

Demo-Fascism

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We are heading towards global “neo-fascism”. The “fate” of Western Democracy as the overall “fate” of the whole of Humankind. In those European countries where Civilization has finally given its most cherished fruits of “civility”, “lay virtue”, “good education”,... (Civility, in short), the post-democratic Police of One-self has already turned real and taken body; it has actually been incarnated.

I

So what is the dream of democracies? What do they want to achieve over time?. Seeking answers to this problem means to raise the question of the relationship between “fascism” and “democracy”. How is “Fascism” defined from this arena of “democracy” in which it once gave rise to feared and horrendous political monuments? Is it just its opposite? Is it something else? Is it the same thing?

The History of ideas has seen three ways to clarify these questions, three theories of fascism from the perspective of Democracy. The first among them, conceived within academic historiography, has attempted to present historical fascism (German, Italian) as a kind of unparalleled monster, a horrifying “isolated” phenomenon that would meet certain very precise, specific causes typical of a certain time and certain countries, certain men and certain attitudes, which have little or nothing to do with us any more. The game of economic (crisis, unemployment, famine, ruin of the middle class, etc.), social (turbulence, conflicts, revolutionary attempts, fear of ruling powerful individuals), political (spread of certain new organizations, sclerosis and vilification of the traditional parties and almost the whole democratic system...) and ideological circumstances (dissemination of racist, nationalist, xenophobic, totalitarian beliefs etc.) often suffices to depict a local, cut-off process, almost like an endemic plague that would have placed two states in

the very same antipodes of Democracy. For these historians, including Mommsen for example, “Fascism” is the perfect antithesis of “democracy” and so its historical implementation during the Inter-war period expresses the aftermath of very “particular” processes and circumstances resulting from a combination of concrete factors quite difficult to duplicate. Western Democracy, having learned the lesson, will always have to remain alert, vigilant, in order not to see itself threatened again by totalitarian organizations which, taking advantage of periods of crisis and social unrest, will always try to spread their abhorrent ideas in order to achieve political and sectarian strength...

This thesis remains dear to politicians and rulers of any kind so it legitimizes Democracy “by contrast” (the monster inhabits beyond, outside of it; it is on the opposite side) and at the same time reassures the population (Auschwitz will never happen again. We have buried its seed in salt). However, it suffers from great inconsistencies and retains some internal issues in the shadows.

Although, once holding the reins of the State apparatus, the fascists proceeded to undermine the liberal regime from within, their previous strengthening, their electoral and political promotion occurred in respect and observance of democratic rules -legalization, polls, alliances...- The public actually wanted fascism and democracy led it to where it was to arrive: the dome of the State...

In spite of some minor variations, this liberal interpretation of the fascist phenomenon has ended up as part of the official ideology of our present system; and has, for a long time, been taught almost without any discussion in our schools, privileged by the mass media etc. It is usually combined with an over valuation of the role of the leaders (Hitler, Mussolini, thoroughly demonized) and an exaggerated emphasis on the impact of ideology. It also clears the whole population, the “average citizen” from the burden of any responsibility. The men and women who voted and applauded these parties to the end, who idolized those leaders, and who, such has been recently testified by Goldhagen¹, did not always want to miss the opportunity to participate themselves in the ongoing torture and murders...

II

The second interpretation emerged in Marxist historiography, within the context of a fierce controversy against the liberal versions. From this perspective, which had in Nicos Poulantzas an exceptional supporter and theorist, “representative democracy” and “fascism” should be regarded (expressed metaphorically) as two “playing cards” that the ruling bourgeoisie, the national oligarchies and the social and economic supporters of Capitalism, can put on the table at their convenience. While one was shown, the other would be hidden up the sleeve, each

¹ “Hitler willing executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust”. Goldhagen, Daniel

of them would be used alternatively according to immediate interests. That way, in times of economic boom and social peace, the democratic card better serves their aspirations, reducing the use of physical repression and hardly raising any “problem of political legitimacy.” Nevertheless, in times of social upheaval, under the threat (real or imagined) of a revolutionary anti-capitalist process, economic crisis, disorder, widespread discontent, vibrant anti-establishment groups or ideologies, and so on, the hegemonic bourgeoisie, the ruling classes that keep control of the state apparatus, will resort, in order to safeguard their positions of privilege, to the terrible fascist “playing card” so far hidden up the sleeve, and will encourage, fund and sustain a process of fascistization whose aim is to restore law and order and prevent the capitalist system from further damage or collapse.

From this trend “Fascism” is no longer perceived as a “horror” buried forever in the past, but as an option for Capital, a mere functional alternative to Democracy, a replaceable monster that can very easily re-visit us. An asset which the bourgeoisie would never relinquish ... According to this interpretation, certainly less reassuring than the former, “fascism” is not the antithesis of “democracy”: it appears rather as its “blood brother”, its occasional replacement. Leaving aside any “humanist” sentimentality, the worst thing that could be said of fascism is that it serves the same interests as democracy: where fascism is bad, democracy is evil. As both regimes are the offspring of the capitalist system, their stories will always go hand in hand, hiding one after the other, following one another in a rhythmical fashion...

III

The third interpretation has emerged in the philosophical and literary fields and is the least complacent, the most disturbing among them. Just to put it in a nutshell: it argues that Fascism, though under a new guise, is the destiny of democracy, its truth and its future, the horizon that it is making for, its very same displaced and postponed essence. I personally concur with this version...

Representative democracy leads to a new type of fascism and, as it spreads worldwide as THE ONE AND ONLY form of political organization in our day, “Neo-Fascism” globalizes with it as the definitive denouement of mankind. Ironically, the roots of this discourse can be found in the “Dialectic of Enlightenment“, by Adorno and Horkheimer, authors who would not subscribe to the subsequent development given to the prospect that their initial work demonstrated. French theory (Foucault, in particular), with its appropriation of Nietzsche’s views, is the second largest source. The theoretical and conceptual material with which to support the unmasking of representative democracy as a liberal genesis of “Neo-Fascism” have been mainly provided by these two traditions (School of Frankfurt, Genealogical Theory).

Despite their overall differences and their divergent intellectual trajectories, both schools have agreed in pointing out a circumstance whose recognition still sounds disturbing to mainstream intellectuality, academic and official knowledge: that the Western liberal democracies are based on the same form of rationality and turning to the same procedures as Historical Fascisms and Stalinism (see, in this regard, “Unmasking power” booklet by Michel Foucault)². This “identity” of the conceptual pre-assumptions (a-priorisms) and the leading categories found in the philosophical matrix of Fascism, Stalinism and Democracy (three versions of the same sort of rationality, three excrements discharged by the bourgeoisie politic ratio), originates in the fact that our culture has closed ranks around its philosophical roots (anchor point) in the Enlightenment and has developed its political concepts in strict obedience to the logocentric dictates of the Ratio, in the rigorous subjugation to the Modern Project. Once the background affinity between “Fascism” and “Democracy” is established, nothing prevents the former from replacing the latter, or rather, nothing prevents to two from overlapping, especially when a broad and unrestrictive concept of this applies.

Eduardo Subirats can be counted among the contemporary authors who have worked towards the elaboration of a comprehensive concept of Fascism. The latter would allow a significant “diversification” in its expressions and would legitimize the idea of a “new kind of Fascism” under a different format from the “old” one, but still sharing with this the most important generative features according to the Spanish author. Subirats carries on by stating that the absence of internal resistance (the lack of a notable opposition and critical response, which is to say the absolute “docility” of the population) and expansionism abroad (belligerency, desire for universalization) constitute the two most significant traits that define “Fascism” as a socio-political phenomenon nowadays. I personally would add a third one: the desire to exterminate Difference (cultural, psychological, political and economic etc..). These three characteristics link the experiences of German and Italian “fascism” (known as Historical Fascisms) with the management models of social space (guidelines for population control, socio-political management policies) that tend to characterize the present Demo-Liberal regimes. It could be said therefore that there is a Neo-Fascism overlapping to a greater or lesser degree with the political apparatus of Democracy (elections, parliament, political parties, etc.). A Neo-Fascism from and within democracies (democratic fascism or demo-

Jonah.

² The title of this essay in Spanish is “Por que hay que estudiar el poder; la question del sujeto” which in English would come to be something like “Why should we study power; the question of the subject”. Since no similar title has been found among the English translations of this author’s writings I have chosen the one that looked more similar to it. Anyway I am not sure if this is the right text. If somebody has an answer to this problem please, let us know.

fascism). I ignore whether there is actually still more to come or if it has already wholly installed itself within our society.

IV

I think that we are on the threshold of a new era, if we have not already entered into it, and the least important thing in this discussion is the adequacy or inadequacy of the words I have chosen to appoint it. I could have called it “democratic despotism”; but the term does not mention expansionism and the repression of Difference. I could have also said “post-democracy”, but I do not want to give the impression that I am in sympathy with any intellectual fashion trend (fashion of the “post”, “Post-Modern”, “Post-Industrial”, “Post-History “...) The various schools of thought that have sought to distance themselves from the Modern Project, which seek to turn their backs on the chain of myths bequeathed to us by the Enlightenment (a chain so revered by all the oligarchies of the planet), provide elements, perspectives and concepts useful in order to establish and develop this idea of post-democracy or demo-fascism. In one of my recent books I attempted to bring this to the limelight and to collect evidence proving that it is not a fantasy.

The reason for me to be interested in this problem is that I believe that the new School of Demo-Fascism, the symbol and source of the new era is already starting to rise. Reformation after reformation, the post-democratic new school is appearing little by little and part of the work is about to be completed very shortly.

V

I have already alluded to the traits that link “post-democracy” with the broad concept of fascism, which are shared by the experiences of the totalitarian regimes in Germany and Italy. Now I would like to allude to those aspects that distinguish and singularise the former from the latter, nearly turning it into the opposite of the Historical Fascisms.

In the first place, a resounding “lack of enthusiasm” for the liberal regime, the antithesis of the “warmth of the masses” that accompanied the former fascisms can be easily detected. This “lack of enthusiasm” comes in part as a result of the de-politicization of society brought by the disempowering practice of political liberalism i.e. vote and wait to see what happens and then wait to vote again because nothing has happened. Faced with the re-politicization of citizenship that distinguished the “fascisticide” Germany and Italy, we have today the growing apolitical attitude shown by those men and women claiming to be democrats only in name, increasingly disappointed with a formula that once promised them “political self-determination “, nothing more, nothing less. Lack of enthusiasm: disillusionment, disenchantment, apathy...

Secondly, the “demo-fascism” is characterized by a progressive concealment (invisibility, imperceptiveness) of all technologies, coercive mechanisms along with every position of power and authority. Therefore, this emerging regime tends to minimize the physical apparatus of repression, and to rely almost entirely on psychological (symbolic) strategies of domination. The dialectic of Force must give up its place to the dialectic of Sympathy. This way, the post-democratic repression frankly does its job very well since, as Arnheim said, in painting as in music “the good work goes unnoticed, It barely hurts our senses“. I am afraid that the post-democratic repression is found among these sorts of “masterpieces”: It is actually excellent, for it goes on all the time but remains unperceived, almost unseen. Its core ideal is defined as: “turn every man/woman into a policeman of him/herself” so as long as certain explicit figures of authority, empirical positions of power still have to be maintained, these will need to become softer, “dulcified“, watered down, diluted and hidden. There we have the “friendly” cops, the “sensitive“ prison guards the “humanitarian” soldiers or “peacekeepers“, the “almost absent” teachers and so on...

In the spaces where relationships of subordination and uneven distribution of power quotas still have to be maintained, it will be required that the dominated people (the victims, the oppressed) grab the reins and take charge of their own subjugation and exert as punishers of themselves: students who act as “self-teachers” intervening in every school-related domain, holding opinions about everything within the school dynamics, “energizing” the lessons/lectures, participating in the governing of the institution and if necessary, even proudly marking themselves with a fail. In this way, the “object” of institutional practice will partly assume the traditional powers of the “subject”, a portion of its prerogatives and its duties as well, becoming almost the subject and object of this at the same time.

Students playing teachers; prisoners being their own guards, watchmen for the other inmates; workers acting as foremen, controlling themselves and their colleagues... Hence, this hybridization and this semi-reversal of roles, is followed by an occultation of coercive procedures and a strategic postponement of the use of force...

Of course, not all students, workers, prisoners, etc.. , fall into this trap. Harcamone, the honest criminal of Genet who really had deserved prison by murdering children, (unlike those others, ending up in “the mansion of pain” (Wilde) on the grounds of pathetic reasons, victims of miscarriages of justice, repentant crooks, criminals and even occasional or involuntary delinquents) wants one day to enjoy the whim of killing a jailer. In the end he chooses his aim well. He does not pick the prototypical sadistic, cruel and inhuman prison guard, but that idealistic young man, full of good intentions, that speaks a lot to the inmates, claims to “understand” their suffering, passes them cigarettes, criticizes the prison governors and policies

and never incurs in gratuitous violence, aggressions or mistreatment. Harcamone chooses to murder that jailer through which the penal institution masks its ultimate truth, lies cynically and even aspires to “become bearable” ... Neither do the poor, the beggars and the homeless of “Viridiana” let themselves be entirely fooled by the half-nun who needed them in order to feel pious, generous, virtuous, and so did not spare undignified and outrageous gestures of unforgivable sympathy towards them. They were even on the verge of raping or killing her at a certain point... Deep poverty is terrible no one can play with it, without risk, to earn a place in heaven for themselves... (“My deprivation kills,” seems to be the message that Maldoror of Isidoro Ducase is trying to tell us after each of his murders). Unfortunately, there are no more killers with the honesty and clarity of Harcamone or poor people with the fortitude necessary to hate the “pious” who come to them to benefit in some way ... Post-democracy blurs the relations of subjugation and exploitation, saving itself the excessive resort to the physical repressive violence that characterized former fascist states...

VI

So “demo-fascism” will be, or rather is already, an order supported by extremely civilized homunculi. Paraphrasing Norbert Elias, men who have internalized, to a high degree, the apparatus of self-repression have thus gotten used to enduring anything without experiencing any emotion of disgust or rejection. Men and women who are extremely “manageable” and incapable of hating what is worthy of being hated and loving what really deserves to be loved. Men and women incompetent for and horrified by any conflict, inept at rebellion, who have deleted the word “no” from their vocabulary and faded away in paralysing scepticism, in the most abject conformism and docility. Men and women who have failed to discern the dangers of common sense and die their lives defeat after defeat. “Withholding, withdrawal, retreat, not only with respect to this world but to all worlds, a mineral serenity, a taste for prettification whether for fear for pleasure or for pain” (Cioran).

Our civilization and culture, in its stage of decline (and, therefore, scepticism and conformism), has provided the post-democracy with the men that it needed to reduce the repressive apparatus of the state. Men moulded for centuries (“what you will never know is how long has been required by man to produce the man“, warned Gide). Men trained and accustomed to the nauseating technique of surveillance, censorship, punishment, correction, watch and snitch on each other in accordance with the expectations of current social standards.

In those European countries where Civilization has finally given its most cherished fruits of “civility”, “lay virtue”, “good education”,... (Civility, in short), the post-democratic Police of Oneself has already turned real. Indeed it has taken body,

been incarnated. I recall with horror those Nordic people, in that phantasmagorical city from the Polar Arctic Circle called Alta, who did not cross the street until the traffic light, feeling sorry for them and pitying them for their absurd waiting (there were barely any cars passing the whole day), gave them the order, ashamed. They also paid for everything mechanically, (for newspapers, drinks and some other articles which, with their corresponding price indicated, appeared here and there without anybody in charge, without locking mechanisms preventing them from being shoplifted or stolen), even though it was so simple to take them “for free” (I did it myself). For somebody like me, who has stolen so many times in his life, and who has always regarded disobedience as the only moral law, those pictures, taken from an otherwise very real nightmare, already predicted the extinction of the human heart. Soon, it will only be a gap that simulates beating under the demo-fascist man’s bosom.

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