

# GLOBAL DIALOGUE

11.1

**3 issues a year in multiple languages**

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with S.M. Rodriguez

Margaret Abraham

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Possibilities

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Gabor Scheiring  
Christopher Muller  
Suresh Naidu  
Patricia Zavella  
J. Mijin Cha  
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Open Section

**> Introducing Global Dialogue's Polish Team**

MAGAZINE



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# > Editorial

**A**t the time this issue of *Global Dialogue* was being edited the US elections were one of the main topics in the media around the globe. In the meantime, we know that they have led to a post-Trump era but this does not mean that the problems witnessed by the US in the last years will not remain. In the section 'Talking Sociology' Margaret Abraham conducts an interview with the sociologist and Black Lives Matter activist S.M. Rodriguez. It gives insight into the history of resistance against racism in the US, and the intersection of social inequalities and concerns of social justice motivating this social movement.

In regard to the developments around the elections Peter Evans and Michael Burawoy organized our first symposium on the plight and possibilities in the US. The articles cover historical perspectives on US "racial capitalism" and analyze the effects of economic and political developments of the last decade, including declining welfare, challenging relations between the working class and communities of color, ecological problems and climate change as well as the disastrous effects of Trump's politics leading to the shocking January events in Washington. Facing this plight the authors also discuss what might be done to make change possible.

In our second symposium, focused on Chinese migration in Europe and organized by Fanni Beck and Pál Nyíri an overview of the history and present of the successive waves of Chinese migration to Europe is presented. The articles analyze the status of these migrants as well as the complex interethnic relations in European countries, and show how they are influenced by the political develop-

ments in China and how the COVID-19 pandemic affects their situation as well as the discourse on migrants.

Over the last years, we have been witnessing the increasing influence of far-right movements, parties and regimes for which the effects of neoliberalism, economic crises, unsolved problems of social inequalities and migration have been windows of opportunity. In the theoretical section, Walden Bello compares facets of the political programs, practices, and leadership of the far-right in the Global North and South.

Our section presenting the sociology of different regions focusses on Latin America. Esteban Torres organized a collection of articles inviting us to a voyage through social theories discussed and developed by prominent researchers, most of them active members of the working group *Teoría social y realidad latinoamericana* (Social Theory and Latin American Reality) of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO).

In the Open Section *Global Dialogue*'s Polish translation team introduces their members and thereby gives insight into the variety of our collaborators' background and research interests.

We take this opportunity to express our thanks to Christine Schickert for her most valuable work as Assistant Editor for *Global Dialogue*, and welcome Walid Ibrahim (University of Jena, Germany) as her successor. ■

**Brigitte Aulenbacher** and **Klaus Dörre**,  
editors of *Global Dialogue*

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The symposium takes a look at the **plight and possibilities in the US** after the 2020 presidential elections. The articles cover historical perspectives and analyze the effects of economic and political developments of the last decade. Facing the events that took place in Washington in January 2021 the authors also look to the future and discuss what might be done to make change possible.



This symposium presents a range of research on **Chinese migration in Europe**. While some contributions focus on migration movements in the 20th century, others deal with the significant changes in the social and economic status of Chinese immigrants in the 21st century.



In the face of today's global challenges, **Latin American sociological theory** is becoming an increasingly important point of reference. This symposium shows the originality of Latin American theorizing in all its breadth and heterogeneity, with research always starting from their local point of view on the way for global theory.



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**“While Europeans – and North Americans – took for granted their universality and saw their particularity as immediately conceptually generalizable, Latin Americans had to begin from their particularity since their universality was in principle denied”**

José Maurício Domingues

# > The Brilliance of BLM

## An Interview with Dr. S.M. Rodriguez



| S.M. Rodriguez.

**Dr. S.M. Rodriguez** is Assistant Professor of Criminology and Director, LGBTQ+ Studies at Hofstra University, Department of Sociology. They are the author of the book, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion: Transnational Organizing for LGBTI Rights in Uganda* (2019), in which Rodriguez provides a nuanced analysis of the implications of transnational organizing and international funding for local activism. Their publications include “Carceral Protectionism and the Perpetually (In)Vulnerable”; “Invisibility Matters: Queer African Organizing and Visibility Management in a Transnational Age”;

“Queer Abolitionist Alternatives to Criminalising Hate Violence” (forthcoming); and “Not Behind Bars: The Rippling Effect of Carceral Habitus and Corrective Violence on the Family and Community Life of Prison Guards” (forthcoming). Dr. Rodriguez is working on two incredibly innovative book projects: *Abolition in the Academy: Scholar-Activism and the Movement for Penal Abolition* and *Marked for Removal: Perpetual Coloniality, Gentrification, and Queer Abolitionist Praxis in New York City*. After years of community organizing with the Safe OUTside the System Collective, Rodriguez joined the Board of Directors of the Audre Lorde Project, the largest organization for and of queer people of color in the United States. Their work has been supported by various grants, awards, and fellowships, including the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Postdoctoral Fellowship (2020-21) for Abolition in the Academy and the American Sociological Association’s Minority Fellowship Program (2014-15).

Here, Dr. Rodriguez is interviewed by **Margaret Abraham**, Past President of the International Sociological Association and Senior Vice Provost and the Harry H. Wachtel Distinguished Professor at Hofstra University.

### **MA: What is Black Lives Matter?**

**SM:** When people reference Black Lives Matter, they typically refer to one of three different, but interrelated, things. It’s firstly, a single, global organization with multiple chapters in the US, UK, and Canada that began in

2013. The key goals of the movement are to combat white supremacy, end state violence against people of African descent, and build the communal power necessary to sustain an anti-racist society. Secondly, BLM is a slogan meant to manifest itself into a reality for African peoples around the world: *we exist, we matter*. Finally,

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and perhaps most often, people mean the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), which is an umbrella organization, a coalition of many aligned, racial justice organizations, most of which have existed for far longer than BLM. By that, I point to the tendency of the media, which immediately labels all anti-police brutality protests a “Black Lives Matter” event, regardless of the actual affiliations of the organizers or participants.

The brilliance of BLM is that, as a catchphrase that all anti-racists can affirm, the sentiment is able to replicate faster than viable chapters can form. Black Lives Matter is the millennial *Black is Beautiful*, or *Black Power*: not so much a centralized movement as a belief system, a prolonged cry, a collective invocation.

**MA: What are some of the continuities and changes that you see between past Black movements and the current BLM movement? What are the strategies for disruptions that have challenged the status quo?**

**SM:** There is a long and righteous history of community organizing and mutual aid in the US, by those who have existed in the margins of the state’s social services. Mutual aid requires resource sharing and reimagining resources and responsibility as an integral part of communal relations, rather than state-to-citizen relationality. Black movements have historically made demands of the state, but they have almost never imagined the state as the “be-all, end-all.” This includes the Black Panther Party’s 10 Point Program’s demand for reparations for slavery and genocide while imagining the community-led distribution of such resources. The Black Lives Matter movement similarly demands reparations and an end to various harms but doesn’t want that distributive work to fall within the purview of the state. W.E.B. Du Bois demonstrated the state’s limitations as he wrote on the Freedmen’s Bureau in *The Souls of Black Folk*. A federal institution set up specifically for the protection of Black American freedom and pursuit of paid labor in the 1870s, the Bureau quickly folded on the task because it was not committed enough to stand up to white supremacist violence (particularly, the Ku Klux Klan) and white supremacist legislative initiatives that criminalized Black life.

The historical continuities are abundant: the demands of safety, dignity, and freedom from political repression; the presence of Black women and LGBT leadership; and the presence of brutal policing, state repression, racist counter-movements, and white indemnity/impunity. The changes are also valuable. We see in certain cities, particularly in the Midwest, that often many protestors in BLM marches are white allies. Historically, these areas may just not have had much direct action. We also see the clear victimization of such white protestors by the militarized police forces and by white supremacist counter-protestors, who have actually killed white BLM allies! In

the Freedom Rides, white (many Jewish) activists were beaten for joining the Civil Rights Movement – so that aspect isn’t so different – but I’m unaware of any time in our history that we’ve seen old white men mowed down by cops, a young white woman ran over, and two white men shot and killed by a white teenager. I mean, despite the perpetuity of anti-Black harms, this is a ghastly new reality – that white allies have suffered unprecedented harms. I think this change points to an important innovation of state repression: the militarization of the police, which has occurred with not just the full, optic openness of media and social media coverage, but with a revived spirit of policing.

**MA: Can BLM transform the systemic racism in the United States? What will it take to bring structural change?**

**SM:** I think we must instead consider *what forms of change would we have to enact for Black lives to matter?* Rather than think of this as a singular organization, with just one goal, we need to think of BLM as a rallying cry. In my work, I explore Black organizers’ foci on transformative justice, anti-carceral feminism, and anti-violent organizing. Centering these as not just values, but as practices, would invite the structural change required to transform BLM from mantra to social reality.

**MA: What are the intersections of gender, race, and class in the context of Black Lives Matter?**

**SM:** BLM is a fantastic example of a movement to explicitly require intersectionality from the outset. Founded by three women of African descent, two of whom are queer, BLM was never meant to uplift the struggle of just one subset of Black Americans. Historically, movements that have fought to end police brutality have centered Black straight men and while – critics assert – Black straight men have received disproportionate attention within this movement, this is not actually reflective of the founders’ goals. Instead, I’d argue this reflects the decades of organizational memory we have that has centered Black straight men and boys. We know how to mourn Oscar Grant, and that precedent provided the format for mourning Philando Castille. We remember grieving Amadou Diallo, so we know how to grieve Alfred Olango. This axis of oppression (racialized manhood) can allow us to craft neat delineations in our narratives about responsibility, wrongdoing; to request relatively simple changes like “arrest killer cops.” When we integrate Black queer people and women, we invite additional layers of nuance that have no widely agreed-upon template, so we’re initiating a conversation that has been completely silenced in our history. This means that when social media-based consciousness-raising efforts like #SayHerName arise, there’s really no set structure for discussing prevalence, meaning, and rectification of harm. Much of the violence

that Black women and queer people face is due to the internalization of state violence and policing, and enabled by weakened (community) relationships. However, it is the lens of intersectionality that allows us to imagine not just targeted change, but transformative change. This is a major contribution of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory: when we imagine and center the needs of those further marginalized, we create interventions that are more comprehensive.

**MA: There has been much discussion and debate on defunding the police. How has BLM raised the need for criminal justice reform?**

**SM:** Propositions for social change often suffer the same pattern of discursive fates: a negative spin will receive the most attention. In this case, it's easy to focus on "taking away," on the absence, or what is called *negative change* because it sounds drastic; it inspires fear. Alternatively, the *positive politic* – that of creation – could invite wonder. The cry to "defund the police" holds so much meaning; it's a rich and nuanced proposal packed into a three-word slogan. The demand here is to *defund the police – fund our communities*: it requires both negative and positive. I don't mean this in the value-laden sense, but in the sense of absence and presence, revocation and creation. In many ways, this should be of key interest to sociologists as it rests on a proposal offered by the founding father of American sociology – W.E.B. Du Bois, in his articulation of *abolition democracy* in 1935. Du Bois's theory upheld that we cannot effect progressive, abolitionist change without integrating the act of creation. We must invest our time, energy, and resources into founding "life-affirming institutions" (Ruth Wilson Gilmore) that will take the place of our carceral institutions and structures of enslavement. This is the only way to "get rid of" without later suffering a vacuum; a new opportunity to evolve carcerality and enslavement. So how has BLM raised this need? Our contemporary social movement leaders have not only articulated what must be removed, but they have also located that which must be implemented.

**MA: How has the media portrayal of BLM affected racial justice organizing?**

**SM:** Interestingly, I find the media coverage of Black protest far more sympathetic in the age of Trump, when the white nationalist agenda is on overt display. Mainstream media has propelled a fictionalized narrative of a newly present danger – what Achille Mbembe would frame as the invention of urgency – regarding the politics of Black life and death. Despite the continuity of anti-Black and nativist state violence, previously "unjustified" demands have suddenly become reasonable.

While researching for my book, *The Economies of Queer Inclusion*, I examined how media attention can provide

a flood of financial support, without really offering much growth in understanding of the problem. The more sensational and drastic the imagery, the more support garnered. However, the support largely remains superficial and engagement tends to decline over time. Media coverage is ultimately responsible for the creation of the cause célèbre that then receives a dramatic and very temporary financial dump! Many individual donors and foundations grasp the outlet for charitable giving that best enhances their own profile. Media creates the cultural cachet and sense of current relevance. In my work, this was the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda and this type of funding flow (typhoon) actually comes with its own unintended consequences. This summer, and I can say this as someone on the Board of Directors for a racial justice organization, BLM meant racial justice initiatives were "in" – and we cannot imagine experiencing a similar funding boon than in a time when people imagine a political crisis.

**MA: How has the progressivism of BLM influenced the elections and major party politics?**

**SM:** Black progressivism, although largely left in the margins of electoral politics, has always influenced our mainstream political realities. For an historical example, we can recall the Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast Program, which became a political centerpiece in the 1960s and achieved widespread integration into US public schools in 1975. We saw a similar occurrence this year, in the Black progressive attempt to get a presidential ticket that would prioritize reparations for slavery atop four democratic socialist initiatives: universal healthcare, school debt cancellation, access to public university, and divestment from military and policing in order to invest in community resources (like daycare, public schools, wellness facilities, etc.). Again, we see that Black progressives did not receive the desired, leftist ticket, but the one Democratic candidate unwilling to converse on the possibility of reparations for the enslavement of African Americans during the presidential primary debates. Nevertheless, history has shown us, through Black political organizing and thought, that the country collectively benefits from the residuals of Black progressive demands.

**MA: Sociologists have challenged the way we think and do sociology. Who are some of the sociologists who influence your perspective on Black Lives politics and activism?**

**SM:** Sociologists have long held critiques of the "total institution" and scholar-activists rooted in this critique organize to rid our societies of these structures of cyclical labeling, surveillance, and punishment. In my current book project on abolition in the academy, these scholars all adopt the language of and identity as abolitionists.



Caribbean-led Black Lives Matter rally at Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn, NY on Sunday June 14, 2020. Credit: Margaret Abraham.

I'd be remiss not to first uplift the work of Mariame Kaba. She has been a crucial developer of abolitionist thought and practice, and her degree is in sociology. To speak of the work of sociologists who are specifically in institutions of higher education is one thing, but to hold firm the work of sociology by seeing it in practice is another. Kaba has been able to influence the trajectory of Black Lives Matter Chicago and so many contributing organizations to the Movement 4 Black Lives, including Black Youth Project 100.

Scholar-activists in the academy who greatly influence my perspective and work include Beth Richie, a founding member of INCITE!, Mimi Kim, founder of Creative Interventions,

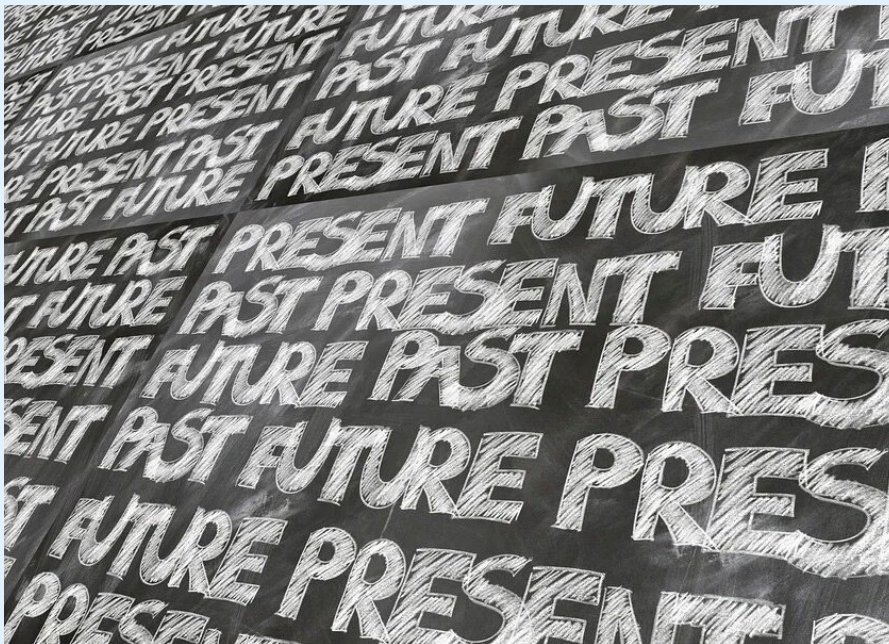
and Liat Ben-Moshe, who compels us to center disability and madness in our scholarship and activism. I think these three women are really at the forefront of intellectual innovation and engaged practice to end carceralism.

Outside of the US, I'm really inspired by the work of Vanessa Eileen Thompson in Germany and Sylvia Tamale in Uganda. Thompson explains the technologies of resistance utilized by activists and community organizers working to end anti-Black and anti-immigrant state violence in Germany and France. Tamale, a feminist activist and researcher, has committed decades of gender and sexual justice advocacy, while engaging various publics to transform cultures of violence. ■

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# > What Might be Done about the United States?

by **Peter Evans**, University of California, Berkeley, USA, and member of ISA Research Committees on Economy and Society (RC02), Labour Movements (RC44), and Social Classes and Social Movements (RC47)



While analyzing the political, social, and economical developments of the last four years in the US it is also necessary to look to the future and possibilities it may hold.  
Credit: Creative commons.

**S**ince the mid-twentieth century, the trajectory of the United States has been emblematic of the global evolution of capitalism. Is the US still a harbinger of capitalism's global evolution? If so, the failing ability of 21st-century US capitalism to sustain twentieth-century standards of well-being for its working classes, and the political ramifications of this failure, has implications for all citizens of the world.

Deciphering the origins and implications of the US's chaotic entry into the 21st-century is an analytical challenge. Five impressive efforts to take up this challenge follow. They are concise analyses, focused on specific arenas of the US political economy, probing the question of what might be done about the disturbing dysfunction of the US. While this ensemble makes no pretense of being a comprehensive overview, it is an insightful and provocative mosaic that offers a productive start on the debates that are likely to consume those who must live in (or in the shadow of) the United States as a new decade begins.

Gabor Scheiring starts our discussion with a newly recognized indicator of declining US wellbeing – the increased mortality rates resulting from “deaths of despair” among white workers without college credentials. The market-

powered destruction of working-class livelihoods and communities that drives deaths of despair has diverted working-class political grievances into support for exclusionary right-populist politics.

Deaths of despair are also a telling symptom for Christopher Muller and Suresh Naidu, but Muller and Naidu's diagnosis highlights “the social divisions produced by credential-based exclusion and exploitation” and the political gulf that follows from this exclusion. Expanding access to the college credential by substantially lowering costs may help to bridge the divide, but they see constructing effective alliances across the credential gulf as even more important. The Muller/Naidu analysis places the onus for alliance building on the educated Left, suggesting, for example, that more members of this privileged group should put their credentials at the service of “organizations that actually are accountable to working-class Americans,” such as labor unions.

Pat Zavella's article moves from the destruction of working-class lifeworlds to the persistent struggles of poor and immigrant women of color. In contrast to Scheiring's argument in which the state is primarily an accomplice to the destructive agenda of neoliberal capitalism, the state's

active repression of reproductive rights is a core threat to these women's lives and families. Yet, having the state, rather than impersonal capital, as the principal antagonist, may be conducive to organizing resistance. For Zavella, the essence of the fight for reproductive justice lies in the broad coalition of social movements, led by women of color, which won some surprising victories while resisting the conservative agenda and will be no less aggressive in confronting the Biden administration.

The transition to a low-carbon future is often treated as a technocratic problem, but Mijin Cha's article makes it clear that inclusive organizing, bringing together working-class organizations and communities of color, is again the key to success. The struggle for climate justice requires coalition building that "inextricably links quality job creation with emissions reduction" and includes communities of color that have been forced to bear the brunt of polluting fossil fuel emissions. Strategies that "silo economic and social considerations away from emissions reduction" are not only unjust but will never build political coalitions broad enough to gain traction against fossil fuel profits.

The last of the five articles, by Marcus Hunter, combines profound historical depth with a comprehensive vision of the path toward a solution. Starting from the foundational role of slavery in the formation and sustenance of US capitalism he underscores the magnitude of the transformation required to correct the racist social, cultural and economic inequities ingrained in 400 years of racial capitalism. The multidimensional program of reparations that Hunter advocates is not, however, simply a theoretical formulation. It begins with very concrete and specific proposals, such as legislation to create national Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) Commissions.

Strikingly diverse in substantive focus and analytic perspective, these five articles do possess common themes, both in terms of their diagnoses of what ails the US and in their identification of ways to move forward.

The destructive effects of Trump's policies are taken as given for these analysts. The January 2021 storming of the Capitol demonstrated Trump's ability to catalyze white working-class anger but also dramatically revealed the political cauldron that has been created by US dysfunctions. Written well before the January storming, Scheiring's article argued that, absent reversal of the havoc wreaked on working-class lives by the decades-long neoliberalization, Trumpism was likely to be a prelude to similar but even more toxic political movements.

Neither COVID vaccinations nor a new president will resolve the problems raised here. The structural roots of 21st-century US dysfunctions are the principal target of the strategies proposed by these authors, and these will persist in spite of having a new national administration in Washington. Zavella concludes that having Biden in the White House doesn't change the fact that "The future is one of struggle." Cha is convinced that the "prospects for a Green New Deal-type mobilization under a Biden-Harris Administration seem dim."

Those anxious about the future of the United States will not finish this ensemble relieved. None of these authors argue that there are ineluctable structural reasons why the solutions they propose are likely to be adopted. None of them claim that powerful political forces are converging to counter the decline of the US economy and polity. There are no reassuring threads of an optimistic teleology to be grasped by those seeking reassurance.

Yet, there are no prophets of doom here either. These analyses are not just diagnostic. They envisage an intriguing set of possibilities for promoting change. Hunter, who is focused on the deepest structural problem of the US – racism – also offers the most optimistic vision, arguing that "acknowledging and archiving the truth and achieving meaningful racial healing can unlock a transformed America." Each article identifies a set of political agents who have the potential to exert leverage on the side of progressive change. Considering national politics an unpromising arena, they focus on concrete possibilities on a smaller scale. Cha cites successful climate justice coalitions at the state level, especially where coalitions include working-class organizations. Zavella focuses directly on coalitions across gender, race and class identities as the essential core of progressive energy. For Muller and Naidu, the willingness of the educated Left to help build and sustain working-class organizations is the key. Scheiring affirms that even sociologists have a role to play by mapping "the complex causal pathways that link economic dislocation to the deaths of despair" and the mechanisms that link despair to regressive politics.

Despite focusing on distinctly different arenas, the authors identify sets of actors that overlap in ways that make victories in one arena reinforce possibilities for moving ahead in other arenas. What this assemblage provides then is an intriguing, intersecting set of plans for action. Not a blueprint for what is to be done, but a set of partial sketches of "what might be done." ■

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# > Deaths of Despair and the Health of Democracy: Challenges for Sociology

by **Gabor Scheiring**, Bocconi University, Italy, and member of ISA Research Committees on Economy and Society (RC02), Social Transformations and Sociology of Development (RC09), Sociology of Health (RC15) and Political Sociology (RC18)



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*Since the turn of the millennium the mortality of middle-aged Americans has been increasing. Three direct causes of this mortality wave are suicides, drug overdoses, and alcohol-related deaths – so-called “deaths of despair.” Credit: Creative Commons.*

**T**he coronavirus pandemic helped temporarily slow populism's rise and relieve the pressure on status quo politics, contributing to Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential race. However, Donald Trump's legacy goes beyond his White House occupancy. Trumpism – and national populism more generally – is an expression of the existential crisis of contemporary capitalism. A second national-populist wave

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and a potentially even worse version of Trumpism is inevitable if – lured by centrism and blocked by obstructing Republicans – Biden’s administration does not fix underlying social tensions and economic dislocations. Sociology can aid politics in this effort.

Populism as a mode of political leadership that tries to build direct connections to non-elites and use them against elites can have a range of valences. Sometimes it propels redistributive agendas that help dislodge the entrenched privileged. At other times it promotes reactionary, regressive agendas in which the “people” whose interests it claims to represent are a circumscribed subset of society, and the attack on “elites” carefully avoids threatening economic privilege and instead reinforces it. The current populist wave falls into the second category: a reactionary, right-wing variety of populism. *Populism* in this article refers to this.

Political scientists supply the most prevalent scholarly narratives about the current populist wave. Their forte lies in analyzing voters’ attitudes and politicians’ maneuvers. While it is clear that political tactics – breaking with the norms and institutions of established liberal democracy – are crucial to understanding populism, populist politicians do not operate in a social vacuum. Others emphasize illiberal cultural attitudes that determine the political demand for populism. However, populism is more than just racism. Writing off populist voters as racists makes liberals neglect on-the-ground party structures in working-class communities – a fatal political mistake.

In contrast to political science, sociology has so far played a peripheral role in the populism debate. Sociologists have highlighted how economic change – globalization, deindustrialization, and the shift to skill-intensive service jobs – has altered traditional electoral coalitions. These tectonic changes have undermined social democratic parties’ electoral base and propelled working-class electorates’ rightward shift. Others have shown that when the Left moves right on social and economic policy, the populist Right wins. Qualitative sociologists and ethnographers have complemented this picture by highlighting how shock therapy-inspired social disintegration and decades-long neoliberalization have wreaked havoc with everyday lifeworlds and working-class communities, thereby eroding class identity and paving the way for the nationalist mobilization of economic grievances.

However, one specific sign of capitalism’s existential crisis has so far escaped most sociologists’ attention: workers’ declining life expectancy in deindustrialized, Rust Belt areas and the accompanying deepening of health inequalities. The US offers the most shocking example of this “deaths of despair” epidemic, but other parts of the world – such as the UK and post-socialist Eastern Europe – have experienced similar increases in working-class death rates and growing health disparities.

Throughout most of the twentieth century in the US and Europe, life expectancy had been increasing, the most robust sign of the benefits brought by developments in health care, the welfare state, and economic growth. However, today the world’s most powerful economy is experiencing a completely different trend that fundamentally calls into question the functionality of the US growth model. The mortality of middle-aged white Americans has been increasing since the turn of the millennium. Black workers experienced a similar health crisis three decades ago as the first wave of mass plant closures wreaked havoc with inner-city communities. As the two Princeton economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton highlight in their book, deaths of despair killed 158,000 Americans during 2017, equivalent to a packed Boeing 737 falling from the sky each day for a year.

The three direct causes of this mortality wave in the US are suicides, drug overdoses, and alcohol-related deaths. These are what Case and Deaton call the deaths of despair. They reflect how people feel about their future and value their lives. Deaths of despair are not distributed equally in society. The increase in deaths of despair is confined to workers without a college or university degree. The social dislocation of the American working class is the most crucial background factor.

The loss of stable industrial jobs has profoundly reshaped communities and torn apart working-class culture. New jobs in manufacturing and services tend to be more precarious, with temporary work arrangements, zero-hour contracts, and jobs recast as self-employment on the rise. Ruthless corporate strategies, the absence of countervailing organized power, and a state captured by capital are central to this transformation. The towns that previously constituted the regional backbone of the blue-collar, working-class aristocracy are today homes of cascading social, economic, and health problems – homes of despair. The deindustrialization of the American Rust Belt drives the disintegration of the working class and leads to the rise of acute psychosocial stress and hopelessness. This context is a fertile breeding ground for emotional and mental disorders that often translate into other health problems and addictions over time.

Despite offering a pathbreaking inquiry into deaths of despair, the disciplinary limitations of economics constrain Case and Deaton’s analysis. Echoing the early sociological literature on adverse social consequences of deindustrialization, the authors highlight the centrality of economic dislocation as an upstream determinant of health inequalities. However, instead of unpacking the complexities of these mechanisms and drawing the necessary theoretical and policy conclusions, they stress the exceptionality of the American experience and conclude their book with a rather underwhelming set of propositions concentrating on the need for better regulation of pharmaceuticals and

“genuinely free and competitive markets” (Case and Deaton, 2020).

A few years before the onset of declining life expectancy in the US, Eastern Europe experienced a comparable mortality catastrophe, whose magnitude was unprecedented in peacetime in the developed world. Russia alone experienced 3.26 million excess deaths in 1990–99. The post-socialist mortality crisis – the topic of my PhD thesis and several subsequent journal articles – was also connected to the rapid changes that transformed Eastern Europe’s industrial and employment structure. Deindustrialization could have been responsible for one-third of the excess male deaths during the post-socialist mortality crisis in Hungary, while the economic benefits of hosting transnational corporations did not translate into better health. Parallel evidence from Russia confirms the negative psychosocial effect of economic dislocation created by deindustrialization and mass privatization. However, life expectancy has started to rise again in Eastern Europe since the second half of the 1990s. In contrast, the life expectancy of working-class American whites has been declining for twenty years.

The health of people and the health of democracy are intertwined. People left behind in regions struck by diseases of despair, and workers facing precarity and the prospect of downward mobility, have a higher tendency to support populist insurgents. Trump’s popularity in health-deprived regions of the US, the high share of Brexit votes in the unhealthiest towns in the UK hit by years of austerity, and the rising popularity of Lega Nord among workers in deindustrialized towns in Italy are cases in point.

However, political strongmen promising a better life to their voters and “taking back control” only exploit these

same people behind the scenes. Elites are the primary beneficiaries of the national-populist mutation of neoliberalism that Trump and “Brexit Boris” represent. Even though inequality undermines economic development in the long run, upward redistribution can bolster growth in the short run. Thus national populists can also attract the support of the national bourgeoisie, foreign investors, and the upper-middle class.

Populists are not the root cause of today’s multiple crises. They are reckless political entrepreneurs who exploit every structural opportunity offered by the crises generated by faulty economic structures. Sociology has great untapped potential in analyzing these underlying economic dislocations – as analyses in *Global Dialogue* showcase the benefits sociological perspectives can bring to analyzing populism.

Centrist politics and policies protecting the status quo will be insufficient to address the underlying causes of the current populist wave and fix the economic dislocations that also drive deaths of despair. The current conjuncture of demographic and democratic crises calls for profound transformations. Sociologists could have a unique role in finding these solutions by exploiting the discipline’s roots in analyzing social deaths and the social consequences of industrial change. Complementing economists and political scientists, only a sociological approach can map the complex causal pathways that link economic dislocation to the deaths of despair and shed light on the mechanisms through which ill health feeds back into politics to drive the support of populists. The health of democracy and the health of citizens depend on each other. ■

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# > Human Capitalists

by **Christopher Muller**, University of California, Berkeley, USA and **Suresh Naidu**, Columbia University, USA



Illustration by Arbu.

**T**he economic devastation wrought by COVID-19, against a background of extreme wealth and income inequality, would seem to be a perfect recipe for a revolutionary situation. Consider the most mechanical economic determinist theories of social mobilization: high structural inequality plus transitory economic shocks and weakened state capacity should translate into a crisis of the state and a potential regime change. At the very least, such theories would predict that Bernie Sanders would have won a landslide victory as the working-class masses in the United States rallied to his redistribution-focused platform.

But instead we have a continued political stalemate that likely will lead to further state paralysis. Autopsies of the 2020 election will proliferate for the foreseeable future. But in the background looms the fact that education, around the world, continues to be one of the strongest predictors of voting for the Left and indeed even of left-wing activism. How should we understand the cleavage between Piketty's Merchant Right and Brahmin Left? Does it mean that a materialist approach to political analysis needs to be abandoned? We don't think so. But it probably needs to be supplemented by an analysis more attentive to the social divisions produced by credential-based exclusion and exploitation.

Consider two points.

First, universities, at least since the 1960s, have become one of the most important venues for institutionally reproducing the ideas of the Left. Conservatives lament this fact, and as we hurtle toward climate catastrophe and nurse ourselves out of a pandemic, it is remarkable how many of them are kept up at night by lopsided campus politics. But it is indisputable that universities, along with most of the culture industry, are thoroughly captured by Democratic partisans. Nowhere is this truer than in the departments that study society: even professors of economics, widely believed to be a conservative discipline, lean Democratic at a 4:1 ratio (sociology clocks in at 44:1). And it is not just centrist Democrats, but many on the Left, who inherit their politics from college.

Second, since the 1970s, the fortunes of people who have not graduated from college have been eroding in both absolute and relative terms. The college premium steadily increased from the late 1970s through 2000. Today, even as the student debt crisis and the 2009 recession have imperiled a generation of college-educated youth, the costs of not graduating from college are unmistakable, illustrated most starkly by the startling rise in mortality among people without a BA documented by Anne Case

and Angus Deaton. Even private-sector unions, the archetypal working-class organization, have become increasingly filled with college graduates, while unionization eludes most low-wage workers.

These two points are usually discussed in isolation, but it's helpful to think about them together. When we do, we can see that universities have increasingly persuaded their graduates of the soundness of ideas like a global wealth tax or a Green New Deal at the same time that they have widened the social, economic, and rhetorical distance between them and the vast bulk of voters in our society.

This estrangement creates an impasse for any movement hoping to build a majority. The resurgence of the Left has revitalized the online public square, bringing to mainstream media outlets powerful ideas for reimagining society that would have been considered fringe even a few years ago. But while online debates between the Left and the center, or within the Left, are vital and necessary, they are also almost exclusively within-BA exchanges, exhibiting many concerns foreign to the 60 percent of people born after 1982 who do not have a college degree. Too often, the concerns and movements of these non-college graduates, organized around kitchen tables and housed in churches and community centers, are only loosely connected to the worlds of the writers who try to channel them into policy demands.

It is obvious that narrowing income and wealth inequality will require narrowing the economic gulf between those with and without a BA. But it is less obvious, and possibly more important, that the social gulf be narrowed at the same time. The task, then, is to hold hands across divides of education and build social networks between the college-educated Left and the non-college educated, turning these networks into organizations accountable to working-class leadership. How might we do this?

One strategy is to expand access to universities and lower both the financial costs and the private benefits of a college education. The university does for the Left what the military does for the Right. The Right makes this fact a reason to defund the university. We should make it a reason to demand free college for all and more public funding for higher education and basic scientific research. Because the returns to a college education depend on its scarcity, this would narrow the economic gap between people with and without a BA. But compressing the college premium and lowering the costs of attendance will still leave a sizable proportion of the population who would prefer not to go to college, and communicative rifts across the educational divide will remain.

Another strategy could be to change our rhetoric, focusing less on debating small differences with people whose politics are close to our own and focusing more on highlighting the radical implications of the commitments of people whose views appear far from our own. Surely there is a role for making our ideas more accessible and palatable to wide audiences and for pointing out connections between the ethics that attract people to service and charity and the ethics that draw them to wider spheres of political engagement and concern. But ideas, even when widely disseminated, will only get us so far. People can hear an idea or receive information and yet not be part of a social network that reflects it back to them in conversation and shared references. The Sanders messaging suffered from no lack of reach and appeal, but it took root only where organizations of immigrants, workers, and immigrant workers echoed those messages within their membership-based networks.

Thus the first two strategies likely will work only if they help to build and sustain working-class organizations. Is there a role for college-educated leftists in this effort? One might be building graduate and precarious academic as well as tech and media-worker labor unions, generating factions of intellectuals integrated into the labor movement. Another might be expanding the range and number of "house intellectuals" maintained by labor unions and other organizations so that they could pursue an intellectual life outside the university, free of professionalizing pressures and academic cant. In the past, the work of such intellectuals has often been strategic, but in the future it may increasingly be technical as well. Some might use the engineering tools they learned in college to strengthen their organizations' legal, technical, and administrative capacity. Others might use the tools of experimental social science in the service of organizing drives, much as MIT's Poverty Action Lab uses them for donor-driven development. Contemporary unions, for example, are data-driven organizations that need software infrastructure and analysis that can generally be built and performed only by people with specialized skills. This kind of work could be modeled on movement lawyering, whose principle is putting college-educated leftists to work for organizations run by the non-credentialed.

Likely a mix of these three strategies will be necessary for the college-educated Left to transcend its class interest: fighting to expand access to college, changing rhetoric and culture on the Left to be more inclusive of a wide variety of discursive backgrounds (perhaps by enforcing transparent norms of mutual respect), and abandoning the foundation, governmental, and donor-driven spaces it occupies for organizations that actually are accountable to working-class Americans. ■

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# > The Future of Reproductive Justice in the US

by **Patricia Zavella**, University of California, Santa Cruz, USA



One of many rallies held all over the US during the Trump administration to protest and reject abortion bans and restrictions. Credit: flickr. Some rights reserved.

**E**fforts at reproductive governance that monitor and control women's reproductive behaviors were central to Trump's policies, buttressed by anti-abortion rhetoric designed to appease his base, especially evangelicals. The attacks on reproductive justice shared political and ideological foundations with parallel attacks on immigrants. Trump pushed an unprecedented agenda of legal violence by framing immigration as a threat to national security, the economy, and the identity of the United States and by promulgating policies and discourse that restricted immigration of the "undeserving."

Reproductive and immigration policies were linked by the fact that women of color were the principal targets of both. The massive numbers of deaths that resulted from Trump's mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic fit the same pattern. People of color and immigrants, who had no choice but to work in risky frontline jobs and reside in crowded housing, were disproportionately victims of the failure to control the pandemic.

A key element of the attack on reproductive justice was the effort to nullify the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which had expanded women's access to reproductive health services through preventative care that included contraception, cancer screening, and prenatal care. While Trump did not succeed in nullifying the Affordable Care Act, many of his efforts to impede women's right to reproductive health care were successful. His administration's successes in-

cluded defunding Title X, which provides health services to 43 million low-income women in the US and abroad, directing funding for teen pregnancy prevention to programs that use ineffective abstinence-only instruction, allowing health care practitioners to discriminate against LGBTQ patients, and appointing almost 200 lower-court judges and three Supreme Court justices who will put women's access to abortion in jeopardy.

The administration's parallel efforts to attack immigrants of color also achieved alarming success. Trump's unprecedented restrictive agenda on immigration demonized Latinos and included over 400 policy changes: it banned travel for people from predominantly Muslim nations, reduced refugee admissions to the lowest since 1980, ended Temporary Protected Status for 400,000 immigrants from ten countries, made qualifying for legal permanent residence or citizenship more difficult, prevented migrants from filing asylum applications unless entering at an official border crossing, removed violence (domestic and gang) as the basis for asylum, "metered" asylum petitioners by forcing them to remain in Mexico until called, and expanded regulations that limited immigrants' ability to qualify for benefits such as food stamps. Under a "zero-tolerance" policy, Trump's administration separated thousands of children from their parents, allowed detention conditions that led to neglect, abuse, and deaths, especially for minors and trans migrants, and deported migrants, which exposed them to COVID-19

and other life-threatening risks. Immigrant women were subject to forced sterilizations and bureaucratic practices that criminalized abortion while in detention.

For low-income women, and women of color in particular, the combination of anti-reproductive justice and anti-immigrant policies had devastating effects. These policies have empowered states hostile toward abortion rights, where six in ten US women live. Increasing maternal mortality rates for Black and indigenous women were a particularly disturbing metric of the effects of attacks on reproductive justice. At the same time, unauthorized women feared seeking basic health care services such as prenatal care or contraception and public benefits such as food stamps, while LGBTQ people faced discrimination in health care settings.

Women, especially women of color, have resisted these attacks. They have agitated against Trump's multifaceted agenda of targeting the most vulnerable. A broad array of advocacy groups, often working in coalitions, challenged retrograde policies and practices and pushed for progressive legislation to reestablish and protect everyone's sexual and reproductive health and rights. These coalitions will continue once a new administration takes power in Washington. They plan to monitor and pressure the Biden administration to redress long-standing injustices with the same determination that they fought against Trump's initiatives.

With indications from Supreme Court justices that the ACA may not be nullified, the Biden administration must work to close loopholes in its contraceptive coverage guarantee, restore anti-discrimination protections, reverse the rule that allows refusal of care for LGBTQ patients, repair the Title X program, including dramatically increasing its funding, remove abstinence-only teen pregnancy prevention programs, and encourage LGBTQ-inclusivity.

The Biden administration should condemn anti-abortion violence and demonstrate its commitment to abortion rights and access by rescinding the executive order that reinforces the Hyde Amendment banning insurance coverage of abortion for millions who obtain health coverage through federal programs. Biden should support legislation that reverses the Hyde Amendment and expands Medicaid. He should expand telehealth and revise Food and Drug Administration restrictions that limit access to demonstratively safe medication abortions. Declaring racism as a public health crisis would set a new tone for politics about health care access and healthy living/working conditions.

On the immigration front, Biden has indicated plans to reverse many of Trump's policies. His appointment of Alejandro Mayorkas, a Cuban immigrant who led imple-

mentation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, to head the Department of Homeland Security and the closure of a detention facility, signals a reversal of legal violence and xenophobia. However, his appointment of Cecilia Muñoz to his transition team is worrisome, since she defended separating families during the Obama administration. For Biden to end family separations and reopen the border for asylum seekers, his attorney general would need to reverse decisions by the Justice Department that limit the independence of immigration judges. Appointing more judges to end the backlog of immigration cases is also an essential part of delivering justice to immigrants. Just as attacks on reproductive justice paralleled attacks on immigrants, pro-immigrant policies would support reproductive justice. An immigrant-friendly administration would facilitate immigrant women's access to reproductive health care services and public benefits while enhancing their sense of belonging. Successes on both fronts will depend fundamentally on the same social movements that resisted Trump.

The social movement devoted to reproductive justice is led by women of color working on behalf of marginalized people – immigrants, the poor, LGBTQ folks, youth, the disabled, et cetera. Working with a holistic framework that melds intersectionality and human rights, this movement advocates for structural change that links sexual and reproductive rights to policies that decrease social, economic, and environmental disparities experienced by those with low incomes. The mission of the reproductive justice movement is to promote women's right to bear children free from coercion or abuse, terminate their pregnancies without obstacles or judgment, and raise their children in healthy environments as well as the right to bodily autonomy and gender self-identification. Working in over 30 nonprofit organizations across the country since the 1990s, this movement also engages in grassroots organizing to politically socialize and mobilize constituencies and in culture-shift work that reframes volatile issues through positive cultural representations and honors secular spiritual traditions. Organizations conduct primary research, develop targeted campaigns to educate and empower women, bring lawsuits, pass progressive legislation, and present their findings to the United Nations, and they have had remarkable successes. Reproductive justice organizations work in coalition with those providing reproductive health services and those working on policy advocacy for reproductive and civil rights.

Regardless of whether their focus is on reproductive justice, immigrant rights, LGBTQ rights, or women's rights, activists will continue pushing the Biden administration on behalf of sexual and reproductive rights. The future is one of struggle. ■

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# > The Fight for Climate Justice

## and the Biden-Harris Administration

by **J. Mijin Cha**, Occidental College, USA



A graffiti calling attention to the necessity to address the climate crisis. Credit: flickr. Some rights reserved.

**A** second Trump administration would have guaranteed catastrophic climate change, but the prospects for a Green New Deal-type mobilization under a Biden-Harris administration seem dim. President-elect Biden's commitment to climate action is more aggressive than any previous administration's, to be clear, but the vision and ambition of the Green New Deal (GND) are missing, not to mention that contending with a likely hostile Senate will severely limit the new administration. If the prospects of a federal GND seem unlikely, the question then becomes, can state and local efforts reach the scale necessary to realize an equitable and just low-carbon transition? State-level climate initiatives can provide a path to a just low-carbon transition but only if social and economic justice concerns are integrated into climate policy.

Although conservatives [weaponized the Green New Deal](#) as coercive governmental control, the GND is not a detailed, prescriptive article of legislation. Rather, it is a nonbinding resolution calling on the federal government to adopt an ambitious, Keynesian program that addresses the dual crises of inequality and climate change within a ten-year time frame. The ten-year time frame aligns with expert consen-

sus that dramatic reductions in greenhouse gases must occur by 2029 to stave off the worst impacts from climate change. By understanding that climate change and inequality are linked, the vision of the GND expands beyond the narrow, technocratic framework of emissions reductions. Understanding and addressing people's material conditions integrates climate change into social and economic considerations, rather than approaching climate change as a separate and distinct challenge.

The integration of social and economic considerations is a much-needed development for climate change advocacy. Moving from technocratic solutions, such as the past myopic focuses on a carbon tax or a cap-and-trade program, climate advocates across the political spectrum have [largely converged on three guiding principles](#) for climate action that integrate social and economic concerns into climate policy. Referred to as "Standards, Investment, and Justice," the common thread among different climate advocacy efforts is a call for zero or net-zero emissions, large-scale public investment in low-carbon sectors and infrastructure, and social and economic justice concerns – creating good, union jobs, transitioning fossil fuel workers and communities, and protecting mar-

ginalized communities that will be hit first and worst by the impacts of climate change.

Given that President-elect Biden announced climate change as [one of the transition priority issues](#) and appointed a presidential envoy for climate change, there is reason to believe climate change will indeed be a priority for the new Biden-Harris administration. However, while there is a sense of relief to have an administration that believes in climate change, the fight for a just low-carbon transition becomes more difficult in many ways because the social and economic considerations – which are what ensures a “just” transition – are the most vulnerable to being removed by a politically moderate administration and a hostile Republican Senate. The [immediate post-election attack by moderate Democrats](#) on progressive issues, such as Medicare for All and defunding the police, indicates that racial and economic justice concerns will not have the strong support necessary to advance through a hostile Senate.

With federal action to ensure a just low-carbon future seeming uncertain, at best, attention shifts to the state level for the push toward an equitable low-carbon transition. In fact, even before the Trump administration, states were leading the way on implementing ambitious climate policies. However, as at the federal level, whether these climate policies are just will depend on policy creation and implementation. When California adopted a cap-and-trade program, environmental justice advocates [sued to stop the program](#) because of the negative impact cap and trade would have on environmental justice communities. The lawsuits were ultimately unsuccessful, and the organizations that brought the suits received considerable backlash from traditional environmental organizations. A recent evaluation of the cap-and-trade program found that the environmental justice concerns were well founded and that [localized pollution had increased](#) in vulnerable communities since cap and trade was implemented. Moreover, California is [not on track](#) to meet its greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, despite the promised goals of cap and trade.

In contrast, New York State passed the [most ambitious climate policy](#) in the country, and fundamental to its success was a broad-based, multi-issue coalition that centered equity provisions. Rather than focus only on emissions reductions, the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act prioritizes investment in vulnerable communities, and the entire climate bill was also contingent upon a [companion bill also passing](#) that created a permanent environmental justice advisory board, among other provisions. The linking of justice and climate resulted in ambitious and equitable climate policy.

State-based climate jobs efforts also provide models for a just low-carbon transition. The fundamental ethos behind these efforts is that the dual crises of inequality and climate must be addressed simultaneously. Replacing fossil fuel jobs, which tend to be higher paying and more likely union, with low-wage, low-quality renewable energy jobs may reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but it is not a just transition. And the failure of past transitions to support workers and communities, such as deindustrialization, make fossil fuel workers all the more resistant to another forced transition. State-level initiatives, such as [Labor Leading on Climate](#) and the [Climate Jobs National Resource Center](#), engage state and local labor unions to advance pro-worker, pro-climate policies that inextricably link quality job creation with emissions reduction. These efforts are particularly effective in that they can harness the political power of labor unions, as evidenced by Climate Jobs New York’s [successes](#), including a pledge of \$1.5 billion to create 40,000 climate jobs.

With equity and justice provisions at risk of being pushed aside in a Biden-Harris administration, state-level efforts must lead the way in advancing a just transition. Ultimately, given the scale and scope of transitioning away from fossil fuels, addressing the climate crisis requires national and international efforts. However, climate policy cannot silo economic and social considerations away from emissions reduction. State-level efforts can provide a road map for how to advance a just transition and further cement the integration of inequality, social injustice, and climate. ■

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# > Radical Reparations

by **Marcus Anthony Hunter**, UCLA, USA

**F**or more than four hundred years, four thousand months, and two hundred million minutes, the United States of America has been living with and in the sin of slavery. Abolished yet alive, as many activists and scholars have demonstrated, slavery in one form or another has persisted and lingered like an untreated virus, constantly spreading and infecting even as many claim its death occurred back when the ink dried on Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. From the prison industrial complex, to the Tuskegee experiment, to chain gangs, to the wars on crime, poverty, and drugs, Black people's lives remain vulnerable and unprotected by the very government that abolished the institution and practice of slavery.

American slavery and a broader European slave trade born of greed, racism, rape, and colonization saw to it that Black people's humanity was defamed, violated, and subverted. From their homes in Africa and the West African ports of no return, hundreds of thousands of Black people were carried across the Atlantic Ocean through the brutal Middle Passage to lands occupied by indigenous peoples across the Americas and the Caribbean. They would die in transport or in the fields of the global South or basements of the global North. Many would die at an early age, but not before they could procreate the next generation of enslaved Black people.

Black people were owned, their bodies and families taken from them, their souls devastated as a matter of daily life. All the while their labor was demanded and provided free of charge. This is the racial history and truth of human violation and suffering that we have inherited. And as with any inheritance, we have been bequeathed responsibilities, among them rectifying certain debts. These accumulated and persistent violations, injuries and debts, compensation commonly known as *reparations*, remain unpaid and unreconciled. In the interim, Black people have effectively been left to their own devices with little state support, though they have been subjected to deeply embedded anti-Black state surveillance.

Nearly half a millennium later it would appear that it is impossible to precisely calculate damages and appro-

priately pay affected citizens and their families. Who gets paid? How are they paid? Why are they paid? If all the slave owners are long dead, then who and what parties do we hold accountable? These are the questions that have animated the reparations debate and attempts to actualize and effectuate repair in the United States since 1865.

In recent years, persuasive cases have been made for reparations across the political spectrum. Whether from conservative or progressive advocates, in almost every case reparations are mistakenly conflated with money. Money-based or *economic reparations* are important, though they cannot fully address all that is required to reach some semblance of repair. Through the continued and repeated emphasis on an economic reparations framework, we are led to believe that the death and devastation slavery produced can be summed up in and through a blank check awaiting figures determined by policy makers, researchers, and litigators. But do souls and lives and human bodies have a fixed market rate, an adequate monetary assessment that if paid makes all parties involved whole? Is the value of human life simply a matter of dollars and cents? Key answers to these questions require staunch adherence to a belief that Black people's humanity is valuable and also beyond value. Therefore, it is necessary that we radically reframe reparations to determine all that is due: the true costs and debts cannot be neatly monetized.

Our unsorted and collective racial history and trauma must be confronted and healed if we are to transform the United States into a freer, safer, and more just society. There are piles of debts to reconcile. There are piles of violations to mitigate and redress. There are piles of unresolved issues of racial equality and racial equity to remedy. These piles reflect the seven types of reparations key to a global and national healing and reconstruction heretofore unseen and desperately needed:

- **Political reparations:** restorative and reparative historically informed advocacy transforming government and political representation and participation.
- **Intellectual reparations:** the purposeful and public recognition and acknowledgment of the creations, inventions, and ideas of formerly enslaved people and their descendants.

**“Our unsorted and collective racial history and trauma must be confronted and healed if we are to transform the United States into a freer, safer, and more just society”**

- **Legal reparations:** restorative justice and racial equity established and authorized in laws and policies.
- **Economic reparations:** pecuniary and/or monetary assistance, subsidy, restitution and debt relief.
- **Social reparations:** restoration and repair of the social contract to end racism and mindsets premised on racial and ethnic hierarchy, thus affirming the dignity of human beings.
- **Spatial reparations:** a restorative and reparative geography of socioeconomic and political opportunity, particularly for those displaced and dispossessed by American slavery and their descendants.
- **Spiritual reparations:** the purposeful and intentional recognition, representation, and recovery of the religious and spiritual cosmologies, practices, and beliefs harmed and lost in the triangle slave trade and American slavery.

These seven forms of reparations must be central to the quest in the United States and abroad to end racial inequity and heal from the sins and persistence of slavery, the slave trade, a global economy premised on enslavement, and the varied and distorted cultural mindsets they have authorized and circulated. Black people did not earn slavery. No human deserves to live within and under such a brutal regime of inhumanity. Black people along with their indigenous and Native American counterparts have, however, earned relief, repair, and a refund from the global, federal, regional, and local governmental bodies and agencies that have failed them, all the while taking tax money from them for centuries.

To achieve this critical shift, truth, racial healing, and transformation are integral. Such a pathway is consistent with and complementary to existing calls for reparations for

African Americans long heralded by Queen Mother Audley Moore and former congressman John Conyers and now advanced by Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee in H.R. 40, a bill that would establish the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act. Through the leadership of Congresswoman Barbara Lee and Senator Cory Booker, there is also currently a call for the creation of national Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) commission, which I envision as the predicate for sustainable national, local, and regional Archives for Racial and Cultural Healing (ARCH).

The United States must seize this historic opportunity to achieve racial equity and racial healing in order to radically transform our society into one where the false notion of human hierarchy is finally obliterated. If this project is taken up seriously as an executive action accompanying legislative action, particularly within the new Biden-Harris administration, the United States can emerge on the global stage as a compelling example of how acknowledging and archiving the truth and achieving meaningful racial healing can create a transformed America where all people are treated fairly, are provided meaningful access, and receive first-class citizenship, thus preventing and mitigating future harms. If we intentionally and with urgency collectively establish dedicated public-private funding endeavors, national and local archives for racial and cultural healing, TRHT commissions, and implementable and targeted reparations policies, we can ensure that the dehumanization that the European slave trade bequeathed will finally end and we can embark on the new beginning we all deserve. The truth holds the key to racial healing, transformation, and our mutual and future prosperity. ■

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# > The Changing Place

## of the Chinese in Europe

by **Fanni Beck**, Central European University, Hungary, and **Pál Nyíri**, Vrije University Amsterdam, Netherlands

In 1998, an [edited volume on the Chinese in Europe](#) identified several successive waves of ethnic Chinese immigration to Europe: small traders from Zhejiang Province in the early twentieth century; colonial migrants from Hong Kong and adjacent areas in the mid-twentieth century; postcolonial migrants from Southeast Asia after decolonization and the Vietnam War; and traders and labor migrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) after its reopening to the world in the 1980s. These waves created distinct sociolinguistic groups with little communication across group boundaries but extensive links across countries. The socioeconomic position of these groups at the end of the twentieth century remained relatively low, although it differed significantly between Northwestern Europe, where they were mostly occupied in the catering trade; Southern Europe, where they worked in small garment workshops; and Eastern Europe, where they imported and sold consumer goods at markets and small shops.

In the new century, the sociodemographic composition and socioeconomic status of ethnic Chinese in Europe has undergone fundamental shifts. This symposium addresses some of these. To begin with, a new, largely upwardly mobile generation of local-born Chinese has come of age. This generation, as Chuang, Le Bail, and Tran document, is more sensitive to discrimination and receptive to liberal anti-racist discourses but finds its career ambitions frustrated by the slowdown of growth in Europe while opportunities in China beckon. This [sometimes results in migration to China](#), but more often in a sustained transnational life course. While migration to Europe was in the past imagined as a shortcut to social mobility in China, the directionality of such moves is more complex today.

Dramatic shifts in the global political economy are also reflected in the nature of new migrations from China to Europe. These are no longer dominated by small traders

and manual workers – such positions in Chinese-owned restaurants and shops are increasingly taken up by other immigrant groups – although a new form of state-directed labor migration is emerging connected to Chinese-financed infrastructure projects in Southeastern Europe. Instead, students, expatriate managers accompanying the overseas expansion of PRC capital, and middle-class lifestyle migrants take up increasingly central positions in these flows, as documented in the contributions by Thøgersen, and Beck, Knyihár, and Szabó. As a result, earlier sociolinguistic divisions among the Chinese in Europe are complicated and increasingly overwritten by class stratification.

The position of the Chinese in European societies is changing not only due to the “integration” and claims-making of the second and third generation and the higher socioeconomic status of new immigrants but also to shifting geopolitics, in which China is an object of both envy and fear. As relations between the European Union and China turn increasingly hostile, the Chinese government is becoming more active in reaching out to ethnic Chinese in Europe as potential lobbyists on its behalf. Such efforts are not new, but they are amplified by the new presence of Chinese social media in Europe and made more persuasive by [China's apparent success in fighting the coronavirus pandemic](#). One effect is a rising national confidence that makes Chinese question the logic of ethnic hierarchies that continue to marginalize them, as Deng's contribution shows. At the same time, in European states that foster friendly relationships with China (Serbia and Hungary), it is not clear that the local Chinese directly benefit (see contributions by Gledić, and Beck, Knyihár and Szabó).

The coronavirus pandemic has thrown the shifting position of the Chinese in Europe into sharp relief. Some were summoned to serve as props in China's face-mask diplomacy. Many encountered verbal or physical abuse as previously dormant racist or xenophobic attitudes combined

with heightened political suspicions found an outlet on account of “the Chinese virus.” As the tide of the pandemic turned, those seeking safety in China were met with a reluctant government that posed ever mounting financial obstacles to those who wished to return and a suspicious populace that accused them of being not only contaminated but also disloyal. But, as Bofulin shows, the very transnational mobility that is normally so common among the Chinese in Europe also elicited suspicion and recriminations among fellow Chinese migrants eager to pinpoint culprits responsible for spreading the contagion.

Today, such panic is amplified by social media. If, in the late 1990s, Chinese media in Europe consisted of local newspapers following different political orientations and fledgling satellite television, today it is dominated by China-based social media platforms such as WeChat, subjected to censorship that amplifies the Chinese government’s preferred views and popular nationalism while suppressing alternative perspectives. This online sphere

is [essential as a mobilization tool](#), but it coexists with platforms such as Facebook and Twitter used as bridges to European public opinion. While local-born Chinese activists in France, inspired by the heightened attention to racism triggered by the Black Lives Matter movement, use Facebook to seek allies among other minorities, Chinese entrepreneurs in Italy create their own racial hierarchies, and middle-class Chinese in Hungary latch on to a resurgent ideal of a white Europe, which, propagated by the government there, echoes [popular racial theories circulating on WeChat](#). If the former protest discrimination by appealing to antiracist, anti-elite solidarity, the latter do so in the name of a racial and class order whose pinnacle is shared by European and Asian elites.

In order to identify and analyze shifting external and internal boundaries and hierarchies that mark Europe’s Chinese, contributors to this symposium<sup>1</sup> ground their studies in actual spaces in which interethnic relations take form, from boarding schools to bars. ■

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1. The idea of this symposium arose from the workshop “Interethnic relations: Chinese migrants and their European host societies” held by the [China in Europe Research Network - CHERN](#) in Budapest on 16 October 2020 and supported by the [COST Association](#).

# > From Silence to Action:

## The Chinese in France

by **Ya-Han Chuang**, Institut national d'études démographiques (INED), France, **Emilie Tran**, Hong Kong Baptist University, and **Hélène Le Bail**, CNRS, CERI-Sciences Po Paris, France



*French-born Asians demonstrating in Paris against anti-Asian racial injustice.  
Credit: Camille Millerand.*

**A**s in other Western European countries like the UK and the Netherlands, the history of Chinese communities in France dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. The early presence of the Chinese is linked to three main factors: colonization, the recruitment of Chinese laborers during World War I, and the sojourn of students in the interwar period. This early mobility had an impact on recent waves of migration: due to the renewal of former migration networks after 1978, Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province is nowadays the principal place of origin of Chinese migrants and their descendants in France. Furthermore, one of the legacies of French colonization is the presence of overseas Chinese from Southeast Asia who arrived as refugees from Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos in the 1970s and 1980s. Since the turn of the century, the composition of the ethnic Chinese population in France has become more diverse in terms of places of origin, migration routes, and class. France has become the destination for a large number of migrants [from northern China](#), especially from places hit by massive layoffs due to the transition from a planned

to a market economy in the 1990s. Generally speaking, the primary legal channel of entry into the European Union remains the [student visa](#). In France, [Chinese study-abroad students](#) are the second largest group of foreign students (9%) after the Moroccans.

France has one of the largest Chinese diasporic populations in Europe (estimated at around 400,000 Chinese immigrants and descendants, although France has no official ethnic statistics); among resident foreigners, citizens from the People's Republic of China (PRC) are the [fifth largest group](#). Not only are they diverse in terms of education, employment, and economic status (rich investors, transnational traders, professionals, students, entrepreneurs, and workers), but they are also diverse in terms of generations, mobility, and level of participation in French society. Against this diversity are some shared features, such as the cooperation between ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia and migrants from the People's Republic of China (mainly Wenzhou) within the diasporic entrepreneurial sphere, and, more recently, the rise of collective actions to denounce safety issues and everyday racism.

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## > Collective action against racism

The Chinese community in Paris and its suburbs have been victims of theft and petty crime. Not only are the Chinese thought to be wealthy – due to the concentration of Chinese business and celebrations, including lavish wedding banquets, in multiethnic socio-economically deprived neighborhoods – they are also more vulnerable because of their reluctance to seek police assistance after being assaulted and robbed. For undocumented immigrants and petty entrepreneurs alike, precarious status and indifference towards French politics had historically made [them reluctant to engage in mobilization](#).

However, in the past decade, amid mounting security concerns and incidents, the Chinese community in Paris, once known as a silent or even *model minority*, hardworking and keeping a low profile, has organized no fewer than five massive demonstrations to demand police protection. At times they have been supported by the Chinese embassy on the grounds of “[protecting nationals abroad](#)”, a priority of the Chinese government since 2012 as a way of projecting its power wherever its citizens’ interests are at stake. The five instances of collective action differ in their pattern of mobilization: three were massive street demonstrations; one was an association of entrepreneurs turned into a (failed) pressure group; and the last one was a combination of street riots and peaceful rallies. The mobilizations usually took place to highlight the lack of security experienced by Chinese residents and merchants in a specific neighborhood, and made common demands: increasing the number of police patrols in the neighborhood; strengthening the punishment for law offenders; and facilitating the procedure to allow Chinese victims to lodge complaints with the police.

[The 2016 street protest that followed the murder of a Chinese worker in a suburb of Paris](#) marked a turning point, with the second generation stepping up in a more active role. [French-born ethnic Chinese reframed the claims](#) to emphasize the structural racism that underlies the violence targeting ethnic Chinese or other Asians. While Chinese activism and pan-Asian social movements have been studied for a long time in North America or Australia, it is a new research focus in Europe. In the French case, one can underline three main kinds of actions launched by French

Chinese, all of them related to stereotyped representations and the quest for recognition: (1) the collection and transmission of a collective memory; (2) mobilization against targeted violence; and (3) [cultural activism](#) to unpack stereotyped representations of Asians and modify these representations.

To understand the recent actions by local-born French Chinese, it is necessary to go back to the 2000s when online social networking started to spread, offering a venue for the transformation of individual experiences into collective experience. In particular, much was shared about experiences of common microaggressions and covert forms of racist insults. French Chinese started to create forums and discussion groups – especially on Facebook, and later on WeChat and Twitter – where they could share their experiences mainly in French, sometimes mixed with Chinese or other Asian languages.

The “cultural activism” that developed after 2016 also mainly uses online tools such as short videos, blogs, YouTube channels, web series, and podcasts, allowing new opportunities for encounters among French-born Asians from the artistic and media spheres. Since 2016, many have contributed to constructing a collective identity and advocating against anti-Asian racism in France. Some try to bridge their actions with other minorities’ claims (such as Grace Ly’s podcast, [Kiffe ta race](#), created with well-known Afro-feminist Rokhaya Diallo; or the participation of Asian French in the Black Lives Matter protests) trying to neutralize inter-ethnic tensions. Other cross ethno-racial issues with gender issues: deconstructing the erotization of Asian women, as well as the desexualization of Asian men.

In 2020, COVID-19 provided China with a unique opportunity to stage an international public diplomacy campaign, mobilizing the support of the overseas Chinese to convey what it calls the “real China story.” It remains to be seen whether and to what extent the PRC seeks to exploit the recent wave of Chinese ethnic activism against the anti-Asian racism sparked by the COVID-19 outbreak. Even more interesting would be to compare how ethnic Chinese from the first, second, and third generations react to the motherland’s transnational outreach and mobilization attempts. ■

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# > Chinese Students in Europe

by **Stig Thøgersen**, Aarhus University, Denmark



Chinese student on a campus in Europe.  
Credit: Creative Commons.

In 1978, Deng Xiaoping announced that China would send from 3,000 to 4,000 students abroad every year to break the country's scientific isolation and speed up its modernization process. His plan seemed ambitious at the time but he can hardly have imagined the flood wave he started. Today China is by far the largest source of internationally mobile students. According to [UNESCO statistics](#), almost one million Chinese students are enrolled in tertiary education institutions abroad, their tuition fees are a considerable source of income for many universities, and they have become a significant component of the Chinese presence around the world.

European countries are receiving their share of this massive exodus. The UK hosts the largest number, over 107,000, surpassed globally only by the US and Australia. This is not surprising considering that English is the dominant foreign language in the Chinese education system. Other larger European countries with highly ranked universities also attract considerable numbers, such as Germany with over 30,000 students, France with almost 24,000, and Italy with over 15,000. Even smaller European countries such as Sweden, Ireland, Hungary, and Switzerland now each host around 2,000 Chinese students. Scholarships from mainland European governments, low tuition fees compared to the US and UK, and the opportunity of visiting several countries on a Schengen visa all play a role in attracting students to

non-English speaking countries. Many are also attracted to European culture and see particularly France and Italy as romantic places with attractive lifestyles.

## > The changing profile of students in recent decades

Many things have changed since the first post-Mao students came to Europe in 1978. First, what started as a strategic maneuver carefully controlled by the Chinese state is now driven primarily by the individual ambitions of students and their families with [90% of Chinese international students being self-funded](#). This has created a highly commercialized market for international education where many factors influence students' choice of destination: the [university's rankings and prestige](#), the amount of tuition fees and living expenses, the possibility of receiving host country grants, the imagined level of social safety, and the host country's general reputation all play a role in an intricate game where [Chinese private educational agents](#) have created a lucrative business by guiding students and their families through difficult decisions and often complicated enrollment and visa application procedures.

Second, studying abroad is no longer necessarily Chinese students' top priority. Right up to around year 2000, most students had [flexible citizenship in the developed world](#) as

their highest goal, but today many consider it more attractive to enter one of China's own top universities. The social prestige associated with a foreign degree has dropped significantly, unless it is from a top-level university with a well-known brand name, and Chinese media reports about foreign "diploma mills" and low-quality programs abound. However, the Chinese higher education system is highly stratified, with admission controlled by a national entrance examination, the much-feared *gaokao*, so rather than going to a second- or third-rate Chinese university that can only offer meager career prospects, many middle-class students and their families will still look for education opportunities abroad.

Third, while students earlier saw studying abroad as the natural starting point for a more permanent migration process, it is now more often seen as a step in a domestic career. During the 1980s and particularly in the aftermath of the suppression in June 1989 of the democracy movement, few young Chinese with foreign diplomas would even consider returning home. This has changed dramatically in the twenty-first century due to a shrinking European job market, increasing salaries and career opportunities in China, and [a series of Chinese state policies](#) encouraging return migration after graduation. Although the Chinese state no longer makes detailed plans about who should study what abroad, it thus still counts on brain circulation to promote national development. Finally, Chinese educational migrants are now considerably younger than before. Undergraduates outnumber graduate students and many families even send their children abroad for high school to prepare them, culturally and academically, for studying at a foreign university.

Most of the early research on Chinese educational migrants focused on the problems they posed to Western teachers who complained that they were [too silent in the classroom, sticking together in ethnic enclaves, and having an instrumental attitude to education](#). These problems are no doubt still felt, but recent research shows students' experiences in a much broader light. Against the background

of the increasing individualization of Chinese society, it has become clear that students see their studies abroad as "[an emotional journey of identity change and transformation](#)," a life-changing experience of personal maturation that will broaden their horizon and make them more competent, not only professionally but also more generally as citizens of the contemporary world. Like their Western contemporaries, young Chinese who can afford it [combine their studies with extensive travels](#) in order to dig deeper into foreign cultures and test their own ability to survive and thrive in different social and cultural contexts. This also means that while many students still focus on the "hard" sciences and business studies, we now see more students entering "softer" social science and humanities programs, knowing well that they do not necessarily lead to a secure position on the Chinese or European job markets.

The many educational migrants have changed the composition of the Chinese population in Europe, but we know relatively little about how students interact with Chinese diasporas. A [French study](#) shows that while students formed strong co-national relationships among themselves, interaction with established Chinese communities was very limited. However, a [study of a UK city](#) shows more interaction and demonstrates the potential importance of Chinese university students for the further development of Chinese diasporas.

The number of Chinese students entering European universities has been consistently growing for decades but two recent trends leave the future less predictable. The 2020 pandemic has temporarily blocked most educational exchanges and will probably also do so in 2021, as the Chinese for a long period will see Europe as a hotspot for the virus. Furthermore, the increasingly tense relations between the West and China have led to a [more negative view of China in Europe](#) and to perceptions of Chinese students as a potential security risk. In this way, international politics may affect future educational migration between Europe and China. ■

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# > Chinese “Golden Visa” Migrants in Budapest

by **Fanni Beck**, Central European University, Hungary, **Eszter Knyihár**, Eötvös Lorand University, Hungary, and **Linda Szabó**, Periféria Policy and Research Center, Hungary

**W**ith China’s changing position in global capitalism and the reconfiguration of its social structures, an increasing number of urban middle- and upper-class families are moving to a select few countries across the globe. Surveys indicate that this “[exodus of the wealthy](#)” is motivated by postmaterialist concerns rather than by aspirations for further accumulation. They constitute an emerging market for the “golden visa” programs launched by countries to attract foreign capital by [selling residency and citizenship](#). In recent years many of these Chinese “golden visa migrants” have started to favor East and Central European countries where governments have been eager to welcome them with cheaper immigration schemes.

## > Hungary’s “golden visa” program

Hungary’s “golden visa” program was one of the most welcoming offers to cater to this newly emerging market: between 2013 and 2017, when the program was in force, Hungary managed to provide the second least expensive scheme within the European Union, outcompeting all of its counterparts in terms of the simplicity and speediness of its procedure. This, and the lack of any further requirements beyond the purchase of state bonds with five-year maturity for around 250,000 Euro (later 300,000 Euro) plus commission fees allowed over 19,000 applicants – 81% of them from China – to receive residence permits. Despite having been designed specifically for “migration without settling,” however, the program, instead of luring businessmen interested in increased mobility within the EU rather than actual immigration, seemed to mostly attract families who effectively seized this opportunity to move abroad. They used investment as an instrument for pursuing particularly non-economic ends: a wholesome environment for raising well-rounded children.

Chinese “golden visa” migrants in Hungary are middle-class families from metropolitan China (mainly from Beijing, Shanghai, or Guangzhou) who continue to rely on incomes or remittances from China. Unlike the small-scale traders, mostly from southeastern China, who [first came to Hungary in the early 1990s](#) mostly for the purposes of economic ac-



Promotion of the Hungarian “Golden Visa” Program.  
Credit: <http://immigration-hungary.com/EN/>

cumulation, these families migrate to Hungary to pursue a relaxed lifestyle in an environmentally green, culturally rich, and racially white urban setting that is [imagined as the authentic “Europe”](#) – at a discounted price in the bargain.

These families’ decision to leave China and their choice of Hungary is anchored in the particular historical, social, economic, and political construction of childhood in reform-era China under the “[one-child policy](#)”. When the government introduced its family planning program in the late 1970s, one [rationale](#) was that the reduction of the population’s quantity would improve its “quality.” Quality thus became a [fixation for middle-class parents](#), who were charged with cultivating their only child’s [quality](#) to the greatest possible extent. According to official discourse, an individual’s bodily, moral, and educational quality is not only a matter of individual effort, but also a consequence of environmental influences. However, middle-class parents’ expectations for such an environment outgrew what metropolitan China could meet.

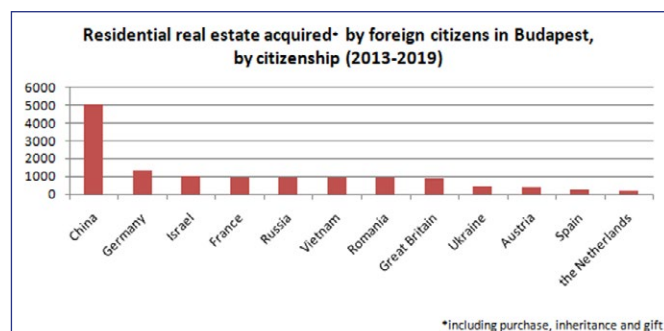
## > European home at a discount

In this light, Hungary is considered by middle-class Chinese migrants to be an ideal destination, where the physical, social, and educational environment is satisfactory and the cost of living is affordable. For many of the Chinese

## “Since the launch of the Hungarian golden visa program there had been a significant increase in Budapest housing property acquisitions by foreigners until last year”

golden visa migrants the goal is to find a well-located, suitable real estate, which, besides being a good investment, can also become a home for the family. The phenomenon of an ideal home is attached to the sense of “finality and settling down,” and tied to the notion of [home ownership](#). The possibility of owning an inheritable home gives Chinese migrants a chance to establish a better quality life for lower capital expenditure in Hungary – in the vast majority of cases in the capital city, Budapest – than in one of the Chinese megacities, or in any of the global or gateway cities of contemporary capitalism.

Since the launch of the Hungarian golden visa program there had been a significant increase in Budapest housing property acquisitions by foreigners until last year; despite the general boom of the housing market, Chinese comprised the largest group of foreign individual investors.



Among Chinese residents, it was not only golden visa immigrants who were attracted to Budapest real estate. A number of small-scale traders turned to housing investments, too. Our research suggests, however, that while the city center was popular with both groups, small-scale traders were more prone to purchase properties close to Chinese wholesale and retail markets, or in more affordable areas of the Pest-side suburbia. Golden visa migrants tended to show more interest in new housing developments, in the

hilly and green areas of the costly Buda side, and in detached houses of the Budapest metropolitan area.

Even if a number of golden visa migrants managed to purchase property both for investment purposes and for settling down, when it came to the choice of home, they mostly looked for apartments in neighborhoods where the quality of schools and housing was reputed to be high. The abstract ideas of quality have been mapped onto space and assessed as an ideal intersection of a neighborhood's and school's racial (referring here to the presence of Roma or immigrant children) and class constitution, taking shape in a form of selective cosmopolitanism. [Attracted to Western lifestyles but alarmed by the presence of Muslims and/or Blacks](#), many Chinese newcomers have leaned on the current Hungarian government's highly anti-immigrant right-wing populism – despite being migrants themselves. Many newcomers emphasized their perception about Hungary as being far more welcoming towards them than Western European countries, and experiencing close-to-no discrimination. Paradoxically, the same interlocutors praised the government's selective immigration policy that resulted in the settlement of relatively few refugees and Muslim and/or African immigrants, as contributing to their sense of security.

The provision of Hungarian residency and citizenship status is used strategically by the national government as a policy tool to access economic resources outside of Western Europe – either through the golden visa program, or through special channels as part of interstate diplomacy. This both enforces the economic interests of the ruling political elite and helps to gain some political and economic leverage at the level of the EU. As citizens of a rising global power outside of the transatlantic power bloc, Chinese golden visa migrants could become beneficiaries of this process; ironically, they could attain a feeling of being at home in Budapest and a sense of belonging to Europe under these controversial political and economic circumstances. ■

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# > The Chinese in Italy: Businesses and Identity

by **Ting Deng**, Population Studies and Training Center, Brown University, USA



Chinese small ads for bed rentals on a mailbox in the Chinatown of Milan. Credit: Ting Deng.

**Y**uan was born in Bologna in 1988. He is a third-generation Chinese whose family first arrived in Italy in the 1930s. His first relative to set foot on Italian soil was his grandfather's brother, who went to Italy with other single men from the same village to try their luck in business overseas. Like many other Chinese men at that time, he married an Italian woman from the countryside, even though interracial marriage was officially discouraged by the fascist regime. Yuan's great-uncle did not go back to China like most other Chinese men during the Second World War but stayed to manage his own artisanal workshop making leather bags together with his Italian wife. They had several children, but, according to Yuan, none of them kept in touch with Chinese relatives who migrated to Italy afterwards. When Yuan's grandfather went to Italy in the 1950s, he worked for his brother in the family leather business, having left behind his wife and children in the natal village in the Wenzhou area of the southeast coast of China. Yuan's father and his siblings were reunited with their father in Italy in 1978. In Italy, Yuan's father opened a Chinese restaurant and was joined by his wife and daughter. The restaurant was located in a neighborhood that currently has the densest Chinese population in Bologna. Yuan's father's siblings all started their own manufacturing workshops or restaurants. In a case of classic chain migration, Yuan's family brought their relatives one by one to Italy to work in their businesses before those relatives struck off to start their own business ventures.

Probably none of these first Wenzhou migrants expected that the chain migration starting from them would ultimately bring hundreds of thousands of Chinese unskilled laborers to Italy and elsewhere in Europe. These Chinese émigrés were eager [“to get rich quickly in Europe”](#) since China's opening up to the capitalist world. From the mid-1980s until the 2008 global recession, [Chinese emigration coincided with an Italian labor market](#) which demanded cheap and flexible transnational labor to work for the rising made-in-Italy brands in the global fast fashion industry.

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Manufacturing workshops, together with Chinese restaurants, constituted two major business niches that enabled this generation of Chinese migrants and their families to achieve wealth. When China emerged as a global producer and exporter of goods, import-export trading and related wholesale businesses became a new economic pathway towards economic success for newer Chinese arrivals in Italy since the 1990s. In the new millennium, while mass migration from China had gradually ended, the Chinese ethnic economy has further extended into the small retail and service industry with more and more Chinese moving into small neighborhood businesses targeting diverse local populations, including coffee bars, cheap consumer-goods shops, and barbershops. In recent years, an increasing number of Chinese immigrants in Italy are also involved in transnational businesses: some are investing back in China while others are using WeChat, a Chinese social media platform, to engage in the booming microbusiness sector for Chinese consumers in both countries.

The intragroup diversity of Chinese populations in Italy has also grown to be increasingly visible in terms of generational differences. Chinese of Yuan's generation who were born or at least grew up in Italy are no longer satisfied with remaining in ethnic economies that typically rely on selling their cheap labor as was the case with the older generations. An increasing number of Italian-born Chinese have received college education and aim to be recruited into the mainstream labor market. However, Chinese identity and ethnic resources are still crucial social and cultural capital that the younger-generation Chinese rely on. Some work as lawyers, doctors, and other professionals who largely serve the Chinese communities while others are recruited into new Chinese state and private enterprises that have operations in Italy. Still others have moved to China to work for Italian or other transnational companies there. Ironically, Yuan and many other Chinese of his generation who grew up in an environment in which the Chinese language was not considered to be important are learning Mandarin Chinese as adults.

Young parents of Yuan's generation now consider Chinese an educational necessity for their children.

China is no longer just a remote imaginary place for Chinese in Italy who themselves may have limited lived experiences there. China as a growing economic power plays an increasingly important role in shaping Chinese ethnic economies in Italy. Being Chinese is a form of "ethnic capital" that they hope to benefit from so as to survive in an economically uncertain present and future. But China is not just a fount of resources for ethnic Chinese in Italy. It has also increasingly become a reference point for them to evaluate Italy as a country. Compared with China's economic success, many have resented Italy's economic stagnation and become disillusioned with Europe's increasingly multicultural reality more broadly. Many criticize as "razzismo" everyday discrimination they encounter, but often internalize mainstream stereotypes in judging other immigrants as well as Italians they meet as they run shops or bars. They often essentialize Italians as lazy, sloppy, and less hardworking than the Chinese. While admiring Italians' supposed embrace of leisure time and general enjoyment of life, many Chinese in Italy believe it is precisely this quality which has led to Italy's economic woes.

On a range of controversial issues related to China, including protests surrounding Hong Kong's extradition law, Xinjiang, and the COVID-19 pandemic, many Chinese in Italy have stood fast with the Beijing government amid pervasive criticism in the Western media against the Chinese state. Indeed, the global rise of China as an economic (and increasingly assertive political) powerhouse has not only redrawn the business contours of long-established Chinese ethnic communities in Italy but has also given rise to an emergent diasporic nationalism that is (re)shaping the ethnic consciousness of the Chinese in Italy. In this sense, the China that Yuan's grandparents departed and the Italy that they chose to make home seem almost unrecognizable. ■

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# > The Changing Status of the Chinese in Serbia

by **Jelena Gledić**, University of Belgrade, Serbia



A restaurant in Serbia's capital trying to attract Chinese tourists. Credit: Jelena Gledić.

**R**elations between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Serbia have been growing closer throughout the past decade, bringing about changes in migrant communities and migration trends. The status of the Chinese in Serbia has shifted from undesirable outsiders, necessary during times of economic crises, to that of a complex group perceived as both an attractive opportunity and a potential threat.

## > The first wave of migration

The first larger groups of Chinese migrants settled in Serbia in the 1990s, moving southward after unfavorable changes in Hungary's visa requirements. They were mostly traders originating from China's southern provinces, operating transnational businesses and living in relatively isolated communities. They continued to distribute goods across the region, only now from Belgrade instead of Budapest. These entrepreneurs seem to have been [driven by a search for transition economies](#), where they profited from a scarcity of consumer goods. Their presence can

be seen as a continuation of [historical trends of Chinese migration in Eastern Europe](#), but also as a [consequence of China's changing global position](#). It can also be understood through the lens of Serbia's position within Europe – while it was a desirable destination for Chinese traders due to more lenient regulations than the European Union's, not many migrants wished to stay permanently. Children are still mostly sent to school in China, so there is no large local-born Chinese population. As Serbia's progress towards EU membership slowed down, many Chinese-owned businesses moved to Bulgaria, Romania, Italy, Croatia, other EU countries, and even South America and Africa.

The status of the first Chinese communities in the Serbian population has been the subject of [several studies](#). These Chinese migrants were mostly perceived negatively, being associated with the low quality of the goods they sold. Serbians did appreciate them as purveyors of a wide variety of goods, which were in short supply during the economic sanctions in the 1990s. However, this link with a tumultuous historical period that everyone was eager to overcome also contributed to their unfavorable status.

## > New migrations and mobility

After China and Serbia formed a strategic partnership in 2009, the two countries' collaboration rapidly grew closer. There was a significant rise in Chinese construction projects and investments in Serbia under the Belt and Road Initiative, enhanced cooperation in the domain of culture and technology, and, most recently, a team of Chinese doctors led the development of Serbia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in line with the "Chinese model." However, these changes did not significantly affect the status of the Chinese migrants already living in Serbia as Serbians [do not see these entrepreneurs as synonymous with China](#) [article in Serbian]. Moreover, new migration and mobility trends led to new waves of Chinese in Serbia, who instead became the perceived face of China.

Chinese investment projects brought about a new migration wave, with fixed-term migrants moving to Serbia, including manual laborers and mid- and upper-management. However, while the projects are highly publicized, these new Chinese communities live outside the public eye, mostly near the remote construction and development sites where they work. This is the first time that Chinese construction workers have migrated to a European country in such numbers and under interstate agreements, marking a shift from Chinese labor that has been present in Europe in the form of [catering work](#) or [garment workshops](#), both often illegal and invisible.

The second new wave of Chinese in Serbia came due to mobility rather than migration, following the establishment of a bilateral visa-free system in 2017. That led to a significant influx of Chinese tourists, reportedly belonging to China's upper-middle class, who arrived in such numbers that [joint police units of Serbian and Chinese officers were formed to patrol tourist spots](#). Along with Cyprus and other [Western Balkan](#) countries, Serbia was among European countries with the [highest rise in Chinese tourist numbers in 2019](#). This rise in tourism is similar to trends elsewhere in [Eastern Europe](#). However, it has not yet been accompanied by middle-class lifestyle immigration like, for example, in Hungary or Portugal, perhaps due to Serbia being outside the EU.

## > Towards a joint future

There are still no extensive studies of these recent developments. Still, an overview of media and anecdotal

evidence suggests that the Serbian population responded to these two new groups differently. The latter were welcomed – business-minded people saw the opportunity in the arrival of growing numbers of relatively wealthy Chinese and tried to adjust or establish services catering to their specific needs, with more or less success. The potential economic benefit for the country was evident at every major travel destination in Serbia. On the other hand, those working on Chinese investment projects are occasionally mentioned as a potential threat in the context of Serbia's high unemployment rate. However, at the same time, there are individual stories about interethnic friendships and examples of close ties between local communities and Chinese workers. The relations with this new type of Chinese migrants might develop in very different ways and should thus be closely observed in the near future.

As for the Chinese already living in Serbia at the turn of the twenty-first century, their status was not much affected by the said changes in geopolitics and bilateral relations, but they were faced with new opportunities. Some saw the two new groups as an opportunity to expand their businesses, by supplying construction sites with Chinese food and goods or opening Chinese restaurants and bubble tea shops near tourist spots. Some used their position as "locals" and advised businesses on how to implement projects or agencies on where to organize tours. The first-wave Chinese might have originally belonged to lower socio-economic classes than these new migrants – they undeniably came from a less-developed China. However, today they can leverage their local knowledge and experience, becoming desirable for new waves of incoming Chinese. In time, perhaps the fact that they can also provide cross-cultural insights to the Serbian side might lead to a change in their status in the eyes of the local population.

The dynamics between these different groups of Chinese and their respective relationships with local communities reflect the trajectories of shifts in the global political economy. With the strong influence of fickle factors, such as populism and public health, new migration trends challenge existing boundaries and hierarchies and require each group's positions to be renegotiated. Considering the vastly varying perceptions of the Chinese in Serbia and the changing perception and position of Serbia and China, their status can develop in completely opposite directions, forming the foundation for future waves of migrants. ■

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# > Chinese Migrants and COVID-19 Pandemic

by **Martina Bofulin**, Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), Slovenia



Grffiti in Vienna, Austria. March 2020. Photo by Sebastjan Jemec.

## > Pandemic-related racism

**S**hortly after the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 at the beginning of 2020, reports on acts of prejudice, racism, and violence against the Chinese started to multiply worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Chinese were screamed at, attacked, and saw their shops and restaurants vandalized due to the entanglement of fear and racism among ordinary people and officials.

Among those most affected by these attacks were small entrepreneurs from China living in Europe whose right to legal stay often rests on their economic activity and whose businesses suffered almost immediately, solely for being “Chinese.” Most of these small entrepreneurs left China during the “going-out fever” in the late 1980s and early 1990s, from Zhejiang or Fujian Provinces, but also from China’s urban areas and Northeast. Over decades they have become well incorporated in the countries of settlement, often operating thriving wholesale import compa-

nies (mostly in Eastern and Central Europe), small apparel businesses (in Italy and Spain), and Chinese restaurants. Despite being subjected to verbal slurs and prejudice in interpersonal relations as well as in their contact with state authorities, they have mostly felt safe and have taken this type of discrimination for granted. Consequently, they have often been called the “invisible” minority and rarely featured in the discussions on racism in Europe.

A mere few weeks after the announcement that the virus had reached Europe, Chinese small entrepreneurs in Europe saw a drop in sales and restaurants’ visits, and some had their shops vandalized (e.g. in Italy). They experienced physical distancing on buses or doctors’ offices (in Germany, Italy, Slovenia), were taunted, attacked, and beaten – often for wearing face masks (in Italy, the Netherlands, the UK) – as well as accused of hoarding face masks for profiteering when they were only trying to protect themselves (e.g. in Slovenia). Moreover, not just Chinese, but all people possessing Asian features, whether or not

they had traveled recently or had ever even been in Asia, experienced such treatment.

### > Acts of resistance

These gruesome acts of exclusion have seen resistance in many countries. In Italy, for example, Massimiliano Martigli Jiang, who moved from Zhejiang as a child, started a social media campaign with photos of himself in front of Florence's main tourist sites with a banner that read: "I am not a virus, I am a person. Let go of your prejudice." In Sweden, Korean-Swedish artist Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom shared one-panel comics on exclusion suffered by Asians in the time of the pandemic, while Italian artist Laika created street art tackling the connection between the pandemic and racism towards Asians in Rome. COVID-19 racism, thus, contributed to the evolving discussions of systemic and interpersonal racism towards people of color in Europe as well as to the growing activism of Europeans of Asian background and Asian newcomers.

### > Exclusion "back home"

But while racism towards Chinese migrants outside China is well documented – in numerous media reports and a dedicated Wikipedia page – much less is known about the exclusion they faced upon returning to China. After declaring no new local transmissions of the virus in March 2020, the People's Republic of China pursued a very close watch on "imported cases" from abroad. They quickly installed various measures to curb transmission, while Chinese embassies, diaspora organizations, and migrant hometowns' representatives called for migrants not to return to China. The return flow of Chinese citizens from abroad threatened the effects of strict measures China had put in place to curb the virus as well as the overall "success narrative" of a country that had dealt effectively and swiftly with the virus.

The discourse on the threat of the "imported cases" initiated by the government spilled over to social media users. Many netizens called for returnees to "return to where they came from" and condemned them for behaving like "giant babies"<sup>2</sup> and for "not participating in building the homeland, but being first to rush from far to harm it." While eventually the state's mainstream media decided to

emphasize the contributions of overseas Chinese to their motherland and quelled the outburst of hate speech online, the exclusionary discourse that developed exhibits the possible transformations in the symbolic role that overseas Chinese have played in China's nation-building since the onset of reforms four decades ago; in the past, Chinese migrants were seen as patriots who contributed to the modernization of the homeland.

After facing exclusion in their place of settlement as well as their place of origin, many Chinese migrants also faced stigma due to COVID-19 from members of the subgroups they belonged to – their relatives, friends, and same-place compatriots. The stigmatization was especially strong among small entrepreneurs hailing from traditional places of emigration in China like Qingtian in the province of Zhejiang, who live in tightly knit social networks of relatives and friends connecting various locations around the world and the place of origin in a mountainous part of Eastern China.

One such case was described in detail in diaspora media, where the family of one of the first COVID-19 victims among Chinese in Europe was subjected not only to vicious rumors but also to threats from their compatriots. The family members felt that they had done everything in their power to act responsibly and contain the spread of the virus, but were still accused of jeopardizing the lives and businesses of fellow migrants. Not only was this news spread widely among the migrant community in the country of settlement, it was also instantly transmitted to the place of origin, adding to the family's stigma among those left behind in Qingtian.

This pandemic has thus highlighted how exclusion and prejudice are still very much part of the Chinese migrants' experience, going beyond the countries of settlement to practically all locations along the migration process. Furthermore, it has pointed to the emergence of a new discourse of exclusion towards Chinese migrants in China. On a more general level, though, it also demonstrates the continued salience of imaginaries connecting migrants and disease that are used to either limit mobility or even more narrowly define which mobility is allowed and welcomed and which is not. ■

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1. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/covid-19-crisis-triggers-eu-racism-against-asians-rights-agency-says>

2. The term "giant babies" comes from the book *The Country of Giant Babies* by psychologist Wu Zhihong where he criticizes the personal development of young Chinese. The term is often used online for describing demanding and arrogant persons.

# > Toward a Comparative Analysis of Far-Right Regimes

by **Walden Bello**, State University of New York at Binghamton, USA

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has triggered an efflorescence of ideas on how to reorganize society along more progressive lines from the left. In webinars spanning the globe, people have been treated to a dazzling array of alternatives, including a reinvigorated left-wing Keynesianism, degrowth, deglobalization, ecofeminism, food sovereignty, emancipatory Marxism, and Buen Vivir or “Living Well.”

The only problem is that these wonderful ideas have little or uncertain political traction, even as the dominant paradigm of liberal democracy cum neoliberal economics has entered into even deeper crisis and may well be “dying slowly,” as economist Dani Rodrik puts it.

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, neither the conservatives nor the far right have any really innovative ideas, and what interesting ones they have, like deglobalization, are pirated from the left. Yet the far right has political momentum, and the destabilizing impact of COVID-19 might, in fact, accelerate that momentum.

The global rise of the far right is one of the two biggest surprises of the last half century, along with the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the last decade of the twentieth century.

In 2010, there were no regimes of what we might call the “new far right” globally except for Hungary. Now we have seen far-right personalities come to power in four of the seven biggest democracies: India, the United States, Brazil, and the Philippines. And even where they are not part of coalitions in power, by their electoral weight they have in many instances moved the center of gravity of politics to the right, as in Germany, Denmark, and Italy.

Right-wing regimes have come to power in both the Global North and the Global South. While sharing some characteristics, there are also unique features to these governing groups associated with their place in the global political economy, so that it is useful to consider them separately for the purposes of analysis without, however, suggesting that it is only, or even mainly, global political-economic location that accounts for the origins and dynamics of these regimes.

## > The far right in the Global North

What factors are behind the rise of far-right regimes and personalities in the Global North?

First, the far right in Europe and the United States was able to take advantage of the negative impact of neoliberal policies on people’s living conditions. Social democrats, or the center left, were implicated in the formulation and implementation of neoliberal policies. This left a big part of their base feeling they could no longer rely on social democratic parties to protect them, making them vulnerable to being pirated by parties of the right that cleverly shed the blanket endorsement of neoliberal policies by the center right and opportunistically cherry-picked “welfarist” positions traditionally championed by the left.

Second, in Europe, the far right was able to harvest resentment against the European Union (EU) by riding on the democracy issue, saying that the unelected technocratic leadership of the EU was lording it over the democratically elected national leaders of the member states. Thus, when, in 2015, the so-called Troika disregarded the results of the Greek referendum on the austerity program it imposed on the Greek people, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Front in France, draped herself as a democrat, proclaiming, “The choice is either democracy or Euro-dictatorship.”

**“Neither the conservatives nor the far right have any really innovative ideas, and what interesting ones they have, like deglobalization, are pirated from the left. Yet the far right has political momentum”**

Third, extreme right-wing parties have been able to dominate the migrant issue, with little effective opposition. They have not only accused the center right and center left of having no viable policy on migration, but have advanced the conspiracy theory that the center right, the center left, and the European Union are complicit with what they describe as the goal of the “migrant hordes” to subvert European and American society.

Opposition to migration and ensuring dominance of white society over minorities is the central issue the far right is riding and mobilizing on, and it is within a racist gestalt that they have positioned their opportunistic advocacy of anti-globalization, anti-neoliberal, and “pro-democracy” stands. Marine Le Pen’s National Front (FN) in France, for instance, now calls for the restoration of the wealth tax whereas it itself opposed all forms of progressive taxation only a few decades earlier. As economist Thomas Piketty points out, this is part of the party’s “social turn,” or posturing in defense of the system of social protection for workers through higher taxes on the rich. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz Party has increased family benefits and created subsidized jobs for the unemployed. Certain measures to safeguard and promote social welfare, save jobs, and protect the economy are all fine, leaders of the far right say, so long as the beneficiaries are only people of the “right” skin color, the “right” culture, and the “right” ethnic stock. Of course, this stance may not be stated that explicitly, but that’s essentially the message that comes through, and so far, it’s been effective.

### > The far right in the Global South

Turning to the Global South, while it is certainly true that, as in the North, neoliberal structural adjustment contributed to worsening the already terrible conditions of existence of the vast majority of citizens of the democracies, what was occurring in places like the Philippines, India, and Brazil was something more fundamental: a repudiation of liberal democracy. Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Narendra Modi in India, and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil personify this rejection: Duterte boasts about violating due process as he presides over the extra-judicial execution of thousands, Modi glories in the fall of secular and diverse India, and Bolsonaro waxes nostalgic over the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil for 20 years.

What mainly accounted for citizens’ alienation from liberal democracy in the three societies was simply the massive

gap between the promise of liberal democracy and its reality. The yawning gap between the glorious ideals expressed in the Indian Constitution, the 1987 Philippine Constitution, and the 1988 Constitution of Brazil and the realities of massive poverty, inequality, and disempowerment was bound to lead to a popular explosion sooner or later.

The rise to power of the far right cannot be understood without taking into consideration the disillusionment of the middle class. The middle class was, in the last 30 years of the twentieth century, a central factor in the undermining of dictatorships throughout the Global South. Over the last two decades, however, they have been greatly disillusioned by the failure of liberal democracy to deliver on its promises and by the deterioration of their living standards. They have become open to more drastic political solutions and some have even endorsed neoliberalism, though neoliberal policies have had contradictory effects on them. These policies eroded the conditions of life for some in the middle class but have simultaneously benefited others, as well as some members of the lower classes, creating what some have called the “aspirational middle class,” or people who are in income terms not middle class but aspire to be such. Pandering to the latter, Modi, Duterte, and Bolsonaro have embraced neoliberal policies while some of their counterparts in the North have been busy distancing themselves from them for opportunistic reasons.

The fear of crime and the so-called “dangerous classes” is also a factor behind middle class mobilization towards the right, and this is especially the case when inequality and poverty are so rampant that some people turn to drugs and crime. In both Brazil and the Philippines, middle-class fear of crime and drugs was certainly a central factor in the electoral insurgency. It is certainly the genius of Duterte to take drugs and crime out of their social context and demagogically turn them into the main problems confronting all classes, rich, middle class, and poor.

There is also the powerful appeal of an anti-corruption stance, and not just to the middle class. Elections are fueled by campaigns to “throw the bums out.” It seems, however, that every party that comes to power on an anti-corruption platform becomes corrupt in power, so that people become very cynical of electoral exercises and are attracted to leaders like India’s Modi and the Philippines’ Duterte, who they may not agree with on many points and

who they may even see as dangerous to political rights, but who are able to project a non-corrupt image (though the reality may be different).

In Brazil, a large number of voters went for Bolsonaro to punish the Workers' Party for perceived corruption among some of its leadership, and while all parties were involved in corrupt practices, Lula's party took the brunt of the voters' ire, probably because it had boasted of a clean record before taking the presidency, then was seen as being corrupted once it gained power. Corruption under previous regimes was much greater than under Lula and his successor Dilma Rousseff, but the wages of hypocrisy, it seems, are greater than those of undisguised dishonesty.

As for the working class, the peasantry, urban and rural poor, and the working class, it would be foolish to deny that Duterte and Modi enjoy widespread support among them. It might be said, however, that there is a difference in the support given to these personalities by the lower classes from that of the middle class. Borrowing from Antonio Gramsci, one would say that theirs is more of a "passive consensus," while that of the middle class is more of an "active consensus" manifested in the opinions articulated in television, the internet, and the print media. The middle class intelligentsia has always taken the lead in forming

public opinion, and in India and the Philippines a large sector of this stratum has supported Modi and Duterte.

Finally, one also cannot understand the success of some of these far-right personalities without taking into consideration their charisma. Modi and Duterte, in particular, are charismatic personalities, who seem to get the overwhelming majority to support or tolerate whatever they say and do, defying explanations based on rational calculus, class, and patronage. None of the far-right personalities in the North can even come close to enjoying the massive, across-the-board appeal of these two figures, though in the case of Donald Trump, he does seem to have a charismatic hold on his party and mass base, as evidenced by the fact that over 74 million Americans voted for him in the elections of 2020 – over 11 million more votes than he got in 2016.

### > Conclusion

Regimes of the extreme right in the Global North and the Global South have shared characteristics. This essay has explored the contrasts between them. The aim has been to contribute to a common effort to arrive at a more comprehensive explanation for their having gained the political momentum against their rivals on the center and the left in the current global political conjuncture. ■

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# > The Universalist Aims

## of Latin American Sociology

by **Esteban Torres**, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba-CONICET, Argentina

**T**his section of *Global Dialogue* presents a small sample of theoretical innovations, intellectual itineraries, and future projects from a group of prominent Latin American authors. All of these colleagues work every day to build new theoretical tools for the comprehensive study of Latin America's social reality and, in several cases, world society as a whole. In conjunction with the affirmation of their respective national identities, the authors of this section assume a substantive Latin American identity that has left its mark in their intellectual projects. That means that they simultaneously nurture an intellectual commitment to the future of regional society and world society. Most of the guest authors propose, among other things, an update, a structural reform, or, plainly, a revolution of current world sociology. None of them is willing to curb their creative power, and all are frightened by the prospect of becoming mere reproducers of the ideas of others. Each one of them has their diagnosis regarding the current state of the regional and world social sciences, the main theoretical and political challenges that this field faces, and how the production of knowledge should evolve towards the future in relation to the processes of social change.

This group of colleagues – who, by their sheer work and talent, stand out

in their respective countries, in the region, and, increasingly, throughout the Western world – all harbor an unusual ambition, in its most noble sense. They have in common an unwavering commitment to research based on new social theories. Each author is inspired by different objects, dimensions, and questions in their original research, theoretical creation, and goals for sociological change. There are also differences in the ideological identifications, normative resolutions, and political positions of each. The aggregation of diversities in this section is the confirmation that the authors have been able to create their own ideas from a localized reading of the great problems of the historical present, to move forward in the production of their own explanatory social theories, and to project horizons of expectations for their communities of reference.

However, all the differences in this section are subordinated to a common high-voltage aspiration, which structures each proposal and is rooted in the most luminous history of Latin America. Each intellectual trajectory has been built from a forceful rejection of any principle of regional autarky, as well as any principle of theoretical subordination of Latin America. Each of the authors considers that their Latin American identity and trajectory is a positive and distinctive value, a source of au-

tonomy on the world stage, and not a limitation of origin or position to think and act in world society. Without this shared appreciation, fed by different emancipatory legacies rooted in regional history, it would not be possible to explain the conviction, power, and originality that accompany the intellectual trajectories and ideas synthesized here.

The last thing I would like to mention is that the vast majority of the authors included in this section are part of the working group “Social Theory and Latin American Reality” (*Teoría social y realidad latinoamericana*) of the Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO). We created this multinational collective space that brings together around 40 researchers, currently coordinated by José Maurício Domingues and myself, intending to overcome current autonomous theoretical production deficits in Latin American sociology and social sciences. To further advance this aspiration, among others, it is essential to establish an egalitarian theoretical dialogue in world sociology between the different countries and regional blocs. *Global Dialogue's* co-editor Klaus Dörre's generous invitation to create this Latin American section is a wonderful example of the new spirit of mundialization that our historical time urgently demands. ■

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# > The World Paradigm:

## A New Proposal for Sociology

by **Esteban Torres**, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba-CONICET, Argentina



**M**ajor social transformations in world society since the beginning of the twenty-first century are exhausting the two paradigms that governed the development of sociology from its origins until today: the modern paradigm and the anti-modern postmodern paradigm. This issue calls for a paradigm shift. My proposal introduces a new, scientifically minded, postmodern program called the “world paradigm” (WP; *paradigma mundialista*, or PM, in Spanish).<sup>1</sup> This intellectual galaxy carries a new idea of world society, world social change, and world sociology. I will review some of those elements here.

### > Mundialization in the wake of COVID-19

The key changes taking place in Latin American sociology are a reaction

to two types of simultaneous crises: (1) the aggravated crisis of neoliberalism, and (2) the budding crisis of the idea of society as conceived by sociology and historical societies themselves. The first crisis has intensified due to the worldwide process of *state recentralization*; the second, from an unprecedented *process of mental and intellectual mundialization*. As observed from Latin America, the two crises, as well as the state and mundialization processes mentioned, have deepened due to the effects of the global financial crisis of 2008, the last wave of bottom-up regional integration in Latin America (2003-2015), and the current COVID-19 pandemic. If the crisis of neoliberalism negatively impacts the anti-modern postmodern paradigm and positively impacts the modern paradigm, the crisis of the idea of society negatively impacts both, although more decisively the modern paradigm. Given the novelty it presents and its potential for social determination, I will focus on the latter.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the main event producing a hyper-accelerated process of mental and intellectual mundialization for the first time in the history of humanity. This process consists of at least three central ingredients: (i) a preliminary idea of a unified world society that integrates the totality of the national, regional,

and global spheres; (ii) a record of the existence of inequalities between nations and regions; (iii) an intuition or corroboration that the world society is not only modern or “in the process of modernization.”

The process of mundialization mentioned above displays the increased exhaustion of the modern and postmodern anti-modern paradigms. Both start from the premise, made common knowledge, that sociology’s framework of reference is the national society. Not just any idea of a national society, but a self-referential and restrictive vision that – with its ideological variants – has been spread from the Global North since the first industrial revolution. In its most refined versions, this idea of a national society has been wrapped in a penetrating and reflective universalism that facilitated its assimilation en masse by academia in peripheral countries to valorize their historical societies. What lies in both modern and postmodern paradigms are different types of methodological, epistemic, and theoretical nationalisms. The vast majority of current Western theories of globalization in world sociology are within this restrictive framework.

The growing inadequacy of both paradigms, the modern and the post-modern anti-modern, is evident not

# “The COVID-19 pandemic is the main event producing a hyper-accelerated process of mental and intellectual mundialization for the first time in the history of humanity”

only in the two crises mentioned. It has been accentuated by a historical process of restructuration of sociology in Latin America and, in part, of world sociology, that began in the 1980s. This restructuration is associated with a material disconnection between sociological and extra-academic political practices and an intellectual disconnection between the scientific, critical, and political engines of sociological practice. This decoupling process has deepened the scientific decomposition and political impotence of world sociology while diminishing the intellectual resources available to political actors.

## > The scientific project of the world paradigm

In the face of this situation, progressive and leftist sociologies need to recuperate their modern core and, at the same time, transcend it towards a new *world paradigm* (WP). The WP introduces a conception of sociology as a *localized and multi-*

*localized socio-scientific force, oriented towards the transformation of world society.* This paradigm demands a new postmodern scientific project, a new reconnection model between the scientific, the critical, and the political nuclei of sociological theory and research, and a new mediation device between sociological and political practice. I will dwell on the WP's first component: the scientific project, which unfolds from the dialectic between a principle of mundialization, a principle of localization, and a principle of historicization.<sup>2</sup> The principle of mundialization assumes that the first substratum of society is worldly and not national. It is a revolutionary premise insofar as it inverts the nuclear spatial equation of the modern and postmodern anti-modern paradigms. The mundialization principle makes it possible to outline an idea of world society as a superior unit that occurs in the interaction between three systemic levels: (i) the relations between national, regional, and global spheres,

conceived as inseparable and irreducible spheres; (ii) center-periphery relations; and (iii) the relationship between the modern and the non-modern.

The principle of localization requires the recognition of localization as a point of reference for world society. For the WP, world society is an unequal social formation, simultaneously localized and multi-localized. Each localization point is a singular direct and indirect condensation of the asymmetric interaction between the three spheres mentioned above. In the same way that world society is not the product of a single localization, a complete vision of said social formation and world social change cannot be either. That is why the movements and programs of structural transformation that we need to build demand creating a *world sociology* destined to bring together in dialogue the theories of world society produced from all historical localizations of our planet. ■

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1. For a comprehensive development of this proposal, see Torres, E. (2021) *La gran transformación de la sociología* [The Great Transformation of Sociology]. Córdoba-Buenos Aires: FCS-CLACSO. Manuscript submitted for publication.

2. For space reasons, and because they are the most disruptive elements, we will refer exclusively to the first two principles.

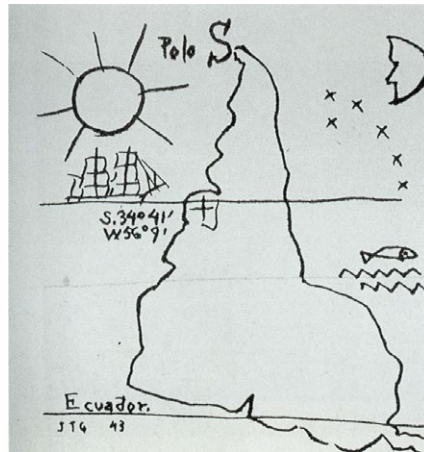
# > Linking Global Sociology with Global Modernity

by **José Maurício Domingues**, IESP-UERJ, Brazil

**P**olitical sociology has a strong tradition in Latin America. It has probably been the core strand of Latin American sociology, though certainly not the only one (“culture” has also been important, as well as some older openings to political economy). Political sociology was extended and transformed with the specific disciplinary emergence of political science, with a North-American countenance, in contrast to formerly more socially-rooted sociological accounts. Political sociology produced important theoretical insights, yet fell short – as has been usually the case in Latin America – of aiming at a more general theoretical contribution. That is, the specific developments of modernity in its specific political dimension were discussed and conceptualized, but usually the analyses stopped at the regional level.

## > The absence of social theory

An example of this was Quijano’s discussion of Marx’s “industrial reserve army” in order to understand why there was so much excess labor in Latin America, generating what he called a “marginal pole.” At some point Quijano realized that the problem was probably present in nineteenth-century Europe as well and that emigration had solved it. But he dared not go further (let alone challenge some of Marx’s ideas). The same can be said of Germani’s discussion of “populism,” in which modernization made the masses



*The picture shows the pen and ink drawing “América Invertida” of the Uruguayan-Spanish artist Joaquín Torres García (1943). The inverted Latin-American continent is a depiction of the strong self-confidence of South-American art. Credit: Creative Commons.*

“available,” since they had not been incorporated by a democratic political system, to “manipulation” by opportunistic elites. This could have implied further reflections about Europe, but Germani (who had immigrated to Argentina from Italy due to fascism) confined himself to a discussion of Argentina and, later with other authors, to generalizing his argument to Latin America as a whole. They all stopped there, though. The thesis about “internal colonialism,” put forward by Pablo González Casanova and Rodolfo Stavenhagen, pointing to the encroachment of the modern, postcolonial state upon indigenous communities, could have allowed for a general characterization of the modern state – which actually grew everywhere this way. They did not,

however, draw these conclusions. Florestan Fernandes even reckoned we could not afford to work on theory due to a lack of specialized personnel and resources as well as more pressing concrete issues.

Latin American sociology – and actually its social sciences by and large – suffers from a chronic lack of theorization. If it is true that this may presently be more of a global phenomenon, the problem is compounded in the region by that former restriction. The issue becomes even more complicated once we discuss the relation of theory and empirical reality with respect to research strategy. Should we start from the particular and move to the general level? Or is it warranted – in Latin America too – to start from general theoretical problems that pertain to this subcontinent as well as to other regions of global modernity? Several decades ago, Leopoldo Zea observed that while Europeans – and North Americans – took for granted their universality and saw their particularity as immediately conceptually generalizable, Latin Americans had to begin from their particularity since their universality was in principle denied.

## > Theory of political modernity

If this was true in the past, it no longer makes sense in the present. Although there are disagreements concerning modernity and its genesis, no one would now suppose that the West is the bearer of modernity in its

universality. Some would speak of colonial and postcolonial modernities, entangled modernities, multiple modernities, etc. Besides, there is everywhere, including in Latin America, an accumulation of knowledge, also theoretical, that allows us to start with theory at the highest level. This is as true of Latin America as of Europe, Africa, the US, and Asia. To be sure, we need to be somehow context-sensitive, but the problem is that our context is – or should be – global. This is the case of course if we do not stick to the immediate experience of being born and/or bred in a specific place – not a good strategy overall for the social sciences anyway.

This is what has guided my sociological efforts. Familiar with Latin American thought and connected to some sort of “historical materialism,” I decided I needed to revise the whole debate about “structure and agency,” as well as permanence and change in social life. I arrived thereby at a theory of “collective subjectivity” and of “social creativity,” including a view of evolution and history. I deepened my knowledge of the main imaginary and institutional elements of modernity and then returned to the

realities of Latin America in what I analyzed as the “third phase of modernity.” This was expanded into a discussion of global modernity – unitary, heterogeneous, and hybrid – in its expansion across the planet. Eventually I took up what is for me today the area where our civilizational and emancipatory issues are located strategically: the political dimension of modernity. At the same time, I decided that it was time I tackled Marx’s “method of exposition,” with which I had been concerned for long, applying it to the political dimension. This implied extensive investigation and a systematic organization of categories that could fully cover political modernity, as well as the establishment of its dynamic trends.

This has led me to propose a categorical exposition of political modernity in its global reach, within a particular form of critical theory. I have tried to incorporate historical developments across the world, but what really matters is their subsumption into the categorical analytic system. My analysis addresses how both imaginaries and institutions unfold, along with the mechanisms that produce and explain this dynamic. The

rights-form, the citizenship-form, law, the state, autonomization, political systems and political regimes, including an imaginable radical democracy, the relation of abstract and concrete, as well as the expansive and restrictive moments of liberalism, furnish the core of the theoretical approach I have been developing. Add to these categories the identification, analysis, explanation, and projection of trends related to the strengthening of the state and the increasing political autonomization of citizens. I have lately been investigating “real socialism,” which I have defined as “authoritarian collectivism,” an original, though not socialist, social formation, parasitical upon modernity.

Some of the material related to this general theoretical understanding of modernity has been published and I intend to produce a final and more integrated theoretical account of political modernity in a few years. This is part of a global sociological approach, with some Latin American background that is nevertheless sublated by universalist – theoretical and axiological – ambitions. ■

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# > Historicizing Theory:

## A Proposal for Latin America

by **Viviane Brachet-Márquez**, El Colegio de México, Mexico



Major territorial changes took place between 1810 and 1860: eight states were born (Nicaragua, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ecuador, Venezuela, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay), and Mexico lost its northern territories to the United States. Credit: Creative Commons.

In the past, social theory, as practiced in central (as opposed to peripheral) countries has been of a static nature, in the sense of perceiving social order as the absence of widespread conflict, and conflict as evidence of disorder. It has also attempted to become “scientific” by predicting stable social continuities based on hypothetical-deductive reasoning. Even as the fathers of sociology were experiencing the traumatic changes of the industrial revolution, they portrayed them as the difference between a fixed point of departure and another fixed point of arrival, with an undertheorized process in between: to wit, the continuum from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*.

Based on this general model, Latin American countries have appeared as both imperfect and unfinished, either moving from “tradition” to “modernity,” or from undeveloped (or less developed or developing) to somewhere closer to “developed.” The historical process “in between” was widely described, but not theorized as a whole.<sup>1</sup> The upshot, in any case, has invariably been that Latin America had “developed” unevenly and im-

perfectly due to world market forces (or imperialism, or colonialism), with little impact from the role people had played in the construction of social orders over the two centuries since independence.

### > The historical construction of social orders in Latin America

I would like to propose that Latin America, taken as a region, can be fruitfully theorized, provided that we recognize its historicity, and start from the premise that the social orders in any geographical setting are the product of formidably complex, historically constructed, and indeterminate social processes. A key question in the analysis of Latin American social orders thus concerns agency in relation to historically created institutions, and from there the questions of: (1) who acts and for whose benefit (benefit maximizing individuals, patriarchal families, indigenous communities, or capitalist profits); and (2) powered by what dynamic principles (systemic, mechanistic, or agentic). Answers to these questions depend on *what theoretical lens* can transform a collection of nineteen Latin American na-

tions into systematically comparable, as opposed to disparate, cases.

In this short article, I can only summarize how my work along these lines can contribute to answering these questions.<sup>2</sup> The general theoretical argument can be summarized as follows: *what has been produced historically in Latin America is a series of spatio-temporally limited social orders made up of mixed, and often contradictory constellations of rules, norms, and symbols that have alternately become either hegemonic, or ceased to be widely shared or enforced.* Put differently, we might say that particular outcomes of this societal process have been, in turn, institutionalized, de-institutionalized, and re-institutionalized, while facing intrusions by foreign states and world corporations as part of an overarching international process of geopolitical and market competition.

From this standpoint, Latin America’s post-independence history has been powered by the alternately conflictive and cooperative interplay between institutional actors, aimed at enhancing the wealth, authority, and

power of the elites closely associated with the institution(s) hegemonic at different time/places. It has also been powered by the ways in which subaltern groups have responded to the events marking their daily lives, and in turn, reinforced or modified these processes. Graph 1 represents abstractly these historical developments, in which corresponding empirical facts can be inscribed as they have happened in different countries of the region, but also as they have shared historically recurring kinds of relatively stable social orders. In this view, key institutional actors, but also people, communities, and organizations build social orders every day through their attempts to reproduce their lives and make sense of their experience. In Latin America as elsewhere, these arrangements have not, by and large, been consensual, or egalitarian, so that many opportunities for progressive change have been missed or counteracted. But that is the reality we can and must theorize, and investigate systematically, away from Eurocentric myths.

To approach this general process empirically, the study underway focuses on the relations over time between states and other institutional orders, powerful social groups, capitalist corporations, and external states, as shown in Graph 1. To attain hegemony, states have striven to dominate over their territory,<sup>3</sup> attain financial solvency, and defend their sovereignty. Doing so, they have exerted what power they could over their population; extracted their share from regimes of accumulation; and made concessions to superior external powers.

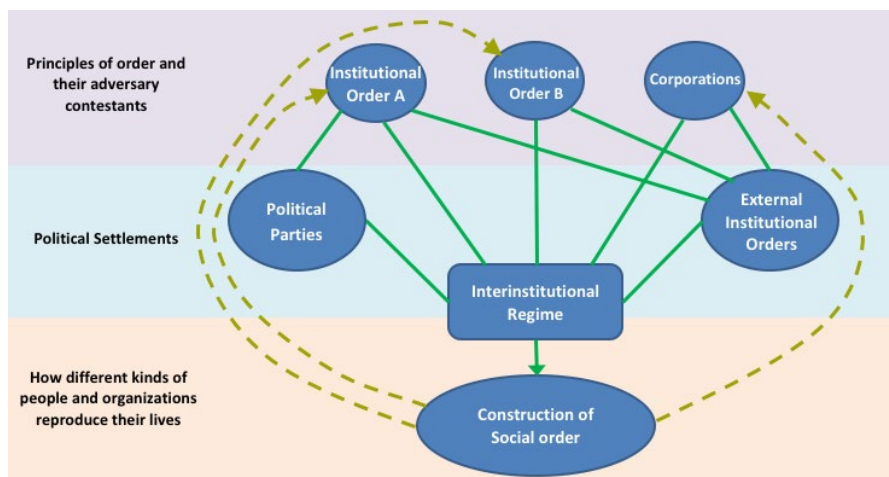
These are the conditions, writ large, in which Latin America's states have acted as institutions among others. They have done so despite having emerged deeply indebted from independence wars, with scant power and authority in comparison with the Catholic Church, the *latifundio*,<sup>4</sup> or military forces, and under constant threat of interference from economically and technologically more advanced countries.

## > Conclusion

Viewed from this angle, the problems facing Latin American states since 1810<sup>5</sup> have been glaringly different from those experienced since the 1500s by model European nations<sup>6</sup> to which Latin American nations have been repeatedly compared, mostly unfavorably and anachronistically. By adopting this approach, we can theorize the making and unmaking of social orders in Latin America not in terms of Euro-centered would-be universal principles, but as comparable and historically changing instances of the historical dynamics created, transformed, and discontinued since 1810 from Rio Grande<sup>7</sup> to Tierra del Fuego. ■

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1. Excepting dependency and world system theorists such as Cardoso and Faletto, Wallerstein and Arrighi, as well as Boserup and Hirschman.
2. This book presently in progress is expected to be completed by July 2021, and published in 2022, both in English and Spanish.
3. The Weberian idea of states as entities dominating over their territory through monopoly of the legitimate means of violence is taken here as historically problematic instead of definitional.
4. *Latifundio* is the generic Spanish term referring to large landed properties.
5. May 1810 marks the start of independence wars in Buenos Aires and Mexico.
6. Comparisons have been restricted to Great Britain, France, or Prussia, leaving out the remaining 24 European nations.
7. Río Grande became the northern-most border after annexation of more than half of Mexico's territory by the United States in 1848.



Graph 1. Credit: Viviane Brachet-Márquez.

# > Rethinking Interdependencities

by **Sérgio Costa**, Free University of Berlin, Germany



*Marcha das Margaridas, demonstration of female rural workers, in Brasília, Brazil, in August 2019. Credit: Renata C. Motta, FU Berlin.*

## > Sociology under pressure

**S**ince its emergence, sociology has had to constantly prove that its results are useful and different from those of neighboring disciplines. Sociology distinguishes itself by its ability to examine social processes by considering their context of origin as well as the meanings that actors attribute to these phenomena. Recent social transformations and various scholarly developments have increasingly challenged the capacity of sociology to adequately grasp the nexus between structures and meanings, as I discuss in my contribution to the volume *Postcoloniality-Decoloniality-Black Critique: Joints and Fissures*, published by Campus in 2014.

First are inclinations within sociology either to reduce the discipline to the study of structures (economism) or to solely investigating the

symbolic dimension of social processes (culturalism). In both cases, the central object of sociology, that is, society – interlacing structures, meanings, and representations – is lost from sight, as the German sociologists Hans-Georg Soeffner and Karl Lichtblau have properly argued. Torn between tendencies to economization and culturalization, sociology faces the challenge of analyzing the contemporary world, which has little resemblance to the model of modern society envisioned by post-World War sociologists. Modernity in sociology corresponds to a world whose order rests upon secure borders and stable identities: Western and non-Western, woman and man, native and foreign, modern and traditional, German, Turkish, and German-Turkish.

The second set of transformations has to do with the globalization of social processes and social life. Sociology still lacks the tools needed to

grasp a world society that is more than the sum of national societies. Moreover, the fact that modernity is no longer significantly shaped by “Western powers” is problematic for the discipline. Western dominance is intrinsic to the concept of modernity in sociology, as postcolonial theorists have extensively discussed. Yet this perspective neither envisions nor allows comprehending, for instance, that intersections between Bollywood, Hollywood, and *telenovelas* would shape twenty-first century romanticism or that Latin America could advance to become a periphery of China. Sociology’s attempts to address global social processes have been mostly concerned with the application of categories of national sociologies to the rest of the unknown world. Society is thus replaced by world society and modernization by globalization. These new concepts, however, retain their strictly national features, although on a new scale.

The result is a lack of genuinely novel findings and an incapacity to grasp the interplay of structures and meanings beyond national borders.

The third is interspecies interdependence. Constituted during the heyday of anthropocentrism, sociology continues to represent human societies as collectivities that merely use the surrounding environment. This contradicts three decades of scholarly advances in the field of posthuman studies which have highlighted webs of interdependence among human and non-human beings including plants, animals, spirits, as well as artefacts. Because it analyzes societies separated from their environments and disregards the webs of relations that inextricably connect human beings and other life forms (such as viruses and bacteria living within our human bodies, and plants and animals with which we “intra-act” and interact), sociology is no longer able to apprehend vital (and lethal!) processes involving interspecies interdependencies. This has become particularly clear in the current COVID-19 pandemic as Catherine Price shows in her article “When Species and Data Meet” published by the journal *Postdigital Science and Education* in 2020.

### **> Latin American contributions**

The sociological tradition in Latin America and various currents of thought developed there offer semi-

nal contributions and reflections that can help overcome these challenges to sociology.

Research on the linkages between structures, social meanings, and representations has been present in Latin American sociology at least since the 1950s. Social scientists such as Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Florestan Fernandes, and Heleieth Saffioti studied, many years before the word ‘intersectionality’ entered the vocabulary of the social sciences, how ethnicity and class, race and class, and gender and class intersect to constitute social places that express positions in the social structure as well as forms of self-representation and action. In her contribution to the volume *Global Entangled Inequalities. Conceptual Debates and Evidence from Latin America* published by Routledge in 2018, the Argentinian sociologist Elizabeth Jelin reconstructs and updates these debates.

In the field of globalization of social processes and social life, the dependency theorists and their successors have properly illuminated the entanglements between economic structures and patterns of sociability in different world regions today, as well as in their historical constitution from colonialism and slavery until contemporary finance capitalism, as I show in my contribution “The research on modernity in Latin America: Lineages and dilemmas” published by *Current Sociology* in 2019.

Even in the case of sociology’s extremely difficult challenge to do justice to interspecies interdependencies, Latin America offers a vigorous repertoire of conceptual resources linked mainly to Indigenous traditions of thought. Some of these are already widely disseminated internationally, such as Amerindian perspectivism, broadly discussed in the oeuvre of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, and *buen vivir* (living well), particularly developed in the Andean region. In these currents of thought, the interdependencies between humans and non-humans are largely considered at the descriptive-analytical level and also from the normative point of view of planetary ethics.

These traditions and repertoires clearly offer a range of possibilities, but do not ensure that Latin American sociology will play a relevant role in the necessary reconstruction of sociology as a discipline devoted to the study of interdependencies at the various levels discussed. To participate in this reconstruction, Latin American sociology must revisit these traditions and translate them into the vocabulary of contemporary theoretical debates. It is also necessary to create new forms of symmetrical cooperation and collaboration between producers of academic and non-academic knowledge, and between Southern and Northern sociologies. The quality and magnitude of the Latin American contribution to reconstruct contemporary sociology depend on these alliances. ■

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# > The Age of Neglect: A Systems Theory of Crises

by **Aldo Mascareño**, Centro de Estudios Públicos, Chile



Credit: Li Lin on Unsplash.

**I**n the last five years, my work has been focused on developing a systems theory of complex social crises. Either because the concept of crisis remained indissolubly linked to that of critique since the French Revolution, or because critical theory adopted the difference of crisis and critique as a unit of its theoretical and political practice, the truth is that systems theory systematically avoided the concept of crisis. Since Luhmann himself understood crisis as a negative self-description of modern society, until recent reflections on the surreal possibility of a critical systems theory, the mechanism of the crisis has been the hidden value from the relationship between system and environment. However, complex social crises are a signature of the twenty-first century.

## > The dark side of modern societies

In the last two decades, the dark side of modern society has shown itself with particular drama and in qualitatively different tones from previous decades. Events that we have tradi-

tionally called crises acquired unprecedented robustness, extension, and periodicity in social evolution. These are times in which we experience hypercomplex social crises that dramatically remind us that the institutions of modern society are overloaded by globally interconnected, multilayered claims and cannot restore disappointed expectations. It is not a mystery that global modernity confronts every corner of world society with experiences of disaffection and estrangement as people suffer the consequences of what is being done elsewhere. In this note, I call these convoluted times *the age of neglect*.

At the twilight of the century of world wars, the Holocaust, and the hope supported by the rise of human rights, the first dramatic signal of this new, networked, post-local age was Chernobyl. And then, the tumultuous century of neglect came into play. First, we became impressed by the fall of the symbols of an expanding and self-securitized modernity, wiped out by regular airplanes resignified as arms of massive destruction. The fall of the Twin Towers was the wel-

come into the age of neglect. Several times in the last twenty years – just the childhood of the new century – we were astonished by attacks in London, Madrid, Nice, Paris, Boston, and also by massacres and violation of human rights in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. There was no place to hide. Only home seemed to be a relatively secure place. However, the financial crisis of 2008, the ever-growing consequences of climate change, expanding religious fundamentalisms, and a trans-ideological, furiously xenophobic populism taught us that even home might be an easy target of neglect.

The financial turmoil of 2008 was clearly a system collapse of the networked age of neglect: too much interconnectivity and too much structural homogeneity made the world too narrow and accelerated to pay attention to more trans-temporal normative concerns. Sudden and more aggressive changes in climatic conditions in different parts of the world have showed the interconnectivity of *spaceship Earth*, raising the question of whether international agreements

**“Global modernity confronts every corner of world society with experiences of disaffection and estrangement as people suffer the consequences of what is being done elsewhere. I call it the age of neglect”**

on sustainability are merely instances of good political intentions or whether they are backed by normatively binding decisions. On the other hand, the territorial and substantive growth of religious fundamentalisms, with their connections into the centers of Western life, have made visible the limits of traditional border controls; they have moved into the foreground the relevance of little breaches in the motivational discourse of human rights, particularly with the young, post-material, disenchanted population. And populism, from classic left-wing experiences as in the Chávez-Maduro regime to right-wing projects such as those of Le Pen, Trump, and Bolsonaro, exploits the normative breaches of the networked age of neglect to reinstall nationalistic, xenophobic discourses aimed at disconnection and isolation from what are considered external influences and exogenous demands.

### **> Theory of critical transitions**

Possibly, future historians will observe 2011 as the year of the first reaction of the new normative consciousness of modernity in the twenty-first century. Of course, there were warning signals before that point, such as the Color Revolution in sever-

al countries of the former Soviet Union, starting with Yugoslavia in 2000, and the riots in the Parisian periphery in 2005, to name a few. But 2011 saw a dynamic wave of social movements reacting against neglect worldwide: Occupy Wall Street, the Indignados, riots in Central Europe and Latin America, and certainly the Arab Spring were the decentered expressions of having surpassed the threshold. The massive migrations from the Middle East to Europe, from Central America to the United States, and the exodus from the collapsed states of Haiti and Venezuela to different countries in Latin America in the last years were the corollary of this normative burnout. In a nutshell, people do not find motivation only in survival, but in the fulfillment of normative expectations that modernity itself had first promised and then neglected.

Faced with complex events of this type, it seems to me that social systems theory has some advantages over other approaches. In the first place, it emphasizes the emergence of autonomous world systems whose control often exceeds both human possibilities and national regulations. Secondly, the theory shows us that autonomous systems generate high interdependencies with each other,

and that from the combination of autonomy and interdependency we can expect more and not less conflicts and contradictions. Thirdly, the theory has also made clear that systems function transnationally, so that entire regions may collapse because of their own blindness or because of the neglect in regions far away. And fourthly, systems theory has also warned us that under today's conditions of higher complexity and risk, rather than contradictions that can be solved in one way or another, we are exposed to paradoxes we must live with.

In my work, I offer a way to approach crises in complex social systems of the last decades that can unravel the causes of their robustness, extension, and periodicity. In doing so, I substitute the concept of crisis for that of *critical transition*, with which I gather some recent developments in experimental research in complexity theories (ecology, physics, graph theory) that are generally unknown to sociology. By means of the design of a sub-theory within the systemic framework, namely, the *theory of critical transitions*, I give an answer to a new type of complex phenomenon: the recurrent and uncontrollable out-of-scale crises of the age of neglect. ■

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# > Researching Neoliberalism from Latin America<sup>1</sup>

by **Verónica Gago**, Universidad de Buenos Aires-UNSAM-CONICET, Argentina

**T**he investigation that I develop in my book *Neoliberalism from Below: Baroque Economies and Popular Pragmatics*<sup>2</sup> aims to discuss the notion of neoliberalism, how to historicize it in our region, deepen theoretical debates, and trace genealogies based on struggles, with the goal of challenging the idea that neoliberalism is synonymous with the market and the opposite of state intervention. These debates are also concerned with characterizing the post-neoliberalism scenario in reference to Latin America.

## > “Neoliberalism from below”

My attempt is to go beyond the definition of neoliberalism as a set of policies from above, as structural planning. Also, the formula “neoliberalism from below” that I have proposed reflects the need to recognize popular attempts to resist and reformulate neoliberal dispossession. By adopting this perspective, I seek to challenge totalizing readings of neoliberalism as well as those analyses that understand it exclusively in terms of the definitive defeat of subaltern subjectivities.

In contrast, I am interested in the plurality of dimensions in which continuities and discontinuities of neoliberalism are both at play, referring to deeper logics than those referenced by the political system.

I research the concrete functioning of neoliberalism from below in what I call “baroque economies” – a term for the “mottling” of times and logics of operations, of the production of saturated spaces and of plebeian initiatives – as a way of naming the political constitution of popular economies as terrains of struggle where “neoliberal reason” (a supposed norm of pure mercantile calculus) is appropriated, ruined, transformed, and relaunched by those who are supposed to be merely its victims.

Struggles within and against neoliberalism are struggles against dispossession and against financial apparatuses as a private solution to those dispossessions and as a new form of value extraction. These practices reveal the heterogeneous and ambiguous nature of the dispute between obedience and autonomy in the interpretation and appropriation of neoliberal conditions.

If we agree that neoliberalism responds to certain cycles of struggle that hence, impact its scale of violence, the question is thus: How to identify neoliberalism’s forms of persistence and recombination and to simultaneously resist the assumption that neoliberalism can eliminate all antagonisms by equating life and capital? Put another way: What types of antagonism does neoliberalism in-

corporate and what conflicts cause it to mutate?

## > A feminist approach to neoliberalism

My recent research continues to focus on a feminist reading of neoliberalism. I am referring to two recent books: *A Feminist Reading of Debt* (co-authored with Luci Cavallero)<sup>3</sup> and *La potencia feminista. O el deseo de cambiarlo todo*.<sup>4</sup> An analysis of neoliberalism has been a central feature of contemporary feminisms and therefore constitutes a crucial element of their internationalism. This is the case, first, because that analysis is a concrete interpretive key for identifying conflicts that were not previously understood as such, and mapping their connections. Second, it allows us to debate and challenge the ways neoliberalism translates and manages conflicts, through multiculturalism or subordinated inclusion that pacifies struggles. Lastly, it enables a diagnosis of the conservative reaction that has been unleashed against feminism’s transnational force, especially in Latin America.

That perspective frames a reading of the violence of neoliberalism that accounts for structural adjustment measures, as well as the way that exploitation takes root in the production of subjectivities that are compelled

# “The relationship between patriarchy and capitalism has shifted to reflect an even greater global reliance on reproductive labor. But why is neoliberalism mutating in this way?”

to precarity and nevertheless fight to prosper in structural conditions of dispossession.

I work on four scenes of violence: (1) The implosion of violence in homes as an effect of the crisis of the figure of the male breadwinner, and his subsequent loss of authority and privileged role in relation to his position in the labor market; (2) the organization of new forms of violence as a principle of authority in popular sector neighborhoods, rooted in the expansion of illegal economies that replace other modes of provisioning resources; (3) the dispossession and looting of common lands and resources by transnational corporations, and thus the deprivation of the material autonomy of other economies; and (4) the articulation of forms of exploitation and value extraction for which the financialization of social life – particularly through the apparatus of debt – is a common code.

Analyzing neoliberalism and extractivism together is crucial for un-

derstanding the imperial dimension of neoliberalism (which is not always underscored in Euro-Atlantic perspectives), as well as in detecting the very source of the current violence.

Many feminist scholars suggest that the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism has shifted to reflect an even greater global reliance on reproductive labor. This raises the question: Why is neoliberalism mutating in this way?

## > Financial extractivism

I am currently focusing on how financialization creates novel ways to (re)organize production and reproduction. But to understand how debt extracts value from domestic economies, non-waged economies, and historically non-productive economies in Latin America, we must see financial apparatuses as true mechanisms of both the extraction of value and the moralization of unfulfilled gender mandates – that is, of a certain articulation between

reproduction and production. We have analyzed (Cavallero and Gago, 2020) how this indebtedness has intensified to the point of colonizing everyday reproduction, taking advantage of gender mandates, while also responding to a demand for greater economic autonomy on the part of women, lesbians, and trans women in the heat of feminist mobilizations. Finance, run through with technical complexity and conceived with regard to its everyday impact, should be understood in terms of an extractive logic of capital, organizing what we call “financial extractivism.”

As I understand it, these features also show why the collective subjectivation deployed by feminist revolts today – in their popular, indigenous, dissident, queer, black forms, along with other compositions and territorialities – is a key component in the battle against neoliberalism’s power of limitless mutation (the infinite utopia of financialization). ■

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1. Translated in English by Liz Mason-Deese.
2. Originally published in Argentina by Tinta Limón in 2014 and then in Spain in 2015 by Traficantes de Sueños; in the United States in 2017 by Duke University Press (translated by Liz Mason-Deese); in Bolivia in 2018 by Autodeterminación Editorial; in Brazil by Editora Elefante (translated by Igor Peres); and in a shortened version along with other essays, in France in 2020 by Raisons D’Agir (translated by Mila Ivanovic).
3. Published in Argentina in 2019 by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation; in Italian in 2020 by Ombre Corte (translated by Nicolás Martino); and in English in 2021 by Pluto Press (translated by Liz Mason-Deese).
4. Published in Argentina in 2018 by Tinta Limón; in Brazil in 2020 by Editora Elefante (translated by Igor Peres); in Peru by La Siniestra; in Mexico by Pez en el Árbol; and in English in 2020 by Verso, under the title *Feminist International* (translated by Liz Mason-Deese).

# > Towards

## A Post-Liberal Grammar

by **Carmen Ilizarbe**, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Peru



*The rally known as “Marcha de los Cuatro Suyos” marked the end of Alberto Fujimori’s time in power. In 2000, thousands of people gathered in the streets of Peru to protest against election fraud and therefore set a strong sign for democracy. Credit: Creative Commons.*

**T**he most important political phenomenon so far in the twenty-first century is the notorious depletion and decline – maybe even the eclipse – of the liberal understanding of representative democracy. Although the legitimacy crisis of political parties is a widespread occurrence in the world, it is not only about this. The very idea of representation as a viable political mechanism has entered into crisis, and perhaps irreversibly. Consider that the concept of representation informs the institutional designs of all contemporary democracies, and that its formulation is tied to the earliest conceptualizations of the modern state. Thus, at least since Thomas Hobbes, we have naturalized the idea

that power can be delegated, and still maintained. The fiction of re-presentation (pretending that those who are actually absent from deliberation and decision-making processes are still present with voice and vote) has been fundamental to the development of modern democracies. I have argued previously that this fiction has been broken, and that the very idea of representation (not just the key institutions and procedures that make it work) has been affected.

### > Research agenda about the collapse of representative politics

In response to the disarticulation of instituted political forms of inter-

mediation, and in light of the evident disconnection between rulers and governed people, new forms of political self-representation emerge, bypassing political parties and their agendas, but also institutional channels contemplated by the system of political representation. However, the field of politics is not abandoned. In processes of medium-term duration that can even span decades, we are witnessing the re-politicization of society and the re-emergence of popular sovereignty, which sometimes manages to transform itself into a constituent power, as the Chilean case clearly suggests.

In this context, a plurality of forms of popular sovereignty can be read as

a symptom of important changes in the understanding and contemporary construction of the political. Thus, it is worth asking what happens when intermediation fails, what happens when the mechanisms of representation no longer operate as they used to, and what happens when even the idea of representation collapses. My research agenda for the coming years will pay attention to two dynamics linked to this process: 1) changes in political systems due to the absence or decline of formal institutions of political representation, and 2) the emergence of forms of self-representation and new political subjects to interact with the state.

Regarding the first line of research, I am interested in studying emerging forms of counter-democracy. The (re) emergence of authoritarian, fascist, and even totalitarian governments has become markedly visible in recent years, both in countries and regions where representative democracy has historically developed with evident difficulty (Brazil is an emblematic case in Latin America), and in countries and regions with solid democratic traditions (the United States is an emblematic case in the Northern Hemisphere). Likewise, countries such as Peru, Colombia, or Chile, but also Bolivia and Ecuador,

with recent and important efforts to affirm the institutional framework of representative democracy, usually develop anti-democratic governmental practices that violate the fundamental rights of vulnerable populations. How to explain the paradox of contra-democratic governments being elected at the polls, and what consequences does this have for the continuity of democracy? What institutional forms and what mechanisms ensure authoritarian rule today? What kinds of responses or reactions emerge in contexts of authoritarian dominance? What are the conceptual and theoretical bases for a critical analysis of counter-democratic praxis today?

With regard to the second line of research, I am interested in investigating how the reappearance of the idea of popular sovereignty takes shape. More and more, in the North and in the South, and across East and West, we witness the strength of massive forms of social mobilization, in response to economic crises with visible social impact, but also in reaction to the lack of means of political representation. These forms of popular overflow that go beyond the established channels for the expression of disagreement and discontent reveal a greater exhaustion, and are

opening up a space for the rearticulation of political energies and projects from below. What characterizes these forms of popular re-emergence? Are these new forms of constitution of political subjects? What possibilities does this open for the democratization of politics? To what extent, and in what ways, may it favor the articulation of anti-democratic politics?

### **> Beyond the boundaries of a liberal grammar**

My research agenda for the following years aims to understand the dynamics of state-society interactions, paying attention to possible forms of renewal of the social pact, and going beyond the hegemonic conceptual framework advanced by liberal democratic theory. Thematically, this involves a critique of democratic and democratization theory, as well as a distancing from social movements theory, in order to better explain the potential of new forms of socio-political expression and participation. As a whole, this work will also involve developing new categories and approaches, outside a liberal grammar, for a more adequate reading and understanding of ongoing processes of political change. ■

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# > Scales, Inequalities, and Elites in Latin America

by **Mariana Heredia**, Universidad Nacional de San Martín-CONICET, Argentina



| *Twentieth-century Argentinian oligarchy.*

## > Growing attention and a faddish debate

**A**s poverty rates have held firm or even increased, massive fortunes have accumulated, and new political leaderships have emerged to cause institutional strain, elites have again captured the attention of both academics and the public. They are now the target of differing and even opposing critiques: some blame corporate greed, others political ineptitude.

No scholarly innovations in the study of elites have accompanied this wave of criticism. In his review of the state-of-the-art literature, Shamus Khan warns of the “faddish” nature of these debates. The first obstacle to a renewed approach to elites is the range of terms in use from diverse traditions. Elite, upper class, oligarchy, ruling class, bourgeoisie, the rich, and privileged groups are

used synonymously, as if all referred to the same idea. The second obstacle is the schism between the social sciences and its methodological approaches.

In their analysis of the elites, many scholars and observers emphasize traits that have been steadily associated with these groups since the end of the eighteenth century: the ambition and lack of scruples among rich and powerful men, their children’s inheritance of their position but not their “virtues,” the confabulations of select circles. In short, in the face of unprecedented inequalities, there remains a certain fascination with these same traits and the contrasts between elites and common folk. Work and workers tend to be history-sensitive: they lead major transformations or are, at the least, influenced by them. The reproduction of capital, power, and its protagonists, however, seems impervious to change.

## > Latin American realities

Social theory – especially as developed in Latin America – provides insight into the region’s inequalities by emphasizing the importance of scales and exploring the ties between elites and local societies. The realities of Latin America have posed challenges for critical theory. Since colonial times, and due to the region’s subordinate role, strategic resources have remained in the hands of foreigners or European descendants. The national scale never sufficed to understand Latin America’s social pyramid. At the same time, most of the region’s countries have relied on the export of raw materials as heavily as on surplus labor value.

In the face of strong foreign influence, Latin American elites nimbly adapted to the challenges of their times. First came the so-called oligarchies, who imposed a neocolonial order on national territories, brought Indigenous

populations to heel, established close relationships with European emissaries, and built political systems that hindered mass participation. Later, in the largest countries, a national bourgeoisie emerged. Often with the support of nationalist movements and military regimes, the bourgeoisie were associated with urban and industrial progress, the hiring of a large workforce, and policies to foster domestic production and consumption.

With regard to this tradition, the more recent conceptualizations of the wealthy pose limitations. Piketty and Oxfam have noted deepening inequalities and emphasize taxes as an innovative approach to income distribution, while other scholars underline that capital tends to be more liquid and deterritorialized during the current cycle of capitalism. However, at least in Latin America, data are not especially reliable, and “the rich” prove highly heterogeneous, yielding a highly unsatisfactory theory based solely on a denouncement of opulence. The rich are a motley bunch up close: old money versus nouveau riche, liquid versus illiquid assets, the resource-dependent versus the labor-dependent, those who reside in the region versus those who accumulated fortunes abroad. Therefore, if the aim is to reduce inequalities, the same approach cannot be applied to countries like El Salvador and France. A great part of Latin American wealth is not in the hands of Latin Americans, nor is this wealth banked within its borders.

### > **Overcoming the poverty of conceptualizing the “rich”**

Three linchpins appear key to a more accurate perspective on Latin

American elites: specifying the inequalities, the scale they apply to, and the type of resources the privileged have available.

The foremost economic inequality is associated with the ability to launch (or halt) major investment projects that impact nature and society. Currently, the large institutional investors and major international companies dominant in the region give these inequalities a global dimension. As capital is increasingly liquid and depersonalized, economic elites now exceed the owners of the means of production, large employers, or the local well-to-do: a hotbed of executives and specialists in finance, law, and technology who operate in diverse territories are now involved in managing that capital.

The foremost social inequality, in contrast, is the advantages elites enjoy in terms of housing, education, healthcare, and cultural offerings, but most especially, social relations, which do not necessarily increase in proportion to one’s wealth. When states abandon the goal of providing universal, high-quality services and rights become merchandise, it matters little what group is elite (successful professionals, high-ranking public officials, or medium-sized business owners): what matters is that these social elites have opportunities that their fellow citizens do not.

Finally, political equality depends on the people’s capacity to mobilize, build support, and have influence. Today, economic globalization and decentralization have eroded the institutional resources of political representatives and many politicians are

co-opted by economic interests. As identity-based demands and differences have risen, governments have been obliged to seek capital beyond their borders and to build coalitions comprised of fractious and opportunistic local leaders.

### > **Fractions and implicit hierarchies**

It is important to note the distinctions between economic, social, and political elites, though also the ties between them. Michael Mann sets out to differentiate between “sociospatial networks of power” – and the authority to which groups and institutions with limited terms in office aspire – and the amorphous power that expands spontaneously through decentralized practices with no defined cores or direct orders. While the authority of a leader illustrates the first type of power (power over), market discipline or the inertia of customs exemplifies the second (power of). This proposal is similar to that of Albert Hirschman: globalized markets have reinforced businessmen’s ability to abandon unprofitable territories (exit), diverse actors have taken to the streets and social media to express dissatisfaction (voice), but the loyalty and obedience that authority and public policy require have eroded.

Analyzing wealth and power appears to be a crucial task to reduce inequalities. Nevertheless, the dazzling magnetism of wealth and power has spread on par with their indiscriminate criticism, both of which can prove equally dangerous for social coexistence and incapacitating for any progress. ■

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# > Primitive Accumulation and the Critique of Law

by **Guilherme Leite Gonçalves**, Rio de Janeiro State University, Brazil



A part of a wall painting by Diego Rivera (1929-45) at the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City depicting the Spanish conquest of Mexico.

**I**n what way are law and the development of capitalism related to one another? This question is often answered first and foremost using the normative schema based on the distinction and friction between capitalism and democracy. Two views emerge from this thesis: Firstly, the available motivational resources are seen as insufficient to legitimize state interventions in late capitalism; secondly, law is presented as the de facto limiting of capital and power accumulation, yet only when this accumulation releases a number of strategic actors who

lead to a general dissent. Both relate back to the normative basis of Jürgen Habermas's theory.

The aim of this schema is to comprehend law and democracy as an ensemble of principles that are immune to discrepant contexts, as if legal-democratic discourses could be separated from the material interests that participate in their composition. By not acknowledging law to be a part of the divergent present, the above schema overlooks the legal arrangements which allow for the connection between accumulation and legitimation.

This becomes even clearer when we see that the prediction of *legitimation problems in late capitalism* has not yet been confirmed. Not only does neoliberalism mobilize new motivational resources, but financial capitalism and its re-commoditizing actors are able to apply legal legitimation mechanisms to speculative tendencies.

## > Legal form

In contrast to the normative schema capitalism/democracy, the critique of the legal form (as brought forth by Evgeny Pashukanis) offers a

concept which aims to analyze law in Marx's value theory. Its point of departure is the understanding that in capitalist society, it is the sociality of labor that takes on the value-form. Consequently, concrete labor is translated into abstract labor and its product is carried out via an exchange, whose value-form is transformed into a necessary condition of social order. As soon as the exchange of various products of labor is made equal to one another, this exchange creates abstract equality among unequal types of concrete labor, which – based on standards such as average social labor-time – allows the self-reproduction of social inequalities. And because the value-form characterizes direct perceptions and leads behavior, it achieves a fetishized character.

As a result, law in capitalist societies is treated as a social form that is activated along with the value-form. It participates in the abstraction process of unequal concrete producers through the imposition of the equivalent exchange principle which is a prerequisite for the exchange of commodities (i.e. "exchange equivalent for equivalent"). The legal instruments for this are the constitutional principles of freedom and equality, as well as the "legal subject." In fact, these instruments create *abstractly* equal subjects who are free to exchange equivalent commodities, while at the same time allowing the material implementation of private interests and inequality. For this reason, legal-democratic institutions are one of the social forms that permit market relations and exchanges to become objectified and fetishized shapes; for this, they also fetishize themselves.

### > Primitive accumulation

The critique of the legal form results in an explanatory variable which is useful for analyzing the position of law

in the (re)stabilization mechanisms of capitalist accumulation – yet not for analyzing the revitalization processes of accumulation and their pressure for continual growth. As was established by the Marxian debate on primitive accumulation, capitalist societies are not static, but rather dynamic societies. From this perspective, capitalist development is viewed as a constant process of overcoming limits to accumulation and growth by means of commodifying non-commodified spaces. This process is induced by the impossibility of realizing overall surplus value in its place of origin as well as the pressure of over-accumulation, which demands the expropriation of a non-commodified area in order to appropriate the surplus value completely and to amortize investments.

Capitalism thus develops based on a dynamic of expropriation that constantly activates the repetition of primitive accumulation and with it, "the grossest acts of violence." These acts should be understood as forms of direct violence (i.e. conquest, robbery, and murder) that in the development of capitalism are applied not merely exceptionally, but in fact frequently.

As a theoretical impulse, the concepts of primitive accumulation and expropriation demonstrate that law does not only function as a fetishized social form in capitalist societies. Indeed, it takes on another character. But how can we describe it? What sort of violence is it? Is there a legal arrangement that contributes to capitalist expropriation?

### > Legal violence of primitive accumulation

Different from the critique of the legal form, the primitive accumulation debate places even more emphasis on crisis periods. In these periods, capital is driven to grow by forces

that, according to David Harvey, press for spatial-temporal adjustments by allowing for (re)commodification and in doing so freeing the flow of capital from limitations. The crisis interventions demand not only the restructuring of space and the temporal horizon, but the creation of a beneficial environment for investments as well. Both cases are characterized by various legal structures (e.g. soft law, criminal law, legal dispossession, police violence, war, etc.). They establish a complex dynamic of institutions that allow both a milieu legitimating (re-)commodification and violent provisions which expropriate certain social groups.

As argued by Klaus Dörre, the current economic-ecological double crisis paves the way for a contemporary diagnosis using the primitive accumulation perspective. In this diagnosis, economic-ecological crises are interpreted as a factor that destabilizes the relationship between growth, prosperity, and democracy. Based on this, the engagement of legal and social orders can be analyzed through consideration of the expansionary pressure of accumulation whose force has been triggered by these crises. This analysis demands the development of a critical legal sociology that goes beyond Habermas's normative schema. On the other hand, the permanent use of primitive accumulation demonstrates that the development of capitalism is linked not only to the exploitative model found in the so-called equivalent exchange principle, but also to a secondary exploitation that allows accumulation by means of racist discrimination, the unpaid labor of women, and the over-exploitation of a migrant labor force. Of course, one must inquire as to what legal modes (in social legislation, police actions, etc.) enable this secondary exploitation. ■

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