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The neo-nationalist ascendency: further thoughts on class, value and the return of the repressed

March 2020. On the borders of EU Europe, with the Covid pandemic threatening human lives, sociality and welfare everywhere, Syrian refugees on the 'Balkan Route', bombed out of Idlib, are being beaten in the forests with wooden clubs by Romanian border guards before they are thrown back onto Serbian territory for further humiliations.[1] Romanian return migrants, fleeing the Italian and Spanish Corona lockdowns *en masse*, are being told over the social networks that they should never have come back, contagious as they are imagined to be and a danger for a woefully underfunded public health system for which they have not paid taxes. Further South, the Mediterranean is once again a heavily policed cemetery for migrants and refugees from the civil wars in the Middle East and North Africa – collateral damage of Western imperial delirium and hubris – as Greece is being hailed by the European President for being the 'shield' behind which Europe can feel safe from the supposedly associated criminality. Viktor Orbàn, meanwhile, has secured his corrupt autocracy in Hungary for another indefinite stretch of years after the parliament gave him powers to single-handedly fight the Covid pandemic and its long-run economic after-effects in the name of the Magyars and in the face of never subsiding threats from the outside to the nation. Orbàn will also continue, even more powerfully so now, to fight immigrants, gypsies, gays, feminists, cultural Marxists, NGOs, George Soros, population decline, the EU, and everyone else who might be in his way. Critique from the EU is in Budapest rejected as being 'motivated by politics'. Vladimir Putin, too, has just been asked by the Russian parliament to stay on indefinitely in his regal position, so as to safeguard Russia's uncertain national future. Erdogan of Turkey is sure to be inspired and will not renege from his ongoing and unprecedentedly brutal crackdown on domestic dissent and 'traitors to the nation' while his armies are in Syria and Libya. Turkish prisons will continue to overflow.

All these, and manifold other events not mentioned here, are part of processes in the European East that have been continuous (as in 'continuous history versus discontinuous history') for at least a decade, all with a surprisingly steadfast direction. They appear to be diverse, occasioned by ethnographically deeply variegated and therefore

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[1] This episode and the other ones related in the next three paragraphs are a selection from reports in the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian* and *NRC Handelsblad* (the Netherlands) in the last week of March and the first days of April 2020. Thanks to Oana Mateescu for pointing out discussions on Romanian social networks.

apparently contingent events. Anthropologists, professionally spellbound by local fieldwork, are easily swayed to describe them in their singularities. But that singular appearance is misleading. These and similar events are systemically rooted, interlinked, produced by an uneven bundle of global, scaled, social and historical forces (as in 'field of forces') that cascade into and become incorporated within a variegated and therefore differentiating terrain of national political theatres and human relationships that produce the paradox of singularly surprising outcomes with uncanny family resemblances. These forces can be summarily described as the gradual unfolding of the collapse of a global regime of embedded and multi-scalar solidarity arrangements anchored in national Fordism, developmentalism and the Cold War, into an uncertain interregnum of neoliberalised Darwinian competition and rivalry on all scales, with a powerfully rising China lurking in the background. Neo-nationalism appears from within this unfolding field of forces as a contradictory bind that seeks to enact and/or re-enact, domestically and abroad, hierarchy and deservingness, including its necessary flip side, humiliation. That is one aspect of the argument I have been trying to make since the end of the nineties (for example Kalb 2000, 2002, 2004), when such forces began to stir in the sites that I was working on and living in: The Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Hungary and Poland.

That universalising argument is easily corroborated by events in the west of the continent, which paint a similarly cohesive though phenomenologically variegated picture.[2] Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini are still credibly threatening to democratically overthrow liberal globalist governments in France and Italy on behalf of the 'people' and 'the nation', and against the elites, the EU, immigrants, the left and finance capital. Dutch politicians, in the face of the global coronavirus calamity, still believe one cannot send money to Italy and the European South lest it will be spent on 'alcohol and women'. Anonymous comments in the Dutch press on less brutal newspaper articles often echo the tone of the one that claimed that Southern countries were mere 'dilapidated sheds … and even with our money they will never do the necessary repair work' (NRC 30 March 2020, comments on 'Europese solidariteit is juist ook in het

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[2] This paper was written just before the Covid pandemic and the worldwide lockdowns, and before a major shift in EU politics towards collective EU debts and the distribution of grants and cheap loans in particular to the financially most stretched nations and the periphery. This strategic (temporary?) shift in EU architecture is already generating important changes in the national political landscapes (without undoing the forces described in this paper). In the wake of the assumption of the Italian premiership by Mario Draghi, the former President of the European Central Bank, the Salvini neo-nationalist right in Italy has abandoned its anti-EU stance and is fragmenting. It also silenced Le Pen's critique on the EU, and seems to disadvantage Hungary/Poland in their intricate nationalist bargaining for 'domestic authoritarianism' with Brussels and Western Europe. This sudden shift within EU governance was conditioned of course by the need for a collective EU response to the ongoing Covid crisis. But its condition of possibility was also based in Brexit (the UK would have vetoed it) and by the Trump attack on EU/NATO speeding up the fracturing of 'the Western alliance'. Together with the Covid experience, it also prefigured a shift towards a more leftist and Green politics in most other EU countries, including in the key EU-naysayer, the Netherlands, often implemented by the right though. With Black Lives Matter keeping pressure on Western social imaginations (often in highly culturalist ways though), the narrow loss of Trump in the US elections, and the unprecedented Biden stimulus coming in, the latter overwhelmingly supported among 'broadly working-class populations' in the USA, the right-wing ascendency seems to have been given at least a temporary blow. What can be concluded above all is that Western capitalist governance has learnt from its failures in dealing with the financial crisis; just have a look at ongoing IMF and OECD recommendations.

Nederlandse belang'). Until its impressive policy turn-around in April/May 2020 in the face of the Covid pandemic and the fast-escalating EU fragmentation amid a world of hostile and nationalist great powers, the German government did not disagree. It was Angela Merkel herself who set up the Dutch as the leaders of a newly conceived right-wing 'frugal' flank in the EU under the historical banner of the Hanseatic League to face down the federalist and redistributionist South. That Hanseatic banner suggested that penny-counting, competitive mercantilism and austerity, and its practical corollary, an imposed hierarchy of 'merit' and 'successfulness', must hang eternally over Europe. Britain, meanwhile, has valiantly elected to leave the EU in order to 'take back control' on behalf of what Boris Johnson imagines as the 'brilliant British nation' (*The Economist* 30 January 2020). It would like to refuse any further labour migrants from the mainland, and seek a future in the global Anglosphere, beefed up by a revitalised British Commonwealth where hopefully, when it comes to ceremony, not juridical equality but imperial nostalgia and deference will rule (see Campanella and Dassu 2019).

Anthropologists working on the European continent have in retrospect done profoundly anticipatory, indeed uncommonly predictive, work on the rise of neo-nationalism long before it broke the global liberal hold (Holmes 2000, 2019; Gingrich and Banks 2005; Gingrich 2006; Kalb 2009; Kalb and Halmai 2011), and a younger generation continues to build on that.[3] I single out neo-nationalism over and above currently competing terms such as authoritarian populism or illiberalism because it produces less confusion and covers more cases.[4] Neo-nationalism, it is essential to emphasise, is not seen here primarily as the sum of mere individual opinions. That is the baked in misconception of much political science and sociology research anchored in the methodological individualism of survey methodologies and poll outcomes.[5] We should see it the other way around: neo-nationalism is a public social and cultural context, a conjuncture if you like, generated within a structured and knowable field of social forces that undergirds it. While Holmes, Gingrich, Banks, myself and others may have evinced an appropriate theoretical instinct 20 years ago, this is not because we were struck by clairvoyance. Anthropologists working in the centre of the continent were exposed early and in profound ways to these processes (also true for those working on India; see Blom Hansen 1999). The Italian Veneto, Austria, the

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[3] For example (without a claim to completeness, excuses to those left out): Buzalka (2008, 2018, 2020); Cammeli (2017); Keskula (2015); Koch (2016, 2017); Makovicky (2013); Pasieka (2016, 2017); Scheiring (2020); Stacul (2014, 2018); Shoshan (2016); Szombati (2018); Teitelbaum (2017); Thorleifsson (2017, 2019). See also: Bangstad et al. (2019). As in all similar work in other disciplines, there is an alternating and overlapping use of terms and focus from 'far right' to 'populism' to 'illiberalism' to 'neo-nationalism'.

[4] Stuart Hall's notion of 'authoritarian populism' has become very popular in particular in the English-speaking world. However, the present context is decidedly different from the early 1980s when that notion was coined. Authoritarian populism overlooks the anti-cosmopolitan capital/anti-elites component, which is just as essential for the present context as the xenophobia and racism. Authoritarian populism ignores the nature of the deep contemporary trouble for the liberal left.

[5] Hence also the tendency among political scientists to attribute the rise of the right to immigration, xenophobia and 'white shift', rather than broader political economic transformations (see Mudde 2019; Kaufman 2018). Their surveys simply repeat what people think they know about themselves at this moment in time, but what they know and don't know is an effect of hegemonic push and pull.

Netherlands, Poland and Hungary were all avant-garde continental cases for the neo-nationalist ascendency. It was from within these sites that we could see the potentially general properties, amid the obvious differences, of what was going on.

These processes were sped up by the political turmoil and austerity in the aftermath of the financial crises, but it was only in 2016, with the rise of Trump and the Brexit referendum, that our continental insights attained an aura of global or Northern universality and began to be noted among non-Europeanists. Anglo-Saxon media in the preceding years had regularly shrugged off the rise of neo-nationalist populisms in the EU with a reference to historical fascism and communism on the continent: not such good liberal democrats, historically, those continentals, was the often explicit suggestion, and they would point at obvious problems with cultural and social memory in the old world. The truth was that the representative electoral systems on the continent made popular organic processes visible long before they could strike at the heart of the state. In contrast, the British and US systems, majoritarian winner-take-all two-party systems, with stark oligarchic tendencies in the latter case, did not permit similar subterranean trends to crystallise out before they would become overwhelming. In Britain it was only with the political *Fremdkörper* of a referendum that the hold of the party elites would be broken. In the USA it required, not surprisingly, a maverick billionaire in real estate, gambling and show business – not finance, not technology, not the oil and defence–industrial complexes – coming from outside the political establishment to wrestle down the globalist hegemony within the Republican Party.

In both these cases, the switch of allegiance of 'socially conservative working classes' in the provinces (the Midwest, the North, the 'red wall' etc.), as Lind (2020) and others have simplifyingly called them, towards a populist right was decisive, as it had been in Europe. This includes the refusal of white, black and Latino working classes to vote for Hillary Clinton. Electoral abstentions are an important part of the process of hegemonic change we are talking about: there was an active refusal on the part of their former beneficiaries to defend the left liberal elites because there seemed little left to be defended. This was not unlike what had happened in 1989 with the communists in Eastern Europe. In fact, we were now witnessing the culmination of a second 'de-communisation'. This time as a slow-motion process hitting the social democrats and left liberals in the West. In the UK, anthropologists such as Gillian Evans and Jeannette Edwards (Evans 2012; Edwards et al. 2012) have described how working classes in Britain had been turning 'white' and ethnic, and thus abandoning the political orbit of labour, long before the Brexit breakthrough. Nothing exceptional here. Everywhere in the global North, working classes, in particular the lowly educated, had over the last decades increasingly stopped voting (Mair 2013). Illusions of inherent Anglo-liberal exceptionalism as compared to a politically once again uncouth European continent, permitted by the political time bubble in the USA and the UK for as long as that bubble lasted, evaporated at once in 2016. The West as a whole now appeared illiberal and populist and with a loud bang a world historical epoch seemed to have come to a close.

Anglophone anthropologists now realised that they had preferred to study people who they overtly liked and favoured politically, and that they had shown little interest in the illiberal right. They also became aware that they had generally ignored questions of class, and indeed of 'the white working class'. This was the summary feeling, put too cryptically perhaps here, coming out of the *American Ethnologist* special issue dedicated to the populist right in 2017 (see in particular Gusterson 2017; Walley 2017;

also, for a next stage of the debate, Maskovsky and Bjork-James 2020). The two issues are intimately connected.

I speak of neo-nationalism as what connects our cases. What we have seen emerging in the last three decades is obviously not the classic liberal civic nationalism of 19th-century nation-state making that an earlier wave of writing on nationalism in anthropology and history was oriented on (Eriksen 1993; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1992; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Smith 1995; Anderson 1991). These are ethnic (or ethno-religious) nationalisms, pervaded by national nostalgias of imagined golden times and greatness that were unjustly broken or humiliated but are now made to be believed to be destined to come back by the sheer force of majority national will and excellence. Such visions are often fed by a combination of historically objective as well as imaginary (self) victimisation at the hand of alliances between imperial actors, EU bureaucrats, transnational capital, culturally liberal and cosmopolitan state-elites betraying the nation, and immigrants or minorities protected by human rights regimes and open borders. Some of them, including the East European ones and Trumpism, but also the Dutch and Italian, indulge variously in painting 'cultural marxism', 'sexo-marxism' and antifascist anarcho-communism as the deeper enemy (see also Seymour 2020).

These nostalgias are a complex politico-cultural product of the popular stagnation, the public decline and the rising inequalities. Brexit Britain replays its memories of victory in the Second World War and its glorious forlorn empire in both cinematic, literary and political theatre. In its new constitution and the expanding historical museums in Budapest, Orbàn's Hungary celebrates the hierarchy, 'estates' and socio-cultural order of property and propriety of the Habsburg Empire, of which it imagines itself the brilliant historical co-owner. The Dutch still believe that debt is *Schuld*, although they are one of the most privately indebted societies in Europe. They are also back to fetishising a mercantilist 'gold standard', imagined to be embodied in the current architecture of the Euro and their carefully curated triple A rating, and have forgotten about the misery produced by sticking to it as one of the last nations in the 1930s (1936) as well as about the free gift for the actual pricing of their competitive exports derived from sharing their Euro with less creditworthy and more import-dependent countries.[6] Nostalgias are painfully distortive but in the current context they seemingly have to be lived and acted out everywhere (see also Campanella and Dassu 2019).

Importantly, many, but not all, of these neo-nationalisms are, at least rhetorically, left–right national socialisms *strictu sensu*. Hence the confusion on the left. Neo-nationalist political claims often demand social protection and recognition for majority national working classes and entrepreneurs of national stock. Quite a few of them have an anti-neoliberal feel (with the important exceptions of the 'Hanseatic' cases, which I have unfortunately no space to elaborate on here). The historical context within and against which they act sums up what they are about. They are driven

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[6] See Kalb (2018b) for a more detailed comparative discussion of Hungary and the Netherlands, both avant-garde players within their own (opposite) category. In early 2021, the Dutch also became painfully aware that the decades-long campaign against benefit cheats and scroungers, which was accelerated after 2010 to the point of a declaring that the Netherlands was no longer a welfare state but a 'participation society' (Orbán's new constitution declared Hungary a 'worker state' interestingly), had led to the state all but gratuitously ruining tens of thousands of families on child benefits, many of them 'xenophobically profiled'. See Kalb 2020 for the historical relationships of the Netherlands and finance.

by the contradictions of the neoliberal globalisations of the last 40 years. But they are not the resolution of these contradictions, and they therefore keep embodying and prolonging them in twisted ways. Contradictions not just in the abstract – although in a Marxian sense that too – but as concretely operating in, and transformative of, the daily lives of situated subjects; contradictions that often worked in dispossessive and disenfranchising ways for many, sometimes violently so, producing pervasive feelings of abandonment. Such abandonment was routinely being denied, obscured, misrecognised, by existing liberal political vocabularies, technocratic knowledges and governance paradigms. Fake news, now a favourite object of concern for liberals, is nothing new and was almost 'expertly' scripted into neoliberal governance through abstract and biased forms of accounting, singularly centred on GDP growth, national accounts and abstract quantitative averages of everything. This basic relational and contextual insight into the nature of the neo-nationalisms we are confronting was the grist of the anthropological political economy approach I and my collaborators were promoting in *Headlines of nation, subtexts of class* (2011; see also Kalb 2011, 2015, 2018a, 2019). Nowadays, of course, parts of the same insight are being repeated over and over again by journalists, commentators and liberal theorists who had little or no eye for all this before 2010 (recently, for example, Lind 2020; Goodhart 2017; Krastev 2017). In the 2000s, this was surely a fresh and important discovery and my point is that it was not accidental that anthropologists of continental Europe were among the first to articulate it.

There were two further reasons for this anthropological vanguard role (hardly acknowledged elsewhere). An empirical and a theoretical one. There was a network of mostly junior researchers converging on Budapest and the Central European University and working on political and economic dynamics in Central/East European urban settings. Budapest was obviously a rich intellectual and geographic-political focal point for the contradictions of neoliberal globalisation in Europe. So much so, in fact, that CEU would subsequently be forcefully expelled from a transformed Hungary gripped by a violently assertive neo-nationalist politics.[7] We shared a critical attitude towards the neoliberal transformations that were working themselves out, piecemeal, incrementally, over a longer period, in the sites in Eastern and Western Europe that we were studying. Those urban sites, from post-socialist Györ (Bartha 2011), Budapest (Halmai 2011), Cluj (Petrovici 2011; Faje 2011), Wrocław (Kalb 2009, 2014) and Kikinda (Vetta 2011), to the Marche industrial district (Blim 2011) and the Ticino region in central and Northern Italy (Stacul 2011), were generating right-wing popular sensibilities before our very eyes. These were often articulated by emerging neo-nationalist movements, right-wing labour unions and proto-party formations.

The second further reason for continental anthropology's vanguard role lay in the enabling theoretical framework offered by Jonathan Friedman's anthropology of global systems, which was hardly read in Britain and the USA. Friedman's work from the late seventies to the early 2000s had creatively assembled a notion of 'double polarisations' driven by the de-nationalisation of capital as a consequence of over-accumulation in the old core, including the consequent demise of national welfare statism and the

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[7] This is a good moment to recall the energising intellectual and professional atmosphere that the young (2003) Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at CEU in the heart of Budapest, from which it has now been expelled, had been enabling all through those years. We should all hope they can recreate it in their new Vienna campus.

collapse of the class compromises behind it. Friedman, it is also worth noting, had developed this vision earlier than Giovanni Arrighi (1994), and with a keener sense of the potential right-wing rather than left-wing political consequences (Friedman 2003, 2015; Friedman and Friedman 2008). Sadly, Friedman has gone native.[8] To focus on situated class trajectories and related relational dynamics in both everyday lives and political fields, as we were doing, was a powerful way to bring Friedman's anthropology of global systems back on the ground and make it run in responsible ways (see also Kalb 2011, 2013, 2015).

Class is the absent presence and the present absence behind the ascendency of the neo-nationalist (and often populist and illiberal) right.[9] Let me clarify that claim, because this is logically not a mere empirical statement, neither for the absences nor for the presences. In *Headlines of nation, subtexts of class* we did write that the people being mobilised behind neo-nationalist banners were 'broadly working class people'. While this was somehow empirically correct for the cases that we were studying in the book, this was not meant to be a covering law or an exclusivist claim. Also, the prefix 'broadly' was supposed to do some serious but perhaps understated empirical work, while also *sotto voce* invoking a theoretical twist. We were clearly not just talking about that classic 20th-century icon, the blue collar industrial working classes, even though we were referring to them too. Our definition allowed for the likelihood that many were in fact precariats, entre-precariats, small entrepreneurs, direct producers, technical managers, lower clerical personnel, shopkeepers, even higher educated ones, teachers, accountants and of course retired workers. We also assumed that their actual class 'positions' may often have been less than well defined, temporary and shifting, rather than fixed and well signified, amid the turbulent neoliberal transformations that were going on. Nor was class just about 'work' or income. Biographies and whole lives, Marx's 'living labour', including their whole habitats, was what we were aiming at. We were referring in a good Marxian sense to the whole sphere of reproduction of people and households who lacked access to capital or high-value property, or highly marketable 'human capital', in spatial contexts that too were part of the polarising logic of capital: the 'common people' in common places who could reasonably be pitched as the people against the elites (see also Kalb 2015). The *sotto voce* theoretical twist was that while some or many of these people might have preferred to see themselves as middle classes, a powerful and broadly shared aspiration as well as a social myth deeply inscribed into the capitalist machine, the point was that those imagined middle classes, too, were feeling the inescapable and often degrading force of the law of value

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[8]   With 'PC worlds' (2019), Jonathan Friedman has arguably descended into the neo-nationalist right himself, an embarrassing slide from his earlier structural Marxism. The slide may have been intellectually enabled by his abstract structuralism, his conceptual focus on global/local, and on national 'elites' instead of on capital, and his relative neglect of class, conceptually as well as 'on the ground'. For a good critique see Trémon (2020).

[9]   Edelman (2019), Scoones et al. (2018) place the crisis not among workers but among peasantries, farmers and people in the disinvested countryside. Note that I have no quarrel with this as those sites are explicitly included in my definitions. I do have a problem though with 'peasants'. Their numerical weight in the global north is simply too small, strictly speaking. I taste a bit of Chayanov's populism here and I must admit I lean towards Lenin in that historical debate on the fate of the peasantry, certainly in the present context (see Brass 2015). 'Broadly working class' seems to represent their actual relationships of social reproduction minimally as well as 'peasantry'.

in many aspects of their lives (Kalb and Mollona 2018; Kalb 2014; Mollona and Kalb 2018; Therborn 2020; see Kracauer 1998 for the classic German 1930s case of a similar twisted class process).

Recent research does offer lots of evidence for this 'broadly working class' picture, even though in the USA and the UK the Trump and Brexit electoral mobilisations did rely too on classical right-wing older suburban middle classes with property and financial outlays, the classical electorates for the Tories and the Republicans. Importantly, we were talking about coalitions and alliances in which 'broadly working class people' were being mobilised, both electorally and in actual movements, alliances that would not become politically successful without broad working-class support. Such alliances were never ideologically 'classist', even though they might be a symbolic feast for 'American workers', 'working-class families', 'working middle-class families', 'Magyar workers', 'the common people', '*la France profonde*' etc. This was 'class without class' (Kalb 2019).

Further, we had already a keen feeling that metropolitan working classes in dynamic labour markets, younger and higher educated, might be less susceptible to the neo-nationalist mobilisations than those in the stagnating provinces, the secondary cities, the suburbs and exurbs, which *we* were studying. Recent events have shown this to be a generally good hunch. The spatial divides of neoliberal capitalism, mostly reflected too in state policies of investment, redistribution and planned abandonment, are an essential part of the class story that is playing itself out. The left–right call for the ethno-nation poses the devalued provinces and the outer boroughs, their inhabitants and 'their ways of life', against the swinging and sexually libertarian capitals and metropoles (except in Denmark and the Netherlands). Finally, we never claimed that the actual political leaderships on any level should be necessarily of working-class origin. That would be an absurd empiricist reduction of what the class account should be about.

Our argument was simply that without substantial working-class support for the new neo-nationalisms, the latter would not break the liberal cosmopolitan chain. Workers, broadly conceived, would have to abandon the social democratic parties in order for the new right to shift the scales. That abandonment had been going in many places for a long while. The new right often had something for them that the by now 'third way' left didn't offer anymore: an enemy, at least some cultural recognition and, hopefully, some economic redistribution.[10] There was an offer made to the common people in the provinces for a new potential belonging, a belonging to an ethno-nationally defined world of recognition, possibly protection, and renewed valorisation and productivity, the latter of inestimable relevance for one's sense of worth and security in a capitalist world. And the offer was made in a style that spoke to their senses.[11]

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[10] Thomas Frank has presciently pointed at the substitution of economic redistribution by cultural recognition in the advance of the right as the Democrats and European Social Democrats were cancelling the redistribution (Frank 2004). This turned out to be a general insight.

[11] See the set of studies offered in Kapferer and Theodossopoulos (2019). Moffit (2016) is among those inspired by Laclau (2004) and Mouffe (2018) who tend to reduce populism to style and discourse (populism is a 'political form') and miss out on the crucial issue of the class and value substance, unsurprisingly, since their own cultural turn in the 1980s, see Laclau and Mouffe (1985). The emphasis on populism as a political form and discourse is generally true for liberal authors, for which Müller 2017 can serve as a general stand in.

A style that could at the very least elicit a protest vote. By 2010 big minorities of national electorates everywhere (> 25/30%) had long stopped voting – let alone actively belonging to established political parties – and this quarter of the electorate was heavily biased toward lower educated working people of all ages and sexes. Ethno-nationalist political entrepreneurs with the right gusto could aim at pushing the electoral scales over in one good go. The abandonment of a solidary politics of class in the 1980s–2000s produced new presences of class within a counter politics of the ethno-nation. As Žižek (2008: 267) has poignantly pointed out, this was the return of the repressed in characteristically tortuous and traumatic ways.

In the early 2000s, Charles Tilly (2001) called on anthropologists to join a new mode of what he called relational studies of class and inequality, such as his own 'Durable inequality' (1998). His call has never lost its urgency. We need more work on an anthropological approach to class, as against the reifications and reductions of sociology and economics. We need a relational and 'expanded class', as I wrote a good time ago (Kalb 1997, 2015; see also Tilly 2001; Fraser and Jaeggi 2018): to describe and analyse a contradictory and shifting field of forces, creating pressures and setting limits for social life, while generating tendencies and rendering directionality to social processes in space and time.[12] This concept must be a verb rather than a substantive. That, in its turn, requires us to understand that the valorisation of capital spans politics, society, economics, culture and space, all of that, in uneven, contradictory and contentious ways: capitalism is a living, structured and contradictory totality, not just 'an economy'. Our entry into this clockwork as anthropologists lies within the interstices of economic value, social and cultural worth ('values' and 'status'), power, place and livelihood (see also Kalb 2016). Straddling and bridging such apparent institutional divides, such a 'value and values' oriented verb-like notion of class can be made into a stark tool for ethnographic and historical discovery in the present, and indeed for theoretical and historical anticipation. Terry Turner once wrote that we need a value theory of labour rather than a labour theory of value (Turner 2005). That remains overwhelmingly true. In an age where the whole of social life seems to be subjected to a 'real subsumption' under capital (see Harvey 2018; Hardt and Negri 2018, 2019), we also need a value theory for social life as a whole, including a keen sense of unfolding contradictions and emerging popular contestations. We might even need a value theory of values with politics written all over it.

Acknowledgements

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[12] Note that Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi have been calling for an 'expanded notion of capitalism'. I cannot agree more (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018).

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