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European integration and the emergence of new racism

Introduction

The idea of creating a federal European superpower was initially expressed by the Italian politician Giuseppe Mazzini during the 19th century, proposing the establishment of the so called United States of Europe as an extension of the unification of Italy (Recchia & Urbinati 2009, pp.1-30). Victor Hugo in a speech delivered at the International Peace Congress in Paris in 1849, backed the creation of a European super-power, which would be for Europe what was the Parliament for England (Verhofstadt 2006, p.5; p.11). A plethora of intellectuals and politicians, from Wilhelm II of Prussia to Leon Trotsky, expressed their desire for the unification of Europe, as the only practical solution to end continental cleavages (Reed 1919; Petropoulos 2006, p.170). “The Second World War was a catalyst for a renewed interest in European unity” in the words of Urwin (2013, p.12); it was “among the Resistance movements of occupied Europe that the voice of unity was most strongly heard” (Urwin 1992, p.7). Through these movements the European Union of Federalists emerged (December 1946) (Bache, Bulmer, George & Parke 2015, p.8). Finally, Winston Churchill in a speech at the University of Zurich in 1946 expressed his vision to build the United States of Europe so that the hundreds would “be able to regain the simple joys and hopes which make life worth living” (quoted by Greenwood 1996, p.26).

The unification of Europe began in the early 50s with the signing of the Treaty of Paris by the Benelux states (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg), together with France, Germany and Italy, signifying the beginning of the process of European integration (Bache, Bulmer, George & Parke 2015, p.5). This paper will explain that the greatest challenges we are currently facing, the rise of racism antisemitism and Islamophobia, are, in fact, direct consequences of the so called European integration, denoting that this process was nothing but an *impossibility* built upon false ideas and promises. Further, instead of discussing the present refugee crisis, which undeniably fueled the emergence of reactionary movements across the continent (movements that, nonetheless, begun to emerge long before the first mass waves of Syrian refugees arrived in Europe) I will exclusively focus on the impacts of European homogenization. My aim is to criticize both the standpoint of the European left, according to which the answer to racism lies in the rediscovery of the founding values of the EU (Tsipras 2014) and the right-wing isolationist perspective, suggesting alternatives to the present political impasses.

European integration and the making of European identity

Among the most determining stages of European integration was the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which officially established the so called European Citizenship (Cini & Pérez-Solórzano Borrágán 2013, p.7). This was a crucial step for the European vision, since it brought into being a new collective identity, that of the 'European citizen' as against that of the national citizenship. This particular identity (mainly from the late 90s onwards) came to de-prioritize the traditional values of civic nationalism which is based on the liberal spirit of the Enlightenment, depriving the civic roots of national institutions, promoting simultaneously the homogeneity of all 28 national communities, as identical members of a larger community. In addition, every invocation to culture and traditions became a subject of intense controversy, received as an inimical expression of backwardness that supposedly awakens the national cleavages of the past. However, this deconstruction process of civic nationalism, instead of strengthening the passion for solidarity and cooperation, led to further intensification of divisions, whilst the outbreak of the financial crisis and the inability of the highly centralized European institutions to tackle the catastrophic hyperinflation of debt and prevent the expected onslaught of poverty, came to give the final blow. Below I will explain the deepest reasons that led to this dystopia, using psychoanalysis and political theory as methodological tools for this analysis.

As we know from psychoanalytic theory, especially that of Sigmund Freud and John Bowlby (1969), *attachment* (or identification) makes an essential part of human living. The primary identification is usually expressed by the attachment of the young person to the mother. But when attachments break, distress, anxiety and emptiness emerge, which in turn lead to distress and a *collapsing personality*. “The trauma of separation begins at birth and recurs every time the child is left alone by its mother or feels the pangs of hunger, terrifying because they are experienced as a threat to its very existence” says Christopher Lasch (1984, p.166). “The child idealizes the mother (and later his father as well) as a source of unending, unambiguous gratification” (Lasch 1984, p.168). “Even the temporary absence of the mother gives rise to frustration and to feelings of rage” (Lasch 1984, p.169). According to Freud, “anxiety due to separation from the protecting mother” is the original source of mental conflict” (Lasch 1984, p.171). The role of the wider environment (together with the values it stands for) plays also a crucial role in the shaping of the individual's personality. “The precise forms of the systems take in a particular individual are, as always, a product of gene action and environment;

and, dependent on species and system, the forms they take are more or less stable environmentally” says Bowlby (1969, p.85) examining the behavior of different species. Thus, a special identification between the *subject* with the *environment* is created. The *environment*, or else, the common social world is what determines human personality, as also Castoriadis argued (Dosse 2015).

The national community, a large group of people sharing common characteristics attributed to them (including language, traditions, ethics and habits), is precisely one of the most significant *objects of attachment*. It is an institution that overwhelmingly determines the *mode of thinking, being and acting* of all individuals included in this community. But as Lasch (1984, p.193) explains, “the fading of a durable, common, public world, we may conjecture, intensifies the fear of separation at the same time that it weakens the psychological resources that make it possible to confront this fear realistically”. Thus, the death of the national identity (obviously, I am referring to civic nationalism) as it occurs under the process of European integration, globalization and the post-modern idea of social and cultural homogenization, is also one of the most important forms of broken *attachment*, especially once this identity is replaced by the *empty and indeterminable signifier* of the European citizenship. We can call this identity *indeterminable* since the idea of European identity cannot easily obtain a precise meaningful content, since it relies on the sum of the 27 nations, with different customs, history, languages (and internal subdivisions which further amplify variations). The European identity, as Bauman (2004, p.36) put it “was a utopia at all moments in its history”. In fact, the diversity of European populations makes the task of what European culture is (and thereby European identity) a very difficult one, as opposed to the less complex imaginary meanings of single nation-states. As a former SYRIZA eurosceptic MP, Costas Lapavistas (2015), rightly put it, “I don’t believe in a single European people, there is no European demos, and there shouldn’t be. Europe is about plurality, many different languages, cultures.”

Thus, the decline of civic nationalism under the process of European integration signifies the weakening of the *attachment* between ‘the people’ and their civic institutions. As the dissolution of each *attachment* leads to confusion and devastation of the psychic world, so the dissolution of nation states reinforces this sense of loss, essentially when the *common world* in which individuals of a society could find answers on their own *practise* no more exists. In addition, the annihilation of nation states in the name of a ‘united Europe’ was, for the most part, the consequence of a series of aggressive and un-democratic policies. As also Lasch explained, the more humble members of society in Europe fear that “the European Economic Community will be dominated by bureaucrats and technicians

devoid of any feelings of national identity or allegiance. A Europe governed from Brussels, in their view, will be less and less amenable to popular control. The international language of money will speak more loudly than local dialects. Such fears underlie the reassertion of ethnic particularism in Europe, while the decline of the nation-state weakens the only authority capable of holding ethnic rivalries in check” (Lasch 1995, p.46)

Thereby, along with emptiness and social distress caused by the disappearance of the collective identity of the nation, disapproval of such an authoritarian social transformation fosters either the pursuit of a more introvert, reactionary – and often violent – substitute identify *object*, (such as tribal nationalism, which is projected by the atomized masses as an alternative to social fragmentation) or the need for a redefinition of civic nationalism. Such a redefinition, however, many times incorporates implicitly elements of the blood-tie racist philosophy – to use the words of Bookchin (1995, p.40) – as the example of PEGIDA and other similar right-wing movements have shown. Such movements, despite they present their demands as 'moderate', the real ideological and social conditions allow extremists to infiltrate, as the BBC (2015) has reported regarding the case of PEGIDA. To understand this reasoning further I will have to resort to *discourse theory*, and more precisely, on the concept of discursive *articulation*: as Oscar Reyes. (2005, p.111) explained, *articulation* is a process determined by the relation between *signifier* and *signified*. Reyes uses as a case-study William Hague's 'foreign land' speech, which “warned a Labour-run country rife with crime, soaring petrol prices and the euro” (Reyes 2005, p.111). The *signifier* 'foreign land', nonetheless, carries a two-fold meaning; on one hand it may refer to loss of national sovereignty at the expense of European integration, but, on the other, it can be interpreted as a xenophobic and anti-refugee rant (Reyes 2005, p.111). In fact, the same term 'foreign' can *signify* the refugee population that is allowed to settle in the country at the expense of the majority of British population, thanks to regulations of the European Union. Similarly, any attempt to redetermine and rediscover the national identity might ostensibly rely on a civic nationalist discourse, but at the same time it could be a Trojan horse for the emergence of tribal or aggressive ethnic nationalist movements.

The impasses of civic nationalism

At this stage, in order to triangulate the above assumptions, it would be important to examine some real-life events. As we have seen, the dissolution of the community of nation as a form of *attachment* establishes the spread of the so called blood-tie nationalism, with emphasis on racial theories,

surrendered to the fury and the distress of the uprooted masses, where individuality itself is destroyed and inmates are “reduced to ‘ghastly marionettes with human faces’” (Canovan 1995, p.24). Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* - essentially in the chapter *The decline of Nation-States and the end of Rights of Man* – elucidates on the events after the First World War, explicating how the collapse of liberal nation-states as a result to the arrival of hundreds of thousands of stateless people, led to the increase of tribal aggression, as a substitute *attachment*. More precisely, the disappearance of civic institutions during the inter-war period, the only legal guarantors of human-rights, resulted for the European Jewry to found itself exposed to the vulgarity of the rapidly growing hostility of tribalism upon which totalitarian movements relied (Arendt 1976). As the collapse of civic state-nationalism during the First World War became the spark for the growth of tribal mass totalitarian pan-movements in Europe (Arendt 1976), similarly, modern Europe experiences the gradual reappearance of tribalism (either being expressed as Islamophobia and antisemitism, or xenophobia) as a substitute attachment.

This, however, does not imply that a return to civic (or liberal) nationalism is necessary, in order to combat the rise of racism. Liberalism and capitalism - to whom the nation state is the most organic product (Hobsbawm 1992) - can create a reality that negates a social paradigm (that of the nation-state) which had earlier established. To clarify this point: as Cornelius Castoriadis (2007, p.47-70) and Jean-Claude Michea (1999) explained, capitalism is founded upon the imaginary of perpetual *progress* that forces all economic institutions to constantly expand and grow without recognizing any limit, trespassing, thus, borders. Unlimited progress signifies also unlimited expansion of capital through rational means (Castoriadis 2007, p.47-70). When, however, capital reaches a stage that cannot any-more expand itself within the institutions of production of a given territory (the nation-state), seeks additional resources beyond its certain geographical region. Imperialism, as Arendt (1976, p.126) stressed, was born when the economic demands of bourgeoisie in capitalist production came up against certain geographical limitations, whilst the “export of power followed meekly in the train of exported money” (Arendt 1976, p.135). Transnational alliances between nation-states, such as the European Union is a similar case, where the capital itself in order to continue expanding and progressing, seeks to escape from the “cage” of the nation-state. Consequently, national parliaments become deprioritized, whilst civic institutions and identities gradually disappear in favour of globalization and internationalization of all economic activities, weakening further the role of the nation-state.

Municipalism and democratic confederalism

The above assumption gives us to understand that the nation state cannot be considered as a viable counter-proposal to the barbarism of racial fanaticism, once self-negation constitutes part of its broad ideological framework (of *progress*) that liberalism seeks to institute. Further, the forces of the so called radical left, since they have entirely embraced the liberal paradigm and the ideology of Europeanism, striving to expand European integration, must be approached with cautionary criticism (if not rejection), essentially if we take into account the recent waterloo of SYRIZA, in its attempt to push forward the narrative of “changing the EU super-state from within”. Although withdrawal from the EU seems the only realistic solution, at the same time it would be of utmost significance to work towards the decentralization of politics, focusing on the role of communal identity and municipality, and above all on the project of de-growth, as Latouche (2009) understood it, aiming to overcome the impasses of liberalism, civic nationalism and, moreover, the negative impacts of the ideology of *perpetual progress*.

Civic republicanism, a localized democratic con-federalism (or else municipalism), implies the existence of a real, physical, participatory, interactive, self-reflective and clearly observable entity (Bookchin 1995). Municipalism, or else direct democracy, relies on commonality and friendship (the highest form of social solidarity) and constant self-reflection (that fosters growth of a highly ethical intellectual insight, through constant involvement in the 'public affairs'). It is what we need aiming to restore the organic sense of the *common world*, to achieve political, economic and social equality, distinguishing at the same time, virtue from vice and to, finally, combat the reverting of the tribal nationalism, which is projected by the atomized masses as an alternative to social fragmentation and loss of identity.

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