

rationality than others, proposing the existence of a hierarchy of goals delineated by the criterion of rationality. For instance, for states, survival holds paramount importance, necessitating that all other objectives be subordinate to it. In essence, prioritizing survival as a primary goal is deemed rational. Throughout history, numerous instances exist wherein states have prioritized survival over other significant goals. Examples include the Thirty Years' War, during which survival superseded religious objectives; Germany's decision to go to war in 1914, prioritizing survival over prosperity; and British foreign policy during World War II, where survival took precedence over ideology. The goal of survival dominates all other goals of the state. Though there have been attempts to find instances where states have risked their survival through reckless and aggressive foreign policies or by failing to deter a dangerous rival, such behavior does not necessarily indicate that they subordinated their survival to another goal.

According to the authors, to fully understand the role of rationality in international relations, it is essential not only to consider the rationality of the decision-making process but also to take into account the rationality of the goals. If the critics are correct, and states are mostly nonrational, then the discipline of international relations is in trouble.

Like all of Mearsheimer's books, this one is also well-written and the result of a huge effort to tackle a topic that is very important, but unfortunately theoretically very demanding and confusing. Numerous scholars may contend that the cases presented are, at the very least, contentious, and there exists disagreement re-

garding the rationality of the described actions, notwithstanding adherence to the criteria outlined by the authors. However, this publication represents a significant advancement in comprehending the role of rationality within the domain of foreign policy.

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Book Review

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### **Tomaž Mastnak** **Civilna družba**

Založba ZRC, Ljubljana, 2023, 219 pp.

The book *Civilna družba (Civil society)*, written by Tomaž Mastnak, represents the first volume of the broader project of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts entitled *The Eighties: Glossary of the New Cultural Field*, with the aim to explain some of the crucial notions and concepts that were used during the 1980s and the way that they influenced and re-shaped the political and social reality in Slovenia. It is thus the first step in the reflection of the turbulent 1980s, which were the time when the real-socialist regimes in Europe were slowly coming to an end, while the capitalist mode of production, instead of socialism, became the only one imaginable.

In this context, it is not a surprise that the broader publishing project begins with

Mastnak's book, because Mastnak is one of the very few scholars who openly admits that some of the goals and ideas that they were standing for in the 1980s and early 1990s have led to very questionable outcomes, especially when it comes to politics and economy. And, in this sense, he is highly critical of the notion of civil society and the way that it was used and of its impact in politics.

The book *Civilna družba* is divided into five chapters. Following the original idea of the broader publishing project, after a short introduction, Mastnak initially provides an overview of different theoretical understandings of the modern concept of civil society. First, Mastnak analyses the rise of the term "commercial society", with the term commerce being understood as a specific modality of liberty, as it was used by William Petty (commercial world), or as explicitly opposed to government, as it was explicated by Antoine de Montchrétien. Mastnak then goes on to explain the crucial contributions of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers to understanding the concept of commercial society. He goes into detail to present Adam Ferguson's seminal work on the history of civil society. Mastnak then goes on to present Hegel's account of civil society (*die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), as most clearly elaborated in the *Philosophie des Rechts*, which was based on the dualism between civil society and the State. The civil society is located between the family and the State, while the civil society logically presupposes the existence of the State. Crucially, the civil society encompasses three elements: the system of needs, the judiciary and the police, and corporations. The third subsection analyses the approaches

taken by four Young Hegelians: Bruno Bauer, Karl Marx, Max Stirner and Moses Hess. Mastnak compares their understanding of civil society and points out Marx's innovation that is the reduction of civil society to the sphere of the economy, which was not present in Hegel's philosophy of right. The fourth subsection provides a glimpse through the different views of various liberal, neoliberal, ordoliberal thinkers regarding the civil society as the reign of economy during the 1920s and 1930s, while also providing an account of re-assertion of the importance of the State, as viewed by Werner Sombart, Alexander Rüstov and Walter Eucken (two famous ordoliberals) in the light of the collapse of the Weimar Republic, since it was seen that the liberty of civil society = economy has led to corruption and to the rise of private economic power, while the lean liberal State was only marginal and an instrument of those who "ruled" the civil society. Also, Carl Schmitt's views regarding the relationship between the State and (civil) society are reflected upon.

The third chapter of the book analyses the rise of the civil society in Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s in the final stages of the Cold War. The rise of the civil society was parallel with the historical revisionism and the demonisation of the real-socialist systems leading to equation between socialism as such and Nazism/fascism. Mastnak focuses mostly on three countries: Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, while also occasionally taking a detour to explain the reception of certain events or publications in Slovenia (and sometimes broader Yugoslavia). He goes into detail and provides an overview of the crucial conceptualisations of civil society

in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary as well as the influence of Western ideas and theories, sketching the crucial debates and open questions between the East European dissidents, while occasionally also referring to the situation in Slovenia. In a special subsection of this chapter, Mastnak explains the crucial differences between the old and the new opposition in the socialist countries. Namely, up until the mid/late 1960s the “opposition” or the alternative was usually coming from the left, while the opposition and the dissidents, that were becoming prominent in the late 1970s and especially during the 1980s, were all coming from liberal and/or national(ist) positions. The re-discovery of civil society was based on the premise that there is a clear antagonism between the civil society and the State, while the idea behind this was that the quest for civil society was a struggle against totalitarianism, which was presumed to be based on the elimination of the distinction between civil society and the State and the supervision of the Party-State over the private and public life. This was in sharp distinction with the humanist Marxist tendency and the problem of the alienated State and the abolishment of the State, while the real existing socialism was an etatist distortion, and thus they formulated the idea of abolishment of the distinction between the State and civil society in the quest for freedom. While civil society was equated with democracy in the manner of distinction between the State and democracy, socialism was equated with Etatism, making it clear that socialism could not have anything in common with democracy, least of all with socialist democracy. Democracy was distinct from socialism – this was something

novel, because the opposition in the 1960s was actually claiming that there was no true democracy without socialism nor true socialism without democracy. Thus, the introduction of civil society into the political and social vocabulary eventually led to distancing from socialist and Marxist revisionism and to the interpretation of real-existing socialist regimes as communists and totalitarian. This opened the door for strong influences from the West, anticommunism and American hegemony.

The fourth chapter is the longest one and provides a detailed, very nuanced and comprehensive analysis of different strands and elements of the civil society in Slovenia in the 1980s. Mastnak first sketches the origins of the “alternative scene” in Slovenia as it emerged from a variety of different social movements and subcultures. Then he analyses in detail the relationship between the new social movements, the alternative, with the formal political structures and institutions (League of Communists of Slovenia and the state apparatuses), but especially the contradictory relationship with the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia. Then he explains the different debates that emerged regarding the nature of the civil society in Slovenia and its relationship with the new social movements, the relationship between civil society and politics, civil society and socialism and self-management, civil society and democracy, civil society and the national programme of one part of opposition. At the same time, others have conceptualised the civil society as a specific postmodern phenomenon.

The concluding chapter discusses the consequences and the political-economic processes, traces the convertism of many

former political officials, and argues that the civil society, once it came to power – which was a huge contradiction, since it was conceptualised as opposed to power/State – led to the specific democratisation, neoliberalisation and oligarchisation in Eastern Europe, while transforming former socialist countries into peripheral countries in the capitalist world system.

Mastnak provides a very thorough, theoretically and politically informed analysis and differentiation within the Slovenian “civil society” field, while also showing great knowledge of some of the crucial theoretical and philosophical works about the modern classics and their writings about civil society, as well as his analysis of the Eastern European works and writings and the contexts in which they originated. However, despite all the merits of this work, one also has to note a few minor shortcomings or gaps.

The most evident is the very weak connection between the theoretical and analytical parts of the book. The brief overview of the different modern conceptions of civil society from the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers to Hegel, Marx, and the brief discussion of the civil society in the works of some ordoliberalists before the outbreak of the Second World War, is useful, insightful and in some aspects innovative, but it does not entail a sketch of some crucial liberal conceptions of civil society. To invoke some of the insights either from the classical and modern liberal tradition (Locke, J. S. Mill) or from some more contemporary liberal thinkers (Kymlicka, Rawls, Gellner) would create a much more solid ground for the further analysis of the liberalisation of the civil society in Slovenia (and Eastern Europe), and would also

make the connection between the theoretical and analytical parts of the book obvious and solid.

On the other hand, what is also missing from the critical theoretical analysis is a reference to Gramsci’s conception of the civil society as an element of the integral State (together with the state/political society). Gramsci’s approach focuses on the creation and stabilisation of *hegemony* (as a specific class compromise, leadership, incorporating different ideas and norms to serve the interests of the ruling classes/social groups). By invoking Gramsci’s theory of the integral State, Mastnak could deepen and develop his theory about the civil society coming to power (in the sense that in Gramsci’s theory the civil society and State create the broader integral State). Moreover, as it turns out, the struggle for the (self-)understanding of civil society (liberal, Marxist, critical) was also the struggle for the processes that followed – the introduction of capitalist mode of production, privatisations and the incremental but steady peripherisation of Slovenia. Thus, invoking some elements of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony and its relation to the civil society would have enriched the discussion and the analytical part of the book.

*Civilna družba* provides very deep analytical and empirical insights about the constitution of the civil society in Slovenia. It is also a very peculiar and unique self-reflection and a critical analysis of the liberalisation and following neoliberalisation of the Slovenian society and State as such. Mastnak, as one of the most prominent actors within the alternative scene in the 1980s, instead of praising the 1980s and today’s civil society and liberalism,

is critical of the peripherisation of post-socialist countries after the re-introduction of capitalism and the EU/NATO accession. And these processes have their roots in the 1980s “discovery” of civil society, in the debates about the nature, role and goals of civil society and in the “rise” of civil society to power.

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Book Review

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**Desmond McNeill**  
**Fetishism and the Theory**  
**of Value: Reassessing Marx**  
**in the 21st Century**

Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2021, 341 pp.

In the book *Fetishism and the Theory of Value*, Desmond McNeill explores various aspects and interpretations of value theory developed by Karl Marx. Focusing on the qualitative, rather than the quantitative, aspect of Marx’s value theory, the author highlights the significance of Marx’s analysis of fetishism (2). The starting point of McNeill’s discussion of Marxian theory is his assertion that Marx’s work is characterized by a tension between the social and the material. Since Marx was both a historian interested in the material and an economist interested in social relations, these two aspects of Marx’s work are inextricably

bly connected. McNeill’s book, however, deals with the economic/social aspect of Marx’s work (3). The book, which McNeill describes as “a sympathetic critique” (1), comprises a short introduction and five parts – *The Concept of Fetishism*, *The Ontology of Fetishism*, *On Value and Meaning*, *The Social Relations of Production, Exchange and Consumption* and *Marx in the Twenty-First Century*.

When it comes to fetishism, it is important to emphasize that McNeill does not equate the word and the concept of fetishism. While the *word* fetishism appears in Marx’s early works, the fully developed *concept* of fetishism can be found in Marx’s mature works such as *Capital* (23). According to McNeill, the concept of fetishism “deserves to be given a central place not merely in philosophy or sociology, but in economics too” (40). Therefore, it can be said that McNeill’s approach bridges the gap between philosophical, sociological and economic approaches to interpreting Marx’s theory. If we take into account that “Marx’s analysis differs from that of most other economists (and particularly those whom he labelled ‘vulgar economists’) in stressing the social” (44), McNeill’s approach to studying Marx seems to be congruent with Marx’s approach to studying capitalism.

Referring to Marx’s famous description of commodity fetishism, McNeill states that “Exchange-value is not a material, nor a natural relation. It is a social relation: a relation between *persons* which assumes the form of a relation (albeit social) between things” (52). Therefore, the concept of value and the concept of fetishism are interrelated. The latter concept “places an emphasis on the social relations underlying