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***IS RUSSIA FASCIST? UNRAVELING PROPAGANDA EAST AND WEST***, By Ayse Dietrich\*,  
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In this book, Marlene Laruelle examines the origins and validity of the accusations that Russia is fascist, discusses the reasons for the European countries labelling Russia as fascist, Russian domestic issues, and the Kremlin's foreign policy in detail. The book consists of eight chapters, and a conclusion.

In the first chapter, “Russia’s ‘Fascism’ or ‘Illiberalism’”, Laruelle examines the literature on fascism in general, on Russian fascism, on the rise of illiberalism, and then discusses the theories put forward by historians to determine where Russia fits within this frame. She defines fascism as “a metapolitical ideology that calls for the total destruction of modernity by creating an alternative world based on ancient values reconstructed with violent means”. She states that the literature on fascism does not include features of Russia, and most academic literature about Russia deals with different issues of the Russian political system and the authoritarian practices in Russia. They do not integrate fascism into Russian politics; and those who blame Russia of being fascist are public intellectuals and in the minority. She explains the term *illiberalism* and emphasized that “illiberalism is not the opposite of liberalism, but an ideology that pushes back against liberalism after having experienced it”, and it depends on the country, space, culture and time. Based on her readings of the literature on fascism, she claims that although the regime in Russia has authoritarian attributes, these characteristics are not considered synonymous with fascism. While the Russian government might have some illiberal approaches to the domestic and international sphere that evoke fascist ideologies, this illiberalism should not be equated with fascism since, by her definition, there is no total destruction of any sets of rules in Russia.

In the second chapter, “The Soviet Legacy in Thinking about Fascism”, the author examines the Soviet understanding of the term fascism. She states that for the Soviets the term fascism denoted

their major enemy, Nazi Germany and it was an emotional rather than an analytical term which was paired with the two names *okkupanty* (occupants) and *zakhvatchiki* (invaders). After WWII, the term *fashist* was used as a common insult in Soviet culture. She also talks about the “cryptic” attraction to Nazi culture via Nazi propaganda, criminal subculture, television and cinema which depict many attractive features of Nazi culture as in a series called *Seventeen Moments of Spring*. She also examines the promotion of Aryanism and neo-paganism.

At the beginning of the third chapter, “Antifascism as the Renewed Social Consensus under Putin”, Laruelle asserts that the “the war against fascism” still carries the meaning of “the highest human values of courage and sacrifice”, and the war still evokes the highest national sentiments. The Russian fear of “fascism returning Russia and she should be ready to save itself and the world from this menace” is used by the president regularly. She states that the Russian authorities still keep the memory of the Great Patriotic war alive by frequently using patriotic programs to mobilize its people against a possible future enemy. She claims that for the Russians the concept of fascism does not have any ideology, it only carries the meaning of struggle against the enemy, that is, Europe.

In chapter 4, “International Memory Wars, Equating the Soviet Union with Nazism”, Laruelle points out that the determining factor in maintaining the relationship between Russia and the Eastern and Central European countries is the memory of joint resistance to fascism in WWII. The perception of Russia as being antifascist exists through the memory of wars. She states that when these countries joined EU and NATO, their memory began to equate the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany, and that this is a geopolitical strategy to isolate Russia from Europe. She points out that to make a foundation for their new postcommunist sense of identity of being part of Europe, the Central European countries created a strategy of putting the blame on the Soviet Union for their national suffering. She also talks about how Russian authorities responded this new historiography.

Chapter 5, “The Putin Regime’s Ideological Plurality”, is concerned with Putin’s Russia and the nature of his regime. The author introduces three schools to describe the nature of Putin’s regime: The first school considers Putin’s regime as a kleptocracy, and the second school sees his regime as a totalitarian, neo-Stalinist institution. In the third school Putin’s regime is seen as an ecosystem which has three components: the Presidential Administration, the military-industrial complex, and the Orthodox realm. Laruelle states that the Presidential Administration does not carry any clearly formulated doctrine, while the military-industrial complex is the continuity of the new style Soviet regime. Their language is conservative and reactionary with allusions to fascism, but remains peripheral, and the Orthodox realm has fascist references at the margins.

In chapter 6, “Russia’s Fascist Thinkers and Doers”, Laruelle discusses the grassroots, far right groups’ as a social trend that has no sociological basis, is less ideologically definite, and stays at the margins with their militia activities, but avoids entanglements with the regime. She also examines the issue of the rehabilitation of fascism as a doctrine among small intellectual circles, who see the Russians as “whites”, and promote Russian Aryanness and neo-paganism. Finally, the author examines another doctrine inspired by European far-right theories promoted by Aleksandr Dugin to revive fascist political doctrines.

In chapter 7, “Russia’s Honeymoon with the European Far Right”, Laruelle states that the Kremlin maintained control over the far-right groups at home and established links with European far-right and populist parties to strengthen its economic ties. The author also discusses the pro-European

avant-garde, Rodina party which claims that Russia is a European country that must protect itself against migrants, and new strategy developed by the Russian authorities to reach out the European Far Right after 2012.

In chapter 8, “Why the Russian Regime is not Fascist”, the author examines the arguments on Russia’s fascism developed by Timothy Snyder, and then discusses the mistakes made in analyzing the concepts of totalitarianism and neo-totalitarianism. By using Roger Griffin’s arguments, Laruelle argues that presence of some features of fascism in today’s Russia does not mean that Russia uses state power to create “an alternative form of modernity on the basis of revolutionary ideology of racist ultranationalism”. She emphasizes that Putin’s regime lacks a core element of fascism, namely, mass indoctrination for the radical transformation of society by mobilizing masses to promote violence. She also discusses the issue of ultranationalism and argues that the Putin regime cannot be equated with Nazism, since the state does not have a “doctrine of Russian ethnic superiority”, and that state policy in the “near abroad” is not “expansionist but rather protectionist”, therefore it is wrong to accuse Russia of being imperialistic”. She identifies only one feature that carries a reference to a scholarly definition of fascism in Putin’s Russia, that is “the militia subculture”, “a constituted paramilitary culture” which is a key feature of a fascist regime.

In the Conclusion, “Russia’s Memory and the Future of Europe”, the author calls culturally Russified doctrines that share some features with the scholarly definition of fascism “parafascism”. These doctrines are outside of the mainstream of the Presidential Administration, and the Russian regime has continued to reinvent itself since the early 2000s, and cannot limit its ability to stay in power with a rigid doctrine. It is clear that the debates over the question whether Russia is fascist or not, and, from Russian standpoint, whether Europe has fascist tendencies against Russia will continue and determine the nature of future relations between Europe and Russia.

*Is Russia Fascist? Unraveling Propaganda East and West* is a very well-written scholarly book that makes a valuable contribution to the study of Russian political culture and state structure, and can be highly recommended to anyone with an interest in these topics. Laurelle has presented all of her arguments well and has shed light on a number of key issues in the understanding of what fascism is in this debate through her masterful use of numerous valuable sources.

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