

Introduction, Living with Ghosts

Part of Living with Ghosts: Legacies of Colonialism and Fascism

Nick Aikens, Jyoti Mistry, Corina Oprea

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This constellation of essays, conversations and images point to the manner in which the legacies of colonialism and fascism reverberate in our present conjuncture. The impulse for producing this issue was a question of whether it may be possible to trace the connections between the violences of the colonial project through the horrors of fascism to current forms of racism, identitarianism and populism – what we initially called 'an arc' of colonialism-nationalism-fascism. As Albert Memmi outlines in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), the historico-political relationship between colonialism and nationalism is a fraught double bind with consequences for the current political climate of Europe.

'In the face of Nationalism an undeniable uneasiness exists in the European left. ... Being on the left means not only accepting and assisting the national liberation of the peoples, but also includes political democracy and freedom, economic democracy and justice, rejection of racist xenophobia and universality, material and spiritual progress. Because such aspirations mean all those things, every true leftist must support the national aspirations of people.'

What the contributions to this issue reveal is that these terms and their histories are in contradictory (at times collapsed) relations, which echo across different facets of contemporary culture and politics. Political history appears now less of an arc and more as a fold.

The fold is a metaphor which recognises no binaries or absolutes, and even though ideas are distinct, these distinctions are continuous and without discrete ruptures. It shows how the term nationalism can be appropriated by both the left and the right at different times. Folds are also flexible. They are seen in the pervasive nature of the twinned legacies of fascism and colonialism, and appear across the media, within the historical inclusions and exclusions of art and culture, and in a nation state's so-called traditions as well as its denial of basic human rights.

This issue outlines the contours of this reality, inviting consideration to the myriad ways in which the repercussions of colonialism and fascism face (and speak to) each other today. The contributions explore the unresolved issues of colonialism, highlighting the urgent need to position colonialism in relation to a spectrum of subjectivities, including those related to indigeneity and migration politics. It turns to art practices, its institutions and creative expressions more broadly to offer a

platform for articulating these connections from specific geo-political positions. What becomes clear from reading these texts is that the resurgence of (neo-)fascist sentiment is intrinsically connected to contemporary forms of racialised politics. The bedrock of the colonial project must be unsettled from its institutionalised forms of representation for these connections and entanglements to be made more visible.

As a European ideology, fascism cannot be detached from other ideological traditions, such as liberalism, which was important for the propagation of colonialism and imperialism. However, fascism is often solely associated with the 1930s and the crimes against humanity which followed; but even at this time fascism was identified as emerging out of a colonial understanding of the world. For example, fascism's appearance was deeply familiar in colonial Africa. In his essay "Discourse on Colonialism," written less than five years after the end of World War II, the poet and founder of the Negritude movement Aimé Césaire reflected on the response of the European bourgeoisie to fascism and Nazism:

'People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: "How strange! But never mind – it's Nazism, it will pass!" And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves, that it is barbarism, the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that it is Nazism, yes, but before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimised it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole edifice of Western, Christian civilisation in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack.'

In the *Road to Unfreedom*, published just last year, Timothy Snyder accounts for the historical political conditions in Europe and Russia which has created the current political climate in which fascism can augment – not just across Europe but in Europe's relation to America. Throughout his work he recognises the patterns which threaten and undermine the core values of democracy. Snyder acknowledges that undermining the sovereignty of the state produces fertile conditions for totalitarianism, he writes:

'The fascism of the 1920s and 1930s ... had three core features: it celebrated will and violence over reason and law; it proposed a leader with mystical connection to its people; and it characterized globalization as a conspiracy rather than as a set of problems. Revived today in conditions of inequality as a politics of eternity, fascism serves oligarchs as a catalyst for transitions away from public discussion and towards political fiction; away from meaningful voting and towards fake democracy; away from rule of law and towards personalist regimes.' These shifts are palpable in the contemporary political uncertainties expressed in this collection of texts. Each of the contributors reflect on the specificities of their environment through their lived experiences, through their artistic practices, or reflections on the curatorial climate. They seek to maintain a space for critical engagement and political criticism. Furthermore, this issue considers the layers of historical conditions that inform states of 'belonging' and 'sovereignty' (even 'citizenry' as a debatable proposition) in Europe. What becomes evident from these various contributions is that there is no sudden or surprising development towards the right – too often

expressed an 'inexplicable phenomena' of contemporary society. They instead address it as a slow and steady movement based on historical events and political terms of reference which have remain unresolved and have again returned, this time through the opportunism advanced and fuelled by the structures of capitalism that connect Europe to Russia and America. Each is a case study that recognises the patterns of violence and inequality evident in the political structures of colonialism and fascism.

The issue consists of two parts. The first introduces the theoretical framework and structural relationship between colonialism and fascism by exploring the continuities in the representations and narratives of colonialism linked to virulent authoritarian nationalism. The second part maps interpretations of fascism to show how re-examinations of history could offer new critical understandings of the colonial project and its implications. Such critical re-evaluations hint to the possibility of an anti-fascist international movement.

Gurminder K. Bhambra looks at the ideological line between the colonial project and its relation to contemporary migration politics in Europe, revealing their arbitrary and repressive functions.

In the conversation between Rex Edmunds and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, members of the Karrabing Film Collective, the Eurocentric definition of nationalism and what it means for the Emmiyengal people is confronted. Their discussion navigates the interstitial zones between nation states, ethno-religious divides, belonging and forceful isolation to pose a question on what fascism might mean to Indigenous peoples.

'White innocence,' the core concept outlined in the lecture by Gloria Wekker, exposes the cultural entanglements and semantic clashes between fascism and colonialism. It refers to the position of the innocent white subject in relation to the colonial project and touches on issues of identity politics and contemporary racism.

Quinsy Gario's visual essay presents a flow of images taken from the Netherlands to Saint Martin in the Caribbean to disrupt traditional readings of photographic documentation. It remixes stills, archive material, documentation of a protest and a painting from a national art museum to undermine aggressive racism as well as its everyday representations.

In her reflective project, curator Nkule Mabaso exposes the limits of the colonial taxonomy of painting traditions in Africa and proposes to reconsider how African women have worked with different constructs of 'the painterly'. As an example proposition, her text invites not only an opening up but a radical rethinking, reimagining and recategorising of painting outside the colonial timeline, and lays claim to the necessary political strategy of finding discourses for a historical position for black women artists.

In the conversation with Walter Famler, Jyoti Mistry discusses the history of former Yugoslavia, the unresolved Nazi sentiment as symptomatic of the move to the right in Europe, and nationalism as nurtured through a discourse of identity politics. Famler decries the absence of discussion on class solidarity and reconfigures the idea of the colonial project as not only taking place on another frontier (in a foreign

land) but which may be best described in a contemporary sense through religion, economic disenfranchisement and migration within Europe.

Curator and critic Jelena Vesić takes a look at the exhibition *Uncensored Lies* staged in Serbia in 2016, organised by the then prime ministerial press service of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). The exhibition, which she describes as an 'alt-facts-post-truth reaction of the right wing', included thousands of newspaper cuttings confirming Prime Minister Vučić's dismissal of claims of censorship. Deploying the aesthetics of the research exhibition, *Uncensored Lies* is a potent example of how the right positions itself contra 'fake news' and it is a worrying reminder of how exhibitions have historically served to forward fascist agendas.

Anthropologist and activist Kuba Szreder opens his essay by warning against the temptation to conflate contemporary forms of the far right with historic fascism, as well as outlines the many contradictions and complexities when looking at the connections between colonialism and fascism. In line with Hannah Arendt, he argues that to understand the far right today means being prepared to face up to it. Here, Szreder looks to current intellectual and cultural initiatives which are facing contemporary fascism and how they can offer a progressive internationalist alternative to both right-wing identitarianism and its counterpart, the neoliberal regime.

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