

Spectres of Fascism

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Historical, Theoretical and
International Perspectives

Edited by
Samir Gandesha

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1

Introduction¹

Samir Gandesha

The electoral successes and growing public profile of a number of authoritarian political parties and movements throughout Europe, particularly in Italy, Poland and Hungary, the success of the Leave side in the Brexit referendum of 23 June 2016, and the election of Donald J. Trump as the 45th President of the United States of America on 8 November 2016, have contributed to a renewed interest in the concept of fascism.² Parties such as, for example, the National Rally Party in France led by Marine Le Pen have been understood to represent a form of “post-fascism,” which is to say a form of far-right politics inspired by twentieth-century fascism that, nevertheless, has largely come to accept the rules of liberal democracy, although the threat remains that they could turn back into neofascist parties and therefore someday seek to mobilize violently against liberal democracy.³ Critics have suggested that what we confront today is a form of “late fascism” based on the displacement of the utopian elements of what Ernst Bloch called non-synchronous temporalities, organized by twentieth-century fascisms, by the fantasy of complete synchronicity in an eternalized neo-liberal present.⁴ Commentators have also charted the logic of “fascist creep” which is to say the convergence of left- and right-wing ideas in notions of National Bolshevism, National Anarchism, the French Nouvelle Droite as well as Aleksandr Dugin’s “fourth political theory” beyond liberalism, fascism and socialism.⁵ Critics have also sought to understand Islamism as a form of fascism that, in turn, has influenced the contemporary far-right.⁶

Rather than witnessing the return of fascism, then, as many others have suggested,⁷ what we see is the spectre or, rather, “*spectres* of fascism” in the plural today. The word “spectre”⁸ suggests the figure of the phantom, both as *Geist* (spirit) and *Gespens*t (ghost) that, in turn, suggests the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) or the unhomely which, as Freud reminds us, is itself in part signified by the word homely or familiar (*das Heimliche*).⁹ In his

recently published lecture to the Austrian Socialist Students' Union at the University of Vienna on 6 April 1967, Theodor W. Adorno speaks of the fascism's "own ghostly shape" (*eigenegespenstische Gestalt*).¹⁰ The ghost of fascism, we might say, is quickly becoming the spirit of our times. We speak of *spectres* because it is not simply in the original domicile of fascism, which is to say Europe, that we see the return of fascism to public life but rather it has become a truly global phenomenon. In India, Turkey, Brazil, Egypt and the Philippines, we see the return of elements of fascist politics, though not the fully fledged counter-revolutionary fascist mass movement as had emerged in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s.

Twenty-first-century fascism is also uncanny precisely because, as already suggested, it transcends the seemingly original birthplace of fascism; its *real* point of origin was, as Aimé Césaire had pointed out already in 1950, Europe's colonies. These were the original laboratories for Italian and German forms of fascism.¹¹ The uncanny is strangely familiar because, for Freud, it suggests that which, having undergone repression, returns later as something discordantly strange, barely recognizable; the barbaric side of civilization. Fascism is uncanny insofar as it is a phenomenon that seems to belong to a distant age in a previous century yet has been all too close at hand in the first two decades of the present one. It entails, then, a socioeconomic, social-psychological and political condition in which previous historical traumas were not worked through or, if they were, then only in a partial and one-sided way. "I consider the survival of National Socialism *within* democracy to be potentially more menacing," as Adorno put it in a key lecture in the post-war Bundesrepublik, "than the survival of fascist tendencies *against* democracy."¹²

Fascism haunts us still because liberal democracy was and remains constitutionally unable to address the fundamental contradiction bequeathed to it by the bourgeois revolution in which it was born. This is the basic contradiction between a democratic polity and a liberal economy, constituting the subject as inherently divided between universal *citoyen* and particularistic *homo economicus*.¹³ Fascism would always continue to figure as a ghostly presence within this order, occasionally taking material form. As Slavoj Žižek extrapolates from Walter Benjamin's "Theories of German Fascism," and his "On the Concept of History," "every rise of fascism bears witness to a failed revolution."¹⁴ Benjamin was thinking of the German Revolution about a decade earlier.

We might, however, suggest that the roots of fascism lie in the serial failure to bring to completion the bourgeois revolution, the most

important episode of which – after the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) led by Toussaint L’Ouverture¹⁵ – was the debacle of 1848. “The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living,”¹⁶ as Marx wrote, commenting on this event. Other failures, no doubt brought about by capital’s not inconsiderable political and military efforts, were the dissolution of the Paris Commune in 1871, the ossification of the Russian Revolution after the death of Lenin, if not earlier with the crushing of Kronstadt, and the destruction of the Bavarian Council Republic in 1918.

Finally, one could add to this list the revolutionary moment of 1968, the main battles of which were fought out by national-liberation and revolutionary movements in the Global South – and this, in part, would help explain the global dimensions of the authoritarian resurgence there today. The failed Revolution of 1848 was an especially consequential event for Europe, particularly the German principalities, as this was the precise moment at which nationalism veered from a republican to an increasingly authoritarian direction, as personified in the particular trajectories of erstwhile proverbial veterans of the barricades in the so-called Vormärz period: Richard Wagner and Bruno Bauer.¹⁷ The end of this cycle of revolutionary activity in France at this time produced the Bonapartism that would in many ways anticipate twentieth-century fascism. It would be seen as a transitional way-station between parliamentarism and fascism.¹⁸

HISTORY OF THE PRESENT

Today, the uncanny return of fascism can be situated between two key events: the Al-Qaeda attacks of 11 September 2001, and the financial crisis of 2007–8.¹⁹ The first event, tragic though it was, became the justification for a full-blown neoconservative foreign policy of aggressive and direct (as opposed to by proxy) regime change. This had already been envisaged by the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) think tank that had been co-founded by William Kristol and Robert Kagan in 1997 and remained active until 2006. Including such neoconservative luminaries as Elliott Abrams, William J. Bennett, Jeb Bush, Dick Cheney, Francis Fukuyama, Norman Podhoretz, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz, the PNAC sought to identify “challenges and opportunities” for the United States in the twenty-first century. It sought increases in military spending, the strengthening of ties with “democratic allies” in confronting its

enemies, the promotion of political and economic “freedom” abroad and the assertion of the “unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity and our principles.”²⁰

In the attacks of 11 September 2001, it found *both* such challenges and opportunities, as the then National Security Advisor to the Bush Administration, Condoleezza Rice, put it in a much publicized speech at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University:

... If the collapse of the Soviet Union and 9/11 bookend a major shift in international politics, then this is a period not just of grave danger, but of enormous opportunity. Before the clay is dry again, America and our friends and our allies must move decisively to take advantage of these new opportunities. This is, then, a period akin to 1945 to 1947, when American leadership expanded the number of free and democratic states – Japan and Germany among the great powers – to create a new balance of power that favored freedom.²¹

Rice and the Bush administration, having hardly waited for the clay to dry, took cunning advantage of such an “opportunity.” By the time of Rice’s speech, the United States had already toppled the Taliban in Afghanistan, weakened Al-Qaeda, and was training its sights on the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq under the false claim that it possessed Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) – and would commence the invasion of that country less than a year after Rice’s Johns Hopkins speech. The policy of regime change tacitly articulated by Rice contributed massively not only to the rise of terrorist organizations such as ISIS in Iraq but also, consequently, a crisis of displaced persons not seen since World War II, if ever. According to the UNHCR, there are some 70 million displaced persons globally.²² The stateless produced by these policies constituted, according to Hannah Arendt, “a new type of human being, the kind that are put in concentration camps by their foes and in internment camps by their friends.”²³ This in turn authorized, as Agamben has shown, the exercise of sovereignty in a new form of biopower via the reduction of the human being as “bare life” to the status of *homo sacer*, the subject that legitimately could be put to death.²⁴

If neoconservatism produced a crisis of displaced persons of unimaginable proportions, then 40 years of neoliberal policies of deregulation and privatization, accelerated in crucial ways by the “extreme centre”

(Bill Clinton and Tony Blair), created a social order in which crisis was no longer managed (as had been the case 1945–75) but had simply become normalized. This ranged from Black Monday, 19 October 1987, through the so-called Asian Flu of 1998 sparked by untrammelled currency speculation in south-east Asian economies, to a near meltdown of the global financial order provoked by the proliferation of subprime mortgages and collateralized debt obligations, by virtue of which high-risk investments were camouflaged amidst apparently low-risk vehicles in 2007–8.²⁵ The extreme centre, according to Tariq Ali, “is the political system that has grown up under neoliberalism. It has existed in the States for at least a century and a half, where you have two political parties with different clientele but funded by the same source, and basically carrying out the same policies.”²⁶ The paradoxical neoconservative tactic of “humanitarian intervention” in the interest of regime change was coupled with the neoliberal remaking of the state via accumulation by dispossession, privatization, deregulation and upward (and *outward*) redistribution of wealth in Iraq.²⁷ If the collapse of the Soviet Union and 9/11 form one set of bookends, then 9/11 and the financial meltdown of 2007–8 form another set establishing the unique conjuncture within which the spectre of fascism haunts the present.

But what precisely do we mean when we speak of “fascism,” and does the term properly apply to the contemporary period? Distant historical antecedents can be found at the origins of the Western tradition of political thought, notably Plato’s *Republic* which, intimating his own aristocratic bias, depicts the degeneration of democracy into tyranny by way of the emergence of the demagogue capable of manipulating and harnessing the disaffections of those citizens constitutionally unable to control their baser impulses.²⁸ Antecedents can also be located in the rise of the era of the Caesars in Rome, who wielded near-dictatorial power in part by buying off the masses with elaborate spectacles in the Coliseum: Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero with Julius Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon on 10 January 49 BCE and the subsequent establishment of himself as Emperor. From this is derived the concept of Caesarism.²⁹ Yet too much focus on these antecedents would be misleading insofar as fascism is a distinctively modern phenomenon. The bourgeois “freedom movements,” as Max Horkheimer has shown, from the sixteenth century themselves contained elements that would later form part and parcel of the fascist ideology of social psychology of the twentieth century.³⁰ But perhaps the nearest anticipation of

twentieth-century fascism was the phenomenon of Bonapartism. In the aftermath of the revolutions that swept through Europe, and on the backdrop of particularly militant workers' uprisings during the June days of 1848, Louis Bonaparte with the support of the *Lumpenproletariat* and the peasantry and appealing in turn to the examples of the Roman Republic and Empire, managed to seize power under the aegis of the "Party of Order" (see Chapter 11). In the eyes of Marx, in a very literal way this constituted a counter-revolution.³¹

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FASCISM: BRINGING COLONIALISM BACK HOME

Historically, the emergence of fascism seemed to contradict Marx and Engels' historical prognosis. In *The Communist Manifesto*, published on the eve of the revolutions of 1848, the authors argue that the contradiction between the forces of production, that is, the development of the industrial form of capitalism, and the communications and transportation infrastructure that it necessitated, would hasten the conflict between an ever-shrinking bourgeoisie and a growing, unified and politically conscious proletariat, which, like Dr. Frankenstein's creation, was to be the bourgeoisie's "grave-digger." Later, in the 1859 "Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," Marx elaborates on this "fundamental contradiction" of capitalist society:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.³²

Yet, in the early twentieth century this contradiction between the productive forces and relations of production, far from leading to "social revolution," led to the opposite: *counter-revolution*. Perhaps one could say that while Marx and Engels were good at forecasting revolution they were not as good at understanding the potentials for political counter-revolution, which is, of course, paradoxical inasmuch as they were driven into exile

by it themselves. The material productive forces of society, technology in particular, were incorporated into a radically masculinist, anti-modern and militaristic vision of society emphasizing hierarchy and a social Darwinist understanding of the struggle amongst races for survival and domination. As Walter Benjamin put it in “Theories of German Fascism,” “Deeply imbued with its own depravity, technology gave shape to the apocalyptic face of nature and reduced nature to silence – even though this technology had the power to give nature its voice.”³³ The roots of this “reactionary modernism”³⁴ can be found in the account of the crisis of the inter-war German capitalism, and its role in creating the conditions for the rise of Nazism can be found in *Economy and Class Structure of German Fascism* by Alfred Sohn-Rethel. In this text, Sohn-Rethel shows the way in which the contradiction between the forces and relations of production were in a sense “solved” through imperialist policies forwarded towards central Europe by German industrial capital.³⁵ Of course, such a solution was to be rather short-lived.

An influential account of fascism is that it constitutes an ultra-nationalist, revolutionary response to the existential crisis of meaning that emerges within a social and historical crisis of modern, secular societies. Such a crisis is perceived as a crisis of the health of the race or nation.³⁶ While this account does well to highlight the existential nature of the crisis, it fails to understand it properly within a class analysis situated within a larger understanding of the socioeconomic crisis of capitalism.³⁷ In contrast, the classical Marxian account of fascism, as alluded to above, is that fascism represents the bourgeoisie’s response to a militant working class and its institutions that threaten to bring about a fundamental social transformation of property relations (revolution) against the backdrop of a socioeconomic and political crisis of capitalism within an international order characterized by mounting and intensifying inter-imperialist rivalries. The classical Marxian approach, for the most part, is, however, unable to properly come to terms with the existential and psychological dimensions of the crisis, namely the problem of insecurity, although it is implicit in its understanding of the social base of fascism as the petite bourgeoisie or the middle class.

This is the contribution made by Western Marxism, in particular Georg Lukács and the Frankfurt School, to understanding the subjective dimensions of the crisis that made the working class susceptible to the siren song of fascism. A key mediator, it must be emphasized, was imperialism which was motivated by the dynamics of capital accumulation

but was justified by way of a form of ultra-nationalism and the positing of Europe's "civilizing mission." By displacing class via national identities, the bourgeoisie is able to gain the support of the lower petite bourgeoisie and the *Lumpenproletariat*, or those classes whose social precarity renders them particularly insecure and susceptible to xenophobia and extreme forms of nationalism within the context of an imperialist project. As Sohn-Rethel had shown, and as was confirmed by a number of Marxist theorists in the first decades of the twentieth century, capitalism seeks to address its fundamental crises of overaccumulation as well as the tensions between the accelerating technological development (forces of production) and the relations of production by seeking out non-capitalist or undercapitalized societies as the basis of renewed profit or surplus value extraction.³⁸

The colonial aspects of fascism become clear in Mussolini's assertion of Italian power over Abyssinia under the aegis of building a new Rome, and in Hitler's project for a thousand-year Reich constructed in the east and the expulsion and liquidation of the Jews and the enslavement of the Slavic peoples living there. In particular, the experience of African colonization and the colonial imaginary of the westward expansion of the US republic in the nineteenth century played a key role as models for the Nazi project to secure *Lebensraum* for the German *Volk*.³⁹ The colonial imaginary was also central to Mussolini's vision of fascism, itself nurtured on the militaristic fantasies of the Futurists (see Chapter 3 for a more nuanced view in this volume). The Italian bombing of Abyssinia was central to the aesthetics of fascism – understood as an exemplary case of the "the aestheticizing of politics"⁴⁰ – the spectacle of war, violence and domination. Moreover, Hitler's ignominious vision was fuelled by both the genocides of the Herero and Nama peoples in addition to the aforementioned stories of conquest of the Western US frontier. At the same time, modernism was also able to throw critical light on the growing authoritarianism in inter-war Europe and imperialism as in, *inter alia*, Franz Kafka's short story "In the Penal Colony."

Building on Arendt's Luxemburgian analysis of the connection between imperialism and Nazism and Foucault's understanding of biopower, Enzo Traverso has argued that fascism represented the application of colonial techniques of violence that had hitherto been applied with little comment to European colonies now to Europe itself. As suggested above, in this sense fascism is uncanny or unhomey. In fascism, Europe (and North America) confronts its own strangely familiar colonial image.

This deep connection between imperialism and fascism was already recognized, however, in 1950 by Aimé Césaire in his *Discourse on Colonialism*, in which he condemns the hypocrisy of certain self-righteous forms of European anti-fascism:

... 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, legitimized it, because, until then, it has been applied only to non-European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole edifice of Western, Christian civilization in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps and trickles from every crack.⁴¹

FOSSIL COUNTER-REVOLUTION

“The incessant excavation of the earth in peacetime was already a type of trench war.”⁴²

Max Horkheimer

It is against this understanding of fascism that we must pose the question of whether we are truly witnessing fascism’s return. In a recent editorial of the *New Left Review* after the US mid-term elections, sociologist Dylan Riley notes the surfeit of invocations of fascism across the political spectrum. Yet, on the basis of four axes – geopolitical dynamics, economic crisis, the relation between class and nation, and the character of political parties and civil societies – he carefully and quite persuasively lays out the case *against* considering a figure like Donald J. Trump to be a fascist.⁴³ While compelling, Riley’s brief is, ultimately, unconvincing because he fails to take seriously the undermining of the institutions of liberal democracy, against a backdrop of the chronic (rather than acute) socio-economic crisis, in the name of collective identities which one witnesses not simply in the United States with the advent of the Trump presidency but globally. And, as we shall suggest, herein lies the core of *contemporary* fascism.

Focusing on the US case, Holocaust historian Christopher R. Browning argues that there are several *continuities* and one significant *discontinuity* with the Weimar period. Then, as with the present, the United States was becoming increasingly isolationist. Then, as with the present, we saw an undermining of the institutions of liberal democracy; the part of President

Paul von Hindenburg, who momentously agreed to appoint Hitler as Chancellor in 1933, today is played by Mitch McConnell. “Like Hitler’s conservative allies,” Browning argues, “McConnell and the Republicans have prided themselves on the early returns in their investment in Trump.”⁴⁴ A key *discontinuity*, according to Browning, between Weimar and the current period involves the unlikelihood of witnessing the rise of an organized, disciplined mass-based fascist movement today. He foresees, rather, an incremental and subtler “suffocation of democracy,” that is, the rise of what he calls “illiberal democracy” insofar as authoritarian leaders and movements typically make exclusionary-populist appeals to the “demos” or the “people” on the basis of which they seek to subvert the rule of law and constitutionality.

In the main, Browning’s analysis is cogent, particularly the argument that fascism today poses the threat of “illiberal democracy.”⁴⁵ And if we look at the rise of other authoritarian regimes across the globe (from the United States and Canada to Poland and Hungary) we see the undermining of checks and balances on the executive branch of the state – the locus of sovereignty (Schmitt) – in particular by the judiciary and the press, as well as political dissent *per se*. This is precisely the manner in which democracy is threatened according to Adorno: not from without but from *within*.

What remains absent, perhaps unsurprisingly, from Browning’s liberal account, is an explanation of the social conditions that led to the rise of fascism in the 1930s and how those conditions might be paralleled by those we are witnessing today. Any convincing account of the spectre of the 1930s must link it not only to a determinate *political crisis* of democratic institutions such as in Germany the mendacity and duplicity of the political elites and their betrayal, but also the distinctive *socioeconomic crisis* not just of the 1930s but also the earlier period of the infamous German inflation of 1924–5. “If you don’t want to talk about capitalism,” as Max Horkheimer famously put it, “then you’d better keep quiet about fascism.”⁴⁶

In this respect, Samir Amin’s recent discussion of fascism is more helpful (although Schmidt contests it in Chapter 2 of this volume). Amin contends that “Fascism is a particular political response to the challenges with which the management of capitalist society may be confronted in specific circumstances.” He goes on to suggest that it is comprised of two features. The first is that, underlying its diatribes against “capitalism” or “plutocracies,” fascism represents a distinctive response to

capitalist crises. Amin argues that the second feature of fascism is that this particular response is a “*categorical* rejection of ‘democracy’” (emphasis added). Amin argues:

Fascism always replaces the general principles on which the theories and practices of modern democracies are based – recognition of a diversity of opinions, recourse to electoral procedures to determine a majority, guarantee of the rights of the minority, etc. – with the opposed values of submission to the requirements of collective discipline and the authority of the supreme leader and his main agents.⁴⁷

Yet, perhaps, with Browning, Amin’s otherwise apposite formulation should be modified to read that fascism embodies an attack not on democracy – a rather more protean concept – but instead on *liberal democracy*. Because it understands fascism as a response to socio-economic crises, it is a much stronger formulation than Browning’s. Amin’s definition of fascism constitutes the crucial framework within which to situate the truly *global* re-emergence of fascism today.

If in the 1930s, the specific contradictions resulting from the accelerated development of the productive forces under the aegis of industrial capital constituted a colonizing logic, today such a logic is impelled by the ever-more abstract *irrational rationality* of finance. The use of finance, as Vijay Prashad has shown, was key to neocolonialism in the post-independence period within the developing world.⁴⁸ The IMF’s strategy of structural adjustment in the 1980s and 1990s played a key part in forcibly liberalizing societies in which the state played an important role in the provision of services and a modicum of wealth redistribution, etc. But financialization also contributes to ontological insecurity and anxiety.

Today, finance has displaced industrial capital and exercises its power not just directly, that is, by military means, but increasingly by means of the politics of debt.⁴⁹ As Césaire remarks in noting the transition from colonialism to neocolonialism in the immediate post-war period: “‘*Aid to the disinherited countries*,’ says Truman. ‘The time of the old colonialism has passed.’ That’s also Truman. Which means that American high finance considers that the time has come to raid every colony in the world. So, dear friends, here you have to be careful!”⁵⁰ The key point here is that, like twentieth-century fascism, contemporary authoritarianism also entails the self-colonization of Europe itself, as we see in the

case of post-referendum Greece. The “violence of financial capital”⁵¹ in Europe is also evident in Emmanuel Macron’s use of brutally heavy-handed policing tactics against the *gilets jaunes*, who have protested against austerity, among other things, in the Place de la République. Here we might point to the role of security services as harbingers of fascism insofar as they are often complicit with the far-right and directly target the left.⁵²

Financial capital, though indirectly in the form of investments in futures markets, is closely tied to extractivism (see Chapter 14).⁵³ If we look specifically at oil, we can discern how it led the development of the global economy, as the post-war “relationship between the American state and US oil companies ... already epitomized ‘globalization.’”⁵⁴ The unity of the global market with the circulation of fossil fuels was further cemented by the linking of oil to the US dollar, and the US dollar to the global financial system.⁵⁵

Such an intertwined system is not without its weaknesses and dangers, and the current “carbon bubble” is “the result of an over-valuation of oil, coal and gas reserves held by fossil fuel companies ... At least two-thirds of these reserves will have to remain underground if the world is to meet existing internationally agreed targets to avoid the threshold for ‘dangerous’ climate change. If the agreements hold, these reserves will be in effect unburnable and so worthless – leading to massive market losses.”⁵⁶ The new far-right could be said to represent a new fossil counter-revolution underwritten by the Koch Brothers.⁵⁷ Thus the financial mechanisms of the global market are so tied to resource extraction that failure in one sector will inevitably lead to failure in the other. This is sometimes described as “locked-in” climate change, and highlights the way in which the current struggle for alternatives is as much a struggle over spaces as it is a struggle over times; that is, the contradiction between the market’s inherent “short-termism” and the “long-termism” of the environmental and climate consequences of market-driven fossil fuel production.

This brings us back to Césaire’s reflection on the deep connection between colonialism and fascism. Just as surplus labour time is extracted by capital from an increasingly internationalized, racialized and precarious workforce, so too are resources forcibly extracted from the earth via renewed forms of primitive accumulation. These disproportionately affect societies located in the Global South and Indigenous communities across the globe.⁵⁸ The accelerated development of capitalism in the twenty-first century – especially in the area of fossil fuels and resource

extraction – has taken this fractured metabolic process to and beyond its sustainable limit, depleting non-renewable resources at an alarming rate, damaging the environmental and social fabrics of communities, contributing greatly to anthropogenic climate change, and reducing biodiversity to the point at which scientists are speaking of an unfolding planetary mass extinction.⁵⁹

Extractive states place unbearable pressure on the extant fault lines of formal democratic institutions and processes. As the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, has suggested, “... democracy and the rule of law, as well as a wide range of civil and political rights are every bit at risk.”⁶⁰ As Timothy Mitchell notes, “countries that depend upon petroleum resources for a large part of their earnings from exports tend to be less democratic”; indeed, “existing forms of democratic government appear incapable of taking the precautions needed to protect the long-term future of the planet” because “economic calculation” occupies “the space of democratic debate.”⁶¹ Such developments point to the very real possibility of the constitution of what has been called a “climate leviathan” or a form of authoritarian planetary sovereignty.

While Amin draws attention to the explicitly anti-liberal-democratic “values of the submission to the requirements of collective discipline and the authority of the supreme leader and his main agents,” he fails to provide an adequate account of how this is possible. “The masses have a right to changed property relations; fascism seeks to give them *expression* in keeping these relations unchanged,”⁶² as Walter Benjamin argued. As his Frankfurt colleagues would show, this expression also had a profoundly social-psychological component: the insecurity generated by fear, anxiety and frustration of the masses in a period of economic turbulence and insecurity was actively and consciously desublimated by fascist movements and turned against *civilization* itself. Franz L. Neumann argues that authoritarian politics entails the transformation of *real* into *neurotic* anxiety.⁶³

The spectre of fascism is due not simply to economic insecurity nor to cultural anxieties or the loss of privilege. It is actively produced by the authoritarian populist translation of economic insecurities into cultural anxieties against the backdrop of the prospect of ecological collapse. As Neumann states, “The intensification of anxiety into persecutory anxiety is successful when a group (class, religion, race) is threatened by loss of status, without understanding the process which leads to its degradation.”