is always provided by a deciding institution, and implies a return to a prior state. It should be remembered in this context that authority in the old regime was always exercised not as sovereignty but as justice (Anderson, 1974, p. 50).

Form of appeal

The second feature of hegemonic struggles is that they synthesise particular group demands with a broader universal interest. The working class of course is not just the bearer of the interests of the working class, but that of the interests of all humanity. Furthermore, the nature of the synthesis among the different groups rests on negativity, not on positive self-assertion. The fundamental historical interest of the proletariat does not consist in its self-assertion, but in its self-dissolution. Thus, the humanised society would have no "proletarian culture"; it would have a universal one.

Redistributive struggles, in contrast, are inherently particularistic. They speak in the name of aggrieved groups. Furthermore, such struggles to assert and defend these groups' interests occur in the positive rather than the negative dimension. Every group in society is to be recognised and treated fairly. Like the closely related notion of justice, this conception is structurally conservative. It leaves the groups intact and indeed fetishises their existence. The ideal of a universal agent is ruled out from the beginning. It also chimes well with the estate-structure of contemporary politics. This is because justice is a matter of "fairness". It is about levelling the scales. But one can level the scales only among different entities.

Social vision

Finally hegemonic political ideologies propose an alternative vision of society as a whole: one can sketch out the elements of a self-reproducing social order,

historically related to, but fundamentally different from, the current one. This contrasts sharply with the idea of "real utopias", as articulated among others by Erik Olin Wright, who relies on the notion of small-scale social engineering. The task here is to identify an entirely new political economy with a distinctive pattern of income distribution, economic development, and structure of social conflict and cooperation.

Redistributive politics offers no distinctive social vision, precisely because it is focused on "groups", not on total structures of social relationships. This disintegration of the concept of a social totality which stretches across the political spectrum could be thought of as one of the deepest ideological triumphs of neoliberalism.

The basic weakness of the contemporary left, to conclude, derives from the fact that it exists in the Weberian, redistributionist, estate group world of political capitalism. Its natural base is thus deeply fragmented, and its theoretical tools, constructed for the capitalism of the M–C–M' period, remain largely inadequate for the current moment. This creates numerous obstacles; but it also comes with one important advantage. The politicisation of exploitation, which is such an obvious feature of the current period, undermines two of the central strengths of the capitalist order: the rendering invisible of the transfer of surplus, and claim that capitalist profitability is the precondition for economic growth. Whether the left will be able to react in a creative and effective way to the prospect opening before us will depend largely on whether a shift from the politics of redistribution to the politics of hegemony is possible.

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CHAPTER 5

NEOLIBERALISM IN SRI LANKA: CRISIS, PROTEST AND LEFT STRATEGY

→ **Kanishka Goonewardena**

1. #GOTAGOHOME!

In both colonised and postcolonial Sri Lanka, crises and protests of various kinds have not been rare, but the scenes witnessed there in late spring and early summer 2022 were quite unprecedented. Commoners rollicking in the swimming pool of the president's official residence, a Buddhist monk checking out the comforts of the first couple's bed and someone playing a sappy tune on their grand piano – such were the surreal scenes circulating in social and global media no sooner than a mammoth crowd of angry protestors amassed in Colombo's iconic public space Galle Face swarmed into the adjacent Presidential Secretariat on 9 July 2022. That was the high point of what has come to be known in Sri Lanka as the *Aragalaya*

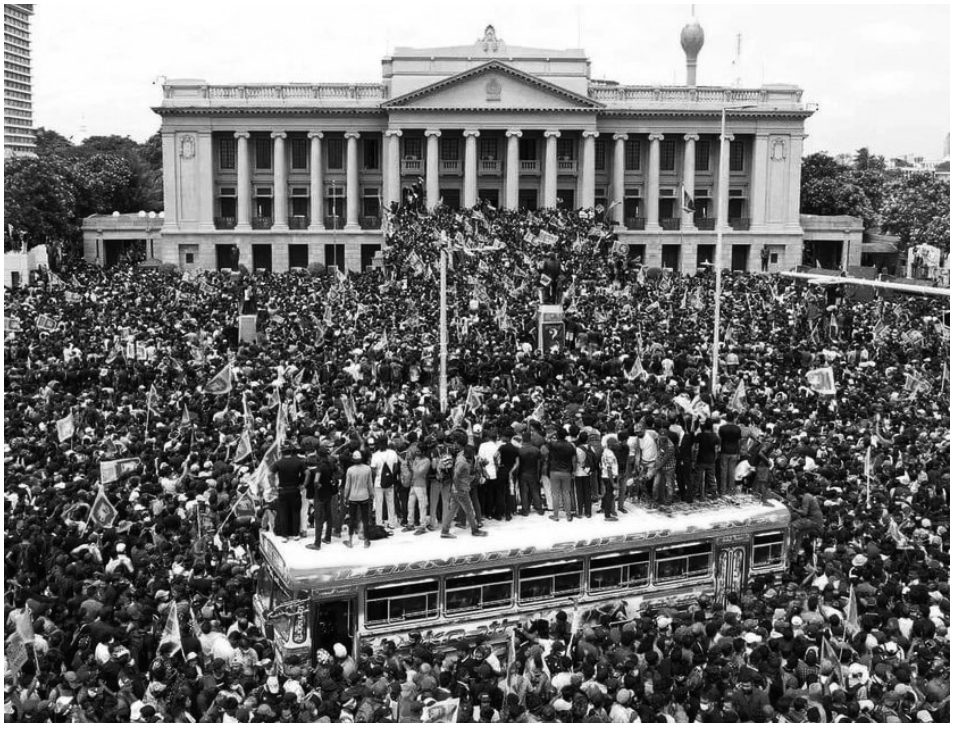

Image 1: Aragalaya, 9 July 2022 (Skanthakumar, 2022)

("struggle"). Within days of what looked like the Sri Lankan version of the storming of the Winter Palace, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, commonly referred to as Gota, fled the island and resigned – less than three years into his five-year term in office, after he was elected with an absolute majority of the popular vote in 2019. So the *Aragalaya*, inconceivable as a political mobilisation even a few months before it became a historical fact, achieved the improbable demand expressed in its ubiquitous slogan and hashtag: #GotaGoHome! Yet barely a month after that, this magical *Aragalaya* revealed itself to be a spent force.

How are we to make sense of the spectacular rise and fall of the *Aragalaya* – a political movement capable of deposing a popularly elected if inept president, but unable to sustain itself as a mass movement even for a few weeks beyond the incredible attainment of its immediate objective? Commonplace liberal and even many left accounts of the *Aragalaya* are of limited use with respect to this question, not least because of their overwhelming obsession with the legendary misdeeds of the ruling Rajapaksa family. Typical of this genre is a report on Sri Lanka in the *Guardian* (16 July 2022) featuring the expert opinion of Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, the executive director of the lavishly funded Colombo-based NGO Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA). For him, the essence of what happened in Sri Lanka in 2022 boils down to a familiar refrain: "the Rajapaksas were venal and corrupt, their regime has nothing to commend itself" (quoted in Ellis-Peterson, 2022). To judge from numerous accounts in corporate and social media, a vast majority of *Aragalaya* activists also thought very much like the *Guardian*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and elite NGOs of Sri Lanka – that the allegedly pro-Chinese Rajapaksas were the country's real problem. But it was not quite so.

2. COMPRADOR CLASS STRUGGLE

We would be better served by a longer historical and deeper political perspective, while paying the necessary attention to the economic dimension of the political crisis in Sri Lanka. The most immediate existential catalyst for the *Aragalaya*, it must be recalled, were the depressingly long lines of cars waiting to fill up petrol and people from many walks of life in search of essential cooking gas, coupled with power outages of up to 13 hours – all of which appeared in the months leading up to Gota's resignation and unusually inconvenienced the upper echelons of the social order. They were incensed at being left without petrol for their cars and electricity for their air conditioners. Accompanying such discontent was runaway inflation, coupled with a precipitous depreciation of the rupee against the dollar, which affected especially the precarious middle and lower classes, who joined their upper-class masters in street protests at a scale and intensity unmatched in Sri Lankan history. Yet the apparently cross-class, ethnically diverse and spontaneous character of the protests that gathered momentum in March 2022 also concealed as much as it revealed.

The distinctly upper-class accent of the *Aragalaya* was evident in the protest movement's urban concentration, initially along a few streets of Colombo and then centred in the largest public open space of the city, Galle Face, which resembled Tahrir Square or Gezi Park during Arab Spring in those tense weeks leading up to 9 July 2022. But the most telling sign that this uprising was *not* predominantly a movement of the oppressed classes could be seen in the very slogans held up by visibly agitated protestors – the vast majority of which were scribbled in English, the language of the privileged class of all ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, as if the whole movement for "system change" was curated for a cosmopolitan Western audience rather than the Sri Lankan masses. Nor is it insignificant that one of the most ardent supporters of the *Aragalaya* on (what was then called) Twitter, as well as other corporate media, was Julie Chung, the US ambassador in Colombo – who was frequently seen entertaining local social media influencers, prestigious think-tankers and the liberally reformed leader of an ex-Maoist political party, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front, JVP). Especially as the potentially radical meaning of "system change" often invoked in the *Aragalaya* was typically and symptomatically left rather vague by various activists, it is not unreasonable that some seasoned foreign diplomats immersed in the commotions of Colombo saw the opportunity for something more traditional: "regime change". The impression of the *Aragalaya* broadcast in social media – heavily *mediated* by cutting-edge Sri Lankan advertising companies and NGOs with links to funding agencies such as the National Endowment for Democracy in the US – was unsurprisingly echoed in Galle Face and beyond, in the spontaneous self-perception of the activists themselves. Most of these protestors seemed fixated on the resignation of Gota – "regime change" rather than "system change", notwithstanding loose rhetoric to the contrary – with hardly a reflection on the nature of the crisis that brought them into the

Image 2: IMF (Sri Lanka Brief, 2023)

streets and what could possibly address it, but not without an intriguing injunction to the government to "Get a Loan From the IMF", presumably of the kind that is credited in the street-level consciousness of the upper classes for having afforded them the comforts of their air conditioners and SUVs.

3. DEBT TRAP

Calls for the government to "go to the IMF", alongside talk of "system change", such was the celebrated diversity and pluralist political spectrum of the *Aragalaya* that seemed to have united, in the excited eyes of social and the global media, the whole island in a mass movement armed with the "GotaGoHome" hashtag against the rule of the Rajapaksas. Yet everyone capable of thought also knew that petrol queues, power cuts and inflation were caused less by merely one nefarious ruling family, but more by dwindling foreign exchange reserves, itself the inevitable and overdue result of an economy that had run for too long on too much borrowed money. The Covid-19 pandemic, in the form of sharp drops in revenue from tourism and remittances from workers abroad, the two largest sources of foreign exchange for Sri Lanka, only snapped an already brittle economic structure, one that had been importing more than it could pay for with exports and covering up the deficits with loans from various foreign lenders, some more predatory and odious than others. This pattern, which has been most pronounced since Sri Lanka was opened up to "free trade" in exemplary neoliberal fashion by the United National Party (UNP) regime led by Gota's unlikely successor Ranil Wickremesinghe's uncle J. R. Jayewardene in 1977 – the last year in which the country's central bank recorded a positive trade balance before privatisation overtook industrialisation on the pretence of being the only available path to economic development – is however the real debt trap that needs "system change".

Against this historical backdrop, it is unfortunate that, all too often, Sri Lanka's poorly understood debt trap is attributed only to China – which accounted for 10% of Sri Lanka's foreign debt in 2022, as did Japan, while nearly half of it was in fact owed to a few finance capital investors particularly fond of international sovereign bonds: Black Rock (US), JP Morgan Chase (US), Prudential (US), Ashmore Group (UK), HSBC (UK), Allianz (Germany) and UBS (Switzerland) (Nicholas and Illanperuma, 2023). Especially in view of the higher interests charged from cash-strapped countries by these intrepid financiers in the international sovereign bond market, we should note that *more* than half of Sri Lanka's recent debt service flowed into the coffers of these "vulture capitalists" (Kaufman, 2022). Their role in Sri Lanka's external debt was recently highlighted by an international group of 182 high-profile academics including Jayati Ghosh, Thomas Piketty, Yanis Varoufakis and Costas Lapavitsas, in an open letter calling for significant debt cancellation as a means to address the country's acute economic crisis (Institute for Political Economy, 2023). The Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt (CADTM)

also issued a statement named the "Colombo Declaration", on 4 December 2022 – in marked contrast to those upper-class protestors of the *Aragalaya* who urged their government, in perfect English, to seek another IMF loan:

> We oppose seeking a bailout agreement with the IMF as a way out of the crisis. We are aware that the policies funded by the IMF have worsened Sri Lanka's food and energy dependency and insecurity; exacerbated the ecological and climate crises; greatly increased inequality; and reinforced the trend towards an authoritarian regime. The government wants the IMF loan to resume debt payments to the bondholders and negotiate for a reduction of 10 to 20 percent. This will certainly strengthen the bondholders. We feel that it can be reduced by 80 percent if Sri Lanka avoids the IMF route and continues the suspension of debt payments. In this case, it would be in a strong position to demand a buyback of bonds at an 80% discount (CADTM, 2022).

Image 3. Sri Lanka's ISBs: Less borrowed, more paid

Sri Lanka's external public and publically guarranteed debt

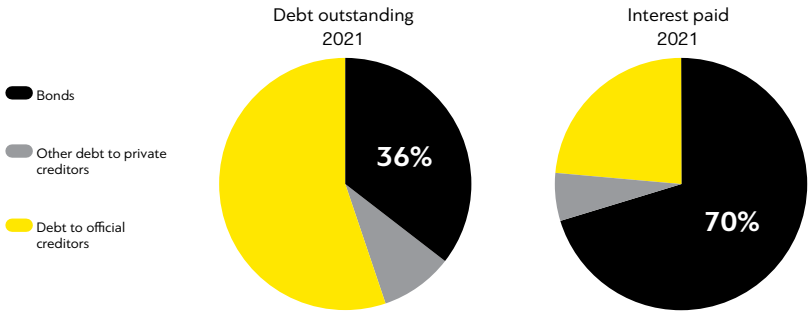

Image 3: Debt trap (Nicholas and Illanperuma, 2023)
Source: World Bank IDS

4. ORIGINS OF THE PRESENT CRISIS

The role of these "vulture capitalist" private lenders, who have targeted many developing countries with structurally compromised economies like Sri Lanka's, can be better appreciated with some basic historical background. It would therefore be useful, as critical observers of the crisis in Sri Lanka such as Shiran Illanperuma (2022), Matt Withers (2022) and Prabhat Patnaik (2022) have done, to see Sri Lanka's present predicament in a longer political-economic perspective – one that contextualises the debt trap as a systemic problem with roots extending to the reformatting of the Sri Lankan economy during European colonialism, of course

with subsequent developments and severe symptoms in our own neoliberal times. As Illanperuma (2022) says:

> Sri Lanka's debt crisis dates ... back to the colonial plantation economy it inherited from the British Raj. When Sri Lanka gained dominion status in 1948, the economy was divided into a peasant sector dominated by subsistence agriculture, and an export-oriented plantation sector dominated by cash crops such as tea, rubber and coconut. The country's first government, on the advice of the World Bank, recklessly squandered foreign-currency reserves while avoiding major industrial investment. By the 1960s, terms of trade began to shift irrevocably, as the export of primary products and raw materials could not sustain the country's consumption of imported manufactures. Sri Lanka sank into a trade deficit and was pushed into the IMF's arms in 1965. The attempt at a policy of import-substitution was insufficient and further destabilized by powerful comprador interests, attempted coups, and a youth insurrection. Later, the first OPEC crisis hit the country hard, forcing it into a long bloody period of liberalization characterized by fire-sales of national assets, union-busting, and ethnicized youth insurrections. Since then, Sri Lanka's trade deficit and debt stock have only grown, alongside a gradual deindustrialization of its economy.

It was the Sri Lankan Marxist political economist S. B. D. de Silva (1982) who laid out most comprehensively the background necessary for understanding the debt trap of Sri Lanka and similarly colonised countries in his magnum opus *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*. This unjustly forgotten work shows how British colonialism in Ceylon fatally transformed the island into a plantation economy, hindering above all the development of indigenous forces of production and prospects of industrialisation. The book also offers a much-needed critique of the dubious views on underdevelopment and prescriptions for development proposed by modernisation theory and mainstream economics, by explaining how policies derived from these doctrines have led only to what Andre Gunder Frank (1966) calls "the development of underdevelopment" – in Sri Lanka and similarly positioned countries within the combined and uneven development of capitalism worldwide. Yes, the socialist-oriented governments of postcolonial Sri Lanka, coalitions of the more or less social-democratic Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) with the Marxist political parties, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL), attempted, with limited success, policies of industrialisation from 1948 to 1977, especially during 1970–1977, in the pre-neoliberal decades when "import-substitute-industrialisation" or more accurately export-oriented industrialisation was still possible to some extent as a way out of the dependence on primary commodity exports – tea, rubber, coconut – for foreign exchange. But the watershed electoral victory of Jayewardene's UNP in 1977, and the attendant decline of the Marxist left as a parliamentary force, brought a

swift end to all that, as Sri Lanka entered the fateful time and space of neoliberal capitalism – making a mockery of its economic and political sovereignty.

5. NEOLIBERALISM IN SRI LANKA

President Jayewardene announced the coming of neoliberalism in 1977 with a brazen declaration (Withers, 2022): "Let the robber barons come!" He dismantled import controls, destroying the heavily unionised industrial sector of the economy; floated the currency; deregulated the banking system; and created free trade zones for garment manufacturing. This was a historic defeat for the working people of Sri Lanka in the theatre of electoral politics, as well as in the extra-parliamentary arena, especially since the 1980 general strike called by the left parties was crushed by Jayewardene's authoritarian political-juridical force in parliament and UNP thugs wielding swords and bicycle chains in the streets. This neoliberal attack on the workers was coupled by an authoritarian-populist declaration of war on the welfare state on the ideological front, inaugurating an era of unrestricted imports of all kinds of commodities, which could not be afforded by a low-tech export sector lacking an adequate industrial base. Low value-added garment manufacturing, remittances from mostly service sector workers abroad and tourism could not pay the bill for the imported necessities and luxuries of domestic consumption. Over the next four and a half decades, a tendency of rising trade deficits corresponded to declining foreign exchange reserves. With an increased reliance on borrowing to cover the trade deficit and to finance state welfare amid "tax holidays" for foreign investors, Sri Lanka's external debt to GDP ratio rose to 75% in 2022 (CEIC, 2022a) and the public debt-to-GDP ratio exceeded 120% by 2020 (CEIC, 2022b). Just as the Sri Lanka government was forced to default on its foreign debt in 2022, UNICEF (2022) warned that "more than 5.7 million people, including 2.3 million children" – over a quarter of the country's population – "require humanitarian assistance".

In his assessment of the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka in this context, the renowned Indian Marxist economist Prabhat Patnaik (2022) raises two important questions on the relationship of the neoliberal longue durée to the present conjuncture: "who is responsible for ... [the] turn-around in Sri Lanka's fortune, from being a 'model' welfare state [before the onslaught of neoliberalism] to being the 'sick man' of South Asia [today]"? And: "while everybody would agree that the Rajapaksa government must take responsibility for the [economic] collapse, ... where exactly [does] the government's culpability lie"? Readers of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and the *Guardian* will be familiar with the standard "Western" answer to Patnaik's first question: "the American establishment and the new cold-warriors of that country put the blame on the Sri Lankan government's ... close economic relations with China".

6. GOTA'S ENEMIES

This is a predictable geopolitical-economic response, given Sri Lanka's strategic location in China's Belt and Road Initiative and proximity to India, although it lacks much explanatory value. Its popularity among Washington ideologues and their European underlings is nonetheless understandable if we recall why Gota handily won the presidential election in 2019, followed by a two-thirds majority for his Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) coalition in the parliamentary election of 2020. These resounding electoral victories were based on the popular reaction to two issues: the dismal failure of the previous Sirisena–Wickremesinghe government to deliver on its ambitious promise to eliminate the corruption identified with the former regimes of Mahinda Rajapaksa, as it became embroiled in a massive corruption scandal of its own; *and* the consequences of its aggressively neoliberal economic policy, especially in the agricultural sector and among the urban poor. To quote Illanperuma (2022) again:

> Gota's rise to power … [and] the family's comeback [in 2019, after their electoral defeat in 2015] was initiated less by ethnicized fervor, and more by the neoliberal policies and corruption of the previous [Sirisena–Wickremesinghe] government, which had entered into an IMF agreement in 2016. Withdrawals of subsidies on fertilizer and fuel had sparked protests by farmers and fishers across the country – the SLPP's main voter demographic. A multimillion-dollar bond scam allegedly conducted by the Central Bank governor had dismayed the middle-class which was hopeful for an end to corruption. High indirect taxation had driven up the costs of living for the urban working classes. High interest rates and import liberalization had affected the fortunes of the domestic agricultural and manufacturing sector.

The popular mandate received by Gota's regime in the 2019 and 2020 elections emboldened them to pursue some policies at odds with the previous government, including a few that departed even if mildly from the prevailing neoliberal practice and even rekindled repressed memories of import-substitution industrialisation efforts of the left-leaning coalitions including the LSSP and CPSL. This was signalled by the appointment as the governor of the Central Bank the heterodox economics professor W. D. Lakshman, whose courses at the University of Colombo once featured Marx. As Illanperuma notes, this move was "poorly received by comprador capitalists and economists at large because he was well known as an ardent critic of the IMF and neoliberal policies … [It] indicated a modicum of ideological conviction by … [Gota's] government – not for socialism, but for a national capitalist industrialisation inspired by the East Asian Tigers growth model." Moreover, Gota's "party, or at least its supporters, also signaled that they would move Sri Lanka out of the orbit of US imperialism by refusing to sign USA's Millennium

Challenge Compact (MCC), or to reinforce military agreements with USA". With reference to such exercises of "national independence", it would be naive to assume that Chung was entertaining chosen local politicians, social media influencers and NGO leaders at her garden parties merely for purposes of entertainment as the *Aragalaya* was in full swing.

Image 4: Julie Chung (third from right), US ambassador to Sri Lanka, and US Senator Chris van Hollen (Maryland) meeting with leaders of Sri Lankan "civil society" (@USAmbSL, 28 September 2023)

In Sri Lanka, the degree to which the *Aragalaya* was stage-managed from Washington in the manner of a "colour revolution" has become the key bone of contention in intensely polarised post-mortem analyses of it. On one extreme is the view that the *Aragalaya* was totally a spontaneous, radical-democratic, multi-ethnic, cross-class and popular uprising against the unprecedented corruptions of the Rajapaksa ruling clan. Such is the predictably unambiguous assessment of *A Brief Analysis of the Aragalaya* published by the prestigious Centre for Policy Analysis (2023), based on a fascinatingly corrupt questionnaire so blatantly scripted and slanted by the very conclusion it pretends to reach scientifically. While the English mistranslation of *Aragalaya* in this booklet as "public [sic] uprising" (the Sinhala word "aragalaya" means "struggle" or "agitation" and refers nowhere to "public" except in the imagination of CPA's "survey research unit") reveals the patent political bias of its pseudoscientific research methods funded by the Global

Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR), several influential studies have recently documented considerable evidence to cast serious doubt on the opinion on Sri Lankan events of 2022 sponsored by this NGO among other service providers to Chung.

The most explosive and incriminating account of the *Aragalaya* from the polar opposite perspective of CPA is *The Ninth: The Hidden Story*, published by the avowedly nationalist leader of the National Freedom Front party and member of parliament Wimal Weerawansa (2023, pp. 68–69) – a book detailing behind-the-scenes operations of a plethora of US-based organisations and their Sri Lankan affiliates such as the National Endowment of Democracy, International Republican Institute, Media Empowerment for a Democratic Sri Lanka and National Democratic Institute. Chung (@USAmbSL) summarily dismissed this "hidden story" as "fiction". Sena Thoradeniya's (2023) collection of articles – *Galle Face Protest: Systems Change or Anarchy?* – covers a similar terrain, with a sociological perspective on the numerous groups of protestors and the hidden and not-so-hidden hands manipulating them. There have been not infrequent reports of social media influencers in the *Aragalaya* confessing to sudden and substantial deposits in their bank accounts. Yet the trouble with the "ugly American" standpoint obsessed with Chung's packed calendar and professional stamina in Sri Lanka, though it has yielded a necessary reality check on the discourse of the CPA and allied organisations, lies in its tendency to deny subjectivity or autonomy to any one of the evidently various and numerous activists in the *Aragalaya*. In so doing, this perspective, despite its appetite for conspiracy theory, ironically lets powerful Sri Lankan opportunists who appropriated the *Aragalaya* for their own questionable purposes off the hook. In contrast to these two mutually exclusive standpoints, a dialectical perspective should register the presence of *both* actually existing "anti-systemic" activists *and* Chung's machinations in the contradictory totality of the *Aragalaya.*

7. MUTE COMPULSION OF NEOLIBERALISM

Returning to Patnaik's second question, concerning the role of Gota's government in the crisis, it is easy enough to note the series of their policy mistakes that worsened an already precarious situation. The most obvious errors include a populist tax cut worsening the fiscal deficit, an ill-advised ban on the import of chemical fertilisers leading to food grain shortages and excessive borrowing from private lenders in the form of international sovereign bonds – even if it was the previous government that in fact ramped up this trend and is responsible for approximately 70% of the debt to international financial corporations. As Withers (2022) also observes, however, the "fixation on [Gota's interventions in the economy] has lent support to a simplistic belief that Sri Lanka's macroeconomic problems would disappear under a liberal market economy" liberated from corruption. Characteristic in this conception of corruption was the identification of the problem almost ex-

clusively with the ruling Rajapaksa family and the state, rather than with various businesses that are reported to have parked their revenues in dollars overseas with recourse to fraudulent "mis-invoicing" or illegal money transfers such as *Undiyal* and *Hawala* (Biznomics, 2022; Sivaguru and Tilakasiri, 2023).

For Patnaik, "the problem with *all* these explanations however is that they completely ignore the role of neoliberalism in precipitating the Sri Lankan crisis". According to him, the debt crisis now faced by Sri Lanka and by Greece in 2009 must be distinguished from the more secular features of neoliberalism, including the day-to-day mechanisms of profiteering in what Nancy Fraser (2022) calls "cannibal capitalism". He calls the Sri Lankan and Greek kind of crisis "contingent" and names the more quotidian operations of neoliberalism "structural", because the word "contingency" points here to the inability of governments faced with sovereign debt and budget deficit problems to know "exactly how much borrowing is 'excessive'" *before* their debts spiral out of control in the volatile neoliberal conditions under which they are compelled to hedge their bets. Patnaik (2022) is right: "a hallmark of [such contingent crises] is that wisdom comes to everyone *after the event*". What is typically missed in these retrospective judgements, Patnaik underlines, is one core lesson of the Sri Lankan, Greek and other comparable crises: the incompatibility of the welfare state with neoliberalism.

Amid the current turmoil, Patnaik urges us to recall that until 1977 "Sri Lanka ... had built up a welfare state that was quite enviable in a Third World context", an achievement inherited even in weakened form by post-1977 regimes. Now, in the *pre*-neoliberal alternative universe in which this welfare state was achieved, it would have been possible to "withstand a sudden drop in foreign exchange earnings, even without enlarging the country's external debt, by cutting down on a variety of non-essential imports". But Patnaik (2022) is correct to point that that option is no longer readily available: "under neo-liberalism ... the government either has to cut back its expenditure, thereby attenuating its welfare state measures, ... or to keep its expenditure going, including on welfare state measures, by increasing the external debt". "In the latter case," as we know, "if there is some delay in the recovery of foreign exchange earnings, then within a very short time the debt terms become onerous and the country is caught in a debt-trap, making *any continuation of welfare state measures an absolute impossibility.*" This is exactly what happened to Gota's government, which attempted to implement both welfare and neoliberalism, admittedly with avoidable errors that compounded its principal contradiction. Patnaik (2022) thus draws a general lesson from the recent Sri Lankan experience: "Even if it may appear for a while that a country can combine welfare state measures with a neoliberal regime, the incompatibility between the two comes to the fore, at the first shock to the system, ... even if it is camouflaged for some time under normal circumstances."

Within the primary contradiction between neoliberalism and the welfare state, we must not miss the essential contours of the Sri Lankan crisis. The basic form of

the neoliberal prosperity ushered in Sri Lanka by the so-called "open economy" was aptly captured by Pieter Keuneman, for many years the leader of CPSL, in an election speech in 1982, when he compared Jayewardene's 1977 UNP regime to a village idiot throwing a wild party on borrowed money, only then to demand that all the *guests* share the debt *and* the hangover. A pithier image for the form of the Sri Lankan economy since then, no matter which neoliberal party was in power, would be hard to find. The real question concerning the economic crisis in Sri Lanka is not about how it happened, but why it took this long for an *Aragalaya*.

8. UNDERSTANDING POLITICS

It will be useful to approach the political – subjective – dimension of the Sri Lankan crisis by recalling Louis Althusser's (1965/1990) famous theorisation of the relative autonomy of politics from economics and Alain Badiou's (1998/2001) complimentary thesis that there exists no transitive relationship between economics and politics. To underline the position that there exists no automatic relationship between crisis and protest, in Sri Lanka or elsewhere, I mention Badiou in particular because of his book *The Rebirth of History*, first published in 2011, which offers an insightful theoretical reflection on a series of contemporary protest movements – the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement and urban riots in various cities – by examining the conditions of possibility of their political success from a revolutionary and indeed communist standpoint. One key premise of Badiou's thought crisply formulated in *Ethics* refers to Marx, Lenin and truth: "I think what is Marxist, and also Leninist – and in any case true – is the idea that any viable campaign against capitalism can only be political. There can be no economic battle against the economy" (Badiou, 2001/1998, p. 105). I juxtapose this proposition to another one – a quotation from Lenin – in Badiou's *Theory of the Subject* (2009/1982, p. 28): "politics is the concentration of the economy". These two Leninist propositions, I suggest, offer us two ends of a theoretical chain with which to investigate the relationship between crisis and protests in Sri Lanka, bearing in mind yet another one of Badiou's (p. 28) radical theses: "Every subject is political. This is why there are few subjects and rarely any politics." Politics for Badiou, in other words, is *not* business as usual – it is precisely a *break* from business as usual. Following Badiou, my own view on the protests in Sri Lanka is admittedly counterintuitive and no doubt controversial: the *Aragalaya* failed to achieve the status of politics understood in the specific sense proposed by Badiou as well as in terms of the activists' own professed if ill-defined and fully unrealised ambition of "system change"; given the persistence of the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, however, the *Aragalaya* – or rather some future manifestation of it – may yet become political.

With some hindsight now it is possible to see petrol lines, power cuts and rampant inflation as the troika of the most proximate causes that led thousands to the streets in Sri Lanka, including middle- and upper-class citizens, the vast major-

ity of whom had never publicly protested in their relatively comfortable lives. An *Aragalaya* however could have happened well before that: for example, during the UNP government's brutal repression of the general strike called by the left parties in 1980; or more recently, on account of the severe hardship imposed on farmers in rural areas by the neoliberal austerity measures of the Sirisena–Wickremesinghe government (2015–2019), as demanded by the IMF in conjunction with its US$1.5 billion loan to Sri Lanka in June 2016. In neither case, however, did anything resembling a regime-changing *Aragalaya* come to pass. When one eventually manifested somehow in 2022, members of "the most deprived class – the rural farmers – were not there" and were conspicuous by their absence among the apparently diverse masses of protestors in Galle Face, according to the sardonic observation of Gunadasa Amarasekara (2023) – a leading Sri Lankan writer and vigorous critic of the *Aragalaya* on account of its shrewd orchestration by Western imperialist interests spearheaded by Chung.

Contingencies of politics are such that the *Aragalaya* as we know it could have been avoided too, had Gota's regime resorted in April or even by May 2022 to the decisive crisis management measure successfully implemented by his successor President Ranil Wickremesinghe in August 2022: the *rationing* of fuel with a system of mobile phone-based QR codes linked to vehicle registrations, which indeed got rid of petrol queues and abruptly neutralised the most vociferous and vacuous middle- and upper-class segment of the *Aragalaya*, leaving only a hard core of the Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF) and the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) together with a handful of independent socialist, anarchist and other postmodern activists stranded in #GotaGoGama to take the assemblage of protesters somewhere beyond the spectacle of 9 July and the more durable designs of the US Embassy in Sri Lanka. With shrinking petrol queues and vanishing mass support for the *Aragalaya*, however, by early August 2022 the remainders of these left and other counter-cultural groups in Galle Face were easily mopped up by the repressive state apparatus now commanded by Wickremesinghe – the same one that remained curiously restrained during the last days of the hapless Rajapaksa regime.

9. DIALECTICS OF AGITATION

Nonetheless, an overly negative judgement of this protest movement in Sri Lanka, despite evident shortcomings stemming from the vanguard role played in it by petty bourgeois and comprador bourgeois elements, themselves acting to an eminently debatable degree as conscious and unconscious agents of forces well served by Chung, would be undialectical. Although it cannot be understood without reference to economic conditions, the *Aragalaya* was, above all, a political process and a subjective experience. It enjoyed an autonomy of its own, which cannot be reduced to objective factors, including the dead weight of dominant

class and national interests in it – both local and global. Indeed, no observer of the prefigurative encampment set up in Galle Face by the most creative and dedicated activists of the *Aragalaya* could fail to register in #GotaGoGama the same kind of radical, utopian and youthful political energy that animated Tahrir Square and Gezi Park during the great mobilisations of the Arab Spring. Galle Face from April to July 2022 became the central site and hive of agitation outside of neoliberal "capitalo-parliamentarianism" in Sri Lanka, thanks in large part to the students and other activists who *occupied* that public space and transformed it into a space ripe for politics – a space suffused with wide-ranging debate on what is to be done, artistic experimentation and other emancipatory activities. At a distance from the limits of liberal democracy, here a new generation – at least those sections of it not so naively manipulated by Julie Chung and her allies in Sri Lankan social media, political parties and NGOs – seemed to awaken itself from its neoliberal slumber in the subjective act of making the *Aragayala*.

It is with respect to this radical subjective-political aspect, however marred by its cynical cooptation by Western powers, that the rapid dissolution of the *Aragalaya* in the late summer of 2022 must be understood: how could a mass movement infused with such idealism and radical potential simply vanish from view as a political force, in spite of the persistence of the objective political-economic conditions of crisis? If we compare the *Aragalaya* to the revolutions of 1789, 1871, 1917 or 1949, with reference to classical as well as recent reflections on the conditions of possibility of these contingent historical events, one conclusion is inescapable: the protests spontaneously spawned by the Sri Lankan economic crisis lacked an organisational form such as the commune, the soviet or the party; moreover, to speak with Badiou again, the whole upheaval lacked an *idea*, such as "equality, liberty, fraternity" or "all power to the soviets" or what Kristin Ross (2015) calls the "communal luxury" of the Paris Commune. This is nowhere more evident than in the famous 9 July 2022 declaration of the popular demands of the *Aragalaya* by an ad-hoc committee assembled from various groups camped out in Galle Face (GotaGoGama, 2022). Aside from the immediate demand for the government to resign, the six (essentially five) demands of this now historic statement are obsessively focused on mitigating corruption through constitutional reform, with barely an original thought on what is to be done about the contingent or structural dimensions of the economic crisis at the root of the *Aragalaya*. Most conspicuously, this statement includes no vision of a systemic alternative to neoliberalism and remains trapped within a middle-class daydream of free markets without the corruption. Needless to say, it falls short of a revolutionary manifesto.

In some ways, this is to be expected from a significantly spontaneous protest movement such as the *Aragalaya*, which had no *time* to be nourished by years of organising and theorising in the ambit of revolutionary or social democratic political parties, trade unions or peasant mobilisations, as was the case with the Russian and Chinese revolutions. Spontaneity, pluralism and horizontality are appealing ideas; but, as recently witnessed in Sri Lanka, they have their limits, not least when manipulated by ruling class interests – national and international. The 9 July statement was issued by an admittedly diverse collection of groups gathered in Galle Face, with many differences and no shared radical political vision beyond the liberal consensus shared by the Centre for Policy Analysis and the US State Department. It is therefore not surprising that within the disappointing list of the demands of the *Aragalaya*, the mention of "debt cancellation" reads like an afterthought, as does the call for a "people's council" in the third of the six points of the Gall Face program. As such, we are obliged to read this statement between the lines, to spot its most radical ideas, which are smothered under the liberal, middle-class and NGOist ideology of the *Aragalaya*. Particularly pertinent for a generous reading of the *Aragalaya* manifesto is its third demand:

> Subsequent to the resignation of the Gota-Ranil Government, an interim Government which subscribes to the economic, social and political aims and aspirations of the "people's struggle/Janatha Aragalaya" should be established. A *People's Council* which has legal standing, through which representatives of the "Janatha Aragalaya" will be able to effectively engage and mediate with the Interim Governance, should be established (GotaGoGama, 2022; emphasis added).

The small group mainly responsible for this intriguing invocation of a "People's Council" as well as the agreeable call for "debt cancellation" in the Galle Face *demand sheet* is virtually unknown to the Sri Lankan general public. Under the name of Socialist People's Forum, it includes a collection of former members of traditional left parties, radical trade union activists and Marxist intellectuals – some of whom also organise a series of lectures, discussions and publications self-identified as the *Marx School*, which operates mostly under the tutelage of Sumanasiri Liyanage, emeritus professor of economics at Peradeniya University and former member of the LSSP. The Marx School published a pamphlet in August 2022, just as the *Aragalaya* was starting to lose steam after Gota went home. *People's Council: The Form of People's Power in Struggle* (Samaranayaka et al., 2022) explains the significance of the "People's Council" as a core concept concerning the *organisation* of the "People's Struggle". It is in this text that we find the only attempt to theorise an organisational form adequate to the *Aragalaya* from a radical political standpoint, in an argument that closely follows the experiences of the Paris Commune,

the Russian Revolutions (1905, February 1917 and October 1917) and May '68 in France. In contrast to the predominantly liberal-populist and middle-class sentiment of the *Aragalaya*, the authors of *People's Council* are commendably clear in their vision of the "commune form" (Ross 2024) as a vital component of what Lenin famously called "dual power" – with unambiguous reference to the role played by the soviets in the Russian revolutions. One looks in vain for such ruminations in the occasional report in the *Guardian* on the *Aragalaya* – but the revival of the notions of "dual power" and "commune form" by a distinct minority of activists seems to be the most promising contribution of the *Aragalaya* in the realm of Sri Lankan political *thought*.

11. THE MARX SCHOOL

The first publication of the Marx School during the *Aragalaya* in fact appeared before *People's Council*, in June 2022: *A People's Solution to the Economic Crisis* (Gurusinghe et al., 2022). In this booklet, three economists of the Marx School make an audacious argument: the economic crisis in Sri Lanka is *overblown* by politicians, apparatchiks and the rentier and merchant classes, precisely to manufacture the illusion that there is no alternative to begging from the IMF and implementing their neoliberal prescriptions in yet another round of debt restructuring. They don't deny the gravity of the foreign exchange crisis in the present; but argue that it is primarily a product of the steady accumulation of sovereign debt since 1977, rather than a consequence of the trade deficit. To make their case, these Marx School economists consult the Central Bank report of 2021 and calculate that Sri Lanka's imports and exports during the pandemic lockdown each amounted to approximately US$20 billion, insisting further that if non-essential imports were discounted, the cost of imports could have been brought down to about US$15 billion. The real problem, they point out, is therefore the burden of servicing a US$50 billion debt – including an interest payment of US$7.3 billion due in 2022.

The crisis appears to be beyond repair without further accumulation of sovereign debt, but only if our thinking is restrained by the neoliberal ideology of the IMF; and the crisis *is* unresolvable within the IMF's own neoliberal framework, which has repeatedly proved to be the problem rather than the solution. Against neoliberal illusions, the Marx School economists urge us to think outside the ideological box of the IMF and their Sri Lankan agents, in order to formulate a genuinely viable left strategy out of the crisis. The message is clear: be realistic, demand the impossible. Their heretical proposal to deal with the crisis therefore includes: a five-year moratorium on debt; de-dollarisation of foreign reserves; import substitution; export development; progressive income and corporate taxation; and banking reforms to promote industrialisation, sustainable agriculture and food security. These measures are reminiscent of Sri Lanka's successful response to the 1973 economic crisis in the wake of global oil and food price hikes. The solution then was conceived

and implemented under the direction of the Trotskyist Finance Minister Dr N. M. Perera, a leading figure of the Sri Lankan Marxist left and former student of Harold Laski at the LSE; the present proposal outlined in *Economic Crisis* by Liyanage and his comrades likewise focuses on the need for national economic planning and industrialisation, the importance of which cannot be overstated in the Sri Lankan context. In general, the proposals of the Marx School are predicated on *three* principles that are fundamentally opposed to the IMF's neoliberal and indeed imperialist policy prescriptions: responses to the economic crisis should not place a disproportionate burden on the lower classes; nor should they further increase the sovereign debt; and the sovereign debt itself shall not be permitted to undermine the sovereignty of Sri Lanka.

A third publication from the prolific Marx School appeared in October 2022, as the government of Sri Lanka was locked in secretive negotiations with its predatory creditors in the form of a new IMF package of debt bondage to finance and rentier capital. It is entitled *The IMF Prescription: A Cure or Another Disease?* and dedicated to the renowned Belgian Marxist economist Ernest Mandel (Pushpakumara et al., 2022). This publication too offers a stinging critique of the neoliberal policies advocated by the IMF, especially the raising of interest rates, reducing welfare and devaluing the rupee – all of which are likely not to save but to sink Sri Lanka into deeper into crisis, with greater independence for global finance capital, more precarity for workers, loss of national income and further

Image 5: The Marx School (Facebook, Sumanasiri Liyanage, 17 September 2023)

reduction of industrial capacity. The authors are especially critical of the IMF's effective opposition to a national economic plan to raise productivity in Sri Lanka; in response, they recommend a discriminating policy on imports, the development of industries for domestic consumption as well as exports, and measures to reign in illegal yet widespread outflows of foreign exchange. The book concludes by urging Sri Lankans to break decisively with the stranglehold of neoliberal capitalism brokered by the IMF.

We must of course bear in mind that I have just presented a sampling of the thinking of only a handful of radical activists trained in the Marxist tradition, who could not during the course of the events of 2022 become the driving force of the *Aragalaya* in the face of other well-endowed organisations hovering over Galle Face – groups celebrated by the media and cheered by the US ambassador, before they dispersed into normal service after a tumultuous spring and summer. But the writings on radical economic policy and forms of political organisation produced in the same seasons by a small minority of activists as well as their lived experiences in the struggle against the economic, political and ideological system – these treasures may yet prove to be the most durable and valuable product of the *Aragalaya*.

12. DUAL POWER AND DEVELOPMENT

Finally, it remains to be noted that in the left political landscape of Sri Lanka the basic ideas of the Marx School activists are not alone. Critiques of neoliberalism have also been formulated by traditional left parties including the CPSL, the LSSP and a breakaway faction of the JVP. Although regrettably compromised by their coalitions with the Rajapaksa regimes, they have now begun to distance themselves from that questionable legacy and reassemble as a potentially independent left parliamentary power (ULS) – just as the two traditionally dominant mainstream parties in Sri Lankan politics, the neoliberal UNP and the and formerly social-democratic SLFP, have all but lost their political credibility and influence in the country. In this context, an election campaign statement in 2019 by the former secretary-general of the CPSL, D. E. W Gunasekara ("DEW"), now seems prophetic.

In a speech aptly entitled "What Is To Be Done?", DEW clearly anticipated the impending economic crisis in Sri Lanka if not the *Aragalaya* itself, and proposed an urgent change of course away from the neoliberal doctrine inaugurated in 1977. DEW's ten-point program also underlined the vital need for such things as national sovereignty, economic planning, human resource development, infrastructure development, tax reform, agricultural development, export development and industrialisation. The difference between the Marx School and D. E. W. therefore is not about economics, but political strategy. The old left of the communists and trotskyists had since at least the 1960s committed itself to the parliamentary road socialism in Sri Lanka, whereas the Marx School of much more recent vintage

speaks of the "commune form" as the rational political kernel of the *Aragalaya*. As I see it, the two need not be contradictory as left political strategies, especially if viewed within a contemporary and creative perspective on "dual power" – such as the one developed by Panagiotis Sotiris (2017) in series of speeches and papers over the last five years or so. After all, the situation in Sri Lanka requires socialist parties and radical social movements to forge a working unity against the liberal political consensus and the neoliberal economic doctrine. To develop a *concept* of such solidarity premised on "dual power", with due attention to the urgent need for the development of productive forces alongside new forms of political organisation, the left could do worse than to adopt for the present conditions another famous slogan of Lenin (1920/1964): Communism = Soviet Power + Electrification!

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CHAPTER 6

MICRO-REVOLUTIONS OF BANALITY? FASCISM, "COMMON SENSE" AND THE ENDURING APPEAL OF NATIONALISM

→ **Aristotle Kallis**

REELING FROM THE twin shocks of the proletarian defeat and Fascism's intensifying brutality in early 1920s Italy, Antonio Gramsci penned one of the most perceptive early interpretations of fascism as a mass phenomenon supremely capable of transcending its original organisational, political and social context. In an article titled "Elementary Forces", published in April 1921, he came to the following conclusion about the Italian Left's failure to stem the rise of fascism:

> It has now become evident that fascism can only be partially assumed as a class phenomenon, as a movement of political forces aware of a real end: it has spread, it has broken every possible organisational framework, it is superior to the will and purposes of every central or regional committee, it has unleashed irrepressible elementary forces in the bourgeois system of economic and political government: fascism is the name of the profound decomposition of Italian society, which could not fail to be accompanied by the profound decomposition of the state and today can only be explained by reference to the low level of civilisation that the Italian nation had been able to achieve in these sixty years of unitary administration.
>
> Fascism presented itself as the anti-party, it opened its doors to all candidates, it gave way, with its promise of impunity, to a loose assemblage that covered with a varnish of vague and nebulous political ideals the wild excess of passions, hatreds, desires. Fascism has thus become a matter of custom [*una cosa di costume*], it has identified itself with the barbaric and antisocial psychology of some layers of the Italian people, not yet modified by a new tradition, by school, by coexistence in a well-ordered and well-administered state. [...]
>
> There is much truth in the affirmation of the fascist newspapers that not all those who call themselves fascists and operate in the name of the Fasci belong to the organisation: but what about an organisation whose symbol can be used to cover actions of the nature of those that daily sully Italy? (Gramsci, 1921; emphasis added).

At that stage (1921), Gramsci still believed in the possibility of an eventual proletarian victory spearheaded by the newly founded Communist Party (PCI) and a "restored state [...] whose power is in the hands of the proletariat". Such hopes

would soon evaporate in the face of those seemingly "irrepressible elementary forces" that he had identified in his article. He later tried to explain the crushing defeat as a combination of political failure (of the liberal state and, to an extent at least, of the leadership of the Italian left for a series of strategic misjudgements that undermined the unity and effectiveness of the proletariat struggle) and the cultural and political "immaturity" of the Italian people. His analysis of F(f)ascism, however, did show a keen interest in exploring the radical possibility that Fascism went from strength to strength in the 1920s because of its deeper, *ir*rational appeal to the masses (Adamson, 1980). What distinguished Gramsci's perspective on early fascism was his acute awareness that this fascism was not a largely constructed phenomenon but an ongoing, flexible, even open-ended project of assembling disparate social and political forces in opposition to perceived common enemies who ostensibly threatened the social order and subverted the national community. In other words, beyond strategic mistakes and short-term historical drivers (e.g., World War I and the postwar crisis), F(f)ascism appeared to him to have succeeded not in spite of but *because* of its lack of clear political identity, of its chameleonic discourse and praxis, of its apparent absence of ideological originality or cogency. His subsequent elaboration of the theory of "Caesarism" sought to address this very paradox of fascism's success as a third-way proposition in the midst of an existential conflict between progressive and reactionary forces in Italian society (Antonini, 2020).

As part of his reflections on the postwar crisis, Gramsci later engaged extensively with a further theme – "common sense" (*senso comune*). The concept appears repeatedly throughout his *Prison Notebook*s, albeit in inconsistent ways. While he rarely connected it directly with his interpretation of fascism, he gradually came to acknowledge the centrality of "common sense" – and the aspiration of fostering an alternative "good sense" (*buon senso*) – to his call for a philosophy of praxis. It is not my intention here to revisit the philosophical foundations of the Gramscian "common sense" (Liguori, 2017, pp. 85–111; Crehan, 2016, pp. 43–58; Rosenfeld, 2011). Instead, I use it as a stepping stone to a wider discussion of the reasons that have helped the radical nationalist right to "hegemonise crises" far more effectively than its ideological and political competitors at critical points in recent history. It is of course true that the interwar crisis that Gramsci grappled with still provides by far the most devastating historical conjuncture of crushing revolutionary defeat *and* extremist victory. However, the processes that helped fascism gain social and political traction in the interwar period remain as relevant and essentially operative in the current crisis as they did back in the 1920s (Hall, 2017; Hall, 2021, pp. 161–173).

At the heart of my argument is the assertion that the radical right (historical as well as contemporary) has enjoyed a powerful historical advantage because of the essential *banality* of its ideas and discourse; a banality that appealed to beliefs and reflexes shared by broad (and cross-sectional) groups. It is in this par-

ticular connection that I have found Gramsci's discussion of "common sense" particularly insightful – not only as a reflection on revolutionary strategy but also as a key to understanding the radical right's appeal to diverse social audiences. I argue that, where interwar fascism succeeded, it did so by successfully rallying and consolidating *assemblages* of otherwise deeply heterogeneous forces and micro-networks, united in their shared enmity towards perceived existential enemies and in supposed dedication to the sanctified national community. It is the radical right's ability to translate its appeals to a banal nationalist "common sense" into new mobilising socio-political coalitions that has underpinned its recent global breakthroughs, not only electorally but in discursive and attitudinal terms as well; and that opens up the possibility – not yet realised but alarmingly plausible – of once again hegemonising current and future crises, with once again calamitous consequences.

BANALITY AS AN ASSET

Superlatives of exceptionalism have accompanied historical narratives of fascism ever since its appearance in crisis-ridden post-World War I Italy. This trend was fuelled by the novelty of the fascist experience: the radical, violent street activism; the surfeit of dramatic performativity; the ultra-modern practices of political communication and social engineering; the capacity for thinking outside the box of the crisis and challenging all sorts of political taboos (Antonini, 2020, pp. 177–179). But it also owed a lot to the way fascists themselves embraced excess in their thinking, speech and action, presenting the world as a series of absolute moral binaries on the cusp of a final existential showdown, imbuing their beliefs with a cultic aura and their perceived enemies with demonic qualities. Fascism seemed novel and unique because it appeared different, full of youthful energy, unpredictable, without precedent, *and* radical in every possible sense of its ideas and practices.

We now know much more about this fascism, thanks to what is by now a significant, highly diverse corpus of work published in the hundred or so years since fascism's appearance. Yet, for all these accumulated nuances, the temptation to exceptionalise this fascism and speak about it in terms of superlatives has persisted. The ex post facto bigger picture projects hindsight onto granular history, especially the kind of history-in-the-making that Gramsci lived through in the 1920s. After all, looking back, how can something that helped mastermind, made possible and oversaw the "final solution" of the "Jewish question" be spoken about in any terms other than the language of exceptionalism? How can the devastation and suffering caused by World War II – a project driven by the dystopian fantasies of a fascist "new order" – be anything less than extreme, even unique? The legacy of fascism was brutal in so many ways for so many people across the world, whether they lived under the direct control of fascist regimes and bore the full brunt of Axis occupation or not. Viewed from the vantage point of 1945, fascism's historical

record exudes the odour of a vicious, excessive rogue that tore apart and then rewrote the rulebook of normality. In this ethical view of history as a struggle of universal moral binaries of civilisation vs. barbarism, fascism is only imaginable as a force roaming the darkest vestibules of a wicked anti-world. Even when and where it has surfaced, it was deemed a "parenthesis", a lapse, a negation and grotesque violation of everything normal, a digression from the path of history, a transgression of the fundamental canons of humanity, an exception in every possible sense of the word (Rizi, 2003; Dunning & Mennell, 1998; Kallis, 2021).

As Peter Turchin has provocatively observed, history – unlike science – thrives in the study of outliers rather than longer-term trends and patterns (Turchin & Hoyer, 2020; Turchin, 2018; Wood, 2020). The history of concepts, of milestone events and periods, of the very drama of social change, is largely told through these outliers: great men of history, big programmatic texts, seismic crises, big bangs. The historical treatment of fascism is no exception – not only it is construed as an outlier from a supposed historical mainstream but it is also exceptionalised analytically as a novelty with a distinct intellectual and political genealogy that somehow begins and quite often ends in big chronological markers. It is my contention that de-escalating fascism critically will enhance the relevance of the "era of fascism" to the study of contemporary history, uncovering patterns and subtle structural continuities that remain important for making sense of the current and future crises. My goal is not to relativise fascism but instead to probe what made it acceptable and "normal" so quickly and widely. I argue that the story of fascism – of its rise, political success, social traction, extraordinary diffusion – deserves to be retold through the lens of its inherent ordinariness in order to render it usable to contemporary commentators, actors and social movements. I contend that it was fascism's inherent banality, not extraordinariness, that accounted for so much of its striking international traction in the interwar years; and that this banality was anchored in a much deeper nationalist common sense, steeped in fantasies of allegedly pure historical and territorial communities and in narratives of sovereign power under threat. It was precisely this fusion of banal nationalism–love of community–pursuit of sovereignty that facilitated fascism's path to hegemonising the interwar crisis internationally; and that the base components of this fusion both predated and survived more or less intact fascism's historical prime time in the first half of the 20th century.

A MIGHTY BANALITY: NATIONALISM AND SOVEREIGNTISM

The adjective "banal" has a troubling intellectual history. It is conventionally understood and invoked in pejorative terms, as pointing to something commonplace and frivolous, in effect not deserving of thorough analysis. Used as a qualifier to the concept of fascism with all its repressive, destructive and murderous historical baggage, it could easily be construed as an attempt at trivialisation. Hannah Arendt

suffered the full force of this slippage when she described Adolf Eichmann, arguably the mastermind of the Nazi "Final Solution" as a devastating modern logistical operation of mass murder, in these terms in her controversial reports from the famous trial in Jerusalem in the early 1960s. Her trope of the "banality of evil" became a discursive battlefield where the highly emotive claim that everything about the evil that drove the Holocaust was nothing other than exceptional and unique took hold (Arendt, 2006). In the ensuing fallout from the publication of her reports, first as serialised articles and shortly afterwards as a book with exactly this subtitle (Amos, 2006), Arendt's thesis, but also her personal and academic integrity, were savaged. As a result, the trope of banality became in effect toxic.

I conjure up "banality" in a different sense – not as a moral category or as the product of absence of imagination but as a descriptive indicator of de facto commonness and familiarity in a given historical context. This "banality", neither negative nor positive, emerges from a different conceptual lineage. I should mention two key works that offered pathways to a productive rehabilitation of "banality" as an analytical category. The first is Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism* (1995). Billig's primary goal was to draw attention to the "endemic" character of nationalism in contemporary societies that is "flagged" constantly in a myriad of seemingly ordinary, low-level ways and embedded effortlessly in quotidian habits. The omnipresence and uninterrupted flow of all these run-of-the-mill nationalist flaggings constitute the everyday framework of a different kind of nationalism, a *banal* nationalism, that is nevertheless instrumental in constantly "reproducing" the nation as a living and cherished locus of collective identity. This routine nationalism is often overlooked or downgraded in favour of the more dramatic performances of national identity; yet it exists alongside all the other periodic and extraordinary stagings of official nationalism in a harmonious relationship – reinforcing each other, deepening the affective power of the nation and embedding it effortlessly in everyday experience to the point that its ubiquity is transformed into a haunting invisibility. Billig's keyword "flagging" is important because it points to the centrality of the iconic national flag as both sacred totem of national identity and its most pervasive symbolic marker. But, as Billig insisted, it extends much further than actual visual cues to include all sorts of linguistic and representational episodes and routines – from the use of the pronoun "we" to the imagery attached to adverbs like "here", and concepts like "history", "education" or "defence". The result is that "the nation" continues to "exert its hold over the political imagination [and] continues to be reproduced as the cause worth more than individual life" (Billig, 1995, pp. 1–7, 174–177).

The second key work worthy of a special mention in this context is one that predates Billig's monograph and deals with a different historical period (interwar). Alice Kaplan's *Reproductions of Banality* (1986) made the bold statement that there was a banal dimension to historic fascism, seamlessly absorbed in and reproduced through its canonical texts and key utterances. Far from being simply

trivial and unworthy of serious analysis, this banality was all-important because it was "open to the use of the entire community" as a common, shared, familiar and indeed desirable place (p. 43). In one of the book's short footnotes, Kaplan made a brief reference to the psychologist Wilhelm Reich, who reflected on the failure of the revolutionary moment in the 1920s and reached the conclusion that "the mere fact of fascism's reactionary nature is no basis for an effective counter political policy, as was amply shown by the events between 1928 and 1942". It is worth quoting more extensively from Reich's *Mass Psychology of Fascism* in this context to appreciate the perceptiveness of his understanding of the same problem that consumed Gramsci:

> The [interwar] revolutionary movement [...] failed to appreciate the importance of the seemingly irrelevant everyday habits, indeed, very often turned them to bad account. The lower middle-class bedroom suite, which the "rabble" buys as soon as he has the means, even if he is otherwise revolutionary minded; the consequent suppression of the wife, even if he is a Communist; the "decent" suit of clothes for Sunday; "proper" dance steps and a thousand other "*banalities*", have an incomparably greater reactionary influence when repeated day after day than thousands of revolutionary rallies and leaflets can ever hope to counterbalance. Narrow conservative life exercises a continuous influence, penetrates every facet of everyday life; whereas factory work and revolutionary leaflets have only a brief effect. Thus, it was a grave mistake to cater to the conservative tendencies in the workers by giving banquets "as a means of getting at the masses". Reactionary fascism was much more expert at this. The budding revolutionary modes of life were not cultivated. There was more truth about the reactionary structure of the workers in the evening dresses bought by the wife of a worker for such a "banquet" than in a hundred articles. The evening dress or at-home beer parties were [...] a testimony of the fact that the groundwork for the reception of National Socialist propaganda was already there. [...] It was the evening dress and not the economic programme that accounted for success in ninety of one hundred cases. *We must pay more, much more, attention to these details of everyday life.* It is around these details that social progress or its opposite assumes concrete forms, not around the political slogans that arouse temporary enthusiasm only" (Reich, 1971, p. 69; emphasis added).

Therefore, when I speak of the inherent "banality" of populist reactionary nationalism, my intention is to draw attention to the oft-forgotten attraction and coziness of its points of reference in order to explain the seeming success of these projects, in the past and present, to gain popular traction and, in the end, "hegemonise" crises. This banality is not meant as a moral judgement but as a tool to explain fascism's striking capacity for mobilising social support. I see historic (interwar) fas-

cism as one of the most extreme manifestations of this much broader modern trend that has repeatedly given an unfair and devastating populist advantage to political projects investing in the "micro-revolutions of banality" (Baudrillard, 2007, p. 40) that raid the arsenal of cliché nationalist tropes and habits.

One of the pioneers of the study of interwar fascism, George L. Mosse described fascism as a "scavenger [...] that attempted to annex all that appealed to people in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century past" (Mosse, 1999, p. 23, p. 42). This particular quality was neither a unique nor a defining feature of the history of fascism; populism – based on a cardinal appeal to and on behalf of "the people" as an ideal, cherished, sovereign community (Rosanvallon, 2021) – was one of the key facets of fascist ideology and politics but only alongside other tropes, such as extreme nationalism, conspiracist thinking, a fierce rejection of aspects of western modernity, and a sense of mission to restore national greatness by defeating the perceived enemies of the community (Griffin, 1993, p. 48). However, Mosse was one the first historians to engage productively with the problem of fascism's social appeal – an appeal that transcended social cleavages, cultural codes and national borders with distressing ease. The suggestion of fascism as a scavenger drew attention to its heterogeneous, often self-contradictory, and protean nature that assembled elements from very different ideological lineages into a new, coherent and potent, synthesis. Writing primarily in reference to National Socialism in Germany, Mosse tried to explain the essential contradiction between tradition and revolution at the heart of the movement's ideology. His response hinged on fascism's scavenging knack that, in his view, subsumed bourgeois and anti-bourgeois elements into a novel radical mix that apparently struck gold in a society consumed by the ghosts of crisis and decadence (Gentile, 2004; Plessini, 2004).

Mosse posited this self-contradictory, inherently populist, indeed banal-in-its-constitutive-parts fascism as a corrective to the postwar tendencies to exceptionalise the era of fascism as a historical deviation or a collective malaise. He was also one of the pioneers of a conception of fascism as a *generic* ideological type that found enthusiastic followers and either willing or strategic supporters in a wide range of societies beyond the two key cases of interwar Italy and Germany. From the outset, scholars of generic fascism have endeavoured to find a balance between extrapolating a core type of universal fascist ideology *and* accounting convincingly for its international diffusion and highly diverse contextual variations (Weber, 1964). If the banality of the elements making up the core of fascist ideology can be used to explain why fascism, the radical start-up in the first Italian *dopoguerra* struck a chord not only in its original native setting but also in many other countries, we still need a convincing framework for explaining why it was "translated" differently in different societies or indeed kept changing in discourse and praxis throughout the interwar period. Powerful precedents from successful radical breakthroughs in Italy, then Portugal, Germany, Romania and elsewhere generated

sources of inspiration and political learning for disgruntled radical nationalists and authoritarians elsewhere – but the ways in which they used these prior templates differed significantly in their diagnoses and operationalisations from case to case (Kallis, 2021).

This complex interplay between the generic and the contextual, the external and the local, defined the history of interwar fascism. Fascism, however, was not *a* thing but a "contingent dynamic", unfolding in front of the eyes of its contemporaries (Roberts et al., 2002, p. 261). It certainly was not the "fascism" that advocates of the generic approach, myself included, have often ex post facto assumed. Between the contingent facts on the ground, on the one hand, and the translation of precedents in different contexts, on the other, there were two further mediating processes – *reception* (Albanese, 2022) and *friction* (Tsing, 2005). The way that these two processes intervened determined whether the fascist experience was identified by particular transnational constituencies as relevant to their own perceived diagnoses of crisis and desires for radical transformation, and to what extent it did. In other words, reception – an active and creative process in itself – paved the way for either productive friction (in the sense of engagement), adaptation or partial/full rejection. What this means is that fascist translations, where they occurred, were already filtered through the subjective reception of "fascism" by diverse actors and local networks, whose prior ideas and beliefs determined to a critical degree the patterns and extent of their engagement/friction with the experience of fascism. If interwar fascism's story is defined by its extraordinary – in scope, speed and intensity – international diffusion, "fascism" was subject to multiple stages of attrition that started from the very first moment of reception and continued throughout the processes of engagement and active translation.

The banality of the core fascist message oiled the wheels of diffusion, friction and contextual translation(s). *Hypernationalism*, with its extreme love of the community, and demonisation of its enemies, together with *sovereigntism*, the promise of restoring full power and historic agency to the national community and its state by crushing the web of local and international usurpers, formed fascism's elemental architecture that rendered its message of revolutionary rupture attractive, intelligible, mobilising and actionable. Nationalism's affective power and capacity for overwriting other social identities had already been aptly demonstrated in the responses to the outbreak of World War I, fuelling chauvinism across the board and even splitting the Second International (Forman, 1998, pp. 110–113). But the fascist sovereigntist message was also supercharged by an angry backlash against the trend towards more diffuse models of internationalism that challenged the legitimacy of national sovereign power in favour of new universal norms of political organisation and policy-making. The 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia was the main enemy of course and the left served as the primary target of the hypernationalist call to action; but it was very quickly inscribed in a wider web of supposed internationalist conspiracies that were assumed to wage a single pernicious campaign to wreck

nationalism and usurp national sovereignty. At a time when an international society was taking concrete institutional shape (Gorman, 2012), internationalism came to represent the single alleged cause of every power deficit – and all associated ills – for the (national, of course) community. Starting from the claim that the primary cause of national decline was the wrongful usurpation of sovereign power by a cabal of global shadowy forces and their local collaborators, fascists demanded that the national community be unshackled and emancipated from the current configuration of power on the local, national and/or global levels (Alles & Badie, 2016, pp. 5–7). They conjured up internationalism as the caricatured supervillain who subsumed, controlled and spurred all of the community's supposed competitors and adversaries, whether inside or outside, close or distant, visible or hidden: the socialist and/or communist, the non- or anti-national alien minority, the liberal internationalist, the rootless cosmopolitan, the plutocrat, and in most cases, "the Jew" as the supposed epitome of all these qualities (Hanebrink, 2018). If there were other internal enemies in particular countries, they too could be seamlessly absorbed into the core architecture of redeeming power on behalf of the narrowly defined national community in an all-out fight against the conspiracist web. What oiled the wheels of fascist diffusion was the perception of a "fascism" as a successful political enterprise of radical transformation, uniquely effective in mobilising the "young" and most productive forces of the nation, providing new tools for collective action, and investing local fights with deeper historic significance.

ASSEMBLAGES OF FASCISM

What happened in Italy between 1914 and 1922 was instructive in another significant sense: it illustrated the power of hypernationalism and sovereigntism as a *unifying* mass-mobilising cause. The interventionist movement that sprang up in the country in the wake of the Italian government's decision to bide its time and negotiate behind the scenes rather than join the conflict in 1914 brought together the most heterogeneous coalition of forces – from paramilitaries and anti-socialist vigilantes to traditional irredentists to dissident radical intellectuals to a subset of revolutionary socialists to fiercely anti-traditional Futurists (Carteny, 2015; De Grand, 1971; Millan, 2016). The continuities between pre- and post-1918 trends in this respect have only recently come into closer focus, pointing to the rise of Italian Fascism as a mass movement and political power in 1920–1922 as supercharged by processes of realignment of both pre-existing and new dissident social forces (Millan & Saluppo, 2021). Here too banality was an asset: continuities in terms of diagnoses (e.g., the perceived failure of the "neutral" liberal state to provide effective responses to workers' mobilisation and the threat of revolution) and discursive tropes (e.g., backlash to internationalism; mobilisation against conspiracies; return to order; appeal to core nationalist myths) played a significant part in reviving Fascist fortunes after the barren years of 1919 and early 1920 (O'Brien, 2018).

News about the unfolding drama of Fascism's rise in Italy during these early years was already circulating across Europe prior to the October 1922 March on Rome, casting light on the full apparatus of Fascist radical resourcefulness and efficient brutality. However, the dramatic escalation of Fascist ambition in the autumn of 1922 that eventually propelled Mussolini to power put the Italian experience on the map for much wider international audiences. It was not just the young radicals who were already joining the ranks of paramilitary formations and violent ultranationalist university student groups but also disillusioned radicalised authoritarians and conservatives who started getting drawn to the Fascist story. That early Italian Fascism could be appealing to these and other heterogeneous communities was already testament to the versatility of the core Fascist promises and their embeddedness in a wide range of national contexts. It also underlines the creative role of subjective perception and reception that facilitated the transnational diffusion, translation and, indeed, fascistisation of already existing grass-root movements (Alcalde, 2018). The fact that different sympathetic audiences, within and across countries, saw in Fascism different things of potential value to their own predicament and struggle transformed this fascism into an adaptable universal prescription that seemed familiar, effective and easily translatable to fit different contingent contextual conditions.

Beyond this, however, the reception of the experience of fascism set in motion local processes of synthesis on the ideological, political and organisational levels. Alignment and realignment went hand-in-hand: the fascist networks featured heterogeneous, often loose clusters of old and new actors, pre-existing and newfangled networks, united more in fierce opposition against common enemies than in positive agreement on the actual shape of an ideal future society. Here then was another strength of the fascist project beyond its affective banality: the capacity for acting as a magnet and catalyst for mobilisation, organisation and collective radical action. The tendency to treat the history of fascism as rooted in the whirlwind of the post-World War I crisis has often obscured how fascisms, first in Italy and then elsewhere in Europe and beyond, mobilised, recruited from and reconfigured diverse dissident political spaces and networks that had already developed their own particular understandings of the crisis, the enemies of the national community and the ideal way forward (Alcalde, 2017). In all the processes of transnational reception and translation of the fascist experience, the new networks of fascism did not simply appear out of thin air, like a tabula rasa hijacked by the aura of apparent fascist success. Critical continuities of radical thought, organisation and activism were at play in each context, refracting receptions and translations of the international fascist experience. While fascism supercharged all these processes – attracting new actors to the radical fold; inspiring new, broader coalitions; and expanding the toolkit of radical activism – its diffusion and translations were propelled by the prior histories and organisational memories of anti-socialist, anti-liberal, anti-minority and, more broadly, anti-internationalist campaigns in each

case. Fascism did appear revolutionary in its own way but it also offered no steep learning curve to redemption, courtesy of its appeal to banal fundamentals of national identity, community and sovereign power against alleged enemies.

Therefore, the history of fascist diffusion within and across interwar societies was one intimately linked to the mobilising and associational dynamics of "fascism". The notion of *assemblages* of fascism is capable of bridging the gap between the circulation of ideas and the emergence of radical networks in the interwar years, based on effective local translations of the perceived fascist experience. The term "assemblage", borrowed from the homonymous theory developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in the 1980s (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004), offers a convincing corrective to an essentialist understanding of fascist transnational diffusion. Assemblages are historically contingent – not only in a broad historical sense but also on the local level – heterogeneous, multiple and overlapping, and above all dynamic, that is, subject to constant change, in terms of identity, membership and momentum. Unlike networks, assemblages are primarily systems of ever-shifting interactions between their constituent parts and the outside world (DeLanda, 2006 and 2016, cf. Latour, 2005; Nail, 2017). Applied to the history of transnational fascism, the notion of "assemblages of fascism" illustrates how fascism, as a latecomer to the radical nationalist fray, did not invent the associational wheel of nationalist politics but rather catalysed new forms of radical association between pre-existing and new networks. It can be used to account for the diversity of receptions, responses and translations of the fascist experience in different contexts, as well as for the varying degrees of fascist success in mobilising social and political support, not only across different countries but also at different stages of the interwar timeline. It can also return historical agency to local actors and movements who "owned" fascism actively but on their terms, further undermining any notion of one-way diffusion of an already formed fascist canon from supposed centres to peripheries. More importantly, however, it helps to bridge conventional dichotomies in the historiography of interwar fascism and radical authoritarian politics (e.g., movement-regime, authoritarian-revolutionary, continuity-rupture) that have often exaggerated taxonomical fractures and thus fragmented a bigger picture of radical anti-socialist politics in the interwar years.

If the history of global fascism in the interwar period was largely based on these complex associational dynamics involving new and pre-existing actors in dynamic local and transnational relationships, and if one key ingredient to its striking momentum of diffusion and local translation was the inherent banality of its core promise, then it is also impossible to talk of an "era of fascism" as a chronologically bound category. The year 1945 represents a seismic rupture but only a partial – and, to a large extent, strategically overblown – one. Beyond the obvious point that some regimes outlived it by a wide margin, and that a revived "neo-fascism" ("genetically the same as historic fascism" (Copsey, 2020, p. 115)) kept appearing in the political fringes. B yond this, however the assemblages that interwar

fascism mobilised in different societies did not simply disappear into the crevasses of history because they were anchored in pillars of a deeply rooted nationalist "common sense". Historically contingent assemblages can change or implode but their social and political base components become candidates for new ones, when favourable conditions appear and a new persuasive mobilising magnet comes to the fore. Thus, if the historically contingent syntheses that produced "fascist" movements and parties (often in name but also in ideological profile, organisational quirks or style of operation) as well as regimes (totalitarian and fascistised authoritarian ones) mostly collapsed, Federico Finchelstein (2017, pp. 1–30) has reminded us that the resurgence of populism in the post-World War II world was the product of historical trends that cannot be confined to arbitrary chronologies. Against the idea of postwar radical nationalist populism as a fundamentally different and essentially new political phenomenon, Roger Griffin (2000) has reflected on the fundamental ideological affinities that continue to bind the histories of historic fascism, neo-fascism and the contemporary radical right:

> their axiomatic rejection of multi-culturalism, their longing for "purity", their nostalgia for a mythical world of racial homogeneity and clearly demarcated boundaries of cultural differentiation, their celebration of the ties of blood and history over reason and a common humanity, their rejection of *ius soli* for *ius sanguinis*, their solvent-like abuse of history represent a reformist version of the same basic myth. It is one which poses a more serious threat to liberal democracy than fascism because it is able to disguise itself, rather like a stick insect posing as a twig to catch its prey (p. 174).

In a not dissimilar fashion to the impossible paradoxes that shaped the post-World War I "new order" in central, eastern and southern Europe, the post-1945 western world was premised on a categorical rejection of "fascism" and its devastating excesses (genocide, war, dictatorship) without addressing the banal ideological tropes that had sustained it (Shorten, 2004; Vázquez-Arroyo, 2013). Back in 1918–1920, the hallowed Wilsonian trope of national self-determination collided with the realities of ethnic and religious mixing in the territories of the disintegrating old empires. The successor states preserved the fiction of ethnic homogeneity and national sovereignty but only on condition that they accepted newfangled provisions about minority protection that were angrily rejected and then, after having been only grudgingly accepted, fed into chauvinism and conspiracist thinking that precipitated their devastating collapse into repression and violence in the 1930s and 1940s (Bideleux & Jeffries, 2007, pp. 369–372; Kallis, 2021). The drawing of the post-World War II order took place in very different conditions of course and the spectre of the Cold War determined many of its foundations and operations in subsequent decades. The decisive strengthening of internationalist trends went some way towards mediating earlier notions of national sovereigntism but did little to shift the banal frames of nationalism, qua Billig, that sustained it. In fact,

this sovereigntism emerged as a powerful retreat for anti-establishment populist discourses against a host of novel trends such as globalisation and supra-nationalism, global migration, multiculturalism and the expansion of international law. Fragmented in groupuscules and loosely connected mini-clusters of dissent marginalised by liberal-internationalist regimes of truth (Griffin, 2003), these forces of a nationalist sovereigntist backlash have since continued to quench their thirst from the wells of a normalised banal nationalism even as they largely failed to morph into the kinds of potent assemblages that supercharged the international histories of fascism in the interwar period.

THE LONG GAME TOWARDS PERSUASION

I write these lines in the shadow of recent dramatic events: Trump's victory in the 2024 US elections and the radical right's strong performance in the European Parliament elections in June 2024. The big story has always been about radical populist leaders, about single parties that persistently attract significant popular support in the ballot box or alternatively about new stars seemingly emerging out of the void to achieve significant electoral gains. We know that the radical right is at its strongest where and when it succeeds in uniting the otherwise disparate undercurrents of the radical right while also mobilising a part of disaffected mainstream constituencies. Fragmentation into small and often transient parties, on the other hand, makes for less attention-grabbing headlines or captivating narratives. In the wake of the June 2023 parliamentary elections in Greece, a largely unknown far-right party, named Spartans, emerged seemingly "out of nowhere" (Logaras, 2023) to take 4.68% of the national vote and elect 12 MPs in the new Greek parliament. Two other parties of the hypernationalist religious right won 4.44% and 3.69% of the vote, respectively, both electing MPs (Samaras, 2023). The three parties of the Greek far right share a number of ideological features that point to Billig's conception of a banal Greek nationalism: religion, traditional social values, nationalist foreign policy, pro-Russian geopolitical orientation, fierce opposition to immigration and naturalisation of immigrants, anti-internationalism and -globalisation, as well as clusters of conspiracist thinking (Boukala, 2021; Roupakias & Chletsos, 2020). It would be possible to trace lines of elective ideological affinity between these new parties and earlier political assemblages (e.g., the Popular Orthodox Rally [Laos], that reached its electoral peak at the 2009 elections), recent milestones in the history of Greek ultranationalism (the conflict around the official name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia that flared up in the 1990s (Demertzis et al., 1999; Roudometof, 1996) and was revived in the build-up to the 2018 Prespes agreement between Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia (Skoulariki, 2022) as well as authoritarian tendencies in recent Greek political history that reach back to the 1967 military coup d'état and the ensuing junta that lasted until 1974 (Alkiviadou, 2020). However, the story behind the un-

expected success of the Spartans in June 2023 is more complicated because it is disturbingly connected with the remnants of Golden Dawn, whose leadership was imprisoned in 2020 following a trial that found that the former party operated as a criminal organisation in blatant violation of the law. Golden Dawn had reached its electoral apex in 2012–2015, repeatedly winning ca. 7% in national elections and reaching a peak of 9.6% in the 2014 European Parliament elections (Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2014). Its electoral fortunes declined precipitously from 2019 onwards, following the trial against its leadership for the assassination of an anti-fascist activist in 2013. The guilty verdict at the trial sealed the fate of the party, which disappeared from the Greek political map.

The result of the June 2023 elections in Greece made waves as international news only briefly after the publication of the results. Given the relatively low percentage achieved by the Spartans, the recent electoral breakthrough of the Greek far right was quickly subsumed into broader narratives overshadowed by other stars brandishing more spectacular successes, such as the National Rally in France, Vox in Spain or the Alternative for Germany, not to mention the ongoing political dominance of Viktor Orbán in Hungary or indeed the resurgence of Trumpism in the USA. Unlike – so far – these high-profile cases, Greece remained in a state typical of the fragmentation of the hypernationalist-sovereigntist political assemblages that so often has bred a false sense of security that is driven by a short-sighted perspective anchored on election results at the expense of paying more attention to disconcerting continua of "common sense". The 2022 electoral drama in Brazil, where Jair Bolsonaro was defeated – albeit with the thinnest of electoral margins – largely eclipsed another story, less sensational in media terms but more concerning in the longer term, that nearly half of the Brazilian population (49.10% to be precise) continued to identify with their populist superhero even after four years in power. The ideological and political debts of Bolsonarism to a long lineage of radical ultranationalism that stretches back to the 1920s and traverses the troubled years of brutal authoritarian dictatorships during the Cold War have already been amply demonstrated in academic research (Gonçalves & Caldeira Neto, 2022) but this has not changed substantially the attitudes of large sectors within Brazilian society. Meanwhile, Trumpism, again only narrowly defeated in 2020, has now made the most sensational comeback after victory in the 2024 US elections, having seized the mainstream of the Republican Party with its potent mix of nationalism, sovereigntism, combative social conservatism, racism, geopolitical isolationism, hard-core protectionism and climate-change denial (Ettinger & Collins, 2023).

Against these stark realities of far-right resurgence and normalisation, the case of Greece is typical of another subset of cases that can be described as currently less worrying. True enough, the Spartans hardly featured in the European elections results only a year after their breakthrough. There is another reading of these facts on the ground, however: hypernationalism is alive and well in contem-

porary Greece, reaching deep into the mainstream of modern society, structurally normalised, feeding from and reproducing banal tropes about national community, history, defence of national territory and resistance to the forces of a caricatured, demonised globalisation (Vasilaki, 2021). Like the characters of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, micro-assemblages of the Greek far right burst into the limelight, still claiming to speak for "silent majorities", accusing elites of having suppressed their voice, and seeking to make their electoral mark, while emboldened by the fact that, in the meantime, their views enjoy significantly wider social traction than any electoral figures could possibly account for. Parties have been coming and – so far thankfully – going without posing existential threats to democratic normality. In this sense, the fall of Golden Dawn offers a cause for welcome relief but no reason for complacency about the supposed robustness of democratic normality in contemporary Greece. More importantly, however, it should be treated as a sombre reminder that deeper polarities and friend-foe narratives endure, not just in the fringes of society or politics but very much among mainstream constituencies. Golden Dawn and Laos before, the Spartans in 2023 and some other radical political start-ups in the future are mere historically contingent magnets and vessels for new assemblages of otherwise enduring anti-democratic and chauvinistic components, the latter outliving the former. Moreover they continue to feed from the same deeper normalised reservoir of social support for banal nationalism and racism with all their sovereigntist and conspiracist extensions (Vasilaki et al., 2021). Copsey (2020, p. 114) warned that "(f)ascism did not die in 1945; the reality is that it never left us". If this statement may still appear as controversial, particularly to those who point to the way in which the contemporary radical right has criticised historic fascism and has seemingly embraced, however strategically, the rules of the democratic process, it also draws attention to deeper lines of attitudinal and discursive continuities that exceed fascism or any particular historical assemblage of radical ultranationalist populism. Even if fascism as a phenomenon rooted in its unique historicity cannot stage a recognisable successful comeback (Eco, 2015), the ideas and tropes that sustained it remain in place, ready to be harnessed by new narratives of nationalist boundary-making, as much part of the combative "common sense" that Gramsci bemoaned in his effort to explain the passing the proletarian moment in the 1920s.

Anand Giridharadas has probed extensively the question of what could render an alternative inclusive discourse more effective, more mobilising, more capable of inoculating people against the divisive appeal of the radical nationalist right, more successful in persuading people that there are credible democratic alternatives to the populist mantras of introversion, national redemption and spiralling conspiracism (Giridharadas, 2022a). The magnitude of this challenge continues to be enormous and fraught with difficulty; it remains strikingly similar to the dead end that Gramsci and his comrades in the Italian Communist Party encountered in the early 1920s because the chasm between common and "good sense" is always

daunting and the powerful banal forces of nationalism remain very much at play in contemporary societies. In a recent interview, Giridharadas (2022b) noted that the radical right is "outcompeting [the left]" in its struggle for the hearts and minds of the electorate. This is an empirically accurate, if uncomfortable admission to make. The nationalist right appears to be having its own historical "moment", not merely or primarily in terms of electoral breakthroughs but more alarmingly in terms of a discursive hegemony that has gripped the societal mainstream in many parts of the world. Such ability to hegemonise the current crises is rooted in the banal reservoirs of exclusive national identity and sovereigntism as a promise of collective subaltern agency and redemption against a world supposedly dominated by corrupt elites and international(ist) conspiracies. This gives every ultranationalist populist an unfair advantage in the battle of persuasion – a battle that, Giridharadas has insisted, is necessary to fight and win in order to overcome the current era of polarised, divisive politics. The assemblages of the ultranationalist-sovereigntist right must be broken before reaching critical mass, political coherence and radicalising momentum once again. Reaching across the divides, engaging with the banal fundamentals of common sense so as to cultivate wider circles of empathy that unlock alternative ways of thinking about and living in the world, requires a long and patient game against "banal" nationalism and sovereigntism, against what makes them so easily accessible and comforting for large sections of society, against what and who normalises them as the default way of thinking and being in the world.

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CHAPTER 7

WHY CALLING THE FAR RIGHT (AND THE LEFT) "POPULIST" IS A BAD IDEA, AND WHY IT IS DONE*

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THIS CHAPTER ORIGINATED in my general dissatisfaction with the disorderly proliferation of the concept "populism" – especially the ways it has been encroaching on my main field, contentious politics. Nowadays, "populism" is not just Orbán or Corbyn, it is also the Arab Spring, "Occupy Wall Street", it is practically every social movement and every popular mobilization. Trying to articulate my criticism amid the massive literature, I realised that I had to go a long way back in order to examine the cognitive-normative motives of extant conceptualisations.

"Concepts," wrote Cambridge physicist George Thomson (1961, p. 4), "are ideas which receive names. They determine the questions one asks, and the answers one gets." When nowadays, increasingly, we use the term "populism", what is it exactly that we have in mind? What sorts of "ideas" does this concept implement, and how does it purport to do it? The question is crucial, for, whether we realise it or not, when we engage in concept-building, we implement *notions of reality* that we hold: mental images of the entities, events or phenomena we deem noteworthy. And this is precisely where normative convictions, ideological beliefs and value systems enter the picture – as the factors determining which "realities" are to be perceived and analysed, and for what purpose.

But the relationship between the two (concept-informing norms and concept-prescribed observables) is bi-directional. If values determine the empirical reality that a concept delimits as significant, it is also possible to work our way backwards: from the guided observables to the guiding values. The point, of course, is not to *judge* these values; the way our disciplines have evolved is a far cry from the vision of a phronetic social science (as Aristotle would prefer), one that would have organically incorporated systematic evaluation of different value claims (Flyvbjerg, 2001). *Wertfreiheit*, value-neutrality ("freedom from values") is – correctly – considered to be among the defining properties of science and this obliges us to abstain from a value-laden perspective.

We *are* entitled, however, to enquire, first, about the identity of the normative goals that inform a concept and, second, whether these are served by the concept adopted. We seldom think of it along those lines, but the latter is precisely the meaning of the Weberian *Wertrationalität*: rationality in accordance with moral imperatives, or value rationality. To illustrate with a simple example, to come up with the concept "bridge" indicates conceiving the need to cross over a river (val-

ue) which, in turn, can be judged as a conceptualisation perfectly rational in terms of this intended goal (crossing the river).

But this is not all we need to check. For, as we pass from the ideational realm to that of empirical reality (from the pure declaration of a meaning to the challenges of denotative adequacy), the concept – in our example "bridge" – would have to include mention of all those elements/properties that are required for the concept to perform successfully in the real word: things such the appropriate materials and construction procedures, safety guidelines, perhaps even the bridge's suitable location. Assessing whether this is the case is the domain of *Zweckrationalität*, of *practical* or *technical rationality*. This requirement of practical efficacy remains – *mutatits mutandis* – if, instead of "bridge", the concept in question is "populism" (or "democracy" or the "radical left"). Aspiring to capture complex realities, such concepts must be connotatively unequivocal, and denotatively adequate so that they can be conducive to sound, cognitively cumulative research. The argument visualised in Figure 1 indicates the two – plus one – controls or assessments we need to be applying not just for "populism" but – I would suggest – for all concepts:

- V-C: the *Wertrationalität*, the normative assessment, the operative question being *Does the concept adequately implement the notion(s) from which it emanates*?
- C-R: the *Zweckrationalität*, the practical or technical assessment, enquiring *Does the concept help us produce sound research – capable of discerning distinct phenomena en route to cognitively cumulative and analytically significant results*?

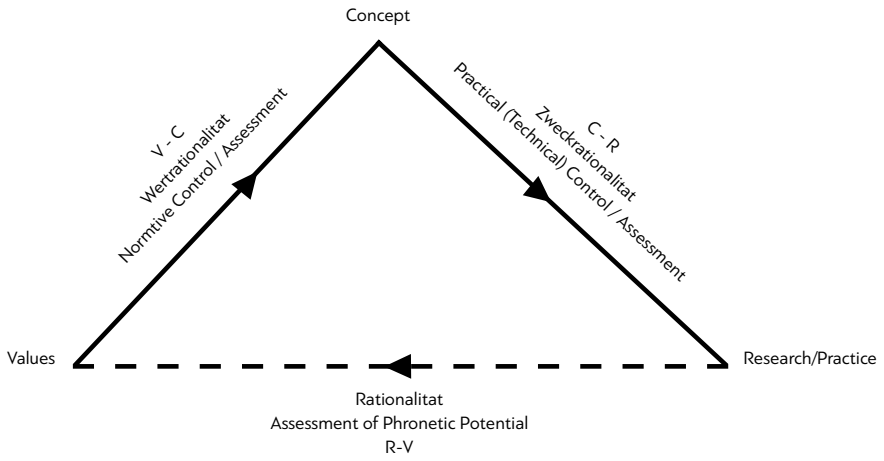
The dotted line at the bottom (R-V: *Rationalität*: assessment of phronetic potential), finally, indicates

- the – hitherto unrealised (hence the line is dotted) – vision of a phronetic social science, the assessment question being *Is the cognitive result of our research sufficiently robust to help us revisit and/or re-assess the values from which we start off*?

There is no denying, of course, that attempting to address extant conceptualisations' normative underpinnings is both risky and – bound to be – controversial. After all, it is something we seldom do (or know how to do) in contemporary social science – the result being the multiplication of patently normative conceptualisations falsely pretending *Wertfreiheit* qualities they clearly lack. All the same (and perhaps precisely for this reason), it is important and cognitively fruitful to endeavour to do it, especially for the politically charged concept(s) this chapter examines.

In this connection, it is also important to remind ourselves of the Weberian notion of *Wertbeziehung*, value relevance. In their comprehensive and incisive overview of Weber's corpus, Richard Swedberg and Ola Agevall (2005, p. 180) put

Figure 1. Values, concepts, research (and phronetic social science)



the matter very succinctly: "Every part of reality that seems deeply meaningful to us [argued Weber] is deeply meaningful because of its relationship to values". In the same vein, Robert Merton observed that the key factor determining the problems that scientists choose to study are the dominant values and interests of the day. In the same vein, Merton observed that the key factor determining the selection of problems scientists make are the dominant values and interests of the day. Relatedly, the Weberian *Wertbeziehung* "suggests that different social locations, with their distinctive interests and values, will affect the selection of problems for investigation [along with their apposite conceptualisations]" (Merton, 1996, p. 248). In short, the task of assessing the values that motivate concepts is not only legitimate, but it may also be a requirement or a prerequisite of serious theorising. So much is at least claimed by Sartori (1984, p. 152), who argued that a properly conceived social science, besides having to "separate judgements of fact from judgements of value...[and] comply to rules of impartiality", also requires from the scholar "to make [his/her] ...values explicit".

Bearing in mind the nature of the controls that need to be applied (the normative and the practical), this chapter sets out to map existing conceptualisations of "populism". I will suggest that, contrary to what is often assumed, there exist two normative, value-laden motives behind extant conceptualisations (one abhorring "populism" as a threat to pluralism and democracy, and one explicitly welcoming it as a "democratic corrective" with a transformative potential), and two major conceptualisations, one seeing it as the "moralising pitting of an innocuous people against a sinister elite" (a conceptualisation which, henceforth, I will be calling

"Manichean"), and another approaching it as "a sinister plot by personalistic leaders against a largely unorganised social base for the purpose of capturing and exercising power" (henceforth, the "strategic" conceptualisation). But the underlying normative prerequisites and implications intersect. Authors who think of populism as a potential blessing share the same conceptualisation with their normative adversaries, and the obverse: scholars who agree in thinking of it as a threat have fundamental disagreements in terms of the overarching concept.

Performing the normative control as described above, I find the Manichean varieties to be quite effective (which is not the case for the "strategic" approach). Although this may appear ironic, I claim that, despite their starting off from – and seeking to implement – different normative and cognitive goals, Manichean "populism" turns out to serve both those conceiving it as a promise as well as those who envision it as a threat. Things turn invariably sour, however, when we pass to the technical control: the situation here is extremely problematic – which makes me attempt to formulate an alternative conceptualisation, one that will not be just another assertion, but the product of elaborate conceptual reconstruction.

The best way to proceed is to apply the *per genus et differentiam* method: identifying, first, the genus under which authors subsume "populism" and, second, the criteria (the *differentiae specificae*) on the basis of which they delimit it as a concrete instance of that genus.

POPULISM, THE CONCEPT: GENERA AND DIFFERENTIAE

In their *Oxford Handbook of Populism*, editors Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul A. Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy (2017) identify three major conceptualisations and corresponding approaches: the "ideational", the "strategic" and the "cultural". Let us briefly examine what they consist of.

Introducing the "ideational" variety, Cas Mudde (2017, p. 29) moves to incorporate a number of similar conceptualisations in the following overarching definition: "Populism," he claims, is a "[thin] ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale."

Mudde's take on the issue is encompassing but also bold, as he is surely aware of other similar conceptualisations at the genus level – things like "populism" as "a type of political discourse" (Laclau, 2005; Howarth, 2005; Stavrakakis, 2004); as a "mode of identification" (Panizza, 2005); or as a "frame" (Aslanidis, 2015). All the same, he successfully subsumes them under his, because much as we may try to discover the cognitive significance of a protracted debate over whether "populism" is an ideology, a discourse or a general political style, the likelihood is that we will be disappointed. No matter which characterisation we choose, we would still be conceiving it as a discursive (hence ideational) construct.

My claim that "discursive modality" adequately captures the genus most au-

thors have in mind when thinking of "populism" may at first sight appear inaccurate when we examine the "strategic" approach suggested by Kurt Weyland (2017, p. 50), who argued that "populism" is "a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks, or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers".

Weyland's definition is clearly different from Mudde's, but this is due to the *differentia specifica* he adopts (to which I will return), not so much due to his account of the genus. After all, to acquire their real-life dimensions, personalistic strategies and opportunist endeavours too must be articulated in discourse. To so argue, however, is not to overlook that a major element in Weyland's approach is his claim that "populism" is not something one says, but something one does (2017, p. 54).

The "cultural" approach formulated by Ostiguy, finally, suggests that "populism" is "the antagonistic, mobilizational flaunting of the "low" – consisting in utterances that are hostile to the culturally elaborate (and nefarious) "high" and, hence, deliberately "improper" with an eye to provoke and shock (2017, pp. 73–77). Although pitched at a level of abstraction higher than that with which Mudde operates, it is fairly obvious that for Ostiguy, too, "populism" is a particular variety of discourse. To fully grasp the intellectual significance of these definitions, however, it is necessary to carefully examine the *differentiae specificae* they propose. Considering the literature's staggering size, it is surprising to realise that, for what really matters, there exist just two basic sets of criteria used to delimit "populism" as a species of the genus.

The first, by far the dominant, is that "populism" – in speech or action, word or deed, as thin ideology, or as a frame – exists when someone invokes an all-encompassing, Manichean notion of the "ethically good" (or "pure") "people" against the "corrupt elite", with an eye to pitting the former against the latter. There is no denying, of course, that different authors stress different aspects of this main theme. Mudde, for instance, highlights the moral underpinnings of the construct, along with the idea that all populist invocations, malleable and ideologically "thin" as they are, claim that "the people" are both homogeneous and capable of restoring the tarnished "general will"; Ostiguy for his part, emphasises the affectual nature of the populist idiom as well as its cultural embeddedness and "relational" character (the view that, besides the populist supply of the "low", there is also a high demand for it); while authors in the spirit of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and the Essex school underscore that "populism" principally involves the construction of "chains of equivalence" (the attribution of homogenising similarity to social strata that may otherwise be heterogeneous) en route to the formation of an antagonistic bloc distinguishing "the people" (itself an "empty signifier") from the elites – a phenomenon which may serve as a democratic corrective. These are important dimensions, the theoretical appraisal, questioning and adjudication of which fuelled constant debates in the literature. The fact remains, however, that, differences in emphases

notwithstanding, they all share the same *differentia specifica*: the pitting of a homogeneous and virtuous people against the equally homogeneous (and corrupt) elites.

The second, qualitatively different, criterion is proposed by the "strategic" approach. For scholars in this line of thinking, what makes "populism" a worthwhile concept is not the discursive construction of two homogeneous antagonistic blocs, but an element of domination: *control*. Among all other comparable phenomena and concepts inside the genus, the feature distinguishing "populism" is that it calls attention to a conscious project which opportunistic and personalistic leaders carry out in word and, more importantly, in deed: to attain and/or exercise power by politically exploiting unorganised followers.

Authors who share this perspective such as, most notably, Roberts (2015) have noticed that, as a consequence of these top-down linkages, there emerges a distinctively "plebiscitary" political subjectivity, called on to ratify but never to help formulate political projects. It also merits attention that, although the strategic scholars do not mention it, the *differentia specifica* they pick echoes the one adopted by the late Peter Mair (2000, p. 33) in his classic article "Partyless Democracy", where specific mention is made of the strong association existing between "populism" and the organisational plebiscitarianism that is the landmark of all cartel parties, such as the Blairite New Labour to which Mair specifically refers (see also Mair, 2002).This is why, while they purport to interpret the "general will", these leaders engage in stratagems such as the abolition of intermediary institutions (between leadership and rank and file) which could impede the schemes they have devised.

But it is time to compare the performance of these approaches, beginning with their value-rationality. This requires us to determine first the normative motives that guide the concepts adopted.

NORMATIVE-COGNITIVE UNDERPINNINGS AND THE WERTRATIONALITÄT CONTROL (V-C)

Although seldom mentioned in the literature, it is not difficult to detect two drastically different attitudes or normative predispositions among the scholars who approach "populism" in a Manichean fashion. Epitomised by the writings of people like Hanspeter Kriesi and Takis Pappas (2015), Paris Aslanidis (2015, 2016), but also by the original formulations of Mudde (2004) and jointly with Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2012) as well as Ostiguy (2009), the first predisposition is characterised by

(a) its thinly disguised – sometimes perspicuous, sometimes evanescent – reproach and condescendence towards discourses that promote the joining together of subaltern populations and/or the construction of akin subjectivities. In this vein, all calls to transformative collective action are derided as "melodramatic", while both the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite" are placed in quotation marks

– implying that neither the people can ever be pure nor the elite corrupt (they are on the contrary "constitutional", "responsible", "serious" – without, of course, any quotation marks); and

(b) the suggestion – sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit – that the contentious mobilisation of the "people" constitutes a major threat to democracy. According to Rosanvallon (2008, p. 265) it is, indeed, "a perverse inversion of the ideals and procedures of democracy" which has to be resisted, since it involves a rejection of pluralism and constitutional guarantees: it is "the opposite of diversity, tolerance and plurality in politics" (Finchelstein, 2017, p. 173); it undermines human rights (Muis & van Troost, 2015), as well as "civic responsibility and participation within the framework of representative institutions" (Gerodimos, 2015, p. 623), invariably breeding ochlocracy, even the menace of totalitarian politics (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Müller, 2017).

Whereas item (a) is universally encompassing and cynically moralising in tone (perfectly antipodal to the "populist moralising" these authors seek to expose) and refers to all the "populist" varieties, item (b) is, for the most part, directed at the extreme right which constructs subjectivities on the basis of exclusionary appeals to the "nation" – a "horizontal" perspective that conceives nationality on the basis of *jus sanguinis* (see, e.g., Bevelander & Wodak, 2019). To the extent, however, that – as species of the same genus – both versions are construed as "populisms", the door remains open for a similar anxiety to appear for the "vertical" left-wing variety (which appeals to the social underdogs) as well. Although the "right-wing populists" constitute a more immediate and tangible threat to democracy, their "left-wing" counterparts are also part of the same picture: as agents who invoke the "sovereign people" par excellence (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Muro, 2017), "left-wing populists" tend to construe the elites as a "political caste" (Ivaldi et al., 2017); do not respect international law (Schwöbel-Patel, 2018); and are characterised by intuitional impatience and recklessness (Müller, 2017). Writing in this spirit, Brubaker (2017, p. 363) expressed the fear that – perhaps despite appearances – the "vertical opposition to those on top" (left-wing "populism") and the "horizontal opposition to outside groups or forces" (right-wing "populism") are connected by a "tight discursive interweaving". As he waxed with evident normative anxiety,

> how did we reach the point at which Brexit, Trump, Hofer, and Le Pen – but also Sanders, Mélenchon, Syriza, and the 2015 Greek referendum rejecting the terms of further bailouts – all had a real chance of victory, and the Eurozone and Schengen system of free movement a real chance of collapsing, at around the same time? (p. 368)

What is very telling, however, is that authors in this tradition have very little to say about the state of democracy in the era of capitalist crisis. A detailed scrutiny of this kind of literature is unlikely to turn up any mention of the economic cri-

sis engulfing all political processes, with either very fleeting acknowledgements that something may be amiss in the way representative institutions have been functioning lately or, incredibly, no mention of this at all. It is quite evident that for these scholars the problem is hardly phenomena such as rising inequalities, shrinking social and political rights, unaccountable executives, etc., but, rather, the massive responses that the crisis has provoked. It can be safely concluded, then, that the principal normative imperative guiding and inspiring this scholarship's conceptual and empirical work is the neoconservative *defence of post-democracy*. Much unnecessary convolution could be avoided, and far more interesting debates could have been produced (enhancing the status of contemporary social science) if they had candidly admitted it.

This, however, does not seem to be the case. In trying to project a normatively moderate persona (a fine example of how normative predispositions are concealed), Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017, p. 81), for instance, have recently combined several logical fallacies in one to claim that, although "populism is essentially democratic", it nonetheless rejects "minority rights as well as the "institutional guarantees" that should protect them". One, however, cannot go without the other, and the same also goes for contraptions such as the notion of "populism" as "democratic illiberalism", introduced by Pappas (2016) – an author championing the combination of logical non sequiturs and fallacies shielded behind a highly pretentious methodological idiom.

Be that as it may, the point remains that for anyone following the pertinent debates in this – methodologically unsuspecting – literature, as well as the way this conception of "populism" has permeated the public sphere, there is absolutely no doubt that, in terms of its *Wertrationalität* (our V-C control), the choice is absolutely brilliant. And the principal reason is that the "cat-dog concept" it concocts (Sartori, 1991) effectively delegitimises all serious criticism of post-democracy: If the normative imperative is to defend post-democracy (conveniently termed sometimes "liberal or pluralist democracy", sometimes "constitutional order"), insisting that the far-right and neo-Nazi reaction, on the one hand, and grassroots initiatives, social movements and left-wing parties, on the other, belong to the same class ("populism"), effects the cognitive delegitimation of any and all criticism to post-democracy. If the 99% slogan of "Occupy Wall Street" can be likened to Hungary's Orbán and the Greek neo-Nazis, then every reader and every citizen has an obligation to defend this battered post-democracy, no further questions asked.

But in suggesting this – normatively effective but methodologically unpalatable – lumping together of social movements with the far right and neo-Nazism, the neoconservative Manicheans do not just delegitimise the former, they also absolve the latter. Authors such as Decker (2003) and Muis & Immerzeel (2017) have in fact, wondered whether "right-wing populist parties and movements" may indeed function as a democratic corrective. That this notion arises associatively (and perhaps involuntarily) does not diminish its materiality, so the point needs to be emphasised.

Drawn into the frenzy – or perhaps even bliss – of collating democratic deepening projects with their direct adversaries (the far right) as a means of promoting their normative goal (defence of post-democracy), neoconservative Manicheans overlook the fact that this dilutes (if not completely annuls) the historically accumulated negative connotations of the "far right" (Rydren, 2017). Whereas "far right" connotes ontological racism, the organic links with big capital (Pool, 1997; Kruse, 2016) and obsessive coerciveness, the principal association "right-wing populism" has is "appeals to the people" and Euroscepticism (see, e.g., Ayhan, 2018; Halikiopoulou et al., 2012; Poli, 2016). In view of this, it is hardly surprising that leaders such as Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini take pride in their "populist" identity (Zúquete, 2019, pp. 416–417).

This problem is rarely discussed in the literature, but the neoconservative Manicheans need to ask themselves: Could it be that their uncritical embrace of contemporary institutional arrangements normatively undermines democracy?

But within the Manichean conceptual universe, there is also a second normative stance, reflected in the work of the Essex school. Unlike their conceptual brethren, scholars in this tradition have been keen to highlight the problematic areas of neoliberal democracy and sensitise their readership to the potentially beneficial aspects of "left-wing populism" as a democratic corrective. The school's father figure, the late Ernesto Laclau (2005), along with, more recently, Mouffe (2018) have, in fact, gone so far as to suggest that this "left-wing" version of populism is, in fact, a promising strategy – if not *the most* promising strategy – for the left; one that can transform and revitalise its internal dynamics, allowing it to decisively defeat neoliberal orthodoxy. As Mouffe's 2018 article dedicated to the experience and trajectory of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour is as good an example as any of this approach's main cognitive coordinates (and normative intentions), it is worth reviewing it in some detail.

Couched in an – unnecessarily – philosophising language, Mouffe suggests that what gave Corbyn's Labour its original boost was that it promoted a new "agonistic debate". So far so good. But what were these – allegedly "new" – elements? They were "the renationalisation of public services such as the railways, energy, water and the postal service, the halting of the privatisation of the National Health Service (NHS) and the school system, the abolition of university tuition fees and the significant increase in social subsidies". Mention is also made of the intent to "empower citizens to take part in the management of public services"; the desire "to build links with social movements"; and its general orientation to uphold the goal of "equality" versus the ill-conceived "liberty" of an all-encompassing and domineering market. One wonders, of course, why any of this is fundamentally different from what the left has traditionally advocated. The answer Mouffe and the Essex school provide is that this new "populist" left establishes "chains of equivalence between different democratic subjects across [...] society".

The argument, however, is utterly spurious. Historical research, especially in the context of the "linguistic turn" in social history, has amply demonstrated that the first mass parties of the left did not address some monolithic "working class" but a wide variety of "popular classes" – establishing the sorts of "equivalences" the Essex school considers to be benevolently "populist" populist" (see, especially, Joyce, 1991, 1994; Reddy, 1987; Stedman Jones, 1983). But this is very consequential. Although widespread methodological glibness typically precludes identification of this practice, what this conceptualisation does is to stipulate a synonymy – *two words for one meaning* – between "left-wing populism" and the left. Since the stipulation of synonymies is one of the main mechanisms through which collective ambiguity is manufactured in the social sciences, it is worth noting something that Sartori (1984, pp. 38–39) stressed in his methodological writings – elevating it, moreover, to the status of a cardinal rule: "Awaiting contrary proof, no word should be used as a synonym for another word." In the absence of such proof, synonymies "unsettle, without resettling, the semantic field to which the stipulation belongs".

To wit, if – following the Essex school – we call Corbyn's Labour (but also Syriza, Podemos and other similar parties and social movements) "populist", how are we to think of and what are we to call the "left", let alone the "radical left"? But reducing "the left" to "populism" has the additional shortcoming of whimsically annulling perfectly valid historic characterisations of strands *within* the left – such as "revolutionism", "reformism", "anarchism" and several others. Considering that all these tendencies in one way or another portray the "people" as "exploited", "dominated" or "oppressed", one fears that this approach threatens us with a cognitive regression to an unbearably abstract generality. The question then arises: *Why is this done?* Which requires that we infer the normative motives behind the conceptualisations in question.

In the above-cited article, Mouffe refers to several new radical left parties and social movements, but what is stunningly absent from her treatment is the party which, employing such discourse and organisational practices, managed to come to power: Syriza. The reason for this absence is glaringly evident: Syriza is the living proof of this strategy's utter failure – precisely the opposite of what Mouffe suggests.

This experience is so theoretically telling because, despite its unquestionable social-movement origins and early characteristics, Syriza subsequently became thoroughly cartelised at a pace which, in terms of its swiftness, may have been historically unprecedented. Coming to power in January 2015, and only after seven short months of haphazard negotiations with the troika institutions (conducted mostly behind the backs of the party organs), the party

- capitulated to the neoliberal template,
- reneged on its electoral pledge to end austerity, and crowned the act with the referendum of 5 July 2015 when, overnight, the leading group around

party leader Alexis Tsipras turned a massive defiant 61.3% "No" against the troika proposals into a compliant "Yes", in a move that was ridiculed internationally as "the Greek concept *kolotumba*". As Claudi Pérez put in in a piece in *El Pais* (on 11 October 2017),

> [k]olotumba is a Greek political concept that means a 180-degree turn. Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras made it globally famous after calling for a referendum on the salvation [*rescate*] of his country, only to do the exact opposite of what the people wanted.

- Days later, on 12 July, Tsipras proceeded to sign a third austerity bailout programme which, quite unsurprisingly, provoked a split in the party.

It is thus possible to conclude that the normative motive guiding it is defence of a particular political strategy, the one epitomised by Syriza and other like-minded parties. Despite their intense theoretical idiom, when upholding their notion of "populism", Laclau and disciples actually tell us very little about the specific nature – the distinctive merits but, more importantly, the eye-catching defects – of this strategy. It is nonetheless crucial to stress (a) that the phenomenon is not at all new or distinctive; and (b) that there exist far more cognisant ways to describe the strategy in question: it is, plain and simple, "reformism" – the old ideology of the Second International, according to which robust and lasting social change can be effected through a protractedly centripetal class-collaborationist *Burgfriedenspolitik* or, simply, by playing by the rules of the game. *This* is the defining feature of the strategy Laclau and Mouffe have in mind rather than the theoretically and empirically bland characteristic "comprehensive antagonistic appeals" or "establishment of equivalence chains". For the sake of simplicity, and also to account for the temporal dimension involved in phenomena such as Syriza, the Podemos and La France Insoumise, we may just call it "new reformism".

But if, as I claim, these scholars' underlying normative-cognitive motive (conscious or unconscious) is the historical and contemporary salvaging of this strategy, the *Wertrationalität* of their choice is impeccable. All that one needs to do to be convinced is to ponder the consequences. If the left is reduced to "establishing chains of equivalence among subaltern populations", then new reformism as "populism" is (a) credited with an undeservedly universal valence; (b) becomes sort of a TINA for the left; and (c) quenches – in fact, cognitively delegitimises – all debate about different strategies' merits and shortcomings.

It is also important to highlight an additional dimension, which in a way is symmetrical to what was previously argued about the moral absolving of the far right effected by the neoconservative concept. By stipulating a synonymy between "left populism" and the left, the Essex school scholars commit a similar blunder, albeit through a different path. The post-Marxist diffusion of core left connotations, such as the struggle of the working class against capital, into the vaguely defined "peo-

ple" or "common man in the street" (Berbuir et al., 2015, p. 156), sets the grounds for the appropriation of these demands by far-right nationalism (Collovald, 2004; Fassin, 2020). As a result, when, nowadays, we say "people" and/or the "working class", the typical connotation is "rule of the mob" (Mondon, 2017): masses enchanted by the likes of Ukip, Orbán and Marine Le Pen. The "people" – not as an amplification but as a substitute of the "working class" – thus becomes an organic element of the "nationalist reactionary wave" that reflects and condenses the "fears of the masses"; a state of affairs further aggravated by the extreme post-foundational constructivism of the discourse-theoretical perspective (see, e.g., Palonen, 2018). None of this is, of course, what Laclau and his disciples intended, but the problem remains and the Essex scholars must immediately consider it: Could it be that, instead of amplifying the appeal to the subaltern, constructs such as "empty signifier", "chains of equivalence", etc., in fact dilute and distort it? Could it be that the normative defence of *Burgfriedenspolitik* ends up undermining what it principally seeks to promote?

We see that, despite their diametrically opposite normative starting points and motives (defence of post-democracy and defence of new reformism), the two Manichean varieties share an impressive *Wertrationalität*. The scholars involved have indeed hit on a way to effectively promote what they hold dear normatively and deem worthwhile cognitively. But, as I will argue below, the results are precisely the opposite when examined from the perspective of their respective concepts' practical applicability prowess.

First, however, we need to consider the *Wertrationalität* of the other major conceptualisation – the "strategic". Although in their writings the authors upholding it dwell little on the precise nature of the capitalist crisis, they are both well aware of it and intensely concerned about its implications. It is also important to appreciate that the late Peter Mair (the scholar who introduced the notion of a "hollowing of western democracy") also belongs to the same tradition, as he was the one to explicitly link "populism" with phenomena of party cartelisation and the use of plebiscitarian tactics by unscrupulous leaderships. It is quite clear, then, that the normative-cognitive motive behind this conceptualisation is neither the defensive anxiety vis-à-vis post-democracy nor the promotion of new reformism as a universally valid strategy for the left. Maintaining that "populism" is not what populist leaders proclaim but what they do, the strategic approach draws our attention to plebiscitarian institutional arrangements and practices in which the rank and file are called on merely to ratify leadership decisions.

By insisting that "populism" is just strategy devised by personalistic leaders, however, scholars in this tradition narrow the potential scope of their contribution. The reason is that fixation on opportunist organisation diverts attention away from the political elements involved in the phenomenon, thereby effectively reducing it to mere organisationalism. In all fairness, Weyland admits that a populist political discourse exists, but then insists that it must be approached as an

instance of organisational imperatives. But this begs the question of what is it that causes the organisational imperative in the first place, while it also hushes over the issue of whether one is entitled to detect "populism" in the absence of such fully grown practices.

As a combined result of these shortcomings, the "populism" of the strategic approach ends up being understood merely as a manifestation of the limits of caudillo-type regimes, mostly in historical and contemporary Latin America. By contrast with the Essex school's implicit support for such regimes, this is an appreciable merit, yet it falls far short of what the strategic approach could potentially explain. Besides separating it from Mair's (2000) perspicacious suggestion that "populism" is the very political substance of all cartel parties in western European post-democracy, this feature also blinds the approach to "populist" practices among parties that lack leadership structures (or executives) that are "personalist" properly speaking. Contemporary social democracy, which Weyland (2017, p. 54) refers to as distinctly non-populist, is a case in point.

All in all, if the cognitive-normative goal is to warn against nepotism and the stunning discrepancy between words and deeds in contemporary political projects, the *Wertrationalität* of conceptualising "populism" as the personalist strategy of individual leaders seems insufficient.

But it is time to turn to these conceptualisations' performance at the practical level, examining their capacity to adequately delimit phenomena for purposes of carrying out research conducive to findings that are cognitively significant and cumulative. This is the content of my *Zweckrationalität* – C-R – control.

A NIGHTMARE OF "FINDINGS": THE ZWECKRATIONALITÄT CONTROL (C-R)

Political sociology and social science, as they have developed over the last few decades, have tended to delegitimise attempts to judge a scholar's normative-cognitive motives. A political scientist may come across data like those regularly published by Oxfam and Crédit Suisse showing that the world's eight richest billionaires together have the same wealth as the poorest half of the globe's population and think that this is quite unproblematic. Or witness such gigantic failures of political strategy as Syriza's and view it as a wise adaptation to environmental constraints. Such scholars may always defend themselves by claiming that pursuing their preferred normative-cognitive motive is their prerogative. But this defence falls away when we examine their work from the angle of its practical rationality. If demonstrating that a concept is cognitively irrelevant is not enough to undermine it, its protracted failure to contribute to sound empirical research certainly is. What is the balance sheet for the conceptualisations we have been discussing?

One may begin by enquiring what "populism" as a concept contributes to our understanding of the contemporary and historical political landscapes. Starting off with the neoconservative Manichean conception, the main prescription is that re-

search on social movements should be tied to research on the far right. Assuming that the objective is *scire per causas* – to know through causes – one rarely finds something so aptly captured by Sartori's (1991) metaphor about the cat-dog fallacy, resulting from an analytical orientation to pseudo-classes, that is, classes which, because they are conceived at a prohibitively high level of abstraction (at which far too many dissimilar ingredients are filtered out), are given a denotation that is both analytically intractable and cognitively spurious. Explanatory hypotheses that combine social movements and far-right parties may be formulated, of course, but either they will be utterly trivial (for example, of which it can be said that both phenomena emerge in times of crisis) or they will have to remain perpetually suspended. As Sartori (1991, p. 248) put it, when our concepts contain "utterly different animals", verifying explanatory hypotheses about them is practically impossible.

But the analytical impasse does not just result from this concept's cancelling out major differences on the flimsy basis of secondary, trivial similarities. Equally fatal is the ambiguity and consequent vagueness of the *differentia specifica* adopted. The idea of pitting virtuous majoritarian collectivities against malevolent minorities is so old and anthropologically rooted that the problem may not become immediately apparent. On closer scrutiny, however, one discovers that, as "appealing to the people" and identifying a sufficiently homogeneous political adversary is a standard practice of practically everyone involved in politics, one is never sure about what is really "populist", and what is not – a state of affairs bespeaking *undenotativeness*, this fatal error in concept-building.

Take, for instance, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's (2017) recent stocktaking of the literature. By my count, in this short book the authors present no less than 70 analytically bewildering varieties, in all five continents. It is quite evident, however, that the reason they can so easily manipulate their denotata (augmenting or reducing their cases at whim) is not because they really discover politicians, movements, parties, or regimes that invoke "the people" in a way that is particularly "populist", but – quite prosaically – because this fits the flow of their – underlying normative – argumentation.

The situation is not very different with the Essex school's theorists of benevolent "populism". One regularly discovers that it is being attributed or not purely on the basis of normatively charged criteria – when, for instance, the conservative position adopted by the French Communist Party during the explosion of May '68 in France, at the time justified on the grounds that it was necessary so that broad-based coalitions (one might say "chains of equivalence") would not be endangered, is described as resisting the "populist temptation" (see, e.g. Balampanidis, 2020). But as the benevolent version flows from the same core concept as the negative, this must come as no surprise. Nor is the problem solved by this school of thought's – otherwise correct – insistence that we distinguish right-wing populism from its left-wing analogue. Though this partly addresses the cat-dog of analyti-

cally combining racism and social movements, the serious problem of ambiguity and vagueness remains. Tsipras and Corbyn (as well as *both* Obama *and* Occupy Wall Street) are customarily declared more or less "populist", Luiz Ignácio Lula, or the interwar French Front Populaire are not. Well, are they? We will never know.

In terms of research, the problem with the strategic approach appears to be the obverse of what it is in the Manichean. The denotation here is not overly extensive, but unduly constrictive – relying exclusively on machinations of opportunist and personalist leaders. The problems this creates have already been highlighted, so there is no need to belabour the point much further. Insistence on the motives of personalist leaders and their internal institutional machinations limits attention to them and them only, at the expense of other research which could highlight organisational plebiscitarianism *in the absence* of such distinctly personalist leaderships. Partly because of this, the approach also tends to depoliticise the populist phenomenon, stripping it of its ideological underpinnings, making it appear as if it were the result of personal whim. Is populism caused simply by the opportunism of some individual leaders? Are there no distinctly political and ideological processes at play that merit research and analysis?

All in all, we see that, in terms of their capacity to adequately delimit "populism" in a manner that would facilitate significant research, the extant approaches fare rather poorly. What would a more adequate approach be?

SEEKING AN ALTERNATIVE: POPULISM AS POLITICAL DECEPTION

Whoever reviews the massive literature on "populism" is bound, sooner or later, to run into the writings of Nadia Urbinati (2014) – an effort to identify democratic pathologies and suggest ways of coping with them. Having identified "populism" as one such pathology, Urbinati suggests that one must distinguish between the "populist rhetoric" that often contaminates popular social movements, from "populism" properly speaking – that is, political projects seeking to reshape society according to their world-views ("populist power"). Cases in point concerning the former are the Italian Girotondi of 2002, the US "Occupy Wall Street" of 2011, and the Spanish Indignados of 2013, while the most typical instance of the latter is Hungary's Fidesz.

The reason I think Urbinati's distinction is telling, however, has nothing to do with her own depiction of the cases: she claims, for instance, that the social movements she cites projected an "anti-representative" discourse (for example in the famous Indignado slogan "¡Que no, que no, que no nos representan!") whereas it is far more reasonable to identify it with an agonistic search for institutional alternatives capable of guaranteeing genuine accountability. Even so, one can still accept her crucial distinction between "popular" and "populist": the former is genuine in its concerns and participatory intentions – seeking social justice, a deepening of democracy, and candid democratic accountability; while the latter, which

also practices an "emancipatory" discourse, in essence makes a sham of it, for its real goal is to dissolve actually existing institutional checks and balances in order to capture and exercise power.

In the same general spirit, equally telling is the notion of "artificial anti-capitalism" in the context of a broader political project of "hijacking the left", as suggested by Vassilis Petsinis (2020). The primary lexical definition of "hijacking" is "to steal, to rob, to seize", but the broader family of meanings to which it belongs is a glaring foul play. In this sense, for a political project to hijack a discourse is to claim being something that it is not.

One will surely realise the affinities that this notion has with the strategic approach's distinction between what populists say and what they actually do. "The very essence of populism," exclaimed Weyland (2017, pp. 53–54), is "the disjuncture between form and substance, style and strategy, rhetoric and reality". What is distinctive about "populism" is precisely this sinister "twist": whereas "discourse implicitly depicts populism as a bottom-up mass movement, it really rests on a top-down strategy through which [...] [specific populist projects marshal] plebiscitarian support for [their own] [...] goals". What stands out is, once again, a malignant discrepancy between what is proclaimed and what is done.

Combining these three insights, and in light of my earlier criticism of extant approaches, let me now suggest my own view that "populism" is best conceived (both cognitively and practically) as *a species of the genus "discourse" that claims to be popular while it is not*.

Though, as anyone can tell, this – admittedly terse – definition is devised at a high level of abstraction, I hasten to say that this is as it should be – for, cognitively as well as practically, "populism" encapsulates a huge variety of human interactions both in the public and private sphere. As far as the less readily identifiable manifestation of populism in the private sphere is concerned, a populist performing privately is someone who, in an unscrupulously moralising fashion, taps feelings of compassion, kind-heartedness and/or care, to promote his or her self-interested motives. His/her "populism" involves of course invocation of some "suffering underdog", but the feature that renders this practice populist is its fake nature.

Moving down the ladder of abstraction, one ought to have no problem conceiving populist instances that are distinctly political. Everything that the Manichean-ideational literature (of both varieties) mentions can be of use in this connection, albeit with the proviso that what makes a discourse populist is not its pitting the subaltern against the dominant, but that it simply claims to be doing it while it does not.

It is also crucial to note that, although populism is principally a discursive recourse that is had by forces in opposition, it can also appear in power; the literature in all shapes and forms has duly made note of that. Although this does not change the overall status of the concept I am proposing, it allows us to incorporate the strategic approach's suggestion regarding the need populist formations

have to establish organisational plebiscitarianism: schemes that practically annul intermediary structures between the grassroots and the executive and establish plebiscitarian rather than participatory political subjectivities. In this connection, the case of ostensibly "radical left" parties, such as Syriza and Podemos, is worth examining, especially in light of the historically unprecedented swiftness of their transformation from allegedly "movement parties" (Della Porta et al. 2017) into fully blown cartel parties (Kotronaki 2018; Seferiades 2018). The point here is that organisational plebiscitarianism is a *consequence* of political populism: Precisely because the latter is a bogus doctrine necessitating bogus practice, all those espousing it have, sooner or later, to attempt to conceal their act by undermining the intermediary institutions that could possibly restrain them.

The same also goes for populism's tendency to depoliticise its claims, obliterate the distinction between left and right as outdated, and slide into rhetorical schemes that are crude and inchoate. Accordingly, what really distinguishes the populist invocation of "the people" is not its comprehensive character, but its vagueness; not its establishing "chains of equivalence", but its concealment of the glaring internal contradictions it contains as a discourse – the fact, for instance, that one cannot *both* promote a "favourable investment climate" for globalised capitalism *and* uphold labour rights.

One must ask, however, where does the populist impulse originate? Is it just the personal whim of opportunist leaders, or are there roots at once deeper and more political in nature? In light of our protracted failure to seriously examine, analyse and evaluate political content (discourse, ideology and strategy), it comes as no surprise that nowadays we find ourselves at a loss when it comes to assessing different political projects. If we begin to do this, however, we will discover that historically speaking (as well as in contemporary incarnations), populism signifies a strategy which a more traditional Marxist jargon would describe as "class collaborationism": a strategy which, although (a) nominally antagonistic, is nonetheless principally characterised by its (b) penchant to collaborate with sections of the elites (typically behind the backs of the rank and file), and by (c) excluding all the intermediaries (initiatives, movements and parties) capable of resisting such collaboration. To a large extent this also explains why, as a discourse, it is (d) internally contradictory, inchoate, and/or evasive: because, while, rhetorically, it brandishes an intent to undo privilege, in practice it seeks to share in it.

But the claim that populism comprises deceptive invocations of the popular also needs to be subjected to the value-rationality and instrumental rationality controls I have applied to all the other approaches examined.

The value-rationality control requires that the analysis I pursue clearly states its cognitive-normative motives. This is quite straightforward. Concurring with the strategic approach, I view populism as a threat: unlike the neoconservative Manichean view, however, a threat not to post-democracy but to the subaltern populations it claims to represent and whose demands and aspirations it claims

a capacity to voice. Clearly at odds with what the Essex school professes, my approach also suggests that popular movements and political initiatives must be on the alert to avoid the political template of "undoing domination without clashing with the dominant", the combination that generates populism. If this is the cognitive goal, I think that the concept I introduce adequately serves it.

Doubt is, nonetheless, bound to persist regarding the concept's performance within the instrumental rationality dimension. Can we produce sound research on its basis? Or, otherwise put, can we ascertain empirically the existence of populism as phony political opposition? My reply is that to do so we will have to rely on the – nowadays all too easily forfeited – historical control. History has witnessed several oppositional strategies claiming they could cope with their contemporary adversities – a small minority of them successful, the vast majority not. We need to tap this experience and draw the necessary conclusions. Judging them by their respective outcomes, we must be able to assess which strategy was authentically promoting the interests of those it claimed to represent and which was just a bogus facade.

Such an exercise is, of course, bound to be difficult and controversial. But it is only by undertaking it that we will be able to discover and pinpoint discourses, strategies and organisational practices that have been or are populist: that is, political projects discursively claiming to express and promote the interests of the subaltern, while in practice undermining them. Such analysis is particularly urgent for the left, especially in the context of the contemporary organic crisis of capitalism.

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CHAPTER 8

DECOLONISING/ ABOLISHING GENDER: EUGENICS, SEXUALITY AND APHRODISIA ETHICS IN (POST) MODERNITY (GREECE)

→ **Demetra Tzanaki**

IN HER WORK "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System", María Lugones proposes reading Western coloniality through gender. However, this was not a call to add a gendered reading and a racial reading to the already understood colonial relations, but, "more importantly to understand the construction of this [the indifference of men who have been racialised as inferior] to the systematic violence upon women of colour" (2007, p. 1) that accompanies the dehumanization of life (Lugones, 2010). Furthermore, in "Toward a Decolonial Feminism" (2010), Lugones, in the midst of a critique of feminist universalism that focuses on the claim that the intersections of race, class, sexuality and gender transcend the categories of modernity, suggested the reintroduction of black women, in order to understand how gender ultimately shapes the boundaries beyond which life is perceived as non-human. With this backdrop, gender constructs the boundary of this dehumanisation and, consequently, contributes to indifference towards violence against other genders. However, from now on, I will refer to binary sex, as the term gender originated much later, as we will see, in order to understand this genealogy and how we transition from sex to gender within the framework of eugenic Western biomedical discourse. By taking this, what I am arguing further is to introduce "black" (nonbinary) sex, thus, through a trans-intersex-black feminist lens, thereby moving beyond the categorical logic of white binary sex and stable notions of nature and human life as a species. Because what is being persecuted behind black women and women from the masses beyond and within European societies, I argue, is their "negro" non-patriarchal-effeminate nature, which reflects their ability to follow their desire for self-identification under the principle that nature is ecumenical and without taxonomisation. There exists a border of whiteness that, when crossed, causes a life to lose its value as human in Western civilisation. This leads to persecution against the effeminate (Negros or intersex) *bios,* body, truth and memory, both with and beyond the West. This means transcending the "categorical" logic of whiteness and understanding a war against a species of uncivilised, unethical androgynous-gynandrous *bios,* truth, and knowledge. Therefore, when I speak of binary sex, I am ultimately referring to a hegemonic colonial interpretation of (human) nature, body, memory, truth, desire, sex and sexuality, based on the white concept of an ecumenical biological truth of nature that must be imposed on humans as a species for the sake of mankind's eternity and heritage. However, I also refer to ethics as, in Aristotle's terms, binary

sex is the only natural sex. This means that only the free male Athenian had the capacity to live a life that aligned with one's values, desires and consciousness, emphasising autonomy and self-determination, while allowing for the subservience of all other lives. With this line of thinking and in alignment with Michel Foucault's concept presented in *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, I explore how aphrodisia ethics – that is, a *ορθός* intentional work of an individual on itself to subject itself to a set of moral recommendations for conduct according to a passive or active sociosexual self – remains the ethical substance for Christian and, ultimately, modern sexual ethics and finally on what came to be called binary sex as the latter was regarded as the only *ορθό sex*. Thus, in the sense that, as George Canguilhem defines it, "the Latin word *norma* which, etymologically speaking, bears the weight of the initial meaning of the terms 'norms' and 'normal' is the equivalent of the Greek orthos" (1966, p. 244). Thus, as orthography, orthodoxy, orthopaedics and orthophrenics, I speak also of the coloniality of science, referring to the control and management of knowledge and mores by Eurocentrism and international capitalism-patriarchal norms, as they were imposed through *ορθός* Christian binary sex and thus a continuous taxonomy of life into active (civilised masculinity) and effeminate passive (savagism, animal, slave, masses, feeble-minded, inverts, morally insane, poor, children), both within and beyond the West, after the abolition of slavery (1865) and the Paris Commune (1871). Within this backdrop, the analysis of this article is structured along three primary axes. First, I seek to demonstrate how the ancient ethics of caring for oneself (aphrodisia ethics) entered Christian times and how modernity perceives it in relation to judicial science – forensic medicine (1602) and thus part of scientific Western discourses in modernity. Second, I explore how aphrodisia ethics served as the framework for *puériculture* (a French term for eugenics) and eugenics by introducing an international moral eugenic discourse of patriarchal binary sex and heterosexuality as the mechanism that we imposed on ourselves after the "Peace" of Lausanne (1923) and the new world of the nation-state. That is, through homogeneous and colonial white scientific, ethical relations against the immorality of the delinquent effeminate feeble-minded "morally hermaphrodite" (human) nature for the sake of immunity and eternity. Finally, within the third axis, in brief, I try to show how, after World War II, a global *ορθός*, morally eugenic science of (social) sex, that is, gender, was a way to rationalise and perpetuate Western white dominance. This was accomplished through a set of homogeneous and standardised moral recommendations against androgynous bios, aimed at the domestication of the masses into obedient social beings. It also served as a strategy to combat communism, as we will see.

1.1 APHRODISIA ETHICS

Naturally, men were free of white Christian Western upper-class men and women, "but women made up only one element of a much larger group that was some-

times referred to as a way of designating the objects of possible pleasure: 'women, boys, slaves'" (Foucault, 1990, p. 47). Foucault (2021) explains that Greeks contemplated questions of sexual behaviour through the lens of two primary factors: "the first is quantitative; it has to do with the degree of activity that is shown by the number and frequency of acts" (p. 44). The second is "a lack of self-restraint with regard to pleasure (akrateia hêdonës)" (p. 45). Foucault argues that this lack of restraint, for Plato, should not be considered the result but rather the effect "of a sickness of the body" (p. 45). Therefore, self-restraint is a prerequisite for free male Athenians. The question of the *kairos* and the *logos* incorporated a code that would later play a substantial role "in the crystallisation of 'that' morality" (p. 49). Furthermore, Aphrodisia introduced a division between two poles (Foucault, 1990, p. 46). It denoted aphrodisiazein, aligning with the so-called "masculine" (active) role in sexual intercourse, characterised by penetration, and on the opposite was its passive form aphrodisiasthënai (p. 46), involving individuals as object-partners: "women, boys, slaves" (p. 47). This division sets apart two clearly distinguishable poles: "that of the subject and that of the object", as Aristotle says, "the female, as female, is passive, and the male, as male, is active" (p. 46). As a result, "the ethical question that was then raised was an ontology of a force that linked together acts, pleasures, and desires" (p. 43) between active actors and object-partners (p. 47), while reproduction requires complementary female and male functionality. Restraint ought to be the primary variable in ethical considerations, and "in addition to the 'quantity of activity' criterion" (p. 47), the secondary variable "was the question of remaining in one's role or abandoning it, being the subject of the activity or its object, joining those who underwent it – even if one was a man – or remaining with those who actively performed it. Moreover, aphrodisia implied an ethical code that every individual had to obey, not as a universal law but rather as a principle of "stylisation of sexual conduct" (p. 36). This code is, according to Aristotle, the telos of the sexes. In addition,

> [W]hat then was the telos of the sexes? Aristotle explained that by definition mortal organisms cannot live forever, and yet all things strive for continued existence. Their only chance at immortality is through the survival of their offspring, which necessitates reproduction of the self and, in higher animals, sexual difference. [...] The male – who was active and spiritually elevated – was in all ways better than the female – who was passive and yoked to the lower realms of matter (DeVun 2021, p. 107).

Through this logic, a narrative of sociosexual isomorphism is created, which recommends that positions be proportional to one's nature, between male and female, active and passive, or human and animal; essentially, nature does not make leaps. In brief, femininity is not anatomically an inversion of masculinity, as Thomas Laqueur tells us and has been criticised for that (Park & Nye, 1991) in the sense that we cannot speak in terms of anatomy before the 18th century (Repo, 2015,

p. 12). Instead, femininity means an inferior species – in terms of passivity. What happens, however, if the free Athenian behaves in terms of passiveness? He will undoubtedly be avenged, which is effeminate. This represents the subversion of nature, represented by the result of patho(s)logy. Thus, the ethics of aphrodisia come to serve marriage and procreation, reproducing an entire discourse of the taxonomy of life as active and passive as an order of nature as well as a continuous ethical practice to sustain each individual's sociosexual status, that is, passive or active. Otherwise, individuals perform poorly, causing pathology. On the other hand, this ethics, which is nothing else but mankind's ethics, pass through the teachings of the Christian Fathers. Augustine of Hippo (354–430), in his work, *The City of God*, counters the contemporary heresy of Pelagianism and the belief that all humans are free from sin. He argues instead that humanity is called to eradicate the sin of Eve. For Augustine, binary sex is God's will and, thus, this is the order of nature. It is within this line of thinking that the terms libido, perversion and Hermaphroditus are introduced as abnormalities while developing a tekhnê for the survival of Christianity through the ethics of Christian binary sex (DeVun, 2021) and sociosexual isomorphism (Foucault, 2017, p. 80). Any disobedience, such as androgynous bios and sodomy is considered heresy and contrary to Christian nature (Tzanaki, 2023, pp. 53-58). Moreover, it delineates the line between the primitive-feral "hermaphroditic" "sodomising" races and the Christian ethical white race. This narrative is illustrated in a medieval world map called the Hereford Mappa Mundi, as Leah de Vun (2021) had previously described (p. 12).

1.2. FROM THE *HERFORD MAPPA MUNDI* TO *FORENSIC APHRODISIOLOGIA*

Within the confines of a single sheet of vellum measuring 158 x 133 cm and dating from the 12th century, the Hereford Mappa Mundi depicts the known world of that era. Notably, on the edges where Asia and Africa are supposed to be positioned, the map portrays their people as hypersexual and physically distinct (monsters) from the inhabitants of the Christian kingdoms, who are presented with binary sexes (DeVun, 2021, p. 12). Moreover, in featuring a turbaned non-European hermaphrodite figure, this map serves as an example of how binary sex is identified with Christianity. In parallel, the 13th-century Montpellier-based physician Arnold of Villanova "claimed that 'black men' were uncivilised and perverse, driven to engage in sexual intercourse with any partner, 'regardless of sex, age, or species'" (DeVun, 2021, p. 104). In this sense, the idea of Christian binary sex fell well within a whole range of explanations of pathology, especially after the spread of syphilis in Europe. It is against narratives that wanted sexual acts to be inseparable from pathology (Foucault, 2017, p. 79); as the English sexologist Havelock Ellis explains, pathos for the ancient Greeks signified the cause of disease, much like syphilis (1927, p. 423) in the 16th century, which was attributed to intercourse with common libidinous women, within which hermaphroditic sex was classified

as diabolical. Concurrently, the witch hunts, as highlighted by Stefanos Milkidis (2018) in reference to Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, are exemplified by the case of Antide Collas (1599), which represents a prime example of persecution related to "diabolic" sex (p. 3). Collas was burned alive, although, as Foucault notes, this was one of the last cases in which such punishment was applied for this reason (Milkidis, 2018, p. 3). However, the breeding and imposition of binary sex as a form of domestication of the savage androgynous-gynandrous sex have been managed not only by repression but also by a judicial forensic code. Within this concept, Fortunato Fedele (1550–1630) published in 1602 his work *De relationibus medicorum libri quatuor. In quibus ea omnia, quae in forensibus, ac publicis causis medici referre solent, plenissime traduntur. Adiecto duplici indice capitum scilicet, & rerum memorabilium* [Four books on the relations of physicians. In these are most fully conveyed all those things that physicians usually report in forensic and public cases. With the addition of a double index of chapters, namely, and of notable things]. This collection of four volumes comprised what might be called forensic medicine today. However, the fourth volume, *Forensic Aphrodite* (or *Aphrodisiologia*, that is, discourses on aphrodisia), represents a fascinating legal code of aphrodisia ethics as well as the sovereignty of white mankind's power through an aphrodisia interpretation of nature, with dual purposes. First, it aims to "protect" Western morals from effeminacy through the prohibition of unnatural acts, such as sodomy. Second, *Aphrodisiologia* aims to regulate issues of virginity, impotence, pregnancy, false embryos, monsters and hereditary diseases (Andreopoulos, 1846, p. θ), according to mankind's and a stable nature's needs. In short, an entire code of sociosexual isomorphic relations, that appeared to be dictated by nature, was introduced into the judicial code for the sake of the human (nature's) survival. In other words, under the threat of pathology, (human) nature came under the control of specialists and the Western state's forensic medical and judicial *ορθός* logos, taxinomisıng (human) nature into normal and abnormal based on sexual acts and binary sex performativity. Ultimately, *Forensic Aphrodite* emerges as the judicial logic of aphrodisia ethics, ensuring that binary sex becomes the sovereign expression of sex. In addition, *Callipédia, or the Art of Breeding Beautiful Children*, was written in Latin by the physician Claude Quillet (1602–1661) and subsequently translated into English (1710, 1712, 1715, 1733, 1761, 1771); Andry's *L'orthopedie* (1749); Vandermonde's *Essai sur la manière de perfectionner l'espèce humaine* (1756); Cadogan's *An Essay upon Nursing and the Management of Children, from their Birth to Three Years of Age* (1748); Essartz's *Traité de l'education corporelle en bas âge* (1760); Balleexserd's *Dissertation sur l'Education physique des enfants* (1762); Raulin's *De la conservation des enfants* (1768); Leretz's *Hygiène des enfants* (1814); and Prevost Leygonie's *Essai sur l'education physique des enfants* (1813) (Foucault, 1988, p. 280) were nothing more than lessons of rationalising sexuality among the masses according to white-Western mankind, through ethical recommendations that merely sustained the sovereignty of binary patriarchal sex. On

the other hand, this appears to be a descriptive, historical statement of a matter of fact, namely, that, in the midst of Protestant ethics, all social ills were described as being caused by a bastardised, primitive, wild, lazy, morally androgynous-gynandrous and ultimately unevolved feral (human) and unethical nature. Thus, the Swedish Protestant botanist, zoologist and physician Carl Linnaeus portrayed himself as the second Adam in the frontispiece of his monumental work *Systema Naturae* (1735). Along with the narrative that some species are disappearing, the Linnaeus system reduced the understanding of human life to a classification of species and rationalised (human) nature in terms of a Western and white perception – primitive and modern genus. This reintroduced a narrative on binary sex as part of biological science and the taxonomy of life into species, opening the door to technologies previously applied only to animals and plants being used on humans. However, at the beginning of the 19th century, studying the human species posed challenges because scientists could not measure or taxonomise humans as easily as they could with animals and plants. The solution to this impasse came from the Protestant Belgian statistician Adolphe Quetelet (1796–1874) and the invention of normality.

1.3. PSYCHOPATHIA SEXUALIS

In the 1830s, Quetelet was inspired to develop a science for managing society using astronomical laws, as scientists believed that the only way to survival is following a rational order as imposed in astronomy. Quetelet introduced the concept of normality by using the "average man" example, where anything deviating from this average was considered abnormal. During the same era, the French zoologist Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1805–1861) classified subjects as "ambiguous" genitalia pseudohermaphrodites (since they had a "true" sex, either female or male), while those with both male and female gonads were classified as true hermaphrodites. Furthermore, Saint-Hilaire "established the norm or the 'specific type' of sex, according to the majority of individuals in a group. [...] This conception of the norm is numerical; hermaphrodites are 'abnormal' because they are rare" (Crahay, 2013, p. 4). Considering these aspects, the definition of normality in terms of sex and anatomy signifies that "a man had a penis, a scrotum and testes; a woman had a vagina, a uterus and ovaries, while binary sex seeks reproduction. [...] It was the role of physicians to provide their patients with legal sex" (Crahay, 2013, p. 3), along with the oaths of stable binary sex/nature. In parallel, a series of works sought to establish sociosexual isomorphic relations through conjugal relations, seeking to breed a homogeneous-white and Christian (human) stable nature. Heinrich Kaan's *Psychopathia sexualis* (1844) draws parallels from nature, where conjugal relations are reflected in the behaviour of plants. In this context of "married plants", the husband asserts his rights, exercises his superiority, takes possession, is on top and so on. On the other hand, the logic of fixed nature among plants could introduce

only the logic of managing (human) nature, as botanists do with plants. This logic prevailed after the Austrian scientist and monk Gregor Mendel's (1822–1884) theory and the laws of heredity. In brief, heredity as Western white ethics ultimately secures the power of white Western hegemonic masculinity through aphrodisia ethics as part of binary sex, providing Western coloniality with a biological explanation and, moreover, with a psychiatric explanation of how psychopathy was linked to abnormal nature-sexualis, emphasising the need for experts to control the human species from the dangerous, non-stable "hermaphrodite" sex. During the same period, a growing fear of human decline and degeneration, driven by concerns about the libidinous and immoral effeminate human genus, emerged after Bénédict Augustin Morel's theory of degeneration dominated French and European psychiatry for almost a century after its publication in 1857 because it provided Western science with a biological and psychiatric explanation of how abnormal mental conditions were acquired and how life is divided into the civilised and feral-degenerate. In 1870, Carl von Westphal mentioned "contrary sexual feeling" (*konträre Sexualempfindung*), while the French forensic expert Auguste Ambroise Tardieu (1818–1879), in *Étude médico-légale sur les attendants de moeurs*, concluded that the third sex did not exist and made a distinction between active and passive paedophiles (the term used for "homosexuals" at that time) (Houbre, 2014, p. 74). This is the period when German biologist, comparative anatomist and Protestant philosopher Ernst Heinrich Philipp August Haeckel (1834–1919) spoke of ontogeny, that is, "an individual human's embryological development repeats the stages of evolution from a one-celled organism through lower orders of animals and mammas before differentiating into a human" (Rosario, 2007, p. 265). In other words, binary sex was the highest stage of evolution and characteristic of the more advanced human species-genus. In this context, binary sex also acquired a racial determination, as every "lower" organism, civilisation, genus, race, sex or species was seen as being stuck in a stage of somatic as well as moral mental "hermaphroditism". In brief, the cause of poverty, laziness, disobedience and violence is the ethos of an unevolved (human) species-genus-bios.

2.1. NATURE-NURTURE, EUGENICS AND THE SCIENTIFIC KU KLUX KLAN

In 1882, French psychiatrists Jean-Martin Charcot and Valentin Magnan introduced the term inversion of sex (replacing contrary) into scientific discourse, a term that refers to the inverted truth of these subjects due to their sexual perversion, of being males, as defined by Western experts, while imagining themselves as females and, thus, acting contrary to their scientifically determined by birth sexual identity. Beyond an entire discourse aimed at aligning this nature with *ορθός* nature through discourses on binary sex, scientists were seeking a technology.

In 1883, Francis Galton, a statistician, anthropologist and pioneer in biometrics, introduced the term eugenics. This term replaced *puériculture*, which was

used in France from the 1860s to 1912 (Schneider, 1990; Carol, 1995). *Puéricultlure* essentially embodied the philosophy of aphrodisia ethics. With the advent of eugenics, this philosophy of rational action through sociosexual isomorphism was replaced by a science involving extended anthropometrics, laboratories, experiments and data, along with the belief in science's right to intervene in natural processes to breed a stable nature. Eugenics brought a new interpretation of nature – particularly after Galton's influential article "The History of Twins, as a Criterion of the Relative Powers of Nature and Nurture" (1875) – not simply a measure of normality, as Quetelet did at the beginning of the 19th century. In his effort to discover which factor, nature or nurture, is more critical for human development, Galton arrived at a whole reinterpretation of nature itself. In a sense, it was science's role in giving normal sex, seeking the homogenisation of the species. This approach gave rise to an entirely new body of literature on the pathology of sexualis and the moral treatment of this disease. In 1886, the Austrian psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing reintroduced the term *psychopathia sexualis*. With this term, he classified types of effeminate men who seemed to suffer from psychical hermaphroditism, mental hermaphroditism, psychosexual hermaphroditism or libido sexualis. On the other hand, Krafft-Ebing's description of psychopathia sexualis encompasses four evolutionary stages, the last of which is called "androgynous" (Tzanaki, 2018, p. 223). Androgynous is the final stage, believed to be fatal, where the individual was thought to be internally dominated by feminine forces, akin to Don Juan. As Foucault explained,

> Don Juan is feminine because he is a womaniser, and because the law of his pleasure, governing an indefinite activity and not the Master of Itself, is characteristic of the object and not the subject of activity. When one is subject to an activity, it means that one can master it. As soon as this activity escapes your control, you become similar [to, or rather] you become the correlative of this activity: you are a woman, or an effeminate being, or a Don Juan. (Foucault, 2017, p. 90)

By this logic, androgynous sex was viewed as an unevolved sex/race, not only in terms of genitals but also in terms of the libido, as human nature was perceived to be captured by the effeminate forces of uncontrolled lust and this is how the issue is also identified by Ellis (1859–1939) (Ellis, 1905/1942, p. 47). In commenting on the work of Krafft-Ebing, Ellis (1927) will speak of "the stage of psychic hermaphroditism" (p. 50). Similarly, the German sexologist Albert Moll (1862–1939) addressed the question of psychopathy of sexual libido while accepting the existence of psychosexual hermaphroditism (Ellis, 1927, p. 39). At this critical juncture, eugenics transformed the ethics of aphrodisia into a scientific truth aimed at engineering a new Western human species, particularly among the masses with enhanced physical, mental and psychic abilities, all framed within the context of Christian ethical binary sex. Under this framework, any perceived pathology,

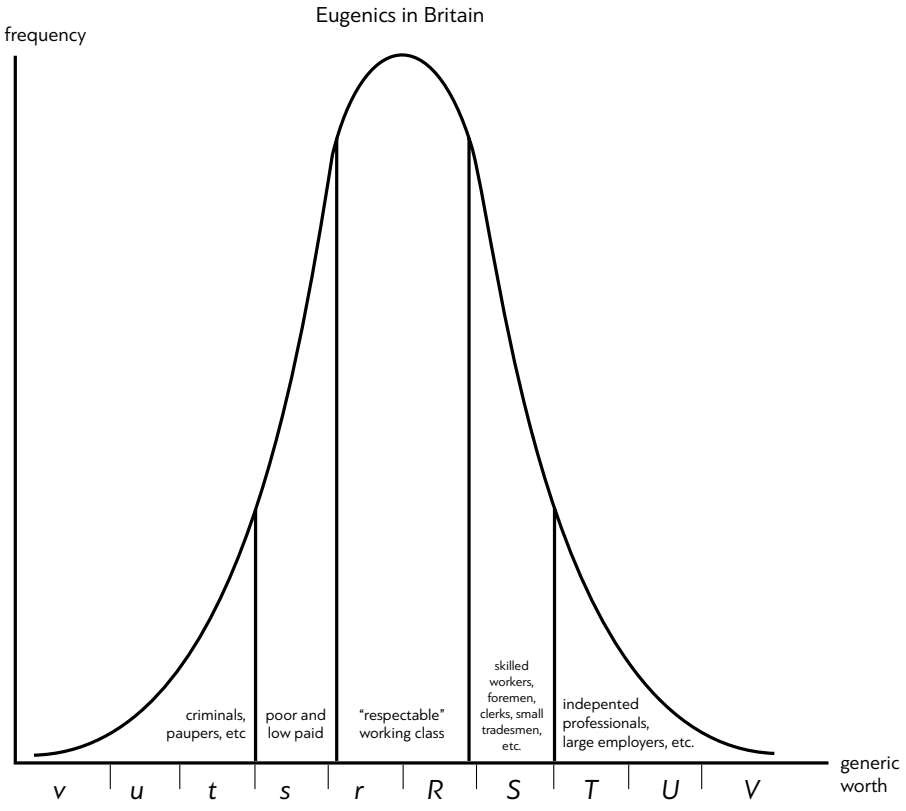
whether individual or societal, is regarded as an indicator of non-self-evolution. This was the period in which Haeckel became famous for his descriptions of phylogenetic trees and illustrations of vertebrate embryos to support his biogenetic law and Darwin's work on evolution. Haeckel argued that the development of an embryo repeats or recapitulates the progressive stages of lower life forms and that by studying embryonic development, one could study the evolutionary history of life on earth. He established the systematic classification that biologists used to classify living species, which in biology translates into the fact that sex or homogeneity (Latin tribus = sex, i.e., race) is identical to race-genus. This means that sexual taxonomy followed the racial taxonomy, stressing the importance of binary sex. Conversely, Mendel's theories on heredity, rediscovered in the late 1890s, gave rise to genetics and eugenics. Mendel developed a law of inheritance that provided a framework for explaining how a parent could pass on traits to its offspring. Within this explanation, binary sex and sexuality became the vehicles of heredity and evolution for Eurocentric patriarchal and capitalist mankind. With this interpretation, the sex chromosomes were discovered by American geneticists Nettie M. Stevens (1861–1912) and Edmund B. Wilson (1856–1939), and were identified according to binary sex. The pair of sex chromosomes is known as the X and Y chromosomes, while currently, certain experts define the Y chromosome as the juvenile delinquent chromosome among human chromosomes. In brief, a colonial Eurocentric and patriarchal discourse was now reaching the interpretation of chromosomes, while biology emerged as the cause of all (social) ills. The conclusion was that a strong nation must be "dehermaphroditised" in terms of body, intelligence, memory, affect, sexuality, sex and psyche, achieved through the technology of (psycho) eugenic-genetics. Within this context, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), argued that there were two types of female orgasm – clitoral and vaginal. The clitoris was considered inherently masculine; this is why he argued in favour of vaginal orgasms, which result from penile penetration. Moreover, in 1908, he wrote "Hysterische Phantasien und ihre Beziehung zur Bisexualität [Hysterical fantasies and their relation to bisexuality], referring to bisexuality as a hysterical and psychoneurotic condition. Finally, in 1909, Freud presented the case of Little Hans, "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy", where, when Freud refers to the castration complex, he changes the content according to his own words. Since then, the castration complex was defined as the loss of the mother's breast; Freud himself explained this as the loss of the penis (Tzanaki, 2024). In other words, if there is a threat to Western civilisation, it is the effeminisation of ethics. The latter is the cause of backwardness and all social ills. This development helps us also to understand the evolution of Greek legislation towards binary sex and sexuality since, initially, the law on "sexual ethics" followed both the corresponding Bavarian laws of 1827 and 1831 (Tzanaki, 2018), with the result that the recognition of sex remained under the jurisdiction of the family. Thus, the Greek forensic pathologist Antonis Kallivokas (1888b), who

translated the work of the French gynaecologist Auguste Lutaud (1847–1925) in the 1880s, in order to adapt Greek legislation to it, concluded that although until 1816 "it was up to the individuals concerned, or their parents, to choose the sex most suited to them" (p. 169), a practice that Greek legislation also followed until the mid-19th century (Tzanaki, 2018). Similarly, "hermaphrodites" were allowed to marry until 1846 (Tzanaki, 2023), as noted by the Greek forensic pathologist Georgios Andreopoulos, since "as K. Orfilas also observes, it does little harm if there are some genitals of the opposite sex in their bodies, or parts that mould them" (Tzanaki, 2023, p. 28). After 1852, the control of recognition of sexual identity passed to the state and its experts, while such marriage was prohibited. As, in the 1880s, the Greek forensic expert Xenophon Theocharidis (1883) proposed to follow the French precedent and to proceed with the annulment of marriages on the grounds of pseudosex identity (that is, anything beyond binary sex) (Tzanaki, 2018). Furthermore, Kallivokas (1888b) explained, when translating Lutaud, that Greek forensic pathologists could also define the sex of an individual by following "the monstrous division of hermaphroditism", as suggested by Saint-Hilaire (pp. 169–170). Additionally, the works of Krafft-Ebing, Moll, Ellis, Magnan and Charcot entered Greek reality through Greek forensic doctors and psychiatrists, such as Achilleas Georgandas, Simon Apostolidis and Georgios Vafas (Tzanaki, 2018), leading to the creation of Athens psychiatric hospital, the Dromokaition, in 1887 and, moreover, the enclosure of those degenerates (Tzanaki, 2024). It is as the point that the doctor, in his role as a "social healer and national reformer" (Kokkinos, 2021), was called upon to reproduce this colonial mankind, while liberal feminists established asylums to domesticate the lower masses into obedient workers (Tzanaki, 2024). Meanwhile, in Greek forensic texts, we find descriptions of parents who attempted to create a vagina using a knife (Kritsotaki, 2013, pp. 197-224). However, what was gradually constructed after the 1910s was the hegemonic internationalisation of this *ορθός* white Western science (Tzanaki, 2024). Additionally, this is the knowledge in which John D. Rockefeller would invest in 1910.

Through the report on medicine and science submitted by the American educator and reformer Abraham Flexner, Rockefeller proposed reforms that ultimately transferred the control of medicine to the American Medical Association, which became the sole authority for approving the licensing of medical schools in America. Simultaneously, the report portrayed the medical education of African Americans as generally inadequate, leading to the closure of universities and broadly excluding any form of knowledge that fell outside the dominant white perspective. Any science that did not align with the framework of eugenics – particularly the concepts of the laboratory, experimentation, data and the need to create a resilience social stable techno-human nature – for the masses both with and beyond Europe, was deemed scientifically deficient. After 1913, this project was also expanded globally (Tzanaki, 2024). In the same period, Galton (2004) utilised data from a social survey of people in London to assign the original social

categories to his categories. On the lower left side of the curve are the groups with the lowest "urban and genetic value", criminals, paupers, etc. (v, u, t); in the middle are the "respectable" middle classes (r, R); and towards the upper right, we find the groups with the highest urban (and genetic) value, such as independent professionals (T, U) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. ***Galton's view of British social structure***



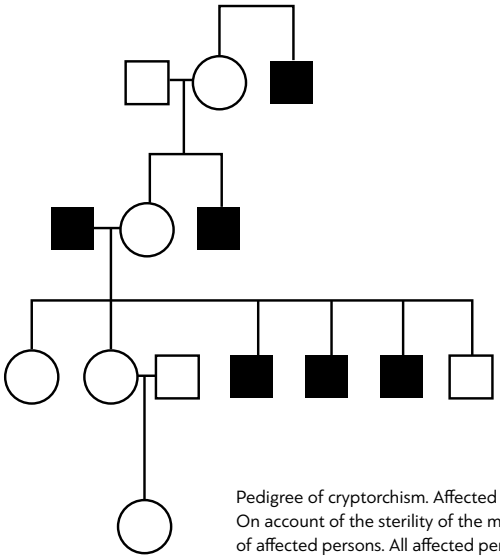
Note. Reproduced from Grue & Heiberg (2006).

2.2. INTERNATIONALISING SCIENTIFIC EUGENIC SEXUALIS

In 1911, American eugenicist Charles Davenport (1866–1944), a Harvard University zoology professor, published *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics*; he categorised "her-

maphroditic conditions" as genetically defective and abnormal. Davenport, using illustrations of graphs and representing "hermaphrodites" with black symbols, claimed that these conditions (and thus affected sex) are genetic defects passed down from the woman's genes, making the mother responsible for giving her child an unliveable life (Figure 2).

Figure 2. ***Pedigree of cryptorchism***



Pedigree of cryptorchism. Affected persons represented by black symbols. On account of the sterility of the males all affected persons are derived from sisters of affected persons. All affected persons are natural eunuchs. BRONARDEL, p. 169.

Note. From Charles Benedict Davenport, Heredity in Relation to Eugenics. New York: Henry Holt, 1911. Republished in Dykerman (2015).

Moreover, in 1911, Davenport founded the International Federation of Eugenics Organisations (IFEO) (Kokkinos, 2021, p. 150) with funding from Rockefeller. Moreover, it was based on the logic of measuring human intelligence and mores; first developed in France in 1908, the French intelligence test was brought to the US by the American psychologist and eugenicist Henry Herbert Goddard (1866–1957). Furthermore, in 1912, Goddard published *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness*. The study essentially argued that immoral mothers had destructive effects on the breeding generations of criminals, morons and lunatics. In 1912, however, the first International Congress of Eugenics was organised. It was at this congress that the term *puériculture*, which resurfaced in 1895 following Adolphe Pinet's publication "Note pour servir à l'his-

toire de la puériculture intra-utérine", where he presented his research on children born at Baudelocque, some of whom to mothers taken in by asylums for abandoned women (Carol, 1995, p. 46), was replaced by the term eugenics. Not much later, in 1916, the German geneticist Richard Goldschmidt (1878–1958) proposed that homosexuality was the result of genetic transsexualism – in short, the result of "moral hermaphroditism". However, unlike Eugen Steinach (1861–1944), who proposed castration and the transplantation of male genitalia, Goldschmidt incorporated Mendelian philosophy into his experiments with moths. Moreover, Goldschmidt asked Davenport to help him find a copy of the journal *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* by the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) to discover how heredity affects homosexuality. His aim, according to Michael Dietrich, was, among other things, to identify the means by which the "masculinisation" of the German army could be achieved by tackling homosexuality in its ranks (Dietrich 2000a, 2000b). In any case, the conclusion was that supreme Christian mankind could be reproduced only through the domination of the *ορθός* Western binary sex. In this context, Goldschmidt coined the term "intersex" (1909) to refer to an intermediate evolutionary stage, while, in the same period, Hugh Hampton Young (1870–1945) became the chief of surgery in the Urology Department at Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1897, initiating sex "corrections" over intersex as a preventive measures against physical and mental disorders, while science was propagandised as an international and objective mechanism of knowledge for humanity (Tzanaki, 2025; Tzanaki & Kouroutzas, 2024). This framework sought to control the masses under the labels of femininity and masculinity, perpetuating a continuous civil war in the name of nurturing "civilised" and resilience ethics in opposition to the ethics of (psycho) gynandromorphism (Tzanaki & Kouroutzas, 2024).

2.3. COLONIALITY: BINARY SEX AS ETHICAL MODE OF SUBJECTION

In 1921, the Second International Eugenic Congress concluded that

> today, as never before, we realise that at the bottom of real progress lies the germ plasm – the chromosome complex which, during all these aeons, has been controlling the progress of the organic world; created the precursor of man and, all hidden and unknown, has directed human evolution with a certainty that has made all human endeavors in this direction almost negligible. (Davenport et al., 1923, p. ix)

In this context, the Committee for Research in Problems of Sex (CRPS, 1921–1965) was created by the Rockefeller Foundation within its Division of Medical Education (Department of Medical Sciences). The main purpose of the commission was "research that would help to arrive at a "rational sex ethics" (Tzanaki, 2025), while the whole effort was to spread scientific social hygiene in the clear sense of eugenic elimination of the morally inferior international race. This concept of social hy-

giene would be internationalised by the League of Nations. Furthermore, in 1921, under Article 23c of its constitution, the league assumed responsibility for monitoring the international problem of white slavery – the forced prostitution of white women – among officials throughout Europe. Moreover, in the same year, delegates from 34 nations, including Greece, met in Geneva and produced a set of resolutions known as the Final Act, which set up an organisational structure to advance the anti-trafficking agenda. The Final Act established the Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, discarding the term "white slavery" since it was titled "more clearly seen and officially declared that the war on trafficking must be internationalised throughout the world" (quoted in Tzanaki, 2024). However, the idea for an international Advisory Committee on Social Hygiene in the League of Nations crystallised in 1923, while the Rockefeller Foundation played a significant role. It organised international visits for experts from different countries. In 1923, 54 public health officers, among whom were Greeks (Tzanaki, 2025), were supported by the League of Nations Exchange Institutes from 27 nations. This meant that experts from each state visited various medical institutions, hospitals and schools in France, Britain and Belgium from 1924 to 1927 and, in the 1930s, learned about the reality of this colonial discourse and implemented it within the limits of European societies (Tzanaki, 2025). In 1923, Louis Pasteur coined the famous phrase "science is the patrimony of humanity, the torch which gives light to the world quoted in Tzanaki, 2025). In this sense, *ορθός* science, which recognises every problem and its solution in terms of biology, leads to Western scientific coloniality, where the object of science is the rationalisation of the human psyche and body through binary sex under the guidance of the Eurocentric expert against the microbe of effeminate pathos, as an international ethical crusade. This means that only through psychic-moral-*ορθός* will the masculinisation of mankind develop. At the same time, Harry H. Laughlin, director of the Eugenics Record Office (financed and directed by the Rockefeller Foundation from 1910), testified to the US Congress in 1923 as an expert witness, citing psychological research to argue that immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were endowed with inherently poor "germ-plasm", opening the door to their forced sterilisation (Tzanaki, 2025). During the same period, Freud formulated the theory of the Oedipus complex, while the Greek psychiatrist Konstantinos Kostantinidis (1931), in his review of the proceedings of the Psychoanalytic Congress, explained that states seemed "to grow with gigantic steps and everyone began to suspect that State order, morality, justice and religion were born during the primitive period of mankind, one after the other, as reactionary formations (Reaktionsbildungen) against the Oedipus complex" (p. 29). At this point, although I will not go into detail, but it is important to emphasise that the Athens School of Public Health – the natural successor of which is the newly established Department of Public Health Policies of the Western University of Athens (2019) – was founded in 1929. This was the same year as the adoption of the Idionymon, established by

Law 4229 of 1929 (directed against communists and anarchists, the law was used to enforce repression against the trade union movement). The school was founded by Eleftherios Venizelos and health ministers Apostolos Doxiadis and Alexandros Pappas. The Athens School of Public Health was established at the suggestion of the League of Nations Health Organisation and with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. Within these limits, social hygiene programmes were created to combat "gynandrous" bios. Thus, the Public Health Department of the National Council of Greek Women (Εθνικό Συμβούλιο Ελνίδων, NCGW) and the Greek psychoanalyst Nikolaos Drakoulidis created the Library of Social Hygiene, seeking the development of a homogeneous eugenic moral discourse for the masses, aligned with the principles of Western mankind. The library was a response to the League of Nations Covenant, which provided for an office to "see that the relations of the Commonwealth are established" (Tzanaki, 2025). To understand the extent of its social influence, we must not forget that the NCGW comprised 72 women's associations and 20,000 women, who constituted an enormous "sexual education" campaign with the families of the popular classes but also schools and factories as the main recipients (Drakoulidis, 1932a, p. 15). In this context, scientists such as Drakoulidis, the Greek gynaecologist Moise Moisidis and the neurologist psychiatrist and pioneer of psychoanalysis in Greece Dimitrios Kouretas would join the NCGW's Public Health Department as consultants and speakers, where among the lectures given in 1932 was one by Doxiadis, director of the Ministry of Social Hygiene from 1922 to 1924. Titled "Ευγονική και Καλλιπαιδεία" [Eugenics and Callipaideia], it praised the scientific charity of the Rockefeller Foundation and, in reality, this development of a colonial eugenics (Tzanaki, 2025) through programs focused on conjugal sexuality. Similarly, Moisidis gave a talk on the "Hygiene of Marriage" [Υγιεινή του γάμου], while it was noted that all the health propaganda lectures were aimed at mothers and factories (Drakoulidis, 1932a, p. 4). In the same year, Drakoulidis reached similar conclusions when he republished his work *Η προ του γάμου ιατρική εξέτασις* [The prenuptial medical examination]: "A question, however, which has always preoccupied the old and new legislators of marriage, and which is always new in its interest, is that which concerns the health of the spouses" (1932b, p. 2); however, again in the same year, Kouretas published *Αι συγκινήσεις: Ψυχοφυσιολογία-Παθολογία* [The emotions: Psychophysiology-pathology], which describes a series of experiments on the use of adrenaline as a means of controlling emotions (Kouretas, 1934, p. 2). At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic, the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis began; this 40-year-long experiment sought to observe the natural course of syphilis in a group of black males in Alabama. Similarly, within this context, the first important research station for free-living monkeys was created on the island of Cayo Santiago, Puerto Rico, with funding from Rockefeller. At this station, in December 1938 American psychologist Clarence Ray Carpenter (1905–1975) conducted experiments with monkeys. He shipped in 400 monkeys, observing their dynamics for

one week before removing the alpha male named Diablo from the group. After subsequent removals of male monkeys, the group's territorial range decreased, and their social organisation became more fluid, leading to increased conflicts and quarrels. This manipulation of the group demonstrated how competitive aggression and the dominance of the strongest emerged as the primary organisational structure (Haraway, 1989, p. 35). Haraway argues that these experiments illustrate a Western tendency to reintroduce the idea of an "eternal" nature that favours the powerful for survival, standardising behaviours associated with masculinity and femininity (p. 38). Consequently, science is seen as having a role in anticipating and constructing narratives around abnormal nature, emphasising the need to control effeminate impulses and manage the reproduction of the masses, as discussed by the British writer Aldous Huxley (1894–1963).

Huxley wrote the novel *Brave New World* (an "anti-utopia") in 1931, in which he described a society where genetics and cloning are used to classify individuals from superior to inferior. In 1936, Lewis Madison Terman, along with his graduate student Catharine Cox Miles, jointly published *Sex and Personality: Studies in Masculinity and Femininity*. The M-F test is a seven-part diagnostic tool that has become popular not only with doctors and psychologists but also with researchers and school districts, as it can standardise the behaviour of men and women (Terman & Miles, 1936), just as Terman had done with his IQ test based on the Stanford-Binet test; all the research was funded by the Committee for Research in Problems of Sex (CRPS), which Rockefeller also supported. In 1937, the first sex change involving a 12-year-old intersex person occurred in Greece, as the father wanted the intervention of science to transform his intersex child into a real man (Tzanaki, 2023, pp. 217–218). After World War II, as far as Germany was concerned, both homosexual men and women were jailed under an 1871 law; at the same time, any person that lived beyond the sex binary and heterosexuality was interpreted as a somatic and psychic pathology of an underdeveloped, morally "insane" nature that had not reached biologically and psychically its full potential or maturity due to libido, leading to the perversion of communism, prostitution, violence, poverty, the reversal of sex identity and homosexuality.

3. GENDER, WHITENESS AND THE COLD WAR

Alfred C. Kinsey (1894–1956), an American sexologist, biologist and professor of entomology and zoology, also financed by Rockefeller, founded the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University, now known as the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction. He is best known for writing *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (1953), also known as the Kinsey Reports, and for the Kinsey Scale. Kinsey's research on human sexuality was fundamental to the field of sexology. As far as the Greek reality is concerned, Kinsey's works were translated by the Greek sexologist Georgios Zouraris,

who claimed, for example, that the asexual woman was the cause of 60 to 70% of divorces in Greece (quoted in Tzanaki, 2025). Moreover, Zouraris (1940) agreed with Kinsey and concluded that according to experimental and thus *ορθή* science-meaning, a science based on data, "the man has a strong impulse, he is a polygamous temperamental type, he likes erotic adventure" (p. 46), while the dominance, competition and subordination of the femininities to him are part of the male sex's personality and, ultimately, a part of (human) nature. In brief, everything is interpreted in terms of the eternal hereditary nature of a hegemonic masculinity that ensures the anti-narrative nature of class struggle. After all, it is no coincidence that homosexuality and, more broadly, queer behaviour were associated with communism and anarchism during this period. In 1947, the Park Police in Washington DC launched a "Sexual Perversion Elimination Program", primarily targeting gay men for arrest and intimidation. A year later, Congress passed legislation "to deal with sexual psychopaths" in the nation's capital. This occurred in the midst of growing concerns about another lurking subversive threat: communism. Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose rhetoric explicitly linked communists with homosexuals and transformed slow repression into a fiery conflagration, gave his now-infamous speech on 9 February 1950, in which he claimed to have a list of 205 known communists working at the State Department (Adkins, 2016; Hudson, 2019). In this context, the utilisation of binary sex became a part of the Cold War campaign against "immoral" and "androgynous" communism and homosexuality and a reinvention of the nature-nurture programme. Given these conditions, in the 1950s, John William Money (1921–2006), a professor of medical psychology and paediatrics at Johns Hopkins University, continued the work of the Urological Institute at the university's School of Medicine. Moreover, Money published, with his colleagues, a series of articles in which he reproduced the nurture nature diptych, arguing that binary sex can be learned – that is, gender – and does not necessarily result from biological factors (Repo, 2015, p. 28). Money was involved in advocating for surgical interventions on intersex individuals, effectively assigning a socially constructed sex and thereby creating a stable binary nature through science, with the intent of preventing psychological and somatic issues. In short, as Jemina Repo (2015) underlines, Money's theory challenged the view that gender is located in the genitals or other biological factors but argued that it constitutes a behavioural control system (p. 35), creating a techno eugenic gender. In other words, it is at this point that gender, I suggest, came to encompass the aphrodisia ethics and an entire discourse of social-sexual isomorphism, through, as Paul Preciado (2013) so succinctly describes, far from being a product of a feminist agenda, the concept of gender belongs to the biotechnological discourse that emerged in the medical and therapeutic industry in the United States in the late 1940s (p. 99). With this background, it makes me wonder if we cannot speak of a least a century of genocide against intersex, trans (Hamburger et al., 1953) and androgynos-gynandros bios. Furthermore, I argue that it is crucial to consider the fascinating insights of Bogdan Popa (2021), who highlights that gender, as developed by Money in re-

sponse to the question of "how is one to diagnose transvestitism and homosexuality in the intersexual?", is intricately linked to an anti-communist ideology (p. 72; Popa, 2023). Moreover, under the assumption that a nondeveloped effeminate species causes all social problems, it is within this perception that human engineering was becoming part of the MKUltra experiment. As the fear of communism grew in the United States after World War II, the focus shifted towards human nature "corrupted" by malevolent black female forces. As a result, scientists and government officials set their sights on developing a weapon: mind control. The CIA led this effort in a project called MKUltra, which consisted of 149 "subprojects" involving more than 80 academic institutions, prisons and organisations, with Subproject 68 and Dr Ewen Cameron's experiments on patients at the Allan Memorial Institute in Montreal being of particular interest for my argument. At that "institute", patients were subjected to taped messages such as "my mother hates me", which were repeated for hours and even days on end (Nickson, 1994). Furthermore, Angela Davis (1983) referred to the Moynihan Report of 1964 to demonstrate the presence of a racial, patriarchal and colonial white discourse. In that report, Daniel Moynihan concluded that the source of black oppression was deeper than that of racial discrimination. In brief, the matriarchal structure caused unemployment, squalid housing, inadequate education and substandard medical care. Thus, the root of oppression was no one other than the "pathological complex" created by the absence of male authority among black people. The controversial finale of the Moynihan Report was a call to introduce male authority (which means male, Western, and white patriarchal supremacy) into the black family and the community at large.

CONCLUSION

In the late 1980s, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) received approval from the Department of Energy, which backed the Human Genome Project, and in 1988 American molecular biologist, geneticist and zoologist James Watson was assigned as director of the project. Eventually, the project was officially inaugurated as a federal project in 1991. It became a multinational, multibillion-dollar project carried out in private and public laboratories throughout Europe and North America (Griffiths, 2016, p. 516; Tzanaki & Kouroutzas, 2024, pp. 289-312). This project marked the beginning of a frantic race to detect the gene(s) responsible for homosexuality, a scientific trend that dominated in the field through the 1990s. On the other hand, based on this foundation, in 2006, the term "Disorders of Sex Development" (DSDs) was introduced into biomedical discourse. This term describes a congenital discrepancy among external genitalia, gonadal and chromosomal sex. However, what I'm arguing is that this "disorder" has been arbitrarily constructed over centuries, based on the colonial and patriarchal assumption that normal sex is defined solely by its ability to facilitate the reproduction of the *ορθός* species, reintroducing a (neo) eugenic discourse that nurtures evolution

into a techno-progressive trajectory toward a superior gender, typically categorized as XX or XY. Thus, gender is transformed into a pet. Similarly, from July to September 2018, various American experts conducted "a national health study of intersex adults aged 18 and older in the US" (Rosenwohl-Mack et al., 2020). The study describes the physical and mental health experiences of intersex adults, including differences by age (18 to 39 vs. 40 and older). The questions were derived from national (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System) and intersex-related health studies. Overall, among the 198 intersex adults, one-third reported difficulty with everyday tasks, and more than half reported severe difficulties with cognitive tasks. Moreover, more than 43% of participants rated their physical health from fair to poor, and 53% reported fair to poor mental health, while health diagnoses included depression, anxiety, arthritis and hypertension. In brief, among the above examples, we witness the ways in which gender served as a colonialist narrative to support the argument of a supposedly ableist nature, as imagined by white, Western, colonial, scientific discourse. Anyone who dares to invert this social-engendered-racial status would be considered – from that moment on – a "monster", suffering from "gender dysphoria". It is against this backdrop that, with regard to the Greek case, Law 4491/2017 concerning the legal recognition of gender identity, did not include intersex subjects. At the same time, as Preciado (2013) succinctly described techno-gender and techno-sexuality give rise to new forms of governance over (human) nature.

In brief, in this article, I have tried to determine, through an intersex, trans, black feminist, and postcolonial approach, how white Western scientific coloniality was introduced through the *ορθός* binary of sex–gender also within Europe. This was achieved through the concept of the state that sought to westernise the masses in civilised homogeneous ethics by using gender, with Greece occasionally cited as an example. I have also discussed how, ultimately, we are indifferent to any lives that are subjected to persecution due to a "black" gender, even in a state of our own subjugation. Moreover, through various examples, I have tried to demonstrate how, in our days, the decolonisation of gender, sexuality, science, nature, animals, primates and our lives is urgent, as is the demand to consider life with merit by itself. This is what should become the social priority of the 21st century, that is, the decolonisation of science itself and the abolition of gender as a label/war machine of the (post) modern state, of imposing a continuous civil war and recognising accordingly life as worthy or unworthy.

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CHAPTER 9

"WHAT'S MISSING FROM THE LGBTQI AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IS AN EROTIC DISCOURSE": AN INTERVIEW WITH PAOLA REVENIOTI (JULY 2019, CONDUCTED BY DESPINA PARASKEVA-VELOUDOGIANNI, GEORGE SOUVLIS AND ROSA VASILAKI)

→ **Paola Revenioti**

LET'S START OFF WITH LAST SUMMER'S ELECTIONS. WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE RESULTS?

Unfortunately, it proves that Greeks have learned nothing from our history and have amnesia. Rather than progressing and becoming more tolerant, they are becoming more conservative. It's absurd that antisemites, homophobes and transphobes are in the government. On the other hand, Syriza paid the price for not making good on its campaign promises. On the bright side, Golden Dawn is no longer in Parliament; however, the real tragedy is that New Democracy has adopted the members of Golden Dawn and their perception of immigrants, etc., which is even more dangerous because New Democracy is the party in power right now. What gives me optimism is that another small party, MeRA 25, is now in the Parliament; what's ridiculous is that the Greek Solution is now in Parliament. I posted a one-liner on Facebook as a joke, that Greeks have the same behaviour in the voting booths as in brothels or massage parlours: the dominatrixes have the most customers. That about sums it up.

DO WE LIKE TO BE DOMINATED?

Yes. We liked to be humbled, to be humiliated. And we find pleasure through humiliation. Sexually, I don't see anything wrong with this. People can do whatever they want in the privacy of their own bedroom. Only that the authoritarianism of New Democracy isn't in bed, it's being put into practice.

AT ONE POINT, YOU POSTED ON FACEBOOK REGARDING THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS, IN WHICH YOU ENCOURAGED PEOPLE TO SUPPORT ANTARSYA, DESPITE THEM BEING "TIGHT-ASSES".

Well, what else should I call them? I like those guys because they really do have good intentions, and I've met quite a few of them. But we need to understand that this isn't the year 1920. I have to admit, when I was watching them make their campaign promises on TV, as if they were selling clementines at the farmers' market from behind an old wooden stall, that this was a truly miserable image. How do you plan on convincing the public? The public isn't made up solely of the

people you see at bars; the public is much larger than that. I was with my son and he said to me, "What are they saying? Do they think this is going to work? They're like communists from Ceausescu's Romania." They're just living in their own microcosm. People living in their own microcosm are unable to make legislation that is for the greater public. If this is what you want, just make a group among yourselves with your own politics.

We're living in a superficial age, an age where everyone just wants to have a good time. You're not supposed to let that misery show. How are you going to convince people to vote for you? Why should I vote for you? So that I can be just as miserable as you are? We vote because we want something better. We don't understand it and a lot of people on the left don't understand it. Activists don't understand it either, just screaming about homophobia from dawn 'til dusk. No one said that homophobia doesn't exist. You have to highlight the good things in life, too. What are you going to say to a young person who's just now getting their life started? "Look out, because they're going to cuss you and make your life hell from morning 'til night?" You can't just constantly frighten them, or always play the victim. I never played the victim, and I'm a person who's been tormented by the police, a person without a single privilege. I've enjoyed my life. I still enjoy my life.

HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN RELATION TO THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT AND, GENERALLY, WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON FEMINISM?

Look, I never thought of other women as competition. I didn't have anything to fear because I always said that I am not a woman, and when men wanted me, they wanted me for what I am. There were times when I was working the corner, and a guy would be behind me with his girlfriend and I would turn to him and say, "As soon as you go home, come to this place" and he would come. On the other hand, the feminists I met when I was younger, 16-18 years old, at AKOE [Gay Liberation Movement of Greece] and in Exarchia, were really tough. I remember when I got a nose job, I'm trans I wanted to look a bit more feminine, they immediately came after me. "Aren't you ashamed that you are caught in the societal trap set for women and are being alienated?" They're unable to comprehend that a trans woman is a *trans* woman and can't survive with hairy armpits and long "hippie-skirts" that touch the ground. No one is going to take care of her, bring her to their home to help her find a job. The ease with which they would say these things is what really gets to me. They're still saying it.

IN RECENT YEARS, LGBTQI AND FEMINIST ISSUES HAVE BEEN AT THE TOP OF THE AGENDA, WHETHER IT WAS THE #METOO MOVEMENT IN AMERICA, OR THE WOMEN'S STRIKE IN SPAIN (IN FACT, THIS WAS THE FIRST YEAR THAT WE HAD A FEMINIST STRIKE IN GREECE, AS WELL), OR FEMICIDE. WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THIS, NOW THAT MANY POLITICAL ACTORS, LEFT AND RIGHT, ARE NOW INVOLVED

IN THE CONVERSATION?

The time has come for them to talk about these issues. But this was achieved through social struggles, and struggles will eventually, in some way, be vindicated. I think this is the result of these movements' struggles over the years. The time has come for people to grow up and mature; whether we like it or not, society is progressing. Even though we say that the right is on a rise, society is progressing. It might be one step forward, two steps back, but it is always progressing. People's lives are getting better.

DO YOU THINK TODAY'S FEMINISM IN GREECE BEARS ANY SIMILARITIES WITH GREECE'S FEMINISM OF THE 1980S? DOES IT HAVE A DIFFERENT WAY OF CONFRONTING TRANS INDIVIDUALS?

I observe the young people, 19, 20, 22 years old. They invited me to Pride in Patras, and I saw kids that were not at all like the people at Athens's Pride, they were young, educated, gay, queer people who had a completely different and open-minded view of things. That made a huge impression on me. We are watching a new generation grow up, I won't say with leftist views but rather with open-minded views about society. I witnessed it. Everyone else is outdated now. You can't say the same things you said in the 1980s.

WHAT ARE YOU REFERRING TO SPECIFICALLY?

I think that what's missing from the LGBTQI and women's movements is an erotic discourse. The word "transsexual" has within it the word "sex", it's stimulating. When you call a trans woman "transgender", you're castrating her. Can I tell you how you're castrating her? Because we don't live in a society where every trans woman can have a normal job at a bank or anywhere else. Most trans women, about 80%, get by working the streets. When you take the sex away from her, she dies of starvation. What do you think a guy who sleeps with trans women is going to say to his friends? "I had sex with a transgender woman who gives mind-blowing blowjobs"? No, he'll say, "That trap gives great head." Even for women, the so-called "sex workers", this term should exist, but what is a John going to say? He'll say, "That hooker really fucks good", not "that sex worker". Sexiness sells. We can't just get rid of all that just for the sake of political correctness. You won't hear erotic discourse among gays. I'm from the generation of politics of desire. That's what I'm saying, call us "faggots" and "trannies" and "traps", we'll fuck all of you, and we did fuck all of them. Up and down Syngrou Avenue, women were losing their minds; they couldn't handle the fact that young hunks would come up and beg us. Hunks, they looked at us like goddesses, because we were selling it and we followed through on our word. Our thoughts were, you're going to discriminate against and

marginalise us anyway, now you'll look at us like goddesses, we'll take your money and have a good time on your dime. Nowadays, it's all whining and crying.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN A MEMBER OF A POLITICAL PARTY OR ORGANISATION?

No, never. Every now and then I would start a group just for the sake of doing something. For example, we had created a team to organise Pride, but nothing more than that. Or creating a team for a rally, just for the sake of not being alone. But I was never a big fan of organised structures. The only organised thing I ever tried to create, which was a failure – well, it was not a failure really – was the Solidarity Association for Transsexuals in Greece. The truth is that I was encouraged by others to do it, and then I thought that if it is not me doing it, then who else would do it. In the end, I was the one who got in trouble.

WHY?

This is the problem when you engage with people only because they happen to have a certain particularity, for example, being transsexual. That particularity does not entail that you want to change society too; you may be a right winger, or something else, you may have different ideas about things. Now we have to find a certain balance. Transsexuals are not a uniform group of people who all share the same ideas and the same lived experiences. That's it, I got in trouble because of that. Why exactly I got in trouble is another story though.

WHAT CHANGES DO YOU CONSIDER NECESSARY WITH REGARDS TO THE LEGISLATION FOR TRANSSEXUAL INDIVIDUALS?

I don't think that anything needs to change; the legislation is good. What is important is for people to have the choice to change their identity, so that everyone can be the gender that they desire, everyone should have the identity they desire for themselves. What is important right now is to come up with welfare policies with regards to transsexuals, who, due to the discrimination they have suffered, were unable to do something with their lives. This is not difficult to design. For instance, I can't survive without a pension. I lived my life within a society which offered me nothing, I had no opportunities to get a job. Are they just gonna let me die? It's not just me; there are many people like myself. That is what's the most interesting to me. Young people have their whole lives ahead of them, we live in a different society now. But just think for a second, how many trans women were not in a position to make something of themselves. Some actually did succeed, but not everyone does, because working the streets is not easy, a lot can happen, sometimes unfortunate things. This is my only objection to the existing legislation.

SO WHAT YOU PROPOSE IS THE GRANTING OF PENSIONS?

Yes, but also the possibility of getting a job. For example, employment found through a job centre or an unemployment office. That way a trans woman in her 50s could work in a theatre for instance, as an usher, or at the ticket office. She doesn't need to feel useless. This is something already happening in Germany, for instance. There are programs for transsexual people, they place them in suitable job positions, not just any job, but ones that care to accommodate them.

WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LGBTQI MOVEMENT OR THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT, OR BOTH MOVEMENTS WITH THE LEFT. HOW DO YOU IMAGINE THIS RELATIONSHIP? THERE IS A LONGSTANDING DEBATE, OR BETTER A CRITIQUE, ACCUSING THE LEFT OF BEING SILENT FOR MANY YEARS...

Well, isn't that true? They did remain silent. We love the Left, we grew up believing in the Left, but we also recognise that they didn't speak up for us. We changed what the Left stands for today. But leftists do not recognise that; they are ungrateful.

ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE THOSE WHO MAINTAIN THAT IT IS SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH FOR THE LEFT TO EXPAND ITS AGENDA BY ADDING FOUR OR FIVE EXTRA DEMANDS. THAT A DEEPER CONNECTION IS NECESSARY. DO YOU THINK THAT THIS COULD HAPPEN? WOULD IT BE IMPORTANT FOR THE LGBTQI MOVEMENT TO GET CLOSER TO THE LEFT ON THE EVERYDAY LEVEL? OR SHOULD THESE MOVEMENTS REMAIN AUTONOMOUS?

I prefer both. The Left must understand that it cannot call itself Left if it discriminates against people. I do not consider a person who deems that workers' rights and issues are more important than LGBTQI rights and issues to be left wing – if you are not gay, if you are straight, you are not in any position to decide, I am the one who can decide on these matters because I am gay. In the end, the LGBTQI individuals should speak for themselves within the political parties, and not just let everybody else speak for them. LGBTQI people need to speak for themselves and not have the leftists speaking for others' rights, as if they were representatives of some kind of philanthropic organisation. This has not happened yet. Take, for example, Antarsya, a small left-wing party: their attitude reeks of machismo. They have included gay issues in their current agenda. However, we have yet to see someone openly gay and "gay-looking", with earrings on, to represent them, to campaign for them, so as to subvert stereotypes. But they wouldn't do that, even solely to be aesthetically subverting. Imagine, if they had chosen a good-looking youngster, a kind of a twink, who always wears earrings. But they wouldn't. This is a deep conversation, anyway.

WHAT IS YOUR TAKE WITH REGARDS TO THE DEBATE ABOUT SEX WORK? DOES IT NEED TO BE LEGALLY RECOGNISED AS LABOUR OR SHOULD SEX WORK BE BANNED?

Why should it be banned?

THE ARGUMENT IS THAT WOMEN – OR GENERALLY, PEOPLE WHO PROSTITUTE THEMSELVES FOR LIVING – ARE BEING EXPLOITED.

Sorry, guys, but I find it appalling when women look down on prostitution. How can you, as a woman, speak about these issues, since you are the one who is told from dusk 'til dawn how you are supposed to make use of your own body. If prostitution is a woman's choice, then everyone else should respect that choice, and you should even support her in that choice. But in the case of prostitution, Christianity and Christian morality always make their way into the discussion. By the way, I think that the very word "prostitution" comes from Christianity. If you follow the Christian morality on this topic, then you are not left wing and you are not a feminist either. This is bullshit. In France, for instance, they criminalise the clients, not the prostitutes. But they deprive them of their livelihood that way. Why do you have to turn a prostitute into a married, petty bourgeois like yourself? She doesn't want that life; she'd rather fuck for money. If that's what she fancies, she should be able to do so; she has the right to make this decision for herself; it is none of your business to tell her what to do. Everyone has the right to govern over their own body. If she wants to make a living this way, she should have all the legal rights to do so, like any other professional, end of story. No one can tell me that sex is something that you do only with your boyfriend or your girlfriend. Sex is also about pleasure. Those who have sex with prostitutes are not necessarily sexually deprived; they enjoy having sex with prostitutes, it gives them pleasure. Sexual pleasure is something in human nature that lets you have a good time. People have a good time having sex. Don't you think I had a good time when I was surrounded by attractive guys? I made good money and I had a good time too.

AMONG THE FAMOUS PEOPLE YOU MET IN THE 1980S, WHO MADE THE STRONGEST IMPRESSION ON YOU?

I was not easily impressed. I mostly remember boyfriends rather than personalities. Talk to me about strapping young men, about being in love. I wasn't easily impressed. Yes, I did meet important people and I can now say "I met so and so, I was so lucky", but I wasn't impressed, in that sense. When you're around these people on an everyday basis, you do not blow them out of proportion anymore, do you understand?

CHAPTER 10

PREDATOR GATE: A SUMMARY OF REPORTERS UNITED'S INVESTIGATION INTO THE "GREEK WATERGATE"

→ **Thodoris Chondrogiannos, Nikolas Leontopoulos and Christoforos Kasdaglis**

SINCE THE END of 2021, Reporters United,[1] an investigative journalism network based in Athens, Greece, has been systematically investigating the Greek surveillance scandal, also known as "Predator Gate" or the "Greek Watergate". A two-pronged surveillance scandal, it involved both the wiretapping by the Greek National Intelligence Service (EYP), which is under the control of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, of journalists, opposition politicians, members of the Greek Army and businesspeople, and the illegal use of the malicious Predator spyware against targets in Greece.

It is noteworthy that in specific cases, the surveillance targets of the EYP and Predator were proven to be common, a fact which raises questions about the use of Predator by the Greek authorities, which would be illegal under Greek law. Among the common targets of EYP and Predator are financial reporter Thanasis Koukakis, former MEP and current Pasok leader Nikos Androulakis and former Meta security manager Artemis Seaford. The Greek government still denies that it made any use of Predator.

The first article of our investigation, published in January 2022, revealed how in March 2021 the government changed the legislation on the lifting of the confidentiality of communications with an unconstitutional amendment (as it was tabled late and was unrelated to the main subject of the law), prohibiting – under any condition – the constitutionally established independent Authority for Communication Security and Privacy (ADAE) from informing affected citizens about the lifting of the privacy of communications in their case for reasons of national security.[2]

Previously, the legislation provided that after the expiration of the measure to lift a citizen's privacy of communications (i.e., after the end of the interception), ADAE could notify the affected person about the lifting of their privacy, whether it was done for the investigation of serious crimes or for reasons of national security. The only condition for the notification was that the purpose for which the lifting of secrecy was ordered would not be compromised.

The aforementioned change in the law was opposed by three active members of ADAE: its president, Christos Rammos, and two other members, Katerina

1 https://www.reportersunited.gr

2 https://www.reportersunited.gr/7359/parakoloythiseis-eyp-siopi-o-vasilias-akoyei/

Papanikolaou, a lawyer, and Stefanos Gritzalis, a professor of information systems security. The three members, according to an article published in the high-profile journal *Constitutionalism*, argued that the new provision may violate the constitutional protection of the privacy of communications, the right to respect for private and family life under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) as well as the respect for private and family life in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.[3]

The first article of our investigation raised a question for us: Which specific surveillance did the government want to hide? The answer was given in April 2022 in the next story.[4] This established – by citing classified state documents – that the government wanted to keep under wraps that the EYP had placed Koukakis under surveillance in 2020, while he was investigating financial crimes.

Despite the government's attempts to cover up the case,[5] our investigation continued, attempting to shed light on the connection between the government and Predator spyware, which according to an investigation published by *Inside Story* had put Koukakis under surveillance in 2021.[6]

In June 2022, the Reporters United investigation put Grigoris Dimitriadis, the secretary-general of the Prime Minister's Office and nephew of the prime minister, at the centre of the revelations for the first time, revealing his business dealings with businesspeople and companies directly or indirectly linked to the surveillance case.[7] For this report, Reporters United received four legal notices (a first legal step towards a lawsuit under Greek law and a necessary step before issuing a lawsuit against journalists): from Dimitriadis himself, from businessman Giorgos Bitharas, from former Intellexa deputy administrator Felix Bitzios and from the company Krikel, which would later turn out to be controlled by Yannis Lavranos, a businessman also involved in the case and Dimitriadis' best man.[8]

In August 2022, we published our next investigation on the involvement of Dimitriadis in the surveillance scandal,[9] which established multiple connections, indirect and direct, between him and Bitzios, who, as it would later turn out, apart from being a deputy administrator, was also a shareholder of Intellexa SA, the company that markets Predator in Greece.[10]

Combined with the revelation of the surveillance of Pasok leader Nikos Androulakis, Reporters United's revelations led to the resignation, one day after

3 https://www.constitutionalism.gr/2021-04-07-rammos-gritzalis-papanikolaou-aporrito-epikinonion/
4 https://www.reportersunited.gr/8646/eyp-koukakis/
5 https://www.reportersunited.gr/8730/sygkalypsi-2-pos-i-kyvernisi-mitsotaki-prospathei-xana-na-kleisei-tin-ypothesi-koykaki/
6 https://insidestory.gr/article/poios-parakoloythoyse-kinito-toy-dimosiografoy-thanasi-koykaki
7 https://www.reportersunited.gr/8948/o-megalos-anipsios-ki-o-megalos-aderfos/
8 https://www.reportersunited.gr/9628/exodiko-mpitzios-ypoklopes/
9 https://www.reportersunited.gr/9529/mesotoichia-to-maximoy-me-to-predator/
10 https://insidestory.gr/article/predatorgate-paramenei-metohos-tis-intellexa-o-felix-mpitzios

the publication of our investigation, of Dimitriadis from his position as secretary-general as well as of Panagiotis Kontoleon from the post of EYP chief.

At the same time, our Predator Gate investigation faced legal action. After the publication of evidence on the government's involvement in the surveillance scandal, Dimitriadis sent a legal notice[11] and, later, on the day of his resignation, a lawsuit against Reporters United journalists Nikolas Leontopoulos and Thodoris Chondrogiannos, as well as the victim of the surveillance scandal, Thanasis Koukakis, demanding damages of more than half a million euros in total from all three.[12] (In October 2024, a first instance court dismissed the lawsuit on the grounds that it was based on unsubstantiated claims. Dimitriadis has appealed the decision.)[13]

Dimitriadis' lawsuit was condemned by international and national press freedom organisations as a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP), that is, an abusive legal action to silence the investigation. These include the representative of the intergovernmental Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Teresa Ribeiro (OSCE),[14] Reporters Without Borders (RSF),[15] the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ),[16] the International Press Institute (IPI)[17] and the Hellenic League for Human Rights.[18]

In October 2022, Dimitriadis won the by CASE Coalition's pan-European SLAPP Politician of the Year award,[19] while Reporters United was selected for its investigative impact by Reporters Without Borders as the only European media outlet on their shortlist of international journalism awards for 2022.[20]

In addition to the legal actions against Reporters United, we also uncovered a spear phishing and tax data interception operation against our media outlet,[21] which were set up to intimidate and discredit it in the midst of the surveillance scandal investigation. Following the intervention of RSF, the Independent Public Revenue Authority (AADE) launched an investigation into the leak of Reporters United's tax data. This investigation is pending.

Despite the attacks, Reporters United has made new revelations.

In November 2022, we established connections between Digital Governance Minister Kyriakos Pierrakakis (another best man of Dimitriadis), Defence Minister

11 https://www.reportersunited.gr/9031/exodika-kai-apo-to-maximoy-kata-toy-reporters-united-gia-tin-ereyna-ton-ypoklopon/
12 https://www.reportersunited.gr/9598/predatorgate-dimitriadis-agoges/
13 https://www.reportersunited.gr/14296/apofasi-agogi-dimitriadi/
14 https://x.com/OSCE_RFoM/status/1564945835858825218
15 https://rsf.org/en/abusive-lawsuits-against-journalists-amid-political-tension-greece
16 https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2022/08/06/greece-efj-demands-full-disclosure-on-illegal-surveillance-of-journalists/
17 https://bit.ly/3AWAuHm
18 https://bit.ly/40Pmiuv
19 https://www.ecpmf.eu/greece-slapp-award-winner-grigoris-dimitriadis-urged-to-drop-defamation-lawsuits/
20 https://rsf.org/en/rsf-unveils-shortlist-nominees-its-30th-annual-press-freedom-awards
21 https://www.reportersunited.gr/10098/reporters-united-dave-woods-ypoklopes/

Nikos Panagiotopoulos and businessman Yannis Lavranos, who is Dimitriadis' best man and is directly involved in the surveillance case.[22]

In December 2022, we revealed how for two years Justice Minister Kostas Tsiaras, Pierrakakis and the EYP sabotaged the creation of a digital archive at ADAE, making it almost impossible to uncover the Predator Gate scandal.[23]

In May 2023, we brought to light how nine months after the resignations of Dimitriadis and Kontoleon, Pierrakakis was still in contact with Lavranos, one of the alleged protagonists of the surveillance scandal.[24] In July 2023, we exposed how Dimitriadis, despite the ongoing judicial investigation on the case, was invited to and attended the US Independence Day celebration hosted by the US ambassador to Greece, George Tsunis.[25]

In October 2023, Reporters United participated in the publication of the Predator Files, a cross-border investigation that revealed the ecosystem of Intellexa and Predator companies around the world while offering important findings on the Greek Watergate.

The Predator Files investigation, the work of 15 media outlets and coordinated by the European Investigative Collaborations (EIC) network, was based on confidential documents accessed by French media outlet Mediapart and German magazine Der Spiegel.[26] These documents originated from the ongoing investigations by the French authorities, who arrested executives linked to the Intellexa alliance of companies for their involvement in the alleged illegal exports of surveillance systems (including Predator). These individuals were accused of "complicity in torture" for selling surveillance spyware and equipment to authoritarian regimes.

Besides Mediapart and Der Spiegel, the media participating in the Predator Files are NRC, Politiken, Expresso, Le Soir, De Standaard, VG, infolibre and Domani – all members of the EIC network – who have collaborated with Shomrim (Israel), Die Wochenzeitung (Switzerland), Daraj Media (Lebanon), the Washington Post (US) and Reporters United.

As part of the Predator Files, Reporters United published four articles. In the first publication, we presented the main findings of the months-long investigation, findings of an international interest but from which important conclusions were drawn regarding also the evolution of the surveillance case in Greece:[27]

- The Intellexa ecosystem is much more extensive than previously imagined. It is a network of individuals and companies based in at least 11 countries:

22 https://www.reportersunited.gr/10012/lavranos/
23 https://www.reportersunited.gr/10275/adae-maximou-parochoi/
24 https://www.reportersunited.gr/11019/pierrakakis-lavranos-ypoklopes/
25 https://www.reportersunited.gr/11357/dimitriadis-tsounis-presveia-ipa/
26 https://eic.network/projects/predator-files.html
27 https://www.reportersunited.gr/11674/predator-files/

Greece, Ireland, France, Germany, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Ireland, France, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, Israel, North Macedonia, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

- Much more extensive is the list of countries in which the Intellexa ecosystem of companies have made sales or promoted their products. In many cases these are authoritarian regimes that brutally violate human rights.
- Greece is at the centre of the Intellexa ecosystem, both at an operational, political (through the Greek government's export licences) and corporate level (with the participation of Greeks in the multidimensional corporate schemes) and at a communication level (with the coordination from within Greece of the company's efforts to manage the scandal).
- Through the confidential leaked documents, Intellexa's Predator emerges as a highly successful commercial product, which Nexa (a company linked to Intellexa) executives freely advertise and, in many cases, manage to sell to many governments around the world, even when it may be against EU law.
- The Predator Files investigation has so far not identified a single country, inside or outside the EU, where Predator has not been sold (directly or through an intermediary) to state authorities or government. This fact seems to refute the Greek government's narrative of Predator being used in Greece by private parties and not the government itself.
- Greece is not the only western country linked to Predator, either as an importer or exporter. But it is, until now, the only EU country in which this illegal spyware has been used for the mass surveillance of ministers, military staff, journalists and businesspeople.

In the second Predator Files article, we published testimonies and evidence about the operation of a Predator training centre in Greece as well as about plans by companies of the Intellexa ecosystem to set up a research and development department for new spyware in Greece.[28] In the third article, we revealed that from February to June 2023 the Twitter (now X) account @Joseph_Gordon16 targeted via Predator more than 50 individuals and organisations in Europe, USA and Asia.[29] The victims of surveillance included high-ranking officials, media and journalists, such as:

- the president of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola
- Pierre Carleskind, French MEP and chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries
- three senators and one representative of the US Congress
- the German ambassador to the USA, Emily Haber

28 https://www.reportersunited.gr/11739/predator-files-2-greece/
29 https://www.reportersunited.gr/11768/predator-files-vietnam-intellexa/

- Albanian Tourism Minister Mirela Cubaro, Tirana Mayor Elyon Veljai and the former justice minister Etilda Jonai
- the president, Tsai Ing-wen, and foreign minister, Joseph Wu, of Taiwan
- the French media outlet France24, three journalists from the US-based CNN and the Vietnamese journalist Le Trung Khoa.

According to the evidence gathered by the investigation, Vietnamese state authorities are believed to be behind the targeting. The classified Predator Files documents show that Intellexa Galaxy's $5.6 million contract with Vietnam was for surveillance solutions. Furthermore, the leak establishes that one of the buyers of Predator was MOPS, an acronym for the Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security, which is also involved in other computer hacking cases and is a prosecuting body for dissidents and human rights defenders in Vietnam.

The fourth Predator Files article revealed the step-by-step story behind the export of Predator – with the assistance and the export licences of the Greek government – to the authoritarian regime in Madagascar, which was first revealed by the New York Times in December 2022.[30]

The investigation continued with two more important revelations. Reporters United exposed how the Supreme Court prosecutor (who is appointed directly by the government) removed the surveillance scandal case from the Athens prosecutor's office while prosecutors were investigating the existence of a joint surveillance centre between the EYP and Predator.[31] We also revealed how Dimitriadis' mobile phone number was used to trap 11 Predator targets, including EYP prosecutor Vasiliki Vlachou, then Greek police chief Michalis Karamalakis and former European Union commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos.[32]

Reporters United's investigation of the Predator Gate scandal has been co-authored by journalists Nikolas Leontopoulos, Thodoris Chondrogiannos and Christoforos Kasdaglis.

30 https://www.reportersunited.gr/11799/madagaskari-predator/. See also https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/08/us/politics/spyware-nso-pegasus-paragon.html

31 https://www.reportersunited.gr/11835/ypoklopes-arios-pagos-predator/

32 https://www.reportersunited.gr/11872/predator-files-dimitriadis/

CHAPTER 11

"IDENTITY POLITICS IS PURSUED MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE ON THE RIGHT THAN IT IS ON THE LEFT":

AN INTERVIEW WITH DYLAN RILEY (MAY 2024, CONDUCTED BY GEORGE SOUVLIS AND ROSA VASILAKI)

⟶ **Dylan Riley**

GS: Could you introduce yourself, by describing the formative experiences (academic and political) that strongly influenced you? More precisely, would you like to tell us how your studies at UCLA under the tutelage of intellectual figures like Perry Anderson, Michael Mann and Robert Brenner influenced your political and research agenda?

Dylan Riley: I was raised in the Upper South. Kentucky had slavery but did not join the Confederacy during the Civil War. The state lacked cotton plantations and the patterns of class and racial conflict growing out of those. Slavery was mostly confined to relatively small-scale tobacco farms. Thus, Kentucky is not the Deep South, but also not really the Midwest. When I was very young, maybe four or five, I remember going to protests with my mom aimed at pushing back against what was called the anti-busing movement. Busing was an attempt to integrate racially public schools, and that policy created an enormous pushback, among more or less the white working class. My parents were petty bourgeois liberals who were not really from the state; they were somewhat involved in this movement to try to integrate the schools. My mother, for example, was a chemistry teacher who taught at an experimental public school, which I also attended. This school was deliberately very integrated, that is to say it was fifty-fifty; what that meant at the time was that it was fifty-fifty white and black. Attending this school was a very important experience. And when I first started getting interested in politics, probably in the latter part of high school, was very much in line with the project of racial equality; at that time, I was reading Black Panther material; Huey Newton was a big person that I was reading. I was reading a lot of Mao at that time, but it was also related to this broader context of the whole question of integration and racial politics, so that was very essential. Subsequently, I went to a very odd place for college, called the Eugene Lang College at the New School for Social Research, which was also decisive for me, but how did I get there? It's a strange story because I was coming from a very different place; not very many people who come from Kentucky go to this place. My brother, had gone to school at a place called Antioch College in southern Ohio not far from where I grew up.

Antioch College was founded by a major abolitionist in the 19th century, and so it had these very long historical ties back to the struggles over slavery; it was a very left-wing kind of experimental place. And it was very important

in the 1960s, and all of that. It had started originally as an Owenite socialist community. (There are many such little communities in the Midwest and there's a place called New Harmony that my mother used to take us to, which was a Fourierist community in southern Indiana.) My brother had some friends from Antioch who came down and visited over some holiday or other. It was they who told me about Eugene Lang College; so, I go to New York City, this is a very interesting place, and so that's why I ended up there. Now, what was it like? I got to New York in the autumn of 1989. There were two fundamental experiences there: one was, obviously, the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of my first classes was comparative economic systems, which was probably the last time that class was ever taught.

GS: By whom?

DR: I can't remember; but she was great, absolutely great; it was a really wonderful class. So that was one thing that was going on, and the second thing of course was the first Gulf War, which would have been '91, so I was probably in my third or second year when that happened and there was a big mobilisation against that. However, in a broader sense those who opposed this war were very, very isolated. That was a very popular war, this was the time of George H. W. Bush, the new world order, so it really did seem like the end of history in certain ways. Intellectually, postmodernism was just everywhere, wall to wall. I rejected this. I was taking classes on *Capital*, trying to figure out Lukács and being very confused, reading Gramsci, and I was very interested in Althusser. I and a small circle of friends were interested in this stuff and then the surrounding milieu was Foucault, Derrida, Hannah Arendt. That's what it was like. I had a spontaneous visceral hatred especially of the postmodern stuff. Some of this came from the rather naïve scientistic positivism instilled in me by my rather aggressively atheistic parents.

GS: The New School was founded by Frankfurt school figures right, if I remember correctly.

DR: It's not quite right to say that the New School was founded by the Frankfurt school, although there were Frankfurt school people there, particularly Andrew Arato, the great Hungarian intellectual. The real founding influence of the New School was Hannah Arendt, a serious, but often overrated, figure. There was also the radical, very serious kind of Marxian political economy around figures like Duncan Foley and Anwar Shaikh. But this had nothing to do with the Frankfurt school as such. In reality, it was the figures from the Budapest school, a kind of heterodox Marxism which could lead to various political destinations that were closest to Frankfurt-style Marxism.

GS: Yeah, okay.

DR: I was very influenced by Ferenc Fehér. He was a student of Lukács' and became pretty politically conservative in his later years and very controversial. He never really published a whole lot, but he was absolutely brilliant, the most brilliant lecturer I've ever come across; he opened the door to that tradition of Central European Marxism coming out of Lukács. He just explained what the arguments were, what the stakes were. I remember that in his class we read Alexandre Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* and all of that kind of stuff. The other important figure of course was Ágnes Heller, who was his wife, and these people had come from this Lukácsian tradition but they were influenced by this kind of Arendtian liberalism, quite hostile obviously to the Soviet world, and pretty hostile to Marxism at the time I was interacting with them; but I learned an enormous amount in that kind of environment, it was incredible. And the other great thing about going to this place is that I never really had what you would consider to be an American undergraduate education. I basically came to this place, took a couple of undergraduate classes, which I thought were mostly a complete waste of time, and then I just went and listened to graduate seminars from the time I was 19. (I had a very negative experience in the one sociology class I took. It was taught by a pompous anti-Marxist who fancied himself a grand social theorist, but who was neither that, nor a serious researcher.) I was fortunate in that way. In any case that was the kind of atmosphere in which I was formed. Then I wrote a thesis of some sort. It was "Modes of Production in Perry Anderson", or something like that, and I was probably trying to demonstrate that Perry Anderson had been insufficiently faithful to Althusser, some pointless and crazy thing in some ways, but I was working with a guy named Ira Katznelson, who was a big historical, political guy, important figure, and he was very generous with his time with me. (I felt rather sheepish years later when I published a long critique of his book on the *New Deal* because he did a lot for me personally.) The other guy I worked with who was very important in American sociology, Aristide Zolberg, was an important student of immigration. In any case they said, oh, you obviously seem interested in this thing called historical sociology, and I said okay, and they said there's only one place you can go for that, and that's UCLA. So that's how I ended up there.

GS: When did you go there?

DR: I got to UCLA in '94. It was right after the OJ Simpson Trial. I had read Mike Davis' *City of Quartz* in preparation, and I thought to myself what is this bizarre place that I'm going to? Los Angeles is as different for someone coming from the East Coast and other parts of the US, as America in general can be for Europeans; it's a culture shock going there. In any case, I showed up at a very interesting time to be there. Michael Mann was there obviously, Perry Anderson was there but I was in the sociology department, and Perry never considered sociology to be a real thing. Robert Brenner was there. I was friendly with him, but I actually never studied formally with Brenner; then there was a man named Iván Szelényi, who

was a second generation of this Budapest school. He is very interesting guy; he co-authored *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, which was a very fascinating book. It was similar in some ways to Milovan Djilas' stuff, but deeper and theoretically richer. So this was a very exciting place to be for this historical comparative stuff because there were all these figures there. And it was also of course a really interesting time because there was the transition to capitalism happening in the Soviet world, so everybody was thinking about questions such as: "What is capitalism?", "What is this transition about?", "How do we think about it in relationship to other transitions?", "What kind of society is going to emerge?" So that was really interesting. But of course, then it was also, again, just as at the New School, extremely difficult to express any kind of Marxist ideas; even to take Marx very seriously was looked on as slightly weird at that time, we're talking about early to mid-'90s. Recall that there was no *Jacobin*, there was no Bernie Sanders presidential candidacy, the Democratic Socialists of America resembled a pensioner's club more than a political party, the Trotskyist groups were interesting but politically isolated, and of course the CPUSA was an irrelevancy. So it was difficult in terms of that. But that's how I got there.

GS: But which courses influenced you more? Was it intellectual history, historical sociology? Do you remember any course or seminar in particular?

DR: Seminars with Perry Anderson were an incredible experience. I attended a couple of those, that was amazing. But I really learned how to do sociology from two people: one of them was my advisor Rebecca Jean Emigh, who was doing this very intense archival quantitative stuff, a brilliant woman who really understood how to do empirical work that talked to theory, that was the whole project. The other person who really influenced me was a man named Maurice Zeitlin, who wrote an important book called *The Civil Wars in Chile*. His course was all about the logic of comparative historical inquiry as a method and that was very, very influential for my thinking. I also, of course, learned a ton from my advisor Michael Mann. But intellectually we were less close. UCLA was an extraordinary place in a lot of ways, in terms of the way that it taught one to think about explanation, this was very important, like how do you articulate a theoretical position and then bring evidence to bear on it. What makes for great sociology is the twinning of theoretical ambition with careful empirical research. To actually pull this off is unusual actually, because a lot of social science can be either very descriptive or in the air, and I always try to bring these things together, and that's probably the main thing that I learned. I learned a lot, but that was the main thing.

GS: And the last question regarding this topic, from a Greek perspective, these people that you mentioned, Brenner, Perry Anderson, even Michael Mann, because he's not a Marxist, he's a neo-Weberian...

DR: He would dispute that actually. Interestingly enough, I agree with you, but he doesn't agree with you.

GS: Because most of the people in Greece know their work from the Marx stuff in the 1970s and 1980s, so did these people even in the 1990s, when you were there, have a difficulty to describe themselves as Marxists, or were they not discussing these types of ideas, what do you remember from this kind of thing, because it's a crucial thing because these people have been acknowledged as some of the most important theorists in the intellectual history of Marxism in the English-speaking world, but also in specifically historical studies like in Brenner's *The Transition to Capitalism*, etc.

DR: My understanding, if you're talking about Perry Anderson and Robert Brenner in particular, is that in no way did they ever distance themselves from their Marxism. There's no sign at all that there was ever any turning away from that basic understanding of the world. And they were surrounded of course by a group of students who tended to much more explicit in their Marxism. (I was one of them, although I was a little bit on the periphery. Part of this was because they were members of the history department and I was a sociologist. Historians tend to very much look down on sociologists, as positivist dilettantes, which is fine; from its beginnings, of course, sociology has always skirted the edge of quackery. But the absurd ambitions of the discipline are also what make it great, and personally I have no problem being a dilettante.) But in any case, there was this group of extraordinary Marxist historical types who were their students, and then there was the *New Left Review*. This was a quite Marxist environment there; there should be like no doubt about all that. If you're asking if they (Anderson and Brenner) had difficulty identifying that way, no, this wasn't really an issue. In some ways American academia is a very strange place because in one sense it is profoundly depoliticised, much more so than, for example, in Greece, from what I understand, or in France, where there are connections between political movements and political parties and intellectuals; in the US it's much more difficult to establish those connections especially on the left because, what, are you going to work for the Democratic Party? In the US, the way in which the academics interact with parties is as basically experts in some very specific policy area; it's not really about thinking about socialism or capitalism, that's not the way it works. But that very insulation also can protect the Marxian intelligentsia from broader shifts in the political environment. And you can say that this is true of the Anglo-Marxian world as a whole; it's somehow more resistant to the complete abandonment of Marxism that was happening on the continent from the 1970s. Perry Anderson makes that point actually, importantly in *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*.

GS: And a last question about how you were involved with the *New Left Review*.

DR: Well, obviously I was working with Perry Anderson very closely on my dis-

sertation, but I wasn't involved in the *New Left Review* until I got to Berkeley; the thing that caught their eye was my piece on Tony Judt. They basically asked me if I want to be involved in this; and I said, "of course". I had been following the *Review* closely since I was an early undergraduate, just reading it and learning an enormous amount from it.

RV: The main theoretical reference that penetrates all your studies is the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Though, in contrast to most of scholars using his work to analyse cultural developments, your work has had recourse to aspects and concepts of the Gramscian repertoire to grasp political and social phenomena. Could you tell us in which ways the Gramscian work could prove useful to the understanding of the phenomenon of class formation and of political parties?

DR: I've been trying to figure out what the *Prison Notebooks* are saying for a very long time, on and off; it's one of these bodies of writing, I'm not even sure if you could call it a "text", which is infinitely rich and people can get lots out of it. I don't think that there's any way to say, "oh this is the right reading, and this is the wrong reading", or whatever. It's a very open kind of thing. Gramsci is basically making this point that under capitalism, at least we could say under classic capitalism, there's a separation between economic production and politics. Because this separation exists, the relationship between classes and political parties or classes and political movements more generally is quite difficult to grasp. Another way of putting that point is to say that what is quite characteristic of capitalism is that politics is actually autonomous, and somewhat underdetermined by class. This follows from the fact that there is a separation of the economic and the political. Therefore, we have to theorise the political in its own right and also in terms of the structural limits that are placed on it by the economy. That basic insight is still very, very relevant. Gramsci cashes this out in terms of this idea of these three levels, what he calls the economic structure, civil society and the state. The great Italian political thinker Norberto Bobbio was quite acute in identifying that contribution as Gramsci's opening move. We need to think with this approach, that the general observation that culture is important. Certainly Gramsci has lots of interesting things to say about culture, but I don't see that as his main contribution. His main contribution is to try to understand the politics of capitalist society in a way that is sophisticated but also that allows for these structural parameters that are put in place by the class structure, if that makes sense.

GS: Your fist monograph, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism* was first published 14 years ago. If you were writing the book today what you would change?

DR: That's an easy one. It's basically the neglect of imperialism. That's the big weakness of the book in my opinion. I will defend the book in the sense that its analysis stood the test of time well; I don't see any reason to change the basic argument of the book in any way. I was absolutely right about that and the evidence in the

book makes the point that needed to be made at that time. So that I would hold on to absolutely; it's important to see, however, that the book was very limited in its question. It wasn't exactly an explanation of fascism; it was asking a question about the connection between civil society and fascism. So it was never saying that a strong civil society was the cause of fascism, which would be a bizarre argument. What it was saying was that the strength of civil society was, on the one hand, no protection against fascism, and, on the other, gave fascism certain characteristics that we associate with classical fascism, mainly its mass mobilising party: so those arguments are absolutely right. To have a full explanation of fascism something further is needed, though. One of the most important elements is imperialism. Fascism was essentially a phenomenon of powers that were excluded from a British-dominated geopolitical structure. This is really important. So that imperialism is really the context of fascism, and then fascism in some way or another is about war, at the end of the day. It's a very important element of that. That's a missing dimension in *Civic Foundations*, but of course that's a missing dimension of other folks who've written about fascism as well.

GS: So, an externalist explanation, not an internalist one.

DR: Somehow those two explanations have to be put together, that's the trick, right?

RV: How would the context of imperialism reform these questions you asked in the first place?

DR: Here the point would be to say that it's part of the whole causal process that produces fascism that these regimes emerged in very particular geopolitical spaces; there are systemic pressures towards interstate competition in the interwar period, and before and the whole period of classic imperialism; at the same time some states obviously escaped these imperatives to some extent. Somehow you have to bring those two things together. And it's just the case that if you look at classic fascist ideology, obviously in Mussolini's writings, or Corradini, a big Italian nationalist who came up with this idea of the proletarian nation, the idea of overthrowing the existing geopolitical system, that's key, that's key to what the whole project is all about, and it gives it its extreme violence and dynamism at the same time, so that's basically what I'm suggesting, and that's about imperialism. It's not about imperialism in the sense that, "oh, strong imperial powers are going to be fascist". Actually, it's quite the opposite. Fascism is a regime of weak or aspiring, not strong, powers. that's the point that I would make.

GS: And, though you know, also to this extent you could read this type of explanation of expansionism as a mode of existing of fascism, as also the reason for its collapse...

DR: Absolutely!

GS: Because in the era of modern states, especially at that time, this contradiction was intensifying...

DR: That's a different question to ask in a way. The stuff that happened in World War II actually matters. It could have been a German, a European order, that's conceivable; it's among the historical possibilities that were on the table, and they failed. That's the point. They were stopped by the Soviet Union, primarily, with some help from the Americans, but that's the real point.

RV: Your work has invited a rethinking of the legacy of dictatorial regimes for democratic outcomes, focusing on the formation of civil societies. A common assumption is that such legacies are exclusively negative for democracy, whereas your work shows that the development of civil society, first, is not antagonistic to forms of dictatorships and, second, that it would be more productive to think of dictatorship and democracy as "successive historical stages" rather than "alternatives". In what ways do such conceptualisations challenge the established notions of liberal democracy today?

DR: I want to start by just saying how difficult the problem of liberal democracy is for the left. It's a very difficult problem. On the one hand, of course, it seems necessary to defend these fundamental gains, like basic civil freedoms, freedom of expression, freedom of association; on the other hand, we have to recognise how profoundly limited – I'll call it capitalist democracy – is. It obviously excludes the whole question of ownership and the dictatorship of the firms maintained in the context of democracy. So how are we supposed to deal with that? Then there's a causal question. There's a super strong temptation, especially given the collapse of what appeared to be a systemic alternative to capitalism, to make the argument that capitalist or liberal democracy was an achievement of the popular masses against this resistant elite. I'm very sceptical of that, and in this I'm quite distinct from lots of other folks on the left who want to make just exactly such an argument. I don't think it's particularly compelling historically, and I don't think it makes a lot of sense conceptually either. In one way or another, a kind of liberal regime where you have some party alternation and you have some kind of representative chamber is pretty good for capital. It's pretty much what they want, and there are lots of reason why; one is that it is a good way of managing the inherent conflicts that emerge among different branches of capital. But it also has, from the perspective of capital, a positive effective on the class struggle. It's a good way of incorporating and tamping down on class struggle because it encourages people to think of themselves as citizens, not as members of a class. But this only works if you've first disciplined the left. And this is why, to some extent, you could say this is what the 20th century has been about; it was essentially cracking down on the left hard enough so then after that you can have liberal democracy. In some ways the Spanish transition is the key exemplar of this process. If you compare the left of the

Spanish Second Republic to the left that emerges after Franco, the key difference of course is that the left of the Second Republic, even the socialists, the socialists of the Second Republic, are well to the left of communists after the transition, because of what the Francoist period did; it scared people and it shifted the entire political spectrum to the right. And, in some ways, that's what happened with the fascist experience. You see the same thing obviously with Eurocommunism and particularly in Italy. The worry is, "oh God, what we don't want to have is Greece, or Chile, let's not push the elites too far". Why? For the very, very rational reason that they had experienced this incredibly traumatic repression. So that leads me to think, and this is not an apology for any kind of authoritarian regime, but it leads me to think that these phases should not really be understood as alternatives to democracy; they should rather be understood as part of the historical process by which capitalist democracies were constructed. Think of the first, in some ways a kind of classical continental European case, which would be France. What is the founding moment of the Third Republic? It's the destruction of the Paris Commune. That's what makes the Third Republic possible in some respects. This is something that we have to grapple with. We just have to face some very difficult facts. We also have to be clear about what to do with the whole legacy of liberalism and proceduralism; it's not possible to just reject that. Those freedoms are important; all that stuff is important, but at the same time we have to recognise the limits and also the way in which it was historically constructed. And then the question is what about the transition to socialism and could that possibly happen in the context of a parliamentary democratic system? I'm also doubtful of that, unfortunately. But that may be something we could talk about later.

GS: You have written an extensive foreword for the new edition of *Fascism and Dictatorship* (Verso, 2019) by Nicos Poulantzas. What aspects of the Poulantzian work do you think are still relevant in order to understand the contemporary far right, if any?

DR: It was Sebastian Budgen who asked me to do the introduction so that's how I came to do it; but I also thought about it as an opportunity to figure out that book, which I really wanted to do, and take it seriously. And it's an amazing book, for me it's Poulantzas' most interesting book; it's really dealing with historical materials in a serious way and making a pretty original argument. In terms of the question of what it has to say to us today, the first thing I was saying is he's very good on the petty bourgeoisie. He understands the petty bourgeoisie, this idea of meritocracy and this myth of the ladder. There's this book that became quite famous by a colleague, a former colleague at Berkeley, Arlie Hochschild, *Strangers in their Own Land*. She interviews these essentially petty bourgeoisie, American southerners. And what did she find? She finds the myth of the ladder, she finds the same thing that Poulantzas was talking about, years, years before, in the context of the interwar period. He's good about that. He's got some interesting things to say

about the way that the petty bourgeoisie played a certain role in organising these fascist regimes even though ultimately for him these regimes were in the interest of capital. So that is all interesting. But the thing when I was rereading the book and really thinking about it, that I thought was most interesting, was that actually what Poulantzas' fundamental project in that book was about science and politics. His point was that you have to get the analysis right if you want your politics to be right. Because what he's saying throughout the book is that the Comintern basically had a crappy analysis of fascism and that is part of why the fascists won. And that point I don't think it's been made that much about Poulantzas' book, but it is very clear that that's the main thing he's doing in that book, ultimately. And so, that suggests that there's a methodological point about the real importance of getting the analysis right for your politics. These aren't different things, if you don't have the analysis right then you may end up carrying water for the other side. So that for me is Poulantzas' message for us today.

RV: You argued in 2018 that the question is not why our contemporary politics resembles those of the 1930s, but why it does not. How exactly does our era differ from the times of historical fascism and are there specifically unique features in our current historical conjuncture?

DR: Of course, there are always unique features in any historical conjecture. The thing I would insist on is just the absence of the Soviet Union basically and in a way the absence of any serious threat from the left for capital. That difference between our period and the interwar period, it's just a huge difference between these two things. So we'll be talking about this in a bit, but I do not want to say that there's no problem, that we shouldn't be worried about democracy or any of that kind of stuff. I'm convinced that the period that we're looking at today is somehow fundamentally different than that interwar period, precisely in the sense that we don't have this massive clash between an anticapitalist left and a far right committed to the order of property; that's not the nature of the conflicts today. They're just different.

GS: Is it possible for something like historical fascism to emerge under conditions of advanced capitalism or post-globalisation societies? And in what kind of loci could one possibly expect to see a rise of quasi-fascist phenomena?

DR: Of course, everything in that question depends on what you mean by "like". As I was saying, capitalist democracy is under really serious threat and those threats are structural, as I've talked about in this room before. The thing that could tip us towards something more like fascism is the thing that you're seeing unfold. That would be a much more competitive bellicose international environment. That's the thing that could really move it to that direction; so where would I expect fascism to emerge, or something like it, depending on what we mean by "like"? It

would be in countries that are engaged in big land wars, like Russia and Ukraine for example. Those would be the kinds of places where you can engage in the kinds of mobilisations and so on, that the classic fascist regimes were able to do. But how far is that phenomenon going to go? I don't know, there's a lot to think about here. For example, to what extent is Europe going to rearm? That would have really profound effects on European politics, so those are things that we need to think about.

RV: In 2017 you argued in an article published in the *New Left Review* that Trump is not a fascist. The question of Trump's political make-up is back on the table since he seems to be performing quite a spectacular come back for the upcoming presidential elections. Do you still think that Trump is not a fascist and what is Trump after all?

DR: What is Trump? That is the question of American politics, I guess. There are various things to say here. First of all, there's something very important going on which is that, for a long time, if you looked at American politics especially from Europe, it seemed like the politics of Tweedledee and Tweedledum, basically. It's an alteration between these two capitalist parties, not much at stake there: passive population, low voting turnout, people seemed apolitical, and then in Europe we have some notional remnants of the left and right and there's something real happening. That is not the case anymore. It's not true that this is the politics of Tweedledee and Tweedledum and there's little to choose between the Democrats and the Republicans. I do think that whatever Trump is, he's very American. His whole appeal, this kind of clever and unscrupulous businessman has a particular appeal for a certain part of the American electorate. His appeal is very deeply American and very cultural also, in a way. Trump is a serious threat to normal democratic freedoms. That's impossible to deny that at this point; it's likely that a second Trump term will be much harsher than the first one and, more importantly, more well organised. What Trump would mean for the international environment is hard to determine. There are paradoxes here. Trump was one of the very few presidents not to start a foreign war during his first term. That's something to note. He's in the tradition of American isolationism which is, you could make an argument, about socially winding up the American empire. Whether would he really be able to carry through such a project, how seriously he would take such a project, it is a really open question but it's something to consider. Furthermore, one should consider what the consequences would actually be for the world. That's probably the more serious question that one would have to think about. But this decision between Trump and Biden is not just two different flavours of ice cream to manage the American empire; this is quite different. To get to the other side of this, what Biden was doing. Biden is in no way a person of the left. But he had adopted certain elements of the Bernie Sanders programme, and he seemed quite deter-

mined to essentially pursue an industrial policy, which was completely unprecedented for the last 40 or 50 years in American politics. Now that is also linked to a quite aggressive American nationalism. It's a very complex situation, but Trump is a pretty serious threat to the domestic left in the US and people looking from the outside need to think what the consequences of him would be geopolitically. Now, what else do I want to say about this. The other point I wanted to make about this, which has, is starting to be, an important aspect that we should take into account, is that the American electorate has become much more active politically, just at the moment the European engagement with politics is declining, which is interesting. There's a weird thing going on where in some ways American politics is being "Europeanised", and European politics is being "Americanised". And I'm not quite sure why that's happening but it's definitely the case.

RV: Is Trump a new kind of political beast, fundamentally different from the kind of Biden, who, when I first saw him as a candidate, seemed like a person from the old world, the world I've always known, since I was born, how American presidents look like.

DR: He looks like a cardboard cut-out of an American president basically.

RV: Trump in many ways disrupts that, in fundamental ways he disrupts that, even at the level of representation. So my question is, are we going to see more Trumps around?

DR: Let me talk about that in terms of the US context first. My understanding of it is that you're right; Trump is unique, and the reason this is so is because the other Republican candidates for the primaries were totally unable to reproduce his charisma. When they tried to, they all looked like phonies and they all failed. He brings out a certain kind of voter that the other people can't bring out. So he may be unusual and unique. When he goes away it's not clear to me that the Republicans can reproduce that. At the same time, the Republican Party as an organisation and institution is going to stay around, and I want to emphasise how far to the right that party is, because the so-called European far right looks quite moderate compared to these people. Someone like Giorgia Meloni, for example, she is just a vanilla far-right politician, and she would be on the centre-left of the Republican caucus or something like that. I know she has this colourful past so we should take into account who she is as a political figure. She and Marine Le Pen exist in a world of some normalcy, they seem to recognise basic things, they seem to recognise climate change, for example, which is of course universally denied in the American Republican Party. So I can't emphasise enough how far to the right and how off the political spectrum the American Republican Party is.

GS: Do you think that this transformation to the far right of the Republican Party is something recent or was it always like this?

DR: So I'm not a huge expert on American politics, but this is what my rough and ready answer to that is: the collapse of the Soviet Union was very consequential for American domestic politics but the consequences have taken a while to really play out. And the Republican Party's reason for existence for a long time was to defeat the Soviet Union, and they did that and then they were lost to a certain extent. At the same time, of course, the Democrats took over much of the Republic platform. This was very similar to what happened obviously in Britain with Blair and Thatcher; you have a similar phenomenon with Clinton presenting himself as a softer version of Reagan. And so the whole political system began to move very, very far to the right, and the Republicans shifted more and more to the right. Now the Democrats also importantly, as has happened to the centre-left everywhere but maybe even more extreme with the Democrats, have lost support among the working class. If you put together basically the shift to the right and the loss of a project – this phenomenon starts in the 1980s, but obviously becomes more and more acute – with an available right-wing working class vote, you get a very different kind of formation than what you had in the older Republican Party. So those are probably things that are going on. The problem for the Republicans is that they should be a right-wing nationalist party aiming for the working class, but they can't quite do that, because they can't give up their deep commitments to capital at the same time. It's a real problem for them actually because they would be more electorally effective if they were more coherent on that side. No one should be under illusions about how dramatically the Republican Party has transformed since 2015. It's really remarkable. Even people who were leading the charge in the second Gulf War, all these old retreads from the George W. Bush administration, they have all reemerged now as, if not Democrats, at least, sort of, non-party disillusioned Republicans who are going to help elect Biden. Which is just bizarre; this doesn't happen. Basically the entire Republican establishment has been transformed by what happened in the Republican Party. It's like a revolution inside that party.

RV: What has actually puzzled me in Trumpian politics, Trump as a personality and the people around him, is how are they going to manage, or whether they're going to be eventually able to manage, this contradiction between the hedonism, conspicuous consumption and hyperconsumerism that Trump represents with ultra conservative values which, to some extent, are very inimical to that. How this is going to play out in political terms, and how consensus is going to be achieved within this new administration, because I don't think that this transformation you were talking about is going to stop. It's going to continue in the next years.

DR: The way I would think about that is the question of the so-called "evangelical vote", because those are the conservatives we're talking about that are po-

tentially critical of certain forms of hedonism which Trump, you're right to say, represents. The point to make about that is that those evangelical voters are key to the Republican Party. They're the thing that gives the Republican Party its organisational heft. They're the civil society, they're the civic foundations of radical Republicanism. But the interesting thing about that voting bloc is they're quite strategic; so they understand that Trump delivered. Trump is unusual in American politics in the fact that he gave his base everything that he said he would. He's responsible for repealing abortion rights; he totally stacked the Supreme Court, in a way that will make it reactionary for a generation. It's a reactionary institution in general, but you get those people on there it's even worse; he delivered tax cuts in exactly the way he said he was going to do; he even started to build this insane border wall; he did all that stuff. It's a very cohesive party. They have a leader who is on their side, and who has a proven track record of delivering the things that they want, and the Democratic Party, of course, is the place where all left hopes go to die. It's a completely different relationship between elite and base on the Democratic side. The base of the party – it's amazing what's happened on the Republican side – the base of the party took that party over and turned it into an instrument for its own ends. That did not happen on the Democratic side, where the elite is largely in control. Of course this elite is somewhat responding, I would say, to pressures. It's very interesting that Bernie Sanders has never really criticised Biden especially on domestic issues; but in general, the relationship between the elite and the base suggests that Democratic Party is quite a different social formation than the Republican Party.

GS: In much of your analysis of the current American political scene the Democratic Party seems to have more similarities than differences with the Republican Party. Do you agree with this take? And if yes, do you think that Tariq Ali's concept of "extreme centre" is useful in understanding current American politics?

DR: I will reply to that. The idea of an "extreme centre" well describes the Clinton-Blair years; it's particularly applicable to the Macron phenomenon; I don't see it at this point as being particularly applicable to American politics. So to say in the abstract that the Democratic and the Republican parties have more similarities than differences, I'd like to know exactly what that means, right; they are similar in some general way. Obviously, they are both fundamentally capitalist parties, for example; but there's a lot at stake in American elections now. This wasn't always the case. To make this very concrete: if you care about women's reproductive rights, you can't say it doesn't matter, you just can't say that; it does matter, it matters quite a bit. If you care about trying to maybe at least admit that there's a problem with the environment and global warming, it matters. These are significant things. I understand the impetus behind this idea of saying, "Well, it's these different parties that manage the American empire." However, I don't really think it provides

much of a guide to what actually is at stake in these American elections now; it's a bit more. So it goes to this other point that I was making, that American elections are becoming more polarised; they're more about things, like they're real issues, and the American electorate is more engaged than it has been before. What Ali describes is the Americanisation of European politics, but what's also happening is the Europeanisation of American politics. These things need to be understood that way.

RV: In much of your late work you have use the concept of "political capitalism". What does this concept offer analytically in order to understand the current phase of capitalist development?

DR: I've been working on this, I've taught about this here, I'm actually working on a response right now to all of the responses to the thing I did with Robert Brenner, the "Seven Theses" article. So I'm very much currently thinking about this. My basic point about that is that it's incredible how poorly capitalism has been performing for a very long time, just in terms of growth. And we need to understand, we on the left, what is going on with that. Why is it that the growth engine is not getting restarted? And we also need to be able to relate that phenomenon to these incredible income inequalities, and the nature of contemporary politics. So we need a framework that can bring these things together. And the notion that, oh well, this is just more of the same, this is just more capital, more capitalism, is not compelling. We need to understand something about the contemporary period. Let me just give you an example about how significant this phenomenon of political capitalism is. So 2022 was the year with the highest number of share buybacks in American history. What does that mean? Well it basically means that this is a period in which the private sector is being showered with public money that it is using to buy back its shares, not to invest. So what kind of process is that? It's not what we would think about as capital, like in the classical sense. What I mean by that is that it's not exactly investing in order to gain relative surplus value. Capital is using public money to juice share prices that are distributed to the investors. And this stuff is going on everywhere, so how does that work, and how do we understand the consequences of that for the nature of political economy and the nature of political struggle? So it's important to think about this new, more directly political method of accumulation.

GS: Is there a way to salvage identity politics from its current political instrumentalisation and ultimately depoliticisation?

DR: This is connected directly to what I see as the phenomenon of political capitalism. The issue about what's called identity politics, and let's be very clear, identity politics is pursued much more effectively on the right than it is on the left.

RV: I was arguing that in class, and students didn't like that, the identity politics of the right.

DR: Absolutely, it's undeniable. But it is a phenomenon across the political spectrum. Now, how do we understand this? We can say, oh it's ideology, or something like that, but we need an explanation of where it comes from. Why is it that suddenly these forms of conflict have emerged? And my hypothesis is basically that there are two sources of this: one of them is the problem of a very slow-growing, if not in some cases stagnant or shrinking economic pie, that encourages a zero-sum struggle among different kinds of wage earners, and these things are often marked by symbolic politics. In a way this is why Max Weber is very useful here, because Weber had this idea that a potentially important source of conflict was among wage earners trying to protect their particular form of labour power on the labour market. Well, that kind of phenomenon is very, very important, and it is going to become increasingly important to the extent that capitalism is a slow growth economy, because of this political capitalist phenomenon. But the second thing that's going on, is the absence of what Gramsci called "concrete fantasy", so an idea of an actual alternative society that can unify a political agency. So in the absence of that, what you get, this is actually as I said both on the left and the right, what you get is this "apolitics" of who-gets-what, basically, and what's the fair distribution. Now that's a very weak politics, and it's intrinsically a politics of fragmentation. Because it's about a juridical redressing of wrongs, or making sure that every particular group gets it's due, but you're not saying anything about the kind of society in which all the different groups that are either getting or not getting their due exist; because you don't have an image of that. And so that is the issue.

GS: This is connected to your argument that the left should not focus solely on the distribution issue.

DR: That's right.

GS: And it is one of the criticisms that you have articulated against some people related to *Jacobin* magazine.

DR: Inequality is of course incredibly important. But the left cannot be content with simply critiquing inequality. Indeed, I reject the idea that the fundamental idea of the left can be grasped as egalitarianism. We've always been about something more. More specifically, the idea of a society that allows for human flourishing. If you read Marx's "Critique of the Gotha Programme", just go back and look at that again, and just see how he thinks about the question of equality. And there's a sense in which for him, the whole notion of equality is an internally contradictory one, because it's not that one would want to encourage inequality, but it's also not that one would want to encourage sameness. The thing about human existence

is that it's individual in some very profound way, that every one of us has these capacities to be the kind of person who we are. That's what we would want to allow for in a society that would promote true human flourishing. That's the project, right? And that project requires the idea of a society, of some kind of qualitative social form. We should, of course, never ignore inequality. But equality as such cannot also be the ultimate lodestar, or goal. That can't be right. I don't know if you want to talk about this more...

RV: It can, because that has an endpoint, and an endpoint that is very much compatible with current forms of capitalism.

DR: Right. Let's just do an experiment. If everybody has the same little plot of land, we've realised the dream of equality. But that's not what we're after; we're supposed to be about socialism! The idea of equal distribution is fundamentally individualistic; it's fundamentally anti-social; it's in some way impossible; and as you're saying it's compatible with capitalism's ideology. That's the thing. In a weird way that kind of equality is capitalism's self-understanding. So is the left then in the business of trying to realise the capitalist utopia, or the capitalist self-description?

RV: It seems to me that it lacks the socialisation of the idea of equality.

DR: It doesn't have an idea of society, it remains fundamentally at the level of the individual, and that's true very widely on the American left.

RV: How do you see the recent farmers' mobilisations across Europe? Could one say that we can locate in such reactions the seeds of a proto-fascist, Europe-wide movement this time around?

DR: You guys are really stretching me. The thing we have to start out with here is that this is a significant phenomenon; no one would doubt that. It's stressing governments across the eurozone. But ultimately, we have to recognise also the fact that the farming population per se is a tiny percentage of the population in most European countries now, which is of course a huge difference from, even a hundred years ago, or even 90 years ago. So you're talking about 4 or 5% of the population at most is really engaged in farming. So what is going on here? Part of what's going on here is a powerful interest group made up of sometimes quite well-off farmers; this interest group is pursuing what is basically protectionist politics. But, of course, there's a broader ideological penumbra under which this happens which is about protecting our homeland, and eating meat, and all of that kind of stuff, which does appeal not just to the farming population but to the population that lives in small towns. That's really an important difference. So the percentage of the population that lives in small towns is not the same as the percentage of the population that is engaged in farming as an economic activity; it's important for us to make that

distinction. Is this a problem for the left? I think so. The left everywhere in the OECD area, let's just put it that way, has a terrible problem with the rural population by which I mean people who live in small towns basically. Peasants exist almost nowhere now in the OECD. That's the problem, how do we appeal outside of the urban centres, and that's something that needs to be urgently addressed. I will speak now about my own country a little bit. My own discipline of sociology, which is focused obsessively on inequalities inside urban areas, has incredibly shockingly little to say about the regional inequalities that exist in the country which are hugely relevant for politics. So the poorest, if you look at a poverty map of the United States, you will find that the poorest areas of the country are all in the Appalachian region, which is this eastern mountain range, and there's very little work that's done on these things, and it's not really an issue in policy circles; it's amazing. So I actually think that one thing that is really important for the left to think about, but also for social science to think about in general, is this whole question of regional inequality. And it's something that is obviously very, very relevant to the European context. Regional inequalities are exploding, and if you look at the Italian evidence, the country was at its most regionally equal around about 1980. So but now it's back to the levels of regional dispersion that you saw basically at unification. The same thing I understand is going on in France, it's probably going on in most parts of Europe where you're getting these incredible concentrations of wealth in certain cities and then much of the country is just left to languish.

GS: What would be a progressive political view with regards to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict?

DR: On this point, I'm just going to enter a plea for this; we have to figure out a geopolitics that can both explain Russian behaviour and American behaviour primarily, in this particular instance. This is a difficult issue for the left, but one thing I'm going to say: any account which doesn't put at the centre the question of why it is that Russia unleashed this massive invasion of Ukraine is not adequate. And the reason I'm saying that is because we have to be honest with ourselves. I was totally surprised by the invasion; I did not expect it to happen. I thought that the Biden administration was overplaying it, and almost everyone on the left thought the same thing. The fact that they in fact pursued this project must be taken as information that we have to incorporate into our thinking. So we basically need an account of Russian imperialism. Now my sense about it, this is just a hypothesis, I'm not an expert on this, so you can take it or leave it. But my sense is that a lot of this has to do with the imposition of neoliberalism in Russia, and what that did to the regime's internal legitimacy in the long term. So the turning point in the Russian geopolitical outlook is really 2008; remember there's a boom in the early 2000s and Putin is the darling of the West in this early period. I remember listening to a political scientist at the UCLA say how great this guy was.

RV: Erdogan had the same treatment for a long time, Assad in Syria had a similar treatment.

DR: Similar treatment, yes. So he was, like these other figures that you're talking about, Erdogan and Bashar al-Assad, a darling of the West. But 2008 made it clear, this is just a hypothesis, but my analysis is 2008 made it clear to Putin and his inner circle that Russia's position in the world was to be a very subordinate regional player in the American-dominated system, and they didn't want it. And it also created a domestic crisis of legitimacy, a crisis that Putin was of course able to get out of with these land grabs and so on and so forth. So a lot of this is determined by a legitimacy problem that is created by a failed economic model. Then we have to ask this question about, what are the driving forces of US geopolitics? This is not clear. It's not clear because, obviously the Soviet Union is gone; so, what is going on here? What is the lodestar, what is the guiding principle of US foreign politics? One of the things that is important to recognise is that the US fundamentally doesn't care that much about Russia. It's not that relevant. It's relevant to some extent as a regional player, and as an export source for energy supplies to Europe. But much more important to the US is China. And that's important to recognise, because what it means is that basically the US really would like in some ways for this whole thing to go away, so they can pivot towards the real geopolitical concern. Which means that it's unlikely that the US was really behind, trying to as it were encircle Russia; I do not think that was in the minds of US planners in the lead-up to the invasion.

RV: Thank you very much, Dylan.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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Kanishka Goonewardena was trained as an architect in Sri Lanka and now teaches critical theory and urban design at the University of Toronto. His writings have focused on the relations between space and ideology, imperialism and colonialism, and Marxist thought. He has been a visiting professor at the Freie Universität (2009) and the Technische Universität Berlin (2013-2014) and co-edited *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre* (Routledge, 2008).

Panayota Gounari is professor of applied linguistics at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Using her background in critical applied linguistics and critical pedagogy, she investigates social issues through the lens of critical discourse studies and their implications for pedagogy, always aiming to produce socially committed research. Her current research focuses on far-right populist discourses and authoritarianism, the discourse of the critical race theory debate and the discourses of collective memory and historical revisionism. She has also written on critical pedagogy and educational and linguistic policy reforms. Her most recent book, *From Twitter to Capitol Hill: Far-right Authoritarian Populist Discourses, Social Media, and Critical Pedagogy* (Brill, 2022) explores far-right authoritarian populist discourses in social media in the context of Trump's presidency and the 6 January insurrection, in an attempt to illuminate how online extremism works and the ways discourses shape social events.

Aristotle Kallis is professor of modern and contemporary history at Keele University. He received his BA (Hons) from the University of Athens and his PhD from the University of Edinburgh. He has previously taught at Edinburgh (2000-2002), Bristol (2002-2003) and Lancaster (2003-2016) universities. His main research interests lie in the fields of fascism/extremism, on the extremism-mainstream nexus in contemporary politics and on the history of urban modernism. He is currently working on two projects – one on fascism and iconoclasm and the other on the normalisation and "mainstreamining" of the radical right since 2001. His most recent publications include *The "Minimum Dwelling"Revisited: CIAM's Practical Utopia (1928–31)* (Bloomsbury, 2023); *Beyond the Fascist Century* (co-edited with Constantin Iordachi, Palgrave MacMillan, 2020); *Fascist Rome*: *The Making of the Fascist Capital* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship* (co-edited with Antonio Costa Pinto, Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), as well as a series of articles and chapters on interwar fascism, the radical right, Islamophobia, and the "mainstreaming" of populism.

Christoforos Kasdaglis is a co-founder of Reporters United. He began his journalism career in 1988 with the column "Soldier, Where Are You Going?" in the iconic Greek newspaper Kyriakatiki Eleftherotypia, where he later served as editor-in-chief from 1995 to 1999. Over the years, Christoforos has contributed to a wide range of Greek media outlets. He has written for the newspapers Ethnos and Pontiki; numerous magazines including Epsilon, 4 Trohoi, Para Pente, Galera, KannabiStreet, NEO, and AllStar Basket; and digital platforms such as forthnet.gr, imerologioanergou.gr, thepressproject.gr, and reportersunited.gr. He has also worked as a radio producer for 902 Aristera sta FM and 959 Rodos FM. From 2002 to 2005, he taught at the Journalism Workshop of Panteion University. Earlier in his life, he worked at the National Bank of Greece. Christoforos is the author of several books (all in Greek), including I'm Discharged and Losing My Mind (ARS LONGA 1988; BELL 1993; OXY 1999; KASTANIOTIS 2011), Dangerous Patent (AGRA 1993), Split! (KASTANIOTIS 2009), The Left and the Big Bad Wolf (OXY 2009), "Damn it" – A Panathinaikos Fan's Cry (KASTANIOTIS 2010), Anonymous Bankrupts (KASTANIOTIS 2012), Diary of an Unemployed (KASTANIOTIS 2014), 1983 (KASTANIOTIS 2019), Dionysis Savvopoulos: Dirty Bread (OXY 2022). Born in 1958, he holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics from the Athens University of Economics and Business (ASOEE). He is married to Youli Kalofolia, with whom he has two children, Stella and Manolis. These days, Christoforos divides his time between Trikala Korinthias and Athens—and in his dreams, between the island of Kythera and the Appalachian Mountains.

Stathis Kouvelakis taught political theory at King's College London (2002-2020). He is currently an independent researcher based in Paris and a

life-long militant of the radical left. He is the author and editor of many books, including *La critique défaite: Emergence et domestication de la Théorie critique* (Editions Amsterdam, Paris, 2019), *Philosophy and Revolution. From Kant to Marx* (Verso, 2nd ed., 2018), the *Routledge Handbook of Marxism and Post-Marxism* (with Alex Callinicos and Lucia Pradella, Routledge, New York, 2020) and *Lenin Reloaded*: *Toward a Politics of Truth* (co-edited with Sebastian Budgen and Slavoj Zizek, Duke University Press, Durham, 2007). His work has been translated in many languages. He is regular contributor to *Jacobin* (US) and *Contretemps* (France), of which he is a member of the editorial board.

→ **Vassilis Lambropoulos** is the C. P. Cavafy Professor Emeritus of Classical Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan. He was professor of modern Greek at the University of Michigan (1999-2018) and Ohio State University (1981-1999), where he taught undergraduate and graduate courses in modern Greek language, literature, criticism, and culture, as well as literary theory and comparative literature. A native of Athens, he received his BA from the University of Athens and his Ph.D. from the University of Thessaloniki. His main research interests are modern Greek culture; classical reception and the classics; civic ethics and democratic politics; tragedy and the tragic; word/poetry and music. His authored books are *Literature as National Institution* (Princeton University Press, 1988), *The Rise of Eurocentrism* (Princeton University Press, 1993), and *The Tragic Idea* (Bloomsbury, 2006). He co-edited the volumes *The Text and Its Margins* (Pella Publishing Company, 1985) and *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1987) and two special issues of academic journals on "The Humanities as Social Technology" (*October*, 1990) and "Ethical Politics" (*South Atlantic Quarterly*, 1996). He has published papers, essays, articles, reviews, translations and interviews in journals, periodicals and newspapers and has served on the editorial board of several international journals. He explores the notion of revolution as hubris in modern tragedy in a site-in-progress and he blogs on music, literature, friends and resistance.

→ **Nikolas Leontopoulos** is a journalist and the co-founder of Reporters United, a network for investigative journalism in Greece. He was born in 1971 in Athens. He worked for ten years for the newspaper *Kyriakatiki Eleftherotypia*. Since 2010 he has collaborated with several international media outlets, such as Reuters, *New York Times*, *Stern*, etc., as a fixer and reporter, and in documentary production and research (ARTE, ARD, Al Jazeera, VPRO). He has participated in various attempts at independent journalism, such as *Eleftherotypia*, *Galera*, *Facthemall*, *The Press Project*, *Greek Report*. He made two documentaries for VICE: "The Commission and the Shelters of the Defence Industry Lobby" and "The German Brother". He has worked at Investigate Europe, a team of nine European journalists publishing in 15 countries.

→ **Dylan Riley** is professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe*: *Italy*, *Spain*, *and Romania 1870-1945* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010, Verso, 2019) and *Microverses*: *Observations from a Shattered Present* (Verso, 2022), as well as co-author, with Rebecca Jean Emigh and Patricia Ahmed, *Antecedents of Censuses*: *From Medieval to Nation States and Changes in Censuses*: *From Imperialism to Welfare States* (Palgrave 2016). In addition to these books, he has published articles in the *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Catalyst*, *Comparative Sociology*, *Contemporary Sociology*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *Social Science History*, *The Socio-Economic Review* and the *New Left Review* (of which he is a member of the editorial committee). His work has been translated into German, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

→ **Seraphim Seferiades** (PhD Columbia) is professor of political science at the Panteion University of Social and Professor of Political Science, Life member in Politics and History at the University of Cambridge (CLH) and Director of the Laboratory on Contentious Politics. Author of many books and articles, he has been senior member at the University of Oxford (St Peter's College), fellow and tutor in the Arts at the University of Cambridge (CHU), Jean Monnet Fellow at the European University Institute and Hannah Seeger Davis Fellow at Princeton University. His work spans European and Greek labour and social history, contentious politics and social science methodology. He has edited or co-edited volumes on methodology, social movements and the Greek dictatorship, and published extensively in journals such as *Comparative Politics*, the *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, the *Journal of Contemporary History*, the *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, *Actuel Marx*, *Pôle Sud*, *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, and the *Greek Political Science Review*. His latest publications include the books *Populism*, *Democracy*, *the Left*: *the Methodological Challenge* (Topos 2021); *The Red Thread of a Decade*: *Analyses and Texts in the Crisis Years* (Topos 2017); *On the Pathways of Historiography*: *Critical Overview from a Social Scientific Perspective* (Themelio, 2014); and *Democratic Functioning at a Crossroads*: *Challenges and Threats in the early 21st Century* (editor) (Athens, Nissos, 2014).

→ **Paola Revenioti**, known as Paola, is a Greek trans woman, filmmaker, publisher, artist, activist and pioneer of the Greek LGBT movement. Due to the social exclusion of transgender people from any work, she made a living as a sex worker from a young age. Paola made a seminal contribution to the struggle for LGBT rights in Greece and she is considered a "legend" of Athenian trans culture. From 1982 to 1993 she was the publisher of the magazine *Kraximo* which included articles on international and domestic political and social movements as well as LGBT rights, along with interviews with global intellectuals

and artistically unique photos of naked young men. Paola was also among the first organisers of the Greek Gay Pride. Since 2011 she has been involved in the creation of a series of documentaries, mainly of activist nature, in collaboration with various young filmmakers, under the brand name "ThePaolaProject" and "ThePaolaTeam".

→ **George Souvlis** completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Crete (Department of Sociology) and his PhD at the European University Institute of Florence (Department of History and Culture). He has taught courses in modern Greek and European history and sociology at the Democritus University of Thrace (Department of Political Science, 2019-2020) and at the University of Ioannina (Department of History and Archaeology, 2020-2023). His research interests are in the fields of fascist studies, contemporary political ideologies, history of ideas and historical sociology. His most recent publications include *Voices on the Left: Challenging Capitalist Hegemony* (Redmarks, 2019), *Back to the '30s?: Recurring Crises of Capitalism, Liberalism, and Democracy* (co-edited with Jeremy Rayner, Susan Falls, and Taylor Nelms, Palgrave, 2020), Mainstreaming the Far Right in Greece: Gender, Media, The Military and the Church [in Greek] (co-edited with Rosa Vassilakis, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung 2021), *"Re-assessing the Metaxas Dictatorship (1936-1941): Greek Fascism or Old-Style Authoritarianism?"*, Fascism 11/2 (November 2022) (co-edited with Aristotle Kallis), *Radical Journalism: Transnational and Commemorative Aspects of Revolution* (co-edited with Athena Karatzogianni, Emerald, 2023), The Metaxist Experiment of Greek society's Fascistazation (1936-1941) (co-edited with Aristotle Kallis, in Greek, Alexandreia, 2024), *The Alternative Right in Greece. The Transformations of the Far Right in the post-Pandemic Period* (in Greek) (with Rosa Vasilaki, Andromachi Koutsoulenti & Nikos Antonakos, Topos, 2025) as well as a series of articles *in Praksis, Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, *Fascism. Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, *Práticas da História and Critical Education*. He is co-coordinator of the *Politics of Liberation* seminar series and a member of the editorial team of *Jacobin Greece*.

→ **Demetra Tzanaki** is a sociologist and historian (PhD in modern history at the University of Oxford) with research interests in the postsociological theory and the history of gender, sexuality and eugenism. She teaches as an academic specialist on gender and sexuality at Lifelong Learning for All (LLFA) at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. She is the author of eight books on gender, sexuality, power and science. Her current research includes a historical and political study of intersex history in (post)modern Western European history and a study on gender and eugenism.

→ **Rosa Vasilaki** holds a PhD in History from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes and a PhD in Sociology from the University in Bristol. She is the founder and

co-coordinator of DISSENSUS-social research and the co-convener of the Politics of Liberation seminar series. Her empirical work revolves around the sociology of violence (political and religious), its manifestations and genealogy. Her theoretical work is focused on questions of Eurocentrism, colonialism and epistemological violence. Her article "Provincializing IR? Prospects and Deadlocks in post-Western IR Theory" (2012) won the Northedge Essay Prize of *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, In 2017 she published the book *Conversations. The Promise of Humanities and Social Sciences* (co-authored with Eleni Andriakaina). Her most recent publications include the volume "Mainstreaming the Far Right in Greece: Gender, Media, the Military and the Church" (co-edited with George Souvlis, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2021) and the co-author of the volume "The Greek Alt Right: The Transformations of the Far Right in the post-Pandemic Era (co-authored with George Souvlis, Andromachi Koutsoulenti, Nikos Antonakos, Topos, 2025). She has also published opinion pieces for *Jacobin*, *Sidecar/New Left Review* and *Red Pepper*.

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THIS EDITED VOLUME hosts a collection of essays first presented at the Politics of Liberation seminar, held in Athens since 2022 under the auspices of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung–Office in Greece. The seminar, now in its third year, has featured academics, politicians, journalists, political analysts and activists. The essays are indicative of the work being done and of the multiplicity of perspectives explored. The authors offer critical and often unexpected and unconventional ways to reflect on the meaning and content of liberation in the current predicament. Their contributions range from theoretical accounts of modernity and its staple traits, such as the nation and the state, to the examination of forms of authoritarianism, fascism and the far right, the relationship between democracy and capitalism, the uneven and unequal development of political capitalism, the critique of the concept of gender itself, the experienced realities of queer subjectivities and the practical manifestations of authoritarian neoliberalism.