

The Journal of International Relations, Peace Studies, and Development

Volume 5
Issue 1 *The Journal of International Relations,
Peace Studies, and Development*

Article 2

2019

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Recommended Citation

Andrew Johnson (2019) "Ur-Fascism and Neo-Fascism," *The Journal of International Relations, Peace Studies, and Development*. Vol. 5: Iss. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/agsjournal/vol5/iss1/2>

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Ur-Fascism and Neo-Fascism

Andrew Johnson

Abstract: Fascism was once a momentous and imperative subject of study, but as the memory of atrocity faded there has been a lessening of stakes and a forgetting of its previous import. The election of Donald J. Trump, along with the Brexit referendum, growing support for economic nationalism, and a global rise of authoritarian populists, has revitalized the “fascism question,” both by scholars and the general public. The reemergence (and electoral successes) of far-right ideological partisans threatens the neoliberal consensus, challenging received wisdom within political science. The dominant approach within international political economy failed to predict escalating political opposition to global capitalism. A prescient exception is the heterodox scholar William Robinson, who had warned his readers of emergent 21st century fascism. This essay is inspired by Robinson’s theories but challenges some of his precepts and conclusions. The study of fascism is intertwined with studies of capitalism, financial crisis, inter-imperialist rivalry, democracy, and history; however, politics is never reducible to the structural settings in which it occurs. There are insoluble contradictions between historic fascism and its present-day recurrence. 21st century fascism is haunted by an overlaid history and overdetermined by the present conjuncture. A renewed study of fascism ought to focus criticism upon the hypocrisy of liberal politics. The struggle against fascism is also a struggle against liberalism, global capitalism, and American empire.

Keywords: American empire, Donald Trump, financial crisis, fascism, global capitalism, historicism, international political economy

Brownshirts and Red Caps

Eight years ago, a fascist murdered seventy-seven people in Norway, the majority of them teenagers. Today, that agenda is winning elections around the world. In India and Poland, the Philippines and Turkey, Brazil and Hungary, Israel and the United States, far-right, authoritarian, ethnonationalist demagogues are in power. In Germany, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden, far-right parties have made stunning electoral gains. In Britain, a center-right government struggles to implement a public referendum demanding a withdrawal from the European Union. In Isla Vista and El Paso, Charleston and Pittsburgh, Christchurch and Montreal, lone-wolf terrorists, each with their own manifesto, have targeted women, Latinos, blacks, Jews, and Muslims. In

Charlottesville, white supremacists and neo-Nazi groups carrying tiki-torches shouted that “Jews will not replace us” and “white lives matter.” In a government building adjacent to the Washington Mall, not long after the 2016 election, a salutation of “Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!” was answered by “Sieg Heil” salutes. At a recent rally, thousands feverishly chanted “send her back” in unison as the current President of the United States insulted Representative Ilhan Omar, a black Muslim woman, a refugee, and an immigrant. There are concentration camps in America. People die in these camps. Some of them are children. There is debate amongst Very Reasonable People as to how long they have been there. To paraphrase a line from the novelist Thomas Pynchon, “look out, it is getting pretty Fascist in here.”¹

Many of us (a general, problematic “us”) are waking up to the realization that there are fascists all around. Perhaps, it is the fascists who are waking up to the realization that there is an authoritarian system already assembled and for the taking.

For an entire generation of thinkers, the causes and nature of fascism was the Really Big Question that demanded critical attention. The names of the great thinkers of the last century, Gramsci, Reich, Benjamin, Adorno, Arendt, Deleuze, and so many more, are forever coupled with this legacy. After the rise and fall of fascism, the imperative within the halls of academia was how to prevent its reemergence. Styled as warnings, this literature displayed a reckoning with the past that held grave consequence for the distant future.

Emblematic of the genre is the Italian man of letters Umberto Eco’s essay “Ur-Fascism.”² The prefix *Ur* refers to the ancient Sumerian city-state and is commonly used to conjure the earliest or original meaning of its referent. For Eco, it was necessary to speak of fascism as archetypal, precisely because it was ephemeral and indistinct. In the beginning, there was no such thing as fascism. The word was invented as a form of group identification.³ Then others appropriated the term, also calling themselves fascist. Not long after, *this word* resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of people.⁴ To think back upon this label was to acknowledge its contradictions, but also, to imagine its potentiality. Ur-Fascism does not merely refer to the index case, but to future cases and the process of metamorphosis. The first generation of fascism scholars recognized this, taking it as their vocation to disentangle fascist movements and their beliefs from the manifested representatives, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. The study of fascism is distinctively comparative.⁵ In the “Preface” to The Mass Psychology of Fascism, for example, Wilhelm Reich states that the motivation and significance of his study is “that there is a German, Italian, Spanish, Anglo-Saxon, Jewish, and Arabian fascism.”⁶

In this essay, I most interested in the roots of American fascism. Whereas there were vibrant fascist movements in Britain, France, and Eastern Europe during the first half of the 20th century, many scholars have expressed shock at the lack of fascism in the United States.⁷ The comparativist approach is equally concerned with such counterfactuals. However, these scholars ignore American

¹ Thomas Pynchon. Gravity’s Rainbow. Viking: New York, NY. 1973. pg. 691.

² Umberto Eco. “Ur-Fascism.” The New York Review of Books. 1995.

³ Italian *fasci* were political associations, the word meaning a “bundle of sticks.”

⁴ In Sinclair Lewis’ 1935 novel, a character says to another: “Why are you so afraid of the word ‘Fascism,’ Doremus? Just a word—just a word!” (It Can’t Happen Here. Penguin: New York, NY. 1970. pg. 18).

⁵ Juan J. Linz. “Some Notes Towards a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective.” Fascism: A Reader’s Guide – Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography (ed. Walter Laqueur). University of California Press: Berkeley, CA. 1977.

⁶ Wilhelm Reich. The Mass Psychology of Fascism. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux: New York, NY. 1970. pg. xiv.

⁷ Peter H. Amann. “A ‘Dog in the Nighttime’ Problem: American Fascism in the 1930s.” The History Teacher. Vol. 19, No. 4. 1986.

history and centuries of settler-colonial, racial, and imperial violence. It is an argument developed within this article that there is a distinct variety of star-spangled fascism.⁸

Comparative explanations are simultaneously historical, confronting the paradox of how to compare politics of dissimilar epochs. The original is always unlike its future imitations. Eco translates Ur-Fascism as *eternal fascism*. He attempts to provide a framework for diagnosing future fascisms from the traits of monstrous forebearers. Eco's Ur-Fascism is a warning about Neo-Fascism. As his fellow Italian, and survivor of the death camps, Primo Levi proclaimed, "Every age has its own Fascism."⁹ The past many thought would never return surely does, and this insight necessitated a vigilance which animated the writings of those with a lived experience of fascism. The fear of future fascisms resulted in a paranoid policing of all manners of everyday-fascism and fascism-next-door. The hyperbolic imaginary is best exhibited in Michel Foucault's observation that there is a "fascism in us all."¹⁰ The American political scientist Richard Wolin later disparaged the sway that fascism maintained in the immediate aftermath of the war as an "intellectual romance."¹¹ The expression of terror by the first and second generations of fascism scholars bears some responsibility for the generalizable decline in the literature and a diminution in stakes.

The third generation of scholars is synonymous with an analytical study of fascism. Fascism (like populism) is now derided as an ambiguous label that ought to be held in suspicion. George Orwell likened fascism to a meaningless swearword applied to everything from youth hostels to fox-hunting and astrology.¹² Fascism has become an unbounded pejorative, used merely to castigate. Such a propensity for concept inflation has tangible disadvantages; indistinct and overused the public has become cynical that fascism is still possible in the here and now.¹³ Scholars have become increasing wary of applying the term for fear of "crying wolf." Added to this, present-day movements which could be labeled fascist disown the label, exploiting its woolliness. But as Ernest Hemingway's protagonist Robert Jordan reminds, when asked why there are no American fascists: "There are many who do not know they are fascists, but will find it out when the time comes."¹⁴ In response to the purported hollowness of the term, the analytical study of fascism has proclaimed a "new consensus," espousing the notion of a "fascist minimum," a thin method for establishing base conditions.¹⁵ The spokesman of the analytical school, Robert Griffin, characterizes the root ideology of *all* fascisms to be "palingenetic ultranationalism."¹⁶ Palingenesis refers to calls for national reclamation. By renewing the analysis of fascism through the identification of political programs that share loose family resemblances, the new comparativist study of fascism does little more than repeat Eco's originary wisdom. However, by tapering the label, something indispensable is omitted and fascism loses its import.

The notion of a "fascist minimum" is an affront to the tens of millions who died. The fear of a *fascist maximum* is what underscored the hallowed reverence afforded the term. The establishment of

⁸ Richard Steigmann-Gall. "Star-Spangled Fascism: American Interwar Political Extremism in Comparative Perspective." *Social History*. Vol. 42. No. 1. 2017.

⁹ Primo Levi. "A Past We Thought Would Never Return." *The Black Hole of Auschwitz*. Tr. Sharon Wood. Polity: Malden, MA. 2005. pg. 34.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault. "Preface." *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN. 1977.

¹¹ Richard Wolin. *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ. 2004.

¹² George Orwell. "What is Fascism?" *Tribune*. London, UK. 1944.

¹³ Gilbert Allardyce. "What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept." *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 84. No. 2. 1979.

¹⁴ Ernest Hemingway. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Scribner: New York, NY. 1940. pg. 116.

¹⁵ Roger Eatwell. "On Defining the 'Fascist Minimum': The Centrality of Ideology." *Journal of Political Ideologies*. Vol. 1. No. 3. 1996. Roger Griffin. "Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age. From New Consensus to New Wave?" *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*. Vol. 1. No. 1. 2012.

¹⁶ Roger Griffin. *The Nature of Fascism*. Routledge: London, UK. 1991.

ideological base conditions belies that the real danger of fascism is the machinations of organized mass death.

The development and subsequent decline in the study of fascism has been an exercise in organized forgetting. As the collective memory of a prior generation fades, social amnesia sets in and fascist movements reappear. The counterpoint to the charge that fascism is a loaded word, easily abused, which has lost its meaning, is that the assumption of fascism as a spent force occasions its return. On this point, Félix Guattari once proclaimed: “We must abandon, once and for all, the quick and easy formula: ‘Fascism will not make it again.’ Fascism has already ‘made it,’ and it continues to ‘make it.’”¹⁷ Many would have us disown the label and disfigure Theodor Adorno’s remark about poetry by asserting “there is *no fascism* after Auschwitz.” The juxtaposition of Ur-Fascism with Neo-Fascism reveals the contradictions inherent in seeing the present in terms of the past. Present-day fascist movements are feeble imitations of their monstrous precursors. If the word fascism still holds purchase it is as a reminder of the monstrous and a lesson that catastrophe remains possible. Recalling the memory of the past is to wake the dead so that they might haunt the living. The contemporary conjuncture is trapped within this paradox: when fascists no longer use the label, as memories of cruelties become more distant, the rejoinder exhausts its power and forces of evil reappear.¹⁸ In an essay on the difficulties of using history for the study of politics, Adorno write of such a danger. “National Socialism lives on, and even today we still do not know whether it is merely the ghost of what was so monstrous that it lingers on after its own death, or whether it has not yet died at all, whether the willingness to commit the unspeakable survives in people as well as in the conditions that enclose them.”¹⁹ If the persistence of our memory of fascism helps incite the ferocity of a resistance against it, then a purpose of this essay is to reawaken the fascist imaginary which once captivated the first generations who wrote in the wake of calamity.

A final note on Umberto Eco’s essay. Ur-Fascism is also a theory of *structural fascism*. When Adorno spoke of unspeakable monstrosity surviving “in the conditions that enclose them” he refers to a fascism that all are complicit in and while seemingly dormant persists. Fascism is intimately linked with liberalism. The strains of capitalism and the fragility of democratic institutions were to blame for the rise of 20th century fascism. Fascism reveals the latent hypocrisy of liberal politics. If the danger of fascism is predicated upon its maximum potential, then the machinations of organized mass death by liberal states and authorized by liberal politicians ought be equally damned.

The essay that follows is styled as a series of vignettes. The 2016 U.S. elections, along with the global rise of populist authoritarians and upsurge in economic nationalism, has occasioned a resurgence of popular and academic interest in the subject of fascism.²⁰ This essay analyzes the reemergence of the specter of fascism within the field of international relations, particularly the subfield of international political economy. Particular attention is paid to (so-called) heterodox scholars who have been excluded and ignored by the discipline. William Robinson, for one, was warning his readers of the rise of 21st century fascism prior to the ascendancy of Donald Trump. Robinson describes fascism as a political response to capitalist crisis. In the sections that follow, I

¹⁷ Félix Guattari. “Everybody Wants to be a Fascist.” *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972–1977*. Semiotext(e): Los Angeles, CA. 2009. pg. 171.

¹⁸ Some argue on behalf of the term post-fascism because it exhibits the contradictory nature of the word. There is similarity between their position and mine. See: Enzo Traverso. *The New Faces of Fascism: Populism and the Far Right*. Tr. David Broder. Verso: New York, NY. 2019.

¹⁹ Theodor W. Adorno. “The Meaning of Working Through the Past.” *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. Tr. Henry W. Pickford. Columbia University Press: New York, NY. 1998. pg. 89-90.

²⁰ William Connolly. *Aspirational Fascism: The Struggle for Multifaceted Democracy under Trumpism*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN. 2017. Jason Stanley. *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them*. Random House: New York, NY. 2018. Alexander Reid Ross. *Against the Fascist Creep*. AK Press: Chico, CA. 2017. Natasha Lennard. *Being Numerous: Essays on Non-Fascist Life*. Verso: London, UK. 2019.

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 (Please cite this paper as the following: Andrew Johnson (2019). Ur-Fascism and Neo-Fascism. *The Journal of International Relations, Peace and Development Studies*. Volume 5.

expand upon, appraise, and complicate Robinson's thesis. The decline of American empire, the reemergence of China as a great power, global capitalism, financial crisis, the liberal international order, historicism, and the role of ideas and organic intellectuals are significant subjects in which to analyze the current fascist conjuncture. The penultimate section is an extended excursus on various theories of fascism and their applicability for understanding current events. I conclude by means of a literary analysis of two anonymous texts, fashioning my own theory of *structural fascism* to resolve the paradox of Ur-Fascism and Neo-Fascism. I do not purport to determine whether fascism has returned. Further, I am uninterested in defining fascism, of saying what it is or what it is not. I am, on the contrary, invested in problematizing the legitimacy of analytical notions of fascism. Ur-Fascism and Neo-Fascism, 20th and 21st century fascisms, are essentially contradictory. By escaping the confines of a literature entrapped in historicism, we might imagine a future more terrifying than what has come before. These variations upon the theme of fascism are haunted by the vertigo of this thought.

“His Coming was Expected on Earth”: Prophecies of Trump

We must keep alert, so that the sense of these words will not be forgotten again.
 -Umberto Eco

The study of international political economy (IPE) has been confronting a crisis of hegemony. In his intellectual history of the subfield, Benjamin J. Cohen selects Susan Strange's 1970 seminal article “International Economics and International Relations: A Case of Mutual Neglect” as the founding document.²¹ Four decades after Strange's inaugural challenge, Cohen accused the now-developed subfield of adherence to a new “dialogue of the deaf.”²² Calling attention to the “transatlantic divide” separating the American from the British schools of IPE was only the first step in unmasking an entrenched “monoculture.”²³ As Cohen wryly retorts: “[T]he case for the inherent superiority of the American style of IPE is remarkably weak.”²⁴ Much ink has been spilt on the shortcomings of the American school: methodological reductionism, econometric absolutism, disciplinary insularity, narrowness of topics, loss of ambition, boring content, impartiality and deference to authority, but none more so than an inability to predict or explain current events.²⁵

The third-wave of American school IPE has been labeled Open Economy Politics (OEP) by David Lake.²⁶ Lake provocatively declares the OEP paradigm “a hegemonic approach.”²⁷ The paradigm is a one-way, bottom-up methodology where national political institutions represent social interests at the international bargaining table. Excluded are structural or systemic theories, relationships of domination and dependence, and ideology. Parsimonious, provable explanations are valued over complexity. Historical analysis is shunned in favor of a rigorous scientific methodology.

²¹ Susan Strange. “International Economics and International Relations: A Case of Mutual Neglect” *International Affairs*. Vol. 46. No. 2. 1970. Benjamin J. Cohen. *International Political Economy: An Intellectual History*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ. 2008.

²² Benjamin J. Cohen. “The Transatlantic Divide: Why are American and British IPE so Different?” *Review of International Political Economy*. Vol. 14. No. 2. 2007.

²³ Kathleen R. McNamara. “Of Intellectual Monocultures and the Study of IPE.” *Review of International Political Economy*. Vol. 16. No. 1. 2009.

²⁴ Benjamin J. Cohen. *Advanced Introduction to International Political Economy*. Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham, UK. 2014. pg. 132.

²⁵ Susan Strange. “Cave! Hic Dragons: A Critique of Regime Analysis.” *International Organization*. Vol. 36. No. 2. 1982. Craig Murphy and Douglas Nelson. “International Political Economy: A Tale of Two Heterodoxies.” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. Vol. 3. No. 3. 2001. Nicola Philips and Catherine E. Weaver (eds.). *International Political Economy: Debating the Past, Present, and Future*. Routledge: New York, NY. 2011. Thomas Oatley. “The Reductionist Gamble: Open Economy Politics in the Global Economy.” *International Organization*. Vol. 65. No. 2. 2011. W. Kindred Winecoff. “How Did American International Political Economy Become Reductionist? A Historiography of a Discipline.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 2017. Benjamin J. Cohen. “Are IPE Journals Becoming Boring?” *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 54. 2010.

²⁶ David A. Lake. “Open Economy Politics: A Critical Review.” *Review of International Organizations*. Vol. 4. No. 3. 2009.

²⁷ David A. Lake. “International Political Economy: A Maturing Interdiscipline.” *Oxford Handbook of Political Economy* (eds. Barry Weingast and Donald Wittman). Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK. 2006. pg. 772.

Interests are endogenous and can be properly accounted for. Actors and institutions are honest brokers. If the first generation of modern IPE focused upon the decline of state power and the rise of multinational corporations, OEP has retained little of that legacy. Instead, the third-wave has adopted the two weakest aspects of realism and liberalism: the nation-state is the central unit of analysis and economic liberalism is ultimately advantageous.

The publication of Cohen's invective, alongside the 2008 financial crisis, turned received wisdom on its head. The subprime mortgage crisis, global in scope and contagious across borders, arrived without notice and undercut the central dogmas of economists. Cohen argued that the inability of IPE scholars to see the crisis looming demonstrated a "grave case of myopia."²⁸ The British school, spearheaded by Susan Strange, was far more attuned to changes in the global economy and the corresponding dangers. Strange's books, *Casino Capitalism*, *The Retreat of the State*, and *Mad Money*, now read as warnings.²⁹ Ronen Palan argued that the prejudices and rigidity of the orthodoxy within IPE blinded them to the hazards of economic liberalism. Arguing that the "proof of the pudding is in the eating," the 2008 financial crisis undermined the credibility of the American school.³⁰

If the 2008 financial crisis undercut the competence of American school IPE, the 2016 election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States (along with Britain's Brexit vote and the global rise of authoritarian populists) exposed the bankruptcy of the school of thought. As Mark Blyth and Matthias Matthijs claim, the financial crisis was no "black swan," rather IPE is a "lame duck" research agenda.³¹ The multi-decade, bipartisan, international, and academic consensus in favor of free trade and capital mobility is kaput.

Not everyone was caught unaware. A pronounced, prescient example is William Robinson, one of the originators of the global capitalism school, who accurately predicted the emergence of 21st century fascism several years before Trump descended to the political stage.³² One never needed to cross the Atlantic to illustrate how critical approaches were disregarded by the orthodox branch of IPE. Robinson, along with a motley crew of academic outcasts, are examples of what Craig Murphy called America's "left-out," scholars whose critical and left-leaning insights have been refused entry or reply in the leading IPE journals.³³ Robinson is a successor to Robert Cox and the Neo-Gramscian school of international relations.³⁴ While formally included in the British school within Cohen's intellectual history of the subfield, Cox was not British, nor did he teach there, and, furthermore, was responsible for promoting a tradition distinct from Strange. As part of the second-wave of Neo-Gramscian thinkers, the global capitalism school is most notable for advancing the study of globalization and the ascendancy of a transnational capitalist class.³⁵

²⁸ Benjamin J. Cohen. "A Grave Case of Myopia." *International Interactions*. Vol. 35. No. 4. 2009.

²⁹ Susan Strange. *Casino Capitalism*. Basil Blackwell: Oxford, UK. 1986. Susan Strange. *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. 1996. Susan Strange. *Mad Money: When Markets Outgrow Governments*. Manchester University Press: Manchester, UK. 1998.

³⁰ Ronen Palan. "The Proof of the Pudding is in the Eating: IPE in Light of the Crisis of 2007/8." *New Political Economy*. Vol. 14. No. 3. 2009.

³¹ Mark Blyth and Matthias Matthijs. "Black Swans, Lame Ducks, and the Mystery of IPE's Missing Macro-Economy." *Review of International Political Economy*. Vol. 24. No. 2. 2017.

³² William I. Robinson and Mario Barrera. "Global Capitalism and Twenty-first Century Fascism: a US Case Study." *Race & Class*. Vol. 53. No. 3. 2012. William I. Robinson. *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. 2014.

³³ Craig N. Murphy. "Do the Left-Out Matter?" *New Political Economy*. Vol. 14. No. 3. 2009.

³⁴ Robert W. Cox. *Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History*. Columbia University Press: New York, NY. 1987. Stephen Gill. *Gramsci, Historical Materialism, and International Relations*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. 1993.

³⁵ Robinson is similarly influenced by another neo-Gramscian thinker: Stuart Hall. Hall provides a more nuanced analysis of (British) domestic politics and police repression than does Cox.

An alternative choice that Cohen could have highlighted as the founding act of IPE was a 1970 conference held at Harvard University on “Transnational Relations and World Politics.”³⁶ Here at the birth pangs of the nascent discipline new actors such as multinational corporations, financial investors, and private foundations were identified as challenges to the analytical primacy and democratic processes of nation-states. Marxist thinkers were included in these early debates. Nearly fifty years later, even though transnational relations and the power of multinational corporations serve as the bedrocks of the global capitalism school, and their work has amassed citations, the “left-out” are no longer even a niche in a vast network of IPE scholarship.³⁷

The question bears asking: why has the modern school of American IPE excised the study of transnational relations which the pioneering generation put as the foundation? The OEP paradigm has failed to live up to its promise of “theoretical eclecticism” and now suffers from a theoretical deficit.³⁸ Cohen himself once playfully depicted Marxists as “outside the ‘respectable’ mainstream of Western scholarship,” while also applauding the current academic environment for encouraging free expression and allowing “radicals” to speak openly without censure.³⁹ Cox’s remembrance of the climate was quite different: “Cold-war ideologies had a powerful impact upon scholarship. Any suspicion of Marxism is anathema... Marxism appears to thinkers in the mainstream as a manifestation of dissidence, obstinate ignorance, even treachery.”⁴⁰ The ascendancy of neoliberal ideology corresponded with a need for organic intellectuals to defend free enterprise and economic globalization. Hegemony entails the institutionalization of the ruling ideas. As Karl Marx reminds us: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.”⁴¹ American school IPE mimicked American global hegemony by systematically discouraging dissensus, through gatekeeping, standardization, conformity, and good ole-fashioned disregard. If IPE suffers from a bankruptcy of ideas, this signals a more general failure of governing ideology. As Cox once proclaimed, “a proliferation of loners is an indicator of crisis in received opinion, perhaps even a crisis of hegemony.”⁴²

Thinkers of the global capitalism school are not “fuzzy thinkers,” nor “navel gazers,” and certainly not “treacherous ignorant dissidents” either; rather, they are indispensable. That Robinson was prescient when so many of his colleagues were oblivious calls for a critical appraisal of his foretelling of 21st century fascism. As IPE attempts to grapple with the Trump Presidency, the reemergence of economic nationalism and authoritarian populists, trade wars, and escalating class conflict, the theories and lessons of the formerly outcast must be given pride of place.

The purported return of fascism is an extreme accusation. Given the historical baggage of the charge, one can hardly lay the blame on IPE for not giving it attention. The entire discipline of political science, along with political elites, failed to anticipate the Trump phenomenon and has spent the past years immobilized and in anticipation of what comes next. Political science has overestimated

³⁶ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr. (eds.). *Transnational Relations and World Politics*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA. 1972.

³⁷ Leonard Seabrooke and Kevin L. Young. “The Networks and Niches of International Political Economy.” *Review of International Political Economy*. Vol. 24. No. 2. 2017.

³⁸ David A. Lake. “Why ‘Isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress.” *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 55. No. 2. 2011. David Lake. “Theory is Dead, Long Live Theory: The End of the Great Debates and the Rise of Eclecticism in International Relations.” *European Journal of International Relations*. Vol. 19. No. 3. 2013.

³⁹ Cohen 2007. pg. 197. Cohen 2008. pg. 136.

⁴⁰ Robert W. Cox. “The ‘British School’ in the Global Context.” *New Political Economy*. Vol. 14. No. 3. 2009.

⁴¹ Karl Marx. “The German Ideology.” *The Marx-Engels Reader*. W.M. Norton & Company: New York, NY. 1978. pg. 172.

⁴² Robert W. Cox. “‘Take Six Eggs’: Theory, Finance, and the Real Economy in the Work of Susan Strange.” *Approaches to World Order*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. 1996.

the sturdiness and merit of institutions.⁴³ However, the study of far-right parties and populism has been an intensifying fascination amongst those in comparative politics and economic inequality and race are commanding subjects within the field of American politics.⁴⁴ International relations is unique for the widespread fealty shown to liberal assurances of peace and prosperity. The optimism shared amongst co-signers of the previous hegemonic consensus felt that the boom-times could last in perpetuity. Myopic and ineffectual, those studying the global economy and global political dynamics lacked a pessimistic imagination.

In the twilight of the Obama presidency, Robinson forecast a set of three possibilities for a time of acute crisis: 1) a reformism from above that strives to stabilize the global capitalist system, 2) a leftist resistance from below, 3) the emergence of 21st century fascism. Whereas the first was already in power, its hold on hegemony was precarious. The least likely option was the second, as a democratic socialist alternative had not yet announced itself. The most likely was the third possibility, as Robinson announced that 21st century fascism was already emergent.

The conclusions of Robert Cox's essays were always formulaic. At the end of each, he proposes a set of alternative futures. His most lauded essay, "Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations," predicts a new world order based upon the internationalization of production. Leading countries and international organizations would unite in a common effort to promote global capital. The lasting legacy of Cox's career was foreseeing the emergence of neoliberal globalization. The Coxian formula also considered less likely scenarios, one being the revival of nationalism and mercantilism. States could reimpose their authority over domestic markets, monetary policy, and cross-border flows. The least likely possibility, but the one Cox was most supportive of, was a counter-hegemonic coalition of Third World countries and/or global social movements.⁴⁵ Cox was a resolute futurist; he employed this formula before and would repeat it after.⁴⁶ The model is a hallmark of Neo-Gramscian theory, as British cultural theorist Stuart Hall analyzed the 1) neoliberal "law and order" state, 2) the social-democratic "solution," and the 3) looming appearance of "authoritarian populism."⁴⁷ As Cox warned: "The danger of authoritarian populism, of reborn fascism, is particularly great where political structures are crumbling and the material basis of resentment appears to be intractable."⁴⁸ Robinson's prophetic powers are less impressive upon recognizing that his Neo-Gramscian forebearers had been announcing the arrival of fascism generations prior. A globalized economy limits the range of political choices. There were two alternatives to the neoliberal consensus: an inclusive global socialism from below or neo-fascism. Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal adage *There is No Alternative* is illustrative of the economic orthodoxy of the time, but also reveals why political elites, upon the breakdown of this consensus, would adhere to authoritarianism as a bulwark against popular movements. As the distribution of gains and losses intensifies, engendering severe inequalities and social upheaval, capital has *no alternative* but to rely upon fascism to maintain the privilege of unregulated financial markets and the wholesale privatization of public goods.

⁴³ Laurel Eckhouse. "White Riot: Race, Institutions, and the 2016 U.S. Election." *Politics, Groups, and Identities*. 2018.

⁴⁴ On populism, see: Cas Mudde. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. 2007. On economic inequality and race, see: Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy. "American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality." American Political Science Association. 2004. Task Force on Racial and Social Class Inequalities in the Americas. "The Double Bind: The Politics of Racial & Class Inequalities in the Americas." American Political Science Association. 2016.

⁴⁵ Robert W. Cox. "Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations." *Millennium: A Journal of International Studies*. Vol. 10. No. 2. 1981.

⁴⁶ Robert W. Cox. "On Thinking about Future World Order." *World Politics*. Vol. 28. No. 2. 1976. Robert W. Cox. "The Global Political Economy and Social Choice." *The New Era of Global Competition: State Policy and Market Power* (eds. Daniel Drache and Meric Gertler). McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal, CA. 1991. Robert W. Cox. "Multilateralism and World Order." *Review of International Studies*. Vol. 18. No. 2. 1992.

⁴⁷ Stuart Hall. "Popular-Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism: Two Ways of 'Taking Democracy Seriously.'" *Hard Road to Renewal Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*. Verso: London, UK. 1988.

⁴⁸ Robert W. Cox. "Global *perestroika*." *Socialist Register*. Vol. 12. 1992.

To its adherents the advantage of the global capitalism school is its “nuanced empirically based analysis.”⁴⁹ The promise of the approach is not empirics, nor its novelty, comprehensiveness, consistency, or even radicalness, but its power of prediction. If Robinson exhibits a weak messianic power, it is, as Walter Benjamin posits, shared with prior generations and structured by our memories of the past.⁵⁰ The fascist messiah, *whose coming was expected on earth*, is always-already present.

Donald Trump is the augur of resurgent fascism. Though proleptic, Robinson’s theory of 21st century fascism suffers from its reliance upon historicism. Robinson’s account of fascism is dependent upon a *crisis-consensus*. Robinson asserts that the principal cause of fascism, in both the 20th and 21st centuries, is capitalist crisis. Robinson ignores other sufficient causes of fascism such as global power transitions, imperial aspirations, uniquely malevolent leaders, and democratic backsliding. Furthermore, Robinson labels 21st century fascism as emergent, but does not describe the life-cycle of fascist movements. Studying fascism-in-motion shows how emergence can become consolidation. Disassembling the temporal theories of fascism holds important implications for what I call dormant-fascism and fascism-without-end. Robinson’s thesis is limited because of the constraints he places on the present by understanding it through the past. An underlying premise forming my own thoughts is that *politics is never reducible to the structural settings in which it occurs*.

American Empire and Global Capitalism

It would be so much easier, for us, if there appeared on the world scene somebody saying,
 “I want to reopen Auschwitz, I want the Black Shirts to parade again in the Italian squares.”
 -Umberto Eco

The myth of fading American empire eternally recurs.⁵¹ The invasion of Iraq and neoconservative unilateralism gave rise to fears of waning American influence and the rise of soft balancing.⁵² Some predicted that the 2008 financial crisis marked the date American hegemony deteriorated.⁵³ Most recently, the election of Donald Trump has produced a new wave of hand-wringing over the coming collapse of *Pax Americana*.⁵⁴ The paragon of the trope is Christopher Layne, whose academic career has centered upon the impermanence of unipolarity and a recurring prophecy that “this time it’s real.”⁵⁵ The cyclical warnings of impending hegemonic decline have become repetitive, inaccurate, and feigned.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ William I. Robinson. *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World*. John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, MD. 2004. Jeb Sprague. “Empire, Global Capitalism, and Theory: Reconsidering Hardt and Negri.” *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*. Vol. 29. 2011.

⁵⁰ Walter Benjamin. “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” *Illuminations*. Tr. Harry Zohn. Schocken Books: New York, NY. 1968.

⁵¹ Bruce Russett. “The Mysterious Case of Vanishing Hegemony; or, is Mark Twain Really Dead?” *International Organization*. Vol. 39. No. 2. 1985.

⁵² Susan Strange. “The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony.” *International Organization*. Vol. 41. No. 4. 1987.

⁵³ Michael Cox. “The Empire’s Back in Town: or America’s Imperial Temptation – Again.” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*. Vol. 32. No. 1. 2003. Robert A. Pape. “Soft Balancing Against the United States.” *International Security*. Vol. 30. No. 1. 2005. Stephen M. Walt. *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy*. W.W. Norton & Company: New York, NY. 2006.

⁵⁴ Stephen S. Cohen and J. Bradford Delong. *The End of Influence: What Happens When Other Countries Have the Money*. Basic Books: New York, NY. 2010. Robert J. Art. “Selective Engagement in an Era of Austerity.” *America’s Path: Grand Strategy for the Next Administration* (eds. Robert Fontaine and Kristin Lord). Center for a New American Security: Washington D.C. 2012.

⁵⁵ David A. Lake. “International Legitimacy Lost? Rule and Resistance when America is First.” *Perspective on Politics*. Vol. 16. No. 1. 2018. Alfred W. McCoy. “The World According to Trump: Or How to Build a Wall and Lose an Empire.” *TomDispatch*. 2018.

⁵⁶ Christopher Layne. “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise.” *International Security*. Vol. 17. No. 3. 1993. Christopher Layne. “The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States’ Unipolar Moment.” *International Security*. Vol. 31. No. 2. 2006. Christopher Layne. “This Time It’s Real: The End of Unipolarity and the *Pax Americana*.” *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 56. No. 1. 2012. Christopher Layne. “The US–Chinese Power Shift and the End of the *Pax Americana*.” *International Affairs*. Vol. 91. No. 1. 2018.

⁵⁷ Paul K. MacDonald. “Those who Forget Historiography are Doomed to Republish it: Empire, Imperialism and Contemporary Debates about American Power.” *Review of International Studies*. Vol. 35. 2009.

The failure to accurately predict hegemonic decline demands we ask a more fascinating question: why has American empire *endured*?⁵⁷ Overstretched and irresponsible, fraudulent and coercive, capricious and derided, military adventurism, financial recklessness, and political malfeasance has not damaged the United States' global power. Some argue that American hegemony endures based upon its monopoly on the capacity to project military force.⁵⁸ Others endorse effective use of strategic restraint, retrenchment, and soft power for winning friends, influencing foes, and maintaining legitimacy.⁵⁹ Worth remembering is Susan Strange's proverb in the first iteration of this debate: "America's 'legions'... are not military but economic."⁶⁰ The U.S. dollar and American markets paradoxically provided safe haven in the aftermath of the 2008 financial collapse. Far from overextended, the reach, capabilities, and position of American economic power has elicited accommodation and collaboration. The U.S. policy of military Keynesianism presides on a substratum of perpetual deficits without tears. The imperial command of the global commons rests upon economic foundations.

The liberal international order is based upon an ideology of economic openness, multilateral cooperation, and unrestrained investment, extraction, and production. American unipolarity persists through alliance systems, international institutions, and widespread acquiescence. Neo-Marxists have castigated the liberal international order as a new type of imperialism.⁶¹ The global capitalism school holds that preponderant American power conceals the totalizing dominance of a transnational capitalist class. The purported hegemony of the transnational capitalist class was intended as a supplement to the eras of successive bids for global hegemony by nation-states. The hegemonic decline thesis ignores the convergence of global elites around a shared project of expansive capitalism. Harkening back to Strange, the history of the present was foretold: "What is emerging is a non-territorial empire with its imperial capital in Washington D.C."⁶²

One reason for the staying-power of American empire is the lack of geopolitical rivals.⁶³ The reemergence of China as a great power has precipitated a growing debate over their intentions and ambitions.⁶⁴ Is China a revisionist state, or will it preserve the status quo; is Beijing a taker, maker, or breaker of the existing order?⁶⁵

⁵⁷ Evidence of hegemonic power is that the word "American" is readily understood to refer to the United States and not the *Americas* (both North and South). A grave sin of this essay is that "American" is used so freely.

⁵⁸ Barry R. Posen. "The Command of the Commons: The Military Foundations of U.S. Hegemony." *International Security*. Vol. 28. No. 1. 2003.

⁵⁹ G. John Ikenberry. *After Victory: Intuitions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Orders after Major Wars*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ. 2000. Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent. "Graceful Decline? The Surprising Success of Great Power Retrenchment." *International Security*. Vol. 35. No. 4. 2011.

⁶⁰ Susan Strange. "The Future of American Empire." *Journal of International Affairs*. Vol. 42. No. 1. 1988.

⁶¹ Enrico Augelli and Craig N. Murphy. *America's Quest for Supremacy in the Third World: A Gramscian Analysis*. Pinter Publishers: London, UK. 1989. Ellen Meiksins Wood. *Empire of Capital*. Verso: London, UK. 2003. David Harvey. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK. 2005. Greg Grandin. *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*. Henry Holt: New York, NY. 2007. Nana de Graaff and Bastiaan van Apeldoorn. "Varieties of US Post-Cold War Imperialism: Anatomy of a Failed Hegemonic Project and the Future of US Geopolitics." *Critical Sociology*. Vol. 37. No. 4. 2010. Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin. *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire*. Verso: London, UK. 2013.

⁶² Susan Strange. "Towards a Theory of Transnational Empire." *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges: Approaches to World Politics for the 1990s* (eds. Ernst-Otto Czempiel and James Rosenau). Lexington Books: Lexington, KY. 1989.

⁶³ Full-spectrum global dominance is impossible. American empire is maintained with the cooperation of its allies, particularly in Europe and Japan. For example, Russia remains a regional hegemon and has successfully challenged the international liberal order in Georgia and Ukraine.

⁶⁴ David C. Kang. *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia*. Columbia University Press: New York, NY. 2007.

⁶⁵ Alastair Iain Johnston. "Is China a State Quo Power?" *International Security*. Vol. 27. No. 4. 2003. Thomas J. Christensen. "Fostering Stability or Creating a Monster? The Rise of China and U.S. Policy toward East Asia." *International Security*. Vol. 31. No. 1. 2006. Michael Beckley. "China's Century: Why America's Edge Will Endure." *International Security*. Vol. 36. No. 3. 2012. Benjamin J. Cohen. "The China Question: Can Its Rise be Accommodated?" *The Great Wall of Money: Power and Politics in China's International Monetary Relations* (eds. Jonathan Kirchner and Eric Helleiner). Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY. 2014. Stephen G. Brook and William Wohlforth. "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-first Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position." *International Security*. Vol. 40. No. 3. 2016.

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 (Please cite this paper as the following: Andrew Johnson (2019). Ur-Fascism and Neo-Fascism. *The Journal of International Relations, Peace and Development Studies*. Volume 5.

The rise of China has proven to be empirically puzzling for the global capitalism school. The bulk of their in-depth empirical studies have focused on the transnational capitalist class and Latin America.⁶⁶ High-growth rates in China have paralleled four decades of growth in East Asia. China is a one-stop shop situated amidst a continent of cheap labor.⁶⁷ Added to this is the difficulty of evaluating China's status as an autocratic regime, the continued presence and magnitude of state-owned enterprises, and restrictions on capital mobility. China rejects the basic tenets of liberalism, remaining nominally a communist government.

Jeb Sprague has produced one of the first studies by the global capitalism school on East Asia.⁶⁸ In this volume, Jerry Harris posits the establishment of a "statist transnational capital class" in China.⁶⁹ Foreign direct investment into China has come predominately from other countries in the region: Japan and the four Asian Tigers. Despite strict controls on capital mobility, Chinese capitalists access offshore financial centers through Macau and Hong Kong. As Anthony van Fossen states, "Hong Kong is not just a tax haven. It is a bridge to a labyrinth of other [offshore financial centers]."⁷⁰ The vast majority of the illicit financial flows in the region originate from China. William Robinson provides the definitive statement on the supposed challenge to American empire by the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa).⁷¹ None of the emerging economies have diversified their economies or developed higher value-added industries. Brazil remains an agricultural exporter, Russia an energy exporter, India a hub for services, and China a supplier for mass manufacturing. While Robinson underestimates the diversification of the Chinese economy and production of capital-intensive goods, far from rejecting globalization, these countries have sought out foreign investment, worked to weaken labor and land rights, and opened their territories and peoples to corporate colonization.

Sean Starrs provides evidence that American firms continue to dominate the global economy and that American investors own large shares of Chinese companies.⁷² Starrs summons the data on transnational corporations, corporate ownership, and sectoral dominance, and from this draws a set of conclusions intended to challenge the global capitalism school. The American economy remains dominate, across sectors and by a significant margin. Chinese firms maintain an inferior position in buyer-driven global supply chains and are thoroughly penetrated by foreign capital. Chinese economic growth benefits foreign investors. The Chinese economy is powered by state-owned enterprises, whose corporate owners owe allegiance to the party and serve on central committees. Starrs takes this to imply the predominant role of the state in the Chinese economy.

Starrs has demanded that we take globalization *and* the state *seriously*.⁷³ By focusing on corporate ownership, Starrs has replicated the methods of the global capitalism school. However, his

⁶⁶ William I. Robinson. Latin America and Global Capitalism: A Critical Globalization Prospective. John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, MD. 2008.

⁶⁷ Dae-oup Chang. "From Global Factory to Continent of Labor." *Asian Labor Review*. Vol. 1. 2015.

⁶⁸ Jeb Sprague (ed). Globalization and Transnational Capitalism in Asia and Oceania. Routledge: New York, NY. 2016.

⁶⁹ Jerry Harris. "Statist Globalization in Russia, China, and the Gulf States." *Science & Society*. Vol. 73. No. 1. 2009. Jerry Harris. "Outward Bound: Transnational Capitalism in China." *Race & Class*. Vol. 54. No. 1. 2012.

⁷⁰ Anthony van Fossen. "Offshore Tax Havens: The Borderlands of Global Capitalism." Globalization and Transnational Capitalism in Asia and Oceania (ed. Jeb Sprague). Routledge: New York, NY. 2016.

⁷¹ William I. Robinson. "Global Capitalism, the BRICS, and the Transnational State." Globalization and Transnational Capitalism in Asia and Oceania (ed. Jeb Sprague). Routledge: New York, NY. 2016.

⁷² Sean K. Starrs. "American Economic Power Hasn't Declined – It Globalized! Summoning the Data and Taking Globalization Seriously." *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 57. No. 4. 2013. Sean K. Starrs. "The Global Capitalism School Tested in Asia: Transnational Capitalist Class vs Taking the State Seriously." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. Vol. 47. No. 4. 2017.

⁷³ The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once warned of those preaching *seriousness*: "How burdensome they must find good thinking! The lovely human beast always seems to lose its good spirits when it thinks well; it becomes 'serious'... Well then, let us prove that this is a prejudice" (The Gay Science. Tr. Walter Kaufman. Vintage: New York, NY. 1974. pg. 257).

analysis of sectors utilizes national economic indicators. Harris asks the fundamental question: “When Nigerian oil powers the assembly lines at Honda and Volkswagen, or Iranian energy lights up FoxConn so computers for Dell and [Hewlett Packard] can flow off the assembly line, just who is benefiting?”⁷⁴ Capitalism-with-Chinese-characteristics is nationally determined, globally integrated, and permeated by foreign investors. That corporate executives serve on the central committees of the Chinese Communist Party demonstrates the influence of globally-oriented market actors on public policy and governance. Starrs does not address Beijing’s support of the liberal international order and economic globalization.⁷⁵ If Starrs’s contribution is the supremacy of an American capitalist class, he knowingly proves its transnational constitution. Robinson has repeated, *ad nauseum*, his position that global capitalism is organized by the United States and that capitalists and elites in the Global South are incorporated as subsidiaries. Starrs’s general findings of American economic dominance reinforce the conclusions reached by the global capitalism school.⁷⁶

Like many who assert the mantle of seriousness, Starrs substitutes data for the rigor of theory. He misrepresents the global capitalism school. To be fair, basic misunderstandings are due to the school’s theoretical ambiguity. The global capitalism school wants it both ways: to posit the predominance of American global power, while emphasizing the hegemony of the transnational capitalist class.

For Robinson, “Trumpism is not a departure from but an incarnation of an emerging dictatorship of the transnational capitalist class.”⁷⁷ Accordingly, economic nationalism is a campaign tactic that belies an agenda based upon the intensification of neoliberalism. While Trump is a member of the transnational capitalist class, whose global business empire has thrived because of the economic policies he criticizes, Trump does not represent the capitalist elites any more than he is a puppet of Vladimir Putin or contained by the Republican party. Trump represents nobody’s interest but his own, a distinguishing aspect of fascist leaders. Trump’s ongoing trade wars are not symbolic but hedged upon the “exorbitant privilege” of American economic power. Political support for economic nationalism is increasing not waning, domestically, internationally, and across the ideological spectrum, threatening existing supply chains and globally-oriented businesses.

The “Make America Great Again” slogan reinforces the myth of fading American empire. The politics of international trade has electoral consequences. Manufacturing industries are concentrated in swing states and the two most populated states are border states.⁷⁸ Trump appealed to domestic interests in favor of economic nationalism.⁷⁹ What was distinctive was how Trump framed the issue in terms of geopolitical rivalry. As President, Trump has pursued a global trade war, against China, but also Mexico, Brazil, and even European allies, not out of fears of hegemonic decline, but to leverage American economic supremacy. “Make American Great Again” appeals to domestic

⁷⁴ Jerry Harris. “Statism and the Transnational Capitalist Class in China.” *Globalization and Transnational Capitalism in Asia and Oceania* (ed. Jeb Sprague). Routledge: New York, NY. 2016. pg. 27.

⁷⁵ A brief example, in a keynote speech at the World Economic Forum, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated: “the problems troubling the world are not caused by economic globalization.”

⁷⁶ Marcelo del Castillo-Mussot, Jeb Sprague, and Alfredo de la Lama Garcia. “Global Capitalism and ‘North-South’ Unevenness: In Light of Ranking, Statistical Correlations, and Profits from the Forbes’ Worldwide List of 2000 Top Firms.” *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*. Vol. 12. 2013.

⁷⁷ William I. Robinson. “Trumpism, 21st-Century Fascism, and the Dictatorship of the Transnational Capitalist Class.” *Social Justice: A Journal of Crime, Conflict, and World Order*. 2017.

⁷⁸ J. Bradford Jensen, Dennis Quinn, and Stephen Weymouth. “Winners and Losers in International Trade: The Effects on US Presidential Voting.” *International Organization*. Vol. 71. No. 3. 2017.

⁷⁹ Political scientists have identified the activation of racial resentment as a counterpoint to those who posit that economic anxieties mobilized voters. It was both/and. Xenophobia animates the rhetoric aimed at Trump’s two foremost geopolitical foes: China and Mexico.

audiences longing for a mythic, fleeting past, but an “America First” foreign policy is enacted to “weaponize interdependence.”⁸⁰

Trade theory remains mired in a methodology that emphasizes national factor endowments.⁸¹ Industrial cleavages, factor mobility, and trading blocs do not account for the preponderance of intra-firm trade. If IPE’s really big question concerns the political determinants of globalization, then the answer by the OEP paradigm is a detailed description of domestic politics. This answer is diametrically opposed to the conclusions reached about the intensification of finance and capital mobility by the second-generation of American school IPE.⁸² The global diffusion of liberalism benefits globally-oriented businesses at the expense of nationally-oriented businesses and the decision-making autonomy of politicians. The global capitalism school argues that the transnational capitalist class is afforded tremendous *autonomy* and controlling *influence* over institutions, leaders, policy, and regulation, thereby holding *structural power* over nation-states. The intensification of intra-firm trade indicates that national growth-rates conceal that an overwhelming proportion of profits goes to multinational firms best positioned within global supply chain networks. Trade wars diminish the profit-margins of capitalists and threaten the globalization of the production process.

Capital and high-wage earners can move freely across borders, whereas low-wage laborers cannot. Trump appeals to the working class by directing animus and resentment towards foreign workers, immigrant labor, and geopolitical competitors. Robinson is correct that Trump has intensified neoliberalism. However, Robinson is incorrect to dismiss Trump’s trade war. The global capitalism school has too eagerly ignored the persistence of geopolitical rivalry as a bygone relic. National political elites retain a high-degree of autonomy from and control over the transnational state apparatus. The Trump regime is not pursuing belligerent economic nationalism solely because it plays well domestically. “Weaponizing interdependence” is based upon the hedge that American owners of capital can more easily withstand losses and exploit new opportunities for extraction. During the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan was able to depreciate the dollar and pressure Germany and Japan into trade concessions.⁸³ Economic conflict and protectionist rhetoric do not necessarily impede heightened global integration. The Trans-Pacific Partnership, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and Belt Road Initiative prove that geopolitical rivalry and the intensification of transnational capitalism easily coexist.

One explanation for the rise of fascism is power transition theory. As the hegemonic power Britain declined in strength, a revisionist Germany reacted aggressively. Modern-day inter-imperialist rivalry is unique because America is not threatened with hegemonic decline. Even though some presume great power wars have gone extinct, no country or combination of countries could currently oppose aggressive American military expansion. The United States has waged a perpetual World War since the end of the last one. Previous U.S. Presidents have openly supported genocide and military expansion without being as effortlessly labeled fascist. There are diminishing checks on a unilateral

⁸⁰ Henry Ferrell and Abraham Newman. “Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion.” *International Security*. Vol. 44. No. 1. 2019.

⁸¹ Ronald Rogowski. *Commerce and Coalitions: How Trade Affects Domestic Political Alignments*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ. 1989.
 Michael J. Hiscox. “Class versus Industry Cleavages: Inter-Industry Factor Mobility and the Politics of Trade.” *International Organization*. Vol. 55. No. 1. 2001.

⁸² David M. Andrews. “Capital Mobility and State Autonomy: Toward a Structural Theory of International Monetary Relations.” *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 38. No. 2. 1994. Benjamin J. Cohen. “Phoenix Risen: The Resurrection of Global Finance.” *World Politics*. Vol. 48. No. 2. 1996.

⁸³ Benjamin J. Cohen. “The Triad and the Unholy Trinity: Lessons for the Pacific Region.” *Pacific Economic Relations in the 1990s: Cooperation or Conflict?* (eds. Richard Higgot, Richard Leaver, and John Ravenhill). 1993.

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executive determined to make “low-intensity conflicts” become “total war.”⁸⁴ Worth noting is that Trump has chosen, instead, economic conflict together with retrenchment.

Equally surprising as the election of Trump in 2016 was the primary challenge by Bernie Sanders, a self-avowed socialist and one of the leading contenders to challenge Trump in the 2020 election. Neither Sanders nor Trump identified with the political parties they sought the nomination of, both were dismissed by corporate media, and each sought to reverse the dominant consensus. The next section will focus more closely upon Sanders’ framing of economic nationalism through class conflict. However, it is important to recognize that Sanders, while defending the benefits of international cooperation, also relies upon the rhetoric of geopolitical rivalry, especially when it comes to China. On the issue of trade, Sanders has repeatedly supported revoking China’s most favored nation status. For those who assume that Trump’s trade war is merely symbolic, or that a new regime will reverse tariffs, it must be emphatically pointed out that a bipartisan consensus has formed in Washington D.C. on behalf of a hardline approach towards Beijing.⁸⁵ In an era of intractable gridlock, Congress has passed multiple bills targeting China. Once introduced, protectionist policies and nationalist rhetoric are not easily reversed. The struggle against fascism does not exclude a future of increased economic nationalism and cascading trade disputes.

Never-ending Crisis and the Messianism of Ideas

Ur-Fascism is still around us, sometimes in plainclothes.
 -Umberto Eco

The collapse of Lehman Brothers on September 15th, 2008 struck at the epicenter of the American financial system but did not upend American unipolar supremacy. Paradoxically, the origin of the crisis became the refuge during and after. The most inscrutable finding of Sean Starrs research is the continued global dominance of American economic power *after* the 2008 financial crisis. The typical response of American school IPE is that the system worked.⁸⁶ Most praise U.S. leadership during the crisis: by acting as a benevolent hegemon the system was stabilized. Far from triggering hegemonic decline, American empire was “too big to fail.”⁸⁷

Political scientists argue that crisis leads to change. Benjamin J. Cohen separates good crises from bad.⁸⁸ Good crises pose opportunities for broad reform through concerted collective action. Bad crises signify the plausible danger that there will be no meaningful reform of the status quo. After failing to predict the crash of the financial system, it was felt that the crisis would lead to a political realignment. Instead of the transformative changes many predicted, the aftermath of the financial crisis was remarkable in how little things changed. The crisis was characterized by the *endurance of the status quo*.⁸⁹ Prematurely, Andrew Gamble claimed that the lack of a populist resurgence is proof that the 2008 crisis did not produce a political realignment.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Andrew Rudalevige. *The New Imperial Presidency: Renewing Presidential Power after Watergate*. University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor. 2005.

⁸⁵ See (but note Susan Shirk’s dissent): *Chinese Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance*. Hoover Institution: Stanford, CA. 2018.

⁸⁶ Daniel W. Drezner. “The System Worked: Global Economic Governance during the Great Recession.” *World Politics*. Vol. 66. No. 1. 2014.

⁸⁷ Thomas Oatley et. al. “The Political Economy of Global Finance: A Network Model.” *Perspective on Politics*. Vol. 11. No. 1. 2013.

⁸⁸ Benjamin J. Cohen. “Crises, Good or Bad.” Keynote lecture at the Symposium on *Financial Crises as Global Challenges: Actors, Structures, and Logics of Global Finance*. Hannover, Germany. 2015.

⁸⁹ Eric Helleiner. *The Status Quo Crisis: Global Financial Governance after the 2008 Meltdown*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK. 2014.

⁹⁰ Andrew Gamble. *Crisis Without End? The Unraveling of Western Prosperity*. Macmillan: New York, NY. 2014.

The principal means of change are norms and ideas. Ideas are roadmaps for achieving objectives.⁹¹ Norms emerge, and upon reaching a tipping point, cascade, eventually becoming internalized.⁹² For Jeffrey Chwieroth, crises lead to change through experimentation with new ideas and eventual consolidation.⁹³ New ideas need entrepreneurial carriers, crossover appeal, and credibility. There is correlation between theories of power transition and political realignments.⁹⁴ Within both schools of thought, legitimation crises necessitate the emergence of new ideas and political principals. The great failing of the crisis-change model is its reliance upon historicism and the messianic power conferred upon ideas. *New ideas are expected, but never arrive.* Ideas are afforded a spiritual power without a material basis. Capital holds structural power over political elites, and political elites retain legal domination over social forces. Fascism is the intensification of capitalism without the impediment of having to win consent or manufacture legitimacy. Global power transitions and political realignments are never predestined. Despite the appearance of patterns or historical analogies, history unfolds stochastically not cyclically. While political change is a focal topic within international relations, also needed are theories that explain *endurance* and *systemic collapse*.

William Robinson argues that there are three types of crisis: cyclical, structural, and systematic. While conventional interpretations blame the 2008 financial crisis on financial complexity, lax regulations, or fiscal imbalances, Robinson emphasizes overaccumulation as the root cause. The accumulation of wealth in the hands of a small number of billionaires generates shortages in demand and an inability to offload surplus commodities. For Robinson, 2008 portended a structural, possibly systemic, crisis.⁹⁵ Neither transparency nor increased regulation, stimulus nor austerity, are suitable remedies. Without addressing the structural contradiction of economic inequality, systemic collapse becomes increasingly likely.

The collapse of the financial system revealed the magnitude of economic inequality and the acquiescence of political elites to capital interests, undermining the legitimacy of neoliberal ideology.⁹⁶ The common sense underwriting global capitalism is no longer believed, but still hegemony endures. The emergence of populist alternatives to neoliberal elites is taken as proof of an ongoing political realignment. Despite the prevalence of this thesis, the role of the 2008 financial crisis in the minds of voters during the 2016 election has not been tested with the same rigor as trade cleavages or racial resentment.⁹⁷

As was said of Benito Mussolini, Donald Trump has no ideology. While positioning himself in opposition to neoliberal ideas and elites, Trump's rhetoric aims to generate affective contagion and is uninterested in persuading audiences to coalesce around a new set of ideas.⁹⁸ Bernie Sanders, on the other hand, has been a prominent entrepreneur on behalf of a counter-hegemonic set of ideas. According to Senator Sanders, those hurt by international trade and the financial crisis have a common

⁹¹ Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (eds). *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Belief, Institutions, and Policy Change*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY. 1993.

⁹² Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." *International Organization*. Vol. 52. No. 4. 1998.

⁹³ Jeffrey M. Chwieroth. "How Do Crises Lead to Change? Liberalizing Capital Controls in the Early Years of New Order Indonesia." *World Politics*. Vol. 62. No. 3. 2010.

⁹⁴ On political realignment, see: Walter Dean Burnham. *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics*. W.W. Norton & Co.: New York, NY. 1970. Stephen Skowronek. *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA. 1993.

⁹⁵ William I. Robinson. "The Crisis of Global Capitalism: Cyclical, Structural, or Systemic?" *The Great Credit Crash* (ed. Martijn Konings). Verso: London, UK. 2010.

⁹⁶ David Singh Grewal. "Three Theses on the Current Crisis of International Liberalism." *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*. Vol. 25. No. 2. 2018.

⁹⁷ For an exception, see: Yotam Margalit "Political Responses to Economic Shocks." *Annual Review of Political Science*. Vol. 22. 2019.

⁹⁸ Trumpism is ideological, but subliminally so. Trump need not say out loud what he clearly implies. But others, Anders Breivik, Elliot Rodger, Brenton Tarrant, and Patrick Crusius, have done so on his behalf.

enemy: the billionaire class. Despite powerful institutional efforts at obstruction, Sanders has mobilized a multiracial, geographically diffuse base of support. By framing American hegemony, international trade, and economic growth as an existential class conflict, Sanders has given voice to a viable socialist alternative and remains the only indication of a political realignment. The neo-Gramscian strategy for attaining hegemony is through a democratic “war of position.”⁹⁹ The war of position is a long-term strategy aimed at capturing control of political institutions. Even if Sanders does not win the Presidency, he has successfully shifted the conversation to the left, causing centrist politicians to affirm his policies, and has distributed leadership opportunities to a new generation of socialists.

Robinson argues that fascist movements are triggered by capitalist crises. Economic conditions are variables of constant change and can never be the monocausal origins of political events. Structural explanations for the emergence of fascism are unable to incorporate historical anomalies that do fit their grand theories. For example, the original fascist movements in Italy predated Black Tuesday by nearly a decade. So too, proto-fascist movements and far-right parties have been a constant in the second half of the 20th century. While the 2008 bank bailout further redistributed capital into the hands of the already-wealthy, high-levels of inequality existed then as they do now. Notions such as crisis or change are nothing more than folkloric mythologies, a fetish beloved by historians and social scientists. Crisis theories, including Marxist crisis theories, rely upon historical assumptions of exceptional times distinct from the norm. Capitalism-in-perpetual-crisis has been the mainstay of the past five-hundred years. Crisis and fascism are always-already here, present even in their absence, a spiritual force deceptively making its own material reality. Historical materialism, power transition theory, and political realignment are predicated upon inferences, drawn from analogies and cyclical patterns, that, in the end, are based upon fallacious logics.

Comparative-historical theories draw lessons from the politics of 1968 and 1980, or the politics of 1929 and 1939, and apply them to contemporary politics. As Karl Marx observed in “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” this mode of generalization makes a caricature of historical repetition.¹⁰⁰ If history happens twice, should we be thankful that the tragedy of Hitler is revived through a farcical Trump? Marx criticized the Revolution of 1848 for parodying the Revolution of 1789. The past exists only as a dogma and the application of lessons from yesteryear is equivalent to a belief in miracles. Comparisons of Trump to Hitler or Mussolini are no less accurate than those comparing him to Napoleon III.¹⁰¹ Trump and Sanders are singular world historic figures and not crisis actors whose arrival were necessitated by structural conditions.

For Robinson, capitalist crises are synonymous with legitimation crises. The role of ideas and political institutions are worth analyzing independently. In the early 20th century, the Russian October Revolution spawned moral panics throughout Europe about the dangers of radical ideas and popular movements. In Germany, the exclusion of communist parties and the fragility of the Weimar Republic contributed to the rise of National Socialism. Colin Crouch argues that the “strange non-death of neoliberalism” after the 2008 financial crisis is due to the hollow nature of contemporary democratic institutions.¹⁰² The extravagance of elections, obsession with personalities, advertising, focus groups, opinion polls, and outsized influence of wealthy donors are evidence of democracy-without-ideas. There are parallels with the global capitalism school and theories of post-democracy. Robinson’s

⁹⁹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Verso: London, UK. 1985.

¹⁰⁰ Karl Marx. “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.” *The Marx-Engels Reader*. W.M. Norton & Company: New York, NY. 1978.

¹⁰¹ Dylan Riley. “American Brumaire.” *New Left Review*. No. 103. 2017. Dylan Riley. “What is Trump?” *New Left Review*. No. 114. 2018.

¹⁰² Colin Crouch. *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism*. Polity Press: Cambridge, UK. 2011.

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magnum opus *Promoting Polyarchy* argued that the promotion of democracy throughout the Global South was a subversive effort to pacify popular movements, create corruptible institutions, and promote the interests of American foreign policy and transnational capitalists.¹⁰³ The dictatorship of the transnational capitalist class has come at the expense of weak political elites and national political institutions. The development of a transnational state apparatus was designed to detach policy making from democratic accountability. The global rise of authoritarian populists is equally due to the failures of democratic institutions.

An unholy trinity pitting nation-states and transnational capitalists against civil-society has created a brave new world with “democracy at bay.” The result has been the total defeat of leftist alternatives.¹⁰⁴ Trump has not prohibited political opposition to the same degree as the Enabling Act. However, the failures of the Pink Tide and Syriza reveal the institutional obstacles to leftist popular movements. The neo-Gramscian “war of position” is a tacit acceptance of the futility in triumphing over totalizing global capitalism. Sanders and the socialist counterforce face insurmountable impediments, both in winning the upcoming election, building a socialist base, and advancing policies once in office. The structural power of capital and the frailty of contemporary political institutions make an insurgent socialist movement a Sisyphean task.

Between an unrealizable socialism and a present-day fascism there is an excluded middle. Liberals, too, have a theory of change: *muddling through*.¹⁰⁵ To muddle through is to solve crises and policy problems by means of incremental progress. Status quo crises are, here, valuable not deleterious, and ought to be countered with system-preserving behavior. Liberal theories of change conceal theories of endurance. Liberalism is untroubled by the need to offer new ideas or deliver transformative reforms. Muddling through promises that thing will stay the same by gradually getting worse. The allegation of post-democratic thinkers is that liberalism has assumed an authoritarian countenance. Political theorist Sheldon Wolin utilizes the label “inverted totalitarianism” to describe the façade of contemporary democracy: “Inverted totalitarianism perpetuates politics all the time... but a politics that is not political.”¹⁰⁶ Liberal politicians are architects of authoritarian governance. The reemergence of fascism has followed the establishment of neoliberal authoritarianism.¹⁰⁷ The specter of a revived fascism reveals the hypocrisy underpinning liberal politics.

As secular stagnation persists indefinitely, 21st century fascism becomes the new normal. Trumpism, the conservative political establishment, and far-right social forces will outlive the regime. If the election of Trump proves to be a lasting political realignment it mirrors the contentlessness of Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign of hope and change. William Robinson and Mario Barrera, years prior to Trump’s political ascent, provocatively caricatured the Obama regime “as a Weimar republic.”¹⁰⁸ The Obama administration is a case study in the politics of appeasement. However, it is

¹⁰³ William I. Robinson. *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK. 1996.

¹⁰⁴ Geoffrey Garrett and Peter Lange. “Political Responses to Interdependence: What’s “Left” for the Left?” *International Organization*. Vol. 45. No. 4. 1991. Dani Rodrik. *The Globalization Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy*. W.M. Norton & Company: New York, NY. 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Charles E. Lindblom. “The Science of Muddling Through.” *Public Administration Review*. Vol. 19. No. 2. 1959.

¹⁰⁶ Sheldon S. Wolin. *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ. 2008. pg. 68.

¹⁰⁷ Ian Bruff. “The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism.” *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society*. Vol. 26. No. 1. 2014. For a reasoned critique, see: Matthew DJ Ryan. “Interrogating ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’: The problem of periodization.” *Competition & Change*. Vol. 23. No. 2. 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Robinson and Barrera.

not enough to blame Obama for being an ineffective stop-gap, his policies, on deportation, family separation, extrajudicial execution, etc., are illustrative of fascism-with-a-friendly-face.¹⁰⁹

From Article 48 to Telegraph 71

Fascism became an all-purpose term because
 one can eliminate from a fascist regime one or more features,
 and it will still be recognizable as fascist.
 -Umberto Eco

Donald Trump’s campaign slogan “Make America Great Again” is an exemplar signifier of “palingenetic ultranationalism.” If nationalism is the ideological foundation of fascism, palingenesis is the performative dimension that exemplifies its aesthetic. The new consensus reprises the follies which have troubled the study of fascism. The early Italian fascist movements pre-dated the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and were not antisemitic. The “Manifesto of the Italian *Fasci*” was heavily influenced by the artistic movement futurism and not based upon appeals for reclaiming mythic history. Today, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is routinely marked a fascist demagogue, but is pursuing policies to further open the country to transnational business. Instead of a minimal essentialism, fascist movements are complex and heterogenous.¹¹⁰ There is an entire ecology of fascism. Common traits include, but are not limited to: propaganda and the telling of “big lies,” symbolic and rhetorical strategies aimed at inducing affective contagion amongst mass audiences, traditionalism and a rejection of the latest social norms, racial anxieties and the use of scapegoating, appeals to masculine, corporeal, and sexual fantasies, charismatic leaders, fetishization of violence, unquestioned deference to law-and-order, they identify as right-wing and anti-Marxist, and have transnational relationships.¹¹¹ Fascist movements replicate standard rituals, such as coded and private language, slogans, uniforms, symbols, hand-signals, and slurs. Fascism flourishes in masses and is characterized by rallies. Fascist extremists valorize violence as the solution to social problems. Where there is fascism there are street-battles, paramilitary organizations, lone-wolf terrorists, secret police, and concentration camps.

The ecosystem of fascist actors includes movements, institutions, and leaders. A symbiotic relationship exists between political leaders and followers. Wilhelm Reich blamed the rise of fascism on a generalizable suppression of sexual desire and rigid families. Theodor Adorno and his colleagues created an all-encompassing scale to measure adherence to hierarchy, aggressive tendencies, and superstitious beliefs.¹¹² Post-structuralists warn of an innate desire for power, what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call micro-fascism.¹¹³ The strong Führer-figure (super-ego) enchants obedient adherents (ego) by stimulating their unconscious desires (id). The confluence of class, racial, and sexual antagonism are social *and* psychological. For Reich, it is important to recognize that supporters are not deceived by propaganda. Grievances are channeled into certain types of prejudice. Economic position is supplanted by the social benefits of group belonging. Leaders induce followers through libidinal investments in status conferred on their positions in the social hierarchy. Racism and sexism,

¹⁰⁹ Bertram Gross. *Friendly Fascism: The New Face of Power in America*. South End Press: Boston, MA. 1980.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Homer-Dixon et. al. “A Complex Systems Approach to the Study of Ideology: Cognitive-Affective Structures and the Dynamics of Belief Systems.” *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*. Vol. 1. No. 1. 2013.

¹¹¹ Ernst Nolte. *The Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*. Henry Holt & Co.: New York, NY. 1966. Robert O. Paxton. *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Vintage: New York, NY. 2004.

¹¹² Theodor Adorno et. al. *The Authoritarian Personality: Studies in Prejudice*. W.W. Norton & Co.: New York, NY. 1950.

¹¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Tr. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen Lane. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN. 1977.

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therefore, are not particular attitudes but material interests.¹¹⁴ Fascism is less a matter of ideology than a politicization of social psychology.

The ecology of fascism is useful for understanding the 2016 election. For William Robinson, 21st century fascism was emergent prior to Trump, indicating the Tea Party and the Republican party establishment as propelling forces. However, Trump gave voice to rhetoric and policies that were not expressed by rival politicians. From the perspective of liberals, it seemed that a fascist movement materialized instantaneously, ready-made. The Republican party was initially hostile to Trump and some have sought to contain his administration. Trump has delivered tax cuts and filled the judiciary, objectives long sought by Republican elites. Trump primarily promotes himself and has not formed a network of ideational entrepreneurs. The dynamics constituting the current fascist ecosystem are not unified.¹¹⁵ The ready exposure of these contradictions disclose the weakness of the regime in power.

Fascism has no monocausal origin. Causes of fascism include global power transitions, capitalist crises, fragile democratic institutions, social disruption, and charismatic demagogues. Some have tried to affix a longer time horizon upon the 20th century fascist convergence. The economic historian Karl Polanyi once claimed: “In order to comprehend German fascism, we must revert to Ricardian England.”¹¹⁶ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* located the “triumphant calamity” of fascism within the enlightenment.¹¹⁷ The Caribbean poet Aimé Césaire proclaimed the shock of the Holocaust was that violence reserved for people of color was employed upon whites. “[They] applied Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa.”¹¹⁸ European colonialism produced a “boomerang effect” where the techniques of violence and domination mastered in the periphery were applied to the metropole. Fascism does not emerge *ex nihilo*. The events heralding the emergence of a fascist movement appeared suddenly but were the culmination of a long fetch of history. The long disaster of a slow-moving, imperceptible fascism reveals its dormant structure.

The American historian Robert Paxton described a life-cycle of fascism that consists of five stages: 1) creation of the movement, 2) rooting the movement in parties, 3) acquiring power, 4) exercising power, 5) further radicalization or entropy.¹¹⁹ The current ecology of fascism complicates the application of Paxton’s stages to present-day circumstances. Neither the Tea Party movement nor Trump are the primary driver of the fascist resurgence. Neither have successfully rooted themselves in the Republican party. Trump has acquired power but has been frustrated in exercising it.

One thing is certain: Trump has inherited a totalitarian global police state. For the past century, the U.S. has waged a perpetual World War. The War on Terror, launched by the last Republican President, was marked by the conferral of unchecked, exceptional powers to military and intelligence services. The September 11th terrorist attacks were the impetus for executive orders authorizing the

¹¹⁴ George Lipsitz. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA. 1998.

¹¹⁵ There are significant variations amongst those who study the social base of the far-right, see: J. Eric Oliver and Wendy M. Rahn. “Rise of the *Trumpenvolk*: Populism in the 2016 Election.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 667. No. 1. 2016. Jesse Daniels. “The Algorithmic Rise of the Alt-Right.” *Contexts*. Vol. 17. No. 1. 2018. Ian Scoones et. al. “Emancipatory Rural Politics: Confronting Authoritarian Populism.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*. Vol. 45. No. 1. 2018.

¹¹⁶ Karl Polanyi. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Beacon Press: Boston, MA. 1957. pg. 32.

¹¹⁷ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Tr. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA. 2002. pg. 1.

¹¹⁸ Aimé Césaire. *Discourse on Colonialism*. Tr. Joan Hinkman. Monthly Review: New York, NY. 1972. pg. 36.

¹¹⁹ Robert O. Paxton. “The Five Stages of Fascism.” *The Journal of Modern History*. Vol. 70. No. 1. 1998.

indefinite detention of enemy combatants. Protected neither by national nor international law, detainees remain imprisoned, never to stand trial. Simon Critchley characterized the logic of the Bush regime's global war as "crypto-Schmittian,"¹²⁰ Carl Schmitt being the Nazi legal scholar who justified the "state of exception."¹²¹ The state of exception was given legal form through Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, which was invoked by Adolf Hitler in the aftermath of the 1933 Reichstag fire. Article 48 symbolizes the transition from an emergent fascist movement to a fully-formed fascism.

The state of exception epitomizes the extralegal machinations necessary for organized mass death. Fascism is not threatening without a police apparatus and not extraordinarily horrific if dissimilar polities commit similar atrocities. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben argues that the state of exception is the very paradigm of government.¹²² Little Eichmanns, ordinary bureaucrats willing to kill and torture out of duty, are ubiquitous figures in fascist *and* liberal states.¹²³ The Nazi regime used the genocide of Native Americans and Jim Crow police laws as their model.¹²⁴ During World War II, the American government detained Japanese Americans in concentration camps without trial. In the past century, the U.S. has waged multiple wars, assassinated numerous foreign leaders, frequently initiated civil wars, and assisted in several genocides.¹²⁵ Deleuze and Guattari's fascination with fascism culminates in their comparison of American world order and the so-called democratic peace with fascism. "[I]t is peace that technologically frees the unlimited material process of total war... [T]here was no longer a need for fascism. The Fascists were only child precursors, and the absolute peace... succeeded where total war had failed. The Third World War was already upon us."¹²⁶ When there are people disappeared inside military prisons without due process, communities imprisoned by the tens of millions, thousands of unarmed civilians extrajudicially executed by police annually, asylum seekers refused, children separated from their parents, and tens of millions of foreign citizens mass murdered, there is no justice and there is no peace. If our labels and theories call this peace but dare not call it fascism, what good are these theories? The emergence of 21st century fascism in the United States has as its origins hundreds of years of settler-colonial, racial, and imperial violence.

The life-cycle of fascism by Deleuze and Guattari entails a cancerous body politic become suicidal.¹²⁷ Micro-fascism spreads throughout the whole social body and fascist movements capture the state apparatus from below. Instead of a state appropriating military and police institutions, a war/law-and-order mentality appropriates the state. The horrific characteristic of fascism is not its causes, or its internal distribution of power, but the processes of organized violence that ensue. For Deleuze and Guattari, fascism is ideological only insofar as it is based upon a cult of death. Its self-creation is subsumed by the necessity of its self-destruction. The Falangist slogan "Viva la muerte!" is realized in Telegram 71. Facing imminent defeat Hitler ordered the destruction of all public

¹²⁰ Simon Critchley. "Crypto-Schmittianism – The Logic of the Political in Bush's America." *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*. Verso: London, UK. 2007.

¹²¹ Carl Schmitt. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Tr. George Schwab. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL. 2005. Carl Schmitt. *Dictatorship: From the Beginning of the Modern Concept of Sovereignty to the Proletarian Class-Struggle*. Tr. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward. Polity: Cambridge, UK. 2014.

¹²² Giorgio Agamben. *State of Exception*. Tr. Kevin Attell. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL. 2005.

¹²³ Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Viking Press: New York, NY. 1963.

¹²⁴ James Q. Whitman. *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ. 2017.

¹²⁵ Some still have the audacity to declare the emergence of a "perpetual world peace," and journals with the temerity to publish such nonsense. Michael Mousseau. "The End of War: How a Robust Marketplace and Liberal Hegemony Are Leading to Perpetual World Peace." *International Security*. Vol. 44. No. 1. 2019.

¹²⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Tr. Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN. 1988. pg. 467.

¹²⁷ John Protevi. "'A Problem of Pure Matter': Deleuze and Guattari's Treatment of Fascist Nihilism in *A Thousand Plateaus*." *Nihilism Now!: 'Monsters of Energy'* (eds. Keith Ansell-Pearson and Diane Morgan). Macmillan: London, UK. 2000.

infrastructure and vital reserves: “If the war is lost, the nation will also perish. This fate is inevitable.” The state of exception where the law no longer applies is analogous to collective death where nobody is spared. The struggle against 21st century fascism, therefore, is also a struggle against the *realized nihilism* of a suicidal liberalism. Capitalist civilization has charted a one-way, irreversible course towards planetary destruction and the extinction of the species. Ecological and systemic collapse portend a fascism-to-come infinitely more terrifying than the Trump regime.¹²⁸

Two Anonymous Texts: “Thinking from the Wreckage”

But the fascist game can be played in many forms,
 and the name of the game does not change.
 -Umberto Eco

In finale, two anonymous texts, written immediately before and after the 2016 election, serve as a gigantomachy displaying the present-day struggle between fascist and anti-fascist forces.

Publius Decius Mus' essay “The Flight 93 Election” is one of the historic documents of the 2016 election. Published anonymously in the *Claremont Review of Books*, the essay was the climatic call-to-arms of a group of conservative political theorists who sought to defend a “coherent, sensible Trumpism.”¹²⁹ Throughout the primary, an online journal by the name of *The Journal of American Greatness* operated as a clearinghouse for those challenging the dogma and entrenched power of conservative elites. The “Mission Statement” of the journal attacks the World Economic Forum and Club for Growth, the *Wall Street Journal* and *National Interest*, Max Boot and Robert Kagan, as signs of a conservative ideology betrayed.¹³⁰ Exposing conformity, they envisioned the Donald Trump campaign as an anti-intellectual, anti-globalist, anti-idealist alternative. *The Journal of American Greatness* sought to make serious and credible Anders Breivik's manifesto for those most at home reading Leo Strauss.¹³¹ The character *Publius Decius Mus* plays the role of vanguard and the essay “The Flight 93 Election” serves as the new manifesto for 21st century fascism.

Published two months prior to the general election, “The Flight 93 Election” is predicated upon a simple premise: “charge the cockpit or you die.”¹³² The essay brandishes the terror of an aging generation, one aggrieved by unrealized expectations, invested in possessive inheritance, fearful of outside threats and hegemonic decline, and convinced of internal paralysis. However, the apocalyptic urgency is all for not. Neither natural disasters, economic shocks, international conflict, nor democratic backsliding are portended. The gravest threat iterated is multiculturalism. Repeated references to changing demographics demonstrates the author's self-identification with white culture and pronounced xenophobia. Loss of an imagined community is an *imagined catastrophe*. The logic of the piece is self-assurance in search of exigence. As the author ironically posits, wishing for a tautology to enact itself is not an argument. The *true (irrational) terror* of the Flight 93 election for dear *Publius* was “a million more Syrians,” which was not a policy of the Hillary Clinton campaign, a realistic scenario, nor would it threaten markets or lives.

¹²⁸ Andrew Johnson. “Twilight of the Humans: Nietzsche, Dismal Politics, and the Coming Planetary Apocalypse.” *The Agonist: A Nietzsche Circle Journal*. Vol. 7. No. 2. 2019.

¹²⁹ *Publius Decius Mus*. “Toward a Sensible, Coherent Trumpism.” *The Unz Review: An Alternative Media Selection*. March, 2016.

¹³⁰ “Our Mission Statement.” *The Journal of American Greatness*.

¹³¹ *Publius Decius Mus* is the pseudonym of Michael Anton, who served as Deputy Assistant for Strategic Communication on the United States National Security Council for most of Trump's first term.

¹³² *Publius Decius Mus*. “The Flight 93 Election.” *Claremont Review of Books*. September 2016.

There is a crisis identified though, a *crisis of conservatism*. The stylistic flair is a conjuring trick intended to hide the singular purpose of motivating voters and feigning seriousness. *Publius Decius Mus* acknowledges but is unbothered that Trump is a “loudmouth” and “worse than imperfect.” What is defended, fanatically, is Trumpism, defined by three central policy planks: secure borders, economic nationalism, and an America-first foreign policy. The author is a paleoconservative, antagonistic to neo-conservatism, harkening back to Pat Buchanan. Trumpism represents a mythic repetition of a weary Reaganism. There is an appeal for neoliberalism without globalization, conservatism without apology, unencumbered by checks and balances. Even the B-movie actor farcically reappears. The 2016 election is imagined as a crisis of conservative ideology. A defeat would be a repudiation of conservatism. *Publius* mistakes the value of a political philosophy for the results of an election. Understated is a deeper fear of declining conservative hegemony. Unrealized is that Trump threatens the survival of the Republican party far more than unfavorable results in a single election cycle. If there is something exceptional about Trump it is the intensification of crisis. The politics of Trump is that if he loses, may the nation also perish. *Publius Decius Mus* fastens conservatism to a realized nihilism, promising to destroy what it sought to safeguard.

What makes “The Flight 93 Election” a historic document is that a) Trump proved victorious and b) this is one of the few (certainly the chicest) intellectual attempts to advocate on behalf of this victory. What makes this document exceptional is the irrationality behind the terror it presupposes. Immigration and trade policies, ideologies and cultural identity, will remain contested issues within American politics. The invocation of existential stakes, “win this election or die,” transforms an election into a war. Mr. *Decius Mus* is aware of the fascism implicit within his argument. “The Left was calling us Nazis long before any pro-Trumpers tweeted Holocaust denial memes.” The hyperbolic propensity of the “fascism charge” excuses not just Holocaust denial, but white supremacist rallies, targeted terrorism, and family separation. In conjunction with the *crisis of conservatism* is an exaggerated danger of the radical left. For *Publius*, the left is an enemy and justifies militancy. Partisan politics becomes a contest for asserting victory and domination, fascist spiritedness, at any cost. The Flight 93 election, therefore, never ends, the crash perpetually delayed, reimagined every election campaign.

Liberals and the radical left shared an experience of 2016 as a Flight 93 election. The campaign of a fascist demagogue was widely portrayed by liberal elites as an existential threat to democratic institutions and America’s global standing. However, no one charged the cockpit. The Trump Presidency is the collective experience of the resulting crash.

One month after the President Trump’s inauguration, an essay appeared on a blog entitled *Research & Destroy*.¹³³ “The Landing: Fascists without Fascism” is haunted by “The Flight 93 Election.” The essay begins by asking the reader to imagine a plane crashing. “So the presidential election of 2016 seemed to those on the plane.”¹³⁴ Unlike “The Flight 93 Election,” “The Landing: Fascists without Fascism” did not receive much fanfare, but is equally deserving of appraisal as an (subterranean) historic document. “The Landing” has a double meaning. Written after the election, the anonymous author asks the reader to look-backwards at the crash-landing, to the experience of the crash, of seeing it coming, and what led to it. *Research & Destroy* depicts the catastrophe of Trump as an abrupt immediacy. Trump is described as an event, the crossing of a threshold, a break, a present without history. What appears fascist is the experience of an exceptional election that repudiates past

¹³³ Even if I knew the author behind *Research & Destroy*, I would not reveal that person’s name.

¹³⁴ “The Landing: Fascists without Fascism.” *Research & Destroy*. February 2017.

norms. However, this is precisely what that author aims to deconstruct. While the election of Trump arrives as a new history, it is a repetition of history and the culmination of a progressive disaster. The catastrophe is not Trump's sudden appearance, but the aftermath of a protracted, drawn-out failure. For *Research & Destroy*, this represents the historical contradiction of the 2016 election. The shock of Trump's victory as an immediate crisis, a crisis-in-itself, belies the complex conjunctural conditions that precipitated the long crisis of hegemony of which he is the consequence. What unites "The Landing: Fascists without Fascism" with William Robinson's theory of 21st century fascism is a staging of Trumpism as both wholly original and not-original.

The additional meaning of "The Landing" indicates that the catastrophe is on-going. The crash-landing denotes a beachhead from which fascism begins its incursion. For *Research & Destroy*, the Trump regime exhibits a *simulacrum of fascism*, colorfully termed "fascists without fascism." The rhetoric, the shock and awe, ape the appearance of power without the corresponding mastery of state institutions or the support of elites. Trump's neo-fascism has not overcome institutional obstructions, nor has it eliminated countervailing democratic forces. The counterpoised phrase "fascism without fascists" is an equally potent descriptor of American politics. The history of the United States consists of a legacy of superfluous settler-colonial, racial, and imperial violence, undeterred in its abuse of power. Ultrationalism and palingenesis has not been the lone prerequisite for exploitation, incarceration, or genocide. The opening of markets and spreading of democracy has justified mass death. If there was a dormant fascism awaiting a moment of crisis, there was likewise a friendly fascism that authorized mass death in idealistic terms and without rhetorical malice. The fascist landing is a continuation of the wreckage brought about by liberalism. Fascism-without-fascists is a theory of *structural fascism*. Structural fascism reveals that liberalism is coextensive with fascist politics. Dialectically, structural fascism functions as a mediation of historic fascism and Neo-Fascism, revising and extending the originary intention of Umberto Eco's "Ur-Fascism."

For the anonymous author of "The Landing: Fascists without Fascism," the spontaneous blockade of airports is the event which catalyzes the struggle against 21st century fascism. Airports are "already in fascism," the state of exception where police power is preestablished as unlimited. Airports acted as the boundary of what was contestable under liberal politics and are, thus, linked to a continual struggle marked by other sites, such as Zuccotti Park, Ferguson, and Standing Rock. As a postscript to the procession of horrors of the Trump Administration, the response by the Jewish resistance movement to the policy of family separation and concentration camps is that "Never Again is Now." As explained by the Jewish cartoonist Eli Valley: "The cautionary tale of European Jews deluded about their safety at the dawn of the 20th century has by now become cliché. But it is happening here—not systemically to Jews, not immediately, but it's already begun against other communities, and it's getting worse."¹³⁵ Under the shadow of a former fascism, the present metalepsis is abused by the far-right to denounce their adversaries and omit their transgressions. It is insignificant whether Trump and his supporters are "minimally fascist" but of great import is the maximum limit of crimes and atrocities they are permitted to



Figure 1: From "On Nazi Imagery Today" by Eli Valley, 2017

¹³⁵ Eli Valley. "A Springtime of Erasure." *Jewish Currents*. November 2019.

commit. *Research & Destroy* asks the reader to *think from the wreckage*. “[T]here is no way back... The plane has crash-landed in the shuddering present. It will not magically reassemble itself like film running backward.” The apocalypticism of the essay emits a warning of structural fascism become *eternal fascism*. Trump is a harbinger of a fascism-to-come. A dismal, melancholy future awaits, of an existential political conflict, portending ecological and systemic collapse, a fascism-without-end.

The formulaic conclusions of the neo-Gramscians are derived from Antonio Gramsci’s adage to adopt a “pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will.”¹³⁶ By admonish their readers that the future is unwritten and contingent, that everyday actors retain a high degree of agency, the Neo-Gramscian school clings to a forlorn belief in the triumphant structure of history. A pessimistic imagination of a hyperbolic fascism without scale, limit, or historical precedent, is contrasted with the optimistic belief in its eventual defeat. The strength of a pessimistic theory of history is its rejection of existing models of change. A dismal, melancholy science teaches that the history of civilization is a series of intensifying atrocities. Walter Benjamin, in Thesis VIII of “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” observes that the “tradition of the oppressed” teaches us that fascism is not a historical exception but the historic norm.¹³⁷ The current amazement that fascism is “still” possible in the 21st century stems from our historical myopia, the organized forgetting and ignoring of mass death. Attaining to a conception of history in keeping with this insight suggests that the fascist exception is a continuance of liberal norms. The revival of a fascist imaginary reminds that there are no limits to atrocity. The “real” state of emergency is here and now, it has always been here and now, and it is our lot to survive amidst the wreckage.

Acknowledgements

Early drafts of this article received hearings at the 2019 meeting of the International Studies Association and workshops organized at the University of California Santa Barbara. Many thanks to the constructive criticisms of the anonymous reviewer. *Special thanks* are deserved for Benjamin J. Cohen and William I. Robinson. Each, in different ways, has taught me invaluable lessons in the art of mentorship and scholarship. I appreciate the patience and hospitality they have exhibited as I have struggled with their ideas. This paper would not be what it is without the influence of early Sonic Youth, Xiu Xiu, and the Viking jazz musician Moondog. Any mistakes, misrepresentations, omissions, and offenses of impudence are mine and mine alone.

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¹³⁶ Antonio Gramsci. *Selections from Political Writings, 1910–1920*. Tr. John Mathews. Lawrence and Wishart: London, UK. 1977. pg. 188.

¹³⁷ Benjamin. 1968. pg. 257.

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