

ETHNICISM AFTER NATIONALISM: THE ROOTS OF THE NEW EUROPEAN RIGHT

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It must be understood that, literally, everything has changed in modern society with the demise of the world-historical challenger or rival of capitalism, the international workers' movement.¹ However momentous, this is usually hidden from view, as if it did not affect or modify 'Western history', that is, a seemingly uninterrupted history of unruffled capitalist domination. In reality, the whole culture of the West since 1848 has been steered by the need to make sense of this adversary, which has thrown everything into doubt.

As Martin Heidegger wrote to Herbert Marcuse on 20 January 1948: 'concerning 1933: I expected from National Socialism a spiritual renewal of life in its entirety, a reconciliation of social antagonisms and a deliverance of Western Dasein from the dangers of communism'.² This kind of rejuvenation of the natural order was the programme of 'reaction' as it had been perceived by the ruling class, i.e. that communist subversion wanted to resist the agonistic and competitive order.³ This once was supposed to be able to select the excellent and the superior and communism wished to replace it with a new social dispensation in which the weak, the base, the vulgar, the uneducated, the unruly, the ungainly would gain the upper hand over the bold, the cunning, the clever, the gifted, the dominant, the elegant, the beautiful, the strong, the cultivated, the connoisseur, where gentlemen's influence would be undermined by women, by 'pederasts', by people of colour and mostly by workers common as muck.

But this old reaction had to give way to a younger one as the biopolitical constraints of caste (noble versus ignoble; social differentiation and distinction by birth) could not hold their own any longer after the Enlightenment and after the spreading of industrial and commercial capitalism. These constraints had been, as it were, exported by imperialism: the difference between metropolis and colony, between settler and slave, between whites and people

of a darker hue, has kept the importance, even centrality of biopolitical inequality alive. The egalitarian discourse in Europe and North America – despite its origins in Rousseau and among his more radical followers – was mostly preoccupied by injustice and discrimination within the white colonial nation-states and within the similarly white continental empires, and not outside them.

Then as later, ‘rule of law’ regimes, constitutional ‘democracies’ in need of citizens’ consent – traditional deference, monarchist sentiment and old-style religion being on the wane – had (and still have) the enormous task to explain why equal rights did not result in equal power and equal wealth for all. Then as now, the main explanation was *nationalism*; then as now there had been three main competitors to the idea of the nation – class, race and gender.

After a century and half of the immense theoretical, sociological, political and historical writing on nationalism (with which I have dealt elsewhere), the retrospective verdict on ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ can be summarized as follows.⁴

The idea of the nation is, or rather was, paradoxically, a universalist notion. It presupposed a preliminary, tentative idea of the ‘common good’ and of ‘public interest’ which ought to be common among citizens with different private interests and aspirations, as befitted their differing stations in life – a ‘common good’ transcending these differences and embodied by the nation-state. This ‘common good’ could not be reduced to any narrowly defined material need, as it encompassed perceptions of common security, dignity, identity and the complicated idea of ‘collective’ liberty (usually expressed as ‘national sovereignty’ and as ‘national independence’) that had to be protected from rival nations suspected of designs of conquest or, at least, of intentions of gaining influence over ‘us’. But the problem remained, always, why and how should this ‘common good’ and ‘public interest’ – outlined by Enlightenment thought – be limited geographically. Which is the factor that could trace convincingly the boundaries of such a polity so that the public interest would not reach beyond them, so that the common good would stop at the frontier?

The answer had to be found beyond Enlightenment thinking in something that has been customarily called Romanticism in Europe: the ‘rational’ idea of the ‘common good’ and of ‘public interest’ had to be circumscribed by ‘experiential’ and ‘emotional’ considerations of inherited custom, especially that shaped by a shared political past (called ‘common history’), by ethnic or dynastic identity, by denomination, by language (meaning a written literary tradition). In one word: by *culture*. In order to attain the necessary limited

conformity, the nation-state had to unify these elements by forcible or voluntary assimilation of minority groups, by merging dialects and idiolects into a national language (remember those *'patois contre-révolutionnaires'* denounced by Saint-Just), by creating a unified national history through the educational system and through the draft (universal and obligatory military service), by introducing a unitary public administration and legal system – all based, in the modern manner, on a collection of canonical *texts* and of visual/aural *symbols*. Languè d'oc, Gaelic or Catalan counted as *'patois'*, French, English and Castilian ('Spanish') as *languages*. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the use of 'dialects' (and of minority languages) was occasionally forbidden and punished. The dominant 'civilized' language, tradition or *Leitkultur* was chosen arbitrarily and, frequently, 'created' arbitrarily and artificially by the dominant bureaucracy and the new intelligentsia.

Siding, as it had sometimes done, with hard-pressed cultural minorities, but having been in general impatient with particularisms and separatisms, the international workers' movement regarded nationalism as a fraud, as an instrument of the ruling class to subdue egalitarian feeling by 'inventing' reasons for cross-class solidarity and to succeed in mobilizing the oppressed against themselves. This was the only 'historical bloc' to resist nationalism in the nineteenth century, and it is forgotten that this was why it was considered *the* public enemy, the first to be accused of 'rootless cosmopolitanism' (a charge later extended to others). But the socialists were wrong or, rather, simplistic. Not everything deliberately or artificially contrived is fraudulent. Many – but not all – modern nations have been founded on the basis of old territorial states, some of the unifications and separations which led to the birth of such nations have been sincerely desired by a majority of politically active people (always a minority, particularly at that time).

It is a fact that the 'national pasts' constructed by institutions fashioned to serve this purpose (well-guarded national borders, national currency, national banks, a state system of elementary education, academies, universities, 'historical societies', dictionaries, encyclopaedias, archives, archaeological and folklore collections, history and ethnography museums, national theatres, popular history book series, patriotic children's literature, militarist-chauvinist poetry, brass band military music in the city park, patriotic statuary everywhere, mass-circulation xenophobic newspapers, never-ceasing nationalist parades and festivities suggesting 'pride' and 'honour') and undergirded by political measures (forcible imposition of the official language, drives to change foreign-sounding names, banning foreign or minority language schools, changing geographic names, forcing people to participate in various nationalistic pledges, oaths, campaigns, officially

fomenting hatred and contempt for neighbouring nations and domestic minorities called ‘nationalities’) were vastly fictitious and propagandistic. The poison injected in our veins in the 1820s is still circulating.

Nevertheless, nationalism remained universalistic: in spite of this tasteless and pernicious *pompiérisme* and war mongering, it was possible to become a member of the dominant nation through linguistic and cultural assimilation. These nations wanted – with well-known exceptions – to attract, not to reject, to construct cultural unity, conformity, uniformity and not hostile diversity. Cultural assimilation was an admission price to civic equality; the republican idea was regarded as the merger of cultural and political characteristics; a ‘political community’ considered to be united in civic practice, common loyalty, unified in the shared tradition of a people solid in its enmities and sympathies. It was real and it was the source of unprecedented political and military strength. It was meant to replace religious piety, feudal deference and loyalty to the crown, and it did. Modernity was seen by the ruling classes as intrinsically divisive and uncertain as modern science and modern philosophy was ‘dissecting’ reality regardless of cherished old prejudices and of once widespread feelings of dependence on a timeless and hard cosmic order. Nationalism seemed to be the answer and, for quite a long time, it was.

The retrospective construction of a supra-historical national past (which presented, e.g., rapacious imperial-territorial conquest by the warrior nobility as an ‘old conflict between nations’) succeeded in hiding the novelty of capitalism and managed adroitly to ensure the identification of the downtrodden and of the have-nots with the interests of their masters, surely the key to political supremacy in modern societies, then as now. The nation, heir to the Third Estate, was supposed to possess (and be united by) a commensurate system of rights and obligations. The trick was (and is) to separate the political from the economic and the ‘social’.

In capitalist society, the political is the legal. The highest power – usually parliament and parliamentary government – is exercising its prerogatives by ‘passing legislation’, i.e., by concocting texts (laws, statutes, legal norms) and by ensuring conformity and obedience to them under penalty of law, that is, under legal coercion administered by learned and uniform interpretation of those texts by the courts. This is a highly abstract way of governance, in keeping with the predominantly abstract character of modern capitalism. What is legal is public, and at the same time mandatory or obligatory. Authority pertains only to the public and to the binding.

Labour, though, is officially considered to be a private affair, a voluntary act between legally equal and equidistant contracting parties, governed

by the offer and demand of the commodity 'labour'. Private contracts – voluntary acts, acts of freedom – are regulated externally by a superior and neutral third, the state. Any arrangement and understanding between private contracting parties, if outwardly legal, is a private affair, and its fairness has to be ascertained by the concerned, not by the political community as such, nor by its lawful representatives.

Socialism is nothing else but the attempt to make this private affair public, to transform 'economy' into 'politics' and thus, it is a major heresy. Breaking through the hallowed dividing lines between 'public' and 'private', 'contract' and 'statute', 'obligatory' and 'voluntary', 'economy' and 'politics' would mean the obliteration of the bourgeois idea of liberty. Also, it would mean breaking up the unity of the nation by showing that there is not *one* public interest, but that there are – at least – *two*. The emphasis is on the 'public'. The political constitution of the proletariat, i.e., socialism, if true and effective, is relocating the major societal division from the struggle of nations for territorial, military, cultural and political primacy into a supra-national (or international or global) class struggle. This would herald – among other things – the end of nations and of nation-states.

To relegate labour into the realm of the 'private' as being a feature of the market that belongs to civil society, not to the state, that is, to the domain of contractual relationships, of voluntary associations – and these contracts can be tacit of course, like in the sphere of the *Öffentlichkeit* – is the flipside of the alienation of labour, its political translation, if you wish. (One should recall that strikes were once illegal because they had been regarded as deliberate breaches of contract.)

The assumption that labour and the market do not belong to the public sphere is a myth, but a founding myth of bourgeois society. In principle, coercion can be legal only if it is exercised by the state as stipulated by law, within certain prescribed limits. If the private contracting parties agree to the severe curtailment of one partner's personal freedom, if they agree, indeed, to his or her submission and subordination, so be it. Such servitude is freely assumed and it can be terminated at will, like an S/M routine freely accepted by two or more partners where submission need not be prolonged beyond the *rendezvous* and it is recognized as *play*, the epitome of freedom in classical humanism. But work is certainly not playful.

Needless to say, technology and work discipline – nowadays extended to educational requirements, dress code, speech habits, personal hygiene, style, rhythm, pacing, speed, manners, language in the myriad offices of the giant global state, para-state and business bureaucracy – a kind and degree of servitude and confinement no medieval serf would have put up with for

an hour, let alone for the interminable length of a contemporary workday, prolonged further by 'creativity', 'passionate interest in one's job', 'fun' and good fellowship. Old-time peasants at least did not have to wax effusive about the delight of it all.

Technology for the worker is the mode of appearance of capitalist domination. As wage labour – which is an *institution* of capitalist society – is totally alien from the aims of production (producing use-value for the satisfaction of consumers' needs), technology is for the proletarian a set of prescriptions regulating his or her behaviour while working for a wage and is equally external for the capitalist whose aim is accumulation.⁵ But it is imposed in an obligatory fashion upon the worker; this is institutional coercion shaping the worker's time and steering his or her activity. There is no escaping it, hence it is not true that it is uncoerced. It is an obligation, thus it is political. For it is only politics that is allowed to prescribe obligations without the consent of the concerned. And if technology cannot be escaped, labour cannot possibly belong to the realm of contract, to civil society.

The *political* meaning of the concept of exploitation is the most radical denial of capitalist legitimacy. This forced the workers' movement to adopt *internationalism* as its main political doctrine which – in modern conditions – is also a denial of institutionalized political power (the nation-state) as well as a rejection of property and of the (patriarchal) family. It tends to be forgotten, but it was quite clear to everybody around 1900 that internationalism was a radicalization of the idea of perpetual peace, as it tends to be forgotten, too, that perpetual peace was a revolutionary idea. The official teaching was that civil war (revolution) was illegitimate, but war legitimate. Socialism had taught the opposite of that. Global class struggle would create perpetual peace, as the agent of war (the supreme coercion), the state, will be dead. Even today, if there would be tens of millions of people believing this, the powers-that-be would be frightened. One needs to have a little historical imagination to picture how this kind of 'godless communism' affected those stable, conservative, puritanical, diligent, respectful, hat-raising societies of the late nineteenth century.

This is not only about the early bourgeois (mercantilist) state, which was violently *on the side* of capitalism (from the enclosures to colonial conquest to the re-invention of slavery). It is not even about the well-known class *bias* of the bourgeois state, still the main target of a non-Marxian left committed to the exploited and to the indigent. It is about what the bourgeois state *is*.⁶

The customary definition of modern power – absolute (exclusive) control of a state over a given territory and over the population thereon – is dependent on the perception that the state not only represents, but also

expresses the political community, i.e., the nation. Law is living morality. The state protects freedom, that is, civil society, that is, contractual relationships, that is, wage labour.⁷

If you resist and reject exploitation, alienation, reification, then you will have to reject the nation-state, which both represents and conceals them. The main idea of a successful nation-state, the ‘common good’ transformed into the veiled injunction of ‘national unity’, presupposes such a cross-class solidarity that no socialist movement can possibly accept it.

And when it did accept it finally – in August 1914 and also later within ‘socialism in one country’ – it destroyed it. The communist revolutions in Europe from 1917 to 1923 had been revolutions against ‘national unity’ and cross-class national solidarity, a result of which was and is war, so it was against a progressivist, reformist, gradualist and positivist social democracy. Old social democracy, the first serious proponent of a welfare state within the boundaries of an egalitarian state capitalism, was only consequent to support the ‘war effort’ as it has replaced the socialist aims with equality, workers’ corporate rights, shorter working hours, higher wages, paid holidays, old-age pensions, cheap housing, socialized healthcare, free general education and universal franchise, all perfectly compatible with a modern capitalist state, an enlargement of liberal objectives, supported by imperial bureaucracies and by the left-leaning bourgeoisie and its press. The price of admission was nationalism.

The communist revolutions have radically opposed nationalism and war; the bourgeois state had opposed communism by invoking ‘the nation’. An adamant refusal of cross-class solidarities, the secret of electoral success then as now, was simply incredible. To reject the ‘common good’, embodied in the nation and represented by the state where the acknowledgment of irreconcilable conflicts within it appeared tantamount to treason or simply immoral, seemed suicidal in day-to-day politics. By desiring the dissolution of national frontiers and the creation of a new international community free of exploitation, oppression and ideology, modern socialism ignored even the Rousseauian idea of a people and contradicted tradition and custom to an extent that was unheard of since the inception of Christendom. The collapse of the Second International demonstrated indeed that desiring sincerely the socialist goals was impossible, that the International fell (and would always fall) apart into warring fragments which joined their respective national bourgeoisies in an intra-national conflict, proving thereby that socialism was merely a *weltfremd* daydream, felled by the irruption of reality.

But then of course the question will arise: if the ‘common good’ fought for heroically by the various imperial armies is something regional, sectional,

particular, peculiar – that is, not ‘common’ at all, but un-common *everywhere* – then what is the universal substance that will create this phenomenon throughout the human universe? Which is the general principle of which nationalism is a special case? If you listen carefully to Max Weber, the reply to this question is that the historically or randomly formed identities around the modern state are subject to the demonic influence of capitalism, an agonistic social order where *polemos*, the Greek spirit of war and battle, is the rule and *eirēnē*, goddess of peace, is the exception: *polemos* may be irrational, but it is rooted if not in human nature, then in the nature of human history and certainly in the nature of the triplet capital/state/technology.

In Weber’s and in so many others’ view, pacifism, internationalism and communism are illusions, a refuge for the weak who don’t get it because they can’t. This is especially because he follows Montesquieu in believing that political virtue is passion, ‘a sentiment and not a consequence of knowledge’, only that for Montesquieu the passion of love of the country had been the reigning ‘principle’ (i.e., passion) of a republic which means an egalitarian regime.⁸ How can such a passion arise in a hierarchical society such as that of any country in 1914 where class antagonism was not only expressly and consciously experienced but acknowledged by most people as something self-evident?

A natural substance had to be found which links together – in a given polity – people with different interests, aspirations and memories, lord and serf, mendicant and magnate, man and woman, city-dweller and peasant. The answer was, as we know, race. Beyond doubt, it is rather difficult to make a valid inference from race to political form – what kind of a state would truly fit, e.g., the Celtic or the Germanic race? – but this answer may address, at least formally, the need for cross-class solidarity in a given polity as opposed to other polities. The necessity in any given state to overcome self-interest – the first step in each and every kind of politics you might imagine – is at least, formally again, made irrelevant by the idea that it is the racial essence or substance or substrate that is talking through you when you speak of public affairs.

At the same time, old-style nationalism had a universalistic streak in it, to wit, it presented itself to itself as a fair summation of a number of rights among which the most important is certainly the right to self-determination in the case of every ethnic group desirous of settling down in its own political-territorial state – a right, by the way, fully granted only by the greatest anti-nationalist of them all: Lenin. The right for political self-assertion for every group is the liminal case of nationalism which would oppose imperialism, war of conquest, colonial subjugation and ethnic inequality; it would be

conducive to autonomies and federations. It is significant that this extreme version came only after the inferno of the First World War, and it was offered, paradoxically, only by the October Revolution (while it lasted – and it didn't for long), and it has inspired Third World liberation movements (it still does in Baluchistan and Kurdistan, and still is opposed by imperialism).

Notwithstanding all this, attitudes not linked to nationality, ethnicity and the hierarchic state (*Obrigkeitsstaat*) are simply not believed to be authentic in the capitalist era, such a behaviour being explained either, simply, by ulterior motives or by moral peculiarities of its bearers, peculiarities wanting an interpretation.

A force which has refused to identify with *any* nation, only with a universal class (or seemed to), had to be identified. The ethnic identity of a resolutely supra-ethnic and supra-national movement was easily found (i.e., Jewish). On the old right, communism was regarded as an alliance of the working class with the secularized Jewish intelligentsia. There is some truth to this, a weighty and thorny matter, which I shall not even begin to examine, only as an aspect of my chosen topic. It was during the First World War that supra-ethnic, political nationalism – that made Jewish assimilation and emancipation possible – had begun to disintegrate, together with the old liberal empires, grounded in 'enlightened absolutism', which defined political capacity as an affair between subjects and the Crown, regardless of status (noble or otherwise), of denomination, ethnic tradition, language or region – a position forced upon the reigning dynasties and their courts by their ancient feud with territorial aristocracy and their reluctant alliance with patrician city burghers. It was this alliance and its Enlightenment ideological and bureaucratic apparatus which enabled Jewish emancipation, and when the main players either disappeared (kings and emperors) or changed (the bourgeoisie, becoming reactionary), the process of emancipation was halted and the non-ethnic and non-denominational elite alliance deemed to be 'the nation' was smashed into fragments by the war.⁹ As capitalism is an abstract conceptual system in which personal servitude and deference and political obedience play a subordinate role, and the bourgeois state is ruled by law, that is, by written text, modern power must be perceived as something called 'spirit' by Hegel and Humboldt. But then this spirit ought to have a body. This body had been identified as Jewish.

When people had to discover the secret of impersonal (abstract, conceptual) rule, they had to find a hypothesis that would put something substantial or natural behind it. This – since class power is indirect and abstract in market and rule of law régimes – had to be a human group which was neither a class, nor a state nation, moreover one which is clearly transgressive as

regards national boundaries, being found in many polities, linked together by something other than class or law. An *ethnie* which could be – rightly or wrongly – identified with international finance *and* with the international workers' movement (and then with 'cold', 'impersonal' science and with 'destructive' philosophic and cultural forms, called '*Kulturbolschewismus*' by Goebbels) addresses this need admirably. Gradually, this non-state *ethnie* will become the model for ethnicism, as classical citizenship (in the republican sense) will be weakened (to the brink of extinction) in late capitalism, especially after 1989.

The imaginary replacement of 'the nation' by 'class', which has entailed internationalism and an end to statehood as it was known hitherto, contradicted the general wisdom acquired during the First World War, namely, that politics was a battle to death between races and states. As the right, not any longer aristocratic or mandarin, but middle class, identified itself with this presumptive lesson of the war, and was facing the new realities, it had – for strong ideological reasons – to look under every stone to find who was behind something believed to be incomprehensible, if not unnatural. The explanation was, of course, that socialism and communism served the Jewish interest, so it was as ethnic or racial as any other political aspiration, the interest of a stateless people that wanted to make everybody stateless.

White Guard-type anti-communism could not fight another, hostile nation, as it had to face an international movement; but nation-states had to oppose other nation-states in order to keep their identity and cross-class substance. In the nationalist imagery, hostile minorities (not classes, as they were not recognized as legitimate belligerents) had to take the place of other, enemy nations: they had to be racial, as class was considered an unreal, fraudulent, treacherous notion. Citizenship was reduced not to adherents of the dominant Christian denominations, but to Aryans; and racial aliens which belonged to a cross-national, universal entity had to be excluded from the equal citizenship granted to the Aryan nations, purged from the universalist element, targeted as Semitic, in cahoots with the barbarous oriental, the Russian and (later) the Chinese. This is the moment of the birth of National Socialism and other fascisms.

Ethnicism begins with Nazism, but it is not necessarily or even predominantly Nazi. The breakup of bourgeois nations – triggered by the communist revolution – resulted in the abandonment of universal and equal citizenship within nation-states (within bourgeois nations), so much so that it had become increasingly difficult to imagine *localized universalism* – also called the liberal bourgeois state – self-contradictory anyway. This has been

resurrected after the defeat of Nazi Germany and of the Axis powers in the Second World War, with the help of the Soviet Union, of the West European communist parties and others. One should not forget that it was the Soviet system that has created the most generous and costly network of ethnic autonomies, following the theory not of Lenin, but of another Marxist, Otto Bauer. Russian and other East European communists did not any longer believe in a possible end to ethnicity and to other kinds of human separateness, they only tried to reconcile it with the fundamental fact of Enlightenment-type central power. (But we must never neglect the part played by imperialism and colonialism in all this. The first *ethnies* treated as non-nations, where citizenship as such did not apply, were the 'coloured' groups bereft of a political status: a special code for *indigènes*, that is, the colonial subjects of France, was valid until 1944 when the anti-fascist provisional government of General de Gaulle threw it out, something that even the Popular Front has not dared to change. Colonial borders were drawn irrespective of traditional, national or ethnic entities, dictated only by natural, economic and military interests; hence the intractable ethnic and denominational problems of most Asian and African countries, where the attempts to achieve non-ethnic, abstract citizenship, and a pervasive notion of cross-class and cross-*ethnie* national interest have almost uniformly failed.)

They have thereby conceded the force of fascism. Or at least the force of an element of fascism and Nazism. Conventional historiography notwithstanding, these latter have not sought the aggrandizement of the nation-state, they have been in search of a space for the *ethnie*, by conquest and genocide (ethnic purification or 'cleansing'), creating empty swaths of the earth to be populated by the seed of the master race. 'Germans' were neither subjects, nor citizens. The *ethnie* that the Third Reich represented was thoroughly and profoundly apolitical. In the Nazi imagination, the only institution was the army, a supreme unity encompassing all males (and even some females) whose only function was the creation of empty spaces for a fantasy warrior tribe. Ethnicism has inherited this apolitical character, and this is why it is so little understood. The biological (genetic inheritance: race) is so essential because it is the soil on which the new, trans-institutional humankind grows, beyond any conceivable notion of public interest. The only interest is self-preservation and self-identity.

All philosophical critique is rejected; everything conceptual is – in keeping with the modernist framework – merely a mask behind which there is nothing else but the hypocritically hidden ethnicity of a weak and cowardly adversary. Anti-philosophy, whose source and origin is always Heidegger, is strangely parallel to ethnicism: it is not 'unmasking' like critical philosophy –

finding the hidden and often unsavoury substance behind the mask, beneath the façade – but rejecting conceptual ‘masks’ as such, since there is no concept, only self-assertion or will of random clusters of humans shaped by historical happenstance. ‘Relativism’ is a word which would underplay its radicality. When ethnicism is, as it were, in opposition – as it is now under global capitalism – it does not, like rebellious groups have done in the past, invent and propose a different version of justice, it will only emphasize its difference and *sui generis* being without any attempt at justification. Bare, unadorned being will suffice.

The old romantic cult of silence – the strong, wordless hero, the unutterable mystery, the inexpressible suggestion, the intuition that wordy reason will never comprehend, the primacy of the act over thought – returns. Being, which is always specific and peculiar, cannot be grasped by language made universal and general by grammar. The *ethnie* is what it is. (This is where Wittgenstein is close to Heidegger, and both are related to Johann Georg Hamann, the holy clown of romantic philosophy.)¹⁰ Paradox, irony, ‘depth’ unexplained, inaccessible for the *raisonneur*. What is being ignored here is that the market, too, is irrational or better: unreasonably self-explanatory, it cannot be summed up rationally or conceptually. The market is not hostile only to state intervention and egalitarian redistribution, but to all politics, which is by necessity conceptual and moral – even if it embodies a morals you passionately reject, the market is as apolitical as ethnicism. Small wonder that some of the most potent ideologies of the bourgeoisie were romanticism and its cognates. Late liberalism’s idea of freedom is freedom from the concept, which is tantamount to freedom from politics. Late, anti-Enlightenment or (dread word) ‘post-modern’ liberalism is deluding itself – due to its remnants of benevolent humanism – in opining that ethnicism and romanticism are ‘archaic’ while it would stress the autonomy of everything partial, particular and peculiar, irreducible to ‘abstract generalizations’ and the like, these being synonyms for power and for the imposition of a utopian, i.e., ‘totalitarian’ ideal. The same goes for contemporary conservatism, but no matter. One cannot say that ethnicism is an ally of any definitely circumscribed political regime. It is rather a feature of the decomposition of progressive bourgeois regimes both of the western and Soviet variety and of the Third World developmental dictatorships.

With the defeat of old-style social democracy and of Bolshevism, the universal element always resisted by nationalism was seen as the new-fangled version of capitalism, market globalization, embodied politically by different versions of liberalism. The world domination of financial markets came to be regarded as akin to the ideology of human rights (opposed to

biopolitical discrimination based on race, gender, age, health and the like, but not necessarily egalitarian where class is concerned). ‘Common good’ and ‘national unity’ seemed too universalist for the spirit of the age. And now, after the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, it is Great Britain’s and Spain’s (and Ukraine’s and Kosovo’s and Montenegro’s and Macedonia’s) turn to be disintegrated. The aspirations of discriminated and oppressed ethnic minorities are not aimed at the universalist idea of civic and social equality – witness the Muslim movements in European cities – but to separation and to the wholesale rejection of the bourgeois and supra-ethnic nation-state. In my country, ‘Hungarian’ means someone who is not Roma and ‘Christian’ means a Gentile. Hungarian minorities in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, etc., count as ‘Hungarian’, but not all Hungarian citizens within Hungary do. The frontiers of nation-states are irrelevant.

There’s no telling apart the Russian army and the pro-Russian irregulars in the present conflict in the Ukraine. This is not merely a trick: the Russian-speaking ethnic minority in East Ukraine in the eyes of everybody in the area is classified as Russian: ethnicity is all, nationality is nothing. Ethnic cleansing is a logical outcome: minorities cannot be tolerated, assimilation is disbelieved, as ethnic or racial belonging are considered the only valid basis for state-formation or for the replacement of the state with a self-asserting social being without any discernible form. In Europe, the national level of politics is much weakened: there is an international institution, the European Union; everything beneath it ought to be ethnic, racial or denominational. The universalist nation-state with its liberal or socialist rationale and its Enlightenment *Vernünfteln* (ratiocination) is simply disbelieved as something that cannot exist. The nation, if it did exist, was only something artificial, i.e. non-existent, inducted by the foreigner. All versions of the political are considered – in opposition to the classical republican ideal, including its Rousseauian idiolect – as inferior to authentic human existence, this latter being reduced to a radicalized tradition purged of high culture (an artifice of cosmopolitan urban elites). The result is a curious indifference to politics among ideologically committed people, considered to be the realm of *private* interest, in contravention to any previous definition of politics. ‘Politics’ in this view is but an instrument, and a pretty value-free one, of an amoral community of kith and kin, opposed to all other communities of this ilk, not because they are wrong, but only because they are there.

So ethnicists can, if need be, cooperate with divergent political forces and, indeed, become parts of various political groups, infecting them with their apoliticism and their ‘value-free’ attraction to power, especially military and police power. But they tend to be closest to right-wing anti-bourgeois

attitudes.

'*Völkisch*' anti-capitalism is nothing new: capitalism is supposed to dilute ethnic and racial identity and togetherness. The leftish nationalism (*not* ethnicism) of Syriza is distinctly old-fashioned (they are in favour of the emancipation of discriminated ethnic minorities in Greece, while resisting great power *Diktat* from abroad). Still, European post-fascists and neo-fascists are greeting Tsipras with great enthusiasm. (And they were doing so even before Syriza's coalition with the right-wing Independent Greek Party.) They are doing so because they suspect liberal capitalism of anti-ethnicism and universalism, according to Mussolini's theory about 'proletarian nations' and 'bourgeois nations' and, in Eastern Europe, according to the Nazi idea of 'old nations' and 'young nations'. Having appropriated the *tiers-mondiste* idea of US (and, in Eastern Europe, of West European) 'hegemony', the ethnicist and racist new right in Europe harks back to proto-Nazi theories opposing culture and civilization, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. The liberal 'left' cannot think of anything else but being 'European', with all the colonial connotations this entails. However, opposing 'ethnic' and 'European' plays into the hands of the ethnicist new right: neither class, nor – for that matter – the nation are reinvented.

But it is not only the far right that is ethnicist in Europe today. European 'multi-culturalism', unlike (or more than) its North American elder sister, is rather ethnicist in defending and even glorifying any minority subject to persecution or discrimination without regard to substantive aspects of their politics. I happen to think, too, that it is our moral duty to defend persecuted groups regardless of their principles, but this should not mean a 'value-free' approval of each and every principle that might be shared by victims of discrimination, however heinous. Approval of or respect for mutually exclusive views only because they are held by humans who by virtue of existing are members of communities believed to be natural is ethnicist. It is apolitical and amoral. But this is, of course, the lesser problem.

The affirmation of unreflecting, irreflexive and ineffable social being in absolute unreasoning opposition to all similar social beings imagined as consequences of genetic and cultural inheritance without the intervention of self-examination will smoothly lead to tyranny, as critical consciousness is not perceived by ethnicism as evil, but as absurd and impossible. Economic and political arrangements are commensurable with ethnicism if they would accord with the *ethnies'* imagined natural characteristics, and they can be construed as arbitrarily as you please.

Ethnicism, as ought to be obvious by now, is the result of the dissolution of late capitalism without the benefit of an alternative. It would appear that

the defunct modern bourgeois state has been propped up by proletarian counter-power and adversary culture – without which universal franchise and the welfare state would have been well-nigh impossible. One of the most extraordinary historical facts, veiled modestly by chroniclers' cant, is that the international human rights regime had been created at San Francisco by, among others, Joseph Stalin and Andrey Vyshinsky. The disappearance of this world-historical competitor means that things taken for granted, like the rule of law and liberal nationalism, are not necessary components of modern capitalism, as fascism has convincingly demonstrated. But fascism was defeated by an unbelievable alliance of liberal imperialism and Soviet 'socialism' (planned, egalitarian state capitalism led by working-class cadres). Fascism forced the Soviet Union to become nationalist and to make its peace with western liberal imperialism. But the victorious Soviet Union and, later, the Chinese People's Republic, on the one hand, coerced the West to become more egalitarian and to accommodate, up to a point, the proletarian adversary in places like Italy and France and, on the other, to renounce its colonial empire. It was an agonistic and antagonistic world system, probably the most 'democratic' in world history. This bipolar system ended in 1989 and, with it, classical nationalism.

Confusing or conflating nationalism with ethnicism is one of the major failings of the contemporary left, a blindness that may herald new defeats.

Bourgeois nationalism – there is no other – was based on a state recognizing, at least in the abstract, civic equality, and on passionate political participation shaped by huge mass parties and open class struggles, on citizens' armies (the draft or national service), on general elementary education, literacy, the popular press, on cross-class solidarity (civic patriotism), on constitutional guarantees and a well-regulated free market, on public hygiene, on secularism, on gender rights (at the beginning, divorce and abortion). The foundation for all this has been the hypothesis that there are no natural barriers between citizens, that people of 'foreign' extraction could be assimilated and 'elevated' in exchange for unconditional loyalty, including a cultural one, to the nation-state and the hegemonic historical identity fashioned by the progressive and patriotic clerisy drawn usually from the dominant ethnic group, unlike in medieval times when minorities (such as the Norman French in England) could be *staatstragend* elites. This nationalism had become conservative at the beginning of the twentieth century, but through most of its historical career – clearing the way before capitalism – had its liberating functions, particularly when it was opposing arbitrary rule by monarchs (for example, in 1848). But nationalism is dead.

The political craft needed for the creation of nation-states is moribund,

too. Next to the economic, ecologic and demographic crisis of late capitalism there is a crisis of the bourgeois state, exemplified – alarmingly – by the immigration and refugee disaster in Europe used mercilessly by the right where it is not any longer possible to tell conservatives and the far right apart. Long forgotten ethnic hostilities are flaring up again under its influence. It is characteristic of the post-national situation that what remains of European liberalism and the European ‘left’ takes refuge in the uncertain institutional framework of the European Union (also incapable of solidarity: see Greece) because it cannot even dream to stop ethnicism that is taking the continent by storm, reinforcing the undisputed supremacy of a repressive reactionary force siding openly and exclusively with the dominant white *ethnies* of each state, rejecting deliberately, *sans phrase*, the last vestiges of republican citizenship or, for that matter, elementary humanity. By declaring an end to the belief that ethnically alien members of the political community (civic nation) are capable of sharing in the public interest or even able to understand the common good which is redefined in terms of cultural identity and tradition (‘values’), the foundations of the bourgeois nation-states are crumbling. The right has shifted its ground: it may still say that it represents ‘the nation’, but in fact it does not. Citizenship as a privilege means an end to the bourgeois nation whose main method for fostering unity, the prerequisite of collective action, was assimilation predicated on an undivided human universality as political hypothesis.¹¹ Britain, where the old constituent parts of the monarchy are drifting apart – while the victorious Little England right, quite indifferent to ‘Old Blighty’, is fostering a new identity based on anti-European and anti-immigrant savagery – is a particularly nasty example.

The old right stood for order, discipline, obedience, honour and deference. Ethnicism is chaos. It may be used perhaps for the purposes of tyrannical domination – it is so used at the moment by the extreme right in Europe – but as it is apolitical, it is also destructive. In the absence of an emancipatory alternative to decadent capitalism, it might be an overture to collapse and global counter-revolution.

NOTES

- 1 This text, which is a fragment of a work in progress, will tacitly re-examine some of my earlier assumptions which since their first appearance had lived their own life. There will be formal similarities, as I think that my historical judgments have proved essentially correct. But they’re just that, formal. See G. M. Tamás, ‘Ethnarchy and Ethno-Anarchism’, *Social Research*, 63(1), 1996; and G. M. Tamás, ‘On Post-Fascism’, *Boston Review*, Summer 2000, available at <http://new.bostonreview.net>. Compare these with my older *Les idoles de la tribu: L’Essence morale du sentiment national*, Paris:

- L'Arcantère, 1991, originally written in the 1980s for samizdat publication, brought out finally by an émigré house, also in Paris, in 1988, in Hungarian, of which this French version is the translation. It is characteristic of the times that the translator thought it wise to chose a pseudonym, for she wanted to travel to Eastern Europe. Now I can name her: Véronique Charaire, thank you.
- 2 Herbert Marcuse and Martin Heidegger, 'An Exchange of Letters', in Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993, p. 162.
 - 3 I elaborate on this 'rejuvenation of the natural order' in a public lecture delivered in Zagreb on 15 March 2013, entitled 'Once More on Post-Fascism' (in English), available on SkriptaTV's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com>.
 - 4 You will find my detailed discussion of the theoretical literature on nationalism in my works cited.
 - 5 For the right, technology is *the* domination, not the instrument of domination. In Heidegger, technology's instrumental character appears (for he was more intelligent than most reactionaries). But instrumentality is presented as a problem of means and ends, where production takes a detour through technology while addressing nature, and so it becomes a mere instrument instead of being a 'bringing-forth of truth' as *technē* was once upon a time. See Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', in Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969, esp. p. 6.
 - 6 'The precondition from which economic theory begins is man producing in society. The general theory of law, in so far as it is concerned with fundamental definitions, should start from the same basic prerequisite. Thus the economic relation of exchange must be present for the legal relation of contracts of purchase and sale to arise. Political power can, with the aid of laws, regulate, alter, condition and concretise the form and content of this legal transaction in the most diverse manner. The law can determine in great detail what may be bought and sold, how, under what conditions, and by whom. From this, dogmatic jurisprudence concludes that all existing aspects of the legal relations, including the subject, are generated by the norm. In reality, the existence of a commodity and money economy is the basic precondition, without which all these concrete norms would have no meaning. Only under this condition does the legal subject have its material base in the person operating egoistically, whom the law does not create, but finds in existence. Without this base, the corresponding legal relation is *a priori* inconceivable'. Evgeny Pashukanis, *Law and Marxism: A General Theory*, London: Pluto Press, 1989, p. 93.
 - 7 Obviously, at this point this essay needs a companion piece concerning the state. Here I can only allude to a number of more or less recent Marxist writings on it, such as John Holloway and Sol Picciotto, eds., *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate*, London: Edward Arnold, 1978; Simon Clarke, ed., *The State Debate*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1991; Associazione delle Talpe/Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Bremen, eds., *Staatsfragen: Einführungen in die Materialistische Staatskritik*, Münster: Westfälischer Dampfboot, n.d.; Joachim Hirsch, John Kannakulam and Jens Wissel, eds., *Der Staat der Bürgerlichen Gesellschaft: Zum Staatsverständnis von Karl Marx*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008; the special edition of *Antipode*, 43(1), 2011; and Heide Gerstenberger's work of extraordinary importance, *Impersonal Power: History and Theory of the Bourgeois State*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009.
 - 8 See Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, pp. 42-7.
 - 9 In an interesting book (*Nationaler Antisemitismus: Wissenssoziologie einer Weltanschauung*, Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), Klaus Holz – followed by Claudia Globisch,

'Was ist Neu am "Neuen Antisemitismus"?', *Krisis*, 32, 2008 – emphasizes that Jews as a non-state *ethnie*, in the European political imagination, would always represent 'A Third' in the conflict of two nations as a sort of 'universal enemy nation' for every state nation. Nationalism, thus, will always produce anti-Semitism. What these excellent authors are neglecting is the retroactive impact of anti-Semitism on nationalism; this is why they ignore Nazism as *the last nationalist and the first ethnicist* political ideology.

- 10 Compare this to Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North: J. G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism*, London: Fontana, 1993. In the preface (p. xiv), Berlin invokes the device of all romantic philosophy: *te saxa loquuntur*, stones are talking to you. See J. G. Hamann, *Schriften zur Sprache*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967.
- 11 For more on 'citizenship as a privilege', see my 'On Post-Fascism'.