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Fascism

Mutations of Fascism: an interview with Enzo Traverso

- Debate - Fascism -

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In [Les Nouveaux Visages du fascisme](#), Enzo Traverso and Régis Meyran discuss the continuities and discontinuities between the fascist movements of the twentieth century and the "post-fascist" far right of today. Olivier Doubre spoke with Traverso for the 16-22 February 2017 edition of [Politis](#). Translated by David Broder.

You use the term "post-fascism" to characterise today's far Right movements. What does this term mean?

Enzo Traverso: The idea of post-fascism firstly serves to characterise a political movement that is shot through with contradictions, and which has an evident fascist matrix for that is its history, where it comes from and in the Front National's case a dynastic line of descent. There is an undeniable fascist hard core in the FN apparatus, its activist base, composed of neo-fascist militants of all generations. They are very active in the FN and hold onto a good part of the organisation. So there is a rift between the organisational reality of this party or even its anthropological fabric and Marine Le Pen's discourse in the media or the public sphere, which is of a xenophobic, nationalist, anti-neoliberal tenor but also comes out of a social Right. Yet if the FN were a neofascist sect, or even a neofascist party, I do not think that it would be considered likely to appear in the second round of the presidential election, or even capable of being France's biggest party. This party is thus clearly transforming, and it is trying to operate a process by which it dialectically transcends its fascist character but without entirely rejecting it. So in order to fight this party, we have to understand what it has become.

But you also talk as the title of your book indicates of the "new faces of fascism" of the

Post-fascism is a transitory phenomenon still in mutation, and this term clearly indicates what its matrix is. There is a big debate on "Trump and fascism" in the United States. But we cannot say that fascism is really the main force driving Trump. For her part, Marine Le Pen knows that that is where her party comes from! And that is why she is trying to adapt her nationalist and xenophobic discourse to the present context, including that of the European Union. Today, post-fascist movements advance a nationalism whose targets are no longer as in the 1930s other nations, and in particular European ones, but postcolonial immigration and Islam. This change of targets has a lot of implications because it allows the FN to present itself with a democratic and republican rhetoric. Taking Islam as its target, it characterises itself as the defender of Western values.

Indeed, you explain that while the FN tries to present itself as "just as republican as the others," this is not the case, including in the eyes of the traditional right!

There is a difference of nature, on account of the simple fact that the traditional Right has far more organic links with the ruling élites than the FN has. Today, this party is not the choice of the globalised ruling classes. Yet it today presents itself as the defender of democracies against the threats supposedly bearing down on it, particularly Islam, fundamentalism and Islamic terrorism. And even as the defender of equality between men and women, or of homosexuals! In my view, the fact that it can appropriate republican rhetoric can only stir up questions on the notions of republic and republicanism. There are a certain number of elements in the republican tradition that allowed for this transplant operation. We cannot defend the Republic as if it were a sacred, immaculate entity; for its history is contradictory and includes nationalism, colonialism, xenophobia and what may be a rather questionable conception of secularism [laïcité]. This should push us to cast a critical look at the history of the Republic, rather than adopt this history wholesale, in an uncritical fashion.

You speak of a "constellation" of post-fascist movements or formations. What holds it together, and what characterises its component parts?

I speak of a constellation because all these movements present a series of common characteristics, beyond the sometimes considerable differences between them. These characteristics first of all include xenophobia and Islamophobia, and then a rejection of globalisation in favour of a socially regressive and nationalist protectionism. But I speak of a post-fascist constellation also in the sense that these movements have sometimes very different ideological matrices and origins. Certain formations have an explicitly neo-fascist profile, such as Greece's Golden Dawn, or the movements appearing in Eastern Europe these last two decades who seek to revive the nationalist tradition of the 1930s. Some movements in Western Europe like the FN have neo-fascist origins but are trying to evolve by changing their discourse; others have different roots but are converging with this same orientation. Such is the case of the Lega Nord in Italy, UKIP in Britain and Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). While Trump is also a comparable case, unlike the FN, Lega Nord or AfD he has links with part of the world of finance.

However, you say that if this "post-fascism" in mutation were to take power, it would certainly result in power being practiced in an authoritarian way?

Let's hypothesise that Marine Le Pen does win the presidential election. It is rather unlikely, but given the state of the Right with the Fillon affair we cannot rule it out a priori. The first consequence would be that the European Union would explode. We would doubtless witness a continental political but also economic crisis, with the Euro unable to resist and the EU's social models splintering. But with this disintegration, everything becomes possible! The FN's goal is to take power, and not to try to conquer an institutional legitimacy like that of the classical Right. That is where the danger lies. But the notion of post-fascism implies a mutation that has not yet been complete: it makes it possible that things will evolve in different directions. However, there is no doubt that the FN's project is an authoritarian one: the Republic for which it stands is not the one we have today, for it questions *jus soli* and a whole series of civil liberties, and it would transform the institutional system into an authoritarian presidentialism, certainly meaning a limitation of counter-powers. Even if all that is still something different from the fascism of the 1930s.

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