# Demos vs. Polis?

## Essays on Civic Responsibility and Participation

No. 56

JOURNAL OF CRITICAL THINKING · ČASOPIS KRITICKÉHO MYSLENIA

**Kritika & Kontext**

Volume XXIII. ročník

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Does the *polis* face the *demos* with hostility? Do citizens contest the city? Is a people in opposed separation from its political institutions? A multidisciplinary collection on people and the institutions they find themselves in and under, the essays here engage questions of the individual, communities, leadership, populism, citizenship, social media, and technology. The collection includes work by philosophers, political scientists, and political theorists using quantitative, historical, and hermeneutical methodologies to take on some of the most pressing issues of our historical moment.

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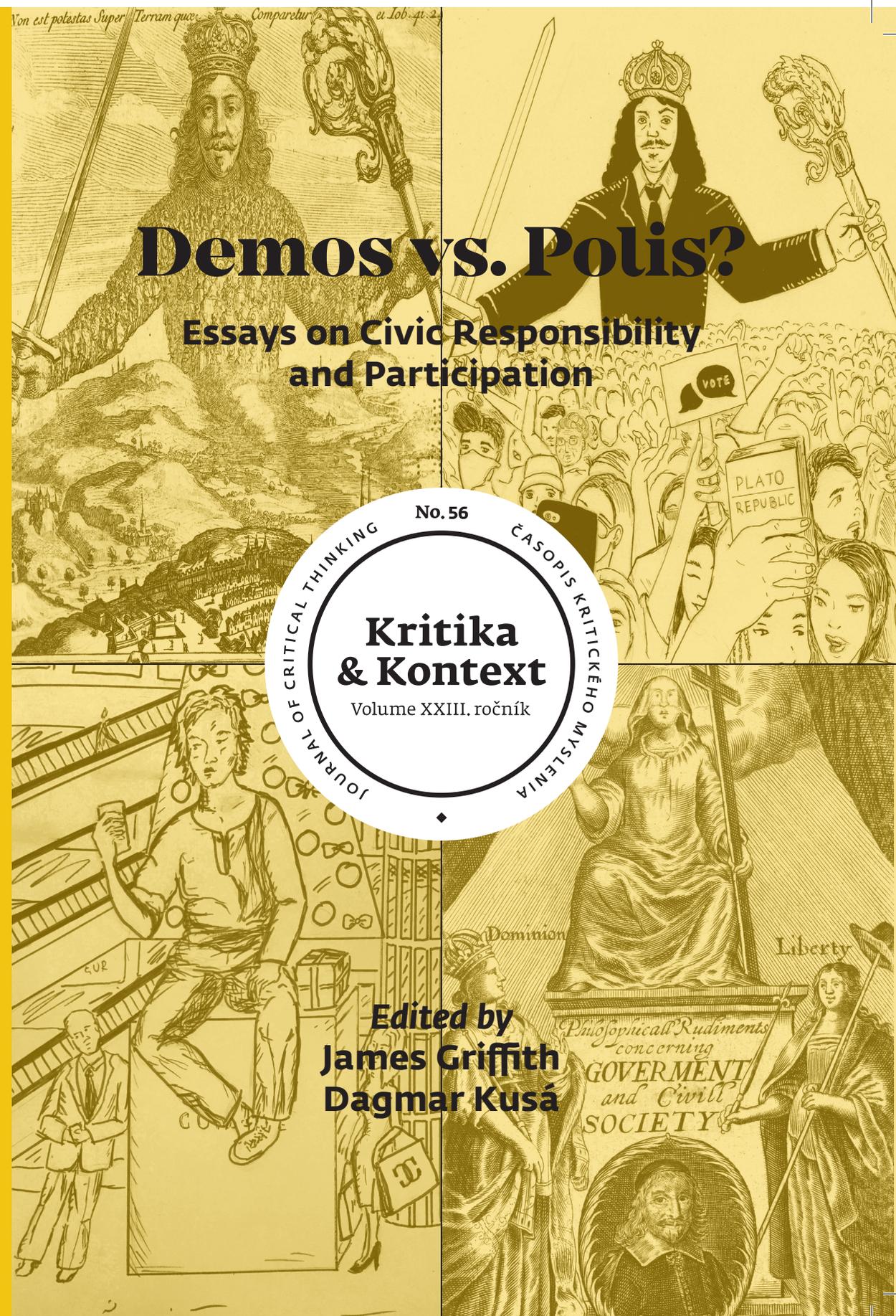Conor Cruise O'Brien: On the Eve of the Millenium

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**Kritika & Kontext No. 56 (2019) — Volume XXIII. ročník**

# *Demos, Polis, Versus*

**James Griffith**

When Cleisthenes empowered the demes in ancient Athens, they probably already existed as indications of suburban and rural Attica. Following his recall from exile after the Spartan–puppet tyrant Isagoras fled and was banished from the city, Cleisthenes' 508/7 BCE reforms reorganised the demes to reflect not only geography but probably also the kinship groupings (*gene*) that were a legacy of the aristocracy, of which Cleisthenes was a part, as well as the brotherhoods (*phratrias*) and clubs (*hetaireai*) (Whitehead, 1986, pp. 25n86 & 31n117–118). He most likely reorganised them in this way so that the new political system could appear and actually be "as natural and as normal as possible" (Nails, 2002, p. 347). This reform, enacted upon a series of pre-existing and overlapping structures, tells us at least two things. First, the birth of democracy was never, perhaps can never be, pure or chthonic (Apollodorus, 3.4.1, & Plato, *Rep.* 414d–5c). It emerged through negotiation and renegotiation of competing and inherited interests, centres, and networks of power. Nonetheless, these negotiations themselves gave birth to something genuinely new. More than that, they did not merely redistribute that power. Mere redistribution is what the Spartans did by installing Isagoras after he and Cleisthenes solicited their support to overthrow the tyrant Hippias of Athens in 510. The negotiations and renegotiations, in generating something new, gave rise to a new power, the power of the demes or the demes as power. This novelty survives, even if the power of the *gene* also survived the reforms.

Second, this very impurity — performed in order to give a sheen of purity, naturalness, and normalcy to the reforms — resulted in a real naturalness and normalcy to the new power structure. Reforms that truly, radically, purely generated a new system, it seems, would not have been recognised as anything other than chaotic and unnatural, as indeed Cleisthenes' isonomic system was considered by outsiders when they insultingly referred to it as *demokratia* (Arendt, 2006, pp. 20 & 276n12), or as imposed. To give birth to the new, the old must survive. To achieve purity, impurity is persistently required. The legacy or legacies of the first, oldest, and purest of democracies, pure despite its exclusion of women and by slavery (so some are fond of saying), the inheritance of this birth is that the rule of the demes was never quite, or never fully, a rule by the demes. Regardless, that legacy is also that the impurity of this inheritance can be purified, if only through reforms to existing systems or networks of power, that the purity is achieved through, or that the purity is the thought of, rule by the demes, the achievement of which requires not mere redistribution but more negotiations and rene-gotiations, more reconsiderations, more births and rebirths of power.

This idea, that the inhabitants of the demes, those living in the suburbs and country-side, could be centres or nodes of political power, gives birth to the Athenian *polis*, properly speaking. As Hannah Arendt points out, "'Wherever you go, you will be a *polis*': these famous words became not merely the watchword of Greek colonisation," although they were that (Arendt, 1998, p. 198). In addition to colonisation, the words speak to the power of speech as the expression of the negotiations and births of power in which all male Athenian citizens were empowered to take part, speech being a power uncoupled from a given location or moment. Every Athenian carried this power, itself taken as the power of democratic Athens

if we listen to the speech Thucydides puts in Pericles' voice (Thucydides, 2.40), with them throughout the ancient world. To be sure, this deterritorialisation and detemporalisation of power is how, along with its naval strength, Athens became a colonial power that hid its hegemony by calling itself a trading league. Still, if democracy as the mark of the Athenian *polis* is power in speech, potentially in any one of the male citizens, then this power, borne regardless of where and when they appeared, tells us that the democratic *polis*, as a *polis*, is itself a mode or form of deterritorialisation and detemporalisation, finding its power in the decentring and perhaps destabilisation of power.

And yet, this *polis* still needed to be built. If part of the pre-Cleisthenic legacies that survived the reforms were the *gene*, *phratrias*, and *hetaireai*, so were things like the Assembly, the literal buildings and walls of the city of Athens. That is, speech needs a place for its expression, a place that empowers it, where others can hear it, even if they do not always, or not all of them, listen. Without this, we speak into an abyss, become a *polis* exclusively within ourselves. Speech, in order to appear as speech, must be mediated. It can only be speech through others. An unmediated speech would be silent, which, politically speaking, appears as the protest of going home or the tyrant's unwillingness even to hear, let alone listen (Plato, *Apol*. 32a–e), this last being at least similar to what Arendt considers the silence of violence (Arendt, 2006, p. 9). Democratic speech requires an architectonics if not an architecture for its power to be empowered. It requires a territory or location where it can appear at a given time, appropriate or not, appreciated or not, heard or not. This is the stability at work within democratic speech's deterritorialisations, and it is a stability that can form or has formed a legacy for its architect.

This very stability, however, lends itself to the thought that the architecture is the seat of power, that democratic political power is a *techne* for maintaining its *arche*, perhaps in a continued exclusion from the locations that empower speech by giving it a space to potentially be heard, in sustaining a deafness to the words of those who were excluded from the founding negotiations and renegotiations. It is also the source of the belief that speech seeks to make present in others what is present in oneself, that it is reducible to the techniques of persuasion (Plato, *Apol*. 17a, & *Gorg*. 452e; Aristotle, *Rhet*. 1354a–5b). Nothing, in other words, prevents the democratic *polis* from becoming the tool of undemocratic interests acting in and through the name of democracy's architectural soundness. Except perhaps the self-same, true (and by 'true' we mean pure qua impure, most impure when calling for purity) Cleisthenic legacy of deterritorialisation and destabilisation, if others are willing to listen to or live that legacy, rather than merely inherit it, like an aristocrat. This legacy is why a democracy worthy of the name remains a *praxis* rather than an accomplished fact (Arendt, 1998, pp. 195–6), why Aristotle distinguishes between the *arche* of the master over the slave and that of the *polis* (Aristotle, *Pol*. 1277a–b).

To this interlocking and overlapping network of contestations, negotiations, internal and external conflicts, inheritances, and destabilisations, we have added one word more. It requires leaving Attica and entering a second language and empire (or third, depending on one's perspective on the language used here). From ancient Greek and Athens, then, we turn to Latin and Rome, and specifically to the word that, as it has developed in English, itself indicates contestation and conflict: *versus*. Being a participle of the verb *verto*, this word has its origins in a network of meanings more complex (Lewis & Short, s.vv. "versus3" & "verto") than how it appears now in English (Versus, 2019). This simplified contemporary appearance, as a facing against or contrast, is accurate in that *verto* does refer to a directing or looking

toward and a turning around. *Demos* and *polis*, citizens and city, turn to face each other, contest each other, vie for the legacy and architectonics or architecture of the system of rule by the people. Each already within themselves contestations of meaning and truth, they argue and fight between each other as much as if not more than they fight within themselves. It is an open question, perhaps, which fights are more intense, those within demes, *gene*, *phratrias*, *hetaireai*, or the conspiratorial clubs called *synomosiai* (Nails, 2002, p. 351); those between the demes in the architectural locations for speech placed within or appearing as the *polis*; or those between the demes and *kratos*, between the people and the power that itself emerges as distinct and new in the empowering of the demes.

But the Latin verb can also mean turning about, turning one's back and running away, giving an account or making profitable, altering and transforming (even to the point of chang- ing one's country, i.e. emigrating). As a turning about, this *versus* would be the whirling and circling of *demos* and *polis* around each other, opposite magnetic poles in a dialectic without *Aufhebung* except perhaps in opposition and differentiation, in the difference and distinction between the demes and the *polis*, even if it is only a *polis* via its demes. If *versus* indicates a running away, however, is this is an act of cowardice or the only political act available in a circumstance where power, as *kratos* or as the rhetorical architecture of democracy, refuses to listen, even if it is, in itself, the location for the appearance of listening? If the space for contestations over meaning and truth, political or otherwise, has been shaped or built such that it is only a rhetorical space, only an apparent space for the appearance of speech, then is going home not also itself an opposition, a *versus*, an appearance in silence of speech, an attempt to take back power and rule for the demes by boycotting or turning one's back on the space that has no true or real space for them, is a corrupted or impure space, because it is only a location for *kratos* as such? Would this not be, in its very silence, an account, an attempt to make and remake the profitability, to itself and to all of Greece, *kosmos*, or globe, of the democratic *polis* (Thucydides, 2.37 & 41)? Indeed, would it not be an answering of silence with silence, a responding to or a call to take responsibility for the silence in and of such an Assembly, a call in silence as the only language this structure can understand? Would it be the hyperpoliticisation of depoliticisation (Schmitt, 1996, pp. 35–7), and a depoliticisation that haunts and gives meaning to all political *theoria* and *praxis* (Derrida, 1997, pp. 129–37), democratic and otherwise, the right to depoliticise oneself being granted, by the *polis*, to all members of all demes, even if the *polis* claims to judge the act harshly (Thucydides, 2.40)? After all, in empowering the demes, in making the demes power, it seems that Cleisthenes altered or transformed the *polis*, and did so such that political rule in fact emerged. But that very doing also transformed the demes. They were no longer only or just geographical markers but nodes in a network of power. And if the political master no longer recognised himself in the *polis*, if he felt himself a foreigner in it, precisely because he was now of the *polis* rather than master over it, this is partly because the demes and citizens have become strangers to masterly rule, foreign to their places of birth as much the former master. Deterritorialisation, *Unheimlichkeit*, and self-estrangement are conditions for the possibility of the democratic *polis*, perhaps of all political structures and systems of and for rule properly speaking (Plato, *Rep.* bks. 8 & 9), the *polis* understood as no longer *oikos* or *domus*, even if the *polis* is generated from out of the *oikos* (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1252a–3a). The familiar rule of the old domestic politics, the old political economy and *oikonomia*, was or has been defamiliarised, deterritorialised. The *versus* between *demos* and *polis* could thus be their making strangers of each other as the space between the words 'democratic *polis*' or even that between the two parts of the word

'democracy'. Each side, having become strange to itself and the other, must learn or relearn how to speak, not only in the silence of speaking to oneself, but also how to speak to each other, to translate each other and for each other, to hear and to listen.

Meanwhile, the third meaning of the Latin *versus* indicates a furrow, line, row, or a measure of land, which becomes a line of poetry, its legacy in English being 'verse'. The very drawing of lines here, placing the *versus* where we have, appears as the demarcation of difference between *demos* and *polis* within or as the democratic *polis*. Yet Cleisthenes' reforms, in attempting to appear and be as natural and normal as possible, kept to old lines and furrows, wanted his architecture to cultivate naturally, which means that the democratic *polis* was a territorialisation as a reterritorialisation that deterritorialised. If it were not so, his seemingly and actually natural and normal new *polis* would not have been mocked by those not of it. What Cleisthenes deterritorialised, however, in being a territorialisation, was also itself a deterritorialisation. The old demes, but also the surviving *gene*, deterritorialized the territories that preceded them, which need not have been those of humans. Territorialisation, the drawing or writing of lines, is always a territorialisation of something, some given. Territories' lines are never quite or fully arbitrary: to function, they must seem and be natural and normal. The poetry, the *poiesis* of this geometry or architecture, political or physical, practices its versification and measurements on a world that appears, insofar as it appears, via if not qua difference or differentiation. Yet this appearance seems to be the appearance of limits, differences between one thing and another whose appearance is the disappearance of the first. In opposition to limits, the *poiesis* of drawing or writing political, architectural, agricultural, and geometric lines is the appearance of a bound because these lines always have breadth, no matter what Euclid says (Euclid, bk. 1, def. 2). There is then a territory of the line, of the deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of territorialisation. Perhaps this is the poetry of Cleisthenes' political geometry, agriculture, and architecture, that the democratic *polis* would itself be the territory of deterritorialisation. But we should not romanticise Cleisthenes' work. It remains a *poiesis*, not a *praxis*. It remains silent, and so perhaps violent, if only to that which it deterritorialised but also perhaps to the very unnatural nature with which it sought to appear in alliance, as did that which his reforms deterritorialised. Romanticising this work is one way how the space of appearance can fail to make space for speech, by confusing the territory of the line with the space for speech. At best, what lives within a line is points, not even nodes, which can never appear or speak, let alone hear. They are, in the end, nothing, even if they remain the condition for the possibility of the imagined appearance of lines and surfaces (Euclid, bk. 1, defs. 1 & 5). To live in the territory of deterritorialisation, as *archon* or deme member, is then to live neither naturally nor unnaturally, normally nor abnormally. It is to live both in and as nothing, not even as atoms, beasts, or protozoa (Democritus, 1903, fr. 9; Aristotle, *Pol.* 1253a; Marx, 1994, 62–4; Foucault, 2008, 223–6; Derrida, 2009, 56–7).

In placing *versus* where we have, we hope to mark out these lines of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, these transformations and alienations of self and other, these architectures and architectonics for speech, these refusals to listen or speak that can challenge speech in positive and negative ways, these dizzying oppositional relationships and face-to-face contestations between and within *demos* and *polis*. Nonetheless, our title ends with a question mark. This is partly because *demos* and *polis* do not always oppose each other. But it is also because only questions can begin the marking out of *demos*, *polis*, and *versus* as distinct, different, and potentially or necessarily oppositional. The essays in this collection attempt to sort through the political and democratic stakes in this question.

Most though not all of the works included here were originally presented at "Demos vs. Polis? Responsible Citizenship in Post-transitional Societies," the fifth conference organised by *The Liberal Herald* and held at the Open Society Foundation in Bratislava, Slovakia, on November 22 and 23, 2018. In this collection, we have sorted the contributions into four sections that we hope reflect the complexity and interrelation of the issues discussed herein.

The essays in the first section, "Subjectivities and People(s)," are all concerned with thinking through the relationship between the institutions under and in which people live, and the individuals that ostensibly constitute them. To begin, Bogdana Koljević Griffith argues that the European Union has failed because its attempt at neoliberal politics is self-contradictory, destructive of both the public space, i.e., of the political, and of the people who constitute the *polis*, but that this failure opens the possibility for a post-capitalist democracy of self-founding communities. Petr Kouba combines Jan Patočka's asubjective phenomenology with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* to call for deterritorialisations that attend to other lives and other ways of life. Jon Stewart traces the historical development of alienation to read the contemporary reappearance of nativism, nationalism, and populism as an attempt to secure traditional, "objectively" given ways of life against real and imagined threats from the larger world, and to seek a broader view that reconciles the desires for the subjective and objective. Maxim von Asseldonk argues for conceptualising democracy as enacting citizenship to contest the tendency to naturalise borders and claims of belonging to a given (democratic) state.

The second section, titled "Leaders, Institutions, and Populism," focuses on elites and institutions as connected with populism and resistance to institutions. There, building on prior work done with Isaac Ariail Reed, Michael Weinman thinks through the sovereignty involved with the concept of popular sovereignty, or the People's Two Bodies, as not demanding a politics of exclusion and sameness. Robert Sata analyses Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's discursive strategies for othering and identity production in developing his populist, illiberal agenda from the 2008 global financial crisis, through the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe, and up to 2018. Dagmar Kusá compares and contrasts the historical background of post-apartheid South Africa and the post-communist Czech and Slovak Republics as well as the respective techniques used by political elites in each to present a simplified, self-serving collective memory, memories currently being challenged by those born after the creation of the institutions that abetted these presentations. Peter Šajda examines the three modes of social involvement – the professional leader of the crowd, the truth-witness, and the politician "who loves being a human and loves humankind" — to reveal that Søren Kierkegaard is not the quietist thinker that others, like Martin Buber, have claimed.

The third section, "Citizenship and Citizens," discusses how citizens are viewed by the political institutions that surround them and how citizens can understand themselves qua citizens. For Jude T. Macannuco, liberal democratic structures both produce, through the exclusion of "the people", and feel threatened by the rise of populism, which represents citizens' attempts to reassert their political power. Stephen Oppong Peprah, criticising social contract theory for being founded on a false premise since the government which acts in its wake is not a party to the contract, making it a master that enslaves its citizens politically and morally – a situation active citizenship attempts to transform into positive recognition. Jonáš Janský takes the 2018 mayoral election of Marek Hattas in Nitra as a case study for an increasing interest in critical and assertive citizenship in Slovakia. Matej Bílik teases out the interrelated historical, ethnic, economic, and racial complexities in Malaysia's trajectory from colonial and postcolonial divide-and-rule toward its current pluralistic policies.

Finally, the essays in the fourth section, "Appearances, (Social) Media, and Technology," ask questions of appearance as a social but also political act, as well as the social's complicated relationship to technology. Through a reading of Helmuth Plessner, Jaroslava Vydrová presents a way of appearing in the public sphere where one neither loses oneself in the community nor removes oneself from it. Cade M. Olmstead examines Turkey's 2013 Gezi Park Protests and American late-night television ridicule of US President Donald Trump through the lens of a Hegelian notion of comedy to offer it as a strategy for democratic subversion of authoritarianism. Zdravko Veljanov analyses the online "I Boycott" protest movement during Macedonia's 2018 name-change referendum as an example of effective campaigning against elites framing of choices to their citizens. Via book 8 of Plato's *Republic*, Sujitha Parshi claims that capitalism's overproduction of innovations has led to a ceding of political responsibility to technology, ultimately resulting in the contemporary environmental crisis. We close with Jason W. Alvis, who takes up the work of Günther Anders and Jacques Derrida to analyse our almost religious faith in our technological creations as something about which we must develop a careful conscience if they are not to overtake every aspect of our lives, political and otherwise.

Hopefully it is clear how much overlap there is not only among the essays within each section, but also among the different sections. Different forms of organisation for this collection could have been taken, which is only appropriate since the conference brought together political scientists, theorists, and philosophers to engage its leading question. The multiple and contesting disciplinary approaches and priorities led naturally to such overlap. Thus, it is recommended to read the contributions as a whole, knowing that the distinctions between them are, to some degree, arbitrary.

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# Twenty–first Century Europe at the Crossroads: *Polis, Demos,* Subjectivity, Democracy

**Bogdana Koljević Griffith**

## ABSTRACT

*In this article, I argue that the contemporary rupture between polis and demos in 21st–century Europe is political, social, economic, cultural, and even existential. This is because what is at stake is not simply the structural democratic deficit of the EU but the issue of subjectivity per se. The neoliberalism of the EU appeared as the result of the consensus of crypto-elites, and consequently produced the crisis of the political as well as the crisis of knowledge. Moreover, since a neoliberal polis is a contradiction in terms it has erased the demos which is now returning in its raw outlook as the haunted other. The response to the situation, in which different types of radical politics emerge, is sought in emancipation – as opposed to tutorial democracy – as well as in the concepts of the politics of the time and the politics of locality.*

### INTRODUCTION: A CONTEMPORARY RUPTURE — POLIS VS. DEMOS

It seems that one of the questions *par excellence* of and for contemporary political philosophy – especially in its European *hypokeimenon* — is how *polis* and *demos* not only became separated but, in the first decades of the twenty-first century, appear to be counterposed practically to the point of unbearable tension and mutual exclusion. In other words, how is it that the city or, more accurately, the place of the political, the *topos* of the body of citizens *qua citizens*, was torn apart from the people who therefore, implicitly or explicitly, now arise as its violent externality? Or, even more precisely and rigorously, how did the place that, first and foremost, has been conceptualised to signify self-governance and autonomy — therefore, precisely the *topos of democracy* (Arnason, Raaflaub, & Wagner, 2013) — suddenly become extremely hostile towards the people in the process of which, likewise, the *demos* itself emerged as hostile in return? This issue refers not merely to the physical space of the ancient *agora* within *the polis*, but rather to the entire spectrum of what we call the public space – as the space in and through which *the public* is created, sustained and developed. In such a way, the question relates practically to the very core of *the political* via the democratic in its direct form.

The matter to be analysed, therefore, is what happened with what was imagined to be a contemporary *synoecism* (Aguliera–Barchet, 2015), i.e. with the gathering, which was – just as in Ancient Greece – supposed to designate a specific political unification. Does the exclusive problem, in this context, lie in the fact that the desired European *cosmopolis* turned

out to be much more of a *technopolis* and, therefore, in the final instance, a *necropolis*? And, in continuation, if the EU cosmopolis now resembles more a city of the dead, a graveyard, should it remain to rest in peace in the name of, for instance, a new and different project of European integration or should attempts be made to restore the relation between the *polis* and the *demos* within the existing framework, that is, within the *polis* as is? Moreover, an issue in and of itself is the question of whether a restoration should even be undertaken in the case of a project in a systemic crisis, such as the contemporary EU, whose only constant element now appears to be a permanent *Rashomon*?

The rupture between the contemporary European *polis* which we call the EU and its own *demos* is not simply political, social, economic, or cultural, but rather, in a way, even *existential* because it relates to practically all different aspects of human life and in such a way refers to the pathos of *subjectivity* proper — in its self-perception and self-comprehension, as well as in its entire *intersubjective apparatus*. Second, therefore, the well-known explanation as to why the EU failed, namely because of its structural democratic deficit — and this is a line of thinking present in authors as different as, for example, Jürgen Habermas and Ulrich Beck, on the one hand, and Jacques Rancière on the other — is a *sine qua non*: a necessary but still not sufficient explanation. Or, more precisely, this type of explanation which argues in favour of a structural democratic deficit as the decisive cause of the failure of the EU in its best and/or in its final implications, discloses the internal contradictions of the concept of so-called liberal democracy in the way in which this has been extensively disclosed in the work of Chantal Mouffe.

Along the same lines, Luke March and Cas Mudde explain how the contemporary existential crisis of socialism has been caused by a specific pragmatic turn which explicitly led to a gradual loss of its ideological basis. What they call *the fall* and *mutation* of the left refers to the process of the disappearance of politics with far-reaching consequences — and all of this for the purpose of preserving power (Mudde & March, 2005). Likewise, this paradoxical moment of reconciling the irreconcilable comes forth even from Habermas's diagnosis of the *post-democracy of the EU* (Habermas, 2012). This emerges from his argument about the monopolisation of the European project by self-proclaimed elites, which then, consequently, also produced bureaucratisation and, in the final instance, democracy as a *façade*. Furthermore, precisely because what is at stake is democracy — in its concept and its practices — the matter of not taking into account the *demos* in fact reveals a broader and, simultaneously, a more fundamental and primary issue: that of *subjectivity*.

**DEMOCRATIC SUBJECTIVITIES**
This is to say that the EU *polis* is collapsing – and the outlook of this collapse has been compared, for instance, to processes such as the disintegration of ex–Yugoslavia (Becker, 2017), the collapse of the Soviet Union (Beissinger, 2009), and the fall of the Roman Empire (Gillet, 2017) — because the latter failed to become a *polis*. In continuation, this failure is then due to the lack of political subjectivity, which, in the case of Europe, means it has not embraced its own differences and multiplicities, i.e. its divergent cultural and political identities. Rather, beginning as an economic alliance and union, the EU evolved into a mixture of its own bureaucratic apparatus — which produced the Brussels technocratic class as well as all the fallacies of alienated EU institutions. As a consequence, the gap between EU *crypto-elites* and European *people* continued to expand, turning the concept of political subjectivities into basically a theoretical and practical impossibility.

In a philosophical setting, this process can be traced to a half-implemented attempt to establish a *oneness* — a European identity in the place of *the many*, i.e. of basically its own plurality. The accent in this endeavour, however, remained *on a technocratic understanding of efficiency, while key issues of and for a political community per se* — such as democracy, legitimacy, community, and subjectivity – for the most part, were *left aside*. Even Jean Monnet — who thought that technocratic measures of economic integration would lead to political unification — refused ever to provide a response to the question of what the EU should become and, from that point on, the matter of its purpose, i.e. of its real *telos*, remained in the empty space of a vague *oneness*. Or, more precisely, Monnet's technocratic strategy never accounted for contradictions of various visions of European alliance and cooperation shaped through cultural-historical experiences of different *demoi*.[1]

Consequently, it is exactly the concept of *oneness* that always already presents a trace of *totality* in and of itself,[2] while *the many* is linked with democracy as well as with *subjectivities* in their *democratic* fashion. Ironically, *the many* in the EU, for the most part, appeared only as an indicator of *class divisions*: between South and North (Regan, 2015) or East and West (Ballinger, 2017) in Europe, between states, and within particular states themselves. The results of the failure to recognise and support *democratic political subjectivities* – in the proper political time, which in this case means, at least, a multi-year period – were harsh and are still potentially far-reaching. Namely, the most radical implication being the appearance and growth of an extreme and radical political right. This corresponded, simultaneously, with two "missing pieces": lack of critical thinking and absence of political imagination.

The proposed concept of "two-speed" or "three-speed" Europe — or, most recently, of a Europe in "three circles" — appears to be fundamentally unhelpful because, instead of resolving the problems, it relocates them in the direction of structural differentiation, i.e. towards legal and political distinctiveness, an endeavour, which, therefore, further strengthens the already existing hierarchical and class divisions. In that sense, it reveals itself as *de facto* closer to the alternative of new colonialism and a contemporary master-slave dialectic then to any type of true democracy and subjectivity. Ulrich Beck's *German Europe* (Beck, 2013) is highly instructive here because it confronts the following dilemma: what kind of a world is it in which one country gets to decide the destiny of another and in which something like this is accepted as a normal state of things? However, perhaps most striking, in this context is Étienne Balibar's well-known political philosophical insight in an article written several years ago: "Europe is a dead political project because some countries are *dominant* and others are *dominated upon*" (Balibar, 2010, p. 11).

Seemingly paradoxically, it appears that what is at stake is the following: had the relation between *identity* and *difference* been comprehended by the political class — a relation that has been articulated in philosophy ever since the highpoint of modernity with Hegel — the rise and growth of extremism most likely could have been prevented. Or, at least, this is the theoretical *sine qua non* for avoiding *per definitionem* failure in political action. This is to say that — even without going into philosophical discussions and nuances — it is a matter of basic

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1    The immanent limits of Monnet's method – especially revealed in and through the confrontation of the crisis of actual European integration – have been analysed in detail by Giandomenico Majone (Majone, 2009).

2    Indisputably, one of the most relevant philosophical critiques of the concepts of "oneness" and "totality" is that of Emmanuel Levinas (Levinas, 1969).

common sense to perceive that no type of *identity* can exist without *difference* — nor is it the case, *vice versa*, that the call for *difference*, i.e. for acceptance of difference, can ever be made without always already present affirmation of *identity*. Because this is how intersubjectivity operates in general: the subject recognises *the other* in its *otherness* in and through the process of its own *self-becoming* (Koljević, 2011). This self-becoming has its ethical, political, social, and cultural aspects and all of them reveal the interdependency, the Levinasian *entre-nous* with a *rapport de face* à *face* and/or the Hegelian *struggle for recognition*, depending on whether one prefers to analyse the process from a post-structuralist or a dialectical perspective. Moreover, the play between *identity* and *difference* sheds light on the dialectical relation between *the universal* and *the particular* as well: the universal always already unfolds itself in and through *particularities*, and a multiplicity of particularities, because there is no other way it can unravel itself — as the universal. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, therefore, brings forward precisely the story that the process of both comprehending in theory and practically implementing "the universal" in political life means the movement from and within something — as both the departure and the mediation point.

### THE NEOLIBERAL POLIS — A CONTRADICTIO IN ADJECTO

In a recent debate between Nancy Fraser and Luc Boltanski (2014) titled *Domination and Emancipation*, a call for re-evaluation of the contemporary critique of capitalism is put forward, arguing that the critique of economic neoliberalism – as the globalised framework into which human lives are still fitted — is not sufficient in and of itself. Consequently, along the same lines, the task of social critique is to recognise and emphasise how the neoliberalism of the EU, not simply in its economic but, likewise, or even first and foremost, in its political and social aspects, has been the real cause of both the collapse of the contemporary European *polis* and its split with the *demos* – like the rupture between EU forms and European realities. This has been equally extensively argued by Giovanni Leghissa, in the sense that, in neoliberalism, politics structurally disappears in favour of a market economy that relates to practically all spheres of human life (Leghissa, 2012).

On the level of contemporary political realities, the fact is that the self-proclaimed "social-democratic" parties in Europe in the previous three decades were based mostly on Anthony Giddens' theory of "the third way" (Giddens, 1998)[3] — which has been conceived as the utterly paradoxical alliance between social democracy and economic neoliberalism. Now, this moment — which Fraser calls "neoliberalism light" — in itself represented not simply an economic stance but likewise a political and social one, especially because it not only manifested itself as a poor outcome for democracy but has actually established the consensus of crypto-elites as the end of politics.[4] This is the final result of the hyperproduction of the other of the same of the system – which at the same time constructed the *contradictio in adjecto called left liberalism*. In addition, this is the outline of the process in and through which the crisis of the EU is an exemplary case of the contemporary crisis of the political per se or, more precisely, how it emerges as an anti-theoretical and, likewise, an anti-political project.

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3    This empty formula, which called itself "beyond left and right", has in practical terms been realised most notably by political actors such as Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder.

4    Precisely in contrast to this theoretical-political project, Rancière argues about the relevance of "dissensus" (Rancière, 2015).

Authors such as Jacques Rancière (2014) and Chantal Mouffe (2005) articulate how this project erased practically all political differences and, consequently, created the situation of a systemic political *simulacrum*. Or, as Jean Baudrillard would have it, this has been an almost *perfect crime*, i.e. a crime without witnesses (Baudrillard, 2007) — ongoing *mimesis* of politics with far-reaching existential consequences. All this is because a neoliberal polis is a *contradictio in adjecto* — for a neoliberal polis *cannot* exist. The reasons for this lie in the concept of *polis* which carries the ultimate reference to the creation of the body of the citizens as well as to self-governance and autonomy. Second, as such, *polis* equally always presupposes the highest relevance of the public space, i.e. of free and open dialogue, debate, and the participation of citizens and — last but not least — therefore, refers to community, to the *topos* of the common and to the space of speech and decisions. Furthermore, it is in this way that the concept of the *polis* demonstrates how the appearance of *the political* is structurally interrelated with *collectivity*, that is, with *the body of politics* as such. Besides, not only is a neoliberal polis, therefore, a contradiction in terms but so is a neoliberal demos — for *demos* in and of itself refers to a *collectivity of the people, i.e. to a community per se*. Because, in all the subtle different aspects of its meaning, *demos* always points to the concept of the common people — of the ancient state — and is, in a such a way, structurally opposed to neoliberal crypto-elites which have very little to do with democracy, especially when compared to the first, true democracies created by the Greeks.

However, what has unintentionally been created by the crypto-elites is an *empty* space which, as articulated in Claude Lefort's *L'invention démocratique* (1994), is the very condition for political *praxis* and therefore the *topos* of potentiality and creativity. In this particular case, because other viable alternatives were missing, the response to the empty place of the polis in and of the EU is the return of demos in its raw outlook — and in fact, nothing could have been more predictable in terms of elementary political logic. On a proper political-philosophical level this equally corresponds to a certain type of *hauntology*, i.e. to the concept of the haunted and haunting other whose exclusion is simultaneously precisely the beginning of its return. Returning once more to ancient Greece, one can say that this, likewise, in a particular context, resembles the beginning of the very beginning, for it appears as the first moment in which *polis* and *demos* were historically and factually separated. In addition, this was the key division of society — in such a way that *demos* signified "country people" and/or "country villages", while *polis* was the site of nobility and aristocracy — and the antagonism between the two bodies of "the country" and "the city" was extremely high. This was before *demos* and *polis* became identical in Athens, through which we then consider the birth of politics — as well as the birth of philosophy, accompanied by the profound tension between the two.

This is now to say — if the entire matter, for instance, is to be elaborated from the perspective of a Foucauldian framework – that contemporary forms of governmentality, as they have been established in the last several decades in Europe in the form of a special dispositive of management – and most often through *quasi-elitist* expertise as the most effective instrument of domination – failed to incorporate the demos not only in form, but more relevantly, in content, in the sense of a multiplicity of subjectivities that are self-constituted in *the polis*. This is the decisive reason for the systemic crisis of governmentality of the EU.

In continuation, the complexity and two-foldedness of the contemporary return of the *demos* should not be underestimated: one needs to distinguish between resistance to neoliberal political and economic policies by Brussels and extreme right-wing tendencies. For example, in the case of Italy today, this means that more than half of its population believes

that joining the EU has not been a good idea in the first place or, more generally, throughout the Old Continent citizens in different countries, strongly oppose the *par excellence* neoliberal concept of austerity measures.[5] These are all distinct phenomena and particularly relevant here is *precisely the act of refusal* as the act of re-appropriation of one's own environment which is constituted precisely in the right to say "no". Even further: if the politics of emancipation can never come from above but always comes from beyond, from actors, i.e. from the people themselves and if, in other words, emancipation always presupposes self-emancipation then it is this movement that represents the possibility of a rebirth of both *subjectivity* and *the polis*.

Likewise, inasmuch as this refusal in and of itself appears as a call for *equality* and *justice*, it stands as an even stronger potentiality because emancipation requires a *démontage* of the social order that has established the structures of inequality. In the perspective of a post-capitalistic framework, on the threshold of the post-neoliberal era and the birth of a new epoch of the twenty-first century world — emancipation above all demands the end of *tutorial democracy and politics* and consequently, of any notion of exporting democracy. This is because emancipation always stands firmly against every form of mastery and every type of domination on all levels and, therefore, true democracy cannot be, in Rancière's terms, *crypto-pedagogical* and *therapeutic*.[6]

In this endeavour we can reinvent critical theories of the past keeping in mind the following: on the one hand, the difference which Gramsci describes as the difference between "*being* a particularist and *preaching* particularism" or — especially in reference to the national character of literature — the difference between "national" and "nationalistic". This difference is even more relevant in the time of the return of history because, to paraphrase Antonio Gramsci, it is true that a European spirit is born ... but precisely this birth toughens the national character of the intellectuals, especially at the highest level (Gramsci, 2011). On the other hand, what needs to be kept in mind is that the creation of the *polis* — as the *public space per se* — is the creation of space for free and public dialogue and debate.

**THE POLITICS OF TIME AND THE POLITICS OF LOCALITY**

Finally, in comprehending all the impulses from the Greeks that can appear as inspiring in contemporary political times — especially in terms of political creation – beside philosophers like Arendt, one can think, for example, of the work of Cornelius Castoriadis. As a thinker of self-organisation and anti-bureaucracy, Castoriadis emphasises that the Greeks not only came forth and shone in glory, showing who they were as unique actors and in their distinctness — as Arendt has articulated this — but also made laws themselves through processes of collective deliberation, i.e. in the self-founding process of becoming of the political (Castoriadis, 1983).

Moreover, in the twin births of *democracy* and *politic*, Castoriadis perceived a new phenomenon, a new grasp of the world which he calls *the project of autonomy*. Because it is the

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5    The case of Greece, i.e. of its political crisis as well as its resistance, has been extensively analysed by Costas Douzinas (Douzinas, 2013).

6    Taking up the example of the French referendum on the EU constitution – in which France voted "no" – Rancière addresses the fact that both the "conservative government" and the "socialist opposition" at the time called for a "yes" vote – in line with a perfect consensus. The explanation of crypto-elites which followed afterwards – namely, that the people "did not understand" – for Rancière is the exemplary case of the *medicalisation of thought* which affects both theory and practice. Rancière further argues how techno-management of the EU – with its crypto-pedagogy – appeared as the greatest enemy of knowledge and philosophy (Rancière, 2010).

Greeks that – for the first time in history – realised that the norms of a society are not *imposed* or derived from *the outside* but that, rather, societies are created by themselves, that is, by ourselves. So, therefore, in rethinking political creation in our time — and how a *demos* can re-create *the polis* such that a *polis* reappears *qua polis* — it is precisely the project of autonomy that can emerge as the proper name. Because, if a *demos* is to decide on its own norms, it begins the process of emancipation first by re-appropriating its surroundings and in such a movement it is no longer an *externality*, an *outside* but, rather, a *subjectivity* that actively builds *the polis*. This would be the new beginning of a new historical re-constitution of the concepts of *citoyen* and *citoyenne* as the very core of European political and theoretical traditions — and a framework through which one can imagine the meaning of a contemporary *revolution citoyenne*.

In the case of Europe in the twenty-first century, it is also possible to conceive the described process in terms of *a new* social contract – or rather, contracts, however, such that they stand close to the idea of direct democracy or, at least, *self-determination*. This project of autonomy is one that can be realised through understanding both the politics of the time and the politics of locality. The politics of the time relates to the genealogy of political forms as well as to the perception of *kairos*, of proper time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action. As such, the politics of time is practically inseparable from the politics of locality i.e. from the local *topos* in and through which politics is created and through which political subjectivities take shape.

There is no politics without location – and there is no democracy without politics proper. This *locality* is interrelated with the *demos* coming into being and is a presupposition for the becoming of *polis* which has the potential to replace the *mimesis* of politics. If the politics of time reinvents the dimensions of past and future – in opposition to the neoliberal paradigm of the eternal present – the politics of *topos* resituates the meaning of "centre" and "periphery" or "margin" through the movement from *the objectification* of governmentality towards *the subjectification* of praxis. This is to say, radical democracy can be re-thought as local participative democracy which opposes neoliberalism in the political and social sphere, simultaneously striving for immanent transformations of the economic sphere. In such a way, the first step of the return to radical democracy is not an appeal for classless society but, rather, existential abandonment of the logic of ruling and ruled as well as the logic of consumer society. Therefore, certainly, one can assume the interconnectedness between divergent local spaces in this process, i.e. a relation between multiplicities of particular localities and public spaces — as places where one lives, works, thinks, and plays. It is in and through such localities that the democratic imaginary restructures itself and that gradual changes take place. And perhaps the most relevant moment to keep in mind here is that – to paraphrase Simon Critchley — a true politics in and of itself requires an infinite demand that flows from the perception of injustice (Critchley, 2013).

In the context of the contemporary EU — in a time of transition of epochs in which new political and ethical articulations are put forward — this quest for democratic, social, and free Europe, however, also means a movement towards creation of an alliance of free and equal states. If such a structural transformation cannot be achieved throughout the existing frameworks – and this, by any means, cannot be done in a neoliberal setting — then perhaps it is time for different political events. Through re-creation of both *polis* and *demos* and therefore through concrete action of self-founding communities — a new Europe of the twenty-first century can be born.

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# Life without Subjectivity: Deleuze, Guattari and Patočka's Asubjective Phenomenology[1]

**Petr Kouba**

## ABSTRACT

*It may appear that Deleuze's relation to phenomenology is most clearly spelled out in* Difference and Repetition *or in* The Logic of Sense. *The aim of this paper, however, is to point out a surprising similarity between the Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy of vital forces, which is presented in* a Thousand Plateaus, *and Patočka's asubjective phenomenology. Where Patočka speaks about three movements of existence, Deleuze and Guattari develop a concept of three kinds of forces that create the composition of life. Both in Patočka and in* a Thousand Plateaus *a main issue is a consistency of life that is neither based on some substance, nor related to some pre-given subjectivity. Even though Deleuze and Guattari were not familiar with Patočka's phenomenology, their attempt to grasp life without fundament and subjectivity brings them close to Patočka's ambition to go beyond philosophical anthropology and analyse the composition of life at the margins of humanity and animality. Moreover, what Deleuze and Guattari have in common with Patočka is their emphasis on our co-existence with others. To put it more precisely, they grasp life as a co-existence. However, this paper does not confine itself to merely accenting an analogy between both conceptions. Rather, it uses Deleuze and Guattari's view of life as a possible corrective to Patočka's asubjective phenomenology, showing its potential as well as limitations.*

*Keywords*:        phenomenology, subjectivity, life consistency,
                 Deleuze, Patočka, Guattari

## OPENING

It may seem that Patočka's asubjective phenomenology has nothing in common with Deleuze and Guattari's view of life. A confrontation between those two conceptions may resemble "the chance *encounter* of a *sewing machine* and an *umbrella* on an operating table". But if we take a closer look, it turns out that there are some surprising similarities between both concepts of life. Despite the ahistoricity of their encounter, both concepts represent interesting attempts to overcome the anthropocentrism that reigned in the Western philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Both Patočka, and Deleuze with Guattari were trying to wake up from "an anthropological sleep" (to use a term coined by Michel Foucault) and grasp life in a way which would involve animals together with humans. No doubt Deleuze and Guattari were in this effort more radical than Patočka, who was still bound by the phenomenological principle of evidence. But even his elaboration of the fact that every phenomenon must be

experienced by someone allowed Patočka to formulate his asubjective phenomenology, which does not rely on any subjectivity in the strict sense of the term. Rather than subjectivity, there is a mere singularity of experience which is always open and unfinished. Our experience is necessarily individual, but this is only because our existence is experienced as a process of individualisation. While relating ourselves to the world, we individualise ourselves, which means that we embrace both the contingency and the finitude of our lives.

But if our individuality remains only in our contingency and finitude, instead of having some solid ground, how do we not lose ourselves in the sheer openness of the world? What prevents us from experiencing total self-disintegration? This brings us to the question of life consistency, which cannot be explained on a material basis. What we need, according to Patočka, is a notion of life in which it is conceived as a movement. More precisely, life is seen as a composition of three movements. In his lectures published under the title *Body, Community, Language, World*, Patočka compares human existence to a polyphony that is composed of three movements influencing each other (1998). Our existence is "a movement of movements", which together expresses both the individuality and the complexity of our experience (Patočka , 1998). "That again", claims Patočka (1998),

> is reminiscent of the movement of a melody in which every component, tone, is a part of something that transcends it; in every component something is being prepared that will form the meaning and the nature of the composition, but it is not a movement of something that exists already at the start. (p. 104)

Renaud Barbaras is absolutely right, when emphasising the importance of sonority in Patočka's conception of three existential movements, that metaphors of melody and polyphony represent keys to Patočka's argumentation (Barbaras , 1999, p. 163).

Deleuze and Guattari, however, face the same problem as Patočka. It is a problem of life consistency that intrigues them; and they select similar means to cope with it. In *A Thousand Plateaus* we find a chapter with the title *Of the Refrain*, where they attempt to grasp life in terms of a musical refrain (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, pp. 381–433). They approach life as a refrain composed of various melodic motifs, rhythms, switches, and counterpoints. But despite all its variety, a refrain must also have consistency. "It is now a problem of consistency or consolidation: how to consolidate the material, make it consistent, so that it can harness unthinkable, invisible, nonsonorous forces" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 343). As a matter of fact, it is all about bringing together various kinds of forces and synthesising them so that they make life coherent. Where Patočka speaks about composition of movements, Deleuze and Guattari bring forth a synthesiser of forces. But their problem is the same: how to explain that life does not dissipate into heterogeneous fragments. The point is that such an explanation cannot be based on an affirmation of some pre-existing entity. As Patočka (1998) puts it:

> [T]he possibilities that ground movement have no pre-existing bearer, no necessary referent standing statically at their foundation, but rather all synthesis, all inner interconnection of movement takes place within it alone. All inner unification is accomplished by the movement itself, not by some bearer, substrate, or corporeity, objectively understood. (pp. 146–147)

**THREE MOVEMENTS**

If we want to understand the dynamic composition of our life, we should now take a closer look at Patočka's description of three existential movements whose divided unity represents a core of asubjective phenomenology. It is well known that Patočka's notion of movement issues from a radicalised interpretation of Aristotle's concept of movement as *ekstasis*, i.e. moving out of a given state. In this context, Patočka also revises Heidegger's notion of three temporal ekstases that together form the ecstatic unity of individual existence. Instead of those three ekstases, he suggests three movements that express the complex unity of our existence.

The first movement he speaks of is the instinctive-affective movement, or — as he puts it — the movement of anchoring and thinking roots. It is through this movement that we are situated in the world, and primarily experience our body and our bodily position. This movement corresponds to the temporal dimension of having-been that in fundamental ontology makes possible our attunement, our openness and thrownness into the world. But Patočka does not content himself with the Heideggerian view of our emotions, because he extends the instinctive–affective movement beyond the experience of adult humans. He claims that the instinctive–affective movement applies also to children and animals. A child, or an animal are "wholly submerged in a relation of empathy, of fellow–feeling with the world" (Patočka, 1998). Accordingly, the first movement of existence expresses moments where we have no distance to the world around us; it is a movement of life rhythms where we are moved by the world, rather than acting independently. In this moment, we do not control the situation, but we find ourselves in harmony with the world. We are accepted by the world, nourished by the Earth, and welcomed by people close around us. This movement is not about self-control, but about contingency and coincidence we find in our lives.

The second movement of our existence is the movement of self-sustenance and self-projection. This movement allows us to cope with the world around us, to represent ourselves in the world and to achieve something. In this movement, as well as in the preceding movement, we are never isolated from others. We experience our co-existence with others in cooperation, in work, or in fight. All these activities are situated in the temporal dimension of the present, which reigns in the everyday way of life as described by Heidegger in his fundamental ontology. We accept the challenges of the present, we understand them as our possibilities and we act according to them in order to change our world. We learn to control our instincts and affects, we postpone immediate gratification, and we stay focused on more distant life goals. This gives us firm ground under our feet, and assures us that the earth beneath us is the solid and unshakable basis for our existence.

The third movement of existence, which Patočka sometimes calls "the movement of truth", is the movement that shakes the ground of our existence, breaks the spell of all the assurances provided by the Earth, and makes us experience our finitude. What we usually ignore in the first two movements of life appears here as the final truth without which our existence would never be complete. The third movement is neither about putting down roots in the world, nor about self-projection to the world, but about our existence as such. As "an attempt at shaking the dominance of the Earth in us", the third movement makes it possible to truly find ourselves, it brings us to completeness because it allows us to integrate what we forget when we get stuck in the dimension of the having-been or present (Patočka, 1998). The temporal dimension proper to the third movement of existence is the future. From this follows that our existence finds its own *integrity* only if we accept the finitude of our life. While in the

first movement of existence our life is dissipated into pleasant or unpleasant moments, and in the second movement of existence it is dissipated into our everyday tasks and goals, the third movement of existence give us true self-integrity. Such is an answer to the question of life consistency in asubjective phenomenology.

In contrast to Heidegger, the third movement of existence for Patočka is not necessarily connected with the experience of loneliness. Rather than underlining the solitary character of authentic existence, Patočka makes a great effort to demonstrate social and collective aspects of the acceptance of our finitude. In his *Heretical Essays*, he links the third movement of existence to the solidarity of those who experience battle (Patočka, 1990). He also refers to the third movement of existence in his reflections on the phenomenon of sacrifice (Patočka, 2002). As an ultimate gesture, a sacrifice appeals to others, and is for others, and as such testifies to the openness of the world we share together. Thus, we can say that every movement of existence in Patočka is a movement in co-existence with others.

We should not, however, forget that all existential movements, according to Patočka, bear some danger. The internal risk of the first two movements is articulated quite clearly and extensively. Above all, the first as well as the second movement of existence make us forget who we really are. They make us blind to ourselves, and if they become our ruling principles, they jeopardise our life integrity. If we sink into the first movement of existence, we live only for pleasurable moments and the immediate satisfaction of our instincts. If the second movement of existence is overemphasised, it suppresses even our instinctive-affective life; we become rigid, we succumb to social roles and conventions without ever being able to break them. Yet, when it comes to the third movement of existence, it seems that Patočka can hardly find any negatives. The only danger he mentions in this respect is that: "[t]he corresponding inauthenticity here is one of being blinded by finitude" (Patočka, 1998, p. 107). He leaves it to us to imagine what exactly this means, and what specific forms being blinded by finitude can take.

**THE WORLD AS A TERRITORY**

Before we examine Deleuze and Guattari's conception of life forces, we need to recollect their view of the life-world. Speaking from a phenomenological perspective, one may say that Deleuze and Guattari approach the life-world as a territory. In his fine study "Art and Territory", Ronald Bogue argues that the concept of "territoriality" in Deleuze and Guattari can be understood as an attempt to extend Lacan's psychological description of "territorialisation" to a broader social domain (Bogue, 1999, p. 86). While Lacan uses the concept of territorialisation to grasp the influence of parental caregiving on an infant's bodily functions, Deleuze and Guattari employ this concept to show that spheres of intimacy, familiarity, and protection appear practically in all social groups. Whether it is in subjugated social groups led by a charismatic, father-like figure, in masses identified with their leaders, or among indigenous people, familial structures are always related to territoriality. In *Anti-Oedipus*, we find a thorough study of various territorial assemblages that shape and codify social co-existence. But territorial structures we inhabit are never static. No territory is simply given. It is always a result of the process of territorialisation, which can at any time be interrupted or fragmented by a process of deterritorialisation, by which we leave established territories to explore life and set new territories. A territory always oscillates between processes of deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation. Together with Deleuze and Guattari, we can track processes of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation in human

history: from primitive territorial assemblages that are destroyed and deterretorialised by imperial states, to modern capitalism that further deterritorialises imperial states to open them to global flows of capital (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972). Capitalism itself is then nothing but a specific combination of deterritorialised social flows and their relative reterritorialisation in state structures that are still to some extent indispensable. In any case, it is all about movements we experience in coexistence with others. Sometimes we build up territory that we paranoically defend against any external danger that might jeopardise our life routine; sometimes we leave our territory in schizophrenic escapes that break our habits and social roles. To put it more precisely, sometimes our paranoid tendencies prevail and we invest our energy into rigid maintenance of our territory, rather than risking schizophrenic breakdown of the semantic structure of our world; sometimes we let loose our schizophrenic tendencies at the expense of safety and caution.

Yet it is obvious that in *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari are siding with deterritorialisation, rather than reterritorialisation. Since the answer to conflicts of global capitalism does not lie in a return to past forms of social life, the only way to cope with our problems is further deterritorialisation of social codes and structures. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) argue that:

> [w]e will never go too far with the deterritorialization, the decoding of flows. For the new earth [...] is not to be found in the neurotic or perverse reterritorializations that arrest the process or assign it goals... (p. 382)

This view, however, changes with a further development of Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, all processes related to territoriality become even more significant, when being extended from the domain of human coexistence to practically all life forms. This involves a broad variety of phenomena, ranging from crystal structures, to DNA strands, codes of animal behaviour, and interspecies relations. All processes concerning territoriality find their special place in the philosophical reflection on biosemiotics and the semiotic study of ecosystems. In this respect, Deleuze and Guattari return to the work of Jakob von Uexküll, whose concept of life-world (*Umwelt*) provides a vital supplement to their own conceptualisation of territoriality (Von Uexküll, 1956). This is evident especially in the chapter *Of the Refrain*, where all descriptions of life processes revolve around von Uexküll's notion of human and animal life-worlds. Territorialisations, deterritorialisations, and reterritorialisations that appear in nature are here described in terms of tonality, which complies with the leading role of rhythms and melodies in human and animal life-worlds (Von Uexküll, 1956). According to von Uexküll (1956), the main principle of nature is *Kontrapunkt*, and every organism has its unique *Lebensmelodie*. It is perhaps such an awareness of life tonality which makes Deleuze and Guattari more cautious about deterritorialisation: '[s]obriety, sobriety: that is the common prerequisite for the deterritorialisation of matters, the molecularisation of material, and the cosmicisation of forces' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 344). Instead of a fundamental prioritising of deterritorialisation, we see here a profound insight into the precariousness and fragility of life whose consistency can be easily broken and lost forever.

It is precisely this reflection on internal finitude and the essential insecurity of life that differentiates Deleuze and Guattari's position in *a Thousand Plateaus* from asubjective phenomenology. While Patočka remains very vague when it comes to dangers of the third movement of existence in which we embrace our finitude, Deleuze and Guattari cannot be

more explicit about the dangers of limiting the experiences and excesses of life. What we need is to have some balance in our operations of consistency. Life experienced as a combination of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation is always in danger of losing its consistency and falling into chaos. Our life composition is not only unfinished, but permanently open to sudden shifts, ruptures, and disruptions. With this ascertainment in mind, we may conclude that territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation are essential movements of life whose social organisation changes according to those movements.

**THREE FORCES**

In the context of tonal explication of the territoriality of life, we then find Deleuze and Guattari's conception of life forces. These are the forces of chaos, forces of earth, and cosmic forces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 382). They are relative to movements of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation, which can be explained in the following way: while forces of earth reign in territory, forces of chaos are lurking outside territory; cosmic forces, on the other hand, allow us to take a line of flight from a closed territory without falling into a threatening chaos. If we fall into chaos, we must become oriented, and find some stabilising points so that we can lay the foundations of a new territory. When in territory, we find ourselves in a familiar environment which has a complex semantic structure. But if we stay within territory for too long, our territorialised, habitual way of life becomes stereotypical, and we might feel the urge to leave territory, which can be successfully done thanks to cosmic forces that allow us to establish new connections and discover a broader context of life. Altogether, forces of chaos, forces of earth and cosmic forces create the composition of our lives. This composition, which Deleuze and Guattari prefer to call 'refrain', is essentially territorial. The territorial refrain expresses not only the sonority of a closed territory, but also movements of deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation. We could say that territory is nothing but an intersection point of movements of deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation which are driven by forces of chaos, forces of earth and cosmic forces.

When it comes to forces of chaos, they destroy not only territorial assemblages with their semantic structures, but also the life consistency of organisms that are exposed to them. They do away with every possible individuation of living organisms. They throw us into a black hole which prevents any subjectivisation and communication. What remains in chaos are only partial objects, disjointed remnants of meaning, and non-personal impulses. We face 'nonlocalisable, nondimensional chaos, the force of chaos, a tangled bundle of aberrant lines' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 383). Deleuze and Guattari thus point to a strange, hostile domain, which requires analysis in terms of an experience without an experiencing subject. Before we can experience ourselves as a subject of experience, we must find here an uncertain centre around which we can become oriented. Here our instinctive-affective life is shattered, as forces of chaos turn our instincts and affects into chaos.

But those uncontrolled, decentralised instincts and affects can be refracted, pacified and organised, as soon as terrestrial forces join the game. Thanks to forces of earth, we can create a safe territory with a homogeneous space-time, where everything acquires clear contours. Thanks to forces of earth we can have a home, where we understand others as well as ourselves. We find our place and keep our distance from others.

> The territory is first of all the critical distance between two beings of the same species:
> Mark your distance. What is mine is first of all my distance; I possess only distances.

> Don't anybody touch me, I growl if anyone enters my territory... (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 320)

What we experience in territory is reorganisation of instincts and regrouping of affects. Old life functions get a new role in territory, and some new functions are emerging here: building a dwelling, competing with others, territorial aggression. In human territories, we find also a place for work, trade and exchange of goods. The same applies to sexuality, which has very strong territorial effects: finding partners, having children, etc.

But already territorial functions such as sexuality require not only territory, but also some sort of deterritorialisation. There is a need to create new territorial assemblages, which is impossible without cosmic forces. These forces are not forces of a closed, organised and complex cosmos whose totality was examined by ancient cosmologies. Rather, cosmic forces as understood by Deleuze and Guattari are forces that carry us out of the familiar home. They open new lines of flight from well-established conditions of life in territory. We employ these forces when we improvise or explore new possibilities. They are "the forces of the future", as we read in *a Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 383). They are the forces of the unknown, as they bring us to unknown regions of life, beyond all familiar horizons. While forces of earth that rule territory are concentrated into a life effort, which makes possible practical self-realisation, cosmic forces are effortless. They go without effort when they deterritorialise our lives.

In fact, every territory is to some extent always already being deterritorialised, as it is traversed by relative movements of deterritorialisation that can get out of control. Every territory is therefore opened to the deterritorialised Cosmos. Territories are constantly on the verge of spontaneous deterritorialisations, which, however, make way for subsequent, or parallel reterritorialisations. An interplay of territorialisations, deterritorialisations, and reterritorialisations is expressed in territorial refrain. The main issue of such a conceptualisation of life refrain is, as we already know, the problem of life consistency.

> The problem of *consistency* concerns the manner in which the components of a territorial assemblage hold together. But it also concerns the manner in which different assemblages hold together, with components of passage and relay. It may even be the case that consistency finds the totality of its conditions only on a properly cosmic plane, where all the disparate and heterogeneous elements are convoked. However, from the moment heterogeneities hold together in an assemblage or interassemblages a problem of consistency is posed, in terms of coexistence or succession, and both simultaneously. Even in a territorial assemblage, it may be the most deterritorialized component, the deterritorializing vector, in other words, the refrain, that assures the consistency of the territory. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 327)

**MOVEMENTS AND FORCES**

If we now proceed to an explicit comparison of *a Thousand Plateaus* and asubjective phenomenology, we may start with a statement that Deleuze and Guattari's view on life consistency remarkably resembles Patočka's own explanation of existential integrity. In both cases it appears that life holds together not thanks to some hidden centre, but because of the most decentralised and decentralising moment. Both in Deleuze and Guattari, and in Patočka, life consistency is assured by an exposure to an extreme, where one risks death, or dissipation

of individual life. In asubjective phenomenology, the true integrity of existence is provided by the third movement of existence in which we accept our own finitude. What is at stake here is not only a completeness in the sense of totality, as some critics argue; it is about an existential integrity which warrants an elementary consistency of our existence. In *a Thousand Plateaus*, a consistency of life is achieved in the most extreme point of deterritorialisation, which deprives life of its autonomy and permanent identity, while exposing it to a radical transformation. "In effect, what holds an assemblage together is not the play of framing forms or linear causalities but, actually or potentially, its most deterritorialised component, a cutting edge of deterritorialization" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 415).

This shift from centre to periphery, from an inside to an outside, is reflected in Deleuze and Guattari's theory of consolidation. For if there is any consistency in our lives, it is because consistency operates through consolidation.

> Consistency is the same as consolidation, it is the act that produces consolidated ag-gregates, of succession as well as of coexistence, [...] Is not consolidation the terrestrial name for consistency? The territorial assemblage is a milieu consolidation, a space-time consolidation, of coexistence and succession. And the refrain operates with these three factors. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 329)

In *a Thousand Plateaus*, as well as in asubjective phenomenology, we also see that extreme moments of life are capable of opening new social spaces and new forms of social organisation. Neither the third movement of existence, nor deterritorialisation driven by cosmic forces leads us automatically to some isolated, autistic form of subsistence; rather, they make possible constitution of new social relations, which is obvious both in Patočka's de-piction of sacrifice or solidarity of the shaken, and in Deleuze and Guattari's description of new territories and social connections that emerge due to the movement of deterritorialisation.

If there is any significant divergence between both conceptions, it remains surely in Patočka's underestimation of all dangers related to the third movement of existence. It is not enough to say that one might be "blinded by finitude". It is necessary to be constantly aware that our existence is permeated by finitude to a much larger degree than Patočka suspects. Deleuze and Guattari, on the contrary, repeatedly remind us that process of deterritoriali-sation may not always end well. Instead of reaching the Cosmos, it may bring us into the black hole. Instead of making possible new social connections and opening new possibilities, deterritorialisation may end in the void. "This is what happens under conditions of precocious or extremely sudden deterritorialisation, and when specific, interspecific, and cosmic paths are blocked" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 334).

When comparing Patočka's notion of three existential movements with Deleuze and Guattari's view of life forces, one may also notice that the picture of the first movement of existence in asubjective phenomenology is too idyllic. Patočka mainly emphasises our accep-tance in the world; he focuses on our "instinctive-affective harmony with the world", ignoring all traumatising aspects of our situatedness in the world (Patočka, 1995, p. 104).

To see that this is not always the case, we can recollect Goldstein's notion of emotion-ality based on his examination of catastrophic situations which disintegrate our habitual life-world, or bodily functions as well as our individuality (Goldstein, 1939). This concept is all the more important inasmuch as Goldstein presents an accurate criticism of von Uex-küll's conception of human and animal life-worlds, objecting to its mainly static view of the

life-world's semantic structure. He argues that animal and human life-worlds are constantly affected by contingencies and irregularities of our environment, which is why they must be viewed as constantly shaking and moving structures that involve processes of adaptation to disturbing situations.

No doubt Deleuze and Guattari were familiar with Goldstein's revision of von Uexküll's concept of life-worlds. Their view of territoriality is essentially dynamic, and their approach to emotionality reflects not only calm and well-balanced emotions of territorial life, but also, and above all, disturbed and disturbing aspects of our instinctive-affective life. Contrary to Patočka, they start their description of our instincts and affects in conditions of extreme discomfort provoked by forces of chaos. While Patočka's description of our instinctive-affective life accentuates everything what might be impacted by forces of earth, Deleuze and Guattari take into consideration the way forces of chaos disrupt our emotions and perceptions. This brings us to the conclusion that *a Thousand Plateaus* provides not only a radicalised view of our finitude, but also a radical concept of contingency, which may serve as a corrective to the notion of existential contingency we find in asubjective phenomenology.

## CLOSING

Last, but not least, we can take into account the political consequences of Deleuze and Guattari's reflection on life movements and forces. As opposed to Patočka, who believed that the power of sacrifice and the solidarity of the shaken, which are closely related to the third movement of existence, can make us attentive and resistant to the dangers of globalised technology, Deleuze and Guattari are not so sure about the positive effects of deterritorialisation of our social life. At least, in *a Thousand Plateaus* they admit that deterritorialised society can be totally atomised, and therefore easily controlled by mass media, monitoring procedures, market surveys, and statistical calculations. They are aware that deterritorialisation of our world often leads to the depopulation of the people, rather than to the liberation of the people:

> The established powers have occupied the earth, they have built people's organizations. The mass media, the great people's organizations of the party or union type, are machines of reproduction, fuzzification machines that effectively scramble all the terrestrial forces of the people. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 345)

This global situation is to be seen as a massive deterritorialisation which brings human society to "an ever wider and deeper black hole" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 345). To avoid the utter destruction of our society, we need to consider the radical fragility and precariousness of life in all its forms. Then we can try to find other ways of deterritorialisation that would open space for new social and environmental connections. It is a task for political activists and artists who improvise and experiment with various lines of deterritorialisation, while being attentive to their own lives, to their communities, and to other living beings.

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# The Dialectic of Subjectivity and Community in the Twenty-first Century: The Struggle for Identity

**Jon Stewart**

**ABSTRACT**

*The current revival of trends, such as populism, nationalism, and nativism strikes many people as surprising and counterintuitive. In this paper I try to understand what historical forces are at work that have brought back to life these ways of thinking. I wish to argue that they can be seen as a backlash to a sense of alienation that comes from subjective freedom. While individuality and subjectivity were hailed as important trends in the modern world, when they lead people to feel isolated and alienated the natural result is a desire to return to some illusory previous time when there was a sense of safety and security stemming from one's participation in a wider group.*

*Keywords*:        populism, nationalism, nativism, racism, freedom, individualism, alienation

Today many academics and educated people stand perplexed as they contemplate the rise of populism and witness the return and establishment of reactionary forces in mainstream politics (Judis, 2016; Mueller, 2016; Taggart, 2000; Kazin, 1998). The legitimisation of these views is deeply perplexing for many, who ask how such a thing could have happened. How do such views arise? In this paper I wish to try to address this issue from a broader historical perspective in order to gain some insight into these recent events. Why are populism, nationalism, nativism and even racism suddenly popular and fashionable once again? Apparently running parallel to this is the gradual erosion of fundamental human rights and democratic institutions in countries such as Hungary, Poland, Turkey, Brazil and the USA. Here we can think of the increasing threats to freedom of the press, respect for institutions of civil society, *habeas corpus*, the political system of checks and balances, and laws designed to respect the privacy of the individual. All of these were long taken to be valuable elements of a healthy and thriving society, which led to the flourishing and free development of individual citizens. When things such as these come to be undermined today, this is perplexing since precisely such rights, laws and institutions had to be fought for over the long course of human history, and only once these battles were won was it possible for the next generation to reap the benefits from them. However, now it seems not to have taken a very long time for people to have forgotten why exactly these laws and institutions were established in the first place. Never having personally experienced the ills caused by the absence of these laws and institutions, some people today are light-minded about rejecting them in favour of some particular political hobbyhorse of the moment.

Perhaps a part of the modern astonishment at the return of certain political opinions lies in the fact that we sometimes intuitively tend to think in terms of a kind of progressive linear development, with the idea being that certain political views grow old and disappear when the disastrous consequences of them become obvious and universally recognised. According to this conception, once this happens these views should simply die out forever. For example, the rise of fascism, aggressive nationalism and the single-minded self-identification with the state that led to disastrous consequences in the twentieth century was in many circles in Europe regarded as an outmoded paradigm that needed to be replaced by a pan-European model. Likewise, after the fall of the Soviet Empire, the ideal of a communist economy and political order was discarded. In terms of political theory or philosophy of history, this idea is often associated with the movement known as Whigism or with Hegel's philosophy, which claims that the human spirit is progressing to ever higher levels of freedom through the course of time. However, this view does not need any deeper philosophical grounding since it also seems in many ways to be in harmony with our common sense and life experience. Reflective people, when they have had bad experiences, try to learn from them in order not to repeat them. It thus seems very natural that after wars or long periods of oppression people become introspective and try to find ways to avoid the repetition of such events.

Thus, the revival of trends such as nationalism, nativism and racism strikes many people as surprising and counterintuitive. For this reason, I think it is important to try to understand what historical forces and what political intuitions are at work that have brought these ways of thinking back to life. I should emphasise that my motivation here is simply to try to understand these new developments and in no way to justify or legitimise them. As a firm believer in the explanatory power of historical contextualisation, I wish simply to take a step back from the usual daily political polemics and to see things in a broader historical perspective in order to gain some insight into these issues. I wish to argue that they can be seen as a backlash to a sense of alienation that comes from subjective freedom. While individuality and subjectivity were hailed as important trends in the modern world, when they lead people to feel isolated and alienated, the natural result is a desire to return to some illusory previous time when there was a sense of safety and security stemming from one's participation in a wider group.

## 1. THE STORY OF THE STRUGGLE FOR SUBJECTIVE FREEDOM AND INDIVIDUALISM

The story of Western civilisation can be interpreted as representing the development of ideas such as individuality, subjectivity, and inwardness. These ideas, which constitute an important part of our modern self-conception, were discovered and refined in different ways through the course of time. In antiquity these principles remained generally unrecognised, and human beings were conceived primarily as members of the specific families, clans, tribes, or larger social groups to which they belonged. With the development of Greek science and philosophy and the advent of Christianity, the conception of human beings as having an inward side that was important and valuable slowly began to emerge. This inward dimension gradually replaced the external points of identification of the individual. This narrative can be continued right up to our present day.

The story has generally been one of liberation, as people have gradually freed themselves from the oppression of tradition, custom, the family, or the group. With the realisation of the principle of conscience or inwardness, people were able to conceive of themselves as individuals for the first time. It is easy for us living in the twenty-first century to identify with

this story of emerging freedom since we generally celebrate the value of individuality. We recognise that inwardness and subjectivity are constituent elements in the development of what it is to be fully human. Most of us are happy to have the right to make the key decisions about things that concern our own lives, and we resent being pressured to do things that run contrary to our conscience or personal preferences. We believe that we know best what will lead to our own happiness and flourishing.

However, in our modern world there has been a high price to pay for our hard-won individuality and subjectivity. As these modern principles develop, other traditional principles begin to recede. It is worth looking at these to see what has been lost with the disappearance of the ancient world. This will in turn allow us to understand our modern age from a new perspective. Specifically, it will provide insight into what is ultimately at stake in the principles of individuality and subjectivity.

## 2. ALIENATION

In our modern world our treasured individuality comes at the cost of isolation, alienation, and anomie. As we embrace individuality, we implicitly reject identification with a larger group, whether that be the family, the tribe, or some other instance. In the past, these points of identification constituted important pillars in the construction of the identity and self-image of people. The Greeks understood themselves as belonging not just to the wider community of Greek-speakers, but also to specific city-states, demes, tribes, and families. These affiliations defined who one was and provided a sense of stability and continuity. They were reinforced by differences in language, religious belief, custom and law, thus constituting the individual's foundation as a person and fundamental orientation in the world. When points like this are removed, as in the twenty-first century, it is easy for people to feel lost and disoriented. It can be a great burden to be an individual in modern mass society, where one can easily feel alone and overwhelmed. So the narrative of human liberation is only half of the story of the development of individuality and subjectivity. There is another part that is worthy of our attention, although it is too complex be told here in all of its details.

The basic idea of alienation is that modern human beings feel a sense of separation from other people and institutions. Although our lives are largely dictated by these relations and institutions, we do not find ourselves reflected in them, and we do not feel at home with them. Unlike, for example, uncontroversial laws prohibiting murder and theft which we are able to identify with immediately since we can see our own rationality reflected in them, many of the practices and institutions of the modern world can strike us as confusing, contradictory or unjust. They are regarded not as the vehicles that enable us to flourish in the world, but instead as oppressive obstacles that stand in the way of our natural development and advancement. This was the way in which the Romantics perceived the conservative value system of bourgeois life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The idea of alienation as a diagnosis of the age was one that arose in the context of German *philosophy* in the nineteenth century. It began with the theories of Hegel and Feuerbach, and was made most famous by Marx. These thinkers explored the idea of alienation in a number of different spheres, such as social life, politics, religion and economics. They also discussed the opposite of the idea of alienation, namely that of identification or recognition. In other words, when I recognise the value and legitimacy of an institution by seeing it as a reflection of my own rationality or an expression of my own will, then I do not have a feeling of alienation but rather one of identification. I *identify with* it and *recognise* it as true and

legitimate. This idea of recognition was a guiding motif in the philosophy of the nineteenth century and remains an object of extensive discussion today in the work of modern thinkers influenced by Hegel, such as Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor.[1]

In addition to these philosophical theories, the idea of alienation also figures prominently in the *literature* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the Romantic period, there was a nostalgic yearning for an earlier time before the feeling of separation or alienation occurred, that is, a time when people still felt at home in the world. The Romantic authors sought models for this period in different forms, such as the idea of a state of nature, non-Western cultures, and traditional folk tales and stories. Their views of earlier historical periods and foreign peoples were often highly idealised. They desired to posit an age when humans lived simpler and happier lives before becoming corrupted by modern society, which was thought to have warped their naturally good nature.

Modern literary works are full of protagonists who feel alienated from traditional values, their families, their communities, and society in general. Turgenev's Barazov, Dostoevsky's underground man, Kafka's Joseph K., Camus' Meursault, Sartre's Antoine Rocquentin, and Salinger's Holden Caulfield are all well-known examples of characters intended to capture, among other things, this element about the modern condition. These characters continually bump up against absurdities in modern human practices and institutions. Separated from others, they feel that they are strangers or outsiders in their own societies.

Also in the *social-political sphere,* the notion of alienation with the emergence of subjectivity has exercised a profound influence in shaping the modern world. In the eighteenth century, traditional practices, privileges and social structures were called into question. This resulted in radical social changes that began with the American and French Revolutions and continued into the nineteenth century with, among other things, the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. During these periods people felt alienated from social and governmental systems that privileged an elite group and disenfranchised everyone else. The emerging principle of subjectivity led to an undermining of the sense of identification with any larger institution. This gave rise to grave suspicion of, for example, the government, the financial sector, the police, or authority figures in general. These were no longer regarded as representing and defending the individual's interests and rationality but instead came to be seen as corrupt and nefarious in different ways. Today, one often feels an alienation from these larger instances, and there is a sense of powerlessness in the face of them. They are even seen to represent a threat to one's freedom and well-being. In the absence of any wider points of identification, the individual is left to flee to the inwardness of oneself. This diminishes the traditional sense of solidarity, community, and civic obligation.

An acute sense of alienation leads to the idea that the reigning societal rules, regulations and laws no longer apply, given that they are issued and enforced by illegitimate institutional powers. It makes no sense to try to comply with the laws of society when that society itself suffers from a deeply rooted corruption and oppresses its members. On the contrary, by going along with the status quo, one simply lends credibility and legitimacy to a corrupt system. Thus, on this view, individuals have the right to resist. In the modern world, this has

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1    See, for example, Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. by Joel Anderson, Cambridge: MIT Press 1995. Axel Honneth, *The I in We: Studies in the Theory of Recognition*, trans. by Joseph Ganahl, Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press 2012. Charles Taylor and Amy Gutman, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994.

taken many forms, including Locke's advocation of the right to revolution or the notion of nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience developed by figures such as Thoreau, Gándhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

From this it is clear that the notion of alienation is a widespread principle in many spheres in the modern world. Moreover, it is dialectical in nature, that is, it can be seen in both a positive and a negative light. Traditionally, it is usually taken to be something entirely negative, as with the Romantics. The idea is that we have lost something substantial from the ancient world that we struggle in vain to recover. The modern sense of dissatisfaction and the feeling of being strangers in the world are sad facts of modern existence. However, modern alienation also has a positive side; it can be seen as the impetus for positive social change and human development. It can motivate people to criticise and combat oppressive institutions in the hope of replacing them with ones that better respect the rights of the individual and cultivate human flourishing.

In any case, it is possible here to see the tension between the ancient view and the modern one. While the ancients enjoyed a sense of immediate belonging in their world with traditional values and customs, we moderns, wallowing in alienation, can never hope to re-establish this. But this is not something that is entirely negative. For all of our deep-seated dissatisfaction, the modern world has made great strides in the establishment of legal and social institutions that ensure a space for the free development of the individual. But in both cases there is a trade-off: something is lost, but something is also gained.

## 3. THE PERCEIVED THREAT AND THE CREATION OF THE OPPOSITE PRINCIPLE

When the breakdown of traditional values and institutions occurs, and alienation sets in, individuals lose their basic points of orientation and identification in the world. When one feels alienated from traditional institutions and affiliations, this leaves an empty space that needs to be filled. Modern people are thus forced to find new ways to address the pressing question: Who am I? There then arises within each individual a struggle to establish one's own identity, without reference to any larger group. This is a vexing issue in the modern world, since without a clear conception of who they are as individuals, people feel insecure and disoriented. This can lead to extreme forms resulting in well-known ways of thinking such as relativism and narcissism. With the entire focus being on the establishment of the identity of the individual, the external world becomes only a malleable means for this.

The principle of subjectivity has developed to such an extreme that it now has reached a point where it produces a backlash, giving rise to its opposite: the principle of objectivity. With this, the pendulum now begins to swing back in the opposite direction. In this we can find the explanation for the rise and increasing popularity of movements such as tribalism, nativism, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism. The adherents of these trends feel threatened by what they perceive to be a loss of the objective, that is, what they regard as secure, traditional values and beliefs. They yearn for a simpler time, when traditions were less diluted and confused. They reject the global trends of international cooperation and cosmopolitanism, which are perceived not as new opportunities but as threats (Josephides & Hall, 2014).

The growth of industrialisation, urbanism, and changes in the structure of the family have all led to individuals losing what were formerly key elements of their traditional identity. Globalisation has only accelerated this trend. As the world begins more and more to creep into the daily lives of people in their local communities, it becomes increasingly menacing.

With globalisation, things which happen on the other side of the world can no longer be ignored as remote and irrelevant. Now everything is interconnected and a local problem can easily become a global one.

There are many examples of this. With increased travel, the danger of the rapid spread of disease increases: thus, the rise in concern about epidemics and pandemics. With the interconnectedness of the global economy, an economic crisis in one place can have a profound effect on the rest of the world. This was illustrated by the financial crisis of 2007 and 2008, which started in the USA but quickly became a major international phenomenon, leading to global recession and costing millions of jobs around the world. Thus, a threat to one's own financial well-being could arise in a country far away, with the individual worker bearing no responsibility for it and having no ability to prevent it. From this arises a feeling of helplessness and vulnerability.

Globalisation has also brought into focus the problem of mass migration. The war in Syria produced several large waves of refugees, many of whom fled to Europe, creating a crisis in several countries. The response was fear and consternation. There were practical concerns that large numbers of refugees would constitute a drain on the national budget, which would be insufficient to pay for the housing and re-education of so many newcomers. However, more vexing for many people was that large numbers of refugees from a Muslim country would undermine traditional Western values. This was particularly worrisome for countries with smaller populations, which feared being overrun and losing their national language or identity. These concerns were sometimes further complicated by a complex historical background in some countries where peoples had long struggled to assert their independence and national identity. All of this is of course a complex topic in itself, but it illustrates clearly the threat that globalisation poses in the eyes of many people.

One of the greatest sources of modern anxiety is the rise of global terrorism. This is another threat that comes from far away and in the face of which the individual feels vulnerable. This makes people nervous in public spaces and separates individuals from one another, as foreigners or those with specific profiles become regarded with an eye of suspicion and fear. The constant thematisation of terrorism in the news media and in the modern political debate leaves one with the impression that it is necessary to be looking over one's shoulder constantly, since the next threat could be right around the corner. The irony of this is not lost on the critical observer, since this sense of fear is precisely the goal of the terrorist in the first place. Terrorism is no longer something far away that can be left to others to deal with. Now globalisation has seemingly brought the terrorist into our immediate lives.

All of this creates a culture of fear, where people are constantly on the lookout for the next threat from the outside world. An enduring sense of uncertainty and anxiety gives rise to a need to hang on to traditional values and beliefs even more adamantly. People believe that with the rise of globalisation they are losing the safe environment that they knew from the past. They feel a need to have a community with others whom they perceive to be like themselves, that is, others from whom no threat will come. One can say that this is just the opposite of the modern celebration of individualism, even though it arises from the same cause — the loss of the objective sphere. People who feel this anxiety would be more than happy to give up a part of their own individuality in order to feel the security and comfort that the group or traditional values and beliefs offer. This intuition testifies to the basic human need for shared values and traditions in communities that can be identified as a positive element in the ancient world.

## 4. THE NEED FOR A BALANCE

The concept of subjectivity can be seen as dialectical or, if one prefers, contradictory. This can be understood as a conflict between the ancient and the modern world. The ancient world focused on tradition and the group, while neglecting the individual. The modern world, by contrast, focuses on the individual at the expense of the larger collective units. In both cases something is won and something is lost. In antiquity, people enjoyed a feeling of belonging to a larger social whole but had no sense of individual freedom. In the modern world we enjoy this freedom, but struggle to maintain a broader sense of community. What this tells us is that the concepts of subjectivity and individuality are ideas that stand in a necessary relation to their opposites: society, community, family and tradition.

The ultimate goal is to strike the correct balance that brings these different elements into harmony with one another in such a way as to lead to human flourishing. This harmony did not exist in the ancient world due to an exaggerated focus on tradition and larger social institutions, at the expense of the individual. Likewise, this harmony does not exist in the modern world due to a one-sided focus on the opposite principle. In short, universalising the one principle to the exclusion of its opposite leads to a lack of balance. Instead, what is required is a recognition of the importance and value of both principles.

This is a balance that we struggle to attain in our modern world of the twenty-first century. As mentioned above, our celebration of subjectivity and individuality has often ended in self-absorption and narcissism. It has separated us from our families, neighbours and communities. In this regard, we have something to learn from the ancients and their sense of identification with their traditions and the generally accepted values of the community. The movements today of nativism, nationalism, and populism give expression to the sense that something has been lost in our modern globalised world, where we all interact with one another as atomic units. There is a felt need for some commonality of values and beliefs. This part of the story of the development of subjectivity and individuality is well worth exploring.

It is neither desirable nor possible to return to the ancient world and live immediately in harmony with custom and tradition. The price of such a harmony is the well-known repression of the individual and subjective freedom. We clearly need critical reflection about our customs and traditions. However, there is something praiseworthy in the old view in the fact that there is a substantive truth in the public sphere which is recognised by everyone. This provides a sense of belonging and solidarity, which we should attempt to preserve. This is an element of the ancient world and parts of the non-Western world that is valuable and important.

Thus, the goal is to unify the two views, that is, the objective and the subjective. We need to strive to create a public order that is generally recognised as true and rational but at the same time allows individuals the opportunity to grant their assent by means of their own critical evaluation of the concrete customs and traditions. In short, the truth is both in the outside world and in the inwardness of the individual simultaneously; while it exists in the customs and traditions in the public sphere, these must be recognised as rational by each individual. This is the formula for overcoming the repression of the ancient world and the alienation of the modern. Hegel articulates this by saying that the "right of the subjective will" to recognise the good must coexist harmoniously with "the right of objectivity," i.e., the right of the validity and truth of the external world (Hegel, 1991).

The desired harmony is characterised by a higher unity by which one can identify with the social whole in a reflective manner without feeling threatened as an individual. While antiquity represents the principle of immediacy with its focus on custom and tradition, and the modern world that of mediation or reflection with its emphasis on the individual, the final step would involve a combination of these elements. One should feel a sense of community and solidarity without being so absorbed in it in such a way that it undermines one's individuality.

With the idea of the tension between dialectical opposites such as individuality and tradition, we have a useful tool for evaluating our own time. This gives us a specific criterion which we can use in critical discussions about the location of our present age on the sliding scale of history with respect to the idea of subjective freedom, on the one side, and shared community, on the other. With this criterion or conceptual framework, we can examine concrete evidence and try to determine whether it suggests that the contemporary situation contains more elements that favour the side of the individual or the side of the social whole. The goal of such studies would be to discern some kind of trend or movement in the one direction or the other. If such a trend could be demonstrated, then this could be used in the service of a broader social-political criticism of our current political situation. This would allow us to compare our present age with previous ages on concrete points. While it would admittedly be difficult to determine any perfect position of harmony between the individual and the social whole, this is not to say that it would be impossible to identify specific trends in the one direction or the other, which could in turn be critically evaluated. This could serve as a point of departure for a valuable assessment of what some regard as the enigmatic social movements of our own day.

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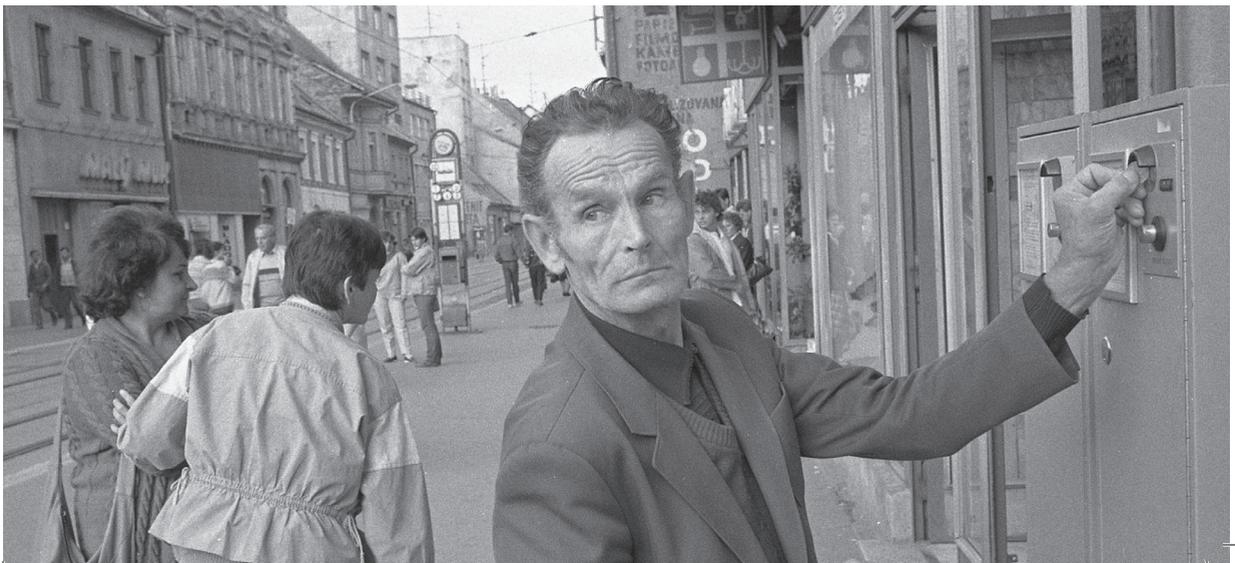
# Disagreeing about the *Demos*: An Agonistic Approach to Democracy's Boundary problem

**Maxim van Asseldonk**

### ABSTRACT

*Having remained under-theorised for a long time, the issue of who constitutes the demos in a democracy has recently become central to debates in democratic theory. This issue, termed democracy's "boundary problem", cannot be resolved by purely procedural democratic means, since such attempts inevitably become stranded in infinite regressions. It is important because the scope of state power often extends beyond those who are legally citizens. Migrants and refugees, for example, are subject to laws over which they have little or no influence, potentially harming these laws' democratic value. Consequently, some advocate transnational democracy via a dramatic increase in the scope of the demos, whereas others emphasise national sovereignty. In this paper, I engage critically with the debate around this boundary problem from an agonistic standpoint. Most existing contributions put consensus and deliberative democracy at the centre. I question whether this is possible without jeopardising democracy itself. Drawing on Jacques Rancière, Chantal Mouffe, and Bonnie Honig, I argue that the deliberative approach to democracy cannot satisfactorily deal with the boundary problem because it risks reducing it to a technicality, depoliticising and therefore de-democratising it. Agonism, by contrast, emphasises disagreement and popular mobilisation as fundamental to democracy. This approach is explicitly political because it renders the question of who the demos is a perpetual one, and hence open to contestation and not limited to those formally included in the demos (i.e. legal citizens). Instead, I theorise citizenship as a political practice rather than exclusively a legal status. The demos consists not of a pre-politically constituted collective to whom democracy is "given", but of those who take democracy by demanding that their voices be heard through popular mobilisation and contestation. Democracy, I conclude, requires openness to contestation and disagreement, rather than superimposition of some supposedly democratic principle.*

*Keywords:*        democracy, boundary, contestation, migration

## INTRODUCTION

Despite having existed as a loosely defined group of irregular or illegalised migrants[1] since 2012, the Amsterdam-based action group "We Are Here" drew renewed country–wide attention after squatting a number of unoccupied residential spaces in Amsterdam in April 2018. The group was formed by refugees whose asylum applications had been denied, but who for various reasons argue they are unable to return to their countries of origin. As a consequence, they

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1    Joseph Carens (2013, 129–130) prefers using "irregular" so as to avoid all-too-obvious political connotations implied by other designations. As will become clear in my argument below, however, "illegalised" is in most cases the most appropriate terminology.

persist in a state of perpetual uncertainty, unable to work legally or rent living spaces. Besides the political issues they explicitly contest themselves, mainly revolving around questions of human rights, refugee rights, and migration policies, their presence presents a problem of a specifically *democratic* nature. Indeed, many members of the group — and many others not directly associated with We Are Here — have lived in The Netherlands for several years. Consequently, they have consistently been subject to a wide range of Dutch laws, from immigration law to traffic regulations, without ever having had a clear say in those laws.

This is a problem for democracy because of the very meaning of the term. Originating in Ancient Greek, the concept of democracy consists of two interrelated concepts: *kratos* or *kratein*, which roughly refers to "power" or the verbs "to govern" or "to organise"; and *demos*, usually translated as "the people". As Robert A. Dahl (1970, p. 46) pointed out, "how to decide who legitimately make up "the people" [...] is a problem almost totally neglected by all the great philosophers who write about democracy." Subsequently, it was, with a few exceptions, to take another three decades for this problem to turn into a hotly and systematically debated issue in democratic theory. Originally re-emerging in the context of migration (Benhabib, 2004), debates on what is now termed democracy's "boundary problem" have since moved to include questions of global democracy and cosmopolitanism (Agné, 2010). The cause of this shift is undoubtedly the prevalence in the recent boundary problem debate of the "all-affected interests principle", most influentially advocated by Robert Goodin (2007), and to a lesser extent Arash Abizadeh's (2012) "all-subjected principle".

In this paper, I challenge the dominance of these principles, and the approaches they take more generally. More specifically, I argue that centralising any such principle that apparently defines the scope of the *demos* in a "top-down" fashion must ultimately depoliticise the problem of exclusion (Whitt, 2014). Drawing on the work of radical democratic philosophers such as Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière, and Bonnie Honig, I argue that rather than eliminating the problem of exclusion from democratic polities, the dominant approaches to the boundary problem merely expand their boundaries without admitting that any boundary ultimately amounts to a political decision (Näsström, 2011). I argue instead that those boundaries must be recognised as political *par excellence*, which is to say they can also be contested. My argument proceeds in three steps: I begin by sketching a more complete overview of the extant debate, focusing on Goodin's and Abizadeh's arguments,[2] and assess the critique of their arguments by David Miller (2009; 2010) and Shmuel Nili (2017). Next, I show that their approaches are only vulnerable to these critiques because they depoliticise the problem. Finally, I conclude by showing why depoliticisation is inherently problematic when dealing with issues of exclusion/inclusion, and argue that rather than being fixed by some principle, no matter how inclusive, the boundary problem must remain a permanent question mark.

**EXPANDING THE DEMOS**
Before proceeding, permit me to note that I consider the boundary problem to be a problem of *legitimacy*, rather than of justice. This illustrates why some accounts are less plausible in my view: justice is first and foremost an *ethical* category, while I take the boundary problem to be a *political* problem. The proper question for the boundary problem to address, thus, is under what conditions any political act within a given polity is *legitimate*; not what requirements

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2    For reasons of space, I am unable to extensively cover the entirety of the vast body of literature that has emerged on this problem over the past two decades.

must be met for those acts to be *just*. To be sure, I do not claim that concerns of justice are not important. However, justice is not primarily what is at stake here. An influential example is Joseph Carens' *The Ethics of Immigration* (2013): while Carens advances many compelling arguments, I am not convinced his arguments plausibly address the boundary problem.

**THE ALL–AFFECTED INTERESTS PRINCIPLE**

As previously noted, the all-affected interests principle (henceforth AAI) is to some degree vulnerable to this critique. First proposed by Frederick Whelan (1983), its most influential recent advocate is undoubtedly Robert Goodin (2007), who discusses an "actualist" and "possibilist" version of the principle. Rejecting the former as incoherent, Goodin (2007, pp. 52–54) argues instead that "anyone who might possibly be affected by any possible outcome of any possible question that might possibly appear on any possible ballot" is to have her voice heard. Acknowledging that this implies a dramatic expansion of the scope of the *demos*, Goodin pre-empts this critique by arguing that it is simply what democracy requires. His principle, however, raises more conceptually pressing problems than this. Goodin does not address the question of when, precisely, persons are to be acknowledged as *affected* (Schaffer, 2012). Furthermore, having their interests acknowledged as affected will scarcely be helpful to a minority that consistently finds themselves outvoted (Cabrera 2014). Finally, Goodin does not account for the agency of those supposedly affected (Saunders, 2011).

Particularly the latter point, in my view, is a consequence of Goodin's rather ethical outlook. Affectedness is first and foremost an ethical category rather than a political one, whereas agency is essentially political, and absolutely crucial for democracy. This depoliticisation, moreover, renders AAI particularly vulnerable to Shmuel Nili's (2017, p. 103) objection that there is no "moral duty" for democratic theory to determine the boundaries of the *demos*. Whether or not such *moral* duty exists is, however, beside the point. Democratic theory must account for this problem if it is to serve as a basis for democratic *legitimacy*. Distinguishing between democratic *procedures* and *values*, David Miller (2009, pp. 203–204) objects that the former cannot resolve the boundary problem because it inevitably becomes stranded in infinite regress. The latter requires more consideration of the characteristics a feasible *demos* must possess than AAI is able to afford. These instrumental conditions of democracy (Song, 2012), including ethical or political agreement and interpersonal trust, must then be balanced with demands for greater inclusiveness (Miller, 2009, pp. 207–208). While the demand for trust carries some force, Miller's requirement for ethical or political agreement is confusing. What, if such agreement already exists, is democracy still required for? Is attaining such consensus even plausible? Would this not imply excluding some on the basis of their ethical or political convictions? Miller seems to attempt to rescue democracy from an unfeasible expansion of the *demos*, but ultimately throws the baby out with the bathwater.

**THE ALL–SUBJECTED PRINCIPLE**

Arash Abizadeh (2012) is more sensitive to the difference between ethics and politics. Restating his *unbounded demos thesis*, which holds that in principle there need not be boundaries to the *demos* (Abizadeh, 2008), he notes that, since there is no intrinsic connection between affectedness and democracy, *subjectedness* is a more appropriate basis for an answer to the boundary problem (Abizadeh 2012, p. 878). Rejecting all pre-political grounds for demarcating a *demos*, such as nationalism (, Abizadeh (2012, pp. 868–873; also Balibar, 1988) notes that boundaries by definition pose an *externality problem*: any line drawn between those inside and

those outside a given polity inevitably subjects to power those who are excluded, and hence this problem arises no matter how one draws boundaries (Abizadeh, 2012, pp. 876–877). To cope with this problem, democratic legitimacy requires the *demos* to be principally unbounded.

Note that this approach is distinctively more political than Goodin's. Note also, however, that it need not imply a less expansive *demos*. As a consequence, Abizadeh's argument is equally vulnerable to objections regarding democracy's instrumental requirements (Song, 2012). Alternative arguments based on a similar normative basis have stressed that democratic legitimacy demands the granting of equal influence to all those "*systematically* and *over time* subjected to the exercise of political power*" (Erman 2014, p. 539 [emphasis added]). While Erman's approach seems generally more balanced in terms of scope, it still risks devolving into a full-formal inclusion discrepancy where minorities may find themselves consistently outvoted (Cabrera, 2014). If the latter seems a particularly obstinate problem, it is because all arguments hitherto discussed suffer from a problem of depoliticisation, which ultimately leads to a deficit in abilities for contestation. Indeed, even Abizadeh's power-based approach seeks to establish a *principle* which may regulate the conditions under which persons ought to be enfranchised. As a consequence, due to having achieved formal inclusion, those who remain disenfranchised may find themselves lacking the means to still challenge and contest remaining exclusions. In the next section, I argue why such attempts are bound to fail because they inherently downplay one of the most distinctively political dimensions of the boundary problem.

## THE PEOPLE'S LEGITIMACY GAP

The problem, to put it most succinctly, is that any attempt to solve the boundary problem is forced to make presuppositions, which subsequently are placed beyond the domain of the political, hence negating their inherently political nature. Abizadeh's all-subjected principle pivots on the exercise of power over individuals, but for that argument to work it must presuppose the existence of states that exercise power and hence forestall inquiries into the legitimacy of these states in the first place (Näsström, 2011, pp. 118–122). As such, notwithstanding their pretensions to radical inclusiveness, the principles discussed above become "strategies of closure" in disguise (Whitt, 2014). AAI, too, must presuppose territory over which a people or concomitant state is sovereign, for otherwise it would be unable to determine the scope of its influence and hence the range of affectedness (Ochoa Espejo, 2013). The result is that one is stranded in a vicious circularity that seems inherent to the boundary problem, since either one of the elements that the boundary problem is to question must be presupposed.

Indeed, this is what many authors seem to accept tacitly as inevitable. Dismissing these issues as mere historical contingencies, they surrender to history without differentiating historical contingencies from *democratic* ones (Näsström, 2007). The problem, Näsström suggests, is that the boundary problem inevitably invokes a "legitimacy gap" which appears to be a paradox one cannot escape from. Indeed, this conundrum seems to be intrinsic to democratic legitimacy, and hence "the people are never so fully what they need to be" (Honig, 2007, p. 5). Consequently, rather than "running into the arms of history" (Näsström, 2007, p. 626), theories of democratic legitimacy must acknowledge this legitimacy gap, and assert the paradox as simultaneously inevitable *and* productive (Ochoa Espejo, 2013, p. 473). Acknowledging the viciousness of the paradox without seeking to avoid it altogether, I aim to show in the next section, is the only way to ensure that the distinctively *political* nature of the elements of people, territory, boundaries, and state are maintained.

### REPOLITICISING THE *DEMOS*

I follow Chantal Mouffe (2005, p. 41) in considering the appropriate scope of analysis of peoples and politics to be *a* people in a world populated by a multiplicity of *demoi*. Note that this need not imply any definite boundaries concerning the scope of any given people. Nor does it mean that the identity and boundaries of peoples are fixed for time immemorial. Instead, democracy cannot avoid the "moment of decision" and the closure that it entails (Mouffe, 2005 , p. 9). A "Mouffian" reading of the boundary problem suggests that the exclusion many authors seek to alleviate cannot ever be eliminated without relinquishing democracy's political nature, and concomitantly democracy itself. Democracy, founded on popular sovereignty, requires closure for decisions to be possible, and closure cannot be attained without exclusion. However, if decisions and therefore closure are intrinsic to democracy, there is nothing that would necessarily imply decision a rather than decision B. The boundaries thus established, and the concomitant exclusions they entail, must hence be recognised for what they are: *political* decisions (Mouffe, 2013, p. 17). And for a decision to be political is to be open to challenge and contestation; boundaries may be closed, but never fixed permanently.

Therefore, I reject Abizadeh's unbounded *demos* thesis. *Demoi* are bounded and limited, but their boundaries must be acknowledged as political artefacts, rather than naturalised and dismissed as historical contingencies. In other words, the *demos* is bounded but the boundaries are not. If this implies a deficit of legitimacy, it is precisely this legitimacy gap that must be asserted as a productive site for contestation. Legitimacy on this reading is not a fixed attribute, but a horizon a polity must always strive towards but can never reach indefinitely (Näsström, 2007). To see this more clearly, I want to suggest that any *principle* seeking to resolve the boundary problem, whether expansive or constrictive, is in fact not political but belongs to what Jacques Rancière calls *police*, a form of *distribution* or *partition of the sensible*[3] (Rancière, 2010, p. 44). As such, it stands in opposition to politics, characterised by the logic of equality (Rancière, 1999, p. 32) and spurred on by the *fact* of democracy (Rancière, 1995, 94).

Most succinctly, *police* asserts and seeks to naturalise an *arkhê*, an "order of distribution of bodies" (Rancière, 1999, p. 99), and as such regulates what and who *counts* in a certain order. Politics, on the contrary, is anarchic in the post-structural sense, signifying "the absence of a metaphysical foundation for who rules and who is ruled" (Vatter, 2009). Through a careful rereading of Plato, Rancière (1999, pp. 8–9) notes that in its original Ancient Greek emergence, *demos* was used to designate those — often in a derogatory way — lacking any qualifications to exercise power and to influence decision-making. The absence of any basis for differences of such qualifications altogether is hence the *factuality* of democracy (Rancière, 1995, p. 94), and politics comes about when it is confronted by the ordering of *police* logic (Rancière, 1999, p. 32). As such, this confrontation demonstrates "the part of those who have no part" (Rancière, 2004, p. 305), and asserts that the *police* count of the community consists of a *miscount*; this miscount is where politics emerges (Rancière, 1999, p. 6).

Because for Rancière (2010, p. 60) "the power of the *demos* is the power of those that no *arkhê* entitles them to exercise," the *demos* is a "supplement", which is to say that it consists precisely of those not counted in the *police* count of the community which asserted that no such supplement existed. In the context of the boundary problem, equating the entire *demos*

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3    I do not go into the specific differences between translations of the French *partage du sensible*, in which *partage* can be translated both as distribution and as partition, and *sensible* as the English sensible as well as sensory. For a discussion, see Chambers (2013, 73; 183–184) and Davis (2010, 91).

not with those already enfranchised, but those normally excluded, may strike one as at least idiosyncratic, if not downright implausible. Bearing in mind that migration is one of the phenomena first instigating this debate, it is useful to look at Bonnie Honig's (2001) idea of "the foreigner as taker". Noting that a central justificatory premise of democracy is consent, Honig argues that those acquiring citizenship by birth in a given polity rarely actively consent to that polity itself. "Outsiders", on the contrary, by exercising the power which by virtue of the established order they do not have, *act* as citizens and hence as a *demos*. In so doing, they re-enact the idea of originary consent on which a polity was founded. Non-citizens taking the power they are not entitled to thus act in a fundamentally democratic way, as "democracy *always* involves some sort of taking" (Honig, 2001, p. 99).

If democracy's unavoidable closure can thus be challenged by polemically using human rights (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 44–45), which are "the rights of those who have not the rights that they have and have the rights that they have not" (Rancière, 2004, p. 302), and by acting *as* citizens without possessing the concomitant legal status, it becomes clear that the boundary problem is not a problem to be solved but a perpetual contestation to be acknowledged and valued. One particular upshot of this view is that agency, which particularly in principles such as AAI is easily obfuscated (Whitt, 2014; Saunders, 2011), comes back with a vengeance. Indeed, any principle seeking to resolve the boundary problem must superimpose that principle, "giving" the excluded enfranchisement. To put this in Rancièrian terms: any principle *regulates* who ought to be included, and therefore must be accompanied by a *count* of the parts which cannot but consist of a *miscount*. The question of the *demos* pre-empts the possibility of a "first, then" line of argument, as any point of departure to solve the problem is in itself already a political claim (Näsström, 2011, p. 76). The outlined approach, on the contrary, suggests that the primary force for inclusion must be democratic taking or "acts of citizenship". The exercise of "substantive" citizenship may give rise to the need to accommodate formal citizenship (Isin and Nielsen, p. 2008).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the conceptual force of Rancière's conceptualisations, practicalities matter. Although Rancière (2006, pp. 72–73) himself admits that *police* orders differ in the space they enable for political disruptions and enactments of equality, it is not immediately clear how acting as though one were a citizen – or collectively as if a group were the *demos* — will benefit those disenfranchised in the long run, i.e. how such disruptive egalitarian acts may lastingly change *police*. It remains true, after all, that formal citizenship grants a wide range of benefits or protections not always allotted to non-citizens. In other words, enactments of equality must be inscribed in a political order that may or may not acknowledge them (Myers, 2016; Norval, 2012). Besides being iterations to inspire future egalitarian events (Inston, 2017), one would prefer these acts of taking somehow to be institutionalised. While these are important issues to consider, I believe these should be reasons for further research rather than for undermining the outlined approach to the boundary problem. Enabling and accommodating democratic acts, within or without the limits of legality, is ultimately beneficial to the democratic legitimacy of any polity.

The upshot is thus that democracy's boundaries of inclusion/exclusion remain a permanent question mark. They do so because, ultimately, these boundaries are political and not natural, and may at any time be challenged. Hence the use of "illegalised" persons or migrants rather than "irregular", which Joseph Carens (2013, pp. 129–130) uses to avoid the political

weight carried by other terms. The markers of legality/illegality are political boundaries. Denying that "illegal aliens" are illega*lised* is to say that their status as "illegal" is something other than a political artefact. Perhaps one may argue that they *ought* to be seen as illegal, but that is a different question altogether. In the final analysis, the political nature of such boundaries must be acknowledged if a democracy is to productively use its legitimacy gap in order to strengthen itself. In domestic politics, the case of "We Are Here" does not seem to have initiated a debate on the issues they raise. Indeed, many arguments have questioned whether they have a right to challenge the Dutch state while residing there illegally. Conceiving of the boundary problem as a permanent site of contestation implies that the opposite question is more astute: to what extent can their voices be legitimately ignored by a state which has itself rendered them illegal?

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# Arendt and the Return of Ethnonationalism

**Michael Weinman**

**ABSTRACT**

*Following the work of Hannah Arendt addressing both the promise and the pitfalls of a politics that is grounded in popular sovereignty, collective action, and/or the mobilisation of the masses, this essay argues that one can find at the heart of popular sovereignty an intrinsic tendency toward the cultivation of ethnic, cultural, racial, national sameness, rather than political equality, within the body politic. Having catalogued some of the recent manifestations of this tendency and offered a diagnosis of the structural commonalities beneath this empirical variety, I try to suggest what might be needed in order to resist the further slippage of the signification of "the People" (dēmos) in the direction of the tribe, nation, or mass (ethnos).*

*Keywords:*      popular sovereignty; collective action; populism; nativism; identitarian politics; mass mobilisation.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent and ongoing work pursued together with historical/comparative sociologist Isaac Ariail Reed, I investigate both the contemporary performance of "political theology" and the intellectual history of that concept since the work of Baruch Spinoza in order to advance a new understanding of what is meant by "the People" and the cognate term "populism" (Reed and Weinman, 2018). In this work, Reed and I analyse how, in the transition from the King's Two Bodies to the People's Two Bodies, a new semiosis of delegation was necessary, through which the newly rewritten social contract could be made legible for all subject to it, including those — women, slaves, and other noncitizens — who were not party to it. The crucial engine by which this system of signs is effected, Reed and I argue, is through chains of power and their representation. Such chains pass through and are represented for and by nodes that can be described as the subject positions of rector, actor, and other; in this way, rectors accrue the agency by which they attain and maintain their position within power relations recruiting actors with whom and through whom their projects are implemented.

One theme gestured toward but left undeveloped there has to do with the apparent necessity of the overproduction of "others" who are often cast as either abject non-subjects outside the game of accruing agency altogether and/or as heroic subjects who are too successful at that game, but are opponents or enemies for the rectors and agents aligned in some project. An essential element of this overproduction overlaps with my focus here: Arendt's worry that democratic majorities might forget their intimate connection with difference and plurality while finding the promise of popular sovereignty in the rule of the same is hugely relevant for contemporary conversations about the resurgence of ethnonationalism today. Indeed, what Reed and I describe as the afterlife of the King's second body in the "enchanted band of brothers" that constitutes – in certain settings and under certain interpretations that more or less dominate civil society – the second body of the People rests beneath Arendt's

unsettling suggestion that this slippage from equality to sameness can become the defining characteristic of the People's second body. In plainer terms, Reed and I worry, following Arendt, that there is an *intrinsic* tendency toward the cultivation of (ethnic, cultural, racial, national) sameness, *rather than political equality*, within the body politic at the heart of what is called popular sovereignty. Here, I aim to partially fulfil a promise made there (1) to catalogue some of the recent manifestations of this tendency; (2) to offer an Arendtian diagnosis of the commonalities beneath this variety; (3) to suggest what might be needed in order to resist further such slippage.

We can find this suggestion – in different forms – across Arendt's corpus: principally, in her discussion of the aporia presented by the grounding of *universal* human rights in *intrinsically particularist* national citizenship (Arendt, 1979); in her discussion of "frailty" of the *polis* as a space of appearance that can only persist in contexts that are constituted in and constitutive of freedom, natality (spontaneity less idiosyncratically), and difference (Arendt, 1958); and in her reading of the tragedy of the Jacobins, and its legacy through the revolutions and revolutionary movements (Arendt, 1990). In part 1 below, I describe how Arendt's account of the ways in which spectacular mythologies can fuel a wide range of political performances, from the self-constitution of a people in spontaneous mobilisation (as in the Velvet Revolution, say) through the mobilisation of a mob to engage in acts of terror (as in Kristallnacht, say). In part 2, I follow Margaret Canovan's reconstruction of Arendt's thinking about popular mobilisation, in distinction from mass mobilisation or mob rule, in order to see how one might determine when a manifestation of "people power" is a spontaneous self-expression of a People, bound as members of a polity from a mass mobilisation with tyrannical intent, or a mob action expressing a totalitarian, or a figuratively or literally tribal, ideology.

## 1. EXECUTIVE POWER AND THE PEOPLE'S TWO BODIES: DEMOCRACY'S SPECTACULAR MYTHOLOGIES

Siobhan Kattago (2017, p. 37) has recently observed that the renewed rise of ethnonationalist (often identified with populist) policies coincides with the renewed interest — both theoretical and, crucially, practical — in Carl Schmitt's jurisprudential and political philosophical arguments concerning sovereignty and the primacy of the executive. The fascination with what could be called Schmitt's "arch-sovereigntist" approach to the constitution of public space and public life, as well as governance and law, emerges in this light as one symptom of a broader return to the politics of resentment: a reaction against the multilateralist and anti-nationalist wave of democratic institution-building that followed the 1989 revolutions.[1]

Digging beneath the surface of these events and decisions — and other leading indicators of the deeply entrenched successes of a (re)new(ed) ethnonationalism, such as the destruction of the refugee camp in Calais (and the related Brexit vote), the attacks on the independent judiciary in Poland, the rise of the AfD in Germany, and more — it is not hard to find a popular, if not populist, policy of intensifying the physical presence and efficacy of walls

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1    Kattago (2017, p. 42) follows historian Timothy Garton Ash in noting the "irony of building walls in Europe after the fall of the long-standing Berlin Wall. "What we are seeing in 2015", he wrote in the *Guardian*, is Europe's reverse 1989'"; a point Kattago underscores with reference to the further unfolding of this phenomenon: "the Slovakian President Robert Fico was ready to accept Christians only. Viktor Orbán achieved notoriety with his decision in the summer of 2015 to seal the Hungarian border with a razor fence and his suggestion in September 2016 to deport refugees to camps "on an island or in North Africa'."

and fences, after three decades of policy meant to minimise the purpose and the presence not only of such boundary markers but even of political boundaries themselves. Why? This makes clear how and why so many have turned to Schmitt as a thinker for our time: he uniquely advances the position that the capacity and competence of the sovereign to decide what is inside and what is outside is the fundamental constitutive moment. One crucial site of this "decision power" is of course the state of exception and the status of the constitution itself, but at the most fundamental level, it is not the power to demarcate what is inside or outside the law in its normal administration; rather, the most primary decision power is that with which the sovereign and the state constitute one another together, and this is by marking off that territory that falls inside the sovereign's ambit from that which does not. And, along with that, determining who has access to the territory that is/makes the state.

Wendy Brown (2010, p. 47) makes this clear in her incisive discussion of Schmitt's analysis of sovereignty as a secularised theological concept, stressing the "coconstitutive relation of sovereignty, theology, and enclosure," by which she means the way in which a fence and/or wall quite literally and physically "founds and relates sacred space and sovereign power." This, she argues, is the "theological aspect in late modern walling projects" and is one blatant, unmistakable sign of, and reaction against, "the decline of nation-state sovereignty". As this makes clear, for Brown (2017, p. 48), the wall-building project is indicative of a fundamental tension within liberal democracies insofar as they cast themselves, and understand themselves to be, a site of *popular* sovereignty: since "sovereignty" is usually discussed as the alternative to rule-of-law, sovereignty itself is taken to be "the state's power to act without regard for law or legitimacy" rather than as "the power of the demos to make laws for itself". But what happens when, as is apparently the case all across the post-socialist space in central and eastern Europe – and not only there – democratic majorities call for and endorse politicians who provide policies that are grounded in a democratic sovereigntism that seeks to wall off, physically and legally, an ethnically defined *demos* from the rest of the world?

Bearing in mind Brown's appropriation of Schmitt, and with the current politics of resentment that has taken hold in the United States and across Europe, it is possible to make clear what is meant by the "spectacular mythologies" of democracy, which always centre on the executive as a site of mediation between the People's Two Bodies. The most robust example of executive power in contemporary liberal democracies is the President-as-Strong-Executive that has emerged in the American Republic since the end of World War II (especially). In looking to and at this executive (as an office, not in terms of the current occupant of that office) as the sovereign/builder-of-walls, one must ask, *what is this game of liberal recognition*?

As Isaac Ariail Reed (2017) has argued in trying to interpret the phenomenon that is President Trump as the second body of the American people, following Jeffrey C. Alexander's (2010) work on Barack Obama's rise to power, liberal political modernity is a particular instantiation, in practice, of the mythology of "the People".[2] Nothing is more important for this mythology, as Alexander (2006, 2010) argued there and earlier, than the *spectacle* of national elections, especially the quadrennial festival that is the presidential election, which become one main *locus* for working out in detail the dynamic interrelation between the sacred and the profane,

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2    Alexander's central focus is the mythical connection between electorates and presidential candidates, who emerge onto the cultural scene via heroic narratives, often managed by campaign staff and public relations experts. Trump consciously positioned himself as anti-Obama in this way; other candidates – who all failed miserably – made a case about policies; Trump made the case that ending the Obama era was more about eradicating the myth of Obama the man, which only he could do.

the civil and the anti-civil, often in the person of the presidential pretender himself — and it is always "himself" in this mythology, Hillary Clinton's nomination in 2016 notwithstanding. This is how the paradoxes of liberal modernity consist both in its being underwritten by the sexual and the racial contracts, and in the ambivalence of the democratic delegation of both power and authority to a robust executive that takes place *within* the space of those who, via the "social question" accede to the status of citizen–authors.

Of course, there remains a complex difference between the King's Two Bodies as a way of representing power in state-society relations, and the People's Two Bodies as a part of the complex, interlocking systems of the modern globe. Filling the breach that remains in this hiatus with the values of popular sovereignty — when interpreted by democratic elector-ates and political leaders as democratic sovereigntism, that is, as the representation of the people's sovereignty in the person of the decisive executive — can take a wide array of forms. These forms, and the policies in which they materialise might be based on an internation-alist rule-of-law-based policy; or a state–sovereigntist pure policy of pure decisionism and a politics of friendship and enmity; or any of a series of models that mediate or blend these two. In this light, it appears, one would do well to understand what is *popular* and what is *populist* in democratic sovereigntism, without collapsing popular sovereignty into populism (as self-avowed populists often do) or defining populism as a defamation or denial of "true" popular sovereignty, as populism's most fervent critics — such as Jan-Werner Müller (2016, p. 6) – often do.

## 2. DEMOCRATIC SOVEREIGNTISM AS POPULAR OR POPULIST: THE PEOPLE'S "MASSIVE SIGNIFICANCE"

The ambivalence of democratic and/or popular mobilisations puts clearly into focus the "spectacular mythology" of democracy that Schmitt and similar critics of liberal democracy miss. The question to be answered in this regard is this: is one or another manifestation of "people power" a spontaneous self-expression of an artificially constituted People, bound to one another as members of a polity by, through, and under the rule of the law? Or is it a mass mobilisation with tyrannical intent, a mob action expressing a totalitarian, or a figuratively or literally tribal, ideology? Canovan (2002) attempts to disentangle this thorny bramble of the people in distinction from the mob or the masses in her discussion of Arendt, focusing on how the *republican* significance of "the People" is constantly in tension with its *massive* signifi-cance. The *locus classicus* for this dialectic in Arendt's work is in her analysis, both descriptive and normative, of the French and American revolutions, in which the former was a failure because *le peuple* carried a *massive* significance in the winning interpretation, and the latter was a success because the people carried a *republican* significance in the winning interpretation.[3]

As Canovan (2002, pp. 404–9) goes on to show, Arendt's seemingly impossible simul-taneous sympathy for "people power" and antipathy for "mass action" and/or "mob rule" needs to be explained by teasing out one consistent set of meanings for three key terms: mass, mob, and People. The basic argument is this. First, Arendt distinguishes "mob" from "people" by showing that while both the mob and people rest on being anchored in the class system, only the people is a class-based collectivity normatively oriented toward the public as such as

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3    Canovan (2002, p. 403), following Bernstein (1996, p. 61, p. 111, pp. 126–33), observed that even while Arendt was amply aware of the ways in which "informal and powerful mobilisation" can do tremendous harm, in the form of mob behaviour or mass mobilisation, the term "'the People' was an honorific term in her vocabulary", and perhaps one can reasonably call her politics themselves "populist," insofar as "she often seems sympathetic to informal political action."

the basis of solidarity. Next, the "mob" is to be distinguished from the "mass" by the different grounds of their worldlessness: while "mass worldlessness" rests on the absence of a world, a space of appearance, altogether, the worldlessness of the mob rests in its having lost *its own place* in a world that it still recognises as existing. An alienated mass (of workers) lack a world altogether and calls for (re-)construction of that missing world in a way fundamentally different from that of the mob (of "True Finns" or "Yellow Vests") calling for their country or their lives or their autonomy to be "given back" to them.

These two different forms of world-alienation bring into sharp focus what makes a people a people for Arendt, in essential differentiation from a mob, a mass, or a tribe. As Canovan (2002, pp. 408–9) summarises it, the "difference between the People and their Others [mob, mass, or tribe] seems repeatedly to hinge on relation to the 'world' and relation to 'reality'. Non-Peoples are in some sense 'worldless,' whereas the People share a human world." This distinction is, at first blush, as clear as it is stark – and also problematic, for more than one reason (Eurocentrism leaps to mind). But, as Canovan (2002, p. 409) notes, it remains unclear upon reflection how Arendt's theorisation of the "worldlessness" of the mob, mass, or tribe in opposition to the "common world" of the People is meant to map on to specific groups of people appearing together within a specific geographical and temporal context. One can see this most pointedly in Arendt's infamous attempt to demonstrate this difference by arguing that the failure of the French Revolution and success of the American one.

So, with a measure of guidance from Arendt concerning "worldlessness" as a condition that afflicts collectivities-that-might-be-but-are-not a People, but resisting with Canovan (2002, p. 413–14) central elements of Arendt's conclusions about when and how a would-be-People actually appears in public as a People, I will try to offer a preliminary conclusion regarding the contemporary valence of popular sovereignty in the direction of a politics and policy of ethnonationalist exclusion. With Arendt, I want to argue that a politics unapologetically grounded in the collective action of the People can still be something other than the mobilisation of a body politic of "brothers" grounded on the exclusion of countless abject and savaged "others".

In a recent discussion of the so-called refugee crisis and where it leaves "solidarity" as a basis for political mobilisation in Europe and the expanded European Union thirty years on from the revolutions of 1989, Kattago (2017, p. 37, p. 40) argues that in the widely noted (and indeed impossible to miss) success of nationalist far-right movements across the globe, "today's disenchantment" with the EU and with the "liberal order" "is deeper than disappointment with representative government" and is in fact indicative of a politics of resentment that shifts "political debate from solidarity and community to fear of foreigners and disenchantment with politics in general." This shift, in light of Canovan's account of Arendt, may not be so much to do with short- or medium-term trends in post–1989 politics and its shortcomings. Rather, as Kattago (2019, p. 25) argues elsewhere in a reflection on the contemporary salience of Arendt's (1979) analysis of the *aporiai* of human rights, the ethnonationalist right's success might well be predicated on the very structure of liberal modernity, where to be a citizen and to be a rights-bearing person are considered identical *in principle*, but where in practice this means that if you are not a national citizen – if you are stateless or otherwise have no recognised or recognisable nationality – you are *in practice* rightless and utterly abject. What is the possible alternative to this scenario? What could form the basis of solidarity grounded neither in ethnicity and exclusion, nor floating in the ethereal inclusion of the market where (à la Marx) all that is solid melts into air?

**CONCLUSION**

In trying to understand what constitutes the sovereignty of popular sovereignty, one may propose that *sovereignty* involves the confluence of *power* – in the sense of *potestas,* the ability or capability to move and shake the world – with *authority* – the *right* to decide, based on various considerations, bequeathed by some mutually constructed artifice. If this is so, then in the terms of contemporary social theory, it is clear that *sovereignty* in the world will always involve some degree of performativity, and, in so doing, *some degree of interpretation*. Whether it is Elizabeth I ruling over, and with, and sometimes against, her ministers, or Nixon's confrontation with the American Congress, or Orbán's reliance on pro-government newspapers to spread antisemitism, the question of sovereign *power* is always a question of the interpretation of its legitimacy, and thus depends to some degree on the interpretation of audiences, large and small, variously positioned in the complex systems of media, political control, and money.

If this is so, then the conditions of a properly *popular* popular sovereignty not grounded on the politics of exclusion would involve a self-consciously mobilised populace that interprets its relationship to its elected leadership as one of delegation for the sake of preserving a space of appearance for a politics based on what Arendt calls plurality. A corollary follows upon this conclusion: social theorists must not hold, with Foucault (and the American revolutionaries of 1776 themselves), that modern democratic societies succeeded in "replacing sovereignty with governance" and ask to what effect it did so. Rather, as theorists we must raise, and at least begin to answer, three questions about the performative character of democratic sovereignty, hedged between power and authority in the sense just described.

First, how did the conditions for successfully performing sovereignty change when they came to include the requirement to perform "the people"? Following the analysis of two very different recent campaigns for the U.S. presidency grounded in the personal charisma of the candidate offered by Reed (writing about Donald Trump) and Alexander (describing Barack Obama), this essay has argued that an essential aspect of this shift rests in the would-be representative of the People successfully performing in public as the second body of the people, itself the object of an interpretation shared by the would-be elected official and the electorate to which the "power of the people" will be delegated and from which act of delegation the authority of the president derives in deed as well as in principle.

Second, how does sovereignty intersect with other forms of modern power (e.g. financial capitalism)? Following Brown's appropriation of Schmitt, I hope to have shown that while sovereignty is often placed by both policymakers and theorists to be in a zero-sum game with financial capitalism — where, if it is possible to provide each with a fictive agency, capitalism always and only wants open borders and the free flow of labour and capital, and sovereignty always and only (or mostly) wants closed borders and strong physical and legal impediments to those flows — the reality is far more complex. We have found that savvy political actors in the Visegrád countries in particular have been able to couple a sovereigntist commitment to the enduring meaning of the borders, both physical and spiritual, that surround and protect "the autonomy of the People" with capitalist commitments to trade and security agreements.

Finally, is it possible to write a deep history of moments of *truly democratic* delegation via representation, including the drawing of limits to executive power in the name of "the people"? Could such a history of delegation provide the necessary perspective and language from which to criticise the turn to populism and illiberal democracy in the current moment? There

is here some ground for creative thought in a coupling of Arendt's reading of collective popular uprising as it manifested – at least for moments – during the French and American revolutions with her theoretical account of "the life of action" as the appearance of truly plural persons in public in *The Human Condition*. This is just the thinnest suggestion of the ground for a politics of solidarity that is both popular and non-exclusionary; its development to any satisfactory degree of detail awaits further articulation.

Given its scope, the present essay cannot hope to have offered answers to these questions with any degree of completeness. I do hope, however, to have laid out the terrain that must be traversed if defenders of the liberal democratic project are to be successful in understanding all the complex valences of popular sovereignty in contemporary liberal democracies, both in terms of what is meant by "popular" and what by "sovereignty," and specifically to see why ethnic and national identities have such strong appeal both in electoral politics and in the development of public policy today.

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# Saviour of Europe, Foe of the EU — Illiberal Populist Discourse in Hungary

**Robert Sata**

**ABSTRACT**

*Austerity arising from the financial crisis, the challenge of the refugee crisis and diminished trust in the European project have had an enormous impact on day-to-day politics in Eastern Europe. Hungary has become infamous for leading the wave of democratic backsliding in Europe, with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán successfully exploiting economic insecurity and cultural fears to legitimise his illiberal, authoritarian rule. Using systematic content analysis of the official speeches of the prime minister in 2010–2018, this paper describes the main features of Orbán's discourse of populist nationalism, one that is not only ethnocentric and anti-migrant but also anti-establishment and anti-EU. I highlight how the discourse relies on populist elements to mobilise the support of the people/nation. The discursive depiction of both Europe and the EU is at the core of this identity-based politics, which uses the processes of "othering" to justify extreme policy measures. Although conceptions of both Europe and the EU change depending on whether the focus is on the financial crisis (2010–15) or the migration crisis (2015–2018), Orbán's discourse presents a fascinating duality: on the one hand it centres on the idea that Hungary is a defender of European Christian civilisation and its traditional values, while on the other hand demands that the EU—portrayed as a supporter of international capital or enforcer of migration policies that threaten Hungary—must be opposed. Europe and European culture/civilisation is thus discursively portrayed as intrinsic to the "self", while the EU becomes the threatening "other". This culminates in Orbán's proposed illiberal democracy, which rests on the discursive processes of "othering" that stand for a contestation of both liberal equality and cultural diversity. According to this, the EU and its common governance systems, liberal foundations, secular organisation, and religious tolerance must be opposed in order to "save" Europe.*

*Keywords:*        populist discourse, Europe, identity, migration, populism, nationalism, inclusion, exclusion

Hungary has acquired international notoriety for leading a wave of anti-democratic and anti-European developments in the European Union over recent years. Ever since Prime Minister Viktor Orbán declared that he was building an "illiberal state" (for his full speech, see Tóth, 2014), the country has been in the headlines, commentators trying to understand Orbán's radical, nationalist, and illiberal shift.[1] Many have been puzzled by how quickly and publicly the dismantling of democratic institutions has occurred in a country that was formerly a poster-child for post-communist democratisation and once had the most institutionalised

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1        See: "Hungary's 'illiberalism' should not go unchallenged" in *The Washington Post*, 16 August 2014; 'Orbán wants to build "illiberal state" in *EUObserver*, 28 July 2014; "Orbán the Unstoppable" in *The Economist*, 27 September 2014.

party system in Eastern Europe (Enyedi, 2016). Yet since Orbán returned to power in 2010 (he previously led a comparatively uncontroversial administration in 1998–2002), the priority seems to have been to redefine the country's political regime and the national community according to a populist nationalist discourse that focuses on re-interpreting political as well as socio-cultural belonging in exclusionary nationalist and illiberal terms.

One might think that this shift away from mainstream politics in Hungary may have been due to a strengthening of the radical right — after all, Jobbik (The Movement for a Better Hungary[2]) has been one of the most successful of such formations in Europe. Jobbik had become the second most popular political party by 2014, and was better positioned to mount a challenge to Orbán's Fidesz (Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Union) than the fragmented opposition on the left. However, this paper argues that this simple explanation — according to which Orbán turned illiberal in order to win the hearts of far-right voters — cannot explain the radicalisation of Hungarian politics. First of all, Jobbik itself has toned down its radical rhetoric considerably since 2010 in order to widen its electoral appeal,[3] and Orbán has himself radicalised his electorate with his anti-establishment, anti-EU, and anti-liberal discourse. I argue that Orbán has adopted this strategy of mainstreaming the radical, or radicalising the mainstream, in order to consolidate his illiberal system against the norms of European liberal democracies.

The paper proceeds as follows: the first section argues that examining political discourse can help our understanding of political strategies. It examines Orbán's discourse to show how nationalist narratives and populist accounts of crisis(es) create a Manichean view of the world in which the national community faces existential threats. In this discourse, the discursive definition of the "self" and the "others" — the processes of othering — plays a key role, defining the "good people" and their enemies. I argue that while in 2010–2015, Orbán's discourse can be characterised as a prime example of economic grievance–based populism, from 2015 on, we see a major shift to a nationalist populist discourse, aimed against migration. This translates into both the "self" and the "others" being defined mainly with reference to Europe and the EU — while Hungary is portrayed as being an integral part of Europe, the EU becomes the dangerous "other" for supporting international capital or immigration that threatens the Hungarian "self". The paper concludes that the processes of othering in Orbán's discourse creates a narrative of illiberal nationalist populism that is not only anti-migrant, anti-Muslim and anti-democratic but also anti-EU to the extent that, though Hungary lies in the centre of Europe, it becomes the main foe of the EU.

## DISCURSIVE OTHERING — "US" VS. "THEM"

This paper analyses political discourse because discourse plays a central role in developing new political strategies. All policies develop and are (re-)produced in a constant struggle between competing notions or understandings of identity, issues, and society overall (Dryzek, 2005). Moreover, political discourses are never independent of the context; they both influence and are influenced by the context, and the prevailing social and political structures and practices, and at the same time they reflect a particular representation of this context.

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2    The name of the party in Hungarian implies both "better" and "more to the right".

3    Party leader Gabor Vona told Reuters. "I honestly want to transform Jobbik into a people's party and to do that I know what is necessary. I know when and where to draw the line." See http://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/hungary-s-far-right-jobbik-party-challenges-for-power/

Political actors and their political discourses interact in public debates and public spaces, and (together with other actors) shape common understandings in a process that can be characterised as intersubjective construction of meaning (Christiansen, Jørgensen, & Wiener, 1999). In this sense, political discourse is a means of discursive construction of reality (Lazar, 2005), i.e. a means to provide meaningful understandings of the world to the community (Weiss & Wodak, 2005; Wodak, 1997).

Political discourse is key to nationalism, an ideology that values membership in the nation (an imagined community) above all other groups (Anderson, 1991) and claims that national and political borders should coincide (Gellner, 1983). Belonging to the national community is constructed using the discursive forms of inclusion and exclusion, defining "us" vs. "them" along several categories and symbolic boundaries. This process of discursive othering is especially important because political discourse is both about ideational aspects and material characteristics (Bacchi, 1999; Lazar, 2000), where ideational interpretations are often more important than empirical facts. Processes of othering create thus the meaning for both "us" and "others", relying on different conceptualisations of both categories. The nominal strategies employed in deciding who belongs and who does not can be different or can centre on different nominal categories, and this also affects the predicative elements present in the discourse, i.e. the "self" is portrayed more positively than the "other" in varying ways, given that the topoi of justification are different.

Let us define identity escaping the "uneasy amalgam of constructivist language and essentialist argumentation" (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) as being neither primordial nor instrumental but contingent and contextual. Contingency is used to refer to a particular type of group self-identification along multiple axes of identification, salient in group interaction. The particular expression of identity is a function of the conjunction and constellation of factors, i.e. it is contextual. In this sense, while identity is historically constructed, it is always relational and multiple, i.e. a particular self-identification is chosen because of a particular context (Bush & Keyman, 1997). The meaning of collective identity is thus formed by its content and its relational feature, denoting that the creation of the in-group identity will produce competitive behaviour with out-groups, a process of social contestation not only within the group, but also between groups (Abdelal & Herrera, 2001). Political discourse drives this contestation, each group seeking recognition from others for its identity.

Quantitative content analysis and qualitative framing analysis can show how the public discourse is set in terms of agendas and public frames. These agendas and frames focus public interest on particular subjects in specific ways because "both the selection of objects for attention and the selection of frames for thinking about these objects are powerful agenda-setting roles" (McCombs & Shaw, 1993, p. 62). Framing is a tool capable of shifting people's attitudes by making aspects of certain issues more salient through different modes of presentation (McCombs, 2004). It is frames that give meaning to particular events and construct reality for the general public, shaping identities, values, and perceptions of both the "self" and the "others". In this sense, the framing of "us" marks the particularities of the community — be it real or imagined — that are evoked to exclude the "others" (Wodak, 2007a; 2007b; Yuval–Davis, 1997). Similarly, if the "other" is portrayed as posing threats to society/ national interests, this will result in clear blame attribution to those allegedly responsible for this problem (Meeusen & Jacobs 2017). The use of processes of "othering" in discursive practices often serves to justify the legitimacy of political action and strategy, and consequently conditions the identity formation for both "us" and "them" (Jensen, 2011).

**THE HUNGARIAN CONTEXT**

Nationalism and identity politics have been important for Eastern and Central European politics ever since the end of communism. Hungary is a peculiar case in the region since it lost about two–thirds of its territory and a third of its people to its neighbours after World War. Since irredentism was not an option for democratisation, one of the top priorities of post-communist Hungarian governments has been the protection of Hungarians abroad, thought to be best achieved by providing an exemplary system of minority accommodation and extensive self-governance for minority communities living in Hungary (Bárdi, 2013). In contrast to this policy aimed at the external world, Hungarian public opinion polls have shown a long tradition of chauvinism and xenophobia among ordinary Hungarians (e.g. Simonovits & Bernát, 2016, p. 41). The radical right[4] has also enjoyed popular support rallying anti-establishment attitudes, nationalism, anti-Semitism and anti-Roma sentiments common in society (Karácsony & Róna, 2011; Biró Nagy, Boros, & Vasali, 2013). Unlike in western Europe, where the radical right rallies against immigration, in Hungary — and eastern Europe in general — the radical right targeted national minorities, who take the role of immigrants in being scapegoats for perceived problems.

The radical right's pan-Hungarian agenda, open racism and anti-Semitism might have contributed to the continued shift to the right of the mainstream governing Fidesz (Minkenberg, 2013) as it is commonly accepted in the literature that radical right parties can exercise influence on mainstream parties. Studies of party manifesto data show that there is a "contagion effect" in policies towards immigrants (Norris, 2005; Alonso & da Fonseca, 2012) or, as Shain (2006) has argued, that mainstream centre–right parties readjust their policy preferences — even if radicals are not part of the governing coalition or even present in parliament — in order to pre-empt the possible erosion of their electoral support by radical parties (Bustikova & Kitschelt, 2009), based on the logic of the spatial model of party competition (Downs, 1957). Yet, even if one does not deny the effect of the far right on the mainstream, changes might be less direct or timely than one would expect (Minkenberg, 2001). Although we cannot tell what would have happened if Jobbik was not present, one should also keep in mind that Fidesz has held a super–majority in parliament for most of the period since 2010, therefore has no strategic need to adapt to far-right (or any other) demands.

Based on the above, Hungarian societal attitudes as well as party preferences provide solid ground for identity–based politics. Hungary is not an exceptional case for the region, state-building processes in central and eastern Europe are very much connected to nation–building and are "shaped by elite and popular visions of the state (…) as well as by perceived threats to its integrity and welfare" (Culic, 2009). Well aware of this, Orbán has used identity fears to rally support for his illiberal state. By contrast, there is no programmatic appeal to the voter and Fidesz has no party program: the party has won successive elections since 2009 without producing a manifesto, proving how central identity has been to Orbán's populist rule.

Although some define populism as a specific organisation type (Taggart, 2004) or a specific rhetoric employed by politicians (Betz, 2002), or a political style (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014), I treat populism as a "thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" and "the corrupt

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4    The first such party, MIÉP, the Hungarian Truth and Life Party, passed the 5–percent parliamentary threshold with a pan-Hungarian agenda, open racism and anti-Semitism (Minkenberg, 2013). Jobbik became popular by pursuing an agenda of "gypsy crime" (Karacsony & Rona 2011) and by founding a paramilitary wing, the Hungarian Guard Movement (Biro Nagy, Boros, & Vasali, 2013).

elite: or "dangerous others", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2004, p.543; Mudde & Kaltewasser, 2013). Populism can thus be both inclusive and exclusive, depending on who is or what groups are excluded discursively from the category of "people". At the same time, categories of "the people" or "elites" and "others" can be constructed with such flexibility that Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013, p. 151) call these terms empty vessels, filled in different ways by different actors. Radical right populist discourse relies on radical frames, "the core element of which is a myth of a homogenous nation, a romantic and populist ultra–nationalism which is directed against the concept of liberal and pluralistic democracy and its underlying principles of individualism and universalism" (Minkenberg, 2013; Ignazi, 2003; Mudde, 2007). Other traditional themes and frames associated with populist discourse are the reference to crisis, breakdown, or threat; an appeal to the people, or its anti-establishment, anti-elite character; as well as bad manners that have entered the public arena (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014).

Let us proceed to examine how Orbán's discourse employs processes of othering and uses different populist elements to rally the support of the people. The analysis focuses on how the "we" and the "other" are constructed and how these change over time; what populist themes and frames are present; and how these interact with the processes of othering. To see how Orbán employs different conceptions of identity to legitimise his rule, this paper examines the speeches, declarations, interviews or press statements delivered by Orbán between 2010 and 2018. This choice is warranted by the absolute power Orbán enjoys over his highly centralised party, Fidesz, which grants him the ultimate say in any policy matter, making him the primary author of current Hungarian public political discourse as well as political strategy. All the speeches have been made available in both Hungarian and English on the government website – I use the English texts for the purposes of analysis. While the texts contain all types of speeches – from public talks to press statements to notes on the opening of factories, all speeches are treated the same for the purposes of analysis.[5]

**2010—2014: THE EU AS BETRAYER OF CHRISTIANITY AND SERVANT OF FOREIGN CAPITAL**
A quick overview of the keyword search results for Orbán's speeches during the period of his second government (2010–2014) reveals that his primary theme for this period was the 2008 financial/economic crisis (see Table 1) that hit Hungary particularly hard. The keyword "crisis" appears almost 400 times in the transcripts, making it the single most important topic, with no other issue being mentioned so frequently. Hungarian economy is mentioned 160 times, and "markets" 137 times, clearly showing that the discourse is economy–focused. Orbán also speaks about the need to "protect" (134 mentions) Hungary and Hungarians (mentioned almost 600 times in different configurations). It is interesting to note that all the speeches focus solely on the national group: foreigners, aliens, migration, and immigration are barely mentioned at all, making the discourse entirely inward looking.

This shows Orbán's discourse relies heavily on one of the key elements of populist discourse: the perception of crisis, breakdown, threat, or lack of security. The financial crisis is evoked in order to justify decisive and immediate action (meaning unorthodox economic policy and a reconfiguration of the entire state apparatus) to protect against the threats.

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5    The language used in the English translations is typically toned down, while the Hungarian versions can use more radical expressions. See http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches To ease referencing the speeches, these are numbered in a continuous way, starting with Speech 1 being Orbán's 2010 election victory speech.

Hungarian identity is portrayed solely in economic terms and the financial crisis is a threat to this economic "self". It is little wonder that the "others" are also portrayed in financial terms: "banks" and "bankers" (106 mentions) and "multinationals" (30 mentions) stand for international capital that is positioned against the Hungarian economy. In the same way, the discourse also blames the former elite and previous Socialist governments for incompetence that supposedly led to "the serious economic crisis […] threatened to push Hungary into bankruptcy" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 36). For Orbán, those threatening Hungary are multinationals, banks, and international financial institutions. Since the EU joined the IMF in Hungarian bailout negotiations, despite Hungary's EU membership, Orbán also portrays EU bureaucrats as "others" to be fought: "we do not wince with respect to anybody; not from the raised voices of multinational companies, nor from the threats of the bankers, nor from the negative forecasts of financial circles, nor from the raised fingers of Brussels bureaucrats" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 100).

Yet at the same time, Orbán positions Hungary at the centre of Europe, claiming "Hungary is part of the European Union and the continent of Europe. This has been the case for 1,100 years, since we established the Christian State of Hungary, and it will remain so in the future" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 104). This creates an interesting duality, where the "cultural self" is in opposition to the "economic self": Hungary is portrayed as a historic member of Europe and the EU, who nevertheless cannot accept "any of the EU's institutions behaving disrespectfully towards Hungarians" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 9), i.e. demanding austerity measures. The Hungarian "cultural self" is thus intrinsically linked to Europe and European civilisation but the "economic self" is up against "Brussels and the bureaucrats" and the EU is portrayed as "a bureaucratic empire in Brussels" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 53) for wanting to impose "uniform economic recommendations for the countries outside the eurozone, or to request or dictate a uniform economic policy" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 53).

Based on this duality, one might expect that the cultural dimensions of Hungarian identity would be often evoked by Orbán, but Hungarian culture or traditions appear only three times, which in turn only underlines the focus on the Hungarian "self" in financial terms. The most frequently used cultural marker of Hungarian identity is language (73 mentions), which for Orbán is the source of Hungarian uniqueness: "our language is a very unique one, a very ancient one, and is closer to logic and mathematics than to the other languages" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 68). Language thus becomes the main identifier for ethnicity, since Hungarian is a language that no one else in the world speaks and one can "only remain Hungarian if it is capable of … preserving its language" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 81). In this setting, language becomes a marker of belonging, "a secret code for Hungarians that generates the feeling that we belong to the same family" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 68). Yet at the same time, language also becomes a barrier, a dividing line that defines both the "self" and the "other" since, as Orbán himself notes, it is a peculiar language that "excludes us from the world and encloses us within our own" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 69).

To overcome the barrier between European belonging and Hungarian-ness based on a unique language, Christianity and Christian roots (175 mentions) are adopted as cultural markers of Hungarian and European identity. This is well illustrated by the fact that the reference to Christianity has no religious meaning in Orbán's discourse, the "self" and the "other" is not constructed in a religious sense as no reference to other religions is ever made (Islam is

mentioned only in reference to Arab countries; Muslims are never mentioned). Christianity is not portrayed as a religion but rather as a cultural or civilisational boundary of the "self", an identity marker for Hungarian-ness, portrayed as a set of values, standards, and behaviours, as well as the source of the traditional family model. Yet, although the common historical roots of Christianity situate Hungary within Europe ("we Europeans, our main resource of civilisation is the story of Christianity", (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 33)), support for Christianity also delineates Hungary clearly against Europe, portrayed as more secular and liberal: "Europe that has forgotten about its Christian roots is like a man who built his home on sand with no foundations" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 13). Orbán claims Christianity must be protected against the secular pressure that is common in Europe: "we must face up against those European political and intellectual trends and forces which aim to push back and undermine Christian culture, Christian civilisation and Christian values" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 15). The Christian roots of Hungarian identity in turn are to provide Hungary a high moral stance against the immoral creditors because "work, credit, family, nation — have become dissolved from the moral foundations that Christianity provides" and "the loans which our countries are suffering from no longer have any relation to any kind of moral principles" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 15).

Orbán barely discusses citizenship (mentioned only 5 times), though this should be one of the most important markers of the Hungarian community. In contrast, he does mention "borders" and "gates" more often (90 and 14 mentions respectively), yet most of this talk is about Hungarians beyond the borders of Hungary — as we noted, a topic that occupies a special position within Hungarian politics. In 2010 Hungary adopted a new citizenship law that grants dual citizenship to Hungarians living abroad. With this, Orbán points out, "the new era of Hungarian national construction arrived: the unification of the nation, irrespective of borders" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 81). As such, dual citizenship is portrayed as a political tool to reunite the Hungarian nation, irrespective of state borders, and also a means to raise the development of the political community. Even the unification of the nation is presented as part of Hungary's struggle for sovereignty, which is understood mainly as economic sovereignty: "We fought for our own Constitution, for the reunification of our nation and for our economic and financial autonomy. We fought for the families who had found themselves in difficulties because of foreign currency based loans, for our central bank, for the reinforcement of our state and for our tax system that rewards work instead of punishing it" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 92).

While Orbán is ready to propagate a new paradigm where state borders become porous and the term "Hungarians beyond the borders"[6] loses its meaning (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 74) for the purposes of uniting the Hungarian nation, this does not mean he welcomes a global world. Instead, Orbán wants to strengthen national sovereignty and state borders to resist European integration and globalisation that he blames for the economic downturn. He opposes the EU for taking away the sovereignty of the nation, which he sees as the root of all problems since "the European Union consists of nations, and nations [should be able to] run their own economic policies" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 86). He places blame for the crisis on "the bureaucrats in Brussels, who rather than supporting us, stood by the banks and the multinationals" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 92), and

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6    The standard expression used in Hungarian public policy to refer to Hungarian-speakers that live in the countries surrounding Hungary.

foreign investors who have taken the profits outside Hungary's borders. Orbán claims he is "building a country in which people don't work for the profit of foreigners" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 26) and profits that "slipped out of the country and went to these big, international companies, will from now on not slip across the border, they will remain in Hungary" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 114) and even "fraud that went beyond our borders" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 90) can be curbed.

In this economic insecurity–based populist discourse, Orbán often speaks as one of the people, identifying with the 'true people', the true Hungarians: "Because I am familiar with our kind, I also know that Hungarians dislike 'spoon–fed talk'" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 26). This is best seen in the frequency of his reference to "us" and "our", by far the most frequently occurring keywords in the transcripts of the speeches. Orbán's discourse is also loaded with anti-elite and anti-establishment claims: he challenges established financial institutions and EU institutions for disregarding "the legal balances between member states and the European Union" and for "unfair, double standard[s] and abus[ing] its power during our debates" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 52). In this way, for Orbán, the EU re-sembles the Soviet Union: in both cases, "the decisions on Hungarian freedom and the fate of Hungary were not left to the Hungarians" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 50).

Similarly, the former liberal–socialist elite are to blamed for present-day economic diffi-culties: "leaders who, professing a philosophy of 'let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die', or at least tomorrow we will not be in government', were capable of casting whole countries into debt" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 15). An important boundary is drawn between the former elite and the people since "the essence of socialist and communist politics [is] to build a political construct based on the bad in people" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 39). This anti–elite or anti-establishment attitude grants Orbán the opportunity to distance himself from his predecessors and claim that in a sense he is not part of the political elite, he speaks in the name of the people, and he embodies the common will of the people: "We felt that we had been cheated, that the Hungarian people were being cheated, and through them the Hungarian Government, and then we said, let's start using a different tone of voice" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 129). All these suggest a re-conceptualisation of the (right) people, of the nation, that is not only uniquely Hungarian but at the same time is no longer the collective of all the people: the political opposition or critics of Orbán do not belong to this group.

## 2015—2018: THE EU AS SUPPORTER OF MIGRATION AND BETRAYER OF HUNGARY

Turning to the speeches of the third Orbán government (2014–2018), we see a major turn in Orbán's political discourse that results in a complete redrawing of the boundaries of Hungarian identity as well as a reconceptualisation of the EU. While issues of migration, refugees, asylum seekers, or immigration had never made it into his speeches until 2015, now these become the main topic — approximately half of the speeches address these issues. This is despite the fact that Hungary is not a target but rather a transit country for — or a source of — migration. One must also note that while Hungary was at the centre of the 2015 European refugee crisis, Orbán was already speaking against mass migration before the refugees reached Hungary. In his State of the Nation Address (27 February 2015, Budapest), Orbán claimed liberal multiculturalism was dead because migration brings "people, many of whom are unwilling to accept European culture, or who come here with the intent of destroying European culture." This anti-migrant discourse has only radicalised further over time, with Orbán declaring that "immigration brings

crime and terrorism to our countries" (Orbán's 15 March 2016 National Day speech, Budapest).

The same radical anti-migrant discourse can be observed from the keyword frequency results, the most striking being that while mentions of "crisis" remain at the same level for 2014–2018 as they were in 2010–2014, mentions of the terms migration, refugees, or asylum skyrocket, showing a more than ten-fold increase, which again only underlines that the issue of migration became the single most important topic from 2015 onwards. There is also a visible imbalance between the different terms Orbán uses in his discourse with reference to the refugee crisis: the terms "migrants" and "immigrant" are used five times more often than the terms "refugee" or "asylum seeker". This is not by chance, but is instead a clear indication of Orbán's stance — he does not consider these people refugees but migrants, who come to Europe mainly for economic reasons. This is important because conceptualising the "other" not as somebody in need but rather as seeking economic benefit, in turn means no obligation (or an exemption from relief) for Hungary or the Hungarians.

Economic issues and the financial crisis lose their importance in Orbán's post-2015 discourse. More importantly, the "self" is being re-conceptualised together with the re-drawing of the "other", now portrayed either in the image of "the migrant" or in the EU and its common refugee policy that would impose refugee quotas on Hungary. While at the time of the financial crisis, international financial organisations and the EU with its institutions were blamed for economic mismanagement, now the EU and its institutions and collective mechanisms, as well as more liberal European countries, are blamed for bringing migration to Hungary: "In Brussels and in some large EU Member States the dominant opinion is still that immigration is on the whole a good thing" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 285). This reconfigured process of "othering" is also noticeable in the descriptive statistics of the keywords. There is an abundance of negative references to the EU in the discourse; moreover, there is a significant, three-fold increase, suggesting (if possible) even more blame is being allotted to the EU and its institutions for Hungary's troubles as a result of the refugee crisis.

Orbán once again portrays loss of national sovereignty to the EU as the main reason for the crisis and claims that "we must reconsider a number of European achievements, agreements and institutions" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 267), meaning a reversal of integration. He claims that it is because of its liberal philosophy that "Europe is weak, it cannot protect this wealth" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 265). Yet, according to Orbán, "Europe is dominated by a liberal politics which the people do not agree with" therefore "it is necessary to change quite a few political propositions at the headquarters of Europe's great powers" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 294). In this conceptualisation of the EU as the "other", although Hungary is within the borders of European civilisation, it is sharply distinguished — in fact opposed to — the EU and its liberal core. Once again, Orbán is not shy when it comes to battling this liberal "other" to ensure that traditional Hungarian identity is preserved: "Then we will have a battle with the European Union. […] because the EU wants to implement the mandatory relocation quota and force us to accept it" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 372).

Similarly, while in 2010–2014 Orbán was preoccupied with protecting Hungarian interests and security conceived mainly in financial terms, after 2015 he talks only about the threats Hungary must face due to migration. Threats have become even more central to the understanding of the Hungarian "self" as illustrated by a more than five-fold increase in references in his speeches to the need for protection or security (from just above 200 to more than 1,000 mentions). According to Orbán, migration is not only a cultural threat to

Hungary alone but a "clash of civilisations" between Christian Europe and Muslim migrants: "this change facing Europe — or which, in my opinion, is threatening Europe — can also have an effect at deeper, civilisational layers. The identity of civilisation in Europe could change" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 251). This way the alien "other" is understood not only as culturally distant but as civilisationally different, further distancing the in– and the out– group, which are now portrayed as civilisations apart with no reconciliation possible.

This new focus on reinforcing cultural/civilisational borders in Orbán's discourse can also be observed when examining his references to Hungary and Hungarians. While in the first period Orbán refers to the Hungarian nation and Hungarians in general terms, and also quite often uses the term "people of Hungary", later his discourse barely talks about the "people of Hungary" (only 27 mentions compared to 74 previously) but includes many more references to Hungarian culture and traditions (up from 3 to 67 mentions). This signals that the meaning of "us" has changed as well, in that there is no more space for abstract citizens while Hungarian identity has become more interwoven with ethnicity, culture and tradition, and a unique civilisation: "Being a Hungarian is a mission, a task, a job of work: to maintain, strengthen and carry forward a great, lonely, thousand-year-old civilisation, built on the Hungarian language and on the foundations of the Hungarian mentality, and surrounded by dissimilar nations" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 398). This stands for an essentialist, if not a primordialist understanding of identity, in the name of which all other cultures or identities are to be excluded from the national group: "We commit to promoting and safeguarding our heritage, our unique language, Hungarian culture … the Hungarian government is not in a position to support mass movements of population which would result in a situation conflicting with the passage I have just quoted" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 335).

Surrounded by the threatening "others", the protection of Hungary's borders and boundaries becomes paramount for the survival of the nation because "each nation is defined by its borders" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 257). According to Orbán, protecting Hungary's borders means protecting Europe, because stopping illegal migration diminishes the threats to "Europe's essence [that] lies in its spiritual and cultural identity" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 283). Orbán claims that building fences on the external borders will also protect an internally borderless Europe since "if we cannot protect our external borders, Schengen will be in danger" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 260). Accordingly, Hungary's borders are to become impenetrable and protected with "police officers, soldiers and weapons" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 344) since border protection cannot be done with "flowers and cuddly toys" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 340).

The reinforcement and rearmament of the borders also draws a line between Orbán and the EU since, he asserts, "sovereignty, and the organisation of the lives of communities, must be taken care of within the limits of state borders" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 354). Similar to what we have seen in the speeches of the first period, a borderless world is available only to Hungarian kin living beyond Hungary's borders, who are welcome to join the national community. This is not only an extension of Hungary's borders to include Hungarians abroad but also a conscious nation–building effort as Hungarians abroad are supposed to contribute to the greatness of the country: "I would like the Hungarian diaspora to form links not only with the mother country, but also with the other communities of the Carpathian Basin. This would be an approach which is worthy of a world nation" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 391).

For Orbán, the rejection of the EU's mandatory refugee quotas is as important as securing citizenship for co-nationals: "the referendum on dual citizenship, which was a national issue of similar proportions, is on the same level as the current question [of mandatory refugee quotas]" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 356). As such, all those that belong to the nation conceived on ethnic terms have the option of membership in the political community — notwithstanding state borders — while all others — even those who are part of the EU scheme — are to be excluded from both citizenship and the understanding of the national self: "only those who have permission from our elected parliament, government or some other official state body can enter the territory of Hungary, can settle here and live here with us" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 356). This is why border protection becomes more important than the refugee quota, in fact Orbán claims "only when we have protected our borders can we ask questions such as how many people we want to receive, or if there should be quotas" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 260).

Opposition to international migration and globalisation can also be noted in Orbán's transformed use of religious references in his discourse. Until 2015, Orbán talked about Christianity not as a religion but rather as an identity marker, but since 2015 this reference to Christianity has acquired a religious understanding. Religious faith has become part of the processes of "othering", contrasting Christianity or Christian values with Islam and Muslims — terms that Orbán never previously mentioned. This approach links the religion of the "other" to migration and, in consequence, faith becomes an important barrier between "us" and "them": Islam or Muslims are portrayed as foreign and alien to both Hungarians and Christian Europe. Orbán is clearly biased in favour of Christian Hungary and Europe, declaring Christianity to be above Islam and Hungarian identity or culture to be above all others, particularly non-European cultures. This supremacy of European culture and its Christian belief makes his public discourse clearly anti-Islam or anti-Muslim, as Orbán readily admits: "to be clear and unequivocal, I can say that in Hungary Islamisation is subject to a constitutional ban" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 335).

This very exclusionary understanding of Hungarian and European identity, culture, and religion, as having no place for non-European or non-Christian migrants, can also be found in other aspects of Orbán's speeches that all serve a discursive conceptualisation of the "other" that is not only culturally and religiously different but threatening to the "self". Moreover, migration is linked to criminality since "wherever there are large numbers of immigrants, crime rates increase" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 285) and even terrorism: "not all of [the migrants] have come with good intentions; in the wake of all this, to distribute these people among the countries of Europe is nothing short of distributing the threat of terrorism or terrorists" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 285). The conception of the "other" as a security threat to the "self" is best illustrated by Orbán's discussion of terrorism: until 2015, terrorism was not a subject of his public talks (10 mentions); after 2015, terrorism and terrorist organisation are mentioned approximately 350 times. Orbán claims it is "the free flow of people without any controls or checks [that] creates the risk of terrorism" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 471), which again only makes the call for border fences and stringent border protection measures more urgent.

On another note, Orbán's discourse becomes not only exclusively nationalist but continues to use the very same populist strategies that he has relied upon since 2010, the only difference being that, after 2015, Hungarian interests are reconfigured from protection of Hungarian economy to protection of Hungarian culture and European civilisation from

mainly Muslim immigration. Orbán continuously recreates the image of crisis and threats that he then accompanies with appeals to the people for their support in the righteous fight to fend off these threats. Orbán portrays himself as a national saviour, speaking in the name of the nation, and serving the national interest or the people's will: "Multiculturalism means the co-existence of people with different background civilisations — for example Islam, the Asian religions and Christianity side by side. We shall make every effort to save Hungary from this" (Speech 253).

Orbán claims not only to be the representative of ordinary people but his discourse is anti-elite (although his government has been in power since 2010), claiming leaders are disconnected from reality — the European elite "is sitting in a closed, ideological shell, which means it has hardly any connection to reality" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 299)) and the former leftist government was "closing its eyes and ears to a fundamentally import-ant issue and ploughing ahead regardless of what the people are saying" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 356). Orbán portrays himself and his government as the true voice that speaks in the name of the Hungarian people and community, in the service of national interest, which is portrayed as its ultimate goal, above all other considerations: "The pre-vailing political leadership has today attempted to ensure that people's personal work and interests, which must be acknowledged, are closely linked to the life of the community and the nation, and that this relationship is preserved and reinforced" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 219). Once again, only members of the "true community" count, and success is a matter of preserving and cherishing the boundaries of this community because "we shall either be successful together or not at all. Either we all advance together, or we all sink into the mud" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 238).

As shown above, Orbán's anti-European discourse has only strengthened since 2015, and the EU continues to be a threatening "other" for the exclusionary understanding of the Hungarian "self". As noted above, Hungary, although a member state, is in opposition to the EU and European integration since "we alone, Hungarians who live here and who claim this country as our own, can decide [...] we must reject all EU and Brussels attempts and designs which seek to take from us and assign to someone else the right to decide" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 294). Once again, borders increase in importance since they divide between those that can have a say and those that cannot, and decision is reserved only for "true people" that are represented legitimately — and solely — by Orbán and his government. Equating once again the EU to the Soviet Union, for Orbán "the task of Europe's freedom-lov-ing peoples is to save Brussels from sovietisation" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 371). In this light, rejecting the migrant quota is not a simple disagreement between the EU and Hungary but an existential fight that divides every aspect of policy, since Orbán claims that "we can even expect revenge and blackmail from the Commission" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 359) and "the procedures which have been instituted against Hungary in the last few days in a variety of legal forms can be seen as a kind of revenge for the fact that we have dared to confront Brussels' immigration policy" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 294).

Although Orbán claims Hungary is the defender of Europe and is "the continent's gate-house and bastion" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 439), the discursively constructed division between Europe and Hungary is irreconcilable. Since 2010, Hungary has been positioned against the rest of Europe. The only exceptions to this division within Europe are the Visegrád Four (V4) counties, since Orbán's central European neighbours are also portrayed as supporting

national sovereignty over European integration: "the external border is crucial for the life of every nation is an idea shared by us in the V4" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 471). According to Orbán, the Central European countries are now together fighting "Brussels' continuous and stealthy withdrawal of powers from the nation states" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 473). This signals the increased importance of regional identities – or the creation of new borders within EU borders — to distinguish between different parts of Europe that stand in opposition to each other. Moreover, by creating regional identities, Orbán not only recreates the divide between East and West in Europe, or between old and new members, but also claims the East can now stand up to the West, correcting past imbalances: "I would like to make it clear that Central Europe has entered an era in which it is apparently quite able to stand on its own two feet, and is able to define itself" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 322).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Ever since re-entering office in 2010, Orbán's political discourse has been focused on discursively creating the image of existential crises and enemies of the nation to be blamed for these crises. This means identity politics are at the centre of Orbán's discourse, with a constant discursive reconstruction of both the "self" and the "others", where the "other" is not only different but threatening: foreign capital is to be blamed for Hungary's near bankruptcy, while migration is supposed to bringing criminality and terrorism to Hungary. The only important change in this discourse of crisis happened in 2015, when the previous populist narrative of economic insecurity was replaced by the narrative that Hungary is experiencing an existential threat because of the migration pressure on its borders. At this point, Orbán's discourse shifted from a standard populist discourse of economic nationalism to what I call the discourse of populist nationalism, where politics is based on national identity characterised by exclusionary views of "us" and "them", where the rights of the nation stand above all others: the political opposition, multinationals, the EU, or individual migrants. In this discourse of populist nationalism, the world is Manichean and poses multiple threats to Hungary — there is a cultural threat from non-European migrants, traditional values are challenged by globalisation pressures, and the world order based on liberal democracy challenges sovereignty, which in turn endangers the survival of the national community.

Orbán discursively creates the image of a threating world in order to reject liberal democracy in favour of a world of state-sponsored intolerance, where the "self" is solely reserved for ethnic Hungarians and every effort must be made to prevent "others" from watering down the cultural uniqueness of the national "self". Orbán's discourse of populist nationalism is thus a discourse of xenophobic nationalism combined with populist elements: it challenges the establishment and the elite, while sympathising and identifying with the "true" people. The discourse centres on different conceptions of Europe and the EU that are at the core of defining both the "self" and the "other": while Hungary is portrayed as part of Europe, or a saviour of Europe: "The time has come to prevent the destruction of Europe, and to save the future of Europe" (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 325)), the EU is conceived as the dangerous "other", siding with either international capital, the challengers of traditional Christian values or those supporting migration. This duality in the discourse shows clearly that Orbán is not only anti-migrant or anti-Muslim but anti-European — he is not only sceptical about the merits of the EU, but often fingers Brussels as the scapegoat for Hungary's problems. As a result the EU, European elites and liberal democracy are all perceived as "others", although Hungary claims to belong to and be the protector of the European community and culture.

It is the process of "othering", by bordering and redrawing the boundaries of the community, that establishes the conflict lines that stand between the Hungarian economy and foreign capital; between traditional society and liberals; between ethnic Hungarians and immigrants; between Hungary's national sovereignty and EU solidarity and commitment to Europeanisation; and between illiberal democracy and Europe and its common governance systems, secular organisation, religious tolerance and liberal foundations — as evidenced by Orbán's own words, taking stock of his regime's achievements:

> Money capitalism replaced by a work-based economy. Fragmentation replaced by citizenship and the unification of the nation. A system of liberal politics replaced by a system of national politics. Reinstating the rights of Christian culture instead of value neutrality. Liberal public morals replaced by the unconditional respect of human dignity (Prime Minister's speeches, n. d., Speech 201).

Table 1. Frequency scores

| Sample keywords/ phrases | 2010 – 2014 | 2014 – 2018 | Sample keywords/ phrases | 2010 – 2014 | 2014 – 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Crisis | 398 | 416 | EU | 71 | 567 |
| Debt crisis /sovereign debt | 5 | 24 | European Union | 319 | 1320 |
| Financial crisis | 10 | 47 | European countries | 40 | 188 |
| Economic crisis | 73 | 39 | Protect | 134 | 909 |
| Eurozone crisis | 1 | 1 | Security | 48 | 462 |
| European crisis | 17 | 0 | Threat | 29 | 288 |
| Hungarian economy | 160 | 121 | Breakdown | 0 | 2 |
| Banks | 96 | 60 | Elite | 13 | 127 |
| Multinationals | 30 | 23 | Hungarians in | 4 | 55 |
| Banker | 10 | 8 | National unity | 3 | 16 |
| Stand on its own | 5 | 12 | Unity | 36 | 327 |
| Socialist | 37 | 111 | Diaspora | 4 | 47 |
| Market | 137 | 268 | Hungarian Standing Conference | 1 | 12 |
| Migration | 13 | 1616 | Hungarian Diaspora Council | 0 | 6 |
| Refugee | 3 | 266 | Ethnic | 3 | 54 |
| Asylum | 0 | 105 | Constitution | 118 | 467 |
| Migration/refugee crisis | 0 | 87 | Fundamental Law | 25 | 65 |
| Immigration | 2 | 767 | Our lives | 38 | 94 |
| Islam | 4 | 55 | foreigners | 9 | 65 |
| Muslim | 0 | 86 | Disintegration | 15 | 26 |
| Christianity | 175 | 529 | Against Hungary | 10 | 38 |
| Religion | 34 | 100 | Trust | 96 | 116 |
| Terrorism | 10 | 335 | Faith | 60 | 126 |
| Islamic State | 0 | 13 | God | 61 | 163 |
| Hungarians | 427 | 1390 | Pray | 9 | 13 |
| Hungarian nation | 50 | 122 | Us | 648 | 3043 |
| People of Hungary | 74 | 27 | our | 1870 | 6359 |
| Sovereignty | 15 | 149 | Soros | 0 | 308 |
| National identity | 5 | 42 | George Soros | 0 | 163 |
| Citizenship | 5 | 24 | Civil | 3 | 70 |
| Hungarian citizen | 7 | 50 | NGO | 3 | 71 |
| Alien | 1 | 18 | Border | 90 | 1281 |
| Hungarian culture/trad. | 3 | 69 | Boundary | 0 | 42 |
| Hungarian identity | 0 | 3 | Gate | 14 | 53 |
| Hungarian family | 39 | 60 | Fence | 0 | 219 |
| Protection of national interest | 2 | 21 | *Speeches numbered* | 1 –142 | 143 – 565 |

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# Captured Memory: Frozen Transitional Justice in South Africa and Central Europe

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**ABSTRACT:**

*Memory regimes—narrative and institutional frameworks for addressing the past — stem from specific historical experience, social structure, and from a constellation of actors before and during the onset of transitions following a regime change. Given the vastly different contexts of the South African and central European pasts, one would not expect striking similarities among the memory regimes employed in the two regions. However, several emerge. The grand narratives of the memory regimes of the two regions are shaped by the discourses of postcolonialism and postsocialism respectively, which influence them in common ways. They are reactive to these discourses, structured by dependency and "periphery" position, and share a sense of victimhood and ontological anxiety. Furthermore, the narratives were captured at the onset of the transitions by their respective political establishments in a comparable manner — political parties in power controlled access to and use of the narratives of the past, and the interpretive frameworks in turn determined the institutional choices employed by the memory regimes. As a consequence, transitional justice in the two regions runs short of expectations and has led to a failure in intergenerational transmission of collective memory. The solution to the deficiencies of the transitional justice outcomes lies not in introducing a specific mechanism or institution, but rather in depoliticisation and pluralisation of access to memory regime narratives.*

*Keywords:*           memory regime, South Africa, central Europe, postcolonialism, postsocialism

Observing recent events in South Africa and in central Europe — Slovakia in particular — one cannot help but wonder about the synchronicity of some of the events transpiring within these societies. After years of relative calm, since 2015 there have been massive protests on the streets of South Africa, followed by mass protests in the countries of the Visegrad Group (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). Even Slovaks, not known for their particularly active spirit of civic participation, took to the streets in 2017 and 2018. In South Africa and Slovakia, the top echelons of the governments resigned under the pressure of mass protests, and temporary replacements were installed.

The transitions from the apartheid and from the totalitarian communist regimes have displayed some of the same ailments, which are perhaps endemic to the processes of transition as such — economic upheaval, power struggles, and massive corruption tend to accompany most such processes. In South Africa and central Europe (focusing here mostly

on Slovakia), the transition was accompanied by state capture by oligarchs through the medium of political parties. Memory regimes, here understood as the narrative and institutional frameworks designed for addressing the past, have been part of that capture by political parties, to differing degrees. Each memory regime was shaped after the fall of the previous regime and became "frozen",[2] set in place by constitutions and legislatures, producing specific consequences. In both regions, it is particularly (and unsurprisingly) the area of criminal justice that seems to be most stuck. Narratives of the past are controlled and managed along party lines, and single, storied narratives are imposed on the education systems, to be perpetuated through future generations. State capture has been underscored by one of the by-products of globalisation: the ascent of "apocalyptic populism" and a cohort of political leaders with narcissistic personalities and authoritarian tendencies, feeding off of the growing social cleavage between the winners and the losers of the globalisation process. The pushback against apocalyptic populism as well as state capture is seen in the rise of "assertive citizenship", a form of political participation that is highly mistrustful of political leaders and institutions but is invested in democracy as the best form of governance. "Assertive citizens" hail predominantly from the ranks of the "born free" generations, which have not experienced the previous regimes first-hand and are now entering adulthood and calling for pluralisation of the narratives of the past, simultaneously rejecting the "single story" interpretation offered by the frozen partisan memory regimes of the present.

**PREFIGURATION OF THE MEMORY REGIMES**
Transitional justice, as a term, unsurprisingly dates back to post-Second World War Germany, when first the Allies and, later, the Federal Republic of Germany, were developing an inventory of measures to address the recent past that was later subsumed under this label (Braun, 2017). The measures taken then to address the past — from criminal prosecutions and the Nuremberg trials for what Sheffer labels summarily as atrocity crimes (war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and war of aggression), to lustrations, reparations, public apologies, rewriting of history, etc. — gradually contributed to an imaginary roster, a transitional justice toolbox which to this day serves as a key source of inspiration. How the new regimes chose from this "menu" depended, to a great degree, on the social constellation of the actors during the time of regime crisis and turnover. The pursuit of reconciliation and of transitional justice in the post–1989 wave of democratisations is very much embedded within the process of "moral globalisation", as Michael Ignatieff describes the spreading global human rights culture embedded in the post-Second World War international organisations and their treaties, covenants, and monitoring mechanisms of human rights implementation.

It is notable that South Africa and the countries of central Europe made their selections from the transitional justice "menu" of tools on rather similar grounds, despite their very different starting points and needs during the process of transition. It was in fact external pressures that were decisive in the very breakdown of the regimes and to some extent the nature of the transitions. The roundtable negotiations which prevailed in both central Europe and South Africa as the main mode of transition were to a large degree the result of external forces: the evaporation of the Soviet Union's will to intervene in the countries of the Eastern Bloc (leaving the last Mohicans of the local communist parties to fend for themselves) combined

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2      The term is borrowed from Stein and Rokkan's seminal work on the freezing of the political party systems. See Lipset and Rokkan 1967.

with the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* which (further) undermined the legitimacy of the old structures of leadership; the aforementioned global human rights culture with its growing number of (morally or legally) enforceable human rights treaties, utilised as platforms of resistance; and of course the fall of these regimes and the end of the Cold War. This latter development meant the loss of the external military and financial support for the South African opposition and thus reconsideration of strategies and gradual willingness to negotiate the transfer of power. The ANC was preparing until then to take power militarily (as late as the ANC's Kabwe conference in Mozambique in 1985 (Mbatha, 2017)). When Nelson Mandela initiated talks with the regime from his prison cell, it came as a shock to his comrades, but later on most were convinced of their inevitability.

The former opposition leaders in both regions also tended to moderate the more radical voices, and negotiate with the previous regime. They advocated for dialogue with the former leaders and for benevolent ambivalence rather than retribution (Mandela, Havel, Michnik, and others came to symbolise these stances), seeking to avoid bloodshed — not least because vast repressive apparatuses were still under the control of old regime structures — and to ensure gradual replacement of the leadership at all levels of society (something which has not sufficiently transpired in either region).

Perhaps, as former Czech Prime Minister Petr Pithart has noted, "politicians recruited from dissent themselves did not have an issue with the past (with its interpretation, evaluation)... They resisted the previous regime, many were discriminated [against] and persecuted. They did not have, unlike most others, the need to prove anything... the fall of the regime itself gave them enough satisfaction, as that was a part of their doing" (Pithart, 1998, p. 29). There was a fear of radicalism that might prevent the establishment of the rule of law and lead to wild retribution. That is also why, he explains, they did not ban the Communist Party, but insisted on beating it in the polls (p. 30).

**SOCIAL CONSTELLATIONS**

The opposition to the totalitarian communist regimes of central Europe and to the apartheid regime in South Africa could not, on the surface, have been more different. The leaders of the African National Congress, e.g. Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Thabo Mbeki, were at the helm of a well-organised organisation with a long history, dating back to 1912, and with robust structures in exile comprising intellectuals, experts, activists, but also combatants. Besides the ANC, the opposition was also composed of the Communist Party, student and labour movements, churches, and unions that had united in the United Democratic Front in the years before the regime's end. Together, these organisations numbered over 400. Meanwhile, the ruling white Afrikaner and British-descended elites represented less than ten percent of the population. The opposition, therefore, could claim to be the strong voice of the oppressed majority, victimised by racial segregation, discrimination, deprivation and poverty.

The ANC was also far better prepared to take power. In the late 1980s, under the guidance of Oliver Tambo, the ANC prepared a new constitution in exile, including South Africa's future Bill of Rights. It held conferences in exile, preparing strategic materials in various areas. There was also a very different legacy of open violence. The working methods of the apartheid police and of the army and their militias were brutal, including torture, disappearances, and the use of death squads. During the years of negotiations, violence engulfed the townships, reaching over 20,000 deaths, actively fuelled and financed by the governing, pro-apartheid National Party. Violence was also used among the opposition to deter collaborators and regime spies.

The "parallel polis" of central Europe was markedly different. In Czechoslovakia, the dissidents who signed the Charter 77 document counted 1,889 by 1989 (of whom only around 40 were from Slovakia). With the ascent of Mikhail Gorbachev to power and the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* pushed by his administration (to the great consternation of the rigid totalitarian regime apparatchiks in Czechoslovakia, who grudgingly formulated a comprehensive reform policy in 1987), civil society was more encouraged to mobilise and wake from its long slumber under so-called "Normalisation". Slowly, civil resistance groupings emerged like mushrooms after rain. Upon its tenth anniversary, Charter 77 issued a brief document, "A Word to Fellow Citizens", which encouraged people to take action towards a more open society (Otáhal, 1994). A journal with a long history, *Lidové noviny*, was revived in Prague, demanding legal registration (failing that, it was published illegally), people sought out information and joined new platforms. In Slovakia, a new wave of ecological activism arose around the publication *Bratislava nahlas!* (*Bratislava Aloud!*), and people mobilised to press for religious freedom.

Before 1987, the Federal Bureau for Press and Information (ÚTISK) recorded five dissident groupings; in 1987 it took note of four new ones; in 1988 another fourteen; by the end of 1989 there were 39 (Otáhal, 1994, p. 70). There was an attempt to create a united Czechoslovak political opposition, a coalition of these initiatives; however, that effort was interrupted by the revolution itself. The newly established Civic Forum and Public Against Violence platforms were a hodgepodge of people, most of whom had not met before (especially in Slovakia). Unlike in South Africa, there was no team of constitutional experts working on a new constitution (save for a feeble attempt of reformist Communists, which has not met with success), no shadow government, just a small grouping of former dissidents, composed of disenchanted former communists, artists, writers, actors, and activists. At a quarterly meeting of the self-published journal *Obsah* (*Content*) in 1986, the writers present placed bets on the likely date of the fall of the regime. These showed that despite the nascent movements and free spaces, the leaders of the opposition themselves had no inkling that change was coming — forecasts ranged from 1988 to 2018 (Jungmann, 2012).

Czechoslovakia in the late 1980s was a frozen post-totalitarian regime, to use the terminology of Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan (Linz & Stepan, 1998), that is, a post-Stalinist regime that has some level of social pluralism but maintains the full control mechanism of the party-state and the sacrosanct position of the Communist Party (Linz & Stepan, 1998, p. 42). Part of this rigidity was a function of the success of Normalisation, which resulted in the capture of the top positions in the leadership and the gradual dumbing down of the party cadres through purges. The leadership was aging and even if a few were sympathetic to the new winds blowing from Moscow, they were unwilling to risk their own positions. Husák, Czechoslovakia's president since the demise of the Prague Spring, expressed the following sentiment on the question of whether to change the official stance towards the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968: "True, after April of 1985, I could have stood up for the historical truth about 1968. But that would have been my last public speech. I would have been toppled. And I did not want that then" (Macháček, 2017, p. 485).

The opposition in Czechoslovakia had the street on their side, but it was a very recent phenomenon: civil society mobilised itself only in the last few months prior to the fall of the regime (some say opportunistically so, anticipating change due to the events unfolding in Poland and Hungary). It had no organised structure and counted just a few hundred individuals, a tiny minority within the society. The majority of the population lived in a grey zone of

acquiescence, benefiting from the communist regime's guarantee of some level of comfort in return for a display of conformity with the regime and its leadership.

## SOURCES OF MEMORY REGIMES' NARRATIVE FRAMEWORKS
Despite the undisputable differences among the leaders of the opposition in South Africa and in Slovakia (and central Europe), the inspiration for the institutional design of the processes for addressing the past drew on some of the same sources, though with significant differences in their interpretation.

## BETWEEN VENGEANCE AND FORGIVENESS
Both regions of transition, in their evaluation of institutional choices to address the past, looked primarily to Germany. South Africa, as already mentioned, also took into account the choices made in Central Europe and evaluated their fit to the South African context.

> The resistance movement effectively calmed the country… but insisted that the apartheid regime could not be allowed to grant amnesty to itself. Nevertheless, as a product of negotiated revolution, the newly elected democratic government understood that there was no certainty that it could succeed in imposing victors' justice, even it if wished to do so… There could be no summary trials and executions of torturers as there were in the German concentration camps; no Nuremberg trials… There have been no purges, no vindictive 'lustration laws' on the recent Czech model, which disqualify certain persons, allegedly from the old order, from holding categories of public or private office-without a semblance of judicial process. There has been no blacklisting of collaborators, as in post-war France and Belgium… This rejection was consistent with the long standing humanist ideals of the anti-apartheid resistance. (Asmal, 2011, pp. 18, 19)

This interpretation, however, seems to have been the product of a historical decision in a particular changing global and local context, and of a constellation of actors and subsequent interpretation, rather than a planned ANC policy, as Asmal himself recalled in a later text:

> Nuremberg set a precedent, of course. Here at last the perpetrators of crimes against humanity were brought to account and, in some cases, executed for their complicity in these crimes. The process was by no means perfect, in fact it was deeply flawed, but suddenly regimes and their lieutenants could no longer commit gross acts of violence and inhumanity against their own people and expect to escape punishment. This, naturally enough, motivated the liberation movement — and myself in particular — to start planning our own Nuremberg Trials, to be instituted the moment the walls of apartheid could be pulled down. (Asmal, 2011, p. 167)

Asmal describes how, in 1987, when negotiations were increasingly likely, Nuremberg-type trials were no longer an option, and apartheid was going to be defeated at the roundtable (Asmal, 2011, p. 175), he thus proposed a truth commission that would seek justice within the framework of human rights culture, founded on a moral sense of personal responsibility for common history. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the main and most well-known platform for reconciliation, which lies somewhere between Nuremberg justice and amnesty, focused on hearing the victims' voices and accumulating evidence about past

crimes in return for amnesty (while leaving avenues open to criminal justice in cases where applicants failed to qualify for an amnesty, which more than 70% of them did), and a system of individual and symbolic reparations.

German transitional justice impacted Central European memory regimes in several ways as well. On the level of grand narrative structures, the Holocaust and the post-war reconciliation processes in Germany were strongly dominant within the western European public discourse and the newcomers were pressured to give them the same status (Neumayer, 2019), thus failing to recognise the traumas of Stalinism and subsequent communist regimes that many also had to deal with. East Germany was the first one to embark on the route of transitional justice, under the direction of West Germany. Judges were, for example, summarily released from their positions and replaced along with the judicial system, faculty at law schools, and many public servants. The former security police, the Stasi, was quickly reigned in (in many places Stasi offices were physically guarded by citizens to prevent destruction of documents) and a mechanism for lustration of MPs and public officials devised. Joachim Gauck headed the Special Commission for the Stasi Records and was the first Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records; the office became known as the "Gauck Institute". The Stasi Records office, in Gauck's own words, was intended not to remove all former communists from power, but to respond to "people's minimal demand that persons who had conspired with the regime, unbeknown to their fellow citizens, should be deemed unsuitable for public positions of trust" (Gauck & Fry, 1994, p. 279) and for a "judicial reckoning with the past", leading to criminal prosecution or vindication of those wrongly accused. Not least, this was also intended to serve the needs of historical research and give people access to their own files in the Stasi archives (a service which is used by almost 50,000 people every year).

In the Central European countries, the turnover had to be far more gradual. Czechoslovakia opted for legal (and personal) continuity (there were no West Germans to take the places of the former communists). But the German path still became an institutional model – lustrations and national memory institutes were reproduced in the other central European contexts, with local variations and priorities (stemming also from differing interpretations of the past). The Nuremberg style of retributive justice was unthinkable not only due to the social constellation of the actors — the majority population was not in the position of oppressed victims in the same way as in South Africa, but were often bystanders and beneficiaries of the system, while also suffering some of the consequences of blunt systemic oppression — i.e. their social roles were mixed. Therefore, when it came to formulating a narrative of the past for present-day purposes, the focus was not so much on victims, but on active collaborators with the regime, and the lustrations and memory institutes were a product of these circumstances.

It was unthinkable also due to the nature of the opposition, which was not fighting illegally, but sought to operate within the bounds of the law and purposely sought out dialogue with power, holding it accountable to its own laws and international commitments.

**THE RIGHTS REVOLUTIONS**
The ascending global culture of human rights in the second half of the twentieth century played a significant role in the orientation of the opposition movements and transitions in both regions. As Paul Blokker notes, the language of rights and insistence on their implementation formed the backbone of the east central European transitions (Blokker, 2015), boosted particularly by the ratification of the UN International Covenant on Social, Economic and

Cultural Rights, and especially the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, which paved the way for the establishment of Charter 77, Solidarność (Solidarity) in Poland, and individual Helsinki committees).

Despite the strong leaning towards communism and Marxist ideology of a majority of the South African opposition leaders (the ANC military wing — the Umkhonto we Sizwe — relied on the support of communist governments for financial support and military training. Mandela himself was a lifelong sympathiser of communism, and Fidel Castro was among his personal friends), the prevailing ideals that were translated into the new legislative design were inspired primarily by the British legal and political tradition. The ANC opposition was, also not coincidentally, centred around lawyers and legal scholars. Mandela himself was one, and had, as Derrida pointed out, a strong affinity for parliamentary democracy, human rights, and British political institutions (Derrida, 1987, p. 16). Oliver Tambo, Albie Sachs, Kader Asmal, and the men of the ANC exile who worked on the preparation of the constitution and its bill of rights were all legal scholars in the British tradition (albeit also of a strong communist persuasion).

**THE NATIONAL IDEA**

What is perhaps more surprising about the utilisation of the language of rights was their interpretation in relation to the national question. South Africa is a country of eleven official languages, as well as four major Black South African ethnic groups divided into numerous tribes, Coloured, White, and South Asian populations. It would thus not have been surprising if the emphasis during the drafting of the new constitution had been placed on collective rights. Instead, the drafters echoed the strong sentiments of Oliver Tambo and built the constitution on strictly individual human rights, the principle of non-racialism, and a "rainbow nation" for all.

Central European constitutions, by contrast, embody an exclusivist ethnic principle (the preambles begin with a declaration on behalf of the "state-forming" nation: "We, the Slovak nation...", "We, the members of the Hungarian nation, at the beginning of the new millennium, with a sense of responsibility for every Hungarian...", that assert ancient national roots in Christendom and sing the praises of their respective struggles for national statehood). They focus on the dominant nation and mention ethnic minorities separately, seemingly treating them as citizens of a different category. Minorities old and new, in this vision of the nation, are tolerated, as if their rights were granted by a special act of clemency, or as a privilege.

Both visions — of the rainbow nation as well as of exclusivist ethnic nations — were central to the shape of the narratives around which the memory regimes of the new political systems developed, and have had significant consequences. They represented the core values, the raison d'être that the interpretation of the past sought to justify and support, and from which the institutions designed to address the past are drawn.

**CONFIGURATION: POSTCOLONIALISM AND POSTCOMMUNISM**
**AS GRAND NARRATIVE STRUCTURES**

Comparisons of the South African and central European, especially Czechoslovak, transitions, were frequent in the 1990s, when the negotiations between the apartheid National Party and the ANC were still unfolding in South Africa and "transitology" literature on transitions from totalitarian and authoritarian regimes was at its peak. The crumbling apartheid regime also took direct inspiration from the dissidents-turned-statesmen of Central Europe. In 1990, the Human Sciences Research Council in Pretoria organised a delegation of South Africans

to Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and in 1991 invited a group of new leaders to South Africa, focusing on Czechoslovakia "as probably the most suitable country for collaborative research" (Prinsloo, 1991). The South African and Czechoslovak academics were comparing notes on the collapse of communism and apartheid (which at that time was in progress), and questions of ethnic diversity. The events and choices made in Czechoslovakia left a great impression on the apartheid government, its willingness to accept the formerly banned opposition, to negotiate, and even to consider social democratic governing ideas, learning from the failures of communism in central Europe — especially of centralised planning, and of the elimination of civil society through single-party rule (Prinsloo, 1991, p. 179).

The transitional narratives, which shape the memory regimes after the change in polit- ical regime, share another rather important similarity: their placement in the grand narrative frameworks of postcolonialism and postcommunism. Both were shaped by them in a similar sense – these frameworks emphasise patterns of dependency, oppression, and the resulting sense of inferiority of a periphery towards the "core". In both frameworks, furthermore, the narratives are told from the perspective of the victim. There is a sense of always being on the wrong side of history, and thus a great deal of mistrust towards history as told by others (Kołodzejczyk & Śandru). They carry an element of orientalisation of these regions, and the notion of an intervening empire. Both frames are, however, also at times seen as an external imposition by Western academia, which domestic scholars grapple to make their own — or to discard. These grand frameworks were not outwardly promoted by the new regimes, but rather were the invisible backbone, the mould into which the national narratives were poured and which impacted people's attitudes and emotions. They are, in a way, more lasting than the specific political narratives of the past, and echo in critiques of the dominant narratives, either by Eurosceptic groupings or the student movement for decolonisation.

The narratives of the past of the Central European nations is best illustrated in the writings of István Bibó and Milan Kundera on the peculiar fear and sense of tragedy of the "small" East Central European nations (Bibó, The misery of small Eastern European states, 2015/1946; Kundera, 2000/1983) — small due to their vulnerability rather than size, and tragic because they perceive themselves to be perpetual victims of history, always used and betrayed by more powerful actors. This interpretation then feeds "political hysteria", the politics of fear exploiting perceived historical traumas and giving ground to a specific type of a political leader – the "phony realist". "Thus what genuine democracies know only in the actual hour of danger became the rule in the permanent anxiety and sense of danger — the curbing of public freedoms; censorship; a search for the 'hirelings' of the enemy, the 'traitors,' excessively forcing order or its veneer at the expense of liberty" (Bibó, 2015/1946, p. 152). Even though Bibó wrote this in 1946, it certainly rings true in Central Europe today. It is underscored by the exclusivist ethnic conception of nations in the region: it focuses inward and places the blame for one's own suffering and victimhood elsewhere. As a consequence, the totalitarian pasts of the twentieth century, fascism and communism alike, have never been fully addressed through a broad public discussion. The guilt for the crimes of those eras is commonly "exported" to the West and to the East respectively (Dujisin, 2015).

This "tragedy" of the small East Central European nations survived communism intact; in fact, it did not leave the public imagination during either, notwithstanding their leaders' advocacy of the international solidarity of the working class and of the socialist nations. When pressed to implement reform policies during the era of *perestroika*, Jan Fojtík, head of the ideological section of the Czechoslovak Central Committee complained to his Russian

counterpart (and friend from university studies) Dmitry Medvedev in Berlin, shortly before the Velvet Revolution:

> What is it that you want from us? Do you want to throw us overboard? If so, tell us directly. We were always dependent on someone, our sovereignty is relative. For three hundred years we were dependent on the Habsburgs, for twenty years on the British and the French, and when our famous Western allies abandoned us, we were taken over by the Germans. Now we have been dependent on you for 40 years, but if you wish to get rid of us, just say the word. But beware that then we will take our St. Wenceslas crown and take it to the Germans". (as recollected in J. Čejka's memoirs, cited in Katrebová-Blehová, 2008, p. 32)

After 1989, this stance has fixed its gaze on the West, exhibiting the split personality traits of desiring to belong, to "return to Europe", and at the same time, an inferiority complex and mistrust towards the West, only deepened by recent migrant crises, the economic crisis of 2008, and Brexit. As Péter Esterházy, a Hungarian intellectual, summarised this identity journey in this region, it has shifted from being ascribed the label of an Eastern European to a Central European, which carried an element of honour and pride, of acceptance and achievement, then becoming a New European, only to be relegated to a non-core European (Esterházy, 2005). Almost fifteen years later, the perceived periphery status, amidst the proposals to develop an EU core, a two-speed Europe, only strengthens the "tragedy" narrative framework and emphasises the split in popular orientations.

Postcolonialism in relation to the South African interpretation of the past falls back on the pan-Africanist and Black Consciousness movements, brought to the forefront by thinkers like Steven Biko or Frantz Fanon. The term itself has a Western origin, and many of the current activists prefer to talk about decolonisation or decoloniality to emphasise the prevailing structures of power, translated into economic and social inequalities, propped up by cultural frames and representations, but also the active engagement in dismantling these structures. Postcolonialism today is critical of "reconciliation ideology", the dominant narrative of the change in regime and healing process thereafter, and which sees the end of apartheid as being coterminous with the end of colonialism. The reconciliation narrative portrays the anti-apartheid movement as a struggle, among other things, against colonialism. With its victory, it may appear as if colonialism was undone and there was a break with the past with the dawning of the new era. Therefore, in the opinion of some, this obscures the continuity of oppression.

The pushback against this narrative emphasises the continuity of colonial structures of oppression. "[W]hat enabled affiliation to the larger political project against apartheid was precisely the production of a subject that was always, and necessarily, threaded through a structure of racial capitalism. This hinders the emergence of a history of colonialism and nationalism that theorises and historicises the relations of knowledge and power" (Lalu, 2008). Rossouw goes further, to state that the post-apartheid system slid right into the colonial superstructure. "What arguably sets South Africa apart, though, from many if not most other African countries is that it went through this historical pattern not once, but twice. The two dates that mark the establishment of this pattern and of its repetition are 1948 and 1994, the latter of course when the African National Congress (ANC) came into power. In both instances an anti-colonial nationalist party strove to capture the colonial state structure and ended

up being captured by it" (Rossouw, p. 69). The reconciliation narrative uses the anti-colonial element as part of its justification mechanisms. The student protests that erupted in 2015 with the #RhodesMustFall campaign were reacting to the unchanging status quo vis-à-vis the narrative upheld by the party in power, pushing for the removal from campuses of Cecil Rhodes statues, which were perceived as symbols of enduring colonial oppression, as well as for the decolonisation of curricula and the removal of Afrikaans as the sole language of instruction in some prestigious institutions of higher education.

The postcolonial frame is so dominant in South Africa that all narratives, the mainstream reconciliation one as well as those that challenge it, have to orient themselves around this structure. The reconciliation narrative was developed primarily within and around the African National Congress, the hero in this story. The fact that the ANC ascended to power in 1994 and remains the sole governing party determines the way in which postcolonialism is woven into that narrative. The ANC cannot portray itself as the enabler of the continuity of the colonial superstructure (or its inheritor, as posited by its critics), and thus embodies one of the major interpretive conflicts of today.

### MEMORY CAPTURE AS A FUNCTION OF STATE CAPTURE

Perhaps the most important trait that the memory regimes of central Europe and South Africa have in common has to do with the political nature of the transition to democracy. Even though the institutional designs are rather different (South Africa is unique in being a parliamentary democratic republic but with a presidential executive administration, and with strong provincial legislatures), they included strong pulls towards the overwhelming capture of the political systems by political parties. In the early transitional years, closed-list proportional representation was the electoral system of choice, and election of the president was by the national legislatures. South Africa retained this system, while Central Europe moved towards the use of preferential votes and direct popular presidential elections — this has not, however, diminished the position of the parties in the political systems.

### PARTITOCRACY AND MEMORY REGIME CAPTURE

In South Africa, the narrative of the past emerged throughout the process of the negotiations in the early 1990s, which came to be dominated by the ANC. The ANC also became the governing party from the first democratic elections of 1994, and the president of the country was elected from within the ANC. The president and the senior ANC leadership are represented as men of the anti-apartheid struggle, the bearers of this legacy. The narrative featuring the leading role of the ANC, the achievements of the constitution and of the TRC became so strong and so dominant that some gave it the label "reconciliation ideology". Molefe maintains that the narrative's reach goes further than just official institutions and public discourse, but also impacts how people perceive their own destinies, life chances, and opportunities. Many don't even realise that they themselves are the victims of persisting apartheid structures of systemic inequality, and more importantly the psychological mark it leaves on their personal psyches (Molefe, 2014). The reconciliation narrative is not necessarily factually incorrect, rather it is highly selective and its dominance marginalises both the roles of other actors and the shortcomings of transitional justice — not least the thwarted process of criminal prosecution of apartheid's architects and leaders, or neglect of the victims of other forms of oppression apart from gross human rights violations, which were the focus of the TRC.

R. Southall notes that "democratisation defused polarisation, but was to be hollowed out by the ANC's construction of a 'party-state,' politicising democratic institutions and widening social inequalities" (Southall, 2019, p. 194). This had several important consequences for open and plural discourse about the past: part of the ANC resisted the TRC as the process for addressing the past, since it was (ironically, in line with the ANC principles ever since the Freedom Charter) built on the assumption of universality and individual responsibility (Villa–Vicencio, 2015). The massive corruption that has accompanied the ANC's virtual monopoly on political power and became symptomatic of Jacob Zuma's presidency in particular also stood in the way of reparations in line with the recommendations of the TRC. Only a portion of the intended reparations were paid out, and large sums of money intended for these purposes were swallowed up by the Presidential Fund (under Zuma's presidency). Finally, it is also an impediment to historical and archival research. Many of the files, especially from the late period of the apartheid regime that document the corruption networks of those times remain locked in the vaults of the ministries. The ANC has not applied pressure for their full release, possibly because of its own issues with corruption and other transgressions during the anti-apartheid struggle that might be unearthed along with the apartheid regime's crimes.

Jacob Zuma was forced to step down in December 2017, following a series of corruption scandals for which he is now being investigated. But the new president, Cyril Ramaphosa, faces a choice "between South Africa and the ANC" (Du Toit, 2019). Du Toit maintains that though it took courage and in-party mobilisation to oust Jacob Zuma, the grip of the corrupt structures on institutions like the State Security Agency or the National Prosecuting Authority (which has within its portfolio responsibility for investigating past crimes) is strong and unceasing. Thus, the democratic future of South Africa depends, to a large degree, on dismantling these networks within the ANC.

The narratives in the central European region were dependent on the political competition between political parties after 1989, and on their particular leanings. James Mark divides the identifiable historical narratives according to parties' stances towards communism — specifically, radical and moderate anti-communist, and ex-communist (Mark, 2010). Thomas Sniegon includes older value cleavages on the Czech and Slovak political scenes, which have delineated the political scene for almost a century: "The four historical narratives selected here are the Czech national-liberal narrative, the Slovak national-Catholic narrative, the Czechoslovak communist narrative and the Slovak national-European narrative" — divided also according to which past era was deemed as especially useful and worthy of remembrance (Sniegon, 2017, pp. 27–28).

One is tempted to add that there is a cohort of political leaders who do not wish for any particular recent past to be remembered. Instead, their rhetorical and symbolic manoeuvres claim continuity with an ancient past, rendering the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century or the transgressions of the transitional governments in the 1990s as mere glitches in a long and glorious struggle for national self-assertion and greatness (for example, in Slovakia this translated into glorification of the ninth-century Great Moravian Empire during the first Fico administration). The particular narrative of the past stemming from the political leadership would then dictate the use of the public institutions vested with addressing the past (i.e. it effectively killed lustration policies in Slovakia in 1993 under Vladimír Mečiar, but allowed for the creation of the Nation's Memory Institute in 2003 under Mikuláš Dzurinda, after years of resistance, particularly from among bureaucratic cadres).

The Polish journalist and public intellectual Adam Michnik laments that there is a broader fad of "historical politics" that has captivated the world, including Poland — perhaps especially Poland. Historical politics is politics carried out backwards, making the past as unpredictable as the future. "The demand for the 'new historical politics' is simply a postulate of a new view of the past. Moreover, it is a demand addressed not so much at historians, but at the state. The state should support that new vision of the past. It should become the arbiter of the truth in the past" (Michnik, 2011). Michnik's historical politics is in widespread use in post–1989 Central Europe – increasingly so in Poland and Hungary. Poland's law forbidding interpretation of the Holocaust that implies any Polish role in it, or Orbán's statues devoted to the reinterpretation of Hungary's position in the Second World War as a victim (e.g. a statue depicting Hungary as the archangel Gabriel being attacked by a Nazi imperial eagle, or another planned for the 100th anniversary of the post-World War One Treaty of Trianon) are among the many cases in point.

As in South Africa, state capture by oligarchs intertwined with the top echelons of the political leadership has further cemented this state of affairs. Traditional political parties have become closely intertwined with the same "sponsors" and cartelised — producing odd coalitions of previously unthinkable partners (for example bringing together Slovak nationalists, ethnic Hungarians, and leftist populists). Such linkages make the willingness to investigate the crimes of the recent past (wild privatisation and organised crime in 1990s) unlikely without massive external pressure. In Slovakia, as of summer 2019, there were signs of a breakthrough, with an oligarch accused of ordering the murder of an investigative journalist and being investigated for influencing senior political leaders, in the course of which many such alleged connections have been uncovered, prompting a heated political discourse.

**A POLARISING PAST**

The *Heritage of the Past and the Quality of Democracy Survey*, which we (myself and a team of students from BISLA) carried out in 2018 provides evidence for the opinion split in relation to the past and its link to political orientation. The survey showed a strong and statistically significant correlation between support for the current government (people who tended to have some or high level of trust towards the prime minister, government, parliament, judiciary, police) and their view on the statement that the past has been sufficiently addressed after 1989 and that former leaders should be criminally prosecuted. Those with higher levels of trust towards the government did not see the past as an issue and were more likely not to want (or care) to see former leaders held accountable. They would, at the same time, not see a link between the unaddressed past and current levels of corruption. Those who mistrust the government held the opposite view. They also tend to be more tolerant towards old and new minorities.[3]

The results of state capture and partitocracy are dominant single-story narratives of the past that are at best highly selective, and on occasion commit abuses of memory, historical revisionism, or commanded amnesia, to use the language of Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur, 2004). Political parties also, significantly, command oversight of the formation of history curricula in primary and high schools, where the single stories are etched in a top-down manner into textbooks. Surveys show that recent history is very distant to the younger generation, failing

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3    Detailed results from the survey have not yet been published but are available upon demand from the author.

to incite any personal or moral connection among them, or to encourage them to draw conclusion regarding the questions of democratic citizenship from it.

In South Africa, the reconciliation narrative leaves White South Africans, in particular, untouched by any inkling of responsibility for the past, whether as perpetrators, enablers, bystanders, or beneficiaries. Furthermore, it alienates and angers the second generation of those who were excluded from that narrative – groups like the former ANC combatants in exile on one hand, or those who inherit stigma by affiliation, such as rank-and-file soldiers or policemen, on the other. Single-storied narratives leave little space for healing, dialogue, rapprochement within societies, or moral lessons for the present. On the contrary, they contribute to cycles of vengeance or at best produce civic apathy.

## LACK OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Given the nature of the totalitarian and the apartheid regimes, it is almost shocking how few former political leaders, state security officials, and army personnel were prosecuted, given the number of people they killed, tortured, disappeared, and persecuted. One of the results of the frozen memory regime — perpetuated by single-story narratives and captured states — is the failure of criminal justice to take its course, even at a minimal, symbolic level.

## CRIMINALISATION OF THE PAST AND AMNESTY FOR THE CHIEF CRIMINALS

Part of the de-communisation processes in central Europe involved legal proclamations on the illegality of the previous regime. Whether in separate laws, as in the Czech and Slovak Republics, or in the constitution itself, as was the case in Hungary, the previous regimes were declared illegal and immoral.

Criminalisation of the communist regimes in central Europe has not led to criminal proceedings, however: quite the contrary. Political scientist Jacques Rupnik maintained that by this *en bloc* criminalisation of a regime, all of its different eras (murderous Stalinist regime, moderate sixties, oppressive Normalisation) were placed on an equal footing, thus blurring the great differences between them. Furthermore, he maintains that the result was the punishment of rank-and-file members of the Communist Party, through lustration policies, while leaving the top perpetrators untouched (Rupnik, 2002).

The apartheid regime was also criminalised, albeit differently. In 1973, the UN passed the controversial Convention on Apartheid as a Crime Against Humanity, which was not, however, ratified by any of the Western powers. It was later included in the Rome Statute among the crimes against humanity, although it has not been used in criminal proceedings as of yet.

Within the context of the TRC, while reference to apartheid as a crime against humanity was frequently invoked, the strong focus on individual victims' stories as well as the hearings of applicants for amnesty prevented the flattening of the discourse to a "criminal regime" trope and instead used, at the same time, a "regime of criminals" characterisation (hence, rather than attributing the faults to the system itself, it also sought to identify individual perpetrators). However, it is often invoked in the present day, particularly in order to assign or deflect responsibility or association with that regime. For example, in 2016 a candidate for the Gauteng High Court, Cornelius Van der Westhuizen, was interrogated by MP Julius Malema, the leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters party. Malema accused van der Westhuizen of benefiting from the apartheid regime, and attempted to get him to agree with the claim that the regime taught white people to hate black people. The candidate denied this, repeatedly emphasising the individual's responsibility to decide for themselves (thus dissociating himself

from the system itself). This approach has been used in TRC hearings frequently. During apartheid, the state security apparatus used *amtsprache*, the official, institutional language which stripped humanity from people and relieved actors of personal responsibility. The commands given were not to "kill" or "murder" someone, but to "make a plan" or to "cleanse" — making political responsibility for murders much harder to establish. Those who followed orders and did the dirty work would in the TRC hearings emphasise, the "criminal regime" scheme, which made them follow orders. Those who gave the orders claimed they knew nothing about the resulting crimes, and that it was just a few bad apples that had misbehaved and broken the rules of conduct. Importantly, the narrative of the criminal regime also points to the continuity of social and economic disparities in the country. When former Minister of Law and Order Adriaan Vlok, in an act of public apology and repentance, washed the feet of Frank Chikane, a pastor for whom he had signed an elimination order while in office, some were angry: Vlok avoided a prison sentence thanks to his apology before the TRC, and his call to other apartheid leaders to step forth and apologise led to concerns that the possibility of criminal prosecutions would thereafter be even closer to nil (Tschabalala, 2015).

**ARCHIVE FEVER AND THE POLITICS OF RETRIBUTION**

The TRC, lustrations, and memory institutes represented something of an archive fever, as Derrida called the obsession with a particular aspect of the past (Derrida, 1995). Archiving, in its own way, is a betrayal of a historical document, as it is taken out of its context and placed into a very different, artificial one. In his book *We, the People,* Albie Sachs describes his experience with "archive fever" during the process of the TRC. Based on his experience, he categorised four ways of arriving at the truth: 1) microscopic (facts, reliable and credible evidence), 2) logical (analysis, inference), 3) experiential (drawn from storytelling), and 4) dialogical (truth enriched by acknowledgment, empathy, understanding) (Sachs, 2016, s. 94–96). It is the latter two, he claims, that are essential for the full truth — constructive and restorative truth — to emerge. Documents alone, however accurate, are powerless to tell the story outside of their original context: they depend on the context from which they are taken, and if that context is an archive of documents on former collaborators, the narrative structure of interpretation of each document is shaped by that context. The archive prescribes the skeleton of the story through the new context it gives to the documents.

The same dilemma has played out even more strongly around the processes of lustration and the access to and research of the files of state security agents and the subjects pursued by the agency. The Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), the Slovak Nation's Memory Institute (ÚPN), modelled after the IPN, and the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ÚSTR) are founded upon that dilemma. They are known to the public for the microscopic truth — most often for providing evidence about well-known personalities' links to the former State Security (as those are the cases most likely to be covered in the media). It is cases like those of Lech Wałesa, Andrej Babiš, Milan Kundera, or Ján Budaj that people associate with the work of these institutes.

In that sense perhaps Sachs is correct. Even if the memory institutes were flawlessly designed and even if they contained a perfect archive of fully reliable documents (which they cannot), they are not able to function in a social vacuum, much less in an environment ripe with political conflict and pursuit of specific agendas that utilise the microscopic truth to produce narrative projectiles for their battles — for instance, the search for dirt on political opponents, as often happens as elections approach. The memory institutes do in-depth

cultural anthropological research and oral history projects which do give context, and offer experiential truth, but as institutions they are embedded in the partitocracies that control their leadership and at times fight over the content of their work and seek to influence it.

## UNFREEZING THE MEMORY REGIMES?

It is notable that winds of change started blowing in both regions at approximately the same time. Perhaps it is a function of generational change, which, even if it does not show yet in public opinion polls – the generation of "Born Frees" not diverging significantly in their attitudes and value orientations from those of their parents and grandparents (especially in South Africa) — strong voices are emerging from their midst that do exert pressure on established narratives of the past and present, and are pushing for their reconfiguration.

In South Africa, these voices have been most often heard in the hashtag movements of the recent past (#RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, #WhitenessMustFall, etc.), which have also inspired broader civic protests as #UniteBehind or #ZumaMustFall. The Rhodes Must Fall campaign, which prefigured the other hashtag movements, sought to remove statues of Cecil Rhodes, perceived as a stark reminder of colonialism, from university campuses. The movement led to the opening of the question of the interpretation of the past, in which student leaders also rejected the reconciliation narrative as false, and focused attention on decolonisation of the curricula, the Black Consciousness movement, and questions of social and economic equality that stem from the colonial (not only apartheid) past. As such, many of its leaders also rejected the idea of the rainbow nation and non-racialism which lay at the root of the reconciliation narrative and are embedded in the constitution. They were perceived as artificial and removed from reality, a product of negotiations and thus of "selling out" by ANC leaders.

The student movements had international links as well. They were greatly influenced by the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA, and have drawn inspiration from the debates there, especially the focus on intersectionality, introducing topics of LGBT equality, feminism and focus on toxic masculinity, etc. These topics have survived the protest movements. The pressure for decolonisation has also led to the opening of the quest for Western universities to examine own role in colonisation, with Oxford University joining in recently (Adams, 2019). These pressures led to a gradual opening of debates on the process of transition and reconciliation, at least in the public fora organised by non-governmental organisations and universities.

In Central Europe, there have also been mass protests featuring the "Born Free" generation, driven by corruption (#SkutokSaStal, the Great Anti-Corruption March in Slovakia), or resistance against the election and rights-curbing policies of populist governments.

These protests have also taken on the current governments' relationship with the past — in the Czech Republic, people protested the composition of the Babiš government, which included several former high-ranking Communist Party members, as well as State Security members and agents (Babiš included). The Slovak public's outcry against corruption also focused on crimes perpetrated during the wild early years of Mečiarism, such as the kidnapping of the then president's son and the subsequent murder of an intermediary connected to the investigation. The second wave of mass protests, the largest in terms of numbers since 1989, followed the murder of an investigative journalist and his fiancée in February 2018. A series of protests organised by high school and university students prompted a major reshuffle in the government, with the prime minister and interior minister being forced to resign. Several things "unfroze" as a consequence – the amnesty for crimes in the case of the kidnapping,

issued by Mečiar himself, was revoked by parliament after twenty years (having been deemed untouchable for many years), and three high-ranking oligarchs with strong political connections are currently standing trial for corruption, for the first time in Slovak history.

Students took on the legacy of November 1989, and in other instances, by facing the anniversary of the fascist Slovak State and organising anti-radicalisation marches, the legacy of the Slovak National Uprising. However, it is worth noting that the historical narrative woven by this generational cohort certainly does not draw on official sources of memory, least of all the education system. They relate to the past *despite* what they have been taught in school, and in their own reconfiguration of historical narratives ascribe the events meaning and significance in the light of their own current lived reality and priorities.

## CONCLUSION

Memory regimes seems to follow a sort of cosmic, global rhythm of history rather than the fickle and ever-changing local context. Memory regimes are established at epochal moments of regime change, and in themselves are tied to that cosmic time, interdependent within the broader scheme of relations and processes. Being etched into founding covenants, legislation, and school textbooks, they become long-lasting value- and normative-structures, lasting generations.

On the question of whether we are now witnessing a reconfiguration of the memory regimes in South Africa and central Europe, the answer must tend towards the negative. There are certainly signs of movement in the frozen structures of memory regimes, at least recently in South Africa and Slovakia (less so in Poland and Hungary). But this is not enough, so far, to topple or significantly shift the prevailing structures that define the existing memory regimes. Much will depend on developments in the domestic political scenes, on success (or lack thereof) in combatting corruption and in loosening the grip of political parties on memory regime narratives, on the degree of access allowed to a multiplicity of actors to interpret the past and engage in dialogue about it, and on the success of educational reform to realise the potential of a quality education for historical understanding based on inquiry, multi-perspectivity, and ethics. The structures that have frozen the memory regimes in South Africa and central Europe remain intact, and have been since the onset of the transition.

However, cosmic time will bring new movements, for example by challenging the current global wave of apocalyptic populism, which has also touched these two regions, or will bring a wave which we cannot yet foretell. The biological necessity of generational change completes the conditions for reconfiguration of memory regimes.

This is not to advocate for apathy and resignation to fate, or to say that change in memory regimes requires revolution. Rather, what is required is to insist on the dialogical truth, to continue to focus on the end-goal of a just society, and to work towards the kind of legislative and institutional design where plurality of narratives, within the bounds of rigorous research and processes of justice, can coexist.

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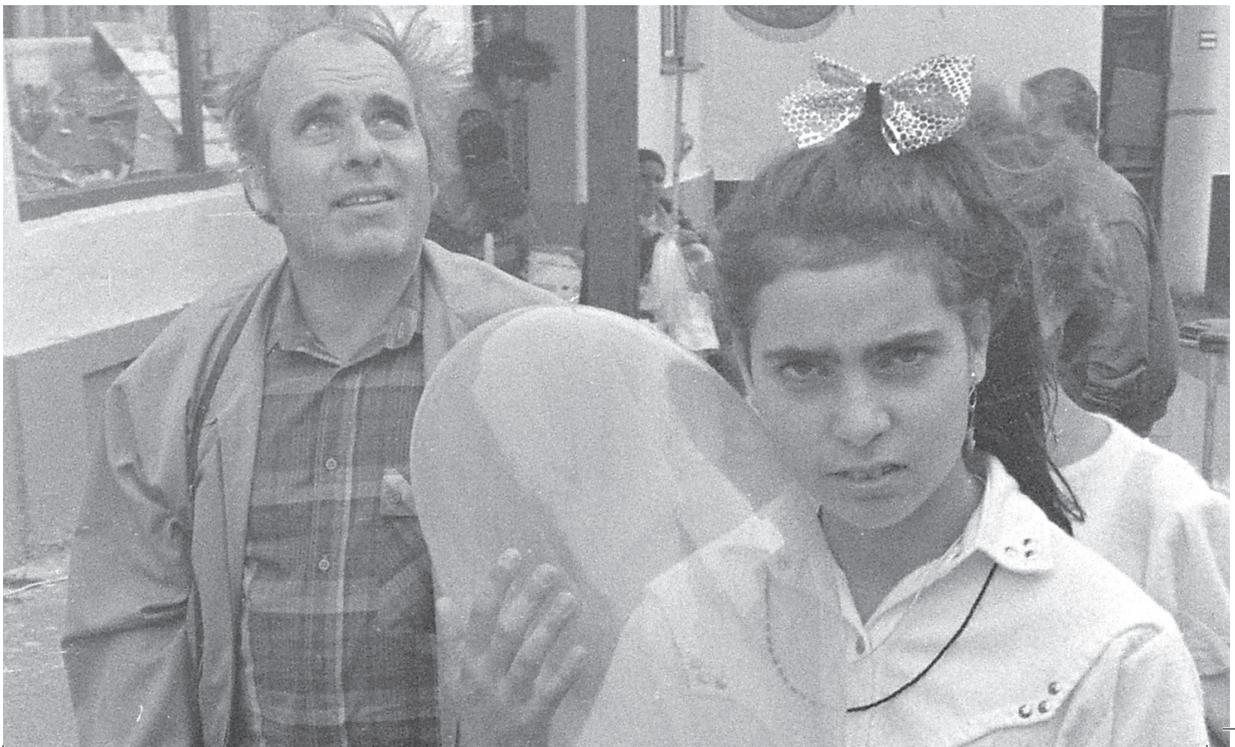
# "Unpolitical Politics" as an Antidote to the Dominance of the Crowd? Some Kierkegaardian Reflections

**Peter Šajda**

**ABSTRACT**

*This paper deals with the issue of the crowd as a decisive phenomenon in modern politics. I examine Søren Kierkegaard's reflections on this phenomenon, which have received substantial attention in the political philosophy of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I focus on the three models of social involvement in Kierkegaard's treatise "The Single Individual", which are embodied in the figures of the professional leader of the crowd, the truth-witness, and the politician who loves being a human being and loves humankind. I explore the motives, stances, activities, and goals of these figures and I analyse their attitudes to the single individual, the crowd, and politics in general. My investigation is done against the background of Martin Buber's claim that Kierkegaard demands that the single individual distance himself from politics and renounce any ambition to shape it.*

*Keywords:* the crowd, the single individual, politics, religion, truth

The crowd is a phenomenon that continuously occupies the minds of political thinkers. The discussion about the nature, dynamic and different forms of the crowd is relevant not only in turbulent revolutionary periods but also in seemingly quiet and stable times, because it is precisely the crowd that can swiftly and dramatically change the atmosphere in society. Søren Kierkegaard belongs to those nineteenth-century authors who described the rise of the crowds in the late 1840s and whose insights found strong resonance among the political thinkers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In 1950 Carl Schmitt claimed that Kierkegaard's writings from the late 1840s are "the greatest and most extreme critique of the age" (Schmitt, 2002, p.110) and that this critique is "more incisive than any other" (Schmitt, 2002, p. 112). Theodor W. Adorno emphasised the accuracy and prophetic nature of Kierkegaard's social criticism when he suggested that in the assemblies of the late 1840s Kierkegaard "seems to have heard those loudspeakers which filled the Berlin Sportpalast one hundred years later" (Adorno, 1939–1940, p. 424).[1] And Hubert L. Dreyfus preferred Kierkegaard's observations from the 1840s to the much more recent analyses of Jürgen Habermas when he maintained that "while Habermas is concerned to recapture the moral and political virtues of the Public Sphere, Kierkegaard brilliantly sees that there is no way to salvage the Public Sphere since,

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unlike concrete groups and crowds, it was from the start the source of leveling" (Dreyfus, 1999, pp. 99–100).

While Kierkegaard's reflections on the nature of the crowd and its role in modern society have been positively received by a number of later thinkers, they have also been harshly criticised. In 1936 Martin Buber looked for inspiration in Kierkegaard when confronting the contemporary rise of crowds but concluded that Kierkegaard's prophetic critique of the crowd paralyses itself, as its last word is the imperative of political non-involvement (Buber, 2002).[2] In an age when Europe was experiencing the rise of totalitarian collectivist movements, namely Nazism and Communism, Buber considered this imperative a tragic mistake. Buber's assessment of Kierkegaard's social criticism has two poles: first, Kierkegaard correctly described the degenerative trends of modern society dominated by crowds; second, he reacted to them in a self-defeating way when he demanded that the single individual stay away from politics and focus on the ethical-religious sphere of inwardness. Thus, Buber agrees with the above-mentioned thinkers on the accuracy of Kierkegaard's *diagnosis* of contemporary society but criticises the lack of a viable proposal for social *reorientation*, which largely disqualifies Kierkegaard as a social and political thinker.[3]

The main target of Buber's criticism is Kierkegaard's treatise "*The Single Individual*"[4] which describes the existential stance of the single individual in sharp contradistinction to modern politics that is ruled by the will of the crowd. Buber pays close attention to Kierkegaard's *criticism of politics* and argues that it prevents the single individual from initiating an open confrontation with the crowd and demands that he distance himself from political affairs and give up the ambition to shape them (Buber, 2002, pp. 47–51; Buber, 2002, p. 75). I will argue that Buber's interpretation is problematic because it does not take into account several crucial moments of Kierkegaard's vision of the formation of social and political life. I will examine this vision by analysing three models of social involvement that I have identified in the treatise "*The Single Individual*."[5] These models are embodied in three figures that represent different approaches to social and political affairs. Their analysis will show

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2    See especially the chapter "The Single One and the Body Politic," pp. 67–75. I analyse Buber's political critique of Kierkegaard in more depth in my monograph *Buberov spor s Kierkegaardom. O vzťahu náboženstva k etike a politike* [Buber's Polemic with Kierkegaard: On the Relation of Religion to Ethics and Politics], Bratislava: Kalligram 2013. Buber's conception of the I-Thou relation, from which his criticism of Kierkegaard is derived, is explored in more detail in Michal Bizoň, "O vzájomnosti a vzťahu Ja-Ty u Martina Bubera," *Filozofia*, vol. 69, no. 7, pp. 569–580.

3    A similar interpretation can be found in Karl Jaspers. See his *Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, 5th ed., Berlin/Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter 1933, pp. 10–11; "Nachwort (1955) zu meiner „Philosophie" (1931)," in his *Philosophie*, vols. 1 – 3, Berlin et al.: Springer 1956, vol. 1, p. xx. For more detail on Jaspers' relation to Kierkegaard see István Czakó, "Karl Jaspers. a Great Awakener's Way to Philosophy of Existence," in *Kierkegaard and Existentialism* (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, zv. 9), ed. by Jon Stewart, Aldershot: Ashgate 2011, pp. 155–197. As for recent papers on Kierkegaard as a social diagnostician see especially Dan Conway, "Reflections on Late Modernity: Kierkegaard in the 'Present Age'," in *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell 2015, pp. 399–412; J. Michael Tilley, "Prolegomena for Thinking of Kierkegaard as a Social and Political Philosopher," in *A Companion to Kierkegaard*, pp. 480–489.

4    The treatise "*The Single Individual*" is a supplement to Kierkegaard's work *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*. It was written in the late 1840s and published posthumously in 1859.

5    For my treatment of these models of social involvement in Slovak see my article "Štyri modely spoločenskej angažovanosti v Kierkegaardovej rozprave *Jedinec*," *Filozofia*, vol. 71, no. 4, 2016, pp. 282–291.

that Kierkegaard's aim is not merely to reject the negative dynamics of modern politics but also to stimulate efforts leading to their correction and to the positive formation of social and political life.

## 1. THE PROFESSIONAL LEADER OF THE CROWD

In the centre of Kierkegaard's criticism of modern politics is the figure of the professional leader of the crowd. This figure embodies a model of social involvement that programmatically negates the political relevance of the individual. Kierkegaard maintains that no one has greater disdain for the individual and for individual human existence than the one who has made the leadership of the crowd his livelihood (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 108). The professional leader of the crowd is indifferent to the demands of individual people, because he deems them politically irrelevant. His interest in an individual person would not increase his power potential, and therefore he refuses to get involved on behalf of individuals. His interest in a political demand increases in proportion to the number of people that subscribe to it.

Leadership of the crowd is an attractive life path in modern society, as it provides a large degree of power and does not require demanding professional training. It does not require special talents, formation or education. If someone is to take charge of the crowd it suffices if he has "some talent, a certain dose of untruth, and a little familiarity with human passions" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 109).

A political leader gains the favour of the crowd by placing it into the position of the decisive authority on truth (Kierkegaard, 1998, pp. 108–109). His point of departure is the claim that there is no truth that the crowd cannot decide on. The will of the crowd is the determining criterion for what is to be accepted as generally valid truth or untruth: other authorities on truth lose their relevance. The voice of the people becomes the divine authority of truth. Attributing unlimited decision-making competence to the crowd means that there are no *untouchable* truths. The crowd deals with truth as it pleases. Each truth is contingent, there is no necessary truth that the crowd would *have to* accept. It is not bound by any *supratemporal* or *a priori* truths. No external source of truth is binding for the crowd. As regards the hierarchy of truths, the crowd is a competent decision-making authority on every level. It is qualified to make decisions not only about common everyday truths but also about logical, ethical or religious truths (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 106; Kierkegaard, 1998, pp. 109–110). The method of decision-making is the application of the weight of the majority, especially by means of voting.

When Kierkegaard describes the crowd he emphasises the fact that he does not speak about a social class or stratum. The crowd can arise in any social environment, be it among workers, bankers or noblemen. The constitutive factor of the crowd is the rule of the numerical: "'crowd' is number, the numerical…as soon as the numerical is operative, it is 'crowd,' 'the crowd'" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 107). The rule of the numerical changes the thinking of the individual, who renounces personal responsibility "by becoming many" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 112). He is integrated into the collective of the many by reducing himself to a specimen. The collective is "higher than the individual or…there are only specimens, not individuals" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 107).[6]

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6 The psychological aspects of an individual's escape into the crowd are examined by Antony Aumann in his "Kierkegaard on Indirect Communication, the Crowd, and a Monstrous Illusion," in *The Point of View* (*International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 22), ed. by Robert L. Perkins. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press 2010, pp. 305–311. The characteristics of an indivdual who resists the crowd are analyzed in Milan Petkanič, "O vášni ako vôli k existencii," *Filozofia*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2013, pp. 62–73.

The qualitative aspect of the numerical is decisive for the formation of the crowd. If a crowd is to be formed, individual persons must gather, but the gathering itself is not sufficient for the constitution of a crowd. There are even large gatherings which are not crowds (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 106).[7] The crowd is constituted first when the gathering is marked by the dynamic in which an individual person "escapes into the crowd and thus cowardly avoids being the single individual" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 108). The renouncing of independent decision making and the attribution of the authority of truth to the crowd is a qualitative existential change, through which an individual becomes part of the crowd. Kierkegaard illustrates this dynamic with an example adopted from Plutarch's biography of the Roman politician and military leader Gaius Marius. Plutarch explains that after Marius' capture and imprisonment on Sulla's orders no one was willing to kill the famous commander. Even a barbarian cavalryman, the only one to attempt it, lost his courage when he entered Marius' cell (Plutarch, 1959, pp. 568–575). Kierkegaard argues that what no individual soldier was able to do, a small group of civilians would be capable of, if they formed a crowd. Due to the rule of the numerical they would be able to act in a way that they would never act individually. They would kill Marius in the conviction that no one would ever find out who did it. No specific person would be responsible for Marius' death; he would be killed by an anonymous crowd (Kierkegaard, 1998, pp. 107–108). The dissolution of individual responsibility and acting in a cowardly way in the name of a group are characteristic signs of crowd mentality.

The professional leader of the crowd supports the dynamic of the crowd and dissuades individual persons from acting independently as single individuals. He prompts them to escape into the crowd, because the quantitative growth of the crowd increases his power. Any initiative that aims to emancipate individuals from the crowd weakens his position, therefore he attempts to suppress it.

Although Kierkegaard discusses professional leadership of the crowd primarily in connection with politics, his reflections can be applied also to the sphere of mass media. Kierkegaard points out that the modern daily press created a new type of abstract crowd which did not previously exist: *the public*. The journalist promotes the public as the decisive authority on truth (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 110) while pursuing a goal similar to that of the political leader of the crowd. The journalist does not set any limits on the authority of the public and promotes its decisions on truth in any area. He presents himself as the spokesman of public opinion, which gives him great power, since he speaks in the name of an invisible human collective that gives the impression of being enormous. The dynamic of the crowd spreads in contemporary daily press also due to the fact that newspapers are keen to publish anonymous texts, whose authors dare to say things they would never say in a signed contribution (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 110). Cowardly messages, for which no one takes responsibility, are swiftly transmitted to the anonymous reading public which daily provides the press with both attention and financial support.

## 2. THE TRUTH–WITNESS

The model of social involvement embodied by the figure of the truth–witness is characterised by an ambivalent relation to politics. The truth–witness's motivation is religious, not political, but his social involvement necessarily has political consequences. This figure is both *unpolitical* and *political*: the truth–witness distances himself from common crowd-oriented politics, but

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7    From the Kierkegaardian point of view it is the dynamic of the gathering and its approach to truth that are decisive.

his activity is directly repugnant to the goals pursued by the leader of the crowd. The social involvement of these two figures is in tension and their efforts negate each other.

The truth-witness is primarily interested in the individual and his ambition is to promote the existential stance of individual responsibility. The truth-witness's religiously motivated *activism* endangers the position of a politician, whose power depends on the formation and propagation of the crowd. Kierkegaard describes the truth-witness's dual approach to politics as follows: "The truth–witness — who of course has nothing to do with politics and does his utmost to see to it that he is not confused with a politician — is to become involved with everyone if possible, but always individually, is to speak with each one individually…in order to split up a crowd or to speak to a crowd, not in order to form a crowd but in order that one or two individuals might go home from the gathering and become the single individual" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 109). The truth–witness refuses to be directly involved in everyday politics, but he shapes it by programmatically hindering the formation of the crowd and contributing to the dissolution of the crowd that has already been formed. He actively approaches both individuals and gatherings of people, and his social involvement has a broad impact.

The truth–witness's key attitude is that he does not recognise the crowd as an unlimited authority on truth. The leader of the crowd knows only contingent temporal truths, which are arbitrarily determined by the crowd. The truth–witness distinguishes between temporal and eternal truths, to which different decision-making authorities apply. He acknowledges that in the sphere of temporal truths and goals the will of the majority can be a legitimate decision-making criterion and that everyday political problems can be legitimately solved by means of voting. He considers it, however, unacceptable to transpose the numerical decision-making model into "the realms of the intellectual, the spiritual, and the religious" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 109). He does not recognise the decision-making competence of the crowd in these areas and considers the leader of the crowd, who eliminates the dividing line between temporal and eternal truths, to be an instrument of untruth. Since the truth–witness's activism is primarily religious, Kierkegaard focuses on *ethical-religious* eternal truth and does not pay closer attention to *intellectual* eternal truth.

The truth–witness builds his existence on the conviction that God "is the truth and its middle term" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 111). God is *personal*, therefore neither the religious nor the ethical moment of the communication of eternal truth can have an *impersonal* character. God relates only to the single individual, never to the crowd, therefore the single individual is *truth* and the crowd is *untruth*. Similarly, in interpersonal relationships, in which God is present as the middle term, the communication of ethical–religious truth takes place only between the single individual and his neighbor, never in the framework of impersonal abstractions, such as the crowd and the public. The basic ethical-religious imperative has a personal character — *You shall love the neighbor!*, not *You shall love the crowd!* — therefore the governing principle of the truth-witness's social involvement is unconditional respect for every human being (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 111).[8] This principle is the basis for genuine humanity and promotion of human equality. In the case of the truth-witness it is not realised in an explicitly political way: it does not prompt him to formulate a political program or organise political activity.

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8    Kierkegaard explores the Biblical commandment of neighbor-love in great depth in his *Works of Love*. He compares *nonpreferential* neighbor-love to *preferential* romantic love and friendship. For a comprehensive account of Kierkegaard's doctrine of love see M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, New York: Oxford University Press 2001 and C. S. Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love. Divine Commands and Moral Obligations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004.

Although the truth-witness's social involvement has substantial political consequences, there is an *unpolitical* moment at its core which is connected to the religious character of his mission. The truth — witness is a disciple of Jesus Christ, who is "the truth which relates itself to the single individual" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 109). Christ's historical mission did not have a political character. He did not seek the favour of the crowd, he did not form a political platform, and he did not enter into the political disputes of his age. He refused to represent the political interests of his people. In this sense also the truth-witness becomes "nothing in the world" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 103) and from the common political perspective his approach appears as "the peak of impracticality" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 103). Such a perception is, however, based on the false premise that social involvement which is not motivated politically and does not use political means does not affect practical politics.

## 3. THE POLITICIAN WHO "LOVES BEING A HUMAN BEING AND LOVES HUMANKIND"

The third model of social involvement is represented by a figure which Kierkegaard describes only in broad strokes but introduces at the very beginning of the treatise. It is the politician who "loves being a human being and loves humankind" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 103). This politician is a political rival of the professional leader of the crowd and his activity can be a transposition of the truth–witness's ethical–religious approach into the sphere of everyday politics. The dream of the politician who loves humankind is *true humanity*, which is manifested in the promotion of *human equality* (Kierkegaard, 1998, pp. 103–104). This politician views an individual person as a goal *per se*, not as a mere means to acquire political power. He approaches the individual with *love* and pays attention to his requests regardless of how much support they have in wider society. His interest in the individual is not limited to the personal level, it is also an integral part of his policymaking. The politician, who loves humankind, takes an active part in everyday political affairs and both his agenda and means are political. His political activity does not have an explicitly religious character; it is realised in a secular framework.

The problem of the social involvement of this politician is that it is characterised by a contradiction: the dream of human equality cannot be fulfilled by means of worldly politics (Kierkegaard, 1998, pp. 103–104). The essential features of worldliness are differentiation and temporality, neither of which can form a basis for the achievement of equality. It is impossible to derive from them a principle that would, under any circumstances, stipulate that all people are equal and would motivate them to act accordingly. Worldliness does not enable the actualisation of the idea of equality and it does not even enable one to "think [it] through… to the ultimate consequences" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 103). Worldly politics therefore resorts to enforcing equality with means of power, thereby completing the failure of its effort to realise its most beautiful dream.

Kierkegaard presumes that the contradiction between dream and reality prompts the politician who loves humankind to re-evaluate his positions and seek an alternative approach to the realisation of his dream. Kierkegaard proposes such an approach and is convinced that if the politician becomes acquainted with it he will recognise its relevance, even if at first he will deem it overly idealistic and impractical. The essence of the proposal is the thesis that "the religious is eternity's transfigured rendition of the most beautiful dream of politics" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 103).[9] Religion and politics, whose point of departure is love for humankind, pursue the same goal: human equality as a fundamental expression of humanity. Their

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9    When Kierkegaard speaks about *religion* and *the religious* he only thinks of Christianity.

approaches to achieve the goal are different, as politics approaches it from the perspective of temporality and religion from the perspective of eternity. The starting point of religion is the conviction that God, who is *eternal* truth, addresses the single individual as the subject of truth and is present as a middle term in the single individual's relationships with others. This presence motivates the single individual to relate to others in the way God relates to them: with unconditional love. The imperative of neighbour–love transforms not only the single individual's perception and action, but also broader social relations: "*The neighbour* is the absolutely true expression for human equality. If everyone in truth loved the neighbour as himself, then perfect human equality would be achieved unconditionally. Everyone who in truth loves the neighbour expresses human equality unconditionally; everyone who, even if he confesses, as I do, that his striving is weak and imperfect, is still aware that the task is to love the neighbour, he is also aware of what human equality is" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 111).

The imperative of neighbour–love is the thinking–through of the idea of human equality to its ultimate consequences and an impulse to a voluntary realisation of this idea. Since it is anchored in eternity it is not determined by the contemporary social–political situation. Once the single individual adopts it, he acquires a stable guiding principle, on the basis of which he is able to determine which action leads to human equality. This imperative is an effective force in forming society and enables the realisation of the dream of human equality without political enforcement. The realisation of the imperative always has a personal character, and the promotion of human equality is a participation in the common project of all those who are guided by this imperative.

Kierkegaard maintains that the age of crowds, which is marked by a multitude of disputes in the sphere of worldliness, supresses eternity. It is, however, unable to eliminate it and the more it rejects it, the more it needs it: "[W]hat the times in the deepest sense *need* can be totally and completely expressed in one single word — the times need: eternity. The misfortune of our age is precisely that it has become merely *time* by itself, temporality" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 104). The imperative of neighbour–love is an *eternal* ethical–religious truth which can become a significant factor of social reorientation. Common politics, which is derived from the will of the crowd and does not recognise eternal truths, regards this imperative as unacceptable. Kierkegaard can, however, conceive of politics that would adopt it and abide by it in practical decisions. In the context of the age of crowds it would appear paradoxical and its approaches would be in conflict with predominant political approaches. By subordinating the authority of the crowd to the authority of eternal truth it would necessarily be at odds with the crowd–oriented politics. Kierkegaard denotes this kind of politics as *the most unpolitical politics*: "A politics that in the sense of *eternal truth* was in earnest about carrying *eternal truth* into actuality would to the highest degree immediately show itself to be the most 'unpolitical' that can be imagined" (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 110).

The key contribution of *the most unpolitical politics* would be the opening of a way to the solution of the contradiction that paralyses the efforts of the politician who loves humankind. It would anchor the original motive for the love of humankind in eternity and thereby provide it with stability. The individual politician's motivation would become an imperative of general social involvement. The *unpoliticality* of such politics would consist in the rejection of the political logic created by the professional leaders of the crowd that dominate the age of crowds. The rejection would be unconditional, as such logic excludes the possibility of the existence of eternal truth and thus makes the realisation of the dream of human equality impossible.

The recognition of the validity of eternal truth that is not derived from the will of the

crowd would bring the politician who loves humankind into the vicinity of the truth-witness's sphere of action. These two figures are connected by the ethical–religious principle of unconditional respect for every individual person. They are also connected by the effort to limit the social influence of the crowd. They differ, however, in their approach to everyday political affairs: while the truth-witness influences politics *from outside*, the politician who loves humankind influences it *from inside*. Kierkegaard does not provide concrete clues about how he imagines the latter's practical political agenda.

## 4. CONCLUSION

All three models of social involvement have a political dimension, while two of them also contain an imperative of unpoliticality. Kierkegaard identifies the first model, which does not have an unpolitical dimension, with the prevalent political *status quo* and considers it unambiguously negative. His *critique of politics* concerns this model. By contrast, he presents the third model, which is also explicitly political, in a mostly positive light. He points out, however, its inner contradiction, which needs to be resolved if it is to represent a political counterbalance to the first model. He describes the basic nature of the resolution but does not provide the specifics of the political line to be followed by the corrected model. The main social goal of the second model is to promote the existential stance of individual responsibility. This model is in conflict with the first but its opposition is not motivated politically, but ethically and religiously. The religious moment which is rooted in discipleship dissuades the individual from participation in daily politics but prompts him to social involvement, with obvious political consequences. From the point of view of the first model, radical religious activism which splits up the crowd can be even more dangerous than direct political rivalry. Both the second and the third model fulfil Buber's requirement of active confrontation with the crowd. Despite the fact that neither contains a complex proposal of social-political reorientation, both emphasise the *need* for it. Buber's critique does not take into account these two models and reduces Kierkegaard's vision of social–political life to the first model. This reductionism is strange precisely because Buber's requirement of social–political reorientation is in line with the one proposed by Kierkegaard.

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# The Material Impossibility of Public Participation: The Historical and Material Precedents of Contemporary Populism

**Jude T. Macannuco**

## ABSTRACT

*In recent decades, the West has witnessed the rise of various "populist" insurgencies that have challenged the hegemony of established liberal and social democratic parties. Much debate and academic scholarship has circulated about the meaning and nature of populism and those who claim or are alleged to represent it. Populism has often been perceived to be inherently anti-democratic and, more broadly, a threat. But the history of populist movements, or movements that claim to represent the "people" and its voice, paints a different picture. Populist movements in North America and Europe have often established or reinvigorated democratic societies. Using the examples of the French and American Revolutions and the populism that attended them, this essay argues that populism can serve to reassert the interests of the people in political contexts have ceased to acknowledge these interests. Using an Arendtian and Marxist framework, this essay will also assert the significance of class-based organising and citizen participation in the rejuvenation or establishment of democratic polities. In this sense, this essay will attempt to offer a more positive perception of populist movements in the context of contemporary liberal democracies.*

*Keywords:*        populism, revolution, Arendt, Marx, democracy

## INTRODUCTION

Within the past decade, so-called "populist" movements have garnered mass electoral support in the West, challenging established centre-left and centre–right parties in federal and municipal elections. In their rhetoric, these mostly right-wing movements address "the people", who face increasingly burdensome economic and social conditions and who feel alienated from a representative system perceived to be unresponsive (Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016, p. 336). US presidential candidate Bernie Sanders' anti-billionaire rhetoric emblematises one application of this political tactic: simply put, he speaks to an American public discontent with economic stagnation and directs this anger towards a tangible culprit. Alongside the rise of populist parties and movements, the term "populist" has become somewhat of a term of abuse. Liberal academics and commentators, such as Jan-Werner Müller, deride populism as inherently irrational or undemocratic without investigating the material conditions underpinning its emergence. They fail to adequately account for, in Mudde's (2018) own terms, liberal democracy's "oligarchic tendencies".

It is clear to these thinkers that ordinary citizens do not have ready access to political life. Hannah Arendt (1963) recognises this political alienation in her analysis of revolution and locates the crisis of modern Western democracy in the failure to institutionalise a public realm that permits the exercise of public power. Her analysis is helpful in understanding the current crisis, though it falls short in forming a full comprehension of populism's rise. A Marxist framework of the state as an instrument of class dominance provides fertile theoretical grounds for analysing liberal democracy's undemocratic tendencies and its relation to contemporary populism. Indeed, the question of how to defuse populism ultimately becomes a question of whom the liberal democratic state *structurally* serves, the role that liberal democracy envisions for the public, or the "people", and whether populism as such should be defused at all. Furthermore, Georges Lefebvre's text *The French Revolution* applies this Marxist framework to the French and American Revolutions, providing a historical analysis that empirically demonstrates the Marxist theory of states as inherently representing the interests of a dominant class. Utilising these theoretical and historical frameworks, it is possible to comprehend the contemporary populist insurgency as not merely an ideological problem, or an ideal one, but a crisis born of material circumstances which are structurally inscribed into liberal democracy itself, and which are intrinsically related to social and economic class. Thus, class-based political organising emerges as the historical and contemporary expression of this class conflict, and it can be found in contemporary populist movements as well. These populist movements, therefore, could embody the citizenry's attempted reassertion of power in public political life.

## HISTORICAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF PUBLIC CITIZENS

Arendt's analysis of the French and American Revolutions provides insight into the perceived roles of citizens in the modern liberal state as viewed via the lens of former revolutionaries, illuminating the formally political separation between the "people" and those who claim to represent them. Arendt (1963) asserts that the American Revolution was partially successful because it generated a lasting "body politic", enshrined in the Constitution (p. 126). It failed in that it did not enshrine a public realm into that Constitution. She cites the townships of the American colonies, which provided a localised framework for the expression of political demands that was "lacking in the Old World" (p. 166). In addition, the American Constitution which arose from the Revolutionary War failed to incorporate these townships into American federal governance; indeed, "by virtue of the Constitution, the public business of the nation as a whole had been transferred to Washington" (p. 251). Furthermore, even the state governments of the United States were too "large and unwieldy" to effectively incorporate "public participation" into the political realm: power was placed in the "delegates" that the people sent to represent them, not in the people itself (p. 251). In this regard, the American Constitution ultimately fails for Arendt, in that the townships, which guaranteed the so-called "revolutionary spirit" of the revolution itself, were not enshrined within it. Jefferson, she points out, was aware of this oversight and called for the subdivision of the American republic into "wards" which were "not meant to strengthen the power of the many but the power of 'every one', … and only by breaking up 'the many' into assemblies where everyone could count and be counted upon" would the new American state be as "republican" as possible (p. 254). The townships served as the "elementary republics" of these wards (p. 250). Furthermore, Arendt argues that Jefferson knew that "the 'salvation of the republic' actually was the salvation of the revolutionary spirit through the republic" (p. 251). Though he advocated for the installation of a public sphere in which citizens could participate, he still maintained that "public power"

in a republic could easily "trespass upon private interests", which could be remedied through the protection of "private property" (p. 252). Hence, Jefferson insisted on the Bill of Rights, which instilled property rights into the Constitution (p. 252). Arendt goes on to compare and contrast the townships to the *sociétés populaires* of revolutionary France. While the townships emerged prior to the revolution, and thereby informed its "revolutionary spirit", the French popular societies sprang up spontaneously in the course of the Revolution. Detached from any particular legislative body, these groups served as spaces in which the people could, according to Robespierre, engage together in France's public issues (Arendt, 1963.). Like the townships, the *sociétés populaires* were a public space that allowed citizens to exercise their political or public freedom. They were also not institutionalised by the revolutionary government, for Robespierre, their original supporter, betrayed them as head of the new revolutionary government in France in 1793, claiming that they inhibited the formation of a single French "people" (p. 241). Thus, Jefferson and Robespierre, before his change of heart, advocated, like Arendt, for a public space of assembly in which citizens, i.e., the "people" or "everyone", could engage in politics freely. In Jefferson's case, though he advocated for the ward system, he still viewed public power as an intrinsic danger to the state and private interests, something which would emerge in the Marxist analysis of the state as inherently unfavourable to the liberation of the masses. Robespierre simply undid his ties to the *sociétés populaires*, despite originally advocating for a people's assembly similar in function to the American townships. They both established a decisive separation between the body politic and the polity, because they failed to establish a lasting institution that protected public power.

Arendt's analysis of the historically contingent flaws of modern democracy hinges on an ideal notion of the state that prioritises the formal realm over that realm's content. Firstly, she prioritises the creation of a public sphere in which constituents can assemble freely and participate in politics. She provides a framework of democracy that functions for all citizens, in which the free mixing of ideas, complaints, and anxieties can somehow be translated into political action through public assembly. Her analysis, however, ultimately fails to go beyond the notion of a formal political realm, in that the systematisation of the body politic does not acknowledge the complex social relations within it. For Arendt, the failures of these post-revolution liberal democracies lie merely in the absence of a proper "public" in which citizens can voice their politics; she does not apply her analysis to the social and economic relations that co-determined the outcomes of these revolutions. Georges Lefebvre supplants Arendt's analysis through his awareness of the class interests of the revolutions' architects. Unlike Arendt, he does not characterise either of the revolutions as a success or a failure, but rather seeks to understand the underlying material and social relations that propelled the revolutions in the first place. Lefebvre's approach herein derives from the Marxist theory of the bourgeois state. This theory must be elaborated further.

## THE MARXIST CONCEPTION OF THE STATE

The classical Marxist conception of the state as an instrument of class dominance supplements the one-sidedness of Arendt's analysis. Marx and Engels (1970) denounce the idealist notion that the products of consciousness, such as thoughts and ideas, are the true "chains of men", and instead advocate for the examination of "real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live" (p. 42). By emphasising the study of "real individuals", they advocate for the analysis of the material relations of the individual, rather than beginning with ideas and applying them, subsequently, to individual relations. This approach contrasts

with Arendt's (1963) more idealistic method of analysing the state through the development of public thought and a "revolutionary spirit". On the liberal state, Marx and Engels (1970) contend that "to modern private property corresponds the modern state, which, purchased gradually by the owners of property by means of taxation, has fallen entirely into their hands through the national debt" (p. 79). They and Arendt converge when the former argue that "through the emancipation of private property from the community, the state has become a separate entity, alongside and outside civil society" (p. 80). Like Arendt, they here argue that the modern state has become alienated from civil society; however, they causally ascribe the alienation of the state from citizens to the expropriation private property from the "community", not to a mere institutional absence.

Furthermore, the property-owning bourgeoisie adopts the statist form of organisation to ensure "the mutual guarantee of their property and interests" (Marx and Engels, 1970, p. 80). Therefore, the bourgeois state is the modern state, of which Marx and Engels consider "North America" to be the best example (p. 80). More specifically, the modern liberal state has arisen as a result of bourgeois "organisation," whose goal is to protect bourgeois property and interests (Marx and Engels, 1970). Here, Jefferson's defence of the Bill of Rights and private property is placed into the web of economic social relations in which he existed. Jefferson was a landowner and slave owner whose interests lay, consequently, in the preservation of his property (Katz, 1976, p. 476). His role in the formation of the American state mirrors these interests, as he, like Arendt, believed the preservation of his property to be the protective force against too much public power. He effectively blocked more public access to the public sphere to protect his own property interests, and the property interests of other American landowners. While Arendt locates the failure of liberal democracy in the lack of a constitutionally ordained public, Marx and Engels recognise the role of material, and empirical economic and social relations in the formation of the state. He develops the notion of the state and the public by laying out its material and economic foundations. Such an approach supplements Arendt's, as it furnishes a material analysis of the world that uses the social formations of "real individuals" to diagnose the nature of the state.

## REVOLUTION, CLASS, AND CLASS ORGANISING

Within the American Revolution, Lefebvre identifies an ascendant bourgeoisie whose class interests shaped the formation of the American Republic, confirming the Marxist notion of the separateness of the state from civil society. For Lefebvre (1962), a crucial difference between the American colonies and England was the former's lack of a hereditary aristocracy. Thus, when the revolution cast off Britain's authority, "the gentry, including George Washington, lost its privileges", and the "sole defining characteristic of its members was the predominance of land in their patrimony" (p. 83). Therefore, this gentry's status could only be maintained through the protection of their land ownership. The gentry became defensive against the resentful "lower classes" and ensured this through a constitution that only allowed property owners to vote (Lefebvre, 1962). The writers of this constitution later represented over half of Washington's cabinet. Furthermore, landowners supported the constitution of a federal power to protect their interests should slave revolts arise (p. 84). From these developments of the then-nascent United States, there is no mistaking the inherently classed nature of its foundation, which remains to this day. The architects of the American Constitution wrote that document with the protection of their property as a political goal, as Jefferson's priorities demonstrate. The people as such, then, were never supposed to have a completely democratic

access point to their body politic. While Arendt argues that the Constitution was successful in creating a body politic by virtue of its durability, she ultimately ignores the material conditions of the real men who created it; she does not adequately identify the class relations that determine the institutions of a state. Arendt's belief that the formal institutionalisation of a public guarantee of political freedom ignores the material reality of the dominance of one class's interest over another's, which is inherently enshrined into the American constitution.

Lefebvre's text highlights the significance of class organisation among the three Estates – clergy, aristocracy, and the "Third", composed of both the bourgeoisie and the peasantry – as the determiner of state policy, thereby shedding more light on the role material relations and interests play in the formation and politics of a state. He begins with the French aristocracy's sometimes violent defiance of the French royal house when the latter decided to roll back noble privileges, such as low taxation. He deems the organisation of this privileged class a precedent, stating that "during these events privileged groups ... had acted together in forming propaganda and resistance organisations to protest royal authority" when royal government proposed the scaling back of noble privileges, such as low taxation (p. 97). Moreover, "these revolutionary precedents were not to be forgotten", as these same tactics — namely, class organisation in order to express a particular class interest — would be repeated in the "bourgeois" revolution (Lefebvre, 1962). An example of this organisation is the convention of the Estates–General of 1789, when the bourgeois representatives and delegates representing the Third Estate demanded voting by head rather than by order; they wanted each delegate's vote to count equally, as opposed to each order's majority vote counting equally. When the king refused to concede, the Estates–General refused to continue, and the proceedings reached an impasse. This impasse led to the break-away of the Third Estate from the Estates–General and the formation of the National Assembly, the political organ through which the Third Estate's grievances could be funnelled. This new assembly, which openly defied royal orders and whose power rested on the threat of popular unrest, frightened the other two orders enough that "resistance to the Third Estate disintegrated" (p. 110). Here, one sees again the role that class organisation plays in the reshaping of constellations of power. This organisation is inherently class–based, as the goals and aspirations of these movements conform to the material interests of the class in question. The bourgeoisie, aspiring to be on an equal footing with the aristocracy to further their economic goals, organised themselves into a coalition to achieve it. Through this coalition, they asserted their right to "public office regardless of distinction by birth", something originally conferred only on the nobility and clergy, and fiscal equality among the three orders (p. 100). They nonetheless largely ignored the demands of the peasantry in the beginning. Indeed, Lefebvre writes that "the people threatened aristocratic property along with aristocratic privileges, and bourgeois aspirations as well. But ... the populace did not have access to the Estates–General" (pp. 103–104). The bourgeoisie, a propertied class, had no interest in giving to the peasantry the political agency for which it vied; they were effectively blocked from France's primary electoral institution. This institution has of course altered immensely, but, nonetheless, corroborates Marx and Engels' conception of the bourgeois state as the instrument of the preservation of class interests.

Moreover, the organising of the bourgeois and the aristocracy aimed towards different political goals, but their underlying tactics remained similar; namely, they fought for, and largely achieved, these goals through rigorous organising and opposition to more privileged classes. This conclusion is simple, but crucial to understanding the roles of not just the organising of privileged groups in achieving their political objectives, but also in so-called

popular — or, today, "populist" — organising in the struggle for common political aspirations. In particular, the bourgeois revolution, which was buoyed by peasant agitation in the countryside, managed to ascribe a new role to the citizenry: active participation in politics, and the possibility to defy established authority. That notwithstanding, these movements were inherently classed in nature, and this quality underpinned the formulations of their interests and their political outcomes.

**CONTEMPORARY POPULISM: MÜLLER'S FORMULATION**

Müller's theory of populism rests upon an idealist theoretical framework that fails to account for the structural problems inherent in liberal democracy. He (2016) describes populism as an "exclusionary form of identity politics" which "tends to pose a danger to democracy" (p. 3). Furthermore, populism is a "*moralistic imagination of politics*" that constructs a political universe in which the "people" stand in absolute opposition to the "elites"; perhaps most significantly, populist politicians maintain the sole claim to the representation of this people (pp. 19–20). Müller characterises populism as inherently undemocratic and incompatible with democratic functioning, while dismissing populist claims as merely moral and illusory in nature. In arguing that populism constitutes an "imagination of politics," Müller discounts the legitimacy of so-called "populist" claims. Though he concedes that anti-elitism is at times valid and not a "sufficient condition" for defining populism, he seems to view the object of populist politics, namely elites and the people as constitutive and opposing political subjects, to be imaginary or unfounded (p. 2). Moreover, he treats populism as a "permanent shadow of modern democracy" rather than a historically particular political *reaction* to it (Müller, 2016, p. 11). The only legitimate solution for Müller (2018) is the inclusion of the "excluded" while keeping the "wealthy and powerful from opting out of the system": in essence, "a new social contract is needed" (p. 99). Müller's configuration and critique of populism as such ignores the material and political alienation of the "people" from the liberal state. In this sense, Müller starts out from an idealist, one-sided perspective that views the problem posed to liberal democracy by populism as a purely ideological one and poses a correspondingly ideal solution in the "social contract."

The revolutions described herein relate to contemporary populist movements in both their illumination of the classed nature of states and their disavowal of a complete public participation in politics. To reiterate, contemporary populist movements are characterised by appeals to popular discontent with liberal democratic failures. They often employ a nebulous notion of the "people" as a social entity pitted against powerful elites. Though they operate through the liberal democratic system of representative electoral politics, they in addition engage in grassroots organising tactics such as mass demonstrations, direct action, and the formation of non-party political groups, such as Bernie Sanders' Our Revolution. They therein attempt to fill both the void of ideas left by the lack of a "public" in which politics can be freely enacted, and the material inadequacy of governmental systems predicated on the domination of a landed class. Therefore, Müller's notion that a new "social contract" between the wealthy and powerful and the people can resolve the crisis posed by populism remains insufficient, because contemporary populist movements appeal to a popular disdain for elites, however they may be depicted. The preceding analysis of the revolutions in America and France expose these structurally undemocratic tendencies of liberal democracy, which remain in place today. Moreover, establishment parties or politicians which are perceived to represent the "elites" and do not emphasise the political and material needs of the "people" fail precisely because they remain, in action and ideology, in line with these structural problems.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

How, then, can liberal democracy adequately respond to the charges levied against it by populists? It is questionable whether it has the capacity to do so. An alternative could be the constitution of a public sphere in which political freedom can truly be enacted, something that the current system of representative electoral politics lacks. In this regard, populism ostensibly offers a solution to the disgruntled citizens of liberal democracies in that it can provide a platform for the representation of common anxieties and grievances that liberal democracy cannot adequately alleviate. This configuration of populism is formal; one must take the differences between left-wing and right-wing populists, and which group and which structural inadequacies they target, into consideration. Such distinctions, however, are not in the purview of this paper. Furthermore, the crux of these movements must be a grassroots, localised project of organising, which can give the "people" a stake in contemporary electoral politics. In other words, liberal democracy cannot inherently mitigate the crises of wealth inequality because, historically, it is predicated upon it. The question, then, remains: how can a populist tendency represent in its ideological content the material relations that underpin political life while prioritising the maintenance and introduction of a democratic polity?

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# Active Citizenship:
# A Challenge to the Political Orthodoxy?

**Stephen Oppong Peprah**

**ABSTRACT**

*Like in the previous century, there continues to be a confrontational relationship between most governments and their citizenries in the twenty-first century. Civil rights movements, political activism, and now social media have created frameworks and platforms to develop and improve the socio-political awareness of the citizenry to criticise, coordinate, and rebel against the government. Usually, the response of the government, despite the name, has been violence, including police brutality and victimisation of activists. In this paper, I attempt to use the social contract theory to offer a theoretical framework within which we can also understand this hostile relationship. In the social contract theory, government and civil society are conceptualised to assume superior moral and political authority over the citizenry. This traditional political arrangement, political orthodoxy, makes the citizens susceptible to victimisation and exploitation. It becomes evident that these political insurgencies and insurrections, like civil rights movements, are indicative of active citizenship, interrogating or challenging the political orthodoxy.*

*Keywords*:        political orthodoxy, violence, democracy, social contract, state.

## INTRODUCTION

In postmodern societies, citizens continue to be distrustful of electoral politics, political institutions, government officials, electoral systems, and they are ready to confront the political elites with demands to either abandon, change, or adopt a policy (Dalton and Welzel, 2014). This current posture of the citizens toward politics and political authority is what I want to call *active citizenship*.[1] Active citizenship, to a large extent, has resulted from the activities of civil rights movements, student organisations, and, more recently, social media, which have, in varying ways, created frameworks to develop and improve the socio-political awareness of citizens — awareness which enables citizens to criticise, organise, coordinate, cooperate and, in some cases, rebel against the government (see Norris, 1999; 2012). On the other hand, the response of governments, both democratic and undemocratic, has been more violent, including police brutality against demonstrators and protesters, and incarceration and victimisation of political opponents and activists. This has resulted in a confrontational relationship between the government and the citizens. In this paper, I attempt to offer a philosophical framework within which we can also understand this hostile relationship. For this purpose, I look at the social contract theory (henceforth "the contract theory" or "the contract"). In its stark simplicity, the contract theory concerns itself with the normative justification of political power and authority, political obligation, as well as the civil or organised state.

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1        Other similar locutions are "assertive citizenship," and "responsible citizenship".

I offer a two-part account. The first part is a critique of classical contractarianism. I divide this into three sections. First, I briefly examine the justificatory basis of the contract theory. Second, I investigate the problem of using morality as the justificatory basis of political authority and the civil state. Here, I shall argue that the contract gives the government and the civil state moral and political supremacy over the citizens. Yet, since the government can exhibit questionable moral characteristics, we must ask why it is not a party to the contract. Third, I explore the implications of the first section to understand the problem of recognition. In the second part, I attempt to understand the upsurge in political insurgencies in postmodern society in light of the discussion in part one. In this regard, my paper will have both theoretical and practical dimensions.

## 2. THE CONTRACT THEORY AND MORAL RATIONALITY

As noted previously, I challenge, among others, the moral justificatory basis of the contract theory. So, it is necessary to begin the discussion by noting the basis of the contractarian moral thesis. In spite of their differences, classical contractarians share these two main views. First, political authority derives from the consent of the people; the contract becomes the foundation of the civic state. Second, morality serves as the main justificatory basis of political authority. Thus noted, the central thesis of contractarianism, I think, is that each member of society must ideally have a mental constitution and a character dominated or controlled by moral rationality. But when moral rationality is absent or fails (see below), authority must be imposed from without, so that under the same authority all may realise the essence of living in harmony and peace. In this paper, I shall concentrate on these shared views.

Thus, moral rationality is distinguished from prudential rationality.[2] Stipulatively, moral rationality entails the basic idea that an agent has the rational capacity to understand that humans are by nature social or relational beings,[3] and the quality of our relationships largely determines our wellbeing. Thus a morally rational person has a genuine sense of recognition for the "other" as a being with self-worth and dignity (or as an "end" in itself, in a Kantian sense). In the sphere of politics, moral rationality instrumentally engenders ethical values like sharing, friendship, cooperation and collaboration. In short, moral rationality is 'other-regarding'. On the other hand, prudential rationality entails the basic idea that an agent possesses the rational capacity to search for means to "actualise" (in a Heideggerian sense) his beingness. However, the actualisation is more of a concern for one's self; it is self-regarding.[4]

This distinction lurks behind the expositions of the classical contractarians. Hobbes argues that those in the state of nature possess prudential[5] rationality to seek the object of

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2    There is a vast literature on moral and prudential rationality, with some scholars arguing that morality cannot be a requirement of rationality. See Gauthier (1987) and Grice (1967), who argue that morality is a species of rationality. Cf. (Hubin, 1980).

3    By saying that humans are social or relational beings, I simply mean it is a fact that humans do not live alone See Singer( 2000, p. 37).

4    Hubin (1980), 67: "A prudential reason is a reason from a prudential point of view. This point of view is defined by certain reason-making principles the most basic of which would be, 'One ought to act so as to maximize his own wellbeing...' [Accordingly,] prudential reasons are self-regarding reasons in the sense that they aim at the good or well-being of the agent."

5    Hobbes repeatedly defines prudence as a species of knowledge called experience; it is however not attained by reasoning, "but found as well in brutes as in man" (Hobbes, 1986, p. 414). In the Elements of Law, Chapter 6.4, prudence is said to be shared by both man and brutes; Hobbes

their felicitous desires, including protection from pre-emptive attackers, but lack moral rationality to foster peaceful co-existence and social harmony between and among themselves (Hobbes, 1986). Consequently, Hobbes's pessimistic view about human nature implores him to propose that the vulnerability of life in the state of nature should motivate members to surrender their *absolute* rights and liberty to a sovereign, or Leviathan, to foster peace and harmony (Hobbes, 1986, p. 107). On the other hand, Locke disagrees with Hobbes on what constitutes 'natural liberty' and the "law of nature".[6] Locke argues that the state of nature is a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence to do as one pleases. For the state of nature has a law of nature to govern it (Locke, 1988). Thus, Locke does not entirely deny the members of the state of nature a minimum sense of concern for the "other". However, for Locke, although members of the state of nature are relatively non-violent, some members have a tendency to disrupt the peace. Therefore, government is needed to help protect the vulnerable. The reasonable thing to do, then, is to submit *part* of one's rights for this purpose (Cf. Rousseau, 2002 ).

Rousseau, however, adopts a different understanding of human nature and motivation, but also end up with a moral justification of political authority. For Rousseau, man is naturally compassionate — a trait which exercises significant control on the drives which lead to attack and war (Rousseau, 2006; see also Wolff, 1996, p. 27). Responding directly to Hobbes, Rousseau argues that men are not natural enemies in the state of nature; and "they have no mutual relations sufficiently durable to constitute a state of peace or a state of war" (Rousseau, 2002). Obviously, there seems to be an inverse relationship between Rousseau's and Hobbes' respective methodology of justifying political authority. Unlike Hobbes, Rousseau thinks that life is relatively better in the state of nature than in an organised state. Rather, it is in the organised state that man is corrupted, and there is a need for a government to ensure peaceful coexistence.

From this brief survey, we can grant that moral rationality serves as the justificatory basis of political authority and the organised state. Members of the state of nature now become citizens in the organised state on the basis of a contract. The *common ground* for their contractual relationship is that they all felt vulnerable in the state of nature.[7] This presupposes that moral rationality is a necessary condition for citizenship. On the other hand, the government and the civil or organised state assume superior moral and political authority over the citizens. This traditional political arrangement is what I want to call *political orthodoxy*. My main thesis is couched in the following question: Is active citizenship a challenge to political orthodoxy? In the next two sections, I challenge the basis of the contract theory.

## 3. WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE CONTRACT THEORY?

The contract theory has many manifestations. In one of its manifestations, it has considerably improved our understanding of the utility of the civil society and the legitimacy of political power and authority, as well as political obligation. In its other manifestations, it has, however, been considered as a theoretical basis for some injustices. Among the contemporary

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says "prudence is nothing else but the conjecture from experience…[However] we cannot from experience conclude, that anything is to be called just or unjust, true or false, nor any proposition universal whatsoever, except it be from remembrance of the use of names imposed arbitrarily by men" (Hobbes, n. d. ).

6    Even though Locke, unlike Rousseau, did not have Hobbes in mind. As is well known, Locke was directly critiquing Robert Filmer's doctrine of the divine right of kings to rule.

7    For a detailed discussion of the contract see Gauthier (1987) and Hampton (1986).

critics of the contract theory are C. W. Mills and Carole Pateman. From a racial perspective, Mills argues that the contract rests on the fundamental assumption that political authority is founded on the popular consent of individuals taken as *equals*, but it never promises a contract among equals in its empirical realities: it "is not a contract between everybody ('we the people'), but between just the people who count, the people who really are people ('we the white people.')....So it is a Racial Contract," (Mills, 1993, p. 3).

Also, Carole Pateman, from a feminist perspective, argues as follows: "The original contract is a sexual contract pact.... [and the] story of the sexual contract is also about the genesis of political right, and explains why exercise of the right is legitimate – but this story is about political right as *patriarchal right* or sex right, the power that men exercise over women" (Pateman, 1988, p. 1). Thus, for Mills and Pateman the flaw in the contract is related to the unequal relationships it establishes between individual citizens who are supposed to be equal: black and white people are supposed to be equal, just as men and women. The solution lies in a reorientation of the composition of citizenship, though Pateman suggests dumping the contract outright in such a reorientation. The concerns of both Mills and Pateman form part of a larger problem: one of recognition. We shall deal with recognition in the next section. In the meantime, let me state clearly what I want to do in this section.

I wish to make a bold claim: that it is questionable whether the contract theory refers to a contract, *qua* contract, at all, in terms of the relationship between government and citizens. This is because a contract indicates an agreement or cooperation between individuals or persons for mutual benefit; it functions as a normative basis for defining social relations and agreements and also sets the rules of justice of such relations (Kleinig, 2010). For our purpose, two central features of mutualism associated with a contract are important: (I) mutualism implies that a party to a contract contemplates that the relative gain of undertaking a particular course of action with others will yield a better outcome than if one had undertaken the action alone (See Gauthier, 1987, p. 113). In this case, members realise that the protection a communal life could afford, which requires submission of all or part of their liberty to a sovereign, is relatively higher than the solitary and vulnerable life the state of nature could afford. (II) mutualism suggests that each party to a contract at least recognises the other as having at least something worthwhile to offer. Thus, by partaking in the contract each member acknowledges the other as, at the least, a subjective, conscious being who is willing to make peace (cf. Hampton, 1986).

Therefore, if I claim that the contract's claim to be a contract is suspicious, that has nothing to do with whether participants comply with the just principles of the contract or not. Rather, what I find to be problematic is that the government is never a party to, but rather a product, or by-product, of the contract; government is the implementer and perhaps the formulator of the contract's principles. Consequently, the contract, in my view, creates a *not-equal* relationship between the government and the contracting parties. By *not-equal* relationship, I mean that there is no *common* ground which establishes a relationship between the government and the contracting parties *before* the contract. My foremost objection is that it becomes a matter of choice for the government to subject itself to the principles of the contract. This is because whatever relationship exists between government and citizens turns out to be justified *post facto*, other than a relationship which proceeds from the contract *ex ante*. Let us explore some of the consequences of a *post facto* relation.

Rousseau and perhaps Locke allow room for rebellion if a government fails to ensure its given mandates.[8] On the other hand, Hobbes proposes that citizens have the right to rebel only when the sovereign illegitimately threatens their lives.[9] Also, Locke and, especially, Rousseau were bent on reconceiving and restructuring the social and political order after the supposed fall of man (See Dunn, 2002, p. 6). Even so, it does not avoid our objection that it remains only an option for the government to set limits on itself, or to expose itself to criticism. The Hobbesian response might be that the mutual benefit is conferred on the contracting parties, even if that generates a not-equal relationship between themselves and the state. But this response only begs the question and raises another crucial question: on what basis can the government be held morally accountable if, for instance, it justifies its use of deadly weapons against its citizens as "reasonable force" (as it is often defined) in the performance of its given mandate, or enacts obnoxious laws to exact compliance from the people?

What makes it more problematic, I think, is that the identity of the government remains largely unclear. By identity, I mean the individual characteristics that define an entity. Hence, by the identity of the government, I refer to the defining or constitutive elements of government, including the temperament, desires, aptitudes, and background of the individuals who constitute the governing body. Historically, Hobbes had in mind the English monarchy; Locke had both the English monarchy and parliament in mind; and we also know that Rousseau and Locke are advocates of direct and representative democracy, respectively.

So, we can be charitable and grant that there will be — as, of course, there are — some institutional checks on the activities of the government in democratic states. Despite this, Locke and Rousseau do not entirely relieve us of our moral dilemmas. Dunn argues that "The originality of Rousseau's social contract is that people bind themselves to a contract but do not subject themselves to any authority except that of their own collective will..." (Dunn, 2002, p. 10). Of course, Rousseau is very enthusiastic about his somewhat utopian vision of fostering better social relations and political interactions between the government and the citizens. However, Rousseau, I believe, may not be able to deny the objection that the anarchist Bakunin raised against Marx: "From the height of the state," individuals who were once workers but are now rulers "begin to look down upon the whole common world of the workers. From that time on they represent not the people but themselves and their own claims to govern the people" (As cited in Singer, 2000, p. 4).

Thus, my objection to Rousseau is that even if the government consists of some selected citizens, who are to guard the general will, it is likely that these individuals will consider themselves superior to the rest, and especially that the entire citizenry will suffer if such individuals possess questionable moral character.[10] But Hobbes is guiltier than the other two. We neither know the background, nor the temperament, of the Leviathan. Is the Leviathan an Oedipus who comes to save the Thebans from the wicked Sphinx, or a Thrasymachean tyrant, who uses his political position as a means to satisfy his degenerate desires? Or is the Leviathan an ancient Greek oligarch who makes material acquisitiveness

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8    Rousseau believes that "In order, then, that an arbitrary government might be legitimate, it would be necessary for the people in each generation to have the option of accepting or rejecting it; but in that case, such a government would no longer be arbitrary" (Rousseau, 2002)

9    Scholars, like Sreedhar (2010), overcontextualise this Hobbesian proviso, to argue controversially that subjects have a significant conceptual position in Hobbesian political theory.

10    See my take on self-interest below.

his overriding aim, to the extent that he could eventually sell his citizens into slavery for non-payment of debt (See Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens*, 1–2)? The question then is this: if the government can have a questionable moral disposition, why must it then be entrusted with moral and political power and authority?

Yet the government is by default assumed to possess the capacity to foster morality among those in the state of nature. In this way, the government is given a moral and political superiority over the citizens which stems from what is usually called the contract question: "What would human life be without civil society and government?" (Wolff, 1996, p. 7). The question assumes that government and civil society are indispensable for citizens. It is on this basis that I think the contract theory creates a moral and political dependency culture: citizens are made to depend on the government for their moral and political wellbeing. However, by saying that the government is morally and politically superior to the citizens, I do not hastily conclude that it is wrong for a state to have a government. Rather, we know from history that governments, regardless of the name, have sometimes been — and continue to be — morally irrational, and that the people bear the brunt of such irrationality.

However, one may raise the objection that we have not distinguished between the government's capacity to develop morality on the one hand, and its capacity to be moral on the other hand. Of course, it should not necessarily follow that if the government can develop morality, then it should be moral itself. But I wish to respond that the contractarians undermine the role of self-interest in politics. By self-interest, I mean the pursuit of those desires that are primarily beneficial to an individual. Self-interest here is not equivalent to de Tocqueville's "enlightened egoism", which defines the domain of one's self-interest to include the interests of others.

Rather, I mean, for instance, something like political corruption; namely, the illegal and unethical exploitation of one's political or official position for personal gain or advantage. Some government officials carry out corrupt practices including graft, fraud, nepotism, kickbacks, favouritism, and misappropriation of public funds. The word "political" in political corruption is intended to refer to public affairs, namely, the official goods, affairs, fortunes, resources, and institutions of the state (Gyekye, 2013, p. 83). This means that "a corrupt act committed against a private or nongovernmental organisation will not be political corruption, even though it is indeed an act of corruption, the committal of which will justify the censure or conviction of the culprit" (Gyekye, 2013, p. 83). The victims of political corruption are the citizens and, invariably, the fortunes, resources, and interest of the state (Gyekye, 2013, p. 83). We should agree with Gyekye, then, that political corruption is essentially a moral problem (Gyeky, 2013, p. 82). In light of our discussion, I wish to state that a ruler with questionable moral character, that is, politically corrupt, is likely to exploit or enslave the citizens to advance his wild desires.[11]

Here, a significant aspect of Plato's political theory is beneficial. Plato thought that states degenerate partly because of the antagonistic interplay of economic and political power. Economic polarisation creates conflicts, tensions, and hatred, and eventually leads to internal *stasis* (domestic warfare). Against this background, even when he had proposed that philosophers must possess political power and authority, Plato did not take the identity

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11    This is exactly the concern of Rousseau in Social Contract, Chapter IV. In the two discourses, Rousseau attacks inequality and corruption, but his utopian vision in The Social Contract, I believe, is thwarted by his undermining of the role of self-interest in politics.

of his philosopher-kings for granted. Strict and rigorous selection criteria are used to select and educate future guardians (*Republic* 473c–8e; cf. 521a–b). However, in spite of their elaborate education, Plato thinks that the guardians are not immune to political corruption. As a result, there are legislative instruments to check abuse of office. For instance, the guardians are not allowed to touch gold or silver, so that their desire will not degenerate into material acquisitiveness (*Republic*, 466b). Plato's auxiliary forces (soldiers and police) are barred from intimidating citizens with their superior strength (*Republic*, 416a–b3). Of course, Plato's own solution to the problem of political authority is no doubt questionable; but when he proposes that the identity of government needs attention, it is hard to disagree.

Therefore, if my argument can be accepted, then I wish to assert that if the government can be morally corrupt, but is not a party to the contract, then the contract can be said to have been founded on a false premise; for it leaves out a major stakeholder. In other words, since both the government and the citizens can act or be morally rational or irrational, it is suspicious to regard the citizens as the *only* "moral patients", namely, "something that is worthy of moral regard in virtue of its ability to be affected by what the moral agents do" (Grayling, 2013, p. 126). But, even if we are correct in thinking that the people possess more prudential rationality than moral, why should the difference be so significant as to be the foremost justificatory basis of political authority? In any case, the unjustified assumption that government is morally superior, I believe strongly, exposes citizens to subordination and victimization by rulers with degenerate moral rationality. In the next section, I explore the implication of this conclusion to the problem of recognition.

## 4. THE CONTRACT AND THE PROBLEM OF RECOGNITION

In this section, I explore, among others, the problem of recognition, which follows from contractarian political engineering. The problem of recognition, I believe, derives from the ex post facto relationship between government and citizens.[12] By recognition, I mean, normatively, the due acknowledgement of an entity or agent, for instance, as a subjective conscious entity with a certain feature, including status. If you recognise another person with regard to a certain feature as a subjective conscious being, for example, you do not only admit that the person has this feature, but you embrace a positive attitude towards the person for having such a feature (Mattias, 2019). However, I think we can have negative and positive senses of recognition. Positive recognition induces some kind of favourable disposition toward the recognised, just as negative recognition can do otherwise. In the case of positive recognition, the recognised person, if he or she is conscious of the recognition, feels a sense of inner pleasure, based on the psychological fact that there is pleasure in being admired or loved.

In either sense, recognition implies some kind of obligation to treat the recognised entity in a certain way, especially when it is mutual. Mutual recognition, whether positive or negative, induces reciprocal actions. Sometimes, we hear someone say: "I will treat you the same way you treat me." This common assertion implies that recognition arouses the capacity to act in a certain way. Like the civil rights movements, the thesis of Mills is that black people should be recognised positively as beings with self-worth and dignity. Such recognition could grant black people the capacity for self-determination, namely, the power to determine their own destiny and make life choices as human beings. Likewise, positive recognition, for Pateman, could extricate women from patriarchal ideology and mentality,

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12    For recent discussion of Hegelian recognition see Honneth (1996) and Constancio (2015).

such that they equally realise their potential. To probe recognition further, the Hegelian notion will benefit our understanding. Hegel suggests that a master-slave relationship is defined by the struggle for recognition. The master is the eventual victor in a duel, and the slave or slaves is/are the loser(s). The master assumes lordship and active control over the slave or slaves because it is in the presence of the slave or slaves that the master can validate his sense of self–worth: "self–consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self–consciousness" (Hegel 1979, p. 175). The common idea is that recognition can grant the will or power to act.

Our account will benefit from a brief account of Hegel's notion of recognition. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel, unlike Locke and Hobbes, does not think that the primordial, pre-contractual society was violent, nasty, and brutish. Nonetheless, he suggests that if one wants to understand the transition from the primordial society to the modern state, one must conceive of a struggle among at least two of the individuals who lived in that primordial society (Constancio, 2015, p. 69). Hegel invites us to imagine that each dueller strives to overpower the other to assert his worth, become certain of himself, become independent, and thus achieve consciousness of freedom, which is the "desire" of self–consciousness (Hegel, 1979, p. 176). But before the struggle there is a minimal degree of recognition, a previously constituted social identity in the primordial society: the duellers are *from the start* social selves (Constancio, 2015, p. 70). However, in the course of the struggle, if neither of the duellers agrees at some point to be subjugated by or submit to the other opponent, and both struggle to the actual death of one of them, there will not be even a minimal degree of *reciprocal* recognition resulting from the struggle (Constancio, 2015, p. 70).

This is because the dead dueller would lose the self–consciousness from which the victor could derive the satisfaction of being recognised. In view of this, there is *reciprocal recognition* when one of the dwellers accepts being subjugated. It follows from this that the acceptance implies self–subversion; it is an acceptance of slave status. Thus, the struggle results in a master-slave relationship. This is because a master-slave relationship is a "failure of reciprocal recognition", namely, that the master does not recognise the slave as another equal self, because he (the master) has become an independent self-consciousness but does not acknowledge the existence of the slave as another independent self–consciousness (Constancio, 2015 , p. 71). Thus, Hegelian recognition is consistent with what I term negative recognition. The slave becomes a mere "object" in the master's consciousness, a dependent self–consciousness; and the slave lacks or has limited capacity to make decisions about his own life. The slave must follow, usually unquestioningly, the bidding of the master.

When we come to the contractarians, it is difficult to get any basis to establish a minimal sense of recognition between the government and the citizens before the contract, as well as a *reciprocal* relation after the contract. Contractarians conceptualise the government to assume a master status, and the citizens a slave status in virtue of the supposed moral incapacity of the latter. How would the citizens assume a slave status? Bakunin criticises Rousseau for suggesting that individuals must submit part of their liberty to the state:

> Liberty is indivisible; one cannot curtail a part of it without killing all of it. This little part you are curtailing is the very essence of my liberty; it is all of it. Through a natural, necessary, and irresistible movement, all of my liberty is concentrated precisely in the part, small as it may be, which you curtail. (Bakunin, 1973)

To infer from Bakunin's criticism, what the contractarian citizens lose is their liberty, which defines the essence of their humanity. On liberty as the essence of humanity, Rousseau also criticises Hobbes as follows:

> To renounce one's liberty is to renounce one's essence as a human being, the rights and also the duties of humanity. For the person who renounces everything, there is no possible compensation. Such a renunciation is incompatible with human nature; for, to take away all freedom from one's will is to take away all morality from one's actions. In short, a convention which stipulates absolute authority on the one side and unlimited obedience on the other is meaningless and contradictory. (Rousseau, 2002)

Thus, Rousseau thinks that losing part of one's liberty is relatively preferable to losing everything. But Rousseau's criticism of Hobbes does not spare him Bakunin's objection; the objection is applicable to all contractarians. Whether the citizens lose all or part of their liberty, for Bakunin, the fact remains that they become enervated because they are denied the capacity for self-determination and personal autonomy. If we are to agree with Bakunin, and I think we should, this explains at least why the citizens become slaves: by surrendering all or part of their liberty they must follow the bidding of the government and the civil state. Thus, the slave-like condition of the citizens is conceived of as a deficiency in moral rationality. This raises a crucial question concerning how the citizens would be recognised by the master. First, I think that unlike the situation of Hegel, Locke and especially Rousseau would not admit that their citizens are "dependent things" in the self–consciousness of the master; but I cannot absolve Hobbes of this negative mode of recognition. However, in the absence of a clear identity for the government, as discussed, the struggle for recognition begins after the contract. So the question is: Why must recognition matter to the citizens?

As noted earlier, the contractarians do not offer a separate account of the civil or organised state; it is founded on the contract. However, the civil or organised state assumes an essence or a good of its own once it comes into being, which is irreducible to any individual's preference. Initially, the good of the civil state is largely its sustenance. By sustenance, I mean that for men not to return to the state of nature, the organised state must continue to exist. It therefore becomes obligatory for the citizens to take care of the good of the state, in varying ways, including via military service and taxation. This basic obligation may not generate any or many problems. This leads me to comment on political obligation.

I think that the protection which the civil state claims to offer seems to be instrumentally valuable for the citizens. Thus, the citizens' motive for becoming moral, by acceding to the rule of the government, is utilitarian. Why should I be moral and obey the state? a contractarian citizen is likely to respond that "morality is a compromise for my convenience". That is, "being moral is not something valuable in itself, but it enables me to secure my property, life, and liberty; and the organised state exists primarily to guarantee this security". In this regard, I think political obligation, to my mind, would be regarded not as valuable in itself, but as a *slavish* return to the civil state for the moral and political benefit it promises to offer. The expression "slavish" has two main connotations: positive and negative. The positive sense connotes the idea that serving the state is a mutual obligation, which flows from the contract; the civil state exists so that the citizens can pursue their desires. As noted, such services include paying taxes and serving in the military.

On the other hand, the negative sense of "slavish" conveys the idea that the citizens can be objects of victimisation and exploitation by morally corrupt individuals who constitute the government. Under the guise of achieving the common good (which is still an ambiguous expression), politically corrupt leaders usually compel the citizens to offer services to the state, including high tax rates to finance expensive military budgets. Even if they are not compelled, we can be reminded of Thrasymachus' objection to Socrates claim that all skills are exercised for the benefit of their subjects. Thrasymachus replies: "the shepherd fattens the sheep for his own and his master's interest" (Plato *Republic*, 347b). As Adam Smith puts it, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher that we expect our dinner, but from his regard to his own self-interest" (As cited in Singer, 2000, p. 40). Thus, it is for the benefit of the state and government that the citizens will be cared for.[13]

As the basis for the struggle for recognition is becoming clear, let us return to our question of recognition. If the citizens are to struggle for recognition, it is not just to validate their sense of self-worth, but an ex post facto struggle for political recognition, which takes many dimensions. These dimensions include, but are not limited to, the struggle for economic and social justice; the struggle for self–determination, so that citizens can legitimately mould their lives to suit their preferences and choices; the struggle for political participation, in order to be able to have a say in politics; and the fight against corrupt political leaders.

In part two, I attempt to discuss the resurgence of political insurgencies in postmodern society, in the light of our discussions in part one.

## 5. THE CONTRACT THEORY AND TWENTY–FIRST CENTURY POLITICS

Nothing said in the first part should be taken to mean that the people are incapable of making a social contract. On this, I strongly agree with Singer that, from an evolutionary perspective, "Tests of our ability to make inferences show that although we are not adept at formal logic, we are particularly good at recognising social contracts, and especially, the cheats who break them. This readiness to cooperate is a true universal among humans..." (Singer, 2000, p. 46). I have also stated clearly that not all individuals who form a government have questionable moral character. What I have done so far is to point out that the problem of identity and recognition are the bane of the contract theory. What then should we do to the contract theory, if we are to heed to the advice of Rawls that: "A theory, however elegant and economical, must be rejected or revised if it is untrue..." (Rawls, 1999, p. 3).

I think a revision is better. By better, I do not mean that revision is *good*, but that revising the contract will yield better consequences to ensure a healthy sort of relationship between the individual and the government. Rawls, to an extent, has been remarkable in his revision of the contract theory to have a significant bearing on improving the lives of the worst-off in societies. However, Rawls's proposals may not directly deal with the political struggles for, say, the demand for political participation, inclusive politics, press freedom, equality before the law, the rule of law, and policy adoption or change (like demonstrations for the adoption of gun laws in the US), which are among the factors that promote demonstrations and activism.

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13      According to Taylor, in a totalitarian state "the purposes and well-being of the individuals are totally subordinated to those of the state. The wellbeing of the state is defined in terms goods such as power, prestige, and security. In so far as the promotion of individual well-being is itself an aim of the state, that is simply because, the citizens being essentially a resource to be exploited for the benefit of the state, it is prudent for the state to husband that resource, just as it is prudent for a slave-master to see that his slaves are well-fed, well-housed and generally content" (Taylor, 1997, p. 31).

Nonetheless, Rawls comes in strongly when part of what incites a protest or demonstration centres on social and distributive justice. Like the riots in England in 2011, a major part of the reasons for the Arab Spring beginning from 2011 was unjust systems of social and economic distribution, contributing to low standards of living (Sadiki, 2014).

In addition, we have hopefully come to terms with recognition as a problem of the contract. To return to the Arab Spring, the protests were also meant to contest authoritarian forms of power. Student and civil society activists were motivated by concerns for freedom and dignity (Sadiki, 2014). These concerns do not differ much from those populist movements in other parts of the world, including Juventud Sin Future (future-less youth) in Spain, Greece, Portugal, and more recently Venezuela (Sadiki, 2014). In the words of Sadiki, "The rebellious youths, students and other types of marginals, notwithstanding their diverse backgrounds, religions, all dissolve into a singular, cohesive, and solidaristic complex of moral outrage acting in unison, raising the banner of 'occupy'…and 'game over'" (Sadiky, 2014.). By "game over", we can understand that activists and demonstrators are challenging the political orthodoxy. It is a protest against political corruption and police brutality. Currently, we are aware of media censorship in communist China and in Saudi Arabia, consequently leading to the death and incarceration of journalists and government critics, the most recent being the alleged killing of Jamal Khashoggi in Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. Again, the statistics of police brutality against unarmed and peaceful protestors and demonstrators are overwhelming. *Washington Post* reports that in 2018 alone in the USA, the police fatally shot and killed 992 people (Fatal Force, 2018) and the number is currently 504 in 2019 (and still counting) (Fatal Force, 2019). These are not mere isolated cases; it cuts across continents. In light of the previous part, we can understand that these incidents are indicative, in varying ways, of the citizens' struggle for political recognition.

In the remainder of this section, I look briefly into two ways in which the idea that citizens possess prudential but questionable moral rationality has not died out. The first concerns contemporary public surveillance and monitoring systems; the second, the issue of abortion. Governments are installing closed-circuit television cameras (CCTV) in town centres. The rationale, we are told, is crime prevention. We cannot deny that this techno-logical development has assisted in fighting crime, in diverse ways. But a common criticism has been that this mode of public surveillance and monitoring is a means for governments to intrude into people's lives, usually without their consent. Julia Bartczak points out two main ethical implications of CCTV public surveillance and monitoring systems: (I) human dignity and self-worth are threatened because humans become 'physical' objects for observation; (II) in some situations, confidential personal data are gathered and disseminated without people's consent (Bartczak, 2012, p. 6).

Second is the issue of abortion, which centres on self–determination. Recently, in the United States of America, the State of Alabama passed a law effectively prohibiting abortion, with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment for doctors who perform an abortion. The basis for such legislation is that abortion is an affront to the wellbeing of the unborn human, the foetus. But the irony is that pregnant women who have committed other crimes are con-victed and sometimes given death sentences (Sherwood, 2014). Yet what crime have those unborn babies committed to merit even a day in prison with their mother? Why must the government interfere in the private lives of citizens? We can now provide a probable answer: that the contract theory grants government such moral authority.

## 6. CONCLUSION

I set out in this paper to attempt to use the social contract theory to provide a philosophical framework to also understand the resurgence of political insurrections and insurgencies in the twenty-first century. In Part I, I tried to challenge the contract theory and found out that part of its weakness is the problem of the identity of government and recognition. Though the government assumes superior moral and political authority over citizens, its background, desires, and temperaments remain obscure. This political arrangement, the political orthodoxy, exposes citizens to victimisation, manipulation, and exploitation. The citizens become what A. C. Grayling dubs "moral patients". And as moral patients, the citizens are made to depend on the government for their moral development. However, the problem of recognition is the struggle for political recognition, including the struggle for political inclusion and self-determination. On the other hand, what seems to motivate these struggles is most probably that the government usually betrays the basis for justifying its political authority: morality. Some politicians engage in political corruption, which affects the citizens and the state, which they claim to protect. In Part II, I tried to show, with empirical evidence, that if citizens are protesting against their governments, it is probably indicative of an active citizenship which seeks to challenge the political orthodoxy.

By way of revising the contract theory, I suggest, in future, we look into the theory of cooperation embedded in evolution, already advanced by Peter Singer in *a Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution, and Cooperation*. In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt articulates the view that whenever people come together, no matter the size, public interests come into play, and the public sphere is formed. Plato similarly articulates this view. Instead of conflict, Plato thinks that people come together to form states and communities because no one is self-sufficient. Accordingly, a state is justified on the principles of mutual need and difference of aptitude (Plato *Republic*, 369a–370e). Hence, instead of theorising on the basis of man's weakness, it is more humane to do so on the basis of human strength, namely, humans' natural tendency to live a shared life, predicated on the assumption that humans are by nature social beings with different talents, endowments and capacities which generate assets that can, nevertheless, be considered common, to be collectively shared (Gyekye, 1997).

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# Assertive Citizens and Democratic Norms in Slovakia

**Jonáš Jánsky**

## ABSTRACT

*Citizens' support for any political regime is one of the most important factors in its survival. There is a growing body of work that shows that societies are now in the midst of a transformation concerning citizens' attitudes toward the way in which they take part in politics within their societies. The aim of this article is to argue that there is an ongoing shift towards the more assertive concept of democratic citizenship in Slovakia. This claim will be illustrated by the electoral campaign of a candidate in the mayoral race in the city of Nitra during the municipal elections of 2018. As this candidate was a known local political activist, this article will focus on investigating both his preceding career as an activist, his personality, and his growing support during the race to assess how far the citizens of Nitra might be slowly shifting towards a more assertive interpretation of citizenship.*

## INTRODUCTION

No political regime can exist without the support of some fraction of its citizens. This statement applies in particular to democratic regimes, in which the whole political system could theoretically be changed provided there is sufficient support for the idea. What is more, if this were to be the case a democracy in such a situation would have great difficulty to preserve itself against such actions without compromising the ideals upon which the regime is founded (Welzel & Dalton, 2014). As both the level and the form of political support are heavily dependent upon citizens' attitudes and views concerning what it means to be a democratic citizen, a study of these attitudes is an important part of studying political systems in democratic countries.

Furthermore, in recent years, a growing body of literature has indicated that we are witnessing a significant change in these attitudes all around the globe (Klingeman, 2014; Welzel & Dalton, 2014; Dalton, 2006; Norris, 1999). This change in attitudes concerning both citizenship and democracy can be seen in both new and old democracies (Norris, 1999), and it is tied to the increasing importance of participatory norms of democratic citizenship among citizens (Dalton, 2006).

In Slovakia, this trend of a more critical and participatory citizenship that could potentially improve the quality of Slovak democracy can be illustrated by the popularity of one of the candidates in a mayoral race in the regional town of Nitra.

## FROM A CRITICAL TO AN ASSERTIVE CITIZENSHIP

As already mentioned, a significant group of political science scholars argue that we are in the midst of a change in both forms of political support for and attitudes towards the prevailing

norms of what it means to be a democratic citizen. One of the first to describe the existence of this trend is Pippa Norris, who identified growth worldwide in the number of people that she dubbed "critical citizens" (1999). According to Norris, the critical citizen is defined by a strong level of support towards a democratic political regime, along with increasing distrust towards both the concrete institutional design of their political system and the political actors occupying it (Norris, 1999). In other words, critical citizens are citizens who, while supporting the ideological foundations of democracy, are distrustful towards both individual politicians and the concrete way in which political decisions are taken. What is more, this trend is also tied to decreasing levels of voluntary civic participation and institutionalised forms of political participation in favour of non-traditional types of participation, such as protests and boycotts, among the citizens in established democracies (Norris, 1999; Norris, 2004).

During her introduction of the concept, Norris withheld judgment about the consequences of this trend due to a lack of consensus among the authors of *Critical Citizens* (Norris, 1999). This lack of consensus was mostly due to the great level of distrust towards institutions and political actors involved in this trend. This was due to a great number of political science scholars being sceptical towards the concept of critical citizenship as they argued that non-institutionalised political actions, such as protests or boycotts favoured by critical citizens, could easily lead to disorder (Norris, 1999). Furthermore, they thought that this disorder could cause even further distrust towards the institution and to the democratic political system as whole (Norris, 1999; Norris, 2004). Furthermore, there was a significant group of authors inspired by Robert Putman's book *Bowling Alone,* which evaluated this trend negatively due to the decrease in the social capital of citizens caused by the lack of institutionalised civic participation among critical citizens (Norris, 1999; Clarck & da Silva, 2009; Dalton, 2006; Ekman & Amna, 2012).

This criticism sparked a discussion with the authors that argued for a much more positive interpretation of the shifts associated with the emergence of critical citizens. For example, Dalton identified that it was not only citizens' attitudes towards institutions and political actors that were changing, but also attitudes towards the concept of citizenship itself (2006; 2008). In his work he identified two basic concepts through which citizens perceived citizenship. The first was a duty-based citizenship; citizens who favoured this concept put much more focus on abiding by the law and respecting authority (Dalton, 2008). The second concept, which he called engaged citizenship, while still holding observance of the law in high regard, put greater emphasis on the right of citizens to participate in the political process as well as the right to criticise and oversee those who are in positions of power (2008). Furthermore, he argued that in democratic states, duty–based citizenship is slowly declining in favour of the participation–based concept and this change is tied to a move towards post-materialist values (Dalton, 2008). As post-materialist values put greater emphasis on the self-expression of the individual as well as quality of life (Inglehart, 2000), Dalton argued that this change should be viewed much more positively, as those citizens focused on participation would be improving the quality of democracy (2006; 2008). This gradual change was confirmed by other scholars in other studies, who also argued that this trend could potentially reinforce democratic systems (Coffe & van der Lippe, 2009; Hooghe & Oser, 2015; Dentes, Gabriel, & Torcal, 2006).

Based on this trend towards a more engaged citizenship, Dalton and Wenzel created the concept of the assertive political culture that is defined by its focus on individual liberties, equal opportunities, and the people's voice – the notion that individual people should have

a voice during the creation of collective decisions (Welzel & Dalton, 2014). Later, they contrast this assertive political culture with a preceding allegiant cultural orientation based on three basic dimensions. These dimensions are first, institutional confidence – respect towards institutions; second, philanthropic faith, which means trust towards others as well as interest in politics and trust in democracy; and third, norm compliance, which encompasses respect for the law (Welzel & Dalton, 2014). Furthermore, they argue that in those democracies in which citizens are slowly moving towards an assertive cultural orientation, evidence shows that both the accountability and effectiveness of their governments thrive (Welzel & Dalton, 2014).

## ASSERTIVE CITIZENS IN CENTRAL EUROPE AND SLOVAKIA

There have been several pieces of research that measure citizenship norms in the central European region (Hooghe & Oser, 2015; Haerpfer & Kizilova, 2014; Coffe & van der Lippe, 2009). This research has shown that there are significant differences between the Central European countries. For example, there is a much greater support for duty–based form of citizenship in Hungary than in the Czech Republic or Slovenia (Coffe & van der Lippe, 2009). Apart from these differences, there are some general conclusions that apply to all of these countries (Hooghe & Oser, 2015; Haerpfer & Kizilova, 2014). For example, one of the studies shows that this trend of transformation toward a more assertive and participatory political culture can be observed not only in the Central European region but also in almost the whole of the former Eastern bloc (Haerpfer & Kizilova, 2014).

What is more, these studies also show that the presence of this culture has proved a crucial factor in the evolution of the democratic states of the region. The authors of these studies have shown a direct link between qualities of democracy, as measured by Freedom House, and the percentage of more active and engaged citizens in the countries established after the fall of the Iron Curtain (Haerpfer & Kizilova, 2014). Furthermore, these studies show that Slovakia is in a group of post–communist countries whose citizens show the greatest leaning towards becoming more assertive citizens and which has one of the highest democracy ratings, according to Freedom House due to this (Haerpfer & Kizilova, 2014).

More specifically, recent researchers have shown that in Slovakia there exists a great deal of support towards the democratic form of government among young Slovaks. A study conducted among young Slovaks showed that even though only 32 percent of them are satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the political situation in Slovakia, they overwhelmingly agree or tend to agree (81 percent in total) that democracy is the best possible political system (Central Europe: Youth, politics, democracy, 2018). This study shows as well that more than 70 percent of respondents disagree or somewhat disagree with the statement that it does not matter whether the system of government is democratic or not, as well as with the statement that they would be ready to sacrifice some democratic principles for a higher standard of living (Central Europe: Youth, politics, democracy, 2018). The only time when this overwhelming majority decreases is when slight plurality (47 to 44 percent) of respondents agree or somewhat agree that some civil and human rights can be restricted in order to protect against threats to national security (Central Europe: Youth, politics, democracy, 2018). This tendency for young people to at least conditionally support democracy appears in Slovakia's neighbouring countries of Poland and Hungary where 81 or 69 percent of them, respectively, agree or somewhat agree with the statement that democracy is the ideal form of government (Central Europe: Youth, politics, democracy, 2018). This percentage indicates that support exists for the democratic system of government in Slovakia.

Apart from support for the democratic form of government, there is support for other qualities displayed by assertive and critical citizens in Slovakia, namely support for non-institutionalised political action as well as a certain distrust towards existing political institutions. For example, support for the statement that the right to protest against government decisions that you disagree with should be certainly or probably allowed increased from 69.6 percent to 75.4 percent between 2006 and 2016 (Zagrapan, 2019). Furthermore, willingness to take part in actions such as signing petitions, taking part in boycotts, taking part in demonstrations, or taking part in unauthorised strikes increased between 2008 and 2017 (Sociologický ústav SAV, 2017). This tendency to take part in non-institutionalised actions increases both with level of education as well as with being an inhabitant of a bigger city, while decreasing with age. Another important trend is the decline of trust towards existing political institutions such as parliament or the government since 2008 (Sociologický ústav SAV, 2017). The willingness to take part in non-institutionalised forms of political participation and the reduced trust in existing political institutions are signs of critical and assertive citizens in Slovakia.

At this point, it is important to note that there seem to be differences in the growth of assertive citizens between rural and urban environments in Slovakia. It has been shown that there is a contrast among the individual post-communist countries on the adoption of post-materialist values between urban and rural areas (Pavlovic, 2015).

This urban/rural divide could be illustrated by the outcome of both municipal elections in 2018, and the presidential election in 2019. In the 2018 municipal elections, it could be caused by the victories of similar independent candidates throughout Slovakia, dubbed the "hipster wave" by sociologist Michal Vašečka. According to him, members of this wave are providing a type of unconventional Western–style politics in Slovakia (Mikušovič, 2018a). Although these candidates also managed to win mayoral races in some of the smaller cities throughout the country, this type of candidate mostly won in big and middle–sized cities in Slovakia (Mikusovic, 2018a). In the presidential election, victory went to environmental lawyer Zuzana Čaputová, who had run on a platform combining rule of law and environmental issues. She defeated Maroš Šefčovič, who ran on a combination of social and conservative issues. In these elections, Čaputová gained most votes in and around bigger cities such as the capital, Bratislava, and the other seven regional capitals (SME, 2019). This shows that Slovakia is not exempt from the rural/urban divide concerning post-materialist values as well as assertive citizenship that is found in other post-communist countries.

**NITRA AS PART OF A 'HIPSTER WAVE'**

Nitra is a town in the Western part of Slovakia. It is one of the bigger cities in Slovakia and has a population of nearly 80,000 people (Mesto Nitra [City of Nitra], 2017). It is the administrative seat of the Nitra Region as well as home to two universities. Eleven candidates ran for mayor during the municipal elections of 2018; ten remained by polling day (WebNoviny.sk, 2018). The eventual winner of the race, Marek Hattas, can be seen as evidence of the emergence of the growing number of more assertive and participation–oriented citizens in Slovakia.

First of all, he himself is the type of person that we can identify as both an assertive citizen and as possessing a post-material cultural orientation. One reason for this is his career before his candidacy, during which he acted as a local cultural and political activist (Mikušovič, 2018b). This professional history shows not only his leaning towards the concept of engaged citizenship and through it towards an assertive cultural orientation but, due to the nature of his activities, which were focused on various issues concerning quality-of-life

improvements, it also shows his leaning towards post-materialist cultural values. He founded a local cultural centre called Hidepark, which organises concerts, theatre performances and other cultural events, was a member of a local initiative that tried to improve conditions for cycling in the city, and organised the "For a Decent Slovakia" protests in Nitra during the spring of 2018 (Mikušovič, 2018b). Apart from his personal history, his leaning towards the concept of assertive citizenship can also be seen in his attitudes towards both democracy and activism. For Hattas, democracy is a system of rights and freedoms and his reported reason for activism was the realisation that if you want to change something around you, you need to participate and try to do it yourself. The final reason that he could be considered to have both an assertive and a post-materialist cultural orientation is his programme. Among the most important issues promoted during his campaign were topics such as a participatory budget, improving quality of life and the possibility for self-expression such as a new cultural centre or support for the culture industry (Program [Programme], 2018).

Support for Hattas grew during the campaign and culminated in his victory in the mayoral race. This could be attributed to Nitra's inhabitants' desire for change, as Hattas' biggest rival, incumbent mayor Jozef Dvonč, had been in office for twelve years. Another fact that might have helped him was the support he received from other local activists such as the founders of a local cycling initiative, as well as several experts that specialised in work with local youth (Hattas, poslanci a odborníci [Hattas, members of city council and experts], 2018). At the start of October 2018, shortly after the start of the official campaign for the municipal elections, a local TV channel released the results of a political opinion poll. In this poll, Hattas placed third in the overall ranking, with 16.3 percent (Lyko, 2018). A month later, another poll was released by a different TV channel in which Hattas placed first, with 27.2 percent (TA3, 2018). In the end, Hattas managed to capture 42.3 percent of the overall vote and win the mayoralty; the incumbent mayor finished in second place, with only 22 percent (SME, 2018). This increase in support, as well as Hattas' victory, could indicate that the citizens of Nitra aligned themselves with the values of assertive citizenship.

**CONCLUSION**

There is a growing amount of research that indicates that we are witnessing a significant change in democratic societies all around the world. Citizens from all around the world are becoming more and more critical towards their governments, as well as more assertive in their wish to take a more vocal and important role in the decision–making process. There is also a significant body of work that argues that this shift in civic attitudes towards the place of the people in the political system increases the effectiveness of, and also strengthens, both democratic governments, which need to be much more accountable for their decisions, and democracy itself, as citizens are more emotionally invested in it. Studies concerning values in Slovakia as well as victories by many similarly minded mayoral candidates around Slovakia may be evidence that this positive trend is not bypassing Slovakia. One such case is that of Marek Hattas, who, due to the combination of his personal history, opinions, programme, and a significant increase in popularity during the campaign, won the mayoral race in Nitra in autumn 2018. This could demonstrate that the citizens of Nitra are starting to lean towards both post-materialist and assertive cultural orientations.

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# Malaysia: The Journey from Divide and Rule to Pluralism

**Matej Bílik**

**ABSTRACT**

*After long 63 years, new coalition is governing Malaysia, after a surprising opposition victory in the 14th General Elections. The paper studies the development of Malaysia from British colony to almost modern developed democratic and just country, as a case study for other diverse post–colonial states. It aims to better understand what social, political and cultural changes took place in this country that contributed to this surprising outcome. Country was divided and ruled by Britain through administrative policies that created a ground for nationalistic and ethno–centric politics. That has impacted the foundation of independent Malaysia and unequal citizenship rights. Both have contributed to the tragic events of May 1969, but great tragedy brought together unlikely coalition to address many underlying problems. It is not story of perfect development within liberal democratic understanding of it, but rather story of slow and in times painful transformation that created a hope for fully fledged democracy and more just society, where all have the same chances to participate.*

*Keywords:* citizenship, minority rights, Malaysia, institutional design

**MALAYSIA: THE JOURNEY FROM DIVIDE AND RULE TO PLURALISM**

> It is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (Anderson, 2006, p. 7).

Nations, as the most modern version of communities, are by their nature imagined, socially constructed by their members and recognised by others. Many countries with a colonial heritage struggle to make sense of a community living within artificially drawn boundaries. The state, often internally diverse, struggles to form a community that can provide stability for the political system to work well. This is the case in Malaysia, where after 63 years of single–coalition rule a new government was elected in May 2018, after a campaign that inspired wide public participation. This gives rise to hope that a single community could finally be realised: a Malaysian nation. All Malaysians would mutually respect and recognise their many complementary identities, leading to the creation of one community. This would be a great leap forward, one that needs leaders with integrity and vision to transform the society, because while the public can fuel transformation, the elite steers it.

The uniqueness of the Malaysian case lies in the complexity of pluralism in Malaysia, which encompasses multiple dimensions and bases (Hefner, 2001, pp. 59–61). The model of pluralism in Malaysian society starts with its place in the global world. And it is not a clear thing, as different segments are pulled in different directions that often in opposition to each
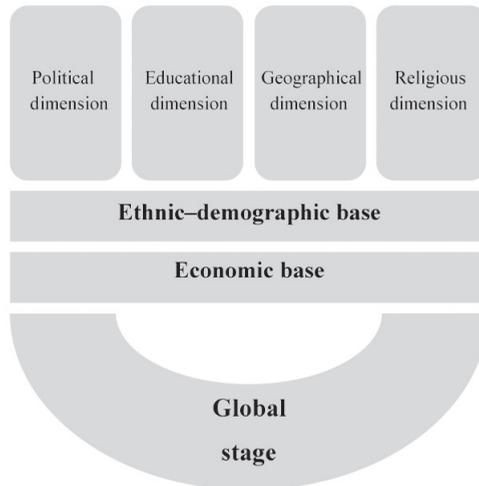
*Figure 1. Complexities of Pluralism in Malaysian Society (Samat, Bustami, & Nasruddin, 2006)*

other. Societies define themselves in part by closeness or animosity to another societies. In case of Malaysia, there can be talk of three directions in which society is pulled, it is a trichotomy of Malaysian positioning at the global stage. Institutions and the part of society with strong British heritage pulls Malaysia towards Western democracies (Nelson, Meerman, & Rahman Haji Em, 2008, p. 34). At the same time, Malaysia is a Muslim majority country, with Islam recognised as the state religion. Thus, it aims to develop close ties to other Muslim–majority societies (Hefner, 2001, pp. 20–21). Lastly, Malaysia is a founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and aspires to be an important player in the region (Nelson, Meerman, & Rahman Haji Em, 2008, p. 159). The rise of China in the region motivates Malaysia to play an even greater role in regional politics and work ever closer with its neighbours. These different pulls often conflict with each other, leaving society in a state with a lack of clarity where Malaysia stands at the global stage (Samat, Bustami, & Nasruddin, 2006). That does not provide a solid foundation for the domestic political stage and creates lack of clarity about the future.

The model developed in work by Samat, Bustami and Nasruddin (2006) then builds of the global stage with two bases, the ethnic–demographic base and the economic base which to a considerable extent are the main factors that would influence the life chances of an individual in Malaysian society. They have been historically rigidly aligned, due to the divide-and-rule policy developed by the British colonial administration. This used censuses and statistics to divide people and then inform public policy based on newly invented ethnic or racial categories. Thus, translating ethnic identity into socioeconomic standing and allowing for little upward movement. Economic and political power was divided between groups, so none would have enough power to challenge the position of the British colonisers (Singh, 2001, pp. 46–47). Both bases in the model held together, which in turn influenced the possible pluralism within four individual dimensions above the bases. As an example, within the realm of education, during colonial rule only a few selected Malays, the elite, could go to the best schools (with British children), while wealthy Chinese were allowed to administer their own schools' structure (Samat, Bustami, & Nasruddin, 2006, pp. 14–15).

Lastly the four dimensions of pluralism in Malaysia are standing above both the global stage, which conflicts society about its identity as country, while society within remains divided along ethnic lines, which are reinforced by socioeconomic lines. For many years, therefore pluralism was not possible in Malaysia, because two groups would never interact, they would live in separate places (geographical dimension), attend different schools (educational dimension), believe in different things (religious dimension) and vote differently (political dimension). In this way the rigidness of ethnic and economic bases did not allow for pluralism to be even considered as possibility. Only the radical restructuring of the society in the past few decades enabled that people of different ethnicity shared the same classroom and neighbourhood.

Malaysia is now at a crucial point in its history, for until now it has been trying to catch up with the rest of the world. But it is still only almost–democratic, is only almost–fully developed, only almost–just and is only almost–pluralistic. The hope is that by understanding how the country transformed, one might get a better understanding of where the future of the country lies. At the same time, Malaysia could become a case study of an ethnically diverse country with a colonial heritage that was able to find a path to its own identity. This paper posits that pursuit of policies that dismantled the rigidity of economic and ethnic–demographic bases to enable pluralism in political, educational, geographical, and religious dimensions. This shift took Malaysia on a path from the colonial divide-and-rule policy towards a developed and democratic state–nation.

## POLICIES OF STATE–NATION MAKING

Linz, Stepan, and Yadav (2010) were concerned that when states are founded, especially as result of decolonisation, their borders do not align with the boundaries between different social groups. Thus, individuals that would share same culture and structures of governance would one day wake up on opposites sides of a border that does not respect any historical heritage. It is somehow assumed "that every state should be a nation, and that every nation should be a state" (Linz, Stepan, & Yadav, 2010, p. 50). This however poses many challenges to almost any state that founds itself without a nation, no democratic state can function without support for political community, without a society that would accept the basic premises of political competition (Easton, 1957). Thus, states pursue different policies to deal with the diversity within their territory and create nations where is only a state. Few choose to give autonomy, either partial or full, to regions that are culturally or in other ways distinct from the rest of the country. Few try to assimilate the population, create one strong cultural civilisation that sooner or later incorporates everyone. The last approach is the longest and hardest to execute well. States could pursue a series of specific policies to allow some cultural autonomy and at the same time, build a national political identity that would connect all inhabitants. Linz, Stepan, and Yadav (2010) propose a framework of seven stages and policies that could guide a country like Malaysia on its journey towards a diverse national community; from a state with its border artificially drawn in London to a political nation, one imagined community, a state–nation.

## AN ASYMMETRICAL FEDERAL STATE

The first of the seven policies is tied directly to the territory of the state and its internal boundaries. In an asymmetrical federal state, internal boundaries between regional territories follow certain historical and demographic lines. At the same time, Malaysia's federal system allows

a certain level of self–governance for different groups over their own affairs and some territory (Linz, Stepan, & Yadav, 2010). Malaysia consists of thirteen states and three federal territories. All federal states to certain extent follow the historic Malay kingdoms, while the three territories are three cities that were given the privilege to govern themselves and their immediate surroundings (Kheng, 2002). After independence in 1957, the Federation of Malaya had only eleven states, all located on the Malay Peninsula. In 1963, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore joined the federation and the country expanded to Borneo and Pulau Ujong, and Singapore island (The Columbia Encyclopedia, n.d.).

Malaysia established itself as an asymmetrical federal state right from the beginning, but territorial division also reinforced the divide-and-rule policy. Both bases, economic and ethnic–demographic, stayed untouched, which prevented the emergence of pluralism from the beginning (Samat, Bustami, & Nasruddin, 2006). The west coast, especially in urban areas, was dominated by wealthy Chinese, with a few elite Malays in government, British citizens and some Indians. The rest of the country was populated by Malays, and other indigenous groups that worked mostly in agriculture (Kheng, 2002). The state followed the advice of preserving the traditional boundaries between historical regions. But no sufficient policies were pursued that would address the great inequalities between regions and different groups, and combination with a fragile system of power–sharing left the country on the verge of political collapse, since day one.

**EQUAL RIGHTS PROTECTION**

In any democratic state, it is fundamental that all citizens can apply their rights equally. Some slight differences are permitted between federal states, but in the end, the federal authorities are responsible for seeing that fundamental rights are observed everywhere (Linz, Stepan, & Yadav, 2010). The British, when they first imagined independent Malaysia, proposed that equal citizenship ought to be given to all groups residing there. Malays, represented by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), protested and tried to negotiate a special status for Malays within the new state (Kheng, 2002, p. 2). Due to a communist insurgency in the 1950s supported by the Chinese population and external actors, the British withdrew before getting an assurance of equal protection (Nelson, Meerman, & Rahman Haji Em, 2008, pp. 36–37). The British leadership effectively failed to stand behind its proposal of equal rights. In the end, a backroom deal was reached between colonial administration and forming Malaysian political leadership, the so-called "historic bargain" which traded away citizenship rights for all — instead, Malays in the new state got special privileges (Kheng, 2002, p. 39) — and with them Britain's original commitment to democratic values in return for a smooth and low–cost decolonisation.

The final draft of the constitution thus promised equal rights to all, but maintained that Malays should hold a special position in the new state (Malaysia Const. art. 153, 2010). Many of the public positions were to be held only by Malays. At the same time, Islam was established as the state religion and Malay as the state language. This goes against the principles of the state–nation, in which no one group would claim cultural superiority especially in federal law, which ought to protect the rights of all citizens equally.

The new regime in many ways just followed the old divide-and-rule policy. Rights were protected equally on paper, but great inequalities were preserved by the constitution, which openly favoured one group over the others. The first constitution, together with the rise of nationalism, preserved the rigidness of the bases in the model. Each dimension was in practice strictly determined by ethnicity and socioeconomic standing. While Indians and

Chinese could join the political elite by law, many constraints made this close to impossible in real life. Many lacked the formal knowledge of the Malay language or experience of public administration, as they were denied jobs as civil servants. The system, through its small injustices, prevented pluralism from arising, leading to greater tensions between social groups. The constitution effectively created two classes of citizens, which lead to tension between groups, as some could not fully participate in the public and civic life, even as officially being full citizens. Without a British administration as the neutral party in any conflict, tensions were rising below the surface since independence.

**A PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM WITH COALITION–MAKING**
An ethnically diverse state must find means to resolve the differences between different social actors. Power ought to be shared and decisions made with the consensus of as many different groups as possible. Coalition making is a process that tests the ability of different groups to work together for a common goal. Parliamentary democracy is therefore the only possible system of decision making that could facilitate this in a diverse country (Linz, Stepan, & Yadav, 2010). As was already pointed out in the previous two points, the state was on verge of collapse and tensions were bubbling under the surface. Almost no nation–building occurred in the first decade of the new state and after a close election in May 1969, riots broke out in Kuala Lumpur.

> Malaysia's proud experiment in constructing a multiracial society exploded in the streets of Kuala Lumpur last week. Malay mobs, wearing white headbands signifying an alliance with death, and brandishing swords and daggers, surged into Chinese areas in the capital, burning, looting and killing. In retaliation, Chinese, sometimes aided by Indians, armed themselves with pistols and shotguns and struck at Malay kampongs (villages). (Time Magazine, 1969)

Harsh rhetoric exacerbated existing divides and tensions (Jomo, 1990). The riots left the elite in shock. Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the monarch in Malaysia, declared a state of emergency two days later and dissolved parliament. A National Operation Council (NOC) was established as an interim government (Kheng, 2002, p. 131). It had to act fast to prevent further violence. Under pressure from within the country and from outside, the country launched multiple initiatives to combat the divisions within society. A new national philosophy, Rukunegara, was introduced. However, the most significant achievement was the launch of a New Economic Policy (NEP), with two central goals: "[1] eradication of poverty and [2] affirmative action to reduce interethnic differences — as providing the socioeconomic conditions for achieving 'national-unity'" (Jomo, 1990, p. 471). The idea was that the socioeconomic restructuring of society would close the gaps between different social groups, but mostly leverage socioeconomic standing of Malays that were the poorest segment of the society (Hefner, 2001, p. 30). This was supposed to reduce tensions and provide a big leap forward for all. The NOC was dissolved, and the country returned to parliamentary democracy in 1971 (Nelson, Meerman, & Rahman Haji Em, 2008).

Times of crisis require swift decisions; the goal, for a while, is so clear that all other concerns and differences are put aside. Both political elites, the public, and the outside world understood that failure to act together after events of May 1969 would lead to the collapse of the state. The leaders acted swiftly and with integrity, trying to ease the conflict. The introduction of the NEP was an effort to effectively change the economic and ethno–demographic

bases of the model. The policy was discriminatory in its over focus on leveraging poor rural Malays, but it received support across the whole political elite (Kheng, 2002). The riots of May 1969 gave rise to an unlikely coalition within NOC that aimed to prevent further violent tensions. The economic and ethnic–demographic bases were disturbed by NEP, hence allowing for some pluralism to emerge. The tragic events brought the country together in pursuit of a common goal that prompted nation–building (Nelson, Meerman, & Rahman Haji Em, 2008, p. 37). It is somewhat ironic that the greatest moment of coalition–making in Malaysia took place when parliament was dissolved. When parliament was reconvened in 1971, negotiation started among parties to form more united front, ruling parties including UMNO, joined with parties that were previously in opposition, to form new Barisan Nasional coalition (Kheng, 2002, pp. 129–130). This unfortunate event brought together formal political rivals to imagine common future for Malaysia.

The implementation and the results of the NEP were questioned by many experts over the years. According to some estimates, over 60% of the total US$12 billion equivalent in spending was mishandled. Also, the favourable global financial situation might have had greater impact on the Malaysian economy than the NEP (Jomo, 1990). Nevertheless, over twenty years of its implementation, incidence of poverty declined significantly among all ethnic groups (Figure 2.) (Economic Planning Unit, 2017), effectively allowing many to partic- ipate actively in public life. The second goal of the NEP, which pushed for 30% participation of Malays in the economy, through different schemes of purchasing capital, stakes and shares in companies. The policy had many loopholes and prevented many Chinese and Indians from doing business, but in the end it created economic interdependence (Jomo, 1990). As one high ranking official at that time said, "because of the New Economic Policy, if Kuala Lumpur burns today, everybody — Malays, Chinese, Indians and others — would suffer. And that's is the most powerful factor for the country's stability" (Hefner, 2001, p. 75).
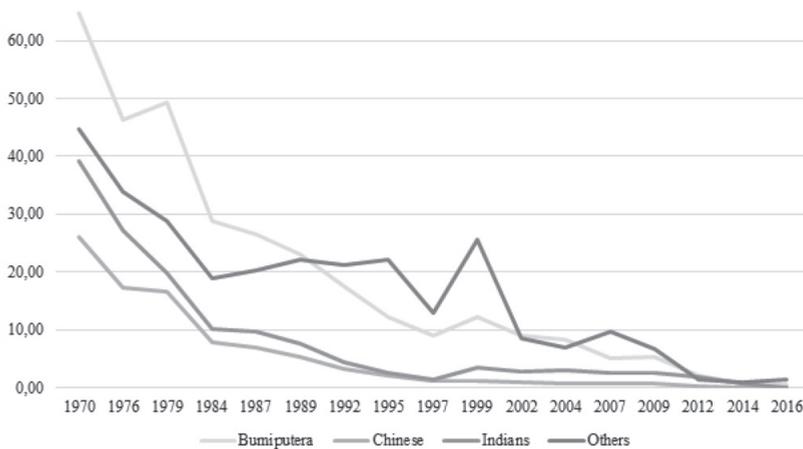


*Figure 2. Incidence of Poverty by Ethnic Group, Malaysia, 1970-2016, Source: Economic Planning Unit, 2017 (data), Author (graph)*

## POLITY–WIDE AND CENTRIC–REGIONAL PARTIES

Some political parties in multi-ethnic societies will necessarily represent a specific group, being cleavage–centric parties, but for state–nation building it is important that parties that gain

votes among multiple social cleavages also emerge. They are a signal that political debate is not dominated by nationalistic and ethnocentric rhetoric, but also by groups with a common approach to social issues (Linz, Stepan, & Yadav, 2010). The first occurrence of multiple–cleavage parties came in the election of 1969, when they lost by only a small margin. After the state of emergency was declared, even the ruling coalition re-evaluated its approach. After talks with several opposition parties they created a new grand coalition, the Barisan Nasional (BN), which consisted of nine parties, many of them cleavage–specific in terms of region, religion, or ethnicity. But together, this grand coalition was able to draw support from multiple cleavages (The Star Online, 2018).

Through coalition–building, political community was created at least at the level of politicians, who bonded over the common issue of ending ethnic violence. BN was a multiple–cleavage party with support across Malaysia, campaigning on the common promise to end violence (Kheng, 2002). There were changes taking place within the model of pluralism in Malaysia at this point. Tragic event shook up the old alignment of the bases, unimaginable changes in the political dimension took place, and a new politics of common approach emerged. There were still many inequalities and poverty, but members of the political elite showed they were able to put aside their differences and work together, even campaigning under one name (Kheng, 2002). It was then only a matter of time before this coalition was translated into the public and the nation could be built even in a place of great differences. In this way, this unfortunate event helped Malaysia to accomplish two of the state–nation policies: coalition making and polity–wide and "centric–regional" parties. In a way it also laid the ground for pursuing a third policy, the political integration of the population, with the political elite understanding that only a cohesive political community could sustain Malaysia and promote peace.

## A POLITICALLY INTEGRATED POPULATION

At some point in nation–building, the population needs to be united behind an idea of them being a single community in some sense. Cultural assimilation, which might seem to be an approach that can best connect people is, however, impossible in some cases. Linz, Stepan, and Yadav propose a different approach, which first involves the political integration of the population (2010). For some time, the Malaysian state tried to culturally assimilate everyone, but that process backfired in May 1969. Large parts of the population did not accept the results and riots broke out, showing how unintegrated politically many social groups were at that time.

The idea of a political community in the years after the launch of the NEP was transferred from the political elite to the public. At the same time the prosperous economic situation in 1980s and 1990s lifted thousands out of poverty. Some ethnic disparities persisted, but everybody was better off, as can be seen in Figure 3. Both political and economic shifts weakened alignment of bases in the model of pluralism in Malaysia. Education became more affordable and enrolment kept rising (The World Bank, 2018). Also, active religious life received a hit (World Value Survey, 2014). Once the bases were not strongly aligned, changes occurred also in the individual dimensions of pluralism. Straightforward life chances and opportunities in all dimensions, whether religious, educational, geographic, or political were no longer determined by socioeconomic standing and ethnic groups. Society became much more plural, allowing breathing space for a political community to emerge.
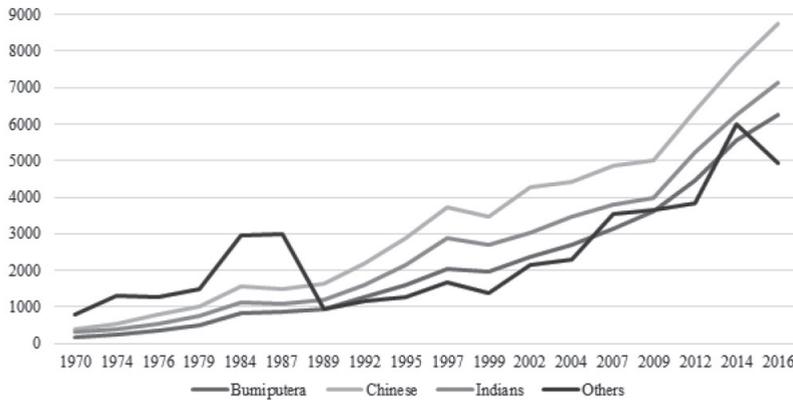
*Figure 3. Mean Monthly Household Gross Income by Ethnic Group (Malaysian Ringit, 1 RM is 0.24 USD), Malaysia, 1970-2016, Source: Economic Planning Unit, 2017 (data), Author (graph)*

## CULTURAL INDEPENDENCE

Within any diverse country, there are forces that would like to gain independence for a group that they represent. If the state wants to remain stable and build a nation, those demands must be separated from political independence, although some cultural divergence might be allowed. Thus, the nationalist would be primarily concerned with freedom in relation to culture (Linz, Stepan, & Yadav, 2010). When the Federation of Malaya was joined by three new states in 1963, many worried that these new territories would sooner or later want to gain their independence back. This turned out to be true for Singapore, which left the Federation in 1967. However, in the case of Sarawak and Sabah, partial autonomy was given to these two states, regarding culture and self–government (Kheng, 2002, p. 196). Figures advocating autonomy and other extreme nationalists have since faded.

Cultural independence also became visible in education. Ever since colonial times, Chinese Malaysians have had their own educational structures, and these became stronger after the Malay attempt to change the language of instruction to Malay. The Dong Jiao Zong association of Chinese schools was able to establish itself as a relevant part of schooling through lobbying to protect the cultural independence of Chinese education. In the end, the government introduced Mandarin Chinese and Tamil, the language of the Indian minority, as optional languages of instruction to all public schools (Samat, Bustami, & Nasruddin, 2006).

If nationalists can settle their differences and demands for political independence without violence, it is a clear sign that a political nation is forming. Emerging pluralism in the educational dimension indicates that policies have indeed manoeuvred Malaysia from divide-and-rule towards a more pluralistic society. The state was able to endure periods of agitation by some groups to break away from the rest.

## MULTIPLE COMPLEMENTARY IDENTITIES

The final stage of state–nation building is the emergence of multiple complementary identities. Political identity is imagined around the state, while ethnic, religious or other identities of citizens are protected and even celebrated (Linz, Stepan, & Yadav, 2010). In 1990, the prime minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad presented his vision Wawasan 2020. The central concept was

the idea of Bangsa Malaysia, one uniting identity for all citizens of Malaysia, and the creation of a modern nation that is inclusive and diverse. Malaysia was to join the club of developed countries, both economically and socially, by 2020. The NEP had economically bridged many gaps between ethnic groups, but Malaysia was still a divided society (Kheng, 2002).

> The challenge that we have always faced is the challenge of establishing a mature, liberal and tolerant society in which Malaysians of all colours and creeds are free to practice and profess their customs, cultures and religious beliefs and yet feel that they belong to one nation. (Mahathir, 1990)

The path to democracy and stability was not as linear as many political scientists imagined. The vision of a pluralistic society was something new in Malaysia. Unfortunately, that vision has not fully materialised since 1990. Already at the beginning, some concluded that the historic bargain must be discarded, but the Malay–controlled government refused to do this. Some opposition figures were even imprisoned. Secondly, the country experienced a major economic crisis in 1997. The Asia–wide crisis slowed down the economy and led to the postponement of many projects. Nevertheless, just by promoting this idea, the country became more pluralistic, especially in urban centres and regions with great diversity (Nelson, Meerman, & Rahman Haji Em, 2008). But the dilemma of Malay privilege inscribed into the Malaysian constitution has not been resolved. This remains the case even though more than 60% of Malays agree that the special privileges for ethnic Malays should be abolished (Teoh, Poll shows most Malaysians want NEP to end, 2008).

Wawasan 2020 put forward a new idea about what Malaysian society could look like. And at least it changed the framing of the conversation. Now there exists the possibility of a new identity, Bangsa Malaysia. Many of the ideals were not matched by practical policy, but conditions for democratic and pluralistic Malaysia are more favourable than ever before. Newly elected government brings hope for deeper reform. The country has performed relatively well in almost all economic indicators (The World Bank, 2018) and people feel financially secure (World Value Survey, 2014). Wawasan 2020 challenged the ethno–demographic base of the pluralistic model. Together with favourable economic conditions, pluralism is continuing to spread through Malaysia.

**CONCLUSION**

The Malaysian nation still faces many obstacles preventing its complete emergence. The legacy of divide-and-rule has created tensions that can be still observed. But even with all its problems and inequalities, a nation is an imagined community because the horizontal comradeship of its members is stronger than the obstacles (Anderson, 2006). The New Economic Policy was successful in disrupting the economic stratification of society and, together with a favourable economic situation, lifted many in the population out of poverty. May 1969 brought together an unlikely coalition that was able to react promptly to the violence and take the necessary steps to prevent it in the future. Singapore leaving the federation provided a lesson on how to manage autonomy and forces calling for autonomy. The Chinese population was able to apply pressure that led to the introduction of teaching in other vernaculars in the education system, but also the competition has strengthened the educational sector, making it one of the best in the region and even the world. Lastly, Wawasan 2020 created a challenge to the ethno–demographic base by proposing a completely new identity that would transcend traditional identities.

Even with all this progress Malaysia is still only almost–democratic, only almost–fully developed, and only almost–just. The historic bargain is still present in contemporary Malaysia, as it is embedded into the constitution and many social norms. The new government elected in May 2018 was the first to appoint a non-Malay as attorney–general (Teoh, 2018). This is a hopeful sign of changing norms, but the situation is not simple. The current government is based on a pact between the former (and current) prime minister Mahathir Mohamad and his one-time political heir Anwar Ibrahim, who was imprisoned by him about twenty years ago. These two are supposed to share power, with Anwar taking over during the current parliamentary term. The succession plan is not being handled well and the resulting power struggle might put an end to the hopes of a bright future (BBC News, 2018). But at least at this point, this affects not only the future of the Malays, but of the emerging Malaysian nation. Even when it is imagined, the consequences of politics are to be felt by all.

The 2018 general election was full of hope and wide groups of the population were mobilised to vote the former government out of power. The demos delivered: it gave a chance to the new government to strengthen democratic institutions and build a future for Malaysia. Now it is up to the politicians to repay the people's trust. But at least at this point, this is not only the future of Malays, but of Malaysians. Without doubt, it is difficult to govern such a country and already the new government has had problems following through on some of its policies. But it can be an inspiration for many of countries around South–East Asia or for former colonies elsewhere. Except for the events of May 1969, Malaysia has lived in relative peace and stability that has lifted the whole country to the world stage by many metrics. At this point, many more Malaysians have adopted a new identity based on the political nation and are ready to participate more in public life and in the shaping of it. They are putting aside the ethnic, religious, or regional identities that until now were the greatest obstacles to the creation of a plural society. Effectively, Malaysia has broken away from divide-and-rule, and the bases — ethno–demographic and socioeconomic — in the pluralism model are no longer so tightly related. This lesson could hopefully be transferred to other countries that are vulnerable to similar conflicts dating from colonial times.

State–nation policies in the case of Malaysia were able to put an end to the divide-and-rule colonial legacy. But no one state would be able to do this by itself. At some points, the state of the global economy could be enough to decide between the country ending as military state and a democracy. The seven policies described above only provide a framework that could make for the conditions to enable stable democracy to emerge. But even with all the modernisation, economic progress and cultural changes, democracies are always on a slippery slope. As Inglehart and Welzel put it, "[e]lite integrity makes the difference between formal democracy and effective democracy (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, p. 324). The modern history of Malaysia tells us how important leaders are in moments of great conflict and instability, how it is important to put aside political differences and work together for political nation. Malaysia was, even under previous government on the path towards becoming fully developed country. But at certain point, economic development is not enough and what contributed to the end of former government was its failure to act with integrity, allowing corruption and shady tactics to flourish. And the fact that the public recognised that threat and held the elite to account is a very hopeful sign. Even though Malaysia might not be fully developed, fully just or fully democratic, it is a state–nation, and it is closer than ever to become one community, a pluralistic nation that is willing to mobilise and act — a complete negation of divide–and-rule.

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# Face and Mask: Becoming Visible in the Public Sphere[1]

**Jaroslava Vydrová**

**ABSTRACT**

*In the background of Helmut Plessner's analyses, the text describes conditions and aspects of appearance by humans in the public sphere, in relation to other people as well as in relation to their own possibilities of power. The aim is to present several phenomena such as mask, face, and armour, and particular examples of their manifestation in the philosophical context as well as in the context of art (theatre, literature) which are connected to the modus of play as the significant anthropological feature. Plessner offers critical diagnoses of the age, and of the deficient manifestations connected to sociality (narcissism, hypocrisy, acedia). In accordance with that, I try to formulate the challenge of humans living in contemporary society and find some ways out of their situation as citizens, and as members of a community as well as of society.*

*Keywords:* limits of community, mask, armour, play, man as dual

The point of departure concerning the question of citizenship and its position in contemporary society is in the following analysis not connected to the sphere of social philosophy, theory, or ethics, but rather to look at some elemental phenomenological aspects by which can be identified how man becomes visible in the community and in society by her or his behaviour and manifestations. In other words, this question is articulated in an altered way: what does it mean when we appear in the public sphere, in the sense of our expressivity? The concept of expressivity is one of the key words of the philosophical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner, on which the considerations in this text are built. By returning to basic analyses of appearance in the public sphere, we can provide an *appropriate* as well as a *moderated* framework for the question of responsible citizenship.

**FROM COMMUNITY TO SOCIETY, AND VICE VERSA**
The reason I am going to refer to Helmuth Plessner's *Limits of Community: a Critique of Social Radicalism* (1924)[2] is that in this work we can find interesting and, in some ways, paradigmatic anthropological insights into human appearance in the public sphere. In relation to it we should first explain the leading motivation and problematics that Plessner considers. In his diagnostic perspective, he questions the difference between *Gesellschat* and *Gemeinschaft*

(*society* and *community*) — which was specifically characterised by Ferdinand Tönnies[3] — and looks into conditions of social radicalism, which arise from the tension of the founding of these forms of togetherness. Community, as based on intense and close relations, creates intimate bonds like family, neighbourhood or friendship; society is derived at an abstract level and instead of real relations leads to boundaries between people. The constellation of conditions of these two forms of human relatedness, when approached from opposite sides and analysed as contra–matters, causes overestimation or underestimation of human relationships in the core of human sociality. On the one hand, an enthusiastic approach to community and the, so to say, pathos of lived and intimate relations can lead to argumentation based on exclusion, nationality, and even radicalism. On the other hand, cold and impersonal attitudes among people in society create responsivity which is mechanistic, distant, and sterile. "From this point of view, Plessner criticises both the Romantic ideal of a complete integration of individual and community, as well as the Frankfurt School notion of alienation that is based on this ideal" (Mul, 2014, p. 26). And Plessner's solution is formulated in his anthropological account in such a way that, contrary to the opposite characterisations, either personal or public, he states that man is inevitably dual, a *Doppelgänger*–like double, while at the same time she or he stands in both spheres, the private as well as the public.

How is this connected with phenomenological considerations concerning visibility, of being or becoming visible/invisible? Exactly in this elemental sphere of human appearance are based the schemes of our visibility which function (or do not function) in the public sphere. The answer can be found in Plessner's descriptions — and in the considerations inspired by him — which offer interesting and apt aspects of manifestations of man as mutual seeing or man caught in the gaze of other. In this respect, it can be said that the dual character of man is derived from his or her expressivity.[4] At the same time this consideration is convergent with the phenomenological approach which derives from experience and aims to uncover and disclose the sphere of phenomena in their appearing and givenness, how they really appear, and in which field or framework they manifest themselves.[5]

In the following sections I will introduce several examples of human appearance such as armour, mask, role, and play. In relation to them may be described three possible deficient modes of the existence of man connected with his or her situatedness in society. Finally, we can try to formulate the challenge for humans living in contemporary society and suggest a possible way out of the actual problems and deficits of sociability as presented by the citizenship of the societies in which we actually live, in other words the "global middle class".[6]

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3    Cf. Bickel, C. (2016) and Peetz, K. (2010), who explain aspects of both conceptions, their theoretical roots and consequences. The interpretations of both thinkers are echoed in different directions and across a wide scale of opinions, among which we could mention, on the one side, the connection to the youth movement (*Jugendbewegung*) by Tönniens and, on the other, to New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) by Plessner.

4    And thus it creates a "specific human feature rather than a sign of alienation caused by a particular form of society and its labour conditions" (Boccignone, 2014, p. 180).

5    Anthropology and phenomenology are intertwined in many respects, for historical as well as philosophical reasons — one possible contribution is presented in T. Breyer's analysis (2012) and there are several analyses published by J. Fischer, a specialist on Plessner's philosophy and one of the founders of the Helmuth Plessner Gesellschaft.

6    To use T. H. Eriksen's concept from his *Syndrome of the Big Bad Wolf* (in Czech, 2010).

## A CHARACTERISTIC OF BECOMING VISIBLE: MASK

One of the most significant features which describe how man is searching for and reaching *modi vivendi*, forms of behaviour, and communication in the situations in which she or he occurs is *shame*. On the one hand shame, or shyness, forces us to hide, not to show too much, or not to show what really concerns our being. We hide in order to conceal what refers to the core of our being. On the other hand, people often want to be seen in different ways, want to perform by their images something from themselves, even pretend something. Plessner introduces to the observation of human expressivity the concept of "armour" (*Rüstung*). Armour functions as an outer protection against things coming from outside as well as inner preservation. It is an outer sign, a manifestation of how man wants to be protected. At the same time, the armour functions as a barrier behind which she or he wants to be completely invisible and hidden. To get this or that form — either a solid shield or a flexible veil — or this or that appearance, means in reality not to be oneself, who one is, but to be "someone". That means, in other words, an irreal compensation. Man gives up being himself but aims to mean something, play some role, represent himself as something, or rather something else. With the help of masks, gestures, schemes of behaviour, and some adopted means (these tools do not always need to be our own — for instance we can hold functions or positions), we create from ourselves a protection boundary. This characterisation is, in other words, part of the *natural artificiality* of man which, according to Plessner, represents one of the elemental anthropological principles.[7]

Let us mention some particular examples from different areas — one from Greek philosophy, another from artistic creation, and another from a novel by Milan Kundera — which illustrate what is in the background, and at stake, in this characterisation:

(1) In Greek philosophy, which is followed by succeeding traditions, we find the same word connected to face as well as to mask: *prosopon* (in Latin, *persona*).[8] Face is what is seen by others as well as being connected with the ability to see. Speaking and acting are also connected to this double aspect of seeing. Mask as such does not function to hide the face, rather it "cancels" the face, thereby functioning to show, or reveal. Sometimes the face is too visible, speaks too much and has to escape notice, to pass unobserved. Specific forms, for example, are manifested in the occurrence of hypocrisy, or pretence. By moving to the latter context of philosophical anthropology we can see the double aspect of mask, which means that man uses mask which shows herself: she or he either plays *in mask*, in role or *with mask*. Play and game represent here an individual, specific situation, with one's mask or, in a general sense, the rules of using masks, revising or replacing one role for another under the common rules. To conclude this characteristic, we can state with Hans-Peter Krüger, that man is "the *bearer* of the role" as well as "the *player* of the role" (2014, p. 67; emphasis added; 2009, p. 197).

(2) The next example, which derives from the above–mentioned tradition, is the obvious analogy of using mask in theatre. This connection is very illustrative and close to the anthropological insight, because an actor plays and acts at the same time, i.e. she or he is a living person and an actor, and their situation is simultaneously connected with life and

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7    Together with *natural artificiality* the other two anthropological principles, *mediated immediacy* and *utopian standpoint*, are analysed in the last part of his main work *The Levels of Organic and Human* (Plessner, 1975).

8    I am thankful to R. Karul for introducing me to the conception of F. Frontisi-Ducroux: *Du masque au visage*. Cf. Frontisi-Ducroux, 2012, pp. 64, 77, 98; and Karul, 2019, p. 160.

with play, too. To really play a part means a real achievement, in fact "expression and emotions thus cannot be played", i.e. completely artificially induced or pretended.[9] Similarly, a musical composer composes by playing an instrument. This kind of play or playing is intertwined with living and agency as the explication of possibilities and variedness of human person who becomes who she is. Thus, we are not far from the anthropological statement that "personal identity is a sort of lifelong improvisation" (Boccignone, 2014, p. 186). Plessner therefore asks the following question: "Is it not exactly in the methodical aspect invaluable, that here [in playing] human existence becomes transparent to its core, that by transformation creates herself?" (2003c, p. 404).

(3) To enrich this search for significant examples we can add a quotation from a passage from Milan Kundera's *Immortality* where he surprisingly describes many phenomena close to our consideration, such as the relationship between gesture and individuality, masks and faces. In one sequence he writes:

> Laura looked at Agnes and saw her glasses in her sister's hands. She suddenly felt a need for them. She felt a need for a shield, a veil that would cover her face from her sister's hatred. … she savored, with a kind of masochistic passion, the vulnerable nakedness of her face, marked with the traces of her suffering". (Kundera, 1991, p.159)

The glasses belong, so to speak, to her body, and when she is sad, when she suffers, she cannot show her eyes. Their covering is more than a technical tool: it belongs to her bodily expressivity as an inherent, appropriate part of it, like a limb. This example shows how the *artificiality* reversed the naturality of Laura, and vice versa.

With these three examples we actually find three specific characteristics. Thus, we can return in this regard again to the Greeks. According to them, face and mask are intertwined in one concept and this seemingly metaphorical and illustrative list of examples of face and mask in different contexts converge to form their anthropological significance.

The interplay of performance and hiding, the relation to ourselves and to others, seeing and being seen, belong to the core of our living and behaviour. The masks which we use are ambiguated in different ways. We choose them, even if only to some extent, because we are aware that we are seen by others; masks belong to person and at the same time are "an artificial border of the expression of man" — as described by Plessner (2003b, p. 82). Nevertheless, they hide and show. In other words: masks, or roles, have a "twofold structure", they "publicly reveal and privately conceal" (Krüger, 2014, p. 67). We use masks because we act, behave and communicate in our professions, functions, and roles at different levels of togetherness and sociality in the public sphere, i.e. via different forms of official physiognomy by which our own intimacy persists.

From this point of view we can conclude that the public sphere is constituted by "conceding to each person the right to wear 'masks", i.e. to play social roles (Helmut Plessner Gesellschaft, n. d.), by conceding "the freedom to play" (Krüger, 2014, p. 97). These official forms of hiding and manifestation follow some communicable rules, as ceremonies like diplomacy, and tact or tactics. Some patterns are more fixed, or sterile, some are more elastic,

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9     "…because we are played by them, … they can be called-in by aiming play" (Hyvnar, 2006, p. 19). The situation of actor and man and, from that, the ensuing ambiguity is pointed out by the theoretician of theatre J. Hyvnar, who analyses Plessner's anthropology of the actor (Plessner, 2008). By that, he also describes the connection to the approach of Stanislavski, to which it is here referred.

or dynamic, and connected with the "element" of play. If with the Greeks we can say that we can represent only that which we can think, with Plessner we can say that we can manifest ourselves according to the possibilities of our own power (*Machtpotential*): it creates our nimbus, armour, charisma, and forms of becoming important. Man is *homo faber* as well as *homo ludens*, who realises herself through irreality and the capability of play, which refers to the core–sphere of her personality (*Spieltrieb*).

**FORMS AND TENDENCIES OF SOCIAL VISIBILITY: BETWEEN NARCISSISM AND APATHY**
By reading Milan Kundera we also find two complaints (Cf. Kundera, 2000, pp. 15, 104) — there are only a few gestures but too many people; there are too many faces which are so similar. The narrator in the book describes how people create their individuality or how they think about their personality: some add features to their characters, ascribe themselves expressions which could make them more visible, noticed, important, special; the strategy of other people is the opposite — they discount and reduce in their expression everything that is derived, alien, or taken from outside and aim to get to the original self and, by doing so, point out that only they are special. These tendencies — seemingly oriented in opposite directions — are at their core the same when man wants "to be somebody", like somebody else, or as "authentic" herself. They are derived from the clash of the inner and outer, intimate and public spheres of individual, to which people react in different, more or less adequate ways. But the right gesture cannot be derived and not all forms of expression are — according to Kundera — real. The epilogue of the novel is written by Květoslav Chvatík, who titled his analyses of Kundera's work *In Search of Lost Gesture*, because it is in gesture that Agnes, one of the main characters of Kundera's novel, is created. Gesture presents individuality, it is a kind of "act" by a person which is not derived from borrowed schemes. Gesture is thus not a loan, but pure expression: it cannot be pretended or learned.

That the "man is double" is a challenge to human existence. We can characterise Plessner's anthropology as the anthropology of expressivity. In such expressions as crying and laughing, mimicry, gestures, etc., human existence can be understood as unique and as bodily significant (*im Körper — im Leib*). This uniqueness is inscribed in the possibilities as well as in the need of human explication in expressions. It should also be added that Plessner characterises the question of human as opened (spread in personal time and human history) and the searched and found features of human existence are subordinated to the main claim of so-called "indeterminacy" (*Unergründlichkeit*). This is caused by the special situation of man as an "eccentric positionality". She or he is thus somewhere and somehow situated, in an individual state, face to face with the present circumstances on the one hand and on the other she or he structures this situation, and measures it with rules, norms, and schemes which influence man's decisions. Eccentricity means the centre and relational pole at once. We behave in different relations and situations in which we occur as well as being able to assume an attitude towards them, stay in some position, transform the situation in language, agency, and in different projects.

From this anthropological perspective we can characterise life on the one hand as the fluctuation and movement in changing situations and circumstances, and on the other hand as the outer order, the system of agreements and different hierarchies. These two spheres are not separate, because the personal, intimate states and the official, public spheres are intertwined; in this intertwining, one perspective is not reduced to another, or subordinated to it. The array of possibilities and choice of decisions are arranged according to one's concrete lived situation. This situation is open to the original, ground flow of the present, i.e. the

flowing present of subjectivity — not decided without subjectivity — and it can be varied in different ways. Also, something new and surprising can arise in relations gripped in schematic standards, and by contrast, newness can alter into grey reality, everydayness, or formalism.

As was mentioned above, Plessner was a good diagnostician of the age and we can look into some of his examples and findings which illustrate the dual and eccentric position of man. In many respects his observations from the interwar period are historically conditioned, but in some respects they touch common problems of man which can be detected in the contemporary situation. He pointed out that in what is visible, in forms which are seen as proper and understandable, we can catch several *deficient* tendencies of becoming visible. According to him, "Industrialism is a form of machinery without tact, expressionism is art without tact and social radicalism is ethics without tact. The need for bodily hygiene influences art and the ethics of thoughtless frankness, and is the principal painful activity against ourselves and against others" (Plessner, 2003b, p. 110). The word which describes the deficit in human relations is *hygiene*, which means distance, inability to be interested or touched, the sterility which eliminates spontaneity. When we use the analogy of characters in the sphere of art again — as a complement to Kundera's characters in *Immortality* — there are two symptomatic figures which represent the disturbed conditions of living relations in society: "Man is split in Kafka's sense, he is either somebody more for himself or he is somebody more for other people. He is Narcissus or a comedian" (Hyvnar, 2008, p. 15). And there is a third possibility, described by German philosopher Josef Pieper as a state when the face is covered by sadness and listlessness. He recalls and updates the older concept of *acedia*. We live in relatively safe, prosperous and free societies, but we are not happy, nor even satisfied. Man is then apathetic, morose, lacking in attraction, indifferent. He becomes stuck in his state, he neither moves nor changes anything because he does not want to be disturbed, to take responsibility for himself, he does not want to be himself — to reference Kierkegaard. Or he has lost hope — to echo Eriksen. But the opposite state of *acedia* is not easily solved by a flow of activity, efficiency, or strenuousness. Paradoxically, those are its symptoms. We find attractions too fast and with the same intensity we let them go. What we lose by *acedia* is not only a kind of praxis, but inner harmony, and a proper relationship to ourselves, things and the world. In the critique of the industrial age and tactless relations, Plessner pointed out that we "should not forget the seriousness of cheerfulness, the melancholy of grace and the meaning of self-covering, non-speaking kindness" (Plessner, 2003b, p. 94).

The critical insight goes further when man lost feeling for nuance, time for detail, and the sense of openness to that what is unpredictable, unplanned, or what is not connected with profit or usefulness. Man overestimates reason, spirit, and values, which make him a sterile, impersonal part of society. The counterreaction to that state is then tricky (to stay with the example of the theatre, then the reaction appears in the form of the theatre of the absurd). And man underestimates the flexibility and diversity of his own being and loses contact with it. There are different side–effects to sterility, or hygiene, in human relations, in impersonal, contactless relations as well as in the invasive imagology (we are also attacked by a massive flow of faces, images, and visual smog) which is strongly present today in visual marketing and the marketing of ideas. Beyond this firm shape of the public space there is in fact fragility, the uncertainty of individuality, which loses its standing point when faced with man's own here and now, according to which the conditions of her or his existence are not pre-given. These can be described in terms of the two extreme poles of public and intimate, which are in contemporary societies becoming common.

**IN SEARCH OF LOST SPONTANEITY**

How to escape this situation? The challenge of the present can be expressed by the keyword of this consideration: to understand man as dual, because man is always already a *Doppelgänger* of the intertwined private and public spheres. The forms of our visibility touch the core of subjectivity itself, as well as the conditions of propriate manifestation in society like the right to be visible, the right to hide, to play a role, and to wear a mask, as mentioned above. The recognition and freedom of agency is thus connected to decisions about one's own visibility and the visibility of others.

With Plessner we can formulate a very basic and simple invitation: to be aware of our possibilities in accordance with the situation and society in which we live, as well as of the capabilities that we can realise. The challenge is then inscribed in the offer of the actual state of present being, the challenge of that which is not prepared or decided in advance, planned by diplomacy, or by tact. To *bear* and to *play* the role which we take in the family, in the community of colleagues, and in the state or nation into which we were born. To understand "who" I am and how this is connected with who I should, want, pretend, or have failed to be — this is linked with the situation in which I am always already placed, to which belong the possibilities that I structure, plan, and interpret, as well as the limits and conditions to which I have to respond.

The challenge of spontaneity does not mean that everything that is unrestrained, impulsive, or playful is inevitable in contrast to stability and morality. Society and sociability are the right spheres where these spontaneous initiatives can be realised, where they receive feedback and the chance to explicate, develop, and even improve. To return to the beginning of this text — the aim of Plessner's considerations in his sharp and apt analyses of *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft* was not to overestimate community, nor to resign from society.[10]

Citizenship in contemporary societies calls for normal, healthy, and moderate relations — contrary to hygiene and excessive or minimal personal investment in relations, as a kind of an appropriate framework of togetherness. We can say that, according to our political and social context, we live in relative abundance and wealth. This stability and quality of life in one sphere of our existence can be accompanied by deficiency and dissatisfaction in another. Social anthropologists and economists describe, using the concepts of "marginal utility" or "hedonic adaptation", the special features of our behaviour when the quantity of goods or pleasure lose their attraction and previous values and utility diminish. Or when, by the widening of possibilities of choice, we lose the ability to decide. The beneficial effect of generous opportunities, openness, and sufficiency — not only in the example of goods, but also in the example of citizenship — can turn into wasted chances because we do not know what to do with them.

We can find illustrations of different variants of the aforementioned lost chances on the one hand and on the other hand the efforts of productive and functioning constellations. These function exactly because of their appropriate forms, in other words, in the discourse

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10    This has different consequences, for example as "clarifying the potential to legal discourse. Legal subjects in a process can be regarded as prototypical role players, as their action potential is strictly framed by process law, practices and customs (…) [and the] notion of social roles can offer a model for the legal subject as an abstract bearer of rights and duties." It is also connected to an important point, namely "the idea that the artificiality and formality of roles, forms and masks contribute to a healthy distance between inner and outer life. Man inevitably has to be a double (Doppelgänger) in order to protect the self and society (…), the stability of the self and the stability and functioning of the legal system" (Mul, 2014, on Hengstmengel's interpretation of Plessner, p. 30).

which is attentive to forms of expressivity and the manifoldness of human realisation (from agency to imagination), which fits with the attitude which is described in the background of Plessner's anthropology by Martino Enrico Boccignone. This suggestion does not lead either to the high-flown attitude to own existence, the claim of rightness, certainty, and urgency in establishing relationships, nor to averageness, provinciality, or the cold surface of social strata. For the glib schemata suggested by pathos, or solutions from above, are far from being incorporated in individual decisions, but are close to superficiality. He states that what we need is a "sober, relaxed and confident irony". This enables the open, "emancipated" approach to oneself and one's own situation in the world which is needed in the state of cultural and political "acceleration"[11] of contemporary societies and in an era in which the roots and traditions of communities are being lost. Citizenship can be playful in the sense of being a "hybrid of responsibility and serenity, involvement and distance, critical reflection and spontaneity, earnestness and joy of playing, engagement and composure" (Boccignone, 2014, pp. 189, 190).

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11    Cf. Eriksen's description of a society of surplus and acceleration.

# In the Court of the Jester: On Comedy and Democracy

**Cade M. Olmstead**

**ABSTRACT**

*This paper seeks to make an assessment of the current political landscape with regard to the way comedy gets deployed as a form of political rhetoric and action. It begins with Alenka Zupančič's analysis in The Odd One In of G.W.F. Hegel's developmental account of ancient Greek theatrical forms. The conclusion of comedy as a concrete universal is then expanded through reference to the performance theory of Jeffrey C. Alexander. Attention is given to ineffective forms of comedy as political action, namely irony. The potential for a subversive form of comedy is identified and explicated through the 2013 Gezi Park Protests in Turkey. Key to this analysis is the way in which protestors responded to ridicule by state actors and sought to take up the epithet of "çapulcu" (looter) through comedic songs and other protest action. It is argued that oppressed actors came to seriously identify with the epithet by becoming looters of public space thus enacting a kind of concrete universal. Ultimately, the paper makes a call for a more rigorous form of political comedy, one that comes under the heading of a "serious comedy" in opposition to prevailing forms of irony today.*

The notions of democracy and comedy seem, upon first consideration, to be issues resting wholly apart. The idea of democracy draws forward signifiers such as "the public", "freedom", "expression", "voice", and many others. 'Peace' may even make its way into this web, but upon observing the happenings all around the globe, we find that democracy is continually under threat and its presence often anything but peaceful. This observation is not meant to discredit democracy, but rather to highlight the need for a continual awareness of its function in order to see how societies might preserve the core of the democratic ideal. This core can be ascribed to the radical ability of actors to embed their collective wills and desires into their surrounding society through a 'more' peaceful contestation of wills. While the higher valuation of democracy when compared to authoritarian politics is to be found in this core, democracy is also elevated in that it even allows for contestation to be expressed. The powers which seek to erode this base have always recognised the importance of rhetoric and narrative and their role in shaping political outcomes. It was Joseph Goebbels who said, "This will always remain one of the best jokes of democracy, that it gave its deadly enemies the means by which it was destroyed" (Stanley, 2015). It should not be assumed that the demagogues of contemporary life have forgotten this.

But in what way is comedy meant to inform the current status of affairs? The understanding of comedy presented here is entirely concerned with the relations between the symbolic and material fields. While comedy may conjure up images of Hollywood blockbuster films or comedians dishing out one–liners on a dimly lit stage, the comic consciousness, as conceived in the works of G.W.F. Hegel and Alenka Zupančič, leads to a more philosophical

point about the relation between ideas, representation, and the concrete. And from this, I argue the comic presents actors with a possible opening to reshape the conditions in which they find themselves. It is along these lines, or rather in the interruption of lines, that comedy can be profoundly instrumental in efforts to not only rhetorically maintain the democratic ideal but draw closer its realisation.

In the following analysis, I will describe a notion of comedy by starting through the lenses of Hegel and Zupančič, proceed to lift it off the page through exemplification, namely the Gezi Park Protests and Jeffrey Alexander's performance theory, and finally conclude with normative comments about the use of the comic in public discourse. Drawing upon the works of various scholars, the analysis presented here aims to draw out the connections, intersections, and possible applications between comedy and the public sphere, without necessarily arriving at theoretical closure or a complete account. My normative suggestions seek not only to give comedy a subversive edge but to provide a pathway forward for actors to claim agency in the face of adversity.

## COMIC CONSCIOUSNESS (OR A NIGHT AT THE HEGELIAN THEATRE)

The notion of the comic I am working with has its foundations in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Hegel's discussion of comedy takes place in the section on religion, where it appears as the finale in a survey of Greek theatre, which includes epics, tragedy, and comedy. Zupančič's *The Odd One In* (2008) notes the significance of it taking place after Hegel's conclusion that "Spirit is reason as materially existing, above all in the ethical life and practices of a community" (p. 13). This conclusion takes place in the section on spirit where Hegel's emphasis is described as "how Spirit (as world) appears to consciousness" (Zupančič, 2008, p. 14). This contrasts with the following section on religion where "the emphasis is on the question of how Spirit (or the Absolute) conceives of itself" (Zupančič, 2008, p. 14). This becomes more concrete when we consider how Hegel conducts his survey of Greek theatre. The common guiding thread of the discussion revolves around how each dramatic form handles the representation of ideas, of the universal. The shift from tragedy to comedy presents a fundamental turning point in his survey. Whereas tragic actors would wear masks to represent the universal, in comedy there are no masks. For Hegel, comedy functions as the point in which "*the Self is the absolute Being*" (as cited in Zupančič, 2008, p. 28). This idea is also found within the Christian tradition. Christ is not representative of God but is God incarnate (Zupančič, 2008, p. 39). The very gap that is implied in representation is lifted.[1] The symbolic comes into materiality or, as Zupančič (2008) states, in comedy we are dealing with "not the physical remainder of the symbolic representation of essence" but "*this very essence as physical*" (p. 26). For Hegel, "Comedy is not the undermining of the universal, but its (own) reversal into the concrete… This is a universal which is no longer (re)presented as being in action, but *is* in action" (Zupančič, 2008, p. 27). Comedy is not just an interesting heuristic for analysing the symbolic and the material; rather, it is integral to the analysis of its essential structure.

## THE JESTER

In Alenka Zupančič's *The Odd One In* (2008), comedy undergoes a further refinement. The first notion to be dispensed with is the common conflation of laughter with comedy, and theorists of ideology have brought attention to this point. It is tied to a similar claim that what looks

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1    For examples, see Joel Schechter's discussion of Aristophanes in *Satiric Impersonations*.

like resistance can often function as a necessary element of ruling ideology. Mladen Dolar is most insightful here when he states, "[Laughter] provides us with the distance, the very space in which ideology can take its full swing" (as cited in Zupančič, 2008, p. 4). Laughter functions as the mechanism of relief from truth, and while comedy may produce laughter, it is keen to observe that the latter does not necessarily imply the former or that laughter should accompany all forms of comedy. This is a key insight in being able to give comedy its subversive edge. Laughter's presence may very well work to conceal a deeper truth of the situation. It is on this point, taking a cue from Zupančič, that the role of the "Jester" should be neither assumed nor welcomed, and furthermore, provides the reason for the titling of this paper. Zupančič (2008) illustrates this as follows:

> Let us imagine a group of philosophers passionately discussing an issue that may seem completely trivial to the so-called common man, like: 'What is the nature of being?' While they are thus debating, a jester might be tempted to intervene in this 'charade' with a gesture of derision – for example, by showing his butt... The problem here, how-ever, is that this all too willing display of what is usually ('culturally') meant to remain covered (a tongue, a butt, a penis...) functions, in most cases, as the veil of a perhaps more disturbing fact... In other words, 'showing it' might be a way of protecting and veiling something else: the sacred mystery of a given symbolic structure, put in jeopardy by this or that 'comic charade'. (p. 102–103)

Today it seems we are trapped within the Jester's domain. For example, late night television comedians in the United States mock and 'reveal' the foolish acts of the country's leaders, yet does this not work to further conceal the reality of the situation, that is, the ability of those to even enter into and exercise these positions of power? While Donald Trump became the exhaustive laughter–object of comedians and his opponents during his campaign for president, this appears to have done nothing to prevent his rise to power.

Turning now to the comic, Zupančič (2008) theorises that comedy is a field composed of various modes. This includes but is not limited to jokes, irony, and humour. Zupančič's text focuses on the "comical" mode in particular, and within this "comic" mode, she further identifies distinct figures. My own discussion of comedy, while now digressing from Zupančič, holds in the background her figure of the comic known as the "The other and the Other". This figure is often found in comic cases of "mistaken identity". The figure of comedy I present here is best characterised not as mistaken identity but as an overidentification of identity. In this figure, two parties hold a common signifier, yet the two exist in different contexts. These two contexts, or narratives, run alongside one another with a common signifier acting as a glue between them. The generation of these contexts is a result of overidentifying. The suturing threads of a symbolic order are interrupted or loosened, and through this opening, new narratives can be threaded but in a process which utilises the same signifiers. This can be imagined in a literary context where characters end up in all kinds of comical mishaps and situations because while they lack shared meanings or knowledge, the audience is aware of these. In this figure, there occurs a disruption of the quilting of a symbolic order, of a mas-ter–signifier. The key to this figure remains the reversal of the absolute, as conceived of being composed of signifying chains, into the concrete. This reversal, I contend, gets at the subversive potential of comedy.

## THE COMIC IN ACTION

The question remains of how to even conceive of comedy operating in action or in society on a large, social scale. To do so, I turn to Jeffrey Alexander's influential theory of performance, or cultural pragmatics. Alexander, following the work of Kenneth Burke, Erving Goffman, Paul Ricœur, and J. L. Austin, among others, attempts to read social life as a text, produced in and through cultural interaction, blending aspects of the sometimes deeply conflicted semantic and pragmatic approaches. Alexander (2003, p. 3) calls for recognising the essential, autonomous role of meanings and signifiers, such as "good and evil, of friends and enemies, of honour, God, civilisation, chaos", and other kinds of narratological terms, in the construction of social life. A common criticism of the narratological turn is the difficulty in moving from idea, *Vorstellung*, to knowledge of society's actual operation but, unique to Alexander's approach, is the ability to transcend the dichotomy between meanings and practices. Alexander is able to do this by conceiving of symbolic action as performance. This involves "fully intertwining semantics and pragmatics" (Alexander & Mast, 2006, p. 12–13). Successful performances in contemporary, ritual–like events occur when there is a proper fusion of actors, audiences, collective representations, means of symbolic production, mise-en-scène, and social power. It is the success and failure of social performances which come to shape, define, and even reinforce social narratives.

Alexander's cultural pragmatics provides the framework on which to further elaborate on my comic figure. For it is in both Hegel's discussion of comedy and Alexander's performance theory that articulations of the interaction between the symbolic and the material are made. The absolute coming into its own is akin to viewing culture as an autonomous force and structure. I will now turn to the Gezi Park Protests to demonstrate my Hegelian–Alexanderian reading and comedy's subversive edge.

## SOME GEZI PARK JAZZ

Turkey's 2013 Gezi Park Protests represent the largest demonstration in the history of the Turkish republic. It is estimated that 3.5 million people engaged in the protests, which, while taking place all across the country, centred on the events in Istanbul's Taksim Square. The protests began as a demonstration against the government's decision to demolish the park and construct commercial buildings in its place. Protesters went on to occupy the park in protest and, after police suppression of the protesters' demonstration efforts, the movement grew rapidly.

The Gezi Park Protests are characterised by a number of interesting facets. The first of these is the unique, powerful role that social media played. The traditional Turkish network media was quick to avoid addressing the protests, but online, activists could still spread their message. While Alexander finds that it is increasingly difficult to enact successful performances in modern society as its elements undergo greater diffusion, social media represents a greater decentralisation of those elements, which may counteract a part of this diffusion, taking into consideration the new forms of media made possible by technological advance and how these forms allow protesters to construct and disseminate their cause without the control of central organs of mediated communication. Social media, in particular, may enable the construction of new performative spaces.

The comedy of the Gezi Park Protests makes its way into the scene through Turkey's President Erdoğan. During the protests, Erdoğan dismissed the protesters as being "çapulcu",

an archaic Turkish word roughly translating to "looter". The comic figure emerges here in that the protesters chose to overidentify with this signifier. The word became a social media sensation and an essential comic object for the protesters. Banners, posters, social media posts, and t-shirts all came to bear the signifier. Songs were even composed in reaction. One of the most famous songs, by the Bogazici Jazz Choir included the humorous lyrics "Are you a çapulcu? Wow wow!" "Çapulcu" soon became çapul-ing. The verb, used directly in the public discourse, also merged the symbolic into the concrete, into action and materiality. This is the case if we consider that the protesters actually became looters of public space. The protesters came to occupy more than just the park – their crowds spread into the rest of Taksim Square and other protests emerged in cities all across the country. While the government of Erdoğan sought to take away the public's space, Gezi Park, the protesters responded by physically occupying their city. Not only did they become looters of space but looters of their right to freely assemble.

The power of "çapulcu" as a comic object only came to be realised through a re-thread-ing of the narrative around the signifier. Erdoğan supplied a term meant to "ridicule" and demean the protesters, but instead of rejecting the association, they overidentified with this term, exploited the arbitrariness of the signifier, and weaved together a new narrative thread alongside Erdoğan's own. This in turn lead to all kinds of "mishaps" for Erdoğan and yet supplied the means towards new agency for the Turkish people. This comic subjectivity, of moving the hegemonic symbolic order into the concrete, in combination with a seizing of *the means of symbolic production*, i.e. social media, leads me to conclude, in a tongue-in-cheek manner, that the Gezi Park Protests are to be read as a *Marxist comedy*.

**CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR A SERIOUS COMEDY**

I want to conclude with some points about the utilisation of comedy in public discourse. This requires not only making critical assessments of the above case but also returning to what constitutes comedy. While the previous examples are illustrative of the comic at work — that is, how its rhetorical nature allows hegemonic discourses to be subverted, thus opening the way for new agency — further points are needed to refine its usage. While the baggage of laughter for comedy has already been dispensed with, this point needs further emphasis. Taking again the Gezi Park Protests, but this time focusing explicitly on the actions of Erdoğan, the rhetorical strategy of "ridicule" emerges. Erdoğan's use of the word "çapulcu" was meant to discredit and mock, or ridicule, the protesters. There is something analogous to Erdoğan's actions and the American late–night television criticism of Donald Trump. While I think there is need for a more expansive discussion of the role of ridicule, I contend that not only does it appear to be an ineffective rhetorical strategy, it does not belong to the comic proper. Ridicule functions as the quintessential example of where laughter and ideology meet. Its revelatory and social moving capacities are impotent. It sows and utilises division, but it fails to draw forward the very 'cut' itself that comedy introduces into the signifying chains of a given sym-bolic field. Ridicule may be an effective tool for the demagogue, but for democratic actors, its use should be avoided. Instead, democratic actors should remain aware of its utilisation by coercive state actors.

Does this make the performance of these comic actors *ironic*? Irony is best characterised by a detachment between action and belief. While irony is often placed within the realm of comedy, it fails to be a liberating course of action and does not sit in tandem with the comic figure with which I have been working. This opposition arises in a comparison of American

satire, specifically Stephen Colbert's show *The Colbert Report*, and the Gezi Park Protests. *The Colbert Report* seeks to criticise the American right through a satirising conservative media. The host takes on the persona of a conservative pundit and attempts to draw out the 'mis-steps' and gaffes of the right wing in his performance. This stands in contrast to the kind of identification the Turkish protesters utilised. For Stephen Colbert, there must be a kind of ironic detachment between himself and his performance. The Turkish protesters, on the other hand, are simply identifying with themselves. They undergo a kind of self–satirisation where they take seriously that they are çapulcu. Irony is irreducible to the comic proper.

It is in this "serious comedy" that the subversive edge of comedy is enacted. It is only by removing the detachment of action from expression, removing the gap of representation, that comedy's potential can flourish. My final claim is not that the comic figure I have been working with should be introduced or grafted onto all contexts; rather, this analysis illumi-nates the rhetorical structures at work in the construction of reality and shows how certain dynamics of comedy might be utilised to subvert hegemonic codes on behalf of the oppressed. Past pragmatic approaches to culture have emphasised this point and been criticised for it, that is, the citationality of hegemonic codes in counter–performances (Alexander & Mast, 2006). The difference here being not a rejection of "culture as text", as traditional pragmatic approaches do, but a transcending of this theoretical dichotomy with seriousness as the key to merging social meanings and their practices.

Supporters of democracy must be strategic in their combatting of authoritarian forces. An effective strategy would be one that includes a critical approach to the rhetorical structures at work in constructing the collective imagination. Comedy presents one kind of opening to re-suture the threads of the imagination at work. The life of signs is one intertwined with our own. When we take seriously, when we perform seriously, the subversive nature of comedy, rituals of re-enchantment may occur and allow for the radical re-shaping of the conditions in which we find ourselves.

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# Digital Space and Public Mobilisation – #IBoycott and Campaigning for "Macedonia"

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**ABSTRACT**

*The long-awaited solution of the name dispute between Macedonia and Greece, over what the former is to call itself, is finally drawing to a close. In June 2018, after a protracted period of intense consultation and negotiation, the two countries signed the so-called Prespa Agreement. The signing of this agreement was warmly welcomed by many countries and international actors, including the EU and the UN, which have invested much time and political capital in the resolution of the name dispute. Conversely, a portion of the populations in both countries staunchly refuse to accept the agreement as it stands and are using digital platforms to express their dissatisfaction with it. The next step in this process was a referendum in Macedonia intended to approve the agreement and provide a green light to the government to continue. The content of the agreement was highly contested and contained many ambiguous provisions, which referred to the implementation of the agreement and the use of adjective "Macedonian". On the one hand, Macedonian citizens expressed dissatisfaction with provisions that relate to nationality and the use of language; meanwhile, on the other hand, Greek citizens overtly opposed any use of the word "Macedonian". The internet enables an alternative sphere and space for digital participation and facilitates political participation and freedom of expression. An opposition campaign named "I Boycott" set up a webpage to disseminate its mission, message and commitments, along with Twitter and Facebook pages. By using the digital space, the "I Boycott" campaign was innovative for Macedonian campaigning strategy, remained consistent in its message, and reached a wider audience than would have been possible using traditional modes of campaigning.*

*Keywords:*       referendum, "I Boycott", digital space, mobilisation

Since the French Revolution in 1789 referendums have been used to show demos participation in the shaping of the nature of the polis, in terms of its sovereignty or constitutional status (Sussman, 2006). Macedonia's first ever referendum was on the subject of its independence in 1991, when the demos of the then federal republic decided to separate from Yugoslavia and became an independent country with the possibility to join future federations or alliances. Almost three decades later, the demos of Macedonia was presented with another referendum, this time on the constitutional character of the polis, the use of its name and national identity. The demos was presented with its most basic democratic right, to vote on the nature of its own polis. However, unlike the 1991 independence referendum, in which all political entities in Macedonia presented a united front, the 2018 referendum divided the people.

On June 17, 2018 the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Greece and Macedonia signed the Prespa Agreement designed to put an end to the quarter-century long name dispute between the two countries regarding the constitutional name of the latter. This long–awaited event was carefully and closely followed by both the European Union and the United Nations with high representatives (including the Vice–President of the European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary Dicarlo, and the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy Matthew Nimetz, who was the chief negotiator throughout the entire period) from the two organisations present at the signing (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018; Kitsantonis, 2018; Zivanovic & Jakov, 2018). The eventual confirmation of the agreement was to be subject to a referendum in Macedonia and a parliamentary vote in Greece. Macedonia's referendum, which is part of this paper's analysis, took place on 30 September 2018. The dichotomous nature of the referendum question, *Yes* or *No* (Baxter & Marcella, 2014), was slightly mixed in this case, as the changing of the name was linked to the country's proposed membership of the EU and NATO. The question was phrased as follows: "Are you in favour of NATO and EU membership, and accepting the name agreement between Republic of Macedonia and Greece?" The national threshold for a successful referendum is 50%+1.

The importance of the name issue and the referendum process is two–fold, in terms of why the name change is of such importance, and how the name change, and EU/NATO integration processes are tied (BBC News, 2018). First, for Macedonia, Greece's refusal to accept the country and its national identity (after its independence from Yugoslavia) amounts to a rejection of their identity. For Greece, the process since 1991 has represented a makeover of national identity (De Launey, 2014). On the other hand, Greece's belief is that Macedonia is trying to appropriate Greek history and culture. This leaves the name (not to mention the history and identity) of Macedonia as a bargaining chip for both parties. It is important for Greece to "preserve" its Ancient Macedonian culture and it is important for Macedonia, because the issue has been blocking its Euro–Atlantic integration process. The second aspect lies in the aspiration of the country to become part of the EU and NATO. The fact the new proposed name for the country (Republic of North Macedonia) is left out of the ballot shows the contentious nature of the issue among the Macedonian public (Bieber, 2018). What is not contentious in the process is the ongoing favourable position of the EU and NATO in the eyes of the population. In the run-up to the referendum, support for NATO stood at 77 percent, while the EU enjoyed the support of 83 percent of the population (International Republican Institute, 2018). These numbers are significantly higher than in any other applicant country.

The agreement's purpose was to change the constitutional name of Macedonia to Republic of North Macedonia. This new name would be used in all international, bilateral and domestic communication, and its history would not refer to Ancient Macedonia, or its history and culture. In return, the country will not be blocked from joining international organisations under its new constitutional name and would receive an invitation to join the NATO alliance and to start negotiations to join the EU. The signing of the Prespa Agreement was followed by a NATO summit and an EU Council meeting, which in effect were deciding on the fate of the country and its Euro-Atlantic integration. While Macedonia received a NATO invitation on condition of a successful change to the constitution and thereby the name of the country, the EU's summit yielded a rather disappointing outcome. What followed was another conditional recommendation, requiring successful judicial reforms and improvements in the condition of the rule of law, to be re-evaluated and possibly to enter into force in the

autumn of 2019. The result created a level of uncertainty amongst the population and made the task for the Yes camp in the referendum slightly more difficult.

The signing of the agreement created cleavages among the population, to put it mildly. The largest opposition party, VMRO-DPMNE, decided not to have a unified party position, and left it to its members to decide individually on their actions. Conversely, a heterogeneous group of citizens formed the movement "I Boycott" (#бојкотирам) and decided to fill the void left by the opposition (Bechev, 2018), mobilising in the digital space through a webpage (with essential information about the movement) as well as via Facebook and Twitter accounts. Furthermore, the boycott camp was supported by the president of Macedonia, Gjorge Ivanov, who stated explicitly on many occasions that he was against the name change (RFE/RL, 2018).

As it is difficult to show causation between the boycott movement and the outcome of the referendum, this paper will focus on the message delivered by "I Boycott." The aim is to provide an explanation for the importance of a cohesive and unified message during campaigning. The focus of the paper will be on the framing of the message and its uniformity throughout the campaign period.

Nevertheless, a message on its own cannot generate the desired effect for the voters. Instead it should be firmly grounded in a clear campaign plan and conveyed with clear communication. All of this begins with the clear framing of the message. In light of this, the guiding research puzzle of this paper is: To what extent has "I Boycott" used innovative measures as campaigning tools and message–crafting in the context of Macedonia, as opposed to traditional modes of campaigning? And why was it important to remain consistent and separate the name change from the question of EU and NATO membership?

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MESSAGE AND THE DIGITAL CAMPAIGN IN THE LITERATURE**

The focal point of any successful (digital) campaign is the message. How the message is crafted, communicated and received by voters determines the success or failure of the campaign. Issues are the foci of the message. They should be brought together, moulded not from randomised events, but carefully assembled to represent a clear whole, which will provide the message with a clear plot, character, and theme. The message should have clear implications for issues (Silverstein, 2018, pp. 17–25). The message should be consistent. It is imperative for messages not to overlap. By doing this they can cover more ground and, instead of confusion, create effective diffusion (Shea, 1996, p. 173).

Additionally, a campaign needs to develop a communication plan that is issue–centred and is able to combine and present a consistent message. In recent decades, the scope and mode of campaign information has dramatically changed. In the age of big data and social media, when the message can be tailor–made and travel faster, short TV spots are not sufficient. Instead, Twitter and Facebook have revolutionised online campaigning, making it cheaper and easier to disseminate the message (Shea, 1996, pp. 4–7). Moreover, the digital space offers low transaction costs, allowing new players to influence the result, and new tactics.

The message and communication plan are components of the campaign plan, whose aim is to create a step-by-step blueprint to win, as well as to create order out of a chaotic process. The other two components of the campaign plan are its strategy and tactics, which determine the style and time at which the activities should take place and how to communicate the message to voters (Shea, 1996, pp. 18–20, 158–159).

The context of the campaign is an additional relevant element for the campaign plan that can create fruitful conditions for one party or the other. Online campaigning allows parties

to create a platform for communication different from the traditional medium, which can communicate not only the message, but also allow interaction with the message, i.e. by sharing or (re-)tweeting the message. This low-cost medium provides candidates with a platform that avoids journalistic filters that might affect the content of their message (Bimber & Davis, 2003, pp. 6, 20–21). They are reflexive, less expensive and have fewer barriers to entry and to the reproduction of the message (Howard, 2006, p. 147).

The framing of the message has an effect on the preferences of individuals in making them alter their choices. It takes place when different, but logically similar, words are presented that cause individuals to change or reinforce their preferences on a certain issue (Druckman, 2004, p. 671). Iyengar (1990) notes the effect of circumstantial and contextual factors on developing or forming political opinions. In the context of the Macedonian referendum, the "I Boycott" group craftily used people's general opposition to losing their country's name. In addition, this was reinforced by the decade-long project of "history building and appropriation" of the Ancient Macedonian culture. Bechtel et al. (2015) show the difficult task that academicians and researchers face when they are trying to show the effect of framing on relevant political issues. The current research, such as experiment-like situations or other similar methods, are still not able to fully account for the effect, especially when it comes to salient referendum issues (as is the case with the referendum and name change).

**"I BOYCOTT"** (#бојкотирам)

"I Boycott" emerged as a result of the indecisiveness of the largest opposition party, VMRO-DPMNE, in formulating a credible position on the issue. What was initially a public expression of dissatisfaction and an abstention from voting among a group of intellectuals turned into a grassroots movement for many other people, who personally disagreed with the name change. This went from online hashtag (#IBoycott) to expressive dissatisfaction, to a disorganised campaign movement, to a structured opposition, and then to the creation of a credible force for the referendum (Dominioni, 2018). The heterogeneous structure of the movement represented a further challenge to its success and to preventing the government from reaching the 50% threshold. The movement consisted of Western-educated intellectuals who favour NATO and EU membership to Russophiles and home-grown nationalists (LeftEast, 2018; Veliu, 2018). Therefore, the success of the movement could be boiled down to the unity of its message compared to the government's efforts to link the name change to EU and NATO membership. In the Macedonian case, the decision of the opposition not to have a unified stance allowed the "I Boycott" movement to fill in the void, while easy access to online platforms allowed it to create effective and consistent messaging at low costs. "I Boycott" was characterised by its strong digital presence and numerous activities. The three main platforms through which "I Boycott" shared its message were the webpage https://bojkotiram.mk, the Twitter account https://twitter.com/bojkotiram and the Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/pg/Бојкотирам-Bojkotiram. The webpage contains a simple interface which allows visitors to quickly browse through the core components of the movement's message: its proclamation, the goal of the campaign, activities, tasks and mission, its code of ethics and finally a slot where the most recent social media activities can be shared. Its message to boycott the referendum was accompanied by government policies that have proved to be unpopular at the time and slow erosion of trust in the executive.

Additionally, the Facebook and Twitter channels enabled citizens to share and exchange their views and opinions. They served as platforms for planning protests and other events to

express discontent with the government's solution of the Prespa Agreement. "#" was an integral part of the "I Boycott" message. It was the essence that complemented every message it sent out. It followed the script of most recent online movements by using the hashtag and what it stands for. Essentially it was easy to reproduce, share, and spread, thus maximising the potential of the message. The sharing of the message was accompanied by two important strands of literature. On the one hand were the methods of social networks that enable citizens or groups to share their message and reach out to a large share of the population. On the other hand, the framing effect of the issue, using the salience of the context and the relevance and importance of the outcome for the "Macedonian (ethnic)" population. The identified frames of the #bojkotiram message were the danger to Macedonian identity, and asking how joining NATO would help with the economic situation in the country or resolve fundamental internal problems. Finally, the message was framed as a boycott, as this was the only way it could render the referendum unsuccessful (LeftEast, 2018). Overall, sound previous research on the possible outcome was visible in the frames designed for the #bojkotiram message.

Moreover, it has also helped to hear the voices of Macedonians living abroad. The digital sphere transcended national borders and as there were many Macedonians living abroad who were signatories of the campaign's proclamation, the advantage of the digital sphere's ability to connect people who disagree and remove possible obstacles to communication was apparent.

**DIGITAL SPACE, THE REFERENDUM AND #IBOYCOTT**

Referendums are important tools for involving citizens in the decision–making process and in some way they make it easier for representatives to make decisions with wide implications for the whole population. They give citizens "power" to decide on important issues for the entire population, encourage citizens to participate, and promote democratic citizenship. Referendum initiatives are employed as common mechanisms for decision–making. As such, they have a profound effect on liberal–democratic governments and have forced scholars to re-examine the meaning of representative democracy (Mendelsohn and Parkin, 2001, pp. 1–5). In recent years, organisation of referendums has been is on the rise and more and more countries are conducting them (Morel, 2001, pp. 47, 51–56). Since the revolutionary campaign of Barrack Obama in the 2008 US presidential election, social media has become an important source for political campaigning but also an untapped source of unresearched data for academics and researchers. Social networks are now an important source and means of communication to promote grass–roots movements and participatory democracy (Williams and Gullati, 2009, pp. 272–273). Messages, as the central focus of communication for a campaign, should be clearly formulated and be able to mobilise, first and foremost, the internal structure of the movement or party, and, second, provide conditions for the campaigners to be able to stay "on message" during the campaign (De Vreese & Semetko, 2004, p. 11). The Macedonian referendum campaign provided favourable conditions for "I Boycott" to create a platform for message consistency and change the manner in which campaigning could be organised in the context of the country. In the Macedonian referendum, the two sides had clearly different strategies and messages. The pro-EU and pro-NATO movement, led by the government and supported by its junior partners and other parliamentary groups, focused on the many benefits of joining the two organisations. However, it had no clear focus on some particular issues — it appeared too broad and "lost in translation". On the other hand, the "I Boycott" message was that (i) the agreement was unconstitutional; (ii) the government was misleading the voters about

the benefits of joining the two organisations; (iii) the focus should be on domestic reforms. Its message was constantly followed with the hashtag (#IBoycott / #бојкотирам). Its various communication channels were used by many citizens. Its Twitter account, for instance, attracted 1,300 followers and more than 16,500 tweets in the short period between the signing of the Prespa Agreement and the referendum in September (Twitter account of #Бојкотирам, https://twitter.com/bojkotiram). Its Facebook page contains a brief description of its mission and what the movement stands for as well as the possible internal and economic implications (Facebook page of #Бојкотирам, https://www.facebook.com/pg/Бојкотирам). The Facebook page has more than 9,900 followers (Petreski, 2018).

In what follows, several instances will be analysed which depict how "I Boycott" managed to use the digital space to organise and share their message in a focused and organised



manner. In this instance, "I Boycott" presents a series of government decisions made since the independence which it portrays as detrimental to the Macedonian nation. These range from the country accepting its interim name in order to be admitted to the United Nations (1993), to signing the Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001), and the referendum on territorial division (2004). Through such messages the movement strongly appealed to national feeling, thereby emphasising the excessive concessions that, it asserts, Macedonians have had to make throughout the years for the benefit of 'having a better life' It clearly alerts citizens to the danger of once again being led by this dictum, this time in light of the Prespa Agreement. It also depicts the referendum as a tool which allows for the unfair treatment of the Macedonian nation and which corresponds with the values of neither the EU nor the UN.

One of the crucial points mentioned above is the use of context to strengthen the message and provide an alternative to supporters. In this regard, "I Boycott" makes an analogy between the reasons to boycott, on the one hand, and the "duty" of Macedonians to prepare the decades–long known traditional dish ajvar, on the other hand.



Pictures of sweet peppers have subsequently become part of a series of posts which are accompanied with brief "interpretations" of some of the articles of the Prespa Agreement. In this way, "I Boycott" found a way to get closer to citizens by conveying their core message and at the same time appealing to Macedonian tradition. The convoluted legal text was simplified and pointed to some provisions that were not

in compliance with the Macedonian constitution. If we analyse these two examples through the prism of the literature on campaigning, a few common features can be observed. The "I Boycott" message is centred on a single issue — boycotting the Prespa Agreement by not voting in the referendum. The campaign's posts contained #бојкотирам, which differentiated them, but at the same time it was easy to remember and share. Moreover, the context they presented to citizens, such as the preparation of the traditional dish, allowed them to slightly diversify their outlook and at the same time preserve the core message of their campaign.

By the time of the referendum, the number of tweets had reached almost 24,000 and the message was amplified by attempts to re-tweet the same content. The further importance from this case is the ability to create a single message in heterogeneous groups, as was the case for "I Boycott". Taking into consideration that the referendum was close to Macedonia's Independence Day (September 8), the movement was able to expand their boycotting message by making it locally viral, present the governing coalition as anti-Macedonian and emphasise the importance of Macedonian independence. As a result, on 8 September "I Boycott" tweets were the top trending hashtags in Macedonia, with almost 3,900 tweets (Karan, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

The result of the referendum clearly shows that there is disconnection between the demos and the political elites. The bitter outcome of the referendum resulted in a lose–lose situation. The nature of the polis was changed, but the demos in the country is also changing. Although an overwhelming majority of the people who voted supported the name change, the low turnout (or boycotting) left much to be desired. The complexity of the problem, constitutional change of the country, split the people into two camps. Moreover, the binary nature of the referendum, without the possibility to be undecided, further complicated the matter.

Despite not reaching the required threshold of 50%+1 vote (State Electoral Commission, 2018), the government managed to gather the support of the 80 MPs required to pass constitutional amendments in line with the provisions of the Prespa Agreement (Agence France Press, 2018). In January 2019, the governing coalition managed to secure a two–thirds majority after a small group of defectors from VMRO-DPMNE supported the name change. Greece later ratified the agreement as well (Rose, 2019). Since March 2019 the official name of the country has been the Republic of North Macedonia. Under this name, the country applied to join both NATO and the EU. A membership invitation from NATO arrived a few months later and is now in the process of ratification by the national parliaments of member states. The EU part proved to be more challenging, as merely the name change (without credible reforms to the judiciary or the rule of law) has not been enough to start negotiations. Nonetheless, the importance that the digital space played in the referendum cannot go unnoticed. Social media was extensively used and allowed "I Boycott" to mobilise and create platform to present and share their core message with the Macedonian citizens. Mobilisation in the context of this referendum meant discouraging participation in the democratic processes: encouraging a boycott (Karan, 2018), is the opposite effect of what a referendum aims to do, i.e. encourage citizens' participation and democratic citizenship. This case represents an interesting study for re-evaluating the possible effects of referendums and challenge some of the core features — bringing decision–making closer to people by encouraging consultation and participation as widely as possible.

Due to time and space limits, this paper presented only a few instances of how "I Boycott" consistently shared its message. It did not provide quantitative analysis of how

many tweets were shared or retweeted and at what point, since this would have required more resources and deeper analysis, but rather it showed through a few instances that the movement managed to use the digital space to organise and share its message in a focused and organised manner. Moreover, it also showed the framing importance of the message in order to  influence individual preferences. The instances selected follow some of the guides presented in the second section about campaign strategy, message, tactics, and context.

There is an evident gap in the literature on using social media for political campaigns in Macedonia and this calls for future studies, which could provide quantitative analysis on how tweets and Facebook posts serve to mobilise citisens. Moreover, an in-depth analysis and experiments could be conducted to try and determine if and how the "I Boycott" message influenced people's decisions. This study aimed to show how #бојкотирам used the digital space by creating a unified message which was shared across the two social media platforms and the campaign's web-page.

The result of the unsuccessful referendum may not have been a direct consequence of the "I Boycott," however, one cannot neglect its importance in mobilising supporters to boycott the referendum. The fractured trust between institutions, party leaders and society has been widening since independence. Many activists were dissatisfied with the way the referendum was executed and compared the practices of the new government with the same bully behaviour of the previous regime. In other words, for many it was not the right path towards the EU and NATO, nor did it have the legitimacy to change the country's name without plebiscitary approval. The low threshold for "I Boycott" effectually represented the broken relationship between the population and its governors, and a failure of representation on behalf of MPs (LeftEast, 2018).

As a result of this broken trust between the represented and the representatives, the movement offered an unambiguous message of boycott and asked for greater accountability from MPs for their parliamentary actions. The movement used cohesive message and framed it in the right political context to extract wide support (at least from the opposition of the Agreement) and present united movement. The context and void they were presented with was filled with many tweets that managed to bring their message to all voters and juxtaposed the different interpretations of the Prespa Agreement to promote their side. Despite the campaign's obvious inferiority of funds, compared to the "For EU and NATO" campaign, the online platform undoubtedly offered the movement a space to reach a wider audience at minimal cost.

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# Simulant Desire: Dissolution, Democracy, and Technology

**Sujitha Parshi**

## ABSTRACT

*In a time of increasing passivity and homogenisation, contemporary democratic practices, subject to a technologically mediated disorientation, endanger the possibility of a future. The element that is proving to be the battleground for both politics and technology is desire. Today, desire, and its inherent plasticity are the object of technological conquest, and capitalist manipulation. The emerging homogeni-sation, and passive, consumerist behaviour patterns, not only threaten the health of our democracies, but also incapacitate our ability to respond to the unfolding issues of the Anthropocene. The crises of democracy is thus a crisis of education. Building critical vocabularies then becomes crucial to this en-deavour. Plato's Republic, with its questioning of desire, and the relation between desire and the polis, read in the light of increasing technicity, is a powerful tool to not only think the problems of politics and the Anthropocene, but also build a way to think beyond them. In this essay, I employ Heidegger's interpretation of the character of technology as a challenging–forth, along with Plato's articulations of democracy, to present a technological dimension to the challenges of democracy, and the growing necessity to think these challenges within the wider context of the Anthropocene.*

*Keywords:*       Heidegger, Plato, democracy, technology, Anthropocene

> "The revealing that rules throughout modern technology has the character of a set-ting–upon, in the sense of a challenging–forth." (Heidegger, 1993)

The proposed geological epoch of the Anthropocene is characterised by a paradigm shift from understanding planetary subsistence as primarily affected by forces of nature — predominantly the Sun — to human activity as a powerful influence on the systemic func-tioning of the Earth. Be it climate change, the depletion and transformation of natural resources, biodiversity loss, or the pollution of the oceans, the effect of human enterprise on the health of the biogeochemistry of the Earth is showing itself in a persistent imbalance in the complex systems that contribute to the life–giving conditions of our planet. In the seminal work *The Anthropocene: Historical and Conceptual Perspectives*, Will Steffen and his co-authors introduce the Anthropocene as a proposed concept to encompass the "quan-titative shift in the relationship between humans and the global environment" (Steffen, Grinevald, Crutzen, & McNeill, 2011, p. 843).

Given this shift in the capacity of human activity to influence complex biogeological systems, the unfolding age of the Anthropocene, on an unprecedented scale, brings its own, new set of concerns whose implications for the future cannot be underestimated. Whether it is the problem of political tendencies or environmental survivability, the umbrella under

which these issues simmers compels us to look at each not as a separate unit, standing in a milieu of its own, but as intricately bound up, and causing, and affecting every other. If we take into consideration the entropic turn of most systems today, be they political, social, or individual, the question of contextuality and commonality serves as an important tool in understanding the accelerating disintegration, and the potential direction it is headed. But today, any effort towards interpreting the unfolding planetary disaster, in hope of self-correction, is disoriented by the ambiguity of the feedback loops themselves, whether biospheric or environmental (natural and social). One of the major players operating in, and behind the global political and economic structures, today, and historically, is technology. The role that technology plays in every aspect of life — politics, agriculture, education, society — is important enough to warrant a critical examination of the history of its evolution. Towards what goal is this advancing supplementation and integration directed? How is this supplementation adjusting, and playing out, today? How do we begin to understand the crises of democracy, climate change, of thinking and education, considering the looming technological presence in every area?

Looking at the history of technology, every time a rupture in a socio–political system occurred, driving the existing system to adopt a more and more democratic politics, technological evolution has also occurred in parallel, if not explicitly as a contributor to the transformation. Given this close relationship between technological evolution and democratic politics, what is the expression of their interdependence today? If we consider democracy and technology from a critical distance as texts, extracting them from the environment in which their development is situated, we cut off the possibility of understanding their current expression. Semantics and genealogical transformations must be taken into account to understand how the texts react, to what they respond, and what their form and meaning signify today. In order to make sense of contemporary democracy we first need to examine the history of democracy, and its reactive tendencies. Subsequently, we must develop vocabularies to approach the issues afflicting democracy today.

Despite the 2,400 years that separate us, The *Republic* of Plato is still one of the most powerful tools not just for developing critical vocabularies, but also for composing potential antidotes. Reading the *Republic* today, in light of technology, is a revelation. With its healthy suspicion of democracy, and articulation of the necessary tension between politics and philosophy, the *Republic* invites us to examine the character of democracy and technology today, and their reception in philosophical discourse; how can a philosophical analysis of democracy and technology expose their inherent co-dependence? My argument will approach the problem of democracy as a question of technology. Primarily using readings of the *Republic*, with the help of Martin Heidegger's interpretation of the character of technology as a challenging–forth (Heidegger, 1954), I will present the disoriented contemporary democratic operation as facilitating a technological, and capitalist, intervention. This essay is divided into two sections — the first section will closely read Plato's metaphors of the cloak (of democracy) and drones in Book VIII of the *Republic*, within the text of the *Republic* itself. The second section will then examine these metaphors through Heidegger's analyses of technology as enframing in its revealing, and expose the situation of democracy within this interpretation of technology. In the conclusion, I will revisit the question of methods, by emphasising why a study of the nature of technology is critical for contextualising the problem of democracy within the epoch of the Anthropocene.

## 1. THE FAIREST REGIME

*a) Concealment:*

> 'It is probably the fairest of the regimes,' I said. 'Just like a many–coloured cloak deco-
> rated in all hues,[1] this regime, decorated with all dispositions, would also look fairest,
> and many perhaps,' I said, 'like boys and women looking at many–coloured things,
> would judge this to be the fairest regime.' (Plato, *The Republic*, 557c)

Book VIII of the *Republic* is a curious piece, in that it builds itself up as a critique of the
various possible regimes that could exist in a city, and the corresponding souls that would
inhabit and hold power of office in them. But behind this layer, something larger is at play.
Socrates, in exploring the dispositions of the souls that would inhabit the corresponding
regimes, and their histories, exposes the soul itself – composed of many elements, just like
the city — as a battlefield of desires. The regime that rules in the city coincides with the psy-
chic regime — that dominant aspect of their soul, that rules over the others, in the person.
Working with Glaucon and Adeimantus' appetites and desires, Socrates, in describing
the democratic regime, and soul, in Book VIII of the *Republic*, composes one of the most com-
plex metaphors in likening the democratic regime to a "many–coloured cloak".[2] The simile of
the cloak sets the stage for democracy, and the ruling desire(s) in a democratic soul, to be of
a concealing nature. But a closer look at it reveals that the concealment is double. Not only
is the base fabric of the cloak itself multi–coloured, but it is, on top of that, embroidered
with all hues.[3] The very fact that something that is already multi–coloured is again dazzlingly
decorated, signifies a double operation – that of an ornament. The function of an ornament
is to accessorise, or rather, enhance the thing that it adorns, a prosthetic[4] in the sense that
it isn't so much covering for a lack as it is enhancing, adding to the operation of the thing it
supplements. Thus, as the most obvious aspect of the cloak, that which the people encounter
on first glance, the infinite decoration (of all dispositions) is a *representation* of the cloak. But
as a *representation*, as a signifier of the cloak, while it does hold traces of the many–coloured
cloak it represents, by itself, this decoration presents its own essence in representing, and
correspondingly, averts the gaze from the actual essence of the cloak — its concealing, or
covering function (thus, the *re*-presentation). The decoration, then, is a double concealment
— it conceals that fact that the cloak is covering something, thus coming off as the fairest
thing. Considering that those who look at this shiny decoration of the many–coloured cloak,
in a state of dazzlement, understand it to be the fairest thing, and consequently democracy,
likened to the cloak, to be the fairest regime, it raises the question: what is this ornament —
the decoration — concealing; why is it concealing? Who is doing the concealing? To answer
this, we have to examine another metaphor of Plato's in Book VIII — the metaphor of the

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1   Bloom's translation here misses out on the extravagant nature of the cloak. For, the cloak itself
is *poikilon*, i.e., multi–coloured, dazzling and shiny, but on top it is also embroidered, or decked with
more dazzle, more colours.

2   The *himation*, a piece of clothing often translated as 'cloak', was typically draped over tunics,
for warmth but also with an important aesthetic and social significance.

3   Cf. note 1.

4   πρόσ-θεσις (pros–thesis): an adding, addition.

drone(s). But in order to understand the influence of the drones on the democratic soul, we will first need to analyse the nature of a democracy, and the character of the democratic man.

*b) Purveyor of the manifold:*

> "When a young man, reared as we were just saying without education and stingily, tastes the drones' honey, and has intercourse with the fiery, clever beasts who are able to purvey manifold and subtle pleasures with every sort of variety, you presumably suppose that at this point begins his change from an oligarchic regime within himself to a democratic one." (Plato, *The Republic*, 559 d, e)

It is undeniable that every book of the *Republic* resonates with the event of the death of Socrates in the democratic polis. But besides the personal note, Plato's problematising of the nature of democracy, read today, brings up the question of the essence of democracy, and whether it has remained the same across the times. And if so, what is this essence, and how can the contemporary democratic operation be read in light of Plato's interpretation of the nature of democracy? In Book VIII of the *Republic*, Socrates explores the nature of democracy and the democratic soul, right after oligarchy and leading up to the establishment of a tyranny. Who, according to Socrates, is a democratic man? The defining aspect of a democratic man comes from his relationship with his desires.[5] While the oligarchic man expends energy in nurturing that (necessary) aspect of his desire(s) which make him spendthrift, and facilitate his money–making disposition while supressing the unnecessary ones in the interest of the other, the democratic man is precisely unable to prioritise and distinguish between necessary and unnecessary desires. Bedazzled by the idea of equality, and claiming it to be true freedom — a liberation from the presumed violence of supressing the majority of desires (of excess) in the interest of the few (desires difficult to nourish) — the democratic man homogenises his field of desires and, in a frantic manner, against the concept of moderation, leans towards that desire which catches his fancy for the day. Correspondingly, the democratic city is one in which passive, superficial understandings of the ideals of equality, freedom, and diversity are endorsed. To what degree each of these ideals is engaged, Plato believes to be the true test of whether the democratic city will continue dwelling in an unproductive, homogeneous loop, or potentially slip into a tyranny. But the most interesting part of Socrates' exposition about democracy is the role that drones play in establishing, and influencing the direction of the democracy.

While Plato first introduces the metaphor of the drones in the oligarchic regime, the metaphor plays a more decisive role in the affairs of the democratic regime. A drone, in an oligarchy, is that soul who is ruled by unnecessary desires. While critical also of the oligarchic man, Socrates is more approving of him than the drone (and also the democratic man), in that despite his money–making disposition, and being a lover of wealth, he is still prudent when it comes to nurturing his soul and desires, choosing to focus his efforts on nourishing necessary desire(s) and suppressing the unnecessary ones in its interest. On the other hand, a drone, born in an oligarchic city, is that man who is unable to moderate his unnecessary desires, and does the opposite of the oligarchic man—he constantly looks towards fuelling his unnecessary desires. Not acting in the foreground, the drones, in the *Republic*, are more insidious, hiding

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5    Cf. 559c, "...ἡδονων και ἐπιθυμιων..."

behind and influencing the behaviour of the rulers and the ruled by subtly manipulating, and exploiting their tendencies. While rarely seen exercising the power of office, until the establishment of a tyranny, the drones spread their influence indirectly, by targeting and manipulating one's desires, thus claiming their territory, where they hold most power, in the garden of desire.

A look around today's decadent, democratic polis reveals capitalist technology to be embodying the role of Socrates' drones — simultaneously creating and dominating an industry of desire through a consumerist manipulation of the market. Looking at Socrates' anthropomorphic drones, the frenzy that they work themselves into — in pursuit of unnecessary desires — seems to follow a logic of reproduction, or rather, multiplication (of desire, pleasures). But the drones themselves are incapable of reproducing independently, whether they be technological or Socratic. Hence, by facilitating a supply, they establish their ground in one's desires, and multiply through them, creating a demand for more technology from the side of the ones giving over control of their desires, and multiplying behind the cloak. But what about Socrates' allusion to the establishment of democracy in a soul being triggered by the taste of the drones' honey *(and the fact that a drone does not make honey)*? What is the honey, today? To understand this, we shall now contextualise the metaphors of the cloak and the drones by further exploring the question of technology.

## 2. THE DECADENT CITY: DEMOCRACY AND TECHNOLOGY

> The way in which technology unfolds lets itself be seen only on the basis of that permanent enduring in which enframing propriates as a destining of revealing. (Heidegger, 1993, 336)

The covering–over in a democracy, as mentioned earlier, is two–fold. The democratic decoration becomes necessary to distract from the fact of the cloak's concealing function, in order to present it in the light of something else — the ornament, in that it shows itself as welcoming of all dispositions (measureless, infinite decoration), of only establishing a ground for equality (simulating that here all colours are equal), and consequently, as transparent in its dispensation. Considering the democratic ideal requires a homogenisation for equality to be established between unequal things, the ideals themselves are an object of suspicion. Essentially, this homogenisation is not only violence perpetrated on things that are by nature utterly different, by subjecting them to a system of valuation, but also, at decisive moments, this equalisation of concerns (social, political, etc.) disables the democratic soul, and so the people in a democracy, when it comes to translating and prioritising their sequence of desires and actions. This has never been more dangerous than in the current phase of the Anthropocene, where decision making is fading away with the increasing resolution of our screens, the allure of algorithmic ease, and with capitalist disorientation, compelling a surrender of decision making to an external master. The ornament's function then leads to one's absolute surrender to the democratic ideals — of equality, or rather, an equalisation, diversity, and consequently a peripheral understanding of all represented within its purview — and unconsciously, operating inside the playing field that the cloak lays out in the guise of a democracy. Thus, democracy and the democratic soul today are passive, unable to actively evaluate or translate what is disseminated through technologically mediated channels — media, applications — handing over the decision making to statistics and algorithms that tell you what you should be deciding.

> If man is challenged, ordered, to do this, then does not man himself belong even more originally than nature within the standing–reserve? (Heidegger 1993, 323)

But what is this cloak, and who is wearing it? Here is where Plato's use of the metaphor of a drone starts to resemble, in contemporary context, a technological disposition. While Heidegger's polemic against modern technology is food for thought about the evolution and nature of technicity itself, contemporary technics is a different case. After the Second World War, in what has come to be known as the Great Acceleration, technological evolution entered a new phase. In placing our current technological condition, it was the Great Acceleration that immediately predated — with the invention of the computer, the television, and later on the internet — and stimulated the emergence of contemporary psychotechnics. But the question remains, who, today, is the drone in this democratic polis? Who has the most influence over people's desires, over their relationship with their desires? Who is deterring people from being mindful of their psychic, erotic lives? Operating in the capitalist phase of its evolution–where it achieves, through a narrative of efficiency, almost total presence in every aspect of a globalised socio–political life — is technology. Today, the drone that is mediating our relation with our desires, fabricating a predetermined understanding of desire, and how to take care of it (or let someone else take care of it) is technology; with the use of psychotechnics that manipulate your behaviour, your understanding of your own desire, and provide the form which your desires then conform to. But let us take a closer look at Plato's inflections of the metaphor of a drone, to see how technology is creating and utilising our contemporary democratic polis — the *himation* it wears with appealing decorative desires.

In his discussion with Adeimantus on the nature of a drone in the oligarchic city, Socrates claims that some drones are created stingless, while others with stings, the former being those that grow up to be wrongdoers, and the latter, the ones who end up beggars in their old age. If we were to consider the drones that influence the development of democratic qualities in a young man's soul to be the ones with stings, and taking into consideration Socrates' indication that the way to distinguish between the two is in their behaviour in the case of guardianship over orphans, the thing that creates an environment where moderation and measure is inadvisable, and homogenises all desires, whether necessary or unnecessary, and creates a demand for those desires which it then supplies, is psychotechnics — any piece of technology that influences and manipulates human desires, and through it, behaviour, i.e. mostly interface technology like smartphones, applications, etc. The orphans in this case would be those without education, whose parents themselves are orphans, both looking for a father–figure. Thus, several generations are tangled up with a technological father–figure, who raises these orphans on a synthetic interpretation of desire, purveying a manifold variety of all sorts in the capitalist economy, through applications, social media, advertising, and, more dangerously, hyper–mediatisation, until all desires are levelled, homogenised, and the way one approaches the world changes — and the way one approaches politics changes; it is, after all, how you experience the world that determines how you behave in it. And so, the democratic soul tastes the drones' honey, the honey of over–choice, the manifold that in reality is actually the same, but that which the infinite floral decoration simulates to be different. The concept of moderation and measure is then suspended, creating an addiction to over–choice, and establishing a consumerist society which capitalism and technology can then supply. The drones slowly start integrating the orphans into their system by making them subscribe to it, until the orphans, in

surrender to their foster parent, start operating within the system; man himself, in Heidegger's terms, becomes standing–reserve.

This also changes what people demand of a democracy. By veiling the interconnectedness of the unfolding problems and issues in the world, technology makes it difficult for us to look deeper than the ornament it posits: to the actual causes of the problem. The drones' main strategy of defence is disorientation and fright. Once one starts to dig deeper, a disorientation sets in, having to work through the many, subtle layers of concealment to reveal the machinery which is simulating the decadent city we inhabit. All the while, technology lies in wait, allowing us to give in to the pain of the endeavour, to fall back into its simulated ease and simplicity in a hard surrender, until the solution is to mediate our problems through more technology; integration of technology to meet the demands for transparency, accountability, *efficiency*, participation — a mechanics of integrating and our being integrated. But this has always been the problem with the democratic soul, perhaps even more so now: the inability to transcend the horizons of homogeneity, of equality, and gain insight into the reality of the issues, to see the entanglement of the elements, and then come back into the polis with this knowledge to prioritise and direct the limited resources to work on the cause of the disease, rather than treat the imminent symptomologies.

In conclusion, the dissolution of the power of choice, and the inhabiting of passive, capitalist, consumerist systems of democracy and politics, fails to respond to the alarming environmental deterioration that follows. The inability to evaluate, and endure the discomfort of changing consumerist habits, does not just *not* slow down the crises, it accelerates them. If we only move around in the immediate expressions of the problems of democracy, we fail to see the figures of the drones that are at the centre of this web of issues, and thus fail to take adequate actions. The Anthropocene demands that we make a hard switch, and that switch is not increased technological intervention and supplementation. The expression of democracy today, playing out in a decadent city, is a politics of desire, and one first needs to understand the game of the regime's master before hoping to overthrow its reign.

That is not to say the solution is a free–relation with technology, or complete technological liberation; as technical beings, technics are as much a part of us, and our systems, as drones are a part of the hive. Instead, what the crises of democracy connotes is a crisis of education, of methods and understandings through which we see and approach these problems; the drones must not be left to become a disease of the hive, rather, we must negotiate our relationship with them. In order to do that, we must first understand their nature, evolution, their role in the ecosystem, in our soul, and contextualise it to our times — to contextualise the Anthropocene. But contextuality is recognising the text as a whole, how it came to be, evolved, transformed, its semantic differences, genealogical progressions, interactions, influences, what it currently signifies, what it might potentially signify in the future. The crises of democracy must not disregard the Anthropocene as only distantly related to its issues, but as something that is simultaneously a cause, and the effect of its issues, and understanding the symptoms of this deeper issue needs extensive preparation. Plato's *Republic*, despite all the time that separates it from us, is still one of the most powerful tools with which to look at the problems of democracy and technology, and to prepare antidotes. The question of the future, after all, emerges from the progression of the presenting past.

And I turned around and asked him where his master was. 'He is coming up behind,' he said, 'just wait.' (Plato, *The Republic*, 327b)

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# Technology, War, and the Revenge of God: Anders, Derrida and Political Prosthesis

**Jason W. Alvis**

**ABSTRACT**

*Despite growing worries that some contemporary forms of technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI), are becoming more like us, such mechanisation has become something so very distinct from us, and as such is something upon which we tend to cast our greatest aspirations, fascinations, and terrors; our mysterium tremendum et fascinans. Many technological developments occur in the name of democratic proliferation, yet on the contrary have contributed to keeping us more unaware of our own actions than ever before: less autonomous, less heteronomous, and more techno–nomous due to an often blind reliance upon seemingly invisible technologies. The aforementioned qualification of technology as a religiously intonated and automated, self-inflicting wound seems clearly on display within the "New Wars" (Kaldor). Instead of the Clausewitzean model of war as determined by the contingency of life and human spatio-temporal limitations, "new wars" do the determining. The contemporary ontological condition of New War technologies such as Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) entail a certain de-humanisation of conflict through augmentation from technicians, creating distance that promises to transcend human finitude. This article highlights how the somewhat conflicting perspectives on technology of Günther Anders and Jacques Derrida can be used constructively to demonstrate how some of the conflicting roles of our technological dependence (which, paradoxically, emerges as these technologies become more independent) impact the shaping of democratic representation, and the consequential yet inconspicuous role religion plays in these regards. Anders' slightly more bombastic approach was to critique the unprecedented industrial and technological developments and rise of "mass society" in the 1950s and 1960s as developing a civilisation of "conscientiousness" without "conscience": of abstraction and reification that anesthetises and dampens moral and political deliberation through technological reliance. Softening the blow of Anders' critique of humankind's unprecedented reliance upon technology, Derrida did not wish to fall prey to the naiveté that life's technicity is avoidable entirely, as even our vocal chords are a form of technological reliance and prosthesis: technological reliance is hardwired into our most basic and even banal engagements with the world. By attending to the often implicit religious implications of our technological dependencies — from the banal and low–tech shipping container that greases the wheels of globalisation and trade wars, to the human–enhancement technologies of the present and near-future new wars — this short article builds upon Anders and Derrida to provide a sketch of political implications for when we (the demos) outsource our representation, and thus the very sense of what it means for means to be a means.*

*Keywords*:      technology, new war, political theology, Anders, Derrida

> The moment devices were replaced by machines signalled the beginning of the obsolescence of human beings (Anders, 1961, p. 12)

> Faith and tele–technology are for this reason mutually insoluble and mutually inseparable—transductively (re)constituted by each othe (Stiegler, 2002, p. 263).

After reading Günther Anders untranslated magnum opus *The Outdatedness of Humankind*, it is possible to imagine twentieth–century industrial technology as a unique, automated, self-inflicting wound with religious undertones. It is what runs, on and on, without depletion and in a way that the human never could. In this particular sense it operates with an omnipotent form that cues an absolute adoration as uniquely distinct from us. It also runs, on and on, with precision and skill, and in a way that the human never could. In this particular sense it operates with a certain omniscience that allows it total knowledge of its given subject, at every point throughout the whole of that which it, in turn, creates. Despite growing interest in concerns that artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming *more* like us, contemporary mechanisation has become something so very *distinct from* us, and as such something upon which we cast our greatest aspirations, fascinations, and uncanny terrors; our *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. This, in part in the name of democratic proliferation, has, on the contrary, contributed to keeping us more unaware of our own actions than ever before, less autonomous, less heteronomous, and more techno–nomous; less reliant upon ourselves and others, and more reliant upon our technologies.

Driven by a unique blend of globalisation and cosmopolitanism, today's technological developments also go hand-in-glove with our insistences upon, and not always peaceful *demands* for "peace" and universal applicability; demands that are driven by deep networks of capital and their technological interfaces of commodification. The demands to avoid conflict and to see ourselves as the harbingers of peace have birthed a reified disarray that has left us precarious to conflict in its potent and potential form. Günther Anders pointed towards something like this in his seeking to reveal the true, Janus–faced nature of a bourgeois optimism whose "peaceful" commitments to technological progress are more violent than we tend to acknowledge.

Exemplifying this aforementioned qualification of technology as a religiously intonated and automated self–inflicting wound, one need look no further than contemporary forms of technology implemented within "new wars". These wars no longer follow the old Clausewitzean (in *On War)* dictum of the "continuation of policy by other means", with war being determined by the contingency of life and the humans' spatio–temporal limitations. These new war technologies such as Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) promise a certain de-humanisation of conflict, replacing the soldier with an armed robotic dog built by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). In place of the pilot sits a camera and a trigger operated with crew augmentation by a technician 2,000 miles away. The present ontological condition of technology, of "being high-tech" is also to create distance between oneself and one's created technologies in order to limit vulnerability. These creations (at work in the "new wars") in part are efforts to transcend human finitude.

Although technology of course does not necessarily entail war, conflict, and struggle, today we must not be naïve to the negative socialities of technologies such as these, which can so easily nourish our "society of enmity" (Mbembe, 2017). With the exponential growth in technological development, it becomes more and more necessary to take account of how

technological conditions have human and political consequences. The critique of mass social media/film/television/Netflix as harbingers and dampeners of actual action and awareness of ownership of institutional activities in the everyday lifeworld is a critique of which we all are quite aware today. Such anesthetising effects (Feldman, 1994; Harmansah, 2015) were referred to by Anders as the development that went hand in hand with modern "civil" philosophy of developing "conscientiousness" without "conscience": of abstraction and reification of the moral life. In the remainder of this short essay, I wish to highlight some aspects of the works of both Anders and Derrida that demonstrate some of the conflicting roles of our technological dependence (which, paradoxically, emerge as these technologies become more independent) and their impact upon the shaping of democratic identities, and also how in these particular regards the religious itself plays a consequential part.

**GÜNTHER ANDERS, TECHNOLOGY, AND AUTONOMY**
Anders' *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* 1 (namely, the section "Über die Bombe und die Wurzeln Unserer Apokalypse–Blindheit" (Anders, 2002)) addresses how the human condition has changed under nuclear warfare/MAD, and the effects of modern industry. Perhaps even more destructive than the bombs themselves are the inter–social changes that the bombs have spawned, as the contemporary condition of humankind is growing increasingly out of imaginative touch with its everyday activities. Modern life is characterised by an ontological ambiguity that technology mediates: we operate with a certain inability to imagine the absolute annihilation of everything, and thus have subjected ourselves to an "apocalyptic–blindness" (*Apokalypse-Blindheit*). We are losing the capability to be *autonomous* (a point I will return to later), and this has come about through a subjectivisation process. The development inner–responsibility or law (auto-nomos) has been sidelined so that normal people are capable of having a clear conscience, not just about doing horribly evil things, but also vastly destructive things through absolutely *banal* means, such as pushing plastic buttons. Unlike his first wife Hannah Arendt (whose arguments regarding Nazism are by now well known), Anders blamed this not so much on Nazi or totalitarian ideology, but, *in nuce*, on the speed of technological advancement in Western societies, and our inability to keep up with it in imagination and moral knowledge.

The means by which humankind has understood its place in the cosmos of activity has been altered and confused. Anders exchanged letters with one of the pilots (Claude Eatherly) responsible for the Hiroshima bombing (*Burning Conscience*). This great *burning* of a society took place with a flip of a switch that symbolises how, in and after the war and its new technologies, humankind's conscience also has been burnt up. Mechanical technology, with its proxies and prosthetics, in fact cloaks our sense of responsibility for our own, individual actions. The loss of conscience and moral responsibility is merely a product of our own doing, for it is not simply that we pass off responsibility to specialist humans (meritocracy, etc), but to the most trustworthy special authorities, which today has become *technology itself*, a kind of technocracy.

Our outsourcing to technologies has "transform[ed] us into minors and subordinates" (Anders, 2002) to the point that we are able, without *perceiving it*, to bring about the end of time itself as these technologies work and "speak on our behalf" and do so without consent.[1]

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1    "Da wir die Macht besitzen, einander das Ende zu bereiten, sind wir di Herren der Apokalypse. Das Unendliche sind wir." (Anders, 2002, p. 239).

Although we exert our will over the use of some devices, more complex machines have begun operating *without* our interest or awareness, making technology the new "subject of history", and thus making humankind only "co-historical". Such a "technification of our being" has rendered responsibility obsolete.[2] Technological objects shroud the meanings of labour processes and entertain us into forms of illusory consumption, which are cast merely as means to ends. Technological–being has made us apocalyptically blind to our own pending doom.[3] Therefore humans are already "antiquated".

In considering how humankind develops its technologies in lieu of itself, a challenging paradox arises: humankind is becoming in a sense immortal and even omnipotent in its outsourcing proxies of technology; yet this omnipotence can ultimately end in humankind's own obliteration. In this sense, humankind acts as a counter–balancing to God's creative power by turning back time to the never-would-have-been. This is why the technologically–dependent human is not a "nihilist" in any traditional sense, but an *annihilist*: "die potestas annihilationis, di reduction ad nihil".[4] We have become "Lords of the Apocalypse" but constantly remain under threat from our actions. We are both "the first Titans" yet also "the first dwarfs".[5] The very ends to the means of our very own omnipotence entail our self–destruction.[6]

When we pause long enough to perceive the advancements in technologies (advancements we make in lieu of fulfilling the humanism and enlightenment vision of actually advancing the human) we come under a "Promethean shame". As we compare ourselves to the technologies and machines we have created, which in many respects are far more advanced than we are, we in fact become deeply affected. This feeling of belittlement by

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2    For Anders "the chain of events leading up to the explosion is composed of so many links, the process has involved so many different agencies, so many intermediate steps and partial actions, none of which is the crucial one, that in the end no one can be regarded as the agent. Everyone has a good conscience, because no conscience was required at any point." (Anders, 1956, p. 52).

3    Anders addresses the wholesale "'technification' of our being: the fact that today it is possible that unknowingly and indirectly, like screws in a machine, we can be used in actions, the effects of which are beyond the horizon of our eyes and imagination, and of which, could we imagine them, we could not approve — this fact has changed the very foundations of our moral existence. Thus, we can become 'guiltlessly guilty,' a condition which had not existed in the technically less advanced times of our fathers." (Anders and Eatherly,, 1961, p. 1)

4    "Annihilismus" concerns how the atom bomb has created a new kind of nihilism. (Günther Anders 1980, 293)

5    (Anders, 1980, p. 235). My translation: "We today are the first people to dominate the Apocalypse, we are the first who are constantly under its threat. Since we are the first Titans, we are the first Dwarves..." ("Da wir Heutigen die ersten Menschen sind, die Apokalypse beherrschen, sind wir auch die ersten, die pausenlos unter ihrer Drohung stehen. Da wir die ersten Titanen sind, sind wir auch die ersten Zwerge oder Pygmäen, oder wie immer wir und kollektive befristete Wesen nennen wollen, die nun nicht mehr als Individuen sterblich sind, sondern also Gruppe; und deren Existenz nur bis auf Widerruf gestattet bleibt.")

6    (Anders 1980, 233). Anders here refers to humankind's omnipotence today: "Wenn es im Bewußtsein des heutigen Menschen etwas gibt, was als absolut oder als unendlich gilt, so nicht mehr Gottes Macht, auch nicht die macht der Natur, von den angeblichen Mächten der Moral oder der Kultur ganz zu schweigen. Sondern unsere Macht. An die Stelle der, omnipotenzbezeugenden, creatio ex nihilo ist deren Gegen macht getreten: die potestas annihilationis, di reduction ad nihil — und zwar eben als Macht, die in unserer eigenen Hand liegt. Die proetheisch seit langem erssehnte Omnipotenz ist, wenn auch anders also erhofft, wirklich unsere geworden. Da wir die Macht besitzen, einander das Ende zu befeiten, sind wir die Herren der Apokalypse. Das Unendliche sind wir."

our own machinery tends to be suppressed, and we do not notice it since we operate with an unrealistic optimism about our own development that mistakes *the development of technology for the development of humankind*. This strange optimism has led to an ignorance that amounts to the absolute "inability to fear".[7] Misplaced optimism (not the same, of course, as hope) is the greatest danger to our liberation, and thus we need to cultivate a moral fear and conscience that "corresponds to the magnitude of the apocalyptic danger" that stands before us.[8] In claiming to live in the present moment we ignore the ends of our production. This has spawned a fatalistic optimism in the form of "nihilism on a global scale".[9] We are annihilists because we are "incurably optimistic ideologists" who "even in a situation of utter hopelessness" will drift quietly, naively, and optimistically into the darkness of our own self–annihilation.[10]

This technological critique all sounds, of course, quite Luddite and fearmongering. Anders even critiqued Heidegger's well-known insistence upon living in the productive angst created by being-before-death as idealistic and optimistic, for it relied upon angst to do the heavy lifting of creating imaginative, subjective self–reflection. Being-before-death led to a subjectification far too detached from environment and spatiality, and Anders sough to set the entire frame beyond one's death to include the death of everything, of all things' endings. Summing up, we can only attune our conscience and identity by: fearing courageously, widening the imagination, enacting a technological resistance, expanding the investigation into one's actions that does not leave them to the will of chance, and actively infusing one's knowledge with the moral actuality of one's actions.

## DERRIDA, TELE–TECHNOLOGY, AND RELIGION

Shifting to Derrida, we might observe a more nuanced approach that is not intended to conjure fear of new technology. Yet, like Anders, he also considers "time" to play an indispensable role in how we are to understand how technology has transformed globalisation. As he puts it, "as soon as we know, 'believe we know', or quite simply *believe* that the alleged alive or direct event is possible, and that voices and images can be transmitted from one side of the globe to the other, the field of perception and of experience is profoundly transformed" (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002, p. 40). This is a belief *about* time, of how a view of the immediacy and "instantaneousness" of an experience alters the very human condition of how we experience time itself, and how we valorise the present.[11] Yet Derrida's position also demonstrates that our uses of technology present a belief about belief itself, and the role belief plays in the intricate networks of our lives.

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7    Ours is "The Age of the Inability to Fear" ("Zeitalter der Unfähigkeit zur Angst") (Anders, 1972, p. 257).

8    Anders puts it similarly elsewhere: "Force yourself to produce the appropriate amount of fear that corresponds to the magnitude of the apocalyptic danger" (Anders ,1961, p.14).

9    (Anders, 1980, p. 286): ""Die Herren der Bombe sind Nihilisten in Aktion." "schuldig des Nihilismus; des Nihilismus in globalem Maßstabe."

10    Reflecting on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Anders claims that what he "presents is not nihilism, but the inability of man to be a nihilist even in a situation of utter hopelessness. Part of the compassionate sadness conveyed by the play springs not so much from the hopeless situation as such as from the fact that the two heroes, through their waiting, show that they are not able to cope with this situation, hence that they are not nihilists." (Anders. 2014)

11    See here Briggs (2015) who claims "teletechnologies … make time. And they make space".

In Dick and Kofman's recorded video interview of Derrida, technology is not only *a form* by which the interviews are conducted, but of course also its content, and Derrida draws attention to this explicitly:

> I want to underline rather than effect the surrounding technical conditions and not feign a 'naturality' which does not exist … one of the gestures of deconstruction is to not naturalise what isn't natural, to not assume that what is conditioned by history, institutions, or society is natural. (*Derrida*, 2002 (minute 14–14:01)

Teletechnology is the more material apparatus of what we mean by "media" (see *Ecographies of Television*), and readers of Derrida will find these reflections to be derivative of his earlier critiques of the "metaphysics of presence" in order to think "time" differently. In another interview, with Bernard Stiegler, Derrida claims:

> Today, more than ever before, to think one's time … is to register, in order to bring into play, the fact that the time of this very speaking is artificially produced. It is an artifact. In its very happening, the time of this public gesture is calculated, constrained, 'formatted', 'initialized' by a media apparatus […]. Who today would think his time and who, above all, would speak about it, I'd like to know, without first paying some attention to a public space and therefore to a political present which is constantly transformed, in its structure and its content, by the teletechnology of what is so confusedly called information or communication? (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002, p. 3)

Drawing upon relations between "artifact" and "artificial," Derrida sets into motion what he determines to be a clear linkage between the historical and the technical, the archiving of knowledge and the technology of writing. This is in order to dispel the naiveté of any possible "return" to the origins of a pure and unscathed nature (topics he also addressed in regards to religion/belief).

This observation follows seamlessly from other works. Elsewhere, he of course will praise writing as not merely a *derivative* and artificial technology. In this sense he is critical of the semioticians who privilege "oral speech" because, they claim, it is non-derivative, pure, and capable of communicating *in an originary and present moment.* This bad faith view of writing overlooks how the bodily organ of one's vocal chords is also a prosthesis or "technics in the service of language", (Derrida, 1974, p. 8) and those holding this view also fall into a metaphysics of presence. Derrida is not "anti-technology", primarily because it is writ large in our very own bodies. He lambasts the critics and their "position of reactionary resistance to technology" (Derrida, 2001, p. 78).

Technology, and teletechnologies in particular, "have always been there … they are always there, even when we wrote by hand, even during so-called live conversation (Derrida 2001 , p. 38). This is different from "media" in the sense that media are forms of passage of presumably "unbiased" information, while teletechnologies do not claim to fully present the event they are conveying, pointing at, or depicting. Teletechnology does not simply act with artificiality following a "politics of representation" but instead points towards a deeper condition of mediality in how our experiences are perceived.

Teletechnologies also need to be considered in light of religion. They are not only about "sciences" or "reason", for they concern "technics" that also are a "condition" of religious faith

(Stiegler, 2002, p. 259). Religions of the past operated with a prosthetic, tertiary memory, namely — as Stiegler interprets — of an "already-there of what is lacking, of this unnameable De-fault (whether one names it God or not) passes through the unlived already–there of those who once lived and bore witness" (Stiegler, 2002, p. 260). Prosthetics is the name Stiegler uses to refer to any technological form that takes something from the past and employs it in the present. He refers to how "A politics of memory and hospitality — of heritage, adoption and grafting — must consequently be a politics of the supplement, that is, of technics. To speak of prostheses of faith is in fact to speak of the graft and adoption" (Stiegler, 2002, p. 261). Thus, to reiterate, prosthesis is reflected in our most basic and even banal engagements with the world.

**TECHNOLOGY, WORLD POLITICS, GLOBALISATION**
By building upon the insights of both Derrida (a more nuanced, aporetic view of technology) and Anders (a more apocalyptic view of technology), it is possible to turn back to the contemporary threats technologies pose to political democracy. Contemporary technological developments require their own political usurpation, enhancement, and prohibition in order for them to continue or be abated. In the context of globalisation (which always already is a form *and content* of technology!), the shaping of technology and its prohibitions influences geopolitics, biopower, and the further evolution of globalisation itself. From internet regulations to climate change in the Age of the Anthropocene, to debates surrounding the roles of nuclear weapons, it goes without debate that the world's history and past can be obliterated and annihilated in a matter of minutes. Here Anders is also instructive for his suturing of nihilism with what he called "annihilism". It would only be later that Heidegger would develop his Luddite-esque searing critique of the "planetary devastation of technology" taking place in the second industrial revolution. Although Anders' critiques came as a result of the second industrial revolution, they still are meaningful today, in the third (or, as some have surmised, already the fourth) industrial revolution. Irrespective of the phase of industrialisation according to which our present moment might be characterised, the truth remains: only one who can learn to "visualize the effect of his doings…has the chance of truth" (Anders, 2014). This imagination today involves a phenomenology of things that inquires into the effective reality of what those things "do" on our behalf, in our place, and as our supposed representatives as prosthetics.

Not only is international politics on the receiving end of technological advancements via globalisation, for it also shapes how intelligibility and meaning are ascribed to certain technological developments. For example, despite the same atomic potential, a nuclear reactor is deemed a positive source of energy, while a nuclear bomb is respected for its capability to outright decimate the population of the planet. Political leaders' relocation of these bombs, like pieces on a chess board, serve as a reminder that nuclear warfare is no longer a worry simply of the fringe protesters. It has become effervescent in the hearts of the *res publica*. Nuclear warfare – and its political prosthesis! – is a reminder that some of the most impactful technologies are not always "high tech". At times, the most inconspicuous forms of technology, which have stood the test of time, actually innervate the processes of globalisation and feed into our global, cosmopolitical identities. For example, the banal and low–tech "shipping container" (Colas, 2017) greases the wheels of globalisation, and is a highly significant meta–symbol for political acts and mobilisation (trade wars, for example, stop or re-route the movement of these containers).

From basic–tech containers to human–enhancement technologies of the present and near–future, contemporary civilisation is a pastiche of creating hybrids between the new

and the old, at times in contradictory ways. This at least raises the question of how political involvement is changing (today's Facebook and Twitter spats and debates are becoming the battlegrounds that primarily shape collective, political identity). This hybridisation of technology has left us thinking new technologies are shiny, new versions of old technologies, as seemingly neutral "media" or means of information dissemination. This has left "the means" of technology in the seemingly safe hands of a skill–class of technicians; or put more radically, we (the *demos*) are *outsourcing our sense of what it means for means to be a means*.

For Anders, "no means is only a means" (Anders, 1980) — technological devices are more than empty husks that can be filled with good or bad purposes. This outsourcing (often without our conscious awareness) to a growing *technocratic* class of political governance allows for a new totality to slip seamlessly into the lattices of everyday life. And herein lies a somewhat ridiculous paradox: humankind is incessant in its desire to go beyond itself, yet when it takes on the posture of abstraction and *theoria* as opposed to *poesis* or imagination (Anders, 1980), its subsequent formation brings about society's ending. This propensity to abstract is highly active in the unreflective and superficial means/ends distinction to which we so often resort.

## TECHNOLOGY AS THE REVENGE OF GOD

Regarding this outsourcing, prosthetic technology, which replaces what had hitherto been taken away (e.g. prosthetic limbs for wounded soldiers), immediately comes to mind. As Freud referred to it in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929), a new subjectivity had arisen under the guise of autonomy, giving humankind the sense of being a prosthetic God (Freud, 1929, pp. 27–29).[12] The white male, settling in the global south, projected an imagination of his identity in conjunction with what he had created. Health/medical technology was always available to him. His telescope and camera all fed the fantasy that he himself was the object being improved upon through the use of his tools:

> With every tool [he] is perfecting his own organs, whether motor or sensory, or is removing the limits of their functioning. Motor power places gigantic forces at his disposal, which like his muscles, he can employ in any direction; thanks to ship and aircraft neither water nor air can hinder his movements; by means of spectacles he corrects defects in the lens of his own eye; by means of the telescope he sees into the far distance; by means of the microscope he overcomes the limits of visibility set by the structure of his retina. In the photographic camera he has created an instrument which retains the fleeting visual impressions. … Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. (Freud, 1929, pp. 27–29)

The overcoming of limits? Today, this prosthesis has shifted. The constant outsourcing of the self to one's technologies has created a new *condition* of prosthesis. It is not just our technologies, which get set up as wholly other and therefore become that which we might worship as greater than us, (conjuring Anders' "Promethean shame"); but also, God *becomes* one and the same as the prosthetic and technological. It is not just, as Freud theorised in a direct inversion, that the human has become the God, following the traditionally understood

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12 Although lack of space prohibits me from developing this any further, similar engagements with topics essential to prosthesis can be found in the work of Benjamin (the puppet/dwarf chess automaton in *One-way Street*), Hobbes (*Leviathan*), and in Derrida (*The Beast and the Sovereign*).

liberal and modern political agenda, lording over creation with a universal, divine, and singular dominion. Instead today, the prosthetic itself, the technology that has been created, threatens to become a new lord over humankind. Like humankind's early modern insurrection against God as God's creation, wreaking havoc on itself and nature, bringing about its own apocalypse (read: the Anthropocene), humankind has become the Frankenstein of its own creations and technologies.

As for the new prosthetic Gods? They are enervating our political processes, and taking their revenge. With the plugging-in of the internet, humankind's secularity has morphed from anthropomorphism to technomorphism. Secular humanism no longer seems to be about faith in ourselves or dialogical communities of persuasion (creating autonomy of mind and spirit), but rather faith in our technological creations – a faith not unlike that blind dogmatism of religion, from which such humanism sought to break free in the first place.

Yet at the same time, we must heed Derrida's concern, that any such drum–beating about the take–over of technology is a technologically–mediated drum–beating. It is thus not a matter of *escape from prosthesis,* just as there is no escape from memory, from taking account of the world, from a "belief in the fidelity of tertiary memory" (Stiegler, 2002, p. 263) and from the "supplement" or prosthetic of writing. Softening the blow of Anders' critique of humankind's unprecedented reliance upon technology, Derrida did not wish to fall prey to the naiveté that life's technicity is avoidable entirely. It thus becomes a matter, it seems, of developing a moral conscience (as opposed to simply conscientiousness or "awareness") in regards to not simply that which *we represent*, but also that *which represents us*, as our prosthetics. We, after all, are living things who have beliefs, communicate, and bear witness to what we experience. The banal shipping container contains, despite its rudimentary nature, some of our most profound hopes as an artifact of prosthesis. And as a prosthetic, the symbol of the shipping container demonstrates both a threat and a promise: as a threat, even it can act as an inconspicuous technocracy; and as a promise, it could provide a sealed-off space of resistance to other, more extreme contemporary sorts of technocracy by reminding us that our prosthesis needs to be more material and more human. Following the line of the latter, yet keeping in mind the former: "the living witnesses *because it is prosthetized*. Let us remember that. Otherwise all is lost" (Stiegler, 2002, p. 262).

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