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Two Historians in Front of the Economic Crisis of 2007–2008: Hobsbawm and Judt between Marxism and the Legacies of 20th Century

Abstract How did intellectuals react to the economic crisis of 2007–2008 and its long-term backlash? What did they learn from the main twentieth-century political and social experiences, in order to make a new sense of the traditional cultures of the Left?

In order to answer these crucial issues, this proposal will analyze the paths of the well-known historians E. Hobsbawm and T. Judt and their apparently similar, but actually different reactions to the crisis. First, I will focus on their respective books: *How to Change the World* (2011) and *Ill Fares the Land* (2010). On the one hand, Hobsbawm's critical approach to the post-1991 world, shaped by his lifelong fidelity to Marxism and his persistent sympathy for the Russian Revolution, was connected to his catastrophic vision of the end of the both conflicting and collaborative dynamics between capitalism and socialism. On the other hand, Judt's re-thinking of the social-democratic tradition, compelled by the global transformations of the social question, was inspired by his connections with the East Central European dissidents' anti-totalitarian liberalism and by his critical approach to the *engagement* of the French intellectuals. Second, I will investigate their different interpretations of the „Golden Age“ of post-1945 Europe (with special regard to the long-term impact of the crisis of 1929 and to the influence of Soviet communism) and of the causes of its crisis. Third, I will show how, in spite of their common reference to Marx, late Hobsbawm's and Judt's historical visions – respectively combined with determinism and moralism – provide opposite ways of coping with the legacies of the 20th century and of criticizing the language of neoliberal economy within the Left.

Keywords: Hobsbawm Eric; Judt Tony; intellectuals; historiography; socialism; communism; Marxism; totalitarianism

Different generation, different left

Eric Hobsbawm and Tony Judt were two of the major historians of the recent times. Both of them were British Jews (with deep roots in East Central Europe), were publicly engaged on the Left, and extensively wrote on their fascinating lives. However, they essentially belonged to two different generations, and they were divided by their conceptions of Left. Hobsbawm was born in 1917 in Alexandria of Egypt, then one of the peripheries of the British Empire, and was mostly educated in Vienna and in Berlin between the 1920s and 1930s. He belonged to the generation of the Russian Revolution and of the Soviet communism, of the fight between fascism and antifascism. His

membership in the German Communist Party began in the early 1930s, when he lived in Germany, at the time of Hitler's ascent to power, and he continued to be a member of the small British Communist Party until the very end of the Soviet Union, in 1991 (Hobsbawm 2002)¹.

Judt was born in 1948 in London, then capital city of the declining British Empire. His family was rooted in the East European Jewry, and the shadow of the Shoah touched him through the killing of a cousin, Toni. He belonged to the post-war generation of the baby-boom, of the public transports and of the Welfare State, and of the rebellious late 1960s. After a brief militancy in the Marxist Zionism as a young student, and a long participation in the 1968 movements in Cambridge and Paris, he reached a skeptical attitude towards any sort of politically organized commitment. In the 1970s he was fascinated by the extreme Leftist ideologies of *tiers-mondisme*, looking at the Mao's China and at the revolutionary peasants, and his early research works reflected this intellectual much more than political fascination (Judt 2010: 98–99).

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As an historian, Judt belonged to what he himself defined as „Hobsbawm generation“ – men and women from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s whose interest in the past had been shaped by the great Marxist historian's writings. Hobsbawm was specializing in the English nineteenth-century working-class movement (Hobsbawm 1964), but he also wrote seminal essays on the primitive or pre-modern forms of popular rebellion and banditry (Hobsbawm 1959). He was then recognized as a great historian of what he called the „long nineteenth century“, extending from the late eighteenth century, particularly since the „dual revolutions“ (i.e. the French and the Industrial revolution), to the early twentieth century, notably the Great War (Hobsbawm 1962; Hobsbawm 1975; Hobsbawm 1987)². His trilogy on the „long nineteenth century“ deeply influenced radical students of history as the young Judt was in Cambridge in the late 1960s. In 1968 he was part of „an attentive and admiring audience“ whom Hobsbawm addressed to in order to explain „the limits of student radicalism“. Judt remembered: „Sometimes, he reminded us, the point is not to change the world but to interpret it. But in order to interpret the world one has also to have a certain empathy with the ways in which it has changed“. In this respect Judt reproached Hobsbawm not to have been up to the demanding standard he himself had set, insofar as he was unable or unwilling to change his mind about the Soviet communism (Judt 1995). Quite the contrary, Hobsbawm's methodological reminder from the late 1960s would keep on being a guiding line for Judt over the next

1 The only attempt at an historical reconstruction of Hobsbawm's intellectual biography has been hitherto made by Elliott, 2010. An archival work for an historical reconstruction of Hobsbawm's biography is under way by Richard Evans.

2 For an historical reconstruction of the British Marxism see Eley 2005: 13–60.

decades. Not incidentally, Judt often referred to a well-known sentence commonly attributed to John M. Keynes: „When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, Sir?“ (Judt 2015).

The twentieth century, a short or a long epoch?

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Hobsbawm was basically an historian of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Even though he occasionally wrote on the twentieth century, only in the mid-1990s did Hobsbawm begin to write extensively on his own time – famously renamed the „short century“. The basic argument of the *Age of Extremes*, published in 1994, was summarized as follows: „the history of the Short twentieth century cannot be understood without the Russian Revolution and its direct and indirect effects. Not least because it proved to be the saviour of liberal capitalism, both by enabling the West to win the Second World War against Hitler’s Germany and by providing the incentive for capitalism to reform itself“ (Hobsbawm 1994: 84)³. Whereas the „direct effects“ of the Russian Revolution applied to the solution of the dramatic conflicts following the crisis of liberal capitalism, the „indirect effects“ of the Russian Revolution applied to the political stability and to the social prosperity of the post-war period. As capitalism was considered in itself as avoid of self-reforming forces from within, the Soviet Union had provided the transformative pressure for capitalism from without. The post-war capitalism was conceived of as „a sort of marriage between economic liberalism and social democracy [...], with substantial borrowing from the USSR, which had pioneered the idea of economic planning“. The „Golden Age“ was thus primarily due „to the overwhelming economic dominance of the US“, but also „to the fear of communism“ (Hobsbawm 1994: 270, 275).

Strangely enough, though, Hobsbawm never researched over the history of the USSR and of the Soviet communism (Pons 2013: 410–416). Albeit his awareness of the limits of a „binary division“ between communism and capitalism, Hobsbawm still referred to it when he wrote his own autobiography *Interesting Times*, which was deeply fashioned by his life-long loyalty and endless sympathy for the October Revolution. The personal experience of the downfall of the Weimar Republic lastingly shaped the mental universe of Hobsbawm, and his catastrophic approach to the post-1989 history seems to remind of the experience of „a world which was not expected to last“ (Hobsbawm 2002: 47).

Consistently enough, Hobsbawm described the world history since the early 1970s in terms of „a world which had lost its bearings and slid into

3 For a discussion of Hobsbawm’s attitude to the Soviet Union and communism see the conversation between Hobsbawm and the Canadian intellectual Michael Ignatieff, held in 1994.

instability and crisis“. Since the 1980s „the foundations of the Golden Years had crumbled“ „irretrievably“. In particular, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the capitalistic world unfolded „disorder“ and „disintegration“ without „convincing alternatives“: the economic forces of the free market were „out of control“, and the states had lost their capacity to plan and govern the society (Hobsbawm 1994: 403). Quite paradoxically, the collapse of the „real socialism“, and the testified failure of the Soviet utopia of total control and planning brought about – alongside the end of the „religious wars“ of the Short century – the crisis and decline of the self-proclaimed winner of the Cold War, the „neo-liberal utopia“, the idea of a society based on a global completely free market (Hobsbawm 1994: 562, 563).

The Age of Extreme provided Hobsbawm with word-wide celebrity, but it also stirred some sharp critiques. In spite of his deep admiration for Hobsbawm and his work, Judt made of *The Age of Extreme* the target of an harsh critique, on *The New York Review of Books* in 1995. Hobsbawm’s autobiography – particularly his *engagement* with a „single cause“ since his youth – had shaped his perception and his interpretation of the twentieth century. As a major consequence, „the categories right/left, fascist/communist, progressive and reactionary seem to be very firmly set, and pretty much as they first presented themselves to Hobsbawm in the Thirties“. At the core of the polemical intervention put forward by Judt was Hobsbawm’s attitude towards communism much more than that towards Marxism (Judt 1995).

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Postwar was published in 2005, more than ten years after *The Age of Extremes*, in a completely different context. Meanwhile, new narratives of the European twentieth century had been proposed by historians of different generations, such as Norman Davies and Mark Mazower, aiming to connect the Western and the Eastern regions of the continent into a unitary historical account (Davies 1996; Mazower 1998). According to Judt, the causes of the post-1945 political stabilization, social reconstruction and economic modernization were complex and multiple all over Europe, but they tended to configure quite different societies in Western and Eastern Europe. As Judt put it, „the Second World War transformed both the role of the modern state and the expectations placed upon it [...]: for the generation of 1945 some workable balance between political freedoms and the rational, equitable distributive function of the administrative state seemed the only sensible route out of the abyss“ (Judt 2005: 73–74). The pre-1914 elaboration of liberal, socialist, Christian democratic reformism, the traumatic lesson of the Great Depression of 1929 and its social backlash, the cogent need for reconstruction after WWII and the economic development intertwined each other in unprecedented ways. Since the early 1970s, „the end of the most prosperous decade in recorded history“ – the 1960s – brought to „an economic slowdown“, which entailed „diminished expectations“ and „a new realism“ (as the precondition or background for the new different forms of liberalism in the

1980s) (Judt 2005: 453). While the „old order“ collapsed through the „revolutions of 1989“ in Eastern Europe, the Keynesian consensus was more and more questioned in Western Europe: in a deep sense, the period 1945–1989, understood both as „a post-war parenthesis“ and as „an epilogue“ to the European civil wars, was over (Judt 2005: 2).

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According to Judt, the fundamental political, social and intellectual agenda of Europe at the beginning of the new century was still shaped by the long-standing legacies and memories of the Second World War, as well as by its deepest roots in the post-1914 decades. In this respect, far from being a short century (in Hobsbawm's terms), the twentieth-century was a long century, projecting its shadow into the next one, the twenty-first. Interestingly enough, albeit their relevant differences, their interpretations of the post-1945 period were based on the narrative of the „Golden Age“. As Geoff Eley insightfully stressed, the basic argumentative structure of Judt's *Postwar*, in spite of his attention for the intellectual and political history, was marked by a „materialist standing point“ to the cycles of growth and of recession, and thus „tends towards the primacy of economics“ (Eley 2008: 205). On the other hand, as Jan-Werner Mueller has clearly put it, the representations of the „Golden Age“ of social democracy (*les Trente Glorieuses*, according to the well-known definition of Jean Fourastié), or even of the „Golden Age“ of democracy as such, are misleading. Both Hobsbawm and Judt tend to downplay the major role of Christian democracy and the disciplined nature of post-1945 Western democratic institutions. Additionally, their historical narratives provide a critical reaction to the euphoria of post-1989 „triumph“ of liberal and capitalistic democracy, but they retrospectively overestimate the positive aspects of the „social democratic moment“ over the negative ones. Last but not least, they neglect a conspicuous opinion which was severely critical of the post-1945 democracies, overemphasizing the positive perception of the political and social post-war progress in the 1960s and 1970s (Mueller 2011: 125–150). In this respect, both Hobsbawm and Judt themselves built retrospective interpretations of those decades.

Converging or diverging positions in face of the economic crisis?

In the context of the economic crisis of 2007–2008, Judt and Hobsbawm published a number of works more or less directly finalized to question the economic system and the meaning of current politics. In 1995, Judt had reproached Hobsbawm the „Geremiah-like tone of impending doom“, characterising the last part of *The Age of Extremes*, entitled *The Landslide* and devoted to the post-1989 period (Judt 1995). Nevertheless, in 2009, both Hobsbawm and Judt, albeit a slightly different language, seemed to address the same issues by an analogous critical standing point. For Hobsbawm, the failure of the „liberal theology“ had proved to be evident and complete since

the 1980s, but the new global crisis of capitalism urged the search for an alternative. As a consequence, for Hobsbawm, „the most serious crisis of capitalism since the Age of Catastrophe“ was no surprise. In an article published on the *Guardian* in April 2009, Hobsbawm pointed out the core problem of the Western economic crisis as follows:

Impotence [...] faces both those who believe in what amounts to a pure, stateless, market capitalism, a sort of international bourgeois anarchism, and those who believe in a planned socialism uncontaminated by private profit-seeking. Both are bankrupt. The future, like the present and the past, belongs to mixed economies in which public and private are braided together in one way or another. But how? That is the problem for everybody today, but especially for people on the left. (Hobsbawm 2009)

In his book *Ill Fares the Land* Judt focused on the political and intellectual problems arising from the global crisis in similar terms to Hobsbawm's:

Why do we experience such difficulty even *imagining* a different sort of society? Why is it beyond us to conceive of a different set of arrangements to our common advantage? Are we doomed indefinitely to lurch between a dysfunctional 'free market' and the much-advertised horrors of 'socialism'? Our disability is *discursive*: we simply do not know how to talk about these things any more. (Judt 2010: 34)⁴

However, it is important to stress that the convergence between Judt and Hobsbawm was much more apparent than real. A close confrontation will help to understand the subtle, but deep divergences between them, and to connect them with their historical narratives of the twentieth century, and to follow their implications.

As the Short century had concluded with the end of the conflict between socialism and capitalism, Hobsbawm maintained that in order to understand the present day, it was necessary to go back to the nineteenth century. If the century marked by the Soviet experience was declared over, the legacy of Marxism might have got rid of the Stalinist legacy. As Donald Sassoon put it, Hobsbawm's last Marx was not the theoretician of the world revolution and the leading role of the proletariat, but the theorist of globalization and of crises, a Marx finally emancipated from the Soviet Union (Sassoon 2012). His interest in a revival of Marxism thus amounted to a radically critical attitude towards the present day. Even if he was conscious that an „alternative system“ might not be on the horizon, he maintained that „the possibility of a disintegration, even a collapse, of the existing system“ was no longer to be excluded. He was pretty sure that economic and political liberalism,

4 Some of his reflection was anticipated in a conference held in New York, October 2009: see Judt 2009.

„singly or in combination“, could *not* provide the solution to the problems of the twenty-first century. In this regard, though, the real paradox was that both the liberals and its opponents had „an interest in returning to a major thinker whose essence is the critique of both capitalism and the economists who failed to recognize where capitalist globalization would lead“. He was convinced that once again the time has come „to take Marx seriously“ (Hobsbawm 2011: 417–418)⁵.

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In the very last sentences of his *Ill Fares the Land*, Judt also mentioned Marx and his famous *Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach* concerning the philosophers' various interpretations of the world and the urgent need to change it. However, quite paradoxically, he especially referred to the thought of John M. Keynes, who was defined as „an instinctive conservative“. He re-read Keynes' thought in the light of some liberal or anti-totalitarian thinkers who were traditionally considered adversaries of the orthodox Left, such as Albert Camus, Raymond Aron, Vaclav Havel, Adam Michnik, Isaiah Berlin. The whole of these readings and references provided Judt with the intellectual means for coping with what he called the „unbearable lightness of politics“ in a „new age of insecurity“, by combining *conservative* and *innovative* strategies⁶. It was his conviction that we are „the fortunate beneficiaries of a transformation whose scale and impact was unprecedented“. By that he meant „the institutions, legislation, services and rights [...] inherited from the great age of 20th century reform“ (Judt 2010: 221–222)⁷. However, the social democratic legacy might have a future, according to Judt, only as a „social democracy of fear“. This notion was inspired and fashioned by the conception of the „liberalism of fear“, theorized by the political thinker Judith Shklar, who tried to draw a new lesson for liberalism from the totalitarian experiences (Shklar 1989: 337–63)⁸. Some crucial issues arise: what did Judt mean exactly by „social democracy of fear“? how did he fit his social democratic position into his anti-totalitarian liberal position?

5 This was a collection of essays, some of whom have been written in the light of the crisis of 2007–2008. This book was dedicated to the German historian of French marxism and European socialism George Lichtheim. Interestingly enough, Judt also dedicated two of his works to Lichtheim (Judt 1986; Judt 2008).

6 Judt's sharp critique of the social and psychological implications of inequality was based on the thick analysis carried out by two social epidemiologists (R. Wilkinson, K. Pickett 2009). Afterwards, the historical dynamics of equality and inequality, and particularly the impact of the two world wars on the European social stratification, have been analysed by the well-known (albeit controversial) book by Pickett 2013.

7 A critical comment was made by his friend the French scholar Pierre Rosanvallon: „Although there is a great nobility in such a vision, unfortunately it does not take seriously enough the irreversible character of the individualism of singularity, which is not to be confused with individualism as selfishness and atomism“ (Rosanvallon 2011: 6).

8 For an historical contextualization of the antitotalitarian liberalism and of its intellectual roots see Lilla 1994: 129–157 and Mueller 2008: 45–64.

Marxism, social-democracy and anti-totalitarianism

Hobsbawm never publicly replied to Judt's harsh attacks, on the *New York Review of Books*. However, after Judt's death, he devoted to him one of his latest public interventions, a Lecture at King's College (Cambridge) in February 2012. This was an insightful analysis of Judt's intellectual biography and an exceptionally sincere proof of their contradictory personal and intellectual relation. In Hobsbawm's opinion, Judt's basic concern during the acute phase of the Cold War was not the Russian threat to the „free world“ but the arguments within the left. Marx – not Stalin and the Gulag – was his subject. Hobsbawm then explained: „Tony's essentially social-democratic liberalism was briefly infected by François Furet's Hayekian economic libertarianism“. However, he couldn't help acknowledging that his brilliant and fearless critique of the post-1989 world since the beginning of the twenty-first century was much more original and radical „for having been a fairly orthodox defender of the 'free world' against 'totalitarianism' during the Cold War, especially in the 1980s“ (Hobsbawm 2012)⁹.

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In Hobsbawm's eyes, Judt's anti-totalitarian liberalism was thus occasional and contingent, but it brought to long-lasting intellectual and historiographical effects. To be sure, though, Judt's sympathy with the anti-totalitarian liberalism had less to do with the Cold War politics than with his overall interpretation of the European history of the twentieth century. In a sense, the French historian François Furet, a well-known scholar of the French revolution, was at the very core of the dissent between Hobsbawm and Judt. Hobsbawm had criticized Furet as a follower of Alfred Cobban's revisionism, by taking sides with the traditional Marxist historiography on the French revolution, understood as a „bourgeois revolution“ (Hobsbawm 1990). More than this, he especially contested Furet as the author of a controversial book on the „illusion“ of communism, *Le Passé d'une illusion*, published in 1995 (Hobsbawm 1996: 129–138). Quite the contrary, since the mid-1980s, Judt had established an intense personal and intellectual relationship with Furet, who wrote a sympathetic foreword for the French edition of his *Le marxisme et la gauche française* (Furet, in Judt 1986: I–XIX). For a long time Judt had been a brilliant but quite obscure historian of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French socialism: in a sense, he was a Leftist historian in Hobsbawm's fashion. Through his critical dialogue with Furet (among others), Judt came to terms with the Leftist sympathetic attitude towards the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet Union, ignoring or overlooking or minimizing the criminal dimension of the Stalinist totalitarian experience. We have to make a step backwards, in order to understand how deeply and radically Judt changed his idea of Left.

⁹ A very harsh polemic against Judt's sympathies for Cold War liberalism, quite similar to Hobsbawm's arguments, was made by D. Riley 2011, 35–62.

Between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s, starting from the problem of French marxism, Judt had begun to make sense of the Leftist attitudes of the French intellectuals' towards Soviet communism and Eastern Europe in the post-1945 period (Tony Judt with Timothy Snyder 2012: 140–194)¹⁰. He turned to the study of the dissidents' discourses, especially drawing attention to Václav Havel, János Kis, Milan Kundera, Adam Michnik, Czesław Miłosz, and György Konrád¹¹. Thanks to his personal connections with the East Central European dissidents in the mid-1980s and to their „impolitical“ thought, he developed a radically critical approach to the *engagement* of the French intellectuals in the name of moral and intellectual responsibility. Far from adhering to the triumphalist post-1989 forms of liberalism, he focussed on both „the importance and primacy of individual“ and „the necessary and desirable complexity, plurality, and indeterminacy of political life“ (Judt 1992: 313). In this respect, his deepest argument was not so much for liberalism, but against any form of historical determinism. In a sense, he rejected the faith in History both of Jean-Paul Sartre and of Francis Fukujama. Quite the contrary, as Judt explained in another book, dedicated to François Furet, his reference points were the concepts of moral and intellectual responsibility of the „prophet spurned“ Léon Blum, of the „reluctant moralist“ Albert Camus, and of the „peripheral insider“ Raymond Aron (Judt 1998). His personal and intellectual friendship to Furet did not entail any sort of adherence neither to the post-Cold war liberal consensus nor to the belief in capitalist democracy as the „end of History“. In an article devoted to Alexis de Tocqueville in 1984, Furet wrote: his „achievement . . . does not lie in any single doctrine but in the acute and sometimes ambivalent ways he confronted the questions of equality, democracy, and tyranny that arose in his time and that continue unresolved in our own“ (Furet 1985; Judt 1997)¹². These words were quoted with approval in Judt's obituary of Furet in 1997 in order to describe the intellectual and political mind of the French historian. However, they also proved to be an accurate picture of Judt himself. Not incidentally, in the same year, in 1997, he published an essay on *The Social Question Redivivus*, where he began to develop a critical assessment of the globalized world and of its impact on the labour market, as well as on the disruption of the post-1945 social consensus (Judt 1997: 95–117)¹³.

As Judt explained in a series of interviews together with Timothy Snyder, the twentieth century, rather than being defined by the opposition between

10 The deep turning point in the French intellectual history in the 1970s has been critically assessed by Christofferson 2004.

11 Judt 1988; Judt 1992; Judt 1999.

12 For a Left-wing interpretation of the French historian, see Prochasson 2013. See also J.-W. Mueller 2015.

13 Interestingly enough, as an epygram to Judt 1997, Judt quoted Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village* (1770), which would inspire the title of his last book: „Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey, Where wealth accumulates, and men decay“.

capitalism and socialism, or democracy and totalitarianism, was marked by the rise of the state, and by the competition between different forms of state. In the wake of the economic crisis of 2007–2008, and because of it, it had become dramatically urgent to re-think the role of the State (Tony Judt with Timothy Snyder 2012). The new role of the state had necessarily to come to terms with the experiences and legacies of the twentieth century – at least in two respects. First, what is possible to learn from the World War II or from the wars in former Yugoslavia – as well as today from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Shore 2015) – demonstrates „the ease with which any society can descend into Hobbesian nightmares of unrestrained atrocity and violence“. Second, what is possible to learn from the history of ideas in the last century is that „the more perfect the answer, the more terrifying its consequences“. Judt’s perspective of a „social democracy of fear“ stemmed from these two points. The Welfare state provided, and can still provide, a set of social services for preventing „a complete breakdown of liberal institutions, an utter disintegration of the democratic consensus“ (Judt 2010: 221).

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To conclude, Hobsbawm thought that the structural dynamics of the twentieth century were over, and that they were doomed to be over and to be followed by endless crisis. In order to search for a perspective *beyond* capitalism, he thus turned himself to the nineteenth century and to Marx. In this respect, his critical vision of the present combined determinism and utopianism. On the contrary, Judt believed that some fundamental political and intellectual options of the twentieth century were still available in the new context of the twentieth-first century, and that it was thus necessary to make sense of its contradictory legacies, and particularly of the connections and continuities between the major catastrophes of the first half and the major progress of the second half of the century. Hence a conception of historical knowledge as the only way of conceptualizing the public discourse, and of re-legitimizing politics. His critical argument, focussing on the social, political and ethical consequences *within* capitalism, intertwined prudential wisdom with moralism.

As a conclusion, it is possible to say that Hobsbawm and Judt, on different, even opposite sides, embodied the dilemmas and the contradictions typical of the European Left in the past two centuries – dilemmas and contradictions such as determinism versus anti-determinism, materialism versus moralism, utopianism versus reformism, thinking beyond or within capitalism. However, it is worth underlying their role in the context of the economic crisis of 2007–2008 as the prefiguration of a new role for historians in the globalized world. Historians as the speakers of big, progressive narratives of History (with the capital H) belong to the past (at least so far). Insofar as the fastening processes of globalization tend to widen space and to compress time, historians like Hobsbawm and Judt, who rethought the complex relationship between past, present, and future, could play a crucial *critical* role in the public debate. Both of them were highly critical towards the post-modern

turn, as well as harshly skeptical towards the politics of identity. Albeit in different terms, they conceived of them as the deepest root of the loss of sense of politics, and particularly of the crisis of the Left. Not incidentally, since the early 1980s, the assertion of postmodernism (with all different interpretations and implications) had coincided with the intellectual decline of Marxism. Insofar as in the last three decades the process of reduction of the state sovereignty has increasingly interwoven with those of individualization and privatization of society, Hobsbawm and Judt, who investigated the *social* history of politics and its long-term impact (until today), could still act as *public* intellectuals¹⁴. In a sense, they tried to re-legitimize politics, albeit through different, even opposite historical and intellectual arguments. In spite of their multiple lines of divergences, their real converging point was thus not only a „nostalgia of politics“, but also „politics of nostalgia“– which was not only a nostalgia of a past, but also a nostalgia of a future.

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14 See the conversation between Marci Shore, Ivan Krastev and Timothy Snyder, at the Institute for Human Sciences, in Vienna, June 10th, 2013: <http://www.iwm.at/events/event/the-end-of-the-state/>.

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Marko Brešani

Dva istoričara u susretu sa ekonomskom krizom 2007–2008: Hobsbaum i Džad između marksizma i nasleđa 20. veka

Apstrakt

Kako su intelektualci reagovali na ekonomsku krizu 2007–2008 i dugogodišnje usporevanje ekonomije? Šta su naučili iz glavnih političkih i društvenih iskustava 20. veka da bi dali novi smisao tradicionalnim kulturama levice?

Da bi odgovorio na ove ključne probleme, ovaj nacrt će analizirati puteve poznatih istoričara E. Hobsbauma i T. Džada i njihove naizgled slične, ali u stvari različite reakcije na krizu. Prvo, usredsređujući se na njihove knjige koje se odnose na ove probleme: *Kako promeniti svet* (2011) i *Teško zemlji* (2010). S jedne strane, Hobsbaumov kritički pristup post-1991. svetu, modeliran njegovom celoživotnom privrženošću marksizmu i njegovom istrajnom simpatijom prema Ruskoj revoluciji, povezan je sa njegovom katastrofičnom vizijom kraja dinamike između kapitalizma i socijalizma, koja je bila kako konfliktna, tako i kolaborativna. S druge strane, Džadovo ponovno promišljanje socijal-demokratske tradicije, podstaknuto globalnim transformacijama društvenih pitanja, bilo je inspirisano njegovim vezama sa antitotalitarnim liberalizmom Istočnoevropskih disidenata i njegovim kritičkim pristupom *angazmanu* Francuskih intelektualaca. Drugo, istraživaču njihove različite interpretacije „zlatnog doba“ post-1945. Evrope (sa posebnim osvrtom na dugotrajni uticaj krize iz 1929. i na uticaj Sovjetskog komunizma) i uzroka njegove krize. Treće, pokazaću kako, usprkos njihovim zajedničkim referencama na Marksa, istorijske vizije kasnog Hobsbauma i Džada – svaka od njih kombinovana sa determinizmom i moralizmom – daju suprotne načine suočavanja sa nasleđem 20. veka i sa kritikom jezika neoliberalne ekonomije unutar levice.

Ključne reči: Erik Hobsbaum, Toni Džad, intelektualci, historiografija, socijalizam, komunizam, marksizam, totalitarizam