



# The Upcoming Fascism

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Przemysław Witkowski

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Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa  
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To Paweł Soszyński, without whose idea  
this book would not have been possible

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# Introduction

Przemysław Witkowski has written a necessary and fascinating book, which strangely no one had done before.

The necessity of such a book is quite apparent because of the long shadow that fascism casts over the world, which has become increasingly dangerous for a decade and a half, especially since the 2007/2009 crisis. Public debates are also still dominated by the denial of the evil that this shadow brings.

Many people, however, see this brown shadow and anticipate its associated risks. Among others, is former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (in her last book – “Fascism. Warning,” 2018), who can hardly be accused of leftist hysteria. Even her calm, precise analysis was not convincing enough for many to take the growing threat of fascism seriously.

Our problem in tracing contemporary fascism comes mainly from simplistic comparisons. You may always be asked: “Where do you see Hitler?” (“Kaczyński is not Hitler,” “Trump is not Hitler,” etc.) or say, “Where is the new Holocaust?” (“Push-backs are not Auschwitz,” etc.). The accusation of using “*reductio* (or *argumentum*) *ad Hitlerum*” to disqualify one’s opponent is, of course, true (e.g., when abortion is compared to the Holocaust). Still, it usually closes discussion on the rebirth of this hazardous phenomenon too quickly.

The new versions of fascism are, of course, different from the fascism(s) of the early 20th century. There are no mass fascist parties with millions of members. There are no party uniforms or paramilitary party militias. But modern fascisms have a similar essence and roots and can lead to similar effects.

The uniqueness and special significance of Witkowski's book lies mainly in the fact that he puts aside irrelevant superficial differences and explores the identical or convergent essence of 20th-century and contemporary processes – from democratic and economic systemic dysfunctions to mythologies, aesthetics, visions of identity, family, and sexuality.

In this way, Przemysław Witkowski shows the deep essence of what superficial political science analysis most often refers to as “new right-wing authoritarian populism.” Thanks to this, the reflective reader, as he reads, discovers that populism is merely a socio-technical tool of the leaders of the revolt, the essence of which is a profound fascist turn taking place not only in politics but also – or rather, especially – in culture. And this dangerous process concerns not only the radical right.

Przemysław Witkowski has been able to show, very convincingly, that fascism is here. It is not only next to us but also among us. And not in fringe niches. Not in dark hiding places. It's around us. Close to the mainstream or even within it. It permeates our lives.

This new emanation is not Nazism or Hitlerism as we know it from the past. The past is the past. There is no point in arguing about turning back time or whether today's fascism is closer to the Italian, German, Portuguese, or perhaps Polish version from a hundred years ago. Because, of course, it is different than any historical pattern. Just as today's democracy is different from the democracy

of 19th-century America, France of the 1930s, or Great Britain of the 1980s. However, just as democracy, despite fundamental differences, is still a democracy when it retains its democratic essence, fascism remains fascism if it keeps the spirit of its fascist nature, as Przemysław Witkowski's book has perfectly captured.

In this sense, Witkowski's book, with each subsequent conversation read – even if they also contain controversial theses – opens readers' eyes to the very uncomfortable truth about the ever-widening and deeper fascism of our reality. Of course, denying this uncomfortable truth will still be possible after reading Witkowski's book. Such a temptation may even increase as the threat becomes more apparent, and we still do not know how to stop the creeping growth of fascism without disturbing the structure of significant, often justified, collective interests that rule the world today.

Przemysław Witkowski does not offer a magic anti-fascist wand. But his book reveals the vast roots of modern fascism. So, we have an essential tip on how to look for antidotes and where to apply them. And first of all, it provides knowledge that makes it harder to say, "I did not know."

Jacek Żakowski



# The Idea



The rise and fall of fascism:  
from “national rebirth” to the  
de-liberalization of democracy.  
An interview with Roger Griffin on  
what fascism is, was, and has become

*What does fascism mean today? Nowadays the word “fascist” can be deployed by the right to insult the radical left, by socialists to insult conservatives, by journalists to describe politicians as varied as Orbán, Trump, Putin, Modi, Xi Jinping, and Netanyahu, and to characterize a vast array of radicals resisting change from radical misogynists, incels and Dark Greens to Polish transphobes or Taliban homophobes. Isn’t the term vastly overused?*

Definitely. It has now become so devalued, or to use a technical term, “inflated”, that it can be heard in phrases such as “My boss is a terrible fascist” because she won’t let us have long lunchbreaks, or “Don’t be such a fascist” when a leader shows despotic or authoritarian tendencies in government and even gets used in private life, as when parents tell a teenager to stop gaming on their computer only to be told, “Mum, you’re being a fascist!”. Even Barbie gets called a fascist in the recent blockbuster. Clearly, this term has become inflated to the point of meaninglessness. The more things it refers to, the less it means. Its use now acts a bit like the Rorschach test of social or political attitudes –



the way different things are read into the amorphous blob that the term has become by different people reveals a lot about what they resent, reject, and would like to change in the contemporary world.

*When did this inflation start?*

Within years of the formation of the first *Fascio* in March 1919, some Marxists saw Mussolini's movement in Italy as the birth of a new guise of the arch-enemy capitalism – more aggressive, more nationalistic, more reactionary, openly terroristic and violent and fanatically opposed to both the interests of workers and the ideals/values of socialists. They also recognized long before so-called liberal journalists and social commentators that the new political force was not confined to Mussolini's movement or Italy: it was a new generic force and a new threat to humanistic values to be combated by the international Left. Assuming it was a product of capitalism's attempt to survive by whipping up populist forms of extreme patriotism which would drown calls for equality and social justice, they began to label all variants of anti-communist nationalism – whether in the form of a militant paramilitary movement, dictatorship, or even militantly right-wing democracy – as fascist. And so Mosley in Britain, Codreanu in Romania, Piłsudski in Poland, Franco in Spain, Salazar in Portugal, and Dollfuss in Austria – and eventually after the war Chile's Pinochet, France General de Gaulle and the UK's Margaret Thatcher – ended up being placed into one conceptual bag by most of the Left. But this blanket, indiscriminate use of the term poses taxonomic and analytical problems.

Let's take Piłsudski in Poland. He was an ultranationalist, a former socialist, an anti-communist, just like Mussolini,

and loved uniforms, speeches, and the ritual of fascist salutes. Similarly, Salazar called his regime in Portugal “the New State”, created secret police, gave speeches from the balcony, and formed a state youth movement. Both suppressed working-class politics and so both are labelled as fascist by Marxists. But closer analysis reveals a far shallower revolutionary drive to create a new type of state than Mussolini had done. Salazar suppressed the more radically nationalist and revolutionary paramilitary movement Blue Shirts, and his regime was light years away from the genocidal, expansionist terror state of the Third Reich.

So, if we apply the Marxist Left’s broad definitional criteria to “fascism” it makes it seem like a powerful international force and a latent tendency of all capitalist societies, an archenemy and a major obstacle on the socialist path to progress and humanity. But once the phenomena it identifies as fascist are looked at more closely, they turn out to have little in common and to often be in conflict, posing major historical problems. For example, if all capitalist societies are latent fascist states, why did the US and Britain join forces in a world war against the ultra-fascist Berlin-Rome Axis and their allies costing millions of lives and unprecedented economic damage? And why did German fascists go to such lengths to wipe out one of the most successful capitalist groups in society, German Jews, when it was against both their economic and military interests to do so? Clearly, capitalist democracies and fascist states represented deeply different and conflicting ideologies expressed in utterly incompatible but deeply held beliefs and values. Capitalist democracies were of a different political genus than the authoritarian nationalist states which attempted to destroy them, and effectively suspended the core principles of capitalist economies to realize their fantasies, such as the

basic human freedoms and the individual right to consume and pursue personal goals freely in a stable international community of shared values.

*So did non-Marxist academia come up with a better approach?*

Well for several decades so-called “liberal” academia failed to arrive at any sort of consensus about what fascism is, or what defines it as a unique form of political energy. For example, there was an academic historian in England named Stuart Wolfe who in the 1960s organized a conference at Reading University near London to discuss international fascism. He invited only acknowledged experts on the subject, mostly working at universities in the countries whose fascism they were reporting on at the symposium. The scientific papers they presented were then turned by Wolfe into a book, *The Nature of Fascism*. But far from establishing that some sort of consensus existed on the subject, all the chapters pointed in different directions about what constituted the “fascist minimum”. It was a situation that led Wolfe in his introduction to suggest that maybe academics should give up using the term generically since it was impossible to give it a specific meaning or heuristic value for investigating either history or politics.

*So, nothing can be done?*

The term fascism is problematic partly because, unlike many generic terms in politics, its roots lie not in an ideological ideal or elaborated theory, as is the case in socialism, communism, anarchism, conservatism, feminism, Marxism, Maoism, or even Thatcherism, but in a particular

phenomenon, that of Mussolini's movement and regime, which is characterized historically by a proliferation of aspects and manifestations and whose followers had a wide array of motivations for joining and distinctive vision of what the Fascist society should be artistically, ethically, economically and politically. There thus can be no "pure" or "objective" use of the term based on the historical facts of Mussolini's Fascism.

*So maybe strictly speaking there is no such thing as fascism, or at least there is no legal definition which allows someone to be convicted of supporting an anti-democratic ideology or movement based on fascism.*

In the past, this was certainly true. A famous example is when one of the most prominent philosophers of radical Fascism under Mussolini, Julius Evola, was acquitted on precisely these grounds after the war when he was put on trial for having supported Mussolini, despite writing a major (and deeply antisemitic) tract on the Fascist theory of race which he presented to the SS in Berlin. His defense that he had never been a member of the Fascist Party was taken at face value (probably by formerly Fascist judges!) and he got off scot-free. Evola went on to be the most influential thinker for Italy's postwar revolutionary right, notably Ordine Nuovo and the terrorists of the Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari (NAR). However, it is encouraging to note that in recent years both the Slovak politician Marian Kotleba, and a prominent member of the German AfD, Björn Höcke, have been legally prevented from campaigning by a legal process which recognized their fascist credentials, a development only made possible because of the emergence of an effective "working definition" of

what fascism actually is at its heart (that is if fascists ever had such a thing as a heart, given their heartless ideology).

*So, how did non-Marxist academics get to the definitional heart of fascism, or at least arrive at a “working definition”?*

By returning to the roots, a process that I became involved in when I was still a green (meaning inexperienced and naïve) academic. When I was asked to teach a course on fascism at Oxford Brookes University in the late 1980s as part of an undergraduate History degree program, I quickly realized that I was supposed to teach students about a phenomenon on which historians outside the Marxist camp had never reached a workable consensus. This seemed deeply unfair on students, so I decided to try to formulate some sort of definition that would help them in their essay work. I was equipped only with a degree in French and German literature, but I had learned to read Italian thanks to having recently married an Italian woman, so though I had minimal historical knowledge academically, I was at least equipped to read a lot of expressions of fascist ideology in several of fascism’s key languages.

So, I started reading original fascist texts and soon realized that fascists themselves knew very well what fascism was. In fact there was a highly conspicuous recurrent pattern in ideas common to all these “fascists” which seemed to be largely unknown to academics concerned with “fascist studies”. It became obvious to me as I read further into theories of fascism that neither Marxists nor liberals were prepared to accept the declarations of fascists as the basis of a definition of fascism because of the deeply-engrained assumption that it had no coherent critique of the present or ideological vision of an ideal future. This means that at

heart it was simply a highly destructive form of anti-modern reactionary and ultimately nihilistic – not to say sociopathic – thought, bent destroying civil society, culture socialism, and “decadence”. However, my reading convinced me that fascists were true revolutionaries determined to inaugurate a new order, and even a new era of civilization, purged of the enemies of the nation, not through theory but through action.

*So you were the first academic to notice this pattern of ideas?*

Of course, not. We are all dwarfs standing on the backs of giants. One of the first academics to take fascist ideas seriously was George Mosse, a German Jew who fled Nazism to England and then to the USA, where he took up a post in Medieval History at the University of Wisconsin. His research into the fundamental way that ideas had shaped the nature of medieval society gave him the key to making sense of the tide of irrational ideas unleashed by Nazism in the 1930s which had swept so many human beings, above all Jews, from the face of the earth. By the 1960s he had developed a sophisticated theory of fascism based on taking seriously the pledge made by fascists all over Europe to destroy the status quo and bring about the rebirth of their nation or race and so create a new era inhabited by a new type of human being.

Significantly Mosse’s scintillating writings remained largely ignored. A handful of other historians – Stanley G. Payne, Zeev Sternhell, Emilio Gentile – also developed theories of fascism which recognized as its central driving force a fanatical devotion to realizing a project of national rebirth within a new state, a national revolution based on an ideology of what I termed “palingenetic ultranationalism”.

My work was based on theirs, through an extensive study of primary sources of fascist ideology and propaganda in the sense of propagating the new faith and by highlighting the central, constitutive role of the rebirth myth of national palingenesis. Thus, when the BUF marching song *Britain Awake* talks of a reborn Britain or extreme right-wingers in Poland today call their party the National Rebirth of Poland, I take it literally as evidence of their fascist vision, their perverse *idealism*.

*Can you find this theme in all such movements?*

Well, my ideal type of fascism makes the palingenetic vision of a reborn nation or race definitional to fascism, so *by definition* national rebirth in a new order (and not just making the country great again in the existing order) is a theme found in all fascist movements. For *heuristic purposes*, therefore, it must be considered the central driving force of Fascism and Nazism and common to all fascisms. But we will not understand generic fascism if we only focus on Italy and Germany. Smaller movements which never succeeded in seizing power also tell us a lot. I have in mind movements which never achieved autonomous political power, such as the Romanian Iron Guard, the British Union of Fascists, the Spanish Falange, Walloon Rexism, or the Irish National Corporate Party. An outstanding example of “failed fascism” which remains important for understanding fascism as a transnational phenomenon is Brazilian integralism, (the ABI) which was, after all, a sizable national movement with its own rituals, calendar and theory of race led by the intellectual and cultural activist and prolific theorist Plínio Salgado, who believed the whole of the world was moving into a new

era of humanity. A particularly violent form of fascism in Europe, apart from Nazism, was the Ustasha, a name meaning the “uprising” of the rebirth of the Croats against their enemies. Far from being a “failed movement”, they ruled over ethnic Croats from 1941 till the end of the Second World War and carried out extensive campaigns of genocide and ethnic cleansing as the precondition for their new exclusively Croatian state.

*But is the theme of rebirth relevant to understanding fascism today, or neo-fascism?*

Again, by definition, yes. (If the more techy readers of this interview want to see how far the obsession with “rebirth” is now considered an essential component of fascism in any age, I invite them to ask ChatCGT the question “What role does palingenesis play in fascism?”) The hate-filled racist websites of neo-Nazis on Social Media which constitute “digital fascism” and the terrorist acts of “lone-wolf” extremists such as Breivik in Norway and Tarrant, the Christchurch terrorist, are testimonies to the centrality of the still active rebirth myth in ultranationalist and racist circles decades after the deaths of Hitler and Mussolini? Tarrant, for example, called the manifesto he posted after his mass murder of Muslims “The Great Replacement”, which refers to a recent theory expressing the existential fear felt by white supremacists in an increasingly multi-cultural and globalized world. However, the symbol on the cover of his manifesto is a black sun. Few people know where this symbol comes from...

*... from Wewelsburg.*



Yes! It is the symbol inscribed into the stone floor of Himmler's private castle which he transformed into the sacred center of his personal cult of the Nazis' Aryan purity and mystic superpowers. The point is that the Black Sun is an esoteric symbol designating (racial) rebirth. Tarrant states in his manifesto that he is an eco-fascist, a fan of Mosley, and modelled his attack on ISIS violence, which shows that each form of fascism is unique. Nevertheless, in his mind his mission is palingenetic and is clearly communicated to fellow believers who can easily decode the symbolism of the Black Sun. It is this premise that informs his pride in being a "white national radical" dedicated to stopping the "genocide of the white race" and pushing back against the "great replacement of Europeans" by awakening fellow white supremacists from their slumber through targeted violence against cultural enemies.

And Anders Breivik? Through the wake-up calls of his twin attacks in Oslo and on the island of Utøya he wanted to prevent "cultural Marxists" from allowing the creation of "Eurabia" in Norway and win the "new battle of Vienna", so that Europe could eventually be once more independent of cultural alien contamination in a new era. They are thus both, once our criteria are applied, fascists. But the same definition excludes Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, however insane or despicable their politics may be, because neither is genuinely revolutionary in the nationalist vision they pursue.

*So you are asking us to distinguish between fascism and other forms of far-right politics?*

Yes. Properly defined fascism is still a valuable term for describing or classifying a particular segment of the right,

such as neo-Fascists and neo-Nazis who demand the dismantling of the EU or reversing immigration as a prelude to creating a new type of authoritarian racial state purged of decadence. But only a minute minority of the 52% of Britons who voted for Brexit in 2016 did so to create a British “Third Empire”. Right-wing populists may be nostalgic for British sovereignty, the Empire or Englishness, but this does not make them fascists. Similarly, to assume that the millions of Trump’s supporters in the US are fascists is ludicrous. As for Trump himself, he is too stupid to have an ideology worthy of the term.

*So, what should we do to “stop fascism”?*

The role of academics, journalists, teachers, and political commentators is critical, but only in creating greater clarity in identifying the enemies of humanity and progress towards social justice. To do this they need to use the word like a scalpel, not as a base-ball bat. The right-wing threat to liberal and social democratic values takes a number of different forms, and it only fuels social polarization and hatred to indiscriminately call any form of right-wing politics “fascist”. The word has been muddied and has virtually lost any meaning in public discourse. The more at pains intelligent public “influencers” and pundits are to make distinctions between different segments of the political spectrum in discussions and articles, the more quickly we will collectively move away from a climate of hatred and anger. Once “anti-fascists” get better at recognizing genuine fascism (which is always illegal in a genuine democracy) and recognize the perverted idealism behind their mission, the more effectively they can target campaigns and legal proceedings at specific individuals and expose

the illegality of particular organizations based on factual evidence and rational argument. On this basis, they can feel empowered to fight separate campaigns against other harmful, anti-humanistic forms of politics, which would be a much more effective strategy than simply holding mass rallies against “fascism”, as happened during Trump’s last electoral campaign when the “refuse fascism” campaign took to the streets.

*Can you give me a concrete example of distinguishing different segments of the far right?*

Well, take a great example from England: the English Defense League. It is interesting for two reasons – firstly, Breivik thought its growing activism in the UK in the run-up to his attacks might herald the beginning of an international anti-Islam movement he called “The Order of the Templars”, but which turned out to be a figment of his perverted neo-Nazi utopianism. He wanted to set up a Norwegian equivalent of the EDL in Norway and sought contact with EDL leader, Tommy Robinson (aka Stephen Christopher Yaxley-Lennon). He came from Luton outside London, where there was a concentration of Islamists and Islamophobes at the time. Breivik by then was a violent fascist with Nazi tendencies hoping to enact a revolutionary form of White Supremacism through lone-wolf terrorist acts to wake the Norwegians from their complacent slumber. Robinson was anti-Islam, an ardent nationalist, but not a Nazi, not a terrorist and not a fascist, and nor was the EDL.

When Nigel Farage left the UKIP movement, there were attempts under Gerard Batten, the leader of the party’s new incarnation, the Brexit Party (now Reform UK) to link

the party to Robinson, signalling the bid to transform it into a “radical right populist” and overtly anti-Islam party. At this point, its more extreme members probably had more in common in mindset with white supporters of apartheid in South Africa than with traditional British democrats. But this did not make them Nazis or fascists. My point is, that so-called “antifascists” should campaign against an openly racist party like the Brexit Party or movement like the EDL not because they are fascist, but because they are illiberal, discriminatory, peddle dangerous ideas of Britishness, and incite racial hatred and violence.

*This is still a pretty problematic and tangled issue. Many right-wing extremists, even clearly fascist ones, like to say that they have a lot in common with Tiso’s Slovakia or the Romanian Iron Guard but not with Mussolini or Hitler. So how should antifascists approach them?*

If they want to gain public support, many neo-fascists find it necessary to distance themselves from Nazism and its Axis ally, Fascism, and hence from the millions of crimes against humanity they are associated with. It thus makes sense to choose heroes who happened not to be Nazis gassing Jews. So neo-fascists may wear Codreanu T-Shirts at demonstrations. He died before the war and was attacked by Hitler, so it may seem OK and “safe” to wear his T-shirt. But Codreanu would surely have enthusiastically participated in the Final Solution had he been in power during the war given the extreme antisemitism of his movement.

And the Spanish Falange? They didn’t have to be anti-Semitic because Spain had already “solved” the “Jewish Question” in the 16th century. Still, I am convinced that if there had been large Jewish populations in Madrid or Barcelona

in the 1930s, it would also have been anti-Semitic and hardly made Spain a refuge for fugitives from the Nazis' "New European Order". We must also remember that in the post-war period, the Nazi Newspeak has been widely translated into the global language of white supremacy so that neo-Naziism is no longer about saving Germany but saving the White Race. Aryanism has been deterritorialized and goes by new names. This enables white supremacists who admire the Third Reich not to use an overtly Nazi discourse, or else to turn it on its head, as when they call mass immigration and multiculturalism a "white genocide".

Moreover, new sources of "palingenetic" ideas of national or racial revolution are available to contemporary fanatics anxious to avoid evoking memories of the Third Reich. They have emerged in right-wing subcultures in the West that claim, like Julius Evola, to have no connection to historical (interwar) fascism but poured their energy in the 1950s and 1960s into formulating new rationales for fascism in a "post-fascist" era. One is the so-called Conservative Revolution, a term coined by the Swiss intellectual Armin Mohler immediately after the war in a collection of writings designed to help true (i.e. fascist) revolutionaries (whom he dissociated from Nazism and its crimes against humanity) realize that after the failure of the Axis, they are condemned to live in an "interregnum" till the right historical conjuncture arrives for a successful national revolution. Till that time their mission must be to keep faith: to ensure the embers of the fascist faith are not extinguished largely through prolific cultural activity detached from party politics. A second successful fascist "influencer" is the French autodidact Alain de Benoist. His cultural movement known as the Nouvelle Droite or New Right, is a blatant attempt, like those of Mohler and of Julius Evola after 1945, to keep

alive the vitality of a heroic, anti-democratic, anti-liberal culture rooted in an (imaginary) ancient Aryan tradition now heavily disguised to conceal its direct links with and responsibility for interwar fascism and its atrocities.

Benoist himself has always claimed vehemently and indignantly that he is not a fascist, that he is an anti-totalitarian (by which he means anti-liberal democracy and its multi-culturalism), that he has moved “beyond” the simplistic binary of right and left, and that he is instead “metapolitical”. However, his demonstrable impact on the self-proclaimed Russian fascist and apologist for Putin’s “Eurasianism”, Alexandr Dugin, refutes such disingenuous claims. The appearance of a “metapolitical” ideology of a future cultural revolution and the surfacing of overtly terroristic forms of fascist extremism in acts of targeted violence by small cells and “lone actors” are the two main innovations of neofascism which maintain its vitality as a political ideology. It succeeds in doing so partly because of the success of ultra-rightists all over the world in exploiting the digital world to disseminate distinctly fascist formulations of utopias and the hatred of demonized Others on a global scale which would have been unimaginable to Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s Minister of Propaganda and Enlightenment. It is easier than ever before to become a fantasy fascist in one’s private life anywhere in the world and to cultivate dreams of hurricanes of cleansing destruction and “healthy” new orders purged of decadence. Fortunately, a minute percentage of fascist fantasists turn their paranoid fixations into acts of violence.

*The Hungarian Marxist Gáspár Miklós Tamás once told me that whenever he hears a reference to Gramsci in public somewhere, it is almost always from the far right...*

He is right. Gramsci is central to fascism's postwar "cultural turn". The appropriation of the brilliant Marxist thinker, Antonio Gramsci, by the far right is a symptom of the desperation of modern "intellectual" fascists to cover their tracks, one which leads them to adopt absurdly contradictory positions in their efforts to avoid being unmasked for what they are: enemies of global humanity and humanism. For example, de Benoist denies that he is a rightist, and on the other hand, his movement is called the New Right, one of his major texts is called *Vu de Droite*, [A right-wing perspective] and his strategy of shifting the West's political culture to the extreme anti-democratic right through the power of ideas he calls "Gramscism of the Right". Also, the visible debt to the Nouvelle Droite of the identitarian discourse of Alexandr Dugin, of right-wing populist movements and the various self-styled identitarian movements of the new millennium refutes his disingenuous, mendacious claims. The Shakespearean line "Methinks he doth protest too much" springs to mind when people like de Benoist or the US Evolian and one-time Trumpist Steve Bannon indignantly reject accusations of fascism. Nevertheless, the "cultural turn" that allows racists and xenophobes to adopt the coded vocabulary of identity, "difference", and "ethno-pluralism" and so avoid the overtly biological language of a natural hierarchy of pure and mongrel races has given fascist ideology a new lease of life, largely by exploiting the naivety and historical unawareness of postwar generations, especially many politicians, journalists and academics who should know better.

*So "classic" fascists and Nazis are already extinct?*

If you mean, are there no “old style” groups or parties which are still recognizably modelled on interwar fascism, then the answer must be broadly yes: fascism in its interwar manifestation as highly visible, and in some cases powerful, uniformed paramilitary movements led by charismatic leaders openly challenging the existing constitutional system with promises of a new order and systematic hate speech has become a species of politics on the verge of extinction. The closest the postwar period came to creating a “classic” fascist party was the Greek *Golden Dawn* which rose to notoriety in the 1990s, and even in this case no Mussolini-style leader emerged. Moreover, by 2020 its leaders had been jailed. In contrast to so many interwar states, democracy had used the law to defend itself from totalitarianism. Other neofascist parties lack a paramilitary wing or exist as a minute paramilitary force but without a party. In some ways, fascism now resembles the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland* which physically disappears leaving only its smile, or in this case a hate-filled grimace.

While fascist verbal attacks on modern civilization survive in digital fascism and the New Right in their thousands, there are now a minuscule number of fascist activists compared with the interwar period: contrast Breivik’s campaign as a Norwegian “lone wolf” with the 500,000 members of the Nazi SA in 1929, four years before the Third Reich, or the ill-disciplined jamboree of different fascist groups that attended the 2017 Unite the Right demonstration in Charlottesville with the geometric, choreographed blocks of Nazified humanity that starred in Nazi Nuremberg Rally of 1934 filmed by Leni Riefenstahl for the documentary *Triumph of the Will*.

Nevertheless, part of the legacy of fascism which is thriving though now in a different, non-fascist, form are



right-wing “populist” attitudes, movements, and parties. These still operate the Manichean distinction central to classic fascism between an imaginary “true”, “pure”, formerly “great” national ethnicity – which has to be protected, celebrated, and made great again – and alien “others”, both within and outside the nation, who are demonized not just as in some way as less human and less important than “us”, but as a threat to “our” existence. This ghost of fascism’s racism – no longer biological but “differentialist” – operating not to overthrow states but as an illiberal electoral force *within states*, has spread throughout the world of constitutionally democratic states to drain them of the reservoir of transcultural humanism without which they cease to be *liberal democracies*.

*Isn't it now the case that new racism is built primarily on citizenship, the right to work and residence?*

I think this is the wrong way to put it. Under the impact of the new post-fascist, non-biological, differentialist and *identitarian* racism, citizenship is no longer based primarily on citizenship and residence rights based on a person’s place of birth, on residence, or on nationality (*ius soli*). Instead, it is bestowed by *ius sanguinis*, on mythic notions of ethnicity and “blood” based on fake histories of religion, nationality, and identity as something inherited not legally and rationally conferred by society. This is the assumption lurking within the declaration in the Alternative for Germany’s 2016 election manifesto that “Islam does not belong in Germany”. I would argue that the populist pressures to de-liberalize democracy is so much more insidious and dangerous than fascism in the shriveled form it has now been reduced to, despite the occasional act of terrorism and

the climate of ethnic hatred it can still inspire. Populism uses the language, structures, institutions and processes of liberal democracy. But by insisting on adding one tiny new right to Enlightenment ideas of human rights – the right to self-determination of individuals and nations, citizenship, the right to a minimal standard of living etc.– namely the right to a distinctive ethnic identity – liberalism quickly becomes as contaminated as if salmonella had entered a Swiss cheese and the Pandora’s box of racism is opened amid European societies.

After all, once we start talking about the right to identity, we will quickly reach a situation where racists can claim that their right to an identity is being encroached upon simply by the presence of someone seen as “different”. Even if that person has a legal right to be in the country and is contributing to society, she or he is still attacked for undermining the intangible “ness” of Britishness, Frenchness, Norwegianness or any national essence. In this way many forms of racial separation, demonization of others and persecution of those who deviate from some mythical “norm” of physicality, sexuality, culture, religion, or ethnicity are legitimized. And when this social virus reaches the government level, we have populist parties gaining power, as the recent pasts of Poland, Hungary, Austria, Italy, Slovakia, and Spain illustrate. This should alarm and mobilize “anti-fascist” movements even more than the occasional act of neofascist terrorism.

Putin’s Russia is a very interesting example: anti-Soviet and anti-Nazi, and at the same time deeply nationalist and populist. Reports from inside the country suggest it is also actively anti-homosexual, legitimizes domestic violence against women, racist towards non-Russian residents of the Federation, anti-Islam, and hostile to any citizen with the courage to uphold basic human rights or criticize any

aspect of Putin's state. In practice, it is actually very similar to a fascist state. Thus, even though Putinism is not fascist ideologically, antifascists should feel the need to enlarge the scope of their movement to include all forms of populist attacks on liberal democracy and pseudopopulist forms of autocracy of the sort that Putin has perfected. Putin's "friend" Orbán has fenced Hungary to keep migrants out, forced the Central European University to move to Vienna because of its "Jewish" funding, and attempted to block the EU's military support for Ukraine, yet continues to rely on EU funds to make his country prosperous. It surely does not matter if this is not fascist, it is anti-liberal, and this in itself should mobilize antifascism. Orbán boasts of having created an "illiberal democracy" and it is this creeping illiberalization of democracy which so many commentators misread as the "rise of fascism" or "the return of fascism".

*And here we come to your post-fascist concept...*

Not mine, but Gianfranco Fini's, former leader of the neofascist Movimento Sociale Italiano which in 1994, after the end of the Cold War, he turned into the right-wing populist National Alliance. He explicitly stated in his rationale for dissolving the MSI that fascism had been needed after 1945 only as long as the threat of communism and the Soviet Union existed. When it fell, Fini announced that he and his party could now leave the past behind and become "post-fascists." The new party, the AN, went on to form a successful coalition with Berlusconi's populist Forza Italia, and symbolizes the way fascism has faded as a major factor in democratic politics at the same time as populism of the sort pioneered by the "postfascist" Jean-Marie Le Pen in France in the 1990s grew in popularity. Since

then, “post-fascist” right-wing populism has come to play an important role throughout the Western world, though its precise form and strength varies considerably from country to country. Meanwhile, fascism has in practice become increasingly marginalized as a historical factor even if its ghost still haunts democracy as powerfully as ever after the traumas of the Second World War.

*So it can be said that, in sum, both fascism and post-fascism are a kind of cancerous liberalism?*

Right-wing identitarian populism can be regarded for practical purposes as the fascism of the anti-fascist era. In the interwar period, the crisis of democracy and the liberal economy created political space for revolutionary forms of nationalism. This space no longer exists because of the Holocaust, globalization, and the reestablishment of consumerist capitalism and democratic individualism in most societies outside the communist bloc and regions where autocracies still rule. Today, the modern version of being against the axial humanist and progressive values of the Enlightenment is no longer fascism. The readers of *Mein Kampf* or *The Turner Diaries* and the admirers of Timothy McVeigh or Anders Breivik are a tiny minority in the world, and despite the many thousands of “fantasy fascists” surfing virtual hate-filled spaces, realistically, very few people are now fascists. The most common way of being anti-liberal and anti-socialist today is to simultaneously praise the institutions of democracy and some of its rights – elections, free education, capitalism, consumerism, the free movement of goods (but not of people), etc. – but on the condition that access to all this is limited to “our people” and not thrown open to “them”.

At the end of the Vietnam War, Alan de Benoist wrote a significant text in which he claimed to be very happy that the Vietnamese had won the war against the US. He declared “Vietnam for the Vietnamese”, “France for the French”, and “Europe for the Europeans”, and has campaigned for a world freed of cosmopolitanism, mass migrations, the United Nations, NATO, and for Europe to become a “fortress.” All this was announced long before the current migration crisis, claims of “white genocide” and “replacement”, and outrages such as the attacks of Breivik and Tarrant, the thinking that led to these was already articulated in that text. The idea is extremely simple. You support your own national liberalism, but you keep it only for your people. That’s precisely what Orbán did. The physical and psychological fence he placed around Hungary (the dream of Trumpists) is a tangible embodiment of the “illiberal democracy” which is sweeping the world in slow motion, and which poses a threat far greater than fascism to the survival of humanism and the survival of our species. The exposure of its dangers must be high up the agenda of “antifascists” even if they retain that description of their cause.

*What if the ecological crisis only increases global hierarchical divisions based on access to goods, clean air, and water?*

It is likely that the intensifying effects of the crisis combined with the demographic explosion will not only deepen the global divides between “haves” and “have nots” but further entrench autocracies – whether religious, communist or simply tyrannical – in their contempt for the democratic world and the determination to “protect” their subjects from what they portray as its anarchy and decadence. Yet history shows positive change can take place very quickly.

England quickly went from a policy of appeasing Hitler to mercilessly fighting him. In my (long) lifetime the rights of a number of groups who used to be the victims of discrimination in liberal democracies have now been recognized. Germany and Japan moved within years from the end of the war from being military dictatorships to pacifist societies. Experts warning of “global warming” were dismissed as alarmist or hysterical in the 1980s and now their concerns have become mainstream. There is still a chance that a global community may emerge in time to minimize the damage caused by the various forces now destroying the biosphere, and even if there is not, we have to live and act as if there is. Movements based on hating fascism are doomed to fail, but those based on loving humanity and the earth it depends on still stand a chance.

With this thought in mind, I would like to end this discussion with some lines from Sting’s song “Send your love” from the album *Sacred Love*:

This ain't no time for doubting your power  
This ain't no time for hiding your care  
You're climbing down from an ivory tower

This is the time of the worlds colliding  
This is the time of kingdoms falling  
This is the time of the worlds dividing  
Time to heed your call  
Send your love into the future  
Send your precious love into some distant time  
And fix that wounded planet with the love of your  
healing

Roger D. Griffin (1948) – professor of contemporary history and political theory at Oxford Brookes University. Researcher of the socio-historical and ideological dynamics of fascism and various forms of political and religious fanaticism. He is the founder of the journal *Fascism* and The International Association for Comparative Fascist Studies; published, among others, *The Nature of Fascism* (1991), *Fascism* (1995), *International Fascism* (1998), *A Fascist Century* (2008).

Europe's fate is South America  
during the Cold War.  
With Enzo Traverso on fascism  
after fascism

*Is fascism coming back?*

I'm skeptical. If I had to answer this question briefly, I would say no. We are not back in the interwar period. This answer does not mean that we are not in any danger. When we deal with fascism, we need some methodological order. The comparison with the 1930s is interesting and fruitful, but establishing an analogy is different from searching for homology. Analogies allow us to show similarities and differences, which are pretty significant at the same time. Homologies instead indicate repetitions. And history doesn't repeat itself that much.

*And yet, we are dealing with a massive wave of the increasing popularity of the far right in the world...*

Since the 1930s, we can observe similar patterns in the formation of the extremist right. Years ago, these patterns were limited to a few Western European countries: France and Central Europe. However, over the years, these patterns, formerly endemic to continental Europe, were



on the margins of the political scene after 1945. Today, parties of this type participate in government coalitions in many European countries and have become the main actors in political life worldwide. Political forces such as the Alternative for Germany have appeared in countries we consider exceptional, such as Germany. Even in Spain, the Vox party was founded, which shows that there are virtually no exceptions to this trend anymore. In my native Italy, Lega or the Fratelli d'Italia dominate the electoral polls today. After 2015, this phenomenon became global, as evidenced by the election of Donald Trump as president of the USA and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. However, when Trump proposed a ban on entry to the US for citizens of several Muslim countries, one of the journalists said at a press conference that he was directly proposing the Nuremberg Laws. He replied, hmm, that's interesting, what are these Nuremberg Laws?

*So, does not knowing the patterns that are repeated free them from the fascist label?*

Most of these movements do not describe themselves as fascist. In many cases, they reject this label outright. Indeed, in many cases, these movements do not have fascist roots. They belong to different ideological families and different intellectual traditions. Regardless, it is impossible to deal with the current political situation and these political movements without comparing it with classic fascism. This parallel seems to be an almost automatic reaction. However, on the other hand, these movements seem to belong to a different historical sequence. They emerged decades after classical fascism, and, with some exceptions, it is impossible to place them in historical continuity with

classical fascism. Of course, comparisons with it are inevitable and valuable. Ultimately, we can only deal with the contemporary situation by including historical memories in our interpretations, which have crucial roles in building our analytical and political responses.

*So what's the main difference?*

Historically, a fascist had to place himself in opposition to some "other." First came the Jew, a mythical vision of some kind of anti-race, an alien body that tried to corrupt the nation. In addition, there was a sexist and misogynistic worldview in which women always remained submissive. Women were considered the reproducers of the race. They had to care for the house and raise children, not play a role in public life. Homosexuality was another form of anti-race, the embodiment of moral weakness and decadent mores that were at odds with the fascist cult of masculinity. Today, all this rhetoric has disappeared, even if homophobia and anti-feminism are pervasive among radical right voters. Such movements often claim to defend women's and gay rights against Islamism. Pim Fortuyn and then his successor Geert Wilders in the Netherlands are the most famous examples of this LGBT conservatism, but they are not exceptions. In Germany, the Alternative for Germany opposes same-sex marriage, but its spokeswoman in the Bundestag is Alice Weidel, a lesbian. Florian Philippot, former secretary of the National Front, does not hide his homosexuality, and Renaud Camus is an icon of French gay conservatism.

*So fascism is not coming back to us after all?*

Today, the rise of the radical right shows a semantic ambiguity: on the one hand, almost no one talks openly about fascism – with the notable exceptions of Golden Dawn in Greece and CasaPound Italia – and most observers see differences between these new movements and their 1930s forebears. On the other hand, any attempt to define this recent phenomenon requires a comparison with the interwar years. In short, the concept of fascism seems both inadequate and necessary to capture this new reality. That is why I will call the current moment the period of post-fascism. This concept emphasizes its chronological distinctiveness and places it in a historical sequence, implying continuity and transformation. It certainly doesn't answer all the open questions but highlights the reality of change.

*Does this mean that fascism is a specific, past, historical phenomenon?*

I don't think we can talk about fascism only in 1922-45. I disagree that what happened next cannot be described as fascism. It can easily resurface in new forms. Not as a mechanical repetition of what already existed, but that, for example, Latin American fascism, if we consider what was happening in this region in the 1960s and 1970s, was entirely possible. On the other hand, I disagree with giving this label to new movements of the radical right.

*So, what is it like in the end can we talk about fascism in the 21st century?*

I believe that fascism is an essence that can take many forms. Collective memory establishes a link between a con-

cept and its public use, which usually goes beyond its purely historiographic dimension. From this perspective, fascism, like other concepts in our political vocabulary, can be seen as a transhistorical concept capable of transcending the era that gave rise to it. In the 21st century, fascism will not take on the face of Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco, nor, hopefully, will it take the form of totalitarian terror. However, it is also clear that there are many different ways to destroy democracy. It is not a re-creation of the same phenomenon but something that retains a particular essence, with separate roots and sources. This is why I am talking about transhistorical fascism or post-fascism and not about something that can be reduced to a simple continuation of an old phenomenon. Thanks to this, I would like to capture the transformation of movements that are still in the process of formation and are not yet crystallized.

*So, not fascism, but post-fascism. What is it?*

It's its effect, but not directly resulting from the same branches or lines. The concept of post-fascism, despite its apparent limitations, helps us describe a phenomenon in transition, a movement that is still in a phase of transformation and has not yet crystallized. When we talk about fascism, there is no ambiguity about what we are talking about, but the new forces of the radical right are a heterogeneous and complex phenomenon. They do not possess the same features in every country, even in Europe: from France to Italy, from Greece to Austria, from Hungary to Poland and Ukraine, they have some standard features, but they are also very different from each other. Post-fascism should also be distinguished from Neo-fascism, i.e., attempts to consolidate and revive old fascism. In most

cases, post-fascism actually comes from a classic fascist background but has now changed its forms. Many movements in this constellation no longer claim such origins and clearly distinguish themselves from neofascism. In any case, they no longer demonstrate ideological continuity with classical fascism. In trying to define them, we cannot ignore the fascist womb from which they emerged insofar as these are their historical roots, but we should also take into account their metamorphoses. They have transformed and are moving in a direction whose ultimate outcome remains unpredictable.

*So it's not the same phenomenon?*

The French National Front embodies these changes. When founded in 1972, it was evident that it grew out of the womb of French fascism. Then, over the following decades, it managed to unite various strands of the far right, from nationalists to Catholic fundamentalists, poujadists, and colonialists. It began to evolve in the 1990s, but only when Marine Le Pen became its leader in 2011 did the party really shed its skin. It sought to join the Fifth Republic system by presenting itself as a “normal,” painless choice. Of course, it opposed the European Union and the traditional establishment, but it no longer wanted to act as a subversive force. Unlike classic fascism, which wanted to change everything, the National Front’s ambition now is to transform the system from within. On the other hand, Le Pen is no longer a fascist in a world that no longer accepts the ideology, language, and practices of old fascism, but the ghosts of fascism still follow her. Nor is she a democrat because her words show that her conversion to democracy remains instrumental and insincere.

*Could you point out some essential differences that distinguish the contemporary far right from classic fascism?*

The issues we must take into account are anti-communism, conservatism, utopianism, anti-Semitism, and attitudes toward global elites. Anti-communism was a fascist fundamental pillar. After World War I, it was the vision of the threat of communist revolution that was an essential element of radicalization that transformed nationalism from its conservative version into the revolutionary right. Mussolini called his movement a revolution against revolution. Fascism became a kind of hybrid of very conservative values inherited from monarchism, counter-revolutionary, anti-Enlightenment movements, and criticism of modernity as such. It was a fight against modernity using very modern means. This paradox was the newness of fascism. Anti-communism was the key to this transformation.

*Is it the same today?*

Given the differences between, for example, France, Poland, the USA, and Brazil, anti-communism nevertheless plays a marginal role in this rise of the far right. Of course, because the Eastern Bloc no longer exists, anti-communism has lost much of its meaning. There are, of course, exceptions, such as Poland, where it has become one of the pillars of national identity. Jair Bolsonaro is also leading a kind of crusade against “cultural Marxism.” However, in general, anti-communism has lost its meaning. And this has serious consequences because classical fascism never achieved a hegemonic position among the working class. In the 1930s, it was a group controlled ideologically, politically, and culturally by the left. In effect, the cessation of

anti-communist rhetoric means that these new right-wing movements can conduct effective activities among the working class without encountering the various obstacles that have been an enormous problem for them in the past. The League, under Mateo Salvini, became the main party of the Italian working class. In eastern Germany, Alternative for Germany plays a similar role. And such examples could be multiplied. The far-right has managed to reintegrate the working class into the national community.

### *How did this happen?*

One of the reasons was the metamorphosis of social democracy into one of the main political forces of neoliberalism. The transformation of these parties from defenders of the welfare state and social rights into advocates of the free market allowed the extreme right to start playing a role previously reserved for the left. Thanks to this, the radical right could assume the role of anti-systemic parties. At the same time, the far right lost the subversive character and dimension that classical fascism displayed. It was a product of World War I and the general crisis of Europe, an anthropological trauma that changed the world of politics, revaluing human life. It was born on a traumatized continent that realized the automaticity of death and killing on the battlefields of World War I from the times that it was discovered that politics could also be the destruction of the enemy. At that time, most mass parties had their armed militias. I also do not believe that anti-communism will manifest itself as an element of the core of new fascism. For example, if there were an election clash in the US where a figure like Bernie Sanders or AOC was pitted against a far-right candidate, this attitude

would come back. Also, in the face of a new global crisis, the radicalization of post-fascism may produce a new form of conservative revolution.

*What about revolutionary visions of the future? Fascism wanted to build a new reality. And post-fascism?*

Classical fascism was built on utopian aspirations and ambitions. It projected its vision of state policy and organization into the future. Its goal was to overthrow the established order and to build a new civilization and a new man in its place. The world would become a field of competition between two alternatives – Bolshevism and fascism. The future was, therefore, at the center of classical fascism. Meanwhile, the new extreme right has completely lost this utopian dimension. They do define the enemies of civilization: globalization, immigration, Islam, and terrorism. However, in the fight against these enemies, the far right instead preaches a return to the past. They want a return to national currencies, sovereignty, a halt to immigration, and protection of Europe's Christian roots. This proposition is a very conservative discourse, rather than a utopian narrative. They do not want to build a new society, but they want to preserve these supposedly endangered values. Therefore, the logic of the far right is not even the logic of the conservative revolution of the 1920s, but rather cultural pessimism. At the beginning of the 20th century, the critical dichotomy was the opposition between culture and tradition, with their conservative values, and a cold civilization: modernist, mechanistic, industrial and urban, materialistic. So, from this point of view, we could build some analogies, but in parallel with the left because it seems to me that this is one of the main problems of the left in



this historical context. This concerns the inability of the left to project itself into the future. Of course, not because the left would defend some conservative perspective, but because all the powerful social and political movements that emerged on the left after 1989 were paralyzed by this inability to project themselves into the future. This is a big difference from the 1930s, when fascism and the radical left fought for the future.

### *What about anti-Semitism?*

This is another important issue. Xenophobia combines fascism and post-fascism. Hatred towards immigrants shapes the core of both movements and drives them to action. The immigrant becomes the embodiment of the internal enemy that destroys the body of the nation from within, like a virus or cancer. At the same time, the search for a scapegoat is a constitutive element of fascist discourse, and we can, of course, create analogies here. However, it is worth noting a significant difference – the transition from anti-Semitism to Islamophobia. So, the main enemy of post-fascists is no longer Jews but Muslims. Of course, old fascism was deeply anti-Semitic, and anti-Semitism shaped the Nazi worldview. Anti-Semitism was also important in French, Italian, Polish, and even Spanish fascism. However, today, the Jews have been replaced by migrants. Biological racism was replaced by cultural prejudice, which is intended to emphasize the drastic difference between Judeo-Christian Europe and the Islamic world. Of course, anti-Semitism has not disappeared, and we still have many examples of anti-Semitism in Europe, especially Central and Eastern Europe, but it has become significantly marginalized. Of course, there are also many cases where

Islamophobia and anti-Semitism appear in parallel in the post-fascist discourse as complementary figures. The most visible example is the rhetoric used by Fidesz and Victor Orbán. There is a two-level threat – the conspiracy of Jewish financiers who control globalization from Wall Street, symbolized by George Soros, and, on the other hand, the demographic threat embodied in mass migration, which interacts at the cultural level with the “Islamic invasion.” This discourse can be very effective in certain circumstances. Still, it is also self-contradictory because Victor Orbán and many other post-fascist, anti-Semitic leaders from Central Europe, whether Trump or Bolsonaro, have excellent relations with Israel. It is about a strong anti-Islamic alliance. In France, the conspiracy theory of the great replacement and the Islamization of France has become very popular in recent years. Right-wing media such as *Le Figaro* and writers like Michel Houellebecq have been essential sources. The concept itself was created by Renaud Camus, who is a very conservative writer and, at the same time, an anti-Semite. He emphasizes the significant presence of Jewish intellectuals in the French media. Regardless, he considers Muslim immigrants to be the main threat to France. In his texts, he outlines the future of France as a Muslim country. Decadence, decline, and loss of traditional “French” values are supposed to be the means to this end.

*So, a Muslim in post-fascism plays the role of a Jew in fascism?*

I only used this example in order only to show the internal contradictions of these discourses. This change of one of the fundamental pillars of fascism (i.e., anti-Semitism, to a completely new one, i.e., Islamophobia) must, of course,

be analyzed and interpreted. There is, of course, a similarity in the figure of the “internal enemy,” but Islamophobia has its own traditions and roots. It is not a pure ersatz of old anti-Semitism because the origins of this anti-Muslimism in Europe are very deep and stem instead from the colonial legacy and the division into citizens of the center and subjects in the colonies. In France, these were two purely legal categories, and they determined the political and social rights of an individual. So, it seems to me that this colonial matrix of Islamophobia gives us essential information for understanding the ideological metamorphosis of post-fascism, which, having abandoned the conquest and imperial fantasies of classical fascism, adopted a much more conservative and defensive attitude. The old fascism directly promoted colonial wars and the conquest of new lands outside Europe, and today, the far right is rather defensive. It feels threatened by the “genocide of the white race,” the “great replacement,” and the disintegration of European values under the influence of mass Islamic immigration.

*Okay, but maybe there are more similarities in their attitude towards global elites?*

Here again, there is a serious difference between it and classic fascism. It was the fear of communism that pushed European elites to support figures such as Hitler, Franco, and Mussolini in the 20th century. Many historians talk about the miscalculation of the German elites, which resulted in the nomination of Hitler as Chancellor by President Hindenburg, which was supposed to save Germany from communism and, as a result, pushed it to start a war. However, the elites are currently much better represented by the European Union than by any radical parties.

Of course, the radical right and post-fascism could be called a reliable partner for the global financial elite in the event of an economic crisis, the collapse of the European Union, or a climate catastrophe. In this case, of course, post-fascism can undergo political radicalization towards neo-fascism without losing the possibility of cooperation with the elites, as Hitler more or less did in the past. However, the Nazi movement was not created by German elites. Both the aristocracy and high finance despised the Austrian corporal. He did not embody their values or aesthetics in his actions or program. But in 1933, after three years of institutional paralysis, the support of this man was a solution for them. Meanwhile, in the US today, Wall Street's candidate was Hillary Clinton rather than Donald Trump. Similarly, in France, the elite candidate was definitely not Marine Le Pen. Brazilian neoliberals also did not directly support Bolsonaro. And yet, very quickly, during his term, Trump also became the candidate of the neoliberal capitalist elites. So, the situation is very fluid. Therefore, it seems to me that the concept of post-fascism adequately reflects this complicated situation. And I don't say this to imply that global elites have anti-fascist potential (laughter). However, they do not currently feel best represented by the radical right. One of the main reasons for the increasing importance of the radical right is that they may seem to be an alternative to neoliberalism. Even in countries such as Poland, nationalist conservatives rule by constantly repeating that they are not the European Union or the European Commission and that they are against the elites, defending the social interests of the popular classes.

*So maybe populism would be a similarity between fascism and post-fascism?*

We are used to talking about the radical right as populists. And this idea seems problematic and confusing to me. I am very skeptical about using the term populism as a strong analytical category and a political one. Sure, we could call these new forms of radical nationalism national populism, but it seems to me that populism as a concept is very problematic. It is much more useful as an epithet than as a clear description. It is a rhetorical procedure that involves praising the “natural” virtues of the people and contrasting them with the elite – and society itself with the political establishment – to mobilize the masses against the “system.” Additionally, when the neoliberal order, with its austerity policies and social inequalities, is established as the norm, all opposition automatically becomes “populist.” You see this rhetoric among many different political leaders and movements. We may as well talk about a populist style, which can manifest itself both on the left and right side of the stage. This figure of speech, describing the image of people’s tribunes versus corrupt elites, this classic dichotomy of the traditional discourse on populism, is also used by Salvini, Orban, Le Pen, Trump, Kaczyński, and Bolsonaro. Still, it often hides a completely different political content.

*Or maybe the fate of Europe is South America during the Cold War? Once a junta, once a democracy, once a dictator, and all because the theatre of global politics has already moved to East Asia?*

I agree with you on this point. Some differences must be taken into account, but these differences do not change the stability of practices.

*Or maybe fascism is a particular constant potentiality of our reality, a kind of inflammation that is just waiting for the weakening of the immune system to attack?*

The analogies are striking. We haven't seen such a rise in popularity of the far right since the 1930s. One reason was the lack of a clear international order in the interwar period at the time. The League of Nations was unable to establish a stable order, and the former concert of powers ended in the trenches of World War I. And something similar happened at the end of the Cold War. Once again, no lasting international order emerged. American hegemony was too weak, unstable, and undermined by various players. The economic crisis was another element in the 1930s that significantly influenced the increased importance of right-wing radicals. And again, in the current wave, the movements I am referring to after the 2008 crisis again see significant increases. However, I would like to highlight one thing here. The radical right, in the context of its view of the world, philosophy, and ideology, is much poorer if we compare it with classic fascism. That's good. Classical fascism produced thinkers like Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt, and Giovanni Gentile. Such influential writers as Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Ernst Jünger were fascists. Of course, there is still anti-Marxist discourse in the Brazilian far right, but in comparison, it is still an inferior version of what we could observe in the 1930s. Of course, Renaud Camus still supports the National Assembly today. However, he plays no significant role in increasing the visibility of the Le Pen family's political project. People like Éric Zemmour and Camus may be brilliant essayists and harbor ambitions to become the equivalent of Marice Barrès and Charles Maurras in today's France.

Still, their influential role depends almost entirely on their presence on television talk shows. I also don't think that the radical right proposes any surgical therapies that involve cutting out cancer...

*What about attitudes towards Jews, Muslims, LGBT...*

In the public sphere, the discourse of memory about the 20th century is dominated by the story of a century of genocide and victims. And to somehow legitimize itself, the extreme right must somehow act in this discourse of memory. So, they cannot suddenly propose radical therapies like those in the 1930s. They cannot say directly that we must expel migrants, gays, or Jews. They must talk about protecting our borders. Yes, they talk about deporting undocumented migrants, but it is not as radical a discourse as the old fascist one.

*Well, we didn't have World War I and the Great Depression, give them a chance (laughter)...*

For now, however, they must make their racist and xenophobic discourse fashionable. That's why they use pop culture very effectively. They enter every possible crevice from which they are not immediately exorcised. Like Alain de Benoist, they try to reframe the discourse. Yet, we do not have the impression of omnipresent death and revolution that hovered over Europe around World War I. Today, their discourse is more ambiguous than before.

In Italy, we have CasaPound Italia, a neo-fascist movement that organizes small "pogroms" in the suburbs of Rome inhabited by Roma people. And their actions are not the discourse of Salvini or Giorgia Meloni, but they both give

the CPI a place in their movements. In the USA, we have the brutal actions of the KKK or the alt-right and Trump, who largely legitimize them. And here there is this ambiguity: on the one hand, discourse, and the other, practice. They also have a very capitalist approach. If I cannot do something myself due to various laws, orders, and prohibitions, I will outsource it to a group, which, if effective, I will not react to. If it is condemned, I will officially distance myself from them and reveal myself.

*Do you think we are in a counter-revolutionary moment?  
To quote Evola, rebellion against the modern world?*

The reference to Evola is instead a step aimed at recreating old utopias. Fascists do not create new utopias, but rather, their very conservative discourse is grounded in fear of the future. Globalization is bad, we must return to sovereignty, defending national culture and traditional values. Neoliberalism was able to privatize utopias. We can no longer think about the future – only regarding individual achievements: career, wealth, consumption. And this is a terrible regression. The end of the 20th century created a world locked in the “now” in which the past and the future are incorporated into the present, which becomes eternity. In a world where we have the impression that everything is changing, but within a specific, intact framework, the free market, private property, individualism, and competition are untouchable. The left must destroy this cage of the present to project itself into the future. And this also includes criticism of post-fascist, ultra-conservative ideas for the future. Because their ideas for the future are primarily ideas from the past. Of course, this is a wholly



invented past, harmonious, socially safe, and stable, which has nothing to do with reality.

*What is the way out of this pseudo-historical fantasy?*

After the historic turn of 1989 and the end of the Cold War, utopias were criminalized and stigmatized. They have come to be perceived as a danger because of the popular notion at that time that although they start from extremely positive premises, they will always ultimately lead to totalitarianism and the end of freedom. This idea was the dominant cliché that emerged from the experiences of the 20th century. I think that today, it is necessary to rehabilitate and re-invent utopia and re-legitimize it as an essential engine for building the future and social movements projecting into it. This change, of course, requires a critical approach to the old utopian ideas of the 19th and 20th centuries. We no longer believe in the concept of progress as it was derived from the works of 19th-century thinkers. We no longer believe in the idea of socialism as it was used in the 20th century. But we need utopia.

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In June 1914, it was also very calm.  
With Gáspár Miklós Tamás  
about fascism in a world without a left

*Do we in Central and Eastern Europe have a particular predilection for fascism?*

I wouldn't essentialize. To explain why Eastern Europe has a particularly nasty version of capitalist society, we need to get rid of the idea that it has anything to do with "totalitarian" habits of local minds or "reactionary" tendencies rooted in "typical" Eastern authoritarianism or servility. Apart from economic dissatisfaction, social and regional inequalities, and the pathetic state of social services, the causes of this state of affairs are pretty specific.

*So why are "strong" and charismatic leaders so popular? Why so much racism? In the latter respect, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary lead the European rankings in racism and xenophobia.*

Regardless of what liberals and the left like to think, today, the primary political identity in Central Europe is the white, "Aryan," heterosexual male. The class identity has been erased here as an unifying option. The only thing that connects them with the West is "race." Today, the last battle is being fought – between universalistic reasons for

rebellion and particularistic ones. The only great historical competitor of nationalism and racism was class, in this respect, the historical heir of Christianity. Concealing its existence and meaning has always been central to the establishment's ideology. Until recently, this was done through a civic nation. It was supposed to transcend classes and bind loyalty to the king and state institutions, primarily the army and the church. Now, it is replaced by ethnic, racial, and linguistic affiliations. Underlining these issues is the oldest tactic of the bourgeoisie. In America, the right says "unemployed" but thinks "black." Welfare recipients are "criminals" and "migrants." "Single mothers" are "sluts." But today, even local underclass members accept the destruction of, social sphere when it affects the "others", even when it is profitable for them.

*So what, the race won? Maybe we are dealing with emerging fascism?*

It's not that easy. Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest are full of rich "non-whites." Tourists and business people settle here with no problems. They are not attacked as "racially inferior." The rich do not count as "the other" – Muslims, blacks, migrants. However, for the local poor, refugees are competition in the labor market. They are considered "social rivals," resulting in social and moral panic. This hysteria is not entirely without reason. These are poor countries. A massive influx of new people would burden the social welfare system considerably. People know perfectly well that their countries are in bad shape. When the system can no longer care for the local population, can you imagine what would happen then? And there is also a competition. It is in the vital interest of the region's countries not to

allow refugees into the EU. Eastern European countries would not survive without the emigration of excess labor to the West. Millions of people went there – mainly young qualified workers and university graduates, including doctors and nurses. If they had competition in the form of refugees in the West, it would be an economic disaster in the East. With collapsing healthcare and pension systems, this ageing region would not survive without remittances from migrants in the West. The economy here is a sad joke. How can people show solidarity in a system that is built upon pure selfishness?

*However, this story doesn't shine through. Who do people blame for this?*

The real problem here is the weakness of the welfare state, lack of social solidarity, and harsh anti-people class politics. Yet the conservative intelligentsia explains the world in cultural or openly racist terms. It's enough to scare. There is danger everywhere. From "bottom" – the "colored" minorities. From the "top" – international finance and the American empire. Migrants from the "outside." LGBTQ from the "inside." And Muslim jihadism, which, to weaken and enslave Europe, sends us the "New York-Tel Aviv axis." So let's fight together, rich and poor, in the name of preserving the "Christian heritage" and "saving Europe" from "cultural suicide." Unfortunately, many people believe this—even those who lose financially.

*Why do we have only this choice?*

"Behind every fascism, there is a failed revolution." Many politicians in Europe today, especially far-right ones, prom-

ise a welfare state, but only for “hard-working,” native-born, “respectable,” white people. The traditional working class has changed. 90% of Austrian industrial workers voted for Norbert Hofer. They are a pretty privileged group that defends its position against competitors in the labor market – refugees, the unemployed, migrants, and women who would work for less. They blame these groups instead of demanding inclusion in the higher wage system. Additionally, the state supports them with small transfers and sports events. In many places, they have become a reactionary force serving the interests of tyrants. The proletariat played the same role in the late Roman Republic and early Roman Empire. So we may end up in an even worse society. Racism, xenophobia, sexism, and homophobia mobilize various groups that become the pillars of the repressive state—those in power in the East present every emancipation project as a threat. People are being suggested that “elites” – the remnants of the left and liberals – are ignoring the needs of “common people.” As a result, “equality” is becoming an “elite” idea for the first time in history.

### *Why is this happening?*

With the collapse of the USSR, the idea of communism, and perhaps more broadly, universalism, was supplanted. Friedrich August von Hayek may have been many things, but he was certainly not a Nazi. He was an emigrant who had to flee the country because of fascism. Conservative and reactionary, he was, yes, but not a fascist. I have a little respect for him because he was honest. And he said something like this: we in Western societies owe a debt of gratitude to Adolf Hitler. He saved Europe from communism. In Europe, the most crucial battlefield

has always been Germany. So thought Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, the Kaiser, and Ludendorff. And so it was. And so it continues to be. More broadly we are talking about Central Europe, but especially Germany. Heidegger said the same thing in his famous letter to Marcuse. Marcuse was his student and friend before World War II. And after the war, he wrote a letter to Heidegger – “What the fuck? Are you crazy? Why? I don’t want to argue with you, but I have a polite request. Would you kindly explain to me what happened to you?” He didn’t expect an answer. Yet, surprisingly, Heidegger responded. “I understand that you are surprised, everyone would be, but I saw this situation at that time as a question – who can save us from communism?” And it turned out that it was only Hitler. Significantly, such different people as Hayek and Heidegger, who had so much contempt for each other, Hayek for the empty words of this philosopher, and Heidegger for the liberal, mechanistic, soulless system Hayek preached, both said practically word for word the same thing. And that’s the truth. Western communism was defeated, and Stalin knew it too. The West has learned so much from Hitler. The British and then the Americans simply would not allow the communists to take over the Seine.

*So, we have a situation again when capital prefers fascism to a universalist project?*

A small detail. I was reading the Viennese newspaper “Der Standard.” There were local elections in Styria, one of the federal provinces of Austria. Previously, there were two communist councillors there. Now they have three. In only one place in Austria, in small provincial elections in Graz. Three communist councils instead of two, when

the conservatives have hundreds of them. This event was enough for all newspapers in Austria to start publishing satirical articles about communists when they usually do not even mention them.

*Do you think that liberals will eventually realize that by destroying any leftist option, they are making room for fascists?*

You know Ferenc Gyurcsány. His MSZP party is the strongest opposition party in Hungary today. It's still only 13-14%, but the entire opposition would have about 40%. And they voted against the resolution to rescue refugees in the Mediterranean. They voted like Orbán's supporters but against their social democratic group. Of course, right-wing newspapers didn't write a word about it. They did not want to make Gyurcsány any popular among their voters. And, of course, leftist intellectuals attacked this decision. But Gyurcsány is a very efficient politician. He didn't answer them. It was an advertisement for him. And that's how it looks all the time. This situation is not simply an alliance between fascists and liberals. Of course, the upper middle class and part of the academic intelligentsia know, sometimes consciously, sometimes subconsciously, that the main threat is communism. It seems even more so on the periphery of the EU. The economy here is based on deep exploitation. Any leftist thought undermines the gains of the local bourgeoisie, which is a thin, faint layer. But even a tiny crack can set a bad example. And which governments are the most anti-communist and, more broadly, anti-leftist in Europe? Polish. Hungarian. Romanian.

*Is it different in Western Europe in this matter?*

Currently, the system is entangled in many contradictions. Liberal democracy is unlikely to survive. Paradoxically, what it lacks today is socialism. There is no balancing force in it. The workers' movement was a necessary condition for the existence of liberal democracy. It was a compromise. In exchange for internal peace and stability, social democracy abandoned its revolutionary demands and became part of the bourgeois state. However, today's ruling classes are no longer threatened from within. They therefore can do what even fascists would not dare to do. They reduce wages, destroy the pension and social welfare systems, public education, health care, and public transport, and liquidate social housing.

*Well, there is no such authoritarian tendency as in the East.*

Capitalism grew organically in the West. It didn't wholly devastate the village life there. Aristocratic and Christian ideas and practices of honor and love remained, alongside some respect for institutions. Several old moral standards have been retained. And in Western countries, and I know England best, there are still remnants of Christian socialist thinking operating in society. I don't mean religion in the strict sense. What I'm talking about is the social heritage of Christianity, especially Protestant Christianity. Let's look at Corbyn. He is an instantly recognizable type for me. I'm Transylvanian, and it's a Protestant region. Corbyn is a vegetarian and has his own garden. He's very puritanical in that being poor and generous are virtues. What is essential here is self-control and not indulging in pleasures. Let's add to this the traditions of the workers' movement. Interestingly, today, Sanders and Corbyn are said to be left-wing extremists. In 1910, they would



instead represent the “right-wing deviation” in the left-wing movement. If they would even have been considered left-wing at all! They would be described as liberals, not even compared to Lenin or Luxemburg, but towards the idealist Bebel. Zero planned economy? No bank nationalization? What kind of social democracy would it be at that time? The state’s central role then meant that it had complete control over banking, energy, and infrastructure. And that was the absolute minimum then. Today, it is considered unthinkable in mainstream radicalism. The classic features of fascism – totalitarian terror and mass violence – are virtually absent in Europe today. Fascists know and have always known that their primary task was to prevent European socialism – especially German and Italian socialism. And they ultimately succeeded, even though they lost the war themselves.

*So, do you think that the leftist ideas of emancipation and egalitarianism are already dead? That the current wave of popularity of the extreme right is a symptom that we are reconstructing, step by step, a hierarchical society? We’re back to the feudal ladder...*

We are ageing as a society. We need migrants, and we welcome them. But on the other hand, we stick to neoliberalism and do not want to expand the social sphere. What remains? Citizen racism. They’re not from here. They are not entitled to the protections of the labor law, pensions, benefits, or health care. We push them away, and they fall back into religiosity and ethnicity, even if they came here to escape from them. Citizenship becomes a privilege. It is a gift of a good state given to some but not to others. Under Boris Johnson, emigrants had to present papers

proving their professional qualifications and a bank account statement. The more specialist they are and the more money they have, the easier it will be for them to enter the UK. It is a return to the 19th century, where voting rights depended on property census.

*Where does this regression come from?*

The dangerous distinction between citizen and non-citizen is, of course, not a fascist invention. The phrase “We the People” did not include enslaved Black people and Native Americans. Ethnic, regional, class, and religious definitions of “nation” led to genocide both in the colonies and in Europe and Asia. However, the idea of universal citizenship is the basis of the concept of progress shared by liberals, social democrats, and all other heirs of the Enlightenment. Once citizenship was thus equated with human dignity, its extension to all classes, professions, sexes, races, creeds, and locations was only a matter of time. In 1914, this process was reversed by exploiting the inherent contradiction of this idea – the fact that citizenship is simultaneously “universal” and yet limited to the nation-state. Today, a double standard is emerging: a state of law for the populations of the capitalist center and a state of arbitrary decrees for the non-citizens who constitute the rest. So, the problem is not that countries are becoming more and more authoritarian but instead that they are democracies for the few. And this, even without concentration camps, leads in a clear, fascist direction: detention, deportation, camps, barbed wire.

*So what is it if it's not fascism?*

Fascism was not conservative, even if it was counter-revolutionary. Despite the somewhat romantic-reactionary nature of this rebellion, it did not restore hereditary aristocracy or monarchy. However, hostility to universal citizenship is, in my opinion, the main feature of fascism. Yet rejecting universalism is precisely what we repeat today in democratic circumstances. I coined the term post-fascism to describe the set of policies, practices, and ideologies that can be seen virtually everywhere in the modern world. They are not totalitarian or revolutionary. They are not based on mass movements or irrational philosophies. They also do not play the anti-capitalism card, even fake one. I also don't want to say that the SS is persecuting Europe again! But may the goals of the right-wing totalitarian machine of the pre-war period, let's call it "fascism," now be achieved through parliamentary and democratic processes? Post-fascism does not need stormtroopers and dictators. It is entirely consistent with neoliberalism, which rehabilitates citizenship as a favor from the sovereign rather than a universal human right.

*Why is this happening?*

Tens of millions of hungry people are knocking on the EU's door. Meanwhile, rich countries are inventing increasingly sophisticated padlocks. The reluctance is growing. This situation leads to drawing more and more generously from the "treasury" of Nazi and fascist ideology.

*And can't they, as the far right says, "stay at home?"*

Class struggles, whether violent or peaceful, are no longer possible there. Nobody exploits them anymore. There is

no additional profit or surplus value to appropriate from them. They are not exploited but abandoned. The poorest have no choice but to leave these inhumane conditions. The so-called capitalist center, in response, establishes tight barriers on the borders of rich countries, and the so-called “humanitarian wars” are fought to prevent masses of refugees from flooding the EU’s social welfare systems, which are already overloaded. Citizenship in the Eurozone is the only safe option in the modern world. However, this is the privilege of a few. The flow is one-way. Capital can change its locus, but labor – especially unskilled labor from poor peripheral countries – cannot. If someone is stuck in the periphery, they are condemned to work in local sweatshops. Post-fascism does not need to pack foreigners into freight trains to kill them. Just prevent newcomers from boarding the trains that could take them to a brave new world. Post-fascist movements everywhere, but especially in Europe, are anti-immigration movements. They do not simply protect race and class privileges in the nation-state but universal citizenship in the wealthy nation-state against virtual universal citizenship for all, regardless of geography, language, race, religion, and customs.

*It seems that things are not very happy inside when it comes to the migration of the poorest people, like, for example, the Roma...*

Yeah. The Roma are the European homo sacer. Their history is full of detention, deportation, and passportization. Many of their communities are affected by this all the time. Both policemen and neighbors persecute them, and Roma people try to escape to the “free West.” Meanwhile, the response is to impose visa restrictions on their countries of

origin to stop the influx and to lecture Eastern European countries to respect human rights. A framework is created that makes racism invisible. The public school system in some areas is only for “colored people.” State-supported church schools have the right not to accept children from the neighborhood and to make selections at their own will. In some regions, more than half of the children are Roma, but Catholic schools are totally “white.” It’s not directly implemented racism, but it works the same way. Or the Roma people are simply neglected. There are villages where no one else lives except the Roma. So, instead of benefits, forced labor campaigns are created for them, which provide a very modest source of income, barely enough to survive on. These Roma cannot leave because these “benefits” are their only form of security, and it is maybe 100-120 euros a month. And there they will remain in this situation forever. This process is simply a reintroduction of feudalism.

*Who else is an outcast in this post-fascism?*

People whose recognition requires moral effort and is not granted immediately and whose inclusion requires recognition of equality. Everywhere from Hungary to the US, minorities have become enemies and are expected to accept the suspension of their civil and human rights. Once considered necessary and logical, the connection between citizenship, equality, and territory is beginning to crumble.

*So what can we do to avoid this? Introduce Communism?*

Nobody even dreams about it nowadays. Not to mention a genuinely socialist program that aims for more than just equality. In more civilized, perhaps less remembered times,

you could find reactionaries who understood socialism and did not focus their criticism on fake problems. Bertrand de Jouvenel was one such distinguished conservative thinker, a charming socialite who became a committed fascist and consequently spent his life in a kind of internal exile after World War II. Today, people misunderstand communism entirely. It means three different things. One is agricultural redistribution, ancient pre-modern. Because land was not legally considered private property in ancient societies, each generation redistributed the land. It has already disappeared as a concept since the 17th century with the spread of land trade. Then we have the social democratic option: redistribution of income to serve egalitarian purposes, mainly through taxation and social welfare for people experiencing poverty, which leaves capitalist private property in place. And the third kind is a higher goal than establishing “ordinary” justice. It seeks to establish a new order of brotherly love. And we have, as Jouvenel writes, examples of communism working well – in monasteries. Why? Monks strive not only for a fair redistribution of wealth or pleasure, but they don’t care about both. Their goal is a brotherly community where selfishness and privateness do not exist. And this redistribution is here a means to make selfishness weaker. It is supposed to prevent hatred, envy, and violence because someone has more. In short, they are a community not because they form a social body but because they are part of a mystical body. Communism seeks to restore this unity.

*But here we have an example of a closed, separated community based on religious norms. How does this relate to actual social movements?*

Yet, de Jouvenel did not write about religion but about monastic communism. And this was the mindset of the true rebels. It stood behind the heroism and cruelty of revolutionaries, the cult of sacrifice, martyrdom, and their self-denial.

*For now, however, the global petit-bourgeois does not produce redistributive communist orders but typical petit-bourgeois divisions, such as racism or xenophobia...*

However, religiosity often erupts in entirely unexpected places. It can be found, for example, in the contemporary ecological movement. Morality comes first, not tolerance and comfort or free exchange of views. There's not enough time because of the climate catastrophe and for social and ethical reasons. There is no time for mockery or contempt for the enemy or apologies for centuries of domination. You have to be perfect now. This attitude is religious atheism, and it cannot be tolerant. And it isn't. From the outside, for example, it is challenging to understand the sexual morality of the new asceticism. On the one hand, it is gentle because it is egalitarian and does not exclude any practice except the degrading and sadistic. However, it is about banning all forms of coercion: economic, cultural, or psychological, and even the use of sexual attractiveness itself to gain power and position. It is no coincidence that Greta Thunberg, the cold-spoken virgin, symbolizes this movement. It is also an ancient symbol. "And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord, making His way," we read in the Gospel of Luke. The authority of virginity, purity, innocence – this is very Christian...

*I'm not convinced by the idea of the morally pure children...*

... nor am I, but that is the concept. We also have leaders of animal rights movements who, when asked that yes, we must protect animal rights, but what about people, respond that they personally do not like them very much. They regularly and openly say that animals are better. Similarly, many middle-class representatives are concerned about the suffering of dogs, cats, and wild animals. Still, they are entirely unconcerned that another person is suffering somewhere far away in the South or East. And this is also deeply religious.

*Maybe it's psychology, after all? We are in the global production chain at the top, and we exploit absolutely everyone, so we just want to deny this suffering and distance ourselves.*

I'm not sure. Let's take feminists. The new ones are prejudiced against sexual pleasure, primarily understood in the same way as in the past. If we take out the element of pleasure, economic gain, wealth, and savings and say – I don't care about any of that, then a fascinating new world begins to emerge. Maybe terrible, maybe wonderful, but the awareness of these rebellious youth is undoubtedly changing. Let's look at Hong Kong. The spirit of sacrifice. So are the yellow vests. People are injured and dying. The same goes for Extinction Rebellion, whose happenings include, for example, playing dead. And again, this is very revolutionary. These people are heroic. They don't go to death because they know they will die anyway. There is no cynicism in this. Contrary. They're fanatics. According to the catechism, what is the evidence that the Church represents the truth? Revelation, tradition, and martyrdom.



Martyrs, therefore, maintain the faith. You know, I come from an old communist family. I know too much about martyrdom and sacrifice. It was central to the experience of the revolutionary left. And also highly Christian in spirit. I asked my father how you can call yourself a communist when, in practice, you are against the regime. You're always complaining, this is shitty, that's shitty. So why? He showed me an album with photos of his comrades murdered in 1944 and told me because I wouldn't be able to explain it to them.

*Well, let's talk about the other side of the same coin. On the one hand, Extinction Rebellion, Hong Kong, Chile. On the other hand, martyrdom for faith is also a typical motivation for neo-Nazi terrorists. They also think they are saving the world and building a new, better one.*

Much less. Communism is utopian. Fascism isn't. Biology is not utopian. Enclosure is dystopian. It's opening up. For them, it is supposed to be heroism. Their fantasy is war. Of course, they have a kind of death cult, but it is not of the martyr type. It is a cult of courage, a warrior spirit, a Kshatriya. Risk and struggle. It is a feudal, noble tradition. It is the tradition of Raubritters, brave, risking their lives for victory. Martyrdom, however, is not for victory. It is for being perfect and holy. What was the most straightforward religious idea for communism? Sacrificing yourself to make the future perfect. Well, that's not the ideal of a warrior. The concept of a warrior is to be a winner. It works every time, from Shakespeare to Conan.

*Regardless, the left is weakening. It becomes part of the liberal camp, its guilty conscience that says we should be*

*better. I wouldn't call it a political position but rather a religious, moral one.*

A situation like this was already discussed in Russia's 19th-century Narodnaya Volya. This approach is an eternal temptation for the left, to become this solid moral component, as they called "Gutmensch" back then. To feel better than this disgusting world. I must admit that if there were no such small enclaves, bars, clubs, and bookstores, where would I be? I want to feel like I'm surrounded by people who may be unreliable here or there but who are certainly not fascists.

*But it's like a zoo or a reserve. I wouldn't call it a path to victory.*

It is a weakness, and yes, we are weak.

*Ultimately, I see only two political groups in Europe today that are fighting without mercy with the system – anarchists and fascists. Others are a more or less polite part of it.*

This system does not tolerate nonconformity. And, of course, Nazis were also imprisoned in the 1920s and were sort of rebels. As long as they remained rebellious, they ended up in prison. However, when they came to terms with reality, they began to throw others into jail. Fortunately, anarchists have never stopped and will never stop being rebels. Or they would have to stop being anarchists. So, there's a significant difference here. But at this very moment, both wings are still anti-system and excluded. After all, the AfD has been telling people for a long time – to distance themselves from extremists and political madmen.

But they don't do it. They know well that they need them to maintain the growth dynamics. Even if they were to lose some votes now, they wouldn't lose much; they would only grow. And they have people in their ranks who are persecuted for their activism, arrested, and beaten by the police. They have a fighting history. And today, they are in local parliaments. With this experience, they already know how to fight. Dissociating themselves from radicals is one of the reasons why social democracy played such a contradictory role between the wars, especially in Germany. It happened because the social democrats were directly separated from the fighting wings by the communists who took over them. And thus, they were forced to move to the right, even though they did not want to. They no longer had roots. They lost them—especially the unemployed. In the last fair elections in Germany, the Communist Party became their party. KPD voters were, on average, twenty-year-olds, and 70% were unemployed. So, obviously, they were radical. If they weren't, they would lose those voters. At the same time, these people were very aggressive and violent. They fought street fights against the Nazis, and Rot Front was, at its beginnings, an organization of Rotter Front Kämpferbund veterans. Young people joined it and wanted to fight, fight in the streets, and kill police officers. Social democracy did not intend to lose the votes of specialized and older workers, housewives, and retirees. That's why they had to distance themselves very sharply from it. So, it wasn't just the negative opinion about the Soviet Union they had. It was also their electoral interest. And they hated each other. This conflict is obvious in the period's literature—these desperate, young, hungry communists. For them, there was little difference between

social democracy and the bourgeoisie. They were all just well-fed conformists, dudes in ties and hats.

*And as a result, both sides, the social democrats and the communists, lost...*

Their voters could indeed vote for the Nazis in 1933 and join the NSDAP, but this does not mean that they forgot who they were before. Thuringia, Saxony, and later eastern Germany were industrial, communist regions. And in 1945, the same people who sat silently during those 12 years of Nazism suddenly stood up and said to the right, “fuck.” “Fuck you,” this is our land now. This moment was the great revenge of the defeated East German working class, which had formerly leaned towards communism and social democracy because it had been laid off from large factories during the crisis. The Third Reich lasted only 12 years... In Hungary in 1945, the communist party was utterly terrified. Because the former activists of the former Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 reappeared. After 23 years! They didn’t die. When the line of the communist party was for a multi-party system, people’s democracy, they showed up and said – “fuck you.” And that’s precisely what they did in various parts of the country. They began to create small council republics, which were eventually destroyed by the communist militia. These activists were imprisoned because the official line was the People’s Front, the coalition government. The same thing happened in Poland. Those who wanted true grassroots democracy ended up in prison.

*What about synthesis? Maybe the only left that is possible here and now is left-wing nationalism?*

I have a theory: bit stupid but still. But I think it's true. We still have a left-wing, but only in those countries where the anti-fascist tradition is part of the national tradition. Greece. Italy. In part of the former Yugoslavia. There, you cannot say that Tito's partisans were simply traitors, pigs. Even in Croatia. Spain and Portugal. Where it was also a national resistance movement. Even in France. Let us also take the Wallerstein model. In these EU peripheries, it always works out this way. Poland: you have Piłsudski, quasi-fascist colonels, and after World War II, Mieczysław Moczar and his anti-Semites. Even Jaruzelski and the dilemma of national socialism or an agreement with liberals. Then Andrzej Lepper. The same idea keeps erupting: let's be patriotic, our nation is great, religion is OK, maybe I don't like priests very much, but there must be some organized spirituality and, most importantly, redistribution, but "reasonably," so that it does not destroy the productivity of the economy.

*So, maybe it's worth trying?*

The left is today accused by the right of being out of touch with these masses. The same masses that the right-wing so despised in the past. When people on the left today say that you shouldn't be elitist, they are simply telling you that it's time to become xenophobic and racist. Like the far right, because they think these are the real feelings of working people. Interestingly, this option is fairly common, although it doesn't seem very effective. Sahra Wagenknecht tried this in Germany – "Enough immigration, enough refugees!" As a romantic communist leader, however, you cannot say this in the current situation. You must remain silent. You don't have to call out right away – "welcome."

But you must not say something similar to what the fascists will say. It's suicidal. Wagenknecht is a very talented politician, but she went a step too far.

*So what, Bolsonaro-type fascism awaits us? Let's cut down the Amazon jungle, introduce ultra-free trade, and build a super strong government, powerful army, and brutal police.*

Mussolini was a budget-financing, free-market politician. Can fascists be ultra-capitalists? Of course. People's fascists will never do this, but fascist juntas have done it many times in the spirit of Franco and Salazar. Those like Salvini who are focused on these two options simultaneously – populism and ultra-capitalism – will lose. These two things cannot be reconciled. What Bolsonaro is doing is still operating in an elitist spirit. He has the army behind him and part of the police. In Germany, the AfD is aiming for something like this... The German police are full of Nazis. And Greek. And here we have one of the richest countries in Europe and one of the poorest. We are sitting in the beautiful sun in Warsaw. It is quiet, nice, calm. But that's how it was in June 1914. It was also very peaceful.

*So what is the European left supposed to be like?*

Socialism did not fail, because it was never actually implemented. We have to try once again.

Gáspár Miklós Tamás (1948-2023) is a Hungarian philosopher and intellectual. He was born in Cluj, Romania, and lived in Budapest from 1978. During the Hungarian People's Republic, he was a dissident. In 1986-1988, he lectured in the United States, Great Britain, and France and continued his studies at Oxford University. After 1989, he was a co-founder of the Union of Free Democrats and a member of parliament. In 2010-2011, he was the chairman of the extra-parliamentary Green Left. He was a prominent opponent of Viktor Orbán and Fidesz's government, capitalism, and neoliberalism.

# If only we had Mussolini in Poland. With Szymon Rudnicki about Polish fascism

*Did Polish fascism exist?*

Before we answer this question, let's consider what fascism is.

*So what is it?*

We need to decide what exactly we are talking about. First of all, there is no single definition of fascism. Many researchers have proposed their own. First of all, fascism has a slightly different face in each country. Because, of course, it exists as an exclusively Italian movement, but it is assumed that there is a particular type of party. It is also a specific type of system...

*This fascism is like a ghost, a bit elusive...*

No. We can consider fascism as an ideology, as a form of organization, and as a system. It will be a little different every time. National radicalism does not always have to be fascism, but most often, it is, it leans towards it, or has some elements of it. Fascist or para-fascist movements have specific characteristic designations. If an organization meets certain primary conditions, we can consider it fascist.



*What are these conditions?*

Radical nationalism is one. Two – promoting an extreme form of change in the social system. Combining these two elements gives you an idea of what kind of game this is. Thirdly, it is a type of organization. It is a group organized like an army, often with a charismatic leader. Of course, not every party that has a leader is fascist, but generally, every fascist party has a leader like that. Whatever they called him – it could be führer, duce, commandant, or capitlanul, the name doesn't matter. What matters is that it is there.

*Isn't it the case that because of the amorphous nature of fascism, which was changing its shape smoothly, we also have problems defining it?*

I will again return to the definition of fascism. Walter Laquer pointed out that research can be undertaken without a single definition. He said: "One can argue endlessly about forms and definitions, but such purism is not helpful in research and may even prove dangerous." However, in propaganda and the press, opponents are eager label others fascists. Also, not every nationalist is a fascist. On the other hand, people and organizations that are de facto fascist defend themselves against being labeled in this way. And the result is that we are left without any specifics through expansio ad absurdum or reductio ad absurdum. Dozens of organizations promote fascism without calling themselves fascists. Let's not engage in casuistry or debates about whether fascism existed in ancient times. Fascist ideology has its roots in the 19th century, even though Mussolini defined what it was very late, only in 1932. However, from the very beginning, he called his party and his government fascist.

*And the pre-war Polish National Radical Movement "Falanga" had a fascist character?*

There is no doubt about it. Many of its activists denied such affiliation after the Holocaust. But its leader Piasecki wrote clearly after the war: "We were fascists." Why should we be better than Piasecki?

*Where did this group come from? What was the class base of the Polish fascists at that time?*

First of all, it was the petty bourgeoisie. The economic crisis that engulfed the capitalist world triggered several new social phenomena. The existing social and moral order was breaking down. The petty bourgeoisie found itself between the leftist workers attacking the old order and the capitalist system destroying it. Its reaction to the phenomena taking place was fear – of workers proclaiming the slogans of the revolution, of the competition of large enterprises, of declassification, and generally of everything new, including cultural changes that were taking place in Europe. A large part of it supported totalitarianism and terror. Disappointed with the ineffectiveness of democracy and the parliamentary system, the petty bourgeoisie, followed fascism. And it created a program corresponding to the aspirations and mentality of the petty bourgeoisie. It took advantage of the dissatisfaction of the middle classes with the capitalist system in its existing form and the desire of these layers to reform it. It showed the petty bourgeoisie who its enemy was and who they needed to attack to achieve success. On the one hand, fascism satisfied petty bourgeoisie and anti-capitalist sentiments by raising slogans such as the fight against anonymous capital,

limiting the size of enterprises or even liquidating them, and on the other hand, fascism opposed the “privileges” of the working class, proclaiming slogans about the protection of private property, class solidarity, and corporatism. Fascism demanded the popularization of small property ownership and support for crafts. The fight against communism was the fundamental factor that attracted part of the propertied classes to fascism.

*Wasn't it more, kind of, classic nationalism?*

Nationalism paved the way for fascism with its theories of hostility between nations and races, shaping the appropriate mentality and preparing a cadre of activists. It indicated who should be fought in one's own country and abroad. However, fascism differed from classic nationalist parties in some doctrinal and organizational elements. First of all, a radical social program. Fascists were the first on the right wing to introduce a new type of political party – mass, militarized, based on an appointed hierarchy, and acting on orders. They preached the cult of action and used physical violence against political opponents. Fascist movements attracted people from all social groups. Still, their organizations were dominated by the petty bourgeoisie and people who were dissatisfied with life, with unfulfilled ambitions, unsure of tomorrow, their social position, and their material existence. Seeking support and compensation in movements that gave them a sense of value, they eliminated social isolation, even at the cost of complete submission. A large group of fascist supporters were World War veterans who could not find a place in a peaceful society and felt underappreciated.

*And the Jews? Why have they become such targets of fascist hostility?*

Anti-Semitism was already a permanent element of the Polish nationalists from the National Democrats' party. In 1902, Dmowski called in their journal "Przegląd Wszecpolski" to establish an "apparatus of professional anti-Semitism." In 1905, the National Democrats, following the Russian model, used anti-Semitism as a tool to fight the revolution. To divert society's attention from nationalist political defeat, which was undoubtedly the loss of the Chełm region annexed to Russia, and to compensate for the losses increased by Dmowski's electoral defeat in Warsaw, the National Democrats intensified their anti-Jewish campaign, announcing in 1912 an economic boycott of Jews. During the Versailles Conference, National Democratic leaders, mainly Dmowski, increasingly succumbed to the thesis about the enormous international influence of Jews, mystified to the point of absurdity. Anti-Semitism was deepened by financial crises. Many Polish banks and enterprises were in the hands of Jewish capitalists. The countryside was also an area of conflict. Here, the peasant met a Jew engaged in trade and intermediation. In the city, the Polish petty bourgeoisie faced competition from the Jewish petty bourgeoisie, and the intelligentsia faced competition from the Jewish intelligentsia. And because of that, many from the Polish petty bourgeoisie thought that the Jew was not only a stranger, but he was also taking over my workplace. And even though competition resulted from capitalism, hatred towards the prevailing conditions turned into antipathy towards Jews. The advantage of the anti-Jewish program was the nationalists' specificity. It helped them explain complicated, negative social, polit-

ical, and economic life symptoms. Hatred towards a common enemy has an integrating effect and binds people from different layers, groups, and classes with diverse educational backgrounds. In Poland, a Jew could be used as a unifying enemy. Not a specific Jew, although he was the one who felt the effects of such a policy, but the Jew as a myth, a mythologized, irrational group, the creator of all evil in the past and present. According to these theories, it was Jewry that contributed first to the development of capitalism and then to Marxism, which opposed this capitalism; it was Jewry that brought about the disintegration of the ideal Christian society, particularly the Catholic Polish society.

*So Polish national democracy can be considered a precursor of fascism in Poland?*

In a sense, yes. The press and media of the nationalist camp did a lot to popularize Mussolini's ideas in Poland. Fascism fascinated the entire right wing. Time and time again, organizations with such tendencies were established, such as the Polish Patriot Emergency Service, the Polish Fascist Organization, and the Order of the Knights of Law. Some National Democrats' leaders, including Dmowski, did not hide their sympathies for fascism. In December 1925, he wrote in "Gazeta Warszawska": "If we were like today's Italy, if we had an organization like fascism, if only we would have in Poland Mussolini, undoubtedly the greatest man in today's Europe, we would need nothing more." For this purpose, he created an organization modelled in terms of structure on the Italian fascist party, with constant reference to concepts typical of totalitarian movements, such as hierarchy and discipline. The National Democrat's "Gazeta

Warszawska” featured numerous statements in which the fight against the democratic system and nationalism were mentioned as positive features of Italian fascism and German national socialism. Both movements were assessed positively as signs of new intellectual trends and new shapes of social life. Attacks on Nazism were described as unrefined propaganda, claiming that there were many exaggerations and inaccuracies in them. Hitlerism was considered to have contributed to civilization by “bravely and consistently” treating the Jewish problem and indicating ways to solve it. Dmowski spoke about fascism and national socialism many times in this newspaper from September to October 1932. In his articles, he wrote particularly positively about National Socialism, seeing its superiority over Italian fascism in the consistent fight against the Jews. The press of the nationalists was the only one in Poland that accepted Hitler’s version of the burning of the Reichstag without any reservations. The Nazi coup lifted the spirit of the entire nationalist camp. It showed that it is possible to come to power by using nationalist and racial slogans. It was seen as a good omen for themselves.

*Were there good conditions for the development of fascism in Poland at that time?*

Historians have been pondering the phenomenon of fascism for years, comprehensively examining the mechanisms of its success. Fascist parties operated in all European countries but came to power only in a few. There was undoubtedly a set of factors conducive to developing movements for which totalitarianism was an essential element of their doctrine or program. These factors include a sense of economic and civilizational stagnation, disbelief

in the possibility of solving existing difficulties under the prevailing form of government, fear for the Polish eastern borderlands where the government could not cope with the growing national liberation movements of Ukrainians and Belarusians, an “excess” of unemployed intelligentsia, and difficult living conditions of the middle classes. And – in the opinion of part of society – the takeover of capital and the position of the bourgeoisie by Jews. The May 1926 coup, generally without changing the constitutional principles of the system, opened a phase of authoritarian rule in Poland. It also forced the nationalist camp to make many organizational and program changes. These tendencies intensified significantly in the ruling camp after Piłsudski's death. Undoubtedly, the successes of fascism in Italy and Germany increased the hopes of its Polish equivalents, and it is not surprising that the Polish nationalist movement and supporters of totalitarianism began to imitate Italian and German methods. The nationalist National Democracy party represented a significant force, in which supporters of totalitarianism gained more influence. The nationalist camp evolved from the parliamentary People's National Union party through the broader movement – Camp of Greater Poland, modelled on Italian fascism -- to the National Party, which, over the years, under pressure from some of the younger generation, increasingly resembled more and more the Camp of Greater Poland, which had been dissolved in the meantime.

### *What was the Camp of Greater Poland?*

It was a radical nationalist political organization established at Dmowski's initiative. The creation of the Camp of Greater Poland aimed to unite right-wing opponents

of the Piłsudski dictatorship and influence society in the spirit of the national idea. Organizationally, the Camp was pretty close to the fascist party. After its creation, the generational conflict in the nationalist camp became increasingly visible because the main strength of the Camp of Greater Poland was its Youth Movement.

*What were the reasons for this?*

Within the national camp, there was a constant struggle between supporters of preserving the doctrinal principles and methods of operation developed before regaining independence and in the first years of the Second Polish Republic and the new generation, starting without the burden of the traditions of its camp, brought up in different conditions and having different patterns and experiences. Over time, mainly due to the economic crisis, the Camp of Greater Poland was transformed from an organization of the nationalist intelligentsia into an organization in which people directly affected by the crisis, the pauperized petty bourgeoisie, youth, and the unemployed, played an increasingly important role. The discrepancy between the totalitarian theory proclaimed by the Camp of Greater Poland and some members of the National Party and its parliamentary activities became increasingly visible. The Camp of Greater Poland youth accused the National Party of inefficiency in organizational work, programmatic and tactical stagnation, maintaining relations with the left-wing parties, excessive restraint, and caution in anti-Jewish and anti-government actions. The Camp of Greater Poland was also even more anti-Semitic than the “older” nationalists. In the Camp of Greater Poland milieu, it was believed that anti-Semitic slogans would be easier to convince soci-



ety than a direct slogan of fighting the government. In Lviv, the All-Polish Youth, following the example of the Nazis, organized a blockade of Jewish shops, not allowing “Christians” to enter them. Other cities followed Lviv’s example. During this period, nationalist student youth also began to wear green ribbons as a sign of their anti-Semitism. The events of 1931 became particularly violent. The All-Polish Youth demanded the introduction of a numerus clausus in the universities. The tragic accident in Vilnius was the trigger for a new wave of incidents at universities across the country. During an anti-Jewish demonstration, there was a clash with Jews and a student of the Faculty of Law, Stanisław Waclawski, was hit on the head with a stone and died in hospital without regaining consciousness. A wave of strikes and rallies organized by the All-Polish Youth swept through the universities. For them, Waclawski became a symbol of the anti-Jewish struggle, used in annual demonstrations.

*What groups or organizations were these radicals’ support base?*

First of all, the Camp of Greater Poland Youth Movement. Italy remained an example for them. They went there to familiarize themselves with the system they wanted to imitate. These travels and readings were reflected in their press, which published numerous texts praising fascism. The National Youth Organization, established in 1927, better known as the National Junior High School Organization, was colloquially called “Balilla”, mimicking the the Italian fascist youth organization. The next pillar was the most prominent academic organization in the Second Polish Republic, the All-Polish Youth. It declared itself a defend-

er of the civilizational achievements of the Polish nation, faith, the Catholic Church, and the family. According to its demands, Jews were to be isolated, in order to preserve the postulated economic and cultural independence. The All-Polish Youth grew in influence at universities by taking over other student organizations. The most common of them was Brotherly Help. The organization gathered 66% of the studying youth, but it must be remembered that Jews could not belong to it. In 1930, all Brotherly Help branches, except the Jagiellonian University, were controlled by the All-Polish Youth. This concentration allowed nationalists to control the material assistance for students, dormitories, canteens, benefits payments, etc. Due to the difficult financial situation of most students, the All-Polish Youth was given a powerful instrument of influence. Nationalists also dominated student corporations. Belonging to a corporation requires considerable financial resources. It was, therefore, an exclusive organization, bringing together mainly young people from wealthy homes. Despite the formal ban on belonging to political organizations, many members simultaneously belonged to the Camp of Greater Poland, and also almost all the student corporations supported the All-Polish Youth. Similarly, nationalists completely dominated the Central Association of Academic Science Clubs, the National Association of Provincial Clubs, and the Academic Sports Association.

*What was the effect of such nationalist domination among bourgeois youth?*

The result of these phenomena was that the young people created their program, and then in 1934, their organization – the National Radical Camp (nicknamed “ABC”), and a year

later, another one, the National Radical Movement (nicknamed “Falanga”). They wanted more than slow, long-term political work. Establishing the National Radical Camp was a further step towards “modernizing” Polish nationalism. The subjective element undoubtedly played a role: “The tool was tired of being a tool.” The establishment of the National Radical Camp was an announcement of the transition to more brutal methods, using violence not as an element of ad hoc political struggle but as an element of the program. Additionally, the National Democrats opposed all programs of broader social reform. This approach made them different from the nationalist parties established after World War I, which operated with radical social programs because they understood that nationalist slogans alone could not captivate the masses. Slogans about improving economic conditions could have paved the way to reach these masses. The “youth” program included elements of social radicalism intended to attract broader masses of the petty bourgeoisie, the unemployed, and some working-class groups. The creation of the National Radical Camp was, therefore, also an attempt to break away from the past of the National Party, from its conservative social program, which seriously hampered agitation. It was impossible to declare an anti-capitalist attitude and remain in the ranks of the National Democracy.

*What was the National Radical Camp's attitude towards Nazism and fascism?*

The National Radical Camp press organ, the “Sztafeta” daily, cited Nazi Germany as a positive example and role model. According to the editors of this magazine, the Nazi movement “is captivating with its freshness and enthusi-

asm, its ruthless fight against the Jews, its achievements for the world of work.” Although the National Radical Camp activists understood that Hitler’s rise to power strengthened border revisionist tendencies in Germany, this did not stop them from proclaiming that the policy of Nazi Germany “enables us to avoid warlike tendencies in the coming years.” At the same time, Sztafeta defended against identifying it with the fascist or National Socialist movement, trying to demonstrate that there were severe differences. Mussolini was, therefore, accused of bowing to big capital and underestimating the racial issue. Hitler was accused of underestimating religion, and the people around him were accused of neo-paganism and – similarly to the Italian fascists – establishing contacts with big industry.

*So, what was the National Radical Camp politically?*

It was an extremist movement that both the right and the left had to take into account. Its role was determined not by the organization’s size but by its influence on the climate of political life. The National Radical Camp drew a lot from the achievements of the nationalist camp. Still, in addition to common slogans of the National Party, new ones appeared, such as “nationalizing” part of the industry and limiting the role of big capital. Relying on the petty-bourgeois youth, students, and the intelligentsia, National Radical Camp activists did not give up influencing the working class. They understood that the Polish petty bourgeoisie was too weak to gain power solely thanks to its support. Therefore, they used radical slogans to fight capitalist exploitation, whilst at the same time trying to reduce the struggle against capitalism to anti-Semitism, and also attempting to discredit left-wing parties, present-

ing themselves as the only defenders of workers' interests. The National Radical Camp was also the most consistent supporter of giving the state a totalitarian character.

*What does totalitarian mean in this case?*

Totalitarianism is a political system in which the individual is completely subordinated to the state. The state controls all areas of social life, striving to subordinate its citizens completely. The national-radical program was a totalitarian program aiming to regulate all areas of life. "Falanga" stood openly on this ground, and the discussion was only about the model. The vision of the system they promoted, i.e., the Political Organization of the Nation, was, by definition, an organization of a totalitarian state. The term "Christian totalitarianism" was also eagerly used. But regardless of the adjectives, totalitarianism was still totalitarianism. In short, everything that destroys the nation's spirit, the minorities, and the opposition must be crushed.

*Well, Polish extremists like to say that they are national radicals, not fascists. Is this a significant difference?*

Judge it yourself. "Falanga" ideologist Włodzimierz Sznarbachowski divided national radicalism into two parts: radicalism of the program and radicalism of action. For him, "the radicalism of the program is a fight against parliamentarism and international Jewry, opposing the international interest with the nation's interest." However, the radicalism of an act "is the use of absolute means, but surely those that lead to the goal most shortly." These "absolute measures" included planting bombs, physical terror, etc.

*How did it look like in practice?*

Anti-Semitism became an essential element of the nationalist camp's program and activities as an element of consciously planned political action. All factions of the nationalist camp cooperated in anti-Jewish actions. "ABC" and "Falanga" played a significant role in them. There was no sin for which Jews were not blamed, and the "solution of the Jewish question" was intended to solve most of the problems plaguing Poland. "ABC" was not inferior to "Falanga" in militant action. In addition to planting bombs and terrorist activities at universities, it carried out anti-Jewish activities, going so far as beatings, smashing windows in Jewish shops, pouring stinking liquids on people and goods in Jewish places, throwing firecrackers and bombs into Jewish apartments, shops, and houses of prayer, and even committing robberies. Terror was not limited to Jews. "Falanga" militants planted bombs at the premises of the Polish Teachers' Union in Łódź and Warsaw, causing fatalities. Polish and Jewish socialist demonstrations were also attacked with firearms. Rallies of the Democratic Party and the Polish People's Academic Youth were attacked. Terror became one of the methods of political struggle. As "Falanga" wrote: "We have to start creating a new era with the roar of bombs, the crack of gunshots, the thrilling dynamics of attacks." It didn't just end with words. The number of people who became victims of bombs, gunshots, and beatings was huge. National Radical Camp claimed that they represented spiritual, not biological, racism, but subsequent articles written about "purity of blood," about "envying Polish blood," and about "Polish Aryanness." A Jew was defined as "any person with Jewish blood in his veins." Michał Howorka, a member

of National Radical Camp, even wrote about Jews as an inferior race compared to Aryans, about “Aryan” capital, and about “littering” the Polish race by Semites. “Kuznica,” a magazine of the Silesian branch of “Falanga,” published on the eve of the war an article stating that “German blood, as well as Jewish blood, belonging to morally degenerate nations, requires thorough scientific research.” In turn, Jan Mosdorf, the first leader of National Radical Camp, wrote that “purely biological racial differences play a serious, underestimated role.”

*So, they can be called fascists?*

Yes. A leading ONR publicist, Jan Korolec, admitted that “years ago we were under the spell of fascism” and “it took time for fascism to stop influencing our minds finally.” It was published in “Falanga” magazine that “national socialism woke up Germany and healed its social and political life.” On the anniversary of the victory of the Nazi revolution, it was emphasized that “Falanga” is the only movement in Poland representing the same values as fascism. Italy and Germany were set as examples because “these countries were able to unleash in people the desire for greatness, the ability to make sacrifices, and heroism on the largest scale.” Jędrzej Giertych, the leading ideologist of the National Party, wrote about the National Radical Camp after the war: “The National Radical Camp – they were Polish fascists.” Similarly, Jan Olechowski, an active activist and publicist of “Falanga” magazine, wrote then that “Falanga was openly fascist in nature.” On November 25, 1945, the leader of the “Falanga,” Piasecki, himself admitted in the first issue of “Dziś i Jutro” magazine that the National Radical Camp was a fascist organization and was

an “expression of totalism on Polish lands.” In 1949, in an article confiscated by the censorship, entitled “We experienced our defeat,” he wrote about the “Falanga’s” leader type and “totalistic program assumptions of a political system modeled on fascism.” In 1950, he wrote that “the ideological publications of ‘Falanga’, including my Spirit of New Times and the Youth Movement, were full of influences of fascism and totalism,” and further: “chauvinism suggested to us the image of a powerful Poland in the form of a total state, modeled on fascism.”

*Were such theses and actions promoted only among radicals?*

No. Anti-Semitism was used not only against Jews but also in the power struggle. Piłsudski’s death significantly impacted the situation in the ruling camp. There was no factor integrating these people anymore. The fight for the succession has begun. In the power struggle, the ruling camp, while fighting the National Democrats, took over and implemented many of its postulates. A militarized organization was created, with authorities appointed from above. Colonel Adam Koc officially became the head of National Unity Camp, and the person promoted as the successor of the Commander and Leader – Piłsudski – was Edward Rydz-Śmigły. A significant part of society treated the National Unity Camp as an attempt to create an organization in Poland that would fulfill the functions of a fascist party. This opinion could not suit National Unity Camp, which wanted to appear in the halo of a new, unique phenomenon. Hence, Col. Jan Kowalewski, Koc’s chief of staff, stated that National Unity Camp was not fascism or Nazism but “Polonism.” The Front of Journals was established, whose main task was to fight communism. A hier-



archical organization with absolute obedience to superiors, the Young Poland Union, was created on the model and with the help of the “Falanga,” which proclaimed, among others, the need to make a psychological breakthrough and mixed extremely nationalistic and imperial slogans with social radicalism, actively imitating the “Falanga” in militant action. As the Lviv “Wiek Nowy” magazine sarcastically wrote, commenting on the establishment of the Patriotic Youth Union: “Verses from the writings of Roman Dmowski will be read to the accompaniment of the anthem of the First Brigade.” The democratic press saw the threat posed by the alliance of the young nationalists with the ruling camp. “Epoka” magazine wrote that together they wanted to build fascism, “no longer the one-armed and half-hearted kind, but the total one, with both fists.”

*How did “ABC” and “Falanga” react to this process?*

The influence of people who had joined “Polonism” from the ranks of the nationalist camp on the ideology of the ruling camp was increasing. However, as the cooperation evolved, its contradictions became more acute. Many ruling camp politicians and its youth organizations protested against this nationalist turn. As a result of the move “to the right,” National Democratic dissidents turned out to be closer to the government than the youth organizations of the ruling camp. “Falanga” was a suitable ally as a dynamic, militant element of Polish fascism, with a relatively significant influence in the academic youth community. For “Falanga,” the transition from opposition to cooperation with the government meant a fantastic opportunity to spread their slogans and directly influence young people, increasing the chances of ambitious leaders to come to power. However,

with the decline of colonel Koc's position in 1938, "Falanga" lost influence in Polish pro-government youth organizations. *Why did the attempt to introduce fascism in Poland ultimately prove unsuccessful?*

First, no conditions were as favorable for the development of fascism as in Germany or Italy. The Polish petty bourgeoisie was weak. There was also no real threat of a grassroots communist revolution. Finally, the state had a more significant influence on the economy than other countries. At the moment when there was a potential chance of introducing totalitarianism, two elements were missing – as a result of the May coup: the party and the leader. Piłsudski camp came to power as an authoritarian group, and while the leader was alive, supporters of totalitarianism had no freedom of action. The ruling party also had many opponents of totalitarianism, although they were losing their domination. Finally, the army, whose structure tends towards authoritarian rule, played a significant role in political life. Ideological issues, an essential element of totalitarian systems, were less important to them. Additionally, totalitarian movements gained strength in Poland not during the period of democracy but during the heyday of the authoritarian system. Most potential supporters of the totalitarian system found themselves in opposition to governments implementing an anti-democratic system. They operated in a party that was initially parliamentary and in which they had to fight for influence. At the same time, the idea of totalitarianism based on Polish nationalism was rejected by one-third of citizens forming national minorities. On the other hand – this large number also fueled this nationalism.

## *What happened to “ABC” and “Falanga” activists after 1939?*

Some died in the Nazi extermination camps. There were – only a few – who collaborated with the Nazis. Others engaged in the armed struggle, sometimes paying for it with their lives. Those who did not die had various experiences. After the outbreak of the war, some joined the National Party, and most joined the Szaniec or Confederation of the Nation groups. Many disputes and animosities that had divided them before the war were forgotten. They also joined various armed forces – the Homeland Army, Personnel Strike Battalions, and the National Armed Forces. After the war, some of them emigrated. Of those remaining in the country, some fought against the new communist authorities, others joined the post-war system, sometimes playing a significant political role, and some fell victim to unjustified repression. Some were proud of their pre-war and wartime activities, whilst others critically revised their views.

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Armor against the plague.  
With Jan Borowicz about fascist  
aesthetics and the psychoanalytic  
image of its followers

*Are aesthetics important to fascists?*

Fascism is the aestheticization of politics. Of course, each ideology will have its own. Fascism, however, is about something more because of the idea of remodelling the social body. Aesthetics becomes the shaping of the body of both the nation and its individual members. It is kept in shape, healthy, and protected from germs, and ultimately, the elements that do not fit and threaten to destroy it are cut off.

*So this is not body dressing, but straight modelling?*

Yes. This approach has a much more specific function of actual actions on a real body. All this is to prevent the nation and politics from transforming into an amorphous mass that cannot be organized.

*So, a slogan such as “Death to the enemies of the homeland” can easily be part of fascist aesthetics and body correction policy?*

Yes. This is the trick that fascism does. After all, the enemies of the homeland are within. If the nation is unified, then “cutting off” its parts means cutting off parts of itself as well. As a result, it is quite a paradoxical revolution. It does not transfer to any other reality. It just makes the one that already exists somehow more bearable for a fascist. And it is a permanent revolution because the foreign element can never be eliminated. It is an illusion created by the fascist state of mind that the danger actually lies outside and that eliminating it will ultimately heal us as a nation. This is how it was during the Holocaust, the more the Holocaust became a reality, the greater the “Jewish danger” in the Third Reich “increased.” The longer Lady Macbeth washes her hands, the dirtier they become, and instead of calming down, she becomes increasingly panicked.

*So, like in Stalin’s approach, the class struggle intensifies as the construction of socialism progresses?*

(Laughter) Yes, but it’s a sad mechanism. It illustrates how difficult it is for us to stop destruction and self-destruction once it starts.

*So we have a nation as a body and, simultaneously, a specific body, a member of this nation. How do these planes come together in the fascist vision?*

Taking care of the body in the capitalist sense is supposed to adapt a person to the requirements of the market and work. However, the goal of a fascist is something completely different. It is not being a worker but a soldier. And that is why fascist aesthetics and practice include both hyper-masculinization and hyper-militarization.

*Is the planned effect to become a literal soldier or more of a political soldier?*

In fascism, politics is no different from war. It is a war waged by other means, to paraphrase von Clausewitz. We may look at fascism not only from the perspective of economic, social, and political theories; psychoanalysis also provides good ways to study the aesthetics, corporeality, and sexuality of fascism. The exercises are intended not only to create the body of an ideal soldier but also to fend off all dangers that seek to dissolve rigid boundaries, weaken and divide, and perforate the skin that separates the internal from the external. Therefore, the individual human body must be constantly trained so that in its steeliness, it forgets that it has emotions, sexuality, and internal drives.

*So, for example, the fascist version of Straight Edge – I don't smoke, I don't drink, I don't take drugs, I don't have casual sex – fits this fantasy well?*

Yes, because it is the idea that we can completely control our body, sexuality, and emotionality. Deep sexual contact with another person or letting go of control after drinking alcohol or drugs work directly against this fantasy. This is what the fascist fears most – weakening, losing control.

*Militarization, homosocial groups, and total control over the body, would this explain this massive fascist homophobia?*

Fascism is neither about homosexuality nor heterosexuality. Both types of sexuality rely on a deep bond with another person. Fascism removes these bonds and produces men who are very similar to each other – mirror images – who

can only communicate with each other, united by an obsessive idea that cannot bring fulfilment.

*So, where does this homophobia come from? From religion?*

From a deep split in the understanding of what is masculine – physical, bodily, athletic, mental, and what is feminine – sexualized, emotional, hysterical, breaking the male whole.

*This description sounds like an incel manifesto...*

It's a bit like that. Anyway, if we look closer at the video trailer of this year's Independence March, we see five men, four soldiers, and a worker. It is an entirely male world. Only the Virgin Mary appears there, representing women – on swords, banners, and badges. I think it's because she's the embodiment of the idea of a mother, a pure, unsexualized woman who cares about men but doesn't demand anything. Alternatively, according to the Romantic tradition, she becomes Mater Dolorosa, mourning her sons who died in the war. Mourns but says nothing. Therefore, she is not a woman with whom you can enter into any deep, equal, emotional contact.

*Where does this incel perspective come from?*

For a fascist, femininity can only weaken a steel, iron man. Through sexuality, through emotionality, through everything that connects us as people. There is a paradoxical closeness between Breivik and ISIS. They hate each other. Theoretically, they should be on separate sides of the barricade, but what connects them and brings them closer like two branches of a horseshoe is absolute hatred

and exclusion of women and femininity, which are regarded as something that do not belong to the political sphere, and therefore war.

*So, fascism is a total war system?*

This is the basic idea of many far-right movements, both the Freikorpsists analyzed by Klaus Theweleit and the ideology of Polish anticommunist guerrillas from the 1940s – men for whom the war does not end. Unfortunately, this is very consistent with the Polish messianic tradition, the ethos of conspiracy and constant struggle. And that is why the myth of the “cursed soldiers” is completely transparent not only to the right but also to a large part of the center. As with Andrzej Wajda in his movie *Ashes and Diamonds*, a man simply cannot choose a woman, family, and stability over fighting and dying.

*Is it because this is a betrayal?*

Yes. Of course, just to be clear, Wajda disapproves of this.

*So, fascism is an extremely romantic aesthetic?*

However, this is degenerate romanticism, which assumes a very specific sexuality – one that is connected with both war and death. One where you can unite with someone only in a brotherly fight and only in the ruins and among the dead. This is the purpose of many Polish historical museums, where war is glorified. For prof. Maria Janion, the romantic ghosts haunting modern Polish culture, introduced forgotten, repressed otherness (women, Jews, children). Fascist or proto-fascist ghosts of soldiers, in



turn, demand bloody revenge and mobilize to fight and are tightening, not expanding, Polish identity – as in Antoni Krauze’s “visionary” last scene of the movie “Smolensk.”

*By what aesthetic means does the production of such a body take place?*

Body organization. A mechanism must emerge from the urban, potentially revolutionary, chaotic human tangle. Let us take as an example the symmetrically organized fantasies of Leni Riefenstahl in her films, in which everyone is in their place. It’s interesting how similar it is to cinema, like *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang, which was made a decade earlier. To a factory-made, capitalist world where the homogenized masses know, like robots, where to go. But for Lang, it was a nightmare come true, while for fascism, which sees in it full discipline and harmony and clear structures, just like in the army, just like in school, just like in the hospital, just like in prison – it is a dream come true.

*Would this also explain the skinhead uniform from the 1990s – shaved head, flares, heavy boots, and now the “black bloc”?*

Definitely. In this sense, purity is an absolute discipline and a permanent structure that nothing can disturb. It is like a well-prepared library catalogue from which nothing falls out. There are no gaps through which something can get through and then weaken or dissolve these structures.

*Would these “uniforms” be armor here?*

Yes, and one through which no germs can permeate. And with this, there are also ideas about others – women, ref-

ugees, Jews, “the rainbow plague,” “the red plague” – who may pass through, penetrate, and dissolve from the inside. This vision is an immunological and epidemiological fantasy that is immediately sexualized in the fascist imagination. Those treated as inferior, Arabs and refugees from Africa, although according to the fascist, they are economically, civilizationally, and politically inferior, have something that white people supposedly do not have, i.e., excess potency. This perspective was clearly visible in right-wing magazines during the so-called refugee crisis. Just like on the covers of Polish right-wing weekly magazines. A white woman in a blue robe, the flag of the European Union, being forcibly torn apart by dark and black paws.

*This is why the story about refugees raping is so popular?*

Yes. This fantasy is a similar fantasy to Hitler’s about the Jews. Like refugees today, they were then presented by fascists simultaneously feminized, emotional, and united by solidarity based on emotions, not reason. And at the same time it is combined with a reverse fantasy. With hypermasculinization. This turn can be seen in the Nazi film *Jew Süss*. The title character wants to enthrone the prince and take over political and economic power there. At the same time, he also fights for sexual control because it is not known what Süss desires more – power or the daughter of one of the councillors. He wants to corrupt and take over both the state and the woman. This picture says a lot about the fascist’s fantasy of himself. A stereotype says much more about the person who creates it than the person who is stereotyped. The latter has no active participation in the creation of this cliché. In making such an image, the fascist is trying to say – I am not like that. And when someone

tries so hard to show that he is not like something, the question arises: how did he come up with it and describe it so thoroughly and clearly?

*Is it a mixture of disgust and desire?*

Yes. Apart from this pair, there is also a combination of several other themes in fascism. On the one hand, there is the fantasy of a woman who is absolutely untainted and purified of sexuality, like a mother or sister. This Oedipal object is forbidden but, at the same time, very desirable. On the other hand, it is about a caregiver who can take care of a fascist boy. And in the next one about terrible, dirty sexuality. In many fascist films, a woman who is raped or simply has sex must be punished. Either she kills herself or someone murders her. She is elevated and desexualized in the role of mother, or she appears as a deeply sexualized, tainted, and horribly dangerous whore.

*And the other side, the migrant? How is he portrayed?*

Epidemiological language is used towards them. They bring diseases that dissolve the national body. It is a copy of the Nazi film *The Eternal Wanderer*, in which historical maps of Jewish migrations are shown and compared to the migrations of rats and the plague. By the way, it fits perfectly with the old vampire myth. In Bram Stoker's story, Count Dracula sails on a ship with rats, later spreading a plague in the cities. We are already in a fascist fantasy when we start talking about waves of refugees. These words evoke the image of a horde, some disorganized, monstrous mass that breaks into the country, into its body, bursts it from the inside, or drowns everything with its magma. It could

be refugees. It could be Jews, it could be Indians, Chinese, or Mongols. What is important is the image of a hard, coherent body drowning in the flood of what is different and alien. People can still get along somehow. With the wave, the only language of communication is violence. And yet, such imaging is thoroughly mainstream. At the individual level, it may be a mass that invades not only the body but also the head, terrible, through terrifying thoughts about oneself, destroying the coherent and clear identity that fascism is about – what nationality am I, what gender, how my sexuality looks like.

*What is the purpose of this? Dehumanization?*

This is the mechanism by which we can wage war. Carry out ethnic cleansing genocide. If you see another person like yourself – suffering, having emotions, connected to other people, then such a killer may go crazy out of guilt. To prevent this from happening, we must dehumanize, just like the hero of Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, who experiences a breakdown when he kills an enemy, a French soldier, face to face in a bomb crater. When shooting from the trench to an unknown alien, he asked himself no questions and had no trouble. And this is one of the greatest fears of a fascist, that he will see someone else just like him. He must be cautious to maintain the armor of his uniform, body control, and ideology to be immune to empathy.

*But what is it for? To dehumanize the enemy and derive pleasure from dominating him?*

For both the pleasure of domination and the joy of elimination. It is removing emotionality, sexuality, and everything that you can't stand in yourself. However, this can only bring pleasure for a moment. He's never quite there. It's just an illusion that the dirt is outside. Eichmann is a very interesting example here. He and his delight, known to all of us, the delight of cleaning. The transformation of a dirty and messy reality into an empty, clean, and plain one.

*If a fascist wants to transform reality so intensely, what kind of deficit is this pleasure supposed to fill?*

It is a difficult question. We must remember that fascism promises to be a therapy, a cure for reality, so sometimes it can be difficult to feel what is underneath. Taking into account various analyzes of German fascism and Nazism, drawing on psychoanalytic theories, the basis of this fantasy seems to be a moment of deep humiliation and a sense of helplessness, in this case, related to the trauma of World War I. For Poland, it could be the time of World War II. Contrary to military fantasies, it was a profoundly humiliating situation when so little could be done. Some salvation from this situation is to reorganize memory in such a way as to emerge as those who triumph. Those who had absolute control over the situation and the entire country were united in conspiracy, partisans, active resistance, and at the same time, helping the weaker, i.e., Polish Jews.

*However, this fashion is primarily anti-communist...*

Some part of it is fueled by the fascist fantasy of armor, of strength, of a specific type of masculinity. At the same time, it seems to be a common heritage and burden of Eastern

Europe. We are talking about two occupations here. In these stories, the second communist one grows into the worst one. When I was in Tallinn, Estonia, in the Occupation Museum, it was devoted almost exclusively to the communist one. Only one paragraph is devoted to recalling what happened in Estonia during World War II: the Holocaust, the shooting of Estonian Jews and the murder of the entire community. It ends with the statement that the Nazi occupation was not so bad for Estonia. And the next ones are about how terrible the communist one was. This perspective is symptomatic of the entire region. It must be a symptom because it is too terrifying and illogical not to indicate some deeper structure. The exclusion of Jews from the state community, both today and in memory, serves to maintain the fantasy of a pure and coherent national body.

*And by subtracting them, don't we succumb to Nazi categories?*

Yes, we accept the division of Poles into ethnic Poles and Polish Jews. We agree to the exclusion of a specific category of citizens from the nation's body so that this amputated part does not mutilate what remains. In such a case, Jewishness turns out to be something essentially foreign to Polishness. This mechanism is visible in fantasies about communist torturers. We can trace this to the figure of "bloody Luna," Julia Bristiger, and a whole host of books and films in which a Jewish communist tortures Polish patriots. A sexualized, terribly dangerous woman who plays her role in this sadomasochistic spectacle because this scene of violence immediately transforms and sexualizes herself. In this fantasy, she is a castrator, a woman who violates the healthy, complete, coherent, and armored body of the nation, turning it into a bloody, howling mass.

*Is there a chance to free yourself from this internalized aesthetics and ideology?*

Let's not turn fascists into some exotic species with which we have nothing in common. It is crucial to examine not only them but also ourselves. Your own fascist states of mind. Those are what we need to be most sure about. Fascism is, after all, an excessive, maniacal need for certainty and control. Who belongs to the nation? Who is what gender? What sexuality is there? There is a demand for clear and transparent categorization and identity. Thinking psychoanalytically, groups act much more radically than individuals behave in similar circumstances. Groups allow themselves much more, and fascist fantasies that could frighten an individual can become a reality in society. I don't know if each of us can become a fascist, but with the right balance of forces and conditions, this part of ourselves can express itself in everyone.

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# The Enemy





# The “Jewish spider” behind all the evil in the world. With Alina Cała about anti-Semitism

*Why is the anti-Semitic myth so vital? You could have thought that it would be replaced as a demonic scare by Muslims or LGBT people, but nothing, a comeback, re-hashed myths.*

It simplifying, from Catholicism. Anti-Judaism has developed in Christianity, i.e., a negative attitude towards Jews as the killers of Jesus. And this is quite an early period, i.e., some 2nd or 3rd century, or, you could say, the third or fourth generation of followers of this new religion. From the beginning, there was a subcutaneous antagonism between Christian communities of Jewish or rather Judaic origin because it was difficult to call it a nationality at that time, and those that came from the broadly understood Hellenistic culture, i.e., those bringing together Romans or Egyptian Greeks, because the new religion spread mainly through the settlements of these the last in the Middle East. It was they who began to propagate various accusations against the Jews because they had a political dispute with them at that time. The idea was to whitewash Pontius Pilate to remove the responsibility for condemning Jesus of Nazareth to death from the Romans symbolized by him and place it on the Sanhedrin, which, so to speak, “snitched”

on Christ. This period is when anti-Judaism began. Most of the myths that are permanently rooted in anti-Semitism have their origins within Catholicism. This cornerstone can be easily traced, for example, to accusations of ritual murder. The first is 13th century England, two or three such allegations – and the Jews are expelled. Immediately afterwards, the idea travels to France and Germany. These allegations spread throughout Western Europe – the Netherlands and France. In the 16th century, pogroms in the West disappeared, and this phenomenon spread more to the East, to Poland in the 17th century. In our case, it is an import from the West because, in Poland, these accusations are raised by “imported” monks, Italians. It entered Orthodoxy only at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

*On what basis are these anti-Judaic myths shaped?*

For much of history, specific religious tension has existed between these denominations. On the one hand, Jews are the ones who “crucified Jesus”, but on the other hand, they are the only “witnesses” of his life and death. It’s the tension between being cursed and holy at the same time. Therefore, in the Middle Ages, the Church’s policy was very sharp anti-Jewish propaganda in sermons. Still, at the same time, Jews were the only religious minority that was tolerated on a broader scale by Catholicism. Hence, it is the element that made them such a unique object. Others were expelled or assimilated. First, in the 4th century, when Christianity became a political religion, all followers of other religions were forced to accept Christianity.

*Apart from Jews?*

Christianity is slowly winning in the Hellenistic world, i.e., the Middle East, Asia Minor, Rome, Greece, Syria and Egypt. It is also very characteristic that around the 2nd century, Egyptian mummies disappeared, and this is probably the moment when the custom of Christian burials, i.e., burying the body in the ground to let it decompose, prevails.

*So, since the establishment of the dominance of Christianity, Jews have been the only minority not associated with this religion in European countries?*

Of course, especially in the Middle East, there were others. Besides, we are still determining what Christianity exactly looked like at that time because all the sources we have were created by the elites, who adopted this religion in a large majority at that time. And they certainly described the reality of that time from its perspective. However, what ordinary people believed then has yet to be discovered.

*However, we have feudal Europe and its Christian universalism, which is the socio-political glue. Were the Jews the only exception then?*

Yes, there was no intention to remove them. They lived peacefully. Moreover, they were not much different from their neighbors. During the period when the diaspora was created, it was part of the broadly understood Hellenistic culture. They wore clothes more or less like the rest of the Romans and went to theaters and baths. And so until the end of antiquity, i.e., the 3rd and 4th centuries, Jews were integrated, although the boundaries between religions were quite fluid. For example, until the 3rd century, Maccabean

worship prevailed, and there was a grave of the seven sons of the Maccabees in Syria. It was a traditional pilgrimage site for Jews, but at the same time, it became a pilgrimage site for the first Christians. At these graves, the followers of Judaism accepted Christianity and changed their religion to Judaism. Contacts in this center were so intense that denominations and believers mixed. There are speculations that, to distance themselves from this veneration of Jewish saints, a similar aspiration also appeared in Christianity, which is why the cult of Saint Stephen was popularized.

*When does this permeation end?*

Jews were integrated until the end of antiquity. Then the barbarian wars came, as a result of which the Western Roman Empire ceased to exist, and the Hellenistic world declined. First of all, the consequences were borne by Jews, who were particularly vulnerable as a minority. Many of them, in the turmoil of history, were killed. Then, the growth of the number of followers of Judaism had stopped. Jews were dying, and at the same time, Christianity was becoming the dominant religion in more and more lands. It has started to spread and thus broke its ties with Judaism. As a result, it entered deeper into local cultures. However, Christianity couldn't cope without the Old Testament. The new religion grew out of the root of a previously planted olive tree, as it is beautifully written about Judaism in the Second Vatican Council documents. And without this root, it is incomprehensible. On the other hand, Judaism gets along just fine without this new branch. You could cut off a twig, and the bush would continue to grow. And that's where the cultural tension comes from. At this point, it begins to become mutual. Judaism also draws its boundaries

more clearly towards Christianity. Christians additionally enter into a synthesis with barbarian tribes. Medieval feudalism was emerging, and there was no room for Jews in this structure. However, anti-Judaism precedes these social and class changes. Since the 2nd and 3rd centuries, there has been a very strong anti-Judaic agitation in the sermons of the Church fathers, and it has entered the canon of the Church's teachings.

*So, we have a classic fight between universalisms?*

It's a bit like that. When it comes to the fathers of the Church, it is also a competition for followers. They must explain to their faithful why they should not go to their neighbors for Jewish holidays.

*And in the economic layer? Is this the root of the sinister Soros, in the sense of the myth of the demonic Jewish banker?*

It comes into play in the late Middle Ages. Previously, we had well-integrated communities that did not differ culturally. But anti-Judaism begins to be preached wherever Christianity is preached, even where there are no Jews yet. The diaspora then lived within the Hellenistic world, i.e., in today's Syria, Georgia, Greece, Turkey, and southern Europe. It was only in the 9th-10th centuries that Jews began to migrate along the Rhine. During the existence of the Roman Empire, there was complete social stratification in the diaspora. That is, there were Jews, traders, philosophers, teachers, soldiers, and slaves. However, those who began to settle along the Rhine were mainly merchants because they settled there to trade. At the same time, they meet people who are newly Christianized but already know that

it was the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus because it is in popular Christian teachings. Before they met Jews, they already had an opinion about them, a bit like Poles do with refugees. This situation later determined the position of Jews in this society. So, they settle down as merchants and cannot enter other professions. Around the 10th century, the process of discrimination and social segregation began. It starts with professional limitations. They are not allowed to own land, teach, or be officials. Several activities and professions are beginning to be closed for them. Church synods of the not-yet-divided Christianity strengthen this process. The earliest anti-Jewish laws are segregationist ones. The first ones were created as early as the 4th century. First, there was a ban on interreligious marriages. The adoption of this ban may indicate that mixed marriages existed. Christians are prohibited from attending Jewish holidays. In the ancient world, these prohibitions worked very poorly. However, when the center of Christianity shifts to Western Europe, the cultural distinctiveness of the Jews is necessarily greater compared to the inhabitants of Italy, France, or Germany because they are Hellenized, and the costumes and customs of the people in the West are entirely different. Moreover, there is also a political memory of the fight against the Romans, so these Hellenistic customs are not liked in the West. Therefore, it is easier to segregate Jews. This process begins to increase around the 10th and 11th centuries. Segregation begins to be implemented more and more intensively. So, apart from the synod laws that have existed for several centuries and which no one was particularly concerned about, the state authorities are also starting to introduce segregation. It is interesting that, at the same time, Western European Jews adopt their laws, which also isolate them. For example,

the Talmud is beginning to be used practically. Because previously, among Jews, just like among Christians, synodal decisions and Talmudic rules, which were very sharp and isolating, were treated with a pinch of salt. The Talmud began to be written already in the 1st century AD and was disregarded. Jews were integrated. They went to theaters, baths, and Christian and pagan holidays and did not care about rabbis' orders. However, they start a similar process out of self-defense, when they begin to be isolated.

*They could also limit the outflow of followers to Christianity in this way...*

Of course. As a result of these processes, Jewish settlements or quarters began to emerge in Western Europe due to the separation of communities and, after the Crusades, ghettos.

*What did the Jews of that time do there? Trade and crafts?*

Mainly trade. Jewish activity in crafts was limited. The trade route from the Middle East through the Kingdom of Jerusalem to Western Europe was largely dominated by Jews. This place was the western terminus of one of the branches of the Silk Road, and the Levantine ports were crucial for trade with the Far East. The fall of the Crusader states and the expansion of Islam cut off these routes from the Mediterranean to the Jews. They then lost their primary job and had to focus on other areas. In Western Europe, usury has become a popular activity because it is the only economic niche that Christians do not dominate. This state created the stereotypical figure of the Jew-lender, which is the root of the “demonic Soros” of the far-right fantasy – the vision of a Jew who has money but does not work, in



the sense that he does not produce things is not a craftsman or farmer, does not sow or reap, but only deals with money and therefore has power over the powerful of this world. It was also one of the most important causes of the medieval pogroms. People were in debt to usurers, so it was profitable to either murder exile them, or at least burn their records and then these debts were necessarily unpaid.

*And what is the role of Jews in the emerging capitalism, since they are already involved in trade and finance?*

Their usury was the beginning of modern finance and banking, which developed first in the Mediterranean countries because they became indispensable facilities for sailors of various faiths. Ship owners paid a deposit to the moneylender. When they sailed to another port, they went to his friend, who was not necessarily a Jew, but often a Christian or a Muslim (even though Islam also prohibited this). The letter assured that the merchant or captain had left a sum to the usurer, so you pay him that amount, and he would pay you back and later return the favor with a similar service in the other direction. This process was the beginning of banking. There was no such practice in the settlements in the Rhine basin and France. Usury remained just usury. In the 17th century, banking houses were established throughout Europe, including Jewish ones, but at first, they were quite small. And precisely because there were so few of them, despite the tradition of segregation and discrimination, these few Jewish bankers were conspicuous. And this is the root of this conspiracy theory, which began with the demonization of royal factors, then the Rothschild banks and today finds another manifestation in the vision of the “demonic Soros.”

*One Soros is just one Soros, but five Soros are already the New World Order. When do these types of myths appear?*

In the 18th and 19th centuries, capitalism was created with the French Revolution, and the equalization of various groups before the law, the abolition of guild privileges professional restrictions, and a more free market reality gradually took shape. First, the Constituent Assembly passed an act containing freedom, equality, and fraternity slogans. All classes were given equal rights and, in a separate act, also Jews. There was also a discussion on women's equality on this occasion, but it has been dropped. However, when there were no more Jews separated by clothing and locked in the ghetto, a fearful fantasy appeared that, even though they no longer differed in appearance, they still maintained their bonds, infiltrated the authorities, and pulled the strings. The legend of world government has its source in the fears of opponents of the French Revolution. And this is also the beginning of conspiracy theories in general. The Freemason movement played a significant role, perhaps not in the outbreak of the revolution itself, but in its course, trying to organize it and put it into some framework. And therefore, all those who lost from the revolution, such as the clergy and aristocracy, hated the Freemasons and accused them of causing it. Which, of course, was a total simplification.

*But what is the relationship between Freemasons and Jews?*

A Jesuit escaped to England during the French Revolution when all religious orders in France were suppressed. His name was Augustin Barruel, and he wrote his qua-

si-memoirs there: Memories illustrating the history of Jacobinism. It was a conspiracy theory and the basis for all subsequent talk about a Jewish world government. He speculated that there was a continuity between the secret groups of magicians in ancient Babylonia and the current situation. That a group of Jews and Chaldeans then had secret knowledge and passed it on from generation to generation. The next incarnation of this group was the Templars, and thanks to them, it reached the present day. Currently, the activities of this group of initiates are carried out by Freemasons. And that these continuators of the Babylonian-Templar conspiracy created a secret world government. And he names various people who hate them, including the names of nine Jews that are members of this secret world government. He doesn't emphasize the anti-Jewish thread there. For him, the enemy is Freemasonry. It is a large work of three volumes, which began to gain popularity during the Romantic period.

*During the Romantic period, modern nations were created, and the Jews again did not fit in. Why? After all, religion does not necessarily exclude nationalism.*

Indeed, it does not rule it out. In France, a political civic definition of the nation has been adopted from the very beginning. So, a Frenchman is anyone who takes French citizenship. And that's basically how it is to this day. Throughout the 19th century, their nationalism was very progressive.

*Therefore, France should have absorbed the Jews even more thoroughly, and we know that this was not the case. So, where did the Dreyfus affair come from?*

From the counter-revolution. All those who began to criticize the revolution also began to attack what it brought with it. One of such elements was criticizing the equal rights of Jews, saying that they were unable to use it, that they abused it, etc. Interestingly, the same arguments could be heard in the discussion against feminists after 1989 in Poland. These are almost the same arguments.

*What were the subsequent stages of shaping the conspiracy concept of this “global Jewish government”?*

These three volumes by Barruel began to circulate in Romanticism. They were published in 1791, and already in 1803, they were translated into the main European languages, including Polish. Barruel was not taken seriously at first. He didn't gain fame. His memories began to function more as a literary concept. In the 1860s, however, the same plot was used by the German writer and spy working for the Prussian secret police, Hermann Goedsche. In 1868, he wrote the adventure and thriller novel *Biarritz*. This book contains chapters titled “The Jewish Cemetery in Prague” and *The Council of Representatives of the Twelve Tribes of Israel*. In this fragment, a group of friends, including a positive hero, a baptized Jew, comes to the area of the graveyard mentioned above at night. Suddenly, a group of rabbis appears, and the protagonists overhear their discussion on secretly organizing the world. As the conversation shows, all new achievements of the modernist world are their invention. This chapter, taken out of the context of the novel, which has an entirely different message, begins to function as a “true document” and simultaneously a conspiracy theory. It still exists today under various ti-

ties. And this is probably the most important root of the conspiracy theory about the “secret plots” of this “Jewish government.”

*Do the famous Russian “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” come from this text? Where does this tendency come from in Russia?*

In Russia, after the assassination of Alexander II, elites were terrified of any radical movements. Various initiatives to combat Narodniks, anarchists, and socialists were created in Okhrana. Activists of these aforementioned political currents were persecuted and forced to emigrate. They most often settled in France, England, or Switzerland. The Okhrana tried to monitor them, and in Russia, an extreme right-wing movement associated with Orthodox religious orthodoxy was established, the Union of Saint Michael the Archangel, which used, among others, falsehoods to discredit progressive activists. The Protocols had precisely this purpose. They were not an original work. The basis was a modification of a pamphlet against Napoleon III by the French satirist Maurice Joly, published in 1864. A group of Russian historians also found borrowings from Goedsche’s book. The Italian anthropologist Umberto Eco pointed to similarities with Eugene Sue’s novel *Les Mysteres du Peuple*, in which, however, the conspirators were Jesuits, not Jews. It is assumed that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* took their final form in 1899 or 1900. In 1903, they were published in the “Russkoye Znamya” newspaper, and in 1905, they were published as a book. Its distribution intensified after the revolution of 1905 when the Black Hundreds and Okhrana began to claim that there existed a global conspiracy led by Jews and they widely distribut-

ed the Protocols. This activity of the tsarist secret police resulted in a wave of pogroms, and the focus on the Jews was intended to distract the Russian population from the internal problems of the empire.

*And why were they so popular in Nazi Germany?*

They were brought there by white post-revolutionary refugees. Alfred Rosenberg, the main ideologist of the NSDAP and, incidentally, a native of Riga, became acquainted with the Protocols while studying in Moscow. Moreover, after World War I, a large group of German- and Russian-speaking “white” emigrants from Russia appeared in Germany, some of them including the mentioned Rosenberg, but also one of the leaders of the Black Hundred Union of the Russian People, Nikolai Markov, the founder of the Nazi organization Aufbau Max von Scheubner-Richter, tsarist general Wasyl Biskupski or the murderer of Vladimir Nabokov Piotr Szabelski-Bork – actively cooperated with the NSDAP. They were responsible for implementing the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the German-speaking world, which significantly influenced Hitler while writing *Mein Kampf*. In Poland after World War I, a belief was emerging in National Democrat circles that Jews had some incredible influence on the American government. The concept of Judeopolonia also appeared, i.e., the suspicion that a Polish-Jewish state would be established in 1918. In the 1930s, the National Democrats used anti-Semitic conspiracy theories to fight the Piłsudski regime and leftist tendencies, including any proposed changes in customs or norms of family life. All these elements carry over to the present day. Current concepts assume that Jews not only control the world government but also have a secret

agenda that involves fighting the family, religion, and nation and promoting multiculturalism, the left, and homosexuality. The same thing ran through Nazi concepts, but it can also be linked to traditional anti-Judaism. There was a constant accusation that Jews were a threat to religion and the family. The “Jewish spider” behind all the evil in the world is extremely necessary for conspiracy theories and the most lasting one as a unifying element because it explains why modern trends are evil and worthy of condemnation. The world Jewish government was supposed to act on all fronts. His branches include communists, capitalists, and anarchists, although this is a contradiction. These would be the direct predecessors of the Confederation MP Grzegorz Braun slogan, i.e., “German-Russian condominium under Jewish trust.”

*One of the above-mentioned elements of the fields of battle of the “New World Order” (NWO) against “normality” is, according to the far-right, the family. Related to this in anti-Semitic myths is the extraordinary sexualization of the image of Jews. Where did this thread come from?*

The source of this is mainly 19th-century German anti-Semitism, obsessed with the idea that Jews were spreading homosexuality, fornication and —generally— immoral behavior. An expression of such beliefs was Otto Weininger’s work *Sex and Character*, published in 1903. The author put forward the thesis that male features are related to morality and logic, while female features are vanity, greed, and lack of knowledge. He then attributed the predominance of “feminine” characteristics to the Jews, unlike the Christians. Weininger, by identifying female factors with Jewishness, introduced misogyny into anti-Semitism, and a new

thread began. Interestingly, he had Jewish roots, and these conclusions led him to suicide at the age of twenty-three. The classic image of such a sexualized Jew stalking a German woman would be *Jew Süß*, a Nazi propaganda film from 1940, directed by Veit Harlan, where a demonic and Machiavellian Jewish merchant wants only the power and charms of the noble German Dorothea. On the other hand, a motif, mainly literary, of a promiscuous Jewish woman finds its way from German society to Polish literature, for example, in Władysław Reymont's *The Promised Land*. The second clue is the Italian occultist and fascist Julius Evola. He, in turn, wrote that Southerners were feminized in general, and Jews were the most northern-living Southerners. And that is why two worlds must be distinguished – the North: solar, masculine, Aryan, brave, honorable, chivalrous, and the South: materialistic, mercantile, sensual, unable to control their impulses and corporeality. Also, in Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*, an extreme male-female opposition is outlined in the analysis of the Nazis. Tough Nazis, enclosed in such armor-suits-uniforms, and their women, who are either passive, weak, obedient, or deceptive, sick and bringing misfortune with their emotions and desires. These speculations can be considered the source of the contemporary narrative among the nationalist right, i.e., fear-filled fantasies about migrants who violate local girls. They are afraid that some black or Arab man will show up and hit on a Polish woman, who will, of course, succumb to his advances.

*What about homosexuality? Jacek Kochanowski and Marcin Starnawski tried to compare stereotypes and show that gays are becoming a new emanation of these anti-Jewish narratives. What do you think about this interpretation?*



This thread also begins with the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and German anti-Semitism. Homosexuality began to become publicly visible at the end of the 19th century. There are already some signs of fighting for the rights of this group. In 1919-1933, the Sexological Institute, a non-profit organization helping LGBT people, operated in Berlin under the leadership of a Jew from Kołobrzeg, Magnus Hirschfeld. He fought for the legalization of homosexuality and abortion as well as sexual education and, collected books on the topic and researched the issue scientifically. On May 5, 1933, students from the Berlin School of Physical Education, members of the National Socialist Union of German Students, occupied and plundered the Institute and burned the books and photos collected there, thus forcing a quick end to its activities. Hirschfeld was forced to emigrate and deprived of his German citizenship. Add to this Weininger and Evola's theories about feminized Southerners, and you already have the foundation for such an association—the feminine masculinity of the Jew and the feminine masculinity of the homosexual. Anti-Semitic stereotypes persist, sometimes only slightly changing their form.

*Will this continue to increase? Is there no end to this conspiracy narrative?*

I even see an increase in these threads, especially after September 11. At first, it looked as if the conspiracy narrative about Jews who knew in advance about the planned attack and saved themselves was absurd. Well, how could Islamic fundamentalists, haters of Jews and Israel, have warned the

Jews employed in the two towers? Nevertheless, it spread widely in the world of anti-Semites.

*Why?*

Hostility towards Islam is secondary. It seems to me that it is specific to the USA that anti-Semitism does not go together with Protestant fundamentalism, which is often filosemitic. Protestant fundamentalists read the Old Testament and, therefore, consider the existence of the Jewish state to be part of God's plan. The establishment of Israel as a state is eyewitness proof that this plan is being fulfilled. Therefore, they support every government of this country, whether social democratic or right-wing. In the United States, anti-Semitism was previously proclaimed by Catholic circles, although not ubiquitously because the Irish were not convinced by it. The very broadly understood constitutional right to freedom of speech, is carefully observed in the United States. You can publicly preach any nonsense, including anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, as long as you do not directly call for violence. The law does not prosecute them *ex officio*. If someone feels aggrieved by the preaching of this nonsense, they can file a civil lawsuit. If the defendant loses, the compensation or compensation can be very high. As happened with the leader of neo-Nazis, the author of the novel "The Turner Diaries," William Luther Pierce, who, having lost in such a trial, was forced to pay millions in damages, which led him to complete bankruptcy. Similarly, the preacher of the Auschwitz lie, David Irving, was legally forced to recant his lies. Then, crazy conspiracy theories appeared, created or compiled by an online publicist hiding under the pseudonym QAnon, who mixed up old threads. We have there the name

of the global conspiracy, “Kabbalah,” referring to Jewish culture. We have in this narrative fantasies about kidnapping children to obtain their blood, which is to be done not so much by Jews as by American democratic political elites, especially women active in politics. So, there is an appropriate name for the medieval provenance of the legend of blood and the NWO. QAnon’s scope exceeds former boundaries. It includes both Protestant fundamentalists, including Pentecostals, who are popular among Hispanic immigrants, and Catholics. This conspiracy narrative is a very forward-thinking syncretism, a postmodern theory that combines many different concepts. Its spread is a real threat to democracy in the US, and not only that, because it is spreading around the world, mainly through the anti-vaccine movement. However, if you want to observe the development of Nazism almost “live”, then follow the attitude of Poles towards refugees trying to cross the Polish-Belarusian border after 2015. This is precisely a repetition of the exact thought process. 52% of Poles support the introduction of a state of emergency. If you wanted to understand how it is possible that people were gassed several kilometers from their homes and people did not react – now we know. It’s about the whole mechanism of indifference that is built in people. Not even indifference, but hostility. I look through comments under articles. And I’m not even talking about right-wing magazines. I read how people are happy that migrants are dying at the border and do not enter Poland because if they did, terrible things would happen. You have a recreation of the exact same mechanisms. And then everyone is surprised that people lived on the outskirts of the extermination camps and “knew nothing.”

Alina Cała (1953) – social and feminist activist, historian, During the Communist times, she cooperated with the opposition Workers' Defense Committee. After 1989 she worked at the Warsaw Jewish Historical Institute. She specializes in the history of Polish-Jewish relations in the 19th and 20th centuries, including the history of anti-Semitism, national stereotypes, ideological movements among Jews, and the history of Jews in the post-war period. Author of many works, including *Assimilation of Jews in the Kingdom of Poland (1864-1897)* (1989), *The image of the Jew in Polish folk culture* (1992), *The Jew – the eternal enemy? Anti-Semitism in Poland and its sources* (2012).



# One hell of a hard-wired binary. With Ewa Majewska about the anti-feminism of fascists

*Why does the far right need the male-female binary so much?*

This question about binary codes is fundamental but also extremely difficult. The entire political spectrum is entangled in its forms, which are very uncomfortable for women. In my PhD, I analyzed political ideologies from extreme conservatism to relatively leftist ones like, for example, the Frankfurt School. Unfortunately, it turns out that Max Horkheimer and Karol Wojtyła say practically the same thing about divorce or contraception. This is very disturbing. But for me, the binary itself is not necessarily problematic. I can appreciate dialectical divisions that can be useful for cataloguing the world and for analysis. The fact that there are two organizing categories is not necessarily a problem in itself. In this sense, I am a bit of a modernist and a dialectician. The tragedy begins when violence, inequality, and different valuations are built into this binary. In a patriarchal system, femininity is produced from the position of lacking everything that a man has. Surprisingly, he is always equipped with reason, decision-making, and agency, and we build a woman by inverting this image. She, on the contrary, does not have reason, etc. Now, when I reread Hegel, I wonder about the Dialectics and the Weak

and the elements of sensitive, fragile, weak identity. I try to see to what extent they can be compared with the strong and rational ones; to what extent can we talk about equal participation in the creation of history by those heroes who ride on horseback and are highly visible and those multitudes of heroes and heroines whom no one will ever remember because we won't find them in the archives. After all, they couldn't write because they were black plantation enslaved people or women.

*And this particular right-wing and far-right binary? They attribute certain characteristics to both sexes, giving them specific roles, subject to a strong relationship of domination and violence...*

Apart from dealing with the Dialectics and the Weak, I also deal with forms of political agency not built from a position of strength and domination. Our idea of political agency is that "the dashing guy changes history." All other forms of agency have difficulty being recorded as making history. In fascism, it is a fundamental assumption that women do not make history. Men make history – women produce children. And make dinner. And do the cleaning. And laundry. And they pleasure this belligerent entity that goes to invade Poland and then returns home and has a child, dinner, bedding, and sex there. And all this is done from a position of absolute subordination. My problem is not only that they have different gender divisions in the fascist family. My problem is the historical narrative that will tell this, which not only petrifies this binary and the subordination that is inherent in it but also does not grant the "feminine" any political agency. It is as if the woman has been thrown out of the decision-making area. I have the impression that

this is a problem not only of conservatism but also of the left, anti-fascism, and certain forms of feminism because it seems to me that liberal feminism essentially inherits this understanding of agency from the conservative, traditional, Aristotelian vision of politics in which a woman is a passive negative complement to a man. Binary code never goes away on its own. It's not just that people have different relationships in families or relationships. There is a strong narrative about what it means to have agency, what it means to make history, and what it means to be agentic, which strengthens, petrifies, and pacifies all forms of revision of these roles. So, we have a double mechanism – ontological and more historiosophical-epistemological, which are intertwined. There is no woman and man. There is knowledge about women and men.

*So, in the fascist approach, such a caricatural and yet actual image of the role of a woman would be those placed in Lebensborn centers, places of breeding of "racially ideal" people?*

In a caricatured form, yes. Binary codes are very clearly placed in Aristotle, and leftists, progressives, even Hannah Arendt, all those friendly people in the history of philosophy who criticized fascism. Many do not revise this Aristotelian binary division into feminine and masculine, political and domestic, oikos and polis. We still live with this division. To exist as a zoon politikon, you still have to be that middle-class white guy who has been living in the polis for three generations. Otherwise, you simply become a second-rate person without political agency or even a tool, as in the case of enslaved people. Even those theories that try to grapple with and oppose fascism, inherit the anachronistic prejudices from two and a half thousand



years ago. The binary you're asking about is incredibly entrenched in our imagination, culture, political theories, and critical ones.

*Even in the somewhat feminist approach to fascism, in Klaus Theweleit's "Men's Fantasies"?*

Yes. Theweleit's problem is that he does not see that there were individuals among women who resisted or built alternatives to the Nazi model of pacified femininity. Theweleit does beautiful mimesis of the fascist division of gender roles, and we appreciate him for that because I think he is excellent in terms of describing what, in the worst way, the reduction of femininity to the role of an object used by masculinity can look like. In Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*, we are dealing with a very detailed reconstruction of various ideas and expectations of fascist men towards women and femininity. What is important to me is what types of images, references, and descriptions of women Theweleit offers us, by collecting fascist narratives, some of their letters home, and notes. This analysis teaches us about this nightmarish way of perceiving a woman. An essential element of this fascist imagination is also the division of women into good and evil. We have a German mother, a white woman, who is a walking innocence that can be reduced to caring and reproductive functions. And we have this raging communist woman who is sexualized, an object of desire for men. Still, at the same time, she is also evil incarnate and is subjected to the worst stereotypes, accusations, and total chauvinistic suspicion. We know this from the classic division into a virgin/mother and a prostitute/crone. However, in Theweleit's work, there is no consideration of alternative scenarios of femininity

– and this is the book’s shortcoming. Because of this, the book gives the impression that he is repeating this cultural trope that femininity is passive and subordinated to the work of culture, men, etc.

*However, I aim to analyze these constructions and their emanations in different eras to identify current and future conditions where another manifestation of fascism will manifest itself.*

But you can read even the most progressive communist narratives and find the same pattern. Of course, some communist stories about the family are very emancipatory and emphasize gender equality and liberation, with sexual freedom as an aspect that should also be available to women. However, we also have communist narratives, more institutional and state-based, in which there is a pattern similar to that of fascism, that the man will be the breadwinner of the family. The woman will still be engaged in professional work but mainly in caring for the children, and the mother is the primary provider of emotional warmth. What I am trying to show is that we need a vision of emancipated, alternative femininity because otherwise, we begin, consciously or subconsciously, to inherit this fascist pattern.

*So, have you also found this “fascist pattern” in yourself?*

Recently, I had such a fascist moment. It was pretty funny. That day, I worked several hours in a row, doing many things. I wrote a paper, prepared a speech, and had a seminar. In the evening, the person with whom I was having an affair contacted me, and he had an obvious wish for

us to talk via video. And I was tired of this online thing. But of course, I decided I wouldn't be rude and agreed to make the video call. It was so paralyzing and stressful for me. We agreed that this wasn't a good idea and ended the conversation. Two hours after this event, I started thinking about why I wasn't up to the challenge and could have been a better "lover." Then I woke up the following day thinking I shouldn't have to. My sense of obligation, that I have to fulfil a million roles and that I have to politely and obediently do what everyone wants me to do, is a classic fascist story about a woman. I have been a feminist for 20 years, and for even longer, I have been trying to fight fascism but also look at it analytically. And suddenly, despite all the criticism of me and my behavior, there is a readiness to submit to the norms of femininity without reviewing the conditions under which this happens. It wasn't like anyone forced me to do it. This decision was the internalized fascism in me. I think every woman and every feminist you know will tell you a million stories like this. The same applies to men. Many have told me how they involuntarily reproduce behavior from their fathers that I would call sinister. It overwhelms them, forcing them to suppress their emotionality to push themselves to reproduce some impossible ideal, ultimately leading them and society to a total crisis.

*And as a result, there are many more suicides among men than women...*

But this is irresponsible because they leave behind many people mourning for many years. It is something that many women would like to do but cannot. Most women would momentarily wonder whether their parents, part-

ners, children, and people around them will be devastated. It's very interesting to talk about what right-wingers, fascists, and incels are doing, but for me, it's even more interesting what's happening on the other, "our" side. Some critical discourses are so incredibly unempathetic that they do not create any space for us to feel overwhelmed and weak in the face of the expectations we have for ourselves. Most fantasies about anti-fascism look like this: we will ride in on horseback and take out this "Nazi scum," regardless of whether it is a "Nazi" in the form of a historical narrative, Carl Schmitt, or a street fascist. This form of struggle persists discursively, and a massive part of anti-fascist writing is downright warfare-like in style. In this context, Theweleit stands out nicely because he changes this assumption about strength and empowerment. However, he shows a certain softness on the researcher's part, which is valuable, in my opinion.

*The story about the demonic Nazi is very convenient. Because it is essentially a fascist dehumanization of the enemy...*

I have the impression that a policy based on hostility is a myopic policy. When we start looking for an enemy and dehumanizing him, we do precisely what fascist politics wants to achieve. Here, the Schmittian scheme of partisan politics and the state of exception operates, in which an "other" is necessary for the proper constitution of sovereignty outside the law. In Schmitt's case, these will be Jews. Today, they may be non-heteronormative people, refugees, or women. I have the impression that anti-fascism should not repeat this because the motivation of people who join fascist groups is that these people want to establish some sensible community because, for example, they feel that

various types of bonds between the inhabitants of a given country need to be reconstructed. For the extreme right, the best way is to scare everyone thoroughly and organize even the smallest elements of their lives in such a way that it is binary. That there is a strong hierarchy within it. We have a *pater familias* at the level of the family and home and a specific extrapolation of this figure in a broader political realm that is, preferably, a single sovereign. And then there is a caring but still quite cruel God who watches over everything and binds it all together. The role and place of women in all this is truly unenviable because this is a place where they can passively contribute to realizing this fantastic ideal of their homeland but not have any autonomy.

*Would you say that this fascist vision of the family is some form of shield against the world?*

For a man, yes. For a woman, no. Women are affected by the violent elements of the world at home in the form of violence from their partners. Family is experienced entirely differently by men and women. For a man it's a place where he can relax. Paweł Śpiewak described it very well in his article for "Res Publica" from 2004. The entire issue was about family. I remember being shocked that in 2004, it was possible to say that a family for a subject is where the subject returns and is soothed and calm. At that time, I was writing a report for Amnesty International on domestic violence against women, and to compile this report, I looked for very different statistics on violence. I looked at the police and the prosecutor's office data, and it turned out that about one-third of households in Poland are violent homes, where women, and often children, experience beatings, psychological terror, economic violence, intimidation, etc.

I thought this subject in Śpiewak's text is fortunate because he is a man, which is why he is so happy. Of course, there are families, not only for the man but for all its members, that are safe and supportive, but essentially, this traditional model is a reality in which violence from the outside world is transferred to the home and unloaded on people who are not at home much. On the other hand, this violence ceases to be experienced by the subject who returns to this house from the outside world. This violent man has a terrible time outside and comes home and delivers all this load to his family. Very rarely are people able to stop this cycle of transmitting violence. From this perspective, the family is a shield of security only for those who are strong in it, while for those who are weak, it is hell.

*However, some women enter this fantasy out of their own free will...*

A fundamental reason for this is habit and upbringing. We live in a specific type of society that perfectly reproduces these violent mechanisms. Judith Butler writes about this very nicely in *Gender Trouble*. She notes how violence is committed against all those people who are gender non-conforming, who do something like acts of gender disobedience. Suppose you have a queer person, as Michał Witkowski has described in *Lubiewo*, in a dress, and with an umbrella and marching happily through the city in high heels and full make-up. In that case, it is a fact that this person will most likely be called names or beaten not because he somehow asks for it but because he disrupts the binary division into women and men, which is very disturbing to all "normies." There is a psychoanalytic answer to this by Julia Kristeva and Mary Douglas:

the borderland, a subjective, mixed place, is a space that arouses great fear because it destabilizes the established structure of the world. A drag queen walking through the city simply disrupts these codes. There is an attachment to the existing divisions, but on the other hand, everything that disturbs them causes great concern. Many acts of domestic violence can be explained by such terror that, for example, a man sees his partner as an object of sexual pleasure. Suddenly, it turns out that she is also an independent mind and begins to comment on political events quite rationally. I imagine this must be very scary for a great many men. Because they have become familiar with this woman figure as someone with whom they have sexual pleasure, and suddenly, it turns out that this person begins to function just like him, like a thinking subject. There are specific codes, norms, and rules to which we are accustomed, but we are also accustomed to order. If these two things are disrupted, it causes a violent reaction in many people.

*He also does one more thing. It shows that you can perform your life in a completely different way. You know, being a father of a family is also torture, all these expectations – supporting children and wife financially – loans, schools, interviews, etc. And he looks at this queer person and thinks, not only does he not have to do any of these things, and he's having fun, but he's also mocking me...*

This description is the old-fashioned topic of jouissance and Žižek's analysis of envy of those that simply derive pleasure from having fun. Fascism seems to me to be the doctrine of very sad people. I was recently talking to a friend, who is a bit of a communist and anti-fascist, about

how we're having such an excellent time when it comes to interpersonal relationships and sexuality. The moral was that this is the best anti-fascism you can imagine. Adolf Hitler would have been very sad if he found out that 70 or 80 years after he had invaded Poland, women here had an erotic life that was not ordered in the way he wanted, which is very autonomous and with which they were delighted. Reich, Fourier, and other utopians often focused on the liberation of the body and sexuality as essential elements in the fight against fascism. They claimed that it resonates very much with our current experience of the world, that there is some liberating element in pleasure. The world of our native fascism is pure martyrdom and necropolitics.

*But fascism promises not only death but also expansion and community...*

What is important here is the nation and its biopolitical, very persuasive story that we will only be strong as individuals when our community is strong. And this power is understood not as joy, intelligence, or the ability to create and receive works of art but as biological strength. Hence the interest of fascism in sport. It is interesting because both fascism and Marxism are interested in sports. For example, the first wave of reception of Herbert Marcuse in France were physical education teachers and scientists from the Academy of Physical Education... But the image of national strength, a robust and causative entity, also female, because women participated in the Olympic Games and the obsession for the community to be physically strong, is an essential part of fascism. They understand something here that individualistic liberals, who see the world and the people in it as a kind of Robinson Crusoe,



do not understand. Fascism is a little more intelligent than individualism because it sees and understands people as social beings. The pleasant warmth that fascist ideology arouses in the hearts of many people lies in the fact that it includes the pleasant warmth of family and social privacy. Sara Ahmed, an anti-colonial queer feminist from London, wrote the book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, in which she talks about fascist groups that, although they support hatred, are themselves cemented by love. This perception is an alarming chapter in her book, which is generally lovely because suddenly, you have this situation where all these Nazis are people who love each other very much. Some love their nation. Others love their community. Of course, if someone has a different skin color, they are no longer part of this community, and that person must be hated. They have a binary understanding of reality and are subordinated to these codes.

*At the same time, this very nationalistic and conservative understanding of community and family, even without any real connections with fascist organizations, is becoming more and more popular. The us-them binary is becoming a key category of the typical attitude toward the world...*

Hanna Świda-Zięba, in a research paper from 2005, writes about the expectations and values of contemporary youth. She concluded that the “youth is now conservative.” In my opinion, this interpretation was wrong. Research shows that young people put family first. Only then do they prioritize matters such as a good job, earnings, and personal freedom. These people were children when the neoliberal transformation took place in Poland. Throughout their lives, they have seen how public institutions ensuring a mini-

mum of social security are reduced to shreds and how capital is authorized to prey on human bodies in a predatory way. During this time, Solidarity elites and pro-social ethical values were utterly devalued. In such conditions, if we ask young people what their mainstay is, they will say family because it is the only thing that has not fallen apart yet. And, of course, they will say that they want to have a family because this is the only institution that they know from their own experience that, despite violence and inequality, will provide a minimum of security, and it will not fall apart so easily. That this may lead to conservatism is a reasonable deduction, but the assumption that this means conservatism is an entirely baseless conclusion. By the way, the sense of community and the community itself in the fascist doctrine is highly superficial. The same skin color or origin does not make us close to anyone. An enormous emphasis on affection cements the deficits in social knowledge under fascism. Please note that the Law and Justice party policy in recent years has been both political and procedural and an affective state of exception. Since 2015, we have been constantly subjected to shock therapy related to moral or symbolic issues. There is no moment of rest. This affective state of exception is not just decorum. It provides coherence to the narrative about the community that is essentially falling apart. Women are important as mothers, an embodiment of the Virgin Mary, whilst simultaneously they can be treated as objects. Therefore, the right-wing narrative is based on contradictions, and is inconsistent, and patchy.

*And what role does the Catholic Church play in spinning these narratives?*

The Church made one important change in the 1970s. Karol Wojtyła wrote a series of books on love and male-female relationships – e.g. *Love and Responsibility*. Imagine that with the deficit of sexual education at that time, because the Polish state was not dealing with this topic in the Polish People’s Republic at all, Wojtyła. Suddenly emerged as the beacon of sexual education in Polish society. He proposed the radical thesis that a man cannot leave a woman unsatisfied sexually, that marital sex should be satisfying for both parties. I wondered why there was such a huge accession of young people to the Catholic Church a decade later. The “Solidarity” movement itself does not explain this fully. While analyzing Wojtyła’s texts for my doctorate, I realized that he provided a completely equalitarian story about intimate relationships. At least an appearance of equality was proposed, in which men and women have certain obligations towards each other. In my opinion, it was a sexual revolution. While in other countries, such a turn was introduced by Marxist circles, feminists, anarchists, and artists, in Poland, part of this essentially egalitarian change was achieved through the progressive narrative of the Church. This paradox shows that political divisions are not so rigid. We also did not have the sexual revolution of ‘68, and this is also an element that allows this sad fascism to occupy Poland, making it so difficult to resist.

*Or maybe it's a bit like this: if we can't give you redistribution or even a liberal career myth, we'll give you male superiority over women...*

This is as old as time and very common. I feel like it would be much harder to do this if these “witches” were coordinated with each other. Once they establish a trade

union, it is very difficult to get hold of every single one of them. And similarly, this discourse of multi-threaded and multi-level hatred is much easier to dismantle in a situation where there is a narrative that is not only slightly different but is also a clear alternative to the mainstream. This is something I miss in Poland. I am a big fan of our domestic feminist movements and the great mobilizations that women are making, even in a pandemic, to oppose the abortion ban. However, I am a bit sad that as soon as some terrible threat fades, there is little of this solidarity and community left. We also accept a lot of behavior in workplaces and in intimate relationships that is no longer acceptable in other countries, sexism, mobbing, verbal or physical violence, and this is an element that educates us to be submissive in every situation.

*Directing men's attention to women as objects of aggression benefits a specific social layer that is not disturbed by this aggression...*

I am a supporter of rather heterodox explanations. Of course, economic deficits are an element that would justify such patriarchal tendencies. Still, another element is the belief about who a man is and who he should be, which has something to do with economics and being cool and what it means to have an attractive body. Economics determines these matters to some extent, but on the other hand, the transclass nature of domestic violence is clear. Even men with high salaries do it. I understand that much of this lies in the very essence of capitalism, which constantly pushes us to want more and more and creates constant frustration that cannot be satisfied, which, men often take out on women. But economic deficits will never fully explain

why someone beats his wife. I have the impression that the mechanisms of violence, so highly valued by patriarchal fascism, are so challenging to unlearn because they are common and at our fingertips. Even very cultured and polite people find it easier to get angry at something than to think something through or wait out this moment of anxiety. There is also gender inequality here. When someone shouts at me, and I respond similarly, it arouses surprise. It turns out that my screaming and men's screaming are two completely different behaviors. In it, they supposedly show their character and strength, and I show hysteria and uncontrollable emotions.

*What about this strong opposition from the far right to anti-violence conventions? Is it more about defending the man's role in the family or does this violence take the form of structuring the family?*

In fascism and various right-wing political ideologies, the traditional family model is sacred, and at this point, any interference is prohibited. For example, suppose I now submit a bill stating that every family must have a dog. In that case, it will be immediately torpedoed by the far right, perhaps even with the same aggressive enthusiasm as the anti-violence conventions.

*Why?*

Because it will violate the coherence and structure of the classic family. Full-stop. I think we are dealing here with a ritualized family religion. It doesn't matter what you interfere with. What matters is that you interfere. The right wing's resistance to anti-violence laws comes

primarily from the fact that the family is what it is and is supposed to stay that way. Secondly, family is a private matter. They understand private as separate from the public. This dichotomy is an essential element of any conservative ideology. The public and private spheres are divided. It is a kind of fuse for the fascist's mental structure. His world will collapse if you mix these two registers. Of course, they mix it themselves. Interference in whether I can sleep with someone or not, or terminate a pregnancy or not, is a very brutal entry from the political level into my home and even into my bedroom and my body. And this is a violation of the wall that divides what is private and what is public. However, these are exceptions. Strong theories of sovereignty must have exceptions that strengthen and constitute them. But the option is that I want to be protected from my partner's violence by the state. I want to be able to call a telephone number so that someone will come and save me if my closest person or my own family decides to murder me. This option is a form of interference, crossing the wall between private and public, which is unacceptable to a fascist. One thing is family as a tradition. The other fantasy is – family as something separate from the political world. And thirdly, of course, it's about male-female relations and not letting these women get lost in their heads.

*I would base my point on Stafford Beer's cybernetic maxim that "the purpose of a system is what it actually does." The energy economy must be sustained. I don't want to believe that there isn't some purposelessness of the multisector system's actions to preserve this violence.*

You know, a man is supposed to be a strong person who doesn't get bothered by anyone. Due to anti-violence con-

ventions, the motif of a man who has absolute power and strength is significantly distorted by the possibility of state intervention. The binary construction between feminine and masculine breaks down here. This interference in the household disrupts the composition of masculinity set against femininity constituted by the fact that we exclude and oppress women. Remember how ancient this model is. For at least 2500 years, starting from Aristotle, we have been harping on about these unfortunate binary differences: female-male and private-public in all political discourses. After all, thanks to Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle was constituted as the main ontologist of social reality. I really want to express my belief that the antiquity and incredible durability of these divisions, repeated in billions of everyday political and private performances, have strengthened the power of this discourse that organizes the world for us.

*Well, to summarize our considerations in this conversation, do you think that we are really threatened by fascism here and now?*

I will answer you with an anecdote. In 2005, Aleka Polis and I were invited to Weimar for the “Achtung Polen kommen” festival. Kuba Szreder, the curator, suggested making a documentary, preferably about Warsaw and Weimar. Well, in January 2005, we started to analyze it. First, we followed obvious leads: Weimar, Goethe, and Schiller. Suddenly, we were talking about the current situation in Poland, and we realized that Poland was heading towards fascism. We checked the statistics of unemployment, dissatisfaction with the political situation, disappointment with the European Union, and how Poles feel inferior to the West, and this led us to the conclusion that fascists

will win the elections in October. We started asking various people in Warsaw and Weimar who might have been threatened by this fascism about the similarities between Poland at that time and the Weimar Republic. We asked migrants, anti-fascist activists, queer people, and women if they saw any parallel between Weimar in the 1930s and Warsaw in 2005. And three-quarters of people told us that we were just crazy. A Weimar antifascist told me directly that we were hysterical. I replied that I accepted this epithet with dignity, as it was historically applied to women like me. After the premiere of this movie, the guy apologized to me. He said he was supposed to leave that day but postponed his departure to apologize to us. The premiere of our film took place on the day when Lech Kaczyński was confirmed as the President of the Republic of Poland and a few weeks after the parliament was elected, in which LPR, Samoobrona, and PiS held a large majority, and created a coalition in the Sejm. People then started calling us Casandras. The experience of making this film was essential to me. Because every other person, journalist, or politician could have read the same statistics and come to the same conclusions as Aleka and I did in January 2005. Meanwhile, everyone was convinced that the PO would win, liberals would rule, and it would be nice. The most essential thing in making this film was hitting the wall of unwillingness to accept that specific fascist trends may return.

*And wasn't this effect of disbelief the result of the lack of these historical props, flags, uniforms, and swastikas?*

We were told straight: "No, girls, it's impossible. This is history. Fascism is a closed chapter." There was resistance. The slogan "Never again" did the worst job because people



believed in it. Maybe three people told us openly – yes, I’m afraid it turn out as you say because these are always a few key statistics. Unemployment. Disappointment. In my opinion, fascism can always be reborn. It is a timeless phenomenon, a social and psychological tendency repeating itself in different places and moments. Of course, there was one Holocaust. But it was only one way of killing people. Entire populations were murdered in different ways in many sections of history in various eras and geographical spaces, as Enzo Traverso and Achille Mbembe show. Today, we are so ahead that I don’t have to explain the similarities between the 1930s and now. I can focus on talking about the details of the process and not, once again, presenting analogies that are obvious to me. It is a comfortable position because I have stepped out of the role of Cassandra, and I am no longer some crazy woman, but I can calmly discuss what this new fascism might look like.

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Fags are the main enemy  
of the Fatherland.  
With Jacek Kochanowski  
about fascist homophobia

*Do you agree with the thesis that homophobia has entered the Polish public sphere, substituting anti-Semitism?*

In a sense, yes. Attempts to mobilize voters with slogans of defending threatened national identity and cultural purity or opposing “strangers” are visible, and in the right-wing narrative, this “stranger” in Poland has the face of a gay, lesbian, or trans person. It is easy to come across language that is hateful towards homosexuals in government-related magazines. The status of heterosexuality as the only “healthy,” “proper,” and “natural” orientation and the homophobia rooted in Polish society make it easier to use the “LGBT issue” as an instrument in political struggle. Discrimination against gays and lesbians does not only mean the lack of recognition of same-sex relationships as legal or denying homosexual couples the right to adopt children, but there are situations of being fired from work, breaking off contact with the family, harassment by neighbors, and even destruction of property and beatings. For many Polish homosexuals, the most sensible choice is emigration. It’s hard not to see the analogy.

*Why is homosexuality so problematic for the political right? Especially the male part. What bothers them?*

Here are some answers. One of them may be related to their traditionalist view of the world. In their ideology, the heterosexual and heteronormative family is the basis of society. They read books by Roman Dmowski and Giertych family, where this is mentioned. This reason is a visible, more obvious cause. However, on the other hand, if we refer to various texts in queer studies or simply turn to psychoanalysis, there is also repression. These are primarily homosocial groups and associations. Yes, women do join there, but they are often an exception. The rule is that these are primarily male communities. Therefore, there are various types of relationships and tensions, including erotic ones, and homophobia is simply their denial. Since the 1990s, there have been several reports written by people who joined nationalist organizations and proved that various events of both erotic and homosexual nature take place in their ranks.

*Really? Is there really such a tendency?*

Being gay is not strictly associated with any ideology. Homosexuals represent a full spectrum of political views, just like in society as a whole. So, I don't see any contradiction, and I'm not at all surprised by the presence of gays, lesbians, or bisexual people in the fascist movement. In Poland, we hear about this activity anonymously or through rumors in far-right groups. In the West, the far right has a different approach to homosexuality. There are even openly homosexual politicians and activists, such as Milo Yannopoulos or AfD spokeswoman Alice Wiedel.

There, gays and lesbians are tempted to support the far right because it would defend them against Islamists. When I published pro-refugee posts, I often received comments from gay friends saying, why are you defending Islam? It will come and ban homosexuality, and they will murder our people. Of course, trying to show that Islam is not its most fanatical version and that there are quite a lot of communities there that accept LGBT people made no sense. If anyone has read medieval Arabic literature, they will know that homosexuality existed there a long time ago and with much fewer problems than in Europe at that time. We also know gays in the Catholic hierarchy, as Polish former priest Krzysztof Charamsa told us a lot about it, confirming that such people thrive in the Vatican, so why not on the extreme right? Additionally, fascist ideology, full of slogans of military brotherhood and a strong male community, suits people who are anxious, withdrawn, and lost. There are many such people among gays. People who are unsure of their identity. Sometimes, to divert attention from themselves, they become great advocates of homophobia. I deny my desires so much that I come to the point where I start to fight them not in myself but in reality around me. In the USA, almost all famous leaders in the fight against homosexuality were, sooner or later, caught engaging in sexual acts with men.

*And apart from denial, are there other reasons for such hostility?*

There is also a third explanation, which is fundamental to our conversation. Fascists are groups whose ideology is based on Schmitt's concept of the enemy. In the past, in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, they were Jews. Currently,

they are homosexuals, Muslims, or migrants. I am deeply convinced that no one in the Law and Justice party leadership has anything against gays. Still, homophobia is an idea that can be mobilized in society following the oldest principle of power, i.e., divide et impera. These three interpretations – traditionalist values, denial of urges, and identification of the enemy – create a conglomerate of pathological functioning of far-right groups in the context of homosexuality.

*Yet, this choice of enemy is not accidental, but has an ideological specificity...*

We must remember that, like any social phenomenon, this reluctance does not have a single cause. On the one hand, it is the denial I was talking about, but on the other hand, it is based on ideological roots straight from fascist Germany or Italy. In their fantasy, the fascist is a warrior, a soldier. Their groups were very homosocial, consisting almost entirely of men in militarized militias. In such a group, all horizontal relationships threaten the relationship with the Leader. Rudolf Diels, the first head of the Gestapo, reports a conversation in which Hitler reportedly said: “Look, if I had a choice between a lovely but incompetent girl as a secretary and one who was suitable but hideous, I would certainly choose the incompetent one. So, if homosexuals took power and influence, Nazi Germany would be in the hands of these creatures and their lovers.” Himmler wanted to create the so-called Mannerstaadt – a state whose goal would be, as George Mosse wrote: “the cooperation of men forming the commune as the ruling elite.” Homosexuals, presented as the third gender, had no place in it. Here, we return to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s theory. Where

there are societies consisting primarily of men, e.g., at the beginning of the industrial era, when women were not in the public sphere and politics, academia, or the economy was simply for men, there is always an attempt to displace homosexuality, which in these societies of course, occurs. Additionally, in fascism, the family is intended for reproduction, giving birth, and shaping new warriors for the cause, not for any individual romantic or erotic satisfaction.

*So, is it the fault of the ideology of war?*

There are two models of societies. One is based on cooperation and joint creation – the other is militarised, whose goal is defense or attack. Military societies are totalistic, i.e., everyone must share the same view, all differences in the face of the enemy that threatens us are blurred, and the primary purpose of our existence, actions, social institutions, and individual activity is defense or attack. In the case of fascists, there was also ethnic cleansing and the building of Lebensraum. Every fascist is a potential soldier, utterly subjected to the orders of the commander and the Leader. He is not allowed to have horizontal relationships, and the only community they should achieve with other men is, as in Jünger works, dying together – Thanatos, not Eros. To kill and die, they must be in connection with the Homeland with a capital H, with the Leader with a capital L, with the Idea with a capital I, and not with each other. In this vertical social hierarchy, there is no chance for any horizontal relationships to occur because even marriage is for procreation, not for love. But the problem of homosociality also returns, where the goal is military relationships, not pleasure. The fascists even forbade the rape of women in the conquered areas, so there was no

room for any excess of pleasure, even violent pleasure. You would rather kill than rape. The racial war knight's armor body had no right to interact like this. You are supposed to compete with each other in society, not fuck each other. You are supposed to kill your enemies, not have sex with each other. The only penetration you may have is through the use of the bayonet.

*You mention the fascist fantasy of family. Do you see any connections with the current situation in this matter?*

We have a similar trend of increasing popularity of far-right movements in Germany in the 1930s and Poland in the last thirty years. In both situations, this fantasy of family appears as a fantasy of the basic social unit when everything around it is falling apart. In the second half of the 19th century, rapid social changes – urbanization, industrialization, and the inability to give narrative to them by major religions – caused people to lose support for the old values. The consequences of World War I deepened the whole situation: weakening of the state, border changes, internal social and ethnic conflicts, and the threat of a Bolshevik revolution. The nationalist right emphasized *das Volk* (the nation), the purity of race and blood, and the role and sanctity of family life. The Weimar Republic was increasingly attacked for allowing excessive sexual promiscuity. Jews and homosexuals were accused of lowering German morale and, above all, of leading an action aimed at destroying the Aryan race and reducing its population.

*How does this relate to Poland in the 20th and 21st centuries?*

Politicized homophobia is a tool for defending the “threatened nation” in the context of contemporary changes in the political and cultural sphere. In times of precarization of work, turbo-capitalism and the breakdown of public education, bankruptcy of the health service, and a corrupt state, Poles have only one “pillar” left – the family. The father and mother will help and lend money, the brother will give you a ride, the brother-in-law will repair your broken sink, the grandson will buy you groceries, etc. This fantasy is their mainstay in the chaos of this world. The dream of the family as a safe refuge in a horrible world becomes a central fantasy, resulting in even the name of the former far-right party – the League of Polish Families. So, right-wingers warn against moral decline, nihilism, promiscuity, or the breakdown of the integrity of the family and its traditional model. Gays and lesbians have become a symbol of contemporary emancipation, moral transformations, and changes in the value system. Moreover, just as Jews were once associated with wealth and greed, today gays and lesbians are associated with the “corrupt West,” and their sexual orientation is treated as a whim of the intelligentsia or middle class, foreign to the “common people” and threatening their “pure morality.” In this context, when someone is shown as the enemy of the family, the one who attacks by seducing or “sexualizing” children, it has serious consequences.

*So, are our turbulent times to blame?*

I would say that the problem is not when such a traditionalist idea appears in the fascist movement but rather when it becomes attractive. Then, it opens the opportunity to recruit more people and achieve a more significant social



impact. On the other hand, we must remember that despite everything, in the 1990s, those years of chaos, Roman Giertych did reactivate the All-Polish Youth, but it did not have any real significance as a political force. People were confused then and had to organize their lives in the new economic conditions during periods of high unemployment and the collapse of state-owned enterprises. However, since 2005, PiS has adopted this fascist phraseology. For them, the main enemy is “LGBT ideology.” They took literally the assumptions we talked about a moment ago – traditionalism, homophobia, and the nationalization of the woman’s body, which was already very clearly visible in the Third Reich. In 1936, the Federal Department of Defense to Combat Abortion and Homosexuality was established at the Gestapo Headquarters in Berlin, headed by Joseph Meisinger. It is characteristic that the fates of non-heterosexual people and women go hand in hand. And this Nazi nationalization of the female body, that the state will decide what to do with her body, we still have today.

*And so we come to the flagship opponent of Polish right-wing populists, i.e., “LGBT/Gender ideology.” What exactly is it?*

I feel sad that I have had to explain such matters for 30 years. Gender itself is simply cultural gender, i.e., everything that culture builds on biological sex and all the processes and dimensions in which culture transforms this biological sex so that a man is a man and a woman is a woman in a normative, social meaning. Well, the right-wing sees masculinity as a kind of monolith. You jump out of your mother’s womb and become a man or a woman, but gender has nuances in some elements.

*So maybe let's point them out to make it more transparent?*

A man is a person who has a penis. But if you look around your friends, it turns out that this masculinity has different patterns. One will be in the style of a lumberjack. Others will adopt behavioral traits that are culturally and stereotypically considered feminine, and this difference is described by the word gender. When my team and I examined masculinity from Russia through South Africa, Portugal, Spain, Poland, and the Czech Republic, it turned out that a different pattern of masculinity dominates in Russia and a completely different one in Italy. There are places where it is believed that a man should leave the family home as soon as possible and become independent. In Italy, it is recognized that a son can live with his mother as long as possible, which is not considered an insult to his masculinity. And next. In our country, any guy who has sex with another guy is recognized as gay, regardless of how he self-identifies. However, in Mexico, a man is only gay if he is passive in anal sex. As long as he is active, he is just a guy, which fits the local “macho” stereotype.

*And what about clothing?*

In sociology, we understand the body in a rather broad sense. It is the way of behaving, moving, speaking, and dressing, and all this is also regulated by culture and is an element of this gender. Currently, the masculinity model is changing in the world. It is not a crisis. There is only a change in the cultural pattern. We can play with them more easily. We don't have to worry about them so much, which allows us to take a breath and not run to a psychiatrist

asking what's wrong with me because I take care of my clothes and use cosmetics. Am I, not a man?

*So, who calls this social change an ideology, and why?*

People who oppose this social change. I am convinced that Kaczyński or Ziobro, or people like that, don't care much about cultural changes. The problem, however, is that they use such changes politically. We were born in a world with specific patterns, but they have changed, especially after 1989. And suddenly, it may turn out that a person who is 80 years old today lives in a completely different world than we, 40 years younger. Let's add political and economic changes to this. Therefore, such a person may be afraid and feel insecure. Politicians brazenly take advantage of this, even if they don't care about "gender ideology" and "LGBT ideology." It starts in the sermons. Some preachers, such as Father Dariusz Oko, specialize in this topic. In parish announcements, we hear about, for example, a lecture by Mrs. XYZ on gender threats or a group of parents meeting on how to protect children from LGBT ideology. And so on, week after week, non-stop.

*You mentioned priests. Isn't this anti-LGBT offensive intended to cover up sexual crimes committed by the clergy?*

It's a bit like that. The church is afraid of losing its influence and money. They are scared of court judgments in cases involving priests' paedophilia, which may result in the Church going bankrupt. So, they need to occupy the minds of the believers with something. The second thing is everyday functioning. All the churches they built must be maintained. The clergy must be financially supported.

It costs money! Archbishop Leszek Sławoj Głódź breeds deers on his estate. This costs money, too. So, you must divert the believer's attention and focus it on something else. According to the principle – I will show you the enemy and protect you from him. As Benedict XVI said, build the church's image as a besieged fortress. Tadeusz Rydzyk made his position using such a narrative. I think it was easier in Poland to study cultural patterns a quarter of a century ago than now. In the 1990s, Agnieszka Graff wrote the book "World Without Women," in which she drew attention to the process of language theft. We then discussed things like an "embryo" or a "fetus." Now, there is a "child under the heart." Graff wrote that a process is beginning in Poland, which is going to result in the idea of the "conceived child" dominating the debate. In the next stage, in the 2000s, it turned out that we should not say "pregnancy" but a "blessed state." And now we hear how Sebastian Kaleta, considers it a scandal that the New Left MP Magdalena Biejat, who was the head of the family parliamentary commission, uses the word "fetus" instead of "conceived child." So it's precisely the opposite of what was the norm in the 1990s. Back then, we were surprised that church language was being introduced. Now they are trying to prohibit any exceptions to their "norm." Cultural change is not always progress. For Poland, it turned out to be a colossal backlash. It is getting worse in academia, politics, and schools. In the 1990s, Kazimierz Kapera was fired from the government for calling homosexuals perverts. And then came 2005 and Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, who, for the first time in the history of the Third Polish Republic, used homophobic language as Prime Minister. In 2019, the entire election campaign was based on homophobia.

*It turns out that homosexuals have replaced refugees as the public enemy. Why is this happening?*

I think the attitude of the episcopacy influenced this. Due to the refugee fever, the clergy criticized PiS's approach and the threat of immigrants. Pastoral letters appeared to defend refugees, resulting from pressure from the Vatican. However, when it comes to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people, there is agreement between the ultra-right and the Church. This alliance is important because the transmission belt works best in ideological matters, and this agreement is the most durable. Jarosław Kaczyński wants to build a society terrified of gays, blacks, and "strangers" who will come here and "dominate us." Victor Orbán did the same thing, only he used chauvinistic, xenophobic, anti-immigrant, and anti-Islamic language. Hungary was on the migration route, and that's probably why. Polish right-wingers tried the same pattern but used the threat of LGBT people.

*Is it effective?*

The political change will be relatively easy to reverse. All it takes is for the opposition to win the elections, and we'll be done with it. It will be more challenging to introduce legal changes, also concerning non-heterosexual people, like civil partnerships or the right to abortion, because PiS currently appoints its representatives to the Constitutional Tribunal, and they have a nine-year term of office. They will block any attempts to change this matter. However, the most challenging thing will be changing what has happened in people's mentality.

*I have the impression that the policy that the Polish government implements towards sexual minorities is primarily copied from Russia...*

If Zbigniew Ziobro takes over Kaczyński's legacy and is already trying to do it, presenting himself as a radical, this is precisely the direction we would be heading. I would like to remind you that not only Russia but also Lithuania and the Baltic countries impose this type of propaganda ban. It's the exact same mechanism.

*Where does this fear come from?*

Judith Butler coined the term "compulsory heterosexuality." It has become the default behavior. When we are born, the entire social system and its institutions assume that we are heterosexual. Well, no mother talks over a male newborn: my god, what a beautiful fag he will be. The key here is to govern, above all, human bodies, and concerning men, as Foucault wrote, it means creating a body-machine that can physically exert itself because it was made when capitalism was based primarily on muscle power. And when it comes to women, all their activity is limited to giving birth because they need to provide as much labor as possible, the so-called human resources. Biopolitics, which was supposed to enable efficient management of society, led to the exclusion of homosexual behavior in a rigorous way, including the entire human sexuality under supervision, which was not the case before, even in the Enlightenment, because people at that time did not particularly care about the Church's teaching in this area. Therefore, we are left with a legacy of modernity and the process of industrialization, which we are only now beginning to discover.

*And is this fear politically useful?*

Look at the last PiS election campaign. It was a classic fascist campaign, replacing Jews with lesbians and gays. I propose such an experiment – if, in Kaczyński’s various speeches during the election campaign, we replaced LGBT people with Jews: the Jewish way of life, Jewish ideology, and typical Jewish lack of patriotism, we would notice that the PiS leader used purely fascist rhetoric and exploited the entire far-right electorate. And that’s why the Confederation party or other far-right entities are failing to achieve better election results because Kaczyński has stolen their whole ideology. If we talk about fascism in contemporary Poland, we should not focus on those poor “five-person organizations” such as the National-Radical Camp or All-Polish Youth or on Mr. Bosak shaking his ass in Dancing with the Stars. We should focus on PiS, whose central message is built around a fascist narrative. Anyone who deals with discourse and language analysis can prove this quickly.

*Well, you noticed that the problem is not these groups but their penetration into the mainstream. Almost one-third of the country is covered by so-called “LGBT ideology-free” zones. It was the same in Russia, where such resolutions were adopted region by region until finally, a nationwide law against homosexual propaganda was created...*

This process is building an enemy. Another thing is what society thinks about it. Fortunately, the public did not buy it because somehow they did not vote for PiS en masse, no matter what the propagandists told us. The votes for Kaczyński’s party were mainly due to the desire to main-

tain the obtained social transfers. Why anti-LGBT zones? Because there was an order from above. It started more or less during the election campaign when these resolutions began to be adopted when Kaczyński thundered that we were being attacked by groups hostile to the family. These resolutions were adopted primarily in places where PiS governs or has the most significant influence. These “LGBT-free zones” say nothing about Polish society. They say something more about PiS apparatchiks willing to vote for whatever the regional cacique orders them to do. I can imagine their regional meetings where they could say – listen, comrades, we are fighting the enemy here, and now we need to adopt appropriate resolutions. I think they very well read the central message of PiS from the 2019 parliamentary election campaign, that fag is the main enemy of the homeland. Because there were no resolutions against feminists there. Supposedly, it was supposed to be in defense of the family, but no matter what they called it, it was always primarily about gays.

*So Poland is a fascist country?*

No, on the contrary. Nevertheless, I believe that the state policy of stalking LGBT people has turned out to be ineffective. PiS did not get the constitutional majority that Kaczyński was counting on, despite spending a lot of money on their campaign against LGBT. Marx says that history repeats itself as farce. Perhaps it is true that Kaczyński was counting on the Hitler effect of the 1930s, that society would take up the cause of homosexuals who threaten Poland, and that would allow PiS to enter a political paradise, which would reveal itself in the fact that they would change the constitution, the political system of Poland, etc. ,



but it didn't work out. In 2019, it was not possible to fascis-  
tize the country. It turned out that Kaczyński was not Hit-  
ler or even Mussolini, but only Kaczyński. He can do a lot,  
but only from above, through administrative orders and  
law changes. However, he is unable to arouse widespread  
hatred towards gays in society and is unable to fascisize  
the country, even though he and his entire support base  
tried very hard. The misery of neo-fascist parties results  
from the fact that PiS, in part of its ideology and methods  
of operation, has become a version of a neo-fascist party.  
But it turned out to be a failure, and gaining significant  
public support this way was impossible. And this is an  
excellent effect of these evil political actions.

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opher, and publicist. He is an academic in the queer and  
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tive* (2009), and *Sociology of Sexuality* (2013).

## The Change of the Leitmotiv in the fascist bestiary. With Przemysław Wielgosz about racism and Islamophobia

*The Muslim, and more broadly, the “Oriental man,” stands rather as a classical model of the universal “Other” for Europe, this small peninsula in Asia. Would you agree that Europe could develop as an independent cultural whole thanks to the encircling of the Islamic surroundings?*

I would argue against this point of view. Firstly, Islam is not a non-European religion. From the beginning of its history, it has been present on our continent, e.g., on the Iberian Peninsula, in southern Italy and Sicily, and then in the Balkans. So, in this sense, it is a European religion in the same way that it is an Indian or Chinese religion. There is no reason to introduce any boundaries here. From the 8th century to today, we have had a continuous presence of Muslims in Europe because Europe is not only northern France or the Netherlands but also Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Russia, the Caucasus, the Serbian Sanjak, and a few other places where Muslims have lived for centuries. Islam is, therefore, a European religion. And its history is not only a history of differences but also of similarities. We, of course, have a history of conflicts, told by

19th-century historians, which make us see the Middle Ages through the prism of modern nation-states and rigid boundaries between political units. Meanwhile, when today's historians look at the history of the Umayyad Caliphate on the Iberian Peninsula and subsequent Muslim states in this area, we know that the division was not necessarily between Muslims and Christians, but primarily between various rulers, Christian and Islamic, who formed alliances, fought and married, regardless of religious issues. Moreover, there was also a Jewish elite there, which was also active in politics, especially in diplomacy, and served the interests of both sides. Muslims even formed military units on the side of Christian rulers and vice versa – Catholics fought for the caliphs. This division was not as evident as it seems today. Alliances changed, and the population's loyalty was often divided beyond religious boundaries. This complex network of dependencies and relationships does not mean that jihad was not announced on the one hand and crusades on the other. Just as in medieval Italy, we have Normans and Arabs, Germanic Lombards, and descendants of Romans, and they all mix and combine there, influence each other, and fight with each other. Therefore, what we call European culture today was born from this meeting of the pagan heritage of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, Middle Eastern monotheism, the so-called barbarian tribes, and Islam in both the Arab and Ottoman versions.

*So, who created the image of European feudalism being so closely related to Christianity? And when did all these processes of deporting Jews, Muslims, and Roma start...*

Of course, in the Middle Ages, religious affiliation determined identity. There were crusades and religious perse-

cutions. But firstly, the approach to identity in politicized categories was limited to elites, and secondly, these elites, and even the entire Church and monarchies, did not have such a significant influence on the life of ordinary people as in modern states. Moreover, at the same time, you have Jews settling in the Kingdom of Poland. There is no single pan-European rule here. In parallel time to the fall of the Iberian emirates, first a sultanate appeared in the Balkans, and then the Ottoman Empire, which turned out to be an attractive alternative to local feudalism for the local peasant population because there was no serfdom in the Ottoman state, in a form similar to that in the Christian countries. Take the history of southern Italy, Sicily, as an example. You will see that Arab influence there is not limited only to the Islamic emirate that existed on the island for two hundred years; it goes much further. The Normans who conquered the territory of this Islamic principality adopted Arab culture and built churches in the Muslim style, blending culturally and politically with their predecessors. This diffusion was one of the reasons why they refused to participate in the crusades. The Roman Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen, known for his fascination with Arab culture and settling Muslims in Italy, was even excommunicated for avoiding the crusade. And when he did set out, it was only to reach an agreement with the ruler of Egypt and peacefully crown him king of Jerusalem. These cultural flows, mainly from the South to the North, were significant for shaping, for example, what we call the Renaissance today. The impetus for its birth was the influx of refugees from the Byzantine Empire – intellectuals, artists, and architects – but distinctly “orientalized,” if we use the 19th-century term. Also earlier, throughout the Middle Ages, Arab-Muslim culture shaped European

culture. The fact that the 12th-century philosophy lectures at the Sorbonne were held in Arabic is no coincidence. Philosophical texts that reached Europe were written in this language. The school of translation in Toledo, thanks to which many classic works of ancient philosophy were translated from and into Arabic, was established in Islamic times. However, it still existed and flourished under the rule of Catholic rulers. All Western medicine, until the 18th century, was based on Islamic texts. The founding father of modern anthropology and sociology is not Emil Durkheim but ibn Khaldun, a 14th-century Tunisian scholar. There are plenty of such things. The first universities were established in Cairo and Baghdad. Agriculture, architecture, medicine, irrigation techniques (like the windmill), paper, poetry and music, tools, and the art of navigation were also adopted from the Arabs. Even the crews of Columbus' ships had Arab navigators on board.

*So, may we look for the roots of Islamophobia in some complex of this puritanical, backward, poorer North, which, after becoming more prosperous and more vital, wanted to displace how much it owes to its southern neighbors?*

It certainly was like that in the beginning. As for the countries that started European colonial conquests, i.e., Portugal and Spain, the impulse for this was undoubtedly the search for riches – gold and silver – which were lacking in Europe, and the path to the rich East was blocked by Muslim countries. But precisely because of economic weakness, the continent's fragmentation, and numerous military conflicts, its inhabitants have undoubtedly achieved superiority in one field – the art and technology of war. However, concerning Islam, there was no such advantage for Europeans as in

the case of clashes with peoples colonized in the Americas. In the 16th century, the Portuguese tried to continue with the Reconquista, i.e., take over Morocco, but it ended in disaster. The Portuguese army was wiped out, and the king commanding this army was killed. As a consequence, Portugal lost its independence to Spain for many years. Researchers of European identity, such as Gerard Delanty, believe that since it began to emerge sometime after the Thirty Years' War in the second half of the 17th century, it has defined itself in opposition to the broadly understood Orient. In the beginning, fear was mixed with fascination and admiration for the wealth and culture of the Middle Eastern and North African countries. The French, who, under the command of General Napoleon Bonaparte, invaded Egypt in 1798, were amazed that the world they associated with One Thousand and One Nights turned out to be in ruins. The region was then in a severe crisis. The Egyptian army was easily defeated. And then – according to Edward Said – there was a turning point. Islam from that time is no longer a slogan that evokes any respect, and Muslims have become a synonym for backwardness, people worthy only of contempt and pity who are asking for protection from Europeans. This change can be seen in literature, philosophy, and linguistics, as in Ernst Renan, who wrote in the first half of the 19th century that Semitic cultures relate to Indo-Germanic-European cultures as a pencil sketch relates to an oil painting. This statement applied to both the Jewish population in Europe and the Arab population in Africa and the Middle East because both communities were considered culturally identical at that time. They have been attributed the same characteristics European colonizers attributed to “savages.”

*So you argue that this is a correct description of the competition of monotheisms, and you claim that the economic collapse caused this shift?*

I guess so—attitudes towards Islam changed when the balance of power changed. Europe gained in strength, and Islamic countries lost their power. There is also a powerful exception here, the Ottoman Empire, a significant European political player even during the Crimean War and a few decades later.

*Would you consider European colonialism as the cause of this shift?*

This element is undoubtedly an essential element that we should rely on, especially when we think about the attitude of Europeans toward “the others –” both the inhabitants of the Americas, Africa, and the Near and Middle East. Colonialism is here a crucial process. Colonial expansion and inter-imperial rivalry give Europe – previously peripheral and weak – a real advantage and a sense of superiority. There is no convincing argument to justify the thesis of Western cultural superiority. Believing in this is one of the consequences of European powers’ military and political domination. Until the 17th-18th centuries the Europeans treated others as barbarians, who although did not belong to our culture were also seen as being powerful and dangerous, and people who should be feared and respected. Since this time, they have been regarded as savages who have been conquered and therefore are despised, or at best pitied, whom we should civilize.

*So, you see an apparent coincidence in time in the emergence of modern racism and Islamophobia? Up to a certain point, a Muslim is dangerous, aggressive, rich, and exuberant, but when Europe begins to dominate, everyone else ends up in one pot – “savages”?*

That’s precisely what happened. The transition from barbarian “other” to “savage” is crucial for the birth of modern racism. Racism does not simply describe “others” but “others” over which the West has gained real power – military, political, economic, and discursive. It can attribute to them a racial identity and inferiority (racialize them), and at the same time, it creates material conditions that practically force them into this identity and inferiority.

*What was the purpose of this “us-others” dualism?*

The point was to normalize and naturalize a particular hierarchy that appeared with colonial conquests but also within European societies. Colonization is an indispensable component of the emergence of the modern world and capitalism. Capitalism emerges from a combination of colonial conquest, the enslavement of the peasant population, the enclosure of arable lands, a change in the attitude towards nature (to an exploitative one), and the degradation of the position of women. European culture has “endowed” very similar features to all these groups and elements.

*What kind?*

Those that today we associate with patriarchally constructed femininity, as well as animality (always close to femininity in Western culture) – weakness, passivity,



unreasonableness, irrationality, inability to control one's fate, laziness, uncontrolled passions, or in other words, succumbing to the whispers of the flesh and the devil, and, of course, sexualization. When we look at the archives, all these features are present in the descriptions of the indigenous people in the Americas, the descriptions of enslaved Africans, and finally, the descriptions of the serfs. And women are described in the same way. And finally, these are features that – with some modifications – are also attributed to the natural environment. This association is significant because all the groups of human beings I mentioned were pushed into the kingdom of nature, as opposed to the kingdom of man, where white, rational men with private property rule. Then, a fundamental reconstruction of the world image takes place. A kind of quintessence of this thinking can be found in Otto Weininger's book *Sex and Character*. The Jew is feminine there, but if we extend this type of thinking, the feminine will be black and swarthy. They have no control over their sexuality. They are exuberant. They cannot self-limit themselves. They cannot create a lasting civilization because they use all their energy for short-term pleasures. They do not think long-term. They are childishly cruel and aggressive because they cannot distinguish between good and evil. They are amoral and treacherous. And this kind of description excludes all these groups from the family of people. And so, all these beings, being both animal and childlike, require the white man's care, his paternalism, and his civilizing mission.

*Of all these groups, why is it that the Muslim stereotype turned out to be so persistent, solid, and relatively homogeneous wherever you look?*

Perhaps because it is pretty recent, Islamophobia as a form of racism began in the 19th century and developed in the 20th century. In the 19th century, we had various testimonies of contempt, reluctance, and a sense of superiority towards the Muslim world, sometimes combined with fascination with its past. It doesn't have to be somehow separate and contradictory. Many authors make sentimental trips to the East, reproduce all the stereotypes generated by the West towards the Arab-Muslim world, and at the same time consider themselves great friends of this world, its history, culture, language, calligraphy, etc. It seems that Islamic uniqueness lies in the fact that Arab countries were the last to be subjected to colonial conquest because most of it happened only after World War I. Yes, Egypt was colonized in the 19th century, as are Algeria and India. Still, the Middle East, which we primarily associate with right-wing fantasies about the Muslim "threat" today, was dominated by the Europeans in the 20th century. The problem is that these countries have the misfortune to rely on oil. And this is one of the two sources – apart from immigration – of contemporary Islamophobia. Because of oil and the dependence of Western economies on its consumption, Arab societies are becoming a "problem" for Europe and America. This approach intensified, especially when decolonization movements began. When various leftist movements appeared in the Middle East and governments emerging from national liberation forces nationalized the Suez Canal or oil deposits in Iran, panic broke out in the rich North. For Western strategists, Arabs (and, since the late 1970s, also Iranians) have become a collective villain. They are beginning to be ascribed the same features that in the 19th century were supposed to justify colonial power, and now they are supposed to justify

the policy of military interventions, intelligence activities, and the expansion of oil corporations. There is also a new thread that explains imperial violence, i.e., the nefarious conspiracies of Arabs with the communist world. People in the Middle East become agents of Moscow. The Cold War caused the Euro-Atlantic right to attribute the development of emancipation movements throughout the Third World to the influence of the USSR and China, and the Middle East is an excellent example of this.

*When did this modern Islamophobia start?*

In my opinion, in 1973, during the oil crisis. At this point, it turned out that the vast majority of Arab countries suddenly became a problem not only for the ministers of foreign affairs of the Western states but also for entire societies because oil prices were soaring. In the West, people realize that “our oil supplies” are controlled by these “unpredictable Arabs.” No wonder that around then, the figure of a fabulously wealthy Arab sheik, a cruel decadent who still tends to sponsor various nefarious activities, comes back into the popular culture. The second such event was the revolution in Iran in 1979, which greatly confused Western experts because it was both anti-American and anti-communist. From that moment on, the communist conspiracy slowly ceases to occupy the imagination of these experts, and they increasingly write about the conspiracy of Muslim fundamentalists.

*Let us come back to the stereotypes for a moment. Why do such features end up there? Those related to sexuality and feminization. What does this say about the person who creates such a stereotype?*

To put it briefly, because it's convenient and because these stereotypes justify aggression, conquest, and subordination. They also tell us a lot about the mechanisms of control and discipline in Western bourgeois societies. "Others" are ascribed traits we would like to expel from our civilized world. It says a lot about the nature of capitalism, which needs such ideological support because its historical formation requires the transformation of a significant part of the world's population into cheap, docile labor, into what Jason W. Moore and Raj Patel call "cheap nature," "cheap care," "cheap work," "cheap life." Without the fundamental degradation of at least the land or the natural environment, the colonized, women, and non-whites, it would be impossible to accumulate such wealth. Attributing supposed inferiority was a way of breaking down those who had to be subjugated and dispossessed. At the same time, it allowed us to rationalize this brutal process in a culture that wanted to be modern and valued freedom and universal rights. Thanks to the stereotyping of others, the Western bourgeois subject can feel superior to those he tries to subordinate. He is better because he controls his emotions, sexuality, and gestures. He has the right and even the obligation to use violence against those who are incapable of self-control. Capitalism undermines or relativizes old divisions based on religion and invents new roots of social hierarchies. He bases it on the attitude towards the means of production, i.e., on class antagonism, and justifies it with references to "nature," "morality," "corporeality," and "biology." The lower classes are supposed to be immoral by nature, dominated by bodily needs, and biologically defective. On the other side, we have a figure that capitalism privileges, or, to put it briefly, a white man who has private property and all

the features that are then associated with whiteness and masculinity.

*Where does this white man's fear of this sexually "promiscuous" Arab or black man come from?*

This fear of unbridled sexuality has a particular economic and political source. It is a form of diverting attention from what has been a real problem since the 17th century, i.e., sexual violence to which slave women, and in our case, e.g., serf women, were subjected. Violence that, as we know, has not ended. On the other hand, it is the fear of insubordination and emancipation of white women, of losing control over them, of a situation in which they can choose their sexual partners. The economic sources of Western sexual obsessions are well illustrated by the evolution of law in the English colonies in the 17th century. The principle was established that status was inherited from the mother, not the father (as was the case in Roman law), which opened the way to the emergence of the culture of rape of enslaved people. Its dissemination contributed to the development of the slave population in the USA despite relatively small imports of people from Africa. A large part of the enslaved people there were simply descendants of women raped by "officials" and plantation masters. The vision of a black rapist still alive in the USA in the second half of the 20th century was an attempt to divert attention from real rapes. A similar culture of rape prevailed on the estates of Polish nobility in Ukraine well into the 20th century. It was similarly masked by narratives about the sexual debauchery of Eastern "Cossacks" threatening noblewomen. In both cases, the point was to camouflage actual sexual violence and a tool for the more substantial

subordination of white women to white men. Moreover, the stereotype of non-white sexuality supports the belief in the irrationality of the non-European. As such, he is supposed to be dependent and incapable of civilizing himself. This is an essential assumption because it suggests that he needs to be muzzled to tame his energy, which he constantly spends thoughtlessly, instead of accumulating it and using it for the pious purpose of building civilization and culture. This image plays an essential role in disarming any claims to self-determination by those social groups or countries whose people are ascribed to such characteristics.

*Well, we are in the 21st century. In the 20th century, there was a sexual revolution. We are no longer living in the puritanical Victorian England...*

Well, it's not the 1960s anymore, either. The Western approach has moved very much towards the conservative side again. And this also applies to the left, which has become much more puritanical than before. Sexual and racist fantasies have a long history, and they come back to us in waves. The fear of Arabs hitting on our Slavic girls is the same fantasy that in the 1930s fertilized the imagination of the creators of such films as *Süss, the Jew*, in which a wealthy Jewish man enslaved and beguiled noble Aryan women. Today, it is undoubtedly driven by the crisis of masculinity models that we are dealing with in the Western world. This situation is a part of the general crisis of patriarchal society. You can read all these sexual fantasies of post-fascists with old good Klaus Theweleit's books in your hand.

*Well, what about the fantasy of the highly spiritual religious life of Muslims? Do you think this is the result of European secularization?*

The point is that the aversion to Islam comes from conservative circles in Europe, in fact, opposed to the legacy of secularization. Hence, we hear about the threat of Islam to “Latin civilization,” not to secularism. Of course, there is also a second trend, allegedly progressive, based on the alleged aversion of Islam to minorities. Today, it is Islam. In the first half of the 20th century, it was Judaism. In this “progressive” trend, both religions were considered a barrier to modernizing the communities that practiced them, which is not entirely false. Finally, we have geopolitics based on the fantasy of the crucial role of Islam in politics in the Middle East. This perspective is somehow funny because five or six decades ago, when the Marxist leftists and various trends of socialism, very critical of religion, triumphed in Arab countries, the Western world, thinking with horror about who would control the oil deposits, supported local conservatives, mainly Saudi Arabia and the emirates on the Persian Gulf, and organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. And now, suddenly, it turns out that since the Marxist left has been eradicated from this strategic region, the Saudi influence is powerful there, and political standards reproduce colonial patterns with the domination of identity politics instead of simply politics (in other words, when the role of religion and religious institutions there has increased enormously), then suddenly it turns out that it is dangerous. Moreover, if we look deeper into history, we will see that the pattern of imperialist interference as a source of strengthening conservative forces and undermining modernization ten-

dencies in colonized countries is universal. In the first half of the 19th century, countries like Egypt had a long history of building modern economies, legal systems, secular education, and a state involved in the economy. Similar things happened in other parts of the world. These processes of indigenous modernization were interrupted by Western interventions and the subordination of these countries to colonial empires, followed by the installation of various conservative forces in power in the colonies. Such forces were a good ally for the colonizers because modernization threatened their interests.

*You mentioned migrations. Can we look for the reasons for this European increase in Islamophobic sentiments?*

Of course, but it's not so much about migration but about the crisis of the social model ensuring integration for immigrants, which began with the conservative neoliberal turn in the 1980s. In the 1970s, Muslim costumes did not bother us so much because the people wearing them had jobs in factories that don't exist today. Today, these people are often unemployed and are simply more visible. Alain Badiou wrote a few years ago that in the 1970s, French townspeople were still sleeping when Muslims went to work in Renault factories and were already sleeping when they came back from work. Therefore, they never really saw them. When the crisis came, and all these people from the Maghreb lost their jobs, they suddenly wandered around the yards or stood on the streets. They became visible to the townspeople and thus became a problem for them. They began to be blamed for all possible sins traditionally attributed to the so-called "dangerous classes." That they are lazy, that they are helpless, that they are parasitic on



social welfare, that they multiply recklessly on benefits from our taxes, that they have a tendency to break the law. The carrier of these prolophobic sentiments has become the lower middle class, which in the 21st century feels the effects of neoliberal policies more and more painfully, falling down the social ladder. The specter of proletarianization is this group's worst nightmare because its entire culture is based on contempt for "workers." No wonder, then, that they tend to blame his poor situation on "lazy workers." And since bourgeois culture does not describe the world in class terms, and unemployed workers were not entirely white and Christian, this middle-class prolophobia quickly found expression in Islamophobia. All these social processes were ideologically framed in political, state, and media discourse. With the change in the ideological climate in the 1980s and 1990s to a conservative-neoliberal one, there was a shift away from thinking about society as a whole as divided into classes that have their economic interests that clash with each other and replaced it with a liberal vision of individuals that contain contracts with each other. Under such assumptions, those who lose are not victims of social injustice but of their weakness. And this is also something that creates the need to regain some sense of the community that was taken away. If You watch a movie like *La Haine* from 1995, you will see friends from different groups presented primarily as unemployed guys from the housing estate. And the fact that one is black, one is Jewish, and one is Muslim is just the local specifics. It does not determine their choices or the police's attitude towards them. Today, if such a film was made and it were to reflect the way these issues are looked at now, it would turn out that religious and ethnic identities are crucial and are to determine the line of conflict between them.

*So, were Muslims in Europe at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries somehow invented?*

Exactly. It's interesting that when hundreds of thousands of Muslims came to France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Great Britain to work in the industry there, when the numbers were growing, it wasn't a problem. Back then, they were primarily seen as workers, the labor force and no one talked about the issue of "cultural foreignness." And suddenly, in the 1990s, they began to be seen as Muslims. Districts that a decade earlier were called working-class suddenly became immigrants, although the population living there did not change much. Additionally, while the first generation of newcomers comprised people who spoke the languages of their homelands and often traveled there, the second and third generations we are dealing with today are people who usually do not know Arabic. These iconic Western Islamic fundamentalists are very often people "reborn in faith," coming from families, to put it mildly, "religiously lukewarm." They usually end up with Islamists because the governments of their European homelands have begun to withdraw from social policies as part of cost-cutting measures. They abandoned the working classes when unemployment was destroying their lives. Not surprisingly, they have chosen religious identity as a shield against this rejection. They lost their jobs, benefits, and sense of material security, and suddenly, it turned out that the only way to feel a little better was to discover their Islamic identity and count on the support of religious institutions. As a result of these economic processes, they felt less and less like they were a part of German, French, or English societies. It must be remembered that this experience is shared by a large part of the Western, including the Polish working class.

This process, in turn, leads us to the phenomenon of erosion of class consciousness and solidarity. In the deepening crisis, its victims lose the material basis for politicization based on class divisions. Identity identification remained the only choice for the unemployed and precarious. As our place in the division of labor – what we do – becomes less important, who we are becomes more valuable. The class division – labor versus capital gives way to cultural differences – us versus them. Effect: folk classes discover their whiteness, religion, and ethnicity, and the enemy is no longer capital or the system but segments of the same class with other identities – us and them, whites versus blacks or browns, Christians versus Muslims, locals versus jans. This dichotomy is the political economy of today's wave of Islamophobia in Western Europe. This phenomenon was imported to Poland by our migrants who started looking for a job after joining the European Union. In Great Britain or Ireland, they competed for the same jobs with migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, or the Maghreb. When the 2008 crisis broke out, and the demand for labor shrank sharply, this competition intensified. Some Polish migrants then began to discover that, unlike Pakistanis, they were white, just like their employers, and to claim that this fact justified their claims to a common civilization with the British and, of course, to better jobs. The British were not convinced, but the need to be distinguished from non-whites became the driving force of Islamophobia, which then reached Poland. It coincided with the anti-immigrant moral panic created by PiS during the election campaign in 2015. Today, the increase in the number of refugees on the Belarusian border has become a pretext for another wave of this panic, fueled entirely from above, systematically, and with premeditation.

*Or maybe the Muslim has become a new type of figure in the theater of old anti-Semitism?*

The analogies are visible. If we compare the anti-Semitic iconography of the 1930s with Islamophobic representations of Muslims today, we will see the same patterns and the same matrix, only slightly modified. The ghost of Jewish communism or Judeo-Bolshevism, which was crucial for historical fascism, has today been replaced by the ghost of the Islam-left alliance. For the rightwingers, the former was, and the latter is today, an existential threat to Western civilization. We may talk about a change in the fascist bestiary. Even in such ultra-right countries as Poland or Hungary, anti-Semitism is no longer generally accepted in the mainstream of political life. However, the conditions that favor the rebirth of various types of xenophobia, hostility, and racism have not disappeared at all. Perhaps even in the last two decades, they have developed significantly in our environment, and I mainly mean various economic crises and the social phenomena that accompany them. Therefore, a new group has emerged that is endowed with similar features and that has begun to play, in some respects, a role similar to that previously played by the Jewish population in the fantasies of the European right.

*What role is this?*

A threat to our culture, to European uniqueness, a virus that poisons the healthy body of our tradition, our families that threatens the foundations of Latin civilization. This description is how it is presented from the conservative side. On the progressive side, they talk about an Islamic ultra-conservative force that will take away our

republican rights, like gender equality and women's rights. For both groups, Muslims are glued to their religion, supposedly resistant to secularization, and prone to violence and terror. In all this, there is an actual situation in the Middle East where the issue of Islam is considered to be crucial, and only looking through its prism allows us to understand what is happening there. National, economic, and class divisions and natural resources do not matter. Only Islam and it explains everything. So, it is precisely like the slogan of the Muslim Brotherhood – Islam is the answer to everything.

*So, in this context, you would call it one of the building blocks for building the fascism of the future?*

It's already happening Muslims have already replaced Jews in the anti-Semitic mindset. This process is also related to international politics because, for several decades, we have been observing trends toward the recolonization of the world, which is, somewhat paradoxically, a reaction of the United States and its allies and competitors to the collapse of American hegemony. The proof lies in subsequent military interventions, especially in the Arab-Muslim world. In turn, the fact that Muslims live amongst us and are part of Europe favors the ethnocentric strategies of the right, which exploits cultural differences, defining it in terms of a political threat to the existence of Europe. This tendency is typical for various post-fascisms and European nationalisms, from Russian to Spanish. Cultural racism plays a significant role in this. Unlike biological racism, which the Third Reich discredited, its cultural version treats religious traditions or ethnic affiliations as the key to radical and insurmountable otherness that condemns us to eternal

conflict with representatives of other cultures – in this case, Muslims. This racism is developing quite well and also has its allies in the intellectual mainstream. When we read Samuel Huntington, we can see who is the father of contemporary cultural racists and who provides excellent theoretical instruments for the new cultural Islamophobia.

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# About a lousy gypsy and a good bear. With Joanna Talewicz about anti-Gypsyism

*When did the Roma people come to Europe?*

They appeared in Greece and Bulgaria in the 14th century. They were wandering blacksmiths, musicians, fortune tellers, and traders. This first period of their European stay was favorable and probably the most peaceful in Roma history. The world of that time was permeated by religion. Values such as asceticism, giving up worldly goods, and devoting one's life to penance were highly respected. The Roma quickly realized what the atmosphere was like and used religion as a tool to adapt to the surroundings. They began to spread stories that they were making pilgrimages because they had given their lives to God and that it was penance for the actions of their ancestors who had turned away from The Creator. On the one hand, yes, they aroused fear and curiosity. They were perceived as a mysterious community, practically out of nowhere, looking different, using a foreign language, and migrating constantly. On the other hand, as those who dedicated their lives to God, they enjoyed sympathy and respect. They gained acceptance from local communities and help – food and a place to settle. This atmosphere created conditions for them to function. They were not chased away or pushed out of the places they came to.



*So, where did this nomadism come from?*

To this day, no one knows. It could be a lifestyle that came with them from India, where nomadism is not strange in some communities, even today. Or maybe nomadism has become a strategy that the Roma have already chosen here in Europe? A blacksmith, a musician, a fortune teller, and a juggler completed the local offer. By moving and operating in different places, they met local demand and simultaneously reduced the village's costs. The Roma could reach the customers and were competitive. Their services were popular. These traveling groups, in Poland or, more broadly, in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, were financially independent. Their lifestyle allowed them to earn enough to spend the winter comfortably, living on what they obtained during their migration. When the demand ended, they could change their place of stay. It was like that till World War II.

*Wasn't this a situation somewhat similar to that of the Jews? They could no longer buy arable land from a certain point, so they had to limit themselves to working in services and trade.*

Initially, no, but over time, yes. The first mentions of Roma in Poland concern their normal financial functioning then. It is from 1401 and refers to one of them purchasing real estate in Kraków. At that time, to be a resident of this city, you had to have the means to buy real estate, permission from the authorities, and a good social position. Unfortunately, it was a short period. However, it is not the Roma that has changed. It is the context. Already in the 16th century, the first anti-Gypsy laws were created, the aim of

which was the assimilation of the Roma community. Countries adopted various strategies to eradicate these people. It would be best if they did not speak their language and did not call themselves Roma or Gypsies, but, for example – as they were forced to do in Spain – New Castilians. The authorities' goal at that time was to get rid of them from the area. So they had to move. And when you do not have the right to settle, you do not have the right to work, purchase land, or become part of the local community. This tendency continued until the 20th century. Of course, the situation depended on the country in which the Roma lived. In Austria-Hungary, under the decrees of Empress Maria Theresa and later her son Joseph II, children were taken away from their Roma parents and sent to educational institutions. In Spain, torture was used for merely speaking the Romani language. In Wallachia and Transylvania, on the border between Romania and Hungary, the Roma were slaves from the 14th to the 19th century.

*What was their situation in Poland like at that time?*

The first anti-Roma laws began to appear in Europe simultaneously with the emergence of the capitalist economy. Poland has a peripheral function in it. The Roma expelled from Germany, like the Jews before them, ended up in Poland. The Polish Roma are a mixture of Polish and German Roma – the Sinti, as evidenced by the numerous Germanic influences in the dialect used by this group. From the second half of the 17th century, anti-Gypsy laws began to be created in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, but they were not fully respected. Why? Local communities simply needed the Roma. They served the magnates as soldiers, artisans, musicians, and jugglers. Polish aristocrat Karol

Stanisław Radziwiłł even had a carriage with a Romani driver, drawn by bears, in which he regularly went on trips around his estates.

*So, Poland was a relatively tolerant country for the Roma?*

The Roma were looking for a better, safer place to live. Poland was undoubtedly such a place. However, this was due to her economic and social backwardness. With modernity, the Roma began to be pushed out of the new “national” societies. They had to flee from Germany due to enormous persecution. The laws in this region were very restrictive. Hunts were organized for the Roma. Extracts from the chronicles evidence this: “Today there was a successful hunt: two fawns, a fox, several deer, and two Gypsy cubs.” It was an entirely legally sanctioned action. The Roma were treated like animals. The goal was to get rid of them from the area. They were forbidden to gather and use the Romani language. Such a policy immediately causes feedback. Outlawing simply for belonging to a particular nation means that it makes no difference to an individual whether he commits a crime since he is punished anyway. The act of existing is a crime, so over time, the group criminalizes itself. The second thing is religiously motivated anti-Gypsyism. There were times when priests were not allowed to administer sacraments to Roma or baptize them. They were not part of the Church because they allegedly “practised magic.” They were arrested and tortured like witches. Here, the economic context mixes with the social one. Incompatibility with certain norms leads to exclusion. From the end of the Middle Ages, a rumor began to spread that Gypsy blacksmiths forged the nails with which Jesus was nailed to the cross or that they

came from an orgy between witches and the devil. All this has its continuation, and the fate of the Jews and the fate of the Roma turn out to be very similar. The economic and socio-religious aspects are the basis of both anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsyism. However, racism against Roma and Jews appeared only in the 19th century, and in the 20th century, it is expressed in practice.

*In the Middle Ages, the Roma had their place in the economy. What happens to them next?*

The emerging capitalism pushes them to the margins. New social aspects and new values also accompany its development. Roma hasn't changed, but reality has. Pilgrimage came to be seen as wandering and avoiding work. The Roma have fallen outside the pale of acceptance. As the economic environment diminished, the group adapted to a particular economic model and withdrew to where it still existed. When the system changed, the Roma were criminalized. In addition, Romani artisans had high production costs. So they gradually lost to factory production and later to factory production. Their work was becoming unprofitable. The same thing happened to state-owned farms that went bankrupt after 1989. That is why Roma communities are often compared to former state farms. Both were socially excluded. The Romani people were famous for making excellent frying pans, but their production costs were high and time-consuming. They could not withstand competition from, for example, China because a new frying pan – although of lower quality – could be bought in a supermarket for PLN 40.

*In the face of this changing world, did the Roma in Poland face any problems?*

With the fall of the inefficient Polish state in 1795, anti-Roma activities also began to intensify in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, the situation depended on the partition. The worst situation for them was in the Prussian partition. Poverty was growing among the Roma, and criminalization of the community was increasing. They had to hide. Any exit from the forest could result in imprisonment, torture, or death.

*Why were the occupying powers so aggressive against the Roma?*

This attitude towards them was a continuation of prejudice based on stereotypes. Roma culture was perceived as criminogenic, which did not provide any chance of educating a future new citizen. Therefore, it had to be changed. Maria Teresa and Joseph II Habsburg are known for their pro-modernization activities. However, modernization could only be implemented if the resistance of those who stood in its way was broken. This perspective is also what the Nazis argued. They referred to 19th-century racial theories and said: we will create a great, strong Reich and then a great, strong Europe, but we must get rid of those who interfere with this. It was the same with Maria Theresa. During her time, children were taken away from their parents and either sent to peasants for state-sponsored upbringing or to special care and education centers. This attitude is typical of 19th-century capitalism's management of labor and the population. At that time, facilities were established to "morally develop" the people under their care. These places

also served as places of forced labor. They were supposed to build a new social fabric by completely assimilating those under their care. The same was done to the Aborigines in Australia, as well as by the Nazis. Children from occupied territories, if they had “Aryan features,” were sent to state institutions in the Third Reich. Even today, we have prison labor programs, and the criminalization of minor offenses ensures a steady supply of new forced laborers into light security facilities. These are jobs where inmates receive wages much lower than the market rate. The most terrifying thing is that today, the presence of the Roma is once again seen as a problem. Hungarian politicians have voiced the need to solve the “Gypsy problem” in contemporary Europe and create special centers where children will become “normal citizens” and not repeat the pathological, criminogenic behavior of their parents.

*How did the situation of the Roma change after the war?*

The Roma were difficult to control, especially the migrating groups. In the East Block, they were forcibly settled. Communists wanted to turn the nomads into workers. Various programs were implemented to control Roma and make this community dependent on the state. Opinions that their behavior was harmful to national harmony were repeated and reinforced. They were included in the so-called “optimization program.” It focused on two actions: literacy and productivization. First – every citizen had to have a job and an apartment. For the first time, there was some interest in the literacy of the Roma, and their children were sent to school. However, this program was part of the propaganda policy, and its effects had to be consistent with the data in the documents rather than with reality. The authorities

did not care whether the people included in the programs could really read and write. Its first beneficiaries benefited the most – the settled Roma. They did not migrate and had more significant contact with non-Roma communities. At that time, Roma intensely migrated from the Karpaty mountains to places with large state-owned enterprises, e.g., Kraków. Hence, this city has a large Roma community from the Bergitka Roma group (Mountains Roma). They also built Kraków's Nowa Huta industrial district. The children were attending school. Nomadic Roma were in a worse position, as they were not interested in such a life. They viewed state institutions as, at best, a necessary evil. This perspective was an effect of the Roma attitude that non-Roma institutions were oppressive. Those who cooperated were despised. Anyway, it was then that Roma went to school for the first time. This new state approach also touched my family, who previously traveled in the Małopolska region but were finally forced to settle in the city of Oświęcim, where they lived until the 1980s.

*And what happened to them in the 80s?*

Ethnic tensions often appeared during the period of crisis. From the implementation of Polish martial law in 1982 until the end of the political transformation at the beginning of the 1990s, there were fights, attacks, and pogroms against Roma. After privatization, they began to be fired from work. Not for ethnic reasons but because they worked mainly as unskilled laborers. They turned out to be the biggest losers of the transformation. They were the least rooted in the system, in the social fabric of the working class, and they also shared the weakest post-work rituals – social contacts with other Polish employees. It was a time of huge social

tension, resulting in intercultural conflicts. The economic situation was complicated, and significant changes were taking place. In such situations, there is always a search for a scapegoat. Long-standing stereotypes were also becoming active. Today, Muslims are “to blame” for everything wrong, while previously Jews and Roma often played a similar role. In 1981, conflicts occurred that are often called pogroms against the Roma population. The first of these events occurred on September 9 and 10, 1981, in Konin, where 70 Roma lived, and the second was on October 21 and 22 of the same year in Oświęcim, where 137 Roma were registered. The course of events there was very typical of pogroms. An ignition spark appeared. A Roma and a non-Roma argued about their place in the queue. They got into a fight and the situation escalated. Speculation began about the Roma’s financial situation. There were rumors about stolen expensive cars. It was also said that Roma from nearby towns to Oświęcim – Kęty, Chrzanów, and Andrychów – were to be resettled in blocks in Oświęcim. People took to the streets to express their opposition to this, although no such plan had actually been drawn up by the authorities. My family’s neighbors, who had previously lived on decent terms with us, formed a local committee to expel the Gypsies from the city and concluded some kind of agreement with the authorities of the Bielsko-Biała Voivodeship. Protesters destroyed Roma property, set fire to their cars, and threw them into the river. There were regular riots, bricks and Molotov cocktails were thrown at windows, setting everything on fire. Fortunately, no one was physically hurt, but the entire community did not leave their homes and often hid in basements. However, their property was destroyed. However, it turned out that they were supposed to leave not only the city but also the



country and lose their citizenship. When martial law broke out in Poland, they reached Malmö by ferry. After 1989, some came back, and some didn't, but for all of them, it was a tragedy. They were kicked out of the country where they were born. It is still unknown on what basis the agreement between the governments of the Polish People's Republic and Sweden was signed. Today only a dozen or so people of Roma origin live in Oświęcim.

*How is the Roma minority perceived in Poland today?*

As backward, problematic, and pathologized – these are the typical stereotypes about Roma. And they are deep. It did not start at all after Romanian and Bulgarian Roma migrated to other European countries after 2007 (after these countries joined the European Union). A certain stereotype that has existed in European culture for a long time has just been refreshed. It is deeply rooted, so it is difficult to change and eliminate its influence because pop culture, media, and literature renew it. According to this stereotype, the Roma wander, beg, and are problematic. Like in a school reading from the 1930s: “About a lousy gypsy and a good bear.” And this Roma stereotype was also perpetuated in literature and films. When the scandal broke over the discovery of a blonde girl in a Roma settlement in Greece, stereotypes came back. There were immediate voices that she had been kidnapped from a white family. After all, “everyone knows” that “Roma kidnap children.” It is a typical element of a moral panic – children and some drastic situations related to them. It was the same during the Kielce pogrom of 1946. There, allegedly, “Jews kidnapped a boy for matzah.” In the Greek case, it turned out that the girl was a Roma from Bulgaria. She was in-

formally transferred from a low-income family to a richer one for her upbringing. I also remember the scandal that broke out when the media became interested in the fact that the Romanian Roma had settled on plots of land in Wrocław. An ordinary person does not distinguish the Romanian from the Polish Roma.. However, this new migrant reinforced the stereotype he already had in his head. Nobody connected this with the processes related to the enlargement of the European Union. Nobody paid attention to the conditions in which the Roma live in Romania, who preferred to come here and live in a communal garden. Well, in Romania they live in much worse conditions. However, the popular belief is that they are simply Gypsies – a threat to the safety of “decent” citizens.

*Are the Roma again the scapegoat during a period of social change?*

A rejection of the Roma is part of European history. Initially, their fate was relatively peaceful. It was related to the attitude towards otherness, which has not changed much, even today, since that period. When we come into contact with someone different, who presents values unknown to us, comes from far away, speaks a strange language, or professes another religion, we experience ambivalent feelings. They are neither positive nor negative. On the one hand, the unknown arouses fear, anxiety, or reluctance. Still, on the other hand, some emotions accompany contact with the exotic, i.e., fascination and curiosity, and these features are, I emphasize, very positive. However, over time, it got worse. The reality around them has changed. Each subsequent period of change, such as the processes of increasing urbanization, the emergence of capitalism, or the Industrial

Revolution, was often associated with the intensification of negative emotions: frustration, helplessness, and confusion. And here, a scapegoat was needed, because somehow, this frustration had to be focused on someone. Very quickly, the Roma became one. As a culturally different group, they have attributed all the worst features that could even destroy the development plan of this wonderful, modern Europe. This rhetoric juxtaposes the culture of the Roma or their behavior with something negative and wild and contrasted with development, modernity, and the so-called proper functioning within societies.

*I see it somewhat similarly to the current attitude towards migrants arriving at the borders of Europe. When the economic situation in Europe is good, this movement can take place, but when a financial problem arises, tension begins...*

We could make such an analogy when it comes to the mechanism and social mood. If we are talking about contemporary Europe and the so-called migration crisis, refugees were placed in opposition to the most fundamental values related to European identity. And precisely the same thing happened with the Roma. Medieval Europe was a land where religion was at the center of the world, and the Roma were considered to be a threat to Christianity, just like refugees “Islamize” Europe. Back then, religion built a wall, a bit like ethnic identity and Christian heritage today, closing itself off from the newcomers, fearing them, and manipulating society’s fear. The exact process in the case of the Roma meant that they were in a worse position at the start. Their demonic image created then has become firmly established over the centuries. Only new negative features were added. First, they were enemies of

Christianity. They allegedly came from Satan. And if so, it was worth getting rid of them because why keep a hellish threat in our community? Then, efforts began to get rid of the Roma from the area. They also gained legal recognition. Their goal was to eliminate and expel them. They were to disappear from the land or dissolve into the majoritarian society, adopting its norms, culture, and customs. And it is a mechanism still used against migrants today.

*Did they have a similar economic situation?*

Their otherness becomes a curse. It's not about cultural values or psychological factors. If someone does not want to be assigned to a specific village under feudalism and become a serf, they will be persecuted. They are problematic and need to be pushed out, likewise, in the capitalist wage labor regime. The economic factor was fundamental here and meant that exclusion took the most drastic forms. It is also similar to modern migrants. Let us remember that the refugee crisis followed the economic crisis of 2008. The Holocaust followed the Great Depression. After all, if it weren't for Germany's disastrous financial situation, Hitler would probably have become only a third-league radical and not a mass murderer. The economic crisis is the fertile ground that radicals, populists, and dictators thrive on. Colonialism and the marginalization of minority groups are also, to a large extent, the result of economic factors. The sick, homosexuals, and the elderly were not placed in camps just because some dictator wanted this. It was justified by their "low productivity" or the perceived threat to the associated moral norms of "decent" citizens. Gays and lesbians threatened the fantasy of a patriarchal, conservative family, while the rest "burdened the budget."

The Roma were also a threat to the economy. At least that's what the Germans were told, fueling it with racist theories from the 19th century, proving that Roma had traits that were genetically inherited, so no resocialization and no concentration camps would help—only physical extermination. The “culture of poverty” as something attributed to the Roma, which is supposed to be their choice, is marginalization resulting from the inability or unwillingness to fit into certain dominant tendencies. As a result, this caused this community to find itself in an increasingly complicated economic situation. Let's imagine functioning in conditions where one's mere presence is a crime. You can be imprisoned, and you can be a victim of violence or murder just for being present in a given country. How do you get an education, acquire property, and build yourself economically in such a situation? Today, the greatest curse of the Roma is their economic status. Poverty and class divisions, in addition to differences, become critical reasons for discrimination and even greater marginalization, which further deepens exclusion.

*What you are describing is again a very similar situation to the one into which today's refugees are thrown. It was illegal to be a Roma. Similarly, being an undocumented migrant is punishable. You are arrested, placed in a camp, and eventually deported...*

Exactly. You are in a vicious circle that is impossible to get out of. If the goal is to get rid of someone from a given area, let's not pretend that anyone here has a chance for integration. But in the case of the Roma, the problem has been getting worse for hundreds of years. Today, the Roma are discriminated against despite their cultural differenc-

es, primarily because of poverty. An additional problem is the common belief that their life is their choice. Roma allegedly didn't want to integrate, so now they live how they want. They are nomads and don't know how to live like "normal people," so they live in their "camps." Nothing could be further from the truth. Poverty is a consequence of discrimination and the various psychological, economic, and political processes that I have mentioned which have lasted hundreds of years. It is now tough for them to escape from impoverished communities. Helplessness and life on the margins are a tendency that is inherited by subsequent generations. In crises and worsening social sentiment, these features and problems become exposed. The idea then grows that we should not accept such communities' functioning and remove them even further from the mainstream. The middle-class response is usually that people experiencing poverty should be thrown out, expelled, deported, put in a camp, or kept out of sight.

*Isn't this similar to new migrants again?*

The mechanism is identical. We are dealing here with something called structural or intersectional discrimination. There is no point in even comparing these two groups. We can speak directly about the situation of Roma migrants and Roma refugees. Today, the status of a refugee or migrant is perceived negatively. There is a crisis, and we do not need additional employees or social welfare recipients. However, we talk positively about immigrants when they are required because they help our economy. The rhetoric may change after the crisis we are experiencing because we will need them again to move forward economically. However, Roma immigrants, regardless of the economic

situation, are simply removed from the financial center of Europe. I'm not talking about human rights, but this aligns with neither national nor European law.

*What do you mean?*

Citizens of the European Union from countries such as Romania or Bulgaria came to Western European countries, precisely like Poles, after 2004, looking for a place to live and a better tomorrow. Their original situation was dramatic because they had escaped from extreme poverty. 80% of Roma in Romania are at risk of or live in poverty. 70% live without running water. Meanwhile, these people, having legally arrived in France, were then illegally deported or placed in camps, as in Italy. I had the opportunity to visit these camps two years ago. 30-40 minutes from Rome, almost a thousand people live behind a barbed wire fence. There are several such camps in Italy. This situation is also a migration crisis, where anti-Roma sentiments are combined with anti-immigrant sentiments. A whole host of refugees have lived without such a status for a long time or continue to live in camps, even since the wars in the Balkans, because no country wants to accept them. They found themselves in a challenging situation after the Kosovo war, but neither then nor now did anyone care about their status. They were victims of ethnic cleansing, about which almost nothing was said. They were accused by the Serbs of collaborating with the Albanians and by the Albanians of collaborating with the Serbs. They were stateless for a very long time. They lived in camps without documents. Can you imagine living in a refugee camp since the late 90s? It's the 20s of the 21st century! Imagine what is happening to these people, not only with their identity

but also with their attitude towards the entire non-Roma world. It is justified that they feel unwanted and rejected, that anger and aggression arise. During the migration crisis, Angela Merkel said we would accept refugees. We want them. But at the same time, those of Roma origin were simply forgotten. These people often no longer know Kosovo because they have spent most of their lives in Germany. What chances would they have in Kosovo? They were already starting to put their lives back together after the war trauma, and now they are being sent back. This case is reminiscent of the situation of Palestinians in the Middle East, in those eternal transit camps in Lebanon or Jordan, deprived of civil rights until, over time, these camps turn into towns.

*Until the refugee crisis, the Roma were the main object of fear for the petty bourgeoisie. Coming in waves, poor, appearing out of nowhere, begging, creating criminal groups, working as sex workers or raping...*

The basis for this exclusion is the fantasy of an enemy. A scared society is easier to manage. Therefore, there must be an enemy. And it had a Roma face many times in history. After Eastern Europe joined the European Union with its millions of excluded Roma, there was talk of an "invasion." For a lot of people, the Roma became synonymous with social problems, and people began to talk about the "Roma problem," "Roma crimes," or "Roma threats." They will come, rob us and our homes, and use violence because they are savages. Moreover, our children are at risk because they are paedophiles. They sleep with minors, they take advantage of girls, and they beg. In 2008, the rape and murder of an Italian woman by a Roma was



immediately attributed to the entire community as its distinctive feature. Berlusconi's policy towards the Roma become more stringent. As a result, Emergenza Nomadi was introduced in Italy, a special law directed against migrants, or in practice, against the Roma. Young Roma boys were immediately wrongly blamed for another rape that happened in a park. We always bear collective responsibility. It resulted in a change in the law. Suburban camps for Roma have begun to be created. Recently, the Italian army has also been stationed there. And their presence signals that the Roma are a threat.

*Do you think that such a treatment of this group may have broader consequences for other "whites?"*

Europe is becoming an increasingly hierarchical and anti-egalitarian region. It has always been like this for various social groups, but now it is also becoming increasingly clear among the "white" majority. I have the impression that the mechanism of barracking the Roma, which began before World War II in various types of camps, including extermination and concentration camps, and after the war in Italy, Macedonia, and Montenegro, is a kind of test, which is being tried with subsequent groups, first with refugees, then with migrants, and then with everyone else. The Roma community is the guinea pig for how to act. How demonized must an enemy be so that constructing a camp for it in the 21st century does not arouse public opposition? Separate them, demonize them. That's how it works. Constantly perpetuate a negative image of them, whether they are the Roma or refugees, so that Europeans perceive them as animals. They come in waves like the flood. Words intended to present them not as people

but as some natural element. There is also fear of population growth, especially in the case of Muslims and Roma. We are supposed to feel threatened. Our culture is collapsing. We are dying out, and will be replaced by these brutish, dark barbarians.

*However, the situation has changed somewhat for the Roma. While before 2015, they were the primary “pest” for the far right, after the refugee crisis, Muslims have significantly surpassed them in this xenophobic bingo.*

Absolutely yes. And this can be seen in public opinion and prejudice research. I laughed that we had fallen in the rankings of the most disliked because refugees and migrants, especially Muslims, took our place. And yet, after some terrorist attacks in Western Europe, when there were no Muslim refugees in Poland, the Roma were automatically punished for it, e.g., in Limanowa, their cars were destroyed. On their houses, graffiti was daubed with slogans such as: “Scum, get out of Poland” etc. This situation itself is not the problem because there is no shortage of idiots and never has been, but the problem is the reaction or lack thereof. There was no social condemnation of this situation, which is simply the norm when it comes to the Roma, and on the other hand, a politician from the ruling party who, when asked to comment on this matter on Radio Kraków, said, “well, if the Roma do not want to adapt, then we have to deal with them differently.” These were the words that were said. These words signify are a terrifying boundary line. Not the actual utterance of these words – but the lack of social reaction to them.

*Do you think there is no social reaction?*

I love the action daffodils, referring to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. However, I have a dream that artists and celebrities would say the same, at least once, on August 2, about the International Day of Remembrance for the Genocide of the Roma. For someone to speak publicly, as this beloved celebrity idol, talking about International Roma Day, celebrated on April 8, to show that we are also fellow citizens here, that we are one. But this mechanism does not exist. In various intellectual and artistic circles, no one supports the Roma. Anti-Roma racism is the only one you can hear without objection in elite garden parties – that Roma steal, that’s just how they are, that it’s in their blood, etc. No reaction. This racism against Roma is not just the domain of extremists. It applies to the entire political spectrum, from the left through liberals to conservatives, including intellectuals and people of culture. People who fight anti-Semitism and homophobia, and preach tolerance and diversity, are at the same time able to hate the Roma without blinking an eye because they are “those with whom nothing can be done”. This situation is a straightforward path and a simple recipe for the greatest tragedy that can happen, of which the Roma may be the so-called substitute victims of various tendencies that we currently observe in society. I’m terrified.

*Can we change this attitude?*

When Poles are talked about badly in the West – when a TV series replicates a negative stereotype about them, and harmful comments appear in the media – there is an immediate reaction to prevent this stereotype from being perpetuated. When such content about the Roma appears in the media, and only such content exists, there is no such

resistance, neither from the public nor from politicians. The only excuse to talk about the Roma as people is the Holocaust, something that is already part of history, a great tragedy, and gives a chance to talk about the experiences of the Roma because it is difficult to expel them from the Shoah today. However, this is the only alternative to the harmful content that appears in the media about the Roma, perpetuating the image of savages, ignorant, maladjusted perverts who have all this in their DNA. And it would be nice to show all our potential, the people we have who are activists, our institutions and organizations. I would like such narratives to develop to show that we are not some passive nation that just waits and reaches out or cries because of centuries of suffering.

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## Le bourgeois fascist. With Rafał Pankowski about the fascism of the bourgeois

*Who is more dangerous – suits or bomber jackets?*

Of course, I understand what lies behind this symbolic dichotomy. However, it is false. If we are talking about neofascism, or even more broadly, about the extreme right, both of these models of ideological and political activity coexist. And in a complementary way. This dichotomy is an entirely conscious strategy that the protagonists of this movement have publicly talked about.

*Are you talking about the 1930s or today?*

Both. And both, no matter if we look at this matter historically or refer to the most contemporary neo-fascism. And nowadays, the recent leader of the English far right, Nick Griffin, wrote directly that both activity levels must coexist.

*What is this strategy?*

On the one hand, we are dealing with a model of radical militant activity, which essentially involves the use of physical violence. Such examples have been described

for years. Since the beginning of the 1990s, a wave of ideological and political violence has been visible, resulting from xenophobia, nationalism, and aggression against all minorities or people or groups associated with minorities. In contemporary Poland – until the arrival of large numbers of Ukrainian refugees – minorities were relatively small compared to many other countries, but xenophobic violence was very real. Often, it was violence not against representatives of minorities but against groups or people associated with their culture or with the fight for their rights against ideological enemies. This model of action goes back to the beginning of the fascist movement and to its Italian roots.

*And the second model that these “suits” symbolize?*

It is a model of institutional action, “march through institutions,” or legitimizing extremist ideologies through participation in the political process, e.g., electoral procedures. And this is nothing new either. This model has worked since the dawn of fascism. It is a bit of a cliché to say that Hitler came to power thanks to democratic elections, but it is not entirely true. The NSDAP never had a parliamentary majority under democratic conditions. Hitler came to power thanks to the decisions of the conservative political elite.

*But you said that this dichotomy is false. Could you explain what you meant?*

Maybe it's not that I completely disagree with it. Still, I think it may overemphasize the contrast between these two models because they have coexisted since the very begin-

ning, both in historical fascism and today in neo-fascism. Since I mentioned the NSDAP, it was evident to anyone interested in its path to power that the street, militant, and parliamentary “suit” strategies complemented each other. One didn’t work without the other. If we look at various contemporary nationalist groups, also in Poland, let’s say the All-Polish Youth, we see that, on the one hand, we are dealing with activities at the street level, demonstrations, counter-demonstrations, attacks on Pride marches, including acts of violence that have been repeatedly described. On the other hand, we consistently attempt to enter the world of political and parliamentary games. And yet, we are talking about the same people. Just a few years ago, this was brilliantly symbolized by the former neo-Nazi Piotr Farfał, who was the head of public television, and the then minister Rafał Wiechecki, who in just a few years had come a long way from a Widzew Łódź hooligan to the Minister of Maritime Economy on behalf of the League of Polish Families party. Of course, there have been dozens of such examples in Poland in recent decades. And not only in Poland. However, in Poland, it is easier for former militants to enter public institutions than, for example, in France. In our state, a long-standing problem has been the unclear situation when it comes to the line of demarcation between right-wing extremism and the right-wing mainstream. Today, it is entirely evident that Poland’s ruling Law and Justice party and its prominent representatives speak a language that is, in fact, often difficult to distinguish from the language of right-wing extremists. However, the problem is not new. Even in the 1990s, there were extreme right-wing groups, such as the National Right, very close to fascist ideas, which managed to penetrate the structures of the state with quite good results, considering



such a small political entity. The leader of this formation, Krzysztof Kawęcki, was the deputy minister of national education in Jerzy Buzek's center-right government and functioned in the same cabinet, or even ministry, with representatives of the liberal Freedom Union, which seemed shocking to us at Never Again. This situation blurs the difference between what is permissible and what is not in the so-called mainstream. It didn't happen after 2015, but it was a multi-year process. I think that the crisis, or even the breakdown of democratic values or democratic culture, which we have been dealing with spectacularly since 2015, began many years earlier, with a certain indifference of the mainstream of politics and public opinion throughout the years.

*Are you not concerned about transfers to the liberal camp of people like ex-nationalist leader Roman Giertych? Do you think they ever really change?*

It is difficult to imagine a more spectacular example of a transfer from the far right. Not so long ago, he was a symbol of nationalism in Poland. We are talking about the creator of this modern incarnation of the nationalistic youth organization: All-Polish Youth. Maybe I'll add a little tidbit here, which we wrote about in "Nigdy Więcej" magazine: a few years after Giertych allegedly withdrew from this far-right activity, he was still thanked in the nationalistic "Polityka National" magazine for financial support. This magazine promotes one of the most aggressive forms of Polish radical nationalism. It is not only an informal ideological magazine of the All-Polish Youth and the National Movement, but it also regularly features authors close to neofascism, such as Grzegorz Ćwik, editor-in-chief of the

neofascist magazine “Szturm,” and Tomasz Szczepański, leader of the neo-pagan Association for Tradition and Culture “Niklot.” In “Polityka Narodowa,” you may find an evident fascination with the most extreme right-wing ideas of the world. As for Giertych’s current popularity in the liberal spectrum, I am surprised that the Polish PM Donald Tusk has legitimized him for years. However, I would like to emphasize that I would not deprive anyone of the right to evolution or ideological change. Nevertheless, I have doubts about how fundamental this transformation is in the case of Roman Giertych. I read Giertych’s book pretty carefully; it was published already when this evolution allegedly occurred. And he says in this book that he has not changed his opinions. I also read a book and many different statements by Michał Kamiński, who started in the National Rebirth of Poland and went to Augusto Pinochet with a scapular with the Virgin Mary. And I admit that I perceive his change differently. He says directly: Yes, I was young and stupid. I was wrong about Jedwabne. I accept it and believe that this is a more authentic evolution. I say this as a person who caused a lot of problems for Kamiński, especially in the British media, when he became the head of the European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European Parliament. At that time, I was often quoted with opinions about him, very negative ones. At that time, I was very far from having any sympathy towards him. However, his gestures and statements prove this transformation is more authentic in his case. I see an evident difference between these two trajectories.

*Aren't you afraid that in the wake of the liberals' fight against "Kaczism," more and more people like Giertych will be brought on board liberal ships?*

The cordon sanitaire is often criticized, but in my opinion, it is quite a good concept, which allows us to protect what is essential in a democracy, i.e., not only the voting procedure itself but its essence, which also consists of recognizing equality between people and respect for minority rights. The cordon sanitaire strategy against the far right has practically never existed in Poland, which worries me greatly. Although in Poland it is better in this respect than in Hungary. I remember one of my last trips before the pandemic to Budapest, shortly before the local elections. There, I saw posters of the Hungarian united opposition with the logo of the Green Party next to Jobbik as part of one list, which moved me deeply at the time. And this shows what point we can reach, unfortunately, if polarization intensifies along only one dividing line. Hungary is another example of the legitimization of the far-right by the so-called democrats. This process is already happening here, as well as the courtship of some liberals toward supporters of Krzysztof Bosak and the far-right Confederation party.

*Who are you more afraid of, extremists like Wojciech Olszański or rather the radicalized petty bourgeoisie represented by the Confederation party?*

I admit that I don't see much difference between Olszański and Bosak. Of course, there is a difference in the form of expression, but it is not a massive difference in the foundation of what they have to say.

*And yet, one can gather a thousand people at a march, and the other gets 10% in the elections...*

We know that even more radical groups than Olszański appear at the Independence March, and the organizers have no problem with that. They are marching there with Krzysztof Bosak, and neither side nor the other is bothered by it. And in my opinion, in a sense, we are dealing with two faces of the same movement.

*However, as long as this movement has Olszański's face, it will be difficult for it to gain critical mass. However, when the petty bourgeoisie joins the extremists... This would be the crucial problem, in my opinion...*

I understand perfectly what you mean. And about the phenomenon of “bourgeois” fascism. Of course, this is nothing new either. The class base of the NSDAP consisted primarily of the lower middle class, not the proletariat of any kind. Of course, sometimes the example of the NSDAP may be invoked too often and too quickly when talking about the model of the new fascism because not every time we are dealing with a simple reproduction of the German model. Sometimes, such analogies can make it easier for us to understand contemporary emanations. Sometimes, they can make it more difficult. It is not the case that fascism always ends in the Holocaust within 15 years. Maybe “only” racial segregation, or “only” in different rights for different ethnic or religious groups, or “only” not allowing refugees into our country – which is still morally scandalous.

*So, what does this “bourgeois fascism” look like?*

For a long time, it would be possible to discuss how the relationship between nationalism and liberalism has

developed, especially in German-speaking countries. In more modern times, Jörg Haider was a great example of a nationalist whose party was also part of the liberal international for a long time. Other cases include the Nigel Farage and the Geert Wilders – they preach a kind of liberalism but with an intensely xenophobic foundation. It's not an impossible connection. The Confederation party shows this once again by having its two wings. One, let's say liberal or libertarian, although these are not entirely adequate concepts here, and the other is nationalistic. Both are slightly different from each other, but as you can see, they can function relatively harmoniously together. It is possible. Again, you can refer to Poland's recent history, and you can find many other examples. Few people probably remember, but Korwin-Mikke was a candidate supported by the liberal Civic Platform (PO) in the Senate elections in Wrocław. Even Stanisław Michalkiewicz was a candidate from the PO list when the PO and UPR had a kind of electoral coalition. I must give credit to Civic Platform for removing him after media protests. But as you can see, there was still a time when various constellations were possible. Even less known is that there was a party called the Real Politics Party (SPR), which we described in *Never Again* in the 1990s, which was a splinter group of Korwin's party. They separated from the UPR because it decided Korwin-Mikke was not right-wing enough. The party's spokesman was Łukasz Warzecha. This party cooperated closely with the National Rebirth of Poland. The informal press organ of the SPR was Tomasz Gabiś's magazine "Stańczyk," which was one of the first platforms for Holocaust revisionism in Poland. But some SPR activists also joined the PO, e.g., Tomasz Tomczykiewicz, who later became an MP from Silesia, now deceased, and Arkadiusz

Karbowiak, a publicist for “Stańczyk” and NOP’s magazine “Szczerbiec,” who is now in charge of the construction of the “cursed soldiers” museum. Often, this line of demarcation between the fascist right and the non-fascist right is blurred. Yet this distinction is essential.

*And where do these alliances come from? Why does the center need these people?*

This type of alliance is sometimes about a misunderstood love for stability or social order. And these fascists are supposed to be a factor that will contribute to stabilizing the hierarchy and social order. What they have in common is admiration for strength and energy, contempt for the weaker, and social Darwinism.

*And isn't this also their anti-leftism?*

Yes, also. And this is also something known from history. The mistake made by German conservatives in the 1930s is a model example of how this mechanism works. I am afraid that similar mistakes are unfortunately repeated. However, I would not like our conversation to create the impression that the liberal center is the main problem because the problem lies primarily elsewhere, on the nationalist right.

*Through what channels does nationalist, xenophobic, or fascist content flow into the mainstream?*

Recently, I have often recalled one sentence that Jerzy Czech wrote many years ago in the “Nigdy Więcej” magazine, that building a right-wing, conservative, mass, popular formation in Poland must at some point end in

anti-Semitism. It was quite a provocative thesis, especially since it was written over 20 years ago, and back then, it did not seem obvious. Even today, it may not be obvious, but in retrospect, Czech may have been somewhat correct. It refers to the long duration of the identity formation, which is, to some extent, hegemonic in Poland. I am not talking only about the stereotype of a Pole but about everything that is connected with the National Democratic, ethno-nationalist understanding of national identity. And I guess in the end, these processes and examples that we can talk about come down to this cultural hegemony of the nationalist model of Polishness.

*So it turns out that Roman Dmowski is the central axis here, not only for nationalists but also for you (laughs).*

The paradox of the current Polish situation also lies in the fact that the ideological boundaries are moved mainly by people who do not necessarily come from the extreme right. And this is an additional aspect of this tragedy. Nationalist leader Robert Bąkiewicz is probably not a big-time star. The actual player is the ex-Minister of Culture, Piotr Gliński, whose ministry greatly sponsored Bąkiewicz. We could easily add him to our previous conversation about political transfers, because he started in the Environmental Forum of the liberal Freedom Union. Quite recently, I recommended his post-doctoral habilitation work on the green movement in Poland as a work containing an excellent outline of the theory of social movements. He is also the man with whom we, as a “Never Again” association, cooperated in combating the influence of the far right in the ecological movement in Poland. So, it is astonishing that a person with this type of worldview changed the front so dramatically.

*I thought you would mention ONR or a nationalist magazine like "Polityka Narodowa."*

I understand what you mean: what the late prof. Aldona Jawłowska called "pattern-creating centers." They can also be called ideology incubators. And, of course, they exist, including the ones you mentioned. There are many of them, but I think Radio Maryja was the key. Probably, no one has done more to shift Polish political discourse so far to the right. It was no coincidence that Jarosław Kaczyński's first party was called the Alliance of the Center because it wanted to distance itself from this type of right-wing party. And where this entire formation is today is very far from this original idea. After all, even under the banner of PiS, this group was once the most pro-refugee party in Poland. About ten years ago, the future prime minister of Poland, Beata Szydło, wrote parliamentary interpellations in their defense. So this is not in the distant past. But over these past twenty years, this party's point of gravity has moved very far to the right. It's a real paradox that it happened thanks to people who were once in a very different place. So this "Polityka Narodowa," which has existed for over ten years, is not very influential. Still, the people in power speak a language similar to these nationalists.

*I thought more about introducing ideology into the mainstream, not precisely about specific politicians.*

The goal of these centers of idea production is not to win elections, as seen in the following decades, but instead, they want to achieve Gramscian cultural hegemony. Because what they write in "Polityka Narodowa," through columnists of the right-wing media such as Stanisław



Michalkiewicz, Wojciech Cejrowski, or Rafał Ziemkiewicz in magazines such as “Do Rzeczy” reaches the mass audience. These publicists are not independent thinkers or producers of ideas. And that’s the crux of the matter. There is no deep ideological center in the populist right-wing parties like the Law and Justice party. There is an ideological void there. What is essential is the pop culture stuff propagated by such people, and this seems to be the mechanism of the xenophobic political hegemony. Or mainstream journalist Monika Jaruzelska – some completely crazy, marginal, extreme right-wing figures and ideas appear on her YouTube channel. Yet she is a very well-known figure in the mainstream, regularly appearing in tabloids and reaching hundreds of thousands of viewers. She is also a councilor of the City of Warsaw, elected from the left-wing list. In her channel, there are mainly guests from the far right, and not only very famous ones like Rafał Ziemkiewicz, who has visited her many times but also such exotic ones as Sebastian Pitoń or Jakub Zgierski, creator of the blog “Hammer on Marxism,” who thanks to this have mass audience. Moreover, in the postmodern media landscape, it is no longer clear who is marginal and who is mainstream. You don’t have to be on TV at all. YouTube is enough. Marcin Rola probably has more influence today than Tomasz Lis, and his viewer-supporter is often more passionate. This situation is, of course, an opportunity for these various dangerous groups and activists that we are talking about here.

*You mentioned pop culture. There also seems to be an open transmission belt here...*

Paweł Kukiz is a vital name here. He is also an interesting example showing how pop culture intertwines with ideology, politics, and xenophobia. Someone recently recalled Kukiz's online entry from 2016, on the anniversary of September 11. He then wrote that September 11 was another example of an "immigrant invasion," and this is just one of his many texts of this type. All we need to do is remember back to that terrible year of 2015. I'm not talking about that year because someone won or lost the elections, but about what happened in the summer in response to the so-called refugee crisis in the Mediterranean Sea. It was indeed a turning point in Poland's modern history. It is a reversal of values and even a revaluation of the categories of good and evil. Hatred and xenophobia became the dominant emotion, not only but also the ideology, for many years. I think that Paweł Kukiz played an essential role in all this. Of course, he perceived social sentiments more or less cynically, but he also amplified and intensified them. And Paweł Kukiz is not a politician. He is a pop culture figure, just like Donald Trump, who gained fame thanks to his participation in a television show. So, I think separating pop culture from broader ideological processes is impossible. Another example from Poland – is the De Press band. Formerly avant-garde-punk, today considered very right-wing. It is a bit like in politics: something that once seemed like a niche phenomenon suddenly appears in unexpected places. It turns out again that those who change the front are key in all these ideological processes because all these Nazi-skinhead rock bands did not achieve great popularity. But who among us would have predicted that Edyta Górniak would appear on Marcin Rola's program and condemn globalist conspiracies? Or Ivan Komarenko, who became the voice of anti-vaxxers.

*So, to summarize these threads, if you were to create a 21st-century model of fascism, what elements would you add to it?*

In my book “Neofascism in Western Europe,” a quarter of a century ago, I coined the definition of fascism as an ideology of total cultural uniformity. And it seems to me that the fascism of the 21st century is also like that. It is a vision of a society hostile to difference – refugees, gays, trans people, and various others who are currently declared public enemy.

*So, it will be xenophobic, homophobic, and racist. What's next?*

This base is the foundation, and everything else follows from this foundation. Homogeneity also requires a guardian. What is needed is some authoritarian or totalitarian system that guards this purity. It seems that this kind of neo-fascism can do just fine without the swastika or a portrait of Hitler. Although, you may remember the sentence said by one of the characters in the “Superwizjer” reportage: “We honor Adolf Hitler and our homeland, our beloved Poland.” Such symbolism may sometimes come back in their actions, but it is not necessary. What was also crucial in this reportage, and was much more important than Hitler’s birthday, which could just as easily have been cut out of this reportage and would still be shocking, is the fascist music festival “Orle Gniazdo” and the fact that the main character of this material is an assistant of a Member of Parliament, Robert Winnicki. That was important, not what was happening in that forest under the swastika. The ideology of total cultural homogeneity

is the foundation, the core, and the basis for them. The slogan “Poland for Poles” is, in this sense, a fascist slogan because it contains a specific version of the idea of Polishness: an ethnonationalist, racist version. Once the enemy is a refugee. Another time, a Jew. Another time, an LGBT community. Such rhetoric and beliefs are also present at Poland’s highest levels of politics.

*What about things like ecology?*

Objectively, this is an essential topic for everyone living on this planet. And one way or another, the far right and neo-fascists must also face this. Some people cope by denying climate change. Others can adopt the ecological discourse and the so-called ecofascism, which, after all, dates back to the times of the NSDAP and even earlier, when the myth of purity of blood and soil appeared. Even recently, the All-Polish Youth carried out some ecological actions in Pomerania. The stormtroopers movement, in turn, carried out anti-circus actions in defense of animals. Marcin Kornak wrote a lot about this topic, the appropriation of green ideas by neofascists and nationalists, e.g., in polemics in Zielone Brygady. And then Gliński was definitely on our side. But there have also been fusions of extreme ideas in Poland, symbolized by, for example, Remigiusz Okraska, who combines ecology with sympathy for the extreme right. I suspect you’re right that this may be one of the more important topics for the future. We can also add neo-pagan ethnoreligions that are developing in the face of the disintegration of the Catholic Church. And again, we have blood and soil because ethnoreligions have this element of worshiping pure-blooded ancestors and hostility towards migrants. In addition, there is Pan-Slavism and

the cult of ancient Slavs, often combined with sympathy for Putin's Russia. Let us add to this the "Europe of 100 Flags." Ethnoregionalism is not always an innocent civic Scottish or even Catalan nationalism, but something that may have a much more racist face, à la the Vlaams Belang. In Poland, this is looking too far ahead, but, for example, it may happen that some xenophobic or racist threads will appear within the framework of Silesian or Kashubian regionalism. After all, there was once a Goralenevolk. An activist of the neo-fascist music scene and an MMA fighter, Bujak, calls for the revival of the Yotvingian ethnos in Masuria, but these are pretty crazy ideas.

*Do you think these are real visions? Do we have anything to fear?*

Fascism can mutate and re-emerge in new forms. Fascists do not always have to exercise power to influence it directly. They take advantage of the confusion of values in the world and the sense of loss and fear in the modern world. In this sense, the threat is still real. The words "Never Again" do not lose their relevance.

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the “Nigdy Więcej” Association, and coordinator of the UEFA Euro 2012 RESPECT Diversity educational program. He worked, among others, as an expert consultant in the OSCE Department of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination. He cooperated with many expert organizations and academic institutions, including: London’s Chatham House, the Vienna Institute of Human Sciences, and the Center for European Studies at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok.



## Dystopias are for the losers. With Andrzej W. Nowak about anti-Enlightenment movements

*Anti-vaxxers, flat earthers, people fighting chemtrails, and the 5G network – where does this current wave of irrationality come from?*

The state and science seem so all-powerful and sinister to us, but simultaneously, they are very sensitive and fragile and require constant activity to sustain them. In 2019, the March for Science took place on the streets of Warsaw. It wasn't very large. Half a year later, an anti-vaccination march took place, led by several right-wing politicians. It turned out that the voices criticizing vaccinations and science were louder than those defending them. They are downplayed and symmetrical. This conflict is another stage of the well-known mechanism of sowing doubts. Since the 1950s, when it turned out that smoking was correlated with numerous lung diseases, tobacco companies in the US began to try to hide this fact and maintain profits. It was impossible to deny the research results, so another strategy was implemented, simply called "selling the doubt." Over time, the same approach began to be used when dealing with the ozone hole and discussing climate change or vaccines.



### *What does it involve?*

It creates a symmetrical scientific discussion, finding controversies in a given matter and publicizing them. The correlation between tumors and cancer was obvious. The effects of the research were evident. Like today, in the case of climate change, 99% of scientific articles agree that humans are co-responsible for changing it. But the idea of “selling the doubt” strategy is to produce a double representation of experts, which will give unprepared viewers the impression that there is a diversity of voices, to provoke journalists and the public into thinking that there are more positions on each of these topics and that the truth lies in the middle. Our skepticism is cynically exploited. It generally seems to us that it is not reasonable to trust authorities completely and we should maintain a healthy distance. This time, however, we are deceived into thinking that nothing is certain, nothing is known, and everything is subject to negotiation. As a result, we are given over to our fears in the fog of doubt.

### *What effects does this have, politically?*

We need certainty, not a multilateral debate in which everyone can participate. A strategy previously subordinated to achieving profits or political influence, leaves us helpless today.

### *Who benefits from this?*

To understand the relationship between the state and science, we must go back to the 17th century. But thanks to this, we will understand not only why anti-vaxxers are

dangerous but also why many people perceive the state ambiguously. Even then, irrationality was approached in several ways. One, the classic Enlightenment one, is simple. Irrationalism is a superstition that needs to be eradicated, and we are on the side that is tasked with doing this through education and science. And it can have two versions. Naive and unnaive. The naive one, in my opinion, prevailed in milieus, such as the new atheists. They believe that progress will happen spontaneously and irrationality will disappear. If you read, really read, the Enlightenment writers, including my favorite Condorcet, the picture is entirely different. In his Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind, superstition is not the world's property but made by agents of irrationality. The fight for reason and rationality is fought against institutions and people who install orders other than the rational one. In this sense, Condorcet is entirely different, closer to today's analyses, such as the one in Klementyna Suchanow's book on Ordo Iuris or earlier institutional analysis, than to this naive vision of the Enlightenment, which is today the proverbial "whipping boy." Condorcet did not describe any Reason that wanders ahistorically through the world. He was interested in expanding the area of rationality and rationality as a result of the struggle for social and political changes. When he said that the early Middle Ages was a failure of reason, he emphasized that part of this failure was the destruction of writing. He was interested in material carriers of rationality and the fight to have as many of them as possible, so he was an apologist for the printing press.

*It sounds like Althusser and his concept of ideological apparatuses...*

Yep, exactly. Let's look at what these discussions around vaccines looked like in the so-called golden era of blogging. In Poland, the first Law and Justice party government was when many blogs appeared. Let's call them irrationalist blogs and rationalist blogs discussing them. Then, diagnosing irrationalists seemed simple at first. Just promote science and rational thinking, and then this abyss will disappear. Although it must be admitted that even then, e.g., on [blogdebart.pl](http://blogdebart.pl), a more complex approach was developing, but more on that later.

*It was a kind of Platonic concept – you will learn the truth, gain virtue, reject evil and errors...*

I call it deceptively rationalistic. And it was an illusion that, in my opinion, is quite closely related to this liberal bias of the new atheists. When this rationalism is maintained as naive and detached from institutional conditions, we are working for the benefit of the other side. This perspective is something that not only rationalists but also Foucault and his readers forget, that is, the fact that analyses of power are always analyses of power structures plus people in power, as Mills did. You need to know who the node is, who is activating at a given moment, who is revealing. But we don't like to do this because it is an analysis that sounds disturbing. In the eyes of others, you come across as a conspiracy theorist, plus you have to name those you call "evil." An example is the already mentioned [blogdebart.pl](http://blogdebart.pl), where in 2006, the Piotr Skarga Christian Culture Association was subjected to critical analysis and seemed something completely exotic. Analyzing such niche movements and organizations back then seemed quite suspicious.

I remember how people were surprised when I talked about anti-vaxxers around 15 years ago.

*However, anti-vaxxers are not some uneducated, ignorant people. It's more of a lower middle class...*

It can be even higher in the United States than in the lower middle class. Jennifer A. Reich showed a correlation between gated communities and support for anti-vaxxers. A popular anti-vaxxer is Jim Carrey and other wealthy show business figures, similar to those in Poland. These religious regions, Podkarpacie and Podlasie, have higher vaccination rates than the seemingly more open-to-the-world Gdańsk or Poznań. These are the main strongholds of anti-vaxxers in Poland. It was in Poznań that Justyna Socha founded the STOP NOP association. These are liberal-middle-class milieu. Therefore, it is worth abandoning this naive dichotomy: rational-irrational, where the people are ignorant, and the rationalists are the enlightened elite because, politically speaking, the anti-vaccine interest is the interest of those who do not want the state. This relation is visible in the United States. Promoters of anti-vaccination or climate denialism represent what the Koch brothers sponsored at their conferences as anti-state ideology. Or, more precisely, they do not want the state to be understood as a regulator. Hence, alliances are being created that are not obvious at first glance, such as anti-vaxxers, with those opposing LGBT rights or the idea of climate change. They all aim to undermine confidence in the possibility of making knowledge-based policies, including policies that oppose the status quo. Let us note whether the fight for the climate or the fight against anti-vaxxers is about pro-

moting the belief that we can rely on and trust scientific experts and public institutions.

*Is this the effect of the privatization of knowledge?*

This outcome is more about introducing maximum distrust in community, public, and state ways of dealing with uncertainty. In the past, personal security and a certain degree of trust in public institutions were strengthened as part of building progressive proposals. The American campaign during the New Deal to create a polio vaccine is a great example of how this worked. It exemplifies a remarkable synthesis of state-managed science with a grass-roots movement. Its element, which I really like, was the so-called copper march, which had a more or less similar dimension to the Polish Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity, i.e., the mobilization of children, local groups, and orchestras to collect money for the vaccine to speed up research. It exemplified the fusion of economic ideas and the mood from the New Deal period with social activism. The anti-vaccine movement is precisely the opposite of this. They are intended to hit both poles, i.e., to undermine both community and public/state methods of dealing with uncertainty. I once read an analysis of the behavior of one of the bots. He bet on many controversies, both sides of the anti-vaccination argument, the refugee crisis...

*For what?*

To create tension. This was done to destabilize the system. Unfortunately, this is disastrous for us post-leftists because half of the blocks that the new irrationalists use to support their vision are from 1968. It creates a complicated

trap for people associated with the broadly understood left or emancipation movements to escape. To fight the new irrationalism, we must first come to terms with the legacy of 1968 because half of these slogans, such as “don’t trust anyone over thirty,” the undermining of the former communist or social democratic elites, the emphasis on grassroots and creativity, were taken over by the opposing side. Other elements of this new irrationalism also have their roots there: new religious movements and the New Age. These are elements of what I once called the poisoned legacy of 1968 when valid criticism of the abuses of science and the state wandered into some strange place, a Newage, post-psychedelic climate. This process depoliticized many issues and resulted, decades later, in what Barbrook calls *California ideology*. The hopes that in 1968 were related to either new spirituality or psychedelics were taken over by the early Internet culture, which, as we already know, was very quickly taken over by capitalism.

*I have the impression that we, convinced of some form of progress, liberal, leftist, whatever, thought that we were going to experience Western secularization, and few people looked at what it looked like. Let’s take the Czech Republic. Supposedly, 60% atheists. But what if more people believe in ghosts, the afterlife, and magic there than in Poland? It turns out that enlightenment did not come with secularization...*

Modern triumphalism existed much longer than the short-lived existence of modernity. In our country, late postmodernism buried the modernity that almost did not exist. The first 20-30 years of the Polish People’s Republic included some attempts to gain minimal autonomy in relation to the West, but this has not happened since 1980. And it’s

similar to all this rationality. When Agata Wdowik analyzed the journalistic reception of the Enlightenment discourse in Poland, in Polish literature, the most intense reception of the Enlightenment was in the period of Stalinism. The first texts and the first retreats from the Enlightenment were from 1953 and 1956. From the point of view of the Enlightenment, the October thaw (1956) was the introduction of anti-Enlightenment publications. So these are interesting paradoxes, and later, the Enlightenment didn't have such good press. Romanticism is back. Here, Przemysław Czapliński would probably add an analysis of Sarmatism. He showed it by discussing the film adaptation of "The Deluge" as an example of neo-Sarmatian ideology at one valuable point for the Polish People's Republic. Don't forget that we are in 1966-1968, which means first the competition between the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) celebrating the millennium of the Polish state and the Catholic Church honoring the "Baptism of Poland," and then the anti-Semitic campaign. So we see a PZPR façade with a nationalistic background. Therefore, it is clear that in the Polish context, the Enlightenment discourse was first promoted in a period in which it had to explain most of its ambiguous allies. And later, also in the Soviet Union from the 1980s, the increasingly exhausting progressive language meant that the language of parapsychology became popular: Kashpirovsky, telepathies, UFOs. Comics based on von Däniken were widely published in the Polish People's Republic.

*I loved them... (laughter).*

Many of my rationalist and scientist friends grew up on Däniken and believed in UFOs.

*Well, I believed in it too... My only defense is that I was ten years old. However, it seems that it saved me from religious fundamentalism after all.*

You're not the only one who was seduced by this. After all, dowsing in the Polish People's Republic had the official status of an association. In this sense, we have never been enlightened to paraphrase Latour, but with a slightly different punchline than his, which is a pity.

*So we were never enlightened, and we only changed the objects of our worship from Jesus to aliens?*

This situation is, unfortunately, also connected to global trajectories. That's why I mentioned our lack of autonomy. The time of fascination with the ideology of the conquest of space and science ran approximately from the vicinity of Sputnik and Gagarin to the Apollo Program. Then it's not good anymore. On many levels, from the level of funding for science and space research to "ideological processing," no one is working so intensively towards progressive technocratic scientism, and both the left and the right are still working intensively to combat it. And this is the paradox: the illusion of the rule of the Enlightenment lived much longer than the Enlightenment itself. We are surrounded by technocratic capitalism, but it is not enlightenment.

*Maybe the problem here is the lack of a meta-narrative backbone. Postmodernism questioned and deconstructed all of them. We haven't developed anything in its place, and people are terrified and privatize religion, science, and anything they can to defend themselves and hide in such bubbles...*



Postmodernism is coming back today with such a poisonous message that we should undergo some general “depostmodernization” in a few years.

*But it happens. These millenarian visions of the collapse of everything are a form of shifting the lever on frightened people so much that they believe that there is some truth, and this truth is the destruction that will occur either ecologically or in the name of a “great replacement” and “Islamization”..*

These collapsological discourses, unfortunately, continue to work for the wrong side. They will not bring us emancipatory solutions. Many of these discussions around the Anthropocene, which I prefer to call the Capitalocene because then we know what it’s really about, are maintained in para-religious discourse. This approach is visible in the nuclear dispute. Part of the left says let’s go back to nuclear power. And the other side, the anti-nuclear side, has nothing to offer, maybe anti-natalism, let’s go extinct, but collectively. The history and legacy of the final period of the Polish People’s Republic is partly responsible for this. The entire Polish opposition was strengthened by its opposition to Chornobyl. This catastrophe and later failure of the Żarnowiec nuclear plant project were good symbols of the system’s failure.

*But Gorbachev said directly that Chornobyl destroyed the USSR...*

It’s hard to fall in love with the same object a second time. I remember from one of the books of the Belarusian Nobel

Prize winner Sviatlana Alexievich a fragment of a conversation with a physics teacher, probably in a primary school in Ukraine or Belarus, that when she heard about the Chornobyl explosion, her reaction was: how will I teach now? She goes on to say that for her, the taming of the atom was linked to rationality, the success of socialism, and the building of a better future. All these elements reinforced each other. For her, the Chornobyl catastrophe was an eschatological failure. It killed the scientific state story. And this is our fundamental problem now, that we would have to fall in love again with the solutions we have already criticized very effectively. Here, we can see the ambiguous role that our heroes from the humanities, like Foucault, now play. Everyone on the left side of the academy is infected with it. He is a generally liberal thinker, as Steve Fuller once maliciously wrote that if you were a Foucauldian in England in the 1980s, you actually supported Thatcher because this criticism of the oppression of the state apparatus, the health service, etc., worked for neoliberalism. The problem is that, as I mentioned, half of our heroes, our tools, work for the other side. When talking about the Koch brothers, the author of the book *Dark Money*, Jane Meyer, used the great slogan that they promote “anarchototalitarianism.” At the bottom, the world is anarchic atomized so that we can create totalitarian, uncontrolled power at the top. And this is the real political economy of this irrationality. And here is the theme that needs to be returned to. That’s why I don’t like the term “tin-foil hat” because it obscures things more. Of course, in social media, it is a discourse that we perceive as irrational, but “underneath,” many actions are about simply gaining power or money, which indicates quite conscious strategies.

*Okay, let's not say that we are great, and they are irrational and crazy. When I listen to ecological discourse, I regularly have the impression that I am subjected to severe manipulation. We have five years left! Seven! Ten! Then, the changes are irreversible! We're about to die out. No reaction to the changes is assumed at all. Plus, creating a model that considers all the variables is simply impossible here. There are eight billion people and their decisions. Let it be even two thousand people. And even rich people and their choices. Nevertheless, any polemic is impossible. This perspective is a religious view.*

The issue of climate change is so complicated that it is a battlefield of serious interests, not any irrationality. Climate denialists are the agenda of oil companies, not “concerned” citizens. And we know that. This mechanism is best illustrated in Naomi Oreskes’ book *Merchants of Doubt*. Corporations had rational knowledge about climate change, but they used it to plan the construction of pipelines or the exploitation of new deposits. Inside the institution, they pragmatically used knowledge depicting the accurate image of climate change. Outside, there was a parallel production of doubts and expertise. A serious, scientific climate report was being created, and, for example, the ultra-free-market Cato Institute produced the same one, point by point. The content was, of course, different, but the charts and maps were almost identical and in identical places in the text. A journalist starts to get dizzy when s/he is exposed to both at a conference. You aren’t able tell the difference between the two without some excellent scientific knowledge, but one was a reasonable climate impact story, and the other was simply denialism. And what you state is merely the result of the fact that we are in the eye

of the cyclone of information wars. We managed to deny climate change for a long time, and now, for some reason, it has stopped, and the those promoting skepticism and doubt use different methods. Previously, they said there was no warming because there was snow outside in winter. Now, they have stopped saying this.

*Well, you're still talking about production from that side. And I keep asking about our story. I have the impression that I do not meet people who are convinced by facts but those who, when presented with any doubt about any element, almost start screaming and crying.*

So what if our side believed in the apocalypse?

Yes.

Well, if there is an apocalypse, we can stop talking about increasing taxes and chasing millionaires, because we will all die anyway.

*However, I remember well what Naomi Klein said, saying that our meta-narratives are dead and that we have nothing to offer to the people who would be captivated by them. The only thing that will help in this matter is ecology. As a result, after 20 years, at the end of history and the apocalypse, penitenziagite!*

I'm observing interesting things in the nuclear battle. I see a return to the discussion about railway usage or the atom, and this is a rational reaction, not succumbing to an apocalyptic vision. But this millenarian fear? As Sasha Levy once said, dystopias are for losers.

*Meanwhile, I also hear the slogan “antinatalism” on the left. And I see it as a very religious, gnostic, non-progressive, and non-left-wing concept.*

Anti-Promethean too. We feed right-wing narratives again. For me, this anti-natalism is a highly religious, puritanical story, not necessarily in content but in form and structure. Every area of your life must be subjected to puritanical control. Not eating something, exercising your body and mind, carbon footprint analysis understood not as a systemic tool, but as recommendations for individuals, all those elements that show how you, the individual, are destroying the planet, and in reality, the end of this route, because there is no God or prohibition on suicide, is ethical suicide—starving yourself to death. If this is supposed to be the left’s answer to how to live, I say thank you and leave. This approach is politically suicidal because it does not point to anyone to blame for this situation. Malicious comments on Facebook that it’s time to devour millionaires are more reasonable. In the golden age of rocketry, we had a global, almost socialist, pop fantasy: Star Trek. Now, we have a feudal Game of Thrones.

*You talk about Game of Thrones and neo-feudalism. We are indeed witnessing the emergence of myth, which has serious political consequences.*

I would put it differently. The rational side forgot that rationality needs a myth. It also consciously created its mythology. When we think about the Soviet side, we have human heroes Yuri Gagarin and Valentina Tereshkova and animal heroes – Laika, Belka, Strefka, Wietierok, and Ugolok. We have huge myth-making machinery that installs

myth and arranges the transition from myth to your everyday life. And then, referring to the sociological approach to the world of life – you have a somewhat more or less coherent existential proposition. You have a toothache. In the past, you could go to a doctor, and it either went away or it didn't go away, but now you see Gagarin on TV, and you take pills that will relieve the pain, or you go to the dentist, and he will pull it out and put in a new artificial one. Maybe it will be golden, and at the same time, you will join the game of social prestige. Still, you won't die, and it won't hurt, so your existential fears or micro-fears will be solved, even if not entirely right away, but living in the rural region, you know that your cousin in the city is doing better. And she knows someone in Moscow who is feeling even better. Of course, this story could, to some extent, be made for America, that is, the story of how the Apollo program and the space race translated into thousands of small dreams or inventions, but also children's toys, designing houses, cars, all those cosmic, rocket symbols. You had a rather serious production of myth-making that was relatively coherent, but it failed for various reasons. In our region, it died with communism. And here, a symbolic moment of bifurcation that resonates in the discussion about rationalism would be the comparison between Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov. These two greatest oppositionists in the Soviet Union also represented two different visions of reality. Sakharov wants to reject the oppressive part of the Soviet Union, the undemocratic, authoritarian part. Still, he does not want to give up his dreams of science, progress, and humanity. His dream was the idea of convergence: when the Western side became socially sensitive, and the USSR became democratically sensitive, this technocratic myth of (socialist) modernity would support humanity's upward movement.

*And did the removal of progressive myths lead to the intrusion of other myths?*

Yes. After 1989, these scientific myths could not be recreated in our region. They were so entangled in the Cold War, in the old promise of the Eastern bloc, that it was virtually impossible to recreate them. Let's be honest: after March 1968, the first blow was the purge of universities, the destruction of careers, and the expulsion of scientists. Those who stayed were already broken. They were also opportunists. From a purely institutional perspective, the most progressive part of the party apparatus was also destroyed. Then we have the technocratic times of Edward Gierek, but nothing was happening ideologically. Let's remember that Leszek Balcerowicz started developing his ideas in the 1970s, when his team started to suggest marketization. Wojciech Jaruzelski's period was one of stagnation. The Polish People's Republic no longer produced its narrative. It would rather sell von Däniken than something progressive. And returning to the "Game of Thrones." We have had 30 years of the decline of this progressive myth-making modern story. After 1989 and 1991, liberal ideology entered the picture, infecting scientists, and unfortunately, in Poland, even the left-wing speaks a liberal language. Talking about a positive hegemony for progress is impossible to articulate, and it has certainly been like that for 20-30 years. There was a liberal idea that if you cut off the radical, "irrational" margins from the left and right, then only that which is considered reasonable and centrist would remain and everything would be fine. I think it has been forgotten that we must create a powerfully positive myth of rationality and progress for them to work. And here, unfortunately, "our" side needs a lot of explain-

ing because when I think about subsequent conferences and texts on biopolitics, they have attacked the Enlightenment and modernity over and over again for 30 years. They have ended up in the same place as Agamben, who says the same things as anti-vaxxers or ultra-conservative critics of modernity.

*As I read in texts of the ultra-Catholic monarchists, those who question the order of democracy and, more broadly, modernity, say directly: "What has modernity given you – the Holocaust, Stalinism, the Great Leap Forward in China, millions of people died, and this is your progress?" So maybe a hierarchy validated by divine law is better?*

From the same milieu, for example, like Polish far-right magazines "Polonia Christiana" or "Do Rzeczy," even during the period of the heated anti-Bauman campaign, when they criticized him for being a militiaman in Moscow or a political commissar in the communist Internal Security Corps, even then I remember texts quoting the anti-Enlightenment segment's from Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Although he was criticized and condemned, he was still regarded as someone who understood the Enlightenment and the dangers it brought. Such an example was the text by Michał Łuczewski from the John Paul II Center, which appeared in "Gazeta Wyborcza," in which he used Bauman to support the anti-abortion narrative. With Sara Manasterska, we wrote a polemic against this text, published in the left-wing "Codziennik Feministyczny." To summarize his arguments, the hygiene of modernity, which led to the Holocaust, has its new incarnation – feminist-progressive hygiene, which leads to the "Holocaust of unborn children" and eugenic abortion.



When analyzing such a neoconservative use of Bauman, one immediately sees the weakness and ambiguity of Bauman's criticism of modernity. When you study Modernity and the Holocaust, there is no capitalism, no forced labor, and no corporate participation in this entire book. This perspective is visible when we think about *Schindler's List* in a non-Hollywood but realistic way. We see that the whole intrigue is an illustration of the contradictions within Nazism when ideological legitimacy collides with slave labor and exploitation. Schindler had no problem exploiting slave labor for years. It was fine for him as long as the ideological machine guaranteed it. But the moment it got out of control from the capitalist's point of view because it wanted to kill his slaves, a problem within Nazism suddenly became apparent to him. In this Baumanian analysis, the Enlightenment is criticized, but capitalism is not. Here, Bauman unintentionally joins a long line of people who have waged war against modernity. You talked about these monarchists, but they didn't start to exist yesterday. The problem is that part of the left-liberal side has now woken up – Brexit, anti-vaxxers, Trump, oh, the irrationality has revealed itself to us. The problem is that the other side never ended the Cold War. When one analyzes the TFP organization and its guru, Plinio de Oliveira, in the book *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, his text is technically an anti-communist Leninism. Copying the Leninist strategy, but with the vector reversed. Or you can compare it with Blanquism. Create a small group, then an organization, be invisible, and fight. An organization known more widely from the Netflix documentary *The Family* works similarly. Its founder understands perfectly well that revolutionary cells should be created only with the prefix counter-. The same thing is evident from the biography of the Koch

brothers. An example would be the John Birch Society in the 1950s, an early seedbed of various conspiracy theories with an anti-communist, ordoliberal bent. Still, they directly copied specific strategies of struggle and taking power used by communist movements only to fight the leftist movements of that time.

*I noticed that the far right started reading Gramsci and implementing methods straight from Lakoff's framing...*

Then, with the help of money, they started a real fight against the then-existing modernist discourses. Charles Koch and his brother David held meetings in the 1970s and 1980s, collecting money under various banners. In 1976, they decided that as billionaires, they could not use the word anarchism, so they started promoting libertarianism. It didn't work out very well. The first label with the most success was the Tea Party. It was all a regular, institutionalized fight against modernity by people placed in the center of capitalism because, for them, it is evident that regulation immediately meant the regulation of the market and business. Hence, wanting freedom from environmental regulations and paying taxes, they promoted every idea and milieu that questioned the sense of public and state control. And this, unfortunately, goes hand in hand with such a half-hearted critique of modernity as in the late Bauman's work. He is indeed a great critic of the state, but he does not touch the market. Criticizing it from a moral perspective, he withdraws from criticism from a political economy perspective. And quite unintentionally, he plays a role in the same story as de Oliveira. For years, we have had a dominant narrative that regulation is wrong, which has been sponsored for several decades by people

interested in deregulation. In 2009, on the last weekend of January, when Obama was sworn in, and the liberal side was celebrating his incredible success, the Kochs gathered the cream of their billionaires to debate how to prevent the implementation of any left-liberal ideas. The number of billionaires that met that day was longer than the list of all billionaires in the US in the 1990s. This meeting was the acceleration of the stratification of the economy. So now, when you think in a Gramscian manner, we can see how far we have fallen behind. This mechanism works for us, too. Look at the fur industry in Poland. You have done such an analysis yourself...

*Well, first, they paid the liberal Civic Platform party. This one fell out of circulation, so they paid the illiberal Law and Justice party. However, it began to change the law regarding breeding animals for fur. So, they started sponsoring the far-right Confederation Party. Its politicians have started attending fur producers' demonstrations, giving speeches there and in their media. These breeders are not particularly interested in the issues of abortion and gays, but they would pay anyone to push through legislation favorable to them. Their primary market is currently Russia. Here, however, there are EU sanctions and counter-sanctions from Russia, plus such ethical pressure from the West that fur production is an unethical and bloody business. Ultimately, the fur producers are paying off this force that may be attacking the West for entirely different reasons, but in the end, it kills two birds with one stone...*

On a micro scale, it is described in the USA as Kochtopus, i.e., creating a network of influence to influence politics to reduce the impact and political regulations on the market.

That is why I have been trying to direct our conversation in this direction from the beginning. We must approach this rationalism differently. I am already reaching the point where I no longer criticize those with irrational views. I'm no longer irritated by the stereotypical anti-vaccination eco-mum. What's more, instead of fighting irrationality, this anti-irrational approach quickly becomes a pretext for, for example, misogyny or anti-feminism. The only analysis of irrationalism to be valid is examining its financial and institutional roots.

*Well, now you're making a typical leftist mistake: you're economizing everything. You mentioned Solzhenitsyn during Sakharov. And we skipped it. And there is, you know, the spirit of Russia, Tradition. People live a spiritual life. Rationalism does not give them this, and certainly not currently.*

I did not economize because it was an internal polemic against a specific type of thinking about rationalism, hence a certain exaggeration. There is no better way to criticize irrationality than the institutional-economic-interest one. However, we must come to terms with the myth-creating role of emancipation again. One such positive strategy should be some types of emancipatory theologies. Such alternative proposals of spirituality are very disturbing in Poland. This is obviously a suspicious topic because you have to fight back because someone will soon tell you that spirituality is not science.

*I see another problem here. Myth, Spirit, Youth, Movement, Myth, and technology in one. What do you associate it with? Because to me, it is fascism.*

We had the possibility of counter-fascism when we had the myth of communism. Enzo Traverso shows this well in his books. And the problem is that it is difficult for us to evaluate it critically now. This is not the moment to answer the accusation that the Enlightenment was religious for various reasons. But yes, it was. And it is the only religion that makes sense. Although sometimes I feel like responding like that. This is the question of how we can afford to say yes – progress is not a feature of the world; it is a specific ideology, but it is the best of those we have to choose from because it is the only one that self-corrects.

*But the Pope also self-corrects. Priests used to be able to have children, but now they can't...*

Please allow me to refrain from being drawn into commenting on the Pope's actions and statements, as many people pay attention to him anyway. Coming back to the reevaluation of progress, it is clear that there are attempts at this. Slowly, the accelerationism promoted by Srnicek and Willimas is breaking through. The idea that the left can be positively progressive again is gradually returning. The problem is again with institutions. If, as of now, you have in Poland more religion classes at school from the first grade to the high school leaving exam than all natural sciences combined, the discussion about irrationality is lost before it even begins. I'm not talking about the situation when children learn about religion, but about school as a machine for producing both doubts and cynicism. Some children and teenagers will learn religious discourse during religion classes, but for others, it will be a lesson in cynicism and hypocrisy. They will treat religion classes as "something they have to do," which affects not only the

institutions of the Catholic Church but also the institution of the secular school because the identical mechanism drives it. If a secular school allows more religious lessons than the other and allows this to occur inside the school, is such a school an ally of Enlightenment and rationality? What does this school offer these children and teenagers? Why should it convince me of a vision of the world supported by knowledge of natural science, and why should I believe in its validity in one lesson when he offers me a counterproduct in others? If religious lessons were held in churches, the message in catechetical rooms would be more straightforward, and the ideological roles of the school and the church would be separated. Someone could probably say that a child would still have two visions to choose from: one in school, the other in religion, but at least there would be a division of labor – one institution is for teaching facts based on experience and science, and another is for the religious, non-scientific zone.

*See, I have the neofascist group National-Radical Camp application installed on my smartphone, which informs me about their new texts on the website, events, etc. The left does not have such a thing. What you have here is an extraordinary combination of reaction and new technology.*

And this gives you a Gilead. In this sense, they are all turbo-modern and, at the same time, anti-Enlightenment. They benefit from the achievements of standardization and technology. In a philosophical sense, while on the side of the free market, the Confederation Party is on the side of the bourgeoisie who fought against their idols. In the 18th century, they would have been against the Pope and kings. Being on the free market side, they would be on the

side of the bourgeoisie. They would be anti-monarchist bourgeois revolutionaries. But they are not consistent or ideological. However, the only thing they care about today is cutting off the regulatory restrictions. Reality should be left to organize itself. This narrative leads to misunderstandings. When anarchists say it, they think about it positively: self-organization is a collective that organizes itself from the bottom up. I think about this concept in a purely philosophical sense, in the sense of self-organization of systems and self-organization of the market. In this sense, the world organizes itself, i.e., it has no conscious political, subjective interference. And that's all. Libertarians and anti-vaxxers have something in common. They are against regulations and top-down control. It is the privatization of everything: spirituality, science, education, organization of life.

*In this context, Poland and Iran are incredibly modern and innovative.*

We are trendsetters of irrationality. This paradox is well illustrated by *Dark Enlightenment* by Nick Land. If the alt-right is a political movement, neo-reactionism is the antidemocratic philosophy that it heralds. Proponents of the Dark Enlightenment believe that people are not equal, exploitation is a natural interpersonal relation, and the most essential feature is intelligence, which gives technological elites the right to rule others.

*Where does this movement have its roots?*

This neo-reactionary utopianism or Dark Enlightenment has been developing for 30 years as several parallel move-

ments. One is the distorted legacy of 1968, the new age, the decline of faith in the state, understood as a rational possibility of planning reality. The second is the abandonment of rationality in favor of either the systemic, evolutionary, or free market paradigms. Adam Curtis brilliantly put this in the movie "All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace." Following this approach, each of these methods of depoliticization emphasized that self-organization is a higher form of organization. The system strives for equilibrium. The free market is more optimal than politics, bureaucracy, etc. All three of them knew how to disguise themselves as progressive. In the late 1980s, they stood out in California as three different sources of influence in early Silicon Valley, where neo-spiritualist and psychedelic hopes became secularized. As Curtis notes, drugs were abandoned, but the hope was growing that computers would do to us what we once thought LSD would do to us – they would give us the shortcut to enlightenment, an instant enlightenment. It is easy to talk about general justice while remaining an atomized libertarian. Every man for himself, but it will all come together at a higher level. And the old reactionary-free-market chant comes out only in various new incarnations. A lot of people from the left and activists fell for this. All those early fascinations with free software and 3D printing. The vision was that it would be less oppressive than the old factory, a fundamental redistribution of the means of production. And you have this anarchist totalitarianism perfectly illustrated in Uber or Uber Eats. On the lower level, you have entirely anarchized units subjected to control unimaginable in a Fordist factory. This change between the Fordist organization and what it is now is that it was once conceivable that you had the right to rest. And now you can't even fight for it because you



don't have the ontological ability to do so. Everything you do is work because there are no boundaries. And you are in the world of Dark Enlightenment. You are in Latifundia, and you are constantly at work. You are not a subject but a property. When someone says I don't trust politicians, s/he is repeating the kind of statement that the Koch brothers paid money for to make common. This statement fits perfectly with the strategy of the irrationalists. Only there the statement is: "I don't trust scientists." Why was it profitable for millionaires? It's pretty simple: the more you destroy trust in the public space, the more only big fish operate in this sphere of confusion. That's why far-right libertarianism wins – because it feeds on the failures of rationality. And what is its symbol here? Universities? I'm not joking. Things that were apparatuses that produced rationality simply died, as was recalled by Bernard Stiegler, among others.

*And what will we be left with if we don't bet on Enlightenment?*

I'll show you a video. This event is a greeting of the picture of the Virgin Mary of Częstochowa. It is being driven through the town in a car with a crown on the roof, roosters, and loudspeakers playing religious songs. It's like the Warhammer 40000 — knights with lasers and a scapular.

Andrzej W. Nowak (born 1974) – philosopher professor at the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań. His scientific research concerns issues in ontology, including social ontology, science studies, and the sociology of knowledge. In this regard, he researches the political and axiological consequences of the so-called ontological turn and posthumanism. He also researches the

so-called peddlers of doubt, including those associated with anti-vaccination movements. He published, among others, *Subject, System, Modernity* (2011), *Whose Fears? Whose Science? Knowledge Structures in the Face of Scientific and Social Controversies* (with Krzysztof Abriszewski and Michał Wróblewski, 2016).



# Instant Apocalypse. With Lech M. Nijakowski about the apocalypse

*Your book “World after the Apocalypse” is experiencing a renaissance in popularity and subsequent editions. Were you expecting it to go so viral?*

I didn't write it as a futurological work, trying to predict the future. *The World after the Apocalypse* analyzes popular culture texts depicting post-apocalyptic communities. So, I was interested in social imagery and “social consciousness.” In these films and novels, we can find many roots of the apocalypse, including the most fantastic ones. Pandemics are also among the most frequently used scenarios. This option is also a variant with a high probability from a scientific point of view. So, I wasn't surprised by a micro-killer coming from China's wet markets.

*So – it's over? Time to get your coffin suit ready?*

We don't know the final effect of this pandemic. Maybe we'll all die. However, fear and panic cannot be identified with apocalyptic thinking. Without a doubt, the fear of the pandemic will increase the popularity of post-apocalyptic works. But this does not necessarily mean that people will generally think they live in the last days. Let us note that

the coronavirus has surprisingly easily replaced thinking about a climate catastrophe. The demand for stories about the world's end does not mean a profound reevaluation of the attitude toward humanity and its fate.

*What will destroy us? Machines, viruses, war, natural disasters?*

Well, it's hard to say. The Christian Apocalypse, the Nordic Ragnarök, the Hindu Kali Yuga, the Islamic Yawm al-Qiyāmah, or the Zoroastrian Frashokereti each has its own vision of the final days.

*And what would pop culture indicate?*

The stories we call post-apocalyptic are a modern construction. Old folk, rural and oral cultures provided people with a complete symbolic description of the world. Sometimes, these could be unorthodox options, such as those in the Polish, nominally Catholic countryside, with its demonology of pagan roots, or the transfer of stories from the Bible to local conditions. This situation began to change with rapid urbanization and industrialization in the 19th century. In its current version, popular culture emerged in the 20th century, when the mass culture became a new "folk culture," although based on writing and other media. Today, it also ensures the circulations, interactions, and meanings we associate with gossiping on the market in folk cultures. So, apart from professional works or what fans do in fandoms, we are dealing with a sphere constantly used in everyday interactions on the Internet. People get scared, have fun, and comment on the world using memes. *So when does the post-apocalypse enter the scene?*

We can look for its roots in the 19th century. *The Last Man* by Mary W. Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein* (1826), is considered one of the first post-apocalyptic novels. Technological progress undoubtedly influenced the birth of the post-apocalyptic novel. It evoked various frustrations and fears that made catastrophic scenarios more readable. These stories regularly featured war gases, a comet, and epidemics, which, for obvious reasons, had dominated for centuries. However, the atomic bomb could only appear after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and murderous artificial intelligence correspondingly later. So it was changing. However, if we sort it out somehow, the oldest causes of destruction that we find, even before the emergence of popular culture, are, of course, gods and nature. Often, God sends a comet to punish sinful humanity. In the secularized version, there is a nature that rebels. It may be a coincidence or a reaction to human action when this rebellion results from pride as enormous as the Tower of Babel, when man, wanting to control the natural elements, creates a catastrophe. The motifs are repeated – meteorites, comets, earthquakes. Let's look at the effect of the Lisbon earthquake in the 18th century. Some will say that we owe the Enlightenment to it. Or the plague epidemic of the 14th century, to which we supposedly "owe" the modern economy. In the past, it was an act of God. Today, it is more motif of the "destructive nature" – a virus that emerges from some dark forest when a forest is cut down, a glacier melts, and, due to human greed, a deadly germ wakes up from its lethargy. Now, of course, this story takes place in a secularized version.

*I would argue with this secularism. For me, this is the religiosity of scientific times.*

This quasi-religiousness is a gigantic topic. When I talk about secularization, I mean that in religious terms, God is behind the destruction and is punishing people for something, and this is the classic Christian approach.

*There were more visions of destruction. Many religions imagined their own Armageddon...*

Of course. Second comings in glory, the last days, the coming of the Messiah, Last Judgments, destruction and reconstruction, great battles – there are whole volumes of end-time visions, still very popular today. Then, we have apocalypses related to human activity, such as war apocalypses. However, this is a relatively late type. It began to develop before World War I, but this conflict was a gigantic accelerator. It was then that the gas mask became a post-apocalyptic icon because the most significant fear at that time was the invisible and mercilessly deadly combat gases.

*And is there a clear motif that dominates now?*

There has been a great acceleration because the world has also sped up. A significant caesura in apocalyptic thinking is World War II. Not even because it was a total war – because World War I had a much more significant impact on the development of this type of story. It was not the first total war either. This was the American Civil War. However, World War II combined old and new fears and a key element was the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It turned out that the human species could bring absolute destruction upon itself. Previously, it was rebellious nature and God, and the suddenly it appeared that this final

destruction could be the result of people's actions. It was so convincing that various religious associations began to describe the moment of the Last Judgment by including the topos of nuclear war. This tendency was further multiplied by mass and popular culture, fantasy, film, TV series, comics, and fandoms, adding threads and hybridizing topics and narratives. And today, we have many: rebellious nature or ecological disasters. However, nuclear war has not disappeared. Pandemics persist. However, we are dealing with rebellious artificial intelligence, robot wars, and alien invasion from space – this is what we are dealing with more often.

*Since the 1970s, the number of thrillers and horror films has multiplied. Are we more nowadays?*

Man as a species has always been afraid. Fear is culturally fundamental. When we look at religion, mythology, and folk cultures, we are constantly dealing with various forms of symbolic control of the world, including, above all, feelings such as fear and anxiety.

*However, technological development is rapid, the economy is unstable, work is uncertain, and the sphere of social welfare is in complete disintegration...*

Are modern fears symbolically organized differently and related to new phenomena, proving there is more of this fear? One could argue against that. Was a man who lived in medieval Europe less afraid? Has he had fewer threats? And epidemics? Wars? No access to health care? However, at the same time, the sacred and spiritual dimension was more explicit. Death had its place in the world's great cycle, the divine plan. Yes, he could be afraid, but he did not live



in constant fear of the end of his existence because his soul was supposed to last forever.

*However, today, in a secularized world, their temporality is all they have...*

Perhaps this Christian promise, or more precisely its lack, is crucial to understanding today's fears. The secularized countries of the rich North impose global trends in mass culture. And the core of the post-apocalypse is founded, after all, on Christian ideas. Today's versions, of course loosely related to the original, are distributed all over the world. And we are dealing with a transformation of these original Christian meanings. They organized fear in such a way that there was always some promise there. The same one that was later transformed into revolutionary utopian thinking. Some authors, e.g., Shmuel Eisenstadt, show that European millenarian movements are the source of modernity. Why? Because they made it possible to question the existing feudal order, which was previously treated as without alternative and sacred. And here arose all these heresies, peasant revolts and subsequent Christs who proclaimed that they had returned. Here the parousia is crucial, they showed that this world could be completely different. Now, however, we are dealing instead with genres that often pretend to describe something extremely dangerous, but in fact entertain the consumer.

*Well, yes, but they relieve real tension by having fun.*

Even if it is a horror, apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic film, its mass consumption does not necessarily indicate an increase of fear in the viewers. This fear can be dealt with

in a completely different way. It is very insidious that films that show the collapse of the world and the related fall of man often do not have a cathartic dimension at all. These visions of doom are most often about the world we live in now, perhaps about its transience, weakness, crumbling foundations, and the fact that civilization is a house of cards. These are the most common structures in post-apocalyptic cinema and social thinking about extermination. However, this does not mean that we are looking into the abyss. They are highly optimistic. After all, they clearly communicate that humanity will survive no matter what happens or how gigantic the cataclysm is. Perhaps our civilization will collapse, and we will be forced to exist in its ruins. Rum-maging through garbage bins will be a luxury, but there will still be people. And it has quite a reactionary dimension, petrifying the culture we live in, telling us, "You don't even know how good you have it today." Of course, they are also pessimistic because they show that our world of the global North is very fragile, that a meteorite, a war or an epidemic, or the mere fear of them, is enough for our entire "extraordinary" culture and civilization to collapse in an explosion of panic, looting of shops and riots. In many of them, we can see a hidden thesis that man is basically like in Hobbes' works, that there is a war of all against all, and the Leviathan, which is supposed to keep all these little people together in order, is very weak.

*So this is a highly conservative, I would say reactionary narrative? Do we need a solid backbone of institutions and the state so we do not fall into brutal chaos?*

Apparently, apocalyptic narratives consider only certain social bonds as strong...

*For the authors of these stories...*

... but how widespread it is! Suppose a topos is constantly essential for many directors, screenwriters, writers, and comic book creators. In that case, it reflects the social consciousness of some individuals and confirms the recipients in their beliefs. We could say in Marxist terms that it works in the superstructure to maintain the base via maintaining cultural hegemony through the story produced by ideological apparatuses. One can also notice the evaporation of utopian thinking in popular culture. Suppose a film appears somewhere that presents a brave new world. In that case, it quickly turns out, as in classic dystopias, that behind the facade, there are very ugly mechanisms that allow the happiness of a few to be maintained, as in "The Giver of Memory." Optimism disappeared. There is no pattern of action, no fantasy pushing you to action. This literature used to work differently.

*I see utopian optimism in some works, although perhaps not the kind we would like. Take "The Turner Diaries". There we have a "race war" that neo-Nazis are winning step by step. If Timothy McVeigh can kill 168 people in an attack after reading it, there is some utopian causative power here.*

But it's more of a dystopia...

*And it depends on what perspective we look at. For the far right, it's the opposite.*

Well, for genociders and Nazis, this will definitely be a positive utopia. A long time ago, they created visions in which they dehumanized their victims, such as the vision of the

thousand-year Third Reich or the Turkish state during the Armenian Genocide. Take Philip K. Dick and *The Man in the High Castle*. Isn't this reality, in some sense, when you look at it from the other side, a Nazi utopia? Breivik also kills 77 people in the name of his utopian vision. For him, the stories of "Eurabia" and the "great replacement" are dystopian. Tarrant murders 45 praying Muslims in Christchurch, driven by the vision of stopping the "white genocide," which is, after all, also an apocalyptic vision. In their opinion, they want to prevent the apocalypse by murdering people. The Islamic State itself is also an example of such thinking. The ISIS Dabiq magazine took its name from the town in Syria where, according to Daesh, the last battle between the forces of Islam and the infidels was to take place.

*So, does ISIS turn out to be the other side of this apocalyptic coin?*

Let's just remember that this post-apocalyptic thinking, expressed in popular culture genres, is qualitatively different from the living apocalypticism in these movements. However, there are numerous superficial influences when, for example, a journalist writing about ISIS vehicles calls them vehicles from Mad Max because they are, as in this series of films, various cars converted into combat vehicles. Likewise, when describing the Mexican Mafia. Or references to superhero cinema. In addition, there are Protestant churches, including millenarian ones, and their influence on the American right-wing and key Republican politicians. One aspect is significant here. There are Protestant millenarian groups who believe that activities aimed at total world war, including nuclear war, are, in fact, consistent

with God's plan because it only accelerates the apocalypse and the second coming of Christ.

*I add another element – ecology. I keep hearing the story that species are dying out, the temperature is rising, drought will kill us, and we will destroy the world...*

You are clearly in such a bubble.

*Yes, but earlier, there were other topics in the same bubble...*

Yes. When we look at the post-apocalypse, where the cause of destruction is nature, ecology, spreading diseases, the greenhouse effect, poisoned nature, etc., we see the increase in the popularity of this genre in the 1970s, which can be related to concerns after the Club of Rome reports. Of course, slightly different reasons were indicated there because the Malthusian crisis was more often suggested as a possible cause, and today, it is rather global warming and its consequences. However, I agree entirely. This approach used to be common, but something more has happened. The coronavirus pandemic and, before that, apocalyptic weather, forests burning in Siberia, forests burning in the Amazon, and forests burning in Australia. Melting of glaciers. Winter without snow and frost. Those events make this feeling grow. Does it make people live greener? Of course not. Do they think about their future through the prism of a climate apocalypse? Some people do. There is even talk of climate depression. But again, most people don't care about it. There are also anti-natalist movements... I will not have children in order to save the world. But the Earth's population is not decreasing.

*Maybe it's the case that after postmodernism, the time has come when the fear of the apocalypse is a form of reconstitution of a new universalism.*

I do not know. We supposedly have ISIS fundamentalists who believe that the final battle is coming, the alt-right who think that there is a “white genocide,” a “great replacement,” and a holy race war is coming, a belief in a climate catastrophe, climate refugees or Christian fundamentalists who talk about the second-coming of Jesus in glory after the nuclear war. On the other hand, we must remember that we are looking from our bubble, which is still located in the global North. However, postmodernism is somewhat endemic to this region. Developed modernism has not yet even appeared in many places. And there, it is difficult to talk about overcoming this legacy. It may be an option for privileged scientists and intellectuals from big cities who, after a period of fascination with Lacan, post-structuralism, and feminism, are now looking for new concepts. Paradoxically, even post-colonialism is also a somewhat specific invention. Many leading researchers in this trend are criticized, for although they may come from these cultures they belong to their privileged layers. Today, the likes of Gayatri Spivak or Homi Bhabha, work in the bubbles of the largest universities. In this context, the question immediately arises about how the situation in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, or Indonesia relates to the re-evaluation of postmodernism.

*But you can't turn them into wild regions, either. Some re-evaluate, while others abandon the shame associated with the feeling of backwardness or peripherality and affirm the local version of universalism.*

And has there ever been a culture that did not claim universality?

*In that case, maybe we should agree with the American fascists who say, "We have been castrated?" We must insist that we are the best and bash everyone around us because, otherwise, they will ruin us.*

We must be honest with ourselves that we are already dealing with confessions of faith at some point. Both with them and with us. A consistent racist who also refers to the concepts of, for example, Evola, de Gobineu, or Chamberlain expresses himself using philosophically internally consistent concepts, not some random combination of slogans. Yes, he uses terms that are scientifically debunked to some extent, e.g., he assumes the existence of races as "spiritual" concepts. Still, a philosophically justified assumption about inequality and hierarchy exists deep in our human condition. On the other hand, we believe that universal human rights, which are pretty similar in nature, are equally scientifically provable and refutable. And this dispute is a question of the foundations of ethics rather than science. Of course, many of us favor not harming humans or, more broadly, beings capable of feeling suffering. Well, we can already see how many solutions exist in this regard in different cultures. And this ethics cannot be taken out of the natural state. Therefore, I again emphasize that the cultural transformation of post-apocalyptic thinking is a phenomenon strongly related to the global North and the popular culture it hegemonically imposes.

*Or is it the case that Europe and the USA are losing importance, living conditions are deteriorating, and this causes concern?*

It is common ground that China's role has been growing and will continue to grow for a long time and that, according to various indicators, the position of Europe and the US is decreasing. But that's a different discussion. Of course, we can discuss opposing and stopping the colonial expansion that began in the 16th century and created global capitalism. And it actually started to regress. Of course, the process of decolonization, especially in the subsequent waves after World War II, contributed to this and founded popular genres that dealt with the threat from Muslims or action films featuring aggressive black men, full of emotions, with weapons. But it also gave rise to postcolonial literature and very radical visions of decolonization. Suppose we are talking about fears and anxieties. In that case, losing global economic and political hegemony certainly raises fears in every dimension, ranging from political projects through books to various intellectual and social movements, parties, and armed militias. However, if you look from a non-European perspective, China in the 20th century funded its own apocalypse in very different versions: from the Great Leap Forward through the Cultural Revolution to the massacre at Tiananmen Square. If we compare it with the Nazi or Stalinist terror system, it had its own specificity. You need to add Confucianism and demonic Asian sect visions of destruction, and this mixture is fascinating. And yet this thinking shows an extremely modernist optimism, expansion, enrichment, control over nature, and Chinese pride associated with quite traditionally understood progress. However, although in Japan went through the phase of becoming rich much earlier, despite Nagasaki, Hiroshima, and now Fukushima, their horror films use traditional Shinto demonology and curses and ghosts that run through several generations,



persecuting the family. So, when we talk about natural phenomena, this vision of global fear falls apart. There are local, class, regional, and generational issues and different paces of modernization or demodernization. However, the situation is different in popular culture, and your questions expose the global hegemony of this version of it, which is primarily based on European and American foundations. ISIS is not some Syrian endemic either. Many fighters there are people who come from or have family ties to Western Europe. They came to Syria because they couldn't find their place in the EU. Rejected, they felt bad and were looking for a new identity. So, we didn't create them just by bombing various countries and supporting local dictators. In this sense, these are all modern phenomena based on a networked society.

*Or maybe this “stew” can become a source of new meta-narratives? Are we going back to religious times?*

The most straightforward answer is: I don't know. When utopian thinking evaporated, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic dystopias took its place. And they can very easily translate into the existence of specific movements, such as far-right militias, survivalists, and preppers. They build tools, want to survive in the forest, learn to hunt, shoot a bow, and even make a bow themselves. They do reconstructions, go to fandom meetings, and mix complete fantasies with fears and actual threats. This is a popular approach: imagining the end of the world is easier than the end of capitalism. A meteorite hits. Civilization is falling apart. And yet, the post-apocalyptic world develops in these stories precisely according to the old rules of capitalism. There is a free market, capital accumulation, and

trade. There is no room here for an all-embracing thought system that would fill the semiotic void of the global North.

*Meanwhile, Naomi Klein pointed to the ecological crisis as a story that unites humanity, and indeed, this seems to move people to fight in the streets, see Extinction Rebellion...*

However, this is still limited to specific, relatively small groups and environments or forms of activity. This narrative is not an old religious story that integrated the community on all dimensions and from all social backgrounds. Instead, we are dealing with a diversity of stories. There is no single global one. Even this ecological story is taken up and told differently by different environmentalists and their groups. Not only because they have local challenges and examples but also because it is related to lifestyle. Eating dogs and cats can be a terrible problem for some, but it can be an everyday culinary practice for others. Plus, 99% of people will be happy to go to a barbecue, have a nice bathtub, and go to a concert. But even if we consider only those who believe climate change is a threat, there is also Enlightenment optimism. Assuming that a climate apocalypse is happening does not mean this will translate into apocalyptic thinking in all these groups. After all, technological optimists will say: yes, we have a big problem. If we do nothing, the world as we know it will end, and that is why we now have to introduce new technologies and subsidize research. The new industrial revolution, accelerationism, and communalism are all modernist thinking. Finally, we have antinatalists, anarcho-primitivists, and preppers. We have multitudes.

*And Poland? After all, we love apocalypses. I see two key ones – the Warsaw Uprising and Smoleńsk.*

But the term apocalypse does not fit here.

*How so? After all, in the first one, the city was utterly destroyed. It was wiped out.*

However, this does not fit into this model. Those who say it was an apocalypse, that the city was destroyed and hundreds of thousands of people died, are instead contesting the dominant post-romantic narrative. This narrative, of course, refers to Christian figures, but different ones. It was a Sacrifice. Even the right-wing Polish poet Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz writes in his book *Kinderszenen* that if it were not for this blood tribute, there would be no independence and no rebirth after 1989. Apocalyptic thinking was and is weak in Poland because romantic and post-romantic thinking won.

*And Polish Catholic nationalism? Isn't it full of visions of impending doom? "Civilization of death," "LGBT ideology," the collapse of principles and values – when I listen to the Polish clergy, I have the impression that the end of times is near.*

In Christian thinking, the apocalypse is optimistic. This feeling is not present in contemporary popular culture. The Christian topoi that are used have been stripped of their optimism. This fantasy is not the second coming of Christ and his thousand-year reign on Earth. This narrative is not the Last Judgment, which gives justice to those who suffered. They signify the final fall, decay. I don't see such thinking in

Poland. Maybe in the 20th century, the fear of Bolshevism at that time or the dystopias describing the Republic of Poland under communist rule. I would look for such a vision in the works of Witkacy or Czechowicz. And you could probably find even more. For example, religious associations that openly say that we live in the last days, which the Catholic Church does not tell us. You can find many such examples, but again, they do not correspond to the dominant thought styles. We still have a solid Polish-Catholic discourse in Poland. Researchers today question it, referring to the results of public opinion polls, Church statistics, and practices, and here, the lack of this domination is clearly visible. But for me, discourse is essential. And Catholic topics still dominate this topic, and it pops up again, for example, in the case of the Smolensk catastrophe. That is why Polish literary historian and essayist Maria Janion talks about the dominance of post-romanticism.

*So, paradoxically, Polish Catholicism stops apocalyptic thinking in Poland?*

This hierarchical structure, rooted in a very conservative institution, referring to Tradition with a capital T, papal authority as a centuries-old continuity, and giving the promise of a parousia in the future, does not allow local entities to envision a faster salvation. In this sense, the domination of Catholicism in Europe is a barrier against the apocalyptic discourse, just as the dominance of Protestantism in the USA is an excellent breeding ground for it.

*But what about the Catholic Church's response to the coronavirus? Wasn't it paradoxically very apocalyptic? Pray, receive communion, joyfully move towards potential death?*

According to the Catholic Church, one must participate in religious rituals during peace and war. Christians assume that history will end, and in this sense, they reject the continuing progress of the Enlightenment. But we are far from the optimism of the first Christians, waiting for the second coming of Christ. Now, everyone fears crisis and conflict, dreaming of further petty-bourgeois accumulation. Apocalyptic thinking in any version paralyzes rational debate about the future. These should be specific political projects, not a stream of meme consciousness. Instead of giving in to the vision of the spectacular end of civilization, we need to discuss the sanitation of social and economic relations. All the more so because after the pandemic, the second horseman of the apocalypse will undoubtedly arrive – the financial crisis; and the third one – the climate catastrophe. Let's not let them trample on the weakest with impunity.

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Sacred forest.  
With Peter Staudenmaier  
on ecofascism

*When I talk about “eco-fascism,” people look at me strangely. For most of them, ecology is an obvious element of the leftist camp. Has it always been like that?*

In Europe, as in the United States, most environmental activists consider themselves “progressive.” This perspective has been a common view since the 1960s. They believe that the needs of people living in poverty, sick or hungry, require our attention and they are generally for social justice. Many would be surprised to learn that it wasn’t always like this. Ecological topics used to be much more politically ambivalent. Finding them on the right end of the spectrum, even the extreme right, wasn’t unusual. From the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, many environmentalists in various countries expressed very conservative views, often nationalistic, racist, or authoritarian.

*Where should we look for the sources of this ultra-right environmentalism?*

Germany is not only the birthplace of ecology and a place where green policy is still fundamental. There, too, under the influence of anti-Enlightenment irrationalism, the

romantic tradition, and 19th-century natural mysticism, a synthesis of naturalism and nationalism was created, which resulted in Nazi “ecology.” Organic farming, vegetarianism, and the religious cult of nature – some motifs prevalent in the Third Reich are disturbingly similar to those today. Meanwhile, not only were they gaining popularity among the authorities, but this Nazi “ecological” ideology was used to justify the murder of European Jews.

*This nazi ecology is the end of this path. And what were its beginnings like?*

At the beginning of the 19th century, Ernst Moritz Arndt, a historian, writer, and parliamentarian, fought against the exploitation of nature, condemned deforestation, and saw nature as a coherent whole. At the same time, he denounced “miscegenation,” demanded purity of blood among the Teutons, and attacked the French, Slavs, and Jews. His student, journalist, and prose writer, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, was an implacable opponent of industrialization and urbanization. Why? So that “despite the Jewish influence, Germany will remain German.” The creator of the term ecology, Ernst Haeckel, developed a Darwinian social philosophy called “monism.” The German Monist League, which he founded, combined scientifically based ecological holism with a belief in Nordic racial superiority, and opposition to race mixing, whilst enthusiastically supporting eugenics and, during World War I, fervent anti-Semitism and anti-communism. Raoul France, a founding member of the League, developed the so-called *Lebensgesetze*, the “laws of life,” through which the natural order determines the social order. He also opposed the “unnatural mixing of races.” Another student of Haeckel, Ludwig Woltmann,

believed that the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society accelerated “racial decline.”

*However, they wanted to sound very scientific. Where's the anti-Enlightenment?*

The Völkisch movement provided this part. The German word “volk” does not quite simply mean a people or a nation, but rather the unification of a group of them with a transcendental “essence.” You can call it “nature,” “cosmos,” or “myth,” but it is always connected to the most inner part of man and represents the source of his creativity, feelings, and unity with others. In the face of real problems caused by industrialization and German unification, the Völkisch movement advocated a return to rural simplicity and life in harmony with nature. For them, the sources of social alienation and environmental destruction were materialistic consumerism, soulless industrialization, uprooted cosmopolitanism, and chaotic urbanization. Behind all this was the eternal object of peasant hatred and middle-class resentment: the Jews. They believed that only true patriots could save Germany from ruin. This was, among other things, thanks to the “Aryan blood,” which was praised by the multitude of occult and esoteric spiritualist groups that abounded in Germany in the 1920s. All these theosophists, anthroposophists, and ariosophists. Martin Heidegger came to the rescue of all those for whom this was not enough or seemed shallow, with his critique of anthropocentric humanism. He wrote about how humanity is engaged in a “game” or “dance” with the earth, sky, and gods, on the possibility of an authentic way to “inhabitate” the earth; complained that industrial technology is destroying nature, and emphasised the importance of locality and “homeland.”



*You might ask, "But so what"? What effects did this bring?*

Maybe let's enumerate it. The direct application of biological categories and the concept of "natural order" in the social sphere and the relationship between environmental purity and "racial" purity is one thing. Seeing man as an insignificant being, as part of the cosmos and nature's overwhelming forces, is another. Ethnocentric fanaticism – that's number three. The rejection of modernity for the vision of the golden age of the Aryan past and the condemnation of reason and rational thinking are four and five. All this was closely related to the belief in the dark, cosmic force of nature, the secrets of which can be understood not through science but through occultism. This perspective had brutal political implications and easily justified authoritarianism. The vision of the "Weimar Republic" as a puppet state controlled by people who did not represent the German "spirit" spread and paved the way for Nazism. National socialism and the elimination of culturally and "racially" "foreign" elements came to be seen as a chance for the German people to finally express their innate understanding and "feeling" of nature and live a fully ecological life.

*So, ecology was significant to the Third Reich?*

For some Nazis, yes. The search for a lost connection with nature was most visible among the neo-pagan part of the Nazi leaders, primarily Heinrich Himmler, Alfred Rosenberg, and Richard Walther Darré. However, it can also be seen in Gottfried Feder's critique of urban planning or Otto Strasser's rural nostalgia. Hitler outright rejected anthropocentrism. For him, man was just an element of na-

ture, always subject to its “eternal laws,” and acting against them must invariably lead to its fall. The National Socialist “nature religion” was thus a mixture of Teutonic mysticism, pseudoscientific ecology, irrational antihumanism, and the mythology of racial salvation through a return to the countryside. The set – an idyllic vision of the countryside, organicism, and mythologization of the peasantry – was important even for many rank-and-file Nazis.

*What did it look like in practice?*

Very different. Many Nazis completely ignored ecological issues, and the regime often pursued environmentally destructive policies. However, the “ecological” tendency in the party, although largely forgotten today, significantly impacted the authorities’ attitude towards the environment. This “green wing” of the NSDAP was represented primarily by Richard Walther Darré, Fritz Todt, Alwin Seifert, and Rudolf Hess. Moreover, they were not the only ones who took this topic seriously. Hitler and Himmler were both vegetarians, lovers of nature mysticism, and were firmly against vivisection and animal cruelty. Himmler even established experimental organic farms for the SS to grow herbs for medicinal purposes. At times, Hitler sounded like a true “green” idealist, discussing renewable energy as an alternative to coal and declaring that water, wind, and tides were future energy sources.

*This description contradicts the typical technocratic-industrial picture of the Third Reich...*

A bit, but only partially. For the Nazis, Jews were rootless nomads, incapable of any real connection with the land.

Therefore, Darré demanded the re-ruralization of Germany and Europe because it was the peasantry that would ensure the health of the “Aryan race” and, at the same time, ecological balance. As the Reich Minister of Agriculture, he used organic farming and biodynamic farming methods on a large scale. The Reich Minister of Economy, Labor, and Armament, Fritz Todt, and his colleague, engineer Alwin Seifert, were also important for introducing ecological solutions. Todt wanted the construction of Germany’s highways – one of its most significant construction projects – to be carried out as harmoniously as possible with nature and the landscape and established strict criteria for respecting wetlands, forests, and ecologically sensitive areas. The highway was to be both an element of the surrounding landscape and an expression of the essence of Germanness. His assistant, Seifert, was called “Mr. Mother Earth” behind his back and demanded the complete subordination of Reich technology to nature.

*Where does this influence of environmentalists come from?*

First of all, the protection of Rudolf Hess was decisive. He joined the NSDAP in 1920 and had the party ID number 16, being practically Hitler’s deputy for two decades. All legislation and every decree had to pass through his desk before it became law in the Reich.

*How did the activities of this faction translate into nature conservation?*

As early as March 1933, a wide range of ecological regulations were approved and implemented at the national, regional, and local levels. They included reforestation

programs, laws protecting animal and plant species, and decisions blocking industrial development that was destroying the natural environment. The land use plans were designed to protect wildlife habitats and included provisions to respect the “sacred German forest.” Another law in 1935 not only established guidelines for the protection of flora, fauna, and “natural monuments” in the Reich but also limited commercial access to remaining wilderness areas. It required all national, state, and local officials to consult with Naturschutz authorities before taking any action that would cause fundamental changes to the landscape.

*Doesn't all this strongly contradict the Nazis' cruel treatment of people? How did they reconcile it?*

It seems like a conflict, but many Nazis didn't see any contradiction here, so they didn't have to reconcile anything. In some cases, their views on nature even helped them to justify the regime's worst atrocities. In December 1942, Himmler issued a decree titled “On the Treatment of Lands in the Eastern Territories,” where he stated directly: “The peasant of our race has always tried to increase the natural forces of the soil, plants, and animals and to maintain the balance of all nature. For him, respect for God's creation is an expression of culture. Therefore, if the new living space is to become a homeland for our settlers, planning the landscape to remain as close to nature as possible is a decisive condition. This is one of the pillars of strengthening the German nation.” The “green wing” of the NSDAP was not a group of innocent, confused and manipulated idealists. They were conscious promoters and executors of a program of racist violence, mass repression, and war. Their “ecological” commitment further radicalized them.

*And they had this approach till the end of World War II?*

Almost. With Hess's escape to England in 1941, and a year later Todt's death in a plane crash and Darré's removal from office, Nazi-ecologists lost their importance. Moreover, Goebbels, Bormann, and Heydrich were against these eco-ideas from the beginning and considered Darré, Hess, and their companions as dreamers, eccentrics, and a security threat.

*Is ecofascism a German specialty?*

No. It has some roots in Germany, but the same phenomenon can also be traced in the British, French, or American context. Look at figures like Madison Grant, Rolf Gardiner, and Jorian Jenks. The beginnings of organic farming in France also indicate that it was started not by the radical left but by fascists.

*Is this already a closed historical chapter?*

Unfortunately not. In most Western societies, at the end of the 20th century, manifestations of racism and anti-immigrant sentiments are becoming more pronounced and more tolerated. Fascist political groups are coming back. By updating their ideology and using a new language, they also refer to ecological topics. They do so in a way that is sometimes reminiscent of the beliefs of progressive environmentalists, they emphasize the superiority of "Earth" over humans; they elevate "feelings" and intuition above reason and provide a sociobiological and sometimes Malthusian vision of society. Mystical and anti-rational varieties new age thinking have updated the old national-

istic, esoteric, and misanthropic threads of the “old” right, manifesting themselves in the form of the so-called New Right of Alan de Benoist and Alexander Dugin.

*How important is ecology to them? What role does it play?*

It has become increasingly popular in recent years. First, as a way to reach wider circles, and second, as part of the ideology. For the New Right, the destruction of nature and the rejection of nationalism have a common root in “Semitic” monotheism and universalism. In the form of Christianity or in its later secularized versions, liberalism and Marxism, they are alleged to have caused both ecological crisis and the suppression of national identity. Moreover, this is thanks to the unbridled technology that they have spawned, not only to destroy nature but also to annihilate the spirit. The destruction of nature threatens life in both a spiritual and physical sense because when people reject pristine nature, their access to their “authentic” self is blocked. New-rightists believe that the United States and its “mongrelized culture of egalitarian democracy” mixes all cultures and “races” to create soulless societies. That is why the New Right promotes the concept of “ethnopluralism.” Instead of a modernist monoculture, Europe should become a “Europe of homelands,” with clearly separated territories of different nations. And so Turks should live in Turkey, Senegalese in Senegal, and Germans should have Germany for themselves. Ecology is often used to justify this “ethnopluralism” – or, simply put, nationalism. Suddenly, it turns out that the traditions and language of the region are mystically connected with the landscape of “our ancestors.” It turns out that the “ecological Heimat” in which people are “rooted” can become a useful tool not

only against imperialism but also against immigration, foreigners, and “overpopulation.”

*Anti-Christianity, anti-universalism, anti-modernism – so, do ecofascists reach back to earlier traditions, e.g., pagan ones?*

I see these relationships, but they are complicated. Neopagans believe that modern industrial civilization alienates humanity from both the true self and the divine, neglects emotions and the body, and enforces a productivist logic of life. Some neo-pagan groups explicitly reject the far-right affiliations of their forerunners. Others accept the fascist elements of their heritage. The connections between neo-pagan forms of spirituality and right-wing ecology date back to the beginning of the 20th century. Even today, ecological and native faith perspectives are spreading rapidly on the far right. This mixture often occurs in Scandinavia, the USA, France, Russia, Germany, and Australia. However, many contemporary anthroposophists and neo-pagans seem entirely unaware of the historical entanglement of their movements.

*Anthroposophists? What do you mean?*

Anthroposophy is a proposal of the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner for reconstructing materialistic civilization. It has sources in occultism and esotericism and contains elements of gnosis. The most famous of this movement are the Waldorf schools. They provide children with an alternative education, free from aggression and pressure to achieve. They emphasize feelings and emotions rather than knowledge. Based on biodynamic agriculture,

anthroposophists produce food under the Demeter brand and cosmetics under Weleda. Obtaining the Demeter certificate requires maintaining the diversity of the ecosystem and soil, being non-GMO, and treating the farm as a living “holistic organism.” Anthroposophists seem to be a typical eco-group, but not all of Steiner’s ideas were so benign. They classify people according to the esoteric theory of evolution. According to this theory, our species emerged sequentially. Various “races” followed – each with a higher level of development and self-awareness. The first races are “astral-etheric,” “polar,” and “hyperborean.” The third and fourth are inhabitants of the lost continents of Lemuria and Atlantis. The most intellectually and spiritually developed white European “Aryans” are supposed to come from the latter. Black people, on the other hand, according to Steiner, must live in Africa, where there is a lot of heat and light because their brains are specially designed to process them. In his opinion, heat and light are retained in their epidermis, and the metabolism of black people is as if the sun were cooking them in themselves. This alleged body construction would be, in Steiner’s opinion, the reason for the “instinctive nature” of black people. When they emigrate from Africa, this process is disrupted, and therefore they are a “declining race.” This theory justifies accelerating the extinction of blacks outside Africa because they are likely to die anyway. Ultimately, regardless of intentions, the ideology of theosophists and anthroposophists, based on the hierarchy of races, blended seamlessly into the national socialist idea of the purity of the “Aryan race.”

*Do we have any more tangible examples of this blending in than just similarities in ideology?*



For example, the anthroposophical World League for the Protection of Life, whose leader was the former leader of Nazi youth organizations, Werner Georg Haverbeck. In 1963, they founded Collegium Humanum, where to this day, groups of ecofascists, esotericists, Völkisch, anthroposophists, and neopagans meet and conduct workshops, while the organization itself opposes the “flood of asylum seekers,” environmental destruction, and “the ongoing transformation of the Federal Republic of Germany into a multicultural society.” Moreover, much of the post-war organic farming movement, from Australia to Great Britain and France, was associated with the far right. Italian neo-fascists in the 1970s were interested in ecology, macrobiotics, and alternative medicine, sponsoring green workshops and publishing a magazine called Environmental Dimension. Their Spanish and French “comrades” shared a keen interest in ecology and specialized in establishing ecological and agricultural associations. Also, in the Netherlands and Great Britain, understanding ecology in this way was very important for such groups.

*However, all this is marginal in political life. Have these views filtered into the mainstream?*

Both the Danish People’s Party and the British National Party combined anti-immigration policies with right-wing environmentalism. Similar themes can be found on the Italian far right in Forza Nuova and Alternativa Sociale. In 2017, Marine Le Pen presented an environmental program promoting organic farming and demanding a zero-emission economy in France. She called for eating local products and condemned international corporations for introducing genetically modified crops and poisoning

the earth with pesticides. One of the co-founders of the German Green Party also referred to his far-right roots. Before he sensationally left the party in the mid-1980s, the former Marxist Rudolf Bahro referred to mystical Germanic spirituality and *Völkisch*. He also saw the need for a “green Adolf” who would lead Germans to ecological “salvation.”

*What about ecological social Darwinism and neo-Malthusianism?*

This connection goes beyond the context of ecofascism. The far-right notion of ecology is, in fact, nothing more than social Darwinism, an ideology that recognizes that biology determines the shape of society and that genes, not the environment, shape culture. Social Darwinist “ecology” regularly identifies seemingly “ecological” reasons for keeping out immigrants and asserting ethnic or national identity while avoiding racial terminology. Herbert Gruhl, initially a CDU politician and then a Green Party member for several years, was such a tough eco-Darwinist. He created the party’s famous slogan: “We are neither on the left nor on the right; we are ahead” to build a right-wing ecological party. He argued that soon, cultures around the world will struggle for survival. The best armed will have the best chance of protecting their resources. As he proclaimed, “overpopulation” in the Third World had created “armies of migrants” that were entering Germany with a “destructive capacity” comparable to an “atomic bomb.” This “wave” will destroy the European order and the natural environment. Democracy in Europe will take the form of a permanent “state of emergency” in the coming years. Sounds familiar? However, the book in which he wrote

this came out in 1975. For Gruhl, the “laws of nature” offer a solution to Third World immigration. The only accepted answer for violating the “laws of nature” is death.

*Are there other ideologists of this type?*

Yes. An example of similar thinking was the Finnish ecologist Kaarlo Pentti Linkola. He comes from a family of professors but dropped out of college and was a fisherman for 40 years. He believed that democracy was a mistake and preferred dictatorships. He considered the Baader-Meinhof group and the Khmer Rouge as signposts for the society. He argued that humans do not deserve to survive at the expense of the entire biosphere. He was a supporter of a new world war and mass depopulation. According to Linkola, an elite should rule and introduce a totalitarian regime for the environment, including banning cars and air traffic, strict birth control, reintroducing the death penalty, and returning to the agricultural community. In one of his more famous metaphors, he wrote about the earth and humanity as being similar to a boat. That if this boat is fully loaded, it will eventually sink. Therefore, it would be necessary to “unload” those burdening the “boat” before it sinks and kills everyone. He also argued that epidemics in developing countries should not be prevented, but nature should be allowed to take its course. Relying on Linkola’s ideas, the 18-year-old Pekka-Eric Auvinen murdered eight people at a school in the Finnish city of Jokela and then shot himself. Linkola expressed support for Auvinen’s ideas but at the same time said that killing schoolmates would be of no use in the long run because a significant mass movement was needed for depopulation.

*Is there a visible revival of interest in the topic after the manifestos of eco-terrorists such as Brenton Tarranta or Patrick Crucius?*

Yes. Their manifestos referred directly to eco-fascist traditions. It's disturbing how widespread some of these ideas are among the radical right. Equally troubling is the extent to which various watered-down versions of similar ideas can be found on the mainstream right. The false link between immigration and environmental degradation has become a common slogan. In this context, the modern resurgence of authoritarianism may make former far-right environmental beliefs popular again.

*Do we have any examples of this?*

In November 2019, a new thread titled "Join the eco-fascist movement, save our race and the planet" appeared on Stormfront, the main neo-Nazi online forum in the US. The first sentence was: "Join us eco-fascists to restore the natural order of things." Racist organizations in the US still support the ideas of "blood and soil." One of the more active groups, Vanguard America, operated the website [bloodandsoil.org](http://bloodandsoil.org) until it was taken down after the August 2017 events in Charlottesville. This manifesto declared the United States "a country exclusively for White Americans" and called for the creation of "an America based on the immutable truths of blood and soil."

*So what, ecology is a bad idea?*

Of course not. We should be aware of the efforts of ecologists to save the biosphere from destruction. On the contrary,

our task is to protect ecological movements from such fascist groups who want to take advantage of the widespread interest in the state of the natural environment. It turns out, however, that the “ecological scene” of our times – with its growing mysticism and anti-humanism – may raise some concerns about where we are heading.

*How can we avoid the specter of ecofascism?*

What keeps the environmental movement away from fascism is broad social pressure that puts the ecological crisis into context. The roots of the current environmental crisis lie in society, not in the biological “nature” of people, in any religion, reason, science, or technology. On the contrary, reason, science, and technology are crucial both for the ecological movement and for the ecological society. Instead, a particular set of social relations – primarily the market economy – is currently destroying the biosphere. Mysticism and biologism distract public attention from these social causes. This is the true legacy of ecofascism: genocide, as a necessity, under the guise of environmental protection. The experience of the “green wing” of German fascism is a sobering reminder of the political volatility of ecology. However, it also shows that there is no inherent or inevitable link between ecological issues and specific policies. In addition to the tradition I have discussed here, there has always been an equally important legacy of left-libertarian ecology in Germany and the rest of the world. “Ecology” itself is not doomed to right-wing tendencies. However, it must be interpreted and mediated by some social theory. Calls to “reform society in accordance with nature,” i.e., to formulate some version of the “natural order” or “natural law” and subject human needs and actions to it, are a trage-

dy. As a result of this approach, the fundamental processes and social structures that create and shape interpersonal relationships with the environment remain unexplored and unquestioned. At the same time, it gives them a seemingly “naturally sanctified” status. The ideologically charged “natural order” leaves no room for compromise. His claims are absolute. The Nazis murdered people in the name of nature while protecting animals and landscapes. The National Socialist nature religion not only implemented the policy of extermination as the “final solution” but made it logically and, above all, ethically necessary. Neglecting the green features of Nazism is a naive way of protecting ourselves from what is most disturbing in the history of this topic. So if today the Greens are “guilty” of anything, it is historical ignorance, not Nazi sympathies. And this ignorance has to end.

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*This conversation has been written by Przemysław Witkowski, based on a loose and much longer conversation with Peter Staudenmaier. It is not an exact transcript, but rather a summary of the conversation.*



## Latter-day “Saints”. With Zbigniew Mikołajko on integral traditionalism

*We will dig into a contemporary topic, which, however, is not well known. So, maybe let's start by explaining who Julius Evola was.*

He is one of the “grand masters” of right-wing extremism. He is the patron of the anti-democratic, anti-Christian far right, inspired by pagan traditions, occultism, Far Eastern philosophy and gnosis, the German conservative revolution of 1918-32, and the cult of the Holy Grail. Inspiration to all this world's Dugins, Muttis, and de Benoists. Those who do not hesitate to sympathize with all varieties of anti-capitalist protest, including ultra-leftist ones. Therefore, it is often referred to in very distant circles. Evola is a sign of identity there. A reference to it and integral traditionalism is an application for accession to a broad formation...

*... anti-Enlightenment?*

Yes. And above all, anti-liberal. The iunctum – the glue – is criticising the idea of progress. And somewhere deep inside, there is still a longing for community, for a new tribalism.



*For me, this is a paradoxical figure. On the one hand, few people will know what integral traditionalism is. On the other hand, I see how Evolian hierarchical thinking begins to organize modern societies...*

People are lost and alienated, and they are looking for answers. Integral traditionalism is one such answer. However, we must distinguish the integral one from the archaic one. The last one is being stuck in a closed community, in a motionless, ossified system of its values and norms. In the first case, we are dealing instead with nostalgia, which is also a critical theory. Archaic doesn't work like that. It simply exists and believes there is no other way to live than within the circle of eternal, hereditary values. However, the integral one, in its various incarnations and forms, is aware of the world's diversity and challenges it. Of course, it feeds on different content. Therefore, it means one thing in Italy, France, or Greece and another in Russia within the neo-Eurasianistic formation. In the post-Soviet countries, we are dealing with the most profound search for a separate, non-Western tradition and identity.

*Isn't this a quasi-modernist activity? Because they want to create a certain universality, a new meta-narrative, a fantasy about the "old" world rather than a copy of it?*

Integral traditionalism differs from, for example, Polish Roman Dmowski's National Democratic formation. Hesitating and wavering between the autarkic concept of the nation and the more universalistic Christian one, the author of *Thoughts of a Modern Pole* set himself the goal of modernizing Poland. Integral traditionalism is not about modernization but the spiritual superiority of clinging to age-old myths.

*Or maybe this is an option: the nation's rebirth by appealing to eternity?*

According to Evola, the deep esoteric tradition has disappeared and exists only in a rudimentary form. It only exists today as a myth. That is why you must immerse yourself in the mythical reality, which you need to experience with your whole being, embody it, incarnate it. Therefore, we must avoid discussing integral traditionalism using logos or rationality. Of course, its supporters use rational tools, but ultimately, it is a kind of “rationalism” that deals a blow to rationalism to return to the myth.

*So it is not only pre-Enlightenment but also pre-medieval?*

Yes. Despite the death of “great religions,” myth should, in his opinion, be experienced in sacred space. Paradoxically, this approach connects Evola with the theses of Baptist pastor Harvey Cox, author of the book *Secular City*, which was famous in the 1960s. He dealt with the death of “mass religions.” He wrote that even in a large secularized city, they are dying out in the institutional and ritual dimension, but spirituality and religiosity are not disappearing. And Western man does not cease to be homo religiosus – hungry for faith. Cox, of course, saw the solution in some form of Christianity. Evolianists, however, place them in a mythical, non-Christian space although this varies. Dugin’s neo-Eurasianism has a clear connection between the Orthodox tradition and the pagan or occult tradition.

*Isn't this a risky construction?*

This approach is quite an old synthesis. Russia is a fertile ground for such contamination. I recommend Yuri Luszczyk and his biography of Dymitr Donski. It should be required reading, not only because he is an outstanding Orthodox writer, historian, and hagiographer. It begins by describing Zalesye, the Otsky Forest, i.e., the place where the “collecting of Russian land” begins in Vladimir-on-Klyazma and Moscow. This picture is a fantastic description of the river, the trees, and the thought (i.e. the “Russian idea”) and the stubbornness and consistency contained in it. And with him, everything is identical in its nature: thought, water, the myth of the earth, and spirit. If Spengler talks about “the heritage of our ancestors that is in our blood,” among neo-Eurasianists, the “idea” is decisive. For them, Eurasia is a spiritual reality, separate from both Western Europe, Catholic, and Protestant, and from Asia, but extending beyond Russia itself to some non-Russian and non-Orthodox areas and peoples: Mongols, Turks, Central Asia, Persia, Balkans, Caucasus and Syria. As a result, it gives something like a synthesis of the state of Genghis Khan, the Volga matrix of the Proto-Indo-Europeans, the myth of Zalesye, and the continuation of Byzantium in the concept of the “third Rome.”

*I would also add a new Turbo-Slavic Ariosophy, where “real” Slavic Aryans have their own reserve of Europeanness uncontaminated by Jewish and Protestant mercantilism...*

All this is connected by the Evolian slogan “Rivolta Contro Mondo Moderno”: “Revolt against the modern world” – liberal, Americanized, capitalist – a kind of gnostic approach, recognizing that good is located in a hidden, spiritual tradition. Therefore, among Poles, Ferdinand Ossendowski has

an essential context. It is appreciated in “Le roi du monde,” written by probably the most important of the integral traditionalists, René Guénon. Guénon devotes a lot of space there to Ossendowski’s best-selling book “Through the Land of Men, Animals, and Gods,” in which the author talks about the land of Aghartha – its underground, absolutely mythical tradition, its priests who have esoteric, secret, hidden knowledge that transforms people into demigods. The desire to deify man is clearly visible here.

*By recovering the non-material dimension for him?*

There is an evident duality there. The materialistic world is evil, as in gnosis. It is the creation of a lower god, the Demiurge, the god of the Jews and the Old Testament, who trapped sparks of light in our reality. Salvation is achieved by destroying materiality and causing a great fire in the world. And here we come to something fundamental. This burnt offering will be made by those who “have gnosis” – secret knowledge.

*Isn't it the case that Russians simply felt so humiliated by the collapse of the USSR, Yeltsin's weakness, and the colonization of their country by Western capital that they had to look for another, strong, non-Western identity?*

Partly, of course, yes. Priest-warrior, Proto-Indo-Europeans, Byzantium, Zalesye – these contrast with what comes from the West. They are very similar to the Scandinavians. And here we come back to the issue of the roots of Rus'. Its statehood was initiated by the Varangians – the Vikings. Belarusian nationalists and neopagans, in turn, trace their origins to the Krivichs, the Balts who were forcibly Slavized.

Lithuania and especially Latvia also owe their national rebirth to neo-paganism and similar miasmas. They all have some sense of loss of collective identity and a desire to regain it. They would like to find it somewhere. Therefore, they look for their essence in the primordial community because it expresses strongly and coincides with various contents of mass culture, such as games, historical reconstructions, and music.

*Just like in Poland with turbolehitis. This idea is a fantasy about ancient power. We were an empire, but we were deceived, betrayed...*

There is no such sense of failure in Russia. Yes, the empire has weakened, but it still exists. The “Jew” also symbolizes the materiality of capitalism. He is not a “biological threat” as in Nazi Germany that contaminates “good” “Aryan” blood. Instead, it brings a mental element that does not fit the Russian “soul”: materialism, rationalism, organized logos, and egalitarianism. In the background, there is also this unfortunate misogynist – Otto Weininger, with his concept that a Jew and a woman are one, and they mean nothingness, vanity, and greed. At the same time, a man is naturally a creative element. There is also a fascinating book by Alexander Prokhanov, *Operation Hexogen*. Time – the end of the Yeltsin era, the beginning of Putin’s era, place – fallen Russia, undermined by depraved capitalism and illegitimate elites, demoralized and helpless in the face of what is happening in the Caucasus. The main character is an employee of the former Secret Service and a butterfly collector. He looks at this dying world and joins his former colleagues who decide to do something about it. And they find the “Chosen One.” This symbolic persona

is, of course, Putin, although his name is not mentioned there. He is a messiah, a “katechon” because they need a strong core, a backbone, and to treat what is political in religious categories.

*It seems to me that Evola is needed there because he validates the hierarchical caste system of society.*

Yes, a world of clear hierarchy. And no egalitarianism, no equality. Although here, in the vision of activism, “warrior code,” “priesthood,” and rebirth, a kind of hope and heroism leads to some form of world liberation. On the other hand, Evola was extremely pessimistic, even on the verge of nihilism, and believed that we live in the dark, declining Age of the Wolf – Kali Yuga. He also thought that the most that could be done was to delay this process, but still, it would all end in a great disaster. Because this is the last period of civilization, this pessimistic thread in Evolianism corresponds to the growing feeling that the world is heading towards an apocalypse due to various processes. Great meta-narratives are dead – or at least drastically weakened by deconstruction – and people are still alienated, still terrified. Whether it is a climate catastrophe, the “Great Replacement,” or “white genocide,” all this means calling out: “We are heading for catastrophe!” Today, of course, the strong instrumentalization of this horror dominates, but Evola’s thoughts do not have it. He says: it’s just the way it will be, and that’s it. Such is the cycle of the world. The civilization is destroyed and will be reborn from the ashes. Climate catastrophe and the “great replacement” are paradoxically optimistic visions for Evola, although they remain in the same register: that the world is collapsing. The difference is that these images are served to us for a completely different

purpose. In his opinion, it is a description of the reality in which we live, which began with the original separation of what is secular and what is sacred. The Holy King ceased to be a holy king, and a priestly caste appeared. This moment was the founding act of a decline that continues and deepens. And which will ultimately end in disaster.

*The climate is going wild, resources are running out, the world is subject to commodification, and humanity is creating new hierarchies in social life – dividing people into patricians, citizens, legal, and illegal. Isn't Evola's thought the perfect software for these dystopic "last days?"*

Evola believed that fascism should be a tool to restore the caste system and aristocracy of antiquity and that the universal system of human rights must disappear. We can, of course, still fight and postpone the situation in which the world will explode and burn in this furnace. And maybe one day, it will be recreated. Or maybe not. There is no way out. This approach is also the case with the Polish catastrophist Marian Zdziechowski, but there is Christian hope. There is Christian Prometheism, which he opposes to catastrophe. Evola's inspiration should instead be found in Nietzsche's superhumanity.

*I would say that these are pretty SS fantasies in the spirit of Ahnenerbe.*

The German Ancestral Heritage—Society for the Study of the History of Primeval Ideas, to which you now refer, was very interested in Gnostic traditions, dualism, Cathars and similar groups, and Buddhism. This interest is the same reality as Evola's. Only it has slightly different incarnations...

*Well, compared to Evola, Himmler is a bit more of a simpleton...*

Well, Himmler employed at the Ahnenerbe different sorts of people, from fortune tellers to first-class intellectuals, to be precise.

*So this is where Evola's sympathy for the SS comes from: as the "last knights" fighting for the "European spirit" and "civilization?"*

And for the Freikorps fighting against Poles and Bolsheviks in the East at the end of World War I or just after it. And for the aristocratic-conservative circles of the Deutscher Herrenklub, for the conservative revolution of Jünger and Schmitt, and the SS Ahnenerbe. In Paris, Evola met Monsignor Mayol de Lupe, the future "bishop" of the French SS Division "Charlemagne." He saw hope for slowing down the decline of civilization in the followers of the esoteric tradition or the "knights," embodied for him, for example, in the SS. It was a very esoteric formation – from belief in reincarnation and symbolism to occult ceremonies. And closer to home, in the Polish Presidential Palace, after the assassination attempt on Franz Kutschera, the knight's wedding between Kutschera lying in a coffin and his pregnant Norwegian fiancée took place. Moreover, we are dealing here with the tradition of mystical marriage with death, typical of similar mental formations. It was similar in the Falange Española and especially in the Romanian Iron Guard led by Corneliu Codreanu.

*The latter is another popular hero of the far right. Where does this fame come from in these circles?*



For them, he is also an Evolian figure – a warrior monk, a saint, an ascetic. Codreanu was guided by the vision of an extremely divided world and presented his task as a fight for the victory of Good over Evil, Light over Darkness, Cosmos over Chaos, and Tradition over History. He created the paramilitary Legion of Archangel Michael, commonly known as the “Green Shirts” or the Iron Guard. Also, in the ideology and practice of the legionnaires, especially in their rituals, as in Dugin’s, both Christian and pagan elements were mixed – solar cult and worshipping the sun with an outstretched hand, the cult of the earth and ancestors, invoking the spirits of fallen members of the organization. Codreanu often repeated that he was not interested in gaining power but in creating a “new man.” It is, of course, untrue that Romanians are the only nation that has not produced saints – as Mircea Eliade, a zealous activist of the Iron Guard, argued. They had saints in the Romanian Orthodox Church. Eliade falsified it because only the “religion of death” and the “martyrdom” of legionnaires murdered by the authorities of this country were supposed to contradict it. For Eliade, a typical medieval saint, a Christian ascetic and active under the patronage of Saint. Michael the Archangel, the knight, was only Codreanu.

*What was Eliade’s role?*

He tried to lie about his past, but before the war, he was a racist and fascist. Both Evola, Jung and Gershom Sholem belonged to the large area of the so-called symbolic revolution in culture that began in the 1920s, i.e., restoring the meaning of myth and symbol. They cooperated, meeting after the war and talking at seminars such as the Eranos Circle in Ascona, and they also corresponded with each

other. Eliade later almost became a prophet of a new, unchurched spirituality. And someone who turned religious symbolism into one of the most important keys to understanding culture, one of the foundations of the most general knowledge about man. So, someone whose role in the humanities can only be compared to Martin Heidegger's role in philosophy. And finally, someone who shared a similar fascination with Heidegger. Traces of Eliade's former totalitarian infatuations left an indelible mark on his thinking, religious ideas, concept of culture and vision of history, the. Some of Eliade's essential ideas, such as his concept of cyclical sacred time and sacred cosmos and his attaching so much importance to archaic traditions, clearly derive from Evola's views, primarily expounded in the *Revolt Against the Modern World*. Moreover, Eliade linked Codreanu and Evola, on whom the leader of the Iron Guard made a great impression.

*What was disgusting them all so much in egalitarianism, liberalism, democracy, and capitalism?*

That they were "employees of evil". That they are accelerating Kali Yuga, i.e., the end of the world, the last act of the fall, the dark, Hindu Age of the Wolf, the era of the goddess Kali. Evola deified the primitive metaphysical tradition and sought the path to it through secret, initiatory cults, oriental magical practices, the myths of "blood and soil," "solar race," organic society, elite, hierarchy, "warrior," through the condemnation of "Americanism" and communism, by rejecting the heritage of Judaism and Christianity. Evola's 1945 essay *American Civilization* described the US as the final stage of European decline into "inner formlessness," "a land of empty individualism, conformism and vulgarity

under the universalist aegis of money-making” and the rule of “a mechanistic and rationalistic philosophy of progress combined with a mundane horizon of prosperity, to transform the world into a vast suburban shopping mall.” With Evola, there is no hope for the rebirth of Europe. He had a worldview of hopelessness and ultimate doom.

*And his readers?*

They are a bit more optimistic. The far right, therefore believes that there is a chance for a nationalist revolution that will regenerate Europe and restore its greatness. They also believe that if we do not refer to the past, to any moment, wherever we set it, we will lose as a “civilization.” We can even descend, like Tomasz Szczępański from the Polish neopagan group Niklot to the Slavic lands or Evola to the level of ancient Rome – no matter what we choose, the intended effect is for Europe to be reborn as a power. So, in their opinion, we must live in myth again.

*But why esotericism and occultism? How would this help Europe?*

Why esotericism? Because it is a rebellion against the materialism of the world. And the flat, material reality is Evola’s main enemy — reducing life to consumption and production. In his opinion, it is offensive to human nature, preventing it from fully revealing itself. And here, we can say that, paradoxically, this is a feature taken from Marxism. What is opposed in Evola is the reification of man, the alienation of humanity in the production process, which Marx describes so conscientiously and deeply. The capitalist has no body and therefore does not suffer.

He created capital and became embodied in it, and he does not suffer in it. However, the worker is part of the production system. He has a body that experiences pain, and the production process condemns him to suffering. Therefore, a tradition that rejects materialism in a similar sense would be a rejection of this suffering humanity in favor of spiritual praxis. Antonio Gramsci is also essential in the context of Evolianism, even though he was a Marxist, prisoner, and martyr of fascism. According to his concept, contrary to Leninism, gaining cultural hegemony should precede gaining political hegemony. Who will lead this revolution? According to Gramsci – it will be the “organic intelligentsia”, which cooperates with the popular classes and working people. Extreme right-wingers are trying to position themselves in this role. They call it an elite, but it’s the same thing. They want to be the ones working to gain cultural hegemony, which will precede the acquisition of political power.

*Listening to this occultism and esotericism, I begin to think that New Age and “new spirituality” are an excellent base for Evolian political concepts.*

Reading Evola is a journey through ancient mythologies, pseudo-ethnology, and transcendental mysticism, the mixture of which is enough to make a “woke” user of psychedelics feel at home in this literature. What is disturbing here is the continuous, prolonged, and varied process of contamination of various esoteric and mystical traditions and various occultisms with right-wing ideologies. A process that today manifests itself in segments of the New Age despite spreading the illusion that the movement is apolitical. This contamination happens both within ethnocentric

neo-paganism and in right-wing varieties of Western New Agism that operate through Gnostic myths. This process is facilitated by the assumed radical dichotomy of the world – good and evil, light and darkness, spirit and matter, the concept of the lower God-demiurge, the evil God of the Jews responsible for the creation of matter, the vision of involution, the regress of existence – from the legendary Primordial Tradition to the fall of history, the last aeon of which is modernity as defined by the masters of integral traditionalism, Evola and Guénon. And this modernity is the dark, abyssal Kali Yuga.

*So, the next step is war?*

According to Evola, it can be a spiritually satisfying experience. It is a “mythopoetic” event. Evola establishes the ideal of the “active nihilist” prepared to act violently against contemporary decadence. Traces of this influence can be seen in the acts of terror by Breivik and Tarrant, which fit into this apocalyptic ideal of total renewal. The Europe and the world that are to be created, as a result of their actions, should be organic, hierarchical, anti-democratic, and anti-individual, overgrown with a myth that new-old Europeans are supposed to live in. Effect? It’s like the European Union but modeled on the principles of the SS.

*Is this process of absorbing this content into our native New Age thought also visible in Poland?*

Yes. In addition to the neo-pagan and New Age registers already mentioned, it is also manifested in the so-called miraculous apparitions of the Virgin Mary, in the ritual rhetoric and practice – often of a magical nature – of Radio

Maryja and its “Family,” as well as in such quasi-economic activities as the defense of bankrupt factories in which godless liberalism and *homo oeconomicus* were radically confronted with the alleged traditional *homo religiosus*, the interests of “foreigners” with “Polish” property, and the cosmopolitan universalism of the West with the ethnocentric concept of the Homeland. In this way, a return is created to the *illo tempore*, to the Golden Age, to the cyclical time of myth and the time-honored cosmos, to religion and ritual, to the Primordial Tradition, also to such a vision according to which – to give it a local and appropriately populist meaning – Jesus was born near Nowy Targ in Poland and was condemned and crucified following the concepts of traditional baroque revealed in folk religiosity on Golgotha in Zebrzydowice or Paclaw. In other words, it is a vision according to which the life and martyrdom of God merged into a material-spiritual unity with the Polish *Blut und Boden*, with the life and tragedies of the nation, with the soil of the homeland soaked with the blood of the fallen and massacred.

*Over the last 30 years, similar thinking, through skinhead zines from neofascist Szczerbiec to neopagan Niklot, has seeped into our discourse in a steady stream...*

The latter invited me to their place. I was giving them a lecture about Evola. It is a paradox that one of the prominent Polish researchers of Evola (although I have not been dealing with it for years) is the guy they associate with the demoliberal core. That is, of course, me. And they have a problem with it. They previously had Dr. Bogdan Koziel from Silesia, but he has been dead since 2012, and even before that, he was not doing very well in the academic

world. He did translate some of Evola's work, but not a lot. And hardly anything from Evola has been published in Polish, almost nothing, so, paradoxically, they know Evola mainly from my book. The last interview with Evola was very important as it summarized his path. I also translated and published in the monthly "Open Society" a fragment of one of Guénon's books and one of his characteristic texts about Spanish integral traditionalism.

*So, where did you get this Evola from? Is this rather the area of interest of the Koziel and Szczepański political family?*

Evola is essential to many formations, and someone has to climb Mount Everest, even though it is unpleasant. I wanted to do as much analysis as possible, as unbiased as possible. I suspended my ethical and cultural views for this job. For the first time, I was shocked by the effects of the discussion at the Wawel castle. There was an organized debate there. Ireneusz Kania, Broniek Wildstein, Robert Stiller, and I took part in the discussion. At one point, I heard Wildstein describe my habilitation thesis on Evola as a bestseller, even although only a few hundred copies were printed. At this moment I understood how important this book was for right-wingers.

*But where does this interest come from?*

It all started when I discovered Campo Hobbit, the Italian far-right training camp. And I found out that there is a beloved author named Evola. Then, years later, I went to Italy hoping to write about neo-Ghibellinism, which is also a topic related to Evola. So, while working at the American Academy in Rome on these Neo-Ghibellines,

I bought every Evola book I could get. And I brought a ton of materials and books to Poland. And on October 1, 1996, I sat down and – starting with the first word, working 12 to 16 hours a day – I wrote this book in 80 days. On December 20, I took it to the Institute Publishing House. I've never written anything so smoothly in my life.

Zbigniew Mikołajko (born 1951) – philosopher and historian of religion, essayist, poet, academic teacher, and head of the Department of Research on Religion at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. He obtained his habilitation based on the monograph *Myths of Integral Traditionalism. Julius Evola and the religious and philosophical culture of the right*. He recently published *Lives of the Saints, Revised Again* (2017), *Between Salvation and Smolensk, Studies and Sketches on Polish Catholicism in recent years* (2017), *Provinces of Darkness* (2018), *Now and Always* (2022).





They will return to us and bring forth  
the grain that they sow.  
With Tamir Bar-On about  
the New Right (*nouvelle droite*)

*What is the New Right?*

The European New Right, also called *nouvelle droite* in French, is a political school of thought with roots in ultranationalism and fascism. It is also a unique mixture of two opposing worldviews – the revolutionary right and the New Left, dating back to the 1960s. The New Right is a very ambiguous project. It rejects fascist and far-right labels but still uses the illiberal threads of the right-wing conservative environment based on which both fascist and Nazi regimes of the past were built. At the same time, it is a movement that seeks new alliances more often on the left than on the right. It is attacked with equal zeal from various sides of the political scene – by the pro-capitalist Anglo-American right for its anti-capitalist and anti-Western stance, by Catholics for its non-religious position or from the pagan and anti-Judeo-Christian perspective, and the left, which sees them as the heirs of fascism.

*How is this unusual milieu structured? Who are its prominent thinkers? Where do they operate?*

This environment consists of think tanks, associations, foundations, and journals established initially in France and later in other European countries. The intellectuals of this trend are mainly journalists, writers, scientists, and professors of various disciplines. The most influential magazines of this environment include “Nouvelle École”, “Eléments”, and “Krisis” in France, “The Scorpion” in the UK, and “Trasgressioni” and “Diorama Letterario” in Italy. Russia, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, and Poland also have new right-wing magazines. Its intellectual leaders are scattered all over Europe. The most significant include Alain de Benoist, Charles Champetier, and Guillaume Faye in France, Michael Walker in the UK, Marco Tarchi and Claudio Mutti in Italy, Robert Steuckers in Belgium, and Aleksandr Dugin in Russia. Many of them began their political paths as figures associated with right-wing extremism and even neofascism. In France, de Benoist was involved in the extreme nationalist and pan-European revolutionary right-wing movement in the 1960s. Walker was a former president of the British National Front in London. Tarchi was an activist of the neofascist Italian Social Movement.

*So they are neofascists?*

The fascist label poses many problems because fascism was simultaneously an ideology, a political movement, and a form of government, and there is no agreement among political scientists and historians on what constitutes its essence. So, according to some elements, yes, but according to others, no. Just look at the intellectual roots of the New Right. The ENP’s political thought was influenced by conservative revolutionaries and environmentalism, the New Left and federalism, neo-paganism and

feminism. Critics emphasize elitism and hierarchy in the spirit of ancient Greece and Rome, as well as references to Nazi neo-paganism. Supporters pointed to new-right feminism, federalism, solidarity with developing countries, anti-imperialism, anti-totalitarianism, and anti-racism. In the *nouvelle droite* magazines, the revolutionary-right themes of the past, namely the aristocratic concept of life, the military ethic of honor and courage, the “internal empire of the spirit,” the search for primary, common cultural sources, and a solid attachment to myths, mix in an uneasy coexistence with the federalist, ecological and democratizing motives from the New Left. New Right thinkers strive to reverse the trends of Americanization, capitalist egoism, the idea of unlimited economic growth as the ultimate goal of “progress,” the dominant reign of materialism, techno-utopianism, and scientism. In their view, ancient, pagan, hierarchical, and organic European societies can serve as models for creating a social order in which the political and military spheres are sovereign entities that replace the economic sphere in the chain of social imperatives. Finally, they call for the construction of a pluralism of relevant political opinions, internal conflicts, and a few blocs of great powers on the world stage instead of what they see as a homogeneous, unipolar, and dangerous world order dominated by the United States.

*Are they actually left-wing or right-wing?*

It's tough to tell sometimes. It's a hybrid—an alliance of extremes. An interesting concept, especially in the 1990s, was the idea of New Right intellectuals in France, Italy, Poland, and even North America to look for alliances in the fight against liberal capitalism on the left and not

among right-wing radicals. The entry of the new rightists into the pages of the American leftist magazine *Telos* was one such attempt at unification. The editors of *Telos* claimed that the *nouvelle droite* had left behind its former revolutionary right-wing or neo-fascist roots. Critics of this move perceived the alliance as a coordinated cultural and political strategy of deception, manipulation, and self-legitimization of neofascists. They claimed that extremists were simply adapting to the changing times and the dominant cultural and political environment in Europe, adopting several ecological, democratic, anti-racist, anti-totalitarian motifs straight from the New Left to escape the burden of their history and appeal to a new generation of Europeans, born without unpleasant memories of fascism and the Cold War. In an era of economic and cultural globalization and the dominance of neoliberal doctrine, increasing the power of large corporations and weakening democratic governments both central and local, one can expect more such seemingly strange anti-capitalist and anti-liberal alliances between the extreme poles of the right and left.

*However, nouvelle droite accusations of neo-fascism continue unabated...*

That's true. The harshest critics of the New Right argue that its esoteric, aristocratic elitism and violent revolt against Enlightenment values and progress, positivism, materialism, capitalism, communism, egalitarianism, universalism, and liberal parliamentarism are direct echoes from the fascist ideologists of the past. They also point out that the attempt to transcend categories such as left and right has its roots in European fascist theorists of the past: Georges Valois

in France, Benito Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile in Italy, and Primo de Rivera in Spain.

*Where did this rather original political current come from?  
When and how was it created?*

The leading think tank of the New Right, GRECE, the Scientific and Research Group for European Civilization (*Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne*), was established in times of the events of the French May 1968 in Nice. This moment is their starting point. During this time, the extreme and revolutionary right wing was highly marginalized.

*Why?*

For many reasons. Firstly, for the period of fascism and Nazism and collaboration with these regimes. Particularly in France, there was the history of the Vichy government. Also, during this period, the radical right seemed unable to keep up with the challenges of the times. For example, it opposed decolonization, especially in Algeria. As a result, a group of intellectuals gathered around Alain de Benoist began to ask themselves why the extreme right was in such a crisis, and at the same time, why the radical left was gaining so much popularity, especially among young people. They concluded, that after 1968, the left dominated the leading “laboratories of thought”: think tanks, universities, newspapers, the art world, etc., and, as a result, also politics and its institutions. Therefore, they assessed, the left over time would become the new European elites. Hence, they faced a challenging task. The extreme right is broken and in retreat, while the liberal left is advancing

and occupying new spaces. They therefore replicated Lenin by asking: “What is to be done?”, although of course from their own perspective.

### *Who was active in GRECE?*

It is an impressively long list. On the one hand, there were various types of neo-fascists. GRECE’s collaborators included Maurice Bardèche – the most important post-war French fascist ideologist, defender of Vichy, and brother-in-law of a writer and Nazi collaborator, Robert Brasillach. Also, Armin Mohler – a Swiss who left his homeland army to join the Waffen-SS, and after the war, a secretary of the “conservative revolutionary” Ernst Jünger, and “an unrepentant fascist to end of his life.” On the other hand, the organization attracted academics, writers, and journalists who sympathized with right-wing ideas. Among others who cooperated with GRECE were: writers Anthony Burgess and Arthur Koestler, academics – philosopher Louis Rougier, sociologist Julien Freund, anthropologist Mircea Eliade, psychologist Hans Eysenck and ethologist and Nobel Prize winner Konrad Lorenz, as well as journalists Jean Parvulesco and the founder of the French daily *Le Figaro* Louis Pauwels. It was a broader movement that sought new ways that the right-wing could act and shape society. They decided it had to become more intellectual, thinking, and meta-political.

### *Metapolitical? What does it mean?*

New-rightists believe gaining power through parliamentary elections or a coup is not a sensible path. Revolution is currently impossible. The liberal-democratic bloc is too

strong. The coup will fail, and it will be a political disaster. Winning the elections is possible, but after winning, we will only gain power, but we will not change human mentality, values, norms, and ideas. Thus, metapolitics is a project aimed at changing people's perceptions, view of the world, and psyche. What do we think about the right, left, fascism, immigration, sex, and Europe? And this is definitely a long-term project. New-rightists, above all de Benoist, began to read in depth the Italian Marxist Antoni Gramsci. For his thought, the concept of cultural hegemony is crucial. This approach means that taking cultural power is a prerequisite for acquiring political power. De Benoist says: Gramsci can be a model for us, too. Just because he was a communist doesn't mean we can't use him. And they will use it because they understand that when a gap appears between the thinking of ordinary people and the political, cultural, or economic elites, it can create tension and an opportunity for change within the system. So, to change the system, we need to change the mentality and worldview of ordinary people and key elite representatives. According to the new rightists, civil society is, therefore, a space of counter-hegemonic contestation. This realm is where you can actually build the dominance of new-old ideas. Ultimately, this will create a split between hegemonic ideas that support capitalism and liberal democracy and new right ideas that are clearly anti-capitalist and anti-liberal. Eventually, people will accept these concepts, whether about capitalism, immigration, national and regional identity, neo-paganism, or global ethnopluralism and adopt them as their own. De Benoist writes directly that he does not care about the current elections. So what if Marine Le Pen or Éric Zemmour won the elections in France? This situation is only a temporary political victory.



However, if the mentality of people, masses, elites, and more active individuals changes, your political project will be much more durable.

*That's why he needed something like GRECE?*

Yes. For New Right thinkers, the cultural sphere is the primary vector of political contestation. It is a project where it is clear that the elites play a crucial role in history. And it is no coincidence that this and other think tanks associated with de Benoist have repeatedly tried to infiltrate the institutions of the French state, key universities. Because their second strategy after metapolitics is entryism, this means getting your people into critical places. To the educational system. To the police forces. To the army. To universities. It is building a specific network of support and cooperation. Because if we manage to put people in key positions in these institutions, it will significantly impact the direction in which this organization will go. And thanks to this, they will be more open to the ideas of the radical right.

*Are these effective methods?*

Apparently, very much so. Today, if you talk in Europe about exit referendums from the EU, loss of national identity, and illegal immigration, no one treats you as an outcast anymore. And then you speak de Benoist's language. This shows how, in the long run, this idea has worked. Public opinion on these issues has changed, meaning that thanks to the new right-wing, more and more parties have been created and operate in Europe that question migra-

tion and many of them have participated in governments. This effect means that the metapolitical concept is working.

*And entryism?*

Their position is very interesting because it defies classic classifications, including those used by institutions defending democracy against political extremism. The populist right will certainly undermine liberal democracy and criticize it, but at the same time, it will play inside the system. In turn, the extremist right will use violence and seek to overthrow the liberal democratic system by force. And the new right will not fall into either of these two categories. Since they are metapolitical, they will not fall into the trap of extremism, and they are not a typical radical right that plays by the rules of the parliamentary system. This duality makes them invisible as a threat to democracy. Moreover, they are interested in Europe as a whole and its long-term changes – for the continent to return to its original identity.

*It looks as if they read not only Gramsci, but also Braudel with his idea of the long duree...*

Without a doubt. De Benoist said, for example, that he thinks that if there had been no Enlightenment, there would have been no Obama as US president. The New Right believes that changes in culture and mentality, in the long run, will always be better and more effective than any revolutionary changes, which will occur anyway if we manage to change people's view of the world. They will not only be inevitable but also well-rooted and, therefore, more effective. And they don't have to deal with these revolutions at this point. It's not their job. These forces will be

born anyway. As intellectuals, they must be detached from the here and now. And maybe reality will slip away from them a bit. Still, ultimately, they believe, the metapolitical framework we are working on will come back to us and give rise to the seeds that we have been sowing since the 1960s and will ultimately unseat “cultural Marxism” and the liberal left.

*And what do the new rightists actually want to achieve?*

We can still find their extremist roots in the 1960s. Then they defended Nazi collaboration and looked for advantages in fascism, such as Strasserism or other more anti-capitalist currents of this political thought, especially among those that never came to power. They defended apartheid in South Africa and Rhodesia. If you then called de Benoist a fascist, you would be 100% right. However, the experience of 1968, plus the decolonization of Algeria, changed their perspective. And the whole anti-imperial and anti-colonial spirit of the era. They realized they had to think about these issues entirely differently: in a less imperialist and less assimilationist way. And that the right must define itself through difference and its affirmation. Since the 1970s, they have started saying that yes, we are for White Power, but also for Yellow Power and Black Power, etc. All differences are okay, down with colonialism and imperialism. People have the right to maintain their identity and cultural diversity.

*But wait a second. Who is to decide when this moment in changing culture is, this “biodiversity moment” to which we should refer while respecting these differences?*

I think there is a philosophical error in their thinking because, based on their texts, I would estimate it as the beginning of a multicultural society in France. So it would be about defending differences but in the spirit of those present during our main character's childhood. In de Benoist's approach, multiculturalism threatens his vision of identity because the market and homogeneous global patterns have become the dominant elements shaping it. And such an identity will be imposed on you, not the Breton, Burgundian, or Norman identity with all its nuance and richness, but just a simplified market version. The local ones will disappear.

*And here we come to another critical term for the new right, i.e., ethnopluralism...*

They are introducing biological metaphors here. All these local cultures are our heritage that we must protect, practically equating them with natural biodiversity. They especially adopted this way of thinking in the 1970s. Their magazine "Nouvelle École" contained a lot of sociobiological texts at that time, many articles about biological differences between groups, between individuals in the context of the naturalness of hierarchy, and between men and women. And an analogy was built there that just as we have hierarchy and diversity in nature, we also have hierarchy and diversity between cultures. Over time, it can be said that they introduced a specific element of equality. Every culture begins to have a certain center of gravity, and as long as everyone sticks to it, it's okay. We can sympathize with all kinds of people, from Ayatollah Khomeini to Saddam Hussein to Louis Farrakhan or Thomas Sankara, as long as they keep their people at home in the spirit of cultural separatism. As long as they do not come to Paris,

Warsaw, or Brussels with their burqas and hijabs, we will respect them because their culture has its own center of gravity, traditions, law, religion, etc.

*It sounds like apartheid...*

I must admit that it sounds pretty similar because the essence of it is that you don't want them to come here. Or that those who are already here would somehow disappear, too. Of course, this is dressed up in a description primarily focusing on their fate. That when they arrive, they occupy the lowest social positions, that they are resented, that their arrival lowers the conditions in the labor market, that they will not be promoted anyway and only harm the locals, and all this is done in the spirit of the interests of big capital, which benefits from the destruction our native cultures in the name of globalist utopia. The result is a vision of irreconcilable cultural differences with different centers of gravity, separated from each other as, on the whole, they are very good and beneficial for us. We keep ours, you keep yours, and together, we end this liberal multiculturalism, where both you and I would disappear and melt into global McDonaldisation. Therefore, Aleksandr Dugin promoted a French-born black activist nicknamed Kémi Séba, who decided to emigrate to Senegal and act there.

*And what do they want to do with the migrants already living here?*

And again, they give a controversial answer. De Benoist openly said that he opposed the ayatollahs of France. And he did not mean religious fundamentalists, but those politicians who introduced a ban on Muslim headscarves

in public schools. He called them ayatollahs because they told Muslims how to live. They are the ones who embarrass the French by maintaining their culture in a foreign land, so maybe we French, says de Benoist, should learn from them how to preserve our culture.

*All in all, the new right could be called very specific Euro-enthusiasts...*

I would call them more enthusiasts of ancient European identity. Because, for example, they do not include Christianity in it. They believe that monotheism is the root of totalitarianism. And that it produces both liberal and socialist versions of totalitarianism. The “right to difference” of individuals and communities that they promote must be continually nurtured and encouraged to enable all the cultures of the world to retain their uniqueness and distinctiveness from what is perceived as the grey, dreary, lifeless, and leveling materialism and egalitarianism of liberal and socialist doctrines. The latter two ideologies, seen as rooted in Judeo-Christian biblical monotheism, are viewed as “totalitarian” and “intolerant.” For the New Right, liberalism and socialism are full of missionary zeal because they supposedly come from a culturally insensitive and universalistic belief in one God that respects neither Europe’s polytheistic, pagan past nor the different cultural values and standards of other nations around the world. So they return to the Celts, Scandinavians, Slavs, and Germans, and finally to the Proto-Indo-Europeans, and here they revive the Aryan myth. Overall, they take their vision of an ideal future back to the past, before “totalitarian” monotheism. They look back to those hierarchical societies that, quite coincidentally, are not multicultural

but are much more homogeneous than today. De Benoist is, for example, very interested in the Icelandic model of governance in the Middle Ages—direct democracy, a uniform ethnic and religious structure, and a small community aware of its own goals.

*What goals?*

In their opinion, the goal of politics should be to preserve identity. And in the current conditions, such a departure in views is somewhat problematic for them. You know, at the intellectual level, it sticks – national anarchism in small, socially homogeneous communities based on direct democracy. But how can an ordinary Pole who goes to church suddenly turn into a Proto-Indo-European warrior, a supporter of ruling in a rally-type way? And how can such an attitude compete with prominent religions with temples, clergy, and money? Some kind of collapse of these institutions would have to occur, and this is where they could step in with their narrative.

*And do you think it's real?*

The right must have its own myth. It does not matter whether it is a myth of the nation, the Judeo-Christian tradition, or pagan antiquity. The latter works perfectly, e.g., in the post-Soviet zone. There, the atheistic USSR significantly weakened the religious character during the 70 years of its existence but did not eradicate the spirituality itself, which was looking for an outlet. And one of them became nationalist neo-paganism. Additionally, it gives them the feeling that since they are the homeland of the Proto-Indo-Europeans, the Aryans, they are not some lower-class

Europeans, poor cousins from Barbary, but on the contrary – better ones, a source of identity. And now you have the fashion for Slavic culture, music festivals, costumes, historical reconstructions, bands, tattoos, cosmetics, and gymnastics. New-rightists create a discursive framework that supposedly extends centuries into the past, which even the Judeo-Christian tradition, much less communism, liberal democracy, or capitalism, has failed to erase. They are trying to say that this is such a powerful tradition and stretches so far back into the past that all these homogenizing tendencies have not been able to eradicate it. So, let's get back to it. It has a certain charm, I must admit.

*And this is the fascism of the future that threatens us?*

I also think that, especially in the case of the nouvelle droite, since their 1999 manifesto, describing them as neo-fascists may be a bit excessive. But that doesn't mean that what they want has suddenly changed. I still think they come from the circles of the revolutionary far right, and I still think that remain in those circles. Still, I believe that the French New Right elements are what I could call the dissident right. As they work in a metapolitical layer, it is difficult to classify them as both the traditional right and alt-right neo-fascists. New Right magazines such as "Krisis," "Eléments," and "Trassgresioni" were full of New Left-style themes: heavy accusations against the logic of Western, capitalist, or communist notions of progress, solidarity with the Third World, criticism of bureaucratic modes of domination, positive valorization of federalism and small political communities and economic, open support for the ecology and support for the right of various local cultural identities to oppose the homogenizing, assimilationist logic



of capitalism and the nation-state. The ultimate goal of the *nouvelle droite* was to unite with the most revolutionary remnants of the '68 generation to create a supposedly new political synthesis for the new millennium. Additionally, de Benoist is becoming more and more regionalist. But what kind of regionalism is this? Well, one who would be happy to see a Europe of a hundred flags, as the Breton regionalist Yann Fouéré proposed. But it would have to be regionalism, which includes all those new nations that maintain their customs and traditions, that create new-old Europe and do not intend to allow the influx of people from outside this continent to Europe because this would undermine local distinctiveness. And that's interesting because it doesn't follow the predictable trajectory of far-right thinking. However, positions such as regionalism or neo-paganism in the spirit of fighting the Judeo-Christian heritage or ecological positions are very original.

*I would find all this in German Nazism...*

I agree here. There would be a common genealogy here—the same with anti-capitalism, and not only on the far right.

*Even with this anti-capitalism, we did not move beyond the NSDAP..*

What about the concept of direct democracy? This concept is where the situation gets increasingly complicated (laughter). They say there are two kinds of democracy – liberal and direct democracy. And the latter is proper democracy. Of course, it is known that they do it primarily to maintain the predominance of the interests of the dominant ethnic group in a specific region or country. This is very

difficult to reconcile if, on the one hand, you highly value hierarchy and call yourself a right-winger, and then you support democracy in a tweaked version. You know why you do it, but still.

*New-right thinkers, however, are primarily older people, a bit of a reverse of the new-left generation of '68. What about their grandchildren in the identitarian movement? Maybe we have the fascism of the future here? Do you think this is a continuation of the nouvelle droite?*

I think that identitarians actually have their intellectual source in various figures of the European New Right. Steuckers was a true believer in facing reality and spreading ideas and worldviews in unexpected places, such as trade unions and political parties, wanting to be sure that they had political players at their disposal who could develop these thoughts. So, the identitarian movement does this. They say: you know, metapolitics is not enough. It is not enough that we have this perfect theoretical body on the right that de Benoist was the great mechanic of its creation. These ideas must find their place in the political and cultural spheres in people's minds. We should work on – and this is Steuckers' idea – different paths. It is not enough to leave social change to intellectuals, the sphere of ideas, or universities. My point is that the future of Europe is at stake for them; these ideas are too important, and time is running out. They want their ideas to triumph. And this can only happen in a collision with real institutions, political figures and parties, trade unions, intellectuals, mass media, masses... Everything is metapolitics.

*So you think that identitarians will replace nouvelle droite?*

They would have a huge job to do. No one can easily replace de Benoist when you look at his legacy and influence. Let's just look at the countries where he attends conferences. He was in Iran, South America, North America, and Russia. In that sense, the French New Right is still the number one player. This situation may change in the future, but the amount of work they have put in is enormous. And they want to destroy the system in which we live in a revolutionary way. They just believe it will take time to happen. It's a bit like Evola in his "Ride the Tiger." It will take a really long time, and there will be a lot of failures along the way, but you have to stay on track and keep moving forward. They are pretty good at predicting a future reality where communities close themselves off from one another, grouped around dwindling resources, in opposition to migrants, including climate migrants, in nationalist Shangri la, but only "for our kin," creating a world halfway between Atwood's Gilead and Mad Max. It may take three hundred years, but it can happen. And they, as a movement, know how to wait.

Tamir Bar-On (born 1967) – one of the world's leading experts on the French and European New Right (*nouvelle droite*). He has taught at Yale University, University of Toronto, Wilfrid Laurier University, University of Windsor, and George Brown College. Currently a full professor at the Department of International Relations at the University of Monterrey. He published, among others, *Where Have All The Fascists Gone?* (2007), *Rethinking the French New Right: Alternatives to Modernity* (2013), *The World through Soccer: The Cultural Impact of a Global Sport* (2014), and *Beyond Soccer: International Relations and Politics as Seen Through the Beautiful Game* (2017).

## Afterword

What interested me most about fascism was not how it bloomed but rather its meager beginnings, those seeds from which a tree would grow in the future. It was a moment when having properly recognized the symptoms of the disease, it was still possible to react, saving Europe, the world and millions of victims. With the development of this movement each year, the spiral intensified and eventually broke out into war and the Holocaust. But what if we had noticed something going on along the way? Could we have predicted what happened? Would we have been able to respond? Catch the first symptoms when this snowball could still be stopped. And what gave it strength and momentum? Was it the decay of religion? Economic crisis? Or maybe anti-Semitism? Paganism? Traditionalism? The spirit of counter-revolution? What kind of mental construct was its engine? What were the social conditions? I was interested in how one goes from the state of – I have a neighbor, and he is who he is – to the moment in which I am smashing the head of his two-year-old son against the wall of the house, thinking that I am saving the world, my culture and civilization, and the lives of my loved ones from some deadly plague.

Wanting to understand this, I asked not only historians and political scientists about fascism but also sociologists, film experts, psychotherapists, literary critics, and

Romologists. I wanted to see a fascist response by analyzing the threats it would seek to remedy rather than by extrapolating past trends. The result of these conversations – which opened my eyes to how many problems that seemingly belong to different areas so quickly intertwine in the fascist machinery – is this book.

I couldn't resist asking world-famous experts on the subject – Roger Griffin and Szymon Rudnicki – about classical fascism. But even then, I tried to learn from them what they see mutated today from the old components of fascism rather than explore the sphere of historical reconstruction. Check what seeds germinate in the new conditions. All the more so because I also had the chance to meet Enzo Traverso, whose brilliant analysis of the long duration that resulted in Nazism (“The Origins of Nazi Violence,” 2011) was a groundbreaking read for me a few years earlier. By being able to contrast his and Gáspár Miklós Tamás's homologous concepts of “post-fascism,” we can think through dialogue about what fascism actually is in the post-communist era. I wanted to find out how this new version would reach us, so I asked Lech Nijakowski about apocalyptic thinking and Peter Staudenmaier about whether ecology would introduce fascism in a different way. I tried to examine the petty bourgeoisie with Rafał Pankowski and anti-Enlightenment movements with Andrzej W. Nowak. Will these paths lead us astray into fascist paths? Without Zbigniew Mikołajko, I would not have understood the role of Julius Evola in the current resurrection of integral traditionalism and both the Aryan myth and Hyperborea, which are coming back to us in a big way, this time from the East. Since there is no fascism without an enemy, I decided that I would look at its entire range: with Jacek Kochanowski trying to understand why there is such an intense hostility

towards homosexuality on the extreme right; Przemysław Wielgosz examining the miasmas of Islamophobia; Alina Cała looking at the history of anti-Semitism; Joanna Talewicz romophobia; and Ewa Majewska trying to understand the anti-feminist themes of fascism and Nazism. However, ideology and a defined enemy were not sufficient to fully understand the fascist project. For this another layer was needed: aesthetics. As Tamir Bar-On explained to me during our conversation, the metapolitical level of popular culture is crucial for neo-fascist new rightists. Jan Borowicz also outlined for me a psychoanalytic explanation of Nazi concepts and cultural productions.

As a result, I collected fragments from which I created a picture of a dystopian future. Because I can be sure of one thing after these conversations: the new fascism will not be a reconstruction of the old one. It will retain the principal axes and some motifs, but it will follow a completely different path in some registers. It will replace some actors, shift accents, and take advantage of new conditions. But it will remain fascism in its essence. A social religion of the healthy, clean, fit, and relatively wealthy, living in harmony with the Darwinian understanding of Nature and a morality rooted in Tradition and Myth, that trembles in fear.

**Przemysław Witkowski has written a necessary and fascinating book, which strangely no one had done before.**

**The uniqueness and special significance of Witkowski's book lies mainly in the fact that he puts aside irrelevant superficial differences and explores the identical or convergent essence of 20th-century and contemporary processes — from democratic and economic systemic dysfunctions to mythologies, aesthetics, visions of identity, family, and sexuality.**

**Przemysław Witkowski has been able to show, very convincingly, that fascism is here. It is not only next to us but also among us. And not in fringe niches. Not in dark hiding places. It's around us. Close to the mainstream or even within it. It permeates our lives.**

**Witkowski does not offer a magic anti-fascist wand. But his book reveals the vast roots of modern fascism. So, we have an essential tip on how to look for antidotes and where to apply them. And first of all, it provides knowledge that makes it harder to say, "I did not know."**