

On Post-Fascism: How Citizenship Is Becoming An Exclusive Privilege

By G. M. Tams

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I have an interest to declare. The government of my country, Hungary, is--along with the Bavarian provincial government (provincial in more senses than one)--the strongest foreign supporter of Jorg Haider's Austria. The right-wing cabinet in Budapest, besides other misdeeds, is attempting to suppress parliamentary governance, penalizing local authorities of a different political hue than itself, and busily creating and imposing a novel state ideology, with the help of a number of lumpen intellectuals of the extreme right, including some overt Neo-Nazis. It is in cahoots with an openly and viciously anti-Semitic fascist party that is, alas, represented in parliament. People working for the prime minister's office are engaging in more or less cautious Holocaust revisionism. The

government-controlled state television gives vent to raw anti-Gypsy racism. The fans of the most popular soccer club in the country, whose chairman is a cabinet minister and a party leader, are chanting in unison about the train that is bound to leave any moment for Auschwitz.



On the ground floor of the Central European University in Budapest you can visit an exhibition concerning the years of turmoil a decade or so ago. There you can watch a video recorded illegally in 1988, and you can see the current Hungarian prime minister defending and protecting me with his own body from the truncheons of communist riot police. Ten years later, this same person appointed a communist police general as his home secretary, the second or third most important person in the cabinet. Political conflicts between former friends and allies are usually acrimonious. This is no exception. I am an active participant in an incipient anti-fascist movement in Hungary, a speaker at rallies and demonstrations. Our opponents--in personal terms--are too close for comfort. Thus, I cannot consider myself a neutral observer.

The phenomenon that I shall call post-fascism is not unique to Central Europe. Far from it. To be sure, Germany, Austria, and Hungary are important, for historical reasons obvious to all; familiar phrases repeated here have different echoes. I recently saw that the old brick factory in Budapest's third district is being demolished; I am told that they will build a gated community of suburban villas in its place. The brick factory is where the Budapest Jews waited their turn to be transported to the concentration camps. You could as well build holiday cottages in Treblinka. Our vigilance in this part of the world is perhaps more needed than anywhere else, since innocence, in historical terms, cannot be presumed.¹ Still, post-fascism is a cluster of policies, practices, routines, and ideologies that can be observed everywhere in the contemporary world; that have little or nothing to do, except in Central Europe, with the legacy of Nazism; that are not totalitarian; that are not at all revolutionary; and that are not based on violent mass movements and irrationalist, voluntaristic philosophies, nor are they toying, even in jest, with anti-capitalism.

Why call this cluster of phenomena fascism, however post-?

Post-fascism finds its niche easily in the new world of global capitalism without upsetting the dominant political forms of electoral democracy and representative government. It does what I consider to be central to all varieties of fascism, including the post-totalitarian version. Sans Fuhrer, sans one-party rule, sans SA or SS, post-fascism reverses the Enlightenment tendency to assimilate citizenship to the human condition.

This hostility to universal citizenship is, I submit, the main characteristic of fascism. And the rejection of even a tempered universalism is what we now see repeated under democratic circumstances (I do not even say under democratic disguise). Post-totalitarian fascism is thriving under the capacious carapace of global capitalism, and we should tell it like it is.

The perilous differentiation between citizen and non-citizen is not, of course, a fascist invention. As Michael Mann points out in a path breaking study ^{3*}, the classical expression "We The People" did not include Black slaves and "red Indians" (Native Americans), and the ethnic, regional, class, and denominational definitions of "the people" have led to genocide both "out there" (in settler colonies) and within nation states (see the Armenian massacre perpetrated by modernizing Turkish nationalists) under democratic, semi-democratic, or authoritarian (but not "totalitarian") governments. If sovereignty is vested in the people, the territorial or demographic definition of what and who the people are becomes decisive.

Moreover, the withdrawal of legitimacy from state socialist (communist) and revolutionary nationalist ("Third World") regimes with their mock-Enlightenment definitions of nationhood left only racial, ethnic, and confessional (or denominational) bases for a legitimate claim or title for "state-formation" (as in Yugoslavia, Czecho-Slovakia, the ex-Soviet Union, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Sudan, etc.)

Everywhere, then, from Lithuania to California, immigrant and even autochthonous minorities have become the enemy and are expected to put up with the diminution and suspension of their civic and human rights. The propensity of the European Union to weaken the nation-state and strengthen regionalism (which, by extension, might prop up the power of the center at Brussels and Strasbourg) manages to ethnicize rivalry and territorial inequality (see Northern vs. Southern Italy, Catalonia vs. Andalusia, English South East vs. Scotland, Fleming vs. Walloon Belgium, Brittany vs. Normandy). Class conflict, too, is being ethnicized and racialized, between the established and secure working class and lower middle class of the metropolis and the new immigrant of the periphery, also construed as a problem of security and crime.^{4*} Hungarian and Serbian ethnicists pretend that the nation is wherever persons of Hungarian or Serbian origin happen to live, regardless of their citizenship, with the corollary that citizens of their nation-state who are ethnically, racially, denominationally, or culturally "alien" do not really belong to the nation.

The growing de-politicization of the concept of a nation (the shift to a cultural definition) leads to the acceptance of discrimination as "natural." This is the discourse the right intones quite openly in the parliaments and street rallies in eastern and Central Europe, in Asia, and, increasingly, in "the West." It cannot be denied that attacks against egalitarian welfare systems and affirmative action techniques everywhere have a dark racial undertone, accompanied by racist police brutality and vigilantism in many places. The link, once regarded as necessary and logical, between citizenship, equality, and territory may disappear in what the theorist of the Third Way, the formerly *Marxissant* sociologist Anthony Giddens, calls a society of responsible risk-takers.

Decline of Critical Culture

After the 1989 collapse of the Soviet bloc, contemporary society underwent fundamental change. Bourgeois society, liberal democracy, democratic capitalism--name it what you will--has always been a controversial affair; unlike previous regimes, it developed an adversary culture, and was permanently confronted by strong competitors on the right (the alliance of the throne and the altar) and the left (revolutionary socialism). Both have become obsolete, and this has created a serious crisis within the culture of late modernism.¹ The mere idea of radical change (utopia and critique) has been dropped from the rhetorical vocabulary, and the political horizon is now filled by what is there, by what is given, which is capitalism. In the prevalent social imagination, the whole human cosmos is a "homogeneous society"--a society of useful, wealth-producing, procreating, stable, irreligious, but at the same time *jouissant*, free individuals. Citizenship is increasingly defined, apolitically, in terms of interests that are not contrasted with the common good, but united within it through understanding, interpretation, communication, and voluntary accord based on shared presumptions.

In this picture, obligation and coercion, the differentia *specifica* of politics (and in permanent need of moral justification), are conspicuously absent. "Civil society"--a nebula of voluntary groupings where coercion and domination, by necessity, do not play any important role--is said to have cannibalized politics and the state. A dangerous result of this conception might be that the continued underpinning of law by coercion and domination, while criticized in toto, is not watched carefully enough--since, if it cannot be justified at all, no justification, thus no moral control, will be sought. The myth, according to which the core of late-modern capitalism is "civil society," blurs the conceptual boundaries of citizenship, which is seen more and more as a matter of policy, not politics.

Before 1989, you could take it for granted that the political culture of liberal-democratic-constitutional capitalism was a critical culture, more often than not in conflict with the system that, sometimes with bad grace and reluctantly, sustained it. Apologetic culture was for ancient empires and anti-liberal dictatorships. Highbrow despair is now rampant. But without a sometimes only implicit utopia as a prop, despair does not seem to work. What is the point of theoretical anti-capitalism, if political anti-capitalism cannot be taken seriously?

Also, there is an unexpected consequence of this absence of a critical culture tied to an oppositional politics. As one of the greatest and most level-headed masters of twentieth-century political sociology, Seymour Martin Lipset, has noted, fascism is the extremism of the center. Fascism had very little to do with *passiste* feudal, aristocratic, monarchist ideas, was on the whole anti-clerical, opposed communism and socialist revolution, and--like the liberals whose electorate it had inherited--hated big business, trade unions, and the social welfare state. Lipset had classically shown that extremisms of the left and right were by no means exclusive: some petty bourgeois attitudes suspecting big business and big government could be, and were, prolonged into an extremism that proved lethal. Right-wing and center extremisms were combined in Hungarian, Austrian, Croatian, Slovak para-fascism (I have borrowed this term from Roger Griffin) of a pseudo-Christian, clericalist, royalist coloring, but extremism of the center does and did exist, proved by Lipset also through continuities in electoral geography.

Today there is nothing of any importance on the political horizon but the bourgeois center; therefore its extremism is the most likely to reappear. (Jorg Haider and his Freedom Party are the best example of this. Parts of his discourse are libertarian/neoliberal, his ideal is the propertied little man, he strongly favors a shareholding and home-owning petty bourgeois "democracy," and he is quite free of romantic-reactionary nationalism as distinct from parochial selfishness and racism.) What is now considered "right-wing" in the United States would have been considered insurrectionary and suppressed by armed force in any traditional regime of the right as individualistic, decentralizing, and

opposed to the monopoly of coercive power by the government, the foundation of each and every conservative creed. Conservatives are *le parti de l'ordre*, and loathe militias and plebian cults.

Decaying States

The end of colonial empires in the 1960s and the end of Stalinist ("state socialist," "state capitalist," "bureaucratic collectivist") systems in the 1990s has triggered a process never encountered since the Mongolian invasions in the thirteenth century: a comprehensive and apparently irreversible collapse of established statehood as such. While the *bien-pensant* Western press daily bemoans perceived threats of dictatorship in far-away places, it usually ignores the reality behind the tough talk of powerless leaders, namely that nobody is prepared to obey them. The old, creaking, and unpopular nation-state--the only institution to date that had been able to grant civil rights, a modicum of social assistance, and some protection from the exactions of privateer gangs and rapacious, irresponsible business elites--ceased to exist or never even emerged in the majority of the poorest areas of the world. In most parts of sub-Saharan Africa and of the former Soviet Union not only the refugees, but the whole population could be considered stateless. The way back, after decades of demented industrialization (see the horrific story of the hydroelectric plants everywhere in the Third World and the former Eastern bloc), to a subsistence economy and "natural" barter exchanges in the midst of environmental devastation, where banditry seems to have become the only efficient method of social organization, leads exactly nowhere. People in Africa and ex-Soviet Eurasia are dying not by a surfeit of the state, but by the absence of it.

Traditionally, liberation struggles of any sort have been directed against entrenched privilege. Equality came at the expense of ruling groups: secularism reduced the power of the Princes of the Church, social legislation dented the profits of the "moneyed interest," universal franchise abolished the traditional political class of landed aristocracy and the noblesse de robe, the triumph of commercial pop culture smashed the ideological prerogatives of the progressive intelligentsia, horizontal mobility and suburban sprawl ended the rule of party politics on the local level, contraception and consumerist hedonism dissolved patriarchal rule in the family--something lost, something gained. Every step toward greater freedom curtailed somebody's privileges (quite apart from the pain of change). It was conceivable to imagine the liberation of outlawed and downtrodden lower classes through economic, political, and moral crusades: there was, crudely speaking, somebody to take ill-gotten gains from. And those gains could be redistributed to more meritorious sections of the population, offering in exchange greater social concord, political tranquility, and safety to unpopular, privileged elites, thereby reducing class animosity. But let us not forget though that the social-democratic bargain has been struck as a result of centuries of conflict and painful renunciations by the traditional ruling strata. Such a liberation struggle, violent or peaceful, is not possible for the new wretched of the earth.

Nobody exploits them. There is no extra profit and surplus value to be appropriated. There is no social power to be monopolized. There is no culture to be dominated. The poor people of the new stateless societies--from the "homogeneous" viewpoint--are totally superfluous. They are not exploited, but neglected. There is no overtaxation, since there are no revenues. Privileges cannot be redistributed toward a greater equality since there are no privileges, except the temporary ones to be had, occasionally, at gunpoint.

Famished populations have no way out from their barely human condition but to leave. The so-called center, far from exploiting this periphery of the periphery, is merely trying to keep out the foreign and usually colored destitutes (the phenomenon is euphemistically called "demographic pressure") and set up awesome barriers at the frontiers of rich countries, while our international financial bureaucracy

counsels further deregulation, liberalization, less state and less government to nations that do not have any, and are perishing in consequence. "Humanitarian wars" are fought in order to prevent masses of refugees from flowing in and cluttering up the Western welfare systems that are in decomposition anyway.

Citizenship in a functional nation-state is the one safe meal ticket in the contemporary world. But such citizenship is now a privilege of the very few. The Enlightenment assimilation of citizenship to the necessary and "natural" political condition of all human beings has been reversed. Citizenship was once upon a time a privilege within nations. It is now a privilege to most persons in some nations. Citizenship is today the very exceptional privilege of the inhabitants of flourishing capitalist nation-states, while the majority of the world's population cannot even begin to aspire to the civic condition, and has also lost the relative security of pre-state (tribe, kinship) protection.

The scission of citizenship and sub-political humanity is now complete, the work of Enlightenment irretrievably lost. Post-fascism does not need to put non-citizens into freight trains to take them into death; instead, it need only prevent the new non-citizens from boarding any trains that might take them into the happy world of overflowing rubbish bins that could feed them. Post-fascist movements everywhere, but especially in Europe, are anti-immigration movements, grounded in the "homogeneous" world-view of productive usefulness. They are not simply protecting racial and class privileges within the nation-state (although they are doing that, too) but protecting universal citizenship within the rich nation-state against the virtual-universal citizenship of all human beings, regardless of geography, language, race, denomination, and habits. The current notion of "human rights" might defend people from the lawlessness of tyrants, but it is no defense against the lawlessness of no rule.

Varieties of Post-Fascism

It is frequently forgotten that contemporary global capitalism is a second edition. In the pre-1914 capitalism of no currency controls (the gold standard, etc.) and free trade, a world without visas and work permits, when companies were supplying military stuff to the armies of the enemy in wartime without as much as a squeak from governments or the press, the free circulation of capital and labor was more or less assured (it was, perhaps, a less equal, but a freer world). In comparison, the thing called "globalization" is a rather modest undertaking, a gradual and timorous destruction of *estatiste* and *dirigiste*, welfarist nation-states built on the egalitarian bargain of old-style social democracy whose constituency (construed as the backbone of modern nations), the rust-belt working class, is disintegrating. Globalization has liberated capital flows. Speculative capital goes wherever investments appear as "rational," usually places where wages are low and where there are no militant trade unions or ecological movements. But unlike in the nineteenth century, labor is not granted the same freedoms. *Spiritus flat ubi vult*, capital flies wherever it wants, but the free circulation of labor is impeded by ever more rigid national regulations. The flow is all one-way; capital can improve its position, but labor--especially low-quality, low-intensity labor in the poor countries of the periphery--cannot. Deregulation for capital, stringent regulation for labor.

If the workforce is stuck at the periphery, it will have to put up with sweatshops. Attempts to fight for higher salaries and better working conditions are met not with violence, strikebreakers, or military coups, but by quiet capital flight and disapproval from international finance and its international or national bureaucracies, which will have the ability to decide who is deserving of aid or debt relief. To quote Albert O. Hirschman, voice (that is, protest) is impossible, nay, pointless. Only exit, exodus, remains, and it is the job of post-fascism to prevent that.

Under these conditions, it is only logical that the New New Left has re-appropriated the language of human rights instead of class struggle. If you glance at *Die Tageszeitung*, *Il Manifesto*, *Rouge*, or *Socialist Worker*, you will see that they are mostly talking about asylum-seekers, immigrants (legal or illegal, *les sans-papiers*), squatters, the homeless, Gypsies, and the like. It is a tactic forced upon them by the disintegration of universal citizenship, by unimpeded global capital flows by the impact of new technologies on workers and consumers, and by the slow death of the global sub-proletariat. Also, they have to face the revival of class politics in a new guise by the proponents of "the third way" a la Tony Blair. The neo-neoliberal state has rescinded its obligations to "heterogeneous," non-productive populations and groups. Neo-Victorian, pedagogic ideas of "workfare," which declare unemployment implicitly sinful, the equation of welfare claimants with "enemies of the people," the replacement of social assistance with tax credits whereby people beneath the category of taxpayers are not deemed worthy of aid, income support made conditional on family and housing practices believed proper by "competent authorities," the increasing racialization, ethnicization, and sexualization of the underclass, the replacement of social solidarity with ethnic or racial solidarity, the overt acknowledgment of second-class citizenship, the tacit recognition of the role of police as a racial defense force, the replacement of the idea of emancipation with the idea of privileges (like the membership in the European Union, the OECD, or the WTO) arbitrarily dispensed to the deserving poor, and the transformation of rational arguments against EU enlargement into racist/ethnicist rabble-rousing--all this is part of the post-fascist strategy of the scission of the civic-cum-human community, of a renewed granting or denial of citizenship along race, class, denominational, cultural, ethnic lines.

The re-duplication of the underclass--a global underclass abroad and the "heterogeneous," wild ne'er-do-wells at home, with the interests of one set of underclass ("domestic") presented as inimical to the other ("foreign")--gives post-fascism its missing populist dimension. There is no harsher enemy of the immigrant--"guest worker" or asylum-seeker--than the obsolescent lumpen-proletariat, publicly represented by the hard-core, right-wing extremist soccer hooligan. "Lager louts" may not know that lager does not only mean a kind of cheap continental beer, but also a concentration camp. But the unconscious pun is, if not symbolic, metaphorical.

We are, then, faced with a new kind of extremism of the center. This new extremism, which I call post-fascism, does not threaten, unlike its predecessor, liberal and democratic rule within the core constituency of "homogeneous society." Within the community cut in two, freedom, security, prosperity are on the whole undisturbed, at least within the productive and procreative majority that in some rich countries encompasses nearly all white citizens. "Heterogeneous," usually racially alien, minorities are not persecuted, only neglected and marginalized, forced to live a life wholly foreign to the way of life of the majority (which, of course, can sometimes be qualitatively better than the flat workaholicism, consumerism, and health obsessions of the majority). Drugs, once supposed to widen and raise consciousness, are now uneasily pacifying the enforced idleness of that society is unwilling to help and to recognize as fellow humans. The "Dionysiac" subculture of the sub-proletariat further exaggerates the bifurcation of society. Political participation of the have-nots is out of the question, without any need for the restriction of franchise. Apart from the incipient and feeble ("new new") left-wing radicalism, as isolated as anarcho-syndicalism was in the second half of the nineteenth century, nobody seeks to represent them. The conceptual tools once offered by democratic and libertarian socialism are missing; and libertarians are nowadays militant bourgeois extremists of the center, ultra-capitalist cyberpunks hostile to any idea of solidarity beyond the fluxus of the global marketplace.

Post-fascism does not need storm troopers and dictators. It is perfectly compatible with an anti-Enlightenment liberal democracy that rehabilitates citizenship as a grant from the sovereign instead of a universal human right. I confess I am giving it a rude name here to attract attention to its glaring injustice. Post-fascism is historically continuous with its horrific predecessor only in patches. Certainly, Central and East European anti-Semitism has not changed much, but it is hardly central. Since post-fascism is only rarely a movement, rather simply a state of affairs, managed as often as not by so-called center-left governments, it is hard to identify intuitively. Post-fascists do not speak usually of total obedience and racial purity, but of the information superhighway.

Everybody knows the instinctive fury people experience when faced with a closed door. Now tens of millions of hungry human beings are rattling the doorknob. The rich countries are thinking up more sophisticated padlocks, while their anger at the invaders outside is growing, too. Some of the anger leads to the revival of the Nazi and fascist *Gedankengut* ("treasure-trove of ideas"), and this will trigger righteous revulsion. But post-fascism is not confined to the former Axis powers and their willing ex-clients, however revolting and horrifying this specific sub-variant may be. East European Gypsies (Roma and Sintj, to give their politically correct names) are persecuted both by the constabulary and by the populace, and are trying to flee to the "free West." The Western reaction is to introduce visa restrictions against the countries in question in order to prevent massive refugee influx, and solemn summons to East European countries to respect human rights. Domestic racism is supplanted by global liberalism, both grounded on a political power that is rapidly becoming racialized.

Multiculturalist responses are desperate avowals of impotence: an acceptance of the ethnicization of the civic sphere, but with a humanistic and benevolent twist. These avowals are concessions of defeat, attempts to humanize the inhuman. The field had been chosen by post-fascism, and liberals are trying to fight it on its own favorite terrain, ethnicity.

This is an enormously disadvantageous position. Without new ways of addressing the problem of global capitalism, the battle will surely be lost.

But the new Dual State is alive and well. A Normative State for the core populations of the capitalist center, and a Prerogative State of arbitrary decrees concerning non-citizens for the rest. Unlike in classical, totalitarian fascism, the Prerogative State is only dimly visible for the subjects of the Normative State: the essential human and civic community with those kept out and kept down is morally invisible. The radical critique pretending that liberty within the Normative State is an illusion is erroneous, though understandable. The denial of citizenship based not on exploitation, oppression, and straightforward discrimination among the denizens of "homogeneous society," but on mere exclusion and distance, is difficult to grasp, because the mental habits of liberation struggle for a more just redistribution of goods and power are not applicable. The problem is not that the Normative State is becoming more authoritarian. The problem is that it belongs only to a few.

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