EASA Network “Anthropology of Fascisms”

CALL FOR PAPERS – ONLINE WORKSHOP FALL 2021

Fascism – What’s in a Name?
Coming to Terms with Fascism as a Concept
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The first workshop of the newly established EASA Network "Anthropology of Fascisms" intends to serve as a forum for a general debate on the meaning of the notion "fascism" and its analytical purchase from an anthropological perspective.

Fascism challenges conventional anthropological wisdom in a number of ways, as summarized in Douglas Holmes’s quote, “When we, anthropologists, confront contemporary fascism, we discover that it is our concepts, our disciplinary conceits, and even our methods, that are repurposed in its vertiginous operation” (2016, p. 3). Such challenges become apparent in the very term fascism – the use of which is not uncontested in anthropology. The fact that the term is seldomly used as an emic description by the groups ethnographers study makes things no easier. Thus, even more importance is attached to the question of what analytical terms should be used. In this workshop we intend to discuss whether fascism is a fruitful angle to grasp the diversity of a contemporary political phenomenon. In how far does it differ from other conceptual angles that are often used to describe the same phenomenon, such as far right, extreme right, authoritarian populism, etc.?

The workshop takes as its point of departure the idea that there are good reasons for choosing the unifying term fascism despite the heterogeneity of the subject. First, the term emphasizes the continuity between “historic fascism” the origins of which date back to the late 19th century and its present-day manifestations in terms of a set of ideological key features. In his famous 1995 essay, Umberto Eco described this as “Ur-fascism” – a notion that has long been debated amongst historians. A focus on fascism shifts the gaze to the longue durée of authoritarian movements and explicitly refutes the simplistic (and often politically motivated)
notion that it was a historical phenomenon that somehow disappeared after 1945. The workshop aims to discuss the idea that fascism has continued to exist throughout the 20th century, albeit in a dispersed, marginal form, and that what we are witnessing today is an increase in its political relevance in response to 21st century global political economy rather than a sudden “re-emergence”. Having said this, we still consider 21st-century fascism to differ in form and style from earlier appearances. It has adapted to contemporary political-economic and cultural parameters in ways that have spawned notions of a neoliberal (Giroux) or postmodern (Negri) fascism.

Especially Marxist scholars have linked fascism’s demand to specific political-economic conditions, calling it a particular response to capitalist crisis (Robinson). Like in post-WWI Europe, in the contemporary post-financial crash world capitalism is facing a serious crisis of accumulation, just as the hegemonic neoliberal consensus is starting to wither away. The ensuing current “interregnum” (Gramsci) is shaped by a rising disaffection with the political order and the rampant fear of economic decline and downward mobility, especially among the upper working and lower middle classes. At this historical conjuncture, fascism represents one aspect of an authoritarian shift toward what William I. Robinson (2020) has called “the global police state” characterized by mass social control and “accumulation by suppression” on a global scale.

Finally, fascism is used as a strategic term that evokes an intentional partiality in favor of a critical political stance – something that tends to be glossed over by more balanced phrases like “far right”. It signals the inseparability of scholarly engagement with fascism from a political commitment to the struggle against it. As Adrienne Pine puts it, “At this moment in history, we don’t have the luxury of pretending that we can disentangle our anthropology from our outrage, or our scholarship from our humanity” (2019:37).

Based on this understanding of fascism as a kind of political subjectivity and political praxis at a specific historical conjuncture, we invite papers that explore the analytical value of the concept of fascism in terms of its political, social, cultural, and historical dimensions. They may build on ethnographic research as well as theoretical or comparative perspectives.
Questions to be addressed may include the following:

- What is the specific merit of the term fascism – as compared to other terms – as a guiding concept for studying the range of political subjectivities and practices mentioned above? What is included and what excluded by the use of the term?
- What role does the legacy of historical fascism play today vis-à-vis its adaptation to the present-day postmodern, neoliberal style of making politics?
- Has neoliberal “post-politics” (Swyngedouw) paved the way for the current growth of fascism? How is fascism linked to the contemporary authoritarian assemblage of racism, colonialism, the global police state etc.?
- Can the rise of fascism be analyzed in terms of a class project?
- What might a specific anthropological perspective on fascism look like?

Organizational issues:
The workshop will be held online. While some presenters have been invited by the organizing committee, we warmly encourage submissions for the remaining slots. Researchers at all stages of their careers are welcome to submit. We envisage a workshop format with short papers circulated in advance and ample time for discussion. Plans for a publication based on a selection of the contributions are underway.

Please submit an abstract of 300 words maximum by the 31st of May 2021 to the email addresses below. We will inform you about your participation by mid-June.

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