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Right now: contemporary forms of far-right populism and fascism in the Global South

Recent years have seen the global emergence of populist political formations, leading certain scholars to term our present age the "age of populism" (Krastev 2011, Nandy 2019, Ricci 2020) and some politicians, such as Hungary's current prime minister Viktor Orbán, to proclaim that "the era of liberal democracy is over" (Santora and Bienvenu 2018). Contemporary forms of populism are characterized by 'us' (often 'the people' in an ethnic or communal sense) versus 'them' (usually liberal elites, the establishment, minorities, or immigrants) forms of binary thinking (Berman 2021). For some, the rise of contemporary populism inherently represents the resurgence of forms of reactionary populist nationalism, ranging from the 'radical' to the 'extreme' right, and the revitalization of forms of ideology that may be termed 'neo-fascist'. The great challenge for contemporary democracies is that, in contrast to dictators who seize power via coups, the aforementioned political movements come to power via the ballot box (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

In light of the revitalization of such political formations, the current special issue serves to critically investigate contemporary forms of far-right populism and fascism in the Global South. Many contributors cast a critical perspective upon the political dimensions of the current proliferation of extreme forms of reactionary politics and the social conditions that gave rise, and are in the process of giving rise, to such movements. Other contributors

explore of the historical and theoretical roots of current forms of far-right populism and fascism (FRP/F), critical engagement with present-day problems that are resultant of their preponderance, as well as analyses of the cultural forces and tendencies that have led to, and are leading to, their contemporary ascendance. Some contributors also consider the question of whether it is possible to develop a general theory of FRP/F in contemporary society, present inquiries into the future development of FRP/F, or investigate opportunities for opposition to FRP/F in the present context.

The first group of papers in this collection address the topics of populism and, in Išpanović's case, fascism by way of detailed analyses of contemporary instances of these political forms drawn from Latin America, the United States of America, and the Republic of Serbia. Each of these papers moves between theoretical models of populism and fascism and concrete examples of latter-day manifestations in a way that lends substance to the concepts employed and clarity to the events analysed.

Rezende's paper, 'Populism, courts and *institucionalidad*: a view from Latin America', addresses the phenomena of populism in a contemporary Latin American context by way of an analysis of the relationship between populist politics and state institutions, specifically the constitutional courts. Populism is often positioned as a threat to democracy on account of its erosive effects on the institutional environment. Rezende complicates this understanding of populism by exploring the relationship between populism and the legal system not as a simple matter of the progressive removal of legal constraints on political action by the executive, but as rather the clash of conflicting conceptions of democratic representation. Populism, on the one hand, combines a belief in the sovereignty of the people with a commitment to direct democracy and the capacity to grasp the general will of the people as it is spontaneously expressed. Institutionality in the South American context, on the other hand, represents a commitment to the progressive transformation of social reality through legal means as an essential condition for the development of the nation. The judicial elite then view themselves not merely as responsible for the implementation of the legal system but also as ultimate guarantors of the principle of institutionality.

Consequently, on Rezende's account, the relationship between populism and the courts is not so much a matter of "dedifferentiation", where the difference between the political and the legal is blurred, but rather revolves around the paradox that they argue lies at the heart of the legal system. The paradox lies in the fact that in addition to making decisions founded in law, the legal system also makes decisions that lie outside the law. For example, the use of the courts by minoritized groups to gain access to democratic rights of participation represents

a move by the judiciary to compel the objective realization of basic rights. For the populist this amounts to a form of "judicial activism" which points back to the paradox of judicial self-reference in that the courts, by ruling on areas outside the law, make political decisions rather than legal ones and what is more do so without the validation of the popular vote. Given populism's hostility to intermediary bodies in the political sphere, the very idea of such judicial activism is anathema. However, the use of the legal system to extend participatory rights to minoritized groups also means that democratic representation can be secured via judicial institutions rather than the general will, which in turn indicates that populist movements do not have an exclusive monopoly on democratic representation.

Išpanović's paper, 'Analysis of Fascism as a Signifier in Online Editions of Daily Newspapers *Danas* and *Informer*', addresses the recent resurgence of the term "fascism" in political discourse. It examines the use of the term in political exchanges between opposing political groups in contemporary Serbia in order to demonstrate both the ubiquity of the term 'fascism' and its lack of a fixed meaning. Išpanović argues that the term no longer refers to a specific political ideology but rather functions as a "floating signifier" used for strategic purposes to support opposing political projects. And in support of this position they trace the employment of the term in the discourse of two ideologically opposed Serbian national daily newspapers, the pro-regime tabloid *Informer* and the independent *Danas*, with particular attention paid to the use of the term in the papers' reporting during 2020.

Išpanović notes that the term "fascism" is often utilized by both newspapers to demarcate 'in-group' and 'out-group' political actors. They focus on three narrative clusters in which the term "fascism" appears most often in 2020, namely the Victory Day celebrations of May 9th, the parliamentary elections and violent demonstrations in July, and the election campaign in Montenegro in August. And based upon their analysis they argue that "fascism", understood as a floating signifier, serves in these discursive contexts as a semiotic resource to stabilize or disrupt hegemonic systems of meaning.

The third paper in this section returns to the topic of populism explored in Rezende's paper, but this time in a North American context. In the paper 'Populist nationalism in the age of Trump', Johnson and Autry explore populism in the United States in relation to national identity. Working with an understanding of populism as a form of ideology the authors explore the time period between the economic depression of 2008 and the first year of the Biden presidency through the prism of what they term the 'two nations thesis'. This thesis holds that the US is best understood as two nations, rather than one. By this the authors mean that the United States at present is experiencing a surge of populism and in this

surge we can discern two very different ideas of national identity struggling for hegemony.

Furthermore, the authors argue, each of these hegemonic political projects shares a basis in conceptions of race. On the right we find a white nationalist traditionalist populism and on the left a multi-racial progressivist populism. Johnson and Autry trace the development of these populisms from the Tea Party's racialised response to the Obama presidency through to the 'birther' claims of Trump, and then analyse the recent presidential campaigns of Trump and Sanders as figureheads of current US right and left populism in relation to these conflicting ideologies of national and racial identity. They close with a plea for pragmatists of the moderate left or right to harness and moderate populist demands into a workable democratic form.

The second group in this special issue comprises three papers: Cawood and Jansen van Vuuren's 'Reconceptualising ecofascism in the Global South: an ecosemiotic approach to problematising marginalised nostalgic narratives', Becher's 'Apartheid, authoritarianism, and anticolonial struggles viewed from the Right: critical perspectives on A. James Gregor's search for fascism in the Global South', and Hull's 'Epistemic ethnonationalism: identity policing in neo-Traditionalism and Decoloniality Theory'. Each of these papers relate the concept of fascism to the Global South in a variety of illuminating ways.

Cawood and Jansen van Vuuren argue for the need to reconceptualise ecocritical concepts that have naively been regarded as central, and thus global, scholarly concepts through their focus on ecofascism. Their paper argues that nostalgia, a concept associated with ecofascism and anti-progress in the Global North, needs to be explored to explicate ecofascism in the Global South. The discussion is one of relationality, between concepts such as ecofascism, nostalgia, and solastalgia. Situated in critical ecosemiotics, the authors consider the significance of locality in contrast to globality in understanding the nature-culture relation. The relation between humans and the immediate, local natural environment (as well as humans' symbolic representation of that environment) comes to the forefront in their discussion – indeed, the authors argue that the notion of locality illustrates that living entities (including humans and the ecosystem) of a particular time and space are in semiotic relations with one another and resultantly create and exchange meaning in relation to that locality. At the same time, locality entails taking seriously local context and history (including inter-cultural sensitivity and openness to different cultural and historical contexts) when discussing inherently derogatory concepts such as ecofascism. The authors introduce solastalgia to explain the intense dis-ease experienced by a loss of place due to environmental disaster, and describe the

need for different kinds or responses and actions to re-address Western ecofascist critiques. Semiotic relationality allows a description not just of the *experience* of the loss of place, but also the *meaning* that is associated with that loss (for humans and non-humans, who continually need to make sense of space). For humans, such a loss results in alternative representations of the natural environment (and cultural interaction with said environment), emphasizing an ecosystematic groundedness of meaning to show that changes to the natural ecology can have deep existential effects upon the human. The natural environment, the authors argue in turn, should be regarded as having a determining role in this relationship (which will ultimately bring about experiences of solastalgia) by affording and constraining processes that enable humans to engage with the environment in a particular time and space (and still be nostalgic towards another particular time and space). Cawood and Jansen van Vuuren argue that the desire to change the present is necessary when confronted by ecological dis-ease, particularly by drawing from marginalised culture as a means to reimagine the future or by radically disrupting the present to bring about a new future. They argue therefore that a critical study of the human's perception of and interaction with the natural environment should involve the latter not merely as peripheral entity, but as co-constructor of meaning. This allows for the romanticised nostalgic reactionary politics of the restoration of the past to be problematised in terms of the lack of analysis, reflection, and critique, both from the self, the communal and the natural environment.

Becher's article investigates political scientist A. James Gregor (1929-2019), whose ideo-centric approach proved influential in international academic discussions – Gregor was committed to defending segregation in the United States during the 1960s and helped foster an approach centred on the representation of ideological aspects of fascism at the expense of the critical analysis of other historical elements (thus obscuring fascism's societal roots). Becher highlights that Gregor's definition of fascism blurs the line between colonialism and anticolonial struggles due to his understanding of a developmental dictatorship. In his work on fascism in the Global South, Gregor relegates fascism to the largely left-wing national liberation fronts and the political systems they built up, rather than largely pro-Western right-wing authoritarianisms. His apologia of historical Italian Fascism and recent right-wing dictatorships in the so-called Third World (such as Apartheid) go hand-in-hand with his denigration of anticolonial struggle as it was pursued *inter alia* by the anti-Apartheid movement. Becher is particularly critical of Gregor's totalitarian anticolonialism, which disregards the link between fascistic attempts to block the historical liberation process of colonial peoples while also suggesting that anticolonial struggles are a new and dangerous totalitarian fascist threat. Becher brings together the accounts

of Gregor and Carl Schmitt to identify how they portrayed racial enmity against the white in anticolonial movements. Gregor's works, through camouflaging policy as science, have contemporaneously found their way into a campaign of a serious discursive retortion (and distortion) in his homeland, where the North American Right, with explicit and ubiquitous reference to Gregor's interpretation of Fascism, accused their left-wing opponents of 'fascism'. Both Gregor and Schmitt intuit, as described by Becher, that in order to fight the faux-fascists of the largely left-wing, allegedly totalitarian anticolonial movements (or their contemporary heirs today), one must answer with a true, in their own account 'pre-emptive' fascism in authoritarian, pro-Western attire. Becher links this view to Gregor's sympathies for right-wing dictatorships such as the Apartheid regime alongside his denigrations of anticolonial movements. Becher, through a critique of ideology which delineates and analyses Gregor's argument, contests Gregor's political compass in his search for fascism in a historical-critical manner and offers an alternative proposition on how to identify the historical and contemporary role of far-right politics in the world system of capitalism. Becher argues that, if the stimulation Gregor's writings supposedly offer for postcolonial studies amounts to positions of sympathy for new authoritarian measures against attempts of said Great Convergence, critical scholars must be ready to defend the anticolonial heritage of postcolonial studies.

Hull discusses *epistemic ethnonationalism*, the doctrine that which beliefs one should adopt and which concepts one should employ are determined by which ethnos/ethnie one belongs to. Both neo-Traditionalism and Decoloniality theory, the genealogies of the term arising from Dugin's Eurasianism and Quijano, Mignolo and Ndlovu-Gatsheni respectively, deplore the acceptance of Western beliefs and employment of Western concepts outside the West, both positions turn to existential phenomenology to ground their *ethnorelativism*, and both positions have influenced contemporary politics. Neo-Traditionalism and Decoloniality theory hold that a worldwide form of epistemic colonisation has occurred, is ongoing, and needs to be resisted and overcome. Neither position advocates for epistemic decolonisation in order to attain objective and universally true beliefs by removing errors due to systematic bias; rather, both neo-Traditionalism and Decoloniality theory officially repudiate the very idea of universal truth and advance the ambitious conceptual doctrine that each 'ethnos' or 'ethnie' has values, knowledge, and an 'episteme' which are properly restricted to it. Accordingly, both perspectives posit as a desirable end-state the expunging from each region of the world the acceptance or employment of ideas, concepts and beliefs which do not accord with that region's proper 'episteme'. Hull highlights how, in recent years, there has been significant convergence between neo-Traditionalism and Decoloniality theory. Dugin (from the perspective of neo-Traditionalism) now

also uses the language of 'colonization' and 'decolonization', and he makes more frequent appeals to justice in the epistemic domain (arguing for a 'redistribution of the system of values' to 'recognise the full-scale dignity of non-Western political thought'). Walter Mignolo (from the perspective of Decoloniality theory), has begun to draw explicitly on theorists of Germany's Conservative Revolution, especially Carl Schmitt and Oswald Spengler, who have always been among Dugin's points of reference. Therefore, describes Hull, epistemic ethnonationalism represents a political challenge to the liberal idea that it is right for citizens to adopt beliefs and values based on their own appraisal of the evidence and their own convictions. However, argues Hull, the most striking new convergence is on the notion that the West itself is a victim of epistemic colonization. Mignolo claims that one necessary step in overcoming the coloniality of knowledge is 'appropriat[ing] Western concepts that have been destituted from the hegemonic vocabulary [...] – for example, gnosis and aesthesis'. Dugin now also takes the position that 'Western culture' has been 'hijacked by modernity', indeed that 'the West itself is colonised by modernity'. In addressing these contemporary movements, Hull assesses the theoretical underpinnings of neo-Traditionalism and Decoloniality theory, and argues that if neo-Traditionalism is to be classified as a Rightist body of thought, then Decoloniality theory ought also to be. These aspects have links to Trump and the Far Right in North America, but may also become important for countries like South Africa. Hull argues that it remains to be seen whether, once its ethnonationalism begins to guide party-political campaigns and even government policy, Decoloniality theory can continue to present itself as a theory of the Left.

The final group of papers in this special issue comprises of three papers, namely, Gray's 'Algopopulism and recursive conduct: grappling with fascism and the new populisms vis-à-vis Arendt, Deleuze and Guattari, and Stiegler', Alungal Chungath's 'Dialectical democracy: Indian Muslims and the politics of resistance', and du Toit and Swer's 'From virtual to embodied extremism: an existential phenomenological account of extremist echo chambers through Ortega y Gasset and Merleau-Ponty'. The common feature amongst these papers is that they view oppression and resistance from a theoretical perspective. However, in each case, as we shall see below, the theory is certainly not detached from the reality of our world.

Gray presents an account of resistance to fascism and new populism by first presenting the macropolitical understanding of fascism through the work of Hannah Arendt and then moving to micropolitics and engaging with Deleuze and Guattari. In *lieu* of an introduction, Gray opens her paper with what she calls three vignettes, images of three different instances of more or less obvious instances of manipulation of human behaviour. The first one references the third season

of *Black Mirror* and the social credit system which, through ratings of human behaviour, is supposed to control it within the limits of social acceptability of certain emotions, reinforcing the 'good' ones and negatively reinforcing the 'bad' ones. While the series is, supposedly, set in a fictitious society, the author claims that such credit systems are not really "distant sci-fi inventions", thus querying the voluntary nature of at least some of our activities. The second vignette, by focussing on the monetised image of the 'QAnon Shaman', leads the reader to the issue of conspiratorial thinking which, as the author claims, "draws on some real-world […] uncertainties" but, eventually, misrepresents these in an effort to bend them to the underlying ideology, more often than not resorting to social media for this purpose. Finally, and, in a sense, as a counter-point to the previous vignette, Gray brings the reader's attention to reactions to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, including one in particular, coming from the philosophical world. She focusses on Giorgio Agamben's now famous claim that, to simplify, the emergency measures instituted in the face of the pandemic were, in fact, an excuse for the strengthening and growth of state control. In presenting both Agamben's view and the responses from his critics, Gray leads the reader to unavoidable questions: was Agamben 'fooled' or was COVID-19 indeed been abused as a means to the increase of either state or global corporate power. Having thus whetted the reader's appetite, Gray then moves to the analysis of, as she calls it, a "generalised mode of espionage". Here, she highlights the 'permanence' of some of Hannah Arendt's statements regarding the holocaust, as presented in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. From this, she draws a link to the Derridean notion of hauntology, that is that which persistently rests within the human memory and, while referring to the past, has bearing on the present. This, in turn, forms a basis for the author moving to the discussion of what she terms microfascisms. Here, from the macro image of societies in distress, she moves to the micro world of each individual with their desires. However, and the author's choice of Deleuze and Guattari is here of importance, this desire is not grounded in purely familial roots but, as she puts it, "directed and arrested by myriad social arrangements". Following from the above, for the author, a shift towards "algorithmic governmentality" occurs. From this follows the Stieglerian loss of spirit and care, giving rise to what the author calls algopopulism - a populism augmented by the abundance of data and algorithms used to analyse it.

While Gray's paper uses the reality of the world as a prompt to analyse theoretical views on fascism and populism in order to arrive at her own new theoretical concept, namely *algopopulism*, Alungal Chungath's contribution does the opposite. It applies a well-known Hegelian theory of the Master-Slave (or Master-servant, as the author chooses to put it) dialectic to a particular situation, namely that of Indian Muslims, in order to draw conclusions both about the situation

and about the applicability of the theory. In order to achieve this goal, Alungal Chungath first describes the theory reaching the interpretative conclusion that the servant, having initially recognised the inevitability of their death, accepts their submission to the Master. However, the servant now assumes also the position of the one who, as the author puts it, "works on nature" and, through reflection on this work, reaches a transcendent state of the self, thus also transforming the world through the "formative activity or cultural production". Alungal Chungath further presents a short analysis of how this theory has been employed by others. According to the author, Kojeve and then Fukuyama view Hegel's concept as highlighting the possibility of freedom within the struggle for recognition. Sartre and Beauvoir, for the author, see the Hegelian dialectic as a recurrent feature of human consciousness to objectify and subjugate the other. For Fanon, on the other hand, a clear difference arises between the Hegelian Master and the 'white master' in that the latter does not require recognition from the slave, but just labour. Finally, the author makes mention of Freire and his *conscientization* as a 'way out' of oppression through socio-economic and political education. Having presented the various applications of the Hegelian dialectic, Nissar makes his goal clear: he wishes to do exactly as the other authors have done, i.e. employ the theory, but in the Indian context and in particular, to the situation of the Indian Muslims. Initially, the author shows how, historically, the Muslims have become subordinated through, as he puts it, "majoritarian and exclusionary policies of the democratic State". This, Nissar claims, puts the Indian Muslim in the position of the servant in the dialectic. Then, the author demonstrates how, as the servant in Hegel's concept, the Indian Muslim challenges the conditions of servitude by means of their engagement in 'participative cultural production'. This, according to Nissar, is to be understood as a means of resistance. Thus, the author concludes, as shown on the example of the situation of the Indian Muslim, the Hegelian Master-servant dialectic may be given a reading of, as the author calls it, a "sociopolitical dialectic of the subordinators and the subordinated".

Likewise, du Toit and Swer's contribution again employs a theoretical approach while analysing the formation of extremist echo chambers. The authors claim that there is an existential motivation to this and analyse it through the existential phenomenology of two authors, namely, Ortega y Gasset and Merleau-Ponty. This takes the form of proving two claims. First, the authors propose that experience constantly resides in the framework of virtuality and apply Ortega y Gasset's philosophy to prove the claim. For Ortega, they state, the contemporary extremism (and, *mutatis mutandis*, the political extremism in online spaces) results from several changes in the social world and the popular understanding thereof. The belief in the sovereignty of the individual, a consequence of the rise of liberal democracy, is one of them. However, this belief has now, according to

Ortega, reached a state where it is not something to be aspired to but rather a state inherent in human psychology. Secondly, Ortega points to the advances in technology as that which has also resulted in a higher amount of technological knowledge available to the average individual. Both contribute to the feeling of the increased complexity of our existence and the resulting confusion within it. In order to supplement Ortega's theory, the authors further employ O'Shiel's phenomenology of the virtual, according to which virtuality consists of four axes (Self, World, Others, and Values), constantly present in human experience but also modified by our online involvement. It is through these axes that a link to Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodiment can be made. While creating this connection, the authors counter the move of post- and transhumanist theorists away from the body, a theoretical approach that is still present in many discussions of the virtual. If the discussion remains so, then no connection can be made between the world of online spaces and the offline world. Yet, the authors claim that such a connection does exist. For it to be seen and theoretically underpinned, embodiment and corporeality must be re-instated as effective factors. Thus, the authors suggest that Merleau-Ponty's account of embodiment comes into play when virtuality is concerned since, according to the authors, "virtuality is a permanent feature of embodiment", and has existed as such prior to the advent of the modern-day technology. By introducing the Merleau-Pontian account of the body as the "avenue for perception" but also as a lived body, the authors allow for it to take a role of, as they put it, "implicit mediator and conduit of one's consciousness of the world". However, the authors go further, claiming that perception is both embodied and inherently virtual, a claim which stems from their understanding of Ortega y Gasset. If virtuality is understood as presented above, the authors conclude, extremist echo chambers, because of the presence of embodiment throughout the virtual and, thus, due to the relation to the world outside online spaces, as well as due to the re-organisation of the virtual axes of experience, can affect 'real world' offline politics.

In summation, this special issue gathers together a broad range of theoretical approaches that address the pressing need for the analysis of contemporary Forms of Far-Right Populism and Fascism in the Global South. The first group of papers moves from concrete analyses to conceptual discussions regarding the topic. The second addresses fascism in the Global South head-on. The third group offers a theoretical treatment of oppression and resistance. Each of the papers offers an insight into the contours of these multi-faceted and changeable political movements in a globally underemphasized region, and provides a range of conceptual tools for future research in this area.

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